

## *DMOs look ahead but face uncertain future*

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to re-starting promotions as DMOs begin the long process of recovery from the pandemic shutdown.

Here are some examples:

Instead of launching summer tourism in **Michigan**, the long Memorial Day weekend of 2020 signaled just how far the industry has to travel before it recovers from effects of COVID-19.

Hotels remain largely closed except for essential travel. Tourism promotion efforts lost funding by the millions. And thousands of jobs that support visitors comprise part of the growing unemployment rate that reached 22 percent.

Now industry experts are looking at what they can do to rebuild business and boost spending, which in previous years reached at least \$25 billion per year.

“There are pressures from all directions,” said Stephen Kircher, past chair of the Michigan Travel Commission and president and CEO of Boyne Resorts. “The state setting regulations for reopening is one; so are customer needs and expectations.

“In between is the practical execution of opening,” he said, “and trying to balance all three — and trying to do it so you’re not going to go out of business.”

Unclear is what the future for one of the state’s top-three industries will look like. Owners are setting new operating

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CNN Newsource

**Gatorland’s Social Distancing Skunk Ape attempts to influence behavior.**

## Can DMOs police behavior of visitors?

Memorial Day weekend presented Americans with the freedom to partake in leisure activities that had been banned for eight weeks of coronavirus restrictions.

And many locations experienced large crowds despite strict social distancing recommendations and few people wearing protective masks.

Here are some examples:

Vacationers flocked to the **Lake of the Ozarks** over the holiday weekend, flouting social distancing guidelines as they packed into yacht clubs, outdoor bars and resort pools in the Missouri tourist hot spot.

Images rippled across social media, showing people eating, drinking and swimming in close quarters. In one picture shared by the news station KSDK, dozens of people could be seen crammed on an outdoor patio underneath a sign reading, “Please practice social distancing.”

The scenes underscored how some have interpreted the loosening of

coronavirus restrictions as an invitation to return to a pre-pandemic version of normal. Amid varied and sometimes conflicting orders from state and local officials, people across the country have been left to decide on their own how strictly to follow the rules.

— *washingtonpost.com*

Some attractions are employing humor in new marketing to encourage visitors’ behavior.

**Gatorland, the Alligator Capital of the World**, is using a hilarious and ridiculously Florida video promoting the tourist attraction and reminding visitors to keep to social distancing guidelines and use hand sanitizer.

The marketing video starts with a pig-tailed, cowboy hat-wearing spokeswoman who wishes to welcome visitors back to the now-opened location. She then introduces the Skunk Ape, who forcefully enforces 6-foot distancing and hand sanitizing.

— *cbs12.com*

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# Large crowds ignore social distancing and create DMO dilemma

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Thousands of people enjoyed the warm, breezy Saturday afternoon in Pismo Beach and Avila Beach despite **San Luis Obispo County** officials asking tourists to stay away as California's shelter-at-home orders eased.

The crowds were fairly large in Pismo Beach around the pier and in town despite the county spending up to \$9,000 on a social media campaign urging Valley visitors not to come to the coast during the ongoing pandemic.

In Pismo Beach alone, lifeguards estimated 4,600 visitors on Friday and around 7,600 Saturday, said Cal Fire/Pismo Beach Battalion Chief Paul Lee, who supervises the lifeguards.

The crowds in Pismo Beach seemed to be mostly families relaxing with children who played on the edge of the water and built sandcastles.

A good many groups kept an abundant distance between themselves. Very few people wore masks.

– [sanluisobispo.com](http://sanluisobispo.com)

In **Gulf Shores, Alabama**, the beaches, restaurants and bars were packed over the holiday weekend, showing visitors had little respect for social distancing.

On the beach, police tried to enforce the 6-foot separation rule but were not actively enforcing the rule requiring groups to be members of the same family.

A CNN reporter saw no one on the beach wearing a mask except for himself. Some restaurants were complying by having staff wear masks, but others were not until the rule was pointed out to management.

– [cnn.com](http://cnn.com)



Laura Dickinson

**Avila Beach was open for visitors Saturday during Memorial Day weekend with the coronavirus pandemic still ongoing.**

## *DMOs' uncertain future*

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strategies to balance staff and customer safety.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in October cut the \$37.5 million Pure Michigan travel promotion budget. Funding was restored to preserve ads through year-end, with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation taking over social media promotions in-house beyond that.

Then, in February, the proposed 2021 budget called for \$15 million to again fund Pure Michigan, and some in Lansing said travel promotion money could make its way back to the program in 2020.

– [bridgemi.com](http://bridgemi.com)

Other DMOs are looking local as a bridge to more normal travel.

John Boesche, VP of Tourism for **Visit Seattle**, said the recovery of the industry depends on locals, especially in the immediate future.

“Our visitors are going to come from closer within. And I'd say a halo of around 100 miles would be a reasonable line to draw in the short term, and in fact our locals

may become visitors to some extent,” said Boesche.

Boesche said because of the unknown future of international travel and the cruise industry, the majority of travelers will turn to road trips to scratch that travel itch.

– [komonews.com](http://komonews.com)

Focusing on the Falls and Niagara County's reputation as a family, a leisure and a drive destination, **Destination Niagara USA** has just kicked-off its second digital marketing campaign since the onset of the pandemic. Titled “Dream Now, Adventure Later,” the campaign targets drive-market consumers.

– [niagara-gazette.com](http://niagara-gazette.com)

The **Arizona Office of Tourism** has launched its “Rediscover Arizona” campaign, which features activities for residents who want to stay closer to home.

– [fox10phoenix.com](http://fox10phoenix.com)

**Experience Scottsdale** will deploy a summer radio and digital campaign to entice people throughout the Phoenix metro and Tucson areas to plan staycations at Scottsdale hotels and resorts.

– [yourvalley.net](http://yourvalley.net)