

**FY 2009-2010 Marketing Plan
Community Input Sessions
Summary Report**

On behalf of the TDA's Marketing Committee, Visit Winston-Salem (VWS) hosted four community-based input sessions. These sessions were hosted by VWS to secure community input into the development of marketing strategies for the FY 2009-2010 Marketing Plan. Two sessions were held on Tuesday, February 24 and two were held on Thursday, February 26. The sessions were held at various times of the day, from early morning to early evening, to encourage maximum participation.

Attendance:

In previous years, VWS focused its efforts on securing input from the hospitality industry. This year, a concerted effort was made to expand our outreach beyond the hospitality industry to the community at large. This outreach yielded 89 participants representing a good cross-section of the community including 60 community organizations and businesses. Attendance by category was as follows:

- 27% concerned citizens and business owners
- 24% arts based organizations
- 18% visitor attractions
- 15% accommodations
- 12% sports organizations and venues
- 4% colleges and universities

Session Format:

The format for the sessions was designed to educate participants on the mission, structure and work of the TDA and VWS. Each session began with an overview of the current state of the hospitality industry in Forsyth County, including statistical information regarding travel and tourism, and general information about tourism marketing. Care was given to provide little to no information about specific marketing strategies currently being employed by VWS so as not to bias input.

To gather information about effective marketing messages, participants were asked to select a word that best describes Winston-Salem. Discussion was encouraged to focus participants and to find common ground. As follow-up, the group was challenged to create an emotional phrase that would best sell the community to potential visitors. An emotional connection was stressed, as travel decisions are based on emotional buying impulse rather than a need-based purchase like that of goods or services. This approach was utilized to help find commonality of word usages and develop consensus around the community's marketing messages.

Throughout the session, open feedback was welcomed and encouraged. Participants were offered the floor to express ideas and thoughts and to give direction to the staff. Additionally, participants were given suggestion sheets for their use in providing any input they did not have the opportunity to express

in the open forum or input they would prefer to express anonymously. Participants had the option of giving their written comments to staff members or placing them in a suggestion box at the registration table.

The final exercise was conducted using a small group format, with each group given a real marketing challenge (scenario) that VWS will face in the upcoming fiscal year. The group was asked to develop strategies for addressing their assigned challenge. A series of these scenarios were developed and randomly distributed at the meeting. The purpose of this exercise was twofold: to gather fresh, creative ideas for addressing the challenges of marketing the destination and to provide participants with a better understanding of the issues facing the organization that markets the community to potential visitors in all markets. Additionally, some of the scenarios gave participants the opportunity to give actual leads on potential groups that could be targeted to positively impact tourism in Forsyth County.

Results:

- One word that best describes Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.

The following words were mentioned in all of the sessions:

Artist, Arts, City of the Arts
Family (Family Fun)
Friendly
History (Historical)

These words were mentioned in 3 sessions:

Diverse, Diversity
Easy
Education(al)
Vibrant

These words were mentioned in 2 sessions:

Accessible
Convenient
Creative
Culture, Cultural
Innovation/Innovative
Quaint
Relaxing
Value
Welcome(ing)

- Messaging and emotional connections with potential visitors

Based on participants' characterizations of the destination, they were asked to develop marketing messages that reach out to potential visitors. One phrase was given (almost verbatim) at two meetings; *small town feel/big city opportunities*, but there were a number of sentiments expressed that convey a similar message. This messaging addresses the importance participants think visitors place on diversity in the destination's offerings (arts and culture to NASCAR) as well as value and affordability (*Come to Winston-Salem and open your mind, not your wallet.*). Participants also cautioned that the diversity of

Winston-Salem's offering can be both a blessing and a challenge when trying to develop and focus into a single marketing message. Another cautionary message from the sessions was that the small town, quaint, relaxed feel of the destination can be viewed as a positive by many, but can be seen as a negative by younger demographics seeking a more active, urban atmosphere.

Along with diversity and value, another theme that emerged was a focus on history and heritage and marrying the old with the new (economy). Participants discussed Winston-Salem's heritage as a backdrop for the scientific and educational innovations being developed in the community. The impact of this on attracting visitors was discussed. The following statements address this:

At its core, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County is a community steeped in history that offers the potential visitor vibrant, family-oriented, artistic and cultural experiences in a friendly, affordable destination.

Innovation, science and education represent potential target audiences for the destination, and are becoming synonymous with the destination.

A related theme that was expressed is remaining true to the destination's heritage and culture in marketing the destination – its authenticity – that Winston-Salem is truly diverse and, as such, is attractive to broader markets.

- Ideas, strategic direction, general comments

Participants were asked to develop ideas for addressing some of the destination's top marketing challenges. These challenges were presented in the form of scenarios and included challenges such as creating demand for meetings during low occupancy periods, building attendance at local attractions, and attracting groups that have traditionally met in resort locations. Participant responses to these scenarios are attached.

Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to provide other comments, ideas, and strategic direction. The following emerged from that discussion:

- ✓ Take a stand – Determine who we are and what type of travelers we want to attract. Start the long range process of developing the infrastructure that allows us to reach those targets.
- ✓ Personality based marketing – Employ a more strategic use of images and words of the target demographic throughout Web and print marketing. Become very targeted about who we are trying to attract and market directly to that demographic.
- ✓ Web based marketing – Enhanced Web presence is critical to the growth of the destination. VisitWinstonSalem.com should be the source for everything related to travel for the area. Increase participation in social networking sites for more cost effective marketing. Use testimonials on the Web site. Take advantage of the low cost of Web marketing.
- ✓ Diversity – Focus on diverse aspects of community. Play off NASCAR heritage. Promote gateway to the Yadkin Valley.
- ✓ Group markets to explore – Fraternity and sorority meetings, Hispanic organizations, medical community, religious, and senior citizen groups. Greater focus on sports. Work more closely with local non-profit groups to serve as local hosts. Expand holiday season marketing to family

- ✓ Better education of locals, as well as visitors – Develop strategies for educating local service providers and citizens about the destination to develop pride in the community and so they can better assist visitors. Importance of single message in the community about “who we are as a destination”. Fine tune information for visitors so they will take advantage of the area attractions and offerings. Make changes to “What’s Happening in Winston-Salem” weekly calendar of events. Develop maps showing all visitor attractions and other collateral. Visitor Center should be doing more to promote itself and events; this might include podcasts, videos, and or a radio or TV show. Area attractions/restaurants and arts organizations should be made aware of upcoming conventions and given opportunities to develop programming around these events and market to the attendees.
- ✓ Growing occupancy with occupancy tax – It is important to use the occupancy tax dollars efficiently to develop occupancy that generated more occupancy tax dollars.

Group follow-up

An electronic survey was sent to all attendees after the meeting. Twenty seven participants replied. Results are as follows.

- 67% of the survey respondents felt the session was a “very” or “extremely” valuable.
- 100% felt they were given ample opportunities to give input
- 100% would participate in the future

Attachment

Summary of Participant Responses to Scenarios

Scenario I

Leisure travel represents a large percentage of the overall travel and tourism dollars spent in North Carolina. Many of these travelers are day-trippers or are guests of friends and family. These folks do not generally take advantage of the Visitor Center's services. Think of ways these visitors could learn about and enjoy all the Winston-Salem area has to offer, both by accessing this information from the Visitor Center and by other means. Related to accessing information from the Visitor Center, how could Visit Winston-Salem build awareness of the Visitor Center as a resource?

Group comments:

- Better signage on highways
- Create Twitter site, Facebook page or other social networking media
- Promote itself on its own Web site – use testimonials
- Create and distribute literature that is focuses on the visitor center
- Work with media to generate stories about the visitor center and distribute throughout North Carolina
- Create blog or have a blogspot on Smitty's Notes
- Market the visitor center as a resource for sorting through the diversity of offerings in the city
- Create separate Web address for visitor center
- Advertise the services of the visitor center
- Link to other visitor centers within the state
- Dedicated story about the visitor center in the visitor guide
- Better define all the visitor center offers
- Create an on-line guest book
- Develop attractive promotion-encourage partners to be advertisers
- Have coupon/discounts that are only available at the visitor center
- Create welcome baskets for the Newcomer's Club to offer new residents, who in turn may use the visitor center to become familiar with their new home or for friends visiting Winston-Salem
- Create a scavenger hunt with prizes to be collected at the visitor center
- Encourage partners to be advocates
- Create a Podcast with "What's new", "What's happening" and a calendar of events
- Work with local AM radio stations to get coverage i.e., WSJS's "What's local" program
- Create GPS locator
- Promote the visitor center as a tourist attraction since it is in an historic building
- Work with accommodations to have visitwinstonsalem.com put on hotel keys

Scenario II

Oftentimes, attractions do not see great increases in attendance when major family-based sporting events are held in Winston-Salem and the surrounding area. Consider ways to entice visiting families to explore the area attractions.

Group comments:

- Create family workshops with attractions i.e. Reynolda House, Old Salem, SciWorks, Children's Museum of Winston-Salem
- Voucher books for other events/workshops
- Create Web page with activities for different members of the family – personality based marketing
- Discount vouchers for gas, accommodations, attractions
- Distribute information on upcoming events along with discount coupons to encourage return visits
- Improve/consolidate visitor info. on Web (Google details)
- Partner with PTI.com to promote events
- Cross pollinate events with attractions by dates – attractions can plan special events around sporting event dates
- Promote “Weekends in Winston” Web site to accommodations front desks
- Package events toward sporting events being held in Winston-Salem
- Submit timely calendar to hotels.com. They will post events on hotel confirmations made through their site
- Tell the stories of the community through scavenger hunts for attendees
- Work with the city to provide trolleys that give tours of local attractions during sports events
- Create a “frequent visitor” points program
- Use the back of college and university football tickets to promote visitwinstonsalem.com, especially for out-of-state teams
- Need more targeted events calendar
- Work with groups and obtain schedules to determine “free time” and offer attractions suggestions
- Provide incoming group list to accommodations more than once a month
- Make groups aware of the close proximities of attractions, no more than 15 minutes away
- Give groups information on specific things to do (up-to-date, be specific about shops hours, concerts, exhibits)
- Educate hotel desk/concierge on specifics of attractions
- One page current (weekly) event sheet with map on back

Scenario III

The majority of hotel rooms in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County are in the select service and economy categories and do not have meeting space on-site. Talk about ways Visit Winston-Salem may help these hotels bring in more overnight guests. These ideas might include target market segments such as religious, sports and social guests. Develop a list of potential markets (categories of businesses) that could be tapped to increase occupancy at select service and economy hotels.

Group comments:

- Senior trips/Motorcoach tours
- Bank customer motorcoach tours
- Sporting events
- Golfers
- Create small festivals to generate business

- Build groups by promoting wineries
- Promote events that would require an overnight or two-night stay
- Assist coaches/planners in securing accommodations
- Have accommodation staffs experience attractions in order to better promote to visitors
- Central location promotion
- Promote banquet, reception, meeting space elsewhere in Winston-Salem i.e., LJVM, SciWorks, Old Salem, etc.
- “What’s Happening” calendar offers so much information that guests sometimes prefer to speak to a person who knows the events taking place instead of reading the calendar list

Scenario IV

Travel generated in the motorcoach market has declined over the past years. The seniors market is shrinking and the Boomer market has not taken to this mode of transportation. Student travel via motorcoach is a bright spot and has been on the increase. These groups are often looking to research colleges and universities. Many are performance-based, such as choirs and band competitions. Talk about what Winston-Salem has to offer to student groups, and what community connections can be explored to help build links to student groups and increase this type of travel.

Group comments:

What:

- Family friendly town – Children’s Museum, Children’s Theatre
- A wide variety of attractions
- Hanes Mall, unique shopping in the arts district
- The variety of arts
- Vibrant downtown
- Wineries
- Festivals – Piedmont Craftsmen, National Black Theatre Festival, RiverRun
- “music” opportunities
- Student-low cost/affordable
- Independent restaurants (culinary tourism)
- Stress parking availability
- Coffee shops like Krankie’s
- Parks
- Hot spots/GPS coordinates
- Promote as good stopover on way to the beaches

Connections:

- Sports and entertainment groups
- Special interest groups
- Museums groups
- Arts groups

Scenario V

Conventions and meetings have seasonality. Many associations and groups prefer to meet in the spring and fall. This creates demand in those seasons that doesn't exist in the summer and winter. In the summer and winter, religious-based and minority-based conferences find Winston-Salem to be a great destination. Many religious conventions are hosted by a local church or faith-based organization. Many minority based organizations have strong local ties. Discuss other local organizations that could hold events here and ways to show the value of hosting these groups, and discuss the value of organizations serving as local hosts.

Group comments:

- Summer forensics camps and events at WSSU during the summer
- Band camps/competitions
- Tennis
- Vineyards
- Groups that have an interest in events such as National Black Theatre Festival & North Carolina Black Municipal Elected Officials
- Sorority/fraternity
- Hispanic community
- NACSAR
- Tobacco growers
- Medical associations, cancer center, Brenner's Children's Hospital
- Hispanic community-festivals
- Enhance downtown awareness
- Local high school events such as Parkland wrestling and Forsyth Country Day sports tournaments
- NASCAR heritage/Winston Cup Preview
- Wine industry
- Get city/state to buy into signage issues – way finding signs
- Become the most colorful city or adopt some other theme and make it happen

Scenario VI

From jugglers to chimney sweeps, from medical professionals and teachers to cross-stitchers, almost every group has meetings. Groups that share in some of the unique aspects of Winston-Salem tend to be easier to attract and have greater potential to visit the area's attractions. An example might be art-based conventions, such as the North Carolina Music Educators or a meeting of the Association of Living History, Farm, and Agriculture Museums. Brainstorm types of groups that Visit Winston-Salem might focus efforts on based on the community's strengths and assets.

Group comments:

- Corporate groups that can no longer go to resorts or higher-priced cities
- Wine enthusiasts
- Destination weddings
- Focus on sizes of groups we may accommodate
- Youth sports events
- NC Teachers Association

- Senior motorcoach groups
- Scrapbooking groups
- Quilter groups
- Association for coupon savers
- Multi-tier marketing groups
- Religious market
- Groups for races at NASCAR surrounding tracks (Charlotte, Martinsville)
- Medical associates
- Vintage cars
- Printmakers
- Museums
- Books or literature
- Education or university
- Non-profit
- Community arts groups
- Homebuilders
- Biomedical
- Arts Councils
- Grandfather mountains
- PGA
- Film makers
- Dancers
- Bakers
- Banking
- Slow food groups
- Gardening/landscaping
- Technology
- Science researchers
- Historians
- Railroad/Model trains
- History re-enactors
- Masons
- Medical art
- Odd Fellows
- New wine and beer
- Public Art Advocacy
- Theatre technology
- Motor sports enthusiasts
- Special Olympics-State Games

Scenario VII

Traditionally, pharmaceutical and medical groups have generally met in resort locations. Now, however, there may be an opportunity to bring these meetings to Winston-Salem. Talk about who some of these groups are and how Visit Winston-Salem may encourage more of these types of groups to meet in our destination.

Group comments:

Who:

- Huge medical groups already in town – have both biotechnology and nanotechnology companies
- Medical schools, WFU Primate research
- Any pharmaceutical group/companies that sell to doctors in W-S
- American Cancer Society and other specific illness-based groups

How:

- Promote creative use of resources
- Emphasize personal interaction
- Promote ease of access/roadways
- Promote affordability and value vs. amenities that are offered at resorts
- Outline leisure activities – good cultural mix, family-friendly, diverse arts climate
- Promote that Winston-Salem is a year-round destination
- Provide opportunities for day trips (wineries)
- Target geographic areas for which we are a central location (southeast and east coast)

Scenario VIII:

“Social networking” is the buzz in the marketing world these days. Discuss ways social networking may be used to increase attendance at events such as the National Black Theatre Festival, RiverRun International Film Festival, Salute! and other festivals and events. Also, include ideas on how Visit Winston-Salem might promote general leisure travel through social networking sites, and what messages might be best utilized on what sites.

Group comments:

- Each event should create a Facebook page with information from the director. Visit Winston-Salem could be the umbrella for all of these Facebook pages or they could include Visit Winston-Salem in their Facebook page
- Create “fans of” section within Facebook
- Keep information on Web site up to date – Change it daily
- Create a daily blog using Twitter
- Utilize “Stumble Upon” or research it to see if there are ways to integrate it
- Think about ways to reach the over 50 population that may not be computer savvy
- Share a mailing list and costs with these various organizations with a quarterly “Arts in the City” update – Share costs with partnering organizations
- Search engine marketing, optimization, key words
- Shared memory page
- 140 character forward-URL to release
- What’s Happening in Winston-Salem
- Weekends in Winston-Salem
- One-stop shop for all the “pockets”
- Relish, What’s Happening, 336 events, Facebook
- More effort to communicate the different things to do
- CVB is portal for social networking sites

- You Tube video about the destination

Scenario IX

Events, festivals and performances attract leisure travelers to Winston-Salem, but bringing visitors is a year-round challenge. Currently, many attractions are not open on Monday's and many restaurants are not open on Sunday. Discuss opportunities to increase visitations to the area that might stay over Sunday night, and give ideas on activities that might be of interest to these potential visitors if they stay over.

Group comments:

- Discuss opening at strategic times with affected restaurants and attractions
- Build promotions around certain Sundays of the year
- Consciously schedule Sunday evening events/seasonal
- Third night's hotel stay ½ price or stay 2 nights and get one night free
- Stay third night, free dinner at designated restaurant
- Return promotions
- Personality based promotions
- Distribution of information via grocery stores
- Legalize gambling
- Better rate for Sunday nights
- Sunday night concerts
- Half-off Sundays
- Half off restaurants/hotels
- Events to draw a crowd
- Promote musicians
- Promote wineries
- Theatre in the park
- Creatively Winston-Salem has a lot of great event, restaurant and hotel silos, let's bring them all together
- Focus on what IS open

Scenario X

Holidays in Winston-Salem are dynamic with one-of-a-kind attractions and events. This represents a time when hotel demand is at the lowest. Discuss ways of increasing interest in travel and overnight stays in Winston-Salem during the holiday season.

Group comments:

- Create discount programs to encourage holiday visitors to stay in hotels rather than with relatives
- Market holiday family reunions – temperate climate, nostalgia
- Target smaller families who travel at the holidays because they don't have extended families
- Promote all of Winston-Salem holiday attractions
- Holiday shopping – combine attractions/overnight package

- In this economy will attractions and hotels and restaurants re-think their price points to put together packages?
- More attention to packages for group tours, especially church groups
- German Christmas weekend – All things German
- Package activities
- Religious groups during holidays
- “Come Back Home” for the holidays
- Educate locals about what we have and how we define the community
- Get a tree bigger than the one in New York
- Promote nightlife
- Host auto shows