



Visit SLO CAL Marketing Committee Meeting
Tuesday, January 9, 2024
8:30 am – 10:30 am
Visit SLO CAL Office – 81 Higuera Street, Suite 220, San Luis Obispo, CA

1. CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT: Ashlee Akers, Terrie Banish, Sheridan Bohlken, Molly Cano, Cheryl Cuming, Lori Keller, Kathleen Naughton, Lindsey Roberts, John Sorgenfrei, Michael Wambolt

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy Cartier, Lisa Belsanti, Kristen Carlson, Matt Halvorson, Grace Casola, Aleigh Hogen, Alyssa Manno, Rachelle Ramirez, Lauren Miller, Brooke Weisbecker, Mayla Lohnes, Megan Leininger

Call to order at 8:36 am

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

Public Comment – None.

Committee Comment –

Naughton shared that SLO Coast Wine Collective launched their major fundraiser of the year: the SLO Coast Wine Tasting Pass.

Cano shared that the eat local bonus in the City of SLO is happening all month. Spend \$100 at local eateries and get a \$25 gift card. Additionally, SLO Restaurant week launches Friday (January 12 -21) and is structured around 'perfect pairings.'

CONSENT AGENDA – *motion required*

3. Approval of November 14, 2023 Marketing Committee Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – None.

ACTION: Moved by Akers/Cano to approve the November 14, 2023 Marketing Committee Minutes. Abstained by Cuming, Banish and Keller. Motion denied due to lack of quorum needed to approve. Motion will be brought back to the March 5, 2024 Marketing Committee meeting.

Vote: 7: 0-3

CMO REPORT

4. Visit SLO CAL CMO Report

Cartier welcomed new staff members Aleigh Hogan, Sales Manager & Grace Casola, Senior Manager Human Resources. Cartier also informed the Committee of Matt Halvorson's promotion to Associate Director of Marketing.

Cartier provided an Alaska Airlines Vegas flight launch recap. The first flight was on December 14 and was full. This direct flight from San Luis Obispo to Vegas is scheduled daily as a trial period now through April.

Cartier gave an IPW California Plaza Activation update. IPW is in May 5-7 in LA. Cartier reminded the committee that IPW is a key global trade and media event and Visit SLO CAL is one of 4 platinum sponsors. Currently, VSC has the largest space in the plaza activation and staff is finalizing what the activation will look like. VSC sponsorship also includes the opportunity to put SLO CAL Crafted swag in the Visit CA store at the showcase and an evening activation in the space. VSC will also be included on Visit CA's post IPW FAM. Staff is working on the itinerary now. SLO CAL will be the final day of the FAM and include an overnight on May 11th.

Cartier highlighted the strength of having a social strategy. Showing that one reel, "Ramen Spots in SLO CAL" saw 250k views – more views than the entire quarter pre-strategy.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Akers asked about the Portland flight pause. Cartier shared that the Portland flight is scheduled to come back in May. Cano commented on the need for a transportation solution for the crew with planes now parked overnight. Cartier responded that there is a lot of conversation happening around transportation and the last mile. Cano followed up to let the City of SLO know how they can be helpful in these discussions, especially regarding crew transportation. Cartier will keep the committee updated.

Akers asked if IPW partner participants will be allowed to join the FAM for a meal to continue the relationships built at IPW. Cartier will follow up after confirming with Visit CA.

BUSINESS ITEMS

5. Unpacking Content Series

Cartier provided an update on the first episode in the Unpacking Content Series. The episode, which included eight destinations, was filmed in December with the series launching in March. Staff will present ideas on possible co-op opportunities and how to create more destination specific unpacking episodes at the Marketing Committee Retreat.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – None.

6. Website UX Study

Halvorson reviewed the UX Study findings and next steps. As a review, the study was a mix of quantitative and qualitative data gathering and targeted both consumers and partner groups. The study presented six major insights: the diversity and abundance of information on SLOCAL.com was commonly cited as a strength but also difficult to sift through, “SLO CAL” term is not well understood and doesn’t effectively contextualized the website, geography is important to trip planning but not adequately integrated in the website, locating relevant listings is made difficult by the lack of tools to effectively filter options, primary navigation addresses key goals, but deeper exploration was seen as complex and imagery is seen as a primary strength of the website, but also presents usability barriers as it keeps people from getting to the information. Five actionable recommendations from the study include: ensure size of imagery does not interfere with browsing, update desktop homepage to clearly identify SLO CAL and the purpose of the website, improve navigation, drive home geography on places to visit landing pages and ease navigation by being able to see content at a glance.

Cartier updated the committee on the Simpleview contract including that the current contract expires in June and VSC is in the process of renegotiations. Simpleview will be able to make some of the UX Study recommended website changes based on hours and budget available. Staff is currently mapping out what this will look like, and these changes will likely be completed in the next fiscal year.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion –

Sorgenfrei shared that Pismo CVB decided to sever ties with Simpleview and instead take the website to WordPress. He recommended putting Simpleview on deadlines to get this work done. Cartier responded that all these changes will take some time and VSC will work with Simpleview to map it all out.

Cano requested that a UX Study report summary be shared with the Committee. Cartier will share the executive summary. Cano shared that Visit SLO recently launched their new website in July, implementing many of the recommendations presented here and they are seeing success. Cano also suggested that one solution on how to allow visitors to dive deeper into the area would be pointing back to individual destinations websites and suggested VSC create a linking strategy. Cartier agreed that now is a good time to have this conversation and figure out how we allow users to bounce between the SLO CAL website and individual destination sites.

7. Calendar of Events

Cartier shared an update on the regional calendar of events. Staff has identified a vendor who can do this work – Artsopolis. The vendor will provide a centralized location to collect event information and create customizable outputs built into each destination website.

Halvorson expanded that Artsopolis already has integrations for multiple website platforms but will need to work through customizing the calendars for each partner website. Next step is reconvening

the Events & Festival Strategy Working Group in the hopes of implementing a countywide calendar of events by end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2024).

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion –

Naughton asked how events are currently being submitted. Halvorson explained that staff approves submitted events daily. Once the event is approved there will be a confirmation email sent. Partners can log into the extranet to submit.

Banish asked who to reach out to if something needs to be changed on event listings on SLOCAL.com. Cartier replied that staff is available Monday through Friday. Cano shared concerns that the countywide calendar of events will put VSC in the event business. Cartier responded that the working group will need to have more in-depth conversations about what partners want, need and expect from this calendar and what VSC can deliver. Sorgenfrei suggested adding a step to acknowledge if an event is listed or not after it has been submitted.

8. SLO CAL Open at Morro Bay Recap

Cartier provided a high-level update on the SLO CAL Open at Morro Bay. The new dates worked better with better winds and weather (one day the surf was too big). This year there was a longboard event added. Staff will share more on the performance after the Pismo Beach event is complete, but overall, the event went well.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion –

Sorgenfrei shared that the town likes the surfing event and Pismo Beach CVB is working on the branding effort for the Pismo Beach event in two weeks.

9. Event Sponsorship – *motion required*

Cartier shared the backstory of the Event & Strategy Working Group and that a formal Visit SLO CAL Events & Festival strategy needs to be developed. During a discussion with a group interested in bringing a new event to the area, a previously used Event Sponsorship Form was uncovered. The Bovine Classic has submitted the form and a formal request for sponsorship. Other events are also making sponsorship requests. The Marketing Committee would need to make a recommendation to the Board to move ahead with any sponsorships.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion –

Banish wondered if the Committee should give everyone the opportunity to submit the form. Cuming & Bohlken agreed that everyone should be given an opportunity to request sponsorship. Banish thought approving any sponsorships at this time was premature. Cartier added that The Bovine Classic submitted a great proposal, but VSC does not have any money budgeted for this item in this fiscal year. Cano suggested to slow down and start by figuring out what the regional event

sponsorship model looks like. Cartier agreed that VSC needs to know the budget for these items and what the strategy is first. Cano asked if the Committee will need to approve the official strategy. Cartier answered that she sees it as more collaborative and will bring a draft to the working group to get feedback and ensure everyone is aligned. Sorgenfrei suggested that although VSC may not be able to give dollars, the event can be put on the website, social media, etc. Cartier responded that this type of in-kind sponsorship is exactly how VSC has supported other events in the past.

ACTION: No action taken. The Committee decided to revisit this discussion in the future as the funding seems premature without a VSC strategy and a clear direction on funding.

10. Marketing ESC 2050 & Travel Trade Update

Lohnes informed the committee about winning a Travel Weekly Award for Dylan Efron's "Home Again" and provided a recap of the December PR mixer. The next PR Mixer is anticipated in March. Belsanti provided a coverage report recap calling out Visit CA collaboration and international coverage: Arcadia Magazine (a 7-page spread) and LUXE Magazine (2-page spread). Lohnes provided a reminder about monthly content calls and shared that staff is always looking for partners to submit pitches.

Halvorson provided an overview on owned media. He shared website next steps now that the UX Study has been completed which include implantation of recommendations and developing an editorial strategy to give opportunities to partners keeping SEO top of mind. Halvorson also provided an organic traffic recap demonstrating that the website is seeing a strong uptick in organic traffic YOY. VSC's email strategy is focused on expanding reach and utilizing the consumer database. These strategies include filtering by interest, by location, performing A/B testing, reengagement and database growth strategies.

Weisbecker provided a social media overview. She shared the top social media posts: top ramen spots and spots to stop off along Highway 1. Both these reels saw over 100K impressions (first in VSC history). Weisbecker shared how the social media strategy covers core content about the entire county and trending items as well. In January there will be a culinary content focus including a Michelin guide to SLO CAL reel, poll-driven content on IG stories and the launch of the "Follow the Chef" series featuring Nate's on Marsh.

Halvorson gave an update on the 2024 Visitor Magazine. Starting in 2025 the magazine will be built for a two-year cycle. The 2024 version is a refresh of 2023. The creative is being finalized by Destination Creative Group and will be printed by January 15. 40k copies will be printed for use at events, mailouts, Certified Folder Display distribution and local hotel and visitor center drop offs by VSC staff. Next step will be distribution outreach.

Cartier spoke to paid media. Paid media in November outperformed goals across the board. In December VSC cycled down paid spots to avoid competition with the holidays and will cycle back up in the next week. The second SLO CAL Zine covering culinary content will be printed and delivered in the next few weeks, existing co-ops are in the works and local nomenclature paid media will start later this month.

Carlson presented a travel trade update. Staff recently attended CalSAE, having nine one-on-one meetings with meeting planners. The show resulted in three RFPs and more to come. Sales is attending Go West Summit in February which will be a great opportunity to start conversations with tour operators before going to IPW in

May. The annual UK Mission is coming up in February and will include four days of meetings and two unique SLO CAL training events. The Countywide Sales Strategy is being finalized and will be presented to stakeholders in early February. Some recommendation highlights include expand opportunities to collaborate with constituents, build a network of agents, planners and decision makers (specifically in leisure and MICE segments), improve education for lodging investors to get the most out of VSC services and launch sales incentives to drive bookings.

Cartier provided a reminder about the next meeting. The Marketing Committee Retreat will be on March 5 at Niner. Formal invite to come. The content will start at 9 am and the program will go until 5 pm. All agencies will be in market for the event and will stay in Paso.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion –

Akers inquired if SLO CAL is on TikTok. Cartier replied yes but staff is reposting content from Instagram right now because of limited capacity. Cano mentioned it would be great to have Carlson and VSC as a part of Central Coast Tourism Council.

Next Meeting Marketing Retreat March 5, 2024

ADJOURN: 10:28 AM.