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Consultant: Q-C's prime tourism target market is Chicago

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The Quad-Cities has done a good job of attracting tourists from several very desirable demographic groups. Now it needs to more strongly target them, according to Michael Mahoney, a demographic consultant.

The primary target should be Chicago, according to Mr. Mahoney, of RUF Strategic Solutions, Olathe, Kansas.

RUF was hired by the Quad-Cities Convention and Visitor's Bureau to analyze who the guests to the region are and where they come from. RUF matched the CVB's database of people who had made inquiries about the region, with its own database, and came up with 35,000 names and addresses for which it had detailed demographic information.



Photo: Roger Ruthhart

Joe Taylor, left, executive director of the Quad-Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau, introduces Michael Mahoney of RUF Strategic Solutions. Mr. Mahoney reported that a study by his firm indicated the Quad-Cities is attracting several very desirable demographic groups to the area and laid out a plan to help attract more.

“People inquiring about your city have the resources. The key is getting them to make that decision to visit here,” said Mr. Mahoney, adding that internet usage from people making inquiries here was higher here than normal.

They found that visitors come mainly by car from surrounding states and represent three relatively up-scale demographic groups. The three were described as:

* Male head of household, ages 45-64, who own a home and have an income of \$150-\$250,000. They like outdoor activities and sporting events and travel mainly during the summer months. They are heavy internet users followed by print and radio, not TV.

* Male head of household, ages 35-54, who are in a white collar occupation earning \$79-\$100,000 with children. They travel mostly by car in the summer and also enjoy outdoor activities. They are also internet oriented and focused on raising their children.

* Male head of household, income \$84-\$100,000, in a white collar occupation, and might best be described as “empty-nesters.” They enjoy outdoor activities, golf, gambling, museums and performing arts, and travel throughout the year except winter. Many have served in the

military and belong to fraternal or civic groups. They are strong print media users, followed by online.

Armed with this information, Mr. Mahoney said, the CVB and its members can target others in these demographic groups by planning ad messages based on their interests and designing a media plan to reach clusters where they live.

Mr. Mahoney also encouraged the region to continue to push for passenger rail service to Chicago, which has the highest concentrations of these three demographic groups in the Midwest.

Other individual businesses or attractions can also benefit by merging their own databases with the information already in hand based on CVB inquiries and the RUF study. This, said Mr. Mahoney, will help create a better picture not only of who has enough interest in the area to make an inquiry, but which ones also followed through and visited here.

“If you have names and addresses and you are not doing anything with it, it’s a waste,” Mr. Mahoney added.

While the study was done earlier this year, recent economic concerns should not have an impact, Mr. Mahoney said.

“People still travel, but they are now limiting their travel to one or two tanks of gas, which aligns well with your map of where people are coming from. They are not going long distances, so this is an opportunity for you to attract those who used to vacation at Disney World. It’s a great opportunity to actually increase your visitors,” he said.

“This type of knowledge is imperative to making good, sound marketing decisions and key to attracting more visitors to the Quad-Cities. We have shared this research with area attractions, festivals and others in the Quad-Cities tourism industry in hopes that they will also use this information when making marketing and advertising decisions,” said Charlotte Doehler-Morrison, vice president of marketing and communication for the CVB.