

Case Study

Go Wild, Choose Estonia!

Storytelling Destination Marketing Campaign
by Estonian Convention Bureau

September 2018 – September 2019



Executive Summary

As we all know, every destination needs to develop a story about itself and to tell it consistently and well. Our main challenge is that Estonia as a country is still relatively unfamiliar internationally. Most convention bureaus take advantage of authentic brand identities created by their tourist boards. In our case it could not be done – Estonia does not have a relevant national brand image which we could re-use in ECB marketing activities. So, we created our own brand image!

In September 2018 we started to develop a storytelling destination marketing concept “*Go Wild, Choose Estonia*”. Our goal was to raise awareness and visibility of the destination by proactively communicating authentic and unique experiences that can be enjoyed in Estonia, focusing on creating and curating engaging content. Although mainly aiming for digital marketing, we used multiple channels to reach our target audience to maximize the impact of the marketing message. We decided to add stories and personal touch to every marketing activity.

The *Go Wild, Choose Estonia* concept has a playful meaning – Estonia is one of Europe’s greenest and most forested countries, Estonians love their nature. On the other hand, we are a relatively unknown destination – so we wanted to encourage event planners to book a non-traditional destination for their events.

The campaign’s main goal was to generate business requests to ECB and our members. Since launching at IBTM 2018 the first results of the campaign have been tremendous: the number of requests have increased by 61 %, we’ve gained 70 % more loyal fans on Facebook, + 25% homepage visitors and + 25% new ECB members.



Meaning of the “Go Wild, Choose Estonia” concept

- The concept highlights the novelty of Estonia as a meetings destination as well as the many nature- and adventure-related experiences and unique venues available in Estonia.
- The ‘Go Wild’ slogan works on many levels, starting with the idea of daring to be different. Estonia is still relatively unknown in the meetings world, so planners booking Estonia have to be a little adventurous. With this campaign, we want to encourage them to be brave and try something new.
- The slogan has a literal meaning as well, referring to the fact that a full 70 percent of the country is covered in wilderness. So, Estonia’s ‘wild’ side opens up a wide array of activities from scenic nature walks to bog shoeing.
- The same notion extends to the country’s conference venues, many of which, like the retro-industrial Tallinn Creative Hub and the Seaplane Harbour, fall into the ‘wild’ (i.e. unusual) category. More and more meeting planners are looking for non-traditional venues for their events, even many medical meetings tend to look for out of the box venues to refresh their image.
- We also wanted to show that Estonians are not dead-serious people. We’re easy-going and flexible partners to work with and okay with making fun of ourselves.



What were the marketing challenges addressed

- How to get clients to consider Estonia as a possible destination for their events when Estonia as a meeting destination is fairly unfamiliar in the meetings world, lacking image, visibility, product awareness.

“When I got the invitation to your sales event, I had to check on the map where the country was!”
(attendee of our Amsterdam workshop, March 2019)

- How to attract the whole segment - due to the mixed profiles of ECB membership we also need to attract a broader group of clients, for example; smaller meetings, corporate events and incentives, in addition to association meetings.
- How to maximize marketing impact with a small marketing budget and limited human resources.
- Paid promotional activities could not be undertaken because of a very limited marketing budget, and our total ECB team is only 3 people.



Objectives of the Campaign

Intangible Objectives

- Increase destination awareness and visibility, improve the image of the destination- to be a cool, fresh, lively, diverse destination rather than one of the “*behind the Iron Curtain nobody never heard of*” destinations
- Consistently communicate the unique assets and potential of Estonia, and make the destination distinctive, memorable and appealing, so that curiosity is raised and clients become interested in Estonia
- Create a “WOW, I want to know more” factor about Estonia as a potential meeting destination
- Increase trade and media attention

Measurable objectives:

- Increase the number of requests and bookings (to ECB and ECB members)
- Build the number of loyal fans and social media followers (on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram)
- Drive traffic to the website, increase the number of visitors to our website, SEO
- Product development: Increase the number of social programs and incentive ideas suitable for MICE market
- Create marketing tools for ECB members for their marketing activities
- Boost international trade show attendance
- Increase media attention



How Was the Campaign Undertaken

Although mainly aiming for digital marketing, we ran “Go Wild, Choose Estonia” narrative consistently through all marketing communications. We used multiple channels and platforms to reach our target audience with the objective to maximize the impact of the marketing message and get more engagement from the audience. We decided to add stories and personal touch to all marketing activities.

Stories were shared on social media and newsletters, promoted on our blog, used in press releases, prominently displayed on trade shows and other sales events we attended or hosted together with *Visit Estonia* in 2019.



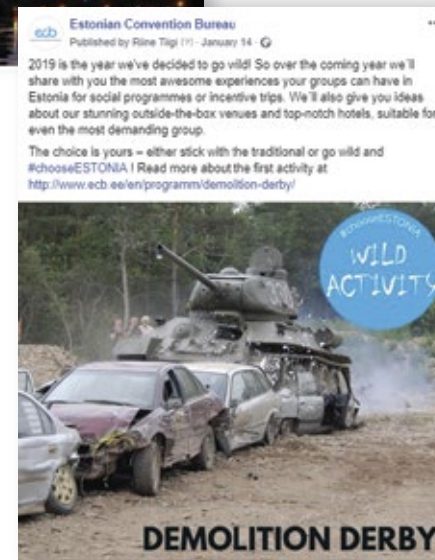
Step 1: Choosing the Core Message / Defining a Desired Image

- We came up with the core message after our team took a memorable raft tour above an underwater prison 40 minutes from Tallinn in August 2018. It hit us then that Estonia is still lovingly wild destination – one can easily go mushroom or berry picking, forest swimming, SUP Boarding, bog shoe walking in the wilderness, drive by car over a frozen sea etc. without being far away from cities. We have unusual conference venues (e.g. former seaplane hangars, power stations, unique islands etc.). On the other hand, we are fresh, challenging, relatively unknown but established destination with highly developed infrastructure and IT capabilities.
- So we decided to create a playful, a bit daring slogan ***“Go Wild, Choose Estonia”*** = be adventurous and a little bit bold, do not choose the same, traditional destination for your conference or meeting, dare to be different.



Step 2: Creating Stories / Product development

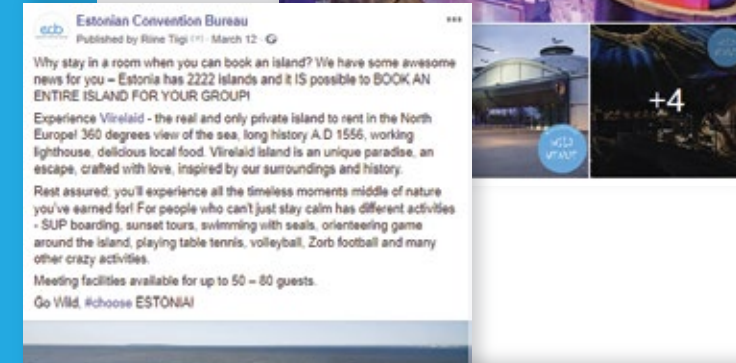
- Our first step was to clearly identify Estonia's MICE industry's strongest, most distinctive and competitively appealing elements– to **build stories** from these that help make Estonia stand out and be in tune with our “Go Wild, Choose Estonia” concept. We decided to focus on what makes Estonia really uniquely and memorable - be bold, brave and daring!
- This was the basis of changing the focus of our marketing messages - we took a look at our products / venues / hotels from different angle: what is unusual, memorable about them.
- We decided to use inspiration as a selling tactic. We decided to start telling about **ENJOYABLE, UNIQUE, MEMORABLE, ENTERTAINING EXPERIENCES** rather than MICE products – to be emotional and engaging, to inspire, entertain and educate. Some of the stories we have created are factual, whilst others are embellished or improvised.
- These stories were leveraged as social media / digital marketing magnets and embedded across the rest of their marketing.



Step 3: Digital Marketing

We used a strategic approach to our social media accounts and web site to promote our message as our main storytelling channels to spread the narrative.

- We re-shaped our social media content in line with “Go Wild, Choose Estonia” concept: we got creative and started **consistent** posting with *authentic, personal, different, emotional, funny, occasionally controversial stories / content*.
- In order to catch attention and establish a dialogue with potential clients and stakeholders we produced content that *our audience cares about*, adds value and sparks them to take action. By doing this, we demonstrate the appeal of the destination and share our expertise at the same time.
- We also started posting regularly new content (news, blog posts, new products) on our www.ecb.ee website, to better optimize our web site for search engines.
- We also reshaped the newsletter to be more inspirational, emotional and engaging.
- One of the most important aspect of our storytelling campaign is the *shareability* and *usability* of the content – the stories we create are applicable for all marketing and promotion opportunities and can also be easily used by our members.



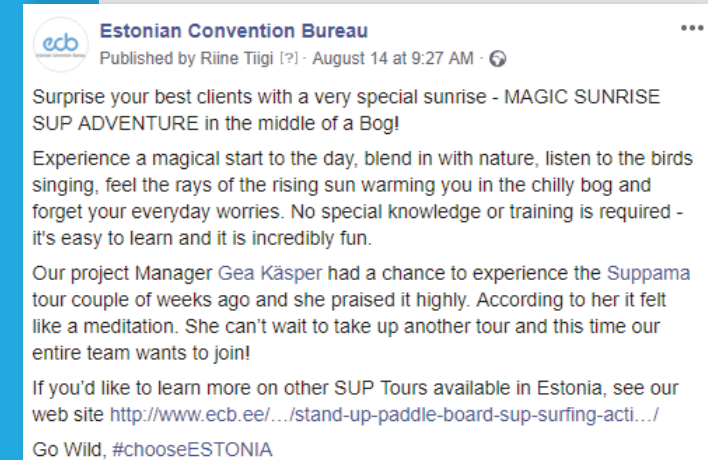
Step 4: Trade Shows and Sales Events

- As a part of the campaign we also decided to maximize our presence at trade shows in co-operation with *Visit Estonia*. Estonia's "Pop-Up Forest" design already was in tune with "Go Wild" concept, but we decided to add some eye-catching but cost-friendly elements to create buzz among attendees. Simply speaking to get people talking about us and to provide visitors with something unique and humorous they can pass along.
- At IBTM 2018 we used a Bear poster, at IMEX 2019 a vintage motor-cycle which both turned out to be perfect magnets for instant photos shared on social media.
- We also happily shared wild-themed products, i.e. bog soaps, nature-inspired sleeping masks, organic Estonian apple juice was an absolute hit.
- We dressed our team in "#chooseESTONIA" dresses to maximise the visibility.
- We made ourselves newsworthy, resulting in plenty of media / social media talk.



Step 5: Getting personal, putting ourselves in the forefront

- To maximise our brand exposure and to get more attention we put ourselves in play / branded ourselves throughout the campaign.
- We came up with #chooseESTONIA dresses to be visible as a team at sales events and also to show that we are cool, a bit edgy, funny, not afraid of to stand out. These dresses were especially handy on those events where roll-up banners are prohibited.
- The stories we created often involved a personal touch, personal engagement.

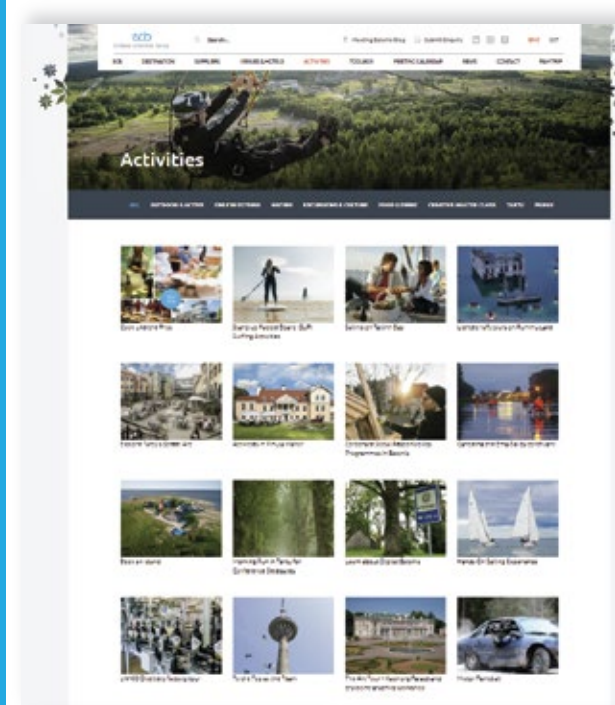


Results of the Campaign*

- + 61% Enquires to ECB
- + 25% Homepage visitors
- + 70 % Facebook followers
- + 400% LinkedIn followers
- + 35% New Social Programs and Incentive Ideas (on our web site)
- + 25% ECB members in 2019

- Buzz on tradeshow, noticed by clients and press
- Increased media attention

* Results from November 2018 to 1st of September 2019, comparing the same period previous year



Results Locally

Implementing the concept has gained positive reactions and engagement from many businesses locally. It has tremendously increased Estonian Convention Bureau's local visibility. It has even increased collaboration with non-members of ECB, showing interest to be involved in our activities. Our team is viewed as being highly creative, proactive, and professional uniting organization.

This has yielded in:

- + % 25 growth of ECB members in 2019, incl. the major airport, 2nd largest university of Estonia, 3rd largest conference city, major catering companies. Additionally, several companies have shown interest to join ECB from 2020.
- Co-Marketing by partners: Our core marketing message has been taken further by our partners. Our major airport, Tallinn airport, created a campaign based on our "Go Wild, Choose Estonia" slogan and our DMCs and hotels have used the concept in their presentations and productions.
- Uniting the industry.
- We've also been invited to speak and share our expertise about the campaign at the biggest tourism conference in Estonia – giving us the platform to get the maximum visibility within the industry and potential new partners.



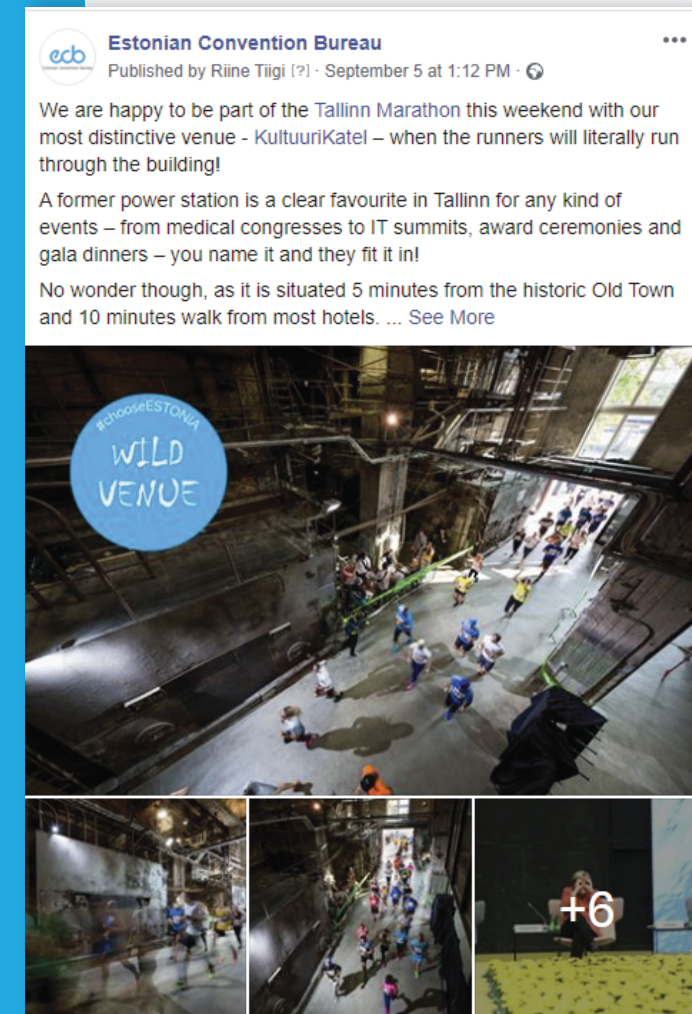
Campaign's Budget

- We **did not have any additional funding nor staff** to execute the campaign. Content was created and activities carried out in-house by the team of 3 people within our yearly budget. We did don't use any marketing agency / consultant to create the concept.
- Only **non-paid promotion** was used.
- 2500 EUR (some copytext writing, collaterals, brochure).



Conclusion - what lessons can other ICCA members learn from our ideas

- We are submitting “*Go Wild, Choose Estonia*” entry to show that being **creative** and **focused** with your message shows there is still hope for small-scale (=low-budget, low staff) convention bureaus / ICCA members who can’t afford to run costly marketing or PR campaigns, nor hire the marketing consultants or agencies. Creative use of a limited marketing budget can generate great return on investment. Sometimes all it takes is a little creativity, changing the perspective and thinking outside the box to get more out of the limited marketing budget.
- Adding stories and personal touch to your marketing adds value, gets engagement, makes a difference. Our message has turned out to be extremely useful in generating enthusiasm, momentum and fresh ideas as it is versatile and flexible.
- One of the most important aspect is the shareability and usability of the message – the stories we create are applicable for all marketing and promotion opportunities and can also be easily used by our stakeholders.
- Our smart marketing also has a **sustainable approach** - existing content is often recycled or repurposed (texts were turned into blog posts, blog post items were turned into social media news etc). The same existing booth design was used at trade shows, we added stories and creative elements to get newsworthy and catch attractions.



Conclusion

And at least, but not least:

Our tiny team implemented the “*Learning by Doing*” (or some might call it “*Trial-by-Error*”) approach and had lot of fun creating the stories and putting the personal touch in. The ECB team has been highly motivated and driven running the campaign. We started with the vision, followed by creativity, practice and skills.

Originally planned to run for 2019, the campaign has got such a positive feedback from our stakeholders that we’ll continue with campaign also in 2020.

Go Wild, #chooseESTONIA!

