



The National Voice of Scenic Byways & Roads

MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX

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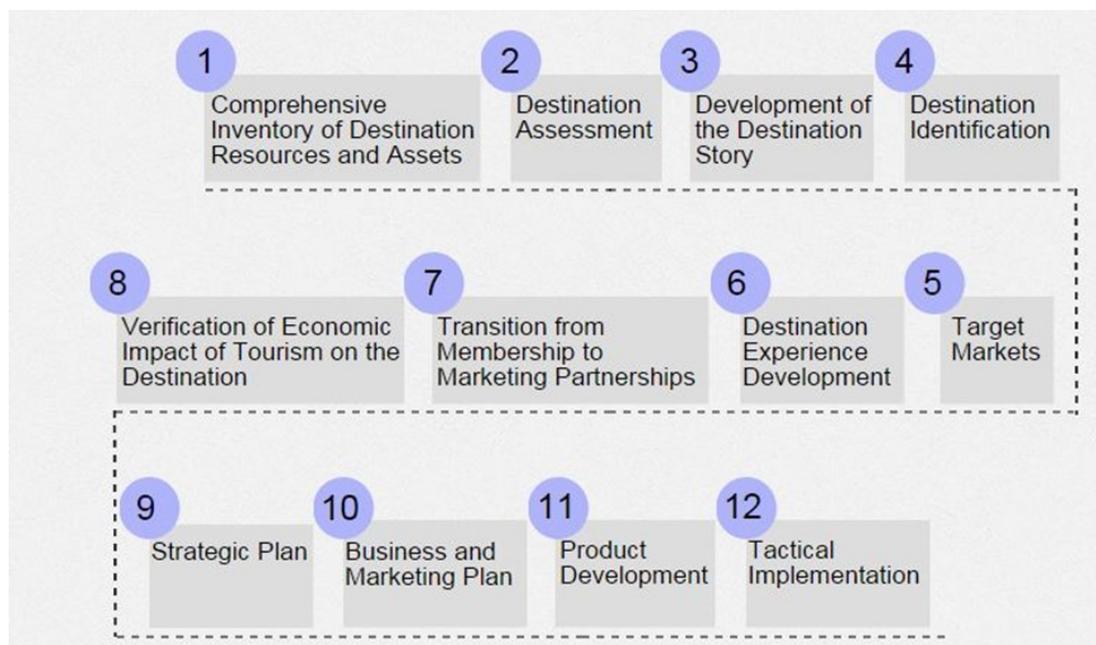
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MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX

National Scenic Byway Foundation is pleased to introduce the members-only Monthly Marketing Toolbox. Each month for the next year, you will receive one unit of a 12 step marketing process. Implementing the entire process will transform a destination's or Byways' marketing from an organization focused on marketing to selected membership to an organization focused on delivering the best traveler experiences that appeal to today's vastly changed travelers.

Each month we will look at a different aspect of marketing and see how it applies to real world situations, enabling you to determine how the material can be used to transform your own destination or Byway marketing.



Before we address the Comprehensive Inventory of Destination Resources and Assets, we will address the importance and impact of experiences, the crux of all destination and Byway marketing.

THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCE: THE CORE OF DESTINATION AND BYWAY MARKETING

Imagine

...driving along a scenic highway enveloped by majestic trees and suddenly emerging into the sunlight overlooking an ancient, broad, lush valley where on a clear day – it looks like you could see forever. A doe and her fawn are grazing quietly, appearing not to notice your presence. You stop for a moment, emerging noiselessly from your car to take a few minutes to listen to the silence of the mountains.

Imagine....

...listening to horses clip clop past your window, a fire crackling in the fireplace, as you relax in an authentic, original house right in the impeccably restored Colonial Williamsburg historic village, your residence for the next few days while you're exploring the oldest plantations on American soil.

Imagine....

...watching sunlight skimmer across the bay on a crisp, golden afternoon, a sailboat gliding by, waves gently lapping at your feet. You've settled into a chair in a colonial waterside village, to spend a few quiet moments before going to dinner in a restaurant that Chesapeake author James Michener rated the highest of any on the Eastern Shore. It still has a reputation for serving wonderful meals.

Imagine....

... your life punctuated with experiences like this on a regular basis! How inspiring it would be!

These special experiences are only one of the many experiences we have. In every encounter with every product, service, technology, activity, or person, we are having some type of experience—they are at the very core of our interaction with the world. Some of our experiences are good, engaging and inspiring, some are bad, disheartening and even maddening, and some, totally non-descript and barely remembered. Yet, all experiences are real. They happen in real time and in a physical environment. And they impact us all for better or for worse.

Americans Preferences for Experiences Are Changing

A study by the Center on the Everyday Lives of Families at UCLA, reported in “Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century” reached the conclusion that as a nation, we are at a point of “material saturation.” So many people are drowning in so much stuff they are beginning to feel overwhelmed by it. Women who find their homes stressful due to all the clutter, have higher levels of cortisol during the latter part of the day which diminishes in healthier people, meaning their bodies are not managing stress well. In addition, women with these higher levels are more likely to be in a depressed mood at the end of the day.

The result is a growing preference for experiences over the purchase of material goods. Even at Christmas, half of all gifts are experiences rather than a physical present. Scholars have believed for many years that when enough Americans got tired of being judged by material success, while getting little enjoyment from the things it represented, things would change. Apparently they are.

The younger generations seem to be the first ones saying enough is enough and ready to leave material culture behind. Many Millennials are electing to live in a city center, in small homes with room for less, and taking public transportation instead of owning a car. They are expressing their identities through experiences and sharing those experiences on social media. More than 80% of Millennials have attended or participated in a variety of live experiences over the past year, and over 70% say they will increase their spending on experiences in the next year, rather than buying physical things. Nearly 80% believe that experiences help shape their identity and create some of their best memories. At the same time, nearly 70% feel a fear of missing out, especially in view of the experiences their friends are having.

Greater spending on experiences is not limited to Millennials. Nearly 75% of all Americans say they will prioritize spending discretionary income on experiences rather than material purchases. But there is peer pressure at work here too, with 20% of Generation Z having stayed at a particular hotel or destination in order to score a positive response from followers on their social media channels. When it comes to the quality of the experiences in demand, nearly 90% of consumers are willing to pay more for upgraded experiences, and over 50% are willing to pay for a guaranteed good experience. Currently, travel, recreation and eating out accounts for 20.4% of the total discretionary income in the United States.

This is all occurring because Americans are stressed out, tired, short on money, short on time, and constantly bombarded with blaring marketing messages, pervasive noise, a stream of bad news, disruption, and a never ending parade of electronic, visual and sound stimulation. They just want to escape it all! Yet, they're not just leaving something behind, they're running towards something to engage in.

All of this represents a golden opportunity for destinations and Byways, because real relaxation only occurs when people physically remove themselves from their normal surroundings, turn off their electronics, and engage in a new situation that stimulates their minds and involves their emotions. Only this level of engagement in a new experience displaces thoughts of work.

If people don't leave home, work is always gnawing at the back of the mind, the technology to engage in it is always close at hand and there is no real "time out." This is in spite of the fact that tech giants have the ability to put us in an internal world where one can purchase experiences of all types – everything from a first rate movie, groceries, appliances, and the ingredients to prepare a gourmet meal at home, to live stream a sports event, get entertainment, and most everything else without ever leaving the house.

But getting people out of the house is very important. Those who work with their minds, rather than their hands, which is most of us, stay connected to work and never really get to experience the feeling of being completely away and free from the workplace, even for a few hours.

On the other hand, any experience which requires that customers get out of the comfort of their homes and the safe universe they can create inside it, into their cars or on public transportation, and physically go to another location to engage in an activity during their leisure time, has to be enticing, exciting, motivating, engaging, and pleasant enough to make the effort required worthwhile.

To just get through today's communication noise, messages surrounding the experiences have to be inspiring and touch the emotions to be adequately tempting. If not motivated by the opportunities on offer, people will look elsewhere, or more likely stay at home, get an experience off the internet, and not move off the couch, and that does not benefit any of us.

With so many different types and levels of experiences available, not all experiences are created equal. To make things more complicated, not all are under the control of a single organization. Those experiences that occur at a destination or in a shopping mall have to depend on others to deliver face to face customer interactions, with little control over what occurs. Outdoor experiences are beholden to the weather. There are experiences that include stories and experiences that include food. There are experiences that feature entertainment, education, escape and more. Experiential travel experiences can include all of these components and require coordination to all feel seamlessly delivered.

The experiences your organization delivers are not just limited to specific experience products. They begin with the first touch an individual has with the organization and continue the entire way through a visit, stay, purchase, or activity. A great deal of money is spent to attract customers to all types of experiences. At the same time, the first touch of a customer can be poor service, cranky attendants, ineptly designed environments, lack of attention to detail, and other factors which detract from the overall product.

If what the customer sees, hears, and does, has been thought through completely, the experience will likely be a good one. If not, the customer will perceive disjointed experience delivery and all the money spent to attract the customer will have been wasted. Each individual who is treated poorly will likely not return or purchase again. Most will tell others about what happened. When this occurs, it takes time and costs five times as much to attract a new customer to replace the one that has departed.

Consider Your Own Experience

Think about a recent experience you have had at a destination, hotel, attraction, or in another situation. The experience was taking up the leisure time you could spend any way you like and was supposed to be relaxing. When you arrived, no signs indicated you were welcome, or pointed you in the right direction to take the next step. A front desk attendant who didn't get enough sleep began your experience with a surly interaction.

The description of your experience in perfect marketing materials designed to attract a multitude of customers had sold you on the great historical story to become engaged in, and exploration of the very best collection of stores offerings great products in the retail mall. In reality, the tour guide knew the historic story, but did not convey it with any excitement in the delivery. When you went to find some needed things at the shopping mall, someone left a heap of trash outside the entrance to the shopping mall populated with plastic plants and poor lighting that delivered the signal that you were not important enough to keep the physical environment in good shape.

Immediately you get the wrong impression and the experience gets off on the wrong foot. You came to understand clearly that even small details can make or break a customer experience, if the customer believes they are significant.

If Only All Experiences Were Wonderful

If all the experiences we have in any given day or in a lifetime were good ones, it would dramatically impact the quality of our lives. Gone would be the stress of sitting on the telephone with one's cell phone provider getting sent from prompt to prompt and getting nowhere. Gone would be the surly retail clerk who doesn't really want to be on the job. Gone would be the car dealership with no ability or inclination to solve a problem. Gone would be the leisure travel supplier who imposes rules that only make a situation worse, instead of more relaxing. With those basic customer service messes behind us, we could begin to look at products that deliver the best while using them, and seek experiences that transform us, make our existence exponentially better, and elevate our lives.

Fortunately, in the midst of all these snafus and disappointments, much of our core happiness in life does not lie in the actual experiences that happen to us. It lies in how we respond to them. Some experiences have a greater impact on us based on what is going on around us at the time. High levels of stress cause different responses than those which would occur under less stressful conditions. On the other hand, with so much going on in the world all at once, we can become numb to it all, and react differently to some experiences than we might have in the face of less chaos.

The most effective experiences begin with products designed to meet specific customer needs, and continue through the delivery of detailed information about the product, ease of purchase, ease of use, and even, efficient returns. In the best cases, product search, sale, and delivery are supported by technology specifically created to make the customer's interaction as easy as possible. Expectations have been heightened by the technology used by Amazon, Apple and even Airbnb which were precisely designed to engage customers, and most importantly, to retain them.

STEP ONE: WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER VISITORS?

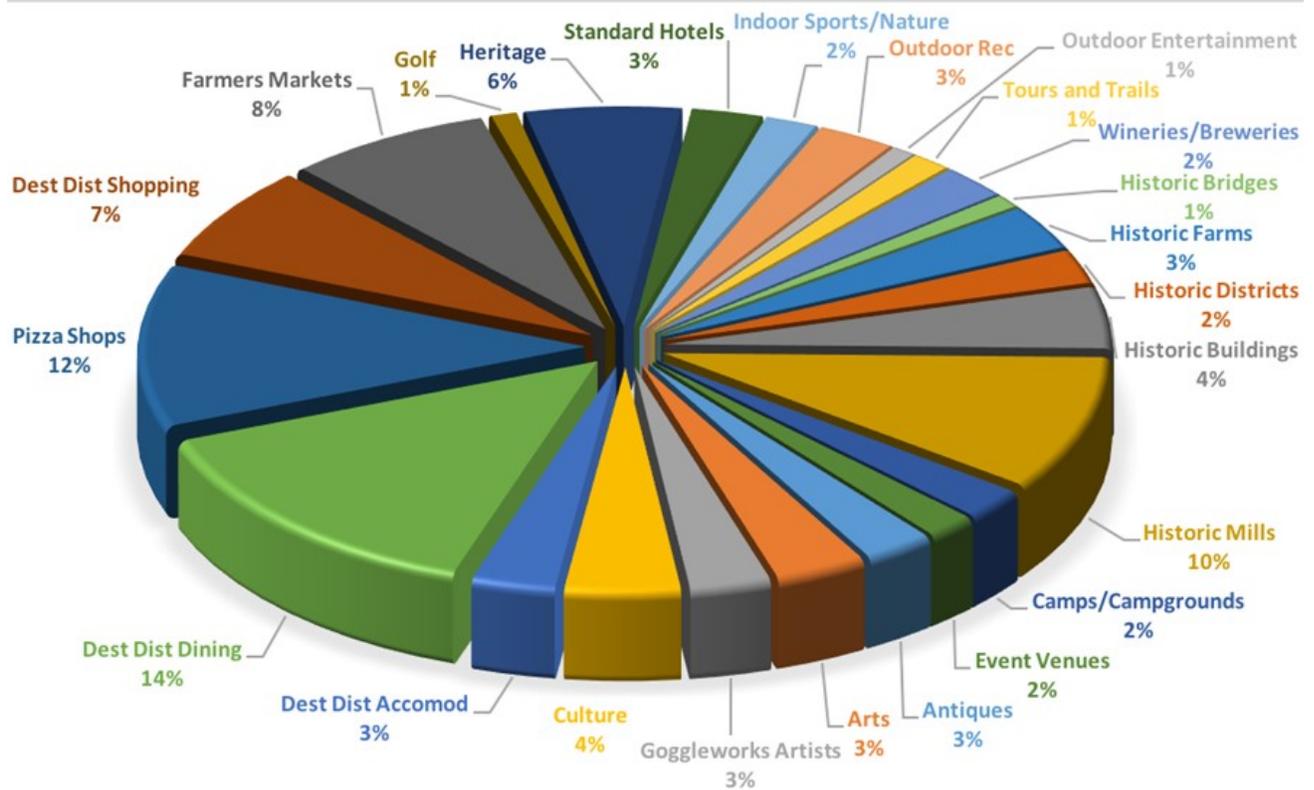
A COMPREHENSIVE INVENTORY OF VISITOR ASSETS AND RESOURCES THAT MAKE UP THE “EXPERIENCE”

Unlike many destinations that have only promoted members, Byways who were compelled to complete a Corridor Management Plan, have a great head start on a comprehensive inventory of assets and resources that will attract and appeal to visitors. Yet, the CMP may not contain all of the categories visitors need to have a comfortable and satisfying, much less inspiring experience.

- Arts and local artists
- Antiques, vintage and heirlooms
- Campgrounds
- Chain hotels
- Chain restaurants
- Culture, date specific performances
- Festivals
- Destination Distinctive Accommodations, reflecting the local culture
- Destination Distinctive Dining, authentic local restaurants
- Destination Distinctive Shopping, shop local
- Farms and Farmers Markets
- Filling Stations and Automobile Garages
- Golf
- Heritage and Historic Sites
- Historic Buildings and other structures
- Historic Districts
- Indoor Sports
- Museums
- Outdoor Sports
- Outdoor Recreation
- Outdoor entertainment
- Tours and trails
- Travel Services, rental cars, limousines,
- Wineries, Breweries and Distilleries

To be of best service, a “Life Happens” category can include a pharmacy, hospital or urgent car center, grocery store and other locations visitors may need. Key attractions from surrounding areas should also be included since visitors will travel as far as 30 miles from their accommodations base camp to experience attractions related to their interests. In some areas, the complete list can include as many as 1,200 to 1,500 locations.

When researching the website of each location, add the hours of operation, street address, phone number and email address for each entry. Once completed, compile all the information into a spreadsheet, that will later serve as a resource to contact all the locations. This will also enable determination of the number of locations that are visitor ready.



Use the spreadsheet tool to enable a view of the proportion of assets and resources in each category. Save all the materials and spreadsheets for use in future steps.