



Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism 2014 Destination Marketing and Media Plan

**Our mission is to improve the local economy by
attracting more visitors who stay longer**

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About Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism

Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism (the bureau) is a non-profit, 501(c)6 economic development agency responsible for competitively marketing Whatcom County as a premier, year-round travel destination for leisure travelers as well as meeting/convention attendees. Incorporated in 1978 as Bellingham Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau; for 36 years it has been the official county-wide destination marketing organization.

Approximately 25% of the bureau's annual budget is generated through the private sector in the form of membership dues, cooperative marketing options and revenue from sales. Approximately 75% of the bureau's funding comes from lodging taxes collected from visitors who overnight at hotels, motels, B&B's, and campgrounds throughout Whatcom County. By law, these are restricted use taxes and can only be used to support tourism promotion activities and tourism facilities. The bureau is the only county-wide organization whose single focus is tourism development – accomplished through a variety of destination marketing and management strategies.

Washington's Travel & Tourism Industry

Travel and tourism is one of the most important "export oriented" industries in Washington. Spending by visitors generates sales in lodging, food services, attractions, transportation and retail business – the "travel industry". These sales support jobs for Washington residents and contribute tax revenues to local and state governments. The latest report prepared for Washington Tourism Alliance by Dean Runyan Associates indicates that travel spending throughout Washington State was **\$17.6 billion** in 2013. Statewide, the travel industry supported over **155,000 jobs** with earnings of **\$4.9 billion**. Travel spending generated more than **\$1.1 billion** in local and state revenues. Although this represents a modest growth over 2012, Washington State continues to lag behind its neighboring states/provinces – a result of the negligible marketing budget WTA has developed since the closure of the state tourism program in comparison to the increased budgets of Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, and other regional destinations. WTA and industry partners throughout the state were successful in acquiring limited state sponsored bridge funding to maintain a call center and website, while seeking adequate long-term funding through private-public partnerships.

Whatcom County's Travel & Tourism Industry

Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism invests in annual county-specific travel spending reports produced by Dean Runyan Associates. In 2013, the direct county-wide traveler spending reached **\$573.9 million**, a slight decrease over the previous record-breaking year. Although occupancy, lodging rates and spending were up within the City of Bellingham, there were two significant factors overall which contributed to the decline: a "normal" refinery season and the closure of Semiahmoo Resort. As a result, job generation (**6,110 jobs**) and state/local taxes (**\$24.8 million** and **\$8.2 million** respectively) were also slightly down. The forecast for 2014 is strong – spurred by the reopening of Semiahmoo and the additional room inventory from newly opened and soon to be opened hotels.

Experience Bellingham

Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism represents all of Whatcom County's businesses, attractions and amenities. However, data and analytics gathered, measured and utilized by the Bureau consistently reinforces that visitors identify with the entire county/region simply as "Bellingham". The media also generalizes the area as Bellingham, even if the primary focus of their feature is actually in the County. Bellingham regularly earns accolades for its world class recreation facilities – such as Best Place to Play Year Round and Best Paddling and Adventure Town – designations that tout sites and amenities which predominantly lie outside of the city limits. BWCT marketing strategies capitalize on Bellingham's reputation and name recognition without diminishing the significance of the communities and lands which surround the City of Bellingham.

Integration of our Brand into the BE Campaign

The words we use to describe our region have the effect of creating a visual and emotional sense of who we are and what we represent. The words and images used in marketing campaigns can reflect the essence, emotion and benefit of our unique brand promise.

Our brand “personality” describes the characteristics of Bellingham and Whatcom County and helps shape the tone of communications whether through brochures, advertising, media releases, social media marketing, or our website. The overall tone of voice and style used is friendly, free-spirited and genuine.

Bellingham and Whatcom County is a destination best enjoyed on an experiential level, and when describing our region, we encourage visitors (and locals) to fully “experience it.” Studies and analysis show that over 80% of our visitors are return visitors, illustrating the experience of our destination is one of our strongest marketing tools.

Some brand words that make up the region’s “personality” are: charming, sustainable, scenic, organic, natural, friendly, adventurous, and unique. Others include: relaxing, unspoiled, exhilarating, fresh, challenging, authentic, and accessible.

In 2013 the Bureau launched the “BE” Campaign. Utilizing “BE” with a verb such as “active”, “in awe”, “refreshed” and other messages tailored to the specific market supports consistency with flexibility. The tag line includes “BE in Bellingham” and “one destination, many adventures”. The campaign has been effectively integrated into all media and marketing options including print, television, video, radio, website, mobile app, social media, communication & correspondence, corporate identity, etc.

Our brand may be revised and adapted through assessment and as community and marketing conditions change.

Our Product

Bellingham and Whatcom County are revered for their natural resources – scenic beauty, nature and an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities including skiing/snowboarding, hiking, biking, sea kayaking, boating, and sailing. The region is home to unique cultural and historical riches and local artists. The county boasts a temperate climate, watchable wildlife, unique attractions, farms and farmers markets, culinary dining experiences and seasonal festivals and events. The region is family-friendly, ideal for a relaxing and/or active romantic getaway for couples of all ages, and is perfect for meetings, conventions and destination weddings.

Our Visitor

According to an expansive 2-year study with Dean Runyan and Associates (2008-2010), more than half of our visitors are from Skagit, Snohomish and King Counties and a quarter of our visitors are from British Columbia, Canada.* Three-quarters of our visitors are repeat, which means we attract loyal customers. This is consistent with our close-in residency. We are a market of convenience. Our visitors tend to want a short getaway, visit family and friends, shop and/or attend a special event or festival. Overnight visitors come for leisure reasons, stay longer, participate in outdoor recreational activity, eat out and generally spend more money. Most of our visitors come in pairs. We also attract educated people – nearly 78% possess a bachelors or graduate degree. Over half of our visitors report making \$75k annually.

*Note: since this study, B.C. visitors have increased due to economic factors. Their primary interest is shopping.

Our Goals

- To help strengthen Whatcom County’s year-round economy.
- To elevate awareness and appreciation of the region’s natural resources and attractions, as well as its history, arts and culture.

- To enhance visitors' travel experiences county wide.
- To earn the support and partnership of residents, businesses and government officials to recognize tourism as a crucial part of the economy and their potential role in growing the economy.
- To inspire participation of local residents to become tourism "ambassadors" in helping promote Whatcom County as a tourist-friendly destination.
- To promote the importance of business and government investment in tourism.
- To optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of all county-wide tourism resources through coordination, cooperation and collaboration with all interested parties.

Our Areas of Focus

- **Develop and Communicate our Message to the Media:** Media relations, press tours, media blitzes, press releases, storylines
- **Develop and Communicate our Message to the Leisure Traveler:** Strategic advertising, web site and email marketing, online promotions, fulfillment, visitor information center(s), trade shows
- **Develop and Communicate our Message to the Business/Convention Traveler:** Strategic advertising, sales missions, trade associations, site tours, conference bids & support
- **Develop and Communicate our Message to the Community:** Educational seminars and workshops, networking, publications, industry trends, partnerships
- **Develop and Communicate with Tourism Industry (Statewide and Regional CVBs):** National and regional conferences, relationships, partnerships, networking, industry trends

2013 Marketing Highlights

Media tours

2013 was a year of great media relations success for the tourism bureau. Since its inception 6 years ago, the Bureau has gained organizational and destination notoriety and earned thousands of dollars' worth of direct result media coverage through its two annual, invitation-only group media tours. In 2013 the bureau hosted a first-ever winter tour: "Snow, Spas and Spirits", and collaborated with Bellingham Beer Week to host a fall tour entitled "Boots and Brews". These tours, while certainly not "free" were extremely cost effective due to bureau members and community support to host the travel writers who attended the tours. The resulting publicity was overwhelmingly successful, and will continue to be in years to come.

Individual tours

In addition to the highly touted group press tours, the bureau assisted over 100 travel writers during the course of 2013 on individual media tours/trips by providing personal/unique itineraries, background information and insight, directions and contacts with organizations and businesses around Whatcom County. The writers and bloggers produced overwhelmingly positive coverage of Bellingham and Whatcom County.

VIB

The Visitor Information Brochure (VIB) is a promotional and informational printed brochure that is produced monthly to assist visitors who are already here (in Whatcom County). The VIB includes information on dining, events, parks, theatres, casinos and other activities/locations. Over 3,000 are produced each month (or more for special events); it is distributed through over 100 sites throughout Bellingham and Whatcom County.

Website

Improvements to www.bellingham.org include integration of the BE campaign, reorganization of the website's homepage and activity pages (under "Things to Do"), new seasonal activities pages, new annual events pages, enhanced maps and itineraries, themed blogs feature outdoor rec, golf, beer/wine/spirits, and family travel/food -- with regularly updated RSS feeds, the "Book Direct" program (for lodging), and more photos and videos to our photo library.

Social Media and Community Outreach

BWCT organized and hosted 2 familiarization (fam) tours around Whatcom County in 2012. Twenty members of the local hospitality and restaurant industries attended the tours to local farms, including a dairy, apple orchard/distillery and a winery. BWCT also assisted the City of Bellingham's myDowntown's "Festival of Ideas" by hosting and organizing a walking tour of downtown called "Hidden Gems." It was open to the public and over 25 people attended.

BWCT continues to ramp up involvement with and within social media on Facebook and Twitter, significantly increasing the number of postings, links and engagements with followers. BWCT continues its bimonthly photo contest that engages and rewards the local community, as well as visitors to the area while helping build our photo library.

Conferences and Presentations

Staff attended and participated in a variety of conferences, sales and media blitzes and presentations in Whatcom County, WA and throughout the country, such as GoWest, NTA, Travel Blogger Exchange, Travel + Words, PRSA Travel and Tourism Annual Conference, and WACVB Tourism Technology Summit.

Trends & Analysis

Key Trends in Tourism

According to Washington State Tourism research, as well as data gathered from the U.S. Travel Association, and the recent Dean Runyan 2-year study commissioned by Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism the following are key travel trends:

- **Travelers Are Taking Shorter, More Frequent Trips Closer to Home** – This trend is influenced by the economy and time constraints of most travelers.
- **Shorter Planning Time/Last Minute Bookings** – Due to the economy, people aren't certain they'll have the time or resources to take a trip until the last minute.
- **Canada Is a Key Market** – Canada's close proximity and more alluring exchange rates may increase the number of border crossings from our neighbors to the north and west.
- **Health is a huge factor in travel decisions** – 58% of American travelers rank "Health benefits" as their primary reason to travel.

- **Visitors Demand Authentic Experiences** – Visitors are demanding more enriching travel experiences unique to destinations, and destinations must make it easy for visitors to purchase/consume these experiences in niches such as agri-tourism, culinary tourism, voluntourism, education vacations, nature-based/watchable wildlife, history/heritage, arts, culture, etc.
- **Social Media and a Virtual Presence is Vital** – Travelers continue to use the web and their smart phones to research and plan their trips. Destinations must “serve up” authentic, niche experiences in ways that make them attractive, personal and easily purchased/researched online. Blogs are an increasingly influential tool when deciding where and when to travel.
- **PANKS: A new demographic** – Professional women are choosing to have children later or not at all, resulting in a new travel trend with its own demographic acronym: “PANKS. Professional Aunt, No Kids” who collectively spend billions on travel with nieces and nephews.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

- **Region:** Scenic beauty; nature; watchable wildlife; year-round recreational opportunities; quality local arts; temperate climate; proximity to Seattle, San Juan Islands, Victoria, and Vancouver; accessibility (ferries, boats, trains, buses, automobiles)
- **Bureau:** website; marketing team; support from members and local jurisdictions (cities, county, port); Potter Street and Downtown Information Centers and satellite info centers (airport, train/bus station, cruise terminal) ambassadors; distribution of marketing materials; ability to assist other organizations promotionally; social media, long term funding plans with City of Bellingham and Whatcom County
- **Perceptions/Trends:** relative value of activities and entertainment (compared to regional urban markets like Seattle and Vancouver); growing interest in sustainable tourism; growing reputation for world-class recreation; increased retail / shopping destination for Canadians; local brewery expansion

Weaknesses

- **Region:** lack of ample convention space; our cities/landscapes have poor visibility from I-5
- **Bureau:** limited staff; small funding sources for promotion compared to other regional destinations; lack of community awareness of who we are and what we do; lack of state support and collaboration with closing of state tourism office in 2011; identity confusion
- **Perceptions/Trends:** Perceived border lines/waits; misconception about weather/climate and ability to participate in activities during inclement weather; lack of awareness of Bellingham and Whatcom County as a destination (beyond the mall, big box stores and other “value-driven” shopping hubs)

Opportunities

- **Region:** redevelopment of the waterfront port; more lodging available with openings of new hotels; border crossing improvements; increased year-round occupancy (with new properties slated); local stakeholder and community commitment to parks and open space
- **Bureau:** “everyone’s a member” growth; expansion into downtown and mall; more presence at airport after remodel; increased opportunities for private funding/advertising; increased media coverage; WWU Alumni; increased community relations regarding economic impact of tourism

- **Perceptions/Trends:** Canadian market growth; increased visitor education and niche market growth; increasing interest in agritourism, spirits and culinary tourism; downtown revitalization; legalization of gay marriage and marijuana

Threats

- **Region:** border congestion, closings, security issues; neighboring destinations' year-round advertising programs; value of loonie; natural disasters
- **Bureau:** funding challenges due to economy or increasing demand for wide-spread funding support
- **Perceptions/Trends:** Economy; gas prices; visitor impact on natural resources and settings; lack of understanding regarding importance of tourism to our economy; lack of understanding as to what the bureau does; negative media attention, concern of environmental impacts and/or limited access to land and facilities

Target Consumer Markets

Target Demographic & Psychographic

Our target demographic is educated adults, families and couples who have easy access to the Interstate-5 corridor (primarily, but not exclusively) from Portland, Oregon to the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Our primary marketing and media relations efforts focus heavily on the Seattle-metro and Vancouver-metro areas, with secondary markets including the Pacific Northwest, niche audiences, and airline feeder cities. Our target audience includes visitors seeking a community-centric destination and experience. Many will be return visitors and includes Western Washington University alumni. Our target demographic includes 7 primary audiences:

Active Outdoor Recreation

Where from: coming from along and beyond I-5 (Pacific Northwest/West Coast including Hawaii)

Who's traveling: friends and family, groups, WWU alumni

Age: 25+

Behavior: adventure driven; budget conscious (camping, affordable hotels, staying with friends); healthy & active

Interests: Camping, Snow Sports, Paddling, Hiking, Running, Bicycling, Events

Consumer Driven

Where from: Coming from Canada

Who's traveling: females and families

Age: 40+

Behavior: budget driven (affordable lodging); sedentary; exchange rate; overnight to increase exemptions

Interests: Shopping, Spas & Health, Casinos, Events, BLI (park and fly)

Culinary & Agri-Tourism

Where from: coming from the Seattle and Vancouver Metro areas

Who's traveling: couples, young families, retirees;

Age: 30+

Behavior: more disposable income; choices made based on values; local, organic, and healthy; WWU Alumni

Interested in: Local Cuisine, Farms & Agriculture, Beer/Wine/Spirits, Events

Cultural & Heritage

Where from: Coming from the I-5 corridor (Western WA)

Who's traveling: couples, families and friends groups, retirees, suburbanites, WWU Alumni

Age: 40+;

Behavior: more disposable income; choices made based on values; curious, well-educated and want to become more educated, arts focused; emotional tie to community/WWU

Interests: Film & Performing Arts, Galleries, Museums, Boutique/Specialty Shops, Historical Districts, Western Washington University, Events

Health & Wellness

Where from: Regional by car; National/International by air

Who's traveling: niche market of health and wellness seekers, with growing medical tourism

Age: Predominately 40+

Behavior: choices based on environment and sustainability; wellness reputation and specific medical services, serenity

Interests: Yoga, Spas, Organic, Medical Facilities, Outdoor/Scenic Opportunities, Culture

Leisure Outdoor Recreation

Where from: Coming from the I-5 corridor and beyond (WA, OR, Northern CA)

Who's traveling: couples, friends, retirees, families (3-gen) and clubs

Age: 50+

Behavior: more disposable income; moderately active and curious, intelligent

Interests: Bird Watching, Fishing, Golfing, Boating, Scenic Drives, Whale Watching, Walking/Parks, Events,

Motorcycles, Antique Cars, History

Groups, Meetings & Conferences

Where from: Pacific Northwest/West Coast (including British Columbia)

Who's traveling: business & association travelers, couples, 3-gen families, extended family

Age: 25+

Behavior: group deals, value-driven, moderately active, curious, seeking unique experiences/scenery

Interests: Family reunions, weddings, business meetings/conferences, sporting events

Membership Development and Private Sector Support

- Offer free membership to any business with a license in Whatcom County. Grow the membership to ensure more comprehensive representation and referrals.

- Hold niche membership meetings throughout the year in order to network tourism businesses, report on programs and accomplishments, and provide tourism marketing and education opportunities. Niche industries include: restaurants/dining, lodging, season-dependent recreation, beer/wine/spirits
- Hold an annual meeting that recognizes industry leaders and their contributions; provides networking and educational opportunities; and showcases local food and beverage suppliers.
- Hold quarterly membership events (including annual meeting in the spring) for networking and educational opportunities and showcasing local food and beverage suppliers
- Hold new member orientation bi-monthly (or as needed)
- Develop and communicate to the members a variety of cooperative marketing and partnership opportunities that enhance their individual marketing efforts. Share industry data and trends.

Local Partnerships

Continue to develop partnerships with funding partners, local and regional business and economic development organizations including but not limited to:

Whatcom County

City of Bellingham

City of Ferndale

City of Lynden

City of Blaine

City of Sumas

Bellingham / Whatcom Chamber of Commerce

Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce

Ferndale Chamber of Commerce

Lynden Chamber of Commerce

Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce

Blaine Chamber of Commerce

Sumas Chamber of Commerce

Port of Bellingham

Northwest Economic Council

Council of Governments

Sustainable Connections

Technology Alliance Group

Downtown Bellingham Partnership

Historic Fairhaven Association

Regional Partnerships

Continue to develop opportunities for “Northwest Washington...We’ve got the Corner on Paradise”, a 5-county, regional partnership; primarily focused on efficient destination marketing to national and international groups, consumer and media markets. This network has also collaborated on crisis communication when necessary, such as the Skagit River Bridge Collapse.

Snohomish County Tourism Bureau

Skagit County Tourism

Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism

San Juan Islands Tourism

Whidbey & Camano Island Tourism

Professional Memberships & Continuing Education

Continue memberships/partnerships with state, national and international media, and travel trade associations which may include, but not be limited to:

Washington Tourism Alliance

Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations

Western Assoc of Convention & Visitor Bureaus

Society of American Travel Writers

US Travel Association

International Culinary Tourism Association

Northwest Outdoor Writers Association

Public Relations Society of America

Destination Marketing Association International

Travel Media Association of Canada

National Tour Association

North American Travel Journalists Association

American Bus Association

International Eco Tourism Society

Pacific Northwest Writers Association

Attend pertinent training, information and marketing conferences, workshops, etc. sponsored by the above organizations.

Marketing

Internet Marketing

All marketing and promotions lead to our website and/or mobile app, making this is an extremely important element to our marketing strategies.

Website (refers to www.bellingham.org and Bellingham app)

- Maintain website for visitors, members, and media seeking information about Whatcom County.
- Continue to upgrade and improve web site appearance and usability, including smart phone and printer-friendly versions.
- Create/maintain more consistency (visual and messaging) between website, advertisements, social media, trade shows, etc.
- Maintain listings in a guide format to allow visitors to find lodging, restaurants, activities and points of interest offered by our members.
- Maintain meeting planning information section on our website.
- Maintain a photo gallery of beautiful, current local images to showcase Whatcom County as a tourism destination and to assist media with editorial imagery.
- Add to YouTube video gallery – both our own and those of others – via our website.
- Maintain an extensive media resource section with links to photos, story ideas, statistics and current press releases from our local members and partners.
- Continue to leverage photo contests to stimulate return visitation to our web site, social media interaction and to promote community involvement.

- Promote seasonal member packages and specials on our web site to entice those looking for value.
- Continue to utilize statistical analysis services such as Google Analytics to track website usage, users, referrers, keywords, page views, and other relevant information. Analyze the data to further improve website function and usability.
- Optimize website pages, posts and content to achieve high search engine rankings under identified keywords in popular search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing.
- Utilize mapping services such as Google maps to assist visitors in locating points of interest.
- Maintain thematic “insider blogs” on website to offer first-hand, authentic insight to a variety of Whatcom County activities, places and events

Events Calendar

- Continue to maintain and edit comprehensive county-wide event calendar at <http://calendar.bellingham.org>
- Continue to encourage community to enter events of interest to be included in our calendar.
- Continue to feed calendar into Facebook fan page to automate posting of events.
- Promote and share our calendar feed to allow local partners to publicize Whatcom County events.
- Assist in promoting regional festivals and events by listing them on our calendar.
- Encourage sharing via services such as AddThis and the Facebook Like button to allow users to quickly and easily share events of interest with their social networks.

Social Media and Networking

- Utilize social media scheduling service such as HootSuite to facilitate managing many accounts and keep content posted on a consistent basis.
- Continue to maintain Twitter account “BhamEXP” designed for current local events and topics of interest by posting 1-2 items of interest per day. Grow the followers and engagement by 15%.
- Continue to actively maintain our Facebook fan page “BellinghamExperience” and post 1-2 events, photos or information of interest to our local and tourist community per day. Increase likes, shares and comments by 20%.
- Add to our YouTube channel with fresh new local video and promote via the website and social media. Search for and add other local videos to our account favorites for promotion via the website and social media.
- Utilize sharing service such as AddThis and the Facebook Like button to allow users to quickly and easily share our posts and content via their social networks.

E-mail Communication

- Include email sign-up forms throughout our website to encourage users to join our email list and receive any of our two monthly / one quarterly email communications:
- The Source: Geared towards the media -- it contains advance (4-6 month lead time) story ideas, future events of media interest and photographs.

- Tourism Talk: A member newsletter that includes bureau news, a featured member, recent publications promoting Whatcom County tourism, photos and events and other items of interest to our local business community.
- The Traveler: Featuring current events, news, photos and a featured member, this newsletter is geared towards our local community and tourists.

Other

- Attend relevant marketing events related to technology and destination marketing such as, but not limited to:
 - WACVB Travel & Tourism Technology Summit**
 - Int'l Sustainable & Eco Tourism Conference**
 - WACVB Destination Marketing Summit**

Advertising & Publications

- Update and enhance our annual, full-color Visitors Guide in order to better promote our regional niches including history, arts, culture, recreation, events and festivals, food and farms, and small towns. Print and distribute 70,000 copies to be used as a fulfillment piece. Provide online, easily downloadable version.
- Update and redesign rack cards as a lure piece to drive inquiries to our web site, phone or in person queries for additional information.
- Produce resource sheets and specialty marketing brochures as needed
- Continue to promote off-season special rates (via “Book Direct” program) specifically in the Seattle and Vancouver metro areas.
- Develop and implement annual ad plan that will generate consumer requests, meeting leads, visitation to web site and drive an increase in room nights booked.
- Produce and distribute the Bellingham Whatcom County Visitor Information Brochure (VIB), which serves as an in-hand resource/rack card for travelers when they are in the area. Updated and distributed monthly to over 100 locations around Whatcom County, the VIB lists local events, restaurants, museums, theatres and shopping ideas for visitors while they are in the region.
- Distribute and update (as needed) the Edible Whatcom restaurant guide to local hotels and visitor centers for visitors already in the area.

Meetings, Conference & Retreat Marketing

- Promote a “BAG” (Bring a Group) local campaign to elevate resident awareness of meeting facilities for 10 to 300.
- Work with local convention centers and facilities and communicate hospitality industry trends, ideas and concerns.
- Research targeted travel trade, media and niche conferences to bid on in order to bring them to the region
- Submit meeting and corporate retreat location storylines to regional meetings publications
- Organize and conduct two annual sales missions in collaboration with hospitality partners.

- Actively participate in lead generation associations, such as Washington Society of Association Executives (WSAE).

Special Marketing Projects & Niches

- **Scenic Byways:** continue work with Washington Tourism Alliance and Washington State Department of Transportation to develop and promote scenic byway tourism products within Whatcom County.
- **Blogs:** add new blog focus as needed to augment the recreational, cultural, culinary, and family fun topics.
- **Cultural Tourism (History/Arts/Culture):** continue to meet regularly with the region's history, arts and cultural tourism organizations in order to partner on marketing projects.
- **Agri-Tourism & Culinary Tourism:** continue to work with agencies, organizations and individual business members to develop rural agri-tourism products.
- Pursue co-op marketing opportunities and data collection with the adventure recreation / event group.
- **Meeting and Convention relationships:** continue involvement and networking with organizations and associations to promote the region as a meeting and convention destination.
- **Video Production:** promote existing videos and add new content annually highlighting outdoor and indoor recreation in Whatcom County through website, social media and BTV; add to video library with professional and amateur video of additional outdoor activities, cultural highlights, farms, small cities, events, and urban activities.

Public Relations

Media Relations

- **Group Media Tours:** Host 4-6 travel writers over 3-4 days for themed media tours throughout the year. Partner with members for support.
- **Media Marketplaces:** Participate with associations and media marketplaces, to develop and maintain one-on-one relationships with travel writers:
 - Travel Media Assoc of Canada - BC Chapter**
 - Society of American Travel Writers / PRSA**
 - Travel Blogger Exchange**
 - Travel Media Showcase**
 - Pacific Northwest Travel Writers**
- **Press Trips:** Host targeted travel writers and editors on individualized press trips, concentrating on our target niche markets. When opportunities present themselves, partner with members, Washington Tourism Alliance and partner CVBs to host writers and editors.
- **Media Database:** Expand our regional, national and international media contact list.
- **Pre-Publication Editing and Fact Checks:** Edit articles and guidebooks for accuracy.
- **Media and Photo Requests:** Respond to requests for media assistance and photo usage.

- **Media Blitz:** Partner with 1+ Northwest Washington CVB's to attend a media blitz in New York or California (alternating years), in order to meet with major magazine and newspaper editors and journalists working in our niche markets.
 - Regional Media Blitz - Seattle / Puget Sound
 - National Media Blitz – East Coast (NYC, DC)
 - Regional Media Blitz - Vancouver / Lower BC
- **Track results:** Utilize Google alerts to track Whatcom County publicity in print and online, and utilize media resources within the application.
- **E-Newsletter:** E-mail seasonal e-newsletter “The Source” to select media, keeping the region and its various storylines “front of mind” and proactively promote member news.
- **Washington State Tourism Press Trips & Media Leads:** Continue to respond to media leads and media trip requests generated through/from WA Tourism Alliance and/or Seattle CVB on behalf of state
- **Press Kit:** Develop enhancements for our press kit – both online and mail formats, highlighting niche markets.
- **A Pitch A Day:** Actively generate and respond to media leads with the goal of “A Pitch A Day” or an average of 260 media pitches per year.
- **Story Ideas:** Research, write and distribute content story ideas to targeted media, including events, unique experiences, and activities to differentiate our destination.
- **Photo & Video Library:** Develop partnerships with local photographers in order to have a wide variety of photos available for media requests, ads, publications, promotions and websites. Also creating more in-house videos to support marketing campaigns and storylines.
- **News Releases:** Write and distribute pertinent news releases regarding new tourism-related businesses, special events, media tours, etc.

Community Relations

- Submit news releases to local media regarding bureau projects, media tours, etc.
- Distribute the Month End Report (MER) to board, community leaders and funding partners.
- Promote National Tourism Week in May to educate local businesses and residents about tourism’s economic impact and that “Tourism Matters.”
- Write a monthly column for the Bellingham Business Journal and other media outlets as requested.
- Request to give presentations at various local non-profit organization meetings (including service organizations) such as Chamber luncheons/breakfasts, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.
- Work with local and regional partners to assure that tourism is viewed as a positive economic development strategy for Whatcom County.
- Continue to leverage internet marketing techniques to inform and engage our local residents.

Visitor Services

- Continue to operate a Visitors Information Center at Potter Street seven days per week.
- Open and maintain a professional welcoming presence at the new downtown information center.
- Update and maintain comprehensive visitor and member information and events calendar on website.
- Continue to host visitor information booths at new student orientations at local colleges and universities, as well as at festivals and events throughout the county.
- E-mail monthly e-newsletter, the Traveler, to opt-in consumers (collected from our web site and travel shows), enticing them with seasonal packages and specials, festivals and events, new attractions, and news regarding Bellingham and Whatcom County.
- Distribute bureau publications and member brochures as appropriate.
- Research new ideas and partners for visitor education projects.
- Gather and report monthly visitor statistics.
- Volunteers/Ambassadors – cultivate and train energetic volunteers to represent the bureau at the Lighthouse Building and Commercial Street Information Centers, Airport, Cruise Terminal, and other activities and events as needed.
- Continue to provide the regional Chambers of Commerce with visitor information, services, and tourism industry opportunities.

Travel Shows

- Exhibit at high traffic consumer travel shows in key markets to talk one-on-one with potential visitors and to maintain relationships and destination awareness with repeat visitors.
- Research new possibilities and niches.
- Invest in tradeshow banners and displays that present the destination in a visually exciting manner.
- Secure partners for more cost effective representation and/or to extend the opportunities to participate in additional consumer trade shows.

Seattle Travel & Golf Show

LA Times Travel & Adventure Show

The Great Outdoors Show

GEAR Expo

San Diego Outdoor Adventure & Travel Show

Sunset Travel Show

West Coast Women's Show

Vancouver Outdoor Travel & Adventure Show

Seattle Bike Expo

Government Relations

- Participate in the Washington State Destination Marketing Organization Association's annual "Tourism Matters" event in Olympia, WA. Communicate legislative issues of industry importance to the members.
- Communicate regularly with local and state elected officials on tourism issues and opportunities; travel facts and trends; and tourism's economic value.
- Support continued development of growth of Washington Tourism Alliance (WTA), which formed a result of the closure of the Washington State Tourism office. Participate in appropriate committees, events and activities to ensure representation of our region and partner with regional CVB's.
- Continue participation with the following organizations, or others as identified:

WACVB CEO Forum

Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations (WSDMO)

Whatcom Council of Governments

Small Cities Partnership

Bellingham Chamber Government Affairs Committee & Cross Border Committee

County-wide Tourism Commissions and Lodging Tax Advisory Commissions

Travel Trade Relations

- Attend the annual Go West Summit, Pow Wow, and NTA marketplace to meet one-on-one with national and international tour operators and U.S. receptive operators interested in West Coast/Pacific NW destinations and products.
- Partner with Washington Tourism Alliance, regional partners, and bureau members to host key U.S. and international contractors, tour operators, airline sales personnel and travel agents on fam tours.
- Continue to partner with members to attend the Victoria Clipper Two Nation Vacation Shows, a trade show and road show which target media and travel trade in Seattle and Portland, as well as five important airline feeder markets in California.

Performance Measures, Research & Communication

Tourism Industry

- Continue to collect and analyze the following tourism industry indicators:
 - Hotel/motel tax collections for Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, City of Blaine, City of Lynden, City of Ferndale, and City of Sumas
 - Hotel/motel tax collections for comparable Washington counties
 - Smith Travel Research (ST*R reports) to gauge ADR, occupancy and other lodging trends
 - Other tourism indicators, such as sales tax and various parks visitation
 - Washington State research, including Dean Runyan Tourism Economic Impact Report

Bureau Marketing Activities

Continue to collect and analyze the following data in order to determine return on investment of marketing methods:

- Number of 800-number inquiry calls received and travel planners distributed
- Number of e-mail inquiries received and travel planners distributed
- Website statistics and analysis
- E-mail list statistics and analysis
- Social media statistics and analysis: including FB, Twitter and YouTube
- Number of responses to trackable advertisements (reader response cards for print ads, special landing pages for online ads, interstitials, facebook stats, etc.)
- Number of press contacts, leads, and familiarization tours
- Number of newspaper, magazine, and internet publicity articles
- Number of consumer and travel trade shows attended and contacts made

Visitor Statistics

- Continue to track where potential and actual visitors come from, how they heard about the region, and why they visit the region
- Compile zip code analysis from reader response and email requests, and statistics of origin from airport and cruise terminal ambassadors
- Track opt-in data from travel & trade shows

Reporting

- Report this data monthly via “Month End Reports” provided to the county-wide public funders, niche sectors, city councils, tourism commissions, board members and executive committees.

Leadership

Staff

Loni Rahm, President & CEO
loni@bellingham.org

Annette Bagley, Director of Marketing
annette@bellingham.org

Cheryl Collins, Visitor Services Manager
cheryl@bellingham.org

Mike Mors, Member Services Manager
mike@bellingham.org

Angie Wrzesinski, Executive Assistant
angie@bellingham.org

Amber Vinup, Marketing & Social Media Assistant
amber@bellingham.org

Larry Manley, Concierge Services Manager
larry@bellingham.org

Visitor Services Volunteers & Ambassadors

Includes a knowledgeable, dedicated core of 18 volunteers, most of whom have served at the Lighthouse Building for over 20 years. Has grown to include more than a dozen ambassadors who provide welcome and information services at the airport and downtown information center.

Board Officers

Randi Axelsson – *Chair* – Silver Reef Hotel • Casino • Spa
Lance Calloway – *Vice Chair* – Whatcom Sports Commission
Sharon Baker – *Secretary* – Key Bank
Bob Nelson – *Treasurer* – Anthony's @ Squalicum Harbor
Trey Campbell – *Past Chair* – Hampton Inn

Board Members

Diana Bakkom – Western Washington University Conference Services
Jim Baron – Northwest Washington Fair
Pete Coy – Whatcom Events
Larry Farr – Whatcom County Association of Realtors
John Gibb – The Willows on Lummi Island
Wes Herman – Woods Coffee
Christine Jenkins – Best Western PLUS Lakeway Inn
Lisa Karlberg – K & L Media Inc.
Pete Kremen – Whatcom County Council
Kim Laskey – Mount Baker Theatre
Carroll MacDonald – The Inn at Mt. Baker
Drew Schmidt – San Juan Cruises

Ex-Officio Board Members

Carolyn Casey – Port of Bellingham
Jack Louws – Whatcom County Executive
Guy Occhiogrosso – Ferndale Chamber of Commerce
Ken Oplinger – City of Blaine Council
Chad Sherfey – Silver Reef Hotel • Casino • Spa
Michael Lilliquist – Bellingham City Council