

TOP TOOLS TO USE TO MARKET YOUR TRAVEL BUSINESS

For any business to thrive it needs to attract and retain customers. In the travel game, this is no different and you'll need a regular flow of repeat business as well as new leads to keep it afloat. But which tools should you use and how do you market on a small budget? We've rounded up our top tips that will get you started without costing an arm and a leg:

Know what you sell and to whom: The golden rule of marketing: if you aren't clear on what you are and who you want to buy your services, no one else will be either. As a first step make sure that you've defined your product e.g. do you offer a specialist service such as sports tours or beach holidays? Travel is a very broad and competitive category so narrowing your focus, and interest, will help you target and market to a more niche (read: interested) audience.

Once you're clear on what your offering is, make sure you know who you're selling to. You're not the target audience, your customers are. Think like them, understand their needs and interests and tailor your messages to their tastes, not yours. An easy way to better understand your audience is to create personas of who they are. Give them a name, think where they live, what is their profession, do they have children, what do they like doing for fun, etc. Understanding their interests will help you market to them in a more meaningful and relevant way.

Be clear on your message and consistent with your brand: Once you've defined your product and target audience, you need to craft your message to make it catchy and engaging to your ideal customer. If you specialise in sports tours for instance, your messaging could have a more casual tone. Or if lux vakays are more your thing, then a sophisticated tone will work. Your logo and look & feel need to reflect your offering and audience too so make sure your colours and style clearly communicate your message. The same goes for your marketing touchpoints – Facebook, a website, business card. Not only does this make your business look more professional, it also communicates a consistent message throughout your marketing.

Produce stationary and collateral: With a clear message, tone and style in place, choose what stationary and other marketing collateral you need. A few basics are a logo, email signature, business card, letterhead and invoice. A website is also a good idea as you can use it to promote your service, explain who you are as well as share contact details. To find a service provider to build it, as well as a designer to create your look and feel, try [freelancer.co.za](https://www.freelancer.co.za); simply log your job need and quickly find a reliable supplier at a reasonable price. Or, if you're a design whizz, there are plenty of free [WordPress](https://wordpress.org/) or [Woo themes](https://www.woothemes.com/) available online for you to use and customise DIY.

Choose your channels: The internet has made it accessible and affordable for businesses to market their services themselves. Choose from social networks like Facebook, Linked-In or Twitter, use organic SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) to drive traffic to your website or distribute email newsletters such as [MailChimp](#) to your database announcing specials, new locations or packages. Here are a few quick tips to consider when using Facebook:

- Set up a business page by visiting www.facebook.com and clicking on “Create a new page”.
- Choose “Companies, Organisations or Institution”. Follow the prompts and include an “About section”. Ask someone you trust and who can write to either copy check your wording or write it for you. Make sure you include your website’s URL
- Include a catchy profile image such as an icon of your logo (ask your designer to create this for you) and relevant cover image such as a sports match if you’re a sports tour specialist.
- Drive interest to your page by creating engaging posts and boost them with a little advertising. Or invite people to like your page who you think will find interest in it. If you promote a hotel or location, tag them in your post. And always “like” a post in your personal capacity as it will show up on your own feed.
- Create Facebook ads for minimal spend, just be clear on your call to action and use a good quality image to attract interest.
- Regularly share new content with your community but do remember not to be too promotional; Facebook is an engagement platform first which means people will visit and stay on your page if they enjoy the content you post. Too much hard sell may result in a few defriends.

You could also start a blog – but only if you have the time and interest to keep it active. Effective at driving organic search to your site, blogs are a powerful publishing platform that you control. Choose topics such as tips to travel, where to go on holiday, useful tourism or travel updates, etc.; then share your posts on your social networks to drive engagement and traffic to your site.

Content production: When using social networks, blogs or emailers, or when creating a website, it’s key that you produce quality content that is error-free and of a high visual quality. These days customers are used to incredible imagery – thanks to Instagram and Pinterest – so invest in good stock images or even work with a photographer to shoot some of your own. You’ll need a range of portrait and landscape images and enough of them to ensure you have a steady supply of great pics to drive your activity. When writing, either use a freelance copywriter or have someone cast their eye over your work. Grammar or typos erode trust in a business so it’s in your interest to double-check yourself before you publish.

Topical tie-ins: When creating content it's valuable to tie into conversations of the day as this makes it more relevant and engaging. Using the sports tour example, link into conversations about the upcoming Olympics in Rio or Wimbledon Tennis Tournament in England in June and July for instance. In so doing, you can tie a related product into these events without it looking too much like a hard sell. Or, why not start a countdown to Rio campaign and post the top ten reasons why you need to be there to watch it live?

Evaluation: It's key that you know which marketing efforts work – or don't. Fortunately most online marketing tools have built in insights that offer valuable feedback. For instance, Facebook's Insights Page shows which posts performed well, how much engagement they generated and how many followers you have. MailChimp tells you how many times your emailer was opened as well as how many people unsubscribed, while Google Analytics is an effective way to see how much traffic your website is getting and from what sources. Using these tools you will soon gain a picture of what marketing works, and if it doesn't, what to change.

Expected marketing costs: While it's hard to provide an exact figure, you can get by with under R12k start-up costs. Here's how:

- Design of a logo, email signature and stationary: Freelance designers charge between R1500 and R3000. Just remember to add printing costs for your business cards.
- Website design: If you're doing the copy yourself, expect to pay around R5k for the design. With copy add an extra R3k
- Stock images: Using Shutterstock, pics cost \$50 for 5 or \$10 for one (about R160). Or you can buy bulk of 25 and pay \$9,16 a pic.
- Facebook advertising: This varies but a post can be boosted for as little as R25 while an ad campaign can cost you as little as a few hundred Rands

After the initial set-up fees, you'll likely need some budget for Facebook boosts or additional image purchases. Also, be aware of the time that marketing will take you; while it is free, it will cost in time. Allow for between 5 – 10 hours a week to keep you going.

Good luck!

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