

How Barclaycard and JetBlue Used a Three-Pronged Influencer Approach

By Nicole Dye-Anderson

Last year, JetBlue and Barclaycard partnered to launch the new JetBlue Mastercard portfolio, consisting of a suite of credit cards with benefits to appeal to the JetBlue traveler. As the new card issuer, Barclaycard needed to create awareness for the credit card products to drive applications and build excitement with existing and potential cardmembers around the enhanced card benefits.

Our strategy for the PR campaign utilized influencers as a primary vehicle to reach our target audiences. Prior to JetBlue, Barclaycard had successfully partnered with influencers on several card launches and has made influencers a core part of ongoing media relations and outreach efforts across Barclaycard's portfolio. Influencers provide the Barclaycard brand and products intangible benefits, like authentic voice, unique point of view, deep storytelling and the reach of an engaged and highly targeted audience.

As a PR practitioner, you should never limit the scope of where and how influencers can be brought into your PR campaign. For this launch, we used a three-pronged influencer approach that integrated influencer activities into other media relations efforts. The approach included 1) a cardmember experience trip, 2) press conference and 3) satellite media tour (SMT).

Understanding the program's objective will inform which influencers you engage. Outlining how you want to collaborate with them and what support you'll need from them will



Welcome goodies for influencers in Costa Rica.

create parameters to help you home in on who makes the most sense.

The Cardmember Experience Trip

During our first phase, we wanted to treat a select group of influencers to an experiential JetBlue cardmember getaway in order to highlight the benefits associated with the credit cards. Through conversations with the JetBlue team, we decided this exclusive trip would be focused on Costa Rica, a popular JetBlue destination.

While it's not possible to plan for every

circumstance, it's important to have flexibility when faced with obstacles. For example, the Zika outbreak quickly became a concern just prior to our Costa Rica trip and several interested attendees had to decline participation due to the potential health risks. While this complication could have put road blocks into our plan, it allowed us to expand our network and secure participation from influencers we hadn't worked with before.

The Zika virus concern provided one parameter of who to invite on the trip. Another important consideration was the audience of each influencer. For this JetBlue Mastercard program, we knew the product offering would be appealing to a variety of markets, we simply had to find who these audiences trusted and verify that they'd be able to speak about our product authentically. Audience, tone, expertise and platforms utilized should all be considered when choosing someone to represent your brand. For our program, we also considered access to an airport with JetBlue service, complementary group dynamics, and an overall interest in planned activities—as determined by influencers' historic posts and social content.

Our final group of five influencers for the trip included a representative from credit card-savvy consumer-focused website NerdWallet, business travel expert Ramsey Qu-bein, and travel credit card experts Angelina Aucello of the blog Angelina Travels, Jason Steele and Brian Kelly aka The Points Guy. This group was a well-rounded mix that reached all of our target audiences both on and offline.

Another key consideration is social media and how to harness an influencer's social power to accomplish your goals. Our trip to Costa Rica was scheduled to take place immediately before the product launch press conference; as such, everything they experienced and learned while on the trip was



Giddy up! Influencers explore Rincón de la Vieja National Park on horseback prior to zip-lining and soaking in the hot springs.

under embargo until then. For social media, this meant no posts in real time. In 2017, this would have been unfortunate because we would have missed opportunities for live social shares, like Instagram stories or Facebook Live. In this instance, our influencers simply held their images and posts about the trip to share after the embargo lifted.

As the Costa Rica trip came to a close, the five influencers returned home and our team executed the second phase of our strategy.

The Press Conference

We held our press conference in New York City—as it's close to JetBlue, Mastercard and Barclaycard's headquarters, is a main base for JetBlue service and hosts the highest concentration of our target media—and at the restaurant Saxon + Parole, which provided food for JetBlue's Mint Class. We invited and



Personalized and interactive dining experience at Rio Bhongo restaurant in Costa Rica.

secured attendance from top travel and credit card media, but we didn't want to stop there. We saw opportunity to include industry influencers as well, given mainstream media rely heavily on them for their expertise. We made it easy for influencers across the country to take part by organizing a virtual press conference. This provided another touchpoint that allowed us to broaden our network and strengthen relationships.

Once the embargo lifted, news quickly spread with a flurry of coverage from influencers on the Costa Rica trip, those who joined the press conference and those we pitched via traditional outreach.

The Satellite Media Tour

To keep the travel credit card top of mind and extend the story past launch, we executed an SMT with The Points Guy Brian Kelly, which aired throughout the country over the

next month. Brian is one of the most respected voices in the travel rewards industry and a natural partner to share the benefits of a travel credit card. As a voice trusted by both the media and the public, our team knew Brian was the perfect partner. The SMT was also a way for our team to deepen our relationship with him.

Results

All three phases of our influencer approach concluded within six weeks of the launch announcement. During that time period, the JetBlue Mastercard earned nearly 300 million media impressions (excluding press release pickup), thanks in large part to our influencers. We earned more than 100 million impressions from stories shared by the five influencers we took to Costa Rica, in outlets including Yahoo Finance, The Points Guy, Credit.com, NerdWallet, AFAR and Travel +

Checklist: Traveling With Influencers

When organizing travel for a group of influencers, it's important to provide all necessary information beforehand. Review this list taken from our international trip to Costa Rica of what we provided:

- ❑ Copies of all travel confirmations (air travel, ground transportation, hotel reservations, etc.) so attendees can confirm all information is accurate. The influencer should also have this on hand in case they get separated from the group.
- ❑ Complete itineraries that are personal and specific to each attendee. If the influencer is bringing a guest, they should also receive an itinerary, outlining their personal travel information and schedule.
- ❑ Packing list with recommendations. This is helpful if you're keeping itinerary details quiet until the influencers arrive, so they can feel secure they're bringing all the right supplies. It's also nice to let influencers know whether they should plan to leave extra space for any gifts or anticipated takeaways.
- ❑ Contact information for everyone going on the trip and a "home base" contact that all attendees can get in touch with for questions throughout the trip.
- ❑ Overview of attendees, including influencers and guests. Influencers within the same space are often friends with each other – or interested in getting to know each other – so it's nice to let them know who will be coming.
- ❑ Social sharing details including all attendees' handles and relevant brand tags they should be using.
- ❑ Welcome gift with food and drinks as well as items influencers may want to use on the trip, for example, a portable phone charger or CamelBak. This is also a great way to share branded swag with the influencer.

Leisure, among others. We earned nearly 10 million impressions from our SMT with Brian Kelly.

Most important to the success of our campaign was finding the right influencers to engage for each phase. This approach allowed us to form and strengthen relationships that continue to this day. As a PR pro looking to form partnerships with influencers, always

consider how just one campaign can impact and lead to future collaborations. A well-planned and executed relationship can have long-term benefits for both the influencer and brand partner. ■

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