

Rethink Vancouver – Tourism Industry Summit

Thursday, March 31, 2011

SFU Centre for Dialogue

Meeting Notes

The forum was opened by *Rethink Vancouver* Advisory Council Chair, James Terry and facilitated by Gary Grimmer, Consultant to *Rethink Vancouver*. There were 130 industry leaders from the Metro Vancouver area in attendance, including industry operators, DMOs, business associations, educators and government officials.

Opening comments:

Under the direction of an Advisory Council, *Rethink's* two core questions were addressed in a series of consultative and input sessions from May 2010 and they are:

1. What is it that the Metro Vancouver tourism industry would like to accomplish together in the coming decade?
2. What, then, does destination marketing for Vancouver look like going forward, beginning in 2012?

The Summit is intended to provide the participants with opportunity for input and feedback to key industry structural issues, focusing on potential solutions.

The questions asked at the Summit are a result of the extensive consultations held to date, where many organizations have had an opportunity to comment on the future of tourism for our destination going forward. The breadth and extent of this process is unprecedented amongst other destinations and included:

- 6 industry panels who met 3 times each
- 2 Tourism Vancouver full member sessions
- 2 Tourism Vancouver board of director sessions
- 2 Tourism Vancouver management and 2 staff sessions
- 31 one-on-ones with business leaders in Vancouver
- A global market scan; and
- Over 100 preferred clients to Vancouver contacted

1. *Should there be a larger shared vision, beyond tourism? If so, should it be for Vancouver or Metro Vancouver?*

It was agreed that the tourism industry in Vancouver cannot work in silos to remain competitive in today's marketplace. We must work together across geo-political boundaries, not only with tourism but with other industries. It was recognized that Vancouver is a portal to the province and that demands we have a larger vision which would provide opportunity for others to participate.

Though a larger shared vision beyond tourism is preferred it should be a Metro vision, not just specific to Vancouver city proper. There was much discussion on what the Metro area should be and who should it encompass – should it be the political boundaries of Metro Vancouver or include places such as Abbotsford and Whistler?

Question then came up on what funding requirements would be needed and how would that be raised.

2. *Should we, together, convene a Metro Vancouver Tourism Alliance? If so, who is it, what does it do, how should it operate?*

There was a broad consensus that we need a collaborative forum but question what would be the primary role/focus of an "alliance". Should it be involved in marketing and/or advocacy, keeping in mind that there are agencies currently working in these areas (e.g. COTA in advocacy, DMOs in marketing)? It was suggested a collaborative forum should discuss specific items of mutual concern that start with the customer (e.g. wayfinding in the region).

It was recognized that the tourism industry came together very effectively during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and we should take that initiative as an example of what can be done.

Though there was no firm conclusion on what the "alliance" is, who it is or what it does, there was agreement on the need for more collaboration and integration. Some consideration was given to the importance of the concept of "alignment" that meets the needs of marketing the region and not focused on policy. Comments were made that government needs to be a part of any "alliance".

There was further discussion on the physical area the "alliance" would cover but the customer should be kept in mind. Many businesses sell the Vancouver/Whistler/Victoria area; some include the Okanagan – maybe it doesn't matter but if you have a specific interest with Vancouver/Metro as the gateway you can be involved. Denver was referenced which functions on its own but they have embraced other areas around them as needed making Denver a bigger destination. Maybe we form "clusters" of organizations with similar interests?

Overall it was agreed on the value of an "alliance" but it needs to be defined and parameters set.

3. *Should there be a Tourism Master Plan? If so, who should be involved?*

The Summit participants agreed there should be a tourism master plan and it must involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including government, in the process. This begs the question of who should be involved and do it. Businesses outside of tourism were very supportive of a master plan, but there was resistance from some of the DMO's who are concerned how an overall master plan would impact their own regional planning.

It was also recognized that both the airport and the port have master plans that extend well into the future and a tourism master plan would need to encompass these entities as well as other businesses to help inform how we should go forward as a community. A master plan must also be inclusive of culture, be respectful of what everyone can bring to the plan and must be very transparent. The role of government in a master plan is key providing more of a role than funding as they can also bring in the citizenry to embrace tourism in the community.

In summary, the participants expressed an interest in a master plan but much work needs to be done to determine its scope.

4. *Should there be an overarching, shared brand strategy for Vancouver? If so, who needs to support it?*

Vancouver and BC have a strong brand but not everyone is putting the effort into embracing it. There is a need to integrate brands both vertically and horizontally with businesses working more collaboratively. It was commented that the further out one goes into the world, the Vancouver brand is stronger than other municipal brands, and in some cases the provincial brand.

As DMOs, businesses and government have identified their own brand, there was a suggestion that "snuggling" of brands might be an effective method. There was further discussion that Vancouver is a brand that was emotionally defined last year during the 2010 Olympics. We need to agree on a common brand that encompasses all of us but leave room for co-branding – hence the "snuggling" of brands. We should lead with the brand that is important and resonates with the customer.

It was mentioned that DMOs have to build better trust and transparency as it's about the customer and we will lose market share if we are not more coordinated. Cooperation of brands does currently happen in the marketplace on specific programs, but is not fully embraced. We need to see and define ourselves as the customer/visitor sees us.

Most in the meeting understood the need for an overarching brand, but sometimes political masters interfere with cities collaborating. In summary, core branding is needed to be agreed upon with all tourism regions in the area.

5. *Should DMOs, such as Tourism Vancouver, become DMMOs, undertaking destination marketing and management?*

During the *Rethink* discussions many of the issues raised related to destination development, not marketing issues. Tourism Vancouver and other DMOs are not adequately resourced to engage effectively in all the destination management issues that come forward. Tourism Vancouver, for example, sometimes backs into issues, often working on shared issues with other DMOs. There is a need for one message, with many voices to government.

The overriding consensus was that there is a need for destination management, but no conclusion on the extent of the role to be played by the DMOs.

6. *What other issues need to be addressed in relation to Tourism Vancouver's future Rethinking?*

At this point in the proceedings, the participants were asked to come forward with any comments they had that would assist Tourism Vancouver as it responds to the final report from *Rethink*.

- The pre-work and preparation for this session was acknowledged.
- We should look at terminology. For example, the word “visitor” not “tourist” is more inclusive; change the word “plan” to “direction”; instead of “alliance” use “community” as it is more open and inviting.
- Need to settle on the boundaries and resources of the “alliance” before going onto next steps for governance.
- Encourage a stakeholder model as opposed to membership model as it breaks down barriers.
- Consider using the “Supernatural BC” brand.
- Question on whether government contribution to tourism is proportionate to what tourism generates; the CTC and Tourism BC have fewer dollars; Tourism Vancouver’s budget is short against Toronto and Montreal; funds are well spent but still not adequate; we are outgunned with resources in the marketplace; the resources that are required to achieve the vision will need to be addressed in the final strategy.
- Tourism is a big contributor to the provincial coffers; whenever we are talking to government we should explain what we contribute; need to articulate better that our industry lends to the vibrancy of the community, including culture; need to do an evaluation of what we contribute and how we benefit the local residents.
- Would like to see more marketing on kinship not individual; more on families not individuals.

- Suggestion to look at the CTC's "path to purchase" strategy as it will help in future discussion on roles; we can find a strong collaborative path; we are facing global marketplace and losing to emerging markets.
- In defining the area of the "alliance" Victoria should be considered as it is a key component to the triangle for the market and consumer.
- It is less costly to bring someone back than to bring a new customer; need to value our existing customer so they keep coming back.
- Safety needs to be addressed in our destination; visitors are encouraged not to go to Chinatown or the East side including Gastown.
- Don't lose what we have started here with this discussion; continue the dialogue and move forward as suggested during the Summit.

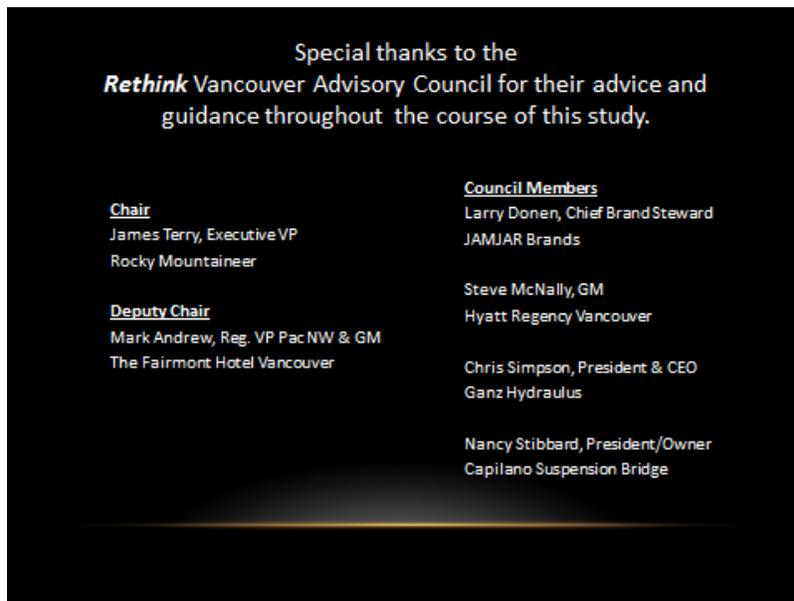
Summit Conclusion

James thanked everyone for their candor and input to today's session; he also acknowledged the interest and support *Rethink* has received over the past 10 months.

Tourism Vancouver is asking the two questions of its organization as *Rethink* is asking on a macro level; Tourism Vancouver will take all this input and continue to drive *Rethink* forward. The board will discuss the information and report out at the Annual General Meeting in June, followed by a detailed operational plan that will be delivered by the end of this year.



Thank you was extended to the *Rethink* Advisory Council whose role was to ensure the process went forward with integrity.



And a thank you was extended to Gary Grimmer for all he has done.