

TEXECUTIVE MONTHLY

The Chamber's Role in Tourism

By Page Michel, IOM, Brenham/Washington County Chamber & CVB

Every Chamber of Commerce is also a Destination Marketing Organization. You may be in a city that has a Convention & Visitors Bureau that operates separately, or tourism marketing may be handled at City Hall, but if your Chamber is promoting your community and your efforts help to attract visitors/consumers, you also play an important role in your local tourism industry.

The Chamber receives endless inquiries via email, phone and social media and responds to every question about where to eat, shop, hold meetings/events, stay overnight, etc. The Chamber is always "selling" the community and its businesses. A CVB also "sells" the community. The two organizations are in sync.

Partnerships between Chambers and CVBs (city tourism departments) are a good match that can create synergies and savings for both entities, so more time and funds can be put into marketing and recruiting visitors. Work in tandem with your city's tourism professionals for maximum results.

The Chamber's mission is to create a positive economic impact for its community. The CVB's mission is to attract visitors to stay in hotels and spend dollars dining and shopping. Though separate, these two missions merge successfully, and a Chamber should be eligible to receive Hotel Occupancy Tax (H.O.T.) dollars for effective activities that lure visitors to the area. This can be a strategic way to accomplish more to generate an impact for your local businesses, for your members, as long as the Chamber is careful to avoid a few pitfalls.

1 - Not being completely transparent in all marketing with H.O.T. dollars.

If you receive any H.O.T. funds for events or marketing activities, you must keep them in separate account. Do not just add a line item to your Chamber budget and track them there. There should be no comingling of Chamber funds with tax dollars. It should be a clear trail to see what income you received from H.O.T. dollars and what activities were funded by them. If you receive any hotel occupancy tax dollars that you put toward Chamber personnel, only their time on tourism-related activities should be funded.

2. Not measuring the R.O.I. of the H.O.T. funds you receive.

From the start, you should build in ways to track and measure the effectiveness of your H.O.T. funded expenditures. In ads and on flyers, you can include unique toll-free numbers so you can measure the calls they generate. Online you can track clicks, likes and shares and depending on your technology, the geography of your online visitors and their time spent on certain web pages. At the end of each fiscal year, you should compile all the data and see what activities had the most impact. If you want to continue to receive H.O.T. dollars, drop activities that show meager results and increase the ones that generate good results.

CHAMBER

TEXECUTIVE MONTHLY

3. Not having visitor-friendly info online.

You will want to have separate social media channels (@ChamberName and @VisitMyTown) and probably also websites (at least build a microsite within your Chamber site) to push visitor-luring promotions and info. Visitors who are seeking leisure info will not engage with events calendars that are clogged with listings for club meetings, ribbon cuttings and fundraisers. Your online calendar and “what to see & do” pages are key features for luring visitors, so have areas that are geared toward their interests specifically.

The success rate of “selling” your city improves the more organizations are working together in the same direction. Partnering is essential and consistent messaging is crucial. Your local businesses will benefit. Your members will thank you.

#