

Basic Information

Region (Check Region):

Scotland

Category:

22. Best COVID response

Entry Information

Entrant company name:

VisitScotland

Entry title:

VisitScotland's response to COVID-19 and Scottish tourism recovery

Entry

Brief, objectives and budget:

Great communication has been crucial to our response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether supporting our staff or helping industry, the corporate communications team has been central to VisitScotland activity.

When COVID-19 hit, we got out our crisis communications plan, and set up the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG), which includes key tourism contacts from agencies, the Scottish Government and industry.

Key to our strategy was excellent planning and collaboration – working with stakeholders to ensure we helped industry, as well as being agile in dealing with each stage of the crisis effectively.

Objectives

- Ensure our staff are equipped for new ways of working
- Support industry to navigate issues around COVID-19
- Support the recovery of tourism post COVID-19
- Re-set tourism, ensuring communities and visitors can live in harmony
- Showcase the work of VisitScotland, showing leadership in times of crisis

Budget: £10,000

The idea, research and planning:

Working with internal and external stakeholders, we developed a communications recovery

plan to coordinate activity related to the pandemic. For each announcement, a plan was created with key messaging. Each plan fed into the recovery plan to avoid duplication, ensure consistency, and coordinate activity.

As a member of STERG, leading on its communication, we heard first-hand the needs and priorities of industry and adapted our communications accordingly.

Strategy, creativity and innovation:

Our strategy was to support our stakeholders, communicating in a timely and honest manner, ensuring everyone had the information and help needed. We positioned ourselves as the strategic team, driving decisions as well as communicating them.

STAFF: Overnight, we set 570 staff up to work from home, ensuring they were informed and supported. We organised initiatives to support mental health – from gardening tips to giving staff access to the Headspace app and our activity led to a six-point increase in engagement.

TOURISM INDUSTRY: Externally, our aim was to be a trusted source of information – with timely updates, we positioned our channels as the place for advice and our website the central information source. This included restarting industry as lockdown measures were lifted – and supporting them as we re-entered lockdown.

FUTURE VISITORS: We wanted Scotland front of mind for potential visitors – moving from stay local to encouraging staycations as lockdowns came and went. This allowed us to develop innovative projects to sell the story at key points during the crisis.

Ideas included:

- #Get Tourism Ready – our industry restart campaign
 - #HameTownTourist – our stay local campaign with influencers
 - #take5fortourism – support for tourism campaign
 - #Tourismforceforgood – our campaign to raise the profile of tourism
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Delivery/implementation of tactics:

INTERNAL

Our staff were our first consideration and keeping them informed and ensuring they felt supported in their transition to working from home was important. We wanted to improve the home working experience, focusing on everything from mental and physical health to advice on living more sustainably.

Key tactics

- Resource hub with information, guidance, FAQs and health / wellbeing resources.
- Weekly messages from our Chairman and CEO ran alongside meetings with groups of staff, allowing them to ‘ask the boss’ questions. Emails were stepped up during COVID-19 surges.
- A Friday e-catchup containing news from that week became a regular feature, written with warmth and wit, and staff responded well.
- A wellbeing campaign with regular news stories signposting to support.

EXTERNAL

Our industry was devastated by COVID-19, so our focus was on supporting them and our corporate website became the heart of that effort.

Key tactics

- VisitScotland.org content was continuously reviewed, updated, and expanded in response to changing needs. A COVID-19 advice hub was developed, and we introduced a site wide COVID-19 banner for direct access.
 - Weekly e-newsletter shared essential updates quickly with 13,000+ industry across Scotland – stepped up during COVID-19 surges.
 - Webinar programme provided support to businesses so they could develop their own strategies to rebuild and recover.
 - We had many press enquiries in the first few weeks and months as well as continuously creating corporate lines in an ever-changing landscape
 - Produced effective and emotive films, complementing our activity, that were sensitive to the situation.
 - Get Tourism Ready campaign supported businesses to restart safely.
 - Delivered 14 funding streams on behalf of the Scottish Government.
 - Mini campaigns engaged with media, tourism businesses, events industry and visitors.
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Measurement, evaluation and impact:

INTERNAL

- Staff survey singled out communications for keeping spirits high and informing and motivating staff.
- 97% felt the organisation responded well to the workplace challenges during the crisis.
- Overall engagement increased by 6 points.
- 445 stories on our intranet with more than 110,000 views.
- 150 all staff emails sent.
- 22 Elevenses (webinars) with 860 attendees.
- Yammer - in the first two weeks of working from home, posts jumped by 333%, the number of read messages by 164% and the number of liked messages by 290%.

EXTERNAL

VisitScotland.org

- Over 1.4million views of COVID-19 content.
- Our 'supporting your business' section has seen a 741.6% increase in views (05/02/20 – 29/06/21).
- Published first COVID-19 page on 05-02-20, more than a month before the first lockdown, and since then published almost 450 pages and 300 articles related to COVID-19.
- Year-on-year increase in views of more than 200% (01/04/20 – 31/03/21 compared with 01/04/19 – 31/03/20). New users increased by 120%, with the COVID-19 hub most popular.

Media

- 3,500 pieces of coverage with a reach of 388 million.

Social media

- Twitter engagement – 6.3million as it became a key channel for getting news out quickly.
- LinkedIn – 246 blogs and stories posted, resulting in over 1.1million impressions, 3,695 shares and average engagement of 5.27%. Gaining over 11,000 new followers
- #HameTownTourist: achieved 202,000 followers with 267,160 impressions
- #Take5ForTourism: reached 2.1million
- #AWindowOnScotland: 163 items of coverage, reaching approx 8.7million

COVID-19 Tourism Insider: 40 enewsletters to 13,000+ contacts. Highest open rate 51% / highest clickthrough 40%.

Webinars: 50 webinars, reaching over 12,000 people

Industry funding

- VisitScotland.org traffic spiked early in 2021 with 14 new funding programmes launched
- From Jan-Mar 2021 we saw over 160,000 views of the funding section and received over 5,000 applications via newly developed digital forms
- Over £80million of funding distributed to businesses in need

Get Tourism Ready

- more than 82,500 views of VisitScotland.org pages
- 9,000 businesses signed up for We're Good to Go Scheme
- 6,000+ views of reopening webinar
- Enews: open rate - 41% / clickthrough's - 34%
- Press reach via TV, radio, printed and online press – 15.6million
- June 2020: Twitter channel saw 72,000+ impressions in just one day.
- LinkedIn: 5.7% engagement and the most successful post had 13,160 impressions.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):

Provided
