

CASE STUDY

the
ROAD
BECKONS

BEST PRACTICES FOR BYWAYS

MARKETING

**CREOLE NATURE TRAIL
MARKETING INITIATIVE**

Louisiana



CREOLE NATURE TRAIL MARKETING INITIATIVE

One of America's last great wildernesses, the *Creole Nature Trail* winds through 180 miles of Southwest Louisiana bayous and marshland along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.

Traversing a region affectionately known as “Louisiana’s Outback,” the Creole Nature Trail hugs the land and serves as the primary residential and commercial route along the Gulf Coast. Though traveled by many, it remained one of Louisiana’s best-kept secrets until a comprehensive marketing plan was launched to tout the Trail’s significance as a primary destination. Part of the larger planning initiative, the effort has been carefully executed to coincide with projects being implemented along the byway. Thanks to careful planning, the Trail now welcomes visitors from all over the world who come to experience the abundance of riches the region has to offer. An All-American Road, the route offers unique natural, scenic, cultural, and recreational experiences.

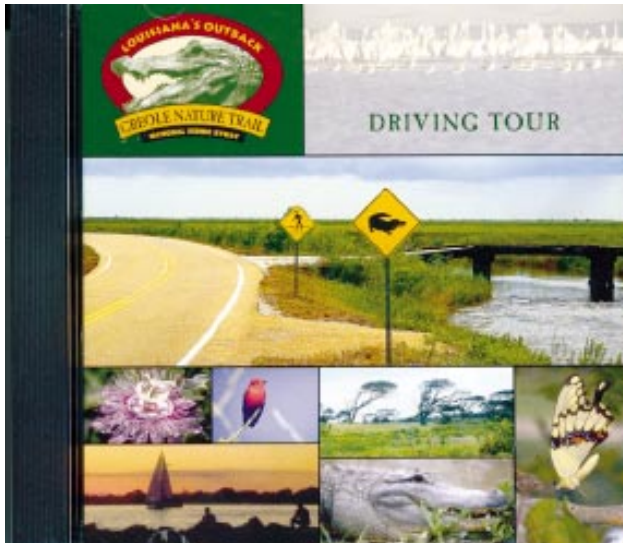
WINNING ELEMENTS:

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING

A MARKETING ACTION PLAN. To help increase visitation and spending in Trail communities, a Marketing Action Plan was developed and implemented by the Trail’s primary marketing agency, the Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau. This multi-year initiative has effectively positioned the area as a primary destination and spurred economic development in the region. Over the last 5 years, tourism has increased 30 percent.



Byway communities welcome visitors with orientation signs (right). A variety of media has been developed to attract and educate visitors (opposite).



EMPLOYING A UNIFYING THEME TO PROMOTE THE BYWAY. Use of “Louisiana’s Outback” as a theme for initiatives promoting the Creole Nature Trail serves as a ready identifier for travelers and has helped promote the byway by maximizing marketing dollars and opportunities.

MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF IMAGERY, CONTENT AND TONE. Developed to complement the “Louisiana’s Outback” theme, the Trail’s logo, a grinning alligator, devilishly taunts visitors to come take a closer look at what the Trail has to offer. Monarch butterflies, oak cheniers, wildflowers and birds indigenous to the area also grace the Trail’s marketing materials and serve as gentle reminders of the wealth of natural resources to be found along the byway. All designed to both entice and increase the visitor’s appreciation for the area’s resources, these materials complement each other in appearance, information and tone.

UTILIZING MULTIPLE MEDIA TO ATTRACT AND INFORM A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES. To capture the imagination of everyone from small children to international travelers to the media, the Trail’s marketing and interpretive materials include

TIMELINE

- 1975 Representatives from local governments, tourist commissions, business organizations and surrounding communities begin to discuss the potential of stimulating economic development and tourism through promotion of the Creole Nature Trail
- 1993 Designated a Louisiana State Scenic Byway
- 1994 Initiated development of a corridor management plan
- 1996 Designated a National Scenic Byway
Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District established
- 1999 Received National Scenic Byways (NSB) program funding to conduct a marketing research study and develop a comprehensive marketing plan
- 2000 Received NSB grant to develop an action plan to guide tourism, transportation, environmental, economic development and cultural objectives

Received NSB grant to fund the development and implementation of an interpretive plan for the Trail
- 2002 Designated an All-American Road
- 2003 Received NSB program funding for additional interpretive signage that will incorporate the Trail’s logo

a Kid’s Fun Box, complete with binoculars, an alligator harmonica and a children’s brochure of the byway; a web site www.creolenaturetrail.org; a brochure (available in English, French and Spanish); an audio driving tour to entertain and inform visitors as they drive the byway (available in both cassette and CD-ROM); the Creole Nature Trail Companion, a comprehensive interpretive guide; and a media kit, complete with press releases, a photo CD-ROM and video.





EVALUATING WHAT WORKS AND WHAT

DOESN'T. To get it right, the Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau tracks the success of the Trail's marketing initiatives by closely monitoring web "hits" and visitor responses. In 2002, a Creole Nature Trail Marketing and Research Study was completed that will help guide future marketing initiatives.

WHAT HAPPENED

For almost 30 years, local government entities, tourist commissions, business organizations, and interested citizens have worked together to create and advance the protection, promotion and enhancement of the Creole Nature Trail. After receiving state designation, the Louisiana legislature established the Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District, a

FUNDING SHARE & SOURCES	DOLLARS	PERCENTAGE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE & SOURCES:		
Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau	\$99,410	20%
FEDERAL SHARE & SOURCE OR PROGRAM CATEGORY:		
National Scenic Byways Program Grant	\$397,640	80%
TOTAL COST	\$497,050	100%

governing board of commissioners, to manage and promote the corridor. Commissioners include a diverse group of representatives appointed by the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury; the Southwest Convention & Visitors Bureau; the Cameron Parish Tourist Commission and the Louisiana Department of Transportation. Early on, as the commissioners began evaluating the route for the development of a corridor management plan, they understood the importance of marketing to ensure the success of the route. Through their efforts and the sustained commitment of the local community, substantial progress has been made to market and interpret the byway.

A Kid's Fun Box teaches young people about the Creole Nature Trail (above). Visitors feast on regional seafood (opposite).

INROADS TO SUCCESS

MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES. By focusing various marketing strategies around the “Louisiana’s Outback” theme and targeting specific markets, the primary marketing agency for the Trail, the Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) successfully increased inquiries by 60 percent in the first year. Collateral materials augmenting the theme are distributed at travel trade shows and visitor information centers; through familiarization tours for tour group leaders and travel writers; and to consumers. Bureau advertisements in trade publications feature the Trail as one of the many things to see and do in Southwest Louisiana. The CVB also supports cooperative marketing programs with public and private entities such as the Louisiana Office of Tourism; Louisiana Tourism Promotion Association; Cameron Parish Tourist Commission; Calcasieu and Cameron Parish Police Juries (county commissions); Port of Lake Charles; Rockefeller State Wildlife Refuge & Game Preserve; Sabine National Wildlife Refuge; and Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Over the last 5 years, this approach has resulted in a 30 percent increase in visitors.

DEFINING OBJECTIVES AND ACCOMPANYING ACTIONS. In a recently completed research study, 4 key marketing objectives were identified: (1) to increase visitation to the Trail; (2) to grow spending in the communities and economies along the Trail; (3) to promote the unique culture of the area; and (4) to enhance the use of the assets that comprise the Trail and its characteristics. Developed through visitor surveys, interviews with representatives of the tourism industry, and discussions with national tour operators and travel writers, the study identifies key market niches, action items and timeframes to achieve each of the objectives.

CLEARLY IDENTIFYING RESPONSIBILITIES.

To help avoid the duplication of efforts and keep activities on track, individual tasks are detailed in a “Long Term Plan of Responsibilities.” To best address Trail activities, these tasks are reviewed and modified at each of the Trail’s quarterly District meetings.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA. To create awareness for the Trail and ensure the consistency and accuracy of the information provided, a detailed media kit has been developed. For ease of use, the kit includes a series of press releases highlighting the natural, cultural and historic assets of the region that writers and reporters can easily draw from to prepare their stories. An accompanying CD-ROM contains over 100 images to help the media step into a story and provide their audiences with high-quality visual imagery. A brochure, *Discovering the Many Charms of Southwest Louisiana: Story Ideas for the Media*, also provides ready access to a variety of topics



of interest. Cleverly conceived, the media kit is an excellent resource that promotes consistent messages and imagery to promote the Trail.

CREATING MATERIALS THAT “SPEAK” TO A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES. Over the years, numerous activities have been initiated to identify the Trail’s primary target audiences. Utilizing this information, materials have been tailored to provide ease of access to information about the Trail for both national and international travelers.

LENDING A VOICE. Who better to share the story of the Trail than the people who live and work along the route? Throughout the year, a hospitality program encourages residents involved in the service industry to get involved and share the rich story of the byway. Held throughout the year, admission to the program is free and includes the provision of a workbook, a video and hospitality pin. To help these local “ambassadors” fully appreciate and share all that the Trail has to offer, a familiarization tour is also offered.

LEADING THE WAY. Faced with a 180-mile corridor, alternate routes, and 2 spurs off the main loop, travelers to the Trail benefit from directional signage, as well as site-specific signage that provides interpretive information, traveler services and attractions within the byway communities.

LESSONS FROM THE ROAD: “IN THEIR OWN WORDS”

During this project we learned:

- Interpretive planning and implementation
- Sign development and installation

If we were to do it again, we would:

- Complete an interpretive plan as a component of our initial marketing plan rather than later in the process



ASSESSING YOUR EFFORTS

This project was successful because of a number of factors. Is your byway implementing similar best practices?



A Vermilion Flycatcher spotted on the byway.

ASSESSMENT
1 2 3 4

1: Never 2: Sometimes 3: Frequently 4: Always

1. We have clear marketing goals and objectives.
2. We have outlined a marketing action plan to accomplish our goals and objectives.
3. Our byway's marketing materials carry a consistent logo, image, content, and tone.
4. We use multiple media to attract and inform a variety of audiences.
5. We proactively involve the community in our marketing initiatives.
6. We take time to evaluate our marketing efforts and make adjustments as needed.

CONTACT

Name Shelley Johnson, executive director
Organization Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau
Address 1205 N. Lakeshore Drive, Lake Charles, LA 70601
Phone 337-436-9588
Fax 337-494-7952

RESOURCES

Creole Nature Trail Media Kit, Trail Companion, consumer brochure, Kid's Fun Box, Corridor Management Plan, Southwest Louisiana 2002 Marketing Action Plan, 2002 Creole Nature Trail Marketing Research Study, National Scenic Byway Marketing Tool Kit (developed by representatives of the Creole Nature Trail and Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau), hospitality workbook and video.

ROAD WORK AHEAD

1. How are we drawing upon interpretive information for our marketing efforts? Is our marketing message consistent with our interpretive materials and byway attractions? Will people experience and learn what we lead them to expect from our promotional materials?
2. When people come to our byway, will they be able to find their way following byway signs or maps?
3. What can we learn from this case study?
4. Are there aspects of this case study that we would like to incorporate into our byway plans and initiatives?
5. What are our *marketing* success stories? In what ways are we working to promote our byway?
6. What steps would we like to take to improve and enhance our *marketing* efforts?
7. What would we like to know more about related to this case study?



The byway logo features a grinning alligator, gators outnumber people in this area.



America's Byways Resource Center
227 West First Street, Suite 610
Duluth, MN 55802
P 800.429.9297, ext. 5
F 218.625.3333
www.byways.org

MAY 2003

Case studies are drawn from the 2001 and 2003 Best Practices for Byways competitions.