

How Dubai is innovating and marketing



Interview with Issam Kazim

In this second blog about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism in Dubai, Issam Kazim, CEO of the Dubai Corporation of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), updates on some of the innovation and marketing initiatives that has been introduced as a result of the pandemic.

Can you tell us a little bit about building innovation in the time of pandemic? What was the thought process behind some of these initiatives?

What we did was start to roll out our comms campaign. We have a very active social media channel, and it was important for us to not disconnect from our audience; from our fans and our visitors. We started with a 'Till We Meet Again' campaign which we launched during the peak of the lockdown. The message was one of solidarity, saying, look we're in this together, you're going through it, as is the city of Dubai. We made it a bit personal through the city and to the individuals as well. We showed them that just as you are stuck within the confines of your four walls, Dubai is also empty and it's missing you. Those messages got a lot of positive impact and response from the audience and led to some great engagement.

Then we started to slowly introduce other campaigns which evolved in response to how people reacted to the campaigns. We noticed a trend of people searching for Dubai and certain things about Dubai. Then we evolved the campaign to feed the anxiety that people felt as they wanted to get out and explore the world again. We started to share beautiful images of Dubai, allowing them to imagine what it is like now, and what it can be like once the lockdown is over.

That started to generate more positive engagement. During all of these phases of the campaign, we introduced the safety and hygiene aspect. Because we knew that even though somebody wants to go out, even if it's only in the subconscious, the questions arise; is it safe, is it clean, can I go there? All the efforts that we, our partners and the government were doing to keep people safe, were woven into the communication. By marrying those two things together, we created a better, more visible picture of confidence and traveller comfort when thinking of their next destination.

This process evolved from awareness into consideration and then down to the conversion part of the funnel. We're still looking at a big part of it being the individual's hygiene and wellbeing and pushing down into the conversion aspect.

We undertook all those phases in a playful way which gave us a chance to look at new opportunities that I would describe as low hanging fruit, which we've been discussing for quite some time. We felt this was an excellent opportunity to trigger those discussions and put them into action.

Another trend we noticed was the virtual working visa. This trend is easy to see now. Many companies are allowing their staff to work from home for the next few months, at least. With that in mind, we said, okay Dubai has 200 different nationalities. We still have many people visiting friends and relatives, so we introduced a new programme that will allow people to come to Dubai on this virtual working programme and work from Dubai. We have amazing infrastructure when it comes to office space, and the infrastructure within connectivity and IT is second to none.

"We rolled that out recently, so now people can come over here and work seamlessly with their offices back home and at the same time, enjoy what Dubai has to offer. We can almost guarantee 365 days of sun. The weather for the next six to eight months is stunning, so why not take that opportunity to come and visit your friends and relatives and have a great time while also working efficiently."

And I loved the campaign concept, the short videos were very clever, and they are on the Visit Dubai site and social media.

The idea was to, be playful, light-hearted, and a little tongue and cheek, to take people out of the mindset of worry and concern and enjoy the situation we are all in. As long as we focus on the hygiene and safety and wellbeing, you know, just enjoy this opportunity.

As you know, we have people living in Dubai from two hundred nationalities. The ex-pats loved it, and they saw if there's anywhere you want to be during this period, it would be Dubai. We were getting messages from our own friends and colleagues from the ecosystem, telling us that their family and friends abroad are jealous of how Dubai has managed things.

That gave us the idea to introduce something to make people stay here for a much longer time and feel very comfortable. We then launched the Retirement Programme off the back of that, encouraging people to think of Dubai as a long term option, not just a stopover.

Over the past twenty or thirty years, many people have thought of Dubai as a stopover but ended up staying much longer, even to a second or third generation. This was something that we've been discussing for years.

We talked about the marketing element and the initial campaigns, and the current one is the 'Live Your Story' campaign. Can you tell us a little bit more about what you're going to do with this campaign?

With 'To Live Your Story' your story becomes relevant to every individual client. We make it as bespoke as possible, showing them the wide variety of things you can do in Dubai, which goes well beyond just the beach, retail and luxury.

We undertook four different phases of our campaign. Initially, we had the awareness part of it, during the first few months of the lockdown. This ensured that people still engage with Dubai, and Dubai remains top of people's minds. The

continuation phase was the 'Ready When You Are' campaign. That started to move people down the funnel, giving them things to be excited about and look forward to, and remind them of things they're missing. And at the same time, the natural evolution moved into the conversion part with your story. Now is a time to come to Dubai, and enjoy what Dubai has to offer. So you've been building and dreaming about this moment.

We work very closely with our partners in the trade; we have Emirates nearby, and we work very closely with them, of course. Also, as Dubai airports have the open skies policies, we work with all our partners around the world, to bring as many tourists as possible into the city. And of course, with the trade on the ground, we can leverage many of our campaigns. These assets are all readily available for them to access and then convert those potential interests.

In all of our campaigns, we always make sure that it's relevant to different target audiences, different segments within the other markets and serving a different purpose.

For example, we pride ourselves for being a family destination. Our family targeting is quite broad. We start with families with kids; those kids can be young adults who might be with their siblings and friends. Then we have couples travelling as newlyweds or honeymooners. It opens up the horizon for us, but we also make sure the messaging is relevant for them all.

What we're offering the families in terms of the theme parks, the various hotel and beach offerings will be very different from couples travelling together who will be looking for other experiences. They may be looking for the cultural and heritage side of Dubai and of course, let's not forget the fantastic gastronomy scene as well.



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