

BCTDA 2016-17

# SALES & MARKETING PLAN

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# Marketing & Public Relations

## 2016-2017 MARKETING AND PR OBJECTIVES

### KEY OBJECTIVE

Expand the presence of Destination Asheville in the national conversation and increase aspirational desire along with demand.

- Drive **5 million** visits to ExploreAsheville.com
- Exceed **3 billion** earned media impressions
- Generate **750,000+** video views of Asheville CVB videos

The marketing team and its agency-of-record develop strategies to increase awareness and understanding the Asheville area destination brand, create desire for visitor experiences and drive demand for overnight accommodations. Using data-driven insights, the team shapes messaging and determines the most effective distribution channels for paid media, while complementing that with integrated proactive media relations efforts, content development strategies, niche promotions and a social outreach program to further amplify destination buzz.

### ASHEVILLE'S BRAND PROMISE

We guarantee you a life enriching experience each and every time you visit Asheville. It's personal, personal to you. And it is also personal to us. We live that same genuine experience and want to share it with you. We empower you to discover a collection of experiences that is as unique and varied as each individual who visits us, and allow you to do so in a warm, embracing and creative environment.

### BRAND POSITION

The unique and eclectic array of experiences in Asheville opens wide your sense of discovery and enriches your life.

**CORE VALUES** Welcoming | Natural | Vibrant

## PAID MEDIA

Target Audience  
Adults 25-54  
Median HHI: \$75K  
Slightly skewing female

### PRIMARY AUDIENCE

Experiential Travelers: Eclectic doers who relish discovery and collection of experiences; enjoy trying different types of food; want to explore and learn about new things; continue to learn throughout life; find excitement in stimulating experiences; frequently choose active vacations with lots to do; are open-minded, intend to travel in the next year and traveled 3+ round trips in past 12 months. Targeted niche subcategories include: foodies, art and music lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.

### SECONDARY AUDIENCE

- Niche Segments – Experiential travelers who also exhibit actions that categorize them as passionate enthusiasts in the follow four areas: food, art, music and outdoors.
- Engaged Couples – Individuals interested in a destination wedding and/or honeymoon.
- Meeting Planners – Coordinators of overnight group functions and events.

### GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- Primarily east of the Mississippi with special focus – particularly in broadcast - on core and opportunity markets.
- Core DMAs: Atlanta, Charlotte, Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point, Raleigh-Durham, Knoxville, Columbia, Charleston.
- Opportunity DMAs: Nashville, Cincinnati, Washington D.C. region, Florida markets (Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, West Palm Beach, Miami)
- Expand to national audience as opportunities are identified.

## STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Increase destination awareness by expanding paid advertising reach and extend familiarity beyond the Southeast.

- Use available research and market demand insights to refine a comprehensive plan to optimize further market expansion and build in national opportunities for print, digital and broadcast.
- Continue to focus advertising primarily in the Southeast and the D.C. Capital region while building in opportunities for extended reach and national exposure.
- Focus broadcast and video streaming in core DMAs and designated opportunity markets while layering in other advertising tactical efforts such as out-of-home and guerilla marketing to provide additional weight in designated markets.

Utilize regional editions of high-profile print publications to reach core DMAs and additional markets throughout the Southeast/Southcentral regions. Expand assets and build on positioning with execution of integrated brand messaging that provides crossover opportunities that includes paid and earned media channels.

- Lead with video assets as often as possible due to its increased storytelling potential.
- Use vibrant, engaging photography in print and digital that works to tell a story.
- Align timing and messaging of paid media, search engine marketing and social activities.
- Direct call-to-action to custom landing pages on ExploreAsheville.com.

Continue to leverage video assets that deliver inspirational imagery and storytelling to create emotional connections and increase aspirational desire among travelers through the channels best suited for reaching the target.

- Use market penetration data intelligence to determine efficiencies for effective video delivery via traditional broadcast, Hulu, TrueView and other opportunities.
- Integrate video assets into rich media ads, where feasible, to maximize views and increase click-throughs to ExploreAsheville.com.
- Serve niche video to segmented audiences to gain interest through passion points.

Continue to use and test performance of retail/urgency messaging to better impact identified demand periods and encourage more immediate booking.

- Use digital advertising and explore additional marketing channels to deliver specific messaging that drives visitation in the moment and complements destination brand awareness creative.
- Use a mix of time-sensitive events, value-added packages and pricing to generate incremental and mid-week business during need periods.
- Continue campaign aimed specifically at driving mid-week business and test results using new research tool, Arrivalist.
- Tailor call-to-action according to the market.

Schedule advertising to create year-round presence with focus on opportunity seasons that have the best potential for turning day trips into overnight visits.

- Continue paid advertising into the holiday season in an effort to convert day trips to Asheville area holiday events to overnight visits.
- Use digital retargeting to create year-round continuity of messaging in the marketplace.
- Use niche interests to create more laser-focused messaging that will appeal to specific subsets of the experiential traveler.
- Use existing assets and messaging that align with digital promotions aimed at specific segmented audiences with interests in culinary, arts, outdoors, meetings & conventions and weddings.
- Create compelling native advertising that appeals to niche audiences and has potential for viral share.

Entice potential visitors actively searching for information about vacation activities or destination attributes that align with the Asheville area experiences and offerings to put the Asheville area in the consideration set and drive them to book.

- Use pay-per-click (PPC) program to target specific keyword sets.
- Use A/B testing of messaging to optimize and maximize response to specific keyword campaigns.
- Layer in display banners that are hyper-targeted to travel intenders, identified based on recent and current travel content consumption and search behaviors.

Consistently apply data intelligence and market research to optimize messaging and delivery and understand consumer behavior as it pertains to destination travel.

- Deploy new Arrivalist technology to understand how paid and owned media influence in-market visitation.
- Use travel intelligence to shift messaging, delivery vehicles and market, as needed, to maximize efficiencies in reaching target audience.
- Use research to test creative messages, as needed.
- Monitor and tweak performance of advertising, social campaigns and digital promotions with the help of online analytic tools.

## NICHE MARKETING EFFORTS

Continue to showcase the vibrancy, variety and depth of Asheville's cultural and natural attributes (specifically in the areas of arts, music, culinary and outdoors) through expanded content and microsites, destination storytelling and integrated marketing efforts aimed at growing awareness and illuminating/facilitating the visitor experience.

- Further grow credibility and awareness for the Asheville area food scene by leveraging content (including assets from the Foodtopia Partner Program and culinary e-book) in expanded web platforms and ongoing marketing and media relations efforts.
- Continue to provide updates as needed to the AshevilleArtsAlive Arts Portal, an in-depth online resource for users interested in exploration of arts and culture-related offerings, attractions, events and resources.
- Execute on phase II of the music initiative, adding curated playlists to ExploreAsheville.com and using music assets in social media campaigns.

- With the understanding that mountains continue to be a travel motivator, continue to generate dynamic outdoor content (i.e. hiking trails, highest peaks, national parks, Blue Ridge Parkway and other signature natural adventures) that shows potential visitors and committed Asheville travelers the connection and accessibility points of the area's distinctive natural offerings.
- Develop content that meets consumer expectations upon click-through with the aim of increasing time-on-site and more effectively funneling behavior flow to improve conversion goals.

## CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Develop and curate world class content: Continue to embrace the idea of storytelling and maintain a dynamic, diverse and deep content library to generate affinity for the destination, highlight distinctive brand attributes and evoke an emotional connection with the consumer.

- Draw on an insiders' contributor network of freelance writers/photographers who have destination authority for bylined features, itineraries, pictorials and additional content as assigned for use on the web site and repurposed for other uses.
- Implement a strategy to procure, create and integrate more high-quality visual content (video, cinemagraphs, infographics, quizzes) that have shareability, engagement and viral implications across CVB web and social mediums.
- Develop a Trending page for ExploreAsheville.com as an at-a-glance resource for travelers to find what's hot and new in Asheville, including links
- to rich content assets such as editorial articles, videos, social media updates, user-generated visual content and strategic landing pages.

Optimize the online experience for visitors to ExploreAsheville.com and followers to associated social media channels to provide information according to individual needs and interests.

- Analyze findings and implement technical and content recommendations from a comprehensive SEO audit to improve organic performance of ExploreAsheville.com.
- Employ search optimization best practices and findings from Google Analytics, Search Console, AdWords and Moz into development of new content pages and in updates to existing and seasonal content.
- Implement Get Smart Content personalization technology to customize key landing pages based on users' geography, search terms, advertising activity and consumer personas.
- Engage and retain web users with content that balances detailed, practical destination insight/resources with more aspirational destination context, incorporating dynamic functionality and high-impact visuals to inspire and improve online consumer planning as well as grow CVB understanding of key areas of travel interest.
- Develop custom landing pages as a fulfillment mechanism for digital campaigns to increase time-on-site and encourage specific actions that lead to booking and other conversion goals.
- Use booking engine to drive consumers deeper into the planning funnel with the aim of closing the sale.

- Leverage the ExploreAsheville.com to serve as main point of fulfillment and motivate actual and aspirational visitation, promote saving and sharing content, and encourage additional exploration and vacation bookings.
- Drive advertising and social communications to ExploreAsheville.com content and landing pages and measure specific click-through actions.
- Undertake an SEO audit and implement tactical improvements.
- Create content based on SEO to encourage growth of organic visitation.
- Drive online bookings and downstream traffic to partners, including those signed on to Simpleview's Destination Travel Network (DTN), a turn-key solution for implementation of an attractive advertising program.
- Capitalize on Asheville's awe-inspiring scenic assets, cultural connectivity and philosophy of self-expression to provide more expansive and deeper awareness of destination assets, while creating emotional connections with potential and repeat visitors, destination fans and enthusiasts.
- Utilize the recently produced world-class inspirational video to showcase the destination and create additional video assets for a variety of marketing uses.
- Continue to contract locally for production of complementary video shorts that build our multimedia library, expand our YouTube Channel, and provides assets for digital and native advertising.
- Create and procure still photography that can be used across marketing channels, promotions and media outreach.
- Provide additional information to consumers who have responded to advertising or requested additional information about the Asheville area.
- Work with Journal Communications to produce the Official Asheville Travel Guide that can be used by potential visitors and travelers on the ground to learn about the destination and plan their visit.
- Ensure flexibility and device compatibility by providing online and iPad versions of the Travel Guide.

## MEDIA RELATIONS & ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Continue a proactive media relations program with an emphasis on relationship building and on-brand, news-ready outreach to generate earned media in strategically targeted outlets and ensure key messages are conveyed in editorial, broadcast and online placements.

- Create customized pitches aimed at editors, journalists, bloggers, influencers and video/rich media producers. Identify and respond to pitch opportunities generated through outside sources.
- Cultivate new and existing media relationships through meaningful one-on-one connections including media tours, targeted pitches, networking events, story support and site visit facilitation.
- Encourage journalists on assignment to expand and infuse stories with brand messages, as well as seasonal and niche story ideas. Promote inclusion of call-to-action conversion-oriented elements including ExploreAsheville.com resources, multimedia assets, travel packages, events and online booking.

- Continue to evolve pitch and press release tactics to provide media contacts the news and destination insight that is most relevant to their coverage. Update the online news room to meet changing needs of journalists on assignment, including photo/video asset management and streamlined media vetting.
- Optimize and fully leverage destination news and messaging strategies through integration and alignment with ExploreAsheville.com editorial content. Continue to repurpose ExploreAsheville.com news, pitches and editorials across audiences—including media—to maximize message reach, boost awareness and create synergy among CVB communications platforms and media outreach initiatives.
- Refine best practices for deployment and integration of destination news content that will strategically boost SEO/keyword share, backlinks and positively impact ExploreAsheville.com's online and social authority.
- Leverage social media as an integrated tool for media relations, targeted pitching, news distribution and media reciprocity, by sharing stories and tagging journalists through CVB media channels.

Use media tours and site visits to elevate personal connections with media and increase dialogue and ACVB influence on Asheville stories, while also seeking opportunities to secure on-the-spot broadcast coverage.

- Conduct media tours that leverage a diversity of media and publicity opportunities, including deskside visits, broadcast interviews, sponsored/hosted activities and destination showcases. Additionally, maintain an industry conference presence targeting events that focus on media networking and marketplace opportunities. Schedule:
  - Visit NC In-State Mission in Raleigh (**Aug.**)
  - Fall Media Tour | I-40 (**Sept.**)
  - SATW Marketplace (**Oct.**)
  - NYC Desk Visit Tour & Visit NC Media Event (**Jan.**)
  - Winter Drive Push | Greenville/Spartanburg, Columbia, Knoxville (**Jan.**)
  - Florida Media Tour (**Feb.**)
  - Visit NC 365 Media Roundtables (**Mar.**)
  - Beer Marketing & Tourism Conf. | Asheville (**Mar.**)
  - Visit NC Regional Mission (**April/May**)
  - TBEX (**May**)
  - PRSA 2017 Conference (**May**)

Maximize perennial media and consumer interest in season-specific travel through well-timed, integrated media and content/social marketing campaigns.

- Leverage the popular fall foliage season to maximize national and drive market exposure through an integrated marketing effort of strategically placed/secured fall predictions, destination news, call-to-travel elements and aspirational multimedia elements (e.g. Facebook Live color reports, dynamic web content and stunning photography/video).
- During typically slower winter months, hone-in on broadcast and news opportunities in key drive markets to boost awareness of seasonal offerings, specifically those tied to culinary, romance, performing arts and time-sensitive event news (e.g. Grovewood Village Anniversary, Asheville Restaurant Week, SoCon, travel packages).

- Identify and help facilitate development of newsworthy, seasonal travel packages to feed integrated marketing efforts with fresh, season-specific news and on-brand curated experiences.

Target emerging and existing niche markets, especially music, arts, culinary and outdoor, while maintaining emphasis on primary travel motivators.

- Continue to expand and leverage music niche assets to generate media interest, including execution of a media strategy and outreach plan to connect with journalists/influencers to increase awareness of this destination attribute.
- Execute destination immersion site visits for music media and influencers with special focus on establishing new connections within the music media genre.
- Update and develop media materials and pitch ideas for specific content areas to generate media placements. Streamline pitch process through use of HARO Premium and establishment of a more team-friendly story idea catalog.
- Engage top-tier digital influencers as paid brand ambassadors to strategically place destination messages with their niche audiences. Create immersive destination experiences for brand ambassadors that will provide content inspiration for their channels that is authentic, engaging and inspiring.

Use key social media channels to drive awareness and create engagement with traveling consumers.

- Use a combination of social media channels and tools to complement specific promotions, increase organic and referral traffic, perpetuate destination awareness and expand the reach of marketing messages.
- Utilize Facebook to keep Asheville top-of-mind for online fans; extending reach with buzzworthy content, shareable multimedia assets, timely news items, strategic post promotion/advertising and special giveaways to engage fans and drive traffic to ExploreAsheville.com.
- Continue to leverage YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook and Instagram as video distribution platforms for the CVB's extensive video content program, including a series of Facebook Live broadcast opportunities to showcase Asheville's unique destination attributes.
- Evaluate other emerging social tools and technologies to further expand the Asheville brand.

Make CVB social channels work harder and smarter through content optimization and audience targeting.

- Craft attention-getting social messaging and dynamic multimedia assets with the aim of maximizing viral potential using a balance of wow-factor destination attributes, aspirational visuals and breaking news.
- Strategically integrate, promote and evaluate new content and share-worthy visual assets on CVB social mediums, documenting best practices and learnings for increased engagement and web traffic.
- Incorporate keyword strategy in all messaging to assist in driving traffic to website.
- Target brand enthusiasts and affinity groups with actionable, shareable content aimed to increase repeat visitation and boost length of stay.
- Further amplify the reach of social content through mobilization of industry partners, business stakeholders and proud community ambassadors (i.e. Movoto) willing to link to

ExploreAsheville.com or share CVB social and multimedia messages/assets through their channels.

Continue an online outreach program that leverages e-mail newsletters and viral marketing opportunities, utilizing a more customer-focused approach.

- Continue to explore opportunities aimed at building the e-newsletter subscriber database/open and growing click-through and open rates.
- Create a fresh look and feel for the Asheville Traveler e-newsletter to match the newly redesigned website.
- Develop and execute a re-engagement strategy for the new Asheville Traveler e-newsletter, evaluating and recommending opportunities including segmented outreach to self-identified niche interest groups (arts, outdoors, culture and food) and new/prospective travelers, as well as a plan for content, asset and social integration.

Use insights and measurement tools to gauge effectiveness of specific media relations and social campaigns and make adjustments as needed.

- Continue to track effectiveness and ROI of media relations efforts by employing news/clips services, tracking media touchpoints and site visits, logging proactive pitches, monitoring release performance and assessment of online, print and broadcast placements.
- Use Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, SproutSocial, Hootsuite Pro, YouTube Analytics and other tools to measure traffic and engagement on media placements, online stories, CVB content assets and social activity as recorded in the monthly marketing matrix.
- Use insights to further refine campaigns, establish best practices or create new actionable items to help advance the business objective.
- Measure viral impact of shared content to help drive strategy for future efforts.

# Group Sales & Service

## HIGHLIGHT METRICS

	Sales Leads Issued	Definite Rooms Booked	Estimated Revenue Generated	Familiarization Tour Participation	Independent Site Visits
FY 15-16	782	64,965	\$13,999,491	45	59
FY 14-15	725	60,906	\$11,828,241	66	65
FY 13-14	608	57,138	\$9,684,241	46	50

## 2016-2017 GROUP SALES & SERVICES OBJECTIVES

Book **72,000** definite room nights

Issue **775** sales leads

## GROUP SALES OUTLOOK

The sales and service department will continue focusing on delivering the business the hotel partners want—the right groups at the right times at the right rates. The team will target groups able to meet a Sunday through Thursday meeting pattern, who have the ability to pay a higher room rate and whose space requirements fit what the area currently offers and expects to have available in the next 36 months. To help achieve this goal, a dedicated northeast sales manager position has been added to the staff and is charged with developing northeast based corporate, incentive and association accounts. The department plans to grow its efforts toward increasing the awareness of Asheville as a meeting destination in the regional and national marketplaces through well-placed sponsorships.

With industry partner support, the CVB will execute four 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experiences, two specifically targeting the third/independent-party segment and two targeting the direct planner segment. Client events will also be hosted by the sales team in different regions of the country.

Tradeshows and marketplaces will continue to be an integral part of the department's sales strategy.

Client communications will continue to be vital. With a communications plan in place, the department will communicate with planners throughout the year with e-newsletters, pre- and post-tradeshow and marketplace communications, creative RFP contests and incentives, seasonal correspondence, targeted niche mailings and more. This fiscal year brings a tighter focus on the editorial process and content strategy to generate more client engagement and sales leads. A more detailed system to measure growth and success of communications will also be implemented to improve performance. National level print advertising will continue with digital placements being added.

Other major initiatives targeted for the next 12 months include the roll-out of the *Have More Fun on Us* meeting incentive program, hosting of two tour operator-focused FAM tours, hosting of the Spotlight On the Southeast tour operator marketplace and finally, the expansion of the group/sports sections on ExploreAsheville.com.

## KEY STRATEGIES

- Research/secure well-placed regional and national sponsorship opportunities with the aim of placing Asheville in a new and wider consideration set
- Focus on the cities/regions offering the most meeting and convention opportunity for Asheville. These include: Chicago/D.C., home to the largest number of national associations; Atlanta, home of important regional associations and corporate planners; and Texas/Florida, home of important association and corporate planners
- Targeted sales efforts to take place in the Northeast by the new national sales manager
- Emphasis on the sports market, specifically targeting events for the off-peak periods
- Attend 21 key industry tradeshows and marketplaces to promote Asheville as a group destination

### INCREASE TARGET MARKET SALES VISITS AND CLIENT EVENTS

- Host client events in different regions of the country targeting current and potential buyers
- Execute regular sales trips to core and new markets
- Hold "Lunch and Learns" for third-party/independent planners in conjunction with sales calls
- Bookend trade show/marketplace visits with sales calls in the immediate area when feasible
- Assignment of resources to gain traction in the medical, pharmaceutical and incentive markets

## HOST BUYERS TO EXPERIENCE THE ASHEVILLE PRODUCT

- Execute four 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience events – Sept. 8-11; Nov. 10-13 (targets third party/independent planners); March 28-30 and May 9-11, 2017
- Research the viability of hosting a meetings mega-FAM supported by a national meeting publication in spring 2018
- Promote individual site visits, recognizing the conversion rate increases once a planner actually visits
- Execute the Spotlight on the Southeast 2016 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tour Operator Convention marketplace bringing in approximately 75 tour operators/suppliers for a two-day meeting
- Partner with Nashville and Louisville to host Welcome to Christmas-Ville, a motorcoach operator FAM in November
- Support independent FAMs and site visits hosted by industry partners
- Participate in international group and individual FAMs spearheaded by Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

## SUPPORT THE SALES PROCESS

- Identify sponsorship opportunities for the current and next fiscal year with organizations having a regional and national-level impact in the meetings market
- Use external lead-generating vendors to qualify meeting prospects for the area with a specific focus on corporate buyers
- Maintain an expanded destination presence on Cvent and respond aggressively to leads received through this channel
- Roll out the *Have More Fun On Us* meetings incentive program for booking business in Asheville
- Expand content in the online Meeting Planner Guide
- Complete new fact sheets specific to the luxury/incentive and motorcycle/motorcar niche segment
- Build library of group images and video assets

## ONE TEAM, ONE DREAM: DEVELOP TEAM ASHEVILLE AND REGIONAL

### PARTNERSHIPS

- Invite area hotel and meeting partners to attend scheduled trade and client events
- Partner with the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina and regional tourism bureaus on international and group tour marketing initiatives
- Include current partnership opportunities on AshevilleCVB.com and in monthly Partner Connect e-newsletter
- Host quarterly directors of sales meetings and twice-annual Citywide Task Force meetings to exchange information and update partners on current/future sales initiatives

## RAISE AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE AREA AMONG SOUTHEAST

### AAA BRANCH OFFICES

- Continue quarterly web-based destination orientation and training programs focusing on niche and seasonal marketing promotions
- Attend AAA Superbowl of Knowledge, the annual training event for AAA Carolinas
- Participate in the annual Blue Ridge Parkway AAA FAM in April 2017
- Continue to host in-market FAMs for select AAA clubs

## COMMUNICATION AND CONVENTIONS SERVICING OUTLOOK

Client communication is a key part of the sales department's strategy. With a robust communication plan in place, the CVB will be in touch with planners throughout the year with e-newsletters, pre- and post- tra

deshow and marketplace communications, creative RFP contests and incentives, seasonal correspondence, targeted niche mailings and more. A major initiative will be the rollout of the new *Have More Fun On Us* meeting incentive program and making the online Meeting Planner Guide the "go to" document when considering planning a meeting in Asheville.

The convention services manager will continue to strive to support the CVB sales managers' efforts and enhance the meeting planner and attendee experience through exceptional customer service, knowledge of local resources and by providing creative services. Focus will continue on marketing assistance to help planners build the meeting's attendance through materials that raise awareness of Asheville's attributes to potential meeting attendees.

## CONVENTION SERVICES STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Expand Exclusive Services to enhance the meeting planner experience in Asheville. Use client connections to help generate future leads and content for sales communications.

- Provide services to 425 groups hosting events in Asheville
- Roll out new Registration Assistance service to groups with 150 rooms or more on peak
- Update Attraction Value Card to include more attraction deals to conference attendees
- Collect testimonials and meeting details from meeting planner clients for media and sales leads

# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Maintain contact with clients, generate leads, promote incentives and special offers and continue to increase awareness of Asheville and the CVB sales team's services.

- Expand placement of the print and digital advertisements used to promote Asheville as a group destination
- Expand communications strategy: establish a monthly editorial process and broaden content strategy to keep content current, and increase engagement and lead generation
- Implement additional metrics to measure success and performance of e-blasts
- Send two system-wide direct-mail promotions offering incentives for sending RFPs
- Work with the PR team to pitch publications for stories about Asheville as a group destination and respond to media requests
- Use the CVB's social media channels to highlight lifestyle events booked in Asheville
- Continue the e-marketing program to: promote incentive programs and Asheville's group assets to our client database, connect with attendees of tradeshow attended by sales managers, and send invitations to client events hosted in and out of market
- Improve website content, promote new content and track page view performance
- Develop prospect communication strategy to engage new client