

# *The death of Visitors Guides and what to do **instead.***



The set-up:  
what's the deal with visitor's guides?

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- In deciding where to go visitor guides rank #10 for trip inspiration
  - 6% decide where to go based on a visitor guide
  - Advertising, trade shows: 20%
  - Word of mouth, articles, TV: 74%

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## Key fact

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- Ask yourself this: is your website good enough to close the sale?

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Is your website good enough to close the sale?

## when (and if) they find your guide online, and look at it, you are a finalist

- The point being – if someone spends the time to find, order and/or download your visitor guide, you are already a finalist. They are already serious about visiting
- How they find your guide
  - Official destination website: 32.6%
  - Search engine results: 28.7%
  - Search engine ads: 8%
  - State/provincial/regional website: 6.7%
  - Free travel guide website: 6%
  - Online banner ad: 2.7%
  - Other website: 1.7%
  - 86.4% are finding your visitor guide via the internet
  - Habit – always order guides: 6.1%
- Advertising: 4.8%
- Walk ins, trade shows: 2.7%
- Shows the importance of the internet for finding your visitor guide



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## Key fact

If they request a copy you're in like flint.  
They will use it to plan their visit.

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## What they need and expect

1. Information about attractions & amenities
2. Maps and directions
3. Travel tips & ideas
4. Dining, events & accommodations
5. Recreation
6. Entertainment
7. Tours
8. Shopping

## What happens next?

70% actually travel to the destination  
70% request it as "vacationers" - staying in local lodging  
20% have not made a final decision on you

71% increase their stays as a result of the guide  
80% use it as a planning resource  
75% while in your market area

## Key fact: if they request a copy, you're in

- They will use it to plan their visit
- 79% already decided to visit: they use the guide for travel planning
- Not being used to make the sale
- Here is WHY they want your guide
  - To plan their trip
  - To bring with them as a true "guide"
  - For trip inspiration

## What they need and expect

- Information and attractions and amenities
- Maps and directions
- Travel tips and ideas
- Dining, events and accommodations
- Recreation
- Entertainment
- Tours
- Details! Details! Details!
  - Not general information – they want details

## Once they have your guide in hand

- 70% actually travel to the destination
- 70% request it as "vacationers" – staying in local lodging
- 20% have not made a final decision on you
- 71% increase their stays as a result of the guide
- 80% use it as a planning resource
- 75% use the guide while in your market area

## The bottom line

Guides are still very important: Online AND in print

**BUT**

They are evolving.

The traditional "Visitor's Guide" is dying.

## The future of Visitor Guides

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No more Visitor Guides  
(or Visitor's Guide)

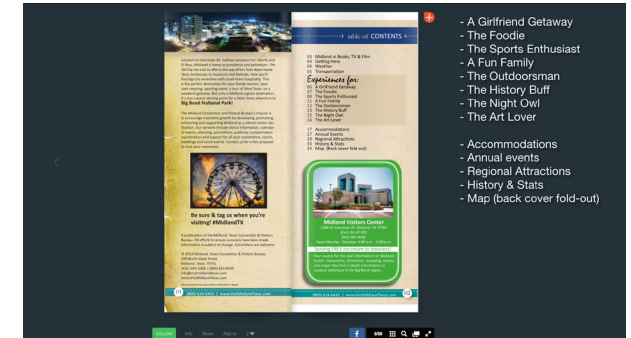
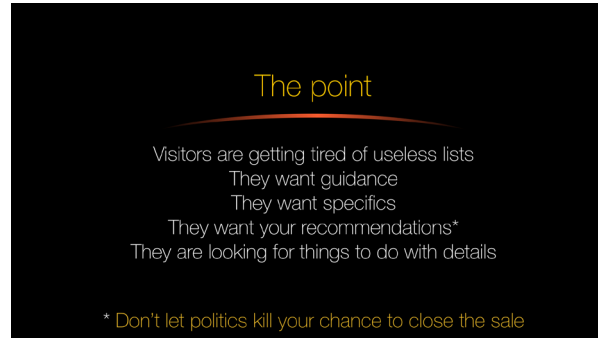
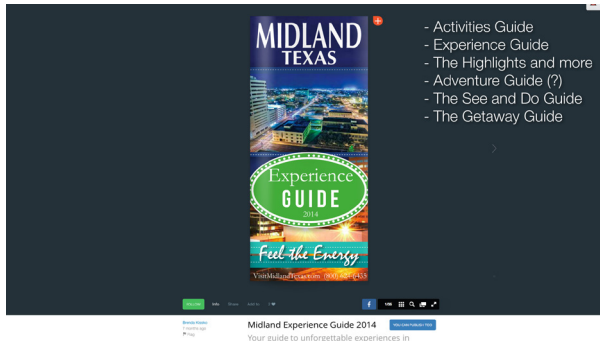
**Bottom line: guides are still very important, online and in print BUT they are evolving. The traditional visitor guide is dying**

- Thank you
  - Western Association of CVB's research: The economic impact of visitor guides
  - US Travel Association
  - Travel and Tourism Research Association

### 1. No more Visitor Guides (or Visitor's Guides)

- Create an Activities Guide
- No lists, places – people want things to do
- You cannot pummel people with advertising
- Content rules the day
- You must sell activities, not places
- They do not want lists, they want recommendations – think like a travel writer
- They want details and specifics – no more generalities
- Cut to the chase
- It must be awesome, easy to use and HELPFUL

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## Midland Texas

- Called an Experience Guide
- Could call your guide
  - Activities Guide
  - Experience Guide
  - The Highlights and More
  - Adventure Guide (? Adventure is becoming an overused word)
  - The See and Do Guide
  - The Getaway Guide

## The point: visitors are getting tired of useless lists

- They want guidance
- They want specifics
- They want your recommendations\*
- They are looking for things to do with details
- Don't let politics kill your chance to close the sale

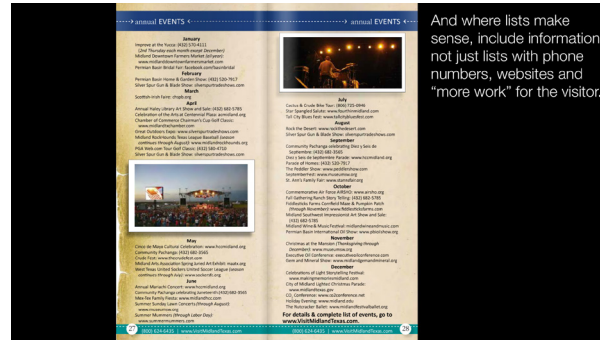
## Midland table of contents

- Organized by type of activity
- A Girlfriend Getaway
- The Foodie
- The Sports Enthusiast
- A Fun Family
- The Outdoorsman
- The History Buff
- The Night Owl
- The Art Lover
- Also includes:
- Accommodations
- Annual events
- Regional attractions
- History and stats
- Map (back cover fold out)

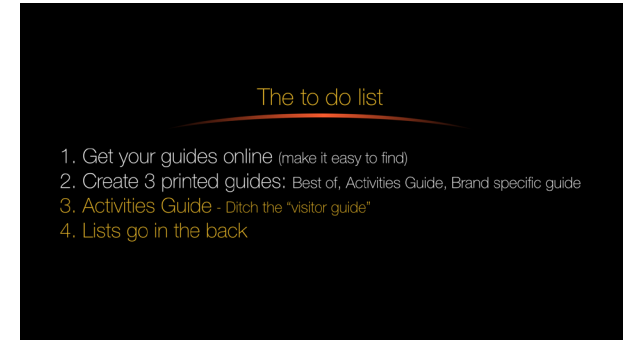
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Sample itineraries with specifics!  
Awesome. Easy. Helpful.  
Think like a travel writer!



And where lists make sense, include information not just lists with phone numbers, websites and "more work" for the visitor.



## The to do list

1. Get your guides online (make it easy to find)
2. Create 3 printed guides: Best of, Activities Guide, Brand specific guide
3. Activities Guide - Ditch the "visitor guide"
4. Lists go in the back

## Sample itineraries with specifics

- Awesome, easy, helpful (remember these three words!)
- Think like a travel writer
- Recommendation
  - Only half-day and full-day itineraries
  - For more: QR code or link

## What to do: avoid creating a list-based guide

- No more lists!
- Except in the back
- And where lists make sense, include information
  - not just lists, with phone numbers, websites and "more work" for the visitor
- Rule: always promote your anchor tenants first!
- History should be in the back

## The to do list

- Get your guides online and make them easy to print
- Create three printed guides: Best Of, Activities Guide, Brand specific guide
- Activities Guide – ditch the visitor guide
- Lists go in the back

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You must have them both online and in mobile friendly format, **and** in print.

## You must have them both online and in mobile friendly format, and in print

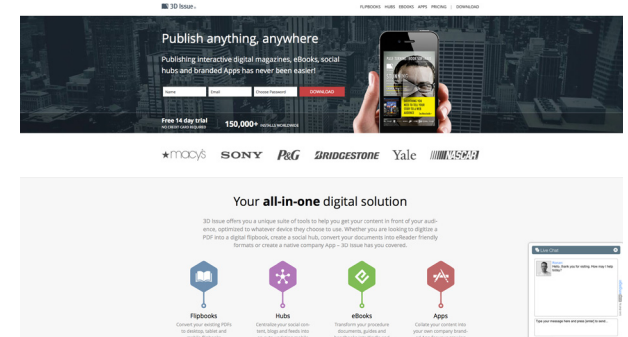
- Bentley University's Center for Marketing Technology
  - Prior to traveling, only 32% of travel decisions are made using brochures (#1: internet, #2: friends)
  - While traveling, 81% of decisions are made using brochures (#1

You only need three printed pieces:

1. Your "Activities Guide"
2. "The Very Best of [Your Town]"
3. Brand specific: "Bike Town Alberta's Biking & Trail Guide"

## You only need three printed pieces

- Your Activities Guide
- The Very Best Of...
- Brand specific

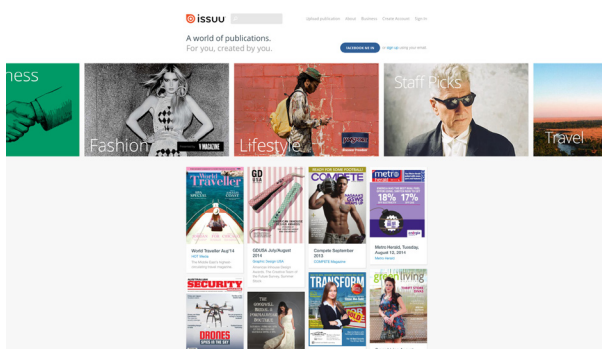


## Digital publishing of your guide

### 3DIssue.com

- Software program that allows you to put your guides online
- Allows you to turn your PDF guide into a digital publication with links, video, etc.
- This is the do-it-yourself option

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## Issuu – issuu.com

- Monthly plans
- You upload the guide, which automatically converts it to a digital magazine format



## NxtBook Media – nxtbookmedia.com

- Highly interactive
- More expensive option
- You send them the PDF – their production team does the rest
- During the build process, they make all URL's live, and links from the content page, share features, etc.
- Their designers can add media, digital extras and mobile options
- Turn-around time: 3 to 5 days



## Tallahassee – what not to do

- "Request a Visitor Guide" – no
- "Get your guide here" – yes
- This gives you an immediate solution
- All the links are ads – not very helpful
- Started off with lists – no!
- Links to external websites – no!
- Have the content on YOUR website
- It takes until page 22 to answer the question of "why I should come to Tallahassee"
- You need to close the sale FIRST



## Very important:

If you want to close the sale, you MUST:

- Make it as easy as possible to visit you
- Must make it convenient to get and gather information
- If your focus is on advertising & revenues, then your guide will be a failure - this is about attracting customers

3

Promote experiences before places

4

Details, details, details

## If you want to close the sale, you MUST:

- Make it as easy as possible to visit you
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## 3. Promote experiences before places

- What NOT to do: don't market cities or counties on the top 3" of your guide
- Don't market cities or counties IN your guide
- Leave "place marketing" for the back in your Lists section
- Think like a travel writer
- Always show people and use just one photograph on your cover
- Organize by type of activity – for example:
  - For the girls
  - The great outdoors
  - Multi-generational
  - Culture and the arts (music, visual, culinary, etc.)
  - The ultimate kids experience
  - The learning retreat (or vacation, weekend, etc.)
  - Shopping and dining
  - On the edge and perhaps extreme
  - On the road and trails
  - On the water
  - Hook and bullet (hunting and fishing)
  - Romantic escapes

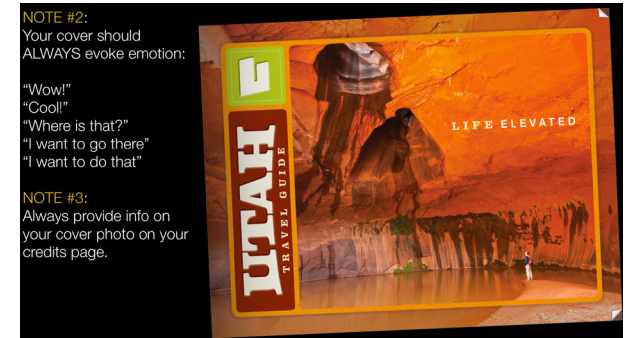
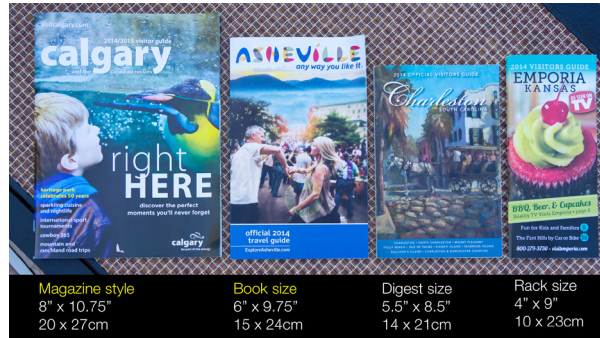
## 4. Details, details, details

- People want specifics – itineraries!
- Details are critical
- Maps, addresses and lots of information
- You can direct people to your website for more details so the guide isn't too long – use QR codes

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Always promote the “best of”  
first and up-front



## 5. Always promote the “best of” first

- “Top 5 local picks” or top 3
  - Don’t go past 5 – more and it isn’t the “best”
- The best of’s
  - Best photograph (the social media icon)
  - Local picks or hidden gems, nightlife
  - Must see and do activities – top three (no more than five)
  - Best picks: breakfast, lunch, dinner, shops (if there is room – can also be in the itinerary)
- Remember: always show people enjoying an activity
- This is an activities guide, not a places-guide
- Don’t miss attractions
  - Remember: what you include is a “promise” of an exceptional experience
- “You have to see these. And while you’re here, this is what else we have to offer
- A single let down will ruin the entire effort – one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch
- Don’t let politics get in the way of success

## Let’s design the perfect Activities Guide

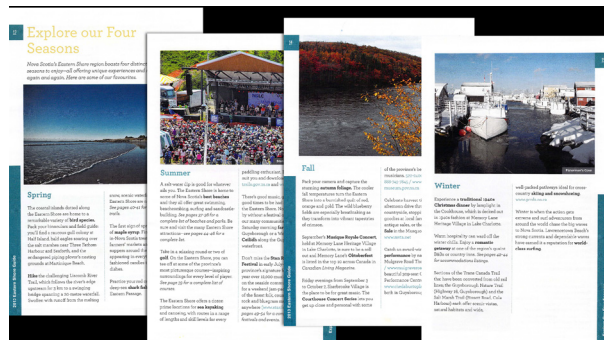
### 1. Size matters

- Four basic guide sizes
- Magazine style – 8”x10.75”, 20x27cm
- Book size – 6”x9.75”, 15x24cm
- Digest size – 5.5”x8.5”, 14x21cm
- Rack size – 4”x9”, 10x23cm
- Our favorites are magazine size and book size
  - You can fit more in these sizes
  - Digest size can be harder to open and also more expensive to print
  - Can’t get large enough photos in a rack size
- Why book size?
  - Fits in a standard purse
  - Easier to read into the spine and hold open
  - Can showcase larger photography
  - Easy to read in a car or restaurant
  - Won’t get lost in the shuffle of other rack or magazine-sized brochures
  - More “real estate” for ads, content – with fewer pages

## 2. The cover must say “wow!”

- Show people enjoying the activity
- Note #1: you should ALWAYS focus on your brand
  - your core point of differentiation and you should cater to your core audience
- Note #2: Your cover should ALWAYS evoke emotion:
  - Wow!
  - Cool!
  - Where is that?
  - I want to go there!
  - I want to do that!
- Note #3: Always provide info on your cover photo on your credits page

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## 3. Introduction: short and sweet. It MUST differentiate you

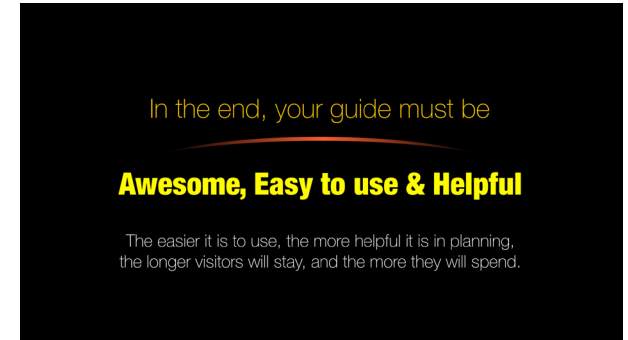
- No more letters from the mayor or other officials
- It needs to sell the visitor on coming there
- One photo, just like the cover

## 4. Table of contents: seasonal considerations, experiences

- Pick your season
  - Nov-Jan: winter solstice
  - Feb-Mar: romantic escapes
  - Apr-Jun: spring fling
  - Jul-Aug: summer fun
  - Sep-Oct: fall color
- This tells people you are open year round
- Seasonal information
  - Weather that time of year (in centigrade and Fahrenheit)
  - Getting here and travel considerations
  - What to wear or bring with you
  - It's the best time of year for (activities, special deals)
- Sample Table of Contents
  - Welcome – pulls us in
  - Contents – pulls us in
  - The seasons – we're open year round

- Building your bucket list (experiences – each w/ own title page) 4 pages each – closes the sale
  - Categories with signature photo (with people)
  - Top picks (with map) – no pay to play!
  - Additional options and ideas
  - Sample half-day/full-day itinerary (specifics) – extends the stay
- Calendar of events – return visit
- The communities
- Travel planning – easy and helpful
  - Lodging (with map)
  - Dining (with details and map)
  - Signature shops (details and map) – increases spending
  - Travel information
- Getting here – easy and helpful
  - Maps – tear out is best
  - Directions (from major cities)
  - Travel options (planes, trains, RV, motorcycle, bike, Uber, etc.)
- Additional travel-planning resources – easy and helpful
- Building your bucket list (experiences)
  - Full page: signature photo with "Did you know..."
  - ½ page why it's so great here for this activity
  - ½ page: Top pick – the signature activity (plus map)
  - ½ page: other top picks (plus map)
  - ½ page: sample itinerary
  - Full page: while you're here (activities that cater to this audience)

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## 5. Advertorial Format

- No more blasting with ads
- Promoting the best – not just a bunch of advertisements
- Keep it clean and simple
- Advertorial format makes it easy for someone to use the guide
- Marketing partners, not advertisers
- Visitors ignore the ads anyway
- If there is additional space, put in stunning photographs that help close the sale
- Makes the ads look like activities, not ads – the ads are more effective
- A word about advertising: more effective ratio is 1/3 advertising and 2/3 content
  - Ok if you use an advertorial approach: half and half
  - but still not a pay to play

## 6. Distribution: getting it “out there”

- Where?
  - Local lodging establishments
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - City facilities
  - Retailers, attractions, activity-locations
  - Visitor information center
  - Kiosks in various locations
  - The key: convenient and easy
- Remember: once we’re there, we use visitor guides to make decisions

## Last minute notes

- State and provincial guides: why aren’t they following this format?
- They can’t
- Their guide would be too big – has to be more generic
- Local or regional destinations MUST use this format
- Their job is to bring them to your website – your website and guide needs to close the sale
- In the end, your activities guide must be awesome, easy to use and helpful
- The easier it is to use, the more helpful it is in planning, the longer visitors will stay, and the more they will spend.