

# Santa Maria Valley 2020-2021 Marketing Plan

## *Engage. Inspire. Create Experiences.*

Welcome to the 2020–2021 marketing plan for Santa Maria Valley. This plan will serve as a roadmap to meeting Santa Maria Valley’s marketing objectives over the course of the next several months. As we head into our fifth year of implementing an integrated marketing communications plan, you will see a common thread to deepen our interactions with our target audience and encourage active engagement with the brand. Our primary objectives remain consistent with prior years, although our strategy continues to be refined, especially as we navigate through the current environment as presented by the ongoing pandemic.

## Primary Goals

- Increase overall awareness of Santa Maria Valley, leverage its assets, events (as applicable) and local flavor in an effort to attract overnight visitors.
- Attract high-quality visits to the website so that we may best influence our audience’s decision to visit the area. This will be monitored by tracking visits to hotel pages and outbound clicks to hotel websites. We do anticipate that overall traffic will be down year-over-year due to the implications of the ongoing pandemic.
- Continue our strategic and cohesive marketing and communications efforts for Santa Maria Valley based on a \$389,000 budget through June 2021.
  - \$146,000 of this budget is for media placement spread over a nine-month period (October 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). The recovery campaign budget of \$50,000 in media placement will take us through September 30, 2020.
  - The remaining \$243,000 is distributed over the course of the full 12 months (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) and includes account management, reporting, media management, strategic communications, creative services, website design/development, SEO services and photography/video for the period.

## Things to Consider

This will continue to be a volatile year for the travel industry. In anticipation of this, we’ve re-evaluated our approach to goal-setting for individual areas of this plan, and, while we do identify some specific objectives later in this document as it relates to publicity value, stories earned, social traffic referrals to the website and paid traffic to the website, we recommend taking a closer look at these on a quarterly basis and revisiting as needed based on how the situation evolves.

For one, organic search has proven to be the primary driver of website visits for Santa Maria Valley, and while we’re unable to predict exactly how search volume will continue to be affected by the pandemic, we do know how it’s been affected thus far:

- Events and the searches associated with them have been decimated by the pandemic. The loss of this traffic will continue to severely impact the total number of visits coming to our site.
- Wine and travel/tourism search has been volatile during the pandemic; it sunk dramatically during March/April but has been back on the rise since May.

Overall, we are likely to have several “down” months this year for total website visits. Our goal will be to keep a very close eye on our traffic and replace deficits where we can via paid digital media.

Although we can't predict what our traffic channel breakdown will be with as much accuracy as in prior years, we think it will likely look fairly similar with one key change - paid digital media will likely replace organic search as the top driver of website visits:

- Paid Traffic 45-55%
- Organic Traffic 35-45%
- Direct Traffic 10-15%
- Referral Traffic 5-15%
- Social Traffic 5-10%
- Email Traffic 5-10%

Second, we've seen that people are turning to social media for updates and future trip inspiration during these times. While engagement on Instagram and Twitter remains steady, engagement on Facebook, which largely relies on events, has significantly decreased. As we turn our attention toward driving engagement on our social platforms this year, as detailed later in the document, we will continue to evolve our social media strategy so as to best navigate what lies ahead.

From a public relations and earned media perspective, the objectives outlined for earned stories/articles and publicity value remain flat year-over-year, to start. While we've been successful in recent months in our efforts to attract visiting journalists/writers, it's hard to tell what the future holds. As we continue our outreach in this area, we will again adjust these objectives as it's appropriate.

## Brand Foundation

Santa Maria Valley provides visitors a true change of pace in an unpretentious atmosphere while discovering an approachable, unexpected wine experience, traditional Santa Maria Style barbecue and open spaces to explore rolling hillsides and coastal access points; all at a price that gives you more.

### BRAND PILLARS

- Genuine Heritage
- Unexpected Wine Experience
- Santa Maria Style Barbecue Culture
- Real Value
- The Ideal Home Base
- Naturally Unconstrained
  - Emphasis on wide-open spaces

### BRAND PROMISE

We treat visitors like family.

This promise is bold, simple and attainable. It can be as natural as a warm greeting or asking how someone's visit is going. This promise embodies the culture of Santa Maria Valley and the authentic hospitality its businesses and residents are known for.

# Target Audience

## APPROACH

Over the past several years, we have worked to better define our audiences based on interests and geography. This year, and given the state of travel and tourism amid the pandemic, we plan to continue to hone in on our drive markets, primarily as it relates to paid media, where our focus will remain on Fresno and Bakersfield.

Though our targeting and positioning is becoming more sophisticated and dynamic, we still have instances where our general interest and beliefs come into play.

## INTERESTS AND BELIEFS

The investments we make in media and content creation will be informed by the interests and beliefs of our target visitor. Those who love Santa Maria Valley value the following aspects of tourism:

- Outdoors
- Family
- Culinary
- Events/Entertainment
- Value
- History and heritage

## MOTIVATORS

- Being outside
- A bottle of wine and a juicy steak
- Finding a place to be yourself
- Friendly, “real” people
- Value for time and money spent

## WHAT'S NOT APPEALING

- Dress codes
- Reservations
- Lines
- Facades
- Prestige or status

## DEMOGRAPHICS (FOR SPECIFIC MEDIA BUYS)

- Age: 25-54
- \$75,000-\$100,000 annual household income

## Santa Maria Valley's Core Customer

### *LAI D BACK RECREATIONAL WEEKENDER*

#### YOUTHFUL

I want to keep feeling young, even as I age. It's important to me that we continue to have fun with new and different experiences, creating memories I'll cherish for years.

#### OUTGOING

I make friends wherever I go. I like to send my friends to places I've been and loved, and will keep up with people I meet along the way on social media.

## **ECONOMICAL**

I am frugal and like to make our money work harder. I look for offers and discounts that stretch our dollars and our time together. I would rather spend less on a room and venture out to do more. Besides, all you do in the room is sleep, anyway.

## **LOYAL**

I will come back to have the same amazing experience and love it when people remember me. I like the feeling of being treated like I'm family - that's the real VIP treatment.

## **CASUAL**

I'm most comfortable in jeans and in shoes I can wear all day. I'm not fussy about most things. I like going at my own pace.

## **GOOD TASTE**

I know and appreciate delicious, classic, fresh food that's thoughtfully prepared but don't think I should have to spend a fortune on it. Family-style eating with my favorite people at the coziest hole-in-the-wall is the best but I also love stumbling across a cool taco truck. As long as the food is good, I wouldn't think twice if there are paper napkins at a restaurant. I wouldn't exactly call myself a foodie. I just like to eat.

## **LOW IMPACT OUTDOORSY**

I like to go for a nice bike ride or a walk. I like to roll the windows down. The fresh air always feels good and puts me in a good mood. I can easily get distracted by something in nature, especially a beautiful sunset. Hiking is fun as long as we're not gone all day. I've always wanted to drive a dune buggy. I like sitting on a patio and enjoying a glass of wine or a cold beer.

## **AUTHENTIC**

I enjoy real people. I appreciate real conversation, a genuine smile and people who are comfortable being themselves. I don't like the feeling that I am just another number. I don't want a cookie-cutter or cliché experience. I want to do things that enrich my life and make me happy.

## **Media Strategy**

Last year, we modified our spend approach to focus the majority of our budget on highly targeted and trackable media. We will continue that approach this year. Additionally, due to the unpredictability of the pandemic and its impact on tourism, we are investing less money in media that requires a contract (i.e. native opportunities with publications).

We are putting the vast majority of our spend (77%) toward digital media platforms over which we have more control and flexibility relative to spend/budgets, and that we can stop and start at will (e.g., Facebook, Google Ads, etc.). Of these channels, the lion's share of the budget is going to paid search to ensure we are capturing as much "low hanging fruit" in these turbulent times as possible. We will also be spending on Facebook/Instagram and YouTube ads; these channels allow us to build brand recognition by providing a high frequency at a cost-efficient price. Finally, we will continue to build our remarketing campaigns in order to move people further down the funnel.

Geographically, we will continue to target central Californians, specifically the Bakersfield and Fresno areas, as we already have been with our "Let's Get Together Again" recovery campaign that kicked off on June 12, 2020, and was crafted to, in some ways, frame the larger marketing plan for this year.

## Objectives

- Be nimble and flexible with our media spend
- Keep Santa Maria Valley front and center in peoples' minds, especially as travel restrictions continue to lift
  - Increase the number of targeted, unique visitors to the website so that we may best influence their decision to visit the area
  - Increase paid traffic by 55-70% year-over-year
- Use media to bolster off-peak season visitation while maintaining top-of-mind awareness throughout the year
- Leverage remarketing across all digital channels in order to move these people further down the conversion funnel, knowing they've already interacted with our ads/brand at some level

## Placement (based on \$146K)

- Non-Contract Digital Media (\$107,845)
  - Paid Search
  - YouTube & Online Video
  - Display (including remarketing)
  - Facebook & Instagram (including remarketing)
- Print & Native Opportunities (\$15,645)
  - Bakersfield Life Advertorial
  - Visit CA Dedicated Newsletter
  - 805 Living
  - Visalia Lifestyle Magazine
- Existing Commitments & Co-op (\$15,285)
  - Yosemite Journal (for 20/21)
  - Wrangler Network (digital advertisements/sponsorship for rodeo, pending event)
  - CO-OP Travel & Leisure Road Trip
  - CO-OP CA Visitor Guide
- Contingency (\$7,225) - for UGC Platform

## MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Media management includes all media strategy, planning, negotiation, media promotion development, coordination with media representatives and trafficking of final media files.

This also includes digital media management: the execution, monitoring and updating of campaigns on Facebook, Instagram and Google Ads.

## Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Strategy

This year, we will maintain our focus on ranking organically for wine tasting and wine trip queries, which we identified last year as our multi-year focus for SEO. This is a long-term SEO strategy, however, during the pandemic it is also critical that we take advantage of any short-term SEO wins that we can.

Furthermore, with a lower budget this year as compared to last, we'll need to rely on optimizing existing website content as much as possible. So, we have identified less competitive, non-event content on the site that is well-positioned to rank higher (e.g., surrounding attractions and outdoor activities) and will require a minimal amount of net new content.

Over the years, we've seen substantial gains for branded wine terms (e.g., Santa Maria wine tasting) and have a good hold on them currently, but we have not devoted the resources to putting a concentrated effort toward building our presence for non-branded wine searches. This will be our SEO priority for 2020-21.

### Objectives

- Increase organic visitors landing on non-events pages
  - Our strength in non-event rankings has helped us greatly during the pandemic. While search volume for these keywords will have been (and will likely remain) lower than in years prior, continuing to build these rankings should remain our focus.
- Continue to build ownership in the wine space
  - This year, we'll be focusing on nearby geographic modifiers (e.g., Central Coast, Santa Barbara)
- Leverage existing website content for short-term, non-event ranking wins. We've identified content that will help us:
  - Maintain rankings for barbecue
  - Grow non-branded wine rankings
  - Improve rankings we hold for outdoor activities (beaches, hiking, cycling)
- Work with the comms team to develop new content that will help us:
  - Gain new cycling/biking tourism rankings
  - Build non-branded wine rankings
  - Start moving into the motorcycling/touring space

### Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

#### Organic Traffic

Last year, our goal was to increase organic traffic by 30%, and the site was on track to well exceed this goal through February. Despite the pandemic, which decimated the event and travel search space, we were able to increase organic traffic 16% year-over-year. Organic traffic landing on non-event pages increased 43%.

Search volume continues to be volatile. While we cannot predict what the next year holds, we know our events will be affected for some time. So, while we will likely see an overall decrease in total organic traffic this year, our goal will still be to increase organic traffic landing on non-event content year-over-year.

#### Rankings

We will monitor our rankings for all of our target keywords and our goal is to increase those rankings over time. In addition to our position in the blue links on the SERPs, we will identify and monitor any relevant SERP features and develop content for those we may want to go after. For example, when you enter "santa maria barbecue recipes" into Google, our website is featured in the Recipe Card SERP feature, in addition to holding position 1 in the ten blue links.

### Website enhancements

Our website design & development budget for 20/21 will include the following aimed at implementing updates that address learnings we've discovered in the last year. Design-wise, we'd like to optimize select pages and templates that are highly trafficked and/or website calls-to-action (CTAs) for which we can increase prominence.

- Refresh and optimize itineraries (Plan Your Trip detail pages)
  - Refresh template
  - Video integration
- Develop a way to increase prominence of email signup CTA
- Continue to use data to inform design and UX enhancements in order to increase time on site, decrease bounce rate, and drive site engagement
  - A/B testing for better data/ROI forecasting (audiences, messaging, etc.) as needed/in order to solve a specific problem
- Ongoing site maintenance, bug fixes and hosting hard costs are also included in this budget line item

## Creative

For the remainder of the year, our creative strategy will lead us to play a larger role in social and content creation. Organic communication is more important than ever as people remain home and in research mode waiting for the right time to resume traveling. With this in mind, we will enhance our social presence and begin to revamp our visual presence and creative copywriting as it relates to social and website content. We'll also look for opportunities to connect our organic strategy, creative campaigns and digital marketing to unite our messaging and effectively cross-promote for higher engagement.

We will continue to refresh static visuals and copy for the "Let's Get Together Again" campaign for the remainder of 2020. Starting in January, we will begin to assess the effectiveness of the campaign, and potentially begin to reintroduce the "Uncorked" campaign. As we do so, we'll evolve and refresh the creative assets accordingly to fit in with the appropriate tone at that time.

We will also continue to leverage our existing photo and video assets, and provide creative direction to drive new photography and videography opportunities in an effort to grow our library.

- Enhance our social media presence with increased creative crossover
- Collaborate with the paid digital media and content teams to determine the best campaign direction in the second half of the fiscal year
  - Create transitional spots for "Uncorked" by updating the video scripts/voiceover and copy/creative assets for the static ads OR
  - Continue to evolve the "Let's Get Together Again" campaign with new video and static assets
- Partner with a local photographer in SMV who can regularly capture new assets to grow our library

## Photography/Videography

As outlined above, our photography and videography budget for the year will cover the cost of an on-the-ground photographer that will be available to provide us with fresh assets on a regular basis. This budget also covers art direction for this photography/videography and archiving of the assets within our digital asset manager, where they are tagged, organized and easily searchable.

## Strategic Communications: PR + Content + Social Media

Santa Maria Valley's communications strategy is designed to successfully build relationships that establish rapport and communicate strategically with our audiences. When public relations, content and social media complement one another, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Our approach to developing plans and campaigns, optimizing to reach, touch and engage people, all supports the key goal of stellar storytelling.

Our approach will also consistently tie into our digital-first mindset, understanding that opportunity can be found through data. We will continue to act on that to connect brand-centric messaging with quantifiable insights, driving bottom-line results.

### Public Relations

- Obtain \$775K in publicity value and 50 regional/national articles in the fiscal year, while increasing awareness of Santa Maria Valley.
- Solicit FAMs and visiting journalists through pitches, partnerships with Visit CA, CCTC, our Central Coast co-op (Monterey, H1DR and Santa Barbara) and other DMOs, alignment with select large events
  - Continue to work through travel and press trips during COVID and the challenges that come with that
- Pitch and utilize press releases as appropriate
- Coordinate media missions with Visit CA as they are appropriate during and post-COVID-19
- Build a new, enhanced reporting structure for PR efforts: Barcelona Principles
  - Customized to specific and pre-defined PR criteria and KPIs
  - We'll use this year as a benchmark year for new Barcelona reporting metrics, reporting on:
    - Whether the story is a feature or mention
    - Whether there is brand pull through
    - Whether there is a link to our website
    - Brand pillar(s) covered: general travel, wine, barbecue, outdoor/recreation, arts/culture
    - Whether there is a mention of outlet domain authority

### Content Development

- User-generated content (UGC)
  - Select a UGC aggregation platform that supports integration with the website (i.e. a gallery feature). Ideally, this tool would also streamline use of UGC assets throughout our other channels (email, social media, native placements, etc) and streamline rights management and will be more robust in sourcing content than the social listening tools we're already using. Features included will depend on pricing.
  - Increase asset portfolio with organic, relevant content that showcases the destination through the visitors' (or locals') lens
  - Continue monitoring relevant brand hashtags to source and showcase user-generated content; highlight the experiences of visitors to the region and locals
  - Note: the cost of this tool will come out of the media plan contingency budget

- Website content (blog, itineraries, page updates)
  - Continue content curation and SEO collaboration
  - Lean heavily into improving existing attractions and listings on the website (at least one per month)
  - Repurpose high-performing content to be better optimized for search
  - Continue with authentic blog posts that align with our brand pillars and are optimized for search (one per month)
  - Use this year to start building our motorcycling/touring content bank and improve rankings for regular cycling-related content
- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest
  - Align more closely with creative asset generation (photo/video/graphics)
  - Establish and lean into our brand voice/tone and stay mindful of opportunities to tie back to SMV and inspire tourism
  - Develop an organic content calendar that is informed by creative and aligns with paid social initiatives as appropriate
  - Drive higher engagement using polls on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
  - Build our calendar of “national days” that are relevant to SMV
  - Continue to follow/like media and travel outlets we work with and are inspired by
  - Experiment with posting days/times and new content “themes” to gain learnings around social engagement
  - Platform-specific Goals
    - Facebook
      - Post on Facebook four to five times per week, highlighting upcoming events and attractions (as applicable), new blog posts, news stories and more to reinforce brand identity and drive traffic back to the website.
      - Likes per post: 12 average
      - Website Referrals: 500/month average
    - Instagram
      - Post on Instagram three to four times per week, using visuals informed by the creative team that have a consistent tone
      - Likes per post: 65 average
      - Website Referrals: 30/month average
    - Twitter
      - Post on Twitter three to four times per week, highlighting upcoming events and attractions (as applicable), new blog posts, news stories and more.
      - Likes per Tweet: 7 average
      - Website Referrals: 15/month average
    - Pinterest
      - Post original content and re-pin relevant content monthly
      - Monthly engagements: 575
      - Website Referrals: 10/month average
- Email newsletters
  - Continue segmentation, drip campaigns and re-engagement campaigns to optimize current subscribers
  - Evaluate email performance and subscriber engagement in order to identify the types of content that result in higher traffic back to the website

- Potentially leverage email capture through our chosen UGC platform (depending on capabilities) as well as through a more prominent call-to-action on the website (per website enhancements section of the plan)

## Campaign Management

### REPORTING + ROI TRACKING

In order to properly judge our marketing efforts, we must constantly monitor and report on the progress of each strategy. A monthly marketing summary report will be provided, based on key metrics and KPIs, as well as general statistics such as overall traffic, demographics, search engine traffic, and traffic by region. This also includes ad hoc requests for analytics or performance summaries as needed.

### ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Managing all of the elements in this marketing plan requires oversight and management. This element includes non-project specific campaign management, strategic planning, goals-related research, status meetings, campaign optimization, budget and timeline tracking spread over the course of the fiscal year. It also requires travel (and expenses) for 6 trips for meetings per fiscal year. Travel time is not billed.

## Marketing Budget Overview

Media Placement + UGC Contingency: \$146,000  
Media Management & SEO: \$45,600  
Website Design & Development: \$18,000  
Public Relations: \$47,400  
Content Creation (Newsletter, Blog, Social Media, Web): \$48,000  
Photography/Videography: \$15,000  
Creative Services: \$20,000  
Reporting: \$16,400  
Account Management: \$27,600  
Marketing Plan Development: \$5,000

**Total \$389,000\***

*\*Does not include \$75,000 Recovery Plan/Campaign Budget*