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Visit Portsmouth Digital Marketing report 2022

Throughout 2022 Visit Portsmouth continued to put great focus on its digital output, via the website; social media channels; digital ad campaigns; video output; insiders and influencers; third-party publishers, and more.

As outlined in the Destination Marketing Strategy 2023-28, this focus on digital will continue over the coming years to reach our objectives:

- Continue to grow the profile of Portsmouth as a national brand
- Increase the value of the visitor economy
- Work with partners to manage and develop the destination for tourism

This report represents the 12 months from November 2021 to October 2022 inclusive.

Campaigns

We ran a number of campaigns throughout the year to reach certain demographics or amplify our messaging at key times. The below information details our main campaigns for the year to date, in chronological order, not on the size of the campaign or budget allocation.

Winter campaign

In winter 2021 we ran a campaign to promote Portsmouth as a destination for the run-up to Christmas. It involved a main catch-all campaign featuring the 'Wind in Your Sails' messaging, as well as two smaller campaigns micro-targeted to specific audiences.

The primary campaign used familiar imagery and logos from the summer campaign but with a wintry twist (a similar photograph of a girl at the beach, but in colder weather, wearing warmer clothes, and with a wintry design). The campaign ran on social media but also reflected on the Visit Portsmouth website, with a homepage banner and designated landing page - detailing the things to do in Portsmouth around Christmas.

The two smaller campaigns ran alongside in support. The first promoted the city's various Christmas markets to those with an interest in retail, independent shopping, and so on. The second promoted the ice rink to residents in and around Winchester, as that didn't have a rink as usual, so there would be heightened interest.

As well as the marketing on our own channels, we secured placements within e-newsletters from Tourism South East and Visit Hampshire, as well as a mention on the latter's social media.

Across the three campaigns, for a total spend of £700, we achieved on social media:

Impressions - 210,351

Reach - 91,723

Link clicks - 1,772

In addition to the above campaign, we also ran the Event Advent and Portsmouth Top 10 (to showcase events throughout the city and great images from the past year respectively) on our social channels throughout December.

English Tourism Week

English Tourism Week saw the launch of Visit Portsmouth's Event Guide for 2022, taking the place of the traditional Visitor Guide which rolled over from the previous year.

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It was also the opportunity for a campaign targeting a more local audience, as well as our more typical markets.

Visit Portsmouth partnered up with a host of top attractions to offer discounts and added extras for those living in the local area, so people could explore the culture on their doorstep. This would have the added benefit of making them advocates for the attractions and city as a whole - especially pertinent with results from Visit Britain showing that visits to family and friends remain popular post-pandemic, especially so during the more challenging off-season.

These offers were collated on the Visit Portsmouth website. Also featured was the more general English Tourism Week messaging from Visit England, with content specifically written to target their key pillars and use their official hashtags.

Two ads were run on Facebook during the campaign, the first to promote the 2022 Event Guide and the second to support a poster campaign ongoing on the railway network in partnership with South Western Rail.

The social media campaign (comprising organic [i.e. unpaid] posts and £200 in ad spend) reached 77,000 people in our two target areas: the London area and surrounds, and within Portsmouth itself. Across English Tourism Week the Visit Portsmouth website saw a 32.6% increase in users, 33% increase in sessions, and 23% increase in page views.

Summer and autumn campaign

Our main season campaign ran once again during summer and autumn, thanks to support from our primary partners, South Western Rail, Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard and Spinnaker Tower. Poster sites were secured around London and the South, with some budget retained for a digital campaign in support.

This digital aspect took the form of video adverts (run across Facebook, YouTube and Sky AdSmart), as well as great prominence on the Visit Portsmouth website, through seasonal landing pages featuring imagery from the campaign alongside content optimised for our target audiences.

We utilised video advertising for almost the entire digital campaign, to not only target the growing video market (which Facebook in particular is focusing on and therefore giving greater weight in its algorithms), but also make full use of some great video content recently sourced by partners across the destination.

To avoid using a third-party digital agency (and therefore passing a percentage of the budget to them), the Visit Portsmouth team undertook full management of the campaign, from video editing to running the ads, monitoring their results mid-campaign, and reporting afterwards. Whilst this was a significant undertaking it did allow us to spend more money on ads and get a better return (better than both industry standards and on previous results).

To this end, our contact at Simpleview (the company that hosts the Visit Portsmouth website) said we were the only client he has to run ads in-house and not rely on agencies, whilst a representative of Meta (the parent company of Facebook and Instagram) said when appraising the campaign: "you don't see results like these every day", and that there was nothing more he could recommend to optimise it further.

YouTube:

£6,000 spend

3,388,530 impressions

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653,822 interactions (clicks and , engagements, views)
402,148 views
Total watch time: 13,514 hours (well over a year and a half)

Facebook:
£5,000 spend
2,500,224 impressions
543,358 reach
511,170 ThruPlays
657,501 page engagements
1,475 link clicks

Sky AdSmart reached a smaller but more defined audience, our £3,000 spend generating 130,447 impressions and 431 clicks through to the website, with 586.8 hours of video play time.

Additionally, we secured other placements including Big Screen Portsmouth on Guildhall Square and on the screens at Victorious Festival. The maximum potential reach for the Big Screen playouts alone was 969,428. The messaging was also included within our Visit Portsmouth e-newsletter and shared by partners around the destination.

Our targets for the summer campaign were set using previous results where possible, and industry benchmarks where not.

As we'd run a Facebook campaign before we set a target of 128,000 impressions, 122,000 reach and 254 unique clicks. Our achieved results were 541,334 impressions (a 332.9% increase), 116,699 reach (4.4% below target, as our ads were shown to fewer people but more often), and 463 clicks (up 82.3%).

Having never run Google Ads for a summer campaign before we had to use industry standard benchmarks, although these varied wildly from source to source. By averaging figures from four different outlets (Emeraldsoft, Creatopy, OnlineMarketingGurus and InfluenceMarketingHub) we set a target of 125,000 views. Even without including one entire segment of our YouTube campaign (Non-Skippable ads, which are 15 seconds long, and Google only counts a view as being 30 seconds or more), we achieved 309,828 views - a 147.9% improvement on the target.

Staying campaign

Following the success of skippable YouTube ads for the summer campaign, we ran a short staying campaign from 9-26 August, targeting people interested in short breaks, city breaks, staycations etc., reaching outside of our usual two-hour drive time. This was not only done to boost Portsmouth's reputation as a staying destination (and combat the day visit belief), but also support local hotels that had reported struggles to reach their pre-pandemic booking levels.

A one-minute re-cut of the video was used, linking through to the Accommodation section of the Visit Portsmouth website. It achieved the following results:

128,001 impressions
37,158 engagements
16,735 views
Total watch time: 504 hours

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Website

The Visit Portsmouth website remained a strong focus for us in 2022, to warm up visitors whose attention had been piqued on social media or through our campaigns, for example, and also as a way to promote our key messaging in full and with total editorial control.

During the past 12 months, the Visit Portsmouth website had:

829,639 sessions

652,937 users

1,467,227 page views

Whilst this represents a marked increase in the previous year's figures (sessions up 45.8%, users up 40% and page views up 42.9%), figures are still down from the previous comparable pre-pandemic year (sessions down 6.1%, users down 0.8% and page views down 19.9%). Whilst this may still be down to hesitancy to travel after the pandemic, or a result of the ongoing cost of living crisis, there are other factors that could also be at play.

Google, for example, is launching new products and is using the Knowledge Graph to display as much information in the search results pages as possible - therefore meaning some visitors don't need to click through.

To this end we are supporting Tourism South East on an information gathering exercise to see how many other destinations have similar concerns, and to what extent their traffic is up or down.

Social media

We have maintained Visit Portsmouth's social media presence over the past year, with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram being our primary channels.

Facebook remains our largest audience, and in recent years the audience has got slightly younger, with those in the 25-35 age bracket being the largest segment (34%) followed by 35-44 (28%). Our audience skews slightly more female, the split here being 55:45.

Whilst our page likes remain below the likes of Liverpool and Bristol, they remain higher than Brighton and Bournemouth, and are growing faster.

Facebook results:

Post reach - 5,496,010 (comprising 3,054,741 organic and 2,465,313 paid)

Page reach - 1,741,897

Page likes - 37,800

New Page likes - 714

Our Instagram audience skews even more heavily in favour of female followers, the ratio here being 62:38. This is a positive and a definite target of ours, as women are widely known to be the primary decision makers and organisers of holidays and day trips.

Instagram results:

Post impressions - 72,883

Post reach - 65,778

Post engagements and actions - 3,405

Page reach (through organic and paid) - 128,665

New followers - 815

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Twitter remains a way for us to get messages out quickly and effectively. There is also a much more business-oriented audience on our Twitter channel, allowing us to amend content accordingly (and share more updates from the Port, our attendance at trade events etc.) on there.

Twitter results:

Tweet impressions - 414,532

Engagements - 3,189

Link clicks - 2,231

New followers - 491

Press coverage

Through our work with PR contacts, press agencies and publishers, we have secured much exposure for the city, over and above the general promotion (such as the Which? report that put Portsmouth as one of the Top 10 large cities to visit and the Nomads Nation survey that had Portsmouth as the second coolest place to live in the UK).

Some of our successes are listed below.

Secured a feature for Portsmouth Historic Dockyard in Bella magazine.

Portsmouth as a whole (with a particular focus on the Queens Hotel) featured strongly in ILOVEBILBAO magazine.

The Daily Mail included the Royal Maritime Club Hotel in its list of 'hotels that give back'.

The Guardian wrote about the Village Hotel.

UniLad sent influencers to Portsmouth for Instagram video content (under the banner 'Unexpected Things to Do in Portsmouth') as part of its Reel City Guide series. The influencers went foraging on the beach, visited Portsmouth Distillery Co and ate doughnuts at Hideout Coffee.

Portsmouth got multiple mentions in a new Guardian blog series informed by us but written by our contacts at Govia Thameslink. Abseiling the Spinnaker Tower, trying out independent restaurants and visiting Love Southsea market all got mentions, alongside good photography.

A TikTok influencer with a particular focus on history was invited to The D-Day Story, Southsea Castle and Charles Dickens' Birthplace Museum to create and share original videos. He had 400,000 followers at the time he posted these videos.

Portsmouth was featured in World of Cruising, encouraging those setting off from or returning to our port to stay longer and explore the city, or for those stopping by for day calls to stay local instead of going off to the likes of Winchester or Stonehenge. The D-Day Story also got a strong mention.

We had a journalist visit for a three-page feature in Guild Magazine. He stayed at the Queens Hotel and visited The D-Day Story, Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard and Mary Rose.

The International Kite Festival was featured by Visit England in their press round up after we submitted it for inclusion as part of their focus on free and affordable things to do this summer. The information went out to press and agencies across the country.

We also got Victorious Festival featured in Visit Britain's PR roundup ahead of the event. This was sent out to bookers, agents, journalists and marketers.

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A partnership was established with History Hit (the Dan Snow podcast). We submitted content and imagery for them to share on their social media channels, with coverage including Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery, LCT 7074, the Hotwalls Studios, the Mary Rose and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

Partnerships

We continue to build new relationships and develop our existing ones, to promote Portsmouth to new audiences whilst also getting some huge volumes of exposure for little to no cost.

Our very strong relationship with South Western Rail continues. The company bought into our summer and autumn campaigns, and has included hundreds of posters of Portsmouth on the network at no cost to us. We have also submitted announcements for them to post on social, and have reciprocated with promotion of their sales or rewards offers. The Visit Portsmouth website contains a booking widget for visitors to secure their train tickets without leaving our site - and this has been branded up by SWR in our colourway to make it look even more appealing and authentic.

We remain closely aligned with Visit Britain and Visit England, supporting their campaigns and strategies to not only keep in step with their own trends and research, but also remain front-of-mind for the team there when it comes to organising press visits or pushing certain destinations. Over the past year this has taken the form of regular submission of content and imagery so they have the latest details on events and new openings. We also created new sections on the Visit Portsmouth website for the Escape the Everyday campaign and wrote blogs to align with Visit Britain's main content pillars for 2022 (city foodies, city icons with a modern twist, and outdoors in the city). We supported English Tourism Week and helped amplify their messages and hashtags on social media. In turn, we received exposure as outlined in the Press Coverage section above.

Our long-established partnerships with attractions and businesses around the destination continues and is too detailed to go into at length here, but our work with main season partners enabled the summer campaign detailed above to go ahead. These relationships therefore form a significant part of our marketing efforts. In addition we also work closely with the PR agencies instructed by Gunwharf Quays and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, for example, to keep up to date with the latest developments there and ensure they are fully covered on our digital channels.

We also help Portsmouth International Port to amplify their messaging, with particular focus in recent months being on the green developments there and its growing cruise offer.

Plus, we have contacts at BBC Radio Solent and have been called upon on a number of occasions for interviews when tourism is in the news or for promotion ahead of busy visitor seasons.

General

In addition to the above outputs and actions, work has been ongoing behind the scenes to ensure our digital offer is not just fit for purpose but future-proofed for any developments or opportunities that may come our way.

This has included continued work to optimise the website for search (as Google accounted for 85% of our traffic in the past year).

Additionally, Google Analytics 4 was set up at the first opportunity, to ensure we were ready for the big switch over from Universal Analytics next year. This work has also enabled us to gather data early, so we amass a great amount of information early (as you only harvest data from the moment

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you set the tracking code live and can't go back beyond this, making early adoption crucial for comparable figures straight away).

We have also worked with innumerable agencies, tour operators and others, to provide them with imagery, content and the latest updates on Portsmouth, so they're kept fully informed and can also better promote their tours to the city.