

DESTINATION MARKETING FOR ACTIVE EXPLORERS

BY GRACE PASTORE, WILLIAMS HELDE

Destination marketing is the art of inspiration. It is, quite literally, moving people to act. Reaching the *right* consumers with tailored, impactful communications isn't just a "nice-to-have" ability for brands and destinations. It's the only way to survive in an industry saturated by products and services, diverse experience and consumer autonomy.

So how should your travel brand concentrate destination marketing efforts in order to speak to ideal consumers? The first step is simple: Know who your best consumers actually are.

WHO IS THE ACTIVE EXPLORER?

At Williams Helde, we've helped dozens of companies find the perfect audience for their brands. We also conducted some reconnaissance of our own across multiple industries and markets. We were looking for a consumer segment with influence and spending power unlike any other—a group whose preferences could make or break the larger trends. And that's when we found them: active explorers.

In a nutshell, active explorers are your most educated and affluent customers who are looking to improve their bodies and minds. They're fiercely brand-loyal and deeply connected to likeminded peers, or their tribes. When they shop, they pay for premium gear, organic food and a high-quality user experience.

Brands don't have to be active healthy lifestyle companies to appeal to the active explorer segment. There's a reason why [McDonald's](#) is retooling menus to include healthy options, why [Costco](#) is the number-one seller of organic goods in the world, and why [Gap](#) continues to launch extensive active-wear collections. Each of them is making a big push into this demographic—and reaping the rewards.

THE ALLURE OF THE NEW

That's where destination marketing comes in. An active explorer's appetite for adventure is insatiable, and their worldview is ever-expanding, so it's no surprise that for active explorers, travel is nothing less than a basic need. It's the fuel that inspires, motivates and renews them. And they're just waiting for the right brand to make their plans a reality.

The good news for brands is that active explorers are traveling more than ever. Our recent user group research found that 49 percent of active explorers took three to four trips in the past 12 months. Another 29 percent had taken five or more trips in the past year. For destinations and the businesses marketing them, there's undeniable opportunity and an even larger need to differentiate offerings.

Travel provides an allure of the unique...the appeal of everything new and exciting. When speaking to this fundamental desire among consumers, brands and destinations should tailor offerings; it's not just a destination, it's your destination. It's the possibility of who you can become when you get there.

Many active explorers use a vacation to try out new versions of themselves: kayaker, salsa dancer, wine enthusiast, etc. It's not so much about where they go as it is who they can become. If your brand can help active explorers live the lives they've imagined through fitness, food, fashion, durable goods and more, you have a leg up on your competition.

BALANCING COMFORT AND SPONTANEITY

When appealing to active explorers, the allure of possibility should harmonize with the familiarity of comfort. Spontaneity and new experience play an undeniable role in the travel plans of active explorers, yet surprisingly, nearly a third of our user group respondents prefer hotel chains for their accommodations. In addition, nearly half believed that staying in one place is the best way to relax.

Names like Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott and Kimpton offer more than shelter—they offer a taste of the familiar. It seems that no matter where you go, you need a place to call home, and the more familiar, the better.

Destinations and the brands marketing around them should strategize communications that imply both excitement and comfort, the new and the familiar. Whether you're selling a product, experience or destination, be the basecamp active explorers are looking for, and you're sure to hit the target.

MAKE CONSISTENT IMPRESSIONS

Almost as important as the experience of travel (the sights, smells, tastes and even the luggage people carry with them) is the image of travel. In the social media age, the impression of travel often lives in tweetable stories and Instagram-worthy moments. There's a wealth of compelling, consumer-generated content that is ripe for the harnessing.

[Four Seasons](#) has perhaps one of the most comprehensive social media strategies in the business. Their constant goal? To be where their guests are—to leverage social media's "intimacy" to create not just fleeting impressions, but lasting connections that steadily transform into increased business. Whether it's delightful pop-up food trucks to produce shareable content or creative responses to customers via social media, Four Seasons is getting it right.

And all brands need to do is participate in the conversation or, better yet, start one. Ask for consumer opinions, feature users, create filters, and most importantly, curate how your brand fits into the image of travel online. Get people talking and inspire active explorers to join the conversation. You might be surprised by your return on investment.

IT'S TIME TO START TALKING TO ACTIVE EXPLORERS

Active explorers are defined by their appetites for adventure, their loyalty to brands that help them reach their destinations and their thirst for authentic travel experiences. But like any demographic, they're a diverse bunch. They can be constant thrill-seekers, but they also love the creature comforts of a cruise or hotel room.

Saying something that resonates with the active explorer will go miles toward inspiring them to hear more of what you have to say. Don't over-invest in a campaign that hasn't been tested thoroughly—try multiple approaches. Always push the envelope, and don't be afraid to say something surprising, but don't pigeon-hole consumers into one way of thinking about your offering. And never miss a window of opportunity to make communications timely, nimble and impactful.

Follow those rules, and you'll find your brand's window of opportunity larger than ever before.



BIO

Grace Pastore heard a calling from the mountains and fresh air to travel west to Seattle and become a writer at Williams Helde Marketing Communications. Founded in 1969, Williams Helde is a marketing communications agency focused on inspiring, connecting and awakening the active healthy lifestyle inherent in every great brand. You can learn more about this audience and download the latest report focused on travel at <http://williams-helde.com/pdf/TravelBlogchure.pdf>.