

Direct Marketing

Entry: Send Your Self(ie) To Pensacola

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience included the top five visitor types and four top emerging origin markets based on current visitor research:

- Adventure Seekers: 25-35, 100K+, 6+ trips/yr, active on social media, outdoor
- Self Seekers: 25-35, 75K+, 4+ trips/yr, very active on social media, relaxation
- Bucket Listers: 65+, 100K+, 5+ trips/yr, history and culture
- Go For it Families: 36-50, 200K+, 7+ trips/yr, unique experiences
- Dream Trippers: 51-65, 150K+, 8+ trips/yr, leisure & culture, local experiences

OBJECTIVE

Research conducted in 2014 by Visit Pensacola showed several emerging feeder markets that represented promising opportunities for future tourism business. Among them, four showed very strong potential based on population, traveler profiles of their residents and transportation opportunities opened up by the recent addition of direct flights to Pensacola: Nashville, Houston, Chicago and Baltimore.

This was a prime opportunity to position the Pensacola Bay Area as a travel destination for families and couples in these markets and generate un-tapped tourism dollars. Identifying events that would attract high numbers of our target audience, we would take Pensacola in-market for a "first-person" Pensacola experience—and let the audience spread the word via their social channels. This direct sales campaign would take potential travelers from a one-on-one introduction to an interactive, immersive vacation experience.

The measurable goals we wanted to accomplish included: (1) increase our marketing database by at least 50% in order to communicate with potential travelers on an ongoing basis; (2) drive an increase in the number of visitor guide inquiries (a solid measure of intent to travel) by 10%; (3) to push Nashville, Houston, Chicago and Baltimore/DC into the top twenty feeder markets and, ultimately, (4) to boost bookings from these markets to help generate an increase of at least 5% in overall bed tax collections for Escambia County for FY2014.

IMPLEMENTATION

Social media's impact on the travel industry over the past few years is well-documented and, armed with extensive research of the target audience and their key influencers, a portable promotion was developed that would leverage the power of digital and social media to create engagement with potential travelers and influence their future travel decisions.

“Send Your Self(ie) to Pensacola” was an onsite social experience for local residents in our key markets, one that put them right in the center of a Pensacola dream vacation. With Visit Pensacola on-hand to personally draw them in, participants, armed with props such as sunglasses, beach chairs, paddle boards, a Segway, even a real Pensacola Beach lifeguard, posed in front of one of three giant Pensacola postcard backdrops, took a “selfie” and then shared their photo on their own social sites using a custom, trackable hashtag, #ExplorePcola. Visit Pensacola shared all of the selfies on their own social sites that reached an audience of nearly a quarter of a million travelers.

Visit Pensacola’s “Selfie” booths were strategically placed in high-traffic events and locations including the Nashville airport, Houston’s Memorial City Mall, the Chicago Air & Water Show and Baltimore’s Star Spangled Spectacular, which celebrated the 200th anniversary of the “Star Spangled Banner.” Pensacola’s Blue Angels precision flight team performed at the final two events, which were attended by a combined 4.5 million people.

With #ExplorePcola set up as a live feed on Visit Pensacola’s website and onsite giant monitors, selfies appeared instantly online and to passers-by. Freebies such as branded ChapStik, mini inflatable beach balls and packets of gummy fish, as well as free tastes of one of Pensacola’s signature frozen drinks, the “Bushwacker” (non-alcoholic version), were handed out to visitors, who could also take a free visitor guide, sign up for travel updates and register for a free Pensacola Bay Area vacation. The campaign messaging served to reinforce Visit Pensacola’s current “Loved by Explorers” tagline, and the promotion highlighted the diverse assets of downtown Pensacola, Perdido Key and Pensacola Beach.

RESULTS

The Pensacola Bay Area was exposed to a combined audience of more than 4.5 million potential travelers during Nashville, Houston, Chicago and Baltimore/DC Selfie events. At the time it launched, Pensacola’s “Selfie” promotion was well ahead of similar successful travel selfie promotions launched by New York, New Mexico, and in other countries including Canada and Australia.

Each of the four Selfie markets – Nashville, Houston, Chicago and Baltimore/DC – moved into the top twenty feeder markets by the end of the 2014 fiscal year, and each is still driving strong searches and bookings nearly a year later. (nSight travel data)

Pensacola Bay Area visitor guide sign-ups were up by 139.5% over the same period one year prior, and e-newsletter subscribers increased by 305.4%. Additionally, there was a 6.6% increase in unique visitors to visitpensacola.com. Three of the four Selfie markets generated the most traffic on Visit Pensacola’s Facebook page.

The most important measure, TDT collections, showed an increase of nearly 16% over the same period in 2013.

BUDGET/COSTS

Showcase Pensacola spent \$XXX to execute and promote Selfie events in Nashville, Houston, Chicago and Baltimore during a five-month period. This included \$XXX for overall campaign development, budgeting and creative messaging; \$XXX for materials and production \$XXX for hard costs.