



PLUMAS COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU  
2009  
Year-End Inquiry Analysis

The Plumas County Visitors Bureau (PCVB), a division of Plumas Corporation, is the county's official destination marketing organization. Its primary mission is to position Plumas County as a premiere visitor destination and to increase travel spending.

PCVB's external marketing program operates in consort with numerous partners and tourism businesses within the county, region and state. The Bureau works to coordinate these partnerships, and serve as an information link between them. PCVB further strives to unify the marketing message and avoid duplication of effort among the partnerships.

The Visitors Bureau also operates a Visitors Center that provides countywide information, literature fulfillment, and direct referrals to visitors via an 800-line, the Internet, by mail and in person.

The following written report and accompanying charts and graphs are an assessment of the inquiries received by phone, mail and computer at PCVB during the past calendar year. The Bureau tracks each inquiry received in order to evaluate the results of specific marketing strategies, and to build a database of prospective visitors. Each year, the results are analyzed to make changes or improvements to marketing efforts. The inquiry reports and database also provide valuable data about visitors and prospective visitors to Plumas County over time.

The 2009 Year-End Inquiry Report does not attempt to evaluate or include all of the various marketing tools and program activities undertaken by PCVB or its partnerships throughout the year. Details on PCVB's workplan and projects are provided annually at the end of each fiscal year. For more information, contact Suzi Brakken, Plumas County Visitors Bureau Director, at 530-283-6345 or [info@plumascounty.org](mailto:info@plumascounty.org)

## **ONLINE TRAVEL PLANNING DOMINATES**

Most people who contact the Visitors Bureau have first visited the bureau's Web site (or a referring site), and far more are making their travel plans solely using the information they find online.

Increasing use of the Web site has made it more challenging to assess the results of specific marketing strategies, although a small percentage of web users do fill out "contact forms" on the site which ask how the user discovered the site. Web tracking software also has enabled PCVB to learn more about its Web audience and marketing results.

The numbers are substantial: Web site visits, combined with direct contacts, represent 99 percent of the total requests for information to PCVB. For every person that directly contacts the Visitors Bureau, 73 others are going straight to PCVB's Web site to plan their trips without making direct contact.

## **SLIGHT DROP IN WEB SITE VISITS**

There were 207,511 visits\* to the Plumas County Visitors Bureau's Web site during 2009 (an average of 568 per day) as compared to 218,721 visits tracked in 2008. This reflects a 5 percent drop in site visits overall.

This marks the first time since the launching of PCVB's Web site that site visits were down, and it also mirrors a drop (33 percent) in direct inquiries to PCVB. Why did this happen?

It's interesting to note that the drop did not occur in every month, but primarily during the months of August, September and October (with the trend continuing through the end of the year.) There actually were increases in site visits during January, March, May, June and July.

So many factors could be the cause. First, the "Awesome Autumn" web reports experienced major competition from another site ([californiafallcolor.com](http://californiafallcolor.com)), and fall color ads did not run due to budget cuts. The general drop in travel and poor economy could be another factor. It may also reflect the fact that repeat travelers to Plumas County require less trip-planning. And it could also be that search engine optimization efforts were less aggressive than in past years and will need to be boosted.

The increase in Web site visits in May and June could very likely reflect increased popularity and marketing of the spring "Bloom Blog," where site visitors could follow the progress of spring wildflowers throughout Plumas County.

*\*"Visits" refers to the number of times a user accesses the Web site, as opposed to "hits," which records each time a user clicks a certain page or image. These visits are not included in the analysis of "direct contacts" to PCVB.*

During 2009, the number of people who directly contacted PCVB after first viewing Web sites dropped 26 percent, from 1,720 to 1,278. Of those, 1,092 obtained PCVB's contact information off the PCVB Web site, 141 came from Visitors Guide order forms posted on local chamber of commerce websites, and 45 found PCVB contact information on another Web site. There was a notable drop (55 percent) in inquiries from chamber websites; this is likely due to the fact that the order form was dropped from Chester's Web site during a revamp. It's also likely that with changes in PCVB staff, some email inquiries were not tracked.

Internet marketing efforts included a new social media strategy (with frequent posts on Facebook and Twitter sites), search engine optimization efforts along with quarterly e-mail newsletters, links campaign and presence/publicity on blogs. User visits were highest in May, June and July.

### **TRACKING DOWN DATA ON WEB SITE VISITORS**

Web tracking software was used to produce a separate analysis\*\* of PCVB's Web site, *www.plumascounty.org*, for 2009 (enclosed.) It shows that users made an average of two requests per visit. Most visits were made on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Site users accessed virtually all of the site, but the **most requested pages** besides the home page were Places to Camp, Camping-Lake Almanor, Map, Fishing Report, Events, Places to Stay, Cabins/Resorts and, Awesome Autumn/fall color.

The Occupancy Report, which enables site visitors to check for vacancies at participating accommodations, was a useful tool, and had 8,220 click-thrus to provider sites. It also was a page that visitors stayed on, for a longer time than other pages.

The **top five cities** from which site users came were Sacramento, Chico, San Francisco, Reno and Huntington Beach. The **top key words** used to find the site on search engines were "lake," "Plumas," "Ca," "California," "county," "almanor," "feather," and "river."

The highest daily usage was on Monday, June 29, which was likely due to planning for July 4 activities including High Sierra Music Festival. The second-highest day was Wednesday, June 24, probably for similar reasons.

*\*\*For more detailed information, see the "2009 PCVB Web Data Analysis" publication at the back of this document.*

While most people find PCVB's site by typing in the address themselves or using a search engine, others were referred to PCVB's site via **links from other Web sites**. During 2009, the most click-throughs overall were from the PlumasNews.com site, run by Feather Publishing. The second highest click-through rate came from the County of Plumas site, which has a photo link directly on the home page. Interestingly, the Quincy Chamber of Commerce site, which was the second highest click-thru site in 2008, did not appear in the top 8 referring sites. Others that did appear included wikipedia.org, KOLO-TV (a Reno television channel site which carried an old PCVB paid advertisement), and chamber directory sites (2chambers.com and Chiff.com.)

### **DIRECT CONTACTS DOWN**

The number of **direct contacts (email or phone) to PCVB from all tracking categories were down by 33 percent in 2009 as compared to the previous year**. There were 4,238 inquiries in 2008 versus 2,830 inquiries in 2009. Exempting "reader service" mail-in requests, direct inquiries were down about 25 percent, from 3,673 in 2008 to 2,755 in 2009.

### **LITERATURE MAILINGS DOWN**

Literature requests were down, due to less fulfillment of visitor requests from reader service requests due to the drop in paid advertising. They were also down in general due to the drop in requests. PCVB staff mailed out 1,569 visitor information packets as compared to 2,761 during 2008.

### **WALK-IN NUMBERS UP**

In contrast to the drop in phone/email inquiries, the number of walk-ins to the Visitor Center grew 7 percent, from 2,429 in 2008 to 2,617 in 2009. The heaviest month was in July, followed by October and August.

### **Source of PCVB phone, mail, or email inquiries by percentage**

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>
WEBPAGE/INTERNET	45	41
EVENT PUBLICITY	13	12
DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE	11	6
VISITORS GUIDE/MAP/BROCHURES	8	6
OTHER REFERRALS	7	3.5
PUBLIC RELATIONS	5	3
PREVIOUS VISITOR	4	3
PAID ADVERTISING	3	11
READER SERVICE	3	13
UNKNOWN	1	1

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF ESSENTIAL FOR VISITORS**

**The largest share -- 45 percent of direct contacts to PCVB -- came from 1,278 people who visited a Web site** first, but were still seeking personalized customer service offered by Visitors Bureau staff. This was a 26 percent decrease from last year.

**A combined total of 30 percent of PCVB inquiries (851)** came from people who found PCVB through **directory assistance**, had **referrals from friends/family or other businesses**, had an **old Plumas County Visitors Guide**, or who had **visited Plumas County previously**. This group represents people who rely on recognized visitor information systems such as PCVB for personal interaction, customer service and up-to-date information (including lodging availability.) These factors are key to “closing the sale” on new business and for getting repeat business.

**Visitors inquiring about Plumas County events represented 13 percent of direct contacts to PCVB.** A total of 376 contacts were tracked to 30 different events, as compared to 522 contacts from 42 events in 2008. (Part of the discrepancy could be due to reporting error.) Top events that produced the most inquiries to PCVB include: Fall colors/Awesome Autumn (157), High Sierra Music Fest (66), Longboard Ski Races (53), Graeagle 4<sup>th</sup> of July, (22), and Tree Permits (15).

## **NO ADVERTISING RESULTS IN HUGE DROP**

During 2009, there was no paid advertising program due to budget restraints. Nevertheless, some direct response was tracked to prior year advertising in VIA and Sunset (83) and carryover reader service requests from Sunset and California State Visitors Guide (75). That netted a total of just 158 inquiries tracked to advertising in 2009 versus 1,019 in 2008 -- a year that saw a 40 percent *increase* in ad response.

With no advertising in 2009, the response dropped 84 percent. The greatest drop came from the loss of the fall color magazine ads, which in 2008 produced a combined 349 inquiries (Aug-Oct.). Those same months in 2009 produced just 45 inquiries.

Direct response to paid advertising combined with “reader response” request forms made up 6 percent of PCVB’s inquiries as compared to 24 percent in 2008.

It is interesting to note that VIA magazine still accounted for 81 inquiries – some of which may have been from two indirect editorial placements as opposed to prior-year advertising. However the response tracked to VIA occurred in every month but one.

## **ONLINE MEDIA, RADIO AND “ROAD TRIP” SERIES LEAD PUBLICITY**

Public relations (or PR) refers mostly to inquiries that tracked to unpaid editorial placements in a variety of media, including newspapers, magazines, radio/TV, guidebooks, e-mail newsletters and blogs. Much of this “free” publicity stems from efforts by PCVB to assist and attract writers and photographers. PCVB is the recognized county liaison to travel media, and prepares and distributes press releases, photographs, media kits, guidebook updates, sources, interviews and provides other assistance to media.

There was virtually no change in the number of inquiries attributed to PR between 2008 and 2009, although the inquiries were attributed to fewer venues (19 versus 21.) There were 142 trackable PCVB inquiries attributed to PR during 2009, making up 5 percent of total direct contacts.

Of the venues, 11 are traditional media and 4 are guidebooks, and the remainder are Internet-based. Some 14 of those venues were either the direct result of PCVB’s efforts or received our assistance.

The media that produced the most direct response was: the spring E-newsletter produced by PCVB staff, the California State Visitors Guide, two guest appearances by PCVB staff on “On the Go with KGO” radio program during spring wildflower season and fall foliage season; and the AAA Tourbook.

The San Francisco Chronicle ran three “Sunday Drive” series articles about Plumas County that produced response. These were written by Outdoor Editor and longtime associate Tom Stienstra, who contacted PCVB for assistance. Other notable placements included fall foliage pieces in USA Today, Orange County Register, RV Journal and Smarter Travel (online.)

There were also placements that did not produce direct inquiries resulting from the Outdoor Writers of California Fall Conference (held in Lake Almanor in September) as well as the Golf Media Tour (held in Graeagle in June.) Overall, there is a growing trend of publicity tracked to online media versus traditional print media, which mirrors the state of the industry.

## **E-MAIL NEWSLETTERS PRODUCE GOOD RESULTS, MORE SUBSCRIBERS**

PCVB produced and distributed four e-mail newsletters sent to PCVB's e-mail database of approximately 3,436 addresses, as compared to 2,585 addresses last year (a 33 percent increase.) Overall, the E-newsletters netted a combined 35 percent open rate and 28 percent click-thru rate (way above average click-throughs compared to other travel-related e-newsletters sent through Constant Contact.) Those rates were exactly the same as in 2008.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY BEGUN**

A Facebook page and Twitter account administered by Plumas County Visitors Bureau staff were created in 2009. Eventually those accounts were interlinked, so that posts made to Facebook also go to Twitter. Posts are made every few days to include events, news, vacancies, links to PCVB and other sites, photos, and video. The Facebook fan base totalled 264 as of January 2010, and the Twitter account has 495 followers. The Facebook site was helpful in soliciting user generated content from both visitors and locals, making it useful for "internal" marketing as well as external. The Facebook site also appeared in the top referring sites to [www.plumascounty.org](http://www.plumascounty.org), making it a useful tool for generating traffic to the PCVB Web site.