

MEDIA/PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

2018 Winner: U.S. Travel Association

Entry Title: Growing Travel by Encouraging Americans to Plan for Vacation

Project Overview:

Americans are taking historically low levels of vacation. Overwhelmed by the stress and pressure of a 24/7 work culture, we are operating on the edge of burnout and leaving more than 600 million vacation days on the table each year.

Through its Project: Time Off (P:TO) campaign, U.S. Travel Association seeks to grow the domestic leisure segment and get Americans to understand the value and necessity of taking vacation.

Using smart research and strategic communications, P:TO regularly drives news coverage of America's vacation problem. In order to build a larger movement, U.S. Travel needed to engage its members and the broader industry around the campaign while driving home the message that vacation planning is the simple solution to taking more time off.

In 2017, P:TO launched National Plan for Vacation Day (NPVD), a day to rally the industry around planning and grow engagement for the campaign. Project: Time Off wanted to serve as the convener of the day-providing toolkits, destination-specific research, and consulting organizations on how to activate.

The inaugural celebration, on January 31, 2017, far exceeded expectations with more than 600 organizations representing all 50 states, coming together to encourage Americans to plan for vacation. National Plan for Vacation Day 2017 garnered more than 300 news stories with top-tier coverage in The Washington Post and USA Today and 50 million social media impressions.

Project Goals/Objectives:

The U.S. Travel Association's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States. Project: Time Off's success prior to NPVD was in creating a national conversation on America's bad vacation habits. We needed to move that from a conversation about the problem to action for a solution. Specifically:

- Increase U.S. Travel Association member engagement with Project: Time Off with a 25% participation rate.
- Drive news coverage of the importance of planning by securing five national media hits and 50 local news stories.
- Create an online conversation with #PlanForVacation.

Strategy/Tactics:

Project: Time Off sought to engage the travel industry around National Plan for Vacation Day by equipping them with the tools, resources, and reason to drive the message. We made the strategic decision to hold NPVD in January because of the natural tie-in with new year's resolutions and it is a historically slower time period for the industry. Additionally, our members' audiences, their calendars have more availability early in the year, making planning and booking a vacation more realistic.

We announced the observance at U.S. Travel's fall board meeting to gain buy-in from senior-level leaders among our membership. In the three months leading up to NPVD, P:TO released

new toolkit resources weekly to keep the observance top of mind. The toolkit provided turnkey resources-like template press releases, talking points, and social media content-to make participation simple and time-effective. Beyond standard toolkit items, we enlisted travel personality and TV host Samantha Brown to create a series of videos for members to share on their social channels.

We also provided exclusive research on state-level vacation usage for members to customize their media pitches. To ensure broad participation, we worked with Skift, a go-to travel trade publication, on a promoted email that highlighted the observance and our free toolkit resources. Skift is widely read by our members and the travel industry as a whole, allowing us to reach a broader audience to increase overall engagement. Timed three weeks before NPVD, it provided another touch point coming out of the holidays while allowing plenty of time for organizations to still engage on January 31.

Finally, we conducted media outreach a week ahead of NPVD to drive the message earlier and allow members to own the actual day. We also offered quotes for press releases and served as an expert for industry outreach.

Success Metrics:

By all standards, National Plan for Vacation Day was an overwhelming success. The P:TO team worked directly with 70+ industry organizations to provide state data, brainstorm activation ideas, and offer additional support for NPVD efforts. Toolkit resources were accessed 6.25K times during the three months ahead of NPVD and videos viewed 5.5K times.

ProjectTimeOff.com traffic and page views doubled in January from the previous year (22Kvs.11K, 39Kvs.17k).

We saw activation from 600+ travel industry organizations with representation from all 50 states and 40% of U.S. Travel board members, well beyond our 25% goal, which we thought was reasonable for a new event. Online and local broadcast coverage drove the story with 300+ media hits and 18 million impressions including The Washington Post, Forbes, TravelPulse, Travel + Leisure, Fodor's, and USA Today. On social media, more than 9,000 tweets included #PlanForVacation reaching an estimated 39.5 million. More than 7,500 users engaged with the 650+ Instagram posts reaching an estimated 3.4 million.

Highlights from member participation include:

- Alamo looked into increase week-long car rentals during the summer season by offering a 15% discount. They

- leveraged P:TO research to promote the discount through email, social media, and influencer engagement. This

- promotion was their most successful campaign in 2017.

- Visit California, which used the campaign to publicize its annual California visitors guide, website traffic spiked to nearly

- 200,000-page views on January 31, about double its normal traffic for January. Social media posts were liked and

- shared 29,000 times, all driving traffic to VisitCalifornia.com to download a guide and plan trips.

- Travel Channel themed its January promotional giveaway around NPVD, airing spots with our spokesperson Samantha Brown.

- TravelZoo held a Facebook Live event with Samantha Brown that garnered more than 6,000 comments and did an NPVD SMT with its senior editor Gabe Saglie.

Learn More:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBfGjogVbg&t=22s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oW07JTr7KQ>

[ASAE Award Entry NPVD Strategy](#)

[ASAE Award Entry NPVD Results](#)

Association Website:

www.USTravel.org