



## Grant Details

### 125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

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128717 - FY24 Visit Billings DMO Budget and Marketing Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

**Grant Title:** FY24 Visit Billings DMO Budget and Marketing Plan  
**Grant Number:** 24-52-OOT-DMO-010  
**Grant Status:** Underway  
**Comments:**  
**Applicant Organization:** Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau  
**Grantee Contact:** Alyson Eggart  
**Award Year:** FY24  
**Program Area:** DOC Office of Tourism  
**Amounts:**  
**Contract Dates:**  
**Project Dates:**

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed
06/13/2023	07/01/2023	06/30/2024
Proposal Date	Project Start	Project End

**Grant Administrator:** Barb Sanem  
**Contract Number** 24-52-OOT-DMO-010  
**Award Year** FY24  
**Contract Dates**

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed	Contract Legal
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**Project Dates** 07/01/2023  
06/30/2024

Project Start	Project End
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**Comments**

**Amendment Comments**

### DMO Plan Narrative

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#### 1. Describe Your Destination

*Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.*

**BILLINGS, MONTANA: Travel is an economic powerhouse for Billings: Montana's Trailhead.**

In Billings, travel fuels every industry, while every industry fuels travel to the destination. From energy and education to finance and medical, business and conference travel is key. At the same time, leisure visitation, sports tourism, and group tours help boost visitation growing the visitor economy year-round.

As a destination marketing and management organization (DMMO), Visit Billings promotes the destination and all its offerings, recruits meetings and tournaments, and helps to grow existing events. When Visit Billings markets and sells Billings as a preferred travel destination, businesses in every corner of Yellowstone County across all sectors are supported.

Tourism enhances the overall quality of life by helping support the local business community while also saving households nearly \$900 in taxes annually. The 2.6 million visitors who add \$621 million annually (Destination Analysts) to the Billings' economy annually is not an accidental impact; It's the return on investment of marketing and sales strategies of the Visit Billings leadership, staff, and partners.

**VISIT BILLINGS:**

Visit Billings is the brand that encompasses the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCVB). Both organizations are managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. The Visit Billings team is committed to growing visitation at Montana's Trailhead.

**VISIT BILLINGS CVB LEADERSHIP & STAFF\***

**BILLINGS CHAMBER/CVB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

**JULIE SEEDHOUSE** – Century 21 Hometown Brokers

**JEREMY VANNATTA** – PayneWest Insurance

**DEBBIE POTTER** – Eide Bailly

**JESS PETERSON** – Western Skies Strategies

**TOBY O'ROURKE** - Kampgrounds of America

**NICHOLE MEHLING** – Billings Clinic

**CARMELITA DOMINGUEZ** – Montana Allergy & Asthma Specialists

**STAFF:**

**JOHN BREWER**, CAE - President & CEO

Billings Chamber of Commerce

**ALEX TYSON**, IOM, CATP - Executive Director

Visit Billings (Billings TBID & Billings CVB)

**ALY EGGART**, MSPR, CATP - Leisure Marketing, Sales, and Social Media Manager

Visit Billings

**LUKE ASHMORE**, PDM, CATP - Special Projects & Programs Manager

Visit Billings

**EVAN DECKER**, PDM, CATP - Sports Tourism Manager

Visit Billings

**MEGAN STEVENSON** - Finance Director

Billings Chamber/Visit Billings/Visit Southeast Montana

*\*Tourism Business Improvement District leadership is listed at [VisitBillings.com](http://VisitBillings.com).*

### **VISIT BILLINGS: What We Do**

As a DMMO, Visit Billings is responsible for the development and growth of the tourism industry through promotion, marketing, and sales strategy. The staff is an extension of its stakeholders (lodging partners) working to provide sales, services, and marketing support to the local hospitality industry and tourism partners.

Visit Billings works domestically and internationally to develop and enhance sustainable tourism for the city and region in the leisure, meetings, and sporting events markets. The DMMO does this by increasing awareness and engaging with consumers in both drive and flight markets, as well as with media, the travel industry, meeting and conference planners, and sports promoters with research-driven marketing programs. Marketing campaigns highlight the outdoor adventure, incredible landscapes, arts and culture, culinary and nightlife, as well as the meeting and sports facilities. Visit Billings also collaborates with Billings Logan International Airport on air service development initiatives to assist with access to the destination. Visit Billings staff also work closely with tourism partners and stakeholders to ensure positive interactions between residents and visitors to foster repeat visitation, making customer service and visitor facilitation a priority. Staff also work with national and local organizations to strengthen diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility practices and mindsets including autism certification efforts.

### **VISIT BILLINGS: How We Do It**

Visit Billings is funded primarily through the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and through a portion of the State Lodging Facility Use Tax. The BTBID assesses \$2.00 per occupied room night on all hotels and motels in the city of Billings with six (6) or more sleeping rooms. The BTBID funds stay local for the marketing and promotion of the city as a destination, to grow visitation and support local businesses and stakeholders. Additionally, there are two Montana taxes imposed on users of an overnight lodging facility (such as a hotel, motel, campground, dude ranch, and guest ranch), which are collected by the facility and remitted to the Montana Department of Revenue. These two taxes are a 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax and a 4% Lodging Facility Sales Tax, for a combined 8% lodging tax.

### **VISIT BILLINGS: Why Visit Billings?**

BILLINGS IS MONTANA'S TRAILHEAD. Shaped by the Yellowstone River and sheltered by the sandstone Rimrocks, Billings is a place of forever views and forever memories, where urban amenities and modern conveniences meet the edge of the genuine frontier, and the adventure of the untamed wilderness and history are at your front door. Conveniently positioned in southeast Montana as the largest city between Calgary and Denver, Spokane and Minneapolis, Billings proudly serves a trade area serving more than 500,000 residents. Warm, genuine people take the time to welcome you and greet you with a smile. Unparalleled access to some of the most breathtaking and historic places in the United States including Yellowstone National Park, Bighorn Canyon Recreation Area, national monuments, and the Beartooth Scenic Byway make Billings an idyllic destination for connecting to the best that Montana and the region offer.

### **ABOUT BILLINGS:**

Billings, population 117,000, is the county seat of Yellowstone County (pop. 167,000) and the largest city in the state. As Montana's Trailhead, it's the region's economic hub. Major industries including agriculture, energy, healthcare, finance, and education drive the local economy, and tourism is integrated into each of them.

Popular attractions include the Rimrocks or rock formations which surround much of the community and offer incredible views of the region. The city also boasts a brewery district in historic downtown Billings, restaurants featuring local flavors, Montana's only zoo and Botanical Park, contemporary and western museums, galleries, several theaters, music venues, outdoor community venues, boutique retail, and year-round festivals.

Billings is home to nearly 50 miles of multi-use trails and 24 miles of bike lanes. From the Rimrocks to the Yellowstone River, which is the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48, travelers experience the magic of Montana's Trailhead. Billings sits near the intersection of Interstates 90 and 94 and offers a first-class airport with numerous daily flights to major U.S. cities via Delta, United, American Airlines, Allegiant, Frontier, and Alaska Airlines. Regional carrier CapeAir also plays a crucial role in air travel and connectivity to eastern Montana.

Amazing summer weather and snowy winters with bluebird days offer ample opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to experience adventures during all four seasons. Nearly 4,400 hotel rooms, flexible meeting space, and sports venues are ready to accommodate any traveler or planner's needs and preferences.

## **2. Align with Montana Brand**

*Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.*

### **BRAND MT – MARKETING MONTANA:**

The Tourism Marketing Bureau at the Montana Department of Commerce promotes Montana as a travel destination to potential domestic and international visitors through advertising and promotional campaigns. These strategic campaigns create awareness about Montana, generate an interest in visiting, and influence travel intention. Nationwide tourism trends, statistics from the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at the University of Montana, syndicated research, and the results of contracted research studies help determine a data-driven overall marketing strategy to reach target audiences and measure the success of marketing efforts to create demand for Montana as a global travel destination.

Brand MT facilitated a statewide initiative to unify, under a single brand, the diverse collective of organizations working to market Montana. The Montana Brand consists of three pillars which Visit Billings also takes into consideration for alignment:

- More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48
- Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders
- Breathtaking experiences by day, and relaxing hospitality at night

Additionally, Visit Billings prioritizes joint venture opportunities when/where applicable with Brand MT and its partners.

Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will be considered if offerings align to grow visitation to Billings.

## **3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?**

*Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).*

Destination Marketing

**Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.**

**3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).**

Supporting travel to Billings, media planning will include increased investment and expansion of geo-targeting to support fly and drive markets while also optimizing audience and expanded targeting tactics with existing channels.

Visit Billings will target audiences who offer strong reach and site engagement. On top of contextually relevant content placement, buyers will use behavioral segments to narrow the target ensuring the right message gets in front of the right user.

### **Behavioral Targeting:**

Investments will be made to leverage audiences and targeting tactics that have previously driven strong performance for Visit Billings initiatives. From a behavioral targeting point of view, Visit Billings will leverage frequent travelers, outdoor enthusiasts, in-market and previous visitation, and adventure travel buyers. Behavioral targeting (a.k.a. audience targeting) is the practice of segmenting customers based on web browsing behavior, including pages visited, searches performed, links clicked, and products purchased.

-Frequent Travelers: Users who frequently fly or stay in hotels.

-Outdoor Enthusiasts: Users who like outdoor activities like hiking.

-In-Market and Previous Visitation: Leverage Adara to reach users who are planning or have previously taken related trips to Montana, Billings, or adventure locations.

-Adventure Travel Buyers: Users who have previously bought from REI, Cabela's, etc.

### **Contextual Targeting:**

Visit Billings will reach users who are researching or dreaming their next getaway by aligning the Visit Billings message with the right content through contextual targeting. Contextual targeting is the practice of displaying ads based on a website's content. Think: placing an ad for dishware on a recipe site. Sample categories include:

-Adventure Travel

-Travel Guides

-Tourist Destinations

-Localities in the USA and in Montana

### **Retargeting:**

Visit Billings will capture users who visit Visit Billings webpages or links but have not yet taken action. Visit Billings will serve ads later while they are browsing other sites online to keep Billings and the destination top of mind.

### **Additionally:**

#### **Target Audience/Targeted Demographics:**

Adults 35-65 with an annual household income of \$75+.

Note that according to Zartico, the visitors representing the highest spend in market are with a:

1. HHI of \$101-150k (26.7%)
2. HHI of \$151k+ (24.6%),
3. HHI \$41-60k (16.4%)
4. HHI \$61-80K (15%)

#### **Which age groups are spending the most?**

1. A65+ (25.2%)
2. A55-64 (23.7%)
3. 35-44 (20%)
4. A45-54 (18.7%)

Across all HHI, A35-44 spend the highest, according to Zartico.

Therefore, the visitor with the highest impact are those A65+ with a HHI of \$101+ followed closely by visitors A55-64 with a HHI of \$101+.

According to the Visit Billings Profile for 2023 conducted by Goodway, the Visit Billings target audience is primarily Gen X, parenting-focused, working families. They're educated and describe themselves as open-minded, and value spending time with their families. They're confident using new technology and are comfortable navigating the internet to research and book their travels.

- 36.7% typically find out about new brands and products through word of mouth recommendations through friends or family members.
- 49.1% expect brands to listen to customer feedback
- 46.5% use Facebook more than once a day
- 33% of domestic vacationers are thinking of booking a vacation in the next 3-6 months (as at Dec 2022)

#### **General Demographics:**

- 45% A35-44
- Mostly suburban dwelling consumers
- 52% are married
- 57% have children

#### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?**

#### **KEY TRENDS:**

The U.S. Travel Foundation is forecasting an increase in travel spending in 2023 compared to 2022 (and 2019). Destination Analysts found that Americans' excitement for travel is at record levels and they say they will prioritize leisure travel in their household income's spending – over home improvements, clothing, entertainment and even dining out in restaurants.

American travelers express excitement for cities (47.7%), small towns (44.8%) and national parks (41.2%), according to Destination Analysts. *Travel + Leisure* found there is a renewed emphasis on food-focused travel, wellness and self-care on vacation, and traveling off the beaten path.

About one-third of American travelers overall report they used online video specifically for trip planning purposes. For destination inspiration, Millennial and GenZ age travelers are particularly open to content through video sources like TikTok and streaming services.

A Virtuoso study found that travelers are, on average, booking trips farther ahead for 2023 than they did back in 2019. Experts are recommending travelers should book ahead of time.

"Hush" trips may be the newest travel trend with remote workers packing up and going somewhere new for a week or two, without ever telling their employer, according to *Forbes*. Travelers login, get to work, and save some time to explore. Traditional hotel properties are marketing to remote workers by offering discounts on extended stays - along with the perks of having pools, bars and fitness centers on a workcation.

According to a survey by GetYourGuide, 90% of travelers want to experience a destination "like a local" and two-thirds of Millennial respondents specifically worry about whether it's an authentic experience.

"Set-jetting" is still on the rise - 70% of Gen Z and Millennial respondents have "been inspired to travel to a destination after seeing it featured in a TV show, news source, or movie" like Yellowstone, according to a report by American Express Travel.

Surveyed travelers say they want to shop at small businesses and spend more during a vacation if they know it supports the local community.

Travelers have a new appreciation for the physical and mental health benefits of nature as a “soul-restoring, endorphin-eliciting, stress-relieving outlet,” according to Afar. Forest bathing, or meditative walks in nature, are being integrated into back-to-basic wellness treatments and experiences.

Additionally, throughout a fiscal year, Visit Billings tracks and measures campaigns. Visit Billings staff in partnership with agency colleagues from Sunshine & Bourbon (Agency of Record) and buying group, Goodway Group, monitor the following data:

- Smith Travel Research - demand, occupancy and ADR
- TBID Assessments
- Collections from State Lodging Facility Use Tax
- Destinations International Economic Impact Calculators
- VisaVue Spending Trends
- AirDNA Data
- Destination Analysts reporting
- Zartico and Affinity Reporting
- ITRR

### ***3c. What are your emerging markets?***

Visit Billings will increase investment and expand geo-targeting to support fly markets and will engage in three new markets.

#### **Approach:**

Leverage channels that have previously driven success for fly markets including search, display, and social (Pinterest and Meta).

Increase investment to build brand awareness to drive brand knowledge in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination.

#### **Existing Markets:**

-Minneapolis, MN

-Denver, CO

-Salt Lake City, UT

-Chicago, IL

-Dallas, TX

#### **Emerging Markets (New Market Tests):**

**Please note the approach with the emerging markets is to leverage channels that have previously driven success for fly markets. This includes search, display, and social with Meta and Pinterest.**

**Visit Billings will increase investment in the upper-funnel tactics to drive awareness in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination (see three markets here). Strategies will include increased investment in expanding geo-targeting to support fly markets and secondary national markets where research from Zartico and Goodway Group show strong potential.**

-Phoenix, AZ

-Houston, TX

-Portland, OR

National strategies are listed above. Drive market details include:

**Approach:**

Use channels best for events including search and display to drive awareness and site traffic (no new markets for drive).

-Montana (excl city of Billings)

-North Dakota

-South Dakota

-Wyoming

-Idaho

**4. Define and describe your overall goals.**

*A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.*

FY24 - Visit Billings Priorities:

- 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN
- INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION
- FOSTER SPORTS TOURISM
- THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- RECRUIT MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, AND REUNIONS
- THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE
- BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan will carry forward the momentum and successes of Visit Billings and local tourism today. Critical areas of focus and new areas to concentrate on will be identified, while also revealing strategies to ensure Visit Billings' efforts and investments are set to position the destination and its partners through 2027.

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays from guests to the city. Making sure travelers feel welcome and enjoy their stay at Montana's Trailhead is a top priority for Visit Billings leadership and staff. The Visit Billings team works in many ways to help create a positive experience for visitors including the Billings Trail Guides program, Meet the Locals, and Certified Tourism Ambassador Destination commitments with Mickey Schaeffer & Associates. Such priorities ensure quality customer service and positive visitor experiences. Additionally, Visit Billings is leading destination efforts to offer autism-friendly travel options for visitors to the city. ZooMontana, the Historic Billings Depot, the Boothill Inn & Suites, the Billings Chamber, and the United Way of Yellowstone County have already joined this effort with Visit Billings.



Finally, a positive visitor experience is also directly impacted by how sports events and meetings are supported. Staff offer convention and tournament servicing options like hosted site inspections, registration assistance, city and regional tour planning, financial incentives, grant options, and confidential hotel sourcing to assist meeting planners and tournament owners who want to host events in Billings.

## INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION

Leisure travel marketing strategies remain the highest priority for the organization as leisure visitation supports all Visit Billings' stakeholders (hotels, motels, campgrounds) as well as tourism partners including restaurants, retailers, attractions and event owners. Regional and national marketing campaigns will focus on encouraging unique itineraries that elevate the destination and the region to road trippers, outdoor enthusiasts, history buffs, arts and culture aficionados, and foodies - to name a few. Promotion of events and must-see attractions to regional audiences is key as is elevation of Great American Road Trip-type itineraries to potential visitors in national markets. Billings is a stop along the route from Badlands to Yellowstone and every park, byway, and monument in between.

Visit Billings staff expect higher travel demand during the warm season of 2023 as gateway communities reopen following June 2022's historic floods that impacted the north and northeast entrances to Yellowstone as well as sections of the Beartooth Scenic Byway south of Billings. The team will attend leisure travel shows in addition to executing several national and regional strategic marketing campaigns and publicity opportunities.

## FOSTER SPORTS TOURISM

Sports tourism happens when a person or group travels from one community to another to compete, support, and celebrate sports and athletes. This is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism for Billings. Efforts to support local tournament owners, governing bodies, and growing existing events, while recruiting new sports events to cultivate this market, are key priorities for the destination and staff. Furthermore, ensuring Billings has appropriate and competitive venues is also a priority of the BTBID and the Billings CVB leadership and staff. Namely, supporting the City of Billings in its efforts to build a sports facility. Such a state-of-the-art venue for the community and destination is critical to the future of sports tourism growth. Strategies also will include marketing, lead generation, and attending appointment-based conferences to strengthen relationships with event owners to elevate Billings as a sports tourism destination.

## RECRUIT MEETINGS, CONFERENCE, AND REUNIONS

Visit Billings staff strive to be innovative in meeting the needs of meeting planners and incentivizing decision-makers to choose Billings as their meeting destination. Staff work closely with meeting hotel sales staff to help inspire and orient meeting professionals with thoughtful sales strategies to book meetings and conferences in Billings in 2024, 2025 and 2026. This segment can continue to have a strong economic impact on the community. The team will attend conferences and tradeshow to elevate the Meet Me in Billings campaign effort.

## THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE

International inbound travel was brought to a halt in March 2020. While it has since partially recovered, it is not expected to fully recover until 2025. With Billings being a part of the Great American Road Trip - Badlands to Yellowstone – Montana has seen a stronger increase in international travel and group tours since 2020 particularly with fly/drive visitors. It is important for Visit Billings staff to maintain relationships with international tour operators so overseas visitors who have ranked sightseeing, fine dining, and national parks/monuments as major draws in deciding where to spend time while visiting the United States, keep Billings top-of-mind. Visit Billings works with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to foster this market.

## BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BIL)

Air service continues to be a direct route to foster success in the tourism equation for Billings. Billings Logan International Airport (BIL) has enhanced the traveler's experience with the \$55 million airport expansion and renovation in recent years. This investment has elevated BIL in many ways. At the same time, from a destination marketing and management point of view, any lack of consistent air capacity or high fares can negatively impact a traveler's decision to make Billings part of their business, leisure, or sports itinerary. The BIL experience is strong, but continuing to work on flight options, fares, and capacities is key to community organizations like Visit Billings.

For Billings to continue to compete as a tourism destination, air service including capacity and subsequent competitive fares must be addressed. Accessibility to a destination is a key factor that affects volume of visitor traffic to Billings. Direct flights have grown visitation to Billings' regional competitive set. Direct flights to and from a region offer momentum to a destination for tourism development. If people can't get to your destination, they won't. If it's easier to go to a different destination, they will take the route of least resistance. The I-90 and I-94 corridor is important for roadtrippers, regional conferences, medical tourism, and some business/sports travel, but the airline passenger is critical to visitor growth in Billings and to at least maintain the visitation we see today. Visitor growth increases new money and spend into the city which can be assisted by increased air service.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PERTAINING TO GOALS:

### FY24 GOALS FOR:

#### **ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS**

##### Goal:

- Drive year-round visitation by increasing awareness for Billings as an ideal travel destination, with big skies and outdoor adventure.

#### **TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

##### Goals:

- Increase awareness for the destination that encourages target audiences to deepen consumer engagement with the destination's brand.

Increase awareness for the direct flights to Billings from Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Seattle. While introducing emerging markets of Phoenix, AZ, Houston, TX, and Portland, OR.

#### **INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL**

##### Goals:

- Increase brand interaction with informative and engaging digital content that builds awareness and loyalty, while ultimately motivating consumer travel.
- Provide meeting planners and sports event planners with the information and materials they need to choose Billings as their preferred destination for meetings, conventions and sports events.
- Increase website visitation.
- Grow the audience on Visit Billings' social platforms.
- Increase contacts in Visit Billings email database and encourage an open rate of over 20% for email marketing initiatives.

#### **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

##### Goals:

- Generate earned media and influencer coverage for Billings, positioning the destination as an authentic, welcoming city giving visitors access to modern amenities, outdoor adventure, family fun and exquisite food/beverage options while preserving the Montana feel they are seeking.
- Increase traffic to the Visit Billings website through earned digital media placements including the destination URL.
- Place earned media features in target publications with a total audience impressions value of at least 10 million.

#### **SPORTS MARKETING**

##### Goals:

- Generate new room nights from sports events recruited to the area that will impact room demand and increase revenue while creating even greater awareness for Billings as a choice sports destination.
- Grow or expand existing sports events with current event and tournament owners.
- Retain existing sports events.
- Successfully partner with collegiate partners for NCAA and NAIA event bids.
- Book or support 30 sports events in Billings.

#### **MEETING AND CONVENTION RECRUITMENT**

##### Goals:

- Generate meeting and convention bookings and room nights as a result of sales initiatives to raise awareness of Billings as a choice meeting destination, and by providing meeting planners with the knowledge and logistical support they need to make meeting in Billings a success.

- Generate new room nights from meetings or conferences that will impact room demand and increase revenue while creating a stronger Meet Me in Billings brand.
- Support existing state association and corporate meetings in Billings.
- Support Billings' five meeting hotels in efforts to recruit new and retain existing meetings and conferences.
- Book, support, and/or retain 25 meetings or conferences in Billings.
- Service 20 meetings, conferences, or events in Billings.

## **GROUP TOUR MARKET (INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOUR OPPORTUNITIES)**

Yellowstone National Park was the seventh most visited national park in the United States in 2022 with Glacier National Park rounding out the top 10, according to the National Park Service. In Montana, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is the third most-visited site (Brand MT). Billings as a tourism destination is a trailhead along many routes to and from key attractions like Yellowstone, Bighorn Battlefield, and Glacier National Park – to name a few – and can offer many amenities to international and domestic tour operators and their clients.

Goal:

- Build relationships with domestic and international tour operators to continue the recovery of the group tour market.
- Elevate Billings as a competitive stopover city for the motorcoach industry and continue to work with tour operators and bus tour companies to elevate Billings as a major western tour destination.
- Work with international market representatives to be quick to assist international visitors with longer itineraries for those who may be on fly/drive trips in the west and request more time in the city to explore more products including the brew trail, food scene, and outdoor recreation.
- Foster relationships with existing and new tour operators to continue to grow the domestic and international tour markets. The incubation period for successful leads and marketing strategies is demanding and important to the Visit Billings team to grow this segment.
- Offer insights to operators regarding new products in the destination and refreshing itineraries.

## **HOSPITALITY EDUCATION**

Goals:

- Raise awareness of the value of tourism throughout the community, and support stakeholders and front-line staff by providing tourism education.
- Support initiatives that foster diversity and inclusion.

*4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.*

## **FY24 Tactics**

### **ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS**

Tactics:

- Execute Visit Billings' research driven, consumer-focused brand platform, "Forge Your Own Path," to build marketing campaigns and promotions that showcase rich visuals of the entire destination
- Launch new "Be an Outsider" marketing campaign to increase awareness of the big skies and unspoiled outdoor adventure found in a visit to Billings, as well as the natural attractions surrounding the city.
- Create niche marketing campaigns such as Summer Events as well as creative that focuses on amenities such as the Brew Trail to encourage visitors to discover all the cultural attractions, events and culinary delights found in the city of Billings with its unique urban downtown and hospitality offerings.
- Continue promoting the Great American Road Trip and its itineraries to remind repeat visitors and inform first-time visitors that Billings, Montana is the most scenic route into Yellowstone with incredible proximity to iconic attractions.
- Promote the current and any emerging flight markets through grant opportunities, paid media, as well as through digital and social platforms.
- Showcase Billings in fall and winter through a combined indoor/outdoor tactic through the Keepers of the Cool creative including #hibernate? #hibernope! tag.

- Develop a storymaking strategy leveraging content like Trailguides to showcase the locals and their warm, genuine nature, while sharing with visitors a locals' perspective on life that is uniquely Montanan.
- Develop a placemaking strategy that begins creating more of an understanding and demand for Billings' individual districts and neighborhoods that include Downtown, the West End, the Heights, and Central.
- Through public relations, drive media coverage for the destination that profiles Trailsetters who can share the locals' perspective on how to best enjoy Billings as a destination for adventure-seekers, foodies and cultural enthusiasts.

## TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

### Tactics:

- Use a multi-channel media strategy approach that utilizes Native / Display, Meta, Pinterest, Search and TripAdvisor, while also increasing investment and expanding geo-targeting to support drive and flight markets.
- Launch a Discovery Campaign that utilizes Google's audience and customer intent signals to deliver highly visual, inspiring personalized ad experiences to people who are ready to discover and engage with the Visit Billings' brand.
- Strategically place content in front of the target audience by seamlessly weaving it in throughout the Tripadvisor ecosystem using Boost, where the brand message will be natively integrated into the Tripadvisor experience.
- Optimize audiences and expand targeting tactics within existing channels and test new tactics on new channels.
- Prioritize Meta and Display to promote awareness and drive website traffic as social and display performed well historically, which creates efficiencies in maximizing impressions and leading users to the website to learn more and take a specific action
- In drive markets, use channels best for events - search and display - to drive awareness and site traffic.
- In flight markets, leverage channels that have previously driven success for those markets - search, display, and social (Pinterest and Meta).
- Also for flight markets, increase investment in upper-funnel tactics to drive awareness in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination.
- Harness the power of advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy.
- Engage with local media publications for the promotion of Billings and supporting local businesses.
- Strategically place out-of-home billboards within and around Billings to engage local and regional audiences.
- Sponsor content development and niche digital targeting the two-wheel audience.
- Utilize advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy, while also developing ROI tracking on key advertising/marketing initiatives, that strives to deliver increased impressions through the fiscal year and garners a significant increase in engagements with a click-thru rate that is well above industry average.

## INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL

### Tactics:

#### *Social Media/Email*

- Share the destination's story in a compelling, consistent and editorial manner, with storytelling as the driving characteristic.
- Extend the Visit Billings' voice into the online space as a persona – the approachable and lighthearted Billings Trail Guide.
- Annually develop an integrated editorial content calendar to consistently plan and prepare content (e.g. copy, photos, videos, etc.), streamlining and integrating social content development efforts across all channels.
- Integrate seasonal messaging, key events, new local businesses, etc. across all digital channels.
- Increase video content on all owned channels - which also will be used in paid and earned channels - which engage a variety of local personalities.
- Through Facebook, encourage dialogue by asking followers questions while also highlighting partners and special events.
- On Instagram, curate and utilize consumer-generated photography and video, while also posting editorial photos, videos and engaging "Stories" highlighting destination experiences and offerings. Promote the #VisitBillings and #MontanasTrailhead hashtags while encouraging visitors and stakeholders to do the same.
- Expose travelers to editorial content, blog articles and social content through email marketing.

#### *Website*

- Develop a new Plan Your Trip section on the site to better help visitors make traveling to Billings as easy as possible. Content to include: maps of the flight markets and insight on the I-90/I-94 corridor; highlight the different neighborhoods found in Billings; showcase itineraries and blogs; provide transportation information including Uber/Lyft/rentals; and continue promoting visitor guide/digital guide downloads and e-newsletter sign-ups.
- Promote new blog content on the website, featuring experiences that align with the interest-based personas from History Buffs to Foodies and Outdoor Enthusiasts - as well as Winston The Sloth's page.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

### **Tactics:**

- Identify new, cost-effective means to achieve similar ends of traditional travel/tourism media outreach.
- Explore offering digital experiences to media and influencers to reach a broader audience.
- Develop earned media tactics that tie directly to paid media efforts to amplify seasonal campaigns, and vice versa.
- Leverage evolving industry trends such as multi-generational travel, solo travel and self-improvement trips as a framework for earned media content.
- Share brief news and story ideas with greater frequency about Billings events, award nominations and other news with target media and influencers.
- Explore partnerships with Brand MT and Visit Southeast Montana to share earned media costs.
- Attend PRSA event(s) or Brand MT sponsored opportunities.

## **SPORTS MARKETING**

### **Tactics:**

- Attend sporting event trade shows like SportsETA (May 2023 and May 2024) and TEAMS (fall 2023) to build relationships and create awareness for Billings sports and leisure offerings.
- Generate new leads for sports events by collaborating with IMM to build a Billings sports planning guide/booklet to use as follow-up or leave behind (digital or print) when booking planner appointments.
- Develop email templates and e-postcard for sports marketing that helps to build and sustain relationships with sports planners.
- Focus on Collegiate Sports (RMC/MSUB) and collaborate with Frontier Conference regarding NAIA bids that will be live mid-2023.
- Grow and retain sports events that Visit Billings is already assisting with by meeting with local, state, or regional contacts and asking them how you can help them grow a tournament by a day(s) or by changing venues (say high school gym to a MetraPark building), etc.
- Develop and build upon sports sales toolkit for efficiencies in follow-up. Those tools can include:
  - Create a marketing and advertising plan to promote sports marketing in Billings, and include directories in the plan.
  - Build a new section of Visit Billings website that showcases Billings as a sporting events destination and provides planners with the tools and information they need to book events in Billings.
  - Receive certification with STS through SportsETA.
  - Continue subscription with Destinations International Economic Impact Calculator.
  - Develop a sports planning booklet and business cards for appointments and follow-ups.
  - Capture new photography to help continue to build sports image library for Visit Billings.
  - Begin planning logistics for a 2024 sports planner Fam tour in Billings (invite top leads to Billings and host for two days and two nights showcasing Billings like a hosted site inspection).
  - Become active in Midland Roundtable.
  - Research the possibility of creating a sports advocacy committee to assist with any volunteer needs, etc. (to launch possibly in Spring 2024).
  - Continue to work with key stakeholders on the development of more product development for sports facilities.

## **MEETING AND CONVENTION RECRUITMENT**

### **Tactics:**

- Attend meeting and convention appointment-based national and regional events to build new and foster existing relationships with meeting planners including 2023 Small Market Meetings.
- Generate new leads for meetings by collaborating with Integrated Media Marketing or IMM and fostering relationships with new leads.
- Continue to develop and fine tune digital and printed sales materials for meeting recruitment toolkit.
- Maintain efforts on Cvent and other platforms to better accommodate meeting planners looking to book in small market meeting destinations.
- Use e-communications like e-postcards to build relationships with state, regional, and national meeting planners.
- Look at consideration of a potential meeting planner familiarization tour in the next 12 months.
- Consider sponsorship opportunities with associations or organizations to offer more of an impact for attendees.
- Provide planners services to better facilitate attendees including visitor guidebooks, brew trail maps, off-agenda options, etc.

## **GROUP TOUR MARKET (INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOUR OPPORTUNITIES)**

### **Tactics:**

- Attend an American Bus Association (ABA) event.
- Attend international events hosted in the U.S. including International Round-Up (IRU 2024), IPW 2024, and ACGI 2023.
- Work with Brand MT for 2024 opportunities to host familiarization tours or in the market when applicable.
- Elevate Billings in the Great American West (GAW) publications to garner exposure for Billings to the German, French, Italian, Belgium, Denmark, the UK, and Australia markets. Visit Billings works closely with Brand MT and international Travel and Trade staff at the State of Montana's Department of Commerce.
- Continue to advocate on a national level to shorten Visa interview wait times with the U.S. Travel Association.

HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

Tactics:

- Continue encouraging stakeholders within key industry segments such as lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, and interactive educational venues to become Certified Autism Organizations, which is achieved by training and certifying their staff through the IBCCES like Visit Billings has done.
- Introduce the national Certified Tourism Ambassador Program to the community (CTA)
- Develop a full advocacy campaign that educates the Billings community and residents on the benefits and economic impact of tourism.

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Objective: Increase visitation to destination  Attract overnight visitors to the destination through marketing, sales, event and meeting recruitment, and tourism partner support to increase room demand as reported by Smith Travel Research (STR). Room Demand includes the number of rooms sold in a specific time period and excludes complimentary rooms. Increase room demand by 3% for running 12 months via STR report.	Visit Billings prioritizes a 3% increase in room demand for the running 12 months per the Smith Travel Research citywide report. See previous years' room demand data includes:  2018: 4.9% (exceeded goal by 1.9%)  2019: -1.9% (-4.9% to goal)  2020: -26.6% (-29.6% to goal)  2021: 33.9% (exceeded goal by 30.9%)  2022: 7.1% (exceeded goal by 4.1%)	Room Demand Decrease YOY for Billings Citywide Reporting in calendar year 2023: -3.7%  The metric for FY24 success was to increase room demand by 3% per Smith Travel Research in the running 12-months of the year.	The metric was not met, however the objective remains the same to grow room demand.  Smith Travel Research reports offer benchmarks Visit Billings' uses to evaluate the city wide performance of hotels and motels in the city of Billings. Visit Billings staff continue to monitor monthly reports as well as weekly reports which offer insights to trends and impacts of certain meetings, sporting events, or leisure events on the destination. Additionally staff uses the reports to monitor the competitive set.  Annually, the team works to realize an increase in room demand by 3% in a running 12-months of the year.  The following are room demand percentages for running 12 month periods for the previous year and the year being reported which was 2023.  2018: 4.9% (exceeded goal by 1.9%)

			<p>2019: -1.9% (-4.9% to goal)</p> <p>2020: -26.6% (-29.6% to goal)</p> <p>2021: 33.9% (exceeded goal by 30.9%)</p> <p>2022: 7.1% (exceeded goal by 4.1%)</p> <p>2023: -3.7% (-6.7% to goal)</p> <p>FY24 was a down year for Billings as a destination, however the Visit Billings team hasn't stopped growing and working to build demand for the lodging facilities. While the product in the Billings destination 'store' is a constant conversation and priority together with other community leadership organizations, along with destination stewardship and long-term strategic planning, at the heart of what the DLO does focuses on marketing and sales. At the start of the new Fiscal Year, Visit Billings onboarded a Group Sales Manager position, which will focus on growing group tours, international visitation, and meeting and convention sales. The Visit Billings team is working to diversify the visitation to help build year-round visitation.</p>
<p>Earned Media and Publicity:</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate earned media and influencer coverage for Billings, positioning the destination as an authentic, welcoming city giving visitors access to modern amenities, outdoor adventure, family fun and exquisite food/beverage options while preserving the Montana feel they are seeking.</li> <li>• Increase traffic to the Visit Billings website through earned digital media placements including the destination URL.</li> <li>• Place earned media features in target publications with a total audience impressions value of at least 10 million.</li> </ul>	<p>Metrics: Meet or exceed previous years' efforts to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure four (4) journalists/influencers for a press visit scheduled for spring/summer/fall 2023 for outdoor adventure and Billings Brew Trail feature articles</li> <li>• Virtual meetings introducing Billings to five (5) or more journalists/influencers representing at least 5 million earned media impressions</li> </ul>	<p>Hosted RoadRUNNER Magazine June 2024 for an 8 day familiarization tour of Billings and the greater area. The host resulted in an article to be published in early spring 2025 touching on the Shamrock tour of the area. This also resulted in a couple of videos which Visit Billings will use to promote the 2-wheel market for years to come.</p> <p>Built relationships with Amelia Edelman and John Sizemore for a hosted trip in August of 2024. Amelia writes for Lonely Planet, Travel &amp; Leisure, US News &amp; World and has a collective impression range of 3,700,000. John Sizemore writes for Past and Matador Network and has a collective impression range of 1,250,000. Both visited Billings in August 2024.</p> <p>Billings was featured in SIP Magazine in April 2024. SIP Magazine is a Northwest based publication. Other features included Wherever Family (a blog), USA Today and Men's Journal. Collectively these had just over 5 million impressions.</p> <p>In September 2023, Visit Billings hosted Traveling Mel to cover our annual Ales for Trails event and to promote fall at Montana's Trailhead. In exchanged the organization received a blog post, social content, as well as photos to add to the Visit Billings photo library.</p>	<p>The earned media and publicity strategies were successful. Below is a list of coverage received due to the work being done by these strategies. Visit Billings will continue to incorporate PR strategies to compliment the paid media strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://travelingmel.com/couples-getaway-weekend-in-billings-a-perfect-blend-of-adventure-and-relaxation/">https://travelingmel.com/couples-getaway-weekend-in-billings-a-perfect-blend-of-adventure-and-relaxation/</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://outdoorswire.usatoday.com/2024/06/20/pictograph-cave-state-park/">https://outdoorswire.usatoday.com/2024/06/20/pictograph-cave-state-park/</a></li> <li>• </li> <li>• </li> </ul> <p>The metric was met, and Visit Billings will continue this objective.</p>
<p>Paid Media:</p> <p>Objectives:</p>	<p>Successful metrics include successful execution of campaign(s), site engagement, site visits, and downloads of visitor guide.</p>	<p>KPI April 2023- September 2023.</p> <p>April 2022-September 2022</p> <p><b>EVENTS LANDING PAGE VISITS.</b></p>	<p>The metrics were met. The objectives will continue.</p> <p>Visit Billings launched the Outsiders Campaign, which has been one of the top performing campaigns Visit Billings has seen. Inviting visitors to enjoy the Outsider spirit that built Billings. The narrative focused on what makes Billings unique.</p>

- Develop a new spring/summer campaign, targeting both drive and flight markets. Utilize data from previous campaigns to help guide and build creative.
- Visit Billings will target audiences who offer strong reach and site engagement. On top of contextually relevant content placement, buyers will use behavioral segments to narrow the target ensuring the right message gets in front of the right user.
- Objective includes driving site traffic and building awareness via search, search-discovery, native/display, and Meta.
- Drive unique and repeat traffic to the website and subpages with the 2023 warm season campaign strategy that leverages digital and video-driven channels with Be an Outsider/Made for Outsiders campaign

Also, for Paid Media:

- Meeting and Convention Marketing through Cvent.
- Sports Marketing and Sales through Integrated Media Marketing (IMM)
- International/Group Tour Marketing through Great American West Cooperative Marketing Program

Visit Billings will look to meet or exceed success from previous warm season campaign Key Performance Metrics:

2022 Key Performance Metrics

Spring/Summer - Warm Season National Advertising - GART

- Traffic to website was 285,717
- 22,829,512 impressions delivered
- 222,519 activities generated
- Display CTR was 0.09% (benchmark for Travel/Tourism is 0.05%)
- Video completion rate averaged 95.14% (benchmark is 87%)

Website

- Traffic to website was 391,674
- Average Session Duration: 1:42
- 32,665 click to partner pages
- Visitor Guide views: 4,571
- Visitor Guide requests: 1,143
- E-Newsletter Sign ups: 257
- Top Markets:

- Chicago - 41,124
- Denver - 30,464
- Dallas - 28,883
- Billings - 26,355
- Salt Lake City - 20,270

**Increase all traffic sessions during warm season campaign run from previous period to home page and subpages** using the post analysis report from buying group- The Goodway Group - and agency of record - Sunshine & Bourbon.

Metrics for success are fostered off April to September 2022 campaign insights and dashboard. However, the 2023 warm season campaign is evolving from the previously used *Great American Road Trip* (GART) to *Be an Outsider/Made for Outsiders* campaign. This new creative includes a fresh landing page so no previous data exists for the new campaign. However, the success of the former GART campaign will offer insights to the success of the new campaign. Staff seeks to maintain or exceed the following GART breakdown for the same period in 2023:

GART campaign run from 4.15.2022 through 9.15.2022 netted (eCPA: effective cost per acquisition):

Category	eCPA Activities
Landing Page GART	66,389
Landing Page Views	45,724

2023 – 16,270

2022 – 9,277

HOME PAGE LANDING PAGE VISITS

2023 – 204,604

2022 – 108,700

BREW TRAIL LANDING PAGE VISITS

2023 – 1,288

2022 – 132

VISITOR GUIDE REQUESTS

2023 – 165

2022 – 178

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN – SEARCH

Overall Metrics

211,391 Impression

11,868 Clicks

- Search delivered 7,726 conversions.
- Average Click Through Rate of 5.61%.
- “Billings MT” and “Yellowstone” drove the most impression volume.
- Top 5 locations in terms of conversions were: Wyoming, Colorado, North Dakota, Washington, and Minnesota. These top states accounted for 32% of total search conversions.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN – DISCOVERY

Overall Metrics:

608,044 Impressions

5,138 clicks

- Click Through Rate was .85%.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN – PMAX

Overalls Metrics:

68,038 Impressions

6,384 Clicks

- Launched in July to replace the Discover campaign which wasn't performing as strong.

“To us, the best people in the world are outsiders. People who embrace pure, unencumbered Montana in all its forms. Rock walls. Mighty rivers. Mountains stretching into big, blue skies. But it's also people who go against the grain and believe that normal just isn't good enough. People who crave boldness and authenticity, rather than settling for the same old. Billings was built on that outsider spirit. That despite appearances and naysayers, no climb was too steep. No trail was too rocky. No burger was too juicy. On the idea of staying true to our roots is more important that fitting in with everyone and everything else. That's what is great about Billings. We've been authentic Montana since 1882. And maybe that makes us the outsiders of the bunch. Not sure about you, but that's just fine with us. Because as we say, Forge Your Own Path.”

Visit Billings strategies focused on adults 25-65 with an annual household income of \$75,000+.

Geographic Markets:

**Primary:** Key feeder flight markets include Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Dallas. New markets added this year are Phoenix, Houston and Portland, OR. All with interest in travel to Montana and the western region of the U.S., including monuments, state and national parks, and western heritage.

**Secondary:** Regional close drive markets, *Montana (excl. city of Billings), North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho.*

Behavioral targeting on domestic travelers, those looking for a long weekend escape to their metro area, those interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises. Focusing on families with HH1 \$75K+.

Creative examples are included in the narrative document accompanying these reports.

The staff and buying agency were quick to react when the Discover campaign was not performing well. Switching tactics to test PMAx which proved to be very successful for this campaign and has continued to be a strong tool in Visit Billings campaigns.

After a successful events campaign in the wake of the 2022 flooding, Visit Billings learned that supporting the event scene in Billings provides great return on investment in growing room demand but also in being a strong partner to our community event organizers. The Events campaign has continued to grow and expand in season. Leveraging our regional visitation to enjoy the various events happening throughout the year is laying the groundwork for Billings to become a year-round destination.

The 2-wheel market continues to be an important audience for Visit Billings. With Sturgis Bike Rally being a 5 hour drive to Billings, the 2-wheel campaigns aim to invite motorcyclists to Southeast Montana and Billings to enjoy bucket list rides through Big Sky Country. Digital campaigns as well as partnerships with RoadRUNNER Motorcycle Magazine continue to be an effective way to get in front of that audience. Visit Billings will continue to make these niche audience a priority.

The goals and objectives for paid media were met. Visit Billings will continue to drive traffic to VisitBillings.com to build visitation through paid media campaigns.



Page view	33,164.6
Spring Road Trip - Page View	28,483.55
Visit Billings GART Landing Page	7,542
Visit Billings Landing Page	7,491
Events - Page view	6,638.38
IP2139433_Visit Billings Event Page	3,212
GART- Landing Page	2,246
Landing Page Homepage	1,670

#### Additional Paid Media Metrics:

-Continue placements and marketing package with Cvent to help elevate Billings as meetings and conference destination booking at least 25 meetings and servicing 20 meeting.

-Work with IMM to garner leads for sports events bookings and foster tournament owner relationships helping book, grow existing, or retain at least 30 sports events in Billings.

-Continue with Great American West buys to achieve maximum exposure in the following international markets: UK, Germany, Benelux, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, and the Nordics.

- PMAx delivered by increasing the conversion volume by 114% in the first month.

#### NATIONAL CAMPAIGN - NATIVE DISPLAY

##### Overall Metrics

11,079,661 Impressions

12,089 Clicks

Denver drove the most landing page conversions for the fly campaign.

#### NATIONAL CAMPAIGN SOCIAL – FLY

##### Overall Metrics

710,299 Impressions

30,610 Clicks

- CTR of 6.28%. Well above the benchmark of .99%
- Engagement rate was 65.8 %.
- Facebook Video Feeds accounted for 72% of all landing page views and had a CTR of 7.57%.

#### NATIONAL CAMPAIGN SOCIAL – DRIVE

##### Overall Metrics

605,734 Impression

16,216 clicks

- CTR of 3.93%. Well above the benchmark of .99%.
- Engagement rate was 97.4%.

#### NATIONAL CAMPAIGN – PINTEREST

##### Overall Metrics

873,933 Impressions

231,518 Users Reached

4,935 Pin Clicks

#### TWO-WHEEL CAMPAIGN

##### Overall Metrics

3,746,517 Impressions

5,459 Clicks

#### 2023 Key Performance Metrics

		<p>Website Spring/Summer April 1 – September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traffic to the website was 348,817</li> <li>Average Session Duration: :49</li> <li>Engagement Rate: 90.74%</li> <li>Pageviews per session: 2.44</li> <li>E-Newsletter signups: 276</li> <li>Top Markets</li> <li>Denver</li> <li>Dallas</li> <li>Chicago</li> <li>Houston</li> <li>Billings</li> <li>Phoenix</li> </ul>	
<p>Joint Ventures:</p> <p>Objective: Identify joint venture opportunities with Brand MT and/or other Regions/CVBs to partner and elevate mutual goals to attract visitors to destination(s) and/or increase awareness of travel to a destination(s).</p> <p>Visit Billings typically partners with Glacier Country Tourism, Red Lodge CVB, Destination Missoula, and Visit Southeast Montana as well as Brand MT on projects that can be executed as joint venture opportunities.</p> <p>Visit Billings is selective of joint venture opportunities with Brand MT as they vary from year to year, yet it's important to have budget ready if/when an appropriate offering is made available by the Brand MT team. At the same time, opportunities like the Visit Southeast Montana/Visit Billings MSP take-over from spring of 2022, resulted from a collaboration after a standard meeting with VSEMT and VB staff in fall of 2021. These are such opportunities that play out during a fiscal year and are usually not yet known or available at the creation of a budget in Q3 or Q4 of a fiscal year.</p>	<p>Success will be measured by engaging with Brand MT, Regions, and/or CVBs based on joint venture opportunities that align with Visit Billings strategies.</p> <p>Visit Billings staff will collaborate with four (4) Montana DMO partners and Brand MT/Hoffman York (based on FY24 offerings that would align with Visit Billings marketing strategies) on opportunities that are identified for collaboration during FY24.</p> <p>Visit Billings staff will actively pursue partnerships with at least two (2) local businesses, venues, and/or industry leaders where collaborations with such stakeholders are feasible for strategy and/or mission execution. Additional KPIs can be established once opportunities are identified.</p>	<p>Visit Billings engaged in joint venture efforts with Brand MT in spring 2024 including a \$15,000 digital placement with Medium Giant.</p> <p>Joint Venture assets were created for Sojern, Jun Group, and Pinterest.</p> <p>The commitment is reflected here.</p> <p><b>Sojern</b></p> <p>Display, Native - \$10k Package</p> <p>April 22<sup>nd</sup> – June 21<sup>st</sup></p> <p>\$5000</p> <p><b>Jun Group</b></p> <p>Value Exchange Display – \$10k Package</p> <p>April 22<sup>nd</sup> – June 21<sup>st</sup></p> <p>\$5000</p> <p><b>Pinterest</b></p> <p>Promoted Pin - \$10k Package</p> <p>April 22<sup>nd</sup> – June 21<sup>st</sup></p> <p>\$5000</p> <p>Visit Billings made buys for print placement in Glacier Country, Destination Missoula, Visit Red Lodge and Visit Southeast Montana Guides.</p>	<p>The metrics are reported in the DMO Plan Attachements. The Metrics were successful and Visit Billings will continue the Joint Venture Objectives.</p> <p>Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will continue to be considered. Opportunities to team up and grow visitation to the southeast region as a whole equates to wins for Billings.</p>
<p>International Marketplace:</p> <p>Objective: Grow and/or maintain relationships with international tour operators to support Billings stakeholders.</p>	<p>Metrics for Success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend IPW 2024</li> <li>Attend IRU 2024</li> <li>Attend ACGI 2023 (private fund expense)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attended IPW 2024 in Los Angeles and took 42 appointments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The objective is to build relationships to grow room demand, attendance of these shows and hosting FAM tours assists with this Metric. The objective will continue.</p> <p>Travel and Tradeshow continue to be an important piece of the International and Group Marketplace for Visit Billings. The relationships built over the years at IPW,</p>

<p>it is important for Visit Billings to remain competitive in this segment. Visit Billings plans to attend IPW, International Roundup, and ACGI to help foster efforts to maintain and grow this segment of visitation to Billings.</p> <p>It is important for Visit Billings staff to maintain relationships with international tour operators so overseas visitors who have ranked sightseeing, fine dining, and national parks/ monuments as major draws in deciding where to spend time while visiting the United States keep Billings top-of-mind as post-pandemic travel habits emerge.</p> <p>Visit Billings will work with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to remain relevant in the international travel market and to maintain use of current product in the destination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host tour operator fams with Brand MT as allotted or available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Attended IRU 2024 in Casper, Wyoming and took 44 appointments.</li> <li>◦ Hosted post fam following event in partnership with Southeast Montana.</li> <li>◦ Attended ACGI 2023 in Boise, Idaho. (private fund expense).</li> </ul>	<p>IRU, and ACGI help build tours that result in room nights for Billings lodging facilities.</p> <p>Visit Billings in partnership with Visit Southeast Montana hosted a familiarization tour post IRU in Casper. Four international tour operators explored the Southeast Montana region and learned more about where they can send their guests. The opportunity to host international visitors in partnership with the state is important to Visit Billings and something the organization will continue to support.</p> <p>Visit Billings will continue to attend IPW as well as ACGI, to continue building relationships in the international marketplace.</p>
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## DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$98,497.00	19.82	\$103,948.60	105.5
Agency Services	\$36,000.00	7.25	\$30,000.00	83.3
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$33,386.00	6.72	\$26,536.79	79.5
Education/Outreach	\$4,000.00	0.81	\$1,661.06	41.5
Joint Venture	\$25,000.00	5.03	\$30,360.00	121.4
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,000.00	0.2	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$152,374.00	30.67	\$163,272.41	107.2
Marketing Personnel	\$75,100.00	15.11	\$73,797.29	98.3
Research	\$37,000.00	7.45	\$37,996.00	102.7
Travel/Trade Shows	\$6,500.00	1.31	\$6,321.10	97.2
Visitor Services	\$27,000.00	5.43	\$21,364.64	79.1
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$1,000.00	0.2	\$0.00	0
	\$496,857.00	100.00	\$495,257.89	

## Narrative Evaluation

FY24 provided new challenges than years past for the team, stakeholders, partners, and the marketing and sales strategies outlined for Visit Billings as a Destination Leadership Organization (DLO).

Smit Travel Research reports, which offer benchmarks Visit Billings' uses to evaluate the citywide performance of hotels and motels in the city of Billings, reflected a slightly down year in room demand. Citywide room demand decreased 3.7% over 2022 (Smith Travel Research (STR)). As 2021 and 2022 were record years for many of Billings Lodging Facilities, the staff expected to see a ceiling to that success as more of the nation's largest cities returned to the fold in competing for visitation and visitors began to feel comfortable in busier destinations again. 2023 proved to be that year.

Visit Billings staff monitors monthly and weekly STR reports which offer insights into trends as well as direct impacts of certain meetings, sporting events, or leisure events on the destination, demand was only briefly impacted and seemed to rebound well. STR reports allowed Visit Billings staff to monitor and continue to track data sets including Occupancy, Room Demand, and Average Daily Rate to help foster strengths and successes of each campaign's impact. This is a continued strong investment of Visit Billings (Billings CVB) funds.

Annually, the team works to witness an increase in room demand by 3% in a running 12-months of the year which Billings met in FY23 at 6.1% growth. For reference, the following are room demand percentages for running 12-month periods for previous years and the year being reported here which was 2023:

- 2017: 0.6%
- 2018: 4.9%
- 2019: -1.9%
- 2020: -26.6%
- 2021: 34.1%
- 2022: 6.1%
- 2023: -3.7%

Billings CVB funds support the Visit Billings contract with Smith Travel Research for the monthly and weekly citywide reports. This investment is key and remains active in the current FY25.

## **PAID MEDIA**

### **OUTSIDERS CAMPAIGN**

Visit Billings launched the Outsiders Campaign, which has been one of the top performing campaigns Visit Billings has seen. Inviting visitors to enjoy the Outsider spirit that built Billings. The narrative focused on what makes Billings unique.

"To us, the best people in the world are outsiders. People who embrace pure, unencumbered Montana in all its forms. Rock walls. Mighty rivers. Mountains stretching into big, blue skies. But it's also people who go against the grain and believe that normal just isn't good enough. People who crave boldness and authenticity, rather than settling for the same old. Billings was built on that outsider spirit. Despite appearances and naysayers, no climb was too steep. No trail was too rocky. No burger was too juicy. On the idea of staying true to our roots is more important than fitting in with everyone and everything else. That's what is great about Billings. We've been authentic Montana since 1882. And maybe that makes us the outsiders of the bunch. Not sure about you, but that's just fine with us. Because as we say, Forge Your Own Path."

Visit Billings strategies focused on adults 25-65 with an annual household income of \$75,000+.

### **Geographic Markets:**

**Primary:** Key feeder flight markets include Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Dallas. New markets added this year are Phoenix, Houston and Portland, OR. All with interest in travel to Montana and the western region of the U.S., including monuments, state and national parks, and western heritage.

**Secondary:** Regional close drive markets, *Montana (excl. city of Billings), North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho.*

Behavioral targeting on domestic travelers, those looking for a long weekend escape to their metro area, those interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises. Focusing on families with HHI \$75K+.

The staff and buying agency were quick to react when the Discover campaign was not performing well. Switching tactics to test PMAX which proved to be very successful for this campaign and has continued to be a strong tool in Visit Billings campaigns. All goals were met, and the campaign was deemed successful by staff, buyers, and the agency of record.

Metrics achieved were reported for the Outsiders campaign in the Webgrants section/columns.

**Creative examples for the Outsiders Campaign in attached narrative version.**

**Fun video accessible here:**

<https://youtu.be/cTZ6YAI4QJE?si=P9jiORTQnLol25xx>

<https://youtu.be/2GbbJ2XbkMs?si=EVdTswAuLtBhOdVI>

**More here:** <https://www.visitbillings.com>

## **REGIONAL EVENTS CAMPAIGN TO COMPLIMENT NATIONAL STRATEGIES**

After a successful events campaign in the wake of the 2022 flooding, Visit Billings learned that supporting the event scene in Billings provides great return on investment in growing room demand but also in being a strong partner to our community event organizers. The Events campaign has continued to grow and expand in season. Leveraging our regional visitation to enjoy the various events happening throughout the year is laying the groundwork for Billings to become a year-round destination.

## **REGIONAL EVENT CAMPAIGN - TARGET AUDIENCE**

Visit Billings strategies focused on adults 25+ who have an annual household income of \$75k+.

Focus on couples, friends, and empty-nesters eager to travel as well as families looking for weekend and week-long getaways. Target in-market behaviors for Beer Trail, Events, What's on, Shows, Outdoor Enthusiasts, Sightseeing, Sporting Events and Farmers Markets. They've traveled to Montana in the past 12 months.

**Geo-Targeting:** Regional drive markets, within in-state and neighboring states:

- Montana (excluding city of Billings)
- North Dakota
- South Dakota
- Wyoming
- Idaho

**Creative examples for the events campaign in attached narrative version.**

## **April 17 – October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, Web Traffic**

**All Traffic:**

- 343,020 SESSIONS
- 93.73% ENGAGEMENT RATE
- 3.21 PAGEVIEWS PER USER
- :48 AVG. SESSION DURATION
- 256 NEWSLETTER SIGNUPS
- <https://www.visitbillings.com/events>

Top Metro Markets for all traffic during this campaign included **Denver, Dallas, Chicago, Houston, Billings, Phoenix**

Other paid media efforts for FY24 that proved successful and will be part of the mix in future investments included:

- Yellowstone Journal
- RoadRUNNER
- Great American West
- Montana destination visitor guides like Destination Missoula and Glacier Country Tourism guidebooks
- Visit USA Parks

Highlighting the Visit USA Parks investments, the first of which ran April 2023 – October 2023. The campaign was a success as impressions and clicks both exceeded campaign deliverables of 300,000 and 5,000 respectively. Cost per click of \$0.12 is well below the travel/hospitality industry average of \$0.63. This investment focused on outdoor and in-town experiences for all seasons of visits.

The second campaign was positive as impressions and leads both exceeded campaign deliverables of 75,000 and 2,000, respectively. The cost per click of \$0.20 was well below the travel/hospitality industry average of \$0.63. The CTA Ads were the best performing content, followed by social stories, and itinerary ads. This investment focused on a partnership with our nearby State Parks. This year we also tested the international markets with this buy, which resulted in Germany being the top international performing market.

Of course, all placements are in partnership with the Visit Billings agency of record Sunshine and Bourbon and buyer Goodway Group who assist with strategies, briefs, creative, etc. Billings CVB funds also support the Visit Billings Leisure Marketing Director's position.

As far as leads are concerned, Visit Billings staff foster leads. Additionally with the Yellowstone Journal guide requests, visitor guides are mailed to thousands of prospective visitors annually using Billings CVB funds for fulfillment/postage. Speaking of fulfillment, contracts with Certified Folder remain a top priority to help make visitor guides available. Design and print of the 70,000 Visit Billings visitor guidebooks are paid for with private funds then Billings CVB funds support the shipping and fulfillment. It is a strong reciprocal means to manage the project, publications, and fulfillment.

One other proof of performance worth noting is the continued efforts in the two-wheel or motorcycle market for Billings.

## **TWO-WHEEL DRIVE MARKET**

This market is extremely important to Billings. Billings is a proven stop along the itineraries of motorcycle enthusiasts across North America for many reasons including access to amazing byways and rides as well as proximity to Sturgis.

The Beartooth Scenic Byway continues to help grow the two-wheeled market. The 68-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 212 has been described as "the perfect definition of what a great bike ride should be" by National Geographic and is consistently in the Top 10 best motorcycle rides in the U.S. The Great American Road Trip campaign builds awareness of the destination's proximity to the most scenic route into Yellowstone National Park, aligning with the 2-wheeled market which is drawn to curvy roads, riding long distances, and experiencing the epic journey.

National parks are key drivers of visitation in this segment as is the destination's position along the I-90 and I-94 corridor to and from Sturgis every summer. FY24 plans included additional sponsored content development and niche digital targeting of the two-wheel audience.

Visit Billings saw success in drawing the two-wheel audience with publications like RoadRUNNER Magazine and having a presence at Sturgis Bike Rally. In addition to the paid strategies, Visit Billings hosted two RoadRUNNER journalists on an 8-day itinerary of the area to help produce a video that would assist in future buys with RoadRUNNER Magazine.

## **DISPLAY RESULTS for RoadRUNNER:**

### **Promoted Website Editorial**

- Published 7/21/24 and highlighted at the top as featured for 1 month.
  - <https://www.roadrunner.travel/tours/drop-your-kickstand-in-billings-mt/> (*live sharable link*)
    - Email stats: 69,900 sent, 21,450 opens, 133 link clicks
    - Web traffic: 14,500 visits on web

### **Custom Newsletter**

- Sent 5/2/24
  - <https://www.roadrunner.travel/email/9c303da4-8631-4b69-83a9-27d51fd8492e/> (*private view link*)
    - Email stats: 60,800 sent, 21,750 opens, 251 link clicks

### **Newsletter Banners**

- April 2024

- 4/3 RoadRUNNER Weekly
    - Email stats: 63,300 sent, 23,400 opens, 86 link clicks
- 4/10 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats: 61,100 sent, 21,700 opens, 126 link clicks
- 4/17 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats 62,900 sent, 22,900 opens, 145 link clicks
- 4/24 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats: 60,900 sent, 21,300 opens, 53 link clicks
  - July 2024
    - 7/3 RoadRUNNER Weekly
      - Email Stats: 61,300 sent, 19,200 opens, 154 link clicks
- 7/10 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email Stats: 61,900 sent, 20,730 opens, 82 link clicks
- 7/17 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats: 59,700 sent, 18,880 opens, 76 link clicks
- 7/24 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats: 69,900 sent, 20,500 opens, 39 link clicks
- 7/31 RoadRUNNER Weekly
  - Email stats: 69,430 sent, 20,900 opens, 68 link clicks

## Social Posts

- Shared 7/17
  - [https://www.instagram.com/p/C9iQwWRtbO4/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P0xleHRuA2FibQlXMAABHQ8KB-a0aVGjboV5RD\\_T6jmEvH6KRyhYFFtsOjvrDGxbTd815TN9Aju0sA\\_aem\\_0UlkaSNiNvwuCqQb9pnhIA](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9iQwWRtbO4/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P0xleHRuA2FibQlXMAABHQ8KB-a0aVGjboV5RD_T6jmEvH6KRyhYFFtsOjvrDGxbTd815TN9Aju0sA_aem_0UlkaSNiNvwuCqQb9pnhIA)
    - IG Impressions: 2,437
    - IG Engagement: 39
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid0h1W2KtoyNUDxWP4x7muqVf4aeFVHGiab6tbb87f3imxo9gWpVgdAVwYyuX4PeCVwl>
  - FB Impressions: 3,850
  - FB Engagement: 19
  - Shared 8/5
    - [https://www.instagram.com/p/C-R3K8oMF3Z/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P\\_5leHRuA2FibQlXMAABHdT\\_s8eWAbvATWrxYzADtjWouXWDXTYeMjM1SzQnV88PxLOEh\\_T9inDUdg\\_aem\\_jl8JfvgloJBkM07reWv0AA](https://www.instagram.com/p/C-R3K8oMF3Z/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P_5leHRuA2FibQlXMAABHdT_s8eWAbvATWrxYzADtjWouXWDXTYeMjM1SzQnV88PxLOEh_T9inDUdg_aem_jl8JfvgloJBkM07reWv0AA)
      - IG Impressions: 2,400
      - IG Engagement: 46
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid0x4XWU2ALkvU4HrRQDJwtQCSqnL6d5ZLxu9zrLM2swYpuobkHwwA5B3wu5u2GGGGGI>
  - FB Impressions: 3,950
  - FB Engagement: 21
  - Shared 8/29
    - [https://www.instagram.com/p/C\\_Q1ROft4sM/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QldleHRuA2FibQlXMAABHf16iZxewayrLYhAiP\\_nrQgpduREIs4mgW5e9wecfxTz7NX\\_boMJ5q7Vig\\_aem\\_uAQKzuBHBgKZDLq-FBNU4A](https://www.instagram.com/p/C_Q1ROft4sM/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QldleHRuA2FibQlXMAABHf16iZxewayrLYhAiP_nrQgpduREIs4mgW5e9wecfxTz7NX_boMJ5q7Vig_aem_uAQKzuBHBgKZDLq-FBNU4A)
      - IG Impressions: 2,850
      - IG Engagement: 33
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid09eiTfRpETx4Tde8NRCuNQ3d94KVJT3HvbzwYoACXPeAwxtYutEJ3yZVe9eCn4bH4I>
  - FB Impressions: 5,160
  - FB Engagement: 20
  - Shared 9/20
    - [https://www.instagram.com/p/DAJi0OztLrC/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QM5leHRuA2FibQlXMAABHYwUHM0\\_Yflq-yOH7hMKs8YwbkhFDpoGpFTmOrdKuWTKolQFctR6a0D0qA\\_aem\\_nbwLKUsKTigMqmjNtgSbmw](https://www.instagram.com/p/DAJi0OztLrC/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QM5leHRuA2FibQlXMAABHYwUHM0_Yflq-yOH7hMKs8YwbkhFDpoGpFTmOrdKuWTKolQFctR6a0D0qA_aem_nbwLKUsKTigMqmjNtgSbmw)
      - IG Impressions: 2,300
      - IG Engagement: 28
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid02VsJvLJASVKGw3nHVQKt8go4iChQoNXq3YBtDiYjo2eadAJ6UGQpnFdcSBMh3CoUDI>
  - FB Impressions: 4,100
  - FB Engagement: 25

## Magazine

### 2024

Rate Base: 67,000

Readership: 205,521

**Creative examples for RoadRUNNER in attached narrative version.**

In addition to the RoadRUNNER Partnership, Visit Billings ran a digital campaign during Sturgis Bike Rally as well as in spring 2024 to drive summer traffic. The campaigns were deemed successful delivering 3,746,517 impressions and 5,459 activities. The campaign also tested Digital Out Of Home buys which delivers 1,009,513 of those impressions. These DOOH impressions were delivered through Taxi & Rideshare TV, Gas Stations, Billboards, Subways & Public Transit, Urban Panels, & Convenience Stores.

### FY24 PR RECAP

Earned media is a critical part of the marketing mix, as it represents a source of trusted information to consumers and captivates their attention with relevant content. Whether it be articles in their favorite magazine or Instagram posts of their favorite travel influencer, travelers look to these sources of information for travel inspiration.

Additionally, Visit Billings hosted a Yellowstone National Park VIP media tour, which included writers representing publications such as *Matador Network*, *Lonely Planet*, *Food & Wine*, and *Paste*. Coverage resulting from this media tour will represent an additional 5.5 million impressions and is anticipated to be published in early 2025, when many consumers will be making their summer vacation plans.

As part of the outreach to writers for the Yellowstone media tour, several journalists and writers who were invited yet unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts indicated they would be interested in a press visit to Billings in the future. This includes writers from *Men's Health*, *Thrillist* and the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as influencers including *Planet with Sara*, *Ricky Roams* and *Kids are a Trip*.

In addition to inviting media and influencers to Billings first-hand to experience the destination, the team met with writers in-person and virtually, including journalists from *National Geographic Traveler* and *Forbes*.

The Visit Billings team continues to build upon the relationships we've cultivated with media and influencers to generate even more coverage going forward. These efforts include quarterly "what's new in Billings" press releases, ongoing virtual meetings, and fulfilling media requests for information.

### SUMMARY OF FY24 PR EFFORTS

#### SEASONAL AND EVENT PITCHES

Information about seasonal travel to Billings as well as events taking place within the city at different times throughout the year were shared with regional media and influencers. These events and travel ideas were bucketed into three seasonal categories: fall, winter and spring/summer. The result of this outreach was additional interest from journalists and influencers in a virtual briefing and/or future press visit.

#### PRESS VISIT(S)

In September 2023, Visit Billings hosted Traveling Mel to cover our annual Ales for Trails event and to promote fall at Montana's Trailhead. In exchange the organization received a blog post, social content, as well as photos to add to the Visit Billings photo library.

Hosted RoadRUNNER Magazine June 2024 for an 8-day familiarization tour of Billings and the greater area. The host resulted in an article to be published in early spring 2025 touching on the Shamrock tour of the area. This also resulted in a couple of videos which Visit Billings will use to promote the 2-wheel market for years to come.

Built relationships with Amelia Edelman and John Sizemore for a hosted trip in August of 2024. Amelia writes for *Lonely Planet*, *Travel & Leisure*, *US News & World* and has a collective impression range of 3,700,000. John Sizemore writes for *Past* and *Matador Network* and has a collective impression range of 1,250,000. Both visited Billings in August 2024.

Billings was featured in *SIP Magazine* in April 2024. *SIP Magazine* is a Northwest based publication. Other features included *Wherever Family* (a blog), *USA Today* and *Men's Journal*. Collectively these had just over 5 million impressions.



Articles resulting from PR Efforts are reflected in the Webgrants section/columns.

## **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Along with direct outreach to the media, additional activities from the public relations plan called for the updating of the VisitBillings.com press page to encourage stories and press visit requests from media. The update was successful, and the team has seen successful requests from high performing journalists such as Amelia Edelman through this tool.

## **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Additionally, the overall quality of FY24 earned media coverage was strong. One of the goals of this earned media strategy was to create a scoresheet to help benchmark and measure the quality of articles. The team introduced the Barcelona Principles to result analysis.

Visit Billings' earned media campaign built upon the success of the FY 2023 program, generating significant placements in top-tier publications including *Sip Magazine*, *USA Today*, *Men's Journal* and *RoadRUNNER*. These placements generated more than 5.4 million impressions and an earned media score of 79.2 (Goal: 70) on the Barcelona Principles scale.

## **JOINT VENTURE EFFORTS**

Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will continue to be considered. Opportunities to team up and grow visitation to the southeast region as a whole equates to wins for Billings.

## **THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET**

Yellowstone National Park and Little Bighorn Battlefield, along with the Lewis and Clark Trail, are key attractions positioning Billings as a trailhead to access Montana's iconic sites. These points of interest make Billings a group-friendly destination for the domestic or international traveler. Billings' proximity to the Beartooth Scenic Byway, as well as the northeast and north entrances to Yellowstone National Park, position the city well as a fantastic stop for a group tour itinerary.

Travel and Tradeshow continue to be an important piece of the International and Group Marketplace for Visit Billings. The relationships built over the years at IPW, IRU, and ACGI help build tours that result in room nights for Billings lodging facilities.

Visit Billings in partnership with Visit Southeast Montana hosted a familiarization tour post IRU in Casper. Four international tour operators explored the Southeast Montana region and learned more about where they can send their guests. The opportunity to host international visitors in partnership with the state is important to Visit Billings and something the organization will continue to support.

Visit Billings attends ACGI each year to help build relationships with group tour operators and tour receptive. In 2023 the event took place in Boise. Visit Billings is proud to be the 2025 ACGI host. Attendance of this event is done with private funds.

IPW and IRU are supports with Billings CVB funds as well as placements and partnerships with Great American West.

## **AIR SERVICE**

Supporting Air Service expansion is a priority for Visit Billings as direct route growth fosters tourism success. From a destination marketing and management point of view, any lack of consistent air capacity or high fares can negatively impact a traveler's decision to make Billings part of their itinerary. For Billings to continue to compete as a tourism destination, air service support is critical. In FY24 Visit Billings staff actively supported the Billings Air Service Committee by serving on the marketing committee as well as participating in 3 airline headquarters visits and the Mead & Hunt Air Service Conference to meet with airlines about expanding service to Billings Logan International Airport (BIL). As a result of those meetings Billings welcomed Sun Country seasonal direct service to Minneapolis and Allegiant returned their season direct service to LAX. Visit Billings assisted in marketing these new routes by partnering with BIL for marketing buys within the LA Dodgers Yearbook.

Billings was awarded a SCASD (Small Community Air Service Development) Federal Grant to secure additional service to LAX or SFO. Visit Billings is committed to promoting that new flight market when the route becomes available.

**Creative examples for air service promotion in attached narrative version.**

## **CONCLUSION**

As previously noted, FY24 was a down year for Billings as a destination, however the Visit Billings team hasn't stopped growing and working to build demand for the lodging facilities. While the product in the Billings destination 'store' is a constant conversation and priority together with other community leadership organizations, along with destination stewardship and long-term strategic planning, at the heart of what the DLO does focuses on marketing and sales. At the start of the new Fiscal Year, Visit Billings onboarded a Group Sales Manager position, which will focus on growing group tours, international visitation, and meeting and convention sales. The Visit Billings team is working to diversify the visitation to help build year-round visitation. Destination marketing remains key to the success of mission for our partners. Whether the leisure market or sports tourism and meeting recruitment segments, marketing is critical to growing visitation. Stewardship, long-term strategies, development, and management are absolutely part of our core priorities, but ensuring we are boasting about Billings and driving traffic to the destination to create repeat visitors, is what the team does best to support mission, stakeholders, and partners. Visit Billings is proud to work closely with Brand MT, the Tourism Advisory Council, state, regional, and national colleagues, and local partners to foster visitation to Montana's largest city. Billings CVB funds are extremely important and appreciated.

## ***DMO Plan Attachments***

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<b>Description</b>	<b>File Name</b>	<b>File Size</b>
Regional Events Campaign Report	2023 BMT Regional Events Campaign Post Analysis Report Nov 2023.pdf	7.1 MB
Fall Winter Campaign	Copy of 2023_24 Fall_Winter Campaign Post Analysis Report (1).pdf	5.7 MB
FY24 Digital Two Wheel Final Report	FY 24 Digital Campaign Report two wheel.pdf	661 KB
Great American West Partnership	Great American West FY24 Q2 Report (003).pdf	4.4 MB
Narrative for Completion Reports	Narrative For Completion Reports 2024.pdf	1.6 MB
National Campaign	National 2023 Campaign Post Analysis Report (1).pdf	7.9 MB
National Parks Journal Final Report	National Park Journal Report.pdf	103 KB
Visit USA Parks Fall 2023 Final Report	Visit USA Parks Final Report_Billings 2023 - fall.pdf	996 KB
Visit USA Parks Final Report for 2024 buy.	Visit USA Parks Final Report_Billings 2024.pdf	674 KB
JV April Report	Visit_Billings_April_2024_Preformance_Report.pptx.pdf	253 KB
JV June Report	Visit_Billings_June_2024_Preformance_Report - JV.pdf	244 KB
JV May Report	Visit_Billings_May_2024_Preformance_Report.pptx.pdf	227 KB