

Tour Long Beach From The Couch: New Long Beach CVB Website To Immerse Users In City

It's 'Like Google Street View On Steroids'

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The soon-to-debut Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) website allows users to sit behind the wheel of a race car in the Toyota Grand Prix, walk the deck of the Queen Mary and peek into the shark tank at the Aquarium of the Pacific, all without stepping foot in the city.

The CVB partnered with Xplorit, a Nevada-based virtual travel technology company, and Tempest, a tourism marketing organization, to create a more interactive and user-

friendly experience. New features include a virtual tour through the city's hotels and major attractions, content shared by users, and an optimized search engine.

Loren Simpson, the CVB's director of digital communications, drew on her background in entertainment to execute an inventive design. "What's great about our CEO is that he's an innovator," she said, referring to CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling. "When I come up with these different - maybe scary at times - ideas, he embraces them. With the virtual reality component, we're trying to equip our sales directors with a better tool to explain, 'When you book Long Beach, it's a campus.'"

The virtual reality component of the new site enables users to walk through the city's 16 largest hotels as if they are experiencing them in real time and in person. The site gives potential visitors a sense of the proximity of the hotels to the convention center and the downtown area, highlighting the city's walkability.

"The big business for the convention center is big meetings, so "[the CVB] wanted to show how convenient the center is to all the hotels," Greg Murtha, president of Xplorit explained. He described the site as "like Google Street View on steroids."

Murtha clarified that the technology is designed to bring the immersive interaction to every type of device, such as smartphones, tablets or three-dimensional viewing devices. "There's basically a trend on the web: how do you make your website more experiential?" Murtha explained. "Instead of reading about the Aquarium, you can see what it's like to walk over to the shark tank or see the penguins. Our clients are trying to create a compelling experience to make people want to visit."

Another experiential component is the incorporation of photos posted to social media with the hashtag #VisitLB. "The photos that users take versus marketing pictures are completely different - you can tell," Simpson said. "That's why digital influencers are so huge. People are looking for those authentic takes."

The site's new, optimized search engine also increases the city's accessibility. "[The search bar] looks at your entire sentence rather than individual words," Simpson said. "It aggregates the information it thinks you're looking for. It assists users in their quest, which makes it more user-friendly."

The CVB collaborated with Tempest to create a unique site design and achieve accessibility. According to Jenny Rose, Tempest's director of client services, the company employed technology such as large-format photography, full-screen video and a streamlined navigational experience to connect users to the city. "Intuitive, visual navigational elements invite the visitor to explore additional pages on the website, and advanced filtering options help the visitor quickly sort and sift through local business listings to find the restaurant, attraction, or retail shop that best fits their needs," Rose said in an e-mail statement.

Although the site is scheduled to launch at the end of June, Simpson already has some ideas for future virtual experiences. "The camera could go up on the scaffolding of the POW! WOW! Long Beach murals as they're painting away, so you can see the paint dripping off the wall," she explained. "Long Beach has so many cool things: cultural festivals at the aquarium, music festivals and even a ghost tour on the Queen Mary. . . . I just want to give a teaser to bring everybody out." ■



The new Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) website contains a virtual reality component as well as a sleeker design, content shared by users and an optimized search engine. "With the virtual reality component, we're trying to equip our sales directors with a better tool to explain, 'When you book Long Beach, it's a campus,'" Loren Simpson said. (Photograph courtesy of the CVB)



Loren Simpson is the director of digital communications for the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). Together with Xplorit, a Nevada-based virtual travel technology company, and Tempest, a tourism marketing organization, she has implemented a new website set to launch at the end of the month (Photograph courtesy of the Long Beach CVB)