

# Best Practices Tour 2000

in Adventure Travel  
and Ecotourism



*Discover our true nature*

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TOURISM  
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DU TOURISME





ADVENTURE TRAVEL AND  
ECOTOURISM BEST PRACTICES  
TOUR 2000:

*LEADING ONTARIO AND QUÉBEC OPERATORS SHARE  
THEIR EXEMPLARY PRACTICES*

*Prepared by*

*THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada*

*on behalf of*

*The Canadian Tourism Commission*

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# SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

## Introduction and Objectives

In January 2000, the Economic Planning Group of Canada, a tourism management consulting firm, was commissioned by the Canadian Tourism Commission to design, organize, facilitate, and implement the 2000 Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Best Practices Tour. The Economic Planning Group also facilitated and delivered the 1999 CTC Best Practices Adventure Tour.

One of the optimum ways for small business operators to grow is for them to experience first-hand the practices of successful similar businesses, and to transfer this experience to their own business. This is the premise that fostered the launch of the Canadian Tourism Commission's Best Practices Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Tour - a program which was so well received as a pilot project in 1999, the CTC offered it again in the Spring of 2000.

The 2000 Best Practices Tour was hosted in Ontario and Québec from May 27 to June 4, 2000. (A detailed tour itinerary is provided in Appendix A.) The 9-day study tour provided the opportunity for emerging ecotourism and adventure tourism operators from across Canada to learn, exchange information, and network with some of the most successful businesses in their field. The 2000 Tour had a decidedly national feel, comprised of fourteen operators from Western Canada, Northwest Territories, and Atlantic Canada who visited and shared ideas with 9 leading eco-adventure tourism operators in Ontario and Québec. In addition, about 60 other regional eco-adventure tourism operators from Ontario and Québec attended the daily sessions and presentations, which expanded the benefits of the program significantly.

Overall, the 2000 tour was a tremendous success. National and regional participants were highly supportive of the program and felt the experience was truly of consequential benefit to their companies. Many operators commented that the study tour was one of the best things they had undertaken to advance their business. Some specific comments included:

*“The entire series of experiences and presentations collectively conveyed an understanding greater than the sum of the parts. This is only possible during an intensive exposure such as this trip.”* **Brad Muir, Sundogs Sled Excursions**

*“I experienced and learned more this week than in five years of operation. Openly sharing ideas, concepts and skills with other operators is an opportunity that rarely occurs. I am very thankful I was invited to attend and thrilled that I could participate.”* **Brett Bourne, Adventure Junkie Tours**

# Contents of this Report

It is envisioned that this report will be a valuable tool for the Canadian adventure travel and ecotourism sector, which will complement the documents already published by the CTC on Best Practices including the “*Catalogue of Exemplary Practices in Adventure Travel and Ecotourism*” (Pam Wight and Assoc., 1999) and “*On the Path to Success: Lessons from Canadian Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Operators*” (The 1999 Best Practices tour report, authored by The Economic Planning Group of Canada, 1999).

The rest of the report is organized as follows:

- Section 2 presents a summary of the most outstanding best practices identified and lessons learned from the 2000 Best Practices Tour.
- Section 3 provides the Seminar Presentations that were delivered during the tour by the nine successful adventure and ecotourism operators in Ontario and Québec who were selected to host the tour. The presentations detail the business practices of some of the most successful adventure travel and ecotourism businesses in these provinces and cover a variety of topic areas including product development, partnerships, Internet marketing, and customer service.
- Appendix A features the detailed Tour Itinerary.
- Appendix B provides the presentation materials delivered to the tour participants by MasterCard - the Best Practices Tour’s major corporate sponsor - on their “Exclusives Online” Program.

## Overview of the Tour Program

The 2000 Best Practices Tour was designed to provide tour participants with a daily visit to a leading adventure travel or ecotourism company in Ontario and Québec (these operators are referred to as “host operators”). For most of the tour program, each day consisted of:

- Participation in a sample, half-day, ***adventure activity*** to experience adventure products provided by the hosting adventure tourism companies first-hand. The range of experiences included sea kayaking, Rabaska canoeing, birdwatching, cultural tourism, and interpretive hiking.
- Best Practices ***presentation*** by the host operator, on topics representing the best practices and strengths of their business.
- ***Discussion forum*** on best practices.

As well, informal discussion sessions and seminars were periodically held to review the best practices and lessons learned throughout the tour, as well as to maximize the amount of learning and sharing of ideas among participants. There were also numerous opportunities for networking, both among the national tour participants, the regional daily participants from Ontario and Québec, and with the host operators during all facets of the tour.

## ***Host Operators Selected for the 2000 Best Practices Tour***

The 2000 Best Practices Tour was met with a high level of industry interest and support, and as a result the program featured 9 host operators during the 9-day event. The selected hosts represented an interesting range of product mix, location, and business philosophy which provided an enlightened opportunity for participants to learn new perspectives and insights in an open forum where ideas and concepts were openly exchanged. Specific business practices were spoken of in detail, with the clear intent to enhance the knowledge and expertise of the participants.

The host operators who participated in the best practices tour were selected based on their quality of product, overall success, knowledge, expertise, and strength in best practices. Five of the host companies were based in Québec, with the remaining four based in Ontario, as follows:

- ***Anishinabe Experience***, Golden Lake, Ontario - aboriginal tourism operator offering hands-on, participatory Algonquin Cultural experiences.
- ***Écomertours Nord-Sud***, Rimouski, Québec - multi-day adventure cruising company featuring a 44-passenger ship in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, naturalist guides, wildlife viewing, stopovers in National Parks, kayaking, and regional cuisine.
- ***Excursion Mauricie***, St-Étienne-des-Grès, Québec - soft adventure operator offering a variety of trips including mountain biking, kayaking, Rabaska canoeing, birdwatching, and winter products, in partnership with a resort.
- ***Expédition Eau Vive***, Hull, Québec - this operator is the current president of the Québec adventure tourism association (APTAQ) and offers Rabaska and whitewater canoeing trips along the Ottawa River. Also offer Tai Chi and canoeing combination trips, and heritage interpretation.
- ***Horizon Nature Aventures***, Montreal, Québec - receptive operator specializing in adventure tourism. This company partners with several adventure tourism operators to offer a diversified product to a larger market.
- ***Killarney Outfitters***, Killarney, Ontario - sea kayaking operator offering kayaking in the Georgian Bay and Killarney Provincial Park. Also offer guided canoeing, hiking, outfitting/rentals, and operate a lodge and retail outlet.
- ***Québec Hors-Circuits***, St-Fulgence, Québec - this operator offers, hiking, canoe camping, mountain biking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, zodiac, and sea kayaking in the Saguenay Fjord.
- ***Voyageur Quest***, Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario - offer part and multi-day guided wilderness trips in Algonquin Provincial Park, including canoeing, lodge-based hiking, and dog sledding.
- ***Wilderness Tours***, Beachburg, Ontario - whitewater rafting business in operation since 1975. The company also offers canoeing, camping, and horseback riding, and features an activity centre, kayak school, and camping cabins.

## ***National Tour Participants***

Adventure travel and ecotourism operators were selected from across Canada to participate in the Best Practices tour based on a number of factors, including having a committed and professional approach to their business, being relatively new to the business, operating or intending to operate on a full-time basis, and offering a quality product. An effort was also made to include operators from every region of Canada including BC (4 operators), Alberta (2 operators), Saskatchewan (2 operators), Manitoba (2 operators), Northwest Territories (2 operators), and Atlantic Canada (2 operators).

In total, fourteen emerging companies participated in the tour:

- *Adventure Junkie Tours*, Winnipeg, MB
- *Crowsnest Vacation Creation*, Coleman, AB
- *Destination Snow*, Langley, BC
- *Eastview Wilderness Guest Ranch*, Arborfield, SK
- *Fishdance Lodge*, Surrey, BC
- *Heli Canada Adventures*, Revelstoke, BC
- *Island Quest Marine*, St. Andrews, NB
- *Nature Calls Eco-Tours*, Victoria, BC
- *North Nahanni Naturalist Lodge*, Fort Simpson, NT
- *North River Kayak Tours*, Baddeck, NS
- *Norway House Riverside Outdoor Adventures*, Norway House, MB
- *Ookpik Tours & Adventures*, Tuktoyaktuk, NT
- *Sundogs Sled Excursions*, Waskesiu Lake, SK
- *Wildside Wilderness Connection*, Widewater, AB

## ***Regional Participants from Ontario and Québec***

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the 2000 Best Practices Tour provided the opportunity for local and regional adventure travel and ecotourism operators based in Ontario and Québec to participate in the daily host best practices sessions. Overall, some 60 regional participants attended these daily sessions, with an average of 6-7 regional participants per day.

## Acknowledgement of Key Partners and Sponsors

The 2000 Best Practices Tour was truly a partnership effort between the Canadian Tourism Commission and its major funding sponsors - the **Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership**, and **Tourisme Québec**. In addition to major financial contributions, both agencies provided valuable assistance in recommending potential host operators, suggesting potential tour itineraries, and facilitating the invitations for regional operators to attend the tour sessions.

These partnerships were found to be vital components and we would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance and contribution of these organizations for their key involvement in the Tour.

Other significant contributors we would like to acknowledge include Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and the Northwest Territories Ministry of Resources, Wildlife, and Economic Development. These sponsors provided much-needed financial support to offset the travel costs of the national participants.

The CTC would also like to thank other tourism corporate sponsors: Killarney Mountain Lodge and Deerhurst Resort of Ontario and Chateau Cartier Resort and Le Baluchon Country Inn of Quebec.

### ***MasterCard - Official Corporate Sponsor***

Our sincere thanks are also expressed to **MasterCard Canada** - the official corporate sponsor of the CTC's Best Practices Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Tour. MasterCard provided cornerstone-funding support for this project - support which is highly valued by the Canadian Tourism Commission and the adventure tourism industry in Canada.

### ***Other Acknowledgements***

The Economic Planning Group of Canada would also like to express our sincere gratitude to all those personally involved in this most worthwhile and rewarding project, most notably André Villemare with the Canadian Tourism Commission for his assistance in overseeing the program.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Steve Bruno and Lori Waldbrook, with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, and Raynald Paquet, Tourisme Québec, for their valuable input and involvement in the delivery of the program, as well as Marie-Andrée Delisle for her assistance in coordinating the Québec portion of the program.

We also would like to take this opportunity to thank the host operators for their willingness to share their valuable insights, ideas, and keys to success.



# SECTION 2 – OUTSTANDING BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CTC BEST PRACTICES TOUR 2000

## Introduction

This section presents the most *outstanding* lessons learned and best practices identified during the 2000 Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Best Practices Tour, drawing from the presentations delivered during the tour by the “host” adventure tourism operators (Section 3), along with our insights from facilitating and delivering the best practices tour. This section also draws upon material provided by Marie-Andrée Delisle et Associés.

## Outstanding Best Practices Identified During The Tour

### ***Defining Adventure Travel & Ecotourism***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – REDEFINING ADVENTURE TRAVEL AND ECOTOURISM***

More and more, adventure travel and ecotourism operators seem to be refining themselves in response to the myriad of terms used to describe adventure experiences, including soft adventure, hard adventure, outdoor experiences, ecotourism, etc. In order to attract the greatest number of market segments as possible, some operators suggest it is preferable to market your products under the single definition “nature tourism,” while taking care to specify what the term means for each product.

#### ***Example:***

Pierre Desjardins of Expédition Eau Vive says that this enlarged definition allowed him to change his vision in terms of the sale of his product and to provide adventure tourism, ecotourism, light adventure, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism all under this general heading. In addition, rather than diversify his product to meet the demands of various client groups, he has chosen to *diversify his markets* by offering the same core products, but with a different theme.

*HORIZON NATURE AVENTURES (adventure tourism inbound operator): "We have repositioned our business in the market with the same products, but with emphasis placed on the word "nature" rather than "adventure." This change in emphasis had a significant impact on our business as we have since attracted a much larger clientele."*

*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS: "We now avoid using the word "adventure" in our business name, preferring to use the term "Back-country Québec" because we want to capture a niche somewhere between hard adventure and mass tourism, which corresponds to the interests of baby boomers and the trend towards travelling in small groups. This is why we prefer to provide custom-made experiences rather than just simply adventure, and this has allowed us to develop a broader range of products and clientele."*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – GET INVOLVED IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY***

Being involved in the tourism industry as well as the local and regional community has a number of important advantages for eco-adventure tourism operators;

- Creates high visibility and builds credibility
- Enhances your reputation
- Allows you to network and be more informed about important issues such as new programs, new legislation, new opportunities, etc.
- Provides recognition which assists you in partnering with the travel trade and other suppliers

Becoming a member of a sectoral association, getting involved in committees in the industry, participating in various projects, and introducing yourself to tourist offices and promotional organizations are all ways of making your business known. Volunteering in your local community is also an important way to generate local support.

Establishing partnerships with other organizations whose credibility is recognized is also an effective way of establishing credibility with clients, potential customers, and other operators in the tourism sector.



*EXPÉDITION EAU VIVE: "As an adventure tourism operator, we are always looking for more visibility and credibility. This is why I have become a "specialist in volunteering." We work on a volunteer basis in the community a lot - approximately one day per week. This involvement provides us with many advantages - most importantly creating new contacts and networks which helps us maintain visibility and credibility in the industry. Being involved also keeps us abreast of industry trends and changes, and helps us be more competitive while we give something back to the community."*

*THE ANI SHI NABE EXPERIENCE: "We always maintain constant communication with government, businesses, and associations. We are actively in the loop by sitting on regional tourism associations, provincial committees and community committees."*

*EXPÉDITION EAU VIVE: "The fact that we are partners with the Canadian Museum of Civilization gave us credibility overnight. There was a radical change of perception among our travellers."*

*EXCURSION MAURICIE: "In order to make our products known, we do tours to familiarize the local accommodation operators in our region with our products. This procedure allows us to consolidate the links of trust and partnership forged with us and towards their clients. At the end of the season, we host a dinner in a traditional maple sugar shack to present our new products, and to talk about our operational methods and client service."*

## **Partnerships**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMPLEMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS***

When the clientele and products of your business are compatible or complementary to those of another business, there may be an opportunity for you to establish a partnership arrangement.

Partnerships with suppliers and other service providers can be very beneficial to adventure tourism businesses because they allow you to create and package new and enhanced products - products that you might not be able to offer independently. As well, partner businesses both benefit from sharing knowledge and skills, and undertaking cooperative marketing initiatives. Partnering also has the benefit of protecting your business and your products from your competition by reinforcing your position and strength in the marketplace.

One type of supplier that offers a distinct opportunity for partnering with the adventure tourism sector is accommodations. Accommodation operators, particularly those located in attractive outdoor recreational areas, often have a desire to provide their guests with a range of adventure experiences and activities, but are not always well equipped to do this on their own. This is where the link with other suppliers becomes important - a partnership between an accommodation operator and an adventure tourism operator can be a powerful partnership that combines the skills and expertise of adventure with the lodging and base amenities provided by the accommodation operator. Such a partnership can be very valuable in opening up new markets for the adventure tourism operator, and providing a higher level of service and more enriched quality of experience for the accommodation operator's guests. Further, partnering in this fashion allows for a seamless operation whereby accommodation operators can offer a quality, controlled, adventure experience - one which can significantly enhance their market appeal.

This form of partnership was evidenced by several of the hosting adventure tourism operators of the Best Practices Tour. For example, Excursion Mauricie has a unique and profitable partnership with Le Baluchon Country Inn in Québec whereby Excursion Mauricie provides on-site guided and self-guided adventure tourism experiences to guests of the Inn. The Inn is able to provide a seamless, quality adventure program to its guests, allowing it to operate much like a small resort. The partnership has resulted in a significant increase in demand for the Inn, and has enabled Excursion Mauricie to operate a viable, year round adventure tourism business.

*VOYAGEUR QUEST: "Piecing and moulding together components from other suppliers is something that is part of every one of our wilderness packages. In fact, very few of our trips are exclusively owned and operated by our company."*

*EXCURSION MAURICIE: "Our partnership agreement with Le Baluchon Country Inn provides for an on-site adventure centre kiosk and equipment rental outlet at the resort, in return for a small surcharge that is levied to each room night at the Inn to offset the expenses associated with equipment use and maintaining a constant staff presence on the site. This revenue stream provides us with a capital-reinvestment allowance to continually upgrade equipment and ensures the fixed costs of operating at the resort are covered. In return, we are able to tap into a large, targeted resort market to provide guided and off-site adventure experiences for additional revenue."*

*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS: "We have developed a partnership with the Federation of Cooperatives of New Québec (Inuit) by adapting products together, financing promotion and publicity together, developing activities together, and involving the Inuit in the product."*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SELECT THE RIGHT PARTNERS***

Selecting the right business partner is essential. When looking for partners, it is important to seek partners that can offer your product mix an added-value experience, or a package component you do not already offer. It is also important to work with professionals who have the same philosophy and goals, who have established visibility and credibility in the marketplace, have a concern for product quality and customer service, and a mutual interest in establishing and maintaining a quality relationship.

Some potential partners may not be appropriate to work with, given differing business philosophies or styles of operation, and it is important to recognize this early on in the negotiations process.

In order to identify the best partners, it can be useful to develop a list of compatible organizations and business, which can be categorized into lists by priority, type of product, or by the potential benefit to your business.

*VOYAGEUR QUEST: Voyageur Quest has learned to develop successful partnerships by building on past mistakes and striving to work with quality suppliers who are willing to collaborate and represent the same interests and service ethics. Good partners are those which have a mutual respect for one another and practice good business ethics in the delivery of partner programs.*

*HORIZON NATURE AVENTURES: "We want to know each adventure tourism operator we represent and the products they offer so we can sell them internationally. For example, we are looking for responsible, reliable professionals who can deliver quality experiences and who can also provide seamless service and ensure a feeling of continuity and confidence."*

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### **Business Tip – Methods for Identifying Potential Partners**

Horizon Nature Aventures, a Québec receptive operator specializing in adventure tourism, recommends identifying partners by;

- ☞ Doing an inventory of the businesses and organizations with which a partnership might be a good idea (accommodation suppliers, complementary businesses, retailers, etc.);
  - ☞ Begin with the partnerships that could have a direct effect on your product or service ( e.g., complementary services);
  - ☞ Categorize the list according to type of partnership and by priority in terms of potential mutual benefit: primary and secondary;
  - ☞ Write down what you have found out about your future partner, and especially what you can offer them.
- 

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY YOUR PARTNERS' CONCERNS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONSTRAINTS***

Successful partnerships take some time to establish, so it is necessary to invest both time and effort in building them. As well, perseverance is often required to design a mutually beneficial partnership that creates a business opportunity that is profitable and equitable for both parties over the long term.

In order for a partnership to be successful, it is essential that each partner research each other's business to identify their markets and product mix, as well as key strengths, concerns, and constraints. This will allow you to determine areas where partnering opportunities may exist, and where collaboration can result in greater success and profitability for both partners.

As the owners of Le Baluchon Country Inn assert, to develop an effective partnership, *"...you need to open your books, perhaps be willing to share profits and to negotiate. In our business, we have had to partner on more than just the adventure activities themselves, by blending our business philosophy with that of our partner to work together in a seamless, collaborating fashion."*

*LA MAURICIE NATIONAL PARK: Le Mauricie National Park in Québec maintains a partnership with Excursion Mauricie - a local adventure tourism operator. The partnership evolved out of a full understanding of each other's visions, and a complementary focus with respect to environmental protection and conservation. "Through our partnership, we are able to attract more visitors to the National Park and to provide them with quality guided adventure experiences that we are unable to provide with our own staff compliment. The partnership is rooted in a common philosophy as well as a mutual need to stimulate tourism demand and provide a higher and more diversified quality of experience to visitors." This partnership is truly a successful model of collaboration between the public and private sector.*

*ST-LAURENT B&B: "When Excursion Mauricie presented us with an opportunity to provide our B&B guests with soft adventure activities, we were immediately interested as this company was promoting nature and the outdoors which corresponded to our vision, philosophy and values. In addition, what was proposed to us in the partnership corresponded exactly to the needs and interests of our clients. This partnership has since created a synergy that has allowed us to expand the "playing field" of our region."*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ESTABLISH A PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT***

In establishing a partnership with another business, it is important to work on common themes and to negotiate the best approaches, while resolving the various logistical and operational problems that may arise.

As well, it is important to define the modes of communication together, and to have written agreements whereby potential problems can be dealt with and solutions designed in advance.

#### ***Example:***

Voyageur Quest finds that being organized and putting solutions to potential problems in an agreement with partners in advance of operations is extremely helpful in preventing mishaps and service delivery problems. They ensure such things as quality of service, interpretive content, consistency in product delivery and marketing approach, and overall business and operating ethics are dealt with up front.

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### **Business Tip – Things to Include in a Partnership Agreement**

A written partnership agreement may contain the following elements:

- ☞ Obligations of each party
- ☞ Agreement to offer exclusive products or packages (location, range of product and service)
- ☞ Management and delivery of products including supervision
- ☞ Quality standards and methods for quality control
- ☞ Use and maintenance of equipment, trails, etc
- ☞ Cooperative marketing plan
- ☞ Mechanisms for providing a continuous service delivery process (seamless service) between the partners
- ☞ Pricing strategy and sharing of revenues
- ☞ Solutions to potential problems
- ☞ Renewal period for the agreement

*Adapted from Horizon Nature Aventures & Voyageur Quest*

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## ***Internet Marketing***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – MAXIMIZE YOUR USE OF THE INTERNET AS A MARKETING TOOL***

An Internet presence can be an effective and low-cost marketing tool for adventure tourism and ecotourism businesses. Internet marketing has unique benefits including being a dynamic medium which allows for continual, relatively low cost updating of information on products and trips, and extending your market reach to national and international levels.

Internet marketing also enables you to track potential customers and on-line bookings, information which can assist you in managing a customer database system and tracking sales.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – INTEGRATE YOUR WEBSITE WITH OTHER MARKETING EFFORTS***

The Internet provides an interesting alternative for getting in touch with potential clients. However, it is still important to use various methods of marketing your product, and to avoid neglecting traditional distribution networks.

It is also important to integrate your Website with your other marketing initiatives to ensure you are presenting the same message about your products and services. In other words, you should maintain a consistent product “branding” - the same look and feel should be reflected in all your marketing materials, from your Website, to your brochure, to your published advertisements.

For example, you should ensure your Website address is prominently printed on all promotional materials and advertising, as this will encourage potential clients to go to the Internet to lookup more information on your business.

*KILLARNEY OUTFITTERS maintains that you can run smaller advertisements if you include your Website address in the ad. For example, in recent newspaper advertisements, Killarney Outfitters simply ran an ad featuring a photograph, their toll-free number, and their Website address.*

*Similarly, by providing ample information on the Website about their destination, company, products, services, and what to expect on trips, Killarney Outfitters has found they spend less time in responding to general customer enquiries, and have reduced expenditures on postage, brochures, and telephone charges because a large portion of customers are getting the information they need on-line. This has enabled the business to respond more effectively to customer enquiries and leaves them more time to invest in upselling and marketing.*

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### **Business Tip – Killarney Outfitters offers the following Website Tips**

- ☞ Get written proposals from several Website designers and choose the right Website designer
  - ☞ Clarify what the costs will be to update your site, and whether you can control content and make changes yourself
  - ☞ Address the issues of copyright, ownership of content, and moral rights
  - ☞ Get your lawyer to review the design contract before signing it
  - ☞ Make sure your Internet Service Provider (ISP) has enough bandwidth to host your site and can handle expected traffic
  - ☞ Ensure you are provided with access to in-depth monthly statistics on site visits including customer origin, pages viewed, search words used, etc.
  - ☞ Be involved in your Website - visit and monitor your site regularly, and strive to keep the site attractive, dynamic, and most importantly, current
  - ☞ Be professional - your Website name should be simple and reflect your business name
  - ☞ Use good photos, quality graphics, and clear site architecture, while respecting common download times
  - ☞ Answer emails the same day
  - ☞ Address security issues if you plan to offer on-line bookings
  - ☞ Integrate your on-line customer information with a customer database system
-

## Customer Service

### ***BEST PRACTICE – PROVIDE CLIENTS WITH AN “EXPERIENCE”***

Today’s travellers are looking for an enriching adventure tourism experience and are seeking physical activity, adventure, interactive learning, and entertainment in a scenic, outdoor setting.

Some of the exemplary practices identified by host operators in providing outstanding adventure tourism and ecotourism experiences include:

- Customizing experiences and products to the interests and needs of clients
- Using a thematic approach (e.g., themed trips featuring themed menus, themed interpretation, themed equipment, integration of relevant culture, etc.)
- Including high quality, knowledgeable, yet entertaining interpretation
- Catering to every detail and leaving nothing out
- Including multi-activities (e.g., Voyageur canoeing with an aboriginal cultural experience and lunch)
- Under-promising and over-delivering
- Providing high quality, regional or local food
- Including extra little surprises or value-added bonuses

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#### **Business Tip – “Never run out of food**

☞ this is one element of adventure tourism you can control!”

***Wilderness Tours***

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One example of catering to every detail is providing complementary client transfer from client accommodations to the adventure departure point. Excursion Mauricie offers this service and finds that clients perceive this to be a personalized, easy to use, and added-value service. In fact, they find that when the transportation component is taken care of, the product is more accessible and the client faces one less constraint to purchase your product.

Québec Hors-Circuits specializes in customizing their adventure experiences with a thematic approach by offering different menus, outdoor activities, equipment, and interpretation. They always choose one theme for each activity so “*the activity is not the sole experience, but rather the means of discovering the outdoors.*”

#### ***Example:***

In an Old Québec themed heritage adventure program, the company serves period food in clay plates and guides experienced in Québec City history and culture. Equipment is also appropriately themed where possible. The themes can change according to the region or the season, and also are designed to reflect a logical sequence of activities for logistical as well as quality of experience purposes.

*EXCURSION MAURICIE: "We provide our clients with complementary transportation from their accommodations. Even if we are only picking up two people, we find the provision of this service is highly regarded and allows us to have a reputation for reliability and consistency in the industry."*

*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS: "One of our expeditions begins in the North of Québec with a descent along the river, alternating with a program of traditional trapping, fishing and a period menu; then, we fly over the Saguenay Fjord in a floatplane and return to the shore to embark in Zodiacs after tasting a local blueberry aperitif, followed by observing seals and arriving at a campsite located in a bay, where dinner has already been prepared. The next day we continue on foot for a hike in the mountains and return to the lodge base camp. In this fashion, we provide a great varied product that minimizes dead-heading and shuttling of clients between venues."*

*ECOMERTOURS NORD-SUD: "Some of our nature biologists play musical instruments, which has allowed us to include an evening concert program during our ecocruises which has been very well received by our clients."*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – COMMUNICATE REGULARLY WITH CUSTOMERS AND BE PROACTIVE***

Today's travellers expect professional communication with operators and a timely response to enquiries. Ensuring a quick follow-up to customer enquiries helps set you apart from your competition.

Customers also expect a high attention to detail and are impressed by operators who provide superior customer service. For example, if you offer a variety of adventure programs, guests find it particularly impressive if you can remember (or look up in guest records) what kinds of programs they are interested in or what types of trips they took with you in the past.

In addition to responding quickly to enquiries from potential clients, it is also important to keep in contact with past clients to build loyalty - especially if your business is one which caters well to repeat visitors. Some operators use a variety of methods to do this, including sending out newsletters, thank you cards, or other forms of greetings to keep your business top of mind.

It is also important to establish a human presence with clients as well. While technological advances such as electronic mail allow for fast, low-cost, and efficient responses to client requests, some enquiries warrant direct contact via telephone to provide more in-depth information and to encourage bookings.

*THE ANI SHI NABE EXPERIENCE: "We maintain contact with our guests by sending them holiday greetings or short letters, often with scanned photos of their experience with us."*



## ***Product Development***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ENSURE YOUR PRODUCT AND INTERPRETATION ARE AUTHENTIC***

Many host operators had a consistent message during the Best Practices Tour: ensure your product and all its components are authentic. Authenticity is essential to appropriately integrate culture and heritage into adventure and ecotourism products - experiences which are increasingly being sought by today's travel markets. One way of doing this is to hire an expert to add cultural interpretation to your product.

#### ***Example:***

Several of the host operators are successfully integrating unique cultural experiences into their adventure experiences by partnering with First Nations tourism groups and experts. By focussing on authenticity, adventure tourism operators have the ability to successfully incorporate adventure with culture and heritage which strengthens their products in the marketplace.

The Anishinabe Experience, an aboriginal cultural tourism operator, offers hands-on, participatory cultural experiences which focus on Algonquin culture and heritage. The company offers the following tips in being authentic;

- Share the culture as it is - do not commercialize or promote what is not authentic
- Ensure explanations are provided on cultural beliefs to heighten understanding
- Provide quality, informed interpretation that is educational yet entertaining
- Offer guests the opportunity to experience and share in cultural traditions as they existed in the past and illustrate how they exist today

*THE ANI SHI NABE EXPERIENCE: "We believe in sharing our Algonquin culture, traditions, and beliefs, however we do not see ourselves displaying talents just because clients may have a pre-conceived notion of our culture. In addition to talking about our traditions and way of life, we want our guests to see how we maintain our culture today in our everyday lives. Our guests highly respond to this type of programming - programming which focusses on authenticity."*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ADAPT AND INNOVATE, INNOVATE, INNOVATE!***

Adaptation and innovation make a company extremely versatile. The adventure tourism industry is fraught with unpredictable factors such as inclement weather, client cancellations, equipment failures, trail closures, etc., so you must be able to quickly make changes and adapt. One method of being able to *adapt* to such factors is to offer alternative products and activities. Businesses that must regularly rely on suitable weather conditions in order to offer their primary products can particularly benefit from such advance planning.

**Example:**

Québec Hors-Circuits and Excursion Mauricie are two operators that have planned adaptations ready for when inclement weather strikes. When the Saguenay Fjord is too rough to warrant a zodiac trip, Québec Hors-Circuits offers alternatives such as guided hiking with geological interpretation of the Fjord. Excursion Mauricie takes advantage of inclement weather by focussing on unique interpretation, e.g., the beautiful scent of conifers in the rain, foggy and mysterious landscapes, and creative photography.

Both operators have found that to be able to successfully offer alternative programs, you have to extensively know your region and have alternative routes and experiences available to your guests. This can require you to have alternative guides and equipment available on short notice, and entails other logistical considerations.

The primary benefit of being able to offer alternative experiences is that you will still generate revenue, and if you can provide a quality alternative experience that satisfies your clients, they may return at another time to participate in the experience they were originally seeking.

*Innovation* not only makes your company versatile and more competitive, but it also helps get your business known in the market.

**Example:**

Horizon Nature Aventures recently innovated in product development by creating a new multi-activity special event entitled the “Trappers Competition.” The event was an 8-day mountain bike and cross-country running race with a complete program of activities. The event allowed the company to identify and work with important partners such as Bombardier, Via Rail, and Tourism Québec, and resulted in positive media coverage and heightened international visibility. The event also increased the company’s presence and credibility in the market.

Innovation in equipment use can also be important. For example, Québec Hors-Circuits uses dry ice to keep food stuffs preserved on multi-day adventure programs.

*EXCURSION MAURICIE: “Even rain becomes a source of pleasure and amusement for our clients! In rainy weather, we ensure guests enjoy their adventure experience by:*

- *Providing guests with complete equipment including spare rain gear*
- *Encouraging clients to test their limits by motivating them to succeed and enjoy the difference of doing the activity in the rain*
- *Having a positive attitude to help see and appreciate the weather in another light”*

*WILDERNESS TOURS innovated in product development by building whitewater rafting into a destination experience packaged with meals, overnight camping and accommodations, sports, activities, and entertainment.*

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**Business Tip – Tips for Innovating and Continually Planning for the Future**

- ☞ Never stop growing - the world is changing and your business must change with it!
- ☞ Explore the world and “borrow” good ideas from other businesses
- ☞ Embrace technology
- ☞ Don't let a lack of education or money prevent you from exploring a good business concept
- ☞ Don't be afraid to make mistakes or to try new things - *a strong enthusiastic wrong decision is always better than indecision*
- ☞ Re-invent your business on a regular basis
- ☞ Think “out of the box” regularly
- ☞ Trade for everything and pay with product (barter) every chance you get

***Wilderness Tours***

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**Business Tip – Use dry ice to preserve food**

- ☞ especially on excursions that last a number of days. It doesn't melt, and can keep meats and other perishable foods chilled for up to 10 days.

***Québec Hors-Circuits***

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***BEST PRACTICE – REFLECT MARKET PREFERENCES IN PRODUCT DESIGN***

Collecting and using information on client preferences, expectations, and satisfaction with your current products and services is essential in being able to improve your products and in meeting the needs of today's adventure tourism travellers.

*ECOMERTOURS NORD-SUD: “We arranged with one client group specialized in bird watching to run a cruise jointly with us. The arrangement gave us the valuable opportunity of learning from their insights and allowed us to improve the bird watching component of our ecocruises. The exchange not only resulted in improved interpretation, but better allowed us to plan our departure schedule and bird observation sites to provide better quality bird watching.”*

***BEST PRACTICE – DEVELOP A DIVERSITY OF PRODUCTS AND MARKETS***

Some operators feel product and market diversity is the key to being able to operate a year round adventure tourism business. A year round operation is a worthwhile objective as it improves business viability and allows operators to focus on making adventure tourism their full time job. The offer of full time employment can also be particularly attractive in recruiting and attracting valuable guides and personnel as well.

**Product diversity** can be developed by establishing partnerships with complementary suppliers who can augment your existing products with a unique experience. Product diversity can also occur within your own business by offering a diversity in types of activities, in the destinations and environments you offer, in interpretation, theming of products, and special programming.

**Targeting new markets** is another way to boost diversity and enhance success. For example, the group incentive travel market is now being successfully targeted by some Canadian adventure tourism operators, as well as the corporate market for targeted programs such as team-building.

Voyageur Quest is one operator that advocates the importance of having a diversity of products and markets. The company is finding new successes in targeting non-traditional markets such as the group tour market, incentive market, and the corporate market. Voyageur Quest feels that all of these markets offer opportunities for adventure tourism, as long as the right products are developed to suit the individual needs of the markets, and operators are willing to invest the time and effort required in building business from these markets.

**Diversity in marketing** is also required to successfully cater to a diversity of markets. For example, leading adventure tourism operators market in a multitude of ways, including direct consumer marketing, marketing through traditional networks such as regional tourism industry associations and local destination marketing organizations (DMOs), cooperative marketing with partners, marketing to special interest groups and clubs, on-line marketing on the Internet, and marketing through specialized inbound or receptive operators.

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**Business Tip – Today’s Markets are Seeking Multiple Activities and Components in Their Adventure Experiences.**

- ☞ Voyageur Quest finds that their clients frequently request multi-activity adventures. Programs which incorporate a range of activities, e.g., trips incorporating canoeing, hiking, and wildlife viewing, are gaining in popularity. The company is continually striving to develop new complementary multi-activity programs which reflect customer interests while staying true to their company philosophy.
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*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS and EXCURSION MAURICIE have tapped into specialty niche markets and are now successfully providing unique adventure tourism experiences to physically challenged children and victims of cancer with the use of specialized equipment and programs. For example, Excursion Mauricie caters to physically challenged children in collaboration with Kéroul (the Québec association for people with limited abilities) to provide paraplegic children with the unique opportunity of experiencing and enjoying adventure tourism. This is done through care and attention to the needs of the clients, adaptations to equipment (e.g., customized canoes), special safety equipment, and a higher complement of guides.*

*THE ANI SHI NABE EXPERIENCE and QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS find that publishing their brochures in different languages corresponding to the markets they target is highly effective in appealing to foreign markets and “opening the door” to doing business in new markets.*

*EXCURSION MAURICIE: “We work with approximately twenty accommodation providers in the region, and most of them include our activities in their brochures for free. Thus, each accommodation operator becomes an additional point of sale for our adventure excursions.”*

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**Business Tip – Catering to the Incentive Market is a unique Opportunity but Requires Significant Effort and Narrowly-focussed marketing.**

- ☞ Québec Hors-Circuits finds that the incentive travel market is seeking unique and complex adventure tourism programs. While catering to the incentive market requires a lot of research, planning, and a high level of attention to the individual needs of each incentive group, this sector can be very profitable if you can provide a high quality, unique, and customized product.
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***BEST PRACTICE – FIND YOUR NICHE AND STICK TO IT!***

There are many adventure tourism businesses in the industry today and the growth in operators has spurred a renewed need to specialize. How do you set yourself apart? How do you offer a unique experience? How do you find your *niche* - the unique products, services, and operating philosophy that make you different?

Here are some tips;

- Keep abreast of product trends in the adventure tourism industry
- Research your competition - what is being offered in the marketplace, and what is successful
- Develop a profile of adventure tourism markets - who are they, where do they live, and what are they looking for? What are their needs and expectations?
- Determine what differentiates your region from other destinations and showcase this
- Use the above information to define your market and product niche, focussing on what is unique about your products/services

In defining your niche, it is important to be versatile, to innovate, and to integrate authenticity. And above all, offer a quality product - if you are going to be successful in catering to your market niche, make sure you deliver on quality.

While it is important to offer a diversity in products and cater to a variety of markets in order to be economically viable, it is also important not to dilute your product offering. Many adventure companies say it is not the identification of your niche that is difficult, it is sticking to it!

Horizon Nature Aventures asserts that you need to know how to keep pace with current market and product trends, but still remain true to your main focus and goals. For example, Voyageur Quest has chosen not to offer snowmobiling despite the fact that some of their clients request this product. They decided that snowmobiling was not appropriate for their particular product and market mix, given their company focus on non-motorized adventure (e.g., cross country skiing, snowshoeing.) This decision was based on an awareness of their market needs and expectations, and a desire to remain true to their niche.

*HORIZON NATURE AVENTURES: "Our niche is providing quality tours and experiences, off the beaten path, in nature, in complete safety."*

*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS: "In our case, we have decided to focus our niche on the interpretation of landscape and nature."*

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### **Business Tip – Some Useful Research Mechanisms to Help You Identify Your Niche**

- ☞ Identify trends, subscribe to distribution lists on the Internet on the national and international level, consult specialized magazines, look for statistical data on various client groups, buy the best books on management, get studies on consumer habits and reports on the various markets, such as those by the Canadian Tourism Commission and the World Tourism Organization. Collect any type of brochures that could give you ideas on market development or for potential partnerships. Do searches on Internet sites for adventure products being offered regionally as well as in other destinations and abroad.

*Horizon Nature Aventures*

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## **Staffing And Training**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – HIRE THE RIGHT GUIDES, AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO CONTINUALLY UPGRADE AND LEARN***

It goes without saying that it is essential to hire the right guides in adventure tourism - guides that have the necessary skills, are cheerful, agreeable, and don't lose their enthusiasm or attention to detail when the tasks are repetitive or the trip lasts a number of days. The various talents and expertise of staff and guides can greatly enrich an adventure trip, and this expertise can be nurtured and enhanced through on-going education and training.

Québec Hors-Circuits spends considerable effort in hiring, training, and motivating their guides. The company strives to hire guides that have a unique and diverse set of qualifications - skills and knowledge bases that are diverse and that complement one another. For example, if the company requires a guide to provide snowmobiling trips, they ensure the guide not only is an expert in snowmobiling, but that the guide also has knowledge of the region and the surrounding environment, as well as a good understanding of outdoor activities.

This range of guides with a diversity of qualifications is further enhanced by Québec Hors-Circuits' practice of fostering on-going guide training - the company encourages guides to continually upgrade their knowledge and diversity of skills, and guides are motivated to continually learn and improve their expertise - particularly in topic areas where they may not be well versed. Québec Hors-Circuits prides themselves on the strengths of their guides, and the company finds that having a diversity of highly skilled and knowledgeable guides enables them to provide unique and high quality interpretation.

*QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS: "It's the people that lead you through the experience that make it valuable. That's why we choose guides known for their familiarity with the local environment, and we are still collecting research and enhancing our knowledge to provide the most exclusive experience."*

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### **Business Tip – Develop A Library of Information Materials to Encourage Guide Training**

- ☞ Québec Hors-Circuits has developed exclusive information “capsules” of information from research they have collected over the years from books, historical centres, museums, interpretation centres, and other sources. This information is used to help train guides and enhances their knowledge in a multitude of topics including such things as wilderness survival, ancestry, culture, geology, folklore, regional cuisine, traditional practices such as trapping, etc.

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Keeping guides in a continual learning environment not only helps build your guides’ expertise, but is an important motivator and confidence builder.

Making the work environment interesting can also increase the value of a job and keep up the motivation of personnel. Some operators practice “guide swapping” whereby guides are exchanged with guides of a partner operator to allow staff to experience working with and offering different adventure products in other regions. This practice can strengthen your team by enhancing guide expertise and allowing them to further their personal careers.

Another interesting way to motivate staff is to involve them in management decisions and product development. Guides and staff can contribute very valuable suggestions for product improvement and customer service, due to their direct guest contact. Operators find that being interested in staff’s opinions, and engaging them in improving the business is a strong motivator that highlights staff’s importance and value to the business.

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### **Business Tip – Hold Debriefing Sessions with Staff**

- ☞ Some operators hold debriefing sessions with staff before and after each trip, in order to share any important details about clients and on the running of the program. This is an effective way of supervising personnel and keeping them informed and motivated to do a good job.

## ***Environmental Stewardship***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RESPECT, UNDERSTAND, AND CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT***

Environmental respect and stewardship were mentioned by several host operators as fundamental best practices in the adventure tourism sector. As Québec Hors-Circuits contends, it is important for adventure tourism operators to;

- Have a passion for nature
- Have an ability to interpret nature
- Protect nature and the environment
- Provide guides and guests with specific information about caring for and respecting the environment

Voyageur Quest agrees with these ethics and calls upon on the adventure tourism industry to work together to halt the “slow but steady erosion of our natural environment.” Voyageur Quest also asserts that the adventure tourism sector has a unique opportunity to transfer this ethic to clients;

*“A motivated and passionate Canadian wilderness adventure industry has the potential to inspire other Canadians to remove their complacency toward protecting and living in wild spaces.”*

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#### **Business Tip – The Ecotourism Label - A Sign of Quality**

- ☞ In the Lower Saint Lawrence region of Québec, businesses that provide water-based adventure activities have been partnering on developing an ecotourism label of quality. The objective is to develop a classification program with standard criteria that will identify adventure tourism and ecotourism professionals who are concerned about conservation, protection, and educating visitors to respect the natural and human environment.
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# SECTION 3 – PRESENTATIONS ON BEST PRACTICES DELIVERED DURING THE TOUR

## Introduction

During each day of the Best Practices Tour, “host” adventure tourism operators delivered a presentation on best practices. These presentations are provided in this section of the report, and cover a variety of topic areas;

- ***“Lessons Learned in Cultural Tourism: The Importance of Authenticity, Community and Industry Involvement, and Marketing”***- The Anishinabe Experience
- ***“The Strengths of our Adventure Cruising Business: Best Practices in Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism”***- Ecomertours Nord-Sud Inc.
- ***“Partnerships: The Road to Success!”*** - Excursion Mauricie
- ***“Redefining Nature Tourism, Product Diversification, and The Importance of Partnerships and Social Involvement”*** - Expédition Eau Vive
- ***“Finding Your Niche and Specializing”*** - Horizon Nature Aventures
- ***“Internet Power: Shaping the Future of Your Business”*** - Killarney Outfitters
- ***“Made to Measure Experiences: Made to Measure Adventure”*** - Québec Hors-Circuits
- ***“Packaging, Working with the Incentive Market, and Other Business Tips”*** - Voyageur Quest and Algonquin Log Cabin
- ***“Wilderness Tours: Our Best Business Practices”*** - Wilderness Tours

Please note that the presentations have been edited for clarity of content, as well as format for use in this report. In some cases, the presentations have also been adapted by the Economic Planning Group, drawing from speaking notes provided by the host presenters and tape recordings of the sessions.





*The Anishinabe Experience Golden Lake, Ontario Aboriginal tourism operator offering hands-on, participatory Algonquin Cultural experiences.*

## “Lessons Learned in Cultural Tourism: The Importance of Authenticity, Community and Industry Involvement, and Marketing” – The Anishinabe Experience

*Developed by The Economic Planning Group from speaking notes provided by Linda Sarazin, President – The Anishinabe Experience*

### ***Authenticity***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – AUTHENTICITY IS INTEGRAL TO A QUALITY CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE***

- Share the culture as it is, do not promote or exaggerate what is not natural.
- Have guests experience the culture of the community the way it exists.
- Emphasize and promote the beliefs, customs and traditions of the local community.
- Know the history of the community, the present and their future vision
- Ensure explanations are provided on cultural beliefs, therefore preventing any misunderstandings.
- Do not commercialize your cultural experience, keep it authentic.
- Provide quality, informed, education and yet entertaining interpretation.
- Do not get steered away from your initial goal on why you started your venture.  
You can improve it to keep up with market demand, but do not lose focus on why you started.

#### ***Example:***

We believe in sharing our Algonquin culture, traditions and beliefs, however, we do not see ourselves displaying talents just because clients may be looking for "Indians." In addition to talking about our traditions and way of life, we wanted our guests to see how we maintain our culture today in our everyday lives. How do we balance our cultural traditions with today's modern technology?

## ***Community Involvement***

In the aboriginal community, it is important to seek and obtain approval of community elders before beginning a cultural tourism business. This can translate to other communities as well - the intent is to consult with the community to obtain buy-in to your business concept.

- The community should set the boundaries on what they deem appropriate or feel comfortable in sharing with visitors.
- Know the community's rich and distinct heritage.
- Conduct an inventory of all human resources based on expertise, skills, language, etc.
- Build partnerships with others in the development of packages.
- Ensure the business benefits the community (e.g., we share our financial resources within the community.)
- Partner with the community on publicity and media opportunities.
- Promote your business and other local businesses, your community, and your region.
- Utilize local resources and expertise as much as possible.
- Build upon community pride in sharing the heritage, cultural diversity, and beauty of the region and surrounding area.
- Keep the community abreast on new trends and opportunities in tourism for the overall benefit of the whole.
- Share feedback on the business with the community, including thank-you's and compliments, media coverage, publicity, etc. This builds community pride and strengthens the business.

### ***Example:***

We believe that we do not have a business without the support of our Algonquin community. What the community thinks and believes is very important to us. We ensure that all the community values are instilled into our cultural programs. The community is our most valuable asset. In other words, *without the community there is no Anishinabe Experience.*

## ***Involvement In Your Local Tourism Industry***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – BE INVOLVED IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY***

Get involved in the tourism loop - being known in the industry is one of the keys to success!

- Your local industry should know who you are and what you do.
- Become involved in local tourism associations as they will also assist in promoting you and keeping you informed on what is happening. (Once you are known, you will be on the first list of people they will remember when an opportunity comes up for your business.)
- Become a member of various committees, board of directors, etc. This provides an insight into who's who, who does what, etc.

- Become an active member with any of the interested parties that can help you in your promotion or increase the knowledge of your product by sitting on various committees, i.e., marketing, product development.
- All interested parties - locally, regionally, provincially and nationally - should be aware of your product.
- International agencies should also be kept informed on your product.
- Regular (e.g., monthly) telephone calls should be maintained to interested parties to ensure your business is kept top of mind when they receive inquiries.
- Always be consistent - keep constant contact and be persistent. (*Remember the squeaky wheel gets the grease!*)
- However, know your limits, you cannot sit on all committees or your business will suffer.
- Know what your goal is and strive for it!

***Example:***

The Anishinabe Experience always keeps constant communication with government, businesses, and associations. We are actively in the loop by sitting on regional tourism associations, provincial committees and community committees.

***No Single Business Has All The Resources It Needs To Succeed***

I strongly believe that in order to be successful you must be a team player. Tourism is teamwork and your team is the people of the local community and surrounding area. You need them and they need you.

***BEST PRACTICE – GET PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS INVOLVED***

Increase your knowledge of your products and vice versa. This provides an opportunity to develop new packages.

Partnering also provides a good opportunity to share one another's experience, such as market trends, cultural differences, marketing tips, trade show preparation, etc.

***Example:***

In our programs, we include a visit of the community buildings, such as our architectural award winning daycare, health centre, and heritage centre. Without their involvement, there would be no community to see and I would have nothing to take my guests on a tour of.

***BEST PRACTICE – LOCAL BUSINESSES SHOULD WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM.***

As a team you can tackle anything. Everyone knows everything and you can share expertise.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – DEVELOP ITINERARIES AND PACKAGES WITH LOCAL TOURISM INDUSTRY PARTNERS***

Develop itineraries to increase the knowledge of your area and package with local tourism industry partners. It is also important to develop specific packages for specific markets, e.g., convention market, leisure market, hiking and bird watching clubs, etc.

#### ***Examples:***

The Anishinabe Experience has packaged with Bonnechere Caves, Canadian Voyageur Adventures, Bonnechere Provincial Park, and Algonquin Park. Our product tells the story of the Little Bonnechere River and the Ottawa Valley, from the glacier period to where the Ottawa Valley is today.

The Anishinabe Experience also partners with Fulton's Pancake and Sugar Bush and the Call of the Wild. Together we are developing an itinerary to encourage travellers to re-route their schedule to come through the Ottawa Valley. Our suggested itinerary is as follows:

- Breakfast at Fulton's Pancake and Sugar Bush
- Cultural lunch and activity at Anishinabe Experience
- Visit to Algonquin Provincial Park for an outdoor experience with the Call of the Wild.

We are still in the initial stages of forming this package, but we know we can develop a good itinerary that we think will appeal to the market.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – USE THE BARTER SYSTEM TO EXCHANGE PRODUCT FOR SERVICES***

Sometimes you can obtain services and items with the barter system. Adventure tourism operators should be aware that the barter system is still alive and well within small businesses!

#### ***Example:***

A friend started working for a company and needed advertisers for a project he was doing. Like every business, budgets are tight. So, in exchange for my advertising, he trained us on Microsoft Access. I think we received the better deal, but we both know that later the favour will be returned.

Other examples include web site design assistance in exchange for a pair of moccasins, and the use of our location for advertising and promotion.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – KEEP FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN YOUR REGION***

Ensure that financial resources will remain in your area and region.

#### ***Example:***

We have extended our programming for the winter. However, I can't feel comfortable offering our Tee Pee accommodations in the winter, knowing my guests will be too cold, so arrangements have been made with a local B&B for accommodations. Programming continues, and financial resources stay within your region.

***BEST PRACTICE – INSTILL PRIDE AND RECOGNIZE YOUR AREA’S HERITAGE AND CULTURE***

Instill pride and recognition of your area's heritage, culture and people.

***Example:***

Adventures in Time is providing this with their programming as they interpret Wilno as the first Polish Settlement in Canada.

***BEST PRACTICE – UTILIZE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A RESOURCE***

The cultural diversity of your geographic region is an important resource in product development, promotion, and future partnerships.

***Examples:***

The Ottawa Valley has an enormous number of linguistic resources. I have utilized these resources by recruiting various translators over the last few years. As well, qualified community members offer their services to translate should the need arise (e.g., translation of our English interpretation into Polish.) These contacts and resources also bring friends and relatives to visit The Anishinabe Experience and community.

We work closely with the community in the promotion and understanding of our Algonquin culture by working with the First Nation, obtaining the First Nation Government's support, and touring the various sites within the community.

***BEST PRACTICE – CONTINUALLY NETWORK WITH LOCAL OPERATORS***

Continuous networking with local industry players is important as it provides an opportunity to learn about regional products (e.g., products offered, hours of operation), and allows cross promotion of one another's business.

Remember, you can barter your services to experience the programs of other suppliers!

***BEST PRACTICE – USE PACKAGING TO DEVELOP NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GUESTS***

Develop new packages to provide new and enhanced opportunities for your guests.

***Example:***

With continued networking with Adventures in Time, we developed an innovative package - the Time Travel package.

***BEST PRACTICE – INCREASE EXPOSURE THROUGH COOPERATIVE MARKETING***

Place an advertising ad as a group of complementary suppliers. This will enable you to get a larger ad, will provide better exposure, will cost a lot less to individual companies.

***BEST PRACTICE – TRAIN YOUR STAFF ON LOCAL ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES***

Provide your staff and other operators with a FAM (familiarization) tour of local businesses. Really see how they operate, what they offer, and where they are located in relation to your business.

***Example:***

At the beginning of every season, local operators select a date and invite other local operators to come in for a visit and ask questions. In return, we invite them to our business for a visit. This way, we all know what everyone is doing and what they offer.

***BEST PRACTICE – TAILOR THE EXPERIENCE TO THE NEEDS OF THE CLIENT***

Cultural tourism has many facets and as such lends itself well to be tailored to the needs and interests of clients. To do this, it is important to get an idea of what their expectations are and what you will offer to avoid misunderstandings. Then you can customize your product and offer what they are truly interested in seeing, learning about, participating in, and observing in cultural tourism. *This is how the site comes alive!*

***Examples:***

- Upon arrival, we meet and greet our guests. We discuss what they are interested in experiencing. This allows flexibility, and a personal contact that makes them feel special - the experience is personalized just for them. We want our guests to feel like they are at home, meeting new friends, learning a new culture, experiencing traditions, and being part of a community.
- Since we started the Anishinabe Experience, no two tours of guest experiences have been the same. Their stays are similar, but different at the same time. They are designed for the individual guests themselves, and each experience provides a different range of cultural programming drawing from experiences we offer such as traditional hide tanning, interpretation of dance regalia, teachings of the Traditional Sacred Medicines, cultural community tours, and aboriginal foods.

You should also be aware of the cultural traditions and beliefs of your clients. For example, if respect is expected of your culture, you must share the same consideration of your guests.

***BEST PRACTICE – BUILD IN FLEXIBILITY AND RELAXATION***

Keep schedules flexible where possible, and allow your guests relaxation and unwinding time prior to programming and activities. This sets the tone for a comfortable atmosphere and allows guests to more openly experience and share in the programming.

***BEST PRACTICE – PROVIDE QUALITY PROGRAMMING***

Quality programming is based on interactive programming, providing clients with a heightened level of understanding, and an overall outstanding experience.

The experience should be rich and exciting for all parties involved, including your own staff.

***BEST PRACTICE – STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOUR GUESTS***

***Example:***

We maintain contact with our guests by sending them holiday greetings or short letters ensuring they made it home safely. We even send scanned pictures of their stay.



## **Marketing**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – KNOW YOUR MARKETS***

No matter what you do, you need to know who would be interested in your services or product and why. Knowing your market, studying the demographics, and keeping abreast of new trends and opportunities will assist you greatly in marketing efforts.

One way of doing this is to survey your guests. Ask them where they have heard of you and why they have come to your business.

Other important information you want to obtain on your markets is age, background, where they are from, and what their perceptions and cultural needs are. Study and learn from the demographics of your market.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – UTILIZE THE 4 “PS” IN MARKETING***

Marketing is more than advertising. For example, if you have not packaged your experiences to make the visit easier, guests will not consider coming back. Remember, bad news travels a lot faster than good news!

The basic principles of marketing focus on four controllable elements and these factors should be considered in your business:

- ***Product*** - know your product inside and out
- ***Promotion*** - marketing is much more than advertising and marketing must be targeted (e.g., identify which trade shows are best suited to your product.)
- ***Packaging*** - Your packaging strategy should ensure that packages are saleable (interesting), has a good price point, and offers options (i.e., one-stop shopping).
- ***Pricing*** - competitive pricing is important for products and packages.

It's important for industry to know the four marketing principles and also be prepared for “uncontrollable” elements such as social conditions, economics, the regulatory environment, technology, and competition.

It is important to look at these uncontrollable factors - assess if they are threats or opportunities for your business.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRAVEL WRITERS, MEDIA, AND JOURNALISTS***

Establish relationships with travel writers, media, and journalists to get articles published about your business and the surrounding area.

Once articles have been written, always thank the media for their efforts. For example, we send media a thank-you note after we receive a copy of the article they published. They are very appreciative of this gesture.





*Écomertours Nord-Sud, Rimouski, Québec  
44-passenger multi-day adventure cruising  
company operating in the Gulf of St.  
Lawrence, featuring naturalist guides, wildlife  
viewing, stopovers in protected areas,  
kayaking, and regional cuisine*

**"The Strengths of our Adventure Cruising  
Business: Best Practices in Ecotourism  
and Adventure Tourism"  
– Ecomertours Nord-Sud Inc.**

*Developed by The Economic Planning Group from speaking  
notes provided by Linda Jones, President  
– Ecomertours Nord-Sud Inc.*

### ***Background***

Before beginning Ecomertours Nord-Sud, the owners were involved in operating research vessels for more than twenty-five years. This experience formed the basis for the development of our ecotourism cruise business which, following a market study done by a specialized firm, began with the purchase and conversion of a former Canadian Coast Guard vessel into a cruise ship. The conversion of our vessel into a passenger ship with cabins, which required an investment of over \$2 million dollars, was a great challenge and a first in Québec.

Ecomertours Nord-Sud Inc. was created at the end of 1996, and we began offering eco-cruises in the summer of 1998. The Echo des Mers, a 170-foot ship, accommodates 44 passengers in cabins, and 18 crew members.

The business finished its second season of operations in 1999 in accordance with its projections, and the 2000 season is already underway. We are already present in the foreign market for summer 2001. A great success for a small and new regional Québec enterprise.

The business's objective is to *facilitate the discovery, experience and knowledge of the river and coastal heritage of maritime Québec*. Our motto is "We protect what we love, we love what we know."

## ***Development and Innovation - A New Field, A New Concept!***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – INNOVATION LEADS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIQUE PRODUCTS***

Ecomertours developed a new concept of cruises in Eastern Québec and even in Canada, by offering medium-term eco-cruises, for the first time, on a ship that is small enough to gain access to little-known places, without compromising the security and comfort of passengers. The importance placed on knowledge and raising awareness of our seaway heritage and the products of the region makes this business unique in its field and a pioneer in Québec in terms of ecotourism cruises.

We wanted to do things differently and provide a new experience on the seaway, while at the same time making people aware of the importance of protecting, conserving, and preserving it for the future.

#### ***Example:***

We offer two types of eco-cruises. "Fantasy" (thematic) ecotours are mainly involved in observing marine mammals and birds, while "Discovery" ecotours are run to discover places, such as the region of the Lower Northern Shore, Mingan, and Anticosti Island, or to rediscover places from another perspective, such as the national and provincial parks in the east using the "blue highway" of the Saint Lawrence.

These cruises give passengers the opportunity of learning more about the fauna, flora and history of lesser-known parts of Québec in a relaxed and jovial atmosphere. Our passengers live on the ship from 2 to 8 days, with daily stopovers that last from 4 to 10 hours. The small size of the group, the experience of getting away, the ports of call, and the qualified and involved Québec crew all add to what these cruises have to offer. To this mix of discovery and exploration of nature, relaxation and new experiences, we have added a touch of *culture* with our mini concerts, humour with our "myth and legends of the region" evening programming, and good food with our high-quality regional cuisine.

#### ***Example:***

When the ship was converted, we built a main deck and added cabins so that we could accommodate a larger number of passengers in comfort and security. In addition, two cabins were transformed into a community room which is also used as a bar (including a television, video, tables and chairs, and a projector and screen for the evening discussions), a living room, a reading room and the renovation of the dining halls. Even on this score, according to Transport Canada, this was the first time that an existing ship was converted into a passenger ship - a first in Québec!

## ***BEST PRACTICE – DEVELOP NEW PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES BASED ON MARKET INTEREST***

Ecomertours Nord-Sud Inc. is constantly evolving and innovating in response to comments from passengers and crew members and a desire to lengthen our season of operation. These comments help us to improve existing concepts or to add new ones. *There is always a place for creativity and improvement!* The staff and clients are our best allies for the overall development of the business and its products.

### ***Examples:***

- During the summer of 1999 we tried two new cruises: "Three National Parks," and "Birds, Islands and Whales of the Saint Lawrence."
- For the summer 2000, the Eastern Québec Parks cruise will be extended to seven days, in response to suggestions from passengers and crew members, and will include three national parks and one provincial park.
- The Birds, Islands and Whales cruise will be increased from six to seven days, and will be led by Jacques Larivé, the well-known ornithologist, coauthor of the *Atlas saisonnier des oiseaux du Québec*.
- In addition, a completely new eco-cruise expedition will be available: "Whales, Whales, Whales" which will include the participation of researchers from the Mingan Research Station, including a whale specialist. This *new concept of research-ecotourism* will give the public the chance not only to observe and discover marine mammals but also to learn about the techniques of scientific research used with these wonderful sea creatures. Passengers will be able to accompany these researchers on their data-collection work, and specialized talks will be given in the evenings.
- Finally, the number of cruises has also increased, thereby lengthening the season. We are therefore expanding from eight cruises in 1999 to fourteen in 2000. In addition, we also provide custom-designed cruises for groups outside the regular season, and the ship is available for survey and research contracts in oceanography and aquatic sciences.

## ***What Sets Us Apart***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – KNOW WHAT SETS YOU APART FROM YOUR COMPETITION***

It is very important to know and promote what sets you apart from your competition. For example, what sets Ecomertours apart is;

- The nature of our product - discovery-oriented and thematic ecotourism cruises in salt water;
- The newness of our approach;
- Double-occupancy cabins with private toilets and showers;
- Portholes in every cabin (which makes them brighter, more open and welcoming);
- A naturalist guide and special guests;
- Scientific lectures;

- Ports of call close to the islands and Zodiac and rowboat excursions to get there;
- High-quality, qualified and pleasant staff, dedicated exclusively to the passengers;
- Management that involves the staff and is geared toward development;
- High-quality, professional service that is full of surprises (e.g., a mini classical music concerts, theatre, etc.);
- Tasty cuisine that promotes products from the region;
- Continuous evaluation of products and services by our clientele.

## ***Business Impact***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – MAXIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS’S ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO YOUR REGION***

It is important to maximize your business’s economic benefits to your local community and region. This can be done by hiring local guides, purchasing local supplies and products, etc.

#### ***Examples:***

- We have opened up a new sector of economic activity for the region and for Québec. Setting up medium-length cruises on the Saint Lawrence by a Québec company with a Québec crew is a real challenge that Ecomertours Nord-Sud has taken up. But above all, we stimulate the regional economy. In fact, we have created approximately 20 new seasonal jobs, 2 (and soon 3) of which are permanent positions in the region, and supplies (equipment, food, basic necessities, etc.) are purchased in the Lower Saint Lawrence and North Shore regions. We purchase products made locally as much as possible. In addition, the modifications made during the conversion of the ship were done in locally in Rimouski by local labour. In total, we have spent over \$2,500,000 in the region over the last three years.
- We hire graduates from the region including Québec Maritime Institute, the Biology and Education programs at the University of Québec at Rimouski, and the Matane Cégep's Tourism program.
- Hotels and B&Bs in the region also get passengers for one or two nights per passenger during the pre- and post-cruise periods, and our clients get to Rimouski by plane, train, bus and car. We also suggest sites they can visit so they will stay a few days longer in the region.

For the past two years, the impact of our clients on these regions has been estimated at over \$100,000 and is increasing every year.

Finally, the regions we visit with our cruises also have benefit economically from our business.

#### ***Example:***

On our cruises, we utilize local operators to provide our various day excursions. In addition, the Echo des Mers contributes to the reputation of the regions of Maritime Québec.

## **Promotion**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY THE MARKETING APPROACHES THAT WORK BEST FOR YOU***

It is important to identify what promotional methods work best for you.

#### ***Examples:***

We utilize the assistance of a specialist to develop a three-year promotional strategy and an annual update.

We have improved our visibility by advertising in newspapers, magazine articles, maintaining an Internet site, and interviews on the radio, as well as by participation in various tourist conventions and groups. As well, a toll-free number for the United States helps our clients get in touch with us easily.

Our primary target market is the Québec market, especially the large urban centres. Quebecers who travel are our best foreign ambassadors. In addition, during these first two years of operation, access to the Québec market has been easier and less costly. To reach the Québec market we have advertised in a number of large-circulation newspapers and specialized magazines, such as *Québec Science*, *Québec Oiseaux*, the *Espaces* magazines, and our second target market for the first few years is Eastern Canada, Ontario and the Maritimes.

The Nova Scotia market (Halifax in particular) has been reached by a publication in a magazine specializing in the outdoors, and the Ontario market is being reached through Ontario tour operators and a few items in the Toronto newspapers.

Our third market is birdwatchers and to target this market we advertise in magazines specializing in the outdoors, such as ornithology and science in Québec and in the United States. We have drawn up a list of persons interested in our product, and we are carefully tracking the effects of our advertising.

We are also listed in the tourist guides published regionally, and the Tourism Québec guides for the American and English Canadian markets. We also work with Maritime Québec for the foreign market. *Cooperative advertising* provided by its agencies is of great interest to us, and we are ready to collaborate with our partners in order to reduce advertising costs.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – CONSIDER OFFERING PRODUCT AS A PROMOTIONAL TOOL***

We have provided cruises as lottery prizes for not-for-profit organizations in the target markets of ornithologists, Québec municipalities and the Toronto corporate market.

At the beginning of our operations, an effective advertising strategy was to invite journalists aboard the *Echo des Mers*, with financial support from Tourism Québec, for a mini-cruise. Through this initiative, some twenty journalists have participated in our cruises and then published articles describing their voyage and their impression of it. In addition, a dozen journalists have participated in our cruises during the season. They have published articles for the international markets of Germany, France and the United States, and also in Québec following their experience.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – MARKET ON THE INTERNET***

Internet marketing can be a valuable tool in reaching your target audiences.

#### ***Examples:***

- We have found the Internet to be one of the most effective ways of reaching our target clientele. A number of reservations, particularly from the United States and English Canada markets as well as from the European market, have come to us over the Internet. We were also showcased as a "special feature" on the Small Ship Cruises Website, following the editor's cruise with us.
- We have set up a bilingual site (<http://www.ecomertours.com>) which contains descriptions of our cruises, destinations, the ship, our menus, services, a number of photos, passengers' comments, etc. We have also provided links to our partners' sites and the sites for the places we visit.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RADIO ADVERTISING CAN BE EFFECTIVE IN REACHING DIVERSIFIED MARKETS***

Radio is a particularly interesting means of reaching a large and very diversified clientele.

#### ***Example:***

Our President has done a number of radio interviews at both the local and provincial levels. We have also offered a cruise for two as a lottery prize in a CBC program, which gave us the chance of increasing our list of potential clients appreciably. The President of Ecomertours Nord-Sud has also done an interview on the CBC Sunday program "Comme une bouteille à la mer." At the end of October 1999, we also appeared on the pan-Canadian channel Prime TV on the Toronto program "On Top of the World," which was shown again in February 2000. A spin-off benefit of this was that the producer made a video of this program for us to use in our own promotions.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – TARGET YOUR BROCHURE DISTRIBUTION***

Brochures can be effective promotional tools if they are distributed in a targeted way.

#### ***Example:***

Each year, our brochure is distributed in tourist offices, offices of Tourism Québec overseas, in trade shows, at various hotels, and we send it to anyone who asks us for information. In the spring, our American partner will distribute our flyers at four American trade shows dealing with the outdoors. This autumn (1999), we mailed our year 2000 flyer to 235 wholesalers and tour operators that we have already met, to 175 travel agencies who have contacted us for information, to 87 journalists with whom we know, and with other people who have made a request. In addition, we have had postcards printed with our picture, and we sent them to the more than 7,000 persons listed in our client database. In mid-December, we will also send a Christmas letter along with our 2000 flyer to our previous clients.



### ***BEST PRACTICE – TARGET NEW MARKETS TO EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS***

In our experience, reaching a new market takes two to three years, while each year we are adding a new target market to expand over the next three years.

#### ***Examples:***

- In terms of the international market, in the year 2000 we will be involved through French, Belgian, German and American tour operators with whom we have been in contact for two years, as well as our association with Québec inbound operators. The various trade shows we have attended have given us the chance of making ourselves known and also of establishing important contacts with various tour operators, wholesalers, agencies, journalists and others. At present, we are choosing trade shows in a strategic manner to reach our target market.
- We are targeting the market of tour organizers for ecological groups, university graduates and American museums, etc. for the next few years. This is a market with people with a high level of education and an interest in the environment and educational travel.
- Since our tourist season in Québec is limited, we are working at developing other options for operating in the South during the winter season, and at extending our summer season in Québec.

### ***Client Service***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – CLIENT SERVICE SHOULD BE OF THE BEST QUALITY***

Our staff is at the heart of our organization, and client service must be of the best quality. First and foremost because we want to provide our passengers with a unique experience on the river, but also because our clients will go on to be our best means of promotion.

That is why we ask our passengers to write down comments for us at the end of each voyage (both positive and negative), as well as improvements we could make to our product. Based on these comments, we reassess the service and the product. Since the cruises are relatively long and the number of clients is small, our staff get to know them and they get to know our staff. This allows us to provide personalized service, and our clients do appreciate our staff since they are always cheerful, available and helpful. The fact that we have a qualified naturalist is also important for our credibility, because our clients count on her to answer their questions. The evening discussions, the small plays and mini concerts also entertain many passengers while teaching about the region and its resources in an enjoyable way.

In summary, the personal nature of our service, the places we visit and the safe and comfortable design of the ship all make our passengers very satisfied with their cruise. You only need to read the comments they give us when they leave, or the letters they have sent us afterwards to be convinced!

## ***Training of Human Resources***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL FOR A QUALITY, SAFE EXPERIENCE***

Training is a very important aspect of operating an adventure tourism business. Training is particularly important for Ecomertours as the mechanics of operating a ship and the quality of interpretation we provide requires a particularly high level of skill and expertise.

#### ***Examples:***

- Aboard our ship, the captain is responsible for running the operations (he is under the supervision of the President). There is one staff member in each department (chief mechanic, chief of hospitality services, and first mate) responsible for directly supervising the employees under them.
- Aboard the Echo des Mers, the ship's crew is specially trained at the Québec Maritime Institute. In addition, we are wholly responsible for the training of cadets from the Maritime Institute, who work on the ship to log the "sea time" experience they need to finish their program of study.
- Our naturalist is a certified biologist who is still continuing with her reading and research, which is necessary so that she can have in-depth knowledge of the fauna and flora of each of the sites we visit and of the history of these places. She attends the training program of the Marine Mammal Active Observation Network, offered at the beginning of the season. As well, our biologist trains the hospitality employees in biology for when they accompany the passengers on their day excursions.
- The members of the ship's crew have taken sea emergency training, and the majority of them have also taken first-aid courses. The hospitality personnel have also had first aid-training, and are all qualified in their fields. For the past two years we have also had a student trainee from the Matane Cégep's Tourism program for client service and reservations.

As of the spring of 2000, staff are now receiving annual economic training with financial support provided by the Québec Federation of Labour's Solidarity Fund.

## ***Management and Motivation of Staff***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – USE EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS AND MOTIVATE STAFF***

Your employees are your biggest asset and they should be involved in business and product evaluations to identify new opportunities and areas of improvement. Further, having your staff involved in this aspect of the business is very motivational.

***Example:***

Weekly meetings are held with employees to review events. We discuss evaluations done by clients, and improvements that would be useful and possible to make. Employees are well aware of our operations and participate with their suggestions for improvements. This approach is a factor that motivates our employees. However, what motivates our staff the most is seeing the satisfaction of clients, who make no secret of their enjoyment all through the voyage. Clients also keep in touch with our staff through exchanging photos and letters, a situation which is after all interesting and exceptional. As a sign of success, we have kept almost all of the same staff for two years.

## ***Involvement In The Industry***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – BE INVOLVED IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY***

As mentioned earlier, we are a member of a number of associations, which allows us to be better known and to take advantage of these associations. Apart from our regional tourist associations in the Lower Saint Lawrence and Duplessis, we are a member of Québec Maritime (QM), with whom we work for the international market; the Association of Québec Adventure Tourism Professionals (APTAQ), with whom we maintain important links for adventure tourism, and the Lower Saint Lawrence Marine Mammal Active Observation Network (ROAMM) (Environment Canada), for whom we collect data on observations of marine mammals during our summer cruises.

We are also developing business relations with local tourism operators at the sites we visit on the North Shore, Anticosti, the national and provincial parks, villages, etc.

Since last February, the North Shore Regional Solidarity Fund has joined with us and we are now a member of the great family of partner businesses of regional solidarity funds.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – PARTNER WITH TOUR OPERATORS AND WHOLESALERS TO ATTRACT NEW MARKETS***

For our American, English Canadian, and European clientele, we work with a number of partners (four main partners) who are tour operators and wholesalers, and for the year 2000 we are adding five new tour operator partners for the Belgian, German, French and British markets.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES***

To investigate the potential of operating our ship down South in the winter, we are currently having discussions with a promoter in the Gaspé who is already in contact with people involved in these types of operations to explore this potential.

We would also like to establish solid links with other organizations, in order to develop new tourism concepts and products of high quality in Québec and by Quebecers, particularly in the field of marine studies and eco-tourism. We believe that the development of cruises on the seaway should be done by Québec businesses. There is a niche to fill if we want to create jobs locally for our young people and remain in control of our own development. We're doing some good things here in Québec, and we should be proud.



*Excursion Mauricie  
St-Étienne-des-Grès, Québec  
Soft adventure operator offering a variety of trips in partnership  
with a resort including mountain biking, kayaking,  
Rabaska canoeing, birdwatching, and winter products.*

## **"Partnerships: The Road to Success!" – Excursion Mauricie**

*Developed by the Economic Planning Group  
from speaking notes provided by  
Mario Marchand, President  
– Excursion Mauricie*

### ***Finding Your Clientele***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – ANALYSE THE SITUATION***

Until the mid-1980s, the regional accommodations sector in the Mauricie area of Québec was primarily made up of hotels which attracted Québec workers who had very little time to spend on tourist leisure pursuits. At that time, the region was defined solely as a "drive through" region. The Mauricie tour sector began developing rapidly at the beginning of the 1990s. A number of excellent country inns and B&Bs were set up, managed by competent and forward-looking owners. The arrival of new clients provided promising prospects for development.

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – DEFINE THE PROBLEM***

The Mauricie is a territory where nature and culture coexist. Lakes and forest were waiting to be discovered. The reputation of its experienced outdoor guides was not exaggerated. Since the seigneurial period in New France, regional craftsmen have been masters in the exploration of uninhabited regions and in the construction of canoes, and their reputation goes beyond our borders. But how can these advantages and natural riches be made available to tourism clientele?

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – DO YOUR RESEARCH***

With the help of statistical research and through discussions with the owners of the B&Bs and country inns in the region, we have gradually developed a precise market portrait, including the number of tourists that stay in the country inns and B&Bs, the number of nights they stay in the region, the number of times they come back, their mode of transportation, and the activities they are interested in.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SELECT AN OPERATING METHOD***

Once the data had been analysed, we decided to develop a business which would organize day excursions for small groups of up to eight people, either by canoe, bicycle or hiking, with equipment and lunch provided. Clients would be met directly at the places they were staying, and returned to the same spots by dinner time. They would be transported in a very comfortable four-wheel drive truck with a trailer for the canoes and bicycles, so that they would really get the feeling of beginning the adventure as soon as they left.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – APPLYING RESEARCH TO BUILD THE BUSINESS***

A market study allowed us to identify the European clientele staying in the B&Bs of the region as 85% Francophone. They travel in very small groups, either in couples or in families, and they adore the wide open spaces. A partnership with the B&Bs was therefore the most direct way to gain access to this clientele.

The advantage that made advertising our product effectively possible was **direct contact of the owner of the B&B with his clients** during breakfast. **These owners have the time** to talk about the advantages of an excursion and to describe the advantages of a guided excursion to those who are sensitive and open to nature.

At the same time, the B&B owner creates a better impression of their property and themselves by allowing the client to experience and share a stimulating adventure before and after the excursion. They give their clients the option of **staying one more night** at their property, of eating meals, of keeping the client in the region, and showing them that the Mauricie has a lot to offer.

When clients go to the Gaspé or other far-away regions, they are often in a hurry. They stay at a country inn for one night and would like to take an excursion, but they don't have enough time. We do not try to pressure clients. When they are **on their way back** to this region, we encourage them to come back and choose an excursion, if their timetable is not so full.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY YOUR POTENTIAL CLIENTELE***

#### **Baby boomer clients:**

The rapid increase of the age group of young retirees aged 50 and over is a possibility for development that will succeed if activities are arranged based on listening to their needs, the experience is authentic, and there is a shared involvement in the activity between the guide and the client. The level of experience the client has in an outdoor environment will need to be assessed and this will require the professional to develop high-quality personalized activities.

#### **Paraplegic children:**

It is important to provide everyone with the opportunity of experiencing and enjoying nature. Excursion Mauricie has developed safe ways of making the natural environment accessible to paraplegic children. For example, during excursions on a river in calm water, special benches in the Rabaska canoes provide secure support, protective headgear is worn, and the ratio of guides is increased.

Excursion Mauricie caters to physically challenged children in collaboration with Kéroul (the Québec association for people with limited abilities).

## ***Promotion With Partners - The Power Of Helping Each Other!***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH PARTNERS***

Excursion Mauricie maintains partnerships with a number of regional partners and businesses. Active partners include 21 accommodation properties representing 550 rooms in the area, and 517 campsites at the Mauricie National Park:

#### **Fixed Roof Accommodations:**

- 11 B&Bs (Bed & Breakfast)
- 10 country inns/hotels

#### **Camping:**

- 517 camping sites in the Mauricie National Park

We have built our business by promoting our products via country inns.

How do we do this?

- A publicity card about Excursion Mauricie's products is inserted into the B&B's brochure, and distributed free.
- A FAM tour is provided to B&B owners to acquaint them with the adventure activities and sites to keep them up to date on information concerning the product.
- An alliance with the B&Bs is formed to promote their products by joining international information networks. For example, five tourist B&Bs in Trois-Rivières have been listed for the past four years in the *Guide du routard*, a very well-known guide popularly used by Europeans.
- An annual dinner party in a maple sugar house is hosted by Excursion Mauricie to discuss the summer product offering with eleven B&B owners.

### ***Mutual Benefits of Partnerships***

Excursion Mauricie has a dynamic partnership with the Mauricie National Park whereby they provide adventure experiences to enhance the range of services offered by the National Park. This is a win-win partnership with mutual benefits for both partners; Mauricie National Park is able to offer products provided by Excursion Mauricie, and Excursion Mauricie is able to tap into park visitors. As well, the partnership is enabling the National Park to attract new visitors through its affiliation with Excursion Mauricie. Overall, the client is the winner as they receive a more diverse experience than that which can be provided by one partner alone.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – KNOW YOUR PARTNER'S BUSINESS***

For the partnership to be successful, however, **each partner must be very aware of each other's business in terms of strengths, opportunities, and constraints.** For example, the National Park is limited in their ability to offer adventure experiences because of budgetary and staffing constraints. Excursion Mauricie was able to identify this as an opportunity to forge an alliance to expand the experiences and services provided to park visitors.

It is also important to **understand your partner's operating philosophy**. For the National Park, it was important that Excursion Mauricie understood their conservation mandate and that they were a professional operator. Both partners feel their alliance is a unique way to provide complementary offerings rather than compete for the same market.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – INVEST IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE LONG-TERM***

Developing a solid partnership is a long-term initiative. Partnerships do not evolve over night. If your attempts to develop a partnership fail the first time, persevere! Work together with your potential partners to figure out each other's needs and strive to identify how you can work together to build stronger businesses.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – GOOD PARTNERSHIPS ARE BUILT ON A SPIRIT OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION***

Excursion Mauricie's partnership with the accommodation sector in the region is a profitable one. For example, Excursion Mauricie brings 500 additional room nights to one property alone. All businesses share a common philosophy and mutual respect and are achieving success in their partnerships.

### ***Partnership With Le Baluchon Country Inn: - The Quality of Partners: A Sign of Success!***

Excursion Mauricie began working with Le Baluchon Country Inn in 1995 by providing guide and skidoo services for groups of Europeans staying at the inn each week during the winter seasons.

Le Baluchon established a formal business partnership with Excursion Mauricie when they became aware of our high-quality expertise and the stability and professionalism of our business.

The way the partnership operates is this: Excursion Mauricie maintains an adventure centre kiosk with equipment rentals and guide services offered at Le Baluchon. Excursion Mauricie provides a high level of expertise in outdoor activities, and also ensures a human presence on the site. Le Baluchon could not provide these services on their own.

In the beginning, Le Baluchon provided the equipment and Excursion Mauricie acted as an adventure concessionaire. But when the popularity of the relationship resulted in a massive influx of summer tourists, Excursion Mauricie offered to purchase all the outdoor equipment in addition to enhancing the inventory with additional equipment. The partnership with Le Baluchon was then reinforced and consolidated by an agreement between the two parties.

Overall, the partnership is a highly valuable one as more services are now available to guests and Le Baluchon is able to operate much like a destination resort with equipment rental (e.g., kayaks, mountain bikes, canoes, skis, snowshoes) included in the price of the accommodation. Excursion Mauricie also provides guests with a range of guided adventure trips and snowmobile rentals on a fee basis.

The partnership has also resulted in a significant improvement in accommodation demand at the inn, and has enabled Excursion Mauricie to operate a viable adventure business year round.



Other advantages for Excursion Mauricie are;

- No rent to pay for the adventure centre kiosk.
- Great visibility, since there is a lot of traffic and all clients going to the inn that pass right by the on-site outdoor facilities.
- The outdoor equipment is located centrally, to facilitate easy access for transportation to other sites, easier surveillance, rapid inventory taking, and maintenance facilities.

***Details of Agreement between Excursion Mauricie and Le Baluchon Country Inn:***

The partnership agreement between Excursion Mauricie and Le Baluchon Country Inn involves the following;

- Excursion Mauricie maintains guide staff at Le Baluchon 300 days/year to provide for guided tours and equipment rental.
- A small surcharge is levied to *each* room night at the inn to offset the expenses associated with equipment rental and maintaining a constant presence on the site. (The surcharge is levied whether or not the client uses the equipment, and is included in the room rate.)

This surcharge ensures:

- That fixed costs of Excursion Mauricie are covered;
- The frequent replacement of equipment to maintain quality;
- Someone on-site 300 days per year;
- The presence of experienced guides who are faithful to the business.

In return, commissions on guided activities from clients not using Le Baluchon accommodations are remitted to Le Baluchon.

In a similar fashion, Excursion Mauricie works with its other 20 accommodation partners by offering guided trips to their guests. These trips are operated throughout the region and include guest pickup and drop-off at the respective hotels. In return, these accommodation properties receive a commission.

***Partners That Work at Le Baluchon - Daily Collaboration!***

The partnership with Le Baluchon Country Inn involves daily collaboration with their staff.

For example, staff at the inn inform guests about the outdoor activities available on site, and when the guides are temporarily absent, they accompany guests to the kiosk to return equipment.

The grounds staff work in close collaboration with Excursion Mauricie to ensure that the infrastructure, paths, and river docks are always easily accessible and safe, and by keeping informed of weather conditions.

Similarly, the horse stable staff provide a horse carriage shuttle service for clients to certain activity sites such as skating or cross-country skiing in the winter.

There is also a complementary relationship among the region's adventure tourism operators. When a product is not provided by one operator, they will inform their clients about what is available in the region, such as rock climbing, whitewater canoeing, sea kayaking, etc., and refer them to other businesses.

## ***Other Best Practices – What Sets Us Apart***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – TAILOR YOUR EXPERIENCES TO YOUR MARKETS***

Excursion Mauricie caters to families. For example, what sets us apart is;

- Interpretation adapted to a family-based clientele (the guide adapts his interpretation to the interest level of children and parents)
- Freedom of movement for parents
- Increased safety and quality of equipment
- Ease of observation of fauna

#### ***Examples:***

- When catering to a family, we typically place children in the canoe with the guide. The guide oversees the safety of canoeing, entertains the children, and tells them about the flora and fauna at an age-appropriate level. The parents then have the opportunity to paddle on their own in a second canoe. This allows them a much deeper appreciation of nature and the experience, and ensures they relax and enjoy their surroundings, while the guide oversees the children's experience. This arrangement has been very successful as both children and parents enjoy and appreciate the experience.
- In another example, Excursion Mauricie has an innovative way of maximizing trips with only a few clients. On such occasions, we take them to new areas so we can explore and learn too. This offsets our costs and enables us to continue providing customized experiences for small groups.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – USE INCLEMENT WEATHER TO YOUR ADVANTAGE***

Even rain becomes a source of pleasure and amusement for our clients! In rainy weather, we ensure guests enjoy their adventure experience by;

- Providing guests with complete equipment including spare rain gear
- Encouraging clients to test their limits by motivating them to succeed and enjoy the difference of doing an activity in the rain
- Having a positive attitude to help see and appreciate the weather in another light

For example, we provide an excursion by canoe on a lake in the Saint-Maurice Wildlife Preserve, or hiking in Mauricie National Park, in a fine rain with lunch under the trees.

In these situations, the guides tailor the experience and encourage clients to be open to new experiences such as;

- The beautiful scent of conifers in the rain
- Foggy and mysterious landscapes
- Creative photography



*Expédition Eau Vive, Hull, Québec|  
Nature tourism company offering Rabaska  
canoeing trips on the Ottawa River, along with  
packages featuring Tai Chi, bird watching,  
culture and heritage, and canoe camping.*

**“Redefining Nature Tourism, Product  
Diversification, and The Importance of  
Partnerships and Social Involvement”  
– Expédition Eau Vive**

*Developed by the Economic Planning Group from speaking  
notes provided by Pierre Desjardins, Director  
– Expédition Eau Vive*

### ***Introduction***

My name is Pierre Desjardins, the Director of Expédition Eau Vive. Expédition Eau Vive is a nature tourism business. We have been in business for more than 10 years and mainly operate in the Ottawa region. Our products mainly use the canoe as the means of transportation, and the natural environment as the venue.

Our company strengths:

- our understanding of the environment
- our partnerships
- our guides, professionalism and expertise (we place a lot of emphasis on training)

### ***Redefine And Classify Nature Tourism***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – REDEFINE AND CLASSIFY NATURE TOURISM, BUT DEFINE YOUR PRODUCTS CLEARLY***

In 1998 I participated in a pan-Canadian committee organized by the Canadian Tourism Human Resources Council. This organization governs and develops standards on working qualifications for personnel working in the field of tourism, from dining room staff to adventure tour guides.

I represented the province of Québec. We had been brought together to develop a basic description of the job of an adventure guide. One of the subjects we discussed at length, without ever finding any conclusive answers, was the title of the document. That could seem ironic, but actually it is significant. We were talking about ecotourism, adventure tourism, soft adventure. there were all sorts of ideas. But none of the proposed names was unanimously accepted by everyone.

After all, I think this is normal. Nature tourism is a relatively young industry, which has developed in various directions. As well, the image of the adventure tourism industry is often confused with that of extreme sports.

Therefore, it's normal that we as adventure operators should have to seek to redefine ourselves.

At Expédition Eau Vive we have just experienced a period in which we felt the need to redefine ourselves, and we analyzed the progress we have already made:

- where we came from
- where we wanted to go
- where we actually did go
- and where we want to go now.

This is the context within which I classified the type of tourism that I call “adventure tourism.”

In my business, I'm now referring to “nature tourism” as including all categories of tourism that involve nature in a significant way. (See table below.)

<b>Nature Tourism</b>					
<b>Adventure tourism</b>	<b>Ecotourism</b>	<b>Soft adventure</b>	<b>Spiritual tourism</b>	<b>Cultural tourism</b>	<b>Sports/hard Adventure tourism</b>

For example, we offer a package that includes an excursion in a Rabaska canoe, a trip on a steam locomotive, and accommodations.

However, it isn't enough to develop package deals. You must ensure that the various products offered within a package are part of an integrated whole and reach the same clientele.

The presentation of nature products, the understanding of these products in terms of the types of client they could attract, and the method used to promote them has been a very important element in the success of my business.

## **Product Diversification**

### ***BEST PRACTICE: USE PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION TO DIVERSIFY YOUR MARKETS***

You can diversify your product in terms of the core activity, but I believe that *it is just as useful to diversify your products* without changing the activity.

For example, I have chosen to diversify my business while working with my own resources and in keeping with my qualifications. If you refer to the table above, you will understand that our products all use the canoe as the vehicle and nature as the background. What changes are the *objectives* of each tour, and the *related activities* we offer with it.

For example, our products are positioned to cater to different markets as follows:

- ***Adventure products:*** one-week canoe expedition. The canoe is the means of transport. Discovering open spaces, fauna and flora, and going canoe-camping are the principal activities.
- ***Ecotourism product:*** a one-day trip through the Plaisance wildlife preserve. The canoe is the means of transport. Ornithology is the principal activity.
- ***Spiritual tourism:*** four-day canoe expedition. The canoe is the means of transport. Contact with nature, reconnecting with nature, Tai Chi and meditation are the principal activities.
- ***Cultural tourism:*** a one-hour Rabaska canoe expedition. The canoe is the means of transport. Talks on the history of our region and the “coureurs des bois” woodsmen are the principal activities.

### ***BEST PRACTICE –ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS AND ASSOCIATIONS***

Developing a nature tourism business is a little like fighting against time. When I ask the question, “Do you think I have a chance at succeeding in my business?” I always get a “yes” for an answer. The question isn’t whether or not I’m going to succeed, it’s how long it will take.

Developing packages by associating with partners allows us to:

- diversify and improve the quality of our products
- benefit from their experience
- benefit from their network of clients
- increase our visibility and credibility

#### ***Example:***

We partner with the Museum of Civilization and an aboriginal tourism operator - Turtle Island Tourism Company - to offer a product featuring a Rabaska canoe excursion, a visit to the Museum of Civilization, and native dancing.

The partnership developed with the Museum of Civilization is interesting enough that we should spend some time looking at it. It is rather exceptional.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization is a national caliber tourist attraction that has a major presence in the Québec, Ontario and the Canadian tourist industry. For Expédition Eau Vive, a small nature tourism enterprise, being associated with a partner of this size had immediate positive repercussions, most particularly with respect to visibility and credibility.

We operate our Rabaska canoe excursions from the Museum of Civilization docks, and we partner on selling trips.

After our second year of business operating at the Museum of Civilization, one of the products that we offered in collaboration with the Museum received a prize at the Québec Tourism Grand Prize Awards. In fact, at the risk of offending some people, I am convinced that the product which received this honour would not have gained the same recognition if it had been provided without the Museum's association and in another location.

We have been successful in this partnership because we provided a cultural nature product that met our partner's objectives. We have greatly benefitted from their network of contacts, and the Museum has been a great source of learning for us.

It is important to understand that a partnership cannot be only one way if it is to succeed.

We have also gained a lot of visibility, and a variety of activities that contribute to the positive energy that already exists at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. I do not believe that our expertise would have gained its reputation for excellence so quickly without the contribution of these various partners.

***BEST PRACTICE – HAVING A QUALITY PRODUCT ALLOWS YOU TO REACH THE GOALS OF CREDIBILITY AND VISIBILITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS***

In the first place, the establishment of a good partnership is based on a solid foundation of quality operations. This can mean guides of the highest calibre and equipment of the highest quality, etc. The result of these operating choices is a *high-quality product with higher returns*, but it is necessary to recognize that good quality partnership products take longer to organize.

The principal result of partnerships is the creation of a faithful clientele: clients who come back year after year. Another result of being a quality partner and having credibility is the very fact that I am standing in front of you today as a host operator for the CTC's Best Practices Tour.

The great drawback of choosing this method is time, and that the various forms of partnership can quickly change the visibility and credibility of our business.

It has taken me a few years, and a number of unfruitful attempts, before I have successfully created durable partnerships that are compatible with my products. I could show you a dozen publications that did not produce any results such as brochures which advertised my packages with various partners.

***Points to remember to produce positive results from a partnership package arrangement:***

- Use compatible products that go well together
- These products should reach the same target clients
- Have respect for the expertise of each partner
- Communication is key
- The large players should not be considered as endless sources of income
- All the partners must participate in advertising

***Target Marketing***

Another particularly important element I would like to mention in this presentation is marketing.

There are a number of ways of promoting your business including web sites which we have in particular found to produce impressive results. However, I won't go into details here.

The key thing to recognize is that in this industry, each type of product is generally sold by a wholesaler or inbound operator, or an association or agency that has a very specific *target market*.

***BEST PRACTICE – SELL THE RIGHT PRODUCT TO THE RIGHT WHOLESALER***

The key is to sell the right product to the right wholesaler, so you don't waste your time or theirs.

***BEST PRACTICE – DEFINE YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR PRODUCTS CLEARLY***

Also, knowing who you are and defining your business and your products clearly in the marketplace are extremely important.

Nonetheless, you can't talk about market development if product being offered is not of really high quality. This is essential.

***Social Involvement***

***BEST PRACTICE – BE INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND YOUR REGIONAL TOURISM INDUSTRY***

Allow me to say a few words about the benefits of social involvement in your community and your industry.

As a company, we are always looking for more visibility and credibility. This is why I have become a "specialist in volunteering." My volunteer efforts include;

- As a canoe instructor, I give volunteer courses at canoe camping clubs
- I loan out my equipment for good causes
- I am a member of the Board of Directors for the Québec Human Resources Council
- I lead an important initiative concerning the qualification of guides

- I am a member of the Québec Canoe Camping Federation's training committee
- I am the President of the Association of Québec Adventure Tourism Professionals (APTAQ)

In total, this adds up to approximately one day of volunteer work per week, which is a lot.

However, there are benefits associated with this involvement which I consider to be important;

- Credibility and high visibility
- Reputation
- Always keeping informed about new legislation, policies, etc.
- Always keeping informed about new programs such as new sources of funding

You know that when a wholesaler wants to sell an adventure product and they have the choice between a number of businesses, the thing that often makes the difference is the operator's reputation. Many adventure tourism operators have an excellent product, but they don't have enough visibility and are not well known.

## ***Training***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ON-GOING TRAINING OF STAFF IS ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN A QUALITY PRODUCT***

Even though training is not one of my presentation topics, I'd like to mention that you can't be better than the people working for you, and in this context ongoing training of staff is essential for maintaining the quality of your product.

## ***Conclusion***

To sum up my presentation, I feel the main objectives for success are;

- *Quality;*
- *Visibility; and*
- *Credibility.*





*Horizon Nature Aventures,  
Montreal, Québec  
Receptive operator specializing in adventure  
and nature tourism in Québec.*

## “Finding Your Niche and Specializing” – Horizon Nature Aventures

*By Sylvain Deschênes, Managing Director  
– Horizon Nature Aventures*

### ***We Are In The Era of Specialization***

In 1996, there were 125 adventure tourism operators in Québec. At the beginning of the year 2000, there were more than 425! This industry is experiencing rapid growth, and sooner or later it will go through a shakedown. The companies that survive will be our “specialists,” those who have found their niche!

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – FIND YOUR NICHE***

Have you found your niche?

To find your niche, you need to keep yourself informed on a number of factors:

- Trends in the industry
- Trends of local, national and international consumers
- Adventure tourism today: what is being offered regionally, nationally, and globally

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – KEEP ABREAST OF TRENDS IN THE ADVENTURE TOURISM INDUSTRY***

To keep abreast of trends in the adventure tourism industry, you should;

- Subscribe to travel professional magazines (weekly, monthly);
- Constantly seek out and consult statistics on arrivals to your destination;
- Consult the latest studies put out by tourist offices, governments, municipalities, etc.
- Subscribe to certain tourism newsgroups on the Internet (local, national and international);
- Consult the monthly magazines on the rack.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY MARKET TRENDS***

Identify trends of local, national and international consumers by;

- There are a number of studies on consumer trends, including some American best sellers (management gurus);
- Monthly magazines on the rack;
- A number of reports on market studies are available on the Internet;
- Read business magazines and journals.

#### ***Example:***

Be curious about everything that is being done and everything that is happening. There isn't a single day that I don't come home with all sorts of small flyers or articles. This keeps us in touch with the needs of consumers and their developments.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RESEARCH WHAT IS BEING OFFERED IN THE MARKETPLACE***

It is important to develop a profile of adventure tourism today: what is being offered?

You need to;

- Research services provided by adventure tourism professionals in your region, province and country;
- By consulting international magazines on adventure tourism, you can see things going on internationally that are not yet being offered here;
- Consult the Websites of the major adventure tourism destinations and do not hesitate to contact them;
- Find out what differentiates your region from other Canadian destinations.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RECOGNIZE THAT YOUR COMPETITION IS OTHER INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS - NOT OTHER PROVINCES OR REGIONS***

Never forget an important point: the real competition is not your neighbour or another province, but the great international adventure tourism destinations such as the Grand Canyon, Kenya, Australia and New Zealand, Mount Everest, etc.

#### ***Example:***

The Canadian West is in a very good position today as an adventure destination with the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains. To show how we are different from the Canadian West, we have decided to highlight the things that best distinguish Québec as a destination: the Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Saguenay Fjord.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – USE THIS INTELLIGENCE TO DEFINE YOUR NICHE***

Now that you have a good idea of what is being done in your destination, what is available internationally, and you have a better understanding of the needs and trends of consumers, it's time to define your own niche.

The study of your competitors should not be giving you ideas, but rather show you what is already being done! Don't waste your time reproducing one of your competitor's winning services or products: they've already beaten you to it!

#### ***Example:***

After more than a year of studying consumer trends concerning destinations in Québec, Canada and internationally, based on statistics of national and international incoming travellers, we established our own niche as a receptive operator: *adventure!* Of course, a number of people have tried to discourage us, saying "The market isn't large enough; "You'll be too specialized..."

However, we stayed true to our original idea and objectives. Today, just three years later, we have become the **specialized inbound operator for adventure tourism in Québec**, the point of reference in Québec for nature holidays.

Our current position: *Display Québec's nature in all its aspects with an original and very high-quality product offer.*

#### ***As a specialized inbound operator in adventure tourism:***

- We are often disappointed by the product of many adventure tourism operators, as many are just a carbon copy of experiences from one region to the next;
- We work only with *product specialists*. We recognize that each of these operators has expertise in a discipline, and we avoid generalists who want to provide a whole range of activities and services.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – YOU'VE FOUND YOUR NICHE: NOW STICK TO IT!***

- The hardest thing isn't finding your niche, it's sticking to it! You will constantly be tempted by outside offers;
- You have to know how to develop your product or service in response to trends and markets, while still keeping your main focus;
- Become a member of your sectoral associations (Tourist association, chamber of commerce, professional association, etc.) This will give you greater credibility;
- Get involved with your tourist association. This is a way of keeping abreast of a number of projects and you will actively be taking part in the development strategies and market development of your region.

## **Create Solid Partnerships**

The tourist industry is very large and diversified. You will constantly have to deal with the large national and international players. To ensure that your business has a solid base, you would be well advised to develop partnership agreements with your suppliers, clients and other service providers. When you do this, you protect your business and your products from your competitors, and you will reinforce your position and strength in the marketplace.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SELECT THE RIGHT PARTNERS***

Now that you have defined your product and your niche, you can determine which organizations and/or structures you should develop partnerships with.

- A partnership develops on a win-win basis;
- A partnership must be developed over a number of years. When you're talking about developing a market you'll start seeing results during the second year (three to five years is normal);
- Developing a partnership with a national organization can require time. You will need to demonstrate your credibility and be persistent.

### ***To identify partners;***

- Do an inventory of the businesses and organizations which whom a partnership would be a good idea (suppliers, complementary businesses, retailers, etc.);
- Categorize this list according to type of partnership and by priority: primary and secondary;
- Begin with the partnerships that could have a direct effect on your product or service (e.g., complementary services);
- Write down what you have found out about your future partner, and especially what you can offer him.

### ***Example:***

At Horizon Nature Aventures, we have identified two types of partnerships we want to establish:

- An agreement with our professional partners (adventure tourism operators), and
- Partnership agreements for market development with the regional tourist associations and other national organizations.

***Details of our agreement requirements with our partner adventure tourism operators:***

- We identify the obligations of each party;
- Adventure tourism operators working with us must provide us with exclusive products;
- We require a renewable three-year agreement period;
- Operators should represent a region and offer a range of exclusive products and services;
- We provide a national and international market development plan;
- High quality standards;
- A line of communication and a continuous service delivery process;
- A price list in terms of the distribution network.

***Details of our agreements with regional tourist associations and national organizations:***

- We identify each party's market development efforts;
- We require a product offer centred on the region concerned;
- A one-year agreement, with a three-year option;
- A shared national and international market development plan;
- The benefits and visibility - creating potential for each party;
- A distinct line of communication;
- The development of regional products.

***Example:***

Since the creation of our business, we have attempted to establish a partnership with VIA Rail Canada. Today, we have developed a nature product in Québec accessible by train from Eastern Canada. After a number of years of overtures, the two organizations finally concluded a partnership agreement, and we are developing tools for the shared market development of nature trips accessible by train in Québec. A brochure entitled "Nature Tour By Train" is now distributed in all the VIA Rail stations in Québec and Ontario, and internationally through representatives of both companies.

***Move Off The Beaten Path***

You have a unique product you want consumers to know about. Be imaginative, and leave traditional market development plans behind but without leaving the traditional *distribution network* behind!

### ***BEST PRACTICE – BE CREATIVE IN PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS***

Our industry is young and it must carve out its own place and create new promotional tools. Don't forget, our real competitors are the international adventure tourism destinations.

- You may need to do advertising that emphasizes a common or everyday consumer product, for example, try to set up a contest with a beer or liquor company, a large restaurant chain, etc.;
- Offer trips in collaboration with a T.V. or radio station in exchange for advertising;
- In collaboration with retailers, ensure that you are prominently displayed at international trade shows.

Be imaginative! We're the ones who can develop the image of the Canadian destination!

#### ***Example:***

With the collaboration of a number of partners, we launched a promotion on the largest French-language radio station in Belgium. The aim of the promotion was to make Québec known as a winter sports destination! Every day for a week, a participant won a one-week trip for two to Québec in a multi-activity package. The result was that Québec had never had so much advertising and such high visibility in Belgium.

This promotion was done on prime time in the morning on the radio, with advertisements on the television and in the newspapers. During the participants' trips, there were direct satellite link-ups with the participants. Following the event, we won the prize for market development of a Québec destination internationally at the National Québec Tourism Grand Prizes in 1999.

#### ***Example:***

To make Québec known as an outdoors destination, we created the "Trappers Competition" event. This was an international mountain bike and running competition that lasted for six days, which included a tourism segment in three tourist regions. Emphasis was placed on the discovery of nature with naturalist guides and meetings with native peoples. This event had a lot of media coverage and was good advertising for the destination, and at the same time raised the profile of Horizon Nature Aventures and its partners.



[www.killarneyoutfitters.com](http://www.killarneyoutfitters.com)

*Killarney Outfitters, Killarney, Ontario Outfitter offering kayaking in the Georgian Bay and Killarney Provincial Park. Also offer guided canoeing, hiking, outfitting/rentals, out of their base lodge operation.*

## “INTERNET POWER: Shaping the Future of Your Business” – Killarney Outfitters

*by Jennifer East, Manager  
– Killarney Outfitters*

### ***The Process - Half the fun is getting there!***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – CHOOSE THE RIGHT WEBSITE DESIGNER***

- Look at other sites they have designed
- Get feedback from other companies they have designed sites for; find out how successful their sites have been
- Establish whether you can work well with your designer; personality management is essential to such an important project
- Find out how involved you can be in the design process; the designer should make it a priority to include you in each stage of development and to educate you about the Internet so you can make the best decisions
- Ensure that the designer is interested in really learning about your products and services (this includes visiting your location, participating in your programs where possible)
- Get a written proposal outlining both process and costs from several web designers before you agree to work with a particular designer
- Discuss costs of updating sites; enquire whether you can make basic changes yourself

#### ***Example:***

Before choosing our Website designer, we looked carefully at other sites they designed and spoke with other resort operators who had worked with them to confirm they had been successful with their sites. We were particularly impressed by the fact that the designers wanted to visit our property before they agreed to take the job. As a result of their careful approach to the project, our sites really reflect the nature of our businesses.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SIGN THE RIGHT CONTRACT***

- Website design contracts tend to be heavily weighted in favour of the web designer
- Address the issues of copyright, ownership and moral rights in the contract
- Watch for clauses requesting that you pay their solicitor’s fees in case of any legal action
- Consider carefully a request for a permanent live link to the designer’s business on your site
- Have your lawyer look at the contract before you sign it
- Don’t sign a contract if you don’t like it; if the web designer won’t change it to suit you, perhaps it isn’t the right company (you are the customer)

#### ***Example:***

We have consulted with a variety of companies with Webster; most have signed contracts that they were not comfortable with. The only company we found that “signed the right contract” was a law firm – they wrote their own contract and included a clause requiring the designer to waive all claims to their moral rights to the site. This means that once the firm pays for the site, they have complete freedom to update and modify it as they wish.

### ***Your Website Is Your Business - Invest in it***

#### ***BEST PRACTICE – GET INVOLVED IN YOUR WEBSITE PROJECT***

- Spend time on the web every day; pretend to be a tourist looking for information about your type of adventure activity; learn what you like and don’t like
- Understand your Website, how it works and what options you have to improve it
- Learn HTML code (it’s not difficult!)
- Get File Transfer Protocol (FTP) access to your site so you can make basic changes when you need to
- If you can administer the hosting of your site instead of your web design company, you may be able to reduce costs

#### ***Example:***

We are now hosting our sites with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) ourselves and administrating our email addresses. This has reduced our costs from \$300 to \$100 per month for three sites. Learning html code has also enabled us to make basic changes to our sites without paying our designer by the hour (our designer’s fee was \$100/hour).



### ***BEST PRACTICE – BE PROFESSIONAL***

- Your domain name should be simple, reflect your business and be easy to remember
- Your email address should be “ \_\_\_\_\_ @ your domain name ”
- Monitor your site daily to ensure that it is working properly
- Use good photos, quality graphics, clear site architecture
- Your site is only as good as the human support behind it: make sure all your staff know the answers to questions about your business, answer emails immediately (ideally within 24 hours), follow through by sending information packages quickly, send out newsletters if you tell people you will
- Take security issues on the web very seriously; if you enable your customers to register for a trip on-line, don't request their credit card number on an unsecure site

#### ***Example:***

We have two Websites that reflect our business names with corresponding email addresses:

- <http://www.KillarneyMountainLodge.com> – info@KillarneyMountainLodge.com
- <http://www.KillarneyOutfitters.com> – info@KillarneyOutfitters.com

We have been told repeatedly that our sites stand out because they are professional looking. They have generated a lot of business because people associate our businesses with quality.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – EVERYTHING YOU AND YOUR STAFF KNOW ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD BE ON YOUR WEBSITE***

- Think of a Website as an edition of a publication; unlike a guidebook or brochure you can update it whenever you have new information (at very little cost)
- Make your site the resource for information about your facilities, the services you provide and the area you run your programs in
- Put all registration forms and recommended gear and clothing lists on-line
- Post job information on your site to attract new staff
- Establish a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on your site and add to it regularly using actual questions your customers ask

#### ***Example:***

We have established a site for the village of Killarney (<http://www.Killarney.com>) that began as a resource for information about the history and natural features of Killarney. We intend to develop the site as a complete guide to Killarney, including information about all businesses and recreational opportunities in the area.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – INTEGRATE YOUR WEBSITE WITH OTHER MARKETING EFFORTS***

- Your Website should promote the same message as other marketing materials, just in a different way
- Your domain name should be prominent on all promotional materials and advertising
- You can run smaller ads if you include your Website address in the ad
- “Branding” your product or service is essential; the same message, look and feel should carry through your Website and other advertising materials
- Branding is more than just choosing the right logo - in order to compete in today’s marketplace, you must brand the whole “experience” of dealing with your company. The Internet provides that opportunity; customers need to know that the way your site looks and functions will tell them what to expect from you when they contact you; this in turn will reflect how they are treated on a trip with your company

#### ***Example:***

We put our Website address on all our brochures and advertising materials. The ads we ran in newspapers last season contained only a photograph, our toll-free number and domain name.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – YOUR WEBSITE SHOULD LOWER YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS***

- Your site should reduce expenditures on postage, brochures, staff hours, phone/fax charges and letterhead because customers can get the information they need on-line
- You/your staff will (hopefully!) have more time to market the business because you won’t have to spend as much time answering customer enquiries

#### ***Example:***

We find that a large percentage of our customers have already looked at our Websites before they email or call us. Rather than trying to “sell” them on our program or describe every detail of our area, we are simply clarifying something they have read on our site or answering a specific question that our site does not address.

## ***Return On Investment (ROI) – Ensure your site is performing for you***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – CHOOSE THE RIGHT INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER (ISP)***

- If your Website designer is hosting your site for you, find out what ISP they use and talk to them yourself so you can find out what they would charge you directly
- Make sure that the ISP you host with has enough bandwidth to;
  1. host your site
  2. handle traffic on the net at busy times (on the other hand, don’t pay for a huge bandwidth that your site doesn’t need)
- 5-15 “virtual” email addresses should be included in the monthly hosting fee

- Make sure you will have access to in-depth monthly statistics on your site; you should know where visitors to your site live, how long they stayed on your site, which pages they viewed, where on a page they left the site, how they came to your site (because they knew the exact domain name, they came via a link on another site, they found you through a search engine, from a specific key word etc.). This enables you to modify your sites according to the traffic you receive.

***Example:***

We have taken over the administration of our Website hosting. Although this means we have to spend time making sure the sites are functioning properly and our email addresses are forwarding mail, it allowed us to pick an ISP that was right for us and also to reduce our costs by making small adjustments ourselves. Even more importantly, we have access to more extensive stats on our sites than we did when our web designer managed the sites for us.

Another resort owner has discovered that “lodges” is the primary keyword visitors are using to find his site. Both his Website and our Lodge site have now placed that word near the top of our keyword list.

***BEST PRACTICE – SEARCH ENGINES ARE KING***

- Each search engine is different, they are unpredictable, constantly changing and very difficult to keep up with, so how can you make them perform for you? You have to work at it!
- Update your sites regularly; your sites will rank higher with most search engines if you change your sites often
- Make sure your sites load quickly (improperly compressed photos, very complex graphics and long pages slow sites down); search engines will reject slow-loading sites. Note: There is a great misconception about photographs on the net and what causes them to slow down a site’s loading speed. Ideally the original source image should be scanned the same way a photo would be for use in print advertising (i.e., at a high resolution). This way the designer can manipulate and resize the photo as required without losing quality. When the photo is saved as a jpeg or gif file for use on the net, the designer must compress the image enough that it loads quickly but not too much so that the photo looks “grainy” and unprofessional.
- Select your keywords carefully and use them in the text of your index (opening) page; place text containing the important key words along the top of your site (above all tables, photos, graphics). This text will be picked up by search engines first. Use keywords in the title of your Website also (this appears as the heading in the “Favourites” list on a viewer’s browser)
- Maintain a balance between a site with good graphic design and one that follows the above “rules” that search engines live by
- Register another domain name(s) relevant to your area/service and point it toward your site; this allows you to capture people who are testing domain names while searching for a specific topic
- Register another domain name(s) and create a basic web page with a link to your site. This allows you to register the site separately with search engines and focus on specific keywords. You will then have more than one site that appears in a single search.
- Re-register your sites with search engines on a regular basis; use a program that submits your site to multiple search engines (700-800) or hire someone to do it for you

**Example:**

We have created a separate site at [www.Killarney.com](http://www.Killarney.com) and find it is often the first domain name people test if they are looking for information about Killarney. There are several links to our two business sites on the Killarney.com site.

For another example, Wanapitei CANOE registered <http://www.CanoeOntario.com> , <http://www.canoetemagami.com> and <http://www.canadacanoes.com> . If you type in any of the three domain names you can get to the Wanapitei CANOE site (<http://www.wanapiteicanoes.com> ).

## **Manage Your Customers - They are the future of your business**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – CREATE A “COMMUNITY OF INTEREST” WITH INCENTIVES FOR MEMBERSHIP***

- Put useful information in your site about weather, water levels and trail conditions so that people will begin to use your site as a resource. If people know that your site is a good source of information (even if they aren't going to use your services), they will return to your site again and again; the best way to increase traffic to your site is to have people bookmark it
- Create an info-gathering form on your Website where people are encouraged to fill out their email and mailing address and indicate their areas of interest; offer incentives for people to fill out this information (eg: access to a restricted part of the site that offers reduced trip rates for “members” only)
- Setup benefits for customers who refer other people to your business (like a discount on their next trip with you); this creates another category of customer who is very valuable to you – someone who uses your business and refers others to you
- Update your sites with photos and reports on recent trips as often as you can so that people will return to see what is new
- Use a message board, chat room or guest book so that people can interact on-line
- Enable visitors to give you feedback on your site

**Example:**

The best example of a successful “community of interest” is the Wildrock Outfitters Boatwerks site (<http://www.boatwerks.net>). It is focused on a message board where paddlers interact by asking questions that others can respond to. Even though it is not a live site, it has become a magnet for paddlers. The site received 500,000 hits in April 2000!

### ***BEST PRACTICE – INTEGRATE YOUR CUSTOMER DATABASE WITH THE INFORMATION YOU GATHER ON-LINE***

- Choose the right customer database management system that will allow you to store information about your customers and categorise them according to what they are interested in (e.g., canoe trips, kayak trips, hiking trips, fall trips, corporate programs, etc.). Programs like Access and Filemaker can be used to build a specific system for you; others like Act or Maximizer can be applied to your business without a lot of additional programming.
- Your system can be set up to remind you to follow up with clients at a later date and can automatically send out info packages to those who register for a specific trip

- The on-line form should be set up so that the information that is filled out is emailed to you as an email and also as a text file attachment; this can then be imported into your desktop database system (rather than re-keyed manually)

***Example:***

Call of the Wild has set up Maximizer to store their customer database and information from their on-line form (<http://www.callofthewild.ca>). When a customer registers for a trip, they are directed automatically to their gear and clothing lists and a personalised email is sent to them confirming their booking with an information package. The database allows them to categorise the names in the database in many different ways: corporate clients, enquiries, friends, participants from a specific trip, etc.

***BEST PRACTICE – BE PROACTIVE AND COMMUNICATE REGULARLY WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS***

- In today’s market, customers expect you to have a record of their dealings with your company; staff should know when a client visited you last, what kind of program they participated in, what areas of your business interest them; this makes people feel a part of your organisation and thus builds loyalty
- Make people feel a part of your business by keeping them informed. Send out newsletters by snail mail or email at least once a year; you can also post your newsletters on-line
- Never send unsolicited emails; include a section in the on-line form that allows the user to request or decline updates and assure them that you will not send out unsolicited messages or sell your customer information to other companies
- Direct selective emails about new programs to people who are interested in specific types of activities/trips
- Send directed emails to help fill last-minute spots on trips

***Example:***

Our “contact us” page allows visitors to fill out their name and address and check off whether they simply want a brochure or if they are interested in our newsletter. Voyageur Quest has a newsletter page right on their Website with new trips and information (<http://www.voyageurquest.com>).

***BEST PRACTICE – USE YOUR WEBSITE AND CUSTOMER DATABASE SYSTEM  
TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF YOUR BUSINESS***

- The database allows you to find out where your revenue is coming from, how many people participate in different aspects of your business; the Website allows you to attract the customers you want
- Many businesses want to improve the 20/80 split in customers (20% of their customers provide 80% of the revenue); you can use your Website and database to accomplish this by ;
  1. attracting/keeping profitable customers
  2. increasing the number of profitable customers you have
  3. increasing the profitability of low-profit customers
  4. reducing the costs of servicing low-profit customers
  5. learning how not to attract low-profit customers!
- You may discover through customer/Website visitor feedback that there are packages you could sell you never thought of ...

***Example:***

In the last four years Killarney Outfitters has expanded our canoe and kayak rental business. Although this has enabled us to increase overall volume, the costs involved in providing the rental and delivery services are very high relative to total revenue. We have been working to “upsell” our services by attracting more customers to our guided trips and resort accommodation. In so doing we are starting to generate more revenue without increasing the number of guests we cater to (this means we can reduce the impact on our natural environment). In addition, we have been able to attract and keep outstanding staff who are interested in guiding trips and pursuing leadership roles within the business. We have begun this process by focussing our Website on our guided sea kayak and canoe trips.

***Credits***

*Maury and Annabelle East*

*Rick Walters, Webmaster of PaddlingOntario.com*

*Brien East of Searchaid Technologies*

*“[Customers.com](http://Customers.com)” by Patricia B. Seybold*

# QUÉBEC HORS-CIRCUITS

## EXPÉDITIONS - DÉCOUVERTES VOYAGES SUR MESURE

*Québec Hors-Circuits, St-Fulgence,  
Québec Outdoor adventure company  
offering hiking, canoe camping,  
mountain biking, snowmobiling,  
snowshoeing, zodiac, and sea kayaking  
in the Saguenay River.*

### “Made to Measure Experiences: Made to Measure Adventure” – Québec Hors-Circuits

*Developed by The Economic Planning Group from speaking  
notes provided by François Guillot, President  
– Québec Hors-Circuits*

#### ***Adaptation and Innovation - Innovate or Die!***

Our business name, “Québec Hors-Circuits” means back country Québec. This name reflects the type of business we represent, i.e., outdoor experiences. We have a great diversity in products and markets as well, so we have used a business name which is not limited to one specific adventure activity.

With this business name and a company philosophy to provide diverse, customized experiences, we have learned that one of the keys to our success is adaptation and innovation.

For example, we are always adapting to;

- our clientele
- our products
- the origin and background/experience of our guides
- culture (e.g., native peoples)
- weather (we are providing outdoor experiences, after all!)

***Adaptation and innovation make a company extremely versatile.*** You must be able to quickly make changes and schedule alternative activities. This means you have to extensively know your region and have alternative routes and experiences available.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ADAPT TO THE NEEDS OF YOUR CLIENTELE***

Adapting to the needs of your clientele is more important than offering products or experiences you would like to offer - it is more market-driven.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ADAPT TO THE LOCAL CULTURES IN THE AREAS YOU VISIT***

You must also adapt to the environment and local cultures where you will be bringing clients. It is important to know these territories, know the different conditions that exist at different times in different areas, and respect local cultures.

Remember - culture is not part of the decor! It is also important to interpret culture from historical perspectives to today - make people aware of what the culture is like today and how it survives or has been altered over time.

#### ***Example:***

We are developing packages with Inuit Québec communities. We partner with them to provide one Inuit guide and one English-speaking guide on tours we operate in Northern Québec. The Inuit community is directly involved in our decision-making and they are integrated right into the product. We even buy some of our food supplies from the community, and as a result, nearly 50% of our package costs stay in the Inuit community. This is a great relationship.

## ***Diversity***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – DEVELOP A DIVERSITY OF PRODUCTS AND MARKETS***

Our desire to operate four seasons per year encouraged us to develop a diversity of products so we could offer products in each season. Being able to operate 12 months per year is an important factor, not only in business viability, but in ensuring an interesting job and keeping your guides as long as possible.

Today we offer a diversity in everything! For example;

- Different products for different types of markets (“Explo-Fjord” (exploring the Saguenay Fjord), skidoo, multi-day and multi-adventure as well as part day programs, etc.)
- Diversity of markets (individual vs. group and incentive clients)
- Different environments and destinations
- A team of guides with diverse abilities and interests
- Different product themes (thanks to research, but especially due to the diversity of our guides)
- Different modes of transportation - e.g., land-sea-air, traditional-modern



***Examples:***

- Our “Explo-Fjord” business is a new subsidiary of our company and offers short excursions from four base locations in the Saguenay Fjord. We have guides located at each location full time and offer guaranteed departures from each site.
- Our guides are skilled in a number of different areas because they work on different activities all the time. Having a diversity of guides allows us to rotate guides so they get to participate in both short excursions and multi-day trips. Guides appreciate this.

***BEST PRACTICE – PARTNERSHIPS BUILD BUSINESS***

It is important to recognize that partnerships with complementary businesses are important as you can't do everything yourself!

***Examples:***

- We have an exclusive arrangement with a local accommodation operator and provide adventure experiences for their guests on a year round basis.
- We also have a partnership with the park and have an exclusive arrangement to take their guests on excursions.

***Authenticity and Themes***

***BEST PRACTICE – CUSTOMIZE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THEMING***

Many of our tours are customized - each with a different menu, outdoor activity, range of equipment, and interpretation theme. We do this with a thematic approach, i.e., nature, history, culture. We always choose one theme for each activity so the activity is not the sole experience but rather the means of discovering the outdoors.

***Example:***

To provide authentic and thematic experiences, we;

- Conduct research of literature and other sources to gain cultural knowledge (e.g., archives, visitor information centres, museums, books, etc.)
- Respect ancestral approaches and methods
- Respect national, regional and local cultures
- Respect customs and traditions
- Use equipment and tools which have a traditional flavour (e.g., oil lamps)
- Choose equipment (where possible) that fits in with the chosen theme (e.g., Old Québec theme - we use clay plates instead of plastic. For canoe trips, we use granite plates.)

- Choose guides (or a team of guides) that have diverse and complementary qualifications (E.g., One of our guides specializes in Northern Québec expeditions and ancestry, whereas another guide specializes in survival skills, group leadership, and working with teenagers. Still another guide specializes in nature interpretation (biodiversity, history, etc.), and another on geology.)
- Provide quality, thematic menus that are based on traditional recipes that are adapted for outdoor cooking. (For example, we choose menus in terms of themes related to ancestral cultures: Amerindians (nomad vs. sedentary peoples), Central American (Mexican Fiesta), etc.) Some menu examples include;
  - Tourtière, pumpkin soup, maple syrup ice cream
  - "Grease" party (pogos, french fries, hot dogs, etc.)
  - Seafood: bouillabaisse from the Fjord, chicoutai pie, local liqueur
  - Pike, hare, blueberries and maple syrup
  - Mexican Fiesta (vegetarian or non)
  - Savory Northern caribou
  - Pizza party (vegetarian or non)
  - Mountain-style meal
  - Innovative lunches (avoid the traditional ham sandwich on white bread!)

***Example:***

We are very careful in our food preparation and pack food *very carefully* for trips. We make certain that foods are packed in certain ways so as to maximize freshness and ensure the food lasts the duration of the trip. One *particularly useful method we use is dry ice*. Dry ice is a fantastic cooling medium - it doesn't melt, and can keep meats and other perishable foods chilled for up to 10 days!

## ***Nature Interpretation***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RESPECT, UNDERSTAND, AND PROTECT NATURE***

To be an adventure tourism operator, it is important to;

- Have a passion for nature
- Be able to interpret nature
- Have a diverse choice of locations and sites in terms of their nature potential and appeal
- Protect nature and the environment
- Provide guides with specific training about nature

Nature is all around us so it is important to respect, understand, and have a passion for nature.

***BEST PRACTICE – CONSIDER SEQUENCING WHEN DESIGNING MULTI-ACTIVITY  
ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES***

In providing nature experiences, the sequencing and relationship of individual elements of a tour are also important.

***Example:***

We offer a 17-day tour that starts with whitewater rafting in northern Québec, followed by canoeing and canoe-fishing, whereby we focus on ancestral interpretation and prepare and eat our catch. The group then takes a hydroplane south to the Fjord for a different experience there, e.g., hiking from shelter to shelter, where we focus on mountain wildlife interpretation. From here, the group is picked up by zodiac where they embark on a sunrise whale watching kayak trip on the Fjord where the focus is marine life.

These types of programs provide change but offer continuity and are related. As well, they are organized to provide the most logical sequencing in terms of operation, e.g., from north to south, with minimal use of guest transferring or “dead heading” of shuttle vehicles.

***Abilities & Qualifications (Training)***

***BEST PRACTICE – HIRE A DIVERSITY OF GUIDES WITH A RANGE OF SKILLS AND  
ENCOURAGE THEM TO CONTINUALLY UPGRADE AND LEARN***

One of our strengths is the quality of our guides. We hire a diversity of guides and continually encourage them to learn. To do this we maintain a huge library of resources, e.g., information on ecology, biology, geology, etc. We give books to our guides to read and encourage them to learn the areas they are weak on.

***BEST PRACTICE – ENSURE YOUR GUIDES ARE EXPERTS IN THE USE OF EQUIPMENT,  
SAFETY PROCEDURES, AND INTERPRETATION***

For all of our guides, knowledge of safety procedures, life saving techniques, rescue, etc. is vital and all our guides have a thorough knowledge of these areas.

Guides also receive customized training for their specific activities and needs, e.g., techniques related to aquatic, land and motor vehicle activities.

***Example:***

Our geologist guide provides a full day of training with all our guides that provide zodiac experiences in the Saguenay Fjord, to teach them about the geology of the Fjord. We do similar training with our local historian to teach our guides of relevant history.

Training is also provided in meal preparation and use of equipment.

Typically, our trips involve a team of guides with a diversity of qualifications. One guide is the “technical” guide (e.g., equipment use, safety, etc.), and the other guide is an “assistant” guide who is an expert in other areas relevant to the theme of the tour, e.g., fishing, history, etc. The two guides complement one another. We have found this method to provide a high quality experience and have found it to be very interesting to clients.

For example, in the 17-day tour described above, a different assistant guide is used for each segment of the tour to offer a different theme.

It is also important to recognize that the personality of the guide adds a lot of flavour to the trip. This is particularly important for incentive trips - they are looking for something very different or special and the quality of your guides adds value.

We also insist on cultural knowledge - guides must be able to talk about local legends, history, music, etc. This is very important.

Guides must also be able to speak several languages since we cater to a diversity of markets. Having this ability increases your success in attracting foreign speaking markets.

Guides are also trained in cooking, and depending upon the skill of the guide, recipes are provided for some trips to ensure quality menu items are prepared.



*Voyageur Quest & The Algonquin Log Cabin,  
Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario  
Adventure operator offering part  
and multi-day guided wilderness  
trips in Algonquin Provincial Park,  
including Voyageur canoeing,  
lodge-based hiking, and dog sledding.*

## “Packaging, Working with the Incentive Market, and Other Business Tips” – Voyageur Quest and the Algonquin Log Cabin

*by John Langford, Director  
– Voyageur Quest and the  
Algonquin Log Cabin*

### **Background**

I am thrilled to be a part of the CTC Best Practices Adventure Tourism Tour which focuses on learning, sharing and becoming better in the business of running Canadian wilderness and adventure tourism operations.

Voyageur Quest and the Algonquin Log Cabin is an entrepreneurial organization that is in a growth mode. While I started the company in 1991, it has been just six years full time and we are still very much - adding / changing / creating / adapting our operation. Our operation is a work in progress. Thus I think it is important that you look at Voyageur Quest as an adolescent company that is growing up quickly!

I think the perspective that I speak from is that of a wilderness entrepreneur.

I am someone that grew up in the city but have always felt a connection to the lakes and rock of the Canadian Shield. I love the outdoors and it is where I feel most at home. The Canadian Shield has had a great effect on me. I have worked in other industries that are not involved with the wilderness (advertising in Toronto, etc.) but the outdoors seems to have a hold on my heart and forces me back to an existence tied to the wilderness.

Most of my life I have been operating between the city and the Shield. When I am in the city - most people perceive me as a northerner. When I am up north - most northerners think I'm from the city. This city/north persona has been helpful in growing an outdoor business which is oriented to bringing urban people out of the gateway - Toronto/Ottawa - to experience a taste of the north - Algonquin Park.

I hope to share some of the growing joys and challenges that Voyageur Quest and the Algonquin Log cabin have faced and continue to deal with in this presentation.

## ***Creative Packaging***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IN CREATING PACKAGES, BEGIN BY SPEAKING WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS***

Finding out the demand for a new trip takes away the risk of creating a package that nobody wants or needs.

#### ***Examples:***

- In 1995 I met with some receptive operators and asked them what they were looking for in terms of their Ontario wilderness needs. Prior to '95 we were dealing with strictly small groups of FIT. The receptive operators told me that it was difficult for them to send groups to Algonquin Park in our existing 6 -10 pax for 3-7 day format. They told me they had larger groups for shorter periods of time. Could we design something in Algonquin Park that was ½ day? Another operator echoed the sentiment and added the suggestion of Voyageur canoes as a means for getting older people safely into canoes. I asked them both that if we created a short ½-day package with Voyageur canoes - would they send us groups? They both responded yes. The result - the genesis for our Traditional Algonquin Paddle Lunch was born. By being flexible and listening to the market needs we were able to create a new product that had a ready-made market.
- Another example of listening to the market is with our award winning Algonquin multi winter adventure package - Footsteps of the Pioneer. For three winters - we operated backcountry ski 3-day trips to rustic cabins in Algonquin. We also operated 4-day dogsled trips to the northwest corner of Algonquin. Many of our customers suggested adding one day of Dogsledding on to our backcountry ski trip. We listened - found a supplier and the result was a huge increase in what became multi adventure winter trips! Two seasons later - our package won the Best Winter package award by the CTC.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – FIND SUPPLIERS TO PARTNER WITH***

As an operation that began without a base and much equipment - we had to find suppliers to partner with.

The wilderness tour industry can involve incredible capital investment (lodge, canoes, trailers, tents, trucks etc.) on top of the service requirements (guides, food, route logistics etc.). By partnering and packaging with suppliers, Voyageur Quest has been able to provide quality wilderness trips without risking huge capital investment.

For example - back to the Traditional Paddle Lunch genesis - we had to find:

- North canoes (large canoes capable of handling 10+ pax)
- A site for our lunches in Algonquin Park
- Guides
- Cook/ chef.

In realizing that there was no way we could afford to buy all of this - we began to source renting and finding partners and suppliers.

We purchased one north canoe from Northern Québec and were lucky (having two outfitters close by) to be able to rent and have them deliver other north canoes to adjust to the volume of the day trips. This style was successful in year one as our average group size was 35 pax requiring 4 canoes and we were able to stretch this to handle a group of 90 pax in 9 north canoes.

Finding an appropriate group site was much more difficult but with persistence we were able to partner with a summer camp operation that did not use their base in the shoulder seasons. By splitting the revenue we were able to gain a location in the target area.

***BEST PRACTICE – BUILDING COMPONENTS FROM OTHER SUPPLIERS INTO YOUR PACKAGES BROADENS YOUR PRODUCT MIX AND MARKET REACH***

Piecing and moulding together components from other suppliers is something that is part of every one of our wilderness packages. In fact, very few of our trips are exclusively owned and operated by our company.

Other examples of working with complementary suppliers include:

- Finding a truck and van rental company to provide us with hired vehicles for our Toronto to Algonquin shuttles
- Working with select canoe outfitters in Algonquin Park to supply us with canoes and equipment when our volume balloons.
- Finding a caterer to prepare meals for our incentive trips

It is also important to recognize that the Travel Trade appreciates good packaging. By combining a number of compatible activities and services, adventure operators can help tour operators avoid dealing with 5 or 6 micro suppliers/attractions.

Many tour operators and receptive operators would like to package 5 to 7 day (and longer) programs. By packaging with other suppliers to create longer/ more diverse programs - wilderness suppliers have opportunities of accessing wider markets.

***Example:***

We have created a 6 day Lodge-to-Lodge multi-day program that includes 3 days at our Algonquin Log cabin with 3 days at another lodge in Georgian Bay. The length of trip appeals to longer haul markets that would like to come to Ontario and see a number of geographic areas. As a result, our trip has been picked up by several receptive operators.

***BEST PRACTICE – PACKAGING SHOULD BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF YOUR OPERATIONS***

As a result of partnering out of necessity, packaging has become second nature for us.

Voyageur Quest and the Algonquin Log Cabin continue to seek creative and non-traditional components to add value to our guest experience. This is especially true in bringing in speakers and experts from many fields.

All of our guides are skilled, friendly and qualified as wilderness professionals. On top of these great guides who provide excellent service - it is nice to add local flavour and introduce guests to the wilderness "culture." By this I mean including information, stories and specialized people who represent the traditions of the wilderness in Canada.

***Examples:***

- For our Traditional Winter trips, we have brought in legendary wilderness travellers like Bob Davis and Craig Macdonald. Both Bob and Craig have travelled on snowshoe with Native communities in the far north. They travelled with elders who passed on traditional ways of living in the north.... Odawban sleds, making snowshoes, living in heated wall tents.... Our guests (and our guides) are fascinated with their stories and appreciate the opportunity to learn some of these traditional skills from skilled and very unique experts.
- Another example of bringing in unique and specialized experts is with our Traditional Algonquin Paddle Lunch program. Each group - especially the incentive market - has different needs and emphasis. We have customized this product by bringing in world class chefs, artists, First nation dancers, drummers, crafts people, folk musicians, trappers and survival experts to cater to each group's special needs and interests.

***BEST PRACTICE – TODAY’S MARKETS ARE SEEKING MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES AND COMPONENTS IN THEIR ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES***

All of our guests receive and fill out comment forms. From this, we have learned that our guests continue to tell us to include more activities. People love to experience a variety of things during a trip.

***Example:***

Our Algonquin Log Cabin Lodge 3 and 5 day summer package includes accommodation, meals, transportation from Toronto, plus guided canoeing, an interpretive hike, and wildlife viewing. Many of our guests have asked us to include fishing and mountain biking. The same thing occurs with our winter trip at the Algonquin Log Cabin - our 3-day trip presently includes dogsledding, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, and ice fishing. Many operators have asked us to add a day of snowmobiling as well. We are presently looking at accommodating some of these requests.

***Challenges With Packaging***

Creating packaging has its challenges and we have faced many of them.

***BEST PRACTICE – CHOOSE YOUR PARTNERS CAREFULLY***

Some competitors may not be appropriate to work with. Some operators simply prefer to work on their own while others may not be trustworthy of working in a two way - "win-win" format. For example - not all of our competitors have appreciated our growth in the industry. One operator changed their approach with us when we began to grow. When we were very small they enjoyed our business - renting us canoes and skis, and generally providing us with excellent service in renting outdoor equipment. But as we started to grow - this company decided to provide an inferior level of service to us (late delivery of canoes etc.), and later - they decided not to rent us equipment at all!



Unfortunately this operator could not see the benefit of doing business with us and as a result we were forced to purchase our own equipment. Fortunately, this was not a problem for us as we had the financial resources to purchase equipment at this stage in our business. But the unpredictability and problematic nature of the competitive operator forced some quick thinking and quick action.

***BEST PRACTICE – WORK WITH QUALITY SUPPLIERS THAT ARE WILLING TO REPRESENT YOUR BEST INTERESTS***

It is important to find suppliers that are trustworthy and who will represent your interests and service ethic. For example, Voyageur Quest has had to deal with suppliers soliciting our guests to do business with them directly. This breaks an important trust and requires immediate action.

***BEST PRACTICE – LEARN FROM NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AND BE PRO-ACTIVE IN PROBLEM SOLVING***

Learn from your negative experiences - who to work with, and how to deal with people.

Be organized and **put solutions to problems in writing before they happen**. Make sure your supplier signs an operating agreement before the operation begins.

***Examples:***

- In searching for First nation speakers, I invited some people from different communities to speak at our events. We ran into the odd difficulties with our speakers discussing inappropriate subjects during the talks as well as speakers bringing uninvited entourages. These matters were addressed with subsequent speakers receiving written job descriptions/written contracts and a one-on-one meeting with the director - prior to the event.

We have also had to look closely at some of the receptive operators that we act as a supply for. For example, in some cases we have had tour operators misrepresent what our experiences were about. The consequence was creating guests expectations that were not consistent with what they were going to receive.

- In another example, we operated an evening night hike for an incentive tour operator this winter. In all correspondence to the client, we expressed in writing and verbally that there was no guarantee of seeing or hearing wildlife. Our winter night programs have more to do with being outside in nature than they do actually seeing or hearing wildlife. Even with our written wildlife statements, the incentive operator chose to hype up the wildlife viewing. As a result, the guests came away slightly disappointed that they did not see or hear anything. We had some red flags with this incentive company prior to the event (unpaid deposits etc.) and have since decided that their style of operation is not compatible with ours.

## ***Working with the Incentive Market***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – OFFER AUTHENTIC /ORIGINAL EXPERIENCES AS THESE ARE APPEALING TO INCENTIVE MARKETS***

Enable guests to experience authentic /original experiences.

Our experience is that a lot of the incentive business focuses on providing a 5 star experience. Many companies want to give their top employees a “top of the line” holiday and thus will spend on top hotels and top restaurants, offering their employees gold star services while on their trip. While comfort is an important ingredient of a 5 star experience, so too is authenticity/uniqueness and many incentive companies have begun to provide authentic experiences to add texture to the 5 star comforts.

The authentic experience should be something “off the high volume track” - something that feels exclusive and "one of a kind." The Canadian wilderness is filled with these type of experiences, and combined with a great exchange rate, makes the Canadian wilderness a premiere incentive destination for foreign markets.

A few years ago, Voyageur Quest supplied a European high tech firm with an overnight experience that involved taking a group of 35 pax away from the comforts of a Muskoka 5 star resort for 24 hours. The experience included paddling the group in 26 foot Voyageur canoes to a remote camp located on an island in the wilderness. The camp was extremely rustic - no electricity, shared accommodations (four to a cabin), outhouses etc. The guests arrived and enjoyed cocktails on the dock with live guitar. After the sunset, a Canadian dinner was served in a wooden dining cabin followed by a torch lit walk to a lakeside bonfire with local storytellers and Canadian folk guitar and voice.

The next morning, the group was given a destination (via coordinates on a map) where their lunch was. After a map and compass skills session, the group was left to navigate through the bush to the indigenous feast. The "survival" was facilitated by two survival experts who walked with the group. The “bush crash” experience was challenging to many, as there was no trail. A few in the group had military training and led the group to the destination. Lunch was held in the middle of the forest hosted by a First nation elder. The group finished the day by arriving back at their 5 star resort.

The event was a huge success. Interestingly, the highlight for the group was the chance to get into the wilderness for an unforgettable night away from telephones and into the simplicity of the Canadian outdoors. For many in the group - the experience was like a dream.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – BE FLEXIBLE***

The incentive market is extremely demanding and requires extreme attention to detail and timelines. Last minute changes and requests are standard fare. The ability to adapt programming before and during a trip/event is vital.

An example of adapting on the fly...Voyageur Quest operates team-building programs involving orienteering in large north canoes. These events include stations marked throughout a wilderness area. The program is essentially a race where each team completes the course as fast as possible. The event ends with a special closing ceremony followed by an exclusive dinner at a gourmet restaurant. The events are structured around tight timelines as the incentive companies have the schedule packed to the minute.

On one of these outings, a large Swiss group was in mid-race and energetically competing to finish when one team came across three moose. Using paddle signals, the guide/ facilitator in the back of the canoe alerted the other teams of the wildlife sighting and soon most of the teams paddled up to take pictures.

The teams just sat back and took in the magnificent sight. The race became irrelevant. After about 20 minutes, the moose left and the race continued at a relaxed pace. At the end of the race, the group was thrilled. The focus switched from a wilderness competition to a wilderness outing and the group couldn't be happier. Thankfully, the incentive company who booked the event appreciated the decision and covered the hefty surcharge levied by the gourmet restaurant for holding the restaurant an extra hour!

***BEST PRACTICE – INCENTIVE GUESTS DO NOT CHOOSE THEIR EXPERIENCE - SO YOU NEED TO BE READY TO ADAPT***

An interesting aspect of the incentive market is the actual end users most often do not choose their trip. The trips are usually selected by the HR department or CEO on behalf of the company. The consequence of this is situations where there are inappropriate people out in the wilderness.

This requires a set of contingency plans for dealing with unhappy guests.

Our very first contract as a company in 1991 was a corporate training event involving sailing keelboats on Niagara on the Lake. The team leader wanted a fun day where his employees could do something active and challenging - together. The focus was being together and having fun together. He arranged an exciting day that was a complete surprise to his team. We picked the group up at the hotel and drove them to Lake Ontario where the sailboats were waiting. Upon arriving and unveiling the surprise, we discovered that one gentleman was very upset. We took him aside and learned that he was completely aqua phobic and could not get near the water. He was entirely rational - stating that he would climb mountains, sky dives...do anything but be on the water. This was quite a challenge for a team building event.

Our facilitators decided on the spot to carry on with the keel boats but have breaks whereby the boats would come into the harbor for some collective (parachute) games on a beach where this gentleman could participate. This was a "plan B" that was created on the spot. All subsequent Voyageur Quest incentive trips now have a planned "plan B" to implement!

Here's another example of adapting on the fly. Some of our evening programs begin with a slide show at a hotel. The talks are usually hosted by Park wardens who speak for 45 minutes...talking about animals, behaviours, habitat etc. On a few circumstances - 10 minutes into the slide show - we cut the talk short as the group showed little interest in the technical information.

***BEST PRACTICE – BEING FLEXIBLE AND ABLE TO ADAPT IS IMPORTANT FOR OTHER MARKETS AS WELL***

Last minute changes and being flexible is not just an incentive issue. Our operation of Algonquin Park 3 and 7 day canoe trips as well as our Algonquin Log Cabin both receive a lot of last minute requests. Being able to handle the swells of last minute bookings means a big difference in our bottom line at the end of each season.

***BEST PRACTICE – CONSIDER OFFERING GUARANTEED DEPARTURES FOR REGULAR PROGRAMS***

Our Algonquin Park canoe trips have guaranteed departures twice a week from Toronto. The guarantee makes our trips easy to book by the travel trade. It also presents challenges in operating. This means that we have to be able to handle last minute volume. In July and August, we have had bookings of 25 pax 48 hours before the departure. The guarantee also requires us to operate trips with only one client if need be.

How do we do it? Careful planning and relying on past calendar years gives us an idea of where the volume is and how many guides, canoes, and permits to have on standby. Normally our projections are correct to within 20%.

In addition, we work with a neighbouring wilderness company (who also happens to be a competitor) who runs quality wilderness departures on the same days. On dates where we have only a few pax, we ask them if they can take our guests. The same thing happens in reverse. The result is that two competitors can work well together and help each other with respect to their guarantees.

***BEST PRACTICE – COOPERATE WITH PARTNERS - IT CAN AID YOUR OPERATIONS***

Our operation in Algonquin Park's northwest corner also requires regular contact with this same wilderness tour operator and we share information where our groups are going within the park. This way we can stay away from each other and give our guests the privacy and feeling of wilderness that is so important. In addition, the two companies cooperate on maintaining the area from the forest access road to the put-in at our own expense, and carefully watch the impact our operations are having on the region.

## ***Other Business Tips***

***BEST PRACTICE – HAVE A CLEAR BUSINESS OBJECTIVE AND GOOD BUSINESS SKILLS***

I recommend wilderness adventure companies have a clear business objective. Is it a hobby? Is it a lifestyle? If it a business, then **good business skills are as important as good outdoor skills**. Cash flow analysis, business plans, financial statements, management, marketing - these are as relevant as interpretation, wilderness first aid, and ability to start a fire in the rain.

Early in the development of Voyageur Quest, I was confronted with the question - is this a hobby or a business? After 3 years of running trips part time while I worked for other wilderness companies, I decided to work solely on Voyageur Quest. My first season of full time effort was rewarded with a summer/ fall where I was guiding one trip after another. It was great to be so busy and even better to be out in the field with my guests. At the end of the season, I realized the

one-man operation had its down side. While I was away guiding, I had not had the time to return phone calls let alone do any marketing to boost the numbers of future trips. While I was busy, it didn't look like I could grow the business without some help. At the end of that season, I decided to hire another guide to do some of the trips while I stayed home (some of the time) to answer the phone and tend to other matters.

Since making that decision, I have moved Voyageur Quest from a hobby to a business. While I miss some of the guiding, I have found that the office work requires a full time effort. I spend most of my time now focussing on the "non guiding" business leaving the operations to our guides.

***BEST PRACTICE – DECIDE WHAT YOU DON'T DO - HAVE A VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION***

As a wilderness start up, we have had a diverse range of trip requests. Many of our past guests have recommended we do longer canoe expeditions in Ontario's far north, whitewater rafting trips in BC, run bike trips in the US Southwest, open more lodges... the list is endless. To add to these suggestions, our guides (and owner!) have their own suggestions as to great trips. This is where a vision and strategic direction are vital. Where is the company going? What is the company known for?

After deciding to grow our business in 1994, Voyageur Quest began to offer a wider range of trips. By hiring staff, Voyageur Quest could run multiple trips simultaneously. Soon we began to offer longer and more unique trips to "deeper" wilderness areas. Some of these trips were very successful, like our multi adventure trips to the Canyonlands of the American Southwest. By 1996 we had over 12 different trips to seven or eight destinations - Wabakimi, Utah, Ecuador etc. In 1997 the result of all these trips was a watering down effect. By being so spread out, it became difficult for our customers to know what our specialty was.

After a strategic planning session in the summer of '97, we decided to operate only in Ontario with a focus on Algonquin Park. Three years later we are happy with this decision. While we miss going to exotic wilderness locales commercially, we now have a wilderness home, a more efficient operation, and a reputation for being leaders in Algonquin and Ontario.

***BEST PRACTICE – BE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR OPERATING PHILOSOPHY***

Beyond "bottom line" efficiencies on what direction to go in or what to do, we also have decided to include (or not include) certain adventures based on a company operating philosophy.

***Example:***

For example, many tour operators as well as the public have asked us to offer snowmobiling trips. The incentive is huge, as the margins seem to be fantastic and the snowmobile revenue would be a nice boost to our slower season. However, our existing guests enjoy seeing natural beauty and experiencing nature in non-motorized means. In summer we shy away from motor boats and jet skis. In winter, we experience the wilderness on snowshoes, skis and dogsled. Our core guests love the silence and the fact that our trails do not have to deal with snowmobiles. By operating snowmobile trips, we would offend our loyal customers. Thus to date, we have resisted operating snowmobile trips. When we receive requests, we pass them on to other suppliers.

Snowmobiling and lately ATV tours both challenge our company's "non-motorized" vision of the Canadian wilderness tour community. Our company philosophy is that we should embrace the environment and help protect the opportunity to experience traditional wilderness travel - canoes, snowshoes, etc.

Other high margin events that don't fit with our philosophy and we have declined to cater to include a day trip for 5,000 people, and recreating a Hollywood portrayal of a First nation banquet.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – HAVE A CONSTANT DESIRE TO IMPROVE ALL ASPECTS OF THE OPERATION***

As an entrepreneurial organization, we are constantly looking for ways to improve. "How can we improve our guest experience?" "How can we improve our means of servicing our guests?" Suggestions from guides and guests are often implemented immediately. Because our operation is very small, we can communicate and move very quickly with respect to making changes. Very little in terms of "how we do things" becomes institutionalized.

The Algonquin Log Cabin Lodge is a brand new part of our business. After each trip, guides fill out a trip report with suggestions on what is working well and what needs improving. Just three weeks ago, upon the suggestion of one of our guides - we widened the focus of a particular interpretative hike and changed the route that had been in use for the first two seasons. The reaction from Spring guests has been overwhelmingly positive.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – HIRE THE RIGHT GUIDES***

We call ourselves a dynamic organization, as it seems that we are constantly in motion - searching, improving, growing. This affects the people we hire.

We look for guides who like to get involved, create, roll up their sleeves and contribute to making us better. This can be very empowering for guides who want to feel valued and have their voice and ideas implemented.

### ***Example:***

Our Traditional Algonquin paddle program was recently discussed during guide training and now this program has been improved with the input of 8 guides.

## ***Hopes and Visions***

### ***BEST PRACTICE – IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE PASSION AND AN ABILITY TO DREAM BIG!***

Voyageur Quest and the Algonquin Log Cabin are the realization of a personal dream. Getting to where we are now has been a challenge, but one worth every step.

The wilderness outdoor business is a tough one for making a living. We are in the holiday business and holidays are susceptible to economic conditions that create spending money. We are fortunate over the last five years to have a booming economy, but economic growth is not always a given.

In addition, our industry has to deal with the slow but steady erosion of our natural environment - conditions which are ever present. Having mentioned these, I think **a motivated and passionate Canadian wilderness adventure industry has the potential to inspire other Canadians to remove their complacency toward protecting and living in wild spaces.**

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ADVENTURE ASSOCIATIONS AND ALLIANCES CAN BUILD SUCCESS***

Small Canadian adventure companies are sitting on an opportunity to form a larger working and professional association. To date, much of our industry has been fragmented with tiny players running micro operations in isolation. Our tiny companies market our operations independently, deal with the banks on their own, and fight for the protection of our wilderness - all on their own. While we stay unconnected, the wilderness erodes, our industry remains niche, and our prices and standard of living remains lower compared to other sectors.

The wilderness adventure industry is filled with natural leaders who have the potential to begin to work together and influence the direction of the "non outdoor" community in Canada. By working together, we can:

- Leverage better interest and loan rates from banks
- Have more influence in the "business community"
- Explore opportunities to co-market and reduce costs of overhead

Recently in Ontario, 13 quality paddle companies have come together and contributed some coop funds to form an association called Paddling Ontario. Our objective is to have Ontario recognized as the # 1 paddle destination - in the world. The alliance is working initially to grow the canoe market in Ontario. The funds are going to finance a web site "Paddling Ontario.com" as well as a PR campaign.

What is fantastic so far, is that many of us in the alliance are competitors. However, we have bought into the notion that **there is a greater pie for all of us if we share resources.** In addition, by working together we have been able to receive help from the Ontario government and the CTC as well as non-traditional private businesses.

Here's another example of how we have created links with other companies. Voyageur Quest has recently put together a **guide exchange network** between wilderness adventure companies. Some of our guides would like to further their career by guiding in different geographical areas. Thus we have found other wilderness suppliers in those areas that would like an experienced guide. In exchange we receive an experienced guide from their operation. So far we are developing an exchange network with wilderness companies in Finland, Florida and Nova Scotia.

### ***In Closing***

I am very excited to see the CTC help the adventure travel industry in Canada. The "Best Practices" report and catalogue published in 1999 are filled with good direction. I hope that we can continue the good work that the CTC has started for us...talking together, sharing ideas, and working collectively to grow our own businesses, grow our industry, and protect the Canadian wilderness.





# **WILDERNESS TOURS**

*25 Years of Rafting on the Mighty Ottawa River*

*Wilderness Tours, Beachburg, Ontario Whitewater rafting resort operator on the Ottawa River. Also offer canoeing, camping, and horseback riding, and feature an activity centre and kayak school.*

## “Wilderness Tours: Our Best Business Practices” – Wilderness Tours

*By Joe Kowalski, Founder  
– Wilderness Tours*

### ***BEST PRACTICE – CREATE OPPORTUNITY THROUGH ADVERSITY***

- Understand that adversity will make you stronger and your business better.
- Accept that life is not easy and it is not fair.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SUCCEED WITHOUT MONEY***

- Learn to bootstrap your business.
- Don't spend more than you take in.
- Money is always the most expensive solution but not necessarily the best one.
- Establish a positive attitude concerning the lack of money.
- Barter is a great way to pay for things.
- Remember that money cannot buy headlines
- Read "How to Win Friends and Influence People"

### ***Bartering***

Trade for everything and pay with product every chance you get.

## ***Free Publicity***

When starting WT, I had no money for advertising. However, I believed in what I was doing and felt it newsworthy enough to seek free publicity through newspapers, radio and TV. I was totally unsuccessful in the beginning until by chance I read "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie. This is a very old book with timeless advice. Basically, the premise is to meet the needs of those you are trying to influence and in the end satisfy your own needs. Following the book's advice, I began to speak to newspaper editors about their "readers" and TV and Radio producers about their "viewers and listeners." This subtle shift in emphasis put WT in the headlines of numerous newspapers and enabled me to appear on over a dozen TV and Radio shows each spring.

## ***Don't Take No for an Answer***

If you strike out with one journalist, go to another one at the same paper. With Radio and TV, contact the show's host first. If you strike out then, you have a second avenue to try by going to the show producer.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – ENHANCE YOUR PRODUCT***

- Continually improve your product.
- Turn your business into a destination.
- Anticipate the needs of your clients and satisfy them.
- Make it easy for your clients to reserve, pay and experience your program.

## ***Packaging***

I came to the Ottawa River from West Virginia where, for example, the Cheat River has 26 major rapids and the Gauley River has 55; The Ottawa River's 5 major rapids seemed lacking when I started. While the rapids of the Ottawa are spectacular, there are only five of them on each channel. Feeling there was not enough of an attraction, I packaged the river trip with meals, overnighting, sports, activities and entertainment.

## ***Involve Your Staff***

WT is both a river company and a resort company but it is the river which gives us our identity. For that reason, we strive to make almost every position a dual one. We endeavor to fill our positions with river guides. Because a river trip is normally 5 hours long, staff are required to work another 3 hours of either "pre-trip" or "post-trip" work. After the 3 extra hours for a day's pay, staff are then paid by the hour for extra work. Although this concept makes for complicated scheduling, it is cost efficient and is excellent for staff morale. Our guests think it's great too!

### ***BEST PRACTICE – SUCCEED WITHOUT BUSINESS EXPERIENCE OR EDUCATION***

- Don't be afraid to try new things
- Re-invent your business on a regular basis
- Think "out of the box" regularly

### ***Don't Be Afraid to Make Mistakes***

I was a young officer in training sitting along 40 others at the edge of a clearing. In charge of training was an intimidating drill sergeant from the heralded 82nd Airborne. For some reason, I was chosen to respond to this question: "Imagine Lt., you are leading your platoon across this clearing and half way across you are bombarded with artillery. Your men are being blown apart. What are you going to do?" As a new military neophyte, I didn't have any idea and just stood there speechless. After a few unbearable minutes for effect, the drill sergeant screamed at me "I don't care what (expletive) you do, just do something."

The moral of the story was *a strong enthusiastic wrong decision is always better than indecision*. A wrong decision made enthusiastically will manifest itself quickly allowing for a hasty retreat. This lesson I have never forgotten. As a result of this lesson, I enthusiastically jump into new projects. If it works - great. If not, the project was modified and tried again. If after modification, it still didn't work, the project was scrapped.

### ***A Business Education Can Stop a Good Idea***

If I had done a cost benefit analysis and a business school style evaluation of jet boating, bungee jumping and skiing, we would have never embarked on those businesses. Because I never gave any thought to the downside, I enthusiastically jumped into these other businesses: Jet Boating Montreal, Jet Boating Niagara, Bungee Jumping, Mount Pakenham.

The jet boating in particular, which will eventually become our biggest business, was extremely difficult to start. Both our Montreal and our Niagara operation took years of work prior to opening but through perseverance are now successful operations.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – RELY ON YOUR CORE BELIEFS***

- If you don't know your core beliefs, establish them NOW
- Establish a lofty vision statement if you don't already have one
- Always leave a campsite cleaner than you found it
- Give more than your clients expect
- Never run out of food - this is one element of adventure tourism you CAN control!
- Know your customer

## ***Share the Magic***

Napoleon said, "Men will only die for ribbons." Staff will only really care for your business if they are inspired to a lofty purpose. WT was founded on the idea of sharing the magic found in whitewater and the great outdoors. It sounds good and it is. It is the kind of purpose that our staff can enthusiastically embrace.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – DEALING WITH SUCCESS - MOVING FROM ENTREPRENEUR TO MANAGER (LEADER)***

- Promote team spirit by having managers work along side staff
- Minimize personnel problems by being upfront on expectations during hiring
- Your staff will appreciate high standards
- Keep your accounting simple so you can understand it
- Join relevant adventure tourism industry organizations such as the Canada River Council which regulates, licenses and inspects river companies
- Join America Outdoors (worldwide trade association with annual convention)
- Recognize trends and seize opportunities

## ***"MOYF"***

At WT, all the management staff works along side the staff they supervise. We call this concept MOYF - "Management on Your Feet." This is better for morale, and it enables management staff to be close to the guests and their needs. At the same time, management can instill and reinforce high standards. We also insist all staff are considered part of the maintenance staff to foster the highest standard of cleanliness.

## ***Trade Associations***

Trade associations are extremely valuable to businesses. Two of the best for the outdoor business are the Canadian River Council (CRC), which regulates, licenses and inspects river companies in eastern Canada, and America Outdoors. Because of the CRC, neither the governments of Ontario or Québec have sought to regulate the river outfitting industry because the operators (i.e., the CRC) already do it and do it professionally. The CRC's membership has fostered a valuable relationship with R.L. Gougeon Insurance who now provides liability, property, and vehicle insurance for most of the CRC membership. Information can be obtained by calling Executive Director, Sean Mannion at 1-819-648-5200.

For industry education and information, nothing beats America Outdoors (AO). With over 600 members worldwide, AO is a must for serious outdoor companies. The biggest benefit of AO membership is the Professional Management Development Series. This series focuses on everything a small outdoor business needs training in: Sales and Marketing, Risk Management, Outfitter Professional Management.

The Development Series takes place the first week of December at the annual Trade Show and Convention known as "Confluence." This year's convention is Dec 6-9, 2000 in Tampa, Florida. If you go, you'll be among more than a dozen Canadian companies, including WT who attend every year. Information about joining can be obtained by calling Executive Director, David Brown at 1-865-558-3595.

## ***Capitalize on Demographic Trends***

By the early 1990's WT had a reputation of "Club Med in the Wilderness" with wild nights following wild days on the river. Some of WT's competitors began offering family trips. Thinking the two distinct markets incompatible, I dismissed family rafting as unworkable and undesirable at WT. Then I had my own children. In August of 1993, my sister Jill and her family from Atlanta visited with their young children. Thinking it was time to introduce the children to rafting, I took our two families with children ranging from three to ten, plus my 75 year-old father down the Middle Channel. Half way down the river, at a spectacular waterfall know as Garvin Chute, my sister uttered words that dramatically changed WT forever. "This has been the best day our family has ever had." An already impressive statement had even more meaning considering Jill's husband Ross is a Delta Airlines captain and the family routinely takes free flights to New York for tennis matches, to Denver for ski trips, or to Nassau for beach vacations. Against this backdrop of plenty, Jill's comments launched WT's Gentle Rafting Program for the family market which has been met with considerable success.

### ***BEST PRACTICE – EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY***

- Buy yourself a laptop and a Palm Pilot
- Load your notebook with an office suite and a contact management program
- Subscribe to a secondary ISP like MSN or AOL to connect when traveling
- Teach yourself desktop publishing software
- Become a Webmaster

## ***Create Your Marketing Material in Half the Time***

My wife and I have always created our own marketing material. Until several years ago, creating our new marketing literature took almost a month of my time. Not anymore - with desktop publishing the time has been cut in half. Using Quark Express, I write the copy and do a rough layout with photos and text. Once we have a rough draft, we email it to our graphic designer (who also uses Quark) to "make it pretty." He emails it back for approval. This process usually occurs two or three times before we are ready to go to print. Small jobs are printed immediately and large ones go through the process of film and phasars to approve the film. Once our material is printed, a portion is shipped directly to our mailing house. Our major mailings go to about 75,000 people. The database Query function is done at WT with our internal client database system and then emailed to the mailing house for distribution. All this work takes place and we don't even leave the office!

***BEST PRACTICE – PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR BUSINESS WITH AN EFFECTIVE RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM***

- Use a release form for protection as well as establishing your database.
- Ensure your promotional material stipulates your liability policies.
- The font size for your liability policy should be the same size as other print - there should be no such thing as "fine print"!
- Your liability message should be printed on everything.
- Assume accidents will happen and establish a back up plan to deal with them.
- Follow up any accidents with in-person visits and phone calls. No one ever sues friends.
- Ensure your staff sees the world through your guest's eyes.

***Stop Lawsuits Before They Happen***

We live in very litigious times where no one wants to be responsible for their actions. Even if someone trips because they do not watch where they are going, they want you to pay for any injury or inconvenience caused by the injury. Notwithstanding, operating a professional program is the single most important aspect of risk management. A close second is victim care at the accident scene and continuous follow up. We instituted this program about ten years ago. Prior to the program we would get several lawyer letters every year (out of about 30,000 clients). Since then we have had none concerning river accidents. We have a few "slip and fall" lawsuits only because we have not been as diligent about them mistakenly thinking they posed no threat.

***Swim the River***

We have had some problems in the past with some river guides with "macho" attitudes towards river running. Being in their late teens or early twenties and extremely athletic, some guides forget the general population and many of our guests tend to be "out of shape." To correct the problem, we changed our guide-training program so that new guides know exactly how our guests feel. Day one of guide-training is swimming the river. This approach teaches respect for the river in a very "up close and personal" way.

***BEST PRACTICE – PLAN FOR THE FUTURE***

- Never stop growing. The world is changing and your business must change with it.
- Explore the world to "borrow" good ideas from other businesses.

## ***Businesses, like Sharks, must Move Forward or Die.***

I naively thought 25 years ago I would work hard for five years to set up the business, and then coast. Was I wrong! Every year brings new challenges and new opportunities.

For example, this year WT was selected by Algonquin College to partner in their new Two Year Diploma Program in Outdoor Leadership. This new program, beginning September 2000, will involve three classroom days at the college and two outdoor days at WT, and later this winter at Mount Pakenham for ski, snowboard and winter survival.

## ***Borrow Good Ideas***

Recently, I had an opportunity to visit Hilton Head, a small island off the South Carolina coast. Although only 20km long and 6km wide, Hilton Head has 30,000 rental bikes. Overwhelmed by the size of the market, WT is now in the bike business.





# APPENDIX A

## Itinerary – Best Practices Tour

May 27 - June 4, 2000

<b>Day 1 Saturday, May 27</b>	<b>Sudbury, Ontario</b>
<i>During day</i>	Group departs from their points of origin and arrives by about 4pm in Sudbury
<i>4:00-6pm</i>	Airport and downtown hotel pickup and transfer by coach to Killarney Mountain Lodge, Killarney (1.5 hour drive) Hwy 69 South, then 637 West for 67 km to Killarney. Turn left on Commissioner St., one block before waterfront)
<i>6:00pm</i>	Check-in to lodge
<i>7:30-9:30pm</i>	Opening Dinner Welcome Reception, Killarney Mountain Lodge.
<i>Overnight</i>	Killarney Mountain Lodge, Killarney Tel: (705) 287-2242/ (800) 461-1117 Fax: (705) 287-2691
<b>Day 2 Sunday, May 28</b>	<b>Killarney, Ontario</b>
<i>8am</i>	Breakfast - Killarney Mountain Lodge
<i>9am</i>	Meeting point for regional attendees: Killarney Mountain Lodge (lobby)
<i>9am-12:30pm</i>	Sea kayaking/canoeing on Georgian Bay - Killarney Outfitters (with BBQ lunch at lodge)
<i>1pm-3:30pm</i>	Presentation/discussion with Killarney Outfitters at the Killarney Mountain Lodge
<i>3:30pm</i>	Check-out
<i>4:15pm</i>	Coach leaves for Huntsville (Hwy 637 east, then 69 south - 350 km on winding roads - about 4-4.5 hrs, plus 1 hr supper break)
<i>6:30pm-7:30pm</i>	Dinner stop: Log Cabin Fine Dining & Lodging (Tel: 705-746-7122) Located 2-2.5 hrs south of Killarney, approx. 10 km south of Parry Sound on Hwy 69. (Fixed menu)
<i>7:30pm-9:30pm</i>	Continue drive to Huntsville (Continue on Hwy 69 south, taking Hwy 141 east to Huntsville)
<i>9:45pm</i>	Arrive Deerhurst Resort, 1235 Deerhurst Drive, Huntsville - Check-in
<i>Overnight</i>	Deerhurst Resort, Huntsville Tel: (705) 789-6411 Fax: (705) 789-5204 (Note: Room service open til 11pm)

<b>Day 3 Monday, May 29</b>	<b>Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario</b>
8:00am	Breakfast at Deerhurst Resort (Eclipse Dining Room)
9:30-10:15am	Coach transfer to Algonquin Provincial Park (45 min)
10:15 am	Meeting point for regional attendees: Algonquin Provincial Park - meet at Centennial Ridges Rd and highway # 60 (at Km 36 at Algonquin Park, White Fish Campground)
10:15am-2pm	Voyageur canoeing excursion with Voyageur Quest - campfire lunch
2-4:30pm	Presentation/discussion with Voyageur Quest (in the field - backup location Deerhurst Resort)
4:45-5:30pm	Coach transfer back to Deerhurst Resort (45 min)
7pm	Dinner, Deerhurst Resort (Eclipse Dining Room) (reservation needed if switch to Steamers Restaurant)
Overnight	Deerhurst Resort, Huntsville Tel: (705) 789-6411 Fax: (705) 789-5204
<b>Day 4 Tuesday, May 30</b>	<b>Golden Lake and Beachburg, Ontario</b>
7am	Continental Breakfast (special arrangement - Eclipse Dining Room), Deerhurst Resort, & Checkout
8am-11am	Coach transfer to Golden Lake (about 225 km - 2.5-3 hours drive) (Hwy 60 east to Golden Lake, then turn Rt at Shell Station - across Bridge is First Nation. Take first Lft, then drive 1km.)
11am	Meeting point for regional attendees: The Anishinabe Experience, on the First Nation, Golden Lake
11am-1pm	Algonquin cultural experience and lunch at The Anishinabe Experience Tel: (613) 625-2519 /(800) 897-0235 Fax: (613) 625-2857
1-2:30pm	Presentation/discussion with The Anishinabe Experience
3-4pm	Transfer to Beachburg (about 60 km - 45min-1 hr) (Hwy 60 east to Eganville, then follow Hwy 60 onto Rte 8 north to Cobden. Turn RT on Hwy 17, then turn LFT on Rte 21 & follow signs through Foresters Falls)
4pm	Arrive Beachburg - check-in to Wilderness Tours cabins
5pm	Meeting point for regional attendees: Wilderness Tours main lodge - lobby
5-9:00pm	Evening supper, tour of white water rafting resort facilities, and presentation/disc. with Wilderness Tours
Overnight	Wilderness Tours, Beachburg Tel: (613) 646-2241 Fax: (613) 646-2996

<b>Day 5 Wednesday, May 31</b>		<b>Ottawa, Ontario/ Hull, Québec</b>
<i>7am</i>		Breakfast & check-out - Wilderness Tours
<i>8:30-10:30am</i>		Transfer to Hull (1.75-2 hours) and the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Rte 21 to Hwy 417, east to Hull. Take St. Nicholas St. exit, following St. Nicholas St. until cross Alexandra Bridge; take first left, Laurier.)
<i>10:15am</i>		Meeting point for regional attendees: at the docks of the Museum of Civilization, on the Ottawa River
<i>10:30-12:30pm</i>		Rabaska canoeing Ottawa River with Expéditions Eau Vive (2 hours)
<i>12:30-1:30pm</i>		Lunch (picnic) during the excursion; return to Museum for presentation
<i>2:00-4:30pm</i>		Presentation with Expéditions Eau Vive (at the museum)
<i>4:30-5:30pm</i>		MasterCard presentation (Major Sponsor) at the Museum
<i>5:30pm</i>		Transfer to Chateau Cartier Resort in Aylmer (15 min. by bus/taxi) upon request or eve. on own in Ottawa
<i>Dinner</i>		Dinner on own at leisure (Aylmer or Hull/Ottawa)
<i>Evening</i>		Optional evening activity to be proposed by Expéditions Eau Vive. Transfer from Hull/Ottawa area to Aylmer will be scheduled for later return to hotel
<i>Overnight</i>		Chateau Cartier Resort, Aylmer Tel. (819) 776-7978 Fax (819) 777-7161
<b>Day 6 Thursday, June 1</b>		<b>Saint-Paulin, Québec</b>
<i>7am</i>		Breakfast & check-out - Chateau Cartier Resort
<i>8am-12pm</i>		Transfer to Saint-Paulin (350 km - about 4 hours) (A-417, then A-40 East, exit Louiseville)
<i>12pm-1:30pm</i>		Check-in & lunch - Le Baluchon Resort at their Microbrasserie Les Bières de la Nouvelle-France
<i>1:15pm</i>		Meeting point for regional attendees: Auberge Le Baluchon, Saint-Paulin, at the Microbrasserie "Les bières de la Nouvelle-France"
<i>1:30-4pm</i>		Birdwatching / Rabaska canoeing with Excursion Mauricie
<i>4-5:30pm</i>		Return to Le Baluchon/free time
<i>5:30-6:30pm</i>		Dinner - Le Baluchon Resort
<i>7:00-9:30pm</i>		Presentation with Excursion Mauricie at the Sugar Shack of Le Baluchon Resort
<i>Overnight</i>		Le Baluchon Resort, Saint-Paulin Tel. (819) 268-2555 Fax (819) 268-5234

<b>Day 7 Friday, June 2</b>	<b>Québec City, Québec</b>
7:30am	Breakfast & check-out - Le Baluchon Resort
9-11am	Transfer to Québec City (200 km -about 2 hours) (A-40 East, exit A-540North, exit Boul. Laurier)
11am-12pm	Check-in - Manoir Lafayette, Québec City (few doors away from Château Laurier)
12:00pm	Meeting point for regional attendees: Lobby of Château Laurier hotel, 1220 Place Georges V ouest (Château Laurier hotel: Tel. (418) 522-8108, Fax (418) 4524-8768)
12pm-1:30pm	Lunch at the Château Laurier hotel restaurant Le Patrimoine (1220 Place Georges V ouest)
2:00-6:00pm	Afternoon presentations with Ecomertours Nord Sud and Horizon Nature Aventure (no activity), at a nearby meeting room (YMCA, parallel to Grande-Allée, at corner of Place Georges V street)
Dinner / Eve.	Dinner on own at leisure and free time to explore Old Town Québec
Overnight	Manoir Lafayette - 661 Av. Grande-Allée - Tel.(418) 522-2652, Fax (418) 524-8768 - Québec City
<b>Day 8 Saturday, June 3</b>	<b>Saint-Fulgence/Saguenay, Québec</b>
7am	Breakfast & check-out - Chateau Laurier / Manoir Lafayette
8-11am	Morning transfer to Ste-Rose du Nord (225 km - 2.5-3 hours) (A-73 North, then 172 East)
10:45am	Meeting point for regional attendees: Pier of Ste-Rose-du-Nord
11am-2pm	Sea kayaking/zodiac with Québec Hors-Circuits (snack upon arrival )
2pm-3:00pm	Lunch on location and transfer to Pourvoirie du Cap au Leste for check-in
3:30-6pm	Presentation with Québec Hors-Circuits (meeting room at the Pourvoirie)
6-7pm	Free time
7-9:30pm	Closing Dinner Reception - Pourvoirie du Cap au Leste
Overnight	Pourvoirie du Cap au Leste, Saint-Fulgence Tel. (418) 675-2000 Fax (418) 675-1232
<b>Day 9 Sunday, June 4</b>	<b>From Saint-Fulgence - Return Home via Montreal</b>
7:30am	Breakfast & check-out - Pourvoirie du Cap au Leste (172 West; 73/175 South; A-40 West)
9am-3pm	Transfer to Montreal Dorval Airport - flights home 4pm+

# APPENDIX B


## MasterCard Presentation



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**MasterCard  
Exclusives Online™**

**Are You Interested in  
Increasing Your Customer Base?**



**MasterCard International**

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**A Global Brand with Global Reach**

- 700 million cards in circulation
- \$650 billion annual card spending
- 23,000 member financial institutions
- 6.5 billion transactions per year



## **MasterCard International**

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### **Who We Are:**

- A global payment brand accepted in more than 17 million locations
- An association of member financial institutions

### **What We Do:**

- Promote the MasterCard brand to drive card usage and loyalty
- Process transactions among our acceptance network



## **MasterCard Exclusives Online™**

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### **What Is MasterCard Exclusives Online™?**

- A direct marketing email program that delivers targeted, personalized exclusive offers to enrolled cardholders
- Cardholders indicate the type and frequency of offers they want to receive
- MasterCard Exclusives Online™ delivers dynamically generated personalized emails matching merchant offers to individual consumer preferences

## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

### A Partial List of MasterCard Exclusives Online™ Partners



## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

### Additional MasterCard Exclusives Online™ Partners

- PC Flowers & Gifts
- Amazing Baskets
- Omaha Steaks
- Diet-Shop.com
- Seattle's Finest
- Hilton Hotels
- African Travel
- Heritage Hotels
- Air Jamaica
- Movietown.com
- Sports Illustrated
- Time Magazine
- JC Penney
- Petstore.com
- KBKids.com
- FamilyTime.com
- Americasbaby.com



## **MasterCard Exclusives Online™**

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### **Partner Benefits**

- A FREE, turnkey direct marketing program that helps you expand your customer base
- Targets consumers interested in your goods/services
- Provides opportunities to test consumer response to various merchandise and offers
- HTML format offers visual merchandising and branding opportunities



## **MasterCard Exclusives Online™**

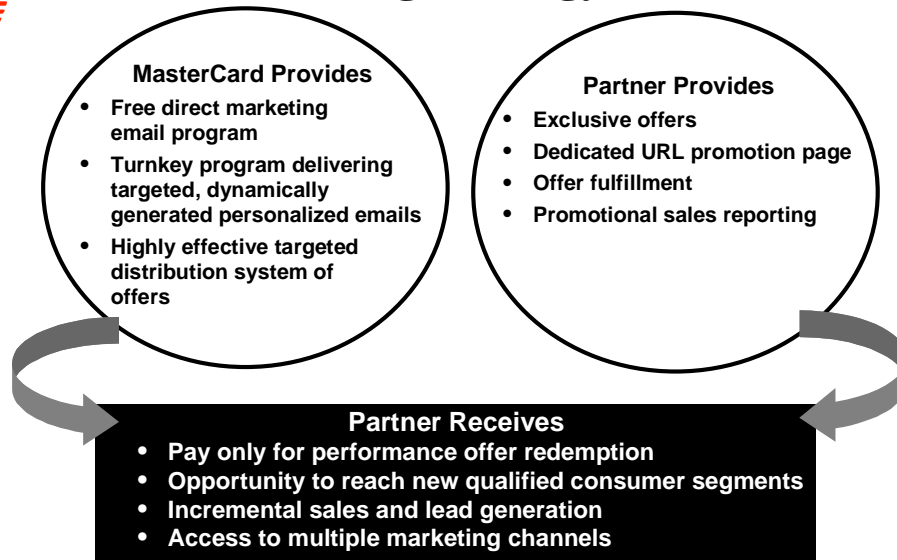
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### **Consumer Benefits**

- Value
  - Exclusive, high-value offers
- Flexibility
  - Choice of up to 20 shopping categories
  - Select frequency of emails (weekly, monthly, quarterly)
- Personal
  - Emails are customized to match pre-selected preferences



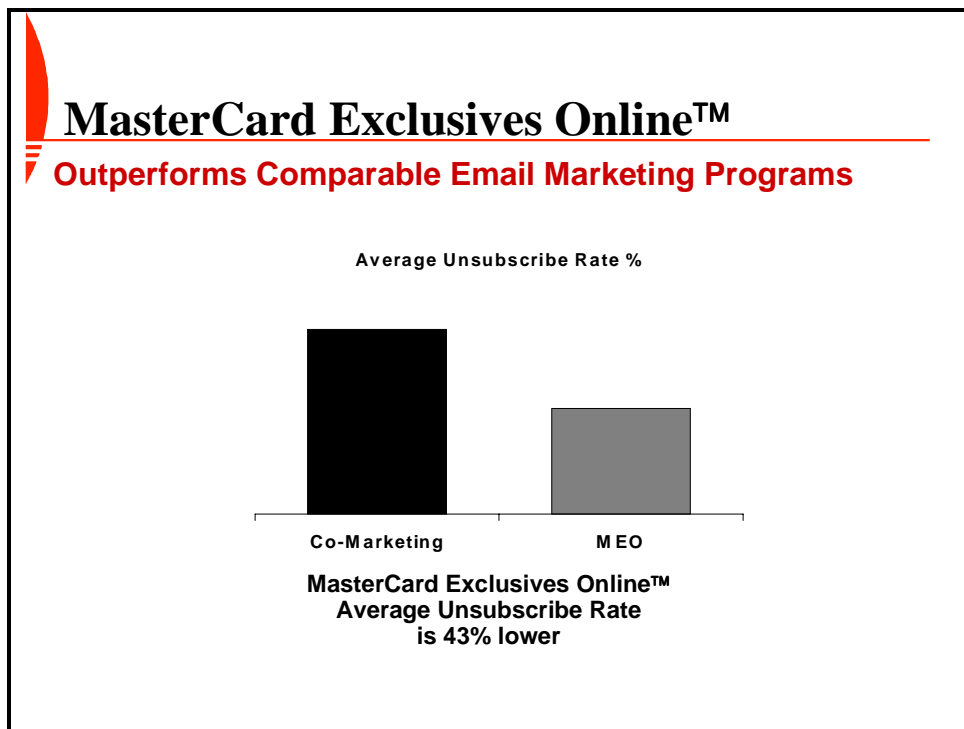
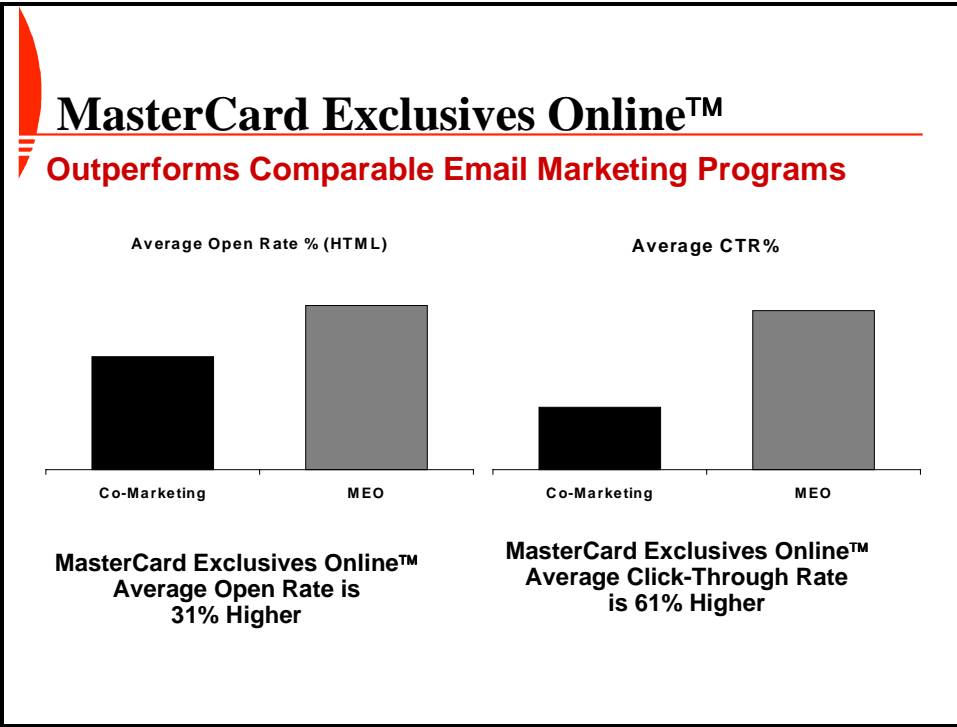
## Partner Marketing Strategy



## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

### Participate in Just 3 Easy Steps

- **Step 1 – Provide an exclusive discount to MasterCard cardholders enrolled in MasterCard Exclusive Online™**
- **Step 2 – Create a dedicated URL and MasterCard Exclusives Online™ branded offer page hosted on your website**
- **Step 3 – Fulfill the offers redeemed by MasterCard cardholders and report back on promotion performance**





## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

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### MasterCard Provides Ongoing Program Support

- Your offers can be included in MasterCard's extensive online promotion and sponsorship marketing efforts
- MasterCard's issuing banks co-brand MasterCard Exclusives Online™ extending the program's reach through bank websites, direct mail, and statement marketing
- Marketing support directs consumers to enrollment through a variety of online and offline marketing initiatives
- MasterCard works closely with our partners to ensure that you maximize your results



## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

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### It's Free. It's Easy. Get Started Now!

- Create exclusive offer(s) available only to MasterCard cardholders enrolled in MasterCard Exclusives Online™
- Review, complete and fax the application agreement to MasterCard Canada - MC Exclusives Online at (416) 365-6670
- Create a dedicated URL and MasterCard Exclusives Online™ promotion page including all offer details, terms/conditions and the MasterCard brand mark (MasterCard will supply)
- Send us your company logo for use in emails and promotional advertising opportunities
- Contact us with any questions
  - Call Stephen Reid at (416) 365-6681
  - Email us at [meo@mastercard.com](mailto:meo@mastercard.com)



## MasterCard Exclusives Online™

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### Additional Shopping Directory Opportunity

- Consumers can shop for offers in the MasterCard Exclusives Online™ shopping directory located at [mastercard.com/exclusives](http://mastercard.com/exclusives)
- MasterCard Exclusives Online™ shopping directory gives consumers instant access to your offer(s)

### How To Participate

- You need only supply an offer good for at least 6 months
- There are no minimum offer requirements
- Simply complete and submit our online merchant enrollment form at <http://www.mastercard.com/exclusives>

*MasterCard  
International*





