



Travel Marketing - Working With Small Budgets

By Edward F. Nesta

Travel Marketing - Madison Avenue versus Main Street

The [Association of Travel Marketing Executives](#) (ATME) presented "ATME's Marketing Issue Forum - Madison Avenue versus Main Street" at a luncheon on April 20, 2006 at The Yale Club in New York. A panel of respected industry travel marketing professionals provided their individual insight into - What are the best travel market strategies to utilize when working with a small budget?

Moderator Gary Sain, CMO & Partner, YPB&R, read the 8 different ways that people find out information about a travel destination such as #1 - recommendations from family and friends, #3 - Travel Guide books, #6 - TV, Radio, Newspapers, #7 - Web Blogs, and lastly #8 - Travel Advertisements, thus pointing out the positioning of Travel Advertising in the decision process. Gary continued with the statistics that 64% of people go on-line to find information about travel, and that 50% book on-line. An interesting set of statistics was that 76% of people read direct mail that is sent to their home, 43% of people find banner advertisements useful in their decision process, and 13% actually click on the banner advertisement.

There seemed to be a mixed message conveyed by the statistics, especially with Travel Advertisements coming in last on the list of 8 ways that people find out about destinations, but that 43% found banner advertisements useful, with 13% actually clicking on them. In addition, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of people who are buying anti-spam and pop-up blocking software, as well as signing up for the 'do not call' and 'do not spam' lists. So, Gary turned it over to the panel of experts to find out what works, and what does not work for them.

The 5 panel members discussed their specific marketing projects starting off with what works for them in reaching their customers. Well, it was no surprise that the synopsis for what worked was: from one panelist - heavy direct mail with outstanding results, as well as word-of-mouth; another panelist - a 350,000 opt-in email list that was growing at an exponential daily rate with a 7% conversion on products sold via email; a third panelist - heavy partnership marketing to expand the message, conservation of budgets while opening access to new markets; a fourth panelist - a move of marketing spend to the brick and mortar world and print advertisements; and the final panelist - traditional advertising for niche markets.

So, what did not work, well that may have been the biggest surprise as it ended up that the marketing success of one panelist was what did not work for another panelist. The key to each person's success was knowledge of their audience and targeting their message and the medium they used to maximize a return.

As much as things change, things stay the same; you still need to know your customer and create a message in a format that not only reaches them, but speaks to them. It was a very enlightening discussion as the audience heard firsthand on what worked and what did not work for different business structures; the secret was to be careful and not react and copy what the 'other guy' is doing, and to make sure that you are listening to what your customer is saying.

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