

Marketing Assessment

Suggestion:

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

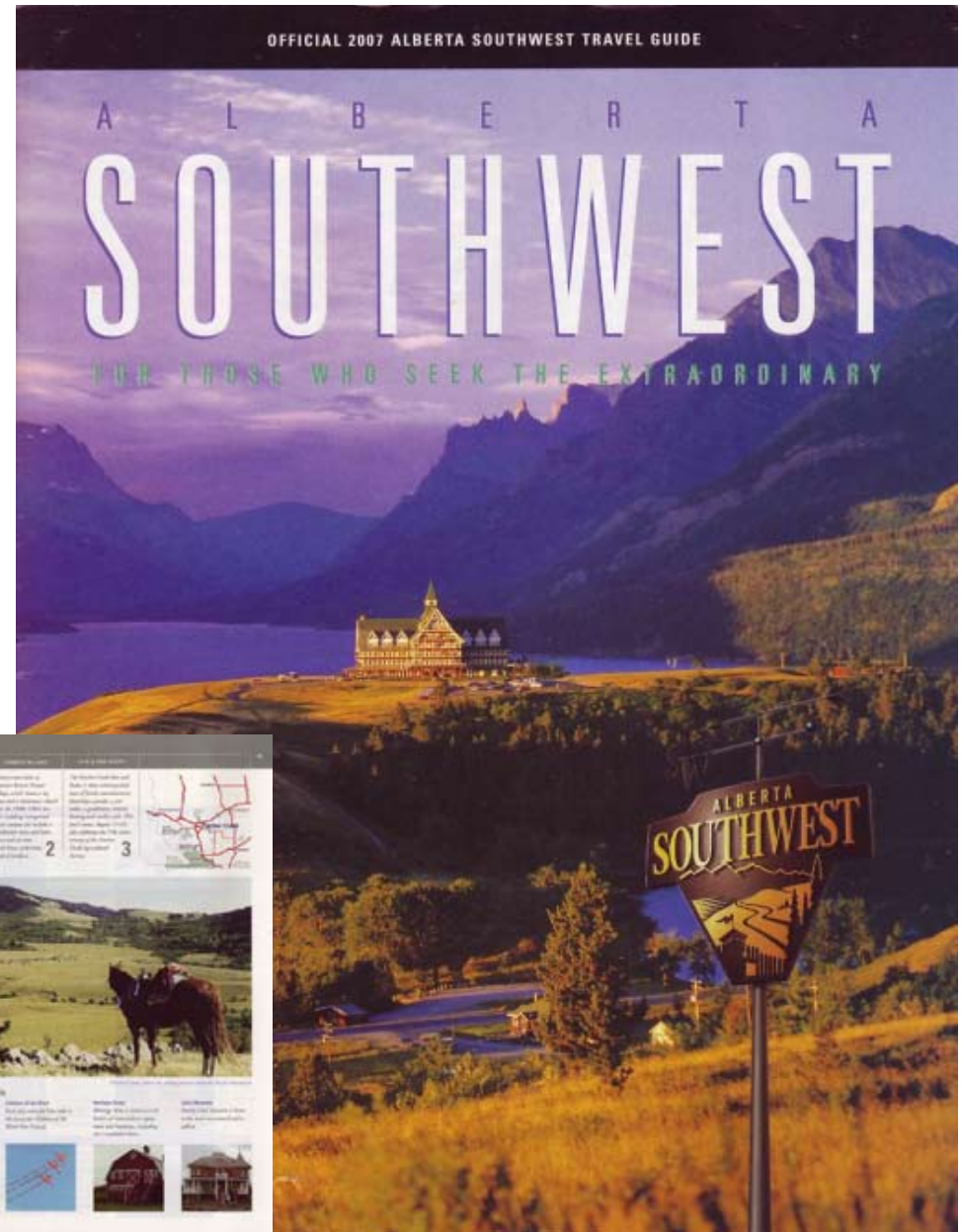
- Stunning photography
- Great maps
- Excellent teasers
- Partners instead of advertisers

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.

The Cowboy Trail is a great guide for the western ranch experience. Its focus:

- Ranch vacations
- Wildlife viewing
- The porcupine hills area

Claresholm can easily be the “Hub to the Cowboy Trail Experience.” Play it up. It’s a great tie to Frontier - your anchor business.



MARKETING ASSESSMENT

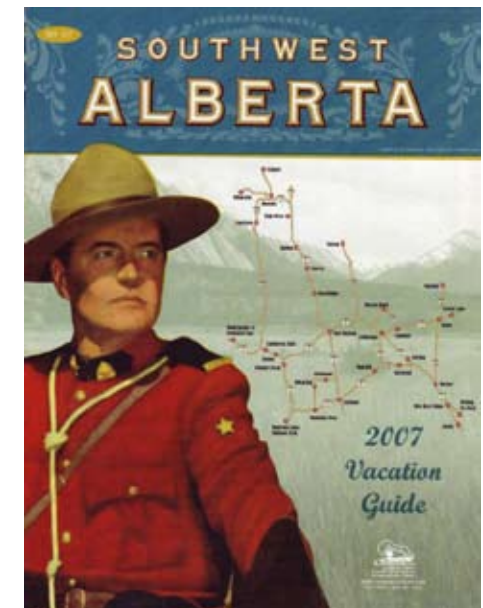
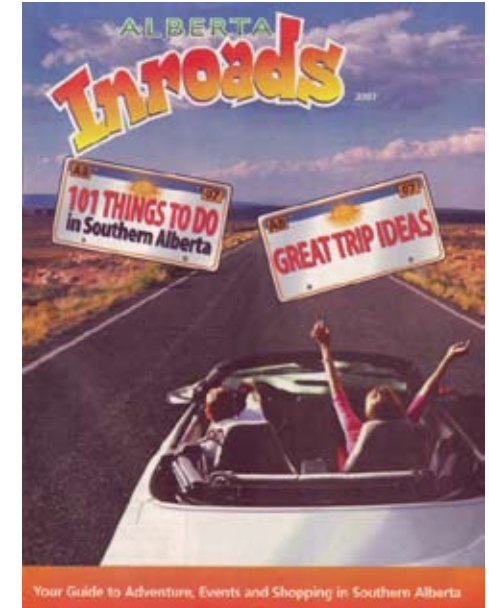
Suggestion:

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.

The Trail of the Great Bear is an important marketing effort to keep the Rocky Mountains of both the U.S. and Canada the “premier” mountain experience in North America. Local communities should tap into the this resource by creating “sister guides” to experiences in their area of the Great Bear Trail.

Suggestion:

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.



Don't Let Your Last Opportunity Become a Lost Opportunity

The Rule of Closing the Sale

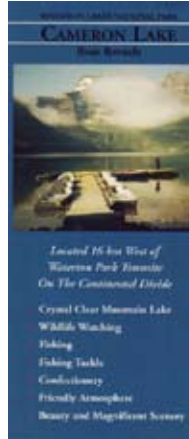
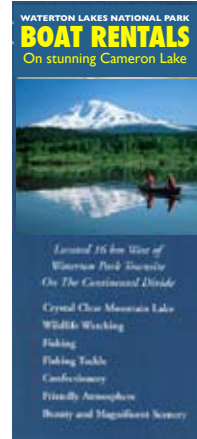
Suggestion:

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

The top three inches of your brochure are critical. Use yellows on a dark background to stand out in a brochure rack. Note which brochures in the rack at right really stand out.

Note how making a few simple changes to the covers of the brochures below makes them grab your attention. Changing the headlines from black text to yellow, and promoting the activity, makes them much more eye-catching.

Be sure to promote the experience over the location. Note the Boat Rental brochure below. The "before" brochure shows a photo of the dock, but visitors aren't looking for a dock - they're looking for a fun boating experience. Changing the photo to one that showcases the experience of boating grabs visitors' attention.

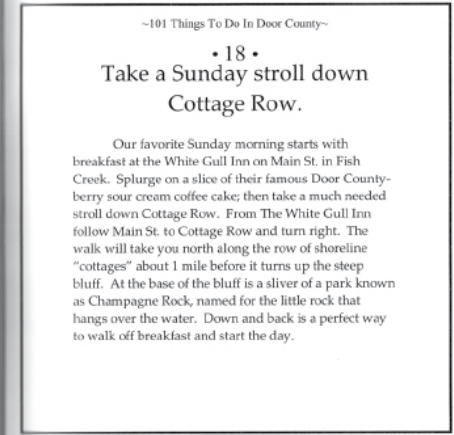
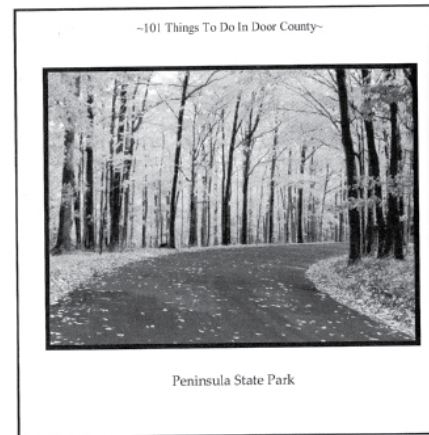
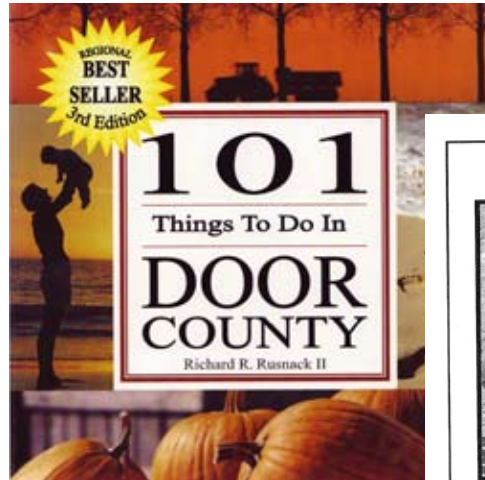


MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Suggestion:

Work with regional tourism folks to create the “Hidden Gems of the Southern Canadian Rockies.” Each hidden gem should be something unique and very specific. Visitors are interested in things to do, and want unique experiences - things they can not do close to home.

Market your specifics - what do you have that is special? Is there a coffee shop that makes the best apple pie around? Promote that pie - describe it in detail to make people’s mouths water. Evoke emotion, market your unique activities, and visitors will come.

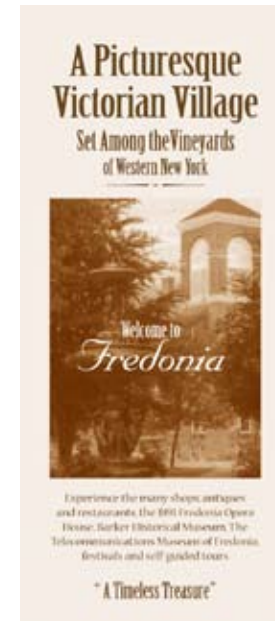


Suggestion:

The Fredonia, NY brochure on the far right is their standard piece. By simply changing the focus - selling the experience first - they can easily make their brochure more effective. “A Picturesque Victorian Village set among the vineyards of Western New York” is more attention-getting than “Welcome to Fredonia, NY.”

For Claresholm, start by promoting the brand, the lure to entice visitors, then the location, the city.

Upgrade the photography, and get rid of the generic. Sell activities rather than just facilities and things to look at. Claresholm makes a great “base camp” for the ranch experience - promote those activities.

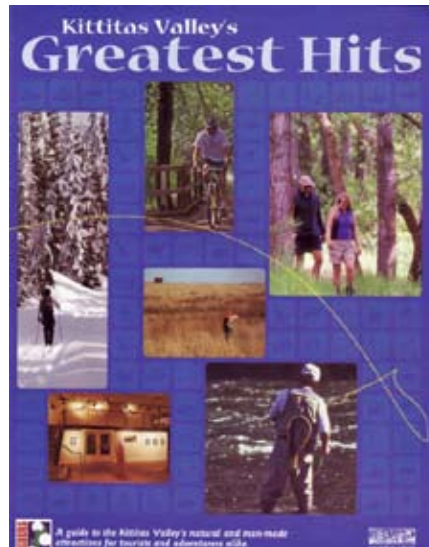


MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Suggestion:

An excellent idea for a marketing tool that works successfully for this merchant in Sisters, Oregon, is this little card. Visitors can use the card to write down special pieces of merchandise, then give the card to a loved one as a "hint" for a special gift. The store receives a lot of business after visitors are long gone through the use of this little card.

Promote specifics, as in Kittitas Valley's Greatest Hits brochure. Details about specific attractions are provided.



MARKETING ASSESSMENT

starved rock
activities guide

YOUR GUIDE TO
NATURE'S
SPLENDOR
OUTDOOR
ADVENTURES
HOMETOWN
COORIN
FAMILY FUN
HISTORIC
TREASURES
RARE FINDS

www.enjoyalbertacounty.com

TWO SISTERS CANDY & GIFTS
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Two Sisters Candy is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom candy bouquets for all occasions. Our candy bouquets are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door. We also offer a variety of gift baskets and personalized gifts.

TWO SISTERS CANDY

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

THE POPCORN WAGON GOURMET POPCORN
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

The popcorn wagon gourmet popcorn is made with the finest ingredients and is delivered to your door. We also offer a variety of gift baskets and personalized gifts.

THE POPCORN WAGON

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

UPTOWN GRILL CONTEMPORARY CUISINE
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

The Uptown Grill contemporary cuisine is made with the finest ingredients and is delivered to your door. We also offer a variety of gift baskets and personalized gifts.

UPTOWN GRILL

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

HEGELER CARUS MANSION TOURS
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

The Hegeler Carus Mansion tours are a unique experience that offers a glimpse into the lives of the people who lived there. The tours are led by knowledgeable guides and are available in both English and French.

HEGELER CARUS MANSION TOURS

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

JEREMIAH JOE SPECIALTY COFFEE
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Jeremiah Joe Specialty Coffee is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom coffee blends for all occasions. Our coffee blends are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

JEREMIAH JOE

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

SKYDIVE CHICAGO SKYDIVING
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Skydive Chicago Skydiving is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom skydiving experiences for all occasions. Our skydiving experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

SKYDIVE CHICAGO

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

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

RIVER ADVENTURES, INC. CANOE & BIKE RENTALS
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

River Adventures, Inc. offers a variety of canoe and bike rentals for all occasions. Our rentals are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

RIVER ADVENTURES, INC.

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

JJ'S PUB BAR & GRILL
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

JJ's Pub Bar & Grill is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom pub experiences for all occasions. Our pub experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

JJ'S PUB BAR & GRILL

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

DEJA VU HOME & GARDEN BOUTIQUE
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Deja Vu Home & Garden Boutique is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom home and garden experiences for all occasions. Our home and garden experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

DEJA VU HOME & GARDEN BOUTIQUE

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

OTTAWA RIVERBOAT CO RIVER CRUISES
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Ottawa Riverboat Co. offers a variety of river cruises for all occasions. Our cruises are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

OTTAWA RIVERBOAT CO

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

HYPERA

WEBER HOUSE & GARDEN COTTAGE TOURS
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Weber House & Garden Cottage Tours is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom cottage tours for all occasions. Our cottage tours are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

WEBER HOUSE & GARDEN COTTAGE TOURS

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

CAJUN CONNECTION TASTE OF LOUISIANA
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Cajun Connection Taste of Louisiana is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom Louisiana experiences for all occasions. Our Louisiana experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

CAJUN CONNECTION

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

Starved Rock Lodge & Conference Center is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom lodge and conference center experiences for all occasions. Our lodge and conference center experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

AUGUST HILL WINERY
1000 Highway 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

August Hill Winery is a family business that has been in operation for over 20 years. We specialize in creating custom winery experiences for all occasions. Our winery experiences are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered to your door.

AUGUST HILL WINERY

From 1000 Hwy 101, Suite 111, Okotoks, AB T1A 1A1
403-823-8238

EXAMER

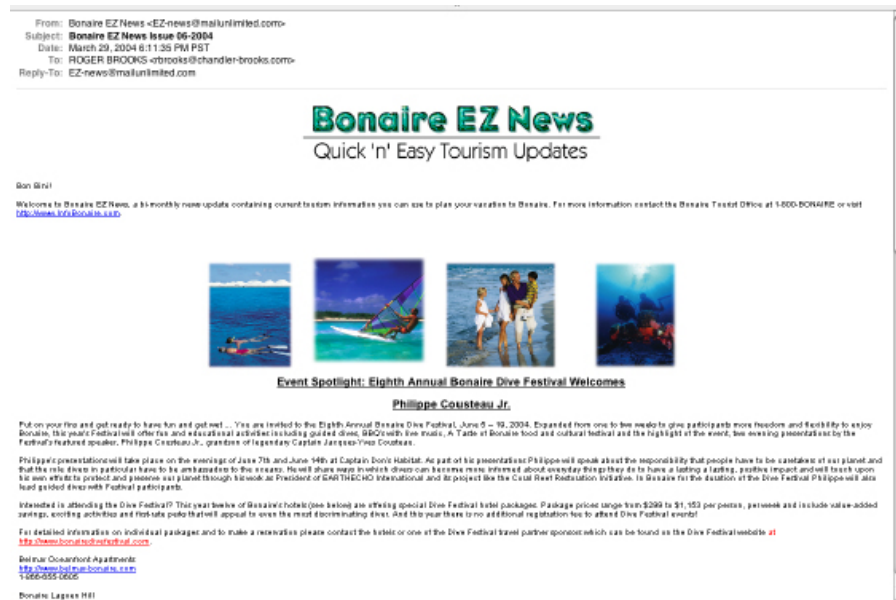
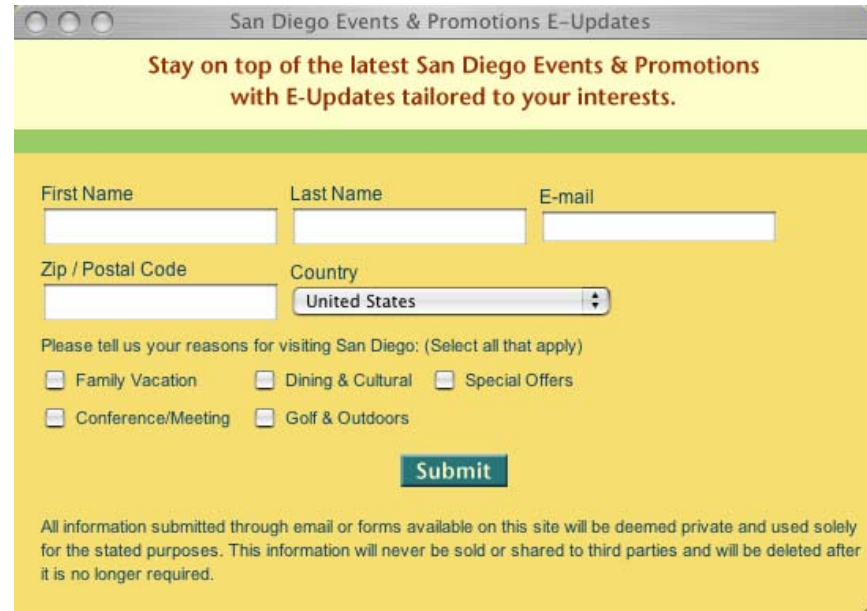
Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Rules of the internet

For more information please see the “Your Town, Online” section of this assessment.

Suggestion:

Develop an e-marketing program to create top of mind awareness. This is permission-based marketing, where visitors can sign up to receive a monthly newsletter. Once a month, you write up the newsletter - make sure it contains information a visitor would want to know about - and send it off. Your visitors will receive a frequent reminder of the fun activities and events happening in Southwest Alberta, creating top of mind awareness.



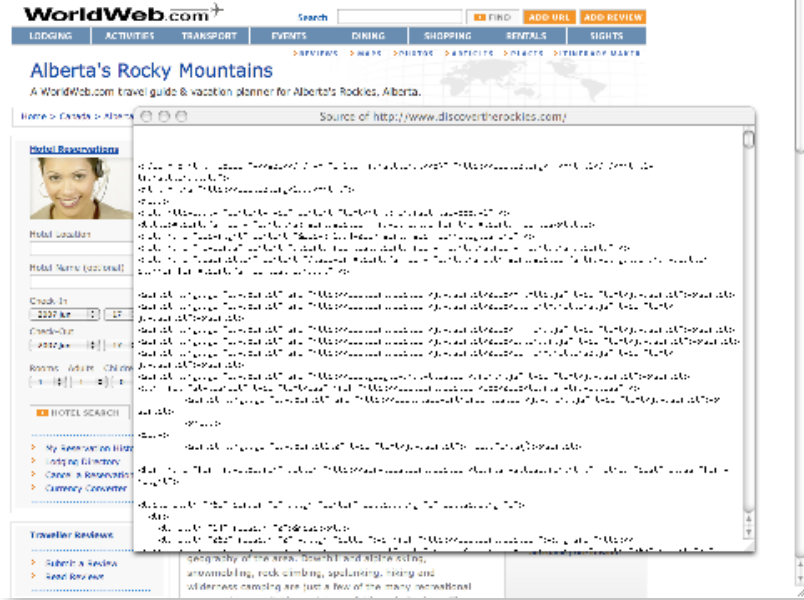
MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Suggestion:

Purchase key words (pay per click). Both Google and Yahoo sell keyword listings. You bid for the keywords, with the highest bidder taking top honors on the first page of results. 70% of web users never go past the first page of search results and 82% never go past the second page of results. This is a powerful and cost-effective way to guarantee that you are on the first page.

You can find good keywords by looking at competitive sites on the "free" area of the page. Go to the site then go to View>By Source (right) in your browsers menu bar. You will then see the "Meta tag keywords" they used to help propel them to the first page of the search results.

Google and Yahoo! command nearly 80% of all search engine searches and both offer pay-per-click programs. You control the budget of how much you want to spend each month.

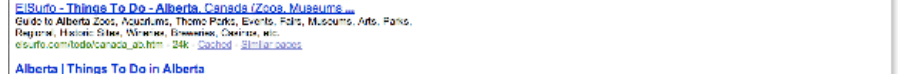
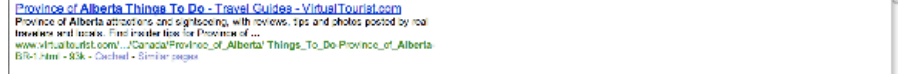
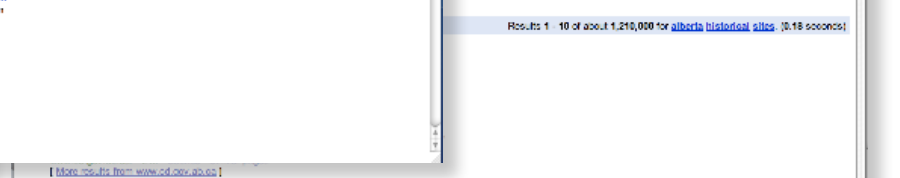
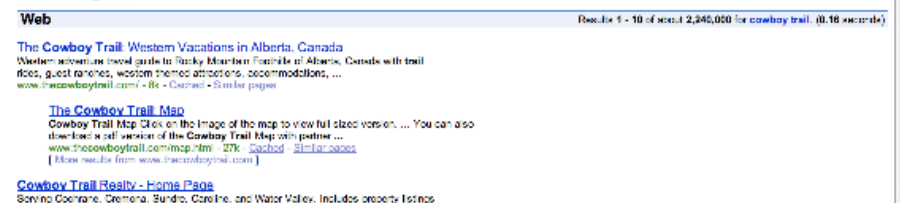


MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Suggestion:

Find strong keywords - not just locations, but activities as well. Most visitors don't really care about Claresholm. They are looking for activities, and if those happen to be in Claresholm, then you win and the customer then does care about the community they are planning to visit.

Buy the keyword: "On your way to Banff" to tap into visitors planning a trip to Banff. Other suggestions include: Rocky Mountains, Things to do Alberta, Alberta historical sites, Porcupine Hills, and Cowboy Trail.



MARKETING ASSESSMENT

Suggestion:

Work on the Claresholm visitor site to alleviate technical issues. Focus on what activities there are for visitors, and by season.

Get rid of the counter. Don't tell people that not many people have visited the site. You can do a hidden counter, which is good for internal purposes, but does nothing for visitors.

Change the focus of the home page to be more of a sales tool, as well as a resource.

Include more and higher-quality photography. Be sure to show potential visitors your town.

Sell activities first, over history and "things."

Reduce the amount of text. Most internet readers simply "scan" the pages.

Create reciprocal links - this helps boost you to the first page of search results.



Welcome to Claresholm!

CHECK OUT THESE ITEMS OF INTEREST:

What's going on in Claresholm? [Click here](#) to find out

Get your water meter and want to know how to read it? [Click HERE](#).



Municipal Development Plan - Take a look and provide your feedback.

Canada Day 2007 - find out what's happening.

We are Hiring!! - [Click here](#) to find out more.

The Town of Claresholm provides a wide range of hotel, government and professional services to the surrounding region. The community's quality of life is enhanced by the rolling foothills to the West, golden grain fields to the East, and many historical ranches.

Claresholm is a great place to live, and provides the best of the West for its residents. Retail services and industrial facilities for a thriving community of over 3,000 people. Claresholm's traditional roots of agriculture, service centres and industrial support have been diversified in the last few years by the growth of the health care sector of the economy. Offers excellent recreation with an [abundance of courses](#), swimming pool, curling and skating rinks, and an active agriculture.

The Town of Claresholm is located in the Municipal District of Willow Green #26, midway between Calgary and Lethbridge on Highway 2. It is 104 km south of Calgary and 90 km northwest of Lethbridge. Claresholm rests on the fringe of the most spectacular part of Alberta's foothills, providing easy access to an endless number of mountain vistas and recreational opportunities.

Farming and ranching still constitute the main economic foundation of this community. However, big health-related employers add to the economic stability of the area and include the Alberta Mental Health Care Centre, the General Hospital, the Willow Creek Continuing Care Centre and the David Lander Centre (Alcohol and Drug Abuse Centre).

Claresholm was named in 1891 by John M. Cook, a Canadian Pacific Railway superintendent, for the name of his home in Medicine Hat. His wife's name was Clara, and they referred to their house as "Clara's home." The first buildings erected were the water tower for the trains, and a school house for supplies needed to build the railroad which came through what is now Claresholm in 1891. Claresholm was incorporated as a village 16 June 1903. The town of Claresholm was incorporated 31 August 1905.

We look forward to having you in our town!

00534



The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Through my research using various Websites and speaking with a very knowledgeable travel specialist, I'm ready to pack my bags and head off to Alberta, Canada.

Before my research, the only personal information I had on Alberta, Canada, was that it is home to Jasper, Canada. Since my hometown is Jasper, Indiana, I have always had an interest in visiting other Jasper's of the world.

I started off my research by searching for "Alberta, Canada" using Google.com. I clicked on the first site to appear in the search and immediately after clicking through and viewing the technical layout of the page, I deduced that it was a government Website—"the official Website for the government of Alberta." I was able to click through a couple of times and found the truly visitor-friendly Website, Travel Alberta—Canada's Rocky Mountain Playground. I navigated through the site very easily and repeatedly found myself coming back to use it for reference even after visiting several other sites.

The site offered more information than I could handle without knowing where to start. It was obvious that the province was rich with tourism destinations. Picking one area to focus on was a little difficult. The offerings included arts and culture, an abundance of recreational sites and activities, events and festivals, historical sites and large cities such as Calgary. I really wanted assess to a detailed map to orient myself and see the regions of the Province. At first glance the packages listed on the page caught my eye. Their spa packages looked interesting, and the Aboriginal tourism section seemed intriguing. I finally decided to take advantage of the suggestion to "speak with a travel specialist!"

I called 1.800.ALBERTA. I had a good first impression because the information line included a French introduction plus I didn't have to hassle with an elaborate voice mail system or wait very long to speak with a live person. The representative was very helpful, knowledgeable and friendly. I was, however, disappointed to be placed on hold four different times during our 10-minute conversation. (She did apologize several times.) She promised to send me an Accommodations Guide, an Alberta Road Map, a Festival and Events Magazine and an Alberta Vacation Guide.

Since this would be my first time visiting, I asked her what area of Alberta she would suggest. She quickly followed with a detailed driving tour leaving Calgary (due to the International airport) and heading to Banff, Lake Louise

and Jasper. In describing the area, she recommended gondola, helicopter and tram tours, Columbia Ice Field bus tours, the historical hot springs, white water rafting, the abundant wildlife and the spectacular views throughout the National Parks. She had obviously traveled through the area and was able to provide personal experiences to her description. I asked about the offering of the Province that celebrated its Aboriginal traditions and history. She suggested that I "Google" Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park.

We finished our conversation with a list of suggested Websites: www.discoverbanff.com; www.discoverlakelouis.com; and www.canadianrockies.net.

I took her suggestions and discovered that these Websites were not as helpful as the Travel Alberta site. The www.discoverbanff.com site provided some helpful lodging suggestions but I found the Banff National Park site more useful. The www.canadianrockies.net site was developed by the locals to help visitors with their planning. I liked that the accommodations section of this site categorized choices by type of facility or geographic area. It also featured a photography section that captured the extraordinary beauty of the Parks.

If I could pick one thing I disliked from the Travel Alberta site, it was a click-through banner on the right side of the page that promoted GoCanadianRockies.com. It said it was the official site of Travel Alberta, so I was confused as to who maintained it. They featured a story section that took a long time to load with a high-speed Internet connection. The packages seemed to focus on rodeos and cowboy events, not a lot of diversity.

By taking the suggestion of the travel specialist, I decided to layout a trip starting in Calgary and heading toward Banff and Lake Louise—1 1/2 hrs drive west of Calgary. Banff National Park contains some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world, including glaciers, ice fields, snow-covered peaks, crystal clear lakes and raging rivers. Materials suggested that a traveler plan a minimum stay of four days to make the most of the sightseeing in the park. The history of the area describes the attempts of three Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) workers staking a claim to the natural hot springs they had discovered bubbling from the base of Sulphur Mountain in 1883 which led to the establishment of Canada's first national park—Banff National Park, which along with three adjacent parks has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

From Banff, the trip would head northwest to the village of Lake Louise. Located in the Bow Valley, the village provides shopping, accommodation, meals, automotive services and tourist information. A must-see is Moraine Lake. Surrounded by a panorama of 10 glaciated summits, the Wenkchemna Peaks, Moraine Lake is found at the base of the Continental Divide, the geographic point where all waters flow either west to the Pacific Ocean or east to the Atlantic Ocean.

MARKETING ASSESSMENT

From Lake Louise, I'd head north along the snow-capped Icefields Parkway to Jasper National Park. A visit to the Columbia Icefield, one of the largest accumulations of ice south of the Arctic Circle, includes a SnoCoach tour on the Athabasca Glacier. The Jasper National Park, Canada's largest mountain park, is known for its alpine meadows and glacier viewpoints. The Park is an outdoor or eco-adventure traveler's dream come true. The recreation choices seemed endless. There were guided tours of every kind listed: hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, rock climbing. Other activities include golfing, rafting, hot springs bathing and a tramway ride to the top of Whistlers Mountain.

I would plan to use Banff as my hub-and-spoke destination. They seemed to offer more accommodation, dining and attraction choices when compared to Jasper. I would have to do more research to finalize my travel plans.

I look forward to receiving my materials from Travel Alberta and comparing them to the Websites I visited. The province definitely impressed me with their promotional materials, with its picture perfect postcard views and exciting activities. The Canadian Rockies of Alberta has been added to my list of "must see" places to visit in the future.

For my next assignment, to find out more about Southern Alberta, I headed back to my new friend, TravelAlberta.com. From the Regions section, I clicked on the "Alberta South" header to discover what this region of Alberta had to offer.

I must admit that I got a little distracted by the City of Calgary. If I flew into Alberta, I would fly into this city and would want to experience a few of its tourist attractions.

I liked the organization of the suggested itineraries on TourismCalgary.com. There were three recommended itineraries to choose from, and each outlined the major attractions within the theme. I would want to explore Art Central, which brings together over 50 artists' studios, galleries, boutiques and dining experiences under one roof. I would also like to take in the view of the city and the Canadian Rockies from 189 meters (626 ft.) above at Calgary Tower.

If I had to plan my travels at a specific time of year, I would possibly choose the peak summer season just to experience the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth!" For ten days every July, Calgaryans and visitors saddle up to the Calgary Stampede. The Half Million Dollar Rodeo is the focal point of this event and features chuckwagon racing, midway entertainment, agricultural exhibitions and stock shows, the Stampede Casino and the Grandstand Show. Some of this year's performing artists include Josh Groban, Willie Nelson, Keith Urban, and Gwen Stefani.

To narrow down my research in Southwest Alberta, I selected www.Alberta-

Southwest.com. I was able to quickly get the layout of the region by the interactive map presented on the homepage. While I liked the concept of the map, it wasn't very interactive. It only showed golf and camping locations. There were no click-thrus to the region's major attractions or its communities. I'm also not sure why the site had a searchable database as outlined through the various interest categories. The same attractions and events were repeated over and over.

Of all the attractions featured on the AlbertSouthwest.com site, I only found one that would make me travel south. It is Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, it is one of the world's oldest, largest and best preserved buffalo jumps known to exist. The site celebrates the ancient Aboriginal tradition of the buffalo hunt and has been used continuously by aboriginal peoples of the plains for more than 5,500 years.

I got a "kick" (pun intended) out of their Website address, www.head-smashed-in.com. I liked their 360 degree view of the Interpretive Centre and grounds. My visit would have to coincide with a special event held there, such as "Drumming and Dancing on the Plaza" in July and August. The site is open 7 days a week. During Sundays, traditional hands-on activities are offered including hand drum-making or moccasin-making.

This Website had a few outdated pages. The calendar section showed March 2007 activities. I also had to view a PDF of an event calendar to learn about the current offerings.

I give the Site's promotional staff credit for their consistent location description, "Head-Smashed-In is located 18 kms north and west of Fort Macleod on Highway 785." It was used on this site and others. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is about a two-hour drive south of Calgary. While I was in the area, I might drive into Fort Macleod to see the oldest theatre in Alberta—the Empress Theatre.

While researching this section of Alberta, I didn't change my mind about my primary reason for visiting the Province. The Canadian Rockies and National Parks area would be my top choice. I would probably finish a 7 to 10 day trip by flying out of Edmonton after visiting Jasper; a suggestion given by the travel specialist.

I'm a history buff so while visiting Edmonton, I would want to see Fort Edmonton Park. One of Edmonton's premier attractions, the Park represents four distinct time periods, exploring Edmonton's development from a fur trade post in the vast Northwest, to a booming metropolitan centre after the First World War. The park features over 75 structures, many of which are the originals. Costumed interpreters operate the site and live the way of the past.

MARKETING ASSESSMENT

If I stayed overnight, I would stay in the Park at Hotel Selkirk. This historic hotel, located in Edmonton's beautiful river valley, offered gracious accommodations at reasonable prices. Their wide selection of packages started at \$119.00 per night based on double occupancy. I also liked their slogan, "We are a proud member of the Charming Inns of Alberta." To finish my memorable trip to Alberta, Canada, I would shop the world's largest entertainment and shopping centre, housing more than 800 shops and services, West Edmonton Mall. I hear a "souvenir" pair of shoes calling my name.



Forward

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

• How would this scene apply to the Internet? Consider the following:

- A new Website goes on line an average of every three seconds. In fact, more than 64 million domain names have been registered in the U.S. alone – so far. Can you imagine a phone book with 64 million names listed in the white pages?

- The Internet is fourth to only electricity, the automobile, and television in its influence among daily American life. Not bad for a technology few even knew existed less than 20 years ago.

- Eighty-eight percent of all Americans say that the Internet plays a major role in their lives, surpassing television for the first time.

- Seventy-five percent of all Americans use the Internet regularly, and sixty-eight percent have immediate access to the web either at home or work.

- New Internet users are growing at the alarming rate of nearly ten percent – per month!

- Ninety-five percent of U.S. car buyers do research on-line.
- Ninety-four percent of all Internet users plan their travel using the web.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

1 TOURISM IS YOUR FRONT DOOR

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

ties, etc. – tourism is a primary attractor for non-tourism economic development efforts. Business people who decide to relocate have always visited the new community first – as tourists.

Your Website should promote the community's quality of life, and the best way to show that is by using great photography. Show off what your community has to offer visitors, residents, and businesses. Showing your community's assets doesn't just attract tourists. It also builds community pride, fosters a sense of cooperative spirit, and promotes economic development.

2 PULL YOUR CUSTOMERS INTO THE SITE

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

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

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

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





3 CREATE A SINGLE FRONT DOOR

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

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

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

Options could include a series of links:

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

If a visitor to the site is looking for visitor information, they will click on that link which will

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

4 KEEP IT SIMPLE AND IT WILL SELL

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

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

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





5 PHOTOGRAPHY IS KING

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

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

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

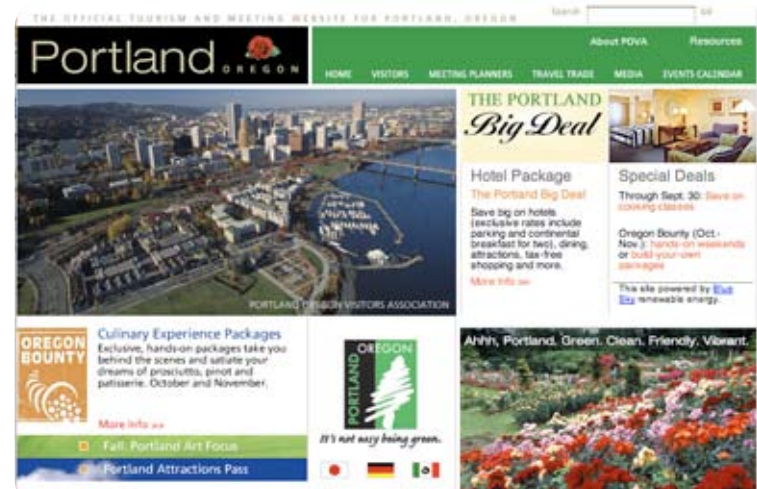
A good example of the use of outstanding photography can be found on Tourism Victoria's Website, www.tourismvictoria.com. The home page has changing photos, showing, in turn, kayakers, people walking on the beach with the mountains in the background, sailboats in their harbor, the fabulous Victoria skyline, the Empress hotel lit at night, and a bicycle rider. The photos are so stun-

ning and show such a wide array of the beauty and activities a visitor can find in Victoria, that they make the sale.



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

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





6 DYNAMIC TEXT IS QUEEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 DON'T PROVIDE LISTS, PROVIDE DETAILS

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

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



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

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

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



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

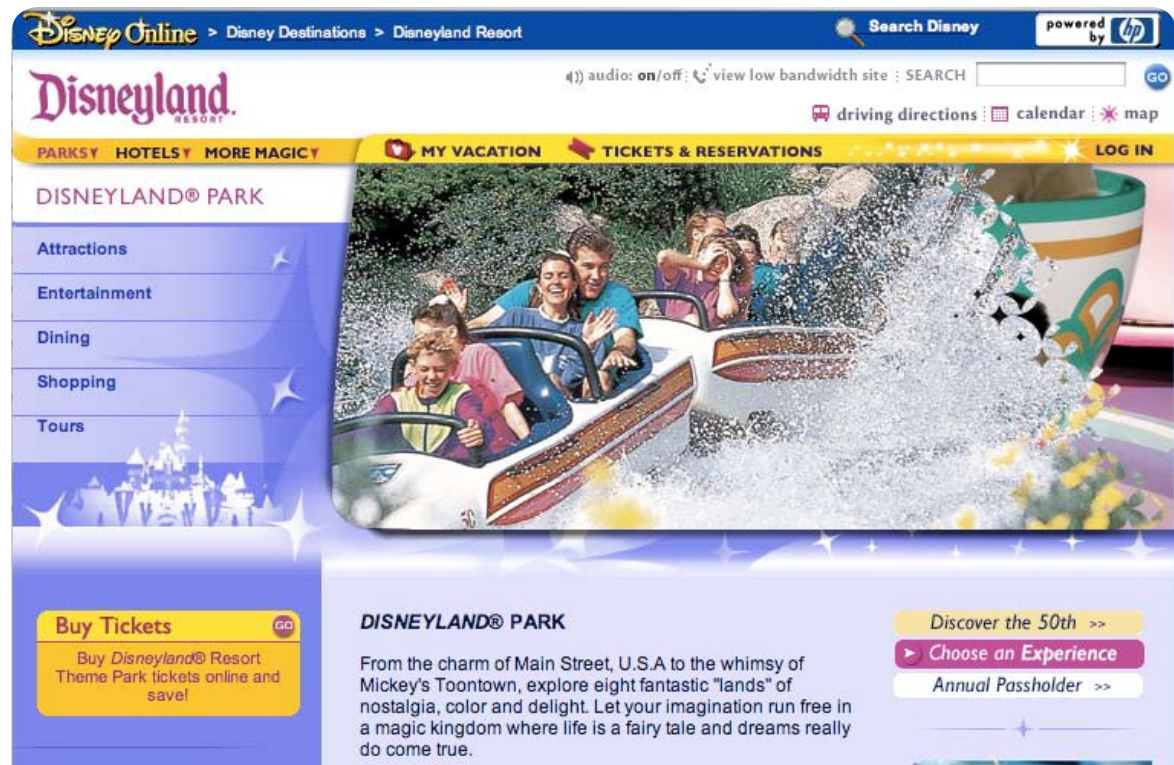
Do NOT just link to the attractions' Website unless you know it's good enough to close the sale, but offer it as an additional link, AFTER you've done what you can to close the sale for them. Details, details, details. If visitors can't get specific details, chances are you'll lose the sale.

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

8 SELL EXPERIENCES, NOT GEOGRAPHY

8 Visitors are far more interested in things to see and do than in places: cities, counties, regions, or even states. Travelers are looking for activities, experiences, things to see and do. You must always provide a potential customer with reasons WHY they should visit. They are far more interested in Disneyland than in Anaheim. Going a step further, while we all know that Disneyland is "the happiest place on earth" (a good reason in itself to go there), the park still promotes the activities in all

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of its advertising: The Matterhorn, Splash Mountain, Pirates of the Caribbean, the Indiana Jones Adventure, or even meeting Mickey or Minnie. If you visit the Disneyland Website (www.disneyland.com) you'll note that they let the visitor "choose and experience." A lot can be learned by looking at the best.

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

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



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

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

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

9 BUILD THE BRAND

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

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

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

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

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





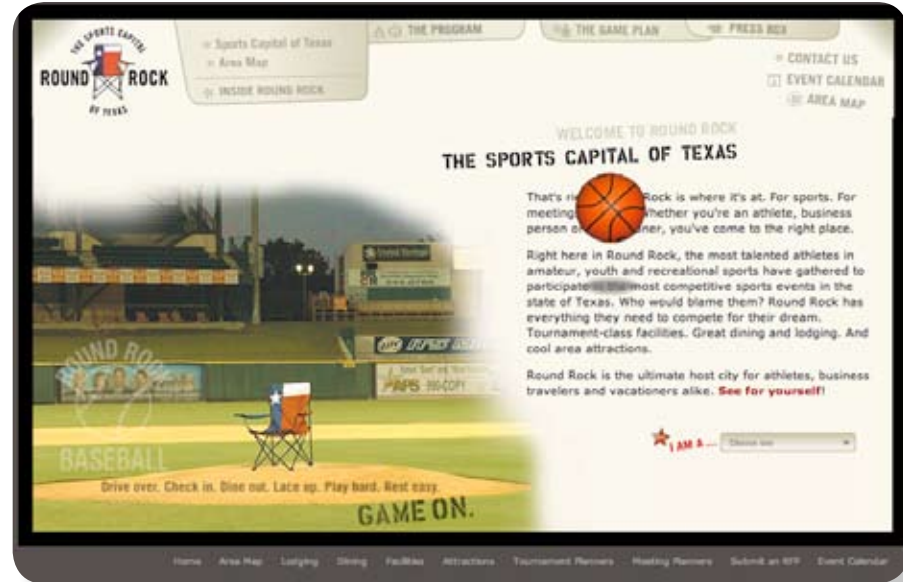
10 SPREAD THE BRAND AROUND

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

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

The city, chamber, convention and visitors bureau, and other local organizations should all use the

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



"Welcome to the Sports Capital of Texas, and thanks for visiting the Website of the Round Rock Garden Club."

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

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

11 CREATE A CALL TO ACTION

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

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



Your Town, Online

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

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

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

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

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

- An online request for information page with a list of publications and/or resources that can be sent them.
- Links to more detailed information and other resources.

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

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

13 DOWNLOADS AND ONLINE VIEWING **SAVE MONEY, INCREASE SALES**

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

14 START WITH THE SITE MAP (CONTENTS)

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

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

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

15 DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

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



16 SIZE MATTERS

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

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

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



17 PUTTING TOGETHER THE TEAM

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

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

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

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

18 COMPARE YOURSELF TO COMPETITION

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

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

If you are looking to relocate or vacation in one of the towns in California's Gold Country, chances are you'll start by doing some web research. You'll

find the towns of Truckee, Angel's Camp, Nevada City, San Andreas, Copperopolis. Where would you go? Looking at their Websites, comparing them, most people are attracted to Truckee, because their Website is so compelling. The outstanding photography, ease of navigation, and text that sets the tone for a great experience makes Truckee the first choice. Comparing the different town's Websites is a great exercise in seeing what makes a good site work.

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

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

19 MAKE YOUR URL MEMORABLE

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

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



Your Town, Online

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 TAP INTO Website TOOLS

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

22 LEVERAGE VALUABLE META-TAGS

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



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

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

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

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

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

23 CREATE LINK EXCHANGES

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

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

24 PERMISSION MARKETING - CREATING TOMA

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

Include a page on your Website for visitors to "sign up." Offer specific categories or topics that might be of interest to visitors to your area, such as "special weekend getaways," or "family activities."

Once a month or so, write and send out the newsletter. Keep it brief. Never use more than two paragraphs, then add links so a viewer can get more information. Be sure the information you send is



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



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

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

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

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

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

Too many communities think nothing of spending \$20,000 or more on a brochure, while they spend \$5,000 on a Website. 94% of all potential visitors (especially those with money to spend) will use the internet, while less than 5% will call or stop by a visitor information center. So how should you spend your money? Spending \$20,000 for a Website good enough to close the sale is a very good investment. Spending another \$10,000 a year to keep it fresh, updated, and changing (to bring cus-

tomers back), is well worth the cost. Investing in an e-marketing program, keeping the newsletters timely and relevant, can have a profound effect on your visibility and tourism sales.

25 YOUR WEBSITE IS FOR YOUR CUSTOMER

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

CONCLUSION

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



SAMPLE SITE MAP

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

INTRO PAGE

- Welcome text
- Flash slide show (four or five photos)
- Skip intro button
- “Pick Your Season”

HOME

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

VISITING (intro text)

- Primary Attractions (intro)
 - Historical
 - Cultural
 - Urban
 - Entertainment
 - Environmental
 - Recreational
 - Activity vendors
- Day Trips and Other Attractions (intro)
 - Within an hour’s drive
 - Local diversions (secondary activities)
 - Quaint escapes
- Events (intro)
 - Major events (visitor-oriented events - not local events)
 - Events by month
- Quick Facts (intro)
 - Legends and claim to fame

- Elevation and geography
- Population, demographics
- Did you know...

Photo Gallery (intro)

- Send a postcard
- Photos by attractions category w/descriptions
- Photographer credits/links

Getting Here - Maps and Directions (intro)

- National
- Region (multi-state)
- State map
- Region/area map
- Distances chart (miles, k/m)

Weather and Seasons (intro)

- Typical weather patterns
- Current weather and forecast (link from weather site)
- Best activities by season

Visitor Services - Lodging, Dining and Shopping (intro)

- Lodging (sort by location, type, price)
- Dining (sort by type, style, location - featured restaurants)
- Shopping (sort by type, location - featured retailers)
- Services (sort by location, type of service)

Transportation (intro)

- Driving conditions
- Travel by RV
- Travel by boat
- Airports and services
- Tours (individual and groups)
- Rentals, other

Group Information (Intro)

- Venues: outdoor
- Venues: indoor
- Reunions and personal gatherings
- Conferences, meetings and trade shows
- Tours, group services
- Sporting events, venues

Trip Planner (Intro)

- Suggested itineraries
- Resources



Travel Links (Intro)

- State tourism info
- Local chamber offices
- AAA, travel clubs
- Services

SITE FOOTER

- Copyright info
- About the site link (browsers, webmaster info)

LIVING (Intro)

- Community info
- Community links, events
- Real estate
- Doing business

HISTORY (Intro)

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

SPECIAL DEALS (Intro)

- Packages
- Seasonal discounts

DOWNLOADS (Intro)

- Activities Guide
- Meeting Planners Guide
- Video clips

RESOURCES (Intro)

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



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