



TravelGreen.org Case Study NTA's Inaugural Green Convention

**The National Tour Association
546 E. Main Street
Lexington, Kentucky 40508
800.682.8886**

**Contact Person:
Lisa Thompson, VP, Marketing
lisa.thompson@NTAstaff.com**

Overview

One of the largest events the National Tour Association executes each year is its Annual Convention. And, while the organization has made strides in many areas toward sustainability, the decision to commit to operating a greener Convention was made in 2008.

The driving force was not only the desire by NTA to leave a lighter footprint with this event, but was also driven by its members desire to preserve our earth. In fact, the idea to make this commitment was first established by a member committee in January of 2008, and was readily embraced by the full membership as the year progressed. The inaugural green Convention took place November 15–19, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. While there are areas that have already been identified that can be improved upon this initial effort, NTA's first green Convention was a record-breaking success.

Program Establishment

As mentioned, the idea of executing a green Convention was first presented by a member task force charged with assisting in the planning of the event in January 2008. The idea was readily accepted by the Board of Directors as it had included a core belief in sustainable tourism in the association's Strategic Plan when it was reviewed and updated in late 2007.

The association began immediately working with the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, its host in Pittsburgh for the November event, on steps that could be taken. The David L. Lawrence Convention Center is the world's first and largest LEED certified convention center, so they were an able partner in this task.

The next step was to get the full membership's input for the project. We knew this would be an easy task, as the members had been providing feedback indicating their desire for a greener event. For a two-month period, the association called for ideas that could be implemented to green the Convention. More than 100 ideas were submitted by the membership.

The task force took these ideas and worked during their July meeting to implement as many as possible in this first year. Happily, more than half of the ideas offered were immediately implemented. Some of them included refillable water bottles, staggered transportation schedules to reduce the time motorcoaches were on the road, ticketless entry to events, all-over recycling efforts and more.

Additionally, NTA work with its catering and exposition services to add to the recycling efforts. The use of composting and locally grown food by the caterer and recycling of cardboard and other packing materials by the exposition group helped add to our record-breaking effort.

With the marketing of the event, NTA utilized two early promotions as well as the event Web site to help stimulate interest and excitement for this inaugural green event:

NTA's Inaugural Green Convention

- First, an initial postcard mailing to promote the event was sent on paper that had been seeded with wildflowers. Members could plant the postcard and watch it grow after receiving it in the mail.
- Additionally, NTA announced that it would donate \$1 to the Arbor Day Foundation's reforestation project for every member who registered on opening day. With this effort, NTA members helped plant more than 620 new trees and increased the awareness of the association's commitment to greening this and future events.
- Finally, to help spread the word about the importance of this initiative NTA dedicated a section of the event Web site that detailed all of the green measures that were being taken. Not only did it inform members of some changes to the usual format as a result of greening the Convention, it also provided a means for members to provide added feedback about the event and ideas that could be used for this or future events.

Outcomes

When the numbers arrived from NTA's first green Convention, they produced record-breaking results. NTA set a record for the amount of materials that were recycled from a single show in the history of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center.

In total, the NTA members who attended this inaugural green Convention in Pittsburgh helped to recycle 9.435 tons of material. To give you an idea of how much that is, for the month of November NTA's recycling represented 49 percent of all the recycling for the convention center. To quote the convention center managers, "That is pretty amazing!"

Here's how that total recycling figure breaks down:

- Cardboard = 3 tons
- Bottles, cans, loose paper = 2.97 tons
- Composted Materials = 3.465 tons

As anyone who has worked to put on a green event knows, there are still items that must be printed and produced to ensure the attendees are able to conduct business as usual. And, given that this was NTA's first green Convention and there were no prior benchmarks in which to compare, we were unsure of exactly what these numbers represented.

By asking our partners in Pittsburgh, who are experts on this subject due to the focus their convention center puts on its green efforts, NTA learned the following:

- The effort that had been put forward in promoting this green convention made our attendees extremely conscious about capturing all recyclable items in the bins around the center. Therefore, anything that could be recycled was put in its proper place and kept out of landfill, which is a goal of any recycling effort.
- Additionally, our event hosts more and larger food events than other shows the convention center has hosted. Therefore, the efforts made toward the composting of food helped add to this impressive total.

Relevance

One of the reasons the travel professionals were so excited about this NTA event is that they are so very committed to showing their customers the great destinations this world offers. And, because that is so integral to who they are and what they do, the idea of helping to preserve that earth is one of great importance. It's more than business to them. It is doing their part to ensure that travelers of today and future generations can enjoy all of the things that they have.

The association as a whole has been committed for some time to greening its printing efforts. For several years, all printed materials from NTA headquarters is on FSC paper and uses soy-based ink. The greening of the Convention gave the association an opportunity to put the importance it places on this subject front and center and begin larger, year-round effort toward sustainability.

And, while these goals may begin with an effort to green an event, it leads to areas beyond the convention for everyone. Attendees can learn ways to green their own business or offer initiatives to their customers to get them involved in preserving the planet for future travelers. The association can take this effort and translate it to other events and more daily in-house practices that it can share with the membership to grow awareness and efforts.

What NTA and its members recognize is that it has to begin somewhere. In 2008, it began with a record-breaking effort at the first green NTA Annual Convention that can be built on in the future.