

Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau

2009 Strategic Marketing Plan

Purpose

1. Promote Union County as a destination
2. To educate Union County residents about restaurants, shopping and attractions in our own community.
3. Position our community to attract conventions, sporting events and other conferences

Background

Tourism can be used as an Economic Development Strategy. Organized properly, tourism activities can reinforce efforts to recruit new businesses and entrepreneurs to the County by making them aware of community amenities that can also improve business operations. Tourism increases the tax base that helps pay for community amenities and services. It creates jobs and business opportunities for entry level people and entrepreneurs. Tourism diversifies the economy so that communities are no longer dependent on one or two industries.

Today's visitor may just be tomorrow's investor. Sometimes business managers and owners first discover an area as a location for one of their business operations through a recreational visit to an area for golf, hunting, fishing or participation in local fairs and other events. Tourism development is especially important to downtown revitalization efforts in Plain City, Richwood and Marysville. The Convention and Visitors Bureau should look for these types of synergy between its tourism, businesses, attractions and downtown revitalization efforts. (See EDAP Strategic Plan)

The marketplace is full of choices for visitors creating a competition among cities, communities and states to attract visitors. Therefore it is imperative to prepare a long term strategic marketing plan and the need for the Convention and Visitors Bureau to have a good marketing foundation. Through the marketing plan, board members and the director should look at: What is Our Strategic Position? What are the industry trends that are impacting us? What is our competition for attracting visitors? Are we gaining or losing our share of corporate and leisure travel market share? Are our services emerging or maturing? Is and how often is our message reaching our potential customers?

In order to stand out among other competitors the CVB should continue to develop comprehensive Agri-Tourism and Heritage attractions. Agri-Tourism and Heritage are one of the newest trends recognized by the Ohio Department of Travel and Tourism. With over 87% of our land agriculture based, Union County should be able to develop a significant Agri-Tourism business. In addition, with the dedication of the Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway, the CVB should develop Heritage Tourism. Another trend emerging is family and class reunion events.

Our competitor is other counties that have a significant amount of attractions such as amusement parks, beaches and mountains. However, we can compete with our small town appeal and low prices. In addition, we should collaborate with neighboring counties to package trips that are attractive to empty nesters, families and individuals planning reunions.

Currently, most of our hotels are full during the week with corporate travel. In order to market to businesses in Union County, additional hotels will have to be built. The hotels have vacancies on the weekends in which festivals or sporting events do not occur. The CVB needs to develop attractions that will appeal to families to fill in during non-event weekends from October-April.

In 1991, the Convention and Visitors Bureau merged with the Union County Chamber of Commerce, a non-profit corporation. The fiscal year runs from January 1 to December 31st.

Situation

1. Tourism is an important growth opportunity for Union County by attracting new outside dollars into the community to support local attractions, events and businesses.
2. The current hotels and motels attract corporate travelers however they need support in attracting leisure travelers to Union County.
3. In order to attract sporting events, the county will need to add additional hotel rooms.
4. Some sectors of our community have seen a decline in business while some new businesses have broken sales records. We have a larger selection of restaurants and stores however each of the municipalities need more unique retail stores in the downtown areas.
5. With today's issue of airport security and the increased hassles of traveling abroad and the increase in gas prices, more and more individuals are taking vacations and weekend trips where they can drive – usually under four hours. These trips are called “staycations”.
6. Individuals who live in the city are seeking relaxing vacations to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. They desire small town charm and hospitality.
7. With an increase in opportunities for dining, shopping and attractions and the designation of the Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway in 2007 which included the opening of two new covered bridges, the Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau needs to continue to educate the community about these opportunities so that they do not travel elsewhere for these services and entertainment.
8. Few residents know that the Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau exist and what services it provides. This fact has improved the last two years. However the Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau needs to continue to educate residents.
9. In 2007, a new logo, tagline and brand were developed for Union County. The Convention and Visitors Bureau needs to continue to incorporate the logo in all publications and advertisements.
10. In 2007 and 2008, the Convention and Visitors Bureau witnessed an increase in the number of day trippers and tour groups due to the opening of the Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway and two new covered bridges and the marketing campaign focused on covered bridges.

Objectives

1. Improve the coordination of local tourism events with regional tourism events to increase traffic to Union County. Work with regional tourism partners to create more tourism packages...i.e. Little Brown Jug.
2. Strengthen tourism marketing activities for Union County and its communities.
3. Work with the Economic Development Partnership, to support the development of the downtown infrastructure of business and other amenities that will enhance the tourism industry.
4. Create opportunities to make the Convention and Visitors Bureau more visible to the community.
5. Increase leisure travel with an emphasis on class and family reunions by 5% by December 2009.
6. Increase number of day trippers by 10% by December 2009.
7. Increase the number of residents dining, shopping and utilizing entertainment.
8. Collaborate with county and city to develop sport facilities for future attraction of regional sporting events.
9. Develop methods to identify statistics that measure the impact of marketing efforts.
10. Continue to execute Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway corridor management plan to develop heritage tourism in the county.

Audience

1. Companies/Business Travelers: Several major company headquarters are located in Union County. These companies have contracts with hotels in Dublin to host their out of town employees or contractors. At this time, the building and contractor business accounts for a large part of the business travel. Most of the hotels are full during the week and cannot accommodate additional corporate travel.
2. Leisure Traveler: The leisure traveler supports area businesses and contributes to the hotel lodging tax. Currently, leisure travel is too reliant on events for hotel stays on the weekends.
3. Group Tours: Group tours mostly consist of day trippers that visit area attractions especially the baby boomers who have retired and have expendable income.
4. Sporting Events: Planners have arranged customized sporting events and tournaments in recent years. This can be expanded upon by developing relationships with the Fairgrounds, Parks and Recreation Directors, Athletic directors, YMCA and health department once additional hotel and sporting facilities are developed.
5. Class and Family Reunions: This market is currently untapped. Class Reunions are held at Benny's and Little Tonys arbitrarily.

Strategies

1. Continue the concept for the Visitors Guide called Passport to Union County due to overwhelming popularity and response. The guide will be updated, reprinted and distributed to other Convention and Visitors Bureaus, ODOT visitor centers, requests through advertisements and information booths at events.
2. Update and reprint the following publications to attract visitors and educate residents; About Town: Calendar of Events, Covered Bridge Tour Guide, Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway Driving Guide, Agri-Tourism brochure, the Meeting and Event Planning Guide and Sports and Recreation Guide.
3. Continue to update, revise and promote the website as the place to go for information. Market the blog on the website. Add a search engine to make website more user friendly. Create a web driver promoting Union County on CVB, City and County websites.
4. Write a Directors Column for the Chamber Newsletter to update residents and companies on happenings in the bureau.
5. Continue to submit a grant to Ohio Department of Travel and Tourism to help support the advertising budget. Advertisements will be placed with appropriate newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio stations and cable TV stations.
6. Continue to develop relationships with the media and update CVB Press Kit for re-distribution.
7. Continue to submit events for public relation listings in appropriate media.
8. Divide advertising/marketing efforts among tour groups utilizing the covered bridges and attracting reunions and individuals interested in motorcycle event formerly in association with Honda HomeComing.
9. Work with restaurants, store owners and attraction operators to encourage Cooperative Advertising and Cross Promotion.
10. Set up display booths at appropriate events including but not limited to Union County Fair, Richwood Independent Fair, Business After Business, etc.
11. Offer giveaways and door prizes at events to assist in the promotion of the county and our website.
12. Offer souvenirs to promote the county. Souvenirs included but are not limited to Covered Bridge Post Cards, Covered Bridge Afghan, Marysville Historical Walking Tour Guide, Covered Bridge Calendar and Covered Bridge CD.
13. Work with current events and attractions to offer ideas and suggestions on improvement such as the Farmer's Market (location, allowing more farmers than locals) and historical society (landscaping and encourage longer hours of operation).
14. Revamp and improve Honda HomeComing Welcome Home Party as a unique event to Marysville and Union County.

15. Continue to develop Annual Covered Bridge Festival in association with Festifair.
16. Initiate conversations about a Garden for All Countries with Scotts Miracle-Gro as the sponsor for 2010.
17. Continue to work on the byway including securing funding, implementing way finding and securing historical markers for the bridges.
18. Work with all cities including Marysville, Richwood, Plain City, Unionville Center and Milford Center to assist in branding and promotion of their individual communities. The downtowns should be marketed as an “integrated package”. In 2009, funds should be allocated to provide additional banners and brackets to Plain City. To date, the Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau has provided banners for Marysville, Richwood, Plain City, Milford Center and Unionville Center.
19. Form a committee and begin development of a more structured Heritage Tourism Program to include ten year plan for Historical Markers and development of the Underground Railroad.
20. Continue to collaborate with the Union County Cultural Arts pARTnership to implement five year strategic plan to include murals, public art, art education, Ohio Chataqua, art exhibits and a cultural arts center.