



Minutes

Visit San Luis Obispo County Marketing Committee

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Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 8, 2015

8:30am

Courtyard by Marriott, San Luis Obispo
1605 Calle Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chuck Davison

PRESENT: Brent Haugen, Judith Bean, Heather Muran, Amanda Diefenderfer, Ashlee Akers, Cheryl Cuming, John Sorgenfrei, Terrie Banish, Lori Keller, Jim Allen, Molly Cano, Christen Goldie, Gordon Jackson, Jennifer Porter

STAFF PRESENT: Chuck Davison, Brendan Pringle, Kylee Jepsen, Jordan Carson

Call to Order at 8:35am.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

3. SAVOR the Central Coast Tickets

Marketing Committee members have access to discounted (20% off) SAVOR tickets for friends and family. The discount applies to the Opening Night Event and the Sunday Main Event, and is valid through September 18, 2015.

Also, VSLOC has selected a new Director of Travel Trade. Michael Wambolt of Springhill Suites in Atascadero will be joining the team on September 21, 2015. Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

CONSENT AGENDA

4. Approval of August 11, 2015 Marketing Committee Meeting Minutes

Davison requested a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Committee Discussion – None.

Public Comment – None.

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

Motion carried: 13:0:1

Davison announced that Item 8c would be reversed on the agenda to accommodate Catalyst Marketing's schedule.

8c. Catalyst Marketing PR Presentation

VSLOC is in the RFP process for its Public Relations outreach, and had engaged both Catalyst and Fleishman Hillard to provide a proposal. Fleishman Hillard dropped out of the RFP process.

Catalyst CEO Mark Astone introduced Marc Gendron, Director of PR at Catalyst, and noted that his primary focus has been tourist destinations. Gendron started out as a reporter for Fresno Bee. Astone noted that Catalyst opted against doing a full scale RFP response, as their goal would be to keep PR working with their broader marketing plan. PR objectives would be to promote San Luis Obispo County as the year-round destination for a variety of audiences, showcase the wide range of attractions and activities in and around the county in new and interesting ways, and establish/increase meaningful partnerships that complement visitation and media coverage. Catalyst has its own database of writers, and the firm is always looking for new story angles. They are set up well for FAM trips and are experienced at screening them. Catalyst's target for deliverables would include 6-8 stories, including 2-3 national stories and 1-2 regional stories. Measurement and tracking would focus on mentions, audiences, and impressions, and would tie back to conversions.

Catalyst would be managing VSLOC's crisis communication plan. Davison added that VSLOC consultant Stacie Jacob of Solterra was drafting this plan.

Committee Discussion. Keller asked how Catalyst will coordinate with DMOs to ensure equal representation of the county. Davison noted that VSLOC would be working with Catalyst on story ideas, and would collaborate with the DMOs to see how this would look. VSLOC subscribes to PR Newswire and is able to release 8 stories, which means that VSLOC has to be strategic about stories released.

Diefenderfer asked how Catalyst would manage FAM trips around the entire county. Davison noted that some may be themed (wine-focused, beach-focused, etc), some more localized, and some more countywide. Davison also noted that the VSLOC budget currently allocates 118 room nights for FAMs.

Sorgenfrei mentioned how a number of DMOs are burned out on "impressions". Mark noted that they do reporting on a monthly basis, and would report as stories appear, as well as actual engagement.

Public Comment—None.

BUSINESS ITEMS

5. STR Report

VSLOC now subscribes to weekly and monthly Smith Travel Research (STR) reports, reflecting 11 segments of the county. This is the best individual and countywide view that is available at this time. These reports provide a benchmark from which to compare.

Committee Discussion. Cuming asked if VSLOC considered inclusion of Avila Beach and other unincorporated communities. Davison responded that Avila Beach doesn't have enough lodging partners reporting and Cayucos has no lodging partners reporting.

Public Comment – None.

6. WebDAM

VSLOC is looking at investing in a countywide digital asset management system. Year 1 would cost \$22,000 (which includes initial costs), while Year 2 would cost \$16,000 (regular maintenance).

This would put VSLOC in the position where content was freely available, and comes back to the question of DMO participation. The more content that is submitted, the more content that would be available to media. Davison asked if this was something DMOs would be willing to undertake.

Committee Discussion. Sorgenfrei voiced support and noted how beneficial participation is for DMOs. Cuming asked about the process, and Davison responded that the tedious part will be tagging the photos. This is something that can be refined over the next few months. Davison noted that each DMO would be responsible for tagging their own content, and providing information on crediting of photos. Porter asked if non-DMOs will have the ability to add photos. Davison responded that DMOs would be “power users,” along with Catalyst and VSLOC. Still in question is how many power users will have access. Non-DMOs will be able to submit digital assets to Kylee Jepsen. The more information VSLOC can collect and submit in the initial submittal, the better, as WebDAM would be doing more work. Muran asked about the timeline, and Davison responded that the goal would be sometime between November and December (8 week timeline). Jepsen added that VSLOC would be sending a template to DMOs for submittal. Cano asked if VSLOC would be able to track and report content usage. Davison responded that Catalyst would be able to track as media would need to request login access. Astone added that Catalyst can pick up on the PR end and follow up. Cuming noted that this would be a great opportunity to help Wine Coast Country determine what assets they have and what assets they still need to secure.

Public Comment – None.

7. Sponsorship – Events

7a. Cow Parade

Davison played a short video about Cow Parade SLO, and noted that the event extends from January to August. VSLOC has had several conversations with Linda Parker Sanpei, who is doing the marketing for Cow Parade SLO. Linda asked for \$200,000 initially, and followed up with a revised proposal for \$20,000. The Cow Parade concept fits well with the agricultural element of the market, and has the potential to bring the county together.

Committee Discussion. Porter asked about the closest market that hosted the Cow Parade. Davison responded that Chicago was the closest full city. Sorgenfrei asked how the event equated to overnight stays, and expressed concern about setting a precedent for other sponsorships, and Davison responded that this depended on how well communities promoted the event, but also noted that there would be opportunities to tie the event to media coverage. Haugen commented how St. Paul had tweaked the Cow Parade concept to fit the destination.

Public Comment—None.

7b. Amgen Tour of California –Multi-year Partnership

VSLOC is involved in negotiations with Amgen for a four-year agreement to keep the Tour of California in San Luis Obispo County.

The City of Paso Robles rejected the concept of a Paso Robles start. Amgen is now considering Morro Bay. Amgen wanted to start in Pismo Beach, but the distance is too far. They need to start in Morro Bay or further north. VSLO’s goal is to help cities offset the dollar amounts for participation.

Committee Discussion. Sorgenfrei mentioned the drawbacks of hosting the starts and finishes: starts require less closures but are a lot of work; finishes offer great exposure, but Avila Beach saw limited returns this past year. Cuming noted that Cambria was launching an initiative called Cycle Central Coast, and might be willing to split sponsorship.

Public Comment – None.

PRESENTATION

8. Catalyst Marketing

8b. Prizm Study Presentation

Mark Astone and Vicki Pass (Media Director) of Catalyst provided a brief overview on the Prizm Study proposed as a way to gather research on the county's tourist demographics. The local lodging community would be asked to provide the data. The study blends lifestyle, demographics and geography together to produce a complete demographic snapshot, which would be incorporated into the VSLOC media plan. The hardest part will be getting the data. Once the data is retrieved (over 4-6 weeks), it is scrubbed for completeness. The cost is \$34,500 (including management and facilitation by Catalyst). Ideal start date would be September 25, 2015. Davison noted that VSLOC has \$136,000 budgeted for research this year. The other research campaigns that are budgeted will be approximately \$50,000 each. Further information would be sent to the DMOs.

Committee Discussion. Sorgenfrei asked if each community would be able to have their own separate data if they bought in. Astone said he would follow up on this. Keller noted that the target demographics of the communities are surprisingly similar.

Davison pointed out that VSLOC is looking for 1) a baseline for Year One, 2) to figure out the lifestyle of San Luis Obispo County consumers, and 3) figure out who to stay away from, in order to narrow down how to spend money through the right channels. Davison noted that VSLOC is open to alternatives to float with the Catalyst team, adding that this is a decision that VSLOC doesn't want to make in haste, but that they also don't want to lose time. Davison noted that some lower-end independent hotels would probably not participate, and neither would some of the lodging partners who don't take email addresses, but that he had no doubt VSLOC would have enough participation for the study. He clarified that the study would go back about 18 months, and break down the specialty and peak periods.

Public Comment – None.

8a. Media Plan Presentation

Vikki Pass of Catalyst presented the 2015/2016 VSLOC Media Plan. Pass noted the objectives of the media plan were: 1) building awareness, 2) driving demand, and 3) increasing traffic. She noted that the primary target audience was Los Angeles/San Francisco residents (HHI \$75k+) and Central Valley residents (HHI \$50k+), with an age range of 35-64.

For Overall Media Strategy, Pass said that Catalyst opted to move away from television, but is pursuing ads on top-rated radio stations to cast a broad net in Los Angeles and San Francisco. She asked if there was a better time to target Los Angeles than San Francisco. Porter and Muran noted that fall was a better time to target San Francisco, and spring was better for Los Angeles. Sorgenfrei noted that he hadn't seen much difference, but that San Jose and also the Ventura/Thousand Oaks area are also good regions to target. In terms of print, Catalyst is looking at larger circulation publications that could really elevate the county, and would be 100% co-op. Catalyst will be working on advertorial and pictorial co-op formats. Davison added that Catalyst is staying away from ad opportunities in publications that DMOs can buy on their own to ensure there is no duplication of efforts. Newspaper ads will run in Sunday travel sections.

With digital media, Catalyst recommended SEM and search engine retargeting in all markets, and geo-fencing the corridor from Los Angeles to San Francisco with display banners on mobile devices. VSLOC would be able to pinpoint the consumer based on behavior (leisure traveler, outdoor enthusiast, etc). VSLOC would be offering co-ops for digital/mobile as well, where VSLOC would take up one third of an ad, and the rest of the elements would be provided by the other partner. A pixel on VSLOC site pages will generate a custom profile for visitors to develop a custom "lookalike" audience. Digital ads will appear on a number of digital news sites in target markets, and will also run on topic targeted websites focusing on food and wine. Monster banner network ads and pre-roll network ads will also be used. Davison mentioned that a substantial portion of the marketing budget is digital, which allows VSLOC to be flexible in case of a crisis like El Niño.

Committee Discussion. Porter noted that she was happy to see television ads removed from the plan in order to boost our presence in other channels.

Davison noted that the Board will approve the budget next week, and that VSLOC is looking to launch October 12. VSLOC is about two and a half weeks away from initial drafts of co-op ad layouts from Catalyst, and that Catalyst is still working on a countywide emblem as well.

Public Comment – None.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 10:35am.