Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan
2022

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the late Summer 2021, Graham County Economic Action Team contracted with Place + Main Advisors, LLC to assist in the creation of a Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan, a component of the Graham County Strategic Plan.

Place + Main Advisors spent a week on the ground in Graham County meeting with local tourism groups and getting a better understanding of the area and the tourism product. The stakeholders had the opportunity to share an overview of current marketing efforts, provide feedback and insight on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to tourism in Graham County. Additionally, an online survey was offered for those unable to meet in-person or other tourism-related stakeholders.

The following document is meant to complement and enhance the existing marketing currently being accomplished by the local and county-wide tourism development authority. Place + Main Advisors recommends an annual review session with local tourism stakeholders to obtain feedback, assess the plan, and modify for future decisions.

STATEMENTS + GOAL

MISSION STATEMENT

Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team is a partnership of citizens that meets the health, social, economic, educational, and recreational needs of Graham County residents, while preserving its cultural heritage and natural resources and instilling pride in community and place.

VISION STATEMENT

Graham County is a place where traditional Appalachian culture lives, people flourish, and businesses thrive and prosper.

GOAL

Support Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team's Strategic Tourism Plan by elevating awareness of Graham County as a tourism destination, utilizing tourism as an economic driver for the county while protecting cultural and natural assets the county is known for. This marketing plan provides strategies and success measures to do so. The mix of marketing, messages and media will engage key audiences from Graham County's target markets.

MARKETING CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

Before a strategic tourism marketing plan can be implemented, there must be an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of Graham County's tourism efforts.

The challenges facing Graham County are extremely detrimental to successful ongoing marketing of the community. In fact, no amount of marketing can overcome these two major challenges. Leaders in Graham County must address these issues if the collective community will have any hope of being more successful in attracting more visitors to the area. Both of these challenges were identified in the Graham County Strategic Tourism Plan created in 2014 and little to no progress appears to be made on addressing them. These two major challenges are:

Challenge: Lack of Product
Graham County has an abundance of world class natural beauty and several options for lodging. However, natural beauty and lodging are simply not enough to attract, and keep, visitors coming to the region. Graham County is blessed with an active and robust arts center, but the county simply needs more retail businesses, restaurants, and specialty businesses such as outdoor outfitters to help visitors enjoy the natural beauty around them.

Opportunity: Small Business Development
Serious effort must be given, both through economic development and tourism efforts, to helping local residents create small businesses that can serve both residents and visitors. Retail, restaurant, and small-scale manufacturing (such as coffee roasting, beer brewers, leather craft goods, etc.) would help give visitors more opportunities to spend their money in Graham County and offer additional reasons for people to visit.

"Much of the reason for the anemic levels of visitor spending in Graham County is simply due to a lack of opportunities for travelers to spend their money. There are comparatively fewer places for spending in retail, lodging, food and beverage, and attractions. There are also surprisingly few opportunities in the county for visitors to spend money (and time) with commercial enterprises specializing in outdoor recreation, even though Graham's greatest assets are nature-based."

- Graham County Strategic Tourism Plan (2014)

MARKETING CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

Challenge: Lack of Cooperation Among DMOs
It is highly unusual for a county of a little more than 8,000 residents to have fours separate Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). It's even more unusual for the regional economic development entity to be the organization commissioning a strategic tourism marketing plan when there is a county wide DMO in existence. This scenario creates a significant level of confusion and dysfunction among all of the entities. This results in a fundamental lack of trust and agreement on what each organization should do.

Opportunity: Joint Implementation Planning
The four DMOs and GREAT, their boards and staffs, would benefit greatly from a set of facilitated implementation planning sessions. These sessions could focus on creating goodwill among the organizations and make determinations as to what actions or goals each organization would be responsible for.
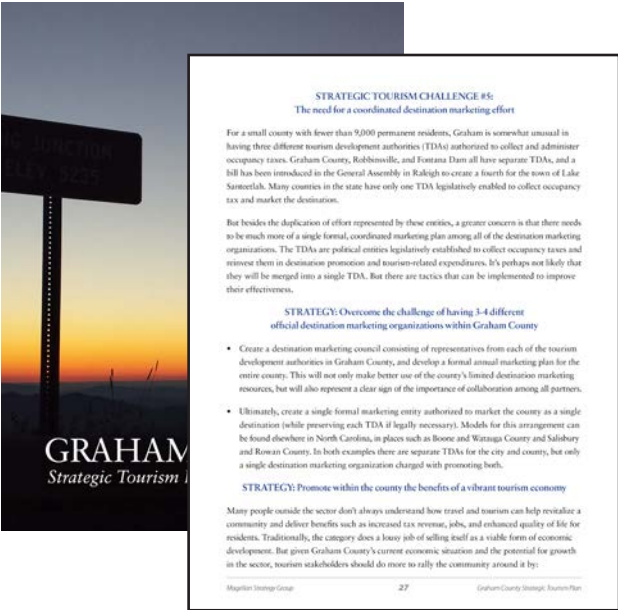
"For a small county with fewer than 9,000 permanent residents, Graham is somewhat unusual in having three different tourism development authorities (TDAs) authorized to collect and administer occupancy taxes. Graham County, Robbinsville, and Fontana Dam all have separate TDAs, and a bill has been introduced in the General Assembly in Raleigh to create a fourth for the town of Lake Santeetlah. Many counties in the state have only one TDA legislatively enabled to collect occupancy tax and market the destination."

- Graham County Strategic Tourism Plan (2014)

UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL VISITORS

According to the 2020 North Carolina Regional Visitor Profile, approximately 11.3 million visitors travelled to the Mountain region of North Carolina:

82% were overnight visitors

91% of all mountain visitors travelled for leisure purposes, while six percent came to conduct business

The majority of the travellers to the region in 2020 visited during the summer and/or fall

2.9 Average party size

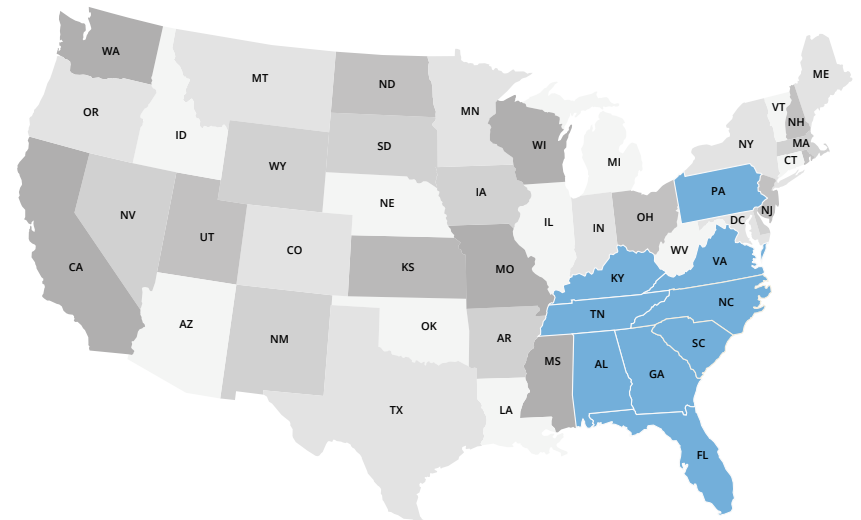**32%** of travel parties including children under the age of 18

$642 Average trip expenditure

$805 Average overnight spending

$131 Average daytrip spending

Top states of origin for overnight visitors to the Mountain Region:

1. North Carolina
2. Georgia
3. South Carolina
4. Florida
5. Virginia
6. Tennessee
7. Kentucky
8. Alabama
9. Pennsylvania

Top Activities Participated In by Overnight Regional Visitors

Activity	Percent of Visitors Participating	Activity	Percent of Visitors Participating
Hiking/Backpacking/Canyoneering	31.40%	Craft Breweries	13.90%
Visiting friends/relatives	29.00%	Other nature (photography, rockhound, etc)	13.20%
Rural sightseeing	24.40%	Fine dining	12.70%
Shopping	22.40%	Gardens	12.70%
Historic sights	22.30%	Urban sightseeing	11.80%
Wildlife viewing	19.70%	Local/folk arts/crafts	11.00%
National Park/Monuments/Recreation Areas	17.30%	Art Galleries	9.60%
State Park/Monuments/Recreation Areas	17.00%	Casino/Gaming	9.60%
Nature travel/Ecotouring	16.40%	Museums	9.20%
Fishing	13.90%	Rock/Mountain climbing	7.80%

GATHERING GRAHAM COUNTY VISITOR INFORMATION

In order to understand more specifically who is visiting Graham County and where they are coming from, technology known as "geofencing" was used. Geofencing is a virtual boundary drawn around a real physical location in a software-based geographical information system (GIS). Once a location is "fenced", one can monitor the fence to determine which specific devices or how many "things" crossed it, and then take corresponding action. This geofencing uses mobility data, or cell phone use, to determine the home location (at the zip code level) of the users crossing this geofence border.

Graham County's Geofences

The physical limitations of the geofencing software could not accommodate the entire county in one boundary. Therefore, two geofences were employed, using US-129 as the dividing line between east and west portions of the county. As the data is presented in the subsequent pages, when there is a division between east and west sides of the county, it is along this boundary line.
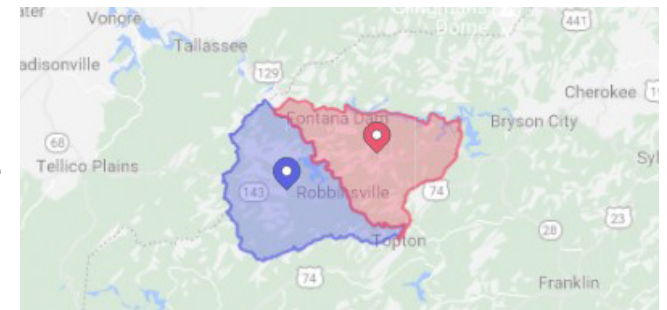

Monthly Visitors

The chart below outlines the number of monthly visitors for each side of the county since 2017.

West= Blue Red= East
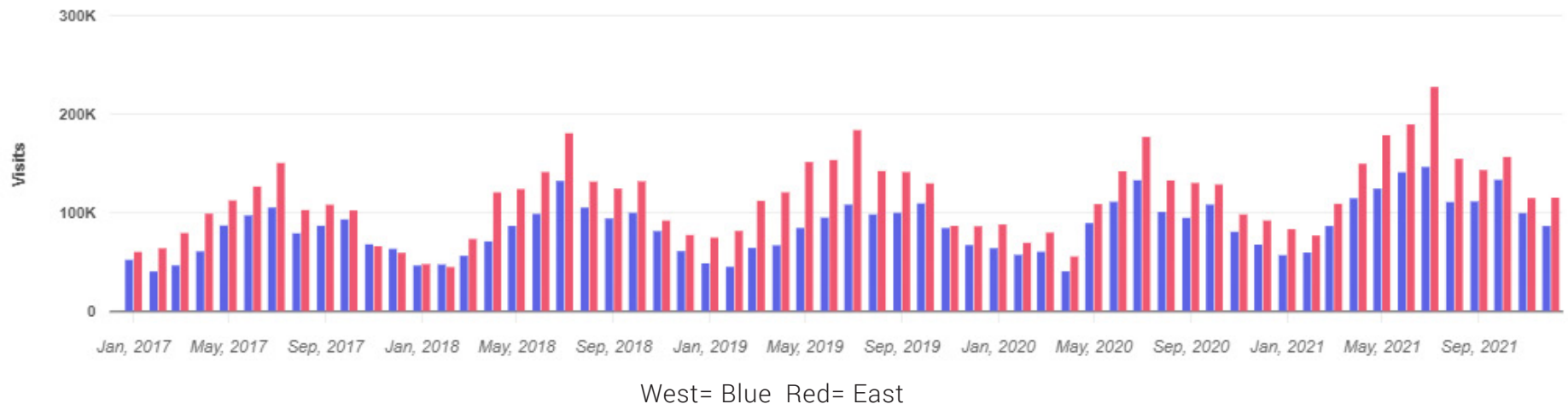
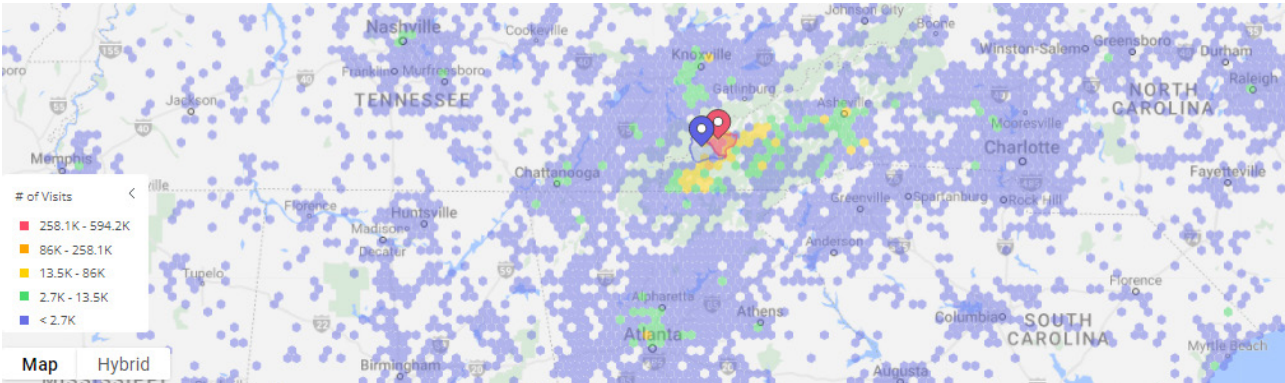*Source: Cobalt Community Research, 2022*

WHERE GRAHAM COUNTY VISITORS ARE COMING FROM

The maps below show where in the US and in the region visitors are coming to Graham County from. These maps are a combination of the east and west side of the county. Each dot represents a visitor to the county. The brighter the dot, the more they visited the county. This data is for visitors to the county from 2017-2021.
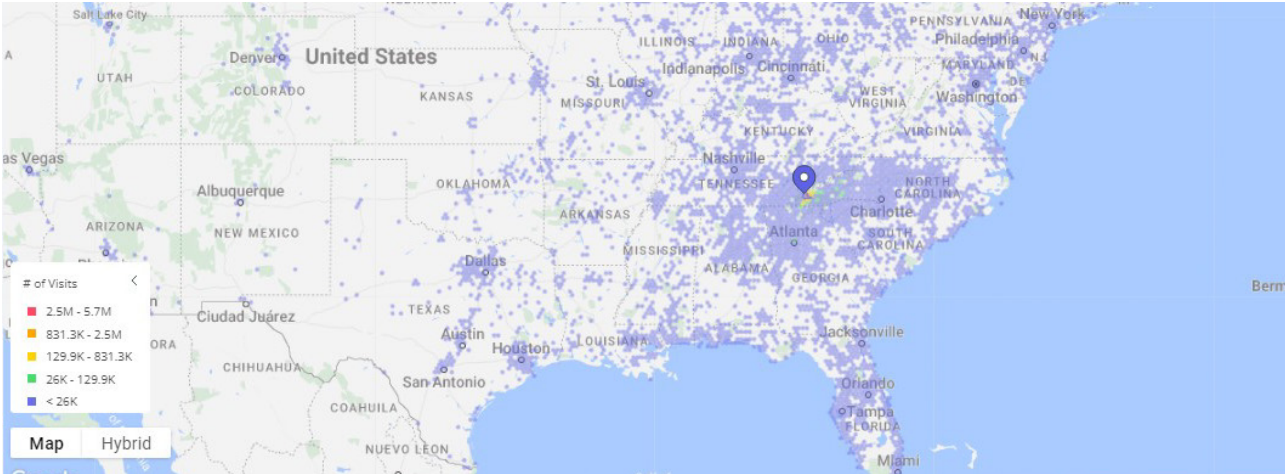
Southeast United States
Not surprising is the large cluster of visitors closest to the region with clusters reaching as far south as Florida. More surprising are the clusters going are far west as Denver, Colorado.

Region
The regional map (left) shows brighter clusters of visitors from areas such as Ashville,NC; Knoxville, TN; Atlanta, GA; Nashville, TN; Athens, GA; and Chattanooga, TN.

Source: Cobalt Community Research, 2022

Top Cities of Origin for Graham County Visitors 2017-2021

Rank	City, State	Designated Market Area (DMA)
1	Murphy, NC	Chattanooga, TN
2	Asheville, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
3	Brevard, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
4	Waynesville, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
5	Chattanooga, TN	Chattanooga, TN
6	Candler, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
7	Hayesville, NC	Atlanta, GA
8	Canton, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
9	New Bern, NC	Greenville-New Bern-Washington NC
10	Mobile, AL	Mobile, AL-Pensacola FL
11	Poulan, GA	Albany, GA
12	Athens, TN	Chattanooga, TN
13	Cullowhee, NC	Greenville-Spartanburg SC-Asheville NC-Anderson SC
14	Knoxville, TN	Knoxville, TN
15	Cleveland, TN	Charlotte, NC

TOP VISITOR PROFILES

Using the data gathered from the geofences, the top market segmentation profiles of visitors to Graham County were identified using Mosiac®. The Mosaic® segmentation tool is a standardized, household-based consumer lifestyle segmentation system that offers insights to anticipate the behavior, attitudes and preferences of residents to build programs, services, and messages to reach them in the most effective communication methodologies. Mosiac® is a product of Experian. The top Mosaic® profiles for Graham County are:

Singles and Starters (13.4%)	**Golden Year Guardians (11.3%)**	**Thriving Boomers (9.6%)**
Key Characteristics	**Key Characteristics**	**Key Characteristics**
Rental housing	Retired	Middle class
Single adults	Health-conscious	Urbanites
Motivated	Daytime entertainment	Politically independent
Aspirational consumers	Established credit	Nature Enthusiasts
Socially active	Country club members	Antique Shoppers
Digitally savvy	Cautious money managers	60s/70s music lovers
Preferred Communication Channels	**Preferred Communication Channels**	**Preferred Communication Channels**
Social Media	Mail	Television
Email		Mail
Website		Radio
Television		

TOP VISITOR PROFILES- SINGLES AND STARTERS

Singles and Starters are made up of fresh young people with mobile aspirations. They tend to reside in college towns and small cities a crossed the country. These households tend to be young, with 80% of them under 35 and unmarried. More than half are single parents, though many are on their own and starting to build independence. They typically live in small, enclosed apartments and reside in cities where rent is cheaper than the national average, like Wisconsin, Texas, Indiana, and Florida. Most hold college degrees or are actively working towards completing one. They are entering the workforce in entry-level positions and are just starting their lives as young professionals. They self-describe as workaholics and have a strong desire to move up in status over time. The housing they are currently staying in has been built up in the last three decades. Since space is closed in, group O likes to venture outside into what the city offers.

Hobbies:
Singles and Starters have active lifestyles and spend quite the amount of time outside in the city. They love to go to bars, nightclubs, and movies, and with their age still in the dating scene, many are into fitness. They can be seen jogging in local parks, the local gym, basketball, or other sports. When they are relaxing in their apartments, they listen to a wide range of music and do quieter hobbies like painting and cooking. Many prefer to spend time with friends and do things around the area. You can find rock'n'roll soundtracks somewhere in their music tastes and keep up to date with pop hits and R&B.

How to reach them:
They are aspirational consumers and love to wear the latest styles. They search for designer labels and can typically afford mid-market retailers like Burlington Coat Factory, Express, and Forever 21. The interest does not just stop at fashion, and it extends into home decor as well. If looking to market towards them, traditional media is not the way to go. They are the makers of electronics and like to buy the newest and emerging technological devices. Singles and Starters are definitely plugged into the latest trends. Never with a newspaper or magazine in their hands they are most likely to subscribe digitally to these kinds of information sources. Most of their commercial watching comes from streaming on the TV.

TOP VISITOR PROFILES- GOLDEN YEAR GUARDIANS

More than 90% of Golden Year Guardians members are 65 years or older. They are the most senior group in the mosaic categories. These seniors who are subcategorized into four types have predominantly limited education and live on extremely modest retirement funds. More than 50% are widowed or living alone as their partner resides in a community nursing home. Most married couples still live in the residences they have owned for the past two decades or more. Nearly 33% of this group now reside in retirement communities. These members of the Greatest Generation have origins of humble beginnings and now enjoy unpretentious lifestyles. Golden Year Guardians have settled throughout the nation but are centered in the Sun Belt suburban retirement communities like Sun City, AZ; Delray, FL; and Laguna Woods, CA.

Many are still living the American dream of homeownership, though their modest cottages and bungalows hold a value at 3/4th the national average. Many have sought out communities where they could rest easy and not have community issues like crime and rush-hour traffic. Those who have moved to new locations did so on the chance to establish new friendships and partake in new leisure activities. With incomes half the national average, this group faces financial challenges, as their sources of income are social security checks and pensions. A tiny percent of this group has substantial investment portfolios. Before retirement, a decade or more ago, they held blue-collar jobs. While many have paid off their mortgages, they do not have extra cash to enjoy a carefree retirement. They are comfortable, appreciating the simple necessities of life.

Hobbies:
Golden Guardians tend to lead quiet lifestyles; their social lives revolve around various community groups. They belong to groups like AARP, churches, and veteran's clubs. They spend a lot of their time in their residences reading books, gardening, sewing/ doing needlework, and playing card games.

How to reach them:
This group is a substantial market for traditional media, and they love newspapers, T.V.- where they watch game shows and can be seen subscribing to magazines. This group did not grow up with computers, so online advertising is lost to them.

TOP VISITOR PROFILES- THRIVING BOOMERS

This group is typically empty-nesters in their 50s- to 60s. They have been around the block before a time or two, usually settled, and have lived in their current residential location for 15+ years. They tend to not move to older neighborhoods like other groups and prefer to stay in mixed-age places. The surrounding youth gives them energy. Thriving boomers are concentrated in cities and suburbs and can own anything from an old ranch-style home to a beachfront condo. Although they are fast approaching retirement or are already in it, 1 in 5 is already retired; they hold mid-level careers. At least one member of the household has a college degree. You can find them working in fields such as white-collar jobs in administration, business, law, education, and sales. The critical factor of this group is their investments, they have put their money into the market, and their IRA accounts are allowing retirement to be comfortable. They are fiscally conservative and will protect their portfolios.

Hobbies:
Although half of these individuals are grandparents, they are not sedentary like the generations before them. They exercise regularly, enjoying biking, walking, hiking, swimming, golf, and fishing. On nights out, they frequent the theater, museums, and classical music concerts. They dine out at their favorite restaurants but choose healthy options. These individuals love to travel, but they prefer domestic travel to foreign. When at home, they like to garden, read books, cook, and play card games. They have a soft spot for T.V. sitcoms, drams, or reality shows.

How to reach them:
This group is a late adopter of technology. They have a relatively low number of smartphone users. They do splurge on specific pieces of technology like the latest smart T.V. and blue-ray players. Thriving boomers are efficient shoppers and usually do not buy products to make a statement. Some have flashy cars, but most have late-model trucks made in Detroit.
Practical shoppers rarely buy products to make a statement but are willing to buy the latest smart T.V.s and blue-ray players. They embrace traditional and new media but still take the cake of being the top reader of newspapers. A key takeaway is that they are more prone to purchase with the phrase "buy American"; they believe in home-produced products.

VISITOR SPENDING – GRAHAM COUNTY

Visitor Spending, 2020

$7.6M
Lodging

$11.7M
Food + Beverage

$4.0M
Recreation

$3.3M
Retail

$6.8M
Transportation

Historic Visitor Spending

Year	Spending	Change From Previous Year
2020	$33.4M	-$8.3M
2019	$41.83M	+$2.37M
2018	$39.46M	+$1.36M
2017	$38.10M	+$2.14M
2016	$35.96M	-

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The approach with this Strategic Tourism Marketing and Communications plan varies from a traditional marketing plan as there are several tourism organizations in the county, utilizing a variety of marketing components, working to move Graham County tourism forward. This plan lays the foundation of how these tourism organizations can work together, identifies challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed and strategies to do so.

Graham County Travel and Tourism

As the overall tourism promotion organization, Graham County Travel and Tourism is the overarching organization to lead tourism marketing, promoting all interests and activities throughout the county, using appropriate marketing channels, to target markets that touch every area of the county. To reduce duplication of efforts between the county-wide organization and community tourism authorities, this should be done with the input and feedback of the community tourism authorities.

Town of Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority

Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority, a unit of town government, is responsible for the promotion of the lodging, dining, and recreation opportunities in Fontana. A destination for water sports and fisherman in every season, Fontana offers a variety of tourism opportunities most, if not all, with a connection to Fontana Village Resort. The Tourism Development Authority is also involved in giving back to the community with a variety of capital improvements projects.

Town of Lake Santeetlah Tourism Development Authority
Surrounded by the Nantahala National Forest, and nearby Great Smokey Mountain National Park, Lake Santeetlah offers many natural attractions and activities of which the Lake Santeetlah Tourism Development Authority is responsible for marketing. Different from other destinations in Graham County, Lake Santeetlah is not home to any commercial lodging properties but rather vacation homes, camping, and other rentals.

Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority
The county-seat and gateway to the many natural attractions in Graham County, Robbinsville offers a quaint, small town feel with a traditional downtown, rich in culture and heritage, and home to many handmade goods. The Robbinsville area offers a variety of lodging options, as well as opportunities for small business development and growth.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Identifying target audiences is critical to successful marketing and communications. These audiences define the group a message is geared to and assists with type and content of messaging to have the desired impact on the respective audience.

Internal Audiences

Graham County Tourism Organizations
    Graham County Travel and Tourism
    Town of Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority
    Town of Lake Santeetlah Tourism Board
    Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority

Community and Business Partners
    Graham County Government
    Graham County Schools
    Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
    Town of Fontana
    Town of Lake Santeetlah
    City of Robbinsville

External Audiences

Visitors (Types)
    Outdoor Enthusiasts
        Hiking
        Biking
        Fishing
        Wildlife Viewing
    Arts and Culture
    Scenic Drives
    Auto Enthusiasts

Media
    Print
    Television
    Radio
    Travel Writers

Residents

STRATEGIC TOURISM MARKETING GOALS

1 Improved partnerships and communication between tourism organizations

2 Increase overnight visitors to Graham County

3 Extend visitor stay and convert day trippers to overnight guests

4 Increase tourism product and services, provide more opportunities for small business and increase Tourism-related employment

5 Expand Public Relations efforts

MARKETING STRATEGIES

1 Improved partnerships and communication between tourism organizations

Graham County is home to several tourism-related organizations all trying to create awareness of the area and the tourism experiences within the county, increase occupancy, and visitor spending.

Strategies

Tourism organizations shall meet quarterly, at a minimum, to discuss overall marketing projects, partnership and collaborative opportunities

Develop an information sharing platform

Success Metrics

Adoption and involvement of local tourism development authorities

Partnerships with nontraditional tourism entities and / or surrounding counties

INDIANA'S COOL NORTH INDUSTRY NEWS

The Northern Indiana Tourism Development Commission (NITDC) was named "Best Cooperative Partnership" by the Indiana Tourism Association at the annual Indiana Tourism Conference held in Plainfield, Indiana on March 5, 2019. Read More

Sign up to receive our partner e-Newsletter

Indiana's Cool North is an initiative of the Northern Indiana Tourism Development Commission (NITDC) working with our member private sector, economic development and tourism authorities representing our member counties. NITDC is the leading regional economic development authority focusing on the advancement destination marketing, government affairs, advocacy, and placemaking.

BEST PRACTICE: Indiana's Cool North *(Indiana)*

A regional partnership of stakeholders in Northern Indiana, Indiana's Cool North has created a place-brand identity with a mission of boosting tourism throughout the area. Realizing one of the most effective ways to increase awareness for Northern Indiana was to work in cooperation with neighboring counties, Indiana's Cool North uses a 'better-together' approach with a variety of marketing tools, including co-op advertising, a dynamic website, and social media presence, to showcase the area. To ensure timely communication with all partners, the program also maintains an Industry Newsletter.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

2 Increase overnight visitors to Graham County, with an emphasis on the quiet season (November-March)

Strategies

Connect travel experiences with lodging properties, including trails, history, attractions, etc.

Create seasonally shifted content for a focus on the quiet season

Create 'value for experience' messaging for price conscious consumers

Create a follow up email/newsletter program to stay in touch with visitors who have already discovered Graham County. Include value added offers for a return visit during the quiet season.

Success Metrics

Track bookings for the quiet season with reasonable target increase
Example: 10% increase over previous year

BEST PRACTICE: Lake 'N Pines Lodge *(Leelanau, MI)*

Lake 'N Pines Lodge has created four separate packages that combine lodging and gift cards around local events, restaurants, breweries, wineries, and other local businesses. They market the packages as weekend experiences where their accommodations are just one item on a list of included experiences.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

2 Increase overnight visitors to Graham County, with an emphasis on the quiet season (November-March)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority
Fontana Dam and Fontana Village Resort are doing an excellent job of creating packages and specials that highlight value and travel experiences, especially during the quiet season. These packages include the Valentine's Weekend package with lodging, dinner, and a special gift from the chef, the March Madness Sale with discounted lodging rates, or the Spring Bass Fishing Tournament with special lodging rates for tournament participants.

Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority
Work with the local accommodations to create a cultural overnight package such as tickets to a concert event at Stecoah Valley Cultural Arts Center along with the overnight stay. Or, package an overnight stay with a gift card or discount to an area business such as Yellow Branch Cheese, Yellow Branch Pottery or Wehrloom Honey, encouraging overnight visitors to support local businesses.

Graham County Travel and Tourism
Incorporate seasonal, experiential content on the Graham County Travel and Tourism website. Visitors may come to site looking to see what type of activity, such as hiking or biking, they can do in the county not knowing where they want to go. Consider adding a layer between the home page and the 'Activities' page that shows a visitor the different types of activities they can experience in Graham County before they have to choose where they want to experience the activity.

In addition, as the county-wide destination marketing organization Graham County Travel and Tourism should be promoting all of the packages each of the other tourism entities create.

Fontana Village promotes a number of packages on its website.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

3 Extend visitor stay and convert day trippers to overnight guests

Strategies

Explore a return visit booking program

Leverage existing evening happenings (events/performances) to generate overnight stays by adding a morning workshop the next day

Create a 'Field Guide' of itineraries for travelers to choose from

Success Metrics

Increased overnight stays

BEST PRACTICE: Colo-Road Trips (*Colorado*)

Developed to inspire road trips, Colo-Road Trips, is an online itinerary tool showing potential visitors what a 3-7 day visit could look like. Created in partnership with the local tourism businesses, each day of the itinerary includes 3 activities, 3 places to eat, and 1 place to stay, plus insider tips to make the most of the destination. Visitors can sort trips by season, length, region, or featured activity.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

3 Extend visitor stay and convert day trippers to overnight guests

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority
Return visit booking program – offer guests during the month of
August a discount code to book for a getaway in January

Lake Santeetlah Tourism Development Authority
Using the existing 'Explore' content, using an itinerary template create
a field guide of things to see/do in the greater Lake Santeetlah area,
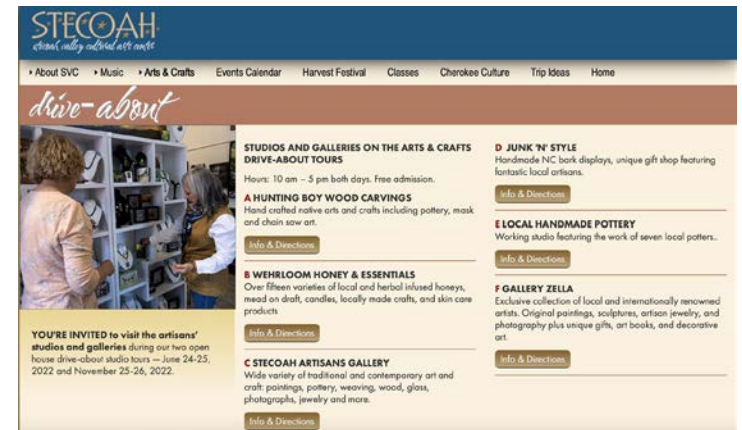giving visitors a reason to stay multiple nights.

Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority
Robbinsville is home to talented artists and crafters. The Steocah
Arts & Crafts Drive-About Tour is a great start to an arts and culture
itinerary, work with the arts center to create a special artist seminar
that takes place first thing in the morning on day 2 encouraging visitors
to stay the night in Graham County to get the full tour experience.

Stecoah Valley Cultural Center's website has several components of an arts and culture itinerary.

Graham County Travel and Tourism
As the county-wide destination marketing organization Graham County Travel
and Tourism should be promoting all of the packages each of the other tourism
entities create.

In addition to packages, other incentives for visitors could include discounts, buy-one get-
one, exclusive events for overnight visitors, or passport programs (get a stamp at each of
the locations along an itinerary and receive a special gift at the end).

MARKETING STRATEGIES

4 **Increase tourism product and services, provide more opportunities for destination businesses to locate in Graham County and increase Tourism-related employment**

There is an immediate need for additional tourism-related businesses in the County. From shops and restaurants to outfitters and guides, there are a variety of small businesses that could help build Graham County tourism.

Strategies

Identify gaps and opportunities for new, unique tourism-related businesses (Example: Outfitters, Bike Shop, Ice Cream Shop)

Pursue opportunities to partner with local economic development groups to create awareness of Graham County, build a presence for new, tourism-related businesses

Promote and support local entrepreneurs to develop tourism- related businesses (Example: Hiking & Fishing Guides, Bike Tours)

Partner with Graham County Affiliate Career Center

Work with Tri-County Community College, specifically the HRM, Culinary Arts, and Entrepreneurship programs to promote Graham County tourism employment opportunities

Success Metrics

New and/or expanded tourism-related businesses throughout the county

Track job openings and turnover rates at tourism-related businesses
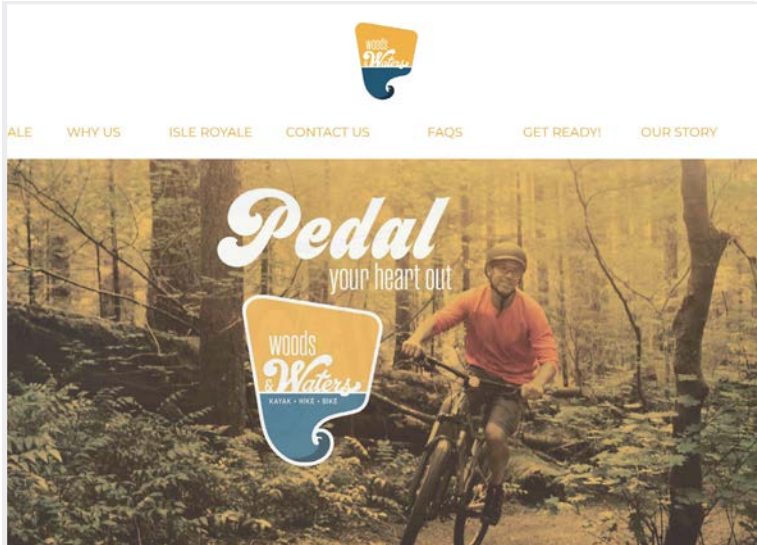
BEST PRACTICE: Woods and Waters *(Hessel, MI)*

It started with one person's love for the outdoors, specifically the woods and waters of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and a desire to share it with the world. Woods and Waters has evolved from a small shop of a handful of guides to a team of outdoor enthusiasts leading kayaking trips, nature walks, hiking, biking, and caving. A destination business to rent kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, fat tire bikes, mountain bikes and gravel bikes, buy quality gear and get knowledgeable outdoor adventure advice.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

4 **Increase tourism product and services, provide more opportunities for destination businesses to locate in Graham County and increase Tourism-related employment**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a sub-committee within the Graham County Travel and Tourism entity to work on product and destination development. This group will work together with partner organizations to create a vision for what Graham County tourism can and should look like, identifying the gaps, and assisting in the product development to achieve the vision.

Potential Partners:
Graham County Travel and Tourism
Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority
Lake Santeetlah Tourism Development Authority
Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority
GREAT
Graham County Schools
Tri-County Community College
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
North Carolina Department of Tourism
North Carolina Department of Commerce
Appalachia Regional Commission

MARKETING STRATEGIES

5 Expand Public Relations efforts

Graham County is home to a variety of compelling local stories that are newsworthy and need to be shared. Proactively seek opportunities to tell the compelling and authentic stories of Graham County.

Strategies

Create media kit highlighting Graham County, the unique and authentic experiences a visitor can have; local stories; facts and figures; and images from around the county

Develop relationships with local, regional, and state media

Develop a list of publications that are a good fit for telling Graham County's stories

Never miss an opportunity to invite media to a meeting or event to help share the

Stories should also be promoted on local assets including website, blog, social media

Success Metrics

Positive media coverage of Graham County including the many unique stories of the area, the natural and cultural assets that make the county as a top tourism destination.

IMAGE LIBRARY

Travel Marquette is able to provide a selection of images and b-roll for editorial use. The images in the catalog below are available at no charge to qualified editorial and travel writers. Travel Marquette retains the copyright to all images and must approve the purpose for intended use. In addition, specific image requests outside of the catalog may be available upon request.

BEST PRACTICE: Travel Marquette *(Marquette, MI)*

When done well an online media room can turn journalists who are just browsing into interested writers who will highlight your destination in a story. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Travel Marquette has incorporated a Press Room as a resource to the media interested in covering the area. The page includes story ideas, accolades, and an image library, as well as touting recent media coverage. A description of how the destination marketing organization can assist the media, along with contact information, is also helpful.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

5 Expand Public Relations efforts

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fontana Dam Tourism Development Authority
Newsworthy story ideas could include:
History- Fontana Dam, Fontana Village Resort
Outdoor Recreation- Disc Golf, Hiking, Biking

Lake Santeetlah Tourism Development Authority
Newsworthy story ideas could include:
Outdoor Recreation- On the water (Fishing, Relaxing), Hiking

Robbinsville Tourism Development Authority
Newsworthy story ideas could include:
Arts & Culture- Stecoah Valley Cultural Arts Center, Cherokee Warrior Junaluska
Memorial
Outdoor Recreation- Home to more than 100 different species of trees at the Joyce Kilmer
Memorial Forest
What's New- Graham County Museum & Historical Center
Notable People from Robbinsville- Ronnie Milsap

Graham County Travel and Tourism
As the county-wide destination marketing organization Graham County Travel and Tourism should take the lead on tourism public relations efforts throughout the county. This includes creating story ideas, response to inquiries and directing inquiries to the appropriate local tourism entity, media outreach as well as industry outreach to Visit North Carolina among other industry members.

A media presence is necessary on the Graham County Travel and Tourism website, with additional information including but not limited to county-wide tourism statistics (# of miles of hiking, # of miles of lakes, etc), awards and accolades, image library and story ideas.
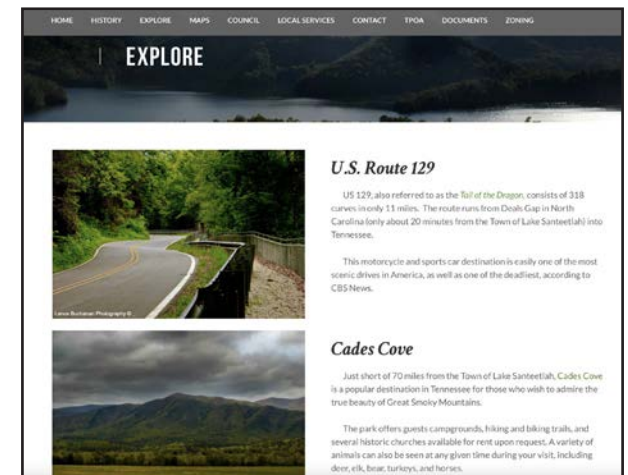
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