

Travel Week, China forum, India marketing highlight recent board discussion

Brand USA’S board of directors met Wednesday, Nov. 13, at Brand USA headquarters in Washington, D.C. The board received glowing reports about the inaugural Travel Week Europe and the yearly U.S.—China Leadership Summit, two major Brand USA events held in September. Discussion about the market in India, a new giant-screen film, and two existing marketing campaigns – “Hear the Music” and “United Stories” – also occurred.

The meeting marked the end of the tenure of two board members, Barbara Richardson and Andrew Greenfield. Both have served the maximum of two, three-year terms. Richardson has been a two-time chair. She is executive vice-president for External Relations at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Greenfield, who has been board secretary, is a managing partner in the Washington, D.C. office of Fragomen, an immigration law firm.

Here are some of the agenda items, including Travel Week and the summit, which the board considered:

Travel Week Europe

A survey of the European tour operators and U.S. suppliers who were at the first-ever Brand USA Travel Week, Sept. 9-13 in London, showed the event to be a major success. Virtually all of the survey respondents – 98

percent – said Travel Week helped them to achieve their industry goals.

Travel Week reinforces Brand USA’s “one Europe strategy,” a marketing approach that views the countries of Europe as a single source market for inbound travel to the United States. During 2018, 14 million European travelers visited the USA, making Europe the third-largest market. Canada (21.2 million) and Mexico (18.5 million) are the top-two markets.

The “one Europe strategy” has paralleled an upswing in air service from Europe to the USA. Air carriers now operate 406 U.S.-bound routes from 33 European airports. The carriers have also expanded their capacity with these flights by adding 7.8 million seats over the past two years.

Overall, Travel Week drew 530 attendees. Among them were 140 tour operators from across Europe and 97 U.S. exhibitors. These buyers and sellers, collectively, had more than 3,400 pre-set, individual appointments with each other during the event.

The success of this inaugural Travel Week has prompted Brand USA to plan an annual Travel Week for the European market for each of the upcoming five years. Next year, it will be held in Germany. Subsequent Travel Weeks are tentatively set for the U.K. (2022), France (2023), the U.K. (2024), and the Netherlands (2025).

U.S.—China summit

Despite a backdrop of uncertainty in the relationship between the governments of China and the United States, and slowing economic growth in China, optimism prevailed at the

13th annual U.S.—China Tourism Leadership Summit, held Sept. 17-21 in Seattle, Washington.

The optimism, event organizers say, was especially notable among top U.S. and Chinese tourism and government leaders. They are the people who set the tone for their respective spheres of influence, Brand USA officials say. The U.S. delegation of 150 tourism leaders at the summit included more than two dozen CEOs.

For U.S. leaders, it's significant that China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism has shown strong interest in advancing tourism ties between the two countries. The ministry, a hybrid organization made up of Ministry of Culture and the former China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), has considerable sway because of its direct link with Chinese government.

Brand USA has adopted a "China 20" strategy in its approach to China. The strategy recognizes that of China's 1.4 billion people, 120 million are passport holders, and 20 million of those passport holders take yearly, long-haul trips for pleasure.

With this in mind, Brand USA 's marketing goals for China are to:

- identify and target the 20 million Chinese travelers with inspiring messages that entice them to visit the United States;
- provide customized ways for stakeholders to also identify and target the 20 million; and
- develop a marketing campaign to guide this effort.

It will also be important, Brand USA officials say, to implement messages that welcome Chinese travelers. Recent research indicates that some of these travelers have a hesitancy about coming to the United States because they wonder if they'll be welcome while tensions exist between the U.S. and Chinese governments.

Brand USA is working with a prominent influencer on social media to develop "Welcome to America" videos to counter any negative impressions.

As the host city for this year's summit, Seattle showed off a range of its signature attractions. Summit attendees went on a Puget Bay boat excursion to Tillicum Village. They also visited the Space Needle, Chihuly Garden and Glass, Boeing, and a selection of area wineries.

A cross-cultural event on the schedule featured a traditional Chinese tea ceremony and a Seattle-style coffee tasting.

Marketing in India

During 2018, 1.4 million travelers from India came to the United States. This level of visitation allowed India to become one of the top-10 source markets for inbound arrivals.

Brand USA regards India as a major growth market, and as such, maintains a fully deployed marketing program there. It is also working with government partners, including the Commerce Department, to pave the way for increasing investment by the U.S. tourism sector in India's outbound-tourism market.

A complementary initiative to enhance this investment is the "India Ready" training program. The program is similar to an effort

that coincided with the 2016 U.S.—China Tourism Year, in which Brand USA helped its industry partners to become more knowledgeable about Chinese culture and more adept in their service for and communication with Chinese visitors.

Brand USA, in partnership with the National Travel and Tourism Office, introduced the “India Ready” program during its yearly sales mission to India, held Sept. 22-27. The mission – with stops in Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai – allowed 55 delegates, representing 40 of Brand USA’s industry partners, to meet with 800 members of India’s travel-trade.

Additionally, Brand USA plans to launch a new Travel Week for the Indian market. It will run Oct. 5-9, 2020, in Delhi.

New film release

Brand USA’s third giant-screen film, “Into America’s Wild,” will have its world-premiere screening, Feb. 4, 2020, at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. A global roll-out of the film follows during the early part of the new year.

The film depicts an outdoors journey by John Herrington, the first Native-American astronaut, and Ariel Tweto, an Alaskan pilot, to scenic byways, hidden trails, ancient homelands, and other destinations that reveal the splendor of America’s landscape. Morgan Freeman narrates the film.

As with its two previous documentaries, Brand USA partnered with MacGillivray Freeman Films to create “Into America’s Wild.” Expedia and United Airlines have taken sponsorship roles.

Here is updated information regarding Brand USA’s first two films:

“National Parks Adventure,” released in 2016, also follows an on-screen journey through the great outdoors of the USA. The film, narrated by Robert Redford, features a number of U.S. national parks as destinations.

It has been seen by more than 4 million viewers around the world. And, it is now showing in a dozen international cities. Viewers have been able to watch it on Netflix since February 2018.

The second Brand USA film was “America’s Musical Journey.” Released in 2018, the film traces the roots of American music. Grammy-nominated singer and songwriter Aloe Blacc takes viewers on a tour of cities and towns across the nation that are known for their connections to specific styles of music.

More than a million viewers have seen the film. It is showing in nine international cities, and will be available on GoUSA TV this month.

Current campaigns

“Hear the Music” – The second year of this campaign concentrated on social and video storytelling, which led to more engagement and cost efficiency, compared to the campaign’s first year.

The campaign garnered 2.05 billion impressions, and the number of social engagements jumped 105 percent in the second year, to 648 thousand.

“United Stories” – Launched in early 2019, this storytelling-style campaign uses mobile, content-creation labs (such as cars and boats) to travel along designated routes and collect

video stories from locals regarding their favorite places.

The year, the campaign visited 26 destinations and created in excess of 450 pieces of content. This generated 8.2 million social engagements; 169 million video views; and 86.1 million minutes of YouTube views.

The second year of the campaign will focus on YouTube and highlight regional travel stories that show how travelers can take advantage of multiple experiences not far from each other.

Financials

Financial disclosures revealed that Brand USA has met in FY 2019 match goal of \$100 million. Additionally, Brand USA is well on its way toward meeting its FY 2020 goal, also \$100 million, by attaining \$56.8 million of that amount. Brand USA is on track to reach the full 2020 match goal during the first quarter of the new year, which is earlier than ever before.

Overall, Brand USA has received \$1.6 million in cash and in-kind contributions from its partners.

Cash contributions have totaled \$45.9 million. The FY 2019 budget called for \$45 million. In-kind contributions have totaled \$55.7 million, \$.7 million more than the budget projection.

Brand USA's funding comes solely from partner contributions and matching ESTA fees. No taxpayer funds are used. Fees from ESTA, or the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, come from international travelers who arrive in the United States under the Visa Waiver Program.

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Story by Gerald H. Levin

Brand USA, 2019