

Case study

Collaborative working for cultural tourism

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Background

creativetourist.com began as a collaborative marketing campaign for Manchester Museums Consortium (nine of the large museums and galleries in Manchester city centre and The Quays) to showcase the real strengths of city's somewhat hidden visual arts and museums offer to potential cultural tourists, and has since broadened to promote cultural activities across the city and the North. It now averages 50,000 unique hits a month from a highly engaged cultural readership.

The creation of the site was also a mechanism to change working practices in the city, to be more targeted and build partnership working across the sector through joint marketing and to make connections between the cultural and tourism sector.

Objectives

- To change perceptions of Manchester (and latterly the North) as viable and vital cultural destinations.
- To progress our understanding of digital marketing, tapping into the worlds of Web 2.0 and social media (in their infancy at that time) in order to engage with culturally motivated, geographically dispersed markets.
- To build long term partnerships within the cultural sector and with the tourism sector.
- Encourage partnership working across different cultural organisations.
- To generate increased visitors to Manchester.

Target audience

Cultural tourist: a niche market of culturally motivated visitors looking for memorable cultural experiences. Drawing on the different market segmentation used by Arts Council England (Arts Audience Insight) and Visit England (Ark Leisure Arkenfold), we identified 3 key markets that would respond to the Manchester cultural product and named them Urbanistas, Urban Families and Classic weekenders.

Our markets were to be found in other metropolitan, urban areas. They are digitally savvy, independent thinkers and travellers looking for an authentic but quality experience, already engaged with arts and media as discerning, consumers (and possibly as professionals). For them the risk was Manchester... and we need to persuade them that the cultural offer here is good enough to meet their expectations – and satisfy their needs for wraparound - where will they eat, stay, shop and play?

Process

- Careful research into the existing online landscape.
- Worked to identify the region's clear cultural and tourism offer, what makes Manchester unique and distinctive – and who will it appeal to?
- We decided upon an editorial (rather than promotional) approach as our target market identifies itself as 'independent' and so this would have more value and credibility to readers and visitors.
- From the outset there was a commitment to quality writing and establishing a distinctive Manchester tone of voice. We also understood the importance of consistency of content and being about 'Manchester' as a whole offer rather than individual cultural brands.
- In addition to regular content we also create and/or support cluster campaigns, such as the Manchester Weekender, Wonder Women and We Face Forward.
- We worked hard to build strategic long-term relationships with the culture sector, hosted media familiarisation visits and helped to create the Blog North Network, a group of cultural bloggers, to help share content through their networks.
- The website was supported by social media, PR, print and selective advertising.

Outcome

- creativetourist.com developed a trusted, independent voice that continues to help raise the profile of Manchester's cultural offer, given our market is highly mobile and active, is now successfully expanding to cover other cultural centres in the North.
- It's also loved by locals who share the same market profile as our out of town readership and was a tool to support the relocation of BBC staff to BBC North.
- With local stakeholders it is seen as the place where culture and tourism comes together strategically, and the mechanism for collaborative working.
- From the project's initial launch through its various iterations and development it has been held up across the industry as excellent and innovative tourism marketing practice.
- It continues to raise the profile of Manchester with our key markets and with the media.
- We have built a loyal and engaged community online through our social media profiles.
- The work to date has provided in-depth learning about the role that culture plays in shaping perceptions of destinations.

Key points for effective practice

- Patience! It takes a long time to build partnerships and it requires long-term commitment from everyone involved.
- This type of work is always more expensive than you think it will be, but often the cost relates to the people resource required to make significant change rather than the direct marketing costs.
- The biggest challenge has been identifying the direct link between creativetourist.com and the increased numbers of visitors to the region, although we have been able to track this more directly in the case of campaigns such as Manchester Weekender.
- When working collaboratively with many different organisations it is vital to build relationships through the organisation and at different levels, don't rely on one person.
- Be ambitious but realistic.
- You will likely need public and private sector support.
- It can be a challenge to reconcile the different focuses of the cultural and tourism sectors and it's important to recognise the sometimes differing, objectives, working practices, timelines and priorities.

Conclusions and observations

- The site continued to attract investment from partners and funders beyond the initial iteration.
- Recognised as a best practice model in cultural tourism by Visit England and Visit Britain.
- We continue to set up partnerships and affiliations, e.g. ticketing agencies, and are now in a position to explore the commercial viability of the site.
- There is a much more integrated partnership between creativetourist.com and Marketing Manchester.
- The team behind creativetourist.com has now set up [Creative Tourist Consults](http://creativetouristconsults.com) in response to demand to work with other cultural destinations across the UK.

Additional information

www.creativetourist.com

www.creativetouristconsults.com

About CultureHive

This case study was produced as part of CultureHive, a free knowledge hub where you can discover and share best practice in cultural marketing. Visit culturehive.co.uk for more great resources.