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### **2009 TOURISM PROGRAM MID YEAR REVIEW**

**The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated May 15, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.**

#### **1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Clerks Department to the local municipalities, the Tourism Advisory Group, the Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade for information and engagement.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council a mid year review of the tourism program activities implemented to date and approved initiatives for the balance of the year.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

**Marketing and Industry Partnership Development were the core activities approved by Regional Council in October 2008 to support and promote the business of tourism throughout York Region**

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 OPTION**

**The marketing program promotes York Region's seasonal experiences through online advertising, radio, television, and print media directing consumers to [www.yorktourism.com](http://www.yorktourism.com) and the toll free consumer phone line**

The marketing program is directed at three key audiences based in the geographic locations of York Region, the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario:

- the local resident (visiting friends and relatives).
- the leisure consumer looking for getaways that are close to home and affordable (same day and overnight).
- the meetings and group markets (corporate and associations, meeting planners, recreation and sport tournaments, student and adult tour groups).

Seasonal campaigns feature regional experiences and promote overnight packages offered by York Region accommodation partners. Seasonal promotional initiatives included on-line contesting, media relations activities and enhancements to the tourism website to maintain search engine optimization and ease of use for users.

##### **4.1 LEISURE CONSUMER**

**New publications and advertising were developed to support leisure consumer marketing**

- The York Region Discovery Guide is the official York Region visitor publication. The Guide is an 84 page publication, designed as an annual directory to tourism experiences and business. It features 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 Discovery Guide is also 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.
- In Your Backyard Magazine, Spring Summer Edition  
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. Five pages of this magazine were dedicated to free listings of accommodation

Getaway Packages and attraction special offers to generate new visitation and overnight stays during what is looking like a challenging summer period for the tourism industry. 21 industry partners purchased advertising space, generating \$7,000 in advertising revenue to offset the magazine production and distribution. (Refer to attachment 2 – Spring/Summer In Your Backyard magazine).

- York Region Postcard  
300,000 postcards were mailed to York Region residents, highlighting the available tourism publications and providing information to call or go to [www.yorktourism.com](http://www.yorktourism.com) to order copies.
- In partnership with York Region's Geomatics branch, the 2002 Take A Hike publication has been transformed into an interactive website of recreational trails. Consumers can now visit [yorktourism.com](http://yorktourism.com) to explore detailed maps that include information about trail length, access points, surface type, area features, parking and facilities and link to the local municipal trail information.
- York Region Tourism E-newsletter  
Quarterly e-newsletters were circulated to 1,000 subscribers who have opted in to receive York Region tourism information.

### **The Winter advertising campaign included print and online media activities and a television commercial**

Winter marketing tactics from January to March included:

- Print advertising was placed in York Works to promote [yorktourism.com/winter](http://yorktourism.com/winter), which highlighted winter events and getaways (300,000 ad distribution).
- Online banner advertising [rogerstelevision.com](http://rogerstelevision.com), the York Region Media Group - What's On page and event calendar, and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership website, [ontariotravel.net](http://ontariotravel.net).
- A 15-second promotion on Rogers Television – York Region, First Local, promoted seasonal experiences and events.
- Continued distribution of the York Region Sports supplement book through the International Silver Sticks Hockey tournament (44 teams participate).
- A winter contest promotion was featured on [yorktourism.com](http://yorktourism.com).

### **The Spring/Summer advertising campaign included print and online advertising promotions plus radio commercials on Jewel Radio, 88.5 FM**

The Spring/Summer print campaign runs April to June and includes:

- The Official Guide to Wineries of Ontario (600,000 distribution).
- CAA Magazine (1.5 million distribution).

- Festivals & Events Ontario – Annual Festival Guide (250,000 distribution).
- Direction Ontario – Quebec Consumer Information Guide (80,000 distribution).
- Harvest Ontario (6,000 circulation through Home Hardware).
- Golfers Guide (35,000 distribution in GTA and 60,000 in Niagara Region) Globe & Mail, Explore Ontario May edition (2.8 million distribution).
- The Toronto Star targeting outside GTA subscribers.
- Lures & Tours – Fishing Lake Simcoe (50,000 copies distributed to communities around Lake Simcoe, Bass Pro Shops, Trade Shows, Tournaments).
- Polo Mallet Magazine (5,000 copies distributed at Polo for Heart Tournament).

The Spring/Summer online campaign from April-July consists of:

- Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership website, banner ads on Ontariotravel.net on the home page, travel guides page and family page.
- Key words were purchased on the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership website: including golf, Canada's Wonderland, York Region, Toronto.
- Our Distinctive Getaway partnership with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, profiles York Region's Golf product through provincial online and print campaigns. 515,000 copies of the Distinctive Getaway brochure will be distributed through Chatelaine, CAA and Zoomer magazines and through the Ontario Travel Centres. As well, eight e-blasts will be sent throughout the year to approx. 480,000 Distinctive Getaway newsletter subscribers.
- Banner advertising on Rogers TV online, York Region section promotes spring/summer activities and the 2009 Discovery Guide.
- Banner advertising on the What's On page and POP calendar of the York Region Media Group, yorkregion.com
- Email blast in June to 60,000 Toronto Star subscribers promoting the accommodation getaway packages and attraction special offers.
- Targeted online program with MSN Sympatico, including a big box and leader board ads plus text links and optimization of our message during the campaign to ensure 2,900,000 impressions reached.
- Email in June to 292,000 Globe and Mail Ontario base subscribers achieving approximately 292,500 impressions.
- Advertising on the new CAA subscriber's website with a link back to yorktourism.com.

Other activities implemented to increase leisure consumer awareness included poster displays at four Ontario Travel Centres, interior bus advertising on Viva/YRT routes and 10 tourism partners distributed 10,000 promotional bags to commuters at the York Region day at Union Station on June 5.

## **4.2 MEETINGS AND GROUPS**

**To encourage and increase business from the meeting and convention market, a new Keynote, Meeting and Conference Planner will be distributed to meeting planners, community groups and business executives in York Region and across the province**

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. Thirty five thousand (35,000) copies are 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 Planners International, Toronto Chapter – Meeting Magazine – targeting meeting and event planners located in the GTA (900 distribution).
- Scott’s Directory mailing to approximately 1800 business executives.
- Canadian Society of Association Executives mailing to approx 1000 association contacts.
- Perspective York – Greater Toronto Area through the Globe & Mail (300,000 distribution).
- Ignite Magazine –to Ontario and Eastern Ontario meeting planners subscribers (15,000 distribution).
- Profile of York Region in the Globe and Mail, In Conference magazine.

**In addition, activities are in place to position York Region as a prime destination for adult and student group travel including**

- Advertising in the Professionally Speaking Magazine – targeting Ontario high school teachers, promoting York Region as a unique school trip destination (195,000 distribution).
- A promotional listing in the Ontario Motor Coach Association, 2009 Resource Guide (distribution to 1800 tour operators) and online banner on Ontario Motor Coach Association, online 2009 Resource Guide.
- Online banner advertising on syta.com the Student & Youth Travel Association website targeting student and youth tour operators (approx 11,500 visitors per month).

### **4.3 INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT**

**Ongoing consultation and interaction with tourism industry partners, community organizations, area municipalities and members of the public with the goal 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 December 4, 2008 which provided direction to 26 participants on how to craft a funding submission to the Celebrate Ontario Event funding program. Celebrate Ontario 2009 was an \$11 million funding program available to increase the economic potential of tourism festivals and events. Celebrate Ontario awarded funding to seven festivals and events in York Region including: Dayco National Snowcross Championships, Georgina Fishing Series, York Shakespeare Festival, Markham Jazz Festival, Soup-A-Licious, Canadian Snowcross Championships and Our Greener Side Celebration.
- On January 8, 2009 a strategy meeting with Hotel Managers and Hotel Directors of Sales was held to consult on the proposed leisure consumer and meeting/group marketing programs and ensure the strategic directions were still aligned given the current economic challenges.
- York Region Tourism established new partnerships with Viva/York Region Transit, Georgina Island Tourism and Doors Open York Region events. The partnerships increased participation in York Region Tourism publications and presented new opportunities to develop tourism product.

**Through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Labour Market Partnership funding program, York Region's tourism industry will benefit from a newly enhanced Customer Service Program Toolkit**

The new Customer Service Toolkit will help tourism based businesses to become more sustainable by addressing customer service awareness and employee recruitment needs. A funding request has been submitted in the amount of \$420,320 to support enhancements to the York Region Tourism Customer Service Program developed in 2008. Focus groups, pilot sessions and market research will be undertaken over an 18 month period to define and create innovative online training tools that support the importance of the delivery of service excellence and meet the growing needs of the tourism sector.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

**Regular consultation with tourism industry partners and officials from the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Toronto and other industry association occur to better understand and react to issues and trends facing the travel and tourism industry**

The tourism program is evaluated against a variety of qualitative and quantitative tracking and performance measures. Current results include:

- The marketing campaigns are successful in driving consumers to the tourism website to learn more about York Region's tourism experiences. Website tracking from January to May 2009 indicates 27,068 total visits, a 24% increase compared to 2008. From January to May there were 161,402 page views which is a 26% increase from 2008. Marketing campaigns have generated 58.5% direct referral rate to yorktourism.com for 2009, compared to a referral rate of 30.9% for the same timeframe in 2008. This means that 58% of people who visited the tourism website typed in the exact website address that was advertised in the marketing activities. Based on geographic location, 79 % of all visits to yorktourism.com are from Canada.
- Tracking of contact information from January to May show 1290 phone inquiries and 2538 information requests via yorktourism.com. These numbers show a dramatic increase from the same timeframe as 2008, which saw 185 phone inquiries and 90 information requests via yorktourism.com. The dramatic increase in requests can be largely attributed to the ad mail drop to residences done in April promoting the 2009 Discovery Guide and Spring/Summer edition of the In Your Backyard magazine.
- Contest promotion from January to May has resulted in 1825 entries.
- Over 1000 consumers have opted in to receive future e-newsletter communications from York Region Tourism, compared to spring of 2008 which have 489 consumers.
- 153 tourism partners have purchased advertising or participated in York Region promotions to date.

#### **4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026**

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

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The tourism program initiatives are funded in the 2009 Economic Development and Tourism budget allocation and are augmented through a destination marketing fee partnership with Tourism Toronto and industry supported co-operative advertising revenues. In April 2009, Tourism Toronto reduced their financial support to York Region from the expected \$300,000 to \$200,000. The regional tourism marketing program was adjusted accordingly so that there is no net impact on the Region's budget.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Visitor and meeting expenditures support the economic vitality of local tourism businesses enhances employment opportunities and encourages sustainable growth. The Region's tourism program is based on developing and implementing a wide range of marketing, promotional and industry initiatives that maximize tourism opportunities, increase local economic impact and assist tourism businesses make informed decisions.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The 2009 Tourism Program provides the framework for the promotion and development of York Region as a viable four season destination. The tourism branch will continue to work collaboratively with industry partners and municipal staff to ensure the York Region tourism program recognizes local tourism objectives and supports a collective approach to tourism and destination development

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

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(The two attachments referred to in this clause were included in the agenda for the June 17, 2009 meeting.)*