



VTC MARKETING PLAN FOR 2024

VTC MISSION

Virginia is for Lovers is one of the most iconic and recognizable travel brands in the world. Using that powerful brand equity, Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) is charged with promoting the Commonwealth as a premier travel destination by showcasing all there is to love in a Virginia vacation.

VTC's mission is to expand domestic and international inbound travel and motion picture production to generate revenue and employment in Virginia. The dollars spent by travelers fuel the economy, provide jobs for Virginians, and improve communities across the state. Simply put, tourism helps make Virginia a great place to live, work, and visit.

MARKETING GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The principles listed below will guide VTC's marketing efforts, providing a clear direction for developing strategies and executing tactics. These are at the core of every VTC marketing initiative and provide a map for VTC and its partners to follow.

- **Welcoming Destination to ALL.** All marketing efforts will reflect our value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will tell the true, full story of Virginia and its history. We will be intentional about engaging and representing diverse communities.
- **"Actionable Abundance"** Virginia's abundance of travel experiences is our strength and sets us apart from our competition. VTC will position Virginia as a premier travel destination by marrying an abundance of product offerings with traveler desires among key audience segments, focusing on the "how and where" to move travelers from consideration to decision. VTC's content, campaigns, and initiatives should focus on providing value and align with the key attributes our target audiences are looking for.
- **Partner-first mentality.** Our partners are as diverse as our products and our resources must reflect this variance. We will listen to our partners through consistent surveys and will respond by looking holistically at partner integration rather than taking a "one size fits all" approach.
- **Research-led decision-making.** Research and analytics will inform marketing strategy in all stages, from planning to implementation to evaluation. We do not "set and forget" marketing plans; we implement, analyze and adjust as needed to achieve our goals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March of 2023, VTC revitalized its marketing strategy, VTC initiated a comprehensive selection process, culminating in the engagement of Sway Creative Labs and Love Communications as its primary creative and media buying agencies, respectively. This partnership leveraged advanced digital marketing techniques and data analytics, setting a new benchmark in tourism marketing and campaign attrition.

This marketing plan details VTC's strategic approach to inspire and encourage visitors to explore Virginia with the ultimate goal of establishing the Commonwealth as a premier travel destination. Through integrated marketing efforts, brand-building, and storytelling, VTC will create relationships with travelers to increase awareness and visitation.

Additionally, this plan tackles two of the greatest challenges facing our destination. First, we must combat low awareness levels regarding the diversity of tourism products and experiences in Virginia. Second, Virginia's tourism landscape faces strong competition from North Carolina and Tennessee in image and economic growth. Virginia benefits from having a balanced image of being a travel destination with abundant activities and things to do across the state. However, at present, these states are outpacing Virginia in tourism growth, which is contributing significantly to their overall economic development. To maintain Virginia's relevance as a premier travel destination, VTC aims to raise awareness of Virginia's key attributes to strategically increase visitor spending to gain market share from our competitors.

VTC plans to maintain high consumer awareness through targeted tactical initiatives and campaigns, such as the Flagship Campaign, focusing on high-yielding micro-audience segments. VTC intends to empower industry partners statewide with cost-effective strategies to amplify the Flagship Campaign's reach and drive visitation throughout Virginia. VTC will intentionally showcase the state's resources for sports, meetings, meetings, and group markets, fostering inbound visitation growth. Moreover, VTC will pursue global partnerships to boost international visitation, positioning Virginia ahead of competitors in the international tourism market. These tactics are specifically crafted to stimulate visitor demand and accelerate growth within Virginia's tourism industry.

VTC MARKETING GOALS

VTC's core goal is to lead with data to accelerate the inbound visitor demand by maximizing Virginia's tourism potential and working strategically to drive \$100 million a day in visitor spending by 2026. Working with a wide variety of partners, VTC aims to grow Virginia's domestic and international tourism economy, raise awareness of Virginia's tourism products, increase consumer consideration to travel, and convert potential travelers to actual visitors.

MARKETING OBJECTIVES + KEY RESULTS

VTC aims to increase awareness and consideration for Virginia as a vacation destination resulting in visitation through bookings and arrivals. The following objectives and key results are part of the integrated marketing efforts, and if achieved would show VTC's success in 2024.

Objective 1: Accelerate Inbound Visitor Demand

Key Results & 2024 Targets:

- Maintain Household awareness levels of 57% for Virginia
- Drive 154k Direct Hotel Bookings (ADARA)
- Drive \$49-\$55M in Direct Hotel Revenue (ADARA)
- Drive 38.1M in total Virginia industry-wide hotel room nights

Objective 2: Maximize Virginia's Tourism Potential

Key Results & 2024 Targets:

- Establish 1 New Tourism Improvement District
- 2 TDFP Certified Projects
- 5,250 Businesses, Entrepreneurs, and Organizations Assisted
- **Support Tourism Partners with Grants**
 - Award 300+ Grants
 - Maintain 4.3X Grant Program Leverage Ratio
 - Assist 1000+ Partners

Objective 3: Build brand loyalty and trust with target audience segments

Key Results & 2024 Targets:

- Increase production of short-form videos and implement boosting strategy to reach new OOS audiences and grow social followers across networks by 3% by EOY
- Maintain at least 55% organic traffic by implementing SEO best practices across owned channels
- Secure an across-network engagement rate of 1.5% or higher by engaging consumers with new serial social media content formats
- Increase focus on social media community management to build trust. Reach 40% actioned messages and engage in comments daily.
- Develop 3 niche content campaigns aligned with audience segments by sourcing compelling assets from outside content creators and partnering with influencers to amplify VTC efforts
- Develop 2 new email marketing lead-generation strategies and 3 new automated drip campaigns to attract, nurture, and retain consumers in target audiences
- Increase average engagement time to 1 minute
- Increase conversions on Virginia.org by 8% YoY

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Research and analytics inform VTC's marketing strategy at all stages, from planning to implementation to evaluation. We do not "set and forget" marketing plans; we implement, analyze, and adjust as needed to achieve our goals. VTC will assess key performance indicators monthly, quarterly, and annually including:

- Increase awareness, engagement, and conversion through owned, earned, and paid media
- Increase economic impact through attributed hotel and flight bookings

AUDIENCE

In-State and Out-of-State Audiences

The relationship between paid marketing and organic marketing is synergistic. While VTC's paid media efforts reach new out-of-state audiences, our always-on organic content marketing efforts provide a steady drumbeat of travel information and inspiration for newly acquired leads, visitors, and Virginia residents alike, building brand advocates and local ambassadors that amplify the message that **Virginia is a great place to live, work, and visit.**

Organic content also significantly increases the visibility and appeal of our state's attractions to in-state audiences, and roughly **half of all visitors to Virginia are visiting friends and family**, so we can't ignore this key in-state audience.

Through content marketing promotions, VTC will speak to this key audience through our **LOVEworks** and **My Home, Virginia** campaigns, and ongoing evergreen and niche content marketing initiatives targeting our key audience segments.

KEY AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Outdoor Enthusiasts

Individuals who like to experience all the outdoors has to offer, from camping to fishing and everything in between.

- Values: Self-identify as adventurous, explorative, and learning travelers.
- Media Habits: Primarily digital channels (music streaming, online mobile, streaming TV, and YouTube)
- Hobbies: National/State Parks, Mountain Scenery, Small Towns, Scenic Drives, Landmarks, Hiking, Fishing, Watersports, Visiting Farms, Boating.
- Main Differentiator: More likely than other segments to enjoy very authentic, non-intensive outdoor sports, activities, and experiences.

Urban Explorer

People who exhibit curiosity toward the world and seek a variety of experiences rooted in an urban center to satisfy their vacation needs.

- Values: Self-identify as risk-taking, brand-conscious, and creative travelers.
- Media Habits: Very digitally heavy, particularly on Google, YouTube, and Expedia when planning a trip.
- Hobbies: Coastal Scenery, Spas, Bars, Festivals, Shopping, Beaches, Breweries, Wineries, Black Heritage, Zoos
- Main Differentiator: More likely than other segments to root their vacations in an urban environment and explore the amenities around the area.

Travel & Activity Enthusiasts

Go-getters who aim to act on abundance and do everything a destination has to offer on their travels.

- Values: Self-identify as adventurous, authentic, explorers when traveling.
- Media Habits: Most likely to use OTA's relative to other audiences for travel planning and use digital channels otherwise.
- Hobbies: Adventure Sports, Mountain/Road Biking, National/State Parks, Mountain Scenery, Bars, Hiking, Winter Sports, ATV Riding
- Main Differentiator: More likely than other segments to partake in many hobbies while on vacation and do so extensively.

GEOGRAPHY

Domestic Target Markets (Excluding Virginia)

High Value - visitors from these markets typically stay longer and spend more per trip

1. Massachusetts
2. Illinois
3. Pennsylvania
4. Atlanta
5. Washington DC
6. Los Angeles
7. San Francisco
8. New York City

Mid Value - visitors from these markets may spend less per trip but visit more frequently

1. North Carolina
2. South Carolina
3. Maryland
4. Tennessee
5. Cleveland

6. Columbus

International Target Markets

Primary

1. Canada
 - a. Québec
 - b. Ontario
2. United Kingdom
3. Germany
4. France

Secondary

1. Australia
2. India
3. Japan

MARKETING INITIATIVES

VTC's Marketing Division includes eight functional areas – Brand, Communications, Content, Digital, Domestic Sales, Global Marketing, and Special Projects & Merchandise. Through integrated marketing, VTC will launch the following campaigns and marketing initiatives.

Campaigns & Editorial Content Themes

Flagship Initiatives - Timeline

April-November

“Vacation Starts with VA” Flagship - Summer flagship campaign highlighting Virginia's abundance of travel experiences with quick access from key travel hubs across Virginia. The campaign will leverage video and imagery across owned channels. A strategic media plan will be deployed and KPIs for each channel will measure success.

April - September

Virginia Music Country Campaign - 2024 is a unique year for celebrating music heritage in Southwest Virginia. It marks the 50th anniversary of the iconic Carter Family Fold but also the 20th anniversary of the Crooked Road, The Birthplace of Country Music Museum's 10th anniversary, and Floyd Country Store's 40th anniversary of its Friday Night Jamborees. To honor and celebrate this significant year for music in Virginia, VTC will lead marketing efforts to highlight experiential travel, authentic culture, and the deep-rooted music heritage in Southwest Virginia. VTC will leverage travel and music media and influencers to tell the story of Appalachian music in Virginia and showcase the unique cultural experiences available in this authenticity-packed region of the Commonwealth.

Niche Campaigns - Timeline

VTC utilizes tastemakers, influencers, and creators to complement and amplify niche campaigns through third-party perspectives. This approach extends the reach of VTC's channels and creates high-quality new content for VTC's marketing efforts.

Season Three: May - June

My Home, Virginia - The My Home Virginia video series explores the stories of noteworthy Virginians across the Commonwealth as we seek to answer a simple question – “Why Virginia?”. The series dives deep into these individuals' stories and highlights the role Virginia plays in their lives, careers, and the pursuit of their passions.

August - November

Virginia: Wine Region of the Year - Virginia received a major accolade in 2023 as Charlottesville, Virginia, as the Monticello AVA won the 2023 Wine Region of the Year at Wine Enthusiast's 24th Annual Wine Star Awards. VTC will leverage this global recognition with a niche campaign in the fall of 2024, celebrating Virginia as the “Birthplace of American Wine.” A strategic digital media plan will be deployed, and KPIs for each channel will measure success.

Editorial Content Pillars

Organic content drives the strongest consumer engagement and keeps audiences moving through the marketing funnel. The following editorial pillars reflect VTC business objectives, research findings, website analytics, and keyword data. The pillars are consistently represented across owned channels, engaging newly acquired leads while fostering brand loyalty and trust, ultimately driving consideration and conversions.

OUTDOORS

hiking | biking | paddling | camping | parks | ATVs | trails | scenic drives | stargazing
State & national parks | eco-tourism | beaches | mountains | outdoor sporting & wildlife viewing

FAMILY FUN

affordable family trip ideas | multi-generational travel destinations | kid-friendly resorts and attractions | kid-friendly outdoor activities

MUSIC+LOCAL CULTURE

major music festivals and big concerts | things to do near major venues | southwest virginia's appalachian music heritage

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY - VA'S 250

presidential homes | revolutionary history sites | colonial history towns & experiences | indigenous virginian history & experiences | history+

FOOD & DRINK

wine | craft beer | cider | spirits | oysters | heritage cuisine | food & drink tours | virginia chefs + recipes | agritourism | locally sourced ingredients | u-pick farms | immersive dining experiences

UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

small towns | hidden gems | city + town profiles | neighborhoods | music + performances | the arts | film

DOI

diversity + inclusion | black travel | LGBTQ-friendly | accessibility

TRAVEL TRENDS FOR 2024

Experiential and Meaningful Travel + Cultural Exploration: Travelers prioritize meaningful experiences, such as connecting with local communities, exploring local cultures, building connections between partners, families, or the self, and seeking authentic experiences while traveling in 2024.

Affordable Luxury and Budget-Friendly Experiences: Travelers are looking for ways to enjoy luxury experiences, hotels, and upscale destinations without breaking the bank, including affordable alternatives to popular vacation cities, affordable luxury resorts, and boutique hotels.

Wellness and Health-Focused Travel: Wellness and health-focused trips are rising as travelers prioritize self-care, rest, and relaxation in 2024.

INDUSTRY/PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

One of VTC's primary responsibilities is to support the Virginia tourism industry. As such, we aim to achieve at least 75% partner participation in marketing initiatives and 80% participation in co-op programs. To accomplish this we will deploy the following tactics:

Brand and Campaign Integration

Empower partners to utilize Virginia is for Lovers brand/strategy:

- Provide direction and templates for each campaign that are easy to access, simple and flexible, and provide consistent opportunities for partners.
- Ensure that all consumer-facing messaging is consistent, harmonious, and congruent.
- Ensure that the brand tone, voice, and personality are woven through all consumer-facing messaging.

Industry Co-op Program

Provide an integrated program of marketing resources for the Virginia tourism industry:

- Industry Advertising Co-Op
- VTC Email Advertising
- Virginia.org Advertising
- Welcome Centers/PMAP
- Travel Guide Advertising
- VTC Social

DRIVE Tourism and the VTC Marketing Strategy

DRIVE Tourism is a statewide, community-led development grant program built from the findings of VTC's Statewide Strategic Plan. The goal of the program is to create community-specific strategies that help to provide promotion and product development direction.

Growing the visitor economy will spur job creation and private investment, further enhance Virginia's brand as a premier destination, and create opportunities for community-focused tourism partnerships.

VTC's integrated marketing plan complements Partnership Marketing's Drive Tourism program by providing a strategic roadmap for VTC and industry partners to develop marketing and relevant promotional messages about travel in Virginia. By aligning messaging across the board -- from the state level to small business owners -- potential travelers to Virginia will see consistent, unified, and compelling messaging.

VTC Industry Resources

While this integrated plan details the strategic approach VTC will take to inspire and encourage visitors to explore Virginia, it is also a guide for the Virginia Tourism industry at large. VTC will continue to provide guidance and recommendations to industry partners and offer helpful and flexible ways to participate in all integrated marketing efforts. Find helpful VTC resources, by department, available for industry partners at <https://vatc.org/marketing/>.

Appendix:

[2024 MARKET RESEARCH](#)

[2024 Marketing Initiatives](#)

[Domestic Marketing 2024 Strategy](#)

Conclusion

The 2024 Marketing Plan outlines a strategic approach to elevate Virginia's position as a premier travel destination. Leveraging the iconic "Virginia is for Lovers" brand, the plan focuses on integrated marketing efforts to boost awareness, visitation, and ultimately, visitor spending.

VTC aims to represent the true essence of Virginia, highlighting its abundant travel experiences across various marketing initiatives. The multi-faceted campaign strategy, including flagship initiatives and niche campaigns, aims to attract key audiences and set Virginia apart from its competition.

By focusing on the key principles of leading with data-driven decisions, prioritizing partnerships, leaning into digital innovation and content-driven storytelling, VTC aims to drive significant economic benefits for Virginia, fostering growth and maintaining its relevance in the competitive tourism landscape.