

SUMMARY RESULTS: EXPLORE MINNESOTA TOURISM "HOW ARE WE DOING?"

- Survey purpose, invitation list, and response rate: Explore Minnesota Tourism (EMT) conducted an informal, online organizational assessment survey in June 2007 to solicit feedback from Minnesota's tourism industry about EMT's services, staff, interactions with the tourism industry, issues for future efforts and marketing tactics. The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to rate the quality and/or importance of specific components in these areas, and also included numerous open-ended questions to allow more specific feedback. E-mail invitations, including a link to the survey, were sent to 3,040 accommodations (indoor lodging properties, campgrounds and state parks), attractions and tourism organizations throughout Minnesota that have provided EMT with an e-mail address. A total of 491 usable, complete survey responses were received for a 16% response rate.

Survey results will help direct EMT's programs, and provide valuable insights into areas needed for improved service. This process will facilitate EMT doing our best possible job for the industry in promoting travel to our state. Results reported here reflect self-reported data from respondents to the survey.

- Overall ratings: Two broad ratings questions provided relatively positive feedback for the quality of services provided by EMT and for the professionalism and support provided by EMT staff. On a four-point scale, from "excellent" (1) to "poor" (4), 40% of respondents rated the quality of EMT services as excellent and another 53% checked the second highest rating for a total of 92% positive ratings. (Note: The total is different than the sum of percents due to rounding.) Regarding the professionalism and support provided by EMT staff, 51% of respondents rated the EMT staff as excellent and another 43% checked the second highest rating for a total of 94% positive ratings.

- Ratings of EMT service quality in program areas: Positive ratings (i.e., ratings of "1" and "2" on a four-point scale) for eight services provided by EMT ranged from a high of 83% for electronic marketing (including www.exploreminnesota.com) to a low of 26% for international marketing. However, many results were impacted by a high number of respondents checking "does not apply; or I'm not aware of this" (referenced hereafter as "NA"), pointing toward the need to build awareness of the service and its relevance to the industry. For example, 62% of respondents checked "NA" for international marketing, 56% checked "NA" for St. Paul contact center (e.g., phone counseling), and 41% checked "NA" for group and package travel. Removing "NA" responses from the base used for calculating percents, the percent of respondents with positive ("1" and "2") ratings for each service was:

- Travel brochures/publications for consumers – 92%
- Domestic marketing – 89%
- Electronic marketing (including www.exploreminnesota.com) – 89%
- State highway travel information centers – 89%
- St. Paul contact center (e.g., phone counseling) – 89%
- Media relations – 87%
- Group and package travel – 82%
- International marketing – 69%

- Ratings of EMT in areas of interactions with the tourism industry: Positive ratings (i.e., ratings of "1" and "2" on a four-point scale) for eight areas of interactions with the tourism industry ranged from a high of 80% for overall relations with the tourism industry to a low of 39% for organizational partnership grants. Again, several categories were impacted by a high number of "NA" responses, including organizational partnership grants (52% "NA"), other conferences and events (51%), annual tourism conference (44%), regional offices/industry outreach (37%) and industry website (www.industry.exploreminnesota.com) (31%). Removing "NA" responses from the base used for calculating percents, the percent of respondents with positive ("1" and "2") ratings for each area of interactions was:

- EMT Express (electronic newsletter) – 93%
- Overall relations with the tourism industry – 90%
- Industry website (www.industry.exploreminnesota.com) – 90%
- Research/reports on travel trends – 87%
- Annual tourism conference – 84%
- Regional offices/industry outreach – 84%
- Other conferences and events – 83%
- Organizational partnership grants – 82%

- Importance of issues for future efforts of EMT: Ratings of "important" (i.e., ratings of "1" and "2" on a four-point scale) for eight issues for future efforts ranged from a high of 97% for marketing to a low of 63% for a statewide lodging reservation system. (Note: No such system currently exists; at this point it is a possibility for future consideration.) Fewer respondents to future efforts issues checked "NA", with only statewide lodging reservation system getting a double-digit percent of "NA" responses (12%). Removing "NA" responses from the base used for calculating percents, the percent of respondents with important ("1" and "2") ratings for each future efforts issue was:

- Marketing – 97%
- Raising awareness of the importance of tourism – 92%
- Funding – 91%
- Research on economic impact, travel trends, etc. – 88%
- Tourism product development – 86%
- Public policy – 84%
- Providing educational opportunities to the industry – 80%
- Statewide lodging reservation system – 63%

- Importance of marketing tactics for EMT: Ratings of "important" (i.e., ratings of "1" and "2" on a four-point scale) for seven marketing tactics ranged from a high of 92% for electronic marketing (including www.exploreminnesota.com) to a low of 52% for international marketing. As with future efforts issues, relatively few respondents to marketing tactics checked "NA"; however, three marketing tactics received double-digit percents of "NA" responses: international marketing (21% "NA"); group and package travel (13%); and marketing partnerships with private sector(12%). Removing "NA" responses from the base used for calculating percents, the percent of respondents with important ("1" and "2") ratings for each marketing tactic was:

- Domestic marketing – 96%
- Electronic marketing (including www.exploreminnesota.com) – 96%
- Marketing Minnesota's tourism regions – 94%
- Media relations – 91%
- Marketing partnerships with private sector – 88%
- Group and package travel – 82%
- International marketing – 65%

- Responses by region: The distribution of survey responses by region was as follows:

- Northcentral/West – 37%
- Northeast – 25%
- Southern – 20%
- Metro – 18%

- Respondent's position in the tourism and hospitality industry: The distribution of survey responses by position was as follows:

- General manager/owner – 53%
- Chamber/CVB/tourism association director – 11%
- Government employee – 11%
- Sales and marketing – 10%
- Other – 15%

- Respondent's type of business: The distribution of survey responses by the type of business employing the respondent was as follows:

- Lodging/campground – 49%
- Chamber/CVB/tourism association – 10%
- Park or historic site – 9%
- Other type of attraction – 7%
- Other government facility/organization – 5%
- Retail – 3%
- Other – 16%

- Responses to open-ended questions: Numerous open-ended questions (i.e., asking for comments) throughout the survey provided opportunities for respondents to provide more specific feedback. Given the relatively broad areas covered by some response categories, responses to these questions were very helpful in getting to the heart of what was important to respondents. Many contained specific comments about things that are or are not working well, and some included helpful suggestions for how to do things differently.

The EMT website was the focus of many comments, including both positive and negative feedback on the recent website redesign. The specific concerns have been noted. Some of the concerns have already been taken into account in recent updates, and other concerns will be considered for future updates of the website.

Numerous comments pointed to a secondary, educational aspect of surveys like this. The simple process of going through lists of EMT services, issues and marketing tactics included in the survey raised respondents' awareness of these things, leading to comments like this: "I was unaware of the industry website and regional offices. Guess I will look that up on the web." Other comments indicated a lack of apparent relevance of EMT information and/or services to respondents. (Note: EMT's "industry website", including a sizable research section with links to other resources, is a good place to look for relevant information. While not all information included on the site will be relevant to all tourism businesses/organizations, a glance through the industry website may reveal unexpected, helpful information for current use and/or future reference.)

Summary statistics for the "how are we doing?" survey can be viewed online at:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/web/SharedResults/SharedResultsPasswordPage.aspx?ID=L232FT4CN72B>

To view results, click on the link, or copy and paste it into your web browser.