ABA Communications Board of Directors Report

Melanie Hinton/Spring 2017

Introduction:

The first part of 2017 has been a busy one for ABA Communications and quite successful in terms of working with the media and interacting with our members about all the benefits being an ABA member brings them.

Promoting ABA

Leading up to the ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace, ABA was active promoting how ABA is working for its members through the #ABAWorkingForYou and #ABAEverywhere campaigns. Both campaigns include posting pictures of ABA staff on Capitol Hill and at industry events. These postings have been quite popular with members and have led to more interaction and engagement with members through social media.

During the Annual Meeting & Marketplace, we took social media to the next level and began distributing videos produced by Terrapin Blue about happenings at Marketplace. Our social media engagement during Marketplace was popular and quite active not only with ABA posting but also with many members contributing and promoting their presence at ABA. We have carried the use of videos outside of Marketplace and now post weekly videos promoting ABA, the ABA Foundation, our Councils, ABA meetings, etc. These videos now receive the highest reach and engagement with members. ABA has now contracted with Terrapin Blue to create more messaging for the association on a variety of ABA events and topics important to our membership.

ABA Foundation:

I have worked closely with the Foundation team to gain traction and recognition for the Foundation and its programs, especially the Fund a Future Campaign. We spent the last quarter capitalizing on scholarship fundraising and writing member alerts, blogs and social posts to promote the ABA Foundation Scholarships. We have named Fridays as Foundation Friday on social media and post regularly Foundation promotions and updates.

As the scholarship season wraps up, we will now focus on promoting the Foundation’s research and working with the Foundation staff to assist with communications for fundraising and unveiling new research.

Government Affairs & Policy:

I continue to work closely with GAP team on promoting legislative and regulatory issues. We have recently hired a Legislation & Communications Associate to focus on GAP communications and BusPAC.

While the Administration continues filling key leadership roles in agencies and the new Congress begins to focus on transportation issues, Communications and GAP have been closely aligned in not only educating new leaders in Washington, DC but also keeping industry members informed on what is happening on Capitol Hill as well as in agencies.
A recent collaboration effort includes the ABA and SYTA letter to the White House and Commerce Department regarding the effects of the travel ban. While GAP was sending the letters out, Communications was alerting the media and our members.

**ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace 2017**

ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace was a great success for ABA in terms of communication and outreach. Below you will see the number of media hits that were garnered during the week and beyond as well as the engagement among our social media followers. We grew all of our social media followers exponentially, as well as the amount of people reached and interacted with during the week and beyond. We worked with Terrapin Blue to create during the show promos as well as post-show highlights that we will utilize as we make plans for 2018 in Charlotte.

**Membership:**

Working closely with the membership team, I have identified a number of ways we can promote our members more and in turn recruit new members. We have added a Member News section to *The Insider* to highlight member news and their work in their communities.

We have also created a Member Benefit of the Week post for social media and *The Insider* to remind members to take advantage of all that ABA membership offers. We have also created a social calendar where we are utilizing videos that highlight all that ABA is and does.

Finally, we have launched a new campaign in an effort to promote our members and their industry. ABA’s Heroes of the Industry highlights all our members do throughout the year to help the industry, their communities and others. This will culminate in a new section of the website as well as recognition during the Annual Meeting & Marketplace.

**New Publisher YGS:**

We announced at the Winter Board meeting that starting Jan 1, 2017 we would be working with a new publisher, YGS from York, Pa. Four months in and with a number of ABA publications published through them we have continued delivering the same high-quality content and publications that ABA members have come to expect. We will continue to adapt and adjust ABA’s publication to meet the needs and interests of our membership.

On May 1, YGS will launch the second annual Destinations Best of the Best program. This program was a replacement of ABA’s Top 100. The Best of the Best is a new special section that was launched in 2016 and will appear annually in the September/October issue of Destinations magazine.

This section features top travel industry suppliers across eight tour and travel categories: hotel/lodging, restaurant/dining, shopping venue, theater, museum, casino/gaming, attraction and events.

Only ABA members in good standing may submit nomination forms. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are limited to three nominations and each nomination must be for a distinct travel supplier within the DMO’s region. Destination marketing entities are not eligible for the Best of the Best competition. Each travel industry supplier may self-nominate only once. In the case of duplicate nomination forms between a DMO and the travel supplier, or any other party, the travel supplier’s own nomination form will take precedence and will be the primary nomination considered.
ABA Media’s creative team and ABA will conduct a review of all nomination forms in May/June. Nomination ratings are based on quantitative as well as qualitative assessments, and all final selections of Best of the Best winners are made at the sole discretion of ABA Media and ABA. Winners will be announced mid-June.

Activities:

Media Engagement:

Since January we have seen a number of articles about the effect that the ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace had on the city of Cleveland. News agencies in and around Cleveland promoted ABA coming to the city, even saying our impact would be bigger than Republication National Convention in August 2016, as well as continued visitor growth to the area since the ABA convention. ABA was also quoted in articles about the Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority blocking buses from dropping customers off at metro stations during President Donald Trump’s Inauguration and an article about the rise in crowdsourcing charter buses.

Media Hits:

**Crain's Editorial: Keep It Going**
Crain's Cleveland Business
April 2, 2017

**Chicago Tour Operator, Who First Visited Cleveland in January, Will Return This Summer with a Bus Full of Tourists**
The Cleveland Plain Dealer
Susan Glaser
March 16, 2017

**ABA Rocks Cleveland**
Chauffer Driven
Feb. 7, 2017

**Visit Canton Shows Off Area to Tour Operators**
Canton Repository
Jan. 29, 2017
By Rich Desrosiers

**OurBus to offer cheap fares from Lehigh Valley cities to New York**
The Morning Call
Jan. 27, 2017
By Scott Kraus

**Branson Invades ABA**
Branson Tri-Lake News
Jan. 24, 2017
Joshua Clark

**Bus operators like what they see in Cleveland stop**
Crain's Cleveland Business
Jan. 22, 2017
Jay Miller

**Breaking the Bus Stigma: Today's Motorcoaches are Real Alternatives for Travel, Industry Experts Say**
The Plain Dealer
Jan. 16, 2017
Ginger Christ

**Much like the RNC, impact of American Bus Assn Convention in Cleveland will be felt down the road**
ABC News 5
Jan. 16, 2017
John Kosich
Convention brings 3,500 tour experts to Cleveland
WKYC 3 NBC
Jan. 15, 2017
Carly Flynn Morgan

Gold Jackets Attend American Bus Association Conference
Pro Football Hall of Fame
Jan. 14, 2017

Cleveland to host its biggest convention since the RNC
WKYC NBC 3
Jan. 14, 2017

Media Statements:

Since January, ABA has sent out eight press releases regarding the events that took place at the Annual Meeting & Marketplace, happenings within the government affecting the industry, including expressing worry about how President Trump’s travel ban will affect the motorcoach, travel and tourism industry.

- ABA, SYTA Urge the President to Clarify that U.S. Open for Business for Secure Foreign Travel - March 24, 2017
- ABA Congratulates Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao on Her Confirmation - Jan. 31, 2017
- ABA Foundation Raises $120,000 for Scholarships during ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace - Jan. 24, 2017
- ABA Statement on Status of WMATA Prohibiting Motorcoaches from Metro Station Drop Offs - Jan. 17, 2017
- Members Recognized during ABA Marketplace - Jan. 17, 2017
- Congratulations to the CTIS Class of 2017 - Jan. 17, 2017
- ABA Elects New 2017 Board Members at Annual Meeting - Jan. 14, 2017

Social Media Activities

We have been utilizing our social media channels more with the #ABAWorkingForYou campaign and promoting the benefits of being a member of ABA as well as attending ABA events. Since January, we have been utilizing videos taken at ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace to promote ABA’s Councils, meetings and ABA work in general. We have contracted with Terrapin Blue to continue building a video library to continue promoting ABA. These videos have proved to be quite popular with followers.

Our average post reach between January – March was 1,659 people.
Because of our increase engagement and use of social media networks, we have seen our social media audience and interaction start to grow:

**Facebook**: 4379 in Dec. 2016 to 4624 now (as of April 10)

**Twitter**: 3542 in Dec. 2016 to 3674 now (as of April 10)

**LinkedIn**: 3491 in Dec. 2016 to 3532 now (as of April 10)

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

**United Motorcoach Association**
**Facebook**: 1789 as of April 10
**Twitter**: 1027 as of April 10

**National Tour Association**
**Facebook**: 4831 as of April 10
**Twitter**: 10.4k as of April 10

**Website Update:**
As ABA nears that launch date of its new Driver Training Program, we are making edits to the buses.org website to better highlight ABA’s commitment to industry education. In time for the Driver Training Program launch, buses.org will have a new section to the website title Education. In this section, visitors will find information about ABA’s Driver Training Program, CTIS, Webinars and other educational offerings throughout the year.

**Crisis Communication**
In 2017, with assistance from Kitchen PR, ABA has assisted the following companies with Crisis Communication Needs:

Storer Coachways (1/4-1/5)

Burlington Trailways (2/24)

**Working with Outside Organizations**
ABA has been active this spring working with outside organizations to promote the motorcoach, travel and tourism industry. To celebrate Earth Day, ABA and MCI teamed up to promote greener travel with motorcoaches at the Department of Transportation’s annual Earth Day event. ABA also posted a blog about how people can travel greener by utilizing motorcoaches.

ABA also teamed up with DC Trails for the DOT’s Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s Bring Your Child to Work Day exhibit. ABA and the American Trucking Association provided vehicles and talked with children about careers in our industries.
ABA continues to lead the efforts with FMCSA, ATA and AAA to launch the video series Our Roads, Our Safety campaign. We hope to launch the first of three videos leading into the highly trafficked Memorial Weekend holiday.