

WE WILL TRAVEL AGAIN

What travel marketers should do today
to be successful **post-crisis**

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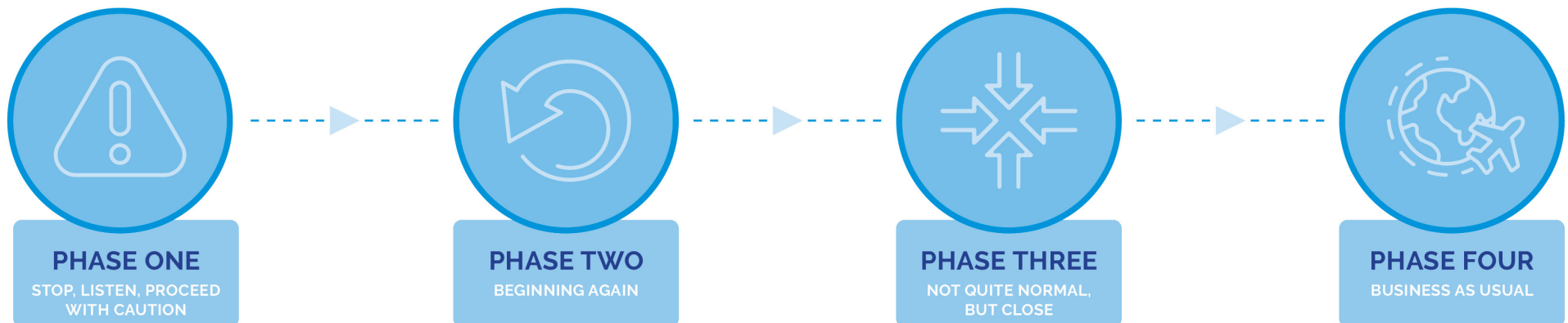
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Introduction

COVID-19 is here and for most of us, we've thrown our carefully planned 2020 marketing playbook out the window. What worked three months ago is now either tone-deaf or irrelevant given shelter-in-place orders, closed public spaces and beaches, and locked bars and restaurants. As marketers though, we know there's a moment of quiet in an otherwise crowded consumer-messaging space. A moment to connect with travelers when they need and want us most. We have a unique opportunity. An opportunity, to offer hope -- for future trips, and summer fun; for dream vacations, and permanent destinations. With some drive and determination, the timing has never been better to position our brands, destinations and attractions for success when this crisis is over. How will you respond?

Instead of traveling, dining out and brick-and-mortar shopping, our customers are staying at home and consuming unprecedented amounts of content --

from social media to streaming sites to podcasts. 39% of consumers say they are reading news more often, 29% say they've upped their social media consumption and 28% say they are purchasing more online (Mittnact & Gibson, 2020). Similarly, a vast majority of travelers, both business and pleasure, have reduced or eliminated travel plans from their Spring agendas creating a pent-up wanderlust.



In the South, bookings are down 90-95% as of early April 2020 and there are no bookings 30-60 days out for vacation rentals in most beach markets. At the end of February into early March, domestic bookings for Spring break showed increases as travelers cancelled European, South American and cruise vacations. But those increases went away as the severity of the virus impact became more obvious to consumers.

While this time is unique time, it's also temporary. Our travelers will emerge from shelter and cautiously, but surely begin to venture out in search of new places and experiences. The real question is, when that urge can be acted upon again, what can we plan now to be ready for the return of the travel economy? While consumers are locked at home, in Zoom meetings and surfing social media, what should destination marketers do to prepare themselves for success in the future?

Even though the crisis came up in an instant, our emergence from it will be gradual. Advance Travel and Tourism

believes the best strategy is divided into four phases. Each DMO's timing could be different. With sensitivity to the issues experienced by our target markets and a good understanding of the challenges facing our different demographic groups, DMO's can build their marketing plans today to ensure a quick recovery in 2020.



NO BOOKINGS

30-60 DAYS OUT
FOR VACATION RENTALS IN
MOST BEACH MARKETS



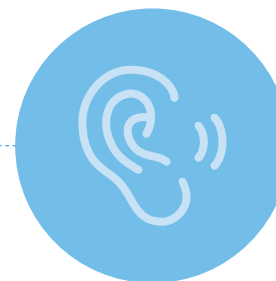


PHASE ONE

Stop, Listen, Proceed with Caution

One of the first marketing questions brands considered at the onset of this crisis was to “go dark” or stay the course. Wisely, most destination marketers decided to pause and think about what was right for their travelers and their communities. Running planned campaigns without adjusting your messaging to the current state of the world can appear tone-deaf and unfeeling. Though the travel and hospitality industry at large isn’t considered “essential,” that doesn’t mean you have to go dark and lose your connection with fans and followers.

The first step is evaluating the content you have in your arsenal. Your sequestered visitors are dreaming about getting out and seeing the world again. And they could be dreaming about you. People still want to travel even though they can’t right now. They are still dreaming of where to go but need help visualizing those places.





You can provide content that becomes a virtual escape for them. Virtual tours with scenic video, photo galleries and Instagram stories will help you stay in touch with travelers in feeder markets near and far.

Calls to action are very light - inviting consumers to virtually experience your destination. Dream of us now, see us later. "Trust is earned in drops and lost in buckets" wrote Jean-Paul Sartre. How we talk to our travelers should be empathetic and hopeful - looking forward to a time when we can host them again. Senior Strategist Jaquelyn Blackwell explains how she helped a Southern market tailor their message:

"One DMO knew they wanted to remain top-of-mind with their fans but knew they couldn't encourage travel. So, in this difficult period, they dropped "visit" from their brand awareness campaigns and focused on providing virtual experiences and tours to their audience."





PHASE TWO Beginning Again

Coming out of isolation may be a gradual state-by-state, region-by-region experience. As restrictions start to ease, marketing messaging and targeting should be carefully plotted and timed appropriately to respect the realities of different communities. If a state is still in lock-down, it's not time to adjust messaging yet. Check state and county websites for mandates in each feeder market. As parts of the country start to relax stay-at-home restrictions consumers will be hesitant to travel too far from home for long durations. Focus on feeder markets within a few hours of your destination. Keep imagery and promotions centered on wide-open spaces, outdoor and spacious attractions where people can feel safe and not crowded. Experts predict that markets will be most successful in feeder markets that can access your DMO easily and quickly.

Use sponsored content, blog posts and

listicles to share short-term trip itineraries for visitor segments like families, outdoors-focused adults, boomers, and families with older kids. "24 hours in Your City USA"

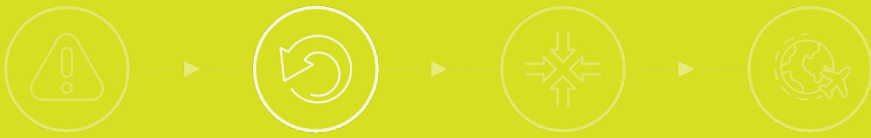
“The most frequent question everyone is asking, is when we will the public start to travel again.”

features will help visitors see how they can make the most of a day trip, overnight or weekend visit. And don't forget to showcase what you are doing differently post-crisis to keep visitors safe. Calls-to-action still shouldn't take on a hard-sell mentality. Instead, be aware of public concerns, be encouraging, be hopeful and be tempting. For most, these first trips post-crisis will be a first foray back into travel and things may look different than they did the last time they took a trip.

The most frequent question everyone

is asking, is when we will the public start to travel again. Travel experts warn that the data is changing daily. So, making predictions based on our best data today, could change tomorrow based on events. As of this writing, many Southern markets are showing a return to 2019 booking levels by late July to early August according to Key Data Dashboard in a webinar held on April 8th. Even if that is a best-case scenario, that doesn't leave much time for destination marketers to prepare their updated marketing plans.



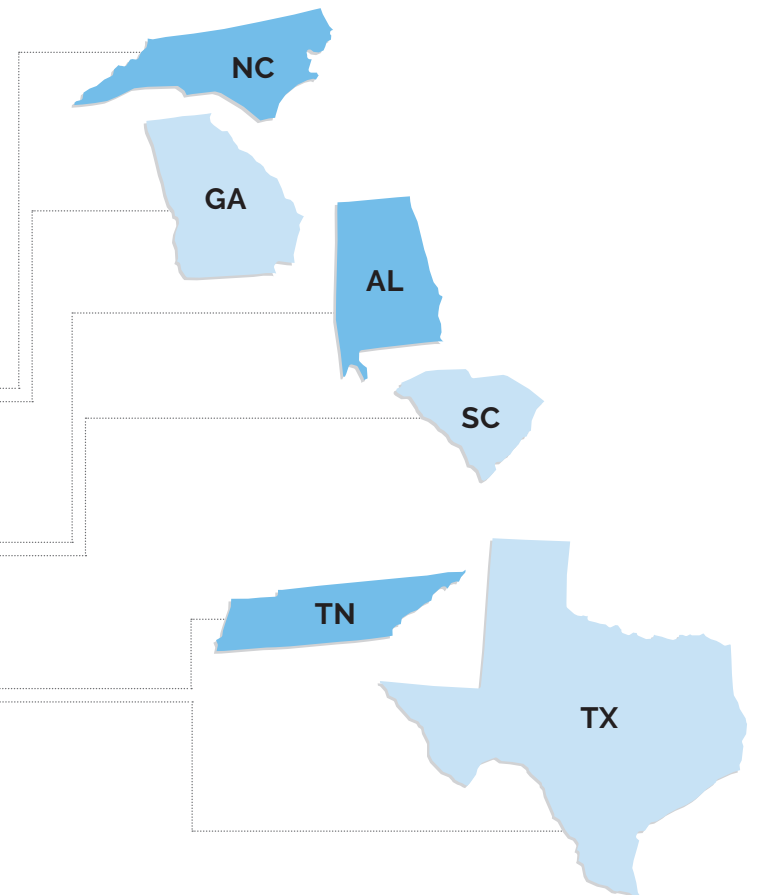


PHASE TWO
Beginning Again

Return to 2019 Levels

(Key Data Dashboard, 2020)

| JULY 2020 | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|---------------------------------|
| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | GEORGIA NORTH CAROLINA 11 |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | ALABAMA SOUTH CAROLINA 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | TENNESSEE TEXAS 25 |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 |





PHASE THREE

Not quite normal, but close

Kyle Stichtenoth, digital director at Advance Travel and Tourism advises that "clients need to know that there will become a time when travelers are expecting destinations to sell to them again, and destinations need to be ready with attractive offers and advertising strategies that get them noticed."

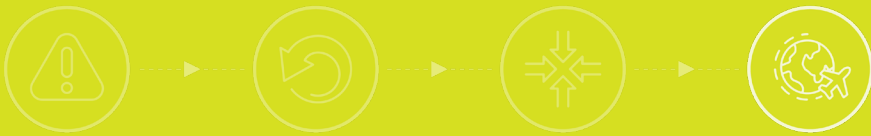
In phase three, as the entire country comes out from the worst effects of the pandemic, demand for getaways will be stronger than ever. If the timing coincides with late summer into early Fall, then longer trips will be back in vogue and most feeder markets can be targeted by DMOs. During this phase, urban creative, more crowded attractions and longer stays will be appropriate to push. But DMO's will be smart to listen to traveler sentiment closely since we can't predict the long-lasting effects and heightened fears brought on by the pandemic.

One of the biggest questions DMO's,



attractions and vacation rental companies may be asking is how deeply I should discount rates to drive conversions. While hotels and vacation rentals need to balance the need for higher revenue

per room (RevPAR) with booking rates, attractions may benefit from offering deeper discounts, extending annual pass dates into 2021 or offering VIP benefits as a value ad to early purchasers.



PHASE FOUR Business as Usual

As air travel resumes and virus fears diminish further, open up your advertising to all core feeder markets. There shouldn't be any limits on creative at this point, but make sure you are versioned to attract the visitors with the most sentiment toward traveling. Post crisis, some groups may be more sensitive to travel cautions than others. Calls-to-action can return to their normal level of urgency and strength. Keep in mind, we anticipate safety and cleaning will stay top-of-mind with travelers in ways it didn't before the crisis. As the new post-crisis world develops, there will be other nuances that emerge letting us know that things look a little (or a lot) different than they did before. While not the center of your messaging, traveler safety and sanitization should be a part of your website, and your core promises to travelers for the long haul.



CONCLUSION

As destination marketers we're responsible for building long-lasting relationships between visitors and our destinations. Our success drives large and small businesses and fuels the economies where we live and work. It's important work. But that work looks different right now than it has historically. To best position our brands for success as the phases of this crisis transition one to the next, we must prepare. This crisis will not last forever, and travelers will hit the road again. In fact, they're already planning their first great escape. Will you be there?

Our responsibility now is to plan for the future. A future where the traveler will be free to put their plans into action and book the trips that bring joy and fulfillment to their lives. We're here to help you be successful in that endeavor. Planning and strategizing for the next phase of your business is what we've always done. And we're here to help you through this phase too.



Tap into our experts now. Consultations are no-strings-attached and absolutely free of charge. While we're dreaming of a time when we can be back with you face-to-face, in the interim we're available through live streams, Zoom meetings and

conference calls. Feeling nostalgic? We'll even write you a letter. Looking for more fun? Let's make it a Zoom Happy Hour. Let's talk and dream up a plan to make your post-pandemic travel season one for-the-ages.



About Advance Travel and Tourism

Advance Travel & Tourism is a destination marketing team within Advance Local, one of the leading media and marketing companies in the United States. From local to regional, national or international, we reach travelers everywhere.

Advance Travel & Tourism works with travel partners across the US, with local account managers waiting to meet you in person. Our hands-on approach ensures we understand your needs and creates a solution that meets your goals and budget.

To book an appointment or learn more contact us today.

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