



Scottish

Thistle Awards

Case Study

Scottish Seabird Centre

Watch Out for the Puffins!

celebrating
excellence

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INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Seabird Centre is an award-winning five star visitor attraction which brings people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds closer to wildlife and the natural environment. From its stunning location at North Berwick, overlooking the wildlife rich waters of the Firth of Forth, the Centre inspires people to appreciate, learn about and care for Scotland's natural environment.

The Scottish Seabird Centre opened for business in 2000. The Centre has been engaged with VisitScotland from the outset and the partnership has been most beneficial.

Marketing manager, Lynda Dalglish, developed a campaign to launch the 2010-11 tourist season called "Watch out for the Puffins!" - To inspire young and old to visit or revisit the Centre. It was this successful campaign that was entered into the Scottish Thistle Awards 2010.

OBJECTIVES

As a charity, The Scottish Seabird Centre aims to engage people to marvel at the environment and wildlife and to become aware of what they can do to sustain them. As an award-winning visitor attraction, it is vital to attract the greatest possible number paying visitors in order to maintain the viability of the organisation. Their full time Marketing Manager works hard to ensure they receive the highest possible public profile and retain close relationships with the media in all its forms. With limited budgets available, any marketing initiative needs to show high value for money. Marketing per se does not benefit from external funding but the Fundraising and Business Development manager is required to raise money for such diverse projects as a children's play area, remote-controlled camera equipment and associated microwave transmission and reception systems and a major project to drive down utilities costs and carbon emissions by use of solar panels, insulation and low energy lighting.

CHALLENGES

In difficult economic times, recreational spend is often the first item to be cut from family budgets. Marketing has to ensure as many people as possible are aware of the VFM and enjoyment available from a visit to the Scottish Seabird Centre. The unique nature of the business is the major selling point and marketing focuses on highlighting itself as unique and without parallel. By constantly keeping the public aware of what is available, especially the new attractions, the business strives to keep up visitor numbers through whichever promotional means are at its disposal.

ENGAGEMENT

The Scottish Seabird Centre believes strongly that by working co-operatively with other, especially local, businesses and organisations, all parties benefit.

Their charity's association with VisitScotland has gained the Centre access to what other visitor attractions do and how they do it. VisitScotland is a library of good practice from which tourism businesses can learn. The Scottish Seabird Centre is also a Chamber of Commerce member and a member of the North Berwick Business Association.

The Scottish Seabird Centre identified that opportunities to enter and win awards would support their marketing objectives as well as demonstrating that their business is an exemplar of excellence. They have won more than twenty awards since the business began but the two which they believe stand out are the **Queens Award for Enterprise** (won twice) and the **Scottish Thistle Awards**.

The Centre identified that the latter award is seen both by the industry and by the public to be a guarantee of excellence. The challenge was to come up with an application which had a realistic chance of winning. Receiving the award meant huge gains in terms of publicity and a small but definite increase in visitor numbers. Induction into the Scottish Thistle Awards Winner's Academy has allowed them to gain significant insights into how the industry is reacting to difficult times and what we can learn from others.

RECOGNITION

They have frequent requests from other organisations to learn about the 'secrets of our success', mainly on the back of publicity generated from the award. They have definitely engaged more with the industry over the last year.

Their publicity material introduces the 'Award Winning Scottish Seabird Centre' and the Scottish Thistle Award trophy is on prominent display.

They are the proud to possess the Five Star VisitScotland Visitor Attraction certificate.

There are plans to expand operations but those plans have not yet coalesced, although they do have a number of ideas. Fully aware that unless an attraction keeps its product up to date and refreshed, it will have great difficulty in maintaining its market share. They are keen to retain contact and relationship with VisitScotland and use its good offices to keep abreast of ideas and innovations in the industry.

SUCCESS STORY

The Scottish Seabird Centre's 'Watch Out for the Puffins' campaign was devised to launch the 2010-11 season. A high impact ambient advertising and PR campaign, launched pre-Easter (20th March) and targeting the Seabird Centre's key markets; Edinburgh & Lothians, Fife and Borders – around 50% of the Centre's target visitors live within an hour's journey of the Centre.

The creative idea was an ambient advertising campaign, involving hiding 500 toy puffins across the key geographical areas, indicated above. Each puffin carried a giant label saying "Please Take Me Home" and each was sequentially numbered. All the puffins entitled the finder to one free entry to the Seabird Centre and, of course, the finder could keep the toy puffin. There were also six daily star prizes, including iPods, digital video cameras and Seabird Seafari boat trips. The label carried full instructions.

Puffins were distributed each morning to key locations across the regions, creating maximum visual impact and catching the attention of commuters, school children and tourists. Locations included the Scott Monument and Greyfriar's Bobby, Edinburgh; the Royal & Ancient Golf course, St Andrews Glentress Forest, the Borders; schools; transport links including rail and bus, as well as rural locations throughout the Lothians, Fife and Central Scotland.

Key objectives were to:

- **Create a high impact campaign** to launch the 2010-11 season and attract families from key target areas, within an hour's journey from the Seabird Centre.
- **Drive ticket sales** – Seabird Centre and Seafari Boat Trips
- **Drive visitors to www.seabird.org** (attracts one million visits a year)
- **Communicate that the Seabird Centre is a fun, educational family day out.**
- **Communicate to target audience the amazing wildlife spectacles which can be seen 30 minutes from Scotland's capital city.** The toy puffins were timed to coincide with the arrival of the 'real' puffins on the islands of the Firth of Forth.
- **Convey educational messages** – e.g., a puffin lives in a burrow and help promote the Centre's conservation and education programmes, including the SOS Puffin Project to save the puffins in the Firth of Forth

So come out and see us sometime!

TOP TIPS

Bear in mind, these awards are only for the best in the land. Check the criteria and then look at previous prize winners. Does your application honestly stack up? The Thistle Awards require a great deal of time and effort. It is not worth expending that effort unless you have a realistic chance of winning. Talk to your own colleagues and others outside your own organisation. If you believe you have a chance, look at the application carefully and answer the questions that are asked. Write carefully, clearly and concisely: judges do not award marks for excess verbiage or jargon. Pass the draft over to at least two other people involved in the project and two who are not. This will give a balanced response. If the entry form includes provision for attachments, ensure they are relevant and brief. Judges have a large number of applications to read and limited time. Read the final draft again and again. Check it against the criteria again. Keep a hard copy – the post is not infallible. Finally, make sure it is on time: a deadline is not a rough guide, it is a cut off point!

Tom Brock OBE, Chief Executive of the Scottish Seabird Centre praised the Thistle awards, saying:

“The Thistle Awards are extremely beneficial in terms of prestige and public perception. They encourage innovation and development and help to recognise the outstanding contribution of staff. The process also makes applicants examine their business from an objective point of view and it can have a significant impact on the implementation of the business plan. The road to the award ceremony is a long and challenging one but it is absolutely worth it”

Charlie Marshall, Fundraising and Business Development Manager October 2011

The Scottish Seabird Centre

