



**Assessment Findings
& Suggestions**
Coos County, New Hampshire
July 2007

Destination 
Development_{inc}

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In July of 2007, Community Tourism Assessment of Coos County, New Hampshire, was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public restrooms, overall appeal, and the community’s ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the “Community Assessment,” we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were “secretly shopped.”

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the “Marketing Effectiveness Assessment.”

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a “new” area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, read travel articles, and looked at AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was

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during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further away. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a "list" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, boating, etc., etc.), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, THEN your diversionary activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knott's Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, way-finding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they

do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It's important to note that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, 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-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there,

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done that” communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don’t have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash – often referred to as “leakage.” Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive “balance of trade.” Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors – providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn’t happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn’t happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn’t happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these – but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B’s, hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it – you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as the attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio’s River Walk, to name a few.

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

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If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

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

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will 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 has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip. Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee,

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Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene,



such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or a vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.



Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how

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wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.

Although 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 of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

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

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all

over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community’s downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue

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in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed “Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan” builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the “development” portion of the plan or the “how to get there” program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with it’s own “to do list.”

Finally, there’s the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an “action plan” as opposed to a “strategic plan.” You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented

4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

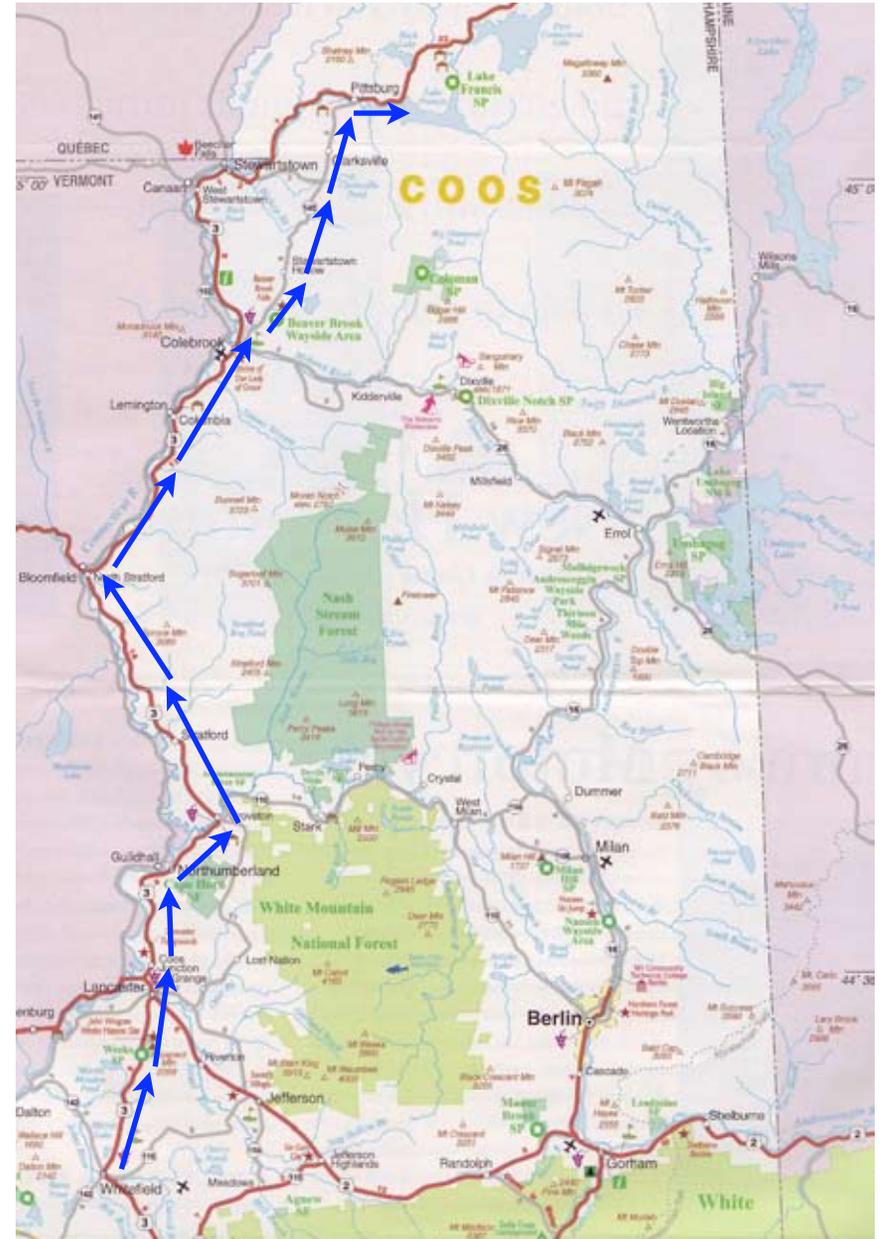
If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work, and visit.

Welcome to Northern New Hampshire - “The Great North Woods.”

What a stunning drive. Where’s my motorcycle? To a first-time visitor the words “Great North Woods,” sounds as though there is a lot of forest land and not much else. In fact, before arriving, I expected The Great North Woods to be similar to northern Maine: a few lakes, small timber towns, a few mills, and hundreds of square miles of wooded area. This is the challenge of marketing “geography” over “experiences” - activities the visitor can’t get or do closer to home.

As I started the assessment I was pleasantly surprised to find that the county had a heck of a lot more to offer than what was originally perceived. This means that the county is under-marketed, or that perceptions are not accurate. One suggestion might be to consider a different regional designation than “The Great North Woods.”

The first leg of the assessment followed the route shown to the right.



Suggestion

Make it easy to tell whether or not you're open. The Moose Landing looks like a great place, but visitors might be reluctant to approach unless they're sure you're open. Add an "open" sign that indicates your days and hours of operation. (top right)

In fact, ALL businesses in these rural areas should do away with "CLOSED" signs and instead put up signs that state: "We'll be open: April through September, every day" or "We'll be open: Thursday - Sunday, 10 to 6, year round." Tell people WHEN you'll be open. This creates an invitation to come back, and not just during the "safe months" of July and August.

Pittsburg is a great little town, much along the lines of what one would expect in this beautiful area of the state. The General Store, CJ's Deli, more across the street. (bottom right)

Suggestion: Reduce the number of signs, plastic banners, sandwich boards. Too much sign clutter and visitors tend to ignore all of the signs. Visitors make decisions within a few seconds, curb appeal being the primary test.



Suggestion

This is a strikingly beautiful area. Some amenities! This would be a perfect hub for visiting the “northern lakes of New Hampshire.” The cabins (right) look terrific and have excellent curb appeal.

The Pittsburg area looks to be a canoeing, kayaking destination. Nearly every vehicle I saw in my three visits to the community was from out of state and most had canoes or kayaks mounted on the roof.

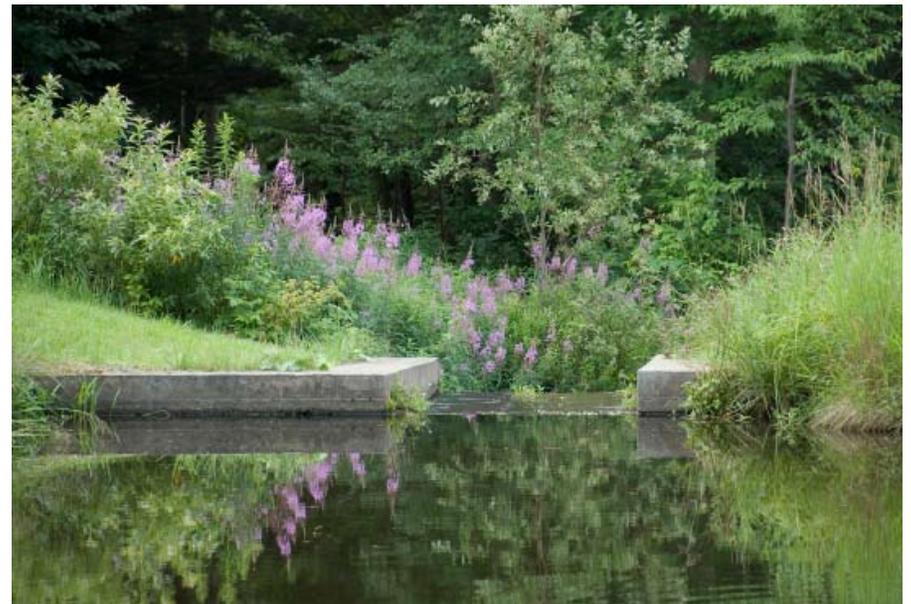
Each community in the area should have its primary focus or “brand” - what it wants to be known for. This northern area of the county seemed as though it could be the “The wilderness canoe & kayaking destination.”

The missing ingredient: Guide services, visitor information, public restrooms, boat rentals, and signage as to places to launch boats.

Note:

The cabins (above) are absolutely charming. The sign is attractive and well-maintained, and the hanging baskets and rocking chairs make you want to spend the night. Good job! Hanging baskets are important: they tell the visitor that you are operating and in business, and the exterior appeal of any lodging facility is typically a direct reflection on the interior space.

In this case I would assume that these are nicely furnished, clean and comfortable.



Suggestion:

PRIMARY LURE

I took Highway 145 past Buck Lake, then took Highway 3 south to Colebrook. This was such a beautiful route that I actually turned around and tried the “loop tour” heading north on Highway 3, then south on Highway 145. This is an incredibly scenic loop and should be marketed as a “loop tour” particularly for motorcycles, bicyclists, and those in private autos. Give it a name. I called it “The Hollow” after Stewartstown Hollow, one of the most scenic sections of the route. By giving a circle route, like this, a name, it makes it a destination - an experience - over just a “route” or a geographic designation.

Develop this into an itinerary: two to three hours. Stop in Pittsburg, pick up goodies, head to one of the lakes. Develop itineraries to describe the driving tour, and send them to automobile and motorcycle clubs to include in their newsletters/publications.

I drove past the waterfall and park (below) twice before noticing it as there is little or no directional signage in the area.



Suggestion

Add highway signage to Beaver Brook Falls. Add interpretive signage as well.

Are there any hiking trails? How long are they? Where do they go? What will I see? Even at the visitor information center along Highway 3, staff had little in the way of information about Beaver Brook Falls.

This is a very good location for a Visitor Information center (bottom photos), with very helpful staff. They did a good job of providing information. Rest-room facilities were clean and well-maintained.

Add 24-hour visitor information, with brochure distribution. Visitors don't just travel during business hours, so it's very important to offer information around the clock. Add outdoor displays and weather-proof brochure holders, either on the wall, or in a separate small kiosk. Post a sign that lets travelers know you have 24-hour visitor information. Take every opportunity you can to always be marketing activities and amenities in the area.



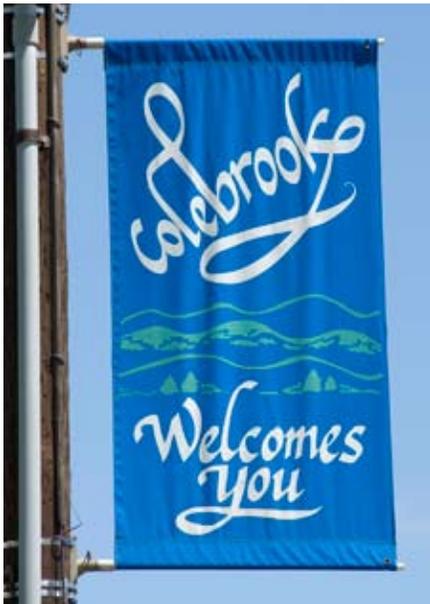
Suggestion:

The Colebrook pole banners are very attractive (bottom left) and parking was easily identifiable (bottom center) - good job!

Add visitor information at the public parking area (bottom right). Make the sale right there. Once people get out of the car, you have a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money, so it's important to start the "sale" right there. Consider adding a visitor information panel to the gazebo with a brochure holder so that people stopping here will see what Colebrook has to offer.

Include a map of downtown, showing specific places to eat, shop and visit. Not just lists, but details about each, showcasing their individual specialities.

The gateway sign (top right) is in a good location and presents a very nice first impression of Colebrook. The homes are well maintained, and the landscaping was very nice. Visitors will always judge the community by the first signs they see. In this case, the gateway area does a good job of getting visitors to slow down and take notice of the community.



Suggestion:

The Pizza shop (top right) does an excellent job with curb appeal - a photo I now show around the country to showcase what businesses should do to attract customers. The one suggestion would be to replace the sign above the entrance-way to fewer words and more decorative. Consider “Video Rentals - Pizza - Deli - Great Subs - Ice Cream.” The words “home entertainment,” the phone number and other words serve little purpose. The average viewing time of retail and wayfinding signage is typically four seconds. Use eight words or less, when possible.

Very nice, very attractive entry to the shop. (bottom left) The challenge: What is Creative Natives? Florist? Landscape supplies? Local art? Always promote the lure, not the name of the business. You’ll attract more customers into the shop if they know WHAT you’re selling, and don’t have to guess. If a customer assumes that you sell flowers, but you actually sell local art, they’ll pass you by when they’re looking for art. So make it easy for customers - let them know what you have to offer.

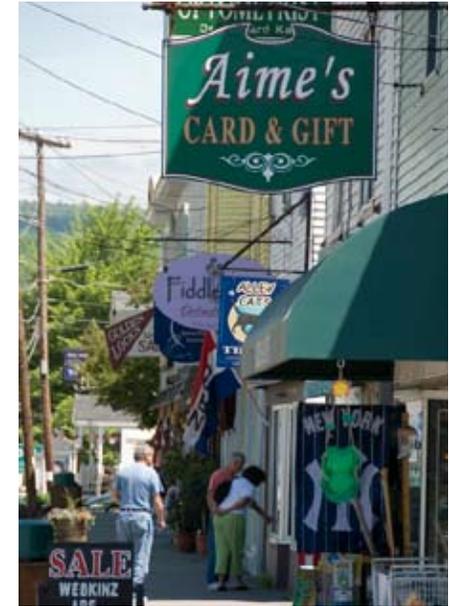
The town, overall, has good curb appeal (bottom right).



Suggestion:

Excellent visitor information kiosk. (top left) Who can I talk to about this? Perhaps these could be placed throughout the county, each one of them promoting the community and cross-selling to other communities in the region. Questions: How much did it cost to build? Imagine if there were 30 or 40 of these placed throughout the county, each one cross-selling to other areas of the county. Suggestion: instead of sticking fliers in the display panels, include “Must See attractions” in one panel, “local amenities in another,” a map of the area in one panel, brochure distribution (nicely done here), and a calendar of events in the fifth panel.

Colebrook looks like an “up and coming” downtown. Suggestion: Add even more curb appeal. (top right) Add hanging baskets, planters, street trees, and benches. Always add “blade signs” - perpendicular signs - on the front of the store (bottom right). I had no idea what this business was, while driving and walking past. Retail signage doesn't need to be large and garish to be effective. Blade signs are seen ten times more frequently and easily than facade-mounted signs. They can be small and decorative to fit the town's ambiance.



Suggestion:

Create gathering areas in each of the towns for public markets, events, art shows, artists in action, etc. Providing a plaza area in town opens up the possibilities for staging events and markets. It also gives the town a focal point for gathering - a place to stroll, offer outside dining, and linger in the evening. People are attracted to active places, and a gathering area in downtown provides a spot for lots of activity. Remember, if locals don't hang out in your downtown, neither will visitors.

LaRua (bottom left) is an excellent example of Whistler, BC's beautification efforts. As the top ski destination in North America, it is actually busier in the summer than the winter. The beautiful ambiance of its pedestrian retail area is part of the reason for the large number of visitors.

Fallbrook, CA has created a permanent location for its farmers market (bottom right).

Note how the umbrellas and plantings make this street scene very attractive in Portland, Oregon's "Pearl District." People are drawn to beautiful places in terms of overall curb appeal.



Suggestion:

These permanent venues for farmers and crafts markets will help keep the town thriving. Farmers markets are growing in popularity throughout the country, not just as a local amenity, but as a visitor attraction. In this case (Fallbrook, California), the town demolished an old corner building, then built this small plaza area. The city leased the space to a local home-based small business to manage with the stipulation that it be open so many days a week, so many days of the year. She makes her income from booth rentals and hosts a variety of events including:

- Seasonal farmers market
- Arts & crafts fairs
- Entertainment (music, magic, chess tournaments)
- Food fairs (Taste of Fallbrook)
- Artists in action (potters, chainsaw carvers, wood workers, stained glass)
- Auctions
- Educational workshops (gardening, woodworking, barbeque)



Suggestion:

Get your local garden club involved. New Hampshire is seen as a beautiful state so your downtowns should mirror that impression. Beautification is an investment with an incredible return.

Notice the wonderful feeling created by the street trees in the photo below? Four communities in various locations took part in a test, planting street trees every thirty feet in just one block with no retail changes in that block. They saw an average retail sales increase of 18% over other areas of the towns without the street trees.

Sisters, Oregon (top right) invests heavily in beautification. Their garden club is actively involved in the retail district's landscaping efforts. The town has the highest retail sales per capita of any city in the state of Oregon. People are attracted to beautiful places and spend more time - and money - in these types of areas.

This shop (bottom right) has brought some of their merchandise outdoors to make a very attractive display. It makes people want to stop, look, and go inside. The owner of this shop says the 20 minutes she spends every day doing so is easily worth the time and effort and provides a good return on investment.



Suggestion

Create “softscapes” to soften the transition between building facades and the sidewalks or streets. Note the streetscape in the photo top right (before) and then bottom right (after). Neenah, Wisconsin has been working on downtown revitalization, and part of the process has included beautification efforts. Note how the addition of planters makes the ambiance more inviting. Which set of shops would catch your attention?

This shop owner (below), in Grass Valley, CA, knows the art of creating an outdoor display that pulls customers through the door. This effort does translate to increased sales. In fact, good curb appeal at restaurants, retail shops, golf courses, and wineries can account for 70% of all sales. For all the money the state is spending to attract visitors to New Hampshire, and for all the time and money being spent to pull those visitors into Coos County, none of that will make a visitor walk into a retail store or restaurant and make them say “here’s my credit card.” The individual businesses must do that. We all travel. Have you ever said the words “That looks like a nice place to eat”? Because we do not know the area, as a visitor, our only way to judge the quality is by the first impression. Make sure it’s a good one.



Suggestion:

Very nice golf course. (bottom) Where's the clubhouse? Is it open for public play? I accidentally found the golf course while exploring the town, but was at a back-entrance utility road. I could not find the primary entrance to the course. Every town in the county could do a better job of "connecting the dots" with a better wayfinding, or directional, signage system.

Where the golf course is visible from primary corridors, consider adding teaser signage with:

- The name of the course
- Whether or not it's open for public play
- Cart and club rentals
- Restaurant or club house

Suggestion: Create a Great North Woods Golf Guide - a brochure that lets people know specific information about golf in the area. Include professionally produced photography.



Suggestion:

The area is stunningly beautiful and well maintained. In a nutshell:

- Develop a decorative wayfinding system to better connect attractions, activities and amenities.
- Direct visitors to public restrooms.
- Merchants should work on beautification and perpendicular signage, promoting the primary lure, not necessarily the name of the business.

Route 26 to Errol

Wow! What a surprise! What is this doing here? (bottom left). Once I left Colebrook, I headed east on Highway 26 towards Errol. As I was driving along I passed the Balsams Resort - a huge surprise. I was actually surprised that this wasn't on the cover of every visitor's guide and promotional piece as the county's "anchor" tenant. It was obvious that this is a major reason for visiting the area from throughout the Northeast.

While I did not see the actual accommodations, studies note that the top 15% of accommodations, in terms of quality, command 85% of the total business. Both leisure and business travelers are spending at the top of the market and so places, like this, are destinations in themselves.

In just half a day exploring the county, I was beginning to be concerned about the lack of wayfinding signage to major attractions and amenities, like this.



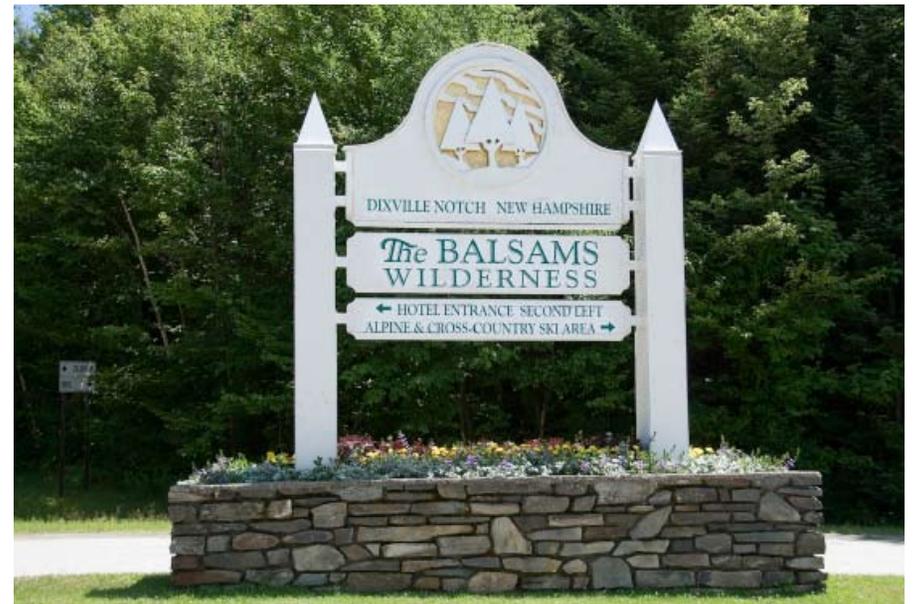
Suggestion:

First impressions are always lasting impressions. Great job. Everything about The Balsams was impressive. The signs are beautiful, and they're placed in incredible landscapes. The buildings are stunning. If any business in the region wants to know how important curb appeal and landscaping is, have them ask the management at the Balsams.

In speaking with several guests, all were from out of state, most with families or were there as a couple, and all were impressed with the resort. The only negative we heard was that some of the rooms were a little "tired" in terms of furnishings, bathrooms and bedding.

Word to all lodging facilities: Curb appeal will pull them in, but the rooms bring them back.

Overall, visiting the Balsams raised the entire bar for the county. Visitors can find a lot of recreational activities closer to home, but chances are slim that they can find a place like this closer to home, making Coos county worth a special trip,



Notes:

When showing these photos to members of our staff, all were amazed and instantly wanted to visit New Hampshire. It is extremely important to market your “anchor tenants” - specific businesses that make the county a true destination. In marketing any area, you must promote the things the visitor cannot get closer to home.

Outdoor recreation is the most overused marketing ploy in North America. But when you tie the recreation to a destination resort, like the Balsams, then you will become the “destination of choice” for recreational opportunities.

Think of the county as if it were a mall. Do you go to the mall because there’s a Hallmark store, Radio Shack, or cell phone dealers there? Typically not. You go there for the anchor tenants, and they all benefit by association. Would you go to Orlando if Disney World was not there? If you said no, what about Universal Studios and the dozens of other attractions in Orlando? You must promote your anchor tenants and everyone else will benefit. Universal Studios is happy to ride the coattails of Disney as a “secondary draw” to the area.



Suggestion

In secret shopping the area, the Balsams can use some better photography on its website. These photos actually did a better job convincing our staff to visit the area, and the Balsams in particular, than did the actual website.

The resort is in a spectacular setting, has stunning grounds, a myriad of activities for both adults and families, and a friendly staff.

Suggestion: Once in the resort it was easy to get lost (perhaps not a bad thing) but an interior wayfinding system would be very beneficial. Once outside I couldn't remember which door took me back into the lobby, so I did a lot of wandering around until I found the primary entrance to the resort.

There were a number of resort guests who were also frustrated by the lack of directional signage to resort amenities and services.



Suggestion

No doubt, a PRIMARY LURE to the state of New Hampshire and one that should be front and center to the entire marketing effort.

Culinary tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the industry. As I was leaving the resort, I noted the sign (bottom right) for a culinary school at the resort. Perhaps a sub-brand for the county could be its culinary programs.

Of the more than 250 cable channels available in the U.S., the Food Network is one of the most watched cable channels. What does that tell you about culinary opportunities?



Route 26 to Errol - continued.

Once I left The Balsams, I continued on to Errol, another “hidden gem” in Coos County. The town was very clean, for the most part, very well maintained, once again exceeding my expectations.



Suggestion:

As in other towns, businesses need to add hanging baskets, planters, tables and chairs. The Errol Motel, for instance (top right) while clean and well maintained, was extremely stark and bare with little curb appeal. Note the motel in the photo below left, taken near Pincher Creek, Alberta - the landscaping adds so much appeal, it makes the motel look quaint and cozy.

Consider adding hanging baskets, planters next to the chairs to make it a nice place to sit (no one likes looking at asphalt), and perhaps small tables next to the chairs to set a drink or magazine.

The Northern Exposure Restaurant looked like a popular spot. Once again, first impressions are lasting impressions. Adding some potted shrubs and flowers, maybe some green shutters to decorate the facade, would make this restaurant really shine.

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return. All too often business owners and workers come in the back door, and don't take a look at the business from a customer's perspective.



Suggestion:

When it comes to retail signage, keep in mind the following general rules:

- 1) Keep all signage at 14' or lower.
- 2) Use less than eight words, if at all possible, always less than 12 words.
- 3) Use only one simple graphic. The restaurant (left) uses three, making the sign too busy.
- 4) When it comes to signage lettering, viewing distance is 1" tall letters for every 12' of viewing distance. Lettering should be a minimum of 6" to 8" tall for maximum visibility.
- 5) Next to curb appeal, signage is very important in pulling customers in.

Suggestion:

Would you eat at this restaurant? (right photo) The window boxes and landscaping make it so attractive, you just know the food will be great. This restaurant, located in Cattaraugus County, NY is out in the middle of nowhere - and yet they do a booming business. I asked the owner how important she thought the landscaping was to their success and she noted that without it they would probably not be in business. The restaurant, by the way, is the most successful one in the entire county. It is a destination in itself.

Whenever possible, avoid the use of plastic banners (below left) and temporary signs. It reduces the overall appeal of the town, something important in this scenic area. Only use plastic banners to promote special events and then for only two weeks.

This is a good provisioning spot (bottom right). Great outfitter, guides, rentals - perfect! The shop couldn't be in a better location and the merchant does a great job of pulling visitors in. It seemed as though Errol is the river rafting and kayaking capital of the Great North Woods. There are good outfitters and supporting businesses in the community.



Suggestion:

I counted vehicles from seven states while here - in just an hour. Especially from Connecticut. This is a wonderful activity for visitors, and all the essentials are here for visitors to enjoy.

Every community should have 24/7 visitor information with brochure distribution as is done in Errol (bottom photo). Take note. One suggestion: When possible, put your visitor information in places where people can spend money. Once visitors get out of the car, you have a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money.

Since visitors don't just travel during business hours, outdoor visitor information is very important. This little information cabin is perfect.

As we saw group after group using this area (top right) as a staging area to get out of the river or to get to the lake, many visitors were looking for restroom facilities. If there are restrooms available include signage or information here. Restrooms translate to increased spending.



Suggestion:

So far in this trip I saw what could be several sub-brands or niche brands for various areas of the county:

1. “The Hollows” loop tour.
2. The Balsams Resort
3. The Canoe & Kayak Trail, with Errol being the spot for “The Rapids.”

Of course there are probably a variety of activities available in this northern area of the county, but the “anchor” was The Balsams, with a tremendous amount of outdoor recreational opportunities, with a focus on water recreation:

- River rafting
- Lake and river kayaking
- Canoeing on a number of lakes
- Fishing

There are probably of other niche-group opportunities in the area as well, including hunting (in season), wildlife viewing, bird watching, and hiking.

However, it’s important to remember that visitors from outside the region or state, can find these activities closer to home. To be successful you must develop detailed itineraries that make what you are promoting different, or better than what the visitor can get or do closer to home. That’s what makes you worth a special trip.

Develop half-day, full-day, and multi-day itineraries for different activities, as listed above. Make sure you include specifics, not generalities.



Route 16 - heading south to Berlin.

Leaving Errol, I headed south on Highway 16, along another “Sunday drive” scenic route perfect for driving/biking (motorcycles and bicycles). Give the route a name. When driving routes have a unique name, it adds to the ambience, and makes the route special, in a way that “Route 16” isn’t. For example, would you rather drive the Redwood Highway, or Highway 99? Or the Cascade Loop, or Highway 20?

This was a very relaxing drive along the river and a perfect RV route for one of the fastest growing niches in tourism. RV sales and rentals continue to climb at double-digit increases annually, in spite of extraordinarily high fuel prices. Itineraries should also be created for RVers including activities, primary routes, campgrounds and RV parks.



Suggestion:

Develop four or five circle routes throughout Coos County, give each of them a name, and promote them to auto, RV, motorcycle, and biking clubs. This is the age of specialization and marketing directly to clubs and organizations (almost all of them have club newsletters) can be an inexpensive way to increase visitor spending.

This is a nice gateway sign, (bottom left) but “The city that trees built”? What does that mean? Instead, consider a slogan that encourages visitors to stop and spend time and money in the community. I assumed that “The city that trees built” means Berlin is a timber town, or was a timber town in the past.

This (bottom right) is a good gateway sign heading north into town. Consider adding to it: “Downtown Berlin - ahead 1/2 mile” or whatever the distance is to the core downtown shopping district.





Suggestion:

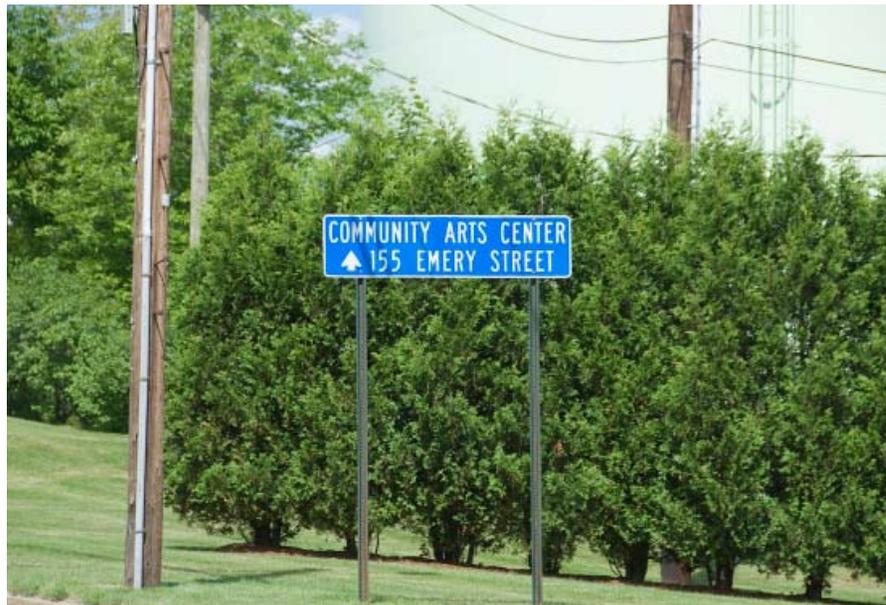
Can you read this banner (bottom left)? Never use photography on pole banners. Avoid outlined and script lettering. Banners are best with a simple graphic and easy-to-read text.

“It’s all here.” Really? Make sure you can deliver on the promise.

Never use addresses on directional signs (bottom center) - visitors won’t have a clue, and drivers can’t stop their cars to write down the address. Use directional arrows, like the signs in the photo bottom right.

Berlin - of all the Coos County communities - would benefit greatly with a “Wayfinding System.” I found it difficult to find my way around and got turned around several times. In fact, it took far more time than most visitors would give to find the Community Arts Center. I never did find the Moffette House Museum.

The gateway park (top left) is very nice and well placed.



Suggestion:

When we follow arrows to attractions and amenities, the wayfinding has to connect. That's missing here (top right) as I was looking for the museum and Arts Center.

There are two primary signage issues that are critical to the success of any community: gateways and directional (or wayfinding) signage. Gateways introduce visitors to your community and provide a sense of arrival. Directional signs help visitors navigate through the area, while telling them what there is to see and do, where amenities are located (public parking, restrooms, visitor information, local services), and where the attractions are.

Wayfinding signs should be decorative, in keeping with the ambiance of the community, as these examples below show. Oak Harbor is developing signs along a nautical theme, with signs in blue for community services, and in gray for visitor attractions and amenities.

Appleton, Wisconsin (bottom right photos) has wayfinding for autos as well as pedestrians, and they've included maps for pedestrians to easily find different districts in town.



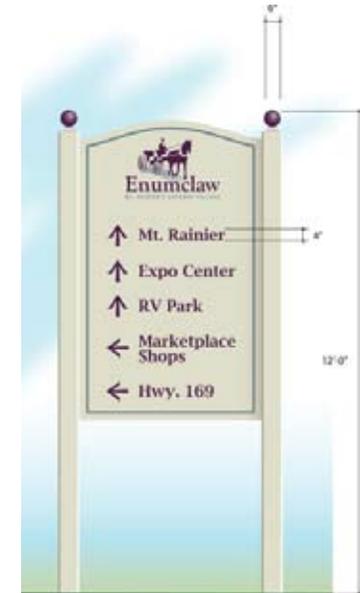
Suggestion:

Newport, Rhode Island's wayfinding system has a historic design (bottom left two photos). The Oldport Water Taxi (top left), also in Newport, saw business increase dramatically when this sign, and two others, were installed. Letting people know what attractions are available using a signage system is a tremendous sales tool. Not only does it help visitors see what you have to offer, but the signs also educate your front-line employees as to what you have and where attractions and amenities are located.

North Adams, MA (bottom right) has an excellent wayfinding system, which includes the use of pole banners as well as free-standing decorative signs.

Enumclaw, WA (top right) is developing an equestrian theme, and their signage will reflect that.

The general rule regarding lettering height: 1 inch for every 12 feet of viewing distance.



Suggestion:

When is this open? (top right) Is there a gallery? Gift shop? Open to the public? Arts education? The sign (below left) lets me know that I've found the Arts Center, but beyond that there is no information. Is this open to the public? If so, when? Add a secondary sign to the monument sign telling visitors if there is anything here for them, and include operating hours.

If you're closed, and don't let visitors know when you'll be open, they usually won't come back. In fact, they'll usually assume you're closed permanently.

We found this to be a very unusual sign (bottom right). "Yeah, Police Department - do your job! Tow all these cars!" We weren't sure whether this was a warning to the police or to offenders, or both. Where do I go to get permission? Who IS allowed to park here?



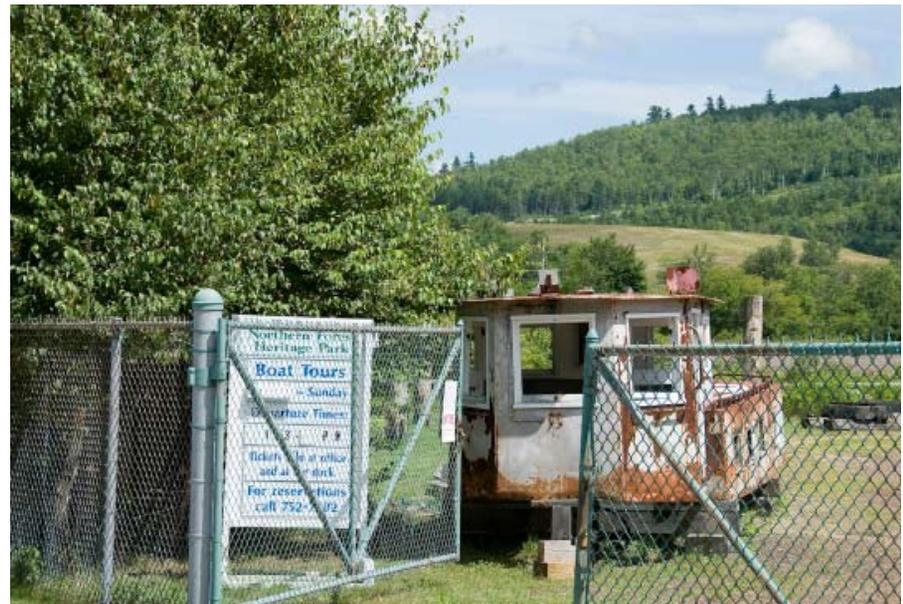
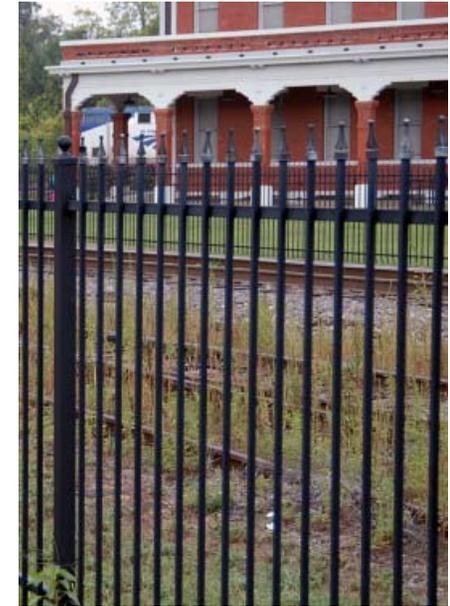
Suggestion:

Aha - a visitor activity - I think. I found the signs for the Northern Forest Heritage Park Boat Tours (upper left), but on closer examination, I assumed it must be out of business (bottom left photo). As I looked around I decided that it was definitely out of business. The tour boat looks pretty rough. (bottom right)

If this IS an operating business, add hours, dates, locations, etc., so that visitors will know when to return. Replace chain link fencing with wrought iron fencing, as in the photo top right.

The assumption that this is an out of business enterprise was based on:

- 1) Lack of signage stating otherwise
- 2) The boarded up window (below)
- 3) The chain link fencing
- 4) The rusted out boat
- 5) The staging area or amphitheater, which seems to be under construction or in the midst of demolition
- 6) The dilapidated signage



Suggestion:

Nice signage. (top right) It could use some cleaning up, but overall is nice. Is there a story to the box of rocks? If so, consider posting an interpretive sign to tell the story. Like the boat tours, this is confusing.

Visitors are resistant to crossing the street to pay admission - especially when it's a very busy highway without crosswalks. Perhaps an honor system fee box at the park's entrance?

A suggestion for all area museums: Promote stories, not structures and artifacts. With any historic building, there are always interesting stories about the people who once used the structure. Make the history come alive with stories about the people.

Where is the gift shop and gallery? This building was a boarding house? I wasn't sure whether the museum was across the street, or is in this location beyond the log house (below). What is there to see here? Consider displays that provide a teaser - enough to get visitors to cross the street to pay admission, then come back. I saw several visitors stop, look, then leave.



This building (far left) is a visitors center? If so, then why is it boarded up? Is the Artisans Gift Shop & Gallery here in the park, or across the street?

Add a large map of the site so that it is clear what is where. Are the boat tours part of the museum or a totally separate enterprise?

Suggestion:

Is this the same as the other river tour, or something different? (top right)
Where is it? The sign should let visitors know where to find the tours. There are the Northern Forest Heritage Park Boat Tours (page 38), and here is the Androscoggin River Heritage Tours. We couldn't find either one.

Downtown Berlin has some great potential (bottom left) in terms of overall architectural appeal, but for the most part didn't have a lot of curb appeal or was rather spotty.

Because of the one-way streets and lack of directional signage, I wasn't too sure what there was to see or do while in Berlin.

This was here (bottom right) two months ago. Any way to get it cleaned up? One thing's for sure: This is Berlin of old...



Suggestion:

...and this is Berlin “The Next Generation.” (top right) A good start. Every town needs an “anchor tenant.” Is this it? What is this? Condos?

The town has some great “bones” to work with - some terrific architecture. (bottom left), but most of the downtown was too stark and drab. Add some color!

Soften the transition between facade and concrete. (bottom center) While the pizza here might be good, with no curb appeal, it simply won't pull visitors in. Bring downtown to life. (bottom right) The businesses need to take the lead:

- Planters filled with shrubs and flowers against the buildings every four to six feet.
- Benches, decorative trash receptacles.
- Create gathering places and open areas for outdoor dining.



Suggestion:

This is a start (top right), but still too drab. Try to emulate the photo (bottom left)

For Berlin:

• Revitalization must be a public/private partnership. Find one block, and make it a “demonstration project.” Get the property owners and merchants involved, and make that block into a real showcase, with facade improvements and beautification. When other downtown businesses see the improvements, they’ll want to join the effort. How to chose the demonstration project? Start with the block where the property owners will work

with the city and will invest WITH the city to make it a showcase. This includes the right business mix.

- Find a niche - a brand - for downtown. Then recruit the right business mix and promote those businesses that reinforce and support the brand.
- Obtain technical assistance for downtown merchants for curb appeal, window displays, merchandising, facade improvements.



The number one diversionary activity of visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This is also where nearly 80% of all visitor spending takes place. To attract visitors and keep them longer, a downtown needs to have the critical mass. In a two-to-three lineal block downtown area, there should be:

- Ten destination retail shops (not neighborhood retail): This can include galleries, farmers markets, antiques (not second hand stores), collectibles, home accents, artisans in action, wine stores, specialty shops, book stores, and other destination retail shops. Develop districts for destination retail, and a separate

district for neighborhood retail: laundromats, professional services, social service agencies, big box retailers, second-hand stores, banks and pharmacies, etc.

- Ten dining/treats shops: Confectionary, coffee shop, internet cafe, bakery, sit-down dining, cafe, bistros, wine stores, sub-shop - any place that sells food.
- Ten places open after 6:00 p.m. Entertainment is preferable: movie theaters, nighttime entertainment, performing arts center, retail shops open until 8:00 or so on Friday evenings.

Sometimes it’s necessary to “rearrange the furniture” in a downtown to achieve the critical mass that will make it a success. Look at any mall. Only certain types of businesses are allowed in the mall, to achieve the rule of critical mass.

On to Gorham.

From Berlin, I traveled down to Gorham, which had good curb appeal. The Libby House (below) looks like a very nice historic B&B.

I saw the “Alpine Tourist Home” but wasn’t too sure if this was a B&B, a rest home for aging tourists, or an elder hostel. It was hard to tell if it was open for business, or was now a private residence.

If it isn’t obvious, visitors will simply move on.



Suggestion:

This is a great location for visitor information, and the building and beautification efforts are outstanding - it looks welcoming!

Add 24 hour information, including brochure distribution. Visitors like to be able to take the information with them, without having to write it down themselves, so weather-proof brochure holders are important. While there is a bulletin board on the building it provides little in the way of visitor information.

The streetside sign states “Moose Tours” and the sign up against the railing states “Moose Tours Inquire Within.” Consider more of a lure on one of the signs. Perhaps something along the line of “Moose Tours - leaving every two hours” or something that will get people to want to find out more.

Overall, this is one of the best visitor centers in the county:

- 1) It's in a good location next to the spending district
- 2) It is colorful and well maintained
- 3) The center has perpendicular signage to the street and pedestrian traffic
- 4) The flags make it obvious that it's open
- 5) The hanging baskets create a good first impression of the community



Suggestion:

This is stunning architecture (top right). What is this building?
This is a great sign (bottom right). Very well done. I'll use this as a good example around the country. It's decorative, easy to read, and briefly promotes the "lures" - what each store has to offer.

Over time, convert the area to "destination retail" to help build critical mass. Sometimes it's necessary to "rearrange the furniture" downtown to create the right blend of businesses for critical mass. Exchange Street is getting close. The number one diversion of visitors is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian setting. This is also where most visitor spending takes place. To attract visitors and keep them longer, a downtown needs to have the critical mass. In a two-to-three lineal block area, there should be:

- Ten destination retail shops (not neighborhood retail)
- Ten dining/treats shops
- Ten places open after 6:00 p.m. Entertainment is preferable.

Good signage and overall appeal (bottom left). The flowerboxes, banner, and awning create a very attractive store.



Suggestion:

The businesses shown on this page have very good curb appeal. Good signage, outdoor seating, landscaping, and decorations. Suggest working on the lawn areas in all cases.

The Top Notch Inn's signage should be turned so it's perpendicular to the traffic. It's a very nice monument sign.

Scoggins General Store may have the best curb appeal in Gorham. They use "Fresh Fudge" as a good teaser to pull visitors in, have added flags, and the window displays are well done.

The only challenge is that the shops are divided by the highway. With not enough crosswalks, the fast-moving traffic, gives visitors pause as to whether or not it's worth crossing the highway to visit some of the shops or restaurants.



Suggestion

This motel looks like a nice place to stay (top right). Note the cleanliness, the potted shrubs, the small-scale wrought-iron fencing. Good job. It looks clean, modern, and well maintained.

After leaving Gorham, I began exploring the “outer reaches” of the county and accidentally passed the Mt. Washington Auto Road sign (below left) and the visitor center (below right). I wasn’t too sure what the Auto Road was, but it seemed to be an attraction worthy of at least checking out.



The Auto Road, while expensive, was worth the price of admission. The audio tour was good and the scenic vistas were exceptional. However, most of the shops at the top were closed, which was surprising during the peak season of the year. Visitors were looking for places to spend money.



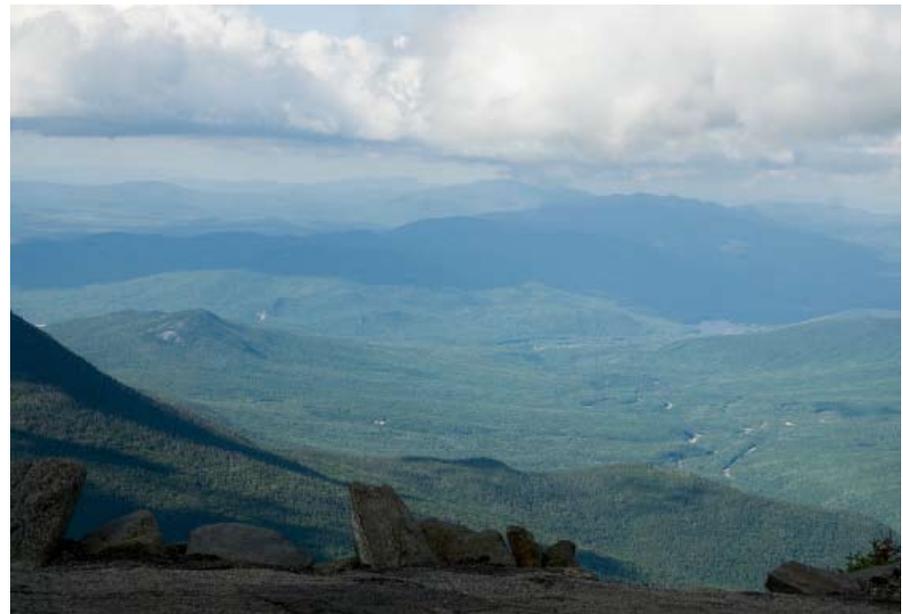
Suggestion:

With so much focus on the “world’s worst weather,” many visitors we spoke with were hesitant to pay the big bucks to climb the mountain. Take the focus off the weather, and instead direct visitors to the exceptional views, the highest viewpoint in the Northeastern United States, the incredible drive, even the wind, and the educational opportunities of visiting this truly unique site.

A great “ad” for Ski New Hampshire (bottom left). Include interpretive signage around the peak noting what visitors are looking at. This is a perfect opportunity to cross sell other activities in the region.

Note the kids hanging on so they don’t get “blown away.” Heading “home” after a long but very delightful day. What a great area with some surprising finds. What a view! (bottom right)

I did all of this in one day, but would recommend making this type of experience a two-day itinerary. I’m sure I probably missed some great attractions or amenities, but with so little in the way of directional signage, the items noted to this point in the assessment were, for the most part, what I found.

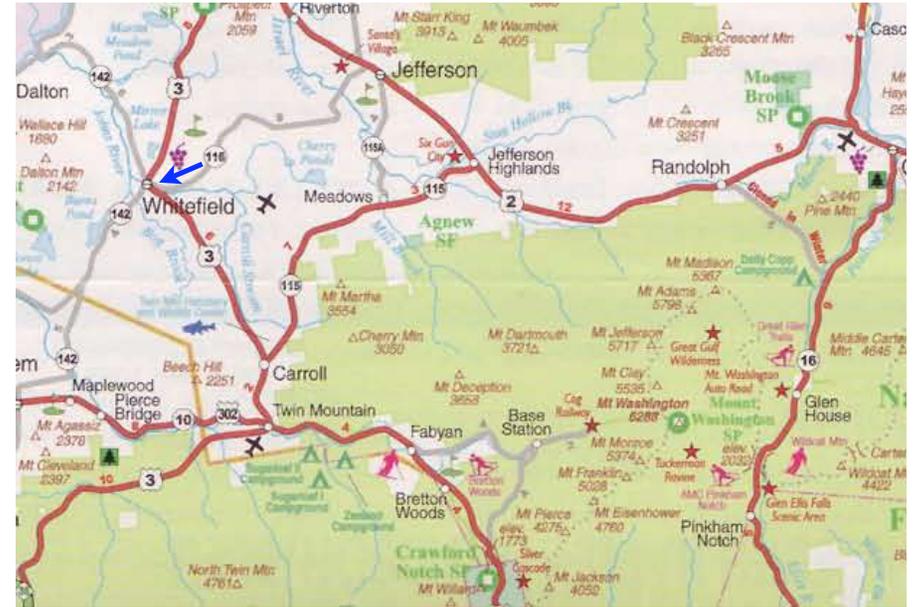


Suggestion:

What can you say? Is this magnificent or what? (bottom left) So far, a beautiful area with two outstanding destination resorts. During this process my entire perception of the area was changing dramatically away from a timber area (perpetuated by the Great North Woods) to one of outstanding resorts, incredible scenery, excellent golf, charming villages, and world-class recreation.

Another PRIMARY LURE. The staff at the Mountain View Grand Resort is exceptional. Really exceptional. And they love working here. I'll be back - and I'm sure everyone who visits here feels the same way. I travel nearly 300 days a year, and the staff here was among the best I've ever experienced in terms of friendliness, willingness to exceed expectations, and in overall hospitality. Hopefully the other grand resorts are the same way.

From what I saw in my first day of scouting out the area, there's no question that the grand resorts are easily a reason to visit this area over other destinations perhaps closer to the metropolitan areas. These types of facilities attract the highest income visitors, and keep them coming back.



Suggestion:

Sitting on the veranda. Mid 80s. Light breeze. World-class view. Yep, this is the life. What beautiful grounds. (top right and bottom left)

Downtown Whitefield has a very nice central square. This would be a good opportunity for visitor information and upcoming events (if any). Once again, visitor information should be working 24/7, 365 days a year.



Suggestion:

If you want to attract customers, promote the lure, not the name of the business. (top right) What is Spalogy? Kaze Dojo? It was difficult to tell whether or not these businesses were still in business.

Like the other communities, work on business mix in the downtown core area. Destination retail shops and restaurants need to be grouped together; the number one activity of visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

It's an odd mix: Pizza shop, tattoo parlor, gun shop (bottom right).

Can an area be cordoned off with wrought iron railing here (bottom left) to create an outdoor dining area? This looks like a nice place to eat, and creating a special outdoor dining area would attract more customers. Note the example on the next page. With the intersection right here (below) it seems like a dangerous proposition to eat outside.



Suggestion:

This restaurant (top right), in Door County, WI, is a great example of creating a lively outdoor dining area, with large catalina umbrellas, beautification, and professional signage.

Whenever possible, avoid plastic banners (bottom left) and too many signs. Make sure signs are professionally produced. Banners and amateur signs create a “garage sale” appearance - not what you want in downtown or for hotels, B & Bs, or restaurants.

A great gallery (bottom right), but easy to miss - tucked away in the “corner.” Good signage, fountain, beautification. This is a good anchor tenant for Whitefield and should be promoted as such. People from throughout the area mentioned this gallery as worth making a special effort to stop and visit.

To this point, none of the towns I visited had the “critical mass” to make them stand-alone destinations, but each had individual businesses worth stopping to see. It will be important to promote these anchor businesses, individually. The days of “we have something for everyone” are over.

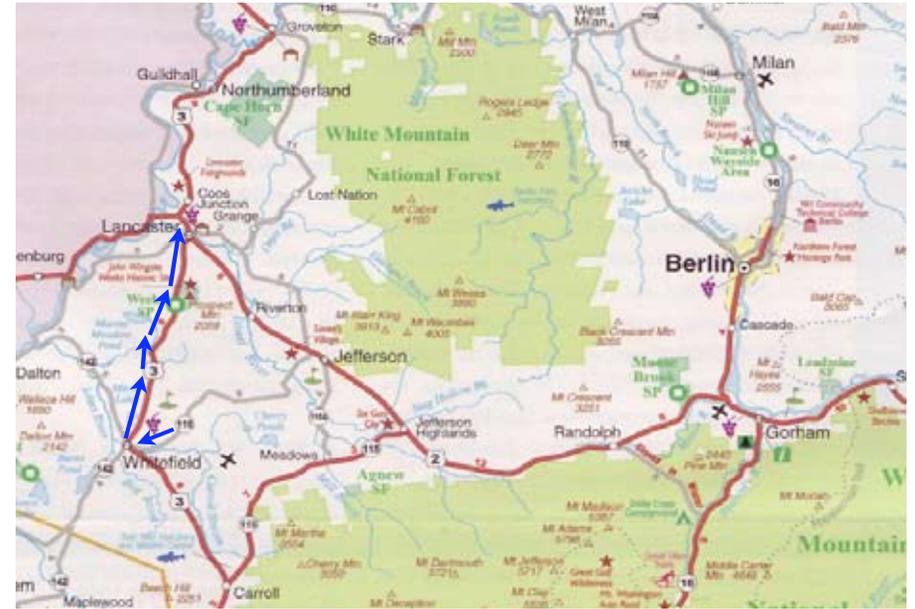


Suggestion:

Continuing on to Lancaster ...

This is a nice gateway sign (bottom left). Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first best impression, which is not necessarily at the town limits (bottom right). The first things I saw after the sign were storage units. Take note Main Street communities in the area.

Once visitors see any signage that says “Welcome” or introduces the community to visitors, they will immediately size up the community by that sign and whatever they see next. What’s around the sign sets the tone for the community: whether or not it’s worth “checking out.”



Suggestion:

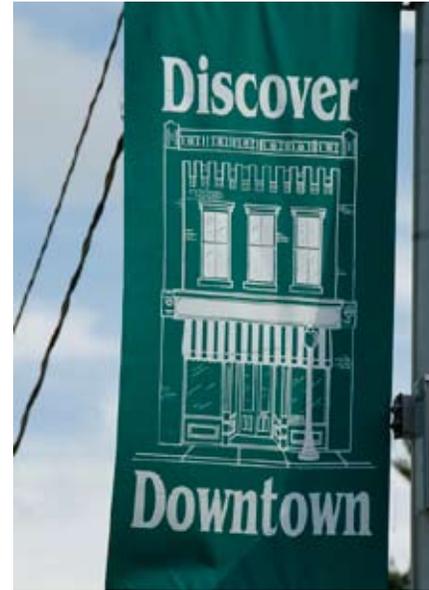
Always tell me why. (banner top left) Why should I discover downtown? What is there to discover? Focus on activities, not buildings.

“Discover” is one of the most overused words in tourism promotion, and it doesn’t tell visitors what you have that is unique to your town. You need to promote specifics, and give visitors a reason to come. And the focus should always be on activities - not your buildings. It’s what’s inside the buildings that makes for a great destination.

Nice signage. (top right) A good example for other communities. Easy to read, and the signs let people know what’s available - not just business names.

The Welcome Center (below) doesn’t have much in the way of curb appeal. It should set the standard. Add beautification, paver stones, 24-hour visitor information, a bench or two outside, hanging baskets, potted shrubs and trees.

THIS should be the visitor information center ala Gorham. (bottom right)



Suggestion:

The smaller motels throughout the area, for the most part, do a very good job with curb appeal and cleanliness. This is rare in rural areas around the country. Good job. (top right and bottom left) The Lancaster Motor Inn also does a great job promoting its major lures: free high speed internet, refrigerators, microwaves, movies, free breakfast - these are all features that more and more travelers are looking for.

Lancaster has a great downtown in terms of overall architectural appeal. Short on critical mass, but the general appeal is good. It would be good if the streets were narrower and sidewalks wider to create more of a pedestrian-friendly, intimate setting. The streets through town are wider than the highways getting to town, which moves traffic faster, but gives visitors little time to note what you have that might get them to stop.



Suggestion:

.Lancaster has a good start on beautification. Like the other towns, take it to the next level. (top right, bottom left and center) Add more planters, benches, hanging baskets, decorative merchant blade signs, etc. Heart Hearth and Home's sign is very well done (bottom left). While the street-side of the sidewalks include street trees and some landscaping (more weeds than flowers however), the storefront sides are still stark and bare.

The pizza shop should have tables, chairs, Catalina umbrellas, and planters to make it a great place to hang out and spend time. Instead, it's hard to tell if it's in business.

A great start. Now take it the next level. Wickford, RI (bottom right) is a great example of how to make a downtown street very appealing. Note the benches, street trees, potted flowers, decorative light poles, even the trash receptacle. Take a close look at the Wickford photo. The seating areas are important, in fact, critical. The husbands are sitting outside while the wives are inside shopping. Women account for 70% of the travel destination decisions and 80% of all travel spending.



Suggestion:

Add perpendicular signage or “blade” signs (bottom left). The upper signs can only be seen from across the street. You want people to be able to tell what’s in your shops as they walk or drive down the street, and the best way to do that is with blade signs. They should be consistent height and size, and be decorative to increase the perceived value of the shops. The bottom of blade signs should be no lower than 7’ above the sidewalk and no higher than 9’ (24” maximum height) and no wider than about 42”.

These shops (bottom right) are doing a very good job with beautification. The flags and flowers create a festive ambiance that will translate to additional spending by visitors and by locals.

This shop in Wickford, RI, (top right) is another great example of very well done beautification.

Suggestion: Work on a weed abatement program. We saw weeds growing in the sidewalks, along curbs, around street trees, and even around planters at retail shops.



Suggestion

Would you shop here? (top right) Are they in business? Without any beautification in front of the store, it looks like the shop is no longer in business. It certainly doesn't look inviting. Beautification can account for 70% of visitor sales for retail stores. It looks as though the book store has been closed for years.

Looks like a great little theater. (bottom right)

The Steakhouse looks like a great place for dinner. (bottom left) Very inviting, clean and well maintained. What meals are you open for? Add that to signage. "Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner." Make it easy for visitors to know when you're open for business. That creates an invitation to come back.



Suggestion

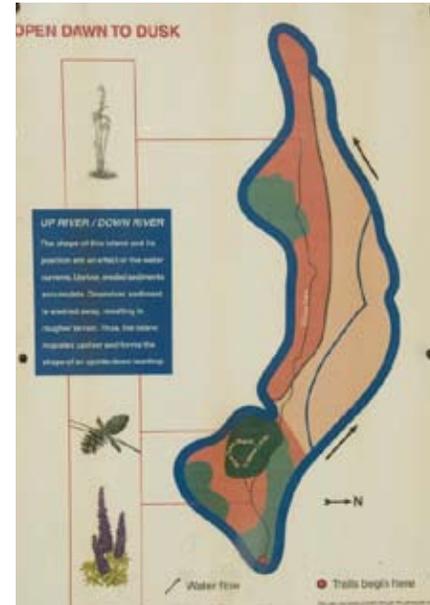
Excellent interpretive signage for Israel's Riverwalk, except ...

I couldn't find the trail, or even a starting point. Add "you are here" to the sign, and post a sign at the access point to the trail. Walking trails are a terrific diversionary activity for visitors, but in this case, I had no idea where the trail was, where it started, how long it is, or what to expect.

Even asking a couple of locals, they had no idea and had never walked the trail. Usually a "riverwalk" is an easy to find attraction, and is typically paved. While the interpretive signage (bottom right) is very well done, it does nothing to tell visitors WHERE the trail is.

I tried walking down to the river, but after a few minutes saw nothing that was clearly defined as a trail, and headed back to the car. A trail like this could generate additional spending. If you can keep visitors occupied for two hours, the chance of getting them to spend money (something to drink, something to eat) doubles. What is #2? (bottom center) Is the trail here somewhere? Provide maps showing what #2 is, or where it's located.

One thing that's fantastic about the area: nearly every town is located along a river or creek. (bottom) Utilize and showcase these areas! People are attracted to rivers, streams, lakes - water in general. This is a stunningly beautiful area.

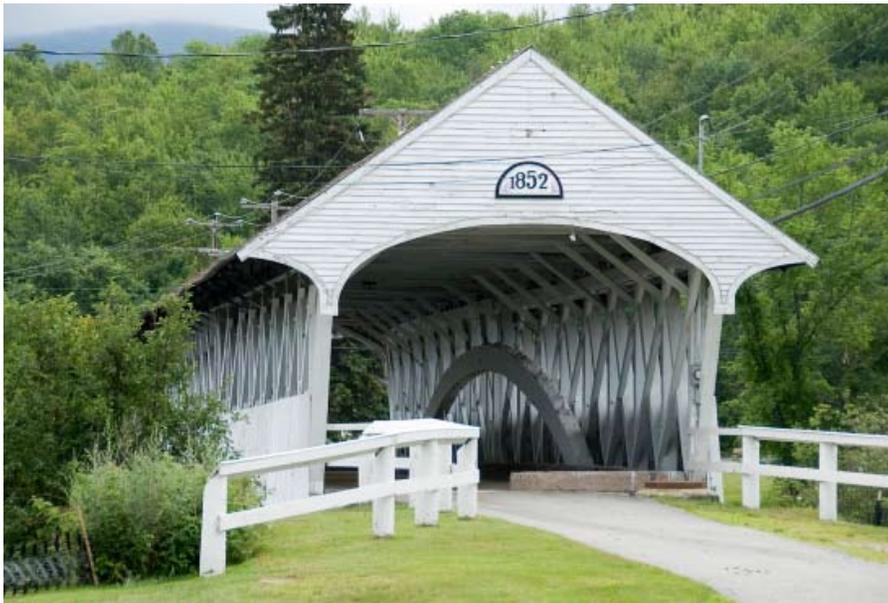
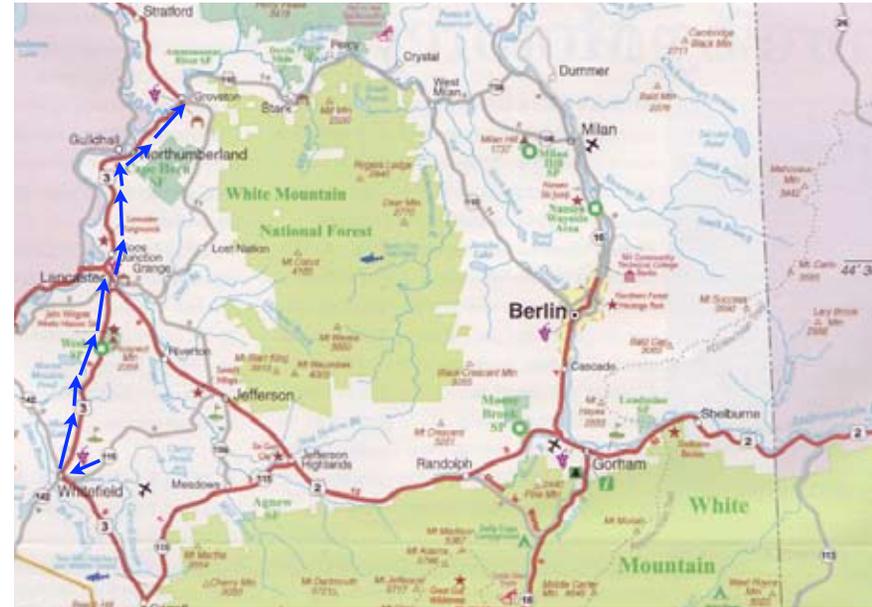


Suggestion:

Up the road to Groveton.

What a beautiful “gateway” to the town. Add interpretive signage about the bridge. This is stunning, and I’m sure you could tell more about it than simply the year it was built. Cross sell to other covered bridges in the region, even bridges in Vermont.

As I was taking pictures of this bridge another visitor, from Vermont, told me that there were many, many other covered bridges in the area and that there are visitors who will travel all over New England to photograph them. Apparently there are guides to these bridges, but I never encountered one while in the county. In fact, this was the only covered bridge I saw. I did drive past one while I was along Highway 116 (if I remember right) but with no signage I only noticed it as I was going past and there was no convenient place to turn around.



Suggestion:

Is this (top right) part of a trail system? Does it go anywhere? If it does, add signage to let people know where it goes, and how long it is. You could post a small kiosk with a map of the trail system.

This is a beautiful building (bottom left). Not too sure about the tires and chain link fencing. Avoid chain link fencing in downtowns - particularly historic downtowns. They give an industrial feel to the town, and make it more undesirable. Use wrought-iron fencing instead. It can add beauty to the area, rather than detracting from the overall ambiance.

This is a good sign to the “business district.” (bottom right) However, consider “Downtown Shops” instead of “business district.” It has more appeal and makes downtown a destination instead of a geographic designation. The sign should be twice the size - I missed this one the first time I drove through town.



Suggestion:

There are a couple of nice shops for provisions. (right) The flags, benches, planters, and especially the ice cream sandwich board make them inviting.

Emerson Outdoor Outfitters is easily the “anchor tenant” for Groveton. It’s a great hunting and fishing shop, and is a great lure for the town. It should be promoted specifically - all the merchants will benefit when more people come to shop. They won’t just go to Emerson’s, but while in town, may want to stop in some of the other shops as well. It’s up to the individual merchants to create the “curb appeal” that will attract these visitors into their stores.

Brand for Groveton: Fishing & Hunting Headquarters. This is where you get your provisions, licenses, equipment, and can get information about hunting and fishing spots.

While promoted as an “outfitter” it seemed that the focus was really on hunting and fishing, more than recreation. Nonetheless, it is a great store and one that needs to be promoted as a “destination retail” shop.



Suggestion:

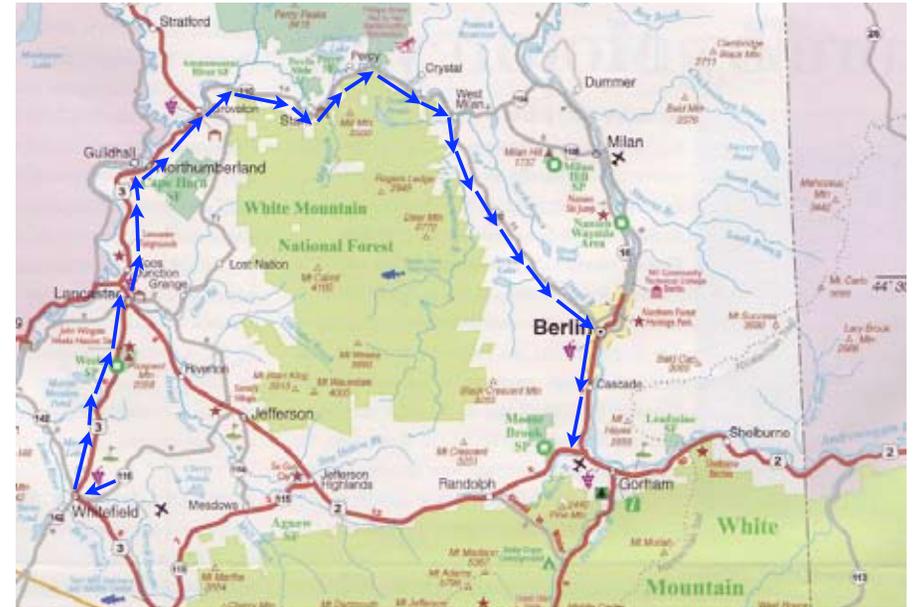
Another stunning tour route, heading from Groveton on Highway 116(?) to Berlin. Along the way I saw a sign to Jericho Lake. (bottom photos) The road to the lake was terrible. Passed another covered bridge on the way but there was no way to turn around and no signage noting it.

95% of vehicles at the lake had New Hampshire plates. That makes the lake a diversionary activity and a great local asset for residents of the area. I would not promote the lake to visitors with the roadway is such a state of disrepair.

Suggestion:

Give this scenic route a unique name - possibly the “Jericho Trail Route.”

- Easy, relaxing, incredibly scenic.
- Stops: The covered bridge, Lake Jericho, Berlin, Milan, etc.
- Anything worth stopping for? Give visitors a reason to stop. Create itineraries to highlight what there is to do on the route.



Suggestion:

Continuing on down to the Town of Carroll. The welcome sign is very attractive (bottom).

Really? “F Troop” is here? (top left)
Many babyboomers remember the F Troop television show with fond memories. Do you want to promote that? Is it really necessary to promote the Troop? Perhaps “State Police - 1 mile” would be sufficient.



Checking out this area was difficult. There were no signs to any attractions and I almost gave up and headed back into the core areas of the county. Once I got to the intersections of Highways 3, 10 and 115 I wasn't too sure what was where, or if there was anything to see or do in the area.



Suggestion:

Once again, good curb appeal at Carlson's Lodge. (top right) The lodging facilities in the Coos County are almost invariably attractive and well-maintained.

Twin Mountain Trading Post (below) is a great-looking shop and a popular spot.

This is a nice area, but there's not much here. (bottom right) Lots of lodging opportunities. Lots of highway signage, but nothing pointing to any attractions. If there are attractions in an area, be sure to promote them with signage so travelers don't miss them. Had I not been doing an assessment I would have finished my "tour" here. There was just nothing else to see or do - that I could easily find.



Suggestion:

I found this by accident. (top right) I wasn't too sure whether this was a residential resort community, or a destination resort, but I thought I should check it out. I came to the building (bottom left) but wasn't sure if this was a hotel, lodge, retail store, or offices.

Is it open? Add visitor information. (bottom right) Let people know what you have for them to do. Bike rentals? Are the lifts open? Are there any places to eat? Shop? Stay? Museum? What are the hours of operation?

I assumed that the resort is a ski resort and that it was closed for the season. There was nothing that said otherwise. Visitors are quick to make judgments, so make sure it's obvious that you are indeed open and that there are things to see and do while here.



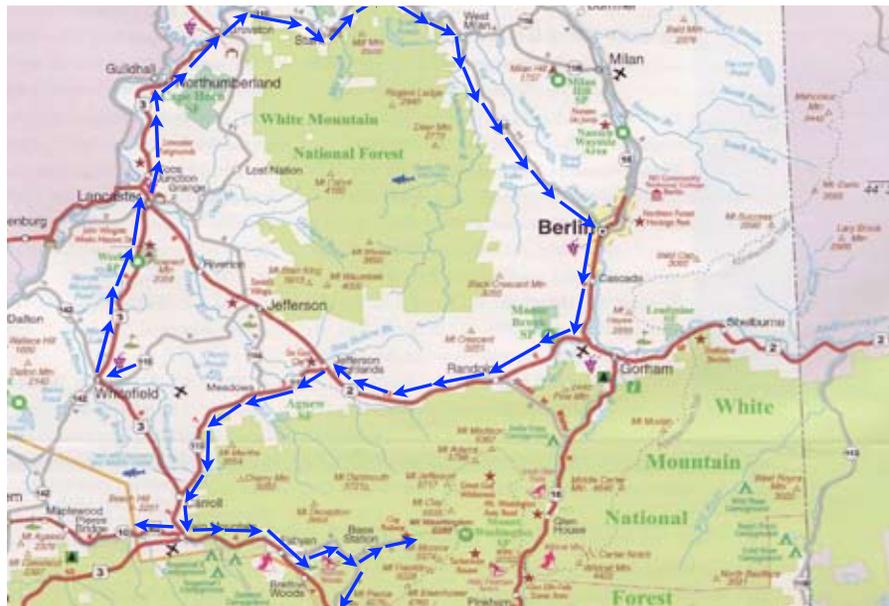
Suggestion:

What is this? (top right) Such a stunning building - does it offer anything for visitors? I couldn't tell whether it was additional offices, a health club for local residents, or a museum of some sort. Bretton Woods looks like a terrific second-home community and a ski resort. If it's more than that, then make sure you let visitors know.

While in the area I almost missed the Cog Railway. (bottom right) Work with DOT to provide signage to your major attractions! If it weren't for this billboard I would have never found it.

Signage is extremely important for promoting your attractions, and can be the deciding factor over whether or not a business succeeds. On-site signs have an average 61% readership, which is huge, making them one of the most cost-effective promotional tools.

While we're typically not fans of billboards, this one is well done and without it, it would be nearly impossible to find the Cog Railway.



Suggestion:

95% of the vehicles at the Cog Railway were from out of state. That makes this a primary lure. In fact, it makes it an awesome PRIMARY LURE. Once again, a lure is an “experience” or activity a visitor cannot get or do closer to home. I think this is one of just two cog railways still operating in the U.S.

Prices are extraordinarily high, but even then the Cog was sold out an hour in advance. It was worth the time just to see them load coal onto the train and watch them approach and take off from the station.

This is one of those attractions that can pull people from miles away. In order to keep people in the area longer, provide visitor information on site that cross-sells other attractions and the rest of the County. The more you have to offer, the longer people will stay, and the more they will spend. I was actually surprised that the attractions don't cross sell each other. That effort would keep visitors coming back and would keep them in the area longer. Forget county lines. Visitors could care less about boundaries.



Suggestion:

Driving back from the Cog Railway, I saw this sight (top right) and wondered, “What the heck is that?” So, I drove around until I saw the sign (below left). ANOTHER grand hotel. Pretty amazing.

Great welcome sign (bottom left). Perfect fit for the stunning hotel. By now I was pretty stunned that:

- 1) The area was home to three outstanding resort hotels
- 2) The area had far more to offer than I expected - even after looking at websites and numerous brochures and guides
- 3) The area has so little directional signage given the outstanding destinations and activities - especially in this area of the White Mountains. It doesn't make any sense.



Suggestion:

The Mount Washington Hotel is another PRIMARY LURE. Please don't charge gate admissions - that's the rumor. Invite people in to take a look. The hotel was undergoing major renovations when I visited and the young man at the guard gate told me that unless I was a guest I couldn't go in - not even to take a look. If I had a tee time, he would call to make sure. I managed to talk my way in, but he also told me that the resort was going to charge people \$8 to just take a look! What a travesty that would be. Heck, most resorts would PAY the customer to come in and take a look. That's how you "close the sale." You WANT people to check it out. It does sell itself, once there.

Suggestion: Add "visitor info" signage on the highway. I saw this (bottom right) when I was leaving the Twin Mountain area. Always promote your visitor information facilities from the highway - you don't want people to miss it! Because it's up on the hill, it's easy to miss.

Make sure it includes 24 hour visitor information and note that on signage.

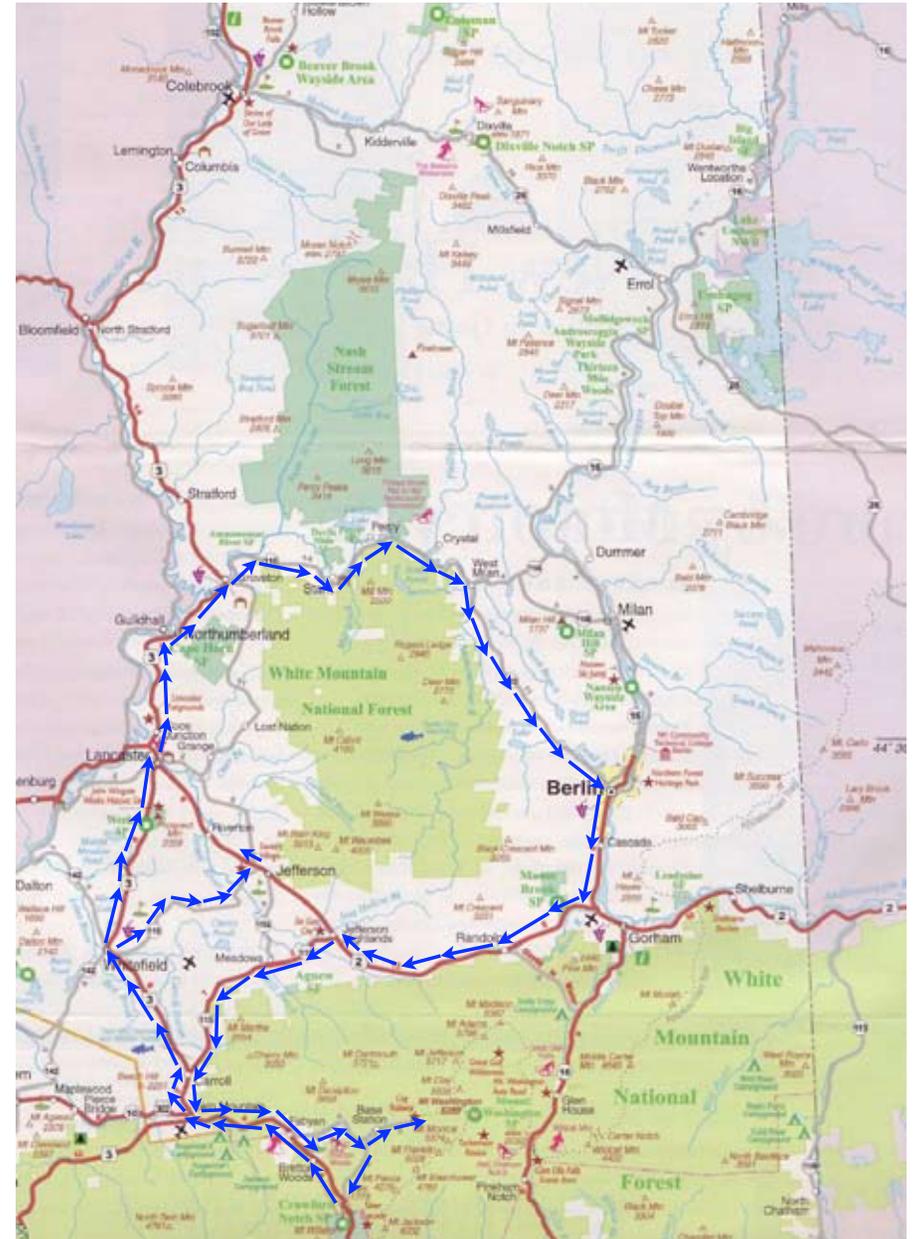


Suggestion:

On to Jefferson ... By now, I assumed I had found everything and was just exploring one or two last towns in the county.

Jefferson has a very nice welcome sign (below), which is in a good location.

The entryway to each community gives visitors their first impression of the community. They begin to judge the character and quality of the town by the gateways, and what's around them. Quality entryways and gateway signs indicate a quality community. Coos County's towns all have very nice entry signage although some could be moved closer to the core spending areas.



Suggestion:

Let's see (bottom left): Hardware store, delicatessen, 24 hour market, yard sale, building supplies, snacks ... the sign clutter here is overwhelming. Is this really an operating business? It certainly doesn't fit the character of the area. It gives new meaning to the words "sign clutter."

The Old Corner Store (top right) and Hometown Market and Grill (bottom right) look like comfortable, friendly places - they have good curb appeal. It's easy to see that they're open and operating. While there's not the critical mass here, it looks like a great place to stop and get a bite to eat.

The bulletin board on the Old Corner Store might be a good place to add some visitor information - if you can find a spot to put anything. As in other areas of the county, there is no signage to any attractions in the immediate area.



Suggestion:

This gateway to the Waumbek Golf Club (top right) is very nice - worthy of a first-class golf course. Curb appeal can account for 70% of sales at restaurants, lodging, retail and golf. And it's important to let the public know that they are welcome to play. Good job.

Gorgeous. The Great North Woods. (bottom left) Change people's perception by changing the picture. Coos County is home to grand hotels, golf courses, first-rate activities - not moose and "outdoor recreation." THIS is different than Maine. Promote these incredible assets.

I'll take it (the home pictured, below right). What a stunning area. I'm not too sure how many golf courses are in the area, but they should be promoted - together - to make this area a golf, spa and resort getaway. That would extend the seasons and would attract the highest-income visitors. Recreational activities are the "diversionary" or secondary activities visitors would enjoy once here.



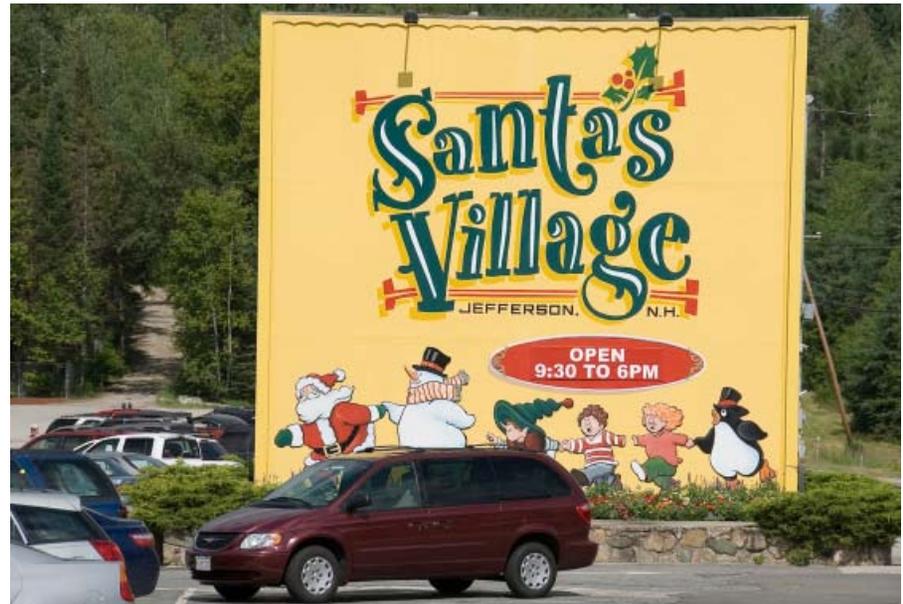
Suggestion:

I was in this area a few days before and could have sworn that this was a western theme park. Too much travel. I remember driving past a western themed park, but it was after hours so I thought I'd try to find it. Instead, it turned out to be Santa's Village. Traveling so much, I just assumed I was thinking of something else, somewhere else. As noted several times, there was no signage stating anything else.

By 10:30 the parking lot at Santa's Village was full. This looks like a terrific attraction and most of the vehicles (80 to 85%) were from out of state.

The signage is easy to see (you simply can't miss it), it clearly states the hours and it looks like a great place to visit. Families there looked as though they were having a great time.

NOTE: After presenting these "assessment findings" I did find out about Six Gun City and realized that I was not, in fact, losing my mind. I did visit it after the assessment and it also looks like a great attraction. There's no reason why a visitor wouldn't spend a week in this area of New Hampshire.

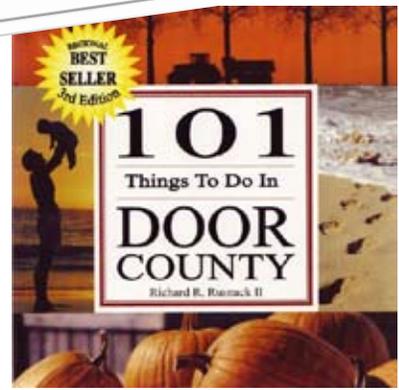




Suggestion:

All in all, this has been a surprising area of the U.S. Pleasantly surprising.

Your public marketing efforts are not even close to being effective, and even the businesses undersell themselves. You are under-marketing the great attractions you have.



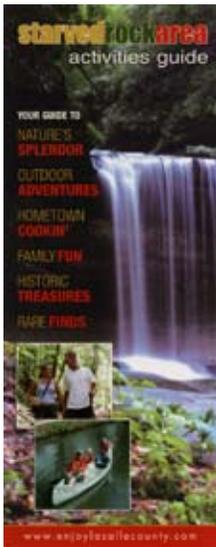
Invest in professional photography. Nothing sells as well as photography. Add streaming video to your website. Sell the primary lures THEN the diversions.

Focus on what sets you apart from Maine and Vermont. The Great North Woods does NOT set you apart. If you use the words "The Great North Woods" then combine those words with pictures of your grand resorts and primary attractions - not scenic shots of, well, woods.

Promote your "anchor tenants" - those businesses that make you worth a special trip. Take this little test: Use your home address as your reference point, and answer the following questions:

1. Where can I get the best dessert? Name the place & the dish
2. Where will my partner and I have the best dining experience?
4. Where can I see a breathtaking sunrise or sunset?
5. Where is the best place to take a memorable photo that says I was really there?
6. Where can I check my e-mails?
7. Where can I get the perfect gift? Something locally made.

Use the answers to develop the "Hidden Gems of the Great North Woods," similar to Door County's "101 Things to Do in Door County." (above) These are things that come from the locals.



TWO SISTERS CANDY & GIFTS

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Two Sisters Candy is a family-owned business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made candies, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

THE POPCORN WAGON GOURMET POPCORN

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

The popcorn wagon is a gourmet popcorn business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made popcorns, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

UPTOWN GRILL CONTEMPORARY CUISINE

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Uptown Grill is a contemporary cuisine restaurant that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made dishes, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

GALE

HEGELER CARLS MANSION TOURS

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Hegeler Carls Mansion Tours is a historic mansion tour business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made tours, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

GALE

JEREMIAH JOE SPECIALTY COFFEE

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Jeremiah Joe Specialty Coffee is a specialty coffee business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made coffees, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

SKYDIVE CHICAGO SKYDIVING

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Skydive Chicago Skydiving is a skydiving business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made skydives, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

RIVER ADVENTURES, INC. CANOE & BIKE RENTALS

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

River Adventures, Inc. is a canoe and bike rental business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made rentals, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

JJ'S PUB BAR & GRILL

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

JJ's Pub Bar & Grill is a pub and grill business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made food and drinks, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

DEJA VU HOME & GARDEN BOUTIQUE

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Deja Vu Home & Garden Boutique is a home and garden boutique business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made home decor, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

OTTAWA RIVERBOAT CO. RIVER CRUISES

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Ottawa Riverboat Co. is a river cruise business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made cruises, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

WEBER HOUSE & GARDEN COTTAGE TOURS

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Weber House & Garden Cottage Tours is a historic cottage tour business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made tours, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

GALE

CAJUN CONNECTION TASTE OF LOUISIANA

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Cajun Connection Taste of Louisiana is a Cajun cuisine business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made Cajun dishes, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Starved Rock Lodge & Conference Center is a lodge and conference center business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made lodging and conference services, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

AUGUST HILL WINERY

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

August Hill Winery is a winery business that has been serving the Chicago area since 1952. We specialize in custom-made wines, chocolates, and gifts for all occasions. Our products are made with the finest ingredients and are delivered fresh to your door.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

OTISDA'S GUIDE TO THE STARVED ROCK AREA

1001 North Lincoln Street
Deerfield, Illinois 60015
847-422-4433

Otisda's Guide to the Starved Rock Area is a comprehensive guide to the Starved Rock Area. It includes information on local businesses, attractions, and activities. The guide is available in both print and digital formats.



Open 1001 North Lincoln Street, Deerfield, IL 60015
847-422-4433

OTISDA

Promote specific businesses: Create an Activities Guide that highlights specific shops, attractions and restaurants that are unique. This one, produced by the Ottawa, Illinois Visitor Center, is proving very successful.

The days of generic marketing are over. You MUST create public/private partnerships. Your best attractions are privately owned.



What do you have that I can't get closer to home?

The primary lure:

The thing you have that no one else has and makes you worth a special trip.

The icon:

The photo opportunity that supports what you are known for.

Diversions:

Things I can get closer to home, but will do while I'm in Coos County

Ambiance:

Historic downtowns, landscaping, agriculture, rural feel, etc.

Coos County diversions:

- Local museums
- Shopping and dining
- Theater (performing arts, movies)
- Scenic drives
- Historic downtowns
- Wildlife viewing

Niche group lures:

- Birding
- Motorcycle tours
- Fishing and hunting
- Snowmobiling
- Sports
- Weddings
- Golf

The Seven Wonders of the Great North Woods:

- The Balsams Resort and Spa
- Mt. Washington Hotel
- Mountain View Grand
- Cog Railway
- Mt. Washington Auto Road
- The Big Three Theme Parks: Story Land, Santa's Village, Six Gun City
- The Canoe & Kayak Capital of New England

Primary lures MUST be different or the best from what people can find closer to home, otherwise, why would they travel to you?





The Art of Branding

Suggestion:

The average visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet they typically spend only 4 to 6 hours with the primary lure ... and 8 to 10 hours with diversionary activities.

But it's the primary lures that get the visitor to decide to visit you. So you need to promote the primary lure first, and the diversionary activities all benefit. 80% of visitor spending takes place with diversionary activities. And primary lures cannot succeed without diversions. Why do you think Disney built Downtown Disney next to the Orlando theme park? To capture that other 80%.





The Art of Branding

Suggestion:

New Hampshire's Great North Woods has so much to promote:

- The Mt. Washington Hotel
- The Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa
- The Balsams Resort
- The Cog Railway
- The famous Washington Auto Road
- New England's "river adventure capital"
- Inviting small town charm
- Santa's Village and Six Gun City
- And a chance to get up close and personal with local wildlife.

This really is a "world-class" destination. Extend your seasons. The baby boom generation, in their peak earning years, are becoming empty nesters and their peak months for travel are April, May, September and October. Are you open?





The Art of Branding

Suggestion:

Promote what you have that is truly world-class, and everyone will benefit. People go to the mall for the anchor tenants, but while there the small shops and kiosks all benefit.

About New Hampshire's state marketing tag line:
"You're going to love it here."

Well, you're right. I do.





Benefits of Tourism

The benefits of tourism as an economic activity are widely recognized. Its ultimate goal is to import more cash into a community than is exported. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in North America. It is one of the top three industries in 49 out of 50 states and in every Canadian province.

Tourism helps diversify local economies. It creates entry-level jobs as well as business opportunities for entrepreneurs. Tourism is the front door to non-tourism economic development efforts. After all, anyone contemplating a new business or a move to your community will first arrive as a visitor. Is Rock Springs a place where they would want to live? Where their employees would want to live? Is it a place with a great workforce or the quality of life to attract a workforce?

For the first time in U.S. history, quality of life is leading the charge in attracting small businesses - the lifeblood of America. Quality of life is most apparent in downtowns. In fact, besides its people, we believe that the heart and soul of any community is its downtown. Is it attractive?

Do local residents hang out there? Does it have a variety of activities, both recreational and cultural? Is it vibrant, alive, and entertaining?

While this plan focuses on downtown and the marina, its implementation will reach far beyond that. It will touch and benefit Rock Spring's economic development efforts, its residential neighborhoods, tourism marketing efforts, and most of all, will increase community pride and slow retail "leakage" - when locals spend their money in other towns.

To take advantage of the potential benefits that increased tourism brings to a community, it is necessary to first understand why people travel. The number-one reason for travel is to visit friends and family. This kind of tourism exists without any special effort by the community. However, it can be enhanced if local residents have a strong sense of community pride and know about its local attractions. That way, when friends and family visit, they are more likely to act as goodwill ambassadors, encouraging their guests to experience all the community has to offer.

Another important group to consider are those who travel for business. This includes corporate meetings, conventions, conferences, and educational activities at colleges and universities. As with visiting friends and family, a community also receives a certain amount of tourism from this segment without any special effort.

Most tourism efforts target a third kind of traveler: the leisure traveler. This group travels specifically for experiences that cater to them and which can not be found closer to home, and they spend the most amount of money. Every true "destination" community caters to this group of travelers.

The Three Phases of Tourism

1. Get passers-by to stop. If you can not get them to stop, you can not become a destination community. What do you have that will make people stop?
2. Become the hub for area attractions and activities. This makes your community an overnight destination. Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors. Are there enough attractions in your surrounding area to keep tourists interested

and willing to spend the night?

3. Become the destination. This is the best of all worlds. People come, stay with you, and spend all their time and money in your community alone. The ultimate goal of any tourism program is to work toward becoming a true "destination."

Know Your Audience

As with many other aspects of our society, participation by the baby-boom generation is critical for any successful tourism effort. They account for 80 percent of all travel spending. This generation, born between 1946 and 1964, includes 85 million people.

Every month, 350,000 Americans turn 50 years old, and this trend will continue for another seven years.

Baby boomers are in their peak earning years and control 70 percent of North America's wealth. They are bound to control even more in the future by virtue of a corresponding inheritance boom. It is estimated that the boomer generation will inherit \$10.4 trillion from their parents - the single greatest transfer of wealth in history. Where are they spending their money? Primarily on second homes and travel.

The baby-boom generation expects quality and requires activities that are truly unique and exciting. They demand comfort, convenience, and easy access. They are pre-occupied with self-absorption (what is in it for me) and maintaining youthfulness late into their lives. Their mantra is, "We may be aging, but we are NOT growing old." It is important to understand travel trends being driven by baby boomers. These include a prefer-



ence for complete and pre-planned itineraries, as well as all-inclusive resorts. Boomers are more likely to travel during April, May, September, and October – months that have historically been called “shoulder seasons.” They like experiential-based adventures, albeit cushy by most standards. More boomer travel is geared around specific interests, including culinary tourism, art and education, genealogy, gardening, and open-air markets. There is widespread use of the Internet for travel-planning among this group. Web-enabled boomers go online for trip-planning 94 percent of the time. They are also more likely to plan regional trips less than three weeks before departure, or even on the spur of the moment.

The next-most important group of travelers are Echo-boomers. Born between 1977 and 1985, these are the children of the baby-boom generation. There are 80 million echo-boomers, making them nearly as numerous as baby-boomers. They appreciate many of the same aspects of travel as their parents and have a strong preference for gathering places, entertainment, excitement, and nightlife. They are the driving force behind destinations such as Las Vegas. Music and entertainment are major draws. Echo-boomers also like extreme adventure sports such as kayaking, mountain biking, and rock climbing.

Regardless of their generation, the same rules apply.

While tourism can play a significant role in Rock Spring’s economic development efforts, it’s important to point out that community comes first. In fact, if locals do not “hang out” downtown or frequent local businesses, neither will visitors. The goal of this effort is to create an outstanding

downtown that will attract local residents, area residents, visitors from neighboring cities, and the greater Bay Area boating public.

At all times, bear in mind the Five C’s of tourism:

- **Convenience:** Easy-to-find information, easy-to-plan activities, easy-to-get-to destinations
- **Control:** Flexibility with, and control over itineraries
- **Comfort:** Beds are a key selling point—the top 15 percent of lodging facilities command 80 percent of the market
- **Cost:** Thanks to the Internet, pricing is transparent with travelers looking for the value
- **Connection:** More than ever, travelers are looking to connect with their heritage, each other, family, and the environment



WHY BRANDING?

Your brand is a marketing tool. It is all about cash. The goal is to import more cash than you export. As a resident, there are times you spend your earned income outside the community. This is commonly referred to as “leakage,” and every community has it. The most successful communities import more cash than they export, usually through tourism. Competition is fierce, as every community is trying to import new cash. But to become a destination, you must offer something the visitor cannot get closer to home; something that helps you stand out from all other competing communities. This is where branding comes into play. It’s the art of differentiation.

1 MARKETING OVERKILL

The average person is exposed to 3,000 marketing messages a day – far more than the mind can absorb and we filter out everything not specifically appealing to us. “We have something for everyone” no longer works. We want something that appeals to us. The days of generic marketing are over.

2 ABUNDANT CHOICES

Our purchasing choices have multiplied. Every year another 2,000 communities in North America are diversifying into tourism. With so many options available, the only way to stand out from the crowd is to specialize. This is the age of niche marketing.

In order to be successful, you must be worth a special trip, and that means being different or the best. What sets you apart from your competition? Why should I travel to Rock Springs, if I can enjoy the same things closer to home?

The specialists have the biggest successes:

- The Limited: Upscale clothing for working women
- The Gap: Casual clothing for the young at heart
- Victoria’s Secret: Sexy undergarments
- Foot Locker: Athletic shoes
- Branson, MO - The music theater capital of the world
- Las Vegas, NV - The adult entertainment playground
- Nashville, TN - The country music capital of the world
- Memphis, TN - Home of Elvis Presley and Graceland
- Orlando, FL - Kids and family (DisneyWorld)
- Williamsburg, VA - Colonial America
- Victoria, BC - The world’s garden city

3 REPOSITIONING MAY BE NECESSARY

If perceptions of your community are negative, you may need to develop a repositioning program. Frequently that starts with “curb appeal” – the first visual impressions of the community or business. Visitors expecting one thing and see something else will reposition your community in their minds.

4 SPECIFIC MARKETING AVOID THE FOLLOWING WORDS AND PHRASES IN YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS:

- Discover
- Explore
- We have it all
- Something for everyone
- Best kept secret
- The four season destination

- Outdoor recreation
- Center of it all
- Historic downtown
- So much to see and do
- Experience
- Gateway

There are 425 counties in the 11 Western States. Almost every one promotes “outdoor recreation,” which can mean almost anything. Just about everyone can find recreation close to home. Three hundred and eighty of these communities promote outdoor recreation as the primary draw. How far would you travel for generic outdoor recreation? You would not. You travel for a specific type of recreation, something that caters to you. We do not go places where there is something for everyone. We go places where there is something for me. None of the words listed above are a brand.

Because communities are so generic in their marketing, is it any wonder that 97 percent of all community-based advertising is ineffective?

The more variations you attach to a brand, the more the customer loses focus. Gradually, the brand comes to mean nothing at all. The specialist, however, can focus on one thing and one message. This focus enables the community to put a sharp point on the marketing effort, quickly driving it to mind.

Take a look at the following opening paragraph to a typical Visitor’s Guide. Could it fit your community?

“Discover the wide open spaces, gracious people, and picturesque landscapes that characterize [insert your town here]. Each season holds the promise of a new adventure and an incredible



memory. Come join us in [your town] and discover the scenic and recreational opportunities that await you.”

To succeed you MUST jettison the generic. Welcome to the “Era of the Brand”; the art of setting yourself apart from everyone else.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

A brand is specific and experiential:

- **Las Vegas, Nevada** - America’s Adult Playground “What happens here, stays here”
- **Ashland, Oregon** - Home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, 460,000 annual visitors who stay an average of six nights
- **Oatman, Arizona** - Home of wild burros and Western shoot-outs on Main Street
Population: 200, Visitors: 500,000 a year
- **Mt. Airy, N. Carolina** - Mayberry, USA
Get arrested by the sheriff in a Barney Fife outfit
- **Asheville, N. Carolina** -Where fine culture meets counter culture “Unscripted” - a funky arts and entertainment town

Tourism is an annual \$1.7 billion industry

5 A BRAND IS A PERCEPTION

This is the most important, most talked about, and most misunderstood rule in the tourism and downtown redevelopment industry. A brand is what people think of you - NOT what you say you are. It is a perception.

In a society that is information rich and time poor, people value feeling more than information. A

brand is the “feeling” a potential visitor has about you. When someone mentions Disneyland, what is the perception - the feeling - that comes to mind? Your brand should evoke emotion or an image. When you hear the words Napa County and then Napa Valley, which one brings an image to your mind? A picture of what it’s like there?

WHAT ISN’T A BRAND?

6 LOGOS AND SLOGANS ARE NOT A BRAND.

They are just tools used to promote the brand. They are exclamation points on your key message. Do you go to Disneyland or Disneyworld because its slogan is “The Happiest Place on Earth”? No, you go there because of your perception of Disneyworld and what you know or have heard about it. The slogan simply reinforces what you have come to believe is true about a trip to Orlando or Anaheim.

7 THESE ARE NOT BRANDS

- **Historic downtowns** - brands are activity-based
- **Slogans and logos** - they just reinforce and promote the brand
- **Geography** - unless you’re the very unique, Grand Canyon
- **Gateway** - something you pass through to go somewhere else
- **Unique** - the most overused word in tourism that has come to mean nothing at all
- **Fruits and vegetables** - are not a brand, they are part of the ambiance
- Scenic vistas - are not a brand, they are part of the ambiance
-

8 ICONS ARE NOT BRANDS

An icon is the photo opportunity that (hopefully) reinforces your brand. How far would you travel to see the world’s biggest lava lamp (Soap Lake, Washington), Gas Can (Gas, Kansas), Catsup Bottle (Collinsville, Ohio), or the world’s biggest garden hoe (Dog River, Saskatchewan)? Would you go to Seattle to see the Space Needle, then head back home? Of course not. The primary lure, or another reason such as visiting friends and family, would bring you to Seattle, and the Space Needle would be a must-see diversion while visiting the city.

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL BRAND?

9 BE WORTHY OF A STANDING OVATION

You have two choices: You can be different or first in a new category, or you can be the best. If you are the best at something, people will skip over the same activity closer to home to experience the best. Think skiing and Vail, Colorado or Whistler Resort in British Columbia.

The challenge with being the best is that people are always gunning for you, trying to topple you off your throne. Being different is a much better road to travel, if you can come up with something totally unique to you.

10 BRAND REQUIRES THIRD-PARTY ENDORSEMENTS

Being the best in your category cannot be self-proclaimed. Brands are built around word of mouth and perceptions, not from advertising. Advertising is used to maintain your position, once you own the brand. Just like a slogan, advertising



reinforces the brand.

Self-proclaimed brands are rarely effective unless you have a bottomless pocketbook and you can saturate the market with your brand message until people come to believe it.

Use third-party quotes appearing in guide books and magazine articles to elevate your status as being the best.

- **Okanogan County, Washington:** “Rocky Mountain powder in the Northwest? Go ahead, pinch yourself, you’re in the Methow Valley.” -Gorp.com
- **Door County, Wisconsin** “One of the top ten vacation destinations in North America.” -Money Magazine
- **Kootenay Rockies, British Columbia:** “The hot springs capital of the Rockies.” - British Columbia Magazine

11 FIND YOUR NICHE

- **Leavenworth, Washington:** Washington’s Bavarian Village
- **Battle Creek, Michigan:** The competitive biking capital of the mid west
- **Carson City, Nevada:** Home of the famous “Divine Nine” (golf)

Be known for something:

- **Hershey, Pennsylvania** - Chocolate
- **Gettysburg, Pennsylvania** - Civil War
- **Lancaster, Pennsylvania** - Amish, Pennsylvania Dutch
- **Washington, DC** - Government
- **Hollywood, California** - Movies and stars

- **Salem, Massachusetts** - The 1692 witch trials
- **Tombstone, Arizona** - Shootout at the OK Corral

This applies to businesses as much (if not more so) than communities:

- **Stew Leonards groceries:** Farm fresh produce and dairy
- **The Ventana Inn, CA:** “No kids, be kids”
- **Westin Hotels:** Heavenly beds (they now sell them)

What are you known for?

- What sets you apart from everyone else?
- What do you have that I can not get closer to home?
- What makes you worth a special trip and an extended stay?

12 EVERYONE MUST BE ON THE SAME PAGE

A brand must have continuity with everyone contributing. Once you get local organizations on board, the process becomes fun. You must define the roles, and everyone plays a role. This is NOT a top-down effort.

13 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT NEVER ENDS

You can never rest on your laurels. Product development MUST be a major part of your branding effort. Branson, Missouri, the “Music Theater Capital of the World” now has 49 theaters and this town of just 6,500 residents hosts some 7.5 million visitors annually. The more you have to offer in your brand, the further people will come and the longer they will stay.

In Victoria, British Columbia, “The World’s Garden City,” the beautification budget is \$4.5 million annually. \$1 million is spent annually to make it even better (capital projects). The city hangs more than 1,000 baskets a year. It has the highest ratio of parkland per capita of any city in North America.

14 PROMOTE THE PRIMARY LURE

Always promote the primary lure, not the diversions. Diversions are things I can do closer to home, but are not what brings me to your town. However, I will do them while visiting you. Diversions include golf, shopping and dining, visiting local museums, attending community events, recreational activities, visiting historic downtowns, etc.

15 THE LURE CAN’T SUCCEED WITHOUT DIVERSIONS

The average overnight visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet spends just four to six hours with the primary lure. Visitors then will spend eight to ten hours a day with diversionary activities. 80 percent of all visitor spending takes place with diversions.

16 IT’S TOUGH TO MAINTAIN YOUR POSITION

People are always gunning for number one. Wine has become the most oversaturated tourism branding effort in North America, yet Napa Valley still “owns” the title “Wine Capital of America.” However, Napa has to always work hard to maintain its position as dozens of other “wine countries” have entered the fray.

17 A BRAND DOESN’T HAVE TO BE SEXY

A brand does not have to be sexy to be



effective. Take the case of Bullhead City, Arizona. It can not compete with its neighbor, Laughlin, Nevada just across the Colorado River. What Bullhead City has, that Laughlin doesn't have - is a Wal-Mart. They say, "For all your personal needs, head to Bullhead City, just across the bridge." When visitors head to Bullhead City for toothpaste or other personal items, those visitors see restaurants, antique shops and river tours. Wal-Mart may not be sexy, but in this case, it is the primary lure.

BRANDING GONE BAD

18 POLITICS IS THE KILLER OF ANY BRANDING EFFORT

Once you have the brand determined, THEN bring the public on board. It takes a village to develop the brand, but only a pioneer and champions to determine the brand.

19 JUST SAY NO TO FOCUS GROUPS

NEVER use a focus group to decide on a brand. Ask your customers - they're better at telling it like it is.

Washington State - "Say WA" campaign

- Died after only six months and wasted \$400,00
- No buy-in from the industry or local residents, businesses
- It was the sixth slogan in just ten years

20 DO NOT SELL IT UNTIL YOU CAN DELIVER

Resist the urge to market the brand until you can deliver on the promise. Hawthorne, Nevada was so gung ho on their brand as "America's Patriotic

Home" that the community rented and posted billboards along major interstates promoting the brand. The problem? The community had little to show for it. A brand must be obvious to everyone who lives there and visits. If it is an empty shell, people won't come back and they will tell people there was nothing to do or see in your town that supported the effort.

21 DO NOT COPY OTHERS

Kellogg, Idaho worked hard to develop a Bavarian or Alpine theme for its downtown but its primary market includes Vancouver, BC, Seattle, WA, and Portland, OR - a population base of approximately 7 million people. The problem? Leavenworth, Washington, "Washington's Bavarian Village," is far closer and already complete. So why drive to Kellogg?

Never copy another brand unless you are in an entirely different market. Leavenworth got the Bavarian idea from Solvang, California, a Danish town along the central California coast, located in an entirely different market.

HOW TO BUILD A BRAND

22 THE FIVE MAJOR STEPS TO BRANDING

- Create the identity and key marketing messages (logo and slogan)
- Develop the publicity machine (brand building)

Notice that the logo and slogan were number four on the list. Most communities put this first and most of their efforts fail because they can not deliver on the promise: they do not have the icon, the facilities, and the experiences that cement a brand position.

- Determine the brand (who are we?)
- Create the icon (the photo opportunity)
- Create the activities and facilities that will reinforce and grow the brand (experience)



23 THE 25 STEPS TO BRANDING A COMMUNITY

Here are the individual steps, in order:

1. Get professional help (The Task Force hired DDI)
2. Determine your primary and secondary markets
3. Inventory your activities (attractions)
4. Inventory similar activities in your major and secondary markets
5. Educate the community about branding
6. Ask the community. What is our brand or what should it be?
7. Run the ideas through the feasibility test
 - Is this something the primary and secondary markets can not get (or do) closer to home?
 - That no one else in the market is already working on?
 - Will it extend our seasons?
 - Can it be developed to a nine-month plus season?
 - Is it experiential?
 - If it were in a community 150 miles away, would you go there for it?
 - How much money will it take to develop and “own” the brand?
 - Where will the money come from? And how long will it take to see a return on investment
 - Can the community buy into it over time? You will never get everyone to agree. Not many cities could easily buy into becoming the next Las Vegas, or Sin City. While the public does not decide on the brand, they are important to developing it and telling the world.
 - Will and can the private sector invest in the brand?
 - How wide an audience will it attract?
 - Does it have legs? Can we start with a niche and add extensions?
 - Is the brand expandable? Does it have legs? Can you attach “brand extensions” to it? For instance, you may decide to become the mountain biking capital - can you add street biking? A velodrome? BMX courses? Cyclo-cross? Then can you add cross-participation sports like rock climbing?
 - Do we have those who will tirelessly champion the cause? (Every branding effort requires pioneers)
 - Can we make it obvious and pervasive throughout the community?
8. Develop the brand perceptions and vision statement
9. Create the key marketing messages

10. Develop identity concepts
11. Work to obtain public buy-in (Note: everyone won't buy in)
12. Test identities and slogans with customers, not locals. If you are going for a team sports brand, then test the key messages and logos with sports organizations - the “customers” you hope to attract.
13. Develop a niche-market plan, and then an expansion plan (in sports you might start with softball, then expand to soccer, then basketball, etc.)
14. Develop the “Graphics System:”
 - Gateways
 - Wayfinding system
 - Monument signage
 - Interpretive signs and displays
 - Information kiosks
 - Pole banners
 - Streetscapes, plaza areas, façade improvements
 - Naming of downtown districts, other facilities to reinforce the brand
 - Marketing materials
 - Crosswalks
15. Create the product development plan
16. Define the roles of local organizations
17. Get the brand champions and pioneers on board
(Your Brand Development Committee)
18. Incorporate the brand into the fabric of the community
19. Sell the community (do not ask for permission, sell them)
20. Keep the focus narrow
21. Recruit and promote specific supporting businesses
22. “Rearrange the furniture” - the business mix to develop the critical mass
23. Implement the PR program
24. Review and revisit the plan every year or two so the brand doesn't stray
25. Never give up

The first 17 of these steps, with the exception of the creation of the Graphics System, are included in this plan. The additional items are part of the actual branding implementation.

24 BRAND FEASIBILITY IS WHAT COUNTS

To succeed you must promote businesses and attractions that support



and grow the brand. If culinary tourism is your primary lure, you must promote the dining experiences that deliver on the promise (Sorry Arby's, you're the diversion, not the lure).

This is why creating a successful brand is never a public process. Feasibility is what determines a successful brand, not sentiment, not memberships, not political clout, and not trying to make everyone happy. This is a critical distinction that separates emotion from the fact. This is about revenues - importing cash into the community or business.

25 EDUCATION IS IMPERATIVE

Educate locals on the difference between the lure (what you have that no one else has, and makes you worth a special trip), the diversion (secondary activities once the visitor is there), the icon (the photo opportunity, but not the reason to go there), amenities (supporting infrastructure like parking, visitor information, restrooms, etc.), and ambiance (scenic vistas, historic downtowns, beautification, etc.). Historic downtowns are not a draw, they are part of the ambiance. It's what is in the buildings that creates the draw. Eventually, everyone needs to be a spokesperson for the brand. Support is imperative to maintaining a strong, successful brand.

26 START SMALL. NARROW YOUR FOCUS.

It is far better to be a big fish in a small pond (then increase the size of the pond), than to be a small fish in a big pond. You won't be noticed.

Narrow your focus. Then narrow it some more.

Take the case of Kellogg, Idaho where visitors will find hundreds of miles of pristine biking trails. Unfortunately, there are thousands of places with hundreds of miles of pristine biking trails. But there is no place in North America where you will find the "Route of the Hiawatha," a 15-mile trail that passes through ten tunnels and over seven high trestles, and is best known for the Taft Tunnel which burrows 1.66 miles under the Idaho/Montana state line. This trail has no competitors and is a national attraction drawing visitors from all over North America. While there, visitors shop, dine, visit historic Wallace, participate in other recreational activities, visit nearby Coeur d'Alene, and other bike trails. Narrow your focus and then narrow it some more.

27 BRANDING REQUIRES A PIONEER

Every branding effort requires a tireless pioneer. Who is your pioneer? Who will work with the pioneer (or pioneers) to champion the cause? Pioneers are those that invest in the brand. 95 percent of the time the pioneers are from the private sector, not the public sector. (see Point #28)

28 BRANDING IS A BOTTOM-UP EXERCISE

Branding is very, very rarely a top-down effort. The business community must take the lead. The local government is there to assist, wherever possible.

29 CREATE THE "BRAND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE"

1. Develop a small "brand development committee." This small group should include both public and private sector stakeholders who are bent on

making something happen for the community and who won't let politics kill the effort. Typically this committee should have no more than seven or so "players."

2. This committee would act as a steering committee in hiring outside expertise to develop the Action Plan. Select your consulting firm using a Statement of Qualifications (SOQ), as opposed to a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Hire the best, then negotiate the fees and scope of work. If you can not reach an agreement, go to number two on your list of finalists. Hire a team that understands what it takes to develop a community or downtown brand. Do not get hung up on the sex appeal of logos and slogans. These are merely a minor part of the branding effort, NOT the brand itself.

3. You will work with your Brand Development Consultant through the process - educating locals as to what branding is, requesting ideas and options from the public. Then, the consultant team will take these ideas and will run them through the feasibility analysis, as described earlier. Once a brand emerges, the Action Plan will be developed. It should include:

- The overall brand and any sub-brands
- Product development that will grow and support the brand
- Roles of various local organizations
- Private investment roles and supporting businesses
- Funding of every recommendation
- Benchmarks and timelines
- Brand identities, sub-brand identities, graphic standards, brand style guide, wayfinding and gateway design, key marketing messages, and slogans.



The Art of Branding

- Public relations plan (brands are built through PR, not advertising)
- Community-outreach planning

4. During this process the “brand development committee” may change to a new group or additional members that will be champions for the brand. If the brand revolves around team sports, the champions would be those that are professionals in the sports industry: coaches, sporting organizations, sports retailers and businesses, sports marketing organizations, etc. This brings credibility and private investment to the branding effort and gives the brand a voice in the community. This group will be charged with promoting the brand locally, getting buy-in from the community, and overseeing implementation of the action plan.

5. Locals should not make the final decision on the logo(s), slogans and key marketing messages. You will never reach a consensus using public input, which usually results in a watered down, generic brand and messages. Instead, the “customers” are used to decide the outcome of this effort.

For instance, Battle Creek, Michigan is beginning the work of becoming the “Competitive Sports Capital of the Midwest.” They will start with competitive biking as the initial brand (The Competitive Biking Capital of the Midwest). You have to “earn” a brand. In this case, logos, slogans, and key marketing messages were designed, but the final four options were sent to customers – competitive biking organizations, race organizers, sports marketing professionals, and event planners – people they want to attract to Battle Creek. They were sent the various options (no group meetings or focus groups - they were tested individually) and asked, “Which would most appeal to you as

a destination?” This is marketing, so why not ask the customers to make the final decision? This also takes the politics out of the process.

6. Once the brand has been set and a draft plan developed, the committee and consulting team need to “sell” it to local leaders, and participating organizations. Make sure that whoever you hire has some top-notch sales ability. They will be your initial voice in promoting the brand.

7. Let your local leaders, particularly elected leaders, take ownership of the brand. It’s okay if it’s their idea - ownership is not an issue; getting something done is. Do whatever it takes to make things happen. There may end up being revisions to the draft plan as a result, but that may be necessary to get total buy-in for the final plan.

NOTE: Cities or counties are often the lead organization in getting the plan developed. Once it has been developed, it’s not up to the governing agency to implement it. They are the conduit in developing the plan, which will be handed over to the business community and other local organizations for implementation. The city, after that point, acts in a supporting role, particularly when it comes to infrastructure or publicly-owned facilities that need to be developed or enhanced in order to capture a successful brand.

8. The Brand Champions will stay involved for years. Branding is a process and not a one-time event. It needs to be nurtured, promoted, and grown. Members may come and go, but all need to be active in the process, not just in advisory roles. Typically this committee would be independent of any organization, but sometimes may be a committee of the city (or county), or work under a destination marketing organization, downtown

(Main Street), or Chamber of Commerce. The consulting firm would determine this as part of their process.

30 BRANDING OFTEN REQUIRES RECRUITMENT

Recruit supporting businesses that can help grow the brand and cement your position so you own it. The Route of the Hiawatha could not succeed without supporting businesses - hotels, restaurants, bike rentals, tour operators, bike repair shops, and transportation to and from the trail.

31 START WITH A PLAN

Every community should create a community (or downtown) Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan. This is NOT a strategic plan, which offers general strategies, goals, and objectives. This is a to-do list for just about every local organization. Everyone participates in the branding process. Start with a plan that will help define the roles for each organization. This way people are pulling in the same direction. That makes it fun. Each key organization should have a member sitting on the Brand Development Committee. Each has a to-do list, and every time they meet the discussion revolves around “how are your doing on your list?”

Always decide on the brand direction using an outside facilitator. If you ask 20 people what your brand should be, chances are you will get 20 different answers. When you eventually pick one, you’ve alienated 19 of your future stakeholders. You need everyone on board to promote and develop the brand.

Everyone will have an idea, and understandably, each will be somewhat self-serving. You must take



the politics out of the branding effort. After all, this is about cash, not sentiment.

32 YES, YOU CAN DEVELOP SUB-BRANDS

Chevrolet doesn't run ads stating "Buy a Chevy. We have cars for everyone." Instead they market the Geo Metro to its specific audience, the Suburban to a different audience, and the Corvette to yet another niche audience.

THE BRAND MESSAGE: SLOGANS AND LOGOS

33 FOUR RULES TO CREATING A GREAT SLOGAN

A slogan is simply an exclamation point on your key message. It's not the brand; it just reinforces it.

The following was adapted by an article written by Kim T. Gordon, author of *Bringing Home the Business*.

Finish the following phrase: "You're in good hands with..."

If you immediately recognized this motto as belonging to Allstate Insurance, then all the marketing muscle and millions of dollars the company has invested in the slogan are paying off by firmly establishing its brand name.

Now try to identify the company that uses this phrase: "It's everywhere you want to be."

Did you instantly think of Visa, or did you wonder whether the slogan might belong to MasterCard?

To win the name game in the marketing world, you must make sure your prospects and customers do more than recall your slogan – they have to associate it with your community, not your competitor's. To make sure your slogan or tag line hits home, follow these four tips:

1. Evoke your key benefit

Great slogans not only are built around a brand's core promise—they also establish an exclusive connection in customer's minds. You and your marketing staff or advertising agency must create a slogan that evokes your key benefits and reflects the unique experience your community (or business) delivers.

For example, back when Burger King introduced its "Have it your way" slogan in 1974, the company was battling the cookie-cutter image of assembly-line fast-food burger restaurants. It positioned itself as the chain where burgers were made to order and focused on diner's ability to customize their burgers by asking counter staff to "hold the pickle, hold the lettuce." Burger King's focus on that flexibility was directly reflected in this memorable slogan.

2. Test with prospects and customers

Qualitative research is essential before putting your marketing resources squarely behind a newly developed slogan. It's important to speak to potential customers as well as existing ones to avoid skewing the outcome. If you only query your current customers, you may never figure out how to appeal to those who never considered your

previous marketing messages compelling. Phone surveys and customer focus groups can be used to test proposed slogans. They can also uncover or verify information about the benefits your prospects and customers expect to realize when they use your product or service.

3. Include your community name

Evidence suggests slogans fare better when it comes to customer recall, if they incorporate the company or product name. Wolf Group New York, an ad agency with such clients as Häagen-Dazs and Miracle-Gro, tested consumer recognition of 19 tag lines that were part of successful, long-running advertising campaigns backed by hundreds of millions of dollars. Each of the top-five brands in the survey included the product or advertiser's name, while none of the bottom 10 did. For example, Visa's slogan, "It's everywhere you want to be," was familiar to 70 percent of respondents, but only 15 percent could correctly identify who the advertiser was. On the other hand, the tag line "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there," experienced practically universal recognition.

4. Stick with it

Never adopt a new slogan as a quick fix or as part of a temporary campaign. Success requires committing to a slogan or tag line for several years, perhaps even decades, and incorporating it into all your marketing materials as a part of the company logo. If you want to protect your business's marketing investment in the new slogan, you should consider trademarking it. At the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Web site, you can fill out a trademark application, search the trademark database and research general information about trademarks.



Whatever you do, just remember that a great slogan is like a partner in a happy marriage—it will share your company’s name and be your marketing partner for many years to come. So please consider your options carefully.

34 NOTES ABOUT BRAND IDENTITIES (YOUR LOGO)

Use ONE simple graphic. Do not try to be all things to all people. Pictures, instead of graphics, are too hard to identify as a “brand mark.” The most overused community identities include mountains, water, trees and sun. Just about every community has these. So what makes you special?

Develop a Branding Style Guide so that you have continuity in all your marketing materials even from other local organizations. Everyone should adopt the brand and design standards. What would happen to Coca Cola if every bottling plant developed its own Coke cans, bottles, ads, etc? It would be a dead company.

Your logo should look good in full color, two colors, in black and white, on signs, banners, and when reduced to about 3/4” in the corner of an ad or on a business card.

The simpler the logo, the better it looks on “logo gear” - things you sell to promote the brand and have it promote itself. Also, can the logo be stitched on shirts and jackets?

The most memorable logos are the simplest logos. Do you know what Nike’s logo looks like? The “swoosh” is one of the world’s most recognized brand marks. It’s not, by the way, a picture

of a tennis shoe.

THE FINAL WORD

It takes a village to create a successful brand, but it starts with just one person, one event, one business. Remember that branding takes time; you can not build a brand overnight.

LOCAL POLITICS IS THE KILLER OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY.

Visitors spend more money on diversions than the primary draw, which is often a “loss leader.” Trying to please everyone is a recipe for an ineffective branding and marketing program.

Finally, implementation of nearly every rule outlined in the book *The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism* should take place AFTER the brand has been developed. Your wayfinding signage, gateways, visitor information kiosks, downtowns, business mix, critical mass, marketing materials, should all reflect the brand. Build the foundation first - and a strong one at that - and that will foster a successful branding effort.

35 SUGGESTED READING

While these books are geared more to products than communities, they will provide you with clear insights as to what it takes to develop a winning brand.

- *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* by Al Ries and Laura Ries
- *The Brand Gap* by Marty Neumeier
- *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout

Perhaps Marty Neumeier summed it up best in *The Brand Gap* when he provided the five keys to a successful brand:

- Differentiate
- Collaborate
- Innovate
- Validate
- Cultivate

The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Coos County, New Hampshire Distance Marketing Assessments

NEW HAMPSHIRE

I started my New Hampshire trip planning with a Google search on “New Hampshire tourism” and this appeared to be productive. The first site <http://www.visitnh.gov> brought me to a home page with a variety of options. I selected “amusements parks” because I had no idea there were any in New Hampshire. The first listing was for a batting cages/go-karts/mini-golf facility, the second was for a hotel, and the third was for a ski resort with hiking, biking, and a climbing wall in the summer. This was disappointing, and I had no desire to continue down the list.

Next I tried the link to “family adventures.” With a page heading that read “From historical sites to museums and nature centers to train rides” I thought I’d easily find something of interest. Here the first listing was an ice skating rink and the second was an outlet mall. I thought maybe the order was random so I refreshed the page. This time the first one was Wallis Sands State Beach and the second was a mini-golf course. The beach was a little interesting, but not enough for me to follow the link.

This site was obviously one where each place decided which categories they fell under, wheth-

er it would make sense to the visitor or not, and the order was random - probably to be fair to everyone. As a result, the site gave me no incentive to visit.

I next tried <http://www.visit-newhampshire.com/> which is a section of the Visit New England website and chose the link “60 Great Things to do in New Hampshire.” This was an excellent find, giving me a taste of what each area had to offer. The tidbits provided were tempting and covered a broad range of interests. After reading the entire list, I couldn’t decide between the area around Hanover and the Lake Winnepesaukee region so I began searching for more specifics.

A search for “hanover nh cvb” did not bring up any hits within the first three pages so I tried “hanover nh tourism.” The first related link was for the Hanover Chamber of Commerce <http://www.hanoverchamber.org> and a small link was marked events/attractions. I clicked this and was taken to an events calendar with no information about things to see or do. I went back to my search and could not find anything else in the first three pages that was local and wasn’t part of a site like Tripadvisor, epodunk, etc. I called the number listed on the website for the Hanover visitor center (603-643-3512) and talked to a very nice woman who said “This was their number in the past and I can give you their new number.” She said the website hadn’t been updated with the correct number and it changed in 2005. She’s been fielding the calls and giving out the correct number. “Fortunately, not that many people call.” I tried the “new” number (603-643-3522) and got a recording that told me they were closed for lunch so I decided to move on.

I went back to the “60 Great Things” site and came to the conclusion that meals at the Canoe Club and Carpaccio Ristorante Italiano would still make Hanover worth a stop.

The search on the Lake Winnepesaukee area was much more fruitful. Searching for “lake winnepesaukee tourism” brought up <http://www.lakesregion.org/> as the first hit. This site covered several area lakes and gave information on the towns around the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee. After reviewing the information, I would plan a 3-4 day trip from Boston going to Weirs Beach (for the kitschy arcades), Castle in the Clouds, The Old Country Store and Museum and the Loon Center in Moultonborough, Canterbury Shaker Village, and the Lake Winnepesaukee Museum in Laconia.

I called the Lakes Region office (800-60-LAKES) where I got a recording with another number to call to talk with someone (603-744-8664). This is probably a cost savings measure, but it makes the visitor think twice because they have to make (and pay for) another phone call to speak with someone. I called and the woman I spoke with encouraged me to add some time to explore the White Mountains and to get out on the lake - either by renting a boat or taking one of the dinner cruises. These both sounded like a good idea and would probably necessitate adding a few more days to the trip.

Overall, this region of New Hampshire interests me as an opportunity to experience a trip similar to those of my childhood. Not historic exactly, but far different from day-to-day life in urban Boston.

COOS COUNTY, NH

I began with a search on “coos county nh” and the third hit was <http://www.northnh.com/>. This site is about the Great North Woods, a term that I never thought of in connection with New Hampshire. Maine or Minnesota, but not New Hampshire. The map on this site divided the area into four regions with the “North” region containing many of the communities we’re looking at. Unfortunately, the link <http://www.northcountrychamber.org/> didn’t work.

I went back to the home page and clicked on coosconversations.com to see what kind of recommendations there might be from locals. Suggestions here were limited but did direct me to hiking trails and demonstrated that the locals continue to look for new ideas http://www.coosconversations.com/extreme_sports/index.html (proposal for whitewater park).

Although a few nights at one of the grand resort hotels - Balsams, Mount Washington, or Mountain View - might be a good option for some people, based on their websites I think they would be too stuffy for me with their dress codes and rules.

Back to the home page, I ran through the links to activities, historic sites, grand hotels, artisans. The amount of whitewater surprised me - I think of New Hampshire as placid and relaxing, not rivers with class III to class V rapids. I knew the Appalachian Trail went through the state but I was intrigued by the information about the Cohos Trail <http://www.cohostrail.org>. Hiking this trail sounds like an opportunity to explore a part of New Hampshire that few people experience.

I also went to other sites: state parks <http://www.nhstateparks.org>; state tourism <http://www.visitnh.gov> but I didn’t find anything else that would make me want to travel to the area beyond the Cohos Trail and other hiking trails. But for me, that’s more than enough!

New Hampshire

I would definitely visit New Hampshire if I lived in Boston. I started with searching New Hampshire on Google and the VisitNH (<http://www.visitnh.gov/about-new-hampshire/contact-us.aspx>) was the first listing. I didn’t love their website as the clicking to other lists was slippery (the menus would fade away), but I did like the lists of itineraries. When faced with the un-

known it seems reasonable to give the State of New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism Development a call and get some advice about where to start. I spoke with a representative there, (603-271-6870) explaining that I have very little Internet access and I could really use some help. They said they couldn’t give me any names, and that once I received the Tourist Guide (requested 7-9-07) within the next two weeks I could call back with specific questions—really frustrating!

In utter frustration I printed a map to get an idea of some towns and then clicked around the above site before coming to a list of historical sites, which gave me the NH State Visitor’s Center phone number in Concord. This time I got some help (603-271-2154) from a very nice representative. The suggestions were Concord, of course, Portsmouth including a visit to Strawberry Banke, Hampton Beach and Mt. Washington and Lake Winnepesaukee (<http://www.winnepesaukee.com/>). The Lake Winnepesaukee website was not very clear as it doesn’t have a visitor listing—I finally found lodgings through the Links option. The home page is obsessed with photos of the lake if you scroll down the whole page, a very unique approach.

I also visited forums on TripAdvisor (http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g659478-White_Mountains_New_Hampshire-Vacations.html) and received some very positive feedback about visiting the White Mountains and staying in Lincoln. One reviewer talked about going on a zip-line tour which would be super fun with Alpine Adventures Outdoor Recreation (www.alpinesnow-mobiling.com) really bad website, but reviewers on TripAdvisor wrote good things.

I would definitely go to Portsmouth and the Strawberry Banke Museum (<http://www.strawberybanke.org/planyourvisit.html>) as the website was very picturesque and I know all the history would be fascinating. I’m sure we would find other fun things to do in Portsmouth.

I would also go to the Lake region (<http://www.lakesregion.org/>) and probably stay at a smaller resort, love the idea of a cruise on the lake. This website was fine, almost too many options. The coast also looked good, however the state’s page on the coast (<http://www.visitnh.gov/what-to-do/scenic-drives-and-tours/seacoast.aspx>) isn’t effective! It gives you this great driving route with all these towns highlighted, but there are no direct links the town’s web pages!

I think you could go to any of these places with family, couples or girl friend getaway, with the exception of Portsmouth, which seems more like a family place. I think any of these towns would be worth a long weekend or you could string some together for a week of exploration.

Central New Hampshire

Berlin

<http://www.berlinnh.gov/Pages/index>
The City That Trees Built

Called 800/386-4664 – number from the website to get a visitors guide.
<http://www.visitnh.gov/maps-guides-and-brochures/order-your-free-visitors.aspx>

The web site says it takes 2-3 weeks to receive your guide. So I called hoping I could get it sooner. I spoke with a representative who said it would take 5-7 days. So I said “I’m going to be in Concord but would like to drive north for a couple of days and could she suggest a few cities/highlights for me to visit.” She said that the call center I reached is located in Kansas City, and she knows nothing about New Hampshire. I ordered the guide on 7/12/07 and received it on 7/16/07.

This web site - <http://www.laconia-weirs.org/index.php> - covers 17 towns. Alton, Belmont, Canterbury, Center Harbor, Gilford, Gilmanton, Holderness, Laconia, Meredith, Moultonborough, Sanbornton, Tilton, Weirs Beach, Lakeport, Lake Opechee, Lake Winnisquam, Lake Winnepesaukee.

Calendar – <http://www.laconia-weirs.org/calendar.php>
Arts & crafts, used book sale, concerts, fireworks...same ole stuff, different town.

Laconia - City Web site - <http://www.cityoflaconianh.org/> - boring

Littleton – <http://www.littletonareachamber.com/>
Offers same visitors guide I requested.

There are many little towns and the scenery is gorgeous, but they all are pretty much the same.
Couldn't really find anywhere I would visit. When I was looking at a map,

Berlin looks like the biggest town north of Concord and it is only 10,331 people (2000 Census.)

The visitor's guide has some beautiful photographs. The fall would be the time to visit, since I don't ski. In looking at the things to do in many of the cities, they all pretty much list the same things – farmer's markets, museums, theatre & performing arts.

Littleton

<http://www.golittleton.com/index.php> - not too exciting
The highlight was the cat and dogs page - <http://www.golittleton.com/doggies.php>

Population in 2006 was 6,162.

<http://www.city-data.com/city/Littleton-New-Hampshire.html>

Honestly, I didn't see any town north of Concord that I would visit. But then I discovered the White Mountain area. Now this looks interesting...

White Mountains

Liked this web site - <http://www.visitwhitemountains.com/>

I would be interested in staying in a small town for a couple of days <http://www.visitwhitemountains.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=5> and then taking a day trip to the White Mountain area.

At least there are quite a few activities offered in this area - <http://www.visitnewhampshire.com/whitemountains.html>

It states the region has 18 family attractions.

The White Mountains is a place simply to drive, gaze, step out of the car, walk, take photos, and gaze some more. A spectacular drive is the Kancamagus Highway from the town of Lincoln to the town of Conway. Conway and North Conway are very pretty mountain towns with main streets lined with interesting stores. North Conway is a hub of outlet shopping in this tax-free state. At the end of the day it is easy to find an assortment of accommodations like lodges, motels, hotels and campgrounds and enjoy fine cuisine at one of many restaurants here in the White Mountains.

I would visit the White Mountains if I had the chance. There are so many little towns north of Concord but nothing that would draw me in. They all

offer the same thing so I would pick the White Mountains as my destination and stay somewhere nearby for a couple of days.

Coos County New Hampshire

Coos has the largest area of the New Hampshire counties, but as of 2000, by far the smallest population, at 33,111. The county seat is Lancaster. Major industries are forestry and tourism, with the once-dominant paper-making industry in sharp decline.

According to this web site- <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/localList.php?local=18848&locTGroup=Attractions&direction=down&sec=0&qty=2> there are 2 attractions for Coos County - Santa's Village and Six Gun City & Fort Splash. Not a big draw for me. It didn't really mention the true attractions and hotels.

http://www.northnh.com/grand_hotels_northnh.php
The Great North Woods website shows all the "luxury" hotels in the area.

On this website, <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/localList.php?local=18848&locTGroup=Hotels&direction=down&sec=0&qty=2> there is only one hotel, Budget Inn in Berlin, but there are actually 20 cemeteries - <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/localList.php?local=18848&locTGroup=Cemeteries&direction=down&sec=0&qty=20>

I still feel that the White Mountains have the most to offer. If I were a skier, then I would have something to do during the day. There is only so much you can do in the small towns.

1. The Balsams – it is definitely in the "Great North Woods." Beautiful... <http://www.thebalsams.com/> - but too far north.

2. Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa - <http://www.mountainviewgrand.com/default.asp>
I definitely prefer the location over The Balsams. I would drive 3 hours for this resort.

3. Mt. Washington Auto Road – <http://www.mountwashingtonautoroad.com/Page-16.html>
Whether you drive yourself or take one of our guided tours, your trip on

the Mount Washington Auto Road will create a lifelong memory. The home of the "World's Worst Weather" is waiting for you to create your adventure. Watch the fog grow and change, try a short hike or just take in the view. The Mount Washington Auto Road is your gateway to all this American icon has to offer.

The fact that they are proud to say it is "the home of the World's Worst Weather" doesn't make me excited about driving the Mt. Washington Auto Road. But if I take a whole bunch of dramamine, I might be able to stomach it. I'll pass on this one!

4. The Cog Railway - <http://www.thecog.com/index.php> - I've done something similar here in Colorado – took a ride on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad - <http://www.durangotrain.com/> - it's a long ride on uncomfortable seats.

5. River Rafting – couldn't really find any information where river rafting is offered. Most web site offered kayaking, fishing and canoeing – no river rafting. Why is that?

Nothing on these sites -
Guided Tours - <http://www.nhliving.com/guidedtours/index.shtml>
Boating - <http://www.nhliving.com/boating/index.shtml>
Outdoor Sports Guide - <http://www.nhliving.com/outdoorsports/index.shtml>
Even the Great North Woods web site did not mention river rafting - <http://www.northnh.com/activities.php>

White Mountains

Still like this web site - <http://www.visitwhitemountains.com/>

If this area were a 3 hour drive away from me, would I visit? Yes, New Hampshire is beautiful. I would only go in the summer, since I'm not a winter sports participant. And since I'm a hotel snob, I would stay at the Mountain View Grand Resort & Spa and take a day trip to the White Mountain area. I would not take a ride on the Cog Railway – a 3 hour ride up and a 3 hour ride back on the hard seats doesn't seem like much fun. It would be a great place for some R&R.

New Hampshire Trip (if I lived in Boston)

I would like to go to Canobie Lake Park in the Merrimac Valley-area, because it would provide my family (small children, included) with a fun and affordable vacation. Canobie is an amusement park, situated an hour's drive from Boston. For \$48 a day per person, you can play together in a nice setting with free parking and plenty of nearby motels that advertise reasonable rates.

Although I love Boston (dearly), you can't help but notice that they live a rules-driven lifestyle. Class and status rule Bostonian's daily lives in a lot of seen and unseen ways.

Once, I was fortunate enough to get a ticket to see the Mariners play the Red Sox at Fenway. My seat was outstanding (three rows up from first base) and I had no time to change out of my business clothes. Although I was rooting for my "Ms", the crowd (around me) treated me like royalty. I really thought that they wouldn't appreciate my sitting there, but my nice appearance and the fact that my ticket was super expensive lead them to believe that I was "a good person."

So, imagine, how nice it would be to take your family to a place of freedom, that's only a short distance from one of America's most hectic cities.

On the www.visitnh.com Web site you can find a link to Canobie's Web page (that's how I found them). The www.visitnh.com pages are really nice, and advertise a lot of "gas saver" promotions – this immediately caught my attention, but ended with just a handful of lodging offers that were not supported by entertainment/destination options. Also, their trip planner function wants a lot more information than I am willing to share, so I skipped it.

The Canobie Web site is great, with all the information you need to visit the park and stay in the area for days at a time. I was really delighted to find they had links to three nationally-recognized motel/hotel chains (nearby) with rates starting at \$99 a night. That's a deal, when you live on the East Coast! Canobie also offer a half-day ticket price (evenings), which seems like a great idea for folks wanting to visit other venues in the surrounding area – Canobie still gets some of your daily dollar.

I asked Google, "what is there to do in New Hampshire?" It resulted in about 12 pages with the top three results being: New Hampshire Outdoors, Historic America's Stonehenge, and the Anheuser-Busch Brewery. The Outdoor's

Web site was filled with lots of information that was color coded by area (Coast, Merrimac Valley, etc), and was a generally good resource. Historic America's Stonehenge looks like a tourist trap and the Web pages are terrible, without links or resources. The Anheuser-Busch Web site was really, really over-the-top with all kinds of links and glossy pictures of their horses (famous Clydesdales). You know that the beer maker is rolling in the dough, with the caliber of information they post and the type of free tourist events they hold.

One last note on my first-round of New Hampshire research...only when you look at the bottom of some Web sites (or really hard) do you find New Hampshire has NO sales tax. Wow! How cool is it that you are free from paying a general sales tax? Come to find out that New Hampshire and Alaska are the only two states to post no general sales tax or income tax... where do they get funds? As someone traveling with a family, this fact would really make New Hampshire an appealing destination. They should advertise the "heck" out of this fact.

I went back to the www.visitnh.com Web site and chose their "amusement parks" link. It led to a list of places (including Canobie), but I wouldn't consider dairy farms or Quaker villages "amusement parks." Included in the list was the Budweiser brewery (which I mentioned in a previous paragraph), whose link I chose to follow again. Although the Web site wants to know you're older than 21, there's nothing published in the Web site that prohibits children from taking a brewery tour or visiting the famous horses (they have photo days).

Another amusement park link was for "Story Land." This seasonal Park is dedicated to telling stories through rides, live entertainment and park features. At \$23 a day for unlimited access to everything, I think that's a bargain. As this park is listed "in the North Country" their directions are well defined, but hilariously outdated (they said they officially have no address for a mapquest or GPS search). They have a problem with their "lodging" feature as it leads to more links-within-links-within-links; a list with direct links would be helpful. It would have taken me several links to find the nearest motel or hotel. The Web site "on the whole" is written in a friendly and relaxed tone, and isn't that what you want for a vacation?

The next place I went to was "travelwithkids.com" and clicked on the "New

England” links for family vacations. Of ten listings, two were for New Hampshire. The first listing was for the Mount Washington Hotel. The hotel promotes a year-round calendar with “Kids Kamps” in the summer, skiing at Bretton Woods (a partner) during the winter, and fall festivities that include a Thanksgiving weekend festival. Their Web site advertises the hotel’s listing on the historic registry and their proximity to the “White Mountains.” A bit on the pricey side, the “travelwithkids” Web site does say that staying there is “over-the-top” and that you can expect fantastic service.

The second listing on “travelwithkids” was for the Indian Head Resort (also White Mountains). Although the link to the resort’s Web site was immediate, their Web functionality was non-existent. You couldn’t access any information about the resort, other than their title page. Functionality aside, the Indian Head Resort main Web page boldly listed something no other Web pages list – New Hampshire is tax-free! It’s too bad that I couldn’t find out how much it was to stay at this resort. It looked amazing beautiful.

According the AIE.GOV Web site (national gas prices), Bostonian’s average per gallon gas price was \$2.90. Given a car with a 13-gallon tank that gets 25 miles to the gallon, you could potentially get as far as Lincoln, NH (North Country-area) and back on that tank of gas. Lincoln is also about two hours and fifteen minutes north of Boston.

Amendment to assessment notes:

Looking at Coos County, New Hampshire there’s not a lot to find. I looked at several listings (e-podunk, New Hampshire Counties, New Hampshire Retailers) but there was nothing tourism or travel related in many of the pages. I did Google the specific towns and came up with some limited information on the three largest towns, Berlin, Jefferson and Lancaster. The most complete information on these towns came from the Wikipedia listings; there was no other sort of information available.

From a couple of key words on I found associated with the cities mentioned above, I took a look at Web sites for the Mount Washington Road and the Mountain View Grand (hotel).

The Mount Washington Road is a historic road that goes to the top of Mount Washington. Their Web site is pretty complete and very friendly, but I don’t know about spending \$20 (plus) dollars to take a half-hour drive. It seems

like an expensive entrance fee for such a short drive that promises, “the world’s worst weather.”

Mountain View Grand interested me, because it is one of the last “grand hotels” from the turn of the century. From other Web pages, I have learned that there were numerous hotels for the wealthy in Coos County that served as “fresh air retreats.” Most of these are long gone, but the Mountain View Grand survives. Their Web site is very elegant and user-friendly. I can easily get a room for \$150-\$200 a night that looks very upscale (what someone from a big city would appreciate). The hotel is located near Whitehall, and it also looks like they cater to weddings, more than tourists.

The Balsams open Web page is very nice and well designed; it makes you feel like you have stepped into a romantic New England weekend spot. That’s how I would categorize this resort, as a place to go for a romantic couples weekend or honeymoon. It looks like an unfriendly spot for kids... their Web site has a tab to click for family activities, but the family activities are childcare and babysitters. Even the “Whistle Camp” is where you drop your children off at breakfast and get them back around dinnertime. So, the Balsams promotes, “drop your kids here and go back to your room for...” I was kind of hoping for activities we could do as a family (croquet, hiking, basketball, etc.) Like the Mountain View Grand, I think that this location is best served by the wedding and romantic scene.

The Cog Railway is just too expensive for a three-hour expedition! At \$59 for adults and \$39 for children, my family of three would cost \$90. It looks like a fun thing to do, but certainly not at those prices. A one-day pass to Disneyland (including rides) for a child is \$73. That is only \$34 dollars more for an entire day’s worth of activity. They definitely need to lower the prices at this destination.

The North Woods Rafting looks like a fun time and is very affordable at \$60/ adult and \$45/child. This is for a “half-day” package that includes two runs and a meal. They advertise with nice (but small) pictures of folks having a super time. Plus they promote their “wickedly good cookies” as part of the meal...a homey and nice touch. Their rivers are rated class II and III, which for beginners and families is perfect. I would definitely take my family to this activity.

I think that New Englanders need to try to make the outdoors affordable for everyone. The area looks like it has a lot of green and outdoor potential.

New Hampshire

I received the info packet from the State of New Hampshire in four days because I pleaded with the woman to please send it ASAP. The map, Events Guide and Visitors Guide were somewhat helpful. The way the tourism bureau divides the state into regions makes sense, however the color-coding is not good. The Great North Woods region is dark green and the Dartmouth/Lake Sunapee region is a lighter green, the colors are not distinctive enough from each other when viewing the guide. I did not find the guides helpful, but the map was a great help. Initially, when I spoke with tourism rep. she would not give me specific towns to visit and said to call back once I received my guide and I could ask about certain towns. I did call back on the 1-800-386-4664 number and spent 8:49 on the phone, however most of the time it was dead air as the representative searched for information about Berlin and the surrounding area—she clearly knew nothing about the Great North Woods region. She suggested I visit Lancaster but couldn't tell me anything other than there is a state park and a museum, but she couldn't find out what kind of museum it is. She did give me Berlin's visitor centers phone number (1-800-992-7480) and that person was very helpful.

Speaking with the representative there I received great ideas for our teenagers including a moose tour that is run out of Gorham, shopping in North Conway, and that they had pamphlets about covered bridges and waterfalls throughout the state that they would send me. They weren't gushing with enthusiasm, but seemed to like Berlin and thought that we would have a good time there. Still not thrilled about the prospect of visiting.

Googling Berlin you get the city government website listed first (<http://www.berlinnh.gov/Pages/index>), which is an okay site. I'm always surprised when city sites don't even have a link to the chamber or a visitor link. I realize there could be some conflict of interest but it seems like it would be in the best interest of the population to have some link to let outsiders know they are invited. The 6th ranked listing on Google for Berlin (www.greatnorthwoods.org) was a bizarre space age site that is also used for Jefferson and Milan, NH and did get me linked to the area Chamber of Commerce. The Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.northernwhitemtnchamber.org/>) is your standard site and I liked that it told me which towns

it represents. The area map link seemed like it would deliver me to each of the seven towns, however this was not the case. Why no links? Seems like a no-brainer.

So I set off Googling: Dummer only has a government site (www.nhes.state.nh.us) that was boring except for the population statistics and since they only have 330 people, it probably isn't a real destination. Next was Gorham's first Google listing (<http://www.gorhamnh.org/>) and it was okay, pretty classic for a government site. There were no links to accommodations or dining. The second listing for Gorham (<http://www.gorhamnewhampshire.com/>) was the best I saw all day! A lovely website with an overview of all the towns.

Loved the Our Towns link with pretty pictures and just a couple paragraphs per town. Some towns had links others did not. Berlin is "essentially a manufacturing and commercial center" and it's link is to the city site. Jefferson sounds a bit more fun with the appeal of some major attractions. Randolph comes out the best with a "summer cottage colony", but when you go to the link it has to be one of the ugliest websites and it shows a summer cottage covered in snow.

Shelburne is "close to anything, yet miles from everything"—I don't even know what to say and the website (<http://www.shelburnenh.com/>) is somewhat reminiscent of Randolph's.

Moving onto Milan, NH and its google listing got me to the that awful galactic website (www.greatnorthwoods.org) but it did have Chamber of Commerce listing and I did get to the White Mountain website (www.whitemountains.com). Thought I would check out lodgings for Berlin, however there were none listed!

Basically, I would probably not visit this part of NH unless I had to go to a meeting or wedding. Hopefully, either of these events would be at The Balsams Grand Resort (www.thebalsams.com) or part of the Great Glen Trails Outdoor Center (<http://www.greatglentrails.com>) with lodgings in some great nearby resort. I'm sure it is beautiful country and maybe a river rafting trip would be fun, but I would most likely stay in Gorham as it boasts 600 rooms and seems to be a good jumping off point for outdoorsy stuff.

Northern New Hampshire

Okay, I would say the weather and potential to have a gray, cold vacation is what would make me shy away from Northern New Hampshire, however the sights are gorgeous! I found the Balsams on my previous searches and would go there, the Mountain View Grand Resort and I also came across the Mt. Washington Hotel (<http://www.mtwashington.com/>) both look like wonderful destinations and I would drive three hours especially if there was a conference or wedding to attend.

The Mt. Washington Auto Road was an attraction I had come across previously, but I thought it was just a scenic drive and didn't realize you had to pay for the opportunity to climb the mountain (<http://www.mtwashington-nautoroad.com>). I located their website and the Cog Railway's website via the New Hampshire Visitors Guide pg. 56 noting the website (<http://www.visitwhitemountains.com>). This website only gives brief, boring descriptions of the attractions but they do give links to the attraction's websites. The Cog Railway (<http://www.thecog.com>) is an okay site. I thought the pictures in the photo gallery were much better than the two they had on the home page. I think some testimonials would also be good since the ticket prices are rather high. It looks like fun but it could also be a real bore especially if it was cloudy. I think I'd wait on the weather and then decide if I would go on this ride. One other attraction I liked was the Lost River (www.lostriver.com) which is in North Woodstock.

Still hanging out at the Visit White Mountains and I tried the Recreation tab and clicked my way to North Woods Rafting (<http://www.northwoodsrafting.com>) in Milan, NH. The pictures look great and made me want to sign up for a trip. The only other company mentioned was Saco Valley Canoe and I didn't explore their site—canoeing seems boring compared to rafting.

I thought I should move farther north and googled Errol, NH. The first listing was the Umbagog Chamber of Commerce site (<http://www.umbagog-chambercommerce.com>) for the area. Pictures make it look very remote. The Points of Interest had no links so I left it for Colebrook, NH. First stop, the city site's useful links page (http://www.colebrook-nh.com/Public_Documents/ColebrookNH_WebDocs/links) and this lead me to North Country Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.northcountrychamber.org>). I checked out Things to Do: when Historical Markers and Clear Waters are listed it gives me the idea that there really isn't much to do. Also, Points of Interest had no links.

I just spoke with a friend and she said she loved exploring Northern New Hampshire just because of the beauty. She visited last fall, early Nov. and is not a wilderness person but loved the scenery, the people and the antiques.

I would go there if someone was having a destination event and I lived within three hours drive. They need to enhance the numerous websites with more people pictures, while nature is gorgeous, not all of us love camping and hiking. Lastly, I think the state needs to reorganize their Tourism Guide by regions so that you can get a real idea of what each region has to offer. Finally, as I mentioned in my previous assessment, the state needs to educate the people answering the information line about some of these smaller northern cities—perhaps a tour of their own state would be a good idea.



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