



*The National Voice of Scenic Byways & Roads*

# **MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX Unit Nine**

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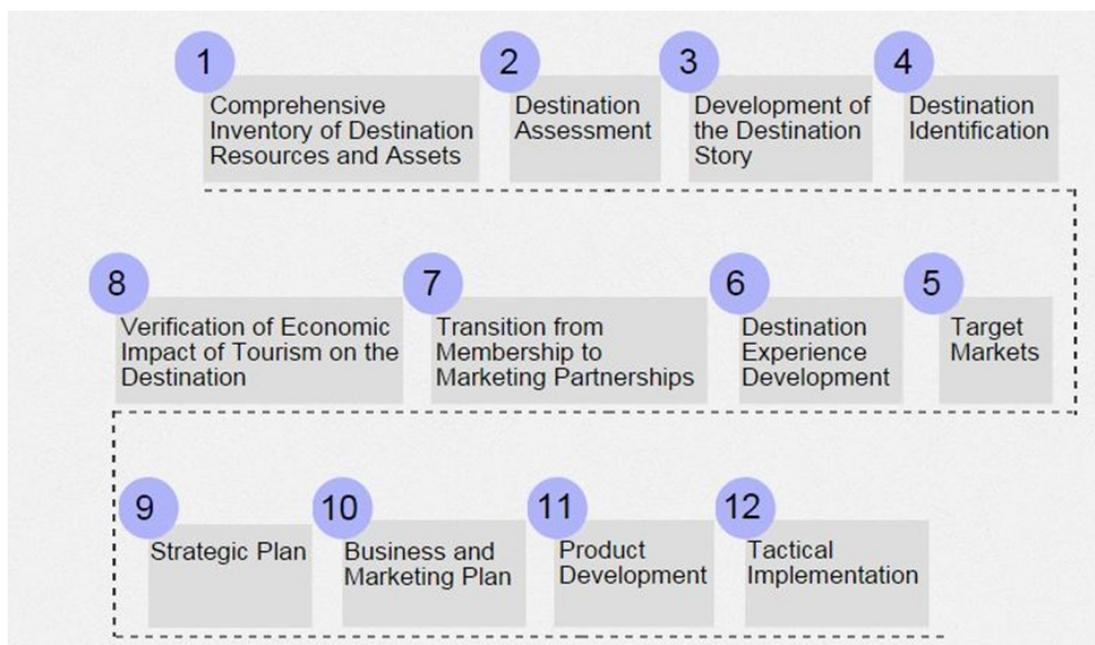
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## MONTHLY MARKETING TOOLBOX

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.

This month we will be addressing strategic planning, the process where long term goals and the ultimate vision for where the organization going is generated. Strategic planning is different from business planning, which will be covered in the next unit.



## The Importance of Vision

Three stone masons in the Middle Ages were hard at work when a visitor came along and asked what they were doing. The first stone mason, hard at work, sweat beading on his brow, grumbled, “I’m cutting this stone.” The second stone mason, this less distraught, responded with a deep sigh, “I’m building a parapet.” The third stone mason replied with a radiant face, “I’m building a beautiful cathedral that will glorify God for centuries to come.”

Business guru, Tom Peters writes that leaders, like the last stone mason, understand that they can “create new world’s “ through envisioning. It may be that these new worlds pose a threat to organizations as they are, but they also provide a path on which the organization can survive in a changing world. Business writers, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus wrote that effective visions can change the basic metabolism of an organization, In today’s competitive marketplace, this is exactly what must happen.

The US Army regards visioning as the first step in goal setting. Without an idea of what things should become - a vision of the future—there is no measure of success to determine if the goal has been reached.

Steve Jobs set the audacious goal of “being the epicenter of the technology industry.” Think Apple, the iPhone, iPad, iPod and all of the other electronic devices that fill our lives. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks set a goal of 2,000 stores by the year 2000. It provided him a specific path of how he thought Starbucks could and should grow.

We could go on and on, illustrating the visions of so many other organizations that have had an audacious vision to accomplish great things. Byways, DMOs and other organizations must become that third stone mason who was able to see the complete vision and end result of what he was doing. He clearly understood what success would look like.

The need for a vision to improve the visitor’s experience has never been greater. The importance of places visitor travel to participate in experiences has never been greater.

Traditionally, the idea of customers and delivering a visitor experience has been viewed as being up to the suppliers, since most DMOs considered that visitors were the customers of the hotels, attractions, Bed and Breakfasts, race tracks, concert halls, and more. Yet these locations are only components of an experience. And then, there's service while visitors are "in destination." Every destination experience includes a multitude of different touch points, some of which may be positive and some not.

The entire industry must keep in mind that visitors don't travel to stay in a hotel, take a plane trip or rent a car. They travel to a destination to have a "DESTINATION EXPERIENCE" and visit particular places to experience something they cannot get elsewhere. They eat, sleep, shop, explore, tour and more, in an experience that is the sum total of the things they do at the destination.

Visitors are the customers of the DMO—because no other entity has the view of the whole visitor experience which the customer is having "in destination." DMOs are the only entity which can promote and deliver these experiences—made up of multiple independent suppliers generally only interested in promoting themselves—which have been blended into a cohesive whole. That places DMOs in the driver's seat in the travel, tourism and visitor industry.

Every DMO and Byway must be able to "envision" what the region looks like and acts like when a vision of what makes the best experience for the visitor, has become a reality. This perspective gives DMOs much greater power, but it can also be the advent of tremendous new responsibilities, engaging and communicating directly with visitors, and managing the visitor experience.

Each visitor experience begins with the primary driver for the trip—the thing that caught the visitor's eye in the first place. Visitors organize their other activities and services around the primary driver, attempting to make the entire trip a cohesive, pleasant and relaxing endeavor.

When visitors experience some touch points that contradict their experience with others, their time in the destination or on the Byway, will feel disjointed and uncomfortable. They will feel welcome in some places and not in others, making it less likely they will return.

There is a tremendous opportunity for DMOs to define experiences visitors should have at their destination and manage those experiences. These actions will serve to snag repeaters who will make the destination their “Destination of Choice,” the objective that DMO should be aiming to achieve—creating repeaters and champions who willingly spread the word about the great experience time they had.

## **It Takes A Vision**

The most important question a DMO can ask is: “what does success look like when the visitor experience has been transformed to attract visitors who make the destination their Destination of Choice? What attributes, attractions, services, accommodations, entertainment, cuisine, retail and more, does the destination have when success has been achieved?

The best visions paint a picture of what the future looks like and what the organization must do to make it a reality. The visioning process can be elegant and inspiring as all seek to find the best vision to aspire to. It’s best not to get too far into the weeds during visioning, broad statements are adequate at this stage, since there will be time to revisit the vision in detail at a later point in the destination master plan. Be sure to include the ideas of all those who can make a genuine contribution.

Other very important questions that must be asked include: How do we want visitors to perceive the destination or Byway? What do we want them to do when they arrive? How do we want them to feel when they arrive? How should locals welcome people who they know are not local? What are the services that people from out of town just can’t get along without? What things enhance their experience?

Additionally, DMOs must ask: What is completely unique and authentic about our destination or Byway that will resonate with visitors? When visioning, remember Steve Jobs. Never discount any thoughts or suggestions no matter how lofty they may appear. They just may be able to be achieved with the right planning and strategy.

The University of Wisconsin, the alma mater of many tourism graduates, defines a Vision for Success as a “clear and succinct description of what the organization or community should look like after it successfully implements its strategies and achieves its full potential. It is an expression of what they want the organization to be—a preferred future, or picture of the situation that will be chosen to create.”

The Vision statement itself should be one brief, clear sentence, accompanied by a mission (what you will deliver to achieve your vision), basic philosophy, goals, basic strategies and performance criteria. I understand clearly that the process of proactively and concretely setting out what things are going to look like in the future is a direct contradiction to the actions of many organizations that have for decades, just changed a number here, adding a program there, re-calculating and done. However, if you don't lay out what the future looks like, you will never get there.

One of the biggest challenges is that a vision comes with responsibility. It is not worth establishing, if it is not going to be realized. The only way to compete is to articulate a vision of how the destination or Byway is unique from competitors, how it will stand out from the crowd, how visitors will be engaged at the location and how they will be served once they arrive.

It is very important that the initial vision be articulated at the beginning of any change process, so it will be less bogged down by perceived constraints. Great visions are inspiring and move people to action. Set it out at the beginning of the change process, when thoughts are fresh and bold. Besides, without a vision to accomplish, even just as an initial sketch, because otherwise organizations are like Alice in Wonderland. Any path will take you there.

## **STEP NINE: THE VISIONING PROCESS**

### **Start with Words and Headlines**

Begin the visioning process by articulating single words or short phrases that describe the destination, location or Byway, not generic words like authentic or cool, but specific descriptors like Americana, outdoor paradise, or snow capital. Use words that describe the actual place.

Get the words on a flip chart and underline the key words and phrases that everyone likes best. A good facilitator will begin to assist in grouping the words and phrases into concepts, and seek out the commonalities to create headlines. A word of caution, however, if you use a facilitator, don't depend on the facilitator for answers.

Then, have every person involved write a the headline of a newspaper story about the destination or Byway 20 years into the future, which tells about the success the region has had. If possible, have each person right the first line or first few lines of the story that describes the actual success. Then ask each person to describe the future in pictures. The final vision statement can be wordsmithed by a small group or one or two participants, and subject to more discussion, until consensus is reached.

### **An Initial Strategy to Support the Vision**

A good strategy is not complicated. It is simply the steps—the path—that will be taken to get from where things are currently to where they need to be to achieve the vision. Strategizing is essentially the exercise of making decisions about what will, and what will not, be done, along the way.

All of the steps needed to deliver the goals must be concluded with an actual planning document, complete with a list of the actions organized into the right sequence, with hard deadline dates for accomplishment.

Planning time horizons can vary from three years to accomplish changes in marketing to 10 years, during which time significant changes can be made to the destination or Byway itself.

### **The Outcome of Strategy**

The desired outcome of the strategic planning process is to establish a concrete competitive advantage for the destination or Byway. Every destination and Byway has a unique combination of the heritage of the people who settled and the landscape they found, rendering the culture that has grown up since, unique only to that location. Perhaps it is this unique combination of heritage, culture and geography, that makes a destination, a destination. There are no two exact combinations of geography and heritage in the United States, giving every destination and Byway a distinct competitive advantage and one that can be built on.

This approach completely reverses the decades old marketing advantage of having “something for everyone.” Developing a competitive advantage and making it come alive means selecting and featuring some members over others and creating a substantive core experience. That’s where today’s outdated membership models get in the way. No matter how politically unsavory that may be, it is necessary to be selective and unique to attract today’s visitors.

Whatever it is called, this competitive advantage and uniqueness has to arise out of the very core and essence of the location. There’s no hedging this with taglines, fancy logos, or cute language. It must be authentic and generated by digging deep to capture the very lifeblood of the place.