

Inland Marketing Advisory Group 9-9-26

Attendance:

Jitu Ishwar, Mitesh, Jan Rodriguez, Scott Schneider, Jamie Peters, Melodie Hilton, Janis MacDonald, Ramon Jimenez

Key Outcomes

The team agreed to prioritize creating a distinct **brand identity** for Inland Mendocino to move away from generic "town directory" marketing and toward story-driven, curated itineraries. The strategy will focus on identifying "hidden treasures," leveraging travel influencers, and creating cohesive 1–2-day journeys to increase overnight bookings.

Decisions Made

- **Marketing Approach:** Shift from broad regional promotion to "story clusters" and specific itineraries that answer why a visitor should go, what they can realistically do, and where to book.
- **Identity Development:** Establish a recognizable Inland identity separate from the coast, potentially emphasizing its role as the "heart" or central hub of the county.
- **Influencer Strategy:** Implement a tiered vetting system for influencers to ensure a brand fit, focusing on those with audiences in the Bay Area, Sacramento, and San Jose.
- **Organizational Structure:** Maintain Visit Mendocino as the "umbrella" organization to ensure professional management and resource efficiency, while allowing for more proactive regional marketing.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Attractions & Itineraries:**
 - Develop packages around specific interests, such as a "history buff" trail including the Grace Hudson and Mendocino County museums.
 - Promote unique experiences like the wine caves at Saraceno, the City of 10,000 Buddhas, and the "Hole in the Wall" swimming spot.
 - Better integrate the Skunk Train (specifically the Highball Express and Christmas train) into Inland lodging packages.
- **Target Demographics:**

- Focus on the "road trip" crowd traveling the 101 corridor toward Humboldt and Del Norte counties.
- Target the 2–3-hour drive radius, specifically San Francisco, San Jose, and Sacramento.
- Attempt to attract visitors from neighboring Sonoma County (e.g., Healdsburg, Santa Rosa) by highlighting the peace and exclusivity of Inland wineries.

Marketing Challenges

- **Lack of Cohesion:** Current marketing is described as "boring" and fragmented, with a heavy over-reliance on coastal imagery.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited budgets require highly targeted spending rather than broad, "random" advertising.
- **Communication Gaps:** Lack of collaboration between Inland towns (Hopland, Ukiah, Willits, etc.) regarding local events and offerings.

Action Items

- **Jan:** Reach out to key contacts in Hopland, Willits, Laytonville, and Leggett to identify the top three identifying features of each area.
- **Visit Mendocino (Scott/Team):**
 - Send a survey (e.g., Survey Monkey) to lodging providers to determine who is staying in their beds and why.
 - Coordinate with Jan to include her in the Hopland committee meeting on Wednesday at 9:00 AM.
- **Mitesh:** Forward a list of mid-to-Northern California travel influencers to Melodie.
- **Melodie:** Share current PR pipeline and influencer outreach status with the group.

Next Steps

- **Follow-up Meeting:** Scheduled for **September 23rd at 1:00 PM** via Zoom to review gathered identity data and refine the game plan.