

Transforming SWOTC into a World-Class RTO

Strategic Plan for 2018-2020

October 10, 2017

Introduction

This document, based on a strategic framework submitted by Twenty31 Consulting Inc., provides an overview of strategic themes for Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation's (SWOTC) 2018 to 2020 Strategic Plan. These themes were developed in collaboration with SWOTC's Board of Directors and Staff through in-depth interviews and a planning workshop in July 2017.

It is a summary of Board and Staff input with some level of consensus on each strategic theme. Each theme is outlined in further detail with a rationale provided on why it is included, along with possible performance measures and timing. "Outputs" are offered as examples only. They will be defined more fully in the business plan

SWOTC's priority product/experience areas were reconfirmed for the next year as: waterfront; beer, wine and culinary; significant events. Similarly, SWOTC initiatives will continue in all five "pillars" defined by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport, namely: marketing, product development, workforce development, investment attraction and governance/administration.

This strategy will be used to develop the 2018-2019 business plan for final approval by the Board of Directors.

© The recommendations herein are considered confidential to the Board of Directors and staff of Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC). Given the competitive nature of the insights presented, we will use this report internally and not release it publically beyond key stakeholders until formally approved.

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Strategic Themes: Overview

Strategic Theme

HIGH PRIORITY

SWOTC will operate like a business vs. a not-for-profit organization.

SWOTC will launch a program of improved communications and collaboration with stakeholders to better tell the SWOTC and tourism story.

SWOTC will develop an evidence-based decision making culture that includes improving its understanding of its current and potential traveller markets and drivers for travel to the Ontario's Southwest region.

MEDIUM PRIORITY

SWOTC will work to identify and secure more sustainable funding, revenue generation and cost offsets.

SWOTC will continue to actively work with travel and tourism operators (i.e., clients) in the region as their prime target audience.

SWOTC will continue to promote the Ontario's Southwest region as a top travel destination via a fully- integrated marketing and PR program.

Operate Like a Business

SWOTC will operate like a business vs. a not-for-profit organization.

Objective: Continue to evolve into a sustainable organization operating with business (i.e. private sector) principles.

Description: Continue to adopt and implement business practices and a business mindset in how it operates, engages stakeholders, and communicates and markets the region to travel consumers.

Rationale: The Board and Staff believe that a private sector business organization can better adapt and thrive in Ontario's dynamic travel and tourism market. Operating like a business entity may shift how SWOTC spends money, works to secure revenues beyond the Ontario Government transfer payment and works to achieve impact in all mandated pillars.

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- Review of current business practices to identify aspects that can be cost-recovered, better communicated to operator clients and/or better aligned to achieving impact around SWOTC's key product categories

Outcomes:

- Operational culture recognizes time and budget constraints and the need for continual demonstration of impact
- Better alignment with travel and tourism operator clients

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q4 2018-2019

Communications

SWOTC will launch a program of improved communications and collaboration with stakeholders to better tell the SWOTC and tourism story.

Objective: Improve awareness and understanding of SWOTC's mandate and impact in developing Ontario's Southwest (OSW) as a top travel destination and growing the regional tourism economy.

Description: Continue to achieve positive impact in terms of the sustainable growth of travel and tourism in Ontario Southwest.

Rationale: Best-practice in DMO/RTO stakeholder engagement suggests a regular and on-going program of external communications and interaction tailored to specific and identified stakeholder audiences. This improves overall collaboration, increases cooperation including joint funding of projects and initiatives and ensures SWOTC maintains good relations and budget stability with its prime 'shareholder' (i.e. Ontario Government).

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- Development and launch of communications plan
- Information to be better condensed and articulated with key stakeholder audiences

Outcomes:

- Mention of SWOTC's impact in regional business news sources (include partners as appropriate)
- Highlights of SWOTC's efforts in regional government communications
- Better engagement with government elected and non-elected influencers (not lobbying)
- One 'announcable' per year for use by Minister, etc.

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q2 2018-2019 (communications plan development)
- Q3 to Q4 2018-2019 (launch)
- Q1 to Q2 2019-2020 (assessment and refinement of plan)
- Q3 to Q4 2019-2020 (launch)

Evidence-Based Decision Making

SWOTC will improve its understanding of its current and potential traveller markets and drivers for travel to Ontario's Southwest.

Objective: Align Ontario's Southwest unique experiences and selling propositions to traveler expectations and preferences and grow high-value tourism.

Rationale: SWOTC needs to continually make more informed decisions using research and data. The availability and utility of government-sourced data and research remains a challenge. SWOTC will obtain and analyze its own data using a combination of internal sources (e.g. visitor profile surveying) and off-the-shelf secondary sources.

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- Conduct primary research with OSW visitors
- Identify and leverage secondary research sources
- Review of key product categories and focus markets

Outcomes:

- Products and experiences and how they are marketed align with high-value travel consumer preferences
- Ontario's Southwest considered the top destination for the key product categories within Ontario and Canada

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q4 2018-2019+ (conduct research and identify secondary sources)
- Q1 to Q4 2019-2020 (conduct review of key product categories and markets)

Revenue Generation

SWOTC will work to identify and secure more sustainable funding, revenue generation and cost offsets.

Objective: Identify and secure alternative funding sources and grow SWOTC's share of non-TPA revenue (including cost offsets) within three years.

Description: To balance cash-flow as well as eventually shift to a more sustainable funding model, also identify and pursue alternative revenue sources and cost offsets.

Rationale: Alternative funding sources should to be identified, mapped and prioritized in a systematic fashion.

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- DMF (Destination Marketing Fund) review report
- One 'announcable' pitched to the Minister of Tourism.
- Alternative funding sources report
- List of SWOTC fees for service developed for industry partners and operators

Outcomes:

- Possible adoption of a DMF (2019 to 2020+)
- More proactive relationship with the Ministry of Tourism
- Percentage of SWOTC's budget from alternative non-TPA sources

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q4 2018-2019 (reviews)
- Q1 to Q4 2019-2020+ (launch)

Customers

Continue to actively work with travel and tourism operators (i.e., clients) in the region as their prime target audience.

Objective: Continually focus SWOTC resources on improving and growing opportunities for regional tourism businesses to boost internal capacity, building regional experiences and OSW's brand as a top travel destination.

Rationale: The 10,000+ travel and tourism businesses (i.e., operators) in the region are SWOTC's prime client audience. SWOTC's existing tourism development and marketing initiatives will be designed as a systematic and adequately funded, multi-tiered program designed to build operator capacity, grow experiences and further strengthen the region's market-ready offerings.

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- Development and roll-out of a refined product development plan
- Communications and launch of enhanced operator training seminars and workshops
- Launch of group tour operator engagement plan and hosting FAMs

Outcomes:

- More market-ready operators aligned to SWOTC's three key product categories
- Improved brand awareness of OSW aligned to the three key product categories
- Tour Operators packaging and promoting SWOTC

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q2 2018-2019 (product development plan development)
- Q3 to Q4 2018-2019+ (product development plan launched)
- Q1 to Q2 2018-2019 (tour operator plan developed)
- Q3 to Q4 2018-2019+ (tour operator plan launched)

Marketing

SWOTC will continue to promote Ontario's Southwest as a top travel destination via a fully-integrated marketing and communications program.

Objective: Better align SWOTC's marketing and communications efforts and eventually shift to a content marketing strategy.

Description: SWOTC plays a key role in marketing and promoting the region to travel consumers.

Rationale: SWOTC's unique role in collectively marketing Ontario's Southwest to end consumers, should continue.

Performance Measures:

Sample Outputs:

- Conduct review of current marketing and communications efforts
- Identify best-practice in content marketing
- Launch an enhanced SWOTC content marketing strategy
- Increase buy-in opportunities with DMO and operator partners
- Link PR (i.e., fam trips and communications) with digital and social media marketing ideally under common content marketing strategy
- Better alignment with product development

Outcomes:

- Better ROI for marketing and communications
- Full alignment between product development, marketing and communications
- Increased frequency and touch points with potential travellers along the Path to Purchase

Timeline:

- Q1 to Q4 2018-2019 (conduct marketing and PR review and best practice identification)
- Q1 to Q4 2019-2020+ (launch content marketing program)