

## The South with a Twist

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GolinHarris and Georgia Department of Economic Development, Jan 1, 2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Reputation Management / Brand Management — Government

To launch Georgia's new tourism campaign, "The South with a Twist", GolinHarris "twisted" through the Peach State with Kevin Langston, deputy commissioner of tourism, on a series of Twist Road Trips to the State's nine tourism regions. Kevin met with 200 local legislators, influencers and tourism partners throughout Georgia to introduce the new campaign and reinforce the economic impact and importance of tourism. He held 40 interviews with local media and visited 26 cities. GolinHarris successfully met and exceeded the communications objectives with a very small budget.

Reputation management / brand management includes campaigns are designed to enhance, promote or improve the reputation of an organization with its publics or key elements of its publics, either proactively or in response to an issue, event or market occurrence. The government subcategory includes all government bureaus, agencies, institutions or departments at the local, state and federal levels, including the armed forces, regulatory bodies, courts, public schools and state universities.

### Full Text: **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

*Beautiful beaches with sparkling blue water...freshly cut emerald green golf courses... majestic antebellum homes.* Open just about any travel or lifestyle publication and you'll see the *same* images used to promote just about every state's tourism industry – particularly those in the Southeast United States. Unlike its competitors, however, Georgia has assets that go far beyond the usual. The largest state east of the Mississippi is also home to some of the most diverse opportunities in the country, and is a balance of traditional and modern. In fact, no state can compare when it comes to blending history and innovation. So when Georgia launched its new tourism marketing campaign, it turned to partner GolinHarris to introduce the effort to the state's influencers and residents alike.

### **RESEARCH**

The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD)'s Tourism Division was eager to differentiate Georgia from neighboring states – with seemingly similar assets – and felt the need to position itself in a fresh, new way. Through extensive research, ranging from one-on-one interviews to focus groups to social media audits, what GDEcD heard was consistent: People seek the authentic southern experiences in Georgia and love the unexpected surprises. The research findings led the state to create a new marketing and advertising campaign based on the underlying theme that Georgia delivers "southern sensibilities, modern possibilities." We were tasked to bring the "The South with a Twist" campaign to life.

Through conversations with key tourism partners and the department's regional representatives, we learned that there was a desire to get more face time with the GDEcD

tourism team. Partners wanted the Deputy Commissioner of Tourism to visit their regions to share the local economic impact of tourism and state's marketing program with influencers. This key learning helped us craft a program that would successfully launch the "The South with a Twist" and cultivate relationships with important leaders.

## **PLANNING**

### **Business Goals of the Tourism Program:**

- Drive incremental trips and tourism spending in Georgia.
- Increase annual tourism revenues by a billion dollars a year by 2020.
- Increase awareness of Georgia's tourism assets among our key targets and evolve our positioning.

### **Communications Objectives:**

- Build awareness of Georgia's unique tourism assets, the economic impact of tourism in the state and "The South with a Twist" campaign. Generate at least 500,000 media impressions.
- Connect directly with at least 100 key influencers (tourism industry leaders, elected officials, etc.) across the state.

### **Target/Audience Analysis:**

- **Audience 1:** Our primary tourism target is Women 25-54, both within Georgia and in surrounding states, who act as the key influencer in planning vacation time for themselves and their loved ones.

**What we want them to believe:** The Georgia experience brings a contemporary and modern twist to the authenticity, heritage and hospitality of the south. I want to experience that twist.

- **Audience 2:** Tourism Partners across Georgia.

**What we want them to believe:** The Tourism Team at GDEcD is creative – and both a partner and a leader in tourism promotion. They're actively and effectively supporting our local and regional efforts to drive tourism.

- **Audience 3:** Legislators and key tourism influencers in Georgia.

**What we want them to believe:** Tourism is essential and important to Georgia's economy and worthy of my support.

### **Key Strategies:**

- Leverage and extend the "Twist" platform to reveal each region's interesting, unknown twists of southern vs. modern with local media as a conduit to all audiences.
- Engage the State's tourism partners in delivering against our objectives in fun and creative ways.

**Total Budget:** \$30,000

## **EXECUTION**

To introduce "The South with a Twist" campaign and get Kevin Langston, Deputy Commissioner of Tourism, out in the local communities, we created a "Twist Road Trip" through the state's nine tourism region. We kicked off the first "Twist Road Trip" in February 2012 and concluded in June 2012.

- **Media Relations:** For each of the tourism regions, we secured interviews, desk-side briefings and roundtables with local media. In support, we developed personalized print and electronic media kits for each media outlet. The media kits included a Twist campaign fact sheet, state, regional and local economic impact numbers, state and local Twist ads, and the updated Georgia Tourism map.
- **Partner/Influencer Events:** We worked with each GDEcD tourism regional representative to host events inviting local tourism partners, government officials and key influencers in the region to meet with Kevin. From casual lunch and dinner events to outdoor press conferences, each event was unique to the region. Though the format of each event was different, we made sure to keep the Twist theme alive through branded GDEcD cocktail napkins, table tops with printed Twist ads, branded Twist icebreaker cards, and “Ask Me How I Twist” stickers. In addition, we developed a speech outline for Kevin to use with key messages on the Twist campaign, state and local economic impact numbers and — depending on whom he was addressing — a chance to thank partners or reinforce support for the tourism industry.

Another critical component of the program challenged Kevin to experience unique tourism products in the regions – from zipping down zip-lines to sleeping in teepees and covered wagons to eating everything from peach ice cream to fried green tomatoes. His first-hand experiences helped reinforce the story and the state’s key messages. We worked with the regional representatives and tourism partners to coordinate tours, book interesting accommodations and allow Kevin to experience some fun twists in each region.

- **Capture the Excitement:** The client drove through the state in the “Twist Mobile,” which was marked by a branded car magnet we designed. We shot extensive photos of every location the “Twist Mobile” took Kevin. We developed the #KevinsGA hashtag and encouraged Kevin to tweet at least 3-5 times during each road trip journey and include photos.

## EVALUATION

While business results will not be available until the end of the year, anecdotal evidence from the state’s nine regions shows tourism is strong. Moreover, we were able to meet – and exceed – communications objectives with a very small budget.

**Objective 1:** Build awareness of Georgia’s unique tourism assets, the economic impact of tourism in the state and “The South with a Twist” campaign. Generate at least 500,000 media impressions.

- **Result:** We reached more than 1.05 million Georgians with 102 articles, TV interviews and tweets. (Please note that most of the local, small town media outlets had a circulation of less than 10,000.) With Kevin’s good humor and willingness, he helped tell the story visually through his experiences on zip lines, tee-pees, kayaks, vineyards, covered wagons and sleeping in a haunted inn.

**Objective 2:** Connect directly with at least 100 key influencers (tourism industry leaders, elected officials, etc.) across the state.

- **Result:** Kevin traveled a total of 3,020 miles across Georgia, visited all nine tourism regions and 26 cities throughout the Peach State. He met and had discussions with more than 200 key tourism partners and influencers.

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