

BROADBAND TESTIMONY

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Visit Potter-Tioga

Tioga County Tourist Promotion Agency is a 501c6 formed in 1993. Now doing business as Visit Potter Tioga, it is the destination marketing organization for Tioga and Potter counties since our two counties joined forces on July 1, 2017. Our mission is to market the region as a destination for visitors. We do this through a highly targeted multi-layered mix of print, television, and online advertising. In addition, we manage a visitors' center near the top attraction in the region – the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. At our center, we have traditional print materials for pickup; however, we also have a variety of streaming information for the visitors: access to our website and continuously updated lodging availability. In addition, we offer free wi-fi access for our visitors.

Visitors come here for leisure, business, multi-generational or group travel. Attracting different demographics of travelers means that we may need to appeal to each in a different way. The leisure traveler may have different expectations and needs from the business traveler.

Within the different types of travelers, we find different expectation levels when they arrive. Some merely want to detach from the world and relax. Others want to enjoy themselves, but many still need to connect to their work during their time away. Even within family groups, we find different levels of accessibility need. Within a multi-generational family grandma may be checking emails, mom may be posting updates on Facebook, teenager is posting on Snapchat while another sibling is playing online games.

While visitors do not need to be connected all the time, they do need to be made aware of what areas offer connection and what types. Visitors coming from many metropolitan areas assume they will have connectivity everywhere. The variety of services available to them in metropolitan areas may not be available here, ie. someone with Nextel or even ATT may have little if any luck finding a signal in our predominantly Verizon area.

Although many travelers are coming here to enjoy our outdoor recreation, many are unaware that in most natural areas, there is little to no service. This sometimes causes safety concerns on the part of the consumer particularly those traveling with children. There are a great many people who are happy to not have connectivity as it gives them the freedom to enjoy their outdoor excursion without interruption from their work lives. It's a pleasant surprise for them to find out they will be "out of service."

From the standpoint of our DMO, it's a catch 22. While it would be nice to have faster, more consistent service at more areas in the county, we ask, at what cost? Do we want to see cell towers on every hillside disturbing the view shed when this is one of the reasons our area is enjoyed? We think, if anything, we need to be able to guarantee that visitors will be able to get access at areas where they congregate such as lodging, dining, shopping and attractions. Communication to the visitors is key so that they know where they can connect. In our towns, it does not seem to be as much an issue. But consumers should be made aware that natural areas may be limited in what connectivity they can offer.

One area where it is particularly challenging is at Cherry Springs State Park. The main draw there being star gazing means that most travelers are arriving in the evening. According to surveys, many of the visitors there are coming in from metropolitan and international points of origin and are unprepared for the remoteness of the area. This is particularly challenging when they are looking for lodging accommodations and don't realize that those may be some distance away from the park. It is important for these travelers to have access. Currently there is wi-fi available; however, there seems to be some confusion as to who is providing it and for how long. Is it the responsibility of the state park to insure accessibility for their visitors?

In conclusion, the challenge seems to be that in the technological world we live in, we need to balance those needs with the realities of our predominantly natural area. That requires communication and knowledge of what is available and where it is available. The hubs seem to have little problem; while the more remote areas are challenged with finding ways to connect.