

Making the Case for Tourism – A Toolkit

Part 4 Communications Manual

Section 1

Introduction

Communicating the ‘business case for tourism’ in your community successfully involves an organized effort, and the development of a communications plan to direct the communications effort. The communications plan would involve these elements:

1. Identification of the *target audiences*.
2. Definition of *objectives* that are clear as to what you are trying to accomplish.
3. The *messages* you want to convey (primarily that tourism is a key economic driver in your community).
4. The *benefits of investing in tourism* (more revenue, more jobs, better health and vitality in the community).
5. The *approach you plan to take* (being proactive about opportunities, enlisting the support of champions and partners, selling the agenda within the community before soliciting others, etc.).
6. The *communications plan*, including a *media plan* (get your stakeholders, partners and municipal council on side before going to the media).

The main audiences will normally include:

- Municipal council.
- The owners and managers of businesses in your community, including tourism businesses.
- The residents of the community.

This manual presents a number of suggestions of tactics in accomplishing the task. It also presents some samples of what others have done.

Section 2 deals with the communication tools you should have available to support the effort.

Section 3 deals with informing municipal council on the benefits of tourism to the community and building support from them for the tourism sector and its efforts.

Section 4 focuses on the media – getting their support in carrying your messages forward to the local business community and the public at large (following approval by municipal council).

Section 5 addresses the topic of direct communications with the business community and the general public.

Section 2

Communications Tools

The toolkit for communications needs to be developed and kept up to date. This should be the task of the organization that leads the tourism effort in the community, be it the local destination marketing organization (DMO), Chamber of Commerce or Municipal Economic Development Department. Following that discussion we turn to different communications activities you might want to consider. The tools would be used in conjunction with them.

IMPACS (Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society)

<http://www.impacs.org/communications/PubResources/>

http://www.impacs.org/files/CommCentre/dev_effective_media_comm_skills.pdf

http://www.impacs.org/files/CommCentre/communications_planning.pdf

http://www.impacs.org/files/CommCentre/communications_toolkit.pdf

Annual Report On Tourism

A report of this nature can be very effective in attracting attention to the tourism agenda and giving it credibility. Its benefits include:

- Keeping the target audiences informed about the industry, its importance, its achievements.
- Providing an excuse to demand their attention on a regular basis.
- Keeping the tourism agenda top of mind.
- Building support for proposed initiatives and their funding.
- Building partnerships with others.
- Building public and business community support for the industry and its efforts, which, in turn, helps build support from politicians and community leaders.

The following topics would be appropriate for such a report:

- Introduction – purpose of the document.
- A brief overview of your community's place in the tourism marketplace – its unique selling propositions (USPs), data on tourist visitation and visitor spending, recent trends.
- Recent tourism developments and other projects in the planning stage.
- Accomplishments of your DMO/tourism organization, accomplishments of others in the industry.
- Opportunities for the future.
- Challenges the industry/DMO/tourism organization face in pursuing the opportunities.

- One or more appendices with background information, more detailed data, etc.

See the Making the Case for Tourism – A Toolkit, Part 2 for instructions on where to find the data and other information to be used in such a report.

The report should be an upbeat, high-powered presentation of the impressive features of your tourism industry, its role in the local economy, its accomplishments and its opportunities for

the future; designed to impress. A background document to accompany the report would present information on tourism in the world, in Canada, in Ontario and in the region and the community, along with more information on your tourism organization itself and its partners. The idea should be to have a relatively short, easy to read piece for politicians, the business community and the general public, along with a background and context information piece for travel writers and the media to use in preparing articles.

An example of such a report is Tourism Toronto’s ‘2002 Key Facts’ (the version in use at the time of the preparation of this document) under the media section of Tourism Toronto’s website, which presents current data on the city’s tourism activity. The website is <http://www.torontotourism.com/Media/Research/VisitorStatistics.htm>.

Presentations

The PowerPoint presentations presented with this Toolkit are examples of the kind of presentation you will want to make to different audiences. The topics would be somewhat similar to those for an annual report.

See the Making the Case for Tourism – A Toolkit, Part 2 for guidance on preparing a presentation.

Fact Sheet

A one or two page summary of highlights of your community’s tourism can provide a ready reference piece for members of the tourism industry, speakers and **others** to have at hand to assist in their own communications about tourism.

The Making the Case for Tourism – A Toolkit, Part 3 includes a template for such a two-page ‘fact sheet’.

The Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) distributes a wallet-sized card with about a dozen key bullet points about Canada’s tourism industry.

Speakers’ Bureau

Getting tourism industry leaders in your community to be a part of a speakers' bureau is a good idea. The DMO/tourism organization can then be proactive about seeking out opportunities to speak about tourism and call on the members of the bureau to do this. The members of the bureau need, of course, to be properly briefed and coached, as well as provided with the information tools they will need in preparing and delivering their speech, or provided with speaking notes.

These people can also be called upon to speak to the media when occasions arise.

Champions

Like the speakers' bureau, it is important to get a few of the members of the industry to 'champion' the cause when called upon. These need to be people who have a profile in the community, are successful and are comfortable with being assertive. They would lend their name and presence to the tourism cause generally, perhaps lead one or more initiatives and also speak out on behalf of the tourism industry when called upon.

Media Tools

Newsworthy events, development projects, tourism results and the like present opportunities for publicity. Where the media is being targeted to communicate this information, there needs to be an appropriate approach to accomplishing this, which is discussed later in this document. The tools involved include press releases, feature stories, public service announcements (PSAs) and being interviewed.

Press Releases

There is a science in designing press releases and in getting them used by the media. A good press release has the following features, in this order:

1. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE should be printed at the top left margin, just under your letterhead.
2. Two lines below, put in a headline in boldface type.
3. Put in a 'dateline' – the city your press releases is issued from and the date you are distributing it.
4. The first introductory paragraph of text should capture the essence of the announcement. It should be an attention-grabber and contain the key relevant information, such as the five 'W's' (Who, What, When, Where and Why).
5. The main body of text to follow provides more particulars and a fuller description.
6. Contact information is provided, including the name, title, email, phone and fax numbers of your spokesperson, plus their home phone number. (The home number is important because reporters work to deadlines and may not be able to call during business hours). This information can be provided at the end of the release, or at the top, following the headline).

7. The website address of your organization and links to more detailed information available.
8. The press release should be 1 or 2 pages maximum, typewritten, double-spaced, and printed only on one side of the page.

Getting a particular media outlet to use the information can be a challenge. Your approach to them has to be done properly. They need to be convinced that the information is 'newsworthy'. The reporter/editor, and the audience of the medium need to connect to the message. It has to be interesting and meaningful to them.

The following issues need to be addressed in your communications with the targeted media:

- Who you are and where you're from.
- What's new about what you're trying to communicate.
- Why it's different.
- Why their audience will/should care.
- How it ties in with other newsworthy events.
- How it relates to other stories of interest.

The following additional points are instructive in getting media people to be responsive:

- The information shouldn't be promotional or self-serving. It needs to be timely and relevant to the audience.
- Obtain quotes if you can. It adds credibility.
- Send it to the right reporter or editor. To this end, look at the publication and track down the names of the writers that deal with your kind of information. Or look at the masthead for the editor's name for the relevant section of the publication and contact that person. Mail, fax or email all work.
- Keep the release brief, and avoid long sentences. Concise is good; rambling is bad.
- Have more details at hand in the event you get a call, organized by each of the key points in the release.
- Call to follow up to make sure the release has been received and noticed. Offer more particulars. Be ready to explain why it's important for that media outlet to carry this message. (Don't call late afternoon after 3 PM as this is close to deadline time.)

Here are a few websites that present 'how to's' of writing and distributing press releases:

- www.press-release-writing.com
- www.infoscavenger.com/prtips.htm
- www.pressflash.com/anatomy.html
- <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~hallahan/hpubty.htm>

Check out a paper from the Association of Research Libraries, entitled 'Media Map: Charting a Media Relations Strategy'. It offers helpful information on press releases and other techniques of dealing with media. Their website is www.arl.org.

You should review the tips on giving media interviews presented in Section 4. The publication in the paper noted above is very helpful in this regard as well.

Feature Stories

Some media will be interested in a feature story about tourism, or about your organization, or about some of the leaders in your industry. A business magazine is one example. Your hometown paper is another. Drafting an article that is likely to be of interest to a particular medium and offering it to them can often be effective. It makes it easy for them to pick it up, as is or in edited form, saving them the research effort.

If you are doing an annual report or major presentation, consider inviting the media to a release event, and offer it to the type of media that runs stories of this type.

Public Service Announcements

PSAs are free announcements made by media, usually radio, about a forthcoming event of interest to its audience. Some of the initiatives we discuss later in this document will lend themselves to this. And the price is right!

Photos and Audio-Visual Materials

Having photos and AV materials at hand is usually useful.

Photos/Captions

It is a good idea to provide colour photos to the media along with any press releases or feature story, preferably featuring a person involved in the story. These photos should be of professional quality. Captions describing who/what is in the picture are important and need to be provided. Make sure you get the approval of the person in the photo. Digital versions are increasingly preferred. Making digital images on your website is advisable.

Here are some ideas about AV materials:

- Radio and TV can make use of a taped speech. TV will usually require a photo of the speaker as well.
- A video clip is even better for TV, but make sure the format is usable by the TV station.

- Video clips can also be used in your presentations to council and other groups.

Section 3

Engaging Municipal Council

A common challenge is to convince the local municipal politicians that tourism is important and worthy of their attention and support. It is important that they ‘get it’ when it comes to understanding and appreciating the vital roles that tourism plays in their community, and the factors that can assist or damage tourism. There are a number of techniques discussed below that can help in this regard.

Presentation To Municipal Council

Making a scheduled presentation to council is a key step, and a vital step for tourism organizations that depend on municipal funding. The presentation approach outlined in this ‘tourism business case toolkit’ is designed with that in mind.

Prior to the presentation it will be important to meet with senior municipal staff to brief them, get their advice on best approaches and to ensure that all the right details are looked after. In particular, copies of the presentation and background information should be provided for both the officials and the councillors.

The presentation itself should be made by a prominent member of your organization. It will be important as well to have a solid delegation of members attend to present a ‘show of force’. This will signal the significance of the event in the minds of the industry and ensure it gets and captures the attention of the councillors. Have all of these people prepared and capable of answering questions from councillors should the main presenter refer to them.

Tourism Champion(s) On Council

It is a useful asset to have one or more members of council who are prepared to champion the tourism agenda. This can be assisted if some leading members of your organization are prepared to periodically meet with councillors who might signal their interest and willingness to become better informed about tourism and its benefits to the community.

Ideally, you would meet with these councillors prior to the full council presentation, brief them on the highlights and answer any of their questions.

Consider writing to council members in advance of the presentation drawing their attention to tourism-related issues.

Tourism Day At Council

Bundling the presentation to council with a more informal and light-hearted ‘Tourism Day at Council’ can be effective. This would involve, with council’s prior agreement, an orchestrated program of activities that are both informative and entertaining. Afterall, this is the creative, innovative hospitality industry. Here are a few ideas that might be bundled with the presentation to council:

- A video tour presentation of tourism features, events.
- Mini skits presented by entertainment venues.
- A presentation or ‘taste of’ of ‘local culinary delights’.
- A video of VIP and celebrity comments about tourism.

Use your imagination. But remember that the tourism industry is all about things that are fun to do. Make the event fun for council too. Make it a nice break from the regular and more tedious things they have to deal with. Make them fans of what the tourism industry is all about!

Section 4

Media Relations

Part of the challenge of communicating the ‘business case for tourism’ is to engage the media in the effort. The more the business community and local residents know about and support the tourism industry’s agenda, the more likely that support from local and other politicians will be forthcoming. The media are central to accomplishing this. Being a ‘player’ in the eyes of the media is vital to achieving a supportive public perception of your industry and organization, and its relevance to the issues in your community. The media is very influential in shaping public opinion. This can work for you, and it can work against you. It is important that the media come to know who you are, what you are, why you are and how you make a difference in your community.

This section addresses the following topics in nurturing and working with the communications media:

- The media plan.
- Media relationships.
- Press releases/news conferences.
- Go on TV, radio, give interviews.
- Media events.
- Media familiarization visits.
- Visiting VIP interviews.
- Media quiz.

Refer the Association of Research Libraries paper, entitled ‘Media Map: Charting a Media Relations Strategy’. It offers helpful information on press releases and other techniques for working with media. Their website is www.arl.org.

The Media Plan

As with anything else requiring specialized skills and effort, dealing with the media needs preparation and careful planning. Similarly, it requires some research into the different media that you might wish to target. Understanding how media people work and think is important.

The main audiences you will normally target via the media include:

- The owners and managers of businesses in your community.
- The residents of the community.

It is important that you select the media that are appropriate in that they target these particular audiences, without a lot of ‘spillage’ (other audiences they reach that will have little or no interest, such as those at a greater distance). That is likely to include, in approximate order of ‘fit’, the following:

- The local general media - community newspaper, radio station and TV station.
- Local and regional business publications.
- Regional general media.

It is also important to understand what is newsworthy. Unfortunately much of what the general media focuses on, because their audience will read it, are disasters, crime, court rulings, conflict, controversy, celebrity antics and politician statements. None of these are particularly relevant to supporting the tourism business case, except perhaps the last of these. The kinds of newsworthy things that tourism-related messages can focus on might include:

- Announcement of new recreational, sports or entertainment amenities.
- News of forthcoming special events and festivals.
- Major achievements of individuals or companies, and awards.
- VIP and celebrity visits and statements.
- Human interest stories.
- Dramatic events/happenings where there are photos.
- New business establishments in the community.
- News about things that are fashionable and trendy.
- News about matters that are generally in the news at the time, that are recognized as being current issues.
- News about things that will directly affect local residents and/or businesses.

Media Relationships

Media relations means just that: establishing a relationship, so having a plan that includes relationship development is vital. Media relations professionals work steadily at developing and maintaining on-going relationships with their media contacts. This involves making sure that the media person is provided with newsworthy information on a regular basis and that they are assisted in understanding how this kind of information is relevant to their audience. That leads to a trusting situation where the media person will respond to your communications and attend your press conferences. If they don’t know who you are and why they should pay attention to you, they likely won’t.

There are a few more useful tips on understanding the media that will be helpful to you in this respect in ‘Media Map: Charting a Media Relations Strategy’. See page 5.

We turn now to the different kinds of media activities you may want to consider.

Press Releases And News Conferences

Press Releases

The ‘how to’s’ of designing and distributing press releases were discussed in Section 2. They will be an important part of your media activity for special events and when really newsworthy information becomes available.

Normally a press release is emailed, faxed or mailed to the target media on a designated release date so that they all get it simultaneously. The latter point is critical; in the media, news is only news for a short, fleeting period. Yesterday’s news is of little interest.

There are a number of examples of press release approaches available on the Internet. First are MTR press releases on their website, www.tourism.gov.on.ca. Click on ‘News Releases’. The next ones are from the Premier Spas of Ontario website, www.spasontario.com, click on ‘in the press’, and on the Tourism Toronto website at www.torontotourism.com, click on ‘media’.

News Conferences

These are useful when really big news is in play, such as a major announcement, or when a visiting celebrity is in town for a major event. You will have to convince the media contact that the conference really warrants their attendance, which is easier to do if you have an ongoing relationship with them. It is very difficult otherwise.

News conferences ensure that everyone gets the same information simultaneously and provides them the opportunity to have questions answered immediately.

Attendees should be provided with your news release, along with supplemental background material as well as pictures and biographies of the key people and organizations involved.

Go On TV, Radio, Give Interviews

An interview is a frequent follow-up event arising from a press release or news conference, when the media wishes to get more information. This is true particularly if it is radio or TV that lend themselves to recording and using interviews.

It is important that your spokesperson is properly prepared in advance. Here are some useful tips:

- As mentioned earlier, have the details at hand in the event you get a call, organized by each of the key points in the release.
- Avoid jargon, technical terms and acronyms.
- If possible, practice by conducting a mock interview with someone else.
- Prepare and rehearse your responses to expected questions, and also to possible challenging questions, in a fashion that minimizes damage and puts the issue in a more favourable light.
- Make sure you have solid evidence (supporting information) of accomplishments being claimed in your press release.
- Correct any wrong information right away. And don't repeat the wrong information in your reply as there is always the risk your answer will be used out of context.
- Be ready with the names and contact information for others in your organization that the reporter may wish to speak with, or who are better able to answer some of the questions. Ideally, these people need to be alerted, briefed and provided with some notes.
- Use the name of the organization in preference to "we, I, our", etc. It helps reinforce brand awareness.
- If possible, make a closing statement that reinforces the key points you wish to make.
- Ask to see the draft article and particularly any quotes the reporter intends to use. This is an accepted thing.
- Also ask when the article is likely to run/air so that you don't miss it. Make sure you get a copy, as you might want to quote from it in future.

Media Events

The media relations program for organizations that have regular dealings with the media should include a periodic invitational event. These are typically social events to which a good number of your tourism industry leaders (particularly your champions and spokespersons) attend and make themselves available to the media (wearing nametags with their title and employer clearly evident).

It starts with a welcome and introduction of tourism industry attendees, followed by a brief presentation of newsworthy information, perhaps a press release or two, then an open format that allows the media people to talk to the other attendees one-on-one. The idea is to make it interesting and entertaining and easy for the media people to pick up stories and get personal interviews.

Media Familiarization Visits

Another technique that can be effective is to invite media people to visit various tourism establishments, with their family members, at which they receive complimentary services accompanied by a media information package, thereby better informing them about what's what in the local tourism industry and making sure they get the information you want them to publish.

A more effective approach is to organize a group tour for the media. This could be to a particular location where something newsworthy is happening, or about to happen. It could also be to several locations that represent the key features of the local tourism product mix. In both cases, try to provide briefing packages.

Visiting VIP Interviews

If an important tourism person is visiting, arrange a press briefing and opportunity for one-on-one interviews. This can be done in association with an announcement or tourism event in the community.

Section 5

Local Resident and Business Community Communications

The third communications challenge is that of communicating directly with the residents of the community and the business community, both tourism businesses as well as non-tourism businesses. Having them on side with the tourism agenda is important, of course, and it also makes it a lot easier to get political support for the tourism agenda.

We present below a number of ideas that have proven to be effective. These are only some of things you can do.

Involve the Tourism Operators

First of all, don't take for granted that tourism operators keep themselves informed about the tourism sector and its role in the economy. So, it will be important to inform them about these things and encourage them to join your efforts in the community.

There are a number of things you can do.

Report on Tourism

One is to send them the Annual Report on Tourism discussed earlier in Section 2, along with a tourism fact sheet in a wallet-sized format.

Website Information

Another idea is to include the same information on the DMO/tourism agency website and make sure the membership is aware it is available there.

Tourism Forum

Schedule a workshop/meeting/presentation during a local tourism event that involves the local tourism operators. Give them the presentation you are using for council and the report on tourism. Inform them of how they can assist. Recognize the efforts of those who have helped with the effort. Build pride in belonging to this vital and dynamic industry. Engage them in the 'Team Tourism' effort.

Newspaper Column

Talk to your local community newspaper about establishing a column on tourism. It would present information of interest to everyone in the community, including tourism operators. Topics could include:

- Information on forthcoming events in the community that locals attend, along with the fact that the event also draws visitors who leave money behind.
- Stories on new tourism-related developments that will benefit the community as a whole.
- Profiles of tourism businesses and tourism people that have contributed to the community in important ways.
- Write-ups on interviews with visiting tourism VIPs.
- Tourism-related news that has a human interest aspect.
- The tourism industry's position on controversial community issues.

As stated in Section 2 under 'Media Tools' and 'Press Releases', the information has to be newsworthy:

Special Events For The Business Community

It can be very helpful to engage non-tourism business people in the 'Team Tourism' effort as well, particularly those that benefit significantly from tourism. You need to help them understand that their interest lies in supporting the efforts of the industry to grow tourism.

The first group are those that deal directly with tourists – department stores, supermarkets, restaurants, convenience stores, specialty shops, gift and souvenir shops, gas stations, and so on. Here are some ideas:

- Encourage them to join the local tourist association.
- Profile them in the communications program.
- Put them on your mailing list for the annual report on tourism. Invite them, whether they are members or not, to attend tourism industry events.
- Make them 'members' of the effort whether they offer to be or not!
- Bring them to the council presentation and have them make a few remarks about the value of tourism to their business.

Other businesses that don't deal directly with the tourists perhaps but do business with tourism businesses are another audience for the effort – food distributors, hardware stores, real estate companies, professional services of various kinds, and so on. Add them to your mailing list for the annual report and make sure they are made aware of how many tourism dollars flow into and through the local economy.

Meal Events (Champion Speakers/Visiting VIPs)

Promote the availability of your ‘speakers’ bureau’ members and tourism ‘champions’ (See Section 2) as luncheon speakers at local service club meetings.

When a tourism VIP is to visit your community, seek out a speaking opportunity, particularly one that can draw media attention. Feed the VIP with presentation content that supports the tourism business case effort.

Special Events for Residents of the Community

Invite residents of the community to an event at which messages about the importance of the tourism industry in their community are articulated.

Community Picnic

One idea is to have a community picnic at a local tourism establishment, themed ‘Tastes of (your community name)’. Local restaurants would have booths in which they would prepare and service items from their menu. Others in the tourism industry would have displays, along with prizes and gifts for kids, coupons for savings on products sold by the operator, vouchers for something free at their establishment, etc. Information panels and leaflets would showcase the tourism industry. Invite councillors and community leaders, and their families. They will come if you also invite the media and their families.

Open House

Think of inviting residents to visit tourism establishments in the community over a scheduled period (outside of high season). Provide coupons or entertainment. Information displays could showcase the local tourism operator’s participation in ‘Team Tourism’ and provide interesting highlights about the industry.

These are just two ideas. We are sure you can come up with even better ones!

Awards Programs

Giving awards is a means to recognize achievement, but more importantly, it attracts public interest, and therefore the media. A tourism awards program, for businesses, and individuals provides newsworthy information and a golden opportunity to communicate and reinforce the tourism business case.

Public Service Announcements

Use this public service commonly provided by the media to inform the business community and public about upcoming events, including those that have a tourism business case component.

Tourism Week In June

One week in June each year is National Tourism Week, and many tourism organizations stage programs and activities at this time, supported by a publicity effort. This is an excellent time for your organization to piggyback on this theme and have your own events of the kinds discussed in this section.

Tourism Ambassador Program

Some communities have established a program of this kind in which local community members agree to be 'tourism ambassadors'. They are provided an orientation and information kit about tourism facilities and programs in the community and subsequently wear a button that says something like 'Ask Me About Our Community'. Volunteers are scheduled to do shifts at the airport and other points of arrival for visitors to the community.

This can be an effective way to augment visitor services, but it is also a very useful way of engaging residents in the industry and signalling to other residents that tourism is a community partnership effort.

Sponsor A Charitable Event/Project

Tourism organizations and tourism events can provide donations to, and otherwise sponsor charitable events in the community. This is good public relations and it definitely draws media attention. It's good for maintaining awareness of your presence.