

The Future of Content

From Awareness to Demand Creation:
How Travel Brands Win in the New Age of AI Discovery



Presented by Curacity in partnership with
Travel + Leisure, Afar, Fathom, and A Hotel Life

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The State of Travel Content in 2025



Inspiring Measurable Demand

The future of content in travel marketing will no longer be about passive awareness, but about inspiring measurable demand at scale. As social and search platforms introduce AI features that reduce visibility and traffic, forward-looking travel and hotel brands will shift to owned channels and storytelling to spark interest early and drive direct bookings.

Travel marketing is at a turning point again. According to recent reporting from [Intelligencer](#), social media platforms are "pivoting away from the news," and Google is making "seemingly corrosive changes to its search algorithm while rolling out the innovation that will one day replace traditional search results: AI summaries."

For the travel media outlets that publish inspirational content and the hotels that sell the experience, the rapid change "amounts to a kind of traffic apocalypse in which it seems all spigots for traffic are being turned off," writes Charlotte Klein for [Intelligencer](#).

How is this impacting travel and hotel brands?

A Search Engine Land study found that, when AI Overviews are present, the brand that ranks in Google's top spot gets 35% fewer clicks. The lower a brand ranks, the greater the impact on its traffic loss.

These findings present a challenge in an industry where, according to Expedia Group's 2023 Path to Purchase study, three in five travelers have no destination or brands in mind when they begin researching a trip. On average, they spend over five hours engaging with travel content in the 45 days leading up to a booking, browsing up to 277 pages of content. While the industry has long regarded this content as awareness-building fluff with no connection to bookings, joint research from Skift and Curacity found that **75% of travelers are more likely to book a hotel after reading trusted content about it.**

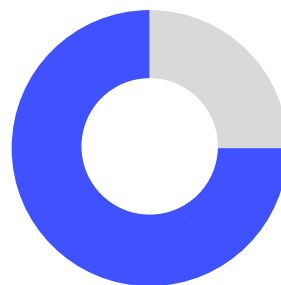
Before your potential guests book a hotel or travel experience, they need inspiration to travel in the first place. That spark comes from content — whether it's editorials

published by respected journalists or the blog posts, newsletters, and videos you create for your brand — but social media platforms and search engines are making it more complex than ever to get your content the visibility it needs to generate demand.

How should travel and hotel marketers respond?

The answer is deceptively simple. Reduce your reliance on third-party channels, prioritize platforms that allow you to own relationships with your potential guests (such as email), and reach them early — before they start searching — with content that inspires them to travel.

This guide is here to show you how. With insights from the award-winning editors at *Afar*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Fathom*, and *A Hotel Life*, we'll unpack how to create quality content like a publisher — and leverage AI to distribute it — so that you can **turn content marketing into a scalable, revenue-driving demand engine**, not just an awareness tool.



75%

of travelers are more likely to book a hotel after reading trusted content about it.

Skift



Content Action Plan



1

Create Content With Intention

Human emotion fuels travel decisions. Yet, too much travel content feels interchangeable. Stock images, listicles, and AI-generated summaries may fill space, but they rarely create demand.

According to [Adobe's 2024 AI and the Creative Frontier study](#), 90% of creators believe that generative AI tools can help them save time and money by automating menial tasks and supporting their creative brainstorming process. At the same time, 70% of U.S. consumers in [Adobe's 2024 Future of Trust study](#) say it's difficult to verify whether the content they are consuming online is trustworthy. And 39% say they have stopped using social media altogether due to the amount of misinformation.

"We have to be the foil to the constant stream of slop that has taken over our feeds and inboxes," says Julia Cosgrove, vice president and editor-in-chief of *Afar*.

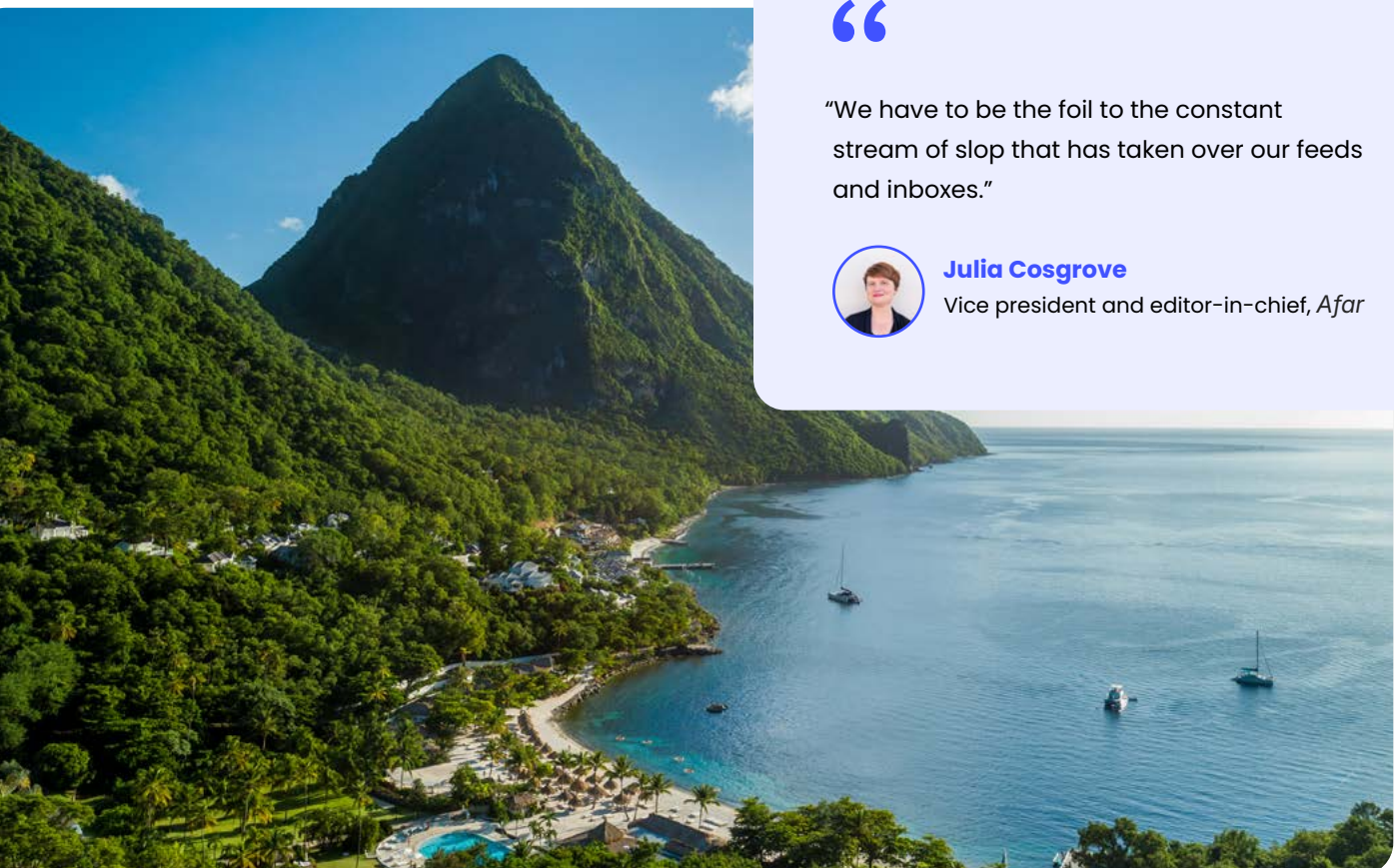
Generative AI may offer the promise of cheap, fast content, but it's not flooding your channels with more content that breaks through and creates demand — it's more strategic content, created with intention. In travel marketing, human storytelling gives your brand an edge.

Find the Story Only Your Brand Can Tell

Your potential guests demand specificity. They want to know what makes a property worth exploring, and that requires more than the well-structured summaries generated by AI. To stand out, your content must answer a deeper question: Why does your brand exist, and why should your potential guests care?

For Cosgrove, the key to good writing is reading. "I read everything I can get my hands on," she says, "about travel, food, luxury, adventure, urban development, climate, and the global economy, because it's all interrelated. A good editor relies on a mix of intuition and analysis."

Too often, travel and hotel marketers lead with their offerings, like amenities, location, and service. But this information is only valuable for a small segment of your potential guests who are already in the market. Experience-driven travelers need something with more emotional resonance to separate you from the property next door.



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"We have to be the foil to the constant stream of slop that has taken over our feeds and inboxes."



Julia Cosgrove

Vice president and editor-in-chief, *Afar*

"People are craving substance," says Tansy Kaschak, editor-in-chief of A Hotel Life. "Who's behind this place? What does it stand for? There's more appetite for narrative. We want to see ourselves there, we want to recognize our worldview and feel like we belong."

According to Paul Brady, news director at *Travel + Leisure*, there's a simple formula. "Who are you writing (or creating) for, and why are you better at it than anybody else?"

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"There's more appetite for narrative. We want to see ourselves there, we want to recognize our worldview and feel like we belong."



Tansy Kaschak

Editor-in-Chief, A Hotel Life

Checklist



Lead with "why," not just "what."

Move beyond amenities and features. Craft content that communicates your purpose and personality — the "why" behind your brand — to create an emotional connection and differentiate yourself from competitors.



Create for the dreaming phase.

Most travelers aren't ready to book when they first engage with content. Focus on storytelling and inspiration — not transactional details — to reach more guests earlier in their journey, before they start comparing brands.



Make your content feel human.

Authenticity matters when travelers are seeking more than AI-generated summaries. Prioritize content that reflects real people, real values, and real stories — the kind that makes your potential guests feel seen and understood.

Leverage First-Person Stories

Travel is personal, and the content that drives bookings reflects that. What persuades someone to choose your property isn't always what you list on a booking engine.

"Nothing will ever compare to writing about a hotel we have experienced ourselves," says Jeralyn Gerba, co-founder and editorial director at Fathom.

Another person's first-person experience can sell your brand better than any content could. Skift and Curacity's joint research found that two-thirds of luxury travelers say that reputation and reviews are most likely to influence their booking decision, which far outpaced any other influencing factor.

Reviews in travel magazines and websites are ideal, but marketers can also apply an editorial lens to their content marketing to build their brand's reputation. It's the difference between using generative AI to write a 1,000-word blog post about things to do in your destination or working with your staff to publish a quick, 300-word blog post about a singular, unique experience with a name and a face attached.

In the past, the former may have gained traction in traditional search listings, although Pew Research indicates that the average reader consumes only 25% of the content. The latter is a repeatable content format that has the potential to appear in a specific AI summary and spark inspiration with your audience. Plus, it's digestible for scalable distribution across your website, email, and social media channels.

In 2023, *Travel + Leisure's* Brady traveled on assignment to Kenya to report on the expansion of Angama, the luxury safari company. The piece stands out to him as one that combines reportage, first-person narrative, and logistical information. Unlike a structured AI summary, the story places the reader in Kenya with Brady, sheltering from thunderstorms and scanning the horizon for Craig, a famous yet elusive 51-year-old elephant.

"The best travel stories activate all your senses – and inspire you to get out there," says Brady. "Whatever the platform — a novel, a magazine article, a short form video — things like plot, character, conflict, and resolution still move us to travel."

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"Nothing will ever compare to writing about a hotel we have experienced ourselves."



Jeralyn Gerba

Co-founder and editorial director, Fathom



Checklist



Use real names and faces.

Feature specific people and firsthand perspectives in your content — from staff, guests, and visiting journalists. This fosters trust and relatability, which are essential to travelers.



Create a series you can repeat.

Develop a consistent format, such as “Staff Picks” or “24-Hour Guides,” that is easy to maintain and update. Consistency builds familiarity and keeps your audience engaged.



Prioritize quality over quantity.

A 200-word post with a unique point of view is more valuable than a 1,000-word article with generic, shallow information. You don’t need volume to move your potential guests.



Anticipate What Your Potential Guests Want

The best content doesn't just respond to interest — it creates it.

By the time your potential guests are actively planning trips, you're already in a crowded race. Forward-thinking content marketers must put on their journalist hats to generate stories that reach travelers early in the journey when they're still dreaming of the possibilities.

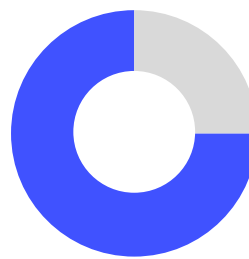
"Our job as travel journalists is to give people information and inspiration before they know they need it," says Cosgrove. "This year, *Afar* is putting more of a focus on inspirational storytelling. We're meeting audiences where they are, surprising them, and offering them something that feels differentiated with a distinct POV and voice."

There are several ways that travel and hotel brands can increase the visibility of their content. While AI summaries

can effectively summarize information, they're limited to generating text based on existing content. This shortfall is a limitation of AI, as joint research by Skift and Curacity found that 75% of travelers want to learn about new experiences, specifically.

"We spotlight under-the-radar gems," says Kaschack, recommendations which often "may not show up on the first page of a search engine."

Gerba's approach at Fathom is similar. "We offer early access [to new experiences] that AI can't offer yet," she says. "Hopefully it won't."



75%

of travelers want to learn about new experiences, specifically.

Skift.

Checklist



Get ahead of the noise.

Don't wait for keyword volume. Use your judgment to surface stories before they become trending (such as a soon-to-open restaurant or a local tradition that hasn't received any media coverage).



Introduce travelers to something new.

Create stories that highlight lesser-known experiences, such as hidden local spots or cultural insights, to inspire early-stage travelers who haven't yet chosen a destination.



Answer questions travelers haven't asked yet.

Start with curiosity. What's the quietest time to walk the High Line? Where do locals go for coffee at midnight? Position yourself as a source of discovery, not just logistics.

2

Distribute Content Strategically

Creating compelling content is only half of the battle. Next, travel and hotel brands must be strategic in reaching the right audience at the right time, which can make or break how your story is seen, remembered, and acted upon.

"Long before algorithms started playing gatekeeper, we knew the value of reaching our community without interference," says A Hotel Life's Kaschak. "That's only become more important."

With generative AI reshaping the search landscape and social media platforms offering reduced reach and engagement, many are turning to an often-overlooked yet high-performing distribution channel: email.

Skift and Curacity's joint research report, ["Reimagining the Role of Travel Media in Building Luxury and Lifestyle Brands,"](#) says, "Leveraging email as a channel is particularly impactful since it blends travelers' desires and hoteliers' needs into a single strategy. Combining personalized messaging with the high-quality and reliable content that travelers crave and rely on — and even more crucially, are willing to subscribe to — gives brands a unique opportunity."

Afar's Cosgrove agrees. "Our editorial team is placing even more emphasis on email," she says. "We're constantly thinking about what our readers want in their inbox — what's going to inspire them, inform them, and keep them coming back."

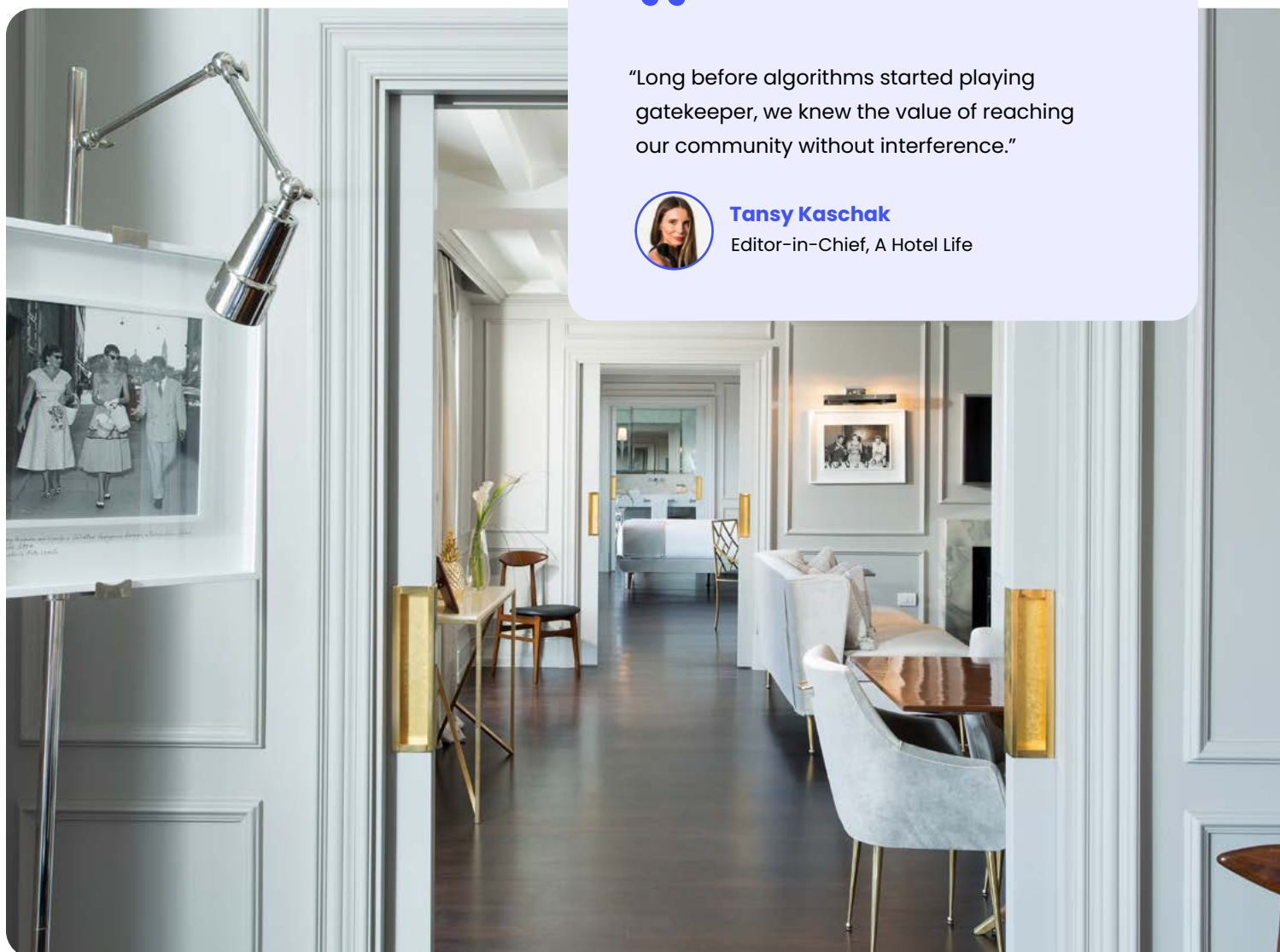
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"Long before algorithms started playing gatekeeper, we knew the value of reaching our community without interference."



Tansy Kaschak

Editor-in-Chief, A Hotel Life



Own Your Audience

Social media platforms and search engines have become volatile. One algorithm change can diminish your organic reach overnight. Paid channels, like search and social, are effective only for as long as you keep spending.

Email, by contrast, is an owned media channel. When a potential guest subscribes to your newsletter, they've permitted you to connect with them on your terms, not Meta's or Google's. Plus, with email open rates topping 42.35% in 2025 (HubSpot) — while Instagram reach rates range from just 5–10% per post (Sprout Social) — there's no better platform to ensure your message is seen and heard.

Once you've invested in creating content, your email list allows you to leverage it to fuel the guest journey. You can inspire early interest with destination guides, create demand with personality-driven stories from your property, and drive bookings with well-timed offers. After guests

stay, you can keep them in the loop with exciting content that inspires future stays. It's a flexible, brand-owned space that serves multiple roles simultaneously: raising awareness, driving demand, and fostering loyalty.

"Email invites an intimate relationship between reader and writer that is lacking elsewhere on the internet, and that was (and is) very appealing to us," says Pavia Rosati, CEO and founder of Fathom.

For marketers, email means more control, more consistency, and a clearer feedback loop. Not sure what content to create? Ask your subscribers. Conducting quick polls can get you instant clarity on what content types will move the needle for your brand.

Checklist



Invest in stable, brand-safe channels.

Unlike social and search, which are vulnerable to algorithm shifts and pay-to-play dynamics, email gives brands lasting, direct access to their audiences.



Leverage clear feedback loops.

Email gives you a direct line to your potential guests. Simple polls can help you gather valuable data that guides your content creation.



Use email to support every stage of the guest journey.

From early inspiration to booking, email is for more than promoting offers. Share destination content, tell stories, and gather feedback to guide guests from inspiration to booking.

EMAIL

>42%

SOCIAL

<10+

Email opens yield higher engagement rates than those on social media.

HubSpot

Match Messaging to Intent

Social media demands brevity. Search engines reward keyword precision. AI summaries prioritize structure over substance. But email creates space for meaningful, unfiltered storytelling.

That freedom matters. When a traveler signs up for your newsletter, they're not stumbling upon your brand by accident. By choosing to hear from you, they've expressed a heightened intent: they're now aware of your brand and closer to booking. How do you get them to the confirmation page? Create in-depth content that provides genuine value to the reader, keeping them engaged and encouraging them to return until they're ready to book.

That's why Fathom started a new newsletter, Way to Go, on Substack. "We wanted to get into the habit of writing more personally, less preciously, and more often," says Rosati. Newsletters allow Fathom to

experiment more with topics, formats, and voice. While Gerba makes Fathom's web content as evergreen as possible, "Substack posts that acknowledge current events seem to resonate with readers," allowing her to meet the needs of her most engaged audience.

Travel and hotel brands can adopt a similar approach. While your website emphasizes the selling points of your brand, and social media necessitates short, pithy captions, your newsletter is where you can go deeper, building relationships with your highest-intent audience.

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"We wanted to get into the habit of writing more personally, less preciously, and more often."



Pavia Rosati

CEO and co-founder, Fathom

Checklist



Match intent with depth.

When someone subscribes to your newsletter, they're signaling interest, not just awareness. Deliver richer stories, insider tips, and content that builds emotional connection, not just promotional offers.



Experiment with formats.

Email gives you the freedom to try new things. Test new topics or write in a more casual style. Unlike your web and social media content, newsletters can be more timely and reflective of your brand's personality.



Invest in growth.

Newsletter engagement leads to real results. Investing in content and subscriber growth can lead to a high-value, high-intent audience that's readily receptive to your content, news, and offers.

3

Measure Content Like a Sales Channel

For years, travel and hotel marketers have treated content as a brand investment — a nice-to-have but hard-to-quantify asset. That's changing.

With demand creation platforms like Curacity, brands can now connect top-of-funnel inspiration to actual bookings and revenue.

Email is at the center of this shift. Unlike social media or search, email is built on first-party data and direct audience relationships. That's what makes it so powerful — and measurable.

Traditionally, email success was measured by open and click-through rates, and even by those metrics, the travel industry outpaces others.

"Our newsletter is still our most effective and trusted channel," says A Hotel Life's Kaschak. "Our open rates are over 40%."

Cosgrove sees a similar impact at *Afar*. "Email gives us a direct, reliable connection to the world's best travelers," she says. "Over 55% of our subscribers open more than 16 *Afar* emails a month. That kind of engagement is rare, and it speaks to the trust we've built."

High Engagement Rate



OVER
55%

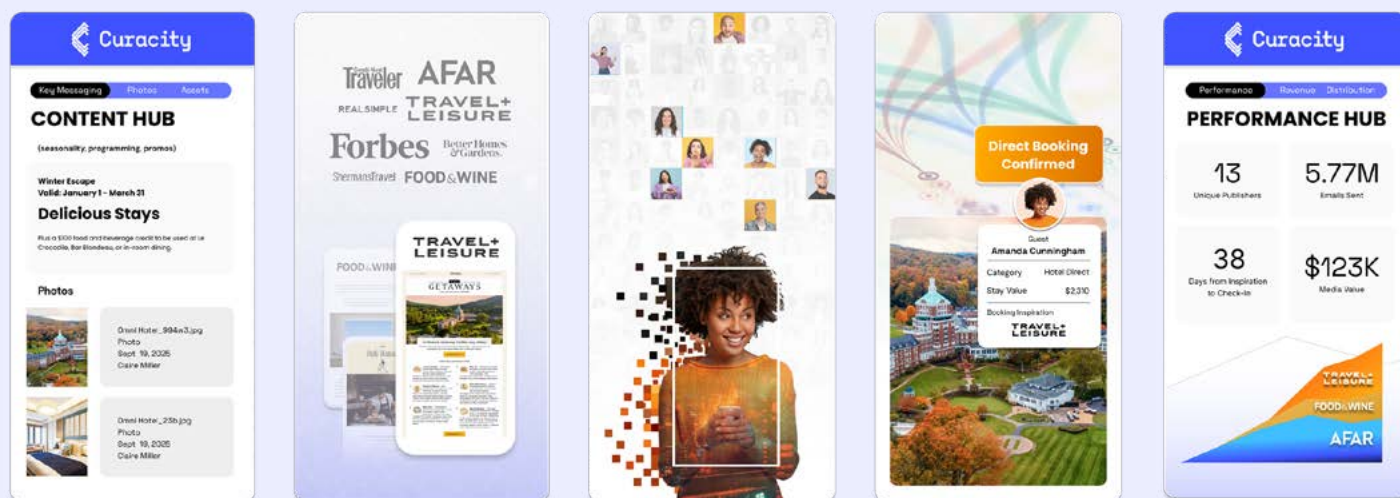
of *Afar*'s subscribers open more than 16 of their newsletters per month.

Curacity helps brands tap into that trust and measure the ROI. By partnering with the industry's leading media brands, such as *Travel + Leisure*, *Afar*, *Fathom*, and *A Hotel Life*, we enable you to turn trusted content into a scalable, revenue-driving channel that closes the loop between awareness and downstream bookings and revenue.

"[Email] is not only a powerful editorial channel," says Cosgrove, "but also a meaningful opportunity for our partners to reach this high-value audience."

How Curacity Works

Curacity helps you spark demand with premium content from *Afar*, *Travel + Leisure*, and many other leading publications. Our plug-and-play platform distributes content to opt-in travelers and closes the loop on the bookings and revenue inspired.



Curacity Checklist



Upload your campaigns.

Log in to Curacity and share your brand voice, preferred photos, and offers on Content Hub. Our media partners utilize this information to create high-quality content about your brand.



Let Curacity handle the work.

Save time and resources. We automate the time-consuming work of content creation and distribution. With no pitching required, sit back and enjoy the content placements.



Drive more bookings at scale.

Reach and inspire travelers early, before they make purchase decisions. We connect you with millions of high-intent travelers who have opted in to receive travel content.



Measure the results.

Eliminate risk and take the guesswork out of marketing. With revenue-based ROI in one convenient dashboard, Curacity customers see a 10-20X ROI.



Get valuable insights.

Inform your strategy with actionable data, such as lead time and market-level occupancy and length-of-stay data from Amadeus Demand360®.

AI Action Plan



Use AI to Improve Your Brand's Visibility

Marriott International's 2023 Annual Report revealed that group bookings accounted for 24% of the company's overall global room nights, resulting in a substantial \$13 billion in room revenue. More impressively, group bookings showed a 9% increase in average daily rate.

A direct channel with room for rate expansion is one of the many reasons group bookings are a crucial metric for hotel brands. How can boutiques and independents compete with global brands like Marriott International?

Jason Cincotta, CEO of the AI company Kismet, has a solution.

"By managing the administrative and analytical work, we enable boutique hotels to sell like the industry's biggest players," said Cincotta in a press release announcing a partnership with Stayntouch, a global leader in cloud hotel property management systems.

A recent Kismet study found that only 16% of the 200 hotel websites reviewed met basic AI readability standards. According to Cincotta, the stakes are high.

"A search like 'Hudson Valley hotel with a 100-person terrace and firepit breakout' might yield a single AI-generated recommendation, but only if the property's data — floorplans, rates, earned media, and even user-generated content — is structured and accessible to tools like ChatGPT or Gemini," says Cincotta. "Your brand voice can now appear in that very first answer — something impossible just a year ago."

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"Let your sales team excel at what AI can't — crafting creative content, building relationships, and closing deals."



Jason Cincotta
CEO, Kismet



Despite this opportunity, hotels struggle to keep pace. "Fewer than half of group booking inquiries receive any reply," says Cincotta. "The average RFP response lands nine business hours later — more than twice the industry target. Meanwhile, "Many hotels treat essential content as hidden assets, buried in PDFs or scattered across websites where AI can't effectively access it, keeping brands invisible in AI search results."

Using tools like Kismet, brands can proactively convert hidden content into structured, AI-friendly data that instantly delivers personalized, actionable answers to planners, turning more searches directly into qualified RFPs for group bookings and, ultimately, generating more group booking revenue. "This low-effort content improvement provides a high-value, always-on sales advantage."

Still, Cincotta believes that using AI to generate marketing content and power chatbots "misses the mark." The vast majority of the sales process, he says, "should remain with hotel associates, especially in the upper-upscale and luxury space. Let your sales team excel at what AI can't — crafting creative content, building relationships, and closing deals."

Use AI to Compress the Travel Planning Journey

Once you've used content to inspire a potential guest to plan a trip, the research phase begins. By pairing your human-driven storytelling with AI-powered tools, you can create a more seamless path to booking.

That's why *Afar* has launched a partnership with [Mindtrip](#), an AI startup that creates custom itineraries from travel content.

"Search is notoriously abysmal," says Julia Cosgrove, vice president and editor-in-chief of *Afar*. "That's why we stopped driving users to it years ago."

Afar's partnership with Mindtrip eliminates friction in travel planning, making it easy for readers to ask questions like, "When is it open? Or crowded? Can you bring the kids? Can I book it now?" Ultimately, it turns *Afar* content into a personalized trip plan.

Previously cited research from [Expedia Group's 2023 Path to Purchase study](#) found that the average traveler browses nearly 300 pages of content in the 45 days leading up to a booking. By integrating with Mindtrip, publishers like *Afar* — which have earned a high degree of trust from travelers — can compress the travel planning journey, guiding people from initial inspiration to booking faster than ever before.

"AI can make our content more actionable," says Cosgrove. "It also helps our editorial team, too. With Mindtrip integrated into *Afar*, we gain valuable insights from consumer conversations, which helps us uncover trends and illuminate gaps we can help fill with new content."

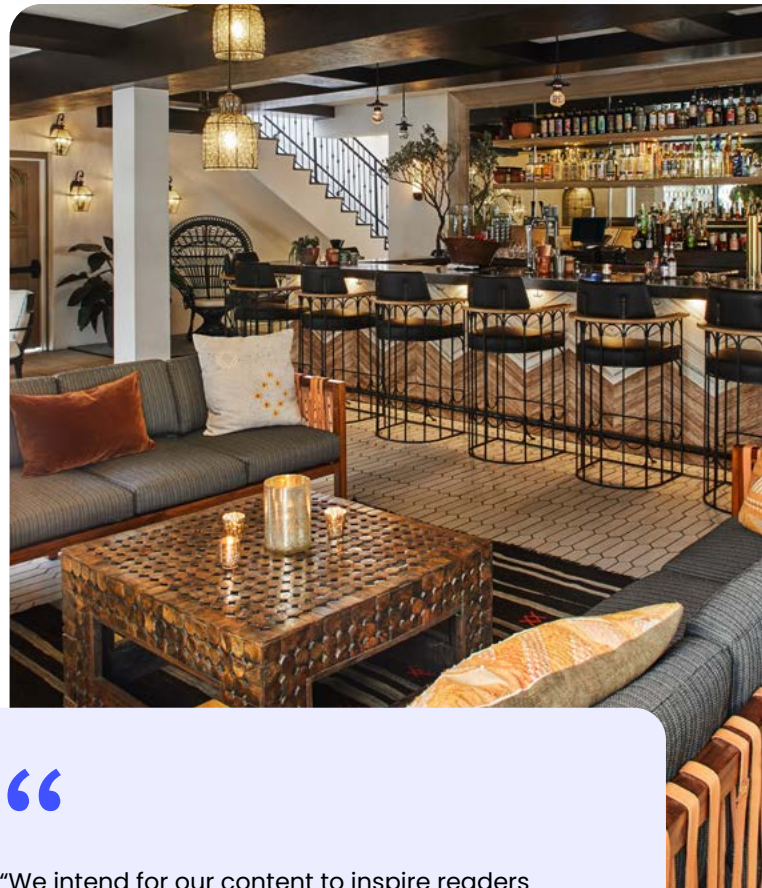
When you invest in quality content created by human storytellers, the opportunities to leverage AI to make that content more multidimensional are limitless.

"We didn't start *Afar* for armchair travelers who never leave home," says Cosgrove. "We intend for our content to inspire readers to travel, and to do so in a better way than they would have otherwise. We believe that advancements in AI, like our partnership with Mindtrip, will lead to more and better travel."

 **300** PAGES OF CONTENT

the average traveler browses nearly 300 pages of content in the 45 days leading up to a booking

 Expedia



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"We intend for our content to inspire readers to travel, and to do so in a better way than they would have otherwise."



Julia Cosgrove

Vice president and editor-in-chief, *Afar*

Use AI to Launch Campaigns at the Right Time

Curacity utilizes AI to assist travel brands in making more informed, strategic decisions about when to launch campaigns and offers by analyzing key data points, including lead time, occupancy, and length of stay. The Curacity platform identifies upcoming periods during which hotels still have the opportunity to influence the booking decisions of their potential guests.

Using this intelligence, the platform prompts customers when to upload new campaigns, including offers, promotional messages, and preferred images. For example, if a hotel typically sees a 40-day lead time for summer travel, Curacity might prompt the hotel in May to launch an offer or experience for timely media distribution. This ensures there's enough time for Curacity to distribute the content to its network of premium media partners, reach high-intent travelers, and inspire them to book summer stays.

"Travel brands need a more agile way to create demand in the upper funnel, before travel decisions are made," says Nick Slavin, CEO and co-founder of Curacity. "With Curacity, they're in the driver's seat, tailoring media distribution to address occupancy gaps as they arise."

By aligning campaign timing with traveler behavior and forward-looking demand signals, Curacity helps hotels stay ahead of the curve. The result: less last-minute discounting, better yield management, and content that works harder by landing in front of the right audience at the right moment, when they're still open to inspiration.

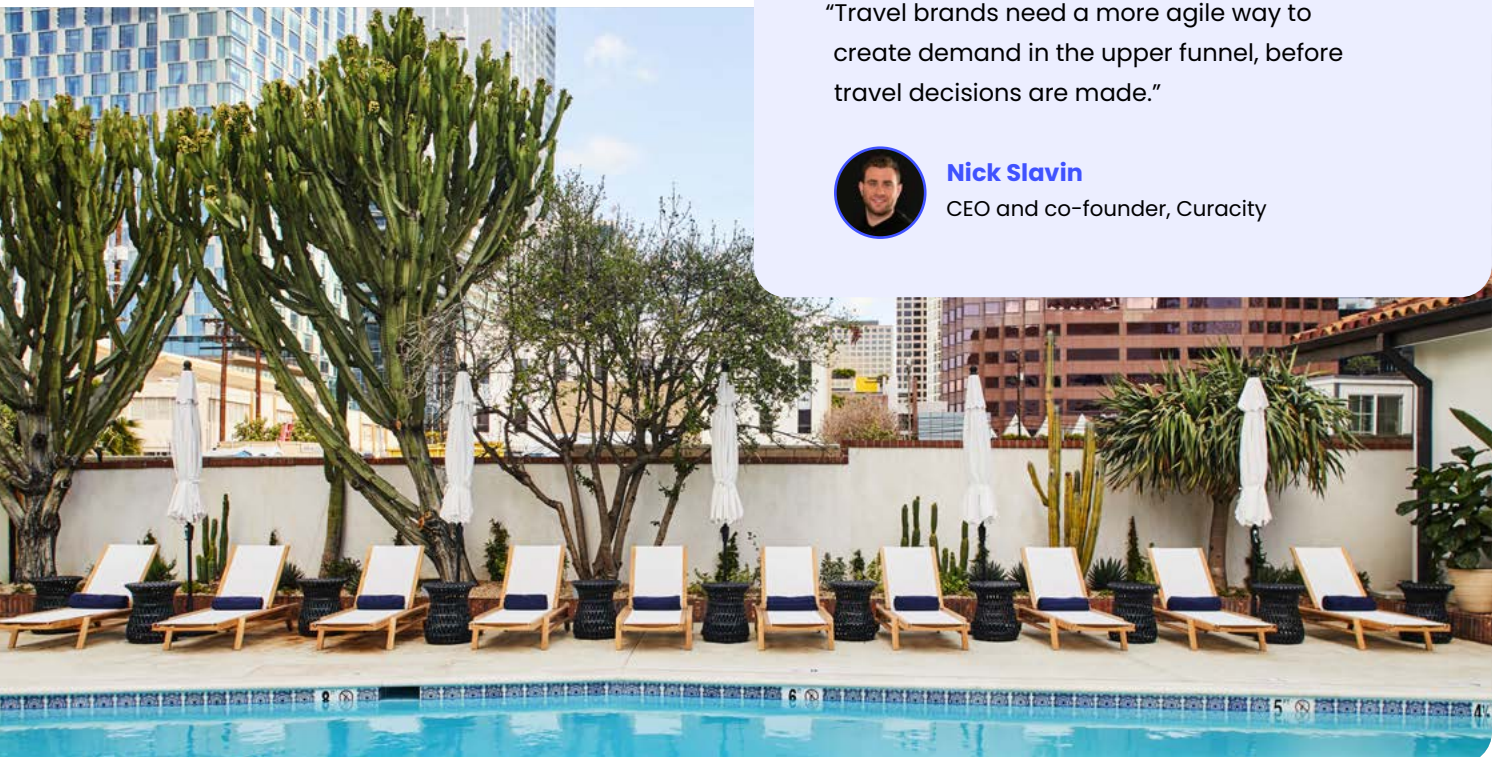


"Travel brands need a more agile way to create demand in the upper funnel, before travel decisions are made."



Nick Slavin

CEO and co-founder, Curacity



Key Takeaways

1

Content is no longer just for awareness — it can drive measurable bookings.

The old belief was that content marketing can't be measured. With platforms like Curacity, brands can now connect storytelling directly to revenue, transforming brand content into a performance asset.

2

The brands that win inspire travelers before they start planning.

By the time a traveler is comparing rates, your chance to stand out is shrinking. The most effective brands use content to reach guests early, when they're still dreaming. Don't just respond to interest — create demand with stories only your brand can tell.

3

Email is your highest-leverage distribution channel.

While social media and search continue to decline in reliability, email remains a brand-safe, first-party channel that delivers unmatched engagement. With the right storytelling content, email can fuel discovery, nurture interest, and drive repeat bookings.

Acknowledgments

We spoke with leaders across travel technology companies and media publishers. We'd like to thank them for their insights provided.

Julia Cosgrove, vice president and editor-in-chief of *Afar*

Paul Brady, news director at *Travel + Leisure*

Pavia Rosati, CEO and co-founder of Fathom

Jeralyn Gerba, editorial director and co-founder of Fathom

Tansy Kaschak, editor-in-chief of A Hotel Life

Jason Cincotta, CEO of Kismet

Nick Slavin, CEO and co-founder of Curacity

