ABA Communications & Marketing Board of Directors Report

Melanie Hinton/Winter 2019

Introduction:

2018 was a busy and successful year for the ABA Communications and Marketing. This fall we revamped the buses.org homepage and a number of pages inside as well as added a Live Chat function where we have had more than 400 people contacted us and answered approx. 1200 inquiries since we launched. We have also been heavily promoting 2019 Marketplace, 2017 Motorcoach Census and 2018-2019 Scholarship program.

With new Senior Director of Membership coming on board, we have helped the membership team streamline and personalize membership promotion as well as retention programs.

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 travel trade press this year to put a spotlight on ABA’s leadership in a number of issues affective the travel and tourism industry such as the travel ban and NPS fees.
- 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 also added Let’s
Talk headers to issues such as NPS and FMCSA regulations throughout the year on social and Pete filmed a number of Let’s Talk videos.

- ABA Communications team has been actively working with the GAP team to not only draw member attention to the possible loss of the fuel tax refund but to engage members to give us information that we can take to Congress through videos, surveys and articles in ABA publications and social media.

- ABA Communications has worked with GAP team to reinvent their section of the website to make it easier for Members and State Associates to access top priority issues information.

**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, i.e. “How Tos”, industry trends, etc.

**Update:**

- ABA has developed a new database system and with that comes the ability to personalize information to members through our new communications system, Informz. ABA is now able to allow members to choose how ABA communicates with them as well track who is opening what and when.

- 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.
The Communications & Marketing Team has also created a new branding campaign: Let’s Talk that engages members and potential members on ABA activities and issues. The Let’s Talk campaign debuted at the SYTA Annual Meeting in August. **UPDATE:** ABA also added Let’s Talk headers to issues such as NPS and FMCSA regulations throughout the year on social and Pete filmed a number of Let’s Talk videos.

Peter has created a number of Let’s Talk videos on issues important to ABA members as well as promote the ABA Foundation and new ABA membership benefits.

Developed phone wallets promoting ABA.

Revamped and developed collateral to promote ABA programs and benefits.

The Communications & Marketing Team has also developed marketing automation techniques to help foster membership growth and retention. **UPDATE:** ABA MARCOMMS developed an online Membership Welcome Kit (http://www.nxtbook.com/ygsreprints/ABA/aba_welcome_201811/index.php#/1) which is now sent via INFORMZ as part of the membership onboard process.

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. You will have seen that we have changed wording on the top level to be more inclusive. We debuted a new, more user-friendly homepage at the end of September.

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 400 people have used the live chat option and we have responded to more than 1200 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.

- In September, produced in both English and Spanish HMC videos with Bill Torres and Rod Vasquez of DC Trails promoting the September meeting and belonging to the HMC.

- In December, helped launch a partnership with School Transportation News to create a school bus operator award and have a presence at STN’s EXPO to bolster benefits for SBC members as well as build closer relationship with the publication.

- Created Meet Your Board Members campaign to introduce ABA Board Members to the larger membership as many have mentioned they do not know who the Board Members are. This appeared in social media as well as relevant publications.

- Created an ad for MCI’s annual calendar in both English and French to promote ABA/MCI’s Motorcoach Operator of the Year.

**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.

- ABA MARCOMMS working with Meetings and Membership Departments 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.
• Developed advertising collateral for trade publications as well as for ABA publications and social media to promote programs and special events during Marketplace.

• Utilized social media and onsite videos to promote current Marketplace as well as create evergreen material to use throughout the year.

• Had many speakers write exclusive articles for ABA’s The Insider throughout the year to not only educate but promote their education sessions at 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. **UPDATE:** Launched John Percy and Brenda Borwege videos calling for donated Auction items in November.

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

• 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. As of this report (Jan. 4) we have had 229 completed survey returned. This is more than the last Census.

- 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.
- 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:

In 2018, ABA sent out 34 press releases and statements regarding Marketplace and the ABA Foundation, industry initiatives, happenings within the government affecting the industry, including Congressional tax reform, terrorism and the travel and tourism industry.

Media Statements:

The Effects of a Partial Federal Government Shutdown on Industry

ABA, School Transportation News Partner to Create More Benefits for ABA’s SBC Members

Industry Leaders Meet to Discuss Parks and Other Issues

ABA, Coalition Partners Succeed in Overturning UCR Fees for Intrastate School Bus Contractors

ABA, Busworld Announce Partnership to Bring Renowned Busworld Academy to ABA’s 2020 Marketplace

ABA Foundation Motorcoach Manufacturing Report Sees Another Strong Quarter

ABA Foundation Accepts Generous Donation from U.S. Tours

ABA Congratulates Board Member for Appointment to DOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking

FMCSA Proposes to Revise Lease & Interchange Rule, ABA & Industry React

ABA Response to Amtrak “Threatening” to Use Buses to Move People

ABA Welcomes Lia Zegeye to Lead New Membership Initiatives

ABA Foundation Board of Governors Plot Road for Future Leaders of Group Travel Industry

ABA Congratulates Successful FY 2018 Intercity Bus Security Grant Recipients

ABA Foundation Congratulates Class of 2018 Scholarship Recipients

ABA Foundation Report Says Motorcoach Manufacturing Sales Grow in Second Quarter
ABA Expresses Disappointment in Chairman Shuster’s Infrastructure Proposal

ABA Releases Statement on Supreme Court Ruling to Uphold Administration Travel Ban

ABA Foundation Report Says Motorcoach Manufacturing Sales Stay Steady in First Quarter

ABA and MCI Launch New Motorcoach Driver of the Year Award

NPS Announces Revised Entrance Fee and CUA Proposal

First United Motorcoach Industry Fly-in a Success

Don’t Get Stranded Because You are Not ELD Compliant

ABA Partners with Busing on the Lookout to Combat Human Trafficking

ABA Foundation Names New Leadership

ABA, John Kennedy Consulting Premiere Partner Announce New Member Benefit

ABA and UMA Team Up for Legislative Fly-In

ABA Foundation Report Says Motorcoach Manufacturing Sales Grew in Q417

ABA Congratulates Raymond Martinez as New FMCSA Administrator

ABA Supports Rebuilding Infrastructure, Wary of Financing

Congratulations to the Award Winners Recognized at ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace

Congratulations to the CTIS Class of 2018

ABA Elects New 2018 Leadership and Board Members During Annual Meeting

ABA Responds to National Travel & Tourism Office Report on the Decline of Inbound Travelers into the US

ABA Announces the Formation of the Asian Motorcoach Council and School Bus Council

Media Hits:

In 2018, we ABA leadership for several interviews and op-eds including: articles in Travel Weekly and Group Travel on NPS fees; Peter wrote an op-ed for Group Travel on the Supreme Court upholding the Trump Administration’s Travel Ban; Peter worked with Travel Weekly on an article on Infrastructure. Peter appeared regularly on Road Dog Radio. In addition to these activities, ABA was covered by the following news outlets:

Bloomberg Government e-Turbo News
Politico Influence FTN News
Politico Morning Transportation Newsday
Metro Magazine Leisure Group
Travel Weekly East Idaho News
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**: 5,223 in Aug. to 5,320 (as of Jan. 4)
- **Twitter**: 4,150 in Aug. to 4,256 (as of Jan. 4)
- **LinkedIn**: 3,580 in Aug. to 3,589 (as of Jan. 4)
- **Instagram**: 855 in Aug. to 984 (as of Jan 4)

To put in context our competitors’ social media numbers are:

- **United Motorcoach Association**
  - **Facebook**: 2,169 as of Jan. 4
  - **Twitter**: 1,359 as of Jan. 3

- **National Tour Association**
  - **Facebook**: 5,007 as of Jan. 3
  - **Twitter**: 10.5k as of Jan. 3

Publications

On Jan. 7, ABA launched a new The Insider with new partner, INLoop. The Insider will utilize 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.

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.

QT Transport (3/9)
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:

International Stage Lines (4/2)
Anderson Coach and Travel (Early Travel)
OurBus (8/13)
DC Trails (July)