



# Visit California Achieves a 17% Lift in Intent to Travel to California by Creating a Unique Experience on YouTube

## Keeping California top-of-mind as a travel destination

Visit California is a nonprofit organization that partners with the state’s travel industry to keep California top-of-mind as a premier travel destination. Visit California has operated with a fixed \$50 million budget for the past several years. Consequently, continuing to grow visitation to the state depends on efficiently expanding Visit California’s global content marketing strategy through hard-working content marketing initiatives and partnerships.

### Goals

- Generate awareness and consideration for the California brand and create incremental travel impact with a limited budget across key global markets

### Approach

- Took over the YouTube masthead for 24 hours and featured a new video each hour
- Broadened the reach with Lightbox Ads
- Created downstream impact on consideration and intent to visit California with TrueView ad

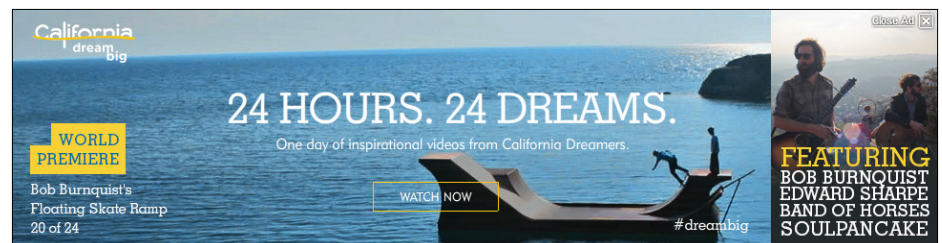
### Results

- 7% lift in consideration and 17% lift in likelihood to visit California<sup>1</sup>
- 21% increase in California travel search volume on Google<sup>2</sup>
- Website visitation lift two days after the YouTube takeover: 306% in U.S., 165% in Canada and 920% in UK<sup>3</sup>

## Google BrandLab: Learning about content’s role in digital

In early 2013, Visit California and its agency of record, MeringCarson, attended a BrandLab workshop to gain insight into how global brands are innovating in content marketing and to take the organization’s own content strategy to the next level. BrandLab is Google’s innovation center where brands learn how to unlock the latest digital tools to engage customers and grow their businesses.

“Our biggest takeaway was content’s role in digital,” says Traci Ward, Visit California’s director of consumer marketing. “We went through case studies, seeing what bigger brands were doing—looking at the content ecosystem beyond just created content.” With their visit, the vision for Visit California’s next campaign was starting to take form.



## The Campaign: The Dream365 Project

Fast-forward one year. On February 28, 2014, Visit California used YouTube to launch The Dream365 Project, an ongoing initiative to amplify content-centric digital brand activity and inspire people worldwide to dream big every day of the year. The global launch, dubbed “24 Hours, 24 Dreams,” featured a new video every hour for 24 hours through the YouTube masthead in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. The videos were aimed at showcasing, inspiring and celebrating California dreamers with their iconic and off-the-beaten-path experiences statewide.

“Each piece of content is reflective of somebody’s dream,” says Ward. “Some pull at the heartstrings, some are more quirky, but they’re all about people who have gone on to do something that manifested in California.”

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The campaign included the 24-hour YouTube masthead takeover, and released different combinations of video content with Lightbox Ads, rolling out full videos in TrueView and serving up video-specific banners across the Google Display Network. “YouTube is the biggest video platform out there,” says Ward. “From a sheer eyeballs perspective, there really isn’t another choice that could’ve done what YouTube was able to deliver.”

The campaign features some of the Golden State’s biggest dreamers, including professional skateboarder Bob Burnquist, artist David Garibaldi and chef Ludo Lefebvre. To showcase the state’s abundance and variety, Visit California employed several tactics and assembled a robust collection of content. First, MeringCarson leveraged past production efforts to develop and produce original content. From there, multiple tactics were used to activate the creative community for custom content—from established YouTube creators, such as SoulPancake, to crowdsourcing companies like PopTent. Finally, the team curated existing YouTube content that showcased the California spirit.

### **Measuring campaign performance and success**

The ultimate metric, however, is whether this content inspires travel to California—and the results speak for themselves. High awareness and engagement levels led to a 17% lift in likelihood to visit California and a 7% lift in consideration to visit in the next 12 months. The campaign achieved a 21% increase in overall California travel search volume on Google during the week of the launch compared to the year before, exceeding the prior week’s year-over-year growth by 1.5 times. Two days after the masthead takeover, viewers exposed to the Dream365 masthead visited the [visitcalifornia.com](http://visitcalifornia.com) site 306% more often than unexposed viewers in the United States, 165% more often in Canada and 920% more often in the United Kingdom.

The campaign also showed the broad reach of Visit California’s digital presence—136.6 million impressions in one day, with a total of more than 2.5 years’ worth of content watched. It reached a click-through rate of 0.28%—exceeding the average across all industries, including entertainment. The interaction rate was 13.1%, nearly seven times the industry benchmark. Results also aligned nicely with Visit California’s overall target audience—75% of the views on Visit California’s YouTube channel were from users over 25 years of age.

As a bonus, the viral nature of the content has boosted reach and attracted media attention. The video featuring skateboarder Bob Burnquist and a ramp floating on Lake Tahoe has been watched more than 800,000 times, and it continues to rack up thousands of impressions in earned media coverage, including a high-profile placement on ESPN.

### **Moving forward with a proven platform**

The months to come will focus on sustaining this momentum through a digital paid media program combined with owned and earned activity, allowing elevated exposure for the initial suite of videos, driving additional consumption of Visit California’s video content and fostering greater content engagement.

“This is probably the best-received campaign we’ve ever launched from an attention standpoint,” says Ward. From a corporate brand perspective, “the B-to-B pickup has been huge.”

Having achieved a solid proof of concept, Visit California now has a foundation upon which to build. To consistently fuel the channel with content, the organization is working on an active management plan. "These 24 pieces of content are good for a while," notes Ward, "but as we move forward the goal is not to have to kill ourselves to do content like this but rather to have an ongoing plan in place to deploy, learn from and react to content."

1. Visit California run study by Strategic Marketing & Research, Inc. (SMARI)
2. Google Internal Data, Google.com Search, California core terms. US, UK, CA & AU. Week prior to campaign = 2/16 - 2/22.  
Week of campaign = 2/23 - 3/1
3. MillwardBrown Digital Ad Impact Report, Visit California YouTube Homepage Takeover. US, UK & CA. 2/28/14 - 3/2/14

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