

Brand USA uses Engagement Ads to create a beautiful, immersive and interactive travel guide inspiring tourists to come “Discover America.”



About Brand USA

- www.thebrandusa.com
- www.discoveramerica.com
- Headquartered in Washington, DC
- Promoting international visitation to the US

Goals

- Find new ways to engage potential visitors
- Build awareness and influence consideration to wide audience
- Showcase US destinations with rich, creative format

Approach

- Created interactive travel guide within Google Catalogs for the Lightbox ad
- Repurposed PDF brochure for digital creative
- Targeted Canadians
- Ran ads everywhere on Google Display
- Optimized targeting settings over time

Results

- 1M+ engagements
- 3.23% average engagement rate
- Reached 20% of Canadian population, 25% of online Canadians
- CPE pricing means only paying for qualified engagements

Created in 2010, Brand USA is a public-private partnership that promotes the United States as a premier travel destination to the rest of the world. With a mission to increase international visits to the US, the organization partners closely with Google to inspire travelers, grow awareness of American cities and regions, and provide trip-planning tools. While the most effective channels for engaging international tourists can vary by target market, digital remains a consistently valuable way for Brand USA to reach customers worldwide. “We can impact the customer much earlier on in the purchase funnel with digital media,” says Jiri Marousek, Brand USA’s global digital marketing director. “It’s highly trackable, provable and efficient.” Brand USA works with Google in particular to create awareness across several platforms, including Google Display, the group’s YouTube channel, and its Google+ page.

Transforming print assets into a digital brand experience

Always on the lookout for new ways to engage travelers and invite them to “Discover America,” Brand USA was eager to try Lightbox ads, a part of the Engagement Ads family. Engagement Ads are interactive formats that let advertisers create and scale brand messages across the web, while only paying when a user engages with the ad. Lightbox ads have a number of different potential creative features you can customize, including videos, games, and re-purposing your YouTube masthead. Since Lightbox ads can also use Google Catalogs to expand into immersive, full-screen catalog, Brand USA saw the potential to repurpose its existing PDF brochure to create a captivating, inspirational digital travel guide.



“By marrying Brand USA’s ideas with Google’s technology and marketing tools, we’re bringing something new to the table.”

— Michael Carroll, vice president of marketing, Brand USA

With the goal of building awareness of US destinations, Brand USA worked with Google to launch its Lightbox campaign, featuring the first interactive travel guide – via their Google Catalog - within a Google ad. “This allowed us to take advantage of the technology and deliver the catalog in a dynamic way to a much broader audience,” says Michael Carroll, vice president of marketing at Brand USA. “We repurposed our existing assets into a beautiful, visual brand experience that’s more of a coffee table book than an ad.”

Because Lightbox ads begin as standard, IAB-sized units that expand into a full-screen experience once a user hovers over the unit for two seconds, consumers can interact with the travel guide and flip through its pages without ever having to leave the original page they were browsing. “Being able to deliver value to consumers and interact with them while letting them stay where they’re comfortable is extremely valuable,” says Carroll.

Google’s algorithm increases engagements, generating customer insights

Brand USA targeted Canadians, casting a wide net by letting the ad run across Google Display and continuously optimizing based on results. Since Google’s adaptive algorithm lifts engagement rates by showing Lightbox ads to users who are more likely to interact, Brand USA not only saw improved performance over time, but also gained powerful insights into what elicited stronger user response. “After letting the algorithm do the work, we learned a lot about which placements worked best and which audience segments were most likely to engage,” says Marousek. These valuable insights will help inform Brand USA’s future targeting decisions.

Generating broad awareness while only paying for qualified interactions

Initial results from the Lightbox campaign have proven successful for Brand USA. It achieved the desired broad exposure, reaching 20% of Canada’s total population and 25% of Canada’s online population. The organization also met its goal of engaging potential visitors: The campaign generated more than one million engagements, with an impressive average engagement rate of 3.23%, reaching a high of 3.68% (compared to an average engagement rate benchmark of 1.75% in the US). And as Engagement Ads are priced on a cost-per-engagement (CPE) basis, Brand USA paid only when qualified users chose to interact with the travel guide – meaning all campaign impressions came at no additional cost.

“Engagement Ads are a way for customers to raise their hands and say they’re interested,” says Marousek. “The CPE pricing allows us to use our budgets most efficiently, as we only pay for customers who choose to interact with us.”

Exploring new horizons ahead

Brand USA is so impressed with the performance of its Lightbox campaign that it’s looking to “double investment” and run additional Lightbox ads with new content. The group is equally pleased that its Google Catalogs in Lightbox ad is the very first to feature an interactive travel guide. Carroll says, “By marrying Brand USA’s ideas with Google’s technology and marketing tools, we’re bringing something new to the table.”