

# 2020 Online Marketing

*for*

## Travel Agents & Advisors



# What you'll learn

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# Why Is This Important?

*Most potential travelers - business or leisure - are now looking for travel services online. How will you be found? How can you build trust and become their go-to person for that next trip?*

We've helped hundreds of agents generate tens of thousands of online customers over the past 4 years, so we know a thing or two about how to get them coming in.

Everyday more of your customers are online. Even if they're just down the road.

If your first line of inquiry is to google things in your city, then everyone else is doing it too.

On one hand, it's easy to get online.

But on the other hand, it's very hard to stand out, build trust and become a partner to travelers.

This practical strategy guide will tell you what to do, to earn new customers online, nurture the ones you already have and become the first person they think of when they need to travel.

They're simple steps that anyone can do.

# Pull Them In With Content

*“If you don’t put it online, then it really doesn’t exist” -  
Derek Sivers*

You could have a big agency, a small mom and pop store, or be in your home-office in your pajamas. It does not matter.

You **need** to get found.

Storefronts rely on elaborate signs and walk-in traffic. Local advertising, flyers and meet and greets also work.

But let’s face it, most of your audience is looking down at their phones as they walk (or heaven forbid, drive) past your location.

They’re looking for you, but they can’t find you. What’s wrong here?

You probably have nothing to search for. No footprint, with barely any presence.

People use search engines.

These services work by scanning most of the websites in the world, including yours. Not only do you have to tell them where your website is (links), but you must also have them something to search for; good content.

Having a website with thin content (home page and a few specials) will not cut it these days.

It's like the difference between Walgreens and your old-fashioned mom and pop pharmacy. As much as you hate Walgreens, they have everything.

No wonder the mom and pop pharmacies went out of business very quickly.

So not only do you need a home page, you need content published across your website in various places.

Here's a list of the kind of content you must have on your site. Each should be a separate page -

- How your agency was founded
- Why you do what you do
- A page for each agent with a photo, email, phone number and bio as well as places they've travelled to
- A main page listing the destinations you specialize in
- A separate page listing each destination with a title, description, photos or videos and a means to contact you for a trip there
- A main page listing the tours you sell
- A separate page listing each tour separately with a title, description, photos, and a means to contact you about the tour
- Testimonials from your past customers
- A contact Us page to generate leads
- A blog

Yes, it takes some work. Most people putting up websites focus on the design and building process, but the real work starts when the people who built your site go home. Now it's all up to you.

# Call to Action

*Don't forget to ask – But first you must give.*

## **All that content is for three reasons.**

- To make you an authority on travel in your niche and location
- To build trust with people who, frankly, don't know you
- To make your visitor's life better - the “give” part.

As we said before, having thin content that just sells and sells and sells is not enough. You must give something too.

By adding all that destination content, you become trusted in your niche.

Now with each piece of content that you give, at the end of it, you can ask for something too.

*Here are things that work in almost all cases.*

## **On a Destination Information Page about Paris**

*“Ask us about a trip to Paris”*

## **On an Agent page**

*“Where are you going on your next trip?”*

## **On a Blog post page about “Madrid”**

*“Start your trip to Madrid”*

## **On your home page**

*“Where do you want to go?”*

**On a product page**

*“Find out more about this” or “Book this trip/cruise”*

**On all other pages**

*“Where do you want to go?”*

All these buttons or links should go to a central lead capture page. The next section will talk about that.

Never use popups. It’s true that they work, but they’re annoying as heck.

Always have your phone number on every page.

Make sure there is a “Contact Us” link on every page, close to the phone number.

# Generating Leads

*Brochure websites merely show information, but never provide a way to capture intent. Does your site do that?*

Now that you have all that content, you need to put it to use to help capture that person online. There are two ways:

Have your phone number on every page

Have a call to action (link or button) that asks the reader where they are going and how you can help them.

Notice we did not say “Contact Us”.

Here’s what you should capture, specifically in order.

1. Where are you going (should be pre-filled)?
2. When are you going?
3. Tell us more about your trip (notes)
4. Your name, email and phone number.

Studies show that people will fill in those three pieces of information first, then add their personal information last, because they’ve invested time into talking about their problem.

Resist the impulse to ask for more information. No one likes to fill out a hundred fields online or on their phone.



When they finish, send them to a page thanking them for their business and let them know that you will be contacting them within 24 hours (more time and the lead gets stale).

Of course, your website software should send a notification to you immediately once the customer has finished filling out the lead form.

Additionally, your website software should at a minimum do some rudimentary tracking, so you know how they visited your site, what's their location and which pages they visited before filling in the form.

Leads get stale quickly - often within an hour of when the customer submitted the info.

# Following Up

*The chances of closing a lead increase by over 85% when you follow up at least 12 times with the customer - IBM*

If you did everything right with the content and calls to action, leads will start coming in. Slowly at first, but then more regularly - a few a week or more, depending on the amount of content you have. Here's how to follow up (nurture) these leads.

Now that you have leads coming in, here's what you need to do with everyone coming in.

## **Add them to your mailing list -**

Get this person on your mailing list (we'll talk about newsletters later).

## **Automatically respond -**

Send a "Welcome to our agency" email immediately as they finish. Your web software should be sophisticated enough to do this. Keep the email simple, as if you wrote it — no fancy graphics or formatting.

Just simple text with your name and email address so they can hit reply and contact you.

Here's a sample:

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*Hi Elaine,*

*Thanks for your business and welcome to Bob's Cruises!*

*I can't wait to talk with you about your trip.*

*In the meantime, do you have anything else you'd love to tell me about this trip before I contact you?*

*At your service,*

*"Bob"*

*Travel Consultant*

*[your phone number]*

*Bob's Cruises*

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Note that we did not say "I'll contact you in 24 hours" or anything like that, just a simple welcome and a request for more information.

It avoids the form letter approach and seems to come from a real, breathing human.

Don't go crazy with titles, long signatures or anything like that. This automated letter should seem as if it came from your desktop.

### **Send destination Information**

You know where they are going, why not send them a free travel guide, or quick links to some of your recommendations for that destination? This builds your trust — do it a few hours later and follow up with at around 12 emails. Studies show that it takes at least 12 "touches" to get someone to buy.

### **Do your thing**

Whether you like to call or email, its time to do that as soon after you get the lead as possible.

See what we did here?

You've immediately followed up on the customer. prepped them with destination information and spoken to them.

If your destination content drip campaign is doing its job, they will be continually receiving destination over the next several days, which preps them and keeps you in mind while they are deciding who to use for the trip.

Additionally, for the next year you'll be sending them at least a weekly newsletter with great travel info that gets them ready for that next trip.

Following up never, ever stops.

# Talk About Yourself

*Here's how to self-promote without being a shameless self-promoter.*

Earlier we talked about agent pages.

## **About you**

Each agent page should have a photo, a bio, clear name, title and contact info.

Keep your Bio to 2 paragraphs. The first paragraph should be about your specialty. The second paragraph should talk about your personal life.

## **Places you've been to**

One of the things it should have, is a list of the places you've been to and why you like each place.

If you're a cruise specialist, talk about the ships you've been on. If the Far East is a thing for you, talk about Japanese Culture.

## **Customer Testimonials**

These should be included on the agent page as well and can also be on a separate "testimonials" page that includes testimonials from all agents and directed to your agency in general.

Ask all agents to forward them to you. Many customers add testimonials these days by email, but others still provide a handwritten note.

Don't keep them in a file somewhere. They need to be showcased.

(If it's not online, it does not exist)

If the handwritten note is very elegant, it might make sense to scan it and put it up in the testimonials area.

Otherwise just type them out and add them to this page.

### **Agency News**

In the blog you can talk about new agents that join. New services that you'll begin to offer.

Whatever you do, don't talk about product, talk about the utterly fantastic service that you offer. The customers who were blown away and totally enjoyed their trip because of you.

Hundreds of companies sell products online. You're selling your service.

### **Anonymized Quotes**

Putting up anonymized quotes is really an amazing thing. As you send a quote to a customer, also send it to the person who updated your site.

Instruct them to remove the name, specific dates and keep destination, source, photos and prices. Add each one to a new page on your site. In no time you'll have a ton of information about all the resorts you're selling.

# Update it Frequently

*The real work begins after your website is published - Travel Agency Tribes.*

Most people look at their website as an afterthought. No wonder we see so many brochureware and forgotten websites.

Search engines like Google rank your website better when its updated often.

This means continually adding new destinations, new blogs, testimonials and updating agent profiles.

But what's a good update frequency?

Best - Daily

Good - Weekly

Poor - Monthly

You're begging for trouble - every 6 months

Think about it, how much could a good lead that closed bring in? Does it make sense to pay someone \$300.00 per month to keep your website updated?

The answer, of course is yes.

Most of the time you're busy handling customers. And if your website works, you'll be busier too.

So put someone in charge of this. Someone that works in the office, or someone outside the office. Either way, update or suffer.

# Newsletters

*“The money is in the list” - Online business proverb*

It costs 5 times less to keep a customer than to get a new one.

And the best way to keep your customers is to keep talking to them in a helpful way - frequently.

Some customers will hate it, but they can always unsubscribe. The others will keep you in their minds.

Anything less than a weekly newsletter is abusing your list. Why?

Because you're not reminding them enough about you and your services.

I'm sure you already receive daily newsletters from some of North America's largest retailers and online properties. Have you ever visited a website, then visited other websites and seen the ad for that website follow you around the web and show up in the unlikeliest of places?

You never forget that, right?

So why are you shy about even sending a weekly newsletter? Some people whine that its too much email for their customers, then see 95% of their customers never come back.

The key is what you send in your newsletter.

It has to be product neutral, informative and helpful.

Blasting out product deals every week is going to turn off people pretty fast, pretty quickly.



Sending a PDF or Word document is shooting yourself in the foot (do you read PDF's on your phone??).

Instead always include some of the following:

- The latest in travel news
- Destinations you like or have recently been to
- Travel tips
- New destination ideas

Always finish off with a call to action - ask the customer to “click here to start the next trip” or hit reply.

Always ensure that if someone hits the “reply” button that reply will come to a real person.

Newsletters do not have to be fancy or be rocket science. Just be helpful, personal and direct.

But do it every week (at a minimum) and never stop.

# Distribution

*As in, distributing the content you already creating into multiple online and offline channels.*

TV is dead. So is radio.

I'm almost kidding about that. You probably still advertise with flyers, local radio, Yellow Pages and local TV. That's smart.

But it's not enough. You need more channels.

Your website always acts as the central hub. Everything should get posted there. Here are some more places where you can post regularly (weekly at least).

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Tumblr
- [wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com)
- Quora
- Travel Publications

For the above list, post under your own name instead of just the name of your agency. After a while people will search for your name first.

Setup a calendar so you know when you need to post to the above list every week. You can pick any kind of content that's already on your website to post. Even if you posted it a long time ago.

Wherever you can, provide a link back to your website. In places where you can't, just reformat the content already on your website to fit that channel.

And some places to get permanent one-time “listings”:

- Yelp
- Foursquare
- Yellow Pages ([YP.com](http://YP.com))
- Google
- Yahoo
- Bing
- All Travel Agency directories and associations
- Other online directories

For the permanent listings always use your business name, location, tagline and logo every time in every place.

This makes it so when someone searches for you - you blanket the home page of Google.

# SEO for Travel Agencies

*Ignore all the emails from SEO firms, if you followed the instructions so far, you're 95% of the way there.*

Any semi-decent travel agency website these days is already SEO optimized. Those are table stakes.

SEO companies trolling for your business will run a free report on your site that shows you should be using an H1 instead of a H2 tag on one or more of your pages.

But truth be told, that's very little of what you need these days. According to Google these are the most important things that will cause you to rank higher:

- 1. Have relevant content that people want**
- 2. Update your website frequently**
- 3. Link to your site from other important websites**

Your "SEO Consultant" is not going to do any of those things for you - they'll only tell you that you need to do them and collect a big fat fee. Here are some more strategies you can follow to boost the above:

1. Have strong headlines and opening paragraphs for everything you write
2. Repost to other channels and link back to your site
3. Go into detail on everything
4. Write how-to and industry related content in your blog

The dirty truth about SEO, is that having high quality content is 95% of the work. The other 5% is the little tricks in the SEO reports that they did with your “site analysis”.

The more content you have on your site, the higher the chances of people finding you.

It's that simple.

# Tools We Recommend

*Free and Paid tools every travel agency should be using already.*

There's a growing number of tools you can use in your travel agency these days to make things more efficient and help your marketing.

## **Slack**

Stop reading this and setup a slack team for your agency right now. Instruct every agent to install it on their desktop and phone. It's the go-to way to keep everyone in the loop and instantly send messages to the whole team or to an individual agent.

## **Social Intents**

<http://www.socialintents.com/slack-live-chat.jsp>

Install a little piece of code on your site, and now you can easily chat with visitors to your website through Slack.

## **Title Generator**

<https://www.portent.com/tools/title-maker>

Use Portent's idea generator for titles to help you make up better titles for blogs, testimonials, products and other content.

## **Evernote**

<https://www.evernote.com>

A good tool to store links about destinations. Whenever you have a new customer, you can simply lookup links and send them a quick email that will just make you look good. A better option will be to prepare quick web pages with links to each destination, then just send a single link to that page.

## **Milanote**

<https://milanote.com/>

Milanote is a tool for organizing creative projects into beautiful visual boards. By design, it feels a lot like working on the wall in a creative studio - visual, tactile and sometimes a bit messy - Milanote is a great fit for designers who work in teams remotely.

## **TinyLetter**

<https://tinyletter.com>

On a budget? Use Tiny Letter to send free email newsletters to up to 5,000 people at once. Perfect for those once a week personal looking blasts that you just have to send out.

## **Wordpress**

<https://wordpress.com>

We recommend this if you need to setup a travel agency blog. Easy to use. And you can make the design anything you like.

## **Buffer**

<https://buffer.com>

Buffer makes it easy to post to all the social media platforms with a few clicks. Schedule stuff and have it post at just the right time. Easy to use, and a nice free tier.

Have fun with these tools and when you're ready to graduate to a large suite for travel agencies call us.

# Hiring Help

*“If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together” - African proverb*

As you can see, success with your online marketing is not about just setting it up. You also need to do the work every week to help retain customers and attract new ones.

If you decide to hire someone to help either full or part time, here are some tips.

## **Get someone who is very internet savvy**

It's no sense hiring someone who does not know basic internet fundamentals. A good way to test the qualifications of anyone is to ask them to:

- Create a social media account
- Post something in a blog on [wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com)
- Determine the best keywords to use for your agency's SEO efforts

## **Create a publishing calendar**

The person you hire should follow this calendar rigorously. Here's an example:

- Write 2 Blog posts on Monday
- Publish additional website content on Tuesday
- Social Media scheduling on Wednesday
- Create and Send Newsletter on Thursday - Traffic and leads report on Friday

Look for local help or use [upwork.com](https://www.upwork.com) to find someone remotely.



Establish the name, address, description, tagline and other blurbs, logo and other assets of your agency should be used consistently in all public postings.

If this is all too much, we do have a service that does all of this in an affordable way.

Travel Agency Tribes will send your newsletters, build your site, update it and keep the supplier content flowing.

**Request a consultation:**

<https://www.travelagencytribes.com/consultation>

Contact us to get started.