

## Ag Tourism



### What is an Interactive Operator Showcase?

An interactive operator showcase can be thought of as an event that “brings the product to the market.” Ag tourism cluster projects can utilize an operator showcase as part of their overall marketing strategy by taking advantage of the attendees already drawn to an existing event or location (i.e. farmers’ market, rodeo, resort, parade, etc.). By coining showcases as ‘interactive’ it is intended partner operators move beyond their ‘booth display’ and offer a participatory display environment, invoking elements of both Showmanship and Boothmanship. It is imperative operators move out of a ‘tradeshow mindset and booth mentality’ and appeal to their audience by engaging all five senses - offering a ‘taste’ to what a day in an ag tourism cluster region *could really feel like*.



#### Why is an Operator Showcase Done?

- To give your cluster/operators visibility
- To get the attention of a larger group of new and existing customers belonging to a predisposed target audience
- To increase your profile in the community (*selling is secondary*)

When creating an operator showcase, organizers need to address and plan for three stages: **Pre-show**, the **day of the Operator Showcase** and **Post-Show**. The sections below will outline each stage of planning and offer suggestions, recommendations and ideas that will help you develop an effective ag tourism showcase.

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## A. Pre Show (*The Most Important Planning Stage*)

### Planning to Make Your Operator Showcase Successful

For an operator showcase to be effective, pre-planning should be the number one focus. It is imperative the group invests at least 80% of their energy and time into this first step. The group's ability to create a well thought out plan and build their foundation will dictate the success of a showcase.

### **TIPS TO: Ensure Return on Investment (ROI) when Planning an Operator Showcase**

#### **1) SET CLEAR GOALS FOR YOUR SHOWCASE EXPERIENCE.**

What does the cluster/individual operators want to get out of their participation?

- Introduce new product/services
- Build profile and distribute brochures
- Educate your target market
- Conduct market research
- Create a mailing list
- Increase sales of cluster passports, guides, etc
- Etc.

You can have more than one goal, of course, but the point is that you need to be clear about what your participation in the showcase is going to achieve.

#### **2) DO YOUR RESEARCH.**

You need to choose an event/venue that will give your product the best ROI in terms of your goals. You want to choose an event/venue that best targets the audience you want to reach, and best suits your participation goals.

- Make a list of opportunities/potential venues to showcase at
- Consider whether your showcase will be indoors or outdoors, mobile, etc
- Create an inventory and recruit people who have expertise in offering interactive displays and value added activities at their own operation



### **3) ONCE YOU'VE CHOSEN A PARTICULAR EVENT/LOCATION TO ATTEND, PLAN YOUR BUDGET, KNOW THE TYPE OF SPACE AVAILABLE TO YOU AND DESIGN YOUR SPACE**

Find out everything you can about the space you will be promoting your product in, including where it is on the floor, the flow of traffic, lighting, amount of space and if it's outdoors are there back up plans for poor weather, etc.

Operator should inventory what props, equipment, ideas, etc. they have for their own display and share with the larger group. Brainstorm and decide on specific activities, themes and props needed to bring the showcase alive.

### **4) PLAN YOUR SHOWCASE EXHIBIT IN TERMS OF YOUR AUDIENCE AND UTILIZE PUBLICITY**

Who is it that you're targeting with your display? Different audiences will have different interests and needs. Consider what message you want people to leave with (i.e. if you had fun today, this is just a sample of the fun you can experience at the cluster).

- Tourists, locals or both?
- Families, young professionals or empty nesters?
- Sponsors and other businesses/operators in your industry?

Public Relations should enhance the reputation of your product, service and/or cluster project in the eyes of the public. Through effective PR, the showcase can generate knowledge, understanding and build confidence that leaves a lasting impression.

### **5) ADVERTISE IN ADVANCE**

Put the word out that you're participating in a particular event/location by inviting operator's and cluster's previous customers (mailing list), media and other partners to attend the showcase.

#### **Tips from the Industry**

“Trade show industry studies show you can increase visitation to a booth by as much as **33%** as a result of coordinated pre-show promotion.”  
~ *Consider adapting the trade show model and create pre show promotion and buzz for your own showcase.*

## Planning for the Showcase Follow Up:

The best time to plan for the showcase follow-up is well before the day of the showcase. It is to the participant's advantage to develop an organized, systematic approach that will allow the group to 'follow-up' and discuss how effective the showcase was in terms of reaching the **operators and cluster's identified goals and objectives**.

- Create a database/ mailing list from the showcase audience
  - Make the effort to compile a mailing list that includes information from those who purchase items and show interest in your ag tourism events.
  - Discern between the truly interested and those who are after freebie.
  - Record interested businesses, potential and existing operators and sponsors on a separate mailing list.
  - You should include a disclaimer when asking people to join a mailing list



- Create a tool that will enable the cluster/operators to easily measure items sold at the end of the day (i.e. sales of passports, guide books, operator product).
  - 'Chat' with booth visitors, and find out what aspect of your business they're most interested in. Be prepared to offer specific solutions to their questions. The trick is to draw them in without intimidating or overwhelming them.
- Create tally sheets that can document *more intangible* information around raised awareness and increasing the profile of the cluster/operators.
  - How many people attended the trade show?
  - How many brochures were distributed?
  - Etc.

## B. Day of the Showcase

On the show floor your display makes a strong statement about **who your operation/cluster is, what you do, and how you do it.**

### Planning for Interactivity

In terms of planning for an operator showcase, the day of the showcase should actually require the least amount of time and energy (about 5-10%) compared to Pre Show planning (80%) and Post Show evaluation (15%). Without a solid foundation, the showcase will not be effective, no matter how ambitious the operators are.

That said, for the audience, the showcase is the most important aspect of their experience. The following section provides some ideas to consider when planning for the day of the interactive operator showcase.

### TIPS TO: Creating an Interactive Operator Showcase Display

Just being at your display is certainly not enough to make an operator showcase worthwhile. Your booth/display should draw and engage potential customers and contacts. **SEE APPENDIX I FOR INTERACTIVE IDEAS.**

- Make your showcase booth a **welcoming space**.
- Make it **easy** for booth visitors to get information.
- Have a **focal point** and a strong key message that communicates a significant benefit to your prospect.
- Opt for **large** graphics and photos.
- **Create an experience** that allows visitors to use as many of their senses as possible.
- The **interactive people behind the showcase** will be your marketing team and help make the showcase memorable to the audience. Those delivering the showcase should be knowledgeable, friendly, and enthusiastic.
- The **most important aspect** of the Operator Showcase is **its people**. An elaborate booth, fancy advertising and impressive literature all help attract visitors, however people manning the display become the showcases most memorable and effective component when attracting potential visitors.



#### Tips from the Industry

“75% of literature gathered at trade shows is **discarded** before attendees leave the show site”

~ *Don't rely on handouts to get the message out, it will be the human connection that will bring visitors back to your event. Literature should be a back up to personal selling and Boothmanship*

## C. Post Show (evaluation and 'now what')

As mentioned in the 'Pre Show Planning Section', it is critical to have a plan of action in place to address and evaluate the effectiveness and productivity of the showcase. Post Show evaluation should include approximately 15% of the group's time and energy.

### Planning for Evaluation

A debrief should be organized with those who participated in the showcase. The group should evaluate the showcase and address the following:

- Did the showcase meet the goals the group set forth?
- What message did the audience leave with?
- Can market research be compiled from the collected information?
- What would we do differently/what changes could be made to improve the effectiveness of the showcase?
- What were challenges/opportunities (positive and negative feedback)?
- What happened that we did not expect?
- How effective was this particular venue/location for our purposes?
- Plans for next year or additional venues/locations?



### Each individual operator should consider the following:

- Organize all quantifiable information collected from visitors during the showcase (surveys, mailing lists, draws, audience questions, product sold, etc.) and compile into databases.
- Follow up on any questions from the audience you were not able to answer at the showcase.
- Commit to tracking and reporting back to the group how many additional guests visited their operation as a direct result from attending the showcase.
- Create a 'follow up' draw on-site where showcase entry forms must be submitted at participating businesses and operations



## APPENDIX I

### A. 'Putting the Interactive' into the Showcase

Don't be afraid to step outside of your display. Really use your imagination. Operators should not feel they must be stationed behind a tabletop booth and bound by their space. Below are some creative ideas to help **make a space come to life**:

- You want to create an interactive environment but not a chaotic one. Think **neatness and visibility** when putting your showcase display together
- **A skit, game show or reality TV show spin off** could all be ideas used to attract a crowd in an interactive manner.
- Stage a mini '**fashion demonstration**' where children have the opportunity to dress up like operators at the showcase (bee keeper, dairy farmer, gardener) and then take pictures together.
- Through partnerships, could members in your community offer **agricultural-based demonstrations** (grain grinding with the Grain Growers Association, rope making with 4H, etc.)?
- Who else could you **form partnerships** with (Ag Societies, commodity groups, UFA, Olds College, farmers' markets, Travel Alberta, etc.)?
- Could **large/unique items** that attract interest be **borrowed** from large-scale venues (i.e. Ag in the City, Stampede, Aggie Days in Calgary, Ag Society fairs...)?



- Create **hands on experiences** with props. For example, **old-fashioned /antique equipment** creates a sense of nostalgia and renders comments such as *"that's just like my grandmother used to have on the farm."* Presenting old-fashioned equipment creates photo opportunities and arouses interest.
  - Old fashioned equipment refers to tools of the trade (i.e. a copper canner for pickles, an antique saddle...but whatever is used, it must make sense with your operation)
- Strive to use equipment and stage experiences that **evoke sensory experience.**

## APPENDIX I

### B. 'Putting the Journey' into the Showcase

Creating an interactive booth display is one thing, but embracing an Interactive Journey takes a showcase to a whole new level! A showcase journey is dynamic and fluid. The audience can move through a 'maze' of experiences and interactions, transporting them out of the showcase and into a 'day in the country.' You'll have to be creative, imaginative and inventive and recruit some extra help.

- **Cowboy poets and musicians** can walk throughout the crowd and involve the audience
- Invite local **artisans** to set up their easels and paint (or craft) in designated areas
- Rather than organizing the display area in straight rows of booths, physically create a 'journey' where visitors travel through an area and meet different operators, mimicking the concept of experiencing a driving route

### C. 'Putting the Tried and True' into the Showcase

Patty Milligan (aka Lola Canola) sells honey at Farmers' Markets in the Edmonton Region and has participated in numerous ag tourism activities. Patty has experience working both with a limited time frame and budget and offers the following advice when creating an interactive display:

#### 1. Props –

- According to Patty, a hat is a great prop when creating an interactive display. Patty refers to her 'Bee Veil' and Lola Canola plastic wig. "People get goofy and try these things on" – this creates great photo opportunities and people relax and feel more comfortable

#### 2. Photos –

- "Take interesting pictures of your operation, product and people having fun. It's as simple as scanning pictures and then blowing them up to 8x11. Size is a must. Don't hide pictures in photo albums, have them in plain site for people who are just 'passing by'"
- Include a brag book with articles written about your operation, yourself and positive feedback you have received from visitors

