

Manitoba's Fish-Hunt Tourism Sector Facilitated Session Summary



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Travel Manitoba
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RESEARCH INC.

...for what you need to know.

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Background & Objectives

Travel Manitoba commissioned Probe Research, Inc. to facilitate a planning session among organizations representing the Fish-Hunt sector in Manitoba on April 24, 2015 at the Hilton Winnipeg Airport Suites in Winnipeg. Representatives of Travel Manitoba and the following individuals were invited to the session:

- *Aaron Wiebe, Uncut Angling*
- *Carol Slobodzian, Quesnel Lake Caribou Lodge*
- *David Fisher, The Lodge at Little Duck*
- *Don Lamont, Hooked Magazine*
- *Ellen Whitmore, Shining Falls Lodge*
- *Harry Walker, Sandy River Outfitters*
- *Ian Krahn, Fin and Bone Outdoors*
- *Jason Hamilton, Jason Hamilton Outdoors*
- *Jerry Dunlop, Dunlop's Fly-In Lodge & Outposts*
- *Josh McFadden*
- *Karmen Johnson, Sasaginnigak Lodge*
- *Kathy Tomm*
- *Ken Rey, K.R. Adventures Guided Fishing Service*
- *Kevin Stobbe, Hooked Magazine*
- *Matt Cornell, Scott Lake Lodge*
- *Patrick Trudel, Aikens Lake Wilderness Lodge*
- *Paul Conchatre, Birdtail Waterfowl Service*
- *Paul Turenne, Manitoba Lodges and Outfitters Association*
- *Peter Slobodzian, Quesnel Lake Caribou Lodge*
- *Pit Turenne, Aikens Lake Wilderness Lodge*
- *Rick Bohna, Big Sand Lake Lodge*
- *Ron Dare, Bear Track Outfitters*
- *Shari Wright, Webber's Lodges*
- *Tobias Becker, Shining Falls Lodge*
- *Todd Longley, City Cats*
- *Trina Veilleux*

Session participants covered a number of topics important to the roles of their respective organizations. The day-long session was facilitated by Lloyd Fridfinnson, Vice President, Probe Research Inc. and followed a guide prepared in consultation with Travel Manitoba (see Appendix I).

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Summit Facilitated Session Summary

Introductions

The session began with the day's objectives being shared:

- ✓ To understand the impact of Travel Manitoba's marketing efforts on sales of fishing and hunting experiences.
- ✓ To seek input into the Fish Hunt marketing plan for the remainder of 2015 and 2016.

Participants were invited to take notes on any matters that they considered to be "unfinished business", to be dealt with at the end of the day, asked for their full and frank input, and reminded that the goal was to have a relaxed, collegial discussion in which all views are equally valid and important.

Travel Manitoba Overview

After everyone in the room was offered the opportunity to introduce themselves, Travel Manitoba CEO Colin Ferguson was invited to speak to the group about the corporation's 2015-16 campaign highlights. In this slideshow presentation, Ferguson noted several efforts made by Travel Manitoba during the past year:

- Travel Manitoba has produced two new hunting commercials for broadcast.
- Traffic to the Travel Manitoba Fish-Hunt website has increased to 71,000 page views, or by about 25 percent.
- The successful launch of a Fish-Hunt Facebook page in July, 2014.
- The creation of a Master Angler mobile app which allows users to submit their information directly to Travel Manitoba electronically.

Ryan Suffron on the Fish-Hunt Influencer's Goal

Ryan Suffron, operator of Alpine Country Outfitters, was asked to provide the session with a summary of his goals as Travel Manitoba's new Fish-Hunt Influencer.

Suffron stated that the industry continues to rely on traditional means of reaching potential customers, such as print advertising and trade shows. However, buying decisions are seldom made through these means and that it is inefficient for operators to wait in a large meeting room or hall alongside their competitors for a customer to amble by.

Content was critical, in Suffron's opinion, to developing sales leads, even though relatively few operators were familiar with inbound marketing or content marketing. Compared to traditional means, he noted that targeted social media campaigns to a content-hungry audience, such as through videos posted on YouTube, are far more effective ways of generating sales leads. Not only was the success of marketing efforts easier to track on these digital platforms, it is also critical to building customer confidence in an outfitter or a product.

Suffron provided several examples of what he considered to be particularly effective content-driven campaigns, singling out outfitter-produced videos that teach hunters how to shoot out of a blind, the videos produced by Aaron Wiebe of Uncut Angling which have attracted 43,600 subscribers as of May 2015, and an Australian tourism campaign encouraging visitors to submit their videos.

There was some expectation that Travel Manitoba would play some role in actively searching for eligible videos. Others said they were willing to submit video and other content to Travel Manitoba. That being said, some participants said that they did not expect Travel Manitoba to do much for them. Later in the day some participants encouraged Travel Manitoba work together with the Manitoba Tourism Education Council to train operators how to produce videos.

Suffron suggested that this strategy should exploit Manitoba's Master Angler program, which he identified as a product that "stands alone for Manitoba". Such an approach would help with an objective of "showcasing" what Manitoba has to offer on the basis of individual species. His preference is also to promote the province by region – such as by having separate pages on the Fish-Hunt website highlighting the Parklands or the North. His vision for this role also would be to improve top-of-mind awareness of Manitoba as a Fish-Hunt destination with a strong "wow factor", through websites, blogs, YouTube, Instagram and other social media, noting that all of these channels except for blogs attract large audiences. Blogs were characterized as allowing for more in-depth content.

The benefits of using multiple platforms was confirmed by a participant who noted that "it is no longer black-and-white" when he asks visitors how they heard of his business. Clients increasingly tend to have heard of the business through several sources.

A commentator in the audience noted the weakness of relying solely on Google and static websites for tourism promotion. While acknowledging that "Google is king", this participant noted that the decision of where to go on Google is made in a mere four-tenths of a second, that the website itself is judged in eight seconds, and only one percent of visitors will make a purchase based on the information gleaned. "It's like throwing a needle in a haystack," this participant noted.

Paul Turenne on the "Master Hunter" Program

Paul Turenne of the Manitoba Lodges and Outfitters' Association was invited to come to the front of the room to discuss an innovation that he had been considering. This was for the introduction of a "Master Hunter" program, based on the Master Angler program, which would allow visitors to aspire to Bronze, Silver or Gold status.

A potential benefit for the industry would be the incorporation of an incentive for aspirants to visit different regions of Manitoba to meet the hunting pre-requisites for a higher status, such as by needing to hunt for waterfowl, caribou, elk or bear. No time limit would be required for hunters to complete these challenges.

This met with a favourable response from attendees, with suggestions that this be branded as the "Master Outdoorsman" program or the "Odyssey Journey".

One participant raised the question of how well this idea would tie in to the Master Angler program. This participant noted that the Master Angler program has a strong conservation element, and that a hunting program would necessarily be difficult to reconcile to that objective.

Linda Whitfield on What's New

Travel Manitoba sales and marketing vice-president Linda Whitfield was provided the session with a "What's New" presentation.

In her 25-minute discussion, she offered more details about the Canadian Tourism Commission's (CTC) decision to re-enter the U.S. marketplace after a five-year absence. Originally, the CTC's withdrawal from the U.S. market had been based on a desire to focus on global and emerging markets. She noted, however,

that several changes made 2015 a more advantageous year for promoting Canada in the U.S. market, including: a recovering American economy, a more favourable exchange rate for U.S. tourists, and a record-high U.S. passport ownership rate estimated by the U.S. State Department at 46 percent in 2014.

A “Look Up North” campaign will be a key part of the CTC’s efforts to penetrate the U.S. market. Whitfield noted that Manitoba’s contribution to this campaign will include experience-oriented advertising focused on hunting and polar bear-related themes. Travel Manitoba hopes to reach the Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul markets, which are seen as promising due to non-stop air links to Winnipeg. The “Look Up North” campaign is expected to use both paid advertising and social media to reach audiences, as well as “earned media”, such as articles in newspapers and magazines.

Whitfield also noted Manitoba’s entry into the CTC’s “Follow the Global Customer” program as a highlight of the past year which will keep the Canadian brand active in global markets. This program, aimed at long-haul international travelers and particularly the young, will use tagging data from social networks and predictive analysis systems to make it easier for the Canadian tourism industry to pursue sales leads.

Whitfield also noted the use of Google “floodlight” tagging on the CTC’s website to track Travel Manitoba promotions carried on that site. These tags collect information on how many times visitors return to a given page after the first click, as well as any online sales that result from these placements.

Travel Manitoba CEO Colin Ferguson added several comments to this discussion, noting that Travel Manitoba had to aggressively lobby the CTC to include Manitoba in its U.S. marketing plans, and that the priority of this new campaign was to provide strong reasons why visitors should choose Manitoba over other potential hunting and angling destinations. He also noted other efforts over the past year to promote Manitoba in U.S. markets, some not entirely successful, such as promotions at a NASCAR event and a Travel Manitoba promotion at a concrete industry trade show in Las Vegas.

Marketing Innovations

Participants were divided into four groups and asked to complete two lists: one list consisting of marketing innovations that they have encountered or that they consider worth trying; the other list consisting of ways to partner with Travel Manitoba to ensure the success of the innovations listed. Each of these four groups was asked to nominate a spokesperson to speak on behalf of the group.

Participants identified four areas for further innovation:

Video Tools: This group was intrigued by the use of YouTube videos to market the industry’s offerings. However, they were surprised to hear that Aikens Lake Wilderness Lodge had requested further assistance in producing videos, given that this is regarded as one of the more “savvy” businesses in this regard. Therefore, this group felt that Travel Manitoba should develop a common “video pot” into which Fish-Hunt outfitters could contribute. These participants also suggested providing outfitters with information on where to get more guidance on video production.

These suggestions received a favourable response from other participants, though there was a widespread acceptance that Travel Manitoba should not be training private businesses. Suggested service providers included the Manitoba Tourism Education Council and the Manitoba Lodges and Outfitters’ Association.

Being at the Top of the Google Searches: This group’s priority was to ensure that Manitoba was immediately visible in anglers’ Google searches. As one participant said, “the more content Manitoba has on Google, the more hits Manitoba will get.” Further to this, participants wanted to see high-quality content and eye-catching websites come up in these searches which, even if they

don't promote a particular outfitter, do promote the province as the best place for anglers to go in North America.

There was also a preference for sharing this content across all social media platforms, and for frequent updates throughout the year to continually remind online visitors about the Manitoba tourism product.

Identifying the Target Market: This group noted that their own clientele do much of the marketing for them, and wanted to see a better identification of, and focus on, their target market. In this case, the group identified the Upper Midwest region, on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border, as the most critical market.

This group inquired about the ability of Travel Manitoba to act as a clearing house for online material, such as videos promoting the Manitoba Fish-Hunt product. It was felt that this would reach a wider audience, whereas current efforts only reach relatively few online visitors.

Showing Real-Life Experiences: This group's comments focused on showing real-life, not "manufactured" experiences, in online videos showcasing the Manitoba Fish-Hunt sector, with the goal of reaching people with related sporting interests that complement fishing or hunting. However, there were also comments suggesting that this "real-life" focus could be used to broaden the product's appeal, such as by showing people who had never fished before making their first catch-and-release.

A secondary suggestion concerned making more of an effort to have Manitoba mentioned in TV shows and movies, even if this were in the form of a character mentioning that someone else was on a fishing or hunting holiday in Manitoba.

Another suggestion mentioned by a participant was to showcase stories related to fishing and hunting in Manitoba. Examples here included human-interest stories about people taking up hunting or angling in retirement, or enthusiasts having their ashes scattered in the Manitoba wilderness post-death.

Minister's Comments

Provincial Tourism minister Ron Lemieux spoke to the audience during the lunch break. In his comments, Lemieux pointed to the success of the "Manitoba: Canada's Heart Beats" campaign, which he said was seen as "a winner" in other parts of Canada.

Lemieux commented on the efforts he had made to advocate on behalf of the sector, describing a conversation he was part of recently with two foreign ambassadors. In the conversation, the visiting ambassadors noted the importance of the Fish-Hunt sector to the Manitoba tourism industry, as this is seen as being strongly tied to the province's rural heritage.

The minister also drew attention to the strenuous efforts that had to be made to include Manitoba in the CTC's U.S. market re-entry program. He said that this required the Manitoba government to "lobby the hell" out of federal Small Business and Tourism minister Maxime Bernier. This U.S. market re-entry is seen as being a key element of the provincial government's goal to increase the tourism sector's share of the Manitoba economy from \$1.5 billion annually to \$2 billion.

The minister cautioned against the industry assuming that new tourist attractions such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Journey to Churchill exhibit at Assiniboine Park Zoo would reduce the need for the province to market itself. He also encouraged the audience to persistently remind politicians

at all levels of the importance of tourism to the Manitoba economy, noting that this sector's value to the wider economy is easily underestimated.

When asked for his reaction to the possibility of a "Master Hunter" program, Lemieux said that he has been having discussions with his constituents about the closely related Master Angler program, adding that some constituents feel that the latter program should be abolished.

Fish-Hunt Guide

In this segment of the discussion, held after the lunch break, participants were asked to describe what benefits they receive from Travel Manitoba's Fish-Hunt Guide, and whether this guide should remain in publication. According to Travel Manitoba representatives, this guide costs \$60,000 to produce, whereas an all-online format would cost about \$30,000 annually.

While some anglers were said to be proud to see their names listed in this guide, there was widespread agreement that it is not particularly necessary to retain it in its current form. Many participants felt that this would be best offered as an interactive online guide, and not just a PDF file, as a printed guide exceeding 100 pages in length was seen to be an out-of-date concept.

There was, however, some consensus around the idea of having a much smaller "sizzler" booklet available, particularly for older visitors who are used to a print product. While it was accepted that the Master Angler list would need to be excluded from this slimmed-down guide, it was thought to be useful to retain lodge and outfitter listings, Customs information, and the addresses of website that tourists could visit for further information.

Fish-Hunt Marketing Budget

Participants were led through an exercise where they were asked to describe what they would like to see happen under two scenarios: the first being a 50 percent cut to Travel Manitoba's marketing budget, the other being a 50 percent increase.

Participants gave a variety of suggestions in response to a 50 percent marketing budget cut, though there was no clear consensus. These suggestions included eliminating the Fish-Hunt Guide, curtailing trade show participation or advertising efforts, cutting expenditures in all areas by 10 percent, or restricting marketing activities to those solidly supported by a return on investment.

In the event a 50 percent increase in the Travel Manitoba marketing budget, participants suggested using the additional resources to produce a Manitoba-based web show highlighting the province's fishing and hunting opportunities, and a desire for more influencers to promote the industry. On this point, it was envisaged that Travel Manitoba would take on more digital influencers from outside the organization and possibly even outside of the province; and that influencers should be sent to trade shows in the U.S. and elsewhere to "seed the dream" of visiting Manitoba to an already-engaged audience, as opposed to simply occupying a display table at a trade show.

Revenue Generation Group Exercise

Virtually all of the suggestions for new revenue focused on advertising in the smaller print guide discussed above. Multiple Fish-Hunt operators expressed a willingness to advertise in this so-called "sizzler" publication at about \$50 per placement. There were also suggestions that this relatively low rate would allow for more advertising sales to businesses more loosely related to the tourism trade, such as tackle shops and service stations.

There was also a suggestion for a regional “spotlight showcase” feature in the new publication, highlighting one sponsoring Fish-Hunt operator per region.

Final Comments

At the end of the session, participants were asked if they had any additional questions or comments to make.

A discussion arose concerning whether newly revised websites and guides should show information by region, species or activity. Fish-Hunt Influencer Ryan Suffron replied that the goal was to organize information by species first, then by region. While one outfitter who sells “a fishing experience” was concerned that sorting information by region would be detrimental to his brand, Suffron countered that trying to promote the entire province would lead to a lost and directionless guide user.

One outfitter suggested the development of a process that would allow a Master Angler to register immediately, so that their name would be published by the time they returned home.

A Travel Manitoba representative suggested that it is time for the corporation to get “hard-nosed” about obtaining copyright and all-rights usage for the material produced when Travel Manitoba brings the media in to promote the province’s tourism industry. Others noted, however, that this would be a complicated process, and one outfitter said that he would expect to be hired by Travel Manitoba as a contractor if they wished to have full rights to material produced for his own business.

At the conclusion of the session, one participant provided the facilitator with a written note with two suggestions. The first was, if the Master Angler listings were to continue, to change the minimum size limit for Walleye from 28½ inches to 30 inches, on the rationale that this would cut the amount of printing required by about one-half. His other suggestion was to introduce a bounty on coyotes in Manitoba, as a growing coyote population is reducing the province’s deer population. The writer went on to note that he regularly sees coyotes on his property, and that coyotes are increasingly migrating into urban areas due to population growth.