

Influencers and travel brands connect to take travel and destination marketing to the next level

The first-ever Big Connect, hosted by South Africa-based travel marketing firm Big Ambitions, recently took place in Cape Town and saw South African travel companies and influencers come together to discuss how travel marketing can be enhanced through working with influencers. Big Connect aims to connect influencers and travel brands and initiate important conversations that will take travel and destination marketing in South Africa to the next level.



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The future of travel marketing, said Lyle Scritten, digital PR and outreach strategist at Travelstart, is telling a story and keeping it authentic, predominantly through video.

There are also immense opportunities to be found in **dark social**, added Theresa Szejwallo, MD Trafalgar South Africa. “We don’t know what people are saying about our travel brands on platforms like WeChat and SnapChat so that’s a very exciting travel marketing space to look at. To get involved in that conversation takes us to a whole new level.”

Paying influencers with priceless experiences

Influencers attending #BigConnect addressed the sensitive topic of being paid for generating content from blogger/media trips, with travel brands acknowledging that they do not pay influencers for their time away from the office.

“We do not pay influencers, but pride ourselves on offering ‘money can’t buy’ experiences like meeting Richard Branson or attending the MTV Music Awards in New York. These are not necessarily experiences you could buy,” explained Lee Raskinen, executive: marketing and communications at Virgin Atlantic.

Negotiations

“Sending an influencer on a trip is a huge investment on our side so while we don’t pay for their time, we do sometimes pay for their content generated during the trip. We recently worked with Stevo and Chanel from *How far from home* on a Trafalgar trip to New Zealand and negotiated up front with them to buy some of their images from the trip. We also negotiated an affiliate marketing agreement where they promoted the trip to their followers and received a commission from whatever bookings they got. There are ways to earn an income by working with travel brands by enticing your followers to travel with that brand,” said Szejwallo.

“ .@TrafalgarSA's Theresa Szejwallo, @Travelstart's @LylesTravels & @VirginAtlantic's @LeeTaran delves into the relationship between brands & influencers and how to nurture it. #BigConnect2017 @BigAmbitionsZA | @RedAndYellowEd pic.twitter.com/ckbc0emcsi— Bizcom Tourism (@Biz_Tourism) November 22, 2017 ”

Influencer Mike Eloff asked if travel brands minded when influencers conducted micro-campaigns for other brands during a trip, for example, camera equipment. The consensus was that they did not, provided the brand being promoted is not in competition with the travel brand. “As an influencer, you need to look at what your value is and if an offer does not work for you, just say no. Otherwise, do the trip because it's an experience and travel brands pay a lot of money to host you.”

Raskinen encouraged influencers to have an open conversation with travel brands and ask what the value of the trip is. “Let's put together a budget, assess the value and compare what it is you can offer on your social media platforms. Let's have a conversation about what the expectations are.”





The difference between a media trip and campaign work

The Incidental Tourist Dawn Jorgensen, who shared first-hand insights into being a successful influencer in South Africa, explained that there was a difference between a media trip and campaign work.

“ The value of the experiences I have had in travel have been phenomenal. But we need to differentiate between a media trip where we’re joining a group of bloggers to have an experience and write about it and campaign work where we need to produce a certain amount of content. With the latter, there’s more responsibility because there’s a contract with deliverables. Then we have the conversation about being paid. ”

Quality of influencer content determines success

Szejwallo explained that as a global brand, Trafalgar’s global head office has in the past worked with South African influencers whose quality of work has been exceptional. “If we like what you do for us in South Africa, there’s a good chance, and we’ve done this with a number of South African bloggers, that you’ll get to work with our global team.”

“We have a global team called The Collective and if the influence you offer and content is amazing, we put you in touch with that team. Every year, we choose 12 bloggers to join The Collective,” added Raskinen.

Influencer content is very attractive for travel brands like Travelstart, concluded Scritten. “There’s always a need for fresh content and we’re happy to pay for quality photos and video footage.”

The Big Connect event will be run again in other major centres in South Africa. For more information about Big Connect or Big Ambitions, contact Danica Helfrich, 072 953 7983 or email Danica@bigambitions.co.za. Follow the #BigConnect hashtag or visit the [Facebook page](#) to find out what’s happening in travel marketing.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>