



Plan Your Trip ▾

Chicago

Outdoor Adventures

History ▾

Illinois Made

Taste Illinois ▾

Travel Illinois

My Favorites

EN

MERCURY AWARDS 2017

ARE YOU UP FOR
Amazing?
Travel Website

PROJECT STORY

ILLINOIS.
ARE YOU UP FOR
AMAZING?



Enjoyillinois.com

Are you up for Amazing?

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Please indicate the time-period for this project.

Cost: Please indicate the cost or budget for this project.

What was the problem you were trying to fix? Or what was your opportunity?

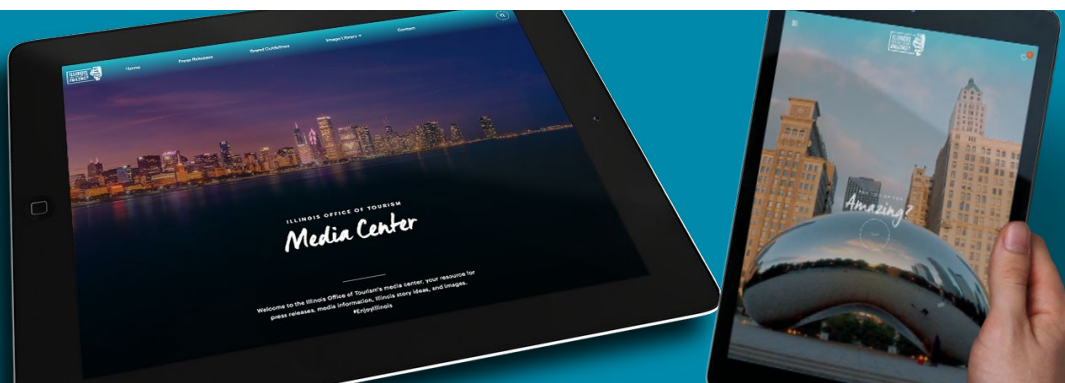
This travel website project commenced on August 24, 2016. The new site went live on March 1, 2017.

The budget for this travel website project was \$380,000.

Opportunities for improvement

When the Illinois Office of Tourism (IOT) commenced this project, our goal was to build a new promotional website to better meet the modern needs of travelers. We saw several opportunities to make our new website better to best serve the needs of travelers:

1. We wanted to make our new site more nimble, cost-effective, and easy to update so that we could quickly and easily update content/images/videos/layout.
2. Our goal was to create a more streamlined and enjoyable user experience to encourage visitors to stay on and explore the site.
3. Our database of business listings were housed in an archaic system that needed a modern update, this would also afford us the chance to drastically improve the quality of our 10,000+ listings.
4. Our digital content strategy needed to be revisited and reworked.
5. Data capture was not being used to its full potential.
6. Our mobile site, while responsive, did not provide the best user experience—a fact reflected in the low-numbers of mobile users.
7. Our SEO campaign lacked when it came to integrating our content marketing.



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Who is the target audience/market for this project?

Target Audiences

The target audiences for the site in order of priority are:

1. Domestic visitors to Illinois
2. International visitors to Illinois
3. Illinois natives—particularly Chicagoans—looking for weekend activities
4. Media and influencers seeking inspiration and information about Illinois
5. The travel trade
6. Illinois CVBs
7. Illinois tourism businesses



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Who is the target audience/market for this project?

Visitor Personas

We used Illinois visitor research to create robust visitor personas. These personas guide our content and marketing strategy.

Nora & Bryan: Outdoor Adventurers

Urban day trippers seeking nature, active adventure, and authentic local experiences. Urban Illinoisans. Professional couples. Age: 25-45.

Phil & Kim: Chicago Sightseers

Domestic travelers from nearby states, seeking an indulgent city break. Domestic travelers from neighboring states. Professional couples. Age: 25-55.

Simon & Sarah: Road Trippers

Domestic and international travelers seeking a quintessential American experience. Older affluent couples. Age: 45-70.

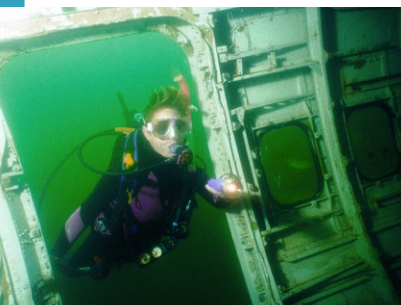
Ben and Jake: LGBT City Break Aficionados

Here to enjoy culture, dining, and check out the local scene. Domestic and international travelers. Professional couples. Age: 25-45.

The Williams: Family Vacationers

Family vacationers here for day-trips or a multi-day vacation. Domestic families within easy driving distance. Our typical parents are in their mid-thirties or early forties, with two children ages 6–12.

Please see enjoyillinois.com personas document for each persona's attributes, motivations for visiting Illinois, and stories that resonate with this group of people.





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SOLUTION

IDEA: Please enter your objectives for this project. Objectives must be clearly stated, specific, and measurable (what is to be achieved, by when, using what resources, etc.). This will aid judges in determining how well the stated results met the stated objectives.

Core Business Objective

The primary goal of enjoyillinois.com is to increase the number and length of overnight stays in Illinois. We do this by:

1. Turning day trippers into overnight stays.
2. Turning overnight stays into multi-night stays.
3. Encouraging more Chicagoans to visit downstate Illinois.

Specific Goals

Our specific goals are to:

- Increase number of overnight stays in Illinois **4.6% by March 1, 2018**.
- Increase length of overnight stays in Illinois **3% by March 1, 2018**.

These targets exceed Illinois tourism growth achieved in 2015–2016 by 0.3% and exceed national tourism growth by 0.6%.

- Domestic tax revenues in 2016 grew 4.3% from 2015.
- The average stay in Illinois in 2016 lasted about 2.7% longer than 2015. That figure outpaced the national growth numbers, in which stays increased by 2.4% for the same period.
- Domestic travel is robust and domestic visitor numbers to Illinois are growing. Our focus on this goal is informed, in part, by a clear trend: domestic travel to Illinois is growing, while international travel throughout the U.S. is falling. There is no indication of this trend reversing, so Illinois is determined to adapt to visitors' needs.

If we attain these targets we will grow Illinois accommodation tax revenue by \$120 million.

Measurable Goals

Our business objectives for enjoyillinois.com are directly linked to generating tourism revenue for Illinois. Domestic tourism statistics for 2017–2018 will be announced at the Illinois Governors conference on Travel and Tourism in March 2018. International tourism statistics are announced in June 2018.

We will pay particular attention to:

- Visitor numbers to Illinois
- Combined travel expenditure by visitors to Illinois
- Combined tax revenues from accommodation

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We use a tool called ADARA to link our efforts online to revenue generated by travel to Illinois. ADARA analytics measure the effectiveness of our digital marketing efforts by mapping website visitors to travel search and booking data, demonstrating the value and ROI of our activity.

ADARA tracks

- Number of travelers to Illinois
- Accommodation booking revenue
- Total number of nights booked in Illinois
- Average length of stay in Illinois
- Digital content resulting in Illinois travel activity

In addition to ADARA analytics, we track the site's performance and report monthly on a range of conversion metrics that measure intent to visit Illinois.

Macro-conversions

- Magazine & travel info pack orders
- Download *Travel Illinois* Magazine
- Newsletter signups

Micro-conversions

- View *Travel Illinois* online magazine
- Social shares
- Number of items added to Favorites—a feature custom-built for the new site
- Favorites page views
- Favorites shares

Actionable Objectives

Our strategy is to create content aligned to Illinois visitors' interests and to the stages of the traveler's decision-making journey.

To do this we:

- Track website performance monthly
- Create content to improve organic reach and visitor engagement
- Create content that generates travel activity, based on ADARA insights
- Create content that targets day trippers, overnight visitors and Chicagoans, encouraging them to extend their stay and book accommodation in Illinois
- Identify ways to optimize the site to improve conversions and visitor engagement

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Resources to Succeed

We have allocated regular monthly resources to analyzing the site's performance and improving the website's content and the user experience. Our enjoyillinois.com team includes a marketing analyst, a content manager, a team of writers and photographers, a team of digital developers, and a project manager. This core team is provided by an independent agency, led by a team of senior strategists.

Secondary Business Objectives

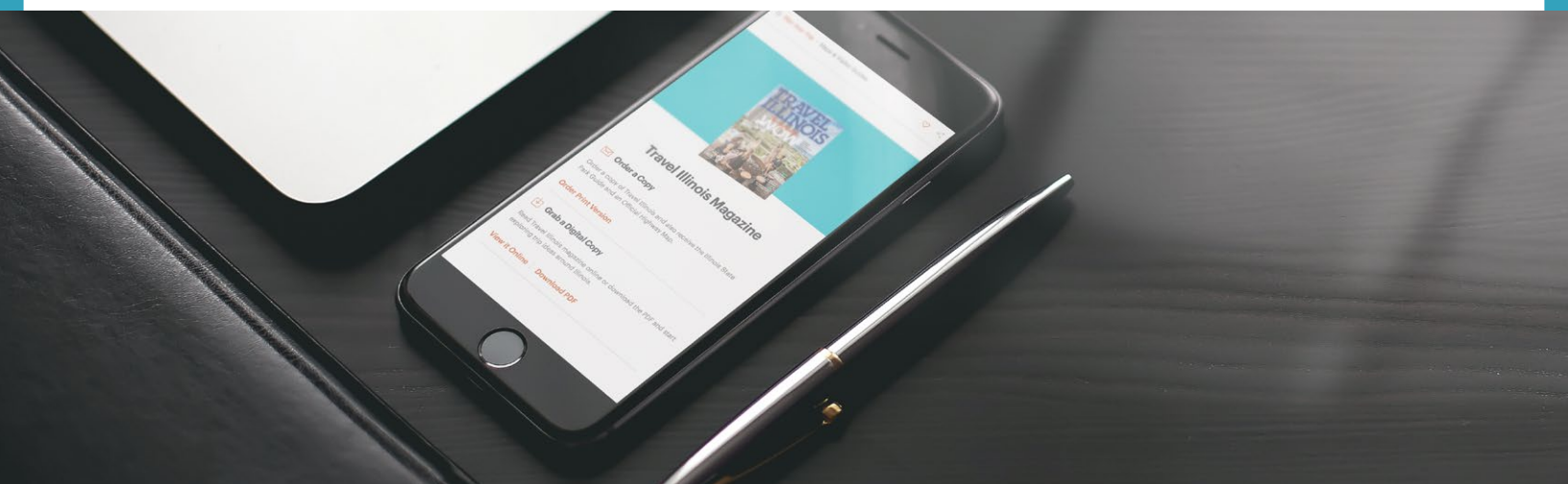
Two secondary business objectives for the new site are to:

1. Make it easy for the Illinois Office of Tourism to make updates to enjoyillinois.com, by providing relevant and timely content, and reducing ongoing need for developer involvement when managing site content.
2. Monetize site with display advertising and native advertising.

The first of these goals has already been achieved. We have implemented a user-friendly CMS that includes a user manual, making it easy for us (and our CVB partners) to add content to the site.

Our agency is currently managing content creation and publication for enjoyillinois.com. However, the Illinois Office of Tourism is fully empowered to manage content production ourselves should we need to.

The second of these goals has also been partially achieved. We are using 2017–2018 as a test for monetized site content. We are running a series of website banner adverts and reporting on these monthly using Google analytics and ADARA. In addition, we have created native content in the form of trip itineraries and magazine articles for Amtrak, a strategic partner. We will use these pilot projects to gather data and create case studies that will enable us to monetize enjoyillinois.com in 2018.



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STRATEGY: Describe the various elements of the program, activity, or campaign; techniques used.

Not so long ago, the travel purchase decision was a linear process. Travelers arrived in their destination after extensive planning, with accommodation booked, and transport and activities scheduled. When they came home, they shared their experiences with friends and family the good ol' fashioned way: with a slideshow that lasted for hours.

These days, things are bit different. Mobile has changed everything. Now travelers book flights—maybe their first few nights' accommodation—then they use their phone to plan the rest of their stay on the fly, sharing their adventures on social media as they go.

Travelers snack on digital content. They compare prices. They look at reviews. They flit around the digital landscape hunting inspiration or information.

So how do you build a destination website for this new generation of digital travelers?

Our strategy for enjoyillinois.com is to create a captivating digital magazine, packed with stories and inspiration to help you plan your trip to Illinois.

The site invites you to immerse yourself in our spectacular destination, explore hundreds of articles and videos, plan your Illinois adventures with our trip itineraries, meet local makers and artists, and discover the real Illinois with our local experts. It's a multi-faceted digital expression of the Amazing Illinois brand.

At the heart of enjoyillinois.com is a personalized content strategy. We used visitor research and digital statistics to build personas for Illinois visitors. Then we used these personas to create content pillars for the site. Each pillar is targeted to one or more personas, and within each pillar we group stories crafted to appeal to these personas. Every piece of content on the site is tagged and aligned to visitor personas.

We've integrated this personalized content strategy with a CRM solution that captures visitor interactions with the site. This helps us further personalize the Enjoy Illinois experience for our visitors. We want to serve travelers planning their Illinois adventure the right content at the right time, inspiring them to choose Illinois for their next vacation.





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- Description of features
- Creative implementation of the destination's brand
- Demonstrates technological innovation

Tactical Features of enjoyillinois.com

Improved business and event listings

Visitors to Illinois find things to do, places to stay, and places to eat, with thousands of local business and event listings. These listings are the engine room of enjoyillinois.com. They drive organic traffic and they generate revenue for local businesses.

Our key tactic was to make these business listings easier to manage, more appealing visually, and stronger in organic search—all of which helps make them a high-quality resource for Illinois visitors and a more powerful lead source for local business.

We upgraded IOT's business and event listings to a new intuitive business listing platform, allowing IOT to dynamically respond to market and visitor needs. The new platform allows businesses to feature high quality imagery and video, and integrate social media and TripAdvisor reviews as well as user-generated content from their visitors. The platform was also chosen because it has a strong program of technological innovation, and will progressively deliver more features and a stronger user experience for local businesses and website users.

As part of this shift, we created a comprehensive user manual and conducted online training sessions designed to upskill Illinois CVB staff and create business success for the CVBs and local businesses. We offer ongoing listing support and report regularly on results.

We made a strategic decision to raise the quality of the user experience by only publishing listings with high-quality imagery. This was a risky decision, as it effectively halved the number of business listings on enjoyillinois.com. We knew we were potentially damaging our organic reach by removing thousands of listings from the site. However, despite this reduction in content, the new enjoyillinois.com is dramatically out-performing the old site for organic traffic and driving conversions for local businesses—a testament to the power of a robust content strategy.

We are now working to support Illinois CVBs as they upgrade over 5,000 listings with new images and video.

Please see TOM user guide document for an example of the training support offered to Illinois CVBs.



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Better mobile experience

Over 60% of destination website traffic is now from mobile devices. A key goal for the site is delivering a better use experience for mobile visitors. The site needs to be fast, but more importantly it needs to meet the task-centric nature of mobile users.

We know, both from research, and from website statistics, that mobile users visit websites more frequently, but for shorter periods of time. Google calls these visits "micro-moments" and understanding the mobile user journey is a vital part of designing a site that meets their needs. As part of our information architecture development, we defined common tasks mobile visitors want to complete. We built the site to be mobile adaptive, rather than simply mobile responsive, which delivers stronger results from mobile conversions.

By understanding the mobile user journey, we have increased mobile traffic to the website 75.82% year-on-year.

Strong focus on data capture

Enjoyillinois.com has multiple data-capture points throughout the site, and a range of data-capture tactics, including ordering Travel Illinois magazine and subscribing to e-newsletters. As part of our CRM and personalization program, we'll soon be adding additional data capture points in the form of micro-surveys and contests. This focus on data-capture has delivered strong results, with a 447% increase in monthly newsletter signups, since the site launched.

Re-engage visitors with e-marketing

We have reinvigorated IOT's e-marketing. This is a tactic to engage visitors before and after their visit to Illinois.

This was a challenging task. Although IOT had a sizable email list, the list had been inactive for over two years. Inactive lists are high-risk from an e-marketing perspective, as they have greater incidence of spam reports, unsubscribes, and hard and soft bounces.

We created an email re-engagement strategy following industry best practices for inactive lists. This strict process involved cleaning the list, segmenting the clean list in date order, and staggering the email over many days, while closely monitoring spam reports, unsubscribes, and bounce rate to protect IOT's e-marketing reputation.

We're delighted to say that we now have a clean and active email list, growing rapidly with new subscribers. We will be engaging this list with monthly emails, personalized to subscribers' content interests.



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Use CRM to capture visitor interactions and personalize enjoyillinois.com

Today's time-poor customers expect highly relevant messaging and offers. The brands that are winning are the brands who know their customer and deliver the right experience to the right visitor, at the right time, on the right device.

Digital personalization gives you tools to continuously learn more about your users and evolve their digital experience. It helps you segment your website users, determine their interests, and content requirements. It delivers success to those who understand their audience and tailor content to meet their needs and expectations.

The outcome is increased customer engagement and loyalty, with bottom-line benefits such as increased revenue.

CRM tactics

GEOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION

- Chicago based
- Illinois based
- Domestic, by state
- International, by country

Why are we creating this segmentation?

If we see different browsing behavior from visitors from different geographic areas we can personalize emails and landing pages to their interests.

BROWSING BEHAVIOR SEGMENTATION

Match/validate visitor personas and landing page strategy by recording browsing behavior. Segments based on visiting two or more pages with certain tags.

Why are we creating this segmentation?

- To serve up more relevant content to return visitors
- Create personalized e-newsletters based on visitor interests
- To serve personalized content

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LEAD SCORING BY CONVERSIONS/LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Lead scoring is action orientated, and measures level of engagement to find out how hot prospects are and serve them with content that makes them feel special and moves them closer to booking.

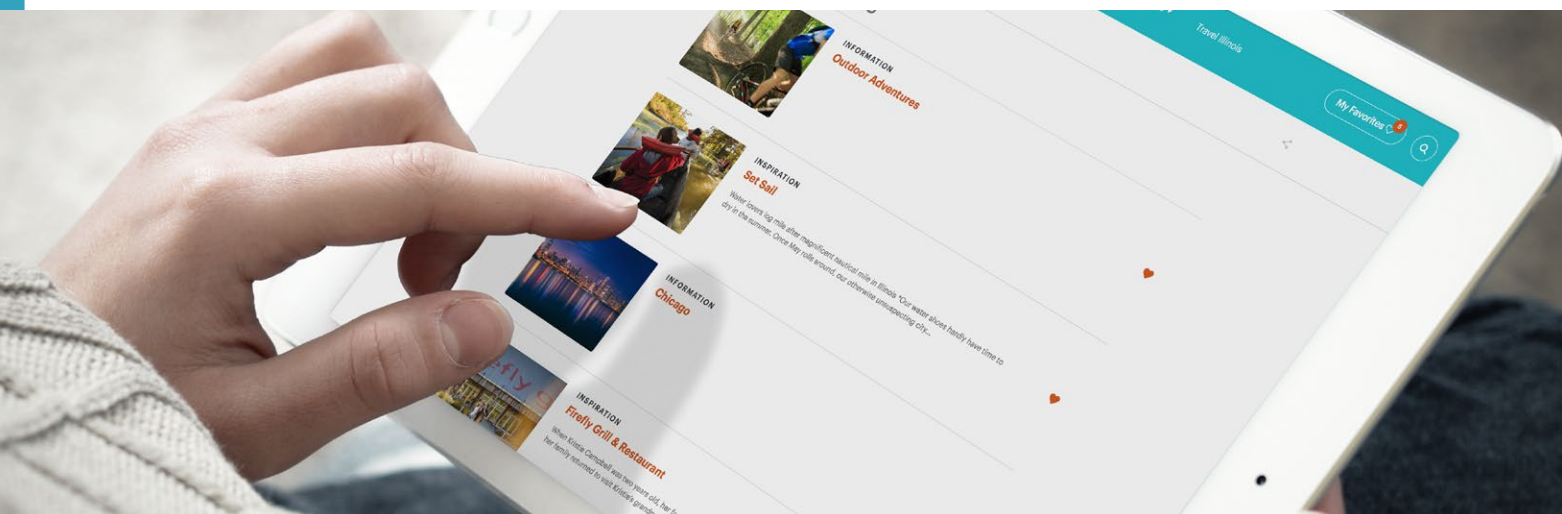
Lead scoring by the following criteria:

- Number of visits to site
- Download/order Travel Illinois magazine
- Downloads from maps & visitor guides page
- Trip Ideas interaction

Why are we creating this segmentation?

- It lets us serve up content tailored to the particular stage of a traveler's decision-making journey. For example, on a first visit we serve inspiring content to encourage them to dream of the destination. On return visits, we serve content that helps them plan their trip, e.g. maps and visitor guides, trip itineraries, and information on local events.
- We can schedule automated marketing messages. For example, a visitor that interacts with three or more pieces of outdoor adventure content can be served up calls to action to download a guide to cycle trails in Illinois.
- Personalization of calls to action.

CRM integration and personalization is being implemented progressively. We now have lead scoring and browsing behavior segmentation in place, and we are now serving up personalized content based on browsing behavior to return site visitors.



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A holistic content strategy, editorial committee, and content calendar

Before the relaunch of enjoyillinois.com, Illinois's digital content efforts were fragmented and results were disappointing.

- Digital content was produced by four different agencies, with no overarching content strategy or content calendar.
- A blog on a separate domain competed with enjoyillinois.com for organic traffic.
- Although Illinois office of Tourism invested in creating high quality digital content, poor information architecture and an outdated website platform meant this content was hidden in the website, resulting in low visitor numbers.
- The old site had no content management system. Publishing content was time-consuming and costly.

Inspirational content is the cornerstone of the new site. We designed and built a digital magazine showcasing amazing Illinois with video, articles, photographs, user-generated content, and features from local experts.

Then we audited all our previous digital content and transferred the top performing content to the new site. The under-performing blog was moth-balled. The new website launched with over 100 pieces of high quality content.

We have a clearly defined content strategy and work collaboratively with our other agency partners to ensure that our content marketing efforts support their goals. We have a monthly content management meeting with the Illinois Office of Tourism and their agencies, where we review our digital content statistics and key learnings, and present the content calendar for the forthcoming months. This is an opportunity for all agency partners to discuss forthcoming campaigns and ensure our content marketing efforts are aligned with those campaigns.

Now that the site is live, we manage content creation and publication. Our goal is to publish at least one piece of high quality content a week. We curate and edit content from agency partners, and create original content. Our content team is supported by a team of freelance writers, photographers and influencers, many of whom embody our Illinois visitor personas. Authentic voice is a cornerstone of our content strategy for enjoyillinois.com, so we always ask ourselves, who is the best person to create this content?

We're experiencing occasional challenges encouraging the other agency partners to work in a more collaborative way. However, we know that good partnerships take time to grow, and we're gently encouraging them to see us as a resource that can make their marketing budget go further and work harder.

Content marketing results are extremely positive. Organic search traffic in May was 82% higher than the old site year-on-year, and organic traffic is growing month on month. Traffic to the magazine section of the site is steadily growing. ADARA statistics show that the digital magazine content is the website's top generator of travel activity, including travel searches and bookings.

Please see enjoyillinois.com content strategy and how to write articles for enjoyillinois.com.

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Actionable inspiration with User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content (UGC) created by visitors on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, is a powerful inspirational tool for destinations. When we started work on enjoyillinois.com we researched UGC and we discovered the following:

- Dreaming about a destination is now happening on social media
- UGC influences people's decisions on destinations
- People like to involve their social community in the travel planning process
- Planning a trip involves lots of negotiation and info sharing
- UGC gets high-levels of engagement when integrated into sites
- Even once people have booked their trip, they snack on UGC to keep themselves enthused about the trip

We looked at how UGC was being integrated into destination websites, and we found that, for the most part, destinations used UGC to create pretty feeds of Instagram images on their homepages. So far so charming. But we thought, what if we got a bit smarter and used UGC as actionable inspiration?

We worked with UGC specialist Crowdriff to source high quality Illinois images from Instagram, creating streams of imagery aligned to our core content pillars, including: images of Chicago, Illinois History, Illinois makers and artisans, food, Illinois adventures, road trips, and scenic drives. Each image is matched to a call to action, directing the user to related content, where they can find out more about attractions and activities in Illinois.

Pinterest style itinerary building

Illinois Office of Tourism wants to help visitors plan their trips to Illinois. Destination marketing websites often provide itinerary planners to facilitate trip planning. The problem with itinerary builders is that they are often clunky to use, require login, and fail to engage website users.

So, we asked ourselves, how do people plan their trips online? The answer is social media—and specifically Pinterest, a platform used to scrapbook ideas for travel. Our idea: to replicate Pinterest's simple pin-and-share functionality for our own itinerary builder integrated into enjoyillinois.com. We call it My Favorites.

My Favorites bridges the gap between inspiration and social sharing. Enjoyillinois.com users "heart" content they like, save it for later, create itineraries, and share content with their friends on social media.

To be completely frank, we weren't sure whether website users would engage with this functionality. They might simply continue to use social media to pin and share. But what we're seeing is that use of My Favorites is dramatically exceeding shares on social media, and that use of the My Favorites function is rising each month. We've used technological innovation, to engage people with the site content in a more interactive manner.

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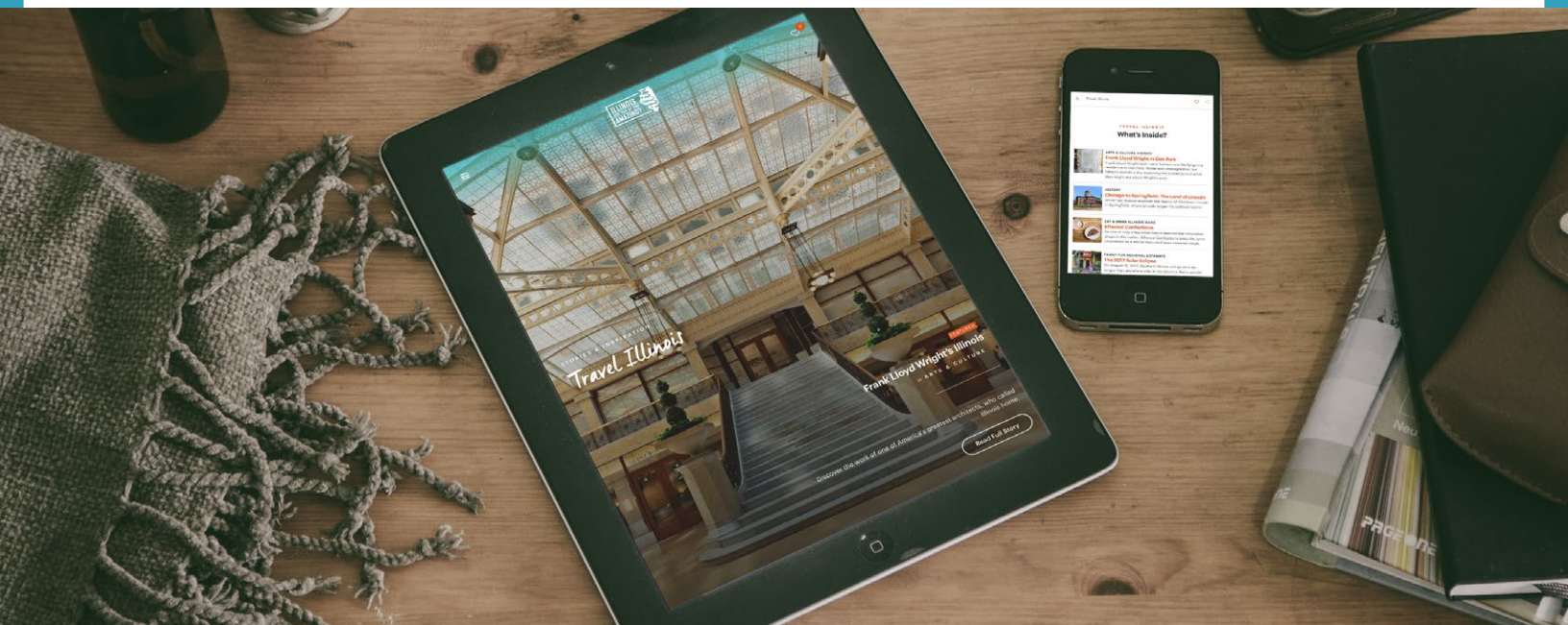
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Methodology for evaluating the campaign

Measurements used in obtaining results to date include:

- Analysis of website traffic.
 - By device
 - By geographic location
 - Key pages
 - Business Listings
 - Content reach and engagement
- Conversions.
 - Analysis of site performance against KPIs
 - Display adverts
 - Sales metrics. Accommodation and flight bookings. Revenue, number of nights, length of stay
- Stats from email marketing

We use this monthly reporting to identify opportunities for improvement.





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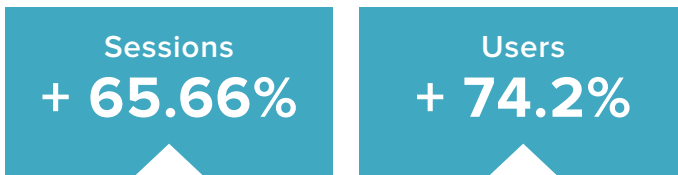
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RESULTS

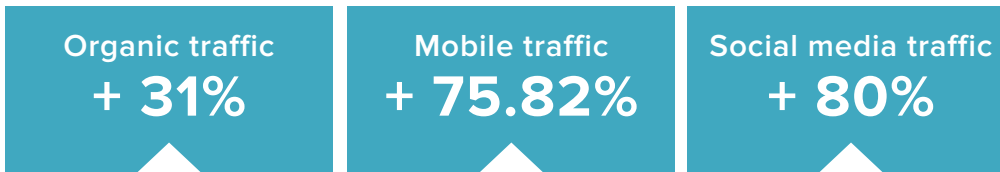
OUTCOME: Please state clearly the QUANTIFIED results achieved (i.e. percentage increase in visitors, inquires or website usage, market share compared to the previous period, reduced units cost, greater economic impact, etc.).

RESULTS MUST BE TIED TO THE IDEA. If specific, quantitative results are not available at the time of submission, you are advised to hold the project for submission in the following year's competition. Entries lacking specific, quantifiable results will not be strongly considered.

INCREASE IN TRAFFIC 1 March–31 May, year-on-year comparison

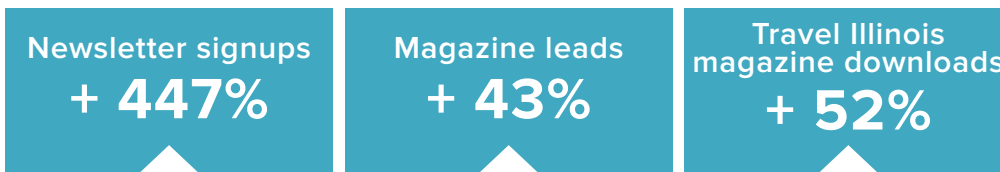


UNIQUE VISITORS



Our new PR agency took over social media management on May 1, 2017

INCREASE IN CONVERSIONS DEMONSTRATING INTENT TO TRAVEL



INCREASE IN TRAVELERS AND TRAVEL BOOKING REVENUE 1 February–31 April (ADARA data starts in February)



NB. Time on site has decreased and bounce rate has increased, however, we have seen 75.82% growth in mobile traffic, and this is entirely in line with mobile visitor browsing habits, and the micro-moments observed by Google. Our agency partner manages numerous destination sites and see similar time on site and bounce rate trends across all sites.



Mercury Awards 2017
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