



Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce “Closer Than You Think” Campaign

Research: The Smith Mountain Lake (SML) Chamber of Commerce exists to promote area tourism, community relations, economic growth, and advocate policies and programs that will promote the interests of community members. The organization’s efforts have successfully contributed to both population and economic growth, primarily due to consistent partnership between the SML Chamber and community members to stimulate activity and development at SML. Desiring to increase awareness of Smith Mountain Lake’s commercial and residential opportunities within the region, as well as in nearby states, the SML Chamber partnered with local independent advertising firm, GO Agency, to launch a public relations campaign that would not only increase awareness but be easily adapted by the rest of the community. In order to create an effective public relations campaign, GO Agency analyzed eight years of visitor inquiry data generated through the SML Chamber’s website and cross referenced response from new residents within the three counties that border the lake to determine which geographic areas to target. Along with demographic research, GO Agency set out to determine the optimal campaign launch time frame according to peak website traffic and tourism research provided by the Chamber. In addition, the marketing team collected media advertising rates and requirements for publishing, outdoor signage and broadcast media entities of interest.

Planning: Research led GO Agency to present the SML Chamber with a multi-purpose public relations campaign that would motivate local spending, boost chamber member business, provide financial assistance for chamber members and encourage long-term residential growth in the area. The campaign needed to target primarily females ages 35-55 in Roanoke, Lynchburg and the New River Valley as well as the more distant areas of Northern Virginia, and the North Carolina cities of Greensboro, Raleigh, and Charlotte. According to research, these were the localities that generated the most online interest. The marketing agency determined the optimal campaign time frame to be the months of April, May and June. GO Agency created a public relations campaign entitled “Closer Than You Think,” which established the ideal public relations message for an outside audience, yet was generic and appropriate for complementing the marketing efforts of any other community business or group. The message, “Closer Than You Think,” was developed to communicate an invitation to visit Smith Mountain Lake, as well as eliminate possible excuses for not making the effort to visit. The marketing team decided the primary goal of the campaign’s advertising should be to drive the audience to the SML Chamber’s recently updated website where they could further explore the attractions at SML. GO Agency worked to create fresh and bold billboard designs and television and radio advertisements that would highlight the tourism attractions, business opportunities and benefits of living at SML.

Execution: “Closer Than You Think” was launched on April 5 as an ongoing campaign made up of television, radio, outdoor, Internet and print advertising in Roanoke, Lynchburg, the New River Valley, Northern Virginia and the North Carolina cities of Raleigh, Charlotte and Greensboro. The campaign’s print, Internet and outdoor advertisements consisted of scenic photographs of the lake, eye-catching graphics and the headline “It’s Closer Than You Think!” with the SML Chamber’s website address listed. Television advertisements utilized video of activities available at Smith Mountain Lake including golf, water sports, boating, shopping, fine

dining and fishing with audio voice-over describing a visit to SML as a combination of the activities shown. Radio spots featured a man and woman seeking the kind of recreation and atmosphere offered at SML, then discovering SML as their choice destination. Both types of broadcasting highlighted the SML Chamber website address and the campaign headline. After the campaign's launch, community businesses and organizations were invited to use the "Closer Than You Think" headline and logo on their marketing resources in order to spread the message across the community and convey a united public relations initiative to responders of the campaign.

Advertising Costs & Overall Budget \$140K:

- \$52,000 Local Spending
 - \$10,000 - Q99, WROV, SUNNYFM Radio
 - \$30,000 – COMCAST, WDBJ, WSET, WSLS Television networks
 - \$12,000 - Outdoor advertising Roanoke/Lynchburg
- \$55,170 Regional Spending
 - \$40,170 - Northern Virginia COMCAST buys
 - \$15,000 - North Carolina COMCAST buys
 - \$10,000 - Outdoor advertising Northern Virginia
- \$5,000 Agency creative and execution costs
- \$23,000 reserve and/or print display ads

Evaluation: The campaign's success was measured according to the amount of online interest generated to www.VisitSmithMountainLake.com since April. Web statistics show that the website received more than 4 million hits through the life of the campaign. The graphics below illustrate the amount of unique visitors and captured leads received from the website in the months of April through August, as well as the visitor locality. In respect to community integration of the campaign, several local organizations, developers and retailers incorporated the "Closer Than You Think" logo for their own marketing efforts regionally and nationally. Plans are being made to re-launch the campaign again next spring.

