

OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting Jan 25th 2011

Attending: Jason Allers, George Curry, Therese Driscoll, Karen Hanford, Katie Hayduke, David Heymann, Joe Hucko, Ben Lockwood, Tony Malavenda, Sarah McIlvain, Aaron McKeon Maude Morse, Don McLaughlin, Aaron McKeon, Greg Munno, Clyde Ohl, Donna Rohde, Merike Treier (*co-chair*) Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

Presentation by David Holder, VP of Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau

The importance of image: How marketing can help address image as seen by potential visitors.

The information comes from 2008 research for marketing campaign launched that year. It shows what happened when we got the word out that Syracuse is an exciting place to visitors from Wilkes Barre, Scranton, Ottawa and Albany (later changed campaign to add Buffalo into that market place.) We wanted to attract potential visitors and reinvent their definition of Syracuse as place to consider visiting.

Our mission at the Convention and Visitors Bureau is to go out and find potential visitors that can be part of this town, be it convention, sporting event, festival, etc. so they can come and spend. Focus is on the 200+ mile area, they are staying overnight.

Travel Motivators

No matter whom decision makers are, there are some key factors involved in making the decision to travel.

- 1) Exciting
- 2) Good atmosphere for adults and families
- 3) Unique, not necessarily one of a kind, but rather when you go back home you want to be able to tell friends and coworkers about great discovery that you have made.
- 4) Popular (want to see others enjoying location.)

Lower ranking factors include affordability and climate. Many times destination markets gets caught up in climate, affordability, safety; those are important once you have made it onto the list of where people want to go, but the first job is to make people move Syracuse to top of list.

We needed to shift image. Before campaign launched, we weren't viewed as exciting. We didn't score as well as some competitors in important criteria. We did rank above Albany and Rochester

We looked at

- 1) Buffalo/Niagara Falls
- 2) Saratoga
- 3) Harrisburg/Hershey
- 4) Syracuse

We had to do a lot in order to move up on the list. What are the things that we need to be *showing* to help us achieve a different image for these prospective customers? What are things that are strongest about us? 1) Lots of shopping opportunities, downtown, malls, and villages. 2) Our cuisine (chef-owned restaurants) 3) Arts and culture and heritage, can be as simple as a festival or complex as state fair, simple as an art gallery or as complex as Everson. We know we have great sports, whether for event attendance, participatory, recreational etc. We are also good at pampering, our area takes care of people. To reach our target audience in those communities, we need to take those five points and narrow it down to 30 seconds (TV commercial.)

It was vital for us to go in and show the destination. We felt TV was the best option to reinvent a community where we may or may not have a negative perception.

Created: 3 TV commercials; 3 ½ minute video, used when pitching to groups and also for use on YouTube and social media sites as a way to experience community.

First commercial aired spring of 2008; followed by summer of 2008 round of commercials; fall 2008 round of commercials. (Commercial shows images of travel and shopping sightseeing and nightlife, with “Why didn’t we think of this sooner? Syracuse; we’ll surprise you, (the phrase “We’ll surprise you,” turns into a smile.) Aired in Wilkes Barre, Scranton, Albany and Ottawa in 2008/ Albany and Buffalo in 2009.

The commercial is showing our great area in action. It shows things that can build appeal and interest. We followed up with heavy media program; created an arrangement where we wrote articles about what was happening in Syracuse for Wilkes Barre/Scranton area paper. We developed a relationship with the Ottawa television station with the biggest morning market.

Look of website started to play off the look of the commercials. We were heavily involved in social media sites, Facebook page grew exponentially. In the first part of the campaign, visitors to our website increased by 50 percent. Emails and calls to our office from people requesting information about travel to area, we saw a 90 percent increase in year over year inquiries (since launch of program.) We were heavy on Albany, Scranton Wilkes Barre and Ottawa as percentages of the statistics.

Comparing “People who were aware of our advertising” and “People unaware of advertising” showed big shifts in perception among those who had been reached.

In terms of actual travel, a person was almost twice as likely to take trip to our community if he or she saw the advertising, than if not. The messaging we were using was working. For every dollar of advertising spent, we generated more than \$11.67 of spending within our community. Our entire budget was coming from taxes visitors pay when they come to our hotels. For every dollar in room tax invested in program, we generated \$1.36 in new taxes.

Looking at intent to visit, “I didn’t go this year but I intend to go in future,” that response was three times as likely among those who had seen the advertising than among those who had not. We went to top of list in terms of “intent to visit,” compared with cities we had termed competitors.

Was our destination able to live up to what people are expecting?

When visitors actually came here, they left more satisfied than they thought they would be, in every category. Visitors who came to our community rated it higher than those who had never been here. We are not promising something we can't deliver. When we get out there and find those good elements of image, and press point home, this community can deliver strongly.

Question: Why did county legislators want to cut funding after that? They were cutting everything.

In 2009, we dropped Wilkes Barre/Scranton and added Buffalo, saw individual results were high in Albany and Ottawa. We felt we could do better if we moved to a stronger market, Buffalo. Part of it is we didn't invest huge amounts of money into this in terms of a media campaign: \$325-\$350 thousand dollars, spread across three markets, doesn't buy a lot. In 2010, we dropped campaign because budget got slashed. We're funded through the county; county going through their own challenges (funded directly by hotel occupancy tax.)

Q: Why wasn't county legislature more supportive?

Distracted by monstrosity of what they are facing. We drive new dollars that wouldn't be there otherwise, but when you are a small part of the overall picture, that message doesn't get through.

Many programs funded by room tax, because they all fit into tourism promotion. (County parks, product development, support for Arts and Culture institutions, OnCenter.)

Q: What areas don't you want to show?

Our statement on this whole campaign was "Let's showcase the things that we like ourselves. Let's showcase those great areas, our attractive Public Spaces (Clinton Square)." Where are the other pockets like that in our community? The reasons people like to meander about, Armory square, is because it is a comfortable space.

We use Onondaga Lake as example constantly because we see people enjoying it. Everywhere that we want to see people, those are the areas we need to cultivate. But we can't leave behind in that equation the existing areas that we need to protect. We can't let areas that are already working go.

Q: Did you ask any questions of people's opinion of image/beauty in Syracuse?

Used one of top marketing based research firms in the world, Toronto-based, Longwoods International. Their system gives you a sense of how effective your marketing program is but we didn't drill deeply into image piece.

Q: How have things changed recently?

Our activity on our website has dropped this year, first year decrease since 2009. Part of it is, I think, because we haven't been out there in the market place. We've got to do something to drive people there. That being said, we made up the difference in spades in social media sites, double digit growth.

The question becomes, are we now seeing people get their information through social media sites and not even going to our website?

Comments:

Thinking about marketing: It is not just about improving what is there, which is what we are about, but also acknowledging what is already there and getting people jazzed up about it.

Holder: As part of Advertising campaign we did do one reach here locally. We did a newspaper insert, targeting other cities, but also dropped locally in the Syracuse newspaper. It featured some nice articles about things going on along with advertisements for some of our destination partners. We wanted to showcase that we were putting a different image out there for our community, not a single image, built a lot around sports and recreation, but along five points.

Q: How do local downtown commercials feed into what you are trying to do? (Downtown Committee does summer and holiday commercials: Experience the shopping dining, night life, arts and culture).

We compete against so many different places, we need as much out there touting what is going on in this area as possible. Because people don't know, need to shake people out of habitual travel patterns you have to throw stuff at them. We need to reinforce this with our local residents.

Q: How does something like the defunding of The Candlelight Series in Armory Square affect the image of what you are trying to do?

Twofold: Perceptual challenge we face in terms of "All of our things closing up." We lose a sense of that community pride when something like that happens. We lose a little bit more of that variety.

Community engagement component of a campaign: Benefit of having visitor and local residents contributing videos and photos that you can use in your marketing. If their material gets selected (is featured) they will use their own social networks to promote; and they will promote and bring people in. Useful to have interactive engagement/involvement to get the ball rolling.

Holder: You have the ability to talk to customers and have customers talk back to you with Web 2.0. The great thing about this campaign is that it showed what our community has to offer in a general sense. We need to be showcasing to specific demographics of the population. Many people in community have the same question, "Where is this to me? Social media is a great outlet for this.

David Holder is speaking at the Thursday Morning Roundtable on March 10th about "Selling Syracuse."

Q: Any items state or local government could do/have to help you do your job?

One of the key pieces: Needs to be correlation between performance of tourism industry and funding of the destination marketing organizations that have responsibility for that performance. To use the example of 2009, room tax collections kept going up. Tourism industry in our area single industry that saw an increase in performance (albeit small), but we have a system in place that doesn't take performance into account.

Public Sessions Discussion:

We wanted subgroups to start focusing on scheduling some public sessions: (Chart distributed with suggestions. Each of the subgroups had some ideas about how to structure presentations).

Between February and end of April, need to fill in a series.

Getting the word out in advance and inviting the public and the media to have an expanded audience.

For each of speakers, tell them “Here is what we are studying,” and “Here are the three generic questions” (covering what we would like them to speak about.)

Case Studies Subcommittee: We were talking about Harrisburg being similar. It was featured on the Diane Riehm show, they can’t put programs in place, comes back to money.

At the last meeting, people talking about Pittsburgh that was one of the cities that came up, because it changed its image. Just as Auburn is a lot smaller, Pittsburgh is larger, but still lessons to be learned.

There are communities that have used marketing to do an internal renovation of image. We are constantly looking on what other places are doing. It might be worth including that. David will work with the Case Studies group re: turnaround areas.

What is our community Image now? If community image is as low as we say how could we score so well on service and things to do? Is community self-esteem problem purely anecdotal?

Comeback Cities, by Rogan, recommended reading as background material.

David will distribute the full image study. It goes into detail with some of the categories being examined, for instance how does Syracuse relate to Saratoga? In what ways they score more highly, related to 10 categories shown on board.

George Curry: When Chris and I were teaching urban studio, did something based on Kevin Lynch’s book, *The Image of A City*, and because most of our students were not from Syracuse, we’d spend first few weeks of the course going to neighborhoods and using this technique. We were getting them to understand what the image of the place was. The last study we did was interesting because we had the students do that and had a steering committee (8-10 people) from Hawley Green also participate.

The idea is to do an exercise at special meeting for this group, to get us thinking.

Discussion of facilities for Public Sessions

In the past we have used The Warehouse. How about City Hall Commons FOCUS uses? CenterState conference room? More public and central the space the better. Public Library downtown? Better to have all sessions in one place. Warehouse has quite a bit of parking around it. Community Foundation does meetings in CNY Philanthropy Center, and has space for 75 or more.

NEXT MEETING: February 8th, 12 noon, 307 UC