

**Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Humboldt Lodging Alliance, meeting Wednesday, November 11, 2015 at the Red Lion Hotel, Eureka, California.**

Present: Marc Rowley, Gary Stone, Chris Ambrosini, Mike Caldwell, Lowell Daniels, John Porter, Tony Smithers.

The meeting was called to order at 12:06 pm by President Chris Ambrosini.

The minutes of the October meeting were examined and approved (Caldwell/Rowley/unanimous).

The agenda for the November meeting was then approved as submitted ((Caldwell/Rowley/unanimous).

The bulk of the meeting was consumed with review and critique of the “Follow the Magic” campaign website under development by the Misfit agency. The website was projected on the screen and the committee went through it page by page. The following responses were generated and subsequently submitted to the agency for action.

- 1) The Follow the Magic campaign elements should be used more—the site should be all about the campaign. There is Alice/Wonderland footage in the “home page” video, but it is not used elsewhere. There is Lewis Carrol-esque wording throughout the site, but the characters do not appear beyond the home page video. Could we find a fun and playful way to embed the campaign preroll videos in the website?
- 2) The site instructions/directions are very obscure—it needs to be obvious what to do and where to go. The instructions can be given in playful language, as is used elsewhere in the site. For example, from the very first screen the user needs to be informed that this site will provide a video exploration of Humboldt County, organized into four travel themes, from which the user can select their favorite locations to build a custom vacation itinerary. The innovative feature of being able to pin video while it is playing is not familiar to people and we can make a big deal out of it (“Yes, you can catch the magic in your hand...”)
- 3) The four theme icons (doors) are a bit too subtle. Some committee members just wanted the icons to directly illustrate the theme (heart for romance, etc.) These could still be rendered in the playful Wonderland manner.
- 4) The place captions for the videos need to be larger.
- 5) There is a significant problem with the readability of text over photo backgrounds—you need to find a solution for this across the site. Possibly a screen behind the text would provide more contrast. Or changing text size and font may help.
- 6) The background music has no one excited. For one of the tracks a committee member commented “Sounds like ‘70s porn”
- 7) Consider the use of voiceovers for site instructions, the location descriptions, flavor text. We’re not saying we definitely want this, just something to consider. But the idea of a narrator or storyteller could fit with the campaign creative vibe. This would need to be in addition to, not instead of, the text information because people might be doing their travel research while at work and will have the sound turned off.

- 8) We all felt the need for better site navigation beyond the forward/back arrows within a category. Some sort of site map? Like a literal and funky board game map? Could still be in the playful Wonderland speak, for example “Home” could be “Back to the Beginning”
- 9) Someone noticed that “Prairie Creek Redwood” should be “Prairie Creek Redwoods.” Reminds of the need for another fine-tooth review before launching.
- 10) We thought that the four theme areas should have some consistent page title to identify which theme you are currently in.
- 11) Back to the itinerary map and the selected pins—which I know we’re already worked on—the larger pin denoting the current location was not obvious to some. We should return to the idea of a different color to highlight.
- 12) We noticed that some of the “read more” links under the Romance theme didn’t work. Don’t know if that was a temporary/connection glitch or something else going on.
- 13) Under the accommodation filters, they would like to have ‘hotels and motels’ listed first. They would also like a “choose all” selection for lodging type.
- 14) There’s something missing between the itinerary and the accommodations area. The town names are on the map, so the user can get some idea of where to choose to look for rooms based on their pin selections, but it is still cumbersome, not intuitive. Let’s think about this.
- 15) After going to the lodging page I tried going back to my itinerary, but it was gone. Does the itinerary only get saved if I print it out or email it? How can it become permanent at least during the current user session?
- 16) Overall, the committee missed the “wow factor” that they were expecting—the sense of excitement and energy that the rest of the campaign manages to convey. “This site is generic” said one committee member. Since this is not a regular travel planning site but more of a sales presentation, could we be playing it too safe? How can we truly surprise and delight site visitors?

It was agreed that the website would be the focus of a special breakfast meeting of the Executive Committee on November 30, in advance of the full board presentation by Misfit.

Following the website review, the committee considered several other issues involving the campaign, the agency, and strategic planning for the Humboldt Lodging Alliance:

- Marc Rowley suggested that a third party marketing consultant could be engaged to analyze the Follow the Magic campaign. Chris Ambrosini agreed.
- Guest Don Banducci reminded the committee that efficient marketing goes after highly targeted audiences such as special interest/user groups.
- Lowell Daniels, referring to the coming agency presentation and board retreat, identified an important goal to prove what the HLA has done, and to explain how we know it is working.

Next, the committee reviewed price quotes from two manufacturers of plush toys, and approved ordering a prototype from each manufacturer for comparison. Mr. Smithers was directed to make the arrangements, and also to ascertain what options are available for imprints/branding on the plush toy.

The Financial Report for October 31, 2015 was then examined and approved (Caldwell/Porter/unanimous.)

Under ongoing business, Marc Rowley noted that boutique hotel entrepreneur Chip Conley had joined Airbnb, presaging a serious move into hotel distribution by Airbnb (which has already disrupted the vacation rental, bed & breakfast and business short stay industries).

Under renewal of the Humboldt County Tourism Business Improvement District, Mike Caldwell commented that it is a very serious issue that a Eureka hotelier is talking about opting out of the district. Chris Ambrosini stated that the renewal is an opportunity to look at other models which the HLA could follow. (For example, more assessment revenues could be directed to Community Tourism projects). Marc Rowley said that the HLA “needs to discuss the future sooner rather than later.” It was agreed that this would be a major topic for the January board retreat.

Chris Ambrosini announced that the HLA Eureka committee had awarded a grant of \$15,000 to the Redwood Coast Music Festival (formerly the Jazz Festival) which takes place in March.

Also under ongoing business, Chuck Leishman from the North Coast Journal returned to present more details on their “Humboldt Cuisine” proposed publication and to request HLA funding. This one-page publication would feature local dining highlights focusing on local ingredients, and would be published in four seasonal versions for front desk distribution. Chris Ambrosini commented that the funding request (\$40,000) seemed high when there are already three dining guides in the county. The motion to support and fund the request was made by Mike Caldwell and seconded by Marc Rowley, but failed to pass.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:42 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Tony Smithers