



Vermont Convention Bureau
Year End Report FY 19
OCTOBER 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019

To: Heather Pelham, Acting Commissioner, Department of Tourism and Marketing

From: Jeff Lawson, Vice President of Tourism & Marketing, Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce

Date: November 18, 2019

Subject: Year End Progress Report for the grant monies received from the State of Vermont, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Tourism and Marketing to the Vermont Convention Bureau.

Grant Monies Received year to date:

Payments received by the Vermont Convention Bureau from the Department of Travel and Tourism total \$71,250.00 since October 1, 2018, there is a balance due to the Vermont Convention Bureau of \$23,750.00.

Recent History:

The Vermont Convention Bureau underwent significant changes in Fiscal Year 2019. In October of 2018, several hotel properties in the greater Burlington area left the Bureau and created the Burlington Regional Marketing Organization, which came into effect on January 1, 2019. The mission of that organization is to promote greater Burlington as a destination for leisure travel as well as for meetings, events, and conferences.

This change has resulted in a 27% decrease in room inventory and a 51% decrease in operating revenue. In addition to paying dues, the departing hotels comprised 10 of the 12 members paying into the Bureau's Destination Marketing Fund (DMF.) The DMF supported marketing efforts and operational costs. It also represents a loss of our largest meeting and conference infrastructure, limiting our ability to satisfy the requirements of larger events.

These changes make year over year comparisons challenging. Such comparisons will require more context and clarification than in past years. In particular, it is important to note that FY19 sales goals were established prior to the departure of the Burlington area properties.

While the loss of these properties is clearly significant to the VCB, this change also represents a strong opportunity in that it enables the Convention Bureau to focus all efforts on the rest of the State of Vermont.

FY19 performance (October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019)

-The VCB provided 236 sales leads to member properties which represents a 4% increase over leads generated in FY18, resulting in 102% of our annual goal. These leads represented a potential of 38,980 room nights and an economic impact of \$12,293,960 (based upon \$322* per room night.)

-VCB leads resulted in 7,178 booked room nights with member properties, which represents a decrease of 56% from FY18, resulting in 43% of our annual goal.

-VCB leads resulted in an economic impact of \$2,311,316.00*, which represents a decrease of 56% from FY18, resulting in 43% of our annual goal.

-The VCB paced at a 31% conversion rate from leads to definites, compared to 48% in 2018.

Breakdown of Meeting Attendee spending based on \$322.00 per room night

Based upon the Convention Industry Council's report entitled, The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy, direct spending (\$322.00 per night) is defined as spending within the economy from the purchases of goods and services attributable to the meeting activity.

Meeting Attendee Spending	
Expenditure	%
Lodging & Incidentals	47.6%
Hotel Food & Beverage	9.9%
Other Food & Beverage	18.8%
Retail	11%
Local – Transportation, Gas, Parking	9.5%
Recreation, Tours, Sightseeing	3.2%

VCB highlights from October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019

New Members

The VCB welcomed the following new members to our organization:

- The Trapp Family Lodge, Stowe
- Ben & Jerry's Factory Tour, Waterbury
- Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee
- Sterling Ridge Resort, Jeffersonville
- Holiday Inn Club Vacations Mount Ascutney, Brownsville
- The Woodstocker, Woodstock

TRADESHOWS/NETWORKING EVENTS/SALES MISSIONS:

The Vermont Convention Bureau participated in a number of trade shows and networking events to promote Vermont to industry meeting planners. VCB Staff and members represented the state at the following events:

TEAMS

TEAMS: TRAVEL, EVENTS AND MANAGEMENT IN SPORTS, is the world's leading conference and expo for the sports-event industry. Presented by *SportsTravel* magazine, TEAMS '19 was held in Louisville, KY in October 2018. TEAMS attracts more than one thousand attendees including CEOs, executive directors and event managers from sports organizations as well as representatives from sports commissions and convention bureaus, corporate sponsors, event suppliers and other hospitality industry opinion leaders. Larkin Properties and Trader Duke's Hotel attended as member partners with the VCB. The VCB had pre-set appointments with 38 sporting event planners, which resulted in three leads, compared to 40 appointments and no leads in 2019.

NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES (NESAE)

VCB Representatives attended NESAE's annual Management Conference in Framingham, MA in January. 39 meeting planners attended. One lead garnered from the event is currently out. Two more leads are in the pipeline. In 2018, the same event included 35 appointments and no leads.

CONNECT FINANCIAL

Senior Sales Manager Maureen Morgan attended CONNECT Financial in Denver in March. 41 meeting planners attended. The VCB had 21 planner appointments and met with 30 planners overall. One lead has been generated with two more expected to develop later in the year. This is the first year that the VCB has attended CONNECT Financial.

NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF CONVENTION BUREAUS (NESCVB)

The VCB attended three board meetings and one board conference call. Meetings focused on planning two cooperative sales missions and cooperative marketing efforts. First, NESCVB hosted a reception at CONNECT New England, which was held in May at the Stoweflake. The second was a Boston Sales mission in late June at Del Frisco's in the Back Bay. VCB staff and member properties attended to meet with meeting planners from the area. One lead was generated from the event compared to no leads in 2018.

CONNECT NEW ENGLAND

The VCB was the premier sponsor at the Connect New England Show held in Stowe at the Stoweflake. The event for planners and suppliers focused on national association, corporate and international meetings and events in New England. As the premier sponsor, the VCB hosted a reception for all attendees and met with over 30 planners in a one-on-one format. The event resulted in one lead for the convention bureau. In 2018, the same event also garnered one lead.

CONNECT MARKETPLACE – ASSOCIATION

The VCB attended the Connect Marketplace event in Louisville, participating in the Association vertical. VCB staff had 41 appointments with meeting planners, resulting in 2 room block leads with 3 service request leads thus far. In 2018, the event resulted in one lead.

INDUSTRY EVENTS

VERMONT TOURISM SUMMIT

The VCB sponsored, attended and had a booth at the VT Tourism Summit held in April 2019, at the Doubletree by Hilton in South Burlington. The Vermont Tourism Summit draws one of the largest gatherings of tourism professionals in the state including owners, managers and employees of the many businesses connected to this important segment of the economy. This event continues to provide the VCB an opportunity to network with existing members and other tourism industry businesses as well as to reach out to potential new members. This event is also a great chance for the VCB to spread the word about our mission.

MEMBER VISITS

2019 was a challenging year for member visits. With a reduced staff and reduced operating budget, we did not connect as frequently with membership as we had intended at the outset of the year. Moving forward in FY20, the VCB has prioritized member visits. We are focused on building our relationships, getting feedback, and encouraging action with each visit to be ensure we are providing a tangible member value. Our members are very important partners and keeping them fully engaged is critical to our organization.

MARKETING PROJECTS

CONNECT CONTENT ACTIVATION

The VCB has initiated a content activation campaign with Connect Meetings, which retargeted visitors to the Connect website and social media channels. Ads will specifically reach meeting and event planners in the Connect Meetings community and drove traffic to the VCB website. Campaign began in May and ran through late June. The campaign garnered 246,667 impressions and generated 1,179 clicks. The average time on page for activation traffic was 1:25 – 22% longer than the site average. The total click goal of 1000 was exceeded by 18%.

MAJOR LEAGUE FISHING

In April, Major League Fishing premiered its Challenge Select television event, which was shot on Lake Champlain in FY 2018. The VCB helped produce the event, connecting MLF with local hotels, restaurants, and vendors. The economic impact of the event in FY2018 was \$210,588. Projected media exposure for the Lake Champlain region in 2019 was approximately 15 million people. The program was broadcast on The Outdoor Channel and distributed online at myoutdoortv.com.

MULTIVIEW DIGITAL ADVERTISING

In August, the VCB began a six-month contract with Multiview, a digital advertising agency associated with several meeting planner groups and associations. Included in the contract is a mix of display network advertising, retargeting, and geo-fencing of events including Meeting Planners International WEC 2019 in Toronto and the Event Planner Expo show in New York City. Monthly website traffic increased by 72% since the beginning of the campaign.

CVENT

CVENT, Inc. is a leading cloud-based, enterprise event management platform. Cvent offers software solutions to event planners for online event registration, venue selection, and event management, mobile apps for events, e-mail marketing and web surveys. Cvent provides hoteliers and convention bureaus with an integrated platform, enabling properties to increase group business demand through targeted advertising and improve conversion through proprietary demand management and business intelligence solutions. In October of 2018, the VCB maintained our listing at a two Diamond level, which offers increased exposure and prioritizes our listing. We also invested in the CVB Copy Feature, which prompts a meeting planner to copy the local CVB on the RFP in the event they did choose the CVB as a selection during their property search. In addition, the VCB contracted with CVENT for banner ads on the CVENT listings of our competitive set, including Providence, RI, Portland, ME and Portsmouth, NH. CVENT has continued to offer strong results in the form of leads to the VCB.

CVENT has continued to offer strong results for the VCB and in FY19 we received 111 leads through the platform, compared to 103 in FY18.

PRINT ADVERTISING

The VCB placed advertisement in the following publications:

Meetings Today: Essential Planners Resource
Vermont Vacation Guides

EMAIL MARKETING NEWSLETTER

The *Meet in Vermont* E-newsletter goes out to over 7,000 meeting planners across the country from our email database. The purpose of the newsletter is to introduce meeting and event planners to the various locations and destinations around the state while providing members with additional exposure. The database has been built by direct sales, trade shows and networking events. Topics promoted over the last year include:

- Teambuilding
- Is Safety a Concern for Your Meetings?
- 3 Ways to Sweeten Your Next Meeting
- 5 Reasons you Should look at Vermont for your Small Meeting Now
- Trending Winter Activities
- Shop Vermont Buses, Boats and SUV's, 3 Ideas to Add Fun to Your Meeting Now
- Fun Off-Site Dinners to Try Next
- What Does a Tree House and a Round Barn Have in Common
- New Ways to Break Routines
- Team Building Ideas to Build Your Team

CANCELLATION OF VERMONT DISCOUNT CARD

For several years, the VCB produced the Vermont Discount Card, which offered dining, lodging, and retail discounts. Over time, the price dropped dramatically from \$50 to \$20, and the card expiration date was removed, which eliminated the opportunity to resell it to customers annually. In addition, the majority of VCB website traffic were consumers looking for discounts rather than meeting industry professionals looking for meeting industry information.

By 2018, the primary user of the card was the UVM Alumni Association, who purchased them in bulk at the rate of \$2 per card. In effect, the program had ceased to be a benefit to the organization. The program was terminated on September 1, 2019, after giving participating businesses and users 3 months' notice.

WEBSITE ANALYTICS

See attachments A1 (FY19) and A2 (FY18)

In FY 2019 VCB website, www.vermontmeetings.com, saw an 11% increase in users from 10,798 to 12,008. The number of sessions increased from 13,420 to 13,694.

Most importantly, with the cancellation of the Vermont Discount Card, we are increasing the quality of overall traffic, moving away from non-industry visitors looking for deals and toward actual meeting planners looking for meeting venues.