



### 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.

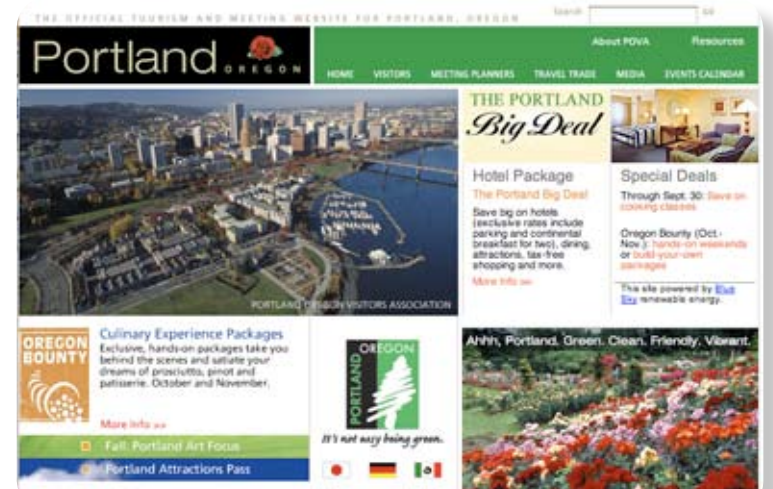
A good example of the use of outstanding photography can be found on Tourism Victoria's Website, www.tourismvictoria.com. The home page has changing photos, showing, in turn, kayakers, people walking on the beach with the mountains in the background, sailboats in their harbor, the fabulous Victoria skyline, 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](http://www.rexcc.com) and click on things





## Your Town, Online

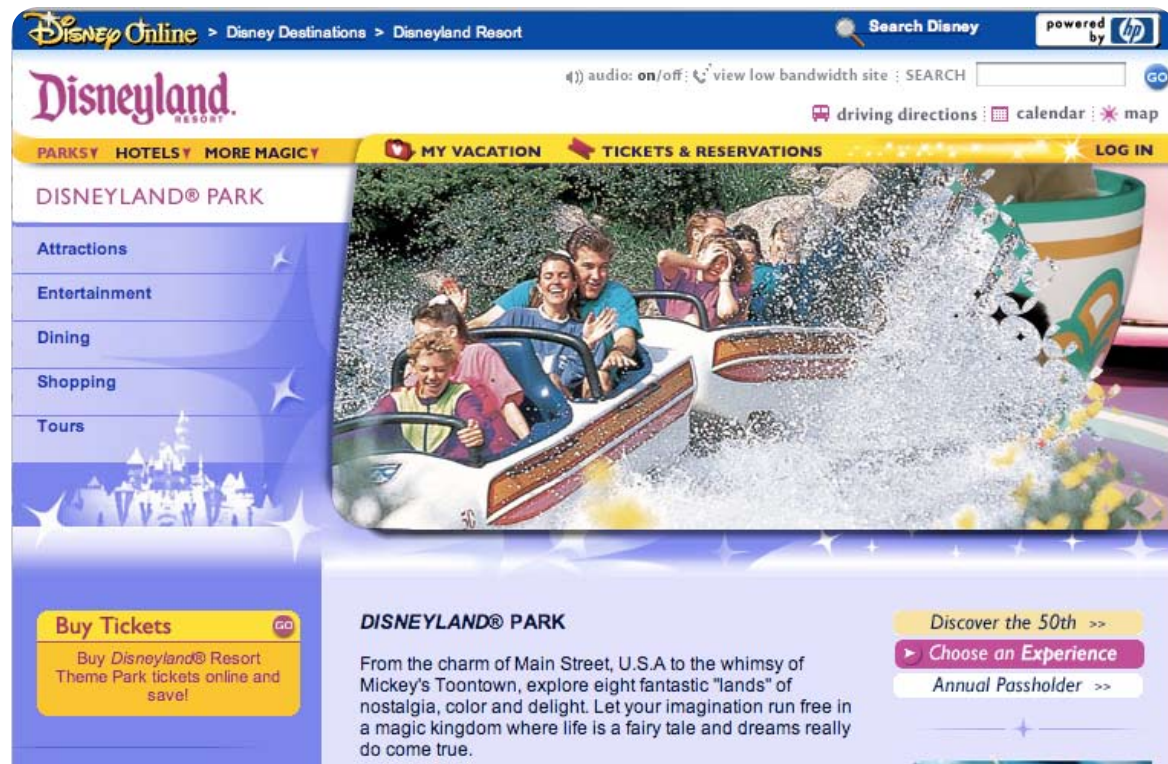
to see and do, then click on local attractions (we recommend just using the word attractions,) it will list the various attractions, providing a teaser for each. These teasers could be better written to pull the visitor in, but provide the right idea. If an attraction grabs your attention, like Yellowstone 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



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.



## Your Town, Online

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.

64 Fort Macleod, Alberta June 2007

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.







## Your Town, Online

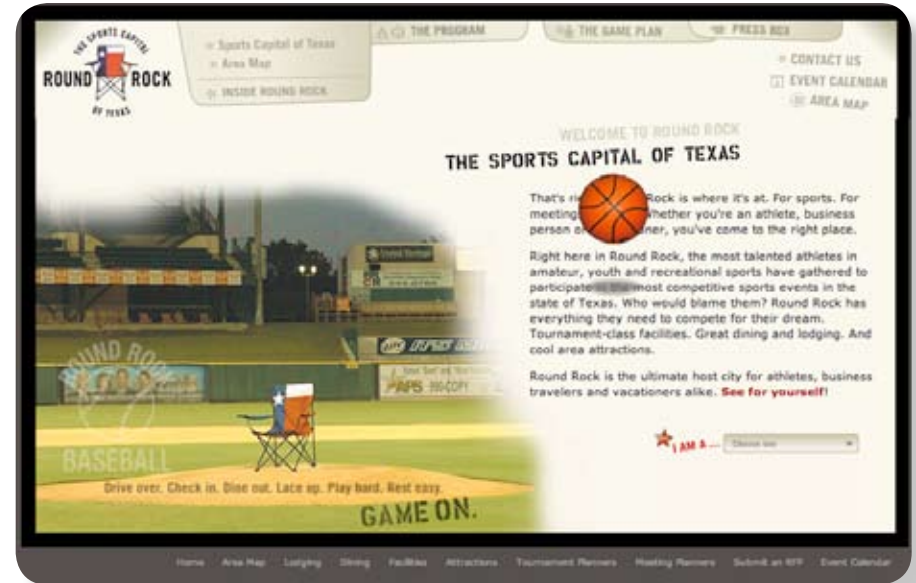
### 10 SPREAD THE BRAND AROUND

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### 11 CREATE A CALL TO ACTION

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

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



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

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

## 12 MAKE IT EASY TO GET MORE INFO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

## 14 START WITH THE SITE MAP (CONTENTS)

The last couple of pages of this book contain a sample “site map,” or contents, for an effective tourism Website. Whether you are a community or 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](http://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](http://www.adwords.com). Yahoo!'s program, which also covers Alta Vista, AOL, and other search engines, can be found at [www.overture.com](http://www.overture.com).

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

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

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

### 21 TAP INTO Website TOOLS

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



## Your Town, Online

### Travel Links (Intro)

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

### LIVING (Intro)

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

### HISTORY (Intro)

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

### SPECIAL DEALS (Intro)

- Packages
- Seasonal discounts

### DOWNLOADS (Intro)

- Activities Guide
- Meeting Planners Guide
- Video clips

### RESOURCES (Intro)

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

### SITE FOOTER

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

**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 & culture, an abundance of recreational sites and activities, events and festivals, historical sites and large cities such as Calgary. I really wanted access 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 & 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](http://www.discoverbanff.com); [www.discoverlakelouis.com](http://www.discoverlakelouis.com); and [www.canadianrockies.net](http://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](http://www.discoverbanff.com) site provided some helpful lodging suggestions but I found the Banff National Park site more useful. The [www.canadianrockies.net](http://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 hours drive west of Calgary. Banff National Park contains some of the most spec-



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

tacular 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 sight-seeing 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.

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.AlbertaSouthwest.com](http://www.AlbertaSouthwest.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](http://AlbertSouthwest.com) site, I only found

## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

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](http://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 & 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.

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.



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