

Marketing Plan

Objectives:

To position the San Luis Obispo County Visitors and Conference Bureau as the tourism leader of the San Luis Obispo County brand reaching audiences year around on a regional, national and global level.

1. Create and execute the county tourism brand to increase the competitiveness of San Luis Obispo County in a changed tourism environment. Lead the integration of the diverse marketing programs among tourism constituents to grow the number of visitors.
2. Strengthen communications with all tourism constituents and position the VCB as the impartial countywide tourism expert to establish, support and grow trustworthy relationships.
3. Develop a sustainable funding model in accordance with countywide tourism stakeholders to support marketing initiatives.

Target Markets (in rank order):

1. Southern CA: Orange County, San Diego, North LA through SB
(i.e., Thousand Oaks, Ventura, Camarillo, Oxnard)
2. Northern CA: San Jose region, SF, East Bay, Peninsula
3. Central CA: Fresno, Bakersfield
4. Central Coast: Santa Barbara, Monterey
5. Western US: Denver, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Portland, Phoenix/Scottsdale, Santa Fe, etc.

6. US: Texas, Florida, New York, etc.

7. International: Canada, Mexico, Europe (UK, Germany, Italy, France), Australia, Asia, etc.

Lodging Demand:

- 40-65% Leisure
- 17-36% Individual/Corporate Business
- 10-13% Group Business

Gender:

- 40-51% Male
- 20-49% Female
- 0-40% Families

Avg. Income:

- HHI of \$80k

Age:

- 10% 19-24
- 25% 25-34
- 55% 35-64 (aging younger – active group)
- 10% 65+

Source: SMG Report

1. Create and execute the county tourism brand to increase the competitiveness of San Luis Obispo County in a changed tourism environment. Lead the integration of the diverse marketing programs among tourism constituents to grow the number of visitors.

Brand Strategy:

- To create a countywide brand tool kit and key messaging standard that delivers consistent brand positioning inside and outside of the county, growing the number of visitors through aggressive advertising, public relations, group sales and film commission programs.

Goal:

- Market the collective interests of the countywide tourism community through compelling and consistent messaging focused on visiting and staying in SLO County to increase overall dollars spent on traveling by 5%. Thereby stimulating incremental TOT income by 1-2%, advertising and public relations impressions by 10%, group and film sales leads by 5-6%, website visits by 12-15%.

Tactics:

1. Marketing Tool Kit

- Logo & Tagline: Launch new logo consistently throughout all branding and marketing efforts. Do SWOT on current tagline usage with new logo. Determine the effectiveness and total integration of all county products using the “California’s Natural Escape”.

Evaluate results and determine next steps. Utilize existing Visitor Database for focused group survey.

- Determine how the tourism brand and tagline could work across all county products for a “*Made in San Luis Obispo County*” brand. This approach may incorporate artisan products, local farms, wine, restaurants, local businesses, etc. Present ideas to Farm Bureau, Chambers of Commerce and Cal Poly Recreation Parks Tourism Association (RPTA) to determine integration and use.
 - VCB Name – As part of the new brand, evaluate the organization name to ensure it works with the intended brand. Research leading VCB’s to determine the trend and identify recommendations for organization name.
 - Budget - \$20,000
- Key Messaging: Develop Internal and External Countywide tourism messaging that is consistent throughout every level of VCB branding and marketing outreach. This messaging platform will include input from key tourism stakeholders to leverage top down consistent messaging.
- Budget - \$15,000

Sample Internal Messages:

- The Visitors and Conference Bureau is a voice of the countywide tourism expert representing X communities, X tourism partners, key attractions and impacting the county by \$x.
- Position the VCB as the expert resource for countywide tourism education and outreach.
- Fiduciary responsible for managing the countywide brand
- Implement and execute the integrated county branding program

Sample External Messages:

- The Visitors and Conference Bureau is the voice for the County destination. Communicating the diversity of attractions, locations and experiences among visitors.
 - Attractions: i.e., Hearst Castle, wine region, elephant seals, Missions, piers, boutique and artisan shops, walk able downtowns, zoo, etc.
 - Locations: i.e., Coastal regions, rural California, state parks, diverse beach, lakes
 - Experiences: i.e., farm visits, farmer's markets, culinary, wine tasting, horseback riding, hiking, cycling, driving, camping, sailing, kayaking, surfing, etc.

- Website and Technology: Position the VCB as the county's prime source for travel news and information utilizing state-of-the-art technology and tools (i.e., Website, jack rabbit, mobile apps, booking engine, social media sites, etc.). Redesign to integrate new branding, input consistent key messaging, showcase regional diversity and organize for ease of use at www.sanluisobispo.com. This key branded marketing tool will work as a portal representing county attractions, locations and experiences; thereby funneling traffic to region specific websites.
 - Assess and prioritize technology tools currently used to determine cost effectiveness and ROI among tourism stakeholders (i.e., jack rabbit).
 - Work with tourism stakeholders to create a paid search strategy to grow overall traffic numbers rather than compete internally.
 - Budget - \$50,000
- Multi Purpose Information Kit: Create a communication package to reach multiple audiences as needed (i.e., journalists, group sales, film sales, and meeting planners, etc.) to include standard FAQ, background, regional and county press accolades, regional diversity: key attractions, experiences and locations (1 pager on each region and county), stock photography, B-Roll, tourist demographic county profile, maps, sample itineraries, etc. Make available in print and electronic (i.e., Website, DVD, thumb drive, etc.).
 - Budget - \$35,000 (\$25,000 content development and writing; \$10,000 printing)

2. Public Relations

- News Bureau – Position the VCB as the media response center for tourism in SLO County. Create a list of SLO County specific trends featuring travel, food, coastal, outdoor activities and lifestyle experiences to use as robust content to communicate to key audiences on a proactive, ongoing basis. These trend stories can be turned into email campaigns to send to the consumer lists and also promote the various aspects of SAVOR and countywide themed programs (i.e., Restaurant Month, Wine Month, etc.). The VCB News Bureau should be all encompassing and positioned as the lead on all programs providing ease of use for media response (i.e., all press releases refer to VCB website, contact, etc.)
 - Countywide themed programs (i.e., Restaurant Month, Wine Month) – launch programs via public relations announcing the program via press release reaching local and regional media, social media, etc. to secure publicity.
 - Sunset Savor the Central Coast – work alongside the Savor team to determine trends and stories about the county, year around securing publicity and promoting Savor as the event where these trends culminate. For example, trend stories could follow the farm-to-table process featuring local farmers, artisan cheese makers, winemakers, chefs, sustainable garden tips, etc. These all translate into event features at SAVOR.
 - Budget - \$60,000 (\$5,000 a month)

- Media FAM Trips – Working in cooperation with BID Partners, community partners and county attractions, create a series of media FAM trips that can be hosted or co-hosted with partners. Plan quarterly proactive media trips (i.e., 8-10 journalists) and reactively as media are interested in visiting the county. Use the trends created as part of the News Bureau as the elements to showcase on the FAM tour. Savor can be a culmination of these experiences and grand showcase for media.
 - Quarterly – Execute FAM Trips quarterly. Plan dates in advance to maximize outreach to writers. Target journalists from top four target audience segments keeping them California based. FAM trips should all promote the Savor event with an element happening at the Ranch to begin securing year around publicity for Savor.
 - February, June, August, October (Savor)
 - Budget - \$60,000 (i.e., \$1,000 per writer for 4-day trip; partner dollars can be used to help offset hosting costs). Includes Public Relations consultant fees.
- Social Media – Build upon current traffic to create the social ‘community’. Use tools (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Four Square, etc.) to foster conversation, encourage participation, share insights via word-of-mouth and direct traffic to www.sanluisobisocounty.com. Position the VCB social media platform as THE place for insider information. Integrate social media tools into branding toolkit keeping all traffic directed and focused towards the website.

- **facebook, twitter, blog promotions and giveaways**
 - Integrate public relations stories with social media to create weekly timely story and promotions (i.e., coupons, specials, etc.). Initiate ongoing photo and video contests, encouraging community members to upload and share links, experiences and press capturing all things San Luis Obispo County.

- **Blog Strategy**
 - Create a blog to integrate public relations stories, cross-promote through Social Media channels and promote local business. Create a name for the blog integrating brand and tagline and a prominent placement on website home page. Encourage highly sharable, ‘viral’ FB campaigns (e.g., Top 20 Signs You’re A SLO County Wine Nut)
 - Develop quarterly blog calendar focusing on promoting SLO County events, experiences, attractions, locations, food and wine focus, integrating video
 - Invite local experts as a guest to post entries on their field of expertise, up-and-coming trends, etc. “Get Inside” with interviews: chefs, hoteliers, travel specialists, wedding planners, festival managers, etc.
 - Livecast events and happenings (live blogging, TwitPic, video) to further publicize experiences, attractions and all things SLO County.

- Budget - \$60,000 (\$5,000 per month – combination of staff and contractor)

3. Advertising: With the VCB serving as the brand manager, develop and facilitate a multi-phase co-op advertising program using the county marketing toolkit as the brand umbrella under which all regional brand messaging is executed. The current countywide co-op program provides efficient, flexible multi-media, and multiple partner opportunities. The VCB coordinates the ad approvals with the key stakeholders on a neutral and very cost effective basis, with limited fiscal impact to the VCB.
- Program 1: Retail Co-op Advertising
 - Build on the successful VCB retail advertising programs currently running in the Central Valley; expand reach to Northern and Southern CA (i.e., Ventura) and frequency of ads; integrate countywide themed program messaging when timing and media is appropriate (i.e., Savor, Wine month, Restaurant Month, etc.)
 - Timing – Monthly, Weekly based on demand
 - Budget - \$5,000 (resources/staff time to facilitate coordination); Participants buy-in at contracted rates.
 - Program 2: Branding Co-op Advertising
 - The VCB has in place an annual multi-phase countywide branding co-op program that offers efficient, flexible multi-media and multiple partner opportunities with great reach and frequency to multiple targeted audiences. This program will also integrate countywide themed program messaging when timing and media is appropriate (i.e., Savor, Wine month, Restaurant Month, etc.)
 - Timing – Off Season – November – May
 - Budget:
 - \$10,000 - VCB Budget (resources/staff time to facilitate umbrella brand campaign)

- \$150,000 + - Tourism Co-op Partners (ad buy at negotiated rates, creative)
- This program targets the following media:
 - LOS ANGELES TIMES & LATIMES.COM:
 - Tactics: E-newsletters, travel blogs, banner advertising, sweepstakes, press release
 - 2.85 million impressions
 - SKYWEST IN-FLIGHT MAGAZINE: Run dates: Spring
 - Tactics: Center Spread
 - 2.5 million impressions (nationally)
 - SAN JOSE MERCURYNEWS.COM: Run dates: February-March
 - Tactics: E-newsletters, travel blogs, banner advertising, sweepstakes, press release
 - SUNSET MAGAZINE AND SUNSET.COM: Run dates: March/April
 - Tactics: Banner ads, full-page advertising and center spreads
 - 7.25 million impressions (CA, OR, WA, AZ, NV)
 - US AIRWAYS: Run dates: April
 - Tactics: 2- page full color spread; 14 page editorial
 - 3.2 million impressions (national)

4. Group and Leisure Sales: Develop a multi-tier program with co-op opportunities that includes proactive and inclusive top down countywide brand messaging (i.e., trade shows, sales blitz, etc.) and reactive sales strategies (i.e., VCB Website leads) along with an education program (i.e., seminars, one-on-one education) to help key tourism stakeholders leverage and track sales leads to maximize economic growth. Use informational toolkit created as the sales tools. Revise the process for group sales leads to provide ease of use for all stakeholders positioning the VCB as the catalyst to drive group sales.

- Tourism B to B: i.e., CALSAE, Affordable Meetings West, MPI Southern CA (meeting planners), NTA (national), Pow Wow (international)
- Tourism B to C: i.e., Sunset Celebration Weekend, LA Times Travel Show, etc.
- Advisory Group – identify tourism stakeholders to serve on an advisory group to develop process and prioritize programs.
- FAM Tour – Create an annual FAM Tour targeting 8-10 travel professionals
 - Budget: \$65,000 (prioritize program and shows based on available budget)

5. Film Commission – Contract with person specialized in seeking out filming opportunities for SLO County. Leverage SLO Film Festival audience to position SLO County as a value, easy use filming location. Host a FAM style trip for film producers/location scouts to see all the location possibilities in the county. Create a location library and strategy for attracting film producers to the county. Identify a series of specific trade shows to attend. Create marketing tools (i.e., one-page outline of the permit process, video demonstrating locations, etc.) specific to target the film audience. Determine opportunities for SLO County through these efforts and evaluate priorities for future Film Commission tactics.

- Budget - \$35,000

Integration Strategy:

- An established working relationship with tourism stakeholders creates an interactive approach, which positions all countywide tourism assets under one brand to increase the reach, impact and results of the destination message.

Goal:

- Assess, build and expand measurable countywide themed programs to leverage the brand to encourage and grow participation.

Tactics:

1. Execute Themed Countywide Programs (Restaurant Month, Wine Month, Sunset Savor the Central Coast, etc.) highlighting experiences and unique SLO County products and personalities. Identify additional promotions supporting tourism stakeholders.
 - a. Restaurant Month – January - This is a proven and successful program developed and executed by the SLOVCB, that the CTTC took statewide this year. This is a cross promotional opportunity integrating chefs, winemakers and restaurants. Grow Restaurant publicity month integrating Savor chefs and Wine month participants. Work with tourism stakeholders to create destination packages that include Savor, Wine month and Restaurant month targeting Savor attendees to return in January for this shoulder season promotion. (i.e., Ad in the Savor program for Restaurant Month and when chefs agree to Savor they agree to restaurant month, etc.)
 - b. California Wine Month – September - Work with county wine associations and Savor winery participants to promote California Wine Month. Leverage Savor winery participation with extended publicity for partners the month leading into Savor.
 - c. Sunset Savor the Central Coast – September/October – The Savor campaign lasts year around based on integration of public relations, social media, website and all VCB programs. Integrate the Savor event dates into themed programs to encourage visitors to save the date and make plans to attend.

- d. Identify additional themed promotions that speak to slower/shoulder seasons. Work with tourism stakeholders to identify and reach diverse tourism partners (i.e., recreation – cycling, running, hiking, history, cultural, etc.). Tourism partners will buy into themed programs for countywide promotions.
 - Budget - \$30,000 (i.e., \$10,000 per themed promotion)
- 2. Events – Working collectively with the VCB and countywide tourism partners, the VCB can position SLO County as a key place to host events and develop strategy to attract key athletic events, food festivals, etc. This can be a two-pronged approach: events the VCB attracts to the region and events the VCB executes (i.e., Savor) to market the region.
 - i. Savor the Central Coast – Sunset chose SLO County and wants to come back!
 - ii. Amgen – SLO and Paso Robles has hosted in the past
 - iii. Inventory events happening during shoulder season and promote these collectively in a unified way to leverage all community assets.
- Budget - \$10,000

2. Strengthen communications with all tourism constituents and position the VCB as the impartial countywide tourism expert to establish, support and grow trustworthy relationships.

Communication Strategy:

- Build upon ongoing tourism constituent and government partner communications: written, verbal, electronic.

Goal:

- Establish interactive communications annually with tourism stakeholders. Improve weekly and monthly communications with informative and useful messages to stakeholders.

Tactics:

- Annual round table discussions and/or tourism workshop about countywide tourism marketing and integration with stakeholder constituent groups (i.e., TPRA, CBID, Pismo BID, SLOTBID, Morro Bay BID, County, Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Grover Beach).
 - o Identify measurements and agreement among all stakeholders for a unified funding agreement.
 - o Timing - January
- Tourism Month - May – Secure county and city proclamations, local publicity, etc. to support the tourism industry and communicate its value to the SLO County economy.

- Annual tourism partners/stakeholder meeting held during tourism month (May). Communicate tourism trends, marketing programs results, accomplishments, future initiatives; announce Board of Directors, guest speaker, etc.
- Develop streamlined and consistent reporting for all tourism constituents - monthly, quarterly, and annually.
- Rebrand weekly and monthly communication tools (i.e., This Week in SLO County) to create meaningful and timely messages.
- Invite elected officials to tourism meetings (i.e., monthly Board Meetings, annual member, etc.).
- Budget - \$25,000 (resources/staff time to execute constituent programs and meetings)

Relationship Strategy:

Position the VCB as the trustworthy resource to disseminate tourism information within San Luis Obispo County. Strengthen regional and statewide relationships that grow sales and marketing opportunities.

Goal:

- Create a reliable and fair process to administer and fulfill leisure and business tourism leads.

Tactics:

- VCB Concierge Service/Fulfillment- Establish a consistent procedure to fulfill leisure and business tourism leads using technology, communications, and marketing tools (i.e., 800 number requests, Visitor Guide requests, website leads, information kits, etc.)
- Coordinate Educational Workshops – i.e., trends, sales, VCB program orientation, technology (Jack Rabbit, Social Media, etc.), group sales leads.
- California Travel & Tourism Commission – utilize the services and programs offered by the state to involve, promote, and educate tourism constituents (PR efforts, Group Sales outreach, special promotions, industry reporting, etc.). Seek out new opportunities to leverage expanded press and marketing reach (i.e., New York press events, international markets traveling Hwy 101, etc.).
- Central Coast Tourism Council- leverage partnership to further promote SLO County to international markets (PR efforts, Group Sales).
- Maintain memberships and relationships with key travel and tourism associations (i.e., US Travel, NTA, CALSAE, MPI, WACVB, CALTIA, FLIC, etc.)
- Budget - \$35,000

3. Develop a sustainable funding model in accordance with countywide tourism stakeholders to support marketing initiatives.

Funding Strategy:

Create a fair, equitable and transparent funding model with buy-in from all county tourism stakeholders to fund the VCB programs.

Goal:

Secure and grow VCB funding for a three year marketing plan – Year 1 \$750K; Year 2 \$1M; Year 3 \$1.5M.

Tactics:

Sustainable Funding Model – Work with tourism stakeholders to create a funding model that secures and grows funding beyond one year.

- Secure and grow San Luis Obispo County funding commitment
- Determine funding mechanism (i.e., Second-tier BID Funding – consider an additional allocation for countywide promotions - i.e., \$.50 per room)
- Assess membership funding model and determine appropriate funding levels. Assess fee based programs (i.e., website listings) and create neutral listings.

Grant Funding – seek new dollars through local, state and federal sources to support tourism marketing initiatives. Hire a grant writer to seek opportunities and write proposals. Consider Cal Poly RPTA as a resource to identify targets for possible grants.

- Budget - \$20,000