

Is it even a city?

VisitOSLO's nomination for ICCA Best Marketing Award

Introduction

Oslo has long been perceived as an underdog among city break destinations and within the business event market in Europe and the Nordics. However, the city has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving into a vibrant and dynamic destination. With the lines between business and leisure increasingly blurring, visitors to Oslo now expect a seamless blend of experiences, whether attending conferences or exploring the city's culture. As Oslo's official tourism body, VisitOslo recognized the need to elevate the city's image and align its public perception with its newfound reality. The ["Is It Even a City?" campaign](#) was designed to achieve this by showcasing Oslo's unique qualities and Norwegian sense of humor, creating a compelling narrative that resonates with both leisure and business visitors.

Background and Inspiration

Norwegians are known for their dry sense of humor, characterized by irony, understatement, and subtlety. We sought to exaggerate these traits, using humor as a powerful tool to convey a deeper message about Oslo's transformation.

This campaign is part of a broader thematic approach that we have employed in previous efforts to promote Oslo to both leisure travellers and business event organizers. In 2019, we launched the "Oslo is Rubbish" campaign, where we humorously criticized Oslo while simultaneously highlighting our commitment to green initiatives. In 2021, we followed up with the "Oslo Sceptics" campaign, which featured Oslo residents convincing their rural friends and family that the city offers activities even for those who might not consider themselves fans of urban life.

In this new campaign we found the success formula by directly underplaying our strongest assets to highlight the quality of living, visiting, and hosting business events in our city.

Objective

For the "Is It Even a City?" campaign, our objective was to build awareness as prerequisite to be chosen both as leisure and business event destination. We build on the humor and irony that we had already established in our previous campaigns, to convey our message in a way that stood out in terms of destination marketing targeted towards both leisure and business visitors. Given VisitOslo's status as a small organization with limited marketing budgets, tasked with overseeing hospitality services, daily management and marketing of Oslo Convention Bureau, and general promotion of Oslo both nationally and internationally, creativity was key to stand out in a crowded marketplace. Our goal was for the campaign to achieve organic reach, allowing it to succeed without being limited by our financial constraints. We aimed to create a campaign that would not only resonate with our target audience but also be shared widely across social media platforms, generating buzz and interest in Oslo as a leisure and business destination.

Creative Process and Development

To bring this vision to life, we collaborated with the production company NewsLab, with whom we had previously worked on video, photo, and text projects. We deliberately set very few initial requirements for the campaign, giving NewsLab the freedom to explore creative ideas and push the boundaries of traditional tourism marketing.

NewsLab director August Jorfald drew inspiration for the campaign's protagonist, Halfdan, from a personal experience during a trip to Paris. Like many travelers, Jorfald initially resisted visiting the iconic Eiffel Tower, deeming it too touristy, only to feel regret later. This experience led to the creation of Halfdan, a know-it-all character who is too cool for tourism, particularly in his own city of Oslo. The character's skeptical attitude and ironic humor became the foundation for the campaign's narrative.

In addition, the campaign drew inspiration from the 2014 commercial "Scandinavian Week" by Kristoffer Borgli and Joachim Trier's "The Worst Person in the World." These influences helped shape the campaign's unique blend of self-irony and pride, resulting in an advertisement that seemingly talks down the city while ultimately celebrating its many virtues.

Campaign Execution and Results

The "Is It Even a City?" campaign was launched on June 24, 2024, and was immediately well-received by audiences. Playing on humor, especially across cultural borders, can be challenging. However, our campaign struck a chord not only with locals but also with an international audience. People appreciated and understood the humor, and received the underlying message about Oslo's appeal.

As of now, the video has amassed 5.7 million views across our own channels. The campaign has also spread organically on "X", where it has been viewed over 10 million times, as far as we have been able to track.

The campaign has been praised by both national and international media, with industry publications such as Business Insider, Kongres, BBC, The Guardian and Afar highlighting its success. The Drum quickly named it "Ad of the Day," and Monocle dedicated five minutes to discussing the campaign on their podcast, The Globalist.

Beyond the media buzz, the campaign has had a tangible impact. According to data from ForwardKeys, there was a significant increase in flight searches to Oslo immediately following the campaign's release. In the five weeks post-launch, there were 7.4 million searches for flights to Oslo, representing a 17% increase compared to the same period before the campaign. This equates to an impressive increase of over one million searches.

Future Prospects

Two months after the campaign's launch, the character of Halfdan continues to generate interest online. Positive feedback continues to pour in, and the campaign is frequently featured in renowned media channels. Additionally, a micro-trend has emerged in Oslo, with other entities such as the University of Oslo creating spin-off campaigns based on "Is It Even a City?". These spin-offs have featured relatives or friends of Halfdan, using humor to promote their own brands.

Looking ahead, the potential for Halfdan and his fictional family to become iconic figures in Norwegian and international pop culture is promising. While it may be ambitious to suggest that they could rival the Norwegian royal family in recognition, the success of the campaign has

certainly exceeded our expectations. We are excited to continue monitoring its impact on Oslo as a destination and look forward to exploring new creative avenues for future campaigns.