

Marketing Geelong & The Bellarine

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ABSTRACT

Geelong Otway Tourism (GOT) was formed as a marketing and advocacy organisation 15 years ago. At GOT our role is to achieve sustainable visitor growth from beyond the region through effective co-operative marketing and collaboration at all levels in the industry in a responsive and pro-active manner.

Our funding comes from a mix of local government dollars which are for administrative purposes, and from industry via membership, sponsorship and direct buy in for marketing campaigns. Funding is also sourced through Tourism Victoria and various grants. Every membership dollar we get from industry is tripled through our partnerships, sponsorships and grants.

We face the same challenges of many industries in the current economic climate. Our challenges and opportunities also include the new Ring Road connecting Melbourne and the Surf Coast, continuing to entice our major market of Melbourne in the face of great competition from other regional destinations and building Geelong & The Bellarine as a brand in its own right, distinct from the Great Ocean Road.

GOT operates two discreet marketing campaigns for Geelong & The Bellarine and for Surf Coast & Otways. The campaigns are based on packages, with tourism operators putting together value-added offers to generate bookings during the traditionally quiet shoulder seasons. These fully integrated campaigns encompass print advertising and a strategic PR effort, however in this age the digital marketing strategy is pivotal and includes a website, online advertising, search engine optimisation and electronic direct mail.

1. INTRODUCTION

Geelong Otway Tourism (GOT) is the regional tourism organisation responsible for leadership, development and marketing of the region including Geelong, The Bellarine, Surf Coast and Otways.

GOT strategies and plans are all underpinned by a commitment to sustainability, including the seasonal dispersal of visitors to the region. To address the issue of seasonality GOT marketing activity focuses on the traditionally quieter shoulder periods to stimulate visitation. Research has also identified the most profitable prospects for the region, intensifying the focus on high yield visitation rather than high volume.

2. CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

GOT and Local Tourism Associations worked in partnership with Tourism Victoria to deliver a tactical campaign with a total investment of over \$200,000. 46 businesses from all aspects of the tourism industry were involved, promoting their packages and value-added offers to drive bookings in the traditionally quiet months.

The campaign was targeted towards Roy Morgan's Socially Aware and Visible Achiever categories, couples in the Melbourne metro area aged 35-55 years.

A strong element of the campaign was industry packaging. Partners developed value-added deals to attract the target market and prompt a visit to the region. Promotion of these packages was a key component of all campaign communication.

Packages were promoted under the 'Hot Deals' banner and activity included:

- Hot Deals website
- Herald Sun print advertising
- Online advertising
- Email blasts
- Hot Deals brochures
- Media visits
- Radio promotions

3. RESULTS

To date this has been the most successful tactical marketing campaign executed by GOT in regards to exposure and generating enquiry, exceeding the unique website visitation of previous campaigns by 330%.

During the campaign period in 2008 a greater number of operators reported business being up at the same compared to the previous year. 66% of operators from Geelong and The Bellarine reported business levels were the same or up compared to the year prior.

Conversion has improved with an increase in the response to packages compared to 2007. Over 86% of businesses who tracked their bookings received business as a direct result of their participation, compared to just 56% last year. Some operators reported that whilst the specific package promoted in the campaign was not booked, the promotion still prompted enquiries during the campaign period.

The Survey of Tourist Accommodation data collected from tourist accommodation providers by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the June 08 quarter show mixed results in some key indicators. Whilst arrivals were flat compared to the rest of the state there was a considerable

increase in occupancy rates for Geelong and The Bellarine. Average takings per room night occupied were significantly higher for the region with an increase in takings per room per night.

3. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The 2008 tactical marketing campaign was very well supported by the industry. Operator buy-in was at record levels. This industry support resulted in a campaign spend of more than \$200,000.

Packaging continued to be an important feature of the campaign and the 'Hot Deals' branding was adopted across all elements of this integrated campaign to communicate a strong retail message to consumers. However the focus of the packages was not 'cheapness'. Some of the most successful packages were also the most expensive, demonstrating that packages should be priced for value and offer an experience. Support from Local Tourism Associations was a crucial element, delivering ongoing training programs to aid package development and conversion.

As the call to action for all campaign activity, the Hot Deals website worked well to deliver over 36,000 unique visitors, an increase of 330% compared to last year. Web advertising represented the entry level buy-in for partners at an economical \$165. Presentation of the packages online improved significantly this year, with effective use of imagery and a clean, fresh design. The overall measurability, cost effectiveness and success of the website represents an opportunity to be further developed in 2009.

Package conversion increased this year with 86% of partners reporting bookings directly from the campaign, compared to just 56% in 2007.

Print advertising in the Melbourne metro market was again a staple for the campaign. Inserts in the Herald Sun 'Escape' travel section supported by half page editorial and EGN placements caused a spike in website visitation and brochure requests. Partners reported strong enquiry and booking levels each time their packages appeared. A total of 10 advertisements appeared, with each advertisement featuring five partners.

Rented databases were used for direct marketing and were found to be very effective. Direct email blasts saw increases in website traffic and brochure requests immediately following their distribution. Click through rates of 57% were achieved, which is above industry averages. Once again, the measurability, cost effectiveness and results from these e-marketing activities make them something to be further explored in 2009 as GOT continues to build an enquirers database.

The Hot Deals brochure was distributed via the Visitor Information Centres and to enquirers opting in through the Hot Deals website to receive further information. Feedback on the brochures has been positive, packages were attractively presented with good use of imagery, however this is an element which could be delivered in an electronic format in future.

The public relations activity undertaken during the campaign period added significant value. A highlight of this included a MIX 101 radio promotion which generating over \$9,000 in value on air with a Great Ocean Road giveaway.

Feedback from industry operators suggests the campaign should be in market earlier in March 2009, with a strong focus on the shoulder seasons. Activity should be pared back to minimal online presence in the depths of winter.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Digital strategies delivered the strongest results and best return on investment:

- Unique web traffic increased 330% compared to LY
- Over 37,000 people viewed the Hot Deals site
- Email blasts delivered click through rates (CTR) of 57%. This result is well above industry average
- Online advertising was also a strong performer:
 - 1.2 million impressions delivered
 - CTR of 0.34%
 - Delivered leads to Hot Deals site at a cost of \$7

GOT will continue to conduct fully integrated marketing programs that address the shoulder seasons with consideration given to the following elements:

- Package brochure delivered in a digital format
- Up weight online advertising
- Expand Search Engine Marketing efforts
- Explore opportunities connected with social media including
 - Facebook
 - Twitter