



LA CROSSE CENTER + LA CROSSE AREA CVB  
STRATEGIC COLLABORATION  
FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

September 2024

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## INTRODUCTION

Explore La Crosse (LCCVB) and the La Crosse Center (LCC) have worked together to grow group business for decades. In response to the recent upgrade and expansion of the LCC and new leadership of the LCC, both organizations recognized deeper and more strategic collaboration was needed to maximize group business opportunities. They agreed the basis for enhanced collaboration was building stronger relationships between their respective team members.

The result was contracting with industry experts to help a) build understanding of the respective organizations' mandates; b) learn more about systems and processes which exist and can be improved; c) identify competitive advantages and gaps; d) establish future work and business strategies and, KPIs; d) get to know one another on a more personal level.

The in-person and survey work of the teams took place in July and August, 2024 with enthusiastic and dynamic engagement of leadership and sales and marketing team members of both entities. The process was facilitated and guided by Anna Tanski of Anna Tanski Consulting (Duluth, MN) and Deb Archer of Archer Strategic Partners (Madison, WI), seasoned convention and visitor bureau and public facility professionals.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The La Crosse Center is ideally located near the downtown center and on the Mississippi Riverbanks of La Crosse, WI. The facility is a multi-purpose venue with space for conventions, public events, concerts and sporting events. It has an internal team responsible for marketing, selling and servicing events. The Center's group business is augmented through sales and marketing efforts of the LCCVB. The facility is a primarily self-sustaining facility and operated and managed by employees of the City of La Crosse.

Explore La Crosse aka La Crosse Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, represents the Upper Mississippi Valley Region. Its mandate is to generate economic impact by attracting leisure and group visitors to the area. It is supported through room tax collections from the City of La Crosse and Onalaska, member revenues and ancillary revenue sources. It is a private 501(c)6 entity, governed by a Board of Directors. It has a team of professionals, including sales and marketing professionals who focus on leisure, conventions and sports.

To increase opportunities, facility revenues and economic impact of group business, the teams participated in two surveys and four in-person workshops. As a result of this work, several areas were identified to enhance collaboration and results. Key findings included:

- Provide LCCVB real time access to space and date calendar of LCC
- Schedule regular meetings of sales and marketing teams of LCC and LCCVB
- Study and understand competitive landscape together
- Expand joint sales and marketing activities
- Establish shared KPIs for unified accountability
- Produce marketing materials jointly and, when independent, with agreed upon language/messages
- Develop an annual (joint) group sales and marketing plan

## SURVEY INPUT

### July Survey

The teams from both organizations were presented with six questions (below) plus a section for open-ended comments, prior to the workshops. All submissions were anonymous to encourage candid responses. The overall themes from the July survey were: Increase communication and collaboration; build trust; and, increase and expand sales success. A summary of responses can be found in the Appendix.

1. What are your hopes/expectations of this process?
2. What's working well in the current sales & marketing effort?
3. What obstacles are impeding success?
4. Ideas/suggestions for opportunities to improve?
5. What are your hopes and dreams for the sales & marketing effort?
6. How do you define success?  
Additional items that define success?

### August Survey

The second survey included seven questions (below) targeted toward marketing efforts discussed on day one and sales initiatives on day two. All team members were asked to reply to all questions to begin the process of aligning these efforts within each team and between both organizations. All submissions were anonymous to encourage candid responses. The themes emerging from this survey included: Expand collaboration; building plans together/sharing information; creative sales and marketing strategies; and, resource needs. A summary of responses can be found in the Appendix.

1. What hopes/expectations do you have for the Sales Collaboration Session?
2. What hopes/expectations do you have for the Marketing Collaboration Session?
3. In a perfect world, what resources do you need to be successful?
4. What did you take away from the first sessions and what have you worked on?
5. What issues/topics from the first session would you like to spend additional time on?
6. What issues/topics would you like to see addressed that relate to the collaboration between LCC/LCCVB?
7. What do you commit to implementing following these sessions?

## WORKSHOPS

LCC and LCCVB sales and marketing teams and their leadership participated in four half-day working sessions, two in July and two in August. These workshops featured content highlighting industry best practices, survey results, facilitated exercises and group discussions\*.

### July

The opening session for this project kicked off with interactive discussions emphasizing trust, communication and team building. From there, participants were divided into two teams with a balance of LCC and LCCVB members serving on each one. Topics included describing characteristics of great relationships, the value of communication, acknowledging challenges and identifying benefits of building a stronger collaboration between both organizations. After reporting out on these exercises, the teams explored opportunities for improved communication and how to enhance sales and marketing efforts.

The second day of content built upon the positive momentum created during the introductory phase of dialogue on day one. Upon reviewing what's working well within current sales and marketing strategies, the group went into breakout discussions as they did the previous day, to highlight steps they can take to improve team dynamics immediately and outline what success looks like six months from now. There was tremendous engagement and a genuine desire to strengthen relationships moving forward.

### August

The first session focused on marketing efforts of the venue and the destination. The format was similar to July with participants divided into two teams with a balance of LCC and LCCVB members serving on each one. Topics included identifying marketing audiences targeted for meetings, events and sports. In addition, the teams prioritized strategies to leverage leisure marketing efforts to enhance awareness for meetings, tournaments and events. Upon comparing discussion outcomes the teams collectively identified Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and metrics to measure these efforts and provide unified accountability between both organizations.

The second day's sessions were focused on group sales efforts for meetings, conventions, weddings and sporting events. Participants were again divided into two teams to share ideas for new sales strategies to enhance existing efforts, establish unified goals and KPIs, and identify opportunities to align sales initiatives with marketing programs to maximize impact for the community.

These intensive workshops resulted in each organization having an equal voice in evaluating existing sales and marketing efforts, defining new strategies and identifying efficiencies to stretch resources and enhance the overall client experience. Moving forward, these teams are committed to working together to implement a unified sales and marketing plan.

\*All input from the workshop session break-outs and group exercises are attached to this Final Report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations include items discussed and agreed upon during the workshops, of which several have already begun to be discussed and/or implemented by the teams. Additional recommendations are noted, which would be useful and contribute to your future goals and success.

In light of the trend that organizations must bring together sales and marketing teams to achieve optimal results, our recommendations represent both elements of your work.

### I. Primary Collaboration Recommendations

- Conduct cross training/shadowing between LCC and LCCVB
- Involve all sales and marketing team members in sales and marketing strategy meetings
- Implement shared LCC space calendar
- Build joint, annual sales and marketing plan
- Plan regular (2-3 x per year) joint social opportunities

### II. Sales Success Recommendations

- Conduct bid presentations and site visits jointly
- Create all-inclusive and flexible pricing options
- Schedule “impact” meetings to review pricing options, update talking points for sales calls/site inspections, ensure bid content is consistent, and discuss issues
- Do joint competitive investigation site visits and analyses
- Conduct cross team presentations of bids, sales strategies and site visits

### III. Marketing Impact Recommendations

- Share digital resources, e.g., photos, proposal software, etc.
- Invest in short and long-form video
- Share and ensure marketing messages are consistent
- Consider special “need date” promotions for need years/months

### IV. Reputation and Relationship Development Recommendations

- Establish facility booking policies and strategies for maximum revenue potential. Ex. “18-mo rule”
  - Rationale: create opportunities to accommodate larger/higher impact event
  - Strategies:
    - Determine value of existing business
    - Work with recurring clients to identify their flexibility in future years to shift dates
    - Provide incentives to shift dates when unique/high-impact event knocks on door
- Conduct pre and post event audits (utilizing DI EIC)
- Share and review Exit Interview input; establish practices on responding to feedback
- Create Incentives Deliverables contract to ensure equity and partnership with clients
- Form Customer Advisory Board; local, regional – include turn downs/losses to other destinations
  - Meet 1 x per year in person, 1 x per year virtually – 3-year commitment; work with facilitator
  - Rationale:
    - Feedback on experiences, hotels, etc.
    - Competitive intel
    - Critique of proposals, communications
    - Build advocates

- Recruit Local Advisory Team
  - Rationale:
    - Gather input and expand partnerships
    - Increase understanding and support among/from partners

## IMMEDIATE ACTION PLAN

An immediate action plan was developed – and embraced - at the July workshop and updated at the August workshop. See appendix for details.

LCC/LCCVB STRATEGIC COLLABORATION PLANNING		
Action Plan - To be completed by Dec 31		
ACTION	LEAD(S)	NOTES
Action Plan Meeting - All Sales & Marketing Teams	Erik	
Group Goals Discussion - All Sales & Marketing Teams	Jared	
Arranging Pre-cons	Elizabeth, Kourtnei	
Develop RFP/Response Process	Ben, Elizabeth	
Solidify Unified Proposal	Ben	
Targeted Top Prospect List	Erik, Elizabeth	
Create/agree on post-event survey	Kourtnei, Jeremiah	
Get joint meetings on calendars	Ben, Elizabeth	All Team meetings, Strategic prospecting
FAM tour (Aug, Dec)	Erik	
Jingle Bell Run (Client blitz/Madison - Nov)	Erik	
Social Event (Thursday Aug 22)	Jared, AJ	
Annual Joint Marketing Plan	Haleigh, Bri	
LCC Event Audit	Elizabeth, Kourtnei, Jeremiah	
Competitive Analysis	Erik, Elizabeth	
Annual Sales Plan	Erik, Elizabeth	
Hotel Audit Need Dates	Ben	
Group Goal Discussion	Jaren	

## **FUTURE STEPS and IMPLEMENTATION**

It is important to review the initial Action Plan in Q4 of 2024.

Moving forward, we recommend leadership of both organizations review progress of the Action Plan and monitor team collaboration. In addition, review and discuss the above Recommendations before end of Q1 2025.

After determination of future strategies, amend the Action Plan.

It will be critically important to orient new team members about this process to familiarize and engage them in this work.

An annual refresh and check-in of the process (bringing the teams together 1-2 times per year for half day workshop) is recommended for a minimum of three years, after which time we believe the systems and processes will become “institutionalized” and part of both teams’ regular regimens.

# APPENDIX A

## Participants

- AJ Frels, Executive Director, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Jeremiah Burish, Director of Sports Sales & Events, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Irish Dishno, Media & Content Marketing Manager, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Haleigh Doyle, Director of Media & Marketing, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Ben Morgan, Director of Group Sales & Sports Services, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Erik Sjolander, Director of Convention Sales, Explore La Crosse/LCCVB
- Jay Odegaard, Director La Crosse Center and City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation & Forestry
- Jared Flick, Deputy Director, La Crosse Center & Recreation
- Elizabeth Poh, Sales & Event Coordinator, La Crosse Center
- Kourtni Alcock, Sales & Event Coordinator, La Crosse Center
- Brianna Beining, Marketing Coordinator, La Crosse Center
- Heather Sommer, Wedding Coordinator, La Crosse Center

## July Survey Responses

### Course Expectations & Hopes

- Improve understanding and appreciation of both org missions and goals
- Define LCC and LCCVB sales & marketing goals/expectations and joint approach to achieve all
- Establish effective and efficient communications and info sharing between LCC, LCCVB and Clients
- Identify tools, strategies and creative solutions to attract high ROI business and provide exemplary service

### What Obstacles Impede Success?

- Differing goals/missions complicate efforts
- Lack of trust
- Lack of open, critical conversations
- Competitive issues: facility costs (rent, FB, AV)
- Lack of access to date/space availability

### What's Working?

- Bi-weekly meetings are great: face-to-face and addressing issues that have popped up
- Communications and relationships have improved
- Interest in destination has increased
- Marketing position at LCC is positive

### Ideas for Opportunities & Improvements

- Attending industry events together
- Shared calendar/space & date access
- Establishing shared "talking pts" when promoting facility and destination
- Sharing and supporting prospecting efforts



## Hopes & Wishes

- Harmony
- Great teamwork, Collaboration & Problem Solving
- Excellent communication
- Mutual respect of relationship
- Relationships will grow

## Defining Success: Common Themes

- Increasing group bookings
- Increasing LCC Revenues
- Creating positive client experiences and feedback
- Retaining and securing new, high ROI (facility revenues and destination impact) clients

## Defining Success: Additional input

- Increased # of RFPs and responses – ensuring responses are competitive and timely
- Pursuing and securing high ROI multi-year events
- Pursuing and securing a major event win for destination and community
- Enhancing downtown vibe and energy

## August Survey Responses

### Marketing Course Expectations & Hopes

- Marketing collaboratively while retaining individual identity...why is this important?
- What are expectations of each other's marketing activities?
- Where/when does it make sense to collaborate?
- Program regular brainstorming sessions to explore ways and when to collaborate
- "Staying on the same page"
- Stretching marketing resources and investing in efficient/low-entry channels, e.g., blogs, newsletters, etc.
- Build annual, joint marketing plan
- Educating sales team members on why marketing matters
- Educating marketing team on how they can support sales

### What do you want to spend more time on?

- Identifying realistic ways/times to partner
- Understanding what sales needs from marketing to be successful
- Additional strategies to improve our partnership
- Creating specific date/action items for moving forward
- Discuss what makes La Crosse and the LCC an ideal location to host an event
- Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration!

### Marketing Resource Wishes

- Admin/support staff
- Understanding competitors' marketing strategies and resources
- Financial resources to build hard-hitting, effective marketing programs; invest in more marketing data tools

### Commitments Moving Forward

- Continue to grow our relationship, e.g., attending more meetings, joining tours for groups
- Open & Honest Communication
- Understanding of workloads
- More strategized client outreach
- Continue to build on initial progress/strengthening partnership
- Take a step back and look at things from all angles
- Open mind when communicating
- Contribute as a team member to achieve desired results
- Sharing content
- Keeping mutual best interests in mind
- Continue learning and evolving
- Look forward ways to improve and work together to find solutions
- Commitment to sales efforts
- More open and transparent conversations

### Sales Session: Expectations & Hopes

- Learn how to be a better asset to the team
- Work more **efficiently** together
- Understanding roles, responsibilities and boundaries, a more clearly defined process
- Partner at trade shows and industry events
- Incorporate hotel sales teams into the overall sales effort
- Continue to grow our relationships and teamwork
- Better defined budget process, understanding how resources are allocated and prioritized

### Resource Wishes

- Additional subsidy/incentive funds
- Improved hotel buy-in and support beyond the "usual" 2-3 properties
- Meetings/Conventions lead generator (ex. Play Easy)
- Calendar sharing platform
- Expanded air service
- Universal tool for tracking efforts and prospecting (lead updates)
- Compare our efforts against competitors

### Defining Success: Input to date

- Increasing group bookings
- Increasing LCC Revenues
- Creating positive client experiences and feedback
- Retaining and securing new:
  - High ROI (facility revenues and destination impact) clients
  - Multi-year clients
  - Major new signature event to benefit facility and community

## APPENDIX B

See attached documents from Workshop Sessions.

### Facilitators and Authors

Anna Tanski, Anna Tanski Consulting, LCC  
Deb Archer, Archer Strategic Partners, LLC

## **JULY: SESSION ONE/MONDAY: Breakout Input**

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **Communications**

- Identify client knowledge/experience level (volunteer vs staff) – share the knowledge to manage level of staff time will be required.
- Post event recap meeting – ROI for venue, hotels to evaluate the benefits of the group
- Combined sales sheet from both orgs that represents destination and venue overview
- Move away from “bid no matter what” to bidding for what works best for the venue (pre-event audit) to determine if it’s viable. More intentional and strategic/selective. Yield management.
- Continue bi-weekly meetings
- Add monthly meetings with entire sales/marketing teams
- Create shared document platform (use software system) to share updates (Question: could you create google or drop box shared folders?)

#### **Collaboration**

- Attend industry events/conferences together
- RFP process/timeline to determine who should be involved
- Brainstorming about events/concerts that could work for LAX
- Use combined resources for benefit of all
- Flexibility to represent each other when needed – we’re a unified team!
- Ensure talking pts for each other are accurate!
- On tours ensure we understand each other’s positions, capacity – what we can, can’t do; highlight on tours for each other when other party not present
- Highlight destination on site tours

#### **Sales**

- Sponsors for events (especially sports) help identify resources
- Proposals to include F&B minimums for clarity and to better inform clients
- All-inclusive price vs listing by line items = package options
- Determine capacity = staff time/flip time required for turnovers to ensure service levels and meet client expectations
- Attend prospecting conferences/tradeshows together
- Look at competitors – determine how to “close the gap”
- Tour other venues as a team – get inspiration

- Carve out more time to spend on sales
- Unified presentation to potential clients – show each other presentations
- Research competitor bids
- Consider secret shopper of other venues and CVBs
- Joint sales blitzed
- Host FAM tours jointly

## **Marketing**

- Co-sponsor at conferences (breakfast, break etc)
- Social media story-telling for the entire area to highlight events
- Info sheet representing an overview of each org
- Monthly meetings – stay on top – involve Iris in all marketing meetings
- Co-op ads: start planning early – before budget is allocated
- Participate in Explore La Crosse Sweepstakes – do ticket giveaways
- Post all LCC events on CVB calendar (these go in LCCVB newsletter and social posts)
- Joint social media ads
- Hashtag each other
- Share video/digital footage and pics
- Create big event giveaway – create foot traffic and generate social media

## **JULY: SESSION ONE/MONDAY: GROUP EXERCISE RESPONSES**

### **Words to describe great relationships:**

- Passion
- Honesty
- Trust
- Faith
- Support
- Communications
- Loyalty
- Respect
- Fun/Humor
- Empathy
- Safety
- Compromise
- Patience
- Sharing

### **The Value/Results of Collaboration**

- Success
- Efficiency
- Synergy
- Client and Community Satisfaction
- Growth
- Reputation
- Ease

### **Obstacles (Additions to survey responses)**

- Disconnect/resentment – Ex: presence during event
- Lack of give/take or perceived “fairness”

## **JULY: SESSION TWO / TUESDAY: Breakout Input**

### **What can/do we do NOW?**

- Continue bi-weekly meetings
- Add monthly meetings and quarterly all staff meetings
- Present unified front to clients: in pre-cons (pre and post) and proposals
- Teams to collaborate in non-stressful situation (social, ex. Cookout!)
- Be responsive to each other and clients
- Open and trusting communications
- Work on marketing materials together
- Develop timeline: RFP – Communication – Proposal
- Collaborate on follow-up to reach goals
- Prepare agendas for meetings
- Find solutions together – don't focus on problem: TRANSPARENCY!
- Establish roles and expectations IMMEDIATELY
- Represent ourselves together/unified in marketing campaigns (have in about each other)
- Share knowledge base

## **JULY: SESSION TWO/TUESDAY: Group Exercises**

### **Group Exercise 1**

#### **Hidden Gems**

- Airport Beach
- Linda's Bakery
- Lady of Guadalupe Shrine
- Hixson Forest Trails
- Trane Park
- SportsNut
- Starlight Lounge
- Ranison Ice Cream
- Lawrence Lake Marina
- Unwined & River Rats
- Goose Island
- Open Field (no name!)
- Briar Patch
- Casa La Crosse
- Rim of the City

### **Group Exercise 2**

#### **How do we see Ourselves?**

- Keeping up – not enough time for strategy, targeting
- Lack of time = Lack of ability to follow up

### **Group Exercise 3**

#### **What do Others see?**

- Confusion: who do I talk to?
- Unique package: no attached hotel
- Facility and hotels are close to downtown
- Safe
- Unique shops & restaurants
- Beautiful

## AUGUST: SESSION THREE – GROUP EXERCISE RESPONSES

### MARKETING AUDIENCES

- Local, State (WI, MN, IL, IA, UP, ND, SD), National
- Concert & Entertainment Attendees
- Event Promoters
- M&C Attendees
- Association and Corporations
- Meeting Professionals
- Weddings
- Leisure:
  - Families, Moms, Outdoor Rec, Foodies, Music, Retirees
- Car & Motorcycle Clubs
- ORA - Trails, Events
- Religious Groups
- Sports:
  - Wrestling
- Ag

### MARKETING PRIORITIES

- Budget/Resources by market (M&C, Weddings, Events, etc.)
- Evaluating by ROI
- Geo-fencing @ events

### ROLE OF LEISURE MARKETING (Messaging, focusing on assets, unique/distinguishing features)

- Proximity, footprint of downtown and region; walkability
- Safety
- Inclusivity (something for all ages)
- Natural beauty/topography/scenic
- Local and small/unique restaurants, retailers
- 3 Universities (WTC, UWL, Viterbo)
- Hospitals/healthcare
- Great River Road
- Parks
- Golf
- Festivals & Events
- 4 seasons
- Festivals



- Events
- Boats/Boating
- Fishing
- Fall Colors
- Birding (migrating, eagles, etc.)
- Agriculture, farmers markets, apple orchards
- Amish

### **MEASURING MARKETING SUCCESS**

- New prospects, leads, RFPs
- Action & firsthand feedback (visitor posts and UGC)
- Clicks, engagement, impressions, web analytics, QR scans
- Increase in community awareness/buzz
- Clients tagging LCC/Explore La Crosse
- Economic Impact
- Event Attendance

### **MARKETING VENDORS**

- Zartico
- Madden Media/MobileFuse
- Google Analytics
- Loomly
- Phase 3 (LCC)
- DI's EIC
- RIPS & PlayEasy
- Sports ETA (new earned media measuring tool/Game Day PR)
- Drift Scape
- Threshold 360
- Muckrack
- Crowdriff

## **MARKETING: Next Steps**

- Develop and implement incentive client deliverable agreement
- LCC/LCCVB mutual tagline/messaging
- LCC/LCCVB like/share posts
- Lodging options of website (tracking RNs for LCC events)
- Identify shared/mutual markets
- Invest in swag/leave behinds for tradeshow, FAMs
- Invest in market research to assess value of bigger markets
- Discuss budget for shared marketing (look for highest ROI)
- Research associations for convention center and network with peers
- Review marketing mediums for % of marketing resources:
  - Print
  - Digital (TikTok, FB, IG, LI, etc.)
  - ENewsletter
  - Geofencing
- Consider money to increase:
  - Shared content
  - Video development
  - Virtual tour of LCC and destination
  - Drone video
  - UGC – incentivize
- Increase publicity/PR engagement with travel influencers, creators, event ambassadors
- Continue hosting travel writer/creator/influencer visits

**KPIs/GOALS:**

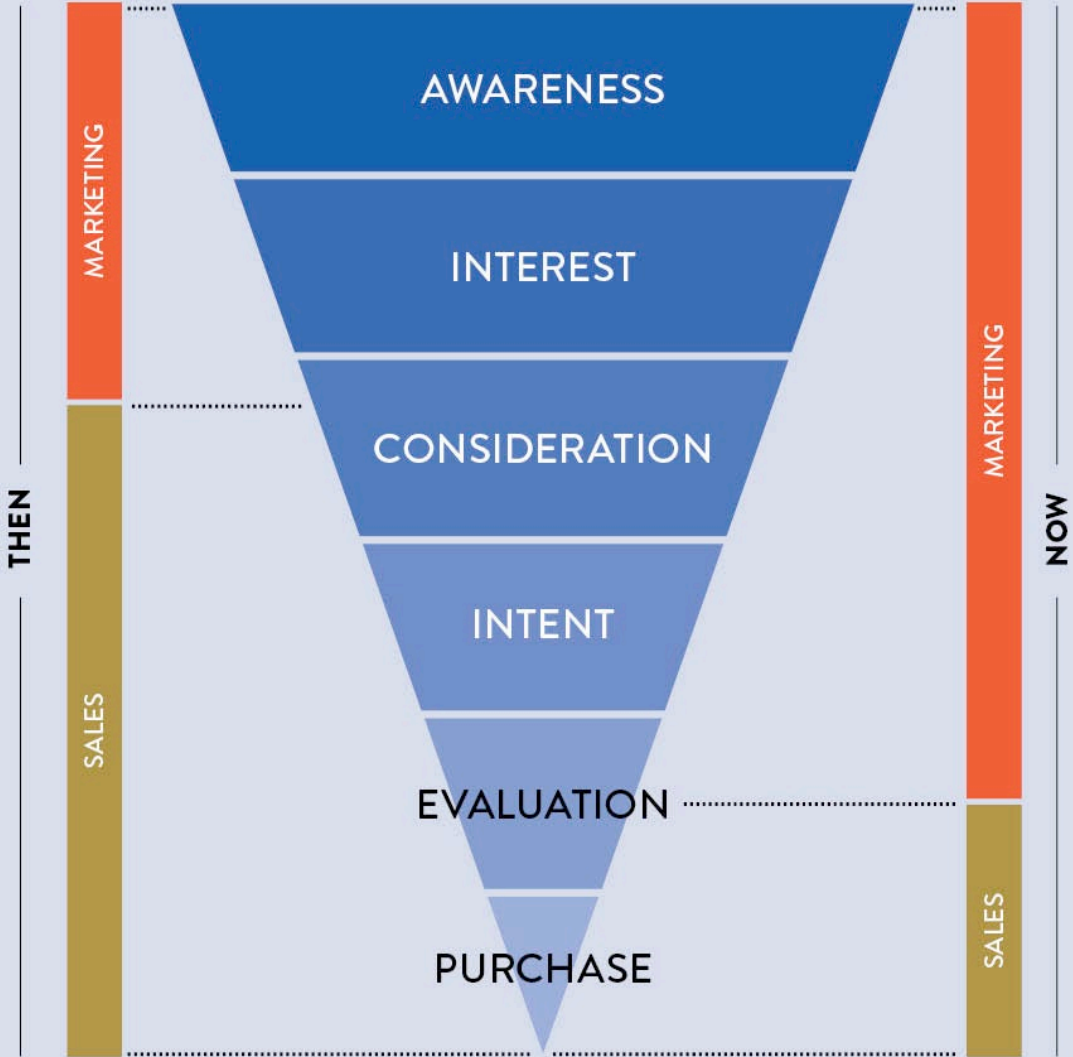
LCC

- Room revenues
- Building attendance
- F&B minimums
- Multi-year bookings
- Ticket sales
- Awareness of facility
- Repeat Clients
- Client satisfaction

LCCVB:

- # of leads generated
- # of tent RNs
- Leads turning definite
- # of new clients
- EI
- Earned media

# THE NEW MARKETING AND SALES FUNNEL



Source: Steve Patrizi