

The Travel Industry's Complete Guide to Digital in 2018/19



the source
Digital Marketing Evolved



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Introduction

We are **The Source**, a full-service integrated digital marketing agency with a difference. Our primary aim is to **deliver more sales, faster and more efficiently than other digital agencies.**

Working with a methodology called **AGILE** and delivering our work using Scrum, we work in very quick iterations, where we measure our results on a regular basis. Our activity is moulded according to results which means ROI on a larger scale quicker and more efficiency, with minimal wasted time. This is our unique approach to marketing.

We've worked with numerous companies across a whole range of sectors, however we are experts in the travel sector having worked with a number of companies in the industry achieve better results from their digital marketing efforts, spanning web development projects, SEO campaigns, Paid Media and Content Marketing campaigns.

In this ebook, we are going to be providing our **insight and expertise** from working in the travel sector and analysing the different digital marketing channels, explaining their benefits and our experience in using that channel to drive return on investment.

We are aiming to help solve the problems many travel companies face, such as customer acquisition, standing out in a saturated market, and how to compete with travel portals such as Expedia and Trivago.

Firstly though, we will be looking at what the **objectives of a digital marketing campaign** should be, including the end goal and the problems faced by travel companies in trying to reach them.



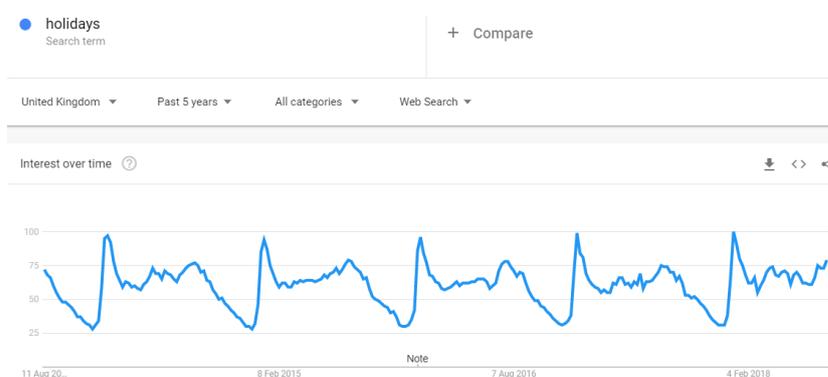
Objectives of a Digital Marketing campaign:

Before undertaking any sort of digital marketing project, it's important to **focus on your business goals** and how your campaign relates to them. Most commonly, the ultimate business goal is to see an **increase in revenue**. However, sometimes you will embark on a campaign for another reason. For example:

- **To attract new customers:** Arguably the most important business goal is to attract and convert customers. The travel industry is incredibly challenging, with some big hitters such as Tui and Thomas Cook in the market, and so competing with them to attract customers and convert them into bookings takes a combination of knowledge, patience and a solid acquisition strategy.
- **To encourage repeat custom:** Repeat custom can be key to a travel websites success. If a customer has a poor experience, either pre-booking, during the holiday or post-break, then it can damage the future prospects of retaining that customer. With this in mind, travel companies have to do everything they can to encourage their previous customers to return to them when they are next ready to book.
- **Brand Awareness & Reputation Building:** Brand awareness is key for every business, but it's particularly important in the travel industry, with so much competition in the market. It's important you stand out from the crowd, and you do everything possible to enhance your reputation.

Of course, in trying to meet these objectives, you are likely to encounter problems which hinder the performance of your campaigns, some of which are beyond your control, others which you may be able to counteract. Potential problems include:

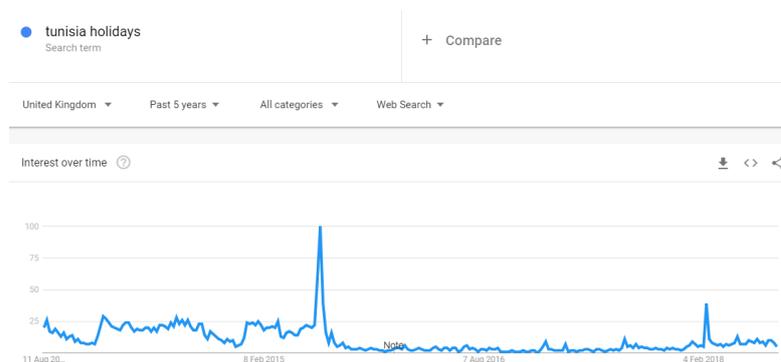
- **Seasonality:** The time of year it is can have significant impact on the performance of your campaigns. Using the search term 'holidays' as an example, we can see that there is a significant spike in interest in early January, but it returns to normal levels after that, with mini-peaks in mid-April and late July to early August. However, after the August spike, the interest declines significantly, which may be as a result of the school holidays ending and the run down to Christmas.





• **Political Events & Terrorism:** Political events and the threat of terrorism can also have an effect on the travel sector. For example, events such as the Brexit vote in June 2016, can mean issues around the exchange rate, passports and visas, with referenda of such magnitude causing a great deal of economic and political uncertainty, depending on the outcome.

Meanwhile, acts of terrorism are often completely unexpected and can have a significant negative impact on how desirable a destination is. The search interest in 'Tunisia holidays' after the attack in Sousse in 2015 is a clear demonstration of that.



Although unlikely, issues such as these can sometimes be counteracted, however, it takes a great deal of planning and understanding of the potential impact any action will have. For example, you may have to change the focus of your campaign, increase budgets or even scrap a campaign altogether in favour of another.

The Market Disruptor

Just like many other sectors, the travel industry is vulnerable to the market disruptor, just like taxis were to Uber and like Blockbuster were to Netflix.

Disruptors such as the travel portals Trivago, Expedia and Booking.com, along with websites such as Airbnb, have caused many traditional operators to rethink their strategy, particularly in regards to online marketing.



The Audience

The next step in developing a successful marketing campaign is identifying your target audience and understanding them, their behaviours and ultimately what their end goals are. This is the key to being able to deliver a truly successful marketing campaign.

Personas

As part of our planning process, we work by developing an understanding of our clients' audience, by creating a 'persona' document. This is essentially a breakdown of our clients' audience, and includes details of their age range, gender, hobbies and interests, their estimated household income, their occupation and their location. We also include details of any challenges they face and the channels in which they are most receptive to information, which allows us to build relevant campaigns and deliver them in ways in which they are more likely to engage with.

These personas are built by gaining insight from the client as to what they think their audience is, using their data to see what the audience really is, and undertaking our own additional research in order to get the best possible picture for each persona.

In the travel sector, we could have a number of different personas. For example:

Parents with school-age children: This persona is typically aged between 30 and 45. They are parents to at least one child, and so have to work around the school holidays when booking a break away in order to avoid a fine for the child(ren) missing school. They have a household income of a minimum of £30,000 per year, are likely to live in an urban area, and have at least one vehicle, most likely a family hatchback or estate car. They are often heavily influenced by the opinion of others within the same persona category, and so reviews have a significant impact on their decision making process.

Sun Seekers: People in this persona group are likely to be younger than the previous example, with ages between 20 and 28 the most likely to be looking for a beach-based holiday. They favour hotter climates, like to be located close to a beach, and want to be nearby to local towns where there is a significant amount of nighttime activity. They will often opt for All-Inclusive breaks, so that they can forget about when they are eating, and have the convenience of drinks whenever they are required. They are likely to work in a city centre, in an office-based surrounding. They have an annual income of between £22,000 and £32,000 per annum.

Experience Seekers: Experience seekers are likely to have a wider age range than either of the previous



two examples of personas, with ages likely to be between 18 and 45. They are likely to have no children, have a considerable amount of disposable income, and are frequent travellers, both in the UK and abroad. Experience seekers typically look for the best deals and savings, and enjoy a number of activities, many of which are outdoor-based.

These are just four brief examples of various personas which could be relevant to the travel industry, and are by no means absolute.

Travel companies who understand their audience will find themselves developing a competitive advantage over their rivals. It's also worth noting that the longer you are able to engage with your audience for, the greater the opportunity will be for you to deliver a positive experience and build a strong relationship with them.

Every aspect of your marketing campaigns should always relate back to at least one of your predetermined personas, and there should always be a justifiable reason behind any action taken.

SEO

Often forming the backbone of digital marketing campaigns, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a vital part of ensuring success on the internet.

“SEO helps to generate traffic to your website from search engines such as Google and Bing, by helping your site appear for search terms your audience is searching for. As a result, you are likely to see more leads generated, whether that be through calls, contact form fills or online bookings.”

Ensuring that your website is **technically sound** is a standard practice for any site, but for a business in the travel sector it's even more important, with a high level of competition for search terms. Failing to ensure that **best practice** is adhered to will mean your website will make the task of **competing with well-established operators and portals** an even harder task. So what is best practice when it comes to technical SEO?

There are many different aspects to technical SEO, all of which play an important part in how well your



website ranks in the SERPs:

Page Titles: Starting with one of the most basic aspects of Technical SEO, Page Titles are absolutely vital. Not only do they tell the search engine algorithms what the page is about, but they also tell the end user. Page Titles should be **between 50 and 60 characters long**, and provide **clear top-level information** about what the page contains. Using Thomas Cook as an example:

[Thomas Cook | Package Holidays, Hotels and Flights, Cheap holidays](https://www.thomascook.com/)
<https://www.thomascook.com/> ▼
Fantastic savings & deals on Thomas Cook holidays. Flights, cruises, hotels, summer & winter breaks for 2018/2019. Don't just book it, Thomas Cook it.

Inclusive Holidays Our all inclusive holidays → include unlimited soft and ...	Travel Money Order your Travel Money with the travel experts for fast home ...
Last minute Discover our last minute holiday deals for 2018 / 2019 ✳. Make ...	Holidays Discover amazing ✳ holidays to top destinations for 2018 / 2019 ...
Flights Best offers on exclusive Flight deals for the best airlines and ...	City Breaks Discover the best city breaks to our top destinations in Europe and ...

[More results from thomascook.com »](#)

The Page Title for Thomas Cook's homepage provides a clear message as to who they are and what they do. By comparison, Tui have "Thomson is now TUI" along with their tagline as their page title, which is not best practice.

[Thomson is now TUI | Discover your smile](https://www.tui.co.uk/)
<https://www.tui.co.uk/> ▼
Discover your smile with TUI, the world's biggest travel group. We offer you even more handpicked holiday choices, city breaks, short breaks, cruises & more.

Flights Flight Deals - Flight Timetable - Where We Fly - Spain Flights	Inclusive Holidays All Inclusive holidays take the hassle out of planning a trip ...
Last Minute Holidays Last Minute Holidays. Finding and booking the latest last-minute ...	Summer 2018 Deals Discover our summer 2018 deals today whether you're looking for ...
Login to your account Click here to sign in to your holiday account where you can view all ...	Holidays Inclusive Holidays - Family holidays - Luxury Holidays - Gold

[More results from tui.co.uk »](#)

Meta Descriptions: Similarly to Page Titles, Meta Descriptions are easy to deal with, but are essential to get right. Situated below the Page Title in the SERPs, the meta description provides **more information** on what a particular page is about.

The length of meta descriptions is something which has been debated recently, with Google often running tests to see whether longer meta descriptions enhance the user experience. There are many free tools online which will help you preview your metadata, but current guidelines suggest that **320 characters** is the optimum length for meta descriptions.



Header Tags: Stylized as `<h1>` or `<h2>` in web code, Header Tags tell search engines about headers and how important they are. Header tags should be different to Page Titles, but it is advisable to put **target keywords** in them. You can have as many Header Tags as you like, but ensure that you only have one of each (1 x `<h1>`, 1 x `<h2>`, 1 x `<h3>` etc.) and that they are in the correct order.

Image Alt Tags: An ALT Tag, or '**ALT attribute**' as it is sometimes known, adds a **short text description** to an image on a web page. It should be used on every image, and inform the search engine crawlers and the end user what the contents of the image is and what its purpose is. A maximum number of characters has not been published, however it is standard practice in the industry to restrict the length of the ALT tag to 125 characters.

URL Structure: When it comes to the structure of your website's URLs, each one should be **concise** and **descriptive**, without space words and prepositions, and only use hyphens rather than underscores. They should also **contain target keywords**, but avoid stuffing them, and should be in **lowercase** font.

Secure | <https://www.virginholidays.co.uk/destinations/caribbean/jamaica-holidays>

Robots.txt: The Robots.txt file of a website is a text file which sits in the backend of your website and tells search engines about specific URLs which you do not want appearing in the SERPs (**indexing**). It is really important that your Robots.txt file is checked on a regular basis to ensure that there are no URLs in there which shouldn't be! Robots.txt files are important in the travel sector as websites in this industry tend to be 'data heavy' with a lot of information and images present, which when crawled can seriously impact the speed of your site. By optimising your Robots.txt to stop certain URLs being crawled and indexed, you reduce the risk of a slow page speed.

Canonicals: A `rel=canonical` tag tells a search engine's crawlers which version of a page to index to include in the SERPs. It is commonly used on websites where some pages have similar content, to avoid being penalised for duplicate content.

404 Pages: A 404 error page is displayed to users when the URL they typed in or were directed to doesn't exist on your website. This could be as a result of a destination no longer being listed on your website. Best practice when it comes to 404 pages is to ensure that they follow the **same structure and navigation** as your whole website, inform users that the page they were looking for doesn't exist, and provide them with **links to alternative pages**.



* Shortlist(0) Travel Information Account & Bookings

HOLIDAYS DEALS DESTINATIONS EXTRAS

We're really sorry, we can't find what you're looking for.

It could be because...

- You clicked on a link from another site and it's past its sell-by date
- You accidentally typed a couple of letters wrong – it's easily done
- It's a problem on our end that we're looking into

Search on website





XML Sitemap: Along with the Robots.txt file, the XML Sitemap of your domain is one of the most important elements of technical SEO optimisation.

Your XML Sitemap is an XML file which contains a list of all the URLs available on your website, and includes information such as their title, their publishing date and when they were last updated. Search engine crawlers use the XML Sitemap to guide them as to which pages to index, and you can submit your XML Sitemap to them through **Google's Search Console** and **Bing's Webmaster Tools**.

SSL: Website security is always a hot topic, in IT departments and marketing agencies all over the world. Installing an SSL certificate on a website will give your website a '**HTTPS**' domain, which in addition to demonstrating to users that your site is encrypted, is also a ranking factor. If you don't have SSL installed on your website, then we would advise that you do so as a matter of urgency.

These are just a few aspects of Technical SEO to consider, however there are many more which you may also want to include on your website to ensure it is fully optimised. For example, **Schema mark-up**, which adds semantic vocabulary to your website to help search engines show more informative results to their users, or **conversion tracking code** to help you identify the pages which generate the most leads.

Off-site is also an important part of overall SEO strategy. Off-site optimisation essentially entails **building the presence of your website online**, which is done by building **links and citations** from **relevant and authoritative domains**. One of the best ways of doing this is by targeting industry press through press releases, interviews or through wider content marketing campaigns. The reason why this is likely to benefit your site more than getting citations or links from other sources such as directories is because the search engine will already know that industry press, for example Travel Week, are an authority and are relevant to the travel sector. By linking back to your website or citing your brand name, this sends a ranking signal to the algorithms of the search engines that your website is also relevant to that sector or topic. High-authority publications also include national newspapers and sources such as the BBC.

Many brands have also previously worked with bloggers which are relevant to their industry. There is an abundance of travel bloggers, however it's important to choose the right ones to work with. You will need to ensure that they have a good Domain Authority, Trust Flow and retweet ratio from their social following in order to get the most from your budget.

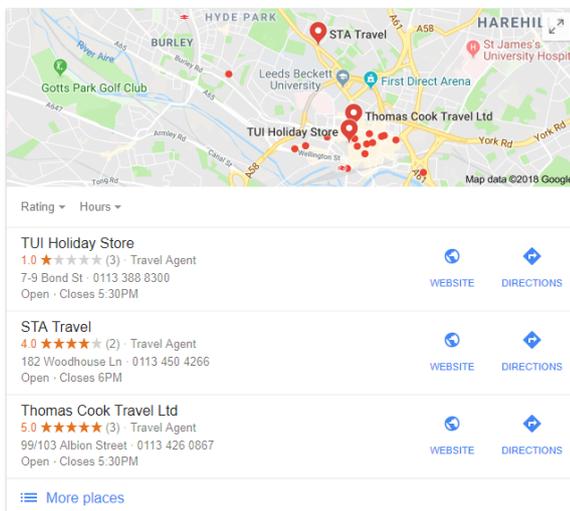
Collaborations or guest posting with other brands which bear some sort of relevance are also a great way of building links back to your site.

As part of off-site optimisation, you will want to monitor the links which are pointing back to your website, and instruct web crawlers not to count some of them when taking ranking factors into account during indexing. For example, as a business in the travel sector, you will want links from websites such as travelweekly.co.uk, newspapers such as theguardian.com and the domains of any relevant bloggers or



influencers you have worked with. However, you will not want links from gillsgardencentre.co.uk for example, as the site is likely to have little authority and is not relevant to your brand. You can also ensure that any malicious sites which have links pointing towards your domain are discounted. The way in which you do this is by listing these domains in a .txt file and submitting them to the **Disavow tool** in Google Search Console. This will instruct Google's crawlers not to take these links into account when assessing the quality of your website.

Off-site optimisation also plays a part in Local SEO, with links and citations from local sources, such as local newspapers, building the profile of your website in a particular area, as they send signals to a search engines algorithm, which tell it that your website is an authority on that topic in that locality, and is therefore relevant to a user's search. Getting your website featured in Google's '3-pack', which includes Google My Business, Google Maps and Google+ is an essential part to ensuring that your local search presence is optimised.



With Google My Business, make sure that you check that all of the required information is correct when you set up the account. This includes your physical address, to which Google will send a postcard to with an authorization code on it, which you will need to confirm that the business is yours. Also, ensure that you have

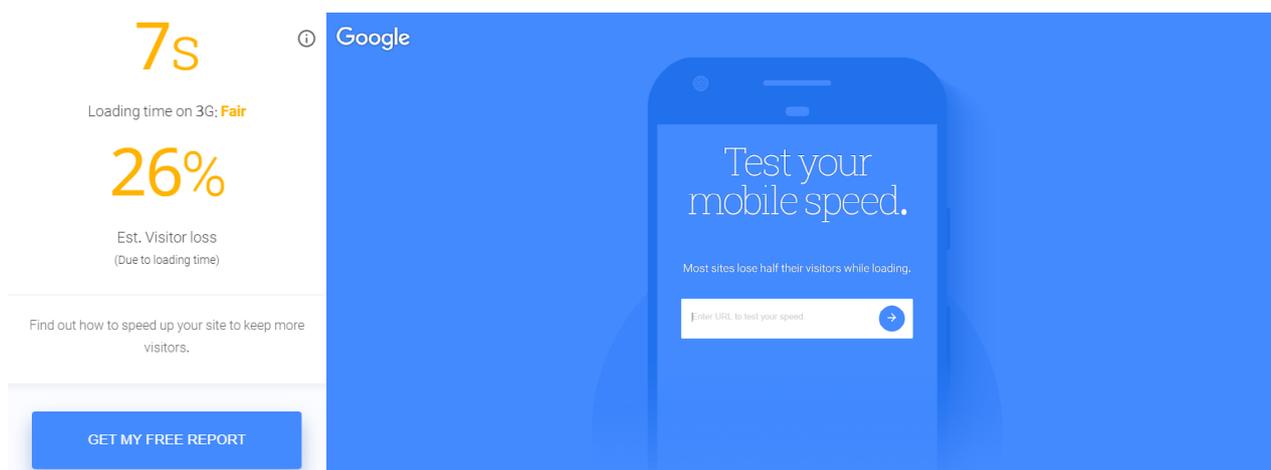


a complete profile. This means specifying your opening times, having correct contact information and having visually appealing photos associated with the listing.

If you have multiple locations, which is likely if you're a travel agent or hotel chain, it is vital that every site is listed in Google My Business.

Mobile optimisation is also incredibly important for websites to get right. We now live in a mobile-first world, where the majority of searches are made on a mobile device. Therefore, it's absolutely essential that your website to be optimised for peak performance in mobile SERPs.

Fortunately there are multiple tools to help with this. For example, Google has a **Mobile Friendly Test**, where you can insert your domain and it will give you a score, as well as make recommendations as to how you can make your website more 'mobile friendly'.



In addition to this, Google have developed a **Page Speed Insights tool**. This tool gives a score for both mobile and desktop page speed, but doesn't generate a report which is as in detail as the Mobile Friendly Test.

In order to improve page load speed, Google have also released the **PageSpeed Module**, which is an open-source server module which optimises your site automatically. This makes the process of ensuring that the load speed of your website, both on desktop and mobile, as low as it possibly can be, without the need for hours of manual optimisation work.

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) is another way of ensuring that your content is suitable for mobile devices.



This open source code, which can be added to areas of your website where there is regular news type content, ensures the best presentation of your content and in the quickest possible time. However, the downside of AMP is that rather than the content sitting on your own websites domain, it sits on a Google domain, for example [Google.com/amp/yourcontent](https://www.google.com/amp/yourcontent). This means that you will see little overall SEO benefit to creating content using AMP.

Finally, we look at **voice search**. It's unquestionable that voice search is rising, with recent figures showing that there are over 500 million assistant-enabled devices worldwide, with one billion voice searches being made every month. Voice has already proven to be a successful addition to businesses in sectors such as eCommerce, however we are yet to see it make any sort of impact in other areas such as travel. With that said, Google assistant in particular is becoming more human, with a demonstration at the I/O conference in 2018 showing how the Assistant can book appointments at business such as restaurants, hairdressers or dentists.

The Assistant interacted seamlessly with humans, having multi-step conversations over the phone, and this raises the question of whether Google Assistant could potentially book activities such as holidays, car hire or hotel rooms.

At present, it is difficult to optimise for voice search, as there is still very little information within the industry on how to do so. However, we would recommend that content is written in a way in which it would be spoken and using semantic search in order to stand the best chance of your content being picked up by the voice search algorithms.

Top Tips for SEO:

Focus on Local

Local search is an important part of the mix for smaller travel companies. Even if you are a smaller independent business, you stand a good chance of ranking for more localised terms if you focus your efforts on building your profile in the area you're situated in, as many larger groups and travel portals will focus solely on the keywords which drive the most traffic.

Write unique content

It sounds like an obvious point, but writing unique content can really benefit your business' website. Avoid



using cliches and write descriptive content about destinations, rooms and surroundings, and you'll find your audience engage with your brand a lot more.

Alternatively, using a social listening tool and writing content based on the results is a great way of ensuring that you are producing content which your audience is almost guaranteed to engage with.

Look at long-tail keywords

Long tail keywords are still neglected by a lot of businesses, and not just in the travel sector. Longer-tail key phrases often have fewer people searching for them, but they have a high level of intent, as they know exactly what they are looking for.



SEO Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Page Titles	Has every page got a unique title? Is the title the correct length?	
Meta Descriptions	Has every page got a unique meta description? Is it the correct length?	
Header Tags	Have you made use of header tags?	
Images	Are all of your images correctly optimised? Do they have ALT tags?	
URL Structure	Are your URLs structured correctly? Does it contain keywords you want to be found for? Are there any elements of punctuation which shouldn't be in there?	
Robots.txt	Ensure that your robots.txt contains all of the correct information regarding pages you don't want indexing, and submit it to Google Search Console.	
Canonicals	Do you have rel=canonical tags in place? Failure to do so may result in a penalty for duplicate content.	
404 Pages	Are your 404 error pages constructed properly? Do they follow the same structure as your main pages? Do they contain links back to other pages such as the Home page?	
SSL Certificate	Have you got an SSL certificate in place? Without one, your website may not be supported in certain browsers, e.g. Chrome.	
Redirects	Ensure that any 302 redirects are changed to 301 redirects, as these will pass the vast majority of SEO authority on to the new page.	
Backlink profile checked?	Have you checked your backlink profile? Use a tool such as Majestic or Ahrefs to download a list of all the domains with links back to your website.	
Disavow File	Once you have checked your backlink profile, put the domains of the websites you don't want linking back to your site in to a .txt file, and upload it to Google Search Console's Disavow tool.	



Issue	Description	Checked?
Google Analytics	A free tool from Google, Analytics allows you to track the number of visitors your site is receiving, where it is coming from, the pages which are most popular and bounce rate, along with many other important metrics.	
Google Search Console	Search Console is a free tool provided by Google to webmasters. With Search Console, you can get data and feedback on how your site is performing. Similarly to Analytics, every website should be making use of Search Console.	
Bing Webmaster Tools	Bing's Webmaster Tools is very similar to Google's Search Console, except it is specifically for Bing, the Microsoft-powered search engine.	
Google My Business	Ensure you have verified your Google My Business page, and that all of the information on it is up to date. Your business name, address, phone number, main email, hours and website should be standard across the web.	
Sitemap	An XML sitemap helps search engines understand the structure of your site and find all the pages on your site that you want to be indexed. Ensure you submit one to Google by using Search Console.	
Speed Test	Ensure your site has a fast page speed. Search engines look favourably on sites which provide a good user experience, and a slow load speed will increase your bounce rate, which in turn has an effect on search rankings.	
Mobile Friendly Test	Have you carried out a mobile-friendly test? Use Google's free tool to test how responsive your site is on mobile devices.	



Paid Media

Misunderstood by many, **Paid Media** is a great way to drive traffic and increase the number of leads your business is receiving. Of course, there are many different aspects of Paid Media for you to consider, including **paid search**, **retargeting**, **display advertising** and **paid social media**.

“Paid Media is a great way to generate leads, without having to rely on your ranking within the SERPs. Unlike organic search, Paid Media means that you pay a fee to appear higher for certain search terms. The vast majority of Paid Media is based on a cost-per-click basis, meaning you only pay when someone clicks on your advert.”

Firstly, let us explore the two primary platforms for Paid Media, those being **Google AdWords** and **Bing Ads**. Google AdWords is by far the most popular platform with millions of active accounts worldwide. This is unsurprising, with Google providing the most popular search engine, meaning a far **greater potential audience** than its main rival Bing. Where Bing perhaps the advantage though is as a result of the lower number of users, the **cost per click (CPC) of a keyword in Bing is typically lower** than it would be on the AdWords platform. Many businesses choose to use both platforms to ensure maximum exposure for their Paid Media campaigns, however, if identical **Ad Groups** and **Keywords** are used, it would be worth analysing these on a regular basis to ensure that you are achieving the maximum number of conversions for as low a cost as possible.

One aspect of both AdWords and Bing Ads which is beneficial to advertisers in the travel sector is the ability to **create custom audiences** depending on your target demographic.

Using **geo-targeting**, an advertiser is able to serve ads to their audience **based on their location**, and exclude people who are searching for the same terms but who aren't within the chosen radius. For example, a travel agent in Leeds may choose to serve an advert to Leeds and within a 10 mile radius, to people searching for 'travel agent'. That advert would only be shown to people looking for that or a similar term, depending on whether the keywords were exact match or broad match, within that radius. A user who searched 'holidays' located in York or Harrogate, would not be shown the advert.

In addition to geo-targeting, it is also possible to serve ads to users based on the **device** they are using to conduct the search. This allows you to ensure that you are showing your ads to your audience on the device on which they are most likely to be using at the time. For example, you may want to **target**



Experience Seekers, and you know through your persona research that they are **active on their mobile devices** on their commute, typically between 7am and 9am, and again between 5pm and 7pm.

Another avenue to consider is **Display Advertising**. Although this method tends not to deliver as high a conversion rate as paid search, it can deliver **high volumes of traffic**. Display is also a great way of generating brand awareness; with a traditional PPC advert appearing in the **SERPs**, users have to read the text and then click through to learn more about the business, whereas with a display advert, they are branded and often combined with an offer so a user can gather information on your brand with a quick glance. As with paid search, it is also possible to **create specific parameters** for them, so that you can control the types of website on which they appear, where the user is geographically and which demographic the user sits in (e.g. male, 25 - 34).

Display Advertising is commonly used in the travel sector, which may be as a result of the majority of the products being 'visual' in terms of destination. Although it has a reasonably **low return on investment**, it could form an important part of a brand awareness campaign or even as part of a retargeting effort.

Finally, we take a look at **paid social media advertising**. Paid or 'Sponsored' posts on social media are a great way of reaching your audience, particularly if your persona spends a lot of time on social platforms.

Facebook Advertising is arguably the primary platform for travel companies to reach their target audience. With the ever-changing algorithm, organic content on Facebook, although still important, is not as influential as it once was, and so many businesses are turning to Facebook Advertising to help them reach their target audience. With the ability to efficiently target ads, which are tailored to specific target audiences, you ensure that only people you want to see your adverts do so.

By using Facebook's Pixel, which is a small piece of code which can be embedded onto your website, you can also retarget website visitors on the social media channel by serving ads specifically based on what they have viewed on your website. For example, if John Smith visits your website as he is looking at a holiday to Aruba, he will see an advert for exactly that holiday, along with associated breaks, on his news feed, if you are running a retargeting campaign.



Top Tips for Paid Media:

Know where your audience are:

As we've previously alluded to, knowing your audience and where they spend their time online is not only absolutely vital to the success of your overall marketing activity, but specifically to your Paid Media campaigns. For example, are you targeting people who are looking for a beach-based holiday or an experience? Where do they spend their time? When are they online? What devices do they use?

Select niche keywords:

Keywords play a key part in the success of a paid search campaign. The competition level for keywords in the travel sector is extremely high, with multiple companies bidding on the same keywords, which in turn inflates the cost per click. By turning your attentions to more niche keywords and keeping on top of your negative keywords you will likely have greater success for less cost than bidding on generic travel terms.

Get your landing page right:

Your landing pages can make or break a campaign. Not only does it have to bear overall relevance to your ads, but the text and imagery on it also have to demonstrate benefits and a clear USP to the user, particularly in such a competitive sector.



Paid Media Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Conversion Tracking	Are your conversions being tracked correctly?	
Targeting	Are your campaigns targeting the right audience? Are your ads focused on the right location? Are you targeting the correct devices?	
Ad Groups	Your Ad Groups should be structured in a logical fashion, which means grouping relevant keywords together.	
Ad Extensions	Ad extensions mean that advertisers can complement their PPC ads with additional text. Sitelinks, Location, Call, and Review are all examples of Extensions which you can use to enhance your ad.	
Keyword Match Types	There are four types of keyword matches; broad keyword match, modified broad match, phrase match type, exact match type. Ensure that your ads are using the correct one, depending on your campaign goals.	
Negative Keywords	“Negative keywords let you exclude search terms from your campaigns and help you focus on only the keywords that matter to your customers.” Ensure that you have included negative keywords in your campaigns, otherwise you may end up paying to appear in searches which aren't relevant to you!	
Budget	Budget is absolutely key to the success of your paid media campaigns. You need to ensure that your budget is correctly allocated, that funds are available from your chosen payment method, and that you're not spending money bidding on terms which aren't relevant.	
Ad Copy	Is your ad copy relevant to the search term/keyword for which you want to appear?	
Landing Page	Your landing page must be relevant to your advert. Ensure you have linked the correct landing page for each advert or ad group.	



Social Media

Similarly to Paid Media, **Social Media** is often misunderstood and even misused by businesses within the travel industry. Everyone agrees that you *should* be on social media platforms such as **Facebook** and **Twitter**, but it's rare to find a business who knows *why* they should be on them, other than the classic 'everyone else is on there' reason.

“Social Media can be used in a number of ways, from building an audience of potential customers and engaging in conversation with them, to retargeting visitors to your website who haven't completed a predetermined goal. Unlike SEO, you are not reliant on search rankings, and unlike Paid Media, you don't always have to pay to get your content seen, but it can still be used to generate leads”

Having a strong social presence can help you attract and engage with your target audience, through the sharing of blogs, promotional material, professional imagery and influencer marketing. Any activity should strongly reinforce your brand message and have a clear purpose.

One aspect to remember when it comes to social media is that a 'one size fits all' approach simply doesn't work, as each platform has its different audiences, and their algorithms work differently in terms of how content is shown to the user base. For example, content you post on Twitter, which has an informal audience, may not be relevant to your audience on LinkedIn, which is a business to business platform designed for professional networking. Alternatively, one platform may not be relevant to your target audience.

Facebook

Facebook is seen as a 'staple' platform for most brands. However, from an organic point of view - the posting of statuses, photos and videos - it tends to generate very little in the way of return on investment, and is better used for showing a human side to your business, and providing knowledge and displaying desirable destinations to your audience. This is because the audience you are talking to have already heard of the brand, hence why they have already liked your page. They may have already had previous contact with you, most likely as a customer, and so have liked your page. However, as we have previously mentioned, Facebook Advertising provides you with an opportunity to engage with people in your target audience who haven't yet liked your page. We would definitely recommend using Facebook ads as part of your overall strategy.



Twitter

Twitter is seen as the 'voice' of a brand, with businesses becoming increasingly active on the platform to try and engage with their audience on a more personal level. Although it is unlikely to generate leads, it is a good platform to post content such as reviews, blog posts and to talk to customers directly, dealing with any quick queries.

Twitter is about being '**of the moment**' and with this in mind, it's important to think about the time users are online using the platform. Typically, during the week, users are on first thing in the morning, during a commute, and at home in the evening, which makes these the prime times for posting content.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a platform which isn't necessarily relevant to the target audience in the travel industry, however it can still be used for sharing commercially-focused news or press coverage.

Instagram

Again, Instagram is unlikely to have a direct effect on the number of leads you receive, unless you are using Instagram advertising. However with **over a billion users**, it's a great place to appeal to one or more of your personas. The vast majority of travel companies will be on Instagram, as they have a 'visual product', and it is easy for them to interact with their audience and influencers.

One slight drawback however, is that Instagram does not yet allow links to be posted with an image, which means users can't visit a specific destination straight from the platform for example.

Top tips for Social Media:

Post unique content:

With social media, it's very easy to churn the same content over and over. This is likely to bore your audience, result in little to no engagement, and possibly even lead to them unfollowing you. **Do your research** into what is being talked about; keeping your posts **topical** will ensure that they are current and that they are of **interest** to your target audience.



Choose the right hashtag:

Ensuring that you **research hashtags** is also essential for your success on social media. Why are you 'hashtagging' that particular word? Is it searched for on a regular basis? Is there a lot of content already out there using this hashtag? Are you hijacking it? Also, consider the relevant hashtags to the post; for example, if it is a competition, use '#win', '#competition', and '#giveaway'. There are a lot of tools out there to help you analyse this, with ['Hashtagify'](#) being one of the best known.

Get your timing right:

We've already alluded to it in the Twitter section, but consider the **time** at which you are posting your content. The vast majority of your audience will find themselves **at work between 9am and 5pm**, so target them when they are most active such as when they **wake up, when they're commuting, or in the evenings** when they are scrolling through their social media channels while watching TV. This may vary slightly however, depending on the platform.

Social Media Checklist:

Issue	Description	Checked?
Profile & Header Images	Do your display images fit correctly? Using the wrong size image can reflect poorly on your business.	
Profile Information	Is your profile complete? Does it have all the necessary information such as website URL, email, address, phone number etc.	
Username	Ensure you are using a username which is relevant to your business, such as your brand/company name.	
Links	Are the links included in your post pointing to the correct page? Are the links too long? - Consider using a link shortener such as Bitly.	
Hashtags	Have you done research into relevant hashtags being used? Take a look at any competitors and see what they are doing?	
Content Calendar	Have you created a content calendar so you know what you are posting and when?	
Metrics	Have you decided on what metrics are most important for the activity you are undertaking?	



Issue	Description	Checked?
Content	Is the tone and style of your content right for the platform? Is the content you are posting relevant to your audience on that platform?	
Identify a primary platform	Identify which platform is most appropriate for your business. In the Travel industry, this is likely to be Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as this is where a vast majority of your target audience is.	

Content Marketing & PR

Content Marketing and PR is a great way to build your reputation within the industry and create familiarity with your target audience. But what is 'content marketing'?

Content Marketing, as defined by the **Content Marketing Institute** is:

"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Having seen a surge in popularity over the last few years, 'content marketing' is now very much one of the industry 'buzzwords'. Content Marketing can take many different forms, including:

- **Blog Content**
- **Infographics**
- **Interactive Assets**
- **Newsletters**
- **eBooks**

By producing content marketing, your business becomes a **credible, authoritative source** for information on topics which are of interest to your audience. This means that you're more likely to turn members of that **audience into customers**, by **strengthening the relationships** with them and **growing your active customer base**.



The ultimate goal for your content marketing activity is to **move your audience along the journey to your end goal**, from initial awareness, through to booking and post-holiday communication. By creating content which is suitable for the persona you are targeting, you are more likely to be able to guide them through the sales cycle.

Of course, the issue with content is that it may become **dated and less relevant over time**, particularly in the travel sector, with issues such as destination desirability, currency fluctuation and other trends changing on a regular basis. With this in mind, it's good to create content which will be '**evergreen**', which means it will be relevant and accurate almost indefinitely.

However, **seasonal** content is also important, particularly as the travel industry has a clearly defined 'selling points' at different points throughout the year, most commonly centred around school holidays. **Use content to your advantage**; if you know a selling point is approaching, start producing content aimed at appealing to the audience and encouraging them to book.

Once you've created a content marketing piece, whether it's a blog or interactive asset, you need to ensure that it is **amplified** in order to reach the target audience. This can happen in a variety of ways, from publishing on your **own social media channels**, to gaining coverage on third-party websites such as **newspapers** and **magazines**. This leads us nicely on to PR. But again, what is it?

PR, or Public Relations, is defined by the **Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)** as:

"...the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

Building associations with trusted sources is a key part of ensuring that your marketing campaigns are successful, both in terms of maximising your potential audience and getting SEO benefits. For example, not only would you benefit as business by having your content picked up by an online newspaper because of the number of people who read it, but it may also contain a link back to your site. As we looked at in the SEO section, links back from relevant and authoritative sources are essential to helping your website rank in the SERPs.



Journalists are always looking for content. They have to have it in order to keep the publication they're working for relevant and fresh. With this in mind, it's often beneficial to contact a journalist about your content marketing piece at an individual level, rather than go through an 'info@newspaper.com' type email address. Of course, you don't have to stick to content you've already created either; you could potentially pitch an idea to them based on a topic which you feel your business would be seen as an authority on.

Many people undervalue PR as an approach, and some even ignore it completely, especially within SEO agencies. Similarly, some PR agencies can have a more traditional approach and not understand the value of a link or brand citation within the pieces on which they are working. This is why it is often beneficial to work with an integrated agency who is able to combine multiple approaches in order to deliver the best possible results.

Email Marketing

Email Marketing forms a vital part of the conversion process, as it helps keep your audience engaged even after they have left your website.

"Email marketing provides an opportunity for brands to keep in contact with their target audience, by sending them relevant content, with the long-term aim of converting the end user into a customer."

The success of your email marketing campaigns can be measured in a number of ways, including how many people opened the email (open rate) and how many people clicked on content within the email (click-through rate).

Recent statistics suggest that you should expect to see an open rate of around 25% in the travel sector, with a click through rate (CTR) of around 3.2%. This is around average across industries.

There are a number of email marketing platforms available to you, including MailChimp, Drip and ActiveCampaign, with each one bringing different benefits. However, they will all be able to track the engagement levels of the emails you send.

One of the key aspects to email marketing is to ensure that the campaign is designed for mobile. The vast majority of people now open their emails on a mobile device, with the iPhone the primary medium, followed by Gmail, then iPad. If your email takes too long to open or is formatted wrong for these devices, then you will likely find that recipients unsubscribe from the list or disengage from your brand altogether.



Also, similarly to considering when you are posting on social media, take into account the time you are sending out your email campaigns. This can make or break the success of the campaign, with studies suggesting that Tuesdays and Thursdays are the best days to be sending out emails to your database.

With this in mind, email marketing can also fall into the category of marketing automation and lead warming. Using email marketing in this way, as part of ongoing interaction with the end user, has been very successful for a number of major travel operators and portals. Automation can be used to a brand's advantage by delivering content such as specific landing pages, to their target audience, which keeps leads 'warm', which makes them easier to convert further along the sales cycle.

Web Design, Development & User Experience (UX)

The overall user experience is key to getting visitors to your site to complete your predetermined goals, whether that's to book a holiday or add a holiday to a shortlist. If a user has a poor experience of your website, they are unlikely to return to it, meaning in a potential customer lost.

There are a number of reasons why a user may have a poor experience:

Slow Load Speed

Slow load speed is one of the primary factors in why a user bounces from a website, and statistics show that 40% of people will abandon a page which takes three or more seconds to load. By making basic changes such as minimizing HTTP requests, using asynchronous loading for CSS and JavaScript files, reducing your server response time and reducing the size of image files on your site, you will make your website significantly faster.

Stock Imagery

Believe it or not, having stock imagery taken from online image libraries is a massive turn-off to a user as it shows that the brand behind the website doesn't see them as an individual as the content isn't tailored towards them.

Overly Complex

If you're on a journey in your car, you program the sat nav, and it takes you from point A to point B by the quickest possible route, with no additional detours. This is exactly how your website should work.



Unfortunately, some designers make websites overly complex in a bid to try and be creative. They pile on additional design elements at the expense of usability, having an adverse effect on the overall user experience. With this in mind, it's important that you make information easily accessible, with no 'detours'.

Boring or irrelevant content

Nobody likes a boring website which is full of irrelevant or outdated content! Keep photos current, embed reviews and ensure your written content is compelling.

Top Tips for Web Design, Development & User Experience:

Usability and function over design:

The content around individual destination listings is important and so it must have 'room to breathe'.

Focus on your user:

The overall journey and functionality of your website must be intuitive and it must flow smoothly. This is particularly important to help those users which aren't as tech savvy as others reach the end goal.

Calls to Action:

Calls-to-action (CTA's) are very important as they encourage users to take action towards the goals which you want them to complete. CTA's must be clear to the user; people need to know what to do, how to book, or how to contact you for more information about a destination.

Which works best?

In short, there's simply no singular correct answer as to which approach or technique works best, as each company within the sector is different, with their audience personas slightly different, and each will have their own individual goals and objectives.

However, we would strongly recommend that a 'full service' approach is the best one to take.



Case Study: Air France

The Client:

Air France are the French national airline, and a founding member of the SkyTeam global airline alliance. They are a leading player within the industry and operate across three divisions: passenger transport, cargo and aircraft maintenance. They fly to over 320 destinations and 118 countries worldwide.

The Brief:

Initially, we were approached by Air France to increase their brand awareness and engagement levels across Facebook. The campaign targets were based on organic engagement and no advertising budget was to be allocated to our content.

This needed to be achieved through a mixed bag of social media content that ticked the humorous, inspirational, fun and topical boxes, accompanied by quality images and sharp copy.

The objectives were similar for our second project with them, taking place a year later, but this time we were focusing on Facebook and Twitter. We were asked to create a competition for them to run and promote via their social media channels, with the aim of increasing engagement and building their email marketing mailing list.

Our Strategy:

For the first campaign, we were able to use our expertise in social media listening to analyse the current buzz, and to shape the creation of an editorial calendar, which would preempt key discussion points among Air France's target demographics. These discussion points included significant topical events such as the release of cult films and TV series finales.

Once the copy had been approved, we were able to proceed to assigning the content to an organic social media strategy.

Our strategy for the following campaign was based around the creation of a content marketing piece, developed specifically for use on social media. The piece, a visually striking interactive game called Streets or Sand, focused on a number of different urban or beach destinations which Air France fly to. Using the 'this or that' concept, users were able to choose their preferred destination, providing them with a final recommended destination, and their preference for streets or sand.

Once the user had completed the game, they were able to share badges on their own social media profiles to highlight whether they were a City Slicker, Beach Bum, or maybe a Globe Trotter. Winners



of the competition would get a holiday to Dubai or Tokyo! In addition to the game, we also created accompanying social artwork, including an animation, for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The Results:

The first campaign was a huge success, generating over 15,000 engagements in just six weeks, growing Air France's fanbase considerably.

Meanwhile, the following #StreetsOrSand campaign, which ran for one week, achieved over 23,000 entries from over 10,000 users.

Case Study: KLM

The Client:

KLM UK, the UK division of the Dutch national flag carrier airline, depart from more than 15 different airports around the country, including London Heathrow, Birmingham International and Leeds Bradford Airport, and have a large global network of convenient connecting flights.

The Brief:

We were approached by KLM to encourage customers to travel from their local airports with the airline.

KLM wanted this to be a creative, engaging campaign that would highlight the convenience of travelling from the UK with their airline via the Amsterdam Schiphol hub. The app required a data-capture mechanic beneath the initial engagement, with a target of 9,000 entries. The app also had to fit seamlessly into the wider "Fly Local" campaign they were running.

Our Strategy:

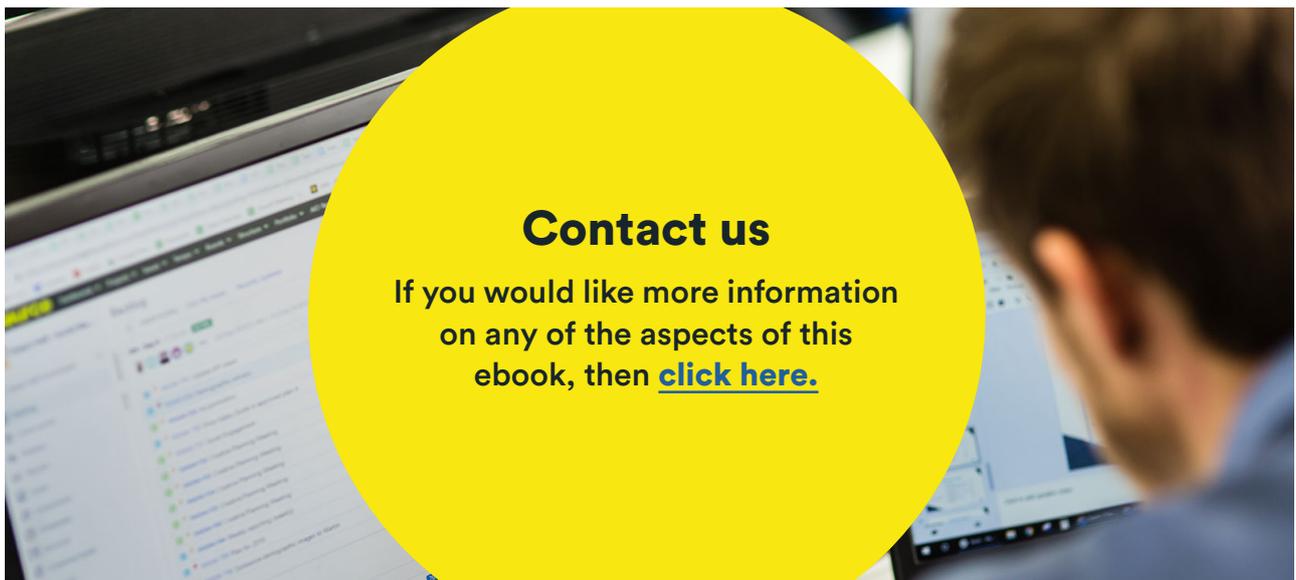
Fly Local was created in the style of popular dating app Tinder, with users swiping left or right on images of six different cities. Playing against the clock, users were asked to correctly guess the name of each – those who were successful were then added to the leaderboard – a proven game mechanic tried and tested in our former successful social media app "Slide and Seek" for the airline's sister company Air France. Of course, the chance to win a trip to Dubai also sweetened the deal, ensuring a concrete incentive to enter.



To be in for a chance of winning, users simply had to select their local airport and enter their email or Facebook login, the data of which was stored for later use. With a huge user target to hit, we gave each contestant the option to share on social to gain extra credits to play the game with. We also exported user data on a week-by-week basis so sign-ups and share counts could be measured appropriately, allowing the internal KLM team to build paid and organic promotion strategy around this.

The Results:

We exceeded our KPIs – the app attracted tens of thousands of users and email address collection. It also increased awareness of both the wider Fly Local campaign and brand through sharing across social media channels using the connecting hashtag #WhereInTheWorld.



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