

**FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN
for
VISIT HOPEWELL PRINCE GEORGE**

**Preparing the Chamber for Long Range
Tourism Development Success**



**MARSHALL
MURDAUGH**
M A R K E T I N G

America's Performance Leader in Destination Strategic Planning

August 19, 2016

Percy Ashcraft
County Administrator
PO Box 68
Prince George, VA 23875

January 5, 2017

Dear Percy:

We're very pleased to share with you our new five-year strategic plan to help chart a productive future course for Hopewell / Prince George and its collective tourism industry and are excited to deliver it and our activities to the Board of Supervisors and the community on January 10, 2017.

We are indebted to the Virginia Tourism Corporation for its DRIVE tourism grant that made this initiative possible and for Prince George County and the City of Hopewell to engage us in the work of growing tourism. The DRIVE Tourism sessions in 2015 are what kick-started our effort, and before that it was your trust in our ability to leverage the chamber's resources to provide value to the community by creating a regional visitor center. You and your team are among the many stakeholders who participated in this strategic planning process, so we want to personally thank you for your candid observations and recommendations. Together a diverse and committed group helped create the development of many important opportunities in this plan that will assist in assuring our community's tourism success for the years ahead.

These are truly exciting times for Hopewell / Prince George. Area visitor receipts grew in 2015, with the latest estimates of domestic tourism spending for both communities totaling nearly \$100 million—while also supporting about 1,000 local jobs and producing state and local visitor tax revenues estimated at \$2.1 million.

We're pleased to be sharing this plan with you after nine months of work and great benchmarking trip to West Virginia, because it couldn't come at a more propitious time as a new wave of renewed optimism continues throughout our region. This information has been delivered to the Virginia Tourism Corporation per the terms of their grant. They are excited about our gateway art, the progress on the Appomattox River Trail, the growth of the Czech/Slovak festival, and the spirit of collaboration in our region.

We look forward to your continued participation and support as we collaboratively work together to assure the brightest future ahead.

Best wishes,

Becky McDonough, CEO

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Planning for Hopewell / Prince George's Tourism Future

Two years ago, the Hopewell / Prince George Chamber assumed management of the area's Visitor Center and tourist promotion program, thanks to a contract with Hopewell and Prince George.

Several months later, the Chamber board authorized the expansion of tourism marketing services for the organization, and the staff began to undertake new public relations initiatives that publicized the destination and the tourism industry for the community. Then last summer, the Chamber completed a series of DRIVE Tourism workshops sponsored by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, which qualified the organization to apply for a mini-grant for its DRIVE tourism program—an initiative to plan and develop new community product development opportunities that would enhance tourism over the next five years. Five such product development opportunities have been highlighted in this plan, followed by many other recommended marketing opportunities.

In tandem with that planning process, the Chamber retained Marshall Murdaugh Marketing to recommend the optimal tourism marketing model for the community—one that would potentially chart a long range course for greater community tourism success. This strategic plan, developed as an independent and objective report by Marshall Murdaugh Marketing, is the result of those two important initiatives.

About the Consultant

An internationally recognized consultant to successful destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and the communities they serve, Marshall Murdaugh was president and CEO for some of America's most successful and best recognized programs, including Atlantic City (94–00), New York City (88–94), Memphis (83–88), and the State of Virginia (70–83) where he developed the successful and award-winning "Virginia is for Lovers" marketing campaign.

For the past sixteen years, his consulting firm, headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, has provided award-winning strategic planning services to more than one hundred county, city, state, and regional destination programs and organizations.

Murdaugh was a member of the performance team that developed the convention/tourism industry's Marketing Performance Standards and return-on-investment (ROI) criteria for the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI). He is the recipient of the Lifetime Career Achievement Award from the Association of Travel Marketing Executives and is a former member of the board of the Destination Marketing Association International and the U.S. Travel Association.

His textbook, *Destination Marketing Insights: How to Boost Performance, Increase Customers and Maximize Market Share* is acknowledged as a major industry resource for destination marketing and management. Many of its best business practices have been incorporated into this plan. For more information, visit www.mmtourismmarketing.com.

The Strategic Planning Process

Creating this plan involved a number of key steps and inputs, highlighted by the perceptions, insights, and recommendations from numerous Hopewell / Prince George tourism industry businesses and government stakeholders.

- **A familiarization tour of Hopewell / Prince George was taken** to become better acquainted with the community's touristic assets.
- **Local market planning documents and programs were reviewed** from the Petersburg Area Regional Tourism (PART) program, along with available local press materials, economic impact data, tourism brochures, visitor publications, and the activities of the Hopewell / Prince George visitor welcome center.
- **A series of focus group discussions** conducted by the consultant provided additional insights from major business and community participants and the Chamber staff to identify current community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) for long range success.
- **Individual meetings were also taken with senior community leadership** to gain additional information and recommendations.
- **The board of directors met to provide insights** during a SWOC assessment.
- **Destination marketing industry trends** were reviewed and noted following review of the Organizational Profile Study of DMOs from the DMAI and its strategic planning *Futures Study*.

As these sessions and inputs were provided, principal strategic opportunities were listed and prioritized, followed by numerous others for future consideration. Major recommendations are noted throughout and include manpower and financial resource requirements, anticipated ROI wherever available, and suggested timelines for implementation when feasible.

Readers should consider this report an evolving process that will be modified and enhanced by the staff over the months and years ahead as plans are addressed and additional steps are taken to bring new initiatives to fruition. Following board review

and approval of this plan and its recommendations, the staff can begin the task of determining their priority programs for implementation and planning steps that support other needs and requirements.

Special Thanks to All Participants

Members of the Chamber Board of Directors who participated in the strategic SWOC assessment included Wendy Austin, Board President, Executive Director of FOLAR; Craig Richards, Board Secretary, Publisher of the Progress-Index; Bhavik Shah, Board Treasurer, Principal of Arihant Corp.; and other board members Beverly Epps, Patient Support Supervisor/Volunteer Coordinator, HCA John Randolph Medical Center; Dr. Vern Linguist, Dean, Richard Bland College; Heather McCall, Accounts Payable, Lucas McCall State Farm Agency; Joyce Lapsley, Client Solutions Manager Corporate Training and Consulting, Community College Workforce Alliance; Elizabeth Watts, Design Engineer–Turbines, Rolls-Royce, Crosspointe; Denny McDermott, Director of Construction, ITAC Engineers and Constructors; and Jeff Stoke, Deputy County Administrator, Prince George County.

Stakeholders who participated in the community SWOC meeting included Kat Rhodes, Leasing Consultant, 1200 Acqua Apartments; Traci Hackley, Manager, Baymont Inn & Suites Hotel; Anne Roy, Director of Sales & Marketing, Public Relations, Boathouse Restaurant; Risha Stebbins, Senior Program Officer and Coordinator of Communications, Cameron Foundation; Bobby Shah, Principal of Arihant, Inc., Chamber Board Member; Nathaniel Satterfield, H/PG Chamber Intern; Shirley Parker, Customer Service Rep., Chamber Staff; Polly Elmore, Chamber Contractor, PR Works; Becky McDonough, CEO, Chamber Staff; Rachel Chieppa, Director of Planning and Economic Development, Charles City County; Jake Elder, Economic Development Assistant, City of Hopewell; Joanna Korkos, COO, Destination Theater; Marshall Murdaugh, Facilitator; Charles Bonnell, Owner, FDM Tactical; Lauren Portluck, Marketing, EVB; Romeo Cristal Jr., Manager, Hampton Inn Petersburg/Hopewell; Dave Harless, Foundation Board President, Historic Hopewell Foundation; Jane McCullen, Past President, Historic Hopewell Foundation; Lillian Quintana, Administration Assistant, Hopewell Redevelopment & Housing; Kiffy Werkheiser, Development Program Officer, John Randolph Foundation; Melody Pind, Branch Manager, Virginia Commonwealth Bank; Rebecca Rose, Works with National Parks Service and Local Museums, Local Artist, Mayor’s Representative; Eliza Lamb, Ed.D., Prince George County Native; Martha Burton, Executive Director, PART; Donald Hunter, Supervisor, Prince George County; Jeff Stoke, Deputy County Administrator, PG County; Keith Rotzroll, Director of Parks and Recreation, PG County; John Kines, Former County Administrator/Resident, PG County; Tanja Brown, Business Development Manager, Virginia Commonwealth Bank, Local Resident; Wanda Johnson, Education Specialist, VSU–School of Agriculture; Jon

Young, Director of Corporate Relations, VSU–School of Business; William Robertson, Chairman, PG Board of Supervisors, PG County; Tracy Bradford, Education Director, U.S. Army Women’s Museum.

Those participating in the field trip to Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown, West Virginia, were Becky McDonough, CEO, H/PG Chamber of Commerce; Marshall Murdaugh, President, Marshall Murdaugh Marketing; Nathaniel Satterfield VATECH Student, H/PG Chamber Summer Intern; Wendy Austin, Executive Director, FOLAR; Heather McCall, Office Manager, Lucas McCall State Farm Insurance and Financial Services; Martha Burton, Assistant to the Director of Crater Planning District Commission, PART Executive Director; Risha Stebbins, Senior Program Officer and Coordinator of Communications, Cameron Foundation; Anne Roy, Director of Sales, Boathouse Restaurant; Joanna Korkos, COO, Destination Theater; Jake Elder, Economic Development Assistant, City of Hopewell; Audrey Blystone, Director of Business Growth, John Randolph Medical Center; Jeff Stoke, Deputy County Administrator, Prince George County; Jeff McIntyre, Director, Active RVA; Marianne Davis, Director, Shepherdstown Tourism; Meredith Wait, President, Shepherdstown Visitors Center Board of Directors.

Individual meetings provided input from Mr. Bill Robertson, Board Chairman, Prince George County Board of Supervisors, including his gracious assistance in providing the county familiarization tour; Hopewell Mayor Brenda Pelham and her willingness to meet at one of the area’s tourism assets, Weston Manor; Mr. Todd Graham, President, The Cameron Foundation; Ms. Martha Burton, Executive Director, PART; and her advertising firm, Joanne Williams, Williams Media.

Additional meetings and briefings included James Smithers, ASLA, VCU Urban Regional Planning Program, Studio 1 Class Spring 2015; and Tevya Griffin, Director of Neighborhood Assistance and Planning, City of Hopewell.

Other individual meetings or discussions were held with the Chamber’s tourism customer service counselor Shirley Parker, Martha Burton; Stefan Calos, Attorney Sands Anderson/Past President H/PG Chamber, Bruce Brockwell, Director of Commercial Lending, EVB/President Elect H/PG Chamber for 2017; Bobby Shah, Chamber Executive Board Member/EconoLodge-Hopewell, Rodeway Inn/PG, Steven Kent conference center at Exit 45 in PG County; Carol Bowman, Executive Director, PG Regional Heritage Center; Wendy Austin Executive Director FOLAR; Craig Richards, Chamber Executive Board Member and downtown business owner; Renee Chapline, Virginia’s Gateway Region President and CEO; and Lewis Rogers, Superintendent of the Petersburg National Battlefield.

Special thanks to Nathaniel Satterfield, Program Intern; Polly Elmore of PRWorks; and Gail Kostro, Administrative Assistant, who provided ongoing support for development of this plan through a number of important initiatives: research and other

data collection, meeting coordination for the field trip to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and development support for the SWOC Assessment Session for community stakeholders, etc.

In addition to meetings, tours, interviews, and phone conversations, we also reviewed previous reports and plans provided by PART, Prince George County, Virginia Tourism Corporation, City of Hopewell, the HPG Chamber of Commerce, and the City Point Master Plan from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Finally, special appreciation is due Hopewell / Prince George Chamber CEO Becky McDonough who graciously provided ongoing guidance and leadership support throughout its development.

Major Findings, Key Highlights, and Recommendations

- **Once considered little more than an invisible industry, domestic tourism spending in Hopewell / Prince George approached \$100M in 2014**—an estimated \$96.96 million, an increase of 5% over visitor expenditures of \$92.52 million in 2013. Local tourism-supported jobs totaled 960 for the combined communities, with a payroll of \$17.84 million. And tourist expenditures generated local taxes totaling \$1.01 million.
- **Hopewell / Prince George can also be the recipients of significantly higher economic benefits of local tourism**—including new visitors, visitor receipts, additional tax revenues, and local jobs generated through tourism spending. To do so, requires an expanded tourism marketing program of the regional chamber, pending availability of modest, consistent government funding to produce the program.
- **A new collaboration of local tourism stakeholder businesses** is required if the community is to produce productive and ongoing new partnerships and alliances for long range success.
- **Top of mind visitor awareness of Hopewell / Prince George is deficient**, as are their travel sites and amenities—a necessary first marketing step in motivating new customer interest and desire to visit.
- **Although history and heritage is the number-one motivational appeal for the region, there's *so much more*** to discover and experience in Hopewell / Prince George—from amateur sports to music and outdoor recreational potentials along the James and Appomattox Rivers.

- **The Chamber Board should formally accept this strategic plan** and begin to expand its destination marketing program under the chamber's tourism office.
- **Then the Board should request that Hopewell / Prince George designate the chamber's tourism office as their official DMO**, while committing to appropriate funding for the tourism office going forward that will deliver quantifiable results.

An Introduction to Destination Marketing Organizations

Today, throughout America there are thousands of DMOs charged with representing a specific destination, be it a city, county, region, state, or country—with each one supporting the long-term development of communities through a travel and tourism strategy.

What is a DMO's value to a community, visitor, business traveler, or meeting planner?

DMOs provide a special consolidated approach to marketing—bringing together all aspects of tourism under one effective umbrella program that produces incremental visitor business and related positive economic impacts for their communities.

For visitors, DMOs are like a key to the city. As an unbiased resource, they can serve as a broker or an official point of contact for convention, business, and leisure travelers. They assist planners with meeting preparation and encourage business travelers and visitors alike to visit local historic, cultural, and recreational sites. Most services provided by DMOs are free.

If DMOs don't charge for their services, how do they receive income for marketing and operations?

For most services, DMOs do not charge their clients—the visitor, the business traveler, and the meeting planner. Instead, most DMOs are funded through combinations of tourism hotel occupancy taxes, membership dues, improvement districts, and government resources.

Why are tourism and meetings important?

Travel and tourism enhances the quality of life for a local community by providing jobs, bringing in tax dollars for improvement of government services and infrastructure, and attracting facilities like restaurants, shops, festivals, and cultural and sporting venues that cater to both visitors and local residents.

Travel and tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. It is responsible for 9% of global GDP and 1 in 11 jobs worldwide. Indeed, travel and tourism is an economic engine and DMOs are important key drivers. That's why there are now thousands of DMOs operating across the country. The most effective ones operate with best business practices that allow them to determine the quantifiable value of their marketing work's positive efforts for their destination.

How are DMOs structured?

Nearly all of these tourism organizations are nonprofit entities. Many operate as Chambers of Commerce or divisions of chambers, while others function as city, county, state, and federal departments, but most of them are stand-alone 501 c6 or c3 independent, non-profit organizations. Whatever their organizational structure, the DMO serves and supports the interests of both government and industry through their public-private partnerships.

How are DMOs funded?

Fully 90% of U.S. DMOs receive their principal operational funding from the local transient occupancy tax (sometimes referred to as "the bed tax") that is paid by overnight visitors who stay in hotels.

Throughout America, the average DMO receives about 65% of the community's collected hotel occupancy tax, according to the DMAI. Those monies are then reinvested annually by the DMO to produce marketing programs intended to generate still more visitors and economic benefits back to their communities, including visitor expenditures that are re-spent locally, tax revenue for government usages, and new jobs generated and sustained by ongoing visitor spending.

What is the challenge for Hopewell / Prince George?

Unfortunately, while both the City of Hopewell and Prince George County have initiated many recent programs of support for their tourism industry, this traditional, generally acceptable funding model has not been fostered by either jurisdiction.

For example, for the fiscal year of 2016, Hopewell City estimates it will receive about \$700,000 from its 8% hotel transient occupancy tax and Prince George will receive about \$397,680 from its 5% transient occupancy tax for a total of \$1,097,680.

Had a local DMO been operating on behalf of Hopewell / Prince George and receiving the average 65% of tax for reinvestment of tax dollars in effective destination marketing programs, the DMO would have received about \$713,089. And if the DMO had produced an ROI of 10-to-1 in visitor receipts from tourism marketing—a very modest return that many DMOs can produce today—the results would be more than \$7

million in new, recirculated visitor dollars for Hopewell / Prince George visitor businesses—a tremendous tourism investment return.

Through this strategic plan, and the hopeful support of future adequate public and private sector funding, the Hopewell / Prince George tourism program will be capable of emulating other successful tourism DMOs—delivering quantifiable performance productivity results from these staff-driven marketing initiatives:

- Visitor Welcome Center services
- Advertising (paid media)
- Its website
- Tourism group sales
- Media PR and publicity (earned media)
- Social media

The Profile of Today's Successful Tourism DMO

According to leading destination marketing experts, there are three major areas or success criteria that, when taken collectively, provide generally recognized standards for evaluating today's successful visitor DMO.

Criterion I

The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) delivers performance of economic development benefits in fulfilling its core mission.

First, DMO productivity results, or "economic impacts," produced from the performance marketing work of the organization based on the attraction of incremental visitors through various market segments are

- Quantifiable
- Forecast whenever feasible in advance as a series of goals
- Reportable to business leadership, stakeholders, and other community constituents on an ongoing bases.

In other words, the DMO delivers and forecasts its future successful achievements to its constituent community.

This is the performance model we recommend in clarifying the economic impacts the tourism program can achieve for the community. Recommendations for program productivity enhancement are offered later in this plan.

Criterion II

The DMO provides marketing, management, and operational excellence through its financial oversight, market research and planning, business execution, and evaluation steps.

As such, the agency strives to deliver the highest standards of performance in the areas of

- Economic impact results against market segments
- Successfully planned, designed, and executed marketing initiatives and a business standard annual marketing plan
- Reporting and accountability systems
- Long- and short-term planning, including this document
- Performance goal-setting, tracking, and delivery
- Staff and program performance evaluation, professional staff development, and employee compensation and recognition
- Community partnership and alliance-building to galvanize tourism industry stakeholder interests, stretch resources, and leverage success.

This is the core work of the successful DMO under the direction of the executive director / president, and the most well regarded employ best business practice standards for their management systems.

Again, the tourism program for Hopewell / Prince George is fully capable of successfully emulating this criterion through professional accreditation from the DMAI—the organization comprised of industry convention and visitor bureaus and other state, local, and national tourism offices.

Criterion III

The DMO, through its tourism program, is the recognized leader in the community for effective tourism development.

On the surface, this last criterion may appear to be extremely subjective. However, the assessment of the tourism program should be impartially made by asking all of its diverse stakeholders to address and evaluate their relationships with the agency. (This future requirement is covered in detail under the Opportunities section, *see Stakeholders.*)

Today's tourism DMO should be well regarded for its local leadership position. Stakeholders (i.e., government, hotels, attractions, art and cultural institutions, related businesses, and other associations) should look to the organization as the focal point for destination marketing, strategic tourism planning, coordinating community stakeholder efforts, research, and long range visioning.

In other words, through leadership of the Board of Directors and executive director, the CVB's role is that of the voice of the industry, the inspiration, the visionary, the chief lobbying organization, and the chief cheerleading organization. Chamber board members and their tourism advisory board should assist in closely monitoring and managing key long range strategic planning issues affecting the destination such as the need for competitive market funding, infrastructure requirements, branding, visitor amenities, and service issues.

The Chamber board and its staff leadership enjoy an excellent reputation with government leaders. The Chamber should also prepare to expand its collaboration with tourism industry stakeholders throughout the community that will maximize manpower and financial resources and results. Recommended programs are included under the Opportunities section of this plan.

The DMO Tourism Mission Statement

Our first step in this strategic planning process is development of the mission statement for the tourism program of the Chamber.

The mission should serve as the mirror for the tourism function and its organization, reflecting the clear reason for its existence—and why it operates on behalf of the community's tourism industry. Because all future business planning and developments that follow should subscribe to it as the foundation of purpose, it is critical that there be clarity and consensus around the mission.

The mission statement should be concise and clear—no more than a sentence or two in length, so that it is easily stated, remembered, and understood. It should focus solely on the reason for its existence, what the organization is, and the fundamental goal it is designed to achieve.

It should be market-driven and responsible for achieving higher or incremental volumes of business. This will confirm that the office achieves, as a result of its work, quantifiable performance impacts in firm numbers and later forecasts them for future delivery as part of a traditional marketing and business plan. This, after all, is what destination marketing is really all about.

The Hopewell / Prince George tourism office also serves as a public–private partnership on behalf of its communities, working to enhance the economic prosperity of Hopewell Prince George and their residents.

Thus, the mission statement, with board approval, may then read:

The Hopewell / Prince George Tourism Office of the Chamber is the official destination tourism marketing organization for the city and county, providing a public and private partnership that is responsible for increasing visitor business and the resulting economic prosperity for all of its residents.

Tourism Office Core Objectives

The following seven broad-based core marketing objectives flow from the mission statement and fully clarify and support the parameters of all its work:

1. **Generate positive awareness of Hopewell / Prince George as a destination of choice for travelers.** (This objective deals with developing brand awareness as an initial step in the marketing process and may involve tactical work such as public travel shows, billboards, and media publicity.)
2. **Stimulate interest and desire on the part of consumers to take action and visit.** (This second marketing objective may include the tactical work of advertising, media publicity, web development, direct sales, signs collateral.)
3. **Maximize visitor length and frequency of stay to increase economic generation and enhance the value of the visitor's experience.** (Visitor welcome center services, kiosks, sales training, and product development applications are important strategies under this objective.)
4. **Increase the business volume of local tourism business partners and constituents.** (Stakeholder partnership programs can be addressed under this objective.)
5. **Proactively support and provide the development of additional tourism products and services to enhance the visitor experience.** (Infrastructure considerations supported by Chamber and tourism office leadership are fulfilled with this objective.)
6. **Maintain a research base for the community's tourism industry.** (Market and marketing research, such as economic impact studies, visitor profile studies, stakeholder assessments, strategic plans and other customer studies such as meeting planners and tour operators would be potential components.)
7. **Create positive awareness, support, and participation for the DMO's marketing programs.** (A comprehensive stakeholder and community relations plan, including partnership collaboration opportunities, may be included under this objective.)

All future plans—including a strategic plan, an industry standard annual marketing plan, and individual staff performance objectives—should flow from the mission statement and these broad-based DMO objectives.

Then each objective can be carried out by a series of strategies, which are followed by specific work programs or tactics that can be modified over time, based on changing market conditions, available budgets, and other evolving needs.

The DMO Tourism Business Process

To support the mission and the organization's principal objectives, the following new business process should be memorialized in writing:

The Hopewell / Prince George Tourism Business Process is to consistently deliver a year-round, research-based, customer-focused, market-driven, and brand-oriented program that produces quantifiable performance success. It also provides a unique consolidated marketing approach by bringing together all tourism components under one effective umbrella program—including hotels, attractions, cultural institutions, restaurants, retail, and outdoor recreation—that can produce incremental travel to the destination and economic benefits in tax revenue and local jobs generated and sustained through travel receipts.

Principal markets include group and leisure individual travel, and manpower and financial resources are deployed against those markets that are most capable of generating the greatest economic results for the community. Because of the optimum return from those staying overnight in hotels, primary efforts are focused there.

Recommendation: *The mission statement, cascading objectives, and organizational business process should be memorialized in future business plans and acknowledged by everyone affiliated with the DMO.*

Destination Marketing: Delivering the Consolidated Approach

Hopewell / Prince George tourism should consistently fulfill the role of umbrella marketing under which stand the extensive collection of businesses that promote their own products and services and are involved in the servicing of travelers. Many refer to this process as a consolidated approach to tourism marketing. Business partners under this umbrella include transportation, accommodations, foodservice, retail, attractions, and outdoor and cultural heritage agencies.

DMO consolidated efforts have consistently provided greater strength, unity, and leveraged results for everyone, rather than segmented, fragmented program efforts

that provide much less impact and success. And working in concert with the DMO, this alliance of travel businesses can collectively generate greater returns for the community, rather than through independent, individual efforts.

The marketing task of the organization—as announced in the mission statement—is to incrementally increase new visitation and its economic benefits to the community. This responsibility calls for strategic marketing initiatives that move the potential customer—or visitor—through the cycle of awareness, interest, desire, and ultimately to action in trip planning and visitation.

The concept of consolidated marketing also recognizes that a stronger marketing program for a destination is realized when all visitor interests, market segments, and regional interests are effectively combined to leverage an expanded program. Stand-alone marketing by individual market segments, such as cultural tourism and the arts, restaurants, nightlife, or special leisure markets are rarely effective in producing significant results. However, combining these various elements in united initiatives offers multiple opportunities and a far greater chance of achieving optimum efficiency. At the same time, this concerted effort provides greater funding resources to reach multiple and mutual objectives.

Other Marketing Principals

Here are some additional important guiding principles and recommendations for Hopewell / Prince George tourism marketing.

1. **Target future efforts against the destination's major markets.** Allocate resources in direct proportion to the most important markets that can produce the greatest amount of return for Hopewell / Prince George. For example, if 80% of the lucrative overnight market is within your 300-mile radius, place 80% of your effort against this audience. Go fishing where the fish are biting, so to speak—placing the major weight of program advertising, direct mail, media publicity, etc. in those areas that provide the greatest return. Then accordingly, limit spending on emerging or secondary markets based on their current percentages of return.
2. **Sell to Hopewell / Prince George's strengths.** Consistently focus communications messages on the community's top attractions, appeals, and benefits as confirmed by consumer research of travelers. This serves to motivate more customers who will become aware of other destination amenities after they've made the decision to visit.
3. **The greatest motivational appeal today for this community, and perhaps for the next twenty years or more, is history.** 400 years of American history as most nearby tourism marketers consistently say. We believe

Hopewell / Prince George can profit from this tried and true appeal with a theme line that provides the historic motivation in spades.

It is:

Hopewell and Prince George
At the Crossroads of American History

For many travel consumers, the term *At the Crossroads* defines a special time or place when major events altered the course of human history. So it was at nearby Jamestown, Henricus, and later at Yorktown, when a new country was born—and later still at City Point, where Grant and Lincoln planned for the war's end and a new future for America.

In addition, a secondary but growing visitor appeal is that there is

So much more to discover and experience in Hopewell & Prince George, from amateur sports to live music at the Beacon, emerging new restaurants, and outdoor recreational opportunities along the James and Appomattox Rivers.

4. Focus on the destination's unique selling propositions. These form the basis of the community's tourism personality. Use them to full advantage, rather than relying on generic appeals. A major example will be the new major public art gateway attractions that will soon be installed in both Hopewell and Prince George.

5. Avoid being an island. Sometimes DMOs feel compelled to only market visitor amenities that are within their jurisdictional borders. But consumers don't care much about political boundary lines, so Hopewell / Prince George tourism can further enhance its drawing power through the *market annexing* of nearby attractions and services that will complement its visitor product for the customer. Examples include Shirley and Berkley plantations and the City of Henricus.

6. Use testimonials whenever feasible, instead of what can be perceived as stale promotional copy. Some of the best testimonials will be those found in travel stories from travel writers or well-known celebrities. For example, Natchitoches, Louisiana, touted itself as "Naturally Perfect." But then Oprah Winfrey visited, calling the city, "The Best Small Town in the USA." (Now the DMO shares her observation with everybody.)

7. Replace existing copy points in brochures and ads with sensory approaches that romance the brand, placing the visitor right in the middle of each attraction. Here are several examples.

Follow the footsteps of history...

Hear the roar of the James and Appomattox Rivers as they converge at City Point, where General Ulysses S. Grant directed the Siege of Petersburg from his headquarters at Appomattox Plantation. Walk in the footsteps of President Abraham Lincoln who visited here just short weeks before his assassination. Then step back in time at Weston Plantation, the stately 18th century manor house and its three floors of period antiques and furnishings. And before leaving, don't miss their special gift shop with its contemporary one-of-a-kind little memories to take home.

And so much more...

Be sure to see one of Virginia's little-known architectural gems, a collection of homes built from kits featured in the Sears and Roebuck catalog during the '20s and '30s.

Additional staff resource information: The book *Fundamentals of Destination Management and Marketing*, produced by DMAI and the American Hotel and Lodging Foundation, edited by Rich Harrill, available from Amazon.

The SWOC Assessment

Two focus group sessions were held to provide inputs and opinions. One focus group comprised Chamber board members, and the other was attended by key tourism stakeholders. Each session employed a traditional SWOC assessment process as participants provided their perceptions regarding community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

Individual meetings with senior community leadership provided additional thoughts. Then comments from each session were incorporated in this collective listing, offering current observations about Hopewell / Prince George's tourism industry.

STRENGTHS

Hopewell / Prince George's community and Chamber strengths are multi-faceted, fueled by optimism and a shared vision for a productive and bright future. They include

- 400 years of American history
- Civil War history enthusiasts attracted first to City Point and then to other nearby war sites
- Two rivers, the James and Appomattox, bind Hopewell and Prince George
- No major negative perceptions that impede our ability to tell a compelling, positive story

- Leadership from the Chamber board of directors and its emergence as a catalyst for tourism expansion
- A cooperative spirit between Hopewell and Prince George government leadership and their partnership support with the Chamber
- Friendly residents
- Undiscovered amenities and visitor sites that can collectively motivate new visitors
- Major interstates draw tourism feeder markets to our community
- Government tourism partnership support from both Hopewell and Prince George
- We're a friendly community
- We have the benefits of a small town vibe
- Hopewell's emerging personality as a playful city
- An abundance of outdoor sports facilities (Atwater soccer, Mathis baseball, Scott Park, Temple Park, JEJ Moore)
- River amenities and events: sports, fishing, boating, environmental stewardship, etc.
- Major amenities so close by: the Metro areas, the beach, mountains, airports, amusement parks, lakes, etc.
- The Appomattox Regional Library System headquarters
- Organizations and associations form a backbone of stakeholders such as Historic Hopewell and the Prince George Historical Society

WEAKNESSES

The weaknesses that impede successful progress for Hopewell / Prince George were noted:

- The Chamber tourism program requires new funding for marketing, making it difficult to effectively compete in the tourism marketplace against a growing list of successful competitive destinations
- Relatively low consumer awareness of the area's visitor amenities, its facilities, and services. It is this missing first step of visitor *awareness* that must be expanded in order to lead to customer *interest* and *desire* to final *action* that generates new visitors
- Lack of focus on quality of life issues for the community
- Lack of awareness of hotel diversity
- A new concentration on tourism office expansion, communication, and collaboration
- The lack of adequate local way-finding signage that could brand the community through the diversity of its facilities and amenities
- A general deficiency in master planning, particularly in tourism development
- Tolerant of status quo
- Depressed housing market

- There is a perception that there's not much to do around here
- The lack of comprehensive visitor amenity signage throughout the community
- Lack of a digital media strategy in local papers
- Stakeholder support needed for producing potential partnerships that could bring additional business
- Lack of research market and marketing data to guide tourism planning
- A serious lack of signage of visitor sites and services
- A limited awareness of our tourism industry and the significant benefits it achieves for residents and our community
- Poverty/low demographics
- Lack of market data and information for market planning and development

CHALLENGES

The challenges or impediments affecting the community and tourism were then listed:

- Ultimately, overcoming any misperceptions or cynicism that Hopewell / Prince George isn't a viable visitor destination requires diligence in local marketing and communications
- Lack of local awareness of new positive developments here today and the visitor experience provided by our community
- Hard to connect to community: lack of a local radio station and splintered readership of print products
- Internet connectivity in area is not fully operable
- Lingering perception of local environmental pollution and factory odors
- There are negative perceptions about Hopewell on Wikipedia
- Loitering in downtown Hopewell
- The Fort Lee museums could be a bigger community asset

Major Strategic Opportunities

The following fifteen priority opportunities, which comprise the center piece of this plan, are recommended in detail, followed by a general listing of additional issues for ongoing discussion and future consideration.

It is a truism that underfunded tourism marketing programs such as Hopewell / Prince George have resulting low consumer top of mind awareness—a critically important required first step for producing customer interest and desire to take action and visit. That is why we have initially focused on creating brand-enhancing programs that provide positive destination awareness. The first five of them are also categorized as product development opportunities for the community.

1. Develop *Discover Hopewell Prince George*—an exciting, motivational new community-wide wayfinding signage and branding initiative that will produce heightened awareness of local visitor sites and produce more visitor attendance, while extending length of stay and encouraging repeat visitation. This is also an important product development opportunity.

Building visitor awareness, interest, and visitation to Hopewell / Prince George's many attractions and visitor amenities is best served by this recommended new flexible, drive-it-yourself *Discover Hopewell Prince George* program that would incorporate the community's area attractions, parks, cultural museums, outdoor recreational facilities, and other amenities.

Indeed, there is no more important and productive destination brand development program for Hopewell / Prince George than this initiative.

The overriding objective of this program is to enhance the value of the visitor experience by introducing both area residents and visitors to the wealth of community leisure travel amenities and resources that are available here. This program makes the powerful statement that Hopewell / Prince George is collectively a valued place of major visitor interest.

Over time, this initiative will have a positive impact in extending customer length of stay in the area, thus increasing visitor expenditures as well. In addition, it will provide a new, strong brand promise for new visitors—as the home of so many travel amenities now waiting to be discovered.

There are three required components that will synergistically work together to achieve optimal benefits:

1. Discover Hopewell / Prince George Signage—A comprehensive ambitious new system of wayfinding signs on secondary roads, each headed by the active headline, *Discover Hopewell Prince George*. Most signs would feature up to three major sites ahead, one above the other (each with directional arrows) guiding visitors throughout the area. This new initiative not only provides a new great brand promise for the community, delivering dozens of experiences to enjoy. It will also constitute a new product for the tourism industry, as well as for local residents who are hosts to the friends and relatives visitor market of the community.

This signage galvanizes the community with more than thirty diverse historic, cultural, retail, outdoor sport sites, and facilities, including:

Visitor Welcome Center
City Point
Grant's Headquarters
Appomattox Plantation
Weston Plantation
Nearby attractions:
Henricus Historical Park
Shirley Plantation
Berkley Plantation
Prince George Historical Center
Downtown Hopewell
The Firemen's Museum
Capital Bike Trail
Marinas (public and private 4)
Park and recreational services
Public golf courses
Merchants Hope Church
Sports parks having soccer, baseball, and softball fields
Fort Lee
U.S. Army Women's Museum
U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum
The Beacon Theatre
City Point National Cemetery
Sears catalogue kit homes
New Gateway Iconic Art Installations (2) in Hopewell and Prince George
other potential considerations:
Shopping Centers: Cavalier Square, the Crossings, River's Bend

2. Brochure Distribution—next, each participating attraction/site should agree to cross-distribute the brochures of other *Discover Hopewell Prince George* attraction participants. For this purpose, a special brochure rack, paid for by a major local sponsor such as a credit card company, bank, etc. should feature the Discover Hopewell Prince George program logo and be placed at each participating venue.

3. New Discover Hopewell Prince George Visitor Brochure—To complete the program, a designated special section in a new four-panel omnibus tourism brochure—should highlight the drive-it-yourself program and list all attractions/sites/areas. Motor coach tour companies will also appreciate the invaluable directional guidance afforded by this program.

In addition, the tourism office should support this important marketing initiative on an ongoing basis with a special section on its website, in media publicity, and other distribution channels.

Recommendation: *Form a Chamber Task Force for sharing this proposed concept with Mr. Todd Graham, president of the Cameron Foundation, along with Hopewell and Prince George government officials. We are familiar with foundations that have produced tourism signage partnerships for communities, most notably the American Express Foundation. Decades ago, other nearby communities have been major partners in development of comprehensive tourism signage programs on local roadways. Examples have included Hampton, Norfolk, and Richmond. We envision the cost of this program to be in the \$200,000–\$250,000 range. About 200 signs may potentially be required for this initiative.*

2. Implement new Visitor Welcome Center enhancements to generate higher volumes of visitors, extend customer length of stay, and produce additional hotel room nights. This is also another product development opportunity.

Throughout the national tourism industry, visitor center travel counsellors are recognized for their roles in hosting and enhancing the value of the visitor's experience and encouraging repeat visitation. Less understood is their significant role as an economic development initiative that can actually produce increased visitor length of stay, hotel room night generation, and resulting visitor receipts.

Some communities have now learned that when their travel counselor specialists responsibility guide and help plan the customer's experience, they can consistently build new profits for their areas by extending travel visits, while providing greater value to the customer.

Issues and Challenges

The Hopewell / Prince George Welcome Center now services about 5,000 visitors annually (and should also begin to record the number of serviced visitor parties as well).

Through a number of enhancements made to this program, we believe the center will be capable of at least doubling its visitors to 10,000 annually and also assist about 20% of them in booking at least 2,000 visitor parties for new Hopewell and Prince George hotel room nights. Here is what is required.

1. **Both the current 295 south and north signs need copy revisions** regarding the name and operating days for the center, but we understand the price for revising the signage, according to state representations, is an exorbitant \$45,000. We suggest that alternatives might be reached through development of a Chamber Welcome Center Task Force and a meeting with appropriate legislative representatives who may assist in ameliorating this issue.

2. **New signage on Route 10 and other strategic locations** should also be afforded as part of the *Discover Hopewell Prince George* comprehensive signage program.

3. **Targeted promotional copy for the welcome center should be prominently added on both the Chamber website and in appropriate publications**, such as a new four-fold tourism visitor brochure. Suggested copy should read, "Be sure to make your first stop the Visitor Welcome Center, where you'll find helpful counsellors ready to help plan your Hopewell Prince George experience!" (directions to follow).

4. **Several structural enhancements and new visual elements** should be made to the welcome center interior.

The large and cumbersome existing floor unit and desk is a hindrance and barrier in developing rapport with guests. It should be replaced with two, side by side tall desk tops, around 4 feet by 3 feet, and 8 feet apart, that will allow the counsellor and visitors to confer together.

Behind the desks, and against the lower back wall, should be about 30 to 50 racks spaces, each filled with nearby local tourism brochures that are in easy reach of the counsellor.

Above the racks, at least 10 large poster-size back-lit color photographs of major attractions (including City Point, the Beacon Theatre, and others) should be placed, along with supporting short photo captions under each.

A carousel movable circular brochure rack should also be placed adjacent to the current television, which could provide a four-minute continuous loop video similar to those produced by the downtown library staff. This element allows visitors to explore the center a bit if the counsellor is busy with other customers.

Recommendation: *Reach out to local carpentry/homebuilding firms, furniture stores and photographers, requesting their public service assistance in refitting the center. In return, provide wall plaques that thank them for their support of tourism with construction enhancements, furniture, photo displays, etc.*

5. **A simple written planning model is required that guides counselors** in how to best assist the visitor in first determining their needs and then providing an extended itinerary based on other visitor interests that have the potential to extend length of stay. In so doing, travel specialists help deliver more unanticipated new accommodation room night reservations, more tickets to attractions, and restaurant meals.

A new travel counselling model

We encourage the staff to follow and memorialize this implementation in writing for new employees and potential volunteers.

An introductory section should include the new mission statement for increasing visitor length of stay, enhancing the value of the visitors experience, encouraging overnight stays, and return trips. This will set the stage for a disciplined process of successful operations. Guidelines for successful counseling include the following:

- **First, capture the traveler**—say “hello,” make eye contact, extend a warm welcome, then ask where they’re from and if this is their first trip to the area (now you’re beginning to build rapport—a needed commodity to get the job done).
- **Start by giving them what they want**—pull together the experiences and the places they wish to visit. Then it’s time to find out how you can really help (not just them, but your tourism program). Listen to not only what they say, but also what *they don’t say*. For instance, they’re interested in outdoor recreation and a particular site—perhaps they’re also interested in other related places and things to see and do, but they just don’t know about them because (as you just found out) it’s their first trip to the area.
- **Then use the supermarket model**—now that you’ve found out their principal interests, begin developing a special itinerary for them with what’s compatible from the nearby shelf of attractions that includes more of the same kinds of visual and sensory experiences—and don’t forget to make room for lunch and dinner and the array of dining options from which they’ll make their choices.
- **Learn to read upside down**—so the consumer can follow right along. Here, you want to take the customer on a planned adventure by placing an area travel map between you and them. And as you plan and validate their interests, you can maintain eye contact while introducing your new guests to Hopewell / Prince George through a personalized, planned tour route highlighted with a yellow marker.

Evaluating ROI Success Recommendation: *After the operational plan is developed, a mechanism for evaluating success should be developed—including results of producing increased length of stay, additional room night generation, and resulting revenue to the community. The analysis can be provided by either a marketing firm or*

initiated as a marketing or research class project by a nearby college or university. The process involves intercepting travelers after they've exited the center, asking them questions about their travel intentions before entering, and then after receiving travel counseling from your staff. Also to be considered would be a post card survey provided for them to fill out and return when they arrive home. If administered properly, this method of operation can produce positive and surprising results: double-digit percentage increases in new room night and extended stays.

What usually occurs is that the more time each travel counsellor has with each visitor, the longer will be the duration of his or her extended trip. So it stands to reason that we should also find new methods for holding visitors longer in the center, allowing them to linger around the well-placed brochure kiosk or the photographs' and video's visual orientation.

3. Maximize PR/publicity support for future community public art—the third product development opportunity.

The world of public art—the kind of cultural nourishment usually reserved for major metropolitan areas—will soon be a compelling part of the region's landscape, thanks to four significant outdoor installations that are planned throughout the Tri-Cities area.

The Cameron Foundation is partnering with several municipalities to conceive and implement this ambitious program, which consists of four iconic gateway projects.

Today, public art has become so universal because it is open to everyone, and not just for those who visit galleries and museums. By definition, public art is art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all.

Public art is significant within the art world, among curators, commissioning bodies, and practitioners of public art, to whom it signifies a working practice of site specificity, community involvement, and collaboration.

The first installation beginning later this year will be located at Interstate 95, Exit 45 in Prince George County. Others will then follow in Hopewell at the end of the Route 10 Bridge over the Appomattox River, and two others in Petersburg at Interstate 95, Exit 52 and on University Boulevard at the Appomattox River near Virginia State University.

Recommendation: *This is a significant development for the region—a truly "wow factor" of new tourism product—that should stimulate a great deal of ongoing public interest and enthusiasm. In terms of tourism marketing, these four iconic public pieces will provide new attractions that will draw much visitor attention. They could also be a*

major hook for travel writers seeking information about the region's emerging new brand.

The development of these installations should be an ongoing component of the Chamber visitor program's proposed media publicity and travel writer familiarization programs, as the region's landscape is further enhanced through public art.

4. Harnessing the power of the James and Appomattox Rivers for outdoor recreational tourism opportunities can be achieved through a program of new package tour development.

The recent familiarization trip to Harpers Ferry by chamber and tourism stakeholders was quite illuminating. For despite the region's mature tourism appeals that draw hundreds of thousands of annual visitors, there are some inspiring comparisons with Hopewell/Prince George; both communities have strong motivational benefits and travel opportunities for history and outdoor recreation. In addition, both destinations are blessed with two major rivers.

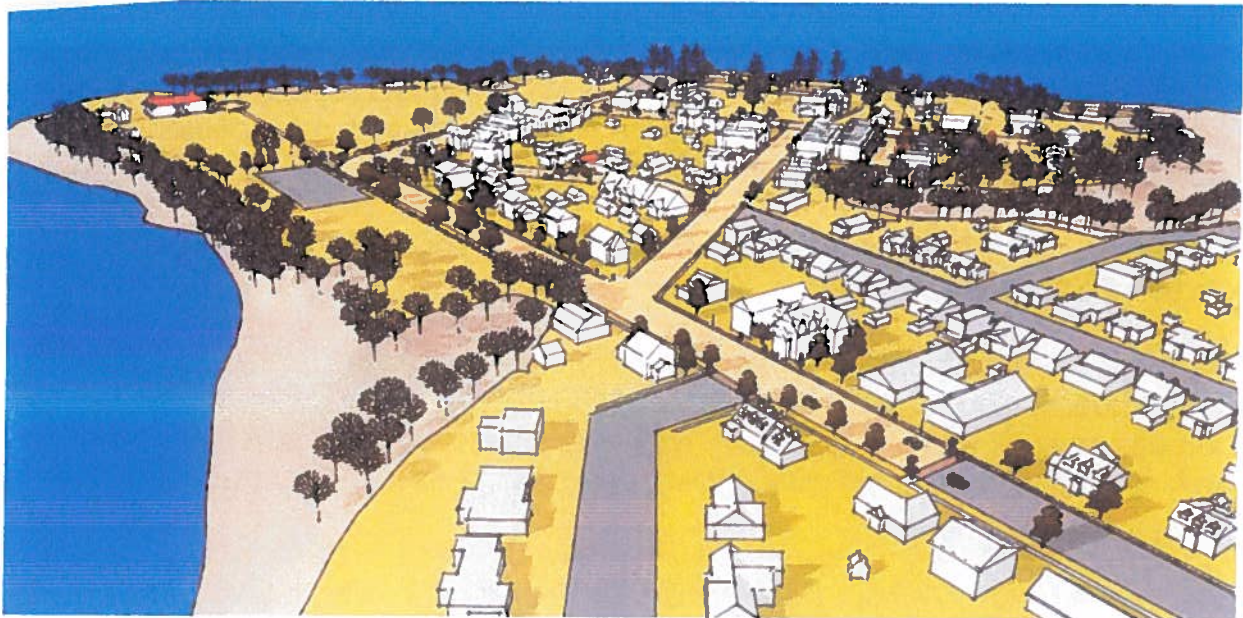
With Harpers Ferry situated at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, there are tremendous outdoor recreational opportunities there that fulfill most enthusiasts needs: white water rafting, tubing, zip line tours, aerial adventure parks, kayaking, canoeing, stand up paddle boards, and fishing—a true smorgasbord of choices and visitor benefits.

Recommendation: *Perhaps the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers could provide insights for the development of outdoor recreation along the James and Appomattox Rivers. The chamber should meet with officials of the Virginia Tourism Corporation to determine opportunities for possible development grants that would involve both river outfitters and tour operator providers.*

One strategy would be development of potential package programs that would be promoted on the tourism office website, as well as through local stakeholders such as hoteliers, marinas, and other interested parties and through listings in new regional visitor guides and through advertising options as noted later.

5. The City Point master plan provides an exciting new vision for tomorrow that must be nurtured and guided if it is to come to fruition.

In the spring of 2015, this master plan was prepared for The City of Hopewell by Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Urban Regional Planning Program's Spring 2015 Studio I class under the direction of Instructor Mr. James C. Smither, ASLA.



The program's vision statement explains the potential opportunity of the plan:
The City Point Historic District becomes a premier place to live, visit, and invest by leveraging the many historic and natural attributes of the district.

The stated purpose of this plan is to improve the appearance of the district and its attractiveness as a destination for both tourists and residents, which in turn may drive up the rate of owner occupancy and increase home values.

This plan provides practical and implementable solutions in order to achieve a vision for the City Point Historic District to become a premier place to live, visit, and invest by leveraging the many historic and natural attributes of the district and has seven specific goals to support it. These include enhanced identity, increased presence through wayfinding, streetscape improvements, designating a historic walking trail, creating community gathering places, developing business opportunities, and forming a neighborhood civic association.

Timelines for various implementation steps for plan development stretch from 2015 to 2027. However, we are told the city council is redefining future steps. In the meantime, we sense that very few in the community have any recognition of this potential development.

Recommendation: *This project could arguably become one of the region's most significant touristic product development opportunities. We envision the Chamber's role as that of an interested community broker who would continue to monitor and bring together interested parties with potential roles in future synergistic planning, which may then best move the plan along.*

To this end, we met with Ms. Renee Chapline, president and CEO of Virginia's Gateway Region, the area's Economic Development Organization. She is an excellent resource for potentially matching the City Points development requirements with a number of interested development firms. Contact her at rchapline@gatewayregion.com, ph. 804-732-8971.

We also reached out to another major resource, one of America's top tourism master planners John Kaatz, the principal of CSL International of Minneapolis, who has produced more than 500 major studies for convention, sports, and leisure development. His recent assignments have included community tourism master plans for San Antonio, Kansas City, and Oklahoma City. Mr. Kaatz would be available for a brief Hopewell-sponsored site review and meeting to determine a variety of potential opportunities for collaboration and support. Mr. Kaatz can be reached at jkaatz@cslintl.com, ph. 612-309-9798 or 612-294-2001. Next, we recommend that the Chamber contact Ms. Tevia Griffin, Hopewell's director of Planning and Zoning to confirm future steps for implementation that may move the program along.

6. Building the Visit Hopewell / Prince George tourism brand through new writer familiarization tours that will produce millions of dollars in annual earned media publicity for the destination.

It is important to recognize that destination brands are best built through media publicity and not through advertising.

The best-selling book, *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR* explains this best: it is because of public relations high consumer acceptability as the most believable of all communications media. Thus, messages that appear on editorial pages in stories—not purchased advertising—get much higher marks with consumers for credibility.

Our task, therefore, is to build the Hopewell / Prince George tourism brand with PR and then support it through advertising, the Internet, and other marketing initiatives.

This PR media publicity function must not be a reactive program, but rather a planned, proactive, and ongoing initiative based on predetermined goals, strategies, and work tactics to be achieved—along with measurable results.

There is no more effective marketing opportunity for Hopewell / Prince George tourism than the media publicity initiative of influencing potential customers to visit. Through this new initiative, the DMO will have the capability *to produce hundreds of thousands of positive media impressions annually with potential travelers that are worth more than the dollar amount of its entire budget.*

It should be accomplished by a two-tiered collaborative approach.

1. First, there should be a proactive in-house plan of ongoing publicity development.

2. Second, there should be a collaborative PR program provided by a professional publicity firm that specializes in travel and tourism and has a long-term track record of success in working with travel writers—principally those members of the society of American Travel Writers who will provide optimal coverage for changing consumer attitudes and stimulating interest in visiting Hopewell / Prince George.

Another major responsibility of the PR firm should be assistance in development of a plan to guide the staff in its supportive efforts.

Major components for inclusion in that plan are

- Reaching the marketplace based on a new Visitor Market Study (as later outlined)
- Measuring media relations performance: ROI (quantifying the value of publicity based on ad lineage rates for the column inches received)
- Evaluating program success (through an independent clipping services contracted to the DMO)
- Conducting writer outreach (the sales call process required to reach and determine writer needs)
- Producing familiarization tours and site inspections for writers
- Generating publicity releases and determining placement
- Database management
- Options for increasing publicity
- Reporting, tracking, and analyzing media inquiries
- Reaching journalists on the CVB website

- Photo maintenance and purchasing
- Building program support
- Merchandizing results to the community
- Establishing PR roundtables (with local PR stakeholders)
- Maximizing positive testimonials (from major media about Hopewell / Prince George)

Oversight and Staff Management

Recommendation: *The Chamber tourism PR function should be vested with a new director of tourism who would oversight all tourism marketing programs for the Chamber.*

This new employee should begin with development of a specific work program to be achieved and the formalized delineation of those responsibilities staff as well as agency functions when feasible. Then the PR plan of work would also be produced as part of the tourism annual marketing plan.

Developing the Annual PR Program

Working with the new PR agency, this integrated plan, for both entities, should include detailed objectives, strategies, tactics, and work programs beginning with:

Objective 1: Influence leisure consumer awareness, interest, and desire to visit Hopewell Prince George as a destination of choice

Strategies:

- Develop market reach designation for staff and agency.
- Develop an introductory program to regional and national media.
- Deliver an ongoing schedule of telemarketing calls from the staff, designed to introduce Hopewell / Prince George to writers who have the best potential opportunity to reach the consumer market.
- Develop an ongoing series of media publicity releases for the leisure market through various targets and tactics that provides constant information to meet diverse customer needs.
- Produce an annual outreach program for writer visits.
- Develop and disseminate a new press kit for writers.
- Develop and implement an online press kit.
- Develop and implement a new photo CD and new system for providing photos to editors.

Other objectives may include the following:

- Develop and increase synergistic effort of Hopewell / Prince George with other partners including the Virginia tourism corporation and PART.
- Monitor effectiveness of the PR publicity program through research and evaluation.
- The senior PR staffer should also begin a series of ongoing sales calls to writers.
- Through conversations with writers, we can quickly determine the writer's knowledge and interest in the destination.
- Get to know the writer on a more personal level.
- Provide new information for the writer, and add them to the arsenal of new media services for future cultivation.
- Consider site inspections or group familiarization opportunities for appropriate writers.

There are currently about 550 active professional members of the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW). They include many of the top media people that PR should be personally conversing with and getting to know—and not just through press releases or by website support. They include freelancers, travel editors, staff writers, photographers, and TV and radio journalists.

By making just four completed telephone calls daily, the media staffer can reach twenty of these writers a week, eighty a month, and every single SATW writer in about seven months. Add to that the important regional media located within a 300-mile radius of Hopewell / Prince George, and the program can efficiently communicate with and influence its entire primary market of media opportunity in less than twelve months. That cycle of ongoing calls should also be continuous.

Although many DMOs rely on press releases as the foundation of their media relations programs, the standard PR release format was never designed to effectively produce major feature coverage that can effectively change visitor attitudes and stimulate maximum destination travel interest.

That important requirement is best delivered by on-site writer familiarization, which is just as essential as it is for the food writer who actually dines in the restaurant, the sports writer who watches the game, and the cultural writer who views the performance, allowing travel writers to share their personal experiences with readers that best motivate them to make future travel decisions to the destination.

The most effective method for major publicity through destination familiarization is a process first implemented more than twenty years ago by Geiger and Associates (www.geigerpr.com), which plans and hosts larger assemblages of journalists for each of their programs—sometimes in excess of twenty-five or thirty writers per tour. The key to their success is individually tailored itineraries designed to meet the individual needs of each writer.

This requires a disciplined and effective planning process including detailed and segregated tour experiences that intrigue each writer and fulfill special needs. Accomplishing this labor-intensive process also requires increased special assistance and hand-holding for each writer from the PR firm's staff, but the results for this process can consistently be positive and extremely productive.

For Hopewell / Prince George, this approach provides the optimal, cost-efficient way to develop media tours that ultimately reach millions of potential visitors in its targeted national and regional markets.

Group media tours averaging twenty-two journalists per trip will provide about fifty CVB business partners the opportunity to be featured in major editorial coverage about Hopewell / Prince George and drive business to their lodging properties, restaurants, attractions, and other activities and amenities.

Media tours with four to eight optional activity tracks occurring simultaneously allow many tourism industry members (beyond a destination's most recognizable and iconic products) to participate. This also allows each journalist to customize the visitation experience and provides for a more intimate and noncompetitive editorial research experience. If the media tour is hosted properly, the CVB pays nothing for the expenses of the media visit and reaps substantial amounts of influential and favorable media coverage in key markets.

A skillfully developed media tour should provide sponsored air transportation, lodging, meals, and activities. (Geiger, for example, tells its destination clients that if it can't obtain sponsored air transportation for the journalists it invites, then it will pay for the transportation themselves.)

Recommendation: *Anticipated Results: a sponsored familiarization from Geiger would produce an estimated \$750,000–\$1,000,000 in valued publicity space as measured in the cost of advertising lineage space. We recommend at least one seasonal fam tour. Costs for each would be in the \$55,000 range. ROI: 20-to-1 range. Contact Debbie Geiger at Geiger and Associates at www.geigerpr.com, ph. 850-942-6685, or 850-509-2906.*

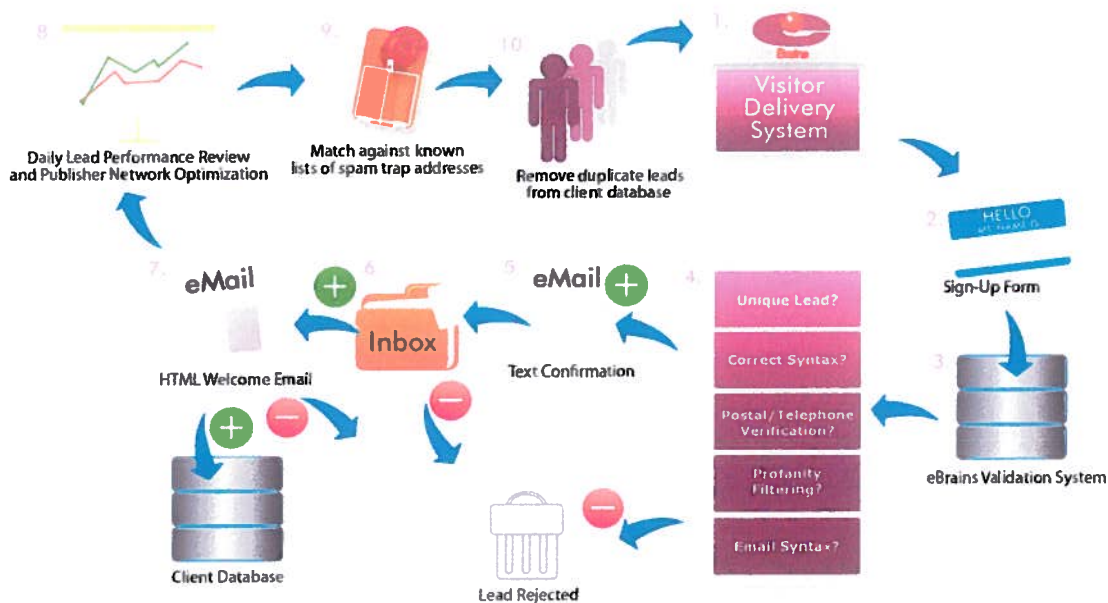
7. Harvesting new visitors to Hopewell / Prince George County through Internet marketing—the leading technology-based destination marketing program that reliably produces new visitors and higher volumes of economic returns.

This state of the art digital outreach solution from eBrains Digital Marketing will guarantee a minimum of \$1.4 million in destination visitor spending in Hopewell and Prince George for an investment of \$50,000. The investment yields a \$28 to \$1 return on marketing investment. Based on the Virginia Tourism Corporation tourism research study, tax revenues, and fees generated would equal 6.9% of visitor party spending.

We propose this visitor inquiry and conversion business solution for the Virginia Tourism Corporation, VHPG, which has evolved over the past 16 years to yield measurable guaranteed performance and one of the highest lifetime values in digital marketing investments.

How It Works

Web visitors to a cross-section of travel-related websites and social communities will see a specially produced branded travel offering from VHPG. The offer is usually a free visitors guide and opt-in to ongoing destination opportunities and values. When visitors are invited to inquire, they receive an electronic content about the destination’s diversity of attractions, events, accommodations, restaurant/retail, and other offerings. Inquiries are also screened through a proprietary 10-step validation process illustrated below. This process assures that the DMO receives only highly qualified, actionable inquiries.



Ongoing Delivery

Once the surviving leads are harvested, eBrains will deliver 5 emails over a 5-month period to prompt engagement and movement through the travel decision cycle to a subsequent destination visit. Its team will develop the communications template and work with you to obtain content to populate the template.

The database of records belong solely to you for further communications to convert more visitor trips beyond the campaign period.

Assuring Success through an Independent Conversion Study

An independent conversion study will be conducted by Texas A&M University research to validate and confirm performance against eBrains' guarantee. If the guaranteed performance is not met, it will continue to deliver qualified leads sufficient to yield the visitor spending necessary to make up any indicated short fall. Nor is there any additional charge to you.

Incidentally, eBrains reports that during the past ten years, there has never been a failure from them to achieve the guarantee in their work with over 150 destinations at country, state, or local DMO levels.

Guarantees and Estimates

A \$50,000 investment will yield the following guarantees and estimates:

25,000 guaranteed inquiries will be harvested and survive the proprietary lead-generation process.

Approximately 1,250 will unsubscribe during your 5-email promotional campaign, leaving 23,750 fully permissioned records to be added to your database for future communications.

They also estimate that 15% of these will convert to a visit, yielding 3,562 visitor parties spending an average of \$401 based on the Virginia Tourism Corporation Visitor Travel Research. \$28 of the \$401 represent state and local tax revenues and fees according to the study.

The guarantee: \$1.4 million in aggregated visitor spending, exclusive of air or rail transportation costs.

At an average of 3.6 room nights per visitor party, they would yield 12,823 room nights of which 8,335 (65%) will represent paid lodging nights.

Added Value

The independent conversion study is conducted primarily to validate and confirm the achievement of the guarantee provided by eBrains. Your added value includes valuable data about all records in your database including visitor profile, trip purpose, visitor spending, visitor domicile, competitor destinations, and reason for not visiting.

Recommendation: *No other destination tourism marketing program today guarantees new visitor business with such a high ROI. We recommend a \$50,000 purchase. Contact Ralph Thompson, president and chief brain, www.ebrainsinc.com/team/ralph-thompson/, ph. 703-303-2252 or 804-883-5077.*

8. Develop a state-of-the-art new tourism website that will reliably produce new visitors.

Today the Internet has surpassed all communications processes and programs in its ability to provide travel information and influence vacation travel decisions. Without question, it is our most critical component today for successful destination marketing. And it requires the latest technology and best business applications to deliver results for Hopewell / Prince George.

The development and implementation of a successful, performance-based strategic website is required to ultimately generate greater consumer travel visits. And it requires a high degree of ongoing professional diligence and best practices applied by an expert tourism Internet firm that can consistently maximize the website for the Chamber.

Assessing the Current Hopewell / Prince George Chamber Site

We asked Destination Advantage LLC, which has over 15 years' experience providing comprehensive Internet destination marketing services to more than 150 CVBs to provide a top-line review of the current chamber website.

They found the www.hpgchamber.org website lacking the structural support necessary to function as a productive destination marketing program. Specifically, the current website lacks clear positioning and cannot effectively lead website visitors to a desired outcome of visitor conversion. While the site includes some good content, it should be structured according to industry best practices—in a more customer-centric fashion for maximum conversion and ROI.

Here are several noted deficiencies:

- Chamber site lacks clear positioning as the official travel resource for Hopewell / Prince George
- The primary URL HPGChamber.org is not an optimal address
- Site does not communicate "where in the world Hopewell / Prince George is?"
- Site lacks clear calls-to-action for measureable ROI
- Site lacks defining and engaging destination images
- Site lacks effective customer relationship management and engagement

Therefore, Destination Advantage recommends a new website that will effectively position the Hopewell / Prince George Chamber of Commerce as a leader in destination marketing for the region, while

- Producing more customer awareness, destination interest, and more influence over travel buying decisions
- Efficiently producing more visitors at lower costs
- Measuring and evaluating performance success and ROI

With a successful market driven, customer-focused new website, the tourism office will have the opportunity to develop a strong foundation for online destination marketing through a new destination portal located at a premium website address.

Having a premium online address is one of the most critical aspects to effective online marketing. As the number of websites has exploded exponentially, premium top-level-domains (TLD's .com, .net, and .org) have become harder to secure. This has led the agency responsible for the domain name ecosystem (ICANN) to release myriad new top-level-domain extensions.

Key facts regarding the importance of your online address:

- URL (online address) is often the text used to link a webpage
- URL is commonly printed on marketing collateral such as business cards, flyers, and email signatures
- URL is an influential factor in how your webpage may rank in search engines
- URL is often spoken by your sales and support staff

VisitHopewellPrinceGeorge.com has been reserved by the Chamber to be used as the primary address for the new destination marketing portal. Through additional research, Destination Advantage LLC, has taken the initiative to secure the URL HopewellPrinceGeorge.com. which should be considered to serve as the primary address for the new destination marketing portal. Principal deliverables of the program would include the following:

- New website design using best practices to quickly identify and route target audiences by various segments, interests, and preferences.
- The new website would be developed using WordPress, customized to interface with your existing Chamber master program and providing for Chamber staff to easily make content updates.
- Destination Advantage will work with your branding/communications consultants to execute and implement approved new branding and positioning elements.
- Search engine optimization is included during the development phase to ensure the new site can be easily found by potential visitors searching for information.
- Customer acquisition via a registered users program for the development of future email marketing campaigns will allow the tourism office to build and cultivate a valuable list of prospects.
- Online revenue generation capabilities for advertising and sponsorships will allow the Chamber to develop new non-dues revenues and provide a value-added service for Chamber members.
- Online lead generation will be produced for the development of packaged tours for leisure visitors as well as group travel planners.
- Robust tracking and reporting analytics configuration provides for access to real-time monitoring of website visitors: mobile vs. desktop, number of pages visited, origin of visitors, time spent on the website, etc.
- Managed hosting facility is included to provide the Chamber with a turn-key program using state-of-the-art technology infrastructure to ensure website performance and accessibility.

Here is Destination Advantage LLC's recommended organizational outline for the new destination marketing portal's website visitors:

HopewellPrinceGeorge.com – The portal homepage positioned as the "Official Destination Resource"

Top-level navigation channels from the homepage (customer segmentation):

- Living in Hopewell / Prince George – Links to appropriate municipalities
- Doing business in Hopewell / Prince George – Links to HPGChamber.org
- Business attraction / relocation information
 - Top reasons to invest
 - Economic development targets
 - Residential or commercial
 - Lead generation for Realtors / Chamber businesses
- Visiting
 - Top reasons to visit / unique selling points of region
 - Lodging (book a room), dining, shopping, entertainment, tour packages
 - Travel and transportation
 - Calendar of events

- Group travel information
- What's New – social media channels, press releases, media inquiries, image gallery
- Join us today – email sign up, Chamber membership, advertising sponsorship sales leads
- Footer: about us, member login, contact

Recommendation: Destination Advantage LLC is highly skilled for developing and managing the peculiarities of tourism websites, and we recommend them for development of a new strategic partnership with the Hopewell / Prince George Chamber of Commerce. Annual website design, development, and hosting fees would be \$30,000, invoiced quarterly in \$7,500 increments. For additional background, Managing Partner Donovan Shia was previously vice president of Market Intelligence for DMAI. As part of the senior management team there, his role was to identify leading destination marketing companies, tactics, CVB best practices and then integrate those trends, tactics, and opportunities with DMAI as part of their board of director relations, strategic partnerships, and alliance development. Contact Mr. Shia at dshia@destination-advantage.com, ph. 361-548-5113.

Optional Ongoing Internet Marketing and Oversight

Once the new website is deployed, Hopewell / Prince George can best assure long-term competitive success by executing proven Internet marketing tactics. This important initiative can be further enhanced through additional optimizing of the destination's web presence, building greater awareness, boosting traffic, maximizing customer relationship programs, encouraging online transactions, and delivering performance tracking and reporting. Principal deliverables would include the following:

- Ongoing search engine optimization and marketing tactics tailored to target audiences by various segments, interests, and preferences
- Online branding that continuously affirms market position, visitor perceptions, and community engagement relative to competition
- Quarterly email marketing campaign design, development, and execution
- Online advertising campaign design, development, and execution
- Quarterly reporting and account management

Other potential services:

- Quarterly email marketing campaigns - \$14,000
- Optional PPC/media budget - \$14,000–\$30,000

9. Delivering & Reporting VHPG's Performance Success

Destination marketing and management experts agree that the preferred process for assuring ongoing success for DMOs is to first consistently measure that success.

The Destination Marketing Association's Handbook of Performance Standards for community CVBs, and other DMOs, makes these initial observations:

"In a perfect world...a CVB would know exactly how many of its destination's visitors were motivated to come solely by its efforts. And further, the CVB would be able to pinpoint exactly which of its marketing efforts were responsible for that visitor. However, the CVB and its local tourism industry don't exist in a perfect world. Instead, potential visitors are constantly bombarded by such a myriad of stimuli (the CVB, its industry partners, national sales offices, the media, and so on) that it becomes impossible to say that a visitor was motivated 100% by the CVB and *only by the CVB*.

In practice...when addressing the issue of visitors generated and their positive economic impacts, CVBs should, at the very least, have in place monitoring and research programs that identify visitors and visitor spending that were *clearly and significantly* generated by its efforts. In addition, the CVB should adopt a conservative approach when determining the number of visitors generated by its efforts to ensure that its stated return on investment is credible and can stand up to external scrutiny."

Therefore, the VHPG should monitor and deliver performance accountability—clarifying the marketing activities of its work and what it resultantly produces for the community through what are known as performance productivity measures that quantify staff accomplishments, including meetings, conferences and sports programs booked and hosted, advertising, and web visitors generated and converted to actual travelers, etc.—all with attendant economic impacts derived from these deliverables.

Accountability: A Critical Government Requirement

Many DMOs are working today to monitor and value the quantifiable benefits they generate from their sales and marketing programs, because they are funded by local government taxes—and public officials and the taxpayers they serve are increasingly asking for transparency in bottom line results they achieve through these publicly funded efforts.

Therefore, we recommend the development of a performance-based management model that values each marketing program by clarifying the specific, quantifiable results each achieves for Hopewell / Prince George.

Following the first year's tracking and benchmarking of results, goals can be assigned for future years.

Determining Program Performance Values

To assure appropriate validation of estimated results, performance estimates should always be produced using industry acceptable formulas and whenever feasible, through the contracting of a third-party expert resource that may include an independent research firm.

Footnoted explanations should be attached to ongoing result estimates that give readers clear understandings about the methodologies employed in reaching these conclusions.

Actual performance productivity for each program should be individually validated in-house by senior management.

Performance Tracking

Consideration should be given to development of an ongoing performance tracking report to monitor and evaluate VHPG's ongoing success, measuring both key specific marketing performance productivity and the marketing performance activity that delivers it. Several customer relationship management software programs capable of capturing this important information are available through the DMAI. And this performance tracking should become the primary method for delivering and measuring success and future goal setting.

Report results for each program should be completed monthly, as well as year to date and annually. Comparisons should also be made to the previous year's periods. It should be disseminated to principal constituents either monthly or quarterly. In addition, an annual report should be accompanied with a brief narrative to highlight any major achievements and also featured in government's annual reports or other communications programs for the community.

The quantifiable results of marketing work for DMOs falls into two categories:

1. *Marketing Performance Activity*—includes such work as literature distributed, visitors serviced on the web, sales calls made, and sales leads issued, etc. As more performance activity is produced and targeted appropriately, there should be corresponding increases, over time in marketing productivity.

2. *Marketing Performance Productivity*—is the most important output for DMOs. These business measurements include conventions and sports functions booked, room nights

produced, and resulting economic impacts, as well as other important indicators of the organizations' successful marketing efforts on behalf of the community. After year one, performance productivity measures can be forecast and stated as goals to be delivered. So should activity that leads to performance productivity, such as sales leads generated, which can then convert to business booked.

Below are the major performance areas of work for DMO monitoring and reporting to management and stakeholders.

DMO PERFORMANCE PRODUCTIVITY

1. Leisure visitors produced through advertising (or general inquiry fulfillment)

Number of leisure visitors produced

Visitor parties produced

Room nights generated

Total economic impact produced (economic impact and other estimates reported annually through independent third-party conversion study evaluation)

To accomplish ad conversion analyses requires the collection of inquiries produced from ads for visitor guides using email or written addresses that may include 1-800 responses. There are a number of qualified firms now producing tourism ad conversion studies. A leading source is Dr. James Petrick, professor of tourism studies, Texas A&M University. Other conversion studies may also be provided for evaluating public show responses, non-ad-related inquiries to the office via telephone, mail, and email.

2. Leisure visitors produced through the HPG website

Total economic impact produced (economic impact and other estimates reported annually through independent third-party conversion study evaluation)

One of the industry's most accurate and defensible models for this analysis is offered by Destination Analysts, Inc., of California. It takes the firm a minimum six-month survey period to collect adequate sampling and a full year is considered ideal to capture any seasonality in destination travel patterns. We recommend that the annual results then be extrapolated for the next three calendar years to save ongoing analysis costs. Marshall Murdaugh Marketing has reviewed this recommendation with the principals of Destination Analysts, and they concur.

Destination Analysts of California currently anticipates that for every 1,000 unique visitors to most DMO websites. The estimated annual economic effect generated would be about \$25,000. Dependent on the current number of unique visitors to the CVB website, the

positive economic results and ROI is likely to be extremely productive in hosting visitors from the website. For comprehensive information, including project timelines and in-depth methodologies, call 415-307-3283 or 415-716-7983. E-mail: ROI@destinationanalysts.com.

3. Positive media publicity impressions produced of travel stories to influence travel decisions as measured in readership (circulation/viewers/listeners)

Number of articles placed

Readership

Resulting dollar value to be estimated in comparative advertising costs based on lineage inches. The optimal measurement analysis is provided by third-party firms who would research, clip DMO-generated articles, and evaluate the positive performance results of printed articles.

4. Social media programs implemented that produce measurable new visitors and resulting economic impacts. If this is not feasible, then the DMO's advertising firm should evaluate social media based on its ability to produce earned media, just as earned traditional media is recommended for evaluation under item 7. If this also proves infeasible, then the budgeting for social media should be transferred to advertising and PR/publicity programs capable of delivering quantifiable economic value and ROI.

(future opportunities for program development and monitoring)

5. New meetings and conferences booked

Number of bookings

Est. attendant room nights generated

Estimated total economic impact produced (using DMAI's new event impact calculator, the industry's most accurate system for measuring the economic impact of meetings, conventions and trades shows). Annual cost usage for this software would be \$2,500.

6. Sports development

Number of events booked

Estimated participants

Estimated room nights generated Est. total economic impact produced (using DMAI's new sport event calculator)

By adding the sports calculator module, the total annual cost for measuring both conventions and sports events should be about \$3,200. As an added module to the event impact calculator, the sports module satisfies an immediate need for an industry

standardized tool, influenced by local data with annual updates. Consistent with the current event impact calculator, the module relies on the support of tourism economics, which specializes in quantitative analysis for businesses and governments. It will report on direct spending on local goods and services, and will calculate indirect and induced spending outputs in terms of jobs, wages, and tax contributions—all of which are important statistics for local policymakers.

Data from various sources include:

1. Longwoods International syndicated survey for U.S. travelers who attended a sports event
2. Survey results of about 50 studies collecting a broad dataset on per participant, per diem spending for various types of sports events
3. Compiled input to DMAI members and event impact calculator users for any destination-specific studies conducted on past sports events
4. All other city-level industry, tax, and economic data points used in the basic event impact calculator to adjust models to the destination

For additional information, contact DMAI or Tourism Economics.

7. New Group Tour Programs Booked

No. of programs

Number of participants

Total room nights produced

Estimated economic impact \$

(The number of programs, participants, and room nights should be reported with input from the tour operators who produced the programs. The economic impact should be estimated using industry available formulas as provided by the National Tour Association or the American Bus Association).

8. Stakeholder partnerships produced

partnerships developed

Dollar value of in-kind services provided

Next, the marketing performance activity accomplished by the CVB could be incorporated in the monthly report as follows:

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

Sales calls made

Meeting planners

Tour operators

Sports decision makers

Travel writers

Trade shows attended

Meetings and conventions

Tour operators

Sports development

Travel writers

General Marketing

Advertising impressions produced

Consumer inquiries generated and serviced

Collateral publications distributed

Media publicity press releases issued

Media inquiries serviced

Website

Unique visitors/user sessions

Page views

Registered users

(other potential measurements may later include the following)

Hotel reservations made

Room nights produced

Economic impact generated

Visitor Services

Visitors serviced at information centers

Inquiries processed (by category, including advertising, the web, etc.)

Convention Leads Generated

Estimated room nights

Potential economic value

Convention Bid Proposals Produced

% Conversion of sales leads to business booked

Sports Leads Generated

Est. room nights

Potential economic impact

Tour Operator Group Sales Leads

Estimated room nights

Potential economic value

Total Sales Leads Generated

Total estimated room nights

Potential economic value

Sales Calls/Client Contacts Made

Meeting planners

Tour operators

Travel writers/media

Sports event planners

Familiarization Tours Conducted

Meeting planners

Clients participating

Tour operators

Clients participating

Travel writers

Clients participating

Sports event planners

Clients participating

(include potential value where available)

Site Inspections Hosted (individual trips)

Meeting planners

Tour operators

Travel writers

Sports event planners

(include potential value where available)

10. Clarifying the HPG Tourism Offices Value can be clearly communicated by measuring and reporting the DMO's quantitative performance productivity returns from its ongoing marketing programs.

This process should include all productivity achievements that can be accurately and quantifiably measured and should include all future annual results achieved from the following marketing programs:

- Conference and meeting bookings
- Leisure visits to the county produced from advertising, web development, etc.
- Media publicity destination story placement
- Group leisure bookings
- Social media value obtained

Productive dollar value returns from these performance categories will help answer this important question: What is the value of the work of the Hopewell / Prince George Tourism Office in fulfillment of its mission?

For future years, by totaling up the annual estimated dollar results of productivity achieved, the following new annual value statement should be obtained:

Last year, operating with a marketing staff of ___ and a \$___ marketing budget, the Hopewell / Prince George tourism office produced an estimated \$_____ in new visitor dollars to the community and tax revenue of \$_____, from ___ leisure visitors and conference delegates.

In addition, staff-generated media publicity valued at more than \$_____ reached _____ potential visitors (expressed in circulation/readership) who are now considering the community for future visits. Thus, on behalf of Hopewell / Prince George and its tourism partners, the tourism office delivered a ___-to-1 ROI (divide the return by the annual DMO budget) of marketing dollars expended.

This value statement will provide a productive and powerful response to the DMO's mission statement; it would not be unrealistic to expect the organization to produce a consistent annual ROI far exceeding 5-to-1 when compared total budget—and at least

10-to-1 when compared to various individual marketing initiatives. Although it is only the tip of the iceberg in marketing value to the community and doesn't address many other important aspects of its qualitative achievements including branding, business partnerships, and the like, this statement does clarify quantifiable dollar performance accountability and major annual ROI for all community stakeholders.

11. Developing a tourism stakeholder program of collaboration will maximize community support for travel and tourism, as well as for the tourism office.

Recommendation: *The Chamber should begin to develop an ongoing collaborative stakeholder program—one that encourages government and business partnerships, leverages resources, produces joint programming, and fulfills the role of community advocacy. Without such an ongoing program, both the DMO and the local tourism industry will be challenged to be fully successful.*

Step one should be the compilation of stakeholder email addresses of front line community tourism related participants, starting with the participants of this plan through meetings and the SWOC session. Also included should be hotel owners, general managers, directors of sales, attraction operators and board members, restaurant operators, historical, military, sports, culture and arts constituents, relevant government department heads, elected officials, etc. This ongoing compilation should yield about 300 major participants.

Major opportunities and benefits

Here is a partial list of significant benefits that should be provided by the stakeholder relations program:

- Stakeholder events (mixers, annual meeting, marketing updates, etc.)
- DMO sales leads for convention and meeting planners, group tours and motor coach business
- Listings in publications and on the website
- Brochure placement in the visitors center
- Referrals from the visitor center
- Advertising opportunities in publications and the website
- Hosting news media and travel writers
- Participating in DMO-led marketing programs
- Hosting and participating in writer familiarization tour
- Chance to expose ones business to other DMO stakeholders
- Stakeholder plaques or window decal showing stakeholder status

- Complementary links from the DMOs website
- Subscription to a monthly or quarterly newsletter, the annual marketing plan, and other insider information including a community visitor profile and other useful market data
- Lending a strong voice to the issues of advocacy that supports tourism as an industry
- Other collaborative roles may include participation in task forces for market planning (such as the annual marketing plan), PR quarterly roundtables, and industry meetings including the annual celebration of national tourism week.

In response to these services, the Chamber's tourism office should track and report out the monthly and annual delivery of stakeholder in-kind financial and manpower services received by the tourism office.

12. Assuring the ongoing needs of tourism stakeholders is best provided by formally asking all community stakeholders their assessment of the tourism offices effectiveness on their behalf and the quality of those business relationships. This is best delivered two or three years after launch of the collaborative stakeholder program above.

The optimal method for going deep to collect the widest range of opinions and recommendations of stakeholders—including their levels of tourism support and future need—is through a third-party online email survey that provides anonymity and tracks responses by the full range of stakeholders with whom you support, report, and collaborate: the governance organization, chamber Board of Directors, government officials, hotels, sports, entertainment, events, attractions, restaurants, retail, the cultural community, and others.

Properly planned and executed, this stakeholder survey captures the opinions of the entire tourism community. It also provides the opportunity to segment findings from each major stakeholder group and quantify their various levels of issues, concerns, and recommendations for the future. Following the results of this study, the tourism office can then apply what we've learned to ameliorating concerns and focusing on new plans going forward with information learned from stakeholders and leaders.

Process and Questions. The survey should be sent out electronically over the name of the Chamber executive, with responses confidentially sent from stakeholders directly back to the firm conducting the survey. Email addresses are required for dissemination of the survey.

Questionnaire Rating Scale. Questions use a 1–5 scale to measure the degree to which a respondent agrees or disagrees with the statements made. At the end of the exercise, the assessment is compiled and the ratings are averaged for each question—as well as for the five major categories, if desired.

Ratings. Interpretation of ratings will range from exceptional, excellent, strong, solid/satisfactory, less than satisfactory, weak, and some serious problems.

The following major tourism categories should be rated by participants:

FULFILLING ITS MISSION. First, participants are introduced to the mission statement of the organization. Then this question is asked: Relative to the mission, how well do you believe the tourism office is fulfilling these initiatives and working on behalf of my business/service?

Creating economic impact

Serving visitors

Encouraging visitors to see and do more while they are here

Positively impacting the local business economy

Expanding the local tax base

Providing impetus for new construction (e.g., new hotels, attractions, restaurants)

Linking visitors and the businesses that serve them

Helping to create jobs

PROMOTING HOPEWELL / PRINCE GEORGE. Again, how well is the tourism office fulfilling this effort?

Promoting and distributing visitor guides, maps, and other merchandising materials

Bringing visitors to the area

Marketing the destination to create destination awareness

Branding and promoting the community's identity

Stressing customer service to visitors

Pursuing positive coverage of the destination's tourism product

Seeking out and attracting new visitor markets

Developing partnership opportunities for cooperative business marketing and advertising

QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE. Rank the tourism office on these service deliverables:

Courtesy

Overall customer service

Timeliness in response

Accuracy

Knowledge

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS. Rank the delivery of the following (where applicable):

Stakeholder constituent newsletters

Annual report and meeting

Website

Partnership mixers

Partnership orientations of the tourism office

Tourism office educational workshops and seminars

Tourism office development of coalitions, partnerships, and alliances for leveraging support and visitor business development

Participation in problem-solving forums, roundtables

Participation in the community (on committees, boards, task forces and partnerships)

LEADERSHIP FOR VISITOR-RELATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Evaluate tourism's leadership in these areas:

Creating quantifiable economic impact for the destination

Communicating economic impact to stakeholders

Being the chief advocate for visitor-related economic development

Being the focal point for research and information about the visitor sector

Keeping the hospitality community informed about and involved with visitor-related issues

Collaborating with other economic development partners

Recommendation: *The top provider of this online assessment service in the tourism industry is Wilfred Brewer, president of Performance Solutions of Stamford, Connecticut, the top CVB human resource firm in the DMO industry. Cost would be in the \$3,500 range. Contact: wbrewer@performance-solutions-group.com, ph. 203-653-4692*

13. Guide community tourism market performance success by producing the first Hopewell / Prince George visitor market study

What is the profile of today's visitor to Hopewell / Prince George? Who are they, and what do we say to best motivate them to travel here?

Answers to these important questions are currently illusive, because no specific consumer research has been conducted to define the profile of our prime visitor—and this information is a required first step in strategic destination market planning.

Such a visitor profile for the area will provide important information regarding visitor motivations as well as the demographic (age, income, trip party size, geographic location, trip frequency, etc.) and psychographic information (likes, desires, attitudes and interests) that guide successful program marketing and destination management.

This study information will also be of immense interest and usage for all community stakeholders who share in this important task of marketing travel to our region.

The recommended survey instrument

A trusted and proven market research methodology that produces a professional analysis and expert recommendations for strategic planning will prevent marketing pitfalls and lost opportunities. It is also necessary for establishing bold new initiatives and directions intended to dramatically improve tourism results.

We recommend that a cost-effective and efficient online survey instrument be designed to assess all the important aspects of the leisure travel market.

Also, as part of a broader effort to further define potential visitors, evaluate current marketing activities, clarify area attribute/amenity appeals and enhanced messaging, the study should address the following key areas and more:

- Develop a detailed picture of the current and potential visitor market in terms of demographics, attitudes, travel needs and interests, travel planning, and behaviors.
- Understand what non-visitors are seeking in vacation destinations and how to best attract them to visit here.
- Evaluate the importance of attributes and amenities that affect destination choice and visitation.

- Measure awareness, familiarity, and favorability.
- Establish our community's competitive strength and position among primary competitors.
- Reveal which information sources are most influential in destination selection.
- Understand how our current communications are working and uncover potential ways to improve future messaging.
- Determine major destination benefits (attractions, appeals, etc.) that can best motivate visitor decisions.
- Query and find out what new visitor amenities and services and other product development will best bring new visitors here.
- Evaluate destination website and Internet engagement.
- Determine broad satisfaction levels among previous visitors, likely return visits, likelihood to recommend.

Online Survey Respondents

The respondents to the Visitor Market Survey would be selected from one of the largest national survey panels in the United States who have recruited millions of consumers that match U.S. census data within 1%, and are representative of the larger North American population.

Members of these national panels have provided extensive personal profile information that goes well beyond the normal demographics of age, gender, location, income, etc. As a result, it is possible to select survey participants according to more than 120 lifestyle characteristics, including travel interests and behaviors.

At the minimum, respondents to the survey would be recruited according to the following criteria (additional qualifications would be used if necessary):

Males and females living within a required geographic area (generally within 300 miles, which comprise about 80% of your visitor market)

Have taken a leisure trip and stayed in a hotel within the last 12 months

Involved in planning and decision-making for a vacation or leisure trips for the household

\$50,000+ annual household income

We recommend production of 500 completed surveys to assure accuracy in projectability to the total universe of visitors to the destination.

The Online Survey Process

One of the important advantages of online research is how quickly the results are available, reflecting what is happening now, rather than being months old. Generally, the entire process can be completed within a three- to five-week period depending on complexity.

The Process

Once the primary goals (as above) are determined, a questionnaire is developed, modified as necessary and approved. Meanwhile, the respondent profile (sample) is determined along with the primary geographic source markets. The survey is then programmed and tested, the sample email addresses are secured, and the survey is launched with an invitation for people to participate. Responses begin immediately. Once the responses reach the target level, the analysis begins and a comprehensive summary/PowerPoint report that outlines the findings and recommendations is provided. Following completion, a community roll-out is suggested. This study and its findings will be of immense help to stakeholders who are attempting to reach new customers.

While various firms can be queried for proposals, we have outlined the model from Equation Research, the industry leader in Internet-based tourism research and market analysis, with whom we have collaborated for many years.

For background, Equation has employed this, or similar, model for numerous clients including Aruba, Atlantic City, Barbados, Bermuda, Chapel Hill, Colorado Tourism, Dallas, Disney World, Door County (WI), Georgia, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Las Vegas, Missouri, Myrtle Beach (SC), New Zealand, Orlando CVB, Wyoming Tourism—plus airlines, major hotel chains, and resorts and over 200 of the top brands and institutions in North America.

Recommendation: *We suggest Equation for its sole source skills that will guarantee successful results. The cost of market research study is in the \$17,000 range. However, before actual purchase, reach out to local banks for potential sponsorship or joint sponsorship with the Chamber. Because banks provide loans to small local businesses, and most tourism businesses fall into that category, this may be a viable match. And the sponsoring bank would then share in study dissemination and publicity. Contact: Chairman Mike Travis, email: mtravis@equationresearch.com, ph. 970-227-2239.*

14. Strengthening community tourism marketing through collaborative efforts

An important axiom of tourism marketing is that as the geographic distance grows between the targeted consumer and the travel destination, so does the lack of familiarity of what attractions and other motivational benefits exist there to motivate visitors.

Thus, it makes good marketing sense to group nearby destinations that can tell their collective story and effectively produce incremental visitors. The overlapping of DMOs, therefore, can make good business sense when everyone can prosper more.

For example, Travel South USA of the eleven southern states supports the work of each state's own tourism marketing organization. Here in Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley Travel Association works to support many local DMOs there as well. It is also true for PART, which has been able to generate higher volumes of visitor awareness and other benefits for multiple jurisdictions.

This is why many DMOs seek to also produce regional marketing partnerships that can deliver more motivational attractions and visitor attributes to entice the visitor.

For this reason, expanding marketing efforts with PART may also be a successful method to enhance the Hopewell / Prince George visitor product, expand market funding, and ultimately achieve greater results. Over the years, PART has had success in producing much needed public awareness of the region's visitor amenities and attributes.

Recommendation: *VHPG should reach out to meet annually with PART management staff to explore potential mutual opportunities for market planning. The first step should be sharing this strategic plan with officials there—particularly the need for an annual traditional marketing plan, which PART does not employ, as well as incorporating the best business practice of producing and quantifying the positive economic impact productivity derived from their various marketing programs—specifically the numbers of new visitors generated and their resulting visitor expenditures. Only then can PART provide and announce the positive return on investment results produced as a direct result of their marketing programs.*

15. Funding the recommended marketing opportunities of Visit Hopewell Prince George

Here are the major program costs and benefits that comprise our initial recommended annual marketing menu for the community that will significantly boost new visitor awareness, generate customer interest, and desire to take action and visit—resulting in thousands of new room nights that will produce higher volumes of visitor expenditures and local bed taxes.

Create the new position of tourism director for the Chamber including salary, benefits, operational support	\$75,000
Internet Advertising eBrains digital marketing guarantees a minimum of \$1.4 million in destination visitor spending in Hopewell / Prince George. Yields a \$28-to-\$1 return on marketing investment—3,562 visitor parties, 12,823 room nights.	\$50,000
Travel Publicity Familiarization Media Blitz Program Generating Hopewell / Prince George publicity value of \$750,000–\$1 million in ad lineage costs	\$55,000
Visitor market study	\$17,000
Website development program	\$30,000
Visitor welcome center highway signage	\$45,000
Center enhancements--furniture, fixtures	\$15,000
Tourism visitor brochure development and dissemination	\$40,000
Contingency fund for marketing and management	<u>\$23,000</u>
Total	\$350,000

There are only four potential options for consideration of funding the Chamber's new destination marketing program, and most of them are not truly viable, as reviewed below.

1. Development of a Chamber Tourism Membership Program—Fully 50% of DMOs today have such membership programs, but while the larger community DMOs have been able to raise substantial income from local business members with deeper pockets, smaller DMOs use membership programs as their main resource to leverage ongoing stakeholder support that delivers in-kind services rather than larger funding that is not achievable from smaller business members—and in many cases, the cost of their labor intensive fundraising efforts barely support revenue to compensate the DMO employees required to solicit and service the program’s fundraising efforts.

2. Community Foundations, whose mission is focused on providing local community support and job generation, are sometimes supportive benefactors for tourism because of the benefits the industry provides to the local economy. And while they can be positive participants for key projects, (such as signage, visitor welcome center development and office equipment such as computers,) they are usually not available for supporting ongoing management or marketing needs of DMOs.

3. The recent development of tourism community business improvement districts (TBIDS), which creates area districts but more often whole communities where hotel communities have agreed to be taxed to solely provide funding for their DMOs has long term merit. The program, which began several years ago in California now has more than 50 TBIDS effectively operating there, and more than a hundred others have formed on an eastward path. Proponents say the viability for such a program is positive for Virginia, but there is no enabling legislation that currently allows this potential to occur. However, we suggest that the Chamber continue to further explore this potential term opportunity with John Lambeth, the principal architect who has created most of these TBIDS.

4. The local transient occupancy tax. Finally, we come to the most viable potential opportunity of city and county funding support through modest increases in what is known locally as the bed tax. As mentioned earlier, fully 90% of all community DMOs throughout America receive their principal funding from this traditional revenue source. And the average DMO receives an estimated 65% of the collected transient occupancy tax, which is then expended to generate new marketing initiatives that are designed to produce incremental visitors and visitor spending as we have reviewed in the prior program opportunities.

Were the new Chamber tourism office to receive the 65% average amount of local transient occupancy tax that is afforded the average U.S. tourism office/CVB, that amount would total about \$713,000 of the \$1,097,680 paid here by visitors.

Recommendation: *Instead, we recommend that Hopewell and Prince George invest a modest \$175,000 each for a total annual program commitment of \$350,000—about one third of the total hotel tax paid by visitors in Hopewell and Prince George for 2016.* Note: Hopewell has estimated it will receive about \$700,000 in 2016 from its 8% hotel transient occupancy tax,

and Prince George will receive about \$397,680 from its 5% transient occupancy tax for a total of \$1,097,680.

The Chamber executive and Chamber Board officers should meet with both Hopewell and Prince George officials to review potential options for this funding mechanism, as well as a contract with the Chamber of three-year duration that would be supported by this plan or a new annual marketing plan developed yearly and offered as an addendum to the contract. This marketing plan would serve to clarify the marketing work to be achieved on behalf of Hopewell and Prince George, including the specific performance benefits anticipated to be produced, including return on investment provided for each program developed.

Additional Opportunities for Ongoing Discussion and Planning

- The experimental travel trend (also known as enrichment or immersion travel) can work well here
- Correct the misinformation about Hopewell on Wikipedia
- Encourage restaurant customers to produce online reviews (Yelp, Trip advisor, etc.)
- Online engagement
- Create travel packages by collaborating with other stakeholders
- Publicizing the Gateway Art Projects developed with the assistance of the Cameron Foundation
- FOLAR trail signage, wayfinding, branding project is underway
- Beacon
- Donna Dean- Country music festival is moving to the Beacon
- Potential use of visitor information Kiosks
- Library building/programming is a great resource
- Crater's geographic information system
- Potential upcoming merger of two Hopewell museums
- Proposal for new firemen's museum
- Proposed riverwalk
- St. John's Church interest in upcoming capital campaign
- Relationship with Sportsbackers and Active RVA
- Sports tourism target – PG County
- Richard Bland College marketing
- Promote Hopewell as a bike-able city, according to Bike Virginia
- Target the time share sector in Williamsburg