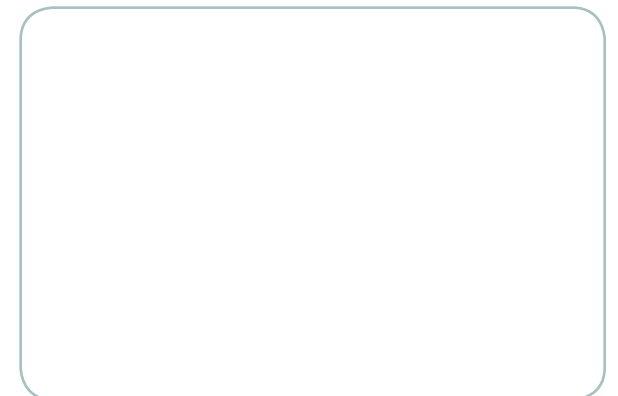


Assessments, Findings and Suggestions

Castle Mountain, Alberta

June 2007



Destination **ddi**
Development inc.

INTRODUCTION



First impressions and some ideas to increase tourism spending

In June of 2007, a Community Tourism Assessment of Castle Mountain, Alberta 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, signs, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public wash rooms, 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 CAA and 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. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can not get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

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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, and boating), 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 you go to Anaheim, California, if Disneyland was not 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 and more 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, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public wash rooms, 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 and hotels. 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 is important to note that to increase the community’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact. 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.) can not 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 not 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 within your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can not get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises. Otherwise visitors might come once, but they would not come back. It is 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 do not 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 costs.

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The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This does not happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it does not happen when visitors go swimming in your city's lake while sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it does not 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 you do want your visitors to do these – but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafés, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, and 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 in an attractive setting. You want to give them reason to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one purpose for 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 signs, 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, conventions and meetings, corporate travel and vendor travel. 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 because of their convention and exhibition facilities. DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk are great examples.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative type of visitor, 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

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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 for a total of four hours. During the other ten hours, the visitor will 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 services, but 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 percent of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway for gas and spent an extra 30 minutes getting ice cream for the family?

If there is a strong pull, imagine the money spent by folks staying two hours; extra time spent (always) translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community, you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. 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, when there are enough activities that appeal specifically to them. And remember - you need enough activities to keep them busy four times longer than the length of their trip.

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

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amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay and 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 will 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 could not 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 do not care whether he is 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 or the experience and 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 not 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. What is in the buildings 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. They do not 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 agricultur-

al center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plymouth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the “capitol” of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capitol of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capitol. Modesto is the tomato capitol. Gridley is the kiwi capitol. Oxnard is the strawberry capitol. Fallbrook is the avocado capitol. But here is the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capitol 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 is 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 a Shakespeare Festival. It 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 Okano-

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gan? 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 will 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 where 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 and wash rooms, — 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. You start with 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, cafés, bistros, delis and the like. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 PM: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop) and other evening entertainment.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors and locals, making it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to critical mass – the opportunity to have



multiple choices and multiple experiences in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal to successful tourism is for folks 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 percent have less than 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 and crafts. 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 revitalizing a community’s downtown. 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

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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 with everyone pulling in the same direction, each with a “to-do list.”

Finally, there is 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 and 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 goal of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry, becoming 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. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will 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 (The rule of perceived value)

Suggestion:

We all make judgments about restaurants, shops, attractions, and communities based on our first impressions. We form our expectations based on what we see from the outside.

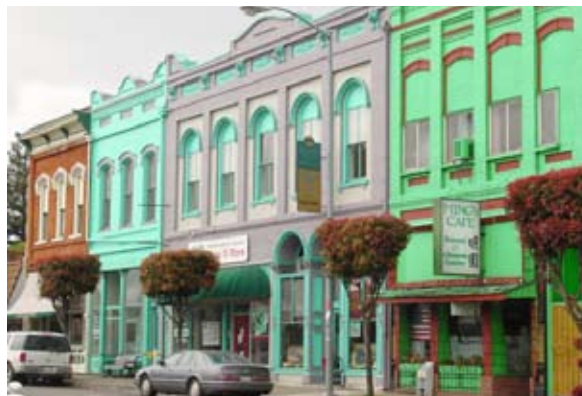
The entryway to your community or resort gives visitors their first impression. They will begin to judge the character and quality of Castle Mountain by the gateway.

Would you eat at the restaurant in the photo top right? Probably not. It does not look inviting, comfortable, clean, or even very safe. And yet this little barbecue in Texas has been written up in GQ Magazine as one of the best places to fly for dinner.

What is your impression of Lakeport? (bottom, right) Would you be surprised to find out that the bottom middle photo is downtown? Its entry sign does not do it justice!

Many communities make the mistake of creating sign clutter at their entry ways. This can include auxiliary organization signs, listings of events and the like. Sign clutter creates a less-than-desirable impression (top, left).

Your entryway gives prospective customers their first impression - they'll judge the quality of Castle Mountain by the entrance. Be sure to make a good first impression, just as the small town of Oroville does with their entry sign (left, middle).



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion:

Castle Mountain is undergoing some major construction, and will soon have a lot more to offer visitors. While this is going on, let people know what is coming up!

Add display signs and billboards that say “Coming Soon to Castle Mountain.” Show drawings of what visitors can expect in the near future. That gives them a reason to come back. We have developed renderings and plans, like those shown here, to “sell” upcoming projects and to entice visitors to come back.



Invest in Beautification (Nothing sells like beautiful places)

Suggestion:

Curb appeal is an investment with tremendous return, and can account for 70 percent of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, resorts, and golf courses.

LaRua in Whistler, BC (upper, right) is a wonderful example of creating a beautiful place. Although Whistler is a ski resort, it now does more business in the summer than the winter, and their beautification efforts are a big part of the reason.

Sisters, Oregon, (top, right) has created stunningly beautiful streetscapes, and now can boast of having the highest retail sales per capita of any city in Oregon.

Studies have shown that the ambiance created by street trees even makes customers willing to pay more for products and services. Adding flowers, potted plants, water features, hanging baskets creates a beautiful resort that people love to frequent, and love to return to.



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Suggestion:

Add flowers, trees, hanging baskets, outdoor furniture to add appeal to Castle Mountain's public areas (below and near right). Make it inviting.

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return, and it creates customer loyalty. The stark look of the resort, off season, does not make it look conducive to weddings, meetings, or as a place to spend time and money. Many ideas are shown on this page and might be implemented at Castle Mountain by merchants or local operators.



Create Gateways & Boundaries (Create the “Mall Mentality”)

Suggestion:

Attractive gateways instill a “sense of place,” creating an identifiable destination where business owners develop the “mall mentality” - that they are all in the mall together and work together as a unit. Creation of boundaries and gateways identifying the core area helps develop a place people are drawn to, proud of, and where they want to spend time and money. Businesses in the area tend to share common goals and efforts in terms of marketing, signs, operating hours, outdoor dining and displays, parking, and public amenities.

Make the sign (middle row, far right) a directional sign, not a gateway sign. It does not provide a good first impression here. “Castle Mountain Village - ahead 200 meters.”

The very broad roadway area (middle row, near right) is a great opportunity for creating plaza areas with gathering spaces.



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Suggestion:

The little welcome sign (near, right) does not make much of a statement. The top right photo was taken in Lethbridge and showcases an attractive “gateway” into the core of downtown.

As work progresses, consider defining the village area with decorative pavement and banners. These beautiful sidewalks in Jasper, Alberta (middle photos), add to the mountain theme, increase pedestrian safety and help define the area.

Colorful banners (bottom, right) can add a festive ambiance, as well as also help to define the village area.

The newly constructed condos in Castle Mountain look very nice. Show potential buyers a “vision” of what this will look like when completed. Post drawings of the “coming soon” vision.



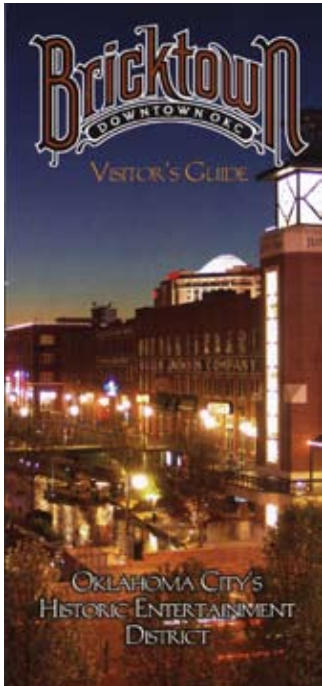
Give the Village a Name (Make it an Attraction, a Destination)

Suggestion:

A name, even as simple as Castle Mountain Village, helps define the village area, and makes it more of a destination in visitors' eyes. Many towns name their downtown retail areas, as well as other districts. Some examples:

- Vancouver - Gastown
- Seattle - Pioneer Square
- San Diego - Gaslamp District
- Portland - Pearl District
- Nelson, BC - Baker Street
- San Antonio - The Riverwalk

Whistler Village and Blackcomb Village - Now it is all Whistler/Blackcomb with an "Upper Village" and a "Lower Village."



Develop Gathering Places & Narrow the Streets (Places for Events, Places to Hang Out)

Suggestion:

Create gathering spaces and places to hold events, shows, and activities. Create areas with intimate settings, and develop “open market” events with flea markets, arts and crafts fairs, educational events and entertainment. Top right: Lethbridge. Center right: Great Northern in Helena, Montana.

Kalamazoo, MI has created a number of covered open areas (below) that are perfect for performances, fairs, other events, or simply having a picnic lunch.

These gathering spaces and intimate locations provide wonderful locations for activities. People love to gather together in bustling surroundings.



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Suggestion:

Several “gathering place” ideas are showcased on this page. Clockwise from top left: Nelson, BC allows restaurants to place outdoor seating areas during the peak season. Olympia, Washington placed a 70 foot fountain plaza downtown, making it a popular gathering place. Fallbrook California created a plaza area for an open-air market that hosts arts & crafts fairs, shows and entertainment, a seasonal farmers market, and artisans in action (middle right and bottom three photos). Whistler Resort now does more business in the summer than in the winter (middle left and center).



Critical Mass is Not Just a Religious Experience (The “Mall Mentality” Rule)

Suggestion:

The number one diversion of visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting. This is also where most visitor spending takes place. To attract visitors and keep them longer, it's necessary to have the critical mass. In a two-to-three lineal block area, there should be:

- Ten destination retail shops (not neighborhood retail)
- Ten dining/treats shops
- Ten places open after 6:00 p.m. (entertainment is preferable).

Start small - create a one-block area, and recruit the right mix of businesses as tenants.

Destination Retail includes:

- Antiques (not just second-hand stores)
- Home furnishings/accents
- Galleries, collectibles
- Food: candy, fudge, ice cream, restaurants, cafes, wine shops, coffee shops, bakeries, bistros
- Lodging
- Artists in action
- Open air markets

Give visitors places where they can spend money and be active when they've finished skiing. The reason Whistler, BC, is busier in the summer than the winter is because the village areas are extensive - lots of variety of shopping, dining, and entertainment - and they are beautiful.



Wash rooms attract more than flies and other notes of convenience

(The Rule of Visitor Amenities)

The number one reason people stop is to use washroom facilities. Take advantage of that, and provide washrooms, and promote them in your signs. Wash rooms translate to spending. Make sure they are located where visitors can spend time and money.

Businesses should never just say “no.” Tell visitors where they can find the public wash rooms.

Visitor information should be working 24/7:

Provide information for visitors - make it easy for them to find out operational hours, prices, events.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Visitors do not just travel during business hours, so offer visitor information services around the clock. It's easy with visitor information kiosks and weather-proof brochure holders.

Let visitors know where to stay, what to see and do, prices, and hours. Provide brochures, so visitors have something to take with them. Also, cross-promote other Southern Alberta towns and attractions. The more there is to do, the longer a visitor will stay, and the more money he will spend.

While at Castle Mountain, we had no idea if it was open or closed, if there are any upcoming events, or even when the ski season typically starts.

There was no information of any kind and so we assumed that every business was closed for the season.



Recruit outside events Have 40-a-year plan

(They do the work, you roll out the red carpet)

Suggestion:

Once you have gathering spaces created, recruit outside events. You provide the location, help with promotion, and the group does the work of organizing and setting up the event.

Many clubs and organizations hold events for their members, such as automobile clubs, motorcycle clubs, quilting clubs, and gardening clubs. Invite them to hold their event in Castle Mountain, and treat them like royalty.

If you hold events often, such as forty times a year, you'll become a hub of activity, and people will be drawn to that. They will know there's always something going on at Castle Mountain.

Once you have plaza areas developed, then work to invite clubs and organizations to the resort. In the example shown here, the First Annual Wheels and Windmills Car Show visited the town of Solvang, California simply because they were invited. They brought in nearly 10,000 guests over a three-day period and have reserved this particular weekend for the next ten years.

You invite them, they do the work and the businesses thrive as a result.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

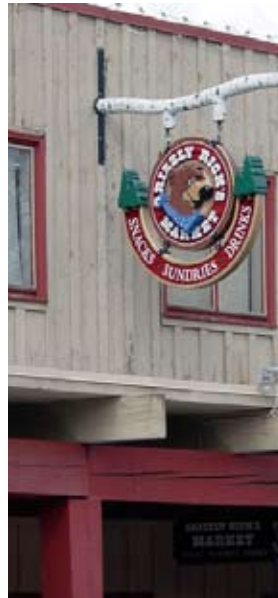
20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$ (The rule of signs that sell)

Suggestion:

Storefront signs should be perpendicular to the street (blade signs) and of uniform height and size, making it easier for motorists and pedestrians to see what is available.

Signs should be decorative to increase the perceived value. Use no more than six words on a merchant signs. Avoid script lettering. The general rule regarding lettering height: one inch for every 12 feet of distance.

Create a co-op sign program. This would create a “jury of peers” to develop effective and decorative retail sign standards to address banners, window displays, sandwich boards, blade signs.



Real Men Don't Ask For Directions (The Rule of Wayfinding)

Suggestion:

There are two primary sign issues that are critical to the success of any community: gateways and directional (or wayfinding) signs. Gateways introduce visitors to your community and provide a sense of arrival. Directional signs help visitors (and residents) navigate the area, telling them what attractions and amenities are available and where to find them. The importance of easy-to-follow wayfinding cannot be overemphasized. If a visitor can not find what he is looking for, he will head down the road.

As Castle Mountain grows, develop a wayfinding sign system that is decorative, easy to read, and easy to follow. Connect the dots with attractive signs that help communicate the brand, or theme, of Castle Mountain.



Other Notes and First Impressions

Suggestion:

When we visited Castle Mountain, we were not sure if anything was open. Put up easy to read signs to let visitors know if you are open, and to provide your hours of operation so they will know when they can come back.

Where is the restaurant? (center, right) Is it really open this time of year? If so, provide information about it.

Let people know what this is going to be (top left).

Assist local “residents” with clean-up and appearance items. This, by the way, will change over time. Many other resorts allow a maximum of 30 days for RV parking - something to consider.

First impressions, this time of year, are less than favorable. While there are some beautiful homes and condos being developed, the commercial area seems stuck in the 70's. It should have more of a lodge feel, and has the potential of becoming a year-round destination.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

There are some very nice, beautiful vacation homes popping up (top, right). You can see the transition taking place.

Work on curb appeal. Provide information panels throughout the resort to let people know what is “Coming Soon.”

Consider phasing in time limits for campers and RV's — no longer than one consecutive month. This would encourage building permanent vacation homes, and would discourage year-round living in a trailer.



Marketing Assessment

Suggestion:

The Cowboy Trail is a great guide for the western ranch experience. It's focus:

- Ranch vacations
- Wildlife viewing
- The porcupine hills area

Southwest Alberta 2007 Vacation Guide is about cities. If you are going to a certain city, this is a great resource. What is Chinook Country? And could you combine Southwest Alberta with Alberta Southwest? All the layers and geography designations make it confusing and more difficult to plan a trip to the region

Alberta Inroads is a great idea. It revolves around activities - things to do, not just places to see. Suggest organizing it as a tour - by experience, then location. Develop itineraries by type of activity.

Alberta Southwest is the class act of all the guides. It has:

- Stunning photography
- Great maps
- Excellent teasers
- Partners instead of advertisers

Suggest changing the focus to “pick your season, then pick your passion.” Create routes by type of experience and type of travel - create detailed itineraries, highlighting specific sites to see and things to do.

A huge area is covered in the Trail of the Great Bear, and the focus is on outdoor recreation, wildlife, and scenic vistas. This is important in keeping the Rocky Mountains the “premier” North American mountain range. Work is in progress on making specific routes, and in identifying specific regions along the way so that visitors can get more information.

