



Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



DLP Case Study: 'Our Edinburgh': From Group Project to Destination Training Tool

DLP Case Study: 'Our Edinburgh' – Neil Ellis, Place Hotels

Background: From Group Project to Destination Training Tool

This case study focuses on the transition of what started out as a group project assignment for three participants on the first Destination Leaders Programme (2013-2014) - Neil Ellis of Place Hotels, Karen Robertson of JacTravel, and Ali Bowden, of Edinburgh City of Literature Trust - and its transformation to tangible product development, now available as an online training tool for Edinburgh's tourism & hospitality sector. 'Our Edinburgh' is available to tourism organisations and businesses via ETAG (Edinburgh Tourism Action Group).

For their Destination Leaders Programme group project assignment, this trio of industry professionals chose to focus on the quality of the welcome for visitors to Edinburgh, in line with the Tourism 2020 strategy: *'Making Scotland a destination of first choice for a high quality, value for money and memorable customer experience, delivered by skilled and passionate people.'* Since presenting on their group project research findings in May 2014, the three DLP alumni, Karen Robertson, Ali Bowden and Neil Ellis continue to support and promote the Our Edinburgh destination training tool to the Edinburgh tourism sector, with support from Scottish Enterprise, the SIG group and further industry input from Marketing Edinburgh.

Our Edinburgh – What is it and how does it work?

Our Edinburgh is a simple, fast and cost-effective online training tool designed to give customer facing staff an overview of the key aspects of the Edinburgh visitor experience. It is engaging and interactive, with images, videos and mini quizzes which helps staff to build their knowledge of Edinburgh. The module takes just one hour to complete and it costs £6.50. The tool was designed by FLOW, the Edinburgh based, award winning training organisation, in partnership with DLP participants and ETAG. The content has been generated by several leading organisations and experts in the Edinburgh tourism sector including Festivals Edinburgh, the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, the City of Literature Trust, Marketing Edinburgh and VisitScotland.

Key Benefits

- Creates more positive, informed and motivated staff
- Ensures businesses are delivering a consistent, informed message to visitors
- Simple and easy to access, with a built in management system;
- Flexible, it can be completed on or off-site and can be completed over a 2 week period
- Fully optimised to be accessed via PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones
- Helps businesses exceed customer expectations – creates the WOW factor.

The Destination Leaders Programme Group Project

The purpose of the DLP group project is to help participants consider the strategic business and market drivers which are affecting destinations globally in their approach to destination development, marketing and management. It also offers participants the opportunity to apply the insights and learnings gained from programme speakers and workshops, and the other DLP participants, as well as the opportunity for reflection based on their own experience, together with research and readings. Where group projects translate into a tangible piece of product development, enhancement of the customer or visitor experience, or prompts for further tourism industry research; these offer a valuable legacy for the programme, destination and individuals involved.

Dr Jane Ali-Knight of the DLP project team says, “Not only does the group project really differentiate our programme from others including that of Melbourne, but it enables the course to be assessed and provides a University qualification for participants.”

Our Edinburgh: Neil Ellis, Karen Robertson and Ali Bowden

In this case study, Neil Ellis explains the motivations for the group’s choice of project study, insights into their sources of research, the challenges they have faced along the way, what impact they hope the new destination training tool can have for Edinburgh as a destination and the benefits of being part of the Destination Leaders Programme.

What was the focus of your Group Project research and what were your motivations for subject choice?

Neil explains, “Our research looked at the area of the ‘customer journey’ in Edinburgh, focusing specifically on the person-to-person welcome visitors receive when they are in the city. The customer journey can be defined as *“every detail of the visitor experience, from start to finish, in every aspect”*. The economic impact of the customer journey on a destination was reinforced through many of the DLP workshops and it was a thread continually focused on by the industry speakers, particularly by Scott Taylor of Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and Bob Downie of Royal Yacht Britannia Edinburgh.

The presentation by Scott Taylor of Glasgow City Marketing Bureau had a significant impact on all of us and his observations on the Glasgow Welcomes project, that *“the key objective of this frontliner training programme was to support the delivery of a world class customer experience for the benefit of the city, its visitors, and its businesses to successfully ‘create multiple touch points on a customer journey to deliver an immersive experience that leads to commitment to purchase.’* We also noted that the consistently highest ranked Visitor attraction in Scotland, the Royal Yacht Britannia in Edinburgh, already sees the ‘Glasgow Welcomes’ programme as an exemplar and has been using it to augment its own customer service programme for some time.

What learnings from the Destination Leaders programme did you draw on for your group project?

The ongoing DLP discussions which developed from the entire group coming together each time, and listening to industry speakers, hearing how people did things in other destinations such as Amsterdam, Manchester, Glasgow, Melbourne – these had a significant impact. Having a room full of engaged people from our sector led to a series of important debates around key challenges we believed destinations including Edinburgh were and are facing – one of these being the quality of the welcome of the customer, the customer journey and the impact this can have on the city's economy and working partnerships, for example. The first DLP coincided with the build up to Glasgow's Commonwealth Games in 2014 and the Ryder Cup in September of that year, so the customer journey and a focus on how Scotland was dealing with this as a destination was very much in our collective consciousness.

As we continued to learn on the programme, we became more aware that in this competitive global marketplace, we must recognise that today, the level of expectation of visitors to a destination is far higher, therefore the quality and friendliness of our city's 'welcome' must be seen as a basic essential. With this in mind, investing in a powerful and memorable 'welcome' delivered by enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well trained staff, delivered as part of a joined up industry approach can hopefully make the city of Edinburgh the winning story. Karen, Ali and I believe that such an approach will in turn lead to repeat visits, referrals and increased spend per visitor to boost the visitor economy. In each of our respective jobs, skills development and training are probably important issues for the three of us, so perhaps this is why we were drawn to the topic.

Were there any other destinations which had an influence on how you developed your own project?

We engaged with around twelve organisations in the course of our research including destinations Dublin and Glasgow which both run successful welcome schemes, and sector specific areas in Edinburgh which to date have implemented their own training programmes and approaches, including transport, hotels, the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, Edinburgh Castle and Edinburgh Airport. It's clear that the 'Glasgow Welcomes' initiative has had a significant impact in terms of its buy-in from business and destination leaders (through its Advisory Group), high sign-up rates and positive impact on employee motivation and abilities. The strong leadership provided by Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and the role of the Project Manager seemed key to its ongoing success.

What challenges have you faced in developing the project into an industry product? Which leadership skills have you used to tackle them?

We tried to maintain a co-ordinated approach across the tourism sector in Edinburgh, aiming for a new baseline of skills and knowledge, and to adapt the “Glasgow Welcomes” to a relevant Edinburgh version, and roll it out in its online form as a frontline destination training tool. In order to achieve this, not only has buy-in from the Edinburgh tourism sector been fundamental, but we have also needed fairly specific tasks, input and support from a number of key stakeholders including Marketing Edinburgh, Scottish Enterprise, the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) and the ongoing support of our industry colleagues in the Destination Leaders Programme.

Bringing this together, managing its development and liaising with multiple stakeholders has proved challenging, as well as driving the project, while managing the demands of our own full-time jobs. Pitching the programme to industry, convincing businesses of the demand for this scheme and the need for a joined up approach in Edinburgh has required a real focus on communicating the key business benefits clearly and succinctly to multiple audiences. We’ve had to tap into our industry networks and use our influencing and negotiating skills, all of which you could definitely say we’ve been able to develop further by being part of the Destination Leaders Programme.

What do you hope *Our Edinburgh* can achieve for individual businesses and organisations, and also the wider destination?

Neil Ellis: “Ali, Karen and I believe that for the Our Edinburgh programme to succeed, we need a high quality welcome where ‘frontliners’ are trained to encourage visitors to explore more widely, stay longer and visit more attractions. We must invest in knowledgeable and well trained ‘frontliners’ and we need a joined up industry approach. Through partnership we can create an environment to boost the visitor economy”.

Tania, an employee of Place Hotels, Edinburgh says: “Our Edinburgh provided me with general but essential information about Edinburgh and its most popular and interesting attractions, as well as several resources and tips to increase my knowledge of the city and its surrounding areas. However, the most important feature that I’d like to highlight is that I found it really encouraging, in the sense that it really captured my attention and interest in the many fascinating features of Edinburgh and it also motivated me, both during and after the training, to keep on with the research autonomously, on my own.”

What impact has the learning experience of your group project activity had on all of you personally and/or professionally?

Neil says, “The three of us are all of the opinion that collaboration was definitely the greatest influence of the programme and the fact that the Destination Leaders Programme brought us all – the eighteen industry professionals taking part in the first year – together into a lasting network. To belong to this network, with DLP colleagues as members of various different tourism strategy, industry and hospitality groups, to have a sounding board of experts there for myself and Karen and Ali to bounce ideas off and get input from them, before we actually finalised and rounded off the Our Edinburgh programme – was so valuable. To be part of the Edinburgh 2020 Strategic programme and have something that fed into that was particularly brilliant”.

Conclusion

Neil concludes, “We now have a tangible product, the Our Edinburgh destination tool, which has evolved from existing Destination Leaders Programme influences, our own learning, what we’ve taken from diverse programme speakers, the workshops, other destinations as well as inspiration and assistance from the people who have been through the programme with us. Industry feedback continues to be positive. This is probably the most positive outcome that can come from this, both for the Our Edinburgh product and for the three of us as DLP participants, and now as DLP alumni”.

Further Information/Links

Place Hotels Edinburgh	www.yorkplace-edinburgh.co.uk
JacTravel	www.jactravel.co.uk
Edinburgh City of Literature Trust	www.cityofliterature.com
Our Edinburgh	www.etag.org.uk/training/our-edinburgh
Scottish Enterprise	www.scottish-enterprise.com
DLP Case Study Videos	http://bit.ly/1okkX9Q

