

10 easy steps to promoting trails in your area



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1. WORK FROM YOUR COMMUNITY OUTWARDS

Experienced walking organisations all agree that you need to get your local community on board as advocates for your new walk. Make sure your key influencers in your community know all about the walk, from its starting point to special features along the way. Talk to pub and B & B owners, bus hire and taxi companies, the local churches, Macra na Feirme, teachers, local special interest groups.

2. BUILD THE BUZZ WITH A GOOD WEBSITE

Remember the web is a visual medium. Capture people's hearts and minds with great pictures, engaging text and lots of news about upcoming events. You're promoting experiences so consider adding video clips to showcase your beautiful walk.

3. THERE ARE SO MANY BENEFITS – TAKE YOUR PICK!

Depending on who your audience is, you can feature and describe the benefits of your walk to attract different groups of people. For families it's a great day out together; for others it's a chance to get fit and healthy; for nature lovers, a walk gives them a chance to discover the landscape at their own pace. For local tourism businesses, walking brings visitors and revenue to your area all year round.

4. IT'S TIME FOR STRONG LANGUAGE!

What is the difference between a tourism product and a tourism experience? A tourism product is what you buy. A tourism experience is what you remember.

This calls for a different type of language and imagery. Here is an example of a product-based description: a 5 k looped walk suitable for all types of walkers. An *experience-based* description: The Glenrua Trail brings you from the mountains to the sea, along deeply wooded paths, finishing at the quaint village of Glencarrig.

5. ICONIC IMAGES

What are the most famous images associated with your area? Is there a wellknown historical monument, or a captivating view of a mountain or lake that is immediately recognisable to visitors and local people? Use well known images to promote your walk because these are the ones that are most instantly recognisable to your target audience. This helps you to promote the area more easily because people feel it's already very familiar.

6. THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLACES

Create a sense of place through the people you choose to help you promote your new walk. If you are lucky enough to have a great walking guide, a local historian or a storyteller who can enthuse people about the walk, then this is your very best spokesperson to work with local and national media.

7. WORKING WITH THE PRESS

Create strong links with the press – including freesheets - by getting to know your local journalists and editors, their deadlines and their particular news interests. Make their jobs easier by providing them with good quality pictures and captions. A good picture has a focal point, so lots and lots of people in a picture is not as powerful as a small group taken in a location that is recognisable and shows off the walk very well. Announce events in the community diary.

8. TALK RADIO!

Talking about walks on the radio is very much a trend so approach your local radio stations and offer to do an interview about your new walk. Time it to coincide with upcoming holiday periods when the radio stations – and audiences – are more receptive to features about leisure activities. Have some stories that are interesting and memorable about the walk. People remember stories long after they have forgotten facts.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA – A GREAT FREE MARKETING CHANNEL

Choose one or two social media tools and do them well. Consider setting up a Facebook account for each trail so that you can build up a group of followers and extend the use of the trail. It can also be used to search for people in the neighbourhood you might like to become friends of the trail.

10. WORK SMART – IDENTIFY YOUR KEY SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Experienced walking trail promoters work closely with Fáilte Ireland and other tourism support organisations to get their message out there. Fáilte Ireland will provide you with great marketing support, maps and route descriptions. The success of your work will rest on how well those materials are used and disseminated in your community. Also consider your local Sports Partnership, an organisation that supports people participating in sport, activity and physical exercise. They have an excellent database of people in your county who have an interest in engaging with physical activity.