

GWCVB Marketing Plan 2010/2011 –Executive Summary

Nationally the hospitality industry has been hit particularly hard with business closures and layoffs due to a sharp decline in travel. According to data from U. S. Travel Outlook, the travel industry recovery continues at a glacial pace. The oft-used phrase “the good, the bad, and the ugly” is certainly an apt descriptor of our situation today.

Business travel continues its slow recovery. Our hotels are also reporting signs of recovery in both transient and meetings bookings. Hotel Room Occupancy for New Castle County is inching up over 2009 figures. According to STR’s revised forecast for 2010 and 2011, recovery could be influenced by things such as tax changes and health care reform. This means a rebound will come quicker in 2010, but could get slow as 2011 unfolds. The revised forecast shows a 1.9% increase in occupancy; average daily rate will decline 2.3% and ADR will decrease 0.5%.

This is why our 2010-2011 Marketing Plan continues to be a “living” document. It is designed to address most of the issues currently facing us. With the economic climate still weak and uncertain we must be flexible and quick to make necessary adjustments, while still keeping our focus on our mission (a destination marketing organization). Revisiting the plan after each quarter will ensure that we remain on track with pursuing our goals and strategies. However, we must be realistic and responsible due to our budget limitations.

The GWCVB’s budget has been reduced by \$50,000 dollars due to drop in lodging tax. Despite this, we have retained our aggressive sales goals, got creative and utilized many new effective marketing tools available.

Our Marketing Committee consists of Board Members as well as members from the community such as the Brandywine Museums and Gardens Alliance, Riverfront Development Corporation, Hotel du Pont and Deerfield Golf and Tennis Club. We continue to reach out to our local media sources, including the News Journal, Delaware Today, Out and About Magazine/TSN Publishing and Film Brothers Production for out-of-the-box ways to do more with less.

Key facts we know regarding the area and we use as our guide:

- ✓ We are a getaway rather than a vacation. Easy drive-in destination and with access for Amtrak travelers, including GWCVB exclusive Amtrak 40% companion discount.
- ✓ The bulk of visitation comes from the East Coast drive markets as Greater Wilmington is ideally positioned within a five-hour drive of one-quarter of the nation’s population.
- ✓ Leisure travelers are making more frequent travel decisions in a shorter window of time.

- ✓ We are an affordable alternative for Meeting Planners to consider as compared to Tier 1 cities pricing.
- ✓ During these economic times our hotel members seek business seven days a week from various markets and rates.
- ✓ Interactive and informative website and effective use of social media are vital for consumer planning.

The GWCVB targets four market segments:

1. Leisure Travelers (“Jane” 35 – 54 years old living within 250-mile radius)
2. Meeting Planners, SMERFE (Social, Military, Education, Religious, Fraternal, Entertainment), Sports, Wedding, Government and Associations.
3. Tour Operators
4. The Media – Journalists/Travel Writers

We are constantly evaluating the best ways to attract our targeted markets segments to the Greater Wilmington and Brandywine Valley; must focus a lot of attention on the changing customer and the behavior of customers. The GWCVB must work towards improving sustainable tourism, as well as civic tourism (“place-based” approaches such as cultural heritage tourism, ecotourism and geotourism). We will continue our efforts for the GWCVB to “go green” and to encourage our members to “go green” since more travelers are demanding this feature. We also help as needed as members go after the corporate meetings market with their internal marketing plans.

Our investment into our new, robust website and database system is paying off; SEO is increasing on all levels and we are continuing to enhance. Members now have 24/7 access to their member listing and account, but most of all – their leads and referrals generated by the GWCVB. Reporting tools allow members to view what the GWCVB has done for them, and where they can participate more in the activities and benefits of the bureau.

It is important to note that during these challenging times we are achieving our goals for membership in both membership retention and in new members.

We will utilize the experience of our website team, internal and external, to keep us in front of the information for this area. Social marketing and e-marketing will be leading tools for moving us forward. The database-generated infrastructure has been built to support the cutting-edge website and a strategic online marketing plan to drive site traffic and ultimately, visits and overnight visits to the Greater Wilmington area.

We are very optimistic due to the high level of interests from leisure travelers, travel writers, meeting planners and motorcoach operators. The GWCVB is proud to be the destination marketing organization for New Castle County and we have taken the lead with a new website that is cutting edge. Our vision is to be the most comprehensive,

convenient and best known source of information for visitors, meeting planners, group tour operators, the media and people wanting to relocate in New Castle County. We have taken a leadership role in the New Castle County BRAC activities and are seeing results.

Tourism Means Development – a strong tourism industry supports new products and infrastructure. The Greater Wilmington area has seen vital growth in product over the last decade with current and planned developments such as:

- ✓ Russell Peterson DuPont Environmental Education Center
- ✓ Delaware Children’s Museum
- ✓ Complete restoration of the Nemours Museum
- ✓ Expanded restaurant offerings on the Wilmington Riverfront
- ✓ The Queen Theatre

This outline highlights the areas of concentration for sales and marketing:

Leisure Marketing - Market Segment Priorities:

- ✓ Utilize efforts closer to home (250-mile radius), encourage overnight stays from Kent and Sussex counties, as well as Philadelphia and Baltimore, and the New York metropolitan area.
- ✓ Evaluate primary target audience segment:
“JANE” – 35 – 64
Married, either working full-time (professional) or retired
\$35,000 and above with college graduation or higher
- ✓ Need to factor in children researching online for family trips.
- ✓ Continue to evaluate audience and review after campaigns
- ✓ Enhance Social Marketing efforts – Facebook and Twitter
- ✓ Focus efforts using e-marketing tools (online, e-blasts) vs. print
- ✓ Build on strategy for organic search and develop a paid search strategy
- ✓ Review list of relevant keywords for SEO
- ✓ Develop online video from Governor, County Executive and Mayor
- ✓ Learn and capitalize on all opportunities new website offers
- ✓ Work with website vendor on niche-specific itineraries (Art, Birding, Bike Tours, Driving and Walking tours, History, Gardens, to name a few)
- ✓ Track, benchmark and report web metrics for all segments
- ✓ Consumer tradeshow are not a part of our efforts

Goals in FY 11:

1. Partner with Gannett and Today Media, Inc. with online effort that will include a 12-week campaign and contest
2. Increase the number of overall leisure inquires – either through print efforts, electronic efforts and the digital visitor guide

3. Target more last minute getaways through our e-marketing efforts via targeted e-newsletters
4. Include families into our target audience
5. Build consumer database for future e-news and marketing efforts
6. Build website calendar to be one-stop for all information
7. Build on our social media presence
8. Explore new techniques – traveler on the street and more- YouTube feeds

Social Media

Conversations that happen in blogs, social networks, Twitter and online video forums can have as much or more of an impact on an organization as an article in a newspaper or a segment on TV. We must keep our finger on the pulse of emerging technology and employ them to their competitive advantage.

Key strategies:

- ✓ Continue to engage potential visitors by investing staff time in managing Facebook and Twitter accounts
- ✓ Grow leisure follower counts to 2,000 by June 2011 (as of 4.9.10 FB= 648 and Twitter = 244)
- ✓ Assist other key departments and members on “how to” and “best practice” for social media

Leisure Info:

Top 5 Feeder Markets (Website)

1. Wilmington
2. Philadelphia
3. New York
4. Washington
5. Baltimore

Top 6 – Gannett Campaign

1. Delaware
2. New York
3. New Jersey
4. South Carolina
5. North Carolina
6. Maryland

Meeting, Event and Group Sales – Market Segment Priorities

- ✓ Focus on Meeting, Conference, Reunion, Wedding and Special Event planners (corporate business is not the Bureau’s main focus).
- ✓ Group Tourism

Meeting, Event and Group Sales

We continue to see strong interest in the Greater Wilmington product. However, the reality is that without a full-service hotel next to the Chase Center, we continue to lose business for New Castle County. In some cases, the planner will book in Kent County.

According to a Market Trends Survey in *Meetings* magazine, February 2010, many planners interviewed are expressing optimism – stating that “better times may be just around the bend.”

Trends:

- ✓ Many groups are having problems with attendance; they are looking for destinations that are drivable.
- ✓ Associations are planning to hold smaller regional meetings rather than one large meeting that would require extensive travel for members.
- ✓ In addition to mainstream associations and groups, many minority groups are reconsidering second tier-cities for their regional and annual meetings due to the downturn of the economy.

Key Strategy: In an effort to convert business, the GWCVB has initiated a transportation incentive based on number of sleeping rooms. This incentive is for new business and has been very successful in driving interest to the area. The GWCVB will continue to pr

Lost Business Summary: The GWCVB uses a tracking method to identify common themes for lost business. There are 16 different reasons used for tracking lost business with three standing out: (1) lack of hotel at Riverfront (2) convention center costs too high and (3) hotel room rates too high.

Group Tour Market

According to the American Bus Association, the number of bus passenger trips overall was up in 2009 from approximately 750 million to about 775 million. The charter and tour segments of the industry and are more susceptible to the economy and are more focused on leisure where discretionary dollars are critical.

Reports indicate that there has been little drop off in the Spring/student business, which was evident last spring (2009) and seems to be the case this spring as well. Most operators' report that their fall 2009 business was off, as much as 10 percent; however, bookings for this fall (2010) look strong at the present time.

There are several reasons for a positive outlook in the long run for group travel:

- ✓ 41 million Americans chose not to take airline flights due to expected hassles with flying
- ✓ Gridlock in highly traveled corridors creates an opportunity for the motorcoach market
- ✓ When traveling the 200 – 400 mile radius motorcaches are competitive on time, cost, convenience and now even offering passenger amenities

- ✓ International tourists to the U. S. also provide a growing market segment for tour operators

Goals in FY11:

1. Collaborate with the State of Delaware Tourism Office in the marketing efforts to the meetings/events and group tour markets
2. Continue and enhance regional group tour marketing efforts with Chester County and Delaware County CVBs
3. Offer opportunities to members to participate in sales missions and FAMs, with a focused interest in targeting international tour operators located in New York
4. Bring 2,500 room nights in future bookings to the area
5. Generate a minimum of 115 qualified sales leads
6. Convert 45 leads to definite bookings
7. Participate in the 2011 American Bus Association Annual Convention to be held in Philadelphia, PA. Create a strong presence for Brandywine Valley through a strategic combining of financial and staffing resources with the above mentioned organizations
8. Bring 60 planners/tour operators in on FAM Tours and/or Site Visits
9. Evaluate and manage social media presence (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube) for market segments

Communications –Market Segment Priorities

- ✓ GWCVB Visitor Guide moves to annual guide September 2010 – August 2011 as part of continuing move towards alternative media.
- ✓ Travel Writers/Journalists

With advertising budgets tight, we will work to maximize exposure for Greater Wilmington's product through aggressive earned media/public relations efforts and unmatched social media strategy. We will proactively pursue media coverage through an ongoing schedule of press releases, pitches, media visits, MATPRA, cooperation with the Delaware Tourism Office PR manager and networking.

We will also market more regionally to capitalize on the last-minute nature of travelers taking shorter trips. Tracking mechanisms for all media and advertising efforts will be established where possible to measure and maximize ROI.

Goals in FY11:

1. Generate GWCVB press releases quarterly for leisure, meetings and group tour markets per Communication Plan, in addition to individual press releases to the media for high profile events/facilities resulting in \$450,000 in earned editorial coverage. Utilize PR Newswire for press releases.
2. Pitch stories to New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Philadelphia Inquirer, the regional Gannett publications and Today Media that are part of our

- ad campaigns. Penetrate the Philadelphia market. Resulting in one article in each publication.
3. Join Facebook and Twitter to reach media
 4. Utilize .coms, blogs to promote the area
 5. Research opportunities/interests for an organized Press FAM into New Castle County
 6. Expand and refresh our photo library and continue building online photo gallery; make the most of office camera
 7. Manage the GWCVB blog by posting quarterly news on the area
 8. E-newsletter to members quarterly (need to see who is going to do e-news to general public?)
 9. Implement and publish new Visitor Guide as a yearly publication and approve digital version

Key Strategies:

1. Schedule media in a concentrated period to create a buzz and maximize the budget.
2. Follow journalists through social media networks to develop customized pitches and engage new media audiences.
3. Expand press trips to target bloggers and extend audience reach.
4. Research online-based software to more efficiently track coverage and easily share clips with members.
5. Scan all articles and utilize on website under recent articles.

Membership – Market Segment Priorities

During this critical time for our industry, it is more important than ever that the GWCVB work together with members and partners to promote our shared goals and objectives. Educating members on new features on visitwilmingtonde.com website and member portal are vital. Regularly and effectively communicate with members and other stakeholders using, whenever possible, electronically resulting in more eco-friendly methods.

Downtown Visitor Services/Center – Market Segment Priorities

Provide excellent, efficient and consistent front line service for incoming visitors and calls. Send weekend calendar of events to members. Manage distribution of Visitor Guide.