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USAID REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF AQUATIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

Go Blue Central America - Website Visitors 2013

Month	Website Visitors (Approximate)
January	2200
February	2100
March	2000
April	1900
May	1800
June	1700
July	2000
August	2100
September	2000
October	2100
November	2400

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DELIVERABLE NO. 2.2: PROMOTIONAL AND MARKETING PLAN RESULTS FOR THE GEOTOURISM PLATFORM

November 30 2013

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**DELIVERABLE NO. 2.2: PROMOTIONAL AND MARKETING PLAN
RESULTS FOR THE GEOTOURISM PLATFORM**

Contract No. EPP-I-00-04-00020-00-SOL

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The author's views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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Acronyms

CMS	Content Management System
CTA	Call to Action
GBCA	Go Blue Central America
GSC	Geotourism Stewardship Council
KRA	Key Result Area
NGS	National Geographic Society
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
RSS	Rich Site Summary
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

This document shares the results of implementation of an online marketing plan for the Go Blue Central America (GBCA) Geotourism platform. The document describes how Solimar International, as USAID Regional Program’s Subcontractor, implemented marketing activities from June 1 to November 30 2013 to drive visitors to the Go Blue Central America website, which in turn refers viewers to the site’s webpages that feature local participating businesses, attractions, and events.

Subcontractor Solimar International (hereinafter referred to as “Solimar”) implemented both online and offline marketing activities in order to accomplish its marketing objectives. Online marketing activities targeted audiences in the early stages of travel planning and included search engine optimization, a blog, social media platforms, and outreach to the travel industry. Offline marketing activities targeted travelers who had already arrived in GBCA destinations and were in the “experiencing” or “sharing” stage of their trip, and included such materials as posters, stickers, and certificates.

The GBCA marketing strategy also included activities targeting the registered users and participating businesses at the GBCA destinations. Those activities included eNewsletters, online training webinars, and other outreach that was designed to increase the local users and businesses’ understanding of the USAID Regional Program, the GBCA platform, and also the ability of those local participants to harness the power of online marketing – both within but also beyond the context of the Go Blue Central America platform.

Based on the successful implementation of these marketing activities targeting the public, the travel trade, and the participating businesses and registered users – Solimar is able to show a significant increase in visitation to the GBCA website from pre-marketing activities (May 2013) to post-marketing activities (November 2013). These results include:

- **A 74% increase** in the number of unique visitors to the website
- **A 105% increase** in the number of webpages visited per unique visitor
- **A 56% increase** in the average visit duration
- **562% more** monthly visitors than a comparable Geotourism website from the Central America region

The overall goal of the online marketing activities is not simply increased visitation to the GBCA website, but rather a \$1 million increase in revenue of participating GBCA businesses to the USAID project indicator 2.4.2. To date, the total nine-month (3 quarters) contribution of the Go Blue Central America platform (and the online marketing activities presented within this report) since its launch on January 1 2013 is **\$899,851**. This figure indicates that the Go Blue Central America program is on track to meet its goal of a \$1 million contribution to indicator 2.4.2 that has been established by the USAID Regional Program.

Introduction

The Regional Program for the Management of Aquatic Resources and Economic Alternatives, financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Chemonics International, with Solimar as a subcontractor, builds on previous projects in Central America to support and promote marine and coastal conservation through rights-based access and market-driven mechanisms in concert with local partners from both the private and public sectors.

The Regional Program employs multiple strategies to positively affect its target species within its regional points of focus including the promotion of rights-based legislation, establishment of managed protected areas and no-take reserves, and by providing economic alternatives to local communities where resource extraction threatens marine and coastal natural resources. Sustainable tourism is employed as a strategy to provide economic alternatives to local communities. As a sustainable tourism consulting firm, Solimar assists the USAID Regional Program in the development and sale of tourism products as alternative livelihoods.

In 2012, in collaboration with the National Geographic Society (NGS), and sponsored by the USAID Regional Program, Solimar created and launched the [Go Blue Central America Geotourism platform](#). Geotourism is defined by NGS as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.” The Go Blue Central America platform aims to promote Central American coastal and marine destinations, businesses, projects, organizations, or government authorities that are sustainably managing authentic and unique tourism products.

Situation Analysis and Opportunities of the Destinations’ Positions

A detailed situation analysis and discussion of opportunities of the two destinations’ positions was laid out in the Promotional and Marketing Plan; therefore only very short summaries are presented below.

Roatán

Honduras is the least developed of the Central American countries in terms of tourism arrivals. It receives around 900,000 visitors per year, representing about 11% of total Central American tourism arrivals, mostly cruise ship tourists and divers. Cruise ship passengers generally have limited understanding or interest in sustainability when it comes to selecting tourism destinations or service providers. On the other, divers are generally aware and concerned about marine and coastal conservation as it affects their diving environments and overall experiences. Local communities have historically received little benefit from these two tourism markets.

Bocas del Toro

The tourism market in Bocas del Toro is demographically diverse but relatively homogenous in its overall tendencies with respect to sustainability and conservation. Most visitors seek out this region for its tourism offerings of wildlife, natural scenery, and authentic cultural heritage. This ability to compete on a product level rather than a price level presents opportunities for sustainable tourism to attract travelers that are more likely to support conservation initiatives and travel philanthropy programs; travelers are also more likely to be receptive to conservation awareness messaging. Yet local businesses are primarily small, meaning that they tend to create more jobs as an aggregate but as margins are often small, businesses are typically unable to contribute large amounts to conservation initiatives. This means that in providing economic alternatives to resource extractors and especially

those that represent a threat to vulnerable wildlife, the tourism markets can only comprise part of the solution.

GBCA has aimed to address the economy of scale issue for both Roatán and Bocas del Toro, providing a platform for promoting small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, as well as for future Central American destinations that could join the platform.

Objectives

Overarching Key Result Area

The GBCA website's primary key result area (KRA) is to increase the total revenue generated by GBCA-nominated businesses through increased sales of goods and services. In order to accomplish this, GBCA began implementing a marketing strategy that utilizes online marketing activities to drive Internet users to the GBCA website which in turn links them to GBCA participating businesses; train participating businesses in the fundamentals of online marketing; and develop and distribute print promotional materials that target visitors already at the destinations. An increase in the total number of arrivals to GBCA destinations will increase the share of destination visitors that patronize GBCA-nominated businesses, thereby increasing those businesses' sales.

Objective 1

To increase the total number of arrivals in GBCA destinations by:

- Distributing inspirational content to a global audience through online channels;
- Providing high quality and timely information to target markets, including practical tools they need to plan their trip to GBCA destinations; and
- Creating channels for travelers to share their experiences directly with other travelers.

Objective 2

To increase the share of visitors that patronize GBCA nominated businesses by:

- Providing nominated businesses an opportunity to market directly to travelers through online and offline channels;
- Educating travelers on the importance of supporting businesses that implement sustainability best practices; and
- Promoting the GBCA brand as the regional standard in sustainable travel.

Objective 3

To encourage GBCA-nominated businesses to become active marketing partners by establishing direct linkages between marketing exposure, sustainability, and increased sales.

Methodology

In June 2013, following the USAID Regional Program's approval of deliverable "2.1 Promotional and marketing plan for the Geotourism platform", Solimar began implementing the online and offline initiatives described in that plan in order to begin accomplishing its marketing objectives. Travelers enter different "mindsets" in the various stages of

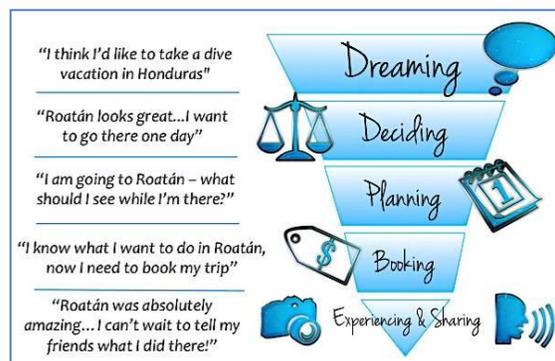


Figure 1: The various stages of the "Traveler Mindset"

travel planning and purchasing, as described in Figure 1. Online marketing activities have targeted audiences in the early stages of travel planning: those that are dreaming, planning, or booking their trip. Offline activities have targeted travelers who have already arrived in GBCA destinations and are in the “experiencing” or “sharing” stage of their trip.

Online Marketing

GBCA’s online marketing initiatives have featured “inbound marketing” or “content-based marketing” activities. Inbound marketing is characterized as marketing that *earns* rather than *buys* consumer attention by providing valuable and relevant information that target markets (like travelers to Central America) are seeking. The advantages of inbound marketing for GBCA include more targeted marketing communications, lower-cost marketing activities, and the opportunity to open two-way communication channels with target audiences.

GBCA’s inbound marketing activities have featured the production and publication of valuable online content and links that direct target markets to the GBCA website. Content has been distributed through social media, a blog, eNewsletters, emails and the website itself. The majority of the content that GBCA has distributed through online channels has targeted travelers who are considering taking a trip, or who are actively planning or booking a trip.

By targeting travelers that are still in the early stages of the traveler buying cycle, GBCA has the greatest potential to motivate travelers to choose GBCA destinations in the first place, and to influence their decision to patronize GBCA nominated businesses when they visit. Table 1 illustrates the type of content that motivates travelers in their various stages of travel planning and purchasing.

Traveler Mindset	Content Description	Example Content
Dreaming	Content that inspires travelers and differentiates GBCA destinations from other Caribbean destinations	Social media posts featuring travelers’ photos of Caribbean beaches, local flora and fauna, surfing, diving, etc.
Deciding	Resources that give travelers an overview of the various attractions offered by a destination	“All About Roatán” blog post
Planning	Resources for people who have decided to travel to GBCA destinations or have already arrived in GBCA destinations	Downloadable travel guide “Surf’s Up” (surfing in Bocas del Toro) that has a map and description of surf sites on the island
Booking	Content that drives travelers to GBCA nominated businesses	“Lodging for \$25 or less” blog post with links to each hostel’s webpage with the GBCA website
Experiencing and Sharing	Communications that encourage visitors to share their travel experience with the world	An email that request visitors post comments and photos on social media and travel forums

Table 1: GBCA marketing content descriptions

With these marketing principles in mind, GBCA has produced and distributed the following types of online content:

1. Static website images and text (via GBCA website)
2. A GBCA blog
3. Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter)
4. Downloadable travel resources (e-books, travel guides, maps, etc.)

Solimar attempted to source (or collect) content from a variety of stakeholders, including GBCA nominated businesses and travelers. “Crowd-sourcing” of content was meant to allow Solimar to source and publish large volumes of content.

In order to achieve this, Solimar created incentives for businesses that shared content by rewarding those businesses with increased market exposure. Solimar actively solicited blog and Facebook

content from nominated businesses by making requests via e-newsletters and individual emails (39 emails sent). Solimar even offered that blog posts written by nominated businesses would include a short paragraph at the end introducing the contributing author or business as well as a link to the business’s website.

Unfortunately, Solimar was not able to crowd-source much content from GBCA members. Despite the aforementioned strategies to collect content, few members contributed.

The following table summarizes the overall type of GBCA marketing content and the envisioned content contributors:

Content Type	Content Contributors
Static website content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User-generated • Solimar International
Blog posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solimar International (graphic design, platform setup, editing)
Social media content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GBCA-nominated businesses • Stewardship councils • Travelers • Solimar International (graphic design, platform setup)
Downloadable travel resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solimar International (graphic design, editing, distribution)

Table 2: GBCA content and contributors



Figure 2: Solimar “offline” marketing activities included the distribution of a GBCA sticker (left) and certificate of recognition (right) to highlight participating businesses to visitors already at the destination - seen here in Roatán.

Offline Marketing

Offline marketing content has included the issuance of stickers and certificates of recognition that allow participating members to promote themselves to visitors already at the destinations. They feature the Go Blue Central America logo and the phrase “Participating Business”. Local GSCs and Solimar Training Specialist Lucia Prinz began handing out the stickers out to members who are in compliance with their sustainability best practices training requirements during her visit to both GBCA destinations in May 2013, and the local GSCs continue to distribute the materials to participating businesses (Figure 2) as they reach compliance.

Roles and Responsibilities

The implementation of the GBCA marketing activities were supported by three distinct groups, which included:

1. Geotourism Stewardship Councils (GSCs)
2. GSC marketing coordinators

3. Solimar International

1. The GSCs' marketing roles and responsibilities included:

- Attending the marketing trainings mentioned below (completed)
- Designating a marketing coordinator (completed)
- Promoting GBCA and recruiting new members (ongoing)
- Promoting the GBCA marketing activities with their destination's members (ongoing)

During her training in both destinations – Bocas del Toro and Roatán - in May 2013, Lucia Prinz completed a marketing training with the GSCs, facilitated their selection of a marketing coordinator, and also assisted them in completing a 2013 work plan that included marketing activities.

Unfortunately, both GSCs have made limited progress in terms of the marketing support they were trained to provide, and therefore it is expected further marketing support provided by the GSCs will be equally limited.

2. The GSC **marketing coordinators'** roles and responsibilities included:

- Assist in creating content required for their destination's marketing activities (ongoing)
- Assist in liaising with their destination's members to collect content required for their destination's marketing activities (ongoing)
- Provide input and feedback on marketing content created by Solimar (ongoing)

In May 2013 both GSCs chose a marketing coordinator: Victor Moncada for Roatán and Angel Gonzales for Bocas del Toro. Once again, based on the limited support provided by the marketing coordinators in 2013, further marketing support provided by the marketing coordinators is expected to be equally limited.

3. **Solimar's** marketing roles and responsibilities included:

- Develop the overall promotional and marketing plan (completed)
- Train GSC members and marketing coordinators in the implementation of the plan (completed)
- Train at least 100 local individuals in online marketing techniques via webinars (completed)
- Implement the first six months of marketing activities so that the GSCs and the public could see the functionality and benefits of GBCA as the platform gained momentum (completed)

Target Markets

GBCA's marketing has targeted market segments that currently form GBCA destinations' core traveler base. During the planning stage, GBCA identified five unique traveler personas (or target markets) that were the focus of the organization's marketing initiatives:

1. Watersports enthusiasts
2. Backpackers
3. Cruise/sun and fun/leisure travelers
4. Nature lovers/wildlife enthusiasts
5. Cultural/community enthusiasts

The five target markets outlined above were identified via consultations with Go Blue Central America GSC members, participating businesses, and Solimar's technical experience and knowledge resulting from a decade of working with sustainable tourism development in coastal Central America.

Content Themes

The following five themes, which mirror the themes on the GBCA website, were used to collect and/or produce engaging content that is relevant for the target markets:

1. Pristine natural areas
2. Living culture and history
3. Food, drink, and nightlife
4. Outdoor recreation
5. Travel and sustainability

Content Concepts

Content concepts – such as the topics of blog articles or Facebook posts – were then developed by cross-referencing one of the five target markets (i.e. backpackers, nature lovers, etc.) with one of the five content themes (i.e. pristine natural areas, outdoor recreation, etc.).

The Travel Trade as a Target Market

Both Roatán, Honduras and Bocas del Toro, Panama are overwhelmingly characterized as “independent traveler” destinations rather than packaged tour destinations. The same could be said for Central America as a whole, especially when compared to other regions of the world dominated by packaged tours operated by international outbound, domestic inbound tour operators, or specialized travel agencies such as Africa and Europe.

Although a small market, the USAID Regional Program considered outreach to specialized tour operators an important part of the Go Blue Central America Promotional and Marketing Plan, and therefore Solimar took the following steps to reach out to these industry partners:

1. Developed a database of more than 40 tour operators and agencies who specialize in the Go Blue Central America destinations and/or specialize in the tourism products and services offered by the Go Blue Central America participating businesses (included in Annex).
2. Developed and distributed a digital informational packet to those specialized tour operators and agencies to facilitate an increased interest of the travel industry in the Go Blue Central America destinations (included in Annex).

Results of the GBCA Marketing Activities

Go Blue Central America Website

A collaboration between USAID, the National Geographic Society (NGS), and the Inter-American Development Bank, the [Go Blue Central America Geotourism website](#) is at the heart of the promotional and marketing strategy. Launched in November 2012, the website serves as the focal point for potential travelers who have heard about the GBCA initiative through other means - social media, the blog, word of mouth, etc. All other components of the promotional and marketing plan provided links back to the GBCA website and the participating business webpages.



Figure 3: GBCA homepage featuring links to Facebook and the participating business webpages.

In an effort to also provide a user-friendly “reverse” link from the website back to the Facebook page and Go Blue Blog, Solimar also facilitated the addition of “widgets” (or links) on the GBCA website homepage back to those social media pages (Figure 3).

GBCA Website Analytics

As stated earlier in this report, the GBCA online marketing activities began on June 1 2013. Therefore, in order to measure the impact of those activities on the GBCA website (the most direct indicator of the success of those online marketing activities), one must compare the GBCA’s website analytics from the pre-marketing activities period to the post-marketing activities period.

One way to do that is to look at the overall website visitation over the course of the last 11 months from the GBCA’s website launch (January 1 2013) to the date this report was due (November 30 2013). The leading indicator of the GBCA online marketing activities is overall GBCA website visitation, which is presented in Figure 4 as monthly totals. One can see that the trend line from January to May 2013 illustrates an overall negative trend, indicating decreasing visitation to the website. Compare that to the trend line from June (when the online marketing activities began) to November and one can see an overall positive trend, indicating increased visitation to the website (with October to November showing a 43% increase in website visitation). These results clearly indicate an upward trend in website visitation since the online marketing activities began in June 2013.

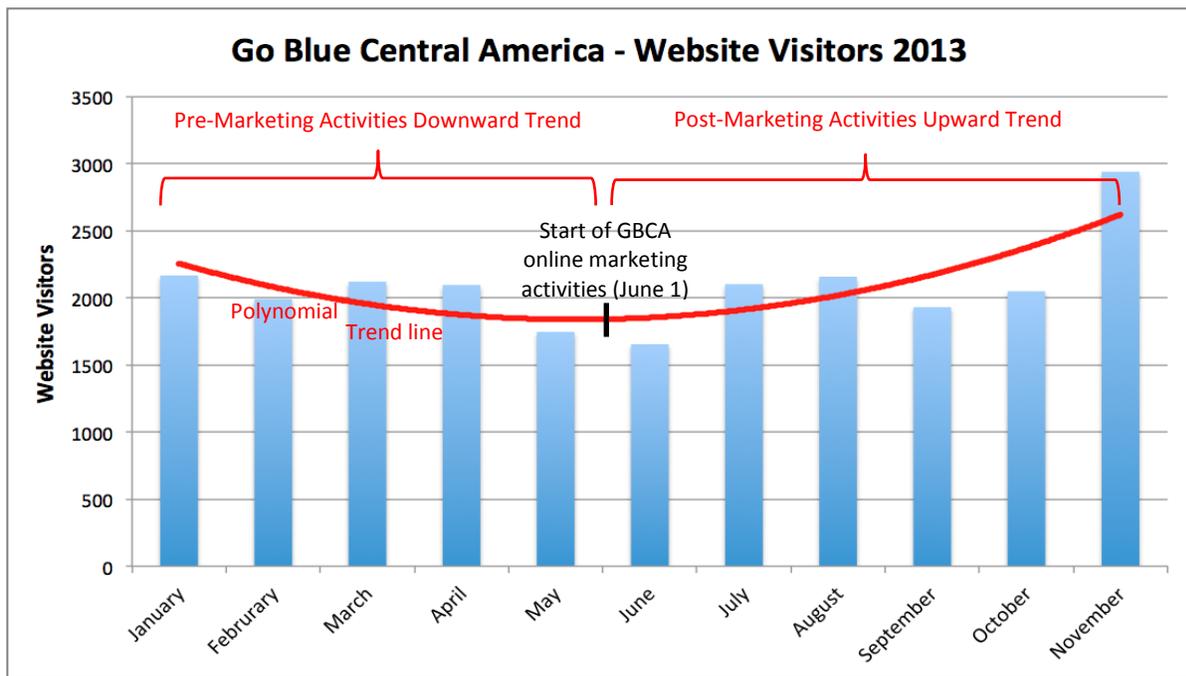


Figure 4: Statistics of monthly GBCA website visitation shows clear trends in the popularity of the website.

One cannot compare the cumulative website visitation for the entire pre-marketing activities period (January – May 2013) to the entire post-marketing activities period (June – November 2013) because the numbers of months are different (five months vs. six months). However, in order to compare “apples to apples”, one can compare a complete pre-marketing activities month (e.g. May 2013) to a complete post-marketing activities month (e.g. November 2013).

In 2012, Solimar facilitated the installation of “Google Analytics” within the GBCA website code. Google Analytics is a service offered by Google that generates detailed statistics about a website’s traffic and traffic sources. It is the most widely used website statistics service.

The following results (Figure 5) are derived directly from Google Analytics, and compare a number of indicators of website traffic between the month of May 2013 and the month of November 2013.

Visits: The amount of times the website is accessed. This data allows you to see how effectively the website is being promoted. GBCA showed a **68.33% increase** in visits between May and November 2013.

Unique Visitors: The number of individual (non-duplicate) visitors to the website. This data is determined by cookies that are stored in visitor browsers. GBCA showed a **73.78% increase** in unique visitors between May and November 2013.

Page views: The amount of times visitors arrive on individual pages of the website. This metric shows not only the quantity of *visitors*, but also the quantity of *content* the visitor is viewing. Higher the page views, the more engaged the visitor. GBCA showed a **105.67% increase** in page views between May and November 2013.

Pages per visit: Similar to page views, this metric shows the average number of pages visited per visitor. Once again, more pages = more visitor engagement. GBCA showed a **22.19% increase** in pages per visit between May and November 2013.

Average Visit Duration: Another critical metric, this is the average amount of time a visitor spends on the website. GBCA showed a **56.79% increase** in average visit duration

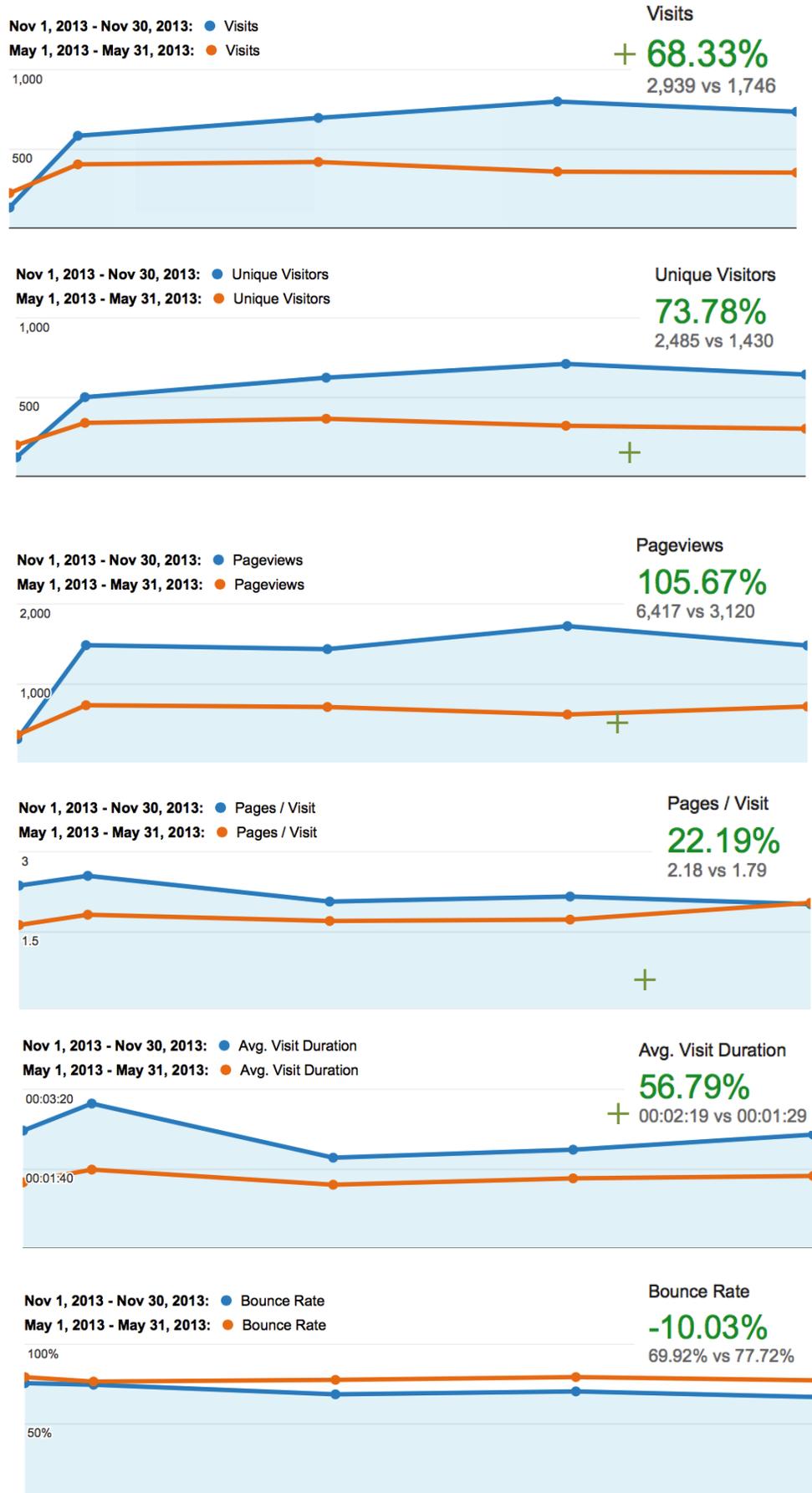


Figure 5: GBCA analytics comparing May 2013 to November 2013 website traffic.

between May and November 2013.

Bounce Rate: The percentage of visits in which the visitor only views one page of your Website before leaving. With Bounce Rate information, you can analyze the quality of user visits. A high Bounce Rate often indicates that your pages are not relevant to what your visitors are looking for. GBCA showed a **10.03% decrease** in bounce rate between May and November 2013 – indicating that less visitors were leaving the website after viewing only one page.

GBCA Website Demographics

Although the GBCA website attracted visitors for more than 140 countries worldwide, 10 countries made up the majority of that visitation. Figure 6 illustrates the country of origin of visitors to the GBCA website, once again based on website traffic statistics provided by Google Analytics. These analytics confirm Solimar’s assumptions regarding the origins of most visitors (both to the website, as well as to the GBCA destinations).

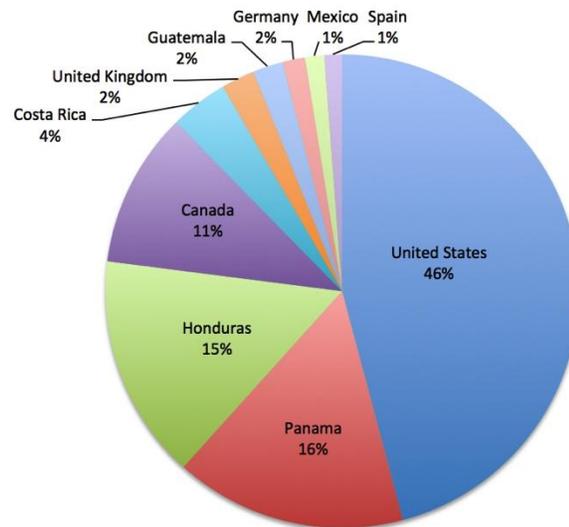


Figure 6: Demographics of GBCA website visitors

GBCA vs. Geotourism Guatemala Website Analytics

One final way to assess the success of the GBCA online marketing activities is to compare the impact of those marketing activities on the GBCA website’s traffic to a similar Geotourism project from the region that did not have supporting online marketing activities to drive visitor traffic to its website.

In order to make such a comparison, Solimar was granted access to the “Geotourism Guatemala” Google Analytics data. The Geotourism Guatemala project was initiated in 2008, supported by the NGS Maps Division and project partner Counterpart International, and followed the exact same process as the Go Blue Central America project (i.e. GSC formation, promotion of nomination period, editing and approval of nominations, etc.) with its public website officially launching in January 2010. However, the Geotourism Guatemala project did not have an online marketing component to promote visitation to its website.

When one compares the average website visitors per month in 2013 of the Go Blue Central America website (average of 2,150 visitors per month) to the Geotourism Guatemala website (average of 325 visitors per month) – the GBCA website represents **562% more monthly website visitors** than the Geotourism Guatemala website. Although a more indirect measurement of the impact of the GBCA online marketing activities, this result certainly illustrates a considerably higher number of visitors to the GBCA

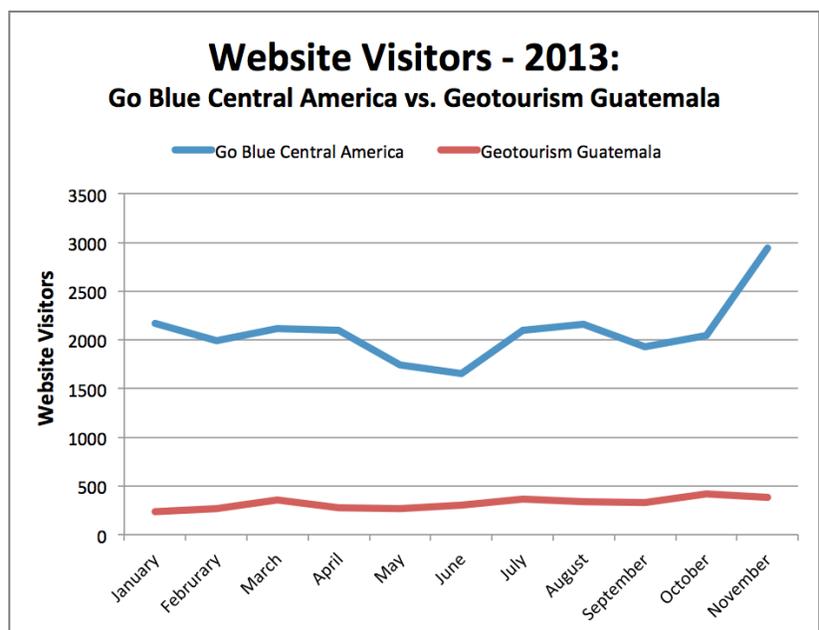


Figure 6: GBCA website traffic vs. Geotourism Guatemala website traffic.

website over the Geotourism Guatemala website.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to the process of improving a website's ranking in search engines for particular search parameters. SEO is an important component of online marketing because of its direct effect on the volume of traffic that arrives at a website. For a website like Go Blue Central America, a majority of website traffic comes from organic search results, and so it is important that the website ranks well for anticipated search parameters.

Search engine ranking depends upon two components: on-screen and off-screen SEO. On-screen components of SEO include the use and density of keywords in website text. Off-screen SEO depends upon elements such as the number and authority of external websites that link to the GBCA website.

To improve its on-screen SEO, GBCA compiled a database of ranked keywords that were deemed likely to be searched by target audiences. GBCA then featured these keywords prominently in static website text as well as dynamic blog content. The volume of monthly searches for any given search term and the difficulty to rank for a given search term was previously able to be determined using Google AdWords' free Keyword Tool; Google has now enhanced the tool, renamed it Keyword Planner, and charges for its use. Figure 7 illustrates the top 20 results culled by Solimar staff for use on the GBCA website.

GBCA selected keywords for which there are a high number of searches but relatively little ranking competition and used these keywords to guide content creation that will be relevant for target audiences. By keeping its keyword database up to date and using the database to guide new content creation, GBCA will ensure that its website continues to move up the search engine ranks and to continually rank for new keywords.

To improve its off-screen SEO, the GBCA website was linked to as many additional external website pages as possible, which included links to the Facebook page, Go Blue Blog, and partner websites.

Top 20 keywords/phrases:

1. Where is Roatán
2. Roatán
3. Panama hotels
4. Tourism and ecotourism
5. Ecotourism tourism
6. Bocas de Toro
7. The Bay Islands
8. Sandy Bay
9. Resort dive
10. Ecolodge
11. Dive sites
12. Dive resort
13. Boca del Toro
14. Where is Roatán, Honduras
15. Roatán in Honduras
16. Roatán en Honduras
17. Dive resorts
18. Panama del Toro
19. Del Toro Panama
20. Bocas vacation

Figure 7: Google AdWords keyword results

Go Blue Blog

Like traditional websites, blogs are platforms that are intended to publish content on the Internet. The main difference between a blog and a website is that blog content is updated regularly and published chronologically, as opposed to a website which is usually composed of static content arranged thematically. Other important features of a blog are the integration of comment forms that allow readers to interact and respond to content and content syndication via rich site summary (RSS) feeds. A blog was created for GBCA, <http://gobluegeotourism.wordpress.com>, and provides a multitude of links back the main GBCA website via blog references to participating GBCA business webpages and featured attractions. The blog also features inspirational content from each destination, destination news and updates, and travel planning information.

The Go Blue Blog has attracted website visitors by publishing content around popular keywords and has become the "voice" of the organization, allowing GBCA to communicate directly with travelers that are considering or experiencing a trip to a GBCA destination. The blog articles represented both Bocas del Toro and Roatán, and also covered the five primary themes (e.g. culture and history, etc.) that represent both destinations. Each blog article was the "tagged" with its geographic or thematic content, which made it easier for visitors to find what they were looking for. The blog articles were

also designed with the five primary target markets' (e.g. backpackers, etc.) travel interests and motivations in mind. The follow page features a screen shot of the Go Blue Blog (Figure 8).

Main navigation links and "Recent Posts" direct visitors to geographic content (e.g. Bocas del Toro) or thematic content (e.g. culture and history) content.

Example of Geographic Content:

The screen shot below features the landing page of all of the blog articles related to Bocas del Toro, which are organized around geographic content.



Example of Thematic Content:

The screen shot below illustrates the eight blog articles that contained (and were "tagged" as having) Culture and History content, regardless of the geographic location of the

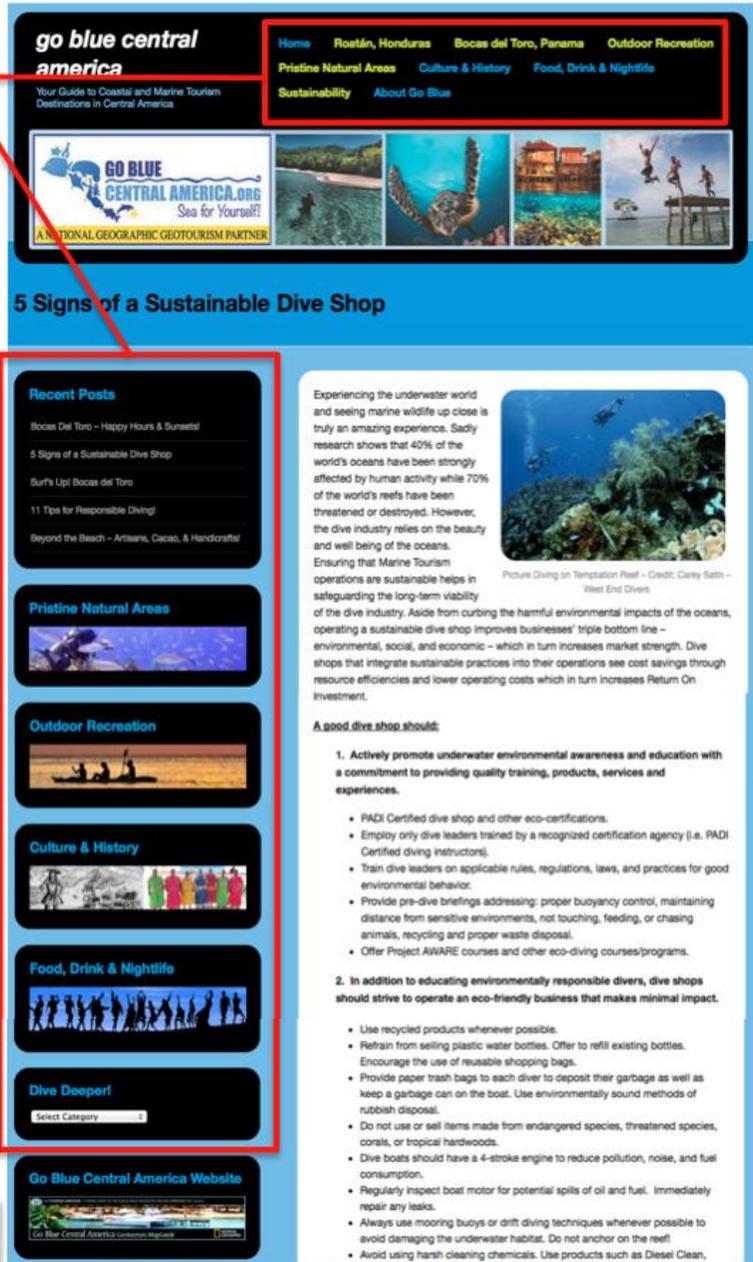


Figure 8: Screen shots of the Go Blue WordPress blog

There were four primary reasons why GBCA published the Go Blue WordPress Blog:

1. To increase visitor awareness and demand for GBCA destinations by creating a platform to publish inspirational content.
2. To generate targeted website traffic by allowing GBCA to push out content specific to highly ranked keywords.

GBCA has posted 15 articles on the Go Blue Blog thus far, and “pushed them out” through the GBCA Facebook and Twitter feeds to increase their exposure (see Figure 9). The breakdown of the Go Blue Blog articles is as follows:

6 Roatán blog articles:

1. All about Roatán
2. Top 10 Travel Tips
3. Community Tourism
4. Roatán Historical and Cultural Experiences
5. 11 Tips for Responsible Diving
6. 5 Signs of a Sustainable Dive Shop

Solimar is currently drafting two more articles about Roatán—one regarding the best dive sites and the other regarding shipwrecks to explore.

9 Bocas del Toro blog articles:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All about Bocas 2. Top 10 Travel Tips 3. Lodging for \$25 or Less 4. Lodging for \$25 or Less – Backpackers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Bastimentos National Park 6. Community Tourism 7. Artisans, Cacao & Handicrafts 8. Surf’s Up 9. Happy Hours |
|---|--|

Blog articles with the most “views” when on Facebook:

- Surf’s Up Bocas del Toro – 128 views
- Community Tourism Roatán – 65 views
- Lodging for \$25 or less Bocas – 48 views
- 11 Tips for Responsible Diving – 44 views

Social Media Campaigns

GBCA introduced a series of thematic cross-channel social media campaigns, which have promoted the GBCA brand and provided platforms for GBCA to distribute content to vast online audiences.

Social media campaigns have leveraged the reach of online social networks to promote the GBCA website and direct users to relevant landing pages on the website and blog. Social media platforms have been updated regularly by Solimar staff to date, with Solimar beginning to transition this responsibility over to the GSCs in early 2014.

Multi-channel social media campaigns have included content publication through the following channels:

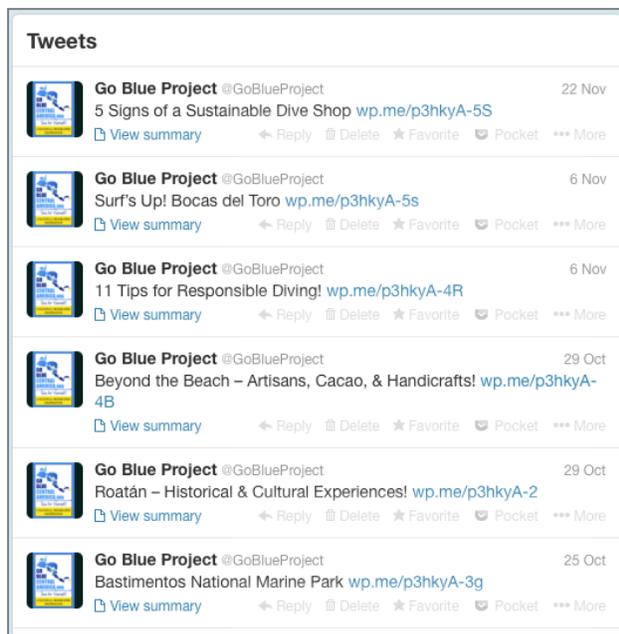


Figure 9: Twitter “tweets” announcing recently published articles to the Go Blue Blog.

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking platform that serves to connect people and keep them up to date with friends through photo, link, and video sharing. There are also an increasing number of Facebook “apps” through which users can deepen users’ experience with the platform. For example, apps can aggregate travelers’ reviews or photos of destinations or can display sample itineraries.



Figure 10: Screen shot of the GBCA Facebook page

Facebook has become such a ubiquitous social media tool that simply maintaining a business profile page is a signal to consumers of a business’s legitimacy. The Facebook business page serves as a powerful medium to interact with the GBCA community, provide customer support, promote content that links back to the GBCA homepage, and to allow loyal customers to further engage with the brand.

GBCA currently maintains a Facebook “fan” page, but does not actively distribute new content through the platform. Rather, the content that is shared is “reposted” from GBCA members’ Facebook pages, or other news pieces or online articles about the two destinations in general.

Also, due to local enthusiasm in Roatán, an internal Facebook page was created for Roatán (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/297617273668381/members/>) that only members can view and post in.

After featuring a particular participating business on the fan page, a Solimar staff person would email that business to let them know they had been featured, to ask them to “like” the GBCA Facebook page, and to ask them to re-share the post, if possible. Numerous members responded positively to these personal emails.

Since June 1, 2013, Solimar staffers have **made 72 posts on the GBCA Facebook page** with engaging content featuring GBCA participating businesses, featured attractions and special events at the GBCA destinations, and relevant travel planning information...all designed to engage the public and drive them to the GBCA website. From June through August the focus was on featuring GBCA member businesses through

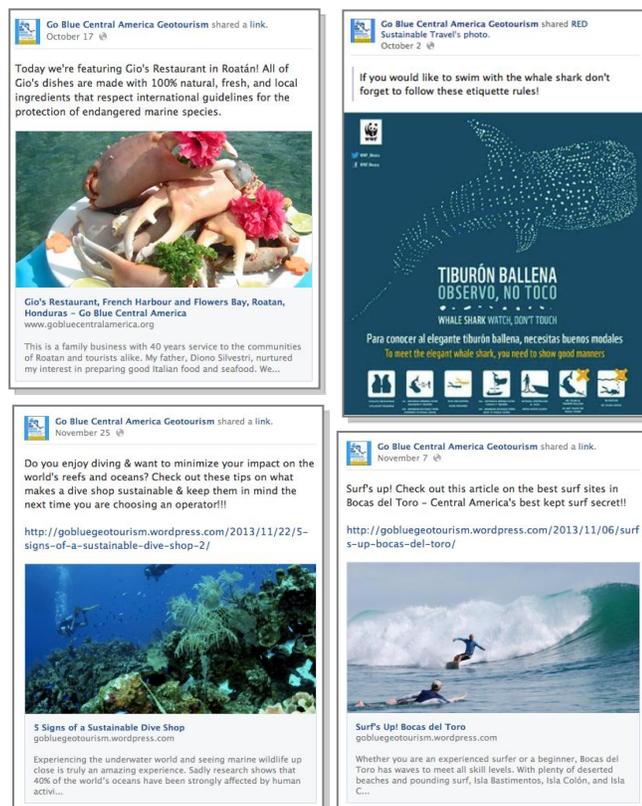


Figure 11: Examples of some of GBCA’s 72 Facebook posts.

Facebook; in September the focus switched to universally appealing content about the two destinations in general.

Summary statistics for the GBCA Facebook page:

- 72 posts
- 116 fan page “Likes”
- 102 post clicks
- 75 “Likes” in response to posted content
- 5 comments in response to posted content
- 10 shares in response to posted content

Most encouraging, as a result of GBCA outreach on the Facebook page, the [Caribbean Panama Network](#) contacted us to enquire about shared marketing and promotional efforts of Panama’s Caribbean coast. Caribbean Panama Network has shared some of our posts on their Facebook page and we have done the same on the GBCA Facebook page. Enthusiasm from other marketing platforms to help share the GBCA content and message is exactly the kind of success Solimar expected from the GBCA online marketing activities.

Twitter

A social networking platform and ‘micro-blogging’ service that allows users to communicate with their followers’ photos, videos, links and text limited to 140 characters, Twitter expands GBCA’s reach to a wider audience. Like Facebook, it can be used to promote content, connect customers and businesses, and build the GBCA brand. Twitter also provides a means to quickly research relevant and breaking information related to the GBCA Project and destinations. Since June 1, 2013, Solimar staffers have made 13 posts on the GBCA Twitter feed.

Pinterest

Pinterest allows users to ‘pin’ photos of interest and organize them into different ‘boards’. Photos can directly link to external content, and users can connect with others by following their boards. It is a relatively new form of social media, and tends to be more highly used by women than by men.

Solimar initially felt that Pinterest would be a promising marketing platform for GBCA due to its visual nature, but due to the aforementioned challenge of sourcing content from GBCA businesses, Solimar decided that continuously updating a Pinterest board would be too time-consuming for GSCs and unrealistic to maintain.

Downloadable Resources: Travel Guides

Solimar created a series of downloadable travel guides that feature geographic or thematic content from both of the GBCA destinations. The travel guides were distributed to the travel trade via the email outreach campaign, and have also been made available to travelers through direct emailing and the social media websites. The travel guides not only share information, but also codes of conducts to help visitors reduce their impact to local cultures as well as fragile coastal and marine ecosystems.

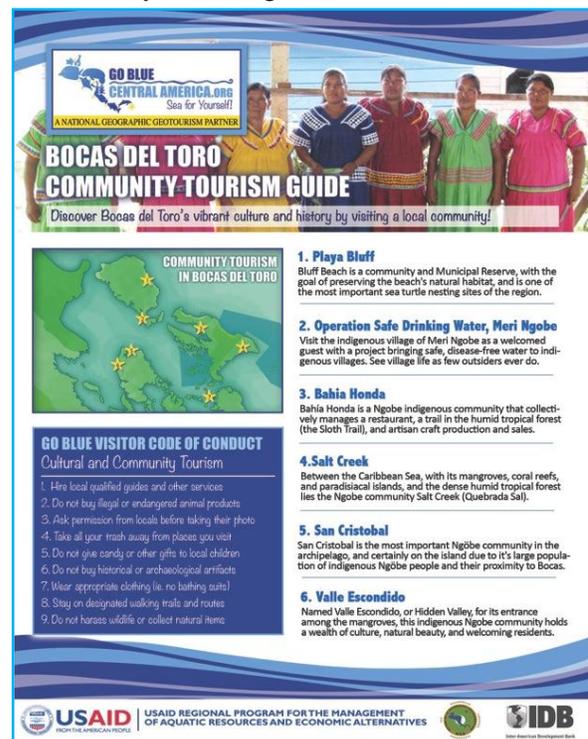


Figure 12: Downloadable travel guide example

Internal Communications with Participating GBCA Members

One of the incentives to being a registered user or business within the GBCA platform is the access to knowledge and resources. To this end, Solimar focused on three primary means of communicating with and building capacity of GBCA registered users – particularly in the understanding and use of online marketing techniques - that included:

1. An internal eNewsletter
2. Online training webinars
3. A Go Blue YouTube Channel

eNewsletters

An internal eNewsletter, a function of the Geoconsensus Content Management System (CMS), was used to communicate with the 500+ registered Go Blue users in the initial part of 2013. Nine different articles were distributed in both English and Spanish via the eNewsletters, and included updates on website analytics, webinar announcements, upcoming special events, as well as tourism and conservation-related news (Figure 13).

Online Training Webinars

Beginning in August 2013, Solimar's home office marketing team began offering a series of online webinars to train all GBCA users in the latest online marketing techniques and tools. Webinars are announced in the internal newsletters and Facebook page, and reminders were sent to all 500+ registered GBCA users via HTML email reminders (Figure 14). Webinars use a platform - GoToMeeting - to that allows members to ask questions. Topics thus far have included the following:

1. Introduction to Online Marketing
2. Optimizing your Website
3. Developing Marketing Content

On December 11, the fourth webinar in the series, Social Media and Tourism, will be presented.

A complete record of all webinar registrants is included in the Annex of this report.

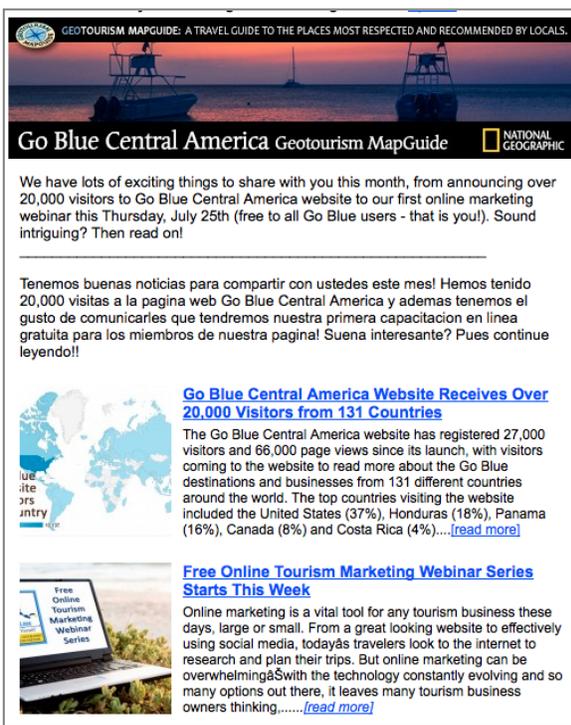


Figure 13: An example of the Go Blue eNewsletter

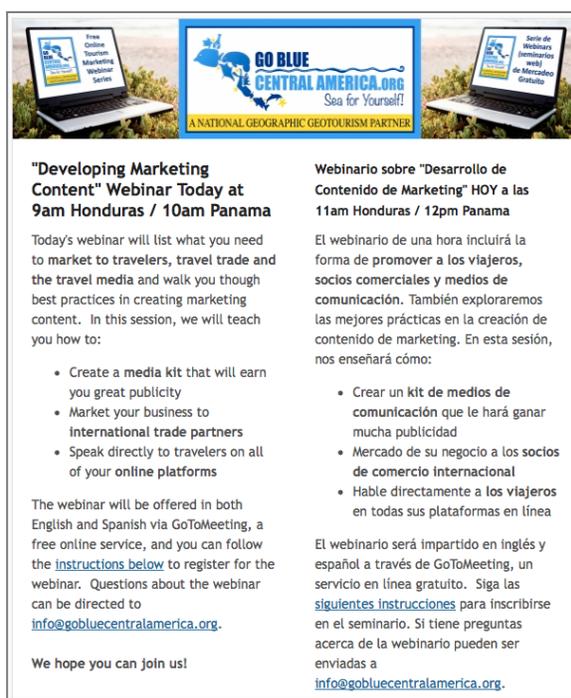


Figure 14: An example of an email announcement inviting registered GBCA users to a marketing webinar.

Go Blue YouTube Channel

Due to the fact that many registered GBCA users are business owners who have difficulty finding time during the day to participate in one of the online training webinars, Solimar created the Go Blue Central America YouTube Channel and have uploaded recorded versions of both the English and Spanish-webinars to the page so any registered Go Blue user can access the training content at any point (Figure 15).

Marketing Training for Geotourism Stewardship Councils

Solimar took a multi-pronged approach to training the GSCs and marketing coordinators in marketing techniques, tools, and responsibilities:

1. A hands-on training for GSC members in each destination in May 2013
2. Distance support through online webinars and e-books (tutorials)
3. A GSC “operations manual” to guide various activities, including marketing

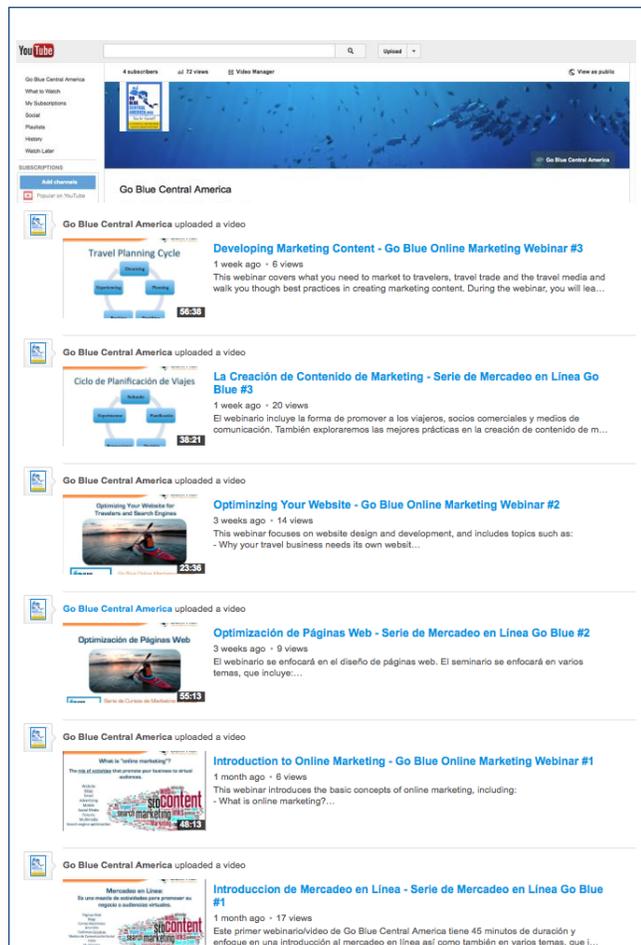


Figure 15: GBCA YouTube Channel screen shot

Hands-on Training

In May 2013, Solimar Training Specialist Lucia Prinz trained the two destinations’ GSC members and marketing coordinators. A training plan, for which the outline of the marketing module is presented below, was drafted to guide Ms. Prinz’s capacity building activities:

GSC Training Plan Outline for Marketing Module

1. Roles, Responsibilities, Policies, and Procedures for Marketing Activities
 - For social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, blog)
 - Who has back end access
 - Who will post content and how often
 - For the blog
 - Who has back end access
 - Who will post content and how often
 - Addressing negative/inappropriate comments
2. Organization of “Nominations Committee” / editors
 - Define editors for specific types of nominations
 - Business-specific (i.e. dive shops vs. restaurants)
 - Attractions-specific (i.e. cultural attractions vs. natural attractions)

3. Nominations Guidelines and Criteria
 - Nominations guidelines review
 - Basic requirements for business/attraction nominations
 - How to deal with a business that is not complying with nominations criteria

4. Editing, Translating, and Activating a Nomination
 - How to create a Go Blue user account
 - Materials needed: Existing Old Town Creative guide
 - How to give a user “editor” access/abilities
 - How to edit a nomination
 - NGS guidelines
 - Tips for editing
 - How to translate a document
 - Google translate
 - Human editing
 - Activating a nomination
 - How to activate a nomination in Geoconsensus
 - Ensuring that businesses have completed the best practices training before activation

5. Recruiting New Nominations
 - How to recruit new nominations
 - Outreach, special events, etc.

GSC Operations Manual

The training plan that Ms. Prinz formulated for the hands-on training sessions in May 2013 served as the basis for creating a standard GSC operations manual, which was left with each GSC as a guide to ongoing destination marketing activities and other day-to-date GSC tasks. In addition to the marketing module presented above, the operations manual covered the following sections:

1. Overall GSC management, meetings, and work planning
2. Sustainable tourism best practices criteria and training
3. Monitoring and evaluation data collection support

Monitoring and Evaluation – Results

In addition to the detailed results already documented earlier in this report on GBCA website analytics and increased traffic as well as the social media outreach, Solimar presents the following results as they related to the USAID Regional Program’s Key Result Areas.

Overarching Key Result Area

The Key Result Areas (KRAs) within the USAID Regional Program’s Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) that are related to the GBCA platform includes both KRA 1.4 and KRA 2.4.

KRA 1.4 - Indicator 1.4.1

Number of people from fisheries and environmental governmental and non-governmental institutions trained.

Within Solimar’s current task order, it is the stated goal that at least 100 participants are trained through online webinars in the use of this marketing plan, and more specifically in the use of online marketing techniques.

To date, **131 individuals** have been trained in online marketing techniques via the Go Blue Online Marketing webinar series (Table X).

KRA 2.4 - Indicator 2.4.2

Value (USD) of additional sales of products or services that can be directly attributed to the activity interventions and which support conservation and / or sustainable use efforts.

Within that KRA, the USAID Regional Program has defined the following indicators to mark success:

As stated both earlier in this document and within Solimar’s current task order, the overall goal of the online marketing activities is not simply increased visitation to the GBCA website, but rather a \$1 million increase in revenue of GBCA businesses to the USAID project indicator 2.4.2. To date, the total nine-month (3 quarters) contribution of the Go Blue Central America platform (and the online marketing activities presented within this ante up) since its launch on January 1 2013 is **\$899,851**. This figure indicates that the Go Blue Central America program is on track to meet its goal of a \$1 million contribution to indicator 2.4.2 that has been established by the USAID Regional Program.

Webinar	# Trained
Webinar 1: GoToMeeting (English)	22
Webinar 1: GoToMeeting (Spanish)	14
Webinar 2: GoToMeeting (English)	8
Webinar 2: GoToMeeting (Spanish)	4
Webinar 3: GoToMeeting (English)	6
Webinar 3: GoToMeeting (Spanish)	5
Webinar 1: YouTube Channel (English)	6
Webinar 1: YouTube Channel (Spanish)	17
Webinar 2: YouTube Channel (English)	14
Webinar 2: YouTube Channel (Spanish)	9
Webinar 3: YouTube Channel (English)	6
Webinar 3: YouTube Channel (Spanish)	20
TOTAL:	131

Table 3: Participants trained via webinars

Conclusion

Within this report, Solimar has attempted to demonstrate not only the wide variety of online and offline marketing activities it has implemented to promote awareness and visitation to the Go Blue Central America website, but also presented quantitative and compelling statistics and trends that clearly illustrate that the marketing activities have resulted in a significant increase in visitation to the GBCA website.

With that said, the success achieved over the past six months via the marketing activities will need to continue to be transitioned to the GSCs and local marketing coordinators to see a sustained positive impact in the GBCA website visitation.

Over the next three months, Solimar will continue (and increase) this transfer of marketing responsibility to the GSCs, as Solimar’s contract comes to a close February 28, 2014. The GSCs, particularly the marketing coordinators, will need to invest more time in supporting the GBCA marketing activities than they’ve show to date.

With that said, a valuable investment has been made in the development of the GBCA marketing strategy, in the online and offline marketing platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, and in the training of GSC members in utilizing these resources to ensure the long-term success of the GBCA website.

Annex

Tour Operators and Agencies who specialize in GBCA Destinations or Products

Name of Tour Operator

Abercrombie & Kent
Advance Worldwide
Adventure Life
Audley
Austin-Lehman Adventures
BootsN'All
Cazenove and Loyd
Chameleon Worldwide
Cox & Kings
Distinctive Americas
Dragoman
Exodus
Explore
Exsus
G Adventures
Geodyssey
Grand American Adventures
Imagine Latin America
Journey Latin America
Kuoni
Last Frontiers
Latin Destinations

Email

info@abercrombiekent.co.uk
advance@advanceworldwide.com
trip.center@adventure-life.com
latina@audleytravel.com
info@austinlehman.com

latin@cazloyd.com
sales@chameleonworldwide.co.uk
cox.kings@coxandkings.co.uk
daniel@distinctiveamericas.com
enquiries@dragoman.co.uk
sales@exodus.co.uk
res@explore.co.uk
escape@exsus.com

enquiries@geodyssey.co.uk

info@imaginelatinamerica.co.uk
tours@journeylatinamerica.co.uk
holidays@kuoni.co.uk
info@lastfrontiers.com
request@latindestinations.com

Website

www.abercrombiekent.co.uk
www.advanceworldwide.com
www.adventure-life.com
www.audleytravel.com
www.austinlehman.com
www.bootsnall.com
www.cazloyd.com
www.chameleonworldwide.com
www.coxandkings.co.uk
www.distinctiveamericas.com
www.dragoman.com
www.exodus.co.uk
www.explore.co.uk
www.exsus.com
www.gadventures.com
www.geodyssey.co.uk
www.grandamericanadventures.com
www.imaginelatinamerica.co.uk
www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk
www.kuoni.co.uk
www.lastfrontiers.com
www.latindestinations.com

Latin Odyssey	info@latinodyssey.com	www.latinodyssey.com
Mercator Travel	info@mercatortravel.co.uk	www.mercatortravel.co.uk
Original Travel	ask@originaltravel.co.uk	www.originaltravel.co.uk
Pesantez Tours	gerencia@pesantez-tours.com	www.pesantez-tours.com
Rainbow Tours	latinamerica@rainbowtours.co.uk	www.rainbowtours.co.uk
Redturs	info@redturs.org	http://www.redturs.org/nuevaen/index.php
Reef & Rainforest	mail@reefandrainforest.co.uk	www.reefandrainforest.co.uk
Scott Dunn	latin@scottdunn.com	www.scottdunn.com
Select Latin America	info@selectlatinamerica.co.uk	www.selectlatinamerica.co.uk
Steppes Travel	latinamerica@steppestravel.co.uk	www.steppestravel.co.uk
Sunvil	traveller@sunvil.co.uk	www.sunvil.co.uk
Trailfinders		www.trailfinders.com
Tribes Travel	info@tribes.co.uk	www.tribes.co.uk
Tucan Travel	uksales@tucantravel.com	www.tucantravel.com
Ultimate Travel Company	enquiry@theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk	www.theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk
Wexas	mship@wexas.com	www.wexas.com
World Odyssey	info@world-odyssey.com	www.world-odyssey.com
Yampu	info@yampu.com	www.yampu.com

Digital Information Packet Distributed to Travel Trade Representatives via Email

A special invitation to tour operators and travel agents that specialize in Central America

[View this email in your browser](#)



Download the Go Blue Guide to Community Tourism in Bocas del Toro



Download the Go Blue Guide to Diving and Snorkeling in Roatán



Download the Go Blue Guide to Outdoor Recreation in Bocas



Download the Go Blue Guide to Nightlife in Roatán



Download the Go Blue Guide to History and Culture in Roatán



Download the Go Blue Guide to Bastimentos Marine Park in Bocas

Discover...

Coastal destinations in Central America that not only feature some of the most pristine reefs, beaches and activities to keep you busy day and night...but that are also embracing sustainability and protecting fragile marine environments.

Go Blue Central America is a partnership between National Geographic, USAID, and IDB that is designed to connect the world to unique and authentic experiences in Roatán, Honduras and Bocas del Toro, Panama and infuse sustainability into the tourism industry. With these goals in mind, we invite you to explore these two magical destinations, the [Go Blue Central America website](#) and the many local tourism service providers it features.



Welcome to Roatán, the largest of the three Bay Islands nestled in the warm waters 33 miles off of Honduras' Caribbean coast. As part of the Mesoamerican Reef (the second largest reef in the world), Roatán boasts world-class diving and snorkeling via one of the most accessible reefs in all of the Caribbean. Roatán retains its authenticity as a real Caribbean island with its vibrant Caracol and Garifuna cultures and local traditions that run deep.

Although cruise ships do stop here...don't expect South Beach Miami. From Roatán's East End that feels stopped in time to its West End that caters to international tourists while maintaining a funky vibe...Roatán is home to an underwater paradise and lots to see above the water line as well.

[Click here to start exploring Roatán, Honduras](#)



The Bocas del Toro Archipelago is a group of islands in the Caribbean Sea in northwest Panama. The archipelago remains relatively undeveloped; Isla Colón is the only island with any roads or vehicles. This leaves visitors to enjoy the clean air, the sound of the waves, and the exotic noises of the jungle—home to monkeys, sloths, toucans, and a spectacular variety of medicinal plants and exotic fruits.

The sea is also full of life. Elusive manatees, endangered sea turtles, playful dolphins and vivid reefs fill the waters of the region. The opportunities for diving and snorkeling are endless, and the waves crashing over these reefs draw surfers from across the globe. The Bastimentos National Park encompasses one part of Bastimentos island and the Zapatilla Cayes. This park includes rich mangroves and over 57 different coral species.

[Click here to start exploring Bocas del Toro, Panama](#)

