

VISIT
VANCOUVER
USA

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Revised 3/14/19

INFORMATION BASE

Overarching Marketing Goals

- Bring about economic development through attracting visitors to Clark County
- Drive occupancy, increase overnight room stays
- Influence visitor spending

Communications Objectives

- Increase top-of-mind awareness of Vancouver and Clark County among target audiences regionally and nationally
- Change negative perceptions of Vancouver among target audiences regionally
- Position Vancouver as the ideal location for conferences/conventions, group tours, sporting events
- Work toward positioning Clark County as the ideal stop for leisure travelers

Target Audiences

- Meeting planners
- Businesses and associations
- Leisure travelers
 - Women (as the household decision-makers)
 - Ages 25 – 55
 - Upper income and education
 - Interests: Culinary/beer/wine, outdoor recreation of all types

Target Geographic Markets

- Portland
 - To change perceptions and influence decision makers
- Seattle for meeting planners and group tours
 - To raise awareness
- Drive markets: South Sound (Olympia/Tacoma), Central Washington (Tri-Cities/Yakima)
 - To raise awareness

Competition

- Spokane
 - Assets: Davenport Grand Hotel, Spokane Convention Center, downtown metro area, weather
- Tri-Cities
 - Assets: wineries, golf
- Tacoma
 - Assets: Larger staff for bigger presence, museums, proximity to Puget Sound/Seattle
- Walla Walla
 - Assets: Marcus Whitman Hotel & Conference Center, wine country, weather, small boutique downtown
- Portland/Hayden Island
 - Assets: Stand-alone properties located at the Portland airport and on the river

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Regional destination
 - Proximity to Portland and entry point for Mount St. Helens, the Columbia River Gorge, the Washington Coast
- A growing destination with a connected community and urban amenities
 - Esther Short Park is the hub for annual events, showcasing community
 - High quality cuisine from a variety of experienced and cultured chefs
 - Fort Vancouver National Historic Reserve – Officers Row, Pearson Air, the Stockade
 - Small towns throughout Clark County – Camas, Battle Ground, Ridgefield
- Vancouver's vibrant downtown, especially in the summer
 - New waterfront development
 - Weekend activities at Esther Short Park
 - Breweries and tasting rooms
 - Farmers market, antique shops
 - Walkable downtown
 - Festivals, concerts, etc.
- The city and region are rich in history
 - Birthplace of the Pacific Northwest / key destination that influenced settlement history
 - The first Vancouver to be settled
 - The first city in Washington
- Vancouver is centrally located and easy to get to
 - Located on the I-5 corridor
 - 15 minutes from Portland International Airport
 - On the Amtrak Cascades Route – now with Vancouver to Vancouver service
- A variety of hotels for meetings and conventions, each with distinct characteristics
 - Hilton Vancouver Washington
 - The Heathman Lodge
 - Steadily growing pipeline of new hotels
- Attention given to large meetings/conventions
- Ample parking
- Mild weather
 - No extremes in temperature or seasons
 - Lively summers

Weaknesses

- Poor transportation services
 - Lack of shuttles to and from the airport
 - Poor taxi service (Uber and Lyft have helped alleviate)
 - No trolleys or streetcars
 - Room for growth with organized tours
- Limited amenities
 - Shopping
 - Nightlife
- Limited activities from October – March
- No boutique hotel
- Sprawling footprint, downtown can feel disconnected from Eastside

- Lack of understanding by local businesses regarding tourism attraction
 - Inconsistent hours and services for visitors at Mom & Pop shops
- Perception as being in Portland's shadow

Opportunities

- Two new waterfront developments (increased shopping and dining opportunities, new parks and trails, modern buildings and structures with an upscale feel to attract more leisure visitors)
 - The Waterfront from Gramor Development: Several restaurants & business space
 - Terminal One development by Port of Vancouver USA: Public Market & AC Marriot
- Local food and craft brew scene
 - Local Chefs: Alan Maniscalco / BJ Smith / Michael Dynes / Miguel Sosa / Genaro Zurita
 - Established brewery scene: Loowit / Trap Door / Heathen / Fortside / Brothers Cascadia
 - Regional wineries and downtown tasting rooms: Cellar 55 / Burnt Bridge / Bethany Vineyard / Koi Pond Cellars
 - Fresh local produce from many seasonal markets including Vancouver Farmers Market
- ilani Casino Resort
 - Hotel
 - Entertainment
 - Shopping
 - Upscale dining
- "Original" / USA branding
 - Opportunity for promotion
 - Raise awareness of Vancouver USA
 - Distinguish between the two Vancouvers
- Specialized tours
 - Food/Drink: Couve Cycle, Foodie Tour coming May 2019
 - History: CCHM Walking Tours, Segway Tours
 - Outdoor recreation: Hiking, Oregon Helicopters
- Urban trails connecting downtown and numerous hiking, backpacking opportunities within an hour
- Headquarters of PeaceHealth – Medical market opportunities
 - Veterinarian headquarters: Banfield Pet Hospital & WellHaven Pet Health

Threats

- Issues with homeless population, perceived safety risks and threat to clean sidewalks/parks
- Increased traffic, lack of proper infrastructure between Vancouver and Portland
 - Interstate Bridge
- Rising costs in Portland market could threaten Vancouver's livability, impacting desirability as a destination
- Animosity from locals toward visitors, lack of knowledge of tourism industry
- Increased marketing budgets from competitors
- Continued hesitancy for Washington state tourism funding
- Dilution of tourism efforts due to local organizations that misunderstand goals/purpose and perceive their organizational work as tourism

KEY MESSAGES

The following are key messages that have been identified to answer the question “Why Vancouver?” by target audiences seeking tourism destinations for themselves (in the case of the independent travelers) or for their clients (in the case of meeting planners and group tour operators). These messages are meant to support Visit Vancouver USA’s communications goals of changing negative perceptions and raising awareness. Whenever possible, these messages should be integrated into all communications and backed up with corresponding proof points. Additional proof points should be added based on personal experience and tailored to resonate with specific audiences.

WHY VANCOUVER USA?

Message #1

Vancouver is a growing destination with a connected community and urban amenities. Its highly accessible and approachable community offers visitors authentic travel experiences.

Sample Proof Points

- Downtown Vancouver provides vintage shopping and intimate restaurant settings with seasonally rotating menus.
- Downtown has a wide variety of attractions within a walkable area: the restored Kiggins Theatre, the Source Climbing Center, 15+ murals, Esther Short Park, art galleries and more.
- Esther Short Park, located in the center of the city, is a gathering spot for locals and visitors and is the venue for concerts, the Vancouver Farmers Market, and numerous community events and festivals.
- Vancouver’s walkable downtown connects to urban trails that bring visitors to the waterfront, the historic reserve, and to Vancouver Lake.

Message #2

If you have not been to Vancouver in the past 5 years, it is no longer the city it used to be.

Proof Points

- Vancouver’s waterfront development is creating national buzz, adding to the potential of this destination.
- Vancouver is now a vibrant city with downtown living, shopping, dining and other services.
- The beer, wine, and culinary scene have boomed with great momentum.
- High-profile businesses are located in Clark County.

Message #3

Vancouver/Clark County is a regional destination that is the entry point to all that the area has to offer.

Sample Proof Points

- Vancouver is located near some of the Pacific Northwest’s most spectacular natural wonders:
 - minutes from the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area
 - minutes from two National Wildlife Refuges
 - 90 minutes from Mount St. Helens

- 90 minutes from the Washington coast
- 90 minutes from Mt. Hood
- It also is close to major urban metro areas:
 - ten minutes from Portland
 - 2 hours from Tacoma
 - 3 hours from Seattle
- There are numerous recreational opportunities:
 - Kayaking at Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge and Vancouver Lake
 - Boating on the Columbia River
 - 44 miles of walking and hiking trails throughout Clark County
 - World-class skiing just 90 minutes away

Message #4

If you have not planned or held a meeting in Vancouver within the past 10 years, the city now offers venues for all sizes of conferences and events.

Proof Points

- The area now has more than 2,800 guest rooms, with several hotels in the pipeline
- There are two major hotels offering varying experiences for travelers:
 - Hilton Vancouver, internationally recognized brand located in the heart of downtown across from Esther Short Park
 - The Heathman Lodge, a rustic retreat that exudes Pacific Northwest history and style
- There is now a wide variety of meeting spaces that can accommodate large conventions, conferences and events as well as smaller meetings:
 - The Vancouver Convention Center with a meeting capacity of 1,500
 - The Heathman Lodge with a meeting capacity of 400
 - Major events can be held at:
 - Sunlight Supply Amphitheater
 - Clark County Event Center
 - Alderbrook Park
 - Esther Short Park
 - Unique venues for smaller meetings include:
 - Pearson Air Museum
 - The Grant House
 - Marshall House
 - Brickstone Ballroom

Message #5

Vancouver USA is the “original.”

Sample Proof Points

- Vancouver is the oldest permanent non-native settlement in the Pacific Northwest.
- It is the first incorporated city in the state of Washington.
- Vancouver was incorporated in 1857, almost 30 years before Vancouver, British Columbia, became a city.
- Visitors can see the original Vancouver come to life at Fort Vancouver National Historic Reserve and it is reflected in local businesses.
- Vancouver is home to the Oldest Apple Tree in the state of Washington and the matriarch of the Washington Apple industry.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MEDIA RELATIONS OUTREACH

The following are the media relations guidelines to be followed in order to achieve Visit Vancouver USA's marketing goals and communications objectives.

Media List

Build on the media list that Visit Vancouver USA has already developed. Update the information as needed and enhance the list with additional editors, writers, reporters, news producers, and bloggers. Updating will be an on-going process due to changes in staff and additions will be made based on the topics we are pitching.

At this time the list includes:

- Leisure travel publications (including in-flight magazines)
- Targeted lifestyle publications
- Outdoor recreation publications
- Regional and national newspapers with travel sections
- Meeting planner trade publications
- Group tour and travel agent trade publications
- Niche personal interest publications (birding, hiking, walking, biking, running, etc.)
- Culinary publications
- Select local and national broadcast media
- Travel blogs

News Releases

News releases will be generated to announce and/or promote newsworthy items that support Vancouver's communications goals. These items must be timely (not old news) and, for the most part, should have regional or national appeal. Topics for news releases include, but are not limited to:

- community events that have regional or national appeal;
- new tourism activities, attractions and/or assets that have regional or national appeal;
- announcements of major conferences/conventions that have been recruited and secured by Visit Vancouver USA; and
- positive travel/tourism trends.

Not only will we research, write, and distribute the news releases, we will follow up with the reporters and writers to ascertain interest and to provide additional information, photos, and/or interviews.

Immediate opportunities include:

- The Great Race (new event)
- NIAA Cross-Country Championships (returning event)

Feature Story Pitches

In order to secure feature stories about Vancouver and the region, we will pitch both timely and evergreen topics to select editors and freelance writers. Topics for these stories fall into four broad categories:

- the region's cities and towns and all they have to offer;
- outdoor recreation and events;
- food and craft beverages (beer/wine/cocktails); and
- historic sites and events.

Feature story pitches will be e-mailed to select writers and reporters followed by personal phone calls to “sell” the idea.

Opportunities include:

- summer events – Independence Day Fireworks, Antique Airplane Fly-in, Vancouver Brewfest, etc.;
- Vancouver Farmers Market, local wineries and restaurants;
- summer hiking; and
- birding.

Media Tours

The Visit Vancouver USA Marketing and Communications department assists qualified members of the press with visiting arrangements. Requests are handled on an individual basis. Additionally, the level of support provided depends upon the story angle, advance notice provided, time of year, length of stay and the ability of Vancouver area hotels and attractions to assist.

Complimentary arrangements are provided through the discretion of host businesses and are subject to the availability and interest of each property. While complimentary meals can be requested, they are provided at the discretion of the host restaurant. Visit Vancouver USA cannot provide airfare trip, nor can it pay for ground transportation.

Touring media – Assistance Provided

- a personalized itinerary;
- media kit with specific information related to the writer’s/reporter’s area of interest;
- specific tour maps; and
- pre-arranged interviews and/or site tours.

Summer is the ideal time to invite reporters and freelance writers to experience, first-hand, all that Vancouver and the region have to offer. The first step will be to create itineraries for specific areas of interest. These will include:

- “Culinary and Wine Tour”;
- “Historic Clark County Tour”;
- “Vancouver - a Boutique City Surrounded by Boutique Towns”; and
- “Walking, Hiking and Biking through Clark County.”

Editorial Calendar Opportunities

Most travel, lifestyle and trade publications have annual editorial calendars that identify topics by issue date. Depending on the publication, we will work with the editors to:

- ensure that Vancouver is included in articles that focus on the region (i.e. Pacific Northwest, Washington, West Coast, etc.);
- place authored articles that pertain to a specific topic; and/or
- secure feature stories on the Vancouver region.

Authored Articles

Opportunities for authored articles and contributed columns are increasing, especially with trade publications that have limited writers and resources. The primary advantage of authored articles is that we can tell our own story without it being interpreted through a third-party reporter or writer.

Social Media

In addition to traditional media, the Visit Vancouver USA Marketing and Communications department will utilize social media venues to disseminate select information to targeted audiences. Posting information on our blog is especially effective when there is a need to get information out quickly and/or when there is a call-to-action within a specified period of time.

- **Facebook:** Facebook has the largest user base of any social media site in the US.
 - Large audience, moving to an older demographic
 - Ideal for sharing varied content (photos/links/updates/videos/anecdotes/blog posts)
 - Easy way to connect with followers via comments and posts to page
 - Downside: Changing newsfeed algorithms can make it challenging to reach fans
 - Counteracted with paid advertising
- **Twitter:** More so than any other social media platform, Twitter is known for its “real-time” features, which make it ideal for sharing and consuming news.
 - Allows for quick and concise updates
 - Great for breaking news dissemination
 - Ability to directly tag high profile visitors, businesses, and travel writers
 - Strong communities centered around hashtags and specialized lists
 - Downside: Limited user growth, mostly younger individuals and businesses
- **Instagram:** Instagram has a growing user base made up primarily of young individuals who are food consumers, avid travelers, recreational enthusiasts and hotel visitors—all of whom document their journeys through sharing photos.
 - Ideal for crowd sourcing
 - Great way to use geolocation to see which attractions visitors are visiting
 - Builds fan loyalty
 - Increase brand recognition
 - Downside: Limited ways to link to outside sites, limited desktop functionality
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn allows for making connections with individuals/stakeholders in the travel and hospitality industry.
 - Share industry articles and editorial mentions (doesn't have to be “flashy” content like other platforms)
 - Show Visit Vancouver USA's role in the community
 - Post job opportunities
 - Downside: Limited audience and user growth