

Amir Eylon (00:01):

We started getting calls after a couple months from destinations that we know we'd never worked with before, and saying, you know, can you help? But we're being asked the questions. You're saying business is bad, you're saying it. What is it compared to? So, we understand you have nothing or next to nothing right now, but what was something, what was the volume? What was the stand? What was, you know, these types of things. And a lot of DMO didn't even have those basic answers.

Bob Gilbert (00:28):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales. A podcast series that explores with traveling tourism leaders, their take on key issues of the day. My name is Bob Gilbert, General manager for the tourism and Destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander, who are bringing you this podcast series. I've had the privilege to have worked with iconic global brands, including Disney Choice Hotels, Yosemite and Shenandoah National Parks, Kennedy Space Center, Visitor Center, and Best Western International. Plus, served on the boards of the US Travel Association National Tour Association, and an elected commissioner for Visit California. Looking forward, I will be chatting with those that are helping shape the travel and tourism industry, all with unique tales to share that I know you will find both interesting and educational. So, without further ado, let's get started. Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales. Today's guest needs very little introduction as he is one of the most popular people and requested speakers in travel and tourism. Amir, President and CEO for Longwoods International. Prior to Longwoods, Amir served as VP of Partner Engagement with Brand usa, joining them from the Ohio Office of Tourism. He serves on the boards of both destinations, International and the US Travel Association. So, Amir, I've touched on the highlights, but please share your journey in traveling, tourism with our audience.

Amir Eylon (02:07):

Oh, wow. And what a journey It's been <laugh>, first of all, uh, honored to be here. Thanks for having me on, Bob. Um, you know, I think, uh, my journey was one that I kind of accidentally fell into the industry and quickly fell in love with it. Uh, my, I was blessing that my, uh, parents when I was little, believed in, uh, taking my sister and I out of school and taking us along wherever their travels took them. My father, um, was an engineer and, uh, he presented a lot of conferences all over the country and all over the world. Uh, they always took us along their journey. So that's where I kind of caught the travel bug. And then, uh, while I was in school, I needed a job for evenings and weekends and whatnot, and, uh, found myself working at a hotel by the local airport, a beman and a, uh, shuttle van driver and banquet setup guy. And next thing I do was be I be behind the front desk and night audit. And by the time I graduated, I decided that my, uh, my, my career, future career in law was not the direction that I wanted to check out this great tourism and hospitality industry that I was falling in love with. And, uh, yeah, one thing led to another and I eventually, I started in hotels, did just in in rental cars, found myself back in hotels. And then destination marketing was something that I, uh, had come across in, in my hotel work and really fell in love with that. And it led me up to, uh, Tourism Ohio and being state tourism director was one of the greatest honors of having my professional career. And then my country came calling, so to speak, and it was an honor to be part of the, uh, team setting up and establishing Brand usa. And had several, uh, amazing years there as, uh, the, uh, vice President of Partner Engagement building and developing the team that helped bring in all the partner contributions and through all of our cooperative marketing programs, etcetera. So, uh, that was an amazing challenge and, and just fun, fun part of the journey. And then, uh, I got the offer I couldn't refuse about seven and a half years ago to, uh, join the team and help run one of the most incredible brands in market research in the travel and tourism industry here at Longwood International. And I've been all smiles ever since.

Bob Gilbert (04:13):

<laugh> quite the, uh, quite the journey. Indeed. So, share with us if there is anybody out there that doesn't know what Longwood's International is and what it, uh, what it does. Uh, could you, could you touch on what the key programs are and, and who it impacts? Sure. A customer standpoint? Yeah. Yeah,

Amir Eylon (04:33):

Sure thing. So without the sales pitch, um, long,

Bob Gilbert (04:36):

Right.

Amir Eylon (04:36):

Quick elevator story is that Longwood's International is a market research consultancy that specializes in the travel and tourism industry. We've been around for about little over almost 44 years now. Majority of our work involves destination marketing organizations. We work with over 175 different destinations, large and small, doing work in about a dozen countries. But most of our clients all are based in North America. You know, we specialize in things like visitor research. We have a program called Travel usa, which is the largest and longest ongoing study of traveling US households. So we do a lot of work with visitor profiles and so forth from Travel usa. We do a lot of image research for destinations that are looking to rebrand or check the image positioning or their brand strength versus their competitive sets. We do a lot of advertising effectiveness research. We're very famous for the methodologies that we've pioneered in advertising effectiveness research, measuring the incremental impacts of, uh, destination marketing campaigns. And course, over the last several years, we've become very known for our sentiment research. First of all, the pioneering work we did in resident sentiment research towards, uh, resident sentiment towards tourism. And of course that started during the beginning of the pandemic and continues today, uh, traveler sentiment research, looking, uh, looking forward at what travelers are thinking and doing and, and reaction to, uh, what's going on in our world these days.

Bob Gilbert (05:59):

Right? So, let me paint this picture. It is spring of 2020 and, um, a disruptor hits the scene, the pandemic hits. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, dmo, another travel brands drastically cut headcount, and many disproportionately, perhaps in the research area, and I don't know why they were the first to, to be furloughed or, or let go, but it, it happened. Budgets were also cut to dramatically or zero in some cases. So the travel and tourism world went to hell in the hand basket. What impact did that have on your business?

Amir Eylon (06:41):

Well, um, obviously it was a tremendous crisis in all sectors of our industry. Ours included, and as, as a supplier to the, as a supplier who's 97% of the clientele comes from travel and tourists. And a great majority of that from destination marketing organizations funded by launching taxes, uh, primarily that suddenly weren't generated, uh, for our bottom line, had a, had a tremendous impact. But, you know, we, we kind of took a different approach through this. Uh, it was actually, I tell the story that it was around February 27th, 2020, and I was actually, um, speaking gig at the, uh, Wyoming office of Tourism's, uh, Governor's conference on tourism. And I was doing a presentation on residence sentiment towards tourism. And I usually, you know, turn my phone off or take it outta my pocket and put it in my briefcase when I speak. And somehow I'd forgotten it in my pocket.

Amir Eylon (07:33):

And, uh, thankfully it was on it, it was muted, but, uh, it was still in my pocket and it just kept vibrating. Like people were trying to call me and text me constantly during my presentation. So, you know, at that point, one thinks to themselves, uh, okay, somebody died, or the office is on fire, right? So I, as soon as I got off stage, I, I quickly went aside and grabbed my phone and looked at it, and it was my team and others communicating with me that the CDC had just uttered the words community spread when it came to cope. And, uh, you know, we, we knew some storm was coming, but we didn't know how big. And, and of course, the same community spread was kind of the game changer. And fortunately, just a couple days later, we were gathering in Columbus, Ohio and our headquarters, all our team members from Canada and across the us and they were all coming in for our annual planning retreat.

Amir Eylon (08:19):

And as I was heading to back to Denver to the airport to fly home the next day, I kind of reworked the agenda and sent a note to the team and then basically said, Okay, the first couple hours we're gonna redo the agenda and just talk about covid. And how bad do we think this is gonna be a, you know, a disrupted our industry, uh, how long it's gonna last. You know, none of us were, you know, are infectious disease experts or medical, right? So question number one, you know, how, how bad we think it's gonna be, how long is it gonna last as a disruptor? And, uh, question number two is what tools are gonna be most useful for the industry as kind of guideposts or, or tools to navigate through, through this? And number three, um, they don't exist. Can we help? And so think about that for the next, over the next day and come prepared to discuss.

Amir Eylon (09:08):

So a couple days later, walk into the conference room where we're meeting and shut the door. And I just said, Okay, let's just do this. We're have a disruption coming and let's pretend we are no longer in the business of selling research. And we may not be here, here in the coming ones, not knowing what's gonna happen, but we're not in the business of selling research. We're in the business of helping and we're gonna be helpers. And how can we help the industry? And I tell you what, Bob, you know, they always say, Hire people that are smarter than you. And I'm blessed to be surrounded by just a wonderful, amazing team of superstars. And, and they had come up within literally that two hour session we had, they had whiteboarded the entire, you know, American what became the American travel sentiment, uh, tracker, which is, you know, started off as focused on covid.

Amir Eylon (09:55):

Now it's moved on to many other issues as well. But, but that, that was the first one. And a week later we launched the first survey and we did it as a free service. It still is to the entire industry. And it was just probably one of the proudest moments I've had for my team. Just them, uh, being able to produce that. So, so that's what we did to kind of keep us busy and focused and being there to help for the industry. And, uh, yeah, you know, like everybody else, we had some lean months and we had to make, uh, some difficult decisions. Thankfully we were able to keep our team in place and, you know, just, just manage things carefully. But by mid to late summer, things started opening up again for us. And there, and, and, uh, so we, we, we survived like so many others and, and been resilient, but, uh,

Bob Gilbert (10:33):

Right. And I think that what that demonstrates is not necessarily pivoting, perhaps more adapting to what is happening. And at the end of the day, most, if not all destinations have to be data driven. Mm-

hmm. <affirmative>. And so if they are for, as a result of covid of the pandemic, if they're lean in research, then they would turn to the experts to assist them in creating and providing that data that's going to be actionable.

Amir Eylon (11:05):

Well, you know, you brought up an interesting point. That's one of the things that I think was kind of eye opening to our team was we started getting calls after a couple months from destinations that we, you know, we'd never worked with before and saying, you know, can you help? But we're being asked the questions of, you're saying business is bad, you're saying it fell, you know, the bottom is fallen out. What does it compare to? Do we understand you have nothing or next to nothing right now, but what was something, what was the volume? What was the spend? What was, you know, these types of things. And a lot of DMO didn't even have those basic answers to those questions. So silver lining is, it really drove home the point that those that didn't have data, they need to get their hands around just the basics.

Bob Gilbert (11:50):

So that triggers two questions for me. The, the first one, So a typical approach from, you know, from a marketing perspective, is built on five key phases, discovery, analysis, synthesis, creation, create the programs, the rollout, implementation and measurement. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, where does Longwoods fit in? If you agree, you know, with that approach, um, where does Longwoods fit into that, uh, process?

Amir Eylon (12:19):

Well, it depends on the product and services, but we're, we are at the beginning, the middle and the end. <laugh>, you know, there, there's, uh, as a former destination marketer, any former teammates of mine that are listening in, we'll, we'll kind of cringe your chuckle when I say my old mantra of if we can't measure it, we shouldn't do it. Then the other one of which is, you know, all great marketing is built on a solid foundation of research, 95% research, 5% gut. Cuz you know, sometimes that good gut can be a difference between good and great. Yeah. But, but you have some that creative energy in there. Um, but, but really, you know, both of those are true. And, and, uh, you know, it depends on what you're trying to accomplish. Obviously, if you're looking to begin a creative process, develop new marketing campaigns and so forth, uh, I use destinations as an example.

Amir Eylon (13:03):

Cause we work primarily with destinations, but you know, don't you, And before you look at your brand or your creative process, don't you want to check your image or perception in the eyes of those target markets that you're trying to reach those target audiences versus between you and your competitive set. So there's some foundational research that needs to be done there. Or even just basic visitor research, knowing who's coming and from where and how they engage with your destination and how they plan their travels and, uh, satisfaction with their experiences. Uh, so you can address some of that in messaging and targeting. Then of course, during the creative process, you, you may find yourself wanting to do pulse checks and take, do focus groups, uh, if you're evaluating concepts and strategies there. And then of course, uh, yeah, once the campaign's, uh, run or running, uh, you wanna make sure you evaluate.

Amir Eylon (13:53):

Of course, so many destination organizations are publicly funded, whether it's through LO tax or general revenues or other, some other funding mechanism. You know, you, you want to be a good steward of the public's trust and be able to demonstrate that for every public dollar invested in that program, how many new public dollars were generated. Right. And show that you're part of that is Jack, my friend Jack Johnson from Destinations International to say you're part of the shared community value that you're bringing in some of those tax essential tax revenues that are helpful to pay for police and fire and education and healthcare and those other essential services that we as residents, uh, expect from our community. So, so yeah. You know, research should be engaged in, in every phase there's opportunity to measure, not just the end evaluation.

Bob Gilbert ([14:33](#)):

Right. And my second question Yeah. Actually just touched on it, and that is community shared values mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so the understanding and alignment with local residents.

Amir Eylon ([14:43](#)):

Yes.

Bob Gilbert ([14:44](#)):

So how can DMO better engage with their communities? Because there was, there was a degree of resentment, if you will, to certain destinations that were not in major cities, but in more rural areas that, uh, were in high demand because folks in big cities wanted to get out and away from the maning crowd and went into those smaller, pristine special places. And, you know, the res the local residents didn't want them because they certainly left a trace <laugh> as opposed to do not leave a trace. So, but how can, I guess the bigger question is how, how can destinations better engage with their communities?

Amir Eylon ([15:24](#)):

Well, you know what, it, it's interesting. Um, you know, destination marketing organizations for many years were taking an outward look from their community, right? Their role was to bring visitors in their role wasn't to necessarily engage with the community. Their role wasn't necessarily to educate res, you know, they weren't marketing to residents, they were marketing to visitors. So they kind of saw themselves as this outward focus tip of the economic development sphere. Right? And, uh, our good friend Mar Ghast always, you know, pointed out years ago, it all begins with a visit. So, so, you know, so we have that, but, but, um, as these issues of sustainability over tourism, all the, and other issues, and yeah, a lot of it did start in rural communities, but it also happened in, in, it started happening in big cities too. Um, you know, we, we got curious in about six years ago, kind of did a first national benchmark of resident sentiment towards tourism.

Amir Eylon ([16:16](#)):

We look at a whole bunch of issues of tourism, how residents generally viewed tourism as it relates not just to those issues, but also economic development, sharing economy, a whole bunch of other aspects of community life, quality of life, et cetera. Uh, there, and, and what we saw was generally speaking, your residents, you know, unless you live in an area with a very specific issue that American residents are generally very favorable towards tourism, and they generally understand that it is mostly beneficial from terms of economic development and that done right, it can be managed sustainably and well and so forth. What we saw were two very telling things that we've seen this in the annual updates of the

study that we've done every year. And now of course we do it for individual destinations. And we see that, and we see similar patterns in so many destinations, is that two things rise up consistently.

Amir Eylon (17:12):

Number one is that many residents feel that they don't have a voice, that the first time they hear about a new development when it comes to tourism, tourism related, um, is the first, is when they read about it in the newspaper or hear it in the local news. And so they're frustrated by that. And then the second part of it is many of them just don't know enough about the topic to offer an opinion. And so you have a very heavy group of people that are just kind of neutral or don't know. And those people, they can be your biggest allies or they can heartbeat, they can turn and be your enemies. And so it became very clear that destination marketing organizations need, you know, you know, your average DMO wears so many hats and their plates are so full, but yet they have to add this additional hat of community engagement and involvement.

Amir Eylon (17:58):

So most destination organizations now need to figure out whose role was that to engage within the community, or how do they divide that up amongst themselves, whether it's the staff and combination of volunteer board leadership or whatnot and engage. And it's not enough to, you know, traditionally they, you know, if you were a DMO traditionally, you know, you report periodically to city council or county commission or whatever element of government that holds your purse strings and, you know, provide your reports and report outs and so forth, and those votes mattered. And then maybe during national travel and tourism week, every year you did an open house and put out your press release of what tourism meets your community, and, and you kind of filed away until the next year. Right? And, but now it's important that not only are you at the city council meetings, but you gotta fish for the fish gather in your community.

Amir Eylon (18:43):

Are you who's sitting at the school board meeting or when there's issues being discussed about police and fire or, or healthcare or, um, you know, who's, who's going to where the church groups are meeting it? Um, or neighborhood association and so forth. So there needs to be a lot of education, storytelling. That being said, there's a silver lining from the pandemic because pandemic hits and the deal with those worlds on these stops, Well, they started turning their marketing inward, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, uh, resources for it became a great community resource where folks can go get, carry out food, where they can, uh, what outdoor activities that are deemed more safe, uh, for people engage in. Or what are the latest rules of engagement within the community. Uh, you know, DMO websites became fabulous tools for communicating these things. So all of a sudden a lot of residents that weren't aware of this thing called a destination marketing organization, suddenly saw this thing come to life. And, and, and, and they were, and it was a great opportunity for these destination organizations to build connections with their communities. So I think we're gone a couple steps forward since the pandemic with this, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

Bob Gilbert (19:52):

So you carry out resident sentiment for destinations?

Amir Eylon (19:58):

Yep. Yep. So, and partnership with Destinations International, actually, uh, next month is their advocacy summit will be presenting the highlights of our national study that we do every year on US, and now also Canadian resident sentiment towards tourism. And then that methodology can actually also be applied to local, regional, and even in state destination marketing organizations. So we do work for a number of destinations and been doing more and more every year, uh, since, since we first rolled out this, uh, this opportunity several years ago. Um, especially since the pandemic, uh, right. We, we do a lot of work, uh, doing individual resident sentiment studies for, for destinations now.

Bob Gilbert (20:35):

So as we look at the DMO world is there, and you have both state travel offices as well as local mm-hmm. <affirmative>, dmo, CVBs, et cetera, as clients, is there a difference between the kinds of information that a state travel office is looking for versus a local smaller DMO or CVB?

Amir Eylon (20:58):

Well, the primary difference is that the locals tend to have more localized issues, right? For a local dmo, they may ask us to look into, uh, you know, they may have a convention center issue or something like that, or a waterfront development issue that they want, you know, to have gauged and, and, and or project that they want to have gauge. So very specific where state tends to be a little bit broader, sticks more specifically to the categories. But, uh, again, it also depends on where they are in the country and the region and so forth. Uh, destinations we work with in the Mountain West region, for example, tend to be very heavily focused on sustainability and those types of questions, uh, sustainable travel and so forth. Uh, so the environment. So, so we tend to ask more questions for them in those categories and things like that, versus a more urban or beach destination. So, uh, but, but probably 80% of what they're all seeking are very, very similar. And, and just that other 20% goes, goes to whatever the local regional factors happen.

Bob Gilbert (22:01):

Yep. And, and I would imagine that some of the states are looking for regional breakdowns as well, That they can share as tools for their, uh, for their various regions. Again, depending upon the size of, of their geography.

Amir Eylon (22:15):

Sure.

New Speaker (22:16):

Their footprint.

Amir Eylon (22:16):

Of course.

Bob Gilbert (22:17):

Let's talk, let's touch a little bit on economic development. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, it's interesting to understand the relationship, the synergy between economic development and their partners on the tourism side. You know, not that long ago, Orlando merged their economic development and tourism

efforts under one umbrella, which may be a precursor of what's to come, but I don't know, how does travel marketing contribute to the broader economic development goals?

Amir Eylon (22:50):

Well, um, we pioneered this research. We thought we, we nicknamed the halo effect of destination marketing on eco economic development beyond tourism. We were fortunate for many, many years to do the image and marketing evaluation research for folks at Travel Michigan, the Pure Michigan campaign. And, uh,

Bob Gilbert (23:08):

Oh, Dave Lorenz.

Amir Eylon (23:10):

Uh, yeah, Dave Lorenz currently, uh, but George Zimmerman, uh,

Bob Gilbert (23:13):

Oh, George the right, of course,

Amir Eylon (23:15):

Poor Dave. Um, and so about six months before I joined Longwoods International, uh, George Zimmerman had retired, uh, about a year prior from, from Travel Michigan. And as he said, he likes to say he failed miserably at retirement, joined our Longwoods team in a consultant role. And, and when he, he came to the table and he said, uh, said something interesting. He said, Look, it's no secret for those of us in destination marketing that people like to live and work in a place they like to play. Right? But there's never really been any definitive research around that notion. And he said, So, you know, he said, Let's look, I'd like to explore something that we learned from our pure Michigan campaign development. And as you know, pure Michigan is arguably one of the most successful, uh, branding efforts, uh, and destination marketing campaigns that mm-hmm.

Amir Eylon (24:04):

<affirmative> that existed in modern times. And so he started sharing these examples of these anecdotal reports. They started getting after a couple years after the, within a couple years of, of the Pure Michigan campaign going national. And, uh, they noticed that second home sales were going up around the lakes. And it wasn't from the usual destinations around the Midwest where people were buying second homes around Michigan's Lakes. It was folks from the East coast, like from New York and Philadelphia, et cetera. And they had a bunch of other anecdotal examples that I won't share with you for sake of time here, but they found out really curious, and they, they always thought there had to be a correlation. So we did some research. We, we picked eighth different destination, large and small, stayed some cities that we were doing image and advertising effectiveness research for at the time.

Amir Eylon (24:51):

And we added some more questions to their questionnaires and asked about those images, images, those destinations as a place to do business, a place to build a second home, a place to retire, a place to send my kid to college, a place to find a job. All these economic development factors beyond tourism that economic development agencies are always busy chasing after. And we found that, uh, the pattern,



the results came in and the pattern were exact, it didn't matter if it was large or small destination, big marketing budget, small marketing budget. The fact that the matter was that in every single case, and we've replicated this research hundreds of times over the past, uh, seven or eight years, and pretty much every single case, if somebody is aware of the destination's marketing campaign versus unaware, their image of that destination as a place to engage in those types of economic development activities beyond tourism is up over those who are unaware of the marketing campaign.

Amir Eylon (25:47):

And the same thing, we also asked folks, you know, how they visited the destination in the last couple years. And of course, in every single case, those who had visited the destination, their images in place for those economic development factors is higher than those who not visited. So then we combined it to and said, Well, what if they saw the marketing and they visited? And that's where the sweet spot was. What we saw was a almost a triple digit exponential growth in the image of the destination lifted lift in the image of the destination from those who had seen the marketing and converted to visitation, versus those who had not seen not been, um, in there, which sends one clear message is that the destination marketing organization in many ways is actually the brand manager should be the brand manager for the destination. So we, we have done this, like I said, hundreds of times since, uh, for many destinations, and it's really a compelling story.

Bob Gilbert (26:37):

So I'm gonna get back to back to the future <laugh>. Okay. So following as we are, you know, understanding that we are hopefully in full recovery mode mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we're swimming in a sea of APA funds

Amir Eylon (26:52):

Mm-hmm.

Bob Gilbert (26:53):

<affirmative>, is there a trend in terms of how destinations are spending those funds? And are you involved in supporting any of these efforts?

Amir Eylon (27:03):

Yes. Uh, obviously a lot of our performance flowing into the destinations right now, and those dollars are being spent in a variety of ways. But, uh, many, many destinations are starting off with planning. And of course planning means there's usually a research component to that. We're engaged with several destinations and doing some of the foundational research for their planning purposes. Uh, a lot of sentiment research, uh, happening right now. Um, a lot of visitor research and a lot of image research going on right now for various clients of ours. At the same time, there's a lot of new campaign development, marketing campaign development happening to help spur this recovery along. And, and again, that requires some, some foundational research. And of course, there are these, you know, to demonstrate that they've been good stewards at this public's trust with the funds that they've received. Um, a lot of destinations obviously want to demonstrate the accountability for that. So we're now starting, we are going to the field right now with a lot of roi, advertising effectiveness, uh, studies to gauge the incremental, uh, benefits of, of, of these marketing campaigns. So, so, uh, yeah, uh, <laugh> it, it definitely, uh, research is popping up left and right in the execution plans for these funds that destinations have been receiving.

Bob Gilbert (28:20):

So we're always in a changing world. I guess that's the constant constantness change. <laugh>, do you have a point of view on geolocation, you know, with, with the changes with Apple and others that are in a kind of privacy mode for travelers, for consumers in general? And, you know, there are some distinct points of view on the value today versus yesterday mm-hmm. <affirmative> on geolocation providers and the data that is provided. Do you have a point of view or, Um,

Amir Eylon (28:51):

Well, you know, I, I'm working with a, uh, survey research company here, so I am not the foremost authority on geolocation, right? So let me qualify what I'm about say with that. So the, the, I think geolocation data is actually a very valuable resource. One of the things that, as, as you know, and, and, and again, Bob, you know, we talked about my bio, I'm not a, I, you know, I, I didn't come up through the industry as a professional researcher. I'm a marketing guy who knows how to use the research. I, right? I employ a number of great researchers, not a marketing guy, knows how to use the research. And, and, and as a marketing guy who knows how to use the research, for me, it's always been important to triangulate and triangulation is a very important thing that I don't think we talk about enough in our industry.

Amir Eylon (29:35):

And that, that's one of my missions and one of my mantras right now, which is survey research shows you provides a wonderful piece of the puzzle for the road ahead and where you've been, where you are and where you're going, Geolocation data provides a wonderful piece of that puzzle. There's big data analytics that provides, or credit card data, et cetera. They all provide great components of that puzzle, but you have to overlay this data together to get a holistic picture, right? You know, the survey data, Yes. We, you know, we have our strengths and weaknesses. Geolocation has the strengths and weaknesses. Um, you know, for geolocation, for example, does a wonderful job of showing you how the visitor moves through the destination, right? You see where they're going from point to point and through, but it doesn't necessarily give you the context of the why, right?

Amir Eylon (30:22):

Well, survey data does provide that, right? Cause we can ask them why. Yep. But it also shows engagement within the community, but in a different way. When you put survey data together with your location data together with other analytics, that's a great thing. You, you made a comment earlier that, you know, when the pandemic hit, a lot of the research positions in organizations were some of the first to be eliminated or, or downsized, uh, as people had to, had to make some quick budget decisions. And it's interesting, uh, I was on a panel a couple years ago with some other CEOs and heads of various research and data houses, and somebody asked me, one of the moderator asked me, you know, what, what would be my, my wish if I had a magic wand? And I said, My, my wish in my magic wand would be that every destination marketing organization employ at least a data analyst, if not a researcher, you know, at least, at least some type A data analyst and their teams.

Amir Eylon (31:14):

Because never has there been so much data out there available to folks, right? And never has there been so many tools available for folks. But it's interesting because research and analytics have been around for a long, long time. But you know, I, I've been around a long, long time. So let me date myself here and say, you know, when the 800 numbers became a thing, like in the right, the eighties, right? We

all, as destination marketers, we all opened up call center. We were quick to get an 800 number and open up a call center. Then this thing, the internet came along in the nineties, right? So we all put up websites and hired staff members to manage our websites. And then this social media thing came around, you know, toward the end of the nineties from two thousands and early two thousands. And, and we all hired staff to manage that and develop that.

Bob Gilbert (31:58):

And now we're hiring more staff, you know, as, as more chances to come open, content developers, etcetera. So every, all these channels we keep there. But on the evaluation part, on the metrics part, we've been looking at research for years, but yet most DMO don't even have a simple data analyst to help interpret and help the organization tell its story. And of course, as a provider of research, we try to tell that story and bring the data that we put forth to life for our clients and their reports and, and their deliveries. But we're not in the room 24 7. We're not in their organization daily, right? So there needs to be that voice from within also. And, and that, that's, uh, that's my aspirational, uh, wish for, for destination moving forward.

Bob Gilbert (32:35):

So, and this is gonna end with this question. You are very well traveled. You partner with di you know, you're on the board of US Travel Association, you know, you have your finger on the pulse. So what trends do you see and what things are happening to disrupt dmo? What actions should they be taking now to stay ahead of the curve?

Amir Eylon (32:58):

Well, that's a great question. Uh, actually, uh, a colleague and I have had this conversation over the past year and a half since, since the height of covid. And we both came to the realization one evening in a heated conversation that, you know what, DMO are always gonna be dealing with prices. There's always gonna be something, whether it's an economic downturn like we're seeing, you know, right now, or covid before that, or, uh, or you know, our, our poor friends in, in Florida and along the Carolinas right now dealing with hurricanes. There's always gonna be some type of crisis, whether it's natural disaster or health disaster could be just a crisis for survival in terms of a county commissioner gone road looking for better uses in their mind to apply launching tax or whatever. You know, we reallocate funds and, and uh, or you know, the old adage of, well, people are just gonna come anyway.

Amir Eylon (33:46):

Why, why do we need to market ourselves the infamous Colorado story? And so there's always going to be a crisis. And I think destination marketers right now need to acknowledge that and set up their infrastructure in a way that it's capable, that they're capable. They need to have that radar up and keep their finger on the pulse of what's the next threat that's around the corner. I know it's a lot of extra work, but it's gonna be essential. Part of that community engagement is gonna minimize that risk. Not plugging my own products or services here, I'm just saying every destination marketing organization needs to have a finger on the pulse of its community sentiment. Right? And it goes beyond those who, who control the purse strengths. They need to know what, how the community feels about what's happening and the issues that are related to there.

Bob Gilbert (34:32):

Everybody needs to do a better job of engagement. You know, the business cycles are gonna be cyclical. They always have been. They always will be. There's gonna be a lot of great more years coming for our industry. The leisure travel rebound has been tremendous. Hasn't it bother me with here, um, there and even with the economic downturn. So yeah, you know, that might slow business travels. Recovery might be, have some hindrances with international travels recovery, but guess what? People still travel. You know, gas, gas hit record high. So over five, \$6 a gallon this year in many parts of the country. And, uh, guess what, The travel volumes, people still came, they just traveled differently. They reallocated their spend, but they came, they went, they traveled. So there's still tons of opportunities. So, so I think, you know, the, in addition to just looking at what the immediate traveler trends are, look at what the community trends are. Watch those community trends, focus on community is gonna be essential for destinations moving forward.

Bob Gilbert ([35:25](#)):

Excellent. Well, Amir, thank you so much for your insight and you've been a great guest, I have to say. And my pleasure. Um, keep safe when you're traveling. Keep sending those.