



March 2005



SKAMANIA COUNTY, WASHINGTON

VISITOR/TOURISM ASSESSMENT



Skamania County • March, 2005

First impressions

...and some ideas to increase tourism spending.



In February of 2005, a Tourism Assessment of the Skamania County area was conducted and presented in a two-hour workshop. A "Tourism Assessment" is a process in which the area is looked at from the eyes of a visitor. No prior research was facilitated, no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area was "secretly shopped."

The assessment is a no-holds-barred look at the community from a visitor's perspective. It includes marketing, signage, things to see and do (attractions mix), critical mass, ease of getting around, customer service, availability of visitor amenities (information, rest rooms, parking, etc.), general appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors, who spend three times that of day visitors.

There are two primary elements to the assessment process:

- 1) A Marketing Effectiveness Assessment
- 2) On-site Assessment

In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment two people were asked to plan trips into the region. They are not told in advance what communities are actually being assessed. They are to use whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, etc.

The community has four opportunities to close the sale:

- Personal contact (visitor information, trade shows, etc.)
- Internet (websites)
- Brochures and printed materials
- Word of mouth (referrals, image)

In this process we test all four methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, looking for activities via the internet, requesting and reviewing printed materials, and asking visitors and regional contacts about their opinions of the area. This last method also includes looking at on-line articles, AAA Tour Book reviews, etc.

The findings determine how "visible" the community is during the research and whether or not the materials and/or personal contacts were good enough to "close the

sale," convincing the potential visitor that the community is worth either a day trip, stop, or an overnight stay.

The On-site Assessment process includes a look at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, things that would pull a visitor off the primary roadways), beautification, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), things to see and do, overall appeal of the community, business attractiveness (drawing power), signage (public and private), customer service, area attractions (things that might prompt a visitor to spend the night), retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass (are these things concentrated in a pedestrian-oriented area?), availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The "Recommendations" made herein are referred to as "suggestions," as they were developed without consulting the local community. It will be up to the community to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we have provided a low-cost suggestion (when possible) on how the challenge, obstacle or negative element can be corrected. It's important to point out that, to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions will have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all of them, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community effort - involving both privately owned businesses as well as county and state agencies, where appropriate.

A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO or CVB, Chamber, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not a community-wide effort.

Tourism is largely a private-sector industry; after all, the benefit of tourism is to convince visitors to come, spend money, then go home. That spending takes place, primar-

ily, in local businesses.

Product development is far more of a driving factor in tourism than marketing. You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises. Visitors are drawn to activities, not cities or counties.

The Visitor/Tourism Assessment took place over a four day period - three days in the community, and one day spent assessing the marketing efforts, providing a low-cost overall assessment with ideas the community can discuss and hopefully implement.

Successful tourism translates to cash

- The idea is to import more cash into your community than you export. When local residents earn money in the community and spend some of it outside the community, this is referred to as "leakage." Tourism is a way to fill that gap, importing cash into the community, without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services.

Communities with successful tourism programs will see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas communities which don't have successful tourism programs find that they are subsidizing visitors - providing services which visitors use, but don't leave enough money behind to cover the cost of having them available.

There are three kinds of tourism

• **1. Status quo**

If you do nothing to further the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, just by the fact that some visitors will pull off local highways or freeways for services (gas, food, lodging), and by the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have tourism.

• **2. Getting people to stop**

Getting people to stop is always the first priority of successful tourism. Imagine how successful the businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through (there are hundreds of thousands every year) pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community.

And if there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which almost always translates to additional spending.

• **3. Becoming the destination**

You cannot be a successful tourism destination if you can't get people to stop. And to become the destination, you must have attractions (things to see and do) or amenities that will convince visitors to spend the night.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors making a "pit stop."

The Four-Times Rule

• Visitors will make it a point of stopping or staying in your community if you have enough to offer to keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes). If a visitor drives an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

In a nutshell, if you hope to keep visitors overnight, you must make it worth the drive.

The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay. This is why rural communities MUST typically market more than just the immediate downtown areas. You need to market neighboring communities, outdoor recreational opportunities, exploration, and discovery.

Finally, you must also be different. Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as a primary draw. But if residents living in the markets you're hoping to attract can enjoy the same activities closer to home, then why should they go out of their way or the extra distance to visit you?

Critical mass means cash

• While it may not be the primary reason *why* visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity - and where visitors spend the most amount of money - other than lodging.

Do you have a pedestrian-oriented shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many rural communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” which would include visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, well-landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb is seven to nine retail stores (more on that in a minute), and three or more dining establishments which can include sit-down restaurants, espresso bars, cafes, dessert and ice cream shops, etc.

“Visitor Retail” would include antique stores, galleries, collectibles, souvenir shops, T-shirt shops, outfitters, bike and jeep rentals, guided tour operations, activity shops (kites, hiking, climbing gear, etc.), home accents, jewelry, old-fashioned hardware stores, casinos, entertainment facilities such as movie theaters, pubs, etc.

By grouping these businesses together, you will create the “critical

mass” in a pedestrian setting that will draw visitors and will make it worth their while to stop and shop.

Have you ever noticed at major intersections you will see a Chevron, Union 76, Conoco, and Shell on each of the four corners? Or how about fast food franchises? McDonald’s, Burger King, Jack In The Box, and Wendy’s on each corner. You would think these places would avoid being next to the competition, but they know that visitors are drawn to the “critical mass” where they have multiple choices that are convenient.

Where are your visitor-oriented shops? If they are spread out, they will be marginally successful when it comes to tapping into visitor spending. Put them all together, and you have what it takes to get visitors out of their cars (or busses and RV’s) and into your stores.

Market the broader package

- Every community **MUST** market more than just the community in order to be successful with their tourism efforts.

Remember the Four-Times Rule and also remember that visitors don't stay within or care about boundaries - so market the attractions you have around your community that might keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some shopping, or an overnight stay.

The more you have to offer "collectively," the longer visitors will stay. And the longer they stay, the more they spend.

You must be different or better than everyone else

- To become a destination community where you're the place visitors spend the night or multiple days, you must set yourself apart from everyone else.

In order to make your community "worth the drive" and/or "worth a special trip," you must be better or different from other competing communities.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, adopted its Shakespeare Festival which runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. It became "different" than other communities and the festival set it apart.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and all of their events revolve around the Bavarian theme. The town is one of the primary tourist attractions in Washington state, hosting more than two million visitors annually. They have something different to offer.

Okanogan County, Washington (just south of the Canadian border in central Washington) is an outdoor recreational paradise - but so are 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guide books, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising ef-

forts. They started using quotes along the line of "Pinch Yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent."

This, and numerous other quotes, makes it "worth the extra drive" to visit Okanogan Country. They used third party endorsements to show that they are the "best."

Just look at how powerful movie ratings are when it comes to box office receipts. "Two thumbs up" carries a lot of weight.





An overview

The Columbia River Gorge is a major destination for Oregon-bound visitors, but the Washington side, due primarily to a miniscule marketing budget, lags behind in media attention.

That being said, in 2003 Skamania County led the state in tourism spending increases at 12.9%. Tourism spending increases in the county that year were three times that of King County, where nearly half the state's total tourism spending takes place.

The benefit of tourism happens when a community imports more cash into the community than it exports - when locals shop outside the community.

Washington tourism: What's in it for you:

As a state:	\$11 billion
Top 6 Counties:	\$7.8 billion (74.5%)
Remaining 33 counties :	\$2.7 billion
Average p/county:	\$81 million
Skamania County:	\$50.5 million
Klickitat County:	\$22.3 million
Good news! Skamania County:	12.9% increase!
King County increase:	\$3.4 million
Skamania County increase:	\$10.3 million

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking
The rule of websites



- 68% of households have immediate web access
- 94% use the internet as their primary travel resource
- 68% have difficulty finding what they are looking for
- 76% find on-line advertising a major nuisance
- 38% will pay up to 20% more for customized products, services, & upgrades

Internet

The internet is the primary travel resource, far surpassing every other resource except word of mouth. It should be your top marketing priority in terms of both budget and effectiveness. Often communities will spend \$15,000 on a brochure and spend \$5,000 on a website. This should be reversed.

Suggestion #1: Purchase key words



The screenshot shows the Google AdWords homepage. It features a search bar, a 'Login' button, and several sections of text and links. Key sections include 'Start gaining new customers in less than 15 minutes.', 'Learn More' with links to 'Quick Tour' and 'Program Details and FAQ', and 'Sign Up Now' with a 'Click to begin' button. There are also links for 'Common Questions' and 'Want expert help?'.

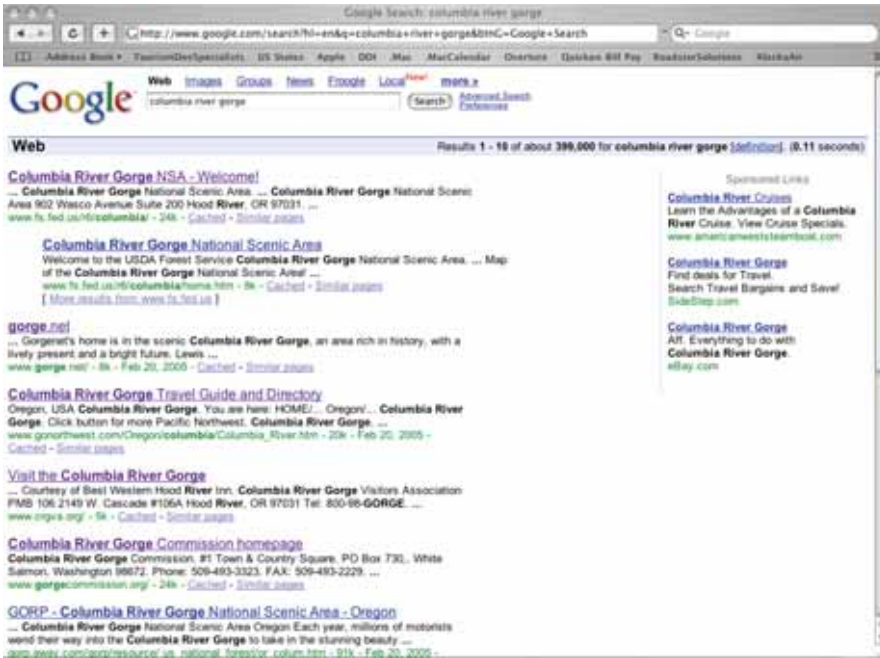
Suggestion #1:

At the end of this assessment, we've provided an article written by Roger Brooks for the magazine Texas Town & Country (Texas Municipal League) that details some important strategies for developing your internet marketing program. Having a website that's good enough to close the sale is extremely important, but just as important is making it easy for potential customers to find your site. 70% of all customers browsing the website will not go past the first two pages of search engine results. 60% don't go past the first page of results.

Suggestion #1 (continued)

All of our “secret shoppers” were told to plan a trip to the Columbia River Gorge area. We did not specify which state, or any communities. As with most visitors, the primary way of getting information was via the internet, and as can be expected, the first thing they used in their search was the words “Columbia River Gorge.”

One of the first sites they come across is the site for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. If a visitor scrolls down the list of attractions and waterfalls, nearly 80% of the listings are for attractions on the Oregon side of the river.



(continued)

Gorge.net turned out to be an internet service provider and was quickly dismissed as an information site. Gonorthwest.com provided information for the Columbia River Gorge (center), but noted that the Gorge is part of Oregon. Washington was not mentioned.

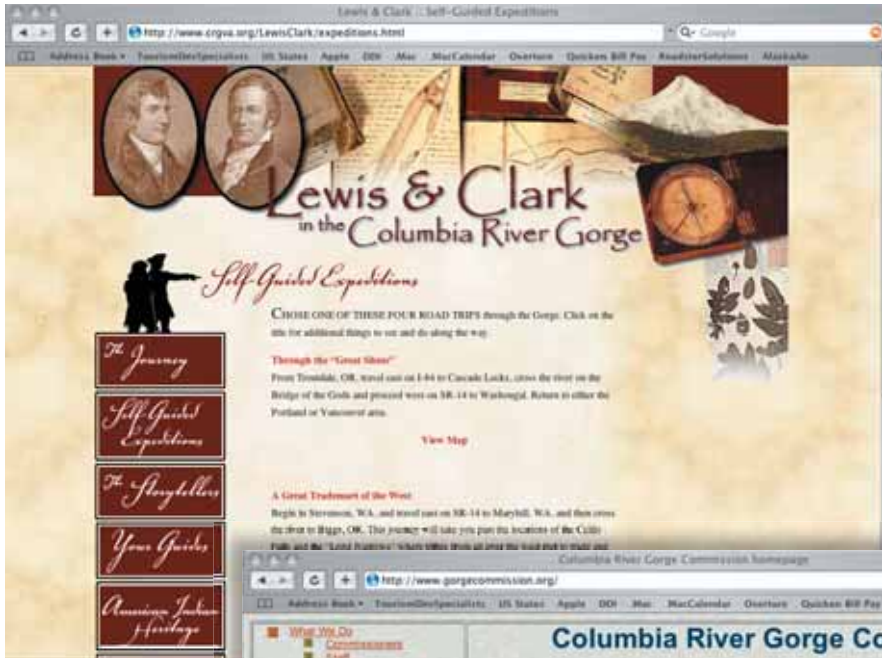
The Columbia River Gorge Visitor's Association site was not an effective visitor site at all. In fact, it promotes the organization and not visiting the area. Our shoppers never made it past the home page.

The Lewis & Clark expedition pages (see next page) provides tour routes and other information, but nothing specific at all: things to see and do, links to other attractions and amenities in each area, etc.

So far in the search, most shoppers would be drawn to the Oregon side of the river.



(continued)

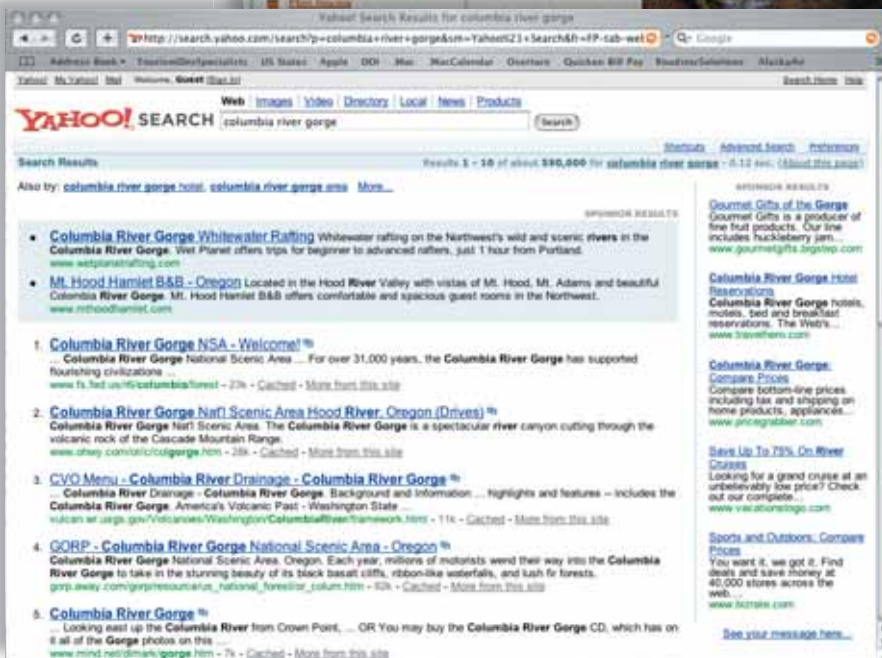


The Lewis & Clark pages (left) provide very little in the way of specifics and little to entice visitors to travel specific routes.

The Columbia River Gorge Commission website, once again, promotes the organization more than it promotes the area to visitors. The "Tour the Gorge" pages would not open on most of the browsers our shoppers used. The site did very little to attract visitors to the area.



Our shoppers used both Google and Yahoo! for their searches, and found little to attract them to the Gorge, particularly the Washington side of the river.



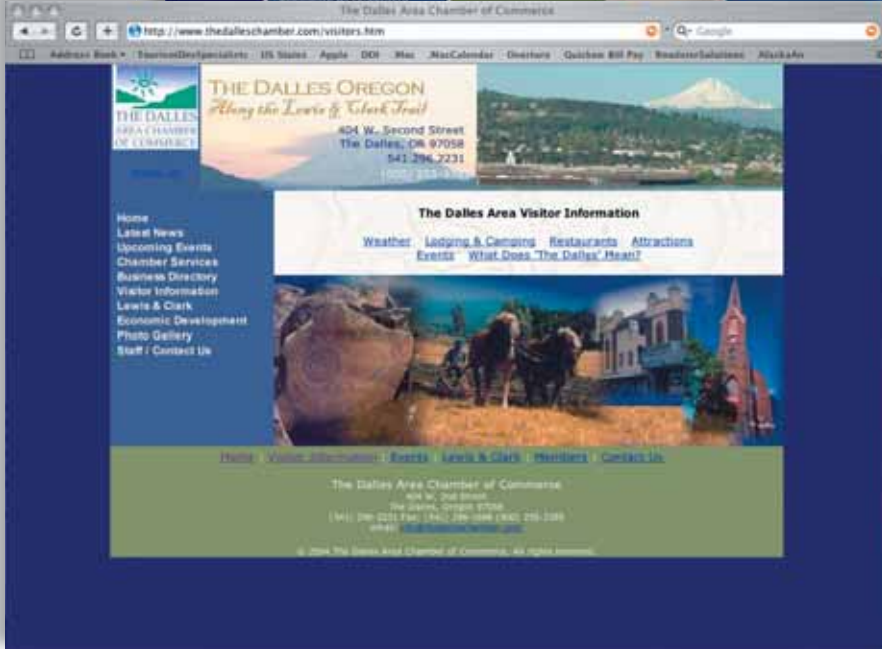
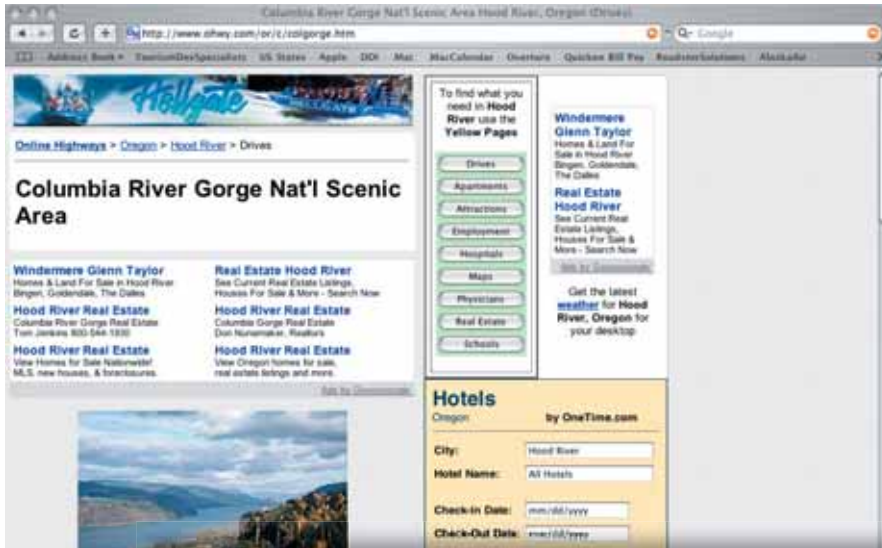
TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

(continued)

The Yahoo! web search turned up additional sites, all heavily promoting Oregon.

The Dalles Chamber makes a mistake common among organizations: they promote the organization: board members, featured members, chamber events, and offer little to visitors. The Dalles Chamber site did not convince our visitors to go beyond the home page.

While the visitor information has some information, there are no photos and the site is not enticing.



(continued)

Nearly 70% of all web users are turned off by advertising. Visitors planning getaways or vacations will typically look for non-commercial websites for “unbiased” information.

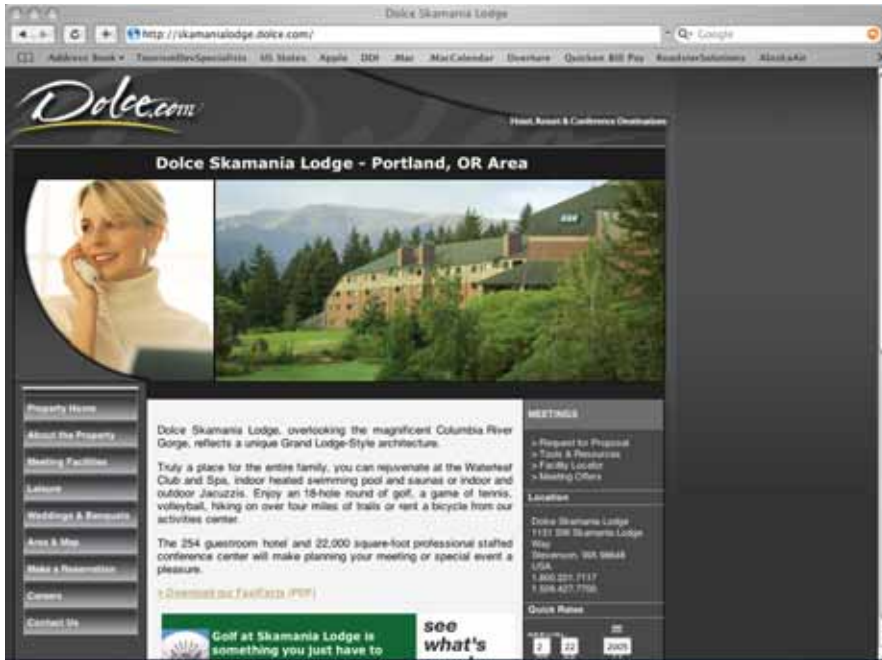
The Hoodriver.org site once again concentrated on listing chamber members and did very little to entice visitors to the area. You must close the sale first, then offer visitors places to stay, dine and shop.

The Columbia Gorge Economic Development Association has one of the nicer sites, but offers nothing for visitors - not even a link to other sites. Sometimes economic development agencies forget that tourism is an economic development activity.

The bottom line: It wasn't until getting to the fourth page of search engine results, did our shoppers find any information about the Washington side of the Gorge.

Visibility of Washington communities gets a failing grade. This shows why any marketing effort MUST include the purchase of keyword listings.





(continued)

We did not find the Skamania Lodge at all - except when searching for it specifically. Many first time visitors will have no idea what Skamania is or how to spell it.

Once on the Skamania lodge site (a part of the Dolce site), we were disappointed with how little information there was about the area or why anyone should even visit.

The best website along the Washington side of the river is the Bonneville Hot Springs Resort. The site does an excellent job telling visitors why they should visit the area, and then makes a great case for staying at their resort.

Suggestion #1: Purchase keywords on overture.com and adwords.com

Suggestion #2: Make the internet your marketing priority

Suggestion #3: Don't rely on links - make the sale, then create the links

Suggestion #4: Have brochures on-line in downloadable PDF format

Summary

All of our shoppers chose to stay in the Hood River area and none of them would have visited the Washington side of the river. We then asked them to look at the Washington side, and once they started looking specifically, they noted that they would go over the bridge to the Maryhill Museum and Stonehenge and then pass back over to the Oregon side.

When pressed on where they'd stay on the Washington side, all noted the Bonneville Hot Springs Resort as the place to stay.

Suggestion #5: "E-marketing"

San Diego Events & Promotions E-Updates

Stay on top of the latest San Diego Events & Promotions with E-Updates tailored to your interests.

First Name Last Name E-mail

Zip / Postal Code Country

Please tell us your reasons for visiting San Diego: (Select all that apply)

Family Vacation Dining & Cultural Special Offers

Conference/Meeting Golf & Outdoors

All information for the stated it is no longer

Inexpensive and powerful.



Suggestion #6: Include special deals & packages

DEALS

February

Deals of the Month

750+ deals, average rates, packages and more types of vacation offers.

Where	Whispering Palmers Park	Bonaire City	Peace, Peace, Bonaire
Why	The ultimate sight-seeing experience... The ultimate sight-seeing experience... The ultimate sight-seeing experience...	Experience the heart of Bonaire... Experience the heart of Bonaire... Experience the heart of Bonaire...	Experience the heart of Bonaire... Experience the heart of Bonaire... Experience the heart of Bonaire...
How
Price
Includes
When
How
How
How

Suggestion #5

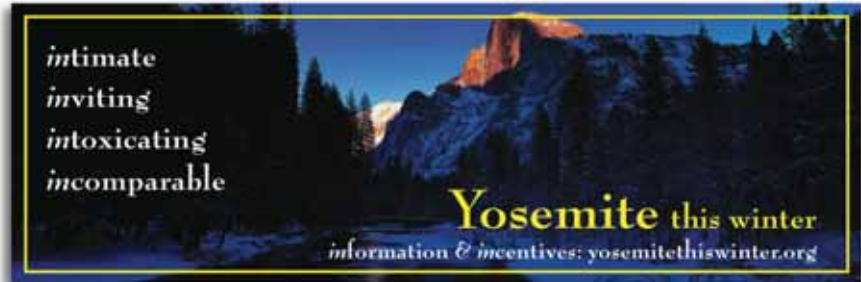
E-marketing provides customers with a way to sign up for periodic information specific to their interests: special deals, events, seasonal information, windsurfing, etc. Their name goes into a database and every other month or so, a quick note is typed up for the people in each category (see center photo) and sent to them. They can click on links to get more information. This creates "top of mind awareness."

Suggestion #6

Always include special deals. Not percentages, but using actual dollars. The internet has changed everything and "cheaper is chicer." People will pay more for quality, but they still expect a bargain. Special deals will get visitors coming back to your website.

Suggestion #7: Purchase easy to remember URLs

- Make your website address your key marketing focus along with a toll-free number. Addresses, fax numbers not necessary.
- Match website addresses to your message.



Suggestion #7:

Purchase additional website addresses that match your marketing theme or slogan. In the example, left, the campaign encourages visitors to Yosemite “this winter.” The website address purchased to go with the campaign is yosemitethiswinter.com and .org.

Don't Let Your Last Opportunity Become a Lost Opportunity

The rule of closing the sale



Marketing Materials

Your marketing materials, including your website, must be good enough to close the sale. Otherwise most of your marketing dollars have been wasted.

Does your brochure stand out in a rack full of brochures? A tip: Use yellow lettering on a dark background, or dark lettering on a yellow background. Which brochures, left, stand out?

The text must also be good enough to entice a visitor to take your brochure. Once they do that, is it good enough to convince them that you are worth a special trip, and, better yet, an overnight stay?



Suggestion #8

Always sell things to see and do. Too often we promote places instead of activities. Visitors don't go to Anaheim. They go to Disneyland - even though it's located in Anaheim.



The Skamania County brochure, while beautiful, needs to be redeveloped in several areas:

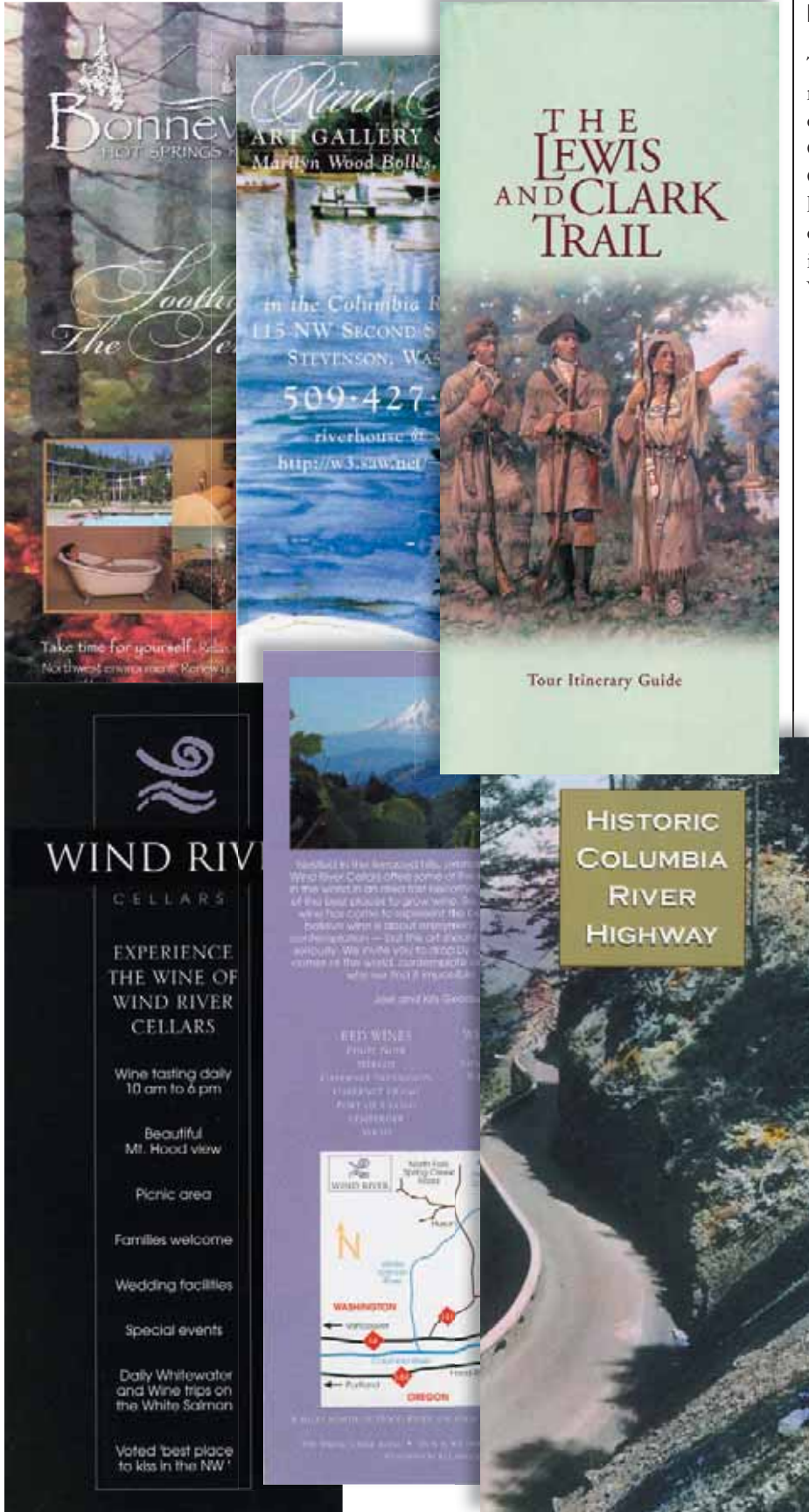
1. People don't go to counties. In fact, visitors don't care about counties, cities, or even state borders. The only county in the western U.S. to successfully promote itself as a county is Sonoma County, California. Even Napa County promotes itself as the Napa Valley.

Most people will have no idea where Skamania County is - unless they know about Skamania Lodge and put two and two together.

Using the header "Washington's Columbia River Gorge" will command attention and visitors will know where you're located.

2) Blue text on a blue background does not grab attention.

3) While the photography is beautiful, the interior text is rather generic. Always promote specifics, or tell the visitor where they can get more information.



Note

There is no continuity between the marketing efforts done by the various businesses and organizations. Consider developing a "Washington's Columbia River Gorge" logo and having Washington businesses and organizations use it on their marketing materials to start building the Washington brand.



When visitors come to the Center, they are able to visualize and participate in the bountiful life of the Columbia River Gorge.

- ◆ Award-winning architecture; exhibits by renowned Jean Jacques André.
- ◆ Creation Theatre recreating the cataclysmic formation of the Gorge.
- ◆ A 37-foot high replica of a 19th-century fishwheel.
- ◆ A restored Corliss Steam Engine that powered sawmills in the last century.
- ◆ Indian dip-netting.
- ◆ Transportation on the river from 19th-century sternwheelers to modern barges.
- ◆ The cultural diversity of Gorge inhabitants.
- ◆ The environmental impact of development on the river.
- ◆ World's largest Rosary collection.
- ◆ Water route of Lewis & Clark Expedition and Oregon Trail.
- ◆ Impressive setting for business or after hours events.

The Columbia Gorge story lives, evolves and continues ...



A variety of educational activities are offered. Call: (800) 901-2338

JOIN US!
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
SKAMANIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND
COLUMBIA GORGE INTERPRETIVE CENTER

YES, I would like to renew or become a member
(Please select one)

SENIOR (Ages 65+)	\$15.00
STUDENT (Ages 18-24)	\$15.00
ADULT (Ages 25-64)	\$25.00
FAMILY	\$75.00
*SUPPORTING	\$100.00
*SUPPORTING	\$100.00
*SPONSOR	\$200.00
*PATERFACITOR	\$1,000.00
*PATERFACITOR	\$2,000.00
*GUARANTEE	\$2,500.00
*CORP. OF DISCOVERY	\$5,000.00

Membership is for one year and is renewable annually. Membership contributions, less the monetary value of special benefits received, are tax deductible. Membership benefits include: free admission, guest passes, a 15% discount in the Museum store, and the newsletter "Taprootations".
*Indicates membership levels for Businesses, Corporations, Organizations. Call for additional benefits.
(Please complete the information below.)

MEMBERSHIP

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
Phone: Day _____ Evening _____

DONATIONS

SQUARE FOOT DONOR _____ x \$100.00 = _____
(Most donors do not pay for shipping or handling.)

For myself
 In memory of _____
 As a gift to _____

GENERAL DONATION OF: \$ _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Check
 Visa
 MasterCard

Please make checks payable to:
Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center
(CGIC)
P.O. Box 238
Stevenson, WA 98681

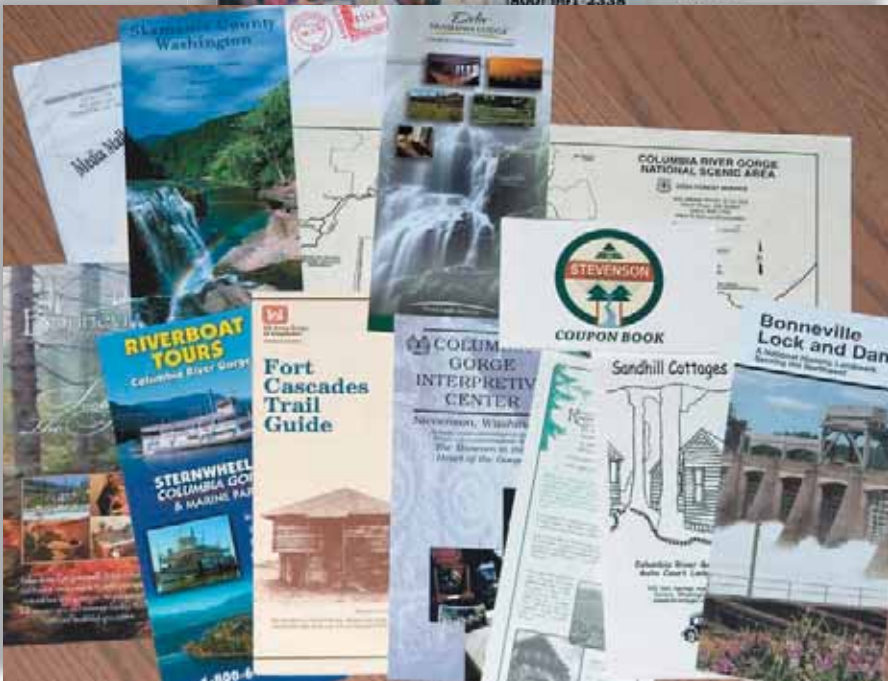
Account # _____ Exp. Date _____
Date _____
901-901-2338
429.

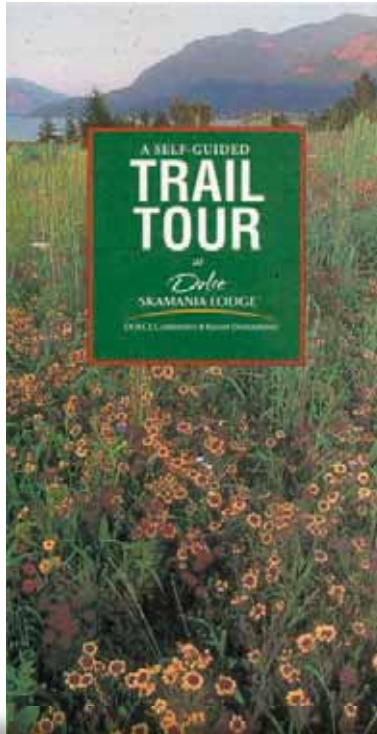
Suggestion #9:

The interpretive center brochure should spend ALL of its space promoting the center. Once there, THEN give the customer a card asking them to become a member. That's when you have the best chance of making the sale.

Suggestion #10:

Develop a public/private Activities Guide. A combination of all the brochures on the previous page (and below left) should be developed into a single guide. This would save money, save on mailing costs, and would be much more effective in closing the sale. It would also develop a stronger brand. The Activities Guide should be a partnership project with Klickitat County - encompassing the entire Gorge area in Washington.





Suggestion #11

The hiking trails in Skamania County make it worth a special trip. They should be promoted, individually, in the Activities Guide and should include specifics, not the generic “we have lots of great hiking trails.” Everyone has that. Always promote specific trails.

The US Army Corps brochure, below, got a thumbs down from our shoppers. It does nothing to promote the Lewis & Clark trail and only promotes the Army Corps of Engineers. This should not even be handed out to visitors. The agency takes credit for the expedition, and talks about other agencies and spreading environmental pests. There is nothing to see or do.



The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers & The Lewis & Clark Expedition Bicentennial Commemoration

What does the Corps

More Things to Consider

Spreading Environmental Pests

Aquatic nuisance species like zebra mussels, and noxious weeds are two environmental problems that need to be kept under control. We don't want to spread unwanted pests into pristine areas. Help keep these areas as unaffected as possible by your presence

Periodically, please check and remove unwanted hitchhikers from your vessels and vehicles to preclude the transportation of exotic pests.

Lockage/Portage

Boating around or through dams will require advanced preparation. You will need to portage (transport around the dams) or use the locks (not all dams have locks). Some dams may have a recreational boat lockage schedule. The Corps does not provide portage, but we do maintain lists of local businesses that do. Contact us to determine if your boat will need to portage or if you can travel through the locks.

Other Agencies

Many Federal, State, Tribal and local agencies manage sites along the trail. If you have trouble determining whose jurisdiction you fall under when visiting a site, the Corps can help so you can follow their regulations.

Some things to think about when planning your trip are: fees, special events, travel times and distances, road conditions, weather, stopping points, roadside/riverside assistance, and points of interest highlighting this country's history.

Why is the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers involved in the Bicentennial Commemoration the Lewis and Clark Expedition?

The Lewis & Clark Expedition was an Army expedition staffed, funded, and supplied by the Army. One of the reasons it succeeded was because of the Army discipline that was maintained by the Captains throughout the journey.

The Corps of Engineers, as the nation's one leading provider of outdoor recreation, has direct stewardship of 22% of the Lewis & Clark Route (of the 5,000 miles, with indirect stewardship of over 68% more).

2003 2009



Suggestion #12

The Chamber of Commerce coupon book is well done and a nice enticement to get visitors into downtown Stevenson.

However, retailers must do their part to make the coupon worth taking advantage of. Promoting half-price appetizers between 3:00 and 6:00 is going to do little to attract diners. Likewise, 30¢ off a sandwich is hardly worth going out of your way for. Think like your customer. What would it take to pull you in?

Suggestion #12: Coupons are meant to entice customers to come in. It must be worth their while and on their terms - not yours.



In a nutshell:

- #1: concentrate on internet initiatives
- #2: beef up your PR efforts
- #3: cater to niche groups
- #4: jettison the generic
- #5: partner with Klickitat County efforts
- #6: sell the experience

Sell the Rapids, Not the River

The rule of selling the experience



Note

Always sell the experience. Not the city. Not the county. Promote activities. Evoke emotion. While in the "Future Theater" in the interpretive center there is a stunning film clip of Beacon Rock. That clip, alone, will bring visitors to the Washington side of the Gorge. You don't even need to see the entire water park (center) to get the feeling that this looks like a fun place to go.

We recently designed a new brochure for neighboring Klickitat County (bottom). Rather than promote the county, cities or towns, we decided to attract attention by promoting the "Seven Wonders of Washington's Columbia River Gorge." Does that pique your interest more than "Discover Klickitat County"?

Part of selling the experience revolves around promoting Highway 14 as the "scenic Columbia River Gorge route." Promote the five tunnels, the stunning vistas, and the old-time stores and shops along the way.

First Impressions Really Are Lasting Impressions

The rule of perceived value



On-site Assessment

First impressions are lasting impressions. This includes storefronts, overall curb appeal, signage, and beautification. The following pages showcase the impressions of a trip through and around Skamania County - as seen from the eyes of a first-time visitor.

20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$

The rule of signs that sell



Signage is a great investment - if done right

Typical Monthly Advertising Costs Of Various Advertising Media



Cost per thousand exposure in a community of approximately 130,000 population.
Source: Signs and Your Business
(© Small Business Administration / Clout and Clout)

Readership Comparisons Of Various Advertising Media



Percent Of Readership

Source: National Sign Company, New Haven, Indiana
Direct Mail - 10,000 mailing
Newspaper - 300 line ad
Radio - 30 seconds, prime time

Signage, both community signage and business signage, can be the deciding factor over whether or not a business succeeds. The charts, left, show the tremendous return on investment of attractive and effective signage. These were provided by the United States Sign Council.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in...
before you promote the name of the business.

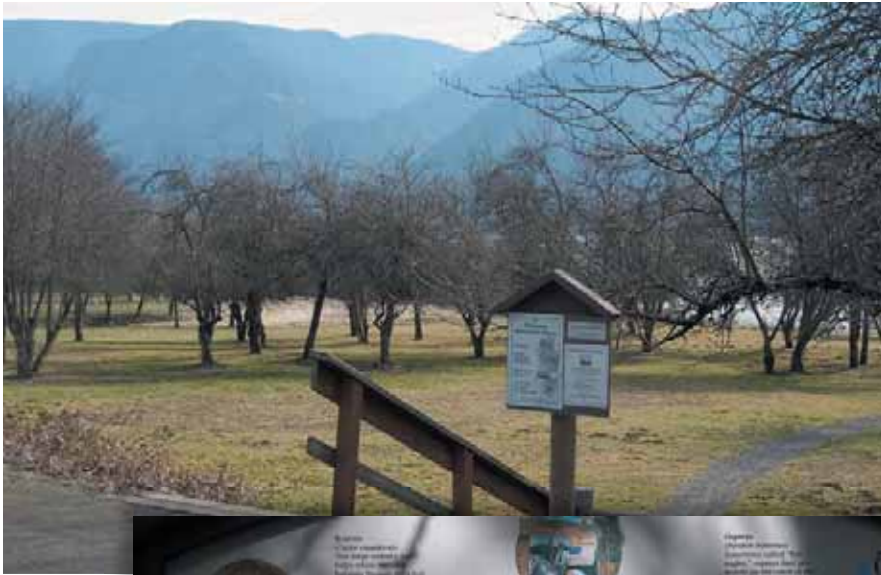
Note

Always sell the "lure" - what will pull people into the store - not the name of the store. Would you ever know that the Laffin Crab (left) sold kites and windsocks? No wonder they are no longer in business.



The on-site assessment took place with visitors traveling from west to east, as most visitors will experience the county. The first attraction we noted was the old Grange hall. The interpretive signage is excellent. The more of these you have, the better. The longer you can keep visitors in the county, the more likely you are to get them to spend money locally.





Suggestion #13

St. Cloud is a great park that should be promoted as an excellent day-hike. The signage is excellent and the park well maintained. All the information on the sign (left) should be included in the Activities Guide and on the website promoting the area. Include photos.

Include a walking tour map, which could be distributed via a weather-proof holder on the sign post (top left).



Suggestion #14

First impressions are lasting impressions. We assumed that this was no longer an operating business. If it is open to visitors, considering adding landscape planters, cleaning up the “stuff” that makes it look more like a junk yard, and adding an “open” sign to the business.



Suggestion #15

A great little country store. It would have more drawing power if some of the sales signage were reduced, and some landscape barrels and even hanging flower baskets were added.



Suggestion #16

Beacon Rock Resort did not have much appeal from the street. The signage is poor, and looking down into the property does not provide a good first impression.

Consider new sand blasted signage, plus some landscape screening around the outbuildings and trailers.



Beacon Rock could be one of the biggest attractions on the Washington side of the Gorge, and should be better promoted. Figuring out how to get to the rock, whether or not it was open, and where to start, was confusing. While the rock is on the right side of the highway, the park is on the left. Is there a bridge over the highway?





Suggestion #27

We read in literature that the park is open year round, yet when we got there the road was closed. We saw hikers coming down the road and were confused over whether or not the park was open, where to go, etc.

The picnic shelter across the highway (bottom photo) offered no additional information.

Signage should be posted that clearly shows the hours and seasons that each section of the park is open.





Suggestion #19

The State Park should add more visitor information. Because we weren't too sure where to go to climb Beacon Rock, or whether or not it was open, we headed to the park headquarters. There was no additional information there. The readerboards simply had the usual postings of rules and regulations. Include information about the park, a map showing the different areas, and other attractions along the Gorge.



Suggestion #20

Down the road, next to the public restrooms, we noted another bulletin board with climbers info. Right next to it is a sign next to an open walkway, which is apparently closed. Very confusing. Can visitors climb Beacon Rock? Is this the spot? Is the trail open or closed? Trail information should be clear.





Suggestion #21

In North Bonneville, we came across the facility (left), home of Gorge Delights. The sign promotes a visitor entrance, so we decided to check it out. The signs on the door say it's open until noon on Fridays, but at 11:30 the business was closed. What is Gorge Delights? Do they offer tours or have a visitor gift shop? Is it really open to visitors?

Suggestion #22

If so, consistent store hours should be maintained.



We also found the Lewis & Clark RV Park, which has some of the best interpretive signage along the entire Gorge. This is a well maintained RV park in a nice setting.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Note

North Bonneville (south side) was like entering a park. A very beautiful community. The golf course is attractive, but had no information available about the area.

Suggestion #23:

The directional sign (below left) is terrific, but it would be great if it could be duplicated on paper so a visitor can take it with them while exploring the community.





Note

There didn't appear to be much for visitors in the area, although Quilter's Landing looked like a terrific store.

Suggestion #24:

The two murals are beautiful. Consider adding interpretive information for each. We assumed that there is some local history associated with each, but there is no information. Have interpretive signs developed like those along the highway.

Suggestion #25:

At City Hall there is a readerboard (below), but no visitor information. Add a weatherproof brochure holder for the Skamania County brochure, or information about North Bonneville.





Suggestion #26:

Promote the walking trail. This looks like a very nice relaxing walk through North Bonneville, but we could find no information about it. Promoting this trail will translate to increased retail sales of refreshments in the town.



Suggestion #27:

Nearby, we found the Hamilton Island Recreation area and Ft. Cascade Historical Site. There is no information on the recreation area: what there is to see and do in the area, and how far down the road it is. Add additional signage or a visitor information kiosk that contains actual information about the area as opposed to just rules and regulations.





Suggestion #28

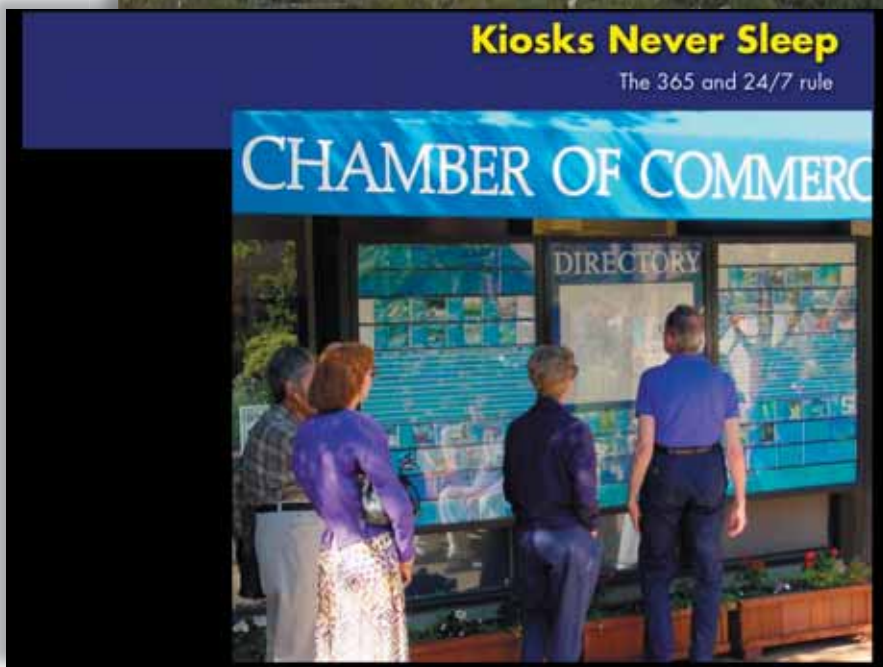
We drove all the way through the Hamilton Recreation area, which ended at a boat ramp and viewing area. We never did find any information about the type of activities the area is home to.

There are an incredible number of missed opportunities throughout the Gorge area. Information kiosks are placed in dozens of areas, but none contain any relevant information specific to each site or the area in general. Perhaps a grant should be secured to provide information about each area.



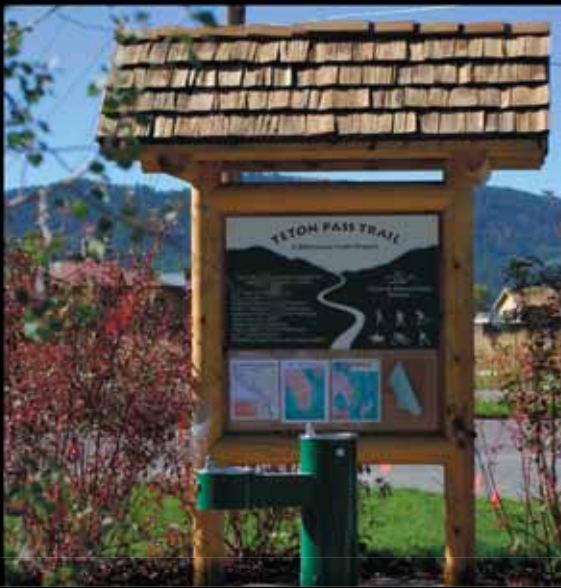
Visitor information should be available 365 days a year, 24/7. In order to be successful you must “connect the dots” between visitor attractions, things to see and do, visitor amenities and services. At each park site, there should be information about other area attractions, always cross-selling things to see and do. That will increase overnight stays in the area and dramatically increase visitor spending. Each of these areas should also be

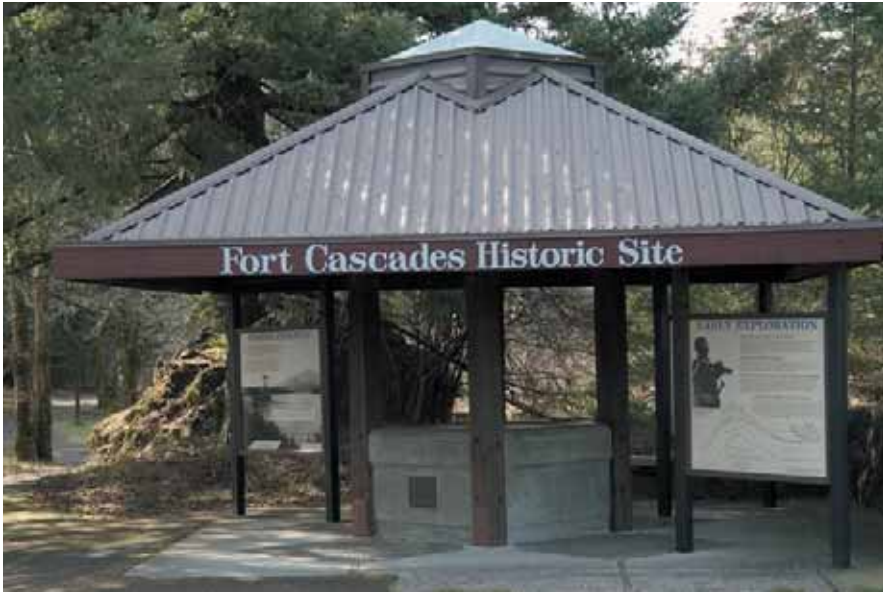
included in the suggested Activities Guide.



(continued)

These photos show a few sample information kiosks. The bottom photo is a typical kiosk found along the Gorge. The kiosks do not necessarily need to be redeveloped, they just need to include visitor information.





Note

The Fort Cascades Historic Site is an excellent attraction. The park is well maintained, has excellent interpretive signage, excellent trail information, and even a weather-proof brochure holder (center) with information about the area, its history, and the hike.

This is another attraction that should be promoted, specifically, in the Activities Guide and on the web.

Other park areas along the Gorge should use this one as a guide. It sets the bar for others to follow.



Suggestion #29

Bonneville Dam is steeped in history, yet is under-promoted. Even the gentleman working the guard gate suggested we head over to the Oregon side: much more to do, the Dam's visitor center is better on the other side, more shopping, dining, and a great Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, to name a few things Oregon has to offer.

The visitor information center was not staffed while there and so getting information was difficult. There were no brochures promoting the area.

1) Train staffing to also promote attractions in Washington: the Town of Stevenson, Beacon Rock, The Gorge Interpretive Center, Maryhill Museum, Stonehenge, the Wine Trail, etc.

2) Include distribution of area information at the Dam's visitor center.

3) Have brochures within reach of visitors when the counter is unstaffed.

The Visitor's Center is immaculate and very nice, and educational displays are excellent. We did not go to the Oregon side to see how it compared, although numerous people said it's much nicer.



Note

The signage for Carson is beautiful and was enough to get us to visit this town. Other communities along the Gorge should follow suit.

Unfortunately, when we got to Carson we found two second-hand stores, which are only open on occasional Saturday's, a closed cafe, and nothing else that would appeal to visitors. In this case, the town doesn't deliver on its enticing sign.

Once in Carson there were no signs to any other attractions or activities in the area. Additionally, there are no signs to Mt. St. Helens, even though the sign promotes Carson as a gateway to the mountain. Work with Dept. of Transportation to add directional signage to Mt. St. Helens and/or other attractions.





Suggestion #30

We drove around Carson and accidentally found signs for Carson Hot Springs. The painted plywood billboard signs don't do much for attracting visitors. Most are in poor condition and don't make the resort seem appealing.

Nonetheless, we followed the signs and did find the hot springs, which appears to have been an historic site until new development came along.

The resort is under construction and perhaps signage is on the way, but we could not find the restaurant, and didn't know if the new buildings were part of a hotel, condos, timeshare, or apartments.



Inside the Hotel St. Martin were some fascinating historical photos of the area, and they did have information on other attractions in the area, something we hadn't found in other local establishments.





Suggestions #31 & 32:

The Sandhill Cottages across the street from the hot springs look charming, yet the signage paints a less-than-quality image. Visitors will always judge the book by its cover when it comes to lodging facilities, restaurants, wineries and golf courses. The faded and hand-painted signs should be professionally developed and/or refurbished.

The Sandhill brochure should include a list of reasons to stay there: both in terms of things to see and do in the area, and what's special about the cottages.



Suggestion #32: Sell the experience. The units. Things to do in the area. Not just the location.





Suggestion #33:

How far is it to the Wind River Recreation Area? One mile? 50 miles? Work with the Dept. of Transportation to add mileage to the sign. If visitors have no idea, they will simply leave.

There were a couple of RV Parks that were really trailer parks - an entirely different type of park. Most RVers will not seek out trailer parks. Perhaps in this instance (center), there might be an RV area and if so, it should be noted on signage.

Home of the “famous Gorge Burger” is a good teaser for the Wind River Inn Restaurant.



Note:

If your signage looks rather outdated, customers are going to assume that the property is also somewhat dated. Visitors, increasingly, will pay more for quality. First impressions are lasting impressions.

Wind Mountain Resort (center), looks like a great country store, but we were unsure where the “resort” was. This store would be much more appealing if some of the advertising signs were removed and landscaping added.



Suggestion #34:

While Drano Lake is touted for its excellent fishing, the name of the lake did little to entice us, thinking of the name Drano in a whole other context. Beautiful park area, with clean public restrooms and beautiful views of the lake. The interpretive signage was also very nice.





Suggestion #35:

Consider hiring a professional photographer/videographer to film and photograph portions of Highway 14, then post clips on the website and use quality photos to promote the tunnels, scenic vistas, neat country stores, etc.

Promote the area for its hiking. Everywhere we went, we found more hiking trails. They need to be promoted specifically. This one, Dog Mountain, is rather challenging, but good information is available at the trail head and should be included in the Visitors Guide and on-line.



Suggestion #36:

Another great opportunity to cross sell other hikes and area attractions (see readerboard, above right).





Note

While the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center seems out of place with its glass fronts, it's still a striking building and a top-notch must see attraction along the Washington side of the Gorge. The Center has virtually no visibility on the internet, in brochures, etc. When asking about things to see and do in the area, it seldom was even mentioned - a travesty, considering how excellent the museum is. The top attractions along Washington's Columbia River Gorge?

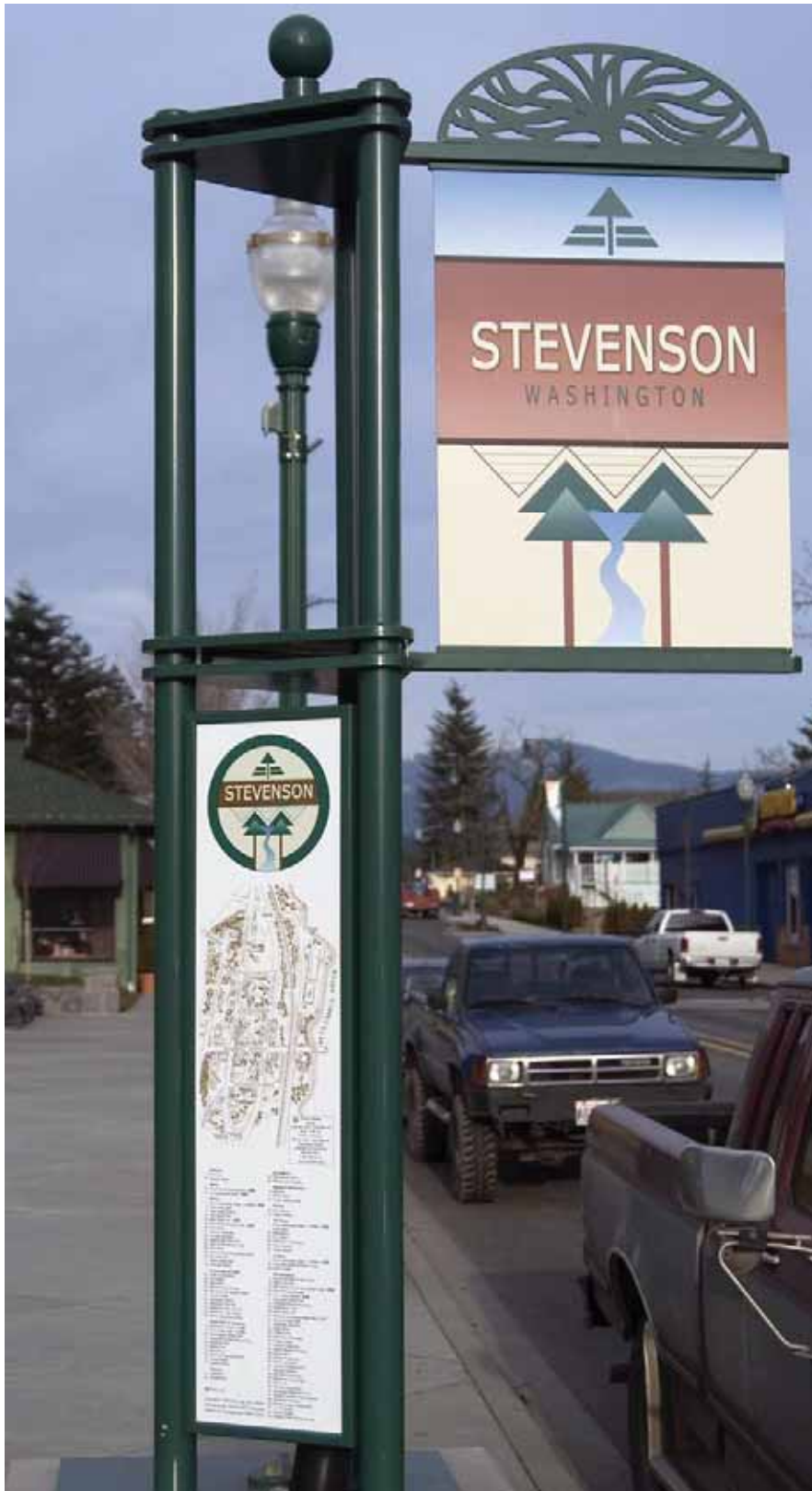
1. Beacon Rock
2. Highway 14 Scenic Hwy.
3. Gorge Interpretive Center
4. Town of Stevenson
5. Town of White Salmon
6. River rafting (in season)
7. Maryhill Museum
8. The Wine Trail

Unfortunately, these things are poorly promoted and there seems to be no cohesive branding effort, particularly between Skamania and Klickitat Counties.



At first glance, we thought the theater wasn't yet operating: that this was the place of a "future" theater. On closer exam, the film shown here is excellent. Play up bigfoot! Visitors love legends.





What a great little town!

We were quite pleasantly surprised on arriving in Stevenson. The streetscape work, signage, and overall appeal is terrific.

Visitor information is located in the heart of town (below), information is available outside the door 24/7, and the visitor center is easy to find. Staff is incredibly helpful and eager to please.





Suggestion #37:

Many of the retailers understand the importance of perpendicular signage and overall curb appeal. Some, like the two shops below are missing out on a golden opportunity to capture visitor dollars.

Some suggestions for these and other shops:

1) Use decorative perpendicular signage that has been professionally produced and presents a clean, quality image. The signage for the restaurant, below, makes the place less than appealing.

2) Add landscape barrels or planters along all shops. Add hanging baskets, and keep the exterior paint fresh. When you travel, how often do you say "That looks like a nice place to eat." We all make judgment calls like that.

3) Gravel parking lots will reduce the number of visitors you get.

Suggestion #38:

4) Put on the signs what you have to sell instead of the name of the business. That can go on the door and windows. In the case of Petal Pushers, we had no idea what the store sold. If visitors don't know, most will simply pass on by. What is the lure that will bring them in? Put that on your signage.





Suggestion #39:

Promote your artists! Stevenson can become a great arts community - not just because of its two galleries, but because it's a place where local artists live, work and sell their art. This is an excellent gallery full of exceptional work. Promote specific artists and showcase samples of her, and other local artists, work. It can be a draw to the community far surpassing gift shops and restaurants - who will still benefit from being near the galleries.



Suggestion #40:

One of the things that hurts Stevenson, during the shoulder seasons, is that many shops are closed for the "season" even though Skamania Lodge is busy year round.

Consider working with local retailers, getting them to extend their seasons from mid-April through October.





Suggestion #41:

Most of the downtown shop owners have done a great job with the overall appeal of their places. Bloomsbury could use additional signage on the corner (below left).

Have professional photography taken of the shops (interior and exterior) and promote them all, individually. It will make Stevenson worth a special trip from the Oregon side and may attract visitors to travel the Washington side, knowing there are places to eat, shop and have fun.





Suggestion #42:

These two shops, left, are excellent and are the “gateway shops” for the entire town. Unfortunately, the curb appeal is poor. Consider removing the lattice work and add-ons, painting murals and adding landscaping to the lot. With a little dressing up, both these shops could be quite charming and much more appealing. Currently they don’t offer a very good first impression of Stevenson.



Suggestions #43 & #44:

Would you eat here? Most of the sandwich boards in Stevenson do more to keep people out of the shops they are trying to promote. These signs are a direct reflection on the quality of what you’re selling.

Consider creating a merchant-driven signage and exterior display review committee to work with merchants on these issues. Signs like these (middle two photos) bring down the appeal of the entire town. Sandwich boards like those used in Mt. Shasta, California (left) entice visitors into the shops.



Suggestion #44:
Develop a merchant-driven signage/display program.



Suggestion #45:

Develop a decorative wayfinding system. Other than the signs shown in the top and middle photos, all signs lead to government offices, schools, etc. In fact, if we hadn't been performing an assessment, we would have missed the waterfront entirely.

Additional decorative signs indicating the waterfront should be placed towards both town entrances.

Every community should have a professionally produced Gateway, Wayfinding and Signage Plan developed and implemented. This will help you connect the dots between shops, restaurants, lodging establishments, and attractions.

Even the municipal signs are haphazard in design and appeal.



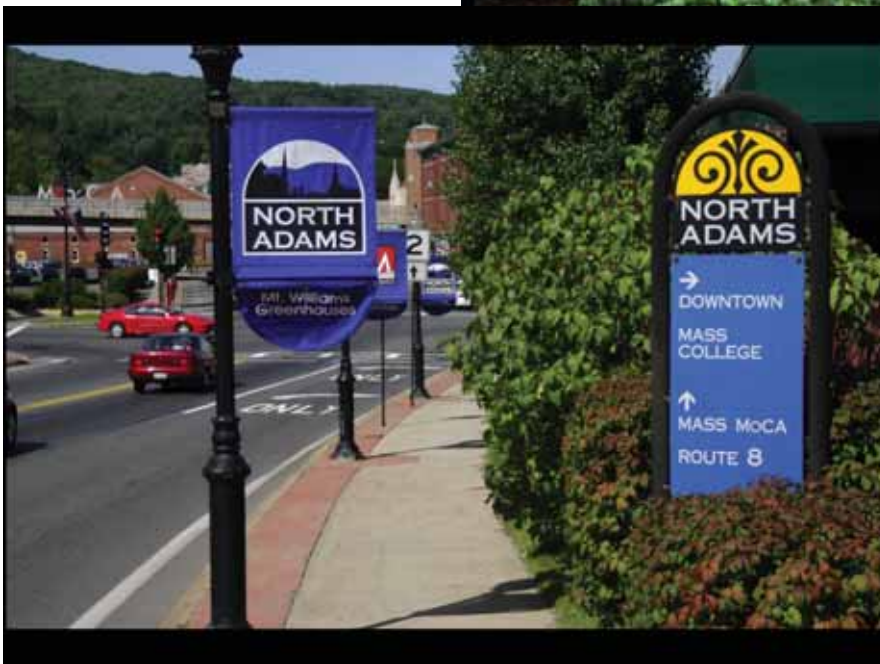
Real Men Don't Ask For Directions

The rule of wayfinding



(continued)

Make sure you provide RV parking and signage, and develop signage that fits the overall theme, which is outstanding. The sign to the left is in Leavenworth and fits its Bavarian theme.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

What to do:

Every community should develop and implement a "Gateway, Wayfinding & Signage Plan"

- Wayfinding (connecting the dots - directional signs)
- Gateways & entries (sense of arrival)
- Attractions and amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays

- Less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers - IF they can find that!



Suggestion #46:

Once we actually found shops and restaurants away from the highway, many looked terrific. In the case of Walking Man Brewing, simply add some curb appeal: planters, hanging baskets, facade decorations, etc. Add some color!



Suggestion #47:

We passed the Sage Center, but were unsure what it is and didn't know if it was open to the public. We almost missed the waterfront entirely, including the fabulous Crab Shack. If it had not been recommended by a local, we might not have even gone down to the water. The railroad tracks create a barrier to exploring this area of town. Once along the riverfront, we found the best visitor information kiosk in the county, additional lodging, a unique sculpture (which we liked), and a nice park.

We were told, later, that we could have walked right down to the river where there is a beach and park - another missed opportunity that attractive signage could fix.

Suggestion #48:

Move the visitor information kiosk uptown, or duplicate in other locations.

Suggestion #49:

In fact, put them in a dozen locations throughout the county.





Suggestion #50:

Many visitors to Skamania Lodge never even know that there is a great town just down the street. Most come from the metro areas and turn to the lodge before ever seeing Stevenson.

When visitors leave the lodge, they do see the signs (above), which should be more attractive and larger.



The visitor information kiosk, above, is excellent, but in a terrible location. There is no place to pull over at the busy intersection, and so it goes largely unread. It would be an excellent sales tool right outside the grand entrance to Skamania Lodge, who would also benefit. The more there is to see and do in the area, the longer visitors will stay and the sooner they will come back.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



In a nutshell:

- #1: develop a visitor wayfinding system (decorative)
- #2: work with merchants on curb appeal enhancements
- #3: make Stevenson the primary route to Skamania Lodge
- #4: use photography in your marketing efforts
- #5: heavily promote the Interpretive Center
- #6: expand visitor information kiosks, brochures
- #7: recruit more visitor retail. Consider zoning changes

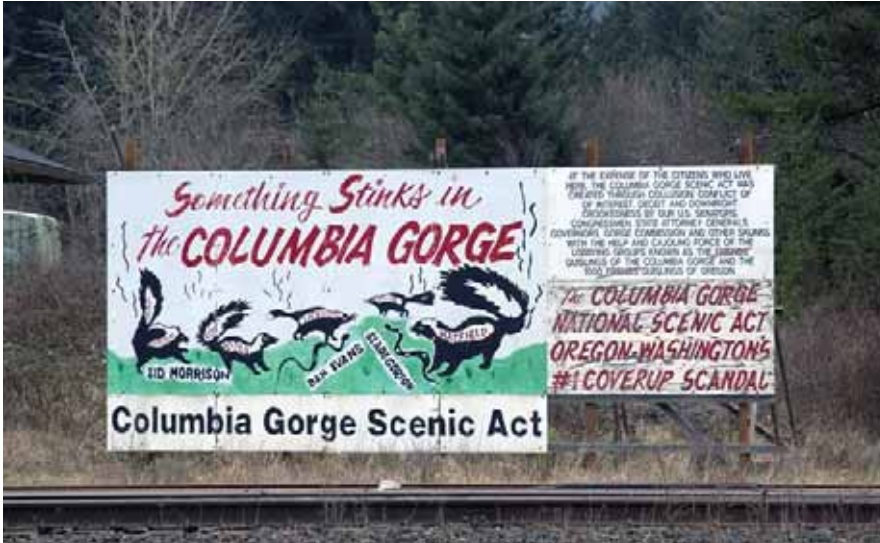
(continued)

From Skamania Lodge to downtown is a beautiful drive, and very nice walk (another one), showcasing the community.

As visitors we expected to perform the assessment in a few hours. Instead, it took two full days. The marketing effort **MUST** be stepped up to include all there is to see and do in the area - providing specific information.

Visitors could easily spend three or four days in the two counties, and still need to come back to see additional attractions.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



In reading this billboard several times, we still have no clue what the problem is, or was. Looks like something left over from the 70s.

**Addendum:
Skamania County Distance Marketing Assessment Summary**

We assigned two people to plan a small vacation or getaway to the Columbia Gorge region without telling them our specific target location. They used whatever means they would typically use to plan the vacation, including the internet, magazines, guidebooks, and word-of-mouth.

Both potential visitors searched the two primary search engines, Google and Yahoo!, and found the U.S. Forest Service website, the Dalles Chamber website, the Hood River website, and the Columbia River Gorge Visitor Association website. The CRGVA site seemed to be more oriented towards promoting the organization, listing members, etc., than promoting the area to visitors. The lists of hotels, restaurants, and services didn't give any information about the Gorge or why they should visit, or which town would be best for their particular needs.

Both visitors chose to base their vacation stay in Hood River. The Hood River Chamber website, though, did not help them make their decision – it looked cheap because of the big ski coupon at the top of the page. It took navigating three menus to get to specific windsurfing outfitter information. The accommodation listing was tiresome; it was necessary to go through five clicks to get to the desired site. Restaurant information wasn't very helpful; there were much better restaurant reviews and vital information on tripadvisor.com, columbiagorge.com and nwsoruce.com.

A telephone call was made to the Hood River Chamber, who suggested some lodging options and was generally very helpful. She suggested visiting the Maryhill Museum and the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles.

The visitors also looked into travel articles printed in the Seattle P-I and the Oregonian. Two specific articles were found on the Gorge, and they both mentioned Hood River and The Dalles. The book, Best Places Northwest, also had a short paragraph on Hood River and The Dalles.

Further internet searching revealed the Bonneville Hot Springs Resort website, which was excellent. Their list of activities was phenomenal.

The visitors both felt that Hood River was kind of the "epicenter" of the Gorge experience. Both would make it their home base, and do various day trips from there, including hiking the Lost Lake area and seeing the waterfalls, visiting the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, Wasco County Historical Museum, and The Dalles Lock and Dam, plus taking a ride on the Mt. Hood Railroad.

The Mt. Hood Railroad had a great appeal, and the information found about Hood River made it appear a very pleasant town to spend time in, shopping and exploring.

When asked if they would consider staying on the Washington side of the Columbia, both visitors took a second look. Right away the Skamania

Lodge attracted them, and the Skamania County Chamber's website was more attractive and inviting than Hood River's. It did focus more on the outdoors, rather than shopping and dining, and made it appear that the Washington side would be good for camping, hiking, and geological sites. The downtown picture of Stevenson looked nice of the river, but was not very favorable for downtown. Stevenson didn't come across as a great place to visit – more as a place to pass through while going someplace else. The best thing there appeared to be the Skamania Lodge.

It would have been helpful for both visitors if they could have seen a map of the Gorge with all the sites located on it, plus photos of the attractions and the highway on the Washington side. They really didn't get a good idea of what the Washington side has to offer from the information they were able to find.

A telephone call was made to the Skamania County Chamber of Commerce to request visitor information. The representative who answered the phone was extremely friendly. She referred the caller to their website and offered to mail visitor information. She said the mail had been a bit slow lately, and offered to tell our caller about the area.

She said there were a variety of attractions, lodging, and places to eat in the area. She recommended the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center as a very good place to visit. She also recommended the hiking trails at Beacon Rock, and explained that it is a 920 foot volcano plug that you can actually walk to the top of, and the view is wonderful. Her helpfulness was very impressive. She seemed excited to share her information, and her enthusiasm was contagious.

**Addendum:
THE POWER OF THE INTERNET:
IS YOUR SITE GOOD ENOUGH TO CLOSE THE SALE?**

“The new phone book’s here! The new phone book’s here!” yelled Navin Johnson, as he danced around the gas station grounds.

“Well, I wish I could get so excited about nothing,” replied his boss Harry, the gas station owner.

“Nothing? Are you kidding?!” Navin shouted back. “Page 73, Johnson, Navin R! I’m somebody now! Millions of people look at this book every day! This is the kind of spontaneous publicity, your name in print, that makes people! I’m impressed! Things are going to start happening to me now!”

Navin, played by Steve Martin in the comedy *The Jerk* (1979), was finally somebody. His name was in print. He was listed in the phone book with hundreds of thousands of other somebody’s. What are the chances that his name was spotted by the millions of people who use the phone book? Well, slim, but he was now somebody.

How would this scene apply to the internet? Consider the following:

- A new website goes on line an average of every three seconds. In fact, more than 64 million domain names have been registered – so far. Can you imagine a phone book with 64 million names listed in the white pages?
- The internet is fourth to only electricity, the automobile and television in its influence on daily American life. Not bad for a technology few even knew existed just 15 years ago.
- Eighty-eight percent of all Americans say that the internet plays a major role in their lives, surpassing television.
- Seventy-five percent of all Americans use the internet regularly, and sixty-eight percent have immediate access to the web either at home or work.
- New internet users are growing at the alarming rate of nearly ten percent – per month!
- Ninety-five percent of U.S. car buyers do research on-line, and a whopping ninety-four percent of all internet users plan their travel using the web.

So, how excited were you when your website “went live?” And now that you have a website, have you ever considered why you have it? What is your website’s purpose?

Many communities will state that the website is simply an information source for local residents, businesses, and community leaders. But the real power of the internet lies in its power to promote.

It’s rare to find a community that isn’t looking for some form of growth: residential, business, industry, or tourism. The internet is the most powerful

and cost effective way to market your community.

There are two major challenges with a website: First, is it good enough to close the sale? And second, can your customer find it?

If Navin Johnson had a book listing the 64 million registered domain names instead of phone numbers, his name would be listed on page number 120,066 of the 313,725 page book. With 28,000 new websites coming on line every day, the phone book would grow by 4,235 pages per month!

The following are some tips for creating an effective website that will both promote your community and provide information to your community members:

1. Purchase keywords.

If bass fishing is the number one draw to your community, searching those words on Google (the most popular search engine), will yield 1,490,000 results. Since 70% of all web users don't go past the first page of search results, and 82% don't go beyond the first two pages, your site isn't going to be an effective marketing tool if it's on page 994.

Now you know why Google and Yahoo!, both with free search services, now "sell" keyword listings. You bid for the keywords, with the highest bidder taking top honors on the first page of results, under "sponsor matches." Keyword bidding is referred to as "pay per click" – a powerful and cost effective way to market whatever you're selling.

Google's keyword program can be found at www.adwords.com. Yahoo!'s program, which also covers Alta Vista, AOL, and other search engines, can be found at www.overture.com. Google and Yahoo! command more than 65% of all search requests.

From either Google or Yahoo!, type in the words "tourism consultants," and you'll see a listing for Destination Development, Inc. If you click on that link, it'll take you to the Destination Development website. The company will pay a one-time charge for that click, costing DDI about 15¢. That's a lot cheaper than the cost of a brochure, a stamp, and an envelope, plus the potential customer gets immediate information – something we expect in the internet age. Depending on your keywords the cost may range from 10¢ to more than \$1.50 per click, so choose your keywords wisely. Fortunately, you can easily monitor which keywords are most effective or not used at all. You can make changes anytime, and you control the cost by setting limits. You even get to write the "teaser text" under your listing, whereas in normal search engines, text from the first page is simply displayed – not always the text that will pull customers to your site.

If you're looking for tourism consulting, you won't have much problem finding Destination Development. But then comes the second dilemma: if you go to the site, is it good enough to close the sale? If not, then the pay-per-click program will be largely wasted.

2. Create a "splash page" that pulls visitors into the site.

Just like a novel or magazine article, the first paragraph or line is critical to grabbing the reader. Your splash page should sell the community in pictures and introductory text. Look at the splash page as the front door to

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

your community. Take a look at Santa Barbara, California's Conference & Visitors Bureau home/splash page, www.santabarbaraca.com. Site visitors are mesmerized and watch the entire introduction (which only takes a few seconds). Does it make you want to go there?

3. Spread the splash page around.

The city, chamber, convention and visitors bureau, and other local organizations should use the same style or "look" on their front doors as well. This continuity helps build the brand: who you are.

4. Create a single "front door" to the site.

Once through the front door, there can be more options. Take a look at www.laconner.net. This small Washington State town did a great job bringing the city and chamber together. Once through the front door, you pick which direction you want to go: to the city portion of the site, or the chamber portion. More effective than multiple websites – and less expensive to boot.

5. Tourism IS your front door.

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in all 50 states, and nothing promotes a community like tourism. It's the quality of life: culture, history, activities, attractions, amenities, etc. Tourism is a primary attractor for non-tourism economic development efforts. The first few pages of your website should promote the community using professional photography.

Take a look at www.pebblebeach.com (see next page). Would you like to visit? Maybe live there? How does your site compare?

6. Check the competition.

Make sure you stack up well against your competition. If you are looking to relocate or vacation in one of the old gold rush towns in California's Gold Country, chances are you'll start by doing some web research. Looking for recreation? Take a look at www.truckee.com (see next page). Then look at other towns in the region. Angel's Camp, Nevada City, San Andreas, Copperopolis. Where would you go?

4/01/2004	2004-05 Sculpture Exhibit
6/24/2005	The La Conner Arts Festival
7/03/2005	Town Site Competition
7/24/2005	Fireworks over the Channel
8/04/2005	102nd Annual Pioneer Picnic

 To the right of the calendar are two columns: 'CHAMBER OF COMMERCE' with a link to 'ENTER THE CHAMBER SITE' and 'LA CONNER' with a link to 'ENTER THE TOWN SITE'. The footer contains copyright information: '© Copyright 2004 - Town of La Conner & La Conner Chamber of Commerce. Photos by: Ellen Williams. Site designed by: How It Works'."/>

7. Keep it simple.

Once through the splash page, have no more than seven links on your home page. Too many choices confuse the visitor and take any focus away from the site. Spend some time reviewing the Truckee site. Notice how easy it is to navigate? It's engaging, informative, and easy to use. Truckee, a town of 16,000, was our clear winner when picking a community in this region to visit. That's the power of a website that's good enough to close the sale.

8. Build the brand.

Branding is the art of differentiation. What sets you a part from every other community. Branding requires continuity in all that you do: your product offerings, claim to fame, marketing, identity (logo), slogan, and the look and feel of your marketing materials – particularly your website. Now take a look at www.calistogafun.com (next page). The Napa Valley town of Calistoga has branded itself as a wellness center, and portrays it effectively on the chamber's website.

Round Rock, just north of Austin, has adopted the brand of Sports Capital of Texas. Home of the Round Rock Express AA baseball team, Dell Diamond, with nearly 500 acres of sports fields and amenities, Round Rock is well on its way to capturing that branding title. Visit www.sportscapitaloftexas.com. If you were hosting a sporting event, would you consider doing so in Round Rock? Probably.

9. Convenience is everything.

Make sure your marketing materials are available, on-line, for immediate download. Most people do their travel and other planning research during the evening hours in the comfort of home – when city hall, the local chamber, and other resources are closed. Make it convenient. Providing a list of PDF files (make sure they print easily on 8 1/2" x 11" paper), will increase your sales and reduce the costs of postage, printing, long distance calls, staff time, etc.



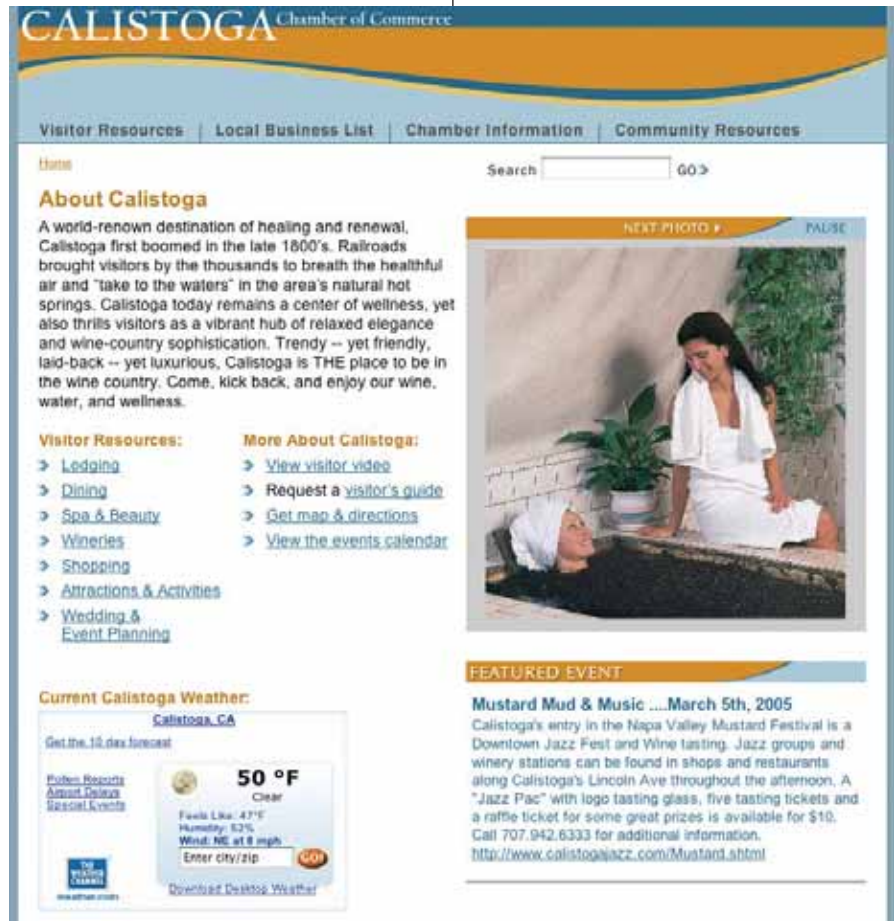
10. Invest wisely

Too many communities think nothing of spending \$20,000 or more on a brochure, while they spend \$5,000 on a website. 94% of all potential visitors (especially those with money to spend) will use the internet, while less than 5% will call or stop by a visitor information center. So how should you spend your money? Spending \$20,000 for a website good enough to close the sale is a very good investment. Spending another \$10,000 a year to keep it fresh, updated, and changing (to bring customers back), is well worth the cost.

E-marketing programs are one of the most effective sales tools in the U.S. They create “top of mind awareness,” bringing visitors back to your website – and your community – time and again.

American Time News Magazine, in an interview, turned its probing eye on Navin Johnson who went on to fame and fortune after inventing Opti-grab eye-glasses. The little glasses handle sold ten million units in a few short months. “Mr. Johnson,” Times News noted, “you’ve become a millionaire overnight. Who are you?”

Unfortunately, the internet hadn’t been invented in 1979. Otherwise, no one would have needed to ask who Navin Johnson was.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

This visitor assessment was prepared by the team at:



120 State Avenue NE #300
Olympia, WA 98501

(360) 754-7920 Voice
(360) 754-7622 Fax

TheTeam@destinationdevelopment.com
www.dditeam.com

