

SABRE Entry Practice Area: 5. Consumer Marketing (Existing Product)

SABRE Entry Industry Sector: 49. Travel & Tourism

Title of Entry: "Life Opens Up" in Sonoma County

Sonoma County Tourism with Fahlgren Mortine

Brief Description of The Assignment & The Challenge It Presented:

Following the pandemic, as a society people learned to navigate a new way of life and were emboldened to say yes to new adventures and unapologetically prioritize their health and wellbeing in a way they had never done before. In 2022, Sonoma County Tourism understood that consumer priorities had shifted, and the destination was in a unique position to help travelers celebrate their newfound pursuit of wellness. Similarly, research also showed that travelers were increasingly seeking out meaningful and conscientious experiences, especially related to responsible and sustainable travel.

As such, SCT needed to position the destination as an authentic place for personal wellness, renewal and connection while also reinforcing the importance of collective regenerative travel that focuses on the wellness of the destination itself by encouraging visitors to travel responsibly to and throughout Sonoma County. Primary goals were to drive conversion and visitation while also purposefully shifting traveler perceptions about Sonoma County. The program needed to focus on the promotion of sustainable, responsible travel in order to preserve the destination while also reducing barriers to travel and bridging the gap between wellness for oneself and wellness for the destination.

Research & Insight That Contributed to The Creative Strategy:

To begin shifting perceptions and to drive awareness, conversion and visitation, the SCT strategy needed to be integrated and inclusive of paid, earned and owned media.

Several studies informed SCT's campaign strategy for 2022. While analyzing trends, key consumer values that were consistent across multiple audiences included an increased consumer focus on personal wellness, authenticity and connecting deeply to culture and community, equity, responsibility and sustainability. (Gartner, Booking.com, Expedia.com)

Targeting Strategy: To ensure the right audiences were being reached, SCT needed to refine its core audience and target travelers who were open to wellness that was both personal and collective. Fahlgren Mortine helped SCT identify a specific "responsible traveler" audience and included demographic breakdown, behaviors and motivations of this audience that would be considered across all integrated campaign activities. This consumer set would be reach a national audience, encouraging visitation from across the country, as well as regionally and in key direct-flight markets.

In addition to the "responsible traveler" consumer audience, additional stakeholders who should be reached by the campaign were identified, including travel media and influencers, industry and trade publications, planners, local businesses and stakeholders and travel/marketing awards programs.

Brand Message / Positioning: In 2021, SCT launched its "Life Opens Up" campaign which positioned the destination as a place where life could open up following the pandemic - literally - through one-of-a-kind experiences. In 2022, campaign efforts leveraged the existing and established "Life Opens Up" messaging to reinforce the destination's wellness amenities and focus on responsible and sustainable travel.

Details of The Creative Execution:

Integrated activities were executed throughout 2022 which showcased how “Life Opens Up” through the lens of responsible and sustainable travel and with the core pillars of wellness and wellbeing, which included Sonoma County’s abundance of offerings including sustainable food and wine offerings, robust mix of outdoor activities, unique and immersive wellness experiences and laid back luxury that is authentic and easy.

Influencer Marketing: SCT launched an influencer-focused campaign that highlighted the importance of setting an intention an intention prior to traveling in order to maximize the benefits from the vacation. SCT partnered with wellness experts to learn more about setting intrinsic travel goals and then partnered with four groups of influencers to put practices into place. Each influencer group set a specific intention for their trip (i.e., Relax & Renew, Spark Creativity, etc.) and then carefully crafted an itinerary with the end goal in mind. Itineraries were put to the test and the experiences were captured and shared on partner social channels and on SCT’s digital platforms.

Paid Media: Paid media assets showcased beautiful images of wellness offerings and activities throughout the region, while key messaging encouraged responsible travel to and throughout the destination. For paid media, audiences were driven to key SCT channels where information about wellness, responsible and sustainable travel could be found. Additionally, assets captured from the Intentional Itineraries program were used for paid media efforts and traffic was driven back to the Intentional Itineraries portion of the SCT site for potential visitors to learn more. Separately, Fahlgren Mortine partnered with Matador Network on behalf of Sonoma County to create and promote assets with Matador that showcased SCT’s focus on responsible travel and sustainability.

Public Relations: PR outreach focused on stories that celebrated wellness and wellbeing and encouraged responsible travel to and throughout the destination. National outreach aligning to key story pillars was conducted, as well as specific market activities including deskside visits in LA and Dallas, TX. SCT also hosted Good Morning Texas in the region for a series of segments which showcased the campaign’s focus on responsible and sustainable travel.

Results:

In 2022, Sonoma County Tourism's integrated promotional efforts led to an increase in incremental trips, as well as incremental visitor spend while in Sonoma County, that would not have materialized in the absence of these activities. PR and influencer efforts generated relationships nationally and in key markets, increasing awareness among key media and partners about SCT’s focus on responsible travel and sustainability, as well as reinforcing Sonoma County as a premier wellness destination.

One study about paid media efforts specifically pointed to an increase in ROI of \$27 in taxes for each ad dollar spent, which directly impacts how tourism sustains and diversifies the local tax base. The same ROI study also reported that Sonoma County has a strong “halo effect” as a destination, where visitation by tourists has produced a positive perception about economic development - proving Sonoma County is not just a destination, but a great place to live, build a career, gain an education and start a business.