

King content: The rising influence of blogs in the African travel trade

 By [Paul Steyn](#)

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It's becoming common knowledge in the travel industry that the single most important part of a website, other than general booking information, is quality blog content.

I say 'well-known' in the loosest sense because in Africa this is less than the case. Maybe even a basket case.

I've worked in the travel industry in Africa for over six years, starting as a guide for an established safari operator, working my way into a top-level online publishing position at Africa Geographic, and now as an agency content creator for businesses.

Even in those early days as a guide - before the social media and online content storm - I could see the marketing potential of publishing travel-related stories online. My guests would leave the lodges and often email me asking for travel advice and updates on the happenings in the bush.

Now, six years later, where social media and Google's emphasis on quality content rule, I still browse the Internet and struggle to find a lodge, guesthouse, or hotel with a quality travel blog.

I'm being hard on the travel industry because it's what I know the best, but I could apply the same criticism to other sectors, where, despite very few businesses actually nailing it, the term 'content marketing' is already an apparent cliché.

I'm also focusing on the travel trade because out of all the industries on the planet, it's travel that can benefit most from publishing quality content online.

Why? Here are the best five reasons:

1. Did you know that one-in-three searches on Google are location-based?

Travellers generally know very little about the destinations they are researching. But they do know what they like.

Here's a scenario: A foreigner wants to visit Botswana, but does not know anything about the country. He's always dreamed of seeing a leopard, though, so he searches: 'Leopards and elephants in Botswana'.

Any Botswana-based safari operator with a blog titled: 'The Best Places to See Leopard and Elephant in Botswana', will

have their website shoot to the top of this valuable search.

There's surprisingly little quality content about African destinations online, so the search field is still wide open. Travel brands with good, reliable advice and stories in the form of blog content will set themselves apart from competitors.

WARNING: Don't create SEO marketing collateral for a blog - Google will know, and nobody will share it. Tell good stories instead. The cream rises to the top.

2. Blogs are highly shareable

The beauty of blogs is in their social media compatibility. With the right design and placing, social sharing can be plugged into the very fabric of a website, ensuring easy ways for content to spread virally.

It may sound obvious, but nobody will share average stories. So consider the three I's when writing: Interesting, Informative and Inspiring.

3. Blogs keep in touch with past guests

All hospitality operators should be out to maintain a long-term friendship with their guests. Short of writing personal letters to each (which may not hurt) the best way to communicate with past-patrons living across the world, is over the Internet.

Blogs are a great way to keep in touch, pass on updates about goings-on and encourage interaction on social media. Remember: out of sight, out of mind.

4. Inspiring in-house creativity

Creativity often emerges from the most unexpected places. I know of lodge blogs that have regular contributions from chefs, rangers and even cleaning staff, enriching the team and bringing them closer to the brand.

Remember: those with a story to tell are attracted to story-telling mediums.

5. Build a content brand and put bums in beds

The above-mentioned points are all part of the bigger objective - to grow the bottom line and strengthen your brand.

With more eyeballs and traffic flowing through a website, the opportunity for inquires and interest grows too, as do the chance of bookings. It's a case of numbers. The more people there are reading a blog, the better the percentage chance of monetary conversion.

Good writing also presents the opportunity to change people's minds - which is very powerful in travel.

Yes, but isn't blogging time consuming and expensive?

No, not if you outsource it.

Most businesses know they should be blogging more.

But they have valid barriers in terms of time, skills and resources to do it. Perfectly understandable.

My view: If you cannot create **QUALITY** content in-house, then start off by outsourcing the content creation process to someone with the right skills and understanding of the online space. Travel writers, journalists, editors, videographers - there are many skilled people out there who would jump at the chance to research and create content on a freelance basis.

Bonus point

Blog content feeds into a traditional PR strategy.

Instead of posting press releases and marketing material that PR agencies so habitually produce for clients - rather write consistent, quality blog stories. The most outstanding content will find its way into bigger media channels with larger audiences, sometimes extending stories beyond the online space into magazine, radio and television.

I have a number of examples of this working for clients, which I'd be happy to site if you get in touch with me.

Final thought

Travel blogging is not only an essential part of online marketing - it's also a fun, creative, team-building practice for a business that ensures a better understanding of their product.

After all, the essence of travel is romantic, and people love to dream about and research their ideal destinations. Good blogs reflect the romance, adventure and excitement of their areas and so attract the dreamers.

ABOUT PAUL STEYN

Paul is a content publisher predominantly for the African travel trade. He was previously editor of Africa Geographic's interactive travel magazine Safari and blogs, and now writes and consults to businesses interested in creating a professional media presence online - something entirely achievable with the publishing tools of today. Paul spoke at the 2012 TEDx conference in Cape Town about multimedia storytelling. You can find the video here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mowEQxJxhmk> paulandrewsteyn@gmail.com @paulsteyn1
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