

# Changing the digital narrative for destination marketing organisations

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Sharing some of his most favourite passions including surfing, balloons and unicorns, Cape Town Tourism CEO, Enver Duminy took us through the destination marketing organisation and its relevance in a digital world during his talk at this year's World Travel Market Africa.



“From a destination marketing organisation's view, we believe we have a reason for existence. From everyone outside of that space, we question the relevance and ask ourselves – would Cape Town tourism grow if Cape Town Tourism didn't exist?”

Commenting that this notion is a career limiting move, Duminy went on to say that this is a question that you need to ask yourself, because the world is changing.

With reference to Seth Godin's book *Tribes*, Duminy shared the story of the balloon factory:

"Now, the balloon factory is an interesting space. They produce balloons, but there are certain things that are scary – pins, needles and sharp objects in general. What is nice about working in the balloon factory is the fact that it's stable – you know what to do and then, in time, you kind of get a little bit anxious when it gets to New Years. But there is also a unicorn

that lives nearby the balloon factory and every time the unicorn gets close to the balloon factory, the folks in the factory shoo him away, because they know what would happen if he got closer.

"However, there was the one day when he actually got into the factory and what happened? They all ran out."

Duminy says what this means is that for a long time destination marketing organisations were living in that status quo – that they were the balloon factory - doing brochures, visitor guides and creating websites with social media channels, and becoming complacent, thinking that that was all that they needed. But a few unicorns started popping up, namely Airbnb, Trip Advisor, etc. making them all run outside.

“ *Question the relevance of your organisation. It's scary as hell, but it's better for you to do it than someone else.* ”

## Challenging the status quo

What is important to realise, says Duminy, is that the status quo needs to be challenged. The question is: Are you going to be the balloon factory or the unicorn? "That's something we asked ourselves at Cape Town Tourism three years ago, and my team responded immediately and said they want to be a unicorn."

Duminy and his team soon realised that although they had a website, a wave of change was hitting them – they were losing visitor numbers and they were wondering why. "We had social media channels that were growing but weren't really engaging with the audience. We were doing all the right things, at least that's what we thought. We were still producing visitor guides, still having distributing information centres, but there was a fundamental change that was shifting and that was digital and mobile."

They had to be a part of the change or become completely lost to the ocean of opportunity. By relooking at their strategies, Duminy and his team began a journey to create their very own mobile-first website in Africa. "We did away with our clunky website and we actually built it for a mobile first. That was a big risk for us, as a non-for-profit, we don't have a lot of money – we needed to be smart about the choices that we make, but at the same time we needed to be brave. And I think we were brave enough to do so, becoming one of the top 25 websites in the world."



Cape Town Tourism one of the top 25 tourism websites in the world

Enver Duminy 22 Aug 2017



## When the wave of change hits

That form of recognition, says Duminy, is not just for consumers. It was the first part of pushing their digital journey and creating a relevance in the industry. However, as the wave of change continued to rise, people began falling out of love with destination marketing organisations, adds Duminy. They started going directly to the product and cutting out the middle man.

By incorporating video into their marketing tactics, Duminy and his team created a platform to showcase authentic experiences through locals who took them as an organisation through their neighbourhoods, sharing their stories and getting a glimpse into a world that people either drive pass or completely ignore. This not only created a platform for visitors for the Cape Town Tourism website, it also became an opportunity for trade to go through these products from the comfort of their office and make it an experience they could call their own.

"Over the years, we've developed remarkable communication tools, especially since the age of digital has allowed us to tap into online channels from our website to social media. This gives us a chance to reach visitors and potential visitors in their own home to provide information, tips, showcase products and offerings from our members. It's all part of staying ahead,

staying relevant."

Designing authentic experiences through video, Duminy and his team began showcasing the real part of a destination. "We created a series of videos in specific neighbourhoods and integrated them into the mobile-first website. By doing this, we were allowing for proper integrated communication. It wasn't just about having separate platforms, it was about how we could connect those platforms and how we could leverage them to tell the continuous narrative."

"It's not just about pushing content through your channels. It's about making a concerted effort to make sure that the narrative is right with a concise message. We wanted to leverage all platforms, so that the same (and right) message could go out, especially when it came to marketing the Day Zero drought crisis. This was something that destination marketing organisations had to damage control with. For us, we emphasised the importance of 'Saving Like a Local' and created a water war room, making sure to position it correctly and reiterate that we were open for business.

"It's about making sure that we have the facts, and that we work toward a common cause to consider our branding management initiatives of a destination. We need to continuously communicate, no matter what we may be driving – we need to ride that wave of opportunity."

Below is an example of how content can be used in a palatable way to get the message across beside its seriousness:

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"I think it's important to know where destination marketing organisations are coming from - understanding our audience and also to look at ways in which we can also help government understand the roles we play in educating our audience."

## **Duminy provided this advice to destination marketing organisations:**

- Question the relevance of your organisation. It's scary as hell, but it's better for you to do it than someone else.
- You need to be brave. It sounds easy, but if you not going to be brave, you are going to wilt and the waves are going to come crashing on you.
- You need to sometimes throw out your own models and reinvent yourself to remain relevant.

He concluded by saying that if you don't know what your business wants and when it wants it, and how to serve it up, then you'll be drowned in the sea of sorrow.

**"So, do you still want to work in the balloon factory or do you want to be the unicorn?"**

## **ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS**

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