

Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce Visitor & Convention Bureau City Council Update

FY Goals & Website Overview

Our 2022-23 marketing plan was designed to increase overall awareness of Santa Maria Valley, its offerings, events and local flavor in an effort to attract overnight visitors. Our approach for the year leans heavily into organic, owned and created content to promote awareness, visibility and engagement among our audiences. This is balanced with a paid media plan dedicated to paid search and paid social platforms, the combination of which continue to drive intent-based visits to core website content and gain visibility for the brand. We continued to focus on the key selling points of Santa Maria Valley as a Central Coast tourism destination. Paid efforts are also leveraged to provide lift to organic content and PR efforts which will allow us to reach a broader, but targeted, audience for specific messaging across channels.

We measured success by way of defined key performance indicators (KPIs) for the year:

- Website engagement
- Hotel referrals
- Earned media placement in priority outlets
- Social media engagement
- Search rankings & organic traffic

Organic Social Media

The majority of our efforts on social media this year were focused on the Santa Maria Valley Instagram and TikTok accounts. Video content consistently outperforms static image content, and consumers' trust of organic content on these platforms is key when it comes to making travel plans and travel decisions.

The majority of the content we create is video content, using assets from our existing library and new assets captured throughout the year. Our video content is intended to showcase all that Santa Maria Valley has to offer from the point of view of a visitor. The content is visually appealing but not overly edited, and it's relatable.

The Santa Maria Valley TikTok uses video content that's primarily repurposed from our Instagram Reels, reaching a slightly different audience via a different algorithm. Each month, we evaluate the type of content that's performing best on each channel so that we can optimize accordingly during content planning for the future.







Instagram

- Total Followers: 7,600
 - +44% compared to last year
- Reach: 588,000
 - +109% compared to last year
- Number of posts: 577
 - \circ +49% compared to last year









TikTok

The Santa Maria Valley TikTok was established in July 2021. A year later, in July 2022, we had 145 followers. By June 2023, we'd more than quadrupled that. While growth is slower on this platform, it has happened steadily, especially in the last year.

TikTok is the new-and-improved Google search engine for many users, meaning they use it to search for anything from educational material to hidden gems to explore at their next vacation spot. TikTok actually surpassed Google in 2021 as the most-used website. Because of this, it is important for Santa Maria Valley to have a presence on the platform and to continue to stay up-to-date on trends and hashtags to best leverage the algorithm.

TikTok does not provide historical or year-over-year comparison data, so the following information is specific to July – December 2022.

- Total Followers: 651
- Total Video Views: 263,800
- Avg. Engagement Rate: 5%

Boosted Posts

As part of our paid media plan, we dedicate a certain portion of the digital spend to boosted posts, which means we're putting money behind our organic posts in order to push them out to a larger, targeted audience. In doing so, we're able to leverage the organic content we're creating and reach more than just those who already follow us on each platform. This results in not only more post engagements on-platform, but it drives website visits and engagements.

This year, our boosted posts have resulted in:

- 184 hotel referrals
- 834,000 post engagements, including 3,000 shares and 125 comments
- 35,000 website visits

Overall, 80% of all Facebook and Instagram ad engagements came from boosted posts, which leverage the same assets we use for our organic social media content.



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Top-performing Boosted Posts



Paid Social Media

73% of all of our paid website visits come from paid Facebook & Instagram ads. Looking at year-over-year KPIs for paid social media, hotel referrals are relatively flat, even taking into account the considerable spike we saw in hotel referrals last year from the Beat Inflation Vacation campaign that launched in May 2022. If we remove that campaign from the equation, hotel referrals from paid social media are actually up 49% year-over-year!

Newsletter signups from paid social media are up 46% year-over-year. Even better is that engagement with our ads is through the roof–on-platform engagement is up 316%,



with shares alone up 298% year over year. Shares are considered the most valuable type of engagement.

Key Website KPIs



Engagements	
1M	
* 316%	



Shares 5K : 298%

Comments
587
: 28%



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Paid Social Media KPIs by Campaign









Paid Search

Paid search is our most targeted marketing tool, capturing intent-based search queries based on closely tracked keywords in order to drive quality website visits and engagement.

- Website visits from paid search are up 30% at 45,000 total for the year
- Click-through-rates have nearly doubled (+98%)
- With the new lodging detail page design, hotel referrals are up 13% year-overyear
- We've increased our CTR by 98% while increasing (and nearly maxing out) our top-of-page rate of 91%.

Paid Search KPIs





Organic Search and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

This year, we continued to focus our SEO efforts on increasing non-branded, non-event organic search visits to the website, with a focus on branded searches, Santa Maria Valley lodging-related searches and Santa Barbara and Central Coast wine rankings. Our stretch goes is to gain two page rankings for California wine terms. So far this year, we have achieved the following significant ranking gains, which contribute to overall growth in organic traffic to the site:

- We have gained the #1 position (outranking Visit California) for the keyword *wine tasting central california*, which was ranked #20 at the beginning of the year.
- The keyword *santa maria tri tip wine pairing* is now ranked #1, previously ranked 15.
- Our average position has improved from 24 to 17 for all tracked keywords.
- We have continued to gain rankings in our top 20, top 10 and top three positions.



New Keywords in the Top 3

Keyword	Position -	Previous position
wine tasting tours santa maria	1	4
wine tasting tours santa maria ca	1	4
santa maria wines california	1	4
santa maria valley wine	1	4
cheap wine tasting in santa barbara	1	4
santa maria wine	1	5
santa barbara wine regions	1	8
free wine tasting santa maria	2	5
santa maria ca wine tasting	2	4
presqu'ile winery	2	4
presquile winery	2	4
cambria estate winery	3	4
free wine tasting santa ynez	3	6
santa maria tri tip wine pairing	3	15
wine tasting central coast california	2	5
wine tasting central california	2	6



Blog Content

We published several new blogs on the site this year. New and updated blogs are a combination of SEO-driven content pieces aimed at increasing rankings in wine space, filling content gaps, and featuring significant news about Santa Maria Valley wine country. Blogs published or updated during this fiscal year are below:

- KTLA: Wine tasting 'Santa Maria Style' with the Santa Maria Wine Trolley
- Hotels in Santa Maria Valley for Every Experience
- <u>The Great Outdoors in Santa Maria Valley</u>
- Stroll, Sip, Shop & Savor in Old Town Orcutt
- Wine Enthusiast: Miller Family Wine Company's Nicholas Miller Named 2022 Wine Executive of the Year
- <u>California Wine Country, #SantaMariaStyle</u>
- The First People of California's Central & Southern Coasts
- <u>Fodor's Travel: 12 Spots in North America to Experience Pantone's 2023 Color</u> of the Year
- <u>Thrillist: 5 Reasons to Drive to the Santa Maria Valley, California</u>
- <u>Celebrating Santa Maria Valley's Leading Women in Hospitality</u>
- Experience California Car Show Culture in Santa Maria Valley
- Travel + Leisure: Santa Maria Valley is a must-visit
- USA Today 10Best: Is Santa Maria the new Napa?
- Santa Barbara Morning News: Hitch a Ride on the Santa Maria Wine Trolley
- We Travel There Podcast: Santa Maria Valley
- Sarah Dandashy: The Perfect Weekend Getaway in Santa Maria Valley
- Rovology: Wineries and Butterflies Exploring Santa Maria Valley, CA

Website Design

In the first half of this year, we updated the design for the lodging property detail pages as we noticed that hotel referrals (instances of people clicking from hotel pages off to the booking sites) were dropping. After an analysis, we determined it was because of the placement of the "Book Now" button, especially on mobile. We've updated these pages to be optimized for mobile and with the addition of featured amenities on each page. Just two months after the update, the results confirmed our hypothesis:

- Hotel referrals were up **30%** year over year (that's **+150** referrals!)
- There were 395 'book your stay' clicks
- There were 242 'check availability' clicks
- The average time spent on these pages has more than doubled





Around the middle of the year, we designed a new, dynamic flyout on the website that would be a global feature to encourage more email signups. We'd had one on the site already, but it was much more subtle and passive than one we'd previously had on the old website before it was redesigned. We set out to reimagine this flyout and reinvent it so that it was still cohesive with the look and feel of the website as a whole, but so that it was more prominent and noticeable.

Further, we wanted to be able to customize that email signup CTA based on the content they were currently viewing to provide some more context to what we're asking them to do.

We ended up with a visually interesting feature with messaging that varied between a general sign-up ask and different CTAs that are wine, barbecue, and outdoors-forward depending on the page they're viewing.

This was implemented in early February, and in one month alone we saw a 195% increase year-over-year in email signups directly attributed to the new flyout. That success continued through the end of the fiscal year with noticeable year-over-year growth in email signups from that feature, as compared to the year prior where we had the more subtle flyout.





Creative

Less is More

Shortly after the start of the fiscal year, the creative team got to work on an evolution of the highly successful Spice campaign – our primary campaign running for our paid social campaigns. This campaign had been out there since February of 2021 and, with a couple of refreshes, garnered results unlike any we've ever seen on the platform relative to ad and website engagement. As we saw that start to plateau, we knew it was time to give the campaign a bit of a "glow up," introducing something new for Santa Maria Valley while leveraging components from the Spice campaign that we knew would continue to resonate with our audience. From this, the Less is More campaign was born.

The concept behind the Less is More campaign is this: We know that Santa Maria Valley is still less crowded, less expensive and less stuffy than some of our neighboring destinations. So, we wanted to talk about what visitors get when they focus on 'less.' Less worry means more seizing the moment; less distraction means embracing more experiences; spending less money means fitting more into your vacation. This concept focuses on all of the meaningful moments you can have when you add up Santa Maria Valley's space, affordability, location and attractions.





Campaign Video – :15 – Facebook and Instagram Instagram Reel – Wine Instagram Reel – Barbecue

Digital Visitor Guide

Early in the second half of the year, we shifted our focus toward the design and development of a digital Visitor Guide. We wanted to be able to point potential visitors and trip planners (via social, email, etc.) to a visually aesthetic version of the printed visitor guide that they can use to gain inspiration for upcoming trips. Because the vast majority of our website traffic comes in via mobile device, the existing printed Visitor Guide PDF download isn't a great user experience on your phone. The idea behind the digital version was for it to be a dynamic landing page with visually interesting content types and a clear path for consuming the information.

Our primary KPIs to measure the success of the digital visitor guide are on-site engagement metrics, first and foremost, but we'll also be paying attention to event conversions coming directly from that page:

- Time on page
- Pages/session

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- Hotel referrals
- Email signups

The <u>digital visitor guide</u> launched on June 8, 2023. By the end of the month, engagements and conversions were as follows:

- 246 pageviews from 203 users
- Average time on page of 38 seconds
- 1.21 average pages per session
- 3 downloads of the printed Visitor Guide
- 14 newsletter button clicks
- 3 clicks to the lodging page



Discover a slice of California's Central Coast

Not just the place, but the people, culture, and traditions that thrive here.

Barbecue Month 2023



Santa Maria Style is the superior style of barbecue and it's backed by a 150-year-old tradition, rooted in California history. Yet, for some reason, when people think of famous barbecue, they think of every region in the U.S. except for the Central Coast.

Central California has been referred to as "one of the best-kept barbecue secrets in America." That's great and all, but we don't want to keep it a secret anymore.

This Barbecue Month, we put Santa Maria Style on the map. We know that once someone tries Santa Maria Style barbecue, they don't need much convincing. But to get them to recognize it and to try it and to start talking about it, we needed to get their attention–in a big, entertaining and scroll-stopping way.

The Barbecue Month mini-campaign was led by organic social–it's the most conversational and offers the perfect platform for sharing our story and having that story shared. By leveraging primarily vertical video, complemented by popular social media trends, we went all in on barbecue in a space that met the audience where they were with the type of content that would get their attention.

The campaign was driven by a strong creative concept and supported by public relations and paid social media tactics to broaden our reach and to ensure a consistent and well-saturated message throughout the month.

The best part? The concept was designed to live on beyond just this month and this year. It would become a longer-term identity for Barbecue Month in Santa Maria Valley – one for which we can build recognition and continue to iterate on each year.







Barbecue Month results:

- We sent 25 Barbecue Month press kits out to key national and LA-area food and travel media. Follow ups will continue, but it's already led to a connect with the digital editorial director of Travel + Leisure magazine.
- Our boosted posts resulted in 240,858 impressions, 3.6k clicks to the website (a 1.52% CTR) and nearly 49k engagements
- Our posts led to nearly 3k website sessions, two newsletter subscribers and three hotel referrals
- A dedicated email sent at the top of the month saw an open rate of 58% and a CTR of nearly 3% the highest engagement metrics we've ever seen from a single email
- The <u>Sizzle Central landing page</u> attracted 2,518 unique pageviews with an average time of page of more than five minutes, 57 newsletter signup clicks, 94 cookbook downloads and 147 link clicks.

Public Relations

Our PR approach continues to be to primarily target the leisure travel audience, continuously reinforcing our unique experiences, Santa Maria Style barbecue, wine country and authentic hospitality at a value.

With Cision, we are able to add publicity value for stories trackable by the monitoring service. Throughout this fiscal year, we achieved \$1.62 million in publicity value through 35 stories placed and 9 FAMs.



Articles

- July 19, Yahoo Entertainment, <u>Wine Tasting 'Santa Maria Style' with the Santa</u> <u>Maria Trolley</u>
- July 22, Drift Travel, <u>Wine Tasting 'Santa Maria Style' with the Santa Maria</u> <u>Trolley</u>
- July 28, Visit California, <u>California's Best Breweries to Celebrate International</u> <u>Beer Day</u>
- August 3, MSN Travel, <u>California Central Coast Road Trip Itinerary: castles, wine</u>
 <u>and more</u>
- August 10, Visit California, September 2022 Events in California
- August 16, New York Times, <u>12 Reasons to Love California Chardonnay</u>
- September 13, Thrillist, <u>Bust Out the Binoculars for This Wildlife-Fueled</u> <u>California Adventure</u>
- October 16, San Francisco Chronicle, <u>Highway 1 Road Trip: Six itineraries along</u> <u>California's iconic coast</u>
- October 19, Santa Maria Times, <u>Enjoy a trip on the Santa Maria Wine Trolley</u> <u>through Thanksgiving</u>
- October 19, Visit California, <u>California's Most Haunted Hotels</u>
- November 10, Santa Maria Sun Online, <u>Santa Maria Wine Trolley offers</u> <u>extended wine tasting transportation through Thanksgiving weekend</u>
- November 13, RoadRUNNER Magazine, Santa Maria Weekend Romp
- November 28, Daily Traveling News, <u>The first people of California's Central &</u> <u>Southern Coasts</u>
- December 2, Visit California, <u>Kidifornia Foodie Finds</u>
- December 7, Forbes Online, <u>This Small Town Along The Central California Coast</u> <u>Is A Hidden Gem For Wine Lovers</u>
- December 21, SFGate, The best places to eat between SF and LA
- January 6, Fodor's Travel, <u>12 Spots in North America to Experience Pantone's</u> <u>2023 Color of the Year</u>
- January 12, Santa Maria Times, <u>'Dine Out Santa Maria Style' culinary celebration</u> <u>kicks off January 13</u>
- January 12, Thrillist, <u>5 Reasons to Drive to The Santa Maria Valley, California</u>
- January 26, Visit California, <u>Discover the Best and Most Unique Times to Visit</u> <u>California</u>
- February 28, Pride Journeys, Embracing Wellness in Santa Maria Valley
- March 8, TravelMole, An off the beaten track California road trip
- April 17, Thrillist, <u>The Best LA Road Trips to Take This Spring</u>
- April 21, Diablo Magazine, The Western Way at Alisal Ranch
- April 21, Reisen Reisen Der Podcast, <u>Kalifornien Roadtrip mit dem E-Auto</u>
- April 26, Afar, California's Best Wine Regions: Where to Stay and What to Drink
- May 1, Associated Press, Santa Maria Valley Becomes Sizzle Central This May
- May 1, Yahoo!, Santa Maria Valley Becomes Sizzle Central This May

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- May 10, KTLA-TV, <u>Best California Road Trip Stops</u>
- May 10, Travel + Leisure Online, <u>The Best Towns to Visit on a Road Trip Down</u> <u>California's Central Coast for Incredible Food, Wineries, and Hotels</u>
- May 12, KEYT-TV Online, <u>All aboard! Santa Maria wine trolley ready to start</u> rolling this weekend
- May 14, KEYT-TV Online, <u>The Santa Maria wine trolley hits the road this</u> <u>Mother's Day</u>
- May 14, KEYT-TV Online, <u>The 5th Annual Santa Maria BBQ Festival brings BBQ</u> lovers from San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara County
- May 15, We Travel There, <u>Luffa Farm, BBQ Festival & Wine Trolley in Santa</u> <u>Maria Valley, California</u>
- May 15, 10Best USA Today, <u>Is Santa Maria the new Napa? Why wine lovers</u> should visit this California valley now
- May 18, Visit California News & Events, <u>13 California Wineries Offering Next-Level Epicurean Experiences</u>
- May 31, The Arizona Republic, Santa Maria Valley is underrated food, wine destination
- June 1, Adventures & Sunsets, <u>31 Unique Things to Do in Santa Barbara You</u> <u>Haven't Thought Of</u>
- June 19, Trips to Discover, <u>15 Best California Wine Trails to Sip and Explore</u>
- June 19, RoadRUNNER, Santa Maria Valley, California Shamrock Tour
- June 25, SoCal Restaurant Show, June 24: <u>Executive Chef Alfonso Curti of</u> <u>Trattoria Uliveto, Orcutt, CA</u>
- June 28, HuffPost, <u>What You Should Know About Regional Styles of Barbecue in</u> the U.S.
- June 30, Sunset Magazine Online, <u>These Fourth of July Party Recipes Will Make</u> <u>Menu Planning So Much Easier</u>
- June 30, SoCal Restaurant Show, July 1: <u>Cork & Fork, Dewlson Family Farm,</u> <u>Naughty Oak Brewing Company</u>

FA`Ms

• Molly O'Brien

Molly O'Brien is a Los Angeles-based journalist who writes for a variety of travel and lifestyle publications, including Fodor's Travel, Travel + Leisure, Matador Network and Business Insider, among others.

• Laura Beausire

Laura Beausire is a Colorado-based freelance writer. You can find her work in Condé Nast Traveler, Food & Wine, Travel + Leisure, Business Insider, Wine Enthusiast, Marriott Bonvoy Traveler, The Telegraph, Hemispheres, Sierra, Robb Report, Family Traveller, The Denver Post, TravelAge West, and other publications.



• Rina Nehdar

Rina Nehdar is founder and editor of L.A. Family Travel. Her work can be seen in L.A. Family Travel, Travel + Leisure, Parents, Global Traveler Magazine LA Parent and more.

• Hannah Stephenson

Hannah came to Santa Maria Valley through a partnership with Visit California. She is a journalist with the UK's Press Association.

• Jeff Buchanan

Jeff Buchanan is a California-based motorcycle journalist and co-founder of Robb Report Motorcycles, primarily writing for RoadRUNNER, an independently owned and published motorcycle touring and travel magazine.

• Jochen Schliemann

Jochen Schliemann is co-host of Reisen Reisen - Der Podcast, the largest travel podcast in the German-speaking world. He has written for multiple German publications, and more recently, Reader's Digest.

• Judy Karnia

Judy Karnia is an Arizona-based journalist and expert contributor to TravelAwaits, a publication focusing on travelers above the age of 50. Her work can be found in TravelAwaits, Flipboard and Wander with Wonder.

Cori Solomon

Cori Solomon is an award-winning journalist and photographer based in Los Angeles. Her work can be found at her blog, The Written Palette, along with Wander with Wonder, FWT Magazine and TravelWorld International Magazine.

• Andrew Harris

Andrew Harris is a Southern California-based veteran specialty radio show producer and an accredited food, wine and travel journalist. He is the showrunner for The SoCal Restaurant Show, a food and travel-focused radio show serving Southern California since 2012.

Email Marketing

Our bi-monthly tourism emails feature news, events, recipes and all things Santa Maria Valley and are designed to keep our subscribers engaged and consuming information on the website in order to inspire a future visit.

This year, our subscriber growth has been strong and steady, especially after implementing the redesigned email flyout in February. Further, we continue to manage our active subscriber list and segment out folks who are not opening/engaging with our



emails, so that our true 'active' subscriber count remains true to those who maintain an interest in content from Santa Maria Valley.

We also maintain our email drip campaigns, ensuring that subscribers who have expressed a specific interest in certain content types (wine, barbecue, or outdoors) are also receiving more of that content, in addition to the bi-monthly email.

In the early part of the year, we redesigned all of our drip campaign emails so that the overall look and feel would more closely match the website and the email redesign that was completed in the later part of the last fiscal year.



- Our email open rate has nearly doubled year-over-year, steadily climbing ever since July 2022 and is consistently above 50%, which is huge compared to industry benchmarks. Our average open rate for the year was 54%
- Our average click-through-rate also exceeds industry benchmarks, coming in at a flat 2% for the year.
- We gained more than 2,000 new email subscribers this year, an average of 166 per month.

City Council Update



Influencer Marketing

This year, we welcomed five social media influencers to Santa Maria Valley through our partnership with Glocally. Social media sharing from a first-person perspective is a primary component of our influencer campaign. Influencers create and share content on their personal social media profiles which then gets amplified through the organization's owned channels. Instagram is our priority platform for this program, so we seek out micro-influencers whose audiences take interest in travel, wine, food and outdoors.

We aim to vary the itineraries (and therefore, the content) for each influencer so that, by sharing that content on our own channels, we're able to showcase multiple offerings and perspectives of the region by way of an actual visitor's point of view.

This year's influencers:

- @california diary
- <u>@hayleyscellar</u>
- <u>@dtlawanderer</u>
- <u>@happymessmom</u>
- <u>@jujuroca</u>

Overall, this year's influencer campaign resulted in:

- 436,000 impressions
- 147 posts
- 1.05% engagement rate

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead to FY23-24, we've got some exciting plans to look forward to! This year will be all about taking our learnings and the strategies we know have worked and making our marketing efforts work harder. As we do every year, we'll keep an eye on our goal tracking, adjusting and optimizing as we go.

Our FY23-24 priorities are:

- Grow our active, engaged email database
- Increase our paid media spend
- Expand SEO efforts to a new category
- Secure more PR story/article placements in top-tier, target media

The marketing plan for the year addresses each of the above, with the following strategic direction being our north star:

- We'll keep content at the forefront of our marketing efforts
- We are shifting away from an annual creative campaign focusing on mini campaigns and frequent promotion of data-driven content

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- Increasing our raw media spend to better promote all of our content
- Staying consistent with our top performing channels SEO, PR, paid search
 - This includes diving head-first into a new SEO content strategy: California Trip Planning
- We'll continue to collect content with a focus on video- specifically, vertical video

We look forward to another year of success and excitement for Santa Maria Valley!