

Couple launch luxury travel guide for Baby Boomers

By Georgann Yara

SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

David Porter's dream to retire at the age of 50 and spend the rest of his years traveling with his wife, Carol, came true.

But an unforeseen wake-up call came when their investments took a hit in October 2008, and the Porters lost \$1 million in the market.

"The recession decimated our assets. The plan we built to be able to survive till the age of 100 broke," David said.

The couple knew they needed to jump-start a second career but being greeters at a big box wasn't appealing.

Instead, they drew inspiration from their passion for traveling and in February started the Roaming Boomers, an online luxury travel guide aimed at Baby Boomers like themselves.

And the Porters have found a niche in the social media world, a venue traditionally reserved for entrepreneurs who are the children of Baby Boomers.

"With the opportunity of building a new breed of online travel magazine, perhaps we could be a trailblazer," David said. "That's the adventure we're on."

The website is a multimedia resource composed of written reviews, video, slide shows and blogs by the Porters. They inform properties ahead of time about their visit and purpose. The Porters disclose whenever a venue pays for their stay or gives them a special rate. Sometimes, properties don't comp them at all.

Whether a venue contributes to their stay does not affect the review, David said. There was one negative experience

at a San Diego hotel that was part of a large international chain. The Porters wrote about the small room, thin walls and very loud band playing nearby. Although the place might go over well with 20-somethings, the Roaming Boomers focuses on their parents' preferences.

"We think about what would appeal most to us as Baby Boomers," David said. "We walk a tightrope. We understand, at the end of the day, if we don't have the trust of our subscribers, we might as well pack it up and go home."

The website attracts 10,000 visitors each month, and there are 1,500 followers on Twitter and 500 on Facebook.

The Porters have targeted a demographic that is financially equipped to enjoy a bit of exclusivity, said Denise Seomin, public-relations director for the Phoenician.

"The Baby Boomers have discretionary income as well as the time to travel and experience. It's a perfect fit," Seomin said.

Seomin worked with the Porters for the Boomers' summer vacation series. She said they are willing to do activities that are off the beaten path, which is a plus.

"With Dave and Carol, you're getting a full package, not just photos or a story. It's important because they can bring the experience across much more effectively," Seomin said.

The Porters' adventurous streak is one shared by many Baby Boomers and one they often indulge when traveling, said Kim Cole, director of public relations for the Four Seasons Resort in Scottsdale.



DEIRDRE HAMILL/THE REPUBLIC

Carol and David Porter's travel guide is a multimedia resource for Baby Boomers.

The Roaming Boomers

Where: Scottsdale.

Employees: Zero.

Interesting stat: Baby Boomers are the wealthiest generation in U.S. history, collectively earning \$3.7 trillion, according to the economics-research firm McKinsey Global Institute.

Details: theroamingboomers.com.

"They've hit on a great niche," she said. "It also speaks to the growing presence of blogs and other Web-based outlets that give many people an opportunity to join in an area that wasn't possible in the past."

David started his Michigan mortgage business in 1991, and after retiring, he and Carol moved to Scottsdale in 2006.

A few years prior, David read an article about blogging. At that time, David wrote a column in the company newsletter he sent to clients.

"I had no idea what blogging was. We were already blogging, by snail mail anyway," he said.

Soon after he started connecting with clients via e-mail and a website, 900 of 1,200 clients moved into an online relationship. That began what he calls "a love affair with social media."

The pair quickly embraced the technology and caught on with ease. It wasn't long before they were active Facebook users.

"For someone like me who is so social, it's a dream come true," Carol said.

After the stock market bottomed out and the couple sought a solution, the Porters attended a blogging conference in Las Vegas, where they met other bloggers and travel journalists. Already comfortable with their computer and proficient in social media, a lightbulb went on.

"We looked at ourselves and said, 'We can do that.' We went home to make the website, and it has snowballed ever since," Carol said.

Last year, the couple were asked to present at the BlogWorld and New Media Expo in Las Vegas.

"What is most rewarding are the friends we have made along the way. It's just wonderful, knowing that we are really helping people," Carol said.

David agreed and said he enjoys being able to use the creative side of his brain in his new career.

"Being able to build this network and make friends all over the world, they become part of our crowd," he said. "We always hear, 'I'm living vicariously through you.'"