

Mississippi River Country (MRC) 2010 Annual Report Based on Marketing Plan (Approved March 16, 2010)

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 Connect-Worldwide's quarterly reports at <http://mrpcmembers.com/mrc.php>)

a. Maintain representation in Japan

- i. **Include representation in the budget and through a contract:**
Contract with Connect-Worldwide (formerly Advanced International)

b. Host at least three media to Mississippi River Country:

- i. Hosted a fall FAM tour featuring Japanese travel writers representing a variety of media
- ii. Included Missouri, Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana
- iii. FAM tour dates: October 11-20, 2010.
- iv. A representative from the National Office and Connect-Worldwide escorted the tour.
- v. Four journalists participated and they were extremely pleased with the trip and the reception they received in each community.
- vi. Two web articles were published in November and December. Others are scheduled for the first half of 2011.

c. Report the media pick-ups including samples and media value:

- i. Obtained inclusion in 4 travel trade pieces, 2 consumer guidebook articles, 13 magazine articles, 2 website pieces and 18 broadcast programs.
- ii. MRC received print earned media value of \$9,059,462 and broadcast earned media value of \$83,955,741
- iii. Total earned media value of \$93,015,203.

1. Globetrotter Guide Books 10/11 and corresponding website: As a result of the fall 2009 MRC FAM tour, a variety of changes and additions were made to the popular Japanese travel guides. All ten states received updated profiles in the guidebooks. Their website also featured pieces on specific attractions visited during the FAM such as the Harley Davidson Museum in Milwaukee, Dubuque Fenlon Elevator, and John Deere Tractor Pavilion in Moline.
2. Sky Magazine: Delta Air Lines Japanese in-flight magazine produced a 6-page feature on Memphis and Tupelo, MS for the March/April edition. After the release of this article, the publisher contacted the office to discuss a possible feature on New Orleans or other MRC destinations.
3. AneCan: Norio Konno (writer of year-long Ocean Life series) produces a monthly travel feature on undiscovered romantic destinations for AneCan, the leading fashion magazine for women mid-twenties to early thirties. Little Rock and Hot Springs were featured in August. Assistance was provided for the crew's early May visit. They have committed to featuring Louisiana in June 2011 spotlighting shopping and dining in the French Quarter and a plantation wedding.
4. Azzurra: The online luxury travel and cruise magazine has committed to a year-long series in 2011 on the Mississippi River Country states to be written by Norio Konno, who produced the Ocean Life series in 2009/10. Mr. Konno attended the fall 2010 media FAM and will visit the region one more time during the year for the series.
5. Japan Elvis Society Video: The organization took a well-known Japanese actor to Memphis and Tupelo in late May to film a video of the region for sale to fan club members. There are also plans to negotiate a television deal for the video. The office was asked to assist with discount airfare, hotels in Memphis and Tupelo and attractions access/interviews.

6. 10:00am Film Festival: A national film festival was organized for July and August to show 50 classic movies at 10am in theaters across the country, to encourage young people to see movies on the big screen. "Field of Dreams" was one of the films and Connect-Worldwide provided images for the festival catalogue and information about visiting the Field of Dreams attraction in Dyersville, IA.
7. Patchwork Quilt Magazine: Assisted with the itinerary and arrangements for a fall FAM to Minnesota and Wisconsin for stories related to quilting.
8. Disney Home Video "Princess and the Frog": The campaign for the release of the video was included on the website and in an e-newsletter to assist in promotion and drive traffic to the website.

d. Maintain regular travel trade communication

i. Include quarterly e-newsletters in the budget:

1. Distributed to travel trade and media on March 15, 2010 featuring sports tourism opportunities through the region.
2. A second e-newsletter was distributed on June 11, 2010 and featured culinary tourism opportunities.
3. E-newsletters are posted in the "What's New" and "Press Room" sections of the MRC Japanese website
4. Unfortunately, due to budget challenges, we were unable to continue e-newsletters distributed in FY11, beginning July 1, 2010.

ii. Provide statistics on the e-newsletters performance:

1. March 2010 (Sent on March 14, 2010) Sent to: 1,468
Opened: 20.4% (263)
2. June 2010 (Sent on June 10, 2010) Sent to: 1,522
Opened: 19.2% (247)

iii. Report the number of calls to travel trade:

1. Toyota Tourist: Provided information on one-day trips for Toyota employees working at the Tupelo, MS plant to Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee.

2. JTB Osaka Shimegi Branch: Provided ideas for tours utilizing Delta service from Kansai to Seattle and on to MRC region.
3. JTB Educational Tours Kobe: Provided ideas for new student tours in 2011.
4. Kinki Nippon Tourist Osaka: Provided ideas for new tours for 2011
5. R&C Tours Osaka: Provided images for Delta Vacations brochure and website for 2011
6. Nikko Travel: Assisted in development of fall foliage Mississippi River themed motorcoach itinerary for seniors for Fall 2011. The tentative itinerary includes Minneapolis, Red Wing, La Crosse, Madison, Chicago, Springfield, Hannibal, St. Louis, Memphis, Tupelo, River Road Plantations and New Orleans.

iv. Report on the meetings attended with the travel trade:

1. Connect-Worldwide focused on contacts with operators considering or finalizing plans for specific tours to the Mississippi River Country region in 2010 including Kinki Nippon Tourist (Kintetsu), R&C Tours, World Air-Sea Service, Nikko Travel and Office Tabi Kobo.
2. Connect-Worldwide attended all of the numerous industry gatherings through New Year Sales Calls/Receptions, where travel agencies, wholesalers, operators and suppliers renew relationships and begin the year on a positive note. Staff also made courtesy calls on key tour operators.
3. Connect-Worldwide attended the ninth DiscoverAmerica Week in Japan held in Tokyo, September 17-26. The events were organized by the Japan Visit USA Committee, US Travel Association and the US Embassy Commercial Service. Travel trade activities were included in the events.
4. MRC had a table at Media Marketplace on September 27th in Roppongi Hills. The marketplace attracted 49 members of the travel trade and general media and generated 15 inquires. MRC had pre-scheduled appointments and additional walk-up appointments.

e. Maintain and update Japanese Web site:

- i. **Provide usage statistics:** Quarterly reports are distributed with usage statistics and are located at <http://mrpcmembers.com/mrc.php>
- ii. **Provide an annual report with website statistics**
 (See Appendix 1 for complete website statistics.)

2010 Website Statistics	
	Unique Visits
January	753
February	885
March	891
April	706
May	885
June	782
July	832
August	777
September	901
October	958
November	1829
December	1148
TOTAL	11,347

2010 Japanese Inquiry report (Total and By-state)

Total	Trade	Media	Consumer/Others	
Total	363	138	129	96
Total Unique Visits				
All	184	81	62	42
Arkansas	29	2	19	8
Illinois	22	10	6	6
Iowa	9	1	7	1
Kentucky	53	12	29	12
Louisiana	68	26	23	19
Minnesota	17	6	9	2
Mississippi	69	18	27	24
Missouri	23	5	11	7
Tennessee	100	31	32	37
Wisconsin	10	6	4	0

- f. **Investigate and pursue providing travel agent training (through webinars, conferences, other ideas)**
 - i. **Train 100 number of travel agents on the Mississippi River states:** Due to budget restrictions, we were unable to fund this project in 2010. We continue to search for funding options to meet this goal.

- g. **Generate tour operator product offering for MRC**
 - i. Baseline based on quarterly reports by 10%
 - 1. A total of 20 packaged tours were included in the Spring/Summer 2010 catalog compared to 16 for the same period in 2009, an increase of 25%. It is the largest number of packages the region has had in several years. The increase in packages is due, in part, to the special fares Delta offered wholesalers to promote the expanded Atlanta service. Destinations from 6 of the 10 states were included.
 - 2. A total of 20 packaged tours were included for the Fall 2010/Winter 2011 catalog compared to 10 for the same period in 2009, an increase of 50%. It is also the largest number of fall/winter packages the region has had in several years. Destinations from 5 of the 10 states were included.

- h. **Host tour operators or Japanese receptive operators**
 - i. **Two per year:** Due to budget challenges, we were unable to host any tour operators or Japanese receptive operators this year.

- i. **Leverage online opportunities including social media and travel blogs at the advice of Connect-Worldwide**
 - i. **Provide the number of followers and fans in the quarterly website reports**
 - ii. **Provide usage statistics:** National Office along with Connect-Worldwide researched funding options to establish an MRC social media presence.

- j. **Develop multi-state itineraries**
 - i. **5 itineraries per year**—a variety of itineraries were created for use with the travel trade and media

- k. **Attend JATA**
 - i. **Include JATA in the annual budget:** Attended JATA World Trade Fair on September 24-26, Tokyo Big Sight. Representatives from Connect-Worldwide and Minnesota participated in the booth.

- ii. **Report the number of leads received from the show:**
 1. 111,232 visitors—71,740 consumers and 39,492 travel trade and press—an increase from 2009
 2. On Travel Trade Day, MRC had 5 scheduled appointments, and a number of walk-ups
 3. Generated 55 new inquiries, an increase from last year
 4. Attended a happy hour reception was held at the close of the first day for travel executives and media
2. **Support Mississippi River states group tour marketing promotions:** A group tour section was added to the website, www.experiencemississippiriver.com
 - a. **Develop multi-state itineraries**
 - i. **5 itineraries per year:** Itineraries created for FAM tours and media were added to the consumer website
 - b. **Place itineraries on the Web and distribute to 10 states group travel representatives**
 - i. **5 itineraries per year:**
<http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com/itineraries.cfm>
 - c. **Maintain the MRC profile sheet**
 - i. **Distribute the profile sheet to 10 states group travel representatives:** The profile sheet was added to the group travel section of the website
 - d. **Increase earned media regarding group travel opportunities**
 - i. **Distribute releases to group travel media at least ten times a year**
 - ii. **Receive five group travel media-related pick-ups:** While no group travel related pick-ups were generated in 2010, we will continue to pitch to this media market.
 - e. **Develop and distribute photo CDs to group travel representatives**
 - i. **Maintain digital assets and look to update five times a year:** A photo library section was added to the group travel section of the website
3. **Optimized domestic Web and e-marketing programs**
 - a. **Consumer research on web functionality**
 - i. **Provide quarterly reports on website statistics**

- ii. **Establish a mechanism for states to access statistics on-line**—
provided the states with the opportunity to access statistics on-line,
however most states opted not to receive these updates.
- 4. **Continue to grow the number of opt-ins for email opportunities**
 - a. **Increase the number of opt-ins by 10% a year:** In 2010, we received a total of 1,295 email opt-ins, up from 940 in 2009, a nearly 38% increase.
- 5. **Send quarterly monthly e-newsletters**
 - a. **Provide statistics on e-newsletter performances:** Due to budget challenges, the monthly e-newsletter program needed to be suspended in 2010. The National Office will investigate options to restart the project.
- 6. **Optimize Web site**
 - a. **Monitor search engine optimization:** Complimentary Google AdWords continues for experiencemississippiriver.com
 - b. **Communicate website usage statistics:**
- 7. **Include video footage and links to videos on the website**
 - a. **Video representation of each of the 10 states on the website**
 - i. Added an Interactive section to experiencemississippiriver.com including a webcam section and a video section.
 - ii. Provided opportunity for states to submit links to webcams
 - iii. Six states have webcams posted.
 - iv. We will continue to work with the states to add video content to the website.
- 8. **Develop social media and interactive marketing opportunities**
 - a. **Provide the number of followers and fans in the quarterly website reports**
 - i. A Facebook page was created for The Great River Road on February 19th, 2010.
 - ii. As of December 31, 2010 there were 650 likes to the page
 - b. **Provide usage statistics**
 - i. 18,885 post views
 - ii. 309 post feedback (likes or comments on page posts)
 - iii. Created an e-newsletter sign-up "tab," encouraging Facebook users to subscribe to the e-newsletter list
 - iv. 701 photographs uploaded in albums
 - v. Updated three-five times per week
 - vi. Posted daily during the October FAM tour to provide updates and highlights on our trip

9. Provide annual reporting—

- a. **Provide an annual report with website statistics**
- b. **Establish a mechanism for states to access statistics on-line**—provided the opportunity to access statistics on-line, however most states opted not to receive these updates.

2010 Website Statistics		
	Visits	Unique Visits
January	10,070	9,100
February	10,548	9,386
March	12,705	11,320
April	12,348	11,065
May	15,362	13,935
June	11,757	10,317
July	11,966	10,520
August	11,453	10,204
September	14,224	12,611
October	12,830	11,477
November	9,687	8,444
December	7,154	6,242
TOTAL	140,104	124,621

10. Add weather content to the website

- a. **Create an opportunity for website users to find weather information from the site:** A weather plug-in will be added to the experiencemississippiriver.com once we determine how to negotiate the weather content for ten states.

11. Add an opportunity for weather related information to be communicated on the website (especially in the event of flooding or other major weather events): A section was added to the experiencemississippiriver.com website home page to provide links to each of the 10-states Departments of Transportations to receive current road conditions and closure information for the Great River Road.

12. Increase earned media

- a. **Distribute release to media at least ten times a year:** A variety of releases we distributed this year including the economic impact of the Great River Road, the NSB designation of the Great River Road in all 10-states, the announcement of the new MRPC Pilot and MRC Chair and Vice Chair and seasonal story ideas. We also organized a press release during the MRPC National Meeting in Baton Rouge announcing the NSB designation.

- b. Receive five media pickups:** In 2010, the releases and press conferences resulted in more than 50 pickups worth more than \$500,000 in conservative estimates.

13. Provide an annual report

- a.** Mailed out 3,167 fulfillment packets in 2010, up from 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 2010 which increased from 2009 by nearly 45% (www.experiencemississippiriver.com/order-maps-state-guides.cfm):

2010 Guide Requests by State		
State	2010	2009
Arkansas	834	700
Illinois	1151	831
Iowa	958	679
Kentucky	878	550
Louisiana	866	531
Minnesota	883	629
Mississippi	970	623
Missouri	1059	746
Tennessee	949	603
Wisconsin	969	681
Total	9517	6573

- c.** Facilitated five Working Group and MRC Board conference calls
- d.** Met with Marjorie Dewey from Connect-Worldwide in March to coordinate Japanese marketing efforts
- e.** Filed annual taxes for 2009 with the MRPC
- f.** Received \$1,037 in donations from fulfillment piece mailing up from \$931.40 in donations in 2009.