TAPP Marketing During a Pandemic

December 2020

The pandemic has caused many challenges across the globe. Gunnison County has done a good job of threading the needle between economic and health risk. While some are frustrated over the conflicting messaging, we are telling locals to avoid travel and to isolate if they do travel and at the same time we are marketing for tourists to come here. There are also serious challenges the valley will face if we experience a serious decline in tourism which will result in business closures and the health ramifications of unemployment, depression, alcoholism, that would follow closing down our economy.

Andrew Sandstrom, TAPP's Marketing Director, has also been serving as Public Information Officer in Gunnison County's COVID-19 response. This has allowed for continued communication between public health and outside marketing. TAPP has a completely digital ad buy this winter season and didn't sign any contracts that cannot be backed out of should COVID-19 restrictions need to be implemented. In addition, TAPP's messaging has been focused on outdoor recreation, which arguably is one of the safest activities during the pandemic. Andrew has communicated to Joni Reynolds that TAPP can turn off marketing in a day's notice should Joni deem it necessary to do so to protect the health of the community.

While it is an ever-evolving situation, Incident Command has thus far deemed the economic risk of shutting out tourists too great in comparison to the gains in health outcomes. We are asking locals to make personal sacrifices by not traveling to save our local economy. What do we have to lose if tourists don't come? Based on the 4% Local Marketing Tax, lodging spend alone by tourists in 2019 was $54.7 million which is on track to be even bigger in 2020. Generally, lodging makes up about 30% of the spend for a tourist. That means that tourists in 2019 brought in $182.4 million to our local economy. By shutting out visitors, we risk losing many more businesses.

Considering the global pandemic, Gunnison County has fared better than most. Local Marketing District Tax Collections are up 8.7% through the month of October. July and then September were our largest lodging revenue months in the LMD's history. Our unemployment rate is lower than other comparable CO mountain towns and the state at 3.9% as of September. While not all business sectors have had gains this year, we are an outlier in our success. According to Forbes, nearly half of all small businesses are at risk of closing for good. Among the worst impacted is travel and hospitality at nearly 62% expecting to close. For us to have a record summer under these circumstances is a testament to the balancing act that Joni and the Incident Command team have done to protect both the economy and the health of our citizens.