

 **Strategic Plan 2021**

**Vision:**

The vision of Discover Stillwater will be the preferred destination for year-round tourism travel in the Midwest, with an emphasis on overnight stays in the St. Croix Valley.

**Mission Statement:**

The mission of Discover Stillwater is to increase the benefits of year-round tourism with an emphasis on overnight stays through strategic utilization of the 3% hotel tax revenue. Working in collaboration with other organizations, Discover Stillwater will use proven and innovative marketing tactics to attract a diverse audience of consumers through-out the entire year.

**Value Proposition**

Stillwater is perfectly positioned to leverage its fantastic St. Croix River location with its historic downtown, world class restaurants, hotels and shops.

**Situation Analysis**

Since its inception in 2008, Discover Stillwater has benefited from its partnerships with the Cities of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights for its funding through Minnesota Statue 469.190; a local lodging tax of 3%. The statue states that 95% of the gross proceeds shall be used by the charter city to fund a local convention or visitor bureau “for the purpose of marketing and promoting the city or town as a tourist or convention center” (State Legislature, 2020). The wild and scenic St. Croix River is a federally protected waterway and is a natural attraction for visitors. The investments the cities of Stillwater, Oak Park Heights and Washington County have made into the bicycle paths, the conversion of the old lift bridge and the purchase of the walking and bicycle trails have helped fuel the growth of commerce and provided the platform for outstanding growth in the years to come. Specifically, the new Brown’s Creek state trail linking to the Gateway State trail has been busy with visitors all week long in Stillwater. The new winter, Fat Tire Bicycle race has reinforced the fact that bicycle racing can take place year long and attract riders. The St. Croix River crossing loop trail is open and has generated considerable interest. The 4.7-mile loop walking and bicycle paths have attracted a record number of visitors who are able to enjoy crossing the pedestrian friendly Lift Bridge into Houlton Wisconsin and crossing back into Minnesota using the new bridge (The Lift Bridge and Chestnut Plaza are both on the national historic register of historic places with Chestnut Plaza scheduled for renovation in 2022).

Discover Stillwater/Christie has done a great job of communicating the value proposition to tourist around the Midwest. The Discover Stillwater board of directors has been active in the disposition of CVB funds and has helped grow the hotel business substantially over the past 10 years.

**Critical Issues**

* Continued, sustainable growth of year-long overnight stays for hotels, Bed and Breakfasts, and VRBO’s in Stillwater and Oak Park Heights which will continue to result in millions of tourism dollars positively impacting the budgets of both cities.
* Expanded and sustainable winter activities to make Stillwater a year round destination
* Coordinated activities between organizations and businesses to keep visitors in Stillwater for multiple night stays (trails, boating, sightseeing, river excursions, shopping and historical tours)
* Continued city infrastructure investment for parking, lighting, river access, snow removal and transportation to create and sustain the continued growth of tourism. The purchase of the Aiple river property is an excellent example of a strategic initiative that resulted in 15 water front acres that can be utilized for sculling contests and other regional water activities.

**Target Market**

The target market for Discover Stillwater are female, with the average age between 35-44. Discover Stillwater has done an excellent job appealing to the target audience with activities, tactics and promotions reflecting the female consumer while not ignoring the influence of male consumers in decision making process. The tactics should continue and expand, constantly looking at ways to pivot in order to stay relevant. The strong growth of increased revenue over the past 13 years bodes well for sustainable growth through increased year round occupancy rates that are consistently in the 65% range.

**Discover Stillwater Website Data**

The data from the Discover Stillwater website shows the significance of the female target market of 65.8%. While the primary age bracket is 25-34, there remains strong interest from other age groups as well. The other significant data is the storing influence of Minneapolis/ St. Paul along with significant interest from Western Wisconsin. A brief summary follows:

* 97% from USA
* 65% from MN (breakdown by city and metro area attached)
	+ 91% of MN from the MSP metro
* 8% from IL
	+ 82% Chicago
* 8% from WI, top from Western WI and La Crosse area

**Discover Stillwater Social Media Followers**

The data from Facebook is quite compelling with 84% of followers being women, and the largest age category being 35-44. The number of Facebook followers is impressive with over 42,000 people following Discover Stillwater; a wonderful core group who will be receptive to new programs, events, hotel room stays, restaurants and retail stores.

The data shows strong growth for Instagram with 80% of the followers being women, and the largest age category between 35-44. An impressive number of followers with over 17,000 is a strong indication of a job well done.

Twitter with 50% female, is typically a stronger demographic with the largest category the 18-29 years old bracket and over 1800 followers. While Twitter followers are not necessarily the people staying overnight in Stillwater, they are a wonderful investment for future stays and are critical for long-term sustainable growth.

The data suggests that Discover Stillwater has a stronger reach beyond Minneapolis/St. Paul. The Minneapolis/St. Paul followers represent 36% of the visitors with Lacrosse/Eau Claire at 15% and Milwaukee at 14%. A strong showing from Madison with 11% of the visitors and Green Bay at 8%. The continued growth of visitors from Wisconsin, Iowa, the Dakota’s and Illinois will help diversify the customer portfolio and create new revenue growth for Stillwater.

**Social Media Platforms and Users (Khoros, 2021)**

The following table illustrates the complexity of the tactical use of social media. Christie has done a marvelous job of marketing to the core demographic audience for Discover Stillwater using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The emerging target market of young females will targeted using Snapchat and Tiktok (Note the media type and the core audience for each demographic in table1).

Facebook continues to lead with a diverse group of users with Instagram as less diverse (younger) but still an important tactic to grow the overnight business. Please note the age of the users per social media medium, household income, active users, amount of average time spent on social media, and the dominant use of smart phones.

Table 1

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Social Media**  | **Facebook** | **Instagram** | **Pinterest**  | **Twitter**  | **Linked in** | **Snapchat** |
| 18-29 | 86% | 67% | 34% | 38% | 21% | 53% |
| 30-49  | 77% | 47% | 35% | 26% | 60% | 34% |
| 50-64 | 51% | 23% | 27% | 17% | 17% | 11% |
| 65 +  | 34% | 8% | 15% | 7% | 3% | 4% |
| Household income | 86% above $80k plus  | 55% over $80k | 41% over $75k | 41% over $75k | 50% over $80k | 42% between $79-$80k |
| Female/Male | 54%/46% | 51%/49% | 70%/30% | 50%/50% | 43%/57% | 61%/39% |
| Average time per day | 35 minutes per session | 53 minutes per session | 14.2 minutes per session | 3.39 minutes per session | 6.7 minutes | 30 minutes per day |
| Mobile device versus laptop | 96%/25% | 100% | 80% | 100% | 57% | 100% |
| Active users per month | 2.7 billion  | 1 billion | 322 million  | 330 million  | 260 million | 381 million |
| Misc. |  | Most followed: Ronaldo 243mAriana 208mThe Rock 205m | People who travel are 2X more likely to use.90% use it to make purchasing decisions; | 67% of B to B use Twitter as a digital marketing tool;Obama- 128mBieber- 104M | Bill Gates-28m | 2nd in mobile use |

The partnership with the Cities of Stillwater, Oak Park Heights, and the St. Croix Valley Chamber of Commerce has created great synergy for Discover Stillwater and the results have shown consistent growth and brand recognition throughout the state and surrounding Midwest area. The tactics employed by the Chamber of Commerce has helped drive overnight stays in the hotels, and patronage in the restaurants and retail stores; this was especially true during the great pandemic due to the strong winter program. A strong, close partnership with all of the parties is critical for continued infrastructure investments, and successful tent pole events to drive traffic and sustainable growth.

**Chamber of Commerce Tactics to Drive Winter Traffic in 2021/2022**

The chamber of commerce has evolved into the envy of the state of Minnesota. This past winter, under the leadership of Robin, created an entirely new calendar of activities that helped drive traffic during the pandemic to downtown Stillwater. While other cities shut down, the city of Stillwater through the leadership of the mayor, city council, city manager and team, found a way to abide by the covid rules set by the governor while creating events that helped bring people to stay overnight in the area and spend money at the restaurants and shops. The tactics designed and implemented in the midst of the pandemic provide a platform for years of solid growth and expansion. The following is a partial list of events for 2021/2022.

Table 2

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Description** | **Dates** | **Owner** |
| Criskindlmarket | A European Market that runs between Thanksgiving and Christmas with carriage rides and other holiday offerings | Nov 26 - December 23 | Chamber of Commerce |
| New Year's Eve Ball Drop at Water Street Inn |  |  | Chico |
| Water Street Ice Rink | An ice rink located behind Water Street Inn | January - TBD | Chuck/Water Street Inn |
| Ice Palace Maze | An ice maze | January - TBD | Zephyr Theatre |
| World Snow Sculpting Championship | 8-12 countries from across the world competing in a world snow sculpturing championship including numerous events and ceremonies | Jan 19-23 | Chamber of Commerce*partnered with the City of Stillwater* |
| Fire & Ice | Hot Air Balloons, Beer tent, Bonfires, outside activities, pond hockey, ice cream social | Jan. 28-30 | Chamber of Commerce |
| Valentine’s Day Paint the Town Red | Promotions and activities | February 11-14th | Downtown Steering Committee |
| Winterfest | Various activities  | Feb 18-20, Feb 25-27 | JX Event Center/Judd |
| Frozen Flannel Outdoor Curling & Bonspiel |  | Saturday, February 19, 2022 | Mike P/Michelle |
| Second Annual Fat Tire Bike Race |  | Sunday, February 20, 2022 | Mike Lynermike.lyner@gmail.com |
| Brian's Frozen Bocce |  | Saturday, February 26, 2022 | Brian's Bar |
| Winter Gala Community Award Celebration | A community gala that provides an award ceremony | Friday, February 25, 2022 | Chamber of Commerce |
| St. Patricks' Day | Celebrate St. Patrick's Day | March 17-20th | Water Street InnDowntown Steering Committee |

**City of Stillwater Infrastructure Investments**

The Brown’s Creek Trail investment has paid dividends and was a critical component that helped pave the way for additional bicycle riders and walkers to come to Stillwater. The completion of the 4.7-mile Lift Bridge hiking trail has added another opportunity to enjoy the St. Croix Valley and has attracted new visitors to the city along with enthusiastic local people to enjoy downtown’s many activities.

The city has continued to invest in parking, lights, public bathrooms, using tax incentive funds (TIF) to help attract new hotels downtown and invest in renovating existing businesses. The addition of the Crosby Hotel and the Zephyr Theater has helped shift and attract people to the north end of town which helps balance out retail sales and attractions. The upcoming work on Chestnut Plaza will be completed in 2023 and will provide a wonderful base for future events.

The new Aiple river front property has the potential to attract thousands of people downtown for scull races, water skiing and educational events for school children to enjoy the scenic river front.

Additional investments into a flexible music tent/venue in Lowell Park for Jazz, music concerts, plays that can be held during the week to help with emphasis on overnight stays, Sunday through Thursday should be considered. A close collaboration with the music program at the Stillwater High School could produce “concert in the parks” and weekly activities that brings locals downtown to spend money as well.

Oak Park Heights has been a strong contributor to the local economy with infrastructure investments for highway 36 and biking trails has been valuable and needed to help with traffic flow and encourage development along the corridor.

**Discover Stillwater SWOT Analysis**

The goal of a SWOT analysis is to identify the key internal and external factors that are important to achieving the objectives of the organization. SWOT analysis groups key pieces of information into two main categories:

* Internal factors – The *strengths* and *weaknesses* internal to the organization.
* External factors – The *opportunities* and *threats* presented by the external environment.

The internal factors may be viewed as strengths or weaknesses depending upon their impact on the organization's objectives. What may represent strengths with respect to one objective may be weaknesses for another objective. The factors may include personnel, finance, politics, and so on. The external factors may include macroeconomic matters (covid), technological change, legislation, and socio-cultural changes, as well as changes in the marketplace or competitive position. Based on discussion with the board of directors on June 28th, 2021, the SWOT included the following items (feedback from the board of directors meeting in June):

Table 3

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** | **Opportunities** | **Threats** |
| Stillwater location and the St. Croix RiverWinter time in StillwaterMarketing/Social media platform/ChristieWeddings and large events (JX, Lowell Inn, Grand Garage, new hotels)Sustainable funding through the Room taxRelationships with the city, chamber and businessesFriday and Saturday staysLow cost business model without fulltime staff  | Sunday through Thursday Sunday occupancyLong range planning Small staffPhysical presence in StillwaterFunding through the room tax is changedLack of signage in downtown Clear purpose on budgetSustainable Long range planning Small staffKiosk or physical presence in StillwaterLack of signage in downtown Clear purpose on budgetSustainable  | Strong economyCovid recovery Economic conditions Collaboration with the ChamberTechnology with RIP codesPublic expectations Winter businessExpand the Stillwater brand through-out the MidwestSunday through Thursday eventsThe St. Croix RiverThe Browns Creek trail, new bridge loopCycling race events Monday through ThursdayRiver Water events – Monday through Thursday | Covid and lingering impact of new strains of the virusCorporate budgets and travelOutside pressure from other organizations to spend budgetStrong economic conditions Weather/floodingLack of strategy/small thinkingPublic expectations and confusion of rolesAll other activities or inactivity’s by competitors Criticisms by outsiders Changes in markets |

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**Marketing Tactics to Increase Tourism**

The comprehensive marketing plan for Stillwater is focused on increasing overnight stays for three main markets: leisure travel, business travel and Weddings. The current number of rooms available in the Stillwater and Oak Park Heights area is estimated to be 600 hotel rooms. The number of rooms can easily accommodate large weddings and other large functions. Overnight stays for the hotels are typically full on Friday and Saturday nights from May 1 through the middle of October. The challenge for hotels is Sunday through Thursday and the first 2 weeks in November. Over the past, 10 years, the data from the 3% sales tax indicates that the majority of hotel stays occur in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of the year. The split between Stillwater and Oak Park Heights varies slightly but typically runs 90%/10%.

Activities help drive consumer visits and as we have learned through the covid crisis, multiple night stays are more profitable and less work for an overworked staff. The majority of tactics focus on digital engagement. Some of the current and recommended tactics include the following:

* Revamped and dynamic Discover Stillwater website
* Monthly travel E-newsletter
* Daily social media blog content and engagement
* Travel/event planning assistance
* Publication and distribution of the Official visitor’s guide (70,000 copies)
* Media relations
* Monthly key influencers who blog about Stillwater

The tactics have resulted in outstanding results with google analytics showing an increase of

* 61% over the first 6 months of 2020;
* Over 10 million impressions from paid advertising through the first 6 months of 2021!
* 193,702 users versus 118,660.
* 63% were new users.
* Doubled website traffic over the winter months over the past 3 years
* YouTube channel views- 196,355
* E-newsletter subscribers of 39,507
* 360 venue tour views- 3.7 million
* 70,000 visitor guides distributed
* Paid advertising is not included in the statistics

**Discover Stillwater Brand Tactics:**

* Continued expansion of bike trails and activities to draw customers for multiple night stays
* Chestnut Plaza redesign completed and welcoming to visitors (2023)
* The theme of taking advantage of scenic bike trails and focusing on “tent-pole” events (World Snow Sculpture Contest) that will draw and encourage people to stay overnight in our hotels
* Attract a national brand like LL Bean, Orvis, REI to Stillwater to increase foot traffic and improve shopping demographics. The evolution of and diversity of retail stores should reflect the changing demographics of customers attracted to Stillwater (Excelsior is a good example).
* Explore partnerships with the city to attract boaters (public dock) and work closely with the River Boats to increase overnight stays with package deals
* Beautify downtown with art (utility boxes) and continue to develop an arts theme for downtown while maintaining its small town charm and ambience
* Continue to focus on the JX event center, Lowell Inn, Grand Garage and other venues that can accommodate weddings and large groups, which will encourage and help drive overnight stays

**Continue to expand Winter activities with consistent off-peak business (November- March)**

* Enhance Winter in Stillwater with the World Snow Sculpting Contest, Fire and Ice, Chestnut Plaza theme lighting, Youth Hockey tournaments, Fat Tire Bike race, Bocce Ball, European Market, Ice Rink, Curling and other winter activates
* Continue to expand and light downtown during the holidays.
* Continue to solicit corporations and entrepreneurs in the Twin Cities to view Stillwater as a great getaway meeting location for customer meetings, strategy sessions and overnight stays.

**River Access**

* Focus activities near the river using Lowell Park tend the new Aiple property
* Expand the number of picnic tables, and special events like music in the park, Shakespeare in the Park, Opera in the Park
* Enhance and continue to improve Lowell Park
* Work with the City of Stillwater on a public pier

**Discover Stillwater will have strong, positive relationships with other community organizations, both public and private.**

* Discover Stillwater will work closely with the City of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights
* Close collaboration/communication with the Chamber of Commerce for the St. Croix Valley

**Stillwater will continue to have a healthy, retail diverse economy.**

* Branded retail stores to attract higher disposable income
* Continued restoration of historic buildings.
* Support bike rentals, cross country ski’s, snow shoes etc…groomed trails in the winter
* Summer music with a Jazz festival, Opera in the Park and other activates to help drive overnight stays

**Embrace technology to keep Stillwater relevant**

* Utilize QR codes for smart phone users to scan for things to do, history of the buildings, latest recommendation for food and entertainment
* Tiktok, podcasts and other expanding social media outlets to stay relevant

**Integrated Marketing Plan**

The comprehensive marketing plan integrates all aspects into a cohesive and consistent message and brand. The website, digital, print, and TV advertising continues to be a consistent message that positions the Stillwater brand to evoke feelings of excitement, fulfillment, safety, and fun that cannot be found anywhere else in Minnesota. The “Discover Stillwater” brand should continue to communicate these values in its advertising and communication messaging. In table 4, please find attached a summary of the current marketing plan including the tactics, and associated costs. Note that the tactics should continue to evolve and change as new more cost effective methods emerge and reflect our targeted demographic. Examples listed above include the use of tiktok, QR codes, podcasts and other emerging technologies. It is important to support Christie and her team to attend seminars and other benchmark activities to continue to current with technology and new tactics.

Table 4



**Creating a Brand Promise**

A brand is a set of perceptions and expectations forged from what hears and experiences and is a promise to the customer. Brands that create a relationship with the consumer helps create and secures future earnings by securing customer loyalty. Consumer expectations are connected to the promise of the brand and need to consistently experience the brand in a positive manner. Discover Stillwater customers need to experience the Stillwater brand consistently, and walk away with their expectations being met or exceeded. The burden falls on all key stakeholders to become brand ambassadors to fulfill the promise by helping visitors experience the best Stillwater has to offer with a positive experience (The key stakeholders for the brand are the hotels, restaurants, suppliers and retail shops). The brand promise details are broken down into three main categories:

* Features - permission to believe- The Discover Stillwater brand has tangible features: the lift bridge, bike paths, parks, historic buildings like the Freighthoue, train depot, and caves
* Claim of the brand – benefits – what are the benefits of the brand that create and reinforce brand loyalty?
* Claim of the brand – rewards- emotional benefits that create and reinforce brand loyalty when visiting Stillwater
* Character of the brand – values – what best describes the target loyalist?
* Character of the brand – personality – characteristics that humanize and give life to the brand

Graphic 1



The Discover Stillwater brand needs further development and exploration. One recommendation would be to complete a deeper dive on the brand promise by collecting data using a consumer survey to build the brand promise and then feature the promise on the website and in marketing materials.

**Total Marketing Budget and Forecast**

The Discover Stillwater Budget fluctuates with the economy and is predicated on overnight visitors and the subsequent hotel tax. In the past 5 years the number of hotel rooms in Stillwater and Oak Park Heights has increased from approximately 400 to 600 rooms with normal adjustments for inflation and higher room costs. This increase in the number of rooms and the pre-covid economy resulted in strong growth in the budget and the ability to increase spending on successful tactics to draw more people to the area.

The budget has shown growth over the past 13 years due to increased occupancy, expansion of the number of hotel rooms and partnership with the cities of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights. In 2008, the first full year of the 3% tax revenue generated $173,720. In 2009, and 2010, during the great recession, the revenue was $150,281 and $152, 662 respectively. In 2011, with the economy starting to strengthen the revenue climbed back to $174,161 and in 2012 to $178,755. In 2013, the revenue was $192,527 and topped $207, 632 for the first time in 2014! Looking ahead to forecasted revenue in 2021 and 2022, you can see a nice upward trend the past few years with the exception of the covid related decrease in 2020 to $267, 951.

Forecasting in always an inexact art form, especially given various market dynamics, the global economy and the pandemic. The winter activities have created additional brand awareness for the Stillwater and Oak Park Heights areas. Christie presented Q1 growth of $56,000 which was substantially higher than pre-pandemic years.

In table 5 below, we have listed the historical revenue for the CVB lodging tax and assumptions for growth over the next 2 years. In addition, by taking the inverse of the 3% tax, we can get an idea of the total hotel revenue for the past 7 years.

* Looking ahead to the finish of 2021, we expect revenue to come back into line with 2019 before we felt the impact of the pandemic.
* In 2022, with the benefit of the second full year of Winter time in Stillwater and the new World Snow Sculpting Contest, we are forecasting growth of 20% in 2022. We did see some benefit in 2021 from the various winter activities but we anticipate a significant leap forward in hotel stays in 2022 with the activities planned.
* In 2023, we anticipate a more modest growth of 10% based on continued strength in the economy and a stronger winter program.

Table 5

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** |
| **Revenue** | $223,864 | $236,596 | $234,725 | $268,858 | $323,472 | $267,951 | $323,000 | $387,600 | $426,360 |
| **Total tax** | $7,462,133 | $7,886,533, | $7,824,166 | $8,895,266 | $10,782,500 | $8,931,700 | $10,766,666 | $12,920,000 | $14,212,000 |

One of the key measurement tools for the board will be to monitor the effectiveness of the marketing campaigns by using the actual tax revenue for the years ahead. This is only one indications. As the board looks at the effectiveness of the marketing tactics,

**Current and Projected Budget**

Table 6 is a historical look at the budget and a forecast for 2021 and 2022. The “big bucket” items need scrutiny and the budget reflects the need to utilize all of the available tactics. There is a concerted effort to return to historical costs on some of the expenditures; especially around content creation and keeping materials updated on the website for videos and marketing. A brief recap of the key budget items of special note:

* There is inflationary growth reflected in the need to pay people a livable wage
* There needs to be more detail in the larger bucket items as to how the money is spent, in particular, vacation travel is a significant budget item, along with digital media comprise almost 50% of the budget. Direct niche marketing should be itemized or should be included in the digital budget
* The possibility of utilizing the Chamber of Commerce office in 2022 to store material, use the conference room for meetings, answer phones and support Discover Stillwater.
* There may be an opportunity to reduce the amount of catalogs printed and use them strategically for the appropriate demographic audience and move toward digital assets based on the smart phone usage
* Increased signage for the winter activities

Table 6

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **2019 Budget** | **2020 Budget** | **2021 Budget** | **2022 Budget** |
| **Reserves** | $4000 | $30,000 | $20,000 | $20,000 |
| Operations/people | $93,680 | $114,000 | $116,000 | $120,000 |
| General Office | $12,180 | $14,000 | $15,000 | $15,000 |
| **Marketing Materials** |  |  |  |  |
| Website | $11,540 | $5540 | $18,000 | $18,000 |
| Software hosting | $3000 | $3228 | $3600 | $4000 |
| Visitor guides fulfillment | $11,000 | $10,232 | $12,000 | $10,000 |
| Signage | $1000 | $500 | $2000 | $4000 |
| Photography and videography | $10,000 | $5000 | $10,000 | $12,000 |
| Printed promotional materials | $500 | $500 | $1000 | $1000 |
| Event Grants | $45,000 | $40,800 | $45,000 | $40,000 |
| Group travel market | $0 | $0 | $0 | $10,000 |
| Meetings Events | $7000 | $4,700 | $7000 | $7,000 |
| Weddings Market | $14,340 | $5350 | $14,000 | $15,000 |
| Vacation Travel | $119,061 | $72,070 | $100,000 | $100,000 |
| Explore Minnesota metro CVB group | $8750 | $4500 | $9000 | $9000 |
| Digital media | $53, 310 | $22,273 | $72,000 | $80,000 |
| Tourism guide books | $17,355 | $5080 | $17,000 | $10,000 |
| Print | $18,064 | $7764 | $18,000 | $18,000 |
| TV | $7000 | $14,000 | $14,000 | $14,000 |
| Radio | $0 | $0 | $0 | $0 |
| Direct/niche marketing | $8332 | $5253 | $8000 | $8000 |
| Billboards/signage | $2250 | $11,200 | $12,000 | $12,000 |
| Discretionary Fund | $4000 | $2000 | $4000 | $4000 |
| Total | $320,121 | $292,000 | $367,600 | $394,000 |

**Key Measurement Metrics**

Measurement is a critical component of a strategic plan. In the end, it all comes down to the financial analysis of the budget and the return on investment.

* The only true measurement of the success of the marketing plan is the increase in budget dollars tied to increased hotel patronage. Many of the hotels are understandably reluctant to share sales data on occupancy rates but the increase in budget dollars allows the board to gauge the success of the marketing campaign tactics. Table 6 illustrates a strong growth of occupancy while factoring in normal inflationary growth. With projected budget dollars of almost $400,000 in 2022 the compound annual growth for 8 years is over 8% which will exceed any inflationary growth in prices.
* The second measurement are the number of followers on Facebook and Instagram. With over 42,000 Facebook followers, Christy has established a wonderful baseline for future growth. A target of 50,000 followers by the end of 2022 would be a reasonable target and would reflect 10% growth over the next 18 months. Instagram will be another key metric and a reasonable expectation would be to grow in excess of 10% over the next 2 years to get to 22,000 followers.

**Action Steps and Recommendations**

1. Review the budget and tactics on a quarterly basis with Christie
2. Measure, measure, measure and measure again. What is the return on investment for the different tactics? What drives overnight stays? Activates in the area?
3. Be flexible and quickly pivot- allow 5% of the budget to be used for new and emerging technologies
4. Review Christie on an annual basis- this is fair to her and to the board (attached performance appraisal example).
5. Continue to meet quarterly with the city councils from Stillwater and Oak Park Heights to review successes and opportunities for growth.
6. Maintain a reserve budget of 5% ($20,000) to help with cash flow and unforeseen issues that arise (force majeure- natural disasters, lingering pandemic).
7. Establish criteria and have a process for the event grants. With the new winter activities there is a great opportunity to drive traffic to the hotels and increase overnight stays.
8. Feature and encourage additional group events in Stillwater with meeting coordinators. A quarterly luncheon might be appropriate with rotating the luncheon location so each venue has an opportunity to host a luncheon.
9. The board has done a wonderful job of providing checks and balances with any expenditure over $500 requiring a second signature. There is an opportunity to simplify the line items in the budget that appear to be duplications. For example, the vacation travel budget- is this the catalogs? Another is the direct niche marketing line.

**Summary**

Discover Stillwater, the board, Christie and the team have done a great job enhancing the website, utilizing social media and appealing to the target market to increase overnight stays in Stillwater and Oak Park Heights hotels.

The growth in partnership between the cities and the Chamber of Commerce should be considered a critical foundation of future success. Tent pole events create excitement and encourages multiple night stays. Discover Stillwater should consider having an office within the Chamber office to help with customer service issues, meeting space and storing marketing materials.

Quarterly reviews of the successes should continue to be held with both city councils. A quarterly review of the budget expenditures, in particular, the big budget items is recommended. Finally, in fairness to Christie and the board of directors, a performance appraisal should be conducted on an annual basis which identifies key strengths and opportunities for growth.

**References**

Khoros. (2021, July 5th). *Khoros.com*. Retrieved from Khoros: https://khoros.com/resources/social-media-demographics-guide

State Legislature, M. (2020). *Local Lodging Tax 469.190.* St. Pau: State of Minnesota.