

# STRATEGIC PLAN | 2022



*Visit*  
**OMAHA**™

VISIT OMAHA - OMAHA'S OFFICIAL TOURISM AUTHORITY

**Mission Statement: To promote and develop metro Omaha as a dynamic destination to stimulate economic growth**

### **Strategic Focus 2022**

- Increase Omaha's awareness as a fly-in destination
- Increase national awareness of Omaha as America's favorite Zoo destination
- Drive increased group and leisure overnight visitation to fill new and existing downtown hotels and CenturyLink Center
- Focus on meetings, sports and leisure for suburban hotels
- Drive increased winter overnight visitation as a regional weekend getaway and a place for meetings/events
- Promote Omaha as the regional hub for unique life experiences.
- Establish Visit Omaha as the destination expert/champion for tourism development.
- Lead efforts to increase sports product development.

Visit Omaha is a research-driven destination marketing organization. This 2020 Strategic Plan presents our overall strategy to drive increased visitation to Omaha. This plan is built upon multiple research sources including data from Young Strategies, The Radcliffe Company, STR, Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority and Scarborough Research. Annual operating & marketing plans will be developed with measurable goals and objectives to achieve the vision laid out in this three-year Visit Omaha 2020 Strategic Plan.

# Omaha is an upper Midwest regional hub rated highly by visitors as a fun destination for leisure, meetings and sporting events.

## Overview of Destination

**Location** – Omaha is located in the center of the U.S. and accessible to at least 24.7 million people within a 500 mile radius. Omaha is located in eastern Nebraska, bordered by the contiguous states of Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota. Interstates I-80 and I-29 serve as conduits to connect travelers to Omaha and beyond.

**Attractors** – Omaha’s Henry Doorly Omaha Zoo, shopping, dining, cultural activities and attractions are the most popular activities for visitors.

**Travel Parties** – While the majority of leisure visitors are families traveling with children, a substantial percentage (50.4%) of the Business/Conference/Meeting visitors were also accompanied by family during their visit. However, the family visitors included very few young children. About one-fifth of the travel parties surveyed (20.8%) visited alone.

**Fly Markets and Growth in Visitation:** Omaha is well-known in the drive markets among families with small children. Growth from increased first-time visitors will come from generating demand among new demographics in the established drive markets and by adding promotional efforts in new regional fly markets.

**Drive increased spending –Need Periods:** Future marketing of Omaha should include new product development to add new attractors to the city’s existing landscape. This will increase the length of stay, increase engagement with activities and daily spending per party, as well as create new visitor point-of-origin markets.

**Core Target Markets:** Research ranks the following states as top feeder markets. KS, MO, IA, IL, CO and MN

**Target Audiences:** Adult couples, retirees & families; meetings/ small conferences, team sports, drive more overnight from drive and fly markets.

**Lifestyles:** Active outdoors, shopping, dining, nightlife and entertainment.

**Direct Sales:** Group Sales (meetings/sports) to fill need periods with growth opportunities coming from main regional feeder markets as well as fly-in markets.

**New Experiences:** Research identified the desire for new or expanded activities. These included active and outdoor experiences such as a riverfront boardwalk with shopping and dining; downtown entertainment district with dining, shopping, entertainment and nightlife; unique shopping boutiques in a historic district; trolley, street car or light rail system; science and innovation experience museum; interactive art and water displays near the riverfront.



### Drive Increased Visitation to Omaha

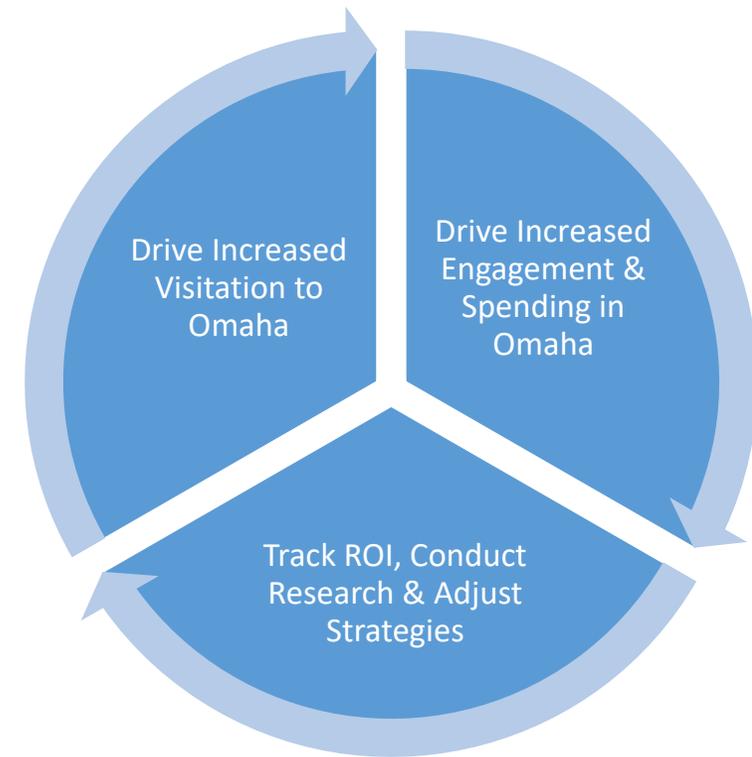
Visit Omaha takes a segmented approach to driving new first-time visitors as well as repeat visitors. Maximum economic impact is driven by focusing on those visitors who stay in paid overnight lodging. Marketing efforts that attract overnight visitors will also attract day-trippers. Visit Omaha develops its strategies focusing on those “need” periods when hotel occupancy is low. Growth in visitation will come from the following traveler segments: leisure, corporate meetings, events, team sports and associations specifically in the social, education, religious and fraternal segments. Visiting Omaha is fun, it’s a place to enjoy new life experiences.

### Drive Increased Engagement and Spending to Omaha

This strategy definitely starts while visitors are in the planning stage to make sure they have all the information needed to plan a lengthy and engaging visit. Once visitors have arrived they will be greeted at the city’s gateways, provided with ample planning information (guides, maps & apps) and assisted in coordinating their plans. Maximum engagement is the goal, visitors need to feel they have had a full experience. Research demonstrates that a fully engaged visitor stays longer, spends more and rates their experience highly. Assist visitors in all segments connect with fun activities in Omaha.

### Track ROI, Conduct Research and Adjust Strategies

Visit Omaha is a nimble destination marketing organization that adjusts its strategies based on market conditions and trends. Annual reviews of this five-year strategic plan will include analysis of the Return-on-Investment of current programs, current trends in the travel industry, changing conditions in the Omaha market and new opportunities that can drive the destination forward. Visit Omaha will invest in market research to identify opportunities to guide future sales and marketing efforts. A strategic direction is provided in this document with specific strategies and tactics provided in the annual plans.



## Leisure Advertising and Promotion

The 2016/17 research confirmed that people visit Omaha year-round for leisure getaways but it also confirmed that most people in the three-hour drive market are familiar with Omaha as a destination and rate it highly. Growth in the downtown lodging supply demands a substantial increase in sales and marketing to create new demand for both downtown and suburban hotels. The annual marketing plan will focus on specific strategies attracting leisure visitors from the core target drive markets with reach into regional fly markets, increasing awareness of active, engaging and unique experiences that visitors can only enjoy in Omaha. Leverage partnerships with local travel industry businesses to extend the reach and stretch Visit Omaha's budget. The research confirmed that the number one attractor for leisure visitation to Omaha is Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium. There is an opportunity to increase fly-in demand by promoting Omaha as America's favorite zoo destination.

### Traditional Advertising and Promotion

**Target those demographics most likely to drive visitation YEAR ROUND.**

- Active adult singles, groups and young couples
- Empty nesters seeking active, fun activities
- Families with kids when school is out

**Target lifestyles and travel preferences as a reason to visit.**

- Active outdoors, Shopping, Family Celebrations

**A well balanced mix of traditional media** (TV, Radio, Print etc.) will continue to be a critical component for building awareness of Omaha as a leisure destination.

**Develop advertising strategies to fill need periods which requires a close partnership with lodging, and weekly analysis of STR data.**

**Maintain a high quality destination guide for inquiry fulfillment and distribution in welcome centers and brochure racks.**

**Maintain high-quality destination maps and brochures to drive in-market spending.**

### Digital and Social Media Advertising and Promotion

**Maintain a dynamic website and engaging social media platforms as strong foundations for digital marketing initiatives.**

- Dedicate staff time to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to enhance content that will increase organic search results.
- Dedicate advertising dollars to Search Engine Marketing (SEM) to enhance visibility in search engine results.
- Keep blog content fresh and use guest bloggers to provide unique perspectives.
- Research updated web design in 2018/19

**Stay on top of the ever-changing trends in social media**

- Continually research new social media platforms and evaluate their value to increase awareness of Omaha as a travel destination
- Monitor OTAs and planning sites and evaluate their effectiveness as advertising platforms.
- Conduct bi-monthly "lunch and learn" social media workshops for local partners to increase audience reach of destination message.

## Public Relations/Communications

Editorial coverage across all media outlets is invaluable to build awareness of the travel experiences in Omaha. A public relations (PR) effort is required to pitch stories to media/travel writers/bloggers etc. to generate both digital and traditional coverage. PR is the most cost-effective form of communication and provides Visit Omaha a level of media exposure it could not otherwise afford. Visit Omaha dedicates staff time to reach targeted media in key regional and national markets to promote Omaha as a travel destination. Visit Omaha is the regional leader encouraging partnerships that raise the awareness of Omaha as a unique travel destination.

A local public relations effort in Omaha is important to increase awareness of Visit Omaha's mission and turn residents into brand ambassadors for the city. Visit Omaha's Executive Director/President has primary responsibility for the organization's image and visibility within the city and immediate area. It is vital that the Executive Director maintain civic buy-in by advocating with local leaders that travel marketing is sustainable economic development. Maintaining partnerships with governing bodies and community leadership is critical to the success of this plan. Visit Omaha partnership within the local travel industry plays a significant role in achieving success.

## MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Host travel writer and blogger site visits
- Maintain memberships in professional organizations such as Society of American Travel Writers and Public Relations Society of America.
- Evaluate and attend trade shows that provide increased exposure for Omaha.
- Target exposure in specific fly markets for growth.
- Maintain regular blog posts and invite guest bloggers to create multi-media content to drive interest on digital platforms.
- Regular, on-going local PR campaigns to change locals' image of Omaha...yes, Omaha is a unique travel destination!
- Maintain partnership with the NE Tourism Commission.
- Annual ROI, economic impact & plan update report.

## Convention Sales

The Visit Omaha group sales effort is focused on maintaining existing and recruiting new groups in partnership with lodging and event venues in Omaha. **Priority 1) attracting new business to fill gaps in the lodging and event space availability calendar. Priority 2) maintaining relationships with existing/repeat business. Emphasis** will be placed on driving growth in group business in two geographic areas of Omaha: Downtown and suburban hotels. Visit Omaha will partner with MECA to drive group business into the downtown convention district. Visit Omaha will also partner with suburban hotels and group facilities to identify business appropriate to drive meetings and sports related room nights to those properties.

Surveys with hotels confirmed the desired growth segments to include corporate meetings/ events, team sports, and associations focusing on the following segments; education, religious and fraternal. Omaha has multiple full- and select- service lodging properties with meeting space and significant event venues. However, Omaha has lacked the density of multiple lodging properties attached to a large event space. Development of new full-service hotels in proximity to the CenturyLink Center puts Omaha into a new competitive set and provides an opportunity for growth coupled with the challenge of new competition. Single-property corporate and smaller group business from the core drive market will continue to be a strategic focus to drive increased room demand in all geographic areas of Omaha.

Visit Omaha monitors new lodging development and shifts the group marketing strategy as new room supply comes into the market. New room supply requires increased marketing effort and shifts the strategy to large group recruitment from fly markets. Continual competitive assessment within the drive and fly group markets is integral to success. Encourage the development of leisure product within Omaha to drive increased destination appeal that supports the group sales process.

## 2022 Goals

- Drive growth in downtown and suburban hotel room nights.
- Visit Omaha conducts regular meetings with individual lodging properties to identify specific sales goals and strategies for each property and its desired growth segments.
- MECA and Visit Omaha will continue to work in close partnership to drive growth in group business tied to overnight lodging.
- Visit Omaha will continually review group facility booking policies in comparison with competitive markets and work in partnership with facilities to improve Omaha's competitive position.
- Visit Omaha will partner with the Omaha Airport Authority to increase fly-in group business.

## Convention Services

The focus of Convention Services is to provide planning assistance and expertise to meeting/convention groups, events, motor coach groups, reunions and wedding parties. Convention Services functions as the destination expert participating in pre-event attendance building, providing referrals, organizing familiarization site visits, gathering pricing, and serving as the liaison between meeting/event planners and local vendors.

In addition, Convention Services offers online housing management services which include; gathering hotel contracts; creating housing agreements with hotels and clients; building and maintaining customized booking sites; training hotel partners; invoicing and collection of housing fees; and maintaining a customer service phone line to answer questions from hotels, clients and guests.

Once groups are in Omaha, Convention Services also assists with on-site visitor information, logistics, volunteer recruitment and registration.

Following an event, Convention Services collects final hotel occupancy numbers to help determine final economic impact of a meeting or event. Convention Services also creates and distributes a post-event survey to gather feedback on overall satisfaction of the city. Survey information is shared with partners in an effort to improve and/or maintain a high quality Omaha experience.

### 2022 Goals

- Serve as the destination expert and primary promotional liaison for clients.
- Enhance the online meeting planner toolbox to make it easier for clients to promote Omaha to their attendees.
- Increase the use of the Convention Housing Management system.
- Research expanding the selection of services offered to clients.
- Provide visitor information services at **events** (sports, conferences, etc.)
- Provide signage, and welcome bags to groups that meet size and impact criteria.
- Increase response rate of client surveys.
- Cultivate new business opportunities by organizing familiarization and site visits.

## Visitor Information Services

The focus of Visitor Information Services is to drive increased visitor engagement and spending once travelers arrive in Omaha. Traditional visitor centers will not be effective in all areas of a city as large as Omaha. Plain and simple, the goal is to fish where the fish are. Visit Omaha will seek new ways to connect with travelers throughout Omaha to drive maximum visitor spending and impact.

Visit Omaha's Visitor Information Services continually monitors online apps and mobile sites (TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.) to stay informed on real-time feedback about Omaha Tourism industry partners in an effort to provide the best information to visitors.

Visit Omaha must continue to train volunteer ambassadors as destination experts. Regular training and site visits for ambassadors are key to ensuring this goal.

Regular training sessions with front-line employees will help local travel industry partners become better tourism advocates, while enhancing our partner relationships.

Additionally, it must be recognized that visitor spending only happens when visitors find where they are going. Effective directional signage is essential in driving higher visitor spending and satisfaction. Visit Omaha should provide leadership and planning to improve these efforts.

### 2022 Goals

- Maintain a primary downtown visitor center and visitor information desks at the airport.
- Maintain visitor information (maps & guides) in **local attractions and lodging**.
- Improve **way-finding & signage** designed to help visitors find experiences throughout the City/area.
- Provide on-going training to the volunteer ambassadors to keep them informed.
- Provide **front-line hospitality training throughout Omaha** as a better informed front-line provides better information and drives increased visitor spending.
- Monitor **online apps and mobile sites** (Trip Advisor, Yelp, etc.) travelers use to make plans while traveling.
- Research the potential of adding a mobile information vehicle (fully wrapped). This mobile Visitor Information Center will operate on a daily route visiting local travel industry businesses serving as a conduit for the sharing of visitor information while connecting with visitors in-market.

## Development of the Destination

Overall satisfaction with a visit to Omaha is very high (4.5 on a 5-point scale). However, trends and traveler behavior are in a constant state of evolution so Omaha cannot rest on its laurels. **Visit Omaha must continue** working with its local travel industry partners to make sure the existing visitor experiences are continually updated reflecting the latest trends in traveler preferences. **Omaha, as a destination, must continue to develop new visitor experiences to drive increased visitation and longer lengths of stay.** Every destination faces product life cycle issues and Omaha must continue addressing the life cycle issues in the area to maintain forward movement, and take its place as one of the top destination cities in America.

## Enhance Existing Experiences

Focus on the redevelopment and improvement of existing visitor experiences in Omaha, paying close attention to the ever-changing life cycle of visitor preferences, and how well local museums, attractions and events are keeping pace. Current activities that rated highest in the research for future growth are:

- Downtown entertainment district with dining, shopping, entertainment and nightlife
- Unique shopping boutiques in a historic district

## Future Development

Core focus areas identified in research as having the highest appeal for future development are:

- Active outdoor engagement such as a riverfront boardwalk with shopping and dining.
- Inner city transportation that is convenient and fun such as a trolley, street car or light rail system
- Engaging and fun activities such as a science and innovation experience museum.
- Active and scenic outdoor experiences such as interactive art and water displays near the riverfront, and further development of outdoor trails system providing better connectivity and ease of use.
- Regional indoor sports complex.

## Tracking and Accountability

Visit Omaha is a research-based, strategic destination marketing & management organization. Progress on accomplishing all goals will be tracked annually. Annual progress reports will be presented to Omaha elected officials and civic leaders. An annual review session will cover prior-year accomplishments, set goals for the coming year and determine if a full retreat is necessary to change the strategic direction of Visit Omaha.

Visit Omaha commissioned multiple comprehensive market research studies as part of this planning process. Visit Omaha should monitor STR data for the market on a weekly basis paying close attention to supply and demand in the market.

## MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- The Executive Director/President will have primary oversight of on-going tracking, accountability and reporting with each department Vice-President tracking their departments goals.
- Retain independent research firms to conduct regular research (every 3-5 years), updates and benchmark studies to guide future planning.
- STR data to monitor room supply and demand as well as rate.
- Yearly economic impact studies that examine the value tourism has on the local economy.
- Conduct annual in-house review as part of planning process to track progress and economic impact of Visit Omaha program of work.
- Investigate tracking software and economic impact models as necessary.