



Spending smarter online

Are you dragging the chain in marketing your business online? LAWRENCE SMITH says it's time to wake up and catch up, or risk missing out.

printing brochures and traditional advertising, while our audience has moved online.

Anecdotally it would appear that many tourism businesses are spending only 5-10 percent of their marketing budget online.

By contrast, the Ministry of Tourism's Regional Visitor Monitor indicates the Internet is the primary source of information for domestic travellers, with 40 percent actually booking online and growing.

How much money and time does your business spend on this firmly established distribution channel? Not enough probably.

Compared to offshore efforts, it's clear that the tourism industry here needs to do a better job online.

Tourism New Zealand is providing some leadership with a more interactive direction and more adventurous online marketing initiatives. Air New Zealand has also been breaking new ground online, with over \$1 billion of airfares now booked directly.

However this also isn't about increasing marketing budgets. It's about spending what you have in a smarter way.

In most cases it means re-evaluating where you spend that money and redirecting a good portion of it online. If your market is online it makes sense to spend most of your precious marketing budget there also.

A good start is evaluating your own website.

How many businesses truly stand back and look at their websites from the consumers' eyes? The first impression your business makes isn't at the front door, it's in your customers' living room, and many

would be shocked by the first impression they make. However, your online marketing should encompass a video variety of components.

Consider the following:

1. Appoint an "online manager" - create a position or engage your web agency.
2. Ensure the design and content of your website is frequently updated.
3. Develop more engaging and relevant multimedia components for your website.
4. Participate in "social media" and monitor/respond to bloggers.
5. Ensure your web site is optimised for search engines.
6. Develop a linking campaign to/from other websites.
7. Spend time maximising online promotion by ensuring your listings are updated on local travel sites. Many of these offer free listings.
8. Pay-per-click advertising, like Google Adwords.
9. Collate and analyse your statistics to help understand your site and the market.
10. Spend more time online as a consumer, understand what people look for and how they search. Are you visible?

If you keep spending your marketing budget in the same way, expect the results to be the same or worse. The pace of change is accelerating and new businesses are succeeding online because they are spending differently; they are threatening your market share.

It's time to start making changes and increasing marketing spend online to appropriate levels, otherwise you'll have no-one to give your glossy brochures to.

Lawrence Smith is the "Chief Cabbage" at Cabbage Tree Creative, a web and software development company specialising in tourism solutions online for more than 10 years. www.cabbagetree.co.nz

MOST people in the tourism industry realise that the internet is vitally important to their business. It's the key driver in changing buyer behaviour for information gathering and purchasing travel products of all kinds.

Despite this consensus, there is also considerable lethargy from the tourism industry to invest properly in marketing online. Seven years beyond the millennium, we still see 20th century marketing plans dominate the industry. It's time for the industry to wake up and catch up.

It's a fact that most of your visitors have turned to the internet to research your product and destination. It might also be true that online bookings account for 50 percent plus of your total sales and for many tourism businesses it now does. However, many businesses have yet to make a shift from traditional marketing to online marketing. We're stuck in a rut of