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design & marketing

for lodgings in the
Catskills, Berkshires and
Mid Hudson Valley

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nycgetaways

Family of regional online guides

Booking Center

PMS and online booking tools

Our main story this month pictures promotion of a region's "brand" as possibly a worthwhile investment by an entire community.

Marketing lodgings usually seems like a zero sum game—if another property attracts more attention, you're going to get less. But suppose your marketing money brought everyone extra attention. You get more bookings but no competitive advantage. Would that be money well spent?

If so, does that argument apply to communities as well? If a community's investment in marketing benefited all nearby communities, increasing its own bookings but providing no competitive advantage, would that be money well spent?

And states? If one state promotes NYC-getaways, benefiting not only itself but also neighboring states, would that be money well spent?

Any ideas? We'll publish them in a subsequent issue. Repond to tips@shaunjohnstondesign.com

Online marketing TIPS & NEWS

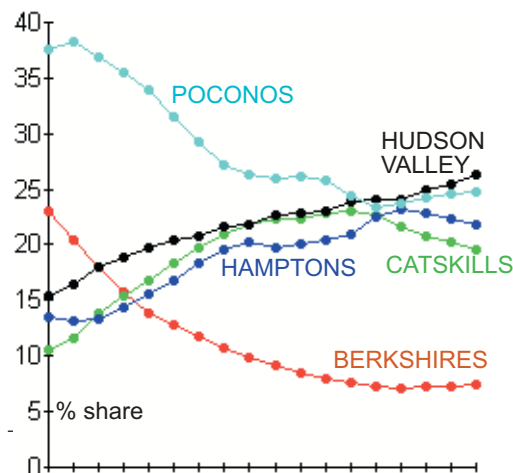
February 2004

Region traffic trends 2001-2004

Interest in our Berkshires and Poconos online guides fell sharply from mid-2001 to the present, while interest in the Hamptons and the Hudson Valley rose. Page-visits to the Hudson Valley rose 71%, bringing it from 3rd to 1st place, the Berkshires dropped 67%, from 2nd place to last. These trends may reflect relative investment by regions in their "brand names."

Since June 2001 the nycgetaways family of web guides has carried pages for five major NYC-area resort regions. Traffic data for those pages is summed up in the graph to the right. Unscientific as this data collection has been, it does provide an opportunity to compare the fate of NYC-area resorts in three different states.

Remarkably, all three regions in New York State show a very similar pattern of relative growth over the past two and a half years, with increases of 61%, 71% and 86% in share of page-visits. Equally remarkably, the other two regions, both clear leaders in 2001, show a similar pattern of relative decline. These trends are confirmed by actual numbers of visits, and search engine enquiries (right, mid and foot).



Percent of traffic to region-guide pages on nycgetaways from July 2001 to December 2003 (12-month averages to smooth the data).

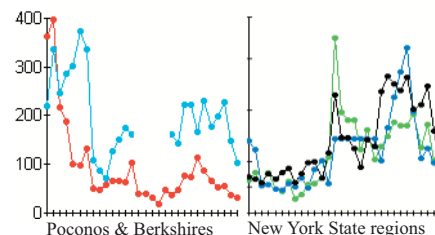
What price brand-name investment?

Both the Poconos and the Berkshires invested heavily to launch their "brands," the Poconos to associate itself with "honeymoon," the Berkshires with "Tanglewood." Is the chart showing both the power of that investing, and the penalty for stopping?

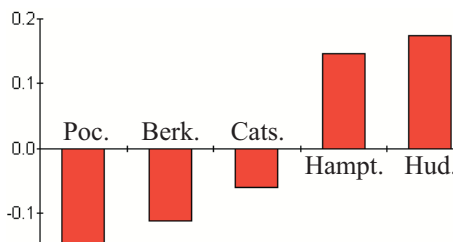
What the chart shows is web-page visits. Web-page visits translate at a fairly constant rate into room bookings, which in turn translate into salaries, profits and taxes. In effect, web-page visits are a form of currency. Can they be proved to generate a positive rate of return for investing in a regional brand?

Return on investment in page visits

Estimates vary for how many bookings a lodging will get per 100 visits to its web site. A figure of 3% seems reasonable. If the average booking value is \$200, that gives each web-page visit a value to the lodging of \$6. If you double that for spending by the visitor apart from lodging, the value to a region of a webpage visit may be closer to \$12, that is, one-thirtieth of that visitors' total spending in the region of \$400. At present, webpage visits can be "bought" on Google or Overture for around 50 cents. "Brand name" investing by states or regions could be a good bargain.



Actual numbers of visits show same trends as averaged "share of traffic" chart above.



The search engine Overture will tell you how many times any word was searched for in the previous month. The chart above shows how each region's share in search traffic in Overture changed from 2001 to January 2004. Generally it confirms the trends in traffic recorded in page visits to nycgetaways.com, top chart.

Traffic analysis: Alexa estimates other site's visits/month

How does your web traffic measure up against other lodgings? You can get a rough idea by going to www.alexa.com/site/site_stats/signup. Enter in your web address, click on the "Build this" button, then try the address of another lodging. Typically you'll get numbers like 234,870 and 359,285. These are how high each of your sites ranks for traffic on the entire world wide web.

Want to know more? Go to www.alexa.com and install the Alexa toolbar. It's OK, it won't harm your computer. But it will tell Alexa what sites you visit. In return, though, it tells you the ranking of every site you visit, on the Alexa toolbar. Like this:



Click on this number and you go to an entire page of information about the site. Click on the link, "See traffic details," and you come to a page of charts. Look for "Reach." You'll find a chart like this:

rg.	3 mos. Avg.	3 mos. Change
	7.8	↓ 32%

This tells you that, for every one million visits on the Web over the past three months, you got 7.8 of them. That's your "reach." If you knew how many visits the entire world wide web got in a month, then you could figure out your traffic, and everyone else's traffic.

By our figuring each unit of rank is equivalent to

approximately 1000 visits. Unfortunately, this doesn't work, for at least two reasons. First, for ranks above 100,000, Alexa becomes increasingly inaccurate. Second, as rank changes, what "reach" stands for seems to change, too. At the ranks of sites like ours, above 100,000, Alexa becomes very inaccurate. But it's the best we've got.

What's it good for? For us, it functions very well as a guide to how our traffic changes over time. And it does give a rough estimate of how one site's traffic compares to another.

Alexa rank is one item of the data we collect for directories. Bbonline.com has an Alexa rank of 10,000, bedandbreakfast.com has a rank of 13,000. Both clearly very powerful sites. The charts we show to the left are for Escapemaker.com. The lower chart says their traffic dropped 32% from the previous 3-month period to the present 3-month period, to be expected for travel directories late-fall, early winter.

Also claiming to provide you with site-rank is www.trafficranking.com/mainframe.html. But above a ranking of 100,000 it doesn't even pretend to provide real data, so at the level of most of our sites this is not a useful service.

The database behind Alexa is vast, one hundredth as big as the entire world wide web. In fact, it includes the entire World Wide Web, and not just now but at intervals going back to its origins. Through the "Wayback" machine you can see previous versions of every site on the web, and when each one was launched.

Directory: Escapemaker.com markets NE to NYC Metro Area

Distinctive feature: Descriptive content with photos created by Escapemaker helping people plan their getaways. Information about resorts, bed & breakfasts, hotels and nearby destinations.

Target audience: NYC Metro Area.

Destination area: North East USA, 12-state region within one day by car or mass transit from NYC. Virginia to Maine, Pennsylvania to Rhode Island.

Price: \$120 a year standard to be a featured listing, in a town for example, up to \$4800 for major destinations involving extensive research and exposure.

Number of clients: Over 500.

Traffic: Over 200,000 unique users per month.

Alexa rank: Feb 2004, 139,127 (60,000 in Sept. 2003).

InnStar rating: 4 stars and a score of 67 in 2004, up from 3 stars and a score of 54 in 2003. (Out of 5 stars max.)

Rank in our directory indexes, January 2004:

Hudson Valley, 41. Berkshires, 52.

Marketing: Monthly newsletter with monthly sweepstakes for subscribers. Has advertised in major NYC press.

Staff: Caylin Sanders, owner, with 2 full-time employees and many freelancers.

History: Launched by Caylin Sanders in Brooklyn in September 2000.

On the value of being seen online: "...according to a recent Internet Advertising Bureau/Avenue A study, 80% of the registrations generated by advertising on one of the top 10 travel websites were driven by people who didn't click on the ad, but came to the site because they got the message from the advertisement (much the same way conventional advertising works to generate sales)".

On trends in directories: "I see them getting more niche oriented. Keywords and indexing is getting better for the most part. But content still dictates stickiness to a site. The fact remains that portals don't seem to do as well as content-driven sites. Sites with some kind of screening/criteria for who advertises do better than portals because they establish trust with their users."