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**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 4, 2013
Holiday Inn Express Hotel and Suites, Huntsville, Ontario**

Present: Don MacKay (Chair), Tony Armstrong (Vice Chair), Andrew Vitch (Secretary/Treasurer) , Jerry Feltis, Jackie Leung, Michelle Berry, Andrew Ryeland, Ken Turner, Diane Wiber, Nicole Saulnier, John Miller, Anthony Rizzo, Hillary Chambers

Absent: Mike Laba, Gary Froude

Staff: James Murphy (Executive Director), Margaret Gage (Scribe)

Guests: Ronald Holgerson, President and CEO – Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation

Bill Kenny, Vice President – Industry Relations – Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation

Resource: Peter Coish – President of Cloud AdAgents

Call to Order: Don MacKay (Chair) called the meeting to order at 9:30 am. Self- introductions were made.

Approval of Agenda

Andrew Ryeland asked that the Northern Ontario Committee Report be moved ahead of Presentations. Jackie Leung moved that the Agenda be approved subject to the change of presentation order. Seconder: Tony Armstrong. **Carried.**

Approval of Minutes for Monday, June 17, 2013

The minutes having been circulated, the chair asked if there were any corrections. Nicole Saulnier notes that there was a typo in the minutes. Under Research Committee notes, the following change to be made: Howard Fleming has been hired to collect data (not date) from operators, in market. Moved by Dianne Wiber, Seconded by Jackie Leung that the minutes of the Monday, June 17 Board Meeting be approval subject to corrections. **Carried.**

Financial Presentation

Andrew Vitch (Treasurer) & James Murphy (ED) presented the Income Statement and Balance Sheet. Vitch noted that the chair is still co-signing cheques and that we are still on budget with the following notations. While the income statement shows that we have spent \$591,000 and are budgeted for \$500,000 under Marketing (Consumer/Social

Media), one must look at the Income Statement and Balance Sheet together. While the total contract for our Agency of Record is committed up front, it is not paid out until scheduled deliverables are met. Also, based upon the partnership income we have received, we are able to overspend on that line item. Details to be presented during marketing presentation. Andrew Vitch moved that the Financials be accepted as presented. Seconded by Tony Armstrong. No further questions. **Carried.**

Approval of Consent Agenda

Chair (Mackay) explained the purpose of a Consent Agenda. (Meant to expedite meeting. Housekeeping items are bundled together and approved as one item) Andrew Vitch asked that in the future emails accompany invites to meetings. James Murphy noted that certain items contained within the agenda such as marketing presentations have a degree of confidentiality over which control needs to be maintained. Andrew Vitch requested that Research Report be moved outside of the Consent Agenda and be presented separately. Nicole Saulnier moved that the Consent Agenda be approved with changes. Seconded by Tony Armstrong. There being no further questions. **Carried.**

Consent Agenda Item Moved to Agenda – Research (Report attached to Agenda)

Discussion: Andrew Vitch noted that request for HST information from Fleming is not pertinent data. Request should be for HST on Revenue Line Item. Don MacKay suggested that particularly with respect to the collection of data from accommodation providers that there be a clarification made with regard to occupancy rates. That HST collected should be the Month to Month HST collected from the start of HST. Andrew Ryeland requested from Ronald Holgerson that aggregate HST information be provided by the government since it is difficult to get info from the government directly. Ronald Holgerson to meet with Rick M and will ask for info.

Visitor Surveys- Andrew Vitch commented that there were too many questions on the survey. Difficult to get customers to complete survey. (takes too long, some info lost) Suggests 5 to 6 questions. Start with less. James Murphy will adjust the survey.

Presentation

Northern Ontario Committee: Andrew Ryeland attended the Marketing Strategy for Northern Tourism OTMPC meeting. Most notable items were:

- a. Question of votes. May be possible for RTO12 to have two members on the Advisory Board Committee to OTMPC.
- b. Group of Seven Program being considered.
- c. Looking to Collaborate on Programs (are particularly interested in Fuel and Fun & Explore the Edge)
- d. Invite James Carrey to a future meeting.
- e. New Minister of Fednor - Kenora MP, Greg Rickford would like to attend a future meeting.

Discussion of where RTO12 sits within the provincial framework of funding catchment areas. It was recommended that the Chair contact Carole Caputo in Sault Saint Marie to discuss possible areas for collaboration as there is \$ 1.5 million available from OTMPC to spend for collaborative projects between RTOs that bring tourism dollars in from outside Ontario. i.e. cross border tourists from New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio markets.

Presentation

Marketing Committee – Jackie Leung reported on meeting of August 14, 2013. Fall Website is up. Seasonal tabs now on. RTO12 received \$60,000 in approved partnership funds from OTMPC. James Murphy provided a backgrounder for new board members with regard to how we position ourselves (accommodation versus attraction portal). Google Adwords cover off traffic on site coming from both sides - geographical location and activity based. What are trip motivators versus trip enhancers? It was noted the success of the Explore the Edge program for particular experience providers like Santa's Village. Discussion surrounding the positioning of attractions ensued with Ronald Holgerson contributing what other RTO's are doing with respect to this issue i.e. (Stratford Festival, Niagara Wine Country, Hamilton/Burlington Area Waterfalls). Almaguin Highlands skone skipping contest was discussed and the efforts being made to help promote that area of the region.

Chair suggested a five minute break.

Fall Blue Campaign- This program is based on the plan approved at the April 2nd meeting which was to "heavy up in the fall" and re-use the Fall Blue Creative Concept from previous year. This aligns with OTMPC targets which are Younger Affluents/Older 50+ affluents without children in the Fall. Research shows that this older affluent group are omnivorous for media both digital and print. (Digital during the week - print media on the weekends).

Peter Coish of CloudAdAgents was introduced.

Peter explained that the Toronto Star Media Group has both print and digital properties and for this reason and their popularity with the target market a deal including custom content, digital gatefolds and guaranteed page views was negotiated. The goal being to increase this number by 250% over last year. Using the Net Margins Network, they will drive traffic to our website. Facebook Contest – Pick your favourite colour is being launched. We are repurposing the creative from last year.

To supplement the digital campaign, an eight page print supplement "The Travel Reporter" will accompany the Sunday, September 15th edition of the Toronto Star at a cost of \$50,000 which is being covered by the \$60,000 grant from OTMPC. The board was asked to keep an open mind. The board was reminded that the purpose of the overall campaign is in part to build the brand which creates demand for overnight stays in the region.

A roundtable discussion ensued. Some comments:

Hillary Chambers - brilliant use of "Print Supplement" to support online campaign

Tony Armstrong – Thanked the ED for using research to substantiate use of print media.

Anthony Rizzo – asked that we concentrate on "ROI" to gauge the unique effect of print media.

John Miller – Great opportunity for us. There is a history of success with Toronto Star. Absolutely positive.

Ken Turner – His clients in particular use print/none use internet. Believes it works with demographic we are hoping to attract.

Michelle Berry – likes format of hi-gloss supplement. Concerned that overruns be put into key hands.

Diane Wiber – Make sense to use this medium to attract target demographic.

Jackie Leung – Digital Wraps/Site Takeovers are important part of campaign as we need to inspire people to come to the region. We must stop picking low hanging fruit and quit targeting people who already come here.

Jerry Feltis – has increased his print budget 40% and his business is up as a result. Looking forward to seeing the supplement.

Andrew Ryeland – questioned the cost of the click as a percentage of the overall budget. Registered his opposition to the print supplement. Felt it a waste of money.

Andrew Vitch – understands the use of print for the segment but feels the Star Media Group is not a effective avenue for marketing and that we should spread the spend between multiple companies.

Moved by Jackie Leung to accept the Fall Blue Marketing Plan as presented and the Marketing Committee has recommended. Seconded by John Millar. **Carried.**

Operational Planning Meeting –

The board was reminded that Strategic Planning Session is scheduled for October 7th and 8th. Expressions of Interest are going out to resorts that can handle our requirements. The committee asked that travel distances be kept in mind with regard to proximity of board members attending. Also asked if the session might be moved until after Thanksgiving. The board was reminded that several dates were circulated and that the Oct 7/8th date was the most popular date from the responses received. Also, the ED noted that our plans must coincide with government deadlines which have been pushed back from previous years. (January 15, 2014)

Lunch Break

Ronald Holgerson – President and CEO: Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC)

Mr. Holgerson has attended all but one RTO. Gave an overview of the OTMPC as an agency of the Government of Ontario. Has 88 staff of which 50 are at Head Office. Has a 27 million dollar marketing budget of which 25% is targeted to the US, 25 overseas, 25 Ontario, 25 product development. Stressed the importance of multilingual signage. Looking to build partnership to target alternate travel communities – ie. PRIDE, Pan-Am Games.

Two Programs are being developed with the purpose of attracting visitors into rather than around province.

One is the Event Marketing Program, the other is TIP. **TIP funding** from OTMPC will be limited to 40% of money to a maximum project budget of \$200,000. The project must involve a consortium of partners (2 or 3). It should attract dollars from outside Ontario. OTMPC is now becoming a listening organization. The board was asked what OTMPC was doing wrong and what they could do to support the RTOs. Jackie Leung offered that the OTMPC used to offer opportunities that were accessible to smaller operators but now the microsite package listings are too expensive. Jerry Feltis hoped that OTMPC could help with lobbying efforts. R. H. explained that as a government agency they cannot lobby. It was also noted that our major airports are rated 139 out 140 in the world and that the Visitor VISA approval process is extremely slow and cumbersome. Andrew Vitch also noted that an impediment to coming to the region is the lack of public transportation and that a portion of tax be allocated to go back to subsidize airlines/trains. (Florida Accommodation Tax used as an example)

Roundtable/Discussion:

Michelle Berry mentioned that with regard to the camping/RV market, her business Parry Sound KOA is up 30% and is just completing their best year ever. She cites the CDN/US dollar parity as a reason. This has allowed the RV entry market to grow and the cost of obtaining an RV is now the same as in the US. Also, due to budget cutbacks within the MNR, Provincial Parks are going downhill. Private campgrounds and their many amenities are looking more and more attractive. She mentioned that for the South Asian/Chinese market, price is no object whereas budget conscious Europeans trend to travel during the shoulder seasons. John Miller commented that the Sequin and Steamships are currently running at 70% capacity.

There being no further discussion, the Chair thanked Ronald Holgerson and Bill Kenny for attending and sharing their insights into the workings of the OTMPC.

Motion to Adjourn by Diane Wiber. **Carried**

Date and Time of Next Meeting: Strategic Planning Session – Oct. 7 – 8th, 2013

Location TBD.