

This month's newsletter will focus on **digitalization as a result of the pandemic, its impacts on the tourism industry, and how operators leverage this trend.** Technology continues to disrupt the industry with global tourism boards and experts recognizing the solutions it can bring to tourism, especially regarding labour bottlenecks, visitor conversion, and more efficient marketing.

What's Inside

- [Generative AI is Shaking Travel Marketing Up](#)
- [Skift Megatrends 2023](#)
- [Facial Recognition Could Make Airports More Efficient, But at What Price?](#)

Technology is Dramatically Accelerating Change in the Tourism Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the tourism industry to rapidly change, and this transformation occurred alongside the ongoing digitalization advancements. Companies have sped up the process of digitizing their interactions with customers and supply chains by three to four years. Over time, consumers have generated vast amounts of data through their use of technology. This data can now be analyzed to map consumer behaviours and guide decisions related to pricing, marketing, and product development.

Technological advancements such as mobile boarding passes and online travel agencies have revolutionized the way travellers plan, pay for, and enjoy their trips. Even after a traveller has returned home, technology extends the journey by providing ways to leave reviews, share memories, and start saving and planning for the next trip. Given the current trend towards mobile technology and consumers' reliance on technology in their daily lives, travel and hospitality businesses can stand out from their competitors by embracing the latest digital advancements. At the same time, geo-targeting and localization are becoming increasingly prevalent, and data can be used in near-real time to monitor the pandemic, airport capacity, source markets, booking trends, program impacts, jobs, and sentiment analysis. As part of this digital transformation, governments have an opportunity to reimagine their role in providing data infrastructure and capabilities to the tourism sector. Data will provide destinations with a better understanding of their visitors, enabling them to identify trends, make

predictions, and enhance experiences. With better data on customer journeys and preferences, destinations can make demand-informed investments in destination development and stewardship.

Travel brands are increasingly realizing the importance of moving ahead with the digital transformation of all business areas they had started before the pandemic, which has hastened the process of digital transformation in the travel and hospitality industries. As we move into a new era of travel, brands that use technological innovation to their advantage will have a competitive edge in regaining customers. Technology will play a crucial role in enhancing the travel experience, as customers will look to artificial intelligence (AI) and other customer experience (CX) technologies to help them deal with the challenges associated with travelling.

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Generative AI is Shaking Travel Marketing Up

While AI historically has been about using existing datasets to draw conclusions and make predictions, generative AI is a fundamentally new development that can generate a new, unique product based on specific rules it's given. Generative AI is based on what's known as a transformer model, essentially a new kind of artificial neural network that spots patterns in data where the sequence of the elements is important. For example, the words in a sentence. In creating a sentence, the software uses an incredibly complex statistical analysis to make a decision on what the next word most likely would be. The AI is "trained" with a significant amount of all the writing humans have ever created, so the computer is able to leverage that data to create something new based on what humans tend to say in those circumstances.

Talk of this phenomenon has now become mainstream since the company OpenAI released a chatbot, ChatGPT, powered by the latest available generative AI technology. OpenAI is a San Francisco-based AI research lab founded in 2015 with \$1 billion from former Y Combinator president Sam Altman, Elon Musk, and others. Microsoft invested \$1 billion in the company in 2019.

The chatbot itself, when prompted, said generative AI has a number of implications in the travel industry: personalized travel recommendations and itineraries, virtual simulated tours of real-life places, improvement of travel-related search engine results, and generating content for travel websites. In travel marketing, it could generate personalized advertisements, predict

customer behavior to inform the best marketing strategies for targeted demographics, and provide personalized customer service.

Marketing agencies are experimenting now with AI software platforms dedicated to generating marketing copy and marketing campaign ideas, as well as marketing campaign assets and images. Google is working on its own technology that uses text prompts to generate art and video as well as edit images. Ultimately, innovators want to be able to generate a number of things, like PowerPoint presentations and even music, starting with a text prompt.

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RTO 9 News

Other Eligibility Requirements

- \$2 Million General Commercial Liability insurance coverage.
- Applicants must be located within the region served by RTO 9.
- Applicants must communicate their project plans with their local DMO/DMP.
- Full disclosure of all other funding granted to the initiative.



Partnership Funding Application Will Close on March 3rd, 2023

The video above will help you determine whether your project or organization is eligible to apply, how the program works, and what expenses can be incurred under the project. For more information, [view our Website](#) or connect with Meg Dabros at mdabros@region9tourism.ca for all questions related to our application process.



Workforce Development - 'Discovery Days'

The Discovery Day - Careers in Skilled Trades and Technologies Event, brings together tourism-related skilled trade/technology professionals and educational institutions throughout South Eastern Ontario for a common goal; to inspire youth to make skilled trades and technologies first choice career options. Originally planned as a virtual event, Skills Ontario, the organization RTO 9 contracted to lead this event, have organized in-person events for the students in Grades 7 to 12 at two amazing venues to be held in April of 2023.

1. Tuesday April 11 at Upper Canada Village in Morrisburg. This will be for those from Gananoque to Cornwall. Upper Canada will be opening the blacksmith and the bakery for the students to have that additional experience.
2. Thursday April 13 at Fort Henry in Kingston for those students west of Gananoque to Belleville.

Connect with Katherine Hobbs at khobbs@region9tourism.ca to learn more.

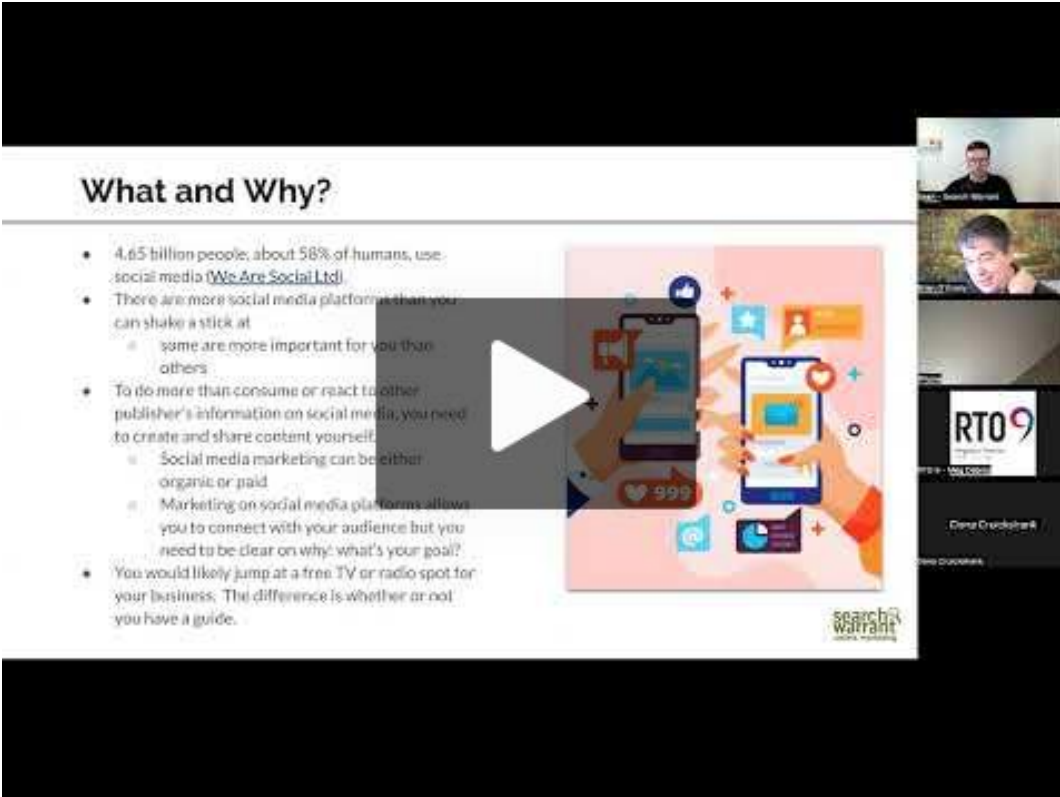
Volunteer Management – Best Practices

Date: Wednesday, March 21st 2023, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Location: Kempville & Online

In this Workshop, you will learn to recruit, track, engage and retain valuable people by crafting a plan that includes an effective system for managing volunteers.

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What and Why?

- 4.65 billion people, about 58% of humans, use social media ([We Are Social Ltd](#))
- There are more social media platforms than you can shake a stick at
 - some are more important for you than others
- To do more than consume or react to other publisher's information on social media, you need to create and share content yourself.
 - Social media marketing can be either organic or paid
 - Marketing on social media platforms allows you to connect with your audience but you need to be clear on why: what's your goal?
- You would likely jump at a free TV or radio spot for your business. The difference is whether or not you have a guide.

The slide features an illustration of hands interacting with various social media devices and icons, including a smartphone, a tablet, and social media icons like a heart, a share, and a person. A large white play button is overlaid on the illustration. The slide is part of a webinar interface, with a video feed of a presenter visible on the right side.

Which Social Media Platforms Are Best for Your Business?

If you missed our Webinar, you can access the recording on our Website.

[VIEW THE RECORDING](#)

Here's How To Connect With Us on Social Media

Our consumer regional brand, [South Eastern Ontario](#), gives a sense of place and the content found on our social channels, website, and newsletter, targets future visitors from outside of the region and locals that live within the region.

We encourage our tourism partners and operators to share with us their stories, products, experiences, and packages [with our South Eastern Ontario social media channels](#). Keeping us in the loop with your offerings can lead to opportunities in features on our channels or pitched to our PR Agency. Read our blog post below on what our channels are and how to connect with us.

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Market Insights

Tourism HR Canada Monthly Tourism Snapshot

Tourism HR Canada released its latest monthly employment summary (February 15, 2023) for the month of January. Here are the key highlights:

- In January, the tourism industry experienced a rise in its labor force (+15,100) compared to the previous month, but there was a slight decrease in employment (-8,500). However, both indices were still lower than the 2019 benchmark. The decline in employment was due to a 1.2% decrease in the number of hours worked, although the ratio of part-time to full-time work was mostly unchanged.
- Unemployment was 1% higher in January than in December, but significantly lower than in January 2022, and overall tourism unemployment matched the broader Canadian unemployment rate of 5.5%

TOURISM LABOUR FORCE

The number of individuals
employed or unemployed
(actively seeking work for < 1 year)

JANUARY 2023
2,022,200

DECEMBER 2022
2,007,100

JANUARY 2019
2,115,000

TOURISM EMPLOYMENT

The number of
individuals in jobs

JANUARY 2023
1,910,900

DECEMBER 2022
1,919,400

JANUARY 2019
2,006,400

- In comparison to January 2022, the tourism sector experienced substantial growth, with all industry groups showing improvement over the past year. The greatest proportionate improvement was seen in travel services and recreation and entertainment. This could be due to increased confidence in these industries as pandemic-related health concerns continued to decrease. The lower unemployment rates for both groups further support this interpretation.
- Tourism employment comprised 9.7% of total employment in Canada in January 2023, which was the same as December 2022, but less than the January 2019 rate of 10.9%. The tourism sector employed 9.2% of the national workforce.
- The unemployment rate in the tourism industry in January was 5.5%, which was slightly higher than the January 2019 rate of 5.1% and over a full percentage point higher than the rate in December (4.4%).

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Resident Sentiment

Destination Canada's Resident Sentiment Report reveals how safe residents feel about travelling to different places in Canada. Here are the highlights from the latest update with data collection in December 2022:

- Compared to the previous month, likelihood to travel over the next 9 months within Ontario and to other provinces and territories has remained stable, but increasing over the previous 2 months. Demand for inter-provincial travel is lower between December to April (between 4% to 13%), picking up again in May (19%).
- Demand for travel to Ontario from residents from Saskatchewan has increased significantly from 6% to 15%, while demand from other provinces remains stable, with residents from Newfoundland & Labrador (37%), Nova Scotia (34%), Québec (31%) and Manitoba (31%) being the most interested to travel to Ontario in the next 9 months.
- Ontarians' interest in travelling to other provinces has increased compared to previous months, being strongest for British Columbia (30%), Québec (27%), Nova Scotia (22%), and Alberta (22%).
- Feelings of safety among Ontarians are at the highest level since COVID-19 when it comes to travelling internationally, with more than half feeling safe to travel internationally. While 88% of people in Ontario feel safe travelling within the province, only 47% of Ontarians feel comfortable travelling to the US - less than to other international destinations. This suggests that there will continue to be strong potential for domestic visitation in 2023, but international travel demand is gradually increasing.
- Lastly, Ontarians' level of comfort with welcoming visitors also increased – with 84% of Ontarians' feeling welcoming to visitors from nearby communities, 84% for visitors from other parts of Ontario, and 82% from the rest of Canada. These levels decrease when considering welcoming visitors from the US (67%) or other countries (70%), but have seen a steep improvement compared to the previous months.

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Skift Megatrends 2023

Leading travel news editor Skift has recently released their annual tourism Megatrends. The report offers a wide-ranging set of topics hoping to guide tourism businesses in smarter ways for 2023 and beyond. These are the 16 trends to watch out:

1. The Anywhere Traveler Puts New Destinations on the Map
2. India Becomes the New China in the Reordering of Asia Travel
3. Travelers Learn to Live With Permanxiety
4. Climate Impact Moves From Marketing to Operations
5. Big Banks Chase a Bigger Piece of the Travel Market
6. Blended Travel Comes of Age
7. Price Transparency in Short-Term Rentals Will Catch Fire
8. Border Bottlenecks Widen Travel's Divide
9. Tour Operators Embrace the Long-Elusive Software Solution
10. The Changing Face of Human Capital in Travel
11. TikTok Chips Away at Google's Dominance in Travel Discovery
12. A New Super Luxury Goes a Step Further
13. Planners Embrace Transformational Experience-First Events
14. Travel Marketing Poised for Reboot From Generative AI
15. Airline Revenue Success Comes With Cost Distress
16. Hotels Make Emotion The New Brand Standard

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Media Spotlight

The Great Taste of Canada

[The Culinary Tourism Alliance](#) is leading a nation-wide program called "The Great Taste of Canada" to support culinary and agritourism development and marketing efforts in Canada. This program, which is supported by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, involves collaborative marketing and

partnership efforts between tourism stakeholders, national organizations, and media across the country.

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Facial Recognition Could Make Airports More Efficient, But at What Price?

Air Canada is launching a new digital identification option for select passengers traveling through Vancouver International Airport and visiting the lounge at Toronto's Pearson International. This new option allows users to board at their gate or enter a lounge without the need for a physical ID like a passport or driver's license. Instead, passengers can upload a photo of their face and a scan of their passport to the Air Canada app, where the information, called a "faceprint," is stored. This move is believed to be the first of its kind for a Canadian airline.

According to John Gradek, an aviation expert at McGill University, Air Canada is behind on facial recognition technology. More than a dozen airports in the United States have already implemented similar technology since last fall, and Frankfurt Airport in Germany recently announced plans to roll out biometrics for the boarding process this year. While facial recognition technology is still in the early stages of implementation, airports and airlines are testing the technology in the hopes of creating a more automated airport process.

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New Global Brand Strategy Inspires Openness and Puts Canada On the Map

[Destination Canada](#) has unveiled a new global brand strategy that positions Canada as the destination that fosters openness. The strategy will be promoted through a range of conventional and unconventional marketing initiatives to increase Canada's appeal as a destination and attract high-value international visitors.

According to Gloria Loree, Senior Vice President of Marketing Strategy & Chief Marketing Officer at Destination Canada, today's travelers want more than just a travel experience; they desire a place for growth, enrichment, and genuine

transformation. Canada's unique combination of open spaces, hearts, and minds offer travelers the room they crave to break free in a world that can make them feel trapped. Loree believes that this uniqueness will differentiate Canada in the highly competitive travel marketplace.

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Workforce Development

TIAO Advancing Sustainable Tourism in Ontario: Take the Sustainable Tourism 2030 Pledge

Date: Wednesday, March 21st 2023, 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Location: Online

Attend TIAO's session with the [GreenStep team to learn about the Sustainable Tourism 2030 Pledge](#), which aims to make Ontario a leader in sustainable tourism. By attending you will learn about how to measure your sustainability performance, an overview of the criteria used to assess your business or destination and be part of a community of industry businesses and destinations making a commitment to improving their results by 2030.

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Rainbow Registered Program

Rainbow Registered is a national accreditation for LGBT+ friendly businesses and organizations. When you see a Rainbow Registered symbol, you know the business or organization meets a stringent set of standards to ensure LGBT+ customers feel safe, welcomed, and accepted.

The accreditation program grants a time-limited recognition to businesses and organizations for demonstrating compliance with the quality standard. Accredited businesses are deemed market ready for the LGBT+ customer and given the right to be associated with the program's prestigious Rainbow Registered designation mark.

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[CGLCC D&I TRAINING OPTIONS](#)



Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA) Launches New Certificate Training Program For Ontario Businesses

This free certificate training program called [“Make Local Sourcing Work For You,” created in partnership with OTEC](#), focuses on incorporating local food into tourism businesses in Ontario to support sustainable economic development.

Participants will learn how to source local ingredients, build business partnerships, and share their story to enhance their tourism products. The course is useful for anyone interested in developing food tourism in Ontario, including front-line staff, tour guides, chefs, and general managers. By the end of the course, participants will understand the local food system and how to leverage it to create a more dynamic taste of place for guests. They will also be able to explain the potential value of local food for the tourism industry, local food systems, and their own businesses.

[REGISTER & USE ACCESS CODE CTA](#)

Featured Operators/ Destinations



Tourism Prince Edward Island Announced Tourism Seasonal Extension Program

Tourism Prince Edward Island has announced a new Tourism Seasonal Extension Program to encourage capital investments that enable tourism businesses to remain open throughout multiple seasons, stimulating economic activity across Prince Edward Island during historically slower periods.

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Ontario Airport and Discover IE Team Up to Encourage Global Travelers to Explore the Two-County Region

Ontario International Airport has collaborated with Discover IE to establish an information center in the international terminal, promoting lesser-known attractions in the Inland Empire to boost tourism. Discover IE, a nonprofit marketing destination, highlights entertainment opportunities in the region, intending to lure tourists to explore the area. The new information center and photo booth at ONT are in the international terminal, which serves as the gateway for Avianca, China Airlines, and Volaris passengers.

In 2022, the airport recorded almost 200,000 international travelers, and the Discover IE center's location puts nearby tourist attractions directly in the path of passengers entering the international terminal.

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Opportunities

Federal Government Declared Millions in Funding For Job Growth, Public Infrastructure in Eastern Ontario

On February 13, the Canadian federal government revealed its decision to invest \$16.5 million in various projects in Eastern Ontario communities. The funding will assist local businesses in expanding, as well as rejuvenating community spaces and enhancing tourism attractions to attract more visitors and generate employment. The funding will also support the economy of eastern Ontario, with three manufacturers and 27 tourism and community projects receiving support.

Francis Drouin, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Glengary-Prescott-Russell, stated that the current investment for 30 businesses, community organizations, and tourism operators in eastern Ontario is benefiting the regional economy and generating more than 150 skilled jobs. Drouin added that the government's investment in these projects is a necessary step in assisting communities and businesses in contributing to a more resilient future.

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Every month, we'll be sending you the latest insights, research and thoughtful perspectives on the issues that matter most to tourism businesses and operators in RTO 9.

If there are any topics you want to read about in a future newsletter, please email Imedeiros@region9tourism.com with your ideas.

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OUR INDUSTRY PARTNERS



DESTINATION
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