



Minutes

Visit San Luis Obispo Marketing Committee

Visit San Luis Obispo County Marketing Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 12, 2016

8:30am

Sands Inn & Suites

1930 Monterey St, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chuck Davison

PRESENT: Ashlee Akers, Jim Allen, Judith Bean, Molly Cano, Amanda Diefenderfer, Christen Goldie, Gordon Jackson, Lori Keller, Heather Muran, Jennifer Porter

STAFF PRESENT: Chuck Davison, Brendan Pringle, Michael Wambolt, Becky Singh, Jordan Carson, Kylee Jepsen

Call to Order at 8:32am.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)**

Matthew Wilkins, General Manager of Sands Inn & Suites, welcomed the Marketing Committee to the hotel.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Beginning of Year Bash is happening January 21, 2016 at Cafe Roma in San Luis Obispo.

Kylee Jepsen noted that the digital assets that were provided by the local DMOs have been uploaded to VSLOC's digital asset management system (WebDAM). VSLOC will be reaching out to wine country partners to upload their assets, and will be sharing information about WebDAM's next webinar so that DMOs can learn how to use the system effectively.

DreamEater is coming to SLO County. Thank you to all who encouraged the host to come to the County on Instagram. He will be visiting Madonna Inn, Sidecar, and Splash Cafe during the week of January 18, 2016.

Jepsen announced Restaurant Month promotional activity. Vikki Pass from Catalyst will speak more on out-of-market advertising that was introduced this year for this promotion. Jepsen also recognized SLO Wine Country Association and Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance for their partnership on Local Wine Deals.

Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. **Approval of December 8, 2015 Marketing Committee Meeting Minutes**

Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

C. Davison asked the Marketing Committee to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

ACTION: Moved by Cano/Keller to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

**Motion carried: 8:0:2
Porter/Jackson abstained.**

BUSINESS ITEMS

4. Marketing Agency RFP

Catalyst Marketing Agency was not present for this agenda item.

VSLOC's agreement with Catalyst Marketing Agency ends June 30, 2016. VSLOC is sending out an RFP for the FY2016-18 marketing agency contract. The marketing agency that is hired will have access to new research and data from which to build a campaign. Catalyst will have the opportunity to participate in the RFP process, and the Marketing Committee will make a recommendation to the Board for approval in March 2016.

Committee Discussion – Porter asked if VSLOC was happy with Catalyst. Davison noted that onboarding with any new agency is difficult, and VSLOC's lack of digital assets did not help. He also noted frequent changes in account managers over the past few months led to a number of challenges and setbacks. Diefenderfer asked if Catalyst has worked well within the marketing budget. Davison responded that they have budgeted well, and that Catalyst has been more challenged with finding unique, creative and effective programs to spend the budgeted funds on. Akers requested that VSLOC add language to the proposal about case studies for co-ops and large partnerships. Porter noted that chemistry is the most important element in any marketing agency relationship.

Public Comment—None.

5. SAVOR the Central Coast Update

Fast Forward Events (F2V) has opted out of the remainder of the SAVOR Joint Venture Agreement for three major reasons:

- 1) The financial structure of SAVOR is too dependent on local DMOs: They are concerned that as VSLOC transitions out of ownership, local DMOs will become less supportive.
- 2) National sponsors don't see high value in San Luis Obispo County: The audience is smaller and harder to get to.
- 3) Volatility around a long-term main event location: Last year, a contract was never reached with Santa Margarita Ranch. There is a lack of long-term options that don't require a substantial build-out, which would be an added expense.

Options moving forward include:

- 1) Ceasing operation of SAVOR, and maintaining the brand trademark for possible similar or different future use.
- 2) Selling the event: F2V suggested that events typically sell for six times the profit (\$78,000) or 0.8 times gross revenue (\$82,000), and that it might be worth more with this year's turnaround. The sale of the event would likely lead to significant changes that may impact the brand and view of VSLOC for those who don't realize we no longer own it. Sale options include engaging a broker or a local partner like Rob Rossi of the Santa Margarita Ranch, and could entail a complete sale of the event, or a similar structure to the F2V deal with VSLOC, where VSLOC would license the brand long-term.
- 3) Place the event on hold for a year, possibly restarting in 2017 with a new production company: SAVOR might lose sponsors as a result (like Sunset), and it might be hard to re-engage DMOs after a year off.

4) Hire a full time event manager and go back to VSLOC running the event: The Board was not interested in pursuing this option.

At their December 16, 2015 meeting, the Board of Directors motioned to place the event on hold for further research and recommendations by the Marketing Committee moving into the future, asking them to bring back recommendations to the Board. The Board had several suggestions:

- 1) Place the event on hold for restructuring
- 2) Use the brand to market events happening throughout the County year-round
- 3) Allow existing events to use the SAVOR brand to promote events in the County
- 4) Create smaller SAVOR events around the County throughout the year, run by each community

Santa Barbara County hosts epicure.sb, which has small events throughout the Santa Barbara County. However, this concept depends on whether local communities are willing to host such events.

Amy Olmsted at *Sunset* notified us that major sponsors like Volvo are not willing to commit this early. *Sunset* does not feel it is in a position to commit to a big event for 2016 and play a large role in the event, without a major sponsor on board, due to all of their recent restructuring. Olmsted noted that they may be willing to assist with smaller events throughout the year and give VSLOC some editorial assistance. *Sunset* has also hired F2V to run Celebration Weekend in Sonoma.

Committee Discussion – Jackson noted that it would be difficult to run an event next year (September 2016). Diefenderfer commented that the way the event has run in the past, there has never been a full event planning cycle, and it has been run like a “new” event every year. Bean suggested selling the event, and Muran expressed caution in selling it without proper vetting. Cano noted that by attaching SAVOR to other events, it doesn’t advance the mission of the brand, and that none of the DMOs are in the event business. Cano recommended taking SAVOR on the road as more of a campaign than an event, and using it for branding at food and wine events. Porter noted that not many DMOs would be upset if the current SAVOR model went away.

Public Comment – Destini Cavalletto, Santa Margarita Ranch, expressed that the Ranch has an interest in continuing the event in some fashion in 2017. Wendy Eidson, Executive Director of the SLO International Film Festival, said that SAVOR has been a topic of their Board. Many film festivals are becoming food and wine events, and SAVOR has components that SLOIFF would like to add to their festival.

6. Sponsorship

Davison discussed the Event Sponsorship application process. The application is on the Members Area of the VSLOC website. This year, sponsorship commitments include the Cow Parade (\$20,000) and Amgen Tour of California (\$30,000)

The SLO International Film Festival has requested sponsorship that includes \$10,000 cash and \$5,000 trade. VSLOC is the Film Commission for SLO County, and the funding request would bring film scouts into the County as an opportunity to leverage the SLOIFF already taking place. Davison noted that the \$10,000 doesn’t have to translate into \$10,000 in “heads in beds” for the week of the event as the benefits are more long-term with film scouts visiting the region, etc.

Committee Discussion – Cano noted that SLOTBID has committed to a \$30,000 sponsorship, which includes a hospitality tent and advertising dollars. Since SLOIFF staff are the experts on advertising for the event, SLOTBID opted this year to allow them to create their own marketing plan for how to spend those advertising dollars. Cano added that since this proposal consists of bringing film producers and film scouts to the area, VSLOC is best positioned to assist. Akers asked if the FAM trip locations have already been determined. Jepsen noted that she has been working on potential locations and asked the Committee to send any suggestions they might have.

Public Comment – Wendy Eidson of the SLO International Film Festival said it is important for the SLOIFF to offer hospitality to filmmakers, and thanked the Marketing Committee for viewing the sponsorship as a long-term investment. The sponsorship will show scouts great film locations, and increase the media attention that SLOIFF has received.

ACTION: Moved by Diefenderfer/Porter to recommend VSLOC sponsorship of SLO International Film Festival.

Motion carried: 10:0

7. Research Agency RFP Proposals

Davison discussed the Research Agency RFP timeline. Finalists will be notified today (January 12, 2016), and oral presentations will take place on January 19, 2016. The Marketing Committee will make their final recommendation at that time, and the Board will vote on this item on January 20, 2016.

King Brown Partners, Merrill Research and Connected Solutions provided proposals. M/A/R/C opted out of the RFP process. Davison asked the Committee for their recommendations.

Committee Discussion – Porter requested that the Committee have King Brown Partners and Merrill Research give oral presentations, and recommended against Connected Solutions based on their proposal and cost. She noted that Merrill Research was very easy to work with on PRWCA research. They were ahead of schedule, very responsive, and very negotiable. She also noted that Apple is one of their clients. Merrill has its own panel, and King Brown would be developing its own panel. Davison suggested that Merrill drill down on the Central Valley DMA (which currently includes Sacramento). Keller noted that King Brown put their proposal into graphic form, and that this would be easy to convey to constituents. Jackson asked about the spending effort in international tourist research. Davison noted that Visit California’s research is based on the Central Coast, and that SLO County is lumped into that area, which stretches from Santa Cruz and Ventura. VSLOC has asked Visit California for buy-in opportunities to get more information on the SLO County’s international tourism numbers.

The Committee recommended Merrill Research and King Brown Partners as finalists for oral presentations on January 19, 2016.

Public Comment – None.

PRESENTATION

8. DMO Spotlight: Travel Paso Robles Alliance

Diefenderfer unveiled Travel Paso Robles Alliance’s “Paso Mavericks” campaign. This branding campaign focuses on the notion that Paso is a maverick destination for wine and more. Diefenderfer showcased TPRA’s Hotel Month promotion and new website that will debut soon.

Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

PRESENTATION

9. Catalyst Marketing

Michelle Meisch and Vikki Pass offered some of the highlights of the Fall Campaign to-date, December media results, updates that were made to keywords, and notable trends. SEM impressions increased 13% over November. Majority of engagement is coming from mobile devices (57% mobile, 14% tablet). The campaign to-date has generated just over 19 million impressions and has driven 20,383 clicks to the landing page. The LA market generated the highest overall click-through rate of VSLOC’s major feeder markets in December.

Meisch and Pass presented new opportunities in the *LA Times*, *SF Gate*, and *OC Register*, and discussed some of VSLOC’s Restaurant Month and Romance Month advertising. They also presented some of the PR highlights for the past month.

The press kit is expected to be completed this week, and upcoming media FAM trips include Terry Gardner, who writes for the *LA Times* and *Chicago Tribune*.

Committee Discussion – Gordon noted that Romance Month advertising should have started a month ago. Keller suggested that with the new opportunities, VSLOC should start testing opportunities and see how effective they are. Muran noted that she is not in favor of the *OC Register* page takeover opportunity. Davison recommended not pursuing any of the options until new banner ads were produced and finalized. Cano asked about other opportunities. Davison responded that *Wine Enthusiast* had proposed a \$170,000 opportunity, and that VSLOC is looking at possibly advertising in *805 Magazine*. Cano asked about international opportunities and Pass said that Visit California is offering a buy-in international opportunity for January and February. Keller noted that Visit California has been successful with television buys, and suggested that there could be opportunities for VSLOC to partner with other local DMOS on cooperative brand awareness television efforts. Pass added that Catalyst is looking at running a 5-page advertorial in *LA Magazine*.

Public Comment – None.

10. CEO Report

The next Marketing Committee meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2016 at 8:30am at the Sands Inn & Suites.

Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 11:00am.