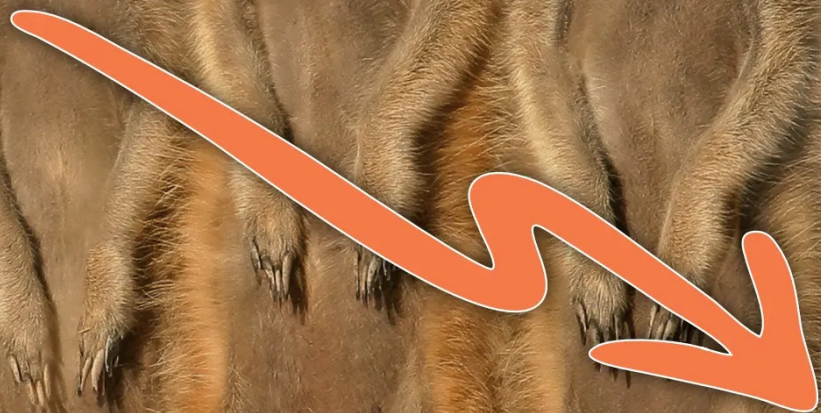


HOW TO SET YOURSELF APART

Brand Guide for Travel Companies

OPEN HERE





This might sound harsh. But if travel companies tried to differentiate themselves based on product alone, it would be impossible.

You may well be able to organise a good trip. It might cater perfectly to your clients' every need, and your booking experience might be impeccable.

But before a person becomes your client, you're just another advert regurgitating their search terms. There are thousands of tour operators and travel agents out there; so what makes your villas, ski breaks, or honeymoons better than those of the company ranking above you?

We're all aware of the seismic shift in our industry. It's easier than ever for people to organise their own travel, and now big tech players like Google and Airbnb are entering the tailor-made holiday market too. But there is good news. Global tourism is at a record high. ABTA's Travel Trends Reports

show that people still crave a personal touch when it comes to making high value purchases. And Forbes has reported that surveys show "people young and old are opting for experiences over things".

Nowadays, more than ever, the tour operator needs to become part of the experience; to provide a service that is so distinctive and compelling that no potential client will ever turn around and say "But... can't I just book this myself?"

This guide is designed to help you express your brand personality by creating an individual look, language and community. Whoever your brand and your travellers may be, we want to help you find each other. This isn't about what you sell. It's about connecting with your tribe.

Best wishes

*Tony Bean
Director*

FIND YOUR VOICE

A brand's tone of voice is how it says what it says. And, in today's market, how you say what you say is every bit as important as the content itself.

Honing your company's tone of voice is crucial in expressing your attitude and personality. When you're able to write consistently in a tone that is uniquely yours, you are better able to connect with your audience and establish your niche in the marketplace.

But how do you do it? We've come up with three key steps to point you in the right direction. Once you've established the foundations of your tone of voice, make sure that everyone responsible for writing copy in your company is on board and able to practise your tone with flair.



1



HOW TO DEVISE YOUR COMPANY'S TONE OF VOICE

STEP 1

Who are you talking to?

Now, before you say something along the lines of, "I've already analysed my target market!" – let me stop you. A lot of companies fall into the trap of identifying their target market in somewhat clinical terms. Yes, it is important to think about the demographic you are speaking to, but do not think of your potential clients as just a "good quality lead". It is much more important to remember that you are speaking to a human being. Human beings are sentient and emotional, and respond well when they are spoken to as such. In short: less jargon, more feeling!

In doing this, don't be afraid to talk to the few, not the many. For example, on the day of the mens' finals at Wimbledon, Black Tomato sent an email that opened: "If you're like us, your eyes are probably glued to Center Court". Evidently, not everyone on their mailing list would be watching Wimbledon, but they know that their kind of traveller is likely to be, and it will resonate with them all the more. In the words of Kurt Vonnegut, "Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your writing will get pneumonia."



STEP 2

What are three key principles that define your tone of voice?

Think about it. If you could distil your values as a brand into three key words, what would they be? Once you have got those words in your mind, think about how they could manifest in your writing. If you want your brand to feel authoritative, you might use shorter, action-driven sentences. If you want your brand to feel inspiring, you might use descriptive imagery and evocative terms. Have these principles at the back of your mind with every piece of writing you approach, and you're on your way to a consistent brand messaging.

STEP 3

What channels will you use your tone of voice in?

Consistency is key when it comes to your tone of voice. It should run through everything you write, from headline to copy to call-to-action. However, bear in mind that you can alter your expressions depending on the channel you use. For example, the way you speak in a letter will likely be more formal than the way you would in a social post. There should still be a thread that connects the two, but remember to be adaptable, too.

TOP TIP

AVOID CLICHÉS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE

Travel is rife with clichés. How many times have you heard a place described as “a blend of old and new”, with a “bustling market” and “something for everyone”?

It's easy to fall into the cliché trap. But do try to avoid it, as far as you can. One of the best ways to do this is to “show not tell”. Rather than simply say “a stunning landscape”, describe the craggy mountains, the pine-covered hills or the blushing pink sky.

Another way to avoid a cliché is to simply say what you mean, and mean what you say. Travel writing is renowned for being over-the-top: speak to your clients honestly and you will gain their trust through authenticity.

“Have a look at whatever you write or send out to people. Ask yourself are you talking to human beings or using business jargon that sounds fancy and impressive to you?

As soon as you start thinking of people as numbers or as some sort of group defined by sociology you're driving off in the wrong direction.”

– Drayton Bird



TELL A STORY

Telling a story that is unique to your company is one of the best ways to differentiate yourself in today's crowded market. Research shows that stories are 22 times more memorable than facts; humans are conditioned to respond emotionally to stories, and absorb them.

Many fall into the trap of just talking about their destination, which is understandable when you know a place is amazing. But this is also what makes so many travel companies look the same. So much of travel marketing, from websites to emails to brochures, focuses on the population, the topography or the weather patterns. You can find facts and figures anywhere. Only you can tell the stories that make your company individual.

Your stories can be long or short, and on any platform you like; even a one-off social post can tell a tale. Here are a few simple ways you can add colour to your comms.

2



WRITE A GREAT STORY

1. TURN TO THE GREATS

Often, one of the best ways to write a great story is by turning to the greats for inspiration. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said that every story should have the following three principles. You can apply these principles to almost any story, no matter how short; even the simplest “problem/solution” narrative structure can benefit from:

PITY. This doesn't mean you need to make your reader feels sorry for you, but rather that they should feel some degree of sympathy for the author, a sense of identifying with them on a human level. This is perhaps all the more pivotal today, when most of the time there is a digital wall between the marketer and consumer. It is essential to have “pity” to earn trust.

FEAR. There should always be tension in a good story: a fear that things might not go the way you anticipate, or simply a desire to get to the conclusion.

CATHARSIS. And, of course, there needs to be some kind of conclusion, or release: a punch line, a purpose, a point.



2. PLAY WITH CHRONOLOGY

As children, we're often told that a story has a "beginning, middle and end" – and you don't need to mess with the basics. However, the problem with this is that it implies a distinct chronology. Don't be afraid to play with the order of your story. You can cherry pick the most interesting parts and bring them to the fore. Starting with a brief but strong anecdote that sets the tone for the piece you're writing is a sure way to grab your reader's attention. After all, research shows that we make snap judgments in seconds: you only have a few moments to engage your audience.



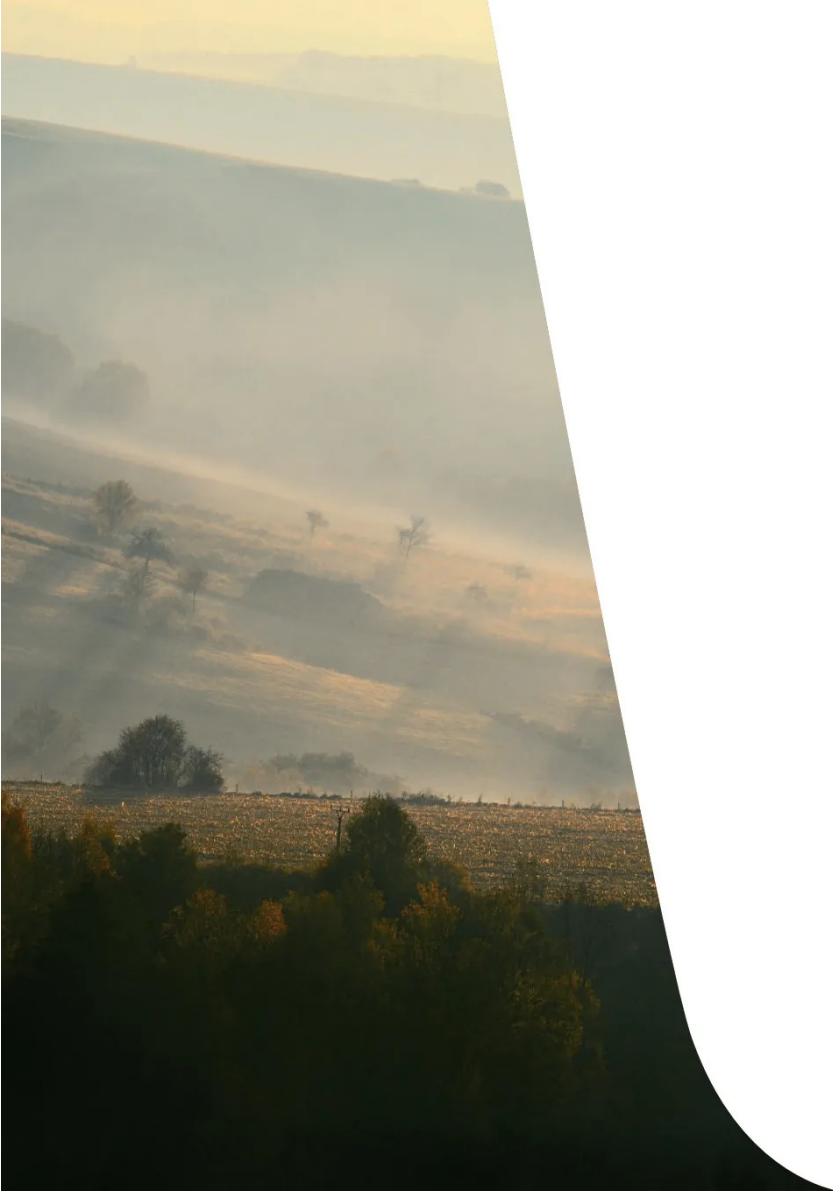
3. BE AUTHENTIC

It's important to be upfront about what your company can and cannot do. Do not claim to be the cheapest on the market if you know you're not. Avoid describing places in terms such as "perfect" or "flawless", or making sweeping generalisation.

And never tell stories about your products that you know are just untrue.

At the same time, renowned marketer Seth Godin also acknowledges that there is a difference between authenticity and facts when telling marketing stories. In his brilliant book entitled "All Marketers ~~Tell~~ Lies Are Storytellers", he says that "a fib is a story that makes something better." It is not an outright lie, but it is a way of spinning a product so that it feels better to the user.

A prime example of this is using a worldview to tell a story. In travel, one such worldview might be "I really deserve a vacation." Your story might then revolve around how your product is the ultimate way to treat yourself. It's not a lie, but it's a way of enhancing your audience's enjoyment of your product.



DECIDE WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

Luckily, we're in a business everybody loves to tell stories about. A simple travel anecdote is an easy way to get things going: why do you love the destination you're writing about? Many travel businesses come into being for the love of travel. If your company came about through passion, or an interesting series of events, don't be afraid to tell that story. It's not all about pushing your trips: telling the story of how you came to be will communicate huge amounts about the dedication of the team, and why you are able to provide the best experience for your customers.

Finally, use your clients. We all know that in this day and age, reviews are of paramount importance. Advertising your company via the travel story of one of your customers is effectively one great review.

TOP TIP

CHOOSE THE RIGHT ANECDOTE

When telling an anecdote of your own, try to select a story that is not only personally affecting, but that illustrates why a destination is amazing. A tale of a missed train on its own might not be particularly inspiring – but perhaps the reaction of the local people epitomised the ethos of the destination?

“Successful marketers are just the providers of stories that consumers choose to believe.”

– Seth Godin



LOOK THE PART

So far in this guide we have focussed on the ways in which you can distinguish yourself using language and stories. However, visual tools are equally important in making yourself stand out from the crowd and communicate with your kind of traveller.

Travel photography is notorious for being all a bit "samey". The ease and convenience of stock imagery sites like Shutterstock and Dollarphotoclub mean we can all end up using the exact same pictures to promote our brands.

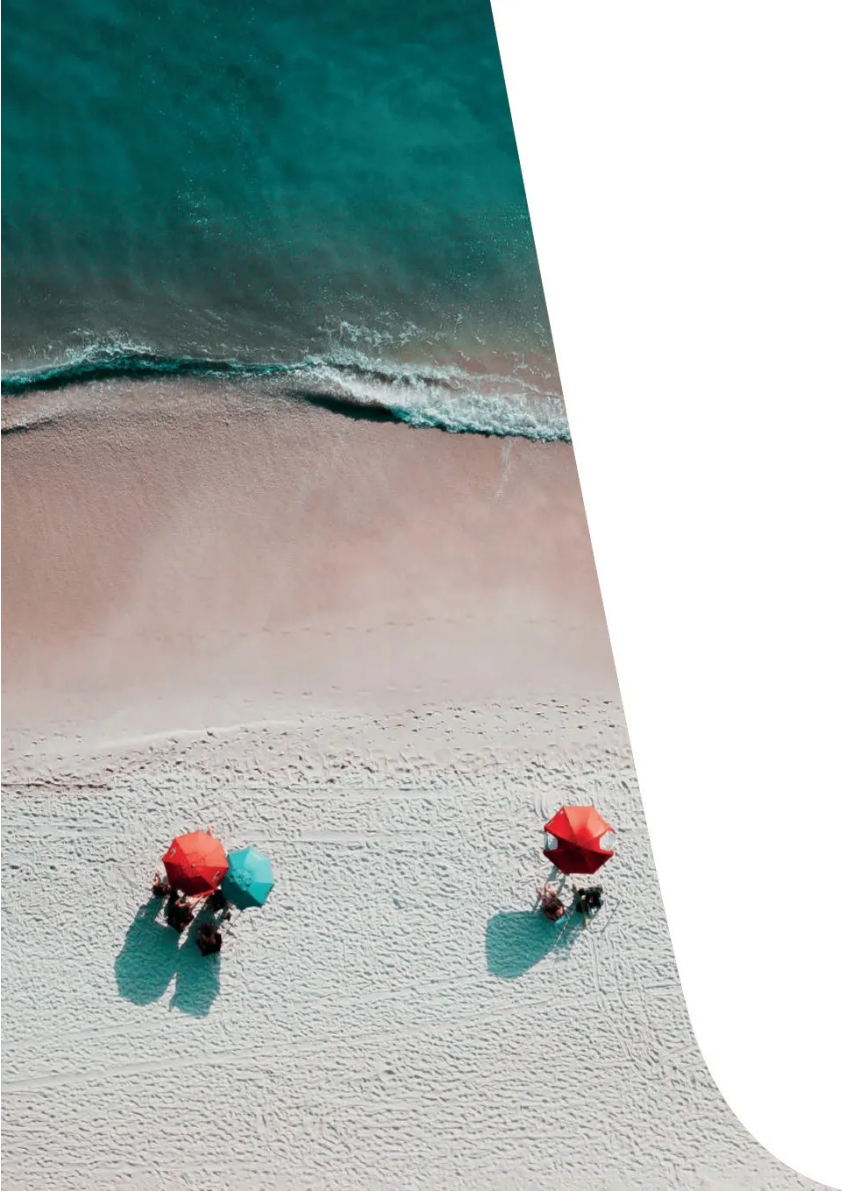
This is something that is noticed even outside of the industry. Katy Howell, CEO at social media agency Immediate Future, drew up ten photographs from ten different travel advertisements in a social media seminar to demonstrate their stark similarity. The colour schemes, composition, subject matter

and saturation in every photograph seemed to be exactly the same, though no doubt each of these tour operators would purport to have a different USP. But, at first glance, how would anyone ever know?

The first step is to subject your own company to this kind of scrutiny. Line up the photography on your homepage alongside that of your three closest competitors. If you were to take away the logos, could you honestly say which imagery belonged to whom?

If the answer is no, then it's time to re-think how you use imagery to promote your brand. It is every bit as important in communicating the tone and personality of your brand - in some ways, even more so, since we all know that people are prone to skim-read online. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

3



1. INVEST IN STRONG BRAND GUIDELINES

The photography you use should reflect your brand values in the same way as your tone of voice. Select the values you want to communicate, and then spend time discussing with your team how to bring this to life. Your photography should reflect how premium your brand is, what kind of holidays you create, and what kind of travellers you want to entice. Creating robust photography guidelines will ensure that you create a seamless experience across your brand.



2. CREATE A PHOTO 'HIERARCHY'

Once you've decided on your aesthetic as a brand, consider hiring a photographer to capture it. You don't have to rebuild your entire photo library, but if you can have a photographer take a handful of images that perfectly encapsulate what your brand's photography is all about, this is an incredible starting point. You can use these 'hero' photos anywhere and everywhere, and they will be the ideal way to convey your message to your kind of traveller in a split second. You can then use bought or stock imagery much more sparingly, for example if you need to illustrate a particular experience.

3. BE BOLD

As we said, travel photography has a tendency to be a bit blah. Don't be afraid to make a statement, to choose striking photographs that would appeal solely to your kind of traveller. An image that might spark wanderlust in one type of traveller might be another's idea of hell – but it's ok to create that tension.

TOP TIP

INVITE YOUR CLIENTS TO CAPTURE YOUR BRAND

Are any of your clients keen photographers? Ask around and see if you would be able to use any of their pictures in your marketing. After all, this is the best way to showcase what your holidays are truly like, and the participation of happy customers is your brand's biggest endorsement.

"A good photograph is one that communicates a fact, touches the heart and leaves the viewer a changed person for having seen it. It is, in a word, effective."

- Irving Penn



CREATE YOUR TRIBE

Visualise your typical client. Or, even better, your ideal client. The client who makes your sales team grin when they've finished a conversation, the client who just 'gets' your company and is delighted with the service you provide them.

Now, wouldn't it be amazing if you could build up a tribe of this kind of client? A pack of people who are passionate about your trips and that are delighted to promote them among like-minded holidaymakers?

The best way to do this is to figure out the worldview that connects your kind of travellers, and play to it. Remember, you're thinking of a real human being here, not a series of statistics and numbers. On the surface you might be

selling a travel experience, but people are buying a whole lot more. Marketing guru and author Grant Leboff makes an excellent case for this in his seminar, *What the Sex Pistols Teach You About Marketing*. The Sex Pistols only ever created one studio album, but their legacy has been enormous - the point being that while they were a band, they didn't just sell albums or records. They sold an ideology, a belief, and the way they expressed themselves meant they were connected to a movement.

Unless you're a punk rock tour operator (and if you are, more power to you!), the things that define your ideology will be a little bit different to the Sex Pistols. But the principle of tapping into your tribe's emotional world is the same. Here are a few tips to get you started.



An ostrich is shown in profile, standing in a field of dry, golden-brown grass. The ostrich has a long, pinkish neck and a dark body. The background is a clear, light blue sky. The image is partially obscured by a white, curved graphic element on the right side of the page.

1. FIGURE OUT THEIR WORLDVIEW

When people book a trip with your company, they might be booking ten days in the sun. But what are they really buying? Is it escapism, a chance to leave their world behind? Perhaps it's cultural currency, or an element of "one-upmanship"? Maybe it's a chance to reflect on the world around them, to soak in something completely new?

Ultimately, the way in which people travel is an expression of their identity. Throughout the rest of the year, the majority of people are confined by jobs and responsibilities. For one of, if not the biggest purchase of the year, they are able to spend time and money on what they actually desire. They need to make it mean something.

To that end, figure out what kind of persona your audience identifies with. Are they the kind

that likes the challenge of a new frontier, or the familiarity and ease of a trodden path? Would they consider themselves intellectual or "cultured"? What do they value about themselves?

We've already spoken about storytelling in this guide. But perhaps the most important story to bear in mind is the story your clients are telling themselves. If you can crack their internal narrative, and communicate it, you're on to a winner.

And remember, sharing a dislike is every bit as powerful as sharing an interest. If you know, for example, that your kind of traveller opposes over-tourism, highlight the contrast between busier tours and your own. Establishing a common enemy is an excellent way of aligning your viewpoints.



2. GO OUTSIDE OF TRAVEL

Of course, love of travel is one thing that unites your customers. But if your clients have a similar outlook on life, there are going to be other interests, reference points or emotions that bind them too. Remember, it's not holidays alone that you're selling!

One tour operator that does this exceptionally well is Flash Pack. Flash Pack organise group trips for solo travellers in their 30s and 40s; busy professional people, usually single, who seek adventure as well as style. So, on their blog, you won't find "the top ten sights in Bali" or travelling checklists. You will find instead content around wellness, the workplace and what to watch on Netflix. They don't just know what kind of traveller they're after: they know exactly what kind of person they're after, and they play to it admirably..



3. CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Once your travellers feel like your worldviews align, you are already on your way to creating a community. But there are several ways in which you can enforce this notion of being part of the club.

Keep certain elements of your business exclusive for clients. Perhaps you might reveal certain news to them ahead of the rest of your database, or hold client-only events or competitions. Retain a sense of exclusivity for those on the list to make your tribe feel special.

Referrals are of course one of the best ways to ensure that your community extends to more like-minded travellers. You might want to introduce some kind of incentive for referral, or simply weave the idea into your conversations as far as possible. Naturally, social media is a key channel for sharing ideas and growing your following. Ask your travellers to tag you in their posts or create hashtags and phrases that they can use throughout their trip.

Even further, you could encourage your community to take part in your marketing by writing blogs or taking photos and videos of their holiday. This will not only keep you at the fore of their mind, but shows just how much you value their input.

TOP TIP

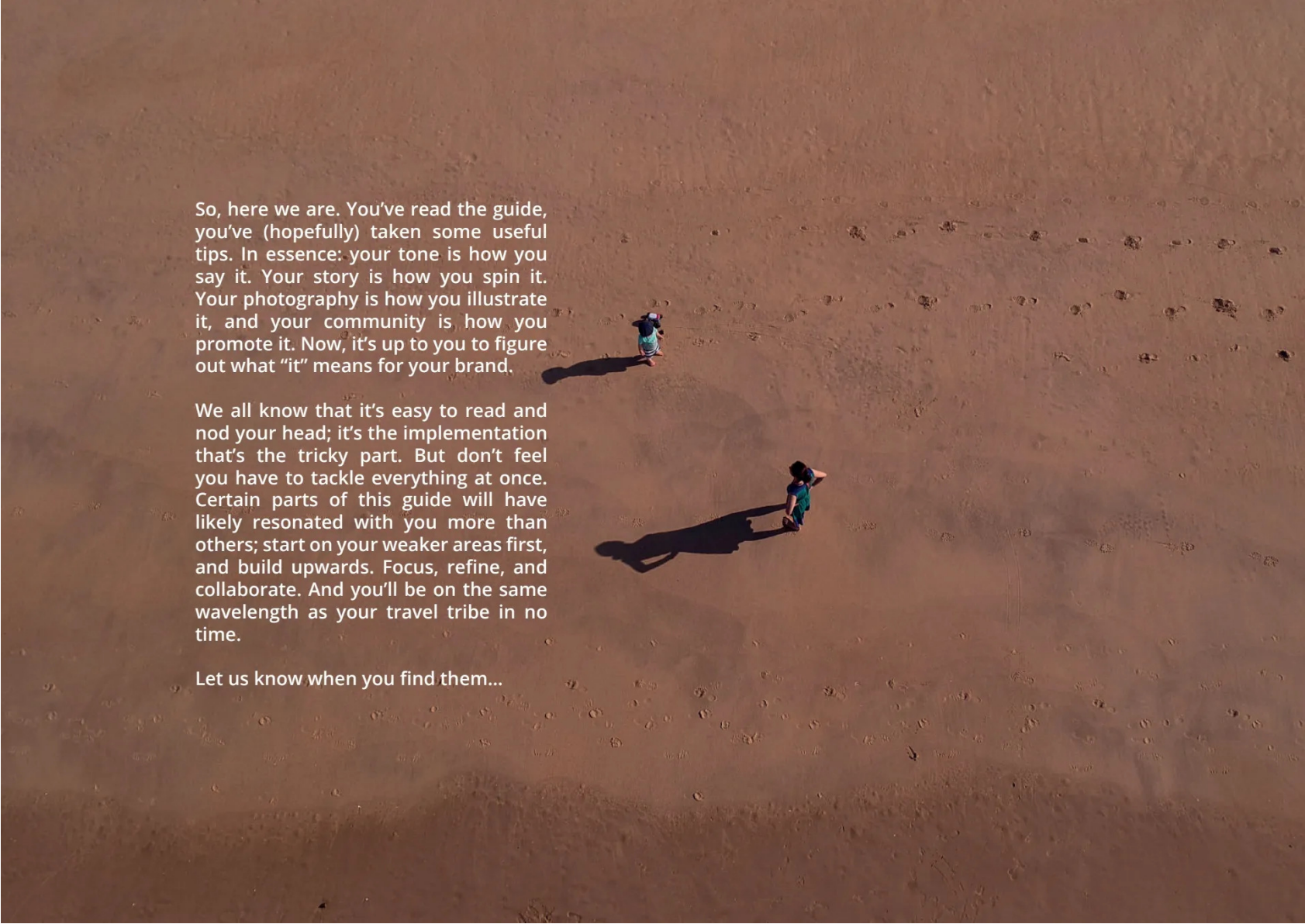
SPOT THE SIMILARITIES

Take ten of your “favourite” kind of clients, the clients you’d love your entire database to resemble, and imagine they’re all at a dinner party together. What would they talk about? What would connect them? This exercise might help you spot some striking similarities or common interests that you can incorporate in your comms.

“Every consumer has a worldview that affects the product you want to sell. That worldview alters the way they interpret everything you say and do. Frame your story in terms of that worldview, and it will be heard.”

- Seth Godin

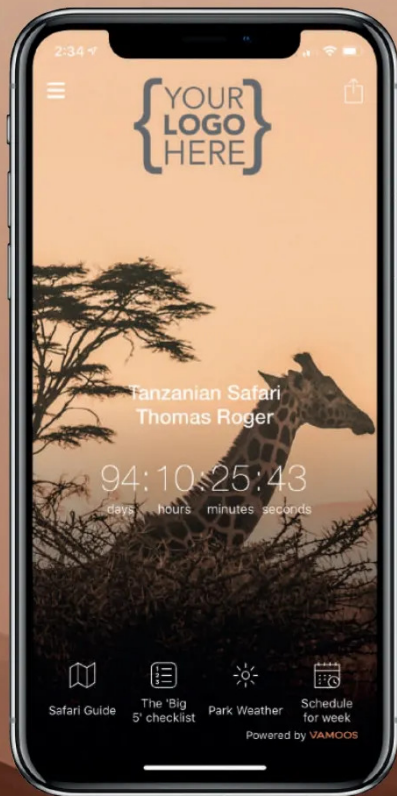


An aerial photograph of a vast, flat, sandy landscape, possibly a beach or a salt flat. The ground is a uniform light brown color, covered with numerous small, dark footprints and tracks. Two people are walking across the landscape. The person in the foreground is wearing a blue shirt and dark pants, and is casting a long, dark shadow to their left. The person in the background is wearing a white shirt and dark pants, and is also casting a long shadow to their left. The overall scene is desolate and open.

So, here we are. You've read the guide, you've (hopefully) taken some useful tips. In essence: your tone is how you say it. Your story is how you spin it. Your photography is how you illustrate it, and your community is how you promote it. Now, it's up to you to figure out what "it" means for your brand.

We all know that it's easy to read and nod your head; it's the implementation that's the tricky part. But don't feel you have to tackle everything at once. Certain parts of this guide will have likely resonated with you more than others; start on your weaker areas first, and build upwards. Focus, refine, and collaborate. And you'll be on the same wavelength as your travel tribe in no time.

Let us know when you find them...



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