

2026-2027 MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

— VISIT —
HAYWOOD
WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

Canton | Clyde | Lake Junaluska | Maggie Valley | Waynesville

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026–2027 Marketing & Communications Plan is designed to position Visit Haywood as a trusted, always-on travel resource in a discovery landscape that is increasingly driven by AI and personalization.

This plan prioritizes:

- Intentional storytelling
- Data-informed decision making
- Audience-centric personalization
- Strategic use of emerging technologies
- Driving year-round visitation
- Co-op advertising & partner collaboration

Core Marketing Channels

- Website & Blog – SEO + AI discoverability foundation
- YouTube – Storytelling & search visibility
- Social Media – Short-form video, engagement, and community building on Meta platforms
- Paid Media – Targeted amplification and conversion support
- Email Marketing – Owned audience engagement and retention
- Earned Media / PR – Authority and trust building



ABOUT VISIT HAYWOOD

About the HCTDA and its Role

The HCTDA is the official destination marketing organization for Haywood County, responsible for investing occupancy tax revenues to support tourism promotion, visitor services, and product development that benefit both residents and visitors alike.

Purpose of the Marketing & Communications Plan

This plan serves as a strategic guide for marketing and communications activities during FY 2026–2027. It outlines priority goals, target audiences, campaign strategies, and performance benchmarks—all rooted in the vision set forth in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.



Vision Statement

Haywood County will be renowned as the authentic destination in the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, offering diverse, year-round experiences while preserving our natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

Mission Statement

The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) drives community and economic prosperity as a strategic leader of the destination. By fostering collaboration and destination stewardship, we strive to make Haywood County an unrivaled place to live, work, and play.

BRAND STRATEGY

The Visit Haywood brand was developed to reflect the county's authentic Appalachian character, abundant natural beauty, and welcoming spirit. This section outlines the guiding elements of the brand and how it will be activated across all channels.

Please refer to HaywoodTDA.com/brand-guidelines for more information.

Brand Promise:

Visit Haywood County, where the Great Smoky Mountains meet the Blue Ridge in Western North Carolina. Experience our Appalachian hospitality and breathtaking scenic views. Explore five charming mountain towns and discover our unspoiled public lands, forests and waters. Whether you seek adventure or tranquility, Haywood offers it all. So take a hike, pack a picnic or enjoy your visit at a rocking chair pace.

Brand Personality:

- Down-to-Earth
- Welcoming & Neighborly
- Uplifting
- Sincere
- Informal & Relaxed

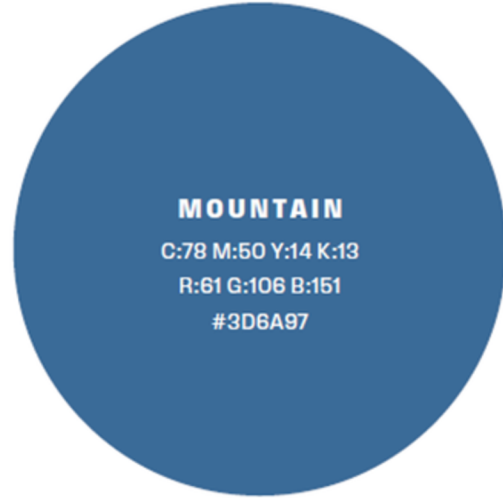
Brand Voice Themes:

- A Charming Mountain Spirit
- A Sense of Adventure
- A Refuge of Tranquility
- A Cascade of Wonder

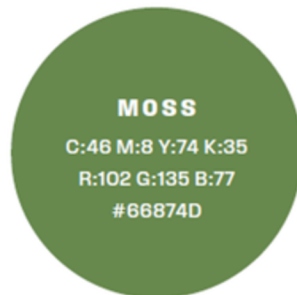
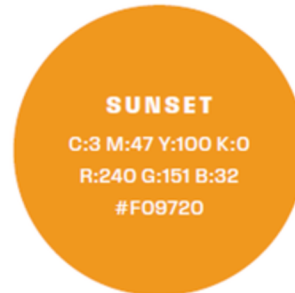


BRAND STRATEGY

Main Colors



Accent Colors



Logo



TARGET MARKETS & SEGMENTS



PRIMARY MARKETS:

- Atlanta, GA
- Charlotte, NC
- Columbia, SC
- Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem, NC
- Greenville-Spartanburg, SC
- Knoxville, TN
- Nashville, TN
- Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne, FL
- Raleigh-Durham, NC
- Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota, FL

SECONDARY MARKETS:

- Augusta, GA
- Charleston, SC
- Cincinnati, OH
- Florence-Myrtle Beach, SC
- Greenville-New Bern-Washington, NC
- Jacksonville, FL
- Lexington, KY
- Louisville, KY
- Savannah, GA
- Tri-Cities, TN-VA

*Target markets are subject to change based on visitor data throughout the year.

TARGET MARKETS & SEGMENTS

Visit Haywood’s marketing strategy will be guided by a deeper understanding of the most valuable visitor segments—defined by a combination of demographics, psychographics, and travel motivations. These audience segments are informed by visitor survey data, lodging trends, and campaign performance from 2025.

Primary Target Segments:

Multigenerational Travelers: “Mountain Memory Makers”

Families—grandparents, parents, and kids—seeking meaningful ways to reconnect in settings that feel both adventurous and comforting. They prefer experiences everyone can enjoy, like scenic drives, easy hikes, museums, and small-town strolls. Comfort and accessibility matter, with interest in spacious cabins, family-friendly dining, and flexible activities. Haywood County’s nostalgic charm and natural beauty make it ideal for building cross-generational bonds and lasting memories.



Young Adult Explorers: “The Trail-Traversing Trend Setters”

Adventurous couples and friend groups in their 20s and 30s crave freedom, nature, and Instagram-worthy moments. Weekend warriors, they love scenic hikes, craft breweries, quirky roadside finds, and live music—often with their dog. Budget-conscious and socially aware, they look for eco-friendly, pet-welcoming options and value spontaneity. Haywood County offers off-the-beaten-path trails, vibrant festivals, and mountain-town energy perfect for their next shareable escape.

Cultural Enthusiasts: “The Appalachian Aficionados”

Often retired or semi-retired, these curious travelers seek the rich heritage of the Southern Appalachians. They explore small towns for authenticity—bluegrass shows, craft galleries, and local history. Favoring immersive, slow-paced travel, they visit midweek and stay in locally owned inns. Haywood County’s arts, traditions, and friendly communities create a soulful destination for story-rich journeys.

KEY INITIATIVES

I. AI-Driven Travelscape & Content Authority

Generative AI is reshaping how travelers discover destinations. To stand out in a “zero-click” internet space, Visit Haywood must strategically reimagine its content structure to convince Large Language Models (LLMs) of its destination authority.

Key Actions:

- Is easy to scan and digest
- Prioritizes answer-driven formats like FAQs, itineraries, and blogs.
- Increases trusted third-party mentions through Public Relations efforts (AI sources 95% of its information from earned media sources, Reddit and blogs without paywalls).

II. Storytelling & Brand Narrative

Travelers are increasingly looking for authentic, meaningful experiences. To meet this demand, Visit Haywood will continue telling place-driven stories while adapting our marketing to connect with a broader range of visitors.

Key Actions:

- Highlight local makers and small businesses, culture, and experiences
- Host content creators and influencers meeting our goal of connecting with younger audiences
- Prioritize vertical video storytelling across platforms
- Create repeatable content to use across all owned channels (not one-off posts)
- Hosting the SATW convention bringing writers and storytellers from around the globe to tell Haywood County’s unique story to a broader audience.
- Invest in stewardship messaging through the Outdoor NC & Trail Town initiatives.
- Partner with our local emergency services team to develop and feature visitor-focused safety awareness content across channels.

KEY INITIATIVES

III. Personalization & Audience Experience

Travelers expect relevant, timely, and personalized content. Visit Haywood's communication channels will offer more customizable trip planning while maintaining broad appeal, with a greater focus on showcasing experiences rather than individual business listings.

Key Actions:

- Launch new website that features seasonally personalized website experiences
- Create website, social media, email newsletter, and visitor guide content by season

Use research to inform future:

- Persona-based content journeys on the new website
- Keep a pulse on emerging PR trends and respond to reactive leads on niche travel topics

IV. Seasonal Campaigns – Driving Year-Round Visitation

Visit Haywood will continue executing intentional, themed seasonal campaigns that inspire travel during off-peak and shoulder seasons. These targeted efforts complement our always-on advertising strategy, helping maintain steady awareness and visitation year-round.

Campaigns:

- November, 2026 – Gift of Haywood Campaign
 - Build on the momentum of Elk Bucks and increase spending at local businesses during the holiday season
- January, 2027 – Ice Fest
 - Positioned as a winter anchor event to drive post-holiday visitation
- March, 2027 – Fat Burger Month
 - A food-driven travel motivator during a slower visitation period
- Spring, 2027 – NEW Campaign + Lodging Packages
 - Launch a spring-specific campaign focused on renewal, outdoors, and shoulder season travel
 - Work with lodging partners to develop bookable lodging packages
- Summer, 2027 - NEW Campaign "On the Road to Haywood"
 - A comprehensive, multi-channel road-trip campaign for individuals, families, and groups traveling to Haywood leaning into the trend of "Detour Destinations," exploring smaller, lesser-known destinations as travelers look for more authentic experiences and alternatives to overtourism.

KEY INITIATIVES



V. Pilot Co-op Advertising & Partner Amplification

Visit Haywood will expand its marketing reach through strategic co-op advertising opportunities with Our State, creating meaningful engagement with local partners. We will also continue to elevate our tourism-related businesses through a new partner portal on our website, while showcasing both new and existing businesses across our digital platforms, social media channels, and visitor guide.

Key Focus:

- Offer co-op advertising placement in Our State Magazine print and digital newsletters
- Allow partners to keep their business content fresh through the partner portal on our website
- Amplifying local businesses across owned channels, including social media, email newsletters, and the visitor guide



VI. Measurement & Performance

Visit Haywood will work with DCI, One Net, and MMGY to implement an integrated tracking and reporting framework.

Key Metrics:

- Website CTRs, on-site engagement, website conversions and lodging referral clicks
- CTR, impressions, and video views for paid media
- Email open and click rates
- PR placements and media impressions
- Social media reach, engagement, and follower growth

KEY INITIATIVES

VII. Research & Strategic Insights

Since 2024, we have made meaningful progress to build and activate our new destination brand. Now, almost three years later, we plan to revise our research to better inform our marketing decisions.

Key Initiatives:

- Perception Studies: A Deep Dive into Visit Haywood's Brand Health
 - Current/Past Visitor Perception Study
 - Travel Media Perception Study
 - Internal Stakeholder Perception Study
- Market & Visitor Segmentation Study
 - Target Visitor Personas
 - Customer Journeys
 - Content Maps
- Establish a Brand Health Dashboard



BUDGET



MARKETING & SALES

Advertising & Marketing	\$1,206,000
Local Advertising.....	\$11,500
Web Technology, Maintenance + Growth.....	\$82,000
Media Relations, Influencers & Press Trips.....	\$212,000
Visitor Guides.....	\$50,000
Collateral + other printing.....	\$15,000
Promotional Items.....	\$6,000
Postage - Fulfillment.....	\$20,000
Dues & Subscriptions.....	\$12,000
Trade Shows & Travel.....	\$0
SATW.....	\$470,000
Research.....	\$91,000
Community Relations.....	\$5,000
Visit Haywood Ice Fest.....	\$155,000
Project Development Plan.....	\$300,000
County Wide Grants.....	\$28,000
Total Marketing & Sales.....	\$2,663,500

2026-2027 CONTENT CALENDAR

July

- Visitor Guide/Co-Op Ad Sales
-
- Swimming Holes
 - July 4 Celebrations
 - Elevations/Cool

August

- Website Launch
-
- 828 Day (Local pride)
 - Agritourism/ Farms
 - End of Summer

September

- Pump Track Qualifier
-
- Elk Rut Season/ Wildlife
 - Labor Day
 - Fall Flavors
 - Autumn Equinox

October

- SATW
-
- Legends & Folklore
 - Leaf-Peeping
 - Harvest & Music Festivals

November

- Gift of Haywood
-
- Small Business Saturday
 - Family/ Friendship
 - Late fall foliage

December

- Gift of Haywood
-
- Christmas Celebrations
 - Shopping
 - Skiing/Tubing
 - Christmas Tree Farms
 - Winter Solstice

January

- Ice Fest Weekend
-
- Skiing/Tubing
 - "What's New"
 - Resolutions
 - Visitor Guide
 - Winter Hiking
 - Plan for Vacation Day

February

- Annual T-Shirt Contest
-
- Romance
 - Dining
 - Indoor Activities
 - Weddings

March

- Fat Burger Month
 - Annual Report
-
- Birding
 - Spring Lodging Packages
 - Start of Spring

April

- Spring Lodging Packages
 - Marketing Plan
-
- Fishing
 - Wildflowers
 - Golf
 - Appalachian Culture/Arts
 - National Parks

May

- Road Trip Campaign
 - NTTW
-
- Hiking
 - Unique Lodging
 - Ramps

June

- River & Lake Activities
- Wellness
- Biking
- Family-Friendly
- Summer Solstice

*This content calendar is flexible and may be adjusted to reflect real-time trends, new events, timely opportunities, and shifting marketing priorities.

PARTNER COLLABERATIONS

At Visit Haywood, collaboration with local tourism businesses and community partners is the foundation of our work. The strength and success of the Visit Haywood brand is built through these shared efforts and collective commitment to promoting Haywood County as a premier destination.

This guide outlines the variety of marketing and partnership opportunities available to help businesses connect with visitors and grow visibility. Whether a business is well established or new to the tourism industry, there are meaningful ways to engage and be part of this expanding network.

As we move into 2026–2027, Visit Haywood looks forward to continuing this momentum together and strengthening the visitor experience across Haywood County.

To view or download the Partner Guide, visit HaywoodTDA.com/partner-resources



Partner Marketing & Collaborations Guide



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