



# Dream of Travel Writing

## How to Sell Blogging to Travel Companies and Tourism Boards

Today, we're going to be talking about selling blogging services to travel companies and tourism boards. I know that sometimes I chide you guys about falling down the research rabbit hole with articles that you're working on and I have to confess that I have definitely been in a research rabbit hole about this because I am currently up at our Retreat House and we're doing a weekend retreat on travel content marketing this weekend.

Let's launch in for today. In particular, I want to start by sharing with you some of these statistics that I've been digging up, both online and at some trade shows that I've been going to that are focused specifically on content marketing for tourism boards.

I'm going to begin by talking about why blogging now. Some of that has to do with things that are already happening that you may or may not have heard of. A lot of tourism boards right now are launching their own blogs that are explicitly blogs in terms of they're a somewhat separate entity from the main tourism board website. They, they have sort of a theme and a content mission and they are being updated regularly. As opposed to some things that you may already be seeing on tourism boards which aren't blogs. Which are itineraries and other pieces of content.

But the thing is, that both of those types of content we're going to look at today as blogging. I'm going to talk to you about why you should be selling blogging services to tourism boards, because it's a really great time for them as well as for travel companies. It's a really great time for them to be jumping on the wave of this type of service and content marketing for themselves.

Then we're going to talk about (because this is super important to understand) where the money to cover your expenses, as the person doing the blog writing, doing the content marketing comes from. If you don't have a really good handle on that, it's very difficult to discuss, whether it's a tourism board or a travel company, why your fee should be what it is. If you don't have a sense of the approximate amount of money that most companies are spending on this, what the return on investment is, and why they should be spending it, it is very difficult to have those conversations. So, we're going to look at the other things battling for tourism board's attention and how they make these decisions.

Then we're going to talk about how to put together the context of your proposal really. What types of things are you proposing? What are tourism boards talking about right now? What are tourism boards doing with their blogs? Why are travel companies adding blogs to their website?



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So, as I said in the in the description of today's webinar, this is really about getting you guys on the same page in terms of lingo nomenclature, but also like I said funding and trends with where these travel companies and tourism boards are coming from. I didn't put them all in the slides, and I might pop over and show you a couple as well, but I've been pouring through the annual reports of a lot of tourism boards.

Do you guys know that you can just go online and even for a tiny, tiny city like Ontario, California, find its exact budget in terms of tourism spending, as well as what its goals are for the year ahead? Do you guys know that you can just find that stuff online? Just go ahead and pop in the chat box if you do or not.

The thing is that I have been spending a ton of time pouring over these, pulling out trends, and what different companies are doing. The thing is that it has been really amazing to see, that not only are a lot of tourism boards investing in the concept of blogging right now, but they're investing hugely. They're investing and setting up entirely new sites. What's really great about the fact that they're already doing those investments, is that now they have the money available to spend on it.

How many of you guys were with us last week when we had Dan Gibson, from Visit Tucson with us? Just drop a yes in the chat box if you were there. If you weren't there, then you may have heard that Dan said, that they spent a lot of money last year on setting up a brand new website. That means that this year, he now has money to, more money available, to pay to commission pieces. When they first started that new site, he did a lot of the writing himself just because the budget was tapped out. But, now that the site is up and running and they don't have to pay for developers and designers and all of that, they have a lot more money to pay writers.

One thing I want to highlight, and I put this in the newsletter today as well, is that one of the things about this webinar right now is that I'm really, like I said, turning you on to the trends and the nomenclature in the way that travel companies and tourism boards talk about this.

So, while we're definitely looking at selling these services to these entities, I'm not going to break down the very specifics of how to put together a proposal, how to have that first phone call, but we do have those available from our January month of series of webinars on travel content marketing in our webinar library. So, that's another resource that we have available that I recommend you check out.



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In terms of my experience with this particular topic, as I just mentioned, I've been kind of far, far down the rabbit hole for the last couple months in learning about this. Both for our retreat and the program that I mentioned and also for a new book that I'm working on. I have also worked on these types of travel content marketing campaigns with tourism boards, with companies, also on an individual basis as well as with larger campaigns that go through third parties such as with Hertz and MasterCard.

For a while I was actually earning pretty much my whole, very healthy, travel writing income from this type of work. If you have more question on, you know, the nitty-gritty aspects of it, I definitely recommend like I said, check out the webinars.

Lets dive right in. Like I said, one of the first things that I really want to talk about why now. Why is this really the time for you to forget about, for the moment, (whether it is email, newsletters, or social media or anything else) and focus on selling blogging to travel companies and tourism boards.

I keep saying travel companies and tourism boards. I will talk about tourism boards for a little bit and then I talk about travel companies for a little bit. The thing is, that for us as writers, the writing of it is quite similar for both of these entities, but the way we need to approach them is different for each of these two categories.

So, this is something that I just pulled from some searching that I had been doing recently. This is from Travel Oregon. This is the state tourism board for the State of Oregon. They have recently launched a collection that they put out quarterly called Seasonal Features that they're commissioning freelance writers for. Now, one thing you'll notice on here is that they don't have a rate. I've cut out the rest of this page, which is quite long, but they have different things that they commissioned essentially from unpublished writers.

This freelance section here is something that's paid for, but what I really want to point out is that they aren't necessarily going out and putting out calls for writers for this. They don't have a job ad up saying Travel Oregon is paying \$175 per feature for writers for this thing. You need to find it, and you need to pitch them.

This is one of the kind of things that I've been seeing in a lot of the searches that I've been doing recently, is that there's more of these opportunities that are sort of in plain sight. The thing is, that like I mentioned, a lot of tourism boards are developing these and their annual report on that isn't going to come out until the end of this year. It will really, be you know like next spring. So how do you know about those? How do you know about those



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opportunities that exist, but aren't out there in writing. Whether it's on their website or otherwise.

As I mentioned, another place that you can look is in the annual reports. I'm just going to pop, I'm going to open another one just to show you for a second, because I want you to see what these annual reports look like.

We're going to look at the one that I mentioned earlier even tiny, tiny places have these like the Greater Ontario California Convention & Visitors Bureau. I got this from their website. They're typically in PDF, but they also have some that are very interesting with graphic layouts online, but you can typically always find a PDF to go through.

As we skim through here, you'll see there's a lot of president's messages, a lot of photos of people, but then they start to, like I said, break out their strategic plan. This one is really lovely, and part of why I wanted to share it is so that you can see how much information is in here.

They talk about their values. This is great if you are pitching a tourism board to know what is important to them from a values standpoint, from a strategic standpoint and from an overall vision.

They talk about what are their strategic anchors and what are their five-year initiatives. Then, they talk about what they've done before. One of the things that I really want to highlight here, and you'll see this with tourism boards when you go through these annual reports, is that room-nights bookings are one of the biggest factors by which they measure their success.

When we talk about travel companies, especially if it is tour companies, that ROI (ROI being return on investment) calculation is usually very closely related to booking with tourism boards, it is as well, but in a slightly sideways way because people are typically booking in the hotels and then tourism boards jurisdiction rather than directly with the tourism board so to say but still booking or actual money spent are important.

Any time you're thinking about pitching a tourism board, it's really important to remember that that's their bottom line. Their bottom line is hotel bookings. Now, why is this something that might be contrary to what a lot of us think about. Is that, specially if you're looking at your area or things near you, you might automatically gravitate toward talking about day activities or day trip or day trips nearby. But, it is really important to remember that room



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night or overnights are very important to tourism boards. That is really one of the things they want to push.

You might not realize this, but tourism boards are typically funded by all of those extra taxes that you hate when you go to a hotel. Like it says that the hotel room cost \$122, but then there's a 17% this tax and 5% this tax and sales tax, in the end it ends up being \$183 and you don't really know how that happened. A lot of those taxes go towards paying for the tourism boards. Now that's not to say that they promote hotels explicitly, because that's what pays for them, but that's an important indicator for tourism boards.

So when you're looking through a lot of these annual reports, that's a major factor that you're going to see. How is their room night booking have grown. You'll see on here, they say total ROI achieved 29 to 1. When they talk about ROI in the context of a travel, in the context of a CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau) or a DMO (we're going to talk a little bit more about definitions) but in the context of the tourism board, when they talk about ROI (or return on investment) they mean the amount of money they spent versus the total economic impact.

I'm not going to give you a whole economics lesson here. Honestly, I don't know/I think a lot of people can't tell you exactly how the total economic impact is calculated. But total economic impact is one of the other main things that tourism boards are looking at. So, this is the money spent in their destination related to tourism. This takes into account things like day trippers, restaurant bookings, tours, and all those other things besides hotels that visitors are spending money on.

One of the important things to look at here is that tourism boards are thinking about their return on investment in terms of how much money they spend proportionally to the economic impact.

Okay, and this 29 to one, I wanted to show you because this is a pretty common number that I've seen 29, 30, 33, these are the numbers that tourism boards are looking at. So, when we talk about return on investment with tourism boards it needs to be quite high in terms of the proportion between money spent and income. However, when we talk about travel companies, especially small travel companies (which are the ones that I recommend that you target) the relationship between what they are spending versus what they expect to get back doesn't need to be as high as a margin as it does with the tourism boards.



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Okay, so for travel companies like a 10% return on investment sounds very, very nice, more than that is great. But with tourism boards, you want to look at this 30%, but again, it's not necessarily direct bookings. This kind of obtuse number, it includes restaurants, hotels, tours, all sorts of different impact numbers, shopping, and thing like that.

Indicating one annual report: Okay, so this—I wanted to use again, this particular annual report as an example because they do go into a lot of detail on a lot of things and economic impact is one of them—so this is one that I recommend you download if you want to sort of start to use these to your advantage.

Again, this is the Greater Ontario Convention & Visitors Bureau. Another reason I wanted to show you this one, this had some really fascinating numbers in terms of their marketing impact that I wanted to share with you. They talk about their media coverage. They have this ridiculously huge number of Impressions. I don't know how they calculate that, we're not talking press trips right now so I'm going to leave that be, but what I want you to look at is their marketing numbers. They talk about different conferences that they have gone to and then they start talking about their website, okay.

Now they do have some room nights that are booked specifically through their website, for instance, you can book a hotel in Ontario through the Ontario's website. But check this out, okay, their total number of website visits is about 200,000. Now for a blogger that sounds great, but a tourism board that's actually on the low side. But you want to know what's particularly on the low side. Digital marketing, check this out. Indicating another page in the annual report.

On Instagram, they have 423 followers, on Facebook they have 21,000 likes. This is a huge difference here, right. So there's clearly a disconnect between what they're doing on Facebook, and what they are doing on Instagram and probably even on Twitter. If we go back up and we look at what they're doing with their digital marketing you'll see that a lot of their digital marketing is coming from this Festival.

We are going to talk a bit about different types of things that you can work with tourism boards on. Events are certainly one of them, but I really want to call out here and again, like I said, this is a great annual report. It includes so much more information, especially for a tourism board this size. Most of them do, but what I really want to call out here is the specificity of these numbers.



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If you look, so this is the Greater Ontario Facebook page, it has only 1500 likes. Which makes me think that this number has actually been created by adding all of these together. These other two numbers, the Instagram followers and the Twitter followers have probably done the same way. What this tells me is there's a huge gap between what this tourism board does in terms of its overall marketing and of the level of professionalism and just the overall ambience of the destination that projects versus what's actually going on on the web right now.

Why am I talking to you about these numbers, about social media marketing, if we're talking about blogging. Let's go back to original slides for a second. The reason is that to go back to something else that Dan Gibson from Visit Tucson said last time, sometimes he feels like he's blogging just because he needs something to share on social media.

This is incredibly important because a lot of (whether its companies or its tourism boards or it's just companies in other sectors) everybody knows they need to be sharing on social media right now. The interesting thing is that they are doing it in this backwards way.

They are saying, we need things to share on social media, and so they're creating things from scratch just to share on social media. Whereas, what's much easier, is to create content in one place, like a blog or some other page on your website that you then share on social media that comes back to that page.

One of the reasons that we want to get into blogging, we want to sell them at, want to promote blogging, and that want to use that as the focal point for our work with travel companies and tourism boards is that all of that social media needs to go somewhere and social media can't just go to a sales page. It can't just go, for instance, for a tour company, to their tour page because they're going to lose eyeballs that way.

One of the statistics that I dug up that I wanted to share with you is that customers want to see 4 – 7 pages on the website of the place that they are going to purchase from or go (if it is a destination) before they pull the trigger.

What that means is that all of the social that everybody so crazy about, it needs to come back somewhere. That's really one of the reasons that a lot of Brands, a lot of, whether that's travel companies or tourism boards are starting these websites.



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We're going to look at another, but first let's go back to what I have pulled up here. So this is from Las Cruces, New Mexico. This is what their marketing department had done in their previous annual report. They said one of the things that they did was that they built the current brand and they use this "Find Your Reason," which is the "Find A Reason To Visit" campaign.

The very first thing that they talk about is the blog. Then they talk about how they redesigned it to make it more user-friendly. Then they talk about the social media channels. So this is kind of the right approach. Is that you need to have the content on the blog for sharing on social media. You need to make it findable and then you need to push it out. This is really kind of the order of operations, order of tasks, the best way to approach it, the way we want to be reaching out with.

So, again with blogging, I talked about how a lot of tourism boards and travel companies are getting into it now. There are some very specific demonstrable numeric reasons for that. I pulled a bunch of statistics here, and these are all from HubSpot. If you guys are looking for places to read about content marketing or to find these statistics for your own proposal, HubSpot where these statistics come from, I really recommend. They pull together kind of a mega list every year of all of the statistics having to do with digital marketing, kind of in any facet. They've got statistics about SEO, the ROI of SEO, they have video marketing, they have Instagram and Twitter, they really have everything. Anytime you are looking for statistics to put in either your pitches or your proposals this is a place I really recommend starting.

I pulled these particular statistics for you because I really want to talk for a minute about how we show that blogging specifically is the place to start. I told you why, but how we show it is like how I said, tying back into the return on investment. In order to talk about return on investment, we need to think about what, like I said, what people are selling. In the case of companies that's pretty clear to know if it's a tour or if it's a hotel with sea views.

Tourism boards, like I said, it's a little more broad. Where their bottom line is measured in economic impact in room nights in a couple different factors but all of that relates back to leads. How many of you guys are familiar with the term lead, l-e-a-d, but not in the journalism context, in the sales context?

Also on that note, as you're thinking, as you're telling me yes or no if you're familiar with leads. Adrian has also mentioned that the Content Marketing Institute is very useful for trends and statistics, and that's true. There's a couple other ones that I recommended, I'm just going to put this in the search bar because everyone's going to ask me what I said, so the





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Content Marketing Institute, and then another one that I recommend is Contently's Blog The Content Strategist, and then like I said, HubSpot is a really good place below for content as well as for statistics. So I put all those names in there.

A lot of you guys are familiar with leads. And I know that some of you have backgrounds—for instance there is someone on the call today who is a travel agent—some of you have backgrounds in other facets of tourism that work with things like leads.

Leads are really a sales term that's not travel specific. It's really kind of business wide for somebody who could potentially be interested in, okay so we're so far away from the sale right now. A lead is someone who's not qualified or not sure, but their somebody who has demonstrated some interest in what it is that you're selling.

Remember like I said with travel companies, what they're selling is very clear and we can go on their website and figure out the price of that thing very easily. With tourism boards, lead is a bit more general term. What I want us to think about is that leads are the most easily measurable type of return on investment that we can talk about in terms of marketing. It's very difficult to track, you know, somebody came to this website or saw us on Instagram and then 6 months later they've booked a trip to this destination. That is very, very difficult to track. There are companies that try to do it, especially affiliate marketing companies, which have a lot of ways to do it and even they're not 100% successful.

A lead, someone who is interested has seen something and pursues that interest—that is much easier for us to look at. Some statistics around how blogging has an impact on leads, that I really want to share with you are very much to show that one blog post a week, which is what a lot of companies and tourism boards do, is not cutting it. Companies that published 16 or more (so that's basically every other day) blog posts per month. Got 3.5 times more traffic than companies that publish zero to four monthly blog posts.

Okay, now it breaks out into B2B and B2C. So B2B and B2C, if you guys aren't familiar, is business-to-business and business-to-consumer. What that means is, in a way when I talk to you guys it's B2B, because you guys have freelance business and I'm talking to you about how to impact your freelance business. Another way to think of B2B, is for instance, you know let's take, not "Office Space" . . . uh why am I blanking on the . . . "The Office," television show right, they're selling office products.

Everyone knows that they are selling, you know whether it's paper printers, whatever, anyone who selling office products is inherently selling them to another business.



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Whereas business-to-consumer is like Coca-Cola. They might be doing also some selling into restaurants in things like that, but all of the campaigns that we would see from Coca-Cola or Pepsi or what not, are all business to consumer. They are designed for one individual person who is buying one individual Pepsi, you know per day or per hour or however crazy their soda habit is, right. So, that is the difference between B2B and B2C.

One of the interesting things that I want to point out here is that B2B companies that blog 11 or more times a month have three times more traffic, three times more traffic than those blogging zero to one time a month.

For a B2B company, there's a bigger leap in terms of going from zero times to 11 times, that's a lot more posts that should be added. However, B2C, business-to-consumer company, this is the travel companies that we're looking at working with and also tourism boards which are reaching out to consumers. They have a larger leap. They get four times as many leads when they go from blogging 4 or 5 times a month (which is once a week) to 11 times a month.

What this means is that, for the travel companies and tour companies that we are looking at working with, even if they already have a blog, they're going to get a very significant jump in leads by adding fewer posts for instance than B2B, generally just by adding, you know, another block of posts a month, whether it's two times or three times a week.

Now somebody pointed out this interesting stat at the top which I was going to circle back to, which is compounding versus decaying post. What this means is something that, if you have a blog or you've worked in publishing context of any kind you're probably familiar with, it's the concept of evergreen content versus newsie content. This is something that I think all of us understand when you put in that context.

A compounding blog post, in this context, means something is evergreen. It means something that can be used over time. The reason they use the word compounding here is it means traffic compounds. It doesn't start and sort of peter off, because that is the decaying post. It starts and as it gains more links, as it has been around longer, the traffic rate goes up.

Essentially, what this post is saying, or sorry what this statistic is saying, is for these posts that we're looking at doing for travel companies and tourism boards newsy post are significantly less valuable than posts that deliver value over time, posts that are evergreen.



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We're going to look a little bit later at what type of content I would recommend that you proposed, but it's really related to this, content that can be used again and again and again regardless of season or year or whatnot is infinitely more valuable. One of the reasons I find a blog, a tourism board blog or a travel company blog, which is really focused right now without your input on highlighting newsy things or events that are happening in a destination or just the upcoming tour schedule of a tour company or other things are going on in the destination that the tour company operates. This statistic helps show them how that is not an effective strategy for them.

Let's talk a little bit more about definitions, the framework. I know we're having an MBA in travel content marketing right now, but I promise we're going to get out of the weeds in a little bit.

One other thing that I want to make sure that you guys are thinking about as you talk, not just to the travel companies and the tourism boards, but even as you talk yourself through what you might want to be offering.

The concept of a customer journey: the thing about a customer journey is, we are all familiar with because we all do it all the time, but with content marketing, which is what blogging is, but particularly with blogging, it is crucial for companies and tourism boards to think about how the posts that they're putting up fit in their customer journey.

Otherwise, like we said up here, otherwise they're decaying posts and they're a waste of the company or the tourism board's money to be assigning you that work. The way the customer journeys work, there's a lot of different metrics for this, but I like this one, because it's less buzz-wordy and kind of easier to grasp onto.

It starts with unhappiness. This is, for instance, but let's take a scenario, Labor Day is coming up, you have no plans. You really want to get away and do something but you are not going to book a flight. You live in a very active area or there's probably going to be a lot of people driving into where you live and other areas nearby. Essentially you feel a bit screwed.

You feel unhappy because you don't have plans for Labor Day. You feel like at this point you just probably are not going to make any. It's probably just not going to happen for you and you are unhappy because you have nothing to do. So the desire, obviously, is to be less than unhappy, it is to have something to do.



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What are your many options? Your many options are:

- Perhaps do something where you live
- To have a staycation
- To go somewhere nearby
- To get a cheap flight.
- Maybe you can get a deal on a train ride so you don't have to drive.

Then within that there's destination options, there are so, so, so many different destination options, right?

Then you eventually make a final decision. Whether that final decision is to stay home and do nothing, or you know, to rent all of the Harry Potter movies and have a big Harry Potter marathon party rather than go somewhere, or you find a deal on a B&B nearby that includes dinners and also a spa stay. There's many different things that could be your final option.

The final option is something specific that you've narrowed down, but that is the right fit for your desire given the many options that are available. Then after you check out reviews, talk to your spouse or whoever else is involved with the price, you finally decide on that final option.

Does that concept of the customer journey makes sense to you guys? Like I said, I like this one because it is not so buzzword heavy. There is a lot of different ways of talking about the customer journey that does have a lot of buzzwords, but this one is something emotional, experience based that we can all relate to.

The customer journey as it relates to blog content, what does that look like? Unhappiness is where inspirational content might come from. This is why Instagram has blown up so quickly as a major force in terms of social media and content because that photo that makes you feel for half a second like you're on a beach in Sardinia or something rather than sitting at your office or the air conditioner is blasting so high that you have to wear a parka in the summer and then feel like you're dying when you go outside and it's humid.

That little moment on Instagram helps with the unhappiness, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have a specific desire. There's a lot of content out there which is kind of vaguely mood lifting and travel-related that fits into this unhappy part of the customer journey.



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But what about the desire part, right? So when I talked about the desire, in the Labor Day example that I gave you, the desire was to get out. To get out of town for a specific weekend and do something.

People's desires around travel do tend to have a certain level of specificity. They can either be where they want to travel a certain week, that they want to do a beer tour, that they want to go somewhere with really great barbecue, that they want to do something with 12 family members, that they want to do a road trip. It has some specificity but not too much.

The types of things that fit really well into that part of the desire section of the customer journey are often roundups. Roundups can give you a lot of options, the next part right, they can give you a lot of options around the desire and help you start to get to that part where you are creating your own personal list of what those options are.

Good roundups for this would be, say your unhappiness is that you are getting married, and that you want to take a honeymoon, but like so many people these days it is very hard to coordinate the travel schedules around that. You really can't take two or three weeks off just, because of the nature of the job that you have and the fact that you are already doing travel writing on the side and you use some vacation days for that.

You just can't figure out how to take three days off or neither can your fiancé, but you want to have a vacation, a honeymoon vacation where you are doing something vacation like. You want something relaxing, something beachy but you just don't know how to make it happen because of the season or because of the prices or something like that.

You're unhappy because you want to have this thing. It just doesn't seem possible. So the desire then is to find an affordable honeymoon. This is where roundups of affordable honeymoon destinations just 2 hours from San Francisco or two hours from New York or two hours from Chicago come in.

This is where roundups are really useful and why they don't die. A lot of us complain about roundups. Especially people who have had their own blog for long time and want to write longer-form content and they don't feel like they understand why people just love the roundups in their blog and won't read anything else. But this is what is useful about roundups, they help people move from desire to many options.



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A lot of, especially travel company websites, not quite so much with tourism boards, but particularly with travel company websites, you see more of these roundup-style things that cater to desire moving into many options.

Like I said, the many options phase is where people now have an abundance of choice. They've gone from feeling like something is impossible to expressing exactly what it is that they want, and then finding different ways to fit into that desire. Now they have a lot of options. The thing about options is that you have to narrow them down. So this is where blog content that really talks about the nuts and bolts of different things comes in.

A really good example of this is itinerary content. Itinerary content right now is huge on tourism Board websites. It's so huge in fact, that there are entire, multiple different apps, that are developing to help people who are coming to tourism board websites put together personal itineraries based on sample itineraries that are on their website. Essentially replacing the concept of a personal travel agent, not just in general, but by allowing the tourism board itself to be your personal travel agent without actually talking to you.

The many options phase is really well served by two things, by itineraries and also by content that helps you know if something is right for you or not. That's particularly the bailiwick of the final option phase.

It's like I said, in the final option is where you think you have something and now you are starting to read reviews, you are getting into the logistics, and you are trying to figure out if this makes sense for you.

The final option phase, a really good example for this is for travel companies. Okay, so let's say that you have a service which does concierge travel booking. You do itineraries, you're like a travel agent except you don't have the actual license. You essentially perhaps have a blog that specialize in different locations. People start asking you for tips and then you said, "Okay sure yeah I can help you find your trip but wait, I'm doing this for free to much so let me start charging for it." Then you started charging \$150 an itinerary.

This is your business. So let's say someone wants to go, I can't remember if I said a city or not, but let's say someone wants to go to California wine country and they have seen that that is your specialty. They have hung out on your blog for a little bit. And they are trying to decide if they are going to choose you to help plan their trip versus doing it themselves or doing a tour or something like that, and they're pretty sure that they want to choose you.



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What type of content do they need now? Now, they need blog posts that will help them confirm that decision, so in this case, it might be testimonials from people who have used your services in the past. It might be details about exactly how you work. Let's say that they are in the final option and they are considering a tour company. So they might want to see details about, you know, when the company picks them up and drop them off. What they can expect in the middle. This is really the phase where you are addressing and clarifying expectations.

Like I said, there's a lot of different types of content that can go to that. Then the decision phase this is something where it is less about content and more about the shopping cart. Again, not so much that you're going to see on the blog.

All of these other phases, particularly desire, where there is a lot of roundups and happiness, like we said, is really well served by photos. Which can be on Instagram or Pinterest, are also on the blogs, also on Facebook but many options. Final options are really well served by various blog posts, whether it is itineraries, or these kind of explainers as they are often referred to now that often have a lot of nitty-gritty details.

If you really are into this idea of figuring out blog post ideas for the customer journey, another resource for you too (like I said we're in MBA class today so we're going to be resource heavy) is Deloitte & Touche. Which is a major management consulting firm, did a big study on travel booking recently. They come up with the concept of micro moments, which is another way of looking at the customer journey, which, like this one that I use, is very closely tied in with all of our personal experience and very easy to understand.

That's another place to look if you want to use the customer journey around designing specific blog posts that you can offer tourism boards. Regardless, I promise you 100 percent, if you bring up customer journey when talking to a tourism board or travel company about how you are planning their blog content, they will just start worshipping you. Because they do not have time to think about such a thing, but they really should be.

Let's get a little bit more into the sales part of this. The how, why, ROI, we talked about already, but I want to get more specific. This is from the Content Marketing Institute, which Adrian mentioned earlier. This is on a piece on the difficulties of travel content marketing and this is a quote that they had, that's not exactly a quote, so I just kind of quoted the article directly and it says, the wealth of channels (and by channels they mean whether it's bloggers, Instagram, or SnapChat, all these different things) makes budget prioritization difficult according to Neal Tornopsky, associate publisher of digital at Northstar Travel Group.



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One of the major challenges travel and tourism marketers face is how to allocate budget and resources against the many channels of travel. What are these, you know, budget constraints, right?

We talked about how social is something that a lot of tourism boards particularly, but also companies aren't measuring. They are measuring output, they're measuring the final numbers, but they're not necessarily looking at what's going into that and how their time is being best spent. Like what I said, way at the top of the call, the content that goes into that is fastest, is best served if it starts from a blog piece that can then be pivoted into multi-channel content.

I talked about how we're going to do a little bit of definition, this is kind of later after I've set a lot of the groundwork and terms of how CVBs and DMOs and everything think, but I say this every call and people always ask. So, I just wanted to get a little bit into DMO and CVB differences. Then I want to talk about earned and owned content, which is something that relates to this multi-channel issue that the gentleman from Nordstrom mentions that I'm not sure that you guys are all familiar with. But it relates to the difference between DMOs and CVBs.

I use the term tourism board throughout a lot of this call because I feel like it is a little easier to hold onto. In travel there's several different types of entities that might function as the tourism board for different destinations.

One is a DMO and I don't usually use this term quite so much as it's a bit more squishy. A destination marketing organization or a destination management organization, it can be either way, is not always a nonprofit or governmental entity. It can be that they sometimes use that moniker, but by and large this is more of a third party that is managing or marketing the destination on behalf of the local government or the Chamber of Commerce or even a tourism board. Sometimes there's a tourism board and also DMO which focuses on marketing.

There's a lot of different structures that this can take. Whereas the Convention and Visitor's Bureau is typically funded by some variety of taxes. We talked earlier about occupancy taxes and there's also other types of hotel taxes that can go into that, there's also grants or parts of city or state budgets that can go into funding Convention & Visitors Bureaus. But one of the things is that a convention and visitors bureau tends to have a very large portion of its activity around non-leisure business.





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What do I mean by that? Non-Leisure business, in this context of travel tends to be one of two things. One of them is group travel which is, you know, tours thing like that. Most importantly, a lot of it is meetings travel. This is really, really huge these days and I mention it often because it's a really important sector for you guys to think about generally.

It's also a particularly important sector to think about when interacting with any tourism board, because meetings business, you know, whether it's a small board meeting that does a lot of very expensive things or a conference with 3,000 or 7,000 or 20,000 people (I went to a conference in DC that had 200,000 people), these are a huge share of what tourism boards think about because it's more visitors in one conversation. You talk to one meeting planner and you get all of these visitors, right?

What about interacting with leisure customers? This is something that obviously both CVBs and DMOs have to do. But if you look at where their money demonstrably comes from, it means that that portion can often get less of their direct time.

Visitor centers, which we are all super familiar with, are the portion of the CVB or in some cases the DMO that does a lot of that face-to-face time. Visitor Centers exist everywhere and they're one of the resources for content that I think is least often tapped. I just want to take two seconds and say that if you are talking to tourism boards that are strapped for resources one of the best things to advocate is getting content from people who work for the visitor center.

When I say getting content, doesn't mean that they necessarily will be writing it. A lot of visitor centers are staffed with volunteers. Sometimes they are, you know, a former professors or other very well educated professionals who would be very apt to be writing that content and you, rather than writing all the content for tourism board can take more of the curation role of organizing the content that comes from those individuals. However, one of the things that the tourism information center (or sometimes called Welcome Centers) are the people one of the things that people who work there are really great for is questions that visitors are asking.

One of the main things that I like to do with all of my clients of the type of blogging nature that we're talking about, is ask them what type of questions their customers have. The people who sit in the marketing office at the CVB or the DMO don't always know.

They might have a sense, they might know what people are asking on the internet, but they don't really know what people who actually show up to destination, what those people care



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about. They know more about what prospects are asking but that doesn't transfer to the actual booking, right.

Again, just a note on this, but if you can get to the people who work in the Welcome Centers and figure out from them what they think people need to know about, that's a huge selling point and something often that these tourism boards haven't thought about.

Now, on the travel company side, like I said, you can just ask the owner because often the owner is the one interacting with the customers. If the company is a bit larger, ask them if you can talk to the people who are doing the bookings. For instance, if it's a tour company, the person who handles the email or other customer service.

Now let's talk about, like I said, these other two definitions which are related both to the type of entity and also to this quote that I had up here about how one of the major challenges of allocating budgets and resources.

How many of you guys have heard of earned versus owned media? I think I have mentioned this very much in passing in some past webinars and had people confused. So, I want to take a minute on this because, as you look at annual reports, like I talked about, or you start to converse with tourism boards and also with companies but generally with travel marketing professionals about their marketing efforts, this is really important.

You remember before, I talked about impressions and I said how the Ontario, the Greater Ontario CVB had a crazy high number from impressions. Then we talked about that ROI fact is about 30 to 1, both of these get into the difference between earned and owned media.

Earned media is when somebody that you haven't paid (now when we get to talk about press trips this is a little wonky) the idea is that, somebody you haven't paid, as in it is not explicitly an ad, has said something about you. That is earned. So, essentially, by being awesome, you, you know, in short terms, you have generated this publicity or this bit of chatter about yourself.

Owned media, however, is something that you have said. So, paid media is a third type, that we're not going to talk about, because we're not talking about advertising. The difference here, is a piece of content that you have created and distributed as owned media. A piece of content someone has written about you that has been distributed on a channel that you don't control is earned media.



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Along with paid, which like I said is not partial to the discussion right now, these three things earned and owned and paid go to the budget that CVBs and also travel companies are spending on their marketing. Now even the smallest, okay, even the tiniest convention visitors bureau, tourism board is spending, if not five figures than six figures on this and eight figures is quite common. The amount of money going into the mix, going to be allocated to these different things is big. We are talking about substantial numbers.

One of the reasons that I waited to say this and I talked about return on investment, and customer journey, and all these things is that I want, I wanted you to understand what the opportunities are before I show you how incredibly easy they are to get.

I was at a conference recently where someone shared some statistics from a very informal study that I am not going to quote cause the gathering methods were a little awkward, but the gentleman sharing it said a bit sadly, that tourism boards are only devoting, you know, 5% or 10% of their budget to working with bloggers and I was like, “Holy cow dude! Do you know how much physical, actual money that is? That’s enormous.”

Let’s make it even smaller, forget about 5% percent or 10%, if you just want \$500 a month, a \$1,000 a month to do some blog posts for a tourism board, that is a tiny, tiny piece of their budget. It is so tiny and so insignificant. The difficulty isn’t getting the money. The difficulty is to get them to have that conversation with you, in the first place.

Also, for tour, travel companies, like tours and activities (I want to just take a second, I keep talking about tourism boards and I know I said I was going to talk about both, because for us in terms of pitching they’re very similar, but the markets are different), I just want to take a second and talk about the size of the market, the amount of money we’re talking about when we talk about tours.

You may have noticed Airbnb has these new experiences. Have any of you guys seen this? I haven’t booked them yet, I’m kind of curious to do one, just to do it. But it’s not really my thing. I’m curious to see how that actually pans out for them, because I know they invested a significant amount of money in setting up all of these experiences.

But, a lot of us are probably familiar with Viator, right, because they commission writers. So, Viator and Airbnb experiences, are two more aggregator style examples of this tour and activities market. We are all familiar with the food tours popping up everywhere.



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If any of you guys have been to WITS or TBEX or anything like that you've probably been on one of these smaller tours popping up. There's haunted house tours, there's marijuana tours, right. The marijuana tour market is huge now. But the point is that the tour and activity market as a whole is picking up steam in this incredible way.

I pulled up a couple different statistics here that you guys can look over, perhaps already looked over. But I particularly want to pull your attentions to this last one. In the U.S. alone, there's approximately 67,000 businesses valued at \$20 Billion dollars in the tour and activity market.

Any time you feel like you don't have someone to pitch, we talk about tourism boards right, but these travel companies are huge and there are so many of them. So, this statistic goes on to say, this makes it the third largest segment of the travel industry, after air and accommodation guys.

So, that is not restaurants, after air and accommodation, it is not food, it's tour and activities markets, okay? So, this is a huge place for us to be doing. So no matter where you live or where you like to travel, or where your travel expertise is, there has got to be some sort of tour and activity company that lines up with that that you could be pitching blogging services to.

Let's get into the physical selling part. So, we talked about how you can talk to them about ROI. We looked at what the budgets are. We looked at what the options are. We even talked a bit about what type of content you can pitch them and how that fits into the customer journey so you can show them why they need that content.

What are some questions that you should ask yourself before you pitch or try to work with a specific company? Have they considered blogging? This is an interesting one I got to pitch, to review the other day as part of the one-off query critiques that I do.

It was a content marketing pitch and it was for, I'm not sure if I want to say the exact entity, but it was for a sort of boutique hotel / social club chain that exists around the world and it's a very recognizable brand it's not new it's been around for decades. It does very well for itself, they have, you know, multiple locations in London, they're in New York, they're really all over in the large markets.



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This was very basic pitch on, “Hey, blogging is really, you know, blowing up. Here are some blog posts that we could do for your for your location or for your company.” And the thing is that you have to start—anytime you’re approaching something of size and reputation and longevity—with the assumption that even if you don’t see a blog, on their website overtly, they have no doubt considered it. This means any tourism board, if they don’t have something that looks like a blog they have no doubt thought of it before.

What does that mean? It means even if you don’t see something there, there is some reason they have covertly started a blog or they have something that you can’t see that’s on a non-public link that they direct people to from their newsletter or something like that.

You should always, unless you are approaching a travel company and tour company that’s very new, like a year or two old, with the assumption that they’re already blogging in some way. That you might just not notice or that they thought about it and there’s a reason that they aren’t doing it in a way that you can see. Which means they might be working on it right now or something like that, but this is very important when writing your pitch.

For instance, if it’s a tourism board, if it’s that Greater Ontario one that I showed you before when we looked at the annual report, you can approach them with the angle that you noticed that their social numbers are much lower than their media impressions and talk about the importance of blogging in the statistics, in the lead generation, and say something like, “If this is something that you haven’t considered I’d love to talk to you about how we can get started. If you’re already working on it I love to lend my expertise about how to make sure it gets going in the right direction,” but never just presume that just because you don’t see something they don’t have it, okay?

Now, in terms of figuring out what should go on the blog or in your proposal, I talked about before something that you can do once you’re already, you know on the phone with them, or already talking with them, which is the idea of talking with whoever their customer service people are or their front-line staff at the Welcome Center about the questions they get from customers.

But what do you do when you’re just looking at approaching somebody in terms of knowing what they should be covering. I would look on their website and see what they talk about. Then go back to Google and put those things into search and see what comes up. Are they actually ranking for the search terms that they probably should be ranking for according to what they’re covering. And if not this is something that you can immediately jump in and offer to help with.



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Search engine results pages are SERPS. If you guys don't know this term, it's very commonly used. SERPS (I just put that in the chat box) are incredibly important in travel marketing right now, because there's a huge battle going on that you guys might not be aware of between Google and essentially everybody, which is that Google has started not only having the questions come in to Google, but it's also providing you with specific responses. So they're not just providing you with facilitation to the correct answer but they're trying to point you to the correct answer.

For instance, if you were to Google "what is the weather like in Ellenville, New York" (where the retreat house is) Google is going to take up half or more of the search results page, giving you its own weather diagnostics. It might pull out from its decided top search result a snippet, like a little clip of text, but most of what you're going to get is answers that are provided by Google.

How does this translate for travel? If you Google where to stay in blah blah blah place, it is going to match you out to a bunch of hotels that it is promoting through its partnership with Zagat guides or if you Google an attraction it's going to offer you Google's place to book that attraction.

Right now it is so much harder to get towards the top of the search results page simply because most of the top of page is provided by Google itself. So ranking well for different keywords is more important than ever. And you say, "Oh my god, ranking for keywords is not something I want to get into. They should go hire an SEO specialist." But the thing is that, I don't have these statistics in here because there is just so, so many, the thing is that right now, content, content marketing is the best way to rank for SEO. Not by writing, you know, keyword-stuffed things, but by writing content that informs.

Just as a statistic to throw out there, on average the results from the first page of Google search results for any search term, have 1,800 words on those pages. So what that means is that, you know long content is one way to put it, but it's really informative and complete content is really what is working right now. And then another statistic, keywords that are best performing and easiest to rank for right now tend to be four to seven words. So, if you guys have ever heard of the concept of long tail keywords, so that means rather than "honeymoons in Bermuda," you would be looking for "honeymoons in Bermuda in October" or "luxury honeymoons in Bermuda in October." Those are keywords that are much easier to rank for now.

These are the kinds of things if you were are looking at working with a company or tourism board you can look at what they think they are covering, what they think that people are



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coming to their website for. Then go back and see if that's actually happening. And if there is a disconnect then blog content that creates more pages on the travel company's or tourism board's website around those topics in a more informative fashion can help bridge that gap.

Now, I have something on here—did they need a sideways blog? So, this is an interesting concept that I have noticed kind of generally around the web that I have seen start to come to travel. Which is that companies have blogs about things that seem very peripherally related to what they sell. That they really, really push hard on.

I know I mention this often but a lot of you guys might be familiar with The Freelancer blog from Contently. How many of you guys know The Freelancer? Great blog, lots of content. It's around freelancing, but also general freelance writing. And that is a good example because The Freelancer, it's around how to make more money as a, you know, freelance designer and writer, what have you, but what Contently sells is content marketing services to companies.

So, having a blog about freelancing is very peripheral to what it sells. And it makes sense, because it gets writers to trust them, work for them, and so forth and so on. But it is peripheral to what it actually sells. A lot of tourism boards are starting to do this. And this is perhaps one of the best opportunities to get into blogging for tourism boards that don't already have a blog is to offer something peripheral. So, I showed you earlier on one of the, one of the very first slides that Las Cruces has this "Find Your Something" campaign or something like this. A lot of campaigns that tourism boards are doing now seem a bit peripheral. They seem more about, you know, you as the traveler and what you like to do. Or one of the things that is really pervasive now for tourism boards is to have blogs for meeting planners about how to plan better meetings.

I don't just harp to you guys about meeting planning because it is something that I have written about, but because it is a really big place for content right now. You can look at what other things your destination or your travel company that you are looking at, what else can they blog about that can help the people who are their customers in another way which is not directly related to what they sell but will build trust in that brand. Those are really great places to slide in where you can offer something that the travel company or tourism board hadn't thought about.

There's really a lot of examples of those, but like I said, some of the good ones are outside of the travel space. Another one is Adobe, which we all know is a creative, you know the Creative Suite. They have Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop of course, and Lightroom for editing photos. They have a blog called CMO (which is for Chief Marketing Officers) and it is all



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about how to be a chief marketing officer. As in, you know, statistics that you need, how to do measurement in analytics, how to make different decisions, trends, things like that.

Does it have anything to do with using their software? No. Never. They don't talk about their software but the assumption is that the decision-makers for an expensive product like Adobe, that's the best place to be, the best person to be interacting with.

You can think about where you're looking at, destinations and especially with companies, who is it they are really talking to and what else they need to know about that can be on their blogs. So for instance, if you are a concierge service specialist for California wine country your whole blog can be, you know, profiling interesting winery owners, talking about what's new, different vintages. Yes, that's about wine. This is a closer example but you're selling tours so it doesn't necessarily have to be about the statistics of those tours. It can be about the interesting stories that are out there in wine country that people should be coming to explore and your tours are a great way to do it. These are some ways to think about sideways blogs.

We talked also about the type of content you should propose quite a bit when we talked about customer journeys. I just want to reiterate a couple things here. Itineraries are really, really big for CVB blogs right now, for tourism board blogs. They are also relatively big for a lot of travel companies, but what's more important to think about is that other statistic that I mentioned on the last slide, which is 1,800 words. That's the kind of blog posts that are showing up on the first page of Google search results. Itineraries easily fall into that. Roundups do as well. Profiles can as well. Think about what type of content is really meaty and helps with different points on the customer journey.

Don't just necessarily think about, I really like this restaurant that's in this destination and I am working with a CVB blog, how can I write about this restaurant. Think about: how can I package that restaurant into something that is going to help customers at a certain point in their customer journey while also providing a very comprehensive look at something that someone coming in from search is going to be interested in?

So these are the different factors that you should think about when you are looking at what type of content you propose. Keep in mind that news doesn't work very well. Newsy things.

As I mentioned earlier that we were going to circle back to, convention and visitor bureaus really focus on events. When we were on the Greater Ontario annual report we looked at about these four or five different festivals that they do. Some things to remember, like I said, something to keep in mind if you are going to be writing about, proposing to write about, or





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are asked to write about different annual events, it is really important to look at ways to make that content evergreen so that it works for them year round.

I know we are over time and I really appreciate you guys sticking with us and I apologize again for the technical difficulties in the beginning of the call but we're going to have a new platform next month, and I am so excited. I just wanted to say something really quick about branching to social.

There is a big reason that I am saying that blogging feeds the social, but I am not telling you to do social, okay. Social media marketing / social media management—being the person to physically be available to respond to tweets and whatnot is a horrible use of your time as a freelancer. You do not sit at a desk all day, you do not want to sit at a desk all day, you should not sit at a desk all day and you do not want to get yourself into a contract which is going to limit your ability to do other work because you need to be on call 24/7 for social.

Now, accompanying your blog post submissions with text that is formatted for different platforms—totally. That is totally something that you can offer as an add on that costs more, as in once they have been working with you for awhile, you say, “Hey, by the way, why don't you pay me twice as much and I will give you all these other things?” Or you can work to train them to be better at sharing your posts, you can have meetings with them and their internal staff. But I do not recommend that you offer social media marketing, because it is not a good use of your time and it's going to infringe on all the things that made you want to get into travel writing, as in being able to travel and not be at your desk.

One quick thing as well on return on investment. I looked at this earlier in the call and I just want to make sure that I put it in very plain terms. For tourism boards and travel companies, there are two different ways of showing return on investment, okay? For tourism boards, it is about exposure—it's about eyeballs. It's about that eventual economic impact which is very difficult to track. So in the case of tourism boards you want to show that the money they are spending on you is significantly less. Like I said, one to 30 is a good ratio, than what they would pay for the same number of eyeballs through adds.

What that means is that it is very easy to go and check out Google on what the going rate for specific keyword is. See how much they would have to shell out to get a certain number of eyeballs on a blog post with that keyword just using Google adds verses saying but you would only have to pay me this much to write this post.



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With travel companies it is about direct bookings. This is very easy because you just look at the price of the tours and then show how that relates to the lead generation statistics that I showed you earlier, right. So four times more leads, etcetera verses your rate.

This is why it's good to go after more lucrative tours rather than, you know, a \$15 or \$25 barbecue tour. Say you are looking at a company that does safari's in Africa. I'll use those, because they are really easy in terms of price point and it costs like \$6,500 for one safari, okay.

They are going to generate four as many leads, by adding more blog posts, make sure that what you are offering is, let's say, you know, one fourth of one tour. And then we are looking at a 16 times difference, okay? So, you are pricing yourself so that you are significantly less than one tour and they are getting four times as many leads, so you look dirt cheap in comparison with them getting the business from these new leads that is being generated.

You want to make sure, and we talk a lot about, you know, pricing for your hourly rate and all these things but when we are looking at how to price for travel companies and tourism boards I recommend starting the thing about your pricing not just in terms about how long does it take you to do this work.

Start thinking about your pricing about what they can afford and what you can convince them of and then backtrack. So, if you are going to offer \$1,500 a month for blog posts – how many blog posts? How much time is that going to take you? How many photos are you going to put in there? Are you going to ask them to do the photos—whatever.

First figure out what is a good number for them to afford, to be okay with and then backtrack in terms with what you are going to offer, okay?

Thank you guys so much for joining us.

Adrian has a good question so I want to answer that for all you guys. “Are you suggesting to pitch blog posts up to 1,500 words based on ranking?”

I am suggesting to pitch blog posts of 1,500 or 1,800 words because that's what establishes authority and then that's what Google ranks better. So, it's actually more because that's what performs and works better for the end goals of having a blog, which is to get more bookings, and to build trust with customers, and so on and so forth. Rather than simply because it has a



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search effect. So, the answer is, is no I am not suggesting based on ranking but yes, it does effect that as well.