



POWERING TRAVEL | SEASON 2 | EPISODE 4

Destination organizations: Making travel possible

What to listen for:

Open up your podcast app and queue episode four of Powering Travel, featuring special guest Andreas Weissenborn, Vice President of Research and Advocacy at Destinations International.

In this episode, your host Brandon Ehrhardt is joined by guest host Andy van der Feltz for an illuminating discussion with Andreas. The three take a deep dive into the responsibilities of DMOs, or destination organizations, and explore the many roles they play in the world of travel.

From promoting tourism to destination marketing, learn how DMOs increase community vitality, support sustainable tourism, and strengthen local destinations.

Introduction:

[00:00:04] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Travel providers are the backbone of the travel experience. In this brand-new season of Powering Travel, we'll dive into industry trends, hot topics, and actionable advice to help business leaders continue evolving and enhancing travel experience one trip at a time. Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Powering Travel Podcast. This week we are bringing you a topic that is meant to pull the curtain back on the entities on the ground at the local level that are making travel possible destination organizations. From marketing attractions to supporting travel providers, the work of a destination organization is vast. Think of any city you've visited in the last year. That destination has a group of folks working hard to ensure that you can get there with ease, find the right accommodations, while also making sure that the local communities are seeing the positive effects of tourism. Joining me in my copilot seat is someone who is deeply familiar with the work of the destination organization, Andy van der Feltz, the global senior director of business development for Expedia Group Media Solutions. Andy, thanks for joining and go ahead and introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your background.

[00:01:15] **Andy van der Feltz** Thank you for inviting me up here in the copilot seat. Yes, you're right. A couple of decades of working with DMOs in various parts of the world, but for the last seven years now with Expedia Media Solutions working closely with DMOs and watching them as they've been evolving. So, I'm really excited to be having this conversation with Andreas today and finding a little bit more about what the future holds for destination organizations and for destination management organizations in particular.

[00:01:39] **Brandon Ehrhardt** The guest we have for you today is living and breathing destination advocacy every day. He's even got a podcast about it. He's knee-deep in destination advocacy. Andreas Weissenborn, he's a senior director of research and advocacy at Destinations International, a global association that equips destination organizations to positively impact local communities. We're going to talk about his journey. It started off with an internship with Visit Baltimore, and he's continued that into an illustrious career that he shares with us, working very closely with destination organizations. His podcast, Architects of Destination Advocacy, is the podcast for professionals in the tourism sector, and it features stories focused on tackling the biggest issues in the industry. So now, without further ado, we're not going to make you wait for it. Here is our interview. Andreas Weissenborn. I've got to start with like my open question here is I saw that you put a random application for an internship and this led you to the world of hospitality. So, give us a little bit

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more about how you got started into travel and then how you've begun a career and really continued a career with Visit Baltimore.

[00:02:49] **Andreas Weissenborn** Sure, absolutely. And thank you for having me, Brandon. Yeah, starting point was like a lot of folks in travel tourism wise. You don't plan to end up in travel and tourism. I was a very young millennial at the time, so it must've have been right around '05, '06. Recognized college kind of wasn't my thing. I was trying to get out as fast as possible and recognize my college had a career center for internships in the area, and this was in the Baltimore area. So, I just started applying to as many internships as possible because I would get credit for it for college. So, less time in college, more time just working, doing my own thing in my time. And I remember I used to be, back in the day, it was just like a physical bulletin board of like paper tearaways. And one of them was at the time was for the local DMO that was then named the Baltimore Area Convention of Business Association, now known as Visit Baltimore. I think I sent out like eight or ten applications, various other tech companies and stuff like that. And Visit Baltimore back at the time was the other one that called back, and so the rest is history.

[00:03:48] **Brandon Ehrhardt** That's pretty incredible. I totally agree on the piece around like a lot of people just find themselves in travel. Andy, let's talk about your journey into travel. How did you get into the travel business?

[00:03:59] **Andy van der Feltz** I thought this was all about Andreas, Brandon. Nice clip.

[00:04:02] **Brandon Ehrhardt** We're rounding it out.

[00:04:04] **Andy van der Feltz** I recognized myself in what Andreas is saying in there. I was looking for a summer job, and so it wasn't even in internship. And I applied to the Scottish Tourist Board, STB as it was known then, and got a summer position, which then elongates to six years and then worked for Dutch National Tourism Board. So, that's been 22 years in DMOs. Not bad for a summer job. Made my way to Expedia a couple of years. When I studied in marketing and modern languages, my dissertation right to the end without knowing it was the effectiveness of UK marketing for the Dutch tourism industry. And it turned out I worked for the Dutch industry six years later, so I don't know, fate. Andreas, what do you think?

[00:04:41] **Andreas Weissenborn** Again, it's just one of those things with tourism as a very unique tale that folks just sort of fall into it without realizing and then of course never leave. I mean, I'm definitely considered a lifer, so I'm sure both of you are as well. So, it's good company to be in.

[00:04:55] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Yeah, I started at United and then made my way over to Expedia, and Andy sounds like he had a summer job he never quit. So, I think it's great to bring the three of us together. Let's dive into why we're here. I think we want to talk about destination organizations, and I think, from my outsider's perspective, it's certainly a concept that most understand but likely don't understand the full nuance of what a really destination organization can be. So, let's talk about the structure of destination organizations and obviously they're structured differently across states as well as structured definitely globally. Can you provide just some clarification? What is a DMO? What is a visitors bureau? What is a Tourism Board? Where do they intersect and how are they different?

[00:05:40] **Andreas Weissenborn** Sure. It's definitely a loaded question. And really, we like to say destination organization, which has all these different acronyms — DMO, Tourism Board, CVB, Convention Visitors Bureau. Really, what it comes down to is an entity that is responsible for a community's brand and promoting it, managing it, and stewarding it at the world stage for attention. So, that can be a traditional, in the United States we'll call 501(c)(6) nonprofit for a community, but they can also be a parks department that has that role. Really, it's any entity in a community on its behalf as the brand, and its job is to try to bring that attention. And that attention, of course, one of the byproducts is not only tourism, but economic development, community vitality, and so on and so forth. That really is what we call the centerpiece of a destination organization. Now, you can add on responsibilities to that. So, particularly those who have that responsibility but also are in charge of selling group business. So, let's say your community has a large conference center, hotel vibrancy, and whatnot. They have the added responsibility of selling what we call

convention sales or business events as well on top of it. Again, though, we're still talking a community brand at the world stage and pushing it out there and try to get people to pay attention to that brand.

[00:06:53] **Brandon Ehrhardt** That was very succinct. If we asked a person on the street, you said, "Hey, you know who enables travel?" I think you'd hear mostly suppliers, airlines, hotels, car rental companies. But really DMOs can do a lot. Destination marketing organizations can do a lot to drive and enable travel. Talk about some of the most successful ways a DMO can really promote travel.

[00:07:15] **Andreas Weissenborn** Yeah, I like to use the analogy a lot that's very similar to a gardener. I reacquired a plot of land and quickly realized that even though I do nothing, stuff grows. But the downside of that, those last of the grows, I don't want to grow. I do think tourism as a byproduct is very similar to that. What a destination organization does is really help synergize and synthesize sales and marketing and promotion and advertising of the community and help bolster it to all its various suppliers and other channels. So, very commonly, one of the most prominent assets a DMO owns and has is its website. Its brand. We're thinking about going to a community, let's actually check out its community's brand or, in that case, the website. But you see this across every type of medium now. I mean podcast one, video, digital, so on and so forth, which really make it really the cornerstone or I would call the steward again of that brand and pushing it out so everyone has a chance to pay attention to it. And then again, when you garner attention, that's how you acquire tourism from it is part of it.

[00:08:14] **Andy van der Feltz** I've noticed, and maybe that's something you started in 2005, 2006. A lot has changed in the world of DMO globally in that period. I think in 2006, I don't think we were talking about the destination management that it owned stewardship. It was still very much about destination management or promotion marketing organizations and therefore pushing, pushing, pushing. But in those transitional years between 2000 and let's say '06 and where we are today, you touched on a stewardship, and management have really taken over from promotion. That thought together with the fact that you still think that the website is the key point because I think you're right. Curation of content is what's happening. I think more and more as the world fragment and consumption of content fragment. Your thoughts around that and where you see the next chapter of that evolution from the necessity to have a website to the necessity to create the content on the broader platform.

[00:09:11] **Andreas Weissenborn** Sure. Let's dig into a little bit of philosophy here. You all understand the link between clean water to be healthy. You understand, to be educated, you need teachers. You understand to get to your jobs, you need roads and bridges. That's what we call common goods, crown goods in the UK, public goods, things that we deem necessary for society to benefit ourselves, essentially what you call a community shared value. Right? Things we know we need to invest in to better ourselves as really just part of the human condition. What I think has really changed is communities are starting to understand, just like those other common goods. When you choose not to invest in clean water, you see what happens. Right? You know, our country in America has many instances. What happens when we devalue infrastructure costs like that. The same thing is true of a brand, right? When you do not invest in it, whether that's website marketing, manager, staffing, whatever, you fall behind. Here's what's really changed since the pandemic. The number one currency in the world, it's not gas, it's not gold, it's not oil. Although I would take any of them if you all got it. It really is what we call talent acquisition. We really are sort of in the talent wars here. You think about what the pandemic did even before it, it accelerated this trend of no longer having to live by where you work. So, from the perspective of destination organization or a community, they now can't compete again at this world stage for the greatest currency in the world: talent. And I think what communities are starting to recognize is saying, okay, we want that attention. How do we get that attention? Well, it starts with having a brand. So, let's invest in a brand. And the way to invest in a brand is we need a destination organization who represents our community. That's really, I think, been the fundamental shift. I would say, really, it's been on this pathway since 9/11. And like everything, the pandemic just accelerated in a timeline unlike we've ever seen in human history. The past two and a half, three years. And that's really what I think the next evolution or natural platform we're evolving to is destination organizations being again in that pantheon of other common goods, right, community share value.

[00:11:18] **Andy van der Feltz** That's the cleanest and most concise answer we've had to that question in years. So, thank you for that.

[00:11:24] **Brandon Ehrhardt** You're phenomenal so far. Let's pivot a little bit from this question and kind of stay in the same space. But something I want to ask you about is overtourism. And this is a term that was coined five or six years ago from our friends at Skift. I think you have a unique perspective on overtourism. Who do you feel is responsible for overtourism and what are some ways a destination marketing organization can help support sustainability?

How DMOs can support sustainability:

[00:11:50] **Andreas Weissenborn** Sure. Interesting as, according to Skift, they recently announced they're going away from it.

[00:11:55] **Brandon Ehrhardt** That they're moving away from the term. Yes. Yes.

[00:11:57] **Andreas Weissenborn** We don't really believe in the term overtourism. What we believe in is a failure in destination management. Again, I'll use that gardener example as well. Right? Like I realize I'm looking at this spot of land in front of me, like if I do nothing, a lot of stuff grows on my grass soil, but there's a lot of stuff that grows that I don't want to grow: weeds, dandelions, something my allergies go nuts for. My role in that is I understand I have to manage the land, right? Tend to the land as part of it. So that I'm able to accommodate what's in my boundaries and my resources. I think overtourism is seen very much the same way. One of the problems is just the term itself, it instantly weaponizes or penalizes tourists, right? It automatically puts it in degrading fashion. And that's not something you want. Tourism for so many communities around the world is not only a viable investment, but it's one of the few things communities can do to invest in that doesn't cause you to have to tax the resident, right, which is political suicide. No politician ever comes out and says, "You know what, budget's tight this year, let's just raise taxes." I mean, that just doesn't happen. So, I think when we have to take a look but understand when management, that also means we have an active role and it means we can actually help guide the conversation, help, again, manage it, steward it, shepherd it as part of it. If you find yourself in a situation where management has not been the best and people see tourism in a negative sense, that is a role for a destination organization to step in and help again garden or tend the land so that they can manage again with those resources, but also educate the community on how viable tourism and tourist are to communities vitality. One thing the pandemic taught us is what happens when tourism goes away. Like a lot of cities are in financial issues because of that, investment is gone. So, you can't simply just say overtourism and then not realize there are implications of what happens when no tourists occur.

[00:13:58] **Andy van der Feltz** Andreas, just on that, I work for two different DMOs. One was 100 percent government funded. The other one is a private public partnership. Different model. In U.S., predominant, you've got DMOs that are funded or CVBs that are funded by bed tax. How do you balance that? The community needs to be a livable area that people are in. Right? So that means the community with the visitor has to find that right balance. How does a CVB or DMO manage the balance between bed tax and therefore hotels that continue to add room infrastructure being added to most? Even Amsterdam, they are still building hotels on the outskirts of the city. So how do you balance when bed tax actually funds the local CVB, DMO?

[00:14:46] **Andreas Weissenborn** Now, that's a tough nut to crack. I mean, I don't think we have definitives yet, but we're starting to finally see people question. I mean, one term I do also want to sort of wipe away with is the heads in beds, because if that's all you say you do, then you are subject to being lumped into corporate welfare, which is not what we are. People have to remind themselves that destination organizations are largely nonprofits, which means they have purpose over profit. One of our other corner of core philosophies around here is if you value something, you fund it. I think what you're starting to see destination organizations do finally is articulate. We usually call the unusual suspects who benefit from the work when we do. Again, you're right, a lot of destination organization of primary funding comes through at some sense of visitors' tax. But if you think about it, how many other people benefit from a positive

brand? One thing, just go to the talent acquisition aspect here. So, many of the communities have a need right now for highly skilled, highly educated workers. The issue is how do we get attention on the community to kind of want to live here or be here? We believe that those entities should be at the table and help support and fund destination organizations because they benefit one a community's brand does well. A good example, you know, you think about three-and-a-half years ago when Amazon was trying to put out their HQ2 bid, and all these people were throwing mad tax tariffs and stuff to get it to come. But what Amazon finally assigned on was, well, we need a community that has a positive brand so people who are highly educated will not only want to work here but will like to live here as well. I don't see any reason why someone like Amazon, I'm not saying this would happen, but Amazon or other private entities shouldn't be at the table to help fund this entity. I really think funding is part of the equation. We've seen prominence in what we call tourism improvement districts as well, which will be, can be funded from hotelier, but doesn't mean they can't be funded from other districts as well. Arts and cultural, wine, cannabis, craft, brewery, whatever. Anything that community wants to value, they should be able to fund. And I hope that something in my lifetime we start to see more and more. Another one, point blank, is I also believe the government has a role to play in just simply providing funds out of the general fund sans visitor tax. No one bats an eye because the government funds clean water and infrastructure. You want a brand, you want at the world stage, you want to invest in economic development, why not also provide investment towards destination promotion as well? We still got a long way to go to shape that, especially in the United States, which is so more prominently by the hotel architects, other parts of the world. You know, they're just tapped into the general fund. But I hope that's starting a shift we're starting to see as people understand, again, you value something, you should fund it.

How DMOs make money:

[00:17:29] **Brandon Ehrhardt** I got a three-parter. I'm gonna ask you one at a time, though. First one is, and this is based out of my own curiosity from this discussion we're having is sounds like there's multiple funding models, whether it's publicly funded, it's a partnership. Talk to me about the difference in the way the DMO operates based on their funding model. Is there a material difference or are these organizations operating pretty much similarly, it's just the funding is different?

[00:17:55] **Andreas Weissenborn** Good question. And it does vary from region to region. So, let me just do the largest demographic of our membership, which is North American basis, to understand that. We're really talking about public dollars. So, largely we see destination organizations get a portion of the hotel tax that, again, goes to the government and is levied down, which makes it public dollars. So, when you stay at some type of occupancy, whether in someplace left in regulation of, it's a charge, it's a percent short-term rental versus a traditional hotel. That money is collected, goes to the government, and the government usually has a contract with a local entity, the destination organization, which what percentage they get. And that varies. Some get 100, some get a 50 to 60, whatever it might be. So, when you think about it, when the destination organization does well, that investment of tourism mostly goes up and the destination organization gets more funded. Again, that's through a government entity. You're seeing another one, which is again what we call tourism improvement districts where it's issued on behalf of a district itself. So, most commonly we see hoteliers again where they are adding on an additional charge or percentage that this time goes directly to the destination organization, does not go through the government as part of it. Private investment varies in a couple of different ways. Most common, we see membership or partnership models where you know those supplier side, your restaurant tours, your attractions, they pay for some level of investment back in the destination organization to have their restaurant or whatever their asset might be on the website, the quick guides, the branding and stuff as part of it. The other parts of the world where it's just a cut from the government's budget. Now you're at the whim of politicians for how much it might be, might go up, might go down, but you're not tied to the same sort of trimmings of like we have to always buy for hotel room nights to make this dollar go up. You're just at the mercy of the politicians, how they feel about tourism. Some of the more common ones that we see across especially United States and North America.

[00:19:54] **Brandon Ehrhardt** So, you can easily see how the funding model will change your actions as a DMO based on where you're going to be getting it. And going back to your heads-in-beds comment, if you're incentivized, just put heads in beds. It's a little bit easier to take your eye off the broader travel picture and actually what you want to create the destination to be.

[00:20:12] **Andreas Weissenborn** Yeah, and that was my comment about I call the usual suspect. We understand if tourism does well, hoteliers and those suppliers are natural benefactors of it. They should be at the table to fund this. But my point a little bit earlier was there's a lot of other folks who benefit from a positive brand. We should be bringing them to the table as well as considering funding, because again, when a destination organization does its job well and competes and participates and invests, it grows the whole pie of the community.

[00:20:42] **Brandon Ehrhardt** So, despite the differences in funding model, is there a challenge that's shared across DMOs currently?

[00:20:49] **Andreas Weissenborn** Oh yeah. Relevancy, that's the number one, right? You asked me earlier a question, how would you describe what a destination organization is? How do we even know what it is? It will always come down to actually relevancy and engagement. There's always the two thing. You know, it's sad to say it took the pandemic in a lot of ways for people to wake up and realize, "Oh, crap, we have no tourists this year. What do we do to restart this? Oh, we got this thing called a destination organization. Maybe we should invest in it." It always comes down to relevancy and engagement, making sure that people fundamentally understand what we do so they have the opportunity to value us and hopefully fund us, but then also be engaged with us, that they understand that our number-one customer, a destination organization's number-one customer, is the resident of the community. Our role is to increase community vitality. It's just make sure that message is there and heard and understood. And we have a lot of room to catch up. Again, the community-shared value philosophy comment. Right? You all know, that we were kids, right? You drink water to be healthy, right? It's a fundamental sustaining life source. We understand to be safe, we need firefighters to put out fires. We've got a lot of room to catch up with destination organizations articulating why destination promotion is equally on that same pantheon of importance for us. So relevance and engagement, it's never ending. It's really advocacy we're talking about. I think every new leader in the destination organization space, it's that component of advocacy which articulates community and relevancy that's going to be never-ending. We just have a lot of ground to catch up to make up for lost time.

[00:22:24] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Cool. Round up my trifecta. When you look into the global space, North American space, which DMOs are doing that very well today?

[00:22:33] **Andreas Weissenborn** I have a lot of favorite destination organizations that I think are doing the job that are sort of unnoticed. I mean, it's very easy to point out these super large budget destination organizations do great job, and a lot of them do. But I always like to point out the average operating budget for our membership is majority under three million, which is not considerably very large. So, you have a lot of these smaller destination organizations of, I'll do one: Champaign-Urbana, Indiana, if you've never been before. That small-person operation, you know, you're talking less than ten people or whatnot, but they're involved in every single decision as part of the community, as a solution, as part of it. To me, that's what we call community-shared value. Someone who's there is seen as part of the solution to help with stuff is aspect of it. I think really to the pandemic, we saw a lot of really unique scenarios of destination organizations being put in positions that they had not been before but luckily we had a platform. Like as a reference as a video visit Norfolk did, where they articulated what they can't wait to get back once not only pandemic ends, but what it means for having tourism and tourists as part of it. But there's so many communities now around the world who are engaging in something before that the pandemic has gotten their opportunities, as part of it. That's hard to pick a favorite. And particularly they're ones that are doing it with far fewer dollars than you imagine.

[00:23:57] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Yeah, and I love that you picked some out that weren't the ones that you'd be thinking, like Norfolk and Virginia. Champaign, which is just down the road from me here in Chicago. Super interesting.

[00:24:10] **Andy van der Feltz** Andreas, your relevancy and engagement, spot on I think is one I agree with you. I think there's one other one which binds them is just not necessarily in their, the bindings, not around the priority of it. And at the sustainability discussion. I think anyone who plays in the world of travel has got to have an opinion and make their thoughts heard around sustainability, broad subject matter, many subjects underneath that, whether it's ecology, environment, industry, employment, etc. So, the extremely broad, but I think that's what unites all these DMOs, it is just there is no tying into one strategy around that. Because I won't name the DMOs, but there are some which are driven so much by managing the ADRs that the sustainability is the furthest thing from their mind. When we look at the advancement going forward, and I truthfully, I'm going to coin a phrase which I don't think it's a million miles away, but the tourism quotas. So, I'm sure you're aware of fishing quotas around the world. You can only catch so many fish — right? But I don't think we're a million miles away from getting to a point. I know it's incredibly difficult to manage. I'm putting it out there, but I would love to hear your thoughts around tourism quotas around the world to a point where, you know, it becomes manageable because, if you look at it, tourism continues to grow at 5.8 percent, expect it to grow, which is way higher than the GDP and just in general to 2.8 globally. So, it's going to be there. What are your thoughts around something that is that drastic of tourism quotas?

[00:25:44] **Andreas Weissenborn** It's an interesting concept, and I don't, I agree with you that I don't think it's parts of the world that are occurring. I think I want to comment on your term the GDP. GDP was invented post-World War II as a way to share information about commerce, and particularly to America, which has been such a largely capitalistic society. We've seen what happens when all you do is chase growth, right, chase GDP and increased tourism is an output of that. But some of these assets, particularly ones environmental, natural, do have limitations, physical environmental limitation. That's not something you can out-market per se or earning capacity for. My point is that if that is the scenario, the destination organization still has a role to play and manage that. I want to use the term etiquette. I think that's something you'll start seeing more and more, as we call it tourism etiquette. Couple of good examples. This really seems like a lifetime ago when the biggest issue we had was just scooters, where commuters are freaking out about e-scooters and whatnot. And one of the best examples I always love to point to was Portland, Oregon, was they had a really nice etiquette sheet on their website that said, if you're going to travel to our community and use an e-scooter, here is proper etiquette for visiting our community as relates to that. I can very much see again with the notion of those come to pass of quotas paired with etiquette. You know, if you're going to visit our community during these times because of it, here is proper etiquette to enjoy it as part of it. I think it has to be a pairing. It can't just be quotas and then binary and then that's it. I think you have to pair it with some semblance of etiquette. Again, that's again, while destination organizations take a role in articulating that so they understand why if they have a quota, why this component of etiquette or why that's responsibility, I should say, is part of the equation as well.

[00:27:36] **Andy Van der Feltz** Yeah, I love that. And I think Iceland has done something very similar where they put it on the visitor to make the adult or the responsible decision in terms of how they treat the environment that they're in. So, I think that's an absolutely spot-on place to be with that. On the remaining tourism in general that they know, it will continue and not just the GDP, an apology for making so crude, but you know if you look at just the total numbers around the world that will continue to travel, the middle classes in the emerging economies that they're emerging pretty, pretty far. What I'm also tending to see now, and perhaps with the more mature DMOs around the world, is chasing the high-value guest. So, the interpretation is fewer people staying longer, spending more. So, you're going to have everybody fighting over what they perceive as the high-value guest. Who, in your opinion, is going to continue to want to have the lower- or mid-value guest?

[00:28:33] **Andreas Weissenborn** You know, I'm not an economist, so it's kind of hard to answer that aspect of it. What I will articulate, though, regardless if you are high- to low-valued guest, you're still chasing the same thing, which is experience. Right? Something fundamentally emotional to the human condition is that you are chasing something that you can't battle with logic. That's what we're going to be arguing is how do we articulate and provide investment back on values-based decisions here. What I think will occur is, is again, if everyone's going to be chasing that experience as part of it. And I think that leaves room for many destination organizations to put their values out there to garner that attention. So, we're maybe, it may not equate to high-dollar investment. I do believe it will reoccur as high-experience

investment as part of it. That's a tough one to answer because I don't think any destination organizations sets out to say I'm targeting just these tiered travelers. Everyone's just trying to attract an experience and how can we provide the best experience regardless of where you are socioeconomically?

[00:29:38] **Andy van der Feltz** Yeah, I agree with that. I think in general the experience is what people take. However, it does come at some point to the economic impact that that leaves behind in the city or region. So, it'll be interesting to watch this one as it continues to develop around the world. Now, just going to follow up with the data that comes out of I mean, in terms of the utilization of data from a DMO's perspective has changed over the years. It used to be just instead of reporting the performance, what would you say are the biggest changes in data utilization and the type of data that the DMOs are looking for today?

[00:30:12] **Andreas Weissenborn** Yeah, absolutely. We firmly live in what I call the golden era of data acquisition for destination organization. When I started my career, I mean, it's not that we were rudimentary, it wasn't like it was the Dark Ages, but it was in comparison to everything that's accessible now through geolocation data to impact data to consumer spend data. It is incredible. What I say, though, has really changed, though, is understanding the responsibility of it. Data in itself is worthless without any sense of a story behind it. And we've really seen in and really through the pandemic how much our society has shifted from a logical society to an illogical one. And I don't mean that as a negative sense. I mean that as the opposite of logic, which is emotion. We make decisions based on emotions and story first, and then we find the logic, the data to back it up. Point being is that even though you might we might have a cornucopia of data now, if your first articulation is data first and ROI first, you're always going to lose the argument for why you matter, why engagement. And I think that's really something destination organization leaned into. I like to call it left brain data versus right brain data. Your left brains, your sequential, your linear, your math. So that is like, oh, our rising RevPAR, that is our room rent acquisition, that is our visitor spend. We've leaned so far left that we've forgotten to incorporate what it means for a sense of belonging to our community, what it means for a sense of, again, the right brain metric story, emotion. What I'm trying to articulate here is that I think we have so much data. It's now the added responsibility of how you articulated, that I hope destination organizations use the data to articulate story in emotion first. Not saying we can't go away from data on ROI, but make sure, again, this is a one-two punch. Your first punch is your story, your emotion, and then you back it up with the ROI and data. So again, you articulate a sense of story of belonging experience, and then it's like, hey, sounds like you guys are doing a lot of great stuff. Can you back it up? Then you're like, oh yeah, here's our RevPAR, here's our geo location data, here's our marketing ad buy plan to the nth degree to back it up. That's what I think really is starting to change and starting to pivot a little bit is that not just pushing data out first but actually articulating a proper narrative and story so people are making those emotional decisions connect first and then you cement it back with your ROI statements and RevPAR and stuff like that, so.

How DMOs impact set-jetting:

[00:32:39] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Shifting gears but staying on the theme of stories. I think something that we talked about a few weeks ago on a previous episode was the concept of what we're terming set-jetting. So, traveling to a destination because you saw it on television or you wanted to experience it. What role does a DMO play in either bringing films, bringing TV shows to a city, or publicizing that the show or TV was filmed was shot there?

[00:33:09] **Andreas Weissenborn** Yeah. Set-jetting, man. I have a toddler, so I just can't fathom that world yet. I hope one day.

[00:33:14] **Brandon Ehrhardt** We just make up words here. It's okay.

[00:33:16] **Andreas Weissenborn** Just be cool to be like, you know what, I'm just going to leave my life or I'm going to go there. Yeah, that's actually one of the really, I don't say we're post-pandemic yet, and destination organization have been asked themselves, you know, how do we rebuild in terms of departments and positions. And the one that I have seen repeatedly now is the investment in particularly film and music-based commissions. Meaning a department solely

dedicated to getting a film shot in their community. Obviously, one of the biggest and most prominent in the world right now is everything with Georgia and Atlanta, like the House of the Mouse has moved from Florida up to Georgia for all things Disney, Star Wars, and that type of stuff. There's a destination organization at the core of that who has a film commission, whose role is to help book those films and to say, "Hey, this is a great place to film here." And of course, tax assets and things like that as part of it. But look at all the great assets we have to shoot to get a sense of our culture one as part of it. I'm excited for that. I mean, I think again, not just for the supplier side of hoteliers, but then saying, well, we can actually now start booking film events and film shootings and stuff like that as part of. So, they very much have a role to play in that. And I do expect the next five to ten years you're going to see more destination organizations announcing a film commission or sports commission department for exactly that asset.

[00:34:38] **Brandon Ehrhardt** So, I think when we think about destination travel, and I'm going to use like White Lotus, people see this amazing destination and they travel to it. They look it up while they're watching this show. That kind of desire to experience deeper, what you're seeing on TV exists at that level at White Lotus, but it also exists just to immerse yourself in the experience. So, Baltimore, Maryland, one of the most popular TV shows, at least in the U.S., The Wire, was shot in Baltimore. You compare the scenes and settings of The Wire to White Lotus. They're starkly different, but I know that there is travel associated with both. So, depending on what film or movie is shot, does it change the approach of the DMO and how they publicize it?

[00:35:25] **Andreas Weissenborn** That's a great question. Certainly, during my time, I visit Baltimore and I need to remember too, Baltimore in particular. It's not just The Wire, but prior to that it was actually the show Homicide after The Wire, the most recent David Simon I'm blanking on the gun, task force ones is part of it, just from my perspective. Because other communities that have what we call these flashpoints where your attention is instantly drawn to your community but not always for the right reasons. Charlottesville is another great example of that. I think at the core of it is one thing is the destination organizations have to lean in to authenticity, right? You know, it's, you can't really stand on a ground with saying, well, this is all just fiction, right? Because the point of the matter is perception is reality and the way we articulate stuff now. What you see destination organizations do, like visit Baltimore, is they really leaned into what authenticity means as part of them. And there are other communities going through this now as well. Not everyone has the benefit of a White Lotus show. I think it's really trying to lean into your authenticity as part of it and understand that it's a battle of perception that will always be ongoing.

[00:36:32] **Andy van der Feltz** I've got a litany of questions, Andreas, I love to ask you and continue to. We work closely with the advocacy and continue to do so from a media solutions point of view as well. There are so many trends that are happening in the world right now. Is there a key one, do you think, that keep an eye on this particular trend in your head of research and analytics that you have your finger on the pulse, I would say, in terms of what the trend in destination management is coming down the road. What is the one that really sticks out you say is something which we need to be aware of?

The biggest challenges DMOs face:

[00:37:02] **Andreas Weissenborn** I'll go back to one of the earlier questions you asked me about what are the biggest challenges, and that is engagement and relevancy. Because of our funding model being so much, probably again, around hotel room nights prior, that kind of stuff, you're finally starting to see destination organizations enter the foray of advocacy and engagement. So, the trend that I'm trying to articulate is destination organizations are either learning to how to hire lobbyist or get involved politically, trying to get more involved than what it means in terms of grassroots advocacy. So, when you are faced with unwelcoming legislation or any type of flashpoint, frankly, is part of it, you actually have some semblance of grassroots already embedded in your community to help to still articulate and push forward. I think that's one of the most prominent trends. Now obviously, can name other stuff of travel trends, things like that, but as it relates to destination organizations, I really think you're starting to see this pivot and investment and advocacy and grassroots engagement from just staffing, just actually having someone on staff who's got the role of advocacy or community relations or engagement or whatnot as part of it. Now that's all the way to hiring lobbyists, stuff

like that. That's really what I think the cornerstone investments I'm seeing in trends, particularly through the pandemic, when you have to remember, destination organizations in particular, they were one of the last to get funded when shit really hit the fans. They were on the very bottom end of it. That really articulated that we still had a long way to go to articulate why we are important and why we should be funded. And you're starting to see destination organization start to say, okay, we can't be seen as the last at the table anymore. We really got to find ways to bolster, again, our advocacy community engagement so that we are thought of first and not only the last to be invited to the table. We now can actually set the table. So I think that's one of those prominent brands is people are starting to take up the role of saying, you know what, it's not just sales and marketing anymore. Advocacy has to be added to my repertoire. And you're starting to see that from staffing to departments to project management, all the way down the stack there.

[00:39:08] **Andy van der Feltz** Hallelujah. Love it. And the last one from me. Where are you going for the summer with your toddler just to get away?

[00:39:14] **Andreas Weissenborn** Good question. So, not to plug, but I do have a major event in the middle of my summer, which is our annual convention in July in Dallas. So, I will 100 percent be in Dallas for over a week. But I'm actually a very family-first individual. I do a couple of planned camping trips across a local area that are driving that I hope to get to with my family and hopefully also some longer stay ones. I travel up and down the northeast because I'm not a fan of the heat, so I like to try to go as far north as possible to avoid the heat and humidity. So hopefully you'll find me quite a bit of latitude-wise through camping and other stuff outside of my family for the summer.

[00:39:51] **Brandon Ehrhardt** I'm going to need some tips. I have a three-and-a-half-year-old toddler and he wants to go camping. And I'm a little nervous to venture past the backyard. But we're going to do a backyard excursion here soon. But that sounds like a great summer. This was really fun for me, too.

[00:40:04] **Andreas Weissenborn** I would just say, if you want to learn more about what we do and the work we do at Destination International, just check us out at [DestinationsInternational.org](https://www.destinationsinternational.org).

Final thoughts and key takeaways:

[00:40:14] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Andy, what a great interview with Andreas, right? I mean, really awesome insights. I wasn't planning on talking about The Wire in this discussion. We set a whole lot of topics and it's just great to talk with someone who understands the day-in and day-out what's needed for destination management. So much to learn from the conversation. Andy, we didn't get to hear about your summer getaway, though. What do you have coming planned?

[00:40:38] **Andy van der Feltz** Both of them are certainly on the list. I'm up with my teenage son through New York and here's the shameless plug, incidentally, for some research that's coming out on the path to purchase. I'm way against what you'd understand in terms of purpose but changed my mind at the end of the hour. Everything was planned to go to Barbados. I booked the flight, 24-hour cancellation period, and on the 18th hour I canceled the flight and booked all three of us to go to New York instead of Barbados. Why? Because I checked the weather reports for the Caribbean and all that. It didn't look great. So, New York it became. That's my time on holiday. I'm looking forward to it.

[00:41:14] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Andy, I do want to ask you a question, because you're so much more ingrained in the DMO space than I am. What were some of the big takeaways that you had from this episode?

[00:41:25] **Andy Van der Feltz** Look, I think it's a fast-moving subject matter. Depending on where you are in the world, who's financing, what are the mandates? So, you have all these subject matters around sustainability, about bed tax, about growth, about economic impact. It's such a diverse group of objectives and goals that these organizations have to achieve, and none are akin to each other very often, especially when you start looking at the financing of it. It's almost a

full-time job to keep abreast of it and understand where they're heading with it to really far-ranging differences. You got Canada one side desperately looking in terms of how they can become and maintain a sustainable business out of tourism. And then Saudi Arabia on the other side, which is entering into the race of sustainability done there, but it's not at the highest level that you would expect it to in comparison to those destinations have been in there. So, it's, to me, it continues to evolve. And when I joined the DMO as it was then, it was tourism, or we only wanted to grow. And I think in my part of the time today, it's all changed and it's all about how do we actually continue to be relevant in today's environment. And I think that's probably the key point is remaining relevant.

[00:42:43] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Change is always present and it's present in travel in many ways, and that's what I took away as well. So, really great episode. Hope you have a great time in New York. It was awesome having you in the copilot seat. As I told you, you can press any of the buttons. Not many of them do anything. So, thanks a lot for joining me. You're welcome any time, my friend.

[00:43:01] **Andy van der Feltz** Thank you, Brandon. Cheers.

[00:43:06] **Brandon Ehrhardt** Thanks for joining us for another episode of the Powering Travel Podcast. We have two more episodes left this season, but do not fret, we're not taking a summer break. We're taking a couple of weeks off and season three is right around the corner, too. So, we want to hear from you. What are the topics you want us to talk about? What do you want to share with us? You can do that at PoweringTravel@Expediagroup.com. That's right. Send us an email. One word poweringtravel@Expediagroup.com, and remember rate and review. It helps people like you find our show. Send us your thoughts. Send us your comments. We're looking forward to the last two episodes of the season. They're right around the corner. Until then, have a great day and we'll talk to you soon. This is Powering Travel brought to you by Expedia Group.