

## MICHIGAN TOURISM BUSINESSES GET A VIRTUAL BOOST FROM IMN

Since 1985, the Michigan State University Tourism Resource Center (TRC) has been conducting research for Michigan's tourism industry. The Center also provides outreach services to state officials, tourism association members, individual business owners, and others. In 2002, together with the university's Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources, the TRC launched an Internet-based training program called the Michigan Virtual Tourism Training Academy. To publicize this training program, and to provide the latest news, industry reports and information to their constituents, the TRC decided to create an e-newsletter.

### **Wanted: A Turnkey, Easy-to-Use Solution**

The job of finding a service provider fell to Lori Martin, Research and Outreach Specialist. "Complicated" was not one of the selection criteria. Lori was looking for a simple, turnkey solution for creating and distributing this e-newsletter. After researching other providers, who were either too involved or offered limited functionality, Martin landed at IMN. "I loved the fact that this was an easy-to-use solution, and that there was no software to buy," she recounts. "I did the demo and was so impressed I signed on within two weeks."



Lori also noted that the IMN service included free hosting of a companion Website; none of the competitors did this. Nor did anyone else offer the full range of list management and reporting features that were important to the TRC. Lori adds, "The value for the price was incredible. In the end, the decision was a no-brainer!"

### **A Wealth of Concise, Easy-to-Access Information**

*Michigan Tourism Business (MTB)*, TRC's e-newsletter, has become an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the state's travel and tourism industry. The publication serves as a compendium of relevant information from a variety of sources, delivered directly to subscribers' in-boxes. Travel forecasts, tourism indicators, local, regional and national news, legislative updates, conference and event information, industry reports and training information are all in one place, in an easily readable, easy-to-access format.

It's not surprising that the response has been overwhelmingly positive. One association Executive Director commented, "I am very impressed. I really like the wealth of information that is presented in a very concise manner with the ability to link to the information that is of greatest interest to the user." Another subscriber wrote. "It looks great. The layout is very user friendly. Overall, I give it a '10.' Good job!" Bottom line: The consensus has been unanimous that the e-newsletter is a "great new tool."

### **The Statistics are as Impressive as the Comments**

The inaugural issue of *MTB* had a 56% open rate; the rate of click-through to view attached pages was 46%. The numbers were similar for the second issue and Martin anticipates that these numbers will grow as more subscribers view *MTB* as a "must read" every month.

Don Holecek and Joe Fridgen, co-editors, were intensely interested in quantifying the success of their e-venture, and had plenty of questions. How many copies would be delivered? How many recipients would open their e-mail? What would they choose to read? And, of course, would readers find *MTB* useful enough to remain subscribers? With IMN, they've been able to answer all of these questions, and easily pass the information along to constituents. As they said in a recent Web report, "One advantage of the software ... is that it comes with analysis tools built in, which allows us to answer the majority of these questions and many more, that only a dedicated statistical fanatic could appreciate!"

### **Taking (Better) Care of Business**

By tapping into the power of e-newsletters and the Web, the Tourism Resource Center is giving Michigan tourism business owners and managers a valuable, one-stop source of relevant news and information. And with IMN, they've been able to accomplish it easily, with a minimum investment of time and resources.