

TOURISM WALLA WALLA

Goals and Objectives, plus Key Findings

February 18, 2010

By Lawson Knight

Blue Mountain Community Foundation

Draft Goals and Objectives, Key Findings and Session Notes

Goals and Objectives

A. Develop and deploy necessary enhancements in the “way finding system.”

1. Initiate community-wide discussion regarding necessary improvements
2. Lead design process
3. Develop pilot program, secure funding and test

B. Design and develop strategies to strengthen the shoulder and off season.

1. Promote local opportunities so visitors decide to “Stay Another Day”
2. Build on the largest reason for visitation: friends and family to develop opportunities

C. Continue to identify and foster year-round special event development and promotion.

1. Initiate new packaging efforts and distribute via the web and other media.
2. Evaluate existing inventory of festivals and events, as well as determine what new and/or expanded events represent the greatest potential for growth.
3. Pursue new marketing efforts on conference recreation, sporting, agriculture, economy, heritage, culture, food, wine, art, and music opportunities.
4. Promote local opportunities so visitors decide to “Stay Another Day”

D. Establish initiatives that enhance the Walla Walla experience while protecting that which makes the destination real and authentic.

1. Evaluate the feasibility of alternative visitor information distribution systems.
2. Pursue initiatives that assist in strengthening alliances between the arts, wine industry, lodging properties, Downtown Walla Walla Foundation (TWW), city, county, port, and other tourism stakeholders
3. Adopt an advocacy role and lead community focus on all destination management issues.
4. Help develop restaurant and music associations, and other stakeholder associations.
5. Develop and promote that which is “Real and Authentic”

E. Evolve marketing strategy tailored to key market segments.

1. Explore cooperative marketing opportunities and revenue generating possibilities.
2. Review brand image and possibly revise.
3. Target midweek stays and off-season stays.
4. Target extra day stay.
5. Expand programs for day visitors.

6. Explore direct sales opportunities.
7. Improve tracking and market research.

F. Engage the citizenry to gain broad community support and understanding of tourism as a key driver of the local economy.

1. Improve the communication to the community through articles, education, etc.
2. Create atmosphere that Tourism is for visitors and residents.
3. Guest articles in U.B.
4. Develop and monitor return on investments (ROI) calculations that substantiate TWW's productivity on behalf of the region.
5. Maintain and strengthen city relations.
 - Develop and present board testimonials about benefits of the visitor industry
 - Measure and monitor community support for tourism

G. Establish initiatives that strengthen Walla Walla as a culinary destination.

1. Examine best practices in cluster development to identify appropriate role for TWW
2. Engage stakeholders
3. Study program models for experiential tourism

H. Identify, develop, propose and secure new funding resources.

1. Establish a board task force to identify and evaluate funding sources.
2. Develop budget income goals.
3. Identify value-added rev. sources – i.e. branding initiative
4. Research and identify web-related revenue.
 - Web store
 - Click-throughs
5. Participation in Tourism Walla Walla
 - i. Membership
 - ii. Fee for service
 - iii. Fee added service
 - iv. Value added service
 - v. Dues playing

I. Identify and assist the development of new visitor opportunities.

1. Resource for Tourism opportunities
 - vi. Educational
 - vii. Forums/Workshops
 - viii. Provide data (Market trends)
 - ix. Convener and conductor

Key Findings

Opportunities

Signage

Every constituent addressed the importance of providing more and better signage to navigate from attraction to attraction throughout the destination. Moreover, the food panel, supported by the experience of board members, believes that tourists are interested in signage that indicates the agricultural activity that happens on a given piece of land (e.g. sweet onions, wheat, apples, and merlot grapes).

As an approach to addressing this opportunity, consider a pilot program, in which one area of the region has several designs installed with a method to seek the preference of the user, either directly from the tourist or indirectly from the leadership of the attractions to which the signage pointed the tourist. Then, take the signage program to scale with a clear understanding of what is the right design, what are costs, where they are to be installed and how to underwrite the program.

Social Media

TWW has a strong footing in social media. Consider the use of additional tools to build relationships with key influencers of visitors to the destination. Begin by identifying who are key influencers that might include travel and wine writers, restaurant owners, wine shop owners and others. Develop a private group using LinkedIn or Ning that is exclusive to this audience—it is not a public website. Provide access to story leads, and perhaps an occasional “sweepstakes” for travel to the destination. Manage the group actively, just as is occurring with Facebook or Twitter.

Packaging and Promotion

The wine industry believes strongly in selling Walla Walla—the place to is consumers when in the marketplace. The message is about the quality of the climate, the land (i.e. terroir) and other factors that make Walla Walla special. To sell its wine, the wine industry sells the destination. Look for ways to leverage this activity to convert wine sales into visitation. Explore channels that reinforce what wineries are trying to achieve that additionally create an inclination to visit the area.

Destination Services

Further develop TWW’s tool kit of services to enterprises that serve tourists. This activity already manifests itself in things like Superhost. Build on current activities and supply additional B2B products and services that strengthen each attractions capacity to better serve tourists. For example, design and distribute electronically a “This Month in Walla Walla” piece that can be printed at an attraction and given to guests to highlight additional activities and events. Highlight “Next Day” activities in an effort to grow stay over opportunities.

Challenges

Funding

Secure revenue sources are and will be essential to mission success for Tourism Walla Walla. With support primarily from room tax revenue collected and awarded by the City of Walla Walla management of this strategic relationship should always be top-of-mind for the Board as it already is for staff.

The Board should continue to understand the structure and function of a TPA and work towards developing a specific point-of-view on this topic that can be shared by most, if not all, board members.

The Board and staff should also pay attention to growth in tourism tax receipts outside of the municipal boundary of the City of Walla Walla. While collections in the near term are not large, there is growth potential for lodging tax outside the City of Walla Walla over time. As such, just as the Board and staff view the relationship with City of Walla Walla as mission critical, so too should Board and staff strive to develop closer working relationships with elected offices throughout the Walla Walla Valley.

Finally, TWW should continue to build on its revenue-generating activities such as royalties for bookings on the website, online and print advertising. Further, TWW should always be mindful of opportunities to replace its capital with the capital of other partners or constituents at the project or program level.

Purpose

The role and influence of Tourism Walla Walla has grown over time. As a result, Tourism Walla Walla finds itself moving beyond destination marketing into destination management. Manifestations of destination management activities include programs such as Superhost, event development, educational programs, current art and future culinary and signage initiatives. The board should develop a specific point of view on this matter in the context of available capital and capacity to assure that the core goals and mission of Tourism Walla Walla are being met.