

Boosting Moscow's Inbound Potential Through E-Channels

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Anyone who has anything to do with the travel and hospitality industry in Moscow is well aware of the fact that the city's leisure-travel potential has never been fully recognized and used enough. A brief scan through an average European frequent traveler's list of preferred destinations — where Moscow is placed somewhere between the 20th and 30th positions — as well as the severe price wars among Moscow hotels for weekend business leave no room for disagreement with this statement. There is a number of reasons for this, from the city's underdeveloped leisure infrastructure and visa regulations to the lack of promotion of the destination in international markets.

While major infrastructural problems require a solid long-term approach, there could be some quick wins as regards the city's promotional opportunities. Most of them are related to e-commerce and Internet channels, since today's world travelers are highly Internet-savvy and stay online to communicate with the world and purchase goods and services wherever they travel. I personally see three major tasks for the promotion of Moscow in e-channels:

1. A potential tourist should have quick and hassle-free 24/7 access to quality information about the city and its tourist resources on the World Wide Web. As a first step, this could be achieved through the creation of Moscow's own interactive web portal, some themed web sites (e.g. Maslennitsa, city events, etc.) and partnership with relevant web resources — a city museums' portal, inbound tour operators, hotels and other associations' web sites. To secure the availability of much-needed information, a promotional program should be introduced in key markets — Russia & the CIS (domestic), Germany, Britain, the United States (international) — with all of the following put in place: a key words purchase for search engine optimization (Google and Bing for international markets, Yandex for the domestic market), interactive banners and links on web sites with active traffic (travel portals, travel review web sites,

social media, etc.), educational tours for bloggers and electronic media users and iPhone apps — to mention just a few strategies.

2. The resources available to a potential tourist should support those who wish to make the dream about a trip to Moscow a reality (choice of trip dates, flight and hotel bookings, visa applications, etc.). That is why the structure of the information provided by these resources — whether it is a city portal or a dedicated iPhone app — should be simple and efficient, available in key languages (English, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese), reflect the schedule of the city's key events and festivals (e.g. Old New Year, Orthodox Christmas, Maslennitsa, as well as mega events such as the 2018 World Cup, etc.). Some interactive options would also be useful, including the possibility to book theatre tickets or museum tours online, city interactive maps, online visa application tips, Moscow discount card print-out, FAQ. Last but not least, we should not forget that anyone traveling to Russia is first of all concerned about their safety and security on the trip — therefore there should be relevant instructions given and a 24/7 call center number provided.
3. Finally, a potential or a repeat tourist should be kept connected and constantly updated on the city's life, news, events and help spread the word about the destination among other potential tourists. He should be offered the chance to sign up for a newsletter, send a link about city events to friends, share news with his contacts on social media web sites (e.g. Facebook) or leave a comment about his trip to Moscow on travel review portals (e.g. TripAdvisor).

The Moscow Tourism Committee has recently announced the creation of the city's travel portal, which will compete with such resources as VisitBritain. This is already a great step forward, which — when supported by the abovementioned initiatives — may secure a greater market share for the Russian capital in terms of global tourist arrivals.

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