

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Top 10 Tips for Marketing and Communication



© vennbahn.eu



Co-funded by the COSME programme
of the European Union



The sole responsibility of this publication lies with the author. The European Commission and the EASME do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
1. Complying with essential requirements	4
1.1 Natural assets.....	4
1.2 Cultural assets.....	5
1.3 Infrastructure requirements.....	5
1.4 Mobility offers targeted to the specific needs of the user.....	5
2. Creating a brand image.....	6
3. Corresponding to the user's expectations.....	7
3.1 What is the user's motivation?.....	7
3.2 What is the user looking for?.....	7
4. Ensuring sustainable quality.....	8
5. Participating in specialized trade fairs.....	9
6. Maintaining close contact with the press.....	10
7. Running specific marketing campaigns.....	11
8. Engaging in social media.....	12
9. Putting customers at the heart of your marketing.....	13
10. Becoming mobile responsive.....	14



INTRODUCTION

The “**Greenways Outdoor**” project consists of the creation and transnational promotion of an outdoor tourism product linked to European greenways, and the capacity building of SMEs located in their vicinity so that they can tailor their services to the demands of customers and so become more competitive.

The project’s general objective is the diversification of the tourism offer in Europe by generating new products relating to greenways and capitalizing on existing ones, thereby improving the competitiveness of the European greenway-based tourism industry, together with the joint promotion of greenways tourism products to make them better known internationally and so attract more visitors. The aim is also to strengthen public and private cooperation to facilitate the creation and promotion of the greenways tourism product.

In the framework of this project, the East Belgium Tourism Agency (TAO), a partner within the consortium carrying out the project, has produced this Best Practice Guide for Marketing and Communication of a greenways tourism product. The guide is based on its wide experience as promoters of the well-known Vennbahn greenway. The following pages expose in a very practical and operational way the top 10 tips for marketing and communication that should help lead to a successful promotion of a tourism product linked to greenways.

Greenways are independent non-motorized routes, mainly using disused railways and canal towpaths. Safe, accessible and very attractive, they provide easy access to areas of outstanding natural beauty (e.g. mountainous areas, by way of tunnels and viaducts). There are thousands of kilometres of greenways in Europe with a great potential for development, and they are a very useful tool for the development of tourism in rural areas.

Further information about the greenways and project:

www.greenwaysoutdoor.org and www.aevv-egwa.org

1. COMPLYING WITH ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

In order to successfully market a tourist cycle path, it is firstly necessary to comply with essential requirements. First and foremost, these include a region's natural and cultural assets and compliance with minimum infrastructure requirements.

1.1 Natural assets

A region's natural assets can be interpreted in different ways. However, it is always an advantage if these have been defined, ideally as **various different types of landscape**.

A suitable example of this is the Vennbahn Greenway, which starts in Germany and runs through East Belgium to Luxembourg. In terms of natural landscapes, the route can be divided into three areas: the forests and meadows in the region around Aachen and Eupen, the high moorland region of the Hohes-Venn-Eifel nature reserve and the low mountain ranges of the Ourtal valley in south-eastern Belgium.

All three areas blend harmoniously into each other and **make the landscape an entertaining experience**. The region is also characterised by numerous lakes, rivers and streams that create additional variety.



© vennbahn.eu

1.2 Cultural assets

A region's natural assets are complemented by its **cultural identity and amenities**, as well as by its historical sites. In the case of the Vennbahn Greenway, this consists mainly of its past as a steel and coal-producing area, and the colourful history of a border region during and after the two world wars. The frequent relocation of the borders has resulted in an **unrivalled mixture of European cultures**. The region around this Greenway is frequently marked by the remnants of railways, as well as castles and fortresses that attest to times past.

1.3 Infrastructure requirements

A high-quality Greenway has many varied requirements. However, there are some requirements that should be ensured in any event. These primarily include:

- **Routes with little traffic**
- **Varied routing**
- **High-quality road surface**
- **Well-maintained bridges and tunnels**
- **Sufficient and clear signage (both on the Greenway and in the surrounding area)**
- **Information boards**
- **Well secured crossing areas**
- **Shelters in case of bad weather**
- **Rest areas/huts**
- **Viewpoints**



© vennbahn.eu

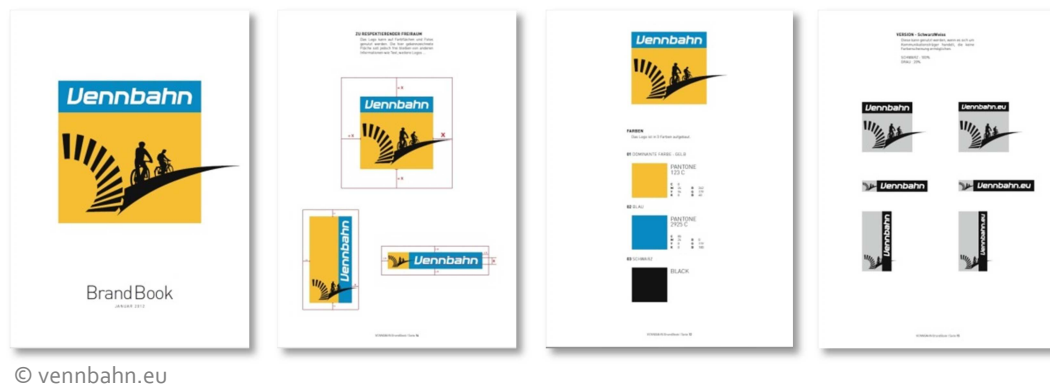
1.4 Mobility offers targeted at users' specific needs

Mobility also plays an important role in terms of a Greenway's accessibility. The most important points in this context are:

- **Start and finish points are easily accessible via local and national transport networks**
- **Suitable mobility offerings along the route (bus and rail)**
- **Short distances between start point and public transport**
- **Bike shuttle service**
- **Bike rental**

2. CREATING A BRAND IMAGE

Marketing a tourism product always starts by **creating a strong brand** in terms of both word and image, i.e. developing a definitive name and a suitable corporate design. The latter should consist of a logo with high recognition value, a suitable font and a colour concept which relates to the region. In the case of the European Greenways, the visual image definitely needs to include the cycling theme. The corporate design provides a guideline that ensures **a consistent visual image across all communications** with tourists.



© vennbahn.eu

As well as creating a brand, high quality images of the Greenway and its natural and cultural environment are also very important. These should create positive and emotional expectations in the viewer, thus inspiring them to come to the Greenway to experience it in person. The images are for use in all marketing channels, although they will mainly be distributed via the internet and social media.

Another aim of the logo is to distinguish it from other Greenways and to **firmly embed it in the user's mental map**, with the final objective of occupying a **clearly defined position in the tourism market** for European long-distance cycle paths.

3. CORRESPONDING TO THE USER'S EXPECTATIONS

3.1 What is the user's motivation?

In order to develop a marketing strategy for tourists, you need to know the key reasons motivating the cycle tourists you would like to reach. Many of them simply **want to do something for their health and engage in some sporting activity** via exercise. Here, proximity to nature is very important to them and offers the perfect backdrop for their activities. There should also be a certain amount of flexibility so they can **get away from the fixed structures of everyday life** as much as possible.

In short, the cycle tourist is looking for relaxed cycle touring in a highly natural environment.



© vennbahn.eu

3.2 What is the user looking for?

Cycle tourists are looking for **exercise and relaxation in a natural environment** and away from traffic (safety theme), closely linked to an attractive cycle route. In addition to the actual cycling, there also need to be cultural highlights along the Greenway to provide variety and entertainment and thus enhance the whole experience. Developing stories and anecdotes from the region and the historical aspect contribute significantly to increasing the value of the experience.

Here the main aim is to create in the users an emotional tie to the region that motivates them to come back and stay there again in the future.

4. ENSURING SUSTAINABLE QUALITY

Ensuring the sustainable quality of a Greenway is achieved through complying with specific quality standards that are specified by a particular label. For example, the German Cyclists' Federation (ADFC) awards up to 5 stars each year to classify long-distance cycle paths. A survey is done to review the particular route and uncover any faults. The most important requirements of the route include **ride comfort, i.e. the condition of the surface, signage and routing, safety, tourist infrastructure and links to local public transport**.

However, quality standards do not just relate to infrastructure, they also look at the service offering in the area around the Greenway. Particular emphasis is placed on accommodation providers that are geared towards the special needs of cyclists, as well as tourist facilities and mobility service providers. If there is the right level of quality and motivation in these areas, the customer also gets to feel this. A region's service providers ultimately also act as ambassadors and advertisements for the entire tourism product.



© eastbelgium.com

Another important milestone in monitoring quality is guest feedback. It is essential to uncover any faults in infrastructure and service, and to correct them as quickly and efficiently as possible. Here, it is very important to be in close contact with all players in the public and private sectors around the Greenway. **Sustainable maintenance management** is only possible if there is a well-functioning network with the shortest possible communication channels. Finally, meeting quality standards in the areas of infrastructure and service helps cycle tourists when choosing their next travel destination. Because a satisfied customer is also a good advertisement.

5. PARTICIPATING IN SPECIALIZED TRADE FAIRS

Even in the online age, participation in relevant trade fairs has not become any less important. Many players have even increased their trade fair participation in recent years. Nowhere else is there such a high concentration of representatives from the cycling and accessories industry, interest groups, tourist organisations, trade press, tour operators and people interested in cycling. They offer an important opportunity to nurture your own image, look for new business partners and models, and investigate the market for current trends. With regard to the latter, it is imperative to **be a part of this broad network** so you always **keep your finger on the pulse**.



© eastbelgium.com

Trade fairs offer you the opportunity to present your own tourism products to potential users in a face-to-face context. It is the best way to explain all aspects of the product and make initial contact with future business partners. You can also ask visitors about existing products. This way you can obtain **useful and valuable direct feedback** that can be used to make any necessary improvements.

In addition, no other event has such a high concentration of trade press who, for their part, are always looking for the latest trends and stories. Organising a press conference can therefore be a way of **intensifying the promotion of your own tourism product**.

Direct communication without the intermediary influence of communication media (email, phone, social media, etc.) is therefore one of the most important aspects of participating in a trade fair.

6. MAINTAINING CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE PRESS

As already briefly mentioned in the previous point, close contact with representatives of the press can add a great deal of value for your own tourism product. A **well-maintained network** of regional and, especially, trade journalists should form the basis of any good public relations activity.

Therefore, organising press trips, whether for individuals or groups, is a highly suitable and popular method of communicating an accurate view of the product. Most journalists are very keen to research “stories” with their own facts and figures that are based on real examples and experienced at first hand. And it is precisely these opportunities, namely experiencing and **obtaining information about a place or a tourism product at first hand**, that are offered by press trips. One small disadvantage of press trips is that they can be expensive and are generally very time-intensive to organise.



© eastbelgium.com © Baptiste

As already mentioned, when selecting the journalists you should take care to achieve as wide a range as possible of both regional and trade professionals. Ideally, you should provide the journalists with news about the Greenway at regular intervals in order to remain in as regular contact as possible and to let them know that there is always something going on around the Greenway. You should also ensure that well-prepared text material and high quality images are available. This makes the journalists' work easier and generally ensures a more seamless process.

The clear advantage of good public relations is the editorial reporting, which comes across as being more serious than, for example, a paid-for advertisement.

7. RUNNING SPECIFIC MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Before the start of any marketing campaign you naturally need to identify the available options and work out which ones have **the best possible promotional potential**. For example, this could be an advertorial, i.e. an ad combined with an editorial piece in a relevant cycling magazine with the highest possible circulation. Then you determine the amount of work involved and the extent of the campaign:

- How long should the campaign run for?
- Which personnel and materials are required?
- What results would you like to achieve?



© vennbahn.eu



It is also very important to include a call-to-action in the ad, as it is not just about **raising awareness among potential users**, but also **motivating them to take a measurable action**. That action could be sending a non-binding enquiry, visiting a website or participating in a competition. This makes it possible to determine the economic return in as precise a way as possible. In addition, you can draw conclusions about what works and what doesn't. Finally, the resulting findings can be used to **optimise future campaigns**.

8. ENGAGING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The times when social media were just a 'maybe' in the tourism sector are long past. Now every tourism professional relies on this extremely useful tool in order to advertise their region or tell consumers about tourism products and the multiplier effects that arise from this should not be underestimated. However, it is important that it is done in a personal way – personal in the sense that the **customer is included as an individual** in email campaigns or via the social media platforms. It therefore involves **creating as lively an interaction as possible** around the tourism product. This can be triggered by publishing inspiring content, mainly of a visual nature. Users should be encouraged to share this content as frequently as possible and thus to make it available and attractive to other groups of people. As well as appealing images, “behind-the-scenes” photos of both your own employees and users who have already got to know the tourism product also work very well. They make the content more authentic, give it a personal touch and thus create greater trust.



© www.tradewireindia.com

Helpful content is also well received by users. For example, by helping users solve a problem you give them the feeling that you can put yourself in their shoes and that you understand them. A good solution to a problem or efficient complaints management also have a good effect on the overall rating of a tourist product or a destination.

Nowadays, criticisms and ratings from other users have a greater influence on the choice of the next travel destination than ever before.

9. PUTTING CUSTOMERS AT THE HEART OF YOUR MARKETING

To return to the last paragraph of the previous point, the fact is that users ascribe great importance to the opinions of other users. **A positive experience is very quickly passed around** and quickly gets the “**word-of-mouth marketing**” ball rolling. In this context, it is also crucial to let a good deal of emotion feed into your marketing. These emotions are created in the first instance through images in the user's head. Therefore you should also provide users with **sufficient high quality images** and thus influence them positively in the decision-making process. In parallel with fixed images, using moving images in the form of video content is, obviously, also recommended. Here the opportunities to convey emotions through the combination of image and sound are significantly more versatile.



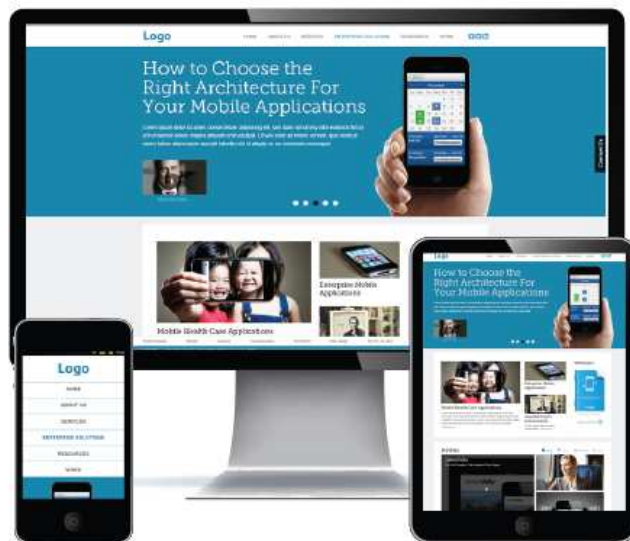
© www.pluscorpphotos.com

At the same time, users can also be encouraged and requested to provide images from their own trips or share them via social media channels. This could happen, for example, via photographic competitions or other campaigns relating to the photos. In this way, **users can also become ambassadors for your own brand** or your own tourist product/Greenway.

10. BECOMING MOBILE RESPONSIVE

It is evident that more and more people own a smartphone or tablet and are using them increasingly frequently for their everyday transactions. Naturally, this also includes searching for and booking their next holiday or short break.

Even in 2015, use of the mobile internet had overtaken that of the desktop internet and the trend is sure to intensify in the future. For this reason, it is essential to make your own website mobile responsive and thus “social-sharing friendly”.



© www.kineticknowledge.com

In doing so, you need to make sure that your online marketing complements your offline marketing as much as possible, i.e. that they are both consistent with each other and that there are no noticeable variations between them. Key words in this context are usability and quality content. Because users will only visit and recommend a website if they have had a good experience when mobile surfing. Otherwise they will most probably not come back and turn their attention to other products.

“Everything has to be short, punchy, intelligent and massively relevant”

(Jesse des Jardins)

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER

East Belgium Tourism Agency

www.eastbelgium.com



EDITING

Christoph Hendrich, East Belgium Tourism Agency

COPYRIGHT

eastbelgium.com, vennbahn.eu, Baptiste, tradewireindia.com,
pluscorpphotos.com, kineticknowledge.com

PROJECT LEAD PARTNER

European Greenways Association (EGWA)

www.aevv-egwa.org



PROJECT PARTNERS

