

Visibility and Marketing

Increasing visibility of the region's assets has been a consistent theme throughout this project. Cohesive and collaborative marketing efforts are the key to making the region more visible, both within the state and outside it. Creating a regional identity assists in the development of a broader marketing campaign, determining what message should be communicated, who should receive the messaging, how the messaging should be disseminated, and reinforces those connections. Initial discussions on a marketing campaign began, and ideas were generated. However, the Towns felt that the efforts at the outset should focus on implementation of the plan and that additional work on the campaign should fall into place after this initial work. AdvanceCT looks forward to reengaging the region around this campaign at its convenience. The ideas discussed up to this point have been included, though they are subject to change as part of the final product.

Audience

In addition to determining the region's messaging and strategy for dissemination, audience is another critical piece in a successful marketing campaign. Because of its many tourism-related assets, the region can become a destination for visitors from around the state and, even, around New England. However, because of its high quality of life, family-friendly amenities, and quaint character, it may also be attractive to new residents. The tactics outlined below will encourage more visitors, with the hopes of an increase in future residents and potential business growth for the region.

Marketing Campaign

As part of these recommendations, stakeholders were engaged to inform the creation of a regional identity and associated language and graphics to be utilized as part of a marketing campaign. This effort was not undertaken to replace or recreate an identity for the communities but, instead, to represent a joint campaign that complements any individual municipal brands (logo/tagline). The results of this information gathering process can be found in Appendix G.

The implementer could reengage when appropriate to finalize the marketing campaign concepts. The above results represent ideas developed through a process of ongoing collaboration with the region. The following recommendations outline the approach to disseminating the above messaging as well as specific information on the region's assets.

Digital Marketing Opportunities

Digital marketing is likely the most impactful strategy that the region can undertake to reach a broad audience. This includes websites, social media channels, online advertisements, smart phone apps, and more. The most important component of this regional marketing effort is the creation of a visitor-focused website clearly portraying the region's identity and containing information on the region's businesses, attractions, and events

and programming. This website should be smart phone-friendly. Assuming that visitors to the region enjoy its amenities and high quality of life, this website will also assist in attraction of residents. Below are the types of information that should be included on this website:

- **Description of the region** – This page should describe the region’s location, key industries, and major attractions. This should give visitors an idea of the region’s identity.
- **Visit us** – This page should provide detailed information on the region’s attractions that appeal most to visitors as well as an overview of lodging, shopping, and dining opportunities. Each specific business or attraction included in the narrative should be hyperlinked to its own website. The implementer should also include predesigned itineraries for day trips and weekend trips, created based on different interests. For example, an extreme sports day trip might include a visit to Bolton’s mountain biking trails, the Storrs Adventure Park, and a meal at Camille’s Wood Fired Pizza in Tolland, while a “friends of the farm” weekend trip might include a tour of the region’s farms over the course of two days, a trip to the UConn Dairy Bar, a stay at the Tolland Inn, and a visit to the Coventry Farmer’s Market. Note that attractive photos are key in exciting potential visitors and helping them understand what types of experiences the region has to offer.
- **Live here** – This page should provide information on quality of life, community services, and other unique amenities attractive to potential residents (CSAs, childcare facilities, opportunities to volunteer in the region, etc.). It should also provide links to local residential real estate offices.
- **Maps of attractions** – This page should include the full attractions map that shows outdoor recreation, agricultural, and cultural amenities. It should also include a map of all trails within the region, specifically marking parking areas and trailheads.
- **Calendar of events** – This page should include a calendar of all events happening within the region. The implementer should populate the calendar as community groups, businesses, municipalities, the universities, etc. share information about their events with the region. The implementer may also consider including a form on this page that those wanting to post their events can fill out to streamline the process of evaluating and uploading events to the calendar. There should be discussion and decisions on the criteria for events that will be uploaded to the calendar and those that will not. There should also be an option to filter events by interest (outdoor recreation, nature and wildlife, arts, food, education, etc.) to facilitate the user experience. The list of activities for each day could potentially grow very large if there is broad buy-in for this calendar as a promotional opportunity among regional constituents.
- **News and promotions** – This page should be updated frequently with news, events, business promotions, etc. in order to maintain an active online presence. Content from social media posts should be uploaded to this page, minimizing any additional effort required to maintain it.
- **List of businesses** – This page should consist of a list of businesses within the region that are relevant to the needs of visitors and residents (restaurants, lodging, museums, retail shops, recreational facilities, childcare facilities, etc.), categorized by business type to facilitate the user experience.
- **Contact us** – This page should include contact information for the administrator of this regional effort as well as information for each individual community for any local inquiries.

While the implementer not may be able to fund a new website and website consultant immediately, each town should create a separate page on its existing website including the information described above. However, the creation of a dedicated regional website should be a priority.

In the near-term, there should be a new page created on each town's website dedicated to the regional effort that includes a statement about this four-town collaboration with links to the other three communities' websites. The suggested content listed above can be added on an ongoing basis, but the most critical items include contact information, individual town calendars of events, individual town business lists, and a broad description of the region and its key attractions and amenities (can be the same description for all four towns).

Social media is a marketing necessity, and the implementer will find a significant return on its efforts if managed properly. The implementer should create Facebook and Instagram accounts and maintain an active presence on both, developing a plan for about a month's worth of posts at a time, featuring news, attractions, and stories. Asking users questions within these social media posts is a great way of engaging them around specific topics the implementer wants to highlight. Additionally, each individual community should share news of events and programs taking place in the other three towns to demonstrate this regional mindset and ensure the maximum number of residents is reached. Another strategy for engagement is to coordinate a social media photo contest where users submit their photos of certain attractions (usually based around a theme) for their peers to vote on, with the winner receiving a prize donated by a sponsoring business.

In the future, the implementer might also consider having an app developed, designed similarly to the website, to even further facilitate the user experience.

One additional online resource for free tourism-related marketing for businesses is CTVisit.com, which is the State's tourism website managed by the Department of Economic and Community Development. Representatives from individual businesses and attractions are able to create and manage their own profiles and listings, and, once live, those profiles are featured on the site. The use of this website requires few resources from the implementer other than some effort around more widely promoting this resource. In return, local businesses have access to free statewide promotion on a highly-trafficked and dynamic website.

Print and Other Physical Marketing Opportunities

There are a variety of opportunities for physical marketing of the region's assets. Print materials are a common approach, and the implementer should plan to create documents to be distributed in public spaces, at events, at businesses, etc. Materials should include:

- "Visitor's guide" highlighting attractions, dining, lodging, shopping, etc. within the region;
- Attractions map and trails map described in the above "Digital Marketing Opportunities" sub-section; and
- Upcoming events guide highlighting upcoming events in the region – should be updated on a monthly basis.

The documents should reflect the regional branding (completed as part of this report). They should be available at each community's Town Hall, community center, and library and at local businesses that are interested in promoting the region. They should also be distributed at large community events. Mansfield is in the process of creating a guide for new residents and businesses, and this could be used as a model for a similar regional brochure.

To improve the region's impact at events, in particular, a tablecloth and pull-up display should be created to ensure that attendees' impressions of the region are of professionalism, organization, and top-quality experiences. Because the Coventry Farmer's Market is such a well-visited event, the implementer should consider setting up a booth there at least once per month. Other promotional events could be the Connecticut Tourism Conference, UConn sporting events, and the Last Green Valley's Walktober events.

Bolton, Mansfield, and Tolland act as entrances to the region from different major roads. Another marketing opportunity exists in the creation of obvious and attractive physical gateways for these towns, including landscaping, signage, lighting, and other aesthetic enhancements to create a warm welcome for visitors. Visitors should have a clear idea of the region's boundaries and identity. These towns have plans and/or regulations in place to support these streetscape enhancements and should continue to seek grant funding to allow their implementation.

Beyond these three gateways, wayfinding signage containing the region's logo should be placed in strategic locations within all four towns. This signage should direct visitors to key attractions and businesses. The implementer may also consider coordinating specific streetscape components to maintain a cohesive feeling within the entire region beyond the wayfinding signage. For example, the towns may consider using the same street lighting fixtures and banners attached to these fixtures. The goal of these efforts is to create a sense of place and identity for the region, and every step the towns can take toward cohesive efforts with regard to infrastructure and streetscaping is critical for reaching this goal.

Business Recruitment Marketing

Because this report has largely focused on expanding the region's strengths in tourism-related businesses, the marketing campaign described thus far has the overarching goal of increasing visibility of these assets to new and returning customers. However, there are undoubtedly opportunities throughout the region to attract new businesses, both within and outside the realm of tourism, that would not fall under the umbrella of this marketing campaign.

“The region's location is great. We've been able to attract talent from UConn, Boston, and other out-of-state locations.” – Tolland business owner

The implementer should engage frequently with the MetroHartford Alliance and AdvanceCT to ensure that those organizations are aware of any large pieces of commercial real estate prime for the location of a new

business. These two organizations are currently taking the lead on marketing the state (AdvanceCT) and, more specifically, the Greater Hartford region (MetroHartford) to prospective businesses at national and international levels. Working with these two organizations allows the implementer to leverage the capabilities of those organizations while conserving the significant resources that are put into large-scale business recruitment work.

However, for smaller businesses likely under the radar of those two organizations, the implementer should prepare data to create a business case for the recruitment of these smaller companies. This data should include information on:

- Key industries – businesses like to know that they are locating in an area where there is already success within their industry;
- Location – businesses like to have an understanding of distance and drive time to larger metropolitan hubs like Boston and New York;
- Transportation options – businesses like to know what options exist to transport their goods (where applicable) as well as commuting options for employees;
- Workforce – businesses like to know what skills and education levels the workforce in the region has so that they can ensure it will meet their requirements; and
- Commercial real estate – without an appropriate building or site, efforts to recruit a business to the region will fail. It is critical that the implementer has an understanding of the amount and characteristics of available commercial real estate.

All this information should be compiled into a concise document presenting a convincing case for recruiting any business to the region. See the Small Business and Entrepreneurship section for additional information on this package.

Cross-Promotional Opportunities

The implementer should leverage the networks of strategic partner organizations to maximize the impact of these marketing activities. Working with the Tolland County and Windham Regional Chambers of Commerce, for example, the implementer can cross-promote community events as well as business news and promotions. The implementer should engage frequently with these chambers to ensure that business retention and promotional efforts are cohesive and collaborative.

The implementer should also reach out to travel bloggers from around Connecticut and within the northeast to encourage them to visit the area's attractions. Based on those experiences, the bloggers can write articles promoting the region to their followers, opening it up to a group that may not have otherwise known about all that it has to offer. Also, local and regional media outlets should be engaged to feature information like events, news, and other announcements.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

The desired outcome for the region's marketing efforts is increased visibility for the region, drawing in additional visitors and businesses. Surveying is the best approach to evaluating success. Questions should focus on how these constituents learned about the region and their opinions on the effectiveness of the marketing collateral.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of components of the Visibility and Marketing section of the plan:

Tourism marketing websites

- The Town of Washington, Connecticut has created a tourism-focused website showcasing the assets and opportunities for visitors in a small town. See it here: <https://explorewashingtonct.com/>.
- Florida's "Palm Beaches" have pooled resources to create a tourism website featuring 39 beach-focused communities in the state. The website is called "Discover the Palm Beaches, Florida" and highlights the obvious similarities between the beach communities as well as the different experiences and atmospheres of each. The four-town region should consider taking this approach with its own website, showcasing the commonalities while demonstrating "niche" areas for each. See it here: <https://www.thepalmbeaches.com/>.
- The State of Michigan has an engaging and user-friendly website, and its "Pure Michigan" logo is well-known nationwide. See it here: <https://www.michigan.org/>.
- Travel Oregon's website is also very attractive to visitors. One interesting concept it features is that visitors can choose a "feeling" they want to pursue (silly, adventurous, nostalgic, etc.), which leads to several different activities and attractions to explore. See it here: <https://traveloregon.com/>.

Tourism smart phone app

- New York's Pass App combines attraction information and tickets, maps, itineraries, and additional trip planning information all in one place. See it here: <https://www.newyorkpass.com/how-it-works/new-york-pass-iphone-app.html>.
- This article makes the case for investment in the creation of a smart phone app, as they are growing in popularity. See it here: <https://tech.co/news/tourism-apps-primed-reshape-app-industry-2016-01>.

CTvisit.com

- CTvisit.com is the state's tourism website, with listings for attractions and businesses being managed by the individuals representing them. This is a free service, and the implementer should encourage its constituents to explore it. See it here: <https://www.ctvisit.com/>.

Visitor's guide

- The State of New Jersey has a magazine-style visitor's guide, which is in print as well as online in a user-friendly format. See it here: <http://digital.milespartnership.com/publication/?m=44722&i=643038&p=0>.
- The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's visitor's guide, while focused on an event and not a place, is well-designed and user-friendly. It includes maps, program information, a schedule, and a business guide. See it here:
<https://www.rodeohouston.com/Portals/0/Content/VisitShow/VisitorsGuide/Downloads/VisitorsGuide.pdf>.