



CONTACT US:
+44 (0)1273 827 700
results@icrossing.co.uk

CONTENT WORTH FINDING

OUR CONTENT-FOCUSED APPROACH BEAT VIRGIN HOLIDAYS' TARGETS FOR NATURAL SEARCH AT A CRITICAL TIME

OVERVIEW

Digital Marketing Agency iCrossing has been the retained search marketing agency for Virgin Holidays since 2005. In mid-2008 they were charged with developing a new search-based customer acquisition campaign focused on the key holiday purchasing period of January and February.

iCrossing responded to this challenge with a combination of tactics that saw the creation of high-quality, exclusive content on the Virgin Holidays website. This content not only created additional consumer-facing value on the site, it also worked to position Virgin Holidays effectively for search engines and thus to drive search rankings against key terms.

The campaign resulted in a significant rise in visitors and conversions on the Virgin Holidays website over the target period and saw the site gain top rankings against key search terms for relevant destinations.

OBJECTIVE

January and February are key months for holiday retailers such as Virgin Holidays, with a huge volume of holidays being booked in this period. iCrossing, retained as Virgin Holidays' natural search agency since 2005, was charged with undertaking a new campaign to drive the site's profile for this key buying period.

In particular, Virgin Holidays particularly wanted to drive volume around high-margin destinations where the company already had a reputation, for example Florida, Caribbean and New York.

In addition to basic volume requirements there was also a broader message for the campaign to address. Following the bankruptcy of key holiday providers such as XL, trust is an increasingly important aspect of holiday purchasing. Virgin Holidays was keen to position itself as a trusted Lighthouse Brand and the natural search work needed to reflect this aspiration.

STRATEGY

iCrossing's strategy was based on the production of high quality, targeted content on the Virgin Holidays' website. This content took the form of proprietary, regularly-updated editorial such as 'In a nutshell' destination summaries as well as broader holiday features on topics such as activity breaks in the Caribbean, green holidays and holidays with young children.

This content was intended to serve two key roles. Firstly, content of this type is in and of itself a consumer benefit for site visitors, giving them information and guidance on the destinations they are booking. Secondly, this content is intended to position the site as an authoritative source to key search engines, thus securing strong rankings in relevant results. Because of the way search engines rank sites, a purely transactional site can tend to rank poorly. With this in mind, the creation of a pool of regularly updated, high quality editorial content can massively increase the ranking of a site against its key topics.

The content itself was focused around the key destinations that the campaign was intended to push, thus ensuring strong search rankings around those terms. Additionally, iCrossing used insight gained from Virgin Holidays' own customer persona development as well as a 'linguistic profiling' project, which looked at the language consumers use when looking for holidays online. By incorporating this information into the content they were creating, the iCrossing team was able to develop highly targeted content to achieve the site's search objectives.

A further important part of the content was that it was written by professional travel journalists, as opposed to copywriters. This was important not just in creating compelling and authoritative content that could be enjoyed by site visitors, but also in creating content that was recognised as valuable by search engines

NATURAL SEARCH

PAID SEARCH

SOCIAL MEDIA

CONTENT

DISPLAY ADVERTISING

USER EXPERIENCE

WEB DEVELOPMENT

ANALYTICS AND INSIGHT

WORKING TOGETHER

"This campaign has been great for Virgin Holidays. By embracing a connected approach across all of our acquisition activity, we were able to utilise natural search to provide richer content to support our user experience particularly focused on the research phase, as well as grow our natural search equity and authority throughout the site"

Claire Palmer, Web Acquisition Manager, Virgin Holidays



Timing was particularly key to this project. As stated, January and February are key sales months for holiday brands. However, in order to ensure that the site's optimisation was effective in time, iCrossing started the natural search work early in the second half of 2008. As well as giving time for the search engines to index the new content, this extended timescale also allowed the campaign team to 'tweak' aspects of the campaign in order to ensure maximum impact.

A key part of the project was the cross-agency collaboration that was involved. Search spend (both natural and paid) was aligned with off-line activities planned for the same time period and data on aspects such as natural search keywords was shared with the paid search agency. In addition, during the run up to the Jan/Feb period there were a number of IT developments on the site itself, and an important part of iCrossing's role was to co-ordinate with Virgin Holidays' in-house IT team to ensure that these developments were not impacting on the success of the search campaign.

RESULTS

The campaign was highly successful on all levels. It achieved 107% of its target in January and 132% of its target in February, giving an overall performance in relation to target of 114%.

The content produced by iCrossing's journalist team has proved popular with site visitors, generating an average 50 second engagement with viewers and an impressively low 6% 'bounce rate' (e.g. the %age of visitors who arrive at a page and then immediately leave).

The site now ranks strongly for some key terms – for example taking number one spot in Google for 'Florida Holidays', 'Disney Holidays' and 'Caribbean Holidays'. In addition, the research phase of the campaign discovered some key behavioural learnings about Virgin Holiday's online consumers – for example identifying that a large number of Florida holidaymakers tend to search for 'Disneyland tickets' rather than 'Florida' based search terms.

NATURAL SEARCH

PAID SEARCH

SOCIAL MEDIA

CONTENT

DISPLAY ADVERTISING

USER EXPERIENCE

WEB DEVELOPMENT

ANALYTICS AND INSIGHT