



# **Conner Prairie**

# **Marketing Strategy**

AAD 610 Winter 2016

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3-17-2016

## **Introduction and Overview**

### Organizational History and Mission

Conner Prairie is an interactive history park in Fishers, Indiana that was founded by Eli Lilly in the 1930s and has grown to include a 1,500-acre campus with five interactive areas, a museum, and the William Conner House. The interactive history park also boasts being one of Hamilton County's top tourist attractions and the first Smithsonian affiliate in the state of Indiana. The mission statement is to "inspire curiosity and foster learning about Indiana's past by providing engaging, individualized and unique experiences" ("CONNER PRAIRIE MUSEUM, INC."). Conner Prairie creates programs that are driven by this mission for the different audiences served in the community and the state of Indiana. The variety of experiences at the interactive history park provides what Conner Prairie calls "multi-generational opportunities to come together, interact, and learn in new and unique ways in the heart of Indiana" ("Conner Prairie Interactive History Park").

### Summary of Marketing Goals

The goal of this marketing plan will be to create a focus in addressing audiences through multiple venues. Through the implementation of these strategies, a potential growth in audiences as well as growth in community support will be the desired outcomes. Each strategy will have a specific focus in which to communicate with a section of Conner Prairie's target audiences.

The desired outcomes of these strategies are not to specifically increase general awareness of Conner Prairie or gain specific numbers of likes and memberships. The

desired outcomes are to increase general contact with people in the surrounding communities.

### Proposed Marketing Strategies

The marketing strategies proposed in this plan will include social media, experiential, and coupon marketing. Each strategy will address different audiences for the interactive history park with a focus on different events and programs offered at Conner Prairie. The social media plan will create a much-needed focus in content on the Internet while the experiential and coupon marketing plans will address the community of Fishers and nearby Indianapolis to gain potential new visitors in a larger age bracket.

## **Situational Analysis**

### Environmental Scan

#### *Economic Scan*

Conner Prairie receives the majority of its financial support from individual contributions, grants and gifts, as well as endowment support. Conner Prairie is the recent recipient of a 2015 Lilly Endowment grant of \$7.5 million. Other income that Conner Prairie accumulates is found in admission and membership fees as well as rental and retail sales. The balance between contributed and earned income has created a financially healthy environment of operations. Major event sponsors for Conner Prairie include Marsh Supermarkets, Farmers Bank, and Reynolds Farm Equipment.

### *Demographic Scan*

The Indiana population has a majority of white residents that correlates to the population of Fishers, Indiana. Two-thirds of the population has a college education with a median income of \$90, 437 (United States Census Bureau). With one-third of the population of Fishers being under the age of eighteen, most visitors come from those families as well as school groups and families within traveling distance. The city of Fishers, Indiana does contribute to the community base for Conner Prairie. The Fishers population is primarily composed of adults with the number of community members being young adults beginning families growing. However, the majority of the constituents are school groups in the fourth and fifth grade. This is in relation to the Indiana state curriculum that history classes focus on Indiana state and United States history, respectively. The audience shifts during the seasons to accommodate school groups and families.

### *Cultural Scan*

Conner Prairie is located in Fishers, Indiana, situated near the capital city of Indianapolis. The physical environment of Conner Prairie is unique in the fact that there is no single building. The interactive park is comprised of administration buildings, an indoor exhibit space, and the many houses, cabins, and grounds that come together to create the 1,500-acre prairie town. The main employees of Conner Prairie that visitors interact with are the actors within the park. Finding the balance between the museum center and interactive park with the overall operations of the large campus is left to the job of two boards of directors. The largest board of directors is tasked with the job of the

museum and interactive park while the other board of directors is specifically focused on the endowments of the park and museum.

Being an outdoor history park, Conner Prairie utilizes the resources around them by creating long-lasting programs that are sometimes seasonal in nature. During the summer, Conner Prairie partners with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra to present a concert series called Symphony on the Prairie. During the fall, especially in the month of October, a series of fall family activities surrounding the Headless Horseman Hayride tradition including magic shows and Halloween themed karaoke. Many of the events that Conner Prairie hosts or cohosts are advertised and focused on family friendly programming.

Conner Prairie has been growing steadily online. The official website has added many interactive areas to explore the many sections of the park while also emphasizing the mission of Conner Prairie and its relationship with the community surrounding it. Conner Prairie's social media presence aligns with the commonly used social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Vimeo. In the last eight years, when Conner Prairie began its social media campaign, very few posts were made but all included a large amount of visual content to promote the park. While this has changed and grown over the last eight years, there is room for improvement and growth.

### SWOC Analysis

#### *Cultural Product*

Strengths

- With five interactive areas in the park, Conner Prairie is able to offer a diverse experience with each visit.

#### Weaknesses

- With a campus that is mainly outdoors, seasonal changes limit which areas of the park and museum are available in the colder months.

#### Opportunities

- Each interactive area can cater to different historical interests and educational needs.

#### Challenges

- Some of the events in association with interactive areas are focused on lower elementary students, limiting potential audiences.

### *Pricing*

#### Strengths

- Variable prices for age as well as members.
- Free parking is available.

#### Weaknesses

- Prices advertised are according to seasons. This prevents extensive prior planning, limiting those that are wanted to visit during a specific time of year.

#### Opportunities

- Pricing for groups and families could be advertised more. There is a small discount if a group of family is wanting to attend, those groups may lead to potential members.

#### Challenges

- The variation in prices and its advertisement can limit the number of visitors according to a specific time of year.

## *Place*

### Strengths

- The large campus is utilized with the different interactive areas.

### Weaknesses

- The size of the campus limits accessibility.
- Several attractions will close depending on weather and time of year.

### Opportunities

- Summer and spring events can increase attendance during the time when school field trips are not possible.

### Challenges

- Traveling to the location (Fishers, Indiana) can be difficult with funding as well as current interstate construction.

## *Promotion*

### Strengths

- Multiple avenues are being used, such as the internet, social media, and print.

### Weaknesses

- The website is the most detailed in promotional material.
- Social media use is limited with very little focus on interactive areas.

### Opportunities

- Create a new social media campaign to engage younger audiences and showcase current programs and exhibits.

### Challenges

- The social media campaign in current use is sporadic with no obvious focus.

## **Scheme**

### *Social Media Marketing*

The use of social media platforms such as Instagram can be tailored to incorporate public interaction and participation in the marketing campaign. Through a campaign on Instagram and Facebook using the hashtag #tbtconnerprairie, Conner Prairie shares photos of staff and visitors of the past while the public can share their own memories as well. By implementing a weekly schedule, regular posting shows the history of visitors and the park. The incentive to post would culminate in a free year-long membership to the photo that gathers the most likes or favorites.

### *Experiential Marketing*

The use of an experiential marketing campaign for Conner Prairie utilizes the experience that the park provides. By creating a small experience outside the park's campus, the number of potential audience members can grow. This particular campaign would occur at the art fairs that happen regularly in the city of Indianapolis, not very far away from Fishers, Indiana. In using these art fairs in the larger metropolis area, the number of people coming into contact with a teaser of the Conner Prairie experience grows. The experience would generate a small, free product that people can easily carry around the art fair and take home as a reminder of what the park offers. The target audience for this campaign will be those families in the Indianapolis and Fishers area attending the art fairs.

### *Coupon Marketing*

The coupon marketing strategy for Conner Prairie is specifically designed with their event History on Tap. The current ticketing scheme for the event offers different



prices for tastings as well as a special ticketed price for a designated driver. The implementation of a Groupon for this event will target the younger adult audiences in the Fishers community that are recent college graduates that are nearing the point in their lives of starting a family. If loyalty is built with these audience members through this event, a continued loyalty as they grow older and begin families is possible.

## **Implementation**

### *Social Media Marketing*

To begin this campaign, a ready supply of photos from collections and staff should be digitized for public sharing on Instagram and Facebook. In addition to the photo and #tbtconnerprairie, a caption should be included to explain the campaign. An example would be:

“On Thursday, join us for #tbtconnerprairie and post your favorite picture from Conner Prairie! Each week, a winner will be chosen by the public to be in the running for a free year-long membership!”

The beginning week will feature a single post from Conner Prairie (CP post) on both Instagram and Facebook with the above caption. On Thursday, the public will post their versions of #tbtconnerprairie. The top fifteen public posts that have the most likes of favorites will be shared on Friday with a reminder caption to “vote” for a favorite. The post with the most likes or favorites will be shared on Sunday and will be placed in the running for favorite post of the month.

The schedule for posting would be as follows:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Instagram	CP post	CP post	CP post	Public posting	Share top 15	Tally likes	Share winner
Facebook	CP post	CP post	CP post	Public posting	Share top 15	Tally likes	Share winner

The monthly posting schedule would be as follows:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1	CP post	CP post	CP post	Public posting	Share top 15	Tally likes	Share winner
Week 2		CP post	CP post	Public posting	Share top 15	Tally likes	Share winner
Week 3			CP post	Public posting	Share top 15	Tally likes	Share winner
Week 4	Share Week 1 winner	Share Week 2 winner	Share Week 3 winner	Share all winners	Share all/reminder +tally likes	Tally likes	Share winner

The majority of the public interaction with this campaign will be from “votes” or the number of likes on the photos shared. After a three month cycle, the winners of each month are then shared again to be voted by the public as the winner of a free year-long membership. The timeline for this campaign is based on months and quarters for the year. Each quarter will be a different seasonal focus for the posts generated from Conner Prairie to showcase the campus of the interactive park in its changing environments.

*Experiential Marketing*

To begin this campaign, a vendor permit for the Talbot Street Art Fair is absolutely necessary. The permit will determine the length of time and amount of space

the teaser experience will occur. In 2016, the fair will take place on June 11 and 12. A vendor spot for June 12 (Sunday) would be preferred as more families are in attendance than June 11 (Saturday). However, a vendor spot for both dates would be ideal.

The teaser experience for the Talbot Street Art Fair is a candle dipping station. An interpreter in costume would be operating and supervising the candle dipping station for safety purposes. Around the station, pre-dipped candles would be available for anyone that stops to interact to continue dipping and take the candles home. These candles would be no larger than two inches in length. The use of the smaller size of candle and pre-dipped candles with the guidance of an interpreter would allow for as many people as possible to experience the station.

In the vendor space, there will also be a museum representative to engage with any bystanders. This representative will hold a small voucher redeemable at the museum gift store for a free piece of rock candy. The voucher would only be valid until June 19, one week after the Talbot Street Art Fair is completed. These vouchers would not be handed randomly walk through the art fair but to those that are actively engaging and showing interest in the teaser experience of what Conner Prairie has to offer.

### *Coupon Marketing*

The Groupon for History on Tap would be focused on a group of eight, roughly the passengers of a large sports utility vehicle. The price for the Groupon is calculated according to the price of five individual tickets, including the designated driver, or the number of passengers in a compact vehicle. The current price for a standard ticket is

\$40 with a \$15 designated driver ticket. For a group of five individuals, the total price would be \$175. The Groupon price for a group of eight would include seven tickets at the price of \$25 with free admission for the designated driver.

A Groupon would be created no later than April 29, one month before the event. The Groupon would be made available on May 15, two weeks before the May 29 event<sup>1</sup>. This will allow for many of the coupons to be redeemed as a purchase before the event and door ticket purchase is available. As the group consists of eight people, the two weeks are necessary for interested parties to gather participants for a group.

## **Evaluation Plan**

### *Social Media Marketing*

The evaluation methods for social media would be based on tracking the traffic on the social media sites. After the first two weeks of the campaign, a tally of new likes and follows would be taken. Every two weeks, a new tally is taken to track the growth of social media traffic.

Future recommendations for this marketing strategy would be to increase the scale of the campaign. Each three month period of #tbtconnerprairie will have a season theme to showcase the changes that the campus sees and has seen through history. At the same time that this scale of the campaign increases, the number of postings from Conner Prairie will decrease. The frequency of the postings in the first, and possibly second, quarter are to create a concrete concept of the campaign. After two quarters,

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<sup>1</sup> This date is well placed as it is a Sunday. Currently, alcohol is not available for purchase outside of a restaurant on Sundays in the state of Indiana.

the campaign should be sustainable with one post from Conner Prairie in the week. Upon completion of a year, or four cycles of the three month campaign, a new incentive will be determined. With the implementation of a new incentive for the #tbtconnerprairie campaign will keep the campaign fresh.

### *Experiential Marketing*

The evaluation methods for the experiential marketing campaign would be based on visitor numbers. During the time at the Talbot Street Art Fair, by the museum representative to count the number of people participating in the candle dipping station. A second count would occur the week after the fair at the museum store with the number of vouchers that were redeemed. The comparison of the two numbers will show any relation between those that stopped and participated and later visited the museum and park.

Future recommendations for this campaign would be to expand to other street art fairs in the city of Indianapolis. Other fairs would include Broad Ripple Art Fair and the Indianapolis State Fair. If the voucher for the free piece of rock candy at the museum store finds some success in bringing new numbers to the museum center, an adjustment to the length of time that the voucher can be redeemed can be made.

### *Coupon Marketing*

In using Groupon for this coupon marketing campaign, the evaluation is completed through the Groupon company. Some features and categories of the evaluation software are revenue generated, customer location and demographics, and comments from customers.

Future recommendations for this campaign would be to create a Groupon strategy for the premium passes for History on Tap. This Groupon could be designed for a compact car's passengers instead of a sports utility vehicle while still offering a highly discounted rate with the potential of a free designated driver as well.

## References

Annual Reports - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2015, from <http://www.connerprairie.org/About-Conner-Prairie/Annual-Reports>.

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