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Social  
Works

The Philippine  
Department of Tourism  
Harnessing a  
population to  
grow tourism

Agency: BBDO Guerrero

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## Summary

The number of tourists to the Philippines had flat lined at below four million, one of the worst performances in the region. This case study describes how a 2012 campaign was developed to increase tourism to the Philippines and make the country and the campaign the most talked about, shared and searched-for in Southeast Asia. The case outlines how a simple idea and creative expression were employed to encourage Filipinos worldwide to create and share their own versions of the campaign on social media, with these expressions later used to create paid-for executions in mass media channels.

The campaign became the No.1 global trend on Twitter just two days after launch. Google searches for the Philippines increased by 231% and the country's tourist volumes hit an all-time high of 4.3 million, outgrowing leading rival market, Malaysia, despite a smaller marketing budget.

This case is part of the #IPASocialWorks initiative, which brings together the IPA, The Marketing Society and MRS, with sponsorship from Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, to identify good practice in social media effectiveness and measurement.

## Market Context

The Philippines is a country with a lot to offer tourists. But it attracts less than four million annual visitors, a fraction of the number of its Southeast Asian neighbours. By comparison, in 2011 Malaysia welcomed 25 million visitors, Thailand 19 million and even Vietnam's 6 million.

Ramon Jimenez Jr, the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) Secretary, cited the country's lack of image as its key problem: "Its image is zero, which is bad for tourism."

Most people only knew the Philippines from what they saw on the news – poverty, pollution, corruption and countless typhoons. And with no additional investment in tourism marketing, things were only getting worse.

So the DoT embarked on a campaign to create a new image for the country, not just to boost tourism revenue but to enhance national pride as well.

Several challenges emerged immediately:

- How could we position the Philippines in a fresh, differentiated way? With multi-million dollars' worth of investment, Malaysia and Thailand had, over many years, established strong identities as the tropical paradises of Asia. What would make people want to choose the Philippines instead?
- How could we achieve cut-through and impact with a fraction of our competitors' budgets? As a benchmark, Malaysia spends approximately \$80m a year on marketing its renowned and effective 'Malaysia. Truly Asia' campaign. We had just \$10m to spend. We needed a way to create compelling tourism 'content' that could encourage word of mouth and make our limited budget work harder.

# Business and Marketing Objectives

Given this context, we set the following objectives:

- Make the Philippines and the campaign the most talked about, shared and searched-for tourism campaign in Southeast Asia.
- Help the Philippines increase visitors by 7%, break the four million tourist mark for the first time, and outperform our strongest competitor and its effective campaign, 'Malaysia. Truly Asia'.

## Channel Choice

Typically, a tourism office 'manufactures' a campaign and then takes it directly to foreign countries in the form of neatly edited TV advertising, well-packaged online content, and tightly-written tourism brochures and publications.

We believed this model omitted a critical audience – the Filipino people.

We decided to turn this approach on its head and make the Filipino people the primary audience, ambassadors of the Philippines and the owners of the tourism campaign.

Our Filipino people were our most powerful asset in several respects:

- It is our people, with their genuine warmth, welcome, good humour and sense of fun that make a visit to the Philippines so memorable. So why not make this national campaign their campaign?
- With over 10 million Filipinos working overseas, we also had an effective way to reach millions of potential tourists all over the world.
- The social media power of Filipinos is staggering. Considered by The Wall Street Journal as 'the social networking capital of the world', the Philippines has almost 30 million Filipinos active on Facebook, and is the sixth largest country represented on Twitter. National usage of online photo sharing is also 88%, versus a global average of 68%.

If we could excite our own people about the campaign and activate their energies on social media – a key channel for travel and tourism awareness – we knew we could get enough new visitors talking about, searching online for and, ultimately, visiting our country. And we would not have to rely so much on expensive, paid advertising media.

# Creative Strategy

The received wisdom about tourism campaigns is that you need to feature your country's glamorous location by employing images of glorious beaches, rainforest walks, authentic marketplaces or modern skyscrapers. Preferably, you should characterise these places by employing adjectives such as 'amazing', 'incredible' or 'truly' (as in 'Truly Asia').

We knew we could not achieve a break by adopting a similar approach, so we decided to use personality to differentiate ourselves. Yes, the Philippines has breathtaking views, natural wonders and exciting destinations that make the country interesting, but ultimately it is the Filipino people that make the country a fun place to visit.

Thus, we adopted the campaign line and the idea: 'It's more fun in the Philippines.'

This was a strikingly simple, down-to-earth, human and galvanising claim that could unlock and trigger great support and participation from Filipinos.

But it wasn't enough to say that it was more fun in the Philippines. We needed a campaign that demonstrated this. For the launch, we came up with three print ads (actually PowerPoint slides) to share the essence of the idea with media and opinion leaders such as famous bloggers and local personalities. The print ads juxtaposed breathtaking images of the Philippines with a headline highlighting a mundane activity that was more fun in the Philippines.



Our campaign approach was so simple and playful that people could easily make their own versions of the ads. And that's exactly what happened. Within hours, online memes appeared as people picked up the theme and tone of the campaign. This created an explosion of free content that would have cost us millions to create and disseminate.

Fig 1: Examples of the original 'It's more fun' campaign creative.





Fig 2: Examples of consumer-created versions of the campaign.

Just two days after the media launch, the campaign became the No.1 global trend on Twitter and the open source nature of the template enabled the campaign line to enter the vernacular, allowing everyone to express their own pride in the fun-loving outlook of the Philippines.

By making it easy for Filipinos to grasp the campaign and take part in it, we sparked off the creation of over 63,900 memes through inspired user-created 'ad-maker' sites, and iPhone, Android and Windows apps.

Individual memes covered the entire spectrum of subject areas in the tourism promotion master plan. In effect, the DoT had turned 95 million Filipinos into a tourism sales force, sending the message spinning out digitally across the world. These crowd-sourced ideas formed the basis of later promotional posters, print ads and even a global TV commercial in paid for media. TV commercials aired over international channels such as CNN, while print and outdoor ads ran on different sites and publications in various markets.

Online, our Facebook page rallied Filipinos to continue promoting the country, while a mobile app and website educated travellers on what they could experience in the Philippines. Altogether, every piece of communications served to introduce the world to Philippine fun.

# Communication Metrics

The campaign met its objectives of making the Philippines and the campaign the most talked about, shared and searched-for tourism marketing in the region.

It triggered an unprecedented explosion of user-generated content and participation, which was measured by collating data from Google, Instagram, Socialmention and Facebook.

Highlights included:

- Over 63,900 user-created memes.
  - 143,057 Instagram photos for #ItsMoreFunInThePhilippines (35 times more than competitors).
  - Over 150 user-generated Facebook pages.
  - The campaign line was mentioned once every minute on social media – six times more frequently than Malaysia's or Thailand's slogans.
  - The volume of social mentions of 'vacation Philippines' was four times greater than that for Malaysia and nine times more than Thailand.
- Online searches increased massively:
- There were over 89 million Google hits for the Philippines in 2012, versus 38 million in 2011 (an increase of 234%).
  - Google searches for 'fun Philippines' increased by 255% versus 2011.
  - The Philippines was the only country in Southeast Asia that achieved an increase in vacation-related searches (see below).

Search Term	2011 Ave Search Interest	2012 Ave Search Interest	% change
"Vacation Philippines"	36.40	38.85	7%
"Vacation Thailand"	62.15	62.04	0%
"Vacation Malaysia"	30.44	29.71	-2%
"Vacation Indonesia"	12.65	12.48	-1%
"Vacation Singapore"	33.54	31.17	-7%

Fig 3: Volume of vacation-related searches in the region. (Source: Google)

Several brands also adopted the campaign's look and spirit, including the airline, Seair, fast-food chain, Jollibee and retailer Watsons.



# Results

Amongst Filipinos, campaign research showed high scores for likeability (92%), believability (87%), empathy (86%) and uniqueness (82%) (source: Ipsos Post-Launch Survey, 2012).

The President of the Philippines himself lauded the campaign during his State of The Nation Address when he said:

“Secretary Mon Jimenez has been at his post for less than a year, but we are already reaping the fruits of the reforms we have laid down. So, when it comes to tourism, we are confident in saying, ‘It’s really more fun – to have Secretary Mon Jimenez with us.’”

The campaign also contributed to an increase in domestic tourism, with the DoT surpassing its target in this respect (source: Manila Bulletin).

Amongst global consumers, ad recall scores for the Philippines posted the highest growth in the region, moving up four ranks since 2010 (source: CNN Consumer connect survey for travel and tourism, 2012).

Tourist visitors to the Philippines grew from 3.92 million in 2011 to 4.27 million in 2012, an increase of 9% and well above our target (source: Philippine DoT).

A comparison with Malaysia – which we used as a benchmark because of the country’s long-standing success in this area – underlines the effectiveness of our ‘It’s More Fun’ campaign.

Despite a smaller marketing budget, the Philippines campaign brought in more incremental visitors in 2012 (versus 2011), at a faster annual growth rate and with a lower investment per incremental visitor achieved. The incremental revenue generated from tourism receipts was also higher for the Philippines than for Malaysia.

In addition, the Philippines continued to experience tourism growth even after Typhoon Haiyan hit several parts of the country in November 2013 – to global coverage.

Despite the typhoon, Philippine tourist visitors for November and December were up over 2% year on year, and the 2013 tourist visitor total ended 9.56% higher than in 2012 (4,681,307 versus 4,272,811) (Source: Dept of Tourism Philippines –Head of Tourism Statistics).

# Key learnings

Tourism really is the people’s business. The Philippine Department of Tourism took this to heart, understanding that, with the right tools at their disposal, millions of Filipinos could be encouraged to use their national pride as a driving force for the country’s tourism industry.

Although the ‘It’s more fun’ campaign had been aiming to achieve a viral effect from the outset, this was an ambition rather than a core part of the original channel strategy. The viral spread of the campaign came as a result of its being based on a simple but galvanising truth – it really is more fun in the Philippines. All Filipinos recognised this and were happy to endorse and spread the message.

By putting a simple and enjoyable idea at the heart of our communications, we opened ourselves up to mass participation – allowing for a myriad of interpretations of the subject of ‘fun’ that built on Filipinos’ love of content sharing and social media.

So while the implementation of the strategy could be replicated elsewhere, the campaign’s nature and content were particularly pertinent to the Filipino audience.

This is ultimately the real secret to the campaign’s success: it found an appealing truth for its audience but it never forgot that the real client was the Filipino people.



# The Steering Group

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## More information

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