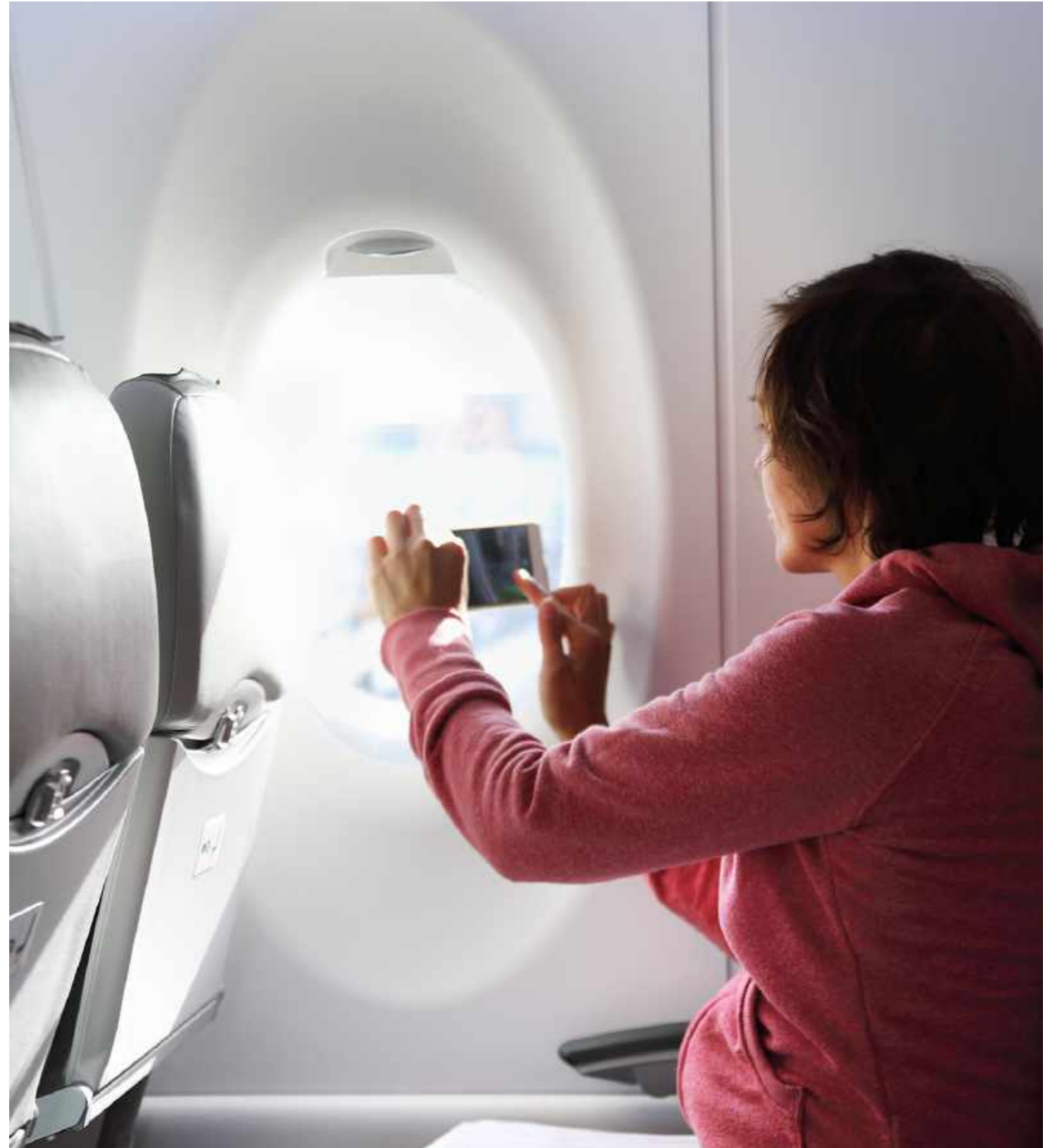


How to use staff travel to power your content marketing

Turn user-generated video
into compelling content that
drives customer engagement



Introduction

Your staff are your best assets

How travel agencies can maximise ROI on fam trips

Staff travel is a great training tool for and essential for expanding product knowledge.

For the travel trade, this is particularly true. New product needs to be experienced first hand.

But it can be challenging for staff to capture their experiences when they are back at the office. Traditional reporting and photos only go so far. Travel consultants may find producing and editing travel videos challenging and expensive.





Fam trips are essential for expanding and updating travel agents' product knowledge. But knowledge transfer upon return is problematic

Familiarisation trips provide essential training for travel consultants. They are also a great way to get fresh, authentic and affordable marketing content for your agency.

Providing access to fam trips for consultants is a great reward. Most travel agency managers see fams as a very important part of training.

However, just because they're necessary doesn't change the fact that it's hard having your staff away from the office. So how can you get the best return on investment for the time that your consultants are away?

The first hurdle is ensuring agents report back to their colleagues upon return in order to update the team.

Staff travel can have an impact on the business and the team left behind

Just because staff travel is necessary doesn't change the fact that it's hard having your staff away from the office. So how can you get the best return on investment for the time that your consultants are away?

“We have staff covering consultants who are away, but I see it as a bonus as our agents are learning and come back with better product knowledge”

Penny Spencer, Managing Director, Spencer Travel Group

According to a recent poll conducted by Vloggi*, the majority of travel agents go on at least one one fam trip per year. For busier agencies, this number can be far higher.

That travel consultant's average salary of \$1150 per week is lost to the agency when they're away from the office.

Agents try to service active clients' bookings while away, but have to pass on new bookings to colleagues. This is a potential loss of \$500-600 in bookings for a mid-tier travel agency turning over around \$300,000 - \$380,000 per year.

Your staff can record their experiences and share them with the team to help improve everyone's product knowledge. It also gives your marketing team fresh ideas about new products that they can push to your audience, subsequently converting this investment in time into bookings.

Case Study: Destination International Holidays

Owner and founder Russ Masterton says: “Our agency often covers the full expense of famil trips. We don't wait for suppliers to offer reduced rates or free trips. This is because I can select the most appropriate dates, destinations or tours and there are also fewer trips for independent agencies.

“In a small agency it can be a challenge scheduling when people are away, but by running our own 'familis' we can set the dates. Since everyone in the team enjoys the same deal, there is less of a problem with covering for each other.

“Including familis for our staff is an investment in the business, because ultimately we see the value in our repeat business and having knowledgable and happy staff.”

*Survey conducted on 5924 members of Facebook group Travel Industry Women July 2019

Creating and sourcing unique marketing content can be a challenge.

Post-trip staff slide shows used to be part of the rituals of travel agency life. But the fast pace of working life means that today's agents no longer regularly do team briefings.

This is compounded by the need many agency owners feel to update their social media channels regularly with fresh content. So how can you use the knowledge and updates your team gets in your marketing and feed the social media beast?

The biggest drivers behind these increasing content demands are growing consumer segmentation, great need for personalisation. This leads to greater demand for fresh content across an increased number of traveller touch points.

The good news for travel agencies is that travellers are more likely to trust the recommendations of "micro-influencers" such as trusted travel professionals. This means you can use your family trip reports as part of your content marketing.

Customers are increasingly looking for social proof for inspiration. The impact social media has had on the travel industry is transformational. Many travellers in all age groups look to user-generated content (UGC) for guidance and ideas. Photos and videos posted by friends, family or peers on social media are the top source of inspiration.

But the advice of trusted travel professionals is almost as valued, especially to high-net worth individuals whose expectations are higher. Consumers want to talk to people who have real experience of the accommodation and transport they will be using. Education trips provide agencies with an arsenal of material that could be used for marketing.

This has led many tour operators and travel agencies to invest time and money in curating content for social media, newsletters and blog posts. Done well, this kind of content marketing can yield great results in lead generation.

“We haven't done a lot of content marketing and it's only recently that we have put some focus on increasing our online exposure and have outsourced a specialist to assist with web content, lead generation and social media.”

Russ Masterton, Founder, Destination International Holidays

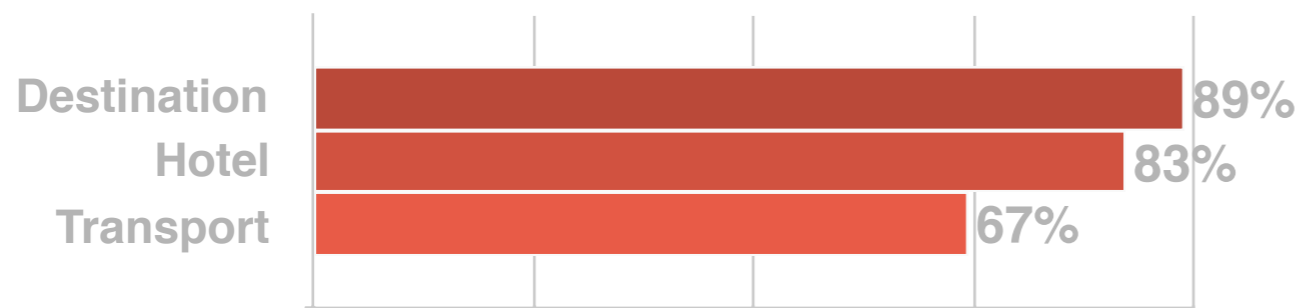
The importance of authenticity in user-generated product reviews

According to research by Stackla, 86% of people say they've become interested in a specific location based on visual social proof. Noticeably, the type of social content matters; consumer-created photos are 1.8 x more likely to interest people in travel than images from a celebrity or social influencer.

Of the travel content produced on social media, destinations lead, with 89% of respondents saying they would post an image online. But next is hotels and transport, with airlines the top sub category. The power of UCG is a real person, having a real experience, with a real smile — we can relate to this more than a staged photo or video created by a brand.

Of the six types of social proof, referrals from existing customers of a product comes first, followed closely by the advice of experts and referrals from friends.

Posts of travel experience, by category



6 Major Types of Social Proof



In fact, guest-generated content like TripAdvisor reviews is trusted seven times more than paid content. Plus the reward is non-monetary, unlike paid influencers, 87% of TripAdvisor reviewers “just want to share good experiences”

But there is a new kid on the block in the form of video blogging. Today YouTube videos are now more trusted than TripAdvisor reviews, due to the authenticity of the people creating the content. Large travel brands already partners with vloggers, but smaller companies can do so now too.



A photograph of three women in matching patterned dresses (yellow and grey) with red flowers in their hair, singing and clapping. The background is dark with some lights, suggesting an indoor party setting.

“I stalked my friend’s Facebook feed when she was on a family holiday in Fiji. She posted videos of the staff singing her happy birthday, photos of the view from the spa and of her son playing with the Mei Mei [nanny].

I ended up booking the exact same deal because I could see that it had everything I was looking for, for my 40th birthday trip.

Renee Mahoney

How to use staff trips to source visuals for your next marketing campaign

Sourcing marketing content can be expensive and resource-intensive. Businesses are predominantly getting their content from a range of sources — both internal and external. The majority of businesses always or very regularly use internal design and creative teams to create visual content for their brand, as well as marketing agencies, in-house photography, user-generated content, and stock photography. The annual cost for your marketing content can be very high.

In-house user-generated content from fam trips can reduce your annual marketing cost dramatically and provide great return on investment

For the travel trade, fam trips can provide a great source of free and authentic new content for your marketing needs. Recent research has shown that when given the choice between two visuals— user-generated or brand-generated— the majority of people said the user-generated images were the most authentic, and more likely to make them trust the brand that posted it, and the most likely to be the image they would click on if both were featured in an ad or social post. Most marketers believe authenticity is the most important component of effective content.

Though it probably won't come as a big surprise, ad-weary audiences are increasingly looking for authenticity. Using your in-house team to provide visuals - video and photography from their fam trips will reduce your annual marketing costs dramatically and provide better results.



The kind of visual content travel staff should be collecting while on trips includes:

- Hotel reviews for each room category
- Destination reports for visited places
- Product updates on preferred suppliers
- Attractions, sightseeing and experiences

Maximise your post-trip reports by re-using as marketing collateral

Your travel consultant is back at the office and it's reporting time. Many travel agencies use written reporting and team briefings to capture their consultants' feedback from the trip.

However, in many cases, reports are stored on the agency intranet for tax audit purposes and the team briefings are limited. The fresh knowledge from the trips is not shared with the team member and the reports are not read.

“We get a lot of hits on our consultant reports when we feature in our newsletters”

Karsten Horne, CEO, Reho Travel

Taking photos with a mobile phone is easy and a great way to capture experiences during the trip. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then videos would be worth a million.

However, producing and editing travel videos can be challenging and expensive. Many consultants would put it in the 'too hard' basket. But if the same agents are already posting trip highlights to social media, you can re-use.

A 7-point guide to the perfect consultant report

Creating post-trip family reports need not be a chore if you automate the process. You're aiming at a 500-1200 word summary of the trip with dates, details and photos.

1. Provide a clear brief for the family trip reporting process.
2. Set up a template that it is easy to use on-the-go. Create a form that staff can fill out using their mobile or laptop.
3. Give guidance to your consultants about what type of things they should look out for, like hotel reports, destination briefings or things to do checklists.
4. Ask staff to make observations tailored to their own client base. The writing should sound like advice.
5. Prompt staff to remember to take visuals as they travel. A picture is worth 1000 words and a video a million!
6. Give staff a deadline when you expect to receive the report. The sooner, the better as the trip will still be fresh in their mind, but the latest, within two weeks. Ideally you would like to get the updates real-time or at least as soon as they arrive to the office.
7. Most importantly, make it clear that you would like to use their content in marketing activities. Your consultants will feel more motivated to provide their insights if they know their reports are being read by their clients.



Visual content draws the crowds

The importance of visual content and especially the use of video in online marketing and social media has exploded in recent years. A Facebook executive has predicted that the social media platform will be all video by 2021 (Hubspot).

YouTube is now the world's second largest search engine and second most visited site after Google. It is also the 2nd most popular social media platform with 1.9bn users.

But many of the kind of travel-related searches on either Google Video or YouTube go unanswered as travel videos tend to be generic, whereas searches are specific. Travel companies now need to incorporate video in their social marketing strategies to reach those searching YouTube.

- Images are the single biggest content type on social media for travel channels(Ofcom, 2017)
- 100 million hours of video content are watched on Facebook daily (Facebook, 2016)
- 20% of people will read the text on a page, but 80% of people will watch a video (MyMSN, 2017)
- After watching a video, 64% of users are more likely to book a tour or attraction online (Forbes, 2017)
- Studies show that people have the ability to recall 65% of the visual content that they see almost three days later (Hubspot 2019)

Which social media tools to incorporate into your trip reporting?

There are various tools that can be used in capturing visuals in fam trip reporting. Some easy to use and some require more effort. Here's a round-up of some of our favourites.

Instagram

Instagram can be a fun way for agents to share pictures while they travel. It's also easy because everyone already has it. But photos and videos you share to your Instagram story disappear from your feed, profile and direct message tab after 24 hours, unless you add it as a Story Highlight.

Memories in Photos on iPhones

Memories is a neat new feature for compiling photos and videos into short movies or slideshows. The photos included in these short movies are added based on the time and place they were taken. Users can set a mood for the accompanying music and speed up or slow down the transitions.



Creating albums based on different trips is an easy way to organise and find photos. However, photos and videos take up a lot of memory. A good idea would be to transfer them to your laptop to free up your phone's memory.

Options for Android

If you want to make videos compilations of your trips with your Android smartphone or tablet, there are several Android apps for capturing, video making, video editing and enhancing your final movie right from your mobile device such as Kinemaster (free) and Wevideo (free) Check out Google Play Store for details.

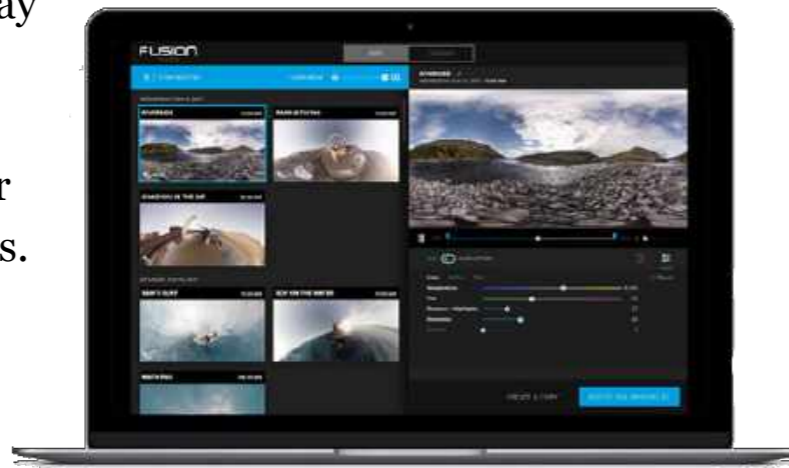


Desktop video editing platforms for marketing professionals

When your staff have shot their videos on their phones, editing them together can be simple with a few browser-based video editors. Here's a sample of the best.

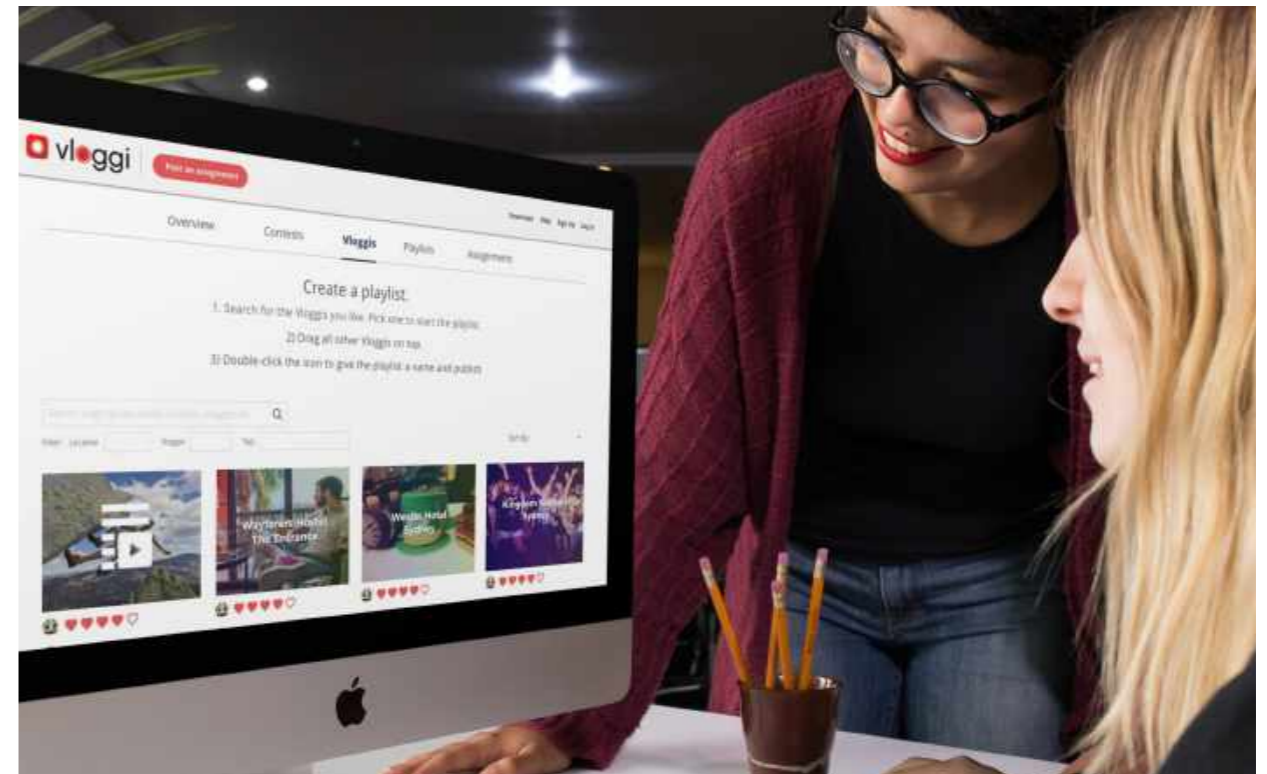
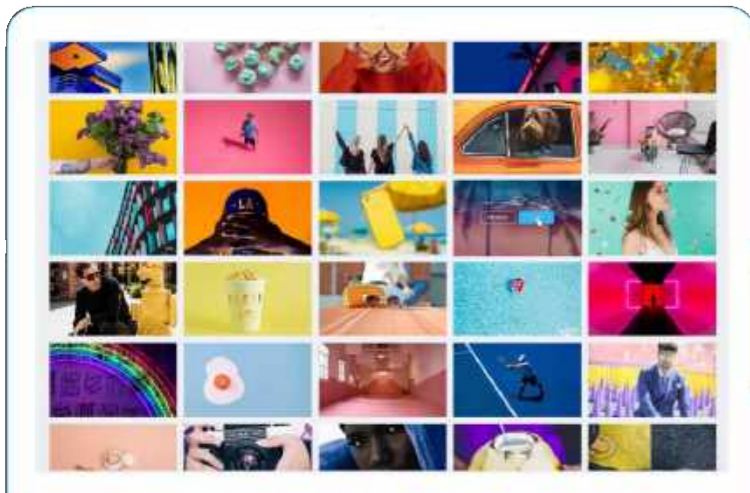
GoPro Fusion Studio

Provides a simple way to transfer footage from a GoPro and convert it to a longer video and add effects. It plugs into professional editing software like Adobe Premiere.



Promo

Promo provides a platform to create marketing videos with footage, music, and editor included. Use preset templates to create video adverts.



Vloggi

Vloggi is a collaborative video platform for communities. It allows teams to co-create video, reducing cost and time.

Vloggi's suite of tools makes it easy for travel companies to source, brand and use video content created on staff trips.

Its technology automatically edits and brands, so you don't have to. The Vloggi app is easy-to-use video capturing tool for travel consultants from their fam trips..

The platform also has a built-in PDF report generator for print out trip reports together with text and photos

When, what and how to post videos to social media

How often you should post depends on what platforms your audience is on, their schedules, and the kind of content you're posting. A great tool is an editorial calendar.

Creating an editorial calendar will help save you time and manage your presence. You can keep track of what you need to post and what's already posted. It is important to choose a routine, be consistent and always offer value. Make sure you schedule posts to coincide with the content that will be generated from fam trips.

Here some guidelines of the length of video to be used in social media and some tips on posting. Why does video matter?

When it comes to social --- video is king. 90% of consumers say video helps them make buying decisions in 2018. Viewers who watch the first three seconds of a video are most likely to finish it. Videos with informative captions work best.

Make sure your videos are visually stunning so they can easily grab the attention of viewers. You can use apps like Hyperlapse or Snapchat to create fun and engaging video formats. Be sure to use plenty of relevant hashtags to facilitate easier discovery of your videos.

INSTAGRAM: 30 SEC

Random or disjointed content confuses your audience. Maintain a consistent brand aesthetic on your Instagram account. Post videos six times per week and include captions on videos for phone viewing.



TWITTER: 20 SEC



Twitter currently has a 30-second limit for video content. The average lifetime of tweet is only 18 minutes so post 10 times daily. You can upload animated GIFS for the best effect to automatically play in news feeds.

FACEBOOK: 90 SEC

Post once a day or less. If you have a large audience, you could probably get away with posting twice. Be selective about what you publish and create more engaging posts. You can post video series for consistency and to create a loyal following of fans.



YOUTUBE: 2 MINS



On YouTube, audiences engage the most with videos that are around two minutes. YouTube videos should be to cover a concept that would take a blog post 1,000 words to explain, making it perfect for trip reports or destination briefings.

How to publish videos to your existing customer channels

Once you have created a few videos, make sure you publish them across your existing channels to reach customers.

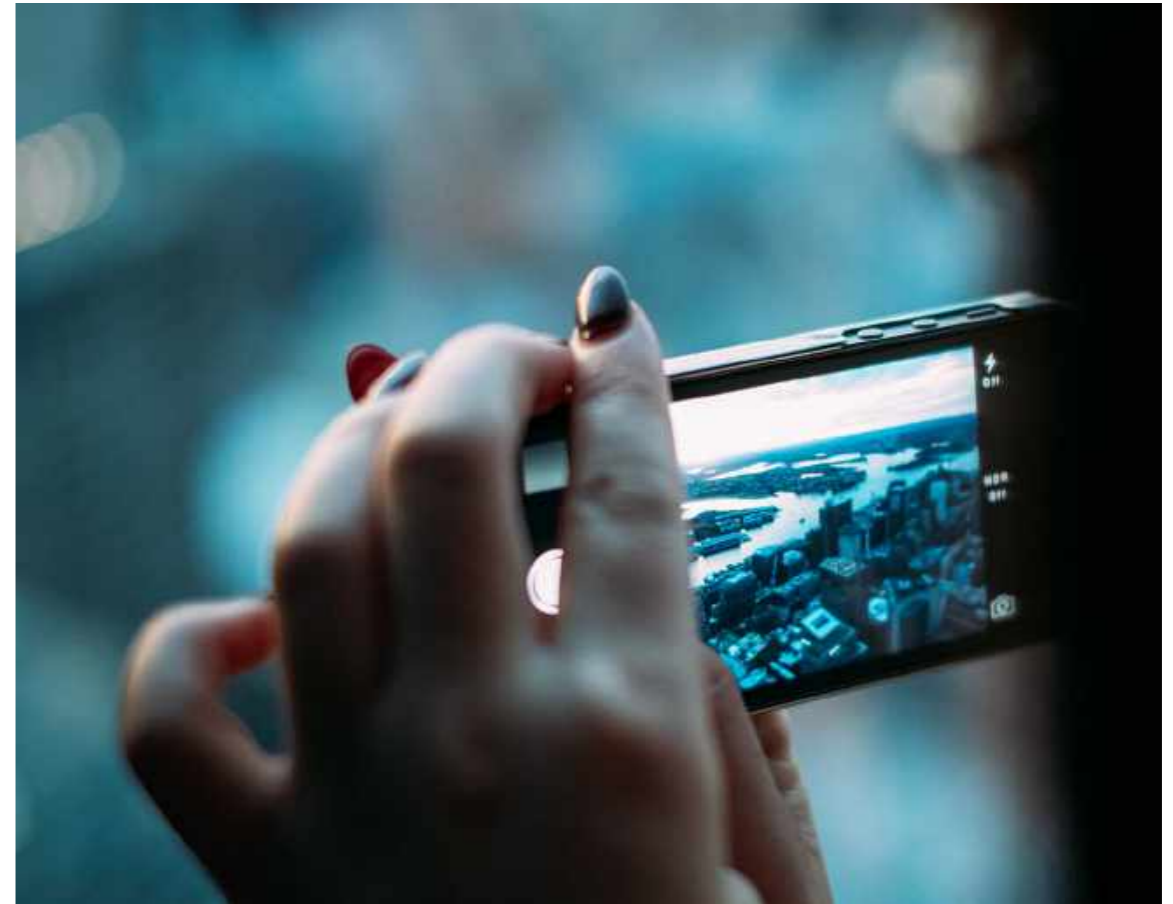
Trip reports should form a series of consistently branded videos with a call-to-action back to you agency. Then include in newsletters and blog posts.

Every time you publish a blog post, it's a new opportunity for someone to find your business's website and learn about your products. By investing in the creation of engaging content that helps answer questions for your target customer, you're establishing trust.

The same is true of video blogging. When you are clear who the kind of niche your agency's clients fall into, you can start creating video content tailored towards them.

The ideal fam trip content can become a captivating and authentic personalised travel story and the content can be reused many times across many social media channels.

Your agents will get a thrill out of seeing their video content used in your marketing, but many agencies also incentivise or reward star vloggers among their staff.



Contact us

To find out more about video blogging for travel agencies, head to vloggi.com/travelagents or contact Vloggi sales for a demonstration at sales@vloggi.com



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