

ASK THE experts

How do you attract potential cruise customers during a pandemic? **Harry Kemble** finds out



PICTURES: Shutterstock/ MSC Cruises/Riccardo Fonti; Regent Seven Seas Cruises

1 “Now is the time to revisit your social strategy”

Maria Payne is Accord Marketing's chief client officer and is responsible for establishing relationships with clients and providing effective marketing solutions to achieve business goals. Payne believes agents should currently focus on selling cruise holidays to existing customers rather than chasing after new clients.



Maria Payne, Accord Marketing

The start of 2021 is the perfect time to revisit your social strategy and focus on strong, engaging content. The target cruise age is typically 50-plus, and they're the ones that are going to be able to travel this year. It's about dreaming and evoking that emotion in people.

I've seen beautiful images on social media. Luckily, the cruise sector lends itself to showcasing appealing imagery. Who doesn't want to see beautiful landscapes and crystal-clear waters pop up on their feed? Take advantage of the content that makes people feel good.

With travel halted, brands can temporarily reposition themselves as providers of inspiration and education. Polls, questions and user-generated content are all great ways of maintaining brand relevance, without pushing sales.

As much as 82% of web traffic is driven by video, so agents need to create emotion through video content. It doesn't matter if the video shows a ship or a destination, it's selling them a dream. The video should be no more than 15 seconds.

Facebook and Instagram remain perfect options for building brands and creating an effective sales funnel, not to mention being very user-friendly. Twitter can be a great tool too, it just requires more attention and care for growth.

If I were an agent, I'd concentrate my budget on existing cruise customers rather than targeting land-based holiday lovers.

2 “We're focusing on people who have cruised before”

Simone Clark, Iglu's senior vice president for global supply, has risen through the ranks at the online travel agency giant since joining as sales and marketing director nearly 17 years ago. This year, Clark believes marketing teams should focus on experienced cruisers and ex-UK sailings.



Simone Clark, Iglu

The way we market is all online. We're concentrating on people who have cruised before because they're not worried. Search traffic is down, although we are busy enough with people rebooking.

It's just about getting the messaging right. There has been really good messaging from MSC Cruises in Italy and the sailings they've done. We had Italian guests on board and the feedback was really positive.

It is important that people understand what the safety requirements are and that it'll be different on board. For a lot of guests, they just want to have certainty to travel, knowing that their plans will not change.

Choose destinations that people are happy with. Some people are worried about going to an airport or do not want to go long-haul because they don't want to wear a mask for 12 hours. Princess Cruises has always offered ex-UK cruises, generally for the American market. There have been years in the past when Americans have stayed closer to home and round-Britain cruises have reduced in price.

This year will be a lates market and it will be keenly priced. The quality of ships will be good, more and more people will say it's safe, and good PR will come from it like we saw with MSC, so there'll be a build-up of business.

3 “Potentially, we may see the biggest surge in demand ever”

Head of commercial Paul Hardwick has been at Fred Olsen Travel for 12 years, including nearly two years in his current role. Hardwick and his team have just produced their biggest customer magazine so far, packed with nearly 50 pages of cruise content and distributed to a digital database.



Paul Hardwick, Fred Olsen Travel

The longer we're in lockdown, the more we're going to need something to look forward to. More than 50% of our business is cruise, so we focus on it a lot. We've produced a digital magazine covering both land and cruise, which 200,000 people from our database and franchisees have access to.

We're going after existing customers, but we are also going to go after new business and push the magazine on social media. We've got two shops in Norwich, so we might spend £50 on boosted Facebook posts targeting the 50-plus age group in certain postcode areas of the city to try and generate some new customers. Our 14 shops are closed, but we've got a window campaign with a QR code that will automatically take anyone who scans it to the magazine.

The majority of what we're pushing is for the second half of this year and 2022.

Since the pandemic, we've been trying to adapt our marketing. We did a Facebook Live event late last year with Regent Seven Seas Cruises' sales director, when they released their 2022 product, and 250 people watched it in the first week. We're going to do more Facebook Lives in February.

I don't think this year is going to be easy, but for summer 2021, if flights and cruises go ahead, the industry will recover. I think potentially you are going to see the biggest surge of demand ever.