



# EXCITE, ENTICE & ENGAGE

CVB marketing campaigns that are driving success with groups.

BY WENDY HELFENBAUM



To cut through all the noise in cyberspace and in meeting planners' inboxes, convention bureaus around the world have had to become incredibly creative. After all, everyone claims to be cutting-edge, state-of-the-art and bucket list-worthy. But as today's event organizers juggle increasingly long lists of expectations with smaller bottom lines, CVBs are coming up with new ways to entice, excite and engage people's imaginations. Here's how five successful marketing campaigns have managed to stand out.

## SCOTLAND

When the Scottish government and its agencies began to focus on global tourism, they launched a series of themed years beginning with the "Year of the Homecoming" in 2009. These themes—which subsequently included food, drink and sport—provide a cohesive banner for all the messaging that comes out from Scotland over a 12-month period. This increases the strength of the messaging and the touchpoints through which they reach consumers and investors, says Richard Knight, Americas director of marketing for VisitScotland.

"That first themed year was about us reaching out to the world and getting them to connect with Scotland with a view to their ancestry, their roots, their historical connections," he says. "There are 55 million Scots worldwide who now live abroad, so that was a great link, but we've learned since then that we needed to look at lots of other connections as well."

Enter 2018's "Year of Young People." Because Knight's team is seeing a transition in the industry where many of the delegates, planners and clients represent the next generation, they're appealing to a younger audience that craves adventure and innovation.

"It's very clear to us that the requirements of planning incentives or conferences worldwide are changing; we're seeing that the programs need to be more fluid, and people want to experience the destination on their own terms, rather than having pre-prescribed itineraries to follow," he says.

To that end, VisitScotland has taken stock of its 5,000 years of culture and put modern twists on it, such as offering up a contemporary version of traditional Scottish folk music, staged in one of the country's 800 castles.

"In this campaign, we're showing that we are a very vibrant, forward-looking, innovative, modern country," Knight says. "We have some of the most technologically advanced convention centers in the world, including Wi-Fi networks, modern hotels and transportation. We're using this campaign as something to add strings to our bow, and strengthen the message and appeal to that new generation of planner and delegate."

Scotland is seeing great numbers from North America, he says. About 25 percent of the traffic into the country is business travel, and over the past 18 months, 90,000 new direct seats into the country have been added.

As Millennials grow into leadership roles, Knight says, they're seeking out destinations that match their preferences. The Year of Young People campaign highlights them and the business visitors Scotland is hoping to attract.

## WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

Marcheta Cole Keefer, director of marketing and communications for Visit Winston-Salem (N.C.), is a big fan of advance prep work. Long before creative work started on the region's "Thought You Knew Us, Meet the New Us" campaign, her team worked tirelessly to find out what planners liked and disliked about the city and the Benton Convention Center, which was about to undergo a massive renovation.

"Before the sledgehammer hit the wall, we wanted to know what our customers thought about the existing building," she says. An independent tourism research firm set up two blind focus groups in Raleigh, a mix of current clients, ones that had not been back for a while and prospective buyers.

"It was fascinating, because the same sentiment came up over and over: The Benton is a functional space, it's the right size, it's centrally located, but it's a bland box that didn't connect with the vibrant downtown feel of Winston," Cole Keefer says.

Because of the disconnect between the convention center and downtown, the architectural plans became more flexible, and Cole Keefer's team commissioned original works of art by North Carolina-based artists in mixed media to add punches of color.

"That research strengthened and connected all the other marketing executions and elements within the campaign," she says. "People thought they knew but we wanted to show them the 'new us.' We really wanted to insert ourselves back into the conversations in a vibrant new way. That's where the marketing came in."

The Benton stayed open for business throughout the 20-month construction, and the marketing campaign evolved as various sections of the center were completed, Cole Keefer says.

"It was reflective of what was going on, and we bombarded customers with construction updates in trade publications, in emails and with video. We have an incredible drone photographer here, and he did lots of construction fly-bys so everyone could see the transformation happening."

When the building re-opened on time, business rebounded immediately, reports Cole Keefer, whose team is just launching a new Hometown Referral Program. Capitalizing on the US\$1 billion

that's been invested in downtown developments including the Benton, this local campaign is reaching out to residents from a sales perspective, encouraging them to book conferences, sporting events and group tours.

"Now that our downtown has had this resurgence, we wanted to introduce the concept of 'you can bring your meeting here,'" she says. "Having this diverse, continuous flow of leads for events in your city is like the cherry on top of the icing on top of the cake."

## THE HAGUE & ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

When two neighboring cities combine marketing forces, everybody wins, says Zhenya Starkova, public relations spokesperson for The Hague Convention Bureau (THCB). That's the concept behind a double-duty campaign called "Going Dutch to Go Dutch."

"In the last few years, there has been a very strong urge to not have a lot of individual campaigns, but try to have a more integrated approach to marketing the city," she says. "Each marketing organization puts its own flavor on it, and uses it for different purposes or markets."

The Hague will host the MPI European Meetings & Events Conference in 2019. When the city created "Seaside Celebration" to mark its 200 years of being a year-round beach destination, THCB jumped onboard too.

"We had noticed that even in some of the closest countries to us, and also in North America, people weren't aware that we are the only seaside city in the Netherlands, or even that we had a beach, so this was an incredible opportunity for us to communicate a really important unique selling point for the city," Starkova says.

For acquisitions in the corporate and incentive markets, she says, they create interesting content related to activities in the city that delegates can take part in.

"We tell stories about venues connected to the seaside. For example, we have fantastic beach clubs and museums which could be used for small events," Starkova says. "We try to tie that content to the venues and the possibilities that are for both event organizers and the delegates. We really aim for recurrent business by creating a really wonderful experience for both the delegates and the event organizers when they come to the city."

Catherine Kalamidas (MPI Netherlands Chapter), an account manager for international conferences at the Rotterdam Partners Convention Bureau, notes that for the North American market, the two cities combined efforts to present an enticing European option for groups.

"Rotterdam is an equally interesting and exciting city, but in a totally different way from The Hague," she says. "We've got the harbor, many different nationalities in the city, lots of history and architecture. Rotterdam is sometimes called the old city with a new heart; it's been in existence since



VISIT SCOTLAND-DEVELOPMENT COUNSELLORS INTERNATIONAL



THE HAGUE CONVENTION BUREAU-DEVELOPMENT COUNSELLORS INTERNATIONAL

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centers interspersed with the remaining buildings that survived. It’s actually quite moving.”

Kalamidas adds that combining the strong “peace and justice” aspect of The Hague alongside Rotterdam’s young vibe, planners can get the total package.

“It competes very well with cities like Amsterdam or even Barcelona. We offer something very, very different from what other cities do,” she says. “What a lot of people don’t know is that both cities are on the same metro line, and they’re about a half-hour ride apart. So when you have a conference in Rotterdam, delegates can go to The Hague to enjoy the museums, or with a conference in The Hague, delegates can get to Rotterdam and do a river tour.”

## DETROIT

When an entire city transitions from being “America’s Great Comeback City” to “Detroit: It’s Go Time,” chances are they mean business.

“Detroit is in the midst of an important and swift transformation, and there came a point where we realized early in 2017 that we don’t have to say we’re the comeback city anymore, because we’re back,” says Renee Monforton, director of marketing and communications for the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB). “And the new generation of people and visitors don’t even know that we came back. Detroit is just Detroit. So it was time for a new campaign.”

With hundreds of groups coming to Detroit in 2018, the goal is to expand further.

“Our product is getting better and better every day and we’re getting more hotel rooms—we have over 5,000 downtown and over 40,000 throughout the tri-county area—which gives us the opportunity to go for bigger and bigger groups,” Monforton says.

In its campaign development preparations, DMCVB conducted lots of critical research.

“We can’t just put out a message that people don’t buy into,” Monforton says. “We worked with our agency and they did considerable research of meeting planners and leisure visitors to find out what they’re looking for in a destination and how Detroit matches up.”

Creative elements were vetted through visitors and meeting planners afterwards. The team is also launching a digital food show on YouTube this month that will reflect more than 100 newly opened restaurants from the past year or so.

“It’s all about the diligence behind the scenes, making sure you understand who your audience is and what their expectations are,” says Chris Pokorski, advertising manager for the DMCVB. “And also, being true to yourself in understanding, from a destination, what are your strong suits? What differentiates you from another destination?”

the mid 1200s, but was destroyed during World War II and rebuilt. So there’s a really interesting combination of very modern buildings, hotels and state-of-the-art conference

DMCVB’s campaign will also play nicely into the major investments coming into the city. Last year saw the launch of the \$800 million, 50-block District Detroit, centered by a new arena, with more build-out expected in the future.

“We’re also introducing a lot of boutique hotels to the market, three of which are opening this year,” Monforton says. “We have a streetcar line that opened last year, which connects our Riverfront through our entertainment district up through our museum and cultural district. It’s another nice way to get meeting delegates around the city.”

## JAPAN

Launched in February, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)’s latest campaign aims to entice the North American meetings market. With the tagline “New Ideas Start Here,” the program hopes to better communicate its brand to groups, says Yurino Murai (MPI Greater New York City Chapter), director of the JNTO’s New York office.

“We want the market to know about Japan’s advantages as an innovative and exciting meetings and events destination that has the support of local convention bureaus all over the country,” she explains. “Not only does Japan have a unique culture and advanced technology, but it also succeeds as an academic, business and industrial leader with the ability to support business events in these industries and beyond.”

JNTO produced a slick video focusing on the international convention market, and revamped its website to launch the three-year marketing campaign.

“We enhanced the site with information on cities and venues all over the country, and it features easy-to-use search capabilities and an extended list of suppliers to help planners organize events and easily get in touch with the right partners across Japan,” says Murai, whose team created the new brand logo and tagline in 2015. “At that time, we had a focus group and did a lot of interviews to discuss the brand concept. We decided to rebuild our brand communication strategy and develop our promotional campaign in the target market. To reveal what wasn’t working before and to get future insight, we are now conducting basic perception surveys and interviews with market leaders.”

For CVBs contemplating re-brands, Murai suggests backing up your campaign with support from partner bureaus.

“Our 12 MICE-ready cities are well set up for what we anticipate will be increased interest from North America,” she explains. “We also think it is very important that your campaign matches and amplifies the assets already existing in your country. Japan is known for innovation and we’re not shying away from that. This campaign will shine a light on what we do well to ensure that planners and event attendees have the best experiences possible.” ■