

DMOs Leading in Supporting Locals

When you think of favorite spots in any destination, how many of those are local businesses? These shops, restaurants and hotels—and the people who keep them up and running—capture visitors' hearts, giving destinations flavor, character and a reason to return. In the face of extraordinary challenges for local communities, Destination Marketing Organizations have been uniquely called this year to bring the focus inward to their hometown people and places.

Read on to learn how four DMOs have led the way in supporting the businesses, communities and neighbors that color their destinations and make them hum.

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Chattanooga Tourism Company: Building Connections

Challenge: A focus on local community is a key pillar of Chattanooga Tourism Company's brand identity, so when their city began to feel the effects of COVID-19, the DMO focused communications almost solely on their local audience. Then, less than one month after Chattanooga Tourism Co. closed their visitor center, a tornado touched down, causing damage to thousands of homes and businesses and injuring multiple residents. Their city needed them more than ever.

Strategy: Within days of Tennessee's stay-at-home order going into effect, Chattanooga Tourism Co. launched **#ConnectChatt**, a collection of virtual experiences focused on two pillars: entertainment and education. Virtual scavenger hunts and tours hosted by local partners, including attractions like the Tennessee Aquarium and Charles H. Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center, are showcased on the [DMO's website](#) and Facebook page, [@VisitChatt](#). The Facebook page became a hub for fun virtual concerts featuring local talent whose gigs and livelihoods have been affected by restrictions.

Results: What began as a way to engage Chattanoogaans and support local talent has also helped increase the city's brand awareness among regional markets as a music destination. In addition to the hundreds of positive comments and impressive number of people tuning in, performers reported tip amounts of \$300+ for single sets.

From Chattanooga Tourism Co.:

"Don't be afraid to be a trusted resource. We found our partners and community needed Chattanooga Tourism Co. to be a centralized hub of information and resources. We stepped up and did regular discussions with our partners—daily at first, then weekly. Post-crisis, we'll transition to monthly discussions and keep this format of being a trusted local resource. People outside your organization might be able to provide information or research, but no one else will do it through a local tourism lens."

Colorado Tourism Office: Protecting Colorado and Coloradans

Challenge: Colorado Tourism Office partnered with Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics to launch the [Care for Colorado Principles](#) in 2017, a campaign aimed at educating visitors how to mindfully explore Colorado's landscape. Care for Colorado had been running successfully (and even earned [national recognition](#)), but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Colorado's residents had new worries about tourism. CTO needed to a way to convey the importance of protecting both the environment and the people of Colorado during the health crisis.

Strategy: CTO developed a new definition of responsible tourism that promoted care for the state's natural resources and for the people who call Colorado home. They shared this message with consumers and created a sense of urgency for adopting new safety practices via a fresh video entitled "[Care for Coloradans](#)," which was distributed across social media and through paid media. They also developed an [updated edition of their "Are You Colo-Ready?" brochure](#) for their Welcome Centers across the state. To support the local tourism industry in spreading the word, CTO created a Care for Coloradans Responsible Tourism Toolkit for industry partners, including downloadable social graphics and poster templates promoting safety requirements.

Results: Care for Colorado videos have been viewed more than 200,000 times across CTO's website and Facebook and even more on partners' channels. In addition to engagement from potential travelers and residents on social media, the Care for Coloradans initiative has earned industry recognition and even support from the state's governor. Regarded as an industry leader for their proactive approach and for balancing their marketing to leisure travelers with protecting Colorado from overtourism, CTO Director Cathy Ritter recently spoke about their efforts at City Nation Place and Alaska Tourism Conference.



“From Colorado Tourism Office:
“As we've seen across the nation, it is absolutely vital for tourism offices to work closely with their public health counterparts, both to allay concerns and lay the groundwork for effective tourism promotion. Like never before, our offices often are in the position of seeking permission to promote and sharing messages we never thought we'd be sharing -- like stay home if you're sick. To be relevant to the times, to be of value to our destinations, it's absolutely imperative to be sensitive to these new realities.”

Delaware Tourism: Providing a Cinematic Platform

Challenge: Small businesses make up 98% of the businesses in Delaware and contribute significantly to the state's tourism sector. These small businesses also employ 55% of Delawareans, so stay-at-home orders have dealt a tremendous hit to the state's residents and hospitality community. As Delaware residents have ventured out with new social distancing guidelines, many businesses have been anxious to safely welcome them back and stay afloat.

Strategy: The Delaware Tourism Office developed a campaign called Local Discoveries, which provides a platform for the Office to promote small businesses via user-created video content on [social media](#) and [YouTube](#). The series showcases how businesses are adjusting operations to keep customers safe, while also reiterating the importance of buying local. This idea also stemmed the Protecting Delaware video series. Working together, Delaware Tourism and the Delaware Division of Small Business developed videos that show the steps the businesses are taking to comply with the Delaware Customer Protection Standards.

Results: In addition to raising awareness for small businesses across the state and creating a sense of appreciation between small businesses and their local communities, the videos have strengthened partnerships between Delaware Tourism and Delaware Division of Small Business, along with the businesses they partner with. They are tracking video views and reach but have been even more encouraged by the relationships they are building by helping local partners during these hard times.



From Delaware Tourism Office:

"We measured success by video views and reach but also by how important it is to the partner. A few thousand views go a long way when the partner feels we were there for them during a difficult time... At such a hard time, it can be easy to feel like we're not doing enough. But, we are. Keeping in consistent contact by phone, not just email, gives businesses a personal connection, shows we're making the effort and helps them get the best resources from our office. The direct contact is also better for businesses fighting to survive that don't have time to do things like fill out a survey."



Discover Puerto Rico: Celebrating Local Culture

Challenge: Exercising an abundance of caution, Puerto Rico was one of the first destinations in the US to move into a restricted state of shelter-in-place in mid-March. With all nonessential business and travel paused, and the majority of the population staying home until further notice, Discover Puerto Rico needed an inventive solution that would support the local community, empathize with their audience and keep Puerto Rico top-of-mind.

Strategy: Discover Puerto Rico reacted quickly, launching its first “virtual vacation” over the last weekend of March. The lineup featured unique live happenings meant to virtually transport viewers to Puerto Rico through Zoom and Instagram, including [salsa dancing lessons](#) and [cooking and cocktail-making tutorials](#). They connected locals, past visitors and future visitors alike to celebrate, learn about and partake in Puerto Rican culture.

Results: The near-instant success of the [Virtual Vacay](#) prompted Discover Puerto Rico to keep the momentum going with a calendar of additional events. Already, Discover Puerto Rico has received an impressive response through earned media and social media, including more than \$6 million in ad equivalency and nearly 600 million impressions, a 13% increase in Instagram impressions and a 23% increase in Facebook impressions. Instagram profile views increased 112% and there was an influx of 6,800 new followers.

From Discover Puerto Rico:

“It was important that the initial activations were rooted in the Island’s culture – a unique combination of African, Spanish and Taino Indian history, that makes Puerto Rico a one-of-a-kind destination. We highlighted dance, food, nature and wellness, which are differentiating products and experiences that set Puerto Rico apart...Our local industry was so excited that many of them started reaching out to us to pitch ideas for how their businesses could help support this effort. During these uncertain times, our industry partners were eager to get exposure for their businesses and collaborate on the initiative.”

» Additional Resources: Miles Partnership is curating the latest research and updates from industry leaders related to COVID-19 and the tourism industry at covid19.milespartnership.com.