

IDEAS LABS

ENGAGING, INFORMATIVE PEER TO PEER LEARNING

Building Back Better – Contributing to a Better Future for Tourism

Industry Topic Specialist

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Specialist Highlights

Sustainability is a pillar around which the Okanagan Lavender & Herb Farm (OLHF) operates and they let people know this. Everything they do is rooted in the land and they strive to leave the land better than they found it.

OLHF has endured a variety of challenges, including hard, cold winters and fires, impacting the viability of their business; COVID-19 is simply the most recent. The following are some of the changes made to ensure their long-term resilience and sustainability.

- Improved their capacity for online sales.
- Strengthened their focus on sustainability in all areas of the business (e.g., introduced biodegradable packaging).
- Rebranded to more prominently emphasize their sustainable practices.
- Diversified their products, services and experiences to attract new markets.
- Invested in high-quality digital content to enhance the online visitor experience and optimize the potential of their digital storefront.
- Better leveraged their newsletter and social media channels to engage with existing and potential customers.

These changes have resulted in OLHF attracting an environmentally conscious market.

Discussion Ideas & Tips

COVID-19 has presented the tourism industry with a choice to consider: emerge doing business as usual or use responsible, sustainable principles to contribute to a better future for the industry.

This summary highlights thoughts and ideas from 15 operators and professionals regarding ways that tourism can look at sustainable, responsible and regenerative practices as an investment in building back better for the long-term.

Key Takeaway

COVID-19 has resulted in changes in consumer attitudes and expectations, some of which relate to environmental practices and a desire for sustainable communities. Businesses investing in such practices and building sustainable business models now are setting themselves up for future success.

Actions Being Taken/ Considered

Environmental impacts

Changes operators have made, that if well positioned are practices that may continue when travel resumes:

- Accommodation providers on Hornby Island asked guests to bring their own linens – an eco-friendly solution (reduced impacts from cleaning laundry), especially for short stay guests.
- High Country Trail Rides had people bring their own gloves, which reduced the use of hard chemicals on the tack.
- Many operators moved to delivering small group, personalized tours with time between them, rather than continuous large group tours, which reduced environmental impacts and made for a better visitor experience.

Sustainable business practices

- Developing online experiences to supplement revenues, which will provide a blended offer of face-to-face and virtual experiences in the future.
- Developing partnerships with other businesses as a way to strengthen the overall offer and attract multi-day stays.

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- Developing self-guided, free touring experiences as a lure that can provide an opportunity for operators to upsell other paid experiences. Covert Farms did this to great success on their farm and may add QR codes next year to provide more information on each spot they highlighted.
- Renting space as a way to monetize infrastructure, such as when [Frog on the Bog](#) rented out their retail store to private bubble groups. Alternatively, partnering with other businesses to share space can also introduce new customers to the both businesses.
- Commercializing virtual experiences based on tapping into what people value or are interested in. (education, learning a new skill, escape, ability to socialize, etc.).
- Partnering with businesses with similar core values. For OLHF this has meant exploring opportunities with other businesses that have similar values regarding sustainability such as [Pelacase](#), a local company making phone cases from flax (how cool!).
- Partnering with non-for-profit organizations can be a great way to showcase a commitment to a sustainable future. OLHF did this when they charged visitors who wanted multiple bags a 'bag fee' that was donated to [Tree Canada](#). Doing this provided staff with an opportunity to talk about the company's sustainability values and initiatives.
- Providing gifts for locals (e.g., OLHF's gift of seed packets that could no longer be given out to visitors) or developing small experiences are ways to attract and engage locals.
- Food was identified as a key way to attract locals. This can be something as simple as offering picnics on the property or more creative such as the experiences offered by [The Paisley Notebook](#). Now is a great time to test new food related experiences on locals that you can offer to visitors once travel resumes.
- Creating new child-friendly visitor experiences to entice families: Covert farms added a mini walking tour of the farm for children that provided opportunities to interact with the animals and an understanding of the farm. This child-based experience provided a regenerative opportunity for parents who were able to relax during a family picnic or wine tasting.
- Investing time and money to build digital marketing capabilities. OLHF focused on building a base of subscribers to their newsletters and found [The Keyboard CEO Manifesto](#) from the [DO Lectures](#) particularly helpful in designing and writing compelling newsletter copy. Their newsletter takes a soft sell approach and includes practical DIY tips for their customers.
- Using influencers was seen as potentially helpful if the influencer's base is a target for the business and if there is an alignment in objectives. Checking with the regional tourism associations or Destination BC can be helpful in assessing the merits of influencer marketing or a specific influencer.
- Reviewing metrics is important in understandings which efforts are working and which are not. Marketing tools (CRM programs, mailing programs, etc.) that provide metrics make it easier for a business to know where to concentrate their efforts.

Industry support / DMOs contributions

- Helping communities (residents and businesses) realize the importance and value of tourism in sustaining the local economy.
- Strengthening the community's understanding of the benefits of Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) funding, that it has potential to support more than just marketing, e.g. address social housing, maintenance of community tourism assets such as trails, etc.
- Developing virtual experiences of their community/region as a way of creating awareness of the area and the experiences available.
- Exploring self-driving tours based on areas of passion as a way to move visitors around the region and support a range of local businesses. Other approaches included adventure races, geo-caching, scavenger hunts, etc. Touring apps and [Google Maps](#) were identified as helpful tools in locating points of interest.
- Providing support and learning opportunities for businesses, especially in the area of digital literacy.

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Additional Helpful Links

- TOTA was the community host for this series and they are working with FortisBC and [GreenStep](#) to provide operators in their region with [eco-efficiency assessments](#).
- Programs to assist operators in building digital literacy offered by regional tourism associations as well as through the [Tourism Resiliency Network](#) and [Destination BC](#)
- Enviro-friendly packaging – [Sulapac](#) (OLHF were the first Canadian company to use this packaging)
- Okanagan Lavender & Herb Farm – [Who We Are](#) YouTube video and COVID-19 – [Resiliency Story](#)
- [The DO Lectures](#) – the encouragement network through courses, podcasts and other approaches
- Destination BC Overview of [Municipal & Regional District Tax \(MRDT\) Funding](#)

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