The Argyll & the Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC) is a cooperative company acting on behalf of its members. The members are the 11 marketing and DMO groups, representing geographic sub-areas, which operate across Argyll & the Isles and jointly represent in the region of 1,000 businesses.

The £80,000 campaign comprised a £40,000 Growth Fund grant with match funding from Argyll & Bute Council (ABC) and the AITC membership. The aim of the Wild About Argyll (WAA) campaign was to actively promote the adventure tourism product in Argyll & the Isles and highlight the proximity to Glasgow and the Central Belt. Adventure tourism had been identified as a growth sector within Scotland. The campaign was targeted at the younger more active market, both enthusiasts and novices, in the Central Belt of Scotland and the North of England. Activities during the campaign included content creation, social media posts, paid search, competitions, cinema advertising, online brochure and attendance at events including the Scottish Cycling Running and Outdoor Pursuits (SCROPs) event at the SEC.

The campaign linked to a wider initiative to reposition Argyll & the Isles as one of Scotland’s premier outdoor destinations – as Scotland’s Adventure Coast. It provided the opportunity to utilise content previously generated featuring Mark Beaumont (the record-breaking long-distance British cyclist) on a 12-day epic Wild About Argyll adventure. The main economic aim was to encourage more active short breaks and holidays in the local area.
 Whilst the reach was below target at 1.7m (target: 2m), the actual engagement rate was above target at 1.5% (target 1%). A number of other KPIs were ahead of target including: 116% increase on Instagram (target: 100%), 35,472 clicks (target: 12,800-14,000), 35,433 average views per video (target: 25,000), 197,000 cinema admissions (target: 183,115). Some KPIs were lower than anticipated with a 65% increase in Facebook followers (target: 100%), 7,498 Twitter followers (target: 10,000), 332,273 page views (target: 369,572) and £1.52 cost per click (target: £1.00).

However, there were a number of other measures for which targets were not set that include 8,619 click-throughs to partner websites, 2,336 e-brochure downloads, 18,716 online competition entries, 10,819 newsletter sign-ups and 40 blogs. Also, Argyll & the Isles was a finalist in the global City Nation Place Awards for Place Brand of the Year in November 2017 on the back of the WAA campaign. The CEO of VisitScotland said about the campaign “it was a whole new market and direction for the region and with that comes a good deal of risk. That calculated risk has paid off immensely”.

Although some KPIs were below target a key lesson from the campaign was not to rely solely on the Group’s own channels to spread the message. The campaign achieved significant reach via Mark Beaumont and Skerryvore (folk-rock band) promoting the films on their own channels. So the overall impact extends beyond the Group’s own activities. The link with Mark Beaumont has been a particularly strong and beneficial one, given his profile and that his following matched the audiences targeted through the campaign.

Mark shared the film online through his own channels and posted about WAA, referring to the quality of the visitor offer. Also, as part of his world record Around the World in 80 Days Challenge, Mark arranged for a panel and a digital screen with the WAA main film on a continuous loop to be an integral part of a larger display in Edinburgh Airport.

The flexibility of the campaign allowed them to redirect campaign activity as appropriate. For example, as the campaign progressed they diverted more funds towards Facebook and competitions as these were having a greater impact than paid search.
There has been a strong level of engagement among the 11 marketing and DMO groups that comprise the AITC, who have been sharing the campaign content through their own channels. Seven have commissioned their own local film edit with each attracting more than 10,000 views on their respective channels. In the case of Argyll’s Secret Coast they have had in excess of 70,000 views.

There has also been a very good level of business engagement. Over 100 businesses took part in the content creation stage and 270 people attended the launch event. Businesses have also been supporting the campaign through content sharing, use of the campaign hashtag #wildaboutargyll and provision of prizes. Also, AITC was offered a dedicated marquee free of charge at both the Cowal Gathering and Best of the West events, with WAA winning the best stand award at the latter.

In addition to the data generated during the campaign, there have also been some other indicators suggesting a shift in perception. For example, prior to the campaign the AITC’s Explore Argyll Facebook page had an age bias towards over 45s which has now shifted to under 45s. Also, a survey undertaken as part of a new bikepacking trail showed that 39% of over 550 people from the UK and overseas were aware of the WAA campaign.

The Growth Fund allowed investment in a coordinated, high-quality campaign that brought together several different partners. Innovation took place for the Group through the link with a celebrity to raise the profile of the area online. Whilst Internationalisation occurred through a partnership with Skerryvore, who used WAA footage in the video for one of their singles. It went straight to number one on the iTunes world chart and was the signature tune for their 2017 Live Forever tour in America and Europe.

The additionality of the Growth Fund grant was key to being able to develop a coordinated campaign with a strong partnership approach. Whilst they would still have undertaken activity in the absence of the Growth Fund grant this would have been more organic in nature and would not have had anywhere near the same profile or impact.
Growth Fund Experience

The monitoring process has allowed AITC to report back on the performance of the campaign to VisitScotland (VS), Argyll & Bute Council and the 11 marketing and DMO groups that comprise its membership plus sectoral associates. This included reporting results against key performance indicators (KPIs) and narrative to provide further insight into the achievements of the campaign. The online data analytics were particularly useful in shaping the type of activity they undertook as the campaign progressed.

It was difficult at times to report on an interim basis as gathering meaningful data at different points was problematic. However, they were able to report fully at the end of the campaign process.

The campaign has strengthened their relationship with VS and helped raise the profile of Argyll & the Isles. The working relationship and flexibility allowed them to modify aspects of the campaign as it progressed. It also provided links with different departments within VS which was beneficial to the delivery of the campaign and will be useful when developing other activities in the future.
The WAA campaign has played a key role in helping to raise the profile, and change perceptions, of Argyll & the Isles for adventure sports activity. The WAA brand is being adopted as the place brand due to the amount of traction it has managed to gain during the campaign. AITC is currently working on registering a collective trademark for the WAA brand so it can be used by local partners and businesses. This ties in with funding secured from Highlands & Islands Enterprise for product development in adventure tourism. Also, a new destination website based on WAA has now been developed which will cement the concept beyond the adventure sports market to include other reasons to be ‘Wild About Argyll’. In summer 2018 AITC adopted WAA as AITC’s online brand on social media.

The campaign has demonstrated the impact of film as a means of promotion, reflected in the number of local marketing and DMO groups that developed their own edit and some local businesses that have also created short films to promote their businesses. The competitions proved successful, not only generating initial interest but also mailing lists for future targeted promotional activity.

AITC is currently working with Glasgow Life, Love Loch Lomond, ScotRail, Calmac, Loganair, West Coast Motors, Enterprise rent-a-car and Glasgow Airport to develop a twin centre campaign – *Heart & Soul* – focusing on city culture and the adventures on each other’s doorsteps. This will be informed by the success and key learning from the WAA campaign.
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