



Attracting Small Groups Through Adapting Your Offer

Industry Topic Specialist

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Specialist Highlights

Stayed true to their core mission while innovating to grow their 2021 business and welcome guests back together safely, comfortably with new, permanent experiences. The following were core to their decision-making and development.

Building Trust through:

- Smaller audiences/pods.
- Outdoor venues to increase the sense of safety
- Shorter concerts and no intermission to decrease opportunity for cluster gatherings
- Separate entrances for new venues to separate traffic flows
- Proactive communication showing new venues and seating, traffic flows prior to ticket purchase

Keeping Fresh by:

- Reconfiguring the barn to provide a new perspective for past guests
- Building new outdoor venues to stage new experiences for groups of 25, 50 and 100
- A more intimate experience.

Becoming More Viable by:

- Engaging artists for multiple experiences on a single day
- Increasing their COVID-19 capacity and scale it up or down.
- Shifting from free to paid online experiences.

Discussion Ideas & Tips

COVID-19 restrictions have forced businesses that attract large crowds to reframe their visitor experiences and/or business model to adapt.

This summary highlights the discussion and ideas generated by 12 Ontario-based tourism operators/professionals regarding how to adapt offers to attract small groups.

“Nature and music have always been integral to Westben and the pandemic has offered us the chance to take this to the next level – both digitally and on site/in person.”

Donna Bennett

Tactical Practical Take Aways

- Create experiences that are shorter and can be offered more frequently in order to recoup revenues that would have come from larger groups.
- Offer the same experience, multiple times in one day, allowing for cleaning between groups, to get the most from the initial set-up time and cost. Also consider offering the experience at night it is likely to attract a different audience.
- Create a series of interconnected experiences to build repeat business. This could be by offering levels of experiences, or by offering the experience at different times of the year.
- Consider segmenting large groups into smaller one based on themes that reflect their interests. This could be different music genres as Westben is doing, or themes relating to the history of the area, food, etc.
- Collaborate with others in your community to create a stronger draw as Fenlon Falls did when the local stores worked together to present a two-day “Shop with your Bubble” event. Where customers made reservations to shop and socialize with each other at participating retailers. The event was so successful it continued for a month and may be brought back.
- Review your location, especially if you operate in a large space, to identify opportunities to structure the space in ways that enhance small group gatherings.

New Ideas shared at the most recent session:

- Some businesses have found increased benefits from small groups. It’s enabled a more intimate and engaging experience that can be sold at a higher price and is something they plan to continue offering post-pandemic.
- Given travellers are looking for 4 hours of activity for every hour travelled collaborating with other businesses in your area may help increase the community’s ability to attract customers from further away.

- The outdoors is a key venue where people feel safe. Offering and moving experiences outdoors will attract visitors. Ideas generated that apply to small groups and yet could scale up as restrictions lift included:
 - Creating tours that can be offered to small groups or through an app if people’s family bubble/pod is too large to be personally led.
 - Geo-caching experiences – physical or virtual can be a great way to help visitors engage with and learn about an area.
 - Mystery tours and scavenger hunts are effective at getting people to move around and engaging with local businesses/the area.
 - Some retailers and galleries are finding a higher proportion of visitors are simply looking around, treating the business as a tourist attraction with no intention to purchase anything. Given restrictions in numbers permitted on site, an increase in non-purchasing visitors can have a significant impact on revenues. In such cases it may make sense to charge an entry fee that is deducted if the visitor makes a purchase. Or ask visitors to make a donation when they leave.
- Additional Ideas shared in previous sessions:**
- Transformational Nature Connection is offering experiences to small groups, or ‘pods’ which is allowing them to personalize elements and delve more deeply into the specific desires of each group to deliver a more nuanced experience that meets the group’s needs
 - Globus Theatre Opened 7,000 square feet of space using Plexiglas screens developed by Ontario Staging which allowed them to offer musical performances and provided a non-distracting safety barrier for the audience and performers.
 - Elmhirst’s resort introduced hybrid meetings where small groups of 10-15 people meet in person and others are brought in via zoom for specific parts of the meeting.
 - Elmhirst’s Resort adapted outdoor experiences (i.e., Escape the Maze) developed for the leisure market for corporate meetings. It was further suggested there is an opportunity to adapt indoor experiences for the outdoors, though in doing so it is necessary to understand and address any weather-related implications and infrastructure requirements.
 - Westben is suggesting concertgoers bring their own seating for outdoor concerts. This addresses people’s preference to use their own things and reduces the costs to the business (buying outdoor chairs and ongoing/between performance cleaning).
 - Look at your community and surroundings with a fresh perspective in order to identify new venues to run existing or new experiences. Westben is doing this with their new, curated nature walk and musical performance on the riverbed at the Mary West Nature Conservancy.
 - Review your experience and create an Experience Map that illustrates the customer journey, highlighting the new changes and guest requirements required due to the pandemic. Identify the points throughout the journey where it makes sense to build trust with the customer and the best way to do this.

Additional Helpful Links

Articles regarding the importance of trust in these times:

- Deloitte: [Maintaining Customer Loyalty and Trust During Uncertainty](#)
- Harvard Business Review: [Ensure That Your Customer Relationships Outlast Coronavirus](#)

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