

2012-2013 Bluffton Marketing Plan

Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce's Visitor & Convention Bureau

Mission

Mutually lead our membership and travel and tourism industry by marketing and guiding the Hilton Head Island, Bluffton, Daufuskie Island and Southern Beaufort County destination brand experience to generate sustainable economic vitality.

Bluffton's Brand Commitment

Bluffton is Hilton Head Island's neighboring historic and creative community located on the May River that is a tapestry of eclectic arts and eco-adventures within a culture that embraces tradition and independent thinking.

Guiding Principles

- Serve as a voice and advocate for the business community
- o Maintain the highest ethical standards in all we do
- Work to preserve and enhance the prudent growth, quality of life and character of our region
- Develop collaborative partnerships only in areas where the partnership can accomplish that which our organization cannot do alone
- Develop and implement programs and services that benefit the economic well-being and common interests of our members
- o Initiate programs for which there is funding and staffing resources

Make decisions based on long-term perspective

Bluffton Marketing Committee

The Visitor & Convention Bureau's destination marketing plan recognizes the fact that major socio-political and economic forces on the macro/global level as well as changing consumer cultural and behavioral trends on the micro level have significantly impacted the travel and tourism industry, along with the entire business community — both globally, across the US and locally here in Beaufort County, South Carolina.

Most demographers agree that this change is generational is its impact; i.e. it defines a major shift in consumer thinking and behavior that will last well into the next decade and perhaps beyond. Peter Yesawich, head of The MMGY Travel Group, first called this change *The New Normal*.

The Hilton Head Island Visitor & Convention Bureau has approached long range strategic planning for the destination from a New Normal perspective. Our steps:

Proactive engagement with local stakeholders, influential and industry thought leaders.

Elimination of single industry sector committees that silo our tourism community.

Expansion of the Bluffton Marketing Committee representing lodging, sports, cultural, retail, restaurants, attractions and Town of Bluffton local stakeholders.

The job of embracing, understanding and leveraging *The New Normal* is not necessarily linear – it's more of a circle that our organization has started, one that is dynamic & collaborative in nature and continuously moving forward as we work with the tourism business community to lead along new pathways.

I. Bluffton Marketing Plan

A. Bluffton Creative Brief Highlights

Main Idea

Enrich yourself with arts, history, dining, shopping and authentic Coastal South Carolina culture

Brand Personality

Warm and relaxed, historic, artsy, eclectic, independent-minded

Support:

- Old fashioned Southern Hospitality with a coastal flair
- Tapestry of eclectic arts, crafts and shops
- Historic sites, characters and stories
- Lowcountry cuisine local, coastal and fresh
- Natural beauty of the May River and Lowcountry environs
- "New Bluffton" entrepreneurial spirit

Key Attributes:

- Rich history and heritage
- Legacy of creative and cultural appreciation
- Strong arts presence
- Independent spirit
- May River
- Balance of tradition and new ideas
- "New Bluffton" retail, business and residential centers
- Complementary contrast to resort luxury image of Hilton Head Island
- Fast growing residential community with an evolving brand identity

B. Bluffton Marketing Committee Goals & Markets

The Bluffton Marketing Committee became an official Chamber standing committee under the Bluffton-Okatie Business Council in early 2003, with two appointed co-chairs, and became a standing committee of the Chamber's Visitor & Convention Bureau in 2008.

The group is committed to the following goals:

- 1. Support the destination's brand position throughout all marketing programs.
- 2. Increase overnight visitation in Southern Beaufort County, particularly Bluffton and Daufuskie Island, which together contribute over 50% of the county's accommodations taxes collected.
- 3. Goal for 2012-13 is 5% lodging revenues increase.
- 4. Increase visitor's expenditures at Beaufort County attractions, retail and dining facilities, particularly in Bluffton. Thus, increase Bluffton and Beaufort County's attraction, hospitality, and sales taxes collected.
- 5. Goal for 2012-13 is 5% overall visitor spending increase and visitor tax base increase.

Marketing tactics and strategies will focus on the following markets:

- 1. Affluent consumers visiting Old Town Bluffton for cultural, historic, tours, shopping and culinary activities as day visitors.
- 2. Overnight stays in Bluffton for new visitors as well as repeat visitors to region.
- 3. Group Tour Planners and their customers with interest in Southeastern destinations, particularly as central location for hub and spoke coastal, historic, shopping, cultural, heritage, cuisine and environmental tours.

C. Marketing Tactics

1. Leisure Brand Marketing

Over the past nine (9) years of operating the Bluffton Marketing Committee and destination marketing program, the Chamber's VCB has expanded our branding efforts through buys in national historic/cultural niche publications and websites in key drive markets targeting travel and cultural enthusiasts with a HHI of \$100k.

Our research shows that the historic and cultural traveler spends more per person during their vacation than the average leisure traveler. According to Mandala Research, South Carolina is the 12th most visited state by Cultural/Heritage travelers. In 2012-13, we plan to continue this national branding campaign in both print and digital platforms.

Additionally, we plan to expand our social media "Content Hub" for Bluffton to reach much deeper into social media channels with the Bluffton travel destination brand message.

2. Digital Advertising & Social Media Integration

We plan to run an online campaign in the fall of 2012 and spring of 2013, driving traffic to **VisitBluffton.org**, **the Chamber/ VCB's destination microsite for Bluffton.** Our ads will drive to a special landing page for fall and landing page for spring, with content featuring Bluffton lodging partner packages paired with local cuisine, tours, cultural activities, festivals, attractions and sports. Whenever possible, we will work with our lodging partners to set up Meta tags or booking codes so that conversion can be tracked through to partner websites.

The microsite and landing page will also feature visitor opt-ins for a short profile/segmentation survey, Bluffton e-news, Facebook, Twitter and our Insiders program.

Smithsonian.com

The editors of Smithsonian magazine bring you Smithsonian.com, an in-depth look at culture, art, science, biography and lifestyle. Smithsonian.com offers exclusive web content, interactive photo galleries, video and highlights from the Smithsonian

Institution's world renowned museums. Smithsonian.com delivers a sophisticated, intellectual audience with a propensity to travel and buy.

The fall ad will promote fall/winter travel promoting the Bluffton Historic Arts & Seafood Festival. A promotion of spring packages and events will follow in early 2013. We will receive over 635,000 impressions through the following marketing programs:

- 225,000 Run-of-Network (RON) Impressions on Smithsonian.com in each season
- (2) Dedicated email eblasts to 120,000 subscribers
- (1) Smithsonian Travelwire e-newsletter to 90,000
- (2) Smithsonian Travel & Culture e-newsletters to 200,000

Net Media Budget: \$14,000

PreservationNation.org

PreservationNation.org, the website of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, reaches an audience with a passion for historic preservation. They are preserving historic homes and are working to safeguard local and national landmarks for future generations. They are members of the Baby Boomer generation, are highly educated, have significant net worth, and a taste for travel. Content on the site is updated daily with the latest news on preservation activities across the country. Travel destinations with historic significance are highlighted. Special features on the site expand on topics of interest covered in Preservation Magazine.

Heritage Travel Banner Package:

PreservationNation.org & Gozaic.com 75,000 impressions per month for 4 months or 300,000 total

Heritage Travel Newsletter (2) 180,000 email addresses each or 360,000 total

Net Media Budget: \$4,000

Leveraging Social Media. As technology changes increasingly pervade our modern lives, as our "instant gratification" world presses forward with a 24/7 news cycle and that *immediate need to know* mindset, as consumers no longer just want but expect to be in control of all their choices in travel -- savvy destinations have both the challenge and opportunity to find the sweet spot of travel communications: Stories and Storytelling.

<u>Word of Mouth</u> marketing has traditionally been the number one driver of consumer purchasing decisions. Today, WOM just takes on a new delivery mode: It's moved from lips to PDA's & IPADS. For the NextGen consumer:

WOM = Social Networking and Media.

And in the world of consumer marketing:
Social Media Engagement = Brand Exposure = Fan Growth

- Emotional connection with the visitor takes precedence over chest-beating claims by marketers in differentiating and defining the destination experience
- There is more to be gained by pulling in relevant, interesting content from our target audiences and using authentic voices than simply pushing out ad content as marketers have done in the past
- People love to tell their stories especially about travel experiences
- Word of Mouth is one of the most powerful forms of marketing
- And do we ever have incoming WOM (along with advertising) in today's digital society – to name a few of today's top media channels....

Text messaging PDAs Mobile Websites Dopplr
Pandora Siri Foodspotting Google+
TravellersPoint
Voice mail iPad4gLTE TripIt WorldWideWeb YouTube
E-mail Facebook Linked In Trip Advisor Sirius
Hulu Gogobot TripWolf Living Social Broadcast & Cable

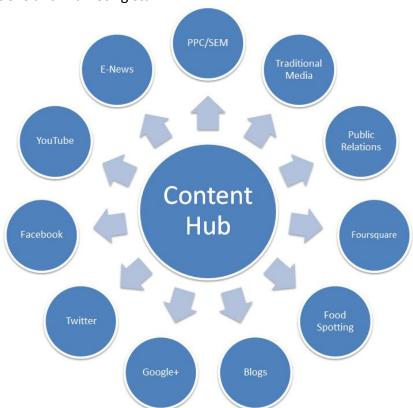
- Destinations that focus on engaging visitors, locals and authentic voices in telling their stories will win.
- Writers, content manager/ editors and marketers who craft relevant, timely
 and intriguing content will win the most important commodity that the
 visitor prospect offers in the destination decision making process their
 immediate attention and repeat attention to the content offered
- Marketers who work with writers and editors to tell their stories through third party editorial and PR promotions will win
- Destinations that bring the right technological tools forward that facilitate ongoing relevant storytelling, information exchange and conversations will win – including making all the social media tools available on the digital devices our target audiences turn to for travel content

Hilton Head Island's Visitor & Convention Bureau's investment in destination digital content management, capable and qualified staff content managers/ editors and a

professional, well executed public relations, digital social media and promotion program is key to operating a robust destination marketing program in today's competitive and cluttered travel communications environment – particularly with limited funding available for paid space media – this aspect of our work has become increasingly important – even over the past 12 months — as new communications channels emerge and evolve to give consumers more choices, more channels and more content.

Working with the Best in the Business

Importantly, we see our Social Media campaigns as an integral arm of our overall Destination Public Relations Program. We plan to engage one of the top travel PR firms in the world, Weber Shandwick Worldwide, who is also the VCB's ongoing PR firm, to develop our Social media program for FY 2012-13, in concert with our local Communications and Marketing staff.



Our Social Media Program development will focus on:

- Best ways to engage destination customers
- Top ways to get customers to "like" our brand, and engage in online content
- Maintaining consistent brand "voice" to keep content authentic & relevant
- Effective methods for measuring Brand Perceptions and Influence
- Setting and Measuring Social Media Benchmarks and Goals
- Social media pitfalls to avoid

- Engaging customer content and interaction
- Maintenance of quality with limited staff resources
- Topline Recommendations Platform-by-Platform

Facebook Display Ads

With more than 750 million users worldwide, Facebook is the leading social network. The average Facebook user spends 50 minutes on Facebook a day.

We plan to use Facebook display ads as an opportunity to increase brand awareness on a CPC basis and to also reach consumers in what has become the most popular social network to date. We can also highly target communities of consumers according to their special travel interests. We plan to geo-target Facebook users east of the Mississippi, and hyper target users based on their user supplied demo. Our branded display ads will give us approximately 5,000 total click-throughs, spread across fall 2012 and early spring 2013 flights. Estimated Website Visitor click-thrus: 5,000

Budget: \$ 6,000

3. Organic Search Engine Marketing (SEO)

The VCB will launch a program to expand and broaden our organic keyword search engine rankings on Google, yahoo, YouTube and Bing for a targeted list of key search terms that best correlate with Bluffton's target visitor and visitor experiences.

Last year saw a marked increase in organic search performance for our websites, including driving up unique visitors to our **VisitBluffton.org microsite** by 4.5% to 24,831 and by 22% to over 1.2 million on our region-wide, "mother ship" URL of HiltonHeadisland.org. Simultaneously, we extended time on our site by each visitor and decreased our bounce rate. In the year ahead, we will work to improve our reach in both quantity and quality by broadening and expanding our organic search engine marketing efforts.

Budget: \$ 6,000

YouTube Brand Channel for Bluffton

The VCB will work with our digital firm to build a "Brand Channel" on YouTube with Bluffton video content. We will use existing Old Town Bluffton/ Eric Hastings video footage and re-edit additional video, working with a local video company. Two new video short films about the arts/shopping experience and the culinary scene in Bluffton will be featured and content will be optimized to drive SEO/ traffic/ travel package promotions to **VisitBluffton.org.**

Bluffton YouTube Brand Channel and Two Video Shorts with SEO:

Budget: \$ 8,000

Bluffton Blog

The Chamber's VCB plans to launch a new Bluffton Blog and connect it to **VisitBluffton.org.** We will feature local freelance blog writers and bi-monthly posts with interviews of locals, Bluffton local event and happenings photography, storytelling and interactive online engagement with Bluffton aficionados.

Our goal is to build a following of at least 5,000 blog followers in year one.

Budget: \$ 5,500

4. Search Engine Marketing (SEM) PPC Campaign

We plan to launch a 10 month PPC/contextual ad SEM (Search Engine Marketing) campaign during the August 2012- May 2013 timeframe. This SEM program will drive traffic to specific pages on **VisitBluffton.org** based on the messaging in the PPC ads. We will also set up tracking for the PPC ads to measure success for these ads.

Our PPC program will be weighted to promote:

50% Bluffton Brand promotions

20% Bluffton Festivals and Major Events Promotions

15% Bluffton Culinary promotions

15% Bluffton Culture, Arts, History and Shopping Promotions

Note: Golf microsite promotions are separately covered through a special golf marketing program.

Included in our fee by the digital agency are monthly reports on the measurable metrics of the SEM program. We will measure Cost per Click, Resulting Time/Pages Viewed on our Website, Conversion to the VCB Visitor Database, Fulfillment ordered, and where appropriate, Conversion to Partner Web Sites. Estimated Website Visitor click-thrus: 15,000

Budget: \$12,000

5. Print Advertising

Preservation Magazine

Preservation is the bi-monthly publication of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It is a trusted source of news, features and travel writing on America's historic places. It reaches 375,000 readers, average HHI of \$184,000. Preservation has been chosen because of the historic travel target audience it reaches. Recent research shows that Preservation readers:

- 78% of whom read the magazine for historic travel ideas
- 93% visit museums
- 88% visit historic communities
- 90% take an average of 6.8 overnight trips a year, staying an average of 21 nights and spending an average of \$6,485.

We plan to run in two special issues:

Sept/Oct 2012

"Civil War Trails":

- o Full page full-color ad
- Two-month banner advertising campaign across PreservationNation.org
- 150 words of copy and image to appear as editorial along with our ad
- Reader service for four months
- Link on PreservationNation.org/reader-services directly to VisitBluffton.org

January/February 2013 "Treasures of the Historic Southeast":

- Full page full-color ad
- Two-month banner advertising campaign across PreservationNation.org
- 150 words of copy and image to appear as editorial along with our ad
- o Reader service for four months
- Link on PreservationNation.org/reader-services directly to VisitBluffton.org

NET MEDIA COST:

\$17,000

2 Full page color ads with 375,000 circ per issue or 750,000 for total buy.

Print & Digital Ad Production

We plan to use a local graphic designer/agency to produce all print and digital advertising components.

AD CREATIVE & PRODUCTION COST: \$5,500

6. VisitBluffton.org Website Enhancements and Mobile Site

The VCB is in the process of developing new content for our primary online fulfillment platform: VisitBluffton.org. Integrated with the new content will be:

- Enhanced organic keyword search
- New photography
- Social Media,
- The Bluffton Blog
- Bluffton Package Promotions
- A changing column about local characters and local places of visitor interest

All will be delivered in a brand voice that amplifies Bluffton's coastal charm and brand character.

In addition, we will produce a streamlined mobile version of the Bluffton microsite, with SEO included.

Budget: \$ 12,000*

*Project is under development now and \$12,000 of the budget total is being paid in the current FY 2011-12 budget and \$12,000 in the FY 2012-13.

7. Destination Photography

It has been 6 years since the VCB invested in a major brand image photo shoot of the destination. Fashion, target demographics, preferred activities, travel experiences and local amenities all change – and the images we use to promote the destination need to change periodically, too. Additionally, use rights to some of our existing key images will expire in the year ahead.

Visuals are at the core of our work across all marketing and sales platforms. This is an investment that is needed and will serve the Visitor & Convention Bureau well for years to come. Some of the considerations in planning the photo shoot include:

- A variety of Island activities and experiences both core and specialty
- Show off Bluffton's products and amenities
- Include ethnic and age diversity
- Feature experienced, professional and natural looking models that portray our target demographics, and supplement with locals
- Shoot in a high level DPI format to create high quality images that will translate well into a variety for formats, including large format displays
- In additional to shooting with models, include a day shooting scenic and helicopter, high quality aerials and scenic photography
- Best, clearest blue sky weather months to shoot include: September, October, April and May
- As possible, negotiate buy out rights for the Chamber/VCB

Budget

Destination Bluffton Photo Shoot with models, Plus aerials and scenic photography

\$ 18,000

(Additional shoot days on Hilton Head Island @ \$50,000 will be paid strictly out of separate Hilton Head Island marketing funds).

8. Research & Market Planning

The Hilton Head Island Visitor & Convention Bureau invests staff management time and resources, as well as significant budget investment with qualified research partners with these goals:

- Understand current and long term trends that drive consumer behavior
- Develop strategic plans that weigh both local stakeholder input and the consumer's voice through quantitative and qualitative research
- Follow the Destination Marketing Association International's DMO Best Practices in research, planning and reporting
- Develop tools that both the VCB staff and the local tourism industry can use to improve marketing, sales and visitor services
- Provide timely results metrics and tourism industry information, particularly through our new <u>ThinkHiltonHeadIsland.com</u> economic and business metrics portal
- Provide transparent accountability metrics and travel industry data that local and state government and related agencies can use to make better public policy and program decisions

Budgeted programs for FY 2012-13 include:

- Updating and maintenance of <u>www.ThinkHiltonHeadIsland.com</u>, the Chamber's <u>online economic metrics portal</u>.
- Smith Travel Research weekly and monthly reports. Measures lodging occupancy, average room rates, room demand and RevPAR for hotels only. Includes monthly comparative report with competitive destinations.
- V-Trip monthly Home & Villa lodging reports on occupancy, average room rates, RevPAR and six month forward booking pace reports. Two-source V-Trip report crunches back end Smith Travel hotel data with V-Trip back end home and villa data to produce a monthly destination report on total destination accommodations tax paying occupancy, average room rates and RevPAR.
- Monthly and YTD Visitor Traffic and Segmentation Reports by USCB's Dr. John Salazar.
- Economic Impact of Tourism on Hilton Head Island, Bluffton and Southern
 Beaufort County Study. A comprehensive study of the past 10 years of tourism
 in our region and its economic impact. The study will include comparatives with
 South Carolina, Southeast and US Travel economic impact data. We will also
 include US Travel forecast information for the next several years, as available,
 and our own V-Trip booking pace data.
- Subscription to the US Travel Association's Travel Monitor Program and related reports.

While the VCB's overall marketing research and strategic planning budget is \$ 96,000 for the year head, the Beaufort County/ Town of Bluffton budget allocation is specifically to support a portion of the **Visitor Economic impact Study.**

Budget: \$ 5,000

B. Group Tour Market

The Bluffton Marketing Committee will continue to focus on marketing the Bluffton corridor and unincorporated areas of Beaufort County as the 'central hub' for group tour adventures. We have experienced tremendous results from these marketing and sales efforts, and look forward to expanding our share of this market in FY 2012-13.

The Motorcoach market generates more than \$55 billion annually in economic transactions. One motor coach spending one night at a destination generates as much as \$11,660 for that local economy in meals, lodging, and other spending. The American Bus Association estimates that motor coaches account for 751 million passenger trips

annually, moving more people in some years than commercial airlines do. Students and seniors use motor coaches for educational trips, sports outings, and cultural and historical destinations.

Motorcoach consumers are becoming more knowledgeable. They seek more visceral, emotional experiences, including more hands-on and soft-adventure activities like culinary arts, water-based trips, themed dining and group participation in theater/cultural events, all of which are becoming more popular.

We intend to draw group tour visitors by:

- Build relationships with operators by attending various industry meetings (ABA, OMCA, Travel South, SC Motorcoach Assoc.)
- Leverage your networks.
- Educate our partners on what it means to be a group friendly community
- Offer tiered pricing/packaging attractions with accommodations

Trade shows continue to be a productive avenue for generating qualified group tour prospects and leads. We plan to target potential leads by attending American Bus Association (ABA), Travel South, Ontario Motorcoach Association (OMCA), and SC Motorcoach Association.

Travel South USA began the first regional, domestic, computerized marketplace in 1983 to bring more group travel business to the Southern states. Twenty-two marketplaces later, the goal has not changed - provide the easiest, most efficient way for tour operators to book business in the Southern states.

Each year, the Chamber joins more than 300 supplier companies from Alabama; Arkansas; Florida; Georgia; Kentucky; Louisiana; Mississippi; North Carolina; South Carolina; Tennessee; Virginia and West Virginia to meet with tour operators and journalists from across the United States, Canada and other countries. In a two-day, fast-paced market place, tour operators and suppliers meet in one-on-one prescheduled appointments to discuss destinations, new itineraries and the best possible rates at hotels and attractions throughout the region they represent.

The American Bus Association (ABA), the trade association of the inter-city bus industry, represents the motor coach industry's interests in Washington, DC. It also facilitates relationships between North American motor coach and tour companies and all related segments of the travel and supplier industries and promotes travel by motor coach to consumers.

ABA represents approximately 950 motor coach and tour companies in the United States and Canada. Its members—operate charter, tour, regular route, airport express, special operations and contract services (commuter, school, transit). Another 2,300 member organizations represent the travel and tourism industry and suppliers of bus

products and services who work in partnership with the North American motor coach industry.

Motorcoach Association of South Carolina (MCASC) currently has 42 Operators located across South Carolina, 194 Associates and 5 Tour Operators located across the nation. MCASC is an affiliate member of the American Bus Association and the United Motorcoach Association to stay abreast of issues and concerns at the national level. There is an annual meeting and marketplace when all the members come together for information sharing and selling. The Annual Meeting and Marketplace is held every August. In 2012 the meeting will be a joint meeting with Florida's Motorcoach Association and will be held in Orlando, Florida – July 2012. Hilton Head Island is also on the radar to be the official host of this meeting in August 2013. Exposure from this convention will position our island for future group tour trips by offering pre and post FAMS for attendees over the duration of the conference.

Budget: \$ 6,000*

*Town of Hilton Head Island budget covers additional \$ 6,000 in costs.

1. Select Service Co-op Program

The Select Service Co-Op is made up of various limited service hotels both from Hilton Head Island and Bluffton. They work on several initiatives throughout the year in targeting Mega Churches, Military, Government, and small corporate transient business markets.

This year, the Co-op will target group tour operators by hosting a FAM April 1- 4th, 2012 when they will host 10 qualified, group tour operators for a 2day/3night visit of Hilton Head Island. In early summer, the partners plan on organizing a sales mission to Atlanta where they will conduct various appointments within the government and mega church markets. Charlotte is also a city that we wish to penetrate further, and plans are in the works for a fall sales blitz in that region.

Budget: \$ 5,000*

*Town of Hilton Head Island budget covers additional \$5,000 in program cost.

C. Bluffton Collateral and Fulfillment

1. Vacation Planner: The Visitor & Convention Bureau completed refreshed and expanded content promoting Bluffton in our 2012 Vacation Planner, including a new 8 page color section with a map of Calhoun Street and all merchants, art

galleries, restaurants, and shops highlighted. In 2013, we would like to expand this map through the Promenade area of Old Town Bluffton, as well as continue to feature "New Bluffton" areas for visitors such as Station 300, the New River Trailhead and Buckwalter centers. Our Vacation Planner is distributed to 110,000 consumers annually as our inquiry fulfillment piece as well as Welcome Centers throughout South Carolina and the region, at trade shows and to Insider inquiries.

- 2. Bluffton Walking Tour Map: We also plan to update and reprint our popular Bluffton Walking Tour Map brochure in the coming fiscal year, printing 50,000 of these 4 X 9 brochures for distribution to Bluffton and historic/arts visitor inquiries, at the Heyward House, at the Chamber Welcome Center, at SCPRT state welcome centers, at the Lowcountry and Resort Islands Tourism Commission Center, etc.
- **3. Fulfillment:** Postage, Shipping and Mail Operations for Bluffton fulfillment for 12 months.

Collateral and Fulfillment

Vacation Planner 8 page section:	\$ 16,000
Bluffton Walking Tour Map:	\$ 7,000
Fulfillment:	\$ 5,800

Budget Total: \$ 28,800