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CAROLYN 'CJ' FEIMSTER

FOUNDER/OWNER CJF MARKETING INTERNATIONAL

By Amy L Charles

Carolyn “CJ” Feimster saw her shopping center/retail background morph into Retail Tourism as the importance of the visitor market to shopping/dining/entertainment destination productivity grew apparent. One of her most important roles has been creating and managing SHOP*DINE*PLAY*USA—a nationwide alliance of unique shopping destinations specializing in custom packaging and itinerary building.



ON CHANGES

I’ve found it most interesting to watch the Retail Tourism evolution from the early 1990s, when colleagues wondered why I was selling/promoting/repping shopping centers at trade shows and sales missions. We instinctively knew the visitor shopped and spent a lot of money. As time went on, there was more discussion about how important shopping was to the visitor experience and we started to conduct research. Department of Commerce stats consistently prove shopping to be among top visitor activities. It’s also interesting to see how we marketers have evolved with our tactics to capture the lucrative visitor market for our centers.

ON CHALLENGES

Pre-COVID-19, the greatest challenge facing our unique niche was the online disruption of brick-and-mortar and overcoming it by fulfilling the promise of offering experiences such as luxury custom itineraries and packages curated by Madison Avenue BID in NYC, or the addition of family activities surrounding the historic Faneuil Hall Marketplace buildings in Boston creating a “community center” atmosphere, or the opening this fall of Fifth + Broadway Nashville, which will house the country’s only National Museum of African American Music.

That pales compared to the devastation caused by this new virus worldwide, with cancellations and postponements of major travel trade and consumer events damaging local and national economies. We need to be proactive and ready for when this hits bottom and the upswing starts. There will

be pent-up demand for travel and shopping. Meanwhile, we should assist operators with special incentives, promotions and marketing dollars. We’re all in this together.

KEEP CALM * TRAVEL + SHOP ON

ON OPPORTUNITIES

Tourism and Economic Development have always been closely linked. “Tourism is an Economic Development Tool”—but what does that mean?

We launched a new platform effectively and strategically linking the two—Investment Tourism, bringing improved ROI to destinations. It “starts with a visit”—and with properly defined “message points” you can get the visitor market’s attention and educate them on investment opportunities in a place they love to visit. Combined with appropriate economic development tools to motivate and make it easy for the visitor to invest, you have an entirely new consumer market with money to bring life back to a community, fill downtown space, and help residential markets.

FOR NEWCOMERS

Get involved. Build relationships in person, not just digitally, and they’ll become lifelong. Many trade shows seek volunteers, which is a perfect way to meet people. Trade associations such as Skai International are important to join. Remember two key words: Leveraging and Partnerships, necessary to be effective in the travel and tourism space. Finally, network—because “networking” is one letter off from “not working”! 

Learn more about Investment Tourism: <https://rma.us.com/services/investment-tourism/>