

# Maine Innkeepers Association Marketing Addendum

Fall 2006

## PROACTIVE PACKAGING

Instead of waiting for the moral at the end of the story, I am going to start with it. Your Inn fills up for two weekends in February. Alright, that isn't a moral, so how's this - "Happiness is a positive cash flow".

So what was the special package that brought the crowds in during the cold weekends of February? Nothing creative, just timing, Valentines Day fell mid-week this year. A really bad place I thought at first, but then realized, that the one holiday opened up two weekends for the same package. Double the fun, two for the price of one.

I released the details of my package a few months in advance to beat the rush and also capitalize on the early bird Google searchers. Early on, there would be little competitive packaging so I would hit a top ranking in the search engines. My hunch worked. But really it was more than a hunch because I did the same thing for Thanksgiving. Months before BB Online sent out a notice reminding Inns to post their thanksgiving package we had ours up.

But it wasn't due to our being smart, just reading the right search engine reports. We found that we had popped up at the top of a search in Yahoo for 'Thanksgiving getaway'. Not a 'Maine thanksgiving getaway', but just a 'Thanksgiving getaway'. And here is the odd part, at the time we were #1 on a Yahoo search for 'Thanksgiving getaway' we didn't even have a Thanksgiving package. The search engine was reading text in one of my blogs. But within a few hours we posted a package and we turned empty beds into revenue for an entire week in November.

Oddly enough we discovered a few things in the process. Half of our guests were from Maine. Empty nesters and young couples who

didn't want to go back to the homes of either parent for Thanksgiving. They were looking for something different.

We also packaged very heavily during the winter months and discovered other interesting things. Our discount packages that were a complete steal brought no one. But when we raised the price to a premium, they sold out. Even when guests could look at the regular room rate, piece things together and save \$100, they chose the package. It means that guests are not always looking at rates. They were looking for an experience.

Although these examples worked well for us, they might not for you. In fact, you could be the most creative packager in world history but the ugly truth is this. And I do mean ugly.....If your web site isn't optimized correctly, in laymen's terms - marketed correctly - then no one can find you which means they aren't going to find your packages. And that is the real end to the story. If people can't find you, they won't find your packages and they won't book with you.

The difference between a good site, optimized and well designed, and one that is the opposite is your bottom line. So what is that worth to you? I'll tell you what its worth to us.

When Amy and I took over the PineCrest, one of the big attractions for us was poor marketing. Yes, I wanted a place with bad marketing. My reasoning was this; a poorly marketed Inn would have a bigger upside. One year ago, when we rolled in the parking lot with our U-haul, dog and kids in tow, the PineCrest had 45 advance reservations for the year. The prior Innkeeper told us that was very good for her and with so many advance reservations she knew the Inn would have a strong summer. (I didn't comment on that!) Exactly one year later, with an improved site and stronger

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# PROACTIVE PACKAGING (CONTINUED)

marketing, at the same point in the season, we have well over 300 advance reservations. I don't know if that's good in comparison to the other Inns in Maine, but I do know that an increase of over 260 advance reservations is one step in the right direction.

A well-marketed site will have numerous angles and will target several markets. Did you know that the largest percentage of vacationers are multi-generational travelers and those travelers are with kids? This group accounts for over 65% of the market. Instead of eliminating children as guests; just strengthen your policy on kids. Make it clear what you expect from parents and kids. Our policy on kids is very straightforward and painfully clear. We don't lecture about parenting styles, but those who understand our policy appreciate it and respect it. Those who don't, stay away. Consider different options, instead of fighting for a bigger slice of the pie, make a bigger pie.

Every Inn these days has a romantic weekend getaway, golf packages are abundant and it seems that everyone has a few orange and red leaves around their property. Compete with these areas if you can be successful. Otherwise, don't waste your web space. Keep them if you have enough other things to be unique. Remember why people stay at B&B's or small Inns.

If I were to offer unsolicited advice, which as a general rule I don't, but if I were....,

- Consider yourself a student of Inn-keeping. Study other Inns and how they operate every day. Dissect individual web sites, which are better than yours and see what makes them tick. Every one has something to teach and something to learn. Learn enough about web marketing to know what's being done and more importantly, what's not being done to your site. Don't let a web designer quote jargon. Find a designer/promoter who is willing to be paid more based on results. The good ones will do that. The bad ones will run.
- Measure your progress in tangible terms. How far you or your site has come is meaningless to a guest. How much you have

learned about web design might impress your children but a guest only knows what they see now.

- Don't under estimate what a package is and what a properly optimized site can do. It is literally, money in the bank.

- Don't raise your rates simply because people will pay more. Use it as a marketing tool. Someone will always pay more but be weary of the price break points, which reduce the amount of people who are willing to pay for your guest rooms in noticeable quantities.

- An Inn needs to differentiate itself from the crowd. This means defining who you are and what you can do in direct straightforward terms. Never pretend. Fact: an unhappy guest will tell 10 people about how bad their experience was compared to happy guests who will tell only 3. If it costs you 5\$ to bring a new guest in and they leave with a forgettable experience, it will cost you 15\$ to get them back.

- Raise the bar. Don't ever lower it. It means a hot breakfast isn't a cup of coffee and a muffin. If you argue for your limitations, sure enough they are yours.

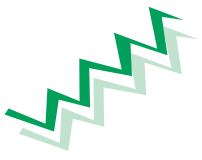
- Unless you are a full time web designer with advanced skills, leave it to the pros. Look at samples from your designer and how they rank in each appropriate market. If your designer has 100 web sites under his or her belt, but none rank well, drop them like a bad habit. Loyalty will never pay your mortgage.

- Use packaging to cater to niche markets, even if you never could pull off the actual package. Having it on your site will draw people to you.

- Use your geographic location properly. Not being in the middle of destination locations can be an advantage in the same way as being in the heart of destination locations can be. Accentuate the positive.

- Differentiate your property. This will be your most positive marketing angle. It is the reason why people will come. This is the reason why people will come back. If you only have repeat guests, learn from that. If you only have first timers, that will tell you something else. Watch for the right lessons.

*“Proactive packaging-  
Happiness is positive  
cash flow!”*



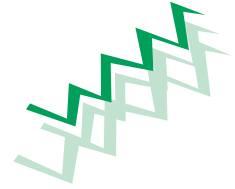
# PROACTIVE PACKAGING (CONTINUED)

- Live outside the box. You can take your Inn to places larger lodging locations and many chains can only dream of going. You can be agile and quick.
- Always look for new ideas or new groups to target. A few hours spent on Google or Yahoo looking at user forums and message boards is a great way to find new groups of people to cater to.
- Build local partnerships on a win/win scenario. They can be incredible sources of support and help.

These are my personal opinions. Opinions are kind of like underwear, we all have a few pairs. Mine may not fit you and visa versa. But I would encourage all in the lodging world to

have open communications and open discussions on how to raise the bar and the level of expectations. Become a leader in the soon to be largest industry in the world, not a follower. Create the direction. Let others follow.

This article was prepared by Matt Mattingly, Owner and Innkeeper of the Pine Crest B&B in Gorham.



*“Itineraries are an untapped resource here in Maine.”*

## ITINERARIES

Itineraries are an untapped resource here in Maine. Although we have vast resources to attract tourists, most of them are either unknown to people in another part of the state or are under-used. This seems to be the result of a lack of coordinated information. Each of the areas of the state has one or two well-known attractions and many more that are not advertised outside of that area. Fermata Inc. ([www.FermataInc.com](http://www.FermataInc.com)) is a world-wide organization dedicated to developing itineraries around a nature theme such as The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. This route, developed by Fermata, that links the resources of communities which have birding sites, was developed with highway enhancement funds through the Texas Transportation Office. Published trail maps are available and have been so successful, that they are planning to publish maps for all of the various sections of Texas. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have also developed trail maps both to attract tourists to their region, but also to provide them with information along the way. Fermata has also done a study for Maine that tells us that such a trail system could be developed in Maine. (<http://www.fermatainc.com/maine/documents/0829prioritiesforaction.pdf>)

Here in Maine, there are already “trails” brochures available that cover a wide variety of subjects - many paid for by private groups - some by the Maine Office of Tourism - and some by individual communities or regional tourism offices. We have compiled a list of as many as we could find.

An itinerary could be developed using these “trails” as a guide for following a specific interest: gardening, architecture, Indian culture, woodshops, historic walking, fiber arts, art museums, fishing, seafaring museums, light-houses, golf, and the railroad trail and probably others.

One way to do this might be to use the internet. Identify the area of interest you want to market and join with other properties within the state that are located a day’s drive away. Tourists would then have a planned itinerary, names of lodging facilities, specific information about each area and knowledgeable local help when they arrive. The internet listings would attract the very people who are looking for that special niche.

Here is a compilation of resources that we found. We are interested in any that we have missed. We are also thinking that this might

# ITINERARIES

(Continued)

make a good seminar topic for our annual meeting. Let us know your thoughts on this issue, please.

The list compiled here is short, we are sure. We would like to continue to add to this list with the hope that someday in the future we can provide our members with a clear understanding of what there is to do in each region of Maine. The knowledge can be of benefit to lodging establishments, business owners and travelers alike. Through individual and group promotion of these itineraries, we will be able to strengthen the relationship between the travelers and ourselves. The use of these itineraries could easily be used to boost shoulder and off season business.

The first group of itineraries includes those that are state wide, or have a single theme and then they map out locations for these themes across the eight regions of Maine.

## **Maine Maritime Heritage Trail - [www.maritimemaine.org](http://www.maritimemaine.org)**

This incredible trail is a guide to hundreds of years of Maine maritime history and culture. Follow the coast and see the maritime museums, historic houses, and shipbuilding industries. Learn about the fishing traditions and Maine's extensive naval history.

## **Maine and National Scenic Byways - [www.visitmaine.com](http://www.visitmaine.com)**

A detailed and informative booklet providing tour information and local histories for the byway locations in the western mountains, Downeast / Acadia and the "county".

## **Maine Art Museum Trail - [www.mainemuseums.org](http://www.mainemuseums.org)**

This "trail" includes seven Maine art museums, offering more than 53,000 works of art. The guide also includes a list of local community contacts such as chambers of commerce, etc.

**Maine Golf Guide** - published as an insert in the paper by Courier Publications

This guide lists 60 plus places to play golf across the state!

**Lighthouses of Maine** - published as an insert in the paper by Courier Publications

A guided tour of Maine's Lighthouses and Harbors from Kittery to Calais.

**Maine Garden And Landscape Trail** - Maine Humanities Council and Maine Arts Commission

This trail is unique in that it includes formal gardens, historic gardens, small village gardens, nurseries, specialty growers and cultivators, and designers. All eight regions are represented. They provide a calendar of events for your use.

## **Maine Fiber Arts Tour - [www.maineiberarts.org](http://www.maineiberarts.org)**

A year round tour of studios, basketry farms, cashmere, yarns, knitting, sheep, fabric, fleeces, craft centers, alpacas, quilts, galleries, processing mills, rovings, tools and wool. They also provide a calendar of events.

**Maine Architecture Trail** - composed by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Six driving tours, throughout eight regions, that introduce visitors to the diverse architectural heritage of Maine's small towns and rural areas.

## **Woodshop Tours and Factory Showrooms - [www.mainewood.org](http://www.mainewood.org)**

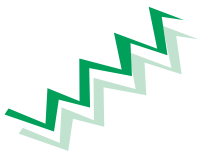
Visit Maine wood craftsmen and artisans, and their shops, all over the state.

## **Maine's Watchable Wildlife - [www.visitmaine.com](http://www.visitmaine.com)**

Here is a guide to where to find wildlife touring opportunities, guides, outfitters, lodging and other services in all the regions of Maine. It also has a calendar of events.

Here are a handful of locally promoted itineraries, based on area of interest.

*"If your web site isn't optimized correctly in laymen's terms marketed correctly no one will find your packages."*



# ITINERARIES

(Continued)

## **Museums of Mount Desert Island -**

composed by the Islands Association of Museums and Historical Societies this tidy map shows the locations of thirteen museums across the island with brief information and contacts for each.

## **Tours of Lubec and Cobscook - toursoflubecandcobscook.com**

View the lighthouses of Lubec and Campobello Island while enjoying the noteworthy diversity and abundance of song, sea and migratory birds. Lubec was the Sardine capital of the world in the 1800-1900's.

The following itineraries are published by government agencies.

## **Fishing Opportunities - www.mefishwildlife.com**

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife provide regional guides to the fishing opportunities in each areas' rivers and streams, ponds and lakes, salmon, walk in ponds and even places to go with the kids and family.

## **Outdoors In Maine - www.maine.gov/doc**

A practical guide to where to find the State Parks, State Historic sites, Abandoned Railroad Corridor Trails

## **Abandoned Railroad Corridor Trails- www.maine.gov/doc**

You can get a map from the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, 22 State House Station, Augusta, Maine, 04333

Here are a few of the regional guides, often published by the chambers of commerce. We would love to have more specific itineraries sent to us if you have them.

## **East Penobscot Bay Region - www.penobscotbay.com**

An excellent reference to all information about Penobscot Bay.

## **The Maine Highlands - www.themainehighlands.com**

This regional guide encompasses the heart of central and northern Maine. It highlights in brief what each area offers for attraction and has a single page of contact information.

## **Walking Trails of Western Maine - www.westernmaine.org**

A guide to the walking trails around the lakes and mountains of western Maine.

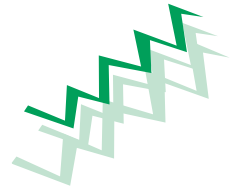
## **Kennebec and Moose River Valleys - www.augustamaine.com**

A guide to the Capital Region, the Kennebec and Moose River Valley areas and a guide to the Old Canada Road Scenic Byway

## **Down East Acadia Region - www.downeastacadia.com**

A guide to points of interest within the five areas of this coastal Maine region.

This article was prepared by Evin Hulbert, Owner and Innkeeper at the Holland Inn and Marian Burns, Owner and Innkeeper at Mira Monte Inn. Both of these inns are located in Bar Harbor.



*“Use packaging to cater to niche markets.”*





## INNKEEPERS SHARE THEIR PACKAGING SECRETS



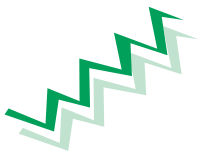
**W**hat better way to provide you with information on packaging than to go to the experts, you! In this article, we explore steps that some Maine Innkeepers Association members have undertaken to create exciting and successful experiential packaging. Our travels will take us to Downeast Maine where Marian Burns of the Mira Monte Inn has taken packaging to new heights. Marian offers a menu style approach to her packaging. Her web site provides the backdrop for choices that consumers can make to include their own interests in their vacation. There is a minor discount on room rate but the theory here is to strictly add value! The “Love in Bloom” package had an interesting start according to inn owner, Marian Burns. “I devised this package as a Honeymoon package to entice newlyweds to stay at least four nights and enjoy what the Island of Mount Desert has to offer. Soon I was getting requests from others to also access the package, so I made the switch from honeymooners to anyone in love.” This package has become a true favorite for individuals celebrating anniversaries and engagements. “It isn’t my best seller but I sell a few a month. The great thing is that it results in a four night stay, which is hard to come by these days,” Marian said. The package is promoted as, “A joyful package for your honeymoon, anniversary, or other special occasion. Mira Monte Inn offers romantic rooms with whirlpools, fireplaces, and private porches overlooking our award-winning gardens, one of the “Gardens of Eden” in Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park.” You have a choice of several options but they are restricted by group. There are three groups. A guest would, of course, get fewer selections from the more expensive options (Group A) to include a guided sea kayak tour or a three-hour sail on a sloop and more selections from the less expensive options (Group C) to include bike rentals or a sightseeing tour of Acadia National Park. There are four plans and they all are available for the same price and they offer either a selection from all three groups, or a combination thereof controlled by the innkeeper to maintain cost integrity on the package. For more info on “Love in Bloom” go to [http://www.miramonte.com/love\\_in\\_bloom.html](http://www.miramonte.com/love_in_bloom.html).



*“There is a minor discount on room rate but the theory is to add value.”*

Sebasco Harbor Resort decided to capitalize on the growing multi-generational travel market by offering the “Sebasco Grand Vacation.” Leslie Hunter, Director of Marketing at Sebasco, said that the concept was somewhat successful with families taking advantage of the package throughout the summer months. The premise behind this package is to allow grandparents the time to relax but also to reconnect or create that initial connection in a very special way with their grandchildren. This type of vacation can be a life-altering event for both the senior and junior members of the family. The package plays upon the many strengths Sebasco has to offer to include golf, canoeing on Sebasco’s fresh water lake or sailing on Casco Bay. Sebasco also boasts a great recreational facility that includes a bowling alley and other interactive games that create the opportunity for all members of the family to bond. The package is for a two night minimum stay and includes overnight accommodations for 4 (2 adults and 2 children, ages 5 through 12), breakfast and dinner each day, complimentary use of the resort’s mountain bikes, and the use of Camp Merritt’s children’s programs and activities. The family also gets a choice of one of the following to do as a group activity: Golf lesson and unlimited play on Sebasco’s 3 hole lake course, a sailing lesson and ½ day sailboat rental or complimentary passage on Sebasco’s very own tour boat, the Ruth! It is so very difficult for families to find the time to spend together any more; the Grand Vacation makes it all possible! Leslie Hunter adds, “The “Grand Vacation” package has generated many phone calls. Sebasco sees the ‘intergenerational’ market also in the form of large family reunions and will be looking at some creative ways to upsell these reunions and personalize each family’s experience.”

The previous two packages are perfect examples of niche tourism packaging. The Hilton Garden Inn Freeport engages in a different form of promotion, which includes both value added and destination-oriented packaging. In its simplest form, the destination is LL Bean and the value added item is a \$10 gift certificate. It never hurts to have an icon or brand like LL Bean in your back yard, but every lodging property has its own resources and assets nearby. The trick is to inventory those assets

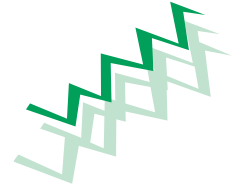


## INNKEEPERS SHARE THEIR PACKAGING SECRETS

and resources and create strategic partnerships that allow you to maximize them. Jeanne Carpentier, General Manager of the Hilton Garden says this package is offered in non-peak times and is very successful with approximately 50 bookings a month. She says it is also a moneymaker for the hotel because they don't discount rate and the guest feels privileged to receive what amounts to a discount to a retail outlet that they were probably going to visit anyway. The Hilton Garden also offers a Discover Freeport package again in the off and shoulder seasons that is more upscale and includes additional value added items to include a \$50 gift certificate at LL Bean, a gift basket of locally made and purchased items and other Freeport goodies. Carpentier added, "These package offerings complement our corporate and group business well. It is an ele-

ment that can provide the guest with a reason to choose the Hilton Garden over many other wonderful properties in our area."

Packaging is part art, part science and part luck but every lodging property needs to be very familiar with the area in which they are located so they may be the conduit between the guest and the various attractions the area has to offer. Even if you do not create a strategic alliance with a retail or recreation provider, you should be able to direct your guests to all that your corner of Maine has to offer and better yet partner with these providers to create a truly unique Maine experience!



*"Packaging is part art, part science and part luck."*

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## SHOULDER SEASON PACKAGING TIPS

In keeping with the spirit of providing food for thought for shoulder season and off-season promotions, one would be remiss not to include existing promotions. One marketing opportunity put forth by your Association is the "Hospitality for Habitat" program. This program was instituted in 2004 to assist innkeepers in filling rooms in May and giving back to the community with dollars presented to local chapters of Habitat for Humanity.

The offer is very simple. Between May 1 and an annually determined date in May generally mid-month, participating member properties will offer a designated number of their rooms at half the regular rate, in exchange for a \$25 check payable to Habitat for Humanity. Innkeepers decide how many rooms they would like to include in the program, what day or dates they would offer and the length of stay associated with the discount. The only constants are the 50% discount and the collection of one \$25 check for the length of stay. Rate can be based on half of some published rate not necessarily the mid-week rate in May. Reservations must be made in advance, and the contribution to Habitat for Humanity must be in the form of a check. Most properties look at the promotion and say I am already sold out for weekends in May and don't need the help

or that the program is too cumbersome for me to handle. The reality is that you can select 3 of your 40 rooms per night for the promotion and only offer it from Sunday through Thursday or for a three-night minimum on one weekend. There are many ways to use this free promotional opportunity to your advantage.


These funds will be distributed among the participating local chapters of Habitat for Humanity. Currently seven out of the 10 chapters are involved. Habitat for Humanity International is a Christian ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. Founded in 1975 by Millard Fuller, along with his wife Linda, Habitat for Humanity International and its affiliates in more than 3,000 communities in 92 nations have built and sold more than 150,000 homes to partner families with no-profit, zero-interest mortgages. Their website is [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org).

Several properties have participated in the program in the last three years and the level of their success is commensurate with level of effort expended. Those properties that create a link from their home page to the package or list the package on their specials or packages web page have had the most success. MEIA




## SHOULDER SEASON PACKAGING TIPS (CONTINUED)

will provide the property with a logo to place on their home page and promotional materials to include property press releases.




Another way to maximize your shoulder and off-season efforts is to use the Maine Getaways program. This program is sponsored by the Maine Office of Tourism on the [www.visitmaine.com](http://www.visitmaine.com) site and is a cooperative effort between the office, the Maine Tourism Association and the Maine Innkeepers Association. Once again it is very easy to create a bed and breakfast package and slap it up there, but the people who have the most success are those who are creative. Packaging and experiential travel are the staples of today's fast paced traveler. They don't want to have to put much time or thought into their travel plans and they want it to be exciting.


*“Packaging and experiential travel are the staples of today's fast paced traveler.”*



The Office sends broadcast e-mails to potential visitors who have voluntarily asked to be notified of any special offerings. You could hardly ask for a more captive audience. Another component to Maine Getaways is the travel agent promotion offering. If you are willing to offer a 10% commission on your packages, you can participate in this heavily marketed program targeted specifically to a qualified list of travel providers on a quarterly basis. One only needs to go to [www.visitmaine.com](http://www.visitmaine.com) and click on the tourism industry link on the bottom navigation bar on the home page. This will take you to an area where you can add your lodging property to the visitmaine database (a must have, free offering) or add and modify your Maine Getaways package at which time you will decide whether these packages are commissionable or not. There are currently 219 packages on Maine Getaways and there are over 1800 licensed lodging properties, so there is still tremendous advantage to be gained by participating. Examples of great packaging include but are not limited to Moose Watching Safari packages that include either two or three nights of accommodation, a four hour moose safari and breakfast each morning, the Lobster Tale package that includes two nights accommodations, a four course lobster dinner and a scenic tour of Kennebunkport. The Sebasco Grand Vacation is another great idea that focuses on the



growth of the multi-generational travel niche. Generation Y loves the idea of spending time, albeit limited, with members of their extended families. The Grand Vacation includes breakfast and dinners together, golf lessons together and the ability for those Generation Y youngsters to spend time at this resort's summer camp. Seem a bit overwhelming! Don't have a golf course nearby? Each and every lodging operator has incredible treasures within a 30 minute drive of their property. If you haven't yet explored, it is your duty to go and create a list of assets and resources nearby so that you can create packages that aren't necessarily driven by your size or the number of amenities on your property. The amusement park down the street, the Moroccan restaurant, the maple syrup museum or all of the above are the root for any great packages you put together and market on Maine Getaways. Don't forget that packages needn't be discounted. It is more important to add value to a reasonably priced package because the consumer is looking for one stop shopping and trusting your good taste to provide it!



One way to seal the sale on your newly minted packages is to sell them on-line. InnLink, a strategic partner with the Maine Innkeepers Association, has developed Package Handling Solutions. If you are participating in the InnLink program you can promote your packages on your web site and through [www.maineinns.com](http://www.maineinns.com) and also, if you are an e-link subscriber, present your packages to the consuming public through 3rd party online sites or through the GDS to travel agents around the world. There is no additional cost save the ordinary commission and fees that apply to this service. Seasonal packages such as Maple Syrup Weekend or Romance on the Coast can be entered through the RESmatrix and will automatically be displayed in the distribution channels you choose. If you need help enhancing the presentation of your package, Mary Skinner, Innlink's Director of Marketing will be more than happy to assist. For more information on InnLink and on-line packaging please contact Greg Dugal at the MEIA office.