



CABOT TRAIL RE-ASSESSMENT

Follow-up Recommendations List

September, 2012

Marketing

1. Find a funding source and continue the work of the Cabot Trail Working Association.

Going forward with these recommendations will require:

- a. A full-time effort
- b. 60% should be dedicated to marketing
- c. 40% should be dedicated to continued product development
- d. A really strong working relationship with the DCBA, Nova Scotia Tourism, and the ECBC

2. Make the trip to the Cabot Trail worthwhile from anywhere on the planet: Market to the Four Times Rule.

This message needs to be loud, clear and everywhere: "If you spend seven to ten days on Cape Breton Island, you will end up with a world-class experience you'll talk about the rest of your life."

3. Change the focus from driving and recreation to music, food and the arts.

Include the Ceilidh Trail in the Cabot Trail experience. As soon as visitors cross the Causeway, they should turn left or head to Baddeck and start there.

Expand the visitor experience: Visitors could spend 2-3 days on the Ceilidh Trail; 5 days on the Cabot Trail (not just one); and 2 days in the Sydney/Louisburg area.

Why do visitors come today?

- a. Outdoor adventure
 - b. Scenic touring
 - c. Coastal experiences
 - d. Culture, arts and heritage
 - e. Culinary
 - f. Niche markets: golf, cruises, etc.
- # 1 reason should be: Food, music and the arts in a world-class setting.

4. Rework your marketing budgets – individually and collectively.

If you want new business, residents, or visitors, your marketing efforts should start in front of a computer screen.

Your marketing dollars should be allocated as follows:

- 45%: Internet/website/social media/apps/peer reviews
- 20%: Public relations, media, brand building
- 20%: Advertising – to drive people to your website
- 10%: Collateral materials
- 5%: Outdoor, trade shows, other marketing avenues

5. Create and promote "The Best of the Cabot Trail" brochure and online guide.

You must promote your "anchor tenants." An anchor Tenant is a business that you would drive an hour or more to visit, specifically. To be successful, you must have at least one or two anchor tenants.

In this “Best of” brochure, market your top five restaurants, retail shops, activities, and attractions. Do not include lodging, because you want every lodging facility to provide these brochures in their rooms.

The “Best of” must meet certain criteria. You can’t just list everything, and you can’t just allow any shop, restaurant, attraction, or activity to pay to be included. They must actually be the “best” of what the Cabot Trail has to offer. Here is sample criteria you can start with to make the selections:

- They must be highly regarded (80%+ positive peer reviews, regional publications, Taste of Nova Scotia, etc.)
- They must have good curb appeal
- They must be open June through October (to start)
- They must be open until at least 6:00 pm
- They must be open six days a week
- They must be unique to The Cabot Trail

6. Create a book of “Cabot Trail Hidden Gems.”

This should be filled with specific unique experiences that visitors can enjoy while on The Cabot Trail – experiences that locals would know about. This should be modeled after the book, 101 Things to do in Door County.

7. Create detailed itineraries from local residents.

Provide specifics – in order of what a visitor should do, when they should do it, allowing the proper amount of time, with details.

Create itineraries for weekends, week-long, couples, families, girls’ weekends out, etc.

8. Evoke emotion in your marketing efforts.

If you want your marketing to be effective, you **MUST** stand out from the crowd to grab folks’ attention.

- Headlines and bullet points are read much more than body copy. Be brief.
- Create and use professional photography and videography. Focus on the people in the photos, not places or things.
- The top 3 inches of your brochure are critical. Promote the experience first, then the business or town. Use yellows on a dark background.
- Try using WordPress for your websites. Spend your money on the content – not the delivery system.

9. Invest in a world-wide public relations program.

You should see a \$3 return on investment (earned media) for every dollar you spend on a PR effort.

10. Provide specifics – not generalities.

The most important missing ingredient in most marketing materials is specifics. Specific information makes trip planning easier for your visitors. The easier you make it, the longer people will stay, and the more often they will come back.

11. Really get into the social media game.

Three priorities for using social media:

- Don’t spend more than one hour a day.
- Watch what people are saying about you on peer review sites, such as TripAdvisor. Respond to their comments and criticisms.
- Going viral is a good thing. Be ultra-creative.

12. Populate peer review sites.

Add your attractions, lodging facilities, restaurants, and shops to peer review sites. This makes it easy for visitors to find you and to share their comments.

Ask your customers to provide a review.

13. Work with Navteq and get maps updated and populated.

14. Change your “Look Offs” to “Viewpoints.” Promote the activity – not a location.

15. Sell “The Cabot Trail” road signs. Visitors want them!

Product Development

16. Create a “world famous” photo opportunity.

One suggestion: In front of a “The World Famous Cabot Trail” sign. It should be about one third smaller than the existing one near the Red Barn. It should be lower to the ground, and the view behind the sign should be gorgeous. Have the words “The World Famous” be black lettering.

17. Fix the kiosks you put up four years ago.

- Kiosks need regular maintenance to always look good.
- Include a QR code or brochure distribution next to a list of local activities.
- Include a large full-sized map with “you are here” notation.
- List the attractions in the immediate area with a QR code, or brochures to provide specific information.
- Maps and prints should always be mounted on foam core board.

18. Work with neighbors to live up to the “world-class” brand position you’ve earned.

- Consider not allowing portable signs around the Cabot Trail. They truly are tacky, and make the Cabot Trail look tacky too.
- Screen trash and storage areas. Add curb appeal.
- Fill in the potholes.
- If you have a readerboard sign, use it or remove it.
- Add beautification. Not only does it make your place of business attractive, it makes it obvious you’re still in business!
- Screen or move trash/construction materials, so they aren’t obvious.
- Be open during the day on weekends.
- Merchant signage should sell specifics. Promote your primary lure.

19. Gradually work to replace the “old” Cabot Trail road signs.

20. **Merchants need to broaden their merchandise offerings.** Be sure to keep an eye on market trends and customer requests, provide a variety of offerings with different price-points.
21. **Develop a program to fix parking lot pot holes.**
22. **Get rid of business signs more than 10 km from the location of the business.**
23. **Clear some of the viewpoint stops, so the views aren't obstructed.**
24. **Work on cell phone access around the trail, and promote local hot spots (with internet access).**
25. **Create QR posts at various places – on kiosks.**
26. **Make it easy for visitors to purchase passes to the National Park through online purchasing and 24/7 kiosks.**
27. **Add a wayfinding sign at the north end intersection, where the road Y's to Meat Cove and Bay St. Lawrence one way, and Ingonish and Baddeck the other way.**
28. **Over time, change the "look off" sign icons to an image of a camera.**
29. **Provide distances on kiosks and wayfinding signage.** This should be done for trails and roads – making it easier for visitors to decide to engage in an activity or see an attraction. If they don't know the distance, they may decide not to take a chance, in case it's too far.
30. **Create a major gateway to the Cabot Trail. Suggested location: along highway 105 just west of the Red Barn.** It should make a profound statement of arrival.
31. **Create a directory sign of the icons used around the trail.**
32. **Keep pushing to get the roadway improvements done!**