

Unincorporated Area, San Luis Obispo County

Tourism Business Improvement District (CBID) BID Marketing Plan

Strategic Marketing Plan for the San Luis Obispo County
Tourism Business Improvement District

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Unincorporated Area of San Luis Obispo County Tourism Vision

To develop and implement tourism programs that take into consideration the interests and needs of current and potential visitors, local tourism related businesses and local governments, with respect for the environment and the values of the community.

Overall Strategic Goals

The strategic goals are based on the interconnection of the economy, the environment and consumers. The achievement of each of these goals will create a balanced and sustainable approach for tourism promotion.

1. Economic

Effectively promote tourism in a way that optimizes recreation, agriculture and history; and contributes to increased occupancy, overall economic prosperity, increased employment and for the unincorporated area of the county while working to support the rural small town attributes.

2. Consumer

To attract visitors through the development of a unincorporated area of San Luis Obispo County brand and education by specifically developing an appreciation of the scenic qualities, geography, history, recreation, attractions and ambiance, *i.e.*, the key benefits and attributes the unincorporated areas of the county and region offers.

3. Environment and Natural Resources

To protect and preserve the aesthetic, historical, agricultural and cultural foundations of San Luis Obispo County.

Objectives

1. Build and strengthen the unincorporated area of San Luis Obispo County brand by positioning the destination as truly unique and different from its competitive set.
2. Increase overall occupancy for CBID members.
3. Target improved occupancy for shoulder and winter season by increasing new visitor and repeat visitors from target market/segments utilizing a mix of elements including special events, advertising, promotions etc.
4. Work with other areas of the county to develop county wide participation and financial support for the San Luis Obispo County Visitors and Conference Bureau.



Core Strategy

In order to achieve its stated goals and to develop a sustainable tourism marketing program, the CBID must successfully position and differentiate the destination, optimize technology and focus on a multi level integrated approach.

1. Create “Rural San Luis” Destination

The core of the CBID strategy is to take the elements of the unincorporated parts of the county and to create a destination called “Rural San Luis”. This new destination positioning includes all the unincorporated areas of the county and assembles them under the umbrella brand of “Rural San Luis”. It is this brand that can serve as an area within the county much in the same way that Pismo Beach, the City of San Luis Obispo as well as others are featured. By bringing all the elements of the unincorporated area together it creates the critical mass of a travel destination and a focal point for consumers to consider visiting.

2. Brand Development.

Given the creation of “Rural San Luis” (place holder name until final brand is developed) and in an effort to establish the destination it is critical for the CBID to successfully brand and differentiate the destination.

- Encompassing the unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo County, “Rural San Luis” needs to create a brand identity that will help to increase awareness of the area among its identified target market segments. A brand is the way in which consumers perceive or distinguish a destination. To be effective, a brand should unify all of the destination’s functional (recreation and events) and emotional benefits (fun, culture and solitude) under one all-inclusive identity (image and positioning statement) to create an indelible impression in the mind of the consumer.
- Part of successfully building the “Rural San Luis” brand is to clearly differentiate the destination from the competition and make it relevant in the mind of consumers. “Rural San Luis” should differentiate its offerings from the competition through an emphasis of its key attributes, translating them into believable and meaningful benefits for its new and repeat target market segments.

3. Sustainable Tourism

A third critical component of the tourism marketing strategy is an emphasis on sustainability. Sustainable tourism is generally defined as tourism activities that create a net benefit for the economic, social, cultural and natural environments of a destination.¹

4. Utilize the Internet and technology to the fullest.

One of the most efficient and effective marketing distribution channels for destinations to reach travelers is the Internet. With over 80% of all travel planning taking place on the Internet, it is imperative that the CBID start its marketing efforts with a comprehensive measureable online marketing program.

5. Multi Level Approach

Currently the CBID has the opportunity to think of its marketing efforts in a multi pronged approach

¹ The World Tourism Organization

designed to maximize “Rural San Luis”. This includes working at the local community level and the “Rural San Luis” level which includes the Unincorporated area of San Luis Obispo County and the San Luis Obispo County Visitors and Conference Bureau.

Implementation Action Steps

- **Building a Brand** - Clearly, one of the biggest challenges facing the CBID effort is the lack of perception by consumers to view the Unincorporated area as a distinct destination within San Luis Obispo County. This being the case, it is important that any and all efforts have a unifying theme to build the “Rural San Luis” brand.
- **Website Development/Online Marketing** - With the majority of travelers using the Internet for vacation planning and with limited marketing funds, it is critical that the CBID build a new website that encompasses the entire Unincorporated area of the county. A unified, all inclusive portal website representing the entire unincorporated area and the “Rural San Luis” brand will assist potential visitors with information gathering and vacation planning.
- **Sustainable Tourism Platform** - As was identified in the marketing plan, the development of a sustainable approach to tourism within the Unincorporated area is key strategy element that serves to benefit the environment, the economy and the local community. Given the natural backdrop, the rural nature, availability of outdoor recreation and smaller scale of tourism development in the Unincorporated areas, a sustainable tourism approach would be a significant approach to tourism.
- **Public Relations** - Public relations is an equally important component within the marketing mix for helping to build the “Rural San Luis” brand, educate potential visitors about the diversity of the region and assist with visitor planning information. Similar to advertising activities, public relations efforts should promote the Unincorporated area of the county in a unified format representing all of its areas and related activities. Efforts should be designed to motivate potential visitors to visit the new “Rural San Luis” website and ultimately to visit the area.
- **Product/Experience Development** - Given the structure of the CBID, which requires that half the funds collected be used by regions within the collection area for tourism development/infrastructure purposes, “Rural San Luis” has an excellent opportunity to develop product/experience investments that can help effectively differentiate this region to potential visitors to the area. Additionally, these follow of funds correctly used can allow for ongoing product/experience improvements that will serve to benefit the competitiveness of the region over the medium and long term.
- **Visitor Information** - Visitor information consists of two primary components. The first is information that is used to attract potential visitors to “Rural San Luis”. The second component is information used to assist visitors once they arrive. Both information components are critical in defining the visitor experience, and have the potential to impact both first-time and repeat visitations.
- **Research & Measurement** - One of the most significant needs for a tourism promotion is one definitive source for all-inclusive, area research data in order to base decisions and strategies. In addition to developing area-wide perspective based on quantifiable data, research is necessary to determine if the newly created “Rural San Luis” branding and marketing strategies are achieving the identified long-term goals and objectives.



The Strategic Marketing Group

SMG is a marketing advisory firm specializing in providing marketing research, strategic planning and strategy development services for the travel, tourism and recreation industries.

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