

Rural Promotion Program

Final Report – June 2019

Prepared for Rural Councils Victoria

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Executive Summary

The LiveCountry campaign conducted between February and June 2019 for the Rural Councils Victoria Rural Promotion Program, has established a new benchmark for campaigns encouraging people to move to rural Victoria.

The campaign was based on extensive market research, which provided valuable insights into key audiences interested in moving to the country, drivers of behaviour, and perceptions of rural life.

Development of original stories, videos and images that have captured the diversity of opportunities and achievements of people in rural areas was identified by focus group participants as a critical initial step in the project. The campaign has built a foundation of unique content, providing an effective introduction to slices of life in every rural area of Victoria represented by RCV.

Content was identified in collaboration with Councils and communities, focusing attention on areas important to local priorities and providing specific insights, including a focus on a number of communities that previously had received little or no attention.

After the development of a brand, website, social media channels and content bank, LiveCountry campaigns have achieved a reach of more than 361,500 people. The campaigns have delivered strong web traffic, more than 13,900 engagements on Facebook and a growing following of more than 550 people on Instagram.

The LiveCountry social media campaign achieved an average Click Through Rate of 4.9%, which is well above industry average – ensuring optimal value was achieved from campaign spend.

Many businesses and communities featured in campaigns have reported increased enquiries and visitation as a result of the campaign and three families have already indicated they will now move as a result of the campaign – an early indication of success given that decisions to move can often take years.

These are the best results documented in any other campaign to encourage people to move to country Victoria, according to available information, and have delivered outcomes that closely align with market research findings.

Website analytics have also provided valuable insights into the optimal times to deliver campaign information and the posts that have proven most popular.

Overall, the campaign has established a strong foundation for future initiatives to encourage people to move to areas across rural Victoria, and a range of recommended future initiatives have been identified to continue the momentum developed during this project.

Rural Promotion Program campaign outcomes

The LiveCountry campaign has set a new benchmark for changing perceptions of living in rural Victoria – but it is clearly a first step in a longer-term campaign required.

Market research conducted prior to the development of the campaign has provided clear insights into the types of people interested in moving to the country, their drivers of choice and key barriers to achieving behavioural change.

These insights have been used to inform the development of a campaign which delivers practical information and case studies about specific locations across the 37 council areas represented by Rural Councils Victoria – casting a light on many areas that have not shared in the benefits of tourism or residential-focused campaigns in the past.

LiveCountry social media campaigns have achieved a reach of more than 361,500 users, delivering strong web traffic, more than 13,900 engagements on Facebook and a growing following of more than 550 people on Instagram.

The social media LiveCountry campaign achieved a Click Through Rate of 4.9%, which is well above industry averages, and we have documented three people who have openly declared they are now planning to move to the country soon as a result of the campaign – a family to the area around Port Fairy, a couple to Seymour and a family to Mansfield. These are small results, but represent a significant success given that the Rural Promotion Program has outperformed campaigns that have been run in the past with a much larger budget and duration.

The campaign has afforded the opportunity to capture insights into perceptions of rural Victoria; audience profile and drivers of choice. In the process of delivering the campaign, Twig has also identified a range of learnings from the project – as well as opportunities that arise from each.

Project insights and opportunities

1. **Negative perceptions** – market research conducted for this campaign indicate that there are negative perceptions about aspects of a rural lifestyle from people in urban regional and rural communities. Altering these perceptions will be vital in order to deliver sustained increases in populations in rural areas. A sustained, positive, multi-channel campaign based on facts will be required over an extended period to build positive perceptions of rural Victoria.

Opportunity: The project has identified a range of facts and case studies that demonstrate the diversity of opportunity and community in rural Victoria.

2. **Invisible jobs** – contact with employers and Councils throughout the campaign have identified thousands of jobs available and unfilled in rural Victoria right now – and

thousands more to come. However, most are not listed on job sites such as Seek or in traditional media such as newspaper classifieds. Many jobs are being filled through Facebook posts, active and sometimes expensive search, personal networks, or local community networks. Some low skilled roles are filled through labour hire firms, although employers have reported that tightened regulations on labour hire are expected to cause some disruption to supply of labour hire workers in the immediate term.

Many employers have reported that workforce shortages are significantly constraining economic growth, with vacancies across trade, professional, managerial and unskilled areas, in the manufacturing, food, agriculture, energy, health and natural resources sectors. These vacancies are not being captured by current data, as most statistics rely on analysis of advertised vacancies through traditional channels.

This is a major issue for workforce planning, analysis of employment rates, local and regional development policies. This is also a significant constraint on advocacy and ability to attract development.

There is also an opportunity to better link employers and employees. Individual shires have attempted to resolve the issue by creating specialised job boards – for example in with websites created for Portland (www.thisisportland.com.au) and Swan Hill (www.swanhillconnectu.com.au). Both sites offer a good software solution, but an unsatisfactory communication solution; because employers are not taking time to post on the separate job boards, and the job boards are not a good representation of a town's potential.

Poorly populated job boards reinforce the impression that there are few jobs available in rural areas. For example, Portland's site, launched just a year ago, currently has five jobs advertised; four of which are for council roles, despite the fact that council and employers have stated to us that they have hundreds of jobs currently available.

Opportunity 1: There is an opportunity for LiveCountry to become a well-resourced hub of information which not only carries content and case studies, but also job vacancies across the State in rural areas. The insights of other projects demonstrates this could only be developed if the LiveCountry team contacts employers and populates the site with jobs – providing the employer with a cost free listing that they don't have to administer.

The creation of a central, administered hub for job listings could be accompanied by a limited number of real estate listings and enable the LiveCountry team to present packages of houses, jobs and school options across the State. The same team would

also be able to seek out and aggregate investment opportunities across the State, helping to make LiveCountry a one stop shop for rural living information.

3. **Radical changes in workforce profile** - The issue of visibility of current vacancies is combining with major and rapid change in the requirements of agricultural workforces, as farms becomes larger and productivity gains are driven through a reliance on technology inputs rather than labour. During the course of conversations with Councils and employers, there were numerous examples cited of farm and food businesses dramatically expanding their production capacity with a focus on automated processes and technology and minimal workforce.

For example, a chicken farm with 600 staff that had doubled its production capacity while adding just 20 additional staff; almond farms where five automatic-drive tractors follow a single lead driver; and fruit processing facilities which enable a doubling of production with a net reduction in workforce; and numerous large farms cropped by superannuation funds on contract, with no permanent workforce resident on site.

These trends came to light in discussing differentiators and value propositions for small communities attempting to attract new residents. The trends have led to a significant reduction in the size and economic outlook for many small communities that have traditionally relied upon agricultural families to populate schools, buy food and fuel and fill out congregations, football teams and service clubs.

Smaller communities need urgent help to identify a new future that achieves growth independently of agriculture, or adjusts to the new requirements offered by technology. A tremendous quantum of community effort is being expended by dozens of small communities trying to identify the drivers of their future existence in isolation, without the benefit of professional marketing, planning or strategy development.

Opportunity: There is an opportunity to help at least some smaller communities identify improved pathways for the future, supporting local agricultural communities while also identifying ways to diversify their economy and grow their community.

4. **Events worked** – two competitions held as part of the LiveCountry campaign offered entrants a chance to win a weekend away, hosted by a local BnB owner who could introduce them to the local community. The events not only attracted many entries, and a considerable increase in recognition of each area; but the winners in each case

said they had confirmed their decision to move to the country as a result of their weekend experience.

Opportunity: getting people interested in moving to the country to visit an area in a weekend curated by locals provides opportunities to establish an instant local network and to sample community life for a short time. Further events which offer deep and authentic links to country people and experiences of community are likely to prove successful in growing recruitment numbers.

5. **The power of homecoming.** Market research conducted for this project confirmed anecdotal evidence that a proportion of the people interested in moving to country Victoria are people who choose to return to the area they grew up in. Drawn by a combination of the familiar landscape, family connections and friend networks, there are a significant number of people of rural origin who are interested in returning to country areas.

In the US, much is made of homecoming by high schools, colleges and churches, with festivals, parades and celebrations of the achievements and contributions of people who have grown up in / or graduated from an area. Australia does not have the same tradition, but there is clear evidence of the same sort of dynamic – with many people feeling an affinity and affection for their home town.

Some small communities have begun the process of building informal communities of advocates through social media, uniting people who grew up in an area with those who visit regularly and new residents through community pages that carry images and news of the local community and environment. There are opportunities to build on this concept further.

Opportunity: While Australia may or may not be ready for homecoming events, the option to build affinity, attendance and impact by engaging former residents in community events holds great promise as a way to directly encourage population growth in rural communities. In most cases this will require a blend of external facilitation and expertise in tracking down and engaging past residents, as well as internal knowledge and expertise in developing events and content that include and engage former residents, as councils and local communities are not resourced to run effective homecoming / open town campaigns.

6. **Competing campaigns** – The Victorian Government committed more than \$51 million to boost regional and rural visitation in the 2018-19 budget but only a small proportion of this was devoted to encouraging people to move to rural areas.

Declining populations in many smaller centres is causing huge social and economic issues, including dislocation of communities from services as they lose schools, police stations and retail outlets.

In other areas, issues overcoming the perceived disadvantages of living in rural areas is constricting growth of numerous companies as they fail to be able to recruit the staff necessary to facilitate expansion.

Hundreds of communities stand ready and willing to grow, but a significant campaign is required to change negative perceptions about rural Victorian living. Market research indicates that the types of information that informs perceptions of rural living are quite different from those related to tourism – which may help to explain why perceptions of rural living remain very poor despite decades of investment in Victorian tourism campaigns.

Market research conducted for this project indicated that people who are considering moving to a specific rural area want to know about jobs, education, healthcare, distance to the supermarket and other practical facts. The fact that there are nice places nearby to have a picnic or a bike ride are expected, and are not considered factors relevant to day-to-day lifestyle.

Opportunity: There is an opportunity to build understanding of the importance of specific destination marketing campaigns which are relevant to people who consider moving to rural Victoria, not just to those who visit.

7. **Huge volumes of information, but users can't get what they want** – While LiveCountry campaign has been successful in engaging audiences, it is very difficult to break through the clutter of information provided in hardcopy and online in relation to regional destinations.

The maze of overlapping, often undifferentiated, and often poorly coordinated information has created an environment where channels are saturated with information.

Furthermore, web analytics from the LiveCountry site indicate that the highest demand for information about moving to the country occurs before and after work on Mondays and Fridays and over the weekends. Council offices and the offices of many potential employers are closed and unable to respond rapidly to requests for information at these times. These trends are outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

Councils, local tourism groups, regional tourism Boards and the State Government all produce an array of destination-focused information, ranging from regional brochures and websites to online campaigns and hardcopy materials focused on individual destinations and events. Most material is exclusively tourism focused and much of it lacks differentiation relevant to people considering moving, rather than just visiting.

Visitor information centres would be a key stop-off point for many people interested in moving when they visit an area, but information available to visitors is at best diverse, at worst scattergun.

There are a huge range of brands, design styles and information types presented to visitors and a common issue with retention of outdated information. While tourism brochures and council websites are beyond the scope of this project, their often negative impact on people researching where they will move is significant. Participants in focus groups conducted for this project indicated that they found it difficult to find information they required through web searches, including after looking through council websites found via Google.

Project-specific insights

The following insights are project-specific and included for RCV information.

8. **Boundary issues** – development of differentiation and identity is sometimes difficult because of demarcation issues between council areas, or State Government districts.

In Seymour, for example, the main networks locally extend into at least three adjacent shires. People considering settling in Seymour often appreciate the wine and food in Strathbogie, the snowfields in Mansfield, the food producers in Murrindindi and the transport proximity to Melbourne, but identifying how to develop those areas nearby as part of the Seymour value proposition presents difficulties, not just for the Mitchell Shire, but also for local tourism boards etc. In the Mallee and Wimmera, there are again a range of attractions and nearby localities that are grouped together in the minds of local people and visitors, but do not fall within common council boundaries.

A common LiveCountry site which covers all areas of the State helps to overcome some of these issues, but further work is required. At present, the LiveCountry site is presented in terms of council areas, but users have indicated that information would be better grouped by town name or by area.

Opportunity: A coherent website that covers the whole State and provides functionality to enable the geographic context of the State to be explored is clearly important to build an understanding and appreciation of the value proposition of any given area.

9. **Council contacts** - Twig built up a huge body of knowledge working with Councils for this project, logging 235 calls and 203 emails to councils in relation to the project – including seeking information and organising visits.

These challenges meant that Twig invested at least twice as much time in gathering and developing information and content for the project as we had estimated; but more importantly, it also meant that we were also forced to produce content later than expected, because of the challenges of making contact and scheduling. We were willing to invest the time in the project, because we are a country-based agency committed to raising the bar for marketing, strategy and communications in rural areas, but thought this issue was worth noting in terms of risks to scoping and delivery of future projects.

Opportunity: There is an opportunity to improve the efficiency of future projects by expediting collaboration with Councils and also by building a network of contacts engaged in and/or accountable for the marketing and communication area.

10. **Council capabilities** – Councils vary significantly in terms of their marketing and communication capability and capacity. Some have excellent communications and/or business development officers while others have vacancies or no staff in these areas. Overall, it is noticeable that staff work in isolation, particularly below the CEO level, with little opportunity to develop their professional skills; understanding best practice evaluation of marketing and communication; and building on ideas and initiatives from other areas / other sectors. There is tremendous potential to rapidly grow the profile of a number of council areas working with staff and/or councillors by increasing council capabilities

Project outcomes

Because it was based on extensive market research, and held accountable through reporting and analysis, the LiveCountry campaign has developed a sound foundation for future campaigns to grow awareness of the benefits and opportunities of moving to rural Victoria.

The campaign has successfully established the LiveCountry brand for information about living in rural Victoria and has also afforded the opportunity to gather a range of insights into future initiatives that will help drive population retention and growth.

The campaign delivered new creative material across 37 council areas, reflecting not only the diversity of stories, opportunities and value propositions across Victoria, but also the need to deliver information relevant to specific locations in order to engage people interested in moving to the country.

After driving 15,000 kilometres across the state, we have delivered content relevant to each RCV council area, using multiple media channels. This content has developed strong engagement through social media channels established for the campaign.

The campaign has yielded valuable insights into the key times when audiences are more likely to engage with messages about moving to the country; the types of content that people wish to see and opportunities to create greater engagement and impact.

A summary of key project outcomes is provided below.

Key Project Outcomes

- Development of successful and growing social media platforms, achieving a reach of more than 361,500 users, delivering more than 13,900 engagements on Facebook and a growing following of more than 550 individuals on Instagram.
- Achievement of a 4.9% click through rate average across the campaign – above industry average, despite strong competition for attention over the March-May period, including the Federal Government campaign and strong tourism campaigns,
- Creation of a successful brand for moving to rural Victoria – LiveCountry
- Creation of a professional curated website www.livecountry.com.au with content from across country Victoria, including every Rural Councils Victoria area, providing case studies and information showcasing opportunities to move to country Victoria and experiences of those that have moved.
- Engagement with employers, residents and community groups across the state
- Development of LiveCountry van, which drove a significant level of campaign engagement and served as a mobile billboard for LiveCountry as it was driven across the State multiple times
- New insights into the drivers of moving to the country, key audiences and audience consumption patterns to help inform future campaigns
- More than 720 users now follow LiveCountry on Instagram or Facebook
- Many businesses profiled have received and increase in custom as a result of the campaign
- Establishment of a bank of engaging content, providing a strong foundation for the development of future content to support campaigns and equip Councils with materials

- Successful demonstration of success of competitions and webinars as effective events
- Development of a much deeper understanding of the huge variability in differentiation, resourcing, strategic workforce demand, in-house capacity and capabilities and need for new residents across the many diverse RCV areas.

Recommendations for next steps

The LiveCountry campaign has developed a strong foundation, building interest and support for moving to rural Victoria. It has thrived and its following has grown as new content has been added – serving to engage audiences with an ongoing, updated stream of information.

Recommendation 1: Expansion of LiveCountry website

The LiveCountry site has been established as a solid foundation for the rural Victorian brand. In order to make the site more effective, and also provide information relevant to people seeking information about investment opportunities in the country, there is an opportunity to enhance the site so that it carries information about jobs, selected homes, investment opportunities across the state. This information needs to be actively sourced and curated by a LiveCountry team, to ensure there is a strong representation of information from employers, real estate agents and councils.

This initiative is required to overcome the invisible jobs issue referenced earlier. There is a disconnect between employers and councils seeking to attract people to rural areas on the one hand, and the people seeking employment and a new lifestyle on the other. This will not be bridged by market forces or by individual council-based interventions. It will only be resolved through a holistic statewide approach where web curators proactively draw in content relating to rural areas from key sources and package it together in an attractive and relevant form for users.

The enhanced site should deliver at each stage of the customer journey for someone interested in moving to the country:

- **Awareness and engagement** – through social media and website stories and images. Ongoing capture of stories, images and videos, as well as redevelopment of existing content, will be required to maintain engagement.
- **Engagement and research** – providing users with current information on job and/or investment opportunities immediately available – for example, a plumber should be able to find where plumbing vacancies are available, what business start up opportunities there are, and what the real estate and education options are like in each location. If this packaged information can be provided to website users, it will be far more effective and persuasive.
- **Conversion** – there is an urgent need to bridge the gulf between website users seeking information about jobs, services etc in specific areas, and the employers,

councils, schools etc in each area. Furthermore, that conversion service mostly needs to be provided out of hours, on weeknights and weekends when many councils are closed. The LiveCountry website should be developed to optimise lead generation, capturing interests of people so they can be connected to relevant people who can provide the information they need. While automation can serve up some of this information, an information triage service delivered by a human is required, to ensure information is relevant and to follow up information requests with people in rural areas.

- **Reinforcement / Ambassadors** – people who choose to move after interacting with LiveCountry can be connected quickly to welcome ceremonies and local services by the LiveCountry information triage service. These people can also be encouraged to be ambassadors for the lifestyle in rural Victoria, building a network of advocacy across the State and incrementally improving perceptions about life in rural Victoria

This enhanced site could be developed with relatively modest resourcing and would make a major difference in providing relevant and targeted information on rural Victoria.

2. Expanded advertising campaign to drive awareness

Changing perceptions of rural Victoria in a significant way will require an advertising campaign to drive engagement in the LiveCountry website. The LiveCountry website and social media platforms are clearly driving engagement, but their reach is small relative to the multi-million dollar campaigns currently committed to tourism-related destination marketing. Increasing campaign spend will significantly enhance the reach and impact of the LiveCountry campaign.

3. Open town / homecoming events

Several communities have already demonstrated strong networking capabilities and the ability to mobilise local people and groups to welcome newcomers. Building on the success of the LiveCountry campaigns competitions, and recognising the power of 'homecoming', there is an opportunity to welcome former residents and also people who have never visited before to an Open Town event, where they join in activities, meet current residents and get to hear about local jobs, business opportunities, schools etc.

To be a success, these events need external event management and marketing support, combined with local initiative and knowledge. A pilot Open Town month, involving four Open Towns holding events on consecutive weekends is recommended, ideally in October (after AFL is completed, before it gets too hot), or March.

By holding four events, economies of advertising, promotion and coordination could be achieved, and four communities in different areas of the State would have the chance to

develop unique programs of attraction. The project would enable each community to rapidly develop a database and social media following of people interested in moving into their community, establishing networks that will help drive change.

4. Workshops with Councils to identify fact-based value proposition and to build marketing and communication capability

Development of clear messages from councils will be vital in building a better public understanding of why they should move to rural Victoria and which area will suit them best. Some councils have very clear strategies and value propositions and do not need this support, but most do not.

Workshops could cover fundamentals of marketing and communication capability, providing opportunities for professional development and networking for council staff.

Enhancing Council capability will help drive improved messaging in rural areas, both for existing and future residents.

Appendix 1 – Campaign analysis

Social media campaigns have achieved a reach of more than 361,500 users when all campaigns are combined, delivering more than 13,900 engagements on Facebook and a growing following on Instagram.

The posts have also delivered significant outcomes for businesses featured in the campaign, with many indicating they had experienced increased enquiries and custom, and numerous conversations online with people considering moving to the country as a result of information shared in posts.

Competitions to win weekend experiences in Port Fairy and Seymour were very successful, attracting many entries, with winners of both events saying they are now more likely to move to rural Victoria, having experienced the areas they visited with insights from their local hosts.

Detailed campaign outcomes are outlined below.

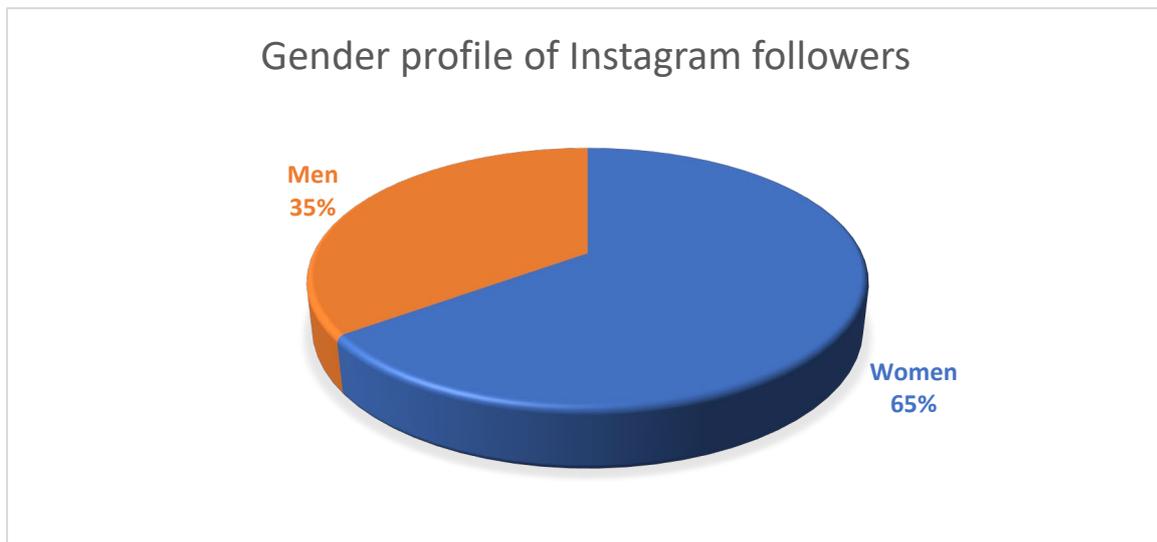
Instagram – promoted post campaign outcomes

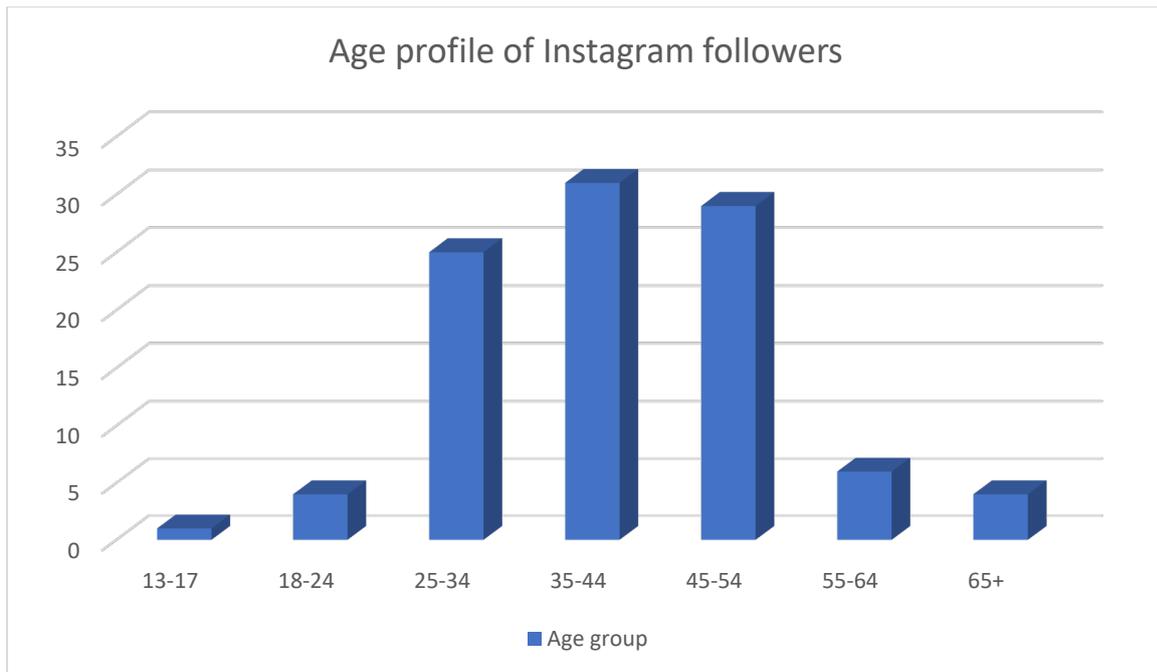
Post	Reach	Gender		Age					
		M	F	18-25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Love Peakhour (pic of car on road)	7728	55%	45%		72%	28%			
Lake Corangamite salt	11,408	55%	45%		59%	41%			
Morning Drive	10,957	56%	44%		53%	42%	5%		
Beach walk	12,287	51%	49%		62%	34%	4%		
Competition promo	4551		100%		53%	29%	18%		
Competition promo	5189	56%	44%		52%	43%	5%		
Tree avenue	5539		100%		53%	25%	22%		
Montage	4514	47%	53%	13%	33%	29%	20%	4%	1%
Paradise	5535	27%	73%	6%	21%	30%	28%	11%	3%
Leaf	6,003	36%	64%	18%	39%	19%	14%	6%	3%
Total	73,711								

Instagram audience profile

There is a high degree of relevance in the Instagram audience with 98% of followers being Australian and 71% of followers from Melbourne – and the majority of the remainder being from regional Victorian cities. An outline of audience gender and age profile is included in the charts below.

Overall, this profile fits strongly with the group targeted by LiveCountry, with the majority of the audience attracted living in Melbourne or regional cities, aged 25-55 and including a reasonable balance of genders.





Facebook

Facebook posts have been viewed reached 101,000 between March and May, with strong levels of engagement, along a similar line to engagement with Instagram posts – stories about real estate and people doing jobs that others could identify with (teacher, bricklayer etc)

Facebook has performed well to engage and inspire action (encouraging viewers to watch posted videos, visit the LiveCountry website and reading stories online). This has translated to a greater awareness of the value of living in country Victoria, but a far more sustained campaign would be required to achieve changes in perceptions.

Analysis of successful ads indicated people were more likely to click on advertisements that offered them an interesting real estate proposition, or a story with an image of someone featured. Posts with landscapes, streetscapes and facts tended to achieve fewer hits on Facebook than images of people linked to stories (ie not just random pics of people in the street, profile pics). However, pics without people still generated strong engagement when paired with relevance to the timing of the post (eg text of 'good morning' paired with pic of a sunrise).

Overall, it was clear that posts performed far better when shared by people who had strong social media followings.

The process of managing posts individually, running them for short periods and assessing their impact and engagement worked very well. This meant we were able to significantly improve levels of engagement in the campaign, by analysing the posts which were achieving the most cut through and allocating more advertising spend to those areas. Active, daily management of the campaign was critical to success.

Facebook campaign reach and engagement

Post	Reach	Engagement
Narrawong	1685	1,984
Goroke Rodeo	2159	1900
Amphi pub	6113	374
Ampi pub 2	6093	511
Amphi pub 3	8,094	323
Otway road	7,948	99
Mortlake Butcher	1,773	109
Lake Corangamite	11,504	68
Edenhope salads	1,908	103
Edenhope salads 2	1,553	264
Ocean near Portland	3,492	745
Morning view	10,860	69
Seymour berries	5,932	384
Moyston General Store	8,449	38
Port Fairy Vid	18,183	4,511
Competition 1	7,858	1,404
Wonthaggi event	439	206
Marlo beach	11,507	75
Comp boost	4,414	43
Comp boost 2	4,696	17
Bright post	4,848	41
Sport – netball training	1,108	215
Montage	4219	90
Yack pies	1100	233
Comp 2	4224	484
Paradise	5132	283
Nhill glamping	1172	268
Benalla leaf	5,490	22
Kilcunda cafe	1,758	37
LiveCountry Facebook reach campaign	124,991	
Jasmine – Hamilton artist	2,277	418
Mick McLean	3,444	158

Jasmine – Hamilton artist 2	1,924	176
Made – Multicultural food	1,514	39
Total at 3/6	287,861	13,981

The total reach was considerably enhanced by a dedicated reach-focused campaign which achieved a reach of 124,991 in (how long). While this reach increased awareness of the LiveCountry campaign, we primarily focused spend on building engagement. The reach of 162,870 achieved in campaigns focused on engagement resulted in engagement of 13,981 – a Click Through Rate of 4.9%. This rate is very strong, and well ahead of the performance of SEM (see below).

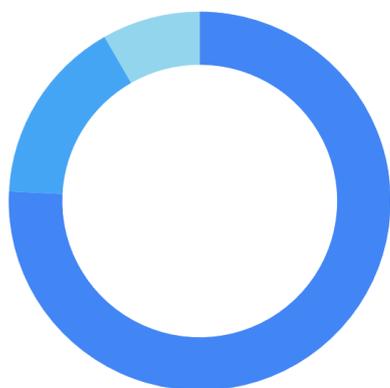
Website www.livecountry.com.au

A number of important insights were gained through analysis of traffic to the LiveCountry website.

More than three in every four users of the site as accessing it on their mobile phone (76%) followed by 15% on desktop and the remainder on a tablet.

Devices used to access LiveCountry site

Sessions by device



Mobile

75.8%

Desktop

15.9%

Tablet

8.3%

Last 90 days ▾

[MOBILE OVERVIEW](#) >

Analysis of usage patterns over the past 30 days and the past 90 days indicates some interesting trends in relation to usage. While patterns are skewed over the 90 day period, as promoted content takes hold on different days, it is clear that Sunday morning 10-11am has been the time when the most people are engaged in the site, followed by Saturday morning 8-9am

People are also looking closely at the site at key moments in the working week, when people traditionally seek solace in thoughts of an alternative working life – Monday mornings commuting to work, Monday lunchtimes, Wednesday nights (known as hump day) and Fridays, as people start imagining what they can do with their weekends.

The emphasis of promotions on weekdays rather than weekends over the past 30 days has meant a stronger concentration of engagement before and after work on weekdays.

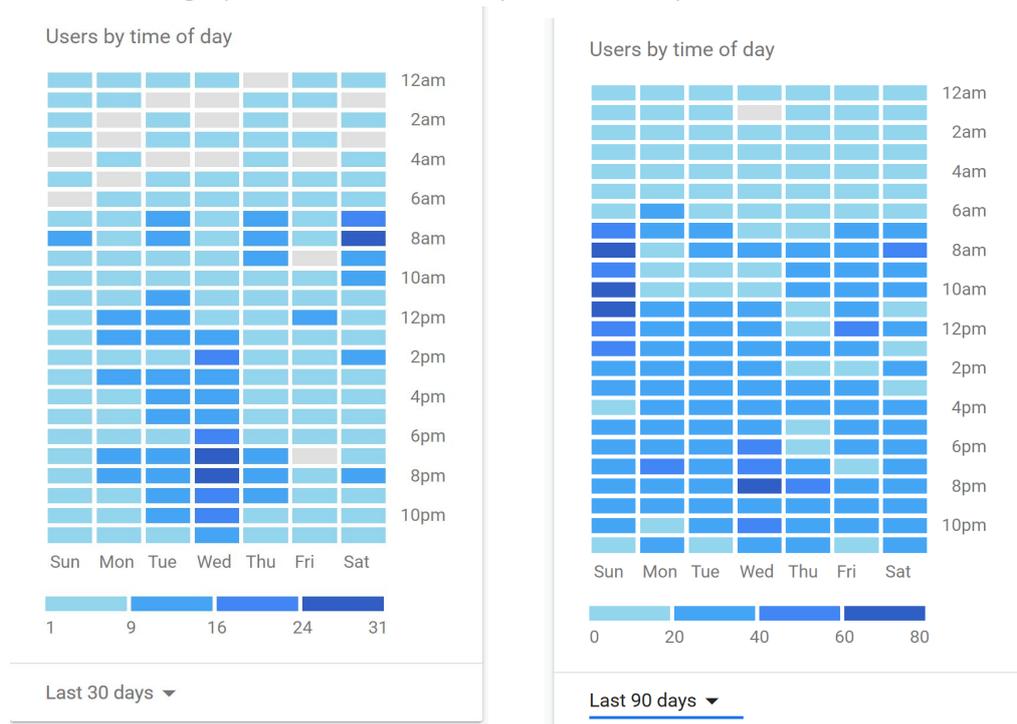
Usage patterns over 30 and 90 days are presented on the following page.

Website Content observations

There were a number of insights from development of content through the campaign:

- Posts which were shared by people with significant social media followings tended to generate a strong response – unsurprisingly. This indicates the importance of influencers in working with Council in key areas to drive interest in moving to their area.
- Readers were also strongly drawn to stories about bargain homes and real estate. These accounted for four of the top 10 stories – and are clearly part of the appeal of moving to the country.
- Stories that invited the reader into the story 'The life we all want to live' / 'the teacher you wish you had' / 'I'd never dreamed of owning a pub til I met' tended to have higher readership than third person stories. However, further research would be required to understand if this style of story tends to be preferred, or whether it is just a matter of the material or of social influencers.
- Posts about work were popular. Tradies who had moved were hard to find, but there was a strong positive response to a story about a bricklayer who moved to Mansfield and found lots of work – with at least one person saying online that they had decided to now move to the country because there was plenty of work.

Website usage patterns over 30 days and 90 days.



SEM

We implemented a pulsed Search Engine Marketing (SEM) campaign, using Google Adwords from March to May.

Careful management of search terms, and 'pulsing' of the campaign so that it was not always on ensured that we achieved reasonable results through the SEM campaign.

SEM campaigns delivered 80,373 impressions (the number of times the ad was served to users) and delivered a click rate of 1,067. This represents a click through rate (CTR) of 1.33%.

This CTR is within an acceptable range by industry standards and the cost per click was lower than the tourism industry average, However, it was significantly less successful than social media marketing and consequently, the majority of the campaign was focused on building social media engagement and impact.

There are a number of likely reasons for SEM having a lower success rate than social marketing:

1. For SEM, LiveCountry is competing for generic search terms relating to country Victoria with a range of other campaigns at a Council, regional tourism and State Government level. Googling "Move to Country Victoria" on 3 June delivers the following advertisers:

2. LiveCountry was a startup brand marketing an idea. Industry click through rates for a holiday, a sale of discounted products or a targeted service are likely to have much higher CTRs than a behaviour change / perception change campaign. This is particularly significant because the market research showed there were strongly-held negative perceptions about the country and a relatively small proportion of people currently willing to move to the country – making it much harder to target audiences.
3. LiveCountry succeeded because of its focus on relevant, engaging content. It is cheaper to engage people who want to move to the country with this type of content, because they want relevant, specific stories, and fewer may be using general search terms. Market research conducted before the campaign indicated that many were seeking information within their own networks, rather than searching for information online. As a result, most of the focus of the LiveCountry campaign was on specific, localised stories which would be shared by people with local or personal links to the story and which would be picked up by others interested in those areas. This strategy appears to be supported by the effectiveness of social media reach relative to generic campaigning.
4. The LiveCountry campaign was run concurrently with the process of generating content relating to living in the country. Because of the need to generate specific local content for regional areas, this took time and the website was far richer in content in April/May than in March. This may also explain higher levels of interest later in the campaign. We realised this would be the case, and therefore weighted advertising spend so that it was significantly heavier in the latter part of the campaign.
5. The effectiveness of SEM was much higher during key periods when Victorians are thinking about the country. Peak click through efficiency for both SEM and social media marketing was achieved in the week of April 17-23 over the Easter weekend. Victorians traditionally focus on camping and visiting rural Victoria over the Easter weekend, and clearly this was a peak time to build on interest in moving to rural Victoria. Likewise website usage showed a much higher visitation rate during Fridays, weekends and Monday mornings.

Overall content insights

During the course of the campaign we analysed a range of hardcopy and online materials developed for visitors and people thinking of moving to rural Victoria, sourced from Council offices, Tourist information centres and online.

Analysis of available material online and in hardcopy form at shire offices and tourist information services indicated:

1. Low frequency of updating – many hardcopy materials were several years old and older materials typically did not seem to be thrown out – they were just left out for distribution. Many Councils appear to work on a brochure development system which is only triggered when the previous brochure has run out of stock.
2. Recreation of legacy documents – When brochures had recently run out, many Councils were planning to redevelop a version of the past brochure, rather than start from scratch identifying what materials will be most effective for key audiences.
3. Little audience evaluation or measurement – there appears to be little work undertaken to define and research the needs of audiences before producing materials for print and online materials. There also appears to be little use of effective measures to identify the value and impact of producing materials.
4. Many brands, many overlays – material is produced at the State, regional, local council and local attraction level – meaning there are significant overlaps in the way information is presented, and some confusion in the style of materials presented. Most information is tourism focused, and usually falls into categories of booklets (usually A5 size), brochures (usually DL), flyers (usually A4) and enhanced maps (folding page, multiple sizes).
5. Regionality – many councils and tourism information services only provide information on their Shire's attractions / destinations. Others present hundreds of different sized, shape and designed brochures, featuring regions, shires and destinations both within Victoria and interstate. Staff do their best to group information under categories on brochure racks, but the profusion and variety of information makes it difficult for staff and visitors alike to easily find relevant information.
6. There is no network of support between rural locations, to strengthen visibility of other rural destinations and emphasise the value of visiting / living rural, as opposed to better-resourced campaigns from regional centres, which tend to hold prominence both online and in hard copy displays. Rural councils don't sell each other very well or very often. Given the fact that visitors have already expressed a willingness to explore rural locations by visiting a rural council website or office/ tourist bureau, and given also that the proportion of funds spent on promoting rural areas is a fraction of that spent on regional cities and Melbourne, there appears to be an opportunity missed in terms of promoting the diversity of landscapes, communities and experiences in other rural locations.
7. Differentiation is too frequently generic. Because of the difficulties in contacting all councils, we were only able to work with a few to have discussions on relevant and fact-based differentiation. Every rural council area can lay claim to offering lower property prices, relative tranquillity, less traffic than an urban area, close knit communities and friendly people. Of these factors, we can build in evidence of property prices and anecdotal evidence of traffic times, but councils are not yet effectively articulating key reasons why residents should move to their area rather

than any other. Market research showed that people interested in moving to the country clearly wanted information relevant to the area they wanted to move to, but they wanted facts – in particular around jobs. The quality of education and health services is very important to people choosing where they will live, but harder to quantify in terms of numbers without artificially disadvantaging rural communities. For example, quoting ATAR results works well for Corangamite, where we can point to the achievements of students at Apollo Bay Secondary College; but in other areas, we need to tell stories about the value of an holistic educational experience, because the local schools have lower ATAR scores, even though they may offer excellent holistic education experiences.

Similarly, with health we know that rural communities already have a higher burden of disease and a lower age of mortality than urban communities, but this does not necessarily mean the health services are poorer, in fact they may be superior.

Identifying better ways to gather evidence and tell stories, rather than relying on generic statements is key in order to attract more people to rural areas.

Overall, there is an opportunity to work with councils to develop a much more strategic approach to population attraction to identify:

- Type of jobs available
- Target groups for attraction
- Differentiators relevant to that area that would matter to the workers who are needed for available jobs
- Differentiators that make an area stand out from others.