

The Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC (ATBC) understands that Aboriginal tourism is in a “marketing sweet spot”. That’s because many of today’s tourists are searching for a unique combination of cultural and nature experiences that few destinations can offer on a par with First Nations.

Tourism is among the top three industries in most provinces and a door opener to other types of economic development. Tourism also survives well in recessions, generates new business start-ups and generally grows community economies with minimal disruption.

Experts agree on some fundamentals for increasing tourism. The following approaches can be adapted by First Nations tourism planners.

The first rule is to have a definite focus that sets your community apart. In fishing terms that’s called a lure. But it is also important for First Nations communities to leverage the attractions of nearby communities. Don’t expect people to visit solely for what your community can offer. This means the dining, entertainment and other amenities of nearby communities should be part of your promotion package.

The next rule concerns using social media. In tourism, it helps you stay abreast of what people are saying about your tourism product. A key caution is to be creative if you are using social media for promotion purposes. It is a very competitive field. Also important is to have volunteers who will keep your sites up to date. Nothing looks more amateur than on-line material that is clearly past its “best before” date.

Related to this is the importance of promotional quality. Engage good photographers, designers and writers. You have mere seconds to get noticed in a competitive market.

Another rule is “be exact”. For example, if you are promoting fishing, don’t simply describe the natural beauty of your community environment. Your visitors will want to know what to bring, where to buy gear, details about licenses etc. It’s also important to break the experiences into pieces. Busy people are happy to pay for a quick, fun experience.

Partnerships are a key resource. First Nations should explore all opportunities to piggy-back their promotion message with other partners. For example, many magazines are searching for material to reach their diverse audiences.

This leads to the rule common to many business sectors. Know your audiences. In tourism, that means knowing the spending patterns of different age groups and packaging your promotions accordingly. For example, in North America, 80 percent of tourism spending is done by boomers. They value quality, sustainability and culture in a tourism experience. They also like to be educated. First Nations should take note.

The most important rule is often ignored. It states “Promote experience, not location”. People do not plan their vacation around a place. They are investing in memories. A vacation experience in a First Nations territory can compete with the memory values of many other destinations.

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