

What Flew and What Flopped

This session focused on participation. Audience members were asked to share their best and worst ideas.

Stan Meador, Moderator, X Bar Ranch Nature Retreat

There is a critical mass of services required for tourism. If I am sending my guests 20 miles to a restaurant, I need to be confident that the restaurant will be open when they arrive. I need to know it hasn't closed early because it wasn't busy.

Don't be afraid of competition. Partner with "competitors" and work together.

Connie Francis, UN-Rural Initiative

Places that have farm and ranch experiences need to work together to network and refer guests to each other: "If you like this, you may like this too."

Stan Meador

Send brochures to other business, piggy-back off them.

Pat Coldiron, Seward Area Chamber of Commerce, also operates a bed & breakfast

Seward started a FAM tour (by bus) two years ago that has been very successful. It shows people what Seward has to offer. The town also put together a 20-page booklet of highlights.

Nebraska bed and breakfasts are considering a passport program, based on the success of the wine passport, that would include nifty attractions nearby.

Stan Meador

Multiple passport programs can get confusing to visitors. You might want to look at how to consolidate these programs to prevent confusion and information overload.

Dena Beck, REAP

At the Watchable Wildlife Conference, it was suggested that you draw a circle around your town on a map and do an inventory of what's around you. It lets you see, and subsequently promote, other attractions/business.

Connie Francis

Kearney County has a nice map that features everything to do in the area

Stan Meador

That brings up the question of print vs. Internet. If those maps are on your website, they are easier to update and costs are reduced—migrate everything to your website.

Tim Montgomery, NE Game & Parks Commission

Game and Parks developed a type of passport program that is completely online. Participants do rubbings, so there are no stamps. It was created to be largely hands off and puts the effort all on the visitor.

Desiree Wineland, Veterans Vineyard, Winery & Ranch

She shared some television public relations opportunities through NTV. The station does weekly stories on farms, food finds and one-tank trips. Mark Baumert of NTV, a speaker at an earlier session, explained the features in detail. (See handouts from “Connecting with the Media” session).

The station is always looking for ideas for these stories. Businesses could work together, package day trips and jointly pitch ideas to the station.

Stan Meador

The “staycation” is a good way to market to our own residents, not just out of state people.

Roger Jasnoch, Kearney/Buffalo County CVB

We were looking at ways to turn a gas stop into an afternoon stop then into an overnight stop. We created more attractions—such as the archway, a hockey team, an arena. Ask what can you do to bring money together in your community to create attractions.

Stan Meador

Different size communities can do this. In smaller communities, it may be just a swimming pool that’s needed.

Tim Montgomery

Get to know the park superintendents and conservation officers at your local parks. Visitors always ask us what else there is to do, where to eat, what nightlife opportunities are there? You can help us answer those questions, and we can drive business to you.

Brook Kreder, Madison County CVB

Hotel front desk people are also great referral sources. Stop in and get to know them. Reach out to them and educate them so you can benefit from those referrals.

Stan Meador

That’s not something you just do once. There’s always turnover, so it needs to be ongoing.

Stan Meador

Regional Partnerships:

- Keep the size of the group manageable. It can be difficult trying to define a region so it is inclusive and friendly, but limited enough to have some continuity and commonality.
- Keep a clear focus. Often these partnerships are trying to do too much.
- Share the work. Often there is a big group, but only three people do all the work. Those who are most involved will benefit most.

Sarah Focke, Kearney/Buffalo County CVB

We’re trying to decide whether to re-create a regional magazine. We used to have one. We created a nice website and created rack cards and postcards to drive traffic to the site. However, we’re about the only regional group that doesn’t have a printed brochure. Are we missing out on trade show opportunities?

Stan Meador

If you have the content and the money, by all means go ahead and print.

Christian Hornbaker, NE Division of Travel & Tourism

I think there is still a place for regional guides.

Tom Tabor, NE Division of Travel & Tourism

Statistics show that more people who are planning trips are turning to the Web. We're probably going to need more phone/mobile apps in the future. Co-op ads are also a good way to get noticed and dramatically increase site hits.

Christian Hornbaker

For three years we were pushing travelers to our website and wondered about reducing the number of travel guides. Then one year we ran out in August or September. People like the staying power of the printed Travel Guide.

Jay Hall, Red Cloud Community Foundation

We have Internet access issues in Nebraska. Some places only have dial up; some don't have it at all. That can be a problem.

Tom Tabor

I recommend everyone get DUNS number so you are listed on GPS devices. You can get instructions on our website.

Stan Meador

Think about that before doing it. I don't want people showing up at our ranch if no one is there, so we don't have a DUNS number. Some outfitters, small bed & breakfasts, etc., may not want to be listed, and that's ok. Also, if you don't know what you're doing, you can get into trouble. If there is a problem with Google maps, it's out there and it's always out there—forever. Reach out and get some help. It's better to do right the first time.

Jay Hall

Identify the strengths and weakness of your community. My area is losing population. We need to force change in the community and create a new interest in evaluating what we have and can build on.

Dena Beck

What's the status of Sen. Tom Carlson's bill about signage along the Byways?

Christian Hornbaker

The bill is still in committee. It butts up against federal Byways laws and threatens \$20 million in federal aid.

Jay Hall

We just got a Willa Cather Roadway designation, so there's a nice sign and that's one way to work within the system for signage. There can also be nice signs off the federal right-of-way. We have Willa Cather signs in pastures. You can work within the laws in creative ways.

Twyla Witt, NE Division of Travel & Tourism

There's no differentiation between Byways and any highway that gets federal funding. You can work with the Department of Roads to get signs. I'm happy to help people with that.

Neal Nollette, 2 the Ends of the Earth

Ricky and Lucy's Greenhouse near Sidney just got a new sign.

Twyla Witt

This is a Tourism Orientation Destination sign (TOD). There is a fee for these, but it is another option.

Christian Hornbaker

I encourage everyone to get involved with the Nebraska Travel Association (NETA) and its lobbyist, and to reach out to our Congressional delegation.

Stan Meador

Also, don't forget about signage within your attraction. That's important too.

Christian Hornbaker

Facebook and smart phones are two key marketing avenues. Facebook has become the most visited site in the world. Whether you like it or not, you need to have some kind of presence. Facebook is free and provides the exponential spreading of information. It takes some time to learn, but have fun with it. It's the way of the world right now and will be for at least a couple of years. Don't be left behind.

Ask questions; create an interactive experience; use competitions and contests to engage your audience. Also, look at what your competitors are doing. Visitors will be attracted to a place with a nicer Facebook page.

Stan Meador

TripAdvisor has been big for them. Also look into YouTube.