



Indianhead, Ragged Mountain Tie for Marketing Awards

Copper, Crested Butte and Jay Peak also Reap Recognition

Once again, NSAA honored the recipients of the 2009/10 Marketing and Guest Service Awards at an awards reception May 3 at the National Convention and Tradeshow in Orlando, Fla. Introduced during the 1999/2000 season, the Marketing Awards recognize excellence in marketing programs that not only support skiing and snowboarding but also promote the sustained growth of the industry. The winners are represented in four categories based on skier/snowboarder visitation numbers: Up to 100,000 visits; 100,000 to 250,000 Visits; 250,000 to 500,000 Visits; and 500,000 or More Visits. Notably, this year's competition resulted in a tie for Best Overall Marketing Program in the Up to 100,000 Visits category.

BY REBECCA W. AYERS

This year's competition is sponsored by BCF, a Virginia Beach-based marketing firm, and SportsInsurance.com. Competition judges were Christine Donovan, event director, BEWI Productions Inc., Mass.; Dan Price, president of Denver-based marketing firm Adrenalin; and Andy Hawk, marketing director for PSIA/AASI.

Here's a closer look at the top marketing programs for 2009/10.

Best Overall Marketing Program: Up to 100,000 Visits

Indianhead Mountain Resort, Mich.



For the second consecutive year, Indianhead tied for top honors in this category – a fitting end to the resort's 50th-anniversary season. Using the milestone as the basis for its 2009/10 marketing campaign, the resort focused on encouraging new guests to create their own memories and traditions at Indianhead. The resort also utilized various technologies to increase its subscriber and fan base – those guests who opted in to receive Indianhead information via e-news, texting, social media forums, and iPhone app downloads, among others.

Return visits are the bread and butter for this upper Midwest resort, the main markets being skiers and snowboarders from

Green Bay, the Fox Valley, Chicago, and the Twin Cities. Expanding on the tagline "Rediscover," Indianhead tweaked the message depending on the target audience – primarily those customers who may have lapsed over the years, as well as families that tend to take one or two long weekend ski vacations. Accordingly, "Rediscover Your Inner Ski Bum" was used on signage and collateral materials to promote season pass sales, while "Rediscover Family Values" called attention to affordable package pricing. Images of Indianhead's history, vintage ski photos, and current images were blended seamlessly to represent the resort's past, present, and future. A free commemorative poster was given out to guests also.

"We hoped to reach our markets on an emotional level with a message of spending quality time with family and friends during tough economic times," said Dave Nyquist, vice president of sales and marketing.

The strategy was to grab market share early and allow guests to adapt offerings as needed. Evaluations of the previous season indicated that many guests make last-minute vacation plans, so Indianhead used online communications in addition to traditional media to shift on the fly and push the message out immediately. Social forums, email, pay-per-click, and online ads were used extensively, and a new website was created with a classic feel using both vintage and current images. Pay-per-click and online offers drove traffic to the Indianhead website, increasing visits by 10 percent over the same period last season. An Indianhead iPhone app was developed and subsequently downloaded by more than 500 users, allowing the resort to push special offers, snowfalls, live cams, and video to guests.

In terms of measurable results, advance lift ticket purchases increased by 3 percent by midseason without sacrificing yield. Lodging nights increased also, and the resort was successful in filling and protecting key holiday periods. Facebook fans increased nearly 500 percent, while web traffic grew 10 percent. eNews subscribers increased nearly 40 percent. Twitter subscribers also increased heavily.

"While these numbers aren't incredibly high, we feel the quality of the subscriber is very high, resulting in more business and favorable response and conversation rates," Nyquist said.

This is Indianhead's third NSAA Marketing Award, with previous wins in 2008/09 and 2007/08. ♦

Best Overall Marketing Program: Up to 100,000 Visits

Ragged Mountain Resort, N.H.



The idea behind Ragged Mountain's award-winning marketing program was to create a fun but different icon of the resort to help unify advertising and set it apart from competitors. The star of the campaign was "Sweeps," a pink flamingo that was introduced at the end of the previous season as a teaser for 2009/10. Named after the end-of-day patrol sweep of all the trails, the flamingo was known to hide out somewhere on the mountain each day. The first person to find the mascot received a free lift ticket for another day, his or her photo on the "Sweepstakes" bulletin board, and bragging rights. Skiers and riders were soon scouring every trail, tree, rooftop, and nook and cranny in hopes of winning the prize.

Before kicking off the season, Ragged sent a press release about the program to the *Boston Herald* and *The Boston Globe*, and other print media picked up on the "Find the Flamingo" story. The resort also placed radio ads in Boston and Manchester, N.H., as well as on some 15 regional stations. Sweeps also made an appearance in Ragged Mountain's booth at the Boston Ski Show. A 12-week television schedule began just before the holiday season on five stations. Ads featured Dave Suckling, operations manager, who has a distinctive New Zealand accent. Almost all the ads had

Sweeps as either the feature of the ad or included subtly in the background. On Groundhog Day, Feb. 2, the resort re-enacted Groundhog Day as they do in Pennsylvania (Sweeps saw his shadow and prognosticated that there would be six more weeks of good skiing at Ragged Mountain).

To promote the program on-site, the resort displayed a 24" x 48" banner to alert customers to the missing flamingo, and a replacement banner was hung with a big X across the flag to indicate when Sweeps had been found. One of the advantages of the program was that it motivated guests to hunt for him on trails they might not normally visit, said Bob Fries, president of the marketing department. "Customers were frequently heard discussing Sweeps in the lodge with their kids, showing the kids the bulletin board, and asking customer service if Sweeps had been found yet," he says. The contest became so popular the resort had to limit winners to a maximum of two "finds" per person for the season.

Sweeps seems to have job security for the time being – skier/rider visits and overall revenue are both up in excess of 12 percent, and the resort has seen a significant increase in new customers, as evidenced by surveys. Much of the increase in volume is no doubt due to the advertising campaign and the fun generated around Sweeps, say Fries.

Best Overall Marketing Program: 100,000 to 250,000 Visits

Jay Peak Ski Resort, Vt.



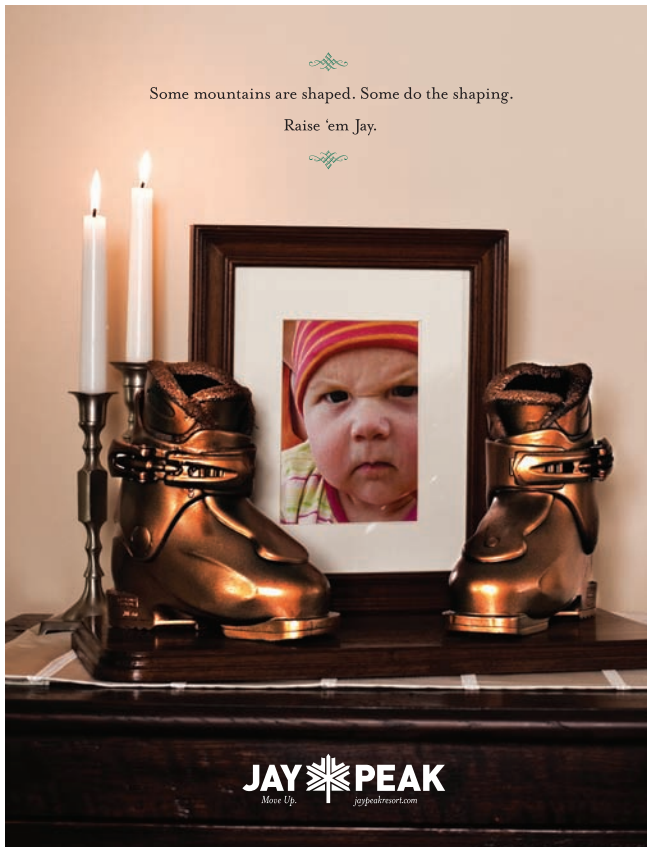
Using recent expansion as an incentive to revamp its marketing approach, Jay Peak focused the majority of its 2009/10 marketing efforts on reconnecting with its base demographic of "hard-core" skiing/snowboarding families, attracting new guests with the same level of passion, and instilling the desire in both audiences to raise their children to be lifelong snowsports enthusiasts. With that in mind, the resort rallied around the tagline "Raise 'Em Jay."

To launch the campaign, Jay Peak rolled out a variety of print ads, electronic media, and other collateral materials containing scenarios about bringing up Jay Peak loyalists, with the resort's terrain as the measuring stick. Having identified an unconventional bent among Jay Peak's base demographic, the resort incorporated an edgy vibe in other marketing products and services.

A series of three ads placed in various national and local magazines portrayed Jay Peakers in different stages of development. One featured an expectant mom knitting a skull-and-crossbones beanie, with the caption "Nobody grows up soft on rugged terrain. Raise 'Em Jay." Another ad showed a fireplace mantle adorned with items a proud Jay Peak parent might display – a pair of bronzed ski boots



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A key component of Jay Peak's "Raise 'Em Jay" campaign was to encourage parents to raise their children to be lifelong snowsports enthusiasts.

and a snapshot of a very tough-looking kid in a ski cap – along with the caption “Some mountains are shaped, and others do the shaping. Raise ‘Em Jay.” Yet another ad spotlighted a doorframe with marks indicating developmental milestones (i.e., the names of trails) with the wording “You’re only as big as your last run.”

A key philosophical element of the 2009/10 marketing campaign involved reaching beyond traditional media to elicit socially meaningful results. Notably, Jay Peak introduced the Raise ‘Em Jay Foundation, which donates money to local charities that enable underprivileged kids to ski and ride. The resort also sponsored several Raise ‘Em Jay camps, in which inner-city youths from New York City got to spend a week at the mountain. Other details were fine-tuned with a focus on the younger set: the children’s menu was beefed up, daycare signage improved, ski school programs tweaked, and social media campaigns revised with a kid-friendly focus. The resort even developed a new Raise ‘Em Jay skull/crossbones beanie, which is given to the toddler set at JayCare (and worn by customer service employees). Jay Peak also debuted its First Skier of the New Year program, in which the first

babies of the new year in various target markets received a lifetime ski pass, gear, and instruction.

Talking mountain ads contained illustrations alluding to animated television commercials that also used cartoon imagery – but with an adult sense of humor. Clearly aimed at the adult markets, the ads were blunt: “I dislike most people; I just dislike Vermonters less” (to promote discounts to visitors from Vermont) and “I’m more of a 3-night stand sort of mountain” (to promote multiday stays).

In terms of results, at the time of the application deadline the resort was pacing 12–15 percent ahead in revenue for the season. Midweek ski vacations increased by roughly 4 percent, and length of stays went up by nearly a full day for the first time in six seasons. Also noted was a major resurgence in real estate sales, suggesting more people are buying into the concept of becoming Jay Peakers and the notion that Raising ‘Em Jay has real value in its distinction.

“At the heart of every marketing campaign we execute are authentic relationships with our guests,” said Steve Wright, vice president of marketing and sales. “Being able to initiate and expand conversations with our skiers/riders enables us to make smart decisions about how we market, how we develop products and programs for our guests, and how we’re running the resort.” Jay Peak is apparently giving and getting the right messages.

This is Jay Peak's fourth NSAA Marketing Award, with previous wins in 2008/09, 2007/08, and 2005/06.

Best Overall Marketing Program: 250,000 to 500,000 Visits

Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Colo.



The phrase “smart solution” comes to mind when considering Crested Butte’s 2009/10 award-winning marketing program, which consists of making it easier for skiers and riders to get to this remote resort nestled in the south central mountains of Colorado. Crested Butte Mountain Resort (CBMR) is a true destination resort, with the closest major metropolitan area, Denver, more than four hours away. Whereas many resort loyalists cherish that off-the-beaten trail factor, Crested Butte recognizes that it loses potential visitors to other mountains because of its distance.

With recent financial turmoil facing the airline industry at large, airfares have increased drastically, and fees and surcharges have skyrocketed. This phenomenon has caused air travel to become one of the largest cost components of a vacation package

and the largest perceptual hurdle to overcome in consumer decision-making. To address this obstacle, Crested Butte introduced the industry's first true "Fly Free" program, the result of a unique public-private partnership between the town of Mt. Crested Butte and Crested Butte Mountain Resort, and funded by the all-encompassing vertical structure of CBMR business units.

"The Fly Free message has also created a unique value proposition in the marketplace which allows CBMR's voice to stand out amongst the crowd of discount-oriented offers," said Kert Kinscherf, Internet marketing manager at the resort. "In doing so, CBMR is able to maintain a value-added strategy in lieu of cutting rates, while also directly addressing consumer concerns over the cost of air travel."

This season the resort secured additional funding from the town of Mt. Crested Butte, which allowed the Fly Free concept to become an additional part of the resort's national marketing strategy. The Fly Free message became the lead value proposition across all channels – for example, the "Buy One Get One Airline Ticket" promotions that targeted specific air markets in order to prop up sales.



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Copper Marketing Director Pete Woods literally brought their ad to life when he showed up on stage clad in the resort's retro patrol uniforms. Photo by Kristen Wynn

As for measurable results? Kinscherf said the Fly Free concept has given life to several promotions that have been top revenue producers and room-night generators in each of the last two years.

"In addition to direct booking revenue earned, the Fly Free program has made a positive impact to the program and thus greatly reduced the financial exposure for CBMR," he said. Lastly, the program has proven to serve as the catalyst for significant new visits. Specifically, Fly Free airline seat sales generated more than \$1 million for the resort, with a return on investment of 2.96 to 1. In terms of reservations, the return on investment was 9 to 1.

Overall, the Fly Free program and its associated messaging has enabled CBMR to stand out in a marketplace cluttered with discount-based messaging, and according to Kinscherf, the actual cost/effective discount to CBMR and its public partner is less than 10 percent of the resulting bookings.

Best Overall Marketing Program: 500,000 or More Visits

Copper, Colo.



Copper's award-winning marketing campaign is as much fun to read about as it must have been to implement. Inspired by the emotions of a childhood snow day, the resort first came up with the tagline "Everyone Deserves a Snow Day," an exultation that infused the entire 2009/10 campaign. Copper then did the obvious: it dispatched charismatic members of the ski patrol to various parts of the country to enlighten others of their due.