

MARKETING

M A G A Z I N E

Call of the Yukon

The challenge: to boost interest in the Yukon by wooing marketers.

The solution: invite marketing industry folk to see dogsled races and the territory first-hand...Page 13

Andrew White (left) of Destination Arctic and Robin Anderson of the Yukon Convention Bureau

BRITISH COLUMBIA

DAWSON CITY
HEART OF THE KLONDIKE
1902-2002
"The Yukon's City of the Century"

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Call of the Yukon

The challenge: to boost interest and investment in the stunning but little-known Yukon by wooing marketers.

The solution: invite marketing industry folk to experience dogsled races and the territory's potential first-hand

Marketing's SARAH SMITH went along for the trip

I wasn't quite sure how I ended up here, trying to hang on to a sled pulled by five very eager dogs. They were tugging on the lead ropes, straining to go faster over slippery snow while I leaned into the curves and dug my heels in to brake when the going got, well, out of control.

It was the highlight of a trip I will not soon forget. As part of an unconventional initiative by the Yukon government and various interested parties, I was among a group invited to experience the Yukon first-hand in a trip designed to showcase the territory to potential marketing partners and advisors.

More importantly, organizers hoped to gain insight on how to market this amazing region of Canada. For, while the heyday of the Klondike put the Yukon on the map a century ago, modern times are calling for new initiatives to rejuvenate the land and the Yukon "brand."

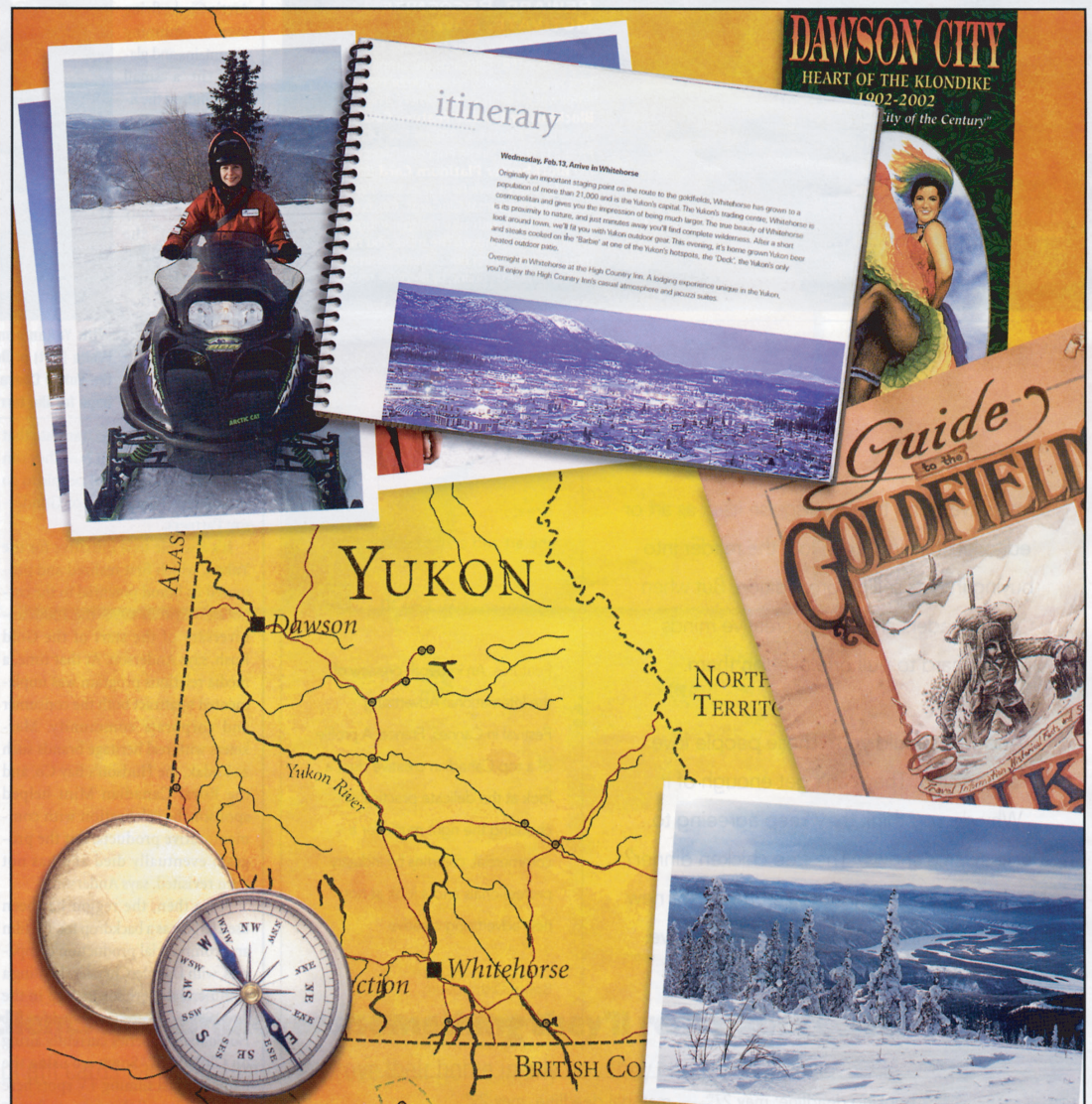
"The advantage of the Yukon is that it's an uncut diamond, offering pure, pristine landscapes, the history of the Gold Rush, independent people and landmarks such as Mount Logan," says Robin Anderson, director of sales and marketing at the Yukon Convention Bureau in Whitehorse.

But that which makes the region special also makes it a challenge. With mining on the wane, tourism is the biggest hope for Yukon's economy and morale, yet its remote location has not made it easy. Many tourists are either reluctant to travel the distance, unfamiliar with the attractions or prefer to skip through the area on their way to Alaska.

Thus the Yukon government, Yukon Convention Bureau, Canadian Tourism Commission and Encore Encore Strategic Marketing, with its tourism marketing subsidiary, Destination Arctic in Toronto, banded together to sponsor a February junket to the territory called the "Team Yukon" branding workshop.

"Nobody is going to make a decision to involve an unknown commodity like the Yukon until they've been there, so we were trying to be more proactive," says Anderson.

The junket, with a budget of \$60,000, had 11 invited guests. It had several goals, including show-



casing the area's potential as a tourism destination, informally picking the brains of outsiders on how to promote the Yukon brand and demonstrating the opportunities available for private-sector partners. In addition, organizers hoped to put together a final report that would induce greater funding from the territorial government to support a marketing program designed

to attract such partners.

"We know there's a brand, but we needed the confirmation of smart people, well-thought-of corporate executives, to confirm that brand," says Anderson, adding that the Yukon offers a great case for third-party co-op marketing because so many companies already use the Yukon brand in their advertising or product names.

The group invited on the trip in-

cluded: Brady Connell and James Jusko, co-owners of ConnQuest/Jusko Productions, an entertainment production company in Los Angeles; Howard Day, president of Fujitsu Canada in Mississauga, Ont.; Steven Gundersen, chief executive officer, and his wife, Tina Moore, managing partner, creative services, at Gundersen Partners, an executive search and consulting firm in New York; Christopher

Holmes, managing director, Europe, for MagiCorp Entertainment, a developer and operator of entertainment facilities, in Toronto; Jenny Nicholson, membership services manager at Presidents of Entrepreneurial Organizations in Toronto; Peter Schwerdt, president of logistics provider GeoLogistics in Toronto; Brad Weir, chief operating officer, creative, at Encore

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Encore Strategic Marketing in Toronto, and his wife, Lee Ann Smith; and me, a staff writer for *Marketing*.

"We were confident they would leave as ambassadors, champions of the destination and the brand," says Andrew White, managing director with Destination Arctic.

And they were right. After taking the group snowmobiling down the Yukon River, snowshoeing through deep snow and dogsledding around a five-kilometre course, gambling in Klondike-era clothing, drinking champagne at the Arctic Circle, flying over stunning mountains and glaciers in a small plane and, on the final night, providing an impromptu view of the aurora borealis, the organizers had not only "blown away" the group but garnered some great feedback on how to market the Yukon.

"Having such a magnificent experience, we came away full of excitement and were able to translate that into sound ideas about how they can go about getting a lot of people to go there," says Tina Moore of Gunder-son Partners.

It's a whole new initiative for the Yukon, which first realized and promoted its brand potential to the corporate world in 1996—the 100th anniversary of the start of the Gold Rush, says Anderson. At that time, a media relations program was implemented to attract both the consumer and corporate community. Marketers with real heritage brands such as Kodak, the Hudson's Bay Co. and the Royal Canadian Mint helped sponsor the celebration with commemorative products, but the program eventually died and has not been revisited, says Anderson.

Since then, the region has been used largely as a backdrop for TV, film and commercial production companies, with DaimlerChrysler shooting a commercial there for its Jeep in the late 1990s, and scenes filmed for the *No Boundaries* series currently airing on Global TV. "Some are using the names or just filming TV spots here because it has all the right attributes, images, messages and bragging rights," says White. "We're saying the Yukon is a lot more receptive now to working with people."

The Yukon's value as a destination brand is already apparent, but organizers feel that to really promote the region they need to take that a step further through sponsorships and co-marketing.

"We've established there is huge equity in the Yukon brand and people are taking advantage of it," says White, referring to previous marketers such as Columbia Sportswear selling its footwear with a "Yukon, You Can't" copy line, Nissan's Chillkoot Pathfinder or Good

Humour-Breyers' Klondike ice cream bars. "The Yukon wants to be part of an integrated marketing strategy, and this trip was the first vehicle to developing that strategy."

The trip was born out of a desire to better understand how the notion of third-party co-op marketing around the Yukon as a brand can happen, says White. "Let's bring a group of influential, senior, experienced executives



With Yukon's mining industry on the wane, Andrew White (left) of Destination Arctic and Robin Anderson of the Yukon Convention Bureau say tourism is the biggest hope for the territory's economy and morale

who operate every day in the corporate world, from diverse backgrounds, on a trip designed to showcase the Yukon, and do it around an event that embodies some of the brand."

That event was the Yukon Quest, an annual 1,000-mile dogsled race from Fairbanks, Alaska to Whitehorse that lasts about two weeks. First run in 1984, the event sees about 30 to 40 mushers vying for US\$125,000 (C\$196,000) in prizes, with the winner receiving about C\$47,000.

During the Team Yukon branding workshop, the Quest was presented as part of a third-party co-op marketing case study, since the event was sponsored by Goodyear Tires' best-selling Fulda tire brand in Germany from 1997 to 1999. Realizing the potential to exploit the race, Fulda had pulled in TV networks like ESPN and Eurosports to cover the event, resulting in 190 million viewers in 28 countries in six languages watching the dogsled race.

Fulda's participation generated huge awareness for the Yukon in Europe, especially in opening up the area to a new market segment seeking a winter adventure destination. The Yukon took serious market share from its main competitor, Alaska, and the number of flights between Germany and Whitehorse increased.

And while that partnership ended with Fulda's decision to sponsor its own Fulda Challenge, a 2,500-kilometre race featuring dogsledding, ice climbing, snowshoeing and axe-throwing for \$10,000 in Canadian gold nuggets, the experience and impact were not forgotten. The Yukon is eager to find a similar big-name company to come on board for the Yukon Quest, as well as other events such as the Midnight Sun Golf Tournament, Klondike International Road Relay

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and Dawson City Music Festival.

"Having talked about Fulda and their experience was a good thing," says Team Yukon participant Peter Schwerdt of GeoLogistics. "It probably spurred some ideas as to how a commercial organization could get involved."

But judging by the feedback from the group at various intervals during the trip, the Yukon still has a few steps to take before it can properly approach marketers with its ambitious ideas.

untapped opportunities to promote the destination," he says.

Following the trip, organizers asked for further thoughts and impressions from the group, along with words of enthusiasm about the Yukon's potential, that might be passed along to the various partners. Much of this went into a discussion paper, *The Yukon: Define it...Unlock it...Leverage it...* that was presented to the junket's sponsors in April.

The basic strategy of establishing relationships with high-profile compa-

strategically approach their marketing and sales.

"Frankly, in the Yukon, we've been doing it backwards. We've been approaching the GMs, or whoever, individually at a very junior level and we've done okay," says Anderson, who mentions that Land Rover is currently filming a commercial there. "But for every one Land Rover that you land, there might be 10 that say, 'Sounds like a nice idea but that's not really for us.'"

However, if a single voice were to reach potential marketing partners at the CEO level and present an entire theme of the Yukon within a corporation's marketing, sales and production departments, promising a package of shooting commercials, consumer dealership point-of-sale displays, contests and sweepstakes, sponsorship, product testing, a PR event in Toronto and corporate meetings in the Yukon, "suddenly, the Yukon starts to become pretty tangible," says Anderson.

As of late April, Destination Arctic had been given the go-ahead to start collecting brand equity information for the Yukon. The Yukon "task force" hopes to have all that work and structure set up so

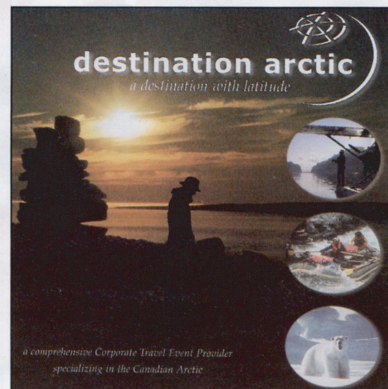


Dogsledding around a five-kilometre course was on the agenda for junket participants (back row, from left): Robin Anderson, Sarah Smith, Tina Moore and Jim Jusko. In front: Steven Gundersen.

"The first thing they have to understand or establish is what the brand equities of the Yukon are, and then find the right kinds of partners those values coincide with," says Steven Gundersen. "Properly marketed, this is a venue, a property that could have tremendous value to a lot of advertisers."

Trip participants spoke of the Yukon's need for a single voice in its marketing efforts, the need to put politics aside among the various groups responsible for this and to work in the best interests of the territory, and the need, when approaching marketers, for a strong mix of proposed marketing elements to leverage their case.

The biggest challenge is a lack of awareness of what the Yukon has to offer, says Schwerdt, and using TV advertising and other media to really get the message out should help. He suggests the region co-market with Alaska or the Northwest Territories to further leverage its cause. "There are a lot of



panies to leverage the commercial value of the Yukon brand has been "wholeheartedly" embraced, says Anderson, noting that trip participants had a huge impact in creating the model. "Some big points came out of it that have proven very helpful, and without that input we might have missed something."

For example, he cites the idea that everybody in the Yukon, from government agencies to the private sector, must be onside to approach marketers, and that the Yukon's pitch for business must mirror how marketers

that it can be in the market with collateral materials by Aug. 1. "We're on a pretty short timeline in terms of getting out there and starting to sell Yukon," says Anderson.

But while the various government bodies and tourism folk are busy putting together their PowerPoint presentations to sell the Yukon, there will be a few of us doing

our small part on a very modest, but still impactful, level.

"It was the greatest trip I've been on in my life, and I've been on quite a few," says Schwerdt, whose office is now filled with photos from the trip. "I had no idea what a marvellous place it was, and I talk about it every chance I get and promote the concept to people all the time."

As do I, with a few words of advice: Remember to lean into the curves and put the brake on as you go down the hill, because those sled dogs can really pick up speed.