

Project Category

NSBF Byway Community Award: Communications

Project Name

#ColoradoByways Instagram Campaign

Byway Name

Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways

Overview

Colorado's diverse transportation system links all of us together, but most importantly takes us to places in our beautiful state that often go missed. The #ColoradoByways campaign on Instagram was a visual storytelling project that highlighted the rich history, beautiful landscapes, wildlife and more along each of the 26 Scenic and Historic Colorado Byways. Our goals were not only to educate and engage our followers on Instagram about Colorado's scenic byways, but to also grow this channel to reach more travelers across colorful Colorado.

For seven months (June - December), we showcased a new Colorado byway weekly in different regions across the state. Using the byways map (see attachment 1), we strategically created an editorial calendar of which roadway we would feature based on best times to safely travel. The weekly schedule (see attachment 3) included impactful, high-quality photos as posts, as well as other tactics like carousel posts, stories that linked to our posts, reshared images from followers and photographers on Instagram, informational branded graphics, and much more. Starting each Monday, attention-grabbing posts built upon each other throughout the week and continued the story from the day before through Saturday. We then teased the next week on Sundays and encouraged followers to share their stories and photos in advance. By using the location tagging feature, viewers were able to learn about the byway by first taking a virtual "road trip" right at their fingertips. This was aided by our use of hashtags, like #ColoradoByways, #roadtrip, #ColoradoHistory, etc., where we would tag specific keywords to help users find our page organically. Our intent was to build excitement and encourage followers to check back daily, and come to appreciate and support the cause to sustain these beautiful environments. This helped us reach our campaign goals and successfully increased two-way engagement with our audience.

Intrinsic Qualities

It was important in our campaign that we honor all 26 Colorado Byways – including 13 designated America's Byways – for their uniqueness, while also supporting the vision of recognizing and valuing these byways for their distinctive experiences, stories and treasured places. In support of the Foundation's vision, this campaign allowed us to connect with existing and new travelers by showing them where our one-of-a-kind byways could take them.

For example, along the Grand Mesa Byway, it was important to mention Cedaredge and Palisade because both are very lush areas with vineyards and orchards that draw visitors and wine enthusiasts. Then there were other byways like the Highway of Legends, where there was an abundance of content but only seven days to tell its story. Within this week's posts, there was more information within the captions. However, by using "Stories" mentioned below, this helped us build on this content. While some byways were more visually rich than others, no story was the same as we used branded visuals with specific colors to make sure each byway was individually represented.

It is also important to note that although we mentioned the more famous locations along each Colorado byway, we also aimed to explore new places. With the help of local agencies and city/county partners, we had access to behind the scenes information and photos, and often tagged these partners in posts to cross promote these resources in the respective communities. We also engaged with followers daily through comments on posts, stories or via direct messages, who graciously shared their experiences and photos when traveling the byways – which were often used in posts/stories. This cross promotion effort demonstrated first hand the excitement to explore the scenic and historic byways, and celebrated the rich communities across our regions in Colorado.

Byway Best Practice

One of the most effective best practices that we implemented into the project was ensuring the content and visuals were consistent from start to finish (see attachment 2,3). We not only consistently posted each day of the week to build a foundation for our followers' expectations, but also made sure visuals were subtly branded and exclusive to encourage partners and followers alike to share on their respective stories and feeds.

Since social media, and Instagram in general, is such a fast moving and evolving communications tool, we made sure to adjust the campaign with what was trending on this channel. We started the campaign posting at 8 a.m., Monday through Friday. Then after four weeks, we looked at the insights and reach of the posts and decided to adjust our posting time to 11 a.m. based on user data. Likewise, we originally intended on posting only five days of the week, Monday through Friday, but quickly recognized early the interest in the campaign and the chance to include the week-ends.

One additional best practice used was maximizing the impact of Instagram stories (see attachment 4). Sometimes users of Instagram prefer to view a profile's "stories" rather than scrolling through their feed. Due to Instagram's unique post feed algorithm, we recognized that it was possible some of our followers may not come across a daily post. Utilizing stories gave us one more touch point to get our message across and more readily available to our followers. We created custom visuals to support this effort, and shared both our posts and user's posts as stories. The result was more engagement by our followers, which in return gave us more reach and more new followers.

Keys to Success

The success of the #ColoradoByways campaign was paramount in several ways. We not only elevated the visual presence of the @ColoradoDOT brand on Instagram through high-quality visuals, but we also helped our followers get a unique look into what lies "beyond the roadways" that CDOT manages across the state. Through visual storytelling, we were able to guide Colorado travelers to plan ahead and "Know Before You Go" so that they can safely explore and travel.

In order to gauge the campaign's success, we used a variety of key performance indicators and metrics specific to Instagram such as reach, likes, saves and shares to monitor and analyze each month. One of our main goals was to reach 10,000 followers on @ColoradoDOT's Instagram channel, which was a newer medium that CDOT had started using in July 2020. We started with 8,000 followers prior to the campaign, and hit this benchmark in October 2021 growing the account by 3,000+ followers by project completion. Our key performance indicators compared to the previous year (July to December) also skyrocketed, gaining 790,558 reach (240% increase), 30,180 likes (228% increase), 1,676 saves (283% increase) and 1,487 shares (901% increase).

Additional Information

Contact Information

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Project Year(s):

6/11/2021 - 12/13/2021

Website

<https://www.codot.gov/travel/colorado-byways>

Photographs

