

5.5. Manage and leverage electronic word-of-mouth

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes

- » Encourage all stakeholders to make use of electronic word-of-mouth, provide the business case for doing so, and provide guidance on how to do so effectively.
- » Incorporate electronic word-of-mouth tools (e.g., reviews, travel blogs) into electronic visitor information tools, allowing visitors to share their "breathtaking experiences".
- » Link to exceptional online communities, threads, and blogs that contain positive reviews or word of mouth regarding your community, its tourism assets, and/or nearby tourism assets.

Businesses & Organizations

- » Monitor electronic word-of-mouth for your product or service.
- » Address problems identified by reviewers and respond to negative reviews with professionalism and good customer service.
- » Link to review sites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Yelp) on your websites, allowing visitors to access your reviews easily.
- » Encourage satisfied customers to post reviews.

Indicators of Success

- » MTOT, Regions, and CVBs websites link to ratings and review sites.
- » A majority of Montana's tourism industry members incorporate reviews into their websites.
- » A majority of Montana's tourism industry members monitor their online reputation.
- » Industry members use online reviews to identify problems, take actions to fix legitimate problems, and manage their online reputation by responding effectively to reviews.

Background & Rationale

Research has shown beyond a doubt that word-of-mouth recommendations have the single strongest effect on traveler decisions. Social media, social networking sites, and consumer generated content (collectively, "Web 2.0") have significantly extended the reach of word-of-mouth by making it available to a much wider audience.

Electronic word-of-mouth can significantly impact the decisions of travelers. In a recent World Travel Market study, a full 58% of travelers changed at least one aspect of a planned trip after consulting Web 2.0 sites, including 35% who changed their choice of hotel. Customer reviews have become an integral part of how people make purchasing decisions. 76% of people use online reviews to shape their decisions; 69% share online reviews with friends, family, or colleagues; and 63% are more likely to purchase from a site that offers reviews or ratings.

Electronic word-of-mouth can be a valuable business resource for tourism stakeholders in a number of ways. It is a valuable source of information for tourism industry members allowing them to better understand the likes, dislikes, and expectations of customers. Tourism providers can respond to negative word-of-mouth in a way that blunts its impact significantly. And businesses and organizations can tap electronic word-of-mouth as a powerful marketing tool by ensuring that potential customers are aware of positive reviews. Tourism promotion agencies have noted the importance of managing online reputation for their industry members and have developed useful guides to simplify the process and overcome the apprehension of small operators. One of the best examples is the Australia Tourism Data Warehouse, which has published tutorials on “Online Reputation Management” and on “TripAdvisor for Tourism”. Within the bounds of fair use, Montana tourism stakeholders can be referred to these existing sources as a cost-effective way to help them adopt best practices.

Resources

Australia Tourism Data Warehouse “Tourism e-kit” tutorials at <http://www.atdw.com.au/tourismekit.aspx>.