

How to Stand Out Online as a Tourism Provider?

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This session introduces the key principles of digital marketing for tourism providers — from understanding the online space and search engine logic to managing social media and intermediaries strategically. Dr. Miha Bratec draws on academic research and concrete examples to show how providers can gain visibility, drive bookings, and avoid costly missed opportunities in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

Presentation script (introduction, objectives...conclusion)

1. The Scale of Digital Tourism

Tourism is one of the most digitised industries in the world. The WTTC's "24 Hours in Tourism" data illustrates the sheer volume of digital interactions happening around tourism every single day — searches, bookings, reviews, shares. Understanding the scale is the first step to understanding why standing out online matters.

The theoretical framework underpinning this session is the **Digital Tourism Economy** (Bratec, 2018), built on four pillars: the economics of tourism distribution and intermediation, the economics of tourism information and online reputation, the economics of digital disruption, and the economics of support services that stimulate online transactions. An important distinction: **e-tourism and the digital economy are not synonymous**. E-tourism refers to digitised business processes; effective digital marketing is what enables a provider to actively participate in — and benefit from — the digital economy.

2. Tourism Marketing — Functions and Phases

Tourism marketing serves three core functions: **promotion, sales, and service/quality/satisfaction management**. Its application depends on two variables:

The phase of travel:

- Daydreaming
- Planning (information search, decision-making, booking)
- Implementation (the trip itself)
- Reflection (post-trip reviews and sharing)

The type of provider: accommodation, catering, experience provider, or destination. Each combination calls for a different digital marketing approach.

3. The Online Space — Understanding the Logic

The internet operates like a web of interconnected channels (Beritelli & Schegg, 2016 — the "octopus tentacles" model): the consumer sits at the centre, reached through multiple distribution channels, all competing to minimise transaction costs while building superiority within their selected channels.

The online space is best understood as **the Oxford Street or 5th Avenue shop window** — a panel effect. It is extremely competitive, it is the cornerstone of marketing success today, and it does not come automatically. It must be fought for with knowledge and investment. **Knowing its logic is the foundation of any successful marketing strategy.**

Practical exercise (slide 7): Map your own journey planning process — which websites and apps do you visit, in what order, and which stage is the critical decision point? This exercise reveals how complex and multi-touchpoint the path to booking really is.

A concrete example (slides 8–9): A Google search for cooking classes in Tajikistan demonstrates how a well-optimised provider can dominate search results and generate significant visibility — including appearing in Google's featured snippets, maps, and organic results simultaneously.

4. Social Media — Facts vs. Hype

Social media is one of the most discussed topics in tourism research — but what do providers actually need to know?

The facts: Social media platforms significantly change travel habits. They are web applications enabling easy creation and sharing of content (text, photos, audio, video). They influence destination image, with the content creator becoming a co-creator of that image — independent, authentic, and trusted. They have a demonstrated impact on purchasing decisions (Cox et al., 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and enable collaboration and information flow that directly shapes tourism decisions (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013).

But which platforms actually matter? Research by Bratec, Anžel & Šegota (2019) among tourism providers reveals a clear hierarchy:

Platform	Extremely important
TripAdvisor	43.8%
Facebook	0%
Instagram	0%
Twitter	0%

TripAdvisor dominates. Facebook and Instagram register as "somewhat important" at best among providers surveyed. Twitter is considered irrelevant by 81% of respondents.

A well-managed Facebook profile (example: La Perla Corvara) shows what professional social media presence looks like — consistent tone, regular posting, community engagement — but the data confirms that social media should not be confused with the primary driver of bookings.

5. TripAdvisor — Alpha and Omega

TripAdvisor occupies a unique position: it is simultaneously a **user review platform** (UGC), a **social network**, and a **meta-search engine**. This triple role makes it the single most important digital platform for most tourism providers — and the one most often underestimated or mismanaged.

The "Lovrenec" case study illustrates a **missed opportunity**: a destination with real assets appearing poorly on TripAdvisor — incomplete profile, few reviews, low visibility — while competitors are fully optimised. When travellers search for things to do in an area, providers not properly listed on TripAdvisor simply do not exist in the eyes of the tourist.

6. Intermediaries — How to Deal with Them

Online intermediaries (Viator, GetYourGuide, TourRadar and others) have long dominated accommodation bookings. Attention is now rapidly shifting to **activities and experiences** — and more and more travellers book these online too.

Key principles for managing intermediaries:

- **If your experience is not on TripAdvisor, it does not exist** — visibility on the platform is non-negotiable
- Use experience brokers **wisely** — they offer reach but come at a cost
- Develop a **sustainable pricing strategy** that accounts for commission structures without eroding margins
- Do not rely on a single channel — diversify your online presence across relevant platforms

7. Key Takeaways

- The online space must be actively managed — visibility does not happen by itself
- Understand the full travel planning journey and be present at the critical decision points
- TripAdvisor outweighs all other social platforms in direct business impact for most providers
- Intermediaries are powerful allies — but only when used strategically with a coherent pricing policy
- Missed opportunities online are real and measurable — act before your competitors do