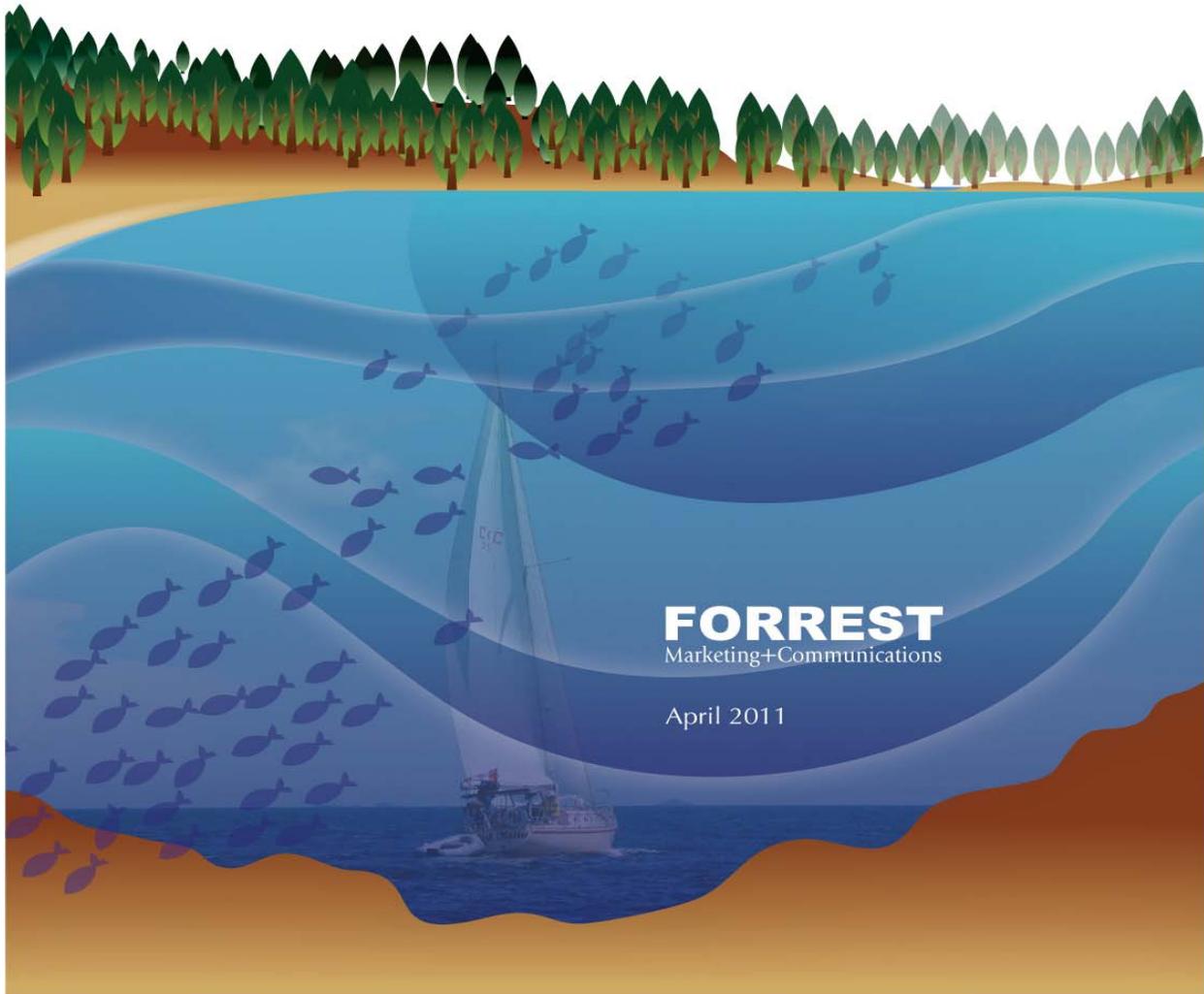


**A MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN  
FOR THE NORTH CHANNEL MARINE TOURISM COUNCIL**



**FORREST**  
Marketing+Communications

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## Executive Summary

The North Channel Marine Tourism Council (NCMTC) was formed in 1987 to help the members and business partners to increase tourism on the waterways of Lake Huron's North Channel. Since that time, government funding for the Council has ended and the Council now relies on memberships and grants to operate and promote the region. The Council currently has no staff, relying on the dedication of volunteers.

The Council's 2010 Strategic Plan identified the need to develop a three-year marketing plan to develop partnerships, attract new members and retain existing members, develop consistent messages, create packages, increase alignment with other relevant programs and overall increase awareness of and support for the NCMTC.

This marketing plan will enable the NCMTC examine its internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats that exist and set practical marketing goals. It can also use this plan as key tool for soliciting funding. The issues of the lack of staffing and lack of funding have been taken into account in the creation of this plan.

The NCMTC region has significant strengths and opportunities. It offers "the best freshwater boating in the world". Its other strengths include the beauty of area, uncongested, clear water, secluded and protected areas, unique geography and interesting and welcoming communities. These strengths should be highlighted in key messaging.

The key opportunities that have been identified— strengthening the brand and the web site, increased marketing and municipal partnerships, seeking new human and financial resources, product development and gathering data—form the basis of this plan.

Lack of awareness, poor web site SEO and the region's reputation as a destination primarily for bigger boats have also been addressed.

Strengthening the brand can be achieved by calling the region "Lake Huron's North Channel" rather than just "North Channel" as well as modifying the logo slightly to appeal to owners of smaller boats and to indicate the land side of the experience. Consistency in key marketing messages will also contribute to a stronger brand.

Descriptive, compelling text and photos that capture the beauty and unique attributes of the region should be incorporated into a professionally-designed lure brochure. The "look and feel" of the brochure should be echoed in any advertisements that are produced as well as the web site and the trade show display unit.

The web site is viewed as the cornerstone of the NCTMC's marketing efforts and, as such, a separate report on search engine optimization (SEO), content building and web marketing has been included in this plan. All advertising should drive consumers to the NCTMC web site.

Marketing partnerships should be explored with the region's travel associations (Algoma Country and Rainbow Country), the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership (OTMP), Boating Ontario and other Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's) to realize economies of scale, capitalize on low cost/no cost opportunities and extend the marketing reach.

Fifteen municipalities in the region are members of the NCTMC but there are a number of other non-member municipalities in the region who also benefit from the very significant economic impact of boating in Lake Huron's North Channel, including those that do not have marinas. It is recommended that a presentation on the economic impact of boating in the region be prepared and presented to all municipal councils to encourage them to continue to be or become members. With this in mind, information on the economic impact of boating is included in this report. Because there is no data specific to this region, it is recommended that this data be gathered, compiled and shared with stakeholders over the next three years to ensure their ongoing support and commitment.

To attract additional members, strengthening the "call to action" on the web site and the membership handout is similarly recommended to include information on economic impact and the importance of working together to promote the region.

The plan recommends seeking the support of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) to acquire a Youth Intern for a one-year term. This full time position should assist the NCTMC to move forward with all of the first-year recommendations contained in this plan.

The plan also discusses the need to develop product such as packages and tours and in-market promotions such as a passport program.

In addition to the U.S. market which has been traditionally a strong market for the NCTMC, the following are markets and customers that are believed to offer good potential:

- Local/regional boaters
- Boaters from the rest of Ontario
- Boaters from Quebec
- Owners of smaller boats who trailer them to boating locations
- Personal water craft owners
- New boaters

“Best bet” markets (markets that should provide the best return on investment) are believed to be Michigan and Ohio boaters and local and regional boaters with smaller boats.

The plan recommends strategic marketing priorities over three years. In the first and second year, the emphasis is primarily on strengthening the branding and messaging of the region and beginning to develop new marketing materials, strengthening the web site, marketing and municipal partnerships, seeking additional resources, developing product and gathering data and market intelligence. Year Two also sees the roll out of a communications strategy to ensure ongoing partner buy-in, developing a boater email database and developing strategies based on survey responses from Year One. Year Three sees the addition of in-market promotions.

## Introduction

The North Channel Marine Tourism Council (NCMTC) was formed in 1987 to help the members and business partners to increase tourism on the waterways of Lake Huron’s North Channel. Its 34 members/partners include both private and public marinas that offer a range of services to boaters as well as municipalities and other businesses.

The North Channel is the boating region of navigable waterways along the north shore of Lake Huron from Killarney to Sault. Ste. Marie including Manitoulin Island, Cockburn Island, St. Joseph Island and Drummond Island.

The vision statement of the North Channel Marine Tourism Council is:

*Boater-friendly communities and busy full service marinas providing excellent customer service across the North Channel where boaters experience the best fresh water cruising waterway in the world.*

The NCMTC mission statement is:

*The mission of the North Channel Marine Tourism Council is a not-for-profit association of marina operators and business partners located between Killarney and Sault Ste. Marie that provides support, information and training for its members and collaborates with other tourism groups in order to promote and increase tourism in the area.*

At this time, the NCMTC is run totally by volunteers and it operates with limited funding. These realities have been taken into account in the development of this marketing plan. As such the plan focuses on:

1. Adopting a consistent brand and messaging.
2. Web site and SEO enhancement as the most efficient and effective means of reaching potential customers;
3. Developing and strengthening partnerships with other tourism agencies and organizations to realize economies of scale; and
4. Seeking additional financial and human resources through membership solicitation and the hiring of a youth intern.

## **Marketing Objectives**

The Council's 2010 Strategic Plan identified the need to develop a three-year marketing plan that will:

- Identify and build new partnerships for product / experience development / marketing and service delivery that are based on consumer needs.
- Improve internal / association member alignment, coordination and partnerships to increase the capacity of the industry.
- Develop cohesive and consistent messaging throughout the association / partners to reduce consumer confusion and competing communications
- Identify and develop experience packages (a plan to develop product)
- Align with and cascade from the Tourism Development and Marketing Strategy for Northern Ontario (2008-2012)
- Increase awareness, understanding and support for the North Channel programs and initiatives by partners (both in the private and public sectors) and, of vital importance, consumers and ensure alignment and cascading with Provincial initiatives

During the development of the Strategic Plan, participants spoke of wanting “a marketing plan so successful that all the various marketing groups would decide to work together” with the goal of marketing the whole area by all organizations as one.

The purpose of this marketing plan is to:

- Enable the North Channel Marine Tourism Council to look internally at the strengths and weaknesses of the products that it promotes as well as the resources that are available for promotion and development
- Allow NCMTC to look externally to fully understand the market in which it competes as well as the opportunities and threats that exist
- Set practical goals and provide achievable direction for future marketing efforts that all stakeholders can understand and support
- Serve as a key tool in obtaining funding to pursue marketing initiatives

As referenced in the introduction, a marketing plan for the NCMTC must, at least in the short term, recognize and address the issues of the lack of staffing and lack of funding as the plan will not be successful if it cannot be delivered within the constraints that currently exist.

## Situation Analysis

### SWOT Analysis

The following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis provides an overview of the external and internal factors that will guide the NCMTC’s marketing strategy. The SWOT has been developed based on discussions with NCFMTC members, a review of documents and the web site and discussions with other stakeholders.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognized as offering “the best freshwater boating in the world”</li> <li>Beauty of area</li> <li>Uncongested</li> <li>Clear water</li> <li>Protected/sheltered/secluded areas</li> <li>Range of services and facilities</li> <li>Outstanding scenery</li> <li>Unique geography</li> <li>Cultural resources</li> <li>Welcoming communities</li> <li>Range of onshore activities and attractions</li> <li>Area is well known in some markets</li> <li>Dedicated volunteers</li> <li>Some partnerships in place</li> <li>Municipal support</li> <li>New web site</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of awareness in many markets</li> <li>Lack of awareness of where “North Channel” is</li> <li>Image as location for the bigger boats</li> <li>Lack of adequate launching facilities</li> <li>Distance from large markets</li> <li>Lack of financial and human resources</li> <li>Poor search engine optimization of web site</li> <li>Limited marketing resources</li> <li>Reliance on U.S. markets</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the web site</li> <li>Reposition as destination for smaller boats/boats brought in by trailer</li> <li>Target first time boaters</li> <li>Promote land-based activities</li> <li>Market unique selling propositions (USPs) more effectively</li> <li>Packaging</li> <li>NOHFC Youth Internship program</li> <li>Outside funding availability</li> <li>Strengthen partnerships with Municipalities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant decline in U.S. traffic (border security, U.S. economy, exchange rates)</li> <li>Competition on U.S. side – full service marinas</li> <li>Fluctuating water levels</li> <li>Fuel prices</li> </ul>

<p>Increasing use of Internet as trip planning tool</p> <p>Marketing partnerships among communities (incentives, etc.)</p> <p>Look at potential of personal water craft (PWC) and kayaking markets</p> <p>Partnerships with NORTAs (Algoma Kinniwabe and Rainbow Country), province (Go Ride program and Northern Ontario Web Portal)</p> <p>Collaborate with First Nations</p> <p>Six million boaters in Canada and 3.4 million in the U.S. Great Lakes States (2009)</p> <p>Two out of five boat shoppers are first-time buyers (Canada)</p> <p>U.S. market appears to be rebounding</p> <p>Boating participation as a gateway to boat ownership</p> <p>Think outside the box (“Think outside the boat”</p> <p>Diversification</p> <p>“Frugality fatigue”</p>	
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## Capitalizing on Opportunities

In addition to enhancing the NCMTC web site, numerous other opportunities exist to strengthen the NCMTC and its marketing efforts. These include:

### Enhanced Partnerships

Opportunities exist to strengthen a number of partnerships including those with Municipalities, members, area businesses, the Northern Ontario Regional Travel Associations (NORTAs), Boating Ontario and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership (OTMP), among others.

#### Municipalities

The North Channel Marine Tourism Council’s municipal members pay an annual fee of between \$600 and \$1000 depending on dockage.

There are numerous other communities with marinas and communities that do not have marinas but who benefit from water-related tourism that are not members.

To encourage increased municipal membership it is recommended that members of the NCMTC prepare and present deputations to each community’s Municipal Council detailing the

economic impact of boating in Ontario to encourage their investment and outlining the ways in which boating tourism in the region will be promoted over the next three years.

#### Members and Area Businesses

Including the municipal members, the NCTMTC has a total of 35 members. There are opportunities to increase both the number of members as well as the partnering activities with members.

First, the “call to action” to become a member of the NCTMTC on the web site needs to be strengthened. Membership benefits are currently listed briefly in the section entitled “The North Channel Marine Tourism Council”. A separate button on the web site entitled “Join the NCMTC!” (or similar language) needs to be created to direct potential members to a page especially for them. More compelling language to explain the many benefits of becoming a member of the NCMTC needs to be utilized. The text should communicate the ideas of “strength in numbers” and “working together to promote the best freshwater boating in the world” and listing opportunities need to be better explained (How many brochures are produced and where are they distributed? How many visitors are there to the web site each year? How many welcome packages are distributed? What kinds of co-operative marketing opportunities exist?). As one stakeholder stated, “There are so many demands on everyone’s time and budgets that they have to see a reason to be involved and it will be more likely that they will be involved when they see the reason. Some will have to learn that there are benefits for the parts when the whole is healthier”. A similar approach should be taken when reworking the existing membership handout.

Members can be more actively involved in product development to increase length of stays and visitor satisfaction. If members worked together to develop appealing packages and tours, these could be promoted on the NCMTC web site. Beyond the boating experience, golfing, festivals, concerts and shopping are among the many interests of Canadian and American boaters alike. Packages and tours that appeal to these interests should be developed by the members. Requiring area businesses to become members of NCMTC in order to be included in a package or tour is recommended.

#### NORTAs

The North Channel Marine Tourism Council region falls within the territory of two travel associations, Rainbow Country Travel Association and Algoma Kinniwabe Travel Association (Algoma Country). These two associations work on behalf of their members to develop and implement tourism marketing campaigns. While the NCTMC recently became a member of both associations, they do not align themselves with these associations’ marketing strategies.

The buy-in partnership opportunities with Algoma Country include:

- Brochure distribution at the Canada Store
- Opportunity to purchase advertising in the Algoma guidebook (have been offered discounted rate)
- Website advertising (note that the site has a boating area)

For the past three years, Algoma Country has promoted the region's boating product on the website and in the guide (free double page spread) because boating is so important to this region. They receive the name of the Council, with contact information web link etc. on the AC site, and they also get a free listing in the guide. Algoma Country also handles brochure distribution through its office but for the Council only as they are the only member. They also have done a few media "fam" tours in partnership with OTMPC.

Rainbow Country handles approximately 50,000 inquiries each year and provides information to almost 90,000 travellers annually through their information centres. Membership benefits include:

- A 150-word web listing
- Free listing on [www.ontariotravel.net](http://www.ontariotravel.net)
- Access to "Plan Your Vacation" micro-site
- Free listing in the Discovery Guide
- Guide distribution at information centres and travel shows
- Display advertising opportunities
- Distribution of member brochures
- Opportunity to purchase bulk space and sell smaller spaces to members and partners

Both associations are willing to work on special projects together and to assist in preparing the funding applications for these projects. Both web sites have a significant emphasis on water-based tourism. Algoma Country also has a library of North Channel photography that it can make available for promotional uses.

### Boating Ontario

Boating Ontario runs a "Discover Boating" campaign in concert with a national campaign to encourage people to try boating, among other programs. Because the NCTMC is looking at ways of targeting new boaters, partnership opportunities with this program could be explored.

Boating Ontario provides an annual allocation of funds (\$5000) through the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership to the NCMTC.

## Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership

The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership's Northern Ontario Web Portal ([www.northernontario.travel](http://www.northernontario.travel)) is the centerpiece of the Five-Year Tourism Marketing Strategy for Northern Ontario. The Portal showcases the feelings, experiences and distinctive features of Northern Ontario's tourism offerings and serves as an over-arching promotional Internet "magnet" for Northern Ontario. The Portal's purpose is to capture interested consumers and link them to the partners' sites that then direct consumers to the points of purchase.

To ensure that content is kept fresh, dynamic and appealing, several providers across the North have been given the responsibility of providing "bundles", stories, itineraries and testimonials to the Portal on a regular basis. These Content Providers represent either a geographic region (such as Algoma Country) or a product (such as snowmobiling). For NCMTC, the appropriate content providers are Algoma Country, Rainbow Country and Boating Ontario. Training is available to develop content and there is no cost to have content posted to the Portal.

The OTMP also operates its "Go Ride" site which promotes, among other experiences, boating in Ontario. The site allows for the listing of events and posting of photos.

### **Staffing**

While the Council has achieved some successes through the work of its volunteers, a logical next step in implementing the marketing plan would be to recruit a full-time employee. The NOHFC Youth Internship Program can fund up to 50% (\$13,750) of a recent Northern Ontario graduate's salary to a maximum of \$27,500 annually (private sector employers) and up to 90% (\$24,750) of a recent Northern Ontario graduate's salary to a maximum of \$27,500 annually (public sector employers).

[http://www.mndmf.gov.on.ca/nohfc/programs/youth\\_internship\\_and\\_co-op\\_e.asp](http://www.mndmf.gov.on.ca/nohfc/programs/youth_internship_and_co-op_e.asp)

Eligible applicants include "private sector and public sector employers located in Northern Ontario involved in the following areas: health care, social services, value-added manufacturing, emerging technologies, environmental sciences, and other activities that will result in an economic or social development advantage for Northern Ontario".

FedNor also has a Youth Internship program for persons aged 30 or under. People being considered for the program must:

- Be unemployed or underemployed youth;
- Have graduated within the last three years with a degree, diploma or certificate from a recognized post-secondary institution;
- Be legally entitled to work in Canada;

- Have not previously participated as youth intern in FedNor's Northern Ontario Development Program or in any other federal or provincial internship program with pay for a period six months or more; and
- Not be related to directors, officers or managers of the organization.

For not-for-profit organizations, FedNor will contribute up to 90% (\$27,500) for the eligible costs of salary and employee benefit expenses for a period of 12 months in a full-time position.

<http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/fednor-fednor.nsf/eng/fn03441.html>

Office space, equipment and supervision could be provided by a member Municipality or one or both of the NORTAs on a shared basis.

Tasks for the youth intern could include the following:

- Web site enhancement including web links, social media, SEO etc.
- Partnership development
- Packaging development
- Content development for the Northern web portal and Go Ride site
- Membership development and liaison
- Boater surveys and analysis of results
- Advertising sales

## **Repositioning**

Key messaging needs to focus on the diversity of options for boaters in the region including kayakers, canoeists, personal watercraft enthusiasts, trailer boaters, cruising power and sail boats. The region is suitable for first time boaters and veteran boaters. It offers a world class experience for all boaters.

Messaging also needs to move away from the marinas and the NCMTC and focus more on the overall product as that is the unique selling proposition of the region.

## **Product Development**

As evidenced in the research, boaters enjoy taking part in a variety of on-shore activities. As such, work should be undertaken with the partner member communities to develop packages and in-market promotions. There are many good reasons to offer packages to visitors including:

- To provide a better, more exciting experience;
- To add value to the main product;
- To encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more;

- To better meet the needs of visitors;
- To provide an example of “things to do” that can be the basis for further exploration.

Components can include but need not be limited to the following:

- Stays at different marinas
- Ground transportation
- Meals and refreshments
- Tours
- Special events
- Picnic hampers prepared by a local restaurant
- Souvenirs
- Musical performances
- Story telling

### **Economic Impact of Boating**

The economic impact of boating is reflected in jobs, sales, travel, repairs, taxes, tourism and consumer spending.

Recreational boating in Canada had an economic impact of \$26.8 billion in 2006. In Ontario in 2006, the economic impact of boating was \$13,063.2 million.<sup>1</sup>

In the U.S., recreational boating accounted for \$30.8 billion in sales and services in the United States in 2009<sup>2</sup>.

A 2007 U.S. study of the economic impact of boating on the Great Lakes<sup>3</sup> found that:

“Marinas serving Great Lakes boaters are key generators of economic benefits to the region. These facilities are where a good share of boater spending takes place, where many jobs are supported and the scene of much private and public investment”.

The study showed that the U.S. Great Lakes states are a “recreational boating powerhouse”, with nearly one third of all registered boats in the United States. Spending on boats and boating activities in the Great Lakes states totaled nearly \$16 billion in 2003, directly supporting 107,000 jobs. With secondary effects figured in, that number grew to 244,000 jobs, with economic impacts of \$19 billion in sales, \$6.4 billion in personal income and, \$9.2 billion in

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<sup>1</sup> *Recreational Boating’s Big Splash: The Economic Impact of Recreational Boating in Canada – 2006 Summary Report*, Discover Boating Canada, Bolton, Ontario, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *2009 Recreational Boating Statistical Abstract*, National Marine Manufacturers Association.

<sup>3</sup> *Great Lakes Recreational Boating’s Economic Punch*, Great Lakes Commission, 2007

value added. Beneficiaries of this activity included manufacturers, retailers, marinas, restaurants, lodging accommodations, charter operators and other businesses.

While no current data exists on the economic impact of boating in Lake Huron's North Channel, the foregoing information along with the information in the Ontario Summary Table contained in Appendix A could form the basis of a presentation that can be made to existing and potential municipal government members to encourage their support of this lucrative industry.

## Target Markets

U.S. boaters typically have comprised the majority of the NCTMC's customers; however, the number of U.S. boaters to the area has declined significantly over the last decade. Some marina operators now say that this important market is rebounding somewhat. In addition to the U.S. market, the following are markets and customers that are believed to offer good potential for the NCTMC:

- Local/regional boaters
- Boaters from the rest of Ontario
- Boaters from Quebec
- Owners of smaller boats who trailer them to boating locations
- Personal water craft owners
- New boaters

### U.S. Boater Overview

- In 2009, 82 million adult Americans participated in recreational boating<sup>4</sup>
- There were 3.4 million boaters in the U.S. Great Lakes States (2009)
- In 2009, there were 12.7 million boats registered in the United States
- The 2020 projections of the number of adult boating recreationists in the U.S. are as follows:
  - 60.4 million motor boaters
  - 21.1 million PWC users
  - 19.1 million water skiers
  - 11.4 million sail boaters
  - 9.7 million rowers
  - 13.5 million kayakers
  - 20.9 million rafters

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Forest Service 2009

23.3 million canoeists

- In 2008, 30% of adult Americans went boating<sup>5</sup>
- American boaters and swimmers are most likely to live in Minnesota, North Dakota, Alaska, Wisconsin and Vermont
- From 2005-2006, U.S. boaters and swimmers traveled more frequently than the average U.S. pleasure traveler and were somewhat more likely to have taken a trip to Canada (19.6% versus 14.6%). The most common destination was Ontario
- Boaters and Swimmers were much more likely than the average U.S. Pleasure Traveler to engage in a wide range of outdoor activities while on trips in the past two years. They were particularly likely to participate in other water-and land-based activities (e.g., hiking, climbing and paddling; sailing and surfing; scuba and snorkeling), sportsmen activities (e.g., fishing; hunting) and winter activities (e.g., downhill skiing and snowboarding; snowmobiling and ATVing).
- Boaters and Swimmers tend to stay at public campgrounds or at lakeside or riverside resorts when on a trip. They are also more likely than average to have taken a sightseeing cruise, lake or river cruise or a Great Lakes cruise.
- Relative to the average U.S. Pleasure Traveler, Boaters and Swimmers are more likely to go shopping and dining and to visit theme parks and exhibits, historical sites, and fairs and festivals.
- Boaters and Swimmers tend to seek family-oriented vacations that allow them to enrich family relationships and provide lots of things to see and do for both adults and children.
- Most U.S. boaters and swimmers use the Internet for trip planning (76.6%) and have booked trip components online (54.8%) in the past two years. They are more likely than average to consult official tourism guides and visitor centres. This segment can be targeted most effectively through travel-related websites and magazines and specialty magazines (e.g., outdoor activity and sports, photography and video, family and parenting).
- They rated selected U.S. states (New York State, Colorado, Florida, California, Hawaii and Arizona) higher than any Canadian province as a boating and swimming destination. Their first choice Canadian province destination was British Columbia (6.3 out of 10) followed closely by Ontario (6.2)
- The majority of U.S. boaters and swimmers consider it important to feel safe while on vacation, to have lots of things to see and do and to have convenient access by car<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Coast Guard 2009

<sup>6</sup> TAMS Report, Ontario Ministry of Tourism 2007

## Canadian Boater Overview

- In 2010, Canada had six million boaters
- 9 million Canadians participate in boating each year
- Two out of five boat shoppers in Canada are first-time buyers
- From 2005-2006, 30.6% of adult Canadians went swimming or boating while on an out-of-town overnight trip of one or more nights
- 13.4% of them went motor boating
- 93.4% of Canadian swimmers or boaters tend to travel within their own province or region
- 54.6% travel to an adjacent province or region
- This is a highly active group that is more likely than average to attend sporting events, concerts, festivals and attractions
- They tend to stay at public or private campgrounds or at lakeside or riverside resorts
- They seek vacation destinations with many activities for all ages that are relaxing and that provide an escape
- 68.8% plan their trip by Internet and 43.2% book their travel by Internet
- They can be also be effectively targeted through sports-related and family-related media<sup>7</sup>

With very limited financial and human resources, the NCTMC will have to focus on its “best bet” markets (markets that are most likely to provide the best return on investment) in the short term. These are believed to be Michigan and Ohio boaters and local, regional and Southern Ontario boaters.

## Tactics

### The North Channel Brand

The name “North Channel” appears to be well known among boaters in the region and in Southern Ontario but less known elsewhere. The following responses were received by boaters and non-boaters when asked, “What do you think of when you hear the term, North Channel?”

Ontario Non-Boaters:

*Somewhere around the British Isles  
North Sea*

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<sup>7</sup> TAMS

*Nothing around here  
Really means nothing to me  
Alaska  
Russia  
Somewhere cold like the Northwest Territories  
Lake Superior – a channel between some islands  
A seaway in Florida  
"North Channel" means nothing to me. I could guess it is a body of water, sounds east coastish  
Maybe a TV channel for the north  
A television channel  
Somewhere cold*

Canadian Boaters:

*Passage across the North of Canada (Thunder Bay boater).  
Manitoulin Island, Georgian Bay and canoe trips. (Barrie boater).  
Great boating (Toronto boater)  
Somewhere in England (New Brunswick boater)*

Changing the name slightly to “Huron’s North Channel” would undoubtedly eliminate much of the confusion in the marketplace.

The North Channel logo currently depicts a boat travelling through a large wave and a sailboat. “Softening” the wave slightly and adding elements of land will more effectively communicate the appeal of the region. Alternate tag line options and the updated logo are depicted below:

### **Messaging**

While the desire to promote the services of the NCMTC members is understandable, key messages to the consumer need to emphasize the appeal of the area. For marketing purposes, it is recommended that the NCMTC use name such as “Boat Lake Huron’s North Channel”.

### **NCMTC Map**

The NCMTC currently produces a map with a listing of marine facilities and distances as its primary lure piece. While informative, the map does not adequately convey the appeal of the region. Descriptive, compelling text and photos that capture the beauty and unique attributes of the region should be incorporated into a professionally designed lure brochure. The “look and feel” of the brochure should be echoed in any advertisements that are produced as well as the web site and the trade show display unit.

## NCMTC Web Site

With an estimated 2 billion users worldwide, the Internet has dramatically changed the way we live, work and play. One of the greatest impacts that the Internet has had is on how people research, plan and book their vacations. The influence of the Internet has been so great, in fact, that for the majority of consumers, planning a trip without it is unthinkable. Here are some of the latest statistics on Internet use by U.S. and Canadian travellers:

- U.S. travellers to Ontario are above-average users of the Internet to plan (76.5%) and book their vacation (57.0%). They are also more likely than other U.S. pleasure travellers to visit the web site of a specific country, region or city.<sup>8</sup>
- A 2005 study of the trip planning behaviour of American travellers and the causes of last minute bookings revealed that the Internet has contributed to these travellers booking their trip on shorter notice than in the past. Because it is easy for suppliers to post last minute packages or price reductions, these bargain-hunting consumers tend to hold off on finalizing their plans. 82% of those surveyed said that they use the Internet at home or at work. By far the highest use of the Internet is to research travel destinations (80%), followed by researching other aspects of a trip (73%). 67% believe that, for travel decisions, the Internet provides better access to the information that they need than other sources.<sup>9</sup>
- Canadian travellers to Ontario are also slightly above-average users of the Internet to plan (66.4%) and book travel (45.2%).<sup>10</sup>
- The majority (69%) of Canadian travellers to Northern Ontario also make use of the Internet as a source of information to plan their overnight pleasure trip. The most common sites used by these travellers were hotel and resort web sites (61.2%) and government tourism authority sites (53.5%).<sup>11</sup>

## Search Engine Optimization

The site ranks well with “the North Channel” related keywords but ranks very poorly with keywords related to boating, yachting, Lake Huron, sailing, cruising and other important search terms. The following search words ranked very poorly:

- Lake Huron boating
- Lake Huron sailing
- Great Lakes boating

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<sup>8</sup> Lang Research Inc., *U.S. Travelers to Ontario: A Profile Report*, January, 2008

<sup>9</sup> Tourism Branch, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, *The Trip-Planning Behaviour of American Travellers and The Causes of Last-Minute Bookings*, June, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Lang Research Inc., *Canadian Travellers to Ontario: A Profile Report*, January, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Tourism Research Unit, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, *Canadian Travellers Who Visited Northern Ontario – A Profile for Marketing Implication*, June, 2007

- Great Lakes sailing
- Lake Huron North Channel
- North Channel sailing
- Lake Huron North Channel boating
- Lake Huron North Channel sailing
- Lake Huron North Channel cruising

The site only comes up as a top listing for:

- North Channel
- North Channel cruising
- North Channel boating

In light of this, two new domain names are recommended:

- Lakehuronnorthchannel.com
- Lakehuronboating.com

A more detailed SEO analysis and discussion of recommended web site enhancements can be found in this plan in Appendix A.

## **Recommended Strategic Marketing Priorities**

Because the NCTMC does not have a set annual budget, it is difficult to assign dollar amounts to the proposed activities that follow. In light of this, activities are being recommended in order of priority over the next three years. In the first year, it is envisioned that the majority of the work can be undertaken by a youth intern. In the next two years, as municipal and other memberships grow and more sponsors are acquired, it should be possible to employ a paid staff member on a part-time basis.

### **Year One:**

Priority 1: Strengthen the Branding of the Region

- Recognize that the experience that is being offered is not just a series of communities or a network of marinas or a Marine Tourism Council but also (and most importantly) a unique and memorable experience: the best freshwater boating in the world;
- Modify the logo as suggested to depict a softer wave, sunshine and elements of land;
- Change the name from “North Channel” to “Lake Huron’s North Channel”
- Employ a consistent “look and feel” and consistent messaging in all marketing materials

- Begin to develop new marketing materials with the first priorities being a new lure brochure and magazine advertisements in various formats

#### Priority 2: Enhance the Web Site

- Implement the recommendations for web site SEO and marketing as contained in Appendix A of this report
- Register the domain names: lakehuronboating.com and lakehuronnorthchannel.com
- Incorporate increased photography to better communicate the beauty of the area

#### Priority 3: Strengthen Marketing and Municipal Partnerships

- Strengthen partnerships with Algoma Country, Rainbow Country, Boating Ontario and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership as discussed. Allocate funding as available to the programs that best fit the needs of the NCMTC.
- Gain a greater level of municipal support by more adequately communicating the economic benefit of boating in the region and the importance of working together to further build this vital industry

#### Priority 4: Seek Additional Financial and Human Resources

- Strengthen membership solicitation as discussed
- Recruit a youth intern

#### Priority 5: Develop Product

- Seek government support to offer packaging and product development workshops with the communities in the region
- Aim to develop 4-6 packages annually

#### Priority 6: Gather Data and Market Intelligence

- Survey boaters regarding length of stay, expenditures, origin, boat size, sources of trip planning information, boater preferences and needs etc.
- Encourage boaters to provide contact information (especially email addresses) through a contest
- Summarize and communicate results
- Undertake a competitive analysis of other boating regions
- Track results: web site traffic, response to advertisements etc. and evaluate

## Year Two

### Priority 1: Branding

- Continue to employ a consistent “look and feel” and consistent messaging in all marketing materials
- Develop new marketing materials as required including new trade show exhibit materials

### Priority 2: Web Site

- Continue to develop the site as is feasible to incorporate, if possible, blogs
- Continue to add links
- Continue to expand offering of photography

### Priority 3: Partnerships

- Develop and implement a communications strategy to ensure ongoing partner buy-in
- Continue to work with Algoma Country, Boating Ontario and Rainbow Country to further identify ways of promoting Lake Huron boating
- Continue to work on content for the Northern Web Portal
- Begin to identify and work with other strategic partners

### Priority 4: Seek Additional Financial and Human Resources

- Continue member solicitation
- Recruit part-time staff person

### Priority 5: Develop Product

- As required, continue to offer packaging and product development workshops with the communities in the region based on information gathered during Year One
- Aim to develop 4-6 packages annually

### Priority 6: Data and Market Intelligence

- Develop marketing and product development strategies based on boater surveys
- Use competitive analysis of other boating regions to inform future marketing strategies
- Develop email database of boaters for marketing
- Continue to track and evaluate results and modify plan as required

## Year Three

### Priority 1: Branding

- Continue to employ a consistent “look and feel” and consistent messaging in all marketing materials
- Develop new marketing materials as required

### Priority 2: Web Site

- Continue to develop the site as is feasible
- Continue to add links
- Continue to expand offering of photography

### Priority 3: Partnerships

- Communicate with partners to ensure ongoing buy-in
- Continue to work with Algoma Country, Boating Ontario , Rainbow Country and others as identified to further identify ways of promoting Lake Huron boating
- Continue to work on content for the Northern Web Portal
- Work with communities to develop in-market promotions such as a passport program

### Priority 4: Seek Additional Financial and Human Resources

- Continue member and sponsor solicitation

### Priority 5: Develop Product

- Work with the communities in the region to develop product and packages based on information gathered during Year One
- Aim to develop 4-6 packages annually

### Priority 6: Data and Market Intelligence

- Ongoing analysis of other boating regions to inform future marketing strategies
- Continue to develop email database of boaters for marketing
- Continue to track results, evaluate outcomes and modify plan as required

## Appendix A - The North Channel: Web Site Analysis and Recommendations

[thenorthchannel.ca](http://thenorthchannel.ca)

*Content Management System: Unknown*

### Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Analysis

 Domain Name: thenorthchannel.ca	 Domain Age: Unknown
 Google Pagerank: 	 DMOZ Directory: No
 Alexa Rank: 24,210,712	 Yahoo Directory: No
 Google Backlinks: 0	 Google Indexed Pages: 92
 Yahoo Backlinks: 89	 Yahoo Indexed Pages: 69
 Alexa Backlinks: 7	 Bing Indexed Pages: 76
 Compete Rank: 0	 Digg Links: 0
 W3C Validator: 21 Errors	 Delicious Links: 0
 Google Bot Last Visit: Mar 7, 2011 20:45:01 GMT	 Technorati (Blog) Rank: 0

### Technical Review and Recommendations

- URLs are friendly and descriptive, no changes required
- Add **different** keywords/description meta tags on each individual page
- Add robots.txt file and with link to sitemap.xml
- Build back links (external hyperlinks to your web site) especially in Google
  - Currently 0 back links appearing in Google
  - Add to free directories and some paid directories (ie Yahoo Directory)
- Currently ranks well with “the north channel” related keywords but very poorly with keywords related to boating, yachting, lake huron, sailing, cruising and other important search terms

### **Content Review & Recommendations**

- Define better keywords and keyphrases
- Change page titles to be more descriptive and include keywords
- Use more descriptive image alt and title tags

### **Content Development**

- Build content with testimonials, stories and other articles on a regular basis (blog format?)
- New sections: Frequently Asked Questions, Ask A Question
- Use of Social Media (Facebook / Twitter) linking back to web site

### **Online Advertising Recommendations**

- Google Ad-Words and Facebook
- Local media websites, boating, outdoors web sites

### **Analytics & Site Maps**

- Set up Google Analytics for Web Statistics (vital in monitoring advertising channels) and generating user-friendly readable reports
- Ensure site map is submitted to Google, Bing and Yahoo Webmaster Tools

### **Moving Forward**

- Create list of keywords/keyphrases
- Build content as necessary using keywords/keyphrases
- Track conversions from all online marketing channels
- Analyze statistics on regular basis and adjust strategies accordingly

### **The North Channel**

## **Web Site Search Engine Optimization and Marketing Recommendations**

### **1. Global Changes**

- Instead of using images as the headings on each page, use text with <h1> tags and <h2> tags styles appropriately.
- Remove “The North Channel” button from navigation menu
- Add alt tags to “Home” button  
***alt=“ Lake Huron’s North Channel: for many it’s simply the best freshwater boating experience in the world for kayakers and canoeists, personal water craft enthusiasts, sail boaters and power boaters alike.”***
- Add title field to all navigational links as this example depicts:  
***<a href=“sault.html” title=“Visit Sault Ste. Marie by boat via Lake Huron’s North Channel”>Sault Ste. Marie</a>***
- Add alt tag to “Members” button:  
***alt=“Lake Huron North Channel Businesses including Marinas, Yacht Clubs, Restaurants, Hotel.”***
- Add an HTML site map page with link at bottom of very page
- Add an XML site map and submit to Google, Yahoo and Bing
- Add Social Media sharing service (AddThis or ShareThis)

## 2. Home Page [www.thenorthchannel.ca](http://www.thenorthchannel.ca)

- Remove this page completely and use home.html as home page

## 3. Opening Page [www.thenorthchannel.ca/home.html](http://www.thenorthchannel.ca/home.html)

- Remove Image heading and replace with <h1> and <h2> tags as follows  
***<h1>Lake Huron’s North Channel</h1>***  
***<h2>Great Lakes Boating Paradise</h2>***
- Move videos to YouTube under custom YouTube Account/Channel (ideally with consistent branding of website and other marketing materials)
- Have map in top right corner (similar to Town/City pages) displaying where the North Channel is located in relation to Lake Huron and Great Lakes and link to main map.  
Use alt tag:  
***alt=“Map of Lake Huron’s North Channel for Boating, Sailing, Yachting, Canoeing and Kayaking”***
- Change page title to:  
***Lake Huron’s North Channel - Great Lakes Boating, Sailing, Canoeing and Kayaking***
- Change meta description to:  
***Lake Huron’s North Channel: for many it’s simply the best freshwater boating experience in the world for kayakers and canoeists, personal water craft enthusiasts, sail boaters and power boaters alike. Spectacular scenery, uncongested clear waters and great facilities in a multitude of welcoming communities make this the boating destination of choice year after year.***

- Change meta key words to:  
**North Channel, Great Lakes, Ontario, boating, cruising, sailing, Lake Huron, Lake Huron's North Channel, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, personal water crafts, restaurants, hotels, marinas, shopping**

### 3. Town/City Pages (using Sault Ste. Marie as example)

<http://www.thenorthchannel.ca/sault.html>

- Change page title tag to:  
**Sault Ste. Marie - Lake Huron's North Channel – Great Lakes Boating**
- Remove Image heading and replace with <h1> and <h2> tags with  
**<h1>Sault Ste. Marie</h1>**  
**<h2>Lake Huron's North Channel</h2>**
- Add alt tag to amenities button:  
**alt="Sault Ste. Marie Hotels, Restaurants, Marinas, Shopping, Gas Stations, Grocery Stores, Recreation, Festivals, Banks and Churches."**
- Add alt tag to associate member (use member name and location)
- Change meta description to:  
**Boating, Yachting or Sailing to Sault Ste. Marie on Lake Huron's North Channel. Explore the Great Lakes and find restaurants, accommodation, marinas and other businesses.**
- Change meta key words to:  
**Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, North Channel, Great Lakes, boating, cruising, sailing, Lake Huron, Lake Huron's North Channel, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, personal water crafts, freshwater, outdoors, power boating, restaurants, hotels, marinas, shopping**

### 4. Town/City Amenities Pages (using Sault Ste. Marie as example)

<http://www.thenorthchannel.ca/sault-amenities.html>

- Change page title tag to:  
**Amenities in Sault Ste. Marie - Lake Huron's North Channel – Great Lakes Boating**
- Instead of having a extremely long list of amenities, each category should have its own page (Accommodations, Restaurants, Shopping, etc). Each link to these pages should have a title tag as follows:  
**title="Accommodations in Sault Ste. Marie on Lake Huron's North Channel"**
- Remove Image heading and replace with <h1> and <h2> tags with  
**<h1>Sault Ste. Marie - Amenities</h1>**  
**<h2>Lake Huron's North Channel</h2>**
- Change meta description to:  
**Amenities in Sault Ste. Marie on Lake Huron's North Channel including restaurants,**

*accommodations, shopping, pharmacies, gas stations, grocery stores, marinas, recreation, festivals & events, transportation, banking and churches.*

- Change meta key words to:  
*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, North Channel, amenities, Great Lakes, boating, cruising, sailing, Lake Huron, Lake Huron's North Channel, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, personal water crafts, freshwater, outdoors, power boating, restaurants, hotels, marinas, shopping, transportation, gas stations, grocery stores*

## 5. New Individual Amenity Pages (Using Sault Ste. Marie and Accommodation as example)

- Change page title tag to:  
*Accommodation in Sault Ste. Marie - Lake Huron's North Channel – Great Lakes Boating*
- Remove Image heading and replace with <h1> and <h2> tags with  
<h1>*Sault Ste. Marie - Accommodations*</h1>  
<h2>*Lake Huron's North Channel*</h2>
- Change meta description to:  
*Accommodation (Hotels/Motels/Bed and Breakfast) in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario located on Lake Huron's North Channel*
- Change meta key words to:  
*Accommodation, Hotels, Motels, Bed and Breakfasts, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, North Channel, amenities, Great Lakes, boating, cruising, sailing, Lake Huron, Lake Huron's North Channel, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, personal water crafts, freshwater*

## Content Building

- A Blog could be used to regularly post stories, events/festivals, visitor stories/testimonials and suggest destinations to visit. It also can be used for discussion, questions and comments. It is important that if a blog is used that is updated and moderated on a regular basis.

## Web Marketing

### Advertisements

- Facebook ads can be used to reach specific markets and demographics
- Google AdWords can be used to target specific keyword searches and advertise across the Google AdSense network.

## Facebook

- A Facebook page can be used at no cost to market the North Channel to millions of potential visitors, promote discussion and increase visitors to the website.
- Add “Like” button to website or incorporate Facebook badges to connect content from Facebook to the website.

## Appendix B – Branding Options



*The Best  
Freshwater  
Boating  
in the World!*

Boater-friendly communities and busy full-service marinas providing excellent customer service across Huron's North Channel.

**Huron's North Channel**



*Great Lakes Boating!*

[TheNorthChannel.ca](http://TheNorthChannel.ca)



*Boater-friendly communities and busy full-service marinas providing excellent customer service across Huron's North Channel.*

**Huron's North Channel**



*Great Lakes Boating!*

[TheNorthChannel.ca](http://TheNorthChannel.ca)