

My name is Steve Wright and I have been marketing, selling and representing the Vermont brand, through the Vermont ski and snowboard industry, for the past 25 years--First as the Director of Sales and Marketing at Killington Resort and most recently, and currently, as the President/General Manager at Jay Peak Resort in the Northeast Kingdom.

I have served on the Governor's Travel and Recreation council, now, throughout 3 administrations, am on the executive board of The Vermont Chamber of Commerce, The Newport (Vermont) Downtown Development Corporation, The Vermont Ski Area Association, The North Country High School Career Center, The Green Mountain Farm To School Program, The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative and, The North Country Hospital Board.

I present this range of representations I both manage and participate in to give you background against which I'm about to speak--as being a marketer first and foremost, but also as a representative of the Vermont brand, with experience in marketing for-profit corporations, non-profit businesses, and not-for-profit institutions; **regardless of the outfit, Marketing works.** And smart marketing not only works better, but ends up being more affordable, provides more value and in today's marketing landscape can be more trackable back to your spend.

I currently manage a business that employs northward of 1500 people in the winter and comprised of roughly 500 Full-time year-round employees that provides the State of Vermont with nearly \$8 MILLION DOLLARS, annually, into the state economy by virtue of our combined tax exposure and I'm here today to tell you that **it certainly could be more**

While I have no interest in creating any sort of alternative tax structure to further burden our guests or make it any more difficult to attract visitors into the State of Vermont than it already is, I *am* saying that there is a deliberate and mutual gain, for both those occupying space

*within* the State Travel and Tourism industry *and* the State itself, to drive more traffic here. While this seems somewhat obvious, the marketing spend that the State assigns to the Travel and Tourism industry suggests that this might not be as clear as I'm assuming. Vermont is second to last in New England, from 2012-2017, in terms of annual tourism spend. And across that same time frame, Vermont is the only state in New England that has lost share of visitor spending.

It is time to begin the process of reversing that trend, to stop relying on the relative strength of the Vermont brand to simply pull people here all by itself and start driving both first timers and repeat visitors into the State.

Marketing, including both electronic and digital outreach, has expanded and evolved to the point where a return on investment calculation can and should be baked into every step of a plan. Gone are the days of having to rely simply on expensive print and television, difficult-to-value radio spots and interstate billboards. These can be replaced by key word search campaigns, targeted manipulation of partner databases, demographic and psychographic based social media buys, and a host of other options that will leave us able to identify, much more than ever, where our dollars worked, where they fell short and where they overdelivered.

More importantly, these sorts of channels allow us the opportunity to alter and evolve campaigns in real time, to load up on what's working and eliminate what isn't, instead of waiting until the campaigns end to see where the chips fell.

When it comes to the elements that make up a brand, Vermont is second to absolutely none. Between outdoor recreation, the arts and creative economy, food and wine and beer, and outdoor festivals and events all overlaid by an indescribable quirk that other states try to manufacture but cannot duplicate, Vermont is a marketers dream

when it comes to having something to showcase; something to yell from the rooftops about.

But without the appropriate budget behind that beautiful picture, *that story we want to tell*, we'll continue running as fast as we can, simply to stay in place, falling further behind other states that are committing resources to showcase *their* pictures and tell *their* stories, to the detriment of both our overall economy and, ultimately, to Vermonters themselves.

And while it's clear that the private sector has equal skin in this game, fighting for individual share against other attractions, competitors and various alternative tourism options, the State needs to provide support for the Vermont brand itself, convincing would-be vacationers that the story of Vermont is compelling enough to listen to. This is the way successful tourism partnership works; the State arguing and advocating that potential vacationers should consider Vermont in the first place and then those businesses within the industry adding emphasis and voice and nuance to that same argument.

That is why I'm here, today, advocating for a \$500,000 increase in our travel and tourism budget and to help support and more importantly **grow** that Vermont share, by telling the Vermont story, that we have all worked so diligently to refine and grow and leverage.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

Steve Wright

President/General Manager

Jay Peak Resort