



# **Midwestern Governors' Conference**

Marketing the  
Midwest

Tourism  
Directors  
Workgroup

Report to the Chair  
January 2004



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## Background

**Meeting:** Midwestern Governors' Conference  
Marketing the Midwest Workgroup

**Date:** November 6-7, 2003

**Location:** Renaissance Grand Hotel – St. Louis, MO

**Attendees:** Jan Kostner, IL                      Mark Eckman, IA  
Scott Allegrucci, KS                      Dan Curran, NE  
Claudia Vecchio, OH                      Colleen Tollefson, MN  
John Robinson, MO                      Bob Smith, MO  
Debra Lee, MO

The workgroup entitled *Marketing the Midwest* was the fourth and latest workgroup added to the Midwestern Governors' Conference – 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting (MGC) held November 6-7, 2003 at the Renaissance Grand Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. In an effort to promote the Midwest region as a diverse economic source of power, the governors in the Midwestern Governors' Conference (MGC) asked the tourism directors from the 13 MGC states to meet for the purpose of creating an innovative and fresh approach to marketing the region. Tourism representatives from the 13 upper Midwest states: **Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin** were invited to the initial brainstorming session. Seven states attended producing several marketing and partnership ideas for consideration. In order to involve as many of the states as possible, the attending tourism representatives agreed that notes via email and conference calls would be arranged to refine strategies and delineate plans surrounding the marketing proposal before a final perspective is delivered to the governors of MGC as a recommendation from the tourism offices.

Having completed the review and refinement phase, the participating state tourism directors have agreed to present this preliminary plan.

John Robinson  
Director, Missouri Division of Tourism



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## Purpose – Regional Marketing

The key concept of regional marketing is simply to expand marketing power through shared resources across geographic boundaries. Instead of competing for smaller pieces of the pie, areas join together to target market segments that may be more difficult to reach but will provide a higher return on investment or greater market share. Partnerships are instrumental in this effort and provide a strong potential for robust research, communication, innovation, and technology.

A review of economic initiatives through several governmental association web sites reveals that government leadership is focusing on building knowledge-based industries, possibly in clusters around key educational institutions, to attract and develop a strong workforce that will contribute to the tax-base of the region. The National Governors' Association web site delineated seven economic development strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century addressing education, infrastructure, taxes & regulations, entrepreneurship, business attraction and development, government services, and preservation of the "quality of life" in communities. One key element in the formula is marketing, a strong suit for tourism offices who focus on putting a state's best foot forward. Building the infrastructure for new business does not guarantee they will come. Advertising and communication are key elements to let customers know the product is available. The Midwestern Governors' Conference has identified this missing link and has taken action to address the issue.



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## Project Overview

Although the primary focus of the *Marketing the Midwest* project revolves around economic development, workforce development and education, tourism has been invited to participate because of destination knowledge and marketing expertise. The governors recognize the state tourism offices are advertising/marketing leaders with in-depth community/visitor information and a valuable resource for developing a strong marketing campaign. MGC has given the tourism workgroup the opportunity to put the “shine” on current promotional efforts and asked them to design new methods for attracting and retaining people in business. Certainly funding is a key component to produce an effective marketing campaign. The MGC will work to develop funding plans, which demonstrate creative ideas to help offset the promotional costs. The MGC will also work to develop recommendations for different styles of partnerships. Within this context, the tourism directors recognize that if we submit innovative, workable proposals, funding will follow more readily.

### **Current Status:**

Utilizing this opportunity to add tourism to the marketing mix, the workgroup held a brainstorming session at the MGC 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in St. Louis for the purpose of collecting project ideas, questions and concerns surrounding partnerships, brand message, target markets, research, marketing tools, advertising, funding and process. The groundwork from this meeting provides the framework for the planning process. It is good to understand that this whole process is a continual work in progress to be refined and augmented as necessary. The final project proposal must outline completion steps, budget, resources, timeline, marketing components and funding mechanisms. The governors and key partners will need to determine if the cost-savings in resources due to partnerships will make the plan actionable to implement. While this is an unprecedented opportunity to build visibility and increase awareness about economic benefits of residing in the Midwest, it is also a perfect example of Midwesterners working together to accomplish a goal. It demonstrates a good work ethic, teamwork and core values proving the Midwest is a magnificent place to live, work and play. *Midwestern values.*



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

During the brainstorming session, a variety of topics were covered as the workgroup unraveled the purpose and direction of *Marketing the Midwest*. The discussion revealed key areas to address before devising a plan. Missouri's tourism office has researched information for the workgroup and has arranged follow up communications to finalize this preliminary proposal to the Midwestern Governors.

The general consensus of the workgroup was that this project first and foremost must have partnerships and "buy-in" from economic development groups, educational institutions, media, private industry and above all the governors of MGC. The tourism representatives also focused on brand message and target markets. To produce a campaign of this magnitude requires shared market research. At this time of a highly competitive market it will be difficult to convince contiguous states that they are partners and not competitors and that shared research benefits all. Target marketing is made equally complicated when searching for elements that appeal to a variety of audiences on a "quality of life" perspective. The product is diverse, the customer is a complicated mix, and the promotion needs to provide the customer with a sense of added value. A barrage of facts and categorical rankings from 13 states leave the customer adrift and potentially unconvinced. It is important to lead into a promotion based on the fact that the Midwest is a magnificent place to live, work and play....otherwise we wouldn't be here. What makes us stay? Certainly the facts are important. Build a strong brand image from which the facts can have deeper meaning.



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Research

#### Issue:

Developing a research-based campaign is clearly a very strong concern for the group. Several suggestions were made about shared market research including "client / lead" specific surveys to check customer satisfaction and propensity to relocate in various segments of the Midwest region. This could be one of the largest challenges the group faces. In this time of a slow economy and strong competition, information is strongly protected. Research is expensive and ownership is often contract-specific and copyright-specific.

#### Solution:

- Acquire product and market research:
  - MGC collect data from each state to determine state industries, key target industries, current marketing tools, current marketing venues including, but not limited to, potential partners and recruitment tactics and strategies.
  - Contract a third party research firm to provide regional industrial profile and make recommendations on target markets and key products.
  - Utilize economic development research programs (such as MERIC) to profile states.
- Analyze and compare economic development markets (businesses) to visitor demographics (people). Identify and group markets. Find commonalities and differences. Design campaign accordingly.



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Partnerships

#### Issue:

The strategy of working in partnership as a regional group for the purpose of attracting a larger number of businesses, investments and people leads to shifts in tactics and competition. New themes and messages should be developed for new audiences. Greater attention will be necessary in the area of organization and action planning. Design of an efficient workflow process is essential. It becomes necessary to share information, financial responsibility and human resources (which are typically guarded with fervor). In order to benefit from regional marketing, a team of local, state, and regional representatives must agree to participate and establish metrics for tracking performance. The investment must include a commitment of time in addition to financial and human resources.

#### Solution:

- Establish a development team comprised of economic developers, educators, private enterprises, media sources, and tourism marketing professionals to design a marketing plan, promote “buy-in” and implement the action steps of the plan (Development Team Partnership)
- Create a resource team to design a partnership-based funding mechanism:
  - MGC partner directly with communities and private enterprise for funding and operation (Resource Team – decentralized approach)
  - MGC partner with states splitting costs among agencies to fund development and implementation of the plan (Resource Team – centralized approach)
- Set up a public relations partnership with “business news” and “lifestyle” media (TV, radio, print) to provide advertising at no cost or low cost to MGC or states. Set up marketing/advertising media partnership with for-profit media venues in private sector or communities. (Marketing/Advertising Team Partnership)
- Investigate building partnerships with front line marketers (communities, realtors, economic developers, etc.). The marketers benefit by receiving leads from MGC. MGC benefits by deferring distribution and production costs to the marketers. (Contact/Lead Distribution Team)





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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### **Audience / Target Marketing**

#### **Issue:**

It is important to find out what the current target markets are, who the economic developers may want to target in the future. Equally important: conduct a profile comparison regarding leisure activities to match a campaign that suits the needs of the market. New target markets may require shifts in marketing strategy and tactics. The workgroup has surmised that new tactics probably will need to be developed in joint advertising, public relations or web-based information delivery. Regardless of the marketing methods used for this project, it appears unprecedented for states to work together in this capacity to promote a region of this magnitude and diverse geographic and demographic base. It will require an audience/market analysis before designing advertising or promotional materials.

#### **Solution:**

- Utilize research to determine target markets with the most propensity to locate in the Midwest region
- Profile population of key target industries to find demographics and psychographics for matching leisure activities and travel habits.
- Find common interests of the audience
- Design campaigns to match the profiles.
- Select a limited number of key target markets to use as a pilot project for promotion
- Create a point-of-sale tool (and direct marketing approach) that's attractive to the customer
- Start by promoting high demand products (locations/facilities), then track and publicize successes.



## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Branding

Diversity of the Midwest presents a challenge for developing a cohesive marketing campaign. At the same time, our diversity is a marketable strength. The “quality of life” component to this campaign would require a true picture of what the Midwest offers. Whether the promotional materials feature the four seasons, sharing between friends and neighbors, wholesome living, outdoor recreation, or a large variety of metropolitan activities, it needs to paint the picture of midwestern life as it really is. This leads to the question – commonality or variety? Do we promote the region by finding common themes, itineraries, or marketing angles that deliver a congruent brand message? Or should we differentiate and diversify to offer variety? Or a combination? Typically when attracting a larger audience, differentiation will appeal to more, however, if the industries being recruited exhibit common interests, then concentration on those interests is imperative.

- Branding appeal should focus on:
  - Quality of life
  - Core Midwestern values
  - Friendly neighbor / Abundant social interaction (Example: Sharing of garden crops - zucchini)
  - Great retirement location
  - Come home to the Midwest (college graduates)
- Branding features may include:
  - Great rivers / Great Lakes
  - Outdoor adventure
  - Wide open spaces
  - Four seasons
- Branding tactics could consist of:
  - Themed itineraries
  - Individual experiences and testimony (especially from resident CEOs)
  - Reacquaint the audience with the known aspects of the Midwest, but be sure to introduce the “unknown” surprises that will delight them as well



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Advertising

#### Issue:

After targeting is determined, message develops, and media plans are proposed, the primary issue with advertising becomes cost. To research, create, and place effective advertising is a tremendous undertaking even the best professionals find challenging. As a large, diverse regional conglomerate of states, this task can become even more challenging. As stated earlier, a successful marketing/advertising campaign requires successful funding and participation.

#### Solution:

- Offset advertising costs by finding media partners that will benefit from marketing the Midwest. Allow media to sell advertising associated with advertorial or insert information. Provide the media with information and material to publish. Offer media familiarization tours. Develop a list of potential sponsors or advertisers. Promote the project through sales presentations. (Print possibilities: Meredith Publishing -Midwest Living Magazine, Traditional Home, Successful Farming, MORE / National Geographic Traveler, or business publications such as Forbes, Ingram's, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today)
- Drive customers to a database-driven web site for additional information. Offer prominent, attractive portholes to individual state web sites.
- Track inquiries through reader response cards, toll free numbers, web reports, etc.
- Place advertising and media buys to coincide with other marketing opportunities (main attractions, events, conferences, tradeshow)
- Build a vibrant "quality of life" message into the advertising. Create appeal from a tourism perspective. Remember: CEOs and location scouts are people!



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Web site

#### Issue:

Information should be readily available to interested potential customers on a 24/7 basis. Organizing, updating and maintaining this information would require strong financial and human resources.

#### Solution:

- Bid a contract for a database-driven web design based on a centralized approach. MGC serves as an administrator and web master. MGC writes the cost into state dues or seeks sponsors that will receive Internet / email advertising in return.
- Bid a contract for a database-driven web design based on a decentralized approach. Communities purchase a template that they will update and maintain on their own. Hosting fees are paid directly to the contractor. MGC still serves as a central link and gatekeeper but does not enter information for the communities. Cost is significantly reduced for MGC and states. Communities cost-share in the final product.



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### Fulfillment / Lead Contact

#### Issue:

Customers often want something tangible for reference material. They may wish to order a marketing kit for an overall perspective of the area or resource to key locations. Communities, economic developers, educators, and destination marketing organizations focus marketing efforts on customers expressing an interest in their product or service. Toll free numbers, reader response cards and web requests can be tracked to provide a list of leads. This list of leads could represent profit or lost profits. It is important to follow up with additional marketing efforts.

#### Solution:

- Advertising – Place ads with toll free numbers, web address, reader response cards, etc. to receive hardcopy fulfillment materials from MGC.
- MGC Brochure:  
Jesse Heier, Washington Director for the Council of State Governments-Midwestern Governors' Conference, presented information on behalf of MGC to give the tourism representatives a clearer idea of the history and governors' intentions for the group. He provided rough first-draft proposed copies of the MGC marketing brochure, emphasizing that this is just a start. The draft of the brochure consolidates information about the states to show the states' "best foot forward." MGC is looking to the tourism group for assistance in developing this brochure in addition to a complete marketing campaign. Reader response card could be added to find out which area interests the customer and the lead could be forwarded to the community.
- Web site – Registration or ordering information could be gathered for email blasts, mailings, and lead generation.
- Fulfillment through MGC – Inquiries go directly to MGC for distribution to communities.
- Fulfillment through communities and key distribution points such as state offices, local Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations or Convention and Visitors Bureaus, educational institutions, realtors, etc. – Inquiry reports delivered to MGC from communities. Entities supporting the regional effort and providing fulfillment materials (MGC marketing kit) could receive a database of leads and marketing report in return for their contribution to the project. (Although we recognize that lead sharing may be problematic).



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### **Funding/Budget**

#### Issue:

At this point we do not have a clear idea of the research and development, marketing, advertising, or implementation costs. Some of the details of the project will have to be solved before this step can be addressed.

#### Solution:

- Governors give approval to proceed
- Baseline funding provided to do research
- Partnerships established with financial commitments



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## Workgroup Suggested Strategies & Tactics

### **Production**

**Issue:**

In the process of creating and implementing a marketing campaign, several areas of responsibility will need to be delineated and a central point must be defined to consolidate the effort.

**Solution:**

- MGC serves as the key coordination point for production and operation, but each partner or team is responsible for the work they are contributing to the project.
- Analyze need for specialized teams, and designate



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## Recommendations for Launch

### Planning

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PHASE I	Assemble Teams / Inventory and Assess Project Budget
PHASE II	Develop Marketing Tools
PHASE III	Launch / Operation
PHASE IV	Track Performance

### Timeframe

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November-	Tourism Directors meet in St. Louis
December-	Prepare draft plan of action and submit back to tourism directors
January-	Adjust and revise plan, assemble teams
February-	Present plan to MGC
March-	Revise plan based on MGC recommendations, begin development of marketing effort
Late Spring-	Launch

\*Note: The short time frame is of concern to some of the Tourism Directors.

### Metrics

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Accomplishments achieved through this group are successes for all 13 states and metrics will be implemented to track performance. Although states typically are in tough competition for market share of economic development projects, this is a case where the states are going to reevaluate the marketing equation and look at the partnership between the 13 mid-western states as a contender against other US regions and international competitors as well.

Regional metrics:

- Increase in workforce/employment
- Increase in tax revenues

Project metrics:

- Number of Inquiries
- Successful business expansion/attraction projects



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