



Assessment Findings and Suggestions Report

CAPE BRETON & SYDNEY



Opportunity Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In August of 2013, an Opportunity Assessment of the Sydney and Louisbourg area of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-and-a-half hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the area - how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public washrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the Opportunity Assessment, we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project. The towns and surrounding area were "secretly shopped." Any person looking to relocate their business, industry, or residence will come to your community as a visitor first. Tourism is the front door to all your economic development efforts.

Once potential visitors find information about your area, are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Assessment, we reviewed your visitor website and print marketing materials.

A typical community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)

- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We searched the internet for activities, requested and reviewed printed materials, and looked for articles and third-party information. As we prepared for travel to your community, we searched both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, tourism websites, and read travel articles and guidebooks.

The marketing assessment determined how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the area would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or from further away. The question on most visitors' minds is: What do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities falter is when they merely provide "lists" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation, historic downtowns, scenic vistas, etc. Of course, nearly every visitor can do these things closer to home. So, what makes the lower Cape Breton area worth the trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip. THEN, promote

your diversionary, or “complementary” activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California, if Disneyland wasn’t there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm mind that Disneyland gets all the glory? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with those secondary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities benefit.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for what makes your community worth a special trip, or a great place to live, or to do business. We look for details, details, details. Do you give a reason for visiting, and do you provide enough information to make it easy to plan a trip? Are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the area, looking at enticements from the highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public washrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The area benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift

shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost “suggestion,” where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed “recommendations,” as they were developed without consulting the communities first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons why the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the communities, leading them to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It’s important to note that to increase the area’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the area’s ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a region-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and provincial agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) will not be successful if the tourism effort is not region-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts.



But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your area? Do your communities have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or they simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, and have developed some suggestions and ideas the communities can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended

social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, and hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it - you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.



THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do your residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think Disneyworld, Disneyland, San Antonio’s River Walk, Banff, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial

lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the





water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries.

They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Jann Arden, I don't care whether she's performing in Ontario or Alberta. People by the millions head to Disneyland, Disneyworld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to

visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or vegetable?

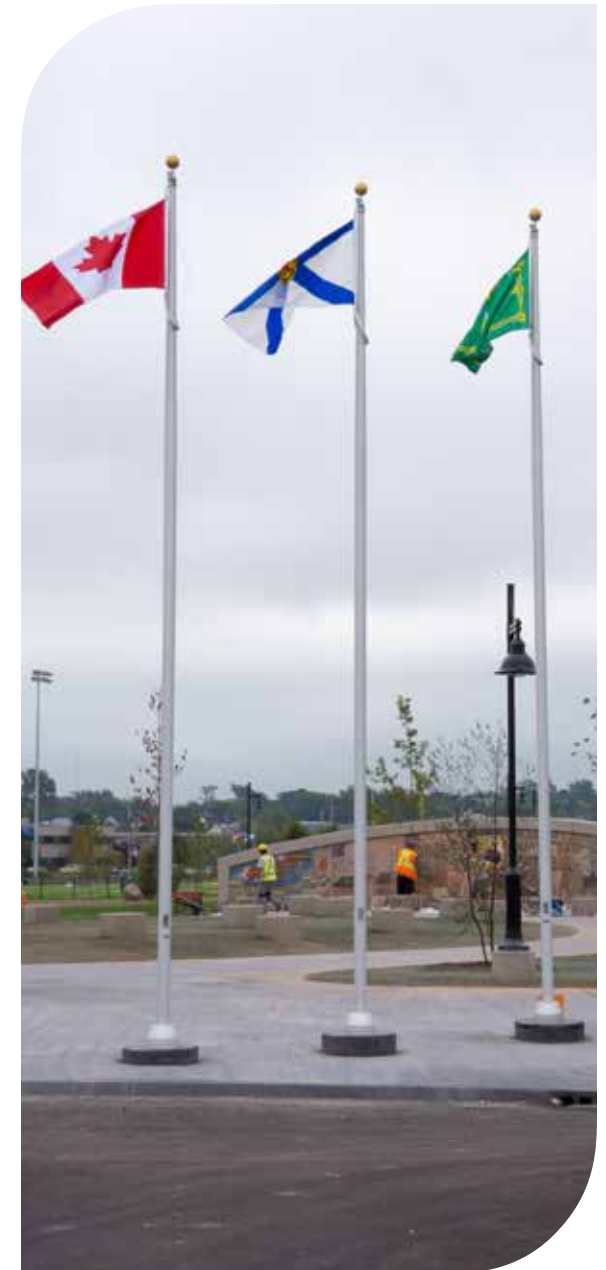
Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. For local heritage to be a major attraction, it needs to combine activities with ambiance, and it needs to be pervasive throughout the area.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of





your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, washrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing arts), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

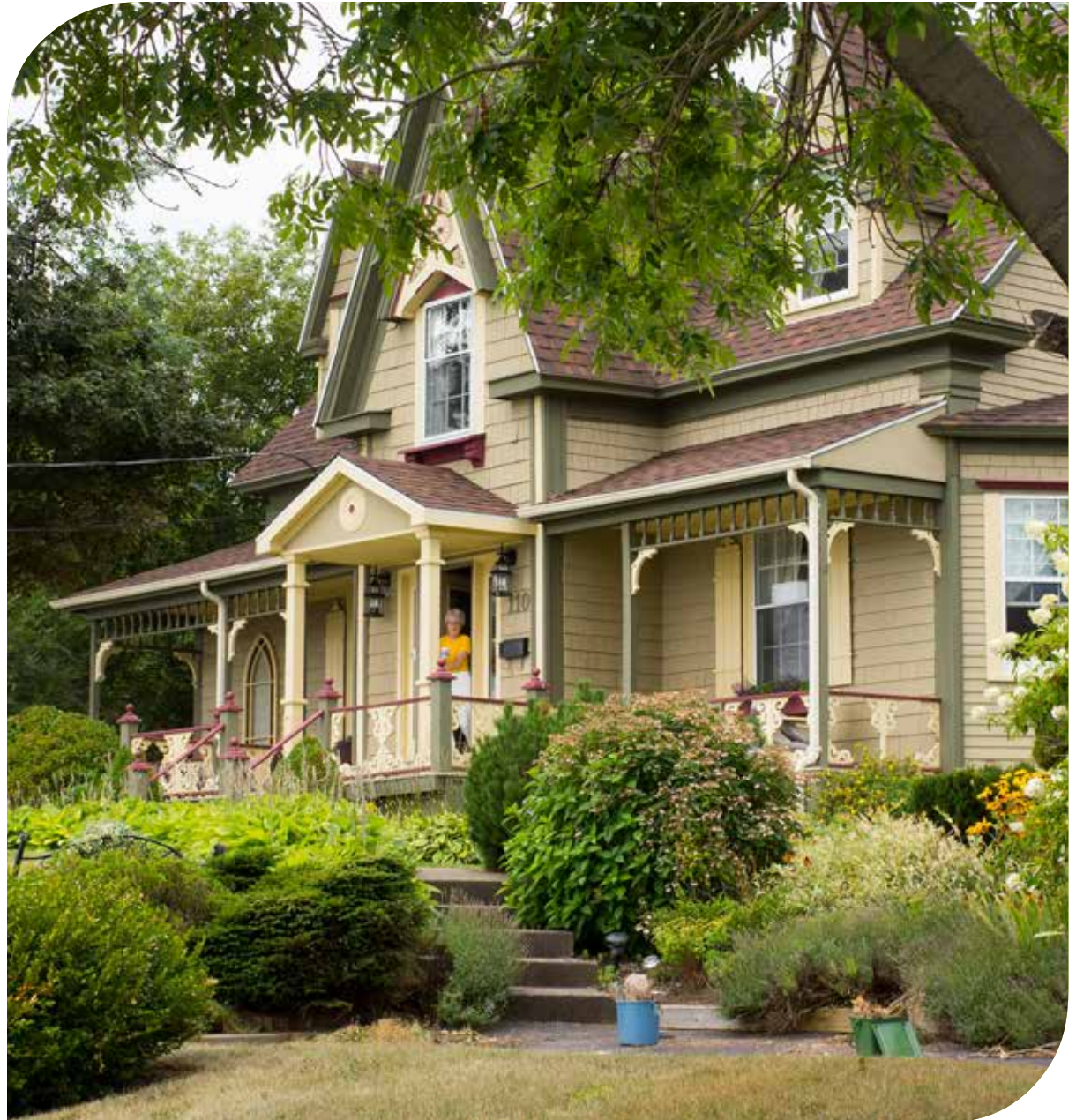
The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass –

the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., nearly \$75 billion in Canada, and supports millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.



NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report will provide many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the communities and becomes a springboard for the communities in enhancing their tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the communities should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed branding plan can build on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and local input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today. RBI's BrandCamp program helps build your branding plan from the ground up - with local input, brainstorming, research, and creative planning. We can work with you to guide you through the process, helping create a plan that has local champions and community buy-in.

The next step in the planning process would be to provide public outreach, and review past and current planning efforts. This would determine your goals as a region.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the "development" portion of the plan or the "how to get there" program: determining

what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with its own "to do list."

Finally, there's the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

A branding plan should be an "action plan" as opposed to a "strategic plan." You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

Recommendations in a branding plan should provide all the necessary steps for your area to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become more attractive and enjoyable for both visitors and citizens.

A good plan can provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the communities, building their unique images in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment in which to live, work, and visit.



Findings & Suggestions



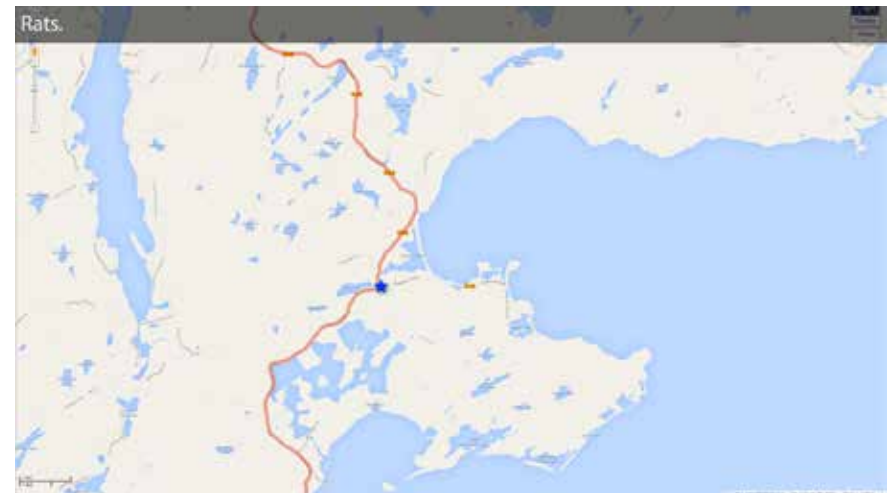
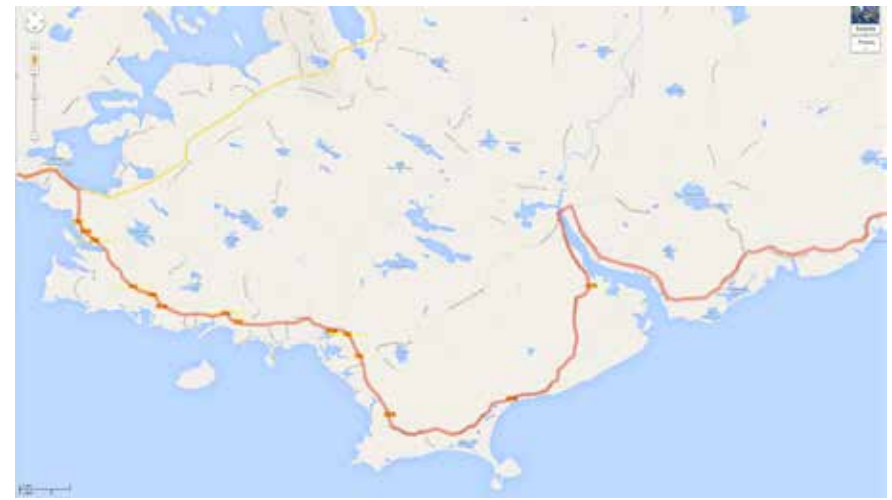
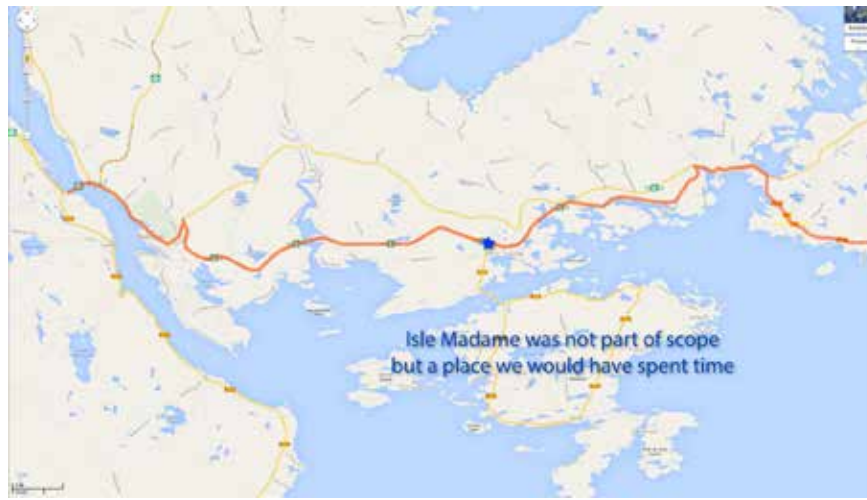


The primary goal of tourism development is to increase the amount of cash that is "imported" into the community. Fortunately, many of the same ingredients that make a destination attractive to visitors, also make the community attractive to residents and new business development - and investment - making it a better place to live, work, and play.

This is not just about tourism, but tourism is the front door to your non-tourism economic development efforts. During this assessment, we examined 60 key elements about the Cape Breton and Sydney area.

We decided we would drive to the area via the shoreline - along the Fleur de Lis Trail. First we stopped at the visitor information center at the Canso Causeway (bottom left and right). The staff is very helpful.

We weren't quite sure how to refer to this area of Cape Breton to differentiate it from the Cabot and Ceilidh Trails area. Consider calling the Sydney & southeaster shore "Lower Cape Breton," and the Cabot & Ceilidh Trails area as "Upper Cape Breton."



From Port Hawkesbury, we drove along Highway 104 through St. Peter's. Then we turned southeast to take Highway 247 - the Fleur de Lis Trail. We thought driving along the coast would give us beautiful views of the ocean. We also didn't realize the highway doesn't lead along the coast all the way to Fort Louisbourg - we needed to go inland anyway.

The Fleur de Lis Trail was a disappointment - there were very few spending opportunities, such as little shops, cafes, restaurants, and no washrooms along the route. It was also not as scenic a drive as we had expected, and the

highway was in poor condition.

Suggestion: Don't promote the Fleur de Lis Trail for the drive - it would be better to encourage visitors to drive to Fort Louisbourg or Sydney or a business by a more direct route. Guide visitors to their destinations by the most direct route.

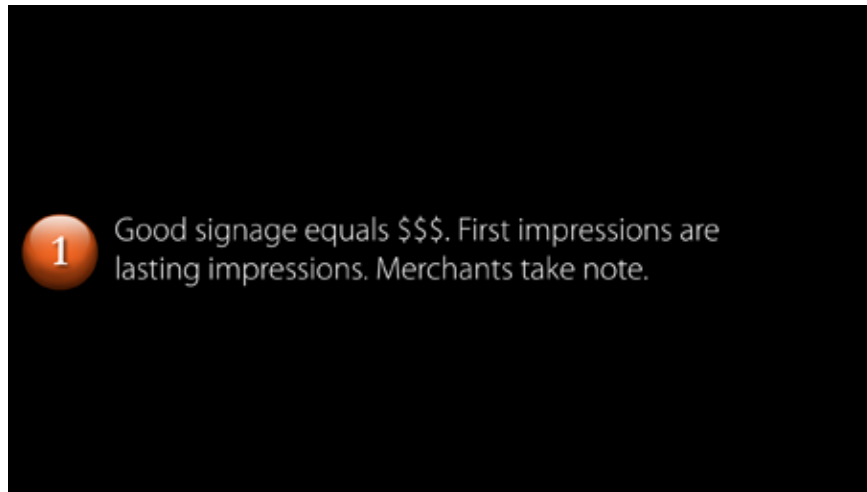


It was a long drive (top left) winding along the Fleur de Lis Trail north to the Mira River and then back south to Louisbourg.

Louisbourg gave us a great first impression (bottom left). This entry is very well done.

We saw the Fort from across the bay (top right), and we couldn't wait to visit.

We were looking for a place for lunch, and we saw The Beggars' Banquet (bottom right). They weren't doing lunch though, but they were setting up for dinner. It looked like it would be fun.



We saw the sign for the Lobster Kettle (top left). The sign needs to be freshened with a new coat of paint, so it didn't give us a great first impression. We saw the restaurant though, and it looks great! (top right)

Good signage is critical for businesses - signs are most visitors' first impression of the business. Make sure your signage is a good reflection of your business.

We had a very good lunch at the Lobster Kettle - we'd definitely eat there again.



The next day we planned to drive around the Mira River (top left) before heading back to experience Fort Louisbourg - we'd heard it was a scenic drive, so we went to check it out.

We knew the Two Rivers Wildlife Park was along the route around the Mira River, and it looks great (top right and bottom left). We talked with some locals about it, and they thought it was wonderful - in fact, one person said her children were spending the day there that very day.

When we were about half-way down the first side, the paved road became a dirt road.

Suggestion: Promote specific activities, but not as a scenic drive. Warn RVers.



Suggestion: Have this information on a brochure and have holders here. (Stay tuned)



Very nicely done and a great first impression of Louisbourg.



We continued around the Mira River along the dirt road, and finally reached pavement again, but much of it was in very poor condition (top left). As a scenic drive, there wasn't much to see except forest with an occasional glimpse of the water, and there weren't any places to stop, shop, or eat, with the exception of the wildlife park. There were a few small lodging facilities. Promote specific activities, like the Wildlife Park, but not as a scenic drive.

We drove on to Louisbourg and stopped to read the information on the interpretive signs (top right). Consider putting this information into a brochure and making them available in brochure holders like these (bottom right).

Louisbourg looks like a very nice town.

Suggestion: Visitor information should be working 24/7, 365 days a year.



2

Develop 24/7 365-day visitor information with brochure distribution



The Louisbourg Visitor Information Centre (top left) is very nice. Since visitors don't just travel during business hours, offering information around the clock is important. Include brochure distribution outside as well as inside.

Brochure holders are one easy way to provide visitor information after hours. This visitors center (bottom left) has a small brochure holder next to the front door.

The Central Bruce Peninsula in Ontario provides a weather-proof brochure holder outside the door to their visitor information centre (bottom right).



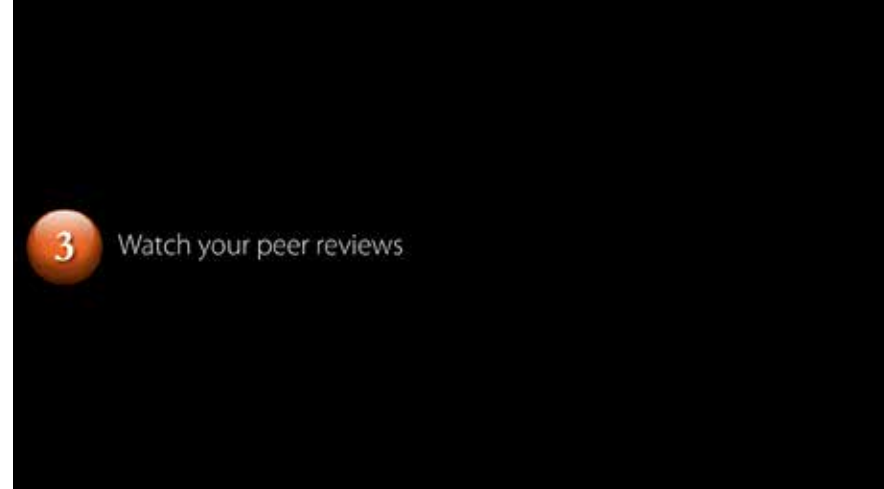
Mahone Bay's visitor information centre (top left) has brochure distribution on each side of its door.

The visitor center in Oxnard, California (top right) provides visitor information in several brochure holders right on their door. Note how the bench and pots create a welcoming ambiance.

In North Platte, Nebraska (bottom left and right), their VIC offers brochures in weather-proof holders, so visitors always have access to information.



Looks very nice! Love the entrance that ties to the Fortress.



Visitor information kiosks can offer the information visitors need 24 hours a day/7 days a week. They should cross-promote activities, events, attractions and amenities. The more visitors see there is to do, the longer they will stay and the more money they will spend. Every site should cross-sell to other sites, attractions and amenities.

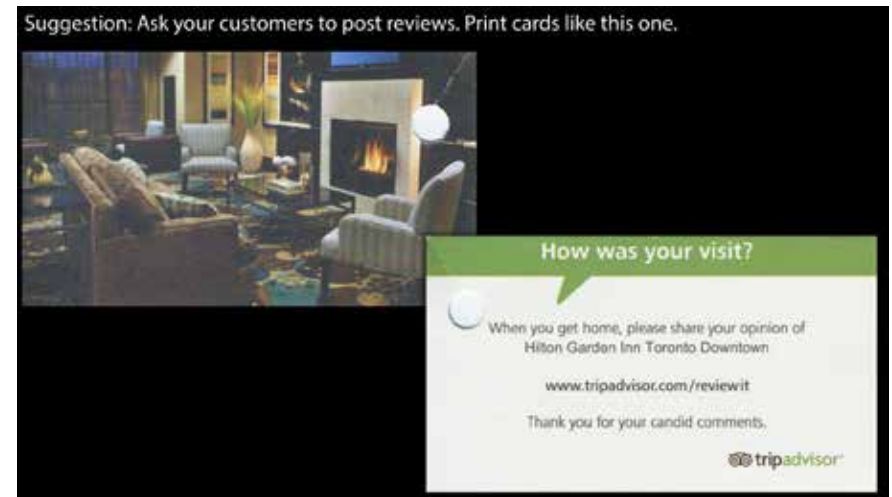
This kiosk in Cape May, NJ (top left and right) is one of our favorites: It has light, shelter from the weather, ample room for brochures and displays, and it fits the ambiance of the locale.

Although the vast majority of visitors do their travel planning online, once they arrive, visitors want to find local information and have a brochure in hand to refer to. Bentley University's Center for Marketing Technology found that:

Only 32% of travel decisions prior to traveling are made using brochures. (#1 resource - internet; #2 resource - friends.)

81% of travel decisions while traveling come from looking at brochures (#1).

Brochures are still important.



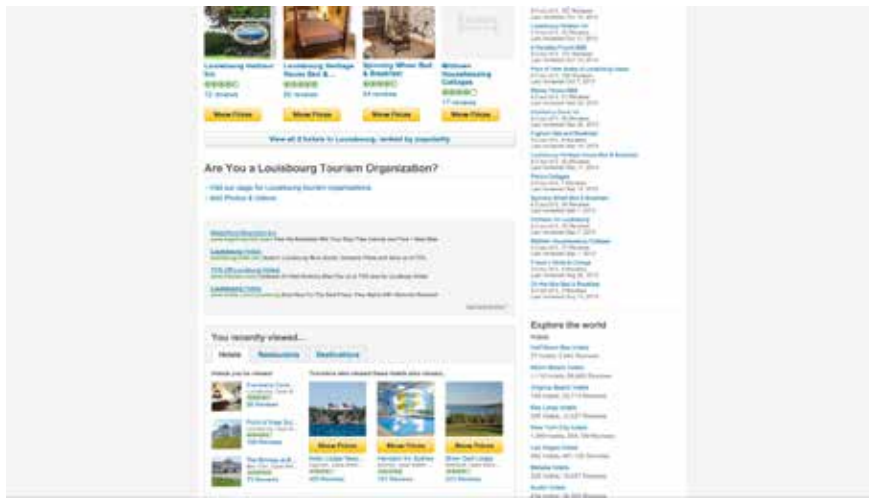
More and more travelers are looking at peer review websites to get information for travel planning. Make sure those visitors can find your businesses and attractions.

Feel free to ask your customers to post a review - first make sure they are happy with your service. Peer reviews are more important than ever before. Consider printing business-card size cards (top right) to hand out to customers who have had a good experience reminding them they can post reviews.

It's critical that merchants, restaurants, and lodging facilities monitor peer

review sites and make a response if necessary. And it costs nothing to reply to a review, but it shows people you care.

When you receive accolades from TripAdvisor, another peer review site, or a magazine or travel writer, let the world know about it! The Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site in Baddeck (top left) has this sign posted in their entry hall.



Provide the information to peer review sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp! about your locations and businesses. You can set up the information yourselves - a customer doesn't have to do it, and it'll be much easier for your happy customers to post a good review.

Make sure your tourism organizations are adding content to TripAdvisor. It does take time, but it's a free service. The folks at TripAdvisor want to be more than just a review site for restaurants and lodging establishments. They are working hard to become the go-to source for planning a trip to just about



anywhere. They want the site populated with attractions, activities, photos, and resources.

Lighthouse Point (bottom left and right) is wonderful! Consider putting the interpretive sign (bottom left) at the lighthouse. Add trail information signage at the lighthouse too: how long the trail is, where it goes, amenities, level of difficulty.

The Louisbourg Lighthouse is one of the "very best" of Lower Cape Breton.

4 Promote your "anchor tenants" specifically



Promote your "Best Of" attractions, amenities, shops and restaurants. Make sure they are experiences visitors will be able to find and enjoy. They should be something visitors would go out of their way to visit - and they've got to live up to expectations. They are your "anchor tenants."

Alpena, Michigan created a "Best Of" brochure featuring their "anchor tenants" - things visitors couldn't get closer to home (all photos this page). They used strict criteria to select their best of's.

Here's a sample criteria for developing a list of your "Best Of's":

- Highly regarded (80%+ positive peer reviews, TripAdvisor, Yelp, regional publications.
- Good curb appeal.
- Open at least May through October (to start)
- Open until at least 6:00 pm.
- Open six days a week.
- Unique to the region.



This was the most confusing of all the Parks Canada sites we've visited (and that's most of them.)

How does this work?
Where do you start?
Where should we park?

Suggestions:

1. Wayfinding signage
2. Information:
"The Fortress is only accessible by park shuttles. Park in the furthest lot with available spaces & walk to the visitor centre."
3. Hours and days the park is open.
4. Park fees: \$\$\$



Suggestion: Redevelop the brochure. It really says nothing and is not helpful.

Now where? Suggestions: Add pedestrian wayfinding from each parking area. Is this where we catch the park shuttle? Go to Sherbrooke Village. They're the best at this.



Suggestion: Add signage "Your Fortress of Louisbourg experience starts right here."

With a lot of anticipation, we drove to the Fortress at Louisbourg. The parking and entrance to the fort is confusing for visitors not already familiar. We didn't know that we needed to park in a lot a distance away from the fort and take a shuttle bus.

Suggestion: Add signage to let visitors know what to do. Include the following:

"The Fortress is only accessible by park shuttles. Park in the furthest lot with

available space & walk to the visitor centre to catch a shuttle bus." Include hours and days the park is open, as well as the park fees.

The visitor centre was very nice, and the staff was informative and friendly.

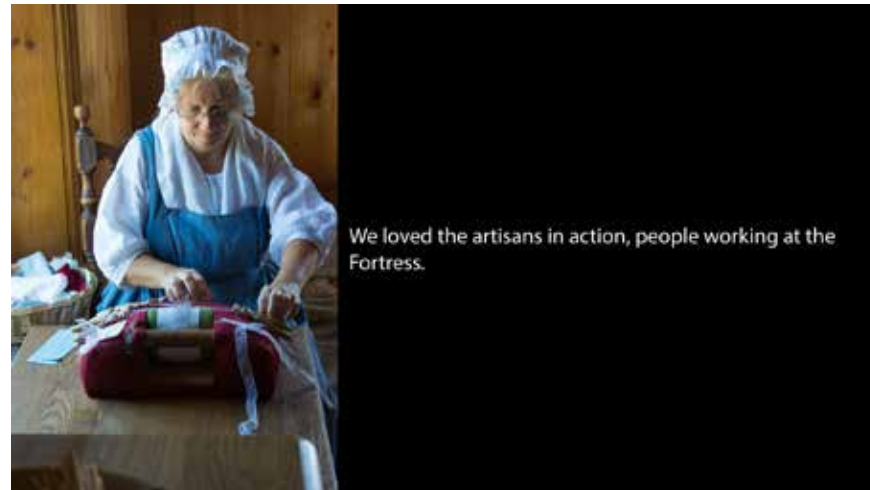


The interpretive displays in the visitor centre were very nice (top left).

We took the shuttle bus and were off to a great start. The actors were excellent, and they really brought history to life through their portrayals (top right).

The Fortress at Louisbourg is not only a gorgeous site in a beautiful, scenic location, it is an amazing experience.

Suggestion: The brochure should tell us about guided tours. How often. Where they start, etc.



Even the actors were pretty fun. Suggestion: these skits should be promoted.

Let us know where we can join a tour (top left), and encourage visitors to do so!

Suggestion: Design a "Tour Guide App to the Fortress at Louisbourg" for visitors to use on their smart phones or tablets.

We enjoyed the costumed interpreters - the actors - in their roles. They were very entertaining and informative.



The recreation of life in the fortress was great - even down to the details of vegetable gardens.

Consider discreetly placed QR codes to provide more interpretive information.

Lunch in the fortress helped really immerse visitors in the experience - the food, silverware, serving style was all authentic (top right). Very fun!

The Fortress of Louisbourg is definitely one of the "Best Of" attractions!

Cranberry Cove Inn (bottom left) has tremendous curb appeal. Doesn't it make you want to stay there? Its reviews on TripAdvisor are also very good.

The playhouse was promoted by staff at the Fortress. Suggestion: Add a brochure holder of upcoming performances.



Suggestion: "Click here for tickets" with a QR code.

Suggestion: Don't allow chain link fencing in the core downtown district.



We accidentally found the promenade. Suggestion: Paint the signs every year.



Make it easy for visitors to find out more about upcoming performances at the Louisbourg Playhouse (top left and right). Invite people back with brochures in weather-proof brochure holders and a QR code on the sign.

Chain link fencing should never be allowed in a downtown area. It has an industrial or prison appearance that isn't attractive. Wood, stone or wrought-iron fencing should be used instead.

The Promenade is great - but we had trouble finding it. Make sure your wayfinding leads visitors there.

Our picks for "very best" of "Lower Cape Breton" so far is:

- The Louisbourg Lighthouse
- The Fortress at Louisbourg
- Louisbourg Playhouse

Suggestion: Add information ABOUT the promenade. And THEN the history of the area.



Suggestion: Signage - how far does it go? A map? What is there to see?



Looks like a great little museum.



Love it! Very cool and very fun.



The Promenade has potential to be a gathering space for Louisbourg residents and visitors. It is a great spot for food vendors, art exhibits, tours, etc. Add picnic tables, chairs, benches.

The Louisbourg Train Museum looks great (bottom left).

The Big Red Bus Chip Wagon really caught our attention. It's awesome and fun. A lot of other visitors thought so too - the place was busy!



Main-a-Deu is a stunning little community.



How far? 1) Key 2) Name 3) Arrow 4) Distance



As we left Louisbourg, we decided to take the Marconi Trail (top left). It was a nice drive, with a lot of beautiful scenery.

The "key" signs should always include:

1. Key
2. Name of the attraction
3. Arrow
4. Distance

These four items are necessary for each sign - visitors are much more likely to

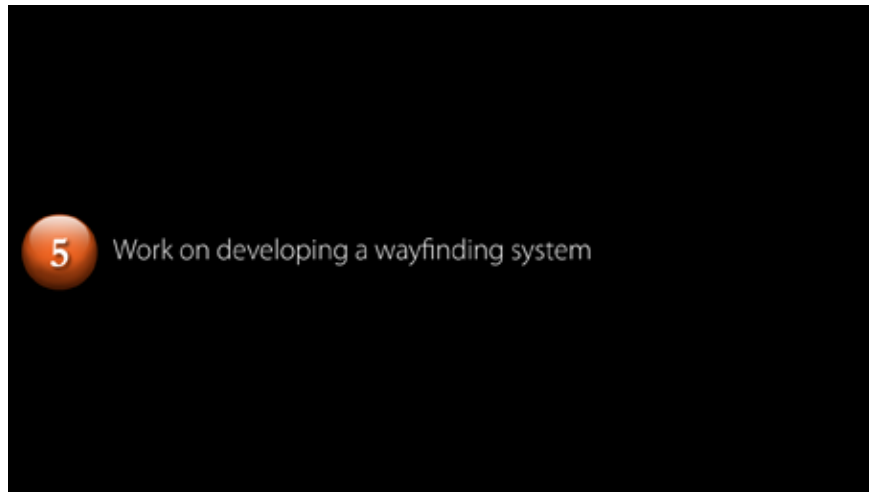
go to an attraction if they know what the attraction is, how far it is, and how to get there. Make an inventory of the "key" signs and update and maintain them.

Along our drive, we passed through the little community of Man-a-Deu - it was very scenic.

Nice gateway sign. Can you deliver on the promise of "Proud People. Strong Future"?



We're not off to a good start. Suggestion: Remove all of these and start over.

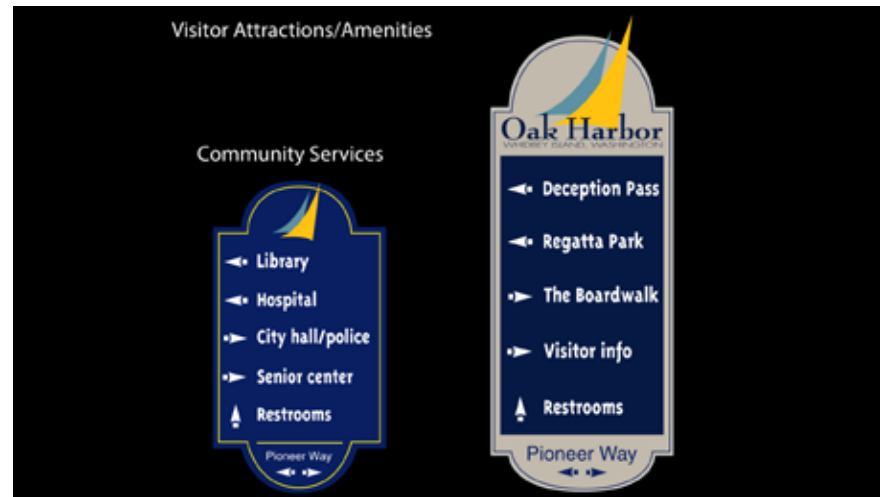


We drove into Glace Bay. The "welcome" sign is nice and is placed in a good location. Gateways are important - they provide visitors with their first impression of the community. Gateway signs should always be attractive and well-maintained, as well as being placed in an attractive location, which isn't always at your boundary line.

Signs say a lot about a community. When they are broken, faded, or not maintained, they give the impression that the community doesn't care. These signs (top right) don't give a good impression.

Suggestion: Develop a professional wayfinding system. That new system will help "connect the dots" to make it much easier to locate attractions and amenities, as well as to guide travelers from the highways into downtown. It can help reduce "sign clutter" by having the necessary information on coordinated signs.

This is an example of one of Pittsburg, CA's wayfinding signs (bottom right).



A wayfinding system includes:

- Vehicular wayfinding signage
- Pedestrian wayfinding
- Pole banners
- Visitor and downtown information kiosks
- Gateways and entry points

The top priority for ANY community is the development of a "Wayfinding System." Connecting the dots to your attractions, amenities, and local services

through a professionally produced directional and gateway signage system. Appleton, WI uses this decorative wayfinding (top left) to help both visitors and residents. Oak Harbor, WA (top right) has two types of wayfinding signs - one for community services and one for visitor attractions. Other examples include North Adams, MA (bottom left) and Modesto, CA (bottom right).

Note how these signs promote the communities' brands, as well as their attractions and amenities.



Wayfinding is as much a science as an art. General rule of thumb: 1 inch tall lettering for every 12 feet of viewing distance. No more than 5 items on a sign. Be sure all your wayfinding signs continue to lead you to the destination. They must connect the dots.

Barrie, ON recently developed their new wayfinding system. They are using one design for the city in general (top left) and another design for their downtown shopping, dining, and entertainment district (top right).

Kalamazoo, MI (bottom left) includes a map to help guide pedestrians. Disneyland's map directory (bottom right) helps guide visitors - you can trust Disney to do visitor-oriented amenities the right way!



Wayfinding includes getting rid of the old and starting fresh.



What does the beaver represent? Does this sign serve a purpose? If not, take it down.



French Lick, IN (top left) provides pedestrians with wayfinding that is decorative and colorful. The finial on top fits their French background.

Wayfinding is an investment, not an expense.

- It plays a role in your branding efforts.
- It is a major component in your marketing efforts.
- It reinforces a positive experience.
- It increases spending locally.
- It educates both visitors and locals about what you have and where it's

located.

- It builds community pride.
- It is as much a science as an art.
- It includes getting rid of old, worn out signs and sign clutter, and starting fresh.

Suggestion: By law - two weeks at a time, four times a year, by permit, with penalties for violations. Most of these are not even well maintained.



Yep. Another one. Does this right turn only?



Suggestion: Create and enforce an abatement program for abandoned vehicles.



Portable signs should only be used for temporary situations - not as permanent signage. Consider regulating their use to only being allowed for two weeks at a time, four times a year, by permit only. There should be penalties for violations. If businesses need permanent signage, they should use a permanent, professionally constructed, attractive sign.

We weren't sure if the occasional arrows we saw (top right) were directing us to an attraction, or if they meant the road was one-way.

Signage says a lot. Can you read this sign? (bottom left) Probably not, since it's upside down.

Our first impressions of Glace Bay.



Once again. For all attractions: 1) key 2) name 3) arrow 4) distance.



Suggestion: Consider adding more trash cans or empty them more often.



Our impressions were that Glace Bay had seen better days. Closed storefronts (top left), neglected signage, and weeds painted a sad picture. Sometimes these things result from lack of funding, and sometimes people just don't notice them since they live there and see them everyday.

Idea - organize volunteer clean-up days twice each year. Residents and business owners come into town for one day and all work together weeding, painting, picking up trash. Make it an event with donated lunches provided by local merchants and donated entertainment from local musicians.

Vacant, boarded up buildings can be cleaned up and freshly painted too, so they have a better appearance (with the owner's permission, of course.)

Suggestions: Orchestrate a volunteer clean-up day. Trash & weed removal, paint.



Note: Are the one-way streets really necessary? Just something to think about!



It looks as though the town went through a revitalization effort, and then had no way to maintain it. First impression: no one cares and a severely economically depressed town.



Is this the museum? Suggestion: Add a sign to the lawn area with hours and open days.



Suggestion: One-way streets through the downtown core tend to divert traffic away from the local businesses. Only use one-way streets if traffic makes it absolutely necessary (top right).

Another possibility for maintaining the landscaping and keeping the weeds pulled downtown (bottom left) is to have businesses or residents "adopt" a garden, portion of sidewalk, or other area. They will be responsible for its upkeep, and in exchange, a small sign can be posted there giving them the credit.

Welcome visitors to the museum by having a sign on the lawn area (bottom right). The sign should include the name of the museum with hours and days it is open.

Assumption: Permanently closed. If not tell us WHEN you will be open.



Very nice kiosk. Suggestion: Add brochure distribution.



Suggestion: Add to the sign hours and days it's open. Add a neon open sign at the entrance.



Suggestion: Add brochure distribution (for the museum and other attractions, activities)



Closed signs tell visitors to go away. Invite them back by letting them know when you will be open - always post your operating hours and days, and tell visitors "Please come back when we're open!"

It was hard to tell if the Marconi National Historic Site (bottom left and right) was open. Make it obvious with a lighted "open" sign and add the hours and days of operation to the signage out front.

Add brochure distribution to interpretive kiosks and outside museum doors to promote the attractions and cross-sell other attractions. The more you have to offer, the further people will travel and the longer they will stay.

Suggestion: Add signage - where does the trail go? How long is it? A beautiful site!



Suggestion: Round Up



Suggestion: Perhaps Tim Hortons can "adopt" this site. Add beautification, sidewalk cafe seating



Plaza areas only work if they are programmed. Idea: Food trucks, vendors, buskers...



Encourage visitors to walk down your trails by giving them more information: Where does it go? What is there to see? How long is it? (top left)

It's obvious that Glace Bay went to a lot of work and expense to develop nice streetscapes (top right). Keep them maintained and weed-free.

The space next to Tim Horton's (bottom left) has a lot of potential to be a nice gathering space for the town. Consider landscaping, using the planter box, painting a mural on the wall, and using the space for some outdoor tables and

chairs. Tim Horton's was a busy spot! We're sure people would enjoy it even more with some outdoor seating and beautification.

We are big proponents of creating plazas - gathering spaces - downtown. Glace Bay has the beginning - the space (bottom right). To attract people to use it, add seating, food trucks, vendor carts, street musicians, buskers.

Downtown has some great bones to work with and could be a charming destination.



This merchant is trying but the effort is offset with the blighted streetscapes.



Suggestions: weed abatement. A permanent sign. Instead of "Closed" when you're open.

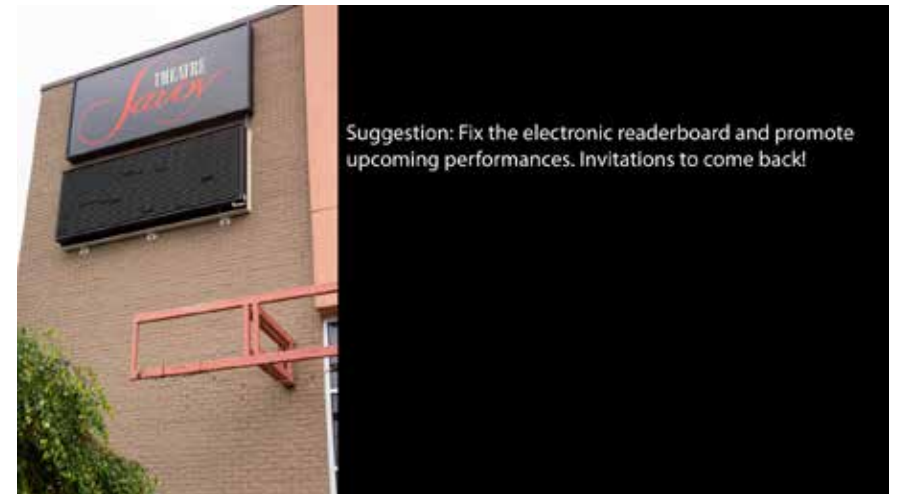


Downtown Glace Bay has some great architecture and nice streetscapes (top left). It has a lot of potential for attracting more visitors. What it needs is some TLC.

Again, consider holding a volunteer clean-up day - a celebratory event where everyone pitches in and polishes up the downtown.



Suggestion: Perhaps a Boy Scout or school project? Garden club? Anyone?



Suggestion: Fix the electronic readerboard and promote upcoming performances. Invitations to come back!

Consider using some of the vacant space downtown for “pocket parks.” These can be temporary parks built by volunteers, such as a Boy Scout troop or garden club.

The Savoy Theatre looks great - a terrific asset for the community and likely attracts a lot of visitors from out of town.

Be sure to post upcoming events on the readerboard.

Another “Best Of” - The Savoy Theatre in Glace Bay.

Suggestion: Add more trash receptacles. We watched as people tossed trash on the ground.



Suggestion: Or move one of these to the bus depot. Round Up.

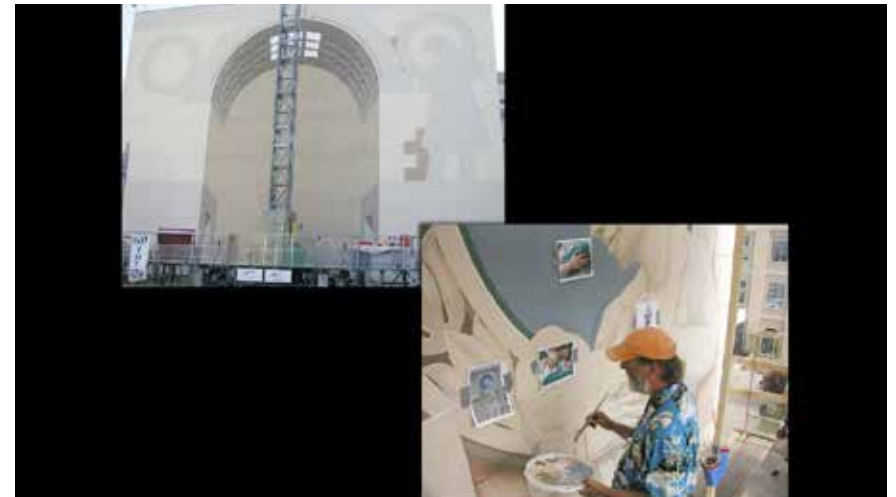


Suggestion: Consider some trompe l'oeil art.



We love the work that had been done to create the plaza areas, streetscapes, and park areas downtown. With clean up and the addition of some tables, chairs, benches, and activities and vendors, this downtown would attract residents and visitors who want to spend time here.

Consider trompe l'oeil art and murals for some of the vacant buildings and bare walls downtown.



Some buildings would be good "canvasses" for murals. Consider trompe l'oeil, (French for "fool the eye") to disguise blank walls with scenes and architectural details painted so they look real.

The variations of trompe l'oeil are endless. The photo top left shows a blank wall painted to look like the outside of an old-fashioned grocery store. The awnings, the windows and doors, even some of the shrubs, are painted.

The top right and bottom left photos show a work in progress. The work in

progress (top right), and the completed work of art (bottom left). This wall was originally an entirely blank concrete block building - even the archway is painted.

In the photos bottom right, you again see a before, during, and after view of the wall.



Some towns have created “facade easements” where the property owners grant an easement to the city, so that public funds and grants can be contributed to enhance the appeal of a downtown district.

Another before and after scene (top left). This appears nearly real even up close.

Murals can transform interior walls as well. This blank basement wall (top right) has been transformed into a very life-like and attractive doorway (bottom left).

The outside of this building (bottom right) was originally blank concrete. It was painted to fit in with the historic architecture of the rest of the town - the bricks, windows, railings, and trim are all trompe l’oeil.



Suggestion: Work with property owners to clean up, or at least screen, stuff like this.



Sometimes murals are a town's biggest attraction, especially when they tell a story. In Winslow, AZ (top left) visitors come to see this trompe l'oeil art that illustrates the famous Eagles' song. Even the reflections in the windows are painted.

Another building (top right) painted with architectural details.

Murals such as trompe l'oeil can transform buildings from blank space into works of art - transforming the ambiance of a downtown.

Suggestion: Keep trash receptacles emptied so that people will be able to use them. Talk with business owners about working to keep the space around their shops, restaurants, and offices picked up.

Excellent sign. Looks like a great attraction.



Suggestion: Add interpretive signage to the exterior displays. Or a QR code.



Suggestion: Add hours and days to exterior signage so it's visible from a distance.



A terrific setting and experience.



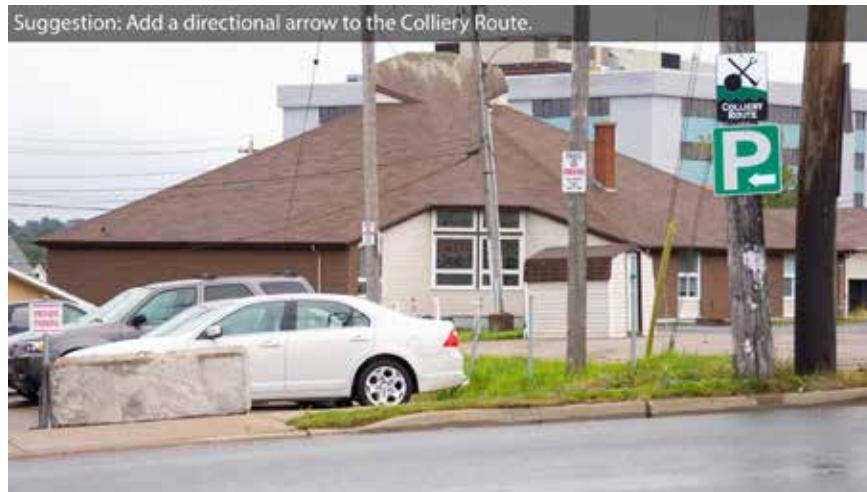
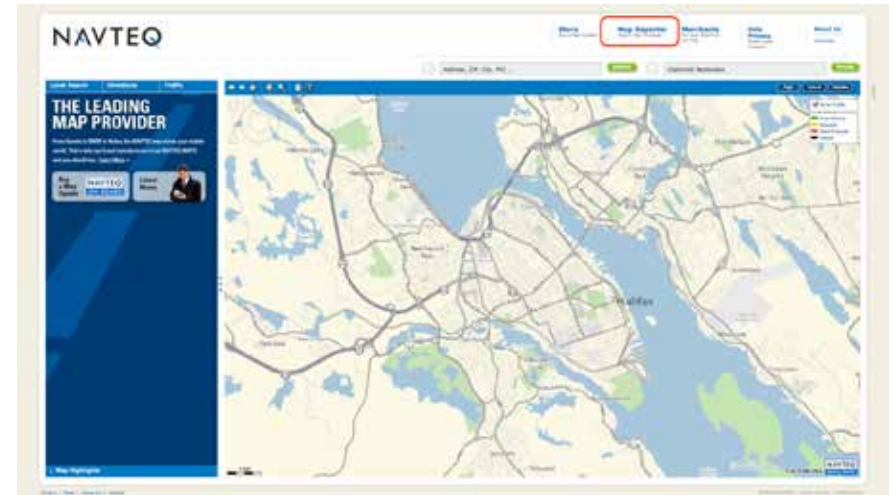
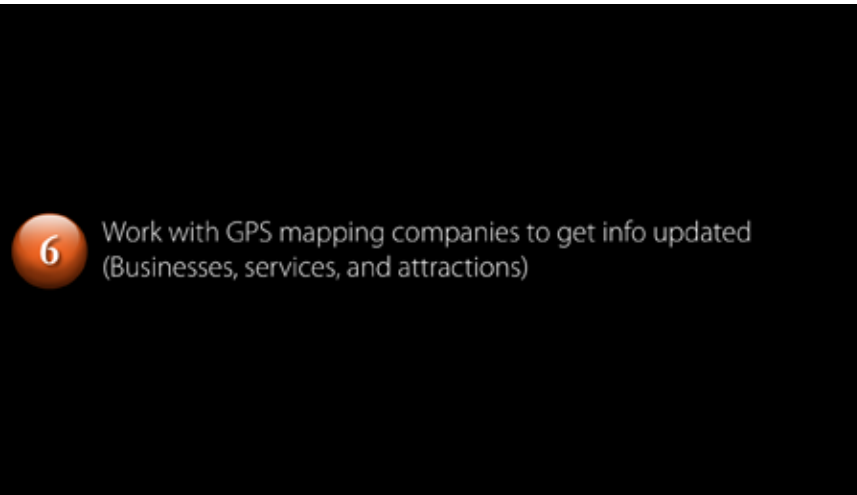
The photo on the Miners Museum billboard is fantastic (top left). The Miners Museum is excellent and has received rave reviews on TripAdvisor.

As one visitor said, "This was one of the best experiences we had on our trip and our time with Abby, the retired miner, was the highlight. Nothing can compare with going into the mines with someone who can tell you what it's really like because he lived it!"

Just a couple suggestions:

- Be sure to post open hours so they are easily visible from the parking lot.
- Add some interpretive signage for the exterior displays.
- Be sure to make it clearly visible on your website when you are closed for the season.

The Miners Museum definitely is on the "Best Of" list.



Suggestion: Add a directional arrow to the Colliery Route.



Glace Bay has a stunning waterfront. It should be utilized!

Suggestion: Work with GPS mapping companies to update information about your region. Get volunteers with various units to test locations: lodging, restaurants, shops, attractions, and more.

Navteq handles the maps for Garmin, Lowrance, NDrive, as well as for web-based applications such as Yahoo! Maps, Bing Maps, Nokia Maps and Mapquest, and for radio: XM Satellite Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio. Navteq's main competitors are Google and the Dutch Company Tele Atlas, which was purchased by TomTom. TomTom provides data for TomTom and

Apple's iOS 6 "maps." Google maps provides its own data. The appropriate URLs to add information to GPS databases:

- NAVTEQ: mapreporter.navteq.com
- Tele Atlas: mapfeedback.teleatlas.com
- Google Maps: www.google.com/placesforbusiness

Is this the heart of town? Suggestion: Add an arrow to the sign. Which way is it?



Nice sign, nice annual color. First impressions are lasting impressions.



We were trying to see if New Waterford had any downtown or spending district. So far, no.

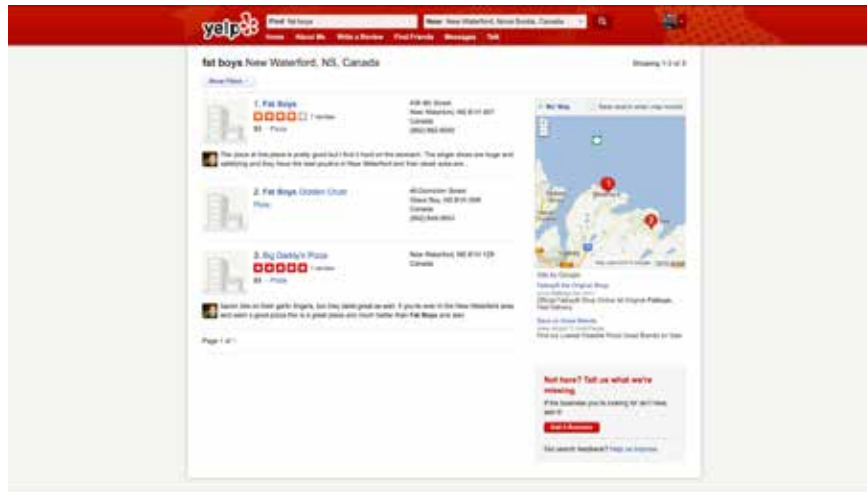


Nothing really for visitors, that we saw.



We drove along the Colliery Route to New Waterford (all photos this page). New Waterford's gateway sign is very nice. We didn't know if there would be a core downtown or a shopping district, and there were no signs letting us know. We drove around trying to discover shopping, restaurants, or anything else a visitor might be interested in. It looks like a pleasant town.

We found the center of town with the interpretive displays by driving around. Consider adding wayfinding signage to direct visitors to your spending district.



We saw this business (top left), and we weren't sure what it was. Be sure to promote what type of business you are - what you sell - restaurant? Bar? We checked it out on TripAdvisor and Yelp (top right and bottom left). There aren't any reviews on TripAdvisor, but Yelp shows that it's a good place to eat!

Encourage your customers to post reviews.

Make sure wayfinding signage continues through every turn. We took a wrong turn here (bottom right) when we were trying to follow the Colliery Route.

Not too sure what town we're in. Suggestion: Add a gateway sign.

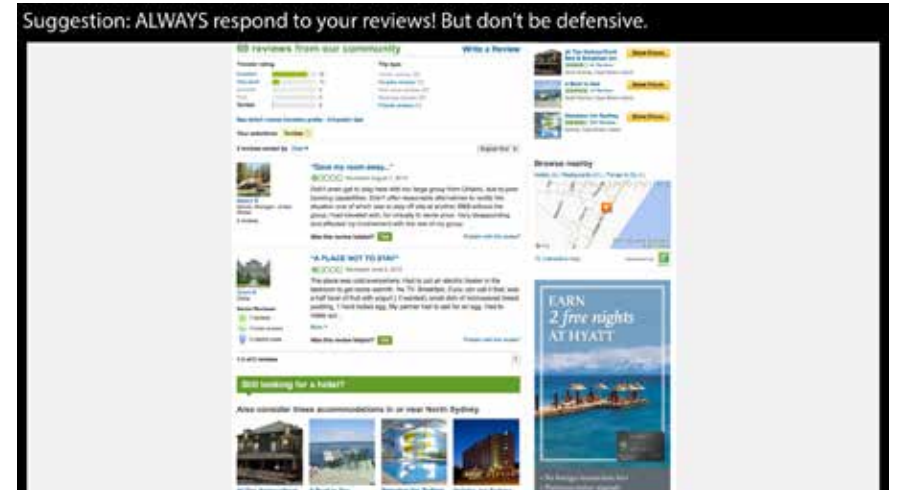


Once again, we didn't see a whole lot for visitors.



We continued driving along the Colliery Route and reached another town, but there was no “welcome” or “gateway” sign, so we weren’t exactly sure where we were. Whitney Pier?

We saw the sign on the museum (behind the double-decker pink tour bus, photo top right), so we knew we were in Whitney Pier.



We continued driving on to North Sydney. There are some stunning homes (top left).

We saw the Heritage Home B & B, which looked very nice. We checked it out on TripAdvisor, and the reviews were almost entirely excellent (bottom left). We saw that there were two negative reviews, so, of course, we looked at them.

It's always advisable to respond to your reviews, especially the negative ones. A response from the business owner can do a lot to alleviate any concerns caused by the negative review. Be reassuring, respectful, and courteous. Tell how you have resolved the problem, but don't be defensive. Thank the reviewer, and mention that their business is important to you.

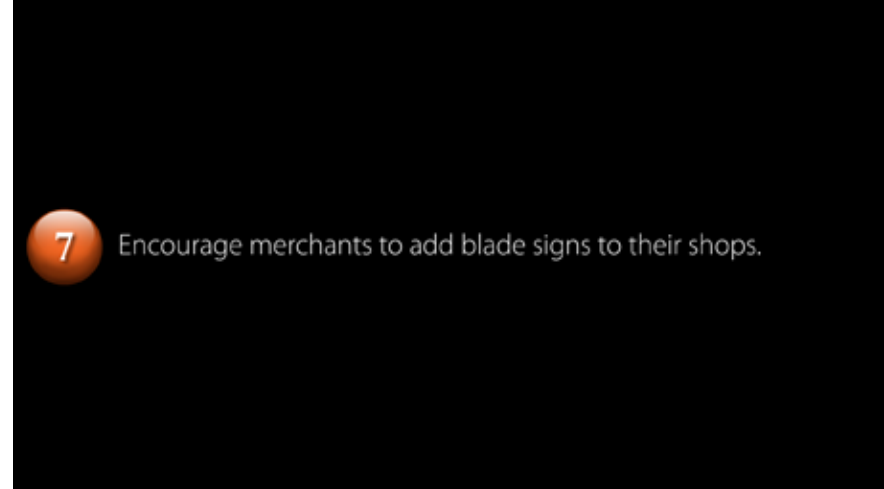
Nice gateway sign.



Suggestion: Consider blade signs.



Yikes! Our staff thought this was far more creepy than clever.



North Sydney's gateway gave us a good first impression of the town (top left).

We saw the shop called "Curl Up & Dye" and thought that name was kind of off-putting. But maybe it works!

Encourage merchants to add blade signs to their shops. The right kind of signage can make or break a retail shop or restaurant. How will potential customers know what you're offering unless you tell them? When visitors drive (or walk) through downtown, signs that are placed flat against the building

are almost impossible to read. Perpendicular (blade) signs take care of that problem.



These signs in Leavenworth, WA (top left) are excellent examples of effective blade signs.

Downtown retail signs should follow these guidelines:

- Lettering should be one inch tall for every twelve feet of viewing distance.
- Script lettering should always be avoided.
- The signage should be decorative to enhance the ambiance of the city. Real signs, no billboards or painted plywood signs.
- Retailers and attractions should promote the primary lure first, then the

business name.

- Blade signs should be a consistent height and size.
- Keep verbiage to four words - no more than six words.

These blade signs are in Nantucket, MA (top right), Carmel, CA (bottom left), and Banff, Alberta (bottom right).



Perpendicular signs are seen ten times more frequently than facade-mounted signs. They have been shown to increase retail sales by as much as 35%.

These signs in Lethbridge, AB (top left) and Canmore, AB (top right) do a great job. Note how they promote what the shop is selling. The sign for The Black Swan (bottom right) in Leavenworth, WA leaves visitors guessing - what do they sell? Visitors are less likely to go into a shop when they don't know what's being offered.

These blade signs are just being installed in Lethbridge, AB (bottom left).



Without blade signs, it's impossible to know what's in the shops shown on this page unless you're across the street. Blade signs will entice visitors to continue walking down the street, because they see what's available.

We had no idea what businesses were in many of the buildings - they didn't have retail signage that we could see. Signage is the best form of advertising there is - if merchants aren't letting people know what they have to offer, they're missing a lot of potential customers.

Successful downtowns invested heavily in retail beautification. This includes the extension of window displays to outdoors, pots with shrubs and flowers, and hanging baskets. Curb appeal can account for up to 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, golf courses, wineries, retail shops and lodging facilities. Have you ever said "That **looks** like a nice place to eat"?

8

70% of first time sales can come from curb appeal.



Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia



Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia



Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia

One of our favorite towns is Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia (top right, bottom left and right). A major reason it is a favorite is that it is so attractive - brightly painted buildings, flowers and landscaping everywhere, beautiful decorative signage, and a large variety of specialty shops. The merchants do their best to keep the sidewalks clean and their storefronts inviting and beautiful. People like to spend time in beautiful places.



Beautification is an investment with an incredible return. Note the many different ways merchants make their shops and restaurants appealing. This restaurant in Mahone Bay (top left) uses lots of pots and bright flowers, plus they list their daily menu on a sandwich board display.

During Mahone Bay's Scarecrow Festival (top right), the town is decked out for autumn, with incredible scarecrows like these ones of Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall.

Beautification includes more than flowers - merchants should use the outdoors as a place for "window displays" of their merchandise, attractively arranged, as these shop owners did in Canmore, AB (bottom left). This shop in Canmore (bottom right) promotes their merchandise on a decorative whiteboard with a pot of flowers in front.



Fredericksburg, Texas (population 12,000) hosts nearly three million visitors annually and is the most visited small town in Texas. Visitors drive from Dallas, Houston and San Antonio - hours away - to spend weekends in this charming town (all photos this page).

The merchants have created a beautiful setting with potted shrubs, planters, annual color, window boxes, decorative signage, beautiful lighting, benches, and covered sidewalks. These photos were taken in March - and the hill country has some wild temperature swings. Most of the plantings are evergreen.



Neenah, Wisconsin did a downtown makeover. Note the streetscape in the top left photo. Although it's clean and neat, compare it to the street just one block down, after the makeover (top right). Note how the planters soften the facades and create a fresher, more inviting sidewalk. Retail sales in the block with the beautification increased by more than 25% of the non-beautified street.

Note the banners, decorative signage and abundance of flowers outside these shops in Cambria (bottom left). Doesn't this street scene make you want to check out the shops?

Think benches (bottom left). Provide places for weary shoppers to rest. Outdoor seating encourages people to linger and visit, creating a much more vibrant, friendly downtown.



What is your impression of First Impressions Pottery? (top left) Their appearance - a complete lack of curb appeal - probably makes you want to avoid the place.

Beautification is an investment with tremendous returns. This shopowner in Grass Valley, CA (top right), creates a very inviting entry with her sign and display of flowers outside her front door. These flowers are silk.

Beautification doesn't have to be pots of flowers and shrubs. Look at Maggie

Mae Mercantile's display (bottom left). Extend window displays to exterior space. Select store merchandise is artfully arranged, and the large "open" flag invites customers inside.

This decorative arrangement of their menus (bottom right) entices customers into their restaurant.



There's a big difference between an outdoor display and outdoor retailing. Toad Hall Book Shop (top left) is a good example of what NOT to do - don't just pile merchandise in boxes, on tables, or on racks and set it up outside. It looks like a garage sale, and decreases the perceived value of the entire downtown.

This outdoor retail (top right) doesn't increase the curb appeal of this street at all.

Outdoor retail displays should be considered decorative - like an extension of a window display.

This Country Store in Wickford, RI (bottom left) does a great job enticing visitors into the shop. On their door, they have this sign (bottom right). So instead of saying, "No Public Restrooms," they tell visitors where they can be found.



Extend invitations - not rejections.

Telling people washrooms are for customers only tells potential customers to go away. Instead, tell visitors where they can go for public washrooms.

"Closed" signs (top right) also tell people one thing - go away. A "Closed" sign can mean you are closed for the hour, for the day, or for the season. Rather than rejecting customers, tell them when you will be open. Let them know

when to come back. Replace your "Closed" signs with signs like the ones bottom right and left.



Create a lure to pull customers in the door. Sometimes that might include a "loss leader."

This shop (top left) in Jonesborough, TN pulls people in with their outdoor beautification as well as their incredible window displays.

This shop in Banff, AB (top right) has to keep its flowers high out of native deer's reach, and they can put evergreen plants that the deer aren't interested in below.

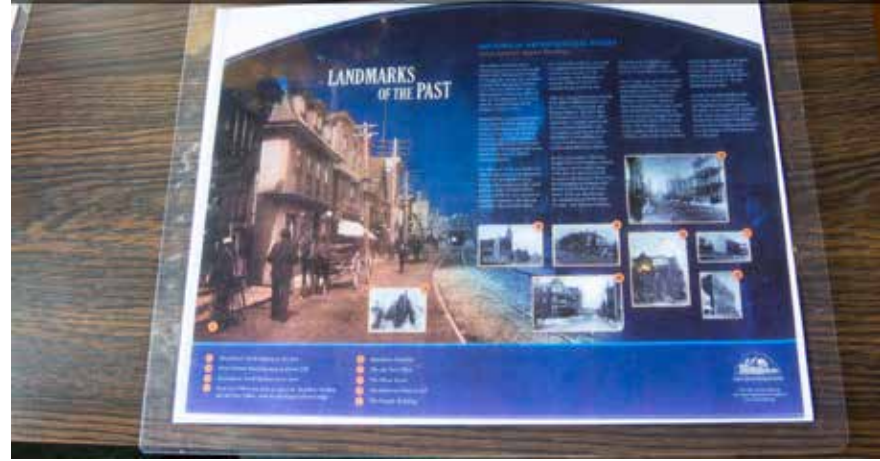
The Great Smoky Mountain Art Trail provides many appealing shops - this gift boutique (bottom left) is decorated with flowers, trees, ribbons and outdoor furniture. Just imagine what it's like inside!

While in North Sydney, we wanted to find the Visitor Information Centre, so we followed this arrow (bottom right). Visitor Information wasn't there, so this sign should be removed.

We didn't find info, but we found a restaurant and decided to try it.



Nice place mat! Suggestion: The best place for visitor info brochures is at restaurants.



Aha! Here it is! Suggestion: Signage should ALWAYS be perpendicular to traffic.



You wouldn't need the sandwich board if the Visitor Info sign was double sided and facing right



We didn't find Visitor Information, but this is a gorgeous spot (top left). We found a restaurant with waterfront views, and it was great.

We were able to find the Visitor Information Centre at the Heritage Museum (bottom left). The sign for Visitor Information should be perpendicular to the road - people would be able to see it while they are driving.

Another beautiful entrance sign. Suggestion: Trim the landscaping so we can read the lower portion of the sign.



Once again: 1)key 2)name 3)arrow 4)distance.



Suggestion: fix or remove these. We have no idea of what or where whatever is.



Not too sure what this is. Suggestion: Add signage out near the street. Visitor info? Museum?



We continued on to Sydney Mines. The gateway sign (top left) is very nice and creates a great first impression. Be sure to keep the shrubs trimmed so visitors can read the entire sign.

For the museum and cultural attractions signs, be sure to always include the key, the name of the attraction, the arrow, and the distance (top right).

When there is just the key and the arrow (bottom left), visitors have no idea what the sign is for.

Be sure your attractions have signage out front so visitors know what they are. Always include open hours and days. (bottom right)

Suggestions: 8 words or less. No phone number. We have no idea where Regent Street is.



We found the visitor information centre. Very friendly, helpful staff.



Suggestion: Perhaps another sign like this on the highway side of the park?



We headed back to Sydney, and on the way saw this sign for the Cape Breton Farmer's Exhibition (top left). It was almost impossible to read everything on the sign while driving - remember to use 8 words or less on a sign. Also, don't put phone numbers on signs along a highway - people can't remember all the numbers as they're driving, and you don't want people writing or phoning while driving.

We stopped at the Visitor Information Centre (top right), and the staff was very helpful and friendly.

Driving into Sydney, we passed this beautiful park (bottom right). We weren't sure where to park or how to find access. This is gorgeous, and we were surprised not many people were using it.

Suggestion: Add another sign for the park along the highway side, provide wayfinding to direct people to parking.

Wentworth Park makes our list of "Best Of's."



Sydney's gateway sign is gorgeous (top left). It's next to impossible to read the small icons, though. If they're not really necessary, just remove them.

We asked some locals for recommendations for dinner, and we were told of several good restaurants. We went to Governor's Pub & Eatery (top right), and besides great curb appeal and ambiance, it had great food too.

There were a few cruise ships while we were in town (bottom left). We could see the giant fiddle, and we wanted to take a look at the cruise ship dock and

amenities for the visitors.

There isn't parking for the public, and no signage to let people know what is there. A security guard let us know when the facilities were open and what was there to see.



The Sydney Fiddle is a great icon, and it makes our list of "Best Of's." It represents a promise of great music, Celtic culture, ceilidhs, and a real Cape Breton experience. Does Sydney live up to this promise for visitors?

We went into the facility to check it out. There were a few permanent shops, the Cape Breton Island Tourism Exhibition, and a room with a lot of tables full of merchants with Cape Breton produced wares for sale. It was a disappointment.

Suggestion: Have live music for the cruise ship visitors. Let them hear Cape Breton sound!

The Tourism Exhibition could show so much more than just the static displays. Consider videos showing the best parts of Nova Scotia. Have artisans working on their arts and crafts. People are much more likely to purchase art when they meet the artist. Include demonstrations and performances. We almost missed seeing this - consider moving it downstairs. Make the upstairs a theatre to show videos of Nova Scotia.



We had to ask where the core shopping district was. Suggestion: Wayfinding - priority #1.



Suggestion: Consider new technologies. Old school is out.



We drove through downtown Sydney and saw the historic museums there - they look great (top right and left).

Wayfinding should be the top priority for Sydney. We had trouble finding the core downtown shopping district. Be sure to include wayfinding for cruise ship visitors, so they are able to find the attractions and downtown.

It's always been difficult finding enough change to feed a parking meter. There are so many new, more convenient options - Sydney should consider revising their parking payment procedures.

9 Parking is not just for lovers



Visitors typically need at least four hours to complete their shopping and dining, so finding longer-term parking is essential. Be sure to let people know where they can find all day parking.

Two hour parking dramatically reduces spending and repeat visits. Two hour parking is a good way to kill a downtown. General rule: Four hour parking available until 5:00 p.m. After that it should be free.

70% of all consumer bricks-and-mortar spending takes place after 6:00 p.m. You want to encourage people to stay downtown as long as they want to

spend money in your restaurants and shops.

Develop wayfinding for parking, being sure to let drivers know where they can find all-day parking.

Parking revenues should always be returned to the district in which they were earned. Public parking is an economic development tool like sidewalks and downtown beautification. It should NEVER be considered a general fund revenue source.



The city contracted with Passport.
Passport provides all the stickers and mounts them on each meter.
There is a small user fee. No cost to the city. People will pay a little more for convenience.
The app is free.
You can also call and pay via phone.



My "first time" experience:

- I scanned the QR code. Within 20 seconds I had the app.
- It uses "location services" to determine my location.
- I gave myself a user name and password.
- I put in the zone and space.
- I then input a credit card.
- I told it how long I wanted to pay (it included prices).

It told me the following:

- Not to worry, the meter won't show any time, but we know you paid for the parking.
- It will text me 15 minutes prior to running out of time.
- If the meter allows for more time, I can "recharge" it - pay for more time.

Total time: Less than three minutes



Most lots have all three choices.
If you don't have a phone and no change, you can use a credit card at the kiosk.



New parking technologies can make a real difference. One example of a town that started using them is Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. They are two communities, with a total population of 6,000. Their brand is the water park capital of the world - they have a lot of visitors.

Drivers have three choices when they park:

- Coin operated meters
- Pay by smart phone (Passport)
- Use a kiosk and pay by cash or credit card

In new lots they use these zone/space markers saving the cost of meters (bottom right). They also have kiosks, or you can call if you don't have a smartphone app.



The next time I used the meter it took about 15-seconds.

- opened the app
- Zone 110
- Space 184
- 4 hours, \$2.35

Done.



NEVER show multiple directions on your wayfinding. Visitors want answers not options.

Keep people turning right, if at all possible.



The bottom line: it's easy.

Wisconsin Dells generates \$400,000 a year in parking fees.

Maintenance, enforcement: \$150,000

Gross margin: \$250,000. This is invested back into downtown.

10 Sydney needs a brand - a focus

Sydney needs a focus. Follow the fiddles to where? Not too sure what, where, when.



Sydney has tremendous potential for being a great destination, plus it has a steady stream of visitors from cruise ships. In order to realize its potential, Sydney needs a unique focus - a brand.

A clearly defined community brand can create value for the city by conveying a distinctive message that eloquently illustrates what the city is known for and creating a compelling vision that empowers and drives the city's future.

Branding is the art of setting yourself apart from everyone else - it requires a

narrow focus. It is specific.

Sydney's giant fiddle is a great icon. But could that be leveraged into a brand? The banners that say "Follow the Fiddles" beg the question: Where do we follow the fiddles to? What more is there?

Downtown Sydney has some great dining - its good to see some outdoor dining available. The restaurant Flavor (bottom right) was another excellent one, and it makes our list of "Best Of's."



Highly regarded but poor curb appeal, no sidewalk seating. Hard to tell if it's in business.



Is this really necessary? Makes it seem like a troubled downtown.



Blade signs have been proven to increase retail sales. Can you tell me what's in any of these shops?



Suggestion: Create a buying co-op for beautification. Emulate Mahone Bay.

Downtown Sydney is kind of a mixed bag of great shops and restaurants, and some not-so-great. It could benefit from a coordinated effort - everyone working together to create a great destination downtown.

Beautification would be a great investment - and merchants would see a big return. People love spending time in beautiful places. The Allegro (top left) was highly recommended, but it would benefit from beautification and outdoor seating.

Be careful of the messages your signs portray. The sign top right gives the impression there is trouble downtown.

Downtown merchants should be encouraged to use blade signs (bottom left). It's hard to see what is in any of the shops unless you are standing across the street.

Start a co-op to help fund beautification efforts downtown. Purchase pots, planters, soil, and plants in bulk, and divide them among the merchants.



Retail shops should extend window displays to exterior spaces, but that doesn't mean piling merchandise on tables or racks (top left). That makes your downtown look like a garage sale. Instead, displays should be decorative.

We went into the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (top right and bottom left and right). It is excellent! The displays of art and crafts are gorgeous, and we consider the Centre to be a "Best Of."

Great map. Suggestion: A "you are here" arrow. Show the Cabot Trail. Provide brochures & maps.



A fantastic gallery.



And a great coffee shop, easily missed. This is why you must promote your anchor tenants.



We saw this map (top left) in the Centre for Craft and Design, and it is great. Since so many of your visitors are from cruise ships, they aren't always familiar with their location or the lay of the land. Provide a "You are here" arrow on the map. Provide brochures and maps from the Centre.

We went into the Shoe Tree and discovered a great set of shops! (top left and bottom left and right) The gallery upstairs is very nice, the shoe store is excellent, and the coffee shop downstairs is great too.

These shops should be promoted specifically as some of Cape Breton's "Best Of's."

The facade appeal of Sydney is pretty poor.



Suggestion: A great candidate for some trompe l'oeil - and some curb appeal.



Suggestion: benches, outdoor seating, beautification.



Very nice.



Suggestion: Make a priority of creating curb appeal in downtown. Some of the retail signage is poor (top left), and all merchants should be using blade signs.

Bring in planters, benches, hanging baskets, and encourage outdoor dining.

11 The power of public plazas

An awesome place for a signature plaza. Imagine...



This might be a smaller candidate.



Looks like another great restaurant, alehouse. Sidewalk seating? Beautification?



Successful downtowns have gathering places - usually a public plaza where people can socialize, be entertained, and relax as a community. Some important features of good gathering places:

- Focal point - stages, water features, art, amphitheater
- They can be a permanent home for an outdoor open market (public markets are excellent revitalization tools)
- Interactive water features encourage activity
- Food, dining should be available nearby

- Places to sit and to walk
- Trees and raised planters - beautification
- Entertainment at certain times
- Night lighting and walking areas



Case History: Waterloo Public Square

Waterloo, Ontario, with a population of 97,500, opened their public square in 2009, after converting this parking lot (top left) and planning for two years. They have space for an amphitheatre (top right and bottom left), vendor booths, events, and performances. They can use the space for classes (bottom right) and entertainment. The approximate cost was \$2.1 million, and the size is 13,200 square feet (1,226 square meters).



Waterloo installs an ice rink from November through March, providing activities in their square all year round.

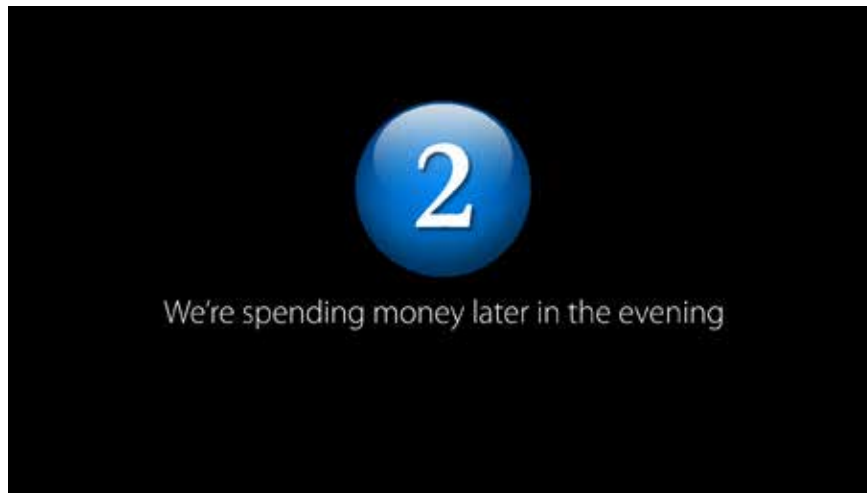
It has become a real asset for the downtown, providing events almost every weekend from June through October. They have regular weekday programming from May through September, and every other weekend from January through May, plus November and December. The plaza has brought businesses together, getting them involved in events.

The plaza is managed by the city's Community Culture Recreation Services,

with an annual budget of \$44,400 for programming, marketing and supplies.

Another example is Ovation Plaza, developed for Old Strathcona, a district in Edmonton, Alberta (bottom left). This plaza design includes a flush-mounted fountain, vendors, a stage, and an ice rink in winter.

Rapid City, SD (bottom right) developed their Main Street Square to lure visitors back to town after they visit the many surrounding sites. The city has now become a popular destination in its own right.



Downtowns are becoming more popular than ever - people want to gather in public places where there are activities, food, and friends. The top activity of visitors (not the reason they travel, but the activity they spend most time doing) is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting. Downtowns. This is where 80% of all non-lodging visitor spending takes place.

People in North America are also spending money later in the evenings - shopping and dining later - following the European standard. In fact, 70% of all consumer retail spending takes place after 6:00 p.m.

A plaza can make you the "after work, after school" destination.



When we helped Rapid City with their tourism development plan, nearly all of our recommendations focused on downtown. Visitors would spend the night in Rapid City, and spread out to the surrounding attractions. But they wouldn't spend any time and money in Rapid City. Downtown Rapid City needed to develop a reason for people to spend time there. This gave rise to a new downtown organization "Destination Rapid City."

Our largest recommendation was the creation of a downtown plaza - Main Street Square. Rapid City turned the parking lot (top left) into their new plaza

(top right and bottom left and right).

The total cost was \$8 million, and the sources of funding were \$4.5 million from philanthropy, and \$3.5 million funded from the city.

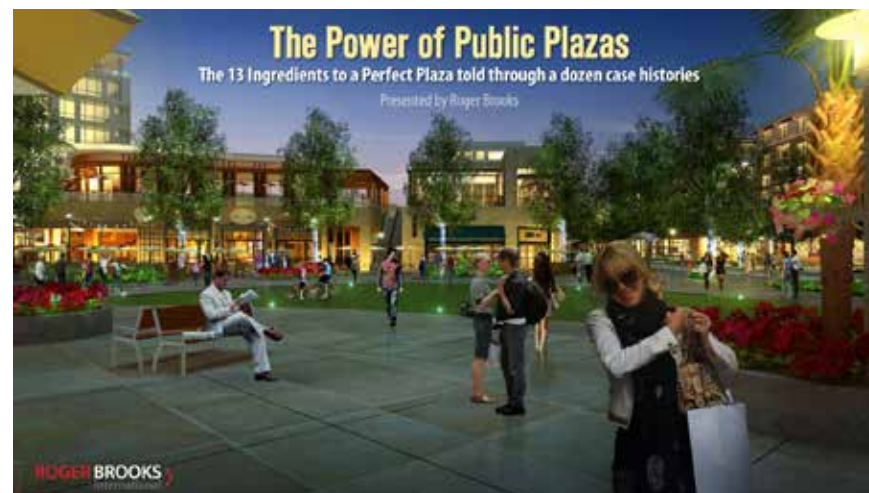
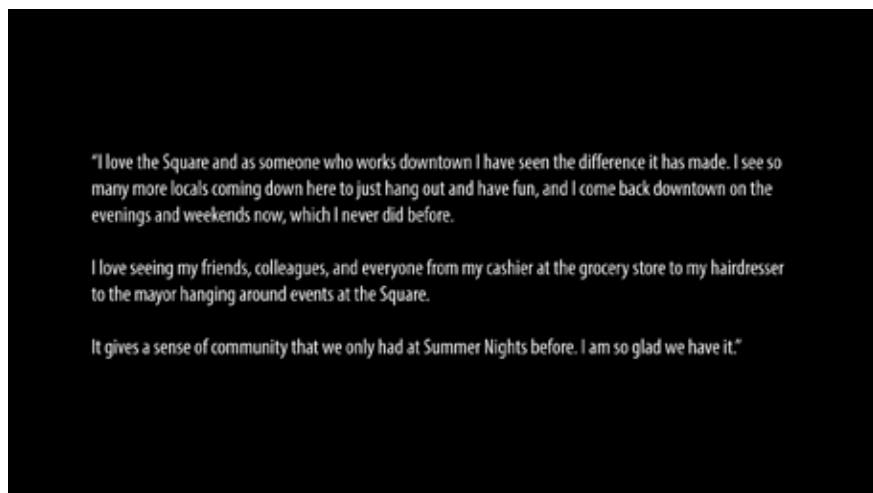
The plaza has space for outdoor dining, vendors, events, a flush-mounted fountain, and a stage.



Rapid City's Main Street Square hosts events all year long - there's always something going on. In the winter, it becomes an ice skating rink (top right and bottom left). It has become so successful, attracting so many residents and visitors, that it is now as big an attraction as Mt. Rushmore.

Ongoing operations, marketing and maintenance amounts to \$500,000 each year. It's paid through a Business Improvement District levy, lots of sponsors and "partners."

Downtown businesses are thriving, and property values have risen dramatically.



Plazas are an investment, not just an expense. When plazas are programmed, located in the heart of the spending district, with activities, dining options, and shopping nearby, they attract residents and visitors, and spending in the district increases.

After researching 100 outdoor public assembly spaces, we could not find a single community that wasn't thrilled with the results and the benefits.

We stayed at the Hampton Inn in Membertou. It had good reviews.



Suggestion: Add signage to the facilities in Membertou. Be more specific than "Entertainment Centre." What does that mean? Casino? Video games? Theatre? Performing arts? If events are held, put up a readerboard showing upcoming events.

The gift shop (top right) was easy to miss. Attract visitors with an "open" flag, an outdoor display.

Make sure the signage states clearly what each building holds. The gas station

(bottom left) was out of any windshield cleaner and towels, and the store was out of most basic supplies. The staff wasn't able to do anything about it.

Whatever you do, don't call this the "tar ponds" park.



Suggestion: Once again, add distances. We started heading there and gave up...



...once we saw how far away it was.



We visited the "tar ponds" site and saw the new park just a couple days before it opened to the public. It is gorgeous and will be a real asset to the community.

So far, our "Best Of" list for "Lower Cape Breton" includes:

- The Louisbourg Lighthouse
- The Fortress at Louisbourg
- Louisbourg Playhouse
- Savoy Theatre
- Cape Breton Miners Museum

- Wentworth Park in Sydney
- Governors Pub & Eatery
- The Sydney Fiddle
- Flavor
- Allegro Grill
- Cape Breton Centre for Art
- The Shoe Tree
- Artisans in the Attic
- Cape Breton Fudge Company
- The new park at the tar ponds

A stunning RV park resort.



Looks like a great place to stay.



Looks like a very nice place.



We drove southwest on Highway 4, and saw this great RV Park on the lake (top left). We also came across this stunning hotel (top right), The Birches. It looks like a great place to stay, and reviewers on TripAdvisor think so too.

The Lakes ski and golf (bottom right) looks fantastic. Is there mountain biking at the ski resort in the summer?



12 Make a list of these and hand out assignments

Of course, we had to stop for lunch at Rita's Tea Room (top left and right). It was wonderful. Definitely a "Best Of."

Here's our final list of "Best Of's"

- The Louisbourg Lighthouse
- The Fortress at Louisbourg
- Louisbourg Playhouse
- Savoy Theatre

- Cape Breton Miners Museum
- Wentworth Park in Sydney
- Governors Pub & Eatery
- The Sydney Fiddle
- Flavor
- Allegro Grill
- Cape Breton Centre for Art
- The Shoe Tree
- Artisans in the Attic
- Cape Breton Fudge Company
- The new park at the tar ponds
- Rita's Tea Room



Additional notes regarding the Louisbourg and Sydney area Nova Scotia Marketing Assessment

Notes about the Cape Breton Island 2013 Official Travel Guide

Cape Breton is such an enormous area with several distinctly different types of attractions that dividing it into five segments, using the official travel trails, makes sense. I think it would be good to “tweak” these segments a bit, though. I was confused about where Sydney fits in – it’s not really on a “trail,” unless it’s on the Marconi Trail. Also, the Fleur-de-Lis Trail between St. Peter’s and Louisbourg isn’t much to promote.

I like the beginning of the guide – the map on the inside cover, and the “welcome” and “How to use this book” on the facing page. Following those pages is the section with a Schedule of Events for Louisbourg (celebrating 300 years), and that’s great. Consider putting the Table of Contents before the Schedule of Events – having the TOC on page 8 is a bit too far – it would be easier to find closer to the front of the guide.

The section about the Marconi Trail focuses more on the history of the area, rather than what there is to do now. Some history is good, but it’s difficult to find out what there is to do when those tidbits of useful information are buried in the descriptions of history.

Suggestion: Rather than providing one long narrative that includes history as well as what there is to do now, divide it. Have a separate history section, and a separate activity section.

Suggestion: Provide much more detail about the activities. The guide just

touches on activities – provide specific information.

Suggestion: Rather than long narratives, use bullet points and headings to organize the information, making it easier for visitors to find what they want.

Suggestion: Add itineraries. Include one-day, two-day, five-day, and week-long itineraries – for each of the regions. Itineraries can be written to focus on families, couples, friends, and baby boomer travelers. They can also focus on different interests: hiking, biking, motorcycling, gallery shopping, culinary, music and entertainment, as well as a mix of all activities. Inspire visitors with tempting itineraries.

The center of the guide includes a section on “Experiences” and one on “Packages.” It’s great to highlight and provide detail for these various experiences on Cape Breton, and these are primarily businesses – which is great.

Suggestion: There are so many more activities that can (and should) be included in the guide, though – perhaps each region’s section should include their own top five or ten activities.

Cape Breton Island Map

We found the map produced by cbisland.com very useful. It is a nice size and is fairly easy to read.

Website: cbisland.com

Attractive layout. Good photography. Nicely organized. There is a lot of good information that is relatively easy to find.

- Suggestion: Under the “Experiences” section, in the “Gift Shops,” there are very, very few gift shops shown. If I search for gift shops along the Fleur-de-Lis Trail or the Marconi Trail, not one shop shows up in the results. That sends the message this entire area has no shopping. Add more gift shops! They should not be included only if they pay – you want to show visitors that you have plenty of great shopping. The number one activity of visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting – visitors want shopping! Set up a criteria for selecting the gift shops to include – for example, you don’t want to include convenience stores. You want the shops to offer good quality merchandise, preferably made locally. The shops could include gifts, art, crafts, local food products, jewelry, clothing, shoes. There is a great shoe store in downtown Sydney that is very popular – that could be on the website. It has a great gallery upstairs – that should be on the website too. Promote your best shops!
- Do an e-newsletter – have a sign-up page on the website – or do a blog. Send informative, short newsletters or write short, informative blogs. Send them out once a month to create top of mind awareness.
- The suggested itineraries weren’t easy to find – the small “My Itinerary” link at the very top of the page led me to believe that this was a place for me to create

my own itinerary – not where there might be sample itineraries. I suggest you label this section “Sample Itineraries.” There is a lot of good detail here, and it can make planning a trip much easier – plus it might show visitors some ideas they hadn’t thought of before.



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