



Regional Tourism Organization 12 / Explorers' Edge  
2015/2016 Marketing Plan

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Prepared by: James Murphy, Executive Director

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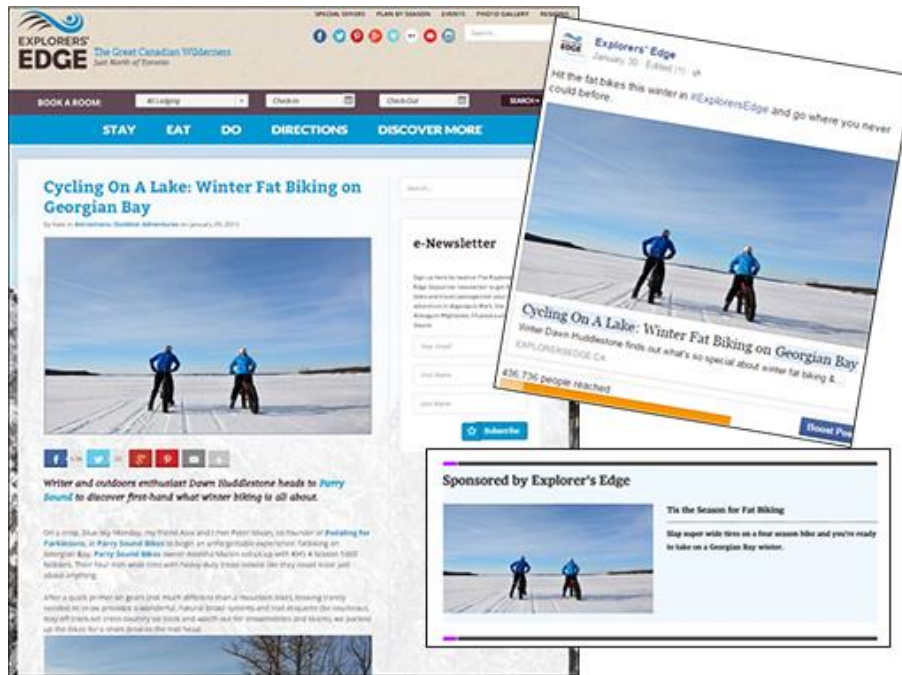
# Learnings

## Quality Content Drives Massive Engagement:

In fiscal 2014, we adopted a new marketing strategy focused exclusively on promoting content published on the Explorers' Edge blog

- **Content marketing** uses relevant and engaging content to attract qualified prospects (“Inbound Marketing”)
- **Content marketing** relies on social media, primarily Facebook, as well as paid search to reach qualified prospects with the published content
- **Content marketing** is “always on,” unlike traditional advertising, which is focused on campaigns.

Since April 2014, **140** stories were published to the EE blog (averaging out to almost 12/month) Supported by **862** Facebook posts



Analysis of top ten blog posts shows they generated an average time-on-site visit that is **more than three times** the site average (!) Posts, like the one about the ice trail, also drove high volumes of organic traffic and as more content is published, and more of it gets indexed by the search engines, traffic from organic search to the site will continue to grow, time on site will increase.

Page Title	All Sessions			Organic			Percent Organic
	Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page (Min)	Bounce Rate	Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page (Min)	Bounce Rate	
The Ice Trail at Arrowhead Provincial Park	92,774	2.8	73%	77,430	2.7	70%	83%
Top Ten Amazing Places Announced	61,787	1.7	73%	58	2.0	44%	0%
Arrowhead: Ontario's Coolest Park	23,799	2.2	90%	1,591	1.4	78%	7%
The Screaming Heads North of Muskoka	21,213	4.1	91%	2,041	3.2	82%	10%
Glamping at Georgian Bay Islands National Park	18,527	3.6	84%	500	2.6	78%	3%
Historical Hot Spots	16,386	1.9	86%	13	1.0	50%	0%
Cycling On A Lake: Winter Fat Biking on Georgian Bay	13,264	2.9	94%	233	4.2	67%	2%
Dog Sledding Adventures Just North of Toronto	12,777	2.2	76%	5,346	2.3	64%	42%
Trails: Thousands of Kilometres to Explore	12,223	3.0	87%	160	4.1	67%	1%
The Decades Show At Deerhurst: Bigger & Better Than Ever!	11,992	3.1	88%	47	2.9	88%	0%

The chart above shows the top 10 blog posts on Explorersedge.ca ranked in term of views. Average time on site for these posts was **2.6 min almost three times the site average!**

These posts also account for almost **40%** of total organic site traffic for the year, and **28** of total page views. Furthermore bounce rate is loosely positively correlated to time on site and the longer the time on site, the higher the bounce rate (correlation coefficient =0.3).

**Facebook is the Most Effective Traffic Driver:**

While organic traffic is growing quickly, we continue to rely on paid sources to drive site traffic, Facebook is the most cost effective source of paid traffic to the site and accounts for 70% of PAID traffic but only 51% of the total spending.

Google CPC and Programmatic Native deliver higher quality traffic, longer visit duration and lower bounce rate. However, these channels cost more than twice that of Facebook on a per minute basis.

The challenge in 2015 will be to continuously refine the mix of paid sources to maximize the volume of quality traffic while minimizing the cost per minute

**Facebook Continues to Grow:**

Of all tourism organizations in Ontario **EE now has the third largest FB Page** ranking behind the OTMPC with 212K Fans and Tourism Toronto with 102K Fans. While Fan acquisition was not a priority in 2014 Fans help drive organic reach for promoted posts so it is important to continue to acquire them. The top 10 Facebook posts in 2014 reached over **2.1 million** Facebook users generated over **75,000 actions** (comments, likes, shares, link clicks, etc.)



We added almost  
**9,000** Fans in 2014  
**38%** growth rate  
**Promoted Content**

Post Message	Lifetime Post Total Reach	Lifetime Post Organic Reach	Organic as Percent of Total Reach	Engagement Rate	Lifetime Post Consumptions	Total Comments, Likes and Shares
<b>All Facebook Posts</b>	<b>8,821,459</b>	<b>2,045,055</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>384,562</b>	<b>115,177</b>
Hit the fat bikes this winter in #ExplorersEdge and go where you never could before.	436,736	42,112	10%	3%	14,346	5,908
Great video showcasing what the Ice Trail at Arrowhead Provincial Park is all about.	93,824	34,720	37%	12%	11,283	735
For the love of all things outdoors people! Keep your camera handy this fall in #ExplorersEdge! New to the region Alex spots his first moose in #AlgonquinPark yesterday...he is still reeling from the incredible encounter.	60,032	31,264	52%	16%	9429	2,208
Make your plans ladies - Huntsville's Girlfriends' Getaway Weekend is back November 7-9, 2014...and this edition is going to be hotter than ever. Seriously.	176,704	31,936	18%	5%	8,113	1,143
If the temperatures keep cool, the Ice Trail at Arrowhead Provincial Park should be open for the Christmas holidays. Make this the winter you visit Ontario's coolest park. #GreatCanadianWilderness #IceTrailatArrowhead	277,632	25,728	9%	2%	6,863	2,165
Here's a partial list of outdoor rinks and pond hockey tournaments happening this winter in the Explorers' Edge region of Ontario - not to mention all the great rinks being built by accommodations in these parts. Lace up and get outside this winter! #WinterLearnToLoveIt #GreatCanadianWilderness	304,768	7424	2%	2%	6,034	1,342
Golf does not stop at The Rock Golf Club - or at least for Spencer Morland, the Director of Instruction. #whiteisthenewgreen	89,760	10,752	12%	6%	5,391	513
Grab your pooch and head to Arrowhead Provincial Park in #Muskoka on Sunday afternoons in February & March and give "skijoring" a try.	234,752	21,760	9%	2%	5,011	6,258
The best people to ask about snowmobile touring in the Explorers' Edge region of #Ontario are the club volunteers who take care of the trails and know them inside and out. Get some "Club Intel" for your Best Ride Ever. #OntarioSnowTrails #RideTheEdge #GreatCanadianWilderness	297472	13,696	5%	2%	4,717	3439
Colder weather is settling in, days are getting darker and shorter. I'd say it's time to book an overnight spa getaway to Ontario's cottage country. <a href="http://explorersedge.ca/stories/spa-getaways-in-ontarios-wilderness/">http://explorersedge.ca/stories/spa-getaways-in-ontarios-wilderness/</a>	135,168	18,048	13%	3%	4,647	1,189

**Channels: Taboola Vs. Programmatic Native Advertising:**

In 2014, we tested two new content distribution engines:

- Taboola is a content marketing platform that provides a web widget to publishers on their website to show "Content You May Like" that includes links to related articles, videos, and slideshows, both from within the site and from other publishers. The Taboola network includes thousands of publishers of varying quality
- StackAdapt is a content marketing platform that places third party content directly on dedicated positions on publisher websites. Advertisers get to place their content on these websites through a bidding process. Stackadapt's network

is much more limited than Taboola's and focused on high quality sites like the Globe and Mail, Reader's Digest and Huffington Post

Our test of these platforms revealed the following:

- Taboola delivered high volumes of traffic at a very low cost per visit, but higher than Facebook on a cost per minute basis due to Taboola's low visit duration and high bounce rate
- Stackadapt delivers a high quality visitor, with the highest visit duration and lowest bounce rate of any paid platform. It is, however, a relatively expensive platform

We recommend dropping Taboola and replacing it with a limited amount of traffic from StackAdapt, in order to increase the site's overall visit duration and reduce the overall bounce rate.

### E-mail Marketing 2014:

Title	Total Recipients	Successful Deliveries	Open Rate	Click Rate
December 2014 Newsletter	6,100	6,011	28.9%	2.9%
September 2014 Newsletter	5,909	5,817	32.0%	4.7%
July 2014 Newsletter	5,696	5,618	32.1%	5.8%
April 2014 Newsletter	5,748	5,672	31.2%	4.4%
<b>Total 2014</b>	<b>23,453</b>	<b>23,118</b>	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>

Average open rate in for the travel sector is 15.0% with the average for the top quartile 33.7%, this means EE's open rate is **significantly above industry average**.

Average click rate for the travel sector is 2.2%, with the average for the top quartile 6.8%, this means EE's click rate of **4.4%** is twice the industry average and placed in the third quartile of performers.

The Explorers' Edge newsletter subscriber list grew by about 1,400 records to just under 6,000 names representing a **34%** growth rate in 2014.

### Website:

Referrals to Third Party Sites Up in 2014, 107k an increase of 144% previous year.



Organic Traffic delivers the highest volume of referrals while Paid Channels such as programmatic native delivers the most referrals per visit, with Facebook and Google CPC virtually tied.

The referral rate has increased over 30% since the launch of the re-designed website!



## **Business Vision**

By 2017, EE will be the most popular tourism destination in Ontario.

## **Marketing Mission**

To make our target audience (Ontario Explorers) aware of Explorers' Edge and the regions within to help them maximize their enjoyment when they visit

### **Brand Positioning**

A quintessentially Canadian wilderness experience just 2 hours from the city

### **Tagline**

The Great Canadian Wilderness, Just North of Toronto

### **Brand Voice**

Earnest, approachable, informed and, most of all, Canadian

## **Marketing Priorities 2015**

- Publish exceptional content that serves the 'Ontario Explorers' segment as well as specific niche markets (pertaining to product development)
- While our focus will be on "discoverers," we will attract "searchers" with product and offer-oriented content
- Grow site traffic and focus on increasing its quality
- Convert Visitors: Nurture consumer leads and convert them to "heads-in-beds"

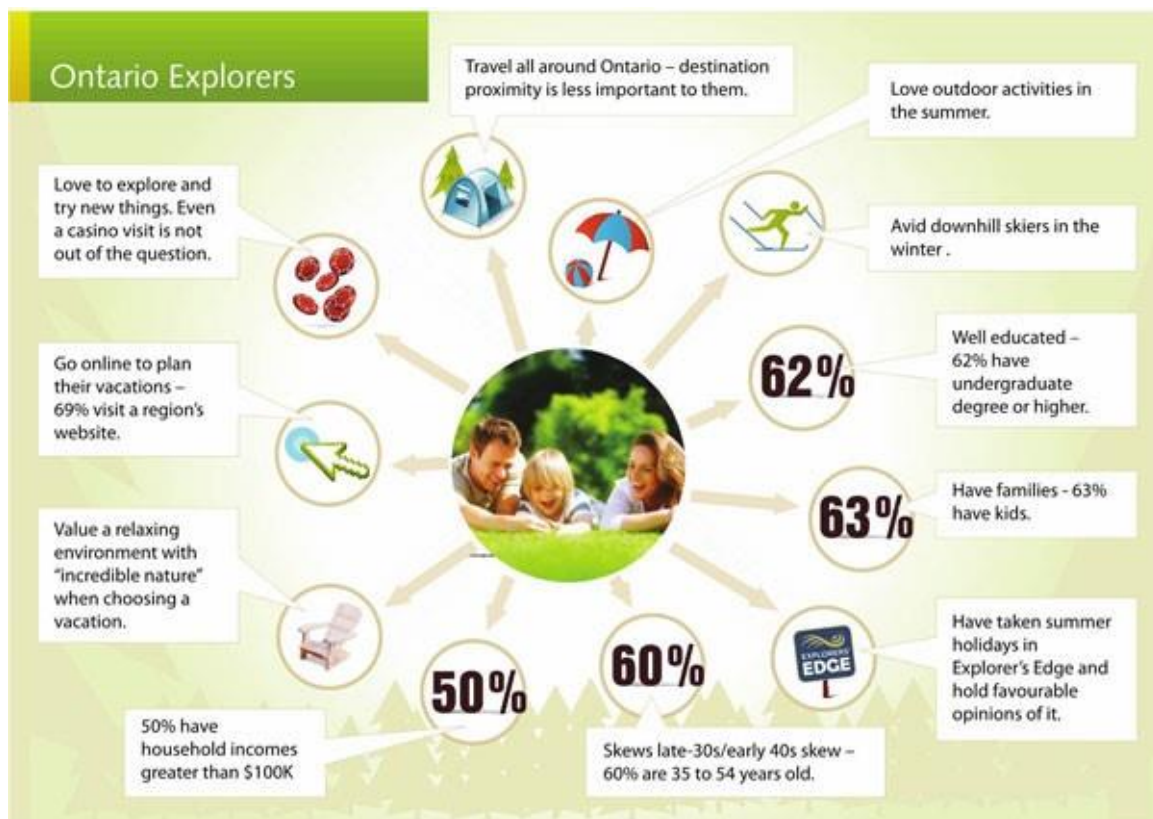
## **Marketing Objectives 2015 / 2016**

- Publish **150+** pieces of content on EE.ca
- Drive **700K** visitors to that content and other pages on ExplorersEdge.ca
- Add **6K** leads to the email database
- Drive **150K** referrals to third party websites



## Priority Target Market(s)

- Ontario Explorers: Married with kids – 35 to 60 years old. Above average household income (HHI) and education. Uses digital media to plan holidays and enjoys broadcast media like radio during commute. Takes family trips in Ontario every summer.
- We will target Ontario Explorers who are actively seeking information (Searchers) by increasing the amount of content on EE.ca and with search engine advertising.
- We will target Ontario Explorers who are not actively seeking information (Discoverers) by increasing the amount of content published on social media platforms
- The Ontario Explorers (2012) mirrors the identified Connected Explorer that was segmented in the Consumer Insight Research Segmentation Report (2013).



## **Marketing Manifesto**

As our target audience turns away from traditional advertising and other interruptive marketing, we will turn towards content to forge a new kind of marketing relationship with them.

The challenge with traditional advertising is that most of what it communicates is irrelevant to our target needs or reaches them at the wrong time. What distinguishes content is that it seeks not to interrupt, but to be found – and to be found at precisely the moment when the target is ready to consider our message. Moreover, because it's better suited to inform and educate, our content will attract to Explorers' Edge and its 5 regions and engage potential customers much earlier in the path to purchase.

And unlike traditional advertising, content marketing doesn't limit the scope of our message, and allows us to communicate the breadth and depth of the Explorers' Edge proposition and be inclusive of ALL the regions it comprises. It also means more of our marketing budget is spent on reaching the prospect and not on agency fees and creative development.

We have already found our voice as social mobile content publishers, and have proved that it can bring qualified prospects to our brand. In 2015 we will fully commit ourselves to becoming leading edge content marketers – and out-smarting our competitors for the attention of Ontario Explorers. We will publish more compelling content more frequently, and ensure that it is fully optimized for the social mobile consumer. And we will use the full suite of content distribution technologies to reach them.

**We will be Ontario tourism's leading social mobile content marketers.**








## **Tactical Plan**

### **Content Publishing Strategy**

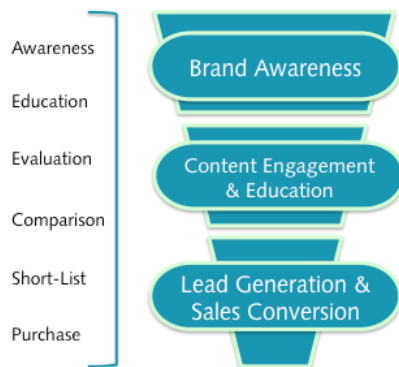
We focus at least one story per month on:

- The purchase decision criteria where EE is perceived to be lacking against competitor regions (these include proximity/accessibility, accommodations, cultural activities, attractions and dining/entertainment)
- Communities of interest, or niches, such as cyclists, motorsports enthusiasts, etc. We will expand guest author program to cover more communities of interest and areas of expertise
- We will publish content that has universal appeal (and thus highly shareable) but still connects to the region (e.g. "How to Launch & Land a Canoe")

## Content Platform Strategy

	Primary Audience(s)	Primary Platform Role	Platform Content
	Searchers & Discoverers	Organic and paid search, lead capture/CRM, sales	Original long-form text and embedded video content
	Discoverers	Amplify blog and YouTube content to reach people unaware of EE	Blog links and YouTube link posts, photo posts, curated third party content
	Searchers, Trade	Communicate "in-the-moment" developments	EE news and promotions, especially those of interest to travel trade
	Searchers & Discoverers	Educate and entertain, build SEO	EE news and promotions, especially those of interest to prospects who already have EE in their consideration set
	Discoverers	Reinforce EE's brand position and create desire to visit	The best in photography from the region
	Searchers	Conversion to heads-in-beds	Participate in forums, add content to EE destination page
	Searchers	Conversion to heads-in-beds	EE news, offers and promotions targeted to the specific segment needs

## Marketing Funnel



## **Evolving Marketing: Lead Nurturing (Direct Marketing)**

Now that the RTO has proven we can drive traffic to our website, it's time to focus on the "last mile" in the content marketing process – converting site visitors into overnight visitors to the region. We will do this through data collection and mining – a.k.a. lead nurturing. "Lead nurturing" plays a critical role in the conversion process: it is the process of building relationships with qualified prospects over the long run with the goal of earning their business when they are ready to book.

### **Lead Nurturing Program Objectives**

The long term objective of our lead nurturing strategy will be to convert more leads to shoppers/heads-on-beds. We will measure this based on activity on their booking engine. The primary objective in Year One of the Lead Nurturing Strategy will be to grow the list from two perspectives:

- List depth – acquire new subscribers and assign them to marketing segments as they are added
- List breadth – collecting data on existing and new subscribers in order to expand our understanding of who they are and their travel preference

To achieve this objective, we must first build and enhance the leads database. Currently, the newsletter list has about 6,000 subscribers:

- With over 600K visits to the site every year, there is a big opportunity to increase the size of the list by capturing them in our email database
- Last year we converted about 0.3% of site visitors. In 2015 we will increase that to 1%

Marketing automation software will make it possible to operationalize our lead nurturing strategy:

- Segment prospects and prioritize them based on engagement and propensity to buy
- Easily create customized landing pages for each email campaign
- Automate the deployment of customized email based on the behaviour of your prospects
- Measure the revenue contribution of each of your marketing programs
- Manage content publication and track content interactions across online and social platforms
- Integrate with lead management systems i.e. Highrise

The lead nurturing program will have three components:

- Building the database: undertaking a marketing effort to capture information from visitors to the website as well as to EE's social media networks i.e. special offers via custom landing pages to encourage sign up
- Lead processing: primarily about data collection upon sign-up. Upon sign-up, we will ask the prospect a series of simple questions in order to assign them based on interests to marketing segments
- Email marketing: Once segmented, they will be included in monthly email deployments. Going forward, we will no longer do one-size-fits-all marketing: Not all segments will receive an email every month – only those for whom we have a relevant message will be targeted

## Timing

In market week of April 1, 2015 (Pending MTCS approval) and run to week of March 31, 2016.

## Partnered Activities

Tactical initiatives and the process for participating in them have yet to be clearly defined by OTMPC. Based on previous years' work and high level information provided by OTMPC there is an opportunity to leverage:

- OTMPC Great North program (Free Standing Insert [FSI], Union Station, ontariotravel.net etc).
- Provincial Power sport Program – Northern OTMPC
- Provincial Outdoor Program – Northern OTMPC
- Provincial Fishing Program – Northern OTMPC
- Oversees (England & Germany) – Toronto OTMPC
- Free Standing Insert (FSI) – Toronto OTMPC
- ontariotravel.net – Toronto OTMPC

## Tracking / Measurement

As part of our marketing management, we will track the results of the campaign and provide a “dashboard” of results. These metrics include:

- Web ad impressions/clicks
- Traffic profiles/trends on Explorers' Edge websites

- Visits by influential bloggers to the region
- Social media posts
- Social network mentions (Facebook/Twitter)
- New interactions with Explorer's Edge
- Net new Facebook fans
- Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest
- Newsletter subscribers
- Referrals – Jack Rabbit Referral System

## 2015 / 2016 Budget

Social Media Advertising - Facebook Ads	\$271,000.00		
Search Engine Marketing - Google Adwords	\$75,000.00		
Content Promotion - Stack Adapt / Programmatic Native	\$60,000.00		
OTMPC	\$17,000.00		
Sub Total		\$423,000.00	
Content Development / Guest Authors	\$25,000.00		
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	\$22,850.00		
Creative Development	\$10,000.00		
Project Mngmt (Facebook 15%)	\$40,650.00		
Project Mngmt (Google 14%)	\$10,500.00		
Project Mngmt (Stack Adapt / Programmatic Native 10%)	\$6,000.00		
Monthly Retainer (\$4,000 x 12 months)	\$48,000.00		
Tools - Social Listening / Subscription	\$4,000.00		
Lead Nurturing Program	\$35,000.00		
Sub Total		\$202,000.00	
Total			\$625,000.00

## MTCS Media Investment Template

- Newspaper 0%
- On-line/Social 78%
- SEM 18%
- Trip Advisor 0%
- Magazine 0%
- OTMPC 4 %
- Other (specify) 0%
- Radio 0%

## Performance, tracking and measurement

The proposed brand/tactical campaign will bring visitors to the region during the fall period. But it will also continue the task of building the Explorers' Edge brand with the key target audience, an investment that will pay dividends for years to come.

As part of our campaign management, we will track the results of the campaign and provide a "dashboard" of results. These metrics include:

- Web ad impressions/clicks
- Traffic profiles/trends on Explorers' Edge websites
- Visits by influential bloggers to the region
- Social media posts (we'll provide periodic reporting on social media reports using our monitoring tool Radian6)
- Social network mentions (Facebook/Twitter)
- New interactions with Explorer's Edge:
  - Net new Facebook fans
  - Newsletter subscribers (through contest entry form)

## Timing

In market with week of April 2015 and run to week of March 15, 2015

- Circulation to the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport, April 2, 2015