

Tourism Minister delivers opening speech to E-Tourism Africa Summit

The Tourism Minister, Derek Hanekom, delivered the opening speech at the E-Tourism Africa Summit 2014, which took place from 4-5 September 2014 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.



The Minister said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome to the 2014 E-Tourism Africa Summit.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning with the people who are at the very edge of leadership and innovation in digital travel technology. You are leading from the front in applying technology to market our destination and to create a better experience for our visitors.

As a former Minister of Science and Technology, I have particular appreciation for how rapidly and profoundly digital technology is changing the way in which the tourism industry approaches its business. It is probably the case for most industries, but in tourism, in particular, the application of technology is opening up a direct artery between markets, trade partners, and influencers in the consumer buyer cycle and the media. It is changing the way that tourists interact with destinations - and with each other.

These technology arteries present us with an extremely cost-effective route to market ourselves; enabling businesses to build personal relationships with their customers; spurring word-of-mouth validation and giving tourism product owners the means to set them apart in an increasingly competitive environment.

Successful entrepreneurs

The South African industry abounds with examples of successful entrepreneurs embracing the opportunities presented in this new world. Vamos Township Tours, operating from Langa, has built its competitiveness and its success through social media and digital review platforms. The owner, Siviwe Mbila (who is here with us today) has built his business from scratch

into a very successful tour operator enterprise, creating jobs and making truly meaningful and sustainable contributions to development in his community.

Ten years ago, neither Siviwe nor I could possibly have imagined that digital technology would so dramatically alter the way that the travel industry operates. Siviwe had no idea that such a powerful platform would have so profound an effect on his business at minimal cost, and I never thought I would be taking an Uber vehicle to the Cape Town International Convention Centre to prepare for the opening of the E-Tourism Africa Summit.

This rapid change also plays out on a global scale. Consider, for a moment, that international traveller arrivals took 62 years to surpass a billion - from a 1950 baseline of only 25 million to one billion in 2012. This represents compound annual growth of just over 4%. Now compare this to the growth of social media. By the end of 2004, Facebook had just 1 million users. Eight years later they have surpassed a billion users - a staggering compound annual growth rate of 137%.

We can also be certain that more rapid change and disruption of business models are to follow. The ongoing innovation that exists at the intersection of technology, travel and tourism will require all of us to constantly Rethink Travel - the theme of this summit. This is also a key part of the mandate of SA Tourism, our destination marketing organisation.

Dominant and valued online presence

South Africa has a very dominant and valued online presence on global travel platforms. I am very encouraged by the growth of online travel bookings to South Africa through SA Tourism's online travel agency partners. In 2011, we had just over 150,000 international passengers booking through these partners' platforms. Just two years later, in 2013, this number had grown by 87% to reach 285,000 international passengers. These results are no coincidence. They are possible as a result of SA Tourism and industry's presence on various partner platforms like TripAdvisor, partner online-travel agencies like Expedia, and so on.

SA Tourism has taken various initiatives to adapt our marketing efforts to respond to the opportunities presented by this changing marketing landscape. For example: The #MeetSouthAfrica campaign recently invited 14 (nine international and five local) bloggers to come and Meet South Africa, and share their perspectives via various social media platforms. This campaign, now in its second year, has proved an ideal, authentic, first-hand lens through which these online influencers have been able to take the story of Meeting South Africa to their audiences.

This video clip demonstrates this ...

The evidence suggests what we all know in this room, that meeting South Africa is one of the most remarkable travel stories

to tell.

Digital marketing continues to evolve at lightning speed and our commitment is to remain on the cusp of this curve.

I encourage you to continue to rethink travel - in order to build your businesses, to enhance our destination's offering and to meet the demands of increasingly tech-savvy international and domestic travellers.

Challenge

I also want to challenge you all today - in particular product owners and attraction managers - to further create an enabling environment that allows our visitors to share their travel memories. Let us share our bandwidth (by that I mean free Wi-Fi in laypersons terms) and broaden the marketing platform. We have succeeded in getting tourists to visit us. Now let us enable them to share their unique experiences with friends. They take pictures and video clips at world heritage sites, national park watering holes, inner-city precincts, on the pavements outside hotels and at iconic landscapes. And, of course, the ever-popular "selfie" has increased this need to share experiences.

These pictures are what sell the destination. They are real and credible; unmediated communication. And modern-day tourists want to share these pictures instantaneously - with family and friends, online on peer-to-peer websites like TripAdvisor, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, and via Twitter. But because of exorbitant data-roaming costs on mobile networks, sharing by international visitors can become very expensive. In other words, an inhibiting cost burden is imposed on our most important brand ambassadors and marketers, namely ordinary tourists who want to share our story with potential visitors. I therefore challenge product owners and managers of tourist attractions to free up broadband - we are living in a new world and we cannot be penny wise pound foolish. This is part of keeping our competitive edge as we creatively rethink travel.

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