

## **Strategic Direction**

Saint Charles, Missouri was a tourism destination before Lewis and Clark purchased their last provisions here and started on their westward journey. Thus, the destination has a history of providing hospitality to travelers that precedes statehood and continues today.

The Greater Saint Charles area has a good geographic position for tourism development. It is located on a major interstate and across the Missouri River from the major urban market of St. Louis, near the meeting point of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. This allows Saint Charles to take advantage of both pass-through and feeder tourism markets both in the contiguous states as well as the larger region. Thus, we have a charming historic town, sitting along a beautiful river, on a major interstate and adjacent to a major urban area. Further, Saint Charles has a good lodging inventory, and the shopping and dining amenities travelers seek. Plus, one finds a casino and wineries in the area in addition to the other amenities and attractions. Thus, Saint Charles has every reason to excel as a tourism destination. The interstate literally equates to a “river of tourism money” running through the destination. Simply put, as long as this volume of potential customers exists, the only reason for tourism failure is found in not providing the customer with products they desire...or helping them find out they exist.

The current mission statement of the Greater Saint Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau is: “To develop and promote the hospitality industry in the Greater Saint Charles area, and to encourage economic growth by providing quality service to the visitor and convention delegate.”

The five years since the “high water mark” of tourism in 2000 have been challenging for all markets including the Greater Saint Charles area. Fortunately, during this time period tourism has continued to grow for Greater Saint Charles. This underscores Saint Charles’s ability to succeed in tourism development.

It is now time to strategically look at how best to grow this industry for Greater Saint Charles. In RTM’s analysis, leaders and residents need to:

- 1) Understand the current “market mix” of segments being served in Saint Charles.
- 2) Make sure existing customers find information that leads them to local cash registers in order to generate greater economic impact immediately.
- 3) Establish a long-range vision for continued tourism development that includes new products and amenities desired by targeted visitor segments.
- 4) Implement strategies that will grow targeted customer segments.
- 5) Monitor and maintain visitor satisfaction.
- 6) Track and report results.

The definition of tourism is “**putting visitors in front of cash registers**”. The Greater Saint Charles area has an excellent opportunity to increase the revenues generated by tourism, while not overburdening its infrastructure.

RTM recommends the following strategies to achieve this balanced growth:

## Marketing Strategies

- A. Acknowledge that the GSCCVB has established a strong foundation and accomplished good results.** RTM was impressed during this study to consistently find that the GSCCVB has earned good results from their direct sales, marketing efforts and investment of resources. They have done a good job and should be acknowledged for their role in driving tourism economic impact. Additionally, RTM was impressed to see the level of support that community leaders have committed to the development of the local tourism industry. An accomplished tourism marketing agency and a willing community is a recipe for success. Having accomplished this foundation, it is now time to become more aggressive and drive this industry for greater results.
- B. Adopt a market segmentation approach for overall strategic tourism marketing growth.** Leaders of the Greater Saint Charles area must understand the current tourism environment and the value of each market segment currently visiting Greater Saint Charles.

2004	Category
<b>62.33%</b>	<b>TOTAL LODGING RESPONSE RATE</b>
22.23%	Leisure – tourists (visiting local attractions, historic sites, shopping, etc.)
19.64%	Individual corporate/business
13.69%	Transient – pass through on interstate
9.20%	Leisure – visiting friends and relatives
7.19%	Convention/meeting/group – corporate
5.59%	Wedding/reunions/family events
5.11%	Convention/meeting/group – SMERF
4.24%	Convention/meeting/group – sports
3.65%	Convention/meeting/group – government
2.73%	Gaming
2.45%	Other
2.21%	Group tour/motorcoach
1.11%	University-related
0.93%	Convention/meeting/group – association
0.03%	Golf package or golf group

- C. Understand the true benefit of tourism to the Greater Saint Charles area is in the growth of per-visitor expenditures, as well as growing the volume of visitors.** Saint Charles leaders need to clearly understand that it is the growth in per-visitor expenditures that creates success.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Spending by Age Group</u>			
	<u>Overall Avg. Amount</u>	<u>39 under</u>	<u>40 – 59</u>	<u>60 above</u>
1. Lodging	\$109.25	\$187	\$174	\$158
2. Shopping	\$82.53	\$149	\$145	\$98
3. Attractions / amusements	\$62.01	\$89	\$110	\$79
4. Food / meals	\$60.16	\$99	\$97	\$91
5. Transportation	<u>\$39.58</u>	<u>\$51</u>	<u>\$61</u>	<u>\$68</u>
<b>Average Daily Expense</b>	<b>\$353.53</b>	<b>\$489</b>	<b>\$525</b>	<b>\$421</b>

## Marketing Strategies

- D. Increase per-visitor spending as the number one objective.** The benefit of tourism to the residents of Greater Saint Charles can be found in generating higher per-visitor spending, economic impact, and tax relief. This should be the absolute priority for all tourism marketing and development efforts.
- E. Provide better visitor orientation and facilitation by installing compact, transportable visitor information kiosks in tourist areas.** Existing and potential visitors to Saint Charles need to be provided information that compels them to visit, leads them to area cash registers and encourages them to dine, shop, and extend their stay. Placing compact, transportable weather-proof kiosks at appropriate visitor points will result in getting information in the hands of more visitors twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. RTM recommends placing these visitor information kiosks at the following locations:
- ∑ Convention Center
  - ∑ Selected hotels
  - ∑ University
  - ∑ Hospital
- F. Move all CVB staff to the Convention Center. Adapt the current Main Street visitor center into a comprehensive sales and interpretive center for Saint Charles.** The CVB staff is undesirably packed into a space that is too small. Also, the Main Street visitor center does not provide the interpretive experience or the “showcase” needed to help visitors learn about all there is to see and do in the Greater Saint Charles area. Thus, RTM recommends that the CVB staff be moved to the Convention Center and the entire facility on Main Street be converted into an interpretive center and selling showcase. The purpose of this center is to serve as a point of orientation, have an overview film, house exhibits of the history of Saint Charles, and a show room of “teasers” to make people want to stay, shop, and explore. This should be the one-stop “WOW” that makes people want to stay longer and return to Saint Charles.
- G. Historic Saint Charles on The Missouri River: Create a “Tourism Strategic Vision” that incorporates land use, design, and development of retail, dining, entertainment, lodging, conventions, and transportation. The focus of this effort should be connecting the river to these amenities and creating an animated and lively historic town setting for long-term success.** Clearly the number one asset of Saint Charles is its location and awesome history on the Missouri River. This heritage has not been capitalized upon as effectively as needed. RTM highly recommends that a task force be appointed to review this report and develop a “Tourism Strategic Vision” including land use, design, and development of Saint Charles into a lively and animated historic village setting that incorporates the river into the land use plan. Visitors to the historic district should be able to see the river and feel the ambiance as they shop, dine and spend. Leverage your history into a lively and animated destination that no tourist can resist. Also, this visioning process should evaluate the kind of retail, dining, lodging, etc. that will work best in generating economic impact for the community.

## Marketing Strategies

- H. Create a highly memorable new gateway on Interstate 70.** The residents of Saint Charles know the amazing history of the area. But, travelers do not. A compelling gateway sign is needed along Interstate 70. It should feature large bronze statues of Lewis and Clark and capture the spirit of the westward movement. It should feature the words, "Historic Saint Charles on the Missouri River". This is the positioning that is the essence of Saint Charles. This gateway will create destination awareness and lure travelers to visit. An effective gateway includes:
- Σ Architectural style that matches the persona of the area
  - Σ Nighttime illumination
  - Σ Attractive landscaping
  - Σ The positioning statement on the sign under the "Welcome" wording
  - Σ Directions leading travelers to visitor information
- I. Continue to develop signage and wayfinding to make it as easy as possible to find visitor information, attractions and amenities.** Signage and wayfinding rated an average of 3.97 on a 1-5 scale where 1=low and 5=high. A rating under 4.00 is considered a failure. RTM strongly recommends a planned signage effort be implemented. Better signage and wayfinding are critical in getting customers to cash registers.
- J. Hire a sports marketing consultant for sports tourism marketing.** RTM recommends hiring a sports marketing consultant to develop the potential for the sports tourism market in Greater Saint Charles. Again, the geographic location of Saint Charles makes this a market to grow. Sports-marketing offers strong potential, but it must be developed in such a way that the greatest return-on-investment is accomplished. Strategic selection of under-served market segments is required and the knowledge to grow those selected sport segments.
- K. Enhance existing products, attractions and activities to meet visitor expectations and develop new products that fit the enhanced positioning.** The products and unmet needs that tested most significantly in this study included:
- Σ Shops open in the evenings in historic district (50.00%)
  - Σ Guided river excursions (31.95%)
  - Σ More places to sit and rest in historic district (38.22%)
  - Σ A craft/artisan co-op featuring hand-made items in the historic district (37.36%)
- Clearly, the customer is saying that works needs to be done to fulfill the appeal of Saint Charles.
- L. Revamp marketing materials to improve conversion and visitor satisfaction.** RTM has provided detailed recommendations for the improvement of the tourism marketing materials, advertising and public relations to drive increased visitation.

**Marketing Strategies**

- M. Test market a variety of promotions and packages to determine potential successes.** RTM encourages GSCCVB to conduct a series of market tests to determine if a variety of promotions could offer success. This would include golf packages, retail promotions, KATY Trail excursions, wine country excursions, etc. Test for success before committing significant investment.
- N. Conduct on-going scientific research to determine efforts earning the best return-on-investment.**
- Σ Monthly lodging market mix survey
  - Σ Visitor profile and conversion research every three years
  - Σ Annual evaluation of inquiry point-of-origin
  - Σ Website visitor interest and conversion analysis
  - Σ Inquiry database “data mining”
- O. Monitor visitor satisfaction with crucial components of visitor activity.** Currently, amenities in the Greater Saint Charles area are rated thusly by visitors: (on a 1 – 5 scale where 1=low and 5=high)

<u>Amenity</u>	<u>Average Rating</u>	<u>Age Groups</u>	
		<u>49 under</u>	<u>50 over</u>
Overall appeal of the attraction in the area	4.33	4.35	4.38
Variety of shopping & merchandise in historic district	4.16	4.03	4.24
Range of choices for dining	4.11	4.17	4.15
Quality of the lodging rooms	4.02	3.98	4.10
Ease of finding visitor information	3.99	3.98	4.10
Signage and wayfinding	3.97	4.03	4.02
Lodging value you received for the price paid	3.89	3.98	3.90
Level of service / employee training	3.89	3.86	3.98
Prices of merchandise in the historic district	3.60	3.68	3.62
Convenience of shop operating hours in Historic District	3.59	3.45	3.59

All ratings that fall below a 4.00 are not acceptable. Clearly, the convenience of shop hours, the prices, level of service, signage and wayfinding must be addressed and monitored for improvement.

## **Recommended Strategies**

Following in this report are RTM's recommendations, based on research, for implementation of this report. These recommendations are segmented by category including:

- Σ Positioning
- Σ Gateways
- Σ Wayfinding and Signage
- Σ Visitor Information Centers
- Σ Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations
- Σ Promotional Efforts
- Σ Direct Sales Efforts
- Σ Tourism Governance and Organizational Structure
- Σ Offices and Staffing
- Σ Funding
- Σ Product Development
- Σ Hospitality Training
- Σ Local Education
- Σ Additional and On-Going Research and Evaluation

## **Positioning**

### **Recommended Positioning Strategy**

- Σ Most visited attractions:
  - Historic district shops and restaurants
  - Lewis & Clark Monument and related sites
  - Frenchtown shops and restaurants
  - Saint Charles area casinos
  - First State Capitol – state historic site
  - Missouri River Wine Country wineries
- Σ Likes:
  - Shops / shopping (49)
  - Dining / food / restaurants (28)
  - Friendly people (17)
  - Historic areas / districts (17)
- Σ Dislikes:
  - Parking (13)
  - Traffic (12)
  - Not open long enough / longer hours
- Σ Most desired new products / amenities:
  - Shops open in the evenings in historic district (50.00%)
  - Guided river excursions (41.95%)
  - More places to sit & rest in historic district (38.22%)
  - A craft / artisan co-op featuring hand-made items in historic district (37.36%)

People generally choose to stay in pleasant, scenic and attractive places where there are many interesting things to see and do, along with great places to eat and shop. Thus, we can have confidence from both the perspective of national research and scientific research conducted exclusively for Greater Saint Charles, the positioning elements listed above will be successful.

The positioning statement Randall Travel Marketing recommends for increasing tourism in Greater Saint Charles is:

## ***Historic Saint Charles Village On the Missouri River***

***Dining, shopping, wineries, and Lewis & Clark historic sites await you  
in Saint Charles, the historic village setting on the banks of the Missouri River.***

## **Gateways**

It is important for visitors to know when they arrive in a destination, that they are welcomed and where they should go to find trip planning information. Thus, it is critically important that Greater Saint Charles have a distinctive and attractive gateway. Upon arrival in the Greater Saint Charles area, one should feel a sense of place. As documented in the Reconnaissance Section of this report, the gateways in Saint Charles leave much to be desired. Although the standard green Department of Transportation (DOT) signage is found marking the entrance to the county, along most major ingress roads, RTM feels a more substantial gateway is needed.

The most critical aspects of a gateway according to visitors include:

1. Prominent location upon entering the community
2. Attractive and architecturally pleasing
3. Directions to visitor information
4. Landscaping
5. Lighting (important at night)
6. Includes positioning (why should I stop here?)

Interestingly, many gateways RTM encounters contain information about the various civic clubs and community groups. Few gateways provide directions to visitor information and this is unfortunate...a missed opportunity!

RTM specifically recommends development of the following:

### **1. Develop a major Lewis & Clark themed new gateway at the Fifth Street Exit of Interstate 70.**

- ∑ This is the primary route into Saint Charles
- ∑ A significant new gateway with a Lewis & Clark theme needs to be added at this site:
  - Large enough to be easily noticed
  - Architecture that portrays the personality of the area – preferably featuring large bronze statues of Lewis & Clark depicting the western movement
  - Landscaped for curb appeal
  - Nighttime lighting
  - “Welcome to Historic Saint Charles on the Missouri River” wording
  - Directions to visitor information center

## **Wayfinding and Signage**

Wayfinding is one of the most frequent complaints RTM documents in numerous tourism research studies. When one is new or unfamiliar with an area, finding the way from attraction to attraction can be frustrating and tiresome. It can actually shorten visitor trips and encourage travelers to leave. RTM has documented once a visitor becomes lost three times, they are likely to give up and leave. Thus, it is incumbent upon Saint Charles to ensure wayfinding is as easy as possible.

Visitors report they need an accurate user-friendly map and written directions to help them find their way. Also, they want signage leading them to attractions. In downtown areas, they want signs placed so they have the time necessary to negotiate their way into the proper turn lanes, etc. If the route they must travel is long, they also want “reassurance” signage confirming they are on the right path. Wayfinding and signage is a constant challenge and becomes the one area that is easy for a destination marketing organization such as GSCCVB to ignore or forget about. After all, all the employees know their way around and there are always many priorities for time, so this is inherently easy to ignore.

In the mail survey portion of this study, we learned that signage and wayfinding were rated a poor 3.97 on a 1-5 scale where 1=low and 5=high. Overall, RTM finds the traffic congestion in and around Greater Saint Charles to be relatively heavy. This puts even more importance on providing excellent wayfinding and signage. Having to retrace routes in heavy traffic is highly frustrating.

RTM recommends the following for the Greater Saint Charles area to continue to enhance wayfinding and signage:

**2. Develop outstanding maps, printed in padded sets to distribute to local hotels, dining, attractions, etc.**

∑ Outstanding maps are critical to overcoming research identified complaints about traffic and wayfinding.

**3. Develop a signage program that guarantees ease of finding cash registers**

∑ Signage leading travelers from Interstate 70 must include directional information for the historic downtown area, shops, dining, and visitor center.

**4. Task force for annual wayfinding evaluation**

∑ RTM recommends that the GSCCVB address this need for a continued excellent signage program by appointing a Task Force that will work with local officials and government departments to annually review existing wayfinding and signage and make specific recommendations for upgrades, changes, and additions.

## **Visitor Information Centers**

RTM recommends the following for visitor centers:

- Σ A convenient location that is easily accessible by all visitors when they first arrive in the destination.
- Σ Highly visible signage. RTM recommends using the bright blue color that travelers have universally been trained to identify as the official visitor information center color.
- Σ Open 7 days a week.
- Σ Handicap accessibility. This is even more important with the aging Baby Boomer population.
- Σ Lighted, exterior informational brochure racks to provide information when center is closed. Make sure those who visit after hours can find cash registers!
- Σ A clean well-maintained exterior with curb appeal.
- Σ Conveniently located parking, including motorcoach parking.
- Σ Readily available, accessible restrooms.
- Σ The look of the exterior of the center must communicate this is a fun place to find great information. It must be irresistible.
- Σ A large help desk is actually a barrier between the staff and the visitor. It would be so much more helpful to have smaller trip planning kiosks located in two or three locations throughout the center. This will encourage planning and interaction rather than requiring visitors to approach a counter to request information. It also makes it much less likely that a visitor will be ignored upon entry into the center. Each kiosk should have highlighters, maps, brochures, and other trip planning tools readily available.
- Σ The “must-sees” need to be clearly and prominently promoted in this center. This can be accomplished with display panels and exciting visuals. One should have the feeling after entering that it is important to stay and see all these “must-sees” or plan a return visit.
- Σ Brochure racks for specific attractions, hotels, etc. need to be conveniently located in order to encourage visitors to browse through the brochures. Be sure the most visible racks focus on Greater Saint Charles and the immediate area. Again, the goal is to provide so many interesting things to see and do while overnighing in Greater Saint Charles, the decision to stay overnight or stay longer is compelled.
- Σ A board is needed for posting current festivals and events and ideal seasonal activities. The goal here is to create the awareness that one *must* stay several days to see and do everything in the area.
- Σ Additional visual displays are needed to sell the dining and the shopping in Greater Saint Charles. Make visitors drool with tempting photos of food and drink. Similarly for shopping, provide visuals that tempt.

## **Marketing Strategies**

- Σ Information for directly offering hotel reservations is a requirement of a good visitor center. Provide direct dial access if possible. EVERY visitor needs to be asked if assistance can be provided in lodging reservations.
- Σ Remember to capture email addresses, zip codes, names and addresses and other contact information at every opportunity. A “Register For A Free Trip To Greater Saint Charles” box and sign is critically important.
- Σ The visitor center needs to provide a great introduction and serve as a teaser to compel visitors to want to know and find out more about the area. In addition to providing an overview of the Saint Charles area, it must place equal emphasis on showing visitors how they can have fun while visiting. It should be clearly understood by the GSCCVB and the staff the entire goal of this visitor center is to compel longer stays and greater expenditures in Greater Saint Charles and to drive economic impact. It is to serve as a showcase and a sales center.

Thus, RTM recommends the following specifically for Greater Saint Charles:

**5. Convert downtown visitor center into a showcase, sales and interpretive center. Its purpose is to provide an excellent orientation, help facilitate trips, and provide historic interpretation that creates an overview of Greater Saint Charles.**

The existing visitor center needs to become an interpretive center that is also a showcase and sales center for the Greater Saint Charles area. RTM recommends the following as further enhancements for the new facility:

- Σ Enhance visibility by adding bright blue colored directional signs leading to this visitor center, as well as exterior signage on the building that clearly indicates this is the visitor information source. The bright blue color is recognized internationally by visitors.
- Σ Preferably this center is open 7 days a week. Weekends are the most important time for the visitor center to be open.
- Σ Weatherproof informational brochure racks that are mounted on the exterior of the building so that those stopping after operating hours can find lodging, dining and shopping information.
- Σ The entire purpose of this center is to focus on selling attractions, shopping, dining and lodging in the entire Greater Saint Charles area and to get visitors in front of cash registers.
- Σ Make sure there are plenty of “make me drool” visuals tempting visitors to find the shops, dining, and attractions in Greater Saint Charles.
- Σ There should also be an orientation film that makes visitors want to stay longer and see and do more in Saint Charles.
- Σ The staff needs to be very proactive in welcoming and engaging visitors.
- Σ Instead of one central help desk, it is preferable to have several tabletop work stations where the staff can actively engage the visitor in trip planning. This kiosk type stand would be equipped with highlighters, maps, and other materials in order to help visitors start planning their stay.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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### **6. To augment visitor information, place information kiosks at selected places and sites around Greater Saint Charles**

- Σ Simple, kiosks with brochure racks, such as a free-standing column with brochure racks found on each side, need to be added to provide visitor information to those who do not stop into the visitor center. The top part of the column would have the positioning statement for Greater Saint Charles.
- Σ It will be impossible to install these informational kiosks without additional funding to the GSCCVB.
- Σ These kiosks would be maintained by the GSCCVB staff.
- Σ Recommended locations:
  - Convention Center
  - Selected Hotels
  - University
  - Hospital
  - Etc.

### **7. Continuous training and enhancement for visitor center staff**

- Σ Continuous training for visitor center staff is recommended. The visitor center staff's role in the conversion process is absolutely crucial. Also, this is a job where burnout is a constant threat. It is quite challenging to continue to answer the same questions constantly and be cheerful and helpful. The staff needs constant reinforcement and support to consistently deliver an excellent performance.
- Σ Upon entry, each visitor should be greeted with a friendly "Welcome to Greater Saint Charles, come on in and let's help you plan a great visit". If a store such as Blockbuster can greet every person entering the building, so can a center such as this.
- Σ Specific training in conversion is recommended. The staff needs to be constantly coached to be proactive in conversion by asking visitors if they can help with lodging reservations. Their primary goal is to create economic impact by getting people to stay overnight, extend their stays, or get them in front of more cash registers.

## Marketing Strategies

### Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations

RTM reviewed the GSCCVB marketing materials and analyzed the design, format, and message content. These aspects were compared to research data findings from this study. The following materials were reviewed:

- Σ GSCCVB Visitor Guide: *Historic Saint Charles, Missouri: Come and Relive the Early American Spirit.*
- Σ GSCCVB Rack Card: *Where History Comes Alive Every Day!*
- Σ GSCCVB Rack Brochure: *Relive the Pioneer Spirit in Historic Saint Charles, Missouri*
- Σ GSCCVB Sports Facilities Guide
- Σ GSCCVB Convention Center Guide and Meeting Planners Guide
- Σ GSCCVB Print Ads:
  - *Early American Spirit*
  - *Come to Historic Saint Charles For a Relaxed Get-A-Way, For a Hour, a Day or a Weekend.*
  - *Relive the Early American Spirit*
- Σ GSCCVB 2005 Special Events Calendar
- Σ GSCCVB 2005 news releases
- Σ GSCCVB website: [www.historicstcharles.com](http://www.historicstcharles.com)

In this section of the report, RTM provides specific detailed recommendations for the primary GSCCVB marketing tools. In evaluating the materials prior to making recommendations the following was noted by the RTM team:

- Σ The materials have a nice, consistent look.
- Σ The materials have worked exceptionally well as is evidenced by the data in the mail survey portion of the study. The GSCCVB visitor guide and website generated were among the top inquiry generators for Saint Charles.
- Σ What survey respondents liked best about these materials included:
  - Historic information
  - The informative aspects
  - Information on shopping, restaurants and attractions
  - Photos
  - Maps
- Σ What survey respondents liked least about these materials included:
  - Limited pricing information
  - Need more detailed information
  - Need better maps and wayfinding
- Σ This is consistent with what RTM typically finds. Although visitors are pleased to find visitor information sources, they often want more detail and more “idiot-proof” maps.

Below RTM offers specific, detailed recommendations for GSCCVB primary marketing pieces:

#### **8. Redesign new primary brochures to include a “lure” piece (or rack brochure) and**

## Marketing Strategies

### **a fulfillment piece (or visitor guide)**

RTM recommends two brochures be developed. A simple tri-fold, six-panel lure piece (or rack brochure) to be used in distribution along Interstate 70 and throughout Missouri. The purpose of this piece will be to lure travelers to the Saint Charles area.

This new lure piece should include:

- Σ 6-panel tri-fold with finished size of 4" x 9."
- Σ Recommended positioning on the front (with photos and graphics).
- Σ Inside front panel should have same "emotional connection" copy and graphics as outlined below.
- Σ Inside panels should feature the "must sees & dos" of Saint Charles.
- Σ Remainder of brochure should include a restaurant chart and lodging chart.

In addition to the lure piece, RTM recommends a new compelling fulfillment piece (same basic format as the 4X9 lure piece but more detailed) should be used in fulfillment mailings and Saint Charles area brochure racks.

The 2005 visitor guide headline is "Historic Saint Charles – Come and Relive the Early American Spirit". Photos indicate historic buildings, and various Colonial scenes. What the RTM found missing was the river and scenes showing lively fun in dining and shopping. RTM feels these pieces can do a better job selling that which makes Saint Charles unique from other Interstate 70 corridor destinations. RTM recommends the new visitor guide contain the following information in the order we have presented it here: *NOTE: The 2005 visitor guide does not include advertisements. Travelers report to RTM that they actually prefer to have visitor guides contain advertisements as long as the ads do not disturb the flow of the guide.* Overall, RTM recommends the revised guide follow the steps outlined below:

- Σ **"Hook" on the top, front one-third page of guide:** This is the hook that will generate interest. This must be based on the positioning statement (branding) adopted by the GSCCVB. Again, RTM recommends, "**Historic Saint Charles Village on the Missouri River**". Then the pay-off line would be added to the bottom.
- Σ **Emotional connection:** The inside front panel of the 2005 visitor guide includes a welcome message and a table of content. RTM would prefer to find an emotional connection that places the reader in the experience of visiting the Saint Charles area. Appeal to the senses with the sights, sounds and relaxing with fun experiences one can enjoy in the area. Talk about watching the mighty Missouri River flow by, walking in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, touching the historic buildings, feeling the ambiance of the village setting, the smells from bakeries and restaurants, etc. Allow the reader to mentally picture themselves in Saint Charles. Including the Table of Contents is excellent, but don't forget the emotional connection part!

## 8. (Continued)

## Marketing Strategies

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- Σ **“Must Sees”**: This includes those things that were rated most highly in the research study. If possible, include these on the same layout as the emotional connection. Lead with your strong suit!
- Σ **Suggested activities**: Include a brief bullet-point style listing of suggested activities to help adults traveling without children as well as families plan a day of fun. Combine the must-sees with lesser known activities to best enjoy the area. Sell the Greater Saint Charles area first and the surrounding region as add-ons.
- Σ **Listing of attractions**: This is an actual listing of attractions that provides details visitors need in order to plan a trip. Include driving directions, hours of operation, costs and contact information. Include the same map code (B-3, G-6) and color-coding as found on the map (recommended in this section).
- Σ **Listing of shopping**: This section in the existing visitor guide is well done. Each listing gives a brief description of the shop, with the address and phone number included. As an added incentive we suggest adding a bold “Open in evening hours” icon and wording for any shop that agrees to be open in the evenings. Add map coordinates for any that are not located in the historic districts.
- Σ **Listing of restaurants**: The restaurant guide is particularly important for Saint Charles as the meals taxes account for approximately 80% of the current CVB funding. The current guide lists restaurants by geographic area, which is appropriate and helpful for the visitor. There are good descriptions for any restaurants that are not national chains. The address and phone number and a good number of websites are included. A full listing of restaurants, shopping opportunities, etc. should also be available in lodging rooms throughout the area and at local visitor centers, not to mention the GSCCVB website. The goal in this guide is to compel visitation by showing off your unique reasons to visit. Make them drool! RTM particularly likes to see “B, L, D” codes, accessibility codes, and the “\$, \$\$, \$\$\$” price codes. This provides excellent information at a glance for the reader.
- Σ **Listing of wineries**: The current listing of wineries is good and includes addresses, phone numbers, websites, hours of operation, and good descriptions. Map codes would be helpful to add, as well as an estimate of driving time from Saint Charles and a general direction such as “Located 1 hour west of Saint Charles.”
- Σ **Festivals listing**: RTM prefers to see these listings take minimal space in a visitor guide. The current visitor guide only allocates 1 page spread to festivals and this is appropriate. Listing should be brief, offer a general description, and then include a reference to visit the website for further details. It would be good to either list by month or include the month in bold so that visitors don’t have to read every listing to see what is available when they are in Saint Charles.

### 8. (Continued)

## Marketing Strategies

- Σ **Listing of accommodations:** The current listing is not as effective as a grid format. Travelers tell us repeatedly they prefer the grid format because it is easier to compare and see which properties offer the items in which they are most interested. Use a grid format and include map codes (B-3, G-6) and rating codes similar to AAA. Also, it is good to separate the grid into sections to segment hotels/motels, bed and breakfast inns, RV parks, etc.
- Σ **Recreation and Sports:** RTM makes no recommendations for change to this section other than to suggest adding map coordinates, accessibility icons, and prices where approximate.
- Σ **Walking Tour:** Increase the visibility of the line that states that Walking Tour Guides are available at the visitor center. This may be a good place to coordinate with an automated service such as [www.talkingstreet.com](http://www.talkingstreet.com) where one can access a recording that describes the historic point where they are standing by calling a telephone number with their cell phone. It is an interesting way of providing an audio tour.
- Σ **Historic Time Line:** This is so clinical looking. RTM recommends having a creative service investigate making this more interesting visually.
- Σ **Specialties & Advertising:** Is there another name for this section? Maybe something along the lines of “Services for Visitors”?
- Σ **Idiot-proof map for planning:** The current maps in the 2005 guide are good. RTM recommends adding a border code (for instance numbers along the top and letters down the side) to help with locating places. The geometric figures (circles for attractions, etc.) work very well and they work when the map is reproduced in black and white as well as color. The wording on the maps is large and that is perfect for the aging Baby Boomer eyesight! Further along in this document RTM also recommends reproducing these maps onto one large sheet of paper to use as handouts at hotels, restaurants, etc. Facilitating visitors and helping them find their way to the good cash registers is a top priority for the GSCCVB.
- Σ **Nighttime entertainment:** Nighttime entertainment is absolutely critical to attract and keep visitors. Use the same listing criteria as in restaurants and remember that nighttime entertainment doesn’t always involve nightclubs and alcohol. Make it easy for guests to know what their entertainment options are in the evening hours.
- Σ **Contact for more information:** Include a toll-free phone number, fax, email address, visitor center locations, as well as website. Put the toll-free number at the bottom of every odd-numbered page and the website URL in big bold letters at the bottom of each even-numbered page.
- Σ **Use of icons:** Icons for accessibility, prices codes, etc. are good.

### 9. Padded maps with information on reverse side

This recommendation is to provide inexpensive, effective wayfinding that helps

## **Marketing Strategies**

facilitate visitors in finding places to see, things to do, and places to spend money!

The design and format need to include the following:

- Σ Two color format, 11 x 14, white uncoated paper stock
- Σ Design resembles the look of all new marketing materials
- Σ Same icons as visitor guide map (cross reference) - feature “must-sees”, attractions, dining/shopping, and lodging
- Σ Sell ads on perimeter to defray costs if needed
- Σ Printed in glued-edge pads so that they can be used easily at hotels and restaurants, etc.
- Σ Information printed on the backside of the map can prominently promote the “must sees” and amenities that will help these visitors have a good time and spend their money doing so!

### **10. Inquiry and fulfillment procedures and e-blasts**

GSCCVB has as established inquiry and fulfillment process. This data will be very useful in future studies. The key goals to be addressed in fulfillment are:

- Σ If the workload becomes too much to process inquiries speedily; consider outsourcing fulfillment to allow for speed and efficiency in processing.
- Σ Cost of the fulfillment package including printing, labor and postage.
- Σ Speed of fulfillment (potential visitors want it in five days or less).
- Σ Contents of the package; ideally it includes additional information at the inquirers request. Custom tailored packages are hot!
- Σ All bulk inquiries (magazine, newspaper etc.) must be received in electronic format (disc or email) and be processed within three days of receipt.
- Σ All inquiries from various sources must be merged into one master database and maintained permanently. Trends must be tracked from these records so they will never be purged or destroyed.
- Σ All inquiries should be maintained in a database that includes the following:
  - Date of inquiry
  - Inquiry source code (advertisement, PR, etc.)
  - Name, address, phone number and email address (point of origin is critical)
  - Primary trip purpose (if known)
  - Areas of interest (if known)
  - Anticipated travel party size
- Σ Develop email address data mine for future marketing.

### **11. Advertisement design**

## **Marketing Strategies**

All ads must reflect the positioning and design elements of all other GSCCVB materials to create a brand image. Design of ads must feature the most compelling reasons to visit the area.

- Σ Ads need to be simple, consistent, clean and highlight the positioning and attractors. Logos are not important in tourism ads. The headline message is everything...and it must be based on the recommended positioning.
- Σ Once advertising imagery is created around the primary positioning, it should be used consistently with content changing based on the placement and topic.

### **12. Advertising planning and placement**

Plan annual advertising investments based on research, objectives, and previous year evaluations and conversion rates. Potential placements need to be analyzed against cost-per-inquiry documentation by the GSCCVB. The visitor survey conducted as part of this research revealed the following ad placements as having the highest conversion rates (however, the Saint Charles visitor guide was number one and the GSCCVB website was number three).

- Σ **Missouri state travel guide**
- Σ **AAA Tour Book**
- Σ **Missouri tourism website**
- Σ **Midwest Living**
- Σ **AAA Home & Away**
- Σ **Travel & Leisure**
- Σ **Woman's Day**
- Σ **St. Louis Post Dispatch**
- Σ **Kansas City Star**

Further, based on research findings for similar destinations, RTM recommends the following for consideration:

- Σ *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel*
- Σ *Pull out special advertising sections in the Interstate 70 Corridor*

### **13. Public relations efforts**

GSCCVB outsources its public relations (PR) effort. RTM has found the most effective public relations programs for destinations are supervised and driven by a CVB staffer who is skilled in PR, knows the destination intimately and can effectively place stories with contacts within the travel media. RTM recommends that the PR effort for Saint Charles be brought in-house and utilize the services of a PR consultant only for help in creating FAM tours.

**13. (Continued)**

The PR effort requires the following:

- Σ Press kit with same image as other materials that can be filed easily in a hanging file folder. Limit brochures and inserts to avoid overloading the travel writer. Include story ideas with a brief paragraph on each unique angle. Reference website for information and photos on demand.
- Σ GSCCVB must host regular FAM tours for travel writers focusing on the positioning theme. A PR consultant can assist with this.
- Σ In-house maintenance of media/press page on the website.
- Σ In-house preparation of annual PR plan based on specific objectives, strategies and tactics to attract new visitors to the area.
- Σ In-house annual “return-on-investment” study for public relations efforts that accurately tracks coverage earned and its corresponding value in advertising placement.

**14. Meeting, sports, group tour and event planner’s guides**

Planners of all types of events tell us in repeated studies they only want information for their type of event. Comprehensive four-color publications are out. Basketball tournament planners do not want a bulky sports guide filled with soccer and baseball facilities. In essence, the contents are produced at desktop with covers that are tailored to the specific market or client, creating a tailor made Sports Planner, Reunion Planner, Wedding Planner, Meeting Planner, etc.

Content considerations for these guides include:

- Σ Design a folder that is easy to file in a hanging file folder.
- Σ Avoid boilerplate “Welcome” pages and other filler information.
- Σ Design the cover to print the client’s name on it and let the client know you have compiled it just for them...customize!
- Σ Include a Table of Contents if there are multiple sections.
- Σ Keep it lean and factual. Avoid filling it up with stuff. Big is bad!
- Σ Include only the information directly relating to the needs of the planner.
- Σ A basic handout format (list of contents) can be developed for distribution at meeting planner associations and shows, sports shows, etc.
- Σ Use the visitor guide and padded map for general information.
- Σ A chart-style listing for lodging and facilities specific to the type of event is good and allows the planner to efficiently determine which options work best. Show proximity to the event facility for each lodging and dining property.
- Σ Including the listing of Convention, Sports or Group Tour Services is important in this economy. This clearly positions the GSCCVB as a full-service organization that is ready and willing to do everything possible to serve the planner.

## Marketing Strategies

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### 14. (Continued)

- Σ Meetings - Do not forget to add a list of potential local speakers and their topics, as this can make having a meeting in Saint Charles more cost effective. Local colleges and universities are sure to have a host of good speakers on a wide range of topics.
- Σ Include a pocket in the back where additional information can be provided (i.e. GSCCVB visitor guide).

### 15. Marketing partnerships with Saint Charles area tourism businesses

GSCCVB needs to have committees that meet regularly to address specific marketing and sales opportunities cooperatively. RTM recommends:

- Σ Holding regular meetings.
- Σ Every GSCCVB initiative will NOT benefit every tourism business.
- Σ Improve direct meeting sales efforts on associations, SMERF, corporate, reunions and sports markets.
- Σ Identify trade shows to attend with lodging participation to contact planners.
- Σ Make regular on-site calls to local lodging properties to share leads and update them on the GSCCVB program of work.
- Σ Establish a meeting servicing policy in conjunction with the lodging properties to make sure every group receives the best possible service to remain competitive with other cities.
- Σ Be a leader in distributing research findings and creative strategies to empower progress for constituents.
- Σ Be a leader in promoting “packaging” co-op opportunities for these groups.

### 16. Revamp website and expand technology strategy for outreach to leisure, business, sports, group and meeting markets

Nationally, travel research reflects continuing dramatic growth in Internet use for planning. In one recent study, over 80% of the participants reported they primarily used the Internet and websites for their travel planning. One can be certain that potential travelers to the Saint Charles area will become increasingly reliant on the Internet for travel planning. The website is where you MUST become a cruise ship on land. RTM found the current site ([www.historicstcharles.com](http://www.historicstcharles.com)) to be very difficult to navigate. Each category (lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, etc.) requires numerous clicks rather than being able to scroll down through continuous listings and photos. Overall, it needs to be designed in a format similar to the recommended visitor guide and it should continue to provide navigation that will make it easy for the travel planner to find the activities that will compel visitation. These enhancements will make the site more effective:

## Marketing Strategies

### 16. (Continued)

- Σ A staff person must be assigned to the e-marketing program to focus on the maintenance and smooth function of the website and resulting email marketing. The GSCCVB must make e-marketing a number one priority and thus dedicate a staffer to this effort and overall research.
- Σ The website imagery will have to be redesigned to match the new marketing materials.
- Σ The home page should feature the primary positioning, top “must sees” and emotional connection.
- Σ Site needs more “WOW” photography and bullet points, avoid lengthy narrative. Planners are impatient. The current site photos tend to be either buildings without people or Colonial-costumed characters. There needs to be more photos showing people having fun. And, we found no shots of the Missouri River. Remember the appeal of water!
- Σ Maps need to be interactive and easy to print.
- Σ The navigation bar now has large buttons that are easy to read and click. Build the navigation bar around what to do, where to stay, where to eat, group tour, media, meetings/events and request information.
- Σ Under “attractions” feature photos of attractions with the names/descriptions beside them. The current site has a list of attractions and one must click on each and every one in order to see what there is to see and do. Too much work!
- Σ The same “see just a list and have to click on each entry” can be found in the lodging section. Again, a grid is preferred by visitors as it allows them to effortlessly see what amenities each of the properties offers without numerous clicks.
- Σ The same “see just a list and have to click on each entry” can be found in the dining section. This sections needs to be like the attractions listing and have photos and listings that are continuous. The clicking required in listings such as this is maddening. Remember, the majority of the funding for the GSCCVB comes from dining taxes. Make them drool!
- Σ The Events Calendar is very well done and readers can choose from a listing of events for a particular week or month. Well done!
- Σ “Request Information” needs to be easily visible on every page of the site. Information request should collect traveler profile and demographic data.
- Σ Meeting planning page must have complete planning information. There must be an option to request information.
- Σ Small fonts are hard to read by travel planners over 40, many of whom require reading glasses.
- Σ Lodging and attractions information needs to be detailed. Again a grid format is preferred by the customer. Local businesses should co-op with GSCCVB to receive an access code to be able to update their rates, hours of operation and other information on the site.
- Σ An events page should feature unique local events packages with lodging.

## Marketing Strategies

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### 16. (Continued)

- Σ Shopping is one of the top activities mentioned by visitors in the research and the current reported shopping expenditures could be increased. Do a better job of selling the unique items that can be bought at the shops.
- Σ The current “request a brochure” section is good. RTM suggests adding a couple of more questions to this including:
  - Number in travel party (number of adults and children)
  - When planning to visit (drop down box for quick answer)
- Σ RTM further encourages GSCCVB to experiment with a full survey on the website. Invite web visitors to complete the survey (approximately 10-15 quick questions) in exchange for travel coupons, or some worthwhile offer.
- Σ Purchase a trends report to monitor most active web generating sources.
- Σ Analyze web data monthly to spot trends.

**Data Mining:** The website questionnaires recommended above allow GSCCVB to perform data mining and analyze the data captured to determine visitation trends, what product is having the greatest appeal in Saint Charles, and help GSCCVB continually shape its on-going marketing efforts.

**E-marketing mailers:** Once the tourism agency captures the e-mail addresses of those who visit the website or call for information, it can begin to send e-marketing messages. When these e-mails are opened, they appear on the computer screen as a one-page ad informing the recipient about Greater Saint Charles and why they should consider visiting. Most importantly, e-mailings are the most economical method for implementing niche marketing efforts. Once a website visitor has completed the questionnaire, GSCCVB can determine through data mining and analysis whether to send them specific information on shopping, festivals, sports, wineries, etc.

E-mailings are enjoying huge success in travel and tourism marketing. Everyone wants to know where to find unique leisure destinations, and these e-mailings are currently delivering huge results. The return on investment is outstanding since e-mailers are basically free. All one needs is the normal e-mail software, a list of e-mail addresses and data that guides the kind of message to craft.

**Electronic Newsletters:** Additionally, this technology strategy will allow GSCCVB to develop monthly newsletters which can be sent to all Saint Charles elected officials, constituents, interested residents, etc. These newsletters can continuously inform GSCCVB tourism supporters on the accomplishments of GSCCVB and planned efforts. Other newsletters may be developed and sent to group tour and motorcoach contacts continually to offer new and exciting suggested itineraries and trip ideas.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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### **17. Trade and consumer shows**

Trade and consumer shows are an important part of outreach efforts for the GSCCVB. It allows the organization the opportunity to present its message to large numbers of group, meeting, and leisure trip planners and travel writers. The trade shows RTM recommends the GSCCVB attend include:

- Σ Travel Media Showcase
- Σ Glamer
- Σ Bank Travel
- Σ Regional shows for meeting and group tour planners - MPI, ASAE, USTOA and SGMP

RTM recommends GSCCVB employ the following principals for attendance to trade and consumer shows:

Be prepared with the newly designed visitor guide.

- Σ Booth display should be visually exciting and utilize the same imagery recommended in this report for brochures, ads, etc. Saint Charles must look unique when compared to other regional and Interstate 70 corridor destinations.
- Σ Solicit support of local tourism “partners” for expenses, promotions, give-aways, etc. Specifically partner with lodging and attractions and go to these shows to sell!
- Σ Encourage participation with local tourism “partners.”
- Σ After attendance to the trade show, an evaluation should be conducted (on an annual basis) to determine which shows generated sufficient return-on-investment and which did not. The next year’s plan of trade show attendance should be based on this analysis.

## **Promotional Efforts**

### **18. Front line information at lodging properties**

- ∑ As mentioned in the Strategic Direction section of this report, one of the most critical audiences for the GSCCVB to reach is the existing overnight guest. The goal is to increase the awareness of the unique visitor opportunities that exist and increase expenditures.
- ∑ A key aspect of this strategy can best be accomplished by informing existing guests about what there is to see and do, as well as what unique dining, shopping and entertainment can be found.
- ∑ RTM recommends that the GSCCVB place the previously mentioned informational kiosks in as many lodging properties as possible.
- ∑ Additionally, RTM recommends the front desk in every lodging property have a display for Greater Saint Charles area maps and the front-line personnel be coached in using these maps to help patrons with wayfinding and locating entertainment and dining options. This should be considered a top priority. Then, the map will do the rest of the work by indicating the “must-sees” and the compelling information that enhances the image.

### **19. In-room extend-the-stay promotion**

- ∑ Existing overnight markets for the GSCCVB include business, meeting, or transient travelers, as well as leisure destination visitors. Those already visiting Greater Saint Charles are one of the best targets for future leisure visitation.
- ∑ RTM recommends a strategy of enticing existing travelers to stay a day longer or come back another time to experience the Greater Saint Charles area as a tourist.
- ∑ This strategy would be implemented by having either tent cards or informational pieces in each lodging room which identifies the “must sees” and other attractions and activities to be enjoyed in the Greater Saint Charles area. Bound room information books are often placed in the drawers by housekeepers and are not as effective for this purpose as a tent card.

### **20. Continue to strengthen partnership with Lindenwood University to target university-related visitors**

- ∑ Universities are major drivers of tourism. The University holds events, and attracts potential students as well as their parents, family and friends.
- ∑ GSCCVB needs to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with Lindenwood University and provide visitor information for University events.
- ∑ Additionally, GSCCVB should implement an annual mailing to all University faculty and staff. A visitor guide and other pertinent information should be mailed to help faculty and staff members with meeting and event planning.
- ∑ RTM recommends also developing a partnership with the Lindenwood University in which students are sent email messages they can forward to their parents, friends, etc. to enroll in receiving information about visiting Greater Saint Charles.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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### **20. (Continued)**

- Σ Additionally, the Lindenwood University and GSCCVB need to maintain links to each other's websites.
- Σ It would be wonderful for Lindenwood University to include GSCCVB contact information in new student materials.

### **21. Visiting friends & relatives (VFR), reunions, weddings, and funerals promotion**

- Σ As we learned in this research study, the primary trip purpose for approximately 13% of the total visitors to Greater Saint Charles is to "visit friends and relatives."
- Σ The smart destination will provide trip planning information and resources to assist these travelers, with the goal of hopefully increasing the number of overnight stays. This is another built-in market the GSCCVB can capitalize upon.
- Σ Have an annual pull-out special section in the local newspaper with tips for planning a reunion, where to find resources (flowers, cards, gifts, etc.) for weddings and other events. Further, this section would contain the "Things to See and Do" and amenities in the area visitors will want to enjoy during their stay.
- Σ A small, inexpensively printed brochure exclusively for planning a family reunion. Have these available at all hotels, restaurants, short-term rental agencies, visitor information centers and any other visitor points. Residents will appreciate the assistance and the area will gain overnight stays.

### **22. Create seasonal reasons to visit Greater Saint Charles**

- Σ In some months visitation is less than desired (November, December, January and February). This is an issue that can be addressed with marketing.
- Σ There are activities and events scheduled in Greater Saint Charles for each season of the year. GSCCVB does a good job of highlighting current events so visitors can easily see what things might be enjoyed. RTM recommends GSCCVB prepare a detailed calendar of seasonal events and activities which can be enjoyed by visitors and distribute this to all lodging properties, restaurants and other visitor points. This is very good information for front desk staff at local lodging properties. This can be accomplished with a WinFax software application that allows GSCCVB to produce the weekly update and automatically have it sent to all lodging properties.
- Σ RTM recommends GSCCVB strategically evaluate its current offering of events and festivals with the intention of increasing promotion of events and activities that boost visitation in the winter months. Further, RTM recommends GSCCVB champion the development of specific events that will drive visitation in these slower months. This might include events such as *The Great Chefs of Saint Charles* promotion in November, or a *Chocolate Lover's Festival* held every weekend in February, or perhaps a holiday promotion.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **23. African-American, Hispanic, Gay and other minority segment promotions**

African-Americans, Hispanics, Gays and other minorities often report to RTM that they tend to visit only those areas where they are sure they are invited. For instance, African-Americans look for advertising that features photography including African-Americans, and special packages targeted to African-Americans. The same is true for other minority segments. Thus, RTM recommends that the GSCCVB:

- Σ Conduct pinpoint research with African-American and other major minority market segment inquirers who contact GSCCVB for visitor information. Determine what type of products and packages each market segment most desires related to Greater Saint Charles. Minority inquirers are quick to respond when they are sincerely asked to help identify products and promotions that offer the most appeal.
- Σ After a period of time conducting inquiries, test market potential packages and promotions. Determine feasibility of more resource commitment to these markets.
- Σ Be sure to include photos of African-Americans, Hispanics and Gays in marketing materials.

### **24. Packaging with Greater Saint Charles attractions**

- Σ Packaging is hot in current tourism trends. GSCCVB is fortunate to have several major attractions with which packages would be ideal. This includes the shops, wineries, and university, festivals, and others.
- Σ RTM recommends GSCCVB identify potential test market packages that would likely be successful based on market trends and likely participation by marketing partners.
- Σ GSCCVB wants to only pursue a limited number of package promotions, testing them prior to major investment of time and resources. Only those that prove successful would then be developed further.

### **25. Test for success – test market a variety of potential product promotions.**

- Σ RTM recommends that the GSCCVB conduct a series of market tests to determine the potential for more serious promotional efforts for niche markets such as golf, KATY Trail promotions, river excursions, birding, etc. One wants to determine if a market offers successful results before committing heavily in resources.
- Σ Test marketing techniques include public relations story placement, e-marketing tools, direct mail and Internet website promotions.

### **26. Girlfriends Getaways**

- Σ One of the growing trends in travel and tourism is “girlfriend getaways” in which friends, mother-daughter pairs, and others travel for pampering and shopping getaways. With the new Marriott Hotel this is an ideal promotion. RTM recommends offering a spa, shopping, and unique dining package and this will succeed.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **Direct Sales Efforts**

The tourism industry nationwide has experienced its first major downturn in decades. Lodging properties have really felt the pinch since a lodging building boom took place in the years prior to the decline that began in early 2001. That means lodging properties all over the country are coming to their local destination marketing organizations and asking “What have you done for me lately?” Even though the lodging in Greater Saint Charles has continued to grow, this current economy demands an aggressive direct sales effort and a destination’s best potential partner for this can be found in the lodging properties that have sales departments in place. A planned coordinated sales effort must be utilized to target specific market segments and drive increased overnight visitation. There is no time for duplication of efforts so the lodging properties, GSCCVB and any other sales organizations in the county should have regular meetings to coordinate their direct sales efforts. The bottom line here is getting out and selling aggressively or risk continuing to lose market share to those destinations who are selling. The following strategies are focused on specific market segments.

#### **27. Leisure tourism sales**

- Σ Leisure tourism is a critically important market and currently comprises approximately 22% of the entire overnight occupancy in Greater Saint Charles (45% when combined with the transient and visiting friends and relatives segment).
- Σ RTM recommends that printed materials be revamped, that trade shows remain a priority, and an increase in sales calls to AAA offices, travel agents, etc is initiated. AAA offices all along the Interstate 70 corridor are a priority.
- Σ RTM recommends GSCCVB investigate additional leisure (Hiking, golf, etc.) trade shows for possible attendance.
- Σ RTM recommends GSCCVB continue to develop a database of all sales call contacts, do everything possible to collect the email addresses for these contacts, and prepare a continuous series of e-blasts to these contacts to present packages and travel itineraries.

#### **28. Group tour and motorcoach sales effort strategy**

The convenient geographic location of Greater Saint Charles provides advantages for group tour promotion. This is a very lucrative market for GSCCVB as it provides significant economic impact. According to the survey of lodging in Greater Saint Charles, group tour is currently approximately 2.21% of the total lodging occupancy. Comparable destinations to Greater Saint Charles average approximately 5% or more of their total lodging occupancy in group tour and motorcoach business. Thus, Greater Saint Charles has some room for improvement in producing its share of motorcoach overnight business.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **28. (Continued)**

Thus, RTM recommends the GSCCVB increase its aggressiveness in researching and recruiting group tours. Doing this will require more direct sales efforts, more direct marketing and promotion to potential group tour customers, attendance at appropriate trade shows with more stringent tracking of leads and follow-up and enhanced analysis of best practices and best return-on-investment. The goal is to either sell a group tour operator on bringing a group to the area or to capture them as an overnight on a longer trip.

Group tour planners have, in numerous interviews, reported to RTM their criteria for choosing a destination to overnight includes:

- Σ A nice, mid-priced meal and evening entertainment.
- Σ A clean and updated mid-range hotel with an interior corridor in a quiet area.
- Σ A destination organization that will work with them to provide special amenities and items that will make their group participants feel special.
- Σ Unique itineraries that appeal to their specific audiences (whether seniors, youth groups or other specific niches).
  
- Σ Develop appropriate solicitation materials, including a desktop publishing template that can be tailored to each contact with suggested itineraries and reasons to choose to overnight in the Greater Saint Charles area as an exclusive trip or while in route to other locations. These materials should go hand-in-hand with all other GSCCVB promotional pieces (see specific recommendations for print materials elsewhere in this document).
- Σ Partner with local attractions to identify group tours that may be visiting. Research should be conducted with those overnighing in Greater Saint Charles and those choosing not to overnight in Greater Saint Charles. One wants to determine which group tour groups provide the best potential for overnight business recruitment.
- Σ Appropriate step-on guides need to be identified and recruited for this effort. Many group tours demand the availability of step-on guides and GSCCVB must ensure that this is available.
- Σ Identify a list of most likely tour operators and trade shows.
- Σ Plan trade shows based on selection of those most likely to match target decision makers (see research for specific recommendations).
- Σ Have a booth for trade shows that is dynamic, matches the image of the revised primary marketing materials and works to capture the attention of trade show participants. You must stand out and be memorable so make that booth dramatic!
- Σ Contact your area tourism marketing partners, attractions, etc. to obtain give-aways and promotional items.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **28. (Continued)**

- Σ Follow-up with all trade show leads for maximum results.
- Σ Develop a consistent annual e-marketing and direct mail program that focuses on the primary appeal of Greater Saint Charles and offers unique trip planning itineraries.
- Σ Make personal sales call missions at least every six months to targeted group tour operators in the Greater Saint Charles target market areas. Produce reports following every sales mission to document who was called upon, what follow-up action is required and what result is expected.
- Σ Follow up all group tours with an evaluation form that allows you to determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Greater Saint Charles area as a group destination. By analyzing these results, GSCCVB can continuously improve its group tour products.
- Σ Produce an annual report with the total number of trade shows attended, sales missions made, contacts made, the total number of follow-up activities and the number of group tours served by GSCCVB. Bear in mind that there will be group tours that occur that are not tracked by GSCCVB. Perhaps include an estimate in the annual report of the number of total group tours, as well as those that can be specifically traced by the GSCCVB.

### **29. Convention and meeting recruitment**

Much change has come in the convention and meeting market segment for Saint Charles with the opening of the new convention center and the new Embassy Suites Hotel. This changes Saint Charles meeting capabilities significantly.

RTM is pleased to report that in executive interviews with meeting and convention planners, GSCCVB rated very well in performance and service. They are rated as being either as aggressive or more aggressive as other CVBs in recruiting business. Most contacts knew the staff well, and were pleased with the service they receive from this CVB.

Thus, now large conventions as well as smaller conferences are a good target market for GSCCVB. Currently the association, government, SMERF (social, military, educational, religious and fraternal) smaller market segments comprise approximately 20% of the overall lodging in Saint Charles. Of those, the corporate meetings market is the largest at 7.19% of total lodging.

Saint Charles is well positioned geographically, has definite charm, and is relatively affordable. Thus, it is a good location for conventions and meetings. Earlier in this report RTM recommended that Saint Charles develop its riverfront presence and incorporate the river more prominently in its historic district. This would definitely appeal to meeting delegates.

### **29. (Continued)**

## **Marketing Strategies**

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- Σ RTM recommends the GSCCVB continue to be aggressive in meeting and convention recruitment. Meetings and groups offer one of the best potentials for increasing visitation to Greater Saint Charles.
- Σ GSCCVB must continue to work with local lodging properties to identify potential for this convention and meeting market. RTM recommends that GSCCVB take a leadership role in partnering with these lodging properties to prepare effective marketing materials for mailings and other contacts. RTM suggests holding quarterly brainstorming sessions, hosted by GSCCVB with area lodging representatives. The purpose of these meetings is to brainstorm new conference and meeting leads and determine what can be done to target new leads.
- Σ Prepare desktop print materials that can be tailored to each contact to sell the attributes of Greater Saint Charles as a destination for convention and meeting planners.
- Σ Identify possible convention and meeting decision makers and support lodging properties in contacting these.
- Σ Follow up with lodging properties to determine the success of promotional efforts and what is needed for continuous improvement.
- Σ Prepare monthly reports documenting GSCCVB's meeting sales efforts and results. These results should be shared with local lodging properties to encourage support for GSCCVB's sales efforts. If the local lodging properties perceive they are receiving great value from the sales efforts of GSCCVB, they will be more willing to partner with GSCCVB.

## **Governance for Greater Saint Charles Tourism Bureau**

The leaders of Saint Charles are to be commended for their commitment to travel and tourism. Clearly the community leaders and officials appreciate the importance of this economic sector and support the development of the GSCCVB. The work of the GSCCVB has been successful and the future calls for further progressing in its skill sets for growing tourism for the area.

During the course of this study, RTM was concerned to hear that there has been much discourse over how the CVB conducts its affairs. Various factions within the community have been in discord over policies and programs of the CVB. In many communities we find differences of opinion regarding the programs and practices of a CVB. However, those differences are more pronounced in Saint Charles than in typical destinations.

RTM believes that there is a combination of “causes” at the source of this discord. One is the most prominent to RTM is the enormous shift in visitation patterns that have occurred in the past few years. The typical destination in the U.S. today was built around the needs of the War Generation and Silent Generation and their families. Today, one finds that these markets are declining while the Baby Boomer and GenX markets are those that offer the most potential. Many destination are having to re-think their products and experiences in order to reach these new audience groups. RTM feels that this is at the heart of the issue for Saint Charles. Simply put, the customer has changed and Saint Charles must adapt its tourism product to these younger audiences. And, regarding leadership, and quite simply put, quality assurance, research, marketing success and priority product development will be key issues for the future of tourism in the Greater Saint Charles area.

The tourism effort in Saint Charles has not had an appointed Board of Directors. Rather, a Convention and Visitors Commission has served. Those positions are all appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Council. RTM gets the sense the Commission and community leaders have worked hard to determine the best course of action and have struggled to find the best course of action for the development of tourism in Greater Saint Charles.

Part of RTM’s recommendations for Saint Charles call for the development of a new Strategic Tourism Vision that includes land use planning, and makes structural changes to the downtown and historic area which visually connect these areas with the Missouri River. This recommendation is made to enhance and preserve Saint Charles’s heritage as a river town of great historic importance.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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Another part of this new Strategic Tourism Vision is to establish the leadership that will proactively and positively lead the tourism industry into this new vision. This can not be accomplished with such discord. Therefore, at this point in its development, RTM recommends that the Convention and Visitors Commission be replaced with a Board of Directors and that a free-standing 501 (c) (3) organization be established. This will remove local politics from the day-to-day operation of the CVB. The primary concern RTM has regarding governance for GSCCVB is that the organization have solid industry *stakeholders*, meaning local travel industry professionals to sit on the Board. RTM recommends that the majority of the Board be comprised of stakeholders who have a vested interest in the health of the local tourism industry. Additionally, RTM likes to see business and community leaders on the Board who can appreciate the economic impact generated by the tourism industry, and its benefits to the local citizens. Those whose livelihoods depend on the economic health of the travel and tourism industry serve well the needs of the industry. Similarly, those with broad business and community vision understand the importance of protecting and supporting tourism as an economic development catalyst.

GSCCVB committees should be created only on an as-needed-basis to perform specific tasks. Any committees created should be chaired by Board members and made up of GSCCVB Board and non-Board members who are actively involved in tourism promotion. Effort should be made to include representation from tourism entities on each committee.

The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) is a membership organization of CVB organizations. The IACVB maintains extensive research that provides communities with excellent resources for determining most effective staffing, promotion, and funding options for tourism development. RTM recommends that as the GSCCVB continues to grow, their practices be continually measured against the standards established by IACVB for appropriate development.

### **30. Recommended committees for GSCCVB Board of Directors**

- Σ Executive Committee (Also serves as Personnel Committee)
- Σ Funding and Finance Committee
- Σ Research and Results Measurement Committee
- Σ Product Development Committee

### **NOT Recommended**

- Σ Marketing Committee: This is the job of the GSCCVB staff. No oversight should be required other than the President/CEO.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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### **31. Strategic Tourism Vision Task Force**

RTM recommends this task force be established to develop a long-term plan for tourism development in Saint Charles. Those appointed to this task force should be accomplished, visionary business leaders who are trusted and respected by the entire community. Placing members on this task force who are going to be argumentative or have personal agendas is counter-productive and will, in fact, prevent the participation of those who are truly needed for this effort.

The purpose of this task force is to look critically at Saint Charles and recruit consultants, land use planners, and others who can help create a master plan for tourism development that will last for the next fifty years. This plan should address leisure, convention, and sports travel as well as the needs of local residents. The plan should include landscape, retail, entertainment, dining, lodging, meetings spaces, and transportation.

RTM strongly feels that this plan must incorporate the Missouri River more integrally into the downtown and historic district. The Missouri River is the reason Saint Charles enjoys its historic reputation. Yet, the river is seldom seen or visited by visitors today. It always has been one of the most crucial assets for Saint Charles. Yet it is not incorporated into today's tourism plans. This is an asset which should not be wasted. Destinations across the U.S. are creating man-made bodies of water (canals, etc.) into tourism master plans. Certainly San Antonio and Oklahoma City, among others are proving the brilliance of this thinking. Saint Charles has an opportunity to leverage its river asset into a superior destination for leisure, meetings, and other market segments.

#### **Σ Strategic Tourism Vision Task Force**

RTM recommends that the City of Saint Charles appoint a Task Force to seek and supervise consultants and land use plans to develop a more dynamic downtown and historic district that incorporates the Missouri River. The plan needs to address land use, retail, dining, entertainment, lodging, meeting spaces, and transportation initiatives. This plan should be the top priority for tourism development in Saint Charles.

**Marketing Strategies**

**Funding For GSCCVB**

As is the standard in the tourism industry, all occupancy tax monies should be used exclusively for growing tourism revenues, promotion of overnight visitation and supporting facilities that drive increased visitation by out-of-area visitors.

The overriding question to be asked regarding ANY tourism tax expenditures is “Will it bring more visitors to the Greater Saint Charles area?” If a strong, affirmative and reliable answer to this question cannot be provided, it is not a wise expenditure. This should be the guiding principle for all future uses of occupancy tax dollars. The following chart shows Room Accommodations Tax collection in Saint Charles over the last 5 years.

The funding for the GSCCVB is provided by allocation from the City of Saint Charles. It is acknowledged that “tourism taxes” which specifically include meals taxes and lodging taxes are the source for tourism funding. It is estimated by City officials that the GSCCVB funding is comprised approximately of 80% meals tax funds and 20% lodging tax funds. It is further acknowledged that meals taxes make up the much larger portion of tax sources.

RTM investigated to determine the use of tax funds and the comparability of budget for GSCCVB to other similar destinations and to other destinations in the State of Missouri. The charts below outline the results of that inquiry.

**Budgets and Expenditures**

The charts below document the expenditures of the GSCCVB. RTM finds that the budget and expenditures seem reasonable when compared with the standards of IACVB and when the overall budget and staff size is compared with other similar destinations and CVBs in the State of Missouri.

**Expenditures as a Percentage of Total CVB Budget/Actual**

<b>Budget Category</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>%</b>
Salaries & Benefits	\$829,361	37.6%	\$695,755	36.5%	\$611,028	33.5%
Operating Expenses	\$263,215	11.9%	\$202,760	10.6%	\$237,728	13.0%
Marketing & Outreach	\$940,095	42.6%	\$898,506	47.2%	\$900,431	49.3%
Festival Contribution	\$172,000	7.8%	\$108,100	5.7%	\$75,400	4.1%
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>\$2,204,671</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$1,905,121</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$1,824,587</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Marketing Strategies

RTM’s only concern with the budget, as outlined above, is the funding for “Festival Contribution”. This is not standard compared to other destinations. Generally, the CVB is tasked with allocating funds for festivals and events. The CVB is the agency that should be held accountable for the effective expenditure of funds and the return on investment generated by those funds. To allocate funds for festivals without a criteria for accountability is not the best use of tourism tax funds.

### Comparable Tourism Marketing Funding

A comparison of Missouri cities by number of lodging rooms and the size of the marketing budget for the community reveals that Saint Charles ranks 5th among tourism marketing budgets statewide. This fairly well confirms that the budget size for Saint Charles is logical.

<b>CITY</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>#of Hotel Rooms</b>	<b>Size of Staff</b>	<b>Budget</b>
Saint Louis	2.6 million	34,000	Marketing 63 Convention Ctr. 87	\$13,000,000
Kansas City	1.8 million	24,000	43	\$8,100,000
Springfield-City	151,580	5,600	22	\$2,803,000
Branson-City	6,050	17,000	33 Welcome staff 5	\$2,500,000
<b>Saint Charles</b>	<b>68,000</b>	<b>1,900</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>\$2,179,950</b>
Columbia-City	87,000	3,126	7	\$1,600,000
St. Joseph	73,990	1,203	8	\$1,000,000
Joplin	44,300	2,000+	6	\$850,000
Jefferson City	40,000	1,300	5	\$650,000
Hannibal	17,757	860	6	\$330,000
Branson-County	33,271	22,000	~	~

(Data collected from other CVBs by Saint Charles CVB staff)

RTM does recommend that all tourism taxes be benchmarked and tracked for Saint Charles. This is a fairly straightforward method of accurately determining what the budget level for the CVB should be.

### 32. Identify and track all Saint Charles local and state taxes related to tourism

This strategy calls for identifying all taxes that are paid by the visitor and tracking those taxes on a monthly and annual basis. For instance, it should be easy enough to track lodging taxes. However, meals taxes are not tracked in terms of what is attributable to residents and what is generated by visitors. RTM recommends developing a simple formula, perhaps 25% of total meals tax funds, that the leaders of Saint Charles feel comfortable attributing to visitors, and including those funds in the tracking. Tracking lodging and meals taxes accurately will allow the entire community, as well as the leaders, to judge if tourism is receiving an appropriate level of funding.

**Marketing Strategies**

**Staffing and Offices for Saint Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau**

The role of the GSCCVB is to be “the voice of tourism” within the community. As such, the President and staff of the organization need to understand the trends driving the industry. The staff needs to be aggressive in attaining awareness of the role of tourism in the community, with business and government leaders as well as residents.

In addition to its leadership roles, the GSCCVB staff should be considered the marketing/advertising agency for tourism in the region. They exist to promote and advertise the area to the traveling public to generate maximum economic impact. Additionally, a critical role for the GSCCVB is in direct sales for convention and meetings, group business, sports team and sports event recruitment, niche market recruitment (reunions, etc.) and in leisure recruitment. Similarly, the GSCCVB needs to be proactive in educating its industry partners (lodging, attractions, etc.) on current research findings and other data, which will assist in tourism marketing.

The Greater Saint Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau is an organization facing change. Currently there is an interim Executive Director, with the previous director having left some months back. There are eight (8) full-time staff positions and four (4) part-time staff positions. The Interim Director reports to the City Administrator. Four (4) new positions are budgeted for 2006 for additional direct sales positions now that the new convention center is open.

The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) maintains records on all CVBs in the country. According to their benchmarks, IACVB recommends that budget allocations for staff fall in approximately the 25-40% range of total occupancy tax collections. To determine when it is time to add new staff, a CVB looks at the county tax collections and percentages of expenditures. If it finds staff costs are in the 25% or less range of total occupancy tax collected, it can reasonably be determined that there is more workload than the current staff can handle.

As seen in the budget chart below, salaries and benefits for GSCCVB currently fall into an appropriate level at 37.6% of total budget. This compares well with similar destinations and with standards established by the IACVB.

**Expenditures as a Percentage of Total CVB Budget/Actual**

<b>Budget Category</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>%</b>
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Festival Contribution	\$172,000	7.8%	\$108,100	5.7%	\$75,400	4.1%
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>\$2,204,671</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$1,905,121</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$1,824,587</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Marketing Strategies**

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After a careful review of the accomplishments and practices of the current GSCCVB staff, RTM is concerned with several factors. First, the staff is in a very crowded office setting. This needs to be remedied.

Secondly, there are several task areas that need to be addressed to meet the modern needs of the marketplace and to achieve necessary growth. These include:

- Σ Convention/Meeting Sales
- Σ Leisure sales
- Σ Research and Technical (website updating, e-marketing, tracking)
- Σ Public relations

Another issue that requires evaluation in any destination is the location of the visitor center. Ideally, the visitor center would be where the most potential visitors are located. It is a simple “fish where the fish are” strategy that cannot be denied. If one hopes to influence travelers to visit an attraction or a town they must first intersect those travelers, get their attention and then change their behavior. RTM encourages the leaders of Greater Saint Charles to be mindful of ensuring that the visitor center is in the most appropriate geographic location to accomplish the mission of the GSCCVB. It exists to serve existing and potential visitors.

### **33. New offices for GSCCVB staff**

- Σ RTM recommends that the GSCCVB staff offices be moved to the Convention Center. This will allow for greater staff space as well as allow the current visitor center to focus more on interpretation and orientation for visitors to Saint Charles.

### **34. Staffing for GSCCVB**

- Σ RTM makes no recommendations for change in staffing for Saint Charles other than the four newly budgeted positions.
- Σ It is hoped that the skill sets outlined above can be incorporated into the existing and newly-funded staff positions.

## **Recommended Product Development**

Visitors enjoy the attractions and tourism products in Saint Charles. This is reflected in an overall satisfaction rating of 4.42 on a 1 – 5 scale where 1 equals low and 5 equals high. In this study, we also asked tourists what products, services, and attractions they would most like to see added to the existing product mix. Interestingly, many of the “unmet needs” that were identified as a priority by respondents are similar to products they are currently enjoying such as shopping and dining. This tells us that typical visitors to Greater Saint Charles are consistent in their desires for fun, unstructured leisure activities. It is also interesting to note the appeal of “river excursions” in this data. Clearly, visitors would like to have more of a connection with the Missouri River that is such a part of the heritage of Saint Charles. This is also consistent with national trends in the decline of attendance to attractions, museums and historic sites, yet an increase in shopping, dining, sightseeing and relaxed leisure time.

RTM has analyzed study participant responses and other customer perception and critical data to make the new product recommendations in this section.

Analyzing all market segments, the combined top reported desired new tourism products that rated near or over a significant level are:

- Σ 50.00% Shops open in the evenings in historic district
- Σ 41.95% Guided river excursions
- Σ 38.22% More places to sit and rest in the historic district
- Σ 37.36% A craft / artisan co-op featuring hand-made items in historic district

Additionally, RTM recommends development of the following based on our experience with similar destinations:

- Σ Continuing to develop the historic district into a lively, animated, attractive walking scale shopping, dining and entertainment district
- Σ Light-up Saint Charles (dramatic historic district lighting)
- Σ Off-season events and festivals
- Σ Recruit additional fine dining
- Σ River excursions
- Σ Reinvigoration of existing amenities

In reviewing the “most desired new products” as reported by visitors to Greater Saint Charles, it is clear they are saying they want more entertainment. This can be considered “shopper-tainment and entertainment.” RTM finds that this matches current visitor trends.

## **Marketing Strategies**

The top rated items identified in the unmet needs above are consistent with the overall marketing thrust recommended in this report. Shopping is always a top tourism activity, and this is reflected in the popularity of this activity for visitors to Greater Saint Charles, as well as the frustration with shops that close early in the evenings. In the list of top desired new products seen above, it is clear the customer is sending a message they want more shopping, entertainment and leisure time options, in addition to heritage products.

Thus, what we find here is quite consistent with national tourism research showing the interest in relaxed leisure activities, as well as “a sense of place.”

As identified in the Strategic Direction section of this report, RTM recommends that Saint Charles appoint a Strategic Tourism Vision Task Force and establish a strategic plan for tourism growth that incorporates the Missouri River into the historic district and downtown area. This is the most significant recommendation in this report. This will ensure the success of tourism marketing in Saint Charles for decades to come and will relieve the current discord as to the direction of future tourism marketing. The current tourism development and marketing conflicts include whether to sell history or shopping and dining. The answer is to change the context of the question! Rather than determining what Saint Charles wants to sell, the destination should first determine what the target audience wants to buy. Then, it should match that need with what it has to offer. A charming, historic, lively village setting on an impressive river animated with shops, dining, and entertainment is irresistible to tourists. And, the Missouri River is at the essence of the heritage of Saint Charles. Dependence upon the river has been the destiny of Saint Charles and the river can be counted upon now to deliver the next era of economic strength for the town.

In the strategies following in this section, RTM recommends specific new products and programs that will speak to these needs and support growth of a stronger tourism market for Greater Saint Charles.

Another major new product category to examine is the sports marketing field. In this study we learned that sports-related visitation comprises approximately 4.24% of the total lodging in Greater Saint Charles. There is also a volume of daytrip sports visitors. Unfortunately, we do not have a way to quantify this volume. This market segment offers strong potential for Saint Charles. RTM recommends that the GSCCVB hire a sports marketing consultant to visit Greater Saint Charles and do an in-depth assessment of the current and planned facilities and the competitive environment for this destination. It will be very important to strategically determine what is required for success. This consultant should be tasked with helping to pick other precise sports niches that promise the best return on both the time and money investment that will be required in pursuit of sports travel.

## **Marketing Strategies**

- 35. Continue to develop Saint Charles as a charming historic and scenic village with shopping, dining and entertainment on the Missouri River**
- Σ RTM anticipates a more animated and lively Saint Charles historic district with shopping, dining and entertainment on the river would have immense appeal for business travelers, those attending meetings, sports visitors and leisure visitors. Incorporating the river more visually would definitely help Greater Saint Charles be selected as a destination by travelers.
  - Σ The only caution RTM would add to this is to ensure the voice of the customer has been closely monitored. In this study, we learned such a shopping and entertainment district needs to include the following:
    - Σ An easy walking scale, preferably with hotels attached
    - Σ Well-lit at night
    - Σ Lively and exciting (translates to having a good number of people visible and colorful, animated surroundings)
    - Σ Fine dining
    - Σ Entertainment options (movies, theater, fun activities)
    - Σ Good resting places, weather protection and shade
    - Σ A relaxing atmosphere
    - Σ Fun shopping and dining options that appeal to Baby Boomer and GenX market segments
- 36. Hire a sports marketing consultant to help determine most effective recruitment of sports tournaments as well as selecting other precise sports niches for the community to pursue**
- Σ Due to the significant investment in time and resources required to win sports travel business in the current highly competitive environment, RTM recommends that GSCCVB hire a sports marketing consultant in order to assist the community in determining the most effective recruitment strategies for existing and potential sports facilities, as well as identifying the best market niches to pursue.
- 37. Encourage shop owners in the historic district to open in evening hours**
- RTM is well aware of the reluctance to shop owners to maintain hours of operation later in the evenings. It is costly and often unproductive and tiring for these shop owners to stay open. And, it becomes a “chicken or the egg” scenario. Often one or two shops will agree to be open only to find themselves without enough customers. What is required is a concentrated number of shop owners who will stay open at agreed upon times. Perhaps it starts with summer weekends and staying open until 7:00PM. At any rate, the customer has spoken and Saint Charles must determine how to accomplish this need.
- 38. Guided Missouri River excursions**

## **Marketing Strategies**

It is no surprise that this was the second highest rated potential new product and tested so highly (41.95%) in the research portion of this study. The Missouri River is beautiful and its history and romance are well known. It is actually surprising to the RTM team that there is not more tourism connection with the Missouri River today.

- Σ With the new Convention Center and facilities on the river, this becomes a priority. Visitors can see the water, but there isn't any way to get on the water and enjoy the experience.
- Σ RTM recommends either an excursion boat, or perhaps even a "cocktail barge" that is operated by a local entrepreneur or hotel. This might be a pontoon boat where one can book a seat for the cocktail cruise in the late afternoon to enjoy the river.

### **39. More places to sit and rest in the historic district**

Baby Boomers are getting older! And, they appreciate being able to sit and enjoy the charming ambiance of a historic area. RTM feels it is necessary to meet this demand for visitors. This rated third in the research study at 38.22%.

- Σ New strategic plans for historic district to include more seating and shady areas for relaxing.

### **40. A craft / artisan co-op featuring hand-made items in the historic district**

- Σ Craft shopping is popular in America. Americans simply enjoy seeing and buying things made by hand.
- Σ This strategy can be accomplished by either creating a co-op in the downtown where local and regional artists and craftspeople can showcase and sell their wares or simply "connect the dots" with existing craft studios and shopping that can be found in Greater Saint Charles and the region. This "trail" information can be highlighted in the visitor guide in the shopping section. The arts and crafts studios and shopping trail can also be captured in an inexpensively printed brochure and distributed at all points along the trail to encourage further exploration by shoppers. This information should also be easily located on the GSCCVB website. Although it would definitely be preferable for the co-op to be located in the historic district, it could be successful in another location, or as a trail of existing facilities.

### **41. Light up Saint Charles**

In this project, the city would engage a designer to develop a dramatic nighttime lighting program that lights up specific architectural features of the historic district. Macon, Georgia has a similar program in its successful "*Lights On Macon.*"

- Σ A lighting designer is selected by the city.

### **41. (Continued)**

## **Marketing Strategies**

- Σ Once a lighting designer has established a plan, then the individual businesses and homes that are featured pay for the lighting and the electricity to have the lights on daily. Thus, the only cost to the city is that of the designer and the time required in recruiting the individual participating properties.
  - Σ The result is a tourism product that provides a significant level of community pride, gives visitors something to do in the evening hours and creates economic impact with visitors from the region stopping in to eat, shop, and see the lights.
- 42. Develop seasonal festivals and events to build slow lodging periods**
- Σ Although occupancy is fairly stable year round in Saint Charles, RTM sees room for improvement especially in the weaker winter months. During this study, RTM noted that there is less than desired occupancy during the winter, namely November, December, January and February. This can be remedied with events that compel people to travel to this area during those shoulder and off-season times.
  - Σ RTM recommends to begin by closely examining events held in Saint Charles. The question to ask is “*Would more aggressive promotion result in increased overnight lodging during this event?*” If an affirmative answer can be provided, then the GSCCVB should provide more aggressive promotion. However, the GSCCVB should also follow up *all* festivals and events with a quick telephone poll to determine how many room nights were generated by each event. This provides the best guidance for continued allocation of promotional resources.
  - Σ Further, RTM encourages the GSCCVB to look at seasonal events that can be packaged to help increase visitation during weaker months. Some possible suggestions might include doing a *Great Chefs of Saint Charles* promotion in January, a *Chocolate Lovers Escape* in February, a *Girlfriends Getaway (fashion, makeup, hair and spa treatments)* in March, etc.
- 43. Build products to fulfill unmet needs of large feeder markets.**
- The nearby St. Louis metro area has a large population. As long as this strong customer base exists, there is no reason for Greater Saint Charles not to be successful in tourism development. Simply put, Saint Charles needs to be mindful of what is missing in these urban markets that the population wants and needs. Products that have been successful in similar geographic settings include:
- Σ Charming, unique wedding and reception facilities such as Fearington Village, North Carolina
  - Σ Rustic and/or charming event facilities for groups and reunions
  - Σ Romantic outdoor restaurant settings

## **Hospitality Training**

## **Marketing Strategies**

RTM recommends enhancing hospitality training in the Greater Saint Charles area to support hospitality workers in understanding and communicating the unique positioning for tourism in this destination.

Hospitality training is a challenge for the tourism industry. The “front line” at state and local visitor centers, hotels, restaurants and attractions tends to have a high turnover. Finding and recruiting a sufficient number of employees is often a problem. Additionally, managers of these front lines may or may not have in-depth knowledge of best practices in tourism hospitality training. Thus, the industry has trouble in motivating what may be an already overworked and fluctuating work staff.

Thus, RTM recommends the GSCCVB work to provide the following support to the local tourism industry:

### **44. Recommended hospitality training**

- Σ Short (30 minute) on-site workshops for any local hotel, restaurant or attraction that requests hospitality training.
- Σ Seasonal half-day or daylong workshops to which the entire base of local industries are invited.
- Σ A package of training materials that can be utilized by local area managers to provide on-going staff training.
- Σ Small laminated cards “The Must Sees of Greater Saint Charles” which identify the top things to see and do in the area. To increase the use and remembrance of these cards by local hospitality industry workers, we further suggest that a representative of the GSCCVB periodically walk up to front line employees and ask “What do you say when asked, what is there to see and do around here?” Any respondent who can name all the things highlighted on the laminated card from memory receives \$25 on the spot. Be sure to also take their photo and send a news release and photo to the local newspaper for coverage of the ambassadors of tourism.
- Σ Periodic faxes and e-blasts sent to the local tourism industry highlighting the seasonal benefits of visiting Saint Charles that have been mentioned earlier in this report, will also help the local industry enthusiastically suggest fun things to do and see.

## **Local Education**

Tourism is an important part of the economy in Saint Charles and it is an industry that is watched by the local residents. RTM recommends an annual educational effort designed to inform the local public regarding what tourists find most appealing about visiting Saint Charles, as well as the objectives of the GSCCVB and an annual report of results.

### **45. Recommended education for local population**

- Σ RTM recommends an annual report be placed in the local newspaper that identifies the top things most appreciated by visitors to Saint Charles, as well as the objectives of the GSCCVB and their annual accomplishments. Residents can then read this and hopefully become better informed as to the importance of tourism to the area, as well as knowing what things are most appreciated by visitors to their town.

### **46. “Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown”**

- Σ GSCCVB may benefit from an event such as Macon, Georgia’s annual “Be a Tourist in Your Own Backyard” event that takes place on two consecutive evenings. The event is publicized locally and residents are invited to visit participating area sites and attractions free of charge on the two evenings. By increasing local awareness of the sites and attractions, the CVB has seen an increased number of tourism “ambassadors” whom are better informed about what their town has to offer. The participating sites have realized increased year-round visitation as result of this promotion.

## **Additional Research and On-going Evaluation**

Walt Disney said it best: “You don’t build it for yourself, you find out what the customer wants and you build it for them.” This is the essence of tourism success. Gone are the days when “if you build it they will come” worked in tourism. Today, there are simply too many choices already competing for the customer’s time and money. A destination who does not listen to the voice of the customer runs the risk of losing that customer to someone who does. That unfortunate scenario has been experienced in many industries. One only has to recall when American automobile manufacturers were so sure they knew what was best for the customer they neglected to do their homework. The Japanese listened intently to what the customer wanted and the rest, as they say, is history.

RTM recommends continued evaluation, research and measurement of tourism success, unmet needs and marketing efforts for the GSCCVB. The specific components of this research strategy include the items listed below.

### **47. Monthly lodging market mix survey**

- ∑ Monthly tracking of lodging market mix.
- ∑ Results will ONLY be shared with those lodging properties that participate in monthly survey.

### **48. Niche analysis**

- ∑ Determine niches to be studied.
- ∑ Determine how many visitors fall into each niche.
- ∑ Determine average expenditures of each niche.
- ∑ Analyze which niches provide the greatest profit potential.

### **49. Conduct visitor profile and conversion research every three years**

- ∑ Changes in visitor profile and conversion need to be reviewed periodically. Therefore, RTM recommends repeating the visitor profile and conversion study every three years. It is not likely to change significantly any more frequently than the three-year period.

### **50. Annual evaluation of inquiry point-of-origin**

- ∑ Annually, RTM recommends evaluating the point-of-origin (where inquirers live) of inquirers who respond to the GSCCVB advertising program. This reaffirms for the GSCCVB it is targeting its advertising outreach placement to the most appropriate markets. This can be accomplished by maintaining a comprehensive database of all inquiries received throughout the year.

## **Marketing Strategies**

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### **51. Website research form analysis**

RTM recommends the GSCCVB have a “request information” page on its website and that it be visible throughout the site. Then it must add a “request for information questionnaire” on its website that requests the following information which will allow the organization to better track visitor characteristics and needs:

- ∑ Point of origin for inquirers.
- ∑ Primary visitor interest(s).
- ∑ Most likely travel party size.
- ∑ When planning to visit Greater Saint Charles.
- ∑ Analyze the information frequently to continuously confirm other research results.

### **52. Annual update to Performance Audit**

RTM recommends the Performance Audit section of this report be repeated annually and monitored for changes. The GSCCVB staff can implement this. The important things to measure include:

- ∑ Increases/decreases in occupancy tax collections and tourism revenues.
- ∑ Number of inquiries generated by outreach efforts.
- ∑ Changes in tourism product infrastructure (number of lodging properties and room counts, new attractions, etc.)
- ∑ Attendance to attractions
- ∑ Advertising, promotion and marketing budget for GSCCVB compared to standards established by industry organizations such as International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus.

### **53. Inquiry database “data mining”**

GSCCVB is now receiving inquiries and it will have to continuously refine its methods of database development and storage to insure all inquiry data is easily accessed and reported in the future. Enhancements to current database methods include:

- ∑ All reader response inquiries received electronically and stored as an accessible electronic database.
- ∑ All bulk brochure requests retained and stored in a separate database.
- ∑ All telephone inquiries not requiring fulfillment should be tracked as such and included in the database system.
- ∑ All databases should be designed to be integrated for year-end reporting of total inquiry information from all sources.
- ∑ Quarterly reviews of data and data mining procedure to make sure errors are caught before going unnoticed for too long.

### **54. Research comparability with State of Missouri**

- ∑ RTM also encourages GSCCVB to maintain regular contact with the state tourism division and compare current research findings to those available from the state. This will ensure comparability of data over the long term.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **55. Convention and meeting segment research**

- Σ Benchmark with other destinations with similar meeting facilities to determine which groups they are successful in recruiting. This may provide new insight into which groups might successfully be recruited to Greater Saint Charles.
- Σ Further, conducting executive interviews with the meeting decision makers of likely groups will help to determine likelihood of use and inducements required to recruit to Greater Saint Charles.

### **56. Group tour research in partnership with area attractions**

- Σ Determine which groups are visiting the Greater Saint Charles area, which ones overnight in Saint Charles and which ones do not.
- Σ Conduct executive interviews with group tour planners to determine profile of most likely group tours to overnight in Saint Charles.

### **57. Sports segment economic impact research**

- Σ Inventory existing sports market segments.
- Σ Conduct intercept studies or telephone interviews to determine spending patterns of each sports segment.
- Σ Determine profile of most profitable sports segments for future recruitment efforts.