



RTO4.ca tourism case study series

Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory

Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory recognized that there were digital hygiene issues and missed opportunities with their existing approach to online marketing. In particular their large website and unremarkable social media presence required a rethink. The benefits were dramatic.

Topics: [Website UI/UX](#) | [Social Media Efficacy](#)

IMPACT

X2

DOUBLED month-over-month online sales after fixing website 'hygiene' issues

DOUBLED organic Facebook fan following from 2,500 to 5,500 in 9 months



27% & 47%

Attendance increases at largest annual events

ABOUT

Visitors to Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory walk among 1000s of free-flying butterflies representing over 40 species, plus birds, turtles and fish. Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory also features seasonal displays, a gift shop, café, presentation spaces and outdoor events. They employ 20 to 40 people with a peak season from April through June. The cambridgebutterfly.com website features online shopping and links to five active social media channels.



WORST THINGS FIRST

Although business was relatively good, Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory knew intuitively it was time to revamp their online marketing on two fronts: their 400-plus page website and unremarkable social media presence.



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An initiative of the  Ontario
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

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THE HIGH LEVEL

In the fall of 2014, Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory partnered with RTO4 and Waterloo Regional Tourism Marketing Corporation to collaboratively critique and analyze the optimal role and function of their digital operations. Here are key insights gained from the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory's management:

- 1** *"Find and delegate staff to direct our online presence: website maintenance, online sales and social media. Create a new position or change a job description, but somebody must take it seriously."*
- 2** *"Re-vamping our 400-page website was a big project, overdue, and worth it. We fixed lots of gaps, glitches and barriers to our online sales, like Adobe Flash animation and the shopping cart not working on popular devices."*
- 3** *"Integrate online marketing with our on-site displays and traditional media. Social media is less expensive than advertising, with more impact. And it's measurable – you can see what is or isn't working."*

“Every attraction and festival should get on this. The trick is to see the potential now, and then take the plunge.”

Doug Wilson, Partner, Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory



WEBSITE HYGIENE

The website's user interface (UI) was not mobile-friendly and became overgrown and weedy with broken links, untitled photos, etc.

The user experience (UX) required customers to burrow down from the homepage to whatever specific event they wanted. If and when they reached the content they were looking for, the path back to purchase was confusing.

"Our website is big because we are an educational destination with a lot of feature-laden programming," says Executive Director & Curator, Adrienne Brewster.

"Last fall [2014] we took RTO4's advice to re-design the site to make it mobile-friendly and more attractive. We also began combing the entire site to clear up 'hygiene' issues – fixing links, adding meta-tags and photo titles for search engines, and placing 'click here' links to streamline the path to purchase. It was a lot of work, but absolutely worth it. And now we just do some monthly maintenance to keep it in shape."

SOCIAL SKILLS

Brewster also delegated social media management to Nicole Cooke, Marketing Assistant. *"She had only casual Facebook experience, but what I call an affinity for social media,"* she says. *"We restructured her job to free her up specifically for this."*

The staff now hold monthly social media meetings (*"In practice, more like bi-weekly,"* says Nicole) where they evaluate the last month, map out their posts for the next month, set budget and timing to 'boost' posts, and so on.

"We also optimize and watermark our photos and always link back to relevant landing pages within the website."

A RISING TIDE

Now Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory's engagement rate for their posts (views, likes, comments and shares) *"averages around 8%,"* says Nicole, *"anything above 5% is considered very good."*

"As a demand generator, Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory does a great job crafting memorable experiences that lead to shared stories. They are now increasing visitation to the region by amplifying those stories in social media and paying close attention to what happens after the click."

Zac Gribble, Director of Media Technology, RTO4

WHAT NOW?



Budget staff time for website maintenance and social media posting.



Encourage and enable existing customers to share stories about your destination experience.



Ensure website is mobile-friendly with tappable phone links, clear call-to-actions, and test with multiple devices.



Schedule website content reviews to ensure up-to-date information, no broken links, etc.



Focus on how to simplify and shorten the online path-to-purchase.



Catch common website UX problems with a usability checklist (visit userium.com for free resource)



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RTO4, one of 13 regional tourism offices established by the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport in the province of Ontario, has been called the "petri dish of tourism development in North America" by the Canadian Tourism Commission because of its innovative, analytical and non-traditional approach to growing tourism and economic development. RTO4 publishes best practices case studies to encourage improved destination marketing. RTO4.ca