VISITOR INFORMATION CENTERS & SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Presented by Roger Brooks
2013 DMO Visitor Information Centers Study

- 8 out of 10 DMOs have an official visitor information center
- Nearly 25% had some type of mobile VIC: kiosks(s), van, trailer or roaming counselors on Segways
- 50% sell merchandise
- More than 50% are in high traffic areas or downtowns
- Full report (non-member price): $490
- Consolidated report (non-member price): $125

• Fact: numbers have been steadily decreasing and VICs even though tourism spending is increasing
- The days of printing tens of thousands of guides has changed

We are now in the digital age and everything is changing

- 90% of Americans have immediate access to the Internet (even more in Europe and Canada)
- 94% use the internet to decide where to travel, live, work, and establish a business
- The days of VICs are not over – not even dying
- They are just changing
- We are going to concentrate on what to do today and how to plan for the future to create a stronger return on investment from your VIC

Change your mindset

- Think of your VIC and services as a business, not an amenity
- That means return on investment
- Figure out what you spend a year on VIC – net (staffing and overhead)
- Then tally each visitor as to where they are from:
  - Within 25 miles – considered “local resident”
  - Outside 25 miles – visitor
- Divide the cost by the number of visitors from outside the 25-mile radius – find cost per visitor
- Then ask: could we better utilize this funding to attract more visitors?
- Litmus test: the average cost per walk in, according to the DMAI study: $2.72
- You want to be at $2.50 or less
VICs should always be in the heart of the spending district

- Once people are out of their cars, they spend four times the money than in remote or freeway locations
- VIC should be located right downtown

Convenience is key to visitor information

- Convenience rules the day
- Remember that in everything you do
- If you have a staffed visitor information center:
  - Easy to find – wayfinding is critical
  - Open at least 360 days per year – people don’t only travel during office hours
  - Hours should be from 8:30 am to 9:00 pm six days a week; Sunday perhaps 11:00 to 6:00
  - Visitor information must be available 24/7/365

An example: Huntsville Texas

- Visitor information available year round, 7 days per week
- Office closes, but visitor information still available in entryway area
Visitor Information Centers | Handout

Visitor information kiosks are a must
- Even if you have a staffed VIC, kiosks are a must
- Visitors prefer old world brochures over digital kiosks – however, that is changing
- The big challenge with digital kiosks is that only one person can use them at a time
- Brochure racks alongside digital kiosks can be a good solution
- New digital kiosks have a “send to me” feature that will email the visitor the content
- But digital does not replace printed brochure racks

CTM Media Group provides digital kiosks
- Brochure distribution (brochure racks)
- ExploreBoard with “send to me” information
- And an app
- Contact Kristen Malin at 630-592-1323 or kmalin@ctmmedia.com

Blue Focus Media – another digital kiosk provider
- Tourist Assistance Portal (TAP)
- App-based (Internet not required)
- Maps, menus, photo galleries, discounts, etc.
- Cost: Approximately $11,000 each
- www.bluefocusmedia.com
Visitor Information Centers | Handout

The best place for visitor information?
- Public washrooms or restrooms
- Provide maps, brochures, etc.
- Great way to turn restrooms into economic development tools

Side Note:
- Create small pads of handouts, measuring 4"x5.5", with maps that show restrooms and local parking

Have kiosks in multiple locations and make sure they have the same look and feel
- Consistency
- Maps and brochure distribution
- Locate in high traffic areas
- Work with your auxiliary organizations – they can be a good funding source
Always include brochure distribution

- Bently University’s Center for Marketing Technology study
- 32% of travel decisions come from brochures prior to traveling (#1 internet: #2 friends)
- 81% come from brochures WHILE they are traveling (#1)
- Once visitors are in your community, they will grab and use brochures
  - Posted maps are helpful for finding your location, but visitors need a take away piece so they can refer to the information later

A great example and personal favorite – the kiosk in Cape May, New Jersey

- Located in the pedestrian downtown district
- Nice design
- Lighted
- At the top says “Town Crier”
- Includes the phrase: “Welcome Friends Old and New; Linger Here a Day or Two”
- Room for numerous brochures that promote local businesses, restaurants and attractions, as well as maps and event information

Beatty, Nevada, population 1,000

- Visitor information gazebo
- Kiwanis and Rotary raised the money – bought a gazebo kit
- Hired a local craftsperson to do the interior kiosk
- Brochures wrapped around the interior
- You can charge $5 per month for businesses to include their brochure which would cover the costs to keep it clean and stocked and perhaps fund the next kiosk location
Jackson, Wyoming, population 12,000
- Popular visitor information center with good signage
- Visitor info available 24/7 with a small rack outside the VIC
- Simple and affordable
- Inside their VIC is part interpretive center, making it an attraction in addition to an information portal
- Brochures are categorized by activity, not location

Kingsport, Tennessee, pop. 50,000
- Brick architecture kiosk
- Maps, brochures, points of interest, etc.
- Local craftsman created brochure rack with cover to keep the weather out

Other examples and ideas
- Oak Harbor, Washington
  - Visitor information at a kiosk outside transit center
- Lodi, California
  - Kiosks every two blocks in the downtown
- Asheville, North Carolina
  - Outside VIC, magazine rack with visitors guides
- The Bruce Peninsula, Ontario
  - Simple brochure holder outside the VIC
- Oxnard, California
  - While VIC is closed, brochure racks are right on the door
- Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia
  - VIC has mailbox style brochure holders outside
- Wickford, Rhode Island
  - Map of downtown and right on posts there are brochure holders
Visitor Information Centers | Handout

**Start at public parking areas**
- Once people get out of their cars, you should provide visitor information
- Even if it is just wayfinding to point out where visitor information is available
- When you send out brochures to VICs, include a card they can send back to you indicating they are out of brochures so you can restock

**Mobile is the new rage!**
- Banff, Alberta, population 7,600
  - PVC frame kiosk on casters with cover
  - Super portable and easy to store
  - Green Mountain Gazebo
  - Cost includes gazebo frame, unprinted vinyl canopy & skirt; two counters, and three carry bags
  - Banff bought four: tourism uses two, one for parts, other used for special events
  - Used during peak summer months; stored in the winter

**Other examples and ideas**
- Oakhurst (Yosemite), California
  - Outside VIC is a wall of space and they charge for advertising in that space, as well as brochure distribution
- Coos County, New Hampshire
  - Solar panels on the kiosk provide power
  - Kiosk was sponsored
  - Businesses can buy space in the kiosk
- Colebrook, New Hampshire
  - Local retired resident built the kiosk
  - Includes windows that open to provide access to brochures
  - Six-sided design

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Eau Claire, Wisconsin
- Vehicle with wrap
- Take it to special events
- Move it wherever it is needed
- Two vehicles and an antique boat
- Spent $5,000-$7,000 for the wraps
- Spent $5,000-$7,000 for the technology
- Advice: plan to spend $10,000-$15,000
- Use year round
- Work with local organizations/events
- Look for highest foot traffic locations
- Excellent tie to social media efforts

Arlington, Virginia
- Electric vehicle
- Mobile visitor information
- Cost: $70,000 in 2010 (Global Electric Motorcars truck)
  - Custom fabricated service area
  - Note: bargain compared to the $78,000 annual VIC lease
  - Mobile, so can go anywhere
  - Serve 40% more visitors using the same number of staff hours
  - Perfect for communities without a central downtown
  - Operates March through November
  - Location: Metrorail stops, events
  - Post on their website where it is located
  - Won numbers of awards
  - Check out the video at www.bit.ly/arlington-mobile

Fort Meyers, Florida
- Airstream trailer turned VIC
- Look fits their image
- New as of June 2013
- $30,000 in donations: purchase and redevelopment
- Side windows have hinged openings (think food vendor)
- Interior: small office and brochure racks
- Staffing: volunteers serving one four hour shift per week
The future: Making your VIC a business incubator

Knoxville, Tennessee
- Great VIC right downtown
- Chock full of locally made arts and crafts – gift shop
- Home to radio station WDVX
- Free live music at noon Mon-Sat: “The Blue Plate Special”
- Free wifi
- Staffed visitor information
- Great way to make a VIC more of a draw
- Can even contract out to a local person to run the shop

Note: 48% of direct revenues at VICs come from merchandise sales

Asheville, North Carolina
- Large visitor information center
- Staffed with multiple people
- Brochure racks
- Gift shop with Asheville merchandise
- Reservations: lodging, two trolley companies and Segway tours stage from there
- You can purchase tickets to attractions
- CVB offices in the back
- Brochures are organized by activity, not by location

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Independence Visitor Center – at Independence Historical Park
- Segway tours, bike rentals, self-guided bike tours
- Partnership with “Wheel Fun Rentals”
The future: The Adventure Center versus just a VIC

- Promoting experiences, not just information
- Whistler Resort calls theirs an “Activity Center” not just a visitor center

Contracting with Private Businesses

Moab, Utah – privately run “concierge service”

- Offering tours, rentals, bookings – 14 activities, including:
  - Jet boats, guided tours, rafting, horseback riding, ballooning
  - Jeeps, mountain bikes and other rentals
  - Multiple businesses within one business
  - They vet their vendors
  - Work with smaller, new start-ups
  - Privately run, gets multiple businesses working together to share the cost
  - Inside sell maps, logo gear, etc.
  - Moab also has a VIC with maps, brochures, etc.
  - Also an interpretive center
  - Can buy posters, etc.
Turlock, California

- Contracted with Hilmar Cheese Company, the main attraction in the area
- Hilmar Cheese Co provides the visitor information at their location

Make your VIC just like home

- Make sure your VIC fits your brand
- Make visitors feel welcome
- Your reputation is determined by the look and feel of your VIC
- It should set the standard for your community
- It should be beautiful with outstanding curb appeal

You need to be “all in” or “all out”

- With the advent of technology if you don’t offer anything more than what I can get online, then spend your money in online content instead
- If it’s just the lobby area of your offices, and it doesn’t cost really anything additional to run: keep it
- Never post “Closed for the Season” signs
  - It tells you the entire town is closed for the season
  - Even if the office is closed, provide visitor information outside year round
- If you only promote members, get out of the visitor information business
  - This is for visitors
- One size does not fit all
Roger’s Advice

- Always include information in your offices – perhaps in the lobby area

- Find a great location in the heart of your downtown or spending district and create an “Official Activity Center”: Tag it with “Chamber” or “name of CVB”

- Lease out space for activity vendors: a 10x10 booth – brochures, photos, etc.

- Create a locally-made gift shop: contract it out to a local business

- Keep it open seven days a week, 9:00 am to 9:00 pm (this varies by location and season)

- Reservations: make the call for the visitor – customer service not just information

- Promote everyone, not just vendors; promote specific places*

- Develop a system of kiosks in high traffic locations (hotels, downtown, at attractions) and include brochure distribution

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This is NOT about you! This is about visitors. They are your customers.
Roger Brooks International

For over 30 years, the award-winning Roger Brooks International team has had a singular mission – to improve people’s lives by helping their communities become healthier, more attractive, and more economically vibrant. We believe that every community has the potential to become a thriving, desirable place for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Working primarily in the public sector with cities, counties, states, CVBs, destination marketing organizations, and provinces, RBI is renowned for its bottom-line, “make-something-happen” approach. This results in tremendously successful planning and implementation efforts.

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About Roger Brooks

As CEO of Roger Brooks International, Roger’s expertise comes from having assisted nearly a thousand communities in their efforts to become better places to live, invest, establish a business, or visit.

The information is not just entertaining – it is clear, concise and it sticks. Known for telling engaging stories, Roger uses real-life examples shown in photos and video clips, some of them hilarious, all of them poignant. His bottom-line rules, tips, and ingredients leave attendees with rock solid action items they can implement today to make a difference tomorrow.

The Incredible
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Introducing a new online program with access to a wealth of information available 24 hours a day. For a monthly fee of $45 you will have instant access to the entire Roger Brooks video library (a few examples are shown here) plus PDF guides on a variety of branding, product development and marketing subjects. Learn more at www.RogerBrooksLibrary.com

Community Marketing on a Minuscule Budget
Learn the seven marketing ideas you can implement today, for practically no money, that will dramatically increase local spending.
HD Video | 70 minutes

The 20 Ingredients of an Outstanding Downtown
We surveyed 400 popular downtowns and downtown districts and found the 20 most common ingredients that led to their success. Learn how these ingredients can help your downtown achieve success too!
HD Video | 108 minutes

The Art of Branding a Community Part 1 & 2
Part 1: In this eye-opening, must-see presentation by Roger Brooks, you’ll learn the ten things you need to do to successfully brand your community.
Part 2: In this fascinating presentation using Alpena, Michigan as a case history, you’ll learn HOW to successfully develop your own brand using the 13-step process that took nearly 30 years to develop and perfect. Best of all: This process has a 100% success rate.
HD Video | Part I: 63 min. Part II: 60 min.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Destination Marketing
A full 97% of destination marketing is wasted. Learn the 7 deadly sins, how to avoid them, and how to make sure that 100% of your marketing is effective.
HD Video | 72 minutes