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Increasing Online Visitation to a Travel Website

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Increasing Online Visitation to a Travel Website

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Dedication

To my parents, Cynthia Ann Rodriguez and Augustine Leo Rodriguez

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friends and family members for their continued support.

Abstract

Increasing Online Visitation to a Travel Website

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The creation of a new travel website in the early 21st century can naively be mistaken as an easy open window to the world. LuminariaTravel.com is an online travel website recently created to inform visitors about San Antonio, Texas tourism. This paper seeks to analyze the challenges and offer solutions in entering an online market already entered. This paper presents insight into understanding the tourism industry online, and current marketing methods being used. In order for the small, privately-owned travel website to gain online visitors, LuminariaTravel.com must consider utilizing marketing tools for an integrated marketing plan. Luminariatravel.com must also be correctly positioned in the online travel market to have a unique stance and be able to communicate information that will set it apart from other San Antonio travel websites. This paper will include literature reviews and an industry case study. A final recommended marketing plan and strategy will be offered to LuminariaTravel.com

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Chapter 1: Introduction

PURPOSE OF STUDY

LuminariaTravel.com is a travel website created to inform visitors about San Antonio, Texas attractions and its unique places to visit and things to do. It was created because the owner of LuminariaTravel.com wanted to bring in a local San Antonio resident perspective. The owner also wanted to showcase the attractions not mentioned on other big, and/or non-local travel websites. When first creating the website, LuminariaTravel.com's owner had limited web developing experience. In April, 2008, the first webpage design was created. Visually the initial website received reviews that the webpage design was too busy with colors and graphics.



Figure 1: First Website Design

Shortly after the first design, a second design was created in June 2008. The owner knew the second design didn't quite fit either, but instead tried to focus on adding content and improving the websites' page ranking position on search engines such as Google. By adding keywords and emphasis to keywords throughout the webpages, the owner tried to implement the initial steps to search engine optimization (SEO) in order to improve position in search engine ranking. The owner also created a MySpace account in 2008 and a Facebook account in 2009, but ineffectively utilized them.



Figure 2: Second Website Design

In August, 2010 the owner created a third web design to incorporate CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) into the web design to make improvements on the website being cross-browser friendly and user-friendly in order to provide easy navigation and readability. The owner also during this time added a Spanish version while repopulating content into the website. These new adjustments managed to impact visitation a little. Instead of receiving 0 to 2 visitors a day, LuminariaTravel.com was now receiving an average of 20 visitors a day.

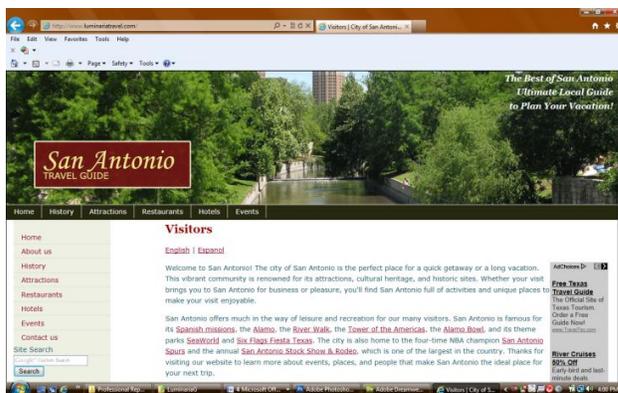


Figure 3: Third Website Design

Currently, LuminariaTravel.com is not bringing in the desired number of online visitors. No marketing plan or analysis was ever implemented. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how to increase online visitation to a travel website, and offer recommendations for LuminariaTravel.com to increase its online presence and visitation.

Key problems:

1. The website is not easily visible from search engines such as Google and Yahoo.
2. No marketing analysis has been conducted.
3. Large competition from big travel websites and older smaller travel websites.

Analyzing San Antonio Tourism Market

According to the San Antonio Area Tourism Council (SAATC), the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the top sectors in San Antonio's economy (Butler, Stefl, 2008). There are many famous places in San Antonio to visit such as the Alamo, River Walk, and the Tower of the Americas. San Antonio also offers two major theme parks, Sea World and Six Flags Fiesta Texas. The Governor's office reported that San Antonio has five of the top 10 attractions in Texas with (#1) the Alamo, (#2) the River Walk, (#3) Sea World San Antonio, (#8) Six Flags Fiesta Texas (#9) the San Antonio Zoo (SAATC, 2007). In 2008, the Alamo, received more than 2.5 million visitors according to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (Combs, 2009). In addition, throughout the year, San Antonio sponsors and host several big events including the Alamo Bowl, San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo, and NBA basketball games with the San Antonio Spurs.

Every two years, the SAATC conducts an economic impact study on San Antonio's tourism. From the 2008 study, it showed the annual economic impact of Tourism in San Antonio was over \$11 billion dollars (Butler, Stefl, 2008). The study also showed that the city had over 20 million leisure visitors, and out of the 20 million, 11.1

million of them were overnight visitors (Butler, Stefl, 2008). In addition, it reported over 8 million visitors used the San Antonio International Airport (Butler, Stefl, 2008). SAATC also reports that the highest occupancy months in San Antonio hotels are in June, July, March, and April, and the lowest occupancy months are December and January (SAATC, 2007).

From the data above, a deduction can be made. The Alamo received an estimate of 2.5 million visitors. The Alamo is considered the top tourist attraction in Texas, and therefore should receive the most number of visitors and represent the highest amount of visitors that come to see San Antonio major attractions. It can then be concluded that even though San Antonio reports 20 million leisure visitors with 11.1 million being overnight leisure guest, only an estimated 3 million visitors come to San Antonio to visit San Antonio attractions, leaving 17 million coming to San Antonio for other reasons. This is assuming that visitors that come to San Antonio for attractions always include the Alamo on their list of to do and see. Another estimate can be gathered from the figures of Sea World visitors. The Executive Vice President and General Manager Dan Decker of Sea World, reported in 2008 that they might not top 3 million but that they would come pretty close to that number (San Antonio Business Journal, 2008). This means even if there were two separate kinds of visitors, those that liked historic sites, versus those that liked amusement parks, that total would be around 6 million visitors, leaving 14 million visitors coming to San Antonio for other leisure activities. This analysis can lead to the knowledge that a good percentage of San Antonio leisure visitors, come to San Antonio for other reasons than major attractions.

With this analysis, leads the question as to how can LuminariaTravel.com attract the other majority of visitors. With a closer look into San Antonio tourism,

Luminariatravel.com can identify a diversified type of tourist and be able to offer them something different than its competitors.

Analyzing Online Competition

Luminariatravel.com's competition will be found by their ranking on search engines. The reason why they will be found by search engines, because according to the San Antonio Conventions and Visitors Bureau Fiscal Report 2010, search engine traffic provides 70% of all traffic for the city's tourism website, visitsanantonio.com (San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 2010).

The following search terms, 'San Antonio attractions', 'Visit San Antonio', and more versions of these keywords all have high search volumes from online users. However, unfortunately, these high search volumes have not transferred over to high internet traffic for Luminairatravel.com. There are many factors that contribute to a website's visibility on search engines such as website age, quality and quantity of content, and quality and quantity of inbound links (Jones, 2010). With all these considerations, it's important to know the competition.

Using the search engine, Google, and entering a keyword in the search box field, Google will return the number of results found for that keyword. For example, 'San Antonio attractions' returned 18,800,000 results when searched on October 7, 2011. This is a high amount of results which translates over to Luminariatravel.com having a large amount of competition.

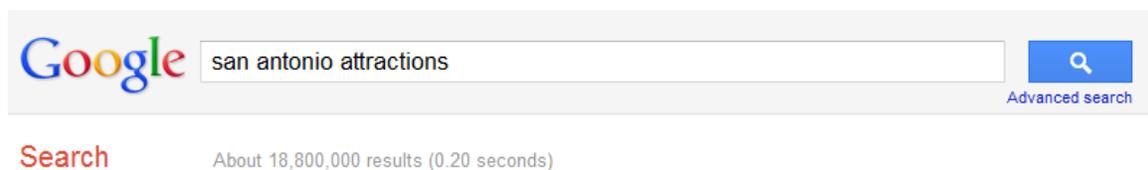


Figure 4: Google Search Engine Results

A more in depth look into Luminariatravel.com's competition through Google search engine reveals who they are when entering the popular keywords for tourism. Using the specific key phrase, 'San Antonio attractions' to search, the first page on Google returns the following websites: visitsanantonio.com, tripadvisor.com, saattractions.com, sanantonio.com, travel.yahoo.com, frommers.com, sanantonioinsider.com, and ripleys.com. Another very popular key phrase 'things to do in San Antonio' on Google search, returns the websites: virtualtourist.com, sanantoniotourist.com, omnihotels.com, travel.aol.com. Altogether, out of both search queries, the City of San Antonio's, visitsanantonio.com, website had the highest page ranking with Google. In 2010, their website received an estimate of 3 million consumers (San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau, 2010). However, out of all the top results for the two popular search queries, only two websites, sanantoniotourist.com and sanantonioinsider.com, are considered similar to Luminariatravel.com's mission and local style view of San Antonio tourism information.

Individually, a closer inspection of the two similar websites to Luminariatravel.com reveals more information on who they are and what they offer. Sanantoniotourist.com shows that the website has been around since 1999 and has several webpages on things to do in San Antonio. From a website design perspective, it gives the impression of a small business ownership rather than a major big travel company with lots of hired writers. The other website, sanantonioinsider.com, has the closest similarity of what Luminariatravel.com wants to offer, and therefore is seen a top competitor. Sanantonioinsider.com, created in 2003, offers to give information about San Antonio that is the owner's opinion while at the same time offering a local view from a native born San Antonian. The web design of sanantonioinsider.com also gives the impression of small business ownership. Both sanantonioinsider.com and Luminariatravel.com will

be websites created from information based on personal views. Based on this research, Luminariatravel.com will need to offer a different views and experiences of San Antonio tourism to gain traffic.

Based on this study of top websites listed on Google, Luminariatravel.com has the potential to offer a unique website. However, the challenge is not overlooked. Overall, there is still a considerably high number of Google search results returned for key terms. Plus, the websites that are ranked high on Google share in common that they were all created earlier than Luminariatravel.com. The two closest website competitors were created in 1999 and 2003. Google uses the number of years a website has been active as part of their ranking decisions. In Google's page ranking patent titled "Information retrieval based on historical data", it revealed details of the Google ranking algorithms (Search Engine Promotion Help, 2011). According to the patent, it reports that Google records the length of a domain registration, the number of pages on a website, the address of the website owner, and the stability of the host company (Search Engine Promotion Help, 2011). Luminariatravel.com will have to implement a marketing strategy to overcome its competition and compensate for the disadvantage of being a new website.

In the following chapters, this paper will cover the essential topics that lead up to creating an integrated marketing plan. The second chapter includes finding a potential target audience. In chapter two, the study of industry trends, and a survey on San Antonio Mexican visitors will be analyzed. After, a target audience is considered, chapter three, will then cover possible online marketing tools to use in the integrated marketing plan. In this chapter, search engine optimization will be considered high priority and relating marketing tools will be sought to compliment search engine optimization. In chapter four, a marketing plan will be devised after combining all previous research. The target audience will be defined in this chapter, as well as, market segmentation and

positioning will be defined to reflect the target audience, industry trends, and competition. Relevant content will also be identified based on the target audience. From the new suggested relevant content, a brand strategy will be created to capture the essence of the website's offerings. Lastly, this chapter will cover the marketing tools recommended that will help search engine optimization and overall increase visibility for LuminariaTravel.com. The final chapter will conclude the paper with methods to track the progress of the marketing plan and offer suggestions for the future of LuminariaTravel.com.

Chapter 2: Analyzing Target Audience

This chapter will include research on finding a potential target audience. In order to find a potential target audience, reports on industry trends including tourism and the economy will be analyzed. In addition, a survey on San Antonio Mexican visitors will also be analyzed.

FINDING POTENTIAL TARGET AUDIENCE

One of the most important things to consider, when increasing traffic to a website, is the target audience. The target audience is the group of people you try to reach through marketing. A target audience is usually defined by demographics of age, nationalities, or specific interests. With knowing the target audience, a website is better received because the website will have been created with understanding the type of design, and language its target audience likes. Design and language are two essential elements of website. The design of a website has the effect of attracting different types of people. For example, a bright funky website design could appeal more to teenagers than to older adults. Likewise, the language style of the web content can also attract different types of people. It is encouraged to study competition in this aspect. There is no need to reinvent the wheel on design and language, just improve on what is needed. Altogether, understanding who the target audience is, and what they are looking for in a website helps them visit and actually use the website (Jones, 2010).

STUDYING TOURISM INDUSTRY TRENDS

In 2008, San Antonio tourism brought in a total of 20 million leisure visitors with 11.1 million being overnight visitors (Butler, Stefl, 2008). Understanding who these leisure visitors are, and what type of tourist they are, can help Luminariatravel.com reach its potential goal. To help solve this issue, the city of San Antonio's tourism industry

report, “Annual Report Fiscal Year 2010”, will be reviewed. In this study, an objective is to identify the target audience and possibly a segment of the target audience that will be easier to reach. According to Kristopher Jones, a segment of a target audience is preferable to reach instead of the full target audience because of other competing websites already providing general information to this target group (Jones, 2010).

From the “Annual Report Fiscal year 2010”, conducted by the San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau, the city reports key focus areas to promote the city that Luminariatravel.com can consider for website content. For example the city concentrates promoting major events such as the Valero Alamo Bowl, U.S. Army All-American Bowl, Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon, Dallas Cowboys Training Camp, Valero Texas Open, and Paseo del Rio Holiday River Parade. In addition, the city recognizes golf as a major asset for San Antonio, and showcases premier golfing courses such as Brackenridge Park, Quarry, Hyatt Hill Country, TPC San Antonio, and La Cantera. The city of San Antonio also highlights culinary through local favorites such as Paris Hatters, Pearl Brewery, Mi Tierra, Los Barrios, and Diamond C Ranch. San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau, also tries to diversify its information depending on the type of tourist. For example, the city created themes like Authentic Culture, Texas-sized Thrills, City Nature & Hill Country, Romance & Relaxation. Also included were themed four-day itineraries with information on events, local accommodations, and related videos. For people interested in saving during their San Antonio vacation, the city created a SAVE program (San Antonio Vacation Experience), that offers information on attractions and ways to save money. In 2010, the SAVE program added new outreach components to promote the city through online media units, an ad exchange program, regional magazine ads, digital influencer promotion, and military outreach (SACVB, 2010). All this information can be considered when creating content for Luminariatravel.com.

A closer look at the city of San Antonio's tourism website describes specific goals for 2010. One of their goals was to continue to diversify the image of San Antonio, with one of the main images to focus on is the image of San Antonio as a great shopping destination. San Antonio is especially interested in increasing this image with the visitors from Mexico. With Mexico visitors, San Antonio also wants to promote the arts, cuisine, medical care, and golf sport. The city is particular interested in the Mexico visitor, because of the statistics that show that they make multiple trips to San Antonio. In addition, San Antonio has also noted a growing demand for the sport golf. Due to this demand, new efforts are being made to provide more information on San Antonio golfing experience. For example, an event, Las Americas Golf Tournament, 2010, was created to help encourage interest in San Antonio being the best U.S. destination for Mexico golfers. This event provided a tournament, gala dinner, and a fashion show. During the event San Antonio was able to promote two key images of the city, golf and shopping (SACVB, 2010).

The San Antonio Conventions and Visitors Bureau Fiscal Report 2010, also reported initiatives made on their website, such as new website micro-sites to provide information on holiday, romance, festival, and summer vacation travel (SACVB, 2010). Micro-sites are created with specialized information that has more detail than the main website and attract a specific audience. Micro-sites are usually around 1 to 7 pages (Microsite Wikipedia, 2011). Additional, microsities were also added to include LBGT, and themes of 'Eat, Pray, Love', and 'Be a Local' for the city. The 'Be a Local' showcases information from local ambassadors for San Antonio. With the 'Eat, Pray, Love' theme microsite, an estimated 15,400 views were generated (SACVB, 2010). The fact that the city is using microsities shows the city's interest in reaching a more specific audience instead of the general broad target audience. It also might represent the need for

specialized websites with more detailed information. These are both key interest for Luminariatravel.com to consider. In addition, with the use of the city's microsites, it was founded that they deliver high conversion rates from 48% to 61%. The conversion rates were established by visitors of the microsites ordering visitor guides, registering for emails, and registering for sweepstakes (SACVB, 2010). This information shows how having a more specific targeted audience with highly specific relevant information engages the audience to interact more with the audience.

The city of San Antonio is also interested in trying to identify their target audience as well. Utilizing a technical innovation called 'smart content' the city is able to find key attributes of website visitors, and based on the attributes, it provides information relevant towards those attributes. The key attributes gathered consist of geographic location and consumer search behavior (SACVB, 2010).

The data collected from the city of San Antonio's website analytics list important information that can help Luminariatravel.com understand possible segments for target audience. Based on geography, the Texas population is the city's top visitors in the U.S., and internationally, Mexico is the city's top visitors (SACVB, 2010). Interestingly, not a lot of competitive websites have a Spanish version for their website. A possible segment target audience to focus on is Mexico because in the month of June alone, the city reported 14,562 Mexicans that visited the city's website (SACVB, 2010).



Figure 5: San Antonio Visitors by Geography (SACVB, 2010)

Since the website analytic reports are showing high numbers of online visits from Mexico, the city is especially focusing on marketing towards the Mexico/Latin American market. The city reported that high travel seasons for Mexico visitors are during Easter, Summer, Fall shopping, and the holidays. San Antonio is currently promoting shopping, family, entertainment, arts & culture, and the country to the Mexico/Latin American market. In 2010, the design of ads were recreated to give a new sophisticated, modern feel to help try to reach this audience better. Recently also in February 2010, the city's own website added a Spanish language version of the website. In addition, San Antonio is

adding new media such as blogs and online newsletters to reach out Mexico visitors (SACVB, 2010). Due to the fact that the city is recognizing a beneficial growing market with Mexico visitors, further research on Mexico visitors will be analyzed in the next section.

STUDYING MEXICAN VISITOR TRENDS

In November 2008 through January 2009, San Antonio conducted a study on Mexican visitors in San Antonio to understand their travel trends. With the help of Dr. David C. Bojanic, professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and intercept research study of Mexican Nationals visiting San Antonio was collaborated with the San Antonio Conventions and Visitors Bureau in 2008. Part of the study included 329 interviews at three popular tourist shopping locations, North Star Mall, The Shops at La Cantera, and the San Marcos Outlets (Bojanic, 2009).

According to the survey, the average party size of the Mexican visitors is 3.9 adults and 1.4 children. The majority of Mexican visitors come from the major cities Monterrey, Mexico City, and border towns. Approximately, 36% come from Monterrey and Texas border towns, 31% come from Mexico City, and 33% come from other areas in Mexico. The survey also shows that the common times to visit are 60% in winter, and 49% in summer. An important fact to find from the survey is that 60% of Mexican visitors reported visiting 2-3 times a year, and 17% visiting 4-6 times a year. According to the report, an overwhelming 67% of Mexico visitors reported their main purpose of their trip was shopping. In addition, 24% of Mexican travelers stated that their main purpose of visiting was for leisure/vacation (Bojanic, 2009).



Figure 6: Main Purpose to Visit San Antonio (Bojanic, 2009)

In addition, the study covers the question on where Mexican visitors when visiting overnight. Noticeably, 73% of Mexican visitors stay in hotels, while a lower number of 21% stay with family or friends. Also on average, it was noted that Mexican visitors stay 4.6 days in San Antonio. Interestingly, the survey also reported on travel arrangements, discovering that 70% of Mexican visitors chose to make their own travel arrangements, and 11% have a friend or relative help them make their travel arrangements. It was also founded that 59% use the internet to find information on their travel and 51% use the internet to book their travel arrangements (Bojanic, 2009)

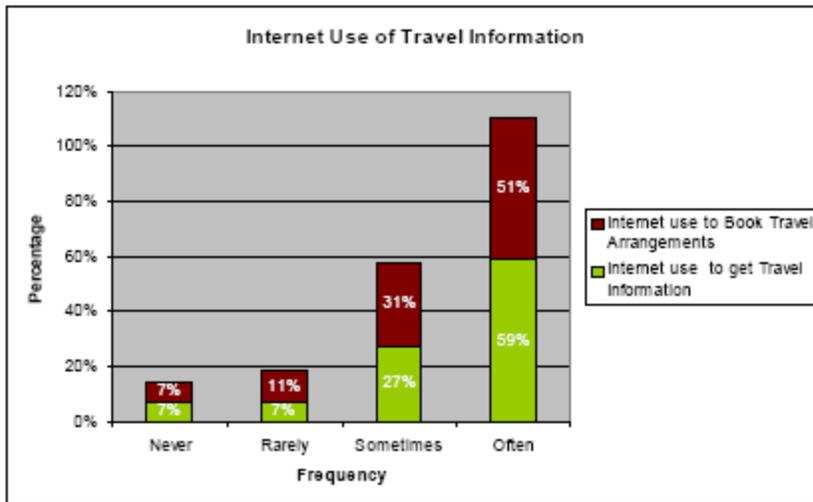


Figure 7: Internet Use of Travel Information (Bojanic, 2009)

In the survey, interestingly to note as well is that 83% of Mexican visitors traveled by vehicle to San Antonio, even though many visitors traveled long distances. In contrary, a low percentage of 16% of Mexican visitors traveled by airplane. The survey also asked Mexican visitors what attractions they planned to visit. Out of the total Mexican visitors surveyed, 70% said they planned to visit the San Marcos Outlets, 49% said they planned to visit the River Walk, 31% planned to visit Six Flags Fiesta Texas, 30% planned to visit the Alamo, and last 28% planned to visit Sea World San Antonio (Bojanic, 2009).

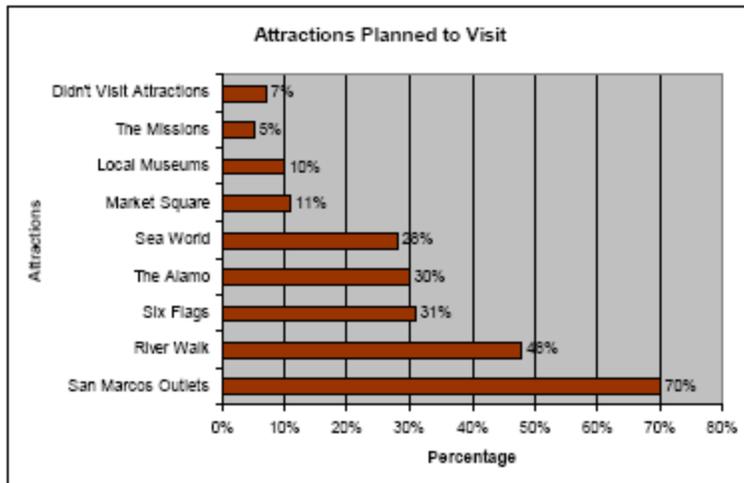


Figure 8: Attractions Planned to Visit (Bojanic, 2009)

STUDYING SAN ANTONIO ECONOMIC INDUSTRY TRENDS

In understanding San Antonio tourism and potential, considerations will also be given to industries that bring in visitors to San Antonio for other reasons than the main attractions.

It is widely known that San Antonio is home to several army medical centers and military facilities. There are currently three major bases in San Antonio including Lackland Air Force Base, Randolph Air Force Base, and Fort Sam Houston Army Post. From these three bases, there is a population of estimated 80,000. In addition, there are more than 140,000 students annually that come for training at these bases (502d Air base Wing, 2011). In the future, these figures are expected to increase because of the military Base Realignment and Closure program (BRAC) (Combs, 2009).

Due to the BRAC program, in 2008, the City of San Antonio commissioned the Growth Management Plan (GMP) to help address potential impacts of population growth around Fort Sam Houston. Fort Sam Houston is one of the major bases included in the BRAC program, and in 2008 it had an overall population of 27,824. With the result of

BRAC, Fort Sam Houston's population is expected to grow. BRAC will make San Antonio Texas "the hub for training of enlisted medical technicians for all services" (DiLuzio Group, 2008). All the training missions will be relocated to Fort Sam Houston, which means that the student population will be expected to double to approximately 8,700 at any given time. Annually, overall the number of students that come on base is calculated to be more than 5 times that number (DiLuzio Group, 2008). With this knowledge of increasing student population, and the increase in military population in general, this could have indirect benefits for San Antonio tourism industry. This fact, leads Luminariatravel.com to consider San Antonio's military presence as a potential target audience.

Lastly, the higher education industry is under consideration as potential tourist. At UTSA in 2004, 19, 847 non-resident students attended. According to a San Antonio Relocation Guide 2011, UTSA is the state's fastest growing public university. 'UTSA 2016' is a strategic plan for the university to become a Tier One institution that will be recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in research, education, and public service. With these developments, UTSA's Institute of Economic Development estimates that if UTSA becomes a Tier One university it could provide the local economy with significant more dollars (San Antonio Relocation Guide, 2011). This possibility could also mean opportunities for the tourism industry, which leads the student population being a potential target audience for Luminariatravel.com.

Chapter 3: Marketing Strategies

In this chapter, current online marketing tools will be studied from literature reviews including articles from popular technology and marketing websites, books, and reports. The focus of this chapter will be on search engine optimization, and thus any marketing tools researched will further be studied to find out possible connections with search engine optimization. With these marketing tools, an integrated marketing plan will be created.

EXPLORING ONLINE MARKETING TOOLS

In 2009, the city of San Antonio implemented an integrated marketing plan that consisted of print, online advertising, website micro-sites, social media, and search engine marketing. With this new marketing plan in action, in 2010, the city reported an increase in their website visitors by 26% for the year of 2009. It was a substantial increase of approximately 780,000 new visitors (SACVB, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, an analysis of the city's online methods will be discussed further with a special focus on online methods that have the potential to contribute to search engine optimization.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an internet marketing strategy to understand how search engines work and understand how people search for information. The basic goal of SEO is to improve the visibility of a website or webpage in search engines through natural, unpaid organic search results (Search engine optimization Wikipedia, 2011). The way search engines work is an online user enters keywords to begin a search, and then the search engine provides a list of links to websites related to the keywords as results. The links that are returned from a search result that have not been paid for by a company are called organic search results. Organic search results are displayed in order

of relevancy to the keywords entered by the user and other factors that are part of algorithms created by the search engine. Popular search engines are Yahoo, Google, and Bing (Organic search Wikipedia, 2011). According to the San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau Fiscal Report 2010, search engines provide 70% of all traffic for the city's tourism website, visitsanantonio.com (SACVB, 2010). Therefore, being ranked high on a search engine has the potential to drive a lot of traffic to a website. The higher ranked a website is on a search engine, the more frequent online users will see them and visit the website. It is Luminariatravel.com's best interest to be listed high on the organic search results to have visibility and higher traffic.

Now, the question is how to perform SEO that will set Luminariatravel.com apart from other San Antonio travel websites. Google states SEO is "about making small modifications to parts of your website" (Google, 2010). Making a website's content high quality, unique, accurate, easily navigable, are top priorities for making a site SEO (Google, 2010). Specifically for web content, it covers all areas of text, images, sounds, videos, animations, and more. In, "Information Architecture for the World Wide Web", content is described broadly as "the stuff in your Web site" (Morville and Rosenfeld, 1998). Google points out that the website creator's main goal is to foremost consider its visitors when creating a website and performing SEO (Google, 2010).

Recently in February 2011, Google released a new search engine algorithm called Panda. The new algorithm was designed to help list more high quality sites in search engine results and reduce rankings for low quality websites. Low quality websites are defined as copy content from other websites or websites that are not very useful. High quality websites are defined as original content and information such as research, reports, analysis (Singhal and Cutts, 2011). Interestingly, an article by Rosenbaum, "Content is King No Longer", explores the topic that just content alone is not the ultimate way to

reach an audience anymore (Rosenbaum, 2010). This idea seems to be reflected with Google's development of a new algorithm. Rosenbaum believes that content isn't scarce, but that content is overwhelming now because of the amount of content that exist on the web from bloggers, to post, to publishers, and more. In Rosenbaum's article, he states 'Curation' as being the new king. By this statement, he explains that not content alone is important, but that the context of content is the key ingredient. For marketing, it's essential that the context be appropriate for the message and the brand (Rosenbaum, 2010). Therefore, having good relevant content is key to building an audience.

From the San Antonio Conventions & Visitors Bureau Fiscal Report 2010, it reports that the way San Antonio creates content to promote the city is by using the city's strengths of arts, culture, history, cuisine, golf, and romance. In addition the city created themed campaigns to showcase these strengths including "Great American Date Night", "Festivo", "Heart & Soul", "Fall Festivals", and "Holidays". The campaigns were created to expose consumers to the diversity of San Antonio accommodations, cuisine, attractions, and showcase San Antonio strengths of romance, culture, festival, and history. From the San Antonio Convention & Visitors report, it also shows that the city increased its content by 100 web pages including microsites. In one of their new microsites, 'Eat, Pray, Love' theme, the microsite generated 15,400 views (SACVB, 2010). This figure reconfirms the guideline that if content is relevant and high quality it will be a successful way to increase online traffic.

However, when dealing with high competitive areas, other marketing strategies can be implemented to aid in driving in traffic. For example, in 2010, the city included increasing their social media presence as part of their integrated marketing plan (SACVB, 2010). Social media is internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It can be internet websites or mobile technologies that enable

users to have social interaction such as internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, videos, and rating and social bookmarking. In a paper titled, “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media” by Kaplan and Haenlein, the authors explain six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) (Social media Wikipedia, 2011).

In their recent integrated marketing plan, the city utilized the following popular social media tools, YouTube, TripAdvisor, Flickr, and Twitter (SACVB, 2010). These social media tools are seen as free ways to boost search results on search engines as well. For example, search engines such as Google are now returning tweets and Facebook Page posts (Harper, 2010). Therefore, with YouTube as a social media tool, a video sharing website, it is possible to make a YouTube Channel SEO. For example, while posting videos on a YouTube, the option to tag those videos and include the company’s brand name and related keywords in the tag, increases the chance of exposure of a company’s brand name through natural searches for keywords related to the company’s website. Also for SEO purposes, videos uploaded into YouTube, can be optimized for search engines through basic SEO practices such as keywords for title, description, and tags of videos. In addition, with the description field it is recommended to always include the company’s website link in the front of the description (Harper, 2010). The following is an example of a description for a YouTube video.

“[Http://www.causal-sneakers-101.com](http://www.causal-sneakers-101.com) - In this video, Casual Sneakers 1010 coach Jim Smith explains how to choose casual sneakers that best suit your needs.

Casual sneakers, when chosen correctly, will make it easier to jog and play low-

impact sports. Jim gives clear advice in choosing casual sneakers for men of all ages” (Harper, 2010).

This is a great practice because the video description is shown in search engine results. It is also advised to include supporting words that give context to a video. After the video is uploaded, it is recommended to post links of the video onto the company’s Facebook and Twitter pages (Harper, 2010). The city in 2009 added 13 new videos to their YouTube channel including 8 new festival videos and five new ‘Be a Local’ videos. Overall, the city’s YouTube channel received 80,648 views (SACVB, 2010). With YouTube, Luminariatravel.com has the opportunity for brand exposure, as well as bringing in traffic to the website.

Similar to YouTube marketing, is Flickr, which is a picture sharing website. Recently, the city added 300 images to their Flickr account to drive traffic to the city’s tourism page and have brand recognition (SACVB, 2010). Flickr can also be considered a way to improve organic (unpaid) search results. With Flickr, SEO can be used the same way as YouTube basically. Once a photo is uploaded, the title, description, and tags should reflect the website the Flickr account is created for, and use accurate keywords that identify the photo. In addition, it is also recommended to include a link to the website in the description and comment section (O’Loughlin, 2011). By doing this, it helps increase traffic directly from Flickr, but also it helps with SEO and brand exposure.

Another marketing strategy along the lines of social media tools is Twitter. The city of San Antonio has a Twitter account with 5, 612 Twitter followers (SACVB, 2010). Twitter is a micro-blogging tool to post short updates, comments, or thoughts. Twitter can be seen as a marketing tool because it lets you leave comments to inform people. Some examples of how to use Twitter for marketing and public relations are: announce specials or deals, updates on events, promote interesting news. Twitter is also seen as a

tool that is very compatible with mobile phones (Volpe, 2008). Currently, Google already returns Twitter pages and event tweets (short post) in its search engine results. The following are some tips for Twitter SEO given by Mike Dobbs, Director of SEO at 360i.

- 1) It is recommended to choose a good handle (username). A good username that is relevant to the brand or campaign. The username is also part of the Twitter URL, e.g.: twitter.com/(username), which helps with search engines too.
- 2) It's important to select a good account name which is different from the handle/URL name. An account name should reflect the brand.
- 3) Optimize your Twitter bio to include the mission of the brand. The bio is always looked at by search engines so the bio content is very important for relevance.
- 4) Link your twitter address on the brand's website.
- 5) Always remember to include the official brand's website URL somewhere in the account settings to drive back traffic to the website.
- 6) It's to consider the initial characters in each post (tweet) that automatically show up as the title tag in search engines links.
- 7) Try to have keyword rich tweets for relevancy in searches (Dobbs, 2009)

Another popular social media marketing tool is Facebook. Facebook is a social networking website that connects people with each other, and helps them share information. The social networking site also offers businesses the option to create Facebook pages to utilize as a marketing tool and recruit fans. The city has approximately 7,000 members who are fans on their Facebook page. It is recommended when businesses use Facebook to not use Facebook as a broadcast website, but as a place to provide genuine, relevant, engaging content on a continual basis. Shankman, author of "Customer Service: New Rules for a Social Media World," recommends that Facebook is suppose to

be used for interacting, not just for broadcasting. Likewise, Smith, a co-author of “The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change,” mentions “marketers need to recognize that people go to Facebook to make a connection or feel like part of a community”(Black, 2011). Shankman also advises against becoming predictable on Facebook post. He encourages mixing up Facebook post from status updates to photos to videos in order to not let fans get bored or annoyed and end up hiding the business’s page from their news feed (Black, 2011). In addition, like Twitter, Facebook pages and post can show up in search engine results. Therefore, SEO can also be used for Facebook. Some suggestions for Facebook SEO are similar to Twitter SEO such as keywords and brand names are recommended for the title of the page and for the description section. Also when making post or recommending links on Facebook, it is recommended to use SEO because only the first 18 characters in the comment section under the post will be displayed in search engine results. Regarding discussion topics and notes page in Facebook, SEO should also be used here (Hines, 2011). Overall, throughout all social media tools the basic marketing advice is to offer engaging information to connect with the audience, and while doing so to remember not forget common SEO practices.

In addition to social media tools, there are other online tools to use for marketing such as email marketing, which is a direct way to contact customers through their email inboxes. Currently the city sends out a monthly e-newsletter plus additional emails for events or specific messages. The emails are sent out to the city’s consumers of 400,000 contacts, who optionally signed up to receive free emails. Statistics show that on average when the city sends out an email there is an 11% open rate (44,000), and out of the 11% open rate there is an average of 31% click through rate (13,640) (SACVB, 2010). From MailChip.com, an email marketing and email list manager website, it shows an average

open rate of email marketing per industry. For the travel and transportation industry there is an average of 14.5% open rate which might mean the City of San Antonio could have a little better open rate. Some suggestions MailChip.com offers for improving open rate is to have a subject line state what content actually is inside the email newsletter. Also MailChip.com suggests refreshing the email list every few months, due to people changing email addresses. In addition, one of the key solutions to help with open rate is to get past spam filters. It's recommended to learn how spam filters work in order to avoid them (MailChimp, 2010). Also recently since social media has grown in popularity it is encouraged to integrate email marketing with social media. According to the article, "Is Your Email Marketing Ready for 2011?" by Gail Goodman, email marketing and social media are complementary. She offers a couple of tips for making them work together. One of the tips recommends making the messages inside the email newsletters shareable by including a Like/Tweet button. This will enable people to share the information through their Facebook, and Twitter accounts. In addition, another tip is to use Facebook or Twitter conversations as potential topic starters for the newsletters (Goodman, 2010). With social media, email marketing now has the potential to reach out to a wider audience.

Lastly, there are many online advertising strategies that are unfortunately not free, but nevertheless they are beneficial. One common online advertising strategy is to purchase online ad spaces on other websites and search engines as a marketing tool. The city utilizes paid search engine campaigns in 2010 with 41 million total impressions being generated. Also with a search engine marketing display a generation of over 149 million impressions were made with an average click through rate of .20% (298,000). Other paid ad campaigns were with AdReady and AARP that contributed with click through rates of .34% and .36%. In addition ad campaigns with Trip Advisor, AdReady,

and the Golf Channel, showed the highest conversions to travel to San Antonio. In 2010, the city also developed advertising campaigns with Expedia and Hotels.com which generated 4.2 million impressions. Another form of paid online advertisement is through blogs. The city paid for San Antonio related content generated on a popular travel blog, 'Lost Girls'. The writers of 'Lost Girls' visited San Antonio during Fiesta 2010, and created several blogs and webisodes (SACVB, 2010). These paid online methods are not advised for Luminariatravel.com's marketing plan at this time, due to Luminaratravel.com being a startup company with limited advertising budget.

Chapter 4: Marketing Plan

In this chapter, a recommended marketing plan will be created from the previous research. A potential target audience will be proposed from the combined study of tourism industry trends and economic industry trends. In addition a market segmentation and market positioning will also be defined from the cumulative studies on target audience and competition. Based on the target audience, content topics will be proposed to identify relevant content. Next, a brand strategy will be recommended to capture the overall product characteristics of LuminariaTravel.com. Last in this chapter, online marketing tools will be proposed to implement an integrated marketing plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the previous research, the following objectives are recommended to increase traffic to Luminariatravel.com.

Marketing Objectives:

- Develop the website to target the tourist that is here more than once throughout the year (the frequent visitor)
- Make content relevant to audience
- Choose areas of information not covered as well by the competition
- Implement Search Engine Optimization
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - YouTube
 - Flickr
 - Luminariatravel.com

Market Segmentation

After analyzing the competition, and carefully considering the current tourism industry trends and economic industry trends, it is recommended that Luminariatravel.com focus their marketing efforts on promoting areas of San Antonio not highly covered by other websites, and therefore an attainable target market. These areas not covered by other websites are considered local community sought after attractions. It is recommended during the initial stages of development to concentrate on the frequent visitor.

Target Market

After studying the tourism industry trends and economic industry trends, it is recommended to concentrate all marketing initiatives on the following segmentation. The following segmentation includes a geographic and demographic market description. Overall, the target tourist for Luminariatravel.com lives in Texas or Mexico, travels frequently by car to San Antonio, interested in attractions other than major attractions.

Target Audience

Due to high competition surrounding San Antonio attractions, it will be more effective for Luminariatravel.com to focus on Spanish speaking visitors as well as English speaking visitors. During the initial stages of development it is recommended that marketing efforts primarily target tourist in close vicinity to San Antonio or that are currently living temporarily in San Antonio. This frequent visitor is considered knowledgeable about the basic common information on San Antonio attractions. They mostly travel to San Antonio by car. They are looking for more things to do in San Antonio not listed on main travel sites. Some of these tourists have become the temporary local, so they are interested in local community events.

Content Relevancy

With the proposed target audience, the following content will be focused on local events and local community entertainment. The content will have extra focus around seasonal and holiday times due to target audience's frequent visits around those times. Providing this content is crucial to increasing visibility and visits to Luminariatravel.com.

Market Positioning

Currently, Luminariatravel.com and other San Antonio attraction websites compete for the same target market (the standard vacationer) and offer similar basic information on San Antonio attractions. Due to limited budget, paid advertising is not a solution to gain visibility over competing websites. Therefore, search engine ranking is the goal for visibility of Luminariatravel.com and potential visits. In order to accomplish search engine ranking more immediately, it is recommended that Luminariatravel.com use less competitive keywords, and focus positioning the website from those less competitive keywords that will clearly differentiate itself from other websites.

Recommended Positioning from Keywords

Using the free Google Keyword Tool and typing in the phrase 'San Antonio attractions', a list of related search keywords are displayed with the amount of advertising competition, and the amount of people that search for the keywords within a month. From this information, Luminariatravel.com can choose keywords/content that has less competition under related keywords to 'San Antonio attractions'.

| Search terms (1) | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Keyword | Competition | Global Monthly Searches ? | Local Monthly Searches ? |
| ☆ san antonio attractions | Medium | 18,100 | 14,800 |

Go to page: 1 Show rows: 50 1 - 1 of 1

| Keyword ideas (100) | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Keyword | Competition | Global Monthly Searches ? | Local Monthly Searches ? |
| ☆ san antonio zoo | Low | 40,500 | 40,500 |
| ☆ san antonio riverwalk | Medium | 201,000 | 201,000 |
| ☆ attractions in san antonio tx | Medium | 3,600 | 2,900 |
| ☆ san antonio hotels | High | 301,000 | 201,000 |
| ☆ things to do in san antonio | Medium | 33,100 | 33,100 |
| ☆ attractions in san antonio | Medium | 18,100 | 14,800 |
| ☆ san antonio texas | Low | 1,830,000 | 1,830,000 |
| ☆ san antonio riverwalk attractions | Medium | 260 | 210 |
| ☆ san antonio attraction | Medium | 14,800 | 12,100 |
| ☆ alamo san antonio | Low | 49,500 | 49,500 |

Figure 9: Google Keyword Tool, Search term ‘San Antonio attractions’

Therefore using Google Keyword Tool, the following keywords will be chosen to reposition Luminariatravel.com.

- ‘fiesta san Antonio’ – Low competition – 49,500 local monthly searches
- ‘san antonio events’ – Low competition – 27,100 local monthly searches
- ‘san antonio nightlife’ – Low competition – 5,400 local monthly searches
- ‘restaurants san antonio’ – Low competition – 90,500 local monthly searches
- ‘shopping mall san antonio’ – Low competition – 9,900 local monthly searches

To the frequent visitor interested in local community events, nightlife, restaurants and things to do, Luminariatravel.com can provide detail information on local attractions with a personal touch. This positioning will offer an attainable market to reach out to through search engines. The competition will be low, providing more opportunity for visibility and visits on search engines such as Google. In addition, with the repositioning to include

more community oriented events, it will help support Luminariatravel.com's theme of a local tourist guide more. This positioning will also be great for the type of tourist who is a temporary new resident trying to get to know San Antonio on a longer term than one week out of the year vacationer. Altogether, the recommended positioning will help improve visibility through search engines and thus contribute to online visits on Luminariatravel.com.

Brand Strategy

It is also recommended that Luminairatravel.com create a recognizable brand identity. Luminariatravel.com has in the past struggled with brand development. Currently, Luminariatravel.com has not settled on a brand image. It is suggested that Luminariatravel.com first create a brand identity. One of Luminariatravel.com's problems with branding is the web design. From reviewing a case study on Gran Canaria Travel Guide, by Roberto Koci, it is recommended for Luminariatravel.com to use WordPress as a quick and efficient way to create its webpage content. In addition, with WordPress, Luminariatravel.com can adjust webpage design multiple times without it interfering with content already created on the website (Koci, 2010). Therefore, WordPress saves time and energy on website creation. WordPress is also recommended because it's free to use and will not cost anything extra for Luminariatravel.com. With the use of WordPress, Luminariatravel.com can concentrate on implementing a web design that will provide consistency to the brand image. Another way, Luminariatravel.com can create a brand identity is through their logo. A proposed logo was created to help match, Luminariatravel.com's mission of offering information on community fun events, and offering information on fun unknown at large attractions. Also the logo, tried to capture the meaning of 'Luminaria', which means 'light the path'.



Figure 10: LuminariaTravel.com Propose Logo

With the logo and web design that matches the brand personality, Luminariatravel.com can effectively be a visual representation that will attract the target audience and provide consistency to develop LuminariaTravel.com's brand image. This image must then be reflected in all other online marketing strategies such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and so on, through use of the logo. A cohesive look throughout all marketing tools will help LuminariaTravel.com gain brand recognition.

Marketing Tools

The following marketing tools are recommended to build traffic to LuminariaTravel.com. Added, unique, relevant website content is seen as the most important way to increase visitor traffic. This can be provided by creating webpages with direct information on San Antonio attractions, as well as creating a blog to include information on personal experiences with attractions. A blog is recommended because it will provide fresh, new information on San Antonio. Also with a blog comments can be included from online visitors, so it will provide an opportunity for visitors to exchange information and thoughts.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr are online social media tools encouraged to be used by LuminariaTravel.com. With each social media tool, it is essential to

incorporate SEO methods. YouTube and Flickr are recommended to be used because they will provide real examples of experiencing San Antonio. The photos and videos uploaded on these sites will offer information about San Antonio and if a online user is interested in seeing more information about the photo or video a link will be visible to show online users where they can find more information about San Antonio. In addition, with Facebook and Twitter, online users can add LuminariaTravel.com as a contact and recommend LuminariaTravel.com to others. Contacts of LuminariaTravel.com can then interact with the brand and comment on San Antonio LuminariaTravel.com related topics, offer information, or receive the latest news from LuminariaTravel.com Altogether, each social media tool will provide brand recognition through consistency and visibility.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The marketing plan was created in a way to help differentiate it from its competition. In order for this to be accomplished, the proposed market positioning was founded to provide a less competitive way through search engines to reach the target audience. With this new market positioning an easier way to be ranked high by search engines was discovered, and therefore provide the opportunity for visibility by search engines users. To compliment the new market positioning, the proposed brand strategy was added to offer LuminariaTravel.com consistency and help build brand equity. In addition, with the recommended relevant content, cohesive web design, and new logo, LuminariaTravel.com can also build its brand image. Last, the marketing tools were suggested to help promote LuminariaTravel.com and at the same time be cost effective.

In order to keep on task of the marketing plan, there are several ways LuminariaTravel.com can use to track progress. Through the web hosting service LuminariaTravel.com uses, a free access log analyzer is provided. The free log analyzer from Alentum offers visitor reports on visitor activity, files accessed, search engines, browsers and more. In addition, Google offers, Webmaster Tools, a free way to see reports on your website's visibility on Google. Through Webmaster Tools, LuminariaTravel.com can see how Google views its web pages. More specifically, Google provides a way to see how many people are accessing LuminariaTravel.com through Google and a way to see what keywords they are using to find LuminariaTravel.com. Through these two website analytic services, LuminariaTravel.com will be able to track the progress of the marketing plan. In addition, LuminariaTravel.com will be able to make alterations on strengths and weaknesses of the website with the statistics provided from the services. Increase content on strength areas

to offer more of what the consumer is looking for is a suggestion. Also promote the strong content areas to increase traffic to a topic area in demand. With the weaknesses found in the website, LuminariaTravel.com can restructure the content to be more relevant. It is suggested to try another angle that will appeal to search engine queries. Overall, the use of both analytic services will help LuminariaTravel.com be able to know if the marketing plan is beneficial. There will be two critical ways to identify if the marketing plan objectives are being met. One way will be by seeing if there is steady increase in visitors. A max number is not officially required at this stage. The second way to identify if the marketing plan objectives are being met is by LuminariaTravel.com rising up in page ranking on Google search engine. The page position of LuminariaTravel.com on Google should steadily increase to be on top especially on query searches involving low competition and high search volume.

For the future, it is recommended that after LuminariaTravel.com has added a majority of the content, LuminariaTravel.com should submit a sitemap to Google to index all web pages. After Google has indexed (added web pages on their search engines), the search queries with keywords used in LuminariaTravel.com should be monitored and see if the changes on LuminariaTravel.com have successfully been recognized by Google search engine. During this time of waiting for search engines to index web pages, attention to other marketing tools such as social media can be created. If after a year no noticeable changes have occurred, LuminariaTravel.com should reevaluate the marketing plan and reanalyze the situation. Search engine optimization is considered a long process and results are not seen overnight. Therefore at least a year is recommended to wait to see if the proposed marketing plan is beneficial to LuminariaTravel.com. Overall, it is believed the recommended marketing plan offers LuminariaTravel.com the strategies and tools to increase online visibility and traffic.

In this paper, several facts were discovered and new marketing strategies were explored. However, the most important thing learned was that you must research your audience. Know who your audience is. Knowing your audience and understanding what they want, is the foundation of any marketing plan. It is the basics that were even reiterated in SEO marketing. Provide content that is for your audience. Provide content that your audience will be interested in. With defining and understanding the target audience, a good foundation will have been created, thereby providing an opportunity to effectively carry out any marketing strategy.

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