

An aerial photograph of a large cruise ship docked at a port. The ship is white with a red stripe and a red funnel. It is docked at a pier with a covered walkway. In the background, a densely populated city is built on a hillside, with mountains visible in the distance under a clear sky.

ELSE

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

An 8 week itinerary for optimising
digital performance

For Publication

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Executive Summary

With ambitious plans to grow their fleet, Fred. Olsen had cruise spaces to fill. To fill these spaces, they needed to acquire new customers and continue to increase the number of returning customers. Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines recognised digital bookings had the potential to offer much more to their business, and they identified a clear opportunity to improve the digital experience and drive the targeted growth.

To Fred. Olsen, not all cruising is the same. While the trend is for ships to get bigger and busier, they are proud to sail their own course — to do things the “Olsen Way” — with smaller ships and hand-crafted itineraries, they genuinely put people, elegance and simplicity at the heart of the experience for their guests.

With a much wider-scale redesign in mind for the future, we defined a tactical improvement programme over four two-week sprints — tackling problems and improvements with lower complexity but disproportionately higher gains. This included re-designing the navigation structure and visual design, re-claiming the homepage for cruising (after a disproportionate focus on customer service and reassurance during the earlier stages of the pandemic), improving data capture opportunities, adding more excitement to landing pages and much more.

17 redesigned modules went live between December 2020 and February 2021. The results have exceeded all original objectives. While tourism has been one of the worst affected industries by the Covid-19 pandemic, key performance indicators for the project show **cruise bookings** are **up 133%**.

****Redacted confidential data****

Launch date:

January/February 2021

****Redacted confidential data****

An overview of the project

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines prides itself on its attention to detail and delivering an exceptional on-board experience for its guests. Satisfaction ratings are routinely over 90% and they have the highest guest return rate in the UK cruise market. (Source YouGov 2019). Looking after guests is all about giving them an experience that allows them to relax and enjoy their journey, without unnecessary interruptions.

Our brief was to redesign the experience — on desktop, tablets and on mobile — to reflect in digital Fred. Olsen's same attention to detail, to attract a wider audience, and to provide newcomers with better tools to choose their cruise.

This project focused on the first phase of development of the existing website that had to integrate with the existing booking engine (Atcore). We are already a long way into the next phase of the complete customer experience redesign, but we will not be presenting that piece here today.

Key objectives

1. Increase bookings made from the website.
2. Promote discovery across the site to engage people who have cruised, but not with Fred.
3. Increase data capture through brochure downloads, newsletter sign-ups and account registrations.
4. Increase referrals to telephone reservation agents from website.

COVID-19: An influence like no other

All cruising stopped during the pandemic. As a result of COVID-19, the Travel & Tourism sector suffered losses of almost USD 4.5 trillion, with its global contribution to GDP declining by 49.1% compared to 2019.

In 2019, stories of Norovirus on cruise ships were already impacting attitudes to cruise travel, and then Covid-19 hit: "Cruise ships were a hotbed of transmission during the early stages of the pandemic, particularly the Diamond Princess. Coverage of this and other ships' outbreaks has taken its toll."

In a poll, nearly 45% of interviewees had less belief than before the pandemic that cruise lines are transparent and honest about safety or health issues. Respondents were also fearful of going on a cruise, with 47% saying they don't trust cruise lines to look after them if something goes wrong. 67% of people are less willing to cruise as a result of the pandemic, while 69% said they feel less positive about cruising now. [\[1\]](#)

In this challenging landscape, where other cruise lines were retreating and divesting their fleet, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines saw it as an opportunity and bought two new ships, which in turn increased their capacity and had ambitious growth targets for the business. As the new normal continued to take shape, it was clear that digital had a major — and so-far under-mobilised — role to play in delivering on those strategic goals.

Design solutions for business goals

By re-designing the site to increase attractiveness and engagement with the new to Fred. Olsen audience, reducing friction and drop off in the booking process, optimising the site for SEO, and leaning on more targeted digital advertising, we helped the business move towards their customer acquisition targets.

The work centred around three different browsing behaviours. Before designing our solutions, we assessed how well each was supported through the end-to-end website journey.

1. The surgical strike: People who know exactly what they're looking for, and who focus on booking and prices. Here, the role of the site is to facilitate their booking, while providing clear information.

2. Browse with intent: People know the type of cruise they want but are open to suggestion. Lateral movement through the site becomes very important — to open up a range of options to inspire them.

3. Open discovery: People who browse without a clear focus. This need was least covered by the existing site — where the purpose is to demonstrate the breadth of offer and help people consider Fred. Olsen as their next cruise choice.

Each of the four sprints had their own focus —

Sprint 1: Entry points and visual language

Using the browsing behaviours as our start point, we assessed the current Fred. Olsen booking journey against other travel and transactional sites. The aim was to find areas that felt sub-optimal and bring them up to and beyond benchmark in an achievable way. This was not about creating new functionality, but about bringing an objective view on how the current content serves the needs of 3 different ways of finding and buying a cruise.

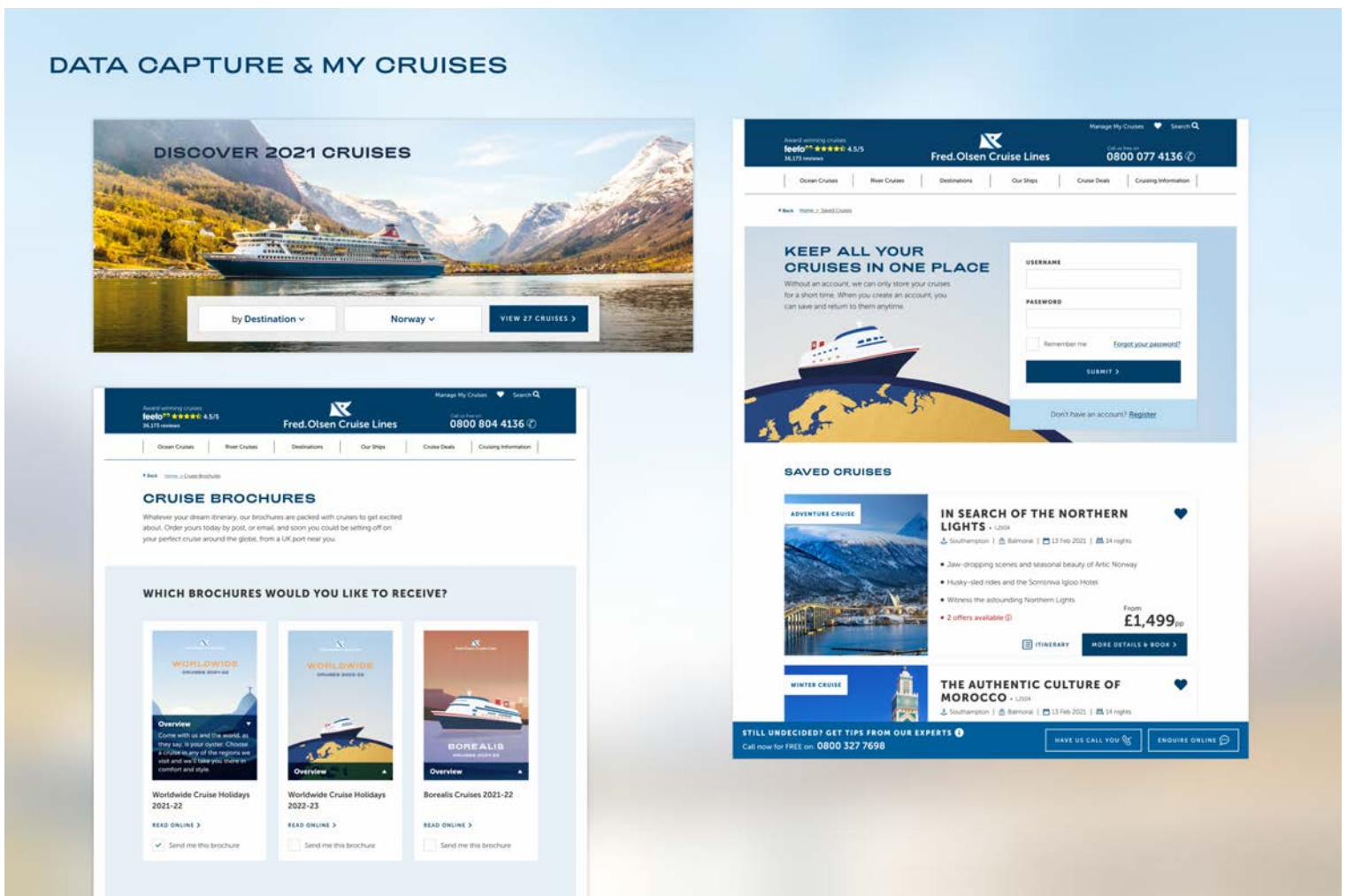
By making the Cruise List module scannable and more visually exciting, we wanted to increase engagement, provide greater possibilities for data capture by encouraging saving and account creation, and improve contact opportunities. A cruise collection grid was introduced to provide enticing themes, to present dynamic information, and to encourage discovery into their bespoke, hand-crafted itineraries.

Lastly, with each increment we looked to enhance the visual language, rather than use the existing design system that often made information difficult to scan. We developed a type scale and link language that unified all old and new components and helped to modernise the site. In this first sprint, we simplified and introduced a more engaging cruise collection grid to promote discovery.

Sprint 2: Making it easier to search and book

With Key Objective 2 in focus, we made search more prominent on the homepage, and introduced a more conversational tone, to encourage further exploration. To drive phone bookings from the web, we introduced a sticky CTA bar — making contact as easy and seamless as possible. To deliver Key Objective 4, we streamlined and reduced the friction in the sign-up process. Our approach to the brochure page was again about simplifying and future-proofing it to encourage interaction.

Many users enter through or quickly navigate to one of the key collection pages such as 2021 Cruises. So, we made these and other collection pages much stickier, more engaging and better at allowing users to browse and discover cruises.

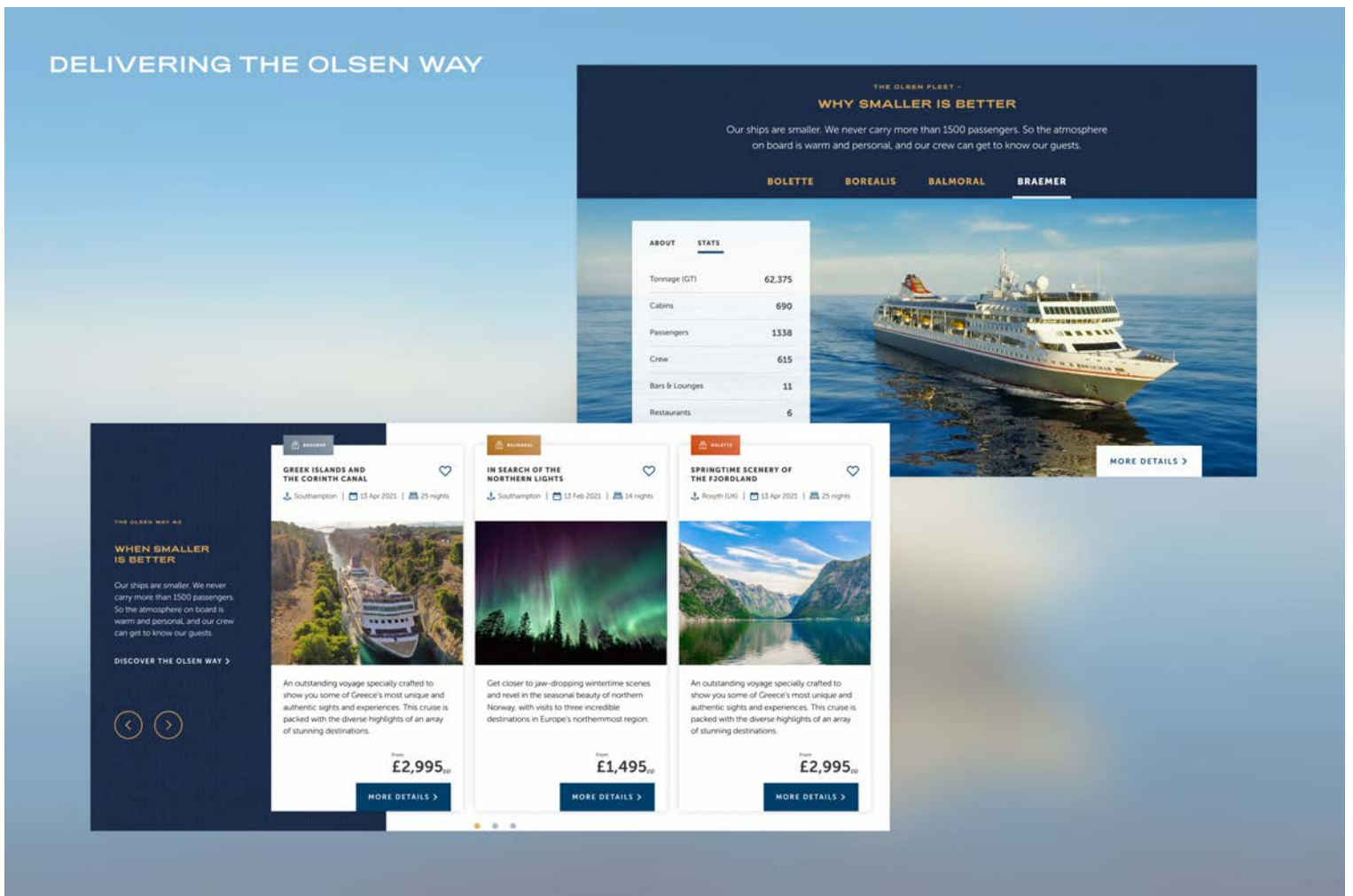


To maximise data capture opportunities, we made more prominent the benefits of the saved cruises function and encouraged registration to this and the Fred. Olsen newsletter. Because of the significance to the business — having a wider audience with which to interact — we wanted all roads to lead a sign up. Currently, the newsletter sign up doesn't create a profile in the CRM data base. But Fred. Olsen were migrating to a new

CRM system, so we were able to design ahead by making sure that saves across the site and signups created additional benefits for the use — like being the first to know about new sailings or deals..

Sprint 3: Embodying The Olsen Way

To communicate the unique aspects of what makes them different and why people should cruise with Fred. Olsen, they have a set of ten principles that together represent The Olsen Way. From hand-crafted itineraries, a focus on scenic cruising and smaller ships, there are a number of compelling factors that differentiate Fred Olsen from other mainstream market alternatives. The aim of our work was to communicate these principles within the experience so that they are felt and can be recalled rather than just stated.



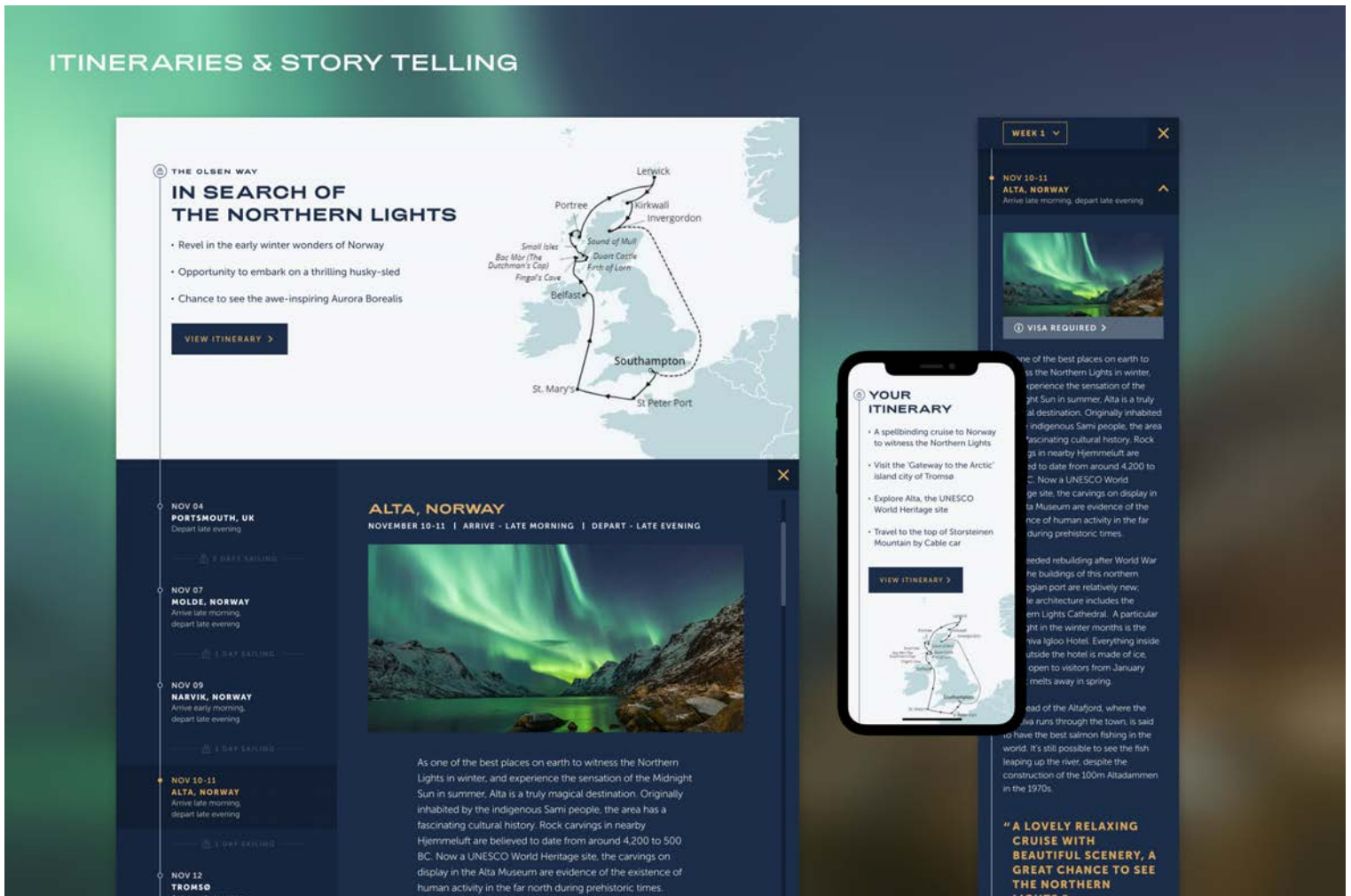
Fred. Olsen's ships are a unique aspect of their offer and embody The Olsen Way. In this sprint work, we really brought the individual aspects of the ships to the fore as a key selling point. In the My Cruise section, we mobilised existing assets to better display cruise highlights, with the option to deep dive — helping build the sense of anticipation and excitement for the journey to come.

Sprint 4: Elevating the role of the itinerary

Previously the site navigation didn't cater for 'browsing' behaviour, was inconsistent across desktop and mobile, and didn't present easy access to the more commonly accessed pages. Using the insights we had — from benchmarking other sites and site analytics — we were able to be considered and user-led in how we restructured the site menu, reduced the number of links, introduced hierarchy and greatly improved usability.

To combat visitors having to dig for information, we elevated the itinerary and enhanced the storytelling within the page through a drawer feature on each cruise page.

The sense of immersive interaction we developed presents existing content and imagery in an intuitive and rich experience that lets users really explore and get a feel for a cruise. A timeline encourages exploration of the itinerary, making it clearer when the ship is in port and for how long.



External factors

Our approach to the project as a set of two-week design sprints meant we worked divergently for the first week, at the end of which we discussed priorities and areas of focus before delivering against these in the

final week. It was a collegiate process - carried out over Zoom - that brought business insights together with user experience and technical feasibility.

During this time we were preparing for the annual post-Christmas sales window, where many of the next year and year in advance cruises are sold.

As we consider the significant improvements in the site's performance post-launch, we should consider how the easing of travel restrictions around the world might have impacted user-engagement and appetite for booking. While the re-opening of travel must be seen as a contributory factor, ultimately the long lead time of cruise booking and the fact that 'back in service' dates for cruises were not, at this point, confirmed means we can largely discount it. And the improvements year on year stand up against pre-pandemic figures.

Results

Key Objective 1: Increasing online bookings

In just nine months, online bookings have risen substantially. This is well on the way to delivering the desired increase in online bookings. **Redacted confidential data**

Key Objective 2: Search bar usage doubled

By redesigning and giving more importance to the search bar we have doubled its usage, helping users find cruises that are relevant to them faster. We have also seen pages per session increase by 20%, session durations increase by 44% and bounce rate decrease by 23%. supporting our aims of making the site more engaging and encouraging users to stay on the site and discover more cruises and collections.



Changes to the cruise listings and the surfacing of engaging imagery prolonged users time on the page and better options for discovery and lateral movement encouraged more page views and reduced exits. Bounce rate on pages with the new search results listing layout have improved by 16%, and bounce rate for the whole site has improved by 13%. Number of pages has increased by 16%.

Key Objective 3: Sign-ups made simpler

Streamlining and reducing friction in the sign-up process has seen a reduction in the bounce rate of 54%, with required sign-up page time coming down by 2 minutes. Registration traffic in Saved Cruises is up by 12%.

Redacted confidential data

Recognition from the business

Of course, you can't iterate yourself into a market-leader and after the work was completed in February 2021, Fred. Olsen recognised that a step-back was needed to ensure we could now leap ahead, rather than continuing to make small changes.

It was decided to invest in a Vision project that we ran for 8 weeks during May/June to define a user journey through the entire web estate — from consideration, through to booking and into pre-cruise build up. This shows the belief Fred. Olsen have in continuing the insight-driven design work started during this project.

A response from our client

"This project has over-delivered ROI for our business and opened a digital door to further growth in the cruise market. Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines has a unique approach to cruising and we are now moving towards an experience online that truly reflects our character, and which appeals to our most important audience"

- Alicia Coghlan, Head of Marketing | Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines

"It was vital for us to find a digital partner who could both match our ambitions for the business and had the design process that could align our stakeholders. In this focused piece of work, you've shown what user-centred design can do for Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines — having a significant impact on revenue at a challenging time — and we now look forward to expanding our vision across the digital estate."

- Ben Williams, Head of Digital | Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines