

Rural County Marketing

Entry: Gilchrist County Blueway Trail Marketing Campaign

TARGET AUDIENCE

As a rural area having two rivers bordering 55-miles of our county Gilchrist County has become a springs capital destination, Gilchrist County primarily targets outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy exploring unique destinations for all their water adventures. In this particular marketing campaign the advertising targeted visitors traveling from the United States - including major markets in Jacksonville, Atlanta and Tampa.

OBJECTIVE

In general the objective is to provide sustainable recreational opportunities that also encourages stewardship and the protection of natural resources of Gilchrist County. To attract paddlers to come and explore Gilchrist County that enhance economic impacts and creates economic opportunity upon which to build a viable nature tourism industry in Gilchrist. To assist and enhance existing businesses along the Santa Fe and Suwannee Rivers. To incubate new, environmentally friendly businesses along the rivers. To generate civic pride and to protect place and the quality of life in Gilchrist County.

IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to development, production and execution of the overall blueway/springs campaign, the Gilchrist County Tourist Development Council conducted several meetings early March 2014 with key interest groups. The first meeting was with Mark Gluckman, an enthusiast kayaker with knowledge of map designing. Mr. Gluckman along with several local outfitters spends numerous hours kayaking the waters plotting the map with GPS indicators and points of interest. He there made arrangements to have Taylor Stein with the University of Florida conduct a UF student Blueway Assessment project formally recognizing that UF would be undertaking the project. The students conducted site investigations where they divided the 55 miles into day and overnight segments, that way each student would paddle portions of the Santa Fe and Suwannee with some camping along the way. They individually and collectively assessed the Blueway's strengths and weaknesses to attract paddlers to Gilchrist. Upon the completion of the map design and student assessment report the TDC determined to have 5,000 copies of the Gilchrist Blueway Trail Map produced. Production of a video was conducted with video sequences highlighting the splendor of the Gilchrist Blueway Trail. The marketing was in full campaign during the Fall/Spring travel seasons. The TDC continues to market Gilchrist as the destination to beat the summer heat come unwind relax and play in one of our springs.

The multi-media marketing mix included: Russell Mick conducted a video shoot on Gilchrist County's Blueway Trail and springs which is featured as a YouTube on VISIT FLORIDA , online video ad placements, magazine print ads, highway billboard ad and collateral.

RESULTS

The marketing campaign has outperformed all our expectations. Results from the campaign (based on fiscal summer & 2014 and spring 2015 compared to fiscal years 2013 & 2014) include a 45% increase in overall tax collection revenue, which already exceeds the prior two years fall & spring combined. Being a county with only a handful of cottages for rent our tax revenue stems mainly from camping. Also noting that all the campgrounds in Gilchrist County are on the Santa Fe or Suwannee Rivers.

Fall of 2014 increase traffic was reported on both the Santa Fe & Suwannee Rivers. Winter is usually an off season for camping in Gilchrist County but this past winter campgrounds had a 15% increase.

During the month of May several campgrounds in the county were at full capacity with park managers stating this has never happened and contributed the visitor increase with the Gilchrist Blueway Trail/Springs Marketing Campaign. There has also been a very visible increase in international travelers camping at one of the springs.

BUDGET/COSTS

Overall campaign budgeted was - \$XXX

- Production cost of developing and producing 25,000 copies of the Gilchrist Blueway Trail Map was - \$XXX
- Production of 5-print ads was - \$XXX
- Production of 1-billboard & 10,000 plastic tote gas was - \$XXX
- Actual marketing campaign cost was - \$XXX