

Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Humboldt Lodging Alliance, meeting Wednesday, August 12, 2015 at the Red Lion Hotel, Eureka, California

Present: Brad Laws, Mike Caldwell, John Porter, Chris Ambrosini, Marc Rowley, Lowell Daniels, Tony Smithers.

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 pm.

The minutes of the July meeting were examined and approved (Laws/Caldwell/unanimous), and the agenda for the August meeting was approved as presented (Caldwell/Laws/unanimous).

The financial report dated July 31 was then presented by Tony Smithers, who noted the expected expenses for the Misfit agency/advertising and several Community tourism project expenses. Revenues were all on target for this early in the fiscal year. The report was accepted as presented (Porter/Laws/unanimous).

An update on work of and progress of the Misfit agency was then given by sub-committee members Lowell Daniels and Tony Smithers. "I am still comfortable with the work of the agency," Daniels said. "We can't keep second guessing the decisions we make."

In discussion the committee recommended that there was outreach to "nay-sayers" so they can be informed of the plans and accomplishments for the HLA marketing campaign. The agency sub-committee was directed to bring major issues and decisions forward to the full Executive Committee. The agency committee report will be a permanent agenda item, it was decided.

A discussion of the campaign and the agency's various projects ensued with a number of important issues being raised:

- Is the HLA website to be transactional, or simply inspirational? The original agency proposal that was approved by the board was for an exciting user experience that built on the "magic" of the advertising campaign—with details of trip planning, lodging choice etc. to be handled by existing websites. The committee discussed how the HLA site will refer site visitors to hotel booking pages—how these will be presented on the site, where the data will come from, how it will be maintained and updated.
- Lowell Daniels said: "we are focusing too much on what happens after the visitor arrives, not enough on the current marketing campaign. I'm waiting for the campaign to kick ass." The committee discussed this statement, especially regarding the effort being put into the front desk kit. The importance of measuring campaign results was stressed. Regarding the front desk kit, John Porter said, "We should have a Follow the Magic tie-in, such as the White Rabbit, not another piece of internal marketing." Chris Ambrosini agreed that "internal marketing is premature."
- Some of the identifying copy in the Misfit advertisements, it was noted, was not consistent. Both "Humboldt Redwood Coast" and "California's Northern Coast" were used in different ads instead of the "Humboldt: California's Redwood Coast" branding. The agency would be alerted to this.
- The Misfit agency will be asked to attend the September meeting of the Executive Committee to give a website update.
- Lowell Daniels: The campaign needs to focus more on the redwoods.

Note: All of the above issues were immediately presented to the agency in a memo. That memo, and the agency's initial responses, are included with these minutes as part of the official record.

Next, the committee discussed issues of the Humboldt County Tourism Business Improvement District renewal, which is coming up in 2017. Marc Rowley began by suggesting that the HLA needs to conduct a campaign to assessed businesses which demonstrates that the assessment is worth it. Mike Caldwell said that Misfit needs to

hit a home run with its marketing campaign. He also wondered whether direct visitor services (a visitor center) should be considered by the HLA. Marc Rowley then expanded his comments to address what he called “the reality of our visitor experience,” which he said “needs work.” He continued: “How do we actually deal with our guests? Everything we know about hospitality has changed. We can’t just keep doing what we’ve done in the past.”

Lowell Daniels said that the industry needs to address the basics first, such as cleaning Eureka up. But, he said, the sooner that the HLA decides to renew and begin campaigning, the better. Mike Caldwell suggested that HLA develops a concrete renewal plan. Chris Ambrosini said yes, show people that the TBID is working. John Porter added that we need to proceed with caution; to realize that a major campaign takes time and explain that to stakeholders. Meanwhile, continue to measure everything we can. Marc Rowley said that the HLA should go “full speed ahead”—to show leadership in economic development and in support of the hospitality sector. John Porter made it clear that the TBID renewal and activities/results of the agency are two separate things. Lowell Daniels agreed, saying that the HLA should “report that we’ve done all these things, including hiring the Misfit agency.” John Porter then suggested that all assessed businesses be invited to an event at which results could be shared and plans made.

Chris Ambrosini asked whether the renewal process would include any changes to the Management District Plan, such as the percentage of the assessment devoted to Community Tourism Funds. Mike Caldwell suggested that TBID district renewal be kept as a permanent agenda item for the Executive Committee, which the committee agreed to. Ambrosini pointed out that continuation of the HCTBID assessment will prevent the cities and county from raising the transient occupancy tax rate. If the assessment goes away, he said, then these entities would see this as a vacuum or gap into which they raise bed tax rates.

The committee approved the board president and administrator having a conversation with John Lambeth at Civitas (the agency that assisted with forming the HCTBID) to get some early advice and direction. John Porter also suggested that a “dog and pony show” of HLA accomplishments be developed.

Following this, the committee turned its attention to the status of the Community Tourism Funding program. This topic was suggested by staff as periodic review and to address some current issues and questions. Mike Caldwell stated that the HLA subcommittees do not have to spend the Community Tourism funds. There was general agreement that suitable projects were not common, that “in every community there’s a few folk who do everything.” Chris Ambrosini added that in the Eureka subcommittee there was plenty of money, but no outreach to potential project partners. Marc Rowley responded that there are destination management companies that can be hired to put on events and run other programs. Staff was directed to look into firms that could perform a destination analysis (such as John Brooks & Associates).

Finally, the committee addressed the destination video and photo projects, which are wrapping up. A list of suggested video topics which can be made into edited videos by Malcolm deSoto was prepared some months previously and will be re-sent for the committee’s review. Lowell Daniels added that the videos “should be focused on timeless things” in our destination, not short-lived attractions or events. Mike Caldwell expressed disappointment over the quality of the photos delivered for the project.

With no further time, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm

Respectfully submitted by Tony Smithers

Hi Tony,

Hope you're having a great week! We agree that it's important to get back to a consistent, weekly, phone call so that we can make sure everyone is on the same page. While we hope the detailed written reports we provide each month are helpful, and the in-person updates presented every other month are important, having a weekly check-in call with the marketing subcommittee (Gary, Lowell and yourself) will be especially important moving forward. Mondays at 3 pm work great for us....except for this coming Monday (Aug 10). Is there any other day next week that would work for you?

Also, it's our pleasure to attend the HLA's meeting on September 9th. What might be helpful, though, is if we could define exactly what updates/info the committee would like presented. As you know, I often get so excited about sharing details of all of the many campaign elements we're working on that I try to cram 6 hours of campaign updates into a 45 minute window. I do this in an effort to communicate as much info to the committee as possible. But I know that, as a result, the information being presented probably feels rushed...and leaves committee members without some of the clarity they desire.

While each of the topics addressed below should be discussed in more detail during our call next week, I also wanted BRIEFLY address each one for the benefit of the rest of the group cc'd on the email — which I've done in red below. These are all great discussions/questions and we look forward to talking through each of them in more detail when we chat. These are also timely in that they are many of the same topics we've been discussing internally as we begin to develop formal recommendations for the HLA's outreach beginning later this year and in 2016 — a recommendation which we've just started putting together in an effort to stay ahead, and keep momentum going, on behalf of the HLA.

matt kolbert
misfit

1013 7th street | sacramento, ca 95814
o: 916-290-9660 ext 103 | c: 559-441-3121
agencymisfit.com

From: Tony Smithers <tony@redwoods.info>

Date: Thursday, August 13, 2015 at 11:11 AM

To: Matthew Kolbert <mkolbert@agencymisfit.com>

Cc: Chris Ambrosini <ChrisA@HumboldtBayInn.com>, Brad Laws <brad.laws@redlion.com>,

"Donna@teamredwood.us" <Donna@teamredwood.us>, Gary Stone <garyastone@suddenlink.net>,

"info@cohocottages.com" <info@cohocottages.com>, John Porter <jporter@benbowinn.com>, Lowell Daniels

<innkeeper@victorianvillageinn.com>, Mike Caldwell <mcldwll@aol.com>, Shailesh Patel

<acvca_hampton_suites@hilton.com>

Subject: HLA weekly phone meetings

Matt, yesterday I reported to the Executive Committee that we had suspended the weekly phone calls in July, with you and your team visiting Humboldt twice last month. However, they were adamant that these should resume with the many moving parts of the campaign still in development.

I would like to propose to you and to Lowell and Gary that the phone calls be scheduled for Mondays at 3:00 pm. Tuesdays don't work so well for me now.

The campaign and the agency's work was discussed at length yesterday, with the following questions and points raised. These are not to be taken as client direction until the agency committee has discussed with you and agreed on what we want:

1. There was general agreement that we are focusing too much on what happens AFTER the visitor arrives in Humboldt County, and not enough on getting them here. We have to demonstrate to the assessed businesses that the campaign is bringing new business, especially starting in September with the shoulder season. This means MORE energy and budget should go to marketing activities now, and LESS to the front desk kit. One person said "internal marketing is premature." There will be plenty of time for that once the campaign has been established and is measurably bringing results. **We totally understand and agree with the concern and think it's certainly something to watch. Just so you know, from a budgetary standpoint only about 10% of the total HLA budget is being allocated to these "internal marketing" efforts and we believe it is an important first-step in encouraging repeat visitation to the county and increasing the chances that visitors will speak favorably with their friends/family about the "magic" they experience while in Humboldt. But let's discuss further...**
2. When we do focus on the front desk kit, it was suggested that internal marketing (such as the proposed printed piece) is not as important as a tie-in to the campaign and brand. For example, a plush toy of our White Rabbit would be an amazing premium for the hotels to give out. **Let's certainly discuss this further on our call. We have loved the idea of creating a plush toy of the White Rabbit, for example, from day one. The only downsides of doing that kind of thing — by itself — is that they aren't always relevant to all of your visitors and, because of the high cost per unit, the total cost to the HLA would likely be even higher. But again, this is a great topic to discuss during our subcommittee call.**
3. Going forward, the metrics of campaign measurement will get more and more important. Audience reach is one thing, but our stakeholders want to know that the phone is ringing. Please keep this in mind as every new strategy and tactic is developed. For example, the Follow the Magic website needs to track all site users and especially lodging referrals. **Agreed. While we've been clear from the very beginning on the difficulty of tracking, with 100% certainty, the impact each marketing activity has on bringing visitors to the area, any data we can get our hands on is valuable in assessing which aspects of the campaign are performing better than others.**
4. Ah yes, the website. There is still a little confusion over exactly where we are with the website. The majority of the committee DO want there to be lodging listings actually on the website, linking directly to the property's booking page or phone number. There is no problem with using the same geographical divisions and lodging types which are on the CVB website. We also would ideally want to keep the visitor on the HLA site, not refer them away until they actually go to make the booking. I have raised the possibility of the HLA site referring to the same Access database which the bureau maintains to populate the booking engine. This makes sense to most committee members who don't want to pay for something that is already being accomplished. The technical questions of doing this need to be explored with your web developer and with my webmaster. Failing this, we need to develop a system for updating the lodging information as efficiently as possible. For example, why could there not be a content management system to which my staff is given access, so that they can make updates to both systems? This creates a central responsibility for the task, which is best given to the agency which handles this information daily. **Based on all of the meetings and conversations we've had on this topic, we've been operating under the direction of the committee to include a listing of all properties on the HLA site with a direct link to each of their respective websites (for booking purposes). Incorporating the HLA database into the site, however, I fear might complicate things dramatically. The intent of this site, from the very beginning, was to create something that did not duplicate what the CVB site was doing....but rather to convey the beauty and magic of the county to potential visitors in a manner that is more compelling than any other current site. I'm not a tech-expert, and we'll check with our team to get details, but I know enough that things that sound simple (like adding a content management system that allows for daily updates) often are not so simple.**
5. Advertising—some branding inconsistencies were pointed out in the recent Brides and Sunset magazine ads, in which both "Humboldt Redwood Coast" and "California's Northern Coast" were used. It was felt that we should pick one destination description—probably California's Redwood Coast—and stick with it across the campaign. **Agreed...we will fix this going forward.**

6. It was observed that the campaign is not putting the redwoods front and center. **This is tricky. The redwoods will always be a prominent part of the campaign...and rightly so. The word "redwood" is even in our destination's name. But in order to increase the number of visitors to the area, and expand the perception of what Humboldt has to offer to those who live within a 4-5 hour drive of the county, we also have to incorporate other activities and sights. There should always be a balance, though, and we will continue to do our best to walk that line.**
7. There is strong interest in extending the campaign to northbound billboards on Highway 101. The Southern Humboldt committee of the HLA has already secured a billboard with their community tourism funds and would like Misfit's help in the messaging and artwork. But it was also suggested that this location (Redwood Valley to the north of Ukiah) could be one of a series of billboards which could, in a fun and intriguing fashion, lead the traveler north down the rabbit hole. Can Carol explore the availability of billboards from San Francisco north? **Absolutely. We see the number of people traveling on 101 everyday as a huge opportunity for us to expand the campaign — and our reach and impact on potential visitors — going forward.**
8. The committee would like to have Misfit present at its September 9 meeting to give a complete update and report on the website, campaign, etc. **We'll be there!**

That's all for now. Is everyone good with Monday at 3:00?



Tony Smithers, Executive Director
Humboldt County Convention & Visitors Bureau
& Administrator, Humboldt Lodging Alliance
w. 707-444-6635
m. 707-832-6332
f. 707-443-5115
tony@redwoods.info
www.redwoods.info