

A year of recovery for hospitality marketers

By [Corné Visser](#) and [Madri van der Westhuizen](#)

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The South African hospitality industry has shown remarkable resilience these past three years, however, this sector has its work cut out in 2023 in terms of marketing.



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The total income from accommodation increased by 80,3% year-on-year during August 2022, according to a *Statistics South Africa report 1* which looked at the year-on-year percentage change in tourist accommodation statistics. There was a promising 54% increase in the number of rooms/nights sold and a 17,1% increase in the average room rate per night.

With statistics like these, the hospitality and tourism industries seem to be on the verge of a recovery.

Create content your audience can engage with

In the post-pandemic era, consumers are looking for brands that they can trust, and this trust can be gained by engaging them in places they feel comfortable. The past two years of restrictions have created an urgency to travel and explore. The need to travel and embrace a *YOLO* (You Only Live Once) lifestyle is gaining more and more traction as workplaces embrace greater flexibility and people seek to explore a world closed off to them these past years. Sounds great, right?

Unfortunately higher fuel prices, increases in interest rates, and a higher global cost of living pose challenges to travellers' aspirations. Our job as hospitality marketers is to showcase our products, services, and activities in a way that creates truly immersive experiences. Content strategies in 2023 need to focus on engaging customers and adding value to their lives, starting conversations and building trust, before helping them take the next step in choosing their partners in their adventure.

Instill consumer confidence in your brand

Another result of the pandemic is that consumers have a diminished sense of stability, and brand confidence is at a low point. One of our goals for 2023 is to build consumer confidence.

When people lose confidence in themselves, they look for brands they can trust. Brands need to establish themselves in the hearts and minds of consumers as a loyal brand that talks to them and cares about them.

Have a good digital footprint - and show your personality!

We find that younger audiences (Gen Z's and younger) are using platforms other than Google (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, and other social media and customer review channels) to research brands they intend engaging with. The onus is on brands to make themselves easily accessible and relevant on these platforms.

It's about ensuring that you are available for your consumer on every platform they deem meaningful and that you are attuned to giving them content they want to see. We love this old marketing saying that '80% is the journey and 20% is the purchase'. People enjoy engaging with content first. They want to have fun and experience the brand's personality before making a decision.



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Having a strong social media presence and knowing your audience is key to a brand's success. Brands should refrain from having their fingers in too many pies. For instance, people are trying the TikTok space, but not everyone is doing it

right. Because this is a viral platform, it can create negative sentiment in terms of consumer feedback.

Ensure you are catering for the travelling working nomad

This is the year of personalisation and wellness for the travelling nomad. With many companies incorporating a hybrid working system, more people are travelling and working from hotels and different spaces than traditional offices. 2023 is going to be the year of the evolved traveller.

What we are seeing in SA, with the increase in inflation and high cost of living, is that people are in search of value wherever they can find it, especially online with aggregators, online travel agents, and other disruptors are trying to drive down prices.

Fortunately, value isn't the only driving factor behind decision-making, and the often "distant/disconnected" feeling of collecting your keys from a lock-box, isn't the experience you're looking for. Madri adds that people also want to feel cared for and that someone can look after the little things that will give them the experience they're in search of.

Experience and personalisation are key

People on social media are seeking experiences and personalisation out of their vacation. Technology needs to drive personalisation without taking away the human element and making it impersonal.

Considering the high cost of living in South Africa, travelling abroad costs more for South Africans than for most international travellers. Domestic and international travellers travel and spend differently, experiencing the same service with an entirely different value realisation. Through engagement and conversations with our customers we're gaining more and more insight into the personal value we need to deliver every day.

Have a marketing strategy with measurable goals

Brands and businesses in the South African hospitality sector should ensure that a content marketing strategy is in place with measurable goals, before the end of the current year. There is no doubt that content visualisation and customer engagement will be two of the biggest trends in 2023.

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