

### **Section 1 - What's in this Chapter**

**Updated 2011**

This chapter begins with a general discussion of marketing and then takes you through the steps necessary to create a marketing plan, including marketing analysis and goal setting. The marketing strategy and tools section describes the development of material appropriate for most of the marketing tools you may use as you promote your community. Evaluating your marketing efforts and partnering with other groups are also discussed.

Throughout this chapter, links will be provided to various resources provided by the Wyoming Office of Tourism (WOT). These resources are available to all lodging tax boards. The industry website for the WOT can be found at [www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov](http://www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov).

### **Section 2 - What Marketing Is**

**Updated 2011**

Marketing creates leads. Sales converts them. - Bruce Beckham

Marketing is the sum total of the messages your potential customers receive through your efforts. These messages come through marketing tools such as paid advertising, brochures, public relations, and special projects funded by grants.

To market effectively, you need to understand who you are, what products you have to offer, and who is buying your products. You get this knowledge by doing market analysis. A marketing plan puts your market analysis into a concise, permanent form from which to work.

Once you have completed your market analysis and created a marketing plan, you can then use the right marketing tools to put your plan into action. And finally, evaluation helps you determine whether your marketing is successful or not.

### **Section 3 - Marketing Analysis**

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To complete a market analysis for your community, you first need to do a travel inventory. This is a list of everything your community offers the traveling public – your potential customers. You will also compile information about your community's accommodations and will research who your customers are to understand their expectations and needs.

#### **Travel Inventory**

As a lodging tax board, you have nothing to sell. Your job is to market the experience your destination has to offer as well as the products that businesses and other partners in your community have to sell. These products will vary widely – room nights, meals, tickets, souvenirs, experiences at attractions, recreation opportunities, etc..

Ask yourselves, “What does our community have to sell?” To build an accurate travel inventory, you must ask this question to as wide an audience as possible. This is an ideal place to involve your community, especially those associated with the tourism industry.

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In addition to items that are sold directly, your travel inventory should include things that bring people to your area and result in peripheral sales. Look for items like the following:

- Cultural attractions such as museums, art galleries, and powwows or other events
- Historical attractions such as forts, historic districts, and archeological sites
- Natural attractions like mountains, parks, and unique or beautiful scenery
- Recreational attractions such as walking paths, wildlife or bird watching areas, water parks, bike trails, ski resorts, golf courses, and sporting events
- Unique accommodations
- Shopping
- Photographic opportunities
- Meeting facilities

What wasn't an asset ten years ago may now be important. For example, a surge in cultural and heritage tourism has created new opportunities to market places and events that shaped Wyoming. Once forgotten homesteads and living history events are now marketable to travelers. The traveling public is diverse: business people, mountain bikers, campers, senior citizens, art lovers, and people traveling with children. The key is to not leave anyone out.

### **Room Utilization**

To analyze room utilization you need to first determine room capacity – the number of rooms your community offers the traveling public. Count motel and hotel rooms, excluding those used primarily for long term stays (30 plus days.) Include rooms offered by bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, and resorts. When you have a count of the total number of rooms available, you've determined your room capacity,

Next, you need to determine occupancy rates. Multiply the number of rooms available by the number of days in the month to determine monthly room nights. Find out from the lodging properties how many of those room nights are being used each month. If you have a period of extremely high usage, such as Cheyenne Frontier Days, you may want to chart weekly or even daily room utilization for that period. If you have a winter tourist season, you will need to chart room utilization for those months as well. You may find that your community is at capacity during the prime travel months of summer, but is underutilized in the spring and fall shoulder seasons. These off-peak seasons may present excellent marketing opportunities. Depending on your situation, you may also want to track usage of your community's major restaurants and attractions.

You may want to verify your numbers with outside sources such as Smith Travel Research or the Rocky Mountain Lodging Report. Copies of the Report are available through the Wyoming Travel Industry Coalition. Numbers are available on a state-wide basis and for any community where six or more properties participate in the report. See Section 9 for additional contact information.

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Additional resources are also available from the WOT. Through the research co-op, various research products are available to help with market analysis and consumer research. For specific co-op opportunities visit: <http://www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov/industry/pdf/2011CoOpKit.pdf>.

### **Customer Analysis**

In this step of your marketing analysis, you look at tourist demographics, finding out as much as you can about your customers. When you have defined who your customers are, how they get to you, and why they come, you can focus your marketing efforts more precisely, as well as tailor your services to meet their needs.

Collecting data about your customers can be a daunting process, but you don't have to start from scratch. The WOT already doing market research on the people coming to Wyoming. The WOT invests annually in research providing a wide variety of information about Wyoming's tourists, ranging from where they are from and how they heard about Wyoming, to how long they stayed, what they liked, and how much they spent while they were here. This information is available at the following website: <http://www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov/industry/pages/Research/research.html>. The Department of Transportation (WYDOT) can also help by giving you traffic count numbers for roads in your area. These numbers can help you estimate how many potential customers are traveling through your region.

Many communities use only state gathered information for their customer analysis. However, studies show that 60% of a marketing campaign's success is determined by how well you define your market. This means it is worthwhile to fine tune state-gathered information by surveying visitors to your community. One effective way to do this is through intercept surveys, where you employ a person to "intercept" tourists while they are in your community and talk to them. Another common method is to design a mail-back survey that is distributed by local lodging and dining establishments and attractions. Sample intercept surveys are given in Appendix 404 and 405, a survey for use at lodging establishments is given in Appendix 406, and a mail-back survey can be found in Appendix 407.

Adding your survey information to the state information gives you a better picture of your community's potential customer. With this customer in mind, review your travel inventory. Where does your community excel at meeting your customer's needs and expectations? Are there areas you could fine-tune to better satisfy your customer?

### **Section 4 - Goal Setting**

**Updated 2011**

Your travel inventory gives you a good understanding of what your community offers. Your room utilization tells you how well your community is utilized by tourists, and your customer analysis describes your potential markets. This body of information will allow your lodging tax board to develop useful and appropriate marketing goals.

The goal setting process is an opportunity for your board to move from being a collection of individuals, each with an agenda, to being a team that works together toward common goals. This means it is critical that your goal setting be done by the full board and that goals be

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determined by consensus. Without consensus, your board may pull in diverse directions, despite what your official marketing goals may say.

Since true consensus can be difficult to reach, consider having someone facilitate your goal setting sessions. If your board is used to reaching consensus and you have someone who makes sure all members' ideas are heard, ask that person to act as official facilitator. If your board is new, or if it has not traditionally functioned by consensus, then experts strongly suggest bringing in an outside facilitator to help you get started.

Boards that have hired a consultant to put together their marketing plan can expect the consultant to act as facilitator (make sure you include facilitation in your request for proposal). If you are doing your marketing plan internally, you will need to find your own facilitator – not always an easy task. The best way to find one is to simply ask around. Someone on your board may know a facilitator or may have participated in other meetings that used a facilitator or local corporate offices and elected officials may have leads.

If possible, choose a facilitator who is familiar with tourism and your community. If this is not possible, don't give up. A facilitator with less background information may force your board to look at things from new perspectives, which can also be helpful. Either way, your facilitator needs to be someone who wants to hear all sides of an issue and who draws people out, making sure that quiet board members get heard. A good facilitator won't force a decision, but will highlight areas of agreement, helping the group to arrive at decisions naturally.

Goal setting by consensus may be time consuming and even frustrating, but the benefits to your board go beyond the creation of useful goals. In fact, the team-making aspect of this process is so important to the board's functioning that experts strongly advise setting goals at least every other year. They agree that the specifics of the goals set are not as important as the process itself.

This doesn't mean, however, that any goal is as good as the next. Here are four guidelines regarding the type of goals your board should make:

- Goals should be measurable. Some goals are too vague to be measured (e.g. we want to do a good job). Instead, you may want to set goals such as increasing by x% the number of fulfillment pieces you send out in response to requests for information, or if you have meeting facilities, increasing by x% the number of conventions booked.
- Goals should be reasonable and attainable. Choose goals that are primarily impacted by factors within your control. Because situations differ widely, common sense is probably your best guide for deciding what is reasonable. If your community has a great travel inventory and has done little or no marketing, your first efforts may be dramatically successful. If, on the other hand, your community has been marketing well for years, you will work hard for every percentage point of improvement.
- Goals should have a time frame. Many successful marketers set both short-term and long-term goals. They recommend putting most of your efforts into detailed short-term goals, one to two years in length. Long-term goals, up to five years, should be broader and much simpler. You may end up with five or ten short-term goals but only one or two long-term goals.

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- Goals should be prioritized. Even two or three goals should be ranked in importance. You may need to give a goal first priority because it must be achieved before you can begin work on other goals. More often, you will rank goals based on their importance or the degree of need. And again, the factors that go into prioritization are not as important as the act itself.

### **Section 5 - Marketing Strategy and Tools**

**Updated 2011**

Now that you have discovered what your community has to sell and who your potential customers are, will you try to reach everyone or attempt to target specific market segments (business travelers, leisure travelers, convention goers, etc. How will you position your community in the tourism marketplace – will you be the crossroads of Wyoming, one of the West’s best kept secrets, the heart of Wyoming – or something entirely different? Once you have decided on your marketing strategy (and this may change over time), you will need to determine which marketing tools you will use to reach your target market. Appendix 403 contains a marketing work plan to help organize your thoughts. Since you need to track the effectiveness of your marketing strategy and tools, be sure to read Section 7 on evaluating your marketing before you create material.

### **Creating Advertising Material that Works**

Some advertising material is twice, three times, even ten times more effective than other advertising of the same size and cost. The difference is in how well the material is put together. For years advertising people have thought of their work as “salesmanship in print.” Many of the characteristics that make a great salesperson will make your advertising material great, too. For example, the longer a salesperson can keep a prospect interested, the more likely a sale will be made. The same is true for your advertising material.

- Your advertising material should be friendly and respectful. Rudeness hinders the sale both in person-to-person selling and in advertising.
- Avoid the temptation to tell too much in your advertising. For your material to be effective you must simplify, condense, boil down, and edit.
- A consistent look across all your advertising material will increase awareness of your community and help communicate your identity.

Finally, do all you can to give your advertising a quality appearance. Make the design clean, simple, and appealing since your advertising material reflects on your community. Cluttered advertising material won’t leave the impression you’re striving for.

### **Determine Your Key Selling Point**

As you begin to create advertising material, the first and most important step is to decide what you want to communicate. Your goal is to communicate what’s important to your potential customer. Draw on your marketing analysis and talk to people who have had personal sales contacts with travelers. Try to determine what most impresses travelers about your community. Put yourself in your customer’s place. What does he or she want to know? What does he or she need reassurance about? When you have crystalized your message into a key selling point and

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two or three secondary selling points, write them down and keep them in front of you as you create your advertising material.

### **Advertising in Newspapers and Magazines**

Print ads have an advantage over billboards, radio and television ads. People can turn back to them, cut them out, study them closely, show them to others, and keep them for future reference. As a result, these ads are a good place for coupons, postal addresses, phone numbers, web site addresses, or complex messages that need studying.

### **Headlines**

To get your ad studied, clipped or filed, you need to make it interesting. And to do that you need a strong headline. The primary job of a headline is to stop readers, to catch their interest. Headlines like, “Have Dinner Here”, “Visit our City”, “Buy Opera Tickets from Us” tell readers that you have something to sell, but they aren’t good headlines. They are conventional, expected and ordinary. There’s no surprise. Even worse, they promise the reader no benefit.

Instead, strive for a headline that speaks to your customers’ wants and needs. Try to surprise the reader with something fresh or different. The object, of course, is to get people to say, “Hey, this looks interesting!”

Here are five kinds of headlines. If you’re attempting to create an ad, try to write a headline from each category that expresses your key selling point.

- The Direct Benefit. This approach puts your main point right up front, instead of hiding it somewhere in the text. That’s why this approach usually works best. Example: “Our dude ranches – and the 94 superb horses who live there – will remind you how much fun you can pack into a week.”
- The Promise of Information to Come. This headline works well when you have too many compelling points to fit into a single headline. Examples: “How to get the most out of your Wyoming vacation.” “Ten things you need to know before you pick a route to Yellowstone.”
- The Do This! Headline. Too often a headline that gives orders falls into the “Stay in our Town” category, scoring few points with readers who respond to benefits not demands. Still, some orders have built-in benefits and make good headline material. Example: “Save money by booking your convention now.”
- The Question-That-Will-Get-Your-Attention. The tricky part is making the question relevant to your key selling point. Examples: “What stretch of Wyoming highway would you pick if you were a convertible?” or “Why do the Wilsons go to Chugwater year after year?”
- The Off-The-Wall Headline. This category includes all those very clever headlines. Sometimes, they are also very effective – often, they’re not. It all depends on whether the cleverness makes the right sales point or whether it’s just cleverness for its own sake. Examples: “Dude ranch or dud ranch?” or “When the sun goes down over Jenny Lake, what sound does it make?”

### Visual Content

The way an ad looks in the magazine or newspaper is an important factor in how effective the ad is. Because your ad will appear with many other ads, strive to make it visually unique. The major visual content of your ad will be the illustration. It can be a photo or artwork or perhaps just the headline presented so dramatically that it becomes the main visual element. Deciding what you want to show in your illustration can be difficult: Should it be a picture of your community? Someone enjoying one of your town's attractions? A visual interpretation of the headline?

Most likely, the visual material in your ads will be photos. The easiest and cheapest way to get photos is to use stock photos from the Office of Tourism, local photographers or see what you can find on FlickrR. However, stock photographs aren't your photographs. They may not meet your specific needs, and others have access to them. You may be better off hiring a professional to take photographs specifically for your ads. Good strong photography can dramatically increase the audience your advertising reaches. (See Photo Library in Chapter 7, Section 8 for more information on this topic.)

Beyond photography are other possibilities. An illustrator can take the viewer places a camera can't go. A cartoonist can come up with an idea that's both funny and eye-catching. Then there are information-packed charts, diagrams and maps to consider. How do you decide? Every visual possibility you come up with should be evaluated not by how clever or creative it is, but by how well it makes the point – your key selling point – to the reader.

Even after you've settled on a great headline and accompanying visual material, a number of other tricky and interrelated visual factors need consideration:

- Crowding. If your ad is a jumble of information surrounded by similar information jumbles, it won't stand out. If your ad is crowded, simplify it, or surround it with a strong border to make it jump out from its surroundings. Of course, white space always makes a very strong border.
- Arrangement. Unless you're attempting some highly unusual layout approach for a good reason, organize the elements so that the eye flows naturally from visual to headline (or headline to visual), then to the text or body and from there to the logo or signature. Consider whether you've allotted each of the elements the appropriate amount of space.
- White on Black. If you have a fairly large headline, choosing white letters on a black background can set your ad apart. But white on black is much harder to read than black on white, so avoid setting text in reverse. If your ad is hard to read, many people won't.
- Typeface and Readability. In general select type that is easy to read. Sometimes a novelty typeface makes sense for the headline, but rarely for the body text. Readers are already inclined to glance and go – why encourage them? Most newspapers give you a good example of what makes readable copy – short lines, short indented paragraphs, and short sentences. Newspapers often make nearly every sentence its own paragraph. You can too.
- Captions. Put captions under your pictures. People tend to read captions more than anything else. A caption is a good place to make your key sales point.

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- Color. The use of full color increases the cost of an ad dramatically. But if what you have to offer demands color photography, you should probably use it. If you notice that most of the ads in the publication are using color – and you don't absolutely have to have it – you'd be smart to stick to black and white. That way, your ad will stand out from the others, and cost less, too!

### **Billboards**

People who are on the road are prime prospects for travel and hospitality messages. But remember that most vacationers aren't wondering how to fill their days. They already have plans. If you want them to spend time in your community, you have to give them a good reason to change those plans. And there are two conventional ways to reach them – with radio advertising (discussed later in this section) and with billboards. So the quality of your billboard matters.

Billboards are the simplest medium of all. Their intended audience is speeding by with only seconds to read their message. They have to make their point very quickly. Effective billboards consist of a single picture (or other visual element) plus a handful of words. Rarely do hardworking billboards have more than seven or eight words on them. Naturally, visuals must be simple, too – simple and BIG.

You often see billboards with cutouts, graphics extending beyond the normal edge of the billboard. Although this catches attention, it can be costly. Creativity in your message is a much more cost-effective way to make people take notice. This creates a lot of pressure to come up with just the right message. Remember your key selling point and make that point by offering drivers a benefit, surprising them with something fresh or catching their interest.

One of the best things a billboard can do is to give people something to think about as they go down the road. Provocative statements get attention, but your message should always be friendly and respectful. Also, keep in mind who your target market is and sell to them. Remember that statistics indicate it is usually the women and children who make vacation decisions.

There are several ways that the materials for billboards are produced. Some are painted, some are printed on paper, and some are printed on vinyl. Consult with the company that owns the billboard you would like to use. They will help you design and produce your billboard in the most economical way.

### **Brochures and Rack Cards**

If your board has limited money to spend, a brochure or rack card is probably your most critical piece of advertising. Without it, you have nothing to send when people inquire about your community and nothing to set out at rest stops and visitor centers for travelers to pick up.

The same rules apply to brochures as to all advertising – keep it simple, present your key selling points, and sell to your target market. You may also want to use your brochure to encourage people to visit your web site.

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Whether you choose a rack card, made of card stock with text on front and back, or a brochure with two, three or more folds, depends on how much you need to say. Either way, remember that it will probably be displayed, at least part of the time, on a brochure rack with other brochures. Only the top one-fourth of the front will show. So plan a design with an interesting top! And proof read VERY carefully before you print. There is nothing like an embarrassing typographical error to send your potential customers precisely the wrong message!

### **Convention Bidding**

If there is enough interest from lodging tax boards, future updates of the manual will explore this topic in more detail. For now, we have included a detailed convention planning checklist as Appendix 408.

### **Direct Mail**

Direct mail is more personal than other forms of advertising because it comes into the recipient's home separate from other materials. As a result, it may be more likely to catch a potential customer's attention. Direct mail is also quite expensive, so it is important to use your direct mail dollars carefully.

Many advertising experts recommend direct mail as an effective marketing tool – as long as it is targeted to very specific groups of people. For example, some lodging tax boards get a list of people who have requested information about Wyoming from the Office of Tourism or from Wyoming magazines and send a direct mail advertisement to them.

- Direct mail – like all other forms of advertising – is salesmanship in print. All the rules and principles apply.
- Direct mail can simply be an extended ad. Take your basic ad, insert sales points you didn't have room for, and put it into a multi-page or fold-out format.
- Getting direct mail opened – rather than instantly trashed – takes some thought. Try to arouse the recipient's curiosity with a clever or provocative statement or question on the envelope.
- To make your piece more intriguing; enclose an object – a coin, a playing card, a noisemaker, an artifact of some kind – anything that is relevant to your key selling point. In light of recent mail scares, make sure the recipients know who the mail is coming from and what is enclosed.
- Check with the post office about the size of your piece before you go to print. Sometimes a small alteration in size can save you a substantial amount of postage.
- Think about direct mail that you responded well to. What made those pieces more effective than the usual? Put these insights to work for you.
- Remember to include a call for action that makes it clear what response you'd like, and makes responding as easy as possible, such as a tear-off section to send back for more information.
- The focus should be on your prospective customers' wants, needs, and desires.

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### **Familiarization Tours**

The fam tour is an event designed to familiarize a specific group of people with your community's attractions. A traditional fam tour is done for people outside the community who could be strategic in sending large numbers of customers your way – people such as travel agents, bus tour operators, or journalists. This kind of fam tour is offered at no cost and your goal is to leave the best possible impression, so you want to plan well and spare no expense.

If you are planning a fam tour, invite other entities to sponsor parts of the trip. An airline might be willing to offer reduced rates in return for official sponsorship status, hotels and motels might offer free lodging, etc..

Also consider doing a “fam tour” at the beginning of each tourist season for the front desk employees of your local lodging facilities. These people advise travelers routinely, but may have little knowledge of what your community offers. Although this fam tour should be offered at no cost, it can be shorter and doesn't need to include meals and accommodations. A relatively simple production will net you a lot of benefit. Worksheets to help you organize a fam tour are given in Appendices 409 and 410.

### **Grants**

Most lodging tax boards offer grants to help fund events held in their community. To have an effective grant program, your board needs to spend some time formulating guidelines for how you want your grant program to work. Some boards fund virtually all grant applications with the goal of creating good will in the community and increasing the probability that the lodging tax will pass the next time it comes up for a vote. Other boards feel strongly that they should only fund applicants whose projects or events are in line with their mission of increasing visitors to the community. Some boards prefer to direct grant money to start up causes, gradually decreasing their support as the events get established. They feel that this pattern will, over time, increase the number of tourist related activities in their community. Other boards are comfortable acting as a perpetual source of funds for specific events.

Evaluation is another key component in having an effective grant program. Your application form should contain your evaluation criteria, and grant recipients should be required to submit a written report before you disburse grant funds. Each event should be evaluated by the lodging tax board following the event and prior to your next application cycle.

Examples of grant application forms can be found in Appendices 411 through 413 and a sample request for payment form is included as Appendix 414.

### **Internet**

A website can help you reach market segments your lodging tax board can not cost-effectively reach using any other medium. However, developing a dynamic web site for your community requires large amounts of time and effort on the part of your board and may also require hiring a

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web development company. Few things are changing as fast as the Internet and while we can't cover the field in any detail, here are a few suggestions.

Designing a website is similar to designing a series of print ads, and the same rules apply – keep it simple, present your key selling points, and sell to your target market. Since the Internet is a strongly visual and interactive medium, you will want to pay close attention to the images you present and the overall design of your site. You will also want to make the most of the unique, interactive characteristics of the Internet. If properly designed, a visitor to your site can obtain desired information quickly and easily. While designing your site, you may want to ask:

- Does your site look good on all browsers? (Internet Explorer 7, 8, 9 – Firefox – Chrome)
- Is your site friendly and easy to navigate?
- How long do visitors have to wait for pages to load?
- Does your site share a consistent look with all your advertising material?
- Is the text clear, concise, and grammatically correct?
- Are the graphical elements clean and crisp?
- Are the calls to action clear and easily found? (request a guide, e-newsletter sign up, etc.)
- Is the site optimized for search engines? (Search Engine Optimization – SEO)
- Have you included elements that generate repeat traffic such as a calendar of events, tip of the day, breaking tourism news, or useful links?

To combine all these elements will require writing skills for the text, graphic skills for the layout and design, and web skills to write appropriate code so that all elements appear properly. You will also need web marketing skills to make sure that your site is top-ranked in the search engines, and is well linked to and from other relevant sites.

While your site is being designed, your board needs to decide where it will be hosted – that is, what computer will contain the files of your site. You may choose to go with a local hosting company or with one of the many hosting companies across the nation. Some things to consider when choosing your host company include:

- Support services provided
- Web traffic reports (i.e. unique user sessions, pageviews, time on site, etc.)
- Their connectivity to the web – how many telephone lines, and how fast they are
- Up-time performance – the amount of time your site is up and running vs. being down.
- Cost

Once your site is designed and hosted, you still need to maintain it. This is an on-going project and something your board needs to commit to from the beginning. Few things are worse than clicking on a site and finding that the information is months or years out of date. You need to schedule maintenance on a routine basis (monthly or quarterly) to ensure that all information is current, that all of the links to other sites work, and that the site looks and feels fresh. “Every day in every way we're getting better and better” is a good motto for web sites.

Finally, you'll need to make sure that people can find your site. Some simple ways of doing this are to list your web address on all your promotional material, including your letterhead, your

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business cards, your email signatures etc. You can ask other tourism sites (including the state site) to exchange links with you. You will also need to make sure that your site is listed (preferably in the top ten) on search engines. Techniques for attempting to achieve top ranking change almost monthly so employing a company to manage your Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is recommended if the budget allows.

SEM is considered one of the foundational elements to your overall campaign. Why? Because the majority of people using the internet to plan their trips are still using search engines to find the information they need to help them plan a trip. High search engine rankings are critical to the success of your website.

### **Electronic Advertising**

There is a lot of information that could be covered in this topic and just not enough room to do it in this document. The information below is intended to be basic, but helpful. For more advanced information about how to conduct an electronic advertising campaign, visit with your colleagues at other lodging tax boards that have already implemented a campaign or visit with the Office of Tourism.

Electronic advertising can be accomplished in many forms including website banner ads, e-newsletters, mobile text marketing, QR codes and many more. The main benefits to using electronic marketing are that it is easily tracked, it is relatively inexpensive and easy to target your audience. Be sure to set goals or understand what you want for return on investment (ROI) for your campaigns as you would with other mediums.

It is recommended that your board hire experts to help facilitate creating and placing an electronic campaign if budget allows. This medium changes so rapidly, keeping up on the best practices can be difficult. If the budget doesn't allow for hiring this work out, then take it slow and ask questions.

Often, the websites on which your board desires to advertise will offer creative services for building your web banner ad or other creative unit necessary to distribute your message on their site. When designing your electronic messaging, be true to the core of your message, just as you would with any other medium. And, be consistent with the design so it complements your other advertising.

Creating an e-newsletter is a good way to engage with your audience on a continual basis. But to be able to communicate with your customer via this medium, you must first garner their email address and this is done through the many other advertising options mentioned in this document. Many off-the-shelf programs exist to help you create an attractive newsletter and help you measure the results (i.e. Constant Contact). It is vital to keep the newsletter delivery consistent; if you promise a monthly newsletter, deliver it monthly; not every other month. These are consumers who have given you permission to communicate to them, treat them with the ultimate respect and they will remain your customer for years.

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Mobile marketing, while new, is very wide spread as more and more people elect to carry cell phones, specifically smart phones (iPhone, Droid, Blackberry, etc.). Mobile marketing requires that you garner a consumer's phone number to be able to communicate with them. Messaging must be concise and relevant to the consumer's needs/wants using this marketing medium. For example, if you have garnered a consumer's number because they texted in to join a ski sweepstakes, don't send them a message about a summer hiking trip. The messaging should remain focused on the topic in which you know they are interested.

### **Promotions and Special Events**

Occasionally your lodging tax board will be asked to participate in a promotion or special event, normally as a sponsor. Sometimes you may want to create your own promotion or special event. These are organized functions that bring together specific target audiences and generally involve the media or corporate sponsors. As you plan your special event, keep these questions in mind:

- What are your goals? You may want to bring visitors into your community, gain media attention, or become more visible within the community. You also need to decide how you will tell whether you have achieved your goals.
- Is the event/promotion beneficial to all entities involved? Don't push for media or corporate sponsorship unless you think the event will benefit them.
- Do you need media coverage? If so, consider creating an event tailored specifically for the media. Plan something that sounds fun. The media are barraged with invitations, press packets and press releases, so your event needs to be unique and exciting to get their attention. Create a mailer that cuts through the clutter when it reaches their desks.
- Is the promotion creative? This is a good opportunity to go out on a limb. Be unpredictable, but be smart and always keep your objectives in mind.

Remember that an event or promotion, no matter how well planned, never goes without a hitch. So be prepared for the inevitable "disaster" by staying innovative and flexible.

### **Public Relations**

Public relations is sometimes defined in terms of handshakes, parties and eternal smiles, but it isn't that easy. In actuality, a public relations program takes as much time and energy as preparing a print advertising campaign. It must be done well if it is to do any good. Effectively implemented public relations can help shape a community's image and help attract new customers.

At its simplest, public relations is alerting the media of newsworthy events that will be going on in your community or with your lodging tax board. By notifying the media and getting coverage, you can gain credible, free exposure through many media channels – newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

Your board will generally focus on public relations at the local level, but you may also choose to work at the state or national level. One advantage of local public relations is that you can normally achieve your goals economically. If you are interested in public relations at the state or

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national level, your board will want to work in cooperation with the Wyoming Office of Tourism which has an aggressive, proactive public relations effort. Your board needs to let their staff know whenever you become aware of events that can be promoted, and help them when they contact you for services during fam tours for national and international travel writers. Always let their staff know about any special events you are promoting.

Before starting your public relations program, consider what you want to achieve. Your lodging tax board may want to:

- Complement your current advertising efforts with publicity.
- Add editorial endorsement.
- Extend your messages into areas not included in your advertising budget.
- Provide customer with in-depth information about your community.

Public relations is not as simple as it sounds. Pitching a potential story to the media is an art that requires as much attention to relationships as it does to the focus of your story. While it's important to know how to use creative formatting techniques to enhance editorial reception of a story (tools of the trade such as seasonal tie-ins, anniversaries, consumer tips, using news to make news, trends, pressing an editor's "hot" buttons) you also need to learn the knack of melding your objectives with the journalist's needs.

- Become a resource. The best publicists see themselves as resources for editors, reporters and producers. Acting as editorial assistants, they find "stories" – news and information – to help fill valuable time and print space. Become such a resource. Get on the journalist's "Golden Rolodex."
- Know your journalists. Find out the kinds of stories they cover and the approaches they take to those stories. Be aware that job turnover is brisk, especially in broadcasting. Keep in touch as often as possible so you know which shows are still on the air and who the right contacts are. Some publicists like to "go for broke," sending pitch letters to every journalist in a particular market. They are wasting their time and postage. You should always take a targeted approach to the media.
- Start off on the right foot. First, send a brief provocative letter that whets the journalist's appetite for your news; not a lengthy dissertation that gives every detail. One phone call after your letter will tell you if the story has caught the journalist's attention. Be prepared with your key selling points in case the contact hasn't read your letter. If your story is so "hot" that there is no time for a mailing, a phone call without a letter is appropriate. This "cold calling" is best done when your lodging tax board is involved in a breaking news story. Standard operating procedure is to send a press kit after the story has been sold.
- Personalize your letter. Journalists see too many impersonal, photocopied letters. Though it takes more time, send letters that at least carry the appearance of personalization. When possible, use your own handwriting to highlight information that is of interest to that particular journalist.
- Respect deadlines. Many publicists have no concept of how hectic journalists' lives are; or how many other publicists are competing for their attention. Often, the publicist doesn't know or respect the journalist's timetable and deadlines. One of your responsibilities is to

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find out the best times to reach a journalist. Keep an index file that can be easily referred to before making calls, so you don't call when your contact is under deadline pressure.

- Ask if you've called at a good time. If you rush into your story and the timing is bad, the journalist will get annoyed, cut you off, and be less receptive the next time you call. Keep your call brief and to the point. There's nothing worse than a rambling, long-winded publicist.
- Listen. Be sensitive to any feedback that can assist you in fine-tuning your pitch. With antennae fully extended, you can learn more about the needs of the journalist you're pitching the story to.
- Expect "no" and be prepared for it. Ask quick, important questions: "Why isn't this story right for you?" "Is there any way I could adapt the story to better suit your needs?" If you've prepared three to five different angles in advance, you'll reduce the chance of rejection.
- Respect the "NO". Don't hit the journalist over the head if a story is rejected. If you've exhausted all your different angles, thank the journalist for his or her time. Don't be discouraged. What's most important is keeping the channels of communication open. Sour the contact and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to interest them in future stories.
- Ask for referrals. What is not appropriate for one journalist could be perfect for another. Before you say good-bye, ask if your story might be more appropriate for someone else. Then, if you're referred to a new contact, you can use the referral to introduce yourself.
- Cultivate your contacts. Get out from behind your desk. The better you get to know the journalist on a one-to-one basis, the better your chance of a receptive ear. Earn their respect by passing along any items of interest you discover that lie outside the domain of your lodging tax board. Also, exhibit professionalism by supplying your most important contacts with your cell phone number so you're reachable after business hours.
- Deliver what you've sold. Make sure your pitch is accurate and your story is as interesting as you've promised.
- Always tell the truth. Integrity is the hallmark of the best and most successful public relations professionals. Remember that a journalist is buying you as well as your story idea. The bottom line is trust. It's up to you to earn it.

### **Radio Commercials**

Because travelers usually listen to their car radios as they drive along, radio can be an outstanding marketing tool. But before you decide that these people can be easily turned into customers, remember that most travelers aren't wondering how to fill their days. They already have plans. If you want them to spend time in your community, you have to give them a good reason to change those plans.

So what kind of a radio commercial will you use? Radio advertising is the perfect place to give your imagination free rein. You can do anything in a radio commercial and usually without going to great expense. Where else can you drain Jackson Lake, fill it with melted cheese, and lower huge nacho chips into it with a crane?

Every radio station wants its commercials to be both creative and effective. Creative because boring commercials will cause listeners to switch to another station, and effective because if your

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commercials don't work, you'll drop radio from your advertising plans. Use radio stations as a resource. They will gladly help you create your commercials.

If your budget is small, a simple announcer-read script can be very effective. It can simply and clearly make the primary selling point you want to make, plus a couple of secondary selling points. If you get into elaborately produced radio spots, don't let radio's infinite possibilities tempt you to stray from your key selling points. Here are some guidelines for successful marketing via radio.

- There are many outstanding professionally-done radio commercials on the air. If your commercial comes off as amateurish or homemade, it will reflect negatively on your community.
- It's easy for a listener to change radio stations, so make sure your commercials are entertaining.
- If you employ humor as a source of entertainment, take care that the laughs don't get in the way of your message. The best use of humor is when the jokes come right out of the sales points rather than being tacked on for the sake of getting laughs. And be sure they really ARE funny, because when humor misfires, it generally fails miserably.
- Don't use music unless you own the rights to it.
- If your radio station has on-air personalities that are well-regarded, take advantage of their skills and reputation by giving them a fact sheet (a listing of things you want to communicate) and letting them wing it on the air.
- A conversation between two characters usually has more listener appeal than a conventional announcer-read spot.
- Consider the use of sound effects. All radio stations have extensive libraries of sound effects that can make your commercials more interesting.

### **Television Commercials**

Television has great allure for advertisers since it offers sight, sound, and motion. Although television is a very glamorous marketing tool, it isn't automatically the right choice. Television can be quite expensive and when poorly used, may do you more harm than good. Nothing looks worse than a poorly-done television ad. So if your marketing goals call for an investment in television, get some professional help – either an advertising agency or a freelance television producer. Some TV stations are also set up to create quality commercials in-house.

### **Video/CD-ROM**

Videos are typically used by lodging tax boards in their display booths at trade shows. Videos or CDs can also be included in the press kits you send out to journalists. Videos are generally too expensive to produce and mail to potential customers, but some groups have started producing and mailing their own CDs. One advantage of using CD technology is that you can design an interactive experience tailored to the market niche you want to reach.

Many of the techniques used in websites can be used for your CD. And whether you're producing a video or CD remember your marketing objectives – keep it simple, present your key

selling points, and sell to your target market. Pay close attention to the images you present and the overall design and flow of your production. It may help to create a story board that describes the various elements you want to showcase and how you will transition between them.

### **Section 6 - Marketing Plan**

**Updated 2011**

Once you have done the market analysis, set goals, developed a marketing strategy, and chosen your marketing tools as described in the previous sections, creating a marketing plan is a relatively straight forward process. The marketing plan is the compilation of these elements in a concise organized format, coupled with a budget and an overall time line made up of the time lines from each of your goals.

#### **Why a Marketing Plan is Important**

If a marketing plan is just a compilation of these elements, why bother to do it at all? The plan is important for two reasons - clarification and continuity. Although you already have all the information that goes into the marketing plan, it is undoubtedly in many bits and pieces. Parts of it will have been completed much more recently than others, and it may be hard to see how the various pieces affect each other. Putting everything together into a marketing plan will clarify and reinforce what you've learned through the analysis process.

The other important purpose of a marketing plan is continuity. A marketing plan is an ideal way to get new board members or personnel up to speed quickly. Without a marketing plan, your efforts can easily be lost in the transition from one board to the next.

#### **Pros and Cons of Outsourcing Your Marketing Plan**

There are several advantages of hiring someone to help you create your marketing plan:

- They bring to the table their own expertise, experience, and knowledge of travel trends.
- They can help with market analysis - doing research, assembling and interpreting data, and building consensus.
- They provide guidance in the goal setting process, helping you end up with reasonable, achievable goals.
- They serve as an outside expert, increasing your plan's credibility to the public.
- They save you the time and effort involved in the actual writing of the marketing plan.

But there are also several disadvantages of hiring someone to help you create your marketing plan:

- They cost money.
- An outside consultant won't know your community like you do. As a result, you might end up with a generic, cookie cutter plan not well tailored to your needs.
- If the board isn't involved in the goal setting process, it probably won't buy into the goals established, and the plan becomes useless.

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- Your consultant can't adequately do your travel inventory or goal setting without you. To avoid getting a cookie cutter plan, or one that isn't accepted by the board, you will still need to be intimately involved in the entire process. This can be resented, especially by boards who hired outside help with the intention of saving themselves the work.

The bottom line is, whether or not you hire a consultant to do your marketing plan, the plan still has to be the board's. The consultant can provide guidance, do research, write the plan, and do the final polishing, but the bulk of the material has to be provided by the board. Otherwise, the entire process and product are much less useful.

### **Procedures for Doing Your Marketing Plan In-house**

Collect your market analysis, goals, and marketing strategy. Couple them with a budget and an overall time line made up of the time lines from each of your goals. Compile everything into a concise, organized form. It is usually best to have one board member draft the document, then review and approve it as a board. A sample marketing plan outline is given in Appendix 401.

### **Procedures for Outsourcing Your Marketing Plan**

If your board decides to outsource your marketing plan, here are some guidelines you may want to follow.

- Create a list of people who are doing marketing plans. Include any local ad agencies and tourism or marketing consultants. The Wyoming Travel Industry Coalition and the Wyoming Office of Tourism also maintain databases of people doing marketing plans.
- Send out a Request for Proposal (RFP). This doesn't have to be a complex document, but it should include specifics of what you expect the vendor to do if hired, the time frame for doing it, incentives for timely work, penalties for late work, plus any items (events, attractions, etc.) that you would like them to focus on. Examples are available from the Office of Tourism. It may be helpful to ask for references and samples. Don't forget to include a deadline for returning the proposal and state how many copies of their proposal you will need for your board. Since you are using public funds, it is advisable to send the RFP to everyone on your list to avoid charges of favoritism. (See Chapter 7 Section 2 for more information on the bidding process and Appendix 402 for a sample marketing plan RFP.)
- Once the proposals have arrived, it may be helpful to create a spreadsheet with pertinent information such as: what is the cost, what is their time line, did they include requested materials (reference, samples, etc.), and did they focus on what you asked them to. Then, as a board, review all of the proposals looking at the sample materials. Choose the agency that looks like the best fit and can work within your budget and time line.
- Finalize a contract or agreement (see Chapter 7) covering the scope of work and be ready to assist in the travel inventory and goal setting processes.

### **Section 7 - Evaluating Your Marketing**

**Updated 2011**

The final step in your marketing effort is to evaluate whether the marketing strategies and tools that you use are successful. Even though you may not be able to gather quantitative data on all

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aspects of your marketing campaigns, you can still gather enough information to give you valuable insight into which elements are working and which are not.

One of the most important things you can do is track – website user sessions, website page views, visitor inquiries, telephone calls, returned response cards, fulfillment pieces mailed out, license plate counts at special events, convention inquiries and reservations, and anything else you can think of. Even if this only reflects a percentage of your “success”, over time you will be able to see trends if you collect your information in the same way each year.

- Make sure you ask telephone callers where they heard about you – and record the information.
- Code your print ads by using a unique address or adding a suffix to your box number. When you tabulate responses, you can tell which ad the reader saw.
- Use a different web address (URL) for each major promotional piece. Track how many visits you had to that particular page to know how successful the promotional piece was.
- If you use direct mail, include a code on your response piece identifying the address list used. This will help you evaluate which address lists are giving you the most responses..
- Put a special offer on your billboards (e.g. get your free map/coffee/doughnut at the information center) then record how many people respond.
- Work with a local lodging or attraction establishment to include a coupon for a free product/service in your fulfillment mailing. Then track how many are returned to the establishment.

Most of the suggestions here focus on tracking “potential” customers. Determining how many of these potential customers became real customers is more difficult. This research is called a conversion study and is normally done by telephoning your list of potential customers to find out how many actually came to your community.

Whatever you do, don’t stop evaluating. Even small amounts of information, consistently collected over time, will help you make better marketing decisions.

### **Section 8 - Working in Partnership**

**Updated 2011**

One of the best ways to stretch limited marketing dollars is to work together. You can buy more – or larger – ads if you combine your efforts with local tourism properties or industry groups, other lodging tax boards, or the Wyoming Office of Tourism. Pooling your funds makes sense because larger ads usually cost less for their size than small ones. Appendices 415 and 416 are examples of marketing letters you can use to solicit interest in your co-op ad opportunities.

To produce a co-op ad with local groups or other lodging tax boards, decide how large of an ad each participating entity can afford. Pool these amounts and buy the largest ad you can. Then split the ad copy and costs proportionally. You’ll end up with more ad than you would have had working alone.

The state frequently arranges co-op advertising opportunities that your lodging tax board can participate in if you choose. These range from single page spreads to large advertorial pieces

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where properties from all over Wyoming are featured alongside extensive “editorial” blocks of text. Contact the Office of Tourism to find out what opportunities are currently available or log on to [www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov](http://www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov) for more information.

### **Section 9 - Resource Material**

**Updated 2011**

Rocky Mountain Lodging Report - Robert Benton (303) 840-1666, Box 262242, Littleton, CO 80163.

This manual should be used as a guide only as it is based on changing legal requirements. We suggest you consult appropriate professional counsel if you have specific questions. The following material is included in the appendix section of this manual for general reference.

- Appendix 401 - Model Marketing Plan
- Appendix 402 - Sample Request for Proposal: marketing plan
- Appendix 403 - Marketing Work Plan
- Appendix 404 - Visitor Intercept Survey: Wyoming
- Appendix 405 - Visitor Intercept Survey: Local Community
- Appendix 406 - Visitor Survey at Motels: Local Community
- Appendix 407 - Visitor Mail-back Survey: Local Community
- Appendix 408 - Convention Planning Checklist
- Appendix 409 - Organizing a Fam Tour
- Appendix 410 - Fam Tour Worksheets
- Appendix 411 - Grant Example: State Guidelines
- Appendix 412 - Grant Example: Matching Funds 1
- Appendix 413 - Grant Example: Matching Funds 2
- Appendix 414 - Grant Request for Payment
- Appendix 415 - Co-op Marketing Letter: Example 1
- Appendix 416 - Co-op Marketing Letter: Example 2