



Destination Optimization: Bridging the Gap Between Marketing & Management

As 2021 unfolds, the anticipated return of tourism is creating both challenges and new opportunities for destinations. Looking towards a post-pandemic world, one thing is clear - marketing to drive demand is only half of the equation for bringing visitors back to our markets. The destinations that will excel in the coming years are the ones that can inspire consumer confidence to push interest into action. Destination Optimization is an approach that couples marketing and management to drive exposure, engagement and ultimately conversion.

What is Destination Optimization?

Destination Optimization was developed by Miles Partnership as a way to expand the role of destination marketing organizations to organically influence more touch points across major travel-planning platforms that help inform critical decisions.

Over the last three years, we have helped 229 DMOs across the U.S., Canada and South Pacific to look beyond their owned channels to the power and reach of major platforms, from Google to Facebook, Apple to TripAdvisor. Destination Optimization looks different for every market based on its priorities and the needs of its stakeholders. But through our interactions, we've seen that Destination Optimization follows three primary courses of action: Stewardship, Readiness and Vibrancy.



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Stewardship

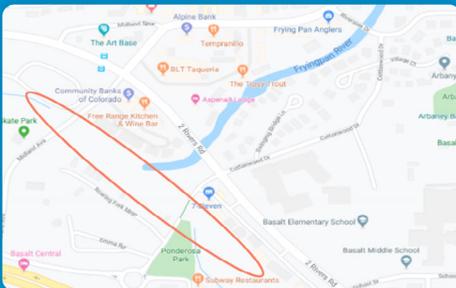
We know that the travel planning process extends well beyond your destination website, paid media and social channels. If you're not paying attention to how your destination is represented online, who is? Our team has done cross-channel audits of the digital presence of destinations from rural communities to major metropolitan cities, and there are consistencies to what these uncover.

Top Five Issues Found in a Destination Audit:

- » Missing points of interest, especially in outdoor recreation
- » Inaccurate or incomplete business profiles
- » Duplicate business listings and points of interest
- » Poor quality or inappropriate user-contributed images
- » Irrelevant or inaccurate programmatically-generated destination content such as cover images, top sights and descriptions

Stewardship in Action

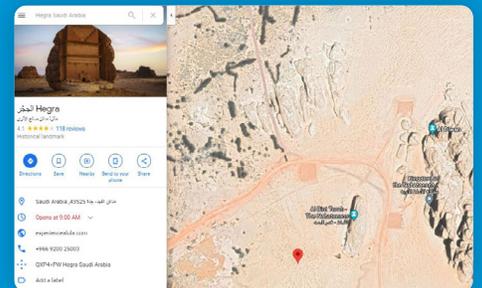
By being proactive, destinations can identify and correct issues before they become larger problems. Here are a few examples of some unpleasant surprises that were remedied through destination stewardship.



Basalt Colorado lies at the convergence for two of the best trout-fishing rivers in the state, but when anglers looked at the destination in Google Maps, the Roaring Fork River, referenced in destination marketing materials, was not visible.



The historic **Gulf Stream Hotel on Florida's East Coast** was being revitalized, but the cover image of its Google Business Profile was surfacing a sinister image from when the building was vacant across search results and maps.



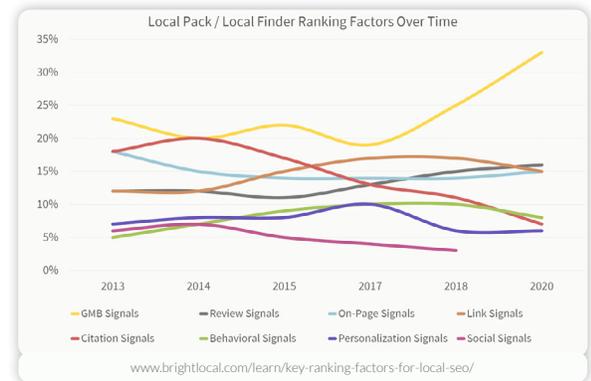
Hegra, the first World Heritage property to be inscribed in Saudi Arabia, was named incorrectly on Wikipedia, causing this error to propagate across platforms such as Apple, Google and Bing.



Readiness

Local businesses are the building blocks of the travel industry, and their digital presence creates an important piece of a destination's overall presentation online. Much of what can be done to improve a market through Destination Optimization is at the business listing level, which brings an increased need for direct industry support and digital upskilling to the forefront.

The 2020 survey of Local SEO Ranking Factors by Brightlocal found that the most important grouped factors for a business to show in the Google local pack search results are:



1. **Google My Business**, which has grown in importance since 2018 - rising from 25% of local pack ranking factors to 33% in 2020
2. **Online reviews**, which are now the second most important factor for local pack rankings, overtaking links

A review of 90,000 online business listings worldwide has revealed that typically:

- » 25% of your local tourism businesses have not claimed their Google business profile, meaning they don't have access to all the tools of Google My Business
- » 50% of businesses have not claimed their Yelp profile
- » Hours are the most common missing listing information, and the most frequently searched by customers
- » 95% of businesses are NOT using Google Posts to share events, news and specials

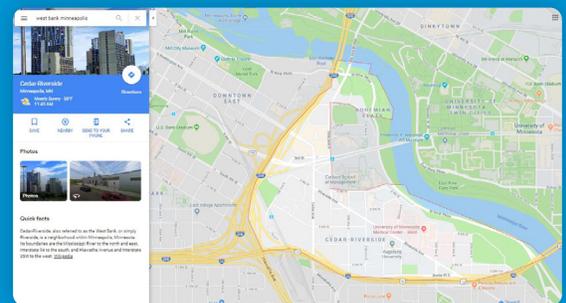
How Can DMOs Help Local Businesses?

Provide training and resources to help businesses understand that it is critical for them to:

- » Claim their listing across the major online channels: Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor, Apple, Bing
- » Monitor, respond and encourage customer reviews
- » Keep core information current, particularly hours, services & health/safety measures
- » Post new images and updates/events regularly

Readiness in Action

Meet Minneapolis and the City of Minneapolis were looking for a way to support tourism development in targeted neighborhoods to aid visitor dispersal. With trends shifting toward local experiences and neighborhood exploration, there was an opportunity to expand the economic impact of tourism to be more inclusive of immigrant business communities. This initiative took the form of working with local neighborhood associations to upskill businesses on utilizing their online listings, ultimately providing a more compelling, complete picture of the city.





Vibrancy

We know photography and video are at the heart of travel inspiration. Images are critical in inspiring customer confidence as well, particularly as part of the recovery process. Travelers want to know what things look like NOW and to be confident that their experience will match their expectations. Has the property been renovated? Is there outdoor seating? Do the meals look delicious? Travelers are making these assessments through the images they see across multiple platforms.

How Can DMOs Extend Their Vibrancy?

There are more ways than ever for DMOs to share their images and stories outside of their owned channels. Leveraging existing or easily-created content - particularly “top” lists - DMO content can be surfaced across multiple platforms with minimal alterations and trackable reach.

- » Instagram Guides
- » Visual Stories on Google
- » Apple Guides
- » TikTok
- » Google Maps Lists
- » Pinterest

Vibrancy in Action

Spiking traveler interest in hiking, biking and other activities has led many destinations to invest in building the visibility and inspirational quality of their local outdoor assets.



Known for Beale Street and blues, **Memphis Travel** is using 360 content to increase the discoverability of the unique parks and outdoor spaces throughout the city.



The **New Mexico Office of Tourism** is currently creating virtual tours and updating Google Street View in parks, forests and public lands statewide.



On the North Island of **New Zealand**, three destinations worked together to add visibility on Google Street View to their connected bike trails.

- » To learn more about how Destination Optimization can be applied in your market, contact Kim Palmer, Program Director, at 941-342-2312 or Kim.Palmer@MilesPartnership.com.