



Marketing Plan FY 2016-2017

Prepared for: Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority (LL&BRF)

Prepared by: McConnell Group Public Relations, Inc.

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OVERVIEW

Objective

To create a strategic marketing plan to increase tourism in Rutherford County.

Goals

External

- To attract travelers to Rutherford County using our brand and iconic assets (i.e. Lake Lure and Chimney Rock) and then, to lengthen their stays and create return visits via exposure to the many other assets of the county
- To improve brand awareness and recognition among key audiences in target markets
- To build visitor and media connection and interest by bringing more attention to Rutherford County and its personality via the deeper, niche stories
- Showcase Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills as an affordable place to visit with quality experiences
- To continuously seek ways to improve and enhance the visitor experience in Rutherford County.
- To introduce and build upon the brand statement, “Have the time of your life in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills” and find ways to incorporate that statement throughout the county in a variety of creative ways

Internal

- To build upon 2014-15 stakeholder engagements and continue to make communication between RCTDA and its stakeholder-partners a priority
- To increase opportunities for partnerships and co-operative efforts between RCTDA and its stakeholder-partners
- To educate stakeholders of opportunities for increase tourism marketing exposure

Measurable Marketing Goals

- Increase visitors to Rutherford County by 5% to be measured by a 5% increase in annual occupancy tax collections
- Increase unique, referral and return visitors to the website overall for the year by 5%
- Increase annual visitors to the welcome center by 2,500
- Increase travel guide production and distribution by 50%
- Increase media tour visits by three more trips
- Increase user engagement on social media
- Collect more visitor data to be used in marketing decisions

SITUATION ANALYSIS

What's happening by county, municipality, etc.

Nation

- Presidential election year
- Forthcoming airing of "Dirty Dancing Live" remake

County

- New RCTDA director
- RCTDA to facilitate new countywide tourism strategic plan
- Way finding signage and info stand implementation approved planned for this fiscal year
- Continued investor interest in hotel and amenity development
- Purchase of Cleghorn Golf by Tryon Equestrian Partners
- Opening of The Gun Club at Tryon Resort in the location of the former West Point Farm
- Continued talk of improvements at Rutherford County Airport
- Growing interest by commercial developers in Highway 74 corridor

Bostic

- Expansions planned for Bostic Lincoln Center

Chimney Rock

- Continued issues surrounding elevator at Chimney Rock State Park
- Ongoing celebration of state parks centennial
- New restaurants and businesses opening (ie: Chimney Rock Pizzeria, Hickory Nut Gorge Brewery expected to open late 2016 and Burntshirt Vineyards Tasting Room expected early 2017)
- 125th anniversary of The Esmeralda Inn

Ellenboro and Northeastern Rutherford County

- Not aware of any significant changes

Forest City

- New way finding signage installed and more planned
- New town website
- New restaurants, retail shops and businesses (Copper Penny, Twisted Pear relocation, Foothills Market, possible amphitheater renovation)
- Launched 4th Fridays on Main music series
- Continued development of rail trail through Forest City

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- New hotel expected to open in 2017
 - Starting master plan for new public park to feature stage, trail, playground, water park, dog park (timeline TBD)

Lake Lure

- Hiring new town manager
- Lodge on Lake Lure now owned by Tryon Equestrian Partners; major upgrades expected starting fall 2016
- Dirty Dancing Festival under new ownership of Chamber of Hickory Nut Gorge
- New restaurants and businesses opening (ie: Scoops Ice Cream Shop)
- Name changed planned for Donald Ross Trail to Dittmer-Watts Trail and trail expansions planned

Rutherfordton

- New town website
- Installed four new walking trails
- Purchase of Bechtler House
- New restaurants and businesses opening (ie: Greek, BBQ, Brewhouse)
- Addition of a self-serve RCTDA welcome center in the Woodrow Jones building
- Planned expansion of KidSenses
- New tourism websites RutherfordtonTrails.com and MyRutherfordton.com
- Downtown being incorporated into a National Park through the National Overmountain Victory Trail

Spindale

- Spinning Bean closing
- Town working on new/refreshed logo

Surrounding Region

- Continued visitation to Tryon International Equestrian Center and more development planned
- Growing commercial interest in Rutherford County because of equestrian center

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths

- Positive brand recognition to those familiar with the Lake Lure & the Foothills
- Awareness of “Dirty Dancing” and the opportunity to capitalize on it more, especially in light of the film’s made-for-TV remake
- Large variety of desirable tourism assets across the county
- Strong visitor loyalty and base
- Municipalities and chambers interested in partnerships and teamwork
- First-class welcome center where RCTDA can engage with visitors and market all assets
- New travel guide for 2016
- Newly-acquired visitor data from 2015 study
- Developing new, mobile optimized website
- Home to Western NC’s largest sports festival, the Lake Lure Olympiad
- Relationships with VisitNC tourism, NC Travel & Tourism Coalition and NC Restaurant and Lodging Association
- Stronger relationships with RCTDA stakeholders because of coffee meeting series and improved e-newsletter reports
- Relationship with Tryon International Equestrian Center
- Marketing and PR team and leadership
- Vision of organization
- Improved exposure through advertising

Weaknesses

- No centralized tourism strategy as defined by the larger stakeholder and county leadership population
- Under-utilization of lesser-known, niche tourism assets and stories in order to build a stronger base for and connection with both our iconic and developing assets
- Website limitations due to current site build
- Limited marketing opportunities because of limited website; the forthcoming rebuild will rectify many problems
- Limited photo and video content
- Lack of capitalization on the “Dirty Dancing” legacy
- Ongoing debate on where occupancy tax dollars are spent
- Debate on how to best incorporate regional attractions (ie: TIEC, The Biltmore, wineries) in RCTDA marketing
- Need for funding for tourism asset development
- RCTDA brand needs a more human personality that connects with people on an emotional level
- Under-utilization of marketing opportunities via welcome center

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- Need to educate stakeholders on how to's for important opportunities through Trip Advisor and other online outlets to improve SEO for the RCTDA tourism industry
 - Need to find balanced approach to addressing where occupancy tax dollars are collected and how marketing efforts are divided among the towns where these taxes are collected
 - Need to improve communication and collaboration with county staff and leaders
 - Lack of attention and marketing to group sales and business travelers
 - Lack of information available from stakeholders to market events or information is releases too late for quality marketing exposure

Opportunities

- To create a shared vision for RCTDA
- To capitalize on "Dirty Dancing" legacy as the "purple cow" of Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills
- To create a "selfie shot" opportunity based on "Dirty Dancing" and need for visitors to find key photo opportunities across the county
- To improve digital presence and implement stronger digital marketing opportunities once the new website is launched
- Potential to expand outdoor recreational outlets
- To engage visitors coming to Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC)
- To further engage visitors coming to participate in our extreme sports
- To define the Hickory Nut Gorge as a premier outdoors destination
- To define Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills as a premier wedding destination
- Welcome Center presence at TIEC
- To increase digital presence through enhanced digital marketing
- Utilize local residents and stakeholders to tell our stories in first-person
- To provide better information to visitors about business hours of operation in off season
- Continue to increase stakeholder awareness of TDA activity and involvement in TDA opportunities
- To educate stakeholders on the importance of utilizing online marketing tools like Facebook and Trip Advisor, and how advanced publicity can benefit event marketing
- To obtain further data collections and measurements from advertising placements; sweepstake surveys, digital clicks to website, social media data

Threats

- Reduced marketing dollars, especially in the digital landscape, when brands are becoming more competitive in this arena
- Lack of funding designated for asset development and the risk of deteriorating assets
- Competing with the activity and marketing of surrounding counties

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- Losing lodging to other counties because of lack of regional information on website searches (ie: TIEC, The Biltmore, etc.)
 - Lack of citizens and hospitality industry understanding of all Rutherford County assets
 - Not adequately meeting demands and needs of rapidly growing visitor base in light of TIEC traffic and limited resources
 - Allowing political friction to compromise wise marketing practices

RESEARCH

Rutherford County TEIM: Travel Economic Impact Model

The Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) is the official international standard for measuring the economic contribution of tourism. This methodology was developed by the World Tourism Organization and ratified by the United Nations in 2000. The 2014 TEIM report was prepared for VisitNC by the U.S. Travel Association and analyzes economic tourism impact from 2013.

FINDINGS:

- Rutherford County is **26th in economic impact** of tourism out of North Carolina's 100 counties.
- Domestic tourism in Rutherford County generated an economic impact of nearly **\$157.59 million** in 2014, a **4.7% increase** from 2013 (Growth from 2012-2013 was 0.55%).
- More than **1,170 jobs** in Rutherford County were directly attributable to travel and tourism; travel generated **\$21.94 million payroll** in 2014.
- State and local tax revenues from travel to Rutherford County amounted to **\$13.82 million**, which equaled a **\$204.47 tax savings per resident** or **\$380 per household**.

Find the full report online at: <http://partners.visitnc.com/research-3/economic-impact/teim.html>

Occupancy Tax Collections

- In FY14-15, Rutherford County TDA reported a total occupancy tax collection of **\$715,072**, which was an **18.55% growth** over the previous fiscal year.

2015-16 Brand Perception and Market Study Research

The study was conducted by Magellan Strategy Group and H2R Market Research in the fall of 2015.

Purpose: To provide decision makers with a better understanding of the current brand image in the marketplace, and serve as a baseline from which to measure future perceptions.

Target Audience: Professionally managed panel of residents living **50-300 miles from Rutherford County (28139 zip code) excluding Asheville**, and an inquiry house list provided by the TDA. Respondents screened to ensure they have traveled for leisure, had visited the Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills area or were open to doing so, and are a travel destination decision maker in their household.

Sample: A total of **683 respondents** (600 from the professional panel and 83 from the TDA house list) were interviewed for this study, providing a maximum margin of error of +/-3.7% at a 95% confidence interval.

Below is a highlight of the studies findings. For full results, see study.

FINDINGS:

Competitive KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)

78

of travelers are familiar with Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills (LL&BRF)

73%

of those travelers have a positive opinion of LL&BRF

36% of regional travelers have visited the LL&BRF area at some point

39% regional travelers say they intend to visit Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills

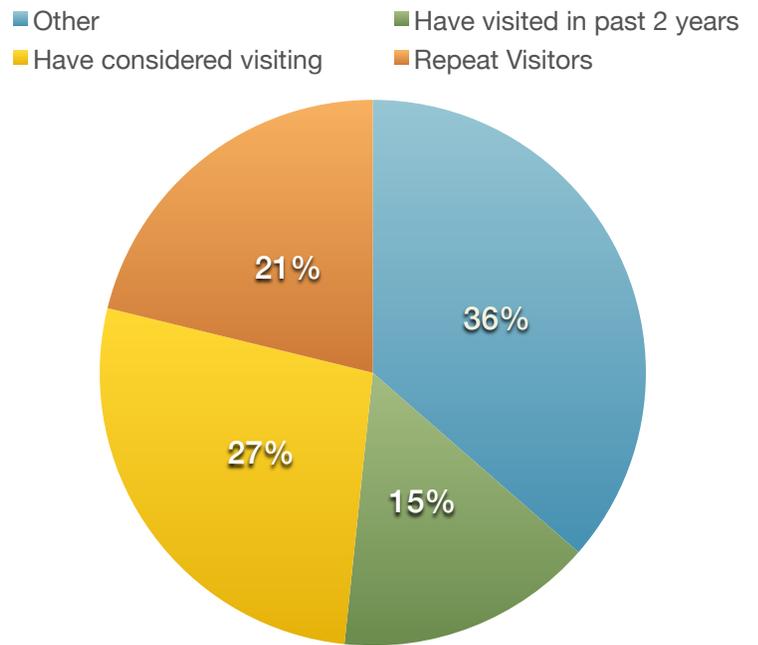


nearly 1 in 4 travelers indicated that they would be likely to visit the area in the next 12 months.

Although the intent to visit the area in the next 12 months is slightly lower than the average for the brand set at 39%; it is higher than Maggie Valley/Waynesville, Hendersonville and Brevard which are some of our top competitors.

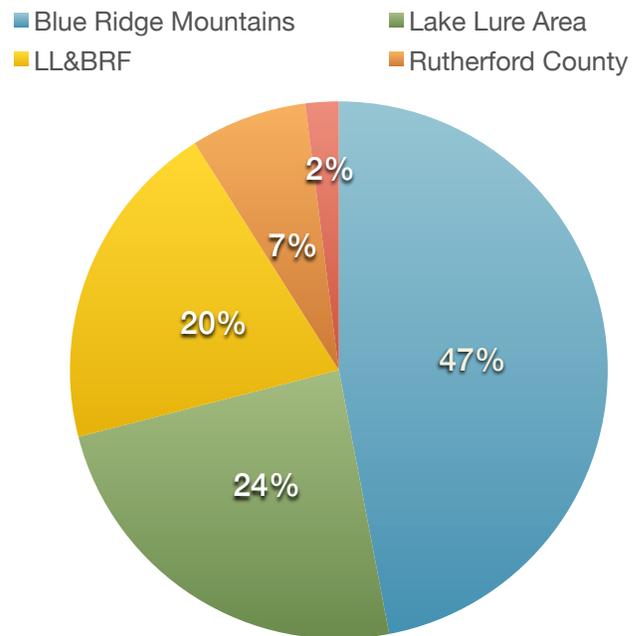
Market Penetration

There are over 15.1 million households within 50-300 miles of LL&BRF. Based on survey results: 2.3 million have visited in the last 2 years, 4.1 million have considered visiting, and 3.2 million are repeat visitors.



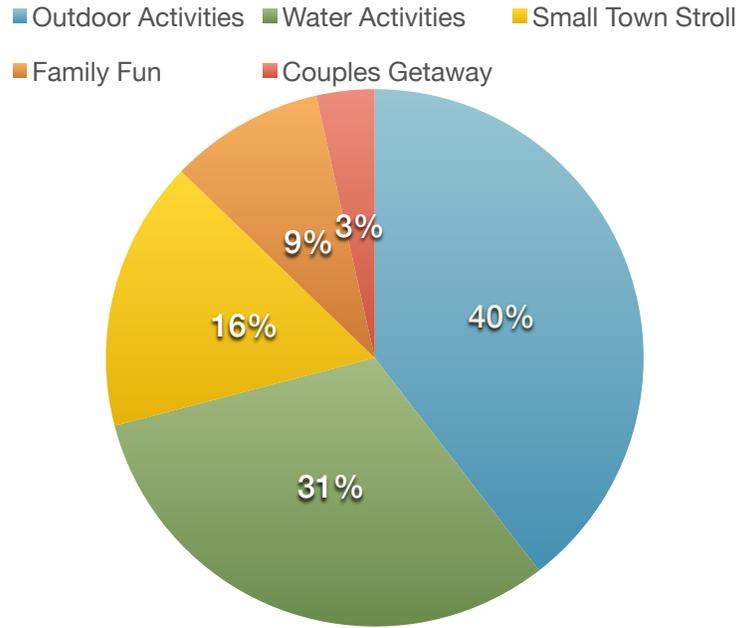
Brand Recognition

Lake Lure and the Blue Ridge Foothills is a fairly new brand for Rutherford County, but it is already being recognized by travelers. Based on the survey sample the names most associated with our area by travelers are:



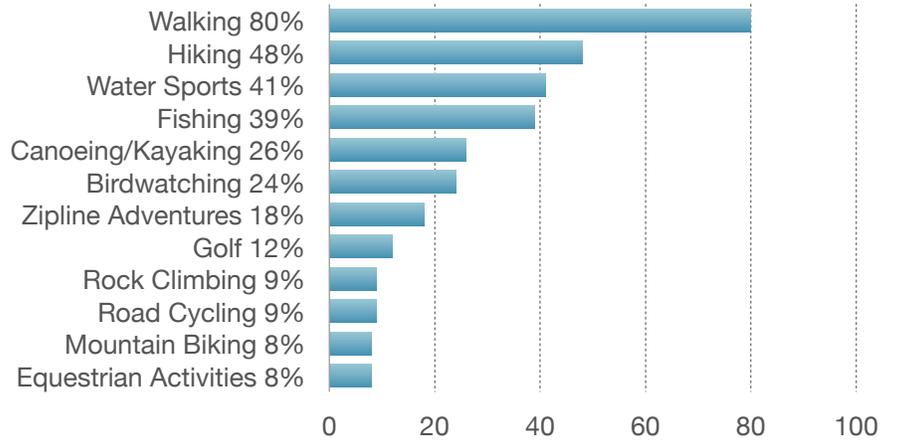
Brand Association

The following activities are most associated with LL&BRF by travelers. It's important to note that we are referring to them as travelers instead of visitors because not all of these responses are by people that have visited our area, it is what they associate with our area and what they use when making a decision to visit or return to the area.



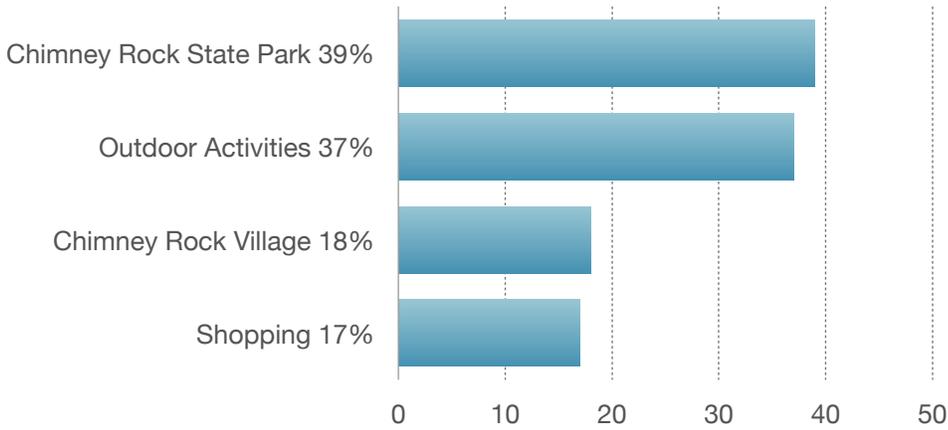
Preferred Visitor Activities

Walking is the most popular regular recreation activity regional travelers participate in, followed by hiking, water sports, and fishing.

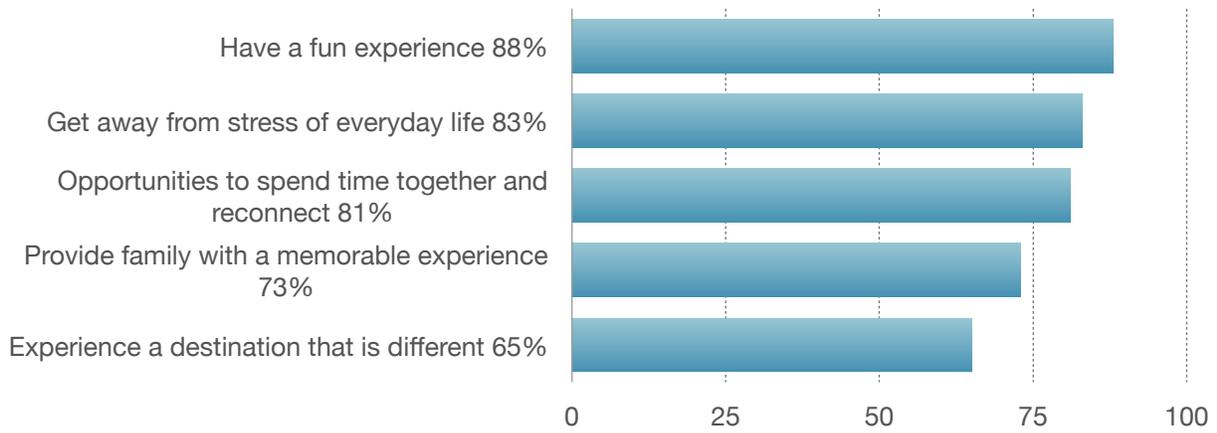


Key Influencers

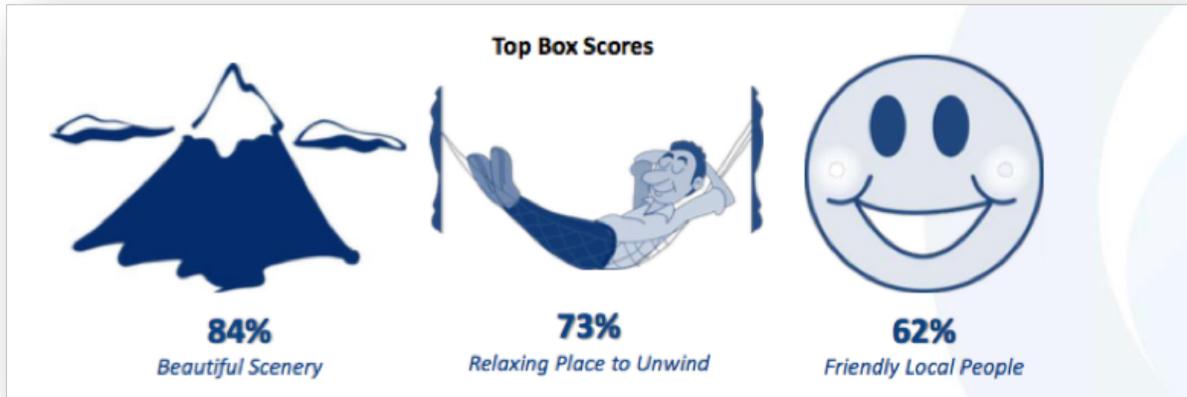
These are the key influencers used by travelers when choosing to visit LL&BRF



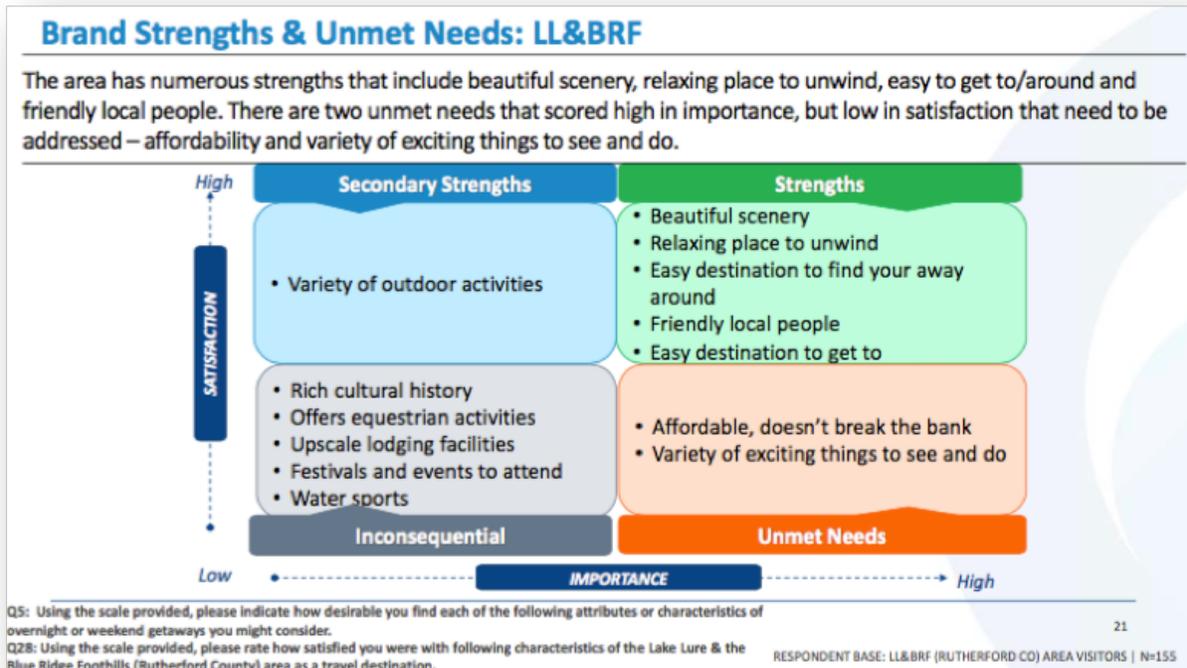
Top Emotional Drivers



Area Satisfaction



Brand Strengths and Unmet Needs



Barriers to Visitation

- Not enough information (50%)
- Prefer to visit other places (49%)
- No recommendations (42%)

Demographics

- Predominately female (77% vs 23%)
- Average age 45
- Mostly no children in household (72% without kids vs 28% with kids)
- Average household size 2.9
- Travel with family (45%) versus adults only (55%)
- Average HH income \$64.4K
- Average distance traveled: 142 miles

CONCLUSIONS

- Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills is perceived as a very good place to visit, and satisfaction among visitors is high. The area features beautiful scenery, friendly people, a variety of outdoor recreational things to do, and a relaxing atmosphere. Visitors both love it and are willing to recommend it to their friends and family members.
- As a travel destination a few issues prevent it from maximizing its potential. Brand awareness is comparatively low and the area is perceived as lacking a variety of exciting things to see and do and “must sees.”
- The region is geographically fragmented in a manner that impedes cooperation. As a whole, the region is seen as lacking a variety of exciting things to see and do, putting the entire area at a competitive disadvantage compared to its competitors.
- A recommendation was made to determine the “purple cow” of Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills – what is the most unique asset that can be promoted

ACTIONS

- **Develop a Purple Cow:** The 2016-17 marketing plan is based around inspiration from “Dirty Dancing” (filmed in Lake Lure) encouraging visitors to come and “Have the Time of Your Life in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills”
- **Develop and Implement Additional Research Collection Methods:** Think of creative ways to collect data and monitor it in a tracking system. Methods for collecting this data can include:
 - Survey feedback cards/contests
 - Scavenger hunt forms
 - Calls to lodging properties following key events to see what impact the event had on lodging

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- Use of pre-defined hashtags
 - Use of Trip Advisor cards
 - **Implement a Tracking and Reporting System:** Implement a way to track and record visitor feedback both in person and online in order to better measure the results of our efforts. Strategies to accomplish this include:
 - Implementation visitor feedback/info cards in key sites around the county
 - Collection of visitor feedback/info using scavenger hunts
 - Google analytics
 - Media impressions reports
 - Social media and web traffic monitoring
 - **Increase Analytics:** Look for more effective ways to measure social media engagement in addition to follower growth.

COMPETITION ANALYSIS

A breakdown of strengths and weaknesses of surrounding TDAs in western NC

Buncombe County

- County Tourism Brand: Explore Asheville – Discovery, inside and out.
- Much bigger market and marketing budget with a plethora of activities to offer
- A market to leverage and not compete with
- Promote Rutherford County as a hub for activities both in the Asheville area and other surrounding destinations

Henderson County

- County Tourism Brand: Discover Historic Hendersonville, North Carolina
- Cyclists in particular who are spending more on equipment
- People who participate in athletic events
- Can order or download a “vacation planner”
- Relocation packet available for purchase
- Outdated website

Polk County

- County Tourism Brand: First Peak of the Blue Ridge – Historic Saluda, Tryon and Columbus, NC
- Limited online travel guide (only seven pages)
- Suggested itineraries online
- Interactive map online
- Limited operating budget, but expected to increase with future equestrian center hotel development

Burke County

- County Tourism Brand: Discover Burke County, Morganton, NC: Nature’s Playground
- Mixed messaging of Burke County and Morganton, NC
- Promote the Morganton Trail Guide
- Cross promotes with assets in nearby counties
- Recently installed new wayfinding signage

Watauga County: Boone & Blowing Rock (2 TDAs)

- County Tourism Brand: Explore Boone, NC
- Year-round adventure
- Similar market as Lake Lure area
- Blue Ridge Parkway and Appalachian State University

MARKETING PLAN

Campaign and strategies for FY2016-2017 based on survey results and market analysis listed above

New Brand Campaign

In response to the visitor research compiled and the county's famous history as the backdrop of the film "Dirty Dancing," a new brand campaign was built with this movie history as the inspiration. The Dirty Dancing Facebook page has a fan base of over 17 million Likes and continues to grow so it is evident that there is an untapped market we can leverage.

The new brand campaign will invite Visitors to the area will be invited to "Have the Time of Your Life in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills".

Stakeholders can build off of this concept by also branding their destinations with the "Have the Time of Your Life" theme. For example:

- Have the Time of Your Life at Rumbling Bald Resort
- Have the Time of Your Life at KidSenses Children's InterACTIVE Museum
- Have the Time of Your Life on the Cherry Bounce Driving Trail

*Have the
time of your life
this Summer*

with us in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills of Rutherford County, NC

Target Audiences and Markets

Based on market research and demographics collected the following are the top visitors to LL&BRF.

Retirees

- Biggest spending audience, but losing quickly to millennials
- Take longer vacations than millennials

Families

- Focused on kids activities
- Want to get kids outside and away from digital screens

Couples

- Looking for romantic getaways
- Weddings/Honeymoons

Millennials

- Rapidly surpassing Baby Boomers as biggest spenders on travel
- Most interested in experiences, less interested in “things”
- Receptive to strong photography

Audience Persona Breakdowns

While Rutherford County attracts more than the four audiences listed below, limited marketing and advertising resources require Rutherford County TDA to focus more tightly on audiences that we know are definitely coming to this area and capitalize on them, while using target messages that cater to a wider audience of people in an effort to attract others.

Based on visitor research and recent traffic patterns at the Welcome Center, the following audiences will be directly targeted:

Personas	#1: Retirees Rita & Robert	#2: Carter Couple	#3: Franklin Family	#4: Millennial Melanie & Mike
Age	60s - 70s	40s - 50s	Parents 40s - 50s; Kids middle and high school	20s – 35
Travel Distance	Near and far; by plane, by car; mostly eastern US hemisphere	Varies by state and country	3-6 hours away	Willing to travel anywhere for amazing vacation experiences at affordable value
Travel Interests	Leisure, shopping, walking, hiking, dining, sightseeing, driving tours, historic sites, charming downtowns, theater, tours, itineraries	Looking for leisurely getaways, hiking, walking, on the water; itineraries; things to do, but also ways to relax; scenic outdoors	Things to do with kids and possibly grandparents tagging along; convenient lodging options; affordable value	Looking for unique experiences that are one-of-a-kind; outdoor adventures; discoverable adventures; great photo opportunities; experiences not things
Income Level	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	\$\$-\$\$\$\$	\$\$-\$\$\$ (beginning to outspend Baby Boomers)
Length of Stay	5-10 days	7-10 days	4-5 days	3-4 days
Travel Planning Resources	TripAdvisor; Mostly online and but also print, regional magazines and newspapers; Facebook; Pinterest; will order travel guides from places of interest	Print publications; Facebook; destination websites; travel planning websites;	Internet; Facebook; Pinterest; Instagram; TripAdvisor; TDA website; travel websites and blogs	Word of mouth; friends and family; online travel resources; Trip Advisor; Yelp; Google; social media
How to Reach	Facebook Boosts; media articles; Our State Magazine; Blue Ridge Country	Travel magazines; travel guides; email marketing; sweepstakes	Family media and blogs; online travel websites; Pinterest & Facebook; Blue Ridge Country, Blue Ridge Outdoors, Our State Magazine	Digital – travel planning websites; social media like Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat

Internal Audience

- RCTDA Stakeholders, Residents, and Governmental Officials of Rutherford County
- Meetings and Events – quarterly coffee meetings in different municipalities and an annual stakeholder event for end of year recap/updates and informative/educational sessions; additional meetings if circumstances dictate it
- Facebook – continue using Facebook to post announcements and updates on a more real-time basis
- Build stakeholder-reporting to TDA of openings and closings
- E-Newsletter – continue monthly e-newsletter to stakeholders and incorporate new graphic reporting system to showcase ongoing growth/loss in occupancy, media placements, welcome center visitor traffic, social media/website insights, etc.

Target Markets

Based on the audience personas created above and past visitor research and activity combined with available resources, the following cities will be targeted in this marketing plan:

- Raleigh, NC
- Greensboro, NC
- Regional Carolina: WNC, Charlotte and SC Upstate
- Columbia & Charleston, SC
- Knoxville, TN
- Atlanta, GA
- Cincinnati, OH

Messaging and Campaigns

There are several different channels for promoting our messaging and campaigns, however the strategy across all marketing channels is as follows:

- Experience over things
- Incorporate more Tips, Lists, Real People Experiences and Testimonials
- Implement more video content, as well as more dynamic photo content; use people within the community to create authentic video content
- Attach stories to photos/videos – collect and produce photos and videos to accompany each piece of content
- Show people through videos and photos how they can have the time of your life
- Use the website as the “Content Hub” for all messaging, campaigns, information that will be disseminated across all the marketing channels including press releases, social media, advertisements, etc.
- Choose social media outlets by determining which are most widely used for travel and vacation planning, for entertainment sources, weddings, group tours, etc.

Types of Content

The following topics are suggested ideas for general and seasonal stories.

GENERAL

- **Have the Time of Your Life in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills**
 - 50 Ways to Have the TOYL in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills

FALL

- **Have the Time of Your Life this Fall Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills**
 - Fall color driving tours (all existing)
 - Different ways to see fall color
 - Main Streets feature

HOLIDAY

- **Have the Time of Your Life this Christmas in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills**
 - Hometown Holidays general – Santa house, hayrides, carriage rides, Christmas Carol characters, million+ lights
 - How to see more than a million lights this Christmas
 - Christmas traditions in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills
 - Santa on the Rock
 - Painted and live windows in Rutherfordton
 - Street parades in Spindale, Rutherfordton and Forest City
 - Holiday Gift Guide

WINTER

- Faces Behind the Places features
- Romantic Focus – weddings, engagement, Valentine’s, etc.
- Valentine’s Day Gift Guide
- Continued push of driving tours, plus introduce Barn Quilt Trail and Murals Trail

SPRING

- **Have the time of Your Life and Unplug this Spring in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills**
 - Continue using outdoor adventure clips
 - Shopping/dining clips of downtowns
 - Relaxing in rocking chairs, scenic views, walking and hiking
 - Hike, bike, paddle or stroll
 - Have the Time of Your Life this Spring Break in Western NC
 - Have the Time of Your Life at These 5 Spring Events in Western NC (Spring events – MayFest, LL Arts & Crafts, SpringGo, Music at the Mills, Lure of the Dragons)
 - 7 Picture Perfect Picnic Places / 7 Picturesque Places to Picnic in western North Carolina
 - 5 Spring Music Series in the Blue Ridge Foothills (FUNC, Music on Main, The Gathering Place, Music at the Mills, Beats Burgers & Brews)

SUMMER

- **Have the Time of Your Life this Summer in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills**
 - Summer adventure water sports
 - Summer festivals
 - Family fun
 - Chimney Rock at CRSP
 - Have the TOYL with a Dirty Dancing Tour of Lake Lure (self guided)
 - # Campgrounds to Visit in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills
 - 20 Free Things to do in Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills
 - 10 Ways for Kids to Cool Off in the Blue Ridge Foothills
 - Live music scene throughout county
 - Equestrian at TIEC

Marketing Strategies

The following marketing strategies will be implemented to achieve our goals:

External Audience:

MARKETING

- Travel Guide
 - Continue print and online version
 - Use more affordable paper and print exponentially higher quantity to distribute to merchants in the county and to welcome centers in the state/region
 - Work beginning of fiscal year and plan for a January 2016 release of new versions of both
 - Collect and take new photography
 - Recycle some content; build some new content and add sections that were omitted last year due to budget restraints
 - Add more detail to maps
 - Sell advertising space (TBD)
- Visitor e-newsletters
- Photography – get new photos to populate marketing materials
- Partnerships
 - Determine ways to maximize marketing dollars by partnership with stakeholders
 - Packages

DESIGN

- Improve consistency of branding throughout all media
- Create a set of images based on marketing campaigns to be streamlined across all materials (ie: social media banners, e-newsletter headers, website banners, etc.)

WEBSITE

- Rebuild a user-friendly, mobile-optimized website and rapidly upgrade content management system and website design; possibly start at end of FY15-16 and continue through FY16-17 to split expenses
- Include ability to measure traffic on outbound links to partners
- Create more interactive components to drive visitor engagement
- Showcase a more balanced presentation of towns located within “Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills”
- Add more detailed content to describe sections, municipalities, more area info
- Currently, the website is more search data than compelling info
- Add more blog, SEO-driven content
- Ability for visitors to gain real-time and mobile information regarding lodging and restaurant openings, closings and vacancies
- More itineraries
- Landing page for each town that features content and contact details; give each custom URL of www.VisitTownNameNC.com that redirects to a landing page on new RCTDA website to use in targeted marketing and on VIN info stand signage to both track website hits from those signs and to keep consistent branding
- Incorporate the VisitNC event widget to improve the quality and audience reach of our online event posts

See Appendix: “Website Marketing Plan” for complete details

PRINT/ONLINE ADVERTISING

- Work with stakeholders to offer more, strong TDA ad co-ops
- Place ads in more affordable regional media outlets
- Suggested media include:
 - TIEC Prize Books
 - WEF Prize Book
 - Blue Ridge Outdoors
 - Our State Magazine
 - Blue Ridge Mountain Host media partnerships with Raleigh News & Observer, Atlanta Journal Constitution, and Creative Loafing Magazine
 - Blue Ridge Parkway Guides
 - Other key area guides
 - Travel websites – ie: TripAdvisor
 - Living Social/Groupon
 - VisitNC Co-ops
- Design ads to reflect travel guide
- Advertorial content generated in part by local residents and stakeholder story-telling
- Facebook Boosts – for more targeted campaign awareness
- Find ways to maximize print/online ad exposure – how many ads will we need to make positive/effective impressions on readers
 - Build blog and social media messages to post when ad runs
 - Feature Welcome Center programs and/or scavenger hunt that relates to ad to bring more attention to it
 - Drive people to website by including a sweepstakes in the ad
 - Example:
 - Do ad about outdoor adventure on the water
 - Create travel package or sweepstakes to win a pontoon boat tour on Lake Lure
 - Draft compelling blog about pontoon boat tour on Lake Lure for website and media outreach
 - Buy Google AdWords to match
 - Create landing page on website that sweepstakes in ad links to and have people answer 1-3 questions to enter sweepstakes (which gives us visitor data)
 - Do one per season or per campaign

See Appendix: “Advertising Plan” for complete details

VIDEO PRODUCTION/PHOTOGRAPHY

- Invest more funds into video production
- Vlogs – video blogs
- Promo video(s) – at least one video to cover “Scenic Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills of Rutherford County, NC” - from the Hickory Nut Gorge to the Cherry Bounce Trail, we are scenic Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills. Welcome to Rutherford County, NC.
- Get more video footage of visitor testimonials

WELCOME CENTER VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

- Welcome Center Pergola Programs (Saturday events that highlight experiences around the county)
- Instagram Frame
- Continue Scavenger Hunts
 - Create 3-4 different scavenger hunts where visitors have to go around the county to answer questions; visitors can bring the completed hunt sheet back to The Welcome Center for a small prize (ie: Dirty Dancing Festival backpack, koozie, etc.); activity will give visitors a reason to explore the county in a fun way

Public Relations

The following public relations strategies will be implemented to build stronger relationships with media and visitors through more meaningful engagement and richer stories about our area through:

- Custom pitching regional, national and niche media as it relates to target markets and audiences
- Compelling content for press releases, blogs, etc. that will be used across multiple channels of communication
- Continued employment of media tours, which have proven very successful for garnering media coverage
- Attendance at VisitNC state-led media missions, which gives us in-person exposure to regional/national media contacts
- Increased communication with stakeholders to keep them aware of TDA and visitor information, updates, news and activity

Frequency

- Press Releases – at least one per quarter with regular custom pitching and additional seasonal events release

Social Media

More and more people are looking to social media for suggestions on where to go and what to do. They follow their friends, bloggers, travel magazines and more just waiting for a picture, video, or event to catch their attention. This makes it absolutely necessary to make sure LL&BRF is visible and active on several social media platforms. A separate, comprehensive social media plan has been developed to support and promote each campaign. Refer to

Appendix: "Social Media Plan" for complete details.

Measurements

Campaign effectiveness will be measured by tracking:

- Press Releases
- Website traffic (beyond Home page)
 - Measure activity on URLs used for advertisements, campaigns, press releases, blogs, event links, etc.
- Online travel guide activity
- Social media engagement (not just increase in "Likes," but comments, shares and messages)
- Occupancy tax growth
- Lodging sales following major events to see if events drive overnight stays

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- Collecting visitor feedback cards from key destinations around the county and online
 - Including a visitor feedback card in the next version of the RCTDA Travel Guide
 - Incorporating new measurement system for media impressions to give higher weight to featured placements versus mentions
 - Number of media tours led
 - Traffic at welcome center
 - Number of mailed travel guides
 - Growth in subscriptions to visitor e-newsletter (and stakeholder e-newsletter)
 - Number of visitors participating in scavenger hunts
 - Survey data collected from sweepstakes participants