



Edinburgh Tourism Action Group  
Growth Fund Case Study

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Edinburgh Chinese Social Media  
Marketing Campaign

 Visit Scotland | Alba™

## Project Overview

Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) began as an informal networking group in 2000 and was formally constituted as an association in 2007. Its aim is to create a strong tourism community that works together to deliver growth for businesses, a great experience for the visitor and economic benefits for Edinburgh and Scotland as a whole. The £110,000 Edinburgh Chinese Social Media Campaign (ECSMC) comprised a £40,000 Growth Fund grant and contributions from private businesses and ETAG. It involved a social media campaign to promote Edinburgh to the Chinese market.

The rationale for the project was that China is the world's most valuable source market for outbound tourism and competitor destinations had started to use social media to increase their market share. In order to compete, Edinburgh needed to develop a presence on social media in China.



It was Edinburgh's first Chinese social media destination promotion strategy. The campaign included set up and management of Edinburgh's first official destination promotion accounts on Chinese social media platforms, regular content managed by a full-time co-ordinator, editorial and paid advertising campaigns, competitions and promotions at key moments and links to key partners e.g. National Galleries exhibition in Nanjing.

The key economic objective was to position Edinburgh as a 'must see' destination for Chinese inbound visitors thus increasing the numbers and value from this market. It also presented an opportunity to create a platform from which the wider Scottish tourism sector can build on in the future.

## Activity Impact & Learning

The campaign has performed very well against its key performance indicators (KPIs). There are 58,954 followers (target: 50,000), 66 million impressions (target: 50 million), 21 companies have participated in a collaborative social media destination campaign (target: 10), Chinese digital skill familiarisation has been undertaken in 75 businesses (target: 50) and best practice has been shared with 132 businesses (target: 100).

Due to ongoing analysis throughout the project the Group now has a very detailed understanding of content effectiveness. Storytelling rather than direct selling has a greater emotional impact and therefore shows higher engagement. Live-streams and video content were particularly effective in terms of engagement and growth in followers. Hosted Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) who experienced the city were found to be far more effective than remote, paid KOLs who simply posted or reposted content. The Student Campaign was a very useful pilot generating high levels of interest and engagement from local students (creating a database of c600 members). The increased knowledge of social media in China will inform their future activity and is currently being shared with other

parts of Scotland e.g. Glasgow and Aberdeen and can be extended to other tourism locations in Scotland.

Partners received regular progress analytics updates for the overall project. For future campaigns they would also like metrics and analysis for their own posts.

The increased visibility of Edinburgh's official channels has led to official accounts approaching the Group. This has led to new relationships and/or projects with National Geographic Traveller China, China Central Television, a high-net worth WeChat travel group and vloggers.



## Wider Benefits

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The campaign was a collaboration of China-focused partners with a total of 21 Partners contributing financially. There was little to no Partner attrition and the Group remained highly engaged and supportive throughout the project. They engaged with the project in a number of ways including driving project activity and submitting translated content and carefully selected imagery/video as per their post quota and agreed content calendar. A number of businesses have improved their own on-site translations and webpages, and some have developed new products or relationships. Partners identified a number of key benefits from participation in the project, such as: increased destination/brand awareness; knowledge exchange amongst like-minded businesses; improved China market awareness; increased footfall, sales and occupancy; digital skills development; access to the local Chinese student market and the opportunity to develop a year-round Chinese market.

The Group feel that the official visitor statistics underestimate the scale of the Chinese market in Edinburgh. Therefore, the key proxy measure for economic impact is the increase in year-on-year footfall/sales in visitors of Chinese

origin with the private sector partners (those that are able to track sales). The increases ranged from 20-46%. There has also been an increase in VAT refunds on purchases by Chinese travellers.

The Growth Fund provided investment that both accelerated the project and allowed it to launch in a meaningful way into the social media market in China. It fostered innovation in allowing Edinburgh to undertake their first social media destination strategy. Social media is a key aspect for Chinese travellers and the campaign was able to meet the needs of the market thus contributing to the aims of internationalisation. It was also inclusive as it engaged with the local Chinese student community allowing for both cultural exchange and recognising the potential role that they have as unofficial advocates for the destination.

The level of additionality in the project is high. In the absence of Growth Fund support some activity would have taken place but this would have been more organic and the growth from this much slower. Statistics the Group have received suggest that the growth has been eight times faster through the Growth Fund Project than if they had only been able to rely on organic growth.

## Growth Fund Experience

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The Group met every six weeks to give Partners an update on progress and they collated a series of statistics to inform these meetings. The online nature of the campaign meant that they had access to a lot of timely data which not only allowed them to report back on a regular basis but also modify their approach. They also undertook an informal evaluation with the Partners to gather their views on the project (as set out earlier).

The flexibility to modify the approach as the project developed was a key aspect. They had three bursts of activity which meant they were able to shift the emphasis between each, where required. They maintained a close working relationship with the Growth Fund staff so that they were aware of progress and the rationale for making changes as the project progressed.

They have also identified ways to improve the operational approach to make it easier to deliver future projects. One consideration is the proportion that can be allocated to project management. Projects with a large number of partners, as in this case, require a lot more project management input.



## Future/Looking Forward

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The Group had made plans from the outset about how they would like to develop the project in the future, so that the momentum generated would not simply peter out but could be built upon.

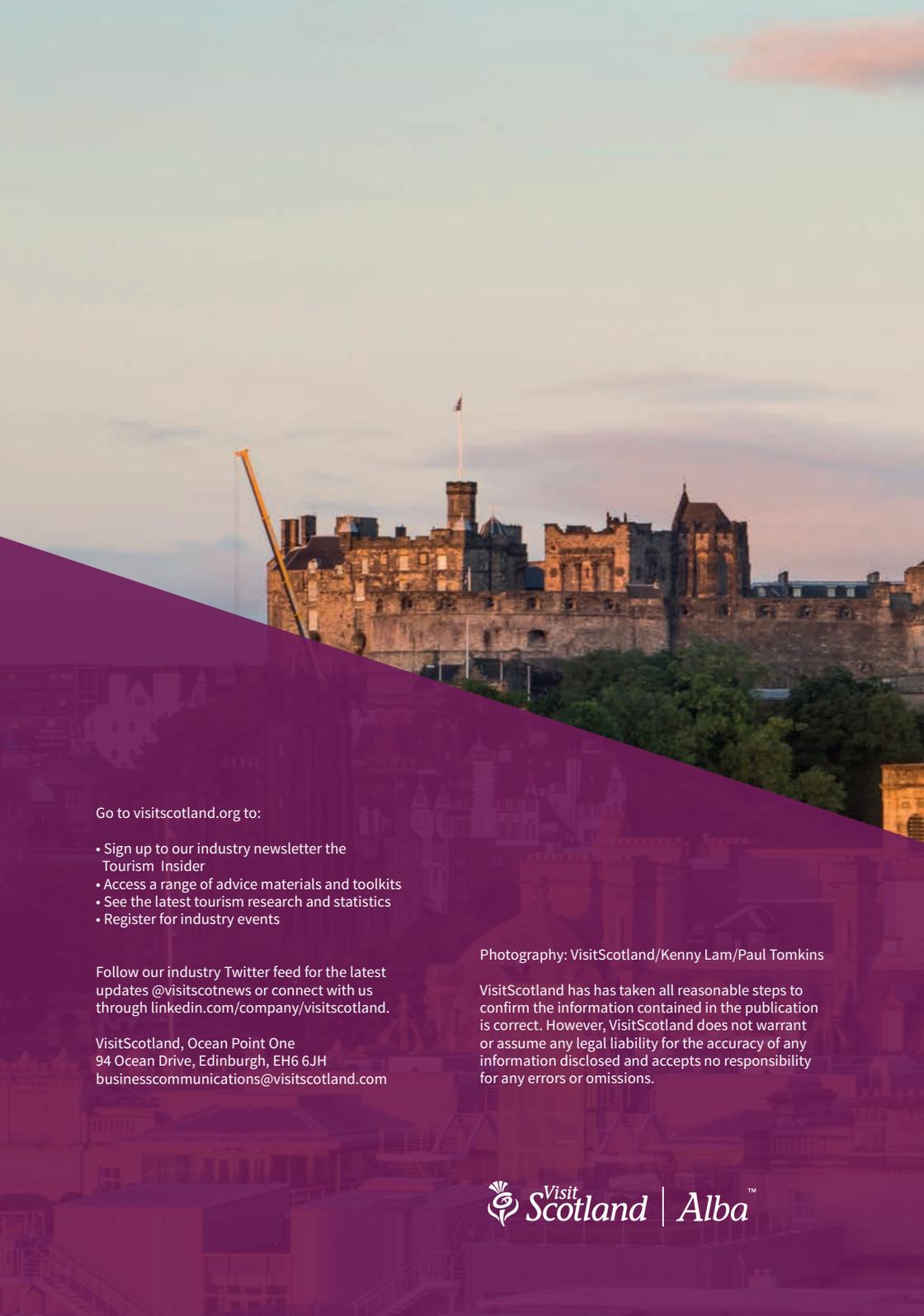
Year 1 has demonstrated to partners the value and impact of having a combined social media presence in China and a number of Partners have already committed to supporting the ongoing maintenance of the Weibo and WeChat accounts for Year 2. There are also potential new partners that have expressed an interest in Year 2. The Growth Fund project has helped to create a virtuous circle.

The Group plan to seek support from the Growth Fund for a brand new project to build on what has been learnt and to develop the advocacy and conversion from the channels and the newly created fan base.

The Group also now has a unique knowledge, within Scotland, of the social media markets in China, which they are able to share with other locations within Scotland's tourism sector.

To find out more about the project please visit [www.etag.org.uk/china](http://www.etag.org.uk/china)





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