

Case Study

Abundance of Opportunities Made New Center's Plan Critical, Complex

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FEW NEW CENTERS HAVE OPENED IN THE US OVER THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF. However, bucking the trend is the new Village at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach, FL (www.thevillageatgulfstreampark.com). It is centrally located between two significant visitor markets, Miami and Ft. Lauderdale.

The Village at Gulfstream Park, jointly owned and managed by subsidiaries of Forest City Enterprises, Inc., opened in February, 2010. To ensure the center's success, both an aggressive local marketing program and a comprehensive tourism program were developed and implemented. We will focus on the tourism program and the strategies and tactics used to capitalize on a complex tourism market.

A one-of-a-kind development, The Village at Gulfstream Park is a retail, dining and entertainment complex developed as part of Gulfstream Park Racetrack and Casino. Three years ago, Gulfstream Park added a new three-level clubhouse, expanded their casino and added dining and entertainment venues.

The Village rounds out this offering, adding shopping, additional dining and nightlife to the complex. The entire complex brings to the market a complete sports/gaming/shopping/dining/nightlife destination unlike anything seen before in the US. At the center of the project is Champion's Plaza, where two levels of restaurants, bars and shops overlook the Walking Ring where prized thoroughbred horses are paraded for all to see

before heading to the track — the perfect destination for any visitor to South Florida!

Unique Challenges

The immediate challenge was to identify the tourism market potential. "Since we are between Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, we draw from both markets, which offers us a tremendous opportunity. But we quickly realized that the visitor market to the two cities was somewhat different, making it more difficult to identify and ultimately target the most lucrative visitor markets to South Florida," explained Director of Marketing Jeannie Roberts. With a limited budget it was necessary to determine not only who to target but how.

Anybody who has been reading this column for any length of time knows that the first step was to develop a strategic Tourism Marketing Plan based on research. What made this project a bit different was that research from both Miami-Dade County and Broward County was needed, because the visitor profiles for the two adjacent counties were different.

Developing goals, strategies and tactics was more of a challenge because who do you target when you sit right in the

middle? To understand the two markets better, a comparison chart was made that displayed the visitor profile of the state of Florida in one column, the profile of Miami-Dade County visitor in the next, Broward County the next, and then what the combined two-county market would look like. This identified some interesting statistics, such as that the combined visitor markets were almost 23 million, meaning that 27% of all visitors to Florida go to just the two counties! However, the international markets in Miami-Dade County are much stronger than Broward, further complicating the issue.

Picture Emerges

Twenty-three different demographic and market profile stats were studied between the two counties, as well as for the state, in an attempt to get a clearer picture of the visitor market and the areas that would be most lucrative to target. A few common statistics emerged, such as the fact that the New York area was the strongest non-Florida domestic market and Canada was the



continued on page 4

Marketing Tourism

Continued from page 3

strongest (but not necessarily the most lucrative) international market. For the overseas market, Brazil came out on top, and it is known to be a lucrative market! The chart provided a clear enough picture to begin to determine strengths and weaknesses, develop goals and, ultimately, the strategies and tactics for the property.

Good News/Bad News

Now the challenge became how to get the word out? “We realized that even though we offered a unique destination, we still had to figure out the most economical and efficient way to get our message out, especially with our two-edged sword of being right in the middle of the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale markets. The good news is that we are between two strong visitor markets; the challenge is we are in between two *expensive* media markets, thus it costs twice as much to disseminate our message,” said Roberts.

So where to begin? The first step was to clearly define what The Village and Gulfstream Park were, as there are so many components to the project. Breaking all the many elements down to a clear and

simple message was not easy. The Village itself is defined in most collateral pieces as follows:

The perfect complement to the Casino and thoroughbred racing action at the legendary Gulfstream Park, is the newly-opened Village at Gulfstream Park. A vibrant village with one-of-a-kind fashion boutiques, outdoor cafes, beautiful home furnishings/accessory stores and fabulous dining experiences.

To co-brand the race-track/casino with the The Village the communication became even more of a challenge due to multiple messages. It was important to keep it simple: Bold graphics with simple statements of “Racing * Casino * Shopping * Dining * Nightlife.”

Plus, website listings for both The Village and Gulfstream Park were included as part of the ad and, of course, a call-to-action as an incentive to drive business to the stores and restaurants.

Cultivating Partners

“Prior to opening, one of our goals was to forge ahead and develop partnerships within the hospitality industry and in the travel and tourism world on a global level,” explained Roberts. “Even joining the local CVB was not as straightforward as in most markets as we realized it was important to become members of the Miami CVB, the Ft. Lauderdale CVB, the Sunny Isles Beach Marketing and Tourism Council, The Hollywood Office of Tourism and the newly formed Tourism Committee of Hallandale

Beach. Those are a lot of organizations to be active in, and you get out of them what you put into them. With a successful partnership, they become an extension of your tourism sales force,” she added.

A variety of visitor programs were developed for both FIT and the groups markets. Programs were put into place such as meet-and-greets, VIP gift bags, group dining programs, spouse programs, tours and downloadable shopping vouchers. A Visitor Information section of the website was segmented into two sections, one for the traveling consumer and the other for the travel trade.

A lot of time was spent on developing the fulfillment program. The goal was to develop an incentive program that would drive business to the property, as well as establish a method to measure where the business was coming from and how the visitor found out about The Village.

Attention to Detail

Most shopping and dining venues offer the traditional coupon book or discount folio. It was important that this program be unique. Welcome packets were developed that consist of shopping and dining discounts, a signature logo souvenir, a directory of both the Clubhouse and The Village, information on entertainment and activities, plus a \$25 play card to the Casino. All advertising was tagged with an incentive message for the reader to pick up their packet at Guest Services. Guest Services repre-

continued on page 16



Marketing Tourism

Continued from page 4

sentatives had been through training that explained the fulfillment program, the importance of their role and how to track the individual programs. (Such as the rack card, specific tourism publication, hotel program, etc). A binder with all details was left with them.

The next step was to identify key hotel partners for a tier one effort. They are listed on the website with links and they offer shopping packages with The Village. Tier two of this program will expand the number of hotel partnerships.

Pre-arrival awareness programs included participating in key travel trade shows such as Florida Huddle, Receptive Services Association's Annual Summit, North American Journeys Summit, etc. For International Pow Wow, participation was via a sponsorship with one of our DMO partners, Sunny Isles Beach Marketing and Tourism Council. The event targeted key international tour operators for a major evening function. Also, we partnered with the Council on sales calls in the NY/NJ area prior to opening to start getting the word out to the tour operators.

Exclusive Opportunities

It is important to capitalize on opportunities that are exclusive to the area, such as Ft. Lauderdale being home to the Oasis of the Seas, currently the largest of the cruise ships. Pre/post cruise programs have been developed with hotels and with the Hollywood Office of Tourism, which recently

launched the "City Pass" program exclusive to the passengers on the Oasis.

Travel websites were part of the communication tactics, and partnerships were formed with sites such as vacations2discover.com and destinations2discover.com. The first is a consumer site and the second a trade site. Other sites include the various DMO sites and shopamericavip.com. Social media is, of course, a part of both the local and visitor efforts, with more Facebook fans signing up every day.

Bringing the tourism program down to a local level, the post-arrival programs play an equally important role in developing the market as the pre-arrival programs. Within weeks of opening, The Village hosted the South Florida Concierge Association function with over 250 in attendance. Seven restaurants participated in a fabulous dine-around – to make sure area concierges had the opportunity to experience the entire property.

As an ongoing communications program, constant contact e-blasts are sent. Weekly events are sent to the concierge while updated visitor programs and packages are sent to the travel trade. Since opening, other partnership programs have been established, such as with AAA, Canadian AAA and Visa Signature.

What about future programs? "We will have a merchant tourism training program this fall," explained Roberts. Part of the training will include a package that will tie in not only the shopping and restaurants but the casino as well.

This could very well be one of the few, if not the only, commissionable shopping and gaming packages in Florida. Additionally, major regional hospitality associations such as Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International and Meeting Planners International are considering holding their holiday event at The Village, which will provide widespread exposure in the industry.

We are continuing this series of articles on tourism every other month and would like to focus on some of the more innovative programs. Please submit your programs to me, either via e-mail at Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com, fax (732/545-3138) or mail. If possible, include samples of your graphics. Full credit will be given to the person or team responsible for the program. Visit our new website: www.cjfmakinginternational.com. ■

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