



*The National Voice of Scenic Byways & Roads*

# **MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX**

## **Unit Three**

**Maree Forbes, Ph.D.**

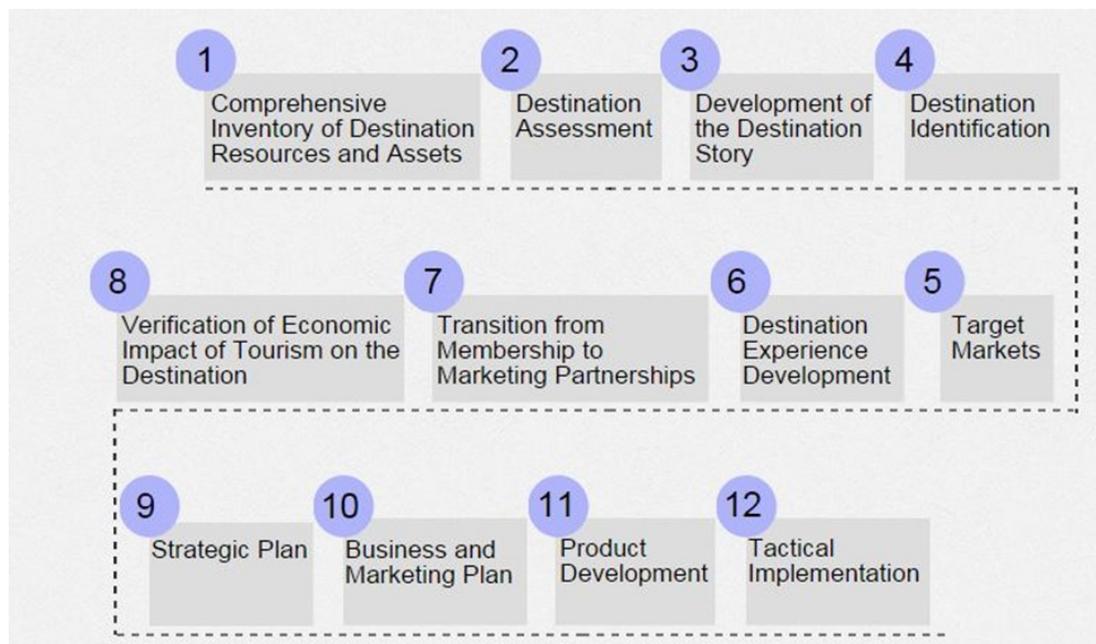
**Director of Development and Marketing, National  
Scenic Byway Foundation**

**Professor, Destination Management and Marketing,  
Temple University**

## MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX

Welcome to Unit Three of the Monthly Marketing Toolbox. Each month we are looking at a different aspect of destination marketing and illustrating how it applies to real world situations. This approach enables you to use the material to transform your own destination or Byway marketing.

This month we're focusing on Step Three: Development of the Destination Story, unique to each destination. Every destination has a story to tell. It is based on the heritage of the people who settled and the landscape they found. Culture is what has evolved since. Since each combination of geography and heritage in the United States is unique, no two destination stories are the same. In fact, the destination's story, unique from all others, is likely what makes a destination, a destination. The story of any destination answers the following questions: why are we unique, why are we important, what are the particular strengths of our visitor experience and what will visitors experience here they cannot experience anywhere else. In this unit, we will help you answer those questions for your destination or Byway.



## **Every Great Experience Starts with an Intriguing Story**

Everybody loves a good story. We all live in, and with, stories. We read novels, go to movies, and share stories with loved ones and colleagues. Good stories warm the heart, and make us feel good and uplifted. Stories let us connect with others, and with ourselves, as we relate to the plot and the action. With little separation between life and work in today's 24/7 world, engaging with a story is the only way today's stressed out Americans can get real relaxation by removing both their body and mind from everyday life, recharge, restore a sense of balance, and re-engage with themselves.

A recent article in the Washington Post illustrated that a story can even set one on a spiral, up or down. Couples who told more positive stories were far more likely to be together in stable marriages than those who told negative stories. People who lead meaningful lives tend to tell stories about redemption, growth and love, and stories that move from bad to good. When this occurs, leisure becomes not only interesting, it is recuperative and regenerating,

Today in many destination circles, storytelling is all the buzz. Reams of professional articles advise "Tell Your Story." Yet, good storytelling is not as easy as it sounds.

Storytelling is made more challenging by the fact that organizations which sell things cannot include any information that would appear to be "selling." Instead of being inspiring, those stories merely come off as commercials. Stories also have to have a focus—it's no longer acceptable to tell a destination story using the old marketing line "we have something for everyone." That story is not a story, since there is no focus on any particular experience.

When the product is words—which is the essence of destination and Byway marketing, good storytelling is survival. The author of *Storytelling That Moves People* says that, "in a story, if you can harness imagination and the principles of a well-told story, then you get people rising to their feet amid thunderous applause instead of yawning and ignoring you."

## **Great Stories Propel Your Experience**

When destination stories are told in an inspiring way, potential visitors will begin to be pulled into the story while they are still reading on the website (or the newspaper or other publication), greatly improving the prospects of a visit when they sense themselves responding to the destination. The sooner people can envision themselves having the experience, the greater the likelihood they will engage in it.

Customers will relate best to a story told in first person, like hearing it from a friend who describes the experience as it unfolds, and how it feels. This applies no matter where you are or who your audience is.

Set the context of the story, the time and the place, before using active verbs. Introducing visitors to the destination or Byway's heritage puts the rest of the destination into context, akin to "setting the stage for the story." Featuring arts and culture enables visitors to grasp the visual presence of the destination. Those visitors who can engage, explore, experience and express the destination's story will go home and tell their friends.

## **Imagine Your Story as a Movie**

Telling the story that surrounds the experience you are planning, is the same as narrating the script of a movie. The best stories are a journey through the experience, described in a way that engages the customer's emotions, and enables them to envision themselves in the experience.

Choose one ordinary moment or object and make it the "gleaming detail" that best captures the essence of the story. Make the ordinary extraordinary. Reflect on a part of the experience that originally captivated you. Dare to share emotions, because there's no way to expect people to respond emotionally if there is no emotions in the storytelling. Choose the strongest of the five senses in the story and use it to make a deeper connection with experience participants, because one primary sense dominates every memory we have.

Let the story build until it reaches a natural, emotional punch line, and then end it, quickly. Good stories told with emotions create familiarity. When a newcomer tells a story, they stop being a stranger. When a location tells a story, it stops being a strange place.

Have great mountain biking trails? Actually describe what it feels like to ride up and down – the thrill, the excitement – in emotionally driven words. Have great heritage? Tell the story of the first settlers arriving at the destination – describe their conditions, however rugged their lives were. Have great art – stand in front of one of the best works and write the words that come to mind. Describe festivals with the smells, sights and sounds that surround the customer. Hear the cheers, savor the smell of freshly baked goodies, mingle at the booths watching the craft! Describe the heat of the moment in auto racing when the lead changes and the checkered flag waves! Tell it all!

Inspire people to the point that those who become so thoroughly engaged in the story to the point where they can express it, and the experiences that go with it, will go home and tell their friends – a level of word of mouth advertising which no static ad can ever achieve.

## **Engage Visitors with Your Story**

Today's visitors engage with the destination's story through exploration of nine interrelated destination asset categories:

Heritage	Scenic Drives and Byways
Culture	Destination Distinctive Accommodations
Arts	Destination Distinctive Dining
Overview Tours	Destination Distinctive Shopping
Outdoors	

Grouping destination assets into these categories illustrates the strengths of the destination and its unique selling proposition. The activities visitors have in these categories make up the destination or Byway experience.

The unique selling proposition that emerges from the destination's actual resources and assets that are illustrated in the story will lead to a carefully chosen brand that resonates from the destination's uniqueness and can be supported with a symbol, words, and tagline. These are topics we will cover in Unit Four.

## **STEP THREE: HOW DO WE DEVELOP DESTINATION STORY CONTENT?**

Each Unit of the Marketing Toolbox includes a tool to assist you to create your own transformational marketing. In this unit we address a process to create the content of your destination story.

### **The Importance of Great Content**

Today's visitors are no longer taking the time to find out if there is something they want to do at a particular location, they're going to places where they know there is something they want to do. That's because marketers have clearly told them there is something they want to do at the destination or along the Byway, and conveyed the message in an intriguing and inspiring story. In addition, they can identify with the individuals shown in the images and hear their needs and desires expressed in words.

### **The Practical Realities of Content Development**

One of the most important things about storytelling is clearly understanding the audience you are talking to. If you're seeking to reach Middle Boomers, don't post images or write the content for young families. The two markets require very different, specifically crafted messages. Likewise, with Millennials subdivided into at least six different personas, there is no point in trying to attract a working professional Millennial who has graduated college with no family obligations, with images of a Millennial family, just because they are the same age. Many Boomers don't view themselves as "seniors" and will not respond to images and words that depict them as Matures, even though their age says they are.

Enter content marketing, a term coined in the digital age to describe getting the right words to the right customers, in the right place, to prompt an action to engage in an experience. It requires content that is relevant, appealing, and in the correct place in the customers buying journey or basically customers will stop paying attention to any of it.

When commencing on content development destination marketers must ask themselves one critical question: are we willing to do true content marketing, or just trying to make content fit into our traditional marketing process? Are we focused on producing inspiring and engaging information to facilitate the customer buying journey and an actual purchase or just filling a space?

Working through the customer buying journey to determine the words that will serve best at each point will enable answering the questions asked by the authors of Content, Inc.:

**What Do We Cover?** The answer is of course, the best information produced about your location.

The next question: **How We Cover It?** is channel specific. These are the places where the words and content will be deployed to appear where target markets are looking.

A third question: **Why We Cover It?** is the WHY, the inspiring aspiration that enables us to reach the destination or Byway's vision.

A fourth question: **Whom We Cover It For?** the visitors who consume the information to make a decision to visit.

The authors of Content, Inc. believe that content produced at the intersection of all of these elements will deliver a uniqueness that no other location can touch.

Begin developing this content the same way you begin other tasks — by setting goals. Approach the task comprehensively; every marketing vehicle that uses words and images must be included in the content development process.

### **Define the Specific Visitor Profiles for which Content Will be**

**Developed:** Determine the basic message that will be developed for each profile and the content for each profile at each stage in the customer buying journey.

**Define the Specific Content Products:** Determine the exact products, such as a planning guide, family fun guide, map or scenic driving guide that will be created for each profile, for each step in the customer buying journey.

**Determine the Outcome of Each Content Product:** How will the potential visitor react to the particular content and what should they be able to do after engaging with the content? What is the call to action?

**Define the Most Effective Distribution Channels:** What are the most effective distribution channels for each content product? And what is the most appropriate content for each distribution channel?

**Define the Conversation to be Generated:** What is the conversation with the visitor the particular content product is expected to generate?

### **Other Helpful Content Insights**

**Become A Knowledge Resource:** Destination and Byway marketers are the only people in a position to be the “expert knowledge resource” about their location and the experience it offers. Who else does the visitor have available to get the best information about the location? Think about it— who else could take this role? Embrace the expert role, revel in it, tout the location’s uniqueness and strengths, and be as helpful as possible. When potential visitors take the time to contact your organization for help, they are looking to visit. Deliver the help you give them from the visitors point of view.

**Build a Community of Trustworthy Information:** Make sure every detail of content is accurate, timely, and developed from the visitors point of view. Make sure the content posted describes the experience accurately and forthrightly. Visitors won’t trust any additional information if they feel a description provided is hyped and overblown.

**Focus the Content:** In every case, provide content that visitors really need to make their decisions – the exact type of information that will create the desired outcome—content that helps visitors make their visiting decisions.

**Talk and Listen:** Feedback from potential visitors is critical to understanding how the content being delivered can be made most useful.

**Deliver a Consistent Message:** As the only entity that promotes the destination or Byway, formulate, drive and distribute a consistent and strong message.

**Keep At It:** Partner with as many organizations as possible to deliver the message, over and over again. Experts believe that an individual has to hear a message 7-9 times before it really sinks in.