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2009 YORK REGION TOURISM PROGRAM ANNUAL REVIEW

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated January 28, 2010, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Clerks Department to local municipalities, chambers of commerce, the Board of Trade and the York Region Tourism Advisory Group.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with an overview of the 2009 York Region Tourism Program activities and how the results generated provided the foundation to formulate strategic 2010 tourism marketing and industry relations programs.

3. BACKGROUND

Regional Council approved the 2009 York Region Tourism Marketing Program in October 2008 and the York Region Tourism Marketing Mid-Year Review report in June 2009. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the marketing, industry relations and destination development initiatives implemented in 2009.

Marketing and Industry Partnership Development were the core activities

The marketing component of the Tourism Program includes the delivery of innovative, integrated research driven advertising, public relations and promotional initiatives in partnership with industry stakeholders that inspire growth in visitation and economic spend.

Industry partnership development is the leadership role undertaken by the Region to create an environment for the development, growth and sustainability of the tourism industry through the provision of education forums, business planning assistance, product and partnership development and research initiatives that assist the tourism industry to make informed decisions.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The marketing initiatives implemented in 2009 were developed based on the Premier Ranked Tourism destination research, guidance from the York Region Tourism Advisory Group and through consultations with the tourism industry.

Industry development initiatives and programs enhanced the marketing efforts and provided additional partnership and development opportunities for York Region tourism businesses.

Seasonal campaigns promoting experiences and overnight packages

The marketing program was focused on promoting York Region by experience and by season utilizing online advertising, radio and print media directed at two key audiences based in the geographic locations of York Region, the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario:

- Leisure consumers looking for getaways that are close to home and affordable (same day and overnight stays).
- Meetings and Group markets (corporate and associations, meeting planners, recreation and sport tournaments, student and adult tour groups).

Seasonal campaigns directed consumers to www.yorktourism.com or to call for information on regional experiences and overnight packages offered by York Region accommodation partners. Seasonal promotional initiatives included online contesting, media relations activities and enhancements to the tourism website to maintain search engine optimization and ease of use for users.

LEISURE CONSUMER

Outreach to consumers via four publications and quarterly e-newsletters

The York Region Discovery Guide is an 84 page publication, designed as the only regional annual directory for tourism experiences and business. The 2009 Guide feature a pull out map and value added coupons. One hundred and fifteen (115) industry partners participated, generating \$86,840.00 in advertising revenue that supported the production and distribution of 100,000 guides. The Guides were distributed throughout Ontario via CTM Brochure Distribution service; Union Station commuter events; trade shows and community events, Viva/York Region Transit sampling days, the Jewell Radio 88.5 Days of Summer events and through consumer requests driven by online, print and direct mail campaigns.

During the Spring/Summer, 150,000 copies of In Your Backyard, Spring Summer were printed with 130,000 copies distributed through Canada Post in Kingston, London, Sarnia, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Windsor, St. Catharines, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Nepean, and through the Forever Young Magazine to Ottawa residents. The balance

of the magazines is distributed through Tourism Information Centres across Ontario and consumer inquiries generated through the Spring/Summer advertising campaigns.

In the Fall, 50,000 copies of In Your Backyard, FestiFALL were printed with 30,000 copies distributed through Canada Post in Brampton, Guelph, Kingston, Kitchener, London and Waterloo. The balance of the magazines was distributed at Union Station to commuters, to York Region Tourism's consumer database, and through consumer inquiries generated through the Fall advertising campaigns.

The International Silver Stick Hockey tournament distributed the York Region Sport Tournament Guide to 76 teams of which 46 teams required overnight accommodation.

Quarterly e-newsletters were circulated to 3,000 subscribers who have opted in to receive York Region tourism information.

Seasonal advertising campaigns included print, radio and online advertising and contesting promotions

Winter marketing from January to March included promotion through the regional corporate publication York Works to all residents, a Rogers Television 15 second commercial, online banner advertising on rogerstelevision.com, the York Region Media Group What's On event calendar and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership ontariotravel.net.

The Spring/Summer campaign from April to July included nine print ads placed in the CAA Magazine, Festival & Events Ontario Guide, the Official Guide to Wineries of Ontario, Direction Ontario (Quebec consumers), Harvest Ontario, GTA Golfers Guide, Lures and Tours Fishing Lake Simcoe Guide and the Polo Mallet Magazine. Online marketing consisted of banner ads on the ontariotravel.net website, Rogers TV online, York Region Media group yorkregion.com and the CAA member website. There were email communications to 480,000 Ontario Tourism Distinctive Getaway newsletter subscribers, 60,000 Toronto Star subscribers, 292,000 Globe and Mail subscribers and a targeted online program with MSN Sympatico.

The Fall print campaign from August until December included six print ads placed in the CAA magazine, Direction Ontario, full page advertorials in the Toronto Star and Globe and Mail, a double page ad in Macleans magazine and a resident promotion through York Works. The Fall online campaign consisted of Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership website, various banner ads on Ontariotravel.net, Ontario Tourism Great Fall Drives program, CHFI Loyalty Club promotion, York Region Media Group Calendar of Events, and email blasts to Toronto Star and Globe & Mail subscribers, promotion on the CAA member website, a targeted online program with MSN Sympatico and a network campaign with Yahoo! Canada.

All marketing and advertising activities directed consumers to seasonal landing pages on the tourism website www.yorktourism.com. All consumer inquiries and online click through rates, referrals, unique visitors and page views were tracked and measured to determine success.

Other marketing activities implemented included poster displays at four Ontario Travel Centres, interior bus advertising on Viva/YRT routes and 12 tourism partners distributed 15,000 promotional bags each day to commuters at the York Region day at Union Station in June and September.

MEETINGS AND GROUPS

A redesigned Keynote, Meeting and Conference Planner was distributed to generate new meeting and convention business

The Keynote, Conference & Meeting Planner has been redesigned to highlight the various “green” activities York Region accommodation and meeting facilities have undertaken to improve their environmental impact and incorporates an incentive program to encourage new business. Twenty five thousand copies were distributed to businesses throughout York Region via direct mail, to planners through key corporate meeting planning publications and through follow-up from inquiries generated through the following marketing initiatives:

Meeting and Conference advertising included key publications such as: Meeting Planners International Meeting Magazine, Speaking of Impact Magazine, Ignite Magazine, Conference, Meetings and Events Magazine, and the Globe and Mail InConference Magazine. Two direct mailings were facilitated through the Canadian Society of Association Executives and Scott’s Business Directory and online activities included a targeted campaign with Yahoo! Canada and a Meetings & Incentive Travel eDirect mail blast to meeting planners.

Marketing activities position York Region as a prime destination for adult and student group travel

York Region was promoted as a unique school trip destination through the Ontario High School Teachers Professionally Speaking Magazine and a promotional product guide was distributed to 1800 tour operators in the Ontario Motor Coach Association Resource Guide combined with an online banner.

INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing consultation to create an environment for the development growth and sustainability of the tourism industry

Industry development activities to date include:

- York Region Tourism facilitated a grant workshop on November 16, 2009 which provided direction to 20 industry participants on how to craft a funding submission to the 11 million Celebrate Ontario Event funding program. Celebrate Ontario 2010 was an \$11 million funding program available to increase the economic potential of tourism festivals and events. Eight York Region festivals and events received a total of \$268,430 in Celebrate and Ministry of Tourism Development funding.
- Fifty tourism industry partners attended the October 26, 2009, Partner Information Session which was comprised of a marketing workshop and overview of 2010 marketing initiatives and partnership opportunities.
- On November 2, 2009 eleven partners participated in the Partner Information Session via webinar.
- The York Region Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy was launched at the Annual Tourism Conference on November 10, with 95 tourism industry partners in attendance.

Funding secured to develop online Customer Service Toolkit

York Region secured over \$420,320 in funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Labour Market Partnership Fund to support enhancements to the York Region Tourism Customer Service Toolkit developed in 2008. Through the request for proposal process the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation and RAD International were retained to modify the existing program to an innovative online training tool that will help tourism based businesses to become more sustainable by addressing customer service awareness and employee recruitment needs.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Tourism visitation and inquiries decline in Ontario

Overall the tourism industry in Ontario suffered due to the soft economic conditions, gas prices, H1N1 and global crisis resulting in fewer visitations from the Overseas and United States markets. From January – October 2009, the Ministry of Tourism performance indicators for Ontario's tourism market show visitation from the US is -15.8% and Overseas -16.6%. Visitor inquiries to the 1 800 Ontario phone lines have decreased -28.5% and the Travel Information Centre have experienced a 12.4% decrease in customers.

The performance results of the 2009 regional marketing program include:

- CHFI Loyalty Club promotion on CHFI's website in partnership with Doors Open Events generated 4,021 click throughs to the Doors Open landing page on yorktourism.com
- Email blast in June to Toronto Star subscribers promoting the accommodation getaway packages and attraction special offers produced 2,755 unique visitors to yorktourism.com
- Email blast in September to Toronto Star subscribers promoting the accommodation getaway packages and the Fall season in York Region which resulted in 3,559 unique visitors to yorktourism.com/fall
- Email blast in September to Globe and Mail Ontario based subscribers achieving 1,273 click throughs to yorktourism.com/fall
- Campaign with Yahoo! Canada resulted in 4,667 unique visitors clicking through to campaign specific landing page on yorktourism.com
- The York Tourism advertising generated 2,487 phone enquiries and the website generated 4,108 information requests in 2009 versus 1,715 phone enquiries and 5,165 information requests in 2008.
- Contest promotions resulted in 8,724 consumer entries.
- Over 9,000 consumers have opted in to receive future e-newsletter communications from York Region Tourism.
- York Region Tourism generated \$112,254 in revenue from partnerships and partner advertising.

Best practices incorporated into the 2010 marketing and industry relations work plans.

Based on 2009 results, York Region Tourism has incorporated best practices into the 2010 marketing and industry relations work plans.

- Seasonal online contests were successful in increasing the consumer database to by 5,600 consumers. Therefore, York Region Tourism will build on the strength of its online contesting in 2010.
- Loyalty Club promotions with CHFI were the strongest referrer of online traffic to yorktourism.com. Seven additional weeks have been added to the 2010 marketing program and industry partners have already purchased advertising for the entire ten week campaign.
- The Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter seasonal magazines had a unique lifestyle editorial and creative look in 2009 which were well received based on feedback from consumers and industry partners. As a result, the size and creative look of the York Region Discovery Guide will be modified to a readers digest size which will allow for expanded editorial and lifestyle sections, the incorporation of an enhanced reader friendly layout and include more value added incentives and overnight package offerings.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The tourism program supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture goals of Vision 2026, is a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy and supports the recommendations of the Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The tourism program initiatives were funded in the 2009 Regional operation budget allocation and were augmented by \$200,000 from Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee and advertising support from the tourism industry partners. A new sponsorship position piloted in tourism in 2009, assisted in generating over \$420,320 for the Customer Service Program, \$32,000 for enhanced regional marketing activities and provided assistance to various festivals and events resulting in the industry receiving \$268,430.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region's tourism program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experience and the facilitation of industry consultations and educational forums that impact all municipalities throughout York Region. The tourism program provides opportunities for local municipalities and tourism businesses to maximize their tourism potential enhance job and wealth creation while contributing to the quality of life for residents.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2009 tourism program activities continued to raise the level of interaction with the tourism industry and partner businesses while collaborative opportunities avoided duplication of efforts, focused resources and expanded market reach. The marketing priorities build upon York Region's key experiences and strongest audience markets to maximize visitation and economic impact.

For more information on this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830-4444, Ext. 1553 or Patrick Draper, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.