

How earned content is

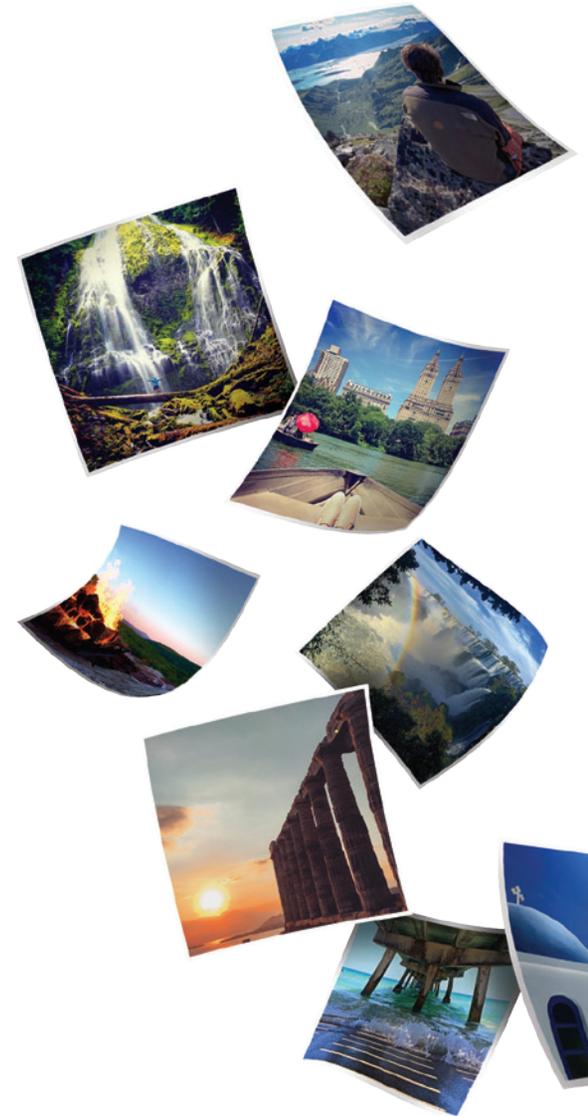
# TRANSFORMING THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

**Olapic**

# HOW EARNED CONTENT IS TRANSFORMING THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY.

The power of visual user-generated content (UGC), or earned content, as an indispensable marketing tool is growing by the day—and the travel industry, which now generates a whopping 10% of the world’s GDP, has arguably more to gain from the visual UGC revolution than perhaps any other industry. The prospective benefits that UGC offers to hotels, cruise lines, and other travel players in this nearly \$8 trillion industry—which is forecast to grow another 50% to almost \$12 trillion by 2025<sup>1</sup>—are innumerable.

Evolving social trends are favoring a major travel-selfie revolution. Already, 72% of consumers post photos on a social network while on vacation, and 76% post them after they return<sup>2</sup>—this within a context where **Instagram’s 400 million active users post 80 million photos per day<sup>3</sup>, and 350 million photos are uploaded daily to Facebook.**



<sup>1</sup><http://skift.com/2015/04/13/five-charts-that-explain-the-size-of-the-global-travel-industry-in-2015/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.helloworld.com/insights/blog/mobile/2014/02/05/mobile-and-the-travel-industry>

<sup>3</sup><https://instagram.com/press/>

By harnessing user-generated photos—the most authentic, compelling, and affordable brand assets available today—on their own websites, hotels and other travel brands can dynamically showcase the overwhelmingly positive experiential and emotional elements that define the travel experience, and keep visitors there to book—a growing imperative in a hypercompetitive operating landscape. In doing so, they’ll both dramatically reduce the staggering costs of producing lackluster stock content—the woefully outdated industry norm—and engage new customers while building their bottom line.

**“TRAVEL BRANDS WHO BANK ON VISUAL STORYTELLING WILL GET MORE BANG FOR THEIR BUCK THAN THOSE WHO DO NOT.”**

**- FREDERIC GONZALO, TRAVEL EXPERT, SPEAKER, CONSULTANT.**

Hotels and other travel industry operators have more incentive than ever before to find new and compelling ways to drive visitors to their sites and keep them there to book: According to new research by Kalibri Labs, the cost of acquiring hotel customers through marketing and distribution channels in the age of OTAs and metasearch sites like Google and TripAdvisor is rising at twice the rate of hotel revenue growth—a trend that is hardly sustainable.

# BEST PRACTICES: PUTTING UGC TO WORK FOR YOU

OK - now you understand how visual UGC is radically shifting how travel marketers can tell brand stories. But how can you achieve the same engagement and activation with your earned content? Here are some **tried-and-true tactics** that will help your brand **to quickly generate a valuable inventory of images:**



## MAKE YOUR HASHTAG KNOWN.

Don't be afraid to shout your hashtags from the rooftops—or at least give them pride-of-place on your homepage and in marketing collateral. On your Instagram feed, including your hashtag prominently in your profile invites your visitors to use it. In addition, use the hashtag at any and all opportunity with your travelers, including on property screens, confirmation pages, door hangers, and in-room menus. Promote the initiative for travelers to share.



## TAG YOUR LOCATION.

Each unique hotel property has its own personality and set of experiential opportunities. By tagging the specific location in the earned content process, you can filter the content to specific locations and further personalize the user experience.



## BE HASHTAG-SAVVY.

Hashtags are valuable tools for expanding your reach across all social platforms. Research the most popular hashtags that are relevant to your property and industry—which will also show you how many posts have been produced under that thread—and include them in your posts to increase the number of users who will see your pics.



**CREATE A UGC GALLERY ON YOUR SITE.**

Showcase your UGC in a separate gallery that lets your customers shine. Showing visitors that you recognize and appreciate what they share with your brand propels future engagement and builds loyalty.



**POST WITH A 360-DEGREE PERSPECTIVE IN MIND.**

You may have gorgeous rooms, a show-stopping lobby and a to-die-for pool, but don't neglect all the other elements that make your property special. Staff members and local scenery and landmarks, for example, add texture and personality to your visual story and will appeal to savvy, discerning travelers.



**DON'T FORGET TO SHARE EARNED CONTENT.**

Sharing, or "regram-ing", guest photos is an excellent way to enrich your hotel's Instagram story and supplement your content. Tag the guests' handles in your photos so they know you regram-ed it, and thank them for taking such great shots to help create brand loyalists.



**POST ABOUT HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN TOO.**

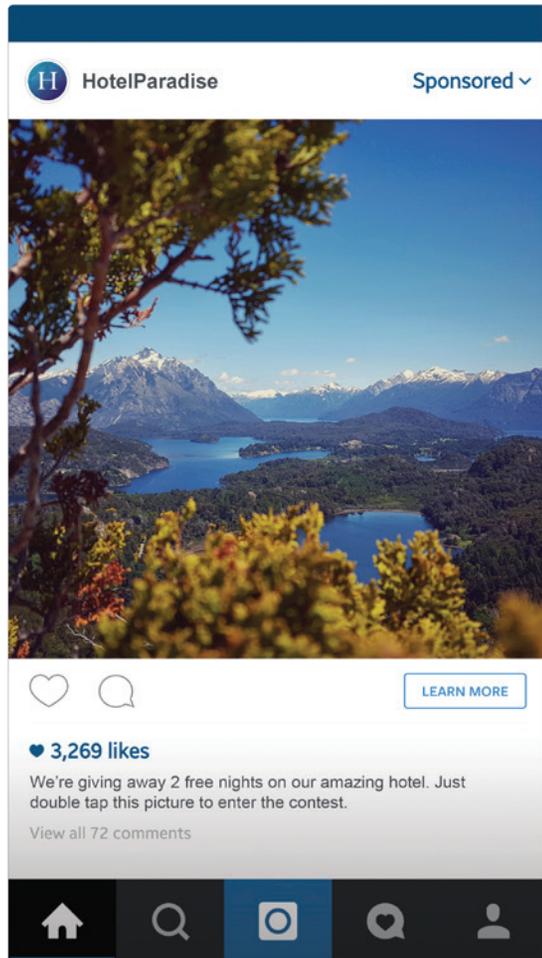
Local events are a great way for your hotel to insert itself into the surrounding spotlight. Hashtagging the event and posting relevant photos is an excellent tactic to join the visual conversation and pique followers' interest in visiting in the future.



**CROSS-PROMOTION IS KEY.**

Posting your content across all social platforms will greatly expand your reach. When you post a picture or video on Instagram, you're given the option to also post it to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and Tumblr, thus inviting your followers from other channels to flock to your Instagram page as well.





## INSTAGRAM CONTESTS: A WINNING TACTIC

Contests are almost always a can't-lose proposition: Incentivizing users to post photos by offering a free trip, night's stay, or even an upgrade on the next visit based on the creativity and visual appeal of their entries practically guarantees you'll end up with an infinitely marketable array of top-shelf images.

Here, three user-friendly contest options according to [Social Media Examiner](#):

### LIKE TO WIN CONTESTS:

Simply ask users to like photos you post, and everyone who does will be entered into the contest.



**Pros:** Easy to set up, and given the very low barrier to entry, they're an easy way to increase your Instagram reach.



**Cons:** A relatively low-engagement proposition: participants don't have to spend much effort to enter, so they're likely also not that invested in the brand.<sup>4</sup>

### HASHTAG USER-GENERATED CONTENT CONTESTS:

Create a contest-specific hashtag and ask participants to share a photo or video using that hashtag to enter. To extend your contest's reach, add a "shareable" component—for example, ask for input from your audience to choose a winner.



**Pros:** By asking for content, you deepen the emotional connection between consumers and your brand, while a branded hashtag lets you effectively generate authentic images created by and for your consumer. Finally, a hashtag creates a gallery for viewing entries: anyone who searches for it will find the earned content stream.



**Cons:** Asking for users' content increases the barrier to entry. Also, a contest must specify that the content is being submitted as part of a contest. So the user will need to have a hashtag including the word "Contest" or add "#contest" to the post, which can make the possibilities less fun.<sup>5</sup>

### EMAIL-GATED CONTESTS:

Ask participants for their email address to enter. This type of contest can also ask for a follow or earned content.



**Pros:** It's a surefire way to build your email list—and your earned content if you ask for a photo or video.



**Cons:** Asking for users' content increases the barrier to entry. And a successful email-gated contest usually needs an especially worthwhile prize (such as an expensive trip).<sup>6</sup>

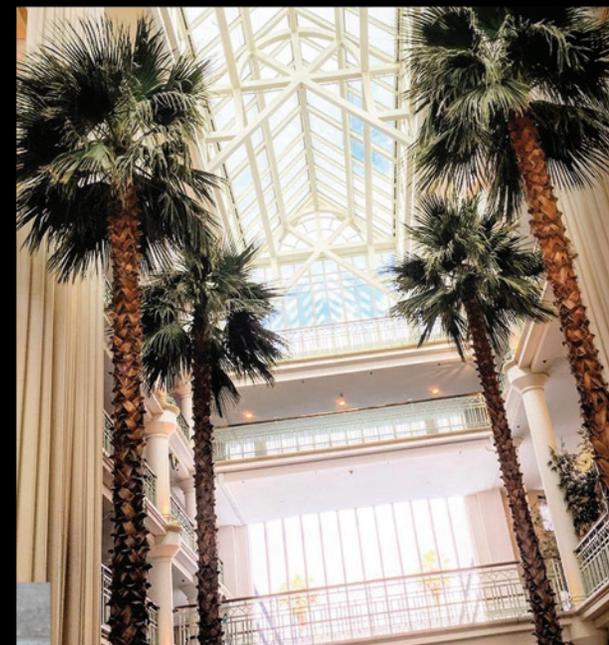
<sup>4-5-6</sup> Bunskoek, Krista. "How to Run a Successful Instagram Contest." Social Media Examiner. 10/29/2014.

## EARNED CONTENT: A COMPELLING TOOL WITH MEASURABLE IMPACT

As the examples outlined above illustrate, earned content is the “brass ring” that travel marketers have been desperately seeking to drive visitors to their websites and keep them there in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Frederic Gonzalo, founder of Gonzo Marketing and a noted travel expert, defines why earned content is so powerful. “Photos and videos are a way to set your brand apart, because visual user-generated content (UGC) has much more perceived authenticity, and perception is reality. Of course, you can have a fantastic, highly-produced content roll-out on social

media, but when it’s OPC (other people’s content), **it has that extra layer of authenticity and legitimacy which is imperative to engaging travelers.”**

By creating forums where travelers can post their photos, travel brands can aggregate fast, free, quality content and stay relevant for the new breed of sharing-oriented traveler—and help retain visitors in an environment where more than 8 out of 10 customers now abandon online travel bookings, according to online marketing consultancy OptiLead.<sup>7</sup>



While travel brands are unlikely to entirely eschew stock photography anytime soon, there's upside to complementing it with dynamic UGC: **According to comScore, brand engagement actually rises by 28% when users are exposed to both types of content.**



Implementing UGC-driven initiatives will also enable travel brands to glean an unprecedented amount of data about their audience to provide deeper insights into their preferences, which can then be used to create campaigns and unique experiences that will resonate with them and convert prospects into guests. In designing experiences for their travelers, brands may overlook simple moments that will resonate most powerfully with traveler segments. Through earned content, give a voice to the traveler, and let them share with you what they really notice and care about as part of the experience with your brand.

Tools such as bookable inspiration galleries and visual reviews—carousels of earned content on property pages that together illustrate the many facets of the hotel experience—offer travel brands a fun, inexpensive way to foster ongoing engagement with customers, as well as gather

information about their habits. By incorporating earned content in creative and compelling ways, travel brands can become one-stop online destinations where visitors can, perhaps for the first time ever, get **a wholly authentic picture of the captivating travel experiences** that await them.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **STANDARDIZE YOUR HASHTAG STRATEGY:**

Make your hashtag part of your brand's DNA, collect relevant earned content and repurpose it across all channels, including on property screens, confirmation pages, door hangers, and in-room menus. Promote the initiative for travelers to share.

- **INSTAGRAM CONTESTS MAY ACCELERATE EARNED CONTENT GROWTH:**

Whether through a "Like-to-Win," "Hashtag," or "Email-Gated" contest, by incentivizing travelers to engage with earned content and provide new visual UGC, your brand will gain an enormous amount of usable content to help service other marketing initiatives. A free stay or experience package will cost a minimal amount for the brand, and will likely lead to enormous interaction and content contributions.

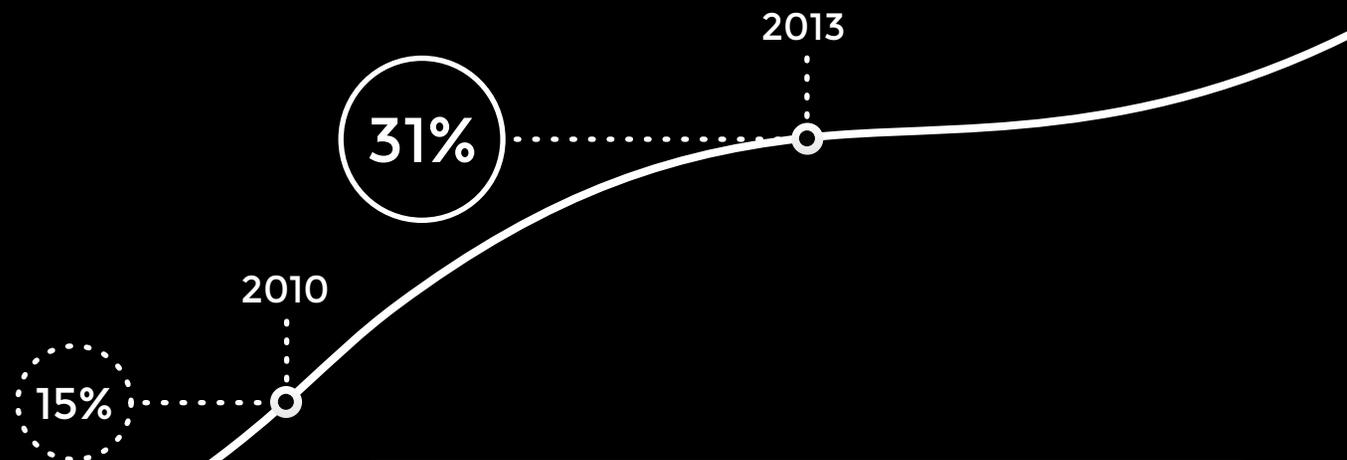
- **EARNED CONTENT IS BOTH COMPELLING AND MEASURABLE:**

Certainly, earned content is a way to create far more engaging and authentic marketing experiences for travelers. Instead of relying on stock photography, brands can let travelers weave a story about their personal travel journeys. However, earned content is also measurable, meaning that by employing it as a marketing strategy, brands do not need to sacrifice their understanding of campaign performance. As a bonus, traveler images will help inform brands of the valuable experiences they should be emphasizing in their marketing programs.

# BIG BRANDS, BOLD EARNED CONTENT INITIATIVES

More and more travel brands are putting the power of visual earned content to work for them—and engaging more and more prospective guests in the process. Here are some of the most notable recent examples of the world’s leading travel providers embracing earned content in innovative ways.

Smart hotel brands are beginning to recognize the value of their own websites: According to a recent **report** from EngageSciences, a U.K.-based marketing consultancy, in 2010, only 15% of travelers visited a hotel website when making a purchase decision. By 2013, this figure had more than doubled to 31%...and continues to rise.<sup>8</sup>



## HOTELS

### MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Creativity is the name of the earned content game at this venerable brand. In January 2015, it launched its **#TravelBrilliantly** campaign, partnering with GoPro to encourage guests to create quality content by giving them a complimentary GoPro Hero4 at 13 Marriott resorts in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, and asked them to share experiences with the hashtag #TravelBrilliantly. The videos are available on the campaign's [website](#), along with links to book your stay. To date, the campaign has received a large volume of submissions through multiple channels and media.

At some resorts, the brand has also integrated “Selfie Spots” across the property, curating locations that are set up for the most powerful “selfie” opportunities. This is a great example of how travel organizations can **connect the online world with the physical location** of their properties.



## HYATT

Hyatt is a fantastic example of how a renowned hotel brand can **optimize marketing by relying on guest-generated photos**. Using #InaHyattWorld, the brand worked with Olapic initially on a test of 9 property galleries to collect visual earned content, before expanding to include the more than 575 Hyatt hotels and resorts worldwide. We have worked together to launch [social.hyatt.com](https://social.hyatt.com), a hub of traveler photos that showcases guest experiences while staying at any of the brand's properties. With so many unique locations, each with distinct experiences and activities, creating valuable content was previously quite difficult, and exceptionally expensive.

Hyatt has enabled experiential filters like beaches, golf, family friendly, and weddings, allowing the hub to help travelers seek inspiration and book their next Hyatt stay without having a specific destination or hotel brand in mind. The hub also reflects the broader organizational direction being taken by



Hyatt, as the brand realizes the impact of the full traveler lifecycle, and advances its digital offerings beyond transactional and toward experiential. In addition to the gallery of consumer-generated photos found at [social.hyatt.com](https://social.hyatt.com), guest photos are featured on individual property sites such as [Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa](#).

The Hyatt hub demonstrates how travel brands can embrace consumer-generated images to create more guest-centric digital experiences that increase engagement and direct bookings. The use of guest photos satisfies the desire for more authentic content and keeps travel buyers on the brand's site instead of forcing them to seek out more visual content and potentially losing the booking to an online travel agent (OTA).

**"WE WANT TO BUILD LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR GUESTS, AND THAT MEANS OFFERING THEM DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES THAT KEEP THEM COMING BACK"**

**- ELLEN LEE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL DIGITAL, HYATT.**



## LARGE HOTEL CHAIN

One large hotel chain has bought into the omnichannel approach resulting in enormous success through earned content. The brand engaged Olapic to help collect the massive amount of content that was already being produced by travelers staying at their many properties. In less than a year, the brand has fully implemented an earned content strategy and in turn has seen enormous engagement, collecting more than **56,000 traveler images**. Here are some of the impressive initiatives that their implementation has enabled:

- **OMNICHANNEL BOOKING EXPERIENCE:**

UGC is placed on almost every page of the booking experience, starting with the homepage and ending with the confirmation page. The brand has used traveler content to help new customers make purchase decisions.

- **FULL TRAVELER LIFECYCLE:**

Perhaps most importantly, the brand engages the traveler not just pre-booking, but during their travel experience, resulting in an additional contribution of earned content.

- **BUILDING TRANSPARENT RELATIONSHIPS:**

The brand has received rights from its travelers for many of the collected and curated images, meaning consumers are actively engaged in helping provide relevant marketing content to the brand. The wealth of rights-approved content also enables far more activation opportunities for the brand down the line.

## SMALL HOTELS,

It's not just global hotel chains that are leveraging the power of Instagram—many independent properties are raising their profile and boosting engagement through creative contests and special offers tied to earned content.

As a [2015 Future Foundation report](#) noted:

Travel brands have now realized their websites and microsites are the most effective environments to consolidate and display authentic, persuasive consumer content. These locations are also where brands can capture valuable consumer data, encourage the creation and sharing of more visual earned content, and seamlessly move visitors directly into the purchase process.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Future Traveler Tribes 2030: Understanding Tomorrow's Traveller." Future Foundation. Accessed 2/10/2016.

## THE BURRARD, VANCOUVER

To promote its standing as a pet-friendly hotel in Vancouver, last April the hotel launched its #DogTiredBurrard Instagram contest. Over a two-week period, contestants were asked to follow the hotel's account and post a photo of their sleeping pet with the hashtag. The hotel's favorite entry won a two-night stay at The Burrard with their pet.

## 1888 HOTEL, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Billing itself as “the world's first Instagram hotel,” designed completely with Instagram-worthiness in mind, this colorful, stylish boutique property features plenty of photo-ready spots, including a “selfie space” with a giant ornate frame for posing. Instagrammers with 30,000+ followers automatically receive a free night's stay, while the non-influencers who share property photos using the #1888HOTEL tag are eligible to win a free night in the hotel's monthly contest.



# TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

## ADVENTURE TRAVEL BRAND

An international travel brand specializing in adventure travel uses Olapic to help them capture and activate the exceptional experiences being had by travelers on their various trips. After just over a year, the brand has collected close to 10,000 traveler photos through the Olapic platform. They've enabled measurement of earned content impact by activating across the entire traveler web experience, including placing UGC on a gallery, on booking detail pages, on the homepage, and on each category page of the website. They also have a checkout pixel that assists in attributing revenue to specific content viewership.

## TIMESHARE BRAND

Olapic has worked with the arm of a major hotel brand responsible for the organization's vacation club options, to enable sharing of relevant earned content from a myriad of applicable properties. Purchasing a timeshare or vacation club is a more involved process than a typical vacation since the price point is much higher and a consumer is being asked to commit to the brand for a number of years. As a result, the need for authentic, engaging content is exacerbated as consumers interact with the brand on many channels prior to the point of purchase. Through our platform, the brand enables owners to showcase not only the properties

in a realistic capacity, but the activities and lifestyle that are facilitated through membership, which is a much more impactful story for both the brand and its prospective consumers alike.

volume of content isn't necessarily helpful if it isn't the right content. Fortunately, Gate 1 also saw an increase of 2,059% in approved photos over the same analysis period.

**GATE1 TRAVEL**

Gate 1 Travel, an international tour operator providing escorted tours, independent travel and custom groups around the world, had been getting a limited amount of valuable visual content from their consumers. Recently, the brand worked with Olapic to launch a contest, drawing on email promotion and social media activation to drum up visual content. In just 30 days, Gate 1 was able to realize a 1,584% increase in collected images compared to the previous month. Still, an enormous



## AIRLINES

Airlines are not typically known for exceptional traveler experiences. Of course, travel, especially to exotic locales, can be a long, uncomfortable experience. Aside from increasing leg-room and in-flight services, smart airline brands are also turning the spotlight onto the incredible travel experiences they are enabling for their consumers.

In addition, airlines are working to improve the experience of travel itself:

- **OFF THE PLANE:**

A better travel/terminal/waiting experience goes a long way. For example, some airline clubs are installing spas, door to door baggage delivery, and other luxury services.

- **ON THE PLANE:**

Airlines are finding more selling opportunities for consumers, such as advanced entertainment and gourmet meal options.



### NORWEGIAN AIR REWARDS

The third largest low-cost carrier in Europe wanted to drum up visual earned content from travelers using the brand to achieve life-changing experiences. Olapic worked with them to **create a contest using the hashtag #CashPoints**, asking travelers to share their best summer vacation pictures, either through Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or the native image uploader on the microsite. The winner, after an enormous volume of engaging submissions, received 10,000 cash points. Certainly, the cost for the brand was miniscule when compared to the value of the content that was created. In addition to engaging a number of travelers, the brand set a precedent for future contests, exposure, and consumer giveaways.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **THINK BEYOND THE IN-ROOM COFFEE MACHINE:**

Pictures of the pool and the guest rooms are fine, but prospective travelers need to know more about the experience they can have while staying at a particular location. Smart hotel brands are enabling their guests to capture user-generated visuals on their own terms, and using the content to create authentic marketing experiences that engage prospective travelers in a more

- **RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF YOUR BRAND'S WEBSITE:**

Smart travel brands have now realized that their brand-owned web platforms are the most effective environments to consolidate and display authentic, persuasive consumer content. These locations are also where brands can capture valuable consumer data, encourage the creation and sharing of more visual earned content, and seamlessly move visitors directly into the purchase

- **IMPROVE THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE FOR MORE EARNED CONTENT OPPORTUNITIES:**

Some airlines are doing more to improve the experience for travelers both on-and-off the plane, as well as highlighting the unique travel destinations they service. In turn, they are increasing the opportunity for earned content creation throughout the entire consumer journey.

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