

Inspiring digital customer journeys for the travel industry

By [Selina Bieber](#)

28 Sep 2020

Now that both international and interprovincial leisure travel is once again permitted under lockdown level 1, most South African travel and tourism businesses have restarted their marketing campaigns. Given the fierce competition for the attention of travellers researching and booking trips online, companies need to be innovative in their marketing to stand out.



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As Vinolia Masera, founder of the tourism portal, Limpopo Guide, says: “The majority of tourism and travel companies cut their marketing budgets during the lockdown. However, the industry is working together to get through this difficult time, for example, through discounted rates and trade exchanges.”

To help create a winning digital marketing strategy for your travel business, it can be helpful to map out the customer’s journey with you. This can help you to target the correct messages and engagements with customers at every step, in turn allowing you to get better results from your marketing.

As we break this journey into a series of steps, here are some ways to think about it:

Inspiring

Your customer’s journey often starts with daydreaming about a holiday, and they will most probably go online to research their daydreamed locations. They will think about destinations and the attractions they offer. Your marketing goal might simply be to get them to consider your city or region as the place to go. You could, for example, use social media and your website to showcase the destination via stunning photographs, evocative descriptions or ‘What’s On’ and “What to Do’ guides.

Tip: Use your accounts on social platforms like Facebook and Instagram to tell your story in a way that gets people excited. Post lots of photos and videos to showcase the stunning weather, the cuisine you serve, the inviting pool on your premises, or the local flora and fauna.

Researching

Once your customer has chosen a destination, they will start deciding in more detail what they want to do, how they will get

there, and where they will stay. Your goal is to get on their list as one of the preferred options, if not the first choice. Search engine marketing and your presence on key booking and travel portals can be key here.

Tip: *Since Google introduced mobile-first indexing, it has become even more important to design your sites to be user-friendly on any given device, including mobile devices. This is more important yet in the travel sector, where many of your bookings will come in from smartphone users.*

Booking

With a short list of choices in mind, the customer will begin to book flights, rental cars, and accommodation. Here, you need to think about aspects of the customer experience, such as setting the correct pricing, ensuring that the booking experience is quick and simple, and showcasing the unique properties of your offer, as compared to other tourism businesses in your area.

Tip: *Focus on developing a website of your own along with a strong Google My Business presence to help attract customers directly. If you offer accommodation, taking a direct booking may save you from paying a commission to a booking platform.*

Experiencing

Your guest has arrived for their holiday, very excited to be there. At this stage, you could consider offering value-added services for your guests. For example, you could use email to welcome your guest to cross-sell a winelands tour or a dining experience to someone staying at your guesthouse. You could also monitor social media to see whether guests are having a pleasant trip and to respond to their reviews.

Tip: *When a user tags you in one of their social media photos or videos, considering sharing it. What better and more authentic endorsement of your service or offering than someone showing themselves having a wonderful time in a social post?*

Remember: You can build relationships with customers that endure – your goal is to be their first choice when they return to your neck of the woods, and to provide a great experience they will want to share with friends and family. You may want to encourage them to share their visit on their social media channels and to follow your social media accounts.

Tip: *Monitor user reviews on sites such as Google or TripAdvisor. Positive reviews are an opportunity to say thank you and build relationships with customers who love your business. Negative reviews give you a chance to set things right, in a positive way, with disappointed customers and to gather feedback.*

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