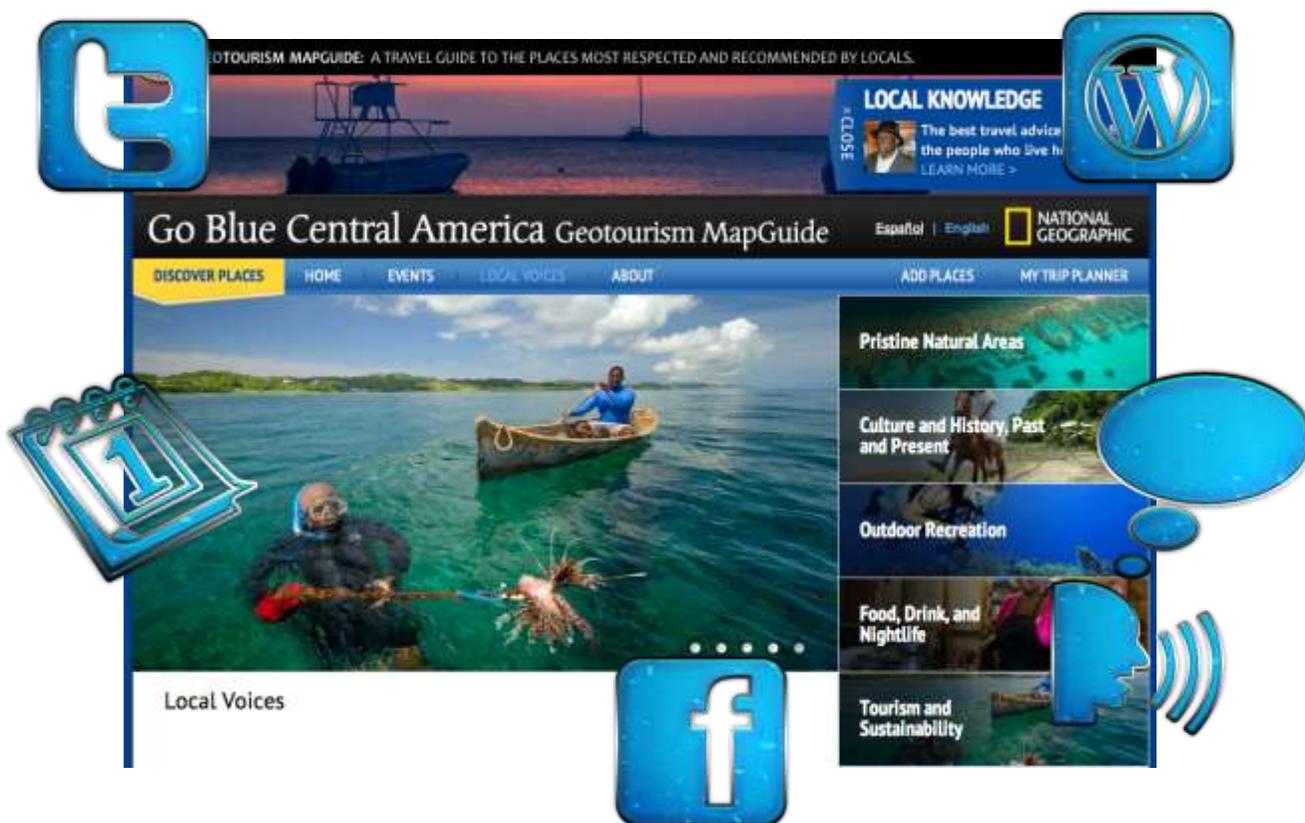




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**USAID REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE MANAGEMENT
OF AQUATIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES**



USAID PROGRAM FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF AQUATIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

DELIVERABLE NO. 2.1: PROMOTIONAL AND MARKETING PLAN FOR THE GEOTOURISM PLATFORM

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Contents

Acronyms	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Situation Analysis and Opportunities of Destinations' Positions	6
Roatán.....	6
Bocas del Toro.....	7
Objectives	7
Overarching Key Result Area	7
Objective 1	7
Objective 2	8
Objective 3	8
Methodology	8
Online Marketing	8
Offline Marketing.....	10
Incentivizing Council Members' Participation	10
Roles and Responsibilities.....	11
Target Markets	12
Plan Components	14
Go Blue Central America Website.....	14
Search Engine Optimization.....	15
Blog	15
Social Media Campaigns	16
Content Themes.....	18
Downloadable Resources: Travel Guides.....	18
Content Calendar	19
Consumer-facing Newsletters.....	21
Internal Communications with Participating GBCA Members.....	21
Audience	21
Marketing Training for Geotourism Stewardship Councils	21
Hands-on Training.....	21
Distance Support.....	22
Expected Results	23
Overarching Key Result Area	23
Monitoring and Evaluation	25
Conclusions	26
References	27

Acronyms

CMS	Content Management System
CTA	Call to Action
GBCA	Go Blue Central America
GSC	Geotourism Stewardship Council
KRA	Key Result Area
NGS	National Geographic Society
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

This document comprises the promotional and marketing plan for the Go Blue Central America Geotourism platform. The plan describes how Solimar International, as USAID Regional Program's Subcontractor during the remainder of 2013, and the Geotourism Stewardship Councils in 2013 and beyond, will create and implement marketing activities to drive potential visitors to the Go Blue Central America website, which will in turn refer website viewers to Go Blue Central America members' businesses.

GBCA will implement online and offline initiatives in order to accomplish its marketing objectives. Online marketing activities will target audiences in the early stages of travel planning and will include static website images and text, a blog, social media platforms, and downloadable travel resources (e-books, travel guides, maps, etc.). Offline activities will target travelers who have already arrived in GBCA destinations and are in the "experiencing" or "sharing" stage of their trip, and will include such materials as posters, stickers, and certificates.

The audience for all activities includes not only potential travelers, but also GSC members themselves. GSC members are our audience as much as potential travelers, so that they can better understand the activities of the USAID Regional Program, the functionality and benefits of the GBCA platform, and use the marketing resources and tools described within this document to promote themselves above and beyond the activities of GBCA.

The objective of Go Blue Central America marketing activities is to have the participation of as many local sustainable MSME tourism businesses as possible in the platform, and to attract potential travelers to spend money in those businesses. This plan lays out the various techniques, tools, and training strategies that will be utilized to market the platform, defines all the players' roles and responsibilities, and discusses the anticipated results and how they will be measured.

The overall goal of this promotional and marketing plan is a \$1,000,000 increase in revenue of GBCA businesses for annual sales of products or services that can be directly attributed to activity interventions and which support conservation and/or sustainable use efforts. Those sales will be tracked on a quarterly basis according to Solimar's Geotourism Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, which was presented and approved by the USAID Regional Program in 2012.

This plan lays out the various techniques, tools, and training strategies that will be utilized to market the platform and defines all the players' roles and responsibilities.

Introduction

The Regional Program for the Management of Aquatic Resources and Economic Alternatives, financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Chemonics International, with Solimar International as a subcontractor, builds on previous projects in Central America to support and promote marine and coastal conservation through rights-based access and market-driven mechanisms in concert with local partners from both the private and public sectors.

The Regional Program employs multiple strategies to positively affect its target species within its regional points of focus including the promotion of rights-based legislation, establishment of managed protected areas and no-take reserves, and by providing economic alternatives to local communities where resource extraction threatens marine and coastal natural resources. Sustainable tourism will be employed as a strategy to provide economic alternatives to local communities. As a sustainable tourism consulting firm, Solimar assists the USAID Regional Program in the development and sale of tourism products as alternative livelihoods.

In 2012, in collaboration with the National Geographic Society (NGS), and sponsored by the USAID Regional Program, Solimar created and launched the [Go Blue Central America Geotourism platform](#). Geotourism is defined by NGS as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.” The Go Blue Central America (GBCA) platform aims to promote Central American coastal and marine destinations, businesses, projects, organizations, or government authorities that are sustainably managing authentic and unique tourism products.

This document comprises the promotional and marketing plan for the platform.

Situation Analysis and Opportunities of Destinations’ Positions

Roatán

Honduras is the least developed of the Central American countries in terms of tourism arrivals. It receives around 900,000 visitors per year, representing about 11% of total Central American tourism arrivals. In the Bay Islands in particular, including Roatán, cruise ship tourists and divers dominate the market, which makes for an interesting contrast in demand profiles. Cruise ship passengers do not generally know very much about sustainability in tourism operations or conservation. They are typically seeking primarily leisure activities and interactions with nature or local communities, while pleasant, are not primary drivers of visitation. For divers conservation is a concern especially when it regards marine ecosystems and specifically reefs. Local communities have historically received little benefit from these markets. Although tourism arrivals from cruise ships and divers provides an economic motor driving job creation in tourism services, demand for community tourism products is not as strong as driver as beaches and reefs. This is not to say demand does not exist, as products in Punta Gorda and Oak Ridge demonstrate. However, these kinds of products are not the primary motivating factor for most tourists in this region.

Bocas del Toro

The tourism market in the Bocas del Toro region is demographically diverse but relatively homogenous in its overall tendencies with respect to sustainability and conservation. Most visitors seek out this region for its tourism offerings of wildlife, natural scenery, and authentic cultural heritage. The destination has maintained its unique “sense of place”, and the result of this differentiation in the market is that it is able to promote itself on its individuality and its product offerings rather than entering into a price war with more established “sun and sand” destinations. This ability to compete on a product level rather than a price level presents opportunities for sustainable tourism to attract travelers that are more likely to support conservation initiatives and travel philanthropy programs; travelers are also more likely to be receptive to conservation awareness messaging.

The weaknesses of the region are tied to its strengths. The preservation of an “identity” and a unique personality that attracts tourists based on product-level competition is dependent on a smaller-scale tourism economy. Businesses are small, meaning that they tend to create more jobs as an aggregate but as margins are often small, businesses are typically unable to contribute large amounts to conservation initiatives. Small and micro enterprises also are often faced with cash-flow difficulties that lead to partial or total shutdowns in cyclical downturns due to the seasonal nature of the tourism industry. This means that in providing economic alternatives to resource extractors and especially those that represent a threat to vulnerable wildlife, the tourism markets can only comprise part of the solution. The low margins typical of small enterprises also means that local organizations are often faced with a constant struggle for survival, making potential conservation initiatives subject to implementation in fits and starts as organizations shed personnel and drop activities in the absence of funding.

GBCA aims to address the economy of scale issue for both Roatán and Bocas del Toro, providing a platform for promoting small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, as well as for future Central American destinations that could join the platform.

Objectives

Overarching Key Result Area

The GBCA website’s overarching key result area (KRA) is to increase the total revenue generated by GBCA-nominated businesses through increased sales of goods and services. In order to accomplish this, GBCA will implement a marketing strategy that will: utilize online marketing activities to drive Internet users to the GBCA website which will in turn link them to GBCA participating businesses; train participating businesses in the fundamentals of online marketing; and develop and distribute print promotional materials that target visitors already at the destinations. An increase in the total number of arrivals to GBCA destinations will increase the share of destination visitors that patronize GBCA-nominated businesses, thereby increasing those businesses’ sales.

Objective 1

To increase the total number of arrivals in GBCA destinations by:

- a. Distributing inspirational content to a global audience through online channels;

- b. Providing high quality and timely information to target markets, including practical tools they need to plan their trip to GBCA destinations; and
- c. Creating channels for travelers to share their experiences directly with other travelers.

Objective 2

To increase the share of visitors that patronize GBCA nominated businesses by:

- a. Providing nominated businesses an opportunity to market directly to travelers through online and offline channels;
- b. Educating travelers on the importance of supporting businesses that implement sustainability best practices; and
- c. Promoting the GBCA brand as the regional standard in sustainable travel.

Objective 3

To encourage GBCA-nominated businesses to become active marketing partners by establishing direct linkages between marketing exposure, sustainability, and increased sales.

Methodology

GBCA will implement online and offline initiatives in order to accomplish its marketing objectives. Travelers enter different “mindsets” in the various stages of travel planning and purchasing, as described in figure 1. Online marketing activities will target audiences in the early stages of travel planning: those that are dreaming, planning, or booking their trip. Offline activities will target travelers who have already arrived in GBCA destinations and are in the “experiencing” or “sharing” stage of their trip.



Figure 1: The various stages of the “Traveler Mindset”

Online Marketing

GBCA’s online marketing initiatives will feature “inbound marketing” or “content marketing” activities.

Inbound marketing is defined as marketing that earns rather than buys consumer attention. The advantages of inbound marketing for GBCA include more targeted marketing communications, lower-cost marketing activities, and the opportunity to open two-way communication channels with target audiences.

GBCA’s inbound marketing activities will feature the production and publication of valuable content that directs target markets to the organization’s website. Content will be distributed through social media, a blog and the website itself. GBCA will implement multi-channel online marketing campaigns to promote its content and drive traffic to its website.

The majority of the content that GBCA will distribute through online channels will target travelers who are considering taking a trip, or who are actively planning or booking a trip.

By targeting travelers that are still in the early stages of the traveler buying cycle, GBCA has the greatest potential to motivate travelers to choose GBCA destinations in the first place, and to influence their decision to patronize GBCA nominated businesses when they visit.

Traveler Mindset	Content Description	Example Content
Dreaming	Content that inspires travelers and differentiates GBCA destinations from other Caribbean destinations	Social media posts featuring travelers’ photos of Caribbean beaches, surfing, diving, etc.
Deciding	Resources that give travelers an overview of the various attractions offered by a destination	A blog post featuring the “Three Best Surfing Beaches in Bocas del Toro”
Planning	Resources for people who have decided to travel to GBCA destinations or have already arrived in GBCA destinations	Downloadable travel guide “Top 5 Shipwrecks for Diving in Roatan” that has a map and description of dive sites on the island
Booking	Content that drives travelers to GBCA nominated businesses	“The Greenest Hostels in Roatán” blog post with links to each hostel’s webpage with the GBCA website
Experiencing and Sharing	Communications that encourage visitors to share their travel experience with the world	An email that request visitors post comments and photos on social media and travel forums

Table 1: GBCA marketing content descriptions

GBCA will produce and distribute the following types of online content:

1. Static website images and text
2. A GBCA blog
3. Social media platforms
4. Downloadable travel resources (e-books, travel guides, maps, etc.)

Each type of content will have its own creation methodology, designed to source (or collect) content from a variety of stakeholders, including GBCA nominated businesses and travelers. This “crowdsourcing” of content will enable the ability to publish large volumes of content. Content creation will rely largely upon creating incentives for stakeholders, particularly GBCA nominated businesses, to share valuable content such as photos and stories.

GBCA will create incentives for business that share content by rewarding those businesses with increased market exposure. For example, GBCA will actively solicit blog content from nominated businesses. Blog posts written by nominated businesses will include a short paragraph at the end introducing the contributing author or business as well as a link to the business’s website. GBCA will feature its most prolific members on the front page of its website, creating another incentive for members to contribute content.

The following table summarizes the overall type of GBCA marketing content and the content contributors below, and overall the content creation plan focuses on Solimar actively generating

content for blogs, social media and downloadable resources at the beginning stages of implementation of the marketing plan (approximately the first six months). Once local actors understand and receive benefits from the marketing plan, it is anticipated that they will then take on more responsibility in content creation.

Content Type	Content Contributors
Static website content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User-generated • Solimar International
Blog posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GBCA-nominated businesses • Stewardship councils • Travelers • Solimar International (graphic design, platform setup, editing)
Social media content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GBCA-nominated businesses • Stewardship councils • Travelers • Solimar International (graphic design, platform setup)
Downloadable travel resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stewardship councils • Solimar International (graphic design, editing)

Table 2: GBCA content and contributors

Offline Marketing

Offline marketing content will include stickers and certificates of recognition that allow participating members to promote themselves to visitors already at the destination. They will feature the Go Blue Central America logo and will say “Participating Business”. The stickers and certificates are an important incentive for membership. Local GSCs and Solimar Training Specialist Lucia Prinz will hand the stickers out to members when she visits both councils in May 2013.



Figure 2: Solimar “offline” marketing activities will include the distribution of a GBCA sticker (left) and certificate of recognition (right) to highlight participating businesses to visitors already at the destination

Solimar will also distribute the best practices and visitor codes of conduct created previously, but due to budgetary constraints will email them to participating members and encourage them to print and display them. The PDFs will also be circulated via internal newsletters (see next section), the blog, and on the internal Facebook group page to encourage their usage.

Incentivizing Council Members’ Participation

GBCA council members will be incentivized to actively participate in marketing activities in the following ways:

- Awards that members receive (for sustainability, etc.) will be featured on the GBCA homepage, which is valuable website “real estate”
- Periodic “calls to action”, such as “Submit your favorite tip and be featured!” will incentivize members to submit content in order to be featured on the website’s homepage
- Internal newsletters and the internal destination Facebook groups (see below) will allow for knowledge-sharing among membership
- Members that offer certain types of tourism products that are being featured in downloadable resources will be listed on that PDF. For example, if we create a guide to the top ten hiking trails in Roatán, Roatán GSC members that offer that tour as one of their itineraries will be listed on the PDF. See below for more information
- Hands-on and online marketing training will be offered to members, as well as access to marketing e-books (toolkits) (see below)



Figure 3: GBCA Visitor Code of Conduct poster

Roles and Responsibilities

There are three groups of people who will be responsible for implementing GBCA marketing activities:

1. Geotourism Stewardship Councils (GSCs)
 2. GSC “Local Voices and Events” marketing coordinators
 3. Solimar International
1. In regards to marketing, the **GSCs are responsible for:**
 - Attending the marketing trainings mentioned below
 - Designating a marketing coordinator
 - Promoting GBCA and recruiting new members
 - Promoting the GBCA marketing activities with their destination’s members

The GSCs will have additional responsibilities in regards to environmental and sociocultural stewardship activities, as well as member capacity building, but those are not addressed here in this promotional and marketing plan.

2. The GSC “Local Voices and Events” **marketing coordinator’s roles and responsibilities include:**

- Assist in creating content required for their destination’s marketing activities
- Assist in liaising with their destination’s members to collect content required for their destination’s marketing activities
- Provide input and feedback on marketing content created by Solimar International

3. Solimar’s role is to develop the overall GBCA promotional and marketing plan; train GSC members and marketing coordinators in the implementation of the plan, their roles and responsibilities, and the latest marketing techniques and tools; and to implement the first six months of marketing activities so that the GSCs and public can see the functionality and benefits of GBCA as the platform gains momentum. Over the course of the next eight to 10 months Solimar will begin handing marketing tasks over to the GSCs.

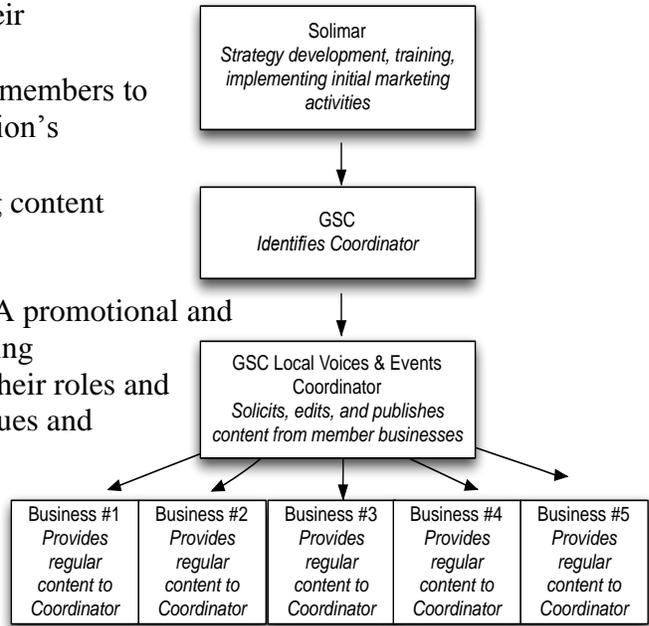


Figure 4: Flow of marketing activities

Target Markets

GBCA’s marketing will target market segments that currently form GBCA destinations’ core traveler base. GBCA has identified five unique traveler personas (or target markets) that will be the focus of the organization’s marketing initiatives:

1. Watersports enthusiasts
2. Backpackers
3. Cruise/sun and fun/leisure travelers
4. Nature lovers/wildlife enthusiasts
5. Cultural/community enthusiasts

Neither Honduras nor Panama governments collect tourism statistics specific to individual destinations (e.g. Roatan, Bocas del Toro) or specific to unique target markets (e.g. dive tourists, ecotourists). Although some statistics are kept regarding overall international arrivals to the countries, as well as broad visitor profiles (e.g. gender, age, educational level), this type of macro-level market analysis provides no relevant insight into specific target markets visiting the Go Blue Central America destinations.

Therefore, the five target markets outlined above were identified via consultations with Go Blue Central America GSC members, participating businesses, and Solimar’s technical experience and knowledge resulting from a decade of working with sustainable tourism development in coastal Central America.

The following table summarizes the primary destination activities and overall travel trends and preferences that characterize these five target personas:

Traveler Persona	Destination Activities	Trends and Preferences
Watersports enthusiasts	Diving, snorkeling, sailing, nightlife	7-10 day trips, highly focused on water activities
Backpackers	Budget tour/lodging options, nightlife	Multi-week/multi-destination itineraries
Cruise/sun & fun/leisure travelers	Day tour options, beaches, dining options	Low to mid-range spending, low risk options
Nature lovers/wildlife enthusiasts	Hiking, birding, protected areas, active adventure	Eager to explore, willing to pay a premium for quality
Cultural/community enthusiasts	Cultural exchange, volunteer opportunities, agritourism	Will to pay a premium for authenticity/uniqueness

Table 3: GBCA Target Personas

The table below prioritizes the target personas according to three important considerations relevant to the proposed GBCA promotion and marketing activities:

1. Volume: What is the volume of the overall market of the target personas, as well as the volume that are currently visiting coastal destinations in Central America.
2. Financial Impact: Based on the known spending patterns of the target persona, what is the overall potential financial impact on the target persona.
3. Ability to Reach and Affect: Finally, based on documented travel planning tendencies, what is the probability that the proposed GBCA promotion and marketing activities are likely to reach and affect the planning and purchasing behavior of the target persona.

Target Personas	Roatán				Bocas			
	Volume	Financial Impact	Reach/Affect	Total	Volume	Financial Impact	Reach/Affect	Total
Watersports enthusiasts	4	3	5	13	4	3	5	12
Backpackers	3	1	2	6	5	1	2	8
Cruise/sun & fun/leisure	5	2	1	8	1	2	1	4
Nature lovers/wildlife	2	4	4	10	3	4	4	11
Cultural/community	1	5	3	9	2	2	3	7

Table 4: Prioritization of Target Personas - *On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest potential.

Of the target personas, watersports enthusiasts and nature lovers have been identified as the market segments for both Roatán and Bocas del Toro with the highest overall potential.

Travel Trade as a Target Market

Both Roatan, Honduras and Bocas del Toro, Panama are overwhelmingly characterized as “independent traveler” destinations rather than packaged tour destinations. The same could be said for Central America as a whole, especially when compared to other regions of the world dominated by packaged tours operated by international outbound, domestic inbound tour operators, or specialized travel agencies such as Africa and Europe.

To illustrate this point, the Honduran Tourism Institute’s *2007-2011 Tourism Statistics Bulletin* cites that in 2010 only 5.7% of all visitors were “package” tourists, and only 7.6% in 2011 (Instituto Hondureño del Turismo, 2012).

Although a small market, the USAID Regional Program considers outreach to specialized tour operators an important part of the Go Blue Central America Promotional and Marketing Plan, and therefore Solimar International will take the following steps to reach out to these industry partners:

1. Develop a database of tour operators and agencies who specialize in the Go Blue Central America destinations and/or specialize in the tourism products and services offered by the Go Blue Central America participating businesses.
2. Develop and distribute a digital informational packet to those specialized tour operators and agencies to facilitate an increased interest of the travel industry in the Go Blue Central America destinations.

In addition to specialized tour operators and agencies, the cruise ship industry in Roatan does present opportunities to link GBCA businesses to cruise ship daily visitors to the island. Therefore, Solimar will be coordinating a team of GWU graduate-level marketing students to analyze opportunities to target cruise ship visitors in Roatán, and provide recommendations that can be incorporated into the overall GBCA Promotional and Marketing Plan (further defined in figure 2).



**The George Washington University
Masters in Tourism Administration
Destination Marketing Graduate Research**

Solimar has recruited a group of graduate-level tourism marketing students to research Central America’s cruise ship trade and create a strategy for marketing to this niche travel trade segment. The scope of work of the graduate students, to be completed May 2013, includes:

- Analyze comparable cruise ship markets and destinations to identify lessons learned and best practices, which may be applied to Roatán
- Provide key marketing recommendations – from positioning to products to placement – that can be incorporated into the GBCA Promotional and Marketing Plan.

Figure 2: Proposed scope of work of GWU graduate-level marketing students.

Plan Components

Go Blue Central America Website

A collaboration between USAID, the National Geographic Society (NGS), and the Inter-American Development Bank, the [Go Blue Central America Geotourism website](#) is at the heart of the promotional and marketing strategy. Launched several months ago, the website serves as the landing page for potential travelers who have heard about the GBCA initiative through other means—social media, the blog, word of mouth, etc. All other components of this promotional and marketing plan will provide links back to the GBCA website, which will in turn request visitors enter their email address to access downloadable resources and other valuable content (see below). Having potential visitors’ contact info will allow Solimar and the GSC to continue to market to this target audience over time. In other words, after the lead has been generated in the form of receiving an email address, the marketing coordinators should nurture that lead to convert it into an actual sale. The website should be constantly updated and maintained by the Solimar and the GSCs, with assistance from NGS, to ensure maximum usefulness.

While the website is already operational, Solimar will add a link to the blog that has already been established as well as links to the GBCA Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest pages.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to the process of improving a website’s ranking in search engines for particular search parameters. SEO is an important component of online marketing because of its direct effect on the volume of traffic that arrives at a website. For a website like GBCA’s, a majority of website traffic will come from organic search results, and so it is important that the website ranks well for anticipated search parameters.

Search engine ranking depends upon two components: on-screen and off-screen SEO. On-screen components of SEO include the use and density of keywords in website text. Off-screen SEO depends upon elements such as the number and authority of external websites that link to the GBCA website.

To improve its on-screen SEO, GBCA will compile a database of ranked keywords that are likely to be searched by target audiences. GBCA will then feature these keywords prominently in static website text as well as dynamic blog content. The volume of monthly searches for any given search term and the difficulty to rank for a given search term can be determined using tools such as Google’s AdWords Keyword Tool. For example, Figure 5 illustrates the top 25 results when the phrase “Central America dive tourism”.



Figure 5: Google AdWords keyword sample results

GBCA will select keywords for which there are a high number of searches but relatively little ranking competition and use these keywords to guide content creation that will be relevant for target audiences. By keeping its keyword database up to date and using the database to guide new content creation, GBCA will ensure that its website continues to move up the search engine ranks and to continually rank for new keywords.

To improve its off-screen SEO, GBCA will update the back end of its website with the appropriate SEO components, such as alt tags for images, meta tags and page descriptions for each web page, and H1 and H2 tags that incorporate popular keywords from the keyword database.

Blog

Like traditional websites, blogs are platforms that are intended to publish content on the Internet. The main difference between a blog and a website is that blog content is updated regularly and published chronologically, as opposed to a website which is usually composed of static content arranged thematically. Other important features of a blog are the integration of comment forms

that allow readers to interact and respond to content and content syndication via RSS feeds. A blog has already been created for GBCA, <http://gobluegeotourism.wordpress.com>, which will be linked back the main GBSC website. The blog will feature inspirational content from each destination, destination news and updates, and travel planning information.

The blog will attract website visitors by publishing content around popular keywords and will become the “voice” of the organization, allowing GBCA to communicate directly with travelers that are considering or experiencing a trip to a GBCA destination.



Figure 6: Screen shot of the GBCA WordPress blog

There are four primary reasons for GBCA to publish a blog:

1. It will drive demand for GBCA destinations by providing a platform to publish inspirational content.
2. It will generate targeted website traffic by allowing GBCA to push out content specific to highly ranked keywords.
3. It will enable GBCA to establish itself as a leading expert in its destinations by allowing it to share valuable travel planning content directly to travelers.
4. It will help GBCA build a community of past, present and future customers.

Social Media Campaigns

GBCA will introduce a series of thematic cross-channel social media campaigns, which will promote the GBCA brand and provide platforms for GBCA to distribute content to vast online audiences.

Social media campaigns will leverage the reach of online social networks to promote the GBCA website and direct users to relevant landing pages on the website and blog. Campaigns will be organized thematically around unique selling propositions of GBCA destinations. The social media platforms will be updated regularly by Solimar at the outset, with Solimar transitioning this responsibility over to the GSCs following the initial six to eight months.

Multi-channel social media campaigns will include content publication through the following channels:

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking platform that serves to connect people and keep them up to date with friends through photo, link, and video sharing. There are also an increasing number of Facebook “apps” through which users can deepen users’ experience with the platform. For

example, apps can aggregate travelers' reviews or photos of destinations or can display sample itineraries.

Facebook has become such a ubiquitous social media tool that simply maintaining a business profile page is a signal to consumers of a business's legitimacy. The Facebook business page serves as a powerful medium to interact with the GBCA community, get provide customer support, promote content that links back to the GBCA homepage, and to allow loyal customers to further engage with the brand.



Figure 7: GBCA Facebook page

GBCA currently maintains a Facebook “Fan” page, but does not actively distribute new content through the platform.

Twitter

A social networking platform and ‘micro-blogging’ service that allows users to communicate with their followers’ photos, videos, links and text limited to 140 characters, Twitter expands GBCA’s reach to a wider audience. Like Facebook, it can be used to promote content, connect customers and businesses, and build the GBCA brand. Twitter also provides a means to quickly research relevant and breaking information related to the GBCA Project and destinations.

Pinterest

Pinterest allows users to ‘pin’ photos of interest and organize them into different ‘boards’. Photos can directly link to external content, and users can connect with others by following their boards.

Pinterest is the newest of the three channels chosen for GBCA but is a promising marketing platform for travel businesses due to its visual nature. Pinterest provides an effective way to promote inspiration by presenting image content to a targeted audience. Pinned photos will link directly back to the GBCA site.

Social Media Activities Schedule

Social media activities will occur regularly according to the following schedule/“triggers”:

- A weekly blog post between the two destinations followed by that blog content being “pushed” out through linked posts on Facebook, tweets on Twitter, etc.
- Anytime an event happens or a new blog post is posted, corresponding Facebook and Twitter posts should be made with links back to the blog or news release on the website
- Recurring thematic posts, such as a weekly photo, etc., should be created for Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest for each destination

- As soon as a prize is secured from a GBCA member for a contest or sweepstakes, a post announcing the contest should be made on Facebook, Twitter, and the GBCA website, with links back to the page announcing the contest and its application procedures

Content Themes

The following five themes, which mirror the themes on the GBCA website, will be used to collect and/or produce engaging content that is relevant for the target markets:

1. Pristine natural areas
2. Living culture and history
3. Food, drink, and nightlife
4. Outdoor recreation
5. Travel and sustainability

Downloadable Resources: Travel Guides

GBCA will create a bank of travel planning “guides” that will be available for download on the GBCA website. Downloadable content will be available for free to website visitors. Travelers who wish to download a resource will be lead to a landing page where they will enter their email address for delivery of the resource. Traveler email addresses will be saved in the GBCA content management system and will serve as GBCA’s contact database for semi-annual email newsletters. Collection of email addresses also allows for further promotion of GBCA and its participating members.

Resources will include:

- A guide to the top dive sites, one for each destination
- A guide to the best beaches, one for each destination
- A guide to the best hikes, one for each destination
- A map of each destination showcasing community tourism products
- “Before you go”/packing checklists for each destination
- Historical/town walking tours for each destination
- A responsible seafood guide
- A pub crawl/happy hour guide for each destination
- A restaurant guide for each destination

Much of the content for these resources can be sourced from previously created informational or marketing products for

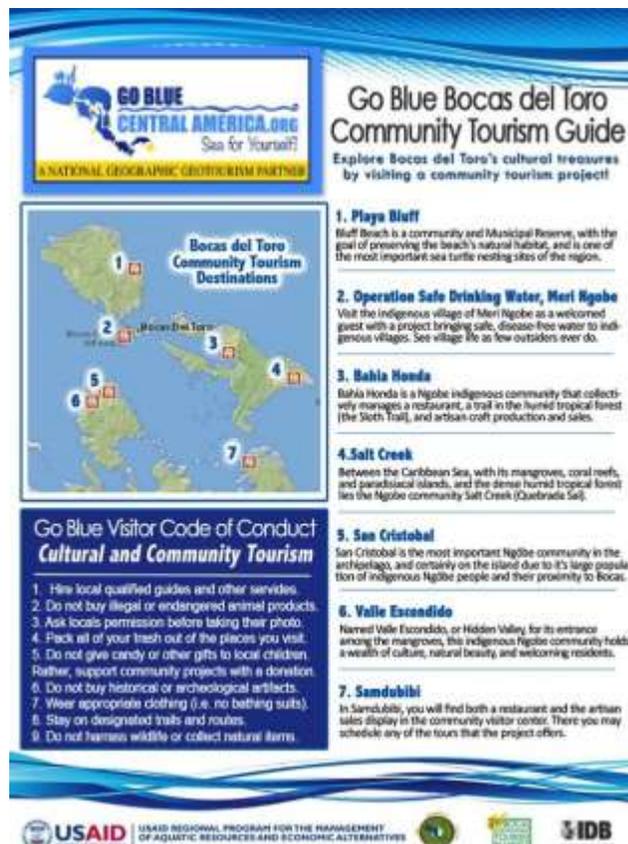


Figure 8: Sample GBCA downloadable travel guide

GBCA, and can easily and quickly be repurposed.

Content Calendar

As mentioned earlier, the content that will be produced as a part of the GBCA promotion and marketing strategy will revolve around two primary inputs, the **target persona** that is being targeted with the content, and the Go Blue Central America **Geotourism themes** that have been determined to highlight the unique characteristics of each Go Blue Central America destination.

With these two primary inputs in mind, the Solimar marketing team has developed a content calendar that outlines the specific **blog entries** (or short stories) and the **travel planning guides** that will offered as free downloads to every website visitors who has registered themselves on the GBCA Geotourism website.

The following page contains the GBCA content calendar in its entirety.

GO BLUE CENTRAL AMERICA GEOTOURISM THEMES						
Go Blue Target Personas	Content	1. Natural Areas	2. Cultural & History	3. Food, Drink, Nightlife	4. Outdoor Recreation	5. Sustainability
1. Watersport Enthusiasts	Blog Post	Roatan: Intro to Roatan Marine Park (RMP) Bocas: Intro to Bastimentos Marine Park (BMP)	Roatan: Shipwrecks and their history	Roatan AND Bocas: Making responsible seafood choices	Roatan: Best time for whale sharks Bocas: Best surf sites	Bocas AND Roatan: 5 signs that your dive shop is sustainable - How to be a Responsible Diver
	Travel Planning Guide	CTA Bocas: Guide to Top Dive Sites CTA Roatan: Guide to Top Dive Sites	CTA Bocas: Guide to Top Dive Sites CTA Roatan: Guide to Top Dive Sites	CTA Roatan: Bay Islands Seafood Guide	Bocas CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites Roatan CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites	Bocas CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites Roatan CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites
2. Backpackers	Blog Post	Bocas: 3 low cost tours in BMP	Bocas: Great lodging under \$25	Bocas: Best spot for a "sundowner"/best happy hours	Bocas: Best hikes in/around area	Bocas AND Roatan: Volunteer opportunities at the destination
	Travel Planning Guide	CTA: Guide to Best Beaches in Bocas	CTA: Bocas Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA: Bocas Sundowner/Happy Hour Guide	CTA: Bocas Hiking Guide	CTA: Bocas Sundowner/Happy Hour Guide
3. Cruise Sun & Fun/Leisure Travelers	Blog Post	Roatan: What to do w/ 1/2 day off your ship	Roatan: Discovering Roatan's Art galleries/museums	Roatan: Best beachside restaurants/sunset view	Roatan: Half-day active options in Roatan	Roatan: RMP storefronts at cruise ship terminals
	Travel Planning Guide	CTA: Guide to Best Beaches	CTA: Roatan Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA: Roatan Sundowner/Happy Hour Guide	CTA: Roatan Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA: Guide to Roatan's Best Beaches
4. Nature/Wildlife Enthusiasts	Blog Post	Bocas: Great day hikes in BMP	Bocas: History of United Fruit Co. in Bocas	Bocas AND Roatan: What's the deal with Lionfish? (invasive species, lionfish recipes, etc.)	Bocas AND Roatan: Best places to spot wildlife	Bocas: Sea Turtle tourism...best practices for sea turtle visitors/tours
	Travel Planning Guide	CTA: Guide to Best Hikes	CTA: Bocas Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA Bocas: Bocas Responsible Seafood Guide CTA Roatan: Bay Islands Seafood Guide	CTA Bocas: Bocas Hiking Guide CTA Roatan: Roatan Hiking Guide	CTA Bocas: Go Blue Sea Turtle Tourism Code of Conduct
5. Cultural/Community Tourism Enthusiasts	Blog Post	Bocas: Community tours in BMP	Bocas: Artisans/handicrafts/cocoa cooperative	Bocas AND Roatan: Traditional dishes	Bocas AND Roatan: Best time of year to visit (based on weather/activities)	CTA: ANABOCA community sea turtle tour
	Travel Planning Guide	CTA: Guide to Community Tourism	CTA: Bocas Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA Bocas: Bocas Restaurant Guide CTA Roatan: Roatan Restaurant Guide	Bocas CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites Roatan CTA: Guide to Top Dive Sites	CTA Bocas: Go Blue Sea Turtle Tourism Code of Conduct
6. General Travel Planning	Blog Post	Roatan AND Bocas: List/description of natural areas	Roatan: What language is spoken in Roatan? Bocas: What language is spoken in Bocas?	Roatan AND Bocas: Central America Food FAQs (safety, cost, etc.)	Bocas AND Roatan: Best time of year to visit (based on weather/activities)	Bocas AND Roatan: 10 sustainable travel tips for coastal areas
	Travel Planning Guide / Call to Action	CTA: Roatan AND Bocas Destination Packing Checklist / "Before You Go" Guide	CTA: Roatan and Bocas Historical/Town Walking Tour	CTA: Roatan AND Bocas Destination Packing Checklist / "Before You Go" Guide	CTA: Roatan AND Bocas Destination Packing Checklist / "Before You Go" Guide	CTA: Roatan AND Bocas Destination Packing Checklist / "Before You Go" Guide

Table 5: GBCA Content Calendar

Consumer-facing Newsletters

Travelers who have expressed an interest in traveling to GBCA destinations by downloading a travel resource will receive a semi-annual email newsletter. Newsletters will be distributed shortly before the conclusion of each social media campaign and will aggregate the most popular content distributed to date. Newsletters will include calls to action that lead recipients to the GBCA website as well as links to social media platforms.

Internal Communications with Participating GBCA Members

One of the incentives to GBCA membership is to gain access to knowledge and resources from other members. To this end we will create an internal Facebook page that only members can view and post in, and create a template for an internal newsletter that will be sent out at regular intervals. These mediums will allow GBCA to update participating members on regional activities; announce online training webinars, request content for blog posts; request photos for Pinterest; provide links to Solimar toolkits, such as the online marketing and sustainability best practices toolkits; and share any other news or announcements.

An example of how we will share knowledge is by sharing articles such as, “[8 best practices for destination tourism boards on Facebook](#).” (See Annex A for the 8 best practices.) Solimar will share relevant articles like this that assist the GSCs in marketing their destinations and assist businesses/NGOs in marketing their products. Ideally the GSCs and enterprises will then further share the information among their networks.

Audience

The audience for all activities includes not only potential travelers, but also GSC members themselves. GSC members are our audience as much as potential travelers, so that they can better understand the activities of the USAID Regional Program, the functionality and benefits of the GBCA platform, and use the marketing resources and tools described within this document to promote themselves above and beyond the activities of GBCA.

Marketing Training for Geotourism Stewardship Councils

Solimar will take a multi-pronged approach to training the GSCs and marketing coordinators in marketing techniques, tools, and responsibilities:

- a) A hands-on training for GSC members in each destination in April/May 2013
- b) Distance support through online webinars and e-books (tutorials)
- c) A GSC “operations manual” to guide various activities, including marketing

Hands-on Training

In May 2013, Solimar Training Specialist Lucia Prinz will train the two destinations’ GSC members and marketing coordinators. A training plan, for which the outline of the marketing module is presented below, has been drafted to guide Ms. Prinz’s capacity building activities.

GSC Training Plan Outline for Marketing Module

1. Roles, Responsibilities, Policies, and Procedures for Marketing Activities
 - For social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest)
 - Who has back end access
 - Who will post content and how often
 - For the blog
 - Who has back end access
 - Who will post content and how often
 - Addressing negative/inappropriate comments
2. Organization of “Nominations Committee” / editors
 - Define editors for specific types of nominations
 - Business-specific (i.e. dive shops vs. restaurants)
 - Attractions-specific (i.e. cultural attractions vs. natural attractions)
3. Nominations Guidelines and Criteria
 - Nominations guidelines review
 - Basic requirements for business/attraction nominations
 - How to deal with a business that is not complying with nominations criteria
4. Editing, Translating, and Activating a Nomination
 - How to create a Go Blue user account
 - Materials needed: Existing Old Town Creative guide
 - How to give a user “editor” access/abilities
 - How to edit a nomination
 - NGS guidelines
 - Tips for editing
 - How to translate a document
 - Google translate
 - Human editing
 - Activating a nomination
 - How to activate a nomination in Geoconsensus
 - Ensuring that businesses have completed the best practices training before activation
5. Recruiting New Nominations
 - How to recruit new nominations
 - Outreach, special events, etc.

Distance Support

Online Webinars

Solimar’s home office marketing team will offer a series of online webinars to train GSC and GBCA business members in the latest online marketing techniques and tools. Webinars will

be announced in the internal newsletters and internal Facebook group, and will use a platform to that allows members to ask questions, such as GoToMeeting. Topics may include the following:

- Introduction to inbound marketing for the tourism industry
- Getting found with SEO
- Building and engaging an online community
- Blogging for lead generation
- Lead nurturing and email workflows
- Online advertising for travel businesses
- Monitoring and evaluating inbound marketing

Online e-books

Along with the webinars, Solimar's home office marketing team will also disseminate the latest online marketing toolkits in the form of "e-books" to GSC and GBCA business members. New e-books will be shared in the internal newsletters and internal Facebook group, and all e-books will be available for download on the GBCA website. Solimar's current e-books include:

- [Blogging for Travel and Tourism](#)
- [Using Flickr to Promote your Travel Business](#)
- [Inbound Marketing for the Travel and Tourism Industry](#)
- [4 Tips and 19 Tricks for Building Brand Loyalty](#)
- [How to Develop Travel Content that Inspires and Converts](#)
- [Website Design for Travel and Tourism](#)
- [Travel and Tourism Review Sites and Forums](#)

GSC Operations Manual

The training plan that Ms. Prinz is formulating for the hands-on training sessions in April/May 2013 will serve as the basis for developing a standard GSC operations manual, which will be left with each GSC as a guide to ongoing destination marketing activities and other day-to-date GSC tasks. In addition to the marketing module presented above, the operations manual will cover the following sections:

1. Overall GSC management, meetings, and work planning
2. Sustainable tourism best practices criteria and training
3. Monitoring and evaluation data collection support

Expected Results

Overarching Key Result Area

The Key Result Area (KRA) within the USAID Regional Program's Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) that is related to the GBCA platform is: **KRA 2.4: *Implement model plans and programs for the recovery of endangered species and their ecosystems, which promotes sustainable economic development for local communities.***

Within that KRA, the USAID Regional Program has defined the following indicator to mark success:

Indicator 2.4.2: Value (USD) of additional sales of products or services that can be directly attributed to the activity interventions and which support conservation and / or sustainable use efforts.

As stated both earlier in this document and within Solimar International’s current task order, the overall goal of this promotional and marketing plan is a \$1,000,000 increase in revenue of GBCA businesses for annual sales of products or services that can be directly attributed to activity interventions and which support conservation and/or sustainable use efforts. Those sales will be tracked on a quarterly basis according to Solimar’s Geotourism Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, which was presented and approved by the USAID Regional Program in 2012.

As agreed upon by both the USAID Regional Program and Solimar International in 2012, monitoring and evaluating the change in gross sales of participating GBCA businesses is the most direct and reliable indicator to measure the success of the Geotourism platform, rather measuring indirect indicators such as visitor arrivals, hotel bed nights, and meals sold. Therefore, Solimar will be measuring the gross sales financial indicator exclusively, in addition to the marketing indicators described in the following section.

A timeline to begin implementation of GBCA marketing activities is presented below.

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Training:											
○ Hands-on Training	x										
○ Distance Support		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
○ GSC Operations Manual		x									
Update GBCA Website	x	x		x		x		x		x	
Develop Keywords for SEO		x									
Develop Editorial Calendar	x										
Blog Design and Integration		x									
Website Backend SEO Update			x			x			x		
Social Media Platform Setup		x									
Develop Content Bank			x	x	x						
Create/Repurpose Downloadable Resources				x	x						
Create Internal Newsletter Template					x						
Send First Internal Newsletter						x					
Create External (Public) Newsletter Template							x				
Send First External Newsletter								x			
Monitoring & Evaluation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 6: Timeline of GBCA promotion and marketing activities

Monitoring and Evaluation

Solimar has developed the following key performance indicators (KPIs) that it will track to assess the results of the proposed GBCA promotion and marketing strategy.

Solimar International will document these marketing key performance indicators monthly, and report their change over an initial baseline of all KPIs in its deliverable “2.2 Promotional and Marketing Plan Results for the Geotourism Platform”. The baseline for all indicators will be set at zero, from the moment of inception of marketing activities.

Website	Total traffic	
	Traffic growth	
	Traffic source: direct, referral, organic search, paid search	
	Most popular landing page(s)	
SEO	Number of inbound links	
	Number of unique search terms driving traffic	
	Percentage of website traffic originating from organic search	
	Number of indexed website pages	
Blog	Total blog traffic	
	Blog traffic increase	
	Number of RSS subscribers	
	Number of comments	
	CTA click-through rate	
Social Media	Facebook	Number of fan page likes
		Number of website referrals from Facebook
		Number of comments on content
		Number of shares
	Twitter	Number of followers
		Number of website referrals from Twitter
		Number of retweets
		Number of mentions
	Pinterest	Number of likes
		Number of repins
		Number of website referrals from Pinterest
	Content Offers	Website CTA click-through rate
Number of leads generated from content offers		
Email/ Newsletter Lists	Number of subscribers	
	Newsletter soft bounce rate	
	Newsletter hard bounce rate	
	List size	
		CTA click-through rate

Table 7: Online Marketing Key Performance Indicators

Conclusions

This plan has laid out the next steps for promotion and marketing plan of the Go Blue Central America Geotourism platform. Solimar International and the GSCs will now begin implementing the online and offline marketing activities described herein to drive visitors to the Go Blue Central America website, which will in turn refer website viewers to Go Blue Central America members' businesses.

References

Instituto Hondureño del Turismo (IHT). “Boletín de Estadísticas Turísticas 2007-2011”. Tegucigalpa, October 2012.