NEWS RELEASE

Brand USA Kicks Off 2021 with a Focus On Canada

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TORONTO, ON: (February 5, 2021)—Yesterday, Brand USA, the destination marketing organization for the United States, hosted Focus On Canada, its first event of the year on the new Brand USA Global Marketplace platform. Looking ahead to the recovery of cross-border travel, the virtual event underscored the importance of the Canadian market in tourism's early recovery. Uncovering the latest insights and trends on Canadian's post-pandemic travel mindset, the event kicked-off with a welcome by Christopher L. Thompson, Brand USA president & CEO.

"We in the U.S. look at our neighbors to the north and I think we look at family," he said in his opening remarks. "We share a border, and it's the largest border we share, but it's so much more than that." Thompson continued on to highlight the importance of the Canadian market, stating, "it's not just the great affinity we have with our Canadian friends, Canada is our largest source market. In 2019, we had 21 million visitors, so of course it makes all the sense in the world that our first event in the new year, where we see the glimmer of light getting brighter, would be a focus on Canada."

On-the-Go Entertainment

Thompson then revealed GoUSA TV—Brand USA's flagship connected TV channel featuring inspiring travel content showcasing the USA's must-see places, great outdoors, foodie hot spots, and amazing road trips—will debut later this year on GO Transit's new GO Wi-Fi Plus free entertainment portal later this month. "Today, I am excited to announce our GoUSA TV Channel will air across GO Transit in Ontario, with huge exposure to the more than 75 million people who travel on that system," he said. "Our job at Brand USA is to be our nation's storytellers. To bring enjoyable, entertaining content and make it available to international travelers 24/7, 365, and this exciting, new partnership helps us further that promise."

Canadian's affinity for digital video and GoUSA TV was supported by Tracy Lanza, Brand USA senior vice president of integrated marketing. She shared research indicating the pandemic has accelerated video consumption worldwide, with nearly two-thirds of the Canadian population having watched digital video in 2020. "Canada is the number one audience for GoUSA TV," she said, "and has been from almost the very beginning. And, we are absolutely thrilled to reach even more viewers connecting travelers to a wide range of USA travel experiences."

Enrichment Series

Partners who tuned-in to the virtual event also heard from a number of Canadian travel experts who shared their unique insights into Canadian traveler's mindset as the industry looks towards recovery. Brand USA called-on Jennifer Hendry, senior research associate of the Conference Board of Canada to share its latest research findings, and to provide an overview of the Canadian traveler. Hendry started off the series stating how important the trans-border traveler is to both the Canadian and U.S. economies, and how the pandemic has really highlighted this fact. While acknowledging this crisis is having a much more prolonged impact than any previous shocks, she noted the resiliency of the tourism industry but cautioned that gaining insight into when travel will return continues to be a challenge. "We're seeing the planning cycle increasing considerably," she said. "Obviously travelers need to wait and see what their options are, but they are researching possibilities and are ready to go at the drop of a hat."

Offering industry partners some optimism, Hendry shared that the organization's latest research shows that nine in 10 Canadians say they miss traveling and that "it's no doubt the road to recovery will be a challenging one," she said. "We need to keep in mind that tourism is one of the most resilient sectors, and Canadians are a very savvy market that will take to the skies again." Hendry also stated that as markets look ahead to recovery, it's expected that in Canada young singles, and newly coupled millennials will be the group of Canadian travelers that have the most likelihood to travel right off the bat when restrictions are lifted, and borders are opened. She advised industry partners tuning-in that overall communication about virus management will be a reassurance and stressed the importance of "being open and honest" stating "that will help attract Canadian travelers in the future."

Trends via Tripadvisor

Speaking to Canadian search trends, Carol Johnson, senior client principal partner, Tripadvisor, shared there is reason for optimism, pointing to the fact that while down, travel sites remain among the most highly-visited sites on the world wide web. In September, travel sites globally captured nearly two billion monthly visits and 14 billion page views, an indication that travelers are continuing to do their research for future trips. "It's hopefully comforting," she said, "to see the U.S. as the number one foreign country viewed by (Tripadvisor) users in Canada, with New York City, Las Vegas and Central Florida (Orlando) the top three destinations for Canadian travelers," according to Tripadvisor search data. More than two-thirds (65%) of Canadian consumers surveyed said the ability to avoid crowded places while traveling is more important in their choice of destination than it was pre-pandemic. And, more than half (52%) say they are more likely to take an outdoor nature trip than they were before COVID-19 hit. "Tripadvisor traffic and search data in Canadian sentiment all point in the same direction: up," said Johnson. "Depending on the speed with which vaccine inoculations progress, and the destinations themselves, a sustained recovery for the global travel sector is closer than ever." However she cautioned that, "instead of a V-shaped recovery, imagine a more jagged line of progress where sometimes two steps forward will be met with one step back," speaking to the travel market's continued volatility.

Travel Engagement with Expedia

"With the borders still closed, Canadians continue to explore travel as dreamers looking to be inspired," offered Expedia's Raina Williams, senior regional manager, Canada Expedia Group Media Solutions. She pointed to proprietary data showing that "84% of Canadians said they traveled for rejuvenation, and we believe that need to rejuvenate is likely to continue and carry into the next 12 months." Expedia's survey data also indicates that Canadians are more likely to travel in the latter half of the year, with 60% saying they would be open to traveling from July to September. Her advice to travel partners, "even if you're not ready to welcome visitors, keeping travelers inspired and driving awareness is key to keeping top of mind for when they are ready," she said.

In Summary

In his concluding remarks, Thompson summed-up Brand USA's optimistic outlook stating, "the new year brings new hope for a better tomorrow. As soon as we're able to travel, we're so looking forward to opening our arms and welcoming everybody back."

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About Brand USA
Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.

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