

CampgroundViews improves RVer expectations

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Four years ago, CampgroundViews planted a flag in the outdoor hospitality industry. It was uncharted territory, and the service the firm provided had never been used by RV parks before.

The company would take videos of campgrounds to give people a virtual tour of a facility so campers could get a flavor for what the RV park was like before the family arrived, or even made reservations.

After a few years, the company expanded its service to provide specific images of every site in the campground. That allowed consumers to see what a specific campsite looked like before they made a reservation.

Today, CampgroundViews provides 360-degree videos that people can pause and use a mouse to look up, down or behind them. It's similar to how people use Google's Street View service.

“Our ultimate goal is to make camping amazing by putting the right campers in the right campsites so they can enjoy a memorable experience,” said founder Mark Koep. “We’re focused on finding the right campers for each campground.”

Koep said video is the single most effective marketing tool in a campground’s arsenal because it often answers all the questions people may have regarding campground.

- Does the RV park have a kid-friendly pool? Yes, it’s in the video.
- Is the dog park big enough for my dog? Yes, it shows in the video.
- Can campsite 112 accommodate my 42-foot RV with slideouts extended? Yes, the video shows there are no trees to interfere with the slideout.

“We make parks look good by helping consumers envision the type of experience they will enjoy when they arrive,” said Koep. “Because consumers go into the experience with the right expectations, they are rarely disappointed that the campground did not live up to what they were hoping to experience.”

Koep said some of his customers have seen a 200 percent increase in online reservations by simply adding video to the campground’s website.

“Campgrounds have reported that videos helped to change the entire mix of clients it attracts,” he explained. “When they make a reservation, they know exactly what they should expect when they arrive.”

In the past, customers would look at carefully-constructed photographs that may not have accurately reflected the reality of a campground or a campsite, Koep said. When customers discovered the discrepancy, it often led to bad feelings, complaints and negative reviews.

“With videos on the website that show exactly what the campground looks like — and a specific site — once RVers show up and discover that they video was an accurate representation, customers are very happy,” he explained.

Securing higher rates

One of the biggest benefits to offering these types of videos on a website is that it helps justify the cost of a campsite. It’s easy to see why a particular site costs more because it has more trees, is larger, allows for pull-through use, and enough separation for the nearest neighbor.

“The 360-degree video is a very powerful tool. People can start the video, sit back and enjoy the tour,” he added. “We’ve also started adding voice narration describing details of the campground and information about what people can do in the local area.”

CampgroundViews has made the biggest difference for mom-and-pop campgrounds by reducing the number of information calls to the office, especially when combined with online reservations. Most simple questions can be answered by viewing a five-minute video.

The next iteration of the system will allow campgrounds to integrate video with their reservations system. That way, people can see which campsites are available on a specific day, zoom in to see what that site looks like, and then book the reservation.

Some campgrounds are reporting success with what Koep called a site lock fee, in which people pay more to guarantee that they will have a specific campsite. In the past, people simply reserved a site, and learned of their assigned site upon registration.

Guaranteeing specific sites is becoming a good income generator for which campers are happy to pay a premium to get a specific campsite, he added.

CampgroundViews' videos are hosted on YouTube, which makes them easy to find in Google searches. Specific moments of the video can be embedded into the park's website so when people explore the campground, they can watch a five second clip of the pool, campstore, playground, etc.

"Our business is up 80 percent over last year, and we're on track to double that in 2019," said Koep.

"For our customers, they are seeing their organic, natural search rankings improve simply because they added video to their website. Everyone really seems to like video," he added.

Videos improve search results

CampgroundViews clients also have access to a private Facebook group in which 900 campground owners engage in discussions with each other and offer advice on how to improve day-to-day operations.

"We're not intending to compete with associations, but we are able to continue conversations following trade shows," Koep explained. "We have developed a strong community of campground owners and operators engaging with each other."

CampgroundViews also shares survey data with their clients. Koep frequently sends out email blasts to campers to get up to 10,000 responses concerning desired features and amenities. Campground owners have access to that data so they can make improvements at their parks.

The company also makes videos available for private and public parks, especially California state parks, Forest Service campgrounds and Army Corps of Engineers facilities. The company plans to add more videographer teams in the months ahead.

“What we do is really hard. We can’t just sit behind a computer and attempt to market someone’s campground. We have to get out and engage campground owners and their customers,” he explained.

“They say a picture is worth a thousand words. If so, then a video is an encyclopedia of information about a campground or RV park,” said Koep. “People find it valuable to be able to sit at their computer or look at their smart phone and actually drive through a campground to see what it’s like.”

To view a sample 360-degree video tour of Chief Timothy Park Campground, visit www.youtube.com.

For more information, visit www.campgroundviews.com or email Mark Koep at mark@campgroundviews.com.

