

Managing Expectations & Reputation through Effective Communication

Question and Answer Follow-up | May 21, 2020

By Daniel Craig (Reknown) and Destination BC

Public Health Office orders are still to avoid non-essential travel across provincial borders. Tourists hoping to travel may be disappointed, and it's challenging to communicate these recommendations. Any tips on how to handle this?

It's important to be empathetic and understanding at this time. You may find the response below to be helpful.

We understand this is a very difficult time.

BC's tourism industry is committed to protecting the health and safety of our employees and residents. We are following the direction of the Ministry of Health, and encouraging others to do the same, to help do our part in flattening the curve of COVID-19 in BC.

All decisions about when it is safe for tourism businesses to begin welcoming guests again will be made under the direction of public health officials. Once domestic travel is considered safe, we look forward to welcoming you back.

What is the correct answer to 'Are we permitted to travel'? It's not an easy answer as there are no orders that forbid travel. Non-essential travel is not recommended.

[BC's Restart Plan](#) outlines the next steps in BC's strategy to move through the COVID-19 pandemic in 4 phases. If COVID-19 transmissions remain low and travel restrictions change, we may be able to safely welcome guests back soon. All decisions about when it is safe for tourism businesses to begin welcoming guests again will be made by public health officials.

There are still many unknowns for all of us. Like others around the world, we learn more each day to guide our decision making. What we do know is that we must continue to be cautious and thoughtful in our approach to move forward safely. For more information on travel, visit the [Government of BC website](#).

We are a transportation company that is going to incur a lot of additional costs to keep our clients safe, while our ridership is going to be lower. What are your thoughts about a COVID surcharge (for safety and cleaning measures) rather than just raising prices with no explanation?

Personally, I wouldn't be surprised to see a COVID-19 surcharge begin to appear on invoices. It's a transparent way of passing on extra costs rather than simply increasing prices. Just yesterday I was charged one at my hair salon (\$3 for personal protective equipment, plus \$10 for the extra time needed to operate each appointment). I didn't blink, and I think most people (though not all) would be okay with reasonable surcharges in the near future.

How do you deal with guests who complain the COVID protocols are too strict? For example, if they refuse to have temperature taken, or sanitize their hands?

I think it's important to set expectations in advance (through notices on your website and in confirmation emails) and to post guidelines on site, so there are no surprises. Make it clear that if people do not follow the guidelines they may not be able to enter the premises. If people resist, explain that the guidelines are for their protection and the protection of other customers and staff, and that they apply to all visitors. If they still refuse, and you feel they present a risk to the safety of staff and other customers, you may decide to refuse them entry to your property. Hopefully, by being reasonable and respectful you can persuade them to cooperate. To avoid being accused of unfair treatment (or worse), be sure to apply the same guidelines to all visitors.

We are running segmented email campaigns to our hotel guests. What features within the email or title on email do you find engage guests most effectively?

Value will likely be a key selling feature for travellers in the coming months while BC tourism's market will be limited to BC residents. Given mass unemployment and the state of the economy, you can expect people to be price sensitive. Even more so than Americans, Europeans and other international travellers whose strong currencies offer a built-in discount. Discounts and special offers will grab attention. Rather than deep-discounting, try to offer incentives and value-adds like upgrades instead.

Other important messages will be related to escape, nature, the outdoors and personal space, all of which people will be seeking after weeks of quarantine. Figure out the most appealing aspects of your business at this time and put it front and centre in your promotional messaging.

If a hotel guest shows up from out of country while we are in staged restrictions, do we question them on how or why they are here?

The Government of Canada has put in place an [emergency order](#) under the *Quarantine Act*. It applies to all travellers arriving in Canada. Its purpose is to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. More information on admittance of travelers to Canada and requirements can be found on the [Government of Canada website](#).

[WorkSafeBC](#) offers general guidance to employers on return to safe operation and industry-specific resources, including checklists, planning templates, education and training materials, signage and other tools

Haircut looks good - curious was it the same experience as pre-COVID? Was the experience less or more with the surcharge? Some businesses will need to reduce amenities.

Thanks! As I mentioned, for my haircut I was charged \$3 for PPE and \$10 for extra time related to COVID. Not an inconsequential markup, but I didn't balk; I completely understand. The experience was very different from the usual, however. Only a few people were allowed in the salon at one time, and everyone wore masks. To my surprise, my stylist did wash my hair. Overall, it was less service than I normally get, but I think that's going to be the reality for many businesses soon. I hope that consumers will be understanding and supportive.

Do you think visitor centres will still carry collateral (brochures, rack cards, guides, etc.)?

Personally, I think that, as long as the pandemic is around, tourism businesses in general will need to ease off our reliance on brochures and other items that could potentially be handled by numerous people and would be difficult to sanitize. It's a great reason to consider going digital.

When you say hotel rooms are stripping the rooms of anything that doesn't need to be there - does that mean the miniature bottles of shampoo/conditioner, etc?

From my work with hotels in various regions of the world, I know that many properties are removing items from rooms that are unnecessary and/or difficult to sanitize. This may include replacing individual bath amenities with bulk amenities, which can be sanitized between guests. Also, some hotels are removing pens and notepads, cushions, throws, extra blankets, coffee makers and other items from rooms. Some of these initiatives will be temporary, others may be permanent. A great resource for finding out what hotel brands are doing is Skift's [Guide to Hotel Companies' Coronavirus Safety and Cleaning Initiatives](#) or [the BC Hotel Association's Guide for Hotels](#).