

TO BE A BOOSTER; ONLINE COMMUNITY JUST THE TICKET TO PROMOTE EDMONTON TOURISM

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Mayor Stephen Mandel is mighty miffed Edmonton seems to get the short shrift when it comes to provincial tourism promotion.

Mandel recently publicly slammed Travel Alberta for promoting the heck out of Banff and all but ignoring Edmonton.

"The attitude that was expressed was there is nothing to see in Edmonton," Mandel quipped after meeting a Travel Alberta bigwig.

It could be a tall mountain to climb before Edmonton gets the kind of provincial promoting Banff gets.

But Edmonton's booster group is embarking on a new initiative that could get this city more bang for its tourism buck.

It's based on the theory that some of our best ambassadors no longer live here.

Yet their love of Edmonton and enthusiasm could pay dividends.

So Edmonton boosters are hoping to get this city a place on the global stage, one person at a time, by creating something called an online community.

Edmonton Economic Development Corporation has taken the first step toward that by sending out a questionnaire to 5,000 people - residents and ex-residents.

"We're basically trying to find out if there is support for an online community globally dedicated to the promotion of all things Edmonton," said EEDC's Kenn Bur.

The online community would be part information vehicle, part people's forum and part booster device for the City of Champions.

It could also provide links to Edmonton media, culture and upcoming events for people to access worldwide.

"We don't know of another place in the world that's currently doing this type of thing, at least on this scale."

It's a fine idea that should work like a charm, I think.

Why?

Unlike other metro areas of one million people or so, Edmonton still has a feeling of a smaller community.

When crisis hits, neighbours help neighbours.

When there's a need for fundraising, people willingly wring out their wallets.

When a world-class special event comes to town, Edmontonians trip over one another to volunteer to put it on.

EEDC is taking the first step in moving toward the design of an online community by sending out a survey on the concept.

Besides going to average Joes and Josephines in Edmonton and worldwide, it'll go to tourism officials and others whose job is to promote and sell this city.

Bur reckons there could be scads of good feedback from these people as to what they'd like to see on such a site - assuming the majority say they'd like such a global gathering place.

He says he's not one to pre-judge, but he's got some good ideas right off the bat.

"We could collect opinions to see how greater Edmonton is perceived locally, nationally and internationally - and it could help promote a positive image of Edmonton to regional residents and international residents."

That's a great idea, I think.

What's more, it could serve as a one-stop spot for people who might want to attend events here or move to this neck of the woods or relocate a business from somewhere else.

The only other site I've seen that's remotely similar to what's envisioned is an online community for my favourite resort town in Mexico - Playa del Carmen: www.playadelcarmeninfo.com.

That offers a forum moderated by people from that town that's aimed at those who want to visit or to live there.

Something like that could work wonders as well for Edmonton.

Bur figures it could be a slam dunk, based in part on the fact some folks are already clamouring to join an online community regarding Edmonton.

"For the last year on EEDC's corporate site (edmonton.com) we've had a little button we've not advertised in any way, shape or form and it just says online community.

"About 80 people from Iraq to Japan have registered there, wanting to become boosters of the community.

"They want to get involved and they're looking for a means to get involved."

An online community could be just the ticket to tapping into that boosterism and sense of community.

Care to become an Edmonton booster and ambassador? No matter where you are, e-mail: info@edmonton.com.

Bur says survey results should be out by August.

Stay tuned, would-be boosters.

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