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Google recognizes South Carolina for 2008 marketing campaign in Chicago

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Google Inc. awards South Carolina Tourism its first-ever Wisdom of the Crowd Award. In 2008, South Carolina launched a multi-faceted campaign that jolted wintery Chicago with a blast of warm air and southern sunshine. The S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism staged the “Time to Thaw” campaign during the snow-laden months of February and March 2008.

Google selected South Carolina’s “Time to Thaw” campaign from among three finalists (the others were the Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau and the St. Louis Convention & Visitors Bureau) chosen out of more than 1,300 entries. The award was presented in New York City on January 26th during the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International’s (HSMIA) Adrian Awards Gala. The “Time to Thaw” campaign also won Gold and Silver Adrian Awards from HSMIA (www.HSMIA.org) for best practices in travel-related marketing and media.

Rob Torres, managing director of travel for Google, said the new Wisdom of the Crowd Award is intended to “recognize a powerful integrated marketing campaign that centers around one of Google’s core philosophies: Focus on the user and everything else will follow.”

“Time to Thaw” was a \$500,000 effort that centered on engaging, unexpected visuals that turned four of Chicago’s underground parking garages – along with buses and a trolley – into sun-splashed beaches, perfect green fairways and scenic destinations in South Carolina. That included large garage interior wall murals, elevator and stairwell conversions, trolley and bus wraps and on-board videos, and a 20-foot-long, custom-built sand sculpture. Other elements were a special Web site, a photo contest inviting people to shoot images of themselves onboard a windsurfer in the Grant Park North garage, converting a downtown trolley into a rolling “welcome center,” air time on more than 50 Chicago radio stations, and personal media outreach.

Torres said 73 percent of respondents marked the two top boxes for the South Carolina campaign in a question about whether the campaign was likely to “grab and hold their attention,” and 53 percent said they were “motivated to visit a Web site or call to learn more about the destination.” “In fact, South Carolina’s ‘Time to Thaw’ campaign received the highest ratings by travelers across the board,” he said.

Google’s Senior Marketing Manager for Travel, Cindy Goodrich noted, “When we looked at how South Carolina’s campaign resonated with over 1,000 travelers in our survey, we saw overwhelmingly positive results. From its ability to make people smile to its effectiveness in driving consumers to its website, the ‘Time to Thaw’ campaign truly stood out among the finalists as an integrated marketing effort that engaged the consumer and won over the hearts of its ‘crowd’.”

Chad Prosser, director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said, “Our goal was to generate direct exposure in the Chicago market and increase online traffic from the region. We achieved that. Inquiries from the Chicago area increased by 51 percent and we have experienced an increase of more than 22 percent in overall traffic to our Web sites.

“This campaign was a fun and engaging way to introduce our product to hundreds of thousands of people a day by showing a little humor and demonstrating the opportunities that are available to visitors in our warm climate,” Prosser added.

The “Time to Thaw” campaign was created and executed by SCPRT in partnership with the state agency’s two ad agencies – Rawle Murdy Associates Inc. of Charleston and the bounce agency of Greenville – with technical help from Web specialist Aristotle Inc. of Little Rock, Ark.

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- Broadcast outlets, click [here](#) for video from Google explaining the award or [here](#) to see the same video on YouTube.
- And click [here](#) for a feature video developed by SCPRT and posted on YouTube about South Carolina’s Chicago campaign.
- Photography available upon request by calling 803-734-0193 or emailing to mrapport@scprt.com