



Four Ski Areas Reap Awards for Top Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaigns

Best Overall Marketing Programs Also Recognized

Eight ski areas from throughout the country have taken NSAA's top honors for marketing programs that spur visitation growth. This year NSAA added a special category, Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaign, to its annual Marketing Awards. More than 75,000 kids and families across the country took ski and snowboard lessons in January, and the marketing awards recognize those areas that excelled in incorporating the grass-roots initiative into their operations. Three ski areas won their first-ever marketing awards this year, while others apparently proved that it's wise to stick with a winning formula, as the four resorts in the winner's circle for Best Overall Marketing Program have all been here before.

BY REBECCA W. AYERS

Ohio-based Ryan Solutions, a strategic marketing and database tech firm, sponsored this season's competition. Judges for the

awards were Michael Bisner, national sales manager for SnowDAG RFID Ticketing Solutions; Mike Carey, owner of ski accessory supplier Seirus Innovation and NFL Referee; and Andy Hawk, marketing director of PSIA/AASI. This year's awards reception, held in May during NSAA's National Convention in Carlsbad, Calif., was broadcast live, thanks to HD Relay. More than 1,000 people viewed the livestream. Here is a closer look at the winners and a summary of their exceptional programs.

Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaign (Up to 100,000 Visits)

EAGLECREST SKI AREA, Alaska



At center Jeffra Clough, director of sales, marketing and snowsports school for Alaska's Eaglecrest ski area, accepts the marketing award for Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month campaign from Jack Turner, award ceremony emcee and president of Snow Monsters, and Emily Torres, NSAA director of member services and programs.

KARINA IRENE PHOTOGRAPHY

The phrase “something for everyone” aptly describes Eaglecrest’s award-winning campaign for Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month. Throughout the season this community-owned area emphasizes that everyone can and should try a snowsport, but it maximized that message in January, clearly conveying just how much it values new skiers and boarders.

Eaglecrest spread awareness of its special offers for the month through radio and newspaper ads, its website, and direct mail, also promoting the event at local events such as a women’s expo to connect with those who wouldn’t normally visit the mountain. One of campaign’s most effective marketing elements was something completely unplanned, when a journalist took advantage of the area’s Learn to Ski package and wrote a complimentary article about his experience in the local newspaper, generating great publicity.

Throughout January, Eaglecrest offered several affordable packages that cut across all markets, starting with the Triple Play Learners Pack (three full-day equipment rentals, three two-hour lessons, and three all-day lower mountain lift tickets, all for \$99) and the Learn to Ski/Ride Special (a full-day gear rental, a two-hour lesson, and an all-day lower mountain lift ticket, for \$49).

“The majority of the people who purchased the special enjoyed their first day so much they come back after their lesson to purchase the Triple Play Learners Pack,” says Jeffra Clough, director of sales/marketing and snowsports school.

Another popular offering was the Sunday Morning Special, tailored to adults who have never before skied or snowboarded. For only \$19, participants received a two-hour lesson, a full day rental, a full day lower-mountain ticket, and a \$10 coupon for the Triple Play Learners Pack. The number of participants increased 400 percent from the same time the previous season, Clough says.

Along with a Learn to Nordic program (for skate or classic skiing), Eaglecrest hosted special days designated for Girl Scouts, city employees, women, and adaptive guests – all of whom received special packages and offers. Other components of the January campaign were Books2Boards Family Day, in which disadvantaged youths visited the area for a day of skiing or riding, and Big Brother/Big Sister Learn to Ski and Snowboard Day, in which kids and their sponsors came to the mountain for a day of fun. Eaglecrest wrapped up the month with its annual Learn to Ski Weekend (now in its 30th year), in which third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders, selected through a lottery, spent two days learning how to ski for free. At the end of the weekend, the participants received a coupon for another free day including a lift ticket, rental, and lesson.

Participation in the area’s Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month rose from 122 guests in 2010 to 333 participants in 2011 – an increase that Clough describes as extremely successful. We certainly agree.

This is Eaglecrest’s first marketing award.

“Eaglecrest executed terrific outreach by identifying and enlisting the help of target audience organizations within their market. This is an excellent example of what all size resorts can do to link winter sports to their community.” – Mike Bisner

Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaign (100,000 to 250,000 Visits)

MT. SHASTA SKI PARK,
Calif.



Northern California’s Mt. Shasta Ski Park in Shasta, Calif., took the prize for Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month in its category. Shasta, which celebrated its 25th anniversary during the 2010/11 season, is located about 60 miles south of the Oregon border and has a strong customer base in both states.

Affordable packages with free add-ons and discounts for future visits served as the foundation for Shasta’s Learn to Ski and Snowboard campaign in January. The Two for One Guaranteed to Learn package, normally offered at \$70 per person, was available for \$35 per person throughout the month. For that amount guests received two beginner lessons, rental equipment, and a surface lift ticket. Designed to help beginners progress to chairlift-accessed runs in the afternoon lesson, the package guaranteed that participants would either learn to ski or ride, or they received the same package for free the next day.

Once participants completed the lesson package they received a \$10 discount card toward the Marmot Level 3 package – a lesson, rental equipment, and a lift ticket for \$70 – strong incentive for guests to come back and “get hooked,” says Jim Mullins, marketing director at Mt. Shasta.

The area also offered a 1-2-3 Learn to Slide package for first-time skiers and snowboarders, who only had to complete three full days of lesson packages by February 28 to receive a free spring season pass.

Using television, radio, and print advertisements as well as website updates, Mt. Shasta spread the word about Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month throughout the region – and the programs received a very strong response. Due in no small part to the area’s various packages and specials, overall lesson numbers increased 79 percent over January 2010. Guarantee to Learn participation increased 120 percent, Marmot Level 3 increased by 218 percent, and the 1-2-3 enrollment increased by 60 percent in that same timeframe.

This is Mt. Shasta’s first marketing award.

Mt. Shasta’s “Guaranteed to Learn” program had excellent supporting elements in radio, television, and print that created a seamless and effective consumer call to action.” – Andy Hawk

Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaign (250,000 to 500,000 Visits)

SUGARBUSH RESORT,
Vt.



Sugarbush Resort won the award for Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month in its category by building on something it started three seasons ago: the First Timer to Life Timer program. For \$230 a customer receives a group lesson, rental gear, and a lift ticket for three consecutive lessons. Over that period, guests make the progression from never having been on snow to feeling confident enough to come back on their own and practice what they've learned, says Candice White, vice president and marketing director. To further encourage guests to come back they receive a free all-mountain pass for the remainder of the season.

The resort also collaborated with Vermont Ski Areas Association (VSAA) to offer two additional programs for first timers: With Bring a Friend, a seasoned skier or rider could bring a never-ever for a free group lesson along with free rental equipment and lift ticket. Meanwhile with the Share the Love program, two first-timers partnered to share their first day on the slopes for the price of one (again, lessons, gear, and tickets included). Guests who participated in either of these promotions were able to upgrade to the First Timer to Life program for a discounted price.

Sugarbush created a spot on its website and Facebook for all three programs, and drove traffic to the pages from its home page, from a series of e-mail blasts, from Facebook ads, and via paid search. "We also ran ads on our in-resort TV screens, and educated our 150-plus ambassadors on the program so they could educate guests arriving at the resort," says White.

The best promotion of all, however, was the resort's collaboration with the VSAA and local business Cabot Creamery to invite a group of high-powered women from Boston and New York to participate in the First Timer to Life Timer program. Nine women attended. It may sound like a small group, but the participants were all bloggers and writers who went home and wrote about their experiences – sharing their stories on numerous online outlets.

"Offering consistent programs, engaging the press, and leveraging partnerships has allowed Sugarbush to realize very promising growth in our learn-to programs," says White, noting that 78 customers participated in the Share the Love Program, nearly 300 participated in the Bring a Friend program, and 167 graduates of the First Timer to Life Timer program had received season passes versus 123 all last season.

This is Sugarbush's first marketing award.

"Sugarbush has created a great single package for turning first-timers to life-timers." – Mike Carey

Best Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month Campaign (More Than 500,000 Visits)

PARK CITY MOUNTAIN RESORT,
Utah.



During Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month, Park City Mountain Resort further promoted its already popular StartNow Program, which has proven to be a leading initiative within the industry to convert new people to the sport. As Marketing Director Krista Parry explains, Park City's parent company, Powdr Corp, issued a challenge to each of its ski areas to effectively address flat and/or declining skier days. In response, Parry explains, Park City latched onto the underlying message of NSAA's Growth Model: Attract the beginners.

The team at Park City put a lot of thought into the development and execution of such a program with a singular purpose: create an inexpensive opportunity that provides a friendly and seamless entry-level experience and leaves participants wanting more.

StartNow is based on three principles: repetition, low cost, and convenience. For just \$25, StartNow participants get a lift ticket, all-day ski or snowboard rental, and a lesson. In addition skiers and riders are given an all-day, all-area lift ticket, equipped with quality rental equipment, and placed in a group lesson at the resort's standard lesson ratio of one instructor per five students. And in line with the Growth Model's five-time ideology, StartNow participants can take advantage of the same great package – lift ticket, rentals, and three-hour lesson – five times at the same \$25-per-day rate.

When it came to communicating with potential participants, Park City took a more personalized approach.

"As one can imagine, participating in a new sport can be challenging and intimidating," says Parry. "We took this into account when creating the communications with StartNow participants."

First, participants begin the StartNow process by signing up at a special website (www.startnow.parkcitymountain.com). The website not only explains how StartNow works, but also demystifies the entire first-timer experience with tips on what to wear, where to park, where to check-in, etc. To further communicate and engage with StartNow participants, a special "What to Know" email is sent three days prior to their first day on the mountain that reiterates what to expect, where to park, and where to go. Once their first lesson is complete, the resort tracks StartNow guest experiences via an email satisfaction survey, which is sent three days after the completion of day one. ♦

“The combination of these tactics proved to be fruitful,” says Parry. “On average, StartNow’s net promoter score is 95, versus the industry-wide average of 65 – incredible results that I wish I could mirror in all of our programs.”

As for results, nearly 6,000 Utahns participated in the program in just its first two years, and 68 percent of the of first-day StartNow participants went on to complete at least two days, while 28 percent completed all five lessons. About 13 percent of participants went on to purchase a Park City pass, and it is anticipated that many more likely went on to purchase season passes at other resorts in Utah. As a result of StartNow, Park City increased Level 1 lesson participation by 145 percent.

This is Park City’s first marketing award.

“Park City Mountain Resort offers an excellent gateway for new participants in our sports. The program is a prime example of the success available within the NSAA’s Model for Growth guidelines. The package offering is simple, yet effective, and is a great reminder of the value available to resorts that are willing to focus on growing our sports.” – Andy Hawk

Best Overall Marketing Program (Up to 100,000 Visits)

**INDIANHEAD
MOUNTAIN, Mich.**



For the fourth straight year, Indianhead Mountain took the prize in its category by adhering to three tenets: build the resort’s social community, introduce new guests to the brand, and differentiate the area from competitors. The resort also focused on increasing its subscriber and fan base by stepping up e-news, text messaging, social media, and iPhone apps.

Indianhead cast a wide net, targeting families, youth groups, and guests who may have lapsed over the years as well as new guests. It then settled on universally relatable themes – food and drink – to convey its marketing messages in a light-hearted way, says Dave Nyquist, vice president of sales and marketing. Using taglines such as “Gourmet Snow, Served Fresh Daily” to tout conditions and “Quench Your Thirst For Unlimited Skiing and Riding” to promote season passes, Indianhead was able to impart key information in a simple, effective manner.

A brochure directed to families interested in affordable package pricing was titled “Something for Everyone” and contained images of milk, energy drinks, coffee, and other adult beverages. A “Kids Menu” listed ski school options, while a brochure for youth groups promised “thirst-quenching black diamonds, hearty blue cruisers, and easy sippin/beginner terrain...all topped off with a heaping portions of pristine Lake Effect snow.” Mailers featuring “All You

Can Eat Buffets” offered discount packages to loyal customers during peak periods.

Wanting to grab market share early and adapt copy as needed, the area relied heavily on electronic/social communication, allocating about 95 percent of its marketing budget accordingly. Indianhead used social media, e-mail, and pay-per-click to shift on the fly, tailor messages to core markets, and push the message out immediately.

One promotion consisted of correlating the lift ticket price with the number of existing Facebook fans, which motivated people to encourage others to join. The area also offered its own version of Group-on, offering discounted rates if enough people signed up. In addition Indianhead introduced an app to push special offers, post snowfall totals, and tap into live cams and video.

At the time Indianhead’s application was received, its 2010/11 campaign was showing sure signs of success: Advance lift ticket purchase had increased 3 percent without sacrificing yield, lodging nights had increased, and group business had increased roughly 3 percent. Facebook fans increased nearly 200 percent, web traffic grew 10 percent, and eNews subscribers increased nearly 30 percent. Also, nearly 1,000 people had downloaded the iPhone app.

“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 conversion rates,” says Nyquist.

Overall, the food/drink theme seems to have left everyone feeling satisfied.

“We hoped to reach our markets in a unique and tongue-in-cheek way,” says Nyquist. “After all, isn’t our business all about having fun?”

This is Indianhead’s fourth consecutive marketing award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2008/09, and 2007/08.

“I applaud Indianhead for recognizing the shift to interactive and digital marketing by committing 95 percent of the budget towards these initiatives. The results are proof that Indianhead knows how to communicate with their customers.” –Mike Bisner

Best Overall Marketing Program (100,000 to 250,000 Visits)

**JAY PEAK RESORT,
Vt.**



Once again, Jay Peak Resort in Jay, Vt., was first in its class for marketing. Building on last season’s anthem to “Raise ‘Em Jay” (i.e., the belief that people brought up as Jay Peakers look at the world through a different lens), the resort took the concept a step further. The new cutline, “Raised Jay,” implies that those raised in

(or attracted to) the Jay Peak realm end up sharing certain values that connect them.

The campaign began with the resort's annual magazine and a series of print and television ads alluding to the Jay Peak mentality: a hand being set in a cast to accommodate a clutched ski pole... a man with a frozen beard and "nasal-cicles"... etc. Jay Peak also introduced a two-word naming convention. In the frozen-beard ad, for example, the copy reads "Pure. Joy." In smaller type: "You know that comfort isn't always comfortable." The resort carried the theme across partner promotions, giveaways, and growth advertising.

Traditional and electronic direct mail helped push the Raised Jay platform. At the center of the electronic campaign was the raisedjay.com "microsite," which contained the magazine, TV spots, print ads, and brand videos. The social media strategy involved soliciting content back from readers, which further engaged fans and followers.

The area also infused the Raised Jay vibe into non-traditional corners, creating an employee recognition program that identified star employees to guests, and a blog that became a hit with travel writers. The resort continued to push the theme in a camp for inner-city kids.

"It is through these extensions that the meaningful work of brand building gets accomplished," says Steve Wright, vice president of marketing, sales, and hospitality. "Through it all we feel that our core audience – the ones who best understand how different our experience is – has the best chance of turning others on."

As for results, at the time of the application deadline Jay Peak was pacing more than 15 percent ahead of resort side revenue and nearly as much in lodging operations. Season pass sales were up by 8 percent in the U.S. and 13 percent in Canada. Vacation stays were extended by almost a full day, and online bookings had jumped from about 7 percent to nearly 30 percent. Clearly, Jay Peak's marketing program is Top. Notch.

This is Jay Peak's fifth marketing award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2008/09, 2007/08, and 2005/06.

"Excellent theme, production and execution with a compelling down-home appeal, Jay Peak's campaign covered all the bases and could compete at any level. – Mike Carey

Best Overall Marketing Program (250,000 to 500,000 Visits)

TELLURIDE SKI AND
GOLF RESORT, Colo.



Telluride has a tradition of excellence in marketing, and its long-held award-winning brand and tagline, "Unmatched in North America," has helped it convey its unusual combination of char-

acteristics. To further imbed the concept, the resort introduced a subtle but far-reaching shift for its 2010/11 campaign – rather than tell the world what makes Telluride special, the resort turned the focus on how it feels to experience the area. With that in mind, the resort introduced "Experience the Unmatched," based on the premise of taking Telluride directly out to the guests and potential guests.

First-time visitors to Telluride are likely to return and also recommend it to a family member or friend, says Matt Skinner, executive director of sales and marketing. With this experience so critical in gaining guest loyalty, and its communication key to gaining new customers and market share, the 2010/11 marketing plan centered on getting the resort into the minds and emotions of guests and potential guests.

Telluride integrated its core brand components across all media, including newly developed scan tags that allowed print and collateral to become interactive pieces. Specially designed mobile pages led readers to the resort video and links to the main site. The resort video took an emotional rather than a narrative approach. The main website was redesigned to become more inclusive of social media sites, cams, video and images, and the popular CEO's blog. Social media sites were designed to become more representative of the brand, and drive traffic back through the main site. Partners were listed as part of print advertising co-ops to provide product for mutual social media campaigns later in the season. Mobile sites and apps put Telluride in the palm of the guests' hands, and the guest in the middle of Telluride, says Skinner.

As the next evolution of messaging, the interactive Experience the Unmatched campaign elicited an "explosion" in social media participation and referral traffic, Skinner says. The new website had received a 4 percent increase in visits with a 30 percent increase in pageviews. Telluride set another record for season pass sales, with an 8 percent increase over last year's record number. The lodging company was pacing nearly 100 percent above the previous season, and seasonal ticket revenues were ahead as well.

Through the evolution of messaging to an experiential approach, utilizing integration of traditional and emerging medias, Telluride adapted to the market, realized success in year-to-date numbers, and correspondingly helped progress and raise marketing standards in the industry. The campaign has effectively engaged past guests and new prospects alike, says Skinner, resulting in positive growth and sustainability for Telluride and the mountain resort industry.

This is Telluride's fourth marketing award with previous wins in 2008/09, 2007/08, and 2005/06.

"Not only did Telluride deliver their branding message successfully, but it did so in a complex fashion that will be hard for others to match without the complete commitment to new technology and media that Telluride exhibited here." – Mike Bisner

Best Overall Marketing Program (500,000 or More Visits)

MAMMOTH,
Calif.



Mammoth wasn't fibbing when "Top of California" became its marketing tagline for 2010/11. At 11,053 feet, Mammoth's peak technically is the highest lift-served ski area on the West Coast. But the desire to be associated with the other definition of "top" was the main push behind Mammoth's recent marketing initiative. Determined to change its reputation as a weekend-only resort, Mammoth focused on positioning itself as a world-class destination – particularly among California residents.

Specifically, the 2010/11 campaign was developed to differentiate and evolve Mammoth's "Play Big" position, repositioning the resort as a unique brand and category leader to target markets in Southern California while introducing the brand and delivering a competitive differentiation to markets in Northern California.

Through research the resort knew that Southern Californians tend to think of Mammoth as their weekend mountain (due to proximity) versus a prime ski/board destination. The task was to reinforce Mammoth's advantages over other western ski destinations to change the perception (i.e., that Mammoth is the best mountain in the western United States) and increase awareness of air service from Los Angeles. As for Northern Californians, they tend to view Mammoth as "SoCal's mountain" because traditionally it has been harder to reach. The objective was two-fold: to

generate awareness for Mammoth's advantages over other ski areas and promote new air service from San Francisco and San Jose.

To achieve these goals Mammoth created a cohesive brand across all platforms, starting with a completely revamped website that not only promoted special deals and loyalty programs but also helped visitors envision themselves at the mountain. Print ads conveyed Mammoth's unique attitude and emphasized the ease of getting there with the new daily flights. Direct mail, radio spots, and newspaper ads continued the theme – as did strategically placed digital billboards in Southern and Northern California. Online messaging and social media had a critical role in the campaign, allowing the resort to get the message out about new products, such as the San Francisco flight, faster and more frequently than any other medium.

The efforts paid off, with paid revenue up 9 percent, season pass revenue up 13 percent, and total revenue up 12 percent at the time of the application deadline. In addition a key metric of success for the Northern California outreach was the load factor of flights from the Bay Area – about 12 percent ahead of the previous season.

This is Mammoth's seventh marketing award with previous wins in 2008/09, 2005/06, 2001/02, 2000/01 (won in two categories), and 1999/00.

"There are two key elements of a great marketing program: captivating messages across a comprehensive set of platforms, and measurement, understanding, and communication of the results of those efforts...this campaign is proof that attention to the fundamentals pays in the long run."
– Andy Hawk ■



Even the marketing team at Mammoth is mammoth. Here the group poses with the coveted 2010/11 NSAA Best Overall Marketing Award.