

Communications

Like all heritage areas celebrating regions heretofore unappreciated as tourism destinations, the National Coal Heritage Area faces several marketing challenges. Fortunately, the state of West Virginia has long understood how tourism can generate economic benefits and works hard to ensure that the traveling public considers all the “wild and wonderful” things to see and do when making destination decisions. Nonetheless, conveying the complexity, diversity and relevance of the coal heritage story to visitors from throughout the US and Canada may require overcoming preconceived notions about the industry and West Virginia.



Parts of the heritage area currently benefit from tourism based economic development.

8.1 Publicity & Identity

Generating free publicity will no doubt become a cornerstone of NCHA's marketing efforts. Hosting travel writers and others who enjoy a media forum is a more effective method of spreading the word in a credible low-cost way than self-serving promotion. The NCHA should also assume responsibility for coordinating approaches to marketing the region, including identifying the fact base, strategizing target niches, choosing communications techniques, establishing quantifiable objectives (e.g., calls requesting further information), and developing the media budget. Similarly, NCHA should take charge of managing the region's image and identity. This will be accomplished by establishing a logo and design vocabulary and by creating the color palette that identifies its brand in the marketplace.

8.2 Marketing the NCHA

A marketing plan should encompass all aspects of communication, including advertising, public relations, and publicity to ensure that scarce marketing dollars are wisely used to attract high yield markets using state-of-the-art approaches. Certain partners will play a critical role, such as the established destination centers that have access to markets of their own.

8.3 Tourism

Without an overarching organization, the NCHA's tourism industry devotes resources to marketing that sometimes represents a duplication of effort and creates conflicting messages about the benefits of visitation. As part of its marketing responsibility, the NCHA needs to identify both the market niches that have affinity for the region's more specialized story as well as how to extend the invitation to already captured markets. The NCHA must determine how to take advantage of the "snowbird" through-traffic and of existing attractions like the various state parks to convey the message that the coal heritage story merits visitors' attention, time and money.



8.4 The Role of the Internet

The Internet influences tourism marketing almost daily. Most of the tourism industry lags behind, unable to make the ongoing investments in e-marketing necessary to stay competitive. The NCHA could benefit

from such tools as database marketing, data mining, and on-line reservation systems except that many of the partner organizations lack the equipment required to participate. NCHA will need to help its partners catch up and stay apprised of these developments to avoid wasting money on e-fads that become outmoded virtually overnight.



The internet brings the coal heritage story to a national and international audience. WVT

8.5 Industry Associations

NCHA can work with private sector partners as well and an efficient way to form relationships is to participate in the various industry associations. Association activities generally include legislative relations, training and education for members, and networking. Many already have or are currently developing a website, which could link to the NCHA website. Each has specialized interests that are industry-specific. Industry associations include organizations devoted to lodging, restaurants, campgrounds, motor coach tours, bed & breakfasts, golf courses, and retailing.

