

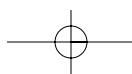
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Photos provided courtesy of the Canadian Tourism Commission



By: Sandra Phinney

Feature Story

T Atlantic Canada is pulling out all the stops to show travel media and tourists alike why the East Coast is the **ultimate** vacation destination

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Out with the old, in with the new! According to the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), the way we used to market Canada is passé. Goodbye vast open landscapes, hello vibrant Canada—a progressive colorful nation full of people, art, architecture, culture, shopping, music, culinary traditions, fashion and nightlife. Oh yeah, we also guarantee plenty of stunning scenery and as much adventure as you can handle.

Although the branding campaign is hardly out of the starting gate, it's already a huge hit. People are paying attention to the bold and brassy message that implies, "We're hot. We're sexy. We're with the times. We want you to visit us, and we mean it."

Newfoundland and Labrador needed precious little convincing to jump on the branding bandwagon. Generating \$820 million in annual revenue and employing 47,000 people directly and indirectly, Newfoundland and Labrador's tourism industry is reaching for the moon. In fact, the government's so excited about its potential that it stretched its marketing coffers from \$6 million to \$11 million in the recent spring budget. It also earmarked \$104,000 to implement an outfitting sector strategy and \$100,000 to develop a cultural tourism strategy.

Newfoundland is not the only Atlantic province to set its sights on tourism as a rising economic star. Throughout the region, tourism budgets are up and more staff are being allocated to the sector at both the provincial and municipal levels.

So how does one go about getting results when there are four provinces competing, in some cases, for the same dollar? Partnering is one solution. The old adage that the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts has never been truer.





Old brand Canada focused on the vast open spaces and rustic scenery shown above. New brand Canada promotes the vibrant and exciting activities the country has to offer. Photos provided courtesy of the Canadian Tourism Commission.

In Southwest Nova Scotia, for example, areas like Yarmouth, Clare and Argyle are all vying for the same bucks. In the past, cooperation amongst stakeholders was as foreign as fleas in a freezer. “Many operators were on autopilot as ferries reliably delivered a steady stream of visitors year after year,” says Larry Peach, Tourism Development manager for the South West

Shore Development Authority (SWSDA). “This all changed in 2005 with the discontinuation of the Scotia Prince service.” Ferry capacity dropped 50 per cent at a time when American visitation was already flat.

Not a pretty picture for a region that was dependant on tourism dollars. But it didn’t take long for the SWSDA to kick into gear, creating a Yarmouth-Acadian shores team

to help rescue the sinking industry.

IN A NUTSHELL, the town of Yarmouth and the municipalities of Clare and Argyle, along with tourism operators and a variety of interested parties started a five-year tourism initiative. Participants focused on product development, developing market readiness and upping standards. Overall, the goals are to change the image of the region from a gateway to a destination and to diversify the region’s markets.

A new Yarmouth and Acadian Shores cooperative project was just launched, promoting each other’s attractions, festivals and events, and 50 operators signed up for a Total Market Readiness business development program. Peach adds: “Visitors don’t see municipal boundaries, so why should we?”

At the provincial level, partnering is not new. In 1994, the Atlantic provinces and their tourism industries came together with the federal government and created the Atlantic Canada Tourism Partnership (ACTP). Since then, along with promoting the region in domestic markets, the partnership has mounted four major campaigns in key international markets. “As a result,

Atlantic Canada now holds a stronger competitive position in these target markets, and the region's economy has benefited," says Colleen Bowes, representing ACTP.

Of particular interest is the Overseas Marketing Program which markets all four provinces under a regional brand in order to grow visitation and revenues from specific target markets. Since 2003, visits have increased by 41 per cent. Overall, between 2003 and 2006, ACTP exceeded its objectives. Its three-year return on investment (ROI) was \$16.83 for every dollar invested, well above the objective of 10:1.

There are many ways in which agencies and tourism departments parade their wares to the world, from ad campaigns to trade shows, direct-mail, consumer guides, creative websites and e-newsletters to name a few. But there is a growing appreciation for one more hunk of the marketing pie—the kind provided by travel writers, film crews and broadcasters. ACTP's media relations program, which includes paying air and ground expenses of visiting media, generated the equivalent of \$5 million worth of advertising from stories that appeared in magazines, newspapers and television.

BRUCE BISHOP is a freelance writer, travel editor of *The European Reporter*, and head of BruceBishop.com where he coordinates and manages press trips for tourism industry clients. "Editorial is very valuable," Bishop says. "One of the stats I found years ago is that a person is seven times more likely to go somewhere if he has read a good story about the place...."

Tourist boards, travel agencies, hotel companies and airlines are well aware of the cost-effectiveness of a favourable media review. For example, it would cost \$26,046 U.S. to place a one page ad in auto club magazine *AAA Living* and \$19,000 CDN in *Air Canada's* in-flight magazine, *EnRoute*. Newspapers charge by the column inch: *The Globe & Mail's* fee is \$587.48 per inch and *The New York Times* is about the same, only in U.S. dollars. A feature page in a newspaper could quickly inch up to over \$500,000. Unless a hospitality service provider or tourism operator has a marketing budget in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, it's not possible for them to buy this kind of advertising, so a travel story about a location, product or service is worth a vast amount in free advertising.

From Bruce Bishop's perspective, offsetting costs to host the media is a small price to pay for the return and he encourages operators to kick in with products and services.

Randy Brooks, manager of Media Relations for Tourism, Culture and Heritage in Nova Scotia has extolled the power of the press and its benefit to the tourism industry for ages. "Last year my budget was about \$120,000 and 90 per cent of it was spent on hosting travel media." In turn, this generated a cool \$50.8 million in travel clips and documentaries related to Nova Scotia—a gob-smacking 470:1 return on investment.

Like other provincial tourism departments, Brooks takes care of air and ground transportation, accommodations and meals for journalists. Yet his biggest challenge is to get industry to come on side and provide complimentary accommodations, meals and programs—or at least to cost-share. So far, the Province is picking up most of the tab.

VALERY KIDNEY used to take care of the media program for New Brunswick Tourism and Parks for many years before starting her own business, Valery Kidney and Associates, two years ago. She's still

involved in tourism and travel media relations and is in tune with the needs of the industry.

Kidney says that from 1993 to 2005 the Province of New Brunswick went from \$10 million in editorial coverage to \$72 million with an ROI of 257:1. That is, for every dollar spent on a travel writer, the Province realized \$257 in coverage. “The only downside with editorial is people want instant results. This is not the way it works.”

The marketing specialist cited how the Province hosted two journalists six years ago who wrote about Grand Manan and the Bay of Fundy. “We waited and waited—five years later the article appeared in Delta Sky Magazine, circulation: millions. New Brunswick received 10 four-colour pages including the cover. Worth the wait in every way!”

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND author and freelance writer Julie Watson jumps in and elaborates from a travel writer’s point of view: “We tell people about the interesting things we find. We pass information along about our own experience. No one is telling us what to say or how to say it, so what we do say has more credibility....”

Watson offers this advice for anyone who hosts travel writers: “Realize that they can’t usually get assignments before a visit. They need to find the story—the unique angle—before they can market the story.” She also suggests that industry needs to look beyond the traditional media to spread the word about their region. “Small niche publications may not have huge readerships but they are targeted. Think of it: if you have a violin maker in your town, consider bringing in folks who write for musicians’ publications. Look for travel writers who have broad horizons.”

A travel writer who recently stayed at the Fishers’ Loft Inn in Port Rexton, Newfoundland had a piece published this past April in *The Globe & Mail* featuring six of the best places to visit “mother nature’s handiwork.” One place she wrote about was the Skerwink Trail in Newfoundland and in the course of writing the article she made reference to the inn where she stayed, resulting in 70 phone calls.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” says innkeeper John Fisher. Result? Forty bookings. “Although we’re fairly large with 21 rooms, 17 staff, and we gross three quarters of a million dollars, we couldn’t possibly spend the money on this kind of advertising. So the only way to do this is to make ourselves interesting and get media to cover us.”

ABM

Think Ink



Remember the reference to Fishers' Loft that recently appeared in *The Globe & Mail* resulting in 40 bookings? Barbara Ramsay Orr wrote that. Orr, a veteran lifestyle writer who concentrates on travel writing, delivered a pep talk to a tourism symposium last year. She called it "Think Ink". After telling her audience about the benefits of travel writing to the industry, she said, "So now you know why you want the attention of writers like me. But how do you get us to write about you?"

- Let me know you exist. Join an organization like the Travel Media Association of Canada. Start a database of writers, media outlets, editors and send us your profile.
 - Let me know what's new. Send me bulletins (short and dramatic works best). Make sure there is something new.
 - Invite me to visit. Invest the money in a press visit. Provide me with a story. Is there a gardener at your inn who has taken care of the gardens for 20 years who can tell me great stories and give me valuable background information? He is worth more to me than a tour of the rooms and a pamphlet extolling your property.
 - Follow up. After a decent interval, contact me to see if I need anything else. But don't hound me. I may never be able to write about you, even after all of your generosity and time. I will do my best but sometimes publications fold, articles are delayed or editors change their mind.
 - Have a good media kit. This doesn't mean loading me down with paper.
- Invest in a really good business card, a CD with top notch visuals and a superb website.
- Be quick to respond to media requests. Be accessible. This means giving out your home phone as well as your cell phone.
 - Treat the media as you would your best customer or client. Remember the media are very busy and the better you can help them by providing information, story ideas and leads, the more effective you will be in getting your business name or story in the media.
 - If you can afford a media specialist (like Bruce Bishop and Valery Kidney from the preceding article) hire one.
 - Don't expect to see a proof of the unpublished article. It's usually against the publication's policy and it's not considered "good form" to ask. Trust the writer.
 - Finally, publicize the publicity. Make hay with it. Make it work to your advantage. And take the time to say thank you.