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6-30-2010

Is Bling Dead — or at Least Wounded?

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Foot, web traffic up on Tybee

Peak summer season is here for busy Tybee Island.

Our season started early this year with the April 2010 hotel/motel tax report showing a 7.4 percent



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increase compared to 2009.

Traffic at the Tybee Island Visitor's Information Center is also up, with April's visitor

count up 20.9 percent and May's count up 21.6 percent compared to 2009.

Upcoming events

Right now, we are getting ready for a big Fourth of July weekend. The weekend is packed with activities, and we are expecting more than the average number of visitors.

The annual fireworks display will be July 3.

New this year will be Tybee Throws a Fit, sponsored by Oceanfront Cottage Rentals on July 2. This fitness event marks the one-year anniversary of Tybee Island being named the No. 1 Healthiest Beach by Health Magazine.

Local fitness enthusiasts and personalities like Style Network's Ruby Get-

tinger and celebrity trainer Michael Banks will assist with the day's activities.

Events will include sea kayaking lessons, yoga on the beach, kiteboarding lessons, a doggie promenade and more. For more information, go to TybeeVisit.com or TybeeThrowsAFit.com.

For those interested in volunteer opportunities, the Tybee Beautification Association will host a Beach Sweep on July 4.

The marketing perspective

The Tybee Island Tourism Council has been busy putting together our 2010-2011 Tybee Island Vacation Planner and updating our website, TybeeVisit.com.

For the vacation planner, we've collaborated with Write to Work Inc.'s Arlene Distel, who has a strong background in copy writing and project management. Distel has helped bring our vision to reality. The new look is clean, fresh, laid-back and will serve as a base for the rest of our marketing materials.

Our goal with the TybeeVisit.com's updates was to create a more user-friendly informative site for visitors and potential visitors to find what they need

for their Tybee getaway. Additions to the site include updated pictures, new content, a special offers page and a Tybee blog.

We're already reaping the benefits of these improvements. Visits to TybeeVisit.com are up 12.57 percent year over year. The most recent monthly figures, from May 22 through June 22, are up 36.05 percent over that same time period last year.

Recent accolades

We've been named to TripAdvisor's Top 10 Vacation Rental Hotspots for 2010 and Connect Savannah's Best Local Facebook Page.

If you haven't been to Tybee yet this summer, pack up your family or friends and come visit. Spend the day hanging out on the beach then sample one of Tybee's fun surfside restaurants.

For more information on all things Tybee, go to TybeeVisit.com. We're also on Facebook. Search for Tybee Island, Georgia.

Lindsay Fruchtl is the marketing coordinator for the Tybee Island Tourism Council. You can contact her at 912-786-5444 or lindsay@tybeevisit.com.

Is bling dead — or at least wounded?

Much has been written about the cautious nature of consumer spending over the past several years.

In June 2010, students in the marketing research course at Georgia Southern



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University conducted an e-mail survey of 220 adults to measure their attitudes on a variety of economic topics. The survey results suggest consumers do

not believe the economy will improve over the next six months.

Furthermore, consumers are somewhat price conscious and prone to using coupons and are neutral regarding the importance of brand names. The outcome that appears most important to consumers is that they get value for their money.

The survey also examined consumer motivation to purchase status products and identified several areas of concern for businesses that sell luxury products.

Only about 5 percent of the sample indicated they were interested in and would buy status products. Fifty-seven percent agreed they were less likely to buy status products during an economic downturn, and 50 percent felt it is frivolous to do so.

The news is even worse with respect to price issues, with more than 80 percent of the sample agreeing that an inexpensive product can have status and they would buy status brands at a discount store.

Thus, the majority of respondents did not feel comfortable buying status or luxury products and would consider inexpensive products and discount store merchandise to meet their need for status consumption. In fact, there was a positive relationship between consumers' need for status and their willingness to buy status products at discount stores.

It should be noted that while status consumers are somewhat price conscious and value conscious, they are significantly less so than consumers who are not motivated to consume for

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status.

In addition, consumers with a higher need for status are more brand conscious and more likely to associate a higher price with better quality.

This suggests there are differences in the levels of price, value and brand consciousness among consumers who are motivated to consume status or luxury products. However, there may not be many of these consumers based on our convenience sample of adults living in the Southeast, and they are willing to shop discounters and buy inexpensive products to meet their status needs.

Our research suggests that while bling may not be dead, it is certainly on life support. Exactly what represents bling to consumers may be different than in the past, and the same is true of the status shopping experience.

Those marketing status products may need to focus on keeping their current customers loyal while also expanding their market because status consumers represent a small percentage of the overall market.

This may require communicating the value that their products offer rather than just the status they provide. Marketers must explain both the rationale for buying their products and the benefits they offer.

Finally, firms may need to reconsider their retail outlets and price points to attract consumers while recognizing the long-term brand impact that non-premium pricing and discount retail outlets have beyond the current economy.

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