#Sherpa17

How Travel Leaders Built User-generated Content from 4,000 Agents and Increased Leads 91%

BRIAN HEGARTY
Vice President of Marketing,
Travel Leaders Group

CHALLENGE

A Rapidly-Changing Travel Market

CHALLENGE

Lead Gen Driving Deal Seekers

OPPORTUNITY

Selling the Travel Agents (Not Travel)

Evolving to Reach Those Who May Not Consider a Travel Agent

The Travel Leaders Group Customer

Travel Leaders Group

Brian Hegarty

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APPROACH

- Understanding the role of TLG is to sell the travel agent
- Equipping travel agents to serve customers better

User-Generated Content

The Travel Leaders Group approach

Focus on Serving the Individual

Understanding the challenge we are solving

Lead Generation was the Wrong Goal

- Unqualified inquiries through third-party channels resulted in **low-quality traffic and leads** that frustrated agents
- Randomized assignment of leads that did qualify meant a **disconnect between the customer's needs** and the agent's expertise

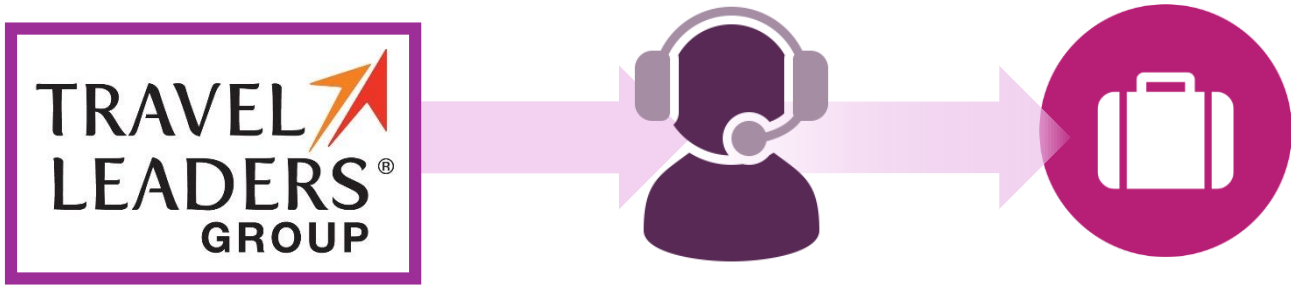
Customer: Kate
Mom of 2, looking to book a Disney cruise

Agent: Thomas
Specializes in European bicycling tours and foodie getaways

The Right Equation: What are we really selling?

Not this:

But this:



The Right Equation: What are we really selling?

Not this:

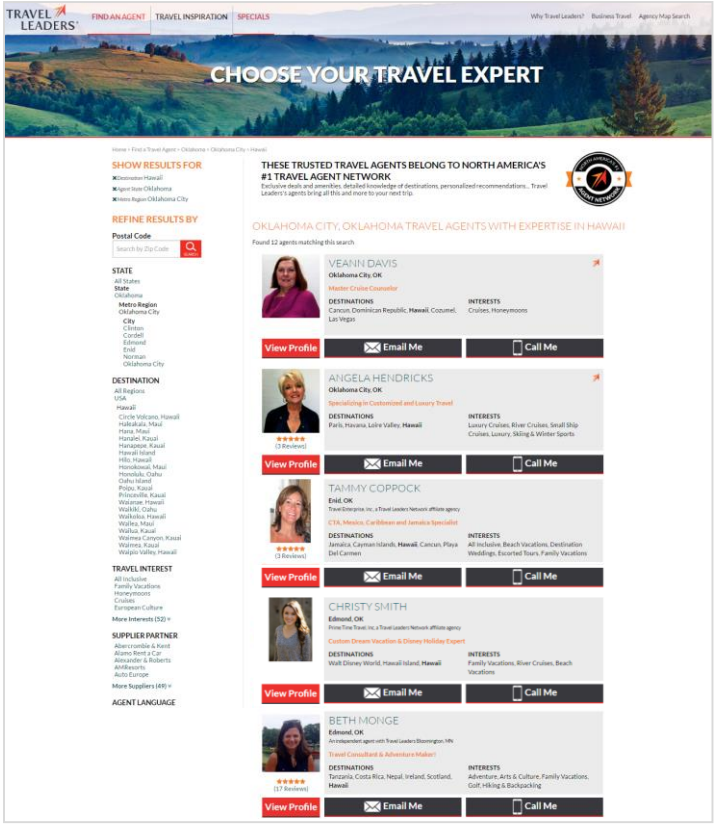
How do you merchandize and market 4,000 unique agents?

Build the User-Generated Content Machine

To run perpetually and at scale

Agent Profiler Platform

- A **marketplace of agents** who have **qualified attributes** in defined areas of expertise:
  - Destinations,
  - Interests and types of travel
  - Suppliers
- This allows us to **present search results** to prospects with agents who **match the expertise qualifications** that a customer is looking for
- The platform was **planned, developed and maintained in-house** by the TLG marketing and dev teams



Implementation and Execution

Training

- Training, tip sheets and best practices
- Online training sessions on-demand
- Workshop sessions at events

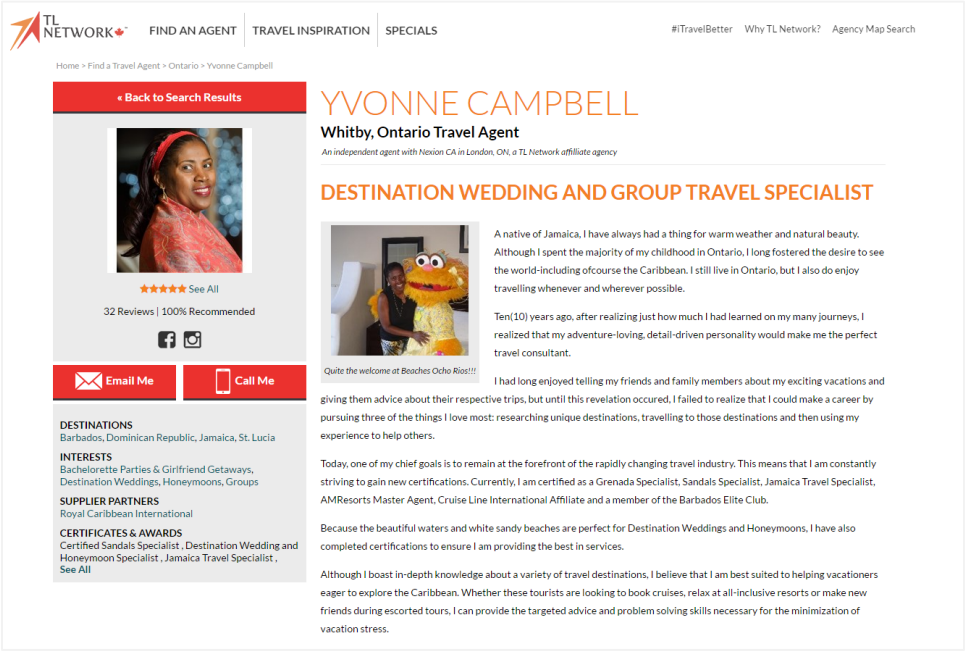
Adoption

- Leveraging the audience of agents who had a **desire to drive new traffic** and no resources to drive demand
- The program feeds itself, **success drives the agents to engage** in improving their profiles

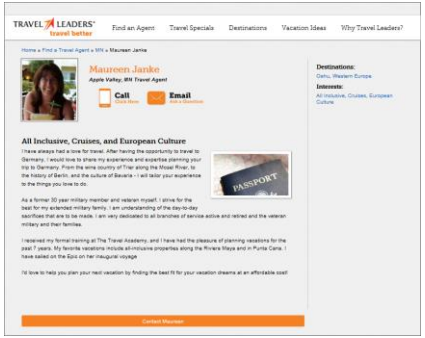
Storytellin
g
Workshops

Equipping Travel Agents to Tell Their Story

- **Fostering** content development skills
- **Giving the agents resources –** help them do what we can't:
  - Discovering their value proposition
  - Capture and telling their stories
  - Writing and editing
- Proving the case with **successful early adopters to encourage growth**



Equipping Travel Agents to Tell Their Story



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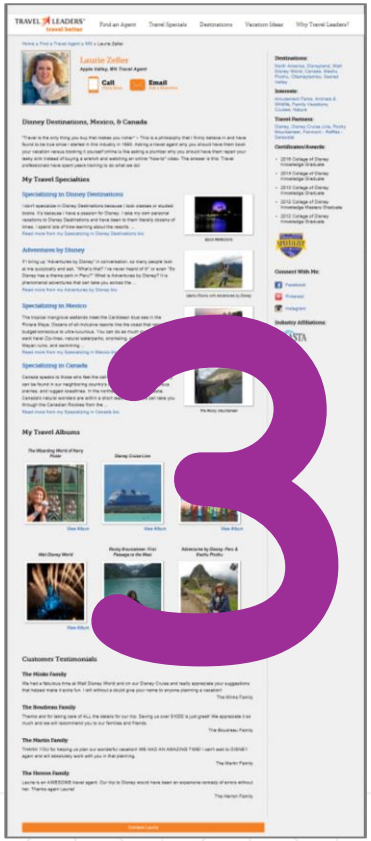

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Continually Evolve the Program

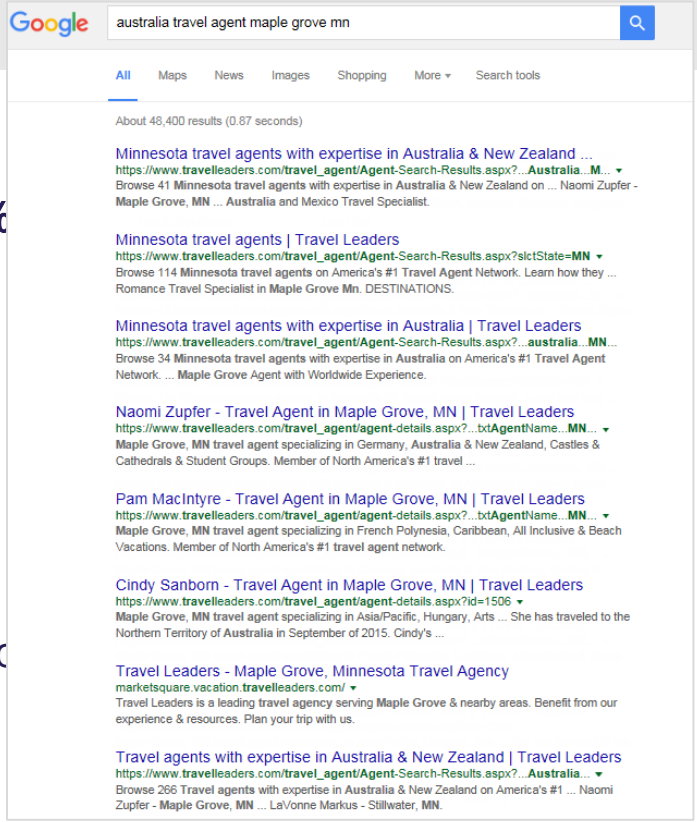
Investment doesn’t end at launch

Measure and Adjust, Test and Optimize

- **User testing**
  - Website UX
  - Mobile focus
  - Recorded sessions
- **Data analysis**
  - Acquisition channels — SEO/SEM/PPC, 3rd Party, email, social, etc…
  - Matching algorithms
- **Weekly and monthly tweaks**
  - Iterative development approach
- **A/B testing**: Button placement, multivariate, headline placement
- **Agent participation** optimization

Agent Engagement Trends

- **Content is king**
  - Agent profiles **with enhanced content** received **91% more leads** vs. agents with basic profiles
- **Technology facilitates opportunity**
  - Faceted search functionality expanded Google indexed pages from a **few hundred to 100K**
- **Value of organic traffic**
  - **SEO/SEM** accounts for **25%** of site traffic but **70%** of leads generated
- **Speed wins**
  - Agents who respond to a lead **within 24 hours have a 75% increased chance of closing the lead**



Pushing for Improvement: Ratings and reviews

- Agents were nervous to launch a feedback mechanism
- Made it optional & provided training on how to turn a negative review into a positive
- Less than half the agents have it on their profile
- Almost 20,000 reviews published on all profiles
- Search results now favor agent with more reviews

★★★★★ Wonderful Wedding Vacay in Jamaica

Reviewed By **Ace - Trinidad and Tobago** | Traveled to

Please let me say first that I have been to Jamaica numerous times. This time I thoroughly enjoyed the destination wedding organized and overseen by Yvonne. Yvonne was always pleasant and helpful to everyone and she took care of the smallest detail. Yvonne has now become Facebook friends with many who attended. I think one of the reasons Yvonne is excellent at what she does is that she is genuinely warm and people gravitate to her. I would strongly recommend Yvonne to anyone desirous of a pleasantly memorable vacation or event.

✔ **I would recommend this agent to my family and friends**

Was this review helpful to you? YES | NO

★★★★★ Taurus Milestone Cruise

Reviewed By **Marlene - Brampton, Ontario** | Traveled to

Yvonne was helpful, patient and very professional in helping us plan our cruise to celebrate my sister's 50th birthday. We had 42 people on our cruise and she made sure everyone was well taken care of. She responded to my emails and our many other questions in a timely manner. She arranged for our flights, some of our group activities on board, had folders printed for each of us, chocolate and wine in each stateroom. Overall everyone was very happy with her services.

✔ **I would recommend this agent to my family and friends**

Was this review helpful to you? YES | NO

Pushing for Improvement: Ratings and reviews

- Agents were nervous to launch a feedback mechanism
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Agent profiles with ratings/reviews received 85% more leads vs. agents with no ratings.

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Never Stop Innovating

What have we learned?

- Focus on agent as product
- AGC is the ‘secret sauce’ to success
  - More unique content = more lines in the water
  - Higher quality content = better bait
- Customers favor expertise over convenience of location

What is new? What is next?

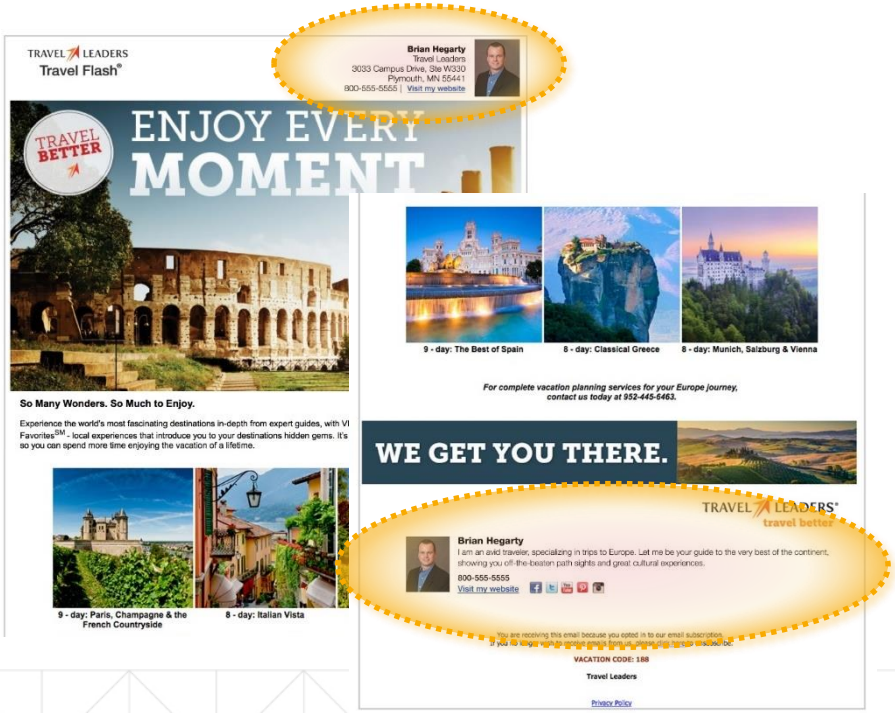
- Travel Leaders Network impact
- Network affect
  - More Agents = More Unique Content = More Authority = More Leads
- Result = 30%+ YOY growth in Q1

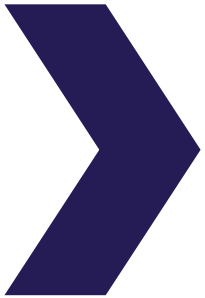
Expand the Program

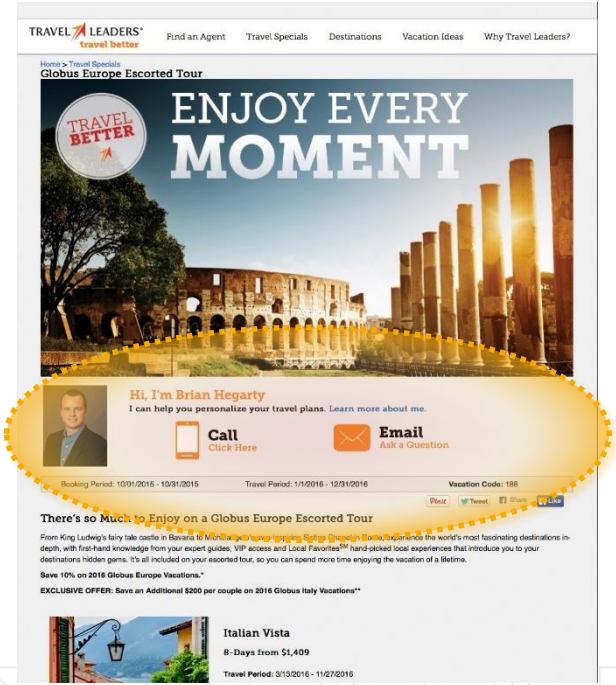
Broader (campaigns) and deeper (funnel)

Broader: Personalized agent campaign

- Incorporating profiles into specific marketing promotions
  - Sign off and call-to-action from personal agent

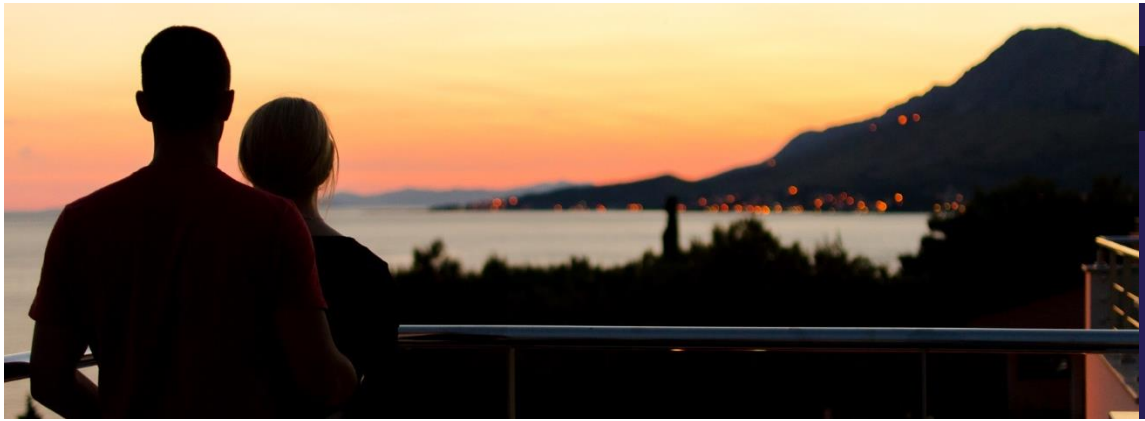






Deeper: Growing beyond the travel agent market

- Moving up the funnel, **optimizing demand**
- Very specific, **high-quality content supporting customer** research habits, decision process and buyer journey
- **Test pilot** a relatively untapped market segment, **then expand**



Test Segment #1

Destination Weddings & Honeymoons

Perpetual Demand Strategy

- A new brand
  - Lifestyle brand — emotional connection of WHY people travel
- Perpetual demand generation platform
  - Customer-centric and content-focused
- The importance of the research you conducted
  - Customer journey
  - Persona targets
  - Content mapping
- Content variety targeted to audience
- Transformation
  - People, process, technology, content, data

The Results

Results: Metrics

- **100,000** leads generated
- **25%** conversion rate from lead to closed won
- **$5,000** average sale
- **$125,000,000** in sales generated from this program

Brian's Key Learnings

- Business is P2P
- UCG Personalizes your brand
  - Authenticity, passion & credibility
- Life moves fast
- Good to be aware of trends — bad to just be trendy
  - Know your customers & your product
  - Build foundation on core fundamentals

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Roundtable Discussion

User-Generated Content:
Build, scale and evolve a content machine to drive quality leads and sales

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Roundtable
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Thank You!

Brian Hegarty,
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