

Northumberland Tourism Marketing Strategy 2015-2020

Northumberland's Destination Management Plan (NDMP) outlines our collective vision and plan for the development of Northumberland as a tourism destination.

The NDMP describes our Brand Story, or all of the aspects that makes Northumberland unique. This Brand Story is articulated in the diagram below:



This marketing strategy outlines how Northumberland Tourism will, over the next 5 years, use the tools at our disposal to promote the county and contribute to the development of Northumberland's reputation as the UK's most loved holiday destination.

Marketing Priorities

Our marketing priorities will follow key themes each year. Ongoing themes which will continue to be priorities are:

- Heritage
- Northumbrian Culture
- Cycling and Walking
- Landscapes and unique/rare wildlife; nature based tourism

- Events – a few authentic and inspirational signature events plus a wide range of smaller events
- Activities
- Dark Skies
- Weddings
- Out of season offer
- Food and Drink

Yearly Themes

2015 Wild Northumberland/Cycling (Tour of Britain)

2016 Gardens (300th Anniversary of Birth of Capability Brown)

2017 Our Great Outdoors (opening of The Sill June), Northumbrian Culture (50th Northumbrian Gathering)

2018 Turbulent History and battles (100th anniversary of WW1, 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Carham)

2019 Adventure (200th anniversary of discovery of Antarctica by William Smith)

2020 Border History – bicentenary of Union Chain Bridge

Target Markets: Who are we aiming at?

We define Northumberland's target markets using the Ark Leisure segmentation model. This model is a values based segmentation model based on UK travellers. People are described by their behaviour patterns and likelihood to behave in certain ways. There are four high value customer groups that have been identified as most appropriate for our marketing activities:

- Functionals – Self reliant low spenders, value functionality, arts & culture important. Likely to take short breaks in the UK.
- Traditionals – Value good service, unlikely to pay extra, relaxed lifestyle, enjoy intellectual challenges. More likely to book in advance and use trusted suppliers and guides.
- Cosmopolitans – Do what they want, try new things, willing to pay for more, service important. Married or retired, with kids and they are internet savvy.
- Discoverers – Independent of mind, style not important, quite high spend but value important. Larger reliance on the internet for information and entertainment.

Early 2015 a new analysis of our database was undertaken using TGI (Target Group Index) Profiling which looks at consumer attitudes, motivations, media habits and purchase behaviour. Analysis was split into within a three hour drive time and outside a three hour drive time; however scrutiny yielded very similar results for both categories. The results consolidate those previously carried out using the Ark Leisure model and also highlighted the importance of family life.

We will also be targeting Northumberland's residents to encourage them to support their tourism industry and to help develop a network of Northumberland Champions to act as ambassadors for the county.

Key Messages; What are we saying?

Northumberland's county-wide brand: An Independent Spirit describes how we should articulate the attributes that make the county distinctive as a destination. Our campaign messages will reflect this brand and its 'propositions' or descriptions of what the county offers:

- A place to bring your senses to life
- A place to slow down and find time
- A place to fall in love with
- A chance to meet character and independence
- A connection to the past
- The textures and colours of nature and rural life
- A place to feel the elements
- A place to feel the rush of adrenaline
- The chance to challenge yourself
- A place to inspire change
- The experience of scale and range

Marketing Objectives

An objective of Northumberland's Destination Management Plan is to

'grow Northumberland's brand reputation as a distinctive visitor destination, inspiring more new visitors and encouraging returning visitors to stay longer'.

Northumberland Tourism's marketing activities will contribute to this county objective by adopting the following organisational marketing objectives:

- **To engage more potential visitors and inspire them to visit** (*measured by number of visitors reached by our activities and the percentage of those surveyed who were inspired to visit*)
- **To promote the wide range of experiences available, encouraging visitors to stay longer.** (*Measured by visitor satisfaction and average visitor length of stay*)
- **To encourage visitors to spend more** (*measured by visitor spend and evidenced by a return on investment for NT marketing activities of 26:1 or more*).

Marketing Activities

Communications Plan

Each year we develop a communications plan which coordinates all the activities described below to contribute to our yearly themes. This plan is developed with key partners to ensure coordination of themes and activity where possible and will be reviewed on a monthly basis to ensure all activities are included.

Campaigns

Campaigns will be run to support to support the key theme identified for each year.

Paid for activity will be dependent on resources available but will be chosen according to identified target audience and past experience of reaching each audience in the most effective way.

Partners will be encouraged to invest in campaigns to increase resources available and to boost value through in-kind support.

Full evaluation of each campaign will be included in the planning to ensure that return on investment can be monitored.

Where possible regional and national partnerships (for example with VisitEngland) will be explored to ensure the greatest reach possible.

Publications

We have three printed publications, which are funded by advertisements placed by businesses:

Holiday Guide

This is the only county wide publication aimed at attracting long stay and short break visitors. The 2015 Holiday Guide had a print run of 80,000 and we will aim to maintain this depending on its continued popularity. Each guide is tendered in April and the sales period is between May and September to allow print and distribution for December. Research is conducted in March to evaluate how the guide has influenced the behaviour of readers and to monitor visitor demographics and habits.

Although the influence of digital marketing continues to strengthen, the current demographics of visitors to Northumberland means that the Holiday Guide remains popular and can demonstrate a strong return for the county. The guide is increasingly used in

conjunction with websites with visitors using the print version for inspiration then turning to online for further information and booking. We will monitor these trends and re-evaluate our investment in the Holiday Guide if a significant change is observed.

The ROI for the 2013 Holiday Guide was £116:1. We aim to maintain this return on investment for the next 5 years.

Bedroom Browser

Our Bedroom Browser is now well established and appreciated by accommodation businesses who were vocal in requesting its publication. To keep costs low this is produced in conjunction with the Holiday Guide. It is distributed to large accommodation providers throughout the county and smaller businesses can obtain copies via Tourism Fairs and the Tourist Information Centre network. Different competition tracking in the Bedroom Browser (implemented in 2015) will allow us to evaluate if its readers behave differently to those reading the Holiday Guide and to estimate a return on investment for the publication.

Our intention is to continue to produce the Bedroom Browser as long as publication of the Holiday Guide makes this financially viable.

Days Out and Attractions Leaflet

This is the principle in-visit publication and includes a map of Northumberland and lists/adverts of attractions, activities and food and drink in the county. The leaflet is produced in partnership with the Northumberland Attractions Association with tendering in August, sales September to Dec and print in January for distribution before February half term week. 250,000 were printed for 2015 and they are distributed within a three hour drive time of Northumberland and throughout the county. Our intention is to continue with this level of distribution.

The ROI for the 2013 leaflet was £98:1. We will aim to maintain this return on investment.

PR

PR is our most powerful communication channel and one we will aim to maximise our resources in this area. A yearly PR plan will identify specific activities and allocate resources for these. This plan will be circulated to our key partners at the start of each year and updated quarterly.

Staff resource

We now have a PR and Social Media Assistant employed and on an ongoing basis additional resource will be utilised where funding is identified including:

- PR Interns and apprentices
- External support for specific campaigns
- Links to partner PR resources.

Subscription to the 'TravMedia' service has provided valuable opportunities in the past and we will continue to invest in this.

PR Activities

- We will work with VisitBritain and VisitEngland to ensure their network of PR Managers around the world are aware of our tourism offer and key stories to enable them to suggest stories and press trip itineraries on our behalf.
- We will also target national and regional press with regular releases featuring our key themes, also distributing these via the monthly release distributed by TravMedia.
- We will develop our relationship with Northumberland County Council's Communications Team to ensure we mutually support each other's messages and can access their networks to communicate with Northumberland Residents.
- We will build a database of bloggers relevant to our key themes and encourage them to visit and write about their experiences.
- We will further build on our database of tourism businesses and partners willing to host journalists and provide competition prizes and will monitor the value of in-kind support provided in this way.
- We will identify relevant events to attend (in partnership if appropriate) and develop inspirational press packs to use at these.
- We will identify key international markets and investigate partnering with University students to develop translated media packs including our key stories.
- We will provide a 'press desk' service for the county, supplying quotes, content and images and arranging press trips for journalists. We will aim to provide this at no cost when possible utilising in-kind contributions from businesses provided in return for press exposure.

PR Monitoring

We have invested in 'Precise' media monitoring on a yearly basis and will continue to do so subject to regular evaluation of alternative services. Using the information this provides we will analyse the return provided to the county by our investment in PR.

Social Media

Our social media presence continues to strengthen and supports our other marketing activities. It also allows us to link with partners to extend our reach significantly. We conduct all social media activity according to our brand guidelines to ensure it contributes positively to Northumberland's brand reputation.

Where required we will set up partner social media groups to be managed/encouraged by the PR and Social Media Assistant. This has worked well for Dark Skies and Hadrian's Wall and we envisage using the same model for subjects such as Capability Brown.

Facebook – Visit Northumberland (www.facebook.com/visitnorthumberland)

Twitter - @VisitNland (<https://twitter.com/VisitNland>)

Pinterest – <http://www.pinterest.com/visitnland/>

Social media is scheduled in line with the Comms plan with individual activity reviewed on a weekly basis. The weekly plan will take into consideration late availability, events and a weekly theme. Businesses will be encouraged to post and share in line with the weekly themes. Social Media aims to raise the profile of Northumberland, drive traffic to visitnorthumberland.com and add value to advertisers (as another platform for promoting their business and events).

CRM

We have a newly cleaned consumer email database of around 70,000 and a business email database of over 2,000. We will continue to engage with both visitors and businesses via our email newsletters which are sent out monthly.

Work on segmenting the database will continue so that we can target specific groups via email newsletters. Investment partners as part of their packages receive feature stories and/or bespoke newsletters. We will also continue to sell feature stories and bespoke newsletters, ensuring that we do not send out too many newsletters as this could have a detrimental effect.

Specific themes and stories will be detailed for each month in the Comms Plan.

Statistics for each newsletter are monitored and we recently made enhancements which have improved the open rate. We will continue to adapt newsletters with the aim of additional improvement.

Website

Visitor numbers to visitnorthumberland.com continue to rise reaching over 1 million for the first time in 2014.

We will continue to develop the website in the following ways:

- We will monitor industry and website intelligence to ensure our digital offer stays abreast of trends and developments and continues to meet the needs of both Northumberland's tourism industry and our visitors.
- We will develop a yearly plan of key developments and improvements.
- We will use specific theme and campaign pages so we can monitor traffic and promote campaign partners
- We recently completed an exercise to improve content quality and will regularly request improved content and images from businesses and Tourism Associations
- We will update content strategically to support campaigns as scheduled in the Comms Plan.
- We will continue to use competitions to drive traffic to the site, again coordinated via the Comms Plan
- All other marketing activity drives to the site either to the homepage or for campaigns to the campaign landing page.
- We will survey website users every year to estimate return on investment and monitor demographics and behaviours.

Search Engine Optimisation

Along with the automated tools in the DMO to enhance the presence of advertisers on visitnorthumberland.com we use industry-leading tools such as "Raven SEO" which allows for keyword and competitor research. We also monitor technical elements such as missing alt and title tags to ensure all elements on the website are Search Engine Friendly. Product pages on visitnorthumberland.com contain relevant "Semantic" data which is a recently new standard adopted by Search Engines using the "Schema.org" microdata. This microdata is only visible to the Search Engines (not in web browsers) and allows them to promote the visitnorthumberland.com website on additional features such as on Google Maps, Local business search and contact directory listings. We will continue to optimise our SEO presence as and when new search algorithms are released.

The ROI for the website in 2013/14 was £1625:1. We will aim to maintain this return for the county.

Research

General Research and Trend Monitoring

A wealth of ongoing tourism research is provided by the ONS, VisitBritain and VisitEngland. We will monitor this information for trends impacting on Northumberland. We will also attend the regular events held by VisitEngland's research team and utilise the 'insights' updates they produce.

We will continue to invest in STEAM Economic Impact research which is coordinated by NewcastleGateshead Initiative each year.

We will also partner with NGI to participate in regionally managed customer and business surveys.

Marketing Activity Research

Online research will be carried out to establish who our 'readers' are (which behavioural group they fit into, how long they stay), the impact of our marketing on aspects including their decision to visit, how much they spent and how. Research will be carried out for:

- Days Out and Attractions Leaflet - April each year
- Holiday Guide – March each year
- Website – May each year

Where appropriate we will publish relevant research on our corporate website and signpost this for partners and businesses.