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Social
Works

Iceland Tourism

How social media rescued Icelandic tourism after the volcano explosion

Agency: Brooklyn Brothers

Additional contribution:
The Effectiveness Partnership

The first cross-industry collaboration between



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Market context

When the Eyjafjallajokull volcano exploded on 14th April, 2010, Iceland's economy was already struggling in the wake of the 2008 financial crash.

The ash cloud thrown up by the volcano threatened to damage the country's important tourist trade in a storm of negative publicity. Negative sentiment towards the country in key tourist sources went from 19% three days after the explosion to 72% in just seven days.

In the three weeks after the explosion, tourist volumes fell 30%, continuing into May. The peak season runs from May to September, when 55% of tourists visit.

The government predicted a 22% decline in tourist volumes, equating to a £180m revenue shortfall for the economy.

Marketing brief

The brief had three main elements:

- Respond immediately, increasing visitors by 10% above forecast levels between May and September
- Turn tide of negative opinion about Iceland as a tourist destination and safety aspects
- Find a way of telling Iceland's story without making it feel like propaganda, thus overcoming increasing public mistrust of government-sponsored marketing

Channel choice

Channel choice was driven by a number of factors, including:

- Budget considerations
- Speed
- The need to find an alternative to traditional tourism promotion models
- The recognition that the best and most authentic voice was that of the Icelandic population itself – the notion of people as media.

Social media allowed all four criteria to be met. Limited use of six-sheet posters showing live webcam footage from the country, press and radio in three major tourist sources was used to supplement and draw attention to the social media efforts.

Social media used included Facebook (www.facebook.com/inspiredbyiceland), Twitter (www.twitter.com/icelandinspired), Vimeo (www.vimeo.com/icelandinspired) and Tumblr (www.inspiredbyiceland.tumblr.com).

In addition, a dedicated website (www.inspiredbyiceland.com) also supplemented and linked to the social media efforts.

Creative/media strategy

The creative strategy involved the use of Icelanders to nullify negative sentiment by getting them to post content on social media under the theme 'Inspired by Iceland'. The content would show how beautiful the country was, how welcoming the people were, and how it was open for business.

Use of the population of Iceland as media allowed Brooklyn Brothers to operate a combined creative and media strategy in three parts.

Research also showed previous visitors were strong advocates. Over 60% were likely to recommend the country as a destination. If their advocacy could be prompted by Icelanders, the campaign would get extra momentum.

1. Unite: target Icelanders around their love of the country, using social media to kickstart the campaign by uniting the population around a national online event – 'Iceland Hour' – when they could stop en masse in order to post content via social media about Iceland.

- Within one week, 65% of Icelanders were aware of the initiative, rising to 96% by week four.
- Within one day of launching, a third of the total population of 318,000 – including the Prime Minister had participated, and after six weeks more than 50% had contributed content.

2. Share: encourage the population to share those stories with the rest of the world via social media from where it could then spread further.

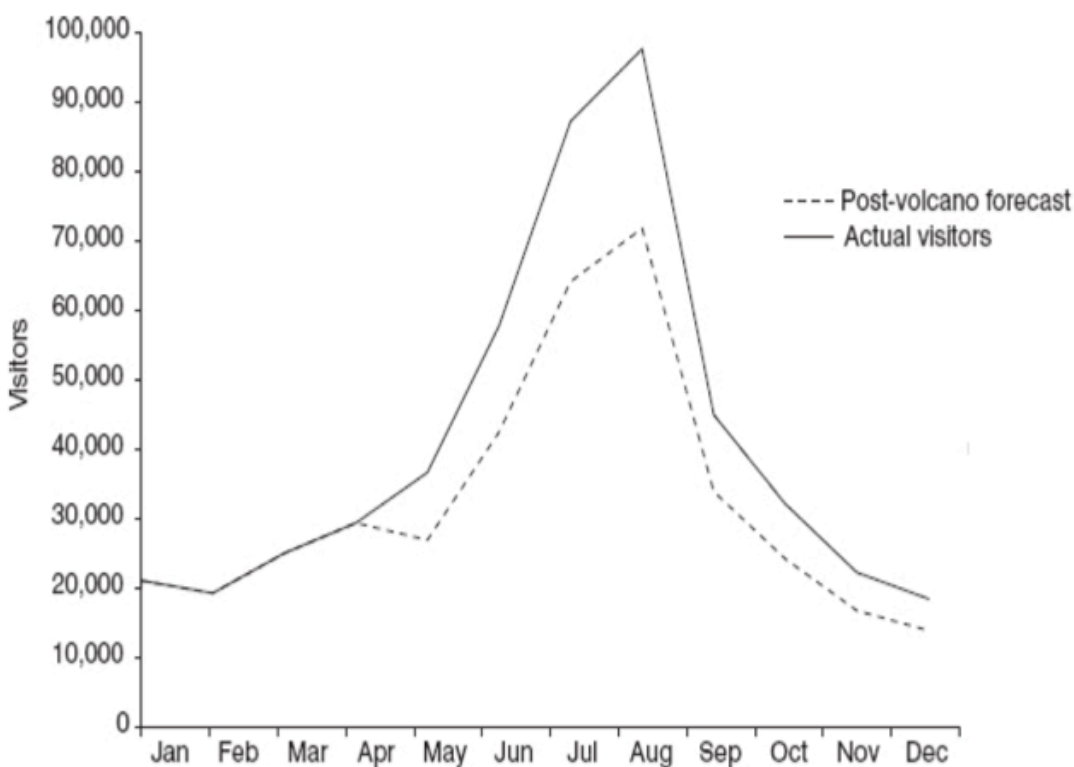
- Within one day, 27% of the population had shared content with contacts overseas; and 1.5m videos had been downloaded. The Facebook page achieved 45,000 fans and sharing and posting activity was twice the average.
- Across social and digital media generally, 2m-plus stories were seen and sent by fans. Between June and August, the live webcam footage of Iceland generated 60m views.
- 65% of Icelanders who posted and shared stories received positive feedback from overseas networks.
- Overall, approximately 80% of posts during the campaign showed positive attitudes towards Iceland. They rose from the mid-70s at the start of the campaign, peaking in the mid-80s.
- Negative posts fell from approximately 20% at the start of the campaign to a low of 5% mid-campaign.

3. Reward: thank Icelanders for participation with a concert in July featuring Icelandic and international musicians and live streaming.

Results

- Over the course of the campaign, positive perceptions of Iceland increased in its three main tourist markets: UK (+ 48%); Germany (+25%); and Denmark (+24%).
- Perceptions of Iceland as a safe place to visit rose over the course of the campaign in the three main markets: UK from 39% to 47%; Germany from 42% to 49%; and Denmark from 56% to 82%.
- Between the launch of the campaign in early May and year-end, tourist visitors beat forecasts by 27%. At the peak of the season, in August, tourist numbers (approx 100,000) were 43% above forecast levels.
- Over the course of the season, tourist numbers from the UK were 31% above forecast; from Germany 32.7% above forecast; and from the USA 40.3% above forecast.
- Overall, 79,252 additional visits above forecast levels were achieved.
- Given an average spend per head of £1,750, total revenue generated was £138.7m.

Actual vs. predicted visitors to Iceland 2010



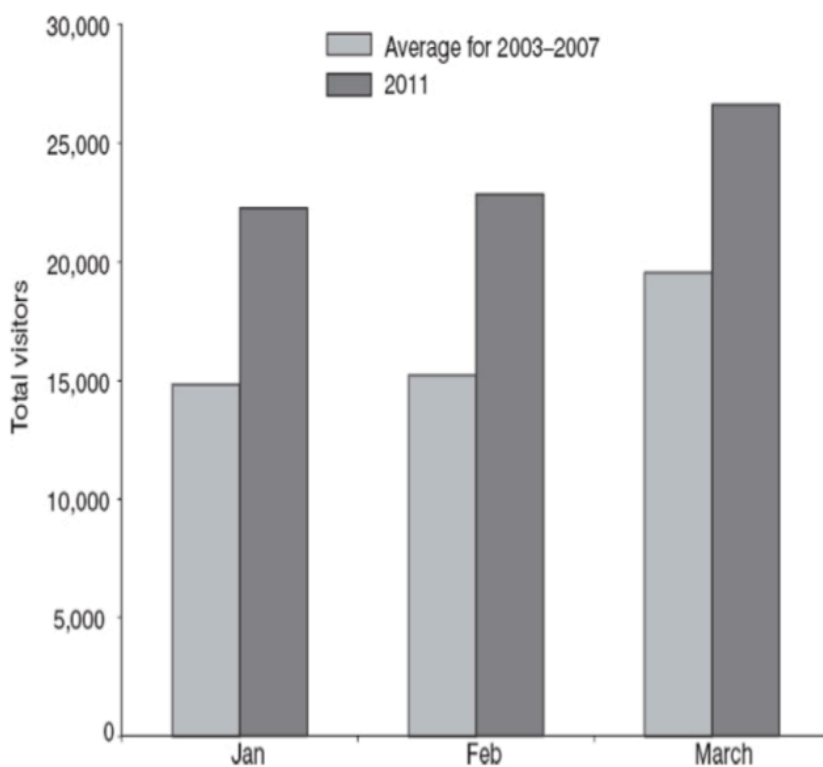
Source: Icelandic Government 2010

Longer-term effects

Government figures indicate visitors to Iceland have a 21% return rate. Applying this to the additional visitors generated over the period of the campaign in 2010, Iceland could expect to see some 16,642 visitors return in the following years, generating some £29m in longer-term revenue.

For Q1 in 2011, Iceland achieved its highest-ever visitor numbers. Compared to average Q1 visitor rates for 2003-2007, those in Q1 2011 were significantly higher, suggesting the campaign had a longer-term effect.

Visitors to Iceland 2011



Source: Icelandic Government 2011

Measurement

A closed loop between social media channels and purchase points (tour operators, travel sites, accommodation sites) enabled analysis of the effect of the campaign. Of visitors, 136,200 were active considerers; and 33,200 entered the purchase funnel (9% of total visitors).

Other potential drivers of tourism volumes were eliminated: flight prices, exchange rates and weather patterns were unchanged from the year before. The Icelandic authorities did not offer any financial incentives to tourists, and there was no change in the number of registered hotels offering accommodation.

ROMI

Media and production spend was £2.24m.

Given the £138.7m revenue generated, the ROMI was 61:1.

Key learnings

Most social media campaigns are based on identifying and targeting a small number of influencers, who then spread the message via their networks.

The Iceland campaign, by contrast, started with a model of unity that drove mass social participation.

The Steering Group

Stephen Maher	MBA (Chair)	Nigel Gwilliam	IPA
Prof. Paddy Barwise	London Business School (academic advisor)	Jed Hallam	Mindshare
Jenny Burns	RSA	Janet Hull	IPA
Fran Cassidy	Cassidy Media P'ship	Chris MacLeod	TfL
James Devon	MBA	Peter Markey	RSA
Simeon Duckworth	Mindshare	Matt Taylor	Twitter
Mark Earls	Herdmeister	Christian Walsh	MRS
Jane Frost	MRS	Christopher Wellbelove	BT
Gemma Greaves	The Marketing Society	Lucy Whitehead	TfL
Keith Gulliver	RSA	Sarah Woodley	The Marketing Society

More information

For the first time, the IPA, The Marketing Society and MRS have joined together to launch a cross-industry initiative.

#IPASocialWorks, with sponsorship from Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, will identify good practice in social media effectiveness and measurement.

Visit

www.ipa.co.uk/effectiveness

www.marsoc.co/IPAsocialworks

www.mrs.org.uk/social

-See case studies from BT, Fridge Raiders, O2, TfL, Iceland Tourism and others that have passed review.

Contact us

We want to hear from you - whether you want to submit case studies, collaborate on a wiki, or share your/ your company's expertise in another way.

Contact

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