Visual Communication Trends and Challenges in Adventure Travel
### Section 1

## Introduction

Organizations across industries are prioritizing visual storytelling. Brands must communicate with photos and videos to get attention. The results of an online survey conducted by Libris by PhotoShelter and the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) show this trend is especially true in the adventure travel industry.

Prospective travelers want to experience a taste of what an adventure travel organization has to offer before they purchase. These potential customers dream of traveling to remote locations and taking once-in-a-lifetime adventures. Photos and videos can bring a customer’s dream to life. The results of this survey show the adventure travel industry is responding to the demand. Adventure travel organizations are sourcing and sharing record amounts of photos and videos, and respondents predict that number will only continue to grow.

But here is the problem: only 5 percent of respondents use a professional visual asset management system to store, organize and share photos and videos. While adventure travel organizations are investing in visual content, they are failing to bring in the most return on that investment. They run the risk of losing assets, duplicating costs and violating copyright agreements. And as they produce more and more visual content, the problem will continue to grow.

Visual storytelling is the way of the future in the adventure travel industry, but organizations are ill-equipped to manage the impending content flood. They must change their processes and invest in the stewardship of their visual assets to ensure a higher return.

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### Methodology:

- Online survey of adventure travel professionals (ATTA members and non-members)
- 203 total respondents
- 81 percent from organizations with fewer than 25 employees, 11 percent from organizations with 26-100 employees, and 8 percent from organizations with more than 101 employees
- 60 percent have one or more full-time marketing / communications employees
- 62 percent of organizations represented have one location, 34 percent have 2-10 locations, and 4 percent have more than 11 locations

**cover image: © ATTA / Gregg Bleakney**
Section 2:
VISUALS ARE ESSENTIAL

Visual communication is essential for organizations in the adventure travel industry. Visual storytelling is part of their DNA. Why? As one respondent said, “We sell dreams, not products.”

72 percent of respondents said visual assets are core to how they communicate and tell their brand’s story. When asked to describe how visuals fit into their marketing strategies, not a single person selected the answer, “we do not use visual assets.”

What best describes your organization’s strategy for leveraging visual assets as part of your marketing and storytelling strategies?

Core to how we communicate and tell our brand’s story
72%

To add excitement to the content and interest to each experience
74%

To showcase products, innovations or features clearly and quickly
49%

To better explain important points or facts outlined in the content
35%

While visual storytelling is already a priority, its importance continues to shift. 80 percent of respondents said the need to access visual assets increased over the past year. In the next section, we’ll dive deeper into how organizations are sourcing and sharing content.
Section 3:
THE STATE AND TRENDS OF VISUAL STORYTELLING IN ADVENTURE TRAVEL

When we asked respondents to rate the importance of different types of media, it was clear that while photography is the most crucial, illustrations, video and infographics all play a part in their communications.

Rate the use and importance of the assets in your current marketing and storytelling strategies.

Photography is the clear front runner, with 81 percent of respondents marking photography as crucial to their marketing efforts. When asked for the primary type of visual asset used by their organizations, 93 percent of respondents said photography trumped video and graphics.

In the future, photography will continue to play a significant role in communications strategies. 67 percent of respondents said photography’s importance will increase over the next year, and not a single person said it would decrease. And while photography might remain the dominant choice, video is catching up. Video plays a key role in communications, with 85 percent of respondents rating video as important or critical to their overall strategies. Moving forward, however, 74 percent of respondents say video’s importance will increase.

How will visual assets shift in use and importance in your marketing and storytelling strategies?
### Section 4:
**HOW ADVENTURE TRAVEL ORGANIZATIONS SOURCE VISUAL ASSETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Photos and Videos</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff photographers / videographers</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance photographers / videographers</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-generated content</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock photo / videography</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see from the graph above, adventure travel organizations obtain photos and videos from a wide variety of sources. The fact that 70 percent of organizations have a staff photographer and/or videographer suggests a strong commitment to professional, high quality, visual content. 40 percent of respondents said they source user-generated content, which shows that adventure travel organizations are incorporating customer and fan experiences into their communications strategies. Many respondents who chose the “other” option noted that they source photos from guides and other staff members. This shows that staff members outside of the communications department, as well as people who are not affiliated with the organization, are involved in the creation of visual assets.
Section 5:
HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE VISUAL ASSETS IN STORYTELLING

Just as adventure travel organizations are obtaining photos and videos from a variety of sources, they are sharing them for a number of different purposes. Visual communication is becoming increasingly pervasive. Adventure travel organizations are sharing visual content across mediums and across departments. Respondents who selected the “other” answer to this question shared a range of uses for imagery including:

- Webinars
- Tradeshows
- Television advertising
- Trade agreements
- Proposals for prospective clients
- Agents and partners
- Magazines

The growing focus on imagery suggests that visuals will fill an increasing number of needs in the future. Visual communication is not just used for marketing anymore. Now, every department must communicate visually. Imagery is shared digitally, printed, broadcast and displayed. This growing need for access across departments presents exciting opportunities for collaboration, but as we will see in the next section, it also presents new challenges.

* respondents were encouraged to check all that applied
Section 6: WHERE THE SYSTEM BREAKS

For adventure travel organizations, friction occurs in the processes between sourcing and sharing.

Number of assets:

- <1,000: 35%
- 1,000-5,000: 25%
- 5,001-10,000: 19%
- 10,001-50,000: 11%
- 50,000-100,000: 6%
- >100,000: 4%

The problem: 2/3 of adventure travel organizations have more than 1,000 assets (1/5 have more than 10,000), but only 5 percent use a proper system to store, organize and distribute their photos and videos.

The majority of adventure travel organizations are ill-equipped to handle the massive number of photos and videos they are using to communicate. As important as visual assets are to overall communications strategies, only a fraction of organizations use a powerful system to manage them.

Instead, organizations are storing assets locally, using photo sharing sites and systems built for consumers (Dropbox, Google Drive, Flickr, etc.), or juggling a combination of systems. The limitations of these options can have a big impact in the long term.

How do you store photos and videos?

- Folder-based server environment (shared drive): 40%
- Online storage service (DropBox, Box, Flickr, etc.): 36%
- Asset management system (Libris, Widen, Cumulus, WebDam, Portfolio): 5%
- Other (hard drive): 12%
- Don’t know/ don’t have: 6%

ATTA Media Library
Given the nature of adventure travel organizations, they need widespread access to their photos and videos. They need access to be fast and easy, to keep up with the speed of social media (the #2 use case for visual assets). They also need an archive of high quality materials that they can use for ongoing projects like maintaining a visually engaging website (the #1 use case). Adventure travel organizations must address their visual asset management pain points in order to maximize the potential of their visual communications.

**What are the challenges with managing visual assets for your organization?**

- **Being able to find the right assets**
  - 66%

- **Storing all assets that are sourced**
  - 48%

- **Centralizing assets in one place**
  - 47%

- **Managing usage rights/compliance across the organization**
  - 36%

- **Sharing assets with teams that need them**
  - 35%

- **Finding outlets to share assets**
  - 15%

*respondents were encouraged to check all that applied*

**Searchability & Discovery**

66 percent of respondents reported "being able to find the right assets" is a major pain point. The majority of adventure travel organizations are using systems, like consumer solutions and local networks, that do not offer powerful search functionality. While many consumer solutions allow you to add metadata, some strip out that metadata when you save the photo to a computer. Plus, some have difficult user interfaces that do not allow you to preview files as you search. Local networks do not have search capabilities and force you to browse photos and videos based on folder structure.

Adventure travel organizations need to be able to add metadata to files to easily find them again later. They also need to be able to search visually, with easy preview capability. Fast search functionality can revolutionize an organization’s public relations, social media and more. Plus, it can streamline workflows for every staff member interacting with visual assets and save time on a variety of projects.

**Storage**

48 percent of respondents marked “storing all assets that are sourced” as a challenge. This is unsurprising, since only a fraction of organizations are using a system that supports all of the files and formats they are using and allows sources to easily add assets to the library.

Systems built for consumers often convert high resolution files on upload or do not support them at all. Some of these systems lack support for video, or have strict storage limitations. Because adventure travel organizations are using visual assets for digital, print and live events, it is imperative that high quality versions are preserved. And, because the focus is shifting toward video, adventure travel organizations need to be able to store, organize and distribute their video files alongside their photos.

These systems are also inconvenient for professional photographers and videographers who are trying to deliver files to other members of the team. If you are using local storage, it can slow down the process and they won’t be able
to share assets from the field. If you are using an online storage service built for consumers, they may not be able to share high resolution versions or add metadata. 35 percent of respondents indicated that “managing usage rights/compliance across the organization” is a challenge. Systems that do not allow you to attach usage rights information to a file (and easily search for it) increase the risk of misusing photos and videos.

Professional cloud-based digital asset management systems can store high resolution photos, videos and more. They enable easy uploading for photographers, as well as guests and other sources. Remember, adventure travel organizations obtain content from a wide variety of sources. Those sources need a convenient and professional way to deliver photos and videos.

Centralization & Access

As we saw in the last section, a variety of staff members (and non-staff members, like guests) need to add photos and videos to an organization’s media library, and a variety of staff members need to access them for a number of different purposes. But access to imagery is limited by the systems organizations are using to store and organize visual assets. This is counter-intuitive to the nature of adventure travel: access needs to be flexible, and the system needs to cater to people who are on-the-go.

Using local storage, instead of a centralized media library, creates a disjointed workflow. Organizations run the risk of losing assets in inboxes, local folders, etc. They are also prone to duplicating costs by re-creating assets they already have but can't locate.
Plus, less than half of respondents have access to their media libraries when they are working remotely. This is a huge pain point for guides and other staff members who are often traveling.

Cloud-based visual asset management is a must for adventure travel organizations. Staff members need access to a centralized media library wherever they are. They also need to be able to back up their assets quickly in the cloud, because of the high risk of hardware damage in adventure travel.

Support

When things go wrong with a photo sharing site, it’s difficult to reach someone who can help you. With an internal server system, it might be impossible. Visual asset management providers offer client services (online and over the phone) to help you solve your problems quickly.

PHOTO SALES

Right now, only 10 percent of adventure travel organizations are selling imagery. But 20 percent—twice that number—are interested in selling photos. When asked for what purpose they might want to sell imagery, respondents noted a variety of reasons including:

- Fine art prints
- Publishing
- Service to customers
- Licensing to magazines and television outlets
- Commercial use

Adventure travel organizations are producing stunning, one-of-a-kind photos. Selling imagery to other outlets helps companies share their messaging and generate revenue all at once. Selling photos to customers makes a dream vacation tangible. It’s an added service for guests.

Adventure travel organizations have a lot to gain from selling imagery, but they must be set up for success. Organization is the key to photo sales. A well-organized media library that allows you to track copyright and usage agreements empowers organizations to generate revenue from their visual assets. And, when organizations take advantage of the opportunity to sell imagery, visual asset management can pay for itself.

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2/3 of respondents said they are dissatisfied with their current system to store, organize, share and/or sell photos, indicating areas for improvement including:

- Ease of use
- Storage space
- Video support
- Remote access
- Speed
- Searchability
- Distribution
- Flexible download options
- Controlled, permissions-based visibility and downloads
- Widespread access
- Tagging and metadata support
- Branded forward-facing website

Despite the growing focus on visual communications, many adventure travel organizations have limited budgets for the creation, procurement and development of visual content. 40 percent of respondents said more budget needs to be allocated toward the acquisition and creation of visual assets. When faced with small budgets, it is important to use them efficiently and get the highest possible return on your investment.

Organizations that use a visual asset management system can easily find assets and track when they are used. They prevent the loss of assets, ensure they do not waste money re-creating assets they already have, and reduce the risk of copyright infringement. They enable teams across the organization to share files easily, so one photo or video can be used for a number of purposes. And, they streamline staff workflows and save countless man hours.
Visual communication holds unmatched potential for adventure travel organizations. Travelers want to see what an organization has to offer. The industry is responding by prioritizing visual storytelling, diversifying content sources and sharing visual content across platforms. But organizations must streamline their processes if they want to keep up with the demand.

As organizations produce more and more visual content, they must address the friction that occurs in the processes between sourcing and sharing imagery. Right now, visual asset management is virtually non-existent in the adventure travel industry. Organizations are producing visual assets, but failing to take full advantage of them. They run the risk of losing assets, re-creating content they already have, and violating copyright agreements. It is imperative that organizations shift the focus to visual asset management.

Adventure travel organizations stand to gain exponentially when they use centralized, cloud-based visual media libraries. Organizations with powerful visual asset management systems address their biggest pain points, reduce risks, and save money and man hours. A visual asset management system is the key to streamlined workflows, efficient communications and powerful storytelling.
How does your organization manage photos and videos?

What are your biggest challenges?

Libris is a cloud-based visual asset management solution that helps organizations harness the power of their photos and videos, and helps their teams to work more efficiently. That means no-hassle implementation, easy asset search, simple collaboration and downloading tools, and flexible options for team-wide user permissions and monitoring.

With 10 years in the cloud and more than 285 million assets managed, our cutting-edge software helps hundreds of top universities, pro sports teams, travel brands and organizations of all sizes easily organize, collaborate on, and share their photos and videos. Libris is a business unit of PhotoShelter and based in New York, NY.

Contact us for a free consultation:

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The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA)’s purpose is to nurture and professionalize the responsible and sustainable development of the adventure travel industry.

Established in 1990, the ATTA serves over 1100 members in 90+ countries worldwide. Members predominantly include tour operators, tourism boards, specialty agents and accommodations with a vested interest in the sustainable development of adventure tourism.

The ATTA excels in professional learning, networking and partnering services. We host events around the world, specialize in adventure travel consulting, and provide connectivity and services to address the needs of our community.

With expertise in research, education, industry news and promotion, ATTA members and the adventure travel community receive competitive opportunities that help establish them as leaders in adventure tourism.

For questions or information on membership, please contact us:

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