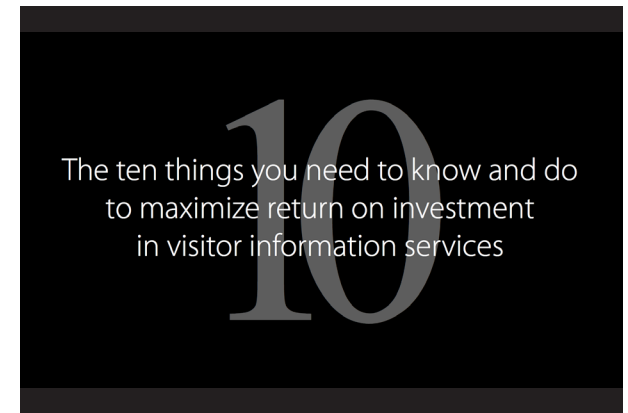


VISITOR INFORMATION CENTERS & SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE





2013 DMO Visitor Information Centers Study

- 8 out of 10 DMOs have an official visitor information center
- Nearly 25% had some type of mobile VIC: kiosk(s), van, trailer or roaming counselors on Segways
- 50% sell merchandise
- More than 50% are in high traffic areas or downtowns
- Full study available for purchase: <http://bit.ly/dmai-vic-cr>
- Full report (non-member price): \$490
- Consolidated report (non-member price): \$125
- Fact: numbers have been steadily decreasing and VICs even though tourism spending is increasing
- The same goes for printed materials
 - The days of printing tens of thousands of guides has changed

We are now in the digital age and everything is changing

- 90% of Americans have immediate access to the Internet (even more in Europe and Canada)
- 94% use the internet to decide where to travel, live, work, and establish a business
- The days of VICs are not over – not even dying
- They are just changing
- We are going to concentrate on what to do today and how to plan for the future to create a stronger return on investment from your VIC

Change your mindset

- Think of your VIC and services as a business, not an amenity
- That means return on investment
- Figure out what you spend a year on VIC – net (staffing and overhead)
- Then tally each visitor as to where they are from:
 - Within 25 miles – considered “local resident”
 - Outside 25 miles – visitor
- Divide the cost by the number of visitors from outside the 25-mile radius – find cost per visitor
- Then ask: could we better utilize this funding to attract more visitors?
- Litmus test: the average cost per walk in, according to the DMAI study: \$2.72
- You want to be at \$2.50 or less

2

VICs should always be in the heart of the spending district

VICs should always be in the heart of the spending district

- Once people are out of their cars, they spend four times the money than in remote or freeway locations
- VIC should be located right downtown

3

Convenience is key to visitor information

Convenience is key to visitor information

- Convenience rules the day
- Remember that in everything you do
- If you have a staffed visitor information center:
 - Easy to find – wayfinding is critical
 - Open at least 360 days per year – people don't only travel during office hours
 - Hours should be from 8:30 am to 9:00 pm six days a week; Sunday perhaps 11:00 to 6:00
 - Visitor information must be available 24/7/365



An example: Huntsville Texas

- Visitor information available year round, 7 days per week
- Office closes, but visitor information still available in entryway area

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Visitor information kiosks are a must



- Tourist Assistance Portal (TAP) 42"
- App-based (Internet not required)
- Maps, menus, photo galleries, discounts, etc.
- Cost: Approx. \$11,000 each

Blue Focus Media
www.bluefocusmedia.com

Visitor information kiosks are a must

- Even if you have a staffed VIC, kiosks are a must
- Visitors prefer old world brochures over digital kiosks – however, that is changing
- The big challenge with digital kiosks is that only one person can use them at a time
- Brochure racks alongside digital kiosks can be a good solution
- New digital kiosks have a “send to me” feature that will email the visitor the content
- But digital does not replace printed brochure racks

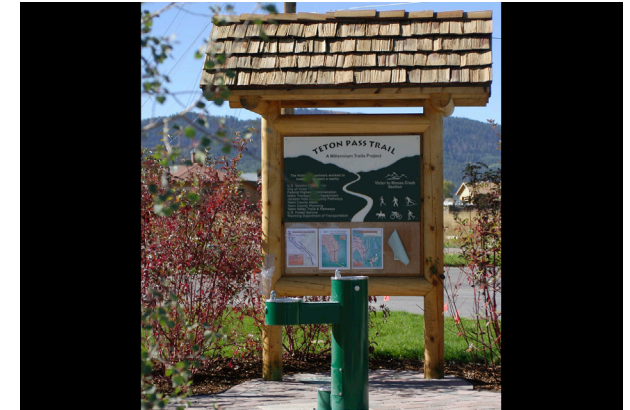
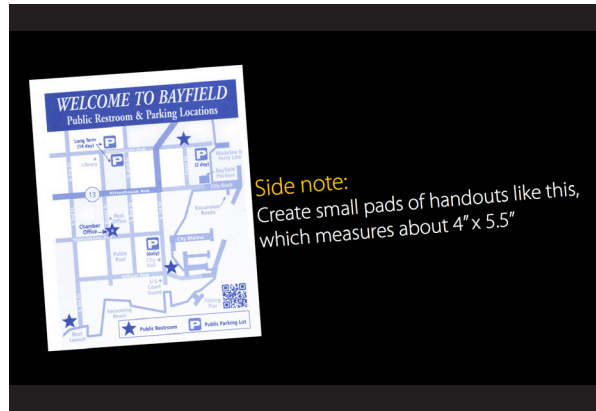
CTM Media Group provides digital kiosks

- Brochure distribution (brochure racks)
- ExploreBoard with “send to me” information
- And an app
- Contact Kristen Malin at 630-592-1323 or kmalin@ctmmedia.com

Blue Focus Media – another digital kiosk provider

- Tourist Assistance Portal (TAP)
- App-based (internet not required)
- Maps, menus, photo galleries, discounts, etc.
- Cost: approximately \$11,000 each
- www.bluefocusmedia.com

Visitor Information Centers | Handout



The best place for visitor information?

- Public washrooms or restrooms
- Provide maps, brochures, etc.
- Great way to turn restrooms into economic development tools

Side Note:

- Create small pads of handouts, measuring 4"x5.5", with maps that show restrooms and local parking

Have kiosks in multiple locations and make sure they have the same look and feel

- Consistency
- Maps and brochure distribution
- Locate in high traffic areas
- Work with your auxiliary organizations – they can be a good funding source



Always include brochure distribution

- Bently University's Center for Marketing Technology study
- 32% of travel decisions come from brochures prior to traveling (#1 internet: #2 friends)
- 81% come from brochures WHILE they are traveling (#1)
- Once visitors are in your community, they will grab and use brochures
 - Posted maps are helpful for finding your location, but visitors need a take away piece so they can refer to the information later

A great example and personal favorite – the kiosk in Cape May, New Jersey

- Located in the pedestrian downtown district
- Nice design
- Lighted
- At the top says "Town Crier"
- Includes the phrase: "Welcome Friends Old and New; Linger Here a Day or Two"
- Room for numerous brochures that promote local businesses, restaurants and attractions, as well as maps and event information

Beatty, Nevada, population 1,000

- Visitor information gazebo
- Kiwanis and Rotary raised the money – bought a gazebo kit
- Hired a local craftsman to do the interior kiosk
- Brochures wrapped around the interior
- You can charge \$5 per month for businesses to include their brochure which would cover the costs to keep it clean and stocked and perhaps fund the next kiosk location

Visitor Information Centers | Handout



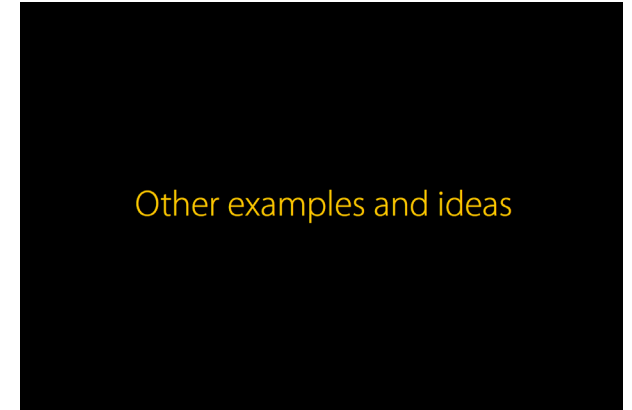
Jackson, Wyoming, population 12,000

- Popular visitor information center with good signage
- Visitor info available 24/7 with a small rack outside the VIC
- Simple and affordable
- Inside their VIC is part interpretive center, making it an attraction in addition to an information portal
- Brochures are categorized by activity, not location



Kingsport, Tennessee, pop. 50,000

- Brick architecture kiosk
- Maps, brochures, points of interest, etc.
- Local craftsman created brochure rack with cover to keep the weather out



- Oak Harbor, Washington
 - Visitor information at a kiosk outside transit center
- Lodi, California
 - Kiosks every two blocks in the downtown
- Asheville, North Carolina
 - Outside VIC, magazine rack with visitors guides
- The Bruce Peninsula, Ontario
 - Simple brochure holder outside the VIC
- Oxnard, California
 - While VIC is closed, brochure racks are right on the door
- Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia
 - VIC has mailbox style brochure holders outside
- Wickford, Rhode Island
 - Map of downtown and right on posts there are brochure holders

Other examples and ideas



- Oakhurst (Yosemite), California
 - Outside VIC is a wall of space and they charge for advertising in that space, as well as brochure distribution
- Coos County, New Hampshire
 - Solar panels on the kiosk provide power
 - Kiosk was sponsored
 - Businesses can buy space in the kiosk
- Colebrook, New Hampshire
 - Local retired resident built the kiosk
 - Includes windows that open to provide access to brochures
 - Six-sided design

Start at public parking areas

- Once people get out of their cars, you should provide visitor information
- Even if it is just wayfinding to point out where visitor information is available
- When you send out brochures to VICs, include a card they can send back to you indicating they are out of brochures so you can restock

Mobile is the new rage!

- Banff, Alberta, population 7,600
 - PVC frame kiosk on casters with cover
 - Super portable and easy to store
 - Green Mountain Gazebo
 - Cost: 6' base price: \$1750. Printing: \$225-\$850
 - Cost includes gazebo frame, unprinted vinyl canopy & skirt; two counters, and three carry bags
 - Banff bought four: tourism uses two, one for parts, other used for special events
 - Used during peak summer months; stored in the winter

Visitor Information Centers | Handout



Eau Claire, Wisconsin

- Vehicle with wrap
- Take it to special events
- Move it wherever it is needed
- Two vehicles and an antique boat
- Spent \$5,000-\$7,000 for the wraps
- Spent \$5,000-\$7,000 for the technology
- Advice: plan to spend \$10,000-\$15,000
- Use year round
- Work with local organizations/events
- Look for highest foot traffic locations
- Excellent tie to social media efforts



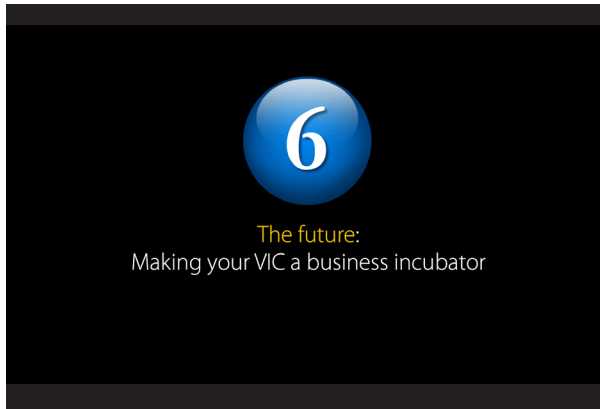
Arlington, Virginia

- Electric vehicle
- Mobile visitor information
- Cost: \$70,000 in 2010 (Global Electric Motorcars truck)
 - Custom fabricated service area
 - Note: bargain compared to the \$78,000 annual VIC lease
 - Mobile, so can go anywhere
 - Serve 40% more visitors using the same number of staff hours
 - Perfect for communities without a central downtown
 - Operates March through November
 - Location: Metrorail stops, events
 - Post on their website where it is located
 - Won numbers of awards
 - Check out the video at www.bit.ly/arlington-mobile



Fort Meyers, Florida

- Airstream trailer turned VIC
- Look fits their image
- New as of June 2013
- \$30,000 in donations: purchase and redevelopment
- Side windows have hinged openings (think food vendor)
- Interior: small office and brochure racks
- Staffing: volunteers serving one four hour shift per week



The future: Making your VIC a business incubator



Knoxville, Tennessee

- Great VIC right downtown
- Chock full of locally made arts and crafts – gift shop
- Home to radio station WDVX
- Free live music at noon Mon-Sat: “The Blue Plate Special”
- Free wifi
- Staffed visitor information
- Great way to make a VIC more of a draw
- Can even contract out to a local person to run the shop

Note: 48% of direct revenues at VICs come from merchandise sales



Asheville, North Carolina

- Large visitor information center
- Staffed with multiple people
- Brochure racks
- Gift shop with Asheville merchandise
- Reservations: lodging, two trolley companies and Segway tours stage from there
- You can purchase tickets to attractions
- CVB offices in the back
- Brochures are organized by activity, not by location

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- Independence Visitor Center – at Independence Historical Park
- Segway tours, bike rentals, self-guided bike tours
- Partnership with “Wheel Fun Rentals”

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The future:
The Adventure Center versus just a "VIC"

The future: The Adventure Center versus just a VIC

- Promoting experiences, not just information
- Whistler Resort calls theirs an "Activity Center" not just a visitor center

8

Contracting with a private business

Contracting with Private Businesses



Moab, Utah – privately run "concierge service"

- Offering tours, rentals, bookings – 14 activities, including:
 - Jet boats, guided tours, rafting, horseback riding, ballooning
 - Jeeps, mountain bikes and other rentals
 - Multiple businesses within one business
 - They vet their vendors
 - Work with smaller, new start-ups
 - Privately run, gets multiple businesses working together to share the cost
 - Inside sell maps, logo gear, etc.
 - Moab also has a VIC with maps, brochures, etc.
 - Also an interpretive center
 - Can buy posters, etc.



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Make your VIC just like home

10

You need to be "all in" or "all out"

Turlock, California

- Contracted with Hilmar Cheese Company, the main attraction in the area
- Hilmar Cheese Co provides the visitor information at their location

Make your VIC just like home

- Make sure your VIC fits your brand
- Make visitors feel welcome
- Your reputation is determined by the look and feel of your VIC
- It should set the standard for your community
- It should be beautiful with outstanding curb appeal

You need to be "all in" or "all out"

- With the advent of technology if you don't offer anything more than what I can get online, then spend your money in online content instead
- If it's just the lobby area of your offices, and it doesn't cost really anything additional to run: keep it
- Never post "Closed for the Season" signs
 - It tells you the entire town is closed for the season
 - Even if the office is closed, provide visitor information outside year round
- If you only promote members, get out of the visitor information business
 - This is for visitors
- One size does not fit all



Roger's Advice

- Always include information in your offices – perhaps in the lobby area
- Find a great location in the heart of your downtown or spending district and create an “Official Activity Center”: Tag it with “Chamber” or “name of CVB”
- Lease out space for activity vendors: a 10x10 booth – brochures, photos, etc.
- Create a locally-made gift shop: contract it out to a local business
- Keep it open seven days a week, 9:00 am to 9:00 pm (this varies by location and season)
- Reservations: make the call for the visitor – customer service not just information
- Promote everyone, not just vendors; promote specific places*
- Develop a system of kiosks in high traffic locations (hotels, downtown, at attractions) and include brochure distribution

This is NOT about you! This is about visitors.
They are your customers.