



CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

Perhaps more than any other sector, COVID-19 has brought the tourism and hospitality sectors to a standstill. This pause – while significantly impacting businesses in these sectors – provides an opportunity to think before taking action.

This series of fact sheets, written by Deloitte for the South Australian Tourism Commission, will help South Australia's tourism industry to emerge stronger than before.

Each fact sheet is organised under three key themes: *respond*, *recover* and *thrive*. We need to be ready to welcome visitors as soon as travel restrictions are lifted.

This means continuing to keep in touch with customers during COVID-19, while remaining aware that travellers are uncertain about what the future holds.

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While COVID-19 has restricted tourism across the world, you can use this time to evolve your business' digital presence, and engage with customers from a distance. Existing customers should be reminded that you will still be there once travel restrictions are lifted, while new customers can still discover your business from their lounge room.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMER

Businesses need to understand what their customers are experiencing and empathise with them during difficult times. An understanding of your customers enables you to effectively engage, while fostering loyalty based on past experiences. Ordinarily, the best way to understand your customers is to talk to them – these days, through surveys or social media.

This is unlikely to be a revolutionary idea for tourism businesses which are based on word of mouth and ongoing customer engagement. But it is important to note that your understanding of customers in 2019 may no longer hold true. Ordinary individuals are facing unprecedented circumstances – including restrictions on movement not experienced within our lifetimes. You need to be in a position to empathise with their situation, while being mindful of your own.

One way to gain a deeper insight is to design an Empathy Map to consider customers' thoughts, feelings and actions. While it might seem like an unusual exercise, it can help you switch to a refreshed, more appropriate marketing style.

SET UP OR INCREASE YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE

All businesses should have a digital presence according to their customer's needs and digital maturity. This is now more important than ever, as word of mouth referrals trickle to a stop and travel is not front of mind for many.

Choose the right platform for your business, depending on your typical market, customer and business needs. A website is a great foundation, with social media building on this.

The SATC has published a range of fact sheets to help tourism operators set up their digital presence, which can be found [here](#). The current downtime might provide a good opportunity to:

- Sign up for or update your Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) listing to be featured (for free!) on southaustralia.com, australia.com and ATDW's network of tourism distributors.
- Review your local search engine optimisation (SEO) by signing up for or updating your presence on Google My Business, as well as other search engines and services.
- On a similar note, review and check that your website's SEO is up to date and your content is reaching target customers. There are many free guides available online to help your content be found online.
- Devote some time to creatively engaging with customers via social media, including signing up for new platforms (more on this below).
- Invest some time setting up and understanding Google Analytics. This free tool allows you to see both the source of your web traffic and your enquiries or sales through Goals.
- Depending on the scale of your business, you may want to set up Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to help you manage customers, track digital interactions and automate email reminders and notifications.

If you already have a digital presence, now is the time to increase it. Sharing a behind-the-scenes view of your offering, or a sneak-peek into new developments, are ways to engage customers while you're not operating. But it's important to remain mindful of what your followers are experiencing.

RESPOND – PREPARE AND MANAGE

- What is your customer saying?
- What words are they using?
- What stories are they sharing about their experiences?



I'VE POSTPONED MY TRAVEL PLANS

PLEASE STAY SAFE. THESE ARE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

I'M NOT SURE WHEN IS A GOOD TIME TO TRAVEL AGAIN

- What is your customer's emotional state?
- What worries them?
- What do they get excited about?
- How do they feel right now?



ANXIOUS



BORED



UNCERTAIN



FEAR



OVERWHELMED



- What is your customer thinking?
- What occupies your customer's thoughts?
- What matters to them?

CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THIS IS OVER

I HOPE I CAN STILL AFFORD TO TRAVEL AFTER THIS

AT LEAST I GET A CHANCE TO CATCH UP ON THAT READING

WHY CAN I ONLY GET A CREDIT AND NOT A FULL REFUND?

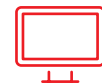
I'LL HAVE TO POSTPONE MY TRAVEL PLANS

CAN I GET A REFUND? I NEED THE MONEY NOW

- What is your customer doing?
- How are they engaging different technologies?



BROWSING THE INTERNET FOR TRAVEL DISCOUNTS



WATCHING TV TO FOLLOW LIVE UPDATES ON THE NEWS



VIDEO CHATTING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



WORKING FROM HOME ON A LAPTOP

CONSIDER YOUR MESSAGING

Communicate transparently, honestly and authentically. Everyone is facing this pandemic together. Customers are more likely to empathise with businesses if they're treated in a way that respects what they're going through.

Let your customers and followers know that you appreciate them – even if they can't travel or are buying fewer products or services. Engaging with customers during difficult times may help forge stronger connections when life returns to normal.

Now is also the time to call for community support. Many customers are willing to support small businesses as an act of goodwill during this time. Those in the arts, for example, are encouraging customers to keep their ticket for postponed events to help artists derive incomes during COVID-19.

While travel decisions are generally made over a longer timeframe compared to other purchases, the current uncertainty means that planning any travel at all might seem futile for many people. Be cognisant of this response, while keeping in mind that your customers will travel again eventually. This may justify a different format of bookings compared to what you're used to (e.g., purchasing vouchers rather than booking dates).

GET CREATIVE

As quarantine measures become stricter, customers are increasingly turning to their screens for entertainment and information. Businesses need to get creative to make customers feel invested in a brand or service through content. For example, when people experience the authenticity displayed through 'behind the scenes' content, they develop a new appreciation and place a higher value on the services.

Businesses should communicate proactively with customers to let them stay connected. This could start with letting customers know about the business' logistics around their COVID-19 approach, where appropriate, but could also consider other ideas such as:



**PROMOTING GIFT CARDS
FOR FUTURE TRAVEL**



**STREAMING OR VIDEO
CONFERRING SERVICES
(WHERE POSSIBLE)**



**HOLDING AN
EVENT ONLINE**



**TAKING ADVANTAGE OF
CURRENT TRAVEL DISCOUNTS**



**LAUNCHING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS
WHICH CROWDSOURCES CONTENT**

Businesses can use the learnings and insights generated from digital channels to shape and improve their operations and customer understanding.

LET YOUR CUSTOMERS KNOW THEY HAVE BEEN HEARD

Social media provides an accessible way to monitor customer sentiment and engagement. Businesses are encouraged to respond to customers who have engaged with the business online. Responses can be done in a timely way through a variety of mediums whether it includes messaging, posts or comments. Businesses should be mindful to maintain ongoing consistent, timely communications. Frequent posts enable businesses to stay on top of their customer's social media feed and maintain relevance.

Responding to customers quickly makes them feel valued, thereby developing stronger relationships. A way to assist with timely responses include developing pre-written responses for general enquiries, and maintaining transparent, timely responses for issues that require additional time and support. Informing a customer that the business is in the process of resolving an issue still enables the customer to feel appreciated and heard.

LEARN FROM YOUR DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Digital platforms generate a wealth of insight from customer engagement with content. Social media, in particular, enables businesses to identify potential customers, find and repurpose content as well as inject their brand into news stories. Assessing and monitoring customer engagement with content allows businesses to identify where potential customers are from and understand their preferences and behaviours. Be mindful that for businesses that already have a digital presence, it is likely there has been an increase in traffic during this self-isolation period and we encourage you to ensure your digital platforms are able to manage this uplift.



THRIVE – PREPARE FOR THE NEXT NORMAL

When the world re-emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic with travel restrictions measures lifted, customers will maintain expectations in the 'new normal' around digital engagement.

Businesses will need to maintain these new ways of working with customers, educating employees on managing digital platforms, content creation and customer service through digital. Remote working may become more common over the coming months and enabling your customer-focused teams to collaborate effectively while working remotely will be required.

In addition, as operations restart after travel restrictions have been lifted, it will take time to ramp back up to normal and therefore it is important for businesses to communicate priorities to customers and employees, so they know what to expect.



WHERE DO I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

The SATC has published a number of resources on their website to assist tourism operators.

To download the full suite of fact sheets visit [here](#) or contact the SATC on tourismresponse@sa.gov.au

South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC) has engaged Deloitte to provide business support to the South Australian tourism industry following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The information contained in this fact sheet is based on or derived from information that is publically available. None of the information provided takes into account the objectives, financial situation or needs of any person or business. Neither Deloitte nor SATC is, by means of this fact sheet, rendering financial or professional advice. SATC and Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss due to any reliance on this fact sheet.

This fact sheet is current as at 2 April 2020 and does not address changes subsequent to this date.

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