

Alaska Highway 60th Anniversary Celebrations

Tourism Marketing Strategy

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Background

On March 9, 1992 at a commencement ceremony in Dawson Creek, BC, Leslie Nielsen et al launched a year-long celebration marking the 50th anniversary of the construction of the Alaska Highway. The celebration was the collaborative effort of multiple agencies that endeavoured to “influence an increase in tourism in the region, and to expand the national and international awareness of north eastern BC for the purposes of economic development.” An International Joint Committee was formed to coordinate efforts on both sides of the border, and through various collaborative efforts, a series of celebratory events were held throughout the year.

Having realised some of the intended benefits from the 1992 initiative, the tourism opportunity operators and regional governments represented by the Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association (NRAHTA), have expressed their collective desire to take advantage of the “round-number” anniversary opportunity in 2002 – the Alaska Highway’s 60th Anniversary. While a preliminary meeting in September of 2000 identified a number of potential events to accompany such a celebration, no further actions have been taken to move the initiative forward. NRAHTA now stands before a significant policy decision in terms of its operational mandate – the shift from serving solely as a marketing and promotional body, to becoming a developer and coordinator of product. The strategy outlined herein was formulated from the perspective of NRAHTA having taken on the latter role.

In developing this strategy, it is recognised that the BC portion of the Alaska Highway historically, presently, and in the foreseeable future, represents a conduit for traffic destined for Alaska.

Purpose

The purpose of this strategic plan is to provide the Northern Rockies Alaska Highway ~~Tourist~~ *Tourism* Association (NRAHTA) with a feasible approach to celebrating the 60th anniversary of the construction of the Alaska Highway. The plan is a comprehensive outline of what is possible in terms of implementation with the limited lead-time that remains. In an effort to be useful as a focusing tool, it must be recognised that a significant number of the initiatives outlined in the plan – though potentially beneficial – will be excluded from implementation as a result of restrictive timelines.

Objectives

In preparing this strategy, we engaged in dialogue with select local stakeholders and reviewed the available record of the last NRAHTA Board of Directors meeting in September 2000. From this we derived the perceived objectives of a coordinated celebration of the 60th anniversary of the construction of the Alaska Highway to be as follows:

- to rekindle the international profile of the highway;
- to enhance the quality of the experience of travellers;
- to provide an opportunity for local community celebration.

After a detailed examination of relevant documentation resulting from the collaboratively organised celebrations of the Alaska Highway's 50th anniversary, taken in the context of NRAHTA's mission – Building business with tourism – we infer the following purpose for the proposed celebration:

To maximise the short- and long-term economic benefits to regional operators of tourism opportunities in the Peace-Liard region.

Derived from this are a number of objectives that are stratified by the level at which their impacts are realised:

Desired short-term benefits

- increased tourist traffic to and passing through the region;
- increased length of stay in the region per party.

Desired long-term benefits

- increased awareness of destination tourism opportunities within the region;
- increased awareness of the region among emerging markets;
- incremental tourism infrastructure investment within the region;
- increased awareness of region by international markets;
- increased international traffic to the region.

Methodology

While this strategic plan builds on the experience from the 50th anniversary, it recognises the evolution of the market over the past ten years, and takes into account the focus-transition that is required to capture successive generations of leisure travellers. Most importantly, it recognizes that this is a tourism strategy responsible for the recognition and marketing of all current opportunities and the development of legacy-type activities.

As no stand-alone, community-based controlling body has been established for the 2002 celebration, the business model on which this plan is based follows a project management structure where NRAHTA is the lead body and other entities deliver specific aspects of the plan. This particular structure allows for a broader, more inclusive theme focus that will maximize the overall potential of this initiative.

Cost estimates are for planning purposes only, and are not binding in any contractual sense.

The plan outlines a reasoned approach to achieving success in the key result areas for the celebration. The overall strategy is to focus first on the areas that have the highest probability of success and that yield the most benefit for the overall project within the present delivery window and resource constraints.

Celebration Year Theme

For an undertaking of this nature, the celebration year theme must be capable of accommodating a number of strategic and organisational considerations:

It must:

- align strategically with the goals of the governing body;
- inspire the celebration;
- be inclusive and accessible;
- be of value to potential sponsors;
- be meaningful, and enticing to the target audience;
- reinforce the experience for the people participating in the celebration.

Strategic alignment with goals of governing body

The success of NRAHTA's transition into its new role as a quasi product development/coordinating/delivery body hinges in part on the success of the undertaking that serves as the backdrop for that transition. Therefore, the theme must be flexible enough to allow for centrally coordinated product development and delivery activities. The proposed theme provides that flexibility.

Inspire the celebration

The theme must be inspirational; it must relate, in a readily recognisable way, the reason for the celebration. The Alaska Highway is a road that brings people together, and the proposed theme recognises the importance of the Alaska Highway to the people of this region. The highway is the people's link to each other, and to the rest of the world, and the proposed theme highlights its importance to the people who live along its length.

Inclusive and accessible

The theme must allow residents, operators, community groups, merchants, politicians and others to participate in the celebration. The proposed theme does this by allowing organizers to paint it onto virtually any event or initiative in a way that brings value to event organizers.

Value to potential sponsors

The theme must serve as a means for sponsors to derive value from their participation – it must allow them to make richer their own promotional efforts, or better yet to construct their own promotional initiative around their involvement. The proposed theme does this for a broad cross-section of potential title sponsors.

Meaningful, and enticing to the target audience

The theme must be understandable to the target audience – those segments of the market that are potential buyers of what this region has to offer.

Reinforce the experience

The theme must reinforce the experience for everyone involved with the celebration. With a selection of initiatives that focus on bringing people together, the theme prevents participants from experiencing conflicting messages that would leave them with negative feelings.

In order to satisfy these requirements we propose the following theme:

ALASKA HIGHWAY 2002

Celebrating 60 Years of Bringing People Together!

Supporting text is also required in order to connect the theme with the events and promotional initiatives that comprise the celebration year. The supporting text is crucial in terms of providing potential sponsors with a means to derive value from their involvement.

- Take the road to adventure... ..(adventure type initiatives)
- Take the road to excitement... ..(carnivals, extreme sport etc.)
- Take the road to friendship... ..(pow-wows, ceremonial unions - Canada & US, cultures within Canada)
- Take the road to tranquility... ..(sightseeing, beautiful peaceful areas that should be seen)
- Take the road back through history..... ..(history of the highway, construction etc..)

The supporting text outlined above provides the rationale for sponsor participation on several levels. First, it provides broad scope for a major title sponsor to buy into the celebration – ICBC's Road Sense campaign is already aligned, and any of the big-three automakers could easily work with the "road" in developing supplementary promotional initiatives. Secondly, it provides scope for the participation of secondary sponsors in a way that makes sense for them – the road to friendship could easily lead to a cappuccino shop or any place where people meet. Third, it allows event organizers and participating community groups to identify with the theme – together, they are taking the road to adventure, excitement, friendship, back through history... ..

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