

mational services will provide visitors better data and directions regarding tourist facilities and travel-oriented attractions than heretofore has been provided by unrestricted outdoor advertising signs. And, needless to add, Vermonters also see the elimination of off-premise billboards as a step in the direction of preserving the type of visual environment that attracts recreational visitors and enhances the pleasure of living in their State.

Vermont's system is unique among the States at the present time. It may be adaptable to the circumstances and policies of other States, or others may wish to modify it in various ways. Certainly it is expected that it will be modified in Vermont as experience is acquired. One example of a desirable modification may be with respect to the number of official roadside directional signs permitted for any one establishment. Initially the number of such signs was limited to four per business. Now, however, the Travel Information Council has adopted a more liberal policy on this matter, and permits more than four signs when the need for more is demonstrated. Another innovation resulting from operational experience with roadside directional signs is the practice of posting so-called "trailblazer" emblems along the lesser roads leading to tourist resorts and other travel objectives in remote locations. These emblems are a second generation development of the logo sign concept, and are smaller than the regular roadside directional signs.

The system of information services and facilities described above is administered by the Vermont Travel Information Council, a public agency created by the State legislature especially for this function. Vermont was the first State to have such an agency, and since its initial action three other States have created similar Councils. Day-to-day administration of the information program in Vermont is centered in nine District Committees of the Council. Decisions of these committees are appealable to the Council itself; and decisions of the Council are appealable to the State Supreme Court. Organizationally the Council is attached to the State's Agency of Development and Community Affairs. While this connection may not seem typical as compared with the organization adopted by other States in their billboard control programs, it has served in Vermont to emphasize the positive aspects of that State's program, and has encouraged interest in viewing it as an advance in the evolution of travel information services.

NEBRASKA'S INTERSTATE TRAVEL INFORMATION SYSTEM

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I would like to outline Nebraska's tourism program as it directly relates to the highway traveler. I will leave it to others to determine how it may relate to the control of roadside advertising as my work does not bring me into the fields of highway planning or research. The State of Nebraska has not yet implemented any program to remove roadside advertising from along the right-of-way. However, our approach to the promotion of tourism in Nebraska, at a time and in a place where there is tremendous usage of the automobile for leisure travel, may very well be applicable to the problem of communicating with motorists without the aid of billboards.

The primary objective of our program is to create an image in the mind of the vacationer as he travels across Nebraska. In order for a person to relate to the environment around him, he must have some conception and understanding of that environment. Second, our program is designed to entice the vacationer and encourage or persuade him to leave the Interstate System to visit our attractions and points of interest, and to utilize the many travel services available to him. Essentially, the program is designed to "share" Nebraska with each visitor.

I believe it would be helpful for you to understand Nebraska's marketing position and our potential for growth in the travel industry because it is this information which has brought about the impulse marketing strategy which we employ.

Since pioneer time, Nebraska has been the Gateway to the West. Where thousands of covered wagons crossed the plains a hundred years ago, millions of travelers now follow the twin ribbons of Interstate 80 across Nebraska.

Though ever a beneficiary of tourism -- even a century ago -- Nebraska has not really taken full advantage of its potential in this booming industry. The State literally hosts most of the travelers heading into, and returning from, the Old West region. In fact, its itinerant traffic counts exceed neighboring Colorado and South Dakota -- both prime vacation destinations -- by a margin of three to one. Until last year, however, both Colorado and South Dakota had longer average lengths of stay than did Nebraska. (Colorado -- 5 days, South Dakota -- 3 days, Nebraska -- 1 day)

Recognizing this fact, and coupling it with the realization that today's traveler is extremely mobile (because of better highways, better cars, and more free time), we developed what we think is an imaginative "share-of-market" concept, similar to what Proctor and Gamble might utilize if they were to introduce a new dishwashing liquid. This marketing concept was designed to (1) position Nebraska within the Old West's inner circle of destination attractions and (2) increase the length of stay of visitors coming to Nebraska.

We realized that if we were to be successful in convincing visitors to pull off Interstate 80 to see one of our many two to four hour impulse attractions -- such as Buffalo Bill's Scout's Rest Ranch at North Platte, an original Pony Express Station at Gothenburg, Fort Kearny along the old Oregon Trail, or the State Capitol in Lincoln -- we would have to successfully encourage that visitor to stay longer in Nebraska. By increasing a vacationer's visit by only so much as a single day it would increase our overall share of market. If totally successful we would actually double our profits from his visit.

We also realized that the Tourism Division could not do the job alone. We approached the development of a communications system as a cooperative effort with the private sector, local communities, regions, and other State agencies, particularly the Nebraska Department of Roads. We all had a common interest, and in some cases a common responsibility, to communicate with the traveling public.

The first aspect of our travel promotion program is a destination campaign to attract out-of-state vacationers to Nebraska. We have no paid advertising in other States or countries except through the programs of the five State Old West Trail Foundation (Nebraska, Montana, the two Dakotas and Wyoming). The Trail's world-wide media campaigns are underwritten in part by each State, private industry, attractions and communities. Over the years the Foundation has sold the region as a major tourist destination. Its promotions have included tie-ins with major advertisers and industries, such as the American Petroleum Institute, Discover America Travel Organizations, the United States Travel Service, B.F. Goodrich, Kellogg's and Conoco. In addition, it has developed travelogue films for domestic and foreign television and theater.

With this being our only out-of-state advertising, Nebraska's promotional program is almost exclusively an impulse campaign. We try to reach and communicate with travelers while they are in our State. Research shows that the interstate traveler will alter vacation plans, change routes, make unplanned stops and stay days longer if he is aware of attractions and facilities around him. We try to create that awareness.

Making travelers aware of attractions and services has been most difficult, not only for Nebraska, but for all states served by major interstate systems. The vacationer has been accurately described as traveling in a tunnel of isolation. To break through this tunnel, Nebraska has devised a unique system yet untried by any State or Federal agency, and has enjoyed dramatic results from its efforts.

We recognized that special new media and programs had to be utilized if we were to properly and effectively communicate with the traveler and lure him off the road. Working in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Roads, the Nebraska Broadcasters Association and local Chambers of Commerce, we initiated a program backed by research.

We suggested to both State and Federal highway officials that they had an obligation to communicate with the itinerant traveler, just as we in tourism had such an obligation. Further, we suggested that in addition to informing the traveler of basic services, we should help the traveler become aware of the environment in which he finds himself; that environment which includes attractions and points of interest, man-made and natural. We felt strongly that there was a need to introduce visitors to the culture and the people in the area around them. There is a definite difference between the people and the life style in Nebraska and, say, Maryland which travelers from each area should understand and appreciate when they visit.

We also suggested that highway officials should make additional attempts to encourage the traveler to leave the Interstate, if only for an hour or so, at various intervals during the day. The Nebraska Department of Roads accepted our basic premises and joined with our Division in developing the overall program.

Nonprofit or publicly financial attractions depicting the Nebraska-Old West environment all along the 450 mile stretch of Interstate 80 were selected by both agencies to be featured as trigger or impulse attractions. Signing would prompt travelers to think of attractions, scenic routes or self-guided circle tours which had been laid out for them off the Interstate.

Once the attractions and scenic routes had been identified, an aggressive integrated communications program was initiated. Special highway signs were designed, travel information centers were set up, and a Nebraska Vacation Network was established and appropriately marked on the right-of-way. In addition, we worked closely with Department of Roads in developing a new highway map featuring an I-80 strip map and its adjacent attractions along with detailed copy explaining alternate scenic routes and other attractions in Nebraska.

We determined that special interstate attraction signs on the right-of-way would serve as the primary communicator because of the fact that every passer-by could see them. A two year experimental period for this type of sign was requested from the Federal Highway Administration, one year was granted, so the design and construction of these signs was carried out on a temporary basis pending permanent approval.

Essentially the sign was designed to identify those attractions which fit into the categories mentioned above and were a short distance from the interstate right-of-way. Each sign had the attraction's name and a logo specially designed for it. The logo introduced a new visual dimension-- going beyond any word message -- in communicating with the traveler, giving him an impression of what he might see. These signs were placed fifty miles in either direction from the exit which serves the attraction, and also at the exit. In other words there are four signs for each attraction.

A third aspect was the Nebraska Vacation Guide Program. The Tourism Division again worked in cooperation with the Department of Roads to open eighteen travel information centers all along Interstate 80 in Nebraska. The Department of Roads had already established an outstanding system of rest areas which were easily remodeled by converting existing storage space in the front of the main buildings. Spotted strategically at approximately fifty mile intervals, the rest area information centers proved convenient and useful to the itinerant traveler.

The centers were staffed with 36 college-age people who were selected from over 260 applicants through the use of a specialized interview process. More than half of these people were hired through the Federal work/study program at colleges and universities in the State.

Prior to the vacation season, the Guides were immersed in a training program to make them more aware and appreciative of Nebraska, the travel industry, and people in general. The group was taken on a seven day tour of the State to explore first-hand the attractions and points of interest they would be sharing with the motorist. In this way they could more effectively relate the surrounding environment to the traveler.

An important part of the Program was local community involvement. Thirteen "sponsoring" communities adjacent to Interstate 80 provided local training and support throughout the entire Program. In addition, dozens of other communities and individuals contributed to the success of the Program by providing free lodging, food and admissions during the training tour.

The fourth aspect, the Nebraska Vacation Network, was made possible through the cooperation of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association. The Department of Roads posted signs along Interstate 80 giving the frequencies of stations involved. The stations provided public service time for thirty and sixty-second spot announcements played on a run of schedule basis. In addition, the Tourism division also provided a three minute travel program which was broadcast twice daily (10:30 and 2:30 PM) which provided travel information (recreation ideas, road conditions, weather, road construction and local services).

Some innovations are planned for this year which will have Vacation Guides interview travelers at their rest areas. By doing this, we hope to have vacationers themselves



Figure 1. Signs utilizing graphics and word messages call attention to tourist attractions located off major thoroughfares and give directional information to travelers.



Figure 2. Signs giving radio frequencies enable motorists driving across Nebraska to receive information about road conditions, weather, and a wide range of travel-related information from local broadcasting stations.

encourage one another to see and do things in Nebraska. Native Nebraskans Dick Cavett, Henry Fonda and Gordon MacRae will be featured in the thirty and sixty-second sport announcements in hopes of increasing their impact.

The fifth aspect involved the use of special television spots which were prepared for airing on Nebraska stations and on out-of-state stations participating in the five-state Old West Trail public service tradeout. Station identification image spots and public service programming, similar to the three minute radio programs, were also aired, principally in the evenings after travelers had settled down for the night.

As noted earlier, the highway map was designed as a special tool for the Vacation Guides in a cooperative effort between the Tourism Division and the Department of Roads. An extra fold was added in order that the entire Interstate 80 system could be featured. Noted on the map were radio station call numbers, attractions, and circle tours. Copy was also included which explained the different areas of the State along with image pictures.

Nebraska is not a "destination State," it is a corridor. Most of our out-of-state visitors have, at least in the back of their minds, some kind of destination -- Yellowstone, the Black Hills, Colorado. We try to present these visitors with viable alternate routes to these destinations, thereby spreading the wealth. We also want them to be aware of experiences they might have at Nebraska attractions and points of interest which will enhance their total vacation. By describing the alternatives to the traveler we hope to overcome his natural hesitancy to get off the interstate system where the quality of the road and the nature of the surroundings are already familiar and secure.

I have briefly outlined the scope of our travel promotion program and will close by mentioning one other project which has been developed by a private corporation in Nebraska, Selection Research, Inc. of Lincoln. The product is a tape cassette series called "Listen To The Land," which comes with its own guidebook and explanation of the tapes. There are six cassettes in the series which can be played on any tape recorder installed in the car or carried as a portable set. Each cassette covers one area of the State describing its physical characteristics and history so as to help the traveler become familiar with his surroundings and relate to them in a much more meaningful way.

As an example, the first tape covers an area from, and including, Omaha to Lincoln, approximately 50 miles. Dr. Robert Manley, who developed the concept, takes the listener down this stretch of road describing the land a hundred years ago and telling about the people who made it what it is today. Other tapes, from Kearney to Ogallala, tell about I-80 as it follows the route of the Oregon Trail, Overland Trail, Mormon Trail, Pony Express, the first transcontinental telegraph and the first transcontinental railroad.

If the vacationer can be aware of this information as he travels, his trip can be that much more meaningful. If it persuades him to get off the highway to personally experience the history at a museum or historic site, so much the better. All he really need do is "Listen To The Land" for the story that it tells.

Our "Nebraska...the Good Life" promotional program was successful on all counts. A real breakthrough was achieved in developing a truly effective communications system with the itinerant traveler. Future plans include the revision of the Highway Map and Travel Guide, expansion of both the Nebraska Vacation Guide Program and the Nebraska Vacation Network, and a more extensive information distribution system utilizing the facilities of the motel, restaurant and petroleum industries in the State. In this way we hope to assure more vacationers an opportunity to share with us "Nebraska...the Good Life."