



VISIT IRVING: A CARES Act Success Story

Primarily a business-oriented destination, Irving, Texas, was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Located in the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, Irving is home to seven Fortune 500 companies. Prior to the pandemic, business travel accounted for approximately 75% of the destination’s annual traffic. But as all non-essential travel came to a halt earlier last year, the destination experienced record-low occupancy rates — hovering around 22%.

When Irving’s occupancy hit the floor, so did their revenue. As a department of the city of Irving, Visit Irving simply did not qualify for the Paycheck Protection Program or other relief options available at the time.

However, the CARES Act, passed in late March 2020, made funding available to combat the economic impact of COVID-19. These funds came with strict guidelines for use, meaning that recipients could not use them to cover any existing expenses already in their current budget or to refill revenue shortfalls.

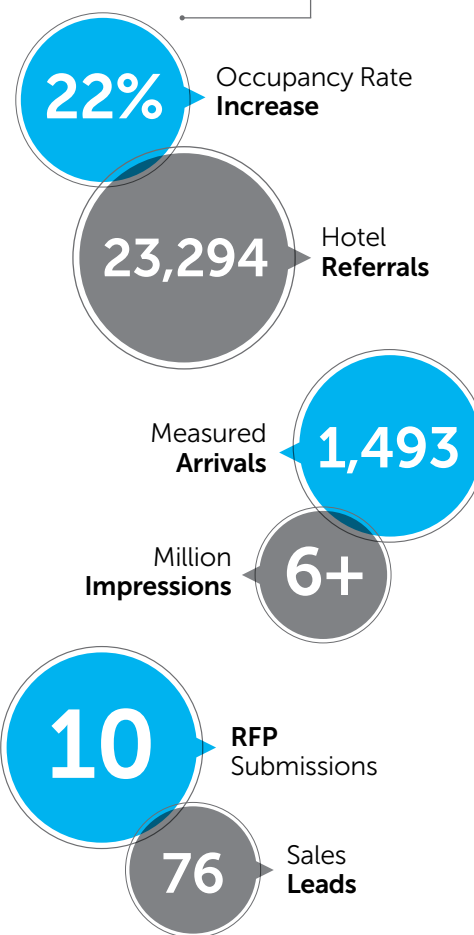
When Visit Irving was approached by the city to discuss how they might be able to utilize these funds to promote tourism, they knew they needed to accomplish two goals:

Find a way to capture leisure travelers in nearby drive markets to boost occupancy rates.

Keep their meetings marketing pipeline as full as possible as to position themselves for a quick recovery when meetings and events resumed.

Keep reading to learn how the team at Visit Irving engaged with Simpleview to launch a successful leisure travel campaign that doubled their occupancy rates and how they were able to prepare for a post-pandemic recovery.

The **STATS**





Preparing for a Post-Pandemic Meetings & Events Recovery

Promoting meetings in the middle of a pandemic is certainly not the easiest thing to do, but that's exactly what the team at Visit Irving did when they received their CARES Act funding.

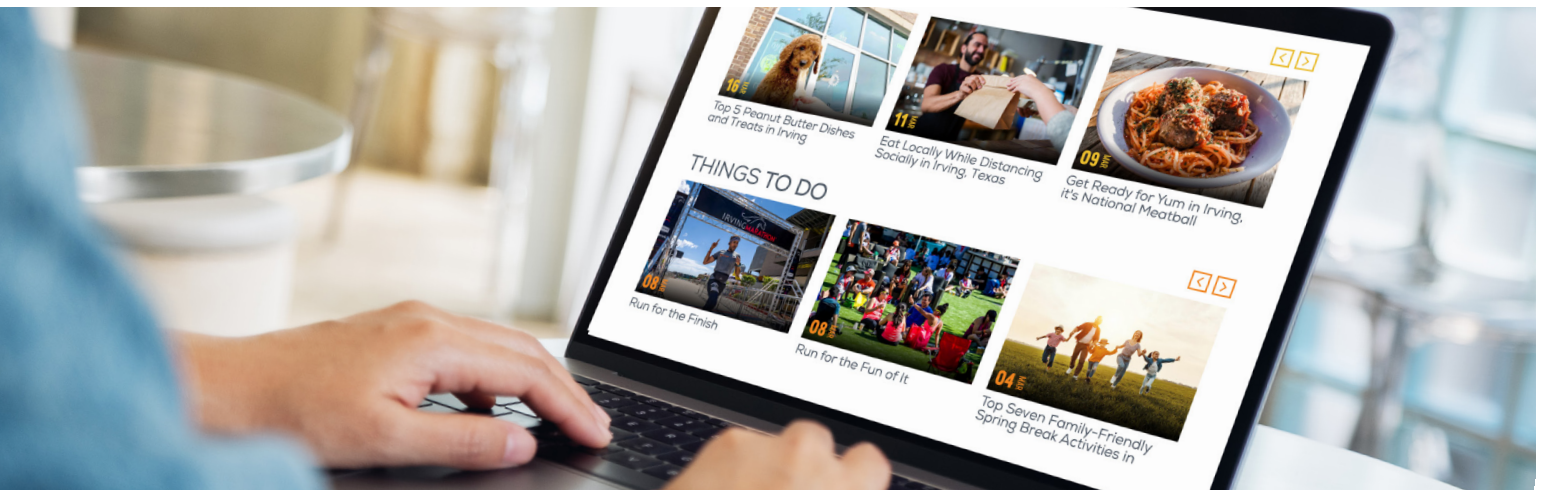
Typically, business travel accounts for approximately 75% of Visit Irving's annual revenue. Naturally, when the pandemic hit, meetings and events came to halt, and Irving was left with thousands of empty hotel rooms across the city.

In the short term, they shifted their marketing strategy to market Irving as a staycation destination to drive markets in nearby Texas cities, such as Dallas, Houston and Austin. This allowed the organization to immediately bring in revenue via hotel referrals, but it didn't solve their long-term problem. **How would they continue to stay top of mind with meeting planners to ensure a quick recovery in a post-pandemic meetings market?**

The answer came in the form of an ambitious omni-channel digital marketing campaign. With guidance from Simpleview, Irving would target a national meeting planner audience using Facebook, LinkedIn and Search Advertising.



The campaign was driven by extensive research from Destination Analysts. A study conducted first in June 2020, and then again in October 2020, provided insight into the immediate needs of meeting planners across the country. **Simpleview used this data to develop relevant campaign messaging that would work to mitigate potential concerns that meeting planners and attendees may have, while simultaneously generating awareness and consideration of Irving as a top-tier meetings destination for future events.**



Both prospecting and remarketing strategies were implemented, in order to capture a wider, yet still qualified, audience. For prospecting, the team leveraged Irving's existing national meeting planner contact list to create look-alike audiences across multiple digital channels. These users would have similar demographics and interests to those already on the sales list. They were also able to take advantage of the Event Meeting Planner Template on LinkedIn, a collection of pre-saved audiences based on relevant job titles across the meetings/ events industry.

Additionally, they chose to remarket to visitors to the <https://www.irvingtexas.com/meet-in-irving/> page who did not submit an RFP as well as those who had previously interacted with the prospecting ad placements via reactions, comments, shares, etc.

The messaging highlighted Irving's meeting package and its key selling points, hotel and convention center sanitation and safety protocols, and amenities relevant to meeting planners.



The team at Simpleview did what they do best, leverage their knowledge of destination marketing to build successful digital marketing strategies.

The results of these campaigns vastly exceeded our expectations and we couldn't be more impressed."



– **MONTY WHITE**
Director of Marketing
at Visit Irving



... We also uncovered an entirely new, untapped market for Irving - the leisure Staycationer. Simpleview capitalized on our hotels' unique experiences and resort-style amenities, which have had a measurable impact on our city's occupancy. For the first time in Visit Irving's history, our occupancy was higher on the weekends than during the weekday.

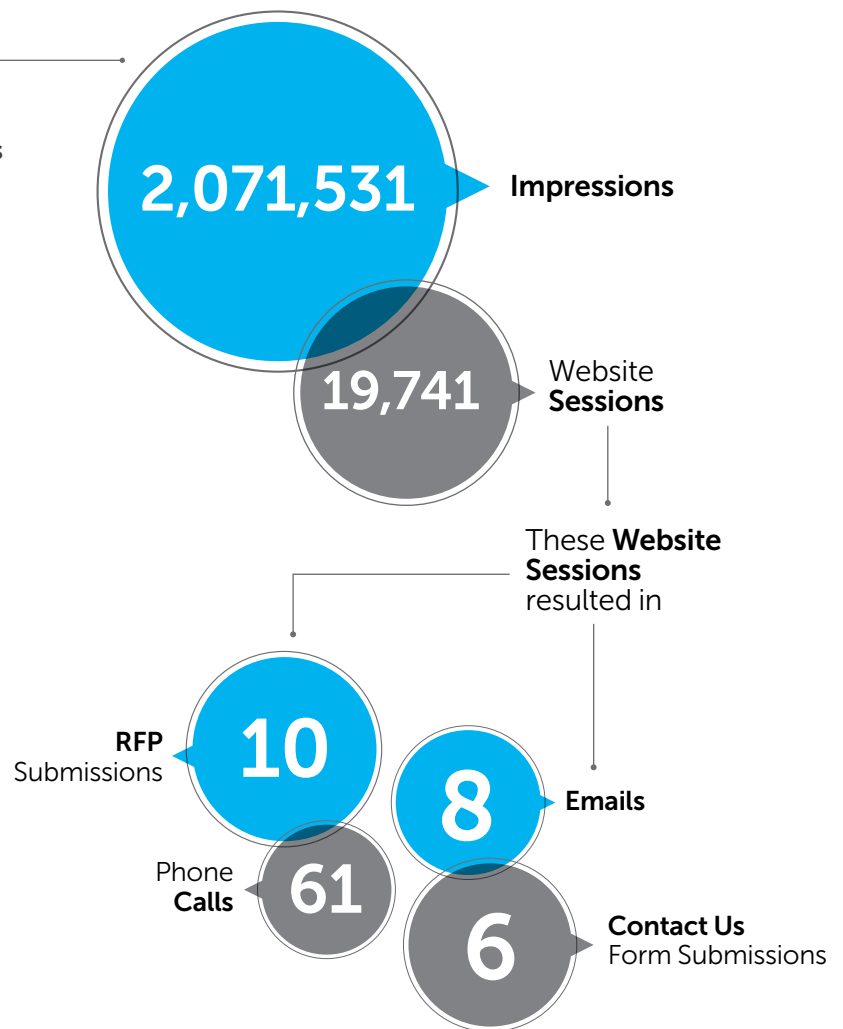
In addition to boosting our occupancy in the short term with the Staycation campaign, our meetings-focused campaign has helped build our meetings pipeline in the long-term. Their work has positioned Irving for a swift recovery of our meetings market."

– MONTY WHITE | Director of Marketing at Visit Irving

THE RESULTS

When all was said and done, the meetings campaign generated 2,071,531 impressions and 19,741 website sessions. These sessions resulted in 10 RFP submissions, 61 phone calls, 8 emails and 6 contact us form submissions. Overall, this was a 12.32% increase in leads generated during the campaign period (September–January) compared to the previous non-campaign period (April–August) during the pandemic.

Given that this campaign was run not only during a pandemic, but also in the winter months, which is typically an off-season, the team at Visit Irving was thrilled with the results. Furthermore, it's important to note that the sales funnel for meetings and events is much longer than a leisure campaign, and the team expects to see continued results from the awareness generated in this campaign in the months to come.



ARE YOU READY TO TAKE YOUR DMO TO THE NEXT LEVEL? Call our customer experience (CX) team at **520-575-1151** or email us at **ACCOUNTMANAGERS@SIMPLEVIEWINC.COM**.