ABA Communications & Marketing Board of Directors Report

Melanie Hinton/Spring 2019

Introduction:

The start of 2019 was an exciting time for the Communications/Marketing team. We started the year in Louisville trying new marketing tools for Marketplace on social media that is now guiding us to promote ABA’s Marketplace 2020, which will showcase the first Busworld Academy North America event. We have also been focused on promoting the Government Affairs Team’s work on the National Park fees issue and other priorities. We spent the first month of the year working with our association and business colleagues to bring an end to the government shutdown.

Regarding membership outreach, we have innovated our outreach to new members and delivered our first Annual Report in a decade at the end of March.

Plans are already underway for promoting 2020 Marketplace and Busworld Academy in Omaha.

**Strategic Plan Benchmarks and ABA Communications/Marketing Activities**

**Advocacy Comms:** Drive legislative and regulatory oversight framework at all government levels to eliminate obstacles and promote the success of our industry.

- Work with Advocacy team on priorities and develop strategies built around them to enhance Advocacy’s impression on influencers.
- Promote Advocacy efforts through email and social media channels to inform and engage members in advocacy efforts.
- Deliver to Advocacy a website that educates members, government officials and decisionmakers on issues important to ABA and the industry.
- Help build coalitions with other associations and government agencies to promote industry’s safety and security objectives as well as ABA’s reputation and influence on Capitol Hill and governing agencies.
- Develop media-ready statements on issues that ABA has taken a stance on. Utilize relationships with trade and mainstream media to promote ABA’s voice on issues.

**Update:**

- ABA Communications has worked with the GAP team on bringing media attention to a number of issues include the National Park Service Fees and CUAs Hike (see Media Hits below), as well as work with influential Capitol Hill news organizations such as the The Hill, Politico and Bloomberg Government to cover ABA’s legislative activities and on transportation issue statements.

- ABA Communications has worked with a number of trade press this year to put a spotlight on ABA’s leadership in a number of issues affecting the industry such as the government shutdown, Intercity Bus Security Grants and NPS fees. **Update:** ABA put out a statement commending the Trump Administration for recognizing the role buses play in a multi-modal world; ABA also
signed on with other associations to take a stand against the US tariff war; the closing of the Mexican Border; and supportive of NY Bus Coalition fighting congestion pricing.

- ABA’s continued #WorkingForYou and #ABAEverywhere posts continue to grow and show ABA members that ABA is leading on issue affecting their business. UPDATE: ABA has been active on sharing the GAP team’s work with Congressional leaders, including showcasing ABA’s success with Congressional Dear Colleague Letters on the NPS fees issue as well as the Intercity Bus Security Grant Program funding. We have focused this year on targeting influencers on Capitol Hill through social media mentions and tags.

- ABA Communications team has been actively working with the GAP team to draw member attention ABA’s work on top priority issues such as: Canadian Carbon Tax, NPS fees, Lease & Interchange, Infrastructure, and Motorcoach Security Grants through member alerts, videos, surveys and articles in ABA publications and social media.

- ABA Communications team has been working closely with FMCSA to write regular columns in Destinations magazine. Also, the team spent a day with FMCSA Administrator Ray Martinez doing Level 1 inspection around the tidal basin in Washington, DC. You can read about the experience, here.

**Membership:** Continue overall membership growth with focus on all segments of the motorcoach, tour and travel industry.

To help Membership achieve their objective, Communications will:

- Work with Membership and Marketing team to continue to design and implement strategies that compliment membership sales team’s objectives.

- Promote ABA as the only association businesses in the motorcoach, tour and travel industry need to belong to by publicizing ABA’s story, benefits, etc.

- Showcase ABA’s breadth and reach in the industry by showcasing ABA’s presence and leadership at conferences and meetings across the country. #ABAEverywhere #ABAWorkingForYou

- Produce content to promote ABA benefits for hard mailings, emails and social media content to reach a larger audience of potential members. Utilize social media for an ad campaign targeting audiences that are in the industry or want to be a part of the industry.

- Promote ABA members to others in the industry and consumers to showcase how ABA helps members business.

- Create more personalized communications to members that will help their business.

**Update:**

- ABA Communications has worked with the Membership Department on new member onboarding outreach which includes a digital New Member Kit; an Onboarding Webinar and timely ABA activity emails focused on engaging new members.
Utilizing the new database and Informz, ABA Communications has created marketing automation campaigns to help recruit new members as well as stay in contact and “care for” new members throughout their first year. **UPDATE:** ABA can now track members when they visit buses.org and therefore use that information to further personalize information to members and give them exactly what they are interested in.

- Revamped and developed collateral to promote ABA programs and benefits.

- ABA Communications has been working closely with Membership team to change the buses.org website to make it more member and potential member friendly. More welcoming.

- Regularly and consistently promote what ABA offers its membership. Highlights of programs and services, include:
  - Advocacy - #ABAWorkingForYou
  - Crisis Communications Assistance
  - Marketplace
  - Discount Partnerships
  - Networking: Councils, Meetings, Webinars
  - Education: Marketplace Education, Webinars, Council Meetings, CTIS, Entry Level Driver Training, John Kennedy on Demand
  - ABA Foundation Scholarships and Research
  - Member Promotion: ABA Publications, Member Blogs, Promotional Social Media Pieces, Member Spotlight, Consumer-focused Promotion

- To enhance our Customer Service: In August, ABA launched a live chat opportunity for members and visitors to buses.org who need help finding information on ABA, Marketplace or need to update their membership information. **UPDATE:** Since its inception more than 600 people have used the live chat option and we have responded to more than 1500 inquiries.

- ABA’s participation in the FMCSA’s Our Roads, Our Responsibility campaign, as well as our partnership with Busing on the Lookout program, continues to raise the profile of ABA not only in the industry but also with government leaders. ABA has taken a lead role in partnerships that deal with our industry and is often the only motorcoach association involved. **UPDATE:** ABA secured Greyhound Bus Driver Keith Cummings from Chicago to participate in OROS’s Voices of Safety video campaign. Keith and buses will be first video launched in this campaign. ABA has also been active in promoting OROS safety materials

- ABA Director of Communication presented to the Charleston CVB Travel Council in March and came back with five new ABA members.

- In March, ABA released the 2018 Annual Report, this is the first annual report ABA has done in a decade.

- ABA Comms helped Membership draft communications for membership recruitment for shows ABA has attended (Heartland/TravelSouth/DestinationNewEngland) or cities ABA President has visited, such as Omaha.
• New membership ads for allied association publications.

**Annual Meeting & Marketplace:** Deliver the leading marketplace for member buying/selling. To help Meetings achieve their objective, Communications will:

• Work with Meetings to develop strategies and partnerships to help sell the Annual Meeting & Marketplace to a wider audience and lead to member recruitment.

• Communicate the benefits of attending the show geared to different segments.

• Utilize social media ad campaign to target potential attendees

• Promote the show and the value on social media channels and publications.

• Develop attendee referral videos to use throughout the year.

• Utilize speakers as Ambassadors for the show, have them create videos.

• Develop a user-friendly, engaging show website.

**Update:**

• ABA Communications is working closely with Meetings Department to utilize host city and Marketplace Chairman to make compelling social media and email content to share with members. We have utilized our #MarketplaceMondays on social media to highlight either Louisville as the host city or an aspect of the event. Marketplace Chair Kim Grzywacz developed regular videos promoting deadlines and highlights for Marketplace. **UPDATE:** For the 2019 Marketplace, pre-show we went around the host city and created sponsor spotlight videos to promote sponsors throughout the week. The following is collection of social media activity around the show:

  o ABA was mentioned more than 700 times on social media.
  o We gained 363 new followers on social media from January 20-February 7, also during this time:
    ▪ ABA social media interaction with followers on Instagram: 31 conversations and ABA mentioned 57 times in Instagram stories and 42 Instagram posts.
    ▪ ABA had 1237 profile visits on Instagram during Marketplace week vs less than 20 on a normal week
    ▪ ABA mentioned 105 times on Facebook
    ▪ ABA mentioned 29 times on LinkedIn
  o ABA hosted a Twitter Wall during Marketplace with the following results (from January 22 to January 30:
    ▪ 2.34 posts per hour
    ▪ 685,954 total unique reach
    ▪ 1.2 million absolute reach
• With the social media success from #ABALouisville, for 2020 ABA will be building on with new videos from Omaha CVB as well as 2020 Chairman Luke Busskohl. We will also be using hashtags: #ABAOmaha and #OMGomaha
  
  o We have secured testimonies from a number of Marketplace Advisory Committee members
  o For more Marketplace 2020 Marketing Plans see addendum attached

• ABA MARCOMMS working with Meetings Department developed an appealing Marketplace microsite to promote the event to outside our membership industry professionals. This launched in January 2019 promoting Omaha 2020.

• We will continue using speakers as program ambassadors and ask for them to do videos promoting their education session as well as the event. Update: We will be utilizing Marketplace and Busworld speakers throughout the year for 2020. Many MKPL speakers are also writing article for ABA’s publications.

• Developed advertising collateral for trade publications as well as for ABA publications and social media to promote programs and special events during Marketplace

ABA Foundation: Support the work of the ABA Foundation

To help the ABA achieve its objective of supporting the ABA Foundation, Communications will:

• Work with Foundation team on strategies to best engage members on both the scholarship side and research side of priorities.

• Communicate the industry’s impact utilizing the Foundation’s research data to help enhance advocacy efforts, support membership and build ABA’s reputation.

• Work with the Foundation team on communications such as press releases, letters and solicitations, and promotions.

• Promote the Foundation’s fundraising efforts through social media channels and publications utilizing videos, blogs and announcements.

Update:

• ABA Communications developed Scholarships in a Box set of printed materials and sent to all ABA members to help promote Foundation Scholarships to their employees.

• ABA Communications continues to promote the Foundation and its activities on social media with #FoundationFridays as well as in ABA’s publications.

• ABA Communications & Marketing have taken Scholarship winner testimonials and are utilizing these stories to promote not only donations to the Fund A Future campaign but also to encourage others to apply.
• Utilize ABA and ABA Foundation leadership in blog and video posts throughout the year to help raise awareness of the ABA Foundation scholarships and fundraising. Launched John Percy and Brenda Borwege videos calling for donated Auction items in November 2018.

• ABA Communications continues to work with Dunham & Associates to release the quarterly motorcoach sales survey. **UPDATE:** ABA sent out one press release on the surveys in 2019.

• ABA Communications took over the communications for the annual Motorcoach Census survey and sent printed and electronic surveys to members and non-members. Created homepage and webpage access to Survey. ABA worked with UMA to have them promote the Census to their members.

• ABA Comms reached out to universities with travel and tourism programs to promote available ABA scholarships for non-members.

• Created #WOWWednesdays to promote big ticket auction items leading up to Marketplace.

• Launched Percy’s Purse Raffle to promote the purse raffle that will benefit scholarships during Marketplace. Sent emails and promoted on social.

• Sent near weekly Foundation Friday emails to promote the scholarship, auctions and ABA Foundation research.

• Peter taped a video to announce the launch of the 2018-2019 Scholarship season on Dec. 6.

**Publishing, Communications and Social Media:** Communicate the value ABA contributes to the industry and its members.

• Develop strategies for major ABA programs and refine strategies as need to create the biggest impact on members and influencers.

• Maintain and deliver a portfolio including online publications, magazine, membership directory that add value. *This will be measured by annual survey. Goal is to keep satisfaction rate above 80 percent.*

• Utilize all media channels including traditional print publications, digital and social media to promote ABA, its membership and the industry's impact.

• Create the right content to match member needs/interests to promote member awareness and engagement. *One message does not fit all. Will develop messaging on all programs and events geared to motorcoach operators and the travel and tourism members.*

• Provide media support to members dealing with a crisis. Will contact or respond to all members involved in any form of crisis and offer to handle the media for them.

• Grow social media channels members by engaging ABA members and potential members on through advertisements, interesting posts and responding to members when they comment.
• Maintain a provocative website to encourage people to stay on longer and act as a resource for all things ABA and in the industry.

• Promote ABA, its story, and benefits of membership to attract new members as well as engage current members across all media platforms.

**Mainstream and Trade Media Engagement:** Position ABA as a leader and valued resource that the media can rely on for factual information on the industry, members as well as legislative and regulatory efforts that affect the industry.

• Develop positive relationships with trade and mainstream media to establish ABA as the industry leader and go-to resource on all things related to motorcoach, travel and tour issues.

• Develop media-ready statements on issues that ABA has taken a stance on. Utilize relationships with trade and mainstream media to promote ABA’s voice on issues.

• Promote ABA members to media to showcase ABA’s reach in the industry.

• Research new media contacts in traditional media outlets as well as bloggers.

• Maintain up-to-date, current media database.

• Promote ABA leaders as sources for media to use to develop stories or have industry voice in stories.

**Update:**

**Media Engagement:**

So far in 2019, ABA has sent out 15 press releases and statements regarding Marketplace and the ABA Foundation, industry initiatives, happenings within the government affecting the industry, including the government shutdown.

**Media Statements:**

*ABA Names Scatter Joy Acres as Marketplace 2020 Charity*

*ABA MAC Gives Back to Omaha*

*ABA Commends the Trump Administration for Recognizing the Role Buses Play in a Multi-Modal World*

*ABA, AmeriFuel Team Up for Exclusive Partnership to Increase Member Benefit*

*ABA Foundation Report Says Motorcoach Manufacturing Sales Stalled in Q418*

*Another Successful Marketplace in the Books*

*ABA Gives Back Raises Funds for Louisville Charity*

*ABA Foundation Raises Money for Scholarships*

*ABA Congratulates the 2019 Marketplace Award Winners*
ABA CTIS Program Celebrates 30 Years

ABA Welcomes New Members to Association Board of Directors

ABA Implores Congress, Administration to Come Together and End Shutdown

Industry Associations Urge an Immediate End to the Government Shutdown

EPA Makes $40 Million Available in FY19 Diesel Emission Reduction Grants, Partner with ABA to Apply

ABA and PerilloTravelVR Partner for Exclusive Benefits for ABA Members

Media Hits:

So far in 2019, ABA has been mentioned 316 times in news articles that covered Marketplace 2019, Marketplace award winners, coverage of ABA statements on the government shutdown as well as other government issues affecting the industry. ABA was also interviewed on the bus shortage and trends in the industry for 2019.

In addition to these activities, ABA was covered by the following news outlets:

- Trade Show News Network
- Transport Topics
- Star Herald
- Group Travel Leader
- Denver Post
- Crain’s New York Business
- Metro Magazine
- Gettysburg Times
- School Transportation News
- Associated Press
- Commercial Carrier Journal
- Fresno Bee
- BusRIDE Magazine

Social Media Activities

ABA’s social media presence continues to grow. We have been active engaging members on a variety of topics such as National Day celebrations where we promote ABA members; using Louisville CVB and 2019 Marketplace Chairman Kim Grzywacz videos to promote Marketplace as well as Peter doing a number of Let’s Talk videos to bring awareness to our events and Advocacy issues. We are seeing that video is king and will be utilizing videos more in the future.

We continue to see our social media channels grow:

- **Facebook**: 5,320 in Jan. to 5,579 (as of April 11)
- **Twitter**: 4,256 in Jan. to 4,330 (as of April 11)
- **LinkedIn**: 3,589 in Jan. to 3,607 (as of April 11)
- **Instagram**: 984 in Jan. to 1,154 (as of April 11)

To put in context our competitors’ social media numbers are:
United Motorcoach Association
Facebook: 2,276 as of April 11
Twitter: 1,407 as of April 11

National Tour Association
Facebook: 5,036 as of April 11
Twitter: 10.5k as of April 11

Publications
On Jan. 7, ABA launched a new The Insider with new partner, INLoop. The Insider utilizes AI technology and enable members to choose the news they want to read regarding their part of the industry and that is all they will see – in addition to ABA News – with this new publication. This is another example of ABA personalizing the member’s experience with ABA. Since January, three ads have been sold in the new Insider.

In the first quarter of 2019, three ads have been sold in the Tour Stop.

In April, Destinations magazine launched the 2019 call for nominations for its Best of the Best Sept/Oct issue.

Crisis Communication
ABA continues its campaign to educate our bus and tour operator members about ABA’s Crisis Communications member benefit. ABA Communications also helped members prepare crisis communications plans as well as deal with customer service communications issues.

Polynesian Adventure Tours (2/18)
ABA also provided “other” communications assistance to members, whether it was to help them create a crisis communications, deal with difficult customer service situations or working with members to create positive media:

EPN Travel – Crisis Communications prep plan
First Class Charter – Crisis Communications prep plan
Innovative Coaches - Crisis Communications prep plan
Addendum

2020 Marketplace Marketing Plan

The purpose of this plan is to outline the Communications and Marketing tactics we will employ to promote the 2020 Marketplace (MKPL) in Omaha, Neb. This plan has a number of moving parts and vehicles to create a comprehensive campaign in promoting MKPL and all activities, including the debut of Busworld Academy, as the leading business event of the year for the motorcoach, travel and tourism industry and Omaha as interesting and exciting place to visit and add to tour plans.

While most tactics will be employed to enhance the Meetings Departments announcement and deadlines, others will be used to keep the conversation and the focus on MKPL all year round. We are coordinating closely with the Communications and Marketing team at the Omaha CVB throughout the campaign.

A living calendar will accompany and guide this plan.

Vehicles That Will Be Used:

Vehicles and Tools that will the Communications and Marketing Team will use throughout the year to promote MKPL will be:

**Informz direct email and marketing automation email campaign**— this will allow us to track and monitor interest in MKPL. For example, by utilizing Informz we will know who opened/forwarded/visited the website and clicked on linked topics so we can then move to personalized follow up on what people are interested in. We will also set up automation, which means depending on the target’s actions, they will get specific follow up.

**ABA Publications**— membership-focused information will be directed to the corresponding publication (Tour Stop or BB) as well as general MKPL and Omaha materials will be included in Destinations and Insider.

**Non-ABA member outreach:** We will target non-ABA member industry companies with specialized emails, advertising in trade publications and hard mailings promoting ABA’s Marketplace and Busworld Academy.

**Social Media**— using all of ABA’s social media channels (FB, TW, LI, INSTA, YT) we will be able to promote deadlines, factual information and announcements as well as creative pieces and video. While most posts will be made on #MarketplaceMonday we will also use opportunities such as #WaybackWednesday and #ThrowbackThursday to use former Marketplace videos when appropriate. We will also be using #FoundationFriday to highlight the Auction, Afterglow and purse raffle. We will utilize the hashtags #ABAOmaha and #OMGomaha in all social posts.

Topics to be covered on social media:

- “Postcards from Omaha” where we will use fun facts and make creative pieces (Erin and Vicki)
- Videos (see below) (Mel/ Erin to coordinate)
- MKPL deadlines and announcements (Meetings Dept)
• Busworld Academy promotion (Mel and Sofie)
• Blogs about Omaha and Marketplace programming (Mel and Members to craft)
• Testimonials (Luke/Board/MAC/Volunteer/Council Members)
• Speakers (MKPL Education and Busworld Academy speakers – Vicki/Mel to coordinate)
• The ABA Foundation Auctions and Afterglow (Brad/Shea with Mel/Erin)
• ABA Gives Back (Meetings/Mel)
• Education sessions and opportunities (Vicki/Mel)
• Council sessions (Council Heads/Mel)
• Dine Around Options (Where to go in Omaha) (Meetings/Mel)
• FAM & Sightseeing tours (Meetings/Mel)
• Volunteering Opportunities (Meetings/Mel)
• The App (Vicki/Mel)

Videos – We had a lot of success with videos with our members. We will kick off the MKPL video series with Peter doing a registration opens today video for the April 24 opening.

2020 MKPL Chair Luke Buskohl will be the face the Marketplace. We have asked Luke to deliver 6 videos to promote the show:

• **May 20** – Have You Registered Yet? I look forward to showing you my hometown. Don’t miss our early bird rates!
• **July 16** – ABA has the best networking opportunities especially through ABA’s Councils. (For Charter operators talk about how tour operators attending as your customers)
• **Sept. 16** – ABA is the only place where you get to meet with your customers face to face all at once. It is where Business Happens.
• **Oct. 21** – ABA provides the most unique education in the industry. Never one to rest on their laurels, ABA will be stepping up its education offerings this year with the debut of the Busworld Academy – the first event in North America from the Busworld Foundation.
• **Nov. 18** – It’s the giving season: talk about ABA Gives Back and ABA Foundation
• **Dec. 9** – One month left until MKPL – are you ready? Is your profile up to date?

Communications/Marketing has reached out to all MAC members and asked that they be “ambassadors” for the show and send in video and written testimonials regarding “Why I am attending ABA’s Marketplace”. We have had a very positive response from the Committee members. We will also utilize our Education speakers to create video vignettes promoting their education sessions. We will also ask Board members, Volunteers, Council members to create “I am going to ABA because....” Videos. We will work with the Omaha CVB to either create or send us videos showcasing the city. One such video we hope to produce is a short video promoting the city and its hotels for the housing opening in August. We will also reach out to the CVB to have them tell us their favorite thing to do in Omaha. We will put these on social with their pictures, just like we did for the Board and scholarship winners.

**MKPL Microsite** – ABA’s new 2020 MKPL microsite allows us to be more creative and targeted in our promotion of the show. While we have the usual sections for business, networking and education that attendees have come to recognize, these sections now POP and are more user-friendly than the previous MKPL pages.
We will also be adding three new sections to the site this year: Busworld Academy, OMG Omaha! (which will essentially be a tour kit of all things Omaha such as Touring Omaha, Dining Around Omaha, Visiting Neighborhoods & Districts, and Enjoying the Nightlife), and the brand-spanking new inaugural Journalist Program (see below for details).

New Programs to Promote

Busworld Academy – as we begin to put together a program for the Busworld Academy, we will create announcements and testimonials regarding this new high-level educational opportunity. We will also target journalists who will benefit from the Busworld program.

Marketplace Journalist Program – ABA will create a 3-day journalist-specific program during the weekend of MKPL. Working with the city of Omaha and Nebraska, we will develop a program that includes:

Friday, Jan. 10 - a city sightseeing tour that will end in a “sponsored” happy hour.

Saturday, Jan. 11 - Journalists will have breakfast on their own and then conduct interview “appointments” on the networking floor from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. (ABA Comms will help match journalists with booths); participate in the networking floor reception; attend the ABA Foundation Live Auction; and then explore Omaha on their own.

Sunday, Jan. 12 – Journalists will be invited to a Nebraska – sponsored breakfast where the state and/or the cvbs it invites to participate can promote tourism in the state and what the state has to offer for visitors. They then can have “free time” to walk around the networking floor; attend education sessions or leave whenever they want.

The timeline for promotion of this (assuming we have sponsors and can do this) would be:

August Launch program to targeted journalists. The list will come from ABA, Omaha and Nebraska/Iowa.

September 30 – registration deadline for journalists who want to participate in this program. Other journalists are welcome to just attend the show as previously offered.

First half of October, reach out to journos and networking floor exhibitors and start match process.

Early November, matches complete (but will be flexible to make appointments with each other on the floor as well), so we can encourage the CVBs/exhibitors to bring their PR/Marketing folks for interviews.

Mid-November – general media advisory about show out to those not participating in program.

Early-December – second media advisory out to journalists not participating in the program.