

Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau 2010 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 attractions and activities can reinforce efforts to recruit new businesses and entrepreneurs to the County. Tourism increases the tax base that helps pay for community amenities and services. 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 Marysville, Milford Center, Unionville Center, Plain City and Richwood. 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 Union County? 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. 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.

Our competitor is other communities 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.

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.

Union County is at a disadvantage when major corporations, convention and athletic events look to host large groups in our area. They are looking for a full service hotel and over 400 hotel rooms.

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 and sports facilities in order to submit proposals for hosting tournaments and events.
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. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, 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.

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. This marketing plan should address working with these companies to host their guests in Union County to keep the dollars local to spend on amenities, services and marketing. At this time, the building and contractor business accounts for a large part of the business 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.

Objectives and Strategies

- A. Continue to implement and expand public relations and marketing activities to promote Union County and its restaurants, stores and attractions.
 - 1) Work with all cities/communities/villages 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”
 - 2) Continue to develop relationships with the media and update CVB Press Kit for re-distribution

- 3) Continue to send regular press releases to appropriate media (local, regional and national)
- 4) Continue to submit events for public relation listings in appropriate media
- 5) Continue to update, revise and promote the website as the place to log onto for information on Union County
- 6) Continue to send monthly Event E-Newsletters
- 7) Incorporate Social Media (Face book, Linked-In and Twitter) in promoting events
- 8) Market the blog on the website
- 9) Write a Directors Column for the Chamber Newsletter to update residents and companies on happenings in the bureau
- 10) If state funds are available, 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.
- 11) Work with restaurants, store owners and attraction operators to encourage Cooperative Advertising and Cross Promotion.
- 12) Host quarterly functions at local attractions highlighting Union County Tourism – this is a series of gatherings designed to provide an opportunity to network with fellow industry peers, learn about activities of the area attractions and discover new attractions/events in Union County
- 13) Continue to develop and host Best of Union County to promote restaurants, stores, attractions, etc in Union County
- 14) Continue to market hotels to Human Resource and Training Directors of major businesses in Union County to encourage over night stays in Union County.
- 15) 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
- 16) 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
- 17) Collaborate with Chamber to set up display booths at appropriate events including but not limited to Union County Fair, Richwood Independent Fair, Business After Business, etc.
- 18) Offer giveaways and door prizes at events to assist in the promotion of the county
- 19) Offer souvenirs to promote the county. Souvenirs included but are not limited to Covered Bridge Post Cards, Marysville Historical Walking Tour Guide, Covered Bridge Calendar, Covered Bridge CD, Courthouse and Spain Creek Note cards

- B. Improve local tourism events including All Ohio Bike Fest and Covered Bridge Festival through collaboration with local organizations and regional tourism events to increase traffic to Union County and to create more tourism packages
 - 1) Recruit organizations and volunteers to help plan these two events
 - 2) Facilitate meetings
 - 3) Assist with fundraising efforts
 - 4) Assist in organizing event
- C. Increase number of day trippers by 10% by December 2010
 - 1) Continue to develop database of Tour Operators and companies
 - 2) Develop, Design and send two direct mail pieces (Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter)
- D. Collaborate with county, city and other organizations to develop attractions, events, sport facilities and recreational opportunities
 - 1) Initiate conversations about a Garden for All Countries with Scotts Miracle-Gro
 - 2) Develop a more structured Heritage Tourism Program including the implementation of the five year plan for Historical Markers and the formation of a committee to develop a heritage tourism program of the Underground Railroad
 - 3) In continuation with heritage brochure series, develop brochure for Richwood emphasizing cabins just recently moved to Richwood Fairgrounds
 - 4) Continue to develop downtown Historical Walking tours. Marysville was a hit in 2009. Work with Plain City and Richwood to develop.
 - 5) Begin exploration of developing a historic church tour, cemetery tour and architecture wonder tour
 - 6) Develop sample on-line heritage itineraries and post on Convention and Visitors Bureau website
 - 7) Collaborate with Land Heritage Trust and Agriculture committee on Parade of Farms to develop agriculture tourism and awareness
 - 8) Work with Scotts Store and Museum to promote as a tourism stop
- E. Develop methods to identify statistics that measure the impact of marketing efforts
- F. Continue to execute Big Darby Plains Scenic Byway corridor management plan to develop heritage tourism in the county.
 - 1) Enhance website
 - 2) Implementing way finding

- 3) Secure historical markers for the bridges
 - 4) Continue Exploration of Canoe Livery
 - 5) Pursue funding opportunities to improve entrances into communities along byway
- G. Continue to collaborate with the Union County Cultural Arts pARTnership to implement five year strategic plan to include murals, public art, art education, Ohio Chautauqua, art exhibits and a cultural arts center
- 1) Continue to seek funding for Marysville mural
 - 2) Continue to develop relationship with Ohio Arts Council and seek funding for pARTnership projects such as art exhibitions
 - 3) Continue to promote cultural arts
 - 4) Facilitate Ohio Chautauqua event for 2010
 - 5) Encourage smaller arts organizations to bring arts to the county and assist with promotion