

DEVELOPING AN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGY

While direct consumer advertising for the international market can be expensive and get lost amongst the sea of travel advertising in the market place, there are some key advertising and promotional tools that a business should investigate.

The Internet

Worldwide usage and access to the Internet continues to increase. The Internet plays an important role in the travel planning and decision making process.

Research indicates that more and more travellers investigate their travel options online. Importantly, online travel sales are also growing in popularity. In 2003, 22 per cent of international visitors to Australia used the Internet to research and gather information before their arrival.

The Internet plays an even greater role in travel planning once the decision to visit a destination has been made (rather than influencing the choice of destination). International visitors to Australia cited researching activities, events and accommodation information as the key reasons for using the Internet. The item most commonly booked on the Internet is accommodation, followed by flights to Australia, flights within Australia and rental cars or campervans.

The complexity of long haul travel may make online bookings more difficult, especially for first time visitors. While FITs rely heavily on the Internet as a research tool, they often seek the advice and expertise of a travel agent when making a booking.

As the Internet grows, it is important to maintain an online presence for your product, either through your own website or by advertising on other major tourism sites. Tourism Australia and the STOs offer a range of online advertising opportunities, including Tourism Australia's consumer website, australia.com. The site is designed to target consumers interested in planning an Australian holiday.

The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) is a system for storing information on Australian tourism products. The ATDW supplies the product information on australia.com and State and Territory consumer websites, and is also an invaluable tool for sourcing appropriate product information. Registering with ATDW provides cost-effective exposure on a number of key tourism websites.

Key points to consider when developing your website:

- Ensure the site is quick to load and easy to use
- Provide clear navigation paths and group information in a way that is relevant to consumers
- Secure a domain name that is easy to remember and if possible, keep it simple
- Provide accurate and up-to-date information
- Show clear validity dates on your rates
- Offer secure payment technology so users feel comfortable entering their payment details
- Make sure that the information is easy to understand. If you are targeting international visitors, consider language barriers and present the information as clearly and concisely as possible

Providing online booking facilities on your own website can impact your existing distribution relationships. Some operators develop mirror sites for their travel partners, which provides the same product information but sends the booking or response back to the distribution partner in the region.

There are several site development techniques that will enable search engines to locate your site more easily. The key is to learn which search engines are used by your target consumers and how those search engines operate. These sites will vary from market to market.

Online advertising or online databases are another effective means of publicising your website. Before investing in online advertising, evaluate the website or database concerned and review the quality and size of the audience it attracts. Online advertisers should report the number of page views and responses to your ad. You may also want to establish a link to your website home page from other sites such as major tourism organisations, dedicated travel websites and complementary product sites in your region.

Product Manuals

A variety of product manuals or travel planners are produced by Tourism Australia, STOs and various RTOs. These manuals feature details on 'international ready' product including accommodation, transport, attractions, inbound tour operators and special interest operators such as arts, education, eco-tourism and adventure tourism in the areas they are promoting. They also feature general information such as maps, climate and shopping details for the destination. Distributed to inbound tour operators, international wholesalers and international travel agents, they are an extremely useful tool for agents when planning itineraries.

Product manuals are also prepared by ITOs for distribution to their international agents. Generally these will include listings of the entire Australian product they work with and often there is also an opportunity to advertise in the guides. Check with your key ITOs for details of the manuals they produce.

Brochures

Brochure production is a major promotional expense for many tourism businesses. By observing a few basic principles during the design phase, you can avoid any misunderstandings and improve the effectiveness of your marketing messages. You will need to decide whether the brochure will be distributed to consumers, the travel trade, or both. It should project a positive image and educate and inform customers.

Consider the following points when preparing your brochure:

- ❑ Ensure that your brochure is created in a format that suits your target market. Consider where will it be distributed (brochure racks, trade shows, travel agencies) as this will affect the size and layout. Unusual shapes, sizes or layouts are appealing but may limit your display and distribution options.
- ❑ How will consumers receive your brochure? The cost of any mail outs will depend on the weight and size of your brochure
- ❑ Provide a concise, factual description of your product and your key selling points
- ❑ Include contact details such as physical address, email address, website address and phone and fax number including international dialling codes
- ❑ Use quality images that demonstrate your product's greatest benefits. Many tourism organisations provide access to their image library.
- ❑ Supply accurate information only. Consumers are well protected in today's international business environment.
- ❑ Use a map to illustrate the location of your product
- ❑ Pricing details may restrict the shelf life of your brochure. Make sure you clearly state validity dates and any terms and conditions. Consider using inserts for rates or directing consumers to your website for further details.

Brochure distribution

There are a number of different options available when distributing your brochure to consumers and the trade:

- ❑ Contact Tourism Australia and your STO to discuss their distribution methods and offer copies of your brochure to distribute to their international offices
- ❑ Many brochure distribution companies will distribute your brochure for a fee within Australia and overseas
- ❑ Direct mail to the travel trade and consumers is effective but can be very expensive and time consuming. In the international market place, direct mail is not likely to produce a return on your investment.
- ❑ Contact visitor information centres in your region and in gateway cities to discuss distribution options

Public Relations and the Media

Harnessing the power of the media through effective public and media relations is a cost effective way of promoting your business to the world.

Tourism Australia uses a global network of representatives and agencies to pitch stories at overseas media every day. New angles and stories to stimulate coverage are constantly being sought, researched and presented.

Tourism Australia's International Media Unit (IMU) runs an International Media Relations (IMR) program dedicated to getting the maximum positive exposure for Australian travel product in the world's media. The IMU produces newsletters and fact sheets, as well as running a media site loaded with feature stories and ideas about Australia. Updated regularly, the site is divided into four key areas: travel news, feature stories, story ideas and a Contacts Directory.

The IMU doesn't wait for international journalists to come looking – it goes out and contacts them. *The Buzz*, an electronic bulletin of Australia-wide products and product updates produced in Sydney, is distributed monthly to media worldwide via Tourism Australia's overseas public relations networks. Another Tourism Australia publication, *Gusto*, specialises in Australia's great food and wine.

Another program the IMU organises is the Visiting Journalists Program (VJP), which brings over 1000 print and broadcast journalists to Australia each year. They write and broadcast stories about their Aussie travel experiences, providing valuable international exposure for tourism products just like yours.

These activities generate publicity for Australia and its tourism industry which exceeds \$1 billion in value each year. In addition to Tourism Australia's activities, each STO operates its own media program, generating additional exposure for the State.

Getting Involved with VJP and IMR

Tourism Australia wants to work with professional operators who understand the value of publicity and who can supply them with their news and images. If you are interested in supporting the VJP by offering discounted or free of charge (FOC) products, then Tourism Australia will let you know where and when your product or service is mentioned in overseas media.

To gain the best advantage, alert Tourism Australia's International Media Unit to any new products or initiatives:

- Email copies of media releases and digital photographs to internationalmedia@tourism.australia.com
- Send in 25 copies of press kits or new brochures to:
Tourism Australia
International Media Unit
GPO Box 2721
Sydney NSW 1006
These will be forwarded to Tourism Australia's global PR network at no cost to you.

Contact your STO to find out how to get involved in their international media programs.

PR Tips

- Think international as well as domestic
- Understand Tourism Australia's Brand Values and how they relate to the market you're targeting. Potential visitors to Australia perceive us as inclusive, irreverent, optimistic, original, candid and honest. They see us as a land without strangers, a place that values mateship and rejects "airs and graces", a country where people address each other on a first-name basis.
- Find your point of difference and emphasise it. Australia is not just seen, it is lived.
- Develop a professional media kit (or even just a media release) which details background, points of interest and why your product is different
- Use pictures as well as words – the right picture can make all the difference to a story
- Have a 'hook' to link your story to – something topical or special that distinguishes it
- Look at holiday themes or experiences to develop the story about your product
- Highlight the 'Australian-ness' of your product – make the most of the points of difference. Tourism Australia's research reveals that people overseas perceive Australia as the only place that "does what it does in the way that it does".
- Where applicable, profile Australian personalities or characters. It's a good opening and it adds a distinctly Australian flavour to the story.
- Don't waffle. Keep it short and sharp – key facts and figures at a glance. Be honest – research by Tourism Australia shows that potential overseas visitors believe Aussies "say what they mean and mean what they say". Don't let them down!
- Ensure PR materials are relevant to the publication (or section therein) they are sent to. If you can, find the correct person at the publication and address your PR materials to them by name.
- If you attend a business event in your target market, take the time to organise a media dinner
- At trade shows such as ATE and Dreamtime, don't underestimate the importance of proactively seeking out the media and selling them a new angle on your product
- Use Tourism Australia and STO International Media Units – they have plenty of contacts and know how to keep the media updated. They are always looking for new opportunities for media exposure

Developing a Media Kit

When working with the media, you should develop a specific media kit including the following information:

- A fact sheet containing precise details about your product
- One or two media releases that highlight key newsworthy aspects of your product in a succinct but motivating style
- A copy of your brochure
- Motivational, 'print quality' images supplied as transparencies, on CD ROM or as downloadable files on your website. It is vital to develop a high resolution image kit containing PR images (not marketing images) as the media are less likely to use 'brochure shots'. For example, images should rarely include people unless they have a 'current' image.
- Staff contact details

Media Release Essentials

- Keep it short – one page is ideal
- Keep it simple and don't waffle. Journalists will ring for more details if necessary.
- Proof read the release for spelling and grammatical errors. Ask someone to check it for you.
- List your name, email and telephone number at the end of the release
- Date the release on the top left hand corner
- Don't use clichés, unexplained acronyms or jargon
- Don't exaggerate or make unsubstantiated claims – stick to the facts
- Use letterhead paper and a clear, easy-to-read, 12-point typeface

Familiarisation Visits

Familiarisation visits (famils) improve the product knowledge of the inbound tour operator, international wholesaler and retail travel agents, providing them with the opportunity to experience your product first hand. They provide product suppliers with highly targeted exposure for their product and present a valuable opportunity to promote their product directly to their extended sales force. That is, those people who will ultimately be selling your product to consumers.

State and Regional tourism offices are proactive in organising trade famil groups. ATEC also runs a series of famils, coordinated by the State branches of ATEC, often linked to industry workshops targeting ITOs.

To obtain maximum benefit for all parties, tourism organisations will endeavour to match the famil groups with the right products for their market. As such it is important to make sure that your Regional and State Tourism Organisations are aware of the markets you are interested in working with.

If you are approached to participate in a famil find out as much information as you can about the participants; it is important that you understand who the group are before committing to host the group. Determine if they are part of your target market and what the benefits of hosting the visit are for your business. Establish if they have been to your region before; do they sell - or is there potential for them to sell - your product. Don't be afraid to say no to a request if you don't think that your product is suited to the group.

Generally support for famils is requested free of charge (FOC) in return for the benefits for your business via the exposure. However, if you are uncertain of the benefits of a famil opportunity, for example if they are not from one of your primary target markets, or due to costs you are unable to offer complimentary services, you may consider extending a reduced rate. Discuss options with the famil organiser to try and create a 'win-win' situation.

How to Host a Successful Famil

Prepare for the visit:

- Understand the participants in the group – who are they (inbound operator, wholesaler or front line retail agent), where are they from, what is their position (product manager, travel agent), do they sell your product (are you already featured in their program), how do they sell your product (as part of a package or on its own), do they have the potential to sell your product?
- Know their itinerary - when they arrive and depart; where the group has been beforehand and where they are going next; have they experienced a competitors product; obtain contact details in case of delay.
- Consider the available time and plan the best way to present your product in this time - remembering it is best to present the product as the customer would experience it
- Brief staff, making sure all staff are aware of the group
- Prepare information for each participant tailored to their needs - you may also wish to include a small gift (keeping in mind they have to carry it home)

During the visit:

- Make sure that the visitor is welcomed
- Introduce yourself and exchange business cards
- Outline the program while at your property
- Escort the group during the visit
- Be a gracious host
- Introduce key staff as appropriate
- Present an information kit at an appropriate time and offer CDs / videos if you have them available (offer to post information to participants – they collect a lot of information along the way)
- Develop some personal relationship with members of the group
- Give time and attention to questions
- Make a note to follow up any requests, such as for images or other information
- Ask the group for feedback on your product – is it appropriate for their market; what changes/improvements could you make?

After the visit:

- Add the participants to your contact database as appropriate
- Send a thank you letter or email and follow up any requests for additional information
- Follow any sales lead opportunities presented by the visit
- Keep participants informed of any relevant changes or updates on your product

Sales Calls

Maintaining regular contact with your distribution partners and providing them with updated information on your product helps foster strong relationships. Face to face sales calls are an excellent way of building rapport while updating clients on your product.

Plan a call schedule. The number of times you visit an operator will depend on how much business, current and potential, that they generate for you. You will also have an opportunity to meet with operators at trade shows and workshops that you attend. Remember, ITOs and wholesalers are busy people, so don't visit them more often than you need to and make sure you always have something new and interesting to tell them.

For international sales calls, the timing of your visit is also important and this will vary from market to market, so don't just plan around your overseas holiday. When planning individual sales calls in market for the first time, contact your local STO as they can assist with planning and introductions to key wholesalers and travel agents on your first sales visits.

Do:

- Make sure you have something new and interesting to discuss or feedback to give
- Make an appointment and turn up on time
- Research the operator before you call. Find out what markets they work in; whether they sell a competitor's product or product that is complementary to your own
- Make sure you have a basic understanding of cultural differences and local customs, even if they are based in Australia (i.e. if you are visiting an Asian operator don't be afraid to take a small gift). Research cultural differences and respect them.
- Be flexible - impress your target operator by offering to accommodate adjustments in product, booking procedures and offering incentives when necessary to secure their business. You also need to consider the potential volume of business vs. the costs of making significant adjustments - work with them to create a 'win-win' situation
- Provide the operator with feedback and let them know how much business they have been producing for you
- Reconfirm your appointment
- Follow up and honour everything you have committed to; maintain regular contact with the operator.

Don't:

- Visit during busy periods, such as when major trade shows are being conducted or during product planning
- Arrive unannounced - cold calling is almost never appreciated and likely to prove counter-productive
- Commit to rates or services without keeping a written record

Staff Training

Once you have established a relationship with ITOs and international wholesalers and they have begun using your product, you should train and educate their staff so they are able to effectively sell your product. It is also a good idea to train staff when your product is being featured in any special campaigns or promotions. Speak with the Product Manager regarding this, as you will find some companies are more flexible with training than others.

When planning your training, consider how the agent will sell your product as part of an itinerary. Conducting training with other complementary product from your region and selling the destination as a whole can be more rewarding than selling an individual product. Consider including details such as:

- What else is there to do in the area?
- How do they get there?
- Where can they stay?

Make sure your STO and RTO are also aware of your product and any changes, as they may update staff when visiting ITOs and wholesalers.

Before you go check:

- How many staff you will be training
- How much time you will have

Points to remember when doing training:

- Keep your presentation simple, factual and interesting
- Make sure you communicate the key points about your product
- If your product is featured in their brochure, highlight where they will find it
- Take brochures and any additional sales collateral that may be relevant
- Try to make your presentation interactive and fun
- Keep in mind busy periods and avoid scheduling training at these times
- Know your audience – think about who you are presenting to and the key message you want to get across and make sure you tailor your presentation
- It's a good idea to take something for morning or afternoon tea

Sales Missions

Tourism Australia and STOs regularly conduct Trade or Sales Missions into identified key markets. The majority of missions are organised by the STOs with Tourism Australia focussing on emerging markets. These trade missions are useful for both first time entrants into the market as well as operators already established in the market looking to further develop their business through the wholesale and retail programs in those countries. Visiting the market allows you to present your product to the travel trade.

Travelling as part of an organised sales mission allows you to present your product and destination alongside other complementary products to a targeted group of operators. The audience will vary from retail travel staff to wholesale product managers so make sure you are aware of who you are meeting with and tailor your presentation to suit their needs. The golden rule for international sales missions is 'do your homework first'. The more preparation you do, the greater the return on your investment.

The guiding principle in a successful trade mission is not the amount of ground covered or even the number of meetings held. It is in seeing the right people from the right organisations that have an interest in seeing you and the potential to sell your product. As with all types of sales activity, follow up is vital. Don't forget to send a follow up thanking them for their time and include any additional information that may have been requested.

Certain countries have customs not usual to Australia; observing local courtesies and morals will be highly appreciated by your hosts and significantly enhance your chances of success. This is especially important when you are visiting the market.

Sales Tools

Develop a tool kit for sales calls, missions and staff training to include:

- Product brochures
- Fact sheets on your product
- A sales presentation using a flip chart or Powerpoint
- A CD/ DVD containing a collection of images of your product
- Display material such as banners and posters

When developing your sales toolkit keep the look and feel consistent and make sure that the information is accurate and up to date.

Trade Shows

Trade shows are a key forum to meet key industry players and develop or enhance business relationships. They are an excellent opportunity to meet with a large number of targeted clients in the one place at the one time. Events may be more cost and time effective than conducting individual sales calls, however often your appointment time will be limited. If attending trade events, especially those held overseas, it is a good idea to incorporate individual sales calls, pre or post event, into the visit.

Trade shows require an organised and targeted approach, with clearly set objectives, and committed staff who understand their roles and what the company is trying to achieve at the event.

Selecting the Right Event

Trade shows are held throughout the year, each targeting different audiences and designed to achieve different objectives:

- ❑ Trade events can target specific elements of the trade distribution chain from wholesalers to inbound operators, specific segments like diving or adventure, or particular industries like business tourism
- ❑ Some events target Product Managers who make decisions on tour programs - other events are designed to train the front line sales staff of those companies

Trade events are a large investment and it is important to understand the difference between each event, and choose events that will specifically meet your trade marketing objectives. Research each event thoroughly by speaking to the trade events department at Tourism Australia, your STO market coordinator or other operators that have attended the event in the past.

Questions you need to ask include:

- ❑ What is the selection criteria and costs? Companies that participate in Tourism Australia organised trade events must meet certain selection criteria. Details of the criteria along with costs and further details on attending events can be found at www.tradeevents.australia.com
- ❑ What are your objectives for participating in the event – i.e. developing new business, consolidating existing relationships, increasing product knowledge with sales staff. Will the event achieve your goals?
- ❑ What is the reputation of the event? Does it suit new product entrants?
- ❑ Is the event based on prearranged appointments between buyers and sellers? This is normally a better format than a completely informal structure, particularly if you don't have a network of established contacts
- ❑ What are the participation options? Can you participate at the event on a 'share basis'? Is it possible, to participate with complementary product or a marketing partner?

Whichever events you choose, you should be prepared to commit to participation in the same event for a minimum of three years. The awareness of your product will significantly increase each year, as will your own expertise and knowledge of how to work the show.

It is also far more effective to participate in international trade shows under an Australian or State umbrella. Tourism Australia and STOs coordinate attendance at a range of international trade shows including the Australian Tourism Exchange. Discuss your objectives with the International Marketing department of your local STO, or contact the Trade Events team at Tourism Australia.

Preparing for a Trade Show

Attending a trade show requires a lot of preparation. It is important to take careful note of the various event requirements when registering. Not reading the events procedures is one of the major mistakes companies can make. Key points to take note of include:

- ❑ Read all pre-event literature and application forms very carefully
- ❑ Note the cancellation policy and deadlines
- ❑ Be sure to meet all designated deadlines
- ❑ If appointments are available research who is attending and request appointments with those most relevant to your product
- ❑ Obtain accurate information on the dimensions of your booth and its exact location to enable you to plan your display accordingly
- ❑ Make sure all your booth and marketing materials are ordered (and due for delivery) well before you need to leave
- ❑ Develop a clear strategy for the trade event and plan your preparations around those objectives (see next section)
- ❑ Consider doing a direct mail piece prior to the trade show to those delegates you want to meet with

Develop a Strategy for the Event

Registering for a trade event is only the first step in achieving your marketing goals. A well thought out strategy and a team who will work towards those objectives are the most important elements of a successful trade show.

Who are you targeting and how can you meet with them?

A successful trade show strategy must include a hit list of the key business contacts you need to meet, and the way you are going to meet them.

Try to obtain an attendee list from the trade event organisers as soon as you can. Many trade shows have a scheduled appointments system matching buyers to sellers based on the preferences each has requested.

Don't despair if you fail to confirm appointments in the scheduled part of the show. There are many other ways to meet up with people. Contact key clients via email or phone before they arrive and see if you can schedule an appointment. Develop a catchy promotion which requires delegates to visit your booth to take part. Secure a high profile booth in a prominent location, which may generate a high degree of walk in traffic.

Try to attend all key social and networking events. They are a great way to meet clients in a casual setting, and can often lead to a commitment to consider your product, or drop by your booth.

Getting your message across

Developing a communication strategy for the trade event includes everything from the branding you use in company uniforms and booth design, to the way you communicate your message in brochure materials and formal meetings.

A golden rule often quoted is, "Listen for 80% and sell for 20%". Understand who the buyer is, and what they are looking for so you can tailor your sales message for the buyer's needs. Aim to highlight the things that set you apart, your unique selling proposition (USP), as well as anything new, but remember to keep your message short, sharp and memorable.

Brochure materials should be succinct, outlining your key product benefits. Make sure you include your logo and contact details. If the budget permits use photos and colour to attract more interest. Pricing information should clearly indicate validity dates. If you are producing a gift to hand out, make sure that it is relevant to your product or service, it has your company logo and contact details and can be carried home if the event is offshore for the buyers.

Staff training is crucial to event success. Staff should know who you are trying to target, and who will handle that client when they visit. Role plays of meeting situations are a good way to polish your sales delivery. Attendees should have a clear understanding of presentation standards, including dress codes, staff positioning within the booth, eating of meals, mobile phone use etc. You should also discuss what happens at the booth between appointments. Developing a roster will enable your booth to be attended at all times.

Plan team meetings during the event to review your progress and make any necessary changes. This could happen between appointments or as a debriefing at the end of each day.

Follow up

The follow up process with those you have met with is possibly the most crucial element of the entire trade show strategy.

Trade show veterans have a system to collect and prioritise the names of key contacts from the event. It is a good idea to design a template form to use in meetings to capture all the key information discussed including any follow up that is required.

A follow up plan should be devised to reply to the most important contacts first, based on the key discussion points during your meeting. Even though it can be time consuming, it is best to personalise your follow up rather than send bulk emails or letters. A thank you should be sent to everyone you met with, even if they did not request any further information.

Make sure you send every piece of information and material you promised as soon as possible. If you are out of stock, send a 'thank you' and mention that the material is being sourced and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

After an appropriate time for delivery, follow up with the person involved to review next steps in developing your business relationship.

Trade Show Evaluation

As with all marketing campaigns, trade shows should be evaluated to compare the returns and potential business from the event against your costs.

Leads can often take several months to generate business, and as mentioned, success should not be expected from your first year's attendance. It takes several years to build up your product awareness, and business relationships, at particular events.