

Effective Online Advertising:

A summary of best practices, resources and creative examples

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A. Overview of Best Practices

In online advertising, the advertising essentials remain the same – advertising needs to engage with potential travelers and move them from awareness to action. The long-standing advertising effectiveness model, which moves through four steps in a funnel: attention, interest, desire, and finally action – often called A.I.D.A for short – has been expanded and rethought for the online space by Google.

Google has categorized the “travel planning cycle” into 5 stages, from dreaming to the actual visitor experience, and the sharing of this experience with friends and family (the all-important word of mouth – both traditional and online). A difference in Google’s model is the inclusion of sharing as a key factor that continues the travel cycle by kick-starting the dreaming process for others, as well as definition of a “Zero Moment of Truth” in the research phase.

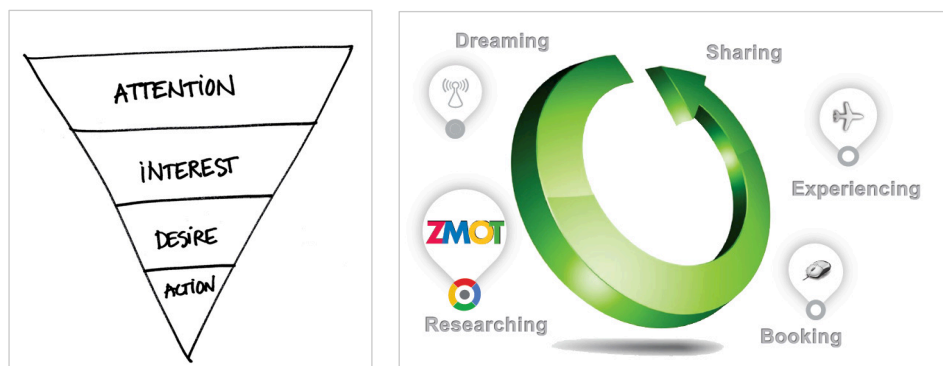


Figure 1. Traditional advertising model vs. travel planning process as imagined by Google.

Google includes a “Zero Moment of Truth,” a critical point in decision-making where a traveler moves from consideration to active preference of a particular business during the planning process. Google also includes sharing as a key factor in continuing the travel cycle.

The “Zero Moment of Truth” is a critical decision point where your business moves from being considered to active preference and then booking. Google argues that in order to be present at the moment of truth, advertising needs to reach and influence travelers at the dreaming (attention or stimulus) and researching phases.

Effective online advertising typically includes addressing each of these six areas:

1. **Integrate** – Online advertising is just one option amongst a range of media and marketing channels. Ensure your online advertising plan is thoroughly integrated into your overall advertising and marketing plan, and is working in a coordinated way with any traditional advertising (e.g. print) or other promotional efforts (e.g. PR).
2. **Plan** – Have a clear plan for your online advertising. A simple online advertising brief, a 1- or 2-page summary of your target audience with objectives for the advertising, is an effective way of ensuring you have covered all the bases.
3. **What are the objectives for the advertising?** Define what you want the advertising to achieve. Is it focused on generating awareness or inspiration in consumers who may not be familiar with you, or is it tactical, driving response and bookings?
4. **Creative that works** – Make sure you or your agency partner develops advertising that works. It needs to attract attention, tell a story and have a clear and specific call to action. Some of the specific elements should include:
 - ▶ **Strong graphics and photography** – Use colors and contrast to attract attention.
 - ▶ **Short, actionable words** – 7 words is often suggested as a rule of thumb for online.
 - ▶ **A clear, compelling and actionable message** to drive the clickthrough, phone call or visit.
 - ▶ **Limited file size** – Load times are critical to maximizing response.
 - ▶ **Consistent branding** – Make sure your logo, colors, font, etc. all integrate with your overall marketing.

If you need inspiration, use the web. We have included some examples and links to other resources in later sections of this paper, or go online to look for other ideas.

5. **Measurement** – Make sure you have an analytics solution (typically Google Analytics) set up and configured on your site. Then ensure you use campaign-tracking codes on all your online advertising and marketing. Your analytics should include not just measurement of bookings, but a range of other important online goals that indicate active interest. Research has shown that up to 50% or more of consumers who research online (viewing content, pricing and availability) actually book offline.
6. **Cross-channel attribution** – Ensure you can measure bookings from consumers across media through tools such as trackable phone numbers (a set of unique phone numbers only displayed in advertising that allows you to measure response from online and print advertising), QR codes, text replies, etc.

Add campaign tracking codes to links to your website so you can measure goal completion rates from your advertising.

You can create these trackable links at <http://budurl.com/urlbuilder>

7. **Test and refine** – The power of online advertising is the ability to change, adapt and refine your creative message, ad units, placement and online channels on a continual basis throughout the year. Online advertising is never “set and forget.” Make sure you review results and make changes on at least a monthly basis (or more often as needed) and have a budget for ongoing testing and changes to your online advertising.

B. Examples of Online Advertising Creative

Below are some examples of online display advertising across destinations that are generating strong results for the advertisers.

See our advertiser gallery from 2012 in section C of this document for additional examples.



Simple, uncluttered design and strong visuals, including images and color palette



Clear, compelling value proposition, and use of a \$ amount, easier to understand than % off

Clear call to action invites the user to click for more

Consistent application of brand logo, colors and fonts across their online offline marketing channels.



The example above is an animated .gif. The text area changes, but the image remains constant. Graphics transitions are simplified, so load times are quick.

C. Top Performing Advertising Examples, 2012





The example above is an animated .gif. The image changes, but the text remains constant.

See these and other examples of online advertising live on these destination websites:

- ▶ www.sanfrancisco.travel
- ▶ www.visitpa.com
- ▶ www.visitsanantonio.com
- ▶ www.visitflorida.com
- ▶ www.colorado.com

D. Additional Online Advertising Strategies, Research and Resources to Consider

- ▶ **Think with Google – research and insights library**
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/insights/>
 - + Real Time Insights – Marketing Planning Tool
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/insights/tools/real-time-insights/>
 - + Display Benchmark Tools
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/insights/tools/display-benchmark-tools/>
- ▶ **Inc – 7 Tips of Effective Online Advertising**
<http://www.inc.com/scott-gerber/effective-online-advertising-tips.html>
- ▶ **Nielsen – Measuring the Effectiveness of Online Advertising** http://www.nielsen-online.com/downloads/nz/Online_Ad_Measurement_Solutions_NZ.PDF
- ▶ **Nielsen – State of the Media. US Consumer Usage Report 2012 (January 2013).**
<http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/2013%20Reports/Nielsen%20U.S.%20Consumer%20Usage%20Report%202012.pdf>
- ▶ **The Webby Awards – 16th Annual Interactive Advertising Winners & Nominees**
http://www.webbyawards.com/webbys/current.php?media_id=98&season=16
- ▶ **Web Marketing Association – Internet Advertising Competition (IAC)**
<http://www.iacaward.org/iac/winners.asp>