

Experience West Sussex, Sussex Chamber of Commerce,

South Downs National Park Authority & Coast 2 Capital LEP Present:

## **Tourism in the time of Coronavirus Survive, **Revive** and Thrive**

A series of dynamic webinars for the Sussex Tourism Sector

Produced by **PLATF9RM**

### Session 2: Revive Part II

Consumer Confidence, Diversification and Innovation

Tuesday 2 June 2020 | 12:00 - 13:30

### **Panellists & Contributors for 'Revive Part II'**

#### **Panel of Experts**

Janet Uttley - Head of Business Transformation Project, [Visit Britain](#)

Nick Hall - Founder, [Digital Tourism Think Digital](#)

Jon Young - Director, [BVA BDRC](#)

Prof Xavier Font - Professor of Sustainability Marketing, [University of Surrey](#)

James Dempster - MD, [Cobb Digital](#)

#### **Industry Contributors**

Emma Keen - Marketing Manager, [Weald and Downland Living Museum](#)

Maurice Bacon - Owner, [Loxwood Joust](#)

Penny Streeter - Owner, [Leonardslee Gardens](#)

Steve Green, Director, [Gilbert White's House](#)

Sophie Tanner, Director of Sales and Marketing, [Historic Sussex Hotels](#)

## **Introduction**

Steve Bustin is hosting the third and final webinar. These events are a joint venture between Experience West Sussex, Sussex Chamber, Coast to Capital Growth Hub and South Downs National Park.

Steve introduced Janet Uttley from Visit Britain. Janet has been looking at the industry standard of how to look at communication to domestic customers. What we do in this space domestically is going to form what happens internationally next year and we need to be doing the best we can now to welcome back the international market. The industry standards are not yet released, as they are making sure that guidance is in agreement with safety guidelines, Public Health England etc. The standards will be online, free and confident and clear. The online form will have a couple of questionnaires and you will need to agree to the terms and conditions. Once completed you can download a 'Good to go' mark, which you can use to highlight social distancing, cleaning. Once you have the standard you will receive a certification. Around 5-10% of companies that sign up will be checked. Visit Britain want to ensure that companies/sites are confident to welcome back guests. Janet stressed that we need to be mindful of public behaviour. Whilst we can not control public behaviour, we can control the messaging that we give. We want to share where sites have great communication to help everyone. Steve asked Janet the timescale for the standards. Janet explained that the questions have to be agreed and signed off, with going live hopefully by 15<sup>th</sup> June. The main domestic campaign will be rolled out two weeks after that (4<sup>th</sup> July) as the official go live date for tourism (accommodation will be later on).

## **Expert Panel:**

Jon Young – Director of a London based research consultancy (BVA BDRC). They are currently producing a weekly tracker which looks at consumer sentiment, consumer confidence now and when we start opening again.

Prof Xavier Font - Professor of Sustainability Marketing, University of Surrey. His main focus is how we use marketing and communication to achieve business goals.

James Dempster – MD and co-owner of Cobb Digital. Cobb Digital specialise in crafting powerful stories around data. They have worked closely with Experience with West Sussex.

Nick Hall – Founder of Digital Tourism Think Tank. They have a very global and international perspective, working with various destination marketing organisations around the world.

Steve starts by asking the panel *'What have you seen people, within the tourism industry, doing over the past two months that is really working?'* Nick answers first by saying that the industry recognised the seriousness of the situation and responding sensibly by saying 'we're closed now, don't come as you can visit later'. This was very powerful. The second stage was creativity. There has been an enormous amount of creativity. Thirdly, DMO's (Destination Management Organisations) have distributed a huge amount of knowledge and advice to help companies.

Xavier answered next, he said that some businesses have been complacent with their business planning and have now changed their business model to be more effective. They are now looking at local visitors first, domestic second and international third.

Jon used the example of Blenheim Palace re-opening and how impressive their re-opening was. There is a lot of uncertainty and lack of confidence from consumers, so people are looking at the

hospitality sector to drive things forward. Blenheim Palace required pre-booking and sent all customers a video before their visit showcasing pre-cautions in place. They also have a live stream on their website so that people can see what is happening/working.

James offered two great ideas. The first was additional revenue streams. One of their clients relied on restaurants and hotels selling their product (which was obviously no longer an option), they have now refocused a lot of energy on selling directly to the consumer. The second positive is brands that have thought about the social in social media. There have been virtual wine tasting evenings, high end restaurants offering how they make some of their specialties. The barrier has been bought down and engagement has been very valuable and worked very well.

Steve's next question to the panel was *'how do we build consumer confidence, and what is the timescale we should be looking at?'*

Jon started by reiterating that confidence is quite low. Providing a level of re-assurance and evidence of measures in place is very important. In terms of timescale, on average people aren't expecting to take a break in the UK for another six months, which takes us past the summer. Around one in five of Britons anticipate taking a summer holiday in the UK (which is way down from normal). This has improved over the last couple of weeks and hopefully the momentum will build. The older generation have dropped off, which is to be expected but we hope as confidence builds that they will book later. Things do change week on week.

Xavier advised that it will take time, and a lot is out of our control. There has been a massive drop of people searching for flights, it seems that people are expecting to be able to fly again by Christmas. Britons are searching more than other Europeans to be able to fly on holiday and people are searching to fly to destinations that they are already familiar with, so places where they feel safe in. One recommendation is to go back to your database, break it down into segments of how loyal customers have been to you in the past and prepare different campaigns (depending on level of loyalty). Confidence will depend on that level of loyalty.

James added that people are more likely to trust what they know. One thing that is important to look at is opening up West Sussex to the London market. Sussex is such a rich and diverse destination, that it's not just about sole companies but work out itineraries for visitors so they have a variety of things to do during their visit. There will be a lot of people not financially well off, so local destinations will be more cost effective for consumers.

Steve discussed diversification and asked Nick *'what should businesses be doing to diversify to give themselves a broader base?'* Nick says that it's important to diversify now, to look at the business model and see how this can be done. What is important is the local market that has been overlooked and taken for granted, in place of international tourism. There is a five-stage recovery framework and it is important to have a strategy for each of the five stages. The first is remote travel, so create a digital, immersive experience. The second is be hyper local – getting people to appreciate what is on their doorstep. Thirdly are staycations and then close to home and finally the new normal to international travel. We need to review business plans and have a response and strategy for each of those five stages. Take the opportunity to not be dependent on traditional tourism.

Steve asked *'what role does technology play in diversification, in terms of finding new ways to deliver things? How can people use digital tools to help them to diversify?'* James answered first, he used the zoom boom as an example of a new normal. There is so much technology at our disposal, it is a good time to look at how we can replicate the see, hear, feel values with technology. A key piece of advice is technology is do not let technology get in the way of delivering a good story or experience. Technology is there to support a key message and not replace it. Focus on what it is you are trying to deliver, and technology helps that.

Steve's final question to the expert panel was *'what one thing do you think that businesses should be doing to build consumer confidence?'*

Xavier suggested looking at diversifying your prospect, start thinking about winter tourism now.

Nick's first tip is to be authentic with communication. The second is to involve customers with new products. The third is to pivot with purpose, don't chase the money, chase the purpose, and the business will follow. Nick's final tip is to adapt to the matter of seasonality and develop a low season offer. If you do all of these then you will end up with a more sustainable business.

Jon suggested keeping an eye on consumer plans and looking at good research to help plan. Around 10% of people are financially better off, so there is that market as well as those looking to save money.

James says to demonstrate your values as a business. What do you stand for and why should consumers come and see you? The second thing to add is truly understand who your audience is, start the conversations now. Give clear advice of what steps you've gone to – via a video/human voice rather than a written blog.

### **Industry Contributors Panel:**

Penny Streeter - Estate Manager for Leonardslee Gardens. Leonardslee Gardens covers 250 acres, with a variety of attractions from a dolls house museum, to wallabies, a Michelin star restaurant and shops, etc.

Maurice Bacon - Loxwood Meadow. They run lots of events, from a Medieval joust to a jazz festival. As they are unable to run these this year, they will be holding drive in movies.

Emma Keen - Marketing Manager, Weald and Downland Living Museum. This year is their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Steve Green – Co-Director, Gilbert White's House. They are a listed historic garden, wedding venue and lots more. This year is the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gilbert Whites anniversary.

Sophie Tanner from Historic Sussex Hotels.

Steve asked the panel *'what are you doing to prepare to re-open?'*

As Leonardslee Gardens have already re-opened Penny answered first. They re-opened on 1<sup>st</sup> June and it was good to have people through the doors. They have put in place measures that will ensure public distancing.

Maurice mentioned that Loxwood involves a lot of people attending and in close proximity. The drive-in movies seemed like the most sensible and safest idea. Going forward, even next year, everything will need to be reviewed.

Emma said that they are waiting for clarity as to when they can re-open. They are hoping to open the gardens within the next few weeks. Their members have been supporting them throughout this time, so they will re-open for members first. There will be very clear signage but thought needs to be considered for how they re-open the shops and café. They will re-open with a time ticket entry.

Steve said that they are preparing to re-open. Immediately after the lockdown they went hyper local and opened a village shop (to replace the one that closed in December). This is turning around £6000 a week. They will retain this in the café and will open an outside café.

As accommodation, Sophie discussed that they cannot open yet and are awaiting confirmation from the government. They are trying to build consumer confidence to ensure they have people stay with them. Even before they had to sustain a high level of hygiene so that is not a new measure. They are trying to reassure customers that they are doing everything they can to ensure their safety, by asking previous customers what they would be expecting to see and also looking at Government guidelines.

Janet added that re-opening dates are not yet confirmed and are very much still open to change.

Steve asked Penny *'what did you do in the build up to opening to help bolster customer confidence, and in the short term you have been open is there anything that you have noticed that will need to be changed to keep the confidence there?'* Penny said that they are constantly reviewing the situation. They have been inundated with telephone calls with prospective visitors asking questions. They have to have a good expectation that the general public will follow the guidelines. Staff need to politely but firmly ensure that the visitors stick to the measures in place.

Steve then asked Emma *'what are you doing around communications and how are you changing your marketing messages to ensure consumer confidence?'* Emma answered that at the moment they are using their website and social media as their main tools. Engagement has increased by 300% so far this year. They will have stewards across site to ensure visitors travel safely around the site. They will only have a certain amount of tickets available each day, starting with a conservative number so that they can learn. They want visitors to feel comfortable and confident on site.

Steve asked Steve how they are diversifying. Steve said that they looked at a two-phase process to diversification. The shop was a reaction to an opportunity from demand around the village, so they started a delivery service for people isolating. This has slightly changed their strategic thinking for the long term, and they realise that they have a vast income in their laps by taking on the village shop. Their hyper local audience is now very important to them and could bring in over £300k a year. Their next step (after re-opening) is to look at digital diversification. They are looking at how education services and how they can move their lecture programme online.

Maurice answered the same question. They have a very big catchment area; they are looking to their domestic audience with the movies (within an hour drive). If they can make it work this year, then maybe it will be something they do every year as another annual event. An option is to open up the site as a drive-in option for other people wanting to hold events.

Steve asked the panel *'what is the one thing that the Government could do to boost the tourism industry?'*

Sophie answered that as hotels they really need the required information and measures from the Government so that they can plan effectively.

Penny agrees with Sophie, it is all about clear guidance.

Steve would like the same guidance but relating to large events such as weddings as they are so important to the business.

Maurice says that they need the confidence in people to do things, and the only way that can happen is with clear guidance. There have sometimes been conflicting messages in the past.

Emma says it is more about the clarity on what and who can open and when. They are a charity and independent museum, so would like to know how protecting gift aid would work.

### **Q&A WITH BOTH PANELS**

1. *Steve asked the expert panel if they have any tips or advice for the industry panel for any issues they may be facing at the moment.*

James suggested that there is a period of time between now and July/beyond where we can bridge the gap with communication and producing content so that followers feel part of the journey.

Xavier thinks that we should not panic about what we can do in the short term but do some forward thinking. Most products are aimed more at Spring/Summer, but we should plan Autumn/Winter tourism, things that are specific to those seasons.

2. *Janet has been answering questions online throughout the webinar, but Steve asked Janet if there was anything that she wanted to add.*

Janet wanted to give clarity over dates of re-opening. The 4<sup>th</sup> July is only a tentative date, it is very much under discussion for accommodation. A positive to look at is collaboration, who can you work with that you have not worked with before. An element of collaboration with people that would not normally work together would be very productive. Start sharing content far and wide.

Jon added that another key thing to add is, it isn't just about thinking about different audiences in location but also different generational audiences.

3. *Steve asked, 'have you heard things here that you can take away and apply?'*

Penny said that one of the great things to come out of this pandemic is the opportunity to listen to things that other people are doing, and to all come together to discuss ideas.

Nick added that the importance of collaboration, especially post Summer. Mid-September onwards will be a very difficult time for businesses, so collaborating cross-sector is very important. We need to move the dial forward from discussing to moving into productivity, so that the experiences catered for the new normal can be put into place.

4. *Steve asked Jo to discuss the working groups that have evolved from these events.*

Jo said that they are in discussions about business support moving forward and sub-sector support. These may be via webinars or another format. They are looking at liaising, bringing more partners together. A big request is to get in touch, follow Experience West Sussex as they do publish a lot of information that could help. They are looking at a at least year long programme of Covid support.

The video and additional resources can be found:

<https://www.experiencewestsussex.com/survive-revive-and-thrive/>