Case Study

2016 GRAND EURO EFFIE AWARD WINNER

“ASK GUDMUNDUR: WORLD’S FIRST HUMAN SEARCH ENGINE”

THE POWER OF A CONTENT-LED APPROACH AND SEVEN ICELANDIC GUDMUNDURS

With a budget of only £1.71m, Iceland created a radically new type of tourism campaign using Responsive Content rather than traditional communications to rapidly change the attitudes and behaviors of tourists, adding £36.5m to the economy with a ROI of 21.3:1.

"Iceland invites you to send your questions to #AskGudmundur. I gather that Iceland has a lot of folks called Gudmundur and they’ll answer." – President Barack Obama
Executive Summary

THE NEED FOR MORE PROFITABLE TOURISM

The Inspired by Iceland (IBI) campaign\(^1\) was created in 2010 as a means of increasing tourism confidence in Iceland as a destination following the seismic effects of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano. Rather than targeting potential tourists, the campaign recognized the power of Iceland’s existing fans and marketing activity was focused on generating positive word-of-mouth.

Since its launch, IBI has helped to galvanise the tourism industry in Iceland; experiencing twenty consecutive quarters of like-for-like growth, with tourism growing more than 300%. The momentum created by the campaign has helped turned Iceland into one of the most desirable tourist destinations\(^2\) in global culture. The campaign had been an unqualified success.

GRAPH-1\(^3\)

But when we looked behind the headlines at the start of 2015, a stark new challenge emerged. Although the campaign had helped drive people in record numbers to visit the country, data showed that tourists spent the majority of their time around the capital area of Reykjavik in the south of the country.

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\(^1\) Source: IBI was 2012 Euro Effie Grand Prix winner


\(^3\) See appendix context graph related to the steady growth of tourism in last 4 years prior to campaign (GRAPH-1)
As a result, the regions beyond the south were badly in need of the economic benefits brought about by increased tourism so it was essential that we found a new way to inspire tourists to travel further and visit the rest of Iceland.

GRAPH-2
And in addition, visitors who travel further are significantly more profitable tourists for the country as a whole, through their increased likelihood to stay longer and spend more. So, it was key that we maximised this profitable behaviour.

Objectives
CREATING MORE PROFITABLE TOURISTS:
RE-FOCUSING OUR OBJECTIVES

The 2015 IBI Client Brief re-focused our objectives on driving more profitable tourism for the whole country.

2015 BUSINESS OBJECTIVES
1. Continue to drive year-on-year growth in total tourist bednights and revenue.
2. Grow tourism revenue outside of Reykjavik and the south.

2015 MARKETING OBJECTIVES
3. Get tourists to stay longer and travel further through the regions.
4. Get tourists to spend more.

2015 COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES
5. Drive awareness of the secrets in all the regions of Iceland.
6. Build positive perceptions of all regions.
7. Increase consideration & search of all regions.

Communication Strategy
THE RESPONSIVE CONTENT MODEL:
A RADICALLY DIFFERENT CONTENT-DRIVEN APPROACH TO MASS ENGAGEMENT

Enlightened Tourists are the key target audience for our campaign. They live in cities in mainland Europe and North America, are well travelled and love travelling to places that are off the beaten track. They don’t just want a holiday; they want to discover somewhere new.

Research amongst Enlightened Tourists found that a key barrier to travelling beyond the south was a lack of

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4 See appendix context graph related to the worrying decline in hotel bednights in the regions of Iceland (GRAPH-2)
5 Source: Attitude surveys towards Iceland as a destination in foreign markets 2010-2015, MMR research company
knowledge about the broader country. In effect, much of the rest of the country remained a secret. It was this realization that helped shape our Communications Strategy.

We realized that ‘Discovering secrets’ was at the core of our audience’s love of travel, so rather than treat secrets as a barrier to travel, we decided to harness them as a catalyst. In effect tourists could stay in the south, but if they really wanted to discover Iceland’s secrets, they should travel further.

The toughest challenge though was engaging them. One of the most over-targeted audiences on the planet, with around 3000 messages consumed per day⁶. It’s also estimated that almost 2/3 of them are ad-avoiding⁷. So, we knew we had to create a more content-led approach – living in their culture rather than the traditional paid and avoidable marketing channels. But our content-driven approach had to change behaviour as well as just attitudes, stimulating our audience to book holidays to Iceland and travel further within it.

So, we created a new kind of Responsive Content model for IBI:

The model was content-led and required a creative vehicle that could share secrets of Iceland throughout the year and be ready to answer our audience’s questions on a daily, real-time basis. Enlightened Tourists can make a holiday decision at any time so it was essential that we develop this 24/7 always-on approach that could answer their questions about Iceland whenever they arose.

Iceland competes for tourists against some big spending competitors (New Zealand, US, Canada and the Nordics) and has a share of voice against them of less than 1%.⁸ So, if our David was to take on their Goliaths, it was key that earned and owned media formed the heart of the campaign maximizing our budget and enabling Iceland to maintain an always-on conversation. Then paid media played a supporting role, being used to amplify our biggest earned and owned moments whenever they happened.

### Media Allocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Branded Content</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Specify: Earned Media (PR): 22%; Earned Media (Social): 11%; Paid Media (OOH): 19%; Influencer Outreach: 5%

### Commercial Communication Expenditure:

Under 5m Euro

### Creative Strategy

Research shows that Google is the first place tourists look when making a holiday decision⁹. But this creates a huge challenge for our Responsive Content model because the Icelandic content that first appears in Google favours the most popular destinations in Reykjavik and the south, whilst the secrets of the lesser-known regions rarely get shared.

We faced a tough challenge. How could we create an alternative source of answers to Google, which would

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⁶ Source: Shenk from his book ‘Data Smog’ quoting Michael Brower PHD & Warren Lean PHD from the Union of Concerned Scientists

⁷ Source: Forbes – ‘Why Millennials Don’t Respond to Ads’ written by Daniel Newman


spread the secrets of all of Iceland rather than just the most popular southern destinations? How could a country the size of Iceland, with a population of less than four hundred thousand people, take on the might of Google and win?

The breakthrough came when we talked to local Icelandic Guides about the recommendations they would give for the regions. During the discussions one Icelandic Guide commented ‘when you really want to know where to go in Iceland, ask a man not a machine.’

It was this insight about the importance of local knowledge, which shaped our creative solution. Rather than try to win in Google we decided to create an Icelandic alternative to it, driven by a more local and human knowledge.

The most popular name in Iceland is Gudmundur (pronounced ‘Good-mun-da’). 98% of the world’s Gudmundurs are actually from Iceland and so popular is it, that it’s a genuinely unisex name. So, we decided to create a service called Ask Gudmundur: The world’s first human search engine.

Ask Gudmundur was operated solely by Gudmundurs throughout the regions of Iceland. The service was available 24/7 across IBI’s media channels with seven Gudmundurs from around Iceland taking it in turn to share their local secrets in response to tourists’ questions.

Hero, Hub and Hygiene film assets were created to launch the Gudmundur service across IBI’s owned, earned and paid channels. The videos announced the service, introduced the Gudmundurs and invited people to start asking questions about Iceland in our key owned channels including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

Over the course of the first four months, the Gudmundurs shared their secrets throughout our channels, engaging with tourist’s questions and providing their own content in response. The activity spanned all key media channels with over 25,000 pieces of content generated by users and our Gudmundurs.

The overwhelming response to our Gudmundurs encouraged us to keep innovating.

We launched Gudmundur Hangouts, where tourists could quite literally hangout with a local Gudmundur in Iceland.

Gudmundur Maps provided geo-located regional secrets of Iceland.

Gudmundur Mobile took our Gudmundurs to key markets to answer our target audience’s questions live wherever they lived.

By giving people the world’s first human search engine, we reinvented Google Gudmundur-style and created the most human, informative and local way of planning your next holiday ...to Iceland of course.

"Iceland invites you to send your questions to #AskGudmundur. I gather that Iceland has a lot of folks called Gudmundur and they’ll answer." – President Barack Obama

Additional Information

The average weather was no better during the period than previous years. Iceland didn’t become more affordable over the 2014 campaign.

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10 Source: President Barack Obama’s address to the world at a state visit discussing world innovation trends - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=be0nACq0qDo&feature=youtu.be&t=57m22s
11 Source: Icelandic Met Office
12 Source: Central Bank of Iceland
No significant reductions in the price of flights for Icelandair, Wow, SAS, Delta, EasyJet and BA in the period.\(^\text{13}\) 
No financial or promotional incentives.\(^\text{14}\) 
The number of cultural events was the same.\(^\text{15}\) 
Growth in the Nordics remained constant during the period.\(^\text{16}\) 
The rate of growth of regional Icelandic tour companies was the same as in previous years.\(^\text{17}\) 
Tourists were actually taking fewer holidays than previous years.\(^\text{18}\) 
Consumers’ travel budgets remained the same versus previous years.\(^\text{19}\) 

\(^{13}\) Source: Icelandair Network Development Report 2009-2016 
\(^{14}\) Source: Icelandic Government 2015 
\(^{15}\) Source: Icelandic Government 2015 
\(^{16}\) Source: The World Travel Trends Report 2010-15 
\(^{17}\) Source: Icelandic Tourist Board 2015 
\(^{18}\) Source: The World Travel Trends Report 2014-15 
\(^{19}\) Source: The World Travel Trends Report 2013-2015