

How small travel and tourism companies can market themselves effectively

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Day one of World Travel Market Africa saw Big Ambitions director of promotions, Natalia Rosa, share her insights into marketing for small tourism and travel companies.



Although not having a marketing background herself, but knowing how to market really well, Rosa assured attendees that they could feel better about the fact that even though they're not studied marketers, that they can still market their own small business successfully.

Sharing a loved quote by David Ogilvy:

“ You cannot bore people into buying your product, you can only interest them in buying it. ”

Rosa says that although small businesses don't necessarily come from a marketing background, or even when they do, they seem to think that the universe revolves around them, but it doesn't. Rosa says that, as a small business owner, it's important to look at your offering from the context of your customer, and not your own.

Getting yourself into gear

Firstly, Rosa suggests that you need to **figure out what it is that you do** and says that if you cannot stand in an elevator and tell a person in 30 seconds what is unique about you, your game lodge, your travel agency – why would they want to do business with you? "In your mind, you have to clarify what your unique selling points (USP) are. You need to figure out what it is about you that stands out from anyone else in the crowd. You need to be able to think about your USP from your own perspective and ask yourself: why is your company, your product and your services different to any of the ones that are your competitors."

What about your offering will entice a customer? Rosa says you need to figure why you're special and what's in it for the customer (what everything needs to revolve around), then you need to figure out what your brand promises.

The mistake that most people make is that they confuse their brand with their logo – their logo is not their brand. With references to brands such as Apple and Samsung, Rosa says that a brand is everything from the personality and values to the language you use when you communicate with a customer. "The logo is just what you see – it's the top of the iceberg. The real stuff behind the brand is the stuff you can feel. It's the warm and fuzzy that is influencing the customer."

Rosa then suggests that you should ask yourself **who are you trying to reach?** Who are you trying to encourage to visit your destination?

You really need to understand who your customers are and the space they are playing in - what ticks their boxes. "And then you have got to think: where do I find them?"

Rosa says that most tour operators or travel specialists think they need a Facebook page. Why? Because everyone has one. "Is that a good enough reason? It's not. Why would you spend five minutes that you do not have available on FB if that is not where your customers are?"

"Facebook is not the platform for corporate travel and yet so many companies are trying to get on that platform. For corporate travel, the right platform would be LinkedIn, for example."



Introducing multi-channel marketing: Rosa then says that you need to try and figure out where people are getting their information from. Where do they find the information they need to make a decision on where to go, what to buy and with whom? "This is how marketing works – a once-off advert in a magazine will never help you, ever. If you going to advertise via print or online, you have to do it consistently, or else people will not remember you.

"There are social media, there's radio, there's website, there's paid search (PPC), there are catalogues, there are even newsletters – newsletters are the most powerful way of doing marketing, still." If you have a database and you have a customer base, make sure to keep yourself top of mind, says Rosa, and try to get your customers to sign up for your newsletter so that they can become your best advocates and refer you.

The importance of cleaning house: Rosa says the last thing you want to do is invite someone to your party, but your house is trashed. A website that is full of spelling mistakes with stretched images inspires no confidence. It would be a good investment to pay for a basic website which would ultimately make sense to your customer, continues Rosa. "Create a beautiful shop front, a beautiful website and beautiful social media – it's worthwhile."

Rosa then shared why networking your existing relationships is so crucial to your marketing endeavours. "Think about who you know, who knows you, who knows someone else. If you had to leverage your existing relationships, what would those be? Think about the people who you do have a relationship with, that might be your customer, that might be able to link you up with a potential customer."

Community, brands and that expert status

Rosa then goes on to say that similar to networking, you might want to **connect to a community**. Ask yourself how you can get involved in your community so that your name ends up front and centre – by doing, for example, charity work or organising sponsorship for a golf day, you'll simultaneously be doing good for the community and getting your name out there."

Collaborating with affiliated brands: Rosa says that more often than not, travel and tourism companies have the same customer as somebody else that doesn't compete with them and provides the following example: "From a marketing perspective, I would market on behalf of my incentive, my incentive would be my customers. So I know Flight Centre is very

interested in wellness travel – so what do I do? I find another brand that works in the wellness space and I start working with them. I might offer a trip for a spa group, for example, where they can take their own community, i.e. have their own social media platform, their own blog, their own advertising, and I give you a trip and you then push my name out to your audience – it's the same audience as my audience, the same guys that I want to reach, but we don't compete. In this way, we're benefitting from each other. So think about who you can link up with, but doesn't compete with you."

People want to be able to trust you – they're fundamentally looking for that '**expert status**', but how do you get people to see you as a thought leader in the industry? Rosa suggests that you begin to make it a habit to comment on articles in spaces that you know has a large following, such as *Tourism Update* for example. "You need to know what's going on in your industry, you have to do the reading anyway. All you have to do is take that reading a step further and put your name out there: be brave and make a comment." Rosa then shares how people on panel discussions don't just become experts overnight – they become experts because they are willing to put themselves out there and comment on it all of the time.

Building your brand's credibility: Rosa says that joining an association should be at the top of your list of things to do – it would lend credibility and it would show that you are more than just a business. Also, registering your business on Google gives you a stamp of credibility as well (keeping in mind that your website looks super cool). "It doesn't cost you a cent to do. It's a bit tedious, but it works. So definitely get yourself a Google Business and then make sure that you have placement on your website – the things you have done before. In this way - if you still want to put packages together, or if you're a tour guide or would like to provide some sort of experience – your customers get to tell your story, promoting you through posts on social media or giving you a testimonial that you can add to your brand." Testimonials are a sure fire way to create the feeling of security for your customers.

"They say that it's really hard to get new business and really easy to get repeat referral business," says Rosa, and adds that **you shouldn't be shy to ask for referrals**. "Leveraging your existing customer base through newsletters is a great way to get referrals because birds of a feather flock together. If they enjoyed your experience, it's likely that their friends will enjoy the experience too. So, how can you incentivise them to refer you? Do they get a little discount or do their friends get a little discount – how can you incentivise them to tell your story, as opposed to you telling your own story, because it's a lot more believable when it comes from them."

Steering the marketing hub

Rosa provides a few tactics to consider when working through your websites hub, also known as your 'online home' – that's where you want people to come and visit you - and asks whether or not the tactics you are using are getting people to your website?

1. Content marketing: Are you pushing out content that's positioning you as a thought leader? It's about producing content that positions you as an expert in a specific space and you can do that through your own platforms, like your own LinkedIn Pulse. "It doesn't cost you a cent. If you don't have a blog on your website, used LinkedIn Pulse, because there's a community that goes there daily and/ weekly, provided that its the community you want to reach."

Also, **earned platforms** - Are you partnering with influential bloggers who can promote your business (remember that they need to be paid)? And how are you managing your **owned platforms** – the things like your website, blog and newsletters?

2. Digital marketing: Travel and tourism is, unfortunately, a competitive space, says Rosa. She says that she wouldn't necessarily make use of Google ads as big companies would outbid you all of the time and says that **email marketing** is the most powerful route you can take.

Also, you need to make use of the right **key words** and **long phrases** when you're looking to come out on top on of a Google search as Google regularly changes its algorithms. Backlinks are also an essential part of your marketing endeavours, but you need to make sure that you link to credible websites.

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