



# bluffton

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

2016-2017

## Bluffton Marketing Plan



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2016-2017

## Bluffton Marketing Plan

### Mission

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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.

### Brand Commitment

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), in partnership with the Town of Bluffton, began working with research partners from the University of South Carolina Beaufort and USC as well as marketing firm Rawle Murdy Associates in May of 2013. Since February 2014, the new brand revealed: Bluffton Heart of the Lowcountry, continues to reflect the deep emotional connection shared by Bluffton residents and the burgeoning business community.

Bluffton is the heart of the Lowcountry. It speaks to the town's central location, its lovable characteristics, and Bluffton is the pumping, economic life force of the Lowcountry. Most importantly, it's a tone and a feeling. When you're in Bluffton, you can see and feel the love. It's real and authentic. It's the heart symbol in your logo, on a window, the pride residents have in their downtown or the warmth shared with strangers at an oyster roast. The town of Bluffton is a well-kept secret. Nowhere else in the Lowcountry do you feel the love like you do in Bluffton.

Bluffton's core distinctions:

- Old Town Charm
- Bluffton Attitude
  - Authentic/Realness
  - Eclectic/Expressive
  - Unique/Pride
  - Town on the Move/Progressive
- Nature
- May River

- Cultural Heritage
- Location
- Experiential Events
- Art and Design
- Thriving Restaurant Scene
- Growing Artisan Community

## Guiding Principles

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- 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

## State of Economy

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### **Travel Industry Trends:**

With more money in their pockets and a desire to have unforgettable experiences, the 2016 visitor looks different from years past. A brighter economic outlook will allow more people to travel for leisure. Corporations and businesses are more willing to spend on employee and group development. Both the individual and business visitor are looking for a variety of things to do in one location.

These nation-wide trends give Bluffton an advantage when courting visitors to stay and play here. The following sections outline the current state of the tourism industry, the needs and wants of our target demographics, and how the Visitor & Convention Bureau plans to drive tourism with innovative partnerships and diverse marketing programs.



**Current State of Economy:**

The United States economic growth in 2016 will look a lot like the last few years, but with a different texture. Housing will be stronger and eventually business spending will grow, but foreign trade will prevent too much economic expansion.

The Consumer Confidence Index average was 92.9% in 2015, the highest since 2004. This indicates that real consumer expenditures will grow in 2016. Consumers have been increasing their expenditures by fewer than four percent per year. If the economy were to surge forward next year, consumers should follow along. (*U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION*)

**Leisure Travel Forecast:**

According to the U.S. Travel Barometer, close to four in 10 people said they planned to travel more for leisure in 2016. Expedia's Vacation Deprivation Study found that worldwide, the median number of paid vacation days available to workers is fewer than 25 per year. Collectively, workers take about 20 of them, leaving 20% unused. The Travel Technology Association has found that although some consumers take less vacation the percentage of Americans who participated in short term home rentals almost quadrupled to 23%.

Recent survey by Martini Media also showed that eight in 10 "affluents" would rather have a luxury experience than purchase a luxury item. The memories they make from their unique travel experiences are simply something money cannot buy. While baby boomers are more interested in the relaxed family vacation, millennials are actively seeking out new experiences to learn about other cultures. The common thread that is cross generational is that both groups would rather spend money on a vacation than material possessions and the amount of time and money they plan to spend is expected to increase over the coming year. (*U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION*)

**Business Travel:**

Destination Hotels' 2016 trend forecast shows that meeting attendees are looking for the chance to engage in "leisure pursuits" such as spa appointments or bike tours and planners want flexible meeting spaces. Six in 10 meeting planners advise attendees to arrive early or stay late on property after meetings for leisure purposes. Still believing that technology could never replace face-to-face meetings, more business travelers and planners are looking for destinations with a variety of environments and unique local experiences.

**International Travel:**

According to U.S. Department of Commerce data, the U.S. dollar does pose some challenges for inbound travel from source markets where currencies have slumped. However, while the strong dollar does pose some hurdles for marketing the U.S., the dollar's strength makes Brand USA's marketing spend go further in markets where there is currency weaknesses.

The United States is still a desirable destination around the world. When currency is not in the international travelers' favor, Brand USA studies found they continue to travel to the U.S. and only change their travel patterns when they arrive.

The National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) recently released updated forecasts for travel to the U.S. through 2020. International inbound visitation in 2015 was revised upward to 75 million visitors from 74.8 million earlier in the year.

**Travel Industry Trends: A Generational Shift: From Millennials to Gen Z:**

Any discussion of the next big thing must start with the generational shift that will drive all other emerging trends in travel. While the millennial cohort will represent up to three quarters of the global workforce within 10 years, we begin to see a shift in a new consumer generation. Millennials take trips for experiences while collecting flashy photos with iconic backgrounds, but on the whole, Gen Z's travel for deeper purposes. In 2016, this generation ranges from age six to 20, and although many haven't reached college yet, Gen Z makes up one-sixth of the world's population. By 2020, they will have more than \$44 billion in spending power and in just five years they will make up 40% of the U.S. population. In the coming years, we will see them looking to take their entrepreneurial talents and embark on "cultural" trips to learn history, visit places for symposiums and knowledge sharing opportunities.

Naturally, this shift will ask that we move the spotlight away from millennials and focus on strategies that nurture their coming of age. The biggest number we should remember, however, is the number eight. Eight is the number of seconds that Gen Zs take to process information. Our destination has an eight second window to reach this generation of travelers – many times in images rather than words.

Although there is plenty of time for research and development surrounding this next generation of travelers – social media, digital efforts and other ideas are worth incorporating in the coming year since these strategies reflect the behavioral changes that cross demographic lines.

## Closer to Home

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The VCB'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. Bluffton has become more than a place to visit, it has become a destination to experience and make new memories.

The local quirks keep travelers loyal to a destinations messaging. The VCB will be positioning Bluffton in the limelight as the ultimate escapes filled with genuine experiences of all kinds. For those looking to travel and immerse themselves in a new vacation experience, Bluffton is where they will find historical traditions, culinary and culture experiences are celebrated.

The **four** pillars of our 2016-17 marketing plan for Bluffton are:

- History
- Culture
- Arts
- Culinary

## **South Carolina Arts Commission: Bluffton As a State-Designated Cultural District**

The cultural district is a geographic area that has a concentration of cultural facilities, activities and assets. It is an area that is easily identifiable to visitors and residents and serves as a center of cultural, artistic and economic activity. A cultural district may contain galleries, live performance venues, theaters, artist studios, museums, arts centers, arts schools, and public art pieces. A cultural district may also contain businesses like restaurants, banks or parks whose primary purpose is not arts, but that regularly make their spaces available to artists or create opportunities for the public to encounter the arts.

Legislation ratified by the South Carolina General Assembly and signed by Governor Nikki Haley authorizes the S.C. Arts Commission to grant official state designation to cultural districts in the Palmetto State.

The legislation specifies the goals of this program:

- attract artists, creative entrepreneurs and cultural enterprises to communities
- encourage economic development
- foster local cultural development
- provide a focal point for celebrating and strengthening local cultural identity

Additionally, cultural districts:

- attract tourists
- help preserve and reuse historic buildings
- enhance the image and visibility of a place
- foster a supportive environment for arts and culture

Bluffton became the sixth community in South Carolina to earn the designation since state legislation was passed in June 2014, allowing the creation of such districts. It joins Rock Hill, Spartanburg, Columbia, Lancaster and Beaufort, which also recently gained approval.

Bluffton's cultural district will span from Bluffton Village south to the May River, and from Burnt Church Road west to Cahill's Market on May River Road. That area includes 120 cultural attractions and roughly three dozen annual festivals and events, according to town documents.



The newly awarded cultural designation will provide the structure and strategy for promoting Bluffton's annual events. The VCB will work with the Bluffton Cultural District Alliance (BCDA) to promote the Bluffton Cultural District. Together we will develop a strategic plan in conjunction with our on-going marketing efforts to promote the arts, history, events and culture of Bluffton to visitors.

### **Cultural Festivals & Events**

As we engage with visitors to promote the art and cultural experiences Bluffton has to offer, the VCB will continue our support for the special events held in Bluffton. 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:

- Historic Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival
- Bluffton International & Craft Beer Fest
- Bluffton Village Festival
- Bluffton Christmas Parade
- Bluffton Historical Preservation Society/Heyward House events
- Bluffton Farmers Market
- Bluffton Sunset Party at Oyster Factory Park
- Bluffton Earth Day Celebration
- Bluffton Duathlon
- Art Walks in Old Town Bluffton
- Children's Easter Celebration Calhoun Street
- Shuckin & Shagging in Old Town Bluffton
- Palmetto Bluff Music to your Mouth
- Palmetto Bluff Half Marathon
- Palmetto Bluff Summer Concert Series
- May River Shrimp Festival
- Beer & Brats/Oktoberfest
- Other opportunities that may develop throughout the year such as the Budweiser Clydesdales and Sunset Parties

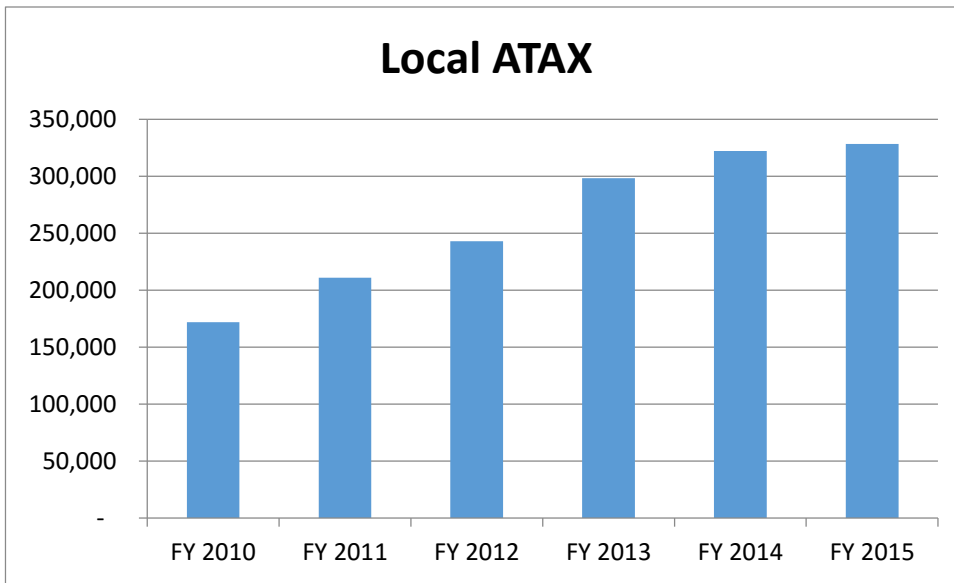
## Bluffton Marketing Committee Goals and Markets

The Bluffton Marketing Committee became an official standing committee within the chamber in 2008 with two appointed co-chairs. For the year 2016-2017, elected committee chairs are Olivia Young, representing May River Oysters, and Fowler Hospitality along with Carolyn Coppola with Celebrate Bluffton. The committee meets quarterly and reviews website performance, special projects and opportunities as put forward by the Visitor & Convention Bureau.

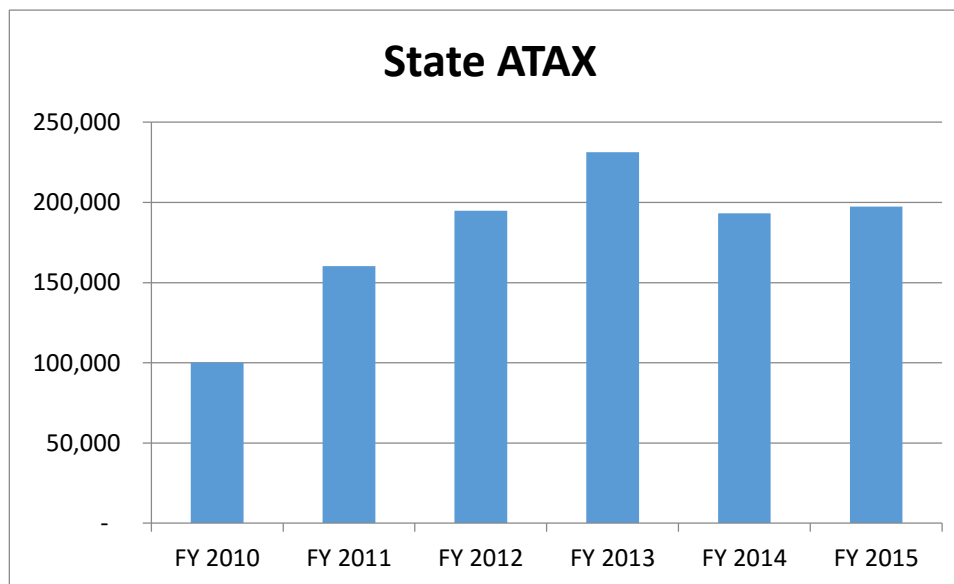
The group is committed to the following goals:

1. Support the destination's brand position throughout all marketing programs
2. Increase overnight visitation in Southern Beaufort County
3. 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
4. Goal for 2016-2017 is 2% overall visitor spending increase and visitor tax base



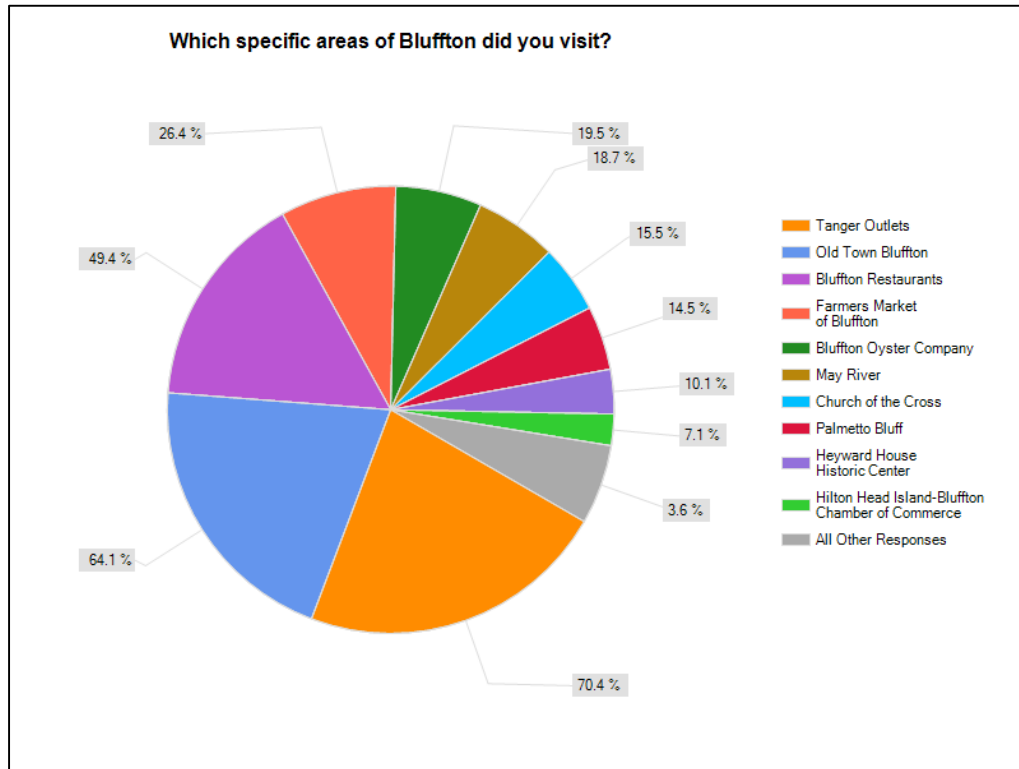


FY	FY	FY	FY	FY	FY
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
171,842	211,054	243,085	298,286	322,103	328,263

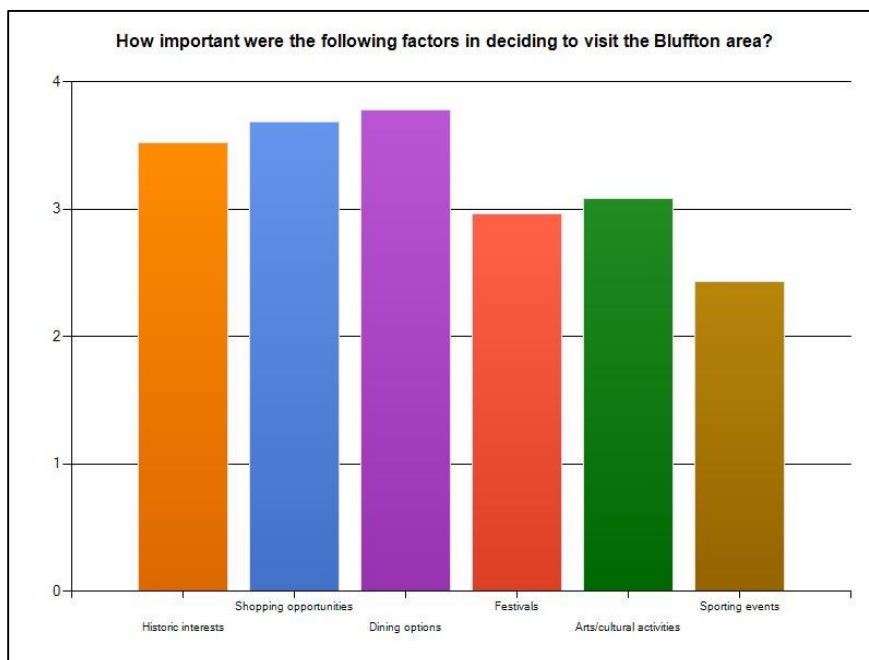


FY	FY	FY	FY	FY	FY
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
100,075	160,372	194,910	231,360	193,264	197,398

Source: Town of Bluffton Finance Department, Special Revenues



Source: 2013-2014 Bluffton Visitor Profile Study



## Marketing Tactics & Strategies

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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 the region
3. Group Tour Planners and their customers with interest in Southeastern destinations, particularly as a central location for hub and spoke coastal, historic, shopping, cultural, heritage, cuisine, and environmental tours

The VCB invests in destination digital content management, qualified staff, content managers/editors and a professional, well executed public relations and digital promotions program. These investments are 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 as new communications channels emerge and evolve to give consumers more choices, more channels and more content.

Over the past twelve years of managing the Bluffton Marketing Committee and destination marketing program for the Town of Bluffton, the VCB has expanded our branding efforts through buys in regional and national publications and digital platforms in key drive markets targeting travel and cultural enthusiasts with a household income of \$100,000+

### **Tactics & Strategies: (1- 11)**

#### **1. Bluffton Quarterly E-newsletter & Insider Program:**

**Bluffton Quarterly E-newsletter:** Each year, we set a robust content calendar of monthly (and sometimes bi-monthly) newsletters around themes to highlight key seasonal events and promotion of

our membership products/services. We also will continue to send emails/epromos that cross market the whole destination to the entire *Insider* database.

Some of the themes include:

- Family Vacations
- Outdoor Adventures
- Culinary Travel and Events
- Cultural & Heritage Travel
- Marquee Events & Festival

Bluffton DMO:	\$1,000
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$4,000</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>

**Bluffton Insider Program:** Grow the specific email marketing distribution list.

Though our digital promotion of the destination, 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.

Bluffton DMO:	\$330
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$770</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$1,100</b>

## **2. Leisure Print Campaign**

The goal of our print campaign for the 2016-17 FY is to unite Bluffton with a Hoffman Media brand that can seamlessly deliver awareness and engagement through integrated content opportunities and an efficient advertising campaign. The VCB will work with Hoffman Media’s *Southern Lady* to provide a creative campaign focused on exploring the hidden gems and cultural experiences of Bluffton.

Founded in 1999, *Southern Lady* Magazine is a bimonthly publication that celebrates, delights, and inspires women who live in the South—and those who are simply Southern at heart. While Southern women move forward in today’s world, they also hold tightly to the culture of the South.



*Southern Lady : In the South, women treasure time-honored traditions while creating new ones. They are a powerful, unique consumer. Southern Lady, a lifestyle magazine that represents gracious living, is a source readers rely on for flavorful food, elegant entertaining, travel destinations, how-to projects, home décor and inspiration.*

Hoffman Media will execute the campaign to reach an engaged audience of readers who virtually mirror your visitor profile through significant presence across print, digital, video and social media. We will utilize digital advertising programs that combine the power of video/multimedia and content producers to deliver incredible reach and engagement among southern travel influencers.

Additionally, digital advertising programs featured on Southernlady.com will highlight things to do in The Town of Bluffton, effectively suggesting itineraries for trip planners.

The women's lifestyle magazine *Southern Lady* will promote What to See & Do in Bluffton in the September issue in a two-page custom content 2-page spread. The *Southern Lady* editors will work with the VCB to produce this section that suggests experiences unique to Bluffton such as restaurants, historical landmarks, cultural experiences, art galleries, as well as places to stay.

#### Print Ad Campaign:

- 1 spread in Southern Lady (September 2016)
- 2 custom content pages in Southern Lady reaching total audience of over 500,000 in total readership (125,000 paid circulation x average reader per copy)

Total Audience	SOUTHERN Lady
Unique Page Views per Month	46,000
eNewsletter Opt-In Subscribers ( <b>30% OPEN RATE</b> )	118,200
Print Paid Circulation	125,000
Print Readership	500,000
Married	76%
Average HHI	\$109,152
HHI \$150K+	17.3%
Average Home Value	\$273,059
Reader Habits:	
Avg Time Spent Reading	2 hrs.
Visited/Requested info from featured destination	36%
Saved an entire issue	78%
Visited a website listed in the magazine	60%
Rate the magazine as one of my favorites	77%

#### Digital Ad Campaign:

- **Travel Blog:** Hoffman Media will utilize the content created through an advertising campaign to create an online feature on southernladymag.com that will be posted in the dedicated Travel section.

- **ENewsletter:** In addition, Hoffman Media will feature the content in a sponsored eNewsletter to drive additional engagement with the content. Within this post we will provide links and promotion for readers to request travel information provided by VCB.
- **Digital Display Ads:** The content strategy will be enhanced by online display advertising, which will run during the window when the print version of the program is in subscriber hands and available on newsstands and throughout the remainder of 2016. (4-MONTH CAMPAIGN, September-December)
- **Social Media:** The content from the advertising program will be featured in social media posts to drive further engagement with the content.
- **Tablet** versions of the magazine will be included, with the ability to hyperlink advertising with one-click access to VisitBluffton.org.
- **Takeover Day:** To kick off campaign, Bluffton will take over all ad positions on the homepage of southernladymag.com for a 24-hour period.
- **Culinary Traveler Video:** Most travelers are attracted by an enticing culinary destination, and what better way to highlight that than an in-destination video that can easily be updated for growth. We have launched The Culinary Traveler video series and will feature Bluffton with a visit from The Culinary Traveler team.

Bluffton DMO:	\$9,000
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$21,000</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>

### 3. Bluffton Destination Photo & Video Shoot

There is a need for the most current destination imagery and video content that showcases Historic Old Town Bluffton, Calhoun Street Promenade, the natural beauty of the May River, recent expansions at Palmetto Bluff Resort and more. These visuals are at the core of our work across all marketing and sales platforms.

Some of the considerations in planning the photo shoot include:

- 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 of formats

#### 4. Custom Video Content: Men Who Dine Foodie Features

Men Who Dine are a team of NYC-based culinary influencers featured in publications including *New York Daily News* and *New York Observer* and national broadcast on the Food Network and The Cooking Channel.

Sharing their food experiences, Alan and Gennaro connect the public with Michelin chefs, restaurants, events and festivals through social media channels. Followed by celebrity chefs, food critics, travel and culinary media outlets, the Men Who Dine reach over **175,000+ followers on Twitter and 8,000+ followers on Instagram.**

This national media exposure is also planned for a 2016-17 project that would produce video footage of Bluffton's vast culinary scene with short video vignettes that speak to the culture and creativity behind the chefs, restaurants and menus. These culinary travel vignettes would feature local restaurants and chefs while showcasing our unique history and cultural backgrounds. These vignettes provide robust content that allows the VCB and its partners to marketing across website platforms, social channels and digital marketing efforts.

In 2015-16 Hilton Head Island received extraordinary culinary press on the national scene as a result of our social and video content created by Men Who Dine. The VCB will continue this effort by combining the best of culinary and culture throughout Bluffton with: 30 second videos that promote local restaurants and share their inspiration for travel and adventure in Old Town Bluffton.

Potential partners and footage include:

- May River Oysters
- The Pearl
- The Bluffton Room
- The Cottage
- Old Town Dispensary/Depot Restaurant & Raw Bar
- Bluffton BBQ

- Fat Patties
- Buffalo's / Palmetto Bluff Chefs

Potential segments include:

- Behind the Scenes look at the chefs, dishes and world-class surroundings
- Tastes, sights and sounds of Historic Downtown Bluffton
- Additional footage might also allow for a dynamic True View Campaign

Bluffton DMO:	\$8,045
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$13,704</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$21,749</b>

## 5. Organic Search Engine Marketing (SEO), Social Media & Content Hub:

### Organic Search Engine Marketing (SEO)

The VCB plans to continue the program for expanding and broadening 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.

Bluffton DMO:	\$2,220
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$5,180</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$7,400</b>

### Social Content Strategy

We are planning to gain a larger audience using an authentic voice within each platform. Attention to a single network will cultivate a more persuasive personality for the destination. We also plan to gain a deep understanding of each social network's idiosyncrasies and curate platform-specific content that is tracked in real-time.

Users have developed sophisticated network-specific cultures. They can spot an “advertisement” from a mile away and this strategy allows us to avoid top-down conversations while curating ideas for posts and campaigns to be driven by a more bottom-up thought process to satisfy the end user specific to that social feed.

A platform-centric approach will drive better seasonal decisions and choices for sweepstakes, seasonal campaigns and allows for more straightforward testing and tracking of results. If one platform focus doesn't work, another emphasis can be tried. But data will be cleaner and priorities will be easier to rearrange.

We plan to generate conversions on VisitBluffton.org by sending qualified traffic and establishing an ongoing relationship with potential customers through social media content. Our overall goal for this strategy is to increase referral traffic from social media to the website and drive engagement for Bluffton.

We have identified the three key elements to increasing referrals, based on our extensive experience and first-hand research:

- Including links in every post
- Using original, informal photography in most posts, as well as custom graphics
- Combining an emotional connection with a tangible incentive

### **Content Hub: Lowcountry Life**

At the core of all social media channels is the Bluffton Blog which provides original content created by local writers on assignment for the VCB to the content hub on an ongoing basis. These content creators will feature festivals, events, dining, shopping, outdoor and adventures for families. With this authentic storytelling we plan to see a large increase in interactive online engagement with Bluffton aficionados.

### **Audience (Our Fans and Followers)**

Our primary outreach target for social media is “Affluent Leisure Travelers”:

- Household income \$150,000+ who take at least one leisure trip requiring overnight accommodations in the last 12 months
- 92% are married

- 51% are Boomers (born 1946-64)
- 29% are GenXers (born 1965-78)
- 11% are Matures (born before 1946)
- 9% are Echo-Boomers (born 1979-97)
- 51% female and 49% male

Additionally, we would target:

- Younger travelers (GenX and Echo-Boomers) who spend a higher portion of their discretionary income on travel
- Mature travelers who spend a higher portion of their discretionary income on travel, which will grow the multi-gen market as Boomers retire
- NextGen visitors
- Bluffton and area locals who are vocal online supporters
- Passionate visitors who make a tradition of vacationing in the Lowcountry every year

### **Primary Campaigns**

- Target travel, lifestyle and food influencers in the Northeast and Southern United States
- Engage with bloggers and influencers by participating in Twitter Chats
- Target bloggers and influencers to attend Bluffton events
- Engage online with influencers visiting Bluffton during press trips, and continue the relationships afterward
- Create engaging Instagram ad campaigns centered around the unique stories and people of Bluffton

Bluffton DMO:	\$1,500
Beaufort County DMO:	\$6,000
Beaufort County Daufuskie Island:	<u>\$2,500</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$10,00</b>



## 6. Search Engine Marketing (SEM) PPC Campaign:

**Paid Search** is the most **fundamental digital channel** and provides a foundation for nearly all digital marketing initiatives. Our deep expertise and experience would be directly applied to drive outstanding results for the destination.

SEM/PPC marketing is a key driver of VisitBluffton.org website visitation and measurable conversions.

2015-2016 campaigns will include the following:

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

### Search Campaigns

When building search campaigns, there are three different types of search efforts to holistically influence consumers as they reach the end of the purchase journey:

- **Branded Search:** Campaign built to capture demand for Hilton Head Island and ensuring it is not lost to competition by purchasing keywords and serving ads to those specifically looking for Bluffton.
- **Category Search:** Tightly themed ad groups and keywords around categories that target a consumer researching related types of vacations: beach vacation, golf vacations, family vacations, etc.
- **Competitor Search:** To drive purely incremental traffic, we would create competitor targeted campaigns to help capture demand from those researching competition: Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Charleston, etc.

### Enhanced Search

Recent advances in Search Engine Marketing via Google have allowed us to become even more refined in how we influence consumers. The following are ways we will enhance Hilton Head Island efforts:

- **Remarketing Lists for Search Advertising (RLSA):** Increasing or decreasing bids based on consumers past website visitation to the Hilton Head website
- **Household Income:** Google now allows us to increase bids to consumers who reside in zip codes that include the top 20% of income

### **Search Key Metrics**

Search is typically one of the last actions consumers take prior to converting, and we hold it to a higher expectation and measure it based on: Assisted Conversions and Last Click Conversions

### **Video Targeting**

As technology and tools evolve, we are now able to focus efforts to target consumer audiences within specific geographies who are more inclined to visit Bluffton. The VCB's newly developed video content will be featured on True View advertising campaigns that will create brand awareness and drive traffic to the website.

### **Affinity Audiences**

Affinity audiences are those consumers who have established an online profile that categorizes them as potentially interested in visiting Bluffton. It is important to stay in front of these consumers via video distribution to help pull them through the consumer funnel as they start to consider their next vacation experience.

Audiences include

- Travel Buffs
  - Beach bound Travelers
  - Family Vacationers
  - Luxury Travelers
    - Arts
    - History
    - Culture
- Outdoor Enthusiasts
- Sports Enthusiasts (Golf, Tennis & Bike)

## **In-Market Audiences**

In-Market Audiences are defined, based on their online behavior, as consumers actively researching and likely to purchase in the near future. We have the capabilities to isolate the consumers who are specifically looking for travel near Bluffton.

Audiences include:

- Air Travel to
  - Myrtle Beach
  - Atlanta
- Hotel Locations
  - Myrtle Beach
- Hotels By Star Rating
  - 3 Stars
  - 4 Stars
  - 5 Stars

## **Demographics and Geography**

In addition to audience targeting, we will also layer on demographic targeting to further refine and improve performance:

- Ages: 25-64
- Gender: Female for leisure and Male for golf
- Parental Status: Family, Multi-generational
- Household Income: Increase bids to reach those consumers in the top 20% of household income
- Geography: Top International and U.S Markets with key focus on > Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia.  
Our countries of focus are: Canada, Brazil, Germany, France and the UK.

## Video Key Metrics

When determining the success for video campaigns, we will look at metrics indicating that demand and interest is increasing. Over a longer period of time we expect to see increases in volume and performance in lower funnel initiatives.

- Reach
- Frequency
- Survey Results (pending volume minimums are met)
- Search lift for Brand related terms

Bluffton DMO:	\$11,625
Beaufort County DMO:	\$27,126
Beaufort County Daufuskie Island:	<u>\$7,500</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$46,251</b>

## 7. Group, Military & Weddings Market

### Group Tour

Group Tour continues to be a market to maintain current and new relationships. Hilton Head Island and Bluffton continue to be an attractive destination for a hub and spoke opportunity. With Savannah 40 miles away, Beaufort 30 miles, and Charleston just under 2 hours, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton region is ideal for groups to stay in one location for up to a week, and focus on day trips from one central area. We intend to draw group tour visitors by:

- Building relationships with tour operators through ABA
- Leverage group tour
- Educate our partners on what it means to be a group friendly community
- Offer tiered pricing/packages attractions with accommodations
- Expand promotion of group experiences on our website and special group ticket pricing

The **American Bus Association (ABA)**, every January, welcomes the travel and tourism community to the first conference of the year, the industry's premier business event Marketplace. More than 3,500 tour operators, suppliers and exhibitors come together to kick off a new year of business

opportunity and growth. Marketplace is truly an active, vibrant forum of buyers and sellers where business gets done. With more than 140,000 pre-scheduled appointments and 900 pre-qualified operators, Marketplace offers a year's worth of sales meetings in one week. And with legendary networking and social events, attendees turn conversations from the conference floor into long-term business relationships. Couple this with leading education seminars and the industry's largest exhibit hall, the Marketplace is really unmatched as the best industry event each year.

In January 2017, The Visitor & Convention Bureau staff will attend the ABA Marketplace, and take advantage of up to 60 pre-scheduled appointments with pre-qualified operators to promote and sell the Hilton Head Island and Bluffton region.

Bluffton DMO:	\$1,440
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$3,360</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$4,800</b>

### **Military Groups**

With Parris Island in our own backyard, it is important that we reach out and strengthen our destination's relationship with the many families who come to attend graduations, as well as those soldiers on active leave that are required to take some R&R once they return home. We intend to do this by participating in the annual Travel EXPO Parris Island hosts every March. The VCB will participate in this annual travel show, and select service partners and represent Southern Beaufort County.

Bluffton DMO:	\$90
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$210</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$300</b>

### **Wedding SEM**

Bluffton has the leverage to stand out as a premier wedding destination. Bluffton's surroundings, including the May River and majestic live oaks, make it an ideal location for destination weddings. The recently released new Bluffton brand (Bluffton Heart of the Lowcountry) with its romantic undertones, aligns perfectly with creating awareness of Bluffton as an ideal destination wedding location.

The VCB will work with their digital marketing company, Net Conversion, to expand the PPC effort in the most efficient and effective channels as today's consumers or brides search in new ways resulting in the need to continually expand and optimize these efforts.

Bluffton DMO:	\$600
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$1,400</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>

## 8. Bluffton Collateral and Fulfillment

### 2017 Vacation Planner Print and Online:

The VCB will complete and refresh content promoting Bluffton in our 2017 Vacation Planner, including an eight page color section with a map of Calhoun Street and all merchants, art galleries, restaurants, and shops highlighted.

Postage, Shipping and Mail Operations for Bluffton fulfillment for 12 months.

Bluffton DMO:	\$7,800
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$18,200</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$26,000</b>

## 9. Budgeted research programs for FY 2016-17

Research provides powerful information to evolve and perfect the VCB's marketing strategy. Throughout the year we will continue to extract detailed reports and information that guides us in understanding our visitors. These research programs will lead to marketing and advertising initiatives aimed at growing the tourism industry for Bluffton. The following programs will be ongoing:

- Updating and maintenance of ThinkBluffton.org, the Chamber's online economic metrics portal.
- Smith Travel Research weekly and monthly reports which 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.
- Subscription to the US Travel Association's Travel Monitor Program and related reports.



Bluffton DMO:	\$3,000
Beaufort County DMO:	<u>\$7,000</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

## 10. Signature Experiences Program

### Engineering Visitor Experiences: Attracting NEW Visitors & Groups

*Phase III is outlined in this plan. A review of Phase 1, already completed, along with Phase II which is currently in progress can be reviewed below.*

#### About Experience Lab Minneapolis, MN

VCB staff attended the Experience Lab hosted by Joe Veneto with Opportunities Unlimited in Minneapolis, MN in May 2014 to evaluate how Meet Minneapolis, the Minneapolis CVB's meetings and groups sector, developed and executed their signature group experiences program. During this intensive 3 day program VCB staff engaged in Meet Minneapolis' signature group experiences first hand and learned the process Meet Minneapolis and the Minneapolis CVB staff, attractions partners and key stakeholders went through along with Opportunities Unlimited to develop these experiences that actively engage and immerse visitors by providing a deeper, richer and unforgettable destination experience.

Out of the Experience Lab came an understanding of the necessary process the VCB Marketing Council, VCB staff along with our experiential tourism partners must go through to enhance our existing signature experiences and potentially develop new experiences for the groups and meetings sector that can also easily translate to the leisure sector

**HiltonHeadMeetings.org Signature Experiences content development** –Development of content and design of a Signature Experiences section on our official meetings and groups microsite, HiltonHeadMeetings.org is due to go live in July 2016 . **1-2 experiences will be developed for Bluffton.** This section of the microsite will be updated following Phase II of the Experiential Development Process. Tourism partners who agreed to be a part of this opportunity include the following:

- Savor the Lowcountry Culinary Tours
- Coastal Discovery Museum at Honey Horn
- Gullah Heritage Trail Tours

- Heyward House Historic Center & Official Welcome Center
- Mitchelville Preservation Project
- Hilton Head Island Gullah Museum
- Enjoy Daufuskie, LLC.
- Bomboras Grille / Art Café

## **Phase II– In Progress**

Design and develop selected attraction offerings into engaging and immersive Experiences along with tourism partners. Focus on enhancing the Signature Experiences of all designated partners. Design, craft, script and stage new Experiential Product offerings for visitors (in the Meetings, Conventions, Group Tour & Travel & Leisure Market segments) with the key partners.

Experiential Development:

- Enhance the current offerings of the designated partners using the Experience Formula created by Opportunities Unlimited.
- Collaboration with the VCB, Opportunities Unlimited and tourism partners to develop new experiential products.

## **Phase III – Implementation and Promotional Marketing**

### **May – July 2016**

New Experiences will be incorporated into all collateral, promotional and online marketing materials of the VCB and designated partners. Out of eight partners who joined and collaborated on this opportunity, we are pleased to announce that The Heyward House Historic Center has been representing Bluffton in this effort and Enjoy Daufuskie representing Daufuskie Island.

The staff at the Heyward House has been working diligently on their tour experiences both the walking tour, and historic house tour and Bluffton along with visitors will soon benefit from their involvement of this program.

We will know success has been achieved when the following has been accomplished:

- The VCB and its partners have enhanced our current offerings to visitors.
- The VCB Partners have engineered a collection of new experiential offerings for multiple market segments.
- The VCB Partners have completed four high-content workshops:
  - Possibilities & Stories
  - Staging & Scripting Experiences
  - Marketing & Selling Experiences
  - Best Practices for Delivering Experiences
- Monthly meetings and deliverables have been completed to engineer new experiences.
- Experiential Products have been tested with key clients, VCB associates and partners for feedback and insight before market launch.
- Experiences have been incorporated into promotional materials, web content and the Social Media strategies of the VCB and their partners for the Conventions, Small Meetings, Tour & Travel and Consumer markets.
- The VCB has created a tracking program to measure the R.O.I. of Experiential products.

#### **Signature Experiences Phase III Marketing Plan:**

- Refresh of Signature Experiences landing page
- Support Signature Experiences with comprehensive SEM campaign
- Support Signature Experiences with e-promotions to the VCB's Group Planner database, plus purchased access to trade media e-mail promotions.
- Support Signature Experiences with PR pitches to appropriate specialty and general travel writers/editors and media outlets.
- Create Signature Experiences printed marketing pieces for VCB sales staff to use as a sales tool at trade shows and for site visits
- Feature Signature Experiences and Results/ ROI in Local Business and Community Communications/PR.

Bluffton DMO:	\$2,400
Beaufort County DMO:	\$4,100
Beaufort County Daufuskie Island	<u>\$1,000</u>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>\$7,500</b>

## Marketing Plan Appendix

➤ 2016-2017 Budget

➤ 2015 Website & Online Marketing Performance