



Visit Faroe Islands

Official Tourist Board of the Faroe Islands

Earning media coverage through
compelling brand campaigns

Overview

Interviewee:

Guðrið Højgaard, CEO, Visit Faroe Islands

www.visitfaroeislands.com

Visit Faroe Islands provides insight into how Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) can co-create innovative low-to-no-cost marketing activity to deliver cut-through brand messaging with clear key performance indicators (KPIs) against engagement, reach and earned media value.

The primary focus of this example is the 2020 Remote Tourism initiative, building on a series of preceding low-cost initiatives, which informed a novel campaign over the Covid-19 timeline. The case study touches on the evolution of the Visit Faroe Islands brand by briefly looking at the timeline of marketing campaigns leading up to this campaign produced in response to Covid-19.

A clear and consistent strategy underpinned by a novel creative approach and theatrical tone has enabled Visit Faroe Islands to respond effectively to the challenges of reduced international travel during the pandemic.

Organisational context

As part of a strategic review in place since 2012, Visit Faroe Islands has evolved the primary tourist offering from that of solely a leisure destination to one that incorporates a wider range of business facilitation and cultural opportunities such as meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE).

The Visit Faroe Islands core team was restructured in order to establish an increased focus on marketing the islands through a programme of PR via digital and online channels, and a move away from traditional B2C messaging. Guðrið Højgaard, leader of the review, has extensive experience in marketing roles with Visit Stockholm and Visit Denmark.

In its first year the core team comprised two full-time staff, expanding year on year to include a digital photographer, a MICE co-ordinator, and PR sales and marketing staff. The marketing group operates alongside an internal development team. These units deliver international PR and marketing campaigns, and also drive internal regional development.

Through a programme with relatively limited government funding and resource, the Visit Faroe Islands team delivers all campaign activities with a cohort of 9.5 full-time staff and additional support from two external agencies, Mensch in Denmark, and local design and branding business Sansir.

Building a unique tone of voice

The first online PR campaign in 2016 intentionally drew attention to the fact that Google Maps Street View did not cover the Faroe Islands at the time. Google Sheep View was devised as a humorous take on this scenario. The resulting online short film garnered global attention, winning a Gold Lion award at the Cannes Festival of Creativity.

This work set the tone for subsequent initiatives, each equally mischievous. Guðrið Højgaard points to a conscious decision to focus on “story doing rather than story telling”, delivering a sense of the personality of the islands’ residents through campaigns that convey a sense of David versus Goliath. Importantly, existing free-to-use software products and digital tools with minimal barriers to technical execution were used.

The organisation launched Faroe Islands Translate in 2017, conceived to simultaneously highlight that Google Translate did not offer Faroese as an option while shining a spotlight on the fact that one language dies approximately every 14 days. Local residents undertook to translate text inputted by potential visitors into a custom website, creating a sense of community cohesion while building connections outwards to international users.

The Closed for Maintenance campaign launch (2019) announced that the islands were closing for tourism completely, with access available only for volunteers who wished to take part in ecology and conservation projects in return for accommodation and food. The programme was so successful that it is being reintroduced for 2022, with 14,000 applicants requesting to take part.

Past campaign case study videos

(Click to play)



2016

Google Sheep View



2017

Faroe Islands Translate



2019

Closed for Maintenance

Visit Faroe Islands: Remote Tourism

At the beginning of Covid-19 international travel restrictions, Visit Faroe Islands created a further novel PR moment, by inviting access to a range of free virtual island tours delivered as a series of interactive live streams on YouTube.

The activities included tours conducted, for example, on foot, by kayak and via helicopter rides, offering virtual visitors a glimpse of the breathtaking landscape, sites and geology across the islands. Online visitors could determine the routes taken, led by a member of the Visit Faroe Islands team equipped with a body- or helmet-mounted camera to provide a first-person experience.

The campaign benefitted from the Faroe Islands' having full 4G mobile coverage, meaning a consistently high-quality video stream could be delivered through a mobile phone via YouTube and accessed anywhere in the world by a virtual visitor. The low-cost production was given an existing platform with integrated streaming capability, with further interactivity offered through live chat functionality.

Case study film

(Click to play)



Regeneration

Before the pivot to a digital PR focus and MICE offering, Visit Faroe Islands' core visitor demographic was leisure travellers in the 50+ age group. Additionally, the peak season was limited to the window of June to August, restricted by seasonality that permitted key leisure activities.

Subsequent to the pivot, a number of significant shifts have taken place. Firstly, the visitor profile has broadened noticeably to include younger travellers aged 18-35, who have responded particularly well to digital-first marketing activities. This shift has also been mirrored in applicants to the Closed for Maintenance programme.

Beyond this, the duration of the tourist season has expanded to run from March through October, supporting the need for development of two further hotel facilities to accommodate the increased visitor numbers, with an attendant positive economic impact on the local construction trades.

While the islands have seen the first international chain arrive with the Hilton Group, a conscious policy decision has been taken to focus on supporting the home-grown hospitality industry, with greater emphasis on locally owned and managed operations prioritised above courting further international investment. The islands currently offer some 700 hotels across the capital area.

Regeneration

Prior to the Visit Faroe Islands' strategic view (2012) and first online visitor production (2016), the core visitor demographic was leisure travellers in the 50+ age group. The peak season was restricted by seasonality (June–August) when primary leisure activities are usually most feasible. Following this novel initiative, there have been a number of significant shifts.

- Visitors have engaged in high numbers with the digital-first marketing activities, mirrored by volunteer application numbers to the Closed for Maintenance programme. The duration of the tourist season expanded to run from March to October. Two further hotel facilities were consequently built to accommodate the increased visitor numbers, with a positive economic impact on local construction trades.
- The islands have seen the first international hotel chain arrive with the Hilton Group.
- However, a conscious policy decision has been taken to focus on supporting the home-grown hospitality industry, with greater emphasis on locally owned and managed operations above courting further international investment. The islands currently offer approximately 700 hotels across the capital area.

Skills development

The internal development function of the Visit Faroe Islands team has provided strategic support towards achieving a sustainable social policy. It has sought to drive inclusion of local voices and perspectives in the development of policies designed to ensure that population maintenance and growth is appropriately managed to ensure long-term sustainability.

White papers have been produced that included informal reports from local residents around development needs, supporting the inclination to remain resident on the islands (Exit Faroe Islands). Consequently, over the period 2012–2021, recorded population across the islands has increased from 48,000 to 54,000 (an increase of 12.5%).

The increase in population has largely been driven by native-born citizens returning from living overseas as the appeal of the islands has increased with improvements to higher education, entertainment and hospitality offerings (including the first two-Michelin-starred restaurant). The shift in perception about the experience of living on the islands is in part a consequence of the work of Visit Faroe Islands.

Perhaps most significantly, Guðrið Højgaard highlights that this population increase is primarily due to women returning to the islands, pointing to an organic shift in population makeup that may have a positive impact on birth rates across the islands and population retention due to improved education opportunities and access.

Regeneration

In the process of building the Visit Faroe Islands core operational team, Guðrið Højgaard focused primarily on a hybrid range of skillsets across marketing, PR and creative content development for online production. This ensures that collectively the team have the breadth of capabilities necessary to develop and deliver innovative, low-cost marketing activations, including the production and distribution of video, photography, live streams and website builds using free, off-the-shelf digital products and platforms.

The total cost of producing the Remote Tourism initiative was approximately €150,000, with return on investment (ROI) based on earned media value calculated at €100 million.



REMOTE TOURISM CAMPAIGN RESULTS

544 news articles

40M social media reach

5.65B online readership

700K remote visitors