



TOURISM TALES

IN Indiana Marketing Campaign Touts State's Assets

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Every person – and place – has a story. Typically, the best way to bring those stories to life is to see them through the eyes of those who know them best. A statewide tourism initiative is engaging businesses, universities, destination organizations and more to boost engagement and raise awareness of Indiana's hidden – and not so hidden – gems.

The "IN Indiana" marketing campaign unifies branding efforts across the state. It was launched in 2022 by the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC) and Visit Indiana.

"Surveys show that if people have no connection to Indiana, if they've visited here or if their family or friends didn't go to college here, they absolutely know nothing about Indiana," emphasizes Elaine Bedel, IDDC secretary and CEO. "They don't know what wonderful assets we have. Or they know about the assets, but they don't know that they're here in Indiana.

"So, we've got to connect! And the best thing we can do – businesses, entities, associations – is figure out how we can all have a common, consistent, unified message that says, 'I'm IN Indiana.' With the IN Indiana campaign, we wanted to do something that was unique but

also something that everybody could use."

The solution? Free, downloadable, customizable toolkits encompassing messaging, print and digital asset needs.

Partners can create their own IN Indiana headline as part of a one-time effort or to complement an existing marketing strategy.

"They can play with the color combination, the size and use it to promote something whether it's on their website, brochures or magazines, signage – anything they want to do," Bedel explains.

Among examples of the campaign in action are "More to Discover IN Indiana" interstate signs welcoming people to the state and murals around the state featuring an IN Indiana reference.

"This initiative gives us a really big megaphone and suddenly people start seeing all of the wonderful assets in Indiana," Bedel declares. "We're building this body of knowledge out there and people can see what we have available in Indiana. And it helps with Hoosier pride."

Curious about some of the innovative ideas on display? Let's dive 'IN.'

Savoring opportunities

Huber Winery, Visit Huber's and Starlight Distillery are staples of southern Indiana tourism. In 2023, the three entities collectively attracted approximately 700,000 visitors.

In operation since 1843, Huber's is a seventh-generation farm.

"Ninety acres of the 790 acres are dedicated

to vineyards, and we're growing our own heirloom corn varieties that go into our bourbons and to our whiskeys in our spirits program," remarks Dana Huber, vice president of distribution and public relations with Huber Winery and Starlight Distillery.

"We're really proud that we're still a leading brand with agriculture within the state of Indiana. We're growing all sorts of fruits and vegetables. We grow peaches, blackberries and blueberries. We also have corn and tomatoes that we do in the summertime, and many other seasonal vegetables as well as pumpkins and apples. We end our season with Christmas trees on the farm."

Huber Winery and Starlight Distillery combined their alcohol and beverage campaign with IN Indiana.

"It's about increasing visibility and ensuring that people know about the campaign. Ensuring that people buy and pick up our products," Huber notes. "We actually put pictures of our Sweet Marcella and our Carl T. Bourbon (whiskey) bottle on some of the trucks that are delivering our spirits through our three tier-distribution system. And it had the hashtag IN Indiana on the side of that campaign."

Stressing the value of collaborating with the IDDC, she adds, "It's a fabulous campaign. Tourism is a very important part of the fabric of Indiana. Not only keeping people traveling within Indiana and spending their time and their dollars but also bringing others from other states. I think that's very important to our rural communities, to our state, to



Communities, businesses and other entities share the state’s appeal via the IN Indiana marketing campaign.

continue to have that enthusiasm for all the great things that can happen in Indiana.”

‘Amplifying a message’

Northwest Indiana is home to a variety of tourist attractions. Heather Ennis, president and CEO of the Northwest Indiana Forum, says that it’s the seven-county economic development organization’s job to tell the region’s story.

“We truly believe that there are greater opportunities in our region,” she asserts. “The IN Indiana campaign is a fun way to engage the community around it. It’s been a great opportunity to amplify that message and drive visitors not just to our region, but deeper into our region to be able to experience things, stay longer, spend more and be able to create that experience that they then fall in love with the place and hopefully move here one day.”

Ennis lights up describing one marketing strategy: the Northwest Indiana Forum’s shadow box initiative.

“We do a shadow box annually to tell the story of Northwest Indiana,” she comments. “We pick three or four iconic places (to highlight). We use the ‘More to Discover IN Indiana’ moniker along with our Northwest Indiana Forum logo to show the beauty of northwest Indiana and provide a little keepsake memento.”

The first shadow box featured Michigan City Lighthouse & Pier, the only public operating lighthouse in Indiana. Among others were the Gary Aquatorium (a National Historic Landmark) and Indiana Dunes Pavilion renovation and restoration project in Chesterton.

“We’re also working on a GO NWI campaign,” Ennis imparts. “‘GO’ stands for ‘Greater Opportunities.’ (That involves) companies that are looking to potentially locate here as well as visitors, and different folks and demographics we’re trying to get to consider moving to northwest Indiana. Partnering that with the IN Indiana moniker gives us the opportunity to tell that story.”

Hitting home

Several education institutions also are taking advantage of the IN Indiana campaign.

Ball State University is elevating awareness of Indiana’s unique assets – literally and figuratively – by incorporating IN Indiana on its light poles in the areas where graduation services take place and the welcome center stands.

Banners share messages such as “Cardinals can find their dream job IN Indiana,” “Cardinals can find adventure IN Indiana,” “Cardinals can innovate IN Indiana” and more.

“When high school students are looking at campus or students are on campus for orientation, that’s one of the first things they’re seeing,” reflects Jeff Eads, director for industry engagement at the university. “It connects their education pursuits with what could be next.

“And at the end of their college career here, that’s where they have their graduation. So, hundreds of students and thousands of family members – everybody who gathered for this significant event – are surrounded by those pole banners around that area.”

In addition, Ball State is bringing IN Indiana to potential employees.

“When people are applying for a job, one of the first things they’ll see is they can click on a link and it goes to the IN Indiana website,” Eads remarks. “They can get a better sense of place and community of what Indiana has to offer.”

Eads cites two other facets that illustrate quality of place.

“We have a County Ambassador Program,” he explains. “Student ambassadors talk about quality of life and job opportunities in their home counties while on campus through the university’s Staying IN initiative. The initiative is a student-facing campaign by the McKinley Avenue Agency, which is a student-run advertising agency.

“We hired them to create a campaign around highlighting from their perspective – to students – the quality of life and opportunities in the state of Indiana. When we work with those students, we point them to the IN Indiana campaign as a resource for the branding.”

The second program, run by Ball State Living-Learning Communities, revolves around academic peer mentors who coordinate off-campus trips to employers or settings such as parks or restaurants. “It helps students begin to see what life in Indiana is like,” Eads observes. “Those academic peer mentors are trained to highlight the IN Indiana campaign.”

Reflecting about the importance of IN Indiana, he comments, “The big picture for us is helping Indiana thrive. I think what the campaign specifically provides is branding – and strong branding helps everyone.

“There’s so many stakeholders in the state of Indiana. We’re all working toward similar goals in terms of talent attraction and population growth and so forth. And a strong brand, it provides continuity and common language that helps unify all our messages.”

RESOURCES: Elaine Bedel, Indiana Destination Development Corporation, at www.visitindiana.com | Jeff Eads, Ball State University, at www.bsu.edu | Dana Huber, Huber Winery, Visit Huber’s and Starlight Distillery, at ww.huberwinery.com | Heather Ennis, Northwest Indiana Forum, at www.nwforum.org