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DMOs face uncertainty as pandemic drags on

DMOs across the country and the world are scrambling to forecast what the future holds for their industry, including whether they can hold on until a recovery.

Regular, planned ad campaigns have been tossed and replaced with a variety of messages but a singular goal: We'll be here when you want to travel again.

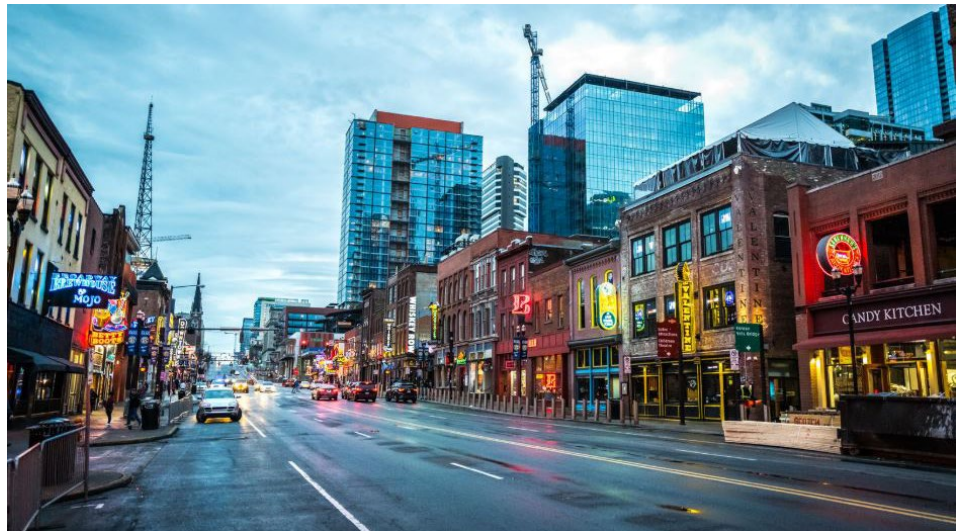
Most of this effort is taking place on social media channels.

Experience Kissimmee Florida (EK) is working not only to revive tourism in Osceola, but also to boost employment.

"The objective is not to just get tourism back, but to really get people back employed," said EK President D.T. Minich.

He noted that his team is working with Osceola County administrators and Osceola Heritage Park to schedule a large tourism job fair once restaurants

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Keith Griner, via fox17.com

Streets in Nashville are empty of the crowds of tourists they normally get.

DMOs implement furloughs, pay cuts

States including Tennessee, Georgia and Alaska this week slowly began a phased reopening of shuttered restaurants and stores.

But DMOs, which have faced plunging revenues, are continuing to furlough or lay off employees as the travel and events industries remain on hold.

A study from Destinations International and Northstar Meetings Group, which polled nearly 300 CVBs, found that 42 percent expect immediate budget cuts between 50 and 100 percent due to COVID-19. In response to shrinking budgets and a declining economy, 20 percent of the CVBs polled have laid off staff members and 30 percent have implemented furloughs.

Of those who have been forced to lay off staff members, 50 percent have let go of more than 20 percent of their total staff. Meanwhile, 68 percent have furloughed more than 20 percent of their staff.

Here are some examples:

Travel Portland (Ore.) cut its staff back by 40 percent. According to the CVB, remaining employees will see a reduction in salary, with higher percentage cuts at the CEO and executive levels.

San Francisco Travel reduced its staff by 60 percent, including a mix of furloughs and layoffs. All remaining employees will take a 20 percent pay cut. Other cost-saving measures have been implemented by the organization, such as a total elimination of advertising, travel and trade show participation for the remainder of the year.

The **Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau** temporarily furloughed 65 full-time employees. This represents nearly 55 percent of the organization's full-time staff, although most of the furlough decisions were tied to positions in the facility-management division. Staff members are expected to return when business resumes.

Source: northstarmetingsgroup.com

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and other tourism venues are re-opened “so we can let people know where employment is in Osceola,” Minich said.

As the restrictions on tourism begin to relax, Minich said EK would first focus on the drive market in the state, targeting cities such as Tampa, Jacksonville, St. Petersburg and Miami.

Though hotels in Arizona are considered essential and permitted to stay open during stay at home orders, the numbers are bleak.

In its latest data for the week of April 12-18, the **Arizona Office of Tourism** found Phoenix hotels and resorts had an occupancy rate of 23.5%. That's a decrease of 67% over the same time period of 2019.

The figures, compiled by Smith Travel Research, brought real numbers to a situation that AOT anecdotally already knew was bad.

“Visitation is just down to unprecedented lows across the board to levels we have never seen before,” said Becky Blaine, Arizona Office of Tourism deputy director.

“It highlights the challenge we all face when it comes time to reenergize the economy,” Blaine said.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating panic in **Montana** for an industry which brought \$3.7 billion to the state's economy last year.

The troubling trends come from the latest survey by the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

As COVID-19 was spreading across the country in late March, businesses in the survey said future bookings began to drop.

Some 63% reported zero bookings for April, 61% had zero bookings for May and nearly half (49%) had none for June. Another 21% said they had zero bookings for July and beyond.

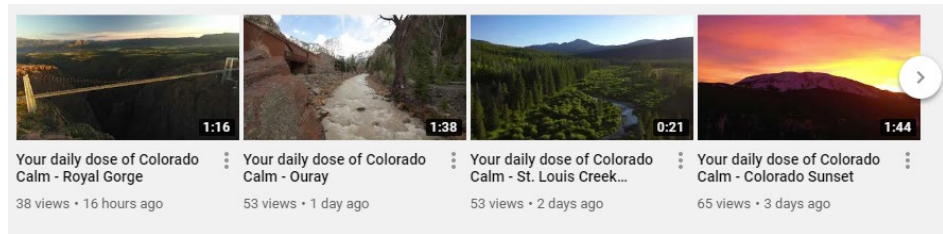
Tourism Whistler has suspended all paid advertising campaigns and is asking visitors not to come to the resort.

“Tourism Whistler is not making any March or April accommodation inventory available on Whistler.com, or accepting any accommodation bookings until after May 1. These dates will continue to be monitored

and adjusted as necessary, as the situation with COVID-19 evolves,” said TW president and CEO Barrett Fisher, in an email.

New Mexico Cabinet Secretary for Tourism Jen Schroer announced that the state has canceled its spring national tourism campaign and will scrap all upcoming events related to certain tourism events.

Sources: aroundosceola.com, azcentral.com, missoulacurrent.com, piquenewsmagazine.com, Associated Press



YouTube.com

Colorado Calm videos appear on the tourism office's YouTube page.

Engagement and other signs of optimism

To keep potential tourists engaged, the **Colorado Tourism Office** turned to its social media accounts and its #ColoradoCalm program. The videos are intended to provide a moment where viewers can sit back and transport to the mountainous west.

According to Colorado, the YouTube videos include “no branding, no links, no hidden agenda — just an honest moment of escape from their newsfeed.”

Beaches and most hotels are still closed. Cruise ships are docked. Nevertheless, the **Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau** wants to “keep Miami top of mind as a travel destination.”

Sources: Michigan.org, miamiherald.com, washingtonpost.com

The bureau rolled out a trilingual “Miami Shines” recovery campaign. The full program won't be deployed until hotels are reopened for tourists, which the bureau anticipates will be sometime in June, according to Rolando Aedo, chief operating officer of the GMCVB.

In **Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Ala.**, officials have taken advantage of the empty beaches to do some deep cleaning.

A bevy of custom-designed tractors, used to sanitize the shore after the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, is digging driftwood and other debris to prepare the beaches for summer.