



Your Town A Destination

Rule #2 The rule of partnerships. Relationships require more than one person.

What kind of 'ship' never sails alone?

If you answered partnership, then you have just recognized the most important rule in creating a successful tourism strategy. Partners are so important that it is impossible to even think that tourism programs can be successful when executed by a single entity. Take San Diego, California, for example. By partnering with an assortment of attractions – San Diego Zoo, SeaWorld, and even Disneyland, which is about ninety-five miles to the north – San Diego presents itself as part of the larger Southern California experience, worth traveling a longer distance to visit. Their strategy convinces millions of visitors to stay for a longer period of time.

In most communities, a single lead agency typically coordinates tourism development, promotion, activities and events. It may be a visitor's bureau or the local chamber of commerce. But just because they are leading the charge does not mean they should do it alone. Tourism development and promotion must be a team sport, especially in smaller communities where resources are limited.

Partnerships accomplish a number of goals: they create continuity in the marketing effort, build a stronger brand for the community, reduce the duplication of efforts (multiple websites, toll free numbers, etc.) and make "selling" the community easier. Prospective visitors are more likely to act when presented with a single vision, a single contact and a single source for getting initial information.

There are three types of tourism partnerships, and all three should be developed.

- ✓ First, there are financial partnerships with other communities or tourism promoters, in which two or more – even all – of the partners pool funds to accomplish certain tourism objectives. This allows communities to leverage available funds for discounts on advertising, hiring public relation services, development of quality photo libraries, and first-class website development.
- ✓ The second type of partnership involves shared resources, which avoids the common duplication of services and visitor confusion. Imagine the benefit of shared photo libraries and press kits, single toll-free information request lines, etc.
- ✓ The third type of partnership involves leveraging the dollars and resources with private sector businesses. Quite often, the best attractions are privately owned. Work with them. Bring them into the program. Create public/private partnerships. For a guide, look at what San Diego and other successful tourist destinations have done.

Partners involved in tourism should include economic development organizations, convention centers, chambers of commerce, tribal units, cultural attractions and organizations, and event organizers, as well as city, state, or federal agencies. The more partners your town has, the more successful it will be. The biggest partnerships should be between communities, counties, or regions. Your town will always be much more successful as one loud voice, rather than a bunch of small voices.

Recently, the Washington State Audubon Society, a nonprofit organization, teamed up with three state agencies (Trade and Economic Development, Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Transportation), six communities, and the Bullet Foundation. Each organization had a role in providing technical, professional, or financial support. The final result was creation of the first “Great Washington State Birding Trail”

Tourism partnerships are very much like a marriage. You agree, disagree, get upset, compromise, and then move on to a decision that will make all parties reasonably happy. The only difference is that in tourism, it’s perfectly legal to have multiple partners, especially when you are building partnerships.

Questions for success:

- Have you developed partnerships that include both public and private attractions?
- Is everyone on the same page in terms of your branding effort?
- Is there continuity in your tourism marketing and development efforts?
- Are you working closely with state agencies and taking advantage of other available resources?