

# FROM THE BASE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS TO THE WORLD

A case study through Visit Estes Park's journey into Generative AI solutions – and how your DMO can carve its own AI path

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## Introduction: Visit Estes Park<sup>1</sup>

Estes Park is a four-season destination 90 minutes northwest of Denver, serving as the base camp for Rocky Mountain National Park. With its pristine landscapes and one of the highest elk concentrations in the U.S., Estes Park is a magnet for outdoor enthusiasts, welcoming over 4 million visitors annually. Estes Park harbors a vibrant community of nearly 7,000 residents.



## Meet the Visit Estes Park team

Visit Estes Park is a destination marketing organization consisting of 11 people, led by CEO Kara Franker. Their AI journey has been spearheaded by Franker and CMO Heidi Barfels.

## The Visit Estes Park journey:

**“ We’re investing in AI because we want a competitive advantage. And we’re hoping to provide an enhanced visitor experience as we learn more.**

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

<sup>1</sup>“Visit Estes Park: Restaurants, Hotels & Things to Do.” Visit Estes Park | Restaurants, Hotels & Things To Do, [www.visitestespark.com/](http://www.visitestespark.com/). Accessed 1 May 2024.

## Demystifying the AI basics

In our conversations within the travel industry, we found that many DMOs and companies hesitated to launch their AI journey out of sheer intimidation.

Before we dive into how we implemented AI into Visit Estes Park’s operational and marketing strategy, it is important to define key terms that will be referenced and built upon throughout this guidebook.

## What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) describes computer systems performing tasks usually associated with human intelligence, like decision-making, pattern recognition, or learning from experience.

Algorithms are the instructions that AI uses to carry out these tasks; therefore, we could say that algorithms are the building blocks of AI—even though AI involves more advanced capabilities beyond just following instructions. -Scribbr<sup>2</sup>

## Generative AI takes things a step further

Generative AI (genAI) is a broad label describing any type of AI that can produce new text, images, video, or audio clips.

Technically, this AI learns patterns from training data and generates new, unique outputs with the same statistical properties. Generative AI models use prompts to guide content generation and use transfer learning to become more proficient. -Techopedia, 2023<sup>3</sup>

Examples: chatbots or ChatGPT, both of which are present in Visit Estes Park’s AI implementation.

**Visit Estes Park is strategically leveraging two Generative AI, white-label products — Happy Places on the backend and GuideGeek on the front end. We’ll get into both shortly.**

## While impactful, Generative AI isn’t perfect

A critical industry term to know is hallucination — this is when the AI hiccups and sends back incorrect or made-up information.

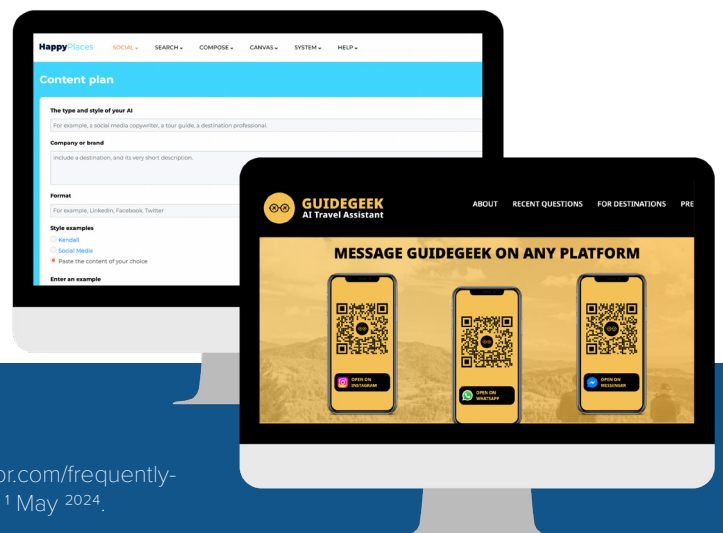
Think of a hallucination as a child getting caught doing something they aren’t supposed to be doing and making up a story to appease the parent.



The child will pull from the information and experiences available to them up to that point — things like what they got away with in the past, the detail needed in their response, and what might get them in the least amount of trouble — and then come up with the best story they can.

Sometimes, their story is half-true. Sometimes, it isn’t true at all. Sometimes, it causes more trouble and stress for the parent and the child.

Later, we’ll explore how to reduce the instances of having a white-lying, white-label GenAI child.



<sup>2</sup> “Are Algorithms the Same as Artificial Intelligence (AI)?” Scribbr, [www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/are-algorithms-same-as-artificial-intelligence-ai/](https://www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/are-algorithms-same-as-artificial-intelligence-ai/). Accessed 1 May 2024.

<sup>3</sup> What Is Generative AI? - Definition from Techopedia, [www.techopedia.com/definition/34633/generative-ai](https://www.techopedia.com/definition/34633/generative-ai). Accessed 1 May 2024.

# AI'S IMPACT ON THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

It's no secret that major travel and tourism companies have invested heavily in AI: Google, Expedia, Booking.com, Airbnb, etc., have already incorporated AI tech into their operations — and with good reason.

It is projected that by 2028, 72% of total travel and tourism revenue will be generated by online sales (Statista<sup>4</sup>), and companies are planning ahead to get their piece of the revenue pie.

Skift, the travel industry's leading media source, is moving with the momentum and launched a newsletter<sup>5</sup> dedicated to AI advances in travel in spring 2023.

“Generative AI is poised to transform the travel industry,” says Seth Borko of Skift Research. “True, there's plenty of hype out there. But even after Skift Research separates the chaff from the wheat, we find that a multi-billion dollar opportunity still remains.”

Then, in October 2023, Skift devoted its annual global forum to talking points surrounding AI, calling it Connection in the Age of AI<sup>6</sup>.

At the forum, during a Q&A with Airbnb CEO and Co-founder, Brian Chesky, the moderator asked:

“Some of the air of hype for AI has come down, especially on the consumer side. What's your current view on how Generative AI can change what Airbnb is today?”

Here are some takeaways from Brian's response that are also at the foundation of how we at Visit Estes Park approached AI.

◆ “AI can level the playing field and create an incredible experience.”

◆ “The challenge with an app like ChatGPT is that when you ask it a question [and] when I ask it a question, we [both] get the same answer — that's great for some questions. **But we should all not get the same answers with travel.** We should all not be going to Paris on the same date. **We have different budgets, we have different dreams, we have different desires, [and] we have different reasons for going.** What if an app could get to know you, understand your preferences, and almost be like a concierge or matchmaker, match you to people, places, experiences, and services worldwide? Here's the key inside the AI: **It is not just the AI you need to build; you must build your foundational capabilities.**”

So what does Brian's mega-company have to do with us, a ten-person team in Colorado?

We believe Brian's thinking applies to DMOs of all sizes, big or small, from ten people to one hundred.

“

**AI can not only level the playing field, AI can widen it.**

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

<sup>4</sup> “Travel & Tourism - United States: Statista Market Forecast.” Statista, [www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/united-states](https://www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/united-states). Accessed 1 May 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Dawes, Justin. “Launching The Skift AI Travel Newsletter.” Skift, 6 Apr. 2023, [skift.com/2023/04/06/launching-the-skift-ai-travel-newsletter/](https://skift.com/2023/04/06/launching-the-skift-ai-travel-newsletter/).

<sup>6</sup> “Skift Global Forum 2023.” YouTube, YouTube, [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0x2YrE2GNe7yR9LBycHt9zNBKI-C2elo](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0x2YrE2GNe7yR9LBycHt9zNBKI-C2elo). Accessed 1 May 2024.

# Here's how and why we integrated GenAI into Visit Estes Park's operational strategy and how your DMO can leverage our findings

## At Visit Estes Park, we wanted to accomplish four things with GenAI:

### 1. Fail forward, fast, and drive strategic, agile innovation

1. We are at the center of the AI hype cycle. The fast-grab trends have mellowed. The realities are kicking in. AI companies have fine-tuned their products.

### 2. Collaborate and share our journey to lessen the intimidations and misconceptions surrounding AI

We wanted to open our doors to the industry to learn together and welcome transparency, especially as a smaller DMO. **We want travel to be at the forefront of the AI conversation versus catching up.**

Reflection point: If you were late to social media, reflect on how hard it was to build an organic social media presence too far after the hype cycle. Who did it well and got ahead of the curve? **If you start now, there is a scalable opportunity with AI that most recently existed at the beginning of social media.**

### 3. Redefine our KPIs

3. We explored the idea of modifying the KPIs in the destination marketing funnel. Rather than tracking traditional clicks, comments and views, a new call to action could be interaction with the AI travel assistant. That's because it can take you from upper-level awareness straight through to booking. Potential travelers can click on a travel ad, and instead of driving you to a landing page on the website, it takes them to our personal travel assistant for the destination, which interacts with them at a deeper level. This could be a NEW accompanying KPI, but not one that replaces website hits, as the tool also lives on our website.

### 4. Elevate our efficiency and effectiveness while empowering and upskilling our team

4. Through AI, we saw the opportunity to take our incredible team to the next level. Our goal was to empower staff to find solutions that serve them and their roles, while also assuring them that no one is losing their jobs. Instead, they would use AI to sharpen their skillset, offload tedious tasks and increase productivity. We handle as much as we can in-house to save funds, and AI is a great tool to help us save time and money.

## Where we saw competitive opportunities

**Early investment in AI** gives us a competitive edge by enabling us to deliver personalized experiences that resonate with today's tech-savvy travelers. By utilizing AI-driven insights, we can tailor our marketing campaigns and offerings to match the interests of different visitor segments.

**Enhance the visitor experience:** By having the capability to monitor AI interactions, we can better understand visitor preferences and behavior, which in turn enables us to curate more relevant and engaging experiences. Whether suggesting personalized itineraries or providing real-time assistance, AI contributes to an enriched visitor journey.

**Incorporate AI into our crisis management strategy:** We want to move towards providing real-time information on weather updates, closures, and other information that is essential for those visiting our unique location.

## We started our AI journey with a team-led approach

### Tactic one: Direct the team to talk to robots

When ChatGPT was launched, CEO Kara Franker decided to get out in front of the looming technology by getting everyone on board fast. Her directions to the staff were simple: Every week, block off time on your calendar to try out different forms of AI in your day-to-day work. Nothing productive has to come out of it. Simply practice using different tools and see what happens. She then had them write about their experiences in their weekly reports to share knowledge.

### Tactic two: Lead from the front

Franker then assigned herself to take an MIT course called "Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Business Strategy," in order to lead the charge with arsenal. Her learnings became a blueprint for Visit Estes Park's next steps.

After testing and collaboration, we landed on **two symbiotic GenAI white-label products specializing in travel: HappyPlaces+** for the internal team's backend and **GuideGeek** for the customer-facing front end.

◆ HappyPlaces operates behind the scenes and supports content creation by populating searches, itineraries and social media posts.

◆ GuideGeek, populates a front-end conversational chatbot and enhances the visitor experience by responding to user-specific questions through WhatsApp, Instagram or Facebook Messenger.



# MEET GUIDEGEEK

GuideGeek is a product of the Matador Network, the world's largest independent travel publisher. Founded in 2006, Matador Network boasts 16M social media followers, 140M video views per month, and 40M monthly website visitors.

**GuideGeek is a front-end conversation chatbot that helps travelers find specific information from your DMO.**

GuideGeek launched in March 2023 and is available on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram DMs.

## Why we chose GuideGeek

"I had seen Matador Network's AJ Kinney at a U.S. Travel Association meeting, and we go way back to my Visit Lauderdale days when we worked together on some great content campaigns. That's when he lands some GuideGeek<sup>7</sup> knowledge in the palm of my hand, and I mean that literally because he texts me this WhatsApp link, and the next thing you know, I'm only half listening to the speaker because I'm trip planning with Ross Borden's shiny new personal AI travel assistant he created. I was like, whoa. Ideas started to drop into my brain like iguanas falling out of trees in Miami after a cold front in January."

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

With GuideGeek, agents or your team can take over the chatbot and guide the conversation whenever you'd like, including if the AI hallucinates. **The real person takeovers can provide the human touch and personalized recommendations to take the planning process through to the booking stage.**

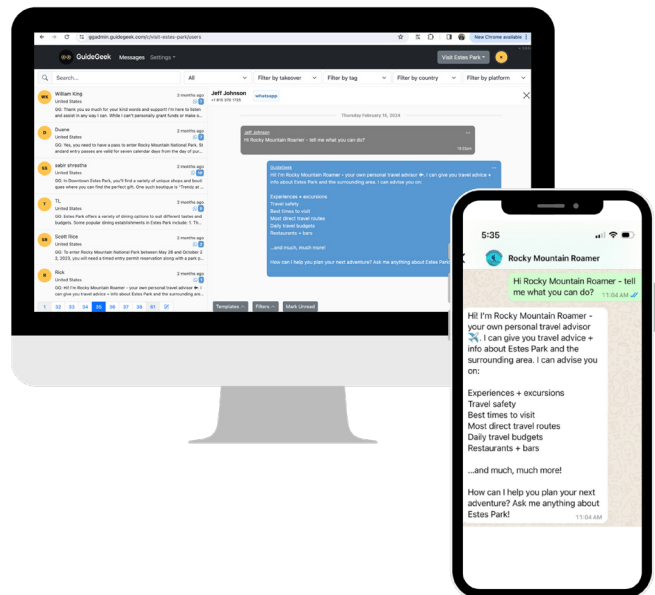
"In the case of GuideGeek, we have access on the backend to go directly into someone's conversation as it is happening and add our human tips and ideas to what the AI is telling them: **This doesn't mean we lose out on the website clicks metric. We can still count interactions with the website because AI tools like GuideGeek embed into the site.**"

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

It is currently #1 in the travel AI space. Since its launch in March 2023 and through December 2023, GuideGeek has decreased its hallucination rate from 15% to 2%.

According to Matador Network, GuideGeek currently has hundreds of thousands of active users and is on track to reach one million by April. To date, it has answered more than 3.7 million questions in 42 different languages from travelers in 61 countries.

"There are **all these pockets of value and commerce:** The right vacation rental, the best flight, the right activity for their family. **And the intangibles** — where can I watch the best sunset? Where is the best place to take photos? What is the culture like? Is this place wheelchair accessible? Can I travel with my dog? What should I know going in? What's the deal with public transportation? Until now, those answers were a needle in a haystack. **Travelers get inspired differently, but what happens after is a slog of Google searches and piecing together itineraries and question marks. And then, after all that, is when you reach confidence — and that's when you finally book.**" - Ross Borden, CEO and Founder, Matador Network/GuideGeek



<sup>7</sup> GuideGeek, guidegeek.com/. Accessed 1 May 2024.



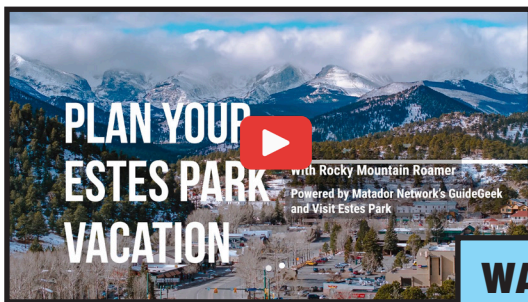
**GuideGeek is cutting through the noise and getting to that confidence level faster because it gets customers the right answers sooner. The customer gets their time back.**

**This scenario is a mutually beneficial relationship.**

**These customer searches can inform content strategy needs and gaps and create the competitive advantage we desire.**

How Visit Estes Park is using GuideGeek

## MEET THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROAMER



**WATCH NOW**

We launched our custom GuideGeek chatbot in February 2024 and named it the **Rocky Mountain Roamer**, tying back to our slogan as “the base camp of Rocky Mountain National Park.” Our chatbot capitalizes on GuideGeek’s technology while adding the personal touch and branding that makes Visit Estes Park signature—it “roams” the region for the information the customer or user requests in the chat.

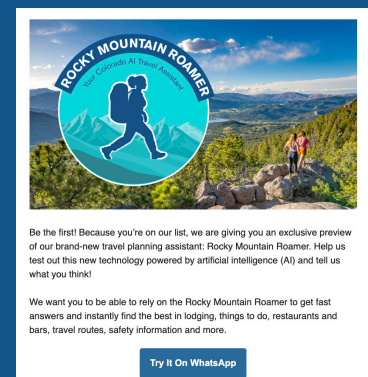
“On the consumer side of the equation, we started working with Ross Borden’s GuideGeek team to train our AI travel assistant, the Rocky Mountain Roamer<sup>8</sup>. Travelers can access our AI travel assistant **through a QR code that drives to WhatsApp, Instagram, or Facebook.** Then, just as you would ask a travel agent for trip planning tips, you interact with Rocky Mountain Roamer, which can provide itineraries, links to our content on our website, and even links to book flights and hotels. The list of features grows daily, and we hope it will soon include the ability to deliver messages to visitors while they are in the destination. Like: “Hey, there’s a road closed in Rocky Mountain National Park, so try this trail instead.” Or even: “Hey, there’s a great happy hour special tonight at The Barrel, so bottoms up.”  
- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

We rolled out the Rocky Mountain Roamer in phases using this product launch strategy:

- ◆ Eblast to our insider’s list
- ◆ Social media launch
- ◆ Paid media launch

<sup>8</sup> “Rocky Mountain Roamer.” Visit Estes Park, [www.visitestespark.com/rockymountainroamer/](http://www.visitestespark.com/rockymountainroamer/). Accessed 1 May 2024.

## CHAT WITH ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROAMER ON WHATSAPP



# MEET HAPPYPLACES

HappyPlaces exists on the backend to support the content creation needed to feed the front-end AI. It helps:

- ✓ populate searches
- ✓ create itineraries
- ✓ write social media posts
- ✓ repurpose and create articles
- ✓ generate image text

HappyPlaces features customizable templates specifically for DMOs. There is an emphasis on facts, brand voice, and multiple user voices like families, travel trade, couples, and more.

The content and data on our website inform the AI on what to create. HappyPlaces uses the OpenAI GPT4 model, and the AI training is automated and can be updated daily (a.k.a, website scrubbing).

Example:

◆ You give the HappyPlaces prompts a persona with the request: A social media copywriter is creating for Visit Estes Park and needs an Instagram post for families visiting for Christmas with XXX keywords.

◆ HappyPlaces searches the Estes Park knowledge base — or our website, in this instance — and then modifies the content found into what we have requested.

HappyPlaces is also committed to data privacy and security. The aggregated information stays within its own domain with a secure API.

“DMOs have a ton of marketing content, but that content doesn’t always have information. Historically, websites became a reflection of advertising and marketing happening offline. So the DMO shows a beautiful road or river, but the end user is looking for things to do or the best time to visit — these two things need to match. AI gives DMOs the opportunity to create more content that supports the user.” - Marina Petrova, CEO and Co-founder, Intentful/HappyPlaces

“We came up with our plan and implementation for HappyPlaces, and the folks at Intentful named it HappyPlaces+ for us, which is cool because we needed customizations. It’s an internal-facing GenAI model tapped into ChatGPT. We trained it on our website, brand voice, things to do, events, and partners. Our data is locked up and secure within the system, a key legal consideration. And it can write in our style based on certain prompts and templates. It also helps us generate words and phrases for SEO purposes.”

**“ The team is now using it weekly and seeing results. It makes them faster. ”**  
- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

**Repurpose**

**Existing content**

No one questions that our natural playground comes first when planning activities. But even in Eden, there are times when we want diversions especially suited to children and the young-at-heart.

A wide array of commercial activities expands the outdoor enjoyment of the area. Rent a bike. Take a fly-fishing lesson. Hike to the top of a small peak for a breathtaking view of the valley and downtown below. Play miniature golf or slide down a giant slide. Take a spin on a go-cart track.

These are but a few of the activities offered in Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. No matter what type of activity you...

**New format**

Website

**Keywords you want to be included in new content:**

Things to do Estes Park

hiking

activities

amusement parks

**Add a call to action?**

Yes  No

**Add suggested image description?**

Yes  No

**SUBMIT**

**AI**

\*\*Homepage Title:\*\* Discover the Best Things to do in Estes Park

\*\*Meta Description:\*\* From natural wonders to a wide array of fun activities, discover the top things to do in Estes Park. Enjoy hiking, biking, fishing, and more in this beautiful outdoor playground. No matter what adventure you choose, you're sure to experience more here! Experience Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park like never before.

\*\*Suggested Image:\*\* A breathtaking scenery of Estes Park - mountain peaks, natural parks and a cozy village in the

**Long-form content topics**

**Article audience**

Families

**Keywords you want to rank for**

Estes Park Activities

Estes Park Wildlife

Family Activities in Estes Park

Kids Activities Estes Park

**Format**

Blog

**SUBMIT**

**AI**

1. "Exploring the Outdoors: A Comprehensive Guide to Estes Park Activities"
2. "Family Bonding Time: Memorable Activities in Estes Park for Every Family Member"
3. "From Sunrise to Sunset: Maximizing Your Day with Estes Park Activities"
4. "Encounter Nature: The Best of Estes Park Wildlife for Families"
5. "Discover Hidden Gems: Lesser-Known Family Activities in Estes Park"
6. "A Winter Wonderland: Unique and Exciting Snow Activities in Estes Park"
7. "An Adventurous Itinerary: Kid-Friendly Activities in Estes Park"
8. "Estes Park: A Haven for Active Families and Nature Enthusiasts"
9. "Unwind and Be Inspired: Immersing into the Natural Charm of Estes Park"
10. "The Perfect 4-Season Destination: What Every Family Should Experience in Estes Park"

In the six months leading up to February 2024, the Visit Estes Park team used Happy Places to create:

- ◆ Any type of content: 622 times
- ◆ Translations: 72 times
- ◆ Content plans: 55 times
- ◆ SEO ideas: 52 times
- ◆ Local business content: 50 times
- ◆ Itineraries: 38 times
- ◆ SEO checks: 34 times
- ◆ SEO content: 32 times
- ◆ Hashtags and emojis: 31 times
- ◆ Repurposing content: 30 times
- ◆ Image generation: 25 times

## What we've learned from using HappyPlaces

We must be as specific as possible when putting a request into the AI and knowing how and when to ask the right questions. Strategy and understanding the technology's parameters are essential.

You must rely on more than just AI to define the best practices for your DMO. Just like AI, all technologies quickly evolve. Things like social media have ever-changing best practices, and you need to be able to adapt.

To overcome this, you must know your audiences and stay on top of best practices and trends when creating a holistic content and marketing plan.

**“AI is changing everything; however, it doesn't mean we need to change all our processes or break what works. There is no one size fits all.”** - Marina Petrova, CEO and Co-founder, Intentful/HappyPlaces

You need to be available to catch hallucinations.

For example, during one Visit Estes Park prompt, the AI returned with British English and not American English. **Someone needs to be able to catch hallucinations and correct them. AI will expose lazy and half-in organizations.**

The screenshot shows the 'Translate' interface. It has a title bar 'Translate' in white on a blue background. Below the title bar, there are two dropdown menus: 'Translate FROM:' set to 'English' and 'Translate TO:' set to 'Spanish'. A large text input area is labeled 'Content to translate:'. Below the input area is a 'SUBMIT' button with a refresh icon. At the bottom, there is a small note: 'If you'd like to continue the initial AI output, click Submit one more time.'

The screenshot shows the 'Local business' interface. It has a title bar 'Local business' in white on a blue background. Below the title bar, there is a section 'Listings and business profiles'. Underneath, there is a sub-section 'Top key facts about the business:' followed by several input fields for 'Business name', 'Location', 'Type of business', 'Fact 1', 'Fact 2', and 'Fact 3'. Below these is a 'Word count' section with a text input 'For example, 100' and a 'SUBMIT' button with a refresh icon. At the bottom, there is a small note: 'If you'd like to continue the initial AI output, click Submit one more time.'

The screenshot shows the 'Find keywords' interface. It has a title bar 'Find keywords' in white on a blue background. Below the title bar, there is a section 'Find keywords'. Underneath, there is a 'Topic' label followed by an input field containing 'Estes Park'. Below the input field is a 'GET KEYWORDS' button.

# INSIGHTS VERSUS REALITIES:

## The challenges we faced and what we've learned through this GenAI journey

### Takeaways and learnings

#### **Content is still king: You need a consistent, relevant, and strategic content stream to train the AI.**

HappyPlaces can't create or repurpose content from your website if it isn't there, and GuideGeek can't give users content if it isn't there.

Revisiting the basics — like user-generated content and content strategy — is inescapable.

#### **DMOs must create strong partnerships and management plans with their local, featured businesses. A community engagement strategy is critical to maintaining the accuracy of the content and the AI's long-term success.**

“We've had board members try Rocky Mountain Roamer and ask the tool about their businesses, but the AI didn't know a thing about them. Oops. So, we're learning to beef up every partner page on our website with as much information and storytelling as possible. Then, we can have the AI scrape the site and learn as much as possible about each partner to get smarter. Our content game has to be on point. Besides generating more blog content to help rank for SEO or help people plan their trips, we need **robust content to train the AI.**”

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

The organization was surprised at how deep the AI could dig, scrub, and find outdated information when searching unlimited sources, which became a challenge. Estes Park is home to many small businesses, some with limited online presence, so accurate content on VisitEstesPark.com became crucial. With content improvement, they could direct the tools to pull primarily from the DMO website and avoid confusion about a business that is closed or a deal that isn't available.

“We're using inconsistencies with Rocky Mountain Roamer as an opportunity to connect with the business associated with the incorrect response to improve the content on our website. That way, we can help the AI improve and provide more accurate information with future indexes. It's also a great touchpoint with our local stakeholders. Additionally, **we're developing our stakeholder communication plan to educate the community on how we're using AI and how to impact their businesses positively.**”

- Heidi Barfels, CMO, Visit Estes Park



## **We are entering a world of Generative AI, conversational marketing, and data storytelling. But AI and Generative AI without human strategy is futile. We still need humans, and AI is creating more strategic roles.**

Copywriters, editors, local experts and guides, videographers, photographers and creators are paramount to your strategy.



“I need strategic thinkers, people who know how to ask the right questions of the platform - this is a higher level position that requires strategic, innovative, technical, and intuitive thinking -i.e., focusing on data (occupancy, average daily rates), send to AI to comb, and then guide the AI to do the data storytelling.” - Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park



“Someone needs to be in charge of making sure we’re governing the data appropriately, where it is, etc.” - Marina Petrova, CEO / Co-Founder, Intentful/HappyPlaces

**The AI might enable more quantity, but the human component will ensure more quality and accuracy.**

## **Having a forward-looking strategy has never been more critical for DMOs to capitalize on revenue opportunities in the years ahead.**

“It is critical to understand that with the rise of first-party data brands will need to strategically focus on customer experience. First-party data will provide brands with a competitive edge. By leveraging their own proprietary data, brands can differentiate themselves from competitors and create unique value propositions. This data-driven advantage enables brands to refine their products, optimize marketing campaigns, and make more informed business decisions.” - Author Amit Arande<sup>9</sup>

Equally important is the focus on human strategy data, privacy security, and compliance. **AI and Generative AI without human strategy is futile.** Generative AI and LLMs will transform how we live, work, and do business. There are enormous benefits and opportunities for DMOs in the next few years.

## **Team education and integration are paramount.**

Undertaking AI is digestible and empowering if everyone is involved and has authority.

“Go person to person in your organization and learn how they use AI. Every single person on our team is using AI.” - Ross Borden, CEO and Founder, Matador Network/GuideGeek

## **Have global considerations if you have a global audience.**

People feel more comfortable planning trips in their native language. Language translations were not top of mind for GuideGeek when it first launched.

We must also consider cultural nuances and regional preferences when incorporating an AI strategy.

## **Approach AI as a cost-distribution and efficiency tool versus a cost-saving measure.**

On the one hand, time-sucks are being automated, but new roles and technology are emerging that you need to invest in to create efficiency and effectiveness.

“There is no one size fits all.” - Stefan Klopp, Chief Technology Officer, Matador Network/GuideGeek

<sup>9</sup> Erande, Amit. “The Power of First-Party Data: Driving the Future of Data-Driven Marketing.” Artefact, <sup>22</sup> Feb. 2024, [www.artefact.com/blog/the-power-of-first-party-data-driving-the-future-of-data-driven-marketing/](http://www.artefact.com/blog/the-power-of-first-party-data-driving-the-future-of-data-driven-marketing/).

## What's next for us at Visit Estes Park?

We'll fine-tune our use of HappyPlaces and GuideGeek, but we're not sitting on these techs because they don't encompass everything we need. We want to review the tourism data and see if the AI can find patterns, personas, and spending habits and help us forecast.

We're exploring how AI can support SEO, and we have asked our videographer and photographer to search for tools to help their needs.

Our CEO, Kara Franker, is also a lawyer and has partnered with Roxanne Steinhoff (also a lawyer) to create a whitepaper on the legal considerations and ethical concerns regarding AI for destination marketing organizations. [Read this paper here.](#)

## STRATEGIC AI OPPORTUNITIES: Embracing AI and how your DMO can get started

### Strategic opportunities to consider:

Brand marketing streamlining	Privacy and ethical considerations
Content creation and governance	Product launch strategy
Data strategy, governance and quality	Redefining KPIs, objectives and key results
Global perspectives and language considerations	Social and community management
Local community, partner and stakeholder engagement	

## WHERE TO BEGIN

### 1. Establish a growth mindset and a change-management process.

"People take time to change. You always need to adapt. We, as humans, are wired to fight or flight with change, which is why there is a disconnect between technological advancements and organizational change. You need to have your **change management process** and understand where you are and where you want to be. You will have to educate over and over, and that is necessary."

- Marina Petrova, CEO and Co-founder, Intentful/HappyPlaces

If you don't get the organizational support, the adoption will fail, and it won't be the technology's fault. Leaders need to lead from the front.

"I'm watching what people like Janette Roush, EVP of Marketing & Digital for New York City Tourism & Conventions, are doing. She is an early adopter and regularly shares what she finds out with her network on LinkedIn and at conferences across the country. She's a real thought leader in this space."

- Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

### 2. Audit: Find the lowest hanging fruit or pick off the small pieces.

What are the unique needs of your destination and DMO?

Is it weather? Is it transport? There may be an AI that suits those needs better than the ones we use.

**"Talk to your stakeholders. Review the processes. Find where the pain points are, then find an AI to meet them."** - Marina Petrova, CEO and Co-founder, Intentful/HappyPlaces

### 3. Organize

Revisit your content plan and audiences to understand what you'll need to train the AI. Establish an operational team.

### 4. Test

“Try one to two AI programs and test them, then jump in and try it. Sure, you will make mistakes, but that's necessary.” - Kara Franker, CEO, Visit Estes Park

“Spend an amazing amount of time as a consumer on ChatGPT and playing with different language models like Bard or Google — their API is now called Gemini.”

- Ross Borden, Founder and CEO, Matador Network/GuideGeek

### 5. Continuously Optimize

Engage with the AI and learn more about your core end users.

Understand the experiences they are searching for and optimize your content, overall strategy, and use of AI-based on qualitative and quantitative metrics.

Empower your team to use the metrics and human conversations to feed the machine. Govern it to ensure brand loyalty and data privacy, and to enable a globally relevant and personalized customer experience.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS: Marrying technology with the human touch

As we enter the age of generative marketing and data storytelling, the marriage between technology and human touch is essential, now more than ever. While these tools allow organizations to optimize and leverage unprecedented opportunities, they are not fool-proof guarantees or bandages for organizational outputs. For DMOs, quality content coupled with human strategy is still essential to front and backend AI technologies. For DMOs to maximize the benefits of generative AI and up-level their brands, we recommend they leverage the strategic possibilities sooner rather than later.

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