

Eurobodalla Visitor Servicing Review



**Final Report
December 2019**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ultimate goal of this project is to determine the best model for the future delivery of visitor information services for Batemans Bay and more broadly for Eurobodalla, over the next 5 years.

To provide a context for our findings and recommendations we thought it would be useful to start with a working definition of visitor services.

Visitor Services is the *delivery of any information that has the potential to influence someone's choice of destination or experience at any stage of the purchase cycle - both outside and inside a destination.*

We also have three starting observations that help frame our recommendations.

- 1.** The first is that, at the risk of being over simplistic, visitor servicing can be separated it into two functions. One that provides visitor servicing solutions for people outside of the region. The other that provides visitor servicing solutions for people who are already visiting Eurobodalla. The two principal tools employed are websites and Visitor Information Centres (VICs) respectively.
- 2.** The second is that the current visitor services model, employed by most destinations, is, if not broken, then in serious need of a major overhaul. Primarily because of the amount of money invested in VICs and Visitor Guides and the very limited return from this investment.
- 3.** The third is that a best practice visitor services model doesn't really exist. There are certainly important insights to be gleaned from the research that exists on the subject, as well as the learnings from how different destinations are evolving their traditional visitor servicing model. The task for this project is to identify the most critical lessons and insights, customise them for Eurobodalla and then determine the most efficient and effective way implement them.

The Current Eurobodalla Model Is Broken

Tourism Research Australia data indicates that over 92% of visitors to a region do not visit the Visitor Information Centre. Indeed, in Eurobodalla's case this is in excess of 95%. The Batemans Bay VIC report acknowledges that door counts have been declining since 2007 as have inbound calls. Revenues has also fallen off dramatically over the last 10 years.

Around two thirds of council investment in tourism supports just 5% of visitors. The NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) framework indicates that councils should ensure that all services continue to improve productivity and deliver value for money.

Clearly a service that consumes two thirds of Council's tourism budget to service less than 5% of its visitors does not deliver a good ROI.

Perhaps more importantly, investment in the wrong type of visitor servicing is at the expense of the right kind of Visitor Services. Services that better meet a wider range of visitor needs such as new social media resources or infrastructure and attraction improvements to deliver a better visitor experience.

As more and more digital tools become available the traditional visitor centre model will come under more and more pressure to deliver an efficient and effective solution to visitor's information needs.

This predicament is not exclusive to Australia. VICs globally are faced with significant declines in visitor numbers. There are of course exceptions, but these are often due to the VICs location, or, more likely, the fact that they have been redeveloped to become visitor attractions in their own right.

Digital Disruption

None of this should be particularly surprising. Digital technology has changed the way visitors consume information; creating a challenge for VICs everywhere. The use of digital before visiting a destination and once in a destination has grown dramatically over the last decade in particular.

The October 2019 Deloitte Access Economics report - *Technology Disruptors in Tourism* - observed

“The introduction of new technologies has disrupted and continues to disrupt the tourism industry in many ways. It has changed the way operators target travellers, it has challenged existing service offerings and is forcing a re-imagining of the visitor experience and the end-to-end visitor journey”.

The Risk Of Doing Nothing

For Eurobodalla the risks of not evolving the current visitor services model are significant.

As your 2019-28 Economic Development Strategy indicated, tourism is the driving force of the Eurobodalla Economy and Visitor Servicing plays a vital role in this economy. Its purpose is to stimulate visitation to the destination and stimulate visitation around the destination. Visitation that results in economic improvement for local businesses and social benefits for local residents.

Visitor Servicing will also play a critical role in ensuring that the recent demand focussed activity that commenced with the new destination brand campaign developed in partnership with Destination NSW, is converted into **actual visitors**.

It also makes an important contribution to delivering a positive visitor experience. One that results in, at the very least, recommendations to friends and family and possibly, repeat visits.

The visitor experience is so important because your most satisfied visitors are your best marketers. They are the engine that powers word of mouth (WOM) and WOM is by far and away the most efficient and influential form of marketing that a destination has. It attracts new visitors and builds your destination's reputation. As a great place to visit.

In short, a broken, or at the very least, a poorly performing visitor services model, undermines the health of the visitor economy. Less visitors. Less visitor expenditure. Less visitor dispersal. And particularly important to the growing debate on over-tourism, lower visitor yield.

Technology has changed the world and along with it, the world of tourism. Visitor services has failed to keep up with the pace of change. It's now time for a new model. One that will not only better meet the needs of your visitors but will also improve your tourism ROI.

Shifting Focus

Clearly there is a need for most, if not all destinations, to shift their focus when it comes to visitor servicing.

Tourism Alberta's (Canada) 2017 report *Engaging Visitors in an Era of Technology - A New Visitor Services Model* recommended shifting the focus in two specific areas;

- from being a provider of Visitor Information Centre's to being a provider of visitor information
- to broaden its focus from visitors to also include residents

The Immediate Opportunity

While your website is arguably the single most important visitor servicing 'tool' for people outside of the region the biggest opportunity for Eurobodalla will be delivered through **in-destination** visitor servicing.

It is important for 3 key reasons;

- It will help generate greater visitor dispersal and yield.
- It will help deliver a better visitor experience (The 2018 Micromax visitor research indicated that providing more information and promotion of what the area provides was the most common suggestion for improving the visitor experience for visitors to the region).
- It provides an opportunity to share the visitor servicing responsibilities with residents and operators. And in doing so help them appreciate that everyone has a role to play in engaging visitors, distributing and communicating visitor information. It also provides an opportunity to more closely and consistently engage with industry (refer to section on high-priority action plan)

The solution is to flip your current model on its head. Instead of making visitors go to the information (VIC's), bring the information to the visitors.

It's a model that shifts the focus from Visitor Information Centre's to Visitor Information Partnerships. Partnerships with both your residents and your industry and that can provide your visitors with the right information, at the right time, in the right way.

The 2018 MICROMAX visitor research indicated that providing **more information and promotion of what the area provides** for people in the destination, was the most common suggestion for improving the visitor experience.

One Final Consideration

It is our strong recommendation that any changes to your current visitor servicing model are introduced as a **pilot study**. The thing most people find difficult when dealing with change is not embracing the new. It's letting go of the old.

The pilot study would be designed to provide a 'soft' launch for a new service delivery model and ensures there is a period of transition from the old to the new. A period that allows ESC to address stakeholder feedback and fine-tune individual elements. It also demonstrates that Council is working collaboratively with the community rather than implementing a fait accompli. Something that will hopefully reduce the kind of response Council received from the Moruya Business Chamber after it confirmed it could not find \$6,000 to support the Moruya Town & Visitor Information Centre

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The Overall Goal

To determine the best model for the future delivery of visitor information services for Batemans Bay (whether within the new regional Mackay Park facility or otherwise) and more broadly for Eurobodalla over the next 5 years.

Four Objectives

1. The Community Objective

Sharing the visitor servicing responsibilities. One of the recommendations made by the Victoria State Government, on behalf of all State Tourism Organisations, in a paper they jointly authored, titled **A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing** was to “...build partnerships with local government, industry and community in growing the visitor economy and directing the future of visitor servicing”. The findings were based on existing STO reports and research conducted on the future of accredited VICs.

It is a sentiment that ESC should also look to embrace and can be summed up in the mantra *tourism is everyone's business*. The desired outcome would for residents and operators to recognise that everyone within the visitor economy has a role to play in engaging visitors and to help distribute and communicate visitor information.

2. The Visitor Objective

Getting the right information to the right people, in the right way and at the right time. The mantra is *the world has changed and visitor servicing needs to catch up*.

3. The Commercial Objective

Increasing visitor yield. Persuading our visitors to stay longer and disperse further. The mantra could be, *just one more night*.

4. The Resourcing Objective

Identifying the required resources and structure to achieve the right balance between creating visitor demand and delivering a positive visitor experience. The 'demand' side of the process commenced with the new destination brand campaign and partnership with Destination NSW.

The next step is to build on this momentum through the visitor experience that the destination delivers. Visitor information and stakeholder management will both play critical roles in achieving a successful outcome in this area.

The mantra should be about *efficiency, effectiveness and ROI*.

THE CHANGING VISITOR & VISITOR SERVICING ENVIRONMENT

Technology has changed the world

In the last twenty years or so technology has changed the world; dramatically.

- Alibaba (launched 1999), the largest retail e-commerce platform in the world has no inventory
- Facebook (launched 2004), the world's most popular media provider produces no content
- iPhone (launched 2007), the largest camera manufacturer in the world is a mobile phone company
- Airbnb launched (2008), the world's largest accommodation provider owns no real estate
- Uber (launched 2009), the world's largest taxi company owns no vehicles

Technology and the Blockbuster lesson

"I've been frankly confused by this fascination that everybody has with Netflix. Netflix doesn't really have or do anything that we can't or don't already do ourselves." [Blockbuster CEO Jim Keyes, in a 2008 interview with CBS News.](#)

In the mid-2000s, [Blockbuster Video](#) was the world leader in movie rentals. The famous blue and yellow stores had spread across the globe, operating in over 9,000 locations and generating an annual revenue of \$5.9 billion USD. They were stocked with thousands of DVDs and knowledgeable employees who often provided their own film recommendations. By 2010, Blockbuster was bankrupt and all of its brick and mortar stores empty, essentially gutted by the Netflix-led tsunami of online movie rental and digital streaming.

The risk of making a Blockbuster mistake!

Technology has also changed the world of tourism. It has changed visitor attitudes and disrupted visitor behaviour; including visitor servicing. Twenty years ago, consumers still relied on information sources such as guidebooks and visitor centres, to find out what a destination or region had to offer. Expedia was created as a division of Microsoft in late 1996, becoming a public company in 1999 and only really gaining mainstream attention in the early 2000's. In 2019, travellers can access an infinite amount of destination information online and make bookings in

their own home or on the go - without ever having to step into a visitor centre or read a visitor guide.

The changing visitor

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicate the proportion of households with access to the internet at home has been steadily climbing since 2004-05. It currently sits at around **86%**.

For households with children aged under 15 years, 97% have access to the internet compared with 82% of households without children under 15.

ABS data also indicated that households located in major cities were more likely to have internet access at home (88%) than those in remote or very remote parts of Australia (77%).

A consumer survey about mobile phones, conducted by Deloitte in 2017 indicated that **89%** of Australian internet users have at least one social media account and that **88%** of Australians own a smartphone.

This has resulted in a significant change in traveller behaviour. As more and more digital tools become available the traditional visitor centre model will come under more and more pressure to deliver an efficient and effective solution to the information needs of visitors.

This change in traveller behaviour is also reflected in the visitor services review conducted within Eurobodalla Shire by My Travel Research in December 2014.

Currently domestic visitors are typically Baby Boomers aged 50+. The demographics are more evenly spread when it comes to international visitors.

Millenials, who will replace 'Boomers' as the largest travel market segment as their incomes and financial security grow, are a different proposition altogether.

They are hyper-connected and digitally driven They take on the planning themselves and often seek out low-cost flights and peer-to- peer accommodation sharing options. With their preference for personal experiences and local connections, they are the generation that fuelled the rise of the sharing economy such as Uber and Airbnb.

By taking a budgeted approach to their travel and accommodations, they typically free up dollars that they can use on indulgences including personalised, authentic experiences that give them a deep connection and inspiration.

Millennials are a generation defined, perhaps somewhat unfairly, as a generation looking for instant gratification. They want information immediately and will not waste time or go out of their way to obtain it if there are easier options available.

Research by Alberta Tourism in Canada found that they valued mobile visitor services and interestingly, were happy consumers of printed materials. Particularly maps. However, they needed reasons beyond accessing information to stop and engage with bricks and mortar VICs.

The changing visitor services environment

Australia has around 450 accredited Visitor Information Centre's (VICs) that service 13.5 million visitors every year. With the growing number of information touch points these VIC's will be under increasing pressure to not only remain relevant but commercially viable.

As the 'National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing' report suggested; a report based on a variety of research conducted by State Tourism Organisations on the future of accredited VICs and authored by the Victoria State Government (Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources).

"In the context of tightening budgets and digital disruption, it is certainly timely to revisit the role of VICs in the visitor economy of the future".

Councils and tourism organisations will need to recognise that while they can and should play a role in the business of visitor information that may not mean they play a role in the business of Visitor Information Centre's; as they look to redefine how they engage with travellers and meet and exceed their expectations.

The 'National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing' report, while not surprisingly advocating an ongoing role for Visitor Information Centres, was also fairly pointed about the need for change. Some of the key recommendations they made were;

- a.** Position VICs to fish where the fish are;
 - Regularly assess visitor movement trends and where visitors are gathering (offline and online) to ensure VICs are prominent and easily accessible to the

target visitor markets on the ground and in online channels.

- Consider opportunities to co-locate with complementary services or businesses that maintain or enhance the accessibility of the VIC and its capacity to increase visitor dwell time and spend in the centre and destination.
- Harness social media marketing and rating tools such as TripAdvisor to build VIC engagement with visitors and share information in a cost-effective way.
- To be located in areas where visitors are – transport hubs, cafes, shopping centres, festivals and events.

b. Integrate technology with face-to-face service;

- Ensure the offline services remain robust with staff and volunteers on hand to answer questions
- Maintain staff and volunteer knowledge with digital technology
- Determine the best vehicles to provide inspiration and added value - bricks and mortar VICs are not the only solution
- Determine the best vehicle to provide inspiration and added value to visitors for the location - bricks and mortar VICs are not the only solution.

c. Look at developing new content not just new channels;

- Determine the consistent information to be provided across the multiple online and offline information sources and ensure its currency and accessibility is maintained.

The Social Media Revolution

Globally, more than 3 billion people – almost half of the world's population – are active users of social media. The spread of social media continues to grow, with an additional 362 million active users since 2017 (Kemp 2018). That is a growth rate of around 1 million new users a day (Deloitte)

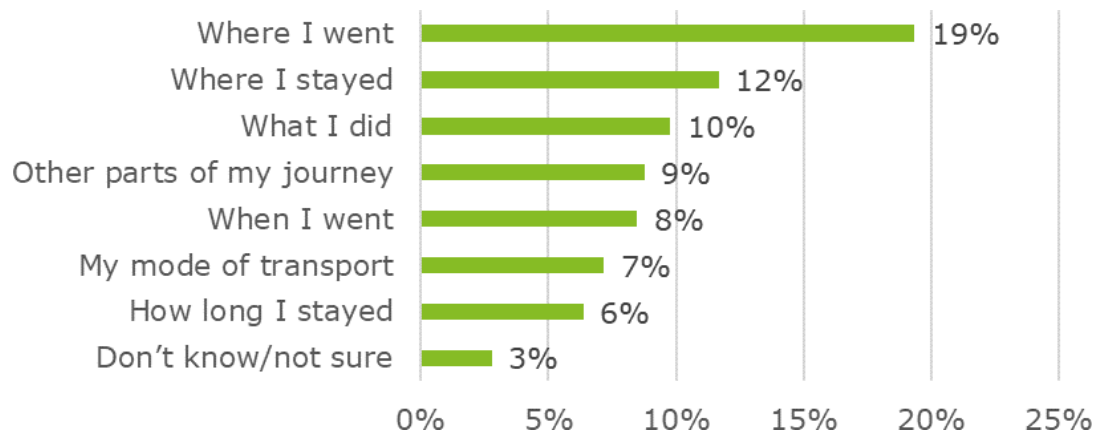
Social Media users in Australia are some of the most active in the world, with a total of around 60% of the country's population an active user on Facebook, and 50% of the country logging onto Facebook at least once a day.

Video is also a very popular medium in Australia with around 15 million Australian visitors to the YouTube website every month.

An October 2019 report by Deloitte Access Economics' titled Technology Disruptors in Tourism found that 75% of domestic travellers reported using social media while travelling.

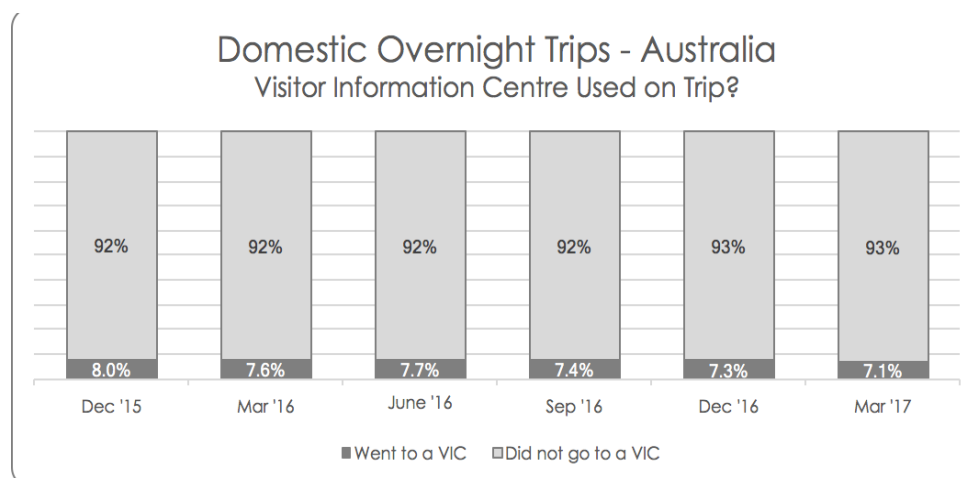
This ranged from 48% of people aged 65-74 to 100% of those aged 18-25. The research also found that social media influenced the decision making of 36% of domestic tourists (see graph below). Social media was most influential in terms of where to go and where to stay.

Interactivity of social media content will be important to capture travellers' attention (the use of chat bots for example). The tourism industry will also need to be mindful of the impact of social media on consumer expectations - of actually experiencing what they have seen online in destination. This makes it increasingly important to accurately capture experiences online and deliver meaningful experiences in destination



Note: For 64% of respondents, social media did not influence their decision making about tourism. Responses do not sum to 100% as respondents could choose multiple options.

The Critical Problem - Reduced Relevance of Visitor Information Centre's (VICs).



Digital technology is changing the way **visitors consume information**; creating a challenge for VIC's everywhere. The use of *digital* before visiting a destination and in destination, is growing.

Data from **Tourism Research Australia** would appear to indicate that many visitor service providers in Australia are at risk of making a Blockbuster mistake unless they make some changes to their approach to visitor servicing. The TRA data indicates **more than 90% of visitors**, to most regions, do not visit the VIC!

And in Eurobodalla's case, according to the review conducted within the Shire by My Travel Research in December 2014, the figure is closer to 95% of visitors. Clearly a service which consumes two thirds of Council's tourism budget to service 5% of visitors does not meet the IPR framework requirements and is delivering a very poor ROI for the community.

This situation is not exclusive to Australia. VICs globally are faced with significant declines in visitor numbers. There are of course exceptions, but these are often due to the VICs location, or, more likely, the fact that they have been redeveloped to become visitor attractions in their own right.

Even more important, investment in the wrong kind of VIC services is at the expense of services that may better meet a wider range of visitor needs such as new social media resources or infrastructure and attraction improvements to deliver a better visitor experience.

A broken, or at the very least a poorly performing visitor services model, obviously undermines the health of the visitor economy. Less visitors. Less visitor expenditure. Less visitor dispersal. And particularly important, lower visitor yield.

Currently, two thirds of council investment in tourism supports just 5% of visitors. The NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) framework indicates that councils should ensure that all services continue to improve productivity and deliver value for money.

Clearly a service that consumes two thirds of Council's tourism budget to service less than 5% of its visitors does not deliver a good ROI. The consequences are significant;

- Lower visitor dispersal, sometimes leading to over-tourism in certain parts of a destination or region
- Lower visitor yield
- A 'poorer' visitor experience

To avoid making a Blockbuster mistake, visitor services providers will need to develop different solutions. Solutions that flip the current model on its head. As more and more digital tools become available the traditional visitor centre model will come under more and more pressure to deliver an efficient and effective solution to visitor's information needs.

Technology has changed the world and along with it the world of tourism. Visitor services has failed to keep up with the pace of change. It's now time for a new model. One that will not only better meet the needs of your visitors but will also improve your tourism ROI.

The immediate opportunity involves flipping your current model on its head. Instead of making visitors go to the information (VIC's), bring the information to the visitors.

It's a model that shifts the focus from Visitor Information Centre's to Visitor Information Partnerships. Partnerships that can provide your visitors with the right information, at the right time, in the right way. The benefits of which are likely to include;

- Wider visitor dispersal further
- Greater visitor yield as they spend more and if they have a flexible travel itinerary, stay longer
- A more positive visitor experience. Something that is more likely to persuade your visitors to visit again, or, at the very least, recommend your destination to their friends and family.

The 2018 MICROMAX visitor research indicated that providing *more information and promotion of what the area provides* was the most common suggestion for improving the visitor experience.

FOUR IMPORTANT DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL LEARNINGS & INSIGHTS

a. People still play a very important role in visitor servicing.

Personal recommendations from friends and locals were unrivalled in their capacity to influence decisions. Whilst official online sources are more often utilised, they rate considerably lower on both satisfaction and influence metrics. (Source: Visit Victoria - Visitor Servicing Research - February 2019).

But it's not just the ability to influence decisions that make the people side of visitor servicing so important. It's the potential to deliver a positive visitor experience - the emotional added-value rather than just the functional distribution of information. Positive 'human' interactions can be some of the most memorable parts of a trip and a positive encounter with a friendly local has the ability to provide the kind of 'deeper' experience visitors are increasingly looking for.

One way to mobilise your community to take a more active role in visitor servicing is by creating some sort of **ambassador program** that informs and incentivises locals to showcase the region to visiting friends and relatives. Eurobodalla has already started this type of local community engagement through the iPostcard VFR platform however there are ways to further expand the scope of the program.

For example, The Columbia-Shuswap Regional District of British Columbia, *Stock the Cabins* program (outlined below) is an example of how the program could be expanded to include Eurobodalla's Airbnb or Stayz accommodation assets.

Imagine your visitor centre multiplied many times over. Given that around 50% of visitors predominantly plan on arrival in a destination (Source: Visit Victoria - visitor servicing research, February 2019) this approach has the potential to deliver significant increases in visitor expenditure without necessarily having to increase visitor numbers.

Recruiting and training locals to become **travel advisors** is another way to leverage locals in the visitor servicing space. Travel advisors are, in effect, like a hotel concierge service that has been adapted for a destination. As the SKIFT '*experiential traveller*' survey highlights, 65% of respondents, when asked to prioritise their travel arrangements, would "*rather come back from a trip having experienced something new over feeling rested and recharged*". Locals are a key source to help them experience something new.

The 2018 SKIFT *'affluent traveller' trends* report found that 67% of such travellers would rather spend money on activities than on nicer accommodation. The right travel advisor can help visitors find new experiences that have been customised to their individual preferences and needs. And in the process not only help improve a traveller's visitor experience but help a destination improve its visitor economy.

b. Proactively reach out to your visitor.

Most visitor servicing models take a **passive approach** when it comes to distributing visitor information. An approach that requires the visitor to seek out the information. Few visitor services providers are proactively reaching out to their visitors. (Source: Engaging Visitors in an Era of Technology - A New Visitor Services Model for Alberta, Canada, January 2017)

So, instead of making visitors go to where the information is housed, which is usually the VIC, they are looking at different ways of delivering the information to where the visitors are. For example, mobile or pop-up visitor information stands.

Information is, at the risk of stating the obvious, the currency of visitor servicing. As such it benefits a destination to make it accessible during **all stages of the visitor journey** (refer stages in the customer journey, p.28). A successful visitor services strategy must be built on an understanding of how and when visitors want to receive information and what kind of information they are looking for. All of the visitor information servicing elements need to be aligned, integrated and interconnected. This includes marketing, promotions and branding.

It is also worth noting that the most effective solutions include both a digital and a physical presence.

Some of the ways a destination can proactively reach out to their visitors are;

- To be more flexible about the location of their VIC's, for example using mobile visitor centres for festivals and events (My Travel Research visitor servicing report, December 2014). In short making sure you *fish where the fish are*.
- Ensuring visitors have greater Wi Fi accessibility
- Engaging your residents to participate in visitor servicing solutions
- Engaging relevant local businesses to actively participate in visitor servicing solutions.

- Using social media to listen to what your audience is saying about your destination and importantly responding with appropriate solutions. The [‘State of Social Customer Service report from Conversocial’](#) published in August 2016, shows that now more than ever, businesses are responding to consumer queries and feedback via their social channels. As visitor behaviour changes listening and responding online is becoming even more important. Anyone can read your destination’s website or read a brochure, but a personalized interaction makes the experience more meaningful for your visitors. British Columbia introduced an online listening component (based around key events) to their visitor servicing strategy to help future travellers better customise their trips and encourage them to stay in the destination longer and find greater value during their stay.

c. The increasing shift to Public Private Partnerships

Public Private Partnerships are being utilised for visitor servicing (Newcastle City Councils **NewCrew** ambassador program) through to disaster recovery programs such as the partnership between the Government of Puerto Rico and Airbnb following Hurricane Maria in 2017.

For Puerto Rico, Airbnb became a critical partner in their recovery program. The Government worked closely with them to engage and sign up new home stay/home sharing stock to supplement hotel and resort accommodation. This has helped them to bounce back quickly while also delivering on longer-term goals, such as a diversification of the accommodation stock in line with consumer preferences. (Airbnb have now overtaken Expedia in terms of nights booked globally.

There is clearly a role for local government to facilitate these relationships and strengthen the way in which the industry engages with the local community. A shift in focus for the positions within a VIC towards industry engagement and relationships (e.g. business development roles) would be more valuable longer term than providing in-destination information across a counter.

d. The Importance of your Content not just your Channels

The information you present and how you present it, is as important as where it is distributed.

Visitor Information, like all marketing, is competing for people’s attention. And it is competing in an environment that is packed with communication clutter and consumer indifference. It is an environment where people ignore the

ordinary.

To succeed in this kind of environment your visitor information content needs to be **remarkable**. Remarkable in terms of what it is saying and remarkable in terms of the format it is delivered in.

A global consumer marketing survey conducted in 2018 identified the top 3 things consumers wanted marketers to deliver. One of those was *marketing materials that were short and to the point* (Source: The Yankelovich Consumer Monitor (YCM). YCM is the longest running continuous tracking study that measures the values, attitudes and motivations of US consumers towards marketing). People are overwhelmed with too much information. They don't want more sales material they want less. Another 'wordy' brochure is likely to be completely ignored.

Other key findings, when it comes to content are;

- Stories beat lists. (Source: My Travel Research visitor servicing report, December 2014).
- Think hyper-local. Visitors are increasingly looking for *authentic local experiences* There is a need for destinations to move beyond the well-known attractions and share some genuine local knowledge. For example, the best sunset picnic locations or where to go for the best Instagram moments. (Source: Komosion Report)
- 33% of visitors are specifically looking for itineraries. (Source: Visit Victoria - Visitor Servicing Research, February 2019)
- Categorising information is important. A study by Harvard University found that people are overwhelmed by choice. The more choice people had the less likely they were to make a decision. They also found that **categorising** information makes it easier to digest and act on For example, water based activities, 10 top things to see and, the six best 'foodie experiences etc.

SIX EXAMPLES OF TRANSLATING THESE LEARNINGS INTO ACTION

1. Your Residents: Engaging Residents to Deliver Visitor Information

Every destination has a free media channel that can reach around 30% of its visitors....every destination has its own FaceBook, its own Instagram and its own Twitter account.

Not only is it a **FREE** media channel but it's a channel that cannot be used by your competition. Most importantly, it's a channel that is trusted more than any other form of marketing.

The Columbia-Shuswap Regional District of British Columbia is home to Shuswap Lake, a Canadian houseboating mecca and outdoor adventure destination developed a visitor servicing campaign called *Stock the Cabins*, which turned locals into tourism experts and passionate advocates for the destination.

They started by establishing a physical presence at local events to encourage locals to put information in their guest room or on their coffee table for visitors to use. They expanded the program to an on-location presence at DeMille's Farm Market, a key stopping point for residents, cabin owners and visitors. Most Fridays, Shuswap Tourism would set up a tent (great example of a cheap mobile VIC) in the parking lot and spread the word about things to do in the Shuswap; encouraging people to take visitor information materials - guides and maps - to use and share with their visitors.

They also began a targeted and systematic process of stocking information in key distribution locations where they knew that visitors and residents (with visitors of their own) would go to stock up on supplies, such as groceries. They made a list of these places and stocked the locations throughout the summer with relevant visitor information and guides.

In short, the locals were provided with tools they could share with their own visitors and which also helped turn the locals into micro-visitor centres.

2. Your Industry: Building Business Information Partnerships

In 2017, **VisitScotland** announced the closure of 39 of its 65 visitor centres after measuring a ten-year "decline in the number of tourists visiting their information centres, amounting to a 58% drop in footfall."

What is more interesting, is that after a 60% reduction in the number of visitor centres, according to the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, Scotland's attractions have seen a bigger increase in visitors than any other area in the UK - a 13.9% increase - with the exception of attractions in London.

Perhaps most relevant, is that the VIC's that were closed were replaced with 1,500 "information partners", made up of local businesses, such as bed and breakfasts, distilleries or local retailers.

Northern Ireland has also adopted a philosophy of taking information to the visitor rather than expecting the visitor to come to a central point for information.

Engaging relevant local businesses to participate in visitor servicing solutions is also something **Yarra Ranges Tourism** has also done very effectively (Komosion Report on Reimagining Visitor Services, September 2018)

Your 2018 MICROMAX visitor research indicated that providing *more information and promotion of what the area provides* was the most common suggestion for improving the visitor experience. Partnerships with local businesses could be an efficient and effective way to achieve this.

3. Your Infrastructure: Deploy Mobile & Pop-Up VIC's

Essentially this is just about fishing where the fish are. It allows a destination to move the VIC to where it will be most effective. For example, the location of major events.

4. Your Understanding of Visitor Needs: Social Media Sentiment Analysis

The 'State of Social Customer Service report from *Conversocial*' published in August 2016, shows that now, more than ever, businesses are responding to consumer queries and feedback via their social channels.

As visitor behaviour changes listening and responding online is becoming even more important. Anyone can read your destination's website or read a brochure, but a personalised interaction makes the experience more meaningful for your visitors.

Using social media to listen to what your visitors are saying about your destination and importantly responding with appropriate solutions is becoming an important way for destinations to help visitors plan and enjoy their trips to the fullest.

It also assists destinations to learn how to best respond to people who talk about your destination online and help improve your offering, reputation and social presence. All of which affect people's travel decisions.

British Columbia introduced an online listening component (based around key events) to their visitor servicing strategy to help future travellers better customise their trips and encourage them to stay in the destination longer and find greater value during their stay.

5. Your Community: Ambassador Programs

As a variety of global and domestic research has indicated, people still play a very important role in visitor servicing. The growth in travel advisors as a category of the travel agent and the increasing focus of companies such as Airbnb, Tripadvisor and Get Your Guide all serve to support these research findings.

However, similar programs can also be created on a much smaller scale. A scale that can be accommodated within the resources, physical and financial, of most destinations. The City of Newcastle is a case in point.

Hundreds of people of all ages and from all walks of life donate their time and expertise to the City of Newcastle in a range of capacities each year. Council's **NEWCREW** volunteer ambassador program provides an opportunity for people to engage with others in a meaningful way while playing a vital role in ensuring visitors to Newcastle have a positive and memorable experience to the city.

6. Your Destination Content: The Importance of Storytelling and Mementos (not just information) in the Sharing Economy

For today's visitors, documenting and sharing travel experiences can be as important as the experiences themselves. Even before the invention of the selfie stick, "bragging" has always been a major motivator for travel. According to recent secondary research that reviewed studies on traveller motivation, seven out of eight studies pointed to prestige, travel bragging, or looking good as one of the top two factors that cause people to travel. (See [Gamification in Tourism](#) by Paul Bulencae and Roman Egger)

In other words, showing your friends online that you held a koala at a zoo may be as or more important than actually holding the koala.

Travellers are intrinsically motivated to document and promote their experiences and fortunately, they are better equipped than ever to share their stories of the destinations they visit.

Destinations need to 'tap' into the growing visitor trend of **'travel to show & share'**.

One way to take advantage of it is for a destination to cater to a visitor's desire for **mementos**. Mementos that are ideally linked to a destination's products and experiences.

A memento is essentially an object or item that serves to remind someone of a past event. In our case, this is the destination experience. Mementos, in a contemporary sense can be either physical or digital.

Physical involves the usual suspects found in the VIC gift shop - tea towels, t-shirts and local produce. It is worth noting that most of these could be made more powerful if they better reflected the destination brand story rather than just being a 'generic' souvenir that could be found in dozens of other gift shops. The more local, the more appeal it will have with your visitors.

Digital mementos are something the visitor can create themselves and instantly share. Destination photographs are the most obvious example but increasingly destinations are creating their own branded **'instagramable- moments'** such as the 'I amsterdam' sign below.



Destinations that provide experiences and infrastructure that include social sharing at the core create a win-win scenario for both guests and hosts. By participating in a shareable experience, visitors benefit immediately through fun,

distraction and the benefit of the social status that comes from participating in unique experiences. As a result, they help increase awareness of a destination or experience among their peers.

Stories will spread through remarkable experiences and historically tourism operators have limited themselves in the degree to which they design the visitor experience. Many operators miss the opportunity to delight visitors.

Modern tourism operators need to be accomplished experience designers. They need to craft their product to make their guests the stars and their staff the supporting cast while triggering guests to share the amazing experiences with their peers. Industry-leading operators have been doing this for decades. According to the book Be Our Guest, Disney's devotion to delighting guests has earned them a 70% visitor return rate, for example.

Operators benefit further from improving the experiences when they are able to prompt social sharing and user-generated promotion. This way, they can help their guests become their best marketers. However, many operators neglect to support and amplify the stories their guests are telling, treating social media as simply an affordable opportunity for them to promote their *own* messages.

When guests start to share, operators have another role to play, flagging remarkable stories and images for their destination marketing organization (DMO) who can bring them to a larger audience and has a need for authentic stories.

Given these changes, operators need to recognize that:

- Almost all of their guests are now newscasters and camera crews.
- They are in the best position to trigger and promote sharing from guests.
- They can't rely on a mass media campaign to bring in guests.
- They can significantly improve the design of their visitor experiences.
- They can help their destination by curating exceptional visitor content for DMOs to share.

Developing and running an industry development program would be one way to help improve this aspect of visitor servicing.

VISITOR SERVICING THROUGH A VISITOR-CENTRIC LENS

Our definition of visitor services is the *delivery of any information that has the potential to influence someone's choice of destination or experience at any stage of the purchase cycle - both outside and inside a destination*

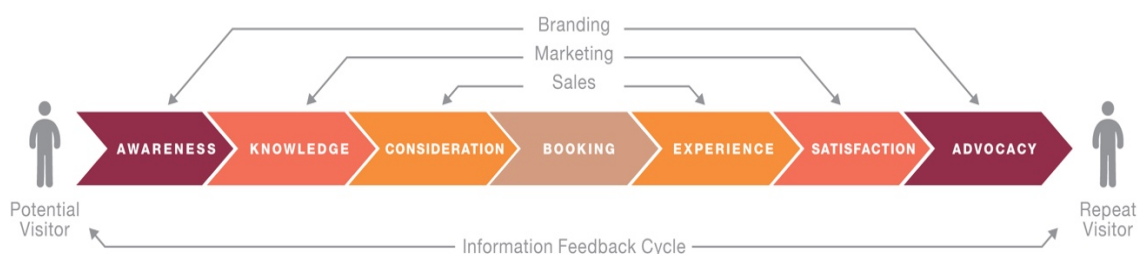
Therefore, adopting a visitor-centric lens requires an understanding, at a minimum, of three areas;

1. The different stages in the potential visitor journey
2. The potential communication channels to reach them through this journey
3. An understanding of the type of information they are looking for - what you present and how you present it, are as important as where the information is distributed.

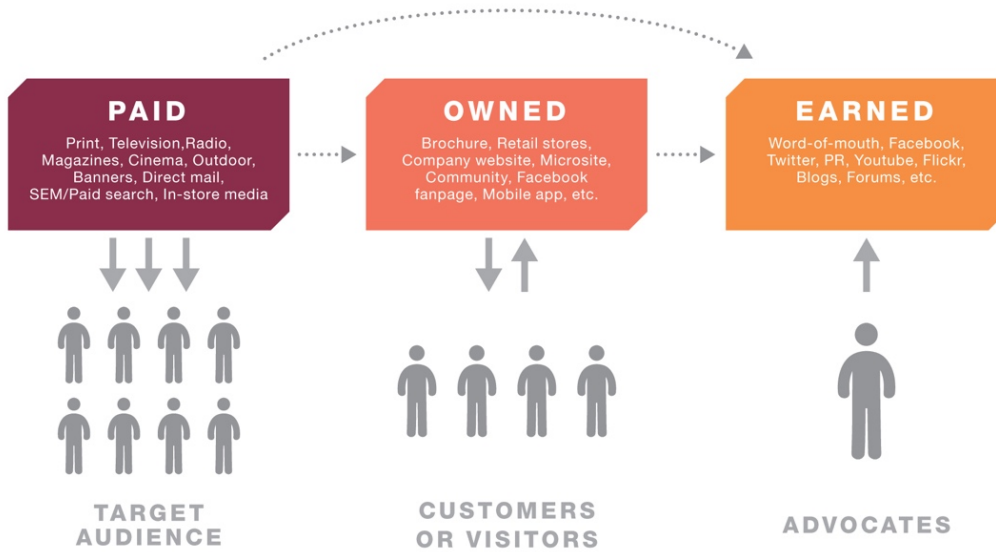
Visitor Information, like all marketing, is competing for people's attention. And it is competing in an environment that is packed with communication clutter and consumer indifference. It is an environment where people ignore the ordinary.

To succeed in this kind of environment your visitor information content needs to be **remarkable**. Remarkable in terms of what it is saying and remarkable in terms of the format it is delivered in. Further details on this point can be found on page 17 (The Importance of your Content not just your Channels) & page 21 (The Importance of Storytelling and Mementos in the Sharing Economy).

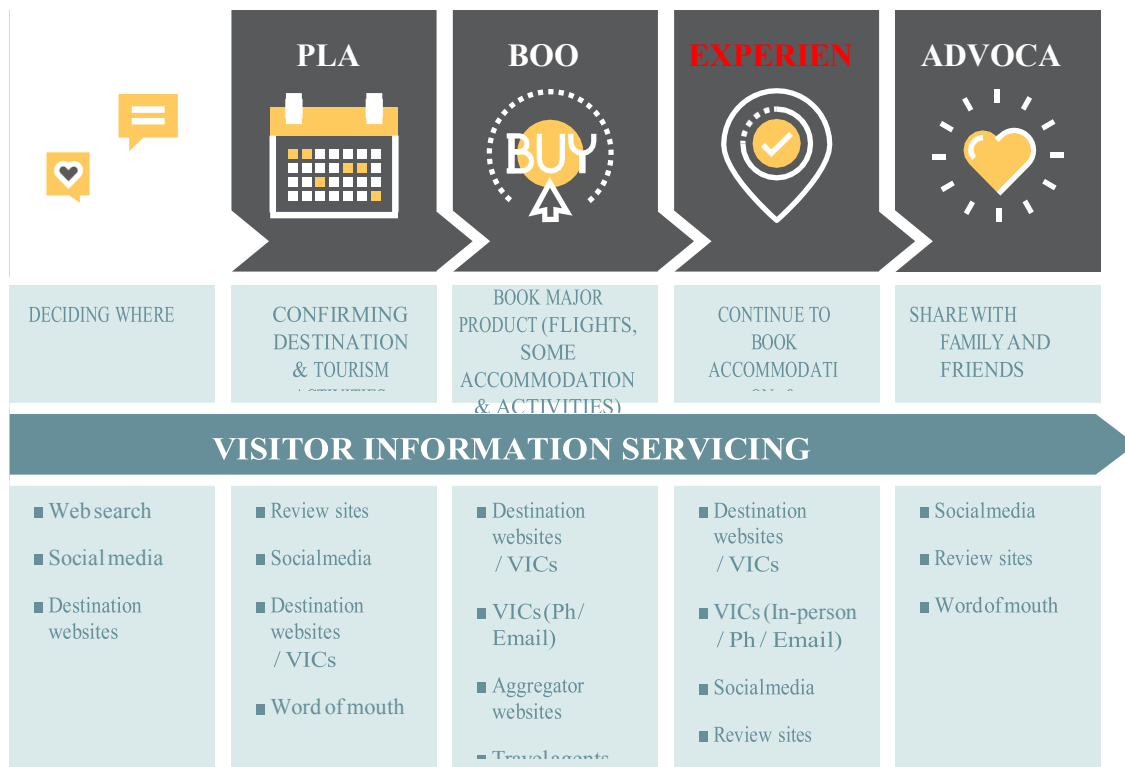
The Potential Visitor Journey



The Potential Communication Channels



Visitor Information Servicing Touchpoints



Source: A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing

The Visitor Journey Opportunity

At the risk of being over simplistic we can narrow the focus of the visitor journey even further by separating it into two halves. The first is visitor servicing to people outside of the region. The second is visitor servicing to people to who are already visiting Eurobodalla.

The objective for the first is to provide emotional information that makes them want to visit and rational information that persuades them to actually visit.

The objective for the second is to make visitor information - both emotional and rational - more accessible to visitors.

While your website is arguably the single most important visitor servicing 'tool' for people outside of the region the biggest opportunity for Eurobodalla is **in-destination** visitor servicing. It is important for 3 key reasons;

- It will help generate greater visitor dispersal and yield.
- It will help deliver a better visitor experience (The 2018 Micromax visitor research indicated that providing more information and promotion of what the area provides was the most common suggestion for improving the visitor experience for visitors to the region).
- It provides an opportunity to share the visitor servicing responsibilities with residents and operators. And in doing so help them appreciate that everyone has a role to play in engaging visitors, distributing and communicating visitor information. It also provides an opportunity to more closely and consistently engage with industry (refer to section on high-priority action plan)

In-destination visitor servicing will involve a range of activities such as;

- Establishing a network of local business partnerships. These could hotels, motels, clubs, cafes, restaurants and attractions.
- Mobile and pop-up stalls for events and peak periods
- Stands, signage and installations - scale to size of business
- Ambassadors - local characters and industry leaders
- Residents - local community, including volunteer ambassadors

Further details can be found in the *Recommended Activities* and *High Priority Actions* sections of this report.

YOUR STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVE

The salient points are;

- Visitor Servicing is unanimously viewed as critically important to the 'health' of tourism in general and the 'wealth' of operators in particular.
- Visitor Servicing solutions are still viewed through a fairly traditional lens - VIC's, Visitor Guides and a tourism website. The difficulty is not really about embracing the new. It's about letting go of the old.
- The responsibility for delivering solutions are, in the main, still seen to rest with ESC.

However, importantly there was a willingness from many operators to play a role to help deliver a better solution. **But** they are looking to ESC to articulate what that solution is and a rationale to support it.

Moving forward it will be important for ESC to;

- Re-connect with stakeholders and present the agreed solution
- The new solution should not be 'pitched' as a case of *in with the new and out with the old*
- Implement the proposed solution through a **transition** period that can be positioned as a 'pilot study' where ESC will work closely with operators.
- Agree an interim framework to measure success

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
AWARENESS	<p>1. Destination brand campaign in market 2019/20 and beyond</p> <p>2. VFR platform Shareable content for locals to inspire friends and family to visit</p> <p>3. Event</p> <p>4. SEO</p>	<p>1. Determine Destination NSW requirements for scope and length of support beyond 2019</p> <p>2. Launch iPostcard VFR platform as part of visitor servicing initiative</p> <p>3. Review tourism events strategy to identify priority event and event content development opportunities and</p> <p>4. Review creative marketing plan with DNSW to understand where and how DNSW resources can be leveraged to help implement, manage and measure. In particular the digital components;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • SEO/SEM 	DNSW iPostcard

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social <p>5. Develop and incorporate a Chat Bot strategy into the marketing plan (this strategy will be relevant across the customer journey but in particular to the areas of consideration, knowledge and booking)</p>	
KNOWLEDGE	Multi-channel content - visitor information and supporting seasonality and year-round visitation	<p>1. Identify a framework for content development and 12-month action plan</p> <p>2. Create and curate content to support visitor information - including the use of video as a format for driving conversion</p>	DNSW DMS (iPostcard)
	Itineraries	Develop a range of new itineraries based on key destination experience themes	
	PR campaign matched with launch of new	Develop PR strategy and action plan if not	

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
	online and digital content	addressed in current marketing plan. Review with DNSW to identify where DNSW resources can be leveraged in implementation.	
CONSIDERATION	Development of packages and bundling of products and experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a Product and Experience Development Workshop for industry partners 2. Identify two new packages for promotional purposes by end Nov 2019 - for summer 2020 	
	Deals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a package of product and experience deals/special offers to encourage local residents to build their understanding of the destination and enhance opportunities for VFR market. 2. Develop a package of deals for driving mid-week (outside of 	

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
		school holiday periods) and low and shoulder season visitation through special offers and value-adds	
BOOKING	Develop a Contact & Response Centre within ESC.	<p>1. Training to reinforce;</p> <p>a. destination story</p> <p>b. product and experience knowledge</p> <p>c. customer expectations</p> <p>2. Implement Chat Bot strategy</p>	
EXPERIENCE	<p>1. Develop a Business Partnerships visitor information distribution strategy</p> <p>2. Online media and social sentiment analysis monitoring</p> <p>3. Industry development strategy</p> <p>4. Local volunteer</p>	<p>1. Business Partnerships:</p> <p>a. Develop content, display and signage materials.</p> <p>b. Industry workshop to share strategy and rationale</p> <p>c. Audit of potential participating businesses (for example the Soldiers Club, air bnb and stayz)</p>	

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
EXPERIENCE	'ambassador' program for key events and/or peak visitor periods.	<p>d. Implementation of pilot study</p> <p>2. Develop 'listening' stations around key events such as the Narooma Oyster festival</p> <p>3. Industry workshops around changing visitor expectations. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the transformative travel trend b. the need to create Instagram-able moments c. Importance of free public WiFi <p>4. Ambassador recruitment and training</p> <p>5. Visitor satisfaction survey</p>	
SATISFACTION	Monitor visitor satisfaction	1. Listening stations	

PHASE IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY	KEY STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS
		<p>2. Visitor satisfaction survey</p>	
ADVOCACY	<p>1. Develop a visitor 'advocacy' strategy based around three key dimensions;</p> <p>a. Locals knowledge and helpfulness b. Local business, attractions and experiences, knowledge and helpfulness c. An easily accessible information safety net</p>	<p>a. Implementation of iPostcard VFR platform</p> <p>b. Business 'partnerships' program</p> <p>c. ESC 'contact & response' centre</p>	

RESOURCING

As highlighted in the goals and objectives section of this report, there is a need to look closely at the resources required to ensure that the demand side of the process that recently commenced with the new destination brand campaign and Destination NSW partnership, is converted into actual visitors. Visitors who also enjoy a positive visitor experience. One that results in, at the very least, recommendations to friends and family and ideally repeat visits.

Visitor servicing resources and stakeholder management will both play critical roles in achieving a successful outcome in this area over the next 5 years.

Recently, resources, both physical and financial, have been focused on the new brand campaign. A campaign that is principally aimed at inspiring visitor demand. This is, of course, an essential function. However, planned resources that focus on visitor servicing and the visitor experience, appear quite limited. Particularly when the closure of the Batemans Bay VIC is completed.

This runs the risk of not achieving the optimum return on investment (ROI) from the new brand campaign with 'flow-on' impacts to visitor dispersal, visitor yield and the visitor experience.

The geographical spread of the LGA means that resources need to be carefully targeted to "fishing where the fish are feeding". Also, significant changes in visitor behaviour, mean that careful consideration should be given to the level of ongoing investment for traditional bricks and mortar solutions i.e. Visitor Information Centres, staffed by Council staff or volunteers.

Based on the review of international trends, as well as emerging trends within Australia, Visitor Services will need to be far more nimble, flexible and aligned to visitor needs.

It is also evident that while digital technology has changed visitors' behaviour, their expectations still reflect a desire to interact with people, although the context and nature of that interaction may be quite different from the traditional VIC model.

The economic importance of the visitor economy to the LGA (according to your 2019-28 Economic Development Strategy, it is the driving force of the Eurobodalla Economy) suggests ESC may need to re-evaluate its allocation of priority resources to the visitor servicing sector.

The first question is what is the optimal amount to be invested in the Visitor Services part of the equation? The second and arguably more critical question is what is the minimum amount to be invested?

In this context, it is clear that any successful strategy will benefit from the support and involvement of the community, and in particular the business community. It is acknowledged this may present challenges but the extent of these challenges will essentially rest on the creation and enhancement of mutual trust, based on strong governance and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The interim recommendations are:

- ESC review the adequacy of resourcing directed at destination marketing and management, and the skill levels required of its staff.
- ESC adopt the mantra of “One more night” - and use it as a way of gaining support and involvement from the industry and the wider community.
- ESC adopt a visitor services ecosystem model founded on the following principles:
 - Council is an enabler not just the sole implementer of visitor servicing solutions
 - One size does not fit all
 - Greater spread of resources throughout the region
 - Back office functions and resources will need to be properly resourced
 - Importance of relationships, not just process management
 - Visitor Services training to build industry capability

2020 HIGH-PRIORITY ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY	SUMMARY OF HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME
1. Business Partnerships	Industry workshop	TBC
	Develop and implement a 6-12 month pilot program for a business-led visitor servicing model, including providing appropriate reference materials	Commence early 2020
	Ongoing industry engagement	Throughout 2020
2. Visiting Friends & Relatives' (VFR) Marketing Solution	Implement a VFR platform	1 st quarter 2020
	Develop and implement an activation strategy to engage residents and local businesses	1 st quarter 2020
3. Content and Channel Review and Optimisation	Content and channel review, with a 12-month Action Plan - focus on reinforcing the brand strategy and reaching identified target markets	Commence ASAP
	Develop and implement digital assets and other content, including new itineraries	1 st quarter 2020

1. Business Partnerships

Most visitor servicing models adopt a passive approach, relying on visitors to seek out the service. This model is being challenged by a range of factors, including advances in technology that facilitate the delivery of information through online and digital channels. However, people-centric provision of information and visitor services continues to be an important way to connect with your visitors, reinforce the destination's brand or positioning and increase awareness of the region's experiences, accommodation offering and hospitality.

As a result, the visitor information distribution strategy should activate local business networks as well as online travel organisations, such as Airbnb and Vrbo (of which Stayz is also a part). This is particularly important with features such as TripBoards being implemented by Vrbo/Stayz, which allow users to pin their

favourite destinations as well as invite friends to join them in dreaming about or planning a trip.

In addition, it is important to consider opportunities for mobile visitor centres during festivals, events or peak periods (for example, during weekends over the summer school holidays). In this way, the destination is proactively taking highly-relevant and inspiring information to the visitor. While this doesn't necessarily rely on business partnerships, it should be factored into the planning and delivery of the proposed pilot project (see Action 1.4 below).

It will be essential to commence this strategy by engaging the industry. For example, by hosting a workshop with industry to share the strategy and rationale, especially those who participated in the consultation process for the Visitor Servicing Review. In preparation for this workshop, it will be important for ESC to identify the preferred options for supporting visitor services delivered by local businesses, from smaller-scale or mobile services through to more permanent arrangements. This would provide clarity for businesses while assisting to manage expectations about the involvement of and resources to be provided by ESC.

Key actions:

- 1.1. Determine the level of resourcing and preferred options to support local businesses deliver visitor services
- 1.2. Industry workshop to share the strategy and rationale, including the range of options (Action 1.1) as well as reporting back on the finalisation of the Visitor Servicing Review - 2 options:
 - 1.2.1. Prior to sharing Visitor Servicing Review with Council to enable feedback to be shared with Councillors (recommended option) *OR*
 - 1.2.2. At the time of presenting the final Visitor Servicing Review to Councillors
- 1.3. Audit of potential participating businesses (for example, the Soldiers Club, local real estate agents and other retailers (etc) as well as Airbnb and Vrbo/Stayz)
- 1.4. Develop content, display and signage materials - this will also support the preferred options identified in Action 1.1
- 1.5. Position and implement a business-led visitor servicing model as a 6-12 month pilot study (as part of the transition phase to Mackay Park)
- 1.6. Run a series of industry development workshops as part of the pilot study. The aim of the workshops will be to share new content and assist in building capacity, capability and interest in visitor servicing through business partnerships.

2. Visiting Friends & Relatives' (VFR) Marketing Solution

Personal recommendations from friends and relatives (as well as unrelated locals when in destination) are unrivalled in their capacity to influence consumer decisions, especially relating to holidays and leisure time.

Encouraging residents to be part of the destination's 'marketing team' by reaching out to their friends and relatives will deliver real results and lift the awareness and perception of the region. Importantly, this approach contributes to a sense of civic pride and builds a more positive perception by locals about the type of people who will visit the destination, year-round.

The strategy involves implementation of an appropriate VFR marketing solution or platform, populated with the best content to inspire and encourage residents to invite their friends and relatives to visit the region.

Once content is developed and the platform ready to launch, an activation strategy should be implemented to raise awareness of the program within the local community. For example, this could involve a 'Be a Tourist in Your Own Town' style of event that runs over nine days, bookended by the two weekends. This would be timed to take place once the Business Partnership program had been finalised in terms of participants, signage and content as well as once the content and channel review (Strategy 3) is completed. Other elements could include a local competition encouraging residents to share their favourite places and experiences.

Key actions:

- 2.1. Implement a VFR platform, including development of content to inspire and engage local residents - content development to be finalised by early 2020
- 2.2. Develop and implement an activation strategy to be launched once content for the Business Partnerships program is developed (Strategy 1) and the content and channel review (Strategy 3) is completed - launch in first quarter 2020.

3. Content and Channel Review and Optimisation

Ensuring that content, including videos, images and copy, resonates with your identified target markets is critical to reinforce your destination brand and positioning. Importantly, the right content should be provided at each stage within the customer journey. For example, in the early stages that relates to building awareness of and interest in your destination (the 'dream' stage), the aim is to inspire people. It is about capturing their attention in a highly-competitive market

place. As people progress along the customer journey, they seek more detailed information - the experience offer, accommodation options or local produce, among other things. During the planning and visit stages, they also want information on how to access the region and the best itineraries to ensure they maximise their time and enjoyment of your destination. It is also worth noting that in today's world, well-designed video is driving conversion more than any other format of content.

Another critical consideration is which channels are the most effective to reach your target audience. This requires an understanding of the preferences of your target audience in terms of where and how they receive information.

As a result, it is recommended that ESC undertake a detailed review of all current visitor information content and channels to market in order to:

- Align with the new destination brand strategy
- Incorporate key global learnings
- Identify best practice implementation, measurement and evaluation practices
- Identify optimum delivery channels, content information and delivery format from a visitor perspective to effectively reach identified target markets, including the ESC website

Key actions:

- 3.1. Determine Destination NSW (DNSW) requirements for support beyond 2019 and review the marketing plan with DNSW to understand where and how DNSW resources can be leveraged to help implement, manage and measure. In particular, the digital components such as:
 - Website
 - SEO/SEM
 - Social Media
 - Chat Bots
- 3.2. Develop a framework for channel priorities and content development with a 12-month action plan
- 3.3. Create and curate content to support visitor information - including the use of video as a format for driving conversion
- 3.4. Develop a range of new itineraries based on key destination experience themes

MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

This is an area that is critically important yet often overlooked, at least in terms of offering a consistent and robust measurement and evaluation framework. In the case of Eurobodalla while a degree of data analysis is currently being undertaken, we would recommend that this is an area that should be completely reviewed with a view to developing a new measurement & evaluation framework. One that goes beyond the standard Google Analytics reporting. One that has clearly defined industry and/or best practice benchmarks. And one where at least some of the measurement details can be shared with stakeholders, either annually or bi-annually.

Without a robust measurement & evaluation framework it will be difficult to;

- Set a clear direction for visitor information servicing.
- Determine resource and budget priorities.
- Engage the local community and industry in an ongoing conversation about direction and rationale.
- Build confidence with industry in the ESC team.
- Defend and evolve the recommended direction with evidence based around key performance indicators. In a digital sense these could include user experience on the website, search engine optimisation, website interaction, bounce rates, conversion tracking and relevant content for all digital channels. In an offline sense it could involve accessibility of 'in-destination' materials.

Further details on potential areas to be monitored and measured are outlined in the Appendix.

TRANSITIONING FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW

a. Develop the **visitor services narrative** (for the Eurobodalla community)

As one stakeholder mentioned the first step is to create a slogan that is easy to understand, easy to remember and importantly, easy for people to rally behind. The slogan **“Just One More Night”** seems to capture the spirit of this idea.

The second step is to summarise the new approach. Essentially this is about **getting the right information to the right people at the right time and in the right format**. That will of course change depending on what stage of the customer journey the potential visitor is up to. By providing the right information, at the right time, in the right way;

- Visitors are likely to disperse further and spend more. They may even, if they have a flexible travel itinerary, stay longer.
- Visitors are also more likely to enjoy positive visitor experience. A positive visitor experience is more likely to persuade your visitors to visit again, or, at the very least, recommend your destination to their friends and family.

The third step is to validate the approach by reminding our audience how the world of tourism has changed and that the world of visitor servicing needs to catch up. And that, in the new world, **“tourism is everyone’s business”**

b. Launch a **pilot study** program to run for a set period of time. The pilot study would be designed to provide a ‘soft’ launch for a new service delivery model and new visitor servicing ecosystem. An ecosystem of inter-related parts that;

- Operates as more of a hub and spoke model where the website is the hub
- Can be distributed more evenly throughout the region. For example, pop-up kiosks/tents offer the means of “fishing where the fish are feeding”
- Has the flexibility to be ‘amped’ up and down, depending on demand and seasonality
- Can offer different formats for different needs i.e. not one size fits all
- Is less capital intensive.
- Shares resources with potential partners, for example operators and residents.
- Free public wi-fi in high-traffic locations - with limitations on usage.
- A greater volume of *Information* directional signage

- Information ambassadors - roving, peak times, locations, providing information, promoting deals.

c. Establish a **measurement & evaluation** framework for the new ecosystem of inter-related parts.

NEXT STEPS

- a.** Confirmation of budget/resource parameters to implement 2020 high-priority actions.

- b.** Follow up industry workshop(s) to present visitor servicing findings and recommended actions;
 - Stakeholder feed back
 - level of participation in business partnerships program
 - channel priorities
 - content development priorities (format and message focus)

- c.** Presentation to Eurobodalla Councillors and Executive

- d.** Determine next level of stakeholder engagement

- e.** Establish the fixed VIP network
 - Determine mobile/pop-up visitor servicing requirements
 - Develop content, display and signage
 - Re-train your VIC staff to become industry liaison officers (with local tourism businesses)

APPENDICES A: Stakeholders Consultation - invited & interviewed

APPENDICES B: Reference Material Reviewed

Alberta Government (Canada) 2017 Report: Engaging Visitors in an Era of Technology - A New Visitor Services Model

Australia's Accredited VIC's: A Strategic Directions Paper

Australian Bureau of Statistics data

Australian Regional Tourism Network, The Contribution of Local Government and Tourism to the Australian Tourism Industry, 2017

A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing: This paper has been produced based on existing STO reports and other research on the future of accredited VICs by the Victoria State Government (Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources).

Batemans Bay Visitor Information Centre - Situation Analysis

Bendigo Visitor Servicing Case Study - Intercepting visitors with an ambassador program

Deloitte Access Economics - Technology Disruptors in Tourism: October 2019

Destination Think Articles:

- Are DMO visitor centres making a Blockbuster mistake?
- How destinations can increase word-of-mouth promotion by designing socialgenic experiences
- Boost word-of-mouth with remarkable mementos
- Changes that shape the future for destination marketers

Dr Ulrike Gretzel (University of Wollongong) - VIC's in 2013: Can Technology Replace Them?

East of England Tourism - Strategic Options for Tourist Information Centres

[Ehrenberg-Bass Institute](#), INSTITUTE OF MARKETING SCIENCE – "Facebook Fans...A Fan for Life!"

eMarketer analyst report - Does 'Liking' a Brand Drive User Loyalty?

Eurobodalla Destination Management Plan 2011 - 2020

Eurobodalla Economic Development Strategy 2019 - 2028

Eurobodalla Micromex Visitor Research

Eurobodalla Visitor Guide survey

Eurobodalla Tourism Monitor

Eurobodalla Creative Marketing strategy

Expedia - Millennial Traveler Report: Why Millennials will shape the next 20 years of travel

Google/Ipsos Media CT marketing research - The 2014 Travelers Road to Decision Report

Haerberlin Consulting, The future of visitor centres in WA, 2014

Ipsos MORI - Millennials: Myths and Realities

Jay Taylor: Why a mobile friendly website is essential to a successful SEO strategy

Journal of Tourism Management - "Role of social media in online travel information search"

Komosion Report: Rethink! Reimagining Visitor Services, September 2018

KPMG: Reimagining the Visitor Information Services Experience 2017

Mackay Park, Aquatic & Arts/Cultural Precinct Business Case Final Draft Report

Mark Ritson (Adjunct Professor of Marketing at Melbourne Business School) - Why social media is mostly a waste of time

My Travel Research - securing the future of visitor services in the Eurobodalla

Nathan Safran - Can We Please Stop Hying Social as the Marketing Messiah/ Search vs. Social: The 50 Shades of Gray in Online Information Retrieval

Nate Elliot - Forrester Research - Search V Social

Narooma Foreshore - Destination Master Plan

Newcastle City Council (NCC) Visitor Services Review

Newcastle Tourism Industry Group - The provision and distribution of visitor information, 2015

Northern Ireland Tourist Board Visitor Information Plan

KPMG, Reimagining the Visitor Information Services Experience 2017

SKIFT Megatrends 2018

SKIFT Millennial and Gen Z traveler survey 2019

South Australian Visitor Information Strategy, 2018

Tourism and Events Queensland - A Way Forward For Queensland VICs

Tourism Council Western Australia, Value of Visitor Centres

Tourism Research Australia, Queensland Snapshot of Year Ending June and September 2018 (IVS & NVS)

Tourism Research Australia, Victoria Snapshot of Year Ending June 2018 (IVS & NVS)

Tourism Research Australia, Visitor Information Servicing in New South Wales, June 2016

Tourism Research Australia, The Influence of Western Australian Visitor Centres on Tourist Behaviour, 2015

Tourism Western Australia, The Importance of Visitor Information Centres in Western Australia, 2018

The Value of Visitor Information Centres to the Victorian Industry and Local Economy (2010)

Travelsat Benchmarking Survey - Top Factors Influencing Destination Choice

Visit Victoria - Visitor Servicing Research (February 2019)

Victoria Tourism Industry Council, Victorian Accredited Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines, 2018

Visit Queensland, An overview of the value of accredited Visitor Information Centres and its flow-on effects to the wider community, 2018

Yarra Ranges Tourism Case Study - servicing beyond VICs

APPENDICES C: Measurement & Evaluation Considerations - outputs & outcomes

Example Outputs:

- Develop and maintain a content and social media calendar where content is designed around individual customer personas. Each piece of content is aimed to meet the interests and needs of one persona (it may resonate with two)
 - 12-month calendar identifying events, holiday dates, what's happening in the area, key dates, marketing campaigns
 - Implement at least one month ahead using Facebook pre-scheduling and planning tool eg. Trello
- Digital reporting for stakeholders
 - Website visitation benchmark goals - sessions increase, returning visitor increase, reduce bounce rate etc
 - Social media following and engagement benchmark targets
 - Google Analytics tracking to measure campaign and social media traffic and conversion
 - Develop member website impressions and click through reports
 - Track and measure Facebook and Instagram engagement
- Industry training to provide operators with a framework to, for example;
 - achieve a quality online presence and easy pathway to booking
 - develop inspirational content that evokes emotion and keeps the visitor on the website including video and large quality images
 - blog posts and best practice SEO applied consistently
 - optimise available resources and improve user experiences
- Sharable content for locals to inspire friends and family to visit

- Develop ambassador recruitment and training program
- Educate industry on the benefits of ATDW and other distribution platforms
- Creation of itineraries to assist decision making and bookable packages (VIC team can coordinate purchase of itineraries and packages)
- User generated content from locals on website e.g. events, locals' favourite experiences in blog posts

Example Outcomes:

- Consistency of new branding across website and social media channels
- Google analytics
- Stakeholder digital targets. For example;
 - sessions increase to an average of XXX per month
 - returning visitor increased to XX%
 - bounce rate reduced to XX%
- Level and accuracy of industry integration with ATDW
- Level and quality content with Visit NSW
- Industry satisfaction surveys
- Conversion rate of businesses approached to participate in distribution of visitor information
- iPostcard VFR metrics
- Destination NSW partnerships
- Visitor satisfaction surveys

APPENDICES D: Social Media Statistics Australia - October 2019

1. Facebook - 15,000,000 Monthly Active Australian Users (steady)
2. YouTube - 15,000,000 Unique Australian Visitors per month (UAVs)
3. Instagram - 9,000,000 Monthly Active Australian Users (FB/ Instagram data)
4. WhatsApp - 7,000,000 Active Australian Users
5. Snapchat - 6,400,000 Monthly Active Australian Users (Snapchat data)
6. WordPress.com - 5,800,000
7. LinkedIn - 5,500,000 Monthly Active Australian Users approx
8. Twitter - 5,300,000 Monthly Active Australian Users approx
9. Tumblr - 3,700,000
10. Tinder - 3,000,000 Australian users (my estimation)
11. WeChat - 2,900,000 Monthly Active Australian Users approx - (my estimation)
12. TripAdvisor - 2,800,000
13. Yelp - 1,500,000
14. Blogspot- 1,200,000
15. Flickr - 450,000
16. Pinterest - 290,000
17. Reddit - 110,000
18. MySpace - 70,000
19. RenRen - 70,000 Monthly Active Australian Users approx - (my estimation)
20. StumbleUpon - 39,000
21. Weibo - 35,000 Monthly Active Australian Users approx - (my estimation)
22. Foursquare/Swarm - 10,000
23. Digg - 10,000
24. Periscope - 9,000
25. Delicious - 7,000

Source: Stats Source: [Vivid Social – Social Media Agency](#).