

**CREATIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:
TRAVELING WITH TRAVIESO THROUGH A BRANDING JOURNEY**

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Executive Summary

This project sought to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a small business' current digital media footprint and branding. The project sought to solve the challenges faced by a travel agency that had goals to grow through digital engagement and establishing a brand identity.

Using the Master of Professional Communication (MAPC) toolset I tapped into MAPC 602 using the Design in Storytelling book that featured industry standards, emotional appeals, and focus on user experience, and determined an audience profile to support engagement goals. This included centering the context of the user experience on what type of marketing to focus on, physical or digital. From MPAC 604, Conflict Resolution, I took mediation and listening skills, and being able to restate what the client was saying so we could both be on the same page together on goals and needs. In MAPC 614 I gained an understanding of research-based methods that were centered in the human experience. Finally, from MAPC 617, I was able to use mindfulness to practice patience in understanding that the ideas I had were maybe not the same ideas that the client or my advisor, Dr. Whiteside had, but that I needed to be able to take everything in stride to keep creating and successfully complete the project.

Needs Analysis

Client Needs

Lourdes Travieso is the owner and central employee of Travel with Travieso. Lourdes has always enjoyed traveling and travel planning for her family trips. After many successful family trips, sometimes including friends, Lourdes realized how much she

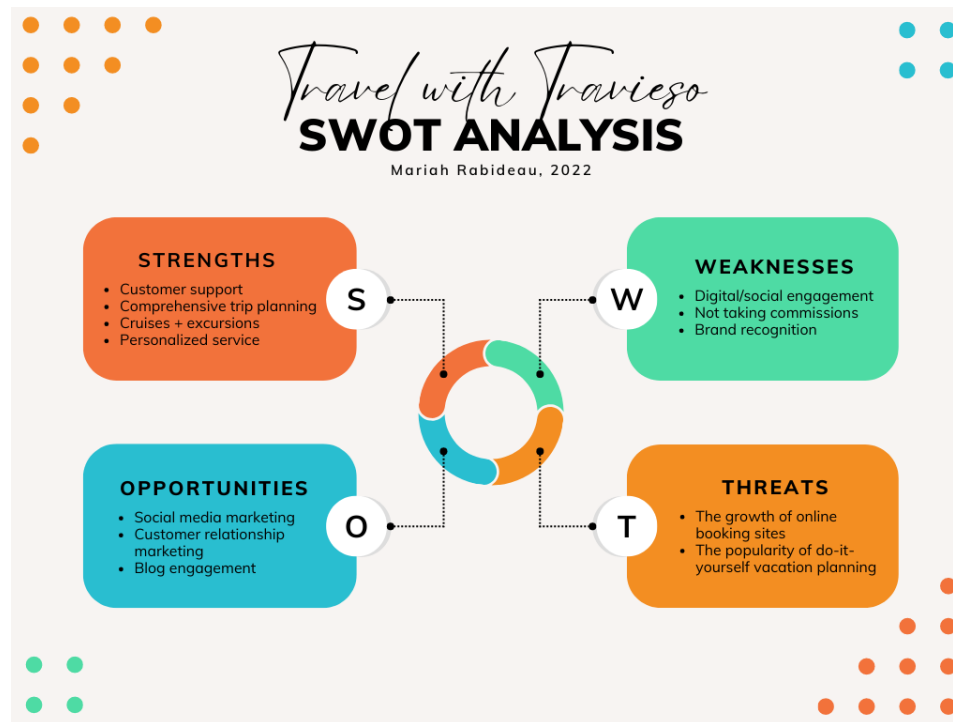
enjoyed the planning process. Additionally, Lourdes began receiving requests from friends and extended family to help them plan their travel. Over many years, Lourdes acquired her travel agent documentation and began planning vacations for more than just friends and family. I sat down with Lourdes during multiple stakeholder discussions to learn more about her needs. “Travel with Travieso is in a transition period, in that we are moving away from this being my hobby to it becoming a small business” Lourdes expressed needs that centered on branding and digital media. She wanted to upgrade the existing website and develop a unique branding profile for Travel with Travieso. In addition to branding needs, Lourdes also wanted to gain insight and support on their digital media footprint and how to grow online. Lourdes’ daughter, Nancy Travieso, functions as their Digital Media Manager, manages their Facebook and Instagram, and plans to expand their blog. Nancy and Lourdes expressed several needs focused on digital engagement. These needs centered on social media and customer relationship marketing tactics and digital media tools that could be used to grow the business online. Specifically, they wanted to ensure there was more than just an icon linking the website to social media, they needed to understand how dynamic content can attract people to engage with their socials, and they wanted to lead people to their website from their socials in creative ways. Leading people to the website was essential because their services are unique, and the website has more details about their services.

Organization Needs

Travel with Travieso is a family-owned and -operated small business that started as a hobby business that provided travel agency services to clients, including scheduling flights, booking cruises, and determining reservations for hotels and transportation. The hobby business grew through word-of-mouth referrals by friends and family that enjoyed their experiences. Services have expanded

due to client needs and now include detailed trip planning, from departure to arrival and back, and organizing excursions for off-cruise exploration. The expanded services were based on requests from customers and to keep aligned or ahead of industry competition. An effective assessment of competitive position within the travel agency industry was necessary to understand what Travel with Travieso was doing well and what opportunities could help support their growth agenda. Figure 1 below shows the SWOT analysis used in assessing Travel with Travieso's current position in the travel industry against their growth goals.

Figure 1. SWOT Analysis Travel with Travieso



Results of the SWOT analysis concluded travel agency competition was not necessarily a major threat. Travel with Travieso sets itself apart from industry competition through personalized planning services and customized customer gifts. I conducted a review of their current digital media and social media platforms and content. This was noted as a weakness because there are several ways, they could utilize digital media marketing to grow their business that are not currently being used. The weaknesses helped me to determine opportunities that included: a social media marketing plan and a plan for blogging about the trips they are planning or trips they are taking themselves. The major threat to Travel with Travieso was the growth of online booking sites. This will remain a threat in the short term because we did not address this challenge during the project. Travel with Travieso prefers to speak with clients directly and opted to maintain the relational aspect of booking clients directly rather than using an online booking service. This choice works well for their client base and primary audience, so I do not foresee any negative business changes as a result.

Target Audience / User Experience

Travel Motivations / Branding

“Since taking a holiday is likely to be one of the largest single expenditures in a year and one of the greatest sources of satisfaction and fulfillment, it is important for service providers to understand travelers’ desires and their psychological and sociological needs in order to accomplish their dreams.” (Campelo et al., 2014).

When starting the journey through branding, I needed to consider and understand the audiences that Travel with Travieso was catering to with their services. These would also be the audiences that I needed to cater to for my branding. A travel agency can have a wide

variety of audiences, but I focused on two audiences with an audience profile assessment. The audience profile assessment underwent two iterations. The first being the assessment I made based on the initial discussions with the Travel with Travieso team. The audiences identified initially included senior citizens or retirees, empty-nesters, large family groups, groups of all ages, anyone looking for luxury vacations, large groups for specific events (i.e., bachelorette parties, family reunions, birthday celebrations, etc.). After consultation with my advisor and upon further research, I narrowed down the audience possibilities in order to help Lourdes and her team to focus in on their most common, return clients. Their primary audience is retirees and empty nesters. Their second primary audience is groups, representing family groups and/or groups celebrating something specific. Their secondary audiences include family members or friends of the primary groups, focusing on those that are thinking of joining the primary audience on their travels but had not yet committed. Understanding these distinct audiences was essential to formulate the draft branding options. “Studying travel motivation helps one to understand customers’ needs, thus enhancing service providers’ knowledge about what kinds of experiences travelers seek, especially for certain groups of people.” (Chang, 2007). When thinking about why these audiences travel, there are a variety of theories as to travel motivation, but it is clear to me that wanting to ‘escape’ and seeking relaxation are the highest priorities for many travelers. In order to understand the audiences' experiences and expectations, I conducted a group session to workshop individual motivations.

Participant Observation in Brand Development

I first conducted market research by using participant observation method where I sat down, in-person with two of Travel with Travieso clients from two different generations. Participant observation is unique within social research because it is not necessarily a

particular research method but rather a mode in which the observer is part of the social world in which they are studying (Atkinson, 1998). I like to travel myself, but more so I had to participate in discussion during the recorded observation time to keep the conversation going and ask questions throughout. I used a talk-aloud approach to understand what they were looking for in the user experience. This discussion covered a wide range of topics but in this part of the discussion we focused on the user experience with Lourdes and personalized trip planning, then on the website, logo, and social media engagement. First, personalized trip planning is very important to the average traveler. Personalized trip planning at Travel with Travieso includes providing detailed itinerary information, with destination information, and sharing picturesque photos and images of the prospective destination. Jeong et al., state that when “potential tourists have more information available about a destination” this increases their familiarity with a destination and reduces external search costs, likely increasing one’s probability of visiting a destination. Travel with Travieso already does this and provides destination details to clients once they begin their travel planning process. But the old website did not highlight these destinations thoroughly. In terms of a website and logo for travel organizations, I conducted research that included competitive market research. This research was done to understand what industry competitors were providing their clients with and what their digital footprint consisted of.

Plan / Branding Solution

Goals

Essential to strategic communication solutions is ensuring “message authenticity, consistency, and truthfulness across all communication platforms” (Schultz and Schultz, 2003). I engaged in massive amounts of market and peer-reviewed research that

covered logos and taglines, effective travel websites, industry standards, travel agency success stories, and luxury travel. Our goals were simple but impactful: tell the story of the small business while strengthening engagement, through enhancing strategy and user experience and ensuring the cultivation of authenticity through all digital spaces. Lourdes and Nancy wanted to make sure that their clients felt valued and that they could trust Travel with Travieso to organize and plan a personalized, relaxing experience. Specific content goals included: 1) overhaul the website on new hosting platform, 2) deliver custom logo and brand portfolio to apply across merchandise and digital spaces, and 3) provide advice on growing their audience via social media.

Phases

Initial discussions started by connecting with Lourdes and discussing initial details about Travel with Travieso's history and focuses with Dr. Whiteside. We talked about organizational goals for Travel with Travieso, including short-term and long-term growth goals. This preceded three more discussions, done separately with Lourdes, her daughter Nancy and Dr. Whiteside, respectively. Each session was focused on different aspects of the branding, audience, and familiarizing myself with Travel with Travieso's unique services. The next phase was the creation phase that included completion of the first iterations of the website and brand board, which included logos, color themes, alternative logos, website banners, and font families. This phase also included researching travel brand logos and elements that familiarize the audience with travel. I then presented these first iterations to Dr. Whiteside, who recommended creating more options. By the time we moved into the final phases of this project, I had 7 drafts of brand boards with a wide variety of options. The option included art deco, modern, minimalist, traditional and nautical themes. The next phase was the market research phase. This phase was when I conducted a participant observation using the talk-aloud approach. I discovered essential ways to

enhance the user experience when engaging with their website, logo, and social media. I also completed competitive market research on travel organizations, travel consortiums, luxury cruise lines, and luxury travel.

Timeline

Initial discussions started in May 2022. We paused temporarily during the summer due to my own and the client's travel schedules. We then picked up with further discussion and initial iteration delivery in October 2022. I met with Dr. Whiteside at least biweekly initially, then weekly for the last 2 weeks. November 2022 was focused on research and final delivery. This included competitive market research and participant observation research. Finally, at the end of November, I completed the website, including a blog and future itinerary listings page, and presented the branding boards and logos that Lourdes and her team decided on. I gave a 30-minute oral presentation [featuring a slideshow](#) with the client, Dr. Whiteside, and the program director, Dr. Chris Gurrie.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

To evaluate overall effectiveness, I plan to present the website and updated branding to current and former clients of Travel with Travieso. I plan to survey them on their thoughts and experiences on engaging with the brand via social media versus just email or phone. I also plan to meet with Travel with Travieso in three months and six months to continue to address the longer-term effectiveness and provide support on digital media management and maintaining their website.

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