

3/19/2024



Re: 2023/2024 yearly report

To Braxton County Commission, Town of Sutton, Town of Burnsville, West Virginia State Auditor, Joint Committee on Government and Finance, and the West Virginia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau:

In accordance with West Virginia state code (§7-18-13a), please find attached the yearly report of the Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). The report includes:

An income statement and balance sheet showing all amounts of hotel occupancy tax appropriated and all expenditures of hotel occupancy tax made by the CVB for the prior fiscal year; (Financial Report)

A marketing plan targeting markets outside of a 50-mile radius of CVB location; (2023 Advertising Plan, and 2023 Marketing Plan)

An annual operating budget allocating approximately 40 percent of annual revenues to advertising and marketing, approximately 40 percent to salaries and personnel, and approximately 20 percent to other operating expenses. (2024 Budget)

We have also included accomplishments for 2023 and goals for 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Smith", is written over a white background.

Andrew Smith  
Executive Director  
Braxton County CVB

## 2023 Accomplishments - Braxton County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB)

**Advertising:** In 2023 the CVB continued efforts in **paid digital marketing** across social media and display ad networks, which resulted in **100,126 impressions, and 4,204 unique trackable website clicks.**

The CVB created and re-printed various **rack cards** on the **Flatwoods Monster, Motorcycle Riding,** and a general **Braxton County** piece. In total, **generating 84,000 printed pieces** to distribute to the traveling public via interstate rest areas, WV Welcome Centers, mail, local tourism destinations, related tourism destinations all over the United States, and our office.

**Print advertising** included several ads placed in lower priced yet highly targeted printed media, such as Hidden Ohio, Map in Black, and a Tri-county map, printed by MMI; to name a few. These publications combined represent over **42,000 pieces, nationwide.**

The CVB advertised with several **podcasts** in 2023. These efforts resulted in an estimated **125,000 impressions** and **84** tracked clicks/visits to the CVB's website. The CVB estimates that for every **one** person who used a traceable method there were **five to ten** others who used more direct and untraceable routes.

The CVB owns two sets of attraction signs on **I-79 at exit 62.** The average daily traffic is around **19,400 vehicles.** The signs produce a possible 19,400+ impressions per day. This number could skew more or less since we cannot account for multiple passengers, etc. In a year these signs could generate **10,940,000 or more impressions.**

**Earned Media:** The CVB worked with several production companies again in 2023 to create **roughly 11 pieces of entertainment content** for various media outlets. YouTube being chief among these media outlets. In total these projects have earned Braxton County about **300,000 free impressions** internationally. This exposure was given at no cost to the CVB. The value of these impressions would equal roughly **\$3,000** in advertising spending.

**Social Media:** The CVB actively markets on social media through many platforms including Facebook, X(Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. All of these platforms are utilized to make users aware of attractions and events in the Braxton County area. On all platforms, the CVB has a combined audience of **over 29,000 followers.** On **Facebook** alone, in 2023, the CVB has generated **665,181 Impressions.**

**Website:** The Braxton County CVB website saw visitation by **48,000 visitors** who generated **118,578 page-views in 2023,** those stats are on par with the record numbers recorded in 2023. The webpage dedicated to the Flatwoods Monster was the most viewed, followed by the page dedicated to the 2023 Bigfoot Festival, then followed by the "Home" page, "Things to Do", "Events", then "Attractions". The website also generated **over 1,000** outbound clicks to **partner** websites and social media accounts. Having a state-of-the-art website is key in an age where web search algorithms not only assess content relating to a search, but also website functionality and security. Much of CVB marketing efforts drive traffic to this website, it must be the CVB's strongest asset in order to perform well for Braxton County tourism partners, many of whom have little to no web presence themselves.

**Events:** The CVB sponsors several events in 2023. These events included the **WV Bigfoot Fest, Braxton County Fair, Burnsville Freedom Fest, WV Emergency Management Conference, Flatwoods Monster Fest, Elk River Float, and Kings of the Lake.** These events attracted over **8,000 visitors** to the area, most for more than one day.

**Education:** The CVB's executive Director, Andrew Smith, attended continued education at the **West Virginia Governor's Conference on Tourism** and **West Virginia Museum Association Conference** in 2023. At the Governor's Conference on Tour Smith learned several cutting-edge and budget-friendly marketing and content creation

techniques to utilize for Braxton County. At the Museum Conference Smith learned several best practices for museums that were previously unknown.

**Accreditation/Membership:** In 2023 the Braxton County CVB successfully applied for and received accreditation from the West Virginia Association of CVB's (WVACVB). The process of accreditation is highly involved and takes place once every three years. In order to become accredited by the WVACVB an applying CVB must illustrate best practices for CVB's. In 2023 the Braxton County CVB also became a member of West Virginia Association of Museums. The CVB did this in order to receive the benefit of the experience of that organization and its other members. The Braxton County CVB has operated the Flatwoods Monster Museum as one of its special projects for over five years.

**CVB Office/Flatwoods Monster Museum:** The CVB office and Flatwoods Monster Museum greeted many visitors to Braxton County In 2023. The visitation led to significant traffic throughout Braxton County, especially to downtown Sutton. In February of 2023 the CVB began tallying all daily visitation. From February 17<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> **visitation totaled 11,269**. Additionally, the CVB made **over \$85,000 in sales of souvenirs**, 15k more than 2022. This additional revenue helped further bolster the CVB's efforts in marketing Braxton County as an ideal West Virginia destination.

**Remodel/building improvements:** In **2018** the Braxton County CVB purchased its headquarters on **Main Street in Sutton**. In that time, even with some of the extra expenses that has cam along with owning and maintaining a building, with all related income and expenses combined for the past five years, the decision to buy this building has resulted in a nearly **\$120,000** positive return on investment. In addition to that, the CVB's move to downtown Sutton has played a role in the current upswing the Town of Sutton is enjoying now. In an effort to further **enhance** the tourism **draw** of Braxton County, and to **reinvest** some of those funds, the CVB began **remodeling** the **apartments** located on the second story to convert them into **Air BnB's**.

The CVB wishes to further expand tourism opportunities in Braxton County as well as to **directly fund** the very resource the CVB uses to function. No tax revenue is collected on the rental of long-term apartments, however, both **sales and Hotel/Motel tax** are collected on **Air BnB** rentals. As of January 2022, all 3<sup>rd</sup> party rental platforms (like Air BnB) are required to charge and remit all applicable **taxes through the platform itself**.

The CVB wishes to use this opportunity to join others in our community, like the **Elk River Hotel and Café** with their **Glamping Domes**, to offer something **unique** to the traveling public. Since these rentals set above the Flatwoods Monster Museum, the spaces will be **Monster themed!** They will be decorated and equipped with wholly unique items specifically for the monster lovers who visit our area.

While providing this unique lodging option, our intention will not be to replace any other lodging option in Braxton County, as we will only be able to provide two rental units at any given time. These units will also be more expensive than the average room available in Braxton County, so the **CVB will not be undercutting** other properties in Braxton, but instead will be catering too a very specific clientele, who may otherwise not decide to stay in Braxton County at all.

On top of renovations, the CVB has also had to replace the HVAC unit in the main floor of the building, The steps leading into the basement, and many small odds and end repairs.

**Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau**

Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31, 2023 Financial Report

**Revenue**

Hotel/Motel Tax (Braxton County)	\$	103,655.60
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Sutton)	\$	1,185.74
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Burnsville)	\$	136.98
Sales	\$	85,174.15
Penny Smasher	\$	760.75
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>190,913.22</b>

**Expense***Staffing*

Net Salaries	\$	38,208.06
Unemployment	\$	327.47
US IRS Withholdings	\$	10,506.96
WV Withholdings	\$	1,453.00
<b>Total Staffing Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>50,495.49</b>

*Office/Administrative*

Building Expenses*	\$	121,596.26
Office Expenses (Includes Adobe)	\$	1,440.36
Utilities	\$	10,764.99
Meetings	\$	80.72
Mileage/Fuel	\$	2,272.09
Legal & Accounting	\$	1,675.00
Sales Tax	\$	5,199.47
Property Tax	\$	954.84
Dues/Education	\$	2,172.17
Insurance	\$	4,471.00
<b>Total Office/Administrative</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>150,626.90</b>

*Promotion of Braxton County*

Grant Partnerships / Sponsorships	\$	7,590.00
Inventory	\$	60,786.80
Phone, Internet, email	\$	1,574.84
Marketing / Advertising	\$	20,895.10
Postage	\$	75.76
Website, hosting and maintainence	\$	534.85
<b>Total Promotion</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>91,457.35</b>

**Total Expenses****\$ 292,579.74**

## 2024 Goals - Braxton County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB)

**Hotel rentals and overnight stays:** The Braxton County CVB will continue to work with, advertise, and sponsor area tourism partners to generate more hotel stays in 2024. This generates more sales for county businesses which benefit from tourism traffic and in turn generates more tax revenue for the local towns, Braxton County and West Virginia.

**Marketing/Advertising:** The CVB will work to market Braxton County as a regional, national, and international tourism destination in a number of ways in 2024.

In 2024, the CVB plans on creating printed pieces (rack cards and brochures) for distribution to the traveling public via WV Welcomes Centers, rest stops, regional tourist attractions, and our office. This will include updating and reprinting all current pieces as needed. The CVB also plans to develop new pieces as well as encourage our local tourism partners to work with us to create individualized printed pieces through our 50/50 rack card co-op program.

Digital marketing will continue to be a large component of the CVB's marketing strategy in 2024. Meeting people where they are is the key to marketing. In 2024, most people will be online. They browse social media, they search on Google, and they listen to podcasts. In 2024, the CVB will advertise on all of these platforms on a regular basis. The advantage of digital marketing is the CVB will receive real-time data and analytics while campaigns are live. This real time data is key for assessing the effectiveness of content as well as helping to determine actual return on investment. This will put the CVB's state-of-the-art website to work by using digital advertising efforts to guide visitors to this website. This web traffic will guide potential visitors to our area partners, some of which have little to no web presence.

**Website:** The website the CVB operates, [Braxtonwv.org](http://Braxtonwv.org), offers intuitive performance and ease of use travelers have come to expect. Much of the CVB's marketing efforts direct visitors to this website, because of that, it has to be the crown jewel of the CVB's marketing strategy. This website is essentially a collection of information guests use to research and travel the Braxton area. The CVB will use trackable links on the site which count the number of clicks to tourism partners websites or to their social media presence.

**Social Media:** The CVB will actively market on social media through many different platforms including Facebook, X(Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. These platforms are utilized to make users aware of attractions and events in the Braxton County area. These platforms allow us to share information for free to an "opted-in" audience. The interaction it receives assists the CVB in understanding what grabs attention and what does not. This helps the CVB to determine marketing messaging for potential paid advertising.

**Sponsorship:** In 2024 the CVB has budgeted \$8,000 for event sponsorship. Sponsorship will be given based on merit and likelihood that the requested funds will help attract visitors to the Braxton area.

**Events:** In 2024 the CVB plans to sponsor, promote, and/or play an advisory role in many events. It is our hope that these events will enrich the culture of Braxton County and draw attendance from over-night visitors and day trippers from all over the state and surrounding states. Some of these events include: The Braxton County Fair, W. Va. Bigfoot Fest, Elk River Summer Float, Gassaway Days, Burnsville Freedom Fest, and Kings of the Lakes Fishing Tournament.

**Guest Tracking:** In 2023, the CVB began counting visitors to the Visitors Center and Flatwoods Monster Museum daily with handheld tally counter. This is a practice the CVB will continue in 2024 to more accurately report on visitation.

**Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau**

2024 Budget

**Revenue**

Hotel/Motel Tax (Braxton County)	\$	90,000.00
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Sutton)	\$	1,000.00
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Burnsville)	\$	100.00
Grants	\$	2,250.00
Rent	\$	20,000.00
Sales	\$	85,000.00
Penny Smasher	\$	700.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>199,050.00</b>

**Expense****Staffing**

Net Salaries	\$	38,500.00
Unemployment	\$	350.00
US IRS Withholdings	\$	11,000.00
WV Withholdings	\$	1,500.00
<b>Total Staffing Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>51,350.00</b>

**Office/Administrative**

Building Expenses	\$	7,500.00
Office Expences (Includes Adobe)	\$	1,500.00
Utilities	\$	13,000.00
Mileage/Fuel	\$	2,500.00
Legal & Accounting	\$	2,000.00
Sales Tax	\$	5,000.00
Property Tax	\$	1,000.00
Financial Review	\$	7,000.00
Dues/Education	\$	2,250.00
Insurance	\$	4,500.00
<b>Total Office/Administrative</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>46,250.00</b>

**Promotion of Braxton County**

Grant Partnerships / Sponsorships	\$	8,000.00
Inventory	\$	60,000.00
Phone, Internet, email	\$	1,650.00
Marketing / Advertising	\$	20,000.00
Postage	\$	100.00
Website, hosting and maintainence	\$	600.00
<b>Total Promotion</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>90,350.00</b>

**Total Expenses****\$ 187,950.00**



# BRAXTON COUNTY CVB 2024 MARKETING PLAN

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## BRAXTON COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU MISSION STATEMENT:

THE BRAXTON COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU  
WILL MARKET BRAXTON COUNTY AS A TOURISM  
DESTINATION IN-STATE, ACROSS THE US, AND  
INTERNATIONALLY USING APPLICABLE UNIQUE MESSEGING  
DESIGNED TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THE INTENDED  
MARKET AND DRIVE TRAFFIC TO THE BRAXTON TOURISM  
WEBSITE AND TO OUR TOURISM PARTNERS WHILE FEULING  
CURIOSITY IN OUR TARGET MARKETS.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is a private, non-profit marketing organization representing Braxton County, West Virginia as a meeting, event, recreation, and vacation destination.

The CVB strives to create a positive and lasting image of the county and its attractions through all publications, promotional materials, and advertisements. Promotional outlets and programs are chosen based on value and effectiveness. The effectiveness of outlets and programs are continually analyzed throughout the year to help determine whether they are successful and if they should be repeated in the future.

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## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS

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### Strengths:

- Located in the geographic center of West Virginia. Ideal for state-wide organizations;
- Easily accessible via five exits along I-79;
- Sutton Lake / Burnsville Lake / Rivers;
- Outdoor recreation activities; such as fishing, swimming, hiking, boating;
- Ample conference and event facilities, both indoor and out;
- History/Civil War/Heritage attractions such as Flatwoods Monster, Battle of Bulltown, Downtown Sutton, Civil War Trail stops, and “ghost towns”;
- Small town atmosphere: Burnsville, Flatwoods, Sutton, Gassaway;
- Various regularly scheduled fairs, festivals, and events;
- Quality, diverse, and numerous lodging options;
- Unique shopping options including outlet stores, many independent specialty and general stores, Flatwoods Monster Museum, WV Bigfoot Museum;
- Many high quality and diverse dining options available;
- Unique entertainment options: Landmark Theater for the Arts, Elk Theatre, Braxton Jamboree, plenty of live music;
- Low crime rate;
- scenic beauty;
- affordability/cheap or free parking;

Weaknesses:

- Lack of outdoor activities and attractions during winter seasons;
- Lack of regularly scheduled evening entertainment options;
- Some areas of Braxton need rejuvenation, visually unattractive;
- Lack of quality hospitality employees/high turnover rate;
- Land access/use issues;
- Located in the geographic center of the state. Difficult to attract out of state visitors. Out of state visitors may find WV destinations just over the boarder rather than venturing well into the state to find us.

Opportunities:

- Further development and establishment of community relationships in our service area to make the CVB the hub of information.
- Development of new promotions and itineraries that emphasize and curate activity already possible in the area.
- Development of new promotions/exhibits/monuments based around famous residents/natives of Braxton, history, and lore.

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## **BRAXTON COUNTY'S TOURISM PRODUCT DEFINITION**

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- Heritage / History Tourism: Bulltown historic area, Sutton Downtown Historic District, Civil War Trail signs in Sutton and Burnsville, Windy Run School, Gassaway Depot, and Historic Elk Theatre;
- Paranormal Interests: Flatwoods Monster, haunted houses, Big Foot, ghost towns, cemeteries;
- Culture / Entertainment: The Landmark Studio for the Arts, Braxton Jamboree, special events in Gassaway, Sutton, Burnsville and Flatwoods; numerous fairs and festivals;
- Outdoor Recreation: fishing, hiking, kayak and canoeing, boating, hunting, camping, swimming;
- Shopping: Everything Fiesta, other Flatwoods Center stores, Bear Heaven, Sister's Antiques, Mountain Laurel Country Store, Flatwoods Monster Museum;
- Dining: Woods and Waters, Waffle Hut, The Spot, Stancattis, El Gallo, Maria's, Braxton Bistro, a wide variety of chain quick-service and set-down restaurants;

- Lodging: Day's Inn and Suites, Microtel, Elk Hotel and Cafe, Sutton Lane Motel, Elk Motor Court, The 79 Hotel, Several Air BnB options, Over 300 total rooms/rentals, totaling nearly 500 beds;
- Meetings and Conference facilities: Flatwoods Conference Center, Microtel, We're Family Park, Elk River Hotel and Cafe;

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## **COMPETITON**

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- Lewis County: Stonewall Jackson Resort and lake;
- Summersville: Large conference center, lots of similar outdoor recreation;
- Pocahontas, Tucker and Randolph Counties: outdoor recreation; resorts, scenic beauty;
- Eastern Panhandle: civil war and heritage tourism; upscale lodging; gaming; meeting facilities, shorter drive time from D.C.;

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## **POSITIONING**

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- Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau office is located in Downtown Sutton, which helps to drive traffic deeper into the county from the interstate.
- Work with the West Virginia Division of Tourism and area tourism partners whenever possible in various advertising opportunities.
- Offer co-op advertising opportunities to area tourism partners to stretch marketing dollars for both the CVB and area businesses.
- Partner with other "Paranormal" attractions in the state, as the Flatwoods Monster Museum, to help draw more people into the state to enjoy all WV attractions in one trip.
- Continue to work with area governing bodies, businesses, civic groups, individual members of community to work together to when goals dovetail.
- Require events, that request sponsorship from the CVB, to supply the CVB with passes to the event in order to offer them as promotion for the events as well as boost CVB visibility.

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## **CONSUMER MARKET ACTION PLAN:**

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- Gain brand recognition and initiate engagements by advertising to specific markets with specific interests. Drop generic messages to stand out. Utilize the Flatwoods Monster whenever appropriate to catch viewer attention.

- Utilize more internet advertising, including: Google, Facebook, YouTube.
- Create and/or recreate brochures for specific activities or subjects. Examples include: The Flatwoods Monster, motorcycling, Elk River Water Trail, “Best Of’s. If time and opportunity allow, create and new Visitors Guide.
- Advertise in specific interest driven publications that have highly interested and engaged readers. Example subjects include: Motorcycling, Fishing, Paranormal, etc.
- Advertise with podcasts who are emerging/mid-level audience sizes.

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## **PUBLICATION DEVELOPMENT / DISTRIBUTION**

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- Brochures: distribute printed material to WV Welcome Centers, area tourism attractions, other like attractions nation-wide, nearby interstate rest areas, CVB office or via mail (when requested)
- E-Newsletter: Newsletter is e-mailed to interested persons, media outlets, and CVB partners monthly or when applicable.
- Continuing the expanded use of electronic publications. e.g. Website upgrades, Facebook, YouTube, other social media.

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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- The Braxton County CVB has taken the lead on marketing Braxton County by fostering relationships in the service area to expand communication and ensure all affected parties are working for the same goals as well as have a voice in the direction of the CVB.
- Sponsor and co-sponsor events with possible tourism draw. Funds help events offset expenses and allow for the event to reoccur year after year in the hopes that they will become self-sufficient. The sponsorship process emphasizes the importance of outside area interest and overnight stays. Sponsorship also requires organizers to take part in tracking and reporting the success of their event which in turn helps the CVB decide if future sponsorship is warranted.
- Provide press releases to news outlets to illustrate CVB effectiveness and purpose.
- Send Newsletter via e-mail that promote special events and attractions in Braxton County.
- Speak with area business owners, event planners, and taste makers to ensure they are familiar with the CVB and its efforts, and to find ways to partner.

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## ADVERTISING CONTENT SUMMERY

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The Braxton County CVB will structure content in advertising opportunities, depending upon desired market attempting to be reached in any given advertising opportunity. In the strategies given below the terms “general advertising” means any application were the CVB will be marketing to a general audience with no particular market segment in mind. The term “specific or target market” means any application were the CVB will be advertising to a particular market segment which will relate to a particular interest or activity. “Market” refers to a segment of the population which we are advertising toward:

- As an attempt to grab and hold attention, the CVB will utilized advertising content (graphics, text, spoken word) which feature the Flatwoods Monster lore in most general advertising opportunities. The CVB has found through extensive testing that this course of action yields a high return on investment of advertising dollars when compared to other general advertising pursuits that have ever been attempted by the organization. Net return on investment generates four to ten times the return on general advertising opportunities.
- In any advertising where a specific market is being targeted, the CVB will utilize advertising content (graphics, text, spoken word) which will feature the subject matter pertaining specifically to the target market we are attempting to reach. For example, if the CVB is attempting to reach fisherman through a channel that is specifically fishing related, we will utilize content which related specifically to the interest of fishing. The CVB has found through extensive trail and error that advertising to specifical markets using specific content delivers a high return on investment by focusing targeted content to an already target market. Marketing to highly targeted markets tend to be less expensive than marketing to a general audience when compared 1 to 1, scaled to compensate for dollars spent and audience reached.

## 2024 Advertising Plan

Ad	Type	Cost	Impressions	Qualifiers/breakdown
Sponsored Facebook/Instagram	digital	\$2,000.00	900,000	Individual ads: \$20 - \$200 each
Civil War Trail dues	digital, print	\$200.00	830,000	Impressions # reflect ad efforts by trail org
Attractions sign dues on I-79	signs	\$600.00	1,825,000	Yearly (5,000 per day)
Monster rack card	print	\$3,794.72	20,000	number of pieces = 20k
Motorcycle rack card	print	\$1,500.00	10,000	number of pieces = 10k
Paranormal rack card	print	\$1,500.00	10,000	number of pieces = 10k
Lakes rack card	print	\$1,500.00	10,000	number of pieces = 10k
General County rack card	print	\$1,500.00	10,000	number of pieces = 10k
Mason Co. CVB guide	print	\$350.00	10,000	1/2 page ad w free 1/4 ad
Website maintenance	digital	\$1,000.00	100,000	Impressions = unique website visits
Regional Rack Card/Co-op	print	\$2,000.00	20,000	Co-op with area tourism partner
Podcasts	digital	\$1,500.00	25,000	15 - one minute spots
WV Swing	asset	\$2,500.00	0	1/2 production costs, upon suitable location
Totals		\$19,944.72	3,770,000	

Note: per the guidelines set forth in the WV state code, our advertising efforts are designed to reach potential travelers from out-a 50-mile radius from our service location. Most of our advertising efforts reach into neighboring states, national, and in some cases an international audience. Our digital efforts tend to have the furthest reach.