

YOUR GUIDE TO MARKETING IN THE 5 STAGES OF TRAVEL

Understanding the '5 stages of travel' to make the most of your brand's marketing by addressing the needs of your audience.





FOUNDATION FOR MARKETING:

A TRAVEL CYCLE

Tourism and travel is the second most common reason why people use the internet. It makes sense; it is an incredibly fast and (usually) reliable way of sourcing information about travel destinations and making the necessary bookings – especially if you are going somewhere new or far away.

And because the internet is so highly utilized for travel and tourism, Google spent two years researching the human travel experience. **They found that we almost all go through 5 key stages of travel: dreaming, planning, booking, experiencing, and sharing.**

With the tourism industry embracing digital trends and technologies, tourism businesses have an opportunity to leverage the 5 stages of travel to get more out of your communications and campaigns. If you skip any of these stages, you run the risk of limiting your reach, your impact and your results.





IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE CONSIDER:

How to spark a traveller's dream

How to give them the right information for research and planning

How to make their booking experience easy

How to provide a great travel experience

How to prompt them to share their experience, and in return, spark the next

These 5 stages of travel are the key building blocks for effective marketing for travel, tourism and accommodation businesses.



PREPARE FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

Before we walk you through the 5 stages one by one, it's important to understand how to prepare an advertisement or a promotion—which we call a 'campaign' in marketing.

STEP ONE – YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

First and foremost, it is important to clearly identify your target audience. Refine it based on gender, age, location, and even what they do on the weekend. Think about what their niche and special interests are so that you can connect and really speak to that audience.

Example: My target audience is couples aged 25-35 who have no children, a sense of adventure and love the outdoors.

STEP TWO – YOUR KEY MESSAGE

Secondly, identify your key message. The message you want to convey needs to be laser focused to that audience, using the language and tone that resonates with them. You might choose to use emojis in your content if your target market is youthful and/or playful, but you might avoid emojis if your market is retirees. Make sure you select images or videos that are aligned. For example, if you are targeting young couples with no children, take the children out of your imagery and include a couple instead.

Example: Discover adventure in the heart of the mountains.



STEP THREE – A CALL TO ACTION & LANDING PAGE

Next, you need to be clear on the action that you want your audience to take.

- **Do you want to drive them to your website to find out more?**
- **Do you want them to book right away?**
- **Would you like them to sign up to your newsletter in anticipation of a future campaign?**
- **What does your success metric look like and what is the Call to Action (CTA) that matches that?**

Next, you need to be clear on the action that you want your audience to take.

If you're going to spend money to engage your audience online, you also want to be sure that you drive people to the right page on your website and have a converting landing page in place. Make it as simple as possible for the customers – this will improve the success and return on investment of your campaign.

Example: Sign up now to be the first to hear about our upcoming winter specials



HARNESSING THE 5 STAGES OF TRAVEL



STAGE 1

DREAMING

Every holiday starts with a dream. The dream is what propels the potential customer through the buying cycle. This is the stage that is emotionally driven—and emotions are sparked visually, so tactics or tools that can generate emotion will draw travellers to your business.

For this reason, Facebook and Instagram are your friends. An image speaks a thousand words; a video speaks a thousand images. Try to interrupt people's days and make them stop scrolling by sharing amazing images and videos of your offer.

A quick and easy example would be to take your mobile phone, hit the time lapse button and take a video of 15 to 20 seconds of the morning sun lighting up your vineyard. Post the video on Facebook and Instagram with a caption like “nothing like waking up in Blenheim with the sunrise on the vineyard.” If a video is difficult for you, just take a beautiful photo.





THERE ARE A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT WAYS YOU CAN PRESENT YOUR POSTS.

On Facebook, you can use carousels, slideshows, videos, weather ads, Facebook live or a tactic called Custom and Mirror Audiences

On Instagram, you can play with stories, slideshows, videos or reels

Other strategies like uploading videos to YouTube or creating pins and boards on Pinterest are effective as well

CHECK OUT OUR PINTEREST EBOOK FOR MORE ON THIS!

TikTok, blogs, email marketing and your website are also channels worth paying attention to

If you're struggling for ideas, there are some great, user-friendly content creation tools available to help during the dream phase. The first one is [Plotagraph](#), which is used for image animation. Another tool is [Canva](#), which can be used to create eye-catching images with text.

TIP: Whatever you choose to post in this dreaming phase, we recommend updating your social media at least three times a week.



STAGE 2

PLANNING

This stage is when a traveller will decide whether or not to purchase from your tourism business. The average traveller visits over 20 different travel websites before making a booking, so this is where intentional marketing plays a crucial role—you need to give your audience the confidence to book.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Travellers are usually searching using specific words that capture what is important and relevant to them. To be seen where your target market is researching, work on your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) by completing keyword research and incorporating meta tags or alt tags. Quality blogs that include your keywords are also extremely useful at this stage.





GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE

We also recommend using your Google Business Profile (previously called Google My Business) and ensure all your information is up to date. This is important when people are looking for details to book, such as contact information and business hours, your website, and it shows that you are still operating.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Other strategies for this phase might include posting informative carousels and videos on Facebook, sharing informative videos on YouTube, and utilizing TripAdvisor to upload fresh images and acknowledge reviews. Any activity that supports your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and demonstrates that you provide great service can help to influence a customer's booking decision.

You can also use Google Ads and remarketing strategies during this phase to keep booking top of mind for your audience.

Some final tips include: providing fresh images to Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) where you have listings, and setting up Google Alerts so that you know what people are saying about you.



STAGE 3

BOOKING

Once you've hooked the travellers with the dream and given them the confidence to book, it's important that you don't make them think twice! At this stage, the usability of your website and your booking engine is critical.

SOME QUICK TIPS:

Ensure your website is responsive so people can book from any screen: mobile, tablet, desktop or smart TV. Use commonly used terms in your website navigation to minimize any chance of confusion

Implement a real time reservation system with clear and actionable 'Book Now' or CTA buttons throughout the purchase path

Make it easy to access cancellation and refund policies

Consider implementing an online instant chat function

Your booking engine should be mobile friendly, quick and easy to book on, and include options to upsell

Set up the Facebook booking widget and TripAdvisor booking – and make sure these complement your brand



STAGE 4

EXPERIENCING

This stage is all about you, your staff and your product! It's now that you need to ensure every person has a positive experience and leaves with a smile on their face. The experience you create for your customers impacts your online marketing, regardless of whether it is good or bad!

INSPIRE CONTENT

Look for ways to encourage photo taking during their time with you. According to Forbes, 80% of travel is booked by women and 90% of the photos taken on a holiday are taken by a woman. When you see a woman taking a photo, offer to help her take it so that she is inside the photo. This leaves a good impression and there is a better chance that she will share the photo if she is in it.

CREATE AWARENESS OF YOUR CHANNELS

You should also promote your social media channels during the experience to prepare for the last stage of travel. Encourage your guests to help you share posts on social media and send post-booking communications that include a 'thank you' note.

In post-booking emails, ask them to hit 'reply now' if there is anything they think you could improve, and to help you by leaving a review on the platform of their choice - include links to TripAdvisor, Facebook and Google My Business.



STAGE 5

SHARING

Sharing isn't simply the last step; it is part of the travel cycle and just as important as steps 1-4. When customers share their positive travel experiences with your business, your brand recognition increases, your reputation improves, and you have the opportunity to get noticed by more people in your target audience.

Fun facts: 52% of Facebook users surveyed said their friends' photos inspired travel plans (source: Adweek – Social media and travel go hand in hand). And in 2022, Tripadvisor announced they reached a staggering 1 billion review count.

As mentioned in stage 4, it is important to encourage your guests to share and follow you. You can provide in-room prompts to remind them to follow or share and let them know that you're available to help with photos.





SOME OTHER GREAT WAYS TO ENCOURAGE SHARING INCLUDE:

Promoting your hashtags and sharing links to your social media and TripAdvisor accounts on your website

Creating social contests seeking User Generated Content (UGC) to encourage people to engage

‘Like’ and reply to customers’ posts and reviews; seize this opportunity to have a conversation with them to encourage the next person to share also.





A FINAL NOTE

Try to remember that you're also a customer. You've probably been on a holiday or and you've gone through the exact same process as your customers.

Within the travel space, you've had a dream, you've done the research, you've made it a reality by booking, you've experienced it and you've talked about it with your friends and family.

At the end of the day, you're human, so be authentic, be true to your brand and to yourself and connect with your customers just like you would connect with any other human.

If you need any further assistance or information from our digital marketing experts at Tomahawk, free feel to connect with us! [Happy marketing!](#)

CONTACT US



+64 (0) 9 969 0080



getintouch@tomahawk.co.nz