

HOW TO GUIDE:
05. MAKE THE CASE

VIRGINIA IS FOR LO♥ERS®

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IS FOR
LOVERS[®]**

MAKE THE CASE

INTRODUCTION

Part of operating in the travel and tourism industry means having to sell not only your region or destination, but also yourself. In fact, how you do so determines how well your stakeholders understand the impact travel and tourism has on your region's economy and quality of life, how much they appreciate the role your DMO or organization plays in enhancing the community, and how far they're willing to go to support your efforts.

Most people put the numbers first, but we're going to flip the script and begin with what is the most powerful story for your key set of stakeholders. While ROI, room nights, and economic impact numbers are important to include, these numbers alone are not necessarily what is going to get your stakeholders furthering your cause. As tourism expert Jack Johnson with Destination International says, it's about finding the "shared common value." It's about emotion and finding something that can't be argued. This can be as simple as tweaking the language you commonly use or the actual story you tell.

That said, your case for tourism should be not only thoughtful and compelling, but also backed by unassailable evidence. Transparency in the world of tourism marketing is paramount, particularly if you derive any funding from taxpayer dollars, so part of what you'll find in this guide will not only help you enlist valuable support but also ensure your organization is operating above-board and has the trust of the community it serves.

To that end, following these five steps will help you perfect your pitch:

1. **Identify your key stakeholders**
2. **Identify the best story for your stakeholders**
3. **Gather the information you need**
4. **Package your case using the right language**
5. **Share your case through multiple channels**

**All DRIVE 2.0 research was conducted in 2019 and compiled pre COVID-19 Crisis.
Please see vatc.org/coronavirus for COVID-19: Industry Response Toolkit.**

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Making a case for local travel and tourism industry starts by identifying the key stakeholders you need to reach. That is, the partners you need to ensure tourism is supported and funded. Traditionally, this includes:

1. **Local tourism industry leaders:** The people who manage attractions, accommodations, events, dining establishments, and other visitor assets and experiences in your region — they're your base of support and your apostles.
2. **Elected officials:** The local, regional, and state-level leaders representing your area.
3. **Residents:** Those who call your region home.
4. **Business and community leaders:** The leaders of non-profit associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), places of worship, educational institutions, etc.
5. **Media:** Those outlets responsible for covering your industry and region.



STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE BEST STORY FOR YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Your stakeholders want to know how you impact them in a positive way, and that benefit may be different for each audience — again this doesn't necessarily always mean numbers, but it does mean values. Only by listening to your stakeholders will you get a true sense of what their values are and what will resonate with them the most.

For example, to get you started and spark your imagination, here are some of the thought processes and priorities you may encounter for each of the stakeholder groups listed in Step 1.

- 1. Local tourism industry leaders:** Local tourism industry professionals are primarily focused on their own products and offerings. They look to local tourism organizations to share insights on the local tourism industry — who's coming, where they're coming from, what they're doing while they're here, how much they're spending, and any other trends. Industry leaders also turn to tourism organizations to drive first-time and repeat visitation and make the case for greater private and public investment in the industry. In addition, some local industry leaders expect to be engaged, standing by to help with broader tourism efforts if given a specific assignment.
- 2. Elected officials:** The tourism industry is not top of mind for elected officials. When it does come up, local, regional, and state-level elected officials want to know that taxpayer money is being deployed effectively for the benefit of the community. They want to know that the current investment in tourism is delivering improved quality of life as well as a positive return measured by jobs and tax revenue. They also want to hear that residents support the local industry, too.
- 3. Residents:** Residents become immersed in travel attractions and experiences when they play host to friends and relatives. However, when not playing host, they may only think about

their local travel and tourism industry when "tourists" are adding to congestion, creating long lines, leaving trash, and causing other negative impacts. Rarely do they consider how much the tourism industry contributes to the local economy or the positive quality of life experiences that come with great local attractions, so helping residents see and appreciate these benefits is important.

- 4. Businesses and community leaders:** For many local businesses, the tourism industry is not top of mind either, and they may have little appreciation for the size and impact of the local travel industry. What they care about is a growing economy, so helping them see how tourism helps strengthen the local economy is key. Also, encourage them to see how tourism contributes to the local quality of life through placemaking efforts and the role tourism plays in helping attract and retain residents and, in turn, businesses.
- 5. Media:** The media is looking for a balanced story that shares something newsworthy but also has a hook or angle. Show the media the bigger picture — the real-life stories behind the numbers in terms of what tourism means for the community.

With these examples, start to think about how to apply your unique, important, and believable core identity as a destination and how to wrap messages around it to appeal to your key stakeholders. If you have a close partner, consider running your story by them to see how well it appeals to them. Anytime you share your story make sure to listen to the questions asked, the body language in the room, the head nods or eye rolls. Take stock and adjust. There is a story that will reach them, and it must be true to your place and backed by measurable data.

To tailor your narrative and supporting evidence, sometimes it can be helpful to think of your stakeholders in the same way you think about potential visitors and then craft mini-stories tailored to each stakeholder group. To get your mind moving here, ask yourself these seven essential questions as you're putting the elements of your case together:

1. Who are you?
2. What are you trying to accomplish?
3. Who can make that happen?
4. What message will move people to action?
5. Which vehicles best deliver that message?
6. What resources do you have?
7. How will you know if you are successful?

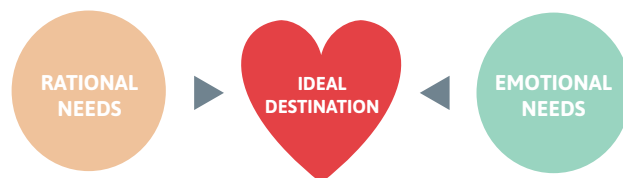
STEP 3: GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED



With your story (or stories) identified for key stakeholders, it's now time to gather both the rational facts and the emotional appeals that will provide the foundation for your case.

It is important to identify the rational and emotional attributes that help define you as an ideal destination. We will detail both the rational expectations that need to be met, but also the emotional (shared community value) appeal.

Gathering this data and information will help you fill in your story in the most compelling and measurable way.



WHAT INFORMATION TO GATHER

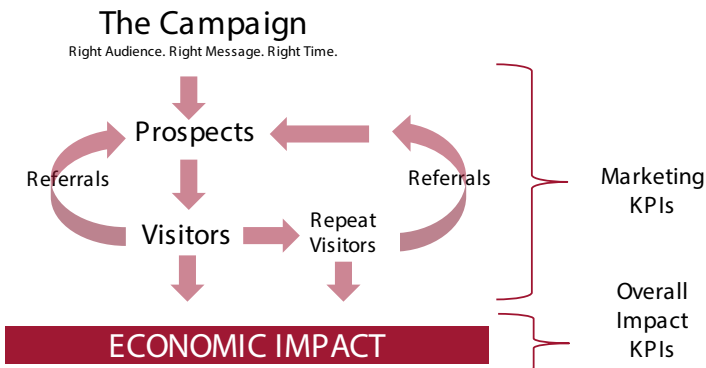
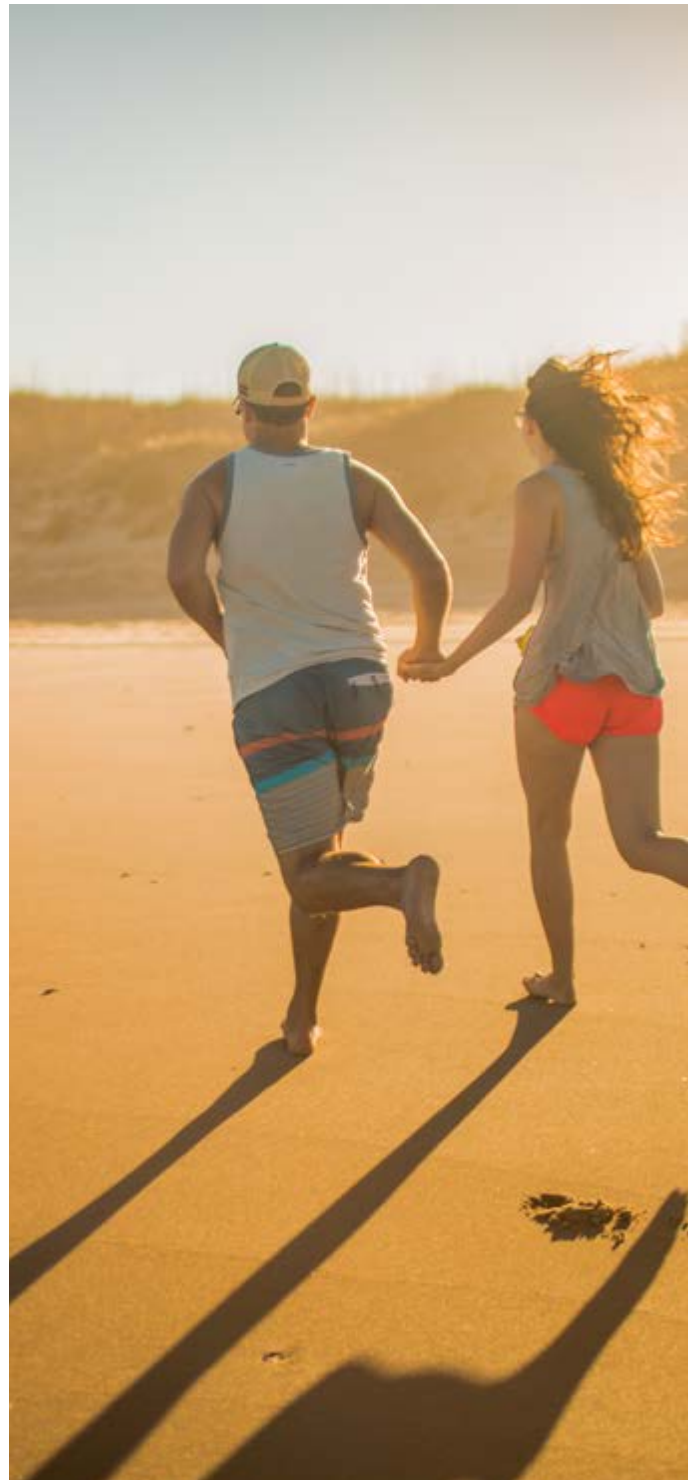
What do you need to measure, track, and report? The answer ties back to each of the key stakeholder groups, their respective mindsets, and what information will be most persuasive. For most tourism efforts, there are two sets of key performance indicators (KPIs) that are often used to help tell the story of impact: Marketing KPIs and Overall Impact KPIs. Think of them in a model like this:

The Marketing KPIs demonstrate the effectiveness of your promotional efforts to bring visitors to the community or region. This is important to show the impact your specific campaign had in bringing people to the community. The Overall Impact KPIs show the economic activity that results from bringing visitors to your community.

In essence, we want to get answers to these questions:

- Are we targeting the right people with the right offers and benefits?
- Is our marketing driving prospects to consider our destination, ask for information, and ultimately make a first-time visit?
- Is our product delivering a great experience, driving customer satisfaction and referrals?
- Is our experience and onsite cross-promotion marketing driving repeat visitation?
- How much of an economic impact does our marketing investment deliver compared to no marketing effort whatsoever?

Each of these questions should have specific KPIs with current corresponding performance assessment and future target goals.



HOW TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

Now that you know the right questions to ask, how should you go about finding the answers? Below lists out various tools to help you gather the information you need. You may not be able to gather all this information, but some is better than none. The good news is VTC provides much of the information needed to get you started. The key is to have a good mix of data to support your story.

1. Take advantage of secondary research.

Taking stock of what others have already spearheaded can keep you from duplicating efforts and may even unlock some key insights. Some potential resources include:

- **VTC Research:** economic impact for state, counties, and localities, visitor profiles, market share, consumer trends, etc., visit for more – vatc.org/research
- Partner and attraction-led studies

What these tools will tell you: Secondary research can provide invaluable insight into key economic impact indicators, as well as particular insights into your partners, which can be used to tailor your case toward addressing specific needs they may have uncovered through their own independent research.

2. Determine your tourism marketing impact.

By collecting data you already have access to from your website and online promotional efforts (Google Analytics and social media data), you can get a powerful picture of how your audience is interacting with you. To that end, you should track:

- Visitation
- Reach during a specific campaign
- Inquiries
- Digital Stats:
 - » Unique visitors
 - » Length of stay on site and individual pages
 - » Pages visited
 - » Click-through rates
 - » Top content
 - » Social media engagement: number of shares, comments, posts, increase in fans, followers, influencers, and content engagement
 - » Hashtag usage metrics

What these tools will tell you: These tools will give you real-time glimpses into how your marketing efforts are paying off, what stories, events, and promotions are driving the most interest, and how people are curating your story on your behalf.



HOW TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

(cont'd)

3. Determine tourism economic impact.

Understanding the economic impact is the holy grail for travel and tourism organizations, and you'll need to work with your partners in the community to collect all the relevant data. The good news is:

- VTC has these numbers for you! To obtain the economic impact numbers for your area just go to vatc.org/research/economicimpact. For towns and localities within a county, you may only be able to obtain county-level data, but that's okay, it's a starting place.

Also, there are numerous third-party organizations that can provide custom economic impact reporting. These are ideal for a smaller town, or if you are trying to determine the impact (past or projected) of a new development or attraction. For a sample of research vendors VTC has contracted or worked alongside visit vatc.org/research/researchlinks

What these tools will tell you:

- Travel employment (people)
- Travel employment wages (payroll)
- Travel expenditures
- Local and state tax receipts
- Hotel occupancy and related room supply and demand metrics
 - » Room Demand – Reflects the percent change in the number of rooms sold
 - » Room Supply – Reflects the percent change in the number of rooms available
 - » Room Rate (ADR) – Reflects the average rate paid for rooms sold
 - » Room Revenue – Reflects the percent change in the amount of revenue collected
 - » Occupancy Percent – Reflects the percentage of rooms occupied
- Summary of all other tourism and hospitality attractions' key performance indicators



HOW TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

(cont'd)

4. Conduct primary research.

The bulk of your ability to track and measure your performance will come from your primary research efforts, such as:

Industry Stakeholder Surveys

Industry stakeholder surveys can help you pinpoint key areas to target for improvement and promotions, as well as provide invaluable insight into your key messaging.

Past and Current Visitor Surveys

You'll need to understand how visitors feel about their experiences in your community. To do so, you should track:

- Places and attractions visited
- Intent to revisit
- Likelihood to recommend
- Drivers of satisfaction, return visit, referral
- Level of satisfaction based on what they expected out of the experience and what the destination delivered
- Travel party demographics and behaviors

The same holds true for repeat visitors. Knowledge is power. Measure:

- Satisfaction overall and with specific attractions
- Places and attractions visited on this trip
- Knowledge of more places and things to do on next visit — to drive intent to revisit
- Intent to revisit
- Likelihood to recommend — Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- Travel party demographics and behaviors
- Impact of post-trip marketing (e-news, promotional offers, etc.)

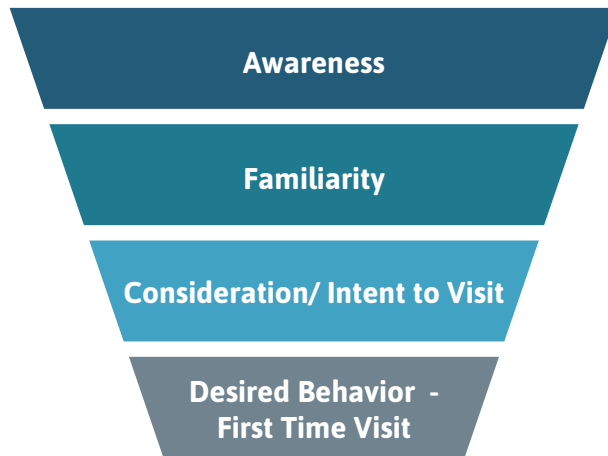


HOW TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED (cont'd)

4. Conduct primary research. (cont'd)

Prospective Visitor Surveys (Awareness Funnel)

In promotions, we want our efforts to move people through the “funnel.”



The goal is to attract as many people into the funnel and then have your promotional efforts move them down until they decide to come visit. Therefore, you need to track how many people are at each level and learn why they move down the funnel or not. For example, knowing what triggers someone to move from “consideration” to an actual “visit” to your community is very important and shapes your promotional messaging strategy.

To that end, a prospective visitor study will help you understand:

- Unaided and aided awareness
- Unaided and aided advertising awareness
- Familiarity
- Consideration/intent to visit
- Actual visitation statistics

Resident Surveys

What this tool will tell you: No one knows you better than the people who call your region home. Their input will help you determine whether the story you’re selling is authentic and matches what people see on the ground every day. It can also help point to areas of improvement in the offering.

HOW TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU NEED (cont'd)

5. Use third-party tools

A common approach to identifying who comes to your destination is to tap into “big data” and buy information about visitors from various resources. VTC utilizes public data and works with other partner agencies and organizations. Many of the more popular data sources are listed via the link below. In addition, at the bottom of this linked page, there is a list of research firms VTC has worked with in the past or is familiar with through previous projects.

If you have any questions on these sources or partner organizations, please contact VTC Research at vatc.org/research. For a sample of research vendors VTC has contracted or worked alongside visit vatc.org/research/researchlinks

What these tools will tell you: These tools can provide you with an all-important glimpse into who your optimal audience is, where they're coming from, and what general attitudes and behaviors are shaping their travel decisions. (See sidebar on profiling visitors.)

PROFILING VISITORS

Key visitor information to track and measure:

- Number of annual visitors
- Visitor demographic profile data, such as household income, age, race, marital status, children in household
- Party trip purpose
- Average party size
- Travel party spending per trip
- Nights stayed
- Top activities
- Origin by state and city
- Planning sources
- Planning time
- Month visited



STEP 4: PACKAGE YOUR CASE USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

Many make the case for tourism by relying exclusively on the rational numbers we outlined in the previous section. Now, we're going to flip the script and urge you to make room for emotional arguments as well. To establish an emotional connection with your stakeholders, you might:

- Showcase real visitors with quotes that speak to how they feel about their visit and what they plan to share with others when they get home
- Showcase real workers in the local travel and tourism industry explaining what their job means to them and their family
- Find the stories that align with the community values of your stakeholders

Similarly, the most effective communicators take the time to identify and use the right language when advancing their case. It's important to think of language as more than just the right or wrong words to use, but about creating the "emotional hook."

“We need to stop saying things like, ‘We support X number of jobs,’ and instead, we should talk about the number of jobs we create in the community ... A lot of times, people think it's simple wordsmithing, but it's not. It's about creating an emotional hook.”

- *Andreas Weissenborn, Senior Director of Research and Advocacy, Destinations International*

Destinations International (DI) has both anecdotal and quantitative research on the right words to use in making a case for tourism. According to DI, the word "marketing" is translated by stakeholders as something you're selling, that you're pushing something. Simply using the term associates you with a business line item that can be cut if needed, whereas the word "promotion" activates a sense of civic pride. Residents and stakeholders with a pride of place are likely to perceive tourism positively and desire to be involved in tourism planning, and DI's research suggests that this simple act of framing investment in tourism as promotion rather than marketing can dramatically influence public perception of your organization and the role of tourism in the community.

Similarly, DI's research also uncovered language repeatedly used by elected officials when talking positively about travel and tourism. Words like "community," "people," "support" and "work" show up over and over again, as do related topics such as economic development, neighborhoods and public goods.

This language should permeate all you do. From your mission statement to your impact brochure. For example, Visit Phoenix recently updated their mission statement to better use this language to demonstrate their story:

Visit Phoenix's mission is to enhance the lives of our neighbors, support people at work within our community and contribute to the creation of economic opportunity in Greater Phoenix through brand development and promotion of the destination.

DI's research can be accessed here:

meetings.destinationsinternational.org/briefs/new-tourism-lexicon through this Policy Brief designed to help tourism organizations update their language and terminology to effectively share tourism information with stakeholders.



Destination International’s new lexicon when talking with stakeholders:

Old language:

“In 2017, travel generated \$2.4 trillion for the U.S. economy, supporting 15.6 million American jobs.”

New language:

“In 2017, travel provided \$2.4 trillion in economic impact to local communities across the country and supported the livelihoods of 15.6 million hardworking Americans.”

Old language:

“A destination marketing organization (DMO) or convention and visitors’ bureau (CVB) is an organization that promotes a town, city, region, or country in order to increase the number of visitors. It promotes the development and marketing of a destination, focusing on convention sales, tourism marketing, and services.”

New language:

“A destination organization is responsible for promoting a community as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, they strengthen the economic position and provide opportunity for people in their community.”

STEP 5: SHARE YOUR CASE THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Once you have identified the right story (or stories) for your key stakeholders and have collected all the relevant data, it's time to package the results in compelling formats and deliver the information through an organized stakeholders' communications outreach campaign. Just remember: The sharing of your case is not a "one and done" project, but rather an ongoing effort to be shared and updated through all of your channels.

In order to break through and get your tourism impact message noticed, heard, understood, and embraced, you need to create an impact information-sharing campaign, which should include the following components:

1. Concise presentation
2. Infographics handout and mailer
3. Social media campaign with videos
4. Media coverage: news stories, op-ed, feature stories, business journals, etc.

CONCISE PRESENTATION

Schedule and give as many in-person presentations as possible, whether it be to local organizational boards, government committees, chamber meetings, or residential town hall events. The point is to use this concise presentation to showcase the industry's impact in a way that celebrates every player. Be sure to get to the point, lead with the story, and back everything up with facts.

Consider hosting an event or meeting — a "State of Tourism" summit — for your community. Invite all stakeholders and make it an informative and engaging session. Think of this event as an opportunity to showcase all you do for your locality to make it a great place for all to live, work, play, and visit.

But practice first with your local industry leaders. Let everyone make this the strongest, most compelling presentation possible.

INFOGRAPHICS HANDOUT AND MAILER

Create a two-sided infographics handout sheet for the in-person presentations as a leave behind document. This piece can serve double duty as flyer to mail. Email a copy to everyone in the industry. Mail a hard copy with a cover letter to elected officials, key business and community leaders, opinion leaders in your region, and the media.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN USING SHORT VIDEOS

Everyone has the ability to create short, informational videos. Shoot your impact story and post the video online through your social media channels. Consider a paid boost to ensure greater reach, especially among your residents.

This video can be as simple as someone holding the infographic and talking through the information presented on it. Better yet, why not humanize your story with comments from local industry workers and visitors that bring your impact factoids to life in a more emotionally compelling way.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Chances are, if you're presenting at a city council meeting, for example, the media will be in attendance, and it'll be your job to ensure you wow them with enough evidence and emotional appeal that they see an angle of newsworthiness. Of course, if you're making a presentation to a board which doesn't necessarily spur media attendance, pick up the phone and invite them along. And, if they say they can't make it, set up a meeting to talk to the editorial board. The point is, the more the media sees the success and reports on it, the more your residents and other stakeholders will pick up on the message of tourism's positive impact. Finally, if your entreaties to the media don't gain traction, the more op-eds you or someone from your organization can pen and place, the better.

BECOMING A COMMUNITY SHARED VALUE

Destinations International's newest defense for Destination Marketing Organizations incorporates the idea of becoming a Community Shared Value paired with their Tourism Lexicon. This idea is that tourism adds to the value of a community in a clear and direct way to improve the lives of its residents. It combines a message of logic and facts to one of utilizing emotion to capture the support of residents and community stakeholders. Learn more about becoming a Community Shared Value at destinationsinternational.org/industry-reports/becoming-community-shared-value



BLACKSTONE: PLANTING THE SEED AND GROWING A PLAN

Despite the revitalization of Blackstone, Virginia's historic downtown area since being named a Main Street community in 2007, pinpointing a direction for the town's tourism industry remained a challenge.

In fact, when asked, area leaders were hard-pressed to come up with many defining, unique tourism lures. But while that might stifle tourism development discussion for some towns, it was really just the beginning for Blackstone.

Led by Sandra Tanner, a Destination Development Specialist with VTC, local business owners and stakeholders held a planning session to help launch a new direction for the town's tourism industry. Organized along with Downtown Blackstone Inc. (DBI), an established organization charged with facilitating the Virginia Main Street Program, the session quickly uncovered that the location of Blackstone could be seen as an advantage for the town.

Located approximately halfway between Richmond and Raleigh, North Carolina, its location could be the hub or spoke of a traveler's vacation planning and could be marketed in coordination with other southern Virginia and North Carolina communities and/or destinations. Similarly, the history of Fort Pickett, the Carriage Museum, Schwartz Tavern, and its proximity to Crewe (with its railroad museum and radio history) could be used as a regional draw, as well as the town's other tourism assets, including local restaurants, festivals and events, antique stores and unique shopping experiences, hunting and fishing, and Civil War sites.

This creative thinking inspired a new perspective. When local and nearby tourism assets are inventoried and linked together, they create a critical mass of experiences that's so much more appealing than a few assets viewed separately.

With this perspective, Blackstone, the small town with little to no tourism growth opportunities, suddenly had hope, all thanks to some brainstorming and creative thinking. Tanner and her team were then able to take the output from that session and develop it into a strategic plan, complete with mission and vision statements, for town leaders to use as a guide as they work to establish a tourism management team, enlist local ambassadors and volunteers, and form strong regional partnerships.

There are still obstacles to overcome — coalitions to build, funding to find, input to gain from residents and stakeholders, and marketing efforts to develop and leverage. However, the narrative has shifted. The topic of conversation no longer revolves around what's missing from Blackstone when it comes to its tourism industry and is now centered on how to make the most of what Blackstone has in order to build even more.



ARLINGTON: ARMING TOURISM'S FRONT-LINE ADVOCATES

With its bevy of local attractions and proximity to D.C., the 45 hotels in the Arlington area have no shortage of year-round visitors, and since these are often the first stop visitors make when they arrive in the city, StayArlington asked itself a simple question: How can we better educate and equip hospitality workers in these hotels to become better ambassadors for the area?

Enter the Arlington Hospitality College—a free educational program into which all members of Arlington's hospitality community can tap to learn more about the city's neighborhoods, attractions, shopping, arts venues, transportation options, restaurants, and nightlife. After all, the more they see and experience — and the more they like what they see and experience — the more they're willing to share and tout.

Held quarterly, each Arlington Hospitality College session lasts roughly three hours and consists of neighborhood walking tours, presentations from local neighborhood advocates and business

owners highlighting what's new, behind-the-scenes tours and experiences, and information for neighborhood contacts and Arlington hospitality resources. Not only that, it also provides an outlet for hospitality industry professionals to network, share experiences together, and build an infectious enthusiasm about the area that inspires spending and repeat visitation.

Since 2009, Arlington has been Virginia's No. 1 county for visitor spending, generating \$3.4 billion in economic impact in 2018 alone. Similarly, tourism supports the livelihood of 26,000 people, \$92 million in local tax receipts, and \$123 million in state tax receipts.

Naturally, the implementation of the Arlington Hospitality College can't account for those numbers alone, but there really is no true accounting for having a well-versed and enthusiastic band of ambassadors ready to assist visitors the moment they come to town.



VIRGINIA BEACH: ENHANCING TOURISM THROUGH RESEARCH AND OUTREACH

For a city like Virginia Beach, with such visible tourism draws and long-standing appeal as a beach destination, it can be tempting to assume residents, business owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders already understand and appreciate the role tourism plays in the health and vitality of the community.

But as Tiffany Russell, Vice President of Marketing Communications for the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, warns, in tourism it's never safe to assume anything. In fact, places that rely heavily on tourism dollars often have to do the most work when it comes to making their case.

For Russell and the Virginia Beach CVB, that work has in the past entailed a vital mix of periodic research to gauge sentiment and economic impact, tourism-centric events, impact reporting and communications, and healthy partnerships.

"Whatever data you can get to validate your efforts is so invaluable, especially when it comes to sentiment," Russell says. "People with negative perceptions of tourism tend to speak up and speak the loudest, but it may be a highly vocal minority driving the narrative. If you can go to your elected officials and partners with a statistically reliable survey sample and say, for example, 'Actually 90% of residents say they support tourism efforts, and 85% say they feel city council should dedicate funding for product development,' then that can be a huge eye-opener for people."

Plus, she adds, since survey responses can be broken down by zip code, it has allowed her office to pinpoint what city districts may be experiencing negative impacts from tourism in the past and work with elected officials and city departments to help address those concerns.

That said, having the numbers to back up impact and target resources can only take a region so far, and in Virginia Beach, Russell says they have traditionally approached making their case from an emotional standpoint as well.

They've managed a website dedicated to housing impact data reporting and videos, answers to frequently asked questions about tourism, and testimonials from local residents and business owners to show tourism in Virginia Beach supports not only the economy but also the environmental and cultural well-being of the region. They've dedicated social media attention to new businesses opening and used those occasions to welcome them while also touting tourism impact. And, in conjunction with National Travel and Tourism Week, the CVB has hosted its own travel and tourism awards ceremonies, where community members nominated people for recognition in different categories, such as best bartender, best tour guide, best catering staff, best chef, and even best transportation provider.

These events, Russell says, not only attracted media attention, they also became a source of local industry pride and helped people to see that it's not just the big hotels and attractions that drive the industry — it's the bussers, housekeeping staff, maintenance crews, and retail workers who make tourism a successful enterprise.

Finally, Russell acknowledges that the Virginia Beach CVB has been fortunate in the past to have financial backing from the Virginia Beach City Council and dedicated funding for the explicit purpose of community outreach and advocacy. That said, she maintains that, even with those resources, there's no substitute for grassroots efforts that cost little or nothing.

"Just being present or asking to get on the agenda of civic league or other organizational meetings, writing letters, providing monthly updates or one-pagers for your city manager to convey during board meetings, these are great ways to build advocates," Russell says. "You'd be surprised how many people have their own tourism story to tell — our previous mayor, his first job was bussing tables in a restaurant — and if you can get these people to understand what you do and advocate for you, that goes a long way."



LEXINGTON: USING UNASSAILABLE EVIDENCE TO SPUR SUPPORT

The importance of travel and tourism to the health of a region's overall economy can sometimes be hard to articulate on the part of tourism organizations — and even harder to appreciate on the part of regional leaders and funding partners. Take into account the regular turnover on both sides of this coin, and tourism leaders often find themselves having to justify their funding levels and demonstrate their effectiveness.

For example, Lexington and Rockbridge Area Tourism (LRAT) reports not only to its own board, but also the cities of Lexington and Buena Vista, as well as Rockbridge County. And while LRAT Director of Tourism Jean Clark likes to joke that she's "only as good as the next election," her organization has taken it upon itself to be proactive when it comes to showing tourism's worth.

For more than 20 years, Clark says, LRAT has undertaken a systematic body of research to make sure current tourism efforts are hitting the right mark and identify potential new avenues to explore. Sometimes, as was the case in 2005 and 2011, Clark and her team embark on a 360-degree comprehensive research plan, which may include traditional economic impact analyses, surveys among hospitality industry leaders, prospective visitor studies, and intercept visitor satisfaction studies. Other times, as was the case for the research effort LRAT most recently completed, Clark and her team track the impact of certain attractions, such as the Virginia Horse Center, or study the conversion rates for pieces of marketing collateral. So, for example, when area officials questioned the value of producing a visitor's guide, Clark's team was able to tailor its next conversion study and demonstrate an 8:1 return on that investment.

As a result of this systematic approach to studying its industry, LRAT has been able to effectively and consistently communicate the scope of the industry and the economic impact tourism has in the area, while also providing an in-depth understanding of who visits, why and how they choose to visit, what they explore while visiting, how they feel about their experiences, what gaps need to be filled, and which new audiences need to be targeted.

Bottom line, Clark says, making your case all boils down to building relationships and partnerships by demonstrating need, showcasing impact, and enlisting support.

"We're not just marketers, especially in a small area like this," she says. "We're helping create products and opportunities, so you need this research not only to help you build your plans and initiatives, but also to show your partners how you're currently helping them, or how you can help them in the future."

And, she adds, bringing those partners on board through up-to-date and compelling research and storytelling often turns them into ambassadors for the industry in their own right, meaning the burden of making the case doesn't have to fall on the tourism organization alone.

APPENDIX A: CONDUCTING PRIMARY RESEARCH

INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Objectives:

- Assess and benchmark industry sentiment towards the current and future state of the tourism industry and marketing efforts.
- Provide a conduit for stakeholder input regarding marketing efforts.

Typical Methodology:

- Share a short online survey with local partners.

PAST VISITOR SURVEY

Objectives:

- Understand trip motivation and the extent to which the area is a primary or secondary location.
- Assess satisfaction levels overall for the area and for individual attractions/experiences.
- Understand how the area is currently positioned in the minds of the visitors.
- Understand the area's existing image and the attributes that drive its personality.
- Understand what attractions visitors are visiting while in the area and to what extent those attractions are drawing them to the area.
- Assess awareness, familiarity, and satisfaction levels (if visited) for the top attractions/experiences.
- Assess spending impact of past visitors.
- Assess repeat visitation intent and patterns.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of travel advertising campaigns and website in generating non-local travel to the area.

Typical Methodology:

- Use owned lists: DMOs and other hotels and attractions often maintain lists of visitors. An online survey with an incentive can be a cost-effective approach.
- Panel: Purchasing online panel is becoming increasingly affordable. Partnering with a panel to screen for respondents who have visited in the past 3-5 years. This allows for a more random surveying process. Plus, if they haven't visited, you can always funnel them to a prospective visitor survey.



CURRENT VISITOR SURVEY

Objectives:

- Understand trip motivation and the extent to which the area is a primary or secondary location.
- Assess satisfaction levels overall for the area and for individual attractions/experiences.
- Understand how the area is currently positioned in the minds of the visitors.
- Understand the area’s existing image and the attributes that drive its personality.
- Understand what attractions visitors are visiting while in the area and to what extent those attractions are drawing them to the area.
- Assess awareness, familiarity, and satisfaction levels (if visited) for the top attractions/experiences.
- Assess spending impact of past visitors.
- Assess repeat visitation intent and patterns.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of travel advertising campaigns and website in generating non-local travel to the area.

Typical Methodology:

- Intercept: more time and manpower required and difficult to get cross-seasonal participation.

PROSPECTIVE VISITOR SURVEY

Objectives:

- Understand the appeal of the area as a travel destination.
- Understand the area’s existing image and the attributes that drive its personality. Identify the area’s relative position vis-à-vis other destinations.
- Identify the overall perceptions and misperceptions surrounding the area.
- Understand the relationship between the area and other nearby destinations and experiences.

- Identify the barriers to take a trip to the area.
- Identify the area’s potential packaging opportunities that could make the area even more appealing.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of travel advertising campaigns and website in generating non-local travel to the region.

Typical Methodology:

- Online panel survey: Purchasing online panel is becoming increasingly affordable. Partnering with a panel to screen for respondents who have not visited but are aware of the destination. Plus, if they have visited, you can always funnel them to a past visitor survey.

RESIDENT SURVEY

Objectives:

- Assess how area residents view tourism and the benefits of tourism on the community.
- Gauge how residents view the area as a place to live, work, play, and visit.
- Identify the level of understanding of the area’s offerings to out-of-town visitors.
- Assess the importance of and perception of tourism benefits.
- Assess awareness of tourism numbers including, number of visitors, spending, and number of conventions (if applicable).
- Identify perception of and usage of primary lures.

Typical Methodology:

- Telephone survey: make sure to weight the data to reflect the population.
- Online panel survey: this works best for those who live in larger areas or regions.
- Convenience survey: where a link to the survey is shared and posted on social media, in newsletters and by the media to obtain as many responses as possible from the community.



SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. ARE YOU AWARE OF X DESTINATION?

- A. Yes
- B. No

2. HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH X DESTINATION?

(1 - Not at all familiar; 5 - Very familiar)

1 2 3 4 5

3. WHAT ARE THE FIRST THREE WORDS THAT COME TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF X DESTINATION?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

4. OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH YOUR MOST RECENT TRIP TO X DESTINATION? (1 - Not at all satisfied; 5 - Very satisfied)

1 2 3 4 5

5. HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RECOMMEND X DESTINATION AS A PLACE TO VISIT TO YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY? [NET PROMOTER SCORE]

(0 - Not at all likely; 10 - very likely)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO MAKE A RETURN TRIP TO X DESTINATION?

(0 - Not at all likely; 5 - very likely)

1 2 3 4 5

MAKE THE CASE HUB AND SPOKE EXERCISE

During DRIVE 2.0 implementation hub and spoke exercises will be used to help communities identify the story that resonates most with stakeholders, the metrics that matter and the best way to tell that story in order to make the case for tourism. This exercise will help lead your community to make the case for tourism.

Begin with identifying the best story that showcases the impact tourism has on your community. This is the hub. Then move around the outer circles filling in the spokes, identifying which stakeholders most need to hear that story.





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