Implementation Guide:

Digital Toolkit for Tourism Businesses

COVID-19 Recovery Strategies

Introduction

Since the onset of the global health crisis in March 2020, the tourism sector has experienced a period of prolonged hardship. Destinations around the world have had to dramatically pivot standard business operations and future developments as the pandemic continues. As a critical economic sector, it is imperative for tourism businesses, destination management and marketing organizations, and governments to work together to find creative solutions that can safely support visitors returning and contributing to local economies once again.

The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies (GW IITS) have partnered to develop practical tools and resources to support tourism industry leaders as they navigate the recovery process. The project was spearheaded by Monica Schmidt and Beth Wright from GW IITS, along with a team of graduate student consultants.

The Implementation Guide that follows is designed to support Destination Organizations (DO) in the roll out of the **Digital Toolkit for Tourism Businesses**.

Purpose: Why have a digital toolkit?

The global pandemic has accelerated the importance of sound digital strategies for destinations and tourism enterprises. Consumers are increasingly turning to digital channels, as they have been more isolated and less mobile over the past several months. With time spent online increasing, consumers have more time to look for travel inspiration. Tourism businesses that have established a strong digital presence are better positioned to remain top of mind as tourism begins to rebound. During the extended recovery period, improved digital strategies can help to instill consumer confidence through the booking process and enhance the guest experience.

For many small to medium tourism enterprises in the Caribbean, digital strategies were not an urgent priority before the pandemic. As the online (and increasingly mobile) marketplace gains importance, these businesses face the challenge of improving the visibility and reputation of their businesses online. To this end, the enclosed Digital Toolkit is specially designed to meet the needs of these small to medium sized tourism businesses throughout the course of the recovery period.

Audience: Who benefits from the toolkit?

Anyone who works within the travel and tourism industry will benefit from the information provided in the digital toolkit, but the following groups will find the toolkit particularly useful:

- Small to medium sized travel and tourism businesses: accommodations, restaurants, event venues, attractions, tour guides, tour operators, parks and recreation areas, etc.
- Destination management and marketing organizations and trade associations: Industry Associations, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, among others, can distribute the digital toolkit as a resource for their industry members.

Partners: Who is Involved in distributing the toolkit?

Industry associations should consider taking the lead on the launch and distribution of the digital toolkit, as they have direct industry ties through their membership bases.

The destination's tourism board (or the organization responsible for marketing) may also play a central role in promoting the digital toolkit as a marketing resource for industry partners.

The CTO will play a supporting role, providing direction and guidance.

Timeline: What is the anticipated time frame?

While the digital toolkit is ready for immediate distribution, it is recommended that destination tourism leaders wait to distribute the materials to tourism businesses until a formal roll-out is planned. This may take 1 to 2 months to arrange.

Ongoing training webinars should occur in the 3 to 6 months following the launch of the resources.

Process: How is the toolkit rolled out?

Prior to distributing the digital toolkit, industry associations may consider hosting a webinar to alert their members to the new resources, and to explain the utility of the digital toolkit.

Industry associations can make the toolkit widely available by publishing it to their member website, and by emailing the toolkit and training videos directly to members.

Following the initial launch and distribution of the toolkit, association leadership can host "office hour" sessions with members to answer any questions about the toolkit.

Lifecycle: What are the next steps?

Destinations may find that the digital toolkit can serve as a starting point for larger digital projects or strategies. The destination's tourism board should be involved in identifying specific areas of need on which to focus for future digital capacity building projects.

Industry associations may consider hosting follow-up webinars, or "deep dives" on specific topics covered in the toolkit.

The digital toolkit framework can be repurposed throughout the recovery process from COVID-19, as the situation for the travel sector improves.

Digital Toolkit Structure & Components

The Digital Toolkit for Tourism Businesses includes six sections, all of which are considered essential to developing sound digital marketing strategies.

Digital Toolkit Outline

I. **Situation**
  A. Latest consumer sentiment
  B. Call to action to embrace digital strategies
II. **Content & Messaging**
  A. "Top 3" messaging themes during the pandemic
  B. Content ideas specific to small businesses in the Caribbean
III. **Website Best Practices**
  A. Website updates for COVID-19
  B. Building consumer confidence through website content
IV. **Social Media**
  A. Best practices for organic social media
  B. Optimizing paid social media during the pandemic
V. **Online Business Listings**
  A. Improving business profiles during COVID-19
  B. Increasing exposure of business profiles
VI. **Digital Technologies**
  A. Guidelines for informed digital technology decisions

Action Checklist

Before Digital Toolkit Launch

❏ Identify the tourism industry organizations and leaders that can support the roll-out and distribution of the toolkit to tourism businesses. Trade organizations, in particular, are well-equipped to assist.

❏ Plan and host a webinar to announce the roll-out of the new digital toolkit.

❏ Create a press release to announce the launch of the digital toolkit, and distribute to relevant tourism industry organizations

During Toolkit Launch

❏ Work with tourism industry organizations to ensure that the digital toolkit is published and featured prominently on industry association websites

❏ Based on feedback from the initial roll-out, consider hosting follow-up Q&A webinars to discuss the content of the digital toolkit

Post-Launch

❏ Solicit feedback on the digital toolkit directly from tourism businesses

❏ Track digital toolkit interaction activity (website clicks, time spent on site, open rate, etc)