



BLUFFTON

discover something wonderful

2013-2014
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 a beautiful southern town that is the heart of the South Carolina Lowcountry. Bluffton celebrates the:

- May River
- Old Town Bluffton National Register Historic District
- Unique Bluffton Character
- Entrepreneurial Spirit
- Eclectic Art and Artists

Guiding Principles

- Serve as a voice and advocate for the business community
- 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
- 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.

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.

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

Investment in a comprehensive Brand Assessment Development project with the Town of Bluffton as well as the business, residential and visitor communities.

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
- Bluffton is open for Business: 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
- 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 2013-2014 is 4% 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 2013-2014 is 2% 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.

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.

C. Marketing Tactics

Leisure Brand Marketing

Over the past ten (10) years of managing the Bluffton Marketing Committee and destination marketing program for the Town of Bluffton, 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 \$100,000.

In 2013-2014, we plan to continue this national branding campaign with a core focus on digital platforms and a scaled back print presence.

Print & Digital Ad Production AD CREATIVE & PRODUCTION COST: \$5,500

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

1. Bluffton-specific e-newsletter on a quarterly basis Budget \$10,000

August 2013 issue: 9th Annual Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival

November 2013 issue: Bluffton Christmas Parade Weekend events

January 2014 issue: Spring Art Walk

March 2014 issue: 36th Annual Bluffton Village Festival

2. Social Media Plans

Budget: \$ 5,000

a. **Bluffton's FaceBook page** will be launched in the second half of 2013.

FaceBook Audience

55% Female as compared to 45% Male

Key Age Ranges: 43% are between the ages of 18-34; 20% are between the ages of 35-49

Somewhat Affluent: 30% earn between \$60 - \$100K; 32% earn \$100K or more

Engagement Tactics

- User Generated Content
- Contests/Sweeps
- Interactive/ Targeted Apps
- Follow local attractions & events to re-post

Facebook "Like" Campaign

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 will continue to use Facebook as an opportunity to efficiently drive “Like” fans that we can then market to via our ongoing social media program.

3. Organic Search Engine Marketing (SEO)

Budget \$6,000

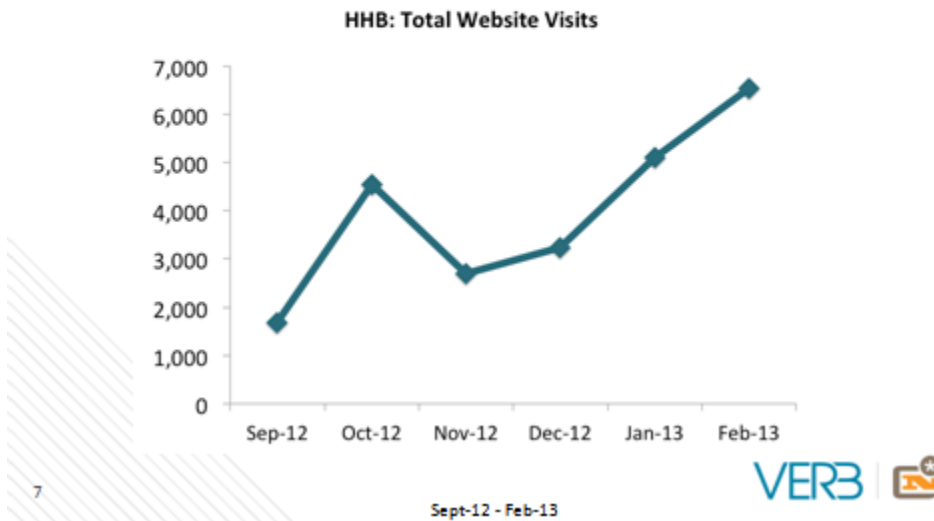
The VCB will launch a program to expand and broaden our organic keyword search engine rankings on Google, yahoo, YouTube and Bing for a targeted list of key search terms that best correlate with Bluffton’s target visitor and visitor experiences.

In September of 2012 we completed redesigned the www.VisitBluffton.org website. Between September 2012 and February 2013 there has been a marked increase in website visitation as noted in the chart below:



Total Website Visitation – Bluffton

- ▶ Total website growth continues to trend higher
- ▶ Already in Jan-Feb 2013 > over 11k Website Visits



Source: Bluffton 2012 Review and 2013 Recommendations report

4. Monthly Bluffton Blog

Budget: \$ 5,500

The Chamber’s VCB plans a monthly 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.

- Identify key influencers, affinity groups, associated blogs and Facebook/Google+ communities to share and syndicate blog stories to attract engagement and content consumption
- Encourage partners to re-post blog content
- Add more visual content to blogs – larger photos, more video, infographics
- New posts in each category twice per month= 16 posts per month and 192 posts per year

5. Search Engine Marketing (SEM) PPC Campaign:

Budget \$36,000

SEM/PPC marketing is a key driver of VisitBluffton.org website visitation and measurable conversions. 2013-2014 campaigns will include the following:

- Local Search
- US Search
- Contextual
- Remarketing
- Interest categories

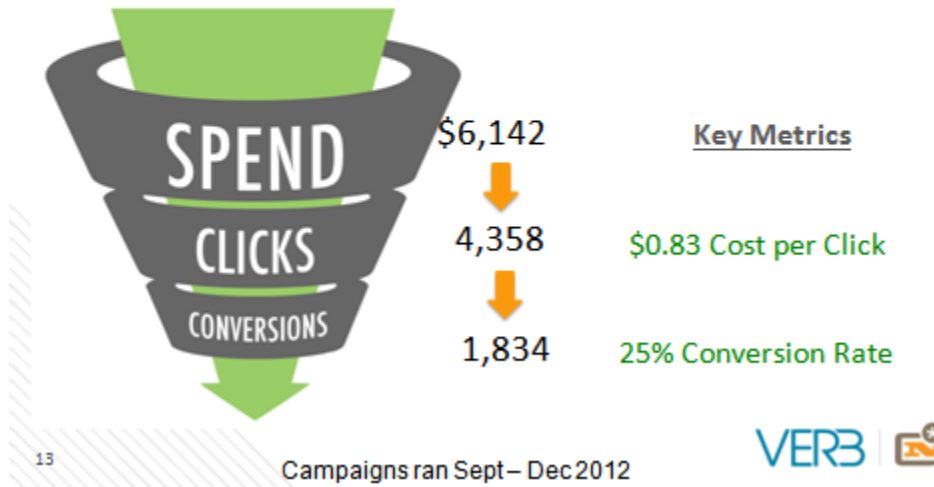
We will expand the PPC effort to build on the most efficient and effective channel plus ads banner campaigns. We will add Mobile and Video Campaigns

- Additional ad groups and keywords-consumers continue to search in new ways resulting in the need to continually expand and optimize
- 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.

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: 30.000.

2012 Bluffton SEM/PPC Results

- ▶ In total, the 2012 SEM/PPC efforts for Bluffton proved to be cost-effective and highly-qualified source of website traffic and conversions



6. Print Advertising

Budget \$10,000

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 per issue with an average household income of \$184,000. *Preservation* has been chosen because of the historic travel target audience it reaches. Recent research shows that *Preservation* readers In the Last Year:

Visited the South: 52%

Visited the West: 46%

Visited the Northeast: 42%

Visited the Midwest: 29%

Visited Any Historic Places in the Last 2 Years: 88%

Stayed Overnight in a Hotel/Motel in the Last Year: 86%

Average Nights Stayed: 21

Average Overnight Trips in the Last Year: 6.8

Average Amount Spent: \$6,485

Traveled on a Commercial Airline: 73%

Registered for a Hotel/Destination Stay Online in the Last 2 Years: 58%

Has a valid passport: 77%

We plan to place advertisements in two special issues:

- Fall (Sept/Oct) 2013 Civil War Trails: \$5,000
- 1/3 page vertical full-color ad
 - Two-month banner advertising campaign across PreservationNation.org
 - 60 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**

- Winter (Jan/Feb) 2014 Treasures of the Historic Southeast \$5,000
- 1/3 page vertical full-color ad
 - Two-month banner advertising campaign across PreservationNation.org
 - 60 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**

7. **Destination Photography** **Budget \$7,500**
Photography will be tied into the new Bluffton Branding Project to be completed by the end of 2013

8. **Destination Video** **Budget \$3,000**
Produce 3 videos to be tied into the new Bluffton Branding Project to be completed by the end of 2013.

9. Research & Market Planning

Budget \$40,000

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 ThinkBluffton.com 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 2013-2014 include:

- Bluffton Brand Study 2013
 - Complete a thorough, research-based brand assessment for the Town of Bluffton and its designated destination marketing organization, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau. Formulate a long term brand development strategy and recommendations in collaboration with the Town, Chamber and its Visitor & Convention Bureau, the business community and the residential community.
 - From the assessment, develop a new comprehensive, community-wide strategic brand position and accompanying logo mark/ tagline. (Visitors + Residents + Business)
 - Collaborate to bring prosperity to the Town of Bluffton through economic development. Part of that process is to develop a comprehensive brand identity that will define the Town to appropriate economic development targets. This shall be geared towards site selectors, business owners, and the general public.
 - Identify and recommend steps for the Town of Bluffton to build a focused, visually compelling brand and a dynamic online presence to support the mission of attracting and growing businesses within the Town of Bluffton.
 - Develop strategic and tactical recommendations for a Bluffton community-wide brand culturalization program for short and long term implementation. The brand identity will convey the Town's economic strengths, superb quality of life, and other assets in a way to emphasize that Bluffton is authentic, progressive and memorable.

- Visitor Profile Study 2013 to research the following areas
 - Visitor Buying Habits
 - Visitor Media preferences
 - Comparison to the findings of the 2009 Visitor Profile
 - Economic Impact of market segments
 - Competitive set comparison

- Updating and maintenance of www.ThinkBluffton.com, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal.
- 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 \$135,000 for Fiscal Year 2013-2014 the Beaufort County/ Town of Bluffton budget allocation is specifically to support the **Bluffton brand project** (\$30,000) and a portion of the **Visitor Economic impact Study** (\$10,000).

10. Group Tour Market

Budget \$6,000*

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 2013-14.

The Motorcoach market generates more than \$55 billion annually in economic transactions. The American Bus Association estimates that motor coaches account for 700 million passengers annually, second behind airlines (785 million). 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, 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), Ontario Motorcoach Association (OMCA), and the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina.

\$3,000 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 1,000 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 2,800 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.

In January 2014 ABA Marketplace, buyers and sellers (the Chamber) will take advantage of pre-scheduled appointments with pre-qualified operators to promote and sell Bluffton and the Lowcountry.

\$15,000 Motor coach Association of South Carolina (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. Hilton Head Island has been chosen to be the official host of this meeting August 18-22, 2013 at the Omni Hilton Head Island Resort. 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

\$3,500 Ontario Motorcoach Association (OMCA) OMCA has over 1100 members and represents more than 75 bus operators, over 100 tour operators, 62 bus product & services, and some 800 affiliated sellers to the group tour industry including attractions, destinations, hoteliers and retail outlets across North America.

The OMCA Marketplace is the premier event in Canada for North American packaged travel. Over a period of 4 days buyers and sellers will meet face to face during the 7 minute pre-scheduled appointments.

*Town of Hilton Head Island budget covers additional \$18,500 in costs.

11. Select Service Co-op Program

Budget \$5,000*

Hotels partner with the VCB to work on various initiatives throughout the year in targeting mega churches, military, government, small corporate and transient business markets. This year, the Co-op will target group tour operators by supporting the upcoming Florida/South Carolina joint meeting being held in August 2013 at the Omni Hilton Head Island Resort. Group Tour operators from the Southeast will be in attendance and the select service properties will assist with both pre-conference and post-conference FAMS. Atlanta and Charlotte will be the group's main target drive markets for scheduling qualified appointments with planners affiliated with mega churches, government and small corporate businesses.

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

12. VisitBluffton.org upgrades, Insiders Program & mobile site Budget \$12,000

Bluffton Insiders Program: Generate a specific email marketing distribution list. Visitors will sign up to become a Bluffton Insider and receive our bi-monthly Bluffton "insider" blog posts, Bluffton quarterly E-newsletters plus an information package including a regional vacation planner and our Bluffton walking tour map.

13. Festivals and Special Events

We will continue to work with local partners who produce area destination events to generate regional and national attention to the events and to support corresponding travel packages. There are many special events in Greater Bluffton including

- Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival
- Palmetto Bluff Music to your Mouth
- Bluffton International & Craft Beer Fest
- Palmetto Bluff Face Your Fears Mud Run
- Bluffton Village Festival
- Art Walks
- Palmetto Bluff Half Marathon
- Bluffton Christmas Parade
- Bluffton Historic Preservation Society/Heyward House events
- Historic Bluffton Farmers Market
- Buckwalter Place Farmers Market
- Hampton Lake Market Days
- Bluffton Sunset Party Series
- Delirium Ultra 24 hour Endurance Race
- Palmetto Bluff Concerts on the Green
- Other opportunities that may develop in the year ahead

Visitor focused events are promoted in a variety of ways:

- Vacation Planner
- Online Calendar of Events
- Facebook, Twitter, Google+ , Blogs
- Rotating features on VisitBluffton.org
- E-newsletters to insiders
- Mobile site & app

C. Bluffton Collateral and Fulfillment

Budget \$31,500

1. **I-Vacation:** With the rapidly growing use of tablets by travel consumers, the Visitor & Convention Bureau is currently researching options for development of a truly engaging, useful and relevant online Vacation Planner for tablets to complement our printed Vacation Planner, or an I-Vacation tool. This will not be just an online PDF of the printed planner – it will be designed and developed with the tablet user’s needs and use habits specifically at the forefront.
2. **2014 Vacation Planner Print and Online**
The Visitor & Convention Bureau completed refreshed and expanded content promoting Bluffton in our 2013 Vacation Planner, including a 10 page color section with a map of Calhoun Street and all merchants, art galleries, restaurants, and shops highlighted. In 2014, we would like to expand this map

through the Promenade area of Old Town Bluffton, as well as continue to feature Greater Bluffton areas for visitors such as Station 300, the New River Trailhead and Buckwalter centers. Our Vacation Planner is distributed to 100,000 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. Qty: 100,000 printed Vacation Planners, and Digital Tablet version.

1. **Bluffton Walking Tour Map:** We also plan to distribute our popular Bluffton Walking Tour Map brochure in the coming fiscal year to Bluffton and historic/arts visitor inquiries, at the Heyward House Historic Center and official Bluffton Welcome Center, at the Chamber of Commerce Bluffton Business office, at SCPRT state welcome centers, at the Lowcountry and Resort Islands Tourism Commission Center, etc.

2. **Fulfillment:** Postage, Shipping and Mail Operations for Bluffton fulfillment for 12 months.

Collateral and Fulfillment

2014 Vacation Planner 10 page Bluffton section:	\$	23,000
Fulfillment:	\$	<u>8,500</u>
Budget Total:	\$	31,500

Appendix A

FY 2012-2013 Digital Advertising Results

PreservationNation.org-digital ads in newsletters

Preservation Enewsletter sent on September 25, 2012

How many delivered? 180,000

How many opened? 29,861

Open Rate 16.6%

Banner impressions: 47,488

of Click thru's to www.VisitBluffton.org: 314

Click thru rate: 0.66%

Heritage Tour Enewsletter sent on February 6, 2013

How many delivered? tbd

How many opened? tbd

Open Rate tbd

Banner impressions: 35,983

of Click thru's to www.VisitBluffton.org: 153

Click through rate: .43%

Heritage Traveler Enewsletter sent on February 12, 2013

How many delivered? 180,000

How many opened? 23,642

Open Rate 13.13%

Banner impressions: 41,623

of Click thru's to www.VisitBluffton.org: 130

Click through rate: .31%

Smithsonian.org-digital ads in Enewsletters

Culture and Travel Enewsletter sent on September 20, 2012

How many delivered? 401,434

How many opened? 61,047

Open Rate 15.2%

of Click thrus to www.VisitBluffton.org: 34

Click thru rate to www.VisitBluffton.org: 0.01%

Travel Wire Enewsletter sent on October 3, 2012

How many delivered? 79,656

How many opened? 10,347

Open Rate 13%

of Click thrus to www.VisitBluffton.org tracked with another enews

Click thru rate to www.VisitBluffton.org: tracked with another enews

Culture and Travel Enewsletter sent on October 25, 2012

How many delivered? 648,269

How many opened? 77,912

Open Rate 11.9%

of Click thrus to www.VisitBluffton.org 86

Click thru rate to www.VisitBluffton.org 0.01%

Travel Wire Enewsletter sent on March 1, 2013

How many delivered? 47,921

How many opened? 8,738

Open Rate 18.2%

of Click thru's to www.VisitBluffton.org: 54

Click thru rate for www.VisitBluffton.org: .10%