

Highway 1 Road Trip 2023-24 Marketing Strategy Check-In

Where We've Been

The past few years, we've implemented a continuous improvement process where we plan, deploy, measure, adjust, optimize, test, and measure again. The team has diligently integrated all of the tactics to broadcast consistent messaging on all of our owned, earned, and paid channels.

Our overall messaging has been attribute focused, communicating what you can see/do here. Typically the fall campaigns have told of hidden secrets/points of interest, winter points to the season of coastal discovery/wildlife, and beaches being the message for spring. And we've deployed accompanying maps to provide additional information to potential visitors and grow a stronger, more engaged database.

What That's Generated

The website now receives an average of 75,000 visitors per month with the majority from Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. We have a nice distribution of age groups with the most in the 35-54 range and it slightly skews female (52.5%). The top driver of clicks from our SEM efforts are homeowners. The next largest audiences in terms of driving clicks, from largest to smaller:

- Beachbound Travelers
- Outdoor Enthusiasts
- Luxury Travelers
- Family Vacationers
- Travel Buffs
- Parents of Grade-Schoolers

The email database contains more than 100,000 subscribers. Both the open rate and click thru rate have continued to rise as a result of a higher quality audience that is engaged with the H1RT content. Most subscribers reside in California and western states.

Social media followers include 38,000 on Instagram and 107,900 fans on Facebook. Engagement rate on both platforms has increased year over year. Top cities reached include Los Angeles, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, San Diego, and Fresno. The age range is largely 35-64 and the audience skews toward women. Our Pinterest audience is also made up mostly of women who are based in LA, New York, Dallas, Chicago, and San Francisco. Our YouTube audience is 75% male with the most users in the 65+ age range.

Looking Ahead to 2023-24

As we look to the future, travel demand is strong, however, market shifts, tech advancements and changing attitudes are changing the landscape. Following are three top tourism predictions for the future, gleaned from various travel industry sources: Each of them offers opportunities for a Highway 1 Road Trip.

Bleisure travel will continue to rise.

While Millennials have already taken over a large portion the workforce, Gen Z has begun infiltrating and their numbers will only continue to grow. With the shift in demographics, business leisure travel is on the rise. Even before the pandemic, 90% of Millennials tacked on entertainment activities to their business trips. Now, employees are taking advantage of flexible corporate travel policies and utilizing their resources, like self-service apps and programs, to optimize their stay.

Sustainability will influence travel decisions.

Recently, green initiatives have become a hot topic. It's reported that seven in ten consumers have actually avoided certain tourism spots because they were skeptical of their sustainable practices. This includes climate, environment and even culture. Travelers in 2024 are expected to closely consider climate warnings when it comes to their travel choices as well as the impact their travel may have on native cultures.

Travelers will prefer unique, authentic experiences.

Experiential tourism is hot right now. Travelers want once-in-a-lifetime adventures. They want to get on the same level as the locals. That's why many travelers prefer non-traditional accommodations, so they can explore their destination with a different lens. In fact, 74% of millennial business travelers opted for vacation rentals versus hotels.

Initiatives for 2023-24

As we work to develop the plan for the coming year, we asked each of the BID Bunch members to share what worked, what didn't, and to offer new ideas to drive continuous improvement. Below are the key initiatives from the team:

Targeting Remains with new audience segmenting initiatives. Our paid media has been targeting travelers 25+ with a household income of \$150,000+ with a focus on the greater Los Angeles area and San Francisco Bay Area residents with interests in things like beaches, road trips, adventure travel, outdoors, wildlife, and nature, to name a few. With millions of people within a 4-6 hour drive time to our area, we are recommending we remain focused on California as our primary market, understanding the Visit SLO CAL is also focused on those markets as well as our various fly markets. We have already started utilize customer data to test more segmented audiences through paid media. We will continue to explore these opportunities as strengthening our email program by testing and segmenting.

Implementation of Updated Strategic Plan. Since the strategic plan didn't take the organization off in a completely different direction, the focus is on enhancing and growing most of the initiatives we've been executing for the past few years with a focus on partnerships, community connection, and measurable results.

Branding/Storytelling: The team is energizing to take things to the next level by engaging a branding partner for

the first time to provide us with a brand foundation to enhance our message in a way that ties to the overarching county brand, “Life’s Too Beautiful to Rush.”

Developing new branding directionally toward “Highway 1 Road Trip at Your Own Pace,” offers an opportunity to enhance our message to the visitor, showing the incredible variety of unique experiences that can be discovered, with attractions and activities that appeal to every type of visitor, with a nod to sustainability at every turn.

A Highway 1 Road Trip offers a bit of everything — from Hearst Castle, with its inspiring collections and iconic architecture, to miles of picture-perfect beaches, small town main streets lined with cafes, and world class wineries to enjoy. Highway 1 in SLO CAL has everything.

It’s important we offer travelers enriching experiences that foster and enable life-long memories and show them the real side of the place they are visiting, to help them immerse themselves fully into the local culture. Long-term, this is a positive thing for our destinations to focus on. And it translates to the Bleisure traveler as well, with our myriad of vacation rentals in close proximity to desired experiences.

Sustainability & Wellness go hand in hand. As people have resumed traveling, their first priority has often been to reunite with friends and family. Today, many want to prioritize relaxation, wellness, and new experiences. To cope with the world around us, self-care is now non-negotiable. The motivations for travel may vary by individual, but the trend is clear: people value travel more than ever before and will continue to make time and save money for it. Travel allows us to invest in our mental and physical well-being and go on new adventures. Since the start of the pandemic, all of the following have become more important reasons to travel:

- Change of scenery
- Physical and/or mental health benefits
- Making up for lost time with friends and family
- Having new experiences
- Getting out of my comfort zone

Visitors with a keen interest in sustainability, conservation, and responsible tourism can experience our diverse ecosystem of protected wildlife and marine life which includes whales, elephant seals, and Monarch butterflies – to name a few. Our organization was a trendsetter in this regard, with a focus on stewardship and travel for good being a core program for more than ten years. As we move forward, we will be working to further integrate sustainability into everything we do, including collaborating with Visit SLO CAL as they develop their Sustainable SLO initiatives.

Partnership Marketing offers opportunities. We are looking to continue the collaboration with Visit SLO CAL and other area DMOs, but to also seek out opportunities for partnership with external businesses to increase awareness.

Utilizing Advances in Technology to further understand results. As the tech landscape continues to change, we will be looking to understand the implications of GA4, AI (artificial intelligence), and other data analysis to expand and understand our efforts. Google has said that, “GA4 offers marketers the flexibility and agility to gain more insights, better activate their data and make an even greater impact on their organizations’ business goals—all in a way that protects user privacy.” We have already implemented it to gather data, and it may change our specific key performance indicators a bit. With every change, comes learning and opportunity. There is not only

opportunity with GA4, but we are already utilizing AI to make our reporting more efficient, identify look alike audiences, suggest program refinements, and more.

Executing these initiatives will help the organization to become even more effective in the coming year in promoting memorable visitors experiences.