

Building Tourism Sales

How to Work with Your Destination Marketing Organization

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I F YOUR SHOPPING CENTER HAS FEW RESOURCES — TIME OR MONEY — TO DEVOTE TO A COMPREHENSIVE TOURISM MARKETING PROGRAM, THIS ARTICLE IS FOR YOU. A limited budget cannot be stretched too far, so it is best to focus on the one area where you will see the greatest return for your investment. Your strategy should be to partner with your DMO (destination marketing organization) such as your CVB or state tourism office. What follows are examples of successful partnership programs with shopping venues and DMOs.

Let's assume you have already established a relationship with your DMO and you work well together. You advertise in their publications, respond to their press leads and follow up on tour operator requests they send you. Now take your program to the next level with creative partnership programs.

I decided to talk directly with the DMOs to see what they look for when they consider partnering with a shopping center or venue. After all, it is up to you to study their program of work. Find out what motivates the DMO and be prepared to discuss programs that you know from the start will be a win-win situation. Hopefully, the following will give you some ideas to discuss with your DMO and lead to a long and fruitful partnership.

I spoke with Rozeta Rad, director of tourism for the Hollywood, FL, Chamber of Commerce. She explained that their retail tourism program is still in its infancy, but that she has lots of ideas on how to grow it. This is the perfect time for the shopping venues to step up to the plate and get involved in the

process. Rad has to promote several shopping venues in her district. Her challenge is to effectively brand shopping in Hollywood, but also to keep a special uniqueness to each shopping area. For example, downtown Hollywood has a very different character from Hollywood Beach. "Besides our two main shopping districts, we also work with shopping venues throughout the Greater Hollywood area so we can package these areas and offer the tour operator a nice variety of shopping options for the day-trippers," Rad said.

Some of the programs she has for her retailers include collateral pieces such as brochures, co-op advertising opportunities in the tourist publications, inclusion in her sales kits, editorial opportunities in the in-flights and travel trade publications, and inclusion in her website.

Rad understands the need to be a resource for her merchants. For example, she knows how they get bombarded with ad reps, so she advises them on which publications are best. She also offers workshops and seminars to help train mer-

chants on how to become a tourist destination. When she develops a program, Rad is sensitive to their fiscal issues and will often ask for something other than just cash. "If I know the funds are tight, then I ask if they will donate a gift we can use in a goody bag for our tour groups. At least that way they are still gaining exposure."

Understanding that many tour groups enjoy special events, Rad will leverage funds from the Chamber of Commerce and the Community Redevelopment Agency to produce events such as street fair type fashion shows her merchants can participate in.

A terrific program Rad has developed for tour groups is her scavenger hunt. "What a perfect way for the groups to not only hear about Hollywood, but to experience it first hand and use the shops and restaurants," said Rad. Besides just the fun of participating in the hunt, restaurants offer complimentary drinks along the way and there is always a major grand prize. How do the tour groups hear of this program? As soon as a group books in Hollywood, Rad sends out her sales kits, which includes information about the scavenger hunt.

Part of any chamber employee's responsibility is to increase membership. Rad has incentive programs that encourage membership. For example, inclusion in her website is free to members, while non-members have to pay.

While Rad feels her programs are still in their infancy, it is clear that she has already done a great job of developing tourism-related programs for her merchants. All of us wish we had a DMO that is this active.

Check out www.hollywoodchamber.org/local/tourism.html.

Many DMO retail tourism programs have been in place for years. For example, I have written much about the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority's Shop Las Vegas, an extremely successful program. However, they are always implementing new components. "One of the newest shopping components is the commissionable shopping packages we developed specifically for Las Vegas, such as Shop & Beauty, Shop & Dine or Shop & Shuttle. These packages provide a unique shopping experience for travelers and new revenue sources for tour operators and travel agencies," explained Art Jimenez, sales executive for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority.

To keep current on their programs, check out www.lvcva.com, go to Plan a Visit and then click on shopping.

Maureen Morgenthien, associate director of tourism sales from the Greater Ft. Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, wanted to offer something unique to her shopping

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partners in Broward County, FL.

“Our research showed that we have an untapped market close by, our Caribbean neighbors,” said Morgenthien. “We were seeing large numbers of Caribbean travelers coming to South Florida, and particularly to Greater Ft. Lauderdale, to take care of shopping needs not being met in their home country. Plus, we have been working diligently on getting more air service into the Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport from the different islands.”

Morgenthien capitalized on the duty-free shopping week Florida has every summer. She contacted the shopping malls and offered to include them in co-op pieces that were distributed throughout the Caribbean via fax, newspaper inserts and e-mail. The collateral was distributed to the travel trade and Caribbean airlines, as well as to the consumer. The traveler merely had to show an ID demonstrating they were a Caribbean resident to receive the shopping center’s offer. The Galleria offered a coupon book with a complementary gift. Check out all their programs at www.sunny.org.

Moving from a local to a state level, I spoke with Jennifer Ackerson of Destinations New York State. “It is important for retailers and shopping centers to understand that they play a vital role in the development of the tourist product. Shopping is the number-one activity for tourists,” explained Ackerson. She sees her role as helping to educate the retailer on the tremendous number of market-

ing opportunities, how they fit into the travel experience and how to go after the business.

“Destinations of New York State provides the means to reach the travel trade and offers these tools to the shopping venues and attractions. For example, we saw the need for a Shopping Guide for consumers and trade that would be developed on a statewide level. We are printing our first one now. Response from the merchants, particularly for a first-time publication, has been terrific,” explained Ackerson.

Destinations of New York State offers a variety of programs, such as participation in direct mail to tour operators. These mailings are done regionally five times a year. There are also sales missions where New York State travel suppliers meet with the top tour operators and receptives in priority market areas, creating opportunities for these travel buyers to do business with travel suppliers.

The Orlando CVB is constantly sending out leads to their partner shopping centers from groups coming into Orlando for family reunions. Often, the families request information on shopping from the CVB because they want to make a visit to the mall as a part of their family reunion.

Are DMOs interested in learning more about how they can better work with their shopping partners?

Yes. Last summer I had the honor of co-teaching a course called “Shopping Tourism,” which was an elective offered in a week-long series of courses given by Purdue University’s

Continuing Education Department for the International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau’s. As part of the course, I did a survey to see what shopping venues would like to see from DMOs. Some of the findings:

- Assistance in forming shopping alliances
- Developing specific shopping programs like the ones discussed in this article
- Submit leads to the mall from groups looking for information on shopping
- Provide research
- Offer booth-share opportunities at trade shows to save on costs
- Coordinate sales missions in key feeder markets
- Inclusion in collateral material and websites
- Offer the list of upcoming conventions so malls can contact the meeting planner directly
- Offer co-op advertising opportunities in feeder markets
- Give out shopping information at visitor centers
- Bring in more fam tours, media and tour operators from your major and emerging markets
- Develop shopping packages
- Assist in translating materials
- Offer brochure distribution at trade shows
- Make sure the in-market reps have all the information on shopping.

Perhaps this list, as well as some of the ideas in the article, will help you to formulate a

shopping partnership plan with your DMO. ■

CJF Marketing International offers a range of services for creating and implementing strategic tourism, economic development and marketing programs for shopping centers, urban entertainment projects, downtown retail districts, communities and commercial properties globally. The firm also offers educational programs and seminars for corporate meeting planners, shopping center developers, communities and re-development agencies. Feimster can be reached by phone at 732/249-6080 or by fax at 732/545-3138. Visit her website at cjfmarketinginternational.com.
