

Bridging the travel brand, influencer gap in destination marketing

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

28 Nov 2017

Whether your customers are brands, consumers or influencers, there is a gap that cannot be ignored when it comes to what travel industries and influencers' expectations are of one another. This was the opening statement from Big Ambitions director, Natalia Rosa, made at the first-ever Big Connect in Cape Town on 22 November 2017.



With the aim to connect influencers and travel brands, as well as address travel and destination marketing in South Africa, the Big Connect saw a conversation spark between influencers and travel brands, which included insights from travel blogger and influencer Dawn Jorgensen, a.k.a. The Incidental Tourist, and travel company representatives which included Theresa Szejwallo, Trafalgar South Africa MD; Lyle Scritten, digital PR strategist for Travelstart; Lee Raskinen, executive marketing and communications at Virgin Atlantic, as well as a demonstration from video creator and tourist guide Dean Paarman which included a short video created with his iPhone under 10 minutes.

The conversation started with Jorgenson sharing her first-hand perspective on being an influencer in travel, and how important it is to find your niche and voice. For her, it's been sustainable eco-travel tourism. "Conscious travel brings me closer to the things that matter, the people and the story told. Doing what I do, I am really fortunate to find myself in beautiful parts of the world, with access to people that I would not ordinarily have access to, and I just want to respect that and write and do what I do – and incorporate conscious travel.

"I am not just writing about luxury travel and being upgraded to business class. I think that there is a real world out there and I am trying to connect with people and hopefully use the reach that I have to bring about consciousness about the environment and the world that we live in."

Social media, the way forward

Jorgenson says that the world of online media is an extension to promote work and that social media isn't going anywhere – and neither are bloggers. It's important to want to be a part of it and look at how you can do it best. "If you have a website or blog, you have to be mobile compatible. People need to be able, when they are sitting down for dinner, go online and book their tickets before the moment passes them by – it needs to be compatible.

“ *We might be travel blogging but we are connecting and we are coming back with stories.* ”

Jorgenson continued to say that it's important to give back. Brands recognise the value that bloggers can add to their brand – airlines don't necessarily have to come up with expensive campaign strategies and send bloggers to beautiful places. With reference to a trip to Morocco, Jorgenson used Qatar airlines as an example. They noticed Jorgenson's added value and upgraded her ticket. When she tweeted about it, she received a huge response and this giving back, to her, is what makes the difference. "It's the same if you see that a blogger or an influencer is travelling to London – you can sort them out with a lunch or day tour."

Keeping up good housekeeping

Jorgenson says that blogging is a profession and it takes a lot of hard work. "We create and edit the content. We take and edit our own photographs. We do our social media management – we're promoting ourselves. So there is a lot that we do and most of us are doing this as a form of making a living."

She advises that influencers should regularly check that their platforms are as they should be, because when someone wants to work with you, they visit your platform and will find out if they want to work with you or not there, so it's always good to clean up and make pretty where you can.



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24 Nov 2017



Building meaningful relationships through collaboration

Building relationships through collaborations are about connecting with audiences and building credibility and allowing the brand to amplify their reach and their message through influencers.

Jorgensen advises that if you take six influencers and bloggers on a trip, don't have the same audience, do the same style or use the same voice. "It's important to diversify and maybe even put some traditional media with some online influencers just to maximise your investment as a brand and to watch what you're hoping to achieve."

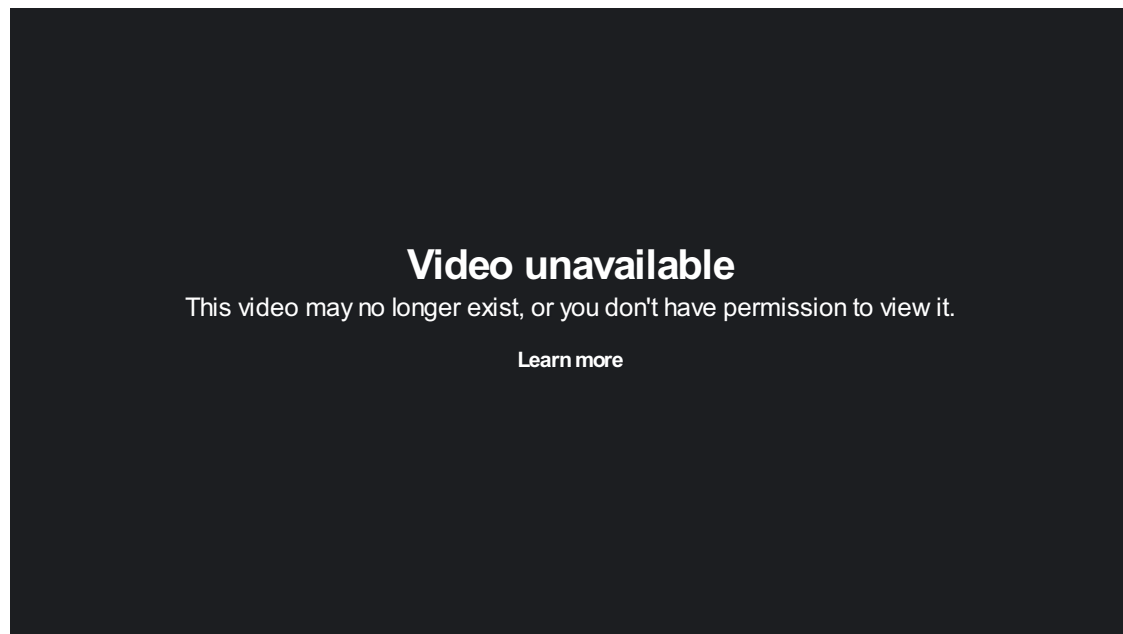
Campaign work is not always all about the money, even though bloggers are trying to make a living, says Jorgenson. "The reach that people can have is so important. It can be about what gets people excited and what you can do to fuel that."

Jorgensen continued on to say that storytelling is essential and that bloggers need to counterbalance giving amazing stories and giving facts i.e. visa regulations, airline information, etc. “We influence travel decisions, we provide immediate live coverage which is good, because a traditional journo will go on a trip or job and only write about it three or six months later. We are on our social media right away and the blog goes up with a guide.”

When it comes to video - whether you're a brand or airline, or whatever company or influencer - Jorgensen says that we all had or have to learn that we need to be creative. “Lots of people are creating stories and that's very popular too. It's bringing the destination to life. So have videos.”

Capturing experiences

Next up was Paarman, the co-founder of Travelvids, a platform dedicated to teaching people how to capture experiences on video, who showed us how to create a video with his iPhone within five minutes:



Paarman edited the video right in front of us, cutting images and choosing sound. Like Jorgenson, Paarman agreed that video provides a viewer with the feel of the event and/or destination and that anyone can be a vlogger if they do it right.

What travel companies expect from influencers

The panel, which comprised of Scritten, Raskinen and Szejwallo tackled topics including the way in which brands work with influencers, what influencers can expect from working with them, what they look out for when choosing an influencer to work with, as well as payment for influencer work done.



Scritten started off by saying that for Travelstart influencers spread the word of the brands and that they connect with influencers and bloggers to also improve their search organically. Raskinen said, for Virgin Atlantic, they use influencers when they're launching a new route – providing influencers with a city experience, looking at activities around an event. “We choose you to work with us because we like your style, we like your audience, the quality that you bring. So we have requirements and we specify that before a campaign runs, but at the end of the day the creative outworking of that is yours.”

When it comes to breaking the mould, Sjewwallo says that they try to break stereotypical thinking that people have about travelling in a group. “When we send out our bloggers and vloggers on our trips, we’ve got to make sure that they getting a real experience – we don’t want to send them on a press trip that we are catering around especially for them. We want them to know everything that they are experiencing is 100% authentic.”

Sjewwallo shared that travel companies look to an influencer's previous posts – what the quality of those posts are and your interaction exchange with your followers. Raskinen reiterated this by saying that Virgin Atlantic also looks at the quality of the followers and also look for influencers who will be able to meet a specific target audience.

When it comes to payment, travel brands offer affiliated marketing exercises and exposure to travel destinations that you would not ordinarily experience. Raskinen says that for Virgin Atlantic they pride themselves on offering you a money can't buy experience – the content is yours. “We don’t want to manipulate you or your content, it has to be a real experience.”

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