

Pennsylvania Tourism Partnership Making Great Progress

By Rob Fulton, President, Pennsylvania Association of Travel and Tourism

The Pennsylvania Tourism Partnership's (PTP) mission is consistent and inspirational branding supported by data-driven marketing communications to attract visitors to the commonwealth. The PTP will be presenting at the annual Travel and Tourism Summit, hosted by the Pennsylvania Association of Travel and Tourism (PATT), May 4–6, at the Harrisburg Hilton.

This is an exciting and high-anticipated event for Pennsylvania's tourism industry. After many years of the tourism industry exploring opportunities for collaboration on branding and marketing tourism, Pennsylvania is making history. The result of two years of meaningful dialogue and increasing momentum toward a structure that enables the public and private sectors to collectively drive the future of Pennsylvania's travel and tourism marketing efforts, the PTP emerged in the fall of 2013. This partnership signals a renewed interest between the public and private sectors toward an integrated approach to tourism marketing.

Representing the tourism industry, the Pennsylvania Association of Travel and Tourism (PATT) played an instrumental role in the collaborative effort that led to the PTP. This is an industry driven initiative that we have been talking about for more than 20 years. The industry will continue to work closely with the governor's office, the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) and Team Pennsylvania Foundation (Team PA), which is incubating the partnership under its 501(c)3 charter. PATT continues to take the lead in working with the current administration and legislature toward a sustainable funding model that delivers meaningful reinvestment in an industry that generates more than \$4 billion in state and local tax revenue.

During the Tourism Summit last May, the PTP introduced a 17-person steering committee, comprised of business and industry professionals, representatives from key government agencies and industry-related organizations throughout the commonwealth. One of the steering committee's initial priorities was to raise the necessary public and private funds for brand development and a strategic marketing communications plan. The committee accomplished this in less than six months, raising \$1 million. After completing a thorough RFP and selection process, the steering committee chose a contractor last fall to assist with a brand and marketing communications plan for Pennsylvania tourism.

Red House Communications and the PTP began work immediately and in earnest, with a goal of delivering a research-driven brand concept at this year's industry summit. Red House and the PTP Steering Committee worked closely to develop the following objectives for the branding initiative:

1) develop a dynamic, inspirational and authentic brand that motivates internal and external audiences to action, 2) energize stakeholders and provide tools to help them promote their destinations and 3) create a marketing plan that protects the volume of in-state tourism while driving more overnight tourism (in-state and out-of-state).

The discovery phase of the project quickly followed, and included:

- Initial interviews with the PTP Steering Committee.
- An online survey, answered by 510 total respondents from the tourism industry across all regions of Pennsylvania. The survey measured perceptions of current tourism assets and utilization of the Pennsylvania tourism product.
- Ten regional meetings held across Pennsylvania, where stakeholders within the tourism industry were able to voice their views on PA tourism—both present and future.
- An online survey of 900 consumers in key tourism markets, including in-state and out-of-state respondents from OH, WV, VA, DC, MD, DE, NJ, NY and New England. This consumer survey measured both perceptions of Pennsylvania as a tourist destination as well as actual behavior.
- Secondary research and tourism trends analysis, and a comprehensive communications audit of all 49 states' tourism branding and marketing efforts.

The synthesized data collected over several months was used to formulate the Pennsylvania brand strategy. This strategy clearly defined how the commonwealth can be uniquely and effectively positioned. The brand platform and strategy were delivered to the PTP Steering Committee in early April and then tested among consumers. This is all leading to an exciting discussion at the Tourism Summit in May.

Tourism is a competitive business. Pennsylvania is competing with other states throughout the country, some of which are investing considerable resources in brand awareness and state-wide marketing. We also compete with international markets for meetings, conventions, sporting events and visitors. A compelling, consistent and authentic brand, supported by marketing communications strategies and meaningful resources, will motivate more visitors to discover what we in the industry already know – that Pennsylvania has one of the richest collections of tourism product of any state in the nation. Finally, if we are successful, Pennsylvania tourism will re-energize as an industry and deliver an even stronger return on investment for our visitors and residents. ■

A compelling, consistent and authentic brand, supported by marketing communications strategies and meaningful resources, will motivate more visitors to discover what we in the industry already know – that Pennsylvania has one of the richest collections of tourism product of any state in the nation.