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Lemax

HIDDEN ICELAND

CASE STUDY | HIDDEN ICELAND | INBOUND TOUR OPERATOR

Location:
Reykjavik, Iceland

Go live date:
2023

Company type:
Inbound Tour Operator

INTRODUCTION

Hidden Iceland is a boutique tour operator specializing in tailor-made, privately guided tours and premium self-drive packages designed to immerse you in the very best of Iceland.

Founded in Reykjavik in 2017, Hidden Iceland started off as a small group tour operator, but they very quickly achieved their goal and shifted into the sphere of private tours and more customizable FIT tours. Today, they are a name that travelers connect with highly tailored, luxury Icelandic tours.

Something else that makes them stand out is that 50% of their bookings are direct customer bookings, while the other 50% mostly go to agent bookings. With the type of product they sell, Hidden Iceland doesn't really rely on OTAs, so they still have a lot of direct contact with the customers.

CHALLENGES

Before COVID, Hidden Iceland was already starting to realize that the workload was constantly growing and required them to keep adding people. Then, COVID broke out and brought everything to a halt. But as things started coming back, it all happened very quickly - the demand for Iceland was enormous.

> It felt like the demand was endless - the backlog was overwhelming. But the sales process was slow and clunky, and we had to manually add more and more people. We soon realized how challenging that was, especially since labor in Iceland is expensive. One of the key selling points Lemax made at the time was that it would only cost the equivalent of one additional person, but could boost the productivity of the existing team by around 50%. That's how we came to see its value.
>
> — Scott Drummond, Managing Director & Co-Owner

They began to feel some strain in **keeping the data accurate**. At the same time, changes were happening in Iceland, as many hotels were switching to the best available rates and moving onto Travia. This shift made things more complicated, especially when **they were still using spreadsheets**, because they were estimating prices for clients based on contracted rates.

The issue was that those contract rates didn't always reflect the actual prices at the time of booking. They needed a way to access near **real-time availability and pricing** directly from the hotels. That's where Lemax's integration with Travia made a real difference - it solved that problem by providing live, accurate data.

The fact that they **had to manually copy data between spreadsheets** impacted their business negatively.

Margins were affected. There were times when trips were sold below the intended margin because the wrong prices were entered, leading to underselling.

There were also **revenue losses from booking errors**. Staff had to manually email hotels with booking details, and sometimes they copied the wrong dates from spreadsheets. As a result, bookings were made for incorrect dates. In some cases, the hotel charged them for a no-show, and they had to pay again to rebook for the correct dates.

These mistakes were hard to track and quantify since everything was managed in spreadsheets, and errors were usually only discovered after the fact. But the overall impact on both margin and revenue was real - even if the exact cost was difficult to measure.

Another major priority for them was **consolidating everything into a single end-to-end system**. They wanted the quoting process, CRM, invoicing, and guide information all in one place. That's why **Lemax's level of integration was a significant selling point.**

WHY LEMAX

There are not many true end-to-end solutions available. A few vendors offered partial solutions, which they were evaluating. However, it wasn't clear if those partial systems would meet all their needs.

> The alternatives had significant limitations. For example, none of the others supported Travia, which was becoming essential in Iceland. Today, it covers about 99% of the hotels here. That integration alone gave Lemax a significant advantage. There were definitely things that promoted Lemax over the others that they either didn't have or were potentially going to work towards having, but didn't really even have on their roadmaps yet.
>
> — Scott Drummond, Managing Director & Co-Owner

Some of the other systems focused mainly on the trip-building phase but lacked robust features for what came after confirmation, like invoicing or guide management. Those would have required additional tools and manual processes. In the end, **there just weren't many solutions that truly covered the entire workflow from end to end, and Lemax stood out** because it did.

Although they did consider building something internally, it was discounted pretty quickly. The wages and overall costs for this type of work in Iceland would have made it expensive very quickly.

From conversations with others who had built their own systems, it was clear that the process often took much longer than expected. In most cases, they ended up relying on at least one key employee - often the one who built the system - to keep it running, which created long-term dependency.

In the end, building an in-house software just didn't make sense.

Lemax

Before implementing Lemax, they were essentially **working across multiple spreadsheets**. These sheets were primarily **used to track pricing, customer details, and other information**. To create client-facing documentation, they would manually build a page on the backend of their website, protected by a password. Guide documentation also had to be created manually.

This led to **a lot of duplicated effort and inefficiency**, as the same information had to be handled in multiple places. While the actual pitching process to the client may have been slightly faster back then, since they were reusing templates and copying existing text from spreadsheets with minor adjustments, it introduced a greater risk of error. The process relied heavily on individuals selecting the correct pricing or copying the right information, rather than drawing from a centralized, reliable source.

Although proposals may have gone out more quickly in that earlier system, they were usually just plain emails with basic text and a price listed at the end. In contrast, **with Lemax, proposals are now sent as polished PDFs** that include imagery, detailed inclusions, and structured formatting - **all generated automatically from the system.**

The biggest improvement has come after a sale is confirmed. **The post-sale steps are now far more streamlined, making the overall process more efficient and reducing the chance for mistakes.** That's where Lemax has had the greatest impact.

> Lemax brought us great value. Our revenue is probably close to double since we started using Lemax. Of course, that is not all directly attributed to Lemax - there was a great surge of reservations coming our way after COVID, and that growth was expected. But Lemax certainly enabled our team to work on multiple bookings at the same time, which was a struggle beforehand, and thus boosted that growth. It also helped us seem more professional and have better recording of client data and CRM.
>
> — Scott Drummond, Managing Director & Co-Owner

Lemax

Lemax helped the team greatly, especially on the post-confirmation steps of the booking, on the front-end. **It allows their travel expert team to work on multiple bookings at once.**

Before, they struggled to work on two or three customers at the same time. Because of all the work they would have if all customers converted at the same time (creating the itinerary, the guide documentation, getting it all ready on the back-end, making the bookings, recording that information manually into sheets, and so on), they wouldn't be able to take on another inquiry for quite some time.

Q&A: INSIGHTS

Q: What impact has Lemax had on your business?

A: One major focus was **streamlining client documentation** by pulling as much information as possible directly from the reservation file. This was a significant time-saver compared to the previous process, where we had to build client documents in WordPress manually.

Another key improvement was **accurate, live pricing, and reducing data duplication.** Previously, client, guide, and backend pricing information were all stored in separate places. Centralizing that data and allowing different parts of the system to sync meant we only needed to update information once, **which not only saved time but also reduced the risk of errors during data entry or transfer**.

There were also pricing errors. For example, a salesperson might accidentally copy the wrong rate from a spreadsheet, using shoulder season pricing instead of summer rates. That kind of mistake happens easily when pulling data manually.

With Lemax, pricing is rule-based. Once the contract is set up correctly in the system, it automatically pulls the correct price based on the travel dates, **eliminating manual errors and ensuring consistency**.

Q: What would be some key metrics related to Lemax's impact on Hidden Iceland?

A: I think one of the key metrics that can be attributed to Lemax is our **conversion rate**. We can now actually measure our conversion rate much more effectively than before.

In the past, it was incredibly difficult to track the number of unrealized inquiries. Everything came in via email, and if a client lost interest or simply didn't respond, we'd just move the thread to a "done" folder. There was no reliable way to assess the value of incoming inquiries or how many we were successfully converting into bookings.

Now, **with Lemax, we can track that data and evaluate the sales process much more clearly**. We're able to ask: *Why didn't a lead convert? Was the price too high? Did we respond too slowly? Did they choose another provider? Or were they simply not a good fit, either because they didn't understand what we offer or couldn't afford it?*

Lemax has made all of this far more visible and actionable. **Even small changes, like updating the forms on our website, now contribute to filtering inquiries more effectively.**

For example, we've added pricing estimates based on group size. If someone selects 2, 4, or 6 people, they immediately see a price-per-day estimate for that group size and trip type. That acts almost like a pre-qualification filter before the inquiry even reaches us.

We've definitely seen a huge improvement. **Lemax has helped us better evaluate the quality of incoming inquiries and fine-tune our sales process accordingly. That's definitely contributed to improved conversion rates.**

Q: Which departments use Lemax daily?

A: Operations and sales teams use it to oversee trips and coordinate how everything will run. The accounts team uses it to check incoming invoices, making sure they match the reservations and that the pricing is accurate. The management team relies on it to track sales performance, generate reports on trip and option statuses, and forecast which inquiries are likely to convert.

It's essentially used across the entire company; even the guides use it to help run the trips. So, **it's a system that's integrated into every part of the business**.

Q: How has Lemax impacted the interdepartmental collaboration?

A: I think **it's made the process much more streamlined**, with less back-and-forth between people. Now, **inquiries can be assigned a priority and passed directly to the travel expert team**, without having to sit in an email inbox.

Previously, everything came in as inquiry forms via email, and we worked through them manually, using tags to decide what to handle next. With Lemax, **the entire process is more organized and easier to manage - it's far more efficient** than relying on a shared inbox.

Q: You've been with Lemax since 2023. How has your impression of the Lemax solution and company changed over time?

A: Before we even began searching or exploring possible solutions, I hadn't really heard of Lemax. At first, there were questions around how big or well-established the company actually was.

But we came to see that **Lemax is, in fact, a large and established company with a significant team behind it**. It's quite professional in that sense - **there are clearly defined teams and departments, all working together to improve the product and deliver effective solutions**.

Q: What would you recommend to travel companies looking for new software?

A: I think it's really about fully **understanding what you're trying to solve, identifying your key pain points, and then weighing the cost of addressing them**. Is that cost justified to fix those specific issues, or are there other solutions that could handle them more efficiently?

If you're looking at an end-to-end system, you need to **consider whether it truly meets all of your end-to-end goals**.

Another **important aspect is timing and knowing when it makes the most sense for you to start the implementation and when to go live**.

When it comes to implementing the software, there's one key learning we exited the process with: we initially assigned a dedicated team to handle much of the implementation. In hindsight, it might have been better to involve more people earlier on.

Doing so could have reduced some of the initial friction, as more of the team would have felt involved and prepared. Instead, many staff members weren't part of the process until the system went live, at which point they were expected to jump right in.

THE FUTURE

Q: What is the main point of focus for Hidden Iceland in the next few years?

A: We've consistently seen around 40% revenue growth year after year, but over the past year or two, that growth has started to level off - simply because we've reached a point where it's naturally tapering.

The focus over the next few years is on **consolidation - building the right team structure to run trips efficiently without needing constant revenue growth or continually hiring more people to stay operational**.

The goal is to shift away from the growth-driven approach of the past five years and instead focus on **strengthening the team and improving profitability from existing trips**. It's about creating a more sustainable model rather than chasing continuous expansion.

Q: What are your thoughts on the future of technology and AI, particularly in relation to the travel industry? Have you seen any issues, and what are your predictions?

A: It's an interesting time because the technology is clearly available, but it still feels like people are figuring out how to properly use it. The widespread impact that AI could have hasn't fully materialized yet, mostly because adoption is still limited. A lot of people are just experimenting with it casually, but it hasn't become fully integrated into daily workflows or systems in a meaningful way.

However, we can see where it's heading. Platforms like Lemax, for example, may soon start incorporating AI in ways that could dramatically change how we operate. Imagine an AI that understands client requests, suggests changes to itineraries based on past behavior, checks availability, and essentially drafts an updated offer with pricing - all without needing much human input. That's the kind of automation we could see in the near future, and it would be a game-changer for efficiency.

We've already started noticing shifts in how clients find and interact with us. For example, some inquiries now come directly from people who say they found us through ChatGPT. They're asking questions like, *"Which company should I use to plan a trip to Iceland?"* and ChatGPT is recommending Hidden Iceland. That's encouraging because it shows that AI is influencing search behavior in our favor.

We're also seeing clients bring in pre-made itineraries they generated using tools like GPT. Early on, those itineraries weren't really usable - they didn't reflect how trips actually run. But now, they're getting much more accurate because AI is learning from existing itineraries and adapting.

Clients are becoming more informed, or at least arriving with more structured ideas. They may not fully understand the logistics behind the itinerary, but they're coming to us with something more concrete, which is helpful.

Q: Do you see challenges with AI making itinerary planning easier and faster than traditional methods? How will your business adapt?

A: It's a fair concern. Some people might think that if AI can plan a trip, clients will stop using services like ours altogether. But in reality, the clients who are going to self-plan probably weren't going to book with us anyway. They're not our core audience.

Our clients come to us because we do more than just create an itinerary. We offer curated planning, seamless logistics, high-quality service, and ongoing support throughout the trip. That's the value they're paying for, not just a schedule of events they could piece together themselves with enough time and effort.

Yes, we do provide detailed proposals, and people sometimes ask if we worry about clients using them to DIY their trips. And sure, it can happen - but we've actually won more business than we've lost by being transparent and thorough. We listen closely, tailor the proposal exactly to what they've asked for, and respond quickly. That builds trust, which leads to bookings.

Where AI has already had an impact is on the search and discovery side of things. Tools like ChatGPT are starting to influence how people find providers. **That's why maintaining a strong online presence is crucial - having high-quality content, good reviews, and a reputation as a trustworthy expert all factor into how AI ranks and recommends you.**

That part isn't so different from traditional SEO. The core idea is the same: be seen as an authority. What might change is the type of content AI tools prioritize. It may become more important to structure content in ways that are easier for machines to interpret and pull from. Most companies are already aware of that and are adjusting accordingly.

The bigger transformation will come when AI tools are built directly into the systems we use. That's where we'll see a significant leap forward - when AI can quickly generate proposals, understand and respond to client feedback, suggest updates, calculate pricing, and build revised offers with minimal human involvement. That's where proper time savings and efficiency gains will come in, without sacrificing the personalized service our clients expect.

Ultimately, **the companies that embrace this shift - either by adopting AI-enabled tools or building those capabilities into their processes - will benefit the most.** It's really about who moves first and how well they implement it. Those who get it right will be able to save time, improve service quality, and focus even more on the human side of customer care.

CONCLUSION

Hidden Iceland's journey with Lemax is a clear example of what's possible when the right technology meets a company with a bold vision for efficiency and excellence. By replacing fragmented spreadsheets and manual workarounds with a single, end-to-end platform, they didn't just automate - they transformed.

The impact is visible across the board: **from streamlined operations and increased booking capacity to smarter data usage and stronger cross-department collaboration**. With better visibility into conversions, reduced pricing errors, and more polished client documentation, **Hidden Iceland was able to scale without compromising the personalized, high-touch service that defines their brand**.

As Hidden Iceland moves from rapid expansion into a phase of strategic consolidation, its focus has shifted from growing headcount to strengthening team structure and maximizing profitability per trip. **Lemax has played a key role** in enabling that shift **by helping them scale intelligently, reduce dependency on manual processes, and deliver a consistently professional and premium client experience**.

Hidden Iceland's evolution stands as **a testament to the power of investing in systems that grow with you - not just in size, but in sophistication.** Their story is a compelling case for how **digital transformation, when aligned with clear business goals, can elevate not just performance but the entire customer experience.**

ABOUT LEMAX

Lemax is a web-based travel software for Tour Operators and Destination Management Companies (DMCs).

We help travel companies achieve the essence of their existence - provide unforgettable experiences to their Customers and excellent service to their Partners.

Our mission is to transform the travel industry from its foundations by digitalizing the business and automating manual processes covering the entire customer journey.

With more than 40 clients globally, we are leading the innovation and changing how travel companies do their business by enabling them to focus more on their Customers and Partners and less on administrative work.

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