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Internet video and the travel industry

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If ever two trends were meant to intersect, it's the growth of consumer appetite for researching their travel and leisure options online on the one hand, and their exploding appetite for online video on the other. Before they decide where to go and how to get there, consumers browse multiple websites, looking for a destination or mode of travel that appeals to them. "Consumers conducting travel research online continue to outnumber those booking online," says Lynn Franco, Director of The Conference Board Consumer Research Center, citing data from a 2007 survey of 10,000 households nationwide. Online travel-related research outpaces actual online buying by two-to-one, Franco says. Which means it is increasingly important for industry websites to grab and keep visitors, and video is one way to accomplish that.

Consider the undeniable facts:

- More than 83% of travelers in the U.S. use the Internet to research or book travel, according to Prospectiv's 2006 nationwide Travel Poll.
- Podcasting News reported in September of 2007 that the online video audience in the U.S. is now 134 million (representing ¾ of all U.S. Internet users), with the average viewer watching 68 videos online a month, or more than two per day.
- Hotelmarketing.com reports in its Oct. 2, 2007 issue that a nationwide survey by Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) for Google and AOL found that more than ¾ of respondents said online video was as good as television

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for learning about advertisers, with more than 6 in 10 respondents saying they had taken some action after watching an online video ad.

– The Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International reported on Sept 4, 2007 that a recent Travel Industry Association/Youpartnership TravelHorizons study found that two-thirds of online adult leisure travelers consume online video and audio clips.

– The Wall Street Journal reported on Aug. 14, 2007 that Cisco says consumer video will be responsible for a significant portion of the Internet-based traffic increases from 2006 to 2011, with video streaming and downloads increasing from 9% of all consumer Internet traffic last year to 30% in 2011.

– Burst Media's 2006 nationwide survey of online video viewers found that video reaches beyond the youngest demographics, with the 35–44 and 45–54 age groups equally as likely to view online content as the 18–24 age group.

It's not just statistics that tell the story. Hospitality and travel industry experts agree that the online and video worlds are coming together because they complement each other. Video provides that extra level of experience on a website that helps build an emotional connection to the visitor by delivering the full impact of a hotel's, resort's or destination's unique blend of sights and sounds that conveys the feel that is a brand's hallmark. And web videos are now supported by Online Travel Agency websites as well as the websites of hotel, resort, destination or transportation properties. Add that to the increasing amount of consumer-to-consumer and social media in the industry with customers sharing peer-to-peer reviews, assessments, images and stories about their travel experiences and you have a situation tailor-made for the full array of media. "I do think the whole video experience is going to be more and more of a requirement online because people are willing to buy more and more online, but they want to understand, get a better feel of exactly what it is they are buying," said Susan Kidwell of online ad agency AvenueA/Razorfish which handles the Carnival Cruise Line Account, as quoted in iMedia Connection's Sept. 21, 2007 publication.

Adds Chris Holden, VP of Global Web Services for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, in the same article: "Price is still very important for our guests – it's still the critical element – but the evolution has been to show what kind of experience you get for the price."

"Video is the most powerful tool that the travel industry can offer," said German film-maker, Wolfgang Jo

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Huschert, head of Huschert Film+Medien, and three-times winner of the Kompass prix-ITB award for tourism promotion. He told travelvideo.tv last year that "moving images and sound can convey so much more than even a glossy brochure so they are very important for promoting destinations and services. The industry can't do without video any more - just look at the huge interest shown in travel programs on television, for example. Then there is demand for tourism web sites to carry videos now that technology makes it possible and relatively easy." It's already happening. For example:

MGM Grand Hotel Las Vegas has launched online video on its website under the title "Maximum Vegas" in order to better illustrate to its potential guests the experience and services of its hotel and gaming resort.

Tourism Massachusetts, a nonprofit group that markets to international visitors, began rolling out last year the first 15 of a planned 50 two-minute videos promoting venues like Cape Cod and the Berkshires.

Furthermore, advances in search engine optimization benefit those web-based travel properties that contain rich media. As RSS feeds, SEO and meta-searches become more important, URL names are diminishing in importance.

A significant percentage of traffic [now] comes to keyworded internal pages, audio and video files through search engines, rather than through the [Web site's] front door," says Russell Johnson, President of California-based TravelMedia, which hosts a trade site at travelmedia and a consumer site at connectedtraveler. In August of 2006 he told TravelDailyNews.com, "The Web is becoming a collaborative mesh of activity rather than linear portals." Creating video for tourism industry websites and online tourism brochures is even more cost-effective if it's part of a broader media plan. With a modest amount of post-production, existing broadcast quality Internet video produced by experienced videographers and editors can be leveraged across a broad variety of marketing, public relations and corporate communications applications:

- Attention-grabbing point-of-presence or point-of-sale videos at retail locations or trade conventions.
- Compelling video story segments for inclusion in online expandable ad banners.
- Video story segments for placement on demographically - targeted cable TV programs and/or out-of-home digital networks.
- Handout b-roll, video news releases, or electronic press kits, or to supplement satellite media tours, for

broadcast media, either proactively or reactively.

– Video assets that enhance multimedia press releases distributed online, increasing the likelihood they will be picked up by online media.

“The essence of Internet video and non-traditional video placement is audience-specific storytelling,” says Victor Lee, CEO of airport multimedia marketer Brandstands International. “Find the compelling story or stories in a brand and you have the targeted messaging you require for different media formats, platforms and audiences. Good advance planning will assure that varying messages to different audiences reinforce each other. With the web’s built-in interactivity, video on the Internet is where the competencies and creativity of advertising, marketing and PR intersect the best.”

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