

‘Right now we’re seeing the industry doing more branding and awareness on the Internet. Now it’s not just about clicks and impressions anymore; it’s about engagement and interaction with the customer.’

— Ryan Bifulco, founder and president, Travel Spike

Even though many offers sell out in a matter of hours, Joyce says, the *Top 20* e-mail often has an extended shelf life. Recent focus groups hosted by Travelzoo have revealed that users save the e-mails and refer to them weeks later for destination inspiration or because they liked a particular company’s past offers.

Branding opportunities and Web 2.0

While online travel marketers certainly can learn a lot from Travelzoo’s marketing approach, there are other tricks of the trade for online travel marketers.

To learn more about these techniques, *eM+C* turned to Ryan Bifulco, founder and president of Atlanta-based online travel marketing firm Travel Spike. Here, he explains some additional online travel marketing tactics.

eM+C: What are the hot marketing trends in online travel right now?

Ryan Bifulco: That depends on the type of campaign. What might be good for an airline might not be as effective for a tourism board or an attraction or a hotel. But broadly, what’s really been hot in the last few years is search. Pay-per-click campaigns in particular are doing very well. But those campaigns are really good only for retail travel or as a call to action.

Right now we’re seeing the industry doing more branding and awareness on the Internet. Now it’s not just about clicks and impressions anymore; it’s about engagement and interaction with the customer. Rather than only advertising to an audience, you can actually have them participate in what’s actually going on, whether that means getting involved with social media or just creating a campaign that’s very engaging.

Seventy-two percent of folks in the travel industry have indicated that they will be spending money on social media marketing and/or social networking in the next 12 months.

Social media marketing is really about going on the offensive, leaving the confines of your own Web site and finding out what people are saying about you. And that’s different from social networking, which is more defensive, in that you’re setting up a space for people to talk about you in the safety of your site.

eM+C: How do you recommend companies go on the offensive with social media marketing?

RB: There are 70 million blogs on the Internet. It’s nearly impossible to monitor all of that chatter, but you do want to search for your name and listen to what others are saying about you. But going on the offensive means engaging with other Web sites, travel directories, podcasters, bloggers or social networks to see if you can exchange links or advertise on those sites.

eM+C: What Web 2.0 technologies is the travel industry embracing?

RB: We’ve recently built an interactive online game for one of our clients. That’s an area I think will see growth in the next few years. You’re seeing games that really involve the consumer in the marketing process, and you can have a really great branding experience, as well. We built our game for the Trade and Tourism Office of Portugal and the Tourist Office of Spain. People can learn a little bit more about Portugal and Spain, but have a good time, as well.

Another thing is podcasting. Recently we helped a client create a walking tour in West Hollywood. Consumers download this audio to their iPods, and we give directions like, “To your left is where Marilyn Monroe used to hang out; and over here to the right is where Guns N’ Roses got its start.”

They also can use podcasts, audio or video to give people a behind-the-scenes look at their hotels or at their restaurants or at their attractions. There’s a lot of fun ways to get involved in podcasting. **e**