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A Case Study on Destination BC's 2016/17 Ski Campaign Tagging Pilot
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Background
As digital marketers, we know that the consumer's path to purchase is no longer linear, or even cyclical; it's become increasingly frenetic, involving multiple channels and devices and often more than 100 individual online interactions[1] before a booking is made. In response to this major shift, new advertising technologies have emerged that allow marketers to track and engage with consumers across multiple channels, creating connection points between data and across channels that were not previously possible.

Prior to our 2016/17 ski campaign, Destination BC had been capturing and reporting on direct referrals to ski resorts only – clicks from our own website properties or ads direct to a resort's site. This limited our view of the true impact of our annual digital marketing investment into ski. As part of our 2016/17 ski strategy, we identified the need to also measure *indirect* referrals, in order to better understand the effectiveness of our efforts - specifically in driving "warm leads" to our ski industry partners. Capturing this information would require working closely with our ski resort partners on a collective approach to data sharing through floodlight tagging[2]; this approach was proposed to and supported by the resorts at the Canada West Ski Areas Association Spring Conference in May 2016, and implemented with 11 of 13 resorts between August 2016 and January 2017.

Summary
Prior to the 2016/17 North America Ski campaign, when common tagging was not in place, Destination BC was unable to capture the full picture from inspiration to booking. But with the support of eleven ski resorts in a collaborative approach to tagging, Destination BC has been able to improve the measurement of impact of our campaign and share new information with the ski resorts.

Our goal of tagging is to be able to create an attribution model that helps us understand what marketing activities drive consumers along the path to purchase to book a trip to BC. Tagging is the first step towards building this attribution model.

Building on the success of this pilot, Destination BC will expand this common floodlight tagging approach to an increased number of partners throughout 2017.

About Google Floodlight Tags

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[1] Source: Facebook, 2016
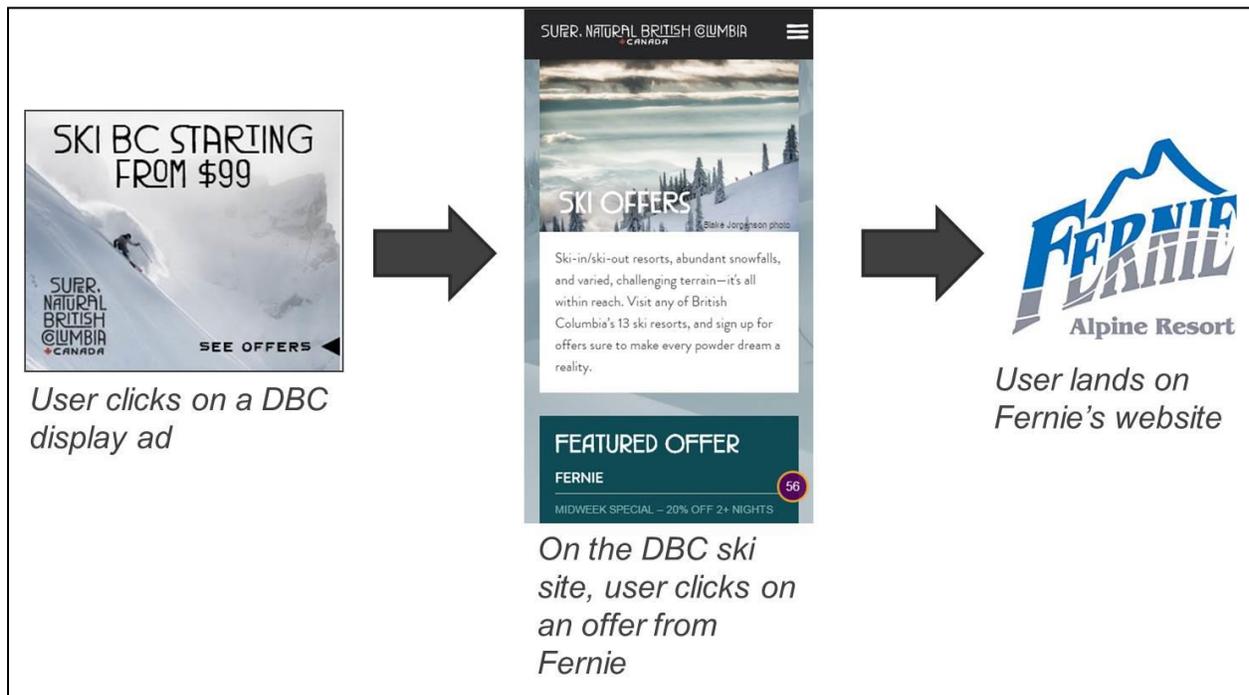[2] A floodlight tag is a piece of code that collects anonymous data from a website.

Floodlight tags allow us to track metrics beyond impressions and click-through rates. They let us track how many visitors Destination BC refers to a partner website (called a referral) and how many bookings those visitors actually make, whether through a Destination BC-led campaign or a sector-led campaign we fund.

Referrals and bookings are tracked as either post-click or post-view conversions:
- Post clicks track a user who clicked on a display ad, arrived at a site and converted.
- Post-view conversions are users who saw a display ad, did not click, but later arrived at a site indirectly by typing the site address or searching online and then converted.

Post-click and post-view conversions help Destination BC understand the effectiveness of our programs and our collective marketing spend. This data lets us understand what content, and which channels, best result in conversions through the path-to-purchase, so that we can optimize accordingly.
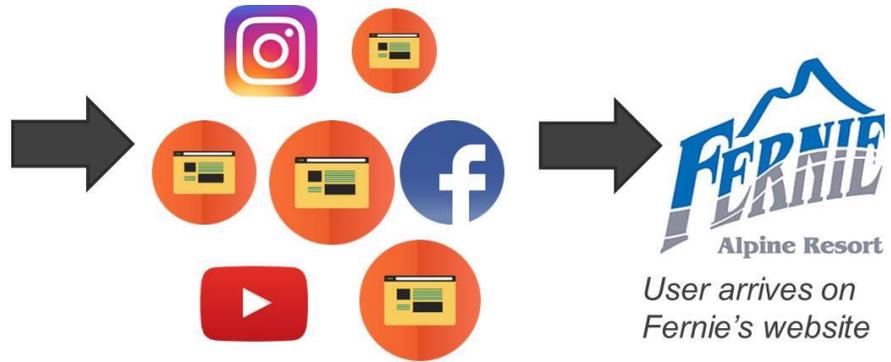
Post-click visual

User clicks on a DBC display ad

On the DBC ski site, user clicks on an offer from Fernie

User lands on Fernie's website

Post-view visual

User sees a DBC display ad but doesn`t click on the ad

User arrives on Fernie's website

Implementation

In August 2016, Destination BC, via its media agency, created two tags for each of the resorts:

- Referral conversion tag - this tag tracks website page loads when a visitor who has been exposed to a Destination BC ad lands on a page where the tag is placed. This tag was placed on all pages on a resort's website, except for sales confirmation pages.
- Sales conversion tag - this tag tracks when a sales confirmation page loads after a visitor who has been exposed to a Destination BC ad makes a booking. This tag was placed on the sales confirmation pages on a resort's website.

Each resort was provided two tags, instructions on how to place the tags on their website, FAQs, and a point of contact (shared amongst all resorts) to direct any technical problems or issues to.

Results

Destination BC's ski campaign launched on August 31, 2016 and ended on February 12, 2017.

Referrals

A total of eleven resorts placed referral tags on their websites. Seven of the resorts had tags placed for the full duration of the campaign, and tags for the remaining four resorts were placed at varying times throughout the campaign.

Nearly 425,000 referrals were generated through Destination BC's digital advertising activities. A few key highlights:

- The total number of direct referrals in 2015/16 was exceeded within the *first four weeks* of the 2016/17 campaign by the combined direct and indirect referrals.
- Over 90% of the referrals are post-view conversions (a consumer saw a display ad, did not click, but later arrived at a site indirectly).
- The tags have allowed us to build a pool of qualified ski consumers, which can be shared with resort partners for retargeting purposes in future seasons.

Bookings

While referrals were the primary measure of success for the campaign, floodlight tags enabled Destination BC to understand how its digital marketing activities also influenced bookings. Over 2,000 bookings can be linked back to Destination BC paid media activities. A total of eleven resorts placed sales tags on their websites, with the tags added on a rolling basis at different times throughout the campaign.

Audience Insights
Through a collective approach to tagging, in addition to sharing referral and booking data with the ski resorts, Destination BC is able share insights on who is responding to digital campaigns. For example, with the data collected through tags, we know that the top referral converters of our campaign are predominantly male, single, between the age of 35-64, educated and affluent. They are outdoor enthusiasts and have an interest in travel, technology, and photography. Some of the popular sites they visit are wunderground.com, realtor.com, cnn.com and yahoo.com. Understanding these interests and visited sites can help guide us, and our ski resort partners, in increasing our reach via building custom target audiences, seeking other ways to reach these audiences (i.e. partnerships), and targeting our ads to the sites they visit most often.

Photo credit: Destination BC/Randy Lincks

Conclusion
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