Assessment Findings & Suggestions
Onoville Marina, New York

July 2007

Destination Development.inc.

Community assessment and ideas to increase tourism spending
In July of 2007, a Community Tourism Assessment of the Onoville Marina area in Cattaraugus County, New York was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public restrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the "Community Assessment," we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were "secretly shopped."

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the "Marketing Effectiveness Assessment."

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a "new" area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:
      1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
      2) Websites
      3) Brochures and printed materials
      4) Publicity (articles)
      5) Word of mouth - the most effective means
We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, read travel articles, and

looked at AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further away. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a "list" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, boating, etc., etc.), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, THEN your diversionary activities. Would to go to Anaheim, California if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, way-finding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining,

shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It's important to note that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not

just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises – otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash – often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors – providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these – but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local

economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it – you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as the attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM
1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do "after hours" while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or "diversions," not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will

do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the "live music-theater capital of the world." This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary "lure" is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

3. Becoming the destination
To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or a vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, "Pinch yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent." This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you'll see that in being unique, you'll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian "village" including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the "critical mass" in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a $650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less then 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revital-

izing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed "Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan" builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the "development" portion of the plan or the "how to get there" program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with it's own "to do list."

Finally, there's the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an "action plan" as opposed to a "strategic plan." You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:
1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work, and visit.

First Impressions Really Are Lasting Impressions

When you're on the road looking for a place to eat, how often have you said, "That looks like a nice place to eat"? If you are like most people, you just made a judgment about the restaurant and its food by the building's general appeal and its exterior signage. A full 70 percent of visitor sales at hotels, retail shops, golf courses, restaurants and wineries come from first impressions or curb appeal.

Most travelers make judgments based on appearance - sometimes it's the only guide they have when it comes to making a decision about places to stay, eat or shop.

When it comes to "impulse buys" - stopping along the way - the decision is usually made within a few seconds. The first decision point: Does this place have something we want? Number 2: Does the overall impression make us want to stop? Number 3: Does the signage pull us in? Number 4: Is it inviting (the actual entry) and is it obvious that it's open?

Would you eat at the restaurant in the top photo? What does its appearance tell you about its quality or the kind of food they serve?

Just as the outside of a restaurant influences travelers' opinions about the quality of the food served inside, entryways and gateways create the first impression for a community, a residential subdivision, a downtown, a park, a shopping district, or a marina. Quality entries and landscaping convey that you are a quality community or business, and that impression increases the perceived value.

What is your first impression of the town of Lakeport (bottom right) from their signage along the highway? Would you take the next exit? Notice the dead trees in the background, the trash and weeds along the highway, the poor quality of the sign.
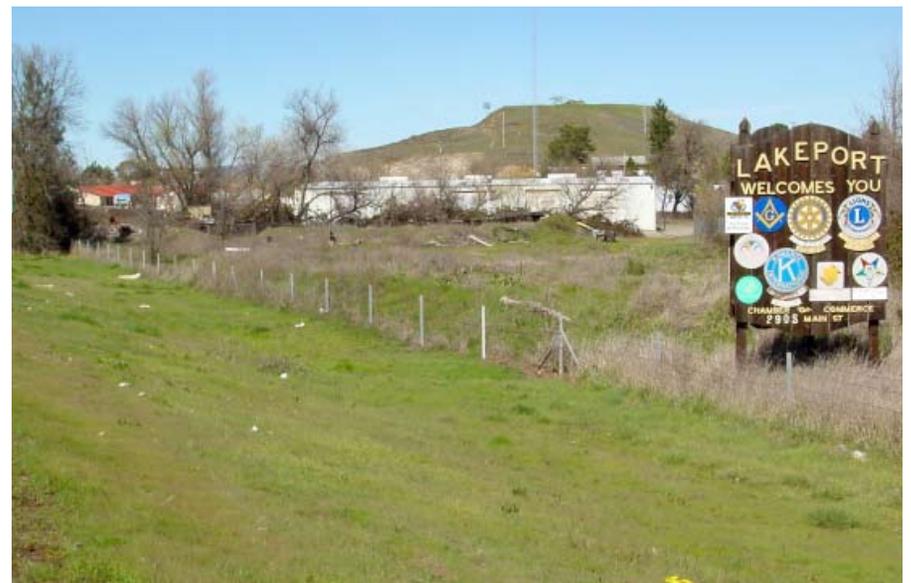
From Lakeport's entry sign on the previous page, would you be surprised to learn that these photos are all taken in downtown Lakeport? It's a beautiful community, but its gateway sells it short. The gateway sign actually creates an impression of a poor quality town, where visitors wouldn't be interested in stopping, or spending time or money.

Every community in Cattaraugus County needs to look at the location of entry signs - as a community or a business. First impressions really are lasting impressions. Visitors will almost always judge "the book by the cover." This also applies to the Onoville Marina and the retail shops and other amenities in the marina area.

Suggestion:

Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression, never at the city or county limits.

The South Valley sign is a nice sign, in a good location. (top right) Suggestion: Maintain it once a week during the peak season, keeping it clean and weed-free. Perhaps a Boy Scout project?

Curb appeal can account for 70% of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, golf courses. Based on our first impressions, it looks as though the area is really struggling or too highly seasonal for businesses to sustain themselves.

It was difficult to tell which businesses are still operational and which are permanently closed. We assumed that the M&M Restaurant (bottom two photos) is permanently closed. We based this on the dilapidated sign (bottom left), the foot tall weeds in front of the restaurant (bottom right), and we saw no signage that said it was open.

Suggestion:

The good "first impressions" of this scenic area quickly melt away as we headed towards the marina.

There are more than 45 signs at OJ's Smoke Shop. Most likely the cigarette companies provide these signs free, but the sign clutter they create is very unattractive. Suggestion: Consider one sign - perhaps even a readerboard, posting prices for various brands, as in the example below center.

Drivers have four to six seconds to read signs. It's impossible for drivers to read all these signs without stopping and spending several minutes looking at them all. Even for smokers looking for the price of their favorite brand, they may have to scan 30 or 40 signs before they find their brand. Additionally, we saw brands that had three or four signs. Is this really necessary?

We assumed that this store sells nothing other than cigarettes, which is fine. But for non-smokers or smokers not needing cigarettes, there is no other reason to stop. This is just a note in case the store actually does sell other goods and/or supplies.

Camel...............$23.70
Marlboro...........30.95
Market...............11.75
Old Gold..........26.25
Sonoma.............18.75
Kool...................29.20

Suggestion:

With all the sign clutter, we didn't have time to read the entire sign (top right) and, at first, thought this store WAS the Nic-L-Inn. Remember, travelers have an average of four seconds to read signage.

Suggestion: Move the Nic-L-Inn sign to a different location. Always sell the primary lure, before the name of the business. In this case consider using in large letters "Fresh seafood & steaks." then in smaller letters, "6 miles, turn right" and at the bottom, "Nic-L-Inn Restaurant." Here's the psychology of this: the "fresh seafood and steaks" sounds good and gets the traveler thinking about food, and gets them to read the rest of the sign. "Six miles" is not that far away and tells us that this is NOT the Nic-L-Inn here. And then finally, it tells us the name of the restaurant.

Suggestion: Consider a reader-board sign instead of all the temporary cigarette signs at the Turtle Pit as well. The Turtle Pit has added "Convenience Store" to its sign, so you know they must sell other goods in addition to cigarettes.

Suggestion:

Signs should be "refreshed" once a year, with cleaning and fresh paint if necessary. Would you camp here? Can you read the sign? (top right)

If you look beyond the sign, this looks like a very, very nice campground (below left). First impressions really create lasting impressions, though, so you want to be sure your signs - which are your introduction to every passerby - provide the best impression possible.

When a sign looks old and dilapidated, the first conclusion is the assumption that the facilities are also old and dilapidated, which may not be the case.

The Onoville General Store sign (bottom right) also says little about the store. Keep weeds mowed and keep the sign freshly painted.

Suggestion:

We assume that the store is permanently closed. (top and bottom left)

Suggestions: Operating businesses should never used "CLOSED" signs. Instead, provide days, hours and seasons of when you WILL be open: "Open Tuesday through Saturday 10-6"

Suggestion: Always promote your lure, before the name of your business. Pull customers in. The deck in front of "TJ's Den" has good curb appeal (umbrellas and flags), but visitors may not know what it is. We assumed it must be a bar. There was nothing that said this was a restaurant, and nothing stating it's open for breakfast, lunch or dinner. The name "TJ's Den" sounds like a bar and so that's what we assumed it is.

Assume that visitors don't know if you're open for business or what you sell. Give visitors a reason to come into your restaurant or shop. Make it easy for them. Most visitors will not stop, get out of the car and look for something that will get them to come in. They simply think one word: "next."

20/20 Signage Equals $$$
The rule of signs that sell

Suggestion:

1) Avoid outlined or script text. It's hard for travelers to read.

2) Yellow on black or dark blue grabs the eye.

3) Never use more than eight words. Travelers don't have time to read more than that, and will tend to just ignore the sign if it says too much.

4) Sell the lure. Give people a reason to stop - the name of your business isn't a reason to stop.

5) Use directions instead of phone numbers. Arrows are best. Drivers aren't typically going to stop the car, write down the phone number, then call to find out where you're located. It's too much trouble.

Note the sample sign bottom center - easy to read, sells the primary lures, and points visitors in the right directions.

Suggestion: Pick one primary lure (bottom left). Italian or ribs & steaks? Avoid script lettering. Only open Friday, Saturday & Sunday from 3:00 to 10:00? Dinner only? Limit the sign to 8 words. There are 19 on this sign.

Suggestion:
Have your signage professionally produced. (top right) It WILL make a difference in your sales. We're not too sure how many people will pull up to the sign, get out of the car, and then bend down to read the notice stapled to the sign post. Perhaps this long notice should simply be handed to each vehicle as they enter the marina grounds.

The Highbanks Campground looks like a very nice place to camp. The grounds around the sign are well maintained and freshly mowed, the sign is very nice. Consider getting rid of the temporary sign and developing a permanent readerboard that you can use to promote teasers to get passers-by to stop.

Beautification is an investment with an incredible return. The mowed "streetscape" makes this look like a great place to stay. We assume the campground itself will also be similarly maintained - in this case, a good thing.

Suggestion:
Signs for the Horseshoe Inn (we assumed was a lodging facility) were promising (top left) ...

... but the first impression (below left) killed the sale. Suggestions: Add planters to soften the transition between the Inn and the parking lot, add trees and landscaping, hanging baskets, better signage, to let visitors know when you're open and what it is the Inn sells. Sell a teaser like we noted on the previous pages. Make it enticing. We found out later that it's a restaurant with a great menu and good food.

Look at what merchants do in Enicottville and then emulate that (right, top and bottom) You'll see a difference. Curb appeal is extremely important for restaurants. Make people feel invited and welcome. For all the money being spent to pull visitors into Western New York, then into the county, none of that will make a visitor walk into a restaurant and say "here's my credit card." The business must do that. You must make it obvious as to what you're selling, make it easy to get to, and you must make it inviting.
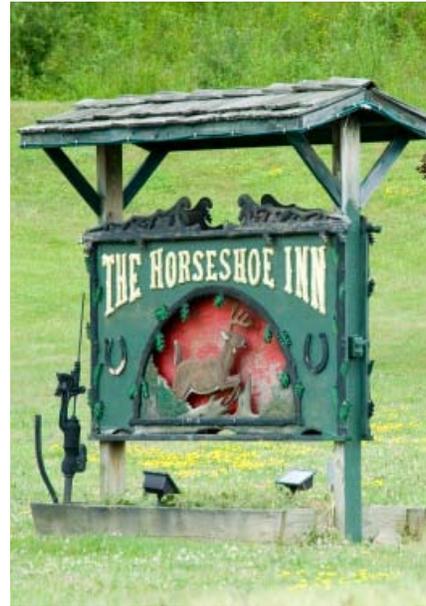
Suggestion:

This should be a top-notch sign, like the one next to OJ's Smoke Shop. (upper right) When we saw this sign, we weren't expecting much and probably wouldn't have turned had we not been doing an assessment of the area. Keep the weeds down. We could barely see the arrows telling us to turn here.

But what a surprise! The Nic-L-Inn is a stunning restaurant. We'll use this as an example all over the country. Outstanding job - great curb appeal. This is a real "hidden gem."

The restaurant has good signage, incredible curb appeal, is well maintained and simply looks like a great place to eat. Just ask the owner if the beautification is worth the cost, time and trouble and you'll get a resounding "yes."

Suggestion:

Consider offering a Sunday brunch during the peak season a the Nic-L-Inn. When is the restaurant open? Add hours to the sign or at the door. We saw several people (top right) at the restaurant while it was closed, and were unsure when to come back. If you're closed, don't say "Closed." Instead say "Please come back. Open at 5:00 for dinner." Make it an invitation.

It looks like TJs Den is open ... but with no hours posted, and no "open" sign, we weren't sure.
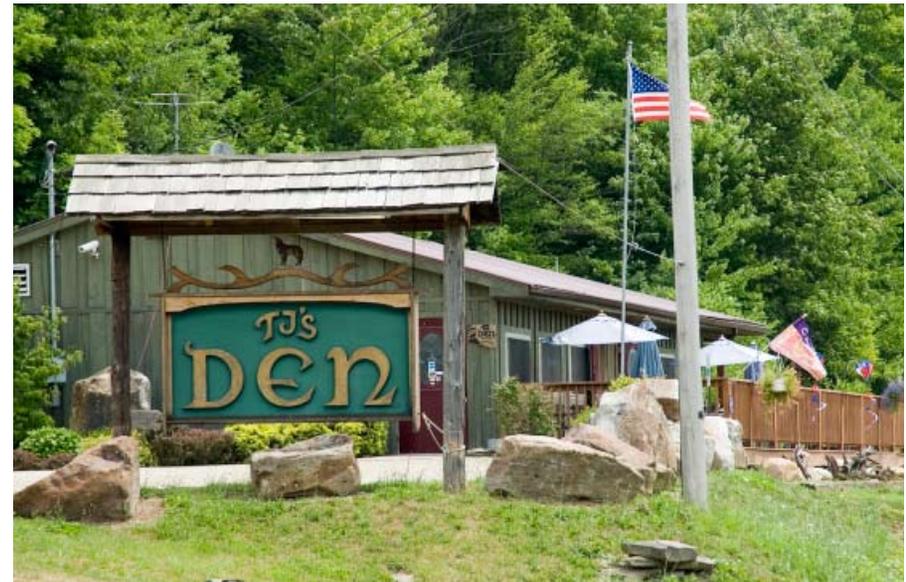
Suggestion:

TJ's Den has very nice landscaping, and is an attractive structure, but consider painting or re-staining the building. Why are there two entrances instead of one? This makes it confusing. We weren't too sure which entrance went to the restaurant and weren't sure why there are two separate entries. Any air conditioning? We saw the fan in the window (upper right) and assumed that it must be hot in the restaurant or bar. If possible, create a primary entrance and then let visitors know where it is.

Suggestion: Post your hours and days. If Italian, make the building look Italian. Park some cars in the lot so it looks like a popular place. No one feels comfortable being the only one there.

Suggestion: Remove the palm tree from Bayview Lodge's sign (bottom right) - add an ice cream cone instead. Visitors will all be tempted to stop if they see you have ice cream. Only breakfast? No other meals? We know there's more - consider stating "Open 8am-9pm daily. Great burgers."

Notes:

The viewing deck at the Bayview Mini Mart is terrific (bottom right). We're not too sure why palm trees are used for decorations. Doesn't seem to fit the overall ambiance of this area in Western New York.

Ice cream was a huge seller during our visit (top left). The Mini Mart did a good, steady business. Good job adding hanging baskets, and the flags and lattice-work make the building very attractive. Consider adding a few planter barrels with flowers as well to soften the transition between parking lot and the structure. The flags and decorations (top right) make it obvious the business is open.

Suggestion:

The lodge looks nice. Suggestion: Invite visitors to "take a look" at the accommodations. This could easily translate to more room nights, particularly since visitors are already here for ice cream and other snacks.

The location makes a big difference for the Bayview Lodge & Mini Mart, directly across from the marina.

The Onoville Marina's welcome sign is excellent. It creates a very good first impression. (bottom right)

So far, in this assessment, we've concentrated on the first impressions visitors get when coming into the area. The roadways are scenic and seem to be well maintained. The businesses, however, for the most part fall short in terms of signage (creating a lure) and overall first impressions.

In a nutshell:

• Make sure the directional signage uses less than eight words and those words should be teasers (tell us WHY we should stop) more than the name of the business.
• Make sure the signs are reflective of the quality of the business. You'll be judged by your signage.
• Make sure your signs tell us what it is you're selling. Are you a lodging facility or a restaurant?
• Make it easy: tell us when you are open and if not, invite us back.
• Once we're at the business, make it attractive. Pull customers in the door. This is done with beautification and additional welcome signage.

Suggestion:

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return - it attracts customers, makes them want to linger, and builds customer loyalty.

While well-maintained facilities can attract boaters to a marina initially, beautification of the buildings and grounds will help bring them back, and will attract other visitors as well - visitors who may want to enjoy lakeside camping in a beautiful setting.

"Softscapes" can really pull customers through a merchant's doors, just as the beautifully landscaped grounds at the Nic-L-Inn do. This shop in Grassville, CA (top left) has an outdoor display works very well attracting customers. Note the streetscape from Neenah, WI, in the photo top right. While it's clean and well-maintained, compare it with the street in the bottom photo, which is just a block away. The planters filled with flowers, shrubs, and trees help soften the transition between the hard sidewalk and the hard surface of the buildings. Emulate these ideas, and you'll see sales increase as they did.

Restrooms attract more than flies and other notes of convenience
The rule of visitor amenities

The number one reason people stop is to use restroom facilities. They translate to spending, if they are located where visitors can spend time and money.

Add restrooms along the highway or at Bayview, and promote them with signage. Boaters aren't the only ones who visit the area. Don't make them pay $3 for a restroom break (entrance fee to the marina) while exploring the area. While we were eating ice cream at Bayview, we noticed several people crossing the highway to go into the woods below, since there were no public restrooms available. (lower left)

Instead of telling customers "no public restrooms" or "restrooms for customers only" tell them WHERE the restrooms are located.

Develop 24 hour visitor information to let visitors know what the area has to offer. (bottom right) This example, in Teton Valley, Idaho, is one that might fit the Onoville area. In this case they will be developing 14 of these, which will be placed throughout the valley, each cross-selling other areas of their county. One side tells what there is to see and do and the other side includes brochure distribution, maps, and additional information.
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Suggestion:

Develop visitor information kiosks to be placed in several locations throughout the area. Cross-sell attractions and amenities. The more visitors see there is to do in the area, the longer they will stay, and the more they will spend.

These examples of effective kiosks include Whistler, BC (top left), a nautical-themed one in Oak Harbor, WA (top right), and the information station in Moses Lake, WA (bottom photos). Throughout the county kiosks should be used to cross-sell other areas. This will keep visitors coming back.

Suggestion:

Visitor information can be provided in any number of ways: This kiosk (top photos) was built by the local high school in Stevenson, WA.

The gazebo in Beatty, NV, below, was built from a kit, and the information display in the center was added by a local craftsman.

Be sure to include weather-proof brochure holders - visitors like to be able to take information with them. It can be as simple as installing brochure holders and displays on a wall or door. (bottom right)

Suggestion:

The small town of Gig Harbor, WA, (top right) provides visitor information displays and brochures on the wall of their public restrooms, making it very convenient for visitors to find out what the town has to offer. Where do you do most of your reading?

Heading west along I-86, we saw the sign for the rest area, and pulled in. We were very pleasantly surprised to find the very nice visitor information center there.

Suggestion: This is just a rest area? Market the fact that it's also a visitor information center! Add signage to let travelers know. (bottom center)

Suggestion:

This is a terrific visitor information and restroom facility - one of the nicest visitor information centers we've seen.

Add 24 hour visitor information. Perhaps a gazebo on the grounds with brochure holders or even on the wall next to the entrance. Your visitor information should always be working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Overall, very nicely done. Very well laid out. NOTE: Visitors prefer "low tech" information - things they can take with them. While having access to a website or digital information is nice, only one person at a time can use it and people won't wait for the opportunity, and it gives the visitor nothing they can take with them. Visitors typically don't carry around a clipboard and paper to write things down. This is the one area where "low tech" is still the preference.

Suggestion:

Let your kiosks be more than just rules and regulations. Use them to cross-sell other state parks, county parks, attractions and amenities.

This kiosk (right photos) has a lot of wasted space. Add brochure distribution. Don't miss the opportunity to inform visitors what there is to do in the area. This is about increasing spending in the county. Use every opportunity to make a sale. Information will let people know what all there is to do while visiting and this keeps people in the area for longer stays and will give them additional reasons to come back again - all translating to increased spending.

Develop kiosks at various locations throughout the county. Partner with Chautauqua and Allegany Counties, and cross-promote each other. Some suggested locations for visitor information:

- Bayview Mini-Mart
- Nic-L-Inn Restaurant
- Three or four locations in the State Park
- At the marina in two or three locations
- At each of the camp grounds in the area providing day trip ideas
- Two at Ellicottville
- One at HoliMont
- The casino and/or Seneca Museum
- Rock City Park
- Griffis Sculpture Park
- At local museums

Consider adding two or three a year. Each one would have different information to sell other areas. The example shown here (right) is at Jackson, Wyoming.

"Product sells itself."

Suggestion:

The Onoville Marina. We've checked out the surrounding area, and are now heading into the marina.

The entrance sign is very nice, and creates a very good initial impression. Once past the entrance sign, however, the good first impressions tend to diminish quickly. Suggestion: Add some color! Add some beautification! Make the grounds attractive. Make it fun. Why is everything a drab gray color? Even the entrance office (bottom left) seems drab. Use a forest green with brown or white trim.

The water-based facilities seem to be very well maintained and in good working order. It looks like a very good marina.

Suggestion:

The docks and slips seem to be very nice. The key focus of the Onoville Marina is definitely on the water-based amenities while the uplands seem second-rate and a "must have" amenity to the docks and marina.

Overall, the grounds did not look to be overly desirable for non-boaters. It looks more like a prison camp than a destination (bottom right)

The following are some suggestions on ways to make the entire "lake" a major attraction and the marina a "park."

These are NOT reflections on management, but are some ideas on how to make the area a major attraction:

#1. Decide on the focus: Typically the lake is the primary lure and the marina a supporting amenity. In this case, the entire effort is focused on the marina with barely a mention on why visitors should come to the lake. You need to decide whether you want the lake (reservoir) and marina to be a local amenity or a major county tourist attraction? Or both? What do you want the reservoir to be known for? Recreation (boating, fishing, water skiing) or the environment (wild life viewing, scenic boat tours)? To be a destination you must differentiate the lake from other competing lakes in the region. Why this lake?

#2. It's all in a name. Consider using the name "Allegany Lake" instead of "Reservoir" in your marketing efforts. Visitors are drawn to lakes, while a reservoir seems more utilitarian.

#3. Quit selling the "marina" and sell the "experience." The lake. THAT will sell the marina. Always sell experiences and that will fill the facilities.

#4. Make it a destination for non-boaters as well. Then it can sustain businesses for extended seasons. Currently there seems to be little reason to come here if you're not a boater.

There is such a wealth of space in the uplands area, and most of it is not put to any use. How can all this land be used to make the whole marina be a fun, attractive place to enjoy?

Suggestion:

In the case of Oak Harbor, Washington (photos and plans this page) they also have grounds and facilities that are similar, in many ways, of those at the Onoville Marina. Lots of lawn areas, an RV park and campground, no defined gathering areas, scattered restrooms and picnic shelters, etc.

In this case, we totally redesigned the park making it into a mixed-use "destination" for both boaters and non-boaters. It includes a public/private redeveloped and first-class RV park with all kinds of supporting amenities, a waterfront boardwalk, five distinct "gathering areas" and plazas, including two amphitheaters - places for events, reunions, concerts - three water features for upland water fun (fountains for kids to play in), interpretive walk that talks about the environment, restrooms, picnic areas, boat rental kiosks, and a number of other supporting amenities.

The Onoville Marina has as much space as this waterfront area in Oak Harbor and could be a major destination as opposed to the uplands simply supporting the marina.

Suggestion:

These plans for the park in Oak Harbor show the details of the R.V. park (below left), the entrance with its gateway sign (bottom right), the amphitheater (upper left), and a detailed overview (top right).

Note how trees (shade areas) and gardens are an integral part of the design. People love to be in beautiful places, and provided a multi-use area filled with beauty is a recipe for successfully attracting visitors.

Consider developing public/private partnerships to turn the marina into a major destination and attraction.
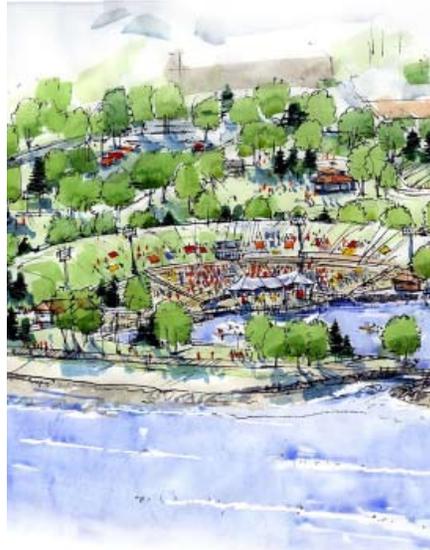
Suggestion:

The restrooms look very institutional - almost jail-like. That's easy to remedy - paint them. Make them colorful and fun. (Note the fun paint on the general store below.) Make the marina an exciting place to be.

Make this a visitor information board (bottom right), and keep it updated. Have you ever seen someone stand there for half an hour reading all the fine print about rules and regulations? Even then, the Bingo notice is pasted on top of the rules and regulations, so just remove them and make this a visitor information center instead of just a bulletin board.

Add planters with shrubs and flowers to soften the look of the concrete. Is there a garden club in the area that might "adopt" the park?

The Onoville Marina could be an outstanding multi-state destination if it were redeveloped to be a major attraction as opposed to a local amenity. Yes, it already attracts visitors from Ohio, other areas of New York and Pennsylvania, but it could attract extended season visitors and non-boaters as well.

Suggestion:

The only beautification in the park is this little triangle. (top right) But around it are weeds. Expand the beautification efforts. Start an adoption program.

Move this gazebo (bottom left) into the "park." It serves no purpose here unless it's a bus stop. Add visitor information inside it.

Create pathways and steps to the local businesses (bottom right). Make it easy for visitors to help support local shops and restaurants. Foster "public/private partnerships" where perhaps the local businesses up the hill would help develop pathways, steps and walking routes between the marina and their businesses. This is about increasing the tax base in the county. That happens when you import new cash into the county, making it easy to help visitors spend more money while at the marina and while in the area.

With a renewed focus, the marina and reservoir could easily have a strong six month season, as opposed to a short summer season.

Suggestion:

Asphalt some of the major access roads to keep dust and rock chips down. Include landscape barriers to handle run off. Recruit a private RV park developer and create a public-private partnership to make this a state-of-the-art RV park. This is a huge and growing market and RVers will pay more to stay in nice RV parks with full hookups and supporting amenities like laundry facilities and showers (all of which generate additional revenues). This would lead to an increase in revenues, even when shared with the private entity.

Develop a weed abatement program. Get county parks involved in making this a true "park" and not just a big parking lot to support the marina.

Upgrade the picnic shelters so some of them include fireplaces and food prep areas.

Make this be an attractive spot to have a picnic, rather than just a utilitarian place to eat - if and when you have to. Place the rules and regulations signage (bottom left) in parking areas, not along the roadways.

Suggestion:

Open these picnic shelters up so the open area faces the water, not the street or parking lot (top right). People are here for the water and views of the lake, not views of the street and parking areas.

These expanses of grass were not being used by anyone - they're currently just wasted open space. Give them a purpose. Plant trees for more shade, add more landscaping, benches and tables, walkways. Make these open grassy areas "gathering areas." Make them plaza areas for major events and "upland" activities. Some of the space could be developed into an amphitheater for performances, or into a sports fields.

Irrigate the lawn areas. Make it beautiful, not an eyesore. This could be one of the state's premier destination spots, if there's any desire to extend the tourism season and to expand into new markets.

Suggestion:

Add some sporting facilities. Baseball diamond, horseshoes, volleyball. Offer activities in the marina uplands - when all you offer is boating, you limit the number of visitors you can support. When you use all the land available for other purposes as well, you can attract many more visitors.

The photos on this page are of a city park in Moses Lake, WA - located on a lake in the middle of the desert. And yet, they keep the lawns green. They offer ball fields, playground equipment, and beautiful picnic and camping areas. This park is very similar to the Onoville Marina in many regards, yet they put a major emphasis on making it a true destination. It includes several picnic shelters (along the water and with lake views), nice public restrooms and shower facilities, an RV and campground, play areas, gathering areas, sports fields, and walking paths.

Suggestion:

There are TREMENDOUS opportunities that would make "Onoville Park & Marina" an outstanding destination.

Develop two or three amphitheaters. These can host reunions, shows, events, open-air markets, interpretive classes, etc., even "Movies in the Park" during the peak seasons.

This amphitheater, in the state park next door, can provide opportunities for concerts, reunions, performing arts, interpretive talks about the reservoir, and notice the screen (bottom right) that can be used at nights for "Movies At The Park."

Imagine if the park were redesigned to include not only one of these, but perhaps three or four different "venues" for a variety of activities.

Suggestion:
The amphitheater shown on the previous page has additional sculpted lawn areas (top right photo) behind the seating benches to accommodate additional attendees.

Natural sculpted areas would be fine for amphitheater facilities, such as these in Carson City, Nevada (bottom left), and Lethbridge, Alberta (bottom right). These are not overly expensive to build, and when not in use for events, still create nice places to sit, have lunch, read, relax, and watch kids play - away from the water. Notice how important shade trees are to the overall appeal of these park and gathering areas.
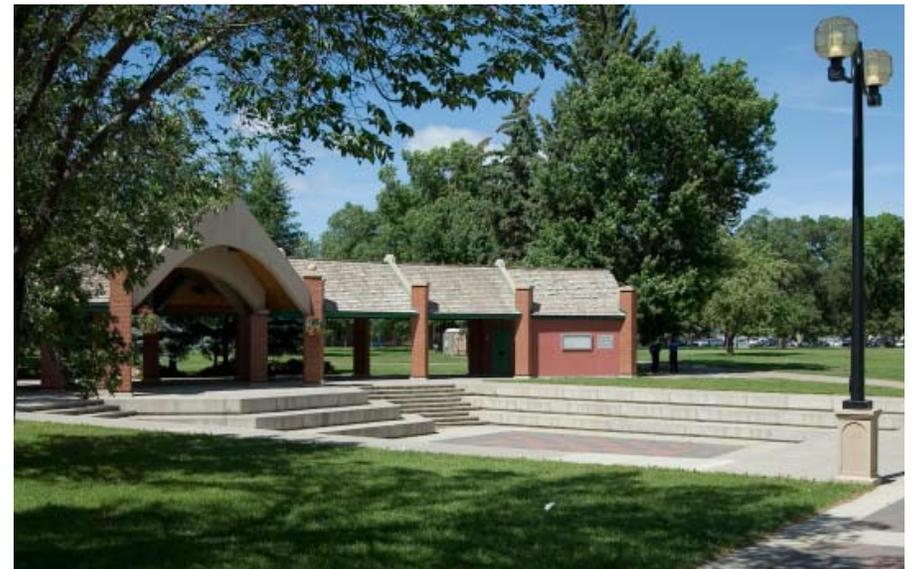
Suggestion:

Kalamazoo, Michigan has built several covered performance areas in their downtown. (top right and bottom left) They use them to hold frequent festivals and events, and they have really enlivened the downtown. The stage shown, upper right, is a 20' x 50' stage with a vinyl covering that can easily be removed during the winter season or during heavy winds. The "bubble" (bottom left) is just to the right of the stage and creates a secondary area for artists in action, open air markets, vendor space during car shows and other public events. Notice the nice picnic areas in the park, known as "Arcadia Creek Festival Place."

Greenville, SC has also developed several small stages downtown, like this one (bottom right). The platform is just 50 feet across.

The events held in these gathering spaces, stages, and amphitheaters attract many visitors, and create a real hub of activity. These kinds of venues can host interpretive displays, talks, classes, artisans in action, and open-air markets, as well as special events. People are always drawn to people.

Suggestion:
Invite vendors to the "park."

Cater to non-boat-owners and families. There are already plenty of boat-owner facilities at the marina, so expand beyond those to include attractions for the potential visitors who don't have their own boat, but would love to enjoy the lake and the "park" too.

Create a dock just for vendors and boat rentals. Make it easy for visitors to rent boats - post signs that tell the hours of operation, the costs, etc. as they do at the state park next door (top right).

Near Kingsport, Tennessee, the local reservoir (bottom photos) has several vendors, or concessionaires, who rent paddle boats, pontoon boats, canoes, kayaks, sells fuel, and even provide fishing and wildlife viewing guides.

Parts of the lake are cordoned off for these other uses, including a swimming beach.

Suggestion:

The photo top right shows Chautauqua Institution's boat rentals. They do a brisk business during the summer season. There are many visitors who don't own a boat, but love renting one and enjoying the water. This creates a small-business opportunity, would increase revenues to the county, and would make the area a draw for non boat owners.

Would it be possible to create a swimming beach somewhere at the marina like the one (below left) at the Chautauqua Institution or at the state park (bottom right)?

Suggestion:

The camping areas at the Onoville Marina, for the most part, are very nice (top right).

As mentioned before, consider a public/private partnership RV park redevelopment project to further develop the RV park. Beautifully landscaped RV parks will attract people who want to just camp in addition to boaters.

In Pahrump, Nevada, between Las Vegas and Death Valley, California, private developers built the RV park shown below. The RV park is so outstanding (paved walking trails, defined RV spaces with paved level parking spots, lots of shade trees, full hookups, wireless internet access (extra fee), laundry facilities, and beautiful lawn areas. RVers pay more than $30 a night, and they are "forced" to leave after 30 days, but many would like to simply move in, if allowed to stay longer. Imagine an RV park so outstanding that RVers will come just for the RV park, in a spectacular setting, and then during the day would venture out to other areas throughout the county, spending time and money in the area.

Suggestion:

Add a couple of interactive water features to the grounds. Water features attract people, and one or two different kinds of fountains or water displays would be a perfect complement to the lake.

Make the "park" a true destination. Make it a county showcase. Make it THE destination of choice between the Finger Lakes, Lake Chautauqua, and other regional lakes. You have an excellent opportunity to "raise the bar" for the entire county making it the destination of choice and setting it apart from all the other parks in the region.

Suggestion:

Once you have an outstanding park to work with, it would be easy to recruit outside events to the park. There is a car club for every 15,000 residents in the U.S. They are looking for places to hold their events, as shown in the right two photos. There are many other clubs and organizations throughout the region who also host outdoor events throughout the year and are looking for outstanding destinations in which to hold them.

Consider inviting automobile clubs, dragon boat clubs (bottom left), canoeing or sailing clubs, rowing clubs, motorcycle clubs, and bird watching organizations are only a few examples. You invite them to hold their event at the "park," roll out the red carpet for them, and they do all the organization and marketing. You get the cash.

The "park" could become a perfect venue for family and class reunions, company picnics, and parties.

Suggestion:

High-adventure boating, dragon boat races, etc. are very popular. Tap into these clubs and organizations, and invite them to the enjoy the marina.

We're not too sure of wind conditions on the reservoir, but might there be an opportunity for Hobiecat Rentals (bottom photos) and regattas? Sail boarding, or sail kayaks (top right)?

In a nutshell: Consider having an "attractions planner" work with the county to do a site plan and feasibility study to make the marina a true destination.

Allegany State Park

The state park is fabulous. It is well maintained, and stunningly beautiful. It's a great primary attraction to the county.

The state park and the Onoville marina should be joined at the hip. Cross-promote each other. Each lake provides a different kind of experience: the lake at the state park is smaller, for a quieter experience. Allegheny Reservoir is huge and wild. It offers boaters a trip through the wilderness.

The headquarters building is beautiful (bottom right). We couldn't find the restaurant, however even when we were walking around inside the facility.

Note:

The cabins look great. What a wonderful amenity!

The bike and boat rentals add additional activities to the park, giving visitors plenty of outdoor experiences. These are some of the ideas that could be incorporated into the Onoville Marina. Bike rentals, paddle boat rentals. Perhaps even a few cabins.

Suggestion

See if you can get a deal on billboard rentals along I-86 during the peak season (below left). Perhaps a cooperative effort? There were several blank billboards that could be used to promote the marina. Often the owners will discount the use considering they would rather get a little income, than no income, as these sit empty. You could negotiate a deal where you use them until such time as another entity comes along and is willing to pay the full price for the rental. The county uses would go up only during "non rented" time periods. New vinyl billboard displays can be put up and taken down easily, so the art can be used many times.

Marketing Assessment

The potential of the Onoville area is tremendous.

1. Have an Onoville Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan created. Set yourself apart from the Finger Lakes, Lake Chautauqua, and other lakes in the region. Allegheny Reservoir is a true wilderness boating experience - that might be a good place to start in setting yourselves apart from the competition.
2. Promote individual businesses and SPECIFIC activities, not generalities.
3. Businesses: Raise the bar in terms of signage and curb appeal.
4. Pick your season, pick your passion. Promote experiences, not facilities or things to look at.

Can somebody just decide on the spelling? Just pick one. Why is it the Allegany State Park in New York, but Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania?

Can't we all get along? Is it Allegany County? Allegany or Allegheny Reservoir? Pick one.

Sell the rapids, not the river
The rule of selling experiences, not geography

It's about the "lake" not the marina. Sell the lake experience and the marina will be full and a major destination.

While there, we rented a pontoon boat and had a terrific time on the lake. However: we saw no eagles, wildlife, etc. If you are selling the wildlife experience, where do we need to go to actually see it? Are there some great hikes around the lake? Wildlife viewing spots? Promote specifics not generalities. Where? When? How? Let visitors know.

Always sell experiences - activities - over facilities.

Suggestion:

Create a brochure that promotes very specific activities in the area, as Klickitat County, WA did.

Rather than headlining the location "Klickitat County," they promoted their activities, creating an instant draw - "The Seven Wonders of Washington's Columbia River Gorge." That piques readers' interest.

Then they selected seven very specific highlights of activities, and readers can't wait to experience "Deadman's Curve" as they go whitewater rafting, or the "towering cliffs of Maryhill." Specifics like this set them apart from other nearby communities, making them a one-of-a-kind destination.
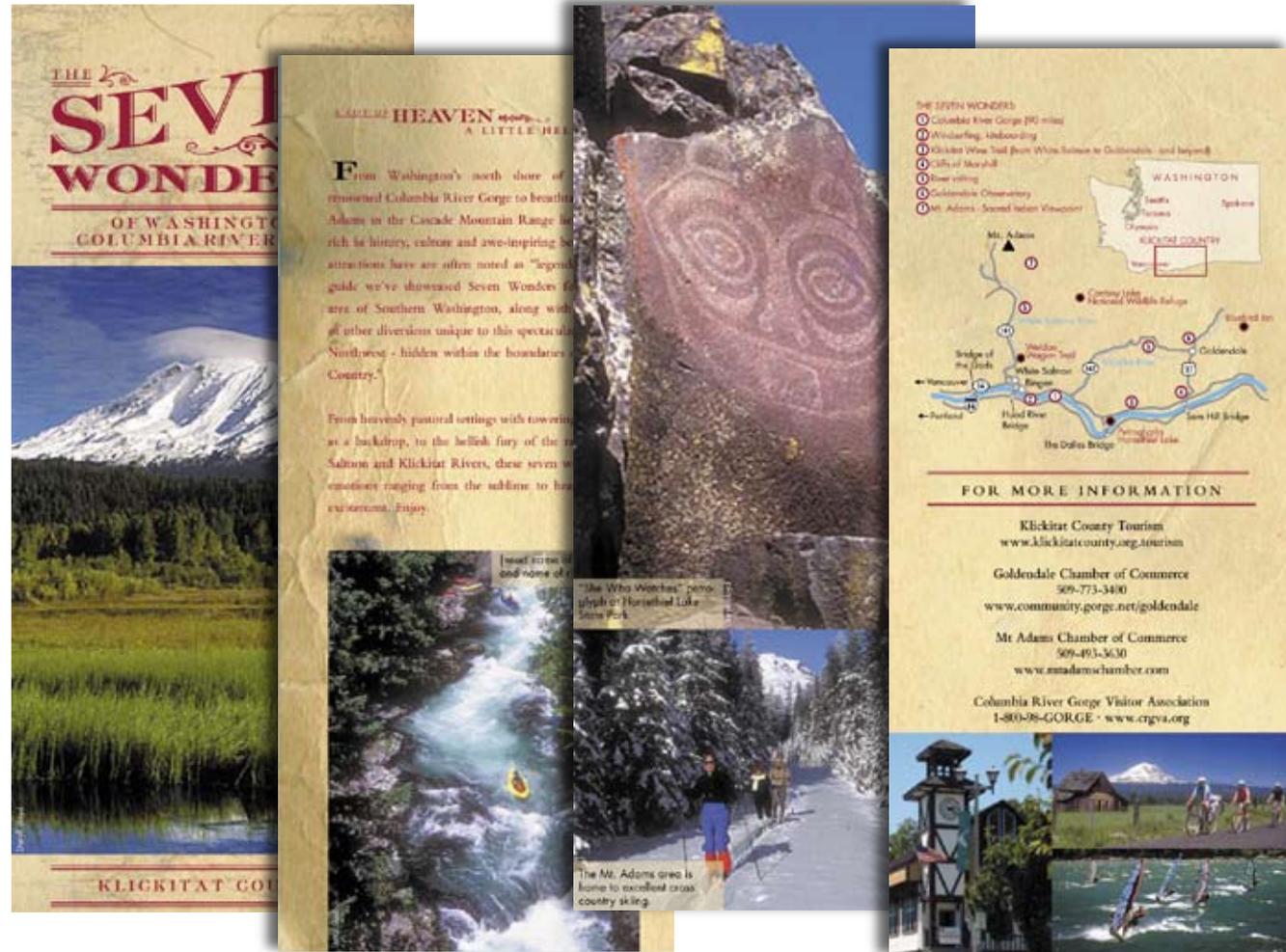
Suggestion:

Select specific attractions in the area, and promote them. If one restaurant has a particular kind of pie that is exceptional, promote that with text that makes the readers' mouths water.

Suggestion:

Forget about promoting boundaries. No one cares but you. It's not about the county. It's about activities that happen to be located in Cattaraugus County.

Develop "The Hidden Gems of the Enchanted Hills of Western New York," along the lines of the little publication "101 Things to Do in Door County." This book has been a very good sales tool for Door County, Wisconsin. Each page describes an activity in detail, with specific locations, places to see, things to do.

Promote private businesses that raise the bar for the community, or that reinforce the brand.

~101 Things To Do In Door County~

Peninsula State Park

~101 Things To Do In Door County~

• 18 •
Take a Sunday stroll down
Cottage Row.

Our favorite Sunday morning starts with breakfast at the White Gull Inn on Main St. in Fish Creek. Splurge on a slice of their famous Door County-berry sour cream coffee cake; then take a much needed stroll down Cottage Row. From The White Gull Inn follow Main St. to Cottage Row and turn right. The walk will take you north along the row of shoreline "cottages" about 1 mile before it turns up the steep bluff. At the base of the bluff is a sliver of a park known as Champagne Rock, named for the little rock that hangs over the water. Down and back is a perfect way to walk off breakfast and start the day.

Promote specific businesses:
Create an Activities Guide that highlights specific shops, attractions and restaurants that are unique. This one, produced by the Ottawa, Illinois Visitor Center, is proving very successful.

Suggestion:

Yes! An "Activities Guide" based on experiences, not geography. Good job on the Enchanted Mountains guide.

Suggestions: Provide more specifics, not just generalities.

Soften the edges of the maps. Extend into your neighboring counties - and state. Visitors don't care about boundaries.

All of your efforts should show maps along this line (bottom right). Help the visitor find and get to you. Blur the boundaries.

Avoid generic terms like "minutes away, worlds apart." This is geography-based - currently the primary draw, but work to move away from this form of marketing into marketing activities over geography. Always sell the experience first, the marina second.

Suggestion: The Onoville Marina brochure is a great start, but tell me WHY I should eat at the Den, or Nic-L-Inn.

Use third-party endorsements whenever possible.
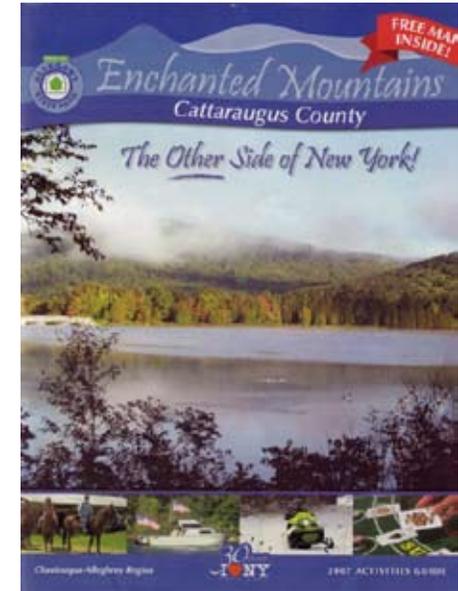
Don't Let Your Last Opportunity Become a Lost Opportunity

The Rule of Closing the Sale

Suggestion:

Always sell experiences, not places. Tell me what you have or who you are, tell me why I should visit you.

The top three inches of your brochure are critical. What brochures stand out the most in this rack? Yellows really pop, so use yellows on a dark background to stand out in a brochure rack. We took two brochures (see below) and did quick five-minute makeovers on each, to show how easy it is to make them readable from a distance and attract attention

Always sell the experience first. The name of the business should be second to the experience. People are looking for boats to rent or for horseback riding. The name of the company is second. Always entice the visitor to rent the boat, and then sell them on why you're the best place to rent it.
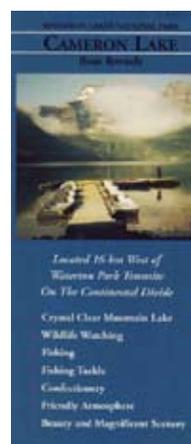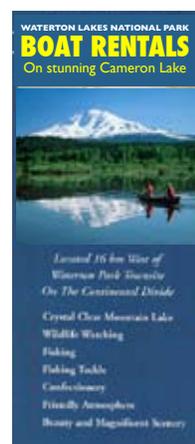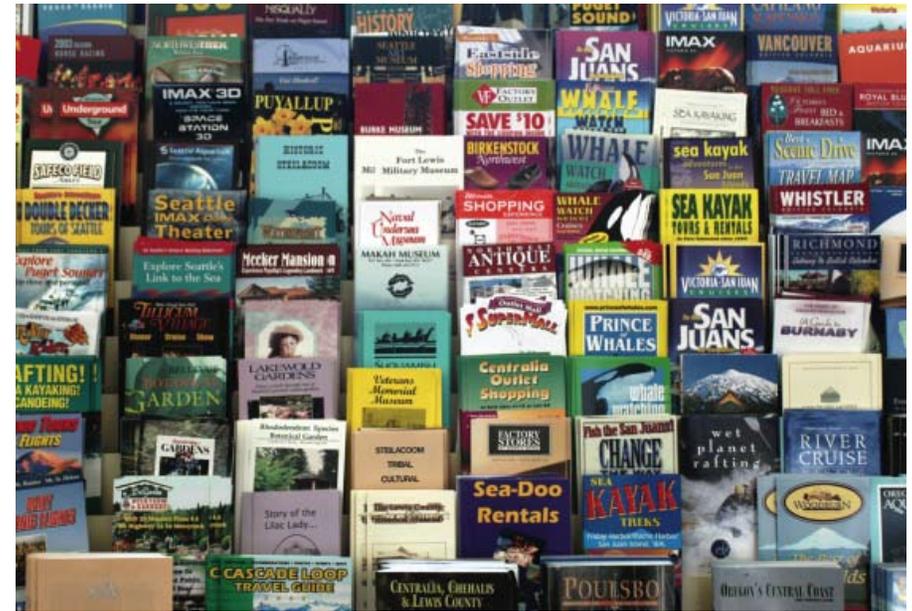
Suggestion:
See how a few simple changes in the focus of the text makes a brochure more appealing. Which makes you want to visit more: A Picturesque Victorian Village set among the vineyards" or "Welcome to Fredonia, NY"?

The Houseboat from Hell brochure is very effective - and appropriate - it's in Hell's Canyon, Idaho.

When writing your promotional text, if you can change the name and it still rings true, then it's too generic. Market specifics.

But as you promote kayaking, canoeing, and bird watching, don't spoil the image with a jet ski jumping out of the water.
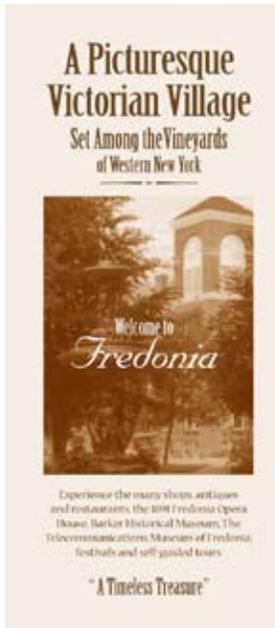
The following pages include a secret shopper assessment of the area. In this case we asked several people to plan a trip into "Western New York" not specifically telling them who this assessment was being done for. We did not specify a boating vacation, but were looking for a general overview in how Cattaraugus County stacked up against the other counties in the region, in terms of marketing effectiveness. Of course, the more money you have to spend, the more likely you are to be the destination of choice.
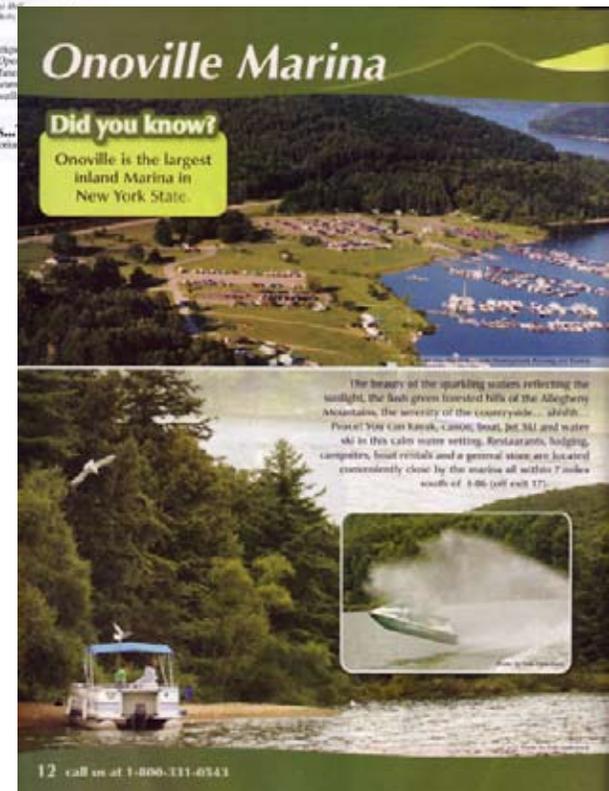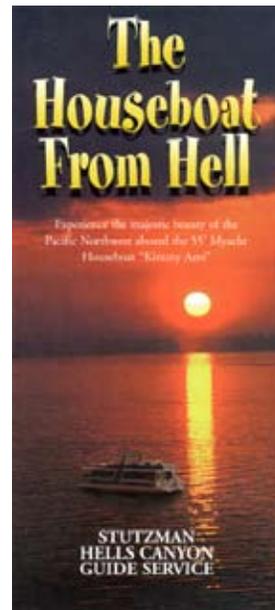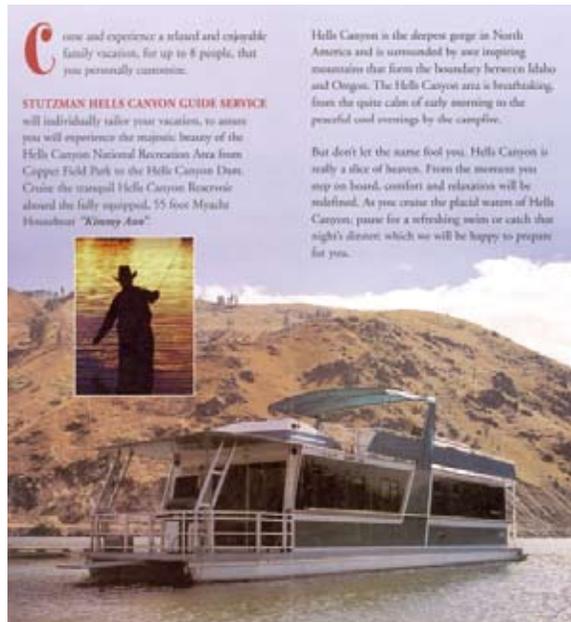
WESTERN NEW YORK DISTANCE MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Assuming that I live in Erie, Pennsylvania and want to plan a four-day, three-night trip, I decided that I wanted to stay within a three-hour drive so I would have more time to do things once I arrived.

My initial Google search was for "hiking western New York" (Screen 1). I went to the first site http://www.wnyhikes.com (Screen 2) and it was filled with information but it took some hit or miss seeking to find it. I had to go through each of the locations on the drop down menu since there was no map, but eventually I found Letchworth State Park and then went to the park's website http://nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/info.asp?parkID=12 for more information. There was only 1 photo and basic information so I did a search on Letchworth State Park and found an on-line copy of a visitor guide http://www.letchworthpark.com. Here I found more photos and information that convinced me that this would be a good choice - it offers camping, more than 60 miles of hiking, waterfalls, and whitewater rafting in an area called "The Grand Canyon of the East." It is also described as the most popular state park so I would plan my visit during the week or in September. I spoke with someone in the visitor center who confirmed that the park is generally crowded on the weekends and during the week in June, July and the first half of August and suggested after Labor Day as the best time to visit when there are far fewer people around.

Based upon the information I found, my choices for a hiking trip would be:

OPTION 1: LETCHWORTH STATE PARK
Day 1 - drive to park, set up camp, hike a short trail.
Day 2 - hike the Gorge Trail
Day 3 - whitewater rafting
Day 4 - break camp, drive home.

OPTION 2: FINGER LAKES TRAIL
While reading information about Letchworth State Park, I saw a reference to the Finger Lakes Trail so I searched "finger lakes trail". The first hit, Finger Lakes Trail Conference http://www.fingerlakestrail.org/ is a non-profit group dedicated to preserving and protecting this trail. The site provides overview maps (and maps for purchase) and trail condition reports for various seg-

ments. After reviewing this site, I believe I could easily spend three days hiking various sections of the trail. In fact, hiking it section by section would be a great way to spend an entire summer. Assuming I lived in Erie, it would be more accessible to me than the length of the Appalachian Trail and the total length of 562.9 miles would be an achievable summer goal. I called the FTLC for more information (585-658-9320), however, there was only an answering machine. I also e-mailed a request for information, however, I have not received a response yet (6 days later).

OPTION 3: ALLEGHENY STATE PARK

SIDE NOTE:
Before I started another search, I went to the Links area I found on the FLTC site. The first listing was for Cattaraugus County - Enchanted Mountains and the name caught my attention. I clicked the hot link and was taken to the county tourism site. Using the trip planner, I selected "things to do" which provided another menu of activities. I was surprised that this list was purely activities since there were no other trip planner links that related to places like museums. Reviewing the site, I did finally use the Arts & Culture button at the top, which provided a link to information about historical and arts related things to do. The link I found the most interesting was "unique attractions." Some of these were not very unique - bowling alleys, casinos, ice skating, laser tag, the YMCA, yoga classes - but others were definitely things I couldn't find closer to home - Rock climbing, the Allenburg Bog, radio-controlled planes, archery, and my all time favorite, two drive-in theatres.

I called the contact number (1-800-331-0543) and when I made the proper selection, I was connected to a voice mail with just a name and then a beep. I didn't know if I was in the right department or not. The second time I tried, the same thing happened.

OTHER OPTIONS:
I searched for "western new york tourism" and went to the first link, which was an interior link for the Western New York Travel Guide http://www.westernny.com/index.html. From here I chose the "Attractions" link where the region is broken into six regions. I reviewed the offerings in each of the six regions but didn't find anything that interested me besides the hiking opportunities mentioned above, the Chautauqua Institution, and the women's

suffrage-related sites in Seneca Falls. It was interesting that the winery region didn't easily show up.

Additional searches through Fodors, Frommer's, Budget Travel, and AAA did not produce anything additional except more information on the winery region, but nothing detailed. I searched "western ny wineries". I found references to wine trails and on the Chautauqua/Lake Erie Trail, there was an interactive map that made it easy to plan a visit http://www.chautauquawinetrail.org/tour.aspx. The link to each winery helped narrow down the selection since you can see what types of wines are available, the tasting room hours, and information on special events. There are also links for lodging and dining as well as other things to do.

If I wasn't going on a hiking trip, I would choose from the wealth of offerings at the Chautauqua Institution (which could easily keep me busy all summer) and then Seneca Falls for a two-day trip. I'm not much of a wine drinker, but for those who are, the Trail would be an excellent choice - probably not as crowded as in Napa Valley, but still providing an excellent variety.

WESTERN NEW YORK STATE ASSESSMENT

A Recipe for a Great Trip to Western New York

11 lakes
90 + wineries
6 State Parks featuring gorges and waterfalls plus 5 others
1 Premium Outlet scattered among lots of antique and shopping choices
4 star rated European-style resort
A dash of history

Mix together and enjoy the Finger Lakes Region of New York State

There were several factors that helped me decide to choose the Finger Lakes area as a three-day getaway: 1. the relatively short driving distance from the Buffalo, NY, area (1 hour, 48 minutes) or the Pittsburgh, PA, area (5 hours, 17 minutes); 2. the plethora of wineries and their history and reputation, and 3. the ease of obtaining information via various websites.

I began my search for travel information on Western New York State by entering the following words into the Google search engine, "New York State Tourism." I selected the top listed result in search engine summary: http://www.iloveny.com.

Once I was on the site, I narrowed my search by region using the available map. After reading the brief description on three of the regions, I continued researching two, the Chautauqua-Allegheny region and the Finger Lakes region. I attempted to use the search engine on the site, but didn't like using it. Without a more detailed map of the region, it was difficult to know what community to choose, and the results summary, when searching by category, listed double entries making the list very long and confusing. I didn't understand what the category "microsite" meant.

I took a look at the Chautauqua, New York, area (in the southwestern corner of New York State) first. I would consider a visit there, but not as an overnight if I were from Buffalo, NY, or Erie, PA. It would be a quick one-hour drive. If I lived in Pittsburgh, it would take a couple of hours to get there. I would definitely go there as a day-tripper in either case because of the Chautauqua Institution, a National Historic Landmark village. The Institution is renowned internationally as a center for the arts, education, religion and recreation and offers an ambitious variety of performing and visual arts, lectures and activities each season. Chautauqua was described as an intergenerational college campus and a festival for the mind, body and spirit. Its 2007 calendar of events was impressive and included lectures by Jane Goodall and Sandra Day O'Connor, performances by LeAnn Rimes, The 5 Browns and Ronan Tynan, in addition to presentations by leading international scholars and religious leaders. I enjoyed their website: http://www.ciweb.org/.

To obtain more information on the Finger Lakes region, I added the following words to a Google search, "Finger Lakes New York." I went to the top two listed sites: www.fingerlakes.org and www.visitfingerlakes.com. I used the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance site primarily (.org). I also phoned their 800 number (1-800-548-4386) for more information. When calling, a live person did not answer the phone. A voice mail recording prompted me to leave my name for travel information. Instead, I pressed "0" to speak with someone in person. While friendly, the representative stated that they had only worked at the office for 3 days, and didn't know much. I was put on hold twice to get answers to some very simple questions. I requested a visi-

tor guide although I could review the entire piece online as a PDF file. I also listened to the Fingers Lake Visitors Radio Channel AM 1110 via a live link. I thought the concept was interesting, but what I heard was a lot of ads.

The Finger Lakes Region is located between the triangle cities of Rochester, Syracuse and the Corning/Elmira area. The region is bordered by Pennsylvania to the south and Lake Ontario to the north. The names of the lakes are derived from the region's rich Native American heritage.

Finger Lakes is one of the world's premier regions for wine production. The winemaking tradition of the area is two centuries old, but the past two decades have redefined the local industry. The area offers several organized wine trails: Seneca Lake Wine Trail, Cayuga Wine Trail and Keuka Lake Wine Trail. Annually, more than one million visitors stop for tastings at the Finger Lakes 90-plus wineries. There are culinary experiences, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, museums, shopping and accommodations offered along each trail.

To select a base for my three-day getaway, I researched Geneva, NY, and Seneca Falls, NY, through their Chambers of Commerce websites. I also took a look a at the Wine Trail websites. My top picks were the Geneva Chamber of Commerce, http://www.genevany.com, The Finger Lakes Wine Country, http://www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com and the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, http://www.senecalakewine.com/jc. Several of the sites offered PDF versions of their visitors guides. The maps were useful on the Geneva Chamber of Commerce site and helped me acclimate to the region.
Since I could only choose one trail to visit during a weekend, I would select the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, which offers 31 member wineries and a diverse variety of wines and special events. I would also consider planning my visit during one of their special events such as the Spring Wine and Cheese Event or the Chocolate and Wine event.
To develop my itinerary further, I would research accommodations in Geneva, NY. Geneva On the Lake, Wine Country Villa and Resort, looked incredible on their website. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and received a AAA Four-Diamond Award. Its lakeside setting, gardens and amenities seemed like the perfect selection to enhance a romantic wine-country getaway.

WESTERN NEW YORK STATE ASSESSMENT

New York fascinates me – when I think of New York, I think of New York City and the fast pace and millions of people. I forget there is more to it than just an island.

When I "googled" Western New York, the following are the sites that caught my attention:

Livingston County New York
Geneseo NY - http://www.geneseony.com/index.html
"You will find our lovely National Historic Landmark Village located just 30 minutes south of Rochester, NY in a setting of stunning landscapes and productive farms."

I called 800-538-7365 – Official Tourism Site for Livingston County New York. Ordered a visitors guide from the representative (ordered 7/12/07, received 7/16/07). I asked why Geneseo was called a village and they said because it is a rural agricultural area. When I would ask a question, they said the guide they were mailing me would have all the information. I don't think they were in a hurry to get me off the phone, I just don't think they were comfortable answering my questions. They did suggest I visit Letchworth State Park which is considered the "grand canyon of the east."

After reviewing the visitor guide I was sent, I may visit one city but there are a bunch of little cities, with restaurants, B&B's, parks and museums. Same old story – that's what every small town has to offer, nothing very special.

Batavia
Ordered visitor information on 7/12/07
Birthplace of Western New York - http://www.batavianewyork.com/
Population in 2006 was approximately 15,000.

http://www.batavianewyork.com/about_batavia.html
The City of Batavia provides an ideal location for travelers that want to take advantage of all that western New York has to offer. It is less than an hour from Niagara Falls, Letchworth State Park and Lake Ontario and less than 30 minutes from the Genesee Country Museum, one of the largest outdoor liv-

ing history museums in the country. Six Flags Darien Lake is located approximately 20 minutes southwest of the City.

Genesee County – ordered information – 7/12/07 http://www.geneseeny.com/orgMain.asp?sid=&formid=4&submitid=2434

Dansville
The Livingston County visitors guide I received covered Dansville. I thought the Clara Barton House would be interesting to see. Dansville has a population of around 6,000. It also has the New State Festival of the Balloons every Labor Day - http://www.nysfob.com/.
The pictures on the Chamber Site - http://www.dansvilleny.net/pic.shtml - such a beautiful area and the pictures are such poor quality.

Medina
Population in 2006 was 6,191.
I checked out this web site - http://www.medina-ny.com/ - not exactly what I would picture in an area of major history. It didn't appeal to me.

Albion
Population in 2000 was 7,438.
The web site is not very inviting - http://www.townofalbion.com/index.html

To summarize:
Based on what I found from websites and reviewing the literature sent to me by the chambers and visitor bureaus, here's what I would plan - I would drive from Buffalo to Rochester and maybe stop in one small town to have a meal and look around. So many little towns simply have the same thing. I would need a reason to go there, and didn't find anything compelling.

WESTERN NEW YORK ASSESSMENT

If I were looking for a place to go boating close to home in Buffalo, NY or Erie, PA, I would pick the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. I would also give consideration to the Allegheny Reservoir, which encompasses parts of Pennsylvania and New York State. A third runner up would be Lake Chautauqua in western New York.

The Finger Lakes span across the west central part of New York State like a hand. The names of the eleven pristine glacier-carved lakes are derived from the region's rich Native American heritage. A boater can take advantage of a treasure trove of amenities in this 9,000 square-mile natural attraction. Seneca Lake, the deepest and the second largest of the Finger Lakes, is centrally located and is home to the Allan H. Treman State Marine Park, New York's largest inland marina. Neighboring Cayuga Lake is the longest Finger Lake and features one of the highest waterfalls in the east—Taughannock. Additional offerings include boat and equipment rental, dinner cruises, spectacular views and, of course, nearly 100 wineries. This area is very appealing.

Just about a 2-hour drive southeast of Buffalo are the Allegheny National Forest and the Allegheny Reservoir, which spans the border between Pennsylvania and New York. In Pennsylvania, the reservoir is completely surrounded by the Allegheny National Forest; and in New York State by Allegany State Park and the Allegany Indian Reservation of the Seneca Nation. This region is at the heart of one of the largest and most popular outdoor recreation complexes in the northeastern United States. The Allegheny (Kinzua) Reservoir with over 100 miles of shoreline encompasses 12,000 acres. The Kinzua-Wolf Run Marina and six boat launches located within the National Forest provide ready access onto the waters of the reservoirs. Houseboat rentals are also available from the Kinzua Wolf Run Marina. This area also looks appealing, but with many fewer amenities than Finger Lakes. It would be a good "wilderness" boating adventure.

Lake Chautauqua, at 1,308 feet above sea level, is one of the highest navigable bodies of water in North America. Long Point State Park on Lake Chautauqua Long Point, which juts peninsula-like into Lake Chautauqua, comprises a day-use area. The park's boat launch is the most modern on the lake. Fishermen come to Chautauqua for the plentiful supply of bass, perch, pike and the challenge of catching a Muskellunge, or Muskie. With the Chautauqua Institute right there, and the other small towns nestled right close to the lake, this would appeal to me if I wanted a more "civilized" boating vacation, where I participated in a lot of other activities.

Website Resources:
http://www.allegheny-vacation.com/boating.html
http://www.fingerlakes.org/
http://nysparks.state.ny.us/

What do you have that I can't get closer to home?

Your Primary Attraction:
The thing you have that no one else has and makes you worth a special trip.

Your Icon:
The photo opportunity that supports what you are known for.

Your Diversions:
Things I can get closer to home, but will do while I'm in the area.

What do you have that visitors from 50 or 100 miles away can't find closer to home? When you have something unique, you become worth that special trip.

Right now, many folks from Pennsylvania drive to Onoville to use the boat launch facilities, because it's an easy drive. But if you want to attract more visitors, from further away, and keep them longer, you need to offer unique experiences.

If you develop the marina uplands to offer more activities for people who don't have their own boats, make the setting beautiful, and promote the specific attractions of the area, more and more visitors will be drawn to the Onoville region.

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Claritas Inc.
Project 2978815 - Prepared For Destination Development
Jamestown, NY - 50, 100 & 150 Mile Radii
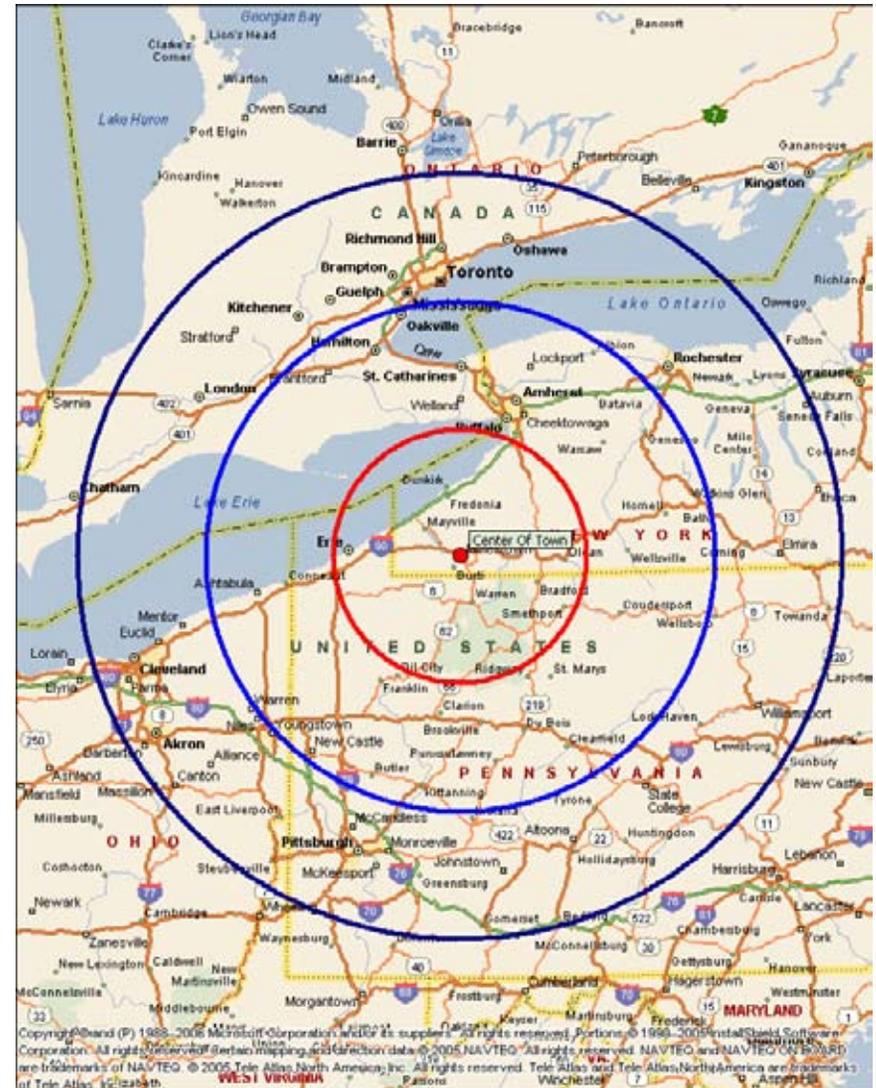
Project 2978815 - Prepared For Destination Development
Center Of Jamestown, NY
50, 100, & 150 Mile Radii

Pop Facts: Demographic Quick Facts	Center Of Town 0.00 - 50.00 mi		Center Of Town 0.00 - 100.00 mi		Center Of Town 0.00 - 150.00 mi	
Population						
2011 Projection	687,514		3,117,761		10,965,536	
2006 Estimate	692,789		3,145,420		11,043,277	
2000 Census	699,843		3,180,690		11,143,699	
1990 Census	696,080		3,182,528		11,078,802	
Growth 1990-2000	0.54%		-0.06%		0.59%	
Households						
2011 Projection	269,276		1,242,610		4,434,092	
2006 Estimate	269,532		1,244,639		4,435,463	
2000 Census	268,083		1,239,830		4,411,955	
1990 Census	257,263		1,197,020		4,235,577	
Growth 1990-2000	4.21%		3.58%		4.16%	
2006 Estimated Population by Single Race Classification	692,789		3,145,420		11,043,277	
White Alone	642,895	92.80%	2,823,703	89.77%	9,518,905	86.20%
Black or African American Alone	25,758	3.72%	215,857	6.86%	1,102,009	9.98%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	5,548	0.80%	13,465	0.43%	27,220	0.25%
Asian Alone	3,866	0.56%	28,219	0.90%	153,595	1.39%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	128	0.02%	663	0.02%	2,878	0.03%
Some Other Race Alone	6,622	0.96%	28,203	0.90%	92,985	0.84%
Two or More Races	7,972	1.15%	35,310	1.12%	145,685	1.32%
2006 Estimated Population Hispanic or Latino	692,789		3,145,420		11,043,277	
Hispanic or Latino	17,177	2.48%	71,711	2.28%	236,719	2.14%
Not Hispanic or Latino	675,612	97.52%	3,073,709	97.72%	10,806,558	97.86%
2006 Tenure of Occupied Housing Units	269,532		1,244,639		4,435,463	
Owner-Occupied	195,424	72.50%	894,996	71.91%	3,139,764	70.79%
Renter-Occupied	74,108	27.50%	349,643	28.09%	1,295,699	29.21%
2006 Average Household Size	2.45		2.43		2.40	

Benefits of Tourism

The benefits of tourism as an economic activity are widely recognized. Its ultimate goal is to import more cash into a community than is exported. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in North America. It is one of the top three industries in 49 out of 50 states and in every Canadian province.

Tourism helps diversify local economies. It creates entry-level jobs as well as business opportunities for entrepreneurs. Tourism is the front door to non-tourism economic development efforts. After all, anyone contemplating a new business or a move to your community will first arrive as a visitor. Is Rock Springs a place where they would want to live? Where their employees would want to live? Is it a place with a great workforce or the quality of life to attract a workforce?

For the first time in U.S. history, quality of life is leading the charge in attracting small businesses - the lifeblood of America. Quality of life is most apparent in downtowns. In fact, besides its people, we believe that the heart and soul of any community is its downtown. Is it attractive?

Do local residents hang out there? Does it have a variety of activities, both recreational and cultural? Is it vibrant, alive, and entertaining?
While this plan focuses on downtown and the marina, its implementation will reach far beyond that. It will touch and benefit Rock Spring's economic development efforts, its residential neighborhoods, tourism marketing efforts, and most of all, will increase community pride and slow retail "leakage" - when locals spend their money in other towns.

To take advantage of the potential benefits that increased tourism brings to a community, it is necessary to first understand why people travel. The number-one reason for travel is to visit friends and family. This kind of tourism exists without any special effort by the community. However, it can be enhanced if local residents have a strong sense of community pride and know about its local attractions. That way, when friends and family visit, they are more likely to act as goodwill ambassadors, encouraging their guests to experience all the community has to offer.

Another important group to consider are those who travel for business. This includes corporate meetings, conventions, conferences, and educational activities at colleges and universities. As with visiting friends and family, a community also receives a certain amount of tourism from this segment without any special effort.

Most tourism efforts target a third kind of traveler: the leisure traveler. This group travels specifically for experiences that cater to them and which can not be found closer to home, and they spend the most amount of money. Every true "destination" community caters to this group of travelers.

The Three Phases of Tourism

1. Get passers-by to stop. If you can not get them to stop, you can not become a destination community. What do you have that will make people stop?

2. Become the hub for area attractions and activities. This makes your community an overnight destination. Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors. Are there enough attractions in your surrounding area to keep tourists interested and willing to spend the night?

3. Become the destination. This is the best of all worlds. People come, stay with you, and spend all their time and money in your community alone. The ultimate goal of any tourism program is to work toward becoming a true "destination.".

Know Your Audience

As with many other aspects of our society, participation by the baby-boom generation is critical for any successful tourism effort. They account for 80 percent of all travel spending. This generation, born between 1946 and 1964, includes 85 million people.

Every month, 350,000 Americans turn 50 years old, and this trend will continue for another seven years.

Baby boomers are in their peak earning years and control 70 percent of North America's wealth. They are bound to control even more in the future by virtue of a corresponding inheritance boom. It is estimated that the boomer generation will inherit $10.4 trillion from their parents – the single greatest transfer of wealth in history. Where are they spending their money? Primarily on second homes and travel.

The baby-boom generation expects quality and requires activities that are truly unique and exciting. They demand comfort, convenience, and easy access. They are pre-occupied with self-absorption (what is in it for me) and maintaining youthfulness late into their lives. Their mantra is, "We may be aging, but we are NOT growing old."

It is important to understand travel trends being driven by baby boomers. These include a preference for complete and pre-planned itineraries, as well as all-inclusive resorts. Boomers are more likely to travel during April, May, September, and October – months that have historically been called "shoulder seasons." They like experiential-based adventures, albeit cushy by most standards. More boomer travel is geared around specific interests, including culinary tourism, art and education, genealogy, gardening, and open-air markets. There is widespread use of the Internet for travel-planning among this group. Web-enabled boomers go online for trip-planning 94 percent of the time. They are also more likely to plan regional trips less than three weeks before departure, or even on the spur of the moment.

The next-most important group of travelers are Echo-boomers. Born between 1977 and 1985, these are the children of the baby-boom generation. There are 80 million echo-boomers, making them nearly as numerous as baby-boomers. They appreciate many of the same aspects of travel as their parents and have a strong preference for gathering places, entertainment, excitement, and nightlife. They are the driving force behind destinations such as Las Vegas. Music and entertainment are major draws. Echo-boomers also like extreme adventure sports such as kayaking, mountain biking, and rock climbing.

Regardless of their generation, the same rules apply.

While tourism can play a significant role in Rock Spring's economic development efforts, it's important to point out that community comes first.

In fact, if locals do not "hang out" downtown or frequent local businesses, neither will visitors. The goal of this effort is to create an outstanding downtown that will attract local residents, area residents, visitors from neighboring cities, and the greater Bay Area boating public.

At all times, bear in mind the Five C's of tourism:

- **Convenience:** Easy-to-find information, easy-to-plan activities, easy-to-get-to destinations
- **Control:** Flexibility with, and control over itineraries
- **Comfort:** Beds are a key selling point—the top 15 percent of lodging facilities command 80 percent of the market
- **Cost:** Thanks to the Internet, pricing is transparent with travelers looking for the value
- **Connection:** More than ever, travelers are looking to connect with their heritage, each other, family, and the environment

WHY BRANDING?

Your brand is a marketing tool. It is all about cash. The goal is to import more cash than you export. As a resident, there are times you spend your earned income outside the community. This is commonly referred to as "leakage," and every community has it. The most successful communities import more cash than they export, usually through tourism. Competition is fierce, as every community is trying to import new cash. But to become a destination, you must offer something the visitor cannot get closer to home; something that helps you stand out from all other competing communities. This is where branding comes into play. It's the art of differentiation.

1 MARKETING OVERKILL

The average person is exposed to 3,000 marketing messages a day – far more than the mind can absorb and we filter out everything not specifically appealing to us. "We have something for everyone" no longer works. We want something that appeals to us. The days of generic marketing are over.

2 ABUNDANT CHOICES

Our purchasing choices have multiplied. Every year another 2,000 communities in North America are diversifying into tourism. With so many options available, the only way to stand out from the crowd is to specialize. This is the age of niche marketing.

In order to be successful, you must be worth a special trip, and that means being different or the best. What sets you apart from your competition? Why should I travel to your town, if I can enjoy the same things closer to home?

The specialists have the biggest successes:

- The Limited: Upscale clothing for working women
- The Gap: Casual clothing for the young at heart
- Victoria's Secret: Sexy undergarments
- Foot Locker: Athletic shoes
- Branson, MO - The music theater capital of the world
- Las Vegas, NV - The adult entertainment playground
- Nashville, TN - The country music capital of the world
- Memphis, TN - Home of Elvis Presley and Graceland
- Orlando, FL - Kids and family (DisneyWorld)
- Williamsburg, VA - Colonial America
- Victoria, BC - The world's garden city

3 REPOSITIONING MAY BE NECESSARY

If perceptions of your community are negative, you may need to develop a repositioning program. Frequently that starts with "curb appeal" – the first visual impressions of the community or business. Visitors expecting one thing and see something else will reposition your community in their minds.

4 SPECIFIC MARKETING

AVOID THE FOLLOWING WORDS AND PHRASES IN YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS:

- Discover
- Explore
- We have it all
- Something for everyone
- Best kept secret
- The four season destination
- Outdoor recreation
- Center of it all
- Historic downtown
- So much to see and do
- Experience
- Gateway

There are 425 counties in the 11 Western States. Almost every one promotes "outdoor recreation," which can mean almost anything. Just about everyone can find recreation close to home. Three hundred and eighty of these communities promote outdoor recreation as the primary draw. How far would you travel for generic outdoor recreation? You would not. You travel for a specific type of recreation, something that caters to you. We do not go places where there is something for everyone. We go places where there is something for me. None of the words listed above are a brand.

Because communities are so generic in their marketing, is it any wonder that 97 percent of all community-based advertising is ineffective?

The more variations you attach to a brand, the more the customer loses focus. Gradually, the brand comes to mean nothing at all. The specialist, however, can focus on one thing and one message. This focus enables the community to put a sharp point on the marketing effort, quickly driving it to mind.

Take a look at the following opening paragraph to a typical Visitor's Guide. Could it fit your community?
"Discover the wide open spaces, gracious people,

and picturesque landscapes that characterize [insert your town here]. Each season holds the promise of a new adventure and an incredible memory. Come join us in [your town] and discover the scenic and recreational opportunities that await you."

To succeed you MUST jettison the generic. Welcome to the "Era of the Brand"; the art of setting yourself apart from everyone else.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

A brand is specific and experiential:

- **Las Vegas, Nevada** - America's Adult Playground "What happens here, stays here"
- **Ashland, Oregon** - Home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, 460,000 annual visitors who stay an average of six nights
- **Oatman, Arizona** - Home of wild burros and Western shoot-outs on Main Street Population: 200, Visitors: 500,000 a year
- **Mt. Airy, N. Carolina** - Mayberry, USA Get arrested by the sheriff in a Barney Fife outfit
- **Asheville, N. Carolina** -Where fine culture meets counter culture "Unscripted" - a funky arts and entertainment town

Tourism is an annual $1.7 billion industry

5 **A BRAND IS A PERCEPTION**
This is the most important, most talked about, and most misunderstood rule in the tourism and downtown redevelopment industry. A brand is what people think of you - NOT what you say you are. It is a perception.

In a society that is information rich and time poor, people value feeling more than information. A brand is the "feeling" a potential visitor has about you. When someone mentions Disneyland, what is the perception - the feeling - that comes to mind? Your brand should evoke emotion or an image. When you hear the words Napa County and then Napa Valley, which one brings an image to your mind? A picture of what it's like there?

WHAT ISN'T A BRAND?

6 **LOGOS AND SLOGANS ARE NOT A BRAND.**
They are just tools used to promote the brand. They are exclamation points on your key message. Do you go to Disneyland or Disneyworld because its slogan is "The Happiest Place on Earth"? No, you go there because of your perception of Disneyworld and what you know or have heard about it. The slogan simply reinforces what you have come to believe is true about a trip to Orlando or Anaheim.

7 **THESE ARE NOT BRANDS**
- **Historic downtowns** - brands are activity-based
- **Slogans and logos** - they just reinforce and promote the brand
- **Geography** - unless you're the very unique, Grand Canyon
- **Gateway -** something you pass through to go somewhere else
- **Unique** - the most overused word in tourism that has come to mean nothing at all
- **Fruits and vegetables** - are not a brand, they are part of the ambiance

- Scenic vistas - are not a brand, they are part of the ambiance

8 **ICONS ARE NOT BRANDS**

An icon is the photo opportunity that (hopefully) reinforces your brand. How far would you travel to see the world's biggest lava lamp (Soap Lake, Washington), Gas Can (Gas, Kansas), Catsup Bottle (Collinsville, Ohio), or the world's biggest garden hoe (Dog River, Saskatchewan)? Would you go to Seattle to see the Space Needle, then head back home? Of course not. The primary lure, or another reason such as visiting friends and family, would bring you to Seattle, and the Space Needle would be a must-see diversion while visiting the city.

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL BRAND?

9 **BE WORTHY OF A STANDING OVATION**
You have two choices: You can be different or first in a new category, or you can be the best. If you are the best at something, people will skip over the same activity closer to home to experience the best. Think skiing and Vail, Colorado or Whistler Resort in British Columbia.

The challenge with being the best is that people are always gunning for you, trying to topple you off your throne. Being different is a much better road to travel, if you can come up with something totally unique to you.

10 BRANDING REQUIRES THIRD-PARTY ENDORSEMENTS

Being the best in your category cannot be self-proclaimed. Brands are built around word of mouth and perceptions, not from advertising. Advertising is used to maintain your position, once you own the brand. Just like a slogan, advertising reinforces the brand.

Self-proclaimed brands are rarely effective unless you have a bottomless pocketbook and you can saturate the market with your brand message until people come to believe it.

Use third-party quotes appearing in guide books and magazine articles to elevate your status as being the best.

- **Okanogan County, Washington:** "Rocky Mountain powder in the Northwest? Go ahead, pinch yourself, you're in the Methow Valley." -Gorp.com
- **Door County, Wisconsin** "One of the top ten vacation destinations in North America." -Money Magazine
- **Kootenay Rockies, British Columbia:** "The hot springs capital of the Rockies." - British Columbia Magazine

11 FIND YOUR NICHE

- **Leavenworth, Washington:** Washington's Bavarian Village
- **Battle Creek, Michigan:** The competitive biking capital of the mid west
- **Carson City, Nevada:** Home of the famous "Divine Nine" (golf)

Be known for something:

- **Hershey, Pennsylvania** - Chocolate
- **Gettysburg, Pennsylvania** - Civil War
- **Lancaster, Pennsylvania** - Amish, Pennsylvania Dutch
- **Washington, DC** - Government
- **Hollywood, California** Movies and stars
- **Salem, Massachusetts** - The 1692 witch trials
- **Tombstone, Arizona** - Shoot-out at the OK Corral

This applies to businesses as much (if not more so) than communities:

- **Stew Leonards groceries**: Farm fresh produce and dairy
- **The Ventana Inn, CA:** "No kids, be kids"
- **Westin Hotels:** Heavenly beds (they now sell them)

What are you known for?

- What sets you apart from everyone else?
- What do you have that I can not get closer to home?
- What makes you worth a special trip and an extended stay?

12 EVERYONE MUST BE ON THE SAME PAGE

A brand must have continuity with everyone contributing. Once you get local organizations on board, the process becomes fun. You must define the roles, and everyone plays a role. This is NOT a top-down effort.

13 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT NEVER ENDS

You can never rest on your laurels. Product de-velopment MUST be a major part of your brand-ing effort. Branson, Missouri, the "Music Theater Capital of the World" now has 49 theaters and this town of just 6,500 residents hosts some 7.5 million visitors annually. The more you have to offer in your brand, the further people will come and the longer they will stay.

In Victoria, British Columbia, "The World's Garden City," the beautification budget is $4.5 million an-nually. $1 million is spent annually to make it even better (capital projects). The city hangs more than 1,000 baskets a year. It has the highest ratio of parkland per capita of any city in North America.

14 PROMOTE THE PRIMARY LURE

Always promote the primary lure, not the diversions. Diversions are things I can do closer to home, but are not what brings me to your town. However, I will do them while visiting you. Diver-sions include golf, shopping and dining, visiting local museums, attending community events, recreational activities, visiting historic downtowns, etc.

15 THE LURE CAN'T SUCCEED WITHOUT DIVERSIONS

The average overnight visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet spends just four to six hours with the primary lure. Visitors then will spend eight to ten hours a day with diversionary activities. 80 percent of all visitor spending takes place with diversions.

16 IT'S TOUGH TO MAINTAIN YOUR POSITION

People are always gunning for number one. Wine has become the most oversaturated tourism brand-

ing effort in North America, yet Napa Valley still "owns" the title "Wine Capital of America." However, Napa has to always work hard to maintain its position as dozens of other "wine countries" have entered the fray.

17 A BRAND DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SEXY

A brand does not have to be sexy to be effective. Take the case of Bullhead City, Arizona. It can not compete with its neighbor, Laughlin, Nevada just across the Colorado River. What Bullhead City has, that Laughlin doesn't have - is a Wal-Mart. They say, "For all your personal needs, head to Bullhead City, just across the bridge." When visitors head to Bullhead City for toothpaste or other personal items, those visitors see restaurants, antique shops and river tours. Wal-Mart may not be sexy, but in this case, it is the primary lure.

BRANDING GONE BAD

18 POLITICS IS THE KILLER OF ANY BRANDING EFFORT

Once you have the brand determined, THEN bring the public on board. It takes a village to develop the brand, but only a pioneer and champions to determine the brand.

19 JUST SAY NO TO FOCUS GROUPS

NEVER use a focus group to decide on a brand. Ask your customers - they're better at telling it like it is.

Washington State - "Say WA" campaign
- Died after only six months and wasted $400,00
- No buy-in from the industry or local residents, businesses
- It was the sixth slogan in just ten years

20 DO NOT SELL IT UNTIL YOU CAN DELIVER

Resist the urge to market the brand until you can deliver on the promise. Hawthorne, Nevada was so gung ho on their brand as "America's Patriotic Home" that the community rented and posted billboards along major interstates promoting the brand. The problem? The community had little to show for it. A brand must be obvious to everyone who lives there and visits. If it is an empty shell, people won't come back and they will tell people there was nothing to do or see in your town that supported the effort.

21 DO NOT COPY OTHERS

Kellogg, Idaho worked hard to develop a Bavarian or Alpine theme for its downtown but its primary market includes Vancouver, BC, Seattle, WA, and Portland, OR – a population base of approximately 7 million people. The problem? Leavenworth, Washington, "Washington's Bavarian Village," is far closer and already complete. So why drive to Kellogg?

Never copy another brand unless you are in an entirely different market. Leavenworth got the Bavarian idea from Solvang, California, a Danish town along the central California coast, located in an entirely different market.

HOW TO BUILD A BRAND

22 THE FIVE MAJOR STEPS TO BRANDING

- Determine the brand (who are we?)
- Create the icon (the photo opportunity)
- Create the activities and facilities that will reinforce and grow the brand (experience)
- Create the identity and key marketing messages (logo and slogan)
- Develop the publicity machine (brand building)

Notice that the logo and slogan were number four on the list. Most communities put this first and most of their efforts fail because they can not deliver on the promise: they do not have the icon, the facilities, and the experiences that cement a brand position.

23 THE 25 STEPS TO BRANDING A COMMUNITY

Here are the individual steps, in order:

1. Get professional help
2. Determine your primary and secondary markets
3. Inventory your activities (attractions)
4. Inventory similar activities in your major and secondary markets
5. Educate the community about branding
6. Ask the community. What is our brand or what should it be?
7. Run the ideas through the feasibility test
	- Is this something the primary and secondary markets cannot get (or

do) closer to home?

That no one else in the market is already working on?

- Will it extend our seasons?

Can it be developed to a nine-month plus season?

- Is it experiential?
- If it were in a community 150 miles away, would you go there for it?
- How much money will it take to develop and "own" the brand?
- Where will the money come from? And how long will it

take to see a return on investment?

 - Can the community buy into it over time? You will never get everyone to agree. Not many cities could easily buy into becoming the next Las Vegas, or Sin City. While the public does not decide on the brand, they are important to developing it and telling the world.

- Will and can the private sector invest in the brand?
- How wide an audience will it attract?
- Is the brand expandable? Does it have legs? Can you attach "brand extensions" to it? For instance, you may decide to become the mountain biking capital - can you add street biking? A velodrome? BMX courses? Cyclo-cross? Then can you add cross-participation sports like rock climbing?
- Do we have those who will tirelessly champion the cause? (Every branding effort requires pioneers)
- Can we make it obvious and pervasive throughout the community?

8. Develop the brand perceptions and vision statement
9. Create the key marketing messages
10. Develop identity concepts
11. Work to obtain public buy-in (Note: everyone won't buy in)
12. Test identities and slogans with customers, not locals. If you are going for a team sports brand, then test the key messages and logos with sports organizations - the "customers" you hope to attract.
13. Develop a niche-market plan, and then an expansion plan (in sports you might start with softball, then expand to soccer, then basketball, etc.)
14. Develop the "Graphics System:"
    - Gateways
    - Wayfinding system
    - Monument signage
    - Interpretive signs and displays
    - Information kiosks
    - Pole banners
    - Streetscapes, plaza areas, façade improvements
    - Naming of downtown districts, other facilities to reinforce the brand
    - Marketing materials
    - Crosswalks
15. Create the product development plan
16. Define the roles of local organizations
17. Get the brand champions and pioneers on board
        (Your Brand Development Committee)
18. Incorporate the brand into the fabric of the community
19. Sell the community (do not ask for permission, sell them)
20. Keep the focus narrow
21. Recruit and promote specific supporting businesses
22. "Rearrange the furniture" - the business mix to develop the critical mass
23. Implement the PR program
24. Review and revisit the plan every year or two so the brand doesn't stray
25. Never give up

The first 17 of these steps, with the exception of the creation of the Graphics System, are included in this plan. The additional items are part of the actual branding implementation.

24 BRAND FEASIBILITY IS WHAT COUNTS

To succeed you must promote businesses and attractions that support and grow the brand. If culinary tourism is your primary lure, you must promote the dining experiences that deliver on the promise (Sorry Arby's, you're the diversion,
not the lure).

This is why creating a successful brand is never a public process. Feasibility is what determines a successful brand, not sentiment, not memberships, not political clout, and not trying to make everyone happy. This is a critical distinction that separates emotion from the fact. This is about revenues - importing cash into the community or business.

25 EDUCATION IS IMPERATIVE

Educate locals on the difference between the lure (what you have that no one else has, and makes you worth a special trip), the diversion (secondary activities once the visitor is there), the icon (the photo opportunity, but not the reason to go there), amenities (supporting infrastructure like parking, visitor information, restrooms, etc.), and ambiance (scenic vistas, historic downtowns, beautification, etc.). Historic downtowns are not a draw, they are part of the ambiance. It's what is in the buildings that creates the draw. Eventually, everyone needs to be a spokesperson for the brand. Support is imperative to maintaining a strong, successful brand.

26 START SMALL. NARROW YOUR FOCUS.

It is far better to be a big fish in a small pond (then increase the size of the pond), than to be a small fish in a big pond. You won't be noticed.

Narrow your focus. Then narrow it some more. Take the case of Kellogg, Idaho where visitors will find hundreds of miles of pristine biking trails. Unfortunately, there are thousands of places with hundreds of miles of pristine biking trails. But there is no place in North America where you will find the "Route of the Hiawatha," a 15-mile trail that passes through ten tunnels and over seven high trestles, and is best known for the Taft Tunnel which burrows 1.66 miles under the Idaho/ Montana state line. This trail has no competitors and is a national attraction drawing visitors from all over North America. While there, visitors shop, dine, visit historic Wallace, participate in other recreational activities, visit nearby Coeur d'Alene,

and other bike trails. Narrow your focus and then narrow it some more.

27 BRANDING REQUIRES A PIONEER

Every branding effort requires a tireless pioneer. Who is your pioneer? Who will work with the pioneer (or pioneers) to champion the cause? Pioneers are those that invest in the brand. 95 percent of the time the pioneers are from the private sector, not the public sector. (see Point #28)

28 BRANDING IS A BOTTOM-UP EXERCISE

Branding is very, very rarely a top-down effort. The business community must take the lead. The local government is there to assist, wherever possible.

29 CREATE THE "BRAND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE"

1. Develop a small "brand development committee." This small group should include both public and private sector stakeholders who are bent on making something happen for the community and who won't let politics kill the effort. Typically this committee should have no more than seven or so "players."
2. This committee would act as a steering committee in hiring outside expertise to develop the Action Plan. Select your consulting firm using a Statement of Qualifications (SOQ), as opposed to a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Hire the best, then negotiate the fees and scope of work. If you can not reach an agreement, go to number two on your list of finalists. Hire a team that understands what it takes to develop a community or downtown brand. Do not get hung up on the sex

appeal of logos and slogans. These are merely a minor part of the branding effort, NOT the brand itself.

3. You will work with your Brand Development Consultant through the process - educating locals as to what branding is, requesting ideas and options from the public. Then, the consultant team will take these ideas and will run them through the feasibility analysis, as described earlier. Once a brand emerges, the Action Plan will be developed. It should include:

- The overall brand and any sub-brands
- Product development that will grow and support the brand
- Roles of various local organizations
- Private investment roles and supporting businesses
- Funding of every recommendation
- Benchmarks and timelines
- Brand identities, sub-brand identities, graphic standards, brand style guide, wayfinding and gateway design, key marketing messages, and slogans.
- Public relations plan (brands are built through PR, not advertising)
- Community-outreach planning

4. During this process the "brand development committee" may change to a new group or additional members that will be champions for the brand. If the brand revolves around team sports, the champions would be those that are professionals in the sports industry: coaches, sporting organizations, sports retailers and businesses, sports marketing organizations, etc. This brings credibility and private investment to the branding effort and gives the brand a voice in the community. This

group will be charged with promoting the brand locally, getting buy-in from the community, and overseeing implementation of the action plan.

5. Locals should not make the final decision on the logo(s), slogans and key marketing messages. You will never reach a consensus using public input, which usually results in a watered down, generic brand and messages. Instead, the "customers" are used to decide the outcome of this effort.

For instance, Battle Creek, Michigan is beginning the work of becoming the "Competitive Sports Capital of the Midwest." They will start with competitive biking as the initial brand (The Competitive Biking Capital of the Midwest). You have to "earn" a brand. In this case, logos, slogans, and key marketing messages were designed, but the final four options were sent to customers – competitive biking organizations, race organizers, sports marketing professionals, and event planners – people they want to attract to Battle Creek. They were sent the various options (no group meetings or focus groups - they were tested individually) and asked, "Which would most appeal to you as a destination?" This is marketing, so why not ask the customers to make the final decision? This also takes the politics out of the process.

6. Once the brand has been set and a draft plan developed, the committee and consulting team need to "sell" it to local leaders, and participating organizations. Make sure that whoever you hire has some top-notch sales ability. They will be your initial voice in promoting the brand.

7. Let your local leaders, particularly elected leaders, take ownership of the brand. It's okay if it's their idea - ownership is not an issue; getting

something done is. Do whatever it takes to make things happen. There may end up being revisions to the draft plan as a result, but that may be necessary to get total buy-in for the final plan.

NOTE: Cities or counties are often the lead organization in getting the plan developed. Once it has been developed, it's not up to the governing agency to implement it. They are the conduit in developing the plan, which will be handed over to the business community and other local organizations for implementation. The city, after that point, acts in a supporting role, particularly when it comes to infrastructure or publicly-owned facilities that need to be developed or enhanced in order to capture a successful brand.

8. The Brand Champions will stay involved for years. Branding is a process and not a one-time event. It needs to be nurtured, promoted, and grown. Members may come and go, but all need to be active in the process, not just in advisory roles. Typically this committee would be independent of any organization, but sometimes may be a committee of the city (or county), or work under a destination marketing organization, downtown (Main Street), or Chamber of Commerce. The consulting firm would determine this as part of their process.

30 BRANDING OFTEN REQUIRES RECRUITMENT

Recruit supporting businesses that can help grow the brand and cement your position so you own it. The Route of the Hiawatha could not succeed without supporting businesses - hotels, restaurants, bike rentals, tour operators, bike repair

shops, and transportation to and from the trail.

31 START WITH A PLAN

Every community should create a community (or downtown) Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan. This is NOT a strategic plan, which offers general strategies, goals, and objectives. This is a to-do list for just about every local organization. Everyone participates in the branding process. Start with a plan that will help define the roles for each organization. This way people are pulling in the same direction. That makes it fun. Each key organization should have a member sitting on the Brand Development Committee. Each has a to-do list, and every time they meet the discussion revolves around "how are your doing on your list?"

Always decide on the brand direction using an outside facilitator. If you ask 20 people what your brand should be, chances are you will get 20 different answers. When you eventually pick one, you've alienated 19 of your future stakeholders. You need everyone on board to promote and develop the brand.

Everyone will have an idea, and understandably, each will be somewhat self-serving. You must take the politics out of the branding effort. After all, this is about cash, not sentiment.

32 YES, YOU CAN DEVELOP SUB-BRANDS

Chevrolet doesn't run ads stating "Buy a Chevy. We have cars for everyone." Instead they market the Geo Metro to its specific audience, the Suburban to a different audience, and the Corvette to

yet another niche audience.

THE BRAND MESSAGE: SLOGANS AND LOGOS

33 FOUR RULES TO CREATING A GREAT SLOGAN

A slogan is simply an exclamation point on your key message. It's not the brand; it just reinforces it.

The following was adapted by an article written by Kim T. Gordon, author of Bringing Home the Business.

Finish the following phrase: "You're in good hands with..."

If you immediately recognized this motto as belonging to Allstate Insurance, then all the marketing muscle and millions of dollars the company has invested in the slogan are paying off by firmly establishing its brand name.

Now try to identify the company that uses this phrase: "It's everywhere you want to be."

Did you instantly think of Visa, or did you wonder whether the slogan might belong to MasterCard?

To win the name game in the marketing world, you must make sure your prospects and customers do more than recall your slogan – they have to associate it with your community, not your competitor's. To make sure your slogan or tag line hits home, follow these four tips:

1. Evoke your key benefit

Great slogans not only are built around a brand's core promise—they also establish an exclusive connection in customer's minds. You and your marketing staff or advertising agency must create a slogan that evokes your key benefits and reflects the unique experience your community (or business) delivers.

For example, back when Burger King introduced its "Have it your way" slogan in 1974, the company was battling the cookie-cutter image of assembly-line fast-food burger restaurants. It positioned itself as the chain where burgers were made to order and focused on diner's ability to customize their burgers by asking counter staff to "hold the pickle, hold the lettuce." Burger King's focus on that flexibility was directly reflected in this memorable slogan.

2. Test with prospects and customers

Qualitative research is essential before putting your marketing resources squarely behind a newly developed slogan. It's important to speak to potential customers as well as existing ones to avoid skewing the outcome. If you only query your current customers, you may never figure out how to appeal to those who never considered your previous marketing messages compelling. Phone surveys and customer focus groups can be used to test proposed slogans. They can also uncover or verify information about the benefits your prospects and customers expect to realize when they use your product or service.

3. Include your community name

Evidence suggests slogans fare better when it comes to customer recall, if they incorporate the company or product name. Wolf Group New York, an ad agency with such clients as Häagen-Dazs and Miracle-Gro, tested consumer recognition of 19 tag lines that were part of successful, long-running advertising campaigns backed by hundreds of millions of dollars. Each of the top-five brands in the survey included the product or advertiser's name, while none of the bottom 10 did. For example, Visa's slogan, "It's everywhere you want to be," was familiar to 70 percent of respondents, but only 15 percent could correctly identify who the advertiser was. On the other hand, the tag line "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there," experienced practically universal recognition.

4. Stick with it

Never adopt a new slogan as a quick fix or as part of a temporary campaign. Success requires committing to a slogan or tag line for several years, perhaps even decades, and incorporating it into all your marketing materials as a part of the company logo. If you want to protect your business's marketing investment in the new slogan, you should consider trademarking it. At the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Web site, you can fill out a trademark application, search the trademark database and research general information about trademarks.

Whatever you do, just remember that a great slogan is like a partner in a happy marriage—it will share your company's name and be your marketing partner for many years to come. So please consider your options carefully.

34 NOTES ABOUT BRAND IDENTITIES (YOUR LOGO)

Use ONE simple graphic. Do not try to be all things to all people. Pictures, instead of graphics, are too hard to identify as a "brand mark." The most overused community identities include mountains, water, trees and sun. Just about every community has these. So what makes you special?

Develop a Branding Style Guide so that you have continuity in all your marketing materials even from other local organizations. Everyone should adopt the brand and design standards. What would happen to Coca Cola if every bottling plant developed its own Coke cans, bottles, ads, etc? It would be a dead company.

Your logo should look good in full color, two colors, in black and white, on signs, banners, and when reduced to about 3/4" in the corner of an ad or on a business card.

The simpler the logo, the better it looks on "logo gear" - things you sell to promote the brand and have it promote itself. Also, can the logo be stitched on shirts and jackets?

The most memorable logos are the simplest logos. Do you know what Nike's logo looks like? The "swoosh" is one of the world's most recognized brand marks. It's not, by the way, a picture of a tennis shoe.

THE FINAL WORD

It takes a village to create a successful brand, but it starts with just one person, one event, one business. Remember that branding takes time; you can not build a brand overnight.

LOCAL POLITICS IS THE KILLER OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY.

Visitors spend more money on diversions than the primary draw, which is often a "loss leader." Trying to please everyone is a recipe for an ineffective branding and marketing program.

Finally, implementation of nearly every rule outlined in the book The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism should take place AFTER the brand has been developed. Your wayfinding signage, gateways, visitor information kiosks, downtowns, business mix, critical mass, marketing materials, should all reflect the brand. Build the foundation first - and a strong one at that - and that will foster a successful branding effort.

35 SUGGESTED READING

While these books are geared more to products than communities, they will provide you with clear insights as to what it takes to develop a winning brand.
- The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding by Al Ries and Laura Ries
- The Brand Gap by Marty Neumeier
- The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell
- Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind by Al Ries and Jack Trout

Perhaps Marty Neumeier summed it up best in The Brand Gap when he provided the five keys to a successful brand:
- Differentiate
- Collaborate
- Innovate
- Validate
- Cultivate

Forward

This section of the plan is for all those charged with promoting the new brand to increase tourism spending, revitalize downtowns, or for economic development reasons.

When local earnings are spent outside the community, this is leakage. But when outside dollars come back into the community, that's economic development. A successful community imports more cash than it exports. As communities are forced to operate like businesses, they are finding that sales and promotion are critical aspects of a community's life.

Whether you are a Chamber of Commerce, an economic development office or destination marketing organization, downtown revitalization (Main Street) manager, or city/county staff charged with marketing your community, you already know how important a role the internet plays in marketing and branding your community.

While there are dozens, if not hundreds, of books on the subject, this book cuts to the chase and outlines what you can do to develop a Website that's good enough to close the sale. You'll see dozens of examples, and key things to keep in mind as you develop a stronger, more effective Website.

Introduction

"The new phone book's here! The new phone book's here!" yelled Navin Johnson, as he danced around the gas station grounds.

"Well, I wish I could get so excited about nothing," replied his boss Harry, the gas station owner.

Nothing? Are you kidding?!" Navin shouted back. "Page 73, Johnson, Navin R! I'm somebody now! Millions of people look at this book every day! This is the kind of spontaneous publicity, your name in print, that makes people! I'm impressed! Things are going to start happening to me now!"

Navin, played by Steve Martin in the comedy The Jerk (1979), was finally somebody. His name was in print. He was listed in the phone book with hundreds of thousands of other somebodies. What are the chances that his name was spotted by the millions of people who use the phone book? Well, slim, but at least he was somebody.

- How would this scene apply to the Internet? Consider the following:
- A new Website goes on line an average of every three seconds. In fact, more than 64 million domain names have been registered in the U.S. alone – so far. Can you imagine a phone book with 64 million names listed in the white pages?
- The Internet is fourth to only electricity, the automobile, and television in its influence among daily American life. Not bad for a technology few even knew existed less than 20 years ago.
- Eighty-eight percent of all Americans say that the Internet plays a major role in their lives, surpassing television for the first time.
- Seventy-five percent of all Americans use the Internet regularly, and sixty-eight percent have immediate access to the web either at home or work.
- New Internet users are growing at the alarming rate of nearly ten percent – per month!
- Ninety-five percent of U.S. car buyers do research on-line.
- Ninety-four percent of all Internet users plan their travel using the web.

Website use for travel planning has grown quickly and varies little by age and income or gender. Surprisingly, older Americans are using the Web for travel planning as often as younger Americans. This means that the highest potential travelers (those older, retired consumers with the greatest disposable income) can be effectively reached via the Internet. According to one study by Stanford University, Internet users spend 5% of their online time researching travel sites.

So, how excited were you when your Website went live? And now that you have a Website, have you ever considered why you have it? What is your Website's purpose?

Many communities will state that the Website is simply an information source for local residents, businesses, and community leaders. But the real power of the Internet lies in its power to promote.

It's rare to find a community that isn't looking for some form of economic growth: residential, business, industry, or tourism. The Internet is the most powerful and cost effective way to market your community.

There are two major challenges with a Website: Is it good enough to close the sale? And can your customer even find it?

Consider this. If Navin Johnson had a book listing the 64 million registered domain names instead of phone numbers, his name would be listed on page number 12,066 of the 313,725 page book. With 28,000 new Websites coming on line every day, the phone book would grow by 4,235 pages per month!

Part I. Make your town shine – effective web-site design for destinations

1 TOURISM IS YOUR FRONT DOOR
Tourism is the fastest growing industry in all fifty states, and nothing promotes a community like tourism. Because visitors see the quality of life – culture, history, activities, attractions, ameni-

ties, etc. – tourism is a primary attractor for non-tourism economic development efforts. Business people who decide to relocate have always visited the new community first – as tourists.
Your Website should promote the community's quality of life, and the best way to show that is by using great photography. Show off what your community has to offer visitors, residents, and businesses. Showing your community's assets doesn't just attract tourists. It also builds community pride, fosters a sense of cooperative spirit, and promotes economic development.

2 PULL YOUR CUSTOMERS INTO THE SITE
Your home page should be like your front door: attractive, clean, and inviting. To sell your community, use knock-out pictures and introductory text. Just like a novel or magazine article, the first line or paragraph must be powerful enough to grab the reader's attention. And too much clutter distracts your visitor. Too many links and topics are confusing. Make it clean, easy to understand, and a pleasure to view.

Think of the splash page or home page as the front door to your community. Santa Barbara, California's Conference and Visitors Bureau's home/splash page, www.santabarbaraca.com, is a beautiful example.

The stunning slide show illustrates the beauty and activities in the area. Site visitors are mesmerized and watch the entire introduction, which only takes a few seconds.

Sonoma County, California, has also done a good job with a splash page slide show at www.sonomacounty.com. The photos not only show the beauty of the county's vineyards, ocean, and rivers, they show people actively enjoying themselves. Your home page needs to portray your town in the best possible light, making visitors want to continue looking through the Website, and making people want to visit.
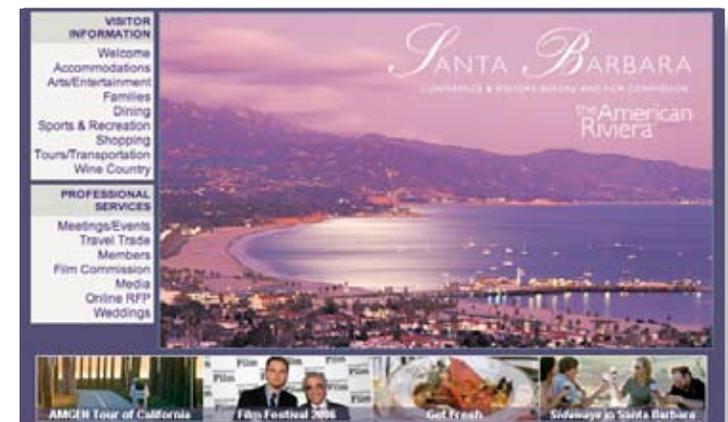
3 CREATE A SINGLE FRONT DOOR

Many destination marketing Websites have twenty, thirty, or forty (or more) links on the home page with no central focus, making the experience confusing right from the start. Seventy percent of web searches are met with frustration when the visitor has trouble finding the information they are looking for. Statistics show that visitors who can't easily find what they're looking for will move on after only twenty seconds.

Think about your Website as if it were your home. You walk up to the front door, finding beautiful curb appeal (your splash page). That sets the tone for a good experience and shows visitors who you are. Once through the front door, you can choose which direction you'd like to go. This can be as simple as two choices: the city section, or the chamber (or visitor) section.

The small Washington State town of LaConner did a great job bringing the city and chamber together, with their home page offering a choice between entering the Town site, and entering the Chamber site. More effective than multiple Websites – and less expensive. Even through keywords they've created a partnership: LaConner, Washington: the town and visitor information.
What a concept!

Options could include a series of links:

- The community
- Doing business here
- Visitor information
- Links and resources
- City hall or Chamber info
- Website contents

If a visitor to the site is looking for visitor information, they will click on that link which will give them more options. If they're looking for the minutes to the last City Commission meeting, they'll click on the city hall info link. Make it easy, logical, and progressive.

4 KEEP IT SIMPLE AND IT WILL SELL

Navigating your Website should be simple, answering the following questions: Where do I find the information I want? Where am I? Where can I go next? Where is the home page? Your links should be the same on each page, offering visitors the opportunity to go back to the home page, or select a different option at any time. Including a back button is also a good idea. Don't force visitors to go through too many links to find the information they want – each additional link is an opportunity to lose the visitor.

Look at the Truckee, California Website (www.truckee.com). Notice how easy it is to navigate? The links remain consistent no matter what page you're visiting. Besides having sub-links for each category, there's also an introductory text. It's engaging, informative, and easy to use. Truckee, a town of 16,000, was our clear winner when picking a community in this region to visit. That's the power of a Website that's good enough to close the sale.

Another excellent Website can be found at www.pebblebeach.com. It's easy to navigate, well written (using little text), uses world-class photography, endorsements and accolades to sell the experience, and makes it easy to plan an escape to Pebble Beach. The 17-Mile Drive page is an interactive map that gives specific information in an easy to follow format. Simplicity sells.

5 PHOTOGRAPHY IS KING

Most communities wouldn't dream of producing a brochure with no photos to promote their town. They know very few visitors would even give that brochure a second look. So, why do so many communities skimp on photography on their Websites?

Nothing sells like a good picture. Outstanding photography – photography that sells the experience – can do more to market your community than anything else.

Show people having a great time in your community: shopping, dining, riding bikes, picnicking, any activity a visitor would want to do in your town. People are looking for things to do, and you want your photos to get the potential visitor excited – to have them say, "Wow. I want to go there – that looks like fun!" Potential visitors want to know what your community looks like. If you have a great historic downtown shopping area, show them photos of people shopping there. If you have beautiful parks, show photos of people playing in those parks. If you have outstanding restaurants, post photos of those restaurants on your site. Give viewers a good image of your community. If you want people to spend the night with you, let them see what you look like first.

A good example of the use of outstanding photography can be found on Tourism Victoria's Website, www.tourismvictoria.com. The home page has changing photos, showing, in turn, kayakers, people walking on the beach with the mountains in the background, sailboats in their harbor, the fabulous Victoria skyline, the Empress hotel lit at night, and a bicycle rider. The photos are so stunning and show such a wide array of the beauty and activities a visitor can find in Victoria, that they make the sale.

The Portland, Oregon Visitor Association's Website, www.pova.org, shows changing photos of downtown Portland on its home page, giving viewers a good feel for the city. When a viewer clicks on the Visitor link, he can see several photos of people enjoying different parts of the city: shopping downtown, strolling in a park, and enjoying the rose garden (Portland is known as the City of Roses.)

Let Website viewers see what a great town you have; make them want to visit and have fun there too. Nothing can make the sale better than outstanding photography.
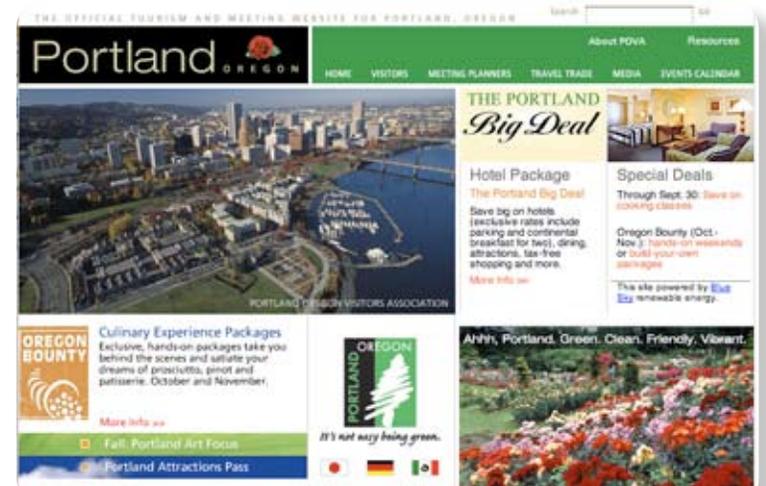
6 DYNAMIC TEXT IS QUEEN

Journalists know the all-important rule that states if you can't engage readers by the end of the first paragraph, chances are you've already lost them.

You want to turn web-site visitors into customers. That means you have to get them engaged almost immediately. If outstanding photography is king in making the sale, dynamic text is queen. Know what you're trying to say and communicate it with friendly, informal, and jargon-free language.

Research shows that most Website viewers don't read thoroughly – they scan the page. That means you need to use a special approach in writing for your Website. Use clear, meaningful titles that give a good idea of the content of the page. Make your first sentence a summary of the content, and use headings to make major points. Bulleted items are a clean way to present information, particularly if they are hot links to other pages. And remember, big words are not necessarily better; long sentences are more difficult to understand; and passive voices are boring. That doesn't mean you should include jokes and puns, though. One man's humor is another man's insult, so be careful.

Your content should inform the reader, letting them know what benefits they'll enjoy by visiting your town. What's in it for them? Use the benefits to entice the reader to want to read more. Then, give your visitor detailed information about what you have to offer.

Don't break up one article into several pages. People scanning the article will usually stop at the end of the page, and you'll lose readers.

Finally, always spell check your writing. And go one step further – proofread. Spell check doesn't find every error. Have someone else proofread your work as well; it's easy to miss your own mistakes. Writing good content takes time and effort. Proofread, tighten, edit, and correct. You want your Website to convey exactly what you want to say, and you can do that with dynamic, brief, descriptive content that convinces your reader that, of all the places they can visit, they need to choose your town.

7 DON'T PROVIDE LISTS, PROVIDE DETAILS

Far too many Websites promote lists of things to see and do, places to shop, eat or spend the night. A list does nothing to entice a visit to the community or business. Nothing can close the sale like professional photography and text that gives the details.

Listing the Compass Rose, a gift shop in Olympia, Washington does not do much for you does it? There are literally thousands of gift shops out there, and just about every community has many of them. But if I told you that the owners of this truly unique shop travel the world picking up one-of-a-kind pieces of art and furnishings from African and Asian countries, you might have an interest. The Compass Rose, in fact, features some fascinating pieces of art hand carved out of ebony, and even stone. You'll find wooden giraffes nearly seven feet tall, a four-poster bed from India, and

a selection of African masks that will enhance any home. Whether you're interested in this type of art or not, it certainly sounds more interesting than just a listing for The Compass Rose. Now imagine a whole collection of interesting stores and dining experiences complete with photography and descriptions. It doesn't take long before you've got a new customer on the way.

One note: Always promote the unusual and truly unique things you have to offer. If your customer can do the same thing closer to home, then pick something else as a key lure, and include photos and text that will make your customer want to go there.

The Rexburg, Idaho Chamber of Commerce has done an excellent job promoting specific activities. If you go to www.rexcc.com and click on things

to see and do, then click on local attractions (we recommend just using the word attractions,) it will list the various attractions, providing a teaser for each. These teasers could be better written to pull the visitor in, but provide the right idea. If an attraction grabs your attention, like Yellowstone Bear World, you can click on a link that takes provides you with more details, links, videos, etc.

Do NOT just link to the attractions' Website unless you know it's good enough to close the sale, but offer it as an additional link, AFTER you've done what you can to close the sale for them. Details, details, details. If visitors can't get specific details, chances are you'll lose the sale.

For instance, if you promote the fact that you have the best bass fishing in the U.S. (that sets you apart from everyone else), then tell me about the details: Where is the best fishing spot? Is a license required? Are there fishing guides or boat rentals? Docks and fish cleaning facilities? Are there seasonal considerations? Bass tournaments? What about the weather? Provide maps, directions, distances (miles and kilometers), resources, contact information, best time of day for the biggest catches, etc.

8 SELL EXPERIENCES, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Visitors are far more interested in things to see and do than in places: cities, counties, regions, or even states. Travelers are looking for activities, experiences, things to see and do. You must always provide a potential customer with reasons WHY they should visit. They are far more interested in Disneyland than in Anaheim. Going a step further, while we all know that Disneyland is "the happiest place on earth" (a good reason in itself to go there), the park still promotes the activities in all
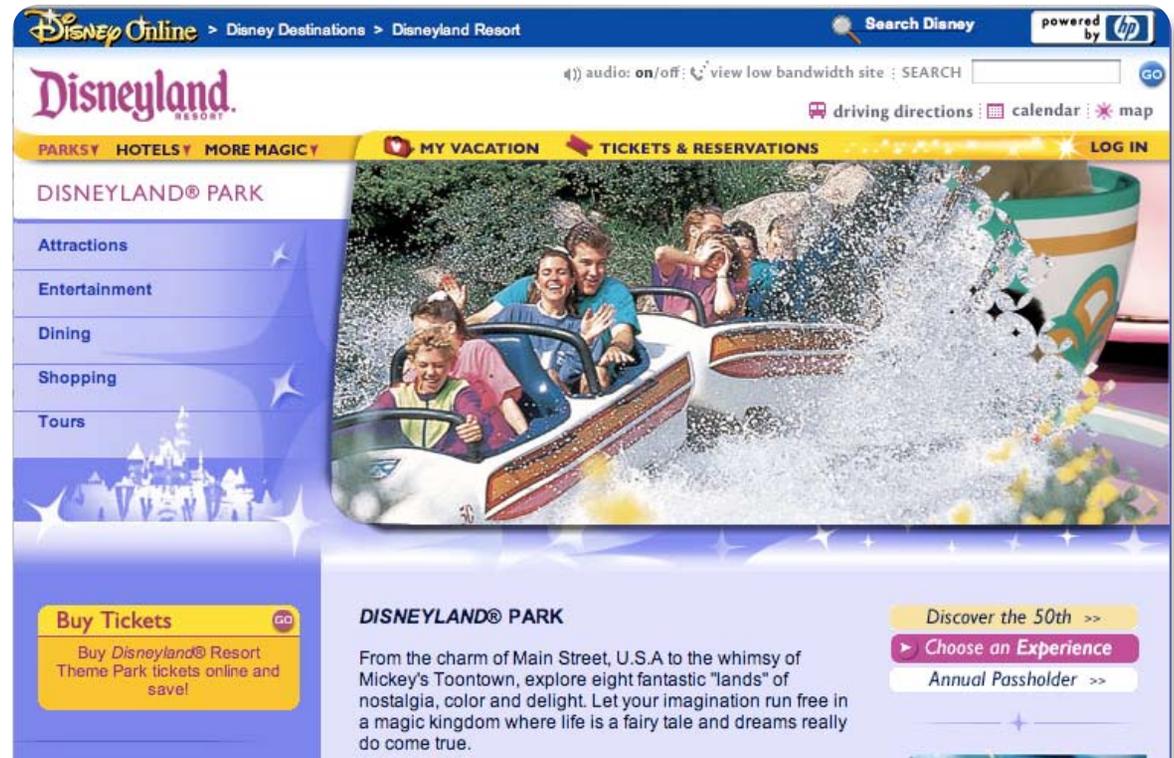
of its advertising: The Matterhorn, Splash Mountain, Pirates of the Caribbean, the Indiana Jones Adventure, or even meeting Mickey or Minnie. If you visit the Disneyland Website (www.disneyland.com) you'll note that they let the visitor "choose and experience." A lot can be learned by looking at the best.

If you browse through the Disney site, or any site that does a great job of promoting experiences, you'll notice that the photography is professional, and shows people having a great time (the purpose of any experience). The photos make

you want to go there. Does your site do the same thing? Every time you add an item to your site, regardless of whether it's an attraction, activity, lodging, dining, shopping, etc., ask yourself: do the photos and text I used make me want to go there? Will it make my customer want to go there? We as human beings tend to be territorial. We are charged with marketing our community or area, so that's what we focus on: marketing the geography within our boundaries. But as visitors, we're not looking for geography. That's secondary to looking for activities. We are looking for things to see and do that cater to our specific interests.

This is perhaps the biggest mistake destination marketing organizations make. Instead of focusing on cities, counties, regions, and geographic areas, consider building your site using the words "Pick Your Season" followed by "Pick Your Passion."

This way you start with WHEN the guest would like to visit, followed by the activities available that time of year. If you pick the winter season in Door County, Wisconsin, the activities might include snowmobiling, snowshoeing, the areas dozen or so Christmas shops, and spa facilities and lodges. During each season, the experiences change.

Always sell the reason WHY someone should visit before you dig in with lodging, dining and diversions. All too often communities miss this step. Sell experiences, not geography, not your boundaries. People want to travel for the experience, so build the anticipation for a fun time, then tell your visitor why you are the best place to experience it. Welcome to the "experience economy."

9 BUILD THE BRAND

Branding is the art of differentiation – the community's unique image in the minds of its visitors. More than just logos and slogans, a community's brand is pervasive. It is a promise to visitors of what the community has to offer. The more distinctive the brand, the more attraction it holds.

Branding requires continuity in all that you do: your product offerings, claim to fame, marketing, logo, slogan, and the look and feel of your marketing materials – particularly your Website. A first glance at your Website should tell visitors who you are and what sets you apart from everyone else.

The Napa Valley town of Calistoga has branded itself as a wellness center, and portrays that theme effectively on the chamber's Website.

The branding focus doesn't mean that is all you have to offer, but it promotes the town's image, which should reflect its primary lure - what you have that the visitor acan't get closer to home. To win the customer you must ALWAYS first promote what sets you apart.

The key is to promote who you are: why you are different and worth a special trip, and THEN the "other things" your visitors can do while in the area. Your brand should revolve around your primary lure. Don't try to be all things to all people.

10 SPREAD THE BRAND AROUND

Building a strong brand requires a consistent message, a consistent look for the entire community. Can you imagine how Coca Cola would be perceived if every Coca Cola bottling plant produced its own Coke logo, own colors, and their own Coke commercials? The brand (and Coke) wouldn't be in existence today. It's the same with every community or region. The trick is to get everyone pulling in the same direction with a consistent look, feel, key messages, and identities.

Once you develop an outstanding splash page with the right logo and the layout and design promoting the ambiance and essence of the community, spread it around.

The city, chamber, convention and visitors bureau, and other local organizations should all use the same style or "look" on their front doors as well. This continuity helps build the brand, imprinting the brand image in the minds of visitors and residents. Round Rock, Texas is working hard to become "The Sports Capital of Texas," based on the community's 500-acre sports park. If the city and other local organizations all introduced Round Rock as the sports capital on their Websites, the brand could become even more powerful.
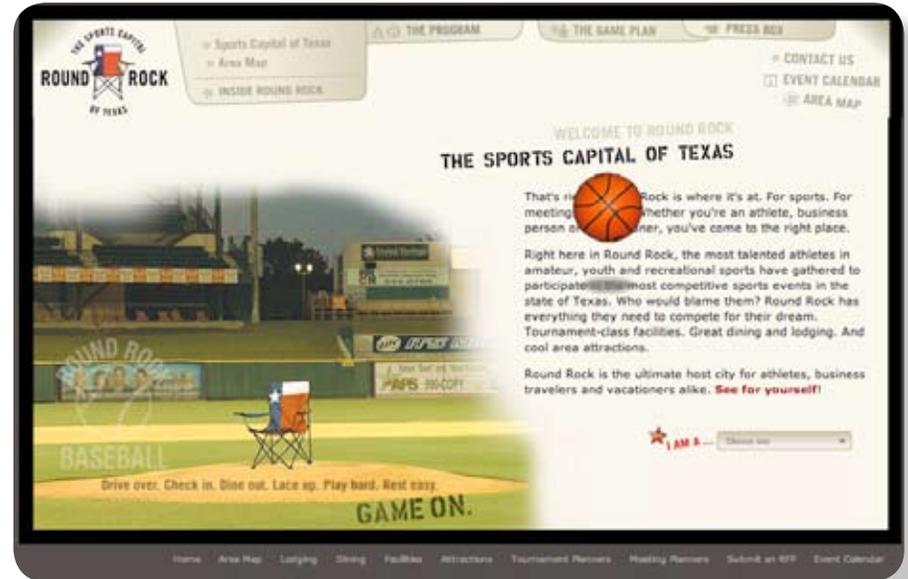
"Welcome to the Sports Capital of Texas, and thanks for visiting the Website of the Round Rock Garden Club."

Charleston, South Carolina, promotes its outstanding history, and you can see that brand image of "history" carried through to various organizations' Websites in Charleston.

When a consistent message, look, brand image, is used throughout the community, the brand becomes more powerful. A good, powerful brand attracts visitors, businesses, and investment to the community.

11 CREATE A CALL TO ACTION

If you've ever purchased a new car you know that the sales person will do everything he or she can to get you to buy right then and there. They know that if you leave, even if you say you'll be back, the chances of you really coming back are less than 3 percent. It's that way in every sales effort whether in a car lot, a retail store, or a Website.

Create a Call to Action - something that will entice the Website visitor to take action. Having a potential customer think, "Gee, I'll have to go there sometime" is nice, but only 3 percent of the time will that translate to a real sale. Sweeten the pot by including a Special Deals section on your site - and promote prices, not percentages. Customers want bottom-line costs, not the usual hyperbole of "30 percent off." Thirty percent off what? Give it to them straight.

Other calls to action can be a "Request for Information" form on the site that they fill out. While the brochure is available as a download, some customers would rather have the real thing. There's certainly nothing wrong with that. After all, in a few days they will be reminded about you when it arrives in the mail. In this case, your brochure needs to be good enough to close the sale. And it should have the same look and feel (overall design) as your Website so that it creates a connection in the mind of the prospect.

Special events are another good call to action. If they only happen once a year, you create a "don't miss it" reminder in the mind of the customer.

12 MAKE IT EASY TO GET MORE INFO

Many organizations are so concerned about receiving spam that they refuse to include contact information on their Websites which, in essence, punishes the customer who is looking to spend time and money in the community.

Some viewers will want to write or call on the phone. It's amazing how many destination Websites do not provide an address, phone number, or even an e-mail address. Be sure to include all three, with your toll-free number if you have one. A "Contact Us" page makes it easy for viewers to find that information if you don't want to include it on your home page.

Not only must you include contact information, you should also provide:

• An online request for information page with a list of publications and/or resources that can be sent them.

• Links to more detailed information and other resources.

The Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau has created a well-designed and easy to navigate site, starting with a focused home page that includes a single link to the visitor section of the site, and then a "send me info" link. It includes options for different materials and doesn't ask too many questions. Too many questions to answer makes many visitors decide to not fill out the form at all. The site also includes phone numbers, e-mail addresses is this form isn't sufficient, and even names of contact people.

Ninety four percent of people with internet access use it for travel planning. Even so, visitors often have specific questions or want materials sent to them. Providing an easy way for visitors to contact you will ensure that visitors get all their questions answered, helping to make the sale.

13 DOWNLOADS AND ONLINE VIEWING SAVE MONEY, INCREASE SALES

Convenience is one of the most important factors of any marketing program. Your customers want - and expect - instant gratification. Since most people do their travel planning during the evening hours in the comfort of home, they need the information readily available. Less than 5 per-

cent of Website visitors will write down a phone number (if they can find that) and then wait till the next day to call to get more information. ALL of your marketing materials should be available on-line in PDF format and formatted so that when downloaded, they can easily be printed on standard 8.5" x 11" paper.

If you've developed a tri-fold rack brochure, unfolded it would measure 12" wide by 9" tall. While this can be reduced to print on a standard sheet of paper, the text will likely be too small to read. Instead, break the brochure up into a series of 4" x 9" panels and the customer can print the panels, or the whole brochure as needed.

Don't forget to make available maps of your destination - its attractions, amenities, and its relationship to highways, airports and Amtrak. Travelers love maps, whether it's a link to a Mapquest.com

version of your destination, or an elaborate schematic of your downtown, resort, trails, or wine country. These should be downloadable as well.

Meeting planners, event planners, editors, writers, and others are purging their file cabinets of press and conference planning kits and are now expecting that everything they will need will be online.

By creating an easy-to-find Downloads section of your site, you will give your customers what they want: instant information, and you will save a substantial amount of money in printing, postage, and envelopes, and time. Make it easy. Make it convenient. As an extra courtesy, you may want to identify the "byte" count of each download, or the download time on a standard 56k modem. Many Internet users are reluctant to begin downloading files unless they know what they are getting.

14 START WITH THE SITE MAP (CONTENTS)

The last couple of pages of this book contain a sample "site map," or contents, for an effective tourism Website. Whether you are a community or busi- ness, you must make it easy to plan a visit. The easier you make it, the more likely you are to close the sale. Include your site map as a link for visitors to use – it helps to have this as a table of contents.

Every community and business is different, and so your site map may vary from the one provided below. But this can provide you with a starting point. Just remember, you must make your site friendly enough that Grandma can easily navigate through it. Do so through a few steps. Don't include more than seven choices on the home page - with all

seven links in one location. Sites with links all over the page have no clear focus and are confusing.

15 DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS

The more you have to offer collectively, the further people will travel and the longer they will stay. It's the Four Times Rule. People will travel to a destination if you have attractions, that appeal to them specifically, that will keep them occupied four times longer that it took them to get there. So, if a visitor travels two hours to reach you, do you have eight hours worth of activities that cater to them?
(2 hours x 4 = 8).

You will be far more effective as one loud voice as opposed to a number of individual small voices. You still need to have a primary lure that sets you apart, but you must also have plenty of diversions or secondary activities - all of which translate to increased tourism spending.

Be sure to include information and links to nearby attractions, towns, amenities, that might appeal to visitors. Have reciprocal links. But don't just link to the other sites, or to partners. You need to make the sale on your site, then link the customer over for additional information. Some search engines use the number of links on a Website as one of their criteria in determining the popularity of that site, and the more links, the higher the ranking of that site.

16 SIZE MATTERS

Laptop computer sales are quickly gaining on desktop systems, as are notepad computers and other small-screen internet devices.

Make sure you develop your site to be approximately 600 pixels wide (8.5") by approximately 400 pixels tall (5.5"). Each "home page" of a new section of the site should adhere to this size. Follow-up pages should still remain the same width, but can be longer, only requiring the customer to scroll down. You NEVER want your customers to have to scroll side to side.

Developing a site that takes up a whole screen can leave lots of empty space, takes longer to load, and is often awkwardly configured. Also make sure you have your site automatically centered on the screen. The goal is to make the site attractive, easy to view, navigate, and use..

17 PUTTING TOGETHER THE TEAM

Website designers are a dime a dozen. Having the technical ability to write HTML does not equate to the talent to build an effective Website. Just about everyone over the age of 12 with a computer can design-build a Website. But having a Website does absolutely nothing for you if it can't close the sale.

Consider building your Website like you were building a home. It's highly unlikely that you'd have the architect actually design the house, build it, furnish it, and decorate it. When it comes to a tourism Website, you will need the "architect" - the tourism professional that will develop the site map and how the site flows. Then you'll need the "finish carpenter" - the graphic designer that makes the site beautiful, easy to read, and sets the ambiance and character of the site. In a home the finish carpenter adds the nice touches - wainscoating, wood accents, tile and other elements that bring together the overall feel and ambiance of the home. Then you need the interior designer - the person who writes your headers and body copy. This part of the site also includes professional photography. The other player is the "engineer" - the professional that creates the "backbone" of the site: the infrastructure. This includes optimization of the site, compatibility, scripts and forms, databases for visitor registrations and opt-in marketing, downloadable files, JavaScript and Flash components (motion elements), etc.

While most Website design firms say they have all these disciplines in-house, check other industry-related sites they've developed. Are they good enough to make you want to go there or buy the product?

Always hire the best, then negotiate the price – consider phasing the project, if you have to. If you can't come to terms you move onto the second best - still very qualified and good. Your Website is like making a movie: You have to have a good story (the experience), a good script (the dialogue that captivates you), a good cinematographer, good actors, and a strong supporting cast. Look at the development of your site in the same way. You're the executive producer.

18 COMPARE YOURSELF TO COMPETITION

Make sure you stack up well against your competition. A potential visitor, undecided about where to stay, might check into all nearby towns. Or a family wanting to go on a kayaking adventure might look into any location that offers that activity. The point is that travelers these days, with access to so much information on the internet, can compare your town to any other town in the world online. You want to be sure you're still in the running.

After you identify your competitors, take the time to analyze their Websites. Look at their layouts, their use of photography and text, and the features they present. How friendly are their Websites? Are they attractive and compelling? Do they provide enough information? Do they offer special deals? And do they invite the viewer to subscribe to an email newsletter? Compare your features with theirs, and make sure you haven't forgotten something your competition is promoting.

If you are looking to relocate or vacation in one of the towns in California's Gold Country, chances are you'll start by doing some web research. You'll find the towns of Truckee, Angel's Camp, Nevada City, San Andreas, Copperopolis. Where would you go? Looking at their Websites, comparing them, most people are attracted to Truckee, because their Website is so compelling. The outstanding photography, ease of navigation, and text that sets the tone for a great experience makes Truckee the first choice. Comparing the different town's Websites is a great exercise in seeing what makes a good site work.

Keep up to date with your competition – what they're offering, and how they present themselves. You'll be able to maintain your competitive edge by knowing how you stack up against the competition.

Part II. Make your town stand out in the crowd – Marketing your Website

19 MAKE YOUR URL MEMORABLE

Your URL is your internet address, and it should be both relevant and easy to remember. A shorter URL is usually better than a very long one; on the other hand, if it is too abbreviated, it won't make sense and might be difficult to remember. Keep it as simple as you can, while still making sense.

You can create additional URLs as part of specific marketing efforts, and have them link directly to your Website. For example, to encourage visitors to Yosemite National Park during the winter, they began an ad campaign: "Yosemite This Winter," highlighting the winter sports and beauty to be experienced in the park. As part of the campaign, they purchased the URL www.yosemitethiswinter.com, which linked directly to the winter in Yosemite landing page on the Website.

Use memorable URLs as one more tool in your marketing efforts, and you'll see results with more hits to your Website, and more visitors to your town.

20 PURCHASE YOUR WAY TO THE TOP

If bass fishing is the number one draw to your community, searching those words on Google (the most popular search engine), will yield 1,490,000 results. Since 70 percent of all web users don't look past the first page of search results, and percent don't look beyond the first two pages, your site isn't going to be an effective marketing tool if it's listed on page 994.

Now you know why Google and Yahoo!, both with free search services, sell keyword listings. You bid for the keywords, with the highest bidder taking top honors on the first page of results, under "sponsor matches." Keyword bidding is referred to as "pay per click" – a powerful and cost-effective way to market whatever you're selling.

Google's keyword program can be found at www.adwords.com. Yahoo!'s program, which also covers Alta Vista, AOL, and other search engines, can be found at www.overture.com.

A company will pay a one-time charge for each click, costing as little as 10¢, and on up to more than $1, depending on how much other companies or communities bid for the keyword. That's a lot cheaper than the cost of a brochure, a stamp, and an envelope, plus the potential customer gets immediate information – something we expect in the Internet age. You can easily monitor which keywords are most effective or not used at all. You can make changes anytime, and you control

the cost by setting limits. You even get to write the "teaser text" under your listing, whereas in normal search engines, text from the first page is simply displayed – not always the text that will pull customers to your site.

After the customer gets to your site, you want to be sure the site is good enough to close the sale.

21 TAP INTO Website TOOLS

While purchasing key words is important, over time you hope to have your site listed at no charge AND on the first page of results. One of the best tools around for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is NetMechanic's Search Engine Power Pack. For $99 a year, this is a major bargain. It can assist you in optimizing your site by analyzing each page for problems, compatibility, and will let you know how to properly emphasize keywords using Power Pack resources such as the Keyword Popularity Tool. (www.netmechanic.com)

22 LEVERAGE VALU-ABLE META-TAGS

When consumers search the internet using key words or phrases, some search engines use a special section of com-

puter HTML language in Websites called meta-tags to find the appropriate sites. Some search engines give the meta-tags more importance than the actual content of the page when searching. Many engines use a combination of techniques including meta-tags to find the Websites they are looking for.

There are two main types of meta-tags recognized by search engines: "description" and "keywords." These tags need to be placed in the "head" section of your HTML document. Several engines look for agreement between the "description", "keyword," "title" and "body text." Using the same keywords in each field will help the search engine locate your site.

If you open up a Website in Internet Explorer, for instance, you can go to a page, then from the menu go to View>Source. You'll see the HTML that was used to build the page, including the meta-tags.

Wisconsin Dells, the Waterpark Capital of the World, has done a good job with the use of meta-tags, using waterparks, resorts, attractions, hotels, motels, campgrounds, restaurants, festivals, dells, family, and more, to help search engines locate their site when potential visitors are searching for any of those keywords.

When you develop, or redevelop your site, it can take up to six months for search engines to find and list your keywords, or meta-tags. Smart communities will use both meta-tags and pay-per-click programs. Once your site appears on the first page of search results as a result of your good use of meta-tags and content, you can drop the pay-per-click listing of those particular search words.

23 CREATE LINK EXCHANGES

Link exchanges can boost your listing positions on major search engines, and create marketing partnerships. Throughout your site you should provide links to other sites - but don't rely on those sites to close the sale. That's for you to do. The other sites will just provide additional information about the experiences you're selling. Make sure you "exchange" links: "If you link to me, I'll link to you." Reciprocal links are a terrific way to increase the visibility of your site at little, if any, cost. Some search engines will boost your standing in the search pages based on the number of other Website that link to your Website.

NOTE: Make sure you check the links on your site once a month. There's nothing more aggravating than clicking on old and/or broken links. Visitors don't have much patience for this inattention to detail.

24 PERMISSION MARKETING – CREATING TOMA

There is no better way to create "Top of Mind Awareness" or TOMA than through "permission marketing" through periodic newsletters or notes fitting a specific category, such as "special deals" or "special events."

Include a page on your Website for visitors to "sign up." Offer specific categories or topics that might be of interest to visitors to your area, such as "special weekend getaways," or "family activities."
Once a month or so, write and send out the newsletter. Keep it brief. Never use more than two paragraphs, then add links so a viewer can get more information. Be sure the information you send is

Wisconsin Dells is the "Waterpark Capital of the World," yet their Website (below) didn't reflect that in its overall appeal. It was very corporate looking, in fact. A redesigned Website (left) sells the experience, is family-friendly, and outright fun. Always sell the experience - and make it obvious what you're about.

newsworthy – not just advertising. You want the reader to feel that your newsletter has value.

By getting the quick and easy update every month or so, the reader is always reminded you exist. So when it comes time for a getaway, what's the first destination to come to mind? Hopefully yours.

Make it easy for subscribers to opt out at any time. Providing this option makes it easier for visitors to decide to sign up. And don't ask them too many questions about themselves on the sign-up page. That discourages readers. It's more important to get the newsletter out to as many readers as possible than to get detailed demographic information on only a few.

The island of Bonaire, in the Caribbean, does a great job of this. Every two weeks, the Bonaire Tourism Board sends out its "Quick 'n Easy Tourism Updates." Quick and easy are the operative words. E-marketing programs are one of the most effective sales tools in the U.S. They create "top of mind awareness," bringing visitors back to your Website – and your community – time and again.

Part III. INVEST WISELY – The Importance of Your Town, Online

Too many communities think nothing of spending $20,000 or more on a brochure, while they spend $5,000 on a Website. 94% of all potential visitors (especially those with money to spend) will use the internet, while less than 5% will call or stop by a visitor information center. So how should you spend your money? Spending $20,000 for a Website good enough to close the sale is a very good investment. Spending another $10,000 a year to keep it fresh, updated, and changing (to bring customers back), is well worth the cost. Investing in an e-marketing program, keeping the newsletters timely and relevant, can have a profound effect on your visibility and tourism sales.

25 YOUR WEBSITE IS FOR YOUR CUSTOMER

Don't make the mistake of building your Website for you, the City Commission, or anyone else's vanity. The only purpose of your Website is to meet the needs of your potential customers. Don't do anything that gets in the way of the sale, like making visitors sit through an animated presentation when they are trying to get to another page. Make sure your Website works on a variety of operating systems (Windows, Mac OS, Linex.). Make the home page representative of what your unique feature is. The viewer should be able to tell what your Website is about in less than five seconds. And as important as the mechanics are to the web designer, the bottom line is, "Does the Website increase visitor traffic to your destination?" Evaluate this regularly, and consider changing your site if it is not producing.

CONCLUSION

The real-life Navin Johnson, our enthusiastic "somebody" introduced at the start of this section, went on to fame and fortune after inventing Opti-grab eye-glasses. The little handle for spectacles sold ten million units in a few short months. American Time News Magazine published an article about him which stated, "Mr. Johnson, you've become a millionaire overnight. Who are you?" In 1979, the internet hadn't yet been invented, otherwise no one would have needed to ask who Navin Johnson was.

SAMPLE SITE MAP

The following is a sample site-map or "contents" for an effective community-oriented Website. This site map is simply a sample, but may give you a starting point if you're hoping to redevelop your site into a powerful marketing machine. Make it easy to navigate, just like walking into a home, starting at the front door.

INTRO PAGE
  Welcome text
  Flash slide show (four or five photos)
  Skip intro button
  "Pick Your Season"

HOME
  "Pick Your Passion" - (activities by season)
  Link to site search page
  Link to contacts (site map)
  Link to contact info page
  Primary buttons to categories below and next pages

VISITING (intro text)
  Primary Attractions (intro)
    Historical
    Cultural
    Urban
    Entertainment
    Environmental
    Recreational
    Activity vendors
  Day Trips and Other Attractions (intro)
    Within an hour's drive
    Local diversions (secondary activities)
    Quaint escapes
  Events (intro)
    Major events (visitor-oriented events - not local events)
    Events by month
  Quick Facts (intro)
    Legends and claim to fame
    Elevation and geography
    Population, demographics
    Did you know...
Photo Gallery (intro)
    Send a postcard
    Photos by attractions category w/descriptions
    Photographer credits/links
Getting Here - Maps and Directions (intro)
    National
    Region (multi-state)
    State map
    Region/area map
    Distances chart (miles, k/m)
Weather and Seasons (intro)
    Typical weather patterns
    Current weather and forecast (link from weather site)
    Best activities by season
Visitor Services - Lodging, Dining and Shopping (intro)
    Lodging (sort by location, type, price)
    Dining (sort by type, style, location - featured restaurants)
    Shopping (sort by type, location - featured retailers)
    Services (sort by location, type of service)
Transportation (intro)
    Driving conditions
    Travel by RV
    Travel by boat
    Airports and services
    Tours (individual and groups)
    Rentals, other
Group Information (Intro)
    Venues: outdoor
    Venues: indoor
    Reunions and personal gatherings
    Conferences, meetings and trade shows
    Tours, group services
    Sporting events, venues
Trip Planner (Intro)
    Suggested itineraries
    Resources

Travel Links (Intro)
    State tourism info
    Local chamber offices
    AAA, travel clubs
    Services

LIVING (Intro)
    Community info
    Community links, events
    Real estate
    Doing business

HISTORY (Intro)
    Pioneer/Native Americans
    Modern times
    Historical attractions (link to attractions)
    Historical resources

SPECIAL DEALS (Intro)
    Packages
    Seasonal discounts

DOWNLOADS (Intro)
    Activities Guide
    Meeting Planners Guide
    Video clips

RESOURCES (Intro)
    Press room
        Press releases (sort by topic)
        Backgrounder
        Events
        Photo library (thumbnail with contact info)
        Press contacts, resources
        Press downloads
    Articles about the area
    State government offices, links

SITE FOOTER
    Copyright info
    About the site link (browsers, webmaster info)

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