

FEATHER RIVER RAIL SOCIETY

DATE: October 2017
ITEM: Advertising Report
FROM: Eugene Vicknair

MUSEUM MARKETING

Big Fish Creations has been working with Director Vicknair on ideas for targeted advertising to increase our visitorship, RAL revenue and membership / volunteer numbers. The goal is to implement the most viable of these ideas as a lead in the 2018 season, as well as promoting the 2017 Santa Trains and the end of the 2017 RAL season.

We are reviewing several factors, including an analysis of our internet traffic to look for sites for possible web advertising as well as geographic areas to target where interest appears high. We are also looking at RAL sign ups and the guest books to make geographic focus decisions and create marketing lists for direct appeals.

Advertising / Marketing areas being researched:

Mass Market Direct mailing (ValPak, similar programs)

Mass Market mailing reaches a large number of people for a relatively low cost, but the response rate appears to be very low, meaning the effective cost per positive contact is likely higher than other methods.

Internal Direct mailing

An expansion of the same kinds of mailings we do for events and our annual fundraisers. These would include visitor and convention data. Cost is higher when we use professional printing and prep companies for the mailings, but response is higher than mass market as we are targeting an audience already known to support or have an interest in us. An end of year fundraising mailer has been created and a draft will be shown at the October Board Meeting.

eBlasts / email Marketing

Very low cost and a program Big Fish has already been utilizing for us to promote events. Need to build a bigger email database to improve reach. Targets already known supporters, so likely a higher response rate. Opinion is we should expand use of this option and build the database larger by capturing better visitor data.

Facebook ads

Low cost and something we can target to likely interested demographics, increasing potential response rate. We have already done some post boosting and are increasing our Facebook posting. This has definitely generated more numbers to our Facebook account and more attention from those visitors. Opinion is to expand on this program.

Website ads on relevant sites (travel, local, rail enthusiast)

Definitely targets interested demographics and would raise awareness. Costs vary wildly and hard to determine response rate. We could do joint or coordinated marketing in this area with local lodging and food venues, as well as with the Chamber of Commerce, enhancing the impact of the advertising. Thanks to Paul Finnegan, we have much useful analytics for researching appropriate sites.

Direct group marketing (wedding venue, car / motorcycle / RV clubs)

An item we have talked about for years. With proposed construction of the small depot / event space, we could market enhanced facilities for groups and small events. Depot space could be used for visitor group meetings, lunches as well as for events such as weddings and parties. We would need to put together some more guidelines on costing and handling of group visits. Also we are lacking in restroom facilities to handle such events. We should look at improving our handling of groups and increase our direct marketing to them. This is also an area to partner with local venues to provide larger options to the group visitors.

While there is some cost to getting this area improved (depot space, restrooms), the advertising cost should be fairly low. This is also a good area for the museum store employees to do active follow up with targeted groups.

Billboards in Reno, Truckee, Sacramento

We had some good success with the Reno RAL billboard which was displayed for 2 months in 2009 and 2010 in the time just before and during Hot August Nights. While we received a grant from a county fund to help offset costs in 2010, that fund is no longer available. Overall cost for the billboard as of 2010 was about \$750 per month. We did see an increase in RALs and visitorship.

A preliminary look finds that space cost has more than doubled and in some cases tripled for similar locations to our previous billboard. A digital (so time share) billboard of same size (48' X 14') near the previous location would cost around \$1,750 per month. A permanent billboard, as we had before, is estimated around \$2,500 per month for something near our previous location and could go as high as \$5,000 per month for a more highly trafficked location in the Reno-Sparks area. Also, the artwork costs have more than doubled.

While we may be able to negotiate a special deal (as we did in 2009 and 2010), we should weigh this higher cost against some of our other options. While a billboard is high visibility, it is also a non-targeted, mass market approach that has low response rate.

Highway 395 Billboard

Bart Hansen's family owns land adjacent to Highway 395 in Doyle. The foundation posts for a billboard are on the property and it is zoned for a billboard. His family has offered that we could build a billboard frame and display a billboard at this location, which would face southbound 395 (heading toward the Highway 70 junction). There would be no monthly cost.

This location is south of Susanville and funnels all the traffic coming from north of Susanville heading to Reno. According to a Department of Transportation traffic census in 2015 (latest dates available) the average daily traffic volume southbound at this location is about 6,000 per day. Peak hour traffic is about 600 cars.

In talking to Bart, we discussed an idea for an 16' X 8' billboard using a reinforced wooden frame. Cost for the frame materials would be around \$1,200 if we purchased everything. Cost to print the banner and have it reinforced and prepped for hanging would be around \$350. We would also need to rent 1 or 2 boom lifts or bucket trucks for a couple of days for some framework and to hang the banner. Depending on how we construct the frame, a small crane (if our Little Giant is road worthy, this would

be perfect) may be needed. Estimated total cost would be around \$2,500 to \$3,000 with volunteer per diems during the construction, etc.

The lack of a monthly cost makes this option very attractive. For an upfront cost, we would have a long term display on a moderate traffic corridor. We could even create 4 or 5 banners and swap them out during the year fairly easily (General Museum, RAL, Pumpkin Trains, Santa Trains, Railroad Days, etc.). This option definitely deserves more consideration.

Venue Specific Advertising

As a variant of the billboard concept, we should look at costs for advertising pieces in specific venues such as the Reno Airport and regional casinos. This is more targeted, as it would be seen by travelers and visitors, many on vacation and looking for things to do, so it enhances the chance a positive connection.

Radio ads (including expanding our current programs)

In tracking where are visitors and RALs are coming from, it appears that our radio ads and interviews are having a definite impact. We have been using radio on 3 fronts: the discount radio ad package with Todd Brusso's company, free PSA ads on two stations (one in Reno and the other in Susanville) and interviews on Todd's radio show. We just added the PSAs on the second station in time for Pumpkin trains thanks to work from Patty Clawson, Bart Hansen and Todd Brusso.

We should continue with the current radio plans and reevaluate early next year after Santa Trains, but preliminary assessment is that these are working and would be a good reinforcement to other advertising avenues.

Encouraging magazine / news items

Big Fish has been working to get news paper and magazine reporters to do stories on the museum with some success and we have also had some other find us on their own, likely due to the enhanced exposure. In the past year, we have had very good write-ups and stories with outlets like Channel 10 in Sacramento, Channel 3 in Reno, some regional travel magazines, the Portola Reporter and its related papers, papers in the Sacramento, Elko and Truckee regions and other print and web venues. We also had a documentary TV film crew at the museum. The Charles Sweetwood dedication received press notice and we are planning press pushes for other events.

This is definitely an area to continue, especially since we have access to Big Fish's press contacts. It is a low cost, high value avenue that does take some management and work, but gains definitely notice.

Direct follow-up (phone and mail previous customers)

This has been touched on in an earlier item, but we can also do direct phone contact with past RAL customers, groups that visited and other targeted demographics. We had plans for a phone follow up on our first sponsorship mailing last year, however that was not followed up on by the former store employee.

This is a low cost, highly targeted path that could be done by the store employees as fill in during other work, increasing their efficiency.

Reciprocal Marketing

We have done some reciprocal marketing in the form of brochure and information exchange for years with some other railroad museums and local venues (Animal Ark in Reno primarily). One option long discussed is offering reciprocal discounts (visit this venue and bring us the ticket, get X% off admission for us) with regional venues such as Animal Ark, the National Car Museum, NSRM, the Virginia and Truckee Railroad and others.

This would require some contact and leg work, and would have a related cost in the discounted admissions and high printing costs, but it is a high visibility, highly targeted option in a proven demographic.

Venue Partnerships

Another are we have talked about, in this case having package deals, advertising and / or other partnerships with local and regional hospitality venues such as hotels, casinos and resorts. Ideas being explored in this area range from simple placement of advertising; offering discounts on admission, RALs or train rides for guests at the venues; to crossmarketing on websites and in publications. We have also discussed joint event packages with venues as we built our capabilities. In all these options, we need to build our relationships with the venues, which would benefit regardless.

Thanks to work by Big Fish, we were part of an advertising campaign for Grizzly Ranch that targeted the bay area and no up front cost to us (was RAL discount) and we

have improved our relationships with Grizzly Ranch and Chalet View. We have also developed a good relationship with The Depot Brewery in Reno and are building a relationship with the Reno Aces.

It has also been discussed to target the casinos in Reno, but this has proven to be a tough market to get into. We did develop some relationship with Harrah's during the recent convention and should look at developing that.

If this could be implemented, it should be a fairly low cost option that could result in a lot of exposure by the venues. We could be a recommended destination for their guests and included in their "Things To Do" packages.

Historic Displays

This is related in some ways to the Venue Partnerships option. Eugene Vicknair is developing some travelling historic displays using portable roll-up vinyl banners based on the advertising pieces we purchased in 2016. Each set of 3-5 banners, costing \$65 to \$115 each, would be joined by a floor standing donation box / brochure rack and could easily travel to different venues such as museums, airports, convention / event centers, libraries, hotels and casinos. Each set would have a story on a piece of WP history (the Sweetwood, California Zephyr, history of the WP, etc.) and would also include an informational / marketing banner with information on the Society, Museum and Archives.

Each exhibit would be relatively low cost, have a small footprint, travel easily and promote the museum while acting as an information display, getting us into venues that otherwise would not allow advertising, and as an educational piece, expanding our mission for sharing the history of the WP family.

Eugene is working with Big Fish and the Archives Department in design and content. The first set will cover the Charles O. Sweetwood and act as a pilot project. Estimated cost for the first set and donation / brochure rack is just under \$500.

Once the Sweetwood exhibit is complete, we should book it into various venues and chart the response to determine the effectiveness of this approach.

NEXT STEPS

As we explore these areas more completely, we will come back to the Board with recommendations on which areas should be pursued further and some estimated budgets for implementation or enhancement.