

CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Developing a destination branding strategy to expand the scope of marketing efforts, increase awareness and establish product differentiation

Company: **TURNING STONE RESORT & CASINO COMPLEX**

Situation: The Oneida Indian Nation's Turning Stone Resort was the first casino in the State of New York. After a dozen years, the complex encompassed 1,200 acres in central New York, with four hotels, a 120,000sf casino (larger than many in Las Vegas), two spas, 21 restaurants, a 5,000-seat event center and 800-seat showroom (hosting more than 150 performances each year by such celebrities as Mariah Carey, Fergie, Tony Bennett, Dolly Parton, Carrie Underwood, Tim McGraw, the Beach Boys and many others) and more. Due to its slow but steady growth, though, few people outside the immediate vicinity had heard of Turning Stone, and there was little awareness of all the resort had to offer. Additionally, Turning Stone's newest facilities – its award-winning all-suite boutique hotel, PGA Tour golf course (*the best 18s in the East*), a unique spa featuring ancient American Indian healing traditions – catered to a more upscale, higher spending audience than that which existed in Central New York.

Action: As Vice President of Sales, Marketing & Entertainment, my first step was to develop an infrastructure and online booking engine that was dynamic, modern and easy-to-use. With the internals in place, I launched a destination marketing campaign with a meaningful brand position, creative theme, target audience identification program, media plan and compelling advertising that generated memorable awareness and recognition of resort attributes. Working with AAA, I developed the concept of “*one of AAA's top 20 diamond award-winning resorts in North America*,” which set Turning Stone distinctly apart from its primary competitors. Television commercials asked the question: “If you were a diamond, where would you shine?” and answered with the obvious: Turning Stone Resort & Casino in central New York.

Results: According to Questex Media (publisher of *Travel Agent* magazine, *Luxury Travel Advisor* and others) the new campaign resulted in a 58% increase in overall brand name awareness among travel agents, an incredible 253% increase in agent perceptions of Turning Stone providing “an outstanding vacation experience,” and increases in recognition in all critical areas: Luxurious resort accommodations, outstanding golf, and unique spa experiences. Additionally, the campaign was honored with 24 awards for marketing and advertising excellence.

