



Greene County Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

**Date: Tuesday February 24, 2015 - 9:30 a.m.
Christman's Windham House**

Attendance:

Committee Members Attending –Carol Schreiber, Baumann's Brookside; Betsy Jacks, Thomas Cole House; Brian Christman, Christman's Windham House; Lenore Whitcomb, Winter Clove Inn; Chuck Tomajko, Fairlawn Inn.

Legislators in Attendance – Kevin Lewis, Chairman; Patty Handle; Eugene Hatton

Others in Attendance – Kelly Frady, Rebecca Steffan, Shelly Cihan of Adworkshop; Ruth Christman

Staff –Warren Hart, Heather Bagshaw, Nancy Petramale, Teri Weiss, Karl Heck

Brian Christman welcomed everyone to the Windham House. He gave a brief overview of the history of the Inn, and explained the renovations that will be taking place this year to the Inn and changes to the golf course.

Chuck started the meeting by mentioning that this has been one of his best years, and he is hoping to break all records. He attributed a lot of it to the ongoing marketing work that the Tourism Office has been doing over the past several years. He also has become very proactive with his own creative marketing efforts, especially in regards to promotional packages and a much more social media presence. Chuck also feels that Trip Advisor has been beneficial to his increase in visitors.

Warren mentioned that ILNY now has a new mobile application. Nancy oversees the site and continually populates it with all of Greene County's information. Additionally, Catskill Association for Tourism (CAT) is now contracted with Adworkshop, and one of the items they are currently working on is creating a CATS Regional Landing Page that will be placed on Trip Advisor.

Gene Hatton complimented Chuck on behalf of his efforts. "It's been almost the perfect winter, plenty of snow, and gas prices have been down, this and strong marketing efforts help contribute to a successful season". Chuck has always felt that it's always good to share "street" information such as stats with fellow tourism partners.

Warren mentioned that state data and statistics are not sent to the County in a timely manner. Our office is continually following and updating County statistical numbers, such as: job growth rate, unemployment rate, visitor spending, click through rates on the website, and sales tax revenue. Recently we were able to report that the job growth rate and sales tax revenue has been up. Kevin also mentioned that unfortunately we're unable to track sales tax revenue that closely, which is very frustrating to the County.

Another discussion that ensued among everyone was the topic of buses from the City to the Mountains, making it easily accessible to ski. Brian mentioned that the Town of Windham, through the Windham Council will now have a shuttle that takes people from the Mountain into the Town and throughout. Gene mentioned the significance of shuttles to towns, like the Spirit of the Hudson that shuttles passengers from Hudson to Athens during the summer months.

Betsy talked about the new studio that's currently being built, in spite of the weather, and is still on track to open this summer. In collaboration with the opening, there will be a ribbon cutting and an exhibition opening party taking place at the Historic Catskill Point. In addition, she also spoke about the shuttle that will coincide with the River Crossing Exhibition, it will originate at the Amtrak Station in Hudson, go to Olana, over to the Thomas Cole House, and down to Main Street in the Village of Catskill.

Nancy recently attended the Philadelphia Inquirer Travel Show at which a woman who has a radio show focusing on the craft beer industry, spoke with her regarding local breweries and then featured Crossroads Brewery in Athens and Cave Mountain in Windham during her show.

Kelly and Shelly then presented the 2014 Marketing Strategy PowerPoint presentation. Kelly began with the overview of the objectives, audiences, campaigns and target markets. She then presented the projects completed in 2014; which included the media plans, broadcast, videos, creative and TAC priorities. Next, she provided a brief summary of the 2014 results specifically pointing out that the new site launched on April 17, 2014 where it takes time for search engines and referrers to "catch up" with these changes.

Next, Kelly reviewed the website statistics where it showed that over 50% of the visitors came from organic search, followed by display advertising, referrals, direct, and paid search, respectively. She went on to show that people are interested in content on events, family resorts, and lodging.

Kelly emphasizes the importance of creating specific packages relating to your business and to make sure you have a clean, friendly URL. She also added that when people are searching, they are going directly to the page, and not necessarily to the home page, but are staying longer on those direct pages. We are also seeing a very good CTR, above the average on every campaign.

Shelly also added that the internal pages bring more people into the site, and result in more shared pages. Facebook also continues to dominate the social media channels. We are also seeing an increase in visits surrounding different holidays.

Kelly went on to show the increase in goal completion, specific to the viewing on the Travel Guide and newsletter signups. Plus, the book now feature added last year is helping to drive traffic to lodging facilities for booking options.

Kelly spoke about the campaign performances, which represented almost 17% of site visits, that had a higher than normal click through rate on banner ads and pre-roll videos. She presented each campaign, which had supporting visuals, results, and ad performances by target.

Shelly then went on to show the results of digital marketing, specific to organic traffic search results, pay-per-click campaigns and Facebook ads. Overall, the click-through-rates (CLR) for Adwords were above Google standards.

Kelly stated that Adworkshop is now purchasing most of the media through a "Trade Desk", which enables them to purchase at a discounted rate. Adworkshop will now create banner and display ads on a template that can be used for all display advertising by just switching out the photos and messaging. This too, will be a cost saving factor.

Heather stated that we are targeting specific audiences for each of our campaigns. We have found that the best performing banner ads are those that have a specific call to action, such as an event, activity or place. For example, Heather mentioned that ads using Taste of Country perform better than a general events ad.

Rebecca then presented the GNC Cumulative PR Report, she spoke about several items;

- PR Efforts and Pitch Summary,
- The Beat – I Love NY

- Media Visits
- 2014 & 2015 Travel Trends
- Top Monthly Placement Overview
- Top Media Placement Keywords
- Going Forward into 2015

Another item discussed was the film landing page, which is now live, already registering downloads, and the feedback has been very positive.

Chuck asked if there was an event centered on food and locally sourced products as this is a growing focus in the Catskills. Warren referenced Taste of the Catskills, which is an annual family friendly event held in Delhi, that showcases food, beer, crafts, and wine of the region. Heather mentioned the Kaaterskill Clove Experience and provided examples on options of art and culture related content for packaging ideas. Chuck suggested the Kaaterskill Clove Experience be included as a presentation topic in the spring Tourism Seminar.

Heather reminded everyone of the date for the Tourism Seminar, which is scheduled for May 5, 2015 at Villa Vosilla. The topics will be Digital Marketing 101 & 102 and the importance of leveraging the Tourism Department and the advertising campaigns. It will open with the 2015 plan, including the Kaaterskill Clove Experience.

Warren introduced the topic and asked the question of how Greene County should get prepared for the opening of the casino in Sullivan County. There will be more discussion on this topic as the CATS regional tourism agency gets information and becomes more engaged. However, initial thoughts shared by the TAC and the Tourism Staff were for Greene County to stay the course on our family friendly and adventure advertising and marketing program.

The next meeting will be held on March 17, 2015 at Windham Mountain.