

Department/Program Description

Marketing and Advertising

To promote Vermont as a top, year-round, global tourism destination, and an ideal place to live and work, VDTM implements seasonal, direct advertising campaigns to Vermont's core audiences in our top markets. Work by the Department includes developing all advertising creative and promoted content; coordinating purchase of advertising media; engaging in digital marketing and promoting owned media; and collaborating with private sector and regional partners.

PAID MEDIA

VDTM's paid advertising strategy includes a combination of digital advertising, native advertising (sponsored content), advertising on social media, print, broadcast and connected TV channels, as well as out-of-home tactics (outdoor advertising). Campaign investments are geotargeted to key "direct" markets (MA, CT, RI, NH, ME, NY, NJ, PA, OH, MD, DC, VA, FL); "distant" markets (CA, TX, CO, IL, MI, WA, NC, GA); and well as some add-on markets for specific tactics (SC, AZ, TN, OR, MN, WI, UT) that have been identified as potential growth markets based on past visitor spending. Targeting for all markets is further honed based on behavior and intent in order to increase brand awareness and encourage visitation. Advertising creative celebrates Vermont as "A Place All Its Own," inviting future visitors to learn about the experiences Vermont offers via our outdoor recreation, culinary experiences, and cultural attractions, with a particular emphasis on the natural beauty of our state.

OWNED MEDIA

The call-to-action on all our advertising and collateral directs consumers to "Start Planning Today" at VermontVacation.com. As the state's official tourism website, VermontVacation.com provides travelers with useful tools and trip ideas to research and plan their vacations. Major content areas include specific landing pages for each season; things to do (recreation, arts and heritage, family and made in Vermont); towns and regions; and an Explore Vermont section that includes trip ideas, sample itineraries, an events calendar, and access to the "Plan Your Visit" business directory for detailed information on specific dining, lodging or entertainment properties.

In addition to VermontVacation.com, VDTM communicates directly with potential Vermont visitors and industry partners using email marketing. Over 124,000 consumers are now

subscribed to receive email content highlighting the best of Vermont, and our tourism email program saw approximately 1.5 million successfully delivered newsletters in 2024.

Communications and Public Relations

Creating and curating high-quality content, that celebrates the brand values and experiences Vermont has to offer, and keeps readers engaged and excited, is at the core of the Department's communications work. VDTM produces written and video content to inspire both visitation and relocation featuring core content themes that tell the story of Vermont in a compelling way on an on-going basis. This content is then shared across all digital platforms, the website, and in certain instances, paid advertising. The highest performing content is promoted to reach a wider audience, targeted by geographic region, behaviors, and interests. Our storytelling seeks to leverage the attributes of the Vermont brand that differentiate us from competitors including Outdoor Recreation; Arts, Culture and Heritage; Culinary Experiences and Agritourism; and Events and Itineraries.

EARNED MEDIA

VDTM actively engages with the media for positive coverage of Vermont as a tourism destination by attending media days (such as Ski Vermont's media days in New York City, Toronto, and Boston each year), generating and pitching storylines, facilitating news coverage, and coordinating media familiarization trips for journalists, bloggers, and lifestyle writers to travel to Vermont to experience our tourism destinations and attractions for themselves.

SOCIAL MEDIA

VDTM nurtures social media engagement to build a community of passionate Vermont enthusiasts who amplify our marketing efforts with their personal social media connections. Through social media channels Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, VDTM provides a fully interactive experience, enabling Vermont "fans" to share, comment on, and recommend locations, attractions and events that ultimately build Vermont brand awareness and motivate others to visit Vermont. Through active brand management and community engagement, VDTM has fostered relationships with @VermontTourism followers in a way that helps them feel welcomed and encourages trust in our brand voice.

Industry Support and Outreach

Travel trade relations provide industry support, including national and international representation, to promote tourism properties and attractions in Vermont. VDTM maintains relationships among statewide tourism, outdoor recreation, agriculture, arts, and cultural heritage organizations to leverage cooperative advertising opportunities and expand our collective reach to potential visitors.

INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

The top international markets for Vermont are Canada, the U.K. and Europe, followed by Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Quebec and Ontario (especially the metropolitan areas of Montreal and Toronto) are considered key markets for Vermont. The tactics VDTM employs to encourage international visitation include media familiarization trips with journalists to achieve positive press coverage; participation in domestic and international trade shows and sales missions; direct outreach to tour operators and consumers; paid advertising; and owned media and social media.

Membership in the U.S. Travel Association enables VDTM access to opportunities under the Brand USA public-private partnership established at the federal level to increase international visitation to the United States. In addition to co-op marketing, international media and tour operator tradeshow opportunities, Brand USA participation allows Vermont to have a page on VisittheUSA.com which is translated in Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish, among other languages. As a member state of Discover New England (DNE), the Department is able to take advantage of additional international representation services and research resources, as well as earned and paid media opportunities focused on international visitation to the New England region.

GROUP TOURS AND CONSUMER EVENTS

Group tours and group travel continue to be an integral part of Vermont tourism's mix. VDTM partners with the Vermont Tourism Network, a group tour planning resource, to support group travel operators that bring hundreds of motor coaches with thousands of travelers to Vermont during all four seasons.

VDTM staff interact with consumers at special events and at select consumer travel shows to speak directly to consumers to highlight Vermont as a vacation destination, some of whom may not have even considered a trip to Vermont before. VDTM also manages the tourism booth in the Vermont building at the Eastern States Exposition (Big E) each year. In 2024, the Big E hit an all-time total attendance record seeing over 1.6 million visitors over

the 17 days. VDTM partnered with 15 partners and industry volunteers to staff the booth for the duration of the fair.

PARTNERSHIPS AND REGIONAL SUPPORT

Collaborative marketing relationships with industry associations allow VDTM to align strategies and best leverage the state's investment in the tourism sector. Annual agreements with the Vermont Ski Areas Association and the Vermont Chamber of Commerce give VDTM the opportunity to set goals and expectations to measure the impact of such partnerships.

VDTM also works regularly with regional chambers of commerce, downtown organizations and activity or sector-specific partners across the tourism industry, such as the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont Fresh Network, the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance, the Maple Sugar Makers Association, and the Vermont Brewers Association to name a few, in addition to state of Vermont partners including Vermont State Parks, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Division for Historic Preservation's State Historic Sites. We collaborate to produce content to be shared across our own channels and those of our partner organizations, as well as cross-promote events, statewide initiatives (e.g. Maple Open House Weekend, Open Studio Weekend or Open Farm Week) and all the authentic experiences visitors are seeking when they come to Vermont and want to immerse themselves in the local culture.

VDTM created the Transformational Tourism, Events and Regional Marketing (T-TERM) Grants Program in 2024 as part of the Department's strategic implementation of a federal funds award under the American Rescue Plan Act, administered through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to support long-term economic recovery and sustainability of travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation in Vermont. The program attracted over \$6 million in total funding requests for the \$1.5 million in funds available. The Department was able to fund 16 projects with grants of up to \$150,000 each and grantees have until September 2025 to complete their projects to increase overnight visitation and visitor spending in their regions.

Research and Analysis

VDTM gathers data and information from varying sources in order to understand the impacts of tourism on the Vermont economy both qualitatively and quantitatively.

-Economic Impact: After a lapse of a few years and previously trying to estimate in-house, the Department contracted industry-leader Tourism Economics in 2024 to prepare a comprehensive economic impact analysis of the tourism sector in Vermont, including visitation estimates, employment in the sector and tax revenues collected based on travel spending. Going forward, the same economic analysis will be prepared annually, both at the state and county level. A separate analysis was also prepared to specifically estimate the economic impact of the total solar eclipse that took place in Vermont in April 2024.

-Visitation Data and Travel Spending by Visitors: In addition to the data compiled by Tourism Economics on visitation, VDTM maintains contracts to gain access to visitor spending data from credit card usage provided by Visa, as well as visitor profile data on Canadian visitors. In 2024, the Department contracted with survey-research firm Downs & St. Germaine to complete a year-long visitor profile survey, with both intercept and online collection strategies to gain additional insights into the behavior and motivations of visitors to Vermont to inform future promotional strategies.

-Tax and Employment Data: Finalized data on tax revenue and employment are generally not available until several months after the end of the reporting period, so year-to-date figures and year-over-year comparisons are helpful to identify trends and monitor the health of the industry.

-Hotel and Accommodations Data: VDTM receives monthly reports from Smith Travel Research and Key Data on occupancy rates, as well as average daily rates for hotels and vacation rental properties throughout Vermont. Although the data only represents a portion of the accommodations industry as a whole, the trends we can observe are a helpful approximation of the market overall and generally correlate with reported rooms tax data.

-Advertising Metrics: VDTM continues to invest in tools and research that can specifically tie our brand awareness campaigns to actual economic impact, including brand lift studies and return on ad spend calculations based on tracking in-market purchases from individuals exposed to VDTM's advertising.

Think Vermont Relocation Marketing

The Department has been playing an increasingly greater role in providing communications and marketing expertise to support Vermont's efforts to recruit new businesses and residents to the state, and to convert visitors to become full-time residents, through support of the Think Vermont initiative and regional relocation network.

The ThinkVermont.com website is the primary tool of Vermont's recruitment efforts. Content on the website includes economic sector profiles, community, and employment resources,

and a "Meet Your Neighbors" library of stories about relocation testimonials, regional spotlights, and the unique accomplishments of Vermonters and Vermont businesses to provide inspiration to potential residents. The primary call-to-action on the ThinkVermont.com website is our "Connect with a Vermonter" lead inquiry form. After a user submits an inquiry, an automated system creates a workflow from inquiry to "hand-off" at the local level so users can be quickly connected with the resources they need to successfully relocate.

Thanks to an increase in base funding received in FY24, the Department was able to launch our Grants for Relocation Outreach Work (GROW) program in late 2023 to help local, regional, county-wide, or state-wide organizations conduct relocation, recruitment, and retention activities to encourage and support new residents relocating to Vermont. There are two tracks to the program: the Regional Relocation Network Track and the Outreach Track. Currently 11 organizations receive funding for the Regional Relocation Network Track to manage and nurture all the leads received through the Connect with a Vermonter program. The 10 organizations that participate in the Outreach Track organize a variety of events and activities that promote the region to new residents and help new residents feel welcome in their new communities.

Chief Marketing Office

The Chief Marketing Office (CMO) was integrated into the Department of Tourism and Marketing in 2019. The Chief Marketing Office serves as the central authority and resource hub for state marketing activity. The Office supports state agencies and departments with their public outreach and marketing efforts, offering several services to State entities. Importantly, the Chief Marketing Office also fills a critical role for the many state agencies and departments who do not have dedicated communications staff.

The CMO helps state agencies and departments accomplish their outreach and marketing goals by providing assistance in five core areas:

- State of Vermont Brand Management: The Chief Marketing Office provides support and guidance for the appropriate and effective use of the Vermont brand. This includes the State of Vermont "Moon Over Mountains" logo and associated brand standards and guidelines. The Office fields questions, provides guidance, and supplies design files that allow state agencies and departments to effectively brand their marketing efforts. The Office also recognized the need for brands to evolve and change over time to address learnings and new opportunities.

-Contracting and Procurement Guidance: The Chief Marketing Office provides strategic contracting support and guidance for marketing services across the enterprise.

-Creative Services: As capacity allows, the CMO provides no-cost design services to state agencies and departments to support their marketing and communications efforts. This includes the development of brand assets, the design of printed collateral such as brochures and posters, and the production of outreach materials for strategic initiatives.

-Accessible Design: The Chief Marketing Office has assembled best practices and considerations to make communications accessible and updated State of Vermont Brand Standards and Guidelines to ensure that the State's foundational standards are in line with accessibility best practices. Additionally, the CMO has developed template resources with step-by-step editing instructions, developed a Language Access Guidance Summary, and assembled a list of Employee Resources to learn more about accessible communications.

-Marketing Workshops and Support: The Chief Marketing Office provides marketing and communications training, coaching, and guidance to State of Vermont employees.

Goals/Objectives/Performance Measures

The Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing's (VDTM) primary objective is to expand awareness of Vermont as a tourism destination and to increase the number of visitors to the state. More broadly, our mission is to promote Vermont's travel, recreation, cultural and historic attractions, as well as the state's goods and services, in coordination with public and private sector partners, to likely travelers from within the state, across the country, and around the world, and to encourage residents and visitors to purchase Vermont-made products and experiences.

The Department has also been playing an increasingly greater role in providing communications and marketing expertise to support Vermont's efforts to recruit new businesses and residents to the state, and to convert visitors to become full-time residents, through support of the Think Vermont initiative and regional relocation network.

In concert with the rest of the Agency, VDTM continues to adapt and transform our operations to help businesses, communities and Vermonters fully recover and take full advantage of the unprecedented levels of post-pandemic federal investment. The types of activities needed to support Vermont's travel and tourism sector have expanded to include new grant programs, more business outreach and industry facilitation, more research, and more support for regional relocation efforts, in addition to our ongoing work to promote Vermont as a travel destination to local, regional, national, and global audiences.

Key Budget Issues

PROPOSED PROGRAM INCREASES AND BUDGET IMPACT FOR FY26

The base funding increase the Department received in FY24 has been hugely impactful in VDTM's ability to help address the workforce crisis facing our state by supporting our efforts on Think Vermont relocation marketing and the regional relocation network. However, there are consistent challenges in promoting Vermont as destination, especially when competing in a global marketplace and directly with neighboring states that substantially outspend Vermont. In FY24, New Hampshire's tourism budget was \$10.4M, Massachusetts' was \$6.9M and Maine's was \$19.1M, compared to \$3.75M for Vermont (base budget for destination marketing).

Thanks to a provision in the American Rescue Plan Act, Vermont received a \$10.4M state tourism grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) that has been funding a diverse array of promotional activities in the last two budget cycles, but that funding will be fully expended at the start of FY26.