

MISSISSIPPI RIVER COUNTRY (MRC)

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

BASED ON MARKETING PLAN

(APPROVED SEPTEMBER 10, 2007)

MISSION

Promote travel to 10 Mississippi River states.

VISION

To be an effective regional travel marketing organization.

GOALS

1. Market the MRC in Japan to the travel trade and media

(For complete Japan marketing results, please review Advanced International's quarterly reports at <http://mrpcmembers.com/mrc.php>)

Tracking: Media coverage and three media visits to MRC states, increase in unique Web visits

- a. **Maintain representation in Japan:** On-going through Advanced International
- b. **Develop one major pay-to-play:** Launched the first of two FAM tours featuring Japanese travel writers representing a variety of media. The first FAM included Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa and took place from October 6-13. Representatives from the National Office escorted the tour.
- c. **Host at least three media to the MRC**
 - i. Obtained inclusion in 5 travel trade pieces, 3 consumer guidebook articles, 23 magazine articles, 9 website pieces and 24 broadcast programs for a print value media equivalent of \$15,968,589 and a broadcast value media equivalent of \$33,787,506
 - ii. Ocean Life Magazine (Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana throughout 2009)
Ocean Life, a magazine for boating enthusiasts focusing on travel

and lifestyle, produced a 10-state, 10-issue featuring a 6-page story on each state along the Mississippi River. Delta Air Lines sponsored the series. There are also plans to use the material collected for Ocean Life Magazine in a travel book to be published by Hankyu Communications.

- iii. LA Kai New Orleans FAM trip, (Louisiana, July 2009)
- iv. Fall FAM tour featuring eight Japanese travel writers to the Northern segment of Mississippi River Country (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa , October, 2009) Two radio broadcasts were made in October and one story for the trip was published in December. Additional inclusions as a result of the FAM will run in 2010.
- v. Elvis 75th Birthday FAM (Memphis and Mississippi, November) Six journalists participated and stories began appearing in 2009 and will continue in 2010.

d. Maintain regular communication with travel trade

- i. E-newsletters distributed in March, June, and November in 2009 to approximately 2,000 travel trade and media with each mailing featuring participatory sports, river cruising, food and agricultural opportunities, music tourism and agri-tourism.
- ii. Assisted with Yomiuri Shimbun, largest nationwide newspaper (circ. 6 million), on information on presidential history for stories surrounding Barack Obama's inauguration
- iii. Travel and lifestyle magazine for Shinkin Visa gold cardholders required assistance in planning a visit to Memphis for their planned 35-page story on nostalgic travel in the U.S. The crew visited January 27-29. The story was published in late March.
- iv. Attended Kanku Travel Fair at the Kansai International Airport, a consumer travel fair on March 28-29. Members of Japan Visit

USA Committee participated for the first time as there was no booth rental fee. The fair attracted a total of 32,000 visitors. With the March launch of the Northwest/Delta service from Kansai International to Narita connection all Northwest/Delta flights to the US. This addition makes travel from Osaka and Western Japan smoother and more convenient.

- v. Proofread a story for Patchwork Quilt, a monthly magazine for quilting enthusiast on a feature on Louisiana quilting and travel. The article was published in April 2009 issue (distributed in March).
- vi. PR agency for Maker's Mark in Japan required assistance for a media FAM trip to Kentucky to visit Maker's Mark in April.
- vii. Horseback Riding, a monthly magazine for riding enthusiasts, did a story on horses in Kentucky. The article was written by Norio Konno, who was involved in the Ocean Life FAM trip. The story was in the August issue (published in late June). He will also publish a story on traveling with horses in Hot Springs, AR in 2010. Both stories were additional opportunities that arose from his visits to the region.
- viii. InterFM, a Tokyo bilingual radio station, was invited to cover the Belease Street Music Festival. Due to H1N1 they canceled their plan, but they are in discussion to reschedule.
- ix. Junglecity.com, a travel information website for Japanese living in US requested information on new tourism attractions.
- x. Attended Pow Wow making appointments with Japanese delegates to inform them of MRC states.
- xi. TV Japan, a New York-based producer of Japanese television programming for NHK and other major networks met at Pow Wow to discuss interest in a Blues documentary. Follow-up to continue.

- xii. Arranged a meeting with Buffalo Records, an independent music label in Japan releasing music from emerging Louisiana artists, and the New Orleans CVB to bring artists to Japan.
- xiii. TBS Vision, a satellite channel of major national network produced a year-long show called “Take it Easy” on American culture and less well-known destination. Assisted with information on Illinois and accommodations in Chicago for an early July visit.
- xiv. Active America follow-up thanking operators for meeting and offered assistance for tour planning as needed.
- xv. Alltech FEI Games was discussed with officials of Alltech Japan. ISM Inc, a Japanese tour operator, is interested in offering tours during the games and developing more Kentucky product. Presented at a day-long seminar for clients on June 25th to make brief remarks about Kentucky tourism and provide the approximately 70 people in attendance Kentucky information. Also assisted with introducing potential sponsors.
- xvi. Assisted with Noveau, a TV production company in Osaka, to film a travel program featuring Kentucky. Filming has been moved to spring 2010.
- xvii. DiscoverAmerica week Media Marketplace took place in September. MRC with MN representative had a table. The marketplace attracted 52 members of the travel trade and general media and it generated 11 new inquiries for the MRC.
- xviii. Provided information for the Memphis in May BBQ Contest to Dentsu, Japan’s largest advertising agency, who is creating a BBQ contest in Japan.
- xix. InterFM also developed a series of 5 short features on Memphis and Elvis to commemorate Elvis’ birthday celebrations. Programs are 5-10 minutes during popular afternoon show and featuring

reports by Mr. Amatatsu, a music expert and participant in the November FAM to Memphis and Mississippi. Features will also appear on their website.

- xx. Worked with Sony Music to provide Memphis and Mississippi FAM participants with a special collection of Elvis music to celebrate the 75th birthday. Sony Music is interested in doing a sweepstakes promotion in 2010 for fans that would include a trip to Memphis.
- xxi. Globetrotter 2010 Travel Trends Book, the largest guidebook publisher producing a consumer travel book featuring the trendiest, often undiscovered destination for Japanese each year in December. The first issue in 2009 produced remarkable results with over 50% of readers actually taking a trip as a result of the book. The editor of the book attended the fall FAM and he was able to attain new information and photos for future editions. Information was also featured on the website for the book.

e. Maintain and update Japanese Web site:

	i. Total	Trade	Media	Consumer/Others
Total	440	171	209	124
All	238	104	130	54
Arkansas	27	31	9	6
Illinois	31	3	24	4
Iowa	19	0	19	0
Kentucky	77	13	42	22
Louisiana	68	29	14	25
Minnesota	64	25	16	23
Mississippi	122	28	67	27
Missouri	9	1	5	3
Tennessee	137	28	87	22
Wisconsin	83	18	50	15

- ii. Promoted a contest with Café du Monde from April 24-July 20th to promote a grand prize trip to New Orleans. The campaign page linked to the New Orleans information the MRC Japanese website and generated 340 visitors to the site. Reports were posted from the visitors of the contest to the website.
- iii. Café du Monde held a second sweepstakes campaign for customers that ran from October to December. A total of 230 visitors came to the site.

f. Attend JATA

- i. Redesigned booth with a larger size for a more prominent space, more interactive construction with a music theme and music trivia quiz and fresh use of photos throughout the 10-states
- ii. Representative from Minnesota participated in the booth
- iii. Attracted 110,784 visitors: 71,240 consumers and 39,544 travel trade and press. Nearly 1,500 more visitors than last year attended.
- iv. New format offered 10 scheduled appointments, as well as walk-ups
- v. Generated 53 new inquiries for MRC, 8 more than last year
- vi. A happy hour reception was held at the close of the first day for travel executives and media
- vii. An auction and entertainment were held to encourage traffic as there was concern with poor consumer turnout—but turnout was very good

g. Distribute multi-state itineraries

- i. A total of 16 travel packages were offered in the Spring/Summer 09 season including Itasca, MN, Pepin, WI, Prairie du Chien, WI, Chicago, IL, Galena, IL, Des Moines, IA, Dubuque, IA, Cape Girardeau, MO, Hannibal, MO, St. Louis, MO, Mammoth Cave NP, KY, Memphis, TN, Nashville, TN, Gatlinburg/Smoky

- Mountains NP, TN, Clarksdale, MS, Jackson, MS, Natchez Trace Parkway/Natchez, MS, Tupelo, MS, Vicksburg, MS, Lake Charles, LA, New Orleans, LA, River Road Region, LA
- ii. A total of 10 MRC travel packages were offered in the Fall/Winter 09 tour compared to 4 the same period last year, including Chicago, IL, Baton Rouge, LA, Lake Charles, LA, New Orleans, LA, River Road Region, LA, Minneapolis, MN, Jackson, MS, Natchez Trace Parkway/Natchez, MS, Tupelo, MS, Gatlinburg/Smoky Mountains NP, TN, Memphis, TN, Nashville, TN
 - iii. Delta is offering special fares for tour operators to use the additional Atlanta service so meetings were held to consider new MRC tour options for Spring 2010. Their new product will feature the southern half of the region. They are planning tours for 2010 aimed at Japanese retired baby boomers who grew up on US culture—especially Elvis. The tour will include Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans. Planning advice and images were provided for the marketing brochure.

2. **Increase awareness of Mississippi River states to group tour markets**

Tracking: Inquiries into state tour coordinators (annual survey interest) and annual review of interest in itineraries

a. **Develop multi-state itineraries**

- i. Created three multi-state itineraries in 2009: Music Trail, Eco-tours and Agri-tours

b. **Place itineraries on the Web and distribute to 10 states**

(<http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com/itineraries.cfm>)

c. **Develop MRC profile sheet**—the profile sheet was completed in 2008.

Our follow-up goal was to distribute the profile sheet. A group tour packet was created that included the profile sheet, fulfillment piece, reply

postcard to be added to the mailing list and receive the photo CD, and a copy of the current itineraries.

d. **Develop and distribute photo CDs**

(<http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com/photo-categories.cfm>) The group tour packet was mailed using a list provided by Minnesota. Nearly 1,500 packets were distributed. 120 group tour planners requested a copy of the photo CD and to be placed on the mailing list for additional information. Those inquires were fulfilled. The leads were forwarded to the states and were considered to be quality leads.

3. **Improve Web and e-marketing programs**

Tracking: Survey results, open rates, Web activity: See attached web site statistics report and updated pages at [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com).

- a. **Add opt in email opportunities**—registered 940 new email subscribers in 2009
- b. **Send monthly e-newsletters**—launched a monthly e-newsletter highlighting one state event each month and information on the other nine states along with a contest to encourage open rates and interaction with readers

	# of Recipients	# Opened	% Opened	# Click-Thrus	# % Click-Thrus	Contest Entries
January issue (LA)	1,759	663	38%	301	17%	157
February issue	1,826	604	33%	258	14%	91
March issue	1,875	493	26%	215	11%	79
April/May issue (MS)	1,910	559	29%	267	14%	170
June issue (WI)	1,892	364	19%	120	6%	155
July issue (IL)	1,946	402	21%	139	7%	116
August issue (IA)	1,982	420	21%	115	6%	41
September issue (MN)	2,049	480	23%	147	7%	199
October issue (AR)	2,032	462	23%	129	6%	97
November issue	NA					
December issue	NA					
AVERAGES		494	26%	188	10%	123

- c. **Provide state information, such as events and attractions, as state Website links**—each month as copy was written for the e-newsletter, the website was updated with the states featured event or attraction to keep content relevant.
- d. **Optimize Web site** (Complimentary Google AdWords continues)
- e. **Develop consumer blogs**—with the assistance of the MRPC Marketing committee a consumer blog was launched. It was decided by the MRPC Marketing committee in September and the MRC during the strategic planning session to focus these efforts in 2010 on social media instead of the blog.
- f. **About Us section**—added language regarding the origins of the site and involved participants to increase credibility, especially with media contacts.
- g. **Provide annual reporting**—in January 2009, we began the switch to a new host for the website. In the switch, the statistics for January became unavailable. In November, 2009, we began using Google Analytics for reports. These reports will be emailed on a monthly basis to the MRC Working Group.

2009 Website Statistics			
	Visits	Hits	Unique Visits
January	N/A	N/A	N/A
February	10,486	282,883	4,668
March	31,904	868,101	13,059
April	28,592	793,761	11,729
May	34,023	880,816	13,355
June	11,112	273,410	4,750
July	33,801	875,706	12,258
August	34,477	841,438	12,376
September	39,812	928,911	14,050
October	40,764	816,051	13,194
November	32,488	613,526	10,745
December	27,427	488,805	8,569
TOTAL	324,886	7,663,408	118,753

4. Administration

- a. Mailed out 1,929 fulfillment packets in 2009 in response to emails and phone calls
- b. Website requests automatically distributed the following number of specific state leads in 2009 which increased from 2008 total
 (www.experiencemississippiriver.com/order-maps-state-guides.cfm):

Arkansas	700
Illinois	831
Iowa	679
Kentucky	550
Louisiana	531
Minnesota	629
Mississippi	623
Missouri	746
Tennessee	603
Wisconsin	681

- c. Facilitated six Working Group and MRC Board conference calls, including a strategic planning session in Chicago.
- d. Filed annual taxes for 2008 with the MRPC
- e. Received \$931.40 in donations from fulfillment piece mailing
- f. Distributed press kits to national media
 - i. *Best of the Midwest*—reviewed copy that included upper 6 states and the experiencemississippiriver.com site
 - ii. *Leisure Group Travel*, August—included all 10 states and mailed to 20,000 planners