

VISIT WINSTON-SALEM



2018-2019 Sales & Marketing Plan



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When we created “Thought You Knew Us, Meet the New Us” to promote the “reinvented” Benton Convention Center and our vibrant downtown, we knew we had a winning campaign brand.

Little did we realize, this campaign slogan could easily sum up the marketing mantra for Visit Winston-Salem’s next-level marketing and sales plan for 2018-19 and set the strategic stage for several years ahead.

Much like an aspiring sports athlete or an avid video gamer, leveling up in strategic destination marketing happens only when you’ve achieved successful milestones and goals. At its core, it is a process and a series of deliberate strides. So, as we review the results of past efforts, we also learn important next steps to propel us forward.

This year’s look-back for us naturally begins with completion of the Benton Convention Center reinvention. Like the start gun at the beginning of a race, the opening of the reinvented Benton bolted the Convention Sales team straight out of the blocks. In July, the Benton hosted more than 400 delegates attending the 62nd Annual Association Executives of North Carolina (AENC) meeting. Immediately on the heels of AENC, we ushered in the Meeting Planners International-Carolinas Chapter July meeting.



As both member organizations are a prime source of bookings for Winston-Salem, the timing of hosting the industry gatherings was the perfect way to start showcasing the new Benton to key customers.

For the first time in a decade, Winston-Salem was honored to host the prestigious Visit NC 365 conference this past March. More than 500 tourism industry colleagues from throughout the state gathered at the Benton and Twin City Quarter. Receiving the accolade that “Winston-Salem hit it out of the park” from Wit Tuttell, executive director of Visit NC, was affirmation that the city is solidly establishing its footing as a vibrant convention destination.

In addition to the boots-on-the-ground sales efforts, the integrated “Thought You Knew Us, Meet the New Us” advertising campaign hit full throttle. The campaign included a series of customized direct mailers and companion e-mails – most embedded with edgy video. Each execution blanketed the mailboxes and monitors of current and prospective clients highlighting the reinvented building’s innovative art, historic architectural nods and its walkable downtown location. An aggressive deployment of print and digital advertising filled national, regional, and state meeting and convention trade publications and websites.

Successful traction of this all-out sales and marketing campaign is evidenced in the convention sales team surpassing sales goals including customer site visits, room night bookings and overall economic revenue estimates. Building on this inertia is the key to, and yet the challenge of, our future sales success.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

With increased hotel room supply in the Winston-Salem market and heightened competition from other convention cities within the state and regionally, Visit Winston-Salem's sales and marketing efforts are also locked on securing a more diversified base of group business including biotech and medical meetings, corporate, faith-based and group tour bookings. To pique the awareness of this more diverse group we are broadening the incentive offerings in the Wake-up Rewards program. Expanding the program, initially built on meeting incentives for Benton-only business, highlights more of Winston-Salem's meeting hotels and venues and more boldly promotes Winston-Salem's arts, culture, historic and culinary attributes.

Supplementing lead generation across all group sales segments, the hometown referral campaign "Bring Your Meetings Home," introduced last fall, takes a bolder role in the community conversations. A consistent deployment of local advertisements via print, radio, billboard, social media, promotions and direct mailers to Forsyth County residents aims to inform locals about the economic importance of bringing their meetings home and motivate them to refer leads to the Visit Winston-Salem sales team. We will continue exploring grassroots marketing partnerships by working with local companies and community partners such as the Winston-Salem Chamber and Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, and leveraging our advertising partnership with Our State Magazine to further zero in on Hometown Referral messaging.

In the sports sales world, "new," "upgraded" and "renovated" facilities reign supreme in being competitive in the world of hosting competitions. Venues like BB&T Ballpark and JDL FastTrack are just a couple of poignant examples.

And the Wake Forest Tennis Complex enabled Winston-Salem to secure the NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Tennis Championship just hosted here May 17-28. The event produced more than 2,500 hotel rooms nights, generating more than \$1.5 million in estimated economic impact for Winston-Salem.

Without question, BB&T Sports Park's addition of four new turf fields to its already impressive soccer complex is opening doors and igniting new conversations with a greater number of potential clients, most notably, lacrosse and field hockey tournaments and events.

Perhaps one of the biggest potential game changers on Winston-Salem's sports horizon is the proposed Carolina Athletic Performance (CAP), a 120,000-square-foot indoor, multi-sport complex slated to break ground on 22 acres adjacent to BB&T Sports Park this year. Unlike any other facility in size and scope of offerings in the region, CAP has the potential to give Winston-Salem an ideal opportunity to host a broader range of sporting events and tournaments. CAP's sharp focus on athletic conditioning, training and sports injury rehabilitation may also highlight the caliber of the venue to attract fitness media/bloggers, as well as sports medicine and fitness training-related meetings and conference planners.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

Crossing from sales to the public relations side, the Visit Winston-Salem PR team is set to host sportswriters this June to coincide with the National Sports Media Association weekend. The journalists, representing a variety of national sports trades, will spend three days touring sports venues gathering feature article ideas about our burgeoning sports destination. The tour is the second in a series of sports-related media familiarizations executed within the last year. The first series launched hosting five fitness bloggers last December and was centered around Winston-Salem's Mistletoe Run and our family-friendly holiday celebrations at Old Salem, Reynolda House and Downtown Winston-Salem.

For the first time, Winston-Salem is hosting S.P.O.R.T.S. The Relationship Conference September 10-13. Winston-Salem will host approximately 100 sports event organizers from around the U.S. and showcase Winston-Salem's premier sports venues. Visit Winston-Salem's PR staff will host sports media from the staff of Covey Communications, producer of this prestigious industry trade show.

As research sets our strategic compass, Visit Winston-Salem's marketing team is spearheading a multi-faceted flight of research to evaluate the strength and staying power of the current brand strategy across all market segments. After more than seven years of strong performance and traction gained using the "Your Southern Wake-up Call" platform, it is wise to now test the strength of audience awareness and perception of Winston-Salem as a place to visit, meet, and compete.



This feedback, along with a concentrated study of our current website analytics, will also assist in a corresponding rebuild of VisitWinstonSalem.com. While the current site has played a key, functional role for six years, technological advances and the need for new online marketing tools dictate a major digital reboot. Like many products and most destinations, the website experience is the opening salvo whether that be for a meeting planner considering the Benton for their next convention or a restless millennial searching for the perfect girlfriend getaway.

Sound architectural and forward-thinking framework will result in a bold mobile-forward site that produces seamless navigation, integrated searchable content, and an entertaining site full of helpful information and intriguing itinerary ideas.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

Consumers and clients alike are moving faster to keep pace with the world perhaps confirming the adage, “a picture (now video) is worth a thousand words.” While an old one, it is perhaps more relevant now than ever. To assist in more efficiently “selling” Winston-Salem, our new website design will incorporate a combination of 360° and virtual reality imagery to immerse the website visitor in the destination and its personality. Research shows an average of 15 percent of website visitors travel to the destination after engaging on the site with a 360° view or virtual tour first.



To Assist in continuing to build awareness and drive website visitors, we will continue to run a saturated series of digital and print advertising in a select collection of publications including Garden & Gun, The Local Palate and Our State Magazine. We will expand our already aggressive outreach to host bloggers and digital influencers. And we'll continue an aggressive series of story & stay articles “penned” by guests bloggers and contributors to boost the editorial content and circulation of seasonal e-newsletters and hotel package e-blasts.



Since 2010, Visit Winston-Salem has contracted with an advertising agency to work with our in-house marketing and sales staff to establish and implement a brand strategy including print, web, direct mail and email campaigns. After more than seven years of increasing visitor, convention and sports business for Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, we reassessed the relationship with our advertising and web design agency and issued a request for proposal to more than 100 advertising and web development agencies located throughout North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. After a thorough search, we will partner with a new fully-integrated advertising, website design and digital development agency to bring Winston-Salem to the next level as a premier leisure, sports and meetings destination for the 2018-2019 fiscal year and beyond.