

Travel PR in 2021:

_planning your recovery

a publication by 8020 Communications





_meet the authors



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Founder & Managing Director

Marc has over 25 years' international PR experience. He was a Middle East country manager for a top-three global PR consultancy and worked for three other leading international PR agencies in London. In-house, Marc was corporate communications manager for a FTSE 100 company and communications director for a technology start-up. He has specialised in aviation, travel and transport for 15 years and has served as a PRCA Awards judge.



Trudi Beggs

Director

Trudi has more than 15 years' travel PR experience. She was previously PR manager at Marketing Birmingham, PR manager at national youth charity The Prince's Trust and worked for seven years at one of the foremost travel PR agencies in London where she managed numerous key accounts. Trudi's sector expertise includes sustainable travel, tour operators, resorts and hotels, airlines, city marketing and corporate travel management.





_contents

introduction

01 develop an agile approach

02 adapt to the changing social media landscape

03 harness data-driven PR

04 connect visually

05 become a partner in sustainability

here to help

our services



_introduction

Since Covid-19, the fortunes of the travel industry have been beset by confusion, disagreement and anxiety. However, finally there is welcome cause for hope. With progress in testing, vaccine rollouts and health passports, the resumption of international travel is at the forefront of customers' minds. Getting your communications right in the coming months will determine how quickly and well your business recovers. Here, we set out five priorities to focus on as you navigate your way to better times.





_develop an agile approach

Vaccines notwithstanding, COVID is likely to be with us for the long term, wherever we are. New variants, changing travel restrictions and targeted lockdowns can all be expected for a good while yet. You therefore need an agile communications strategy that can respond quickly to events.

Your proactive communications plan and crisis communications plan can no longer be separate documents. While inspiring customers with positive storytelling about travel, you also need the appropriate workstreams ready for the moment an adverse travel health event occurs.

Customers need reassurance, speed and consistency in what you tell them. Consider adopting the model pioneered by Delta Air Lines, which created cross-functional teams combining sales, customer service and communications – this approach can help you respond quicker to fast-changing travel information and allow you to communicate better with all stakeholders.



_adapt to the changing social media landscape

Travel and social media has been a marriage made in heaven, although also a source of risk when customers are unhappy. The past year has seen further developments in this maturing landscape that should be reflected in your strategy.

TikTok has moved from youth-oriented fringe platform to a mainstream source of entertainment, recommendations and breaking news. Clubhouse has emerged as a new kid on the block that the uninvited are impatient to access. Facebook has continued to ruffle feathers with politicians and the data-conscious alike – it is still a colossus, but its brand equity has suffered. Instagram has now become the next golden goose for Facebook, with its integration of new eCommerce tools and additions of IGTV, Reels and in-stream shopping. Meanwhile, some influencers have also lost cred during lockdowns, with ill-judged posts flaunting an apparent disregard for social distancing – not appreciated by those following the rules at home.

Some questions to consider, therefore:

- How have your customers' social media touchpoints shifted in the past year?
- With the rise of 15 to 60 second videos, should you consider 'less is more'?
- Are the risks of brand ambassadors still worth the rising bill?
- How could you share your brand with a live audience, through Facebook Live, Instagram Live or TikTok Live?
- How can the tone of paid social media advertising complement, not harm, the authenticity of your organic social content?



_harness data-driven PR

The travel industry could give a masterclass on using data to build customer insights and packaged offers. However, less recognised is data's potential to lift your storytelling, a tactic set to become widespread this decade.

The data your business generates daily, anonymised and skilfully interrogated, can yield up fascinating new stories on trends, habits and preferences. Such stories land well with the news media, as journalists love the certainty and credibility data lends to reporting.

To ensure you're making the most of your data, ask yourself:

- What data have I got and can I use it?
- What is our data telling us?
- How can we build stories around our statistics and link them to the topical news agenda?



_connect visually

Lockdowns have left us feeling disconnected and starved of visual stimulation, so video has become even more important as a travel storytelling tool. There has never been a better time to show off the visual aspects of your business, whether it's a destination, an experience or a type of accommodation.

There is a heightened demand for video content filmed outdoors, celebrating the landscapes, flora and fauna we can't wait to visit again. The media wants to inspire readers and transport them to aspirational getaways. Therefore, capitalise on your b-roll footage by sending it to the media with a fresh news hook, while at the same time being sure to use it on your social media channels.

Don't be shy about putting yourself in the frame. Particularly on social media, video is a powerful way to build a human connection with customers. Whether it is giving travel advice, a 'meet the team' feature or an update on a destination, get your people on camera. Filming segments from home and on smartphones is perfectly legitimate at this time of remote working, and this content can easily be elevated with some deft editing and on-screen graphics.



_become a partner in sustainability

The travel hiatus has increased public awareness of how holiday choices impact our planet and communities. As customers return to travel, many will be determined to act more consciously and sustainably.

Environmental concern is nothing new to the travel industry, but post-pandemic there is an opportunity to move your customer conversations into a true dialogue. Yes, be sure to promote the sustainable initiatives you already have in hand because many customers will be interested. However, strengthen relationships, and your brand, by asking customers what they feel about their holidays and sustainability, what they would like to see happen and for any suggestions you could act upon.



_here to help

At 8020 Communications, we are proud to be members of the travel community. The past year has been an ordeal for all in the industry, but now we can work together to rebuild our success and the pleasure travel brings to millions. All in the industry are united by our love of travel and by its rare spirit of collaboration. The rising tide will lift all ships and we are pleased to play our part.

As travel PR specialists, ABTA members and supporters of the industry we are here to help. If you need feedback on your PR plans or a sounding board on a tricky issue, please give us a call or drop us an email anytime.

Call us on +44 (0)1483 447380 or +44 (0)20 7664 6310, or email us at hello@8020comms.com.



_our services



strategy and messaging

Analysing your business or issue to pinpoint the audiences, actions and messages that hold the key to success, creating the PR framework for all communications activities



website and marketing content

Written, graphical and video content to power digital marketing, from website and newsletter copy to downloadable reports and video testimonials



media relations

Securing eye-catching, message-rich coverage across trade, national and lifestyle news media through creative storytelling that outperforms the competition



social media advertising

Brand awareness and lead generation campaigns using the targeted power of social media platforms, delivering prized content to priority audiences



crisis communications

Protecting your corporate reputation and brand equity by communicating quickly, carefully and consistently during crises and adverse events



graphic design

High-quality visual advice and execution to build brands, enrich campaigns and deliver impact across digital and print media



thought leadership

Building your authority on relevant aviation topics through insightful opinion piece articles, research studies, presentations, speeches and other content



multi-channel campaigns

Creative, measurable programmes across Earned, Owned and Paid media channels, plotting the customer journey from awareness and inspiration through to sales conversion



social media

Building your authority on relevant aviation topics through insightful opinion piece articles, research studies, presentations, speeches and other content



Video production

In-house video production to bring added resonance and value to your PR storytelling, for social media, web and media relations



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