
UNLEASING THE NITINAT III

Marketing & Development Plan

For

Ditidaht Tourism

Prepared by:
Bob Isbister & Associates Ltd.
Duncan, B.C.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 IMPETUS FOR THIS PLAN

The Ditidaht First Nation has acquired 260 acres of deeded property near the Nitinat River for the purpose of creating economic development opportunities, with particular emphasis on tourism. The Ditidaht commissioned the preparation of a development and business plan for these properties in May of 2008. Emerging from the development plan is a proposal to establish a luxury tourist resort as well as a campground and marina.

The proposed Nitinat Resort Lodge will require a number employees and contract service providers including but not limited to: guides for land based interpretative trips; guides and vessels for fishing trips, whale watching trips and day trips to Tsusiat Falls; masseuses for spa treatments; carvers and artists; storytellers and dancers.

Large projects like the Nitinat Resort Lodge take time to develop due to time required for the re-zoning application, sourcing a strategic partner and securing the required financing. There are many steps that the community can take in the short term to get the existing tourism businesses running at capacity, to increase overall hospitality skills and experience, and to develop new businesses.

This report identifies some opportunities, provides an overview of the competition, identifies the key factors in building a successful tourism industry, provides a plan to market these assets and skills. and suggests a method for coordinating the marketing effort.

1.2 RESORT LODGE CONCEPT

A luxury resort is proposed for Site 6, a 51 acre parcel north of the village. The vision is that luxury accommodations will be available, staffed by First Nations people and reflecting *long house* architecture. Talented staff will manage the resort and restaurant. But key to the success will be the availability of cultural, environmental and recreational activities in the region.

1.3 NITINAT TOURISM BUSINESSES

1.3.1 Existing

There are several Ditidaht businesses, including member as well as Band owned, that are operating or ready to operate from the community including;

1. The Ditidaht Visitor Centre
2. The Nitinat Lake Motel
3. Edgar Charters & Deep Sea fishing

1.3.2 Potential Businesses

There are several businesses that could be kick started in the short term with a coordinated marketing effort.

1. **Thompson whale watching and day trip adventure to Tsusiat Falls:** *The vessel and skilled operator is in place*
2. **Traditional canoe rides:** *This opportunity will grow as the number of visitors to the area increases. A traditional ocean going canoe is ideal; however, an alternative is to purchase one of the fibreglass replicas that are available and that sell for about \$15,000. See www.tseycumtours.com/ for sample pictures.*
3. **Arts & crafts:** *Aboriginal arts and crafts is a growth industry, it also a difficult industry to penetrate to the level where individuals can make a living. There are numerous very talented artists and carvers at Ditidaht. They all lack the same thing – market access.*
4. **Gus Bay Marina:** *This opportunity has very good potential but needs to be synchronized with the closure of Doobah and the opening of an alternative campsite, e.g. the Nitinat River campsite.*
5. **Nitinat River RV campsite:** *It has been recommended that a 25-site campground at the location denoted the #1 near the hatchery be established. The initial target was intended to be the numerous fishers who fish the river during the September to November spawning season. The closure of Doobah would likely require this campsite to be expanded to accommodate 50 sites.*
6. **Mountain bike guides:** *The windsurfer's campsite has a large and dedicated following of young adventure seekers. A business that included a four wheel drive vehicle and the establishment of a few biking trails would likely appeal to this same client group and would offer them a new recreation opportunity to mix in with their windsurfing.*

2 COMPETITION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The primary competition to the existing Ditidaht tourism businesses comes from the nearest neighbouring coastal communities, Port Renfrew and Ucluelet with Bamfield coming in a distant third. Very strong, albeit indirect competition, exists in several other Vancouver Island communities including Victoria, Sooke, Sidney and Tofino.

A number of competitors in these areas were examined to demonstrate that tourism business can be successful, to demonstrate the quality of the web based advertising, and to illustrate the equipment and services provided and prices

charged. Those interested in tourism are encouraged to view these examples in the next section as well as other sites easily found on the web.

2.2 COMPETITOR EXAMPLES

2.2.1 Whale watching

1. **Jamie's Whaling Station, Tofino and Ucluelet** - www.jamies.com/
Jamie's has operated out of Tofino for 26 years and offers "guaranteed whale sightings." The website offers a variety of activities such as whale watching, bear watching, tours and hiking. They have the *Shopping Cart* approach which allows the customer to select from a variety of activities and build their own package. Tours are offered aboard a 65 foot boat or Zodiacs. Sample trips:
 - **Whale watching** – 2 to 3 hours, \$79 pp
 - **Bear watching** – 2 to 3 hours, \$79 pp
 - **Meares Island hiking** – 2.5 hours, \$30 pp, Lone Cone Mountain – 5 to 7 hours, \$60 pp
2. **Subtidal Adventures, Ucluelet** - <http://www.subtidaladventures.com/>
This business operates a 40 foot boat and Zodiacs for tours. Their feature trip is a combined whale & bear watching as well a trip through the Broken Island Group. An interesting offering is a one day getaway to a remote island. A couple or small party could have exclusive access to the island to explore. A picnic and safety gear is provided. Sample trips:
 - **Whales & Bears tours** – 3 hours, \$89
 - **Cast-Away Island Day trip** – 9 hours, \$229 pp

2.2.2 Sports Fishing

1. **Jolly Rogers Adventures, Port Renfrew**
www.vancouverislandfishing.ca/
Halibut and salmon fishing charters, 8 hours, \$950 pp
2. **Swiftsure Fishing Charters, Port Renfrew**
www.swiftsurefishingcharters.com/
Halibut and salmon fishing charters, 8 hours, \$900 pp

2.2.3 Traditional Canoe Tours

1. **Tseycum Canoe Tours** - www.tseycumtours.com/
Tseycum Tours offers guided trips aboard a 30ft replica dug-out canoe. *They promote education and traditional spirituality and "it is our desire to pass these on to our guests as they embark on a memorable journey back in time. Learn about potlatches, shell middens and ancient tribal sites. Discover the beauty of the area which can only be seen from the ocean waters. Through the eyes of our First Nation staff, you will see natural wildlife, local flower and fauna and hear legends and song that will have you leaving with a feeling of peace and belonging to the area".* Following are two sample trips:

- **Traditional Canoe and Medicinal Plant Walk** - 3 to 3.5 hours, \$59.00 pp
- **Traditional Canoe Tour** - 1 to 1.5 hours, \$34.00 pp

2. Tla-ook Cultural Adventures - www.tlaook.com/tlaook-homeset.html

This business has operated out of Tofino for over six years. Their trips are in traditional ocean going canoes. Sample Trips

- **Sunset Paddle/Harbour Explorer** – 2.5 hours, \$44 pp
- **"Cluptl-Chas"- Full Day Adventure with Traditional Wild Salmon Barbeque** – 6 hours, \$140 pp

3. West Coast Adventures - www.westcoast-adventures.com/

A variety of cultural and adventure activities are offered by this firm. Guests are met at the Tofino airport and all of their needs are taken care of from that point on. Guides will demonstrate a traditional fishery and food preparation. Training in First Nation crafts is available as is whale watching and bear watching. Accommodation is provided in rustic cabins and food and gathering is in a longhouse.

2.2.4 Competition Summary

There are numerous competitors in the outdoor tourism market on Vancouver Island. With the exception of those located at Bamfield, all of these businesses are easily accessible by a paved highway. In addition, most of these businesses have been in operation for a long time and as such, it will be challenging to take any business from them. However, with a properly executed marketing plan, it is possible to create a sizeable market niche for Nitinat tourism, including enticing clients from these other areas and businesses to “experience the Nitinat”.

3 MARKETING PLAN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first important step in developing a viable marketing plan is to look inward and assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the Nitinat tourism sector.

Strengths

- The community has a number of experienced people who have managed their own businesses for an extended period and who have equipment and vessels.
- The region has unmatched natural resources which will attract tourists.
- The area is somewhat isolated limiting access by outside competitors.

Weaknesses

- Many of the potential employees for jobs in the tourism sector have limited experience and training.
- Raising capital for a small business can be difficult as it always requires a cash equity contribution.
- The road to Nitinat is rough at the best of times and very rough if the logging company has not been maintaining the surface. At times in the winter the road may be impassable during flooding. This is a real concern but our analysis shows that businesses run successfully in very remote areas. People will travel a long way for an outstanding wilderness experience.
- There are currently no facilities to accommodate air charters.

Opportunities

- It is possible to combine or coordinate businesses to share the cost of marketing or providing services.
- There is an existing market of people familiar with the area.
- There is a large market of wealthy, aging tourists interested in high quality wilderness and cultural experiences.
- There is funding available for business start-ups.

Threats

- There is little accommodation available to support an outfitting business.
- There are competitors nearby with better road access.
- The condition of the road

3.2 KEYS TO SUCCESS

3.2.1 Overview

Research on this and similar projects suggest a number of critical factors that need to be addressed to ensure success:

- **Organization** – this plan is for a group of businesses. Some, such as the motel and gas bar, are owned and operated by the Nation. Others will be owned by single proprietors or private companies. It is suggested that the Ditidaht Visitors Centre be mandated to address common needs such as the *Brand* and website support, marketing and possibly to book trips. It can offer services such as telephone answering which may not be practical for individual businesses. The DVC can assist individual entrepreneurs through mentoring and advice. It can also assemble groups of services into packages.
- **Branding** – there needs to be a clear brand represented graphically and with an over-riding theme. It should be easily recognized and suggest the essence or core of the business.
- **Advertising & promotion** – customers need to be able to learn about the business. The internet is probably the most important tool along with Yellow Pages ads. Other techniques such as cross marketing will also be useful. In some cases targeted marketing will be practical.
- **Customer Service** – it is important that when a customer calls or e-mails that a prompt and helpful response is forthcoming. One standard is that the phone be answered by the third ring.
- **Quality** – word of mouth is the most powerful marketing tool. It can also discourage new customers or repeat visitors if a negative experience has occurred. Quality includes all aspects of the customer's experience from the food served to the sea worthiness and comfort of a fishing boat. It can be expected that an unsatisfactory experience will taint the attitude toward other businesses in the relationship. Refer also to the Ditidaht Human Resources Development Plan.

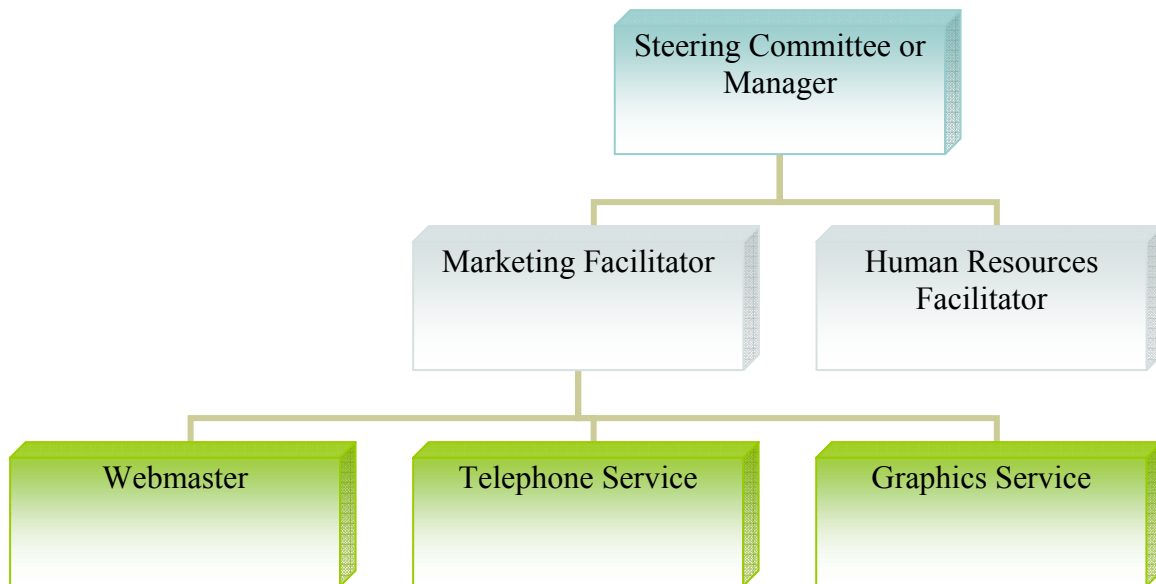
3.3 ORGANIZATION

The Ditidaht Human Resources Plan recommended identifying a Champion to research and organize the education and training activity. A similar approach is recommended here. It is recommended that the Ditidaht Visitor Centre be engaged to serve as a central marketing agency for all small tourism businesses. This may require hiring a new full time part time staff person as Marketing Facilitator. Until the businesses become established, this service could be subsidized by the Ditidaht First Nation for one year, then paid for by a billing fee for reservations and telephone answering similar to the arrangement with the

Motel. Small fees for website maintenance would also be passed on to the owner/operators.

Where the Human Resources Facilitator was identified as someone with their finger on the pulse of the community, the Marketing Facilitator needs to be an outgoing personality with experience in business. They will need exceptional interpersonal skills to manage the inevitable conflicts and aggravations when working with a highly disparate group. This person could be a current Nation employee or a Councillor.

Figure 1 Proposed Organization



3.4 BRANDING

A strong brand identity helps the customer understand and remember the service or products provided. If it is consistent through all signing, printing and websites and over time, the underlying message is reinforced. The brand should reflect the guiding principles and values established by the community and tie together all that the territory has to offer.

Development of an effective brand will benefit from the guidance of a skilled professional. It is recommended that an advertising and communication firm be engaged to provide a process to translate core qualities into the development of a brand.

A deliverable of that assignment will be consistent signing for the motel, gas bar and campground (the windsurfing campground might have its own image). Signing should include wayfinding signs on the road to Port Alberni and Lake Cowichan. It is also recommended that rack cards and brochures be developed for distribution at major tourist spots such as ferries and visitor centres.

3.5 ADVERTISING & PROMOTION

3.5.1 Internet

Website and Blog

The webpage is the critical to marketing today. A website needs to be developed and linked to DFN's site as well as other portals. A page can be prepared for each business. Contact can be via phone, fax or e-mail to the proprietor or to a receptionist provided by the Visitor Centre. The Marketing Facilitator should maintain a Blog with sections for individual activities such as fishing, windsurfing and bear watching. Video of the salmon run, salmon milking, storms, etc can be posted. Individual proprietors can be trained and encouraged to maintain their own Blog. Rich content on the site will greatly influence the effectiveness of the Blog.

Social Networking

Facebook and similar sites provide another means of a proprietor to communicate with existing and potential customers. People and organization that one deals with can be registered on a social networking site. When the link is made you have access to all of their contacts and thereby have the ability to make direct contact.

Webmaster

It is recommended that DFN's existing website continue to be upgraded on a regular basis including a link into the central Ditidaht tourism site as well to the individual businesses when possible. The webmaster may be able to provide training and facilitation for new technology as discussed in the Human Resource Plan.

Nitinat School

It is suggested that consideration be given to involving the school in blogging, networking and website design. The students can be a tremendous source of content and this could provide a way to involve them in the project.

3.5.2 Telephone

A prompt and helpful response to a phone call from a potential customer is crucial to success. It may not be practical for each business to maintain twenty-four hour availability. Relying on the answering machine is a dubious strategy although it may be the only practical solution in some cases. A telephone operator could be trained to book fishing charters for example, or at least describe possibilities and have the proprietor respond directly. In other cases, for pole carving for instance, the operator could have a list of available carvers and their specialties but detailed negotiations would have to be between the carver and the customer. The telephone service could probably be combined with the motel and gas bar operation with some changes to the space so that adequate reference material, accounting records and work area were available.

3.5.3 Marketing by Others

The Marketing Facilitator and consultant will identify and coordinate interviews on radio or TV, travel writing, opinion pieces and other sources for publicity.

3.5.4 Customer Service

New businesses should be market ready when they are initiated. Some upfront work will be required for training and skill development and this can be jointly developed between the Human Resources and the Marketing Facilitators. The community will need to work together on this as the impression of one business will reflect on others.

3.5.5 Quality

Delivering consistent products and services is not easy, particularly when staff turnover is high. Some in the community have been operating their business for years and have found success. While it is acknowledged that each business is independent, the greatest success will be had when standards are kept high. Training can be a big help here. It will also be important for those involved to maintain good relationships and develop techniques to resolve conflicts.

3.5.6 Accommodation

In the short term accommodation will be a problem. The existing motel has only nine rooms and is booked on many weekends. There is some capacity for additional mid-week or off-season stays but the small size of the motel restricts flexibility. The high-end tourist will be looking for more luxurious rooms with a broader range of food services. Consideration should be given to expanding the motel in conjunction with the offering of new businesses. In particular a fishing charter and accommodation package should be developed and could be marketed immediately.

3.5.7 Networking

The Marketing Facilitator in conjunction with the Branding specialist can develop a recommended list of organizations to which DFN should become involved. Publications which may be effective for advertising can also be identified however it is expected that printed advertising is premature at this point.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion the following is recommended:

- That the Ditidaht Visitors' Centre serves as the marketing facilitator for all local businesses.
- That an advertising firm be engaged to develop a Nitinat brand and marketing material.
- That a website be created to include rich content, pages for local businesses, links to related sites and to offer packages.
- That a blog be started and local groups such as the school be involved in creating content. The theme should be telling the stories of the Ditidaht People.
- That initial efforts focus on increasing motel and campground occupancy and tying these to existing operators in the community (fishing charters for example). When higher occupancy rates begin to occur, consider an expansion of the motel.
- That the Marketing Facilitator work with the Human Resource Champion to identify those interested in a career in the tourism sector and create a network which would begin to consider cooperative models for promotion, web services, telephone answering, booking and billing.

5 NEXT STEPS

- a. Approve this attached Marketing Plan – *Unleashing the Nitinat III* – in particular the recommendation that the Ditidaht Visitor Center (DVC) coordinate and deliver this marketing.
- b. Submit application to NEDC for funding assistance¹ to:
 - i. Facilitate a meeting(s) of existing and potential small business owners to develop a working plan for delivery of the marketing services by the DVC.
 - ii. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the DVC and these small business owners so that all parties clearly understand their roles, responsibilities and obligations. e.g. consistency, reliability and quality are crucial – it is important that the guests receive what you advertise. (See *Moments of Truth* in Resort Business Plan)
 - iii. Engage a marketing and communications firm to develop a brand for the Nitinat, to prepare a web page and rack cards.
 - iv. Deliver an “Introduction to Tourism” workshop at Ditidaht
 - v. Deliver a First Host Training program at Ditidaht
- c. One or two packages should be developed to try to increase motel occupancy and charter income this fall. Promotional material could be placed on DFN’s existing website. Packages could include
 - Accommodation and fishing
 - Accommodation and bear watching
- d. Consideration should be given to running a small fishing derby with prizes to include accommodation and a fishing trip as a way of beginning to promote the region and people.
- e. Successfully conclude negotiations to assume the lease for the Gus Bay Marina
- f. Initiate discussions with the Ministry of Forests for the planned and coordinated closure of the Doobah campsite

¹ Assistance from the BEP available at the 75% level, NEDC will provide additional 15%

6 BUDGET

An estimate of costs for the first year of cooperative marketing activities was developed. After the first year these costs will be significantly less and could be funded from booking revenues, based on a percent of sales generated – the same arrangement that the DVC has with the Nitinat Motel.

Table 1 Proposed Marketing Budget for Ditidaht Tourism

Brand Development	\$	15,000
Website	\$	5,000
Road signs	\$	2,000
New signs for motel & visitor centr	\$	12,000
Rack cards & distribution	\$	2,000
Part time marketing facilitator	\$	18,000
Total	\$	54,000