



Tourism Strategy:
Supporting North Central's Tourism Industry

Prepared for North Central Enterprise Region

Tap Communications Inc.
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INTRODUCTION

Tap Communications Inc. was selected by the North Central Enterprise Region in October 2009 to develop a place brand strategy for the Region. The brand identity process included identifying the attitudes and perceptions of key Region stakeholders, as well as highlighting the opportunities and challenges of the Region. The process also included identification of the overall brand key messages for North Central. Tap completed this work and submitted its Branding Report on December 17, 2009.

In early 2010, Tap completed its development of a logo and slogan – as well as a Strategic Marketing Plan to launch the new visual identity.

From the outset, tourism was identified as one of the Region’s major industries. Tap was asked to recommend strategies specifically related to tourism and the North Central brand. By “brand”, we do not mean the logo and slogan. A place brand is the overall perception held by the individual of that place, based on what they have read, heard and experienced. Simply put, a “brand” is a reputation.

This challenge of tourism would be more straightforward if North Central were the sole organization responsible for promoting all tourism in the Region, but it certainly is not. In fact, there are numerous tourism attractions, organizations and destinations within the Region, each with its own distinct brand – and that is how it should be. We cannot ignore, for example, the fact that North Central’s boundaries overlap no less than three Saskatchewan tourism regions. The purpose of this tourism strategy, then, is to recommend the best ways to identify and leverage the role that North Central can play in the creation of a stronger, more sustainable and more competitive tourism industry within the Region.

Finally, it is important that the reader of this strategy also review *Defining Our Place: the Brand and Key Messages of the North Central Enterprise Region* and the visual identity standards presented in *Guidelines for the North Central Enterprise Region Identity*.



PRINCIPLES OF NORTH CENTRAL'S INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM

Our principles need to guide North Central's decision-making, so that we remain on target and leverage our strengths to the Region's full advantage. This Tourism Strategy ascribes to the following guiding principles:

- The North Central brand, including its visual identity, is intended to work with – and not replace – individual brands within the Region.
- All tourism messaging should reinforce one or all of the four key messages of the Region, particularly the key message of North Central as *Saskatchewan's premiere all-season resort destination*.
- For a tourism destination, the greater the diversity of quality experiences, the better. For example, people do not go to Las Vegas because all the hotels are the same, or all the attractions are the same. It is not just gambling; it is shopping, golf, poolside relaxing, nightlife, sports events and big-name entertainment. North Central wants to promote the strengthening of individual brand identities within its Region. Indeed, one of the competitive advantages of North Central is the variety of tourism experiences within its boundaries. Within one weekend, for example, a tourist can see one of Canada's most historic battlegrounds at Batoche, visit a farm, have a picnic in a parkland setting, gamble in a casino, then canoe and camp in the unspoiled boreal forest setting of Prince Albert National Park.
- North Central resources devoted to tourism should not duplicate, but rather serve to enhance, the output and success of North Central tourism stakeholders. Thus, we are not in the business of making the Region's tourism brochures, but in making the Region's tourism brochures better.
- North Central must demonstrate and encourage the true collaborative spirit, rather than the "turf-war" attitudes that have so often hampered place-brand building.



- North Central must always treat Tourism as an industry, not separate from industry. As such, Tourism is one of many industries within the Region that North Central has the mandate to support and develop. It is hoped that some of the strategies recommended for Tourism might be adapted for use with other industries.
- The key message being conveyed, in a multitude of ways – individually and collectively – should be:

Saskatchewan's Premiere All-Season Resort Destination

We have a distinct competitive advantage in offering first-class, all-season resort destinations. Some of the province's best-known tourism attractions – including Prince Albert National Park and Batoche – are located here. The Region benefits from being in the transition zone from prairie to parkland to boreal forest. The Region is easily accessible for visitors from within Saskatchewan and beyond. That, combined, with the diversity of attractions, makes North Central an ideal place for touring and vacationing.



GOALS

- Collect, assess and report on all tourism activities in the Region – create inventory and monitor. Set up scorecard – on, say, an annual or semiannual basis – to indicate how we’re doing.
- Present and celebrate success stories.
- Set up collaborative think-tanks, identifying ways for different tourism entities to team up, such as in the creation of tours.
- Support innovative thinking and “outside-the-box” initiatives to attract tourists.
- Encourage and help enable best practices in tourism marketing and place branding.
- “Connect the dots of tourism” in the North Central Enterprise Region.



MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives have been identified by Tap Communications and the North Central Enterprise Region, for the implementation of the newly defined visual identity by tourism-related industries.

For these objectives, we have differentiated what we term “Currently Active Participating Stakeholders” (CAPS, who are those who have, to one extent or another, participated in the branding initiative to date. By September 2011:

- 65% or more CAPS have used the logo and slogan in their own marketing materials
- 75% or more CAPS have incorporated the key messages into their own marketing materials
- 80% or more CAPS report that they were given clear direction on how to use the logo, slogan and key messages and that the brand would be easy to implement into their own marketing materials
- 80% or more CAPS who implemented the logo, slogan and key messages report that they feel it helped to support their business/organization and that it enhanced their marketing efforts
- 85% or more key CAPS report that they plan to use (or continue to use) the logo, slogan in the future, and to keep focused on the delivering the key messages
- 20% or more of Region stakeholders who did not participate in the branding process have demonstrated interested in using the logo, slogan and key messages in their materials since its launch.

Additional tourism-related objectives, some of which are necessary to measure the above, are:

- By June 2010, identify and involve a core group of Brand Ambassadors in the tourism industry, similar in structure to that identified in the Economic Developers Association of Canada white paper (see Appendix B). The Brand Ambassadors need to be opinion leaders



within the Region, and will play a vital role in the collaborative and branding goals and objectives contained in this Tourism Strategy.

- By September 2010, establish a Tourism Entrepreneur Program, which encourages establishment of new tourism-related ventures in the Region. The TEP program would be a way of (a) encourage tourism entrepreneurs to identify themselves to the Region, to help gauge potential; (b) identify and help address the needs of Tourism Entrepreneurs; and (c) strengthen the brand by encouraging these entrepreneurs to adopt the brand messaging.
- Survey all Tourism stakeholders in October 2010, asking them specific questions related to this North Central Tourism Strategy. (It may be that North Central may choose to survey all stakeholders at this time as well.) Repeat this survey in October 2011.
- In January 2011, send out to all Tourism stakeholders a reminder of the North Central brand and visual identity recommendations – referring them to the web site for more information.
- Ask all Tourism stakeholders to send examples of their tourism marketing to North Central, in order to determine how well the Region is doing at staying “on brand”, and for examples of excellence to illustrate to others how to successfully incorporate the North Central brand while promoting their own unique brand.
- Publish each January, via the web site, an annual “North Central Brand Report” which contains a section specifically on tourism marketing. This report could celebrate excellence and success stories, and serve to reinforce the importance of and commitment to building the brand over the long term. Survey results would also be presented in this report.
- Hold a symposium on collaboration and the role of North Central in tourism development. This Symposium could be held in March of each year, along the lines of the Tourism Unleashed event in March 2010. This would be an excellent venue to identify opportunities for supporting tourism in the Region, working closely with the tourism organizations in the Region, and with Tourism Saskatchewan.

It is also important to identify reliable measurements from other sources to gauge tourism activity and value. These measurements/surveys/reports can be incorporated into the overall monitoring of tourism success and brand-building for the Region.



TARGET AUDIENCES

The principal target audience for the North Central tourism strategy consists of all who are involved in the tourism industry within the Region. This would include:

- Tourism organizations
- Tourism businesses
- Potential tourism entities

Secondary target audiences would be:

- Other Region stakeholders in other industries
- The general public within the Region
- Relevant tourism organizations based outside the Region



KEY MESSAGES

Within the Branding Report prepared in December 2009, the following key messages were established.

While the key message of most significance to the tourism industry is that of the Region as Saskatchewan's Premiere All-Season Resort Destination, stakeholders should be well-versed in all four key messages.

- **Hub of the North**

We are clearly perceived as the main service area for northern Saskatchewan – the “north - south meeting place”. The phrase “gateway to the north” has been used for many years to describe the City of Prince Albert. There is significant potential, especially in the resource industries such as mining and forestry, for future development. The area is also the centre for many different government organizations, notably in health and education.

- **Saskatchewan's Premiere All-Season Resort Destination**

We have a distinct competitive advantage in offering first-class, all-season resort destinations. Some of the province's best-known tourism attractions – including Prince Albert National Park and Batoche – are located here. The Region benefits from being in the transition zone from prairie to parkland to boreal forest. The Region is easily accessible for visitors from within Saskatchewan and beyond. That, combined, with the diversity of attractions, makes North Central an ideal place for touring and vacationing.

- **A Canadian Focal Point for Aboriginal Culture, Advancement and Partnership**

The Region is home to Canada's largest First Nation Tribal Council – Prince Albert Grand Council – as well as Muskoday First Nation and James Smith First Nation. Within the next ten years, Prince Albert is predicted to have the highest percentage Aboriginal population – 50% - of any urban centre in Canada. There are significant initiatives, planned or existing, being developed by and with First Nation and Métis peoples.

- **Affordable Choices for a Desired Lifestyle**

The growing number of retiring baby boomers who still want to remain active will find this Region attractive, and we are already witnessing those who have moved to the Region after



living and working in larger urban centres. Another significant group is the “Next Generation”, also known as “Gen Y”, who share many of the same desires to be in a more natural environment, but still be technologically, and globally, connected to and in proximity to “big city” amenities. A major advantage compared to other places is North Central’s affordability.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are prioritized:

Brand Guideline to Stakeholders

Within the Strategic Marketing Plan, it was recommended that a guide be developed and given to stakeholders with instructions on how to use the visual identity and begin to implement the brand. It contains recommended photo subjects, templates for advertisements and poster, and recommendations for using the key messages. This guide should be made available to all tourism-related businesses and organizations.

Note: This guide has been developed as part of the initial contract with North Central and can be distributed beginning immediately.

Website

Beginning immediately, North Central's website should be updated with a special section specifically related to tourism industries, opportunities and events. Tourism businesses and organizations within the Region should be asked to supply content, and the website should also link to their individual sites. All upcoming tourism-related events like festivals, concerts, sporting events, etc. should be featured with the objective of promoting the Region more as a destination for visiting and vacationing, throughout the year.

Include a section where visitors can post messages about their experiences visiting the Region, or post questions about what they should do on an upcoming trip. Residents of the Region may then feel compelled to suggest ideas and activities, and offer recommendations for local dining, hotels, shopping, etc.



Tourism-related Photo Library

One of the key weaknesses that was noted when Tap conducted its research at the outset of this brand development project was a lack of quality images on stakeholder's websites. Most of the photos were of lakes, trees and sunsets with almost no one ever enjoying the activities of these natural settings.

Beginning as soon as possible, North Central should invest in the services of a professional photographer to gather appropriate images of the Region's tourism-related activities and events. This photographer should attend events within the Region, including the Prince Albert Winter Festival, golf tournaments, parades, the Exhibition, etc., and begin to create a library of photos that the Region's stakeholders can access.

In addition to events, the photographer – who must be accredited and have access to the proper lighting and photography equipment – should also take photos with the following direction:

- Photos need to be welcoming, inviting, intriguing – “drawing you in”.
- Concentrate on activity, movement – positive engagement.
- Our target audience needs to be able to see themselves “in the picture”.
- Avoid the cliché “northern” shot
- Remember, also, that this Region has ALL TOPOGRAPHY – rolling parkland, farmland, and northern forest. It is in what is called the transition zone, from prairie to boreal forest.
- The area is also rich in history – Batoche is in the region. The whole “western” appeal is important as well.
- Show all seasons – not just summer.

Another weakness noted in the analysis of photos on stakeholder websites, is the lack of Aboriginal people. In any occasion that a First Nations person is featured, it is always in a ceremonial event or in costume. Aboriginal people should be portrayed in other settings, showing them as an integrated part of society.



Trade Shows

To promote the many tourism-related industries within the Region, North Central should appeal to a group of stakeholders and ask them to participate in trade shows. All under the North Central 'umbrella', each stakeholder would have a booth that promotes their organization/business. All the booths would be staged in the same area of the trade show, so visitors can learn about all of the tourism possibilities in one stop. This approach also helps to strengthen the reputation and brand of North Central, as visitors will appreciate the wide range of industries and should gain a better respect for all of the possibilities within the Region.

Tourism Stay 'n Play Packages

As an ongoing initiative to leverage the many unique experiences that are available within the Region, North Central should encourage tourism businesses to partner to form fun packages for visitors. For example, a winter adventure themed package may include a stay at the Hawood in Prince Albert National Park, a tour with Sundogs Sled Excursions and a day of ice fishing.

These packages should be promoted on North Central's website and stakeholder websites.



CONCLUSION

It is important to reinforce that the role of North Central is not to promote tourism industries itself, but to act as support for these industries. By ensuring that industries within the region are properly using the four key messages, and ensuring that buy-in has been achieved by region stakeholders, North Central will begin to see success in attracting visitors and new residents to the Region.



APPENDIX A: What Our Stakeholders Said

Stakeholder feedback in late 2009 included the following comments regarding tourism:

- People come here because it truly is a wonderful wilderness experience.
- I've lived here all my life, and even I am surprised about the amount of things to do in the community.
- Visitors from France noticed the birds. We have the highest bird population north of Mexico.
- Our biggest attraction is the lakes.
- There's potential to attract people interested in Aboriginal culture, such as medicine walks, spiritual healing, sweat lodges, traditional historic sites for camping and cultural experiences, celebrations, etc. There's more interest in this, especially by people from the south.
- The history you can experience here is tremendous. The last Red River cart was here. We had 49 trading posts. This was where Riel made his last stand.
- There are a lot of opportunities to design unique tours.
- There's a tranquil vibrancy you can experience here.
- We're incredibly diverse.
- I'm most proud of our diversity of geography.
- We have to let people know that our version of Saskatchewan is not flat. Sell the diversity.
- Our Region is history, culture and nature. We can't think of that as stagnant, but as a resource.
- We've got to work on creating experiences. For example, more "eating experiences" rather than just a place to fill up because you're hungry. ("There are a lot of places to eat here, but very few places to dine.")



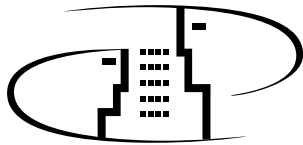
- Our Region is woodland/parkland – green and lush compared to the relatively desolate south.
- Our Region lets you taste wilderness but feel safe.
- We have activity, adventure in any season.
- Were the real thing – real beauty, real nature.
- Here, “north” doesn’t mean “remote”.
- There’s a sense of magic in the boreal forest – the spirit in the trees.
- Expect to be surprised.
- There are 32 golf courses within one hour of Prince Albert.
- People who visit here say it’s more than they were expecting, in a positive sense.
- The draw for tourists is the wilderness experience, whether its rustic or luxurious.
- We get lots of foreign visitors who love seeing our culture and scenery. Every year the Muskoday Pow-Wow has lots of foreigners. This past year we even had Russian visitors.



APPENDIX B: Brand Ambassadors – White Paper

Ambassadors: Your Secret Marketing Weapon

Current issues for
economic development professionals



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White Paper Series

June 2009

Introduction

The idea behind any ambassador program is simple: In a world of too much information, a message delivered by a trusted source is the most effective. Think about it. If you were considering relocating or expanding, would you be more interested in:

- a) A generic information package?
- b) A pitch from city officials with an obvious stake in your decision?, or
- c) A qualified recommendation from someone who knows your business because it is their business too?

The answer of course is c). The best way to lend immediate credibility to an investment location and make it stand out from the crowd is with a recommendation or success story from a peer. A U.S. consultancy, Development Counsellors Inc., has surveyed top executives responsible for site selection five times since 1996. They asked the question “What sources of information influence your perception of a city’s business climate?” The most recent survey saw “dialogue with industry peers” as the top response, at 61%.¹

That helps to explain why so many communities are turning to ambassador programs as critical elements of their marketing and communications strategies. This white paper will discuss how these programs work and how you can create an effective ambassador initiative in your own municipality or region.

How do ambassador programs work?

These programs recruit leaders from business, government and community, as well as past citizens now living elsewhere,

to formally promote the community via a consistent set of tools and events. These are people who are prominent among their peers, actively involved in their networks and are already influencing your community’s image and potential for investment, albeit informally. Why not work with them to ensure they are sharing a consistent message?

According to Placebrands, an international consultancy that ranks how cities are doing at projecting a unified vision and image:

“A place brand strategy requires a realistic, competitive and very compelling strategic vision for a city, region, or country, and needs to ensure that it is supported, reinforced and enriched by every act of communication between that place and the rest of the world. Every government and municipal department or local agency, local people and local companies must consistently communicate and demonstrate the same carefully developed brand.”²

This unified voice is the goal of ambassador programs. They marry pride in a community with tangible investment results. The mandate for each ambassador is to promote the community as a place in which to invest and live, share success stories and personal experience, and to promote specific programs and incentives that are attractive to their industry networks.

Because of all the choices and marketing messages out there, an economic development brochure or a DVD has maximum impact when it is being handed over by a trusted source. Ambassadors bring a new level of credibility to your economic development efforts. They harness word-of-mouth potential to more effectively bring your brand to other businesses and skilled workers.

Ambassador Recruitment

When recruiting your ambassadors, it is critical to ensure that the number of people is large enough to have significant reach from a networking standpoint, but small enough to lend exclusivity and credibility to the program participants. Ambassadors should be identified and invited to become part of the program, perhaps using through a peer nomination process. It is important that members feel chosen as representatives and leaders in order to garner their commitment and passion.

Specifically, you should target the following types of ambassadors:

- Leaders from business and the community with strong affiliations with provincial, national or international industry associations and organizations. You want to leverage their contacts, membership privileges and attendance at trade shows and events to increase the reach of the program.
- High-profile community members, past and present, with recognition and credibility beyond the community.
- Former residents who can leverage networks in their new place of residence to promote the benefits of your community.
- Leaders in sectors that are a strategic focus for your community.
- Most importantly, each member must have a passion for your community. They must demonstrate a commitment to the community through their involvement and support for initiatives.

Implementing your Program

A good ambassador program involves six key ingredients:

1. The strategic recruitment of high-profile leaders and influencers as discussed above.
2. The development of tools that will enable these leaders to present a compelling and consistent case for investment in your city.

These may include:

- Orientation and training materials. Clarify for your ambassadors what it means to be an ambassador, what is expected of their role, and what tools are available to help them.
- Online resources that can be accessed remotely when your ambassadors are traveling to tradeshow and conferences.
- Ambassador kits that include key facts and figures about the community. It is critical that your ambassadors are educated and can speak about specific programs and incentives that may be of interest to their peers.
- Apparel, a lapel pin or some other means to identify them as ambassadors. These also serve as conversation starters with their peers.

3. The identification of opportunities for ambassadors to use these tools in a networking and educational capacity. The ambassadors themselves should identify these opportunities and commit to their role in these situations. These can include trade shows, conferences, online peer networking forums, social networking tools and industry publications.

4. Involving the ambassadors throughout the prospecting process. Providing economic developers with leads is fantastic. Assisting with meetings, introductions and tours is even better. Prospective investors will feel comfortable with a “friendly face” participating in the process, and will be able to ask direct and industry-specific questions of your ambassadors on the spot.

5. Ongoing communication with your ambassadors can help to keep the program top-of-mind for them. Be sure to inform ambassadors about new programs, developments and incentives that may be of interest to their peers. You can do this effectively through periodic email communications. You may also wish to share ambassador success stories with other ambassadors as inspiration and motivation.

6. Finally, recognizing your ambassadors is critical. Their participation in the program should be publicly acknowledged and celebrated, through the media, recognition events and special opportunities to network and be involved in the community. Help ambassadors to see the impact they are making.

The time it takes to develop and nurture ambassador relationships is significant, but the payoff is immense. They truly are your secret marketing weapon, and one that you should seriously consider adding to your arsenal.

About the Author

On Three Communication Design Inc. is a creative agency specializing in promoting places not products. For more information and insight, visit them at www.onthree.ca or read the blog at <http://blog.onthree.ca>.

In Closing

Ambassador programs can provide economic developers with reach into networks that may not otherwise be possible. Further, this reach will involve conversations between trusted peers, rather than a “pitch” from a city official. Ambassadors can share success stories and improve your community’s perception in national and international markets through simple networking activities.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://blog.onthree.ca/2008/08/04/insights-for-economic-development-marketing/>
- 2 http://www.placebrands.net/_files/placebrands_Agenda_Feb2004_FindA_Vision.pdf
“Find a Vision and Dump the Spinning”(emphasis added by M. Thususka)

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