

## **SA Accredited Visitor Centre Network SATIC workshop 2018**

**Topic:** Seeing the future of VICs with both 'I's – information and industry.

**Overview:** How industry engagement with Visitor Information Centres creates a better tourism experience.

**1.**

### **Andy Glen**

Tourism Development Manager, Mount Barker District Council  
Chair SA Accredited Visitor Information Centre Network  
Manages Hahndorf (Adelaide Hills) VIC  
20 years tourism experience  
0408 089 366

### **Glen Christie**

Manager – Tourism & Events, Port Pirie Regional Council  
Member SA Accredited Visitor Information Centre Network  
Chair – Southern Flinders Tourism & Tastes  
18 months in the position  
0407 893 417

There are 42 accredited Visitor Information Centres throughout South Australia, and hundreds of staff and volunteers engaging, inspiring and telling the stories that really matter to more than a million visitors annually.

Is your story being told? Do you have a new chapter to your story? Do you take the time to promote yourself and your product with your local VIC?

We want to inspire a two way engagement to provide a better experience for the visitor and more money in our economy.

**2.**

### **Brief Overview of the State Network**

#### **Brand Statement**

South Australian Accredited Visitor Information Centres will engage with you, inspire you and tell you the stories that really matter.

Engage, inspire, experience

42 Accredited VICs

Open 7 days a week 363 days per year.

2011/2016 average of 1.3 million visitors assisted each year

The aims of the SAVICN are:

- To encourage professionalism and unity of VICs
- To facilitate communication amongst SA AVICs
- To raise awareness about the value of VICs
- To encourage a proactive approach to collaborative efforts
- To promote goodwill and participation VICs and stakeholders including Local Government, RTOs, SATC, SATIC and tourism operators.

- Leading change process

### 3. **Value of AVICs to the state's tourism economy**

- SA VIC Network research (2016) based on Tourism Research Australia data (2012) - VICs linked to an additional unplanned spend of \$121 million average over 5 years - 758 jobs
- Australian Regional Tourism Network research - Local Government spend \$16 million per year on Visitor Centres
- Numerous factors may impact both the cost and benefit calculations – operational efficiencies – do all VICs achieve optimum economic performance? Do Local Government budgets include costs of running VIO's, and non-operational expenditures such as full cost attribution?
- Given that it's not a perfect world, and allowing for the changing environment within tourism, – if we hypothetically added a third to the cost calculation and took a third from the SAVICN benefit = \$24 Million spent for \$80 million benefit = 333% ROI
- VICs also play an important role in the triple bottom line concept – economic benefit, social benefit and environmental benefit. The latter two have had no attributable value assigned to them at this stage.
- The amount of benefit that your business will receive is directly proportional to the amount of effort that you and your local VIC put into your relationship.

### 4. **The cost of running VICs**

- 80% Local Government (LG) owned and managed
- The remainder receive either cash or in kind support from LG.
- ARTN research indicates \$16 million spend by LG on Visitor Information Centres in SA
- There are no VIC's in SA that break even !
- LG play a pivotal role in visitor servicing, facilities and VICs
- Your rates – your opportunity
- Industry support will assist viability arguments for VICs and is genuine ROI
- Stakeholders require ROI to continue investment
- Those VICs not owned by LG require the same ROI - they often but not always receive LG funding but most receive in kind support
- LG acknowledges that tourism is a major economic benefit driver, but is uncertain how possible rate capping may impact VIC operations and other tourism related projects?
- How may this impact your business?
- It's imperative to work together and stimulate the tourism sector

### 5 **Extending length of stay and repeat visitation**

- The longer they stay, the more they pay...but only if they are paying for what they want, not what you think they need.
- VICs also give them a reason to come back...again...and again...
- VICs cause increased length of stay and repeat visitation

- Average daily spend – varies across areas and Regions, but is around \$175 per person, per day (depending on accommodation need)
- Give people an experience to remember, they will come back
- By inspiring visitors to discover more in region, VICs play an important role in extending length of stay and repeat visitation. Your story and your relationship is vital!
- VIC staff are happy to refer visitors to businesses that offer reliable and interesting product, and whilst remaining impartial in their referral, will always aim to inspire visitors to get the most out of their visit.
- Findings of studies in most states have consistently shown that the information given to tourists at VICs will cause an increase in unplanned expenditure and time in your region and around the state.

## 6. **SA VIC Network survey results**

- SAVICN conduct surveys twice each year
- 1.3 million visitors each year
- Origin – SA 26%, Interstate 45%, Overseas 29%
- 74% enter VICs looking for staff advice
- 97% regularly use VICs as they travel
- 99% VIC satisfaction rating
- Staff advice and exceptional customer service are a point of difference for VICs going forward (telling the stories that really matter) – is your story being told, how is it being told and is it being told in the way you want it told?
- 80% of people using VICs are also digitally capable. VIC staff provide assurance to the content of online promotion
- Maps and brochures are still in demand with 70% of VIC users requiring this service. Are you on the map?

## 7. **Half way questions and answers**

### 8 **The changing face of VICs**

- It's about experiences AND information
- The Guest Hosting Model
- Open Plan “Meet and Greet” Approach
- VICs changing their business plans to meet consumer needs
- Ten years ago VICs had to change to meet stakeholder needs to be more commercially oriented. Today we are adapting to the changing digital environment and need to tell our own stories better.
- We are doing so with the SATC and looking at future proofing initiatives
  - Fish where the fish are – no longer 100% bricks and mortar
  - Open Plan “Meet and Greet” Approach
  - Embracing the digital space
  - Plug gaps in visitor servicing
  - Demonstrate return on investment (Industry/Council/Stakeholders/ RTOs)

- Maps & Brochures are important, but they are no longer enough
- Treat all of our visitors like guests
- VICs are becoming more digitally capable with Google My Business pages, Trip Advisor pages, free Wi-Fi, charging stations, online booking and sales systems, social media and web pages
- VICs often identify and fill the gaps in the industry until the industry wishes to take over e.g. hosting events, walking tours, transport options, bicycle hire etc.
- It's no longer a little old lady knitting behind a counter filling a bag full of brochures that's valid – its trained and skilled staff and volunteers, engaging with their clients and matching the client needs to what is on offer within their town, within their region and within our state.
- VICs need industry support and engagement to demonstrate ROI

## 9. **VICs engaging with Industry**

- We want to showcase what you have to offer
- Strengthens our Regional knowledge - Increased number of stories available to tell
- Key component of extending length of stay and repeat visitation
- Increased demonstrable ROI
- Increasing retail potential for both VICs and Industry
- A good host knows all there is to know
- We are curious creatures with need to know your business
- We take delight in inspiring our clients and getting positive feedback
- We are local, think local and act local
- Industry includes Regional Tourism Organisations, Government and private funded attractions, hospitality and family businesses.

## 10 **Industry engaging with VICs**

- Displays that are all about you - information, products, produce
- We tell your story, inspire our guests and refer your product
- We need regular updates on changes – seasonal or other
- Tourists are not the only ones we see
- Experience is the key- taste/smell/touch/enjoy/tell
- if you want us to sell your produce, people need to be able to taste and try, but not at the total cost of VICs
- Up-to-date information means we can keep it fresh
- Locals will source information/experience, if they are aware we have it.
- VIC Managers are a good place for business startups to get information and visitor profiling.
- Do not assume that a VIC knows your business, OR tells your stories well
- VICs are active in the Visiting Friends and Relatives sector
- Have you hosted your local VIC staff at your premises lately?
- Do you refer visitors to your local VIC for more information?
- Would you or your staff like to spend some time in your local VIC?

- Have you considered a commercial agreement with your VIC to sell or display your product?
- Are you prepared to pay commission?
- Commission helps to pay the electricity and reduces net cost to our communities.

**11. Positive Ideas for the two I's to collaborate and integrate – from the floor**

Conversation starters

- We want to take back to the State Network three ideas to improve our engagement with Industry
- Commissions, increasing general income, reducing costs
- Engagement with your business
- Co-funded opportunities – tourism talks, surveys, knowledge sharing

**12. Summary and Close**

- Thank you for being a valued contributor to VICs and allowing VICs into your world.
- VICs and Industry can both benefit by developing or strengthening their relationship with each other
- Local Government plays an important role in financing VICs and delivering infrastructure. It's your rates – your opportunity
- VICs are costly to run and staff
- VICs deliver increased spending and repeat visitation to Industry, and are involved in triple bottom line delivery.
- VICs want industry to be viable and profitable but need to refer with confidence that a consumer will experience unique, reliable and genuine offerings.
- 84% of visitors in VICs are from interstate or overseas – most profitable sector.
- We are changing our model to meet digital advances in information sourcing.
- VICs love to tell stories – make yours count