

Identifying New Sales Channels to Attract New Customers



Discussion Ideas & Tips

Given the loss of traditional customers and markets experienced by many tourism operators, there has been a need to find new customers. In many cases, this has involved looking at new sales channels. This summary highlights the thoughts and ideas generated from 16 tourism operators/professionals.

Tactical Practical Take-Aways

1. Introduce your business to a new generation of Canadians, especially new Canadians looking to learn about and experience what their adopted country has to offer. For operators that have been in business for many years, this could also mean a focus on the children of past customers.
2. Invite existing and past customers to reconnect and share their memories. Elmhirst's did this to great success on social media with their "My favourite adventure memory of Elmhirst's Resort is ..." and asked customers to fill in the blank. Not only did this reengage current and past guests with the resort, it also showed new customers why they might enjoy visiting the resort. Most importantly, it provided new bookings.
3. Consider how you like to travel as a foundation for thinking about and exploring new opportunities and markets to develop. Elmhirst's did this when they discovered [Harvest Hosts](#), a membership program that invites self-contained RVers to have unique overnight stays. The experience as an RVer with the program resulted in their becoming a host location and finding a new market segment. Their experience as a host has shown Harvest Host members, while not requiring accommodations, spend on activities and services and consider returning to the resort as a typical guest.
4. When finding new markets, consider how they align with your current offer and customer base. Ensure that new customers do not conflict with the experience provided to existing customers. For

Industry Topic Specialist

Name: [Anne Marshall](#)
 Position: Director International Sales
 Company: [Elmhirst's Resort](#)
 Location: [Peterborough & The Kawarthas](#)
aem@elmhirst.com

Elmhirst's this meant offering only one spot for use by Harvest host members.

5. Look in your own backyard and closely examine your assets with a COVID-lens. Restrictions may have changed the perceptions of what an asset is and its importance. Elmhirst's identified some assets were of greater importance now than in the past and that the importance differed by consumer segment. For example, new Canadians living in multi-generational households were particularly happy to rent cabins where they can cook their own food and gather as a family.
6. Dive deep into your customer base and reach out in new, more personalized ways. Some operators found success in making sales calls to past/high potential guests. Such calls also allowed operators to understand their guests' comfort level with the safety changes being implemented.

New Ideas shared at the most recent session included:

- "Provide something for nothing." Some businesses are offering their venue, at no cost, to others in the community, which brought in a new customer and generated sales for the host business. Look within your community to identify possible opportunities for you to "give to get." Artists/artisans see if there are any non-traditional locations where you can perform, show how you make and/or present your goods. Such collaborations can help everyone attract new customers.
- Find opportunities to collaborate with other local businesses that share a commitment to the COVID

protocols and are interested in building consumer trust by delivering an experience that is safe and intimate (e.g., restricting the number of people). Consider if everyone would adopt international [safe travels protocols](#).

- Smaller local retailers can differentiate and leverage “love locals” by presenting a small is beautiful (and safe) invitation to a market that typically shops from larger retailers.
- Small businesses can look to optimize their friendships with other operators and sales agents vs. relying on OTAs (e.g., Expedia). Visitors will trust operators with whom they have had a great experience and be more interested in their recommendations than those from an OTA.
- Community ambassador programs will help businesses know about the other businesses in the area and facilitate cross collaboration and selling, which builds the strength of the destination.
- Develop themed experiences based on community experiences and guests’ passions. Focusing on a specific theme can be effective in attracting new audiences.
- Collaborate between small and medium size local businesses in order to provide visitors with access to the heart of the local community.

Additional Ideas shared in previous sessions included:

- If operating a niche business, the more connections you can make and have sell for you the better. Reach out to local businesses and accommodations providers and invite them to try out your experience. They will be more open to promoting your experience if they know what you are offering and the care you are taking,

- Revisit your online sales channels to determine if you are set for the future. If not, use the quiet time to invest and get ready for 2021. Consider Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as [Airbnb](#) and [TripAdvisor](#) who offer experience listings. Both organizations charge a 20% commission to sell experiences.
- Reimagine your 2021 in-person experiences to see if there is a virtual experience, or a blended experience (some guests online, some in person) adhering to evolving COVID-19 guidelines.
- Check to see if there is a guide/directory associated with the experience being offered. If so, this can be an excellent way to promote your business.
- Look at your website and eCommerce platforms to identify if any plug-ins offer integrations that will help you promote and sell in other channels. [Shopify's](#) integration with Facebook and Instagram is an example of this that some appreciate.
- When testing new experiences, identify potential customers to pilot with who could be ambassadors of the new experience and help you promote it. Atlantic Ballet of Canada did this with some of their supporters when they tested out [Experience ballet by the ocean](#) this past summer. The outdoor performance was so successful; it will be offered in 2021.
- Offer the same activity at different times of the day. An activity offered at night will use different senses and can result in a very different experience than the same activity offered during the day and could be of interest to a new consumer market.

“You can worry about COVID or embrace it and figure out how to attract new guests, make them happy, and grow back from there.”

– Anne Marshall

Additional Helpful Links

[Expedia Partner Solutions - Research Reports](#)

[WTTC's Safe Travels & Global Protocols Stamp](#)

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