

There are exceptions to every rule; not everyone acts or thinks the same, and individual tastes vary, as we all know. However, in your efforts to reach out to as many people as possible, here are some guidelines to consider when you plan birding promotions for your organization, community or event:

## *Top 20 Marketing Dos & 7 Marketing Don'ts*

### Do . . .

- **Bird Illustrations** – When illustrating products and promotional materials, use illustrations of birds as your primary illustrations. People and landscapes illustrations can also be used in your promotions, but keep in mind that birders are primarily attracted to birds. Use high-quality illustrations of birds that will help to attract birders – rare birds seem to work best. (Refer to the third week's list of 30 most wanted birds for some good examples.)
- **Photos** – Use photos to illustrate your promotions; photography is an important aspect of birding, and a good photo will attract much more attention than an illustration or artwork. Graphic designs may be best utilized for logos, T-shirts, billboards, etc.
- **Photo Consulting** – Refer photographs you intend to use in promotions and advertising to a professional photographer, preferably a professional wildlife photographer who is familiar with publishing and printing techniques and requirements. There is a big difference between publishable photographs and photos deemed acceptable by amateurs, hobbyists and even newspaper editors.
- **Photo Contracts** – Be sure to obtain permission to use any photographer's image or images in advance. Always address the amount of money to be paid for the use of photographs or photo scans. You should pay any photographer for the use of their photo(s); it's important to your product and promotions, and it's appropriate if the image is good enough to publish.
- **Marketing** – Marketing is essential to promote birding, and it must be conducted annually across a broad section of the country. Develop an annual marketing plan, including a realistic budget. Plan seasonal, even monthly, promotions in your annual plan. Include local, regional and national advertising and press releases.
- **National Reach** – Keep a national marketing perspective, primarily because there are relatively few birders in North Dakota. You will need to attract people from states with large numbers of birders, such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, etc. This can be accomplished by targeted advertising in selected states, or by advertising in national media.
- **International Reach** – If you wish to expand your marketing reach beyond American borders, your best bet is to target birders in Canada, England, the Netherlands and Germany, the countries beyond our borders where other large populations of birders are found.
- **Pool Resources** – If marketing resources are limited, try to expand your marketing reach by pooling resources with other communities and organizations. Communities often work with regional planning groups, state offices including the Tourism Department, and nearby wildlife refuges, state parks and other recreational areas.
- **Seasonal Appeal** – Keep references to the birds people can find seasonal. Birding is an all-season activity, and your information about the birds people can expect to see should be season-specific. For instance be sure birders understand they will have best luck looking for Baird's Sparrows during May and June, while Snowy Owls will be good bets during December through February.
- **All Seasons** – Birding is an all-seasons activity, even in North Dakota. Therefore, you should design promotions that will attract birders throughout the year, rather than merely during a specific weekend of spring, which is too often the case. Birders may visit your area every weekend if you promote birding via all

seasonal options. And certainly, while many people think birding is a spring thing, fall birding offers some of the best birding dramas during migration, and winter brings some of North America's most exciting birds south from the Arctic and the northern forests of Canada.

- **Be Realistic** – Keep references to the birds people can find realistic. Don't offer false impressions to attract birders at all cost. The "common" birds found seasonally in most areas of North Dakota are spectacular enough to attract many birders, and a few of the Top 30 species will add spice to the line-up of the birds found in your area – as long as they are readily found nearby.
- **Trickles** – Also be realistic in your expectations for increased tourism. In response to your marketing efforts, expect a trickle of birders who, within the span of a given year, add up to an impressive total of new visitors to your area.
- **Consulting** – Organizers must consult with someone with a strong background in birding or field ornithology to get basic information about the birds found in your area. You will also need to consult with someone who understands birding and birders, not to mention someone with a national perspective who knows how to market your resources to birders.
- **Community Support** – Make birding a community affair! Get motels, hotels, lodges, restaurants, service stations, sporting goods stores, grocery stores and other businesses involved. Post signs in the windows of local businesses that *Welcome Birders!*. Many kinds of businesses can install feeders and birdbaths outside their window, including outside of motel rooms and restaurant windows (a few bars even offer such interesting outdoor attractions). Restaurants can have bird checklists or simple maps to local birding sites printed on place mats to interest birders and other patrons. Landscaping can be just as effective in attracting birds as food and water, and attractive plantings can enhance the image of any business.
- **Updates** – Keep your communications channels up to date – especially web sites. Too often web sites and other communications tend to get stale and outdated, especially when most are updated only annually. Keep people interested in returning to your communications sites by providing a new look as often as possible. Offer weekly, or at least monthly, updates.
- **Advertise** – You will need to promote birding every year; promotions are a building process, and often, as soon as you're successful in attracting a group of birders, you must begin attracting an all new group (the previous group is likely to travel to a new destination). This means you must plan to have funds available to pay for birding each year, and the more money you can devote to advertising, the better your return will be – if your message is attractive and birder-friendly.
- **Ad Variety** – Utilize a variety of advertising media –newspapers, magazines, signs, a web site or web pages in an existing site, newsletters, invitations to birding groups and travel companies, billboards, etc. Be sure to vary your message too, especially from season to season and year to year.
- **Free Advertising** – Utilize the freebies; submit news releases regularly to newspapers, web sites, magazines and other publications. Also submit news articles and magazine articles to birding, wildlife, travel and outdoors titles. Plan periodic events to utilize the promotional news releases to remind people about your birding attractions.
- **Investments** – Advertising, marketing and promotions should be considered valuable investments to develop birding-based tourism. As any businessperson knows, it requires an initial investment to reap the fruits of your efforts.
- **Fundraising** – Funding for events, products, marketing plans and other birding endeavors require fund-raising, which is never easy for anyone. Consider pooling funds with other organizations and communities, regional funding groups, and private funding sources to reach funding goals. Marketing and advertising will require annual fund-raising to attract birders each year, so long-term planning must be implemented to raise required funds year after year with a minimum of effort.

# Top 7 Pitfalls to Avoid When Marketing to Birders

Just as there is a list of guidelines to follow when promoting birding, there are some things, including some seemingly very obvious things, to avoid:

## Don't . . .

- Don't promote birding in cemeteries, sewage lagoons, garbage dumps and similar questionable locations. Believe it or not, some people promote such unlikely locations because they attract a stray gull or "rare" crow. That's fine if an individual deems it necessary to fulfill their personal interests, but these are not the kinds of locations to tout as ecotourism destinations. Birders will be most interested in finding and photographing the same species – actually any species – in a natural, aesthetically beautiful location.
- Never refer to birders as birdwatchers (or bird watchers or bird-watchers). Use the words birding and birders – always. The term birdwatcher is an archaic term that oversimplifies the many facets of birding. Birding may start with "watching" birds, but it also includes photography and many other kinds of outdoor activities, including field studies, drawing and painting, hiking, cycling, canoeing, auto touring, camping, backpacking, traveling to other states or countries, feeding birds and other activities. Unfortunately, some journalists and non-birders continue to use the term birdwatching because they are uninformed about this popular activity that experienced rapid growth during the 1980s, '90s and beyond.
- Don't use photos of birds perched on fences, utility poles and other unaesthetic sites. Birders prefer birding in "wild" natural locations, so birds photographed in natural settings are most attractive to birders – and most other people. This fact is very obvious when you review the high-quality photographs used in nature and birding magazines and books.
- Don't use photos of birds that do not occur in your region to promote birding in your area. This may seem obvious, but one birding-related web site in North Dakota features a photo of birds that are not found in our state. A couple years ago a tourism promoter used a photo of a bird that is not found in our state to illustrate promotions for a regional tourism workshop. This practice has been repeated by well-meaning but uninformed people again and again, so be sure to consult with knowledgeable professionals and birders to be birding-correct in your choice of images.
- Don't expect a rush of birders to react to promotions and advertisements. Plan for a trickle of birders throughout the year that will add up to an impressive number of new visitors to your community.
- Don't over-estimate the value of a birding festival. While birding festivals appear to be very appealing, they are extremely time-consuming, require considerable marketing funds, and really only attract birders for a short period – usually just a couple days. Instead of marketing for a one-weekend event, market for a year-long attraction for birders to enjoy every week and weekend.
- Do not schedule competing events during the same weekend. Be aware of other community's events in the state, especially birding events, and be sure your event does not detract from another group's endeavors.

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