

Innovation report inspiration trip Topsail Charters

Topsail Charters (Essex) is a company that has managed to reinvent itself after 32 years by thinking about how they can offer that exceptional experience where the tourist looking for today. They focus on generating extra income during the winter months as a seasonal business. And think very cleverly about how you without large communication budgets, can appeal to a wide and diverse audience via social media.

- When you have been in the business for 32 years, it is about repositioning and to re-burn your product. This made the 2-hour afternoon cruise simple transformed into the 2 island adventure. Just the name of your product adapting to the experience that your visitor is looking for does wonders.
- Since social media activities are targeted at women, the bookings are increased from 40 to 60%: "Women move more quickly to book, men see us, they like us on Facebook, but don't book".
- During the winter months, when people are less likely to take a boat trip, Topsail Charters sets up collaborations with other local entrepreneurs. For example, the boats are used as one location for pop-up restaurants. Topsail is able to reach people who have never heard of them and can generate income during the winter months from the sale of food and beverages.
- Communication is mainly focused from October to the end of the year and the sale of gift vouchers for Christmas is an important way of guaranteeing income that is paid up front and leads to early Spring bookings.
- It is essential to offer people a great experience. Everyone has different expectations. It is therefore more important that employees have the right skills to deal with people and fulfil expectations. At the start of each journey, staff members talk about the journey and what the guests can expect.

Although they use sail vessels, the circumstances not always good for sailing. Before setting off the skipper explains exactly what they will do. i.e. "We will be motoring for 30 minutes and then sailing for an hour". That way everyone understands and nobody is goes home disappointed

- TripAdvisor is essential because of the reviews, Instagram is important for creating name recognition and Facebook leads to direct bookings.
- Topsail Charters has chosen to put the guest at the centre of communication. Many companies tell people what they have to offer, such as "we offer you have many opportunities to ...", "we offer a sailing trip"... Topsail Charters tries to reformulate these traditional approaches so that everything comes from the perspective of the guest: "You can choose from many possibilities", "You can sail along the bay" ...
- Social media activities are carefully planned during the day - just before coffee break in the morning, just before the lunch break, during the evening.
- The company has the luxury that guests send them many photos spontaneously. The photographer always explicitly asks for permission to take the photo and for its later use. All photos are then saved, including name and photographer's contact information, sorted by date.

Even if you have permission Topsail Charters only uses the photo on social media and never in official brochures, flyers etc. in order to prevent the persons in the photo being associated be with the sale of Topsail Charters.

- All staff members know every product (including drinks) on board, so that everyone can answer questions from guests and products are for sale after the trip.
- Topsail Charters uses local products as much as possible through local suppliers. This ensures high flexibility, local suppliers where you have a good bond can also deliver extra orders quickly. Both beer, wine and apple juice are produced locally. The ambition is to stock local products only within five years giving the guests a full range of local wines and beers. This approach appears to be highly appreciated by the guests.

