

TITLE OF CASE STUDY: Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory Visiting Friends and Relative



Summary

Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory is the marketing brand for Clackamas County Tourism and Cultural Affairs, which is one of three counties comprising the Portland, Oregon Tri-County DMA. Like most destination marketing organizations, their primary role is to persuade people living outside the area to visit, stay in lodging properties and spend tourism dollars.

However, through several "creative" pieces of research, it was determined that a significant portion of visitors to Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory visited friends and relatives; and that a significant portion of the people staying with friends and relatives felt their trip would be more enjoyable if they spent some of their time in nearby commercial lodging. The research pointed out the direct need to educate Clackamas County residents about attractions, events, and scenic areas, located within their county so they, in turn, could better guide visiting friends and relatives to attractions and lodging destinations.

With marketing concepts developed directly from primary consumer research and then tested through focus groups, a fully integrated marketing campaign was launched to educate local residents and also promote the idea that it was OK for visiting friends and relatives to stay at local commercial lodging. The resulting campaign included a mobile visitor information center, local coop ads, direct mail pieces, a website, contests, radio and television.

Assignment

BN Research was given the assignment to quantify the importance of the visiting friends and relatives market and potential through a two-part process of consumer interviews drawn from guests at commercial lodging properties in Clackamas County. From the research findings, the Advertising Agency, Turtledove Clemens, was to develop an integrated marketing communications campaign designed to draw more visiting friends and relatives to Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory. However, after many meetings with the client, research firm and the advertising agency, it was concluded that the visiting friends and relatives market was much larger, more difficult to efficiently reach and had larger influence over planned activities and lodging than first thought. As a direct result of the research, the assignment was modified to create a public awareness campaign to target residents of Clackamas County about attractions, events, lodging and scenic areas within their own county so residents could then better guide visiting friends and relatives and help keep visitor spending in the local economy.

Situation

- Most visiting friends and relatives stay with local residents and not in commercial lodging.

- Traditional travel industry thinking is to spend marketing budgets out of the area to persuade people to visit.
- When Clackamas County residents do have guests, they tend to take them to the Oregon Coast, Multnomah Falls, Portland attractions, or to Central Oregon. All of which are not located in Clackamas County.
- County residents are surprised with all there is to see and do in their own backyards – close to home.
- The majority of Clackamas County residents do not go to their local visitor information centers to obtain visitor information for their guests.
- The county is not capturing revenue from lodging, restaurants, and retail tourism business to its full capacity.
- Research shows that both visitor and host would rather have guests stay in commercial lodging for a portion of the visit. We need to impart to both visitor and guest that this is a normal feeling and an acceptable one on both sides.

Campaign Objectives

The campaign objectives are as follows: 1) Increase overnight visits and length of stay in commercial lodging; 2) Increase awareness and visits to attractions, activities and amenities in Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory;

3) Increase return visits to the destination; 4) Increase visitor spending in local economy.

Target Audience

The target audience included four distinctly different social groups of local residents and visiting friends and relatives.

1. Young Adults (18-24yrs) with visiting parents (40-60yrs).
2. Married Adults with children (20-45yrs) visiting parents (45-65yrs).
3. All Adults (18-65yrs) with visiting friends (18-65yrs).
4. Seniors (65-80yrs) visiting children/grandchildren (18-60yrs).

Key Challenge

Many residents felt they were knowledgeable about Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory because they were local and didn't feel they would respond to advertising that increased awareness about attractions, lodging, and activities for friends and family who are visiting Clackamas County.

Research Phases

1. Accumulate and analyze secondary sources for industry data relevant to trends, decisions and behaviors of visiting friends and relatives.

An interesting outcome of the secondary research showed a recent study conducted for Expedia.com that not only corroborated our primary work, but also revealed that 40% of visiting friends and relatives said spending a portion of their stay in commercial lodging with more space, privacy, or time for themselves would make the visit more enjoyable. And a finding even more interesting was that an equal number of the hosts felt the same way. A quote by Kari Swartz, product manager for leisure travel, Expedia, stated

“There's no doubt that people enjoy getting together with their families and celebrating the holidays. But giving yourself more space and privacy helps to avoid some of the situations that typically cause stress among families over the holiday season. Minimizing stress over the holidays could just be the best present you could give – and receive – over this holiday season”

2. Conduct primary research to ascertain the size and importance of visiting friends and relatives market in Clackamas County through interviews with guests staying in local lodging properties. This primary research also showed that approximately 10% of all lodging guests were visiting friends and relatives.

The combination of these two bodies of research truly grabbed our attention and rocked our traditional thinking about the role that local residents can and do influence visiting friends and relatives. The research challenged us to rethink our “normal” strategies of spending our entire marketing budget toward out of town visitors and re-directing portions of the budget toward educating local residents.

3. As a direct result of the research, we developed marketing concepts, themes and graphics targeted to local residents that we then refined with multiple focus groups. This stage identified positive formats, period graphics and themes such as “Amaze your Friends and Relatives,” “Got Company Coming?” and geocaching. It dissuaded us from contests and using the term “Ambassadors”. And also supported the strategy of a humorous radio campaign that made it OK for visiting guest and local hosts to bring up the subject and benefits of staying in nearby commercial lodging.

Campaign Elements

2007 work included:

1 TV ad (aired 1 week, multiple cable stations)

2 Radio ads (aired 4 weeks, 3 stations)

Mobile Visitor Information Center (distributed brochures and event calendars)

Coop Newspaper Ads

Local Advertising

Direct Mail 6 Panel (passport game of attractions to visit in Clackamas County)

Postcard

Website (listed coupon savings, events, schedule and contests)

Contests and Coupons (engaged residents in learning about attractions and sights)

Geocaching Event (contest that got individuals to visit sights in Clackamas)

Results

Due to hotel restrictions and competitive issues we are unable to state the exact retail numbers that correlate with hotel stays. However we can state that since launching the campaign web traffic to properties featured increased 300%, we launched the first local radio and TV campaign, mailed over 350,000 games pieces to local residents, distributed thousands of brochures, booked the Mobile Visitor Information Van in all major festivals and events in the County and we received positive feedback from nearly every segment of the tourism industry in the County. Most importantly, overall lodging revenues continue to increase.

Conclusions

Like so many groundbreaking concepts, it doesn't all happen during the first 12 months. The feedback and results have been extremely positive and we are committed to continue and expand the campaign in the years ahead.

The key conclusion is that we are a small destination marketing organization yet we are committed to market research that provides us data for new concepts, consumer behavior and insight, and helps us refine our implementation and prove our results. Many companies say they can't afford research. We are living proof that insightful research is not just for the big national entries. It works for all of us.

Further Information

All materials were developed to support an already established brand. For a more complete Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory brandscape please visit www.mthoodterritory.com.