

Case Histories

**An anthology of travel industry award-winning
marketing, advertising and public relations success stories
by Barry J Parrish**



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CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Strategic partnerships and cooperative marketing build brand and increase sales

Partners: **American Airlines**
Hotel Corp. of the Pacific (Aston Hotels & Resorts)
Tropical Rent-A-Car
Hawaiian Air
Condo Resorts International

Situation: When the availability of condominium resort accommodations in Hawaii exceeded that of hotel rooms for the first time, Hawaii's largest condominium management company (Aston Hotels & Resorts) found itself with more available condo accommodations than anyone – while the total Hawaii vacation market itself appeared to have plateaued. At the same time American Airlines was introducing Hawaii service from San Francisco and expanding service from its Dallas/Ft. Worth and Los Angeles gateways in order to gain a larger share of the profitable, long-haul vacation business which had been dominated by United.

Action: Acting on behalf of my clients, Condo Resorts International and its co-op partner, American Airlines, I developed "*Condo in Paradise*" – a cooperative program which combined the available resources of several companies, and which utilized a combination of unused room capacity, rental cars and airline seats to create a barter fund of more than \$3 million in today's dollars. Added to cash funding, the budget was used to produce television and radio commercials, a full-color brochure, consumer and trade advertisements, and a travel agent direct mail program – and to place targeted, comprehensive media schedules in travel trade magazines and consumer media focused in the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Dallas markets.

Results: In the first full month following introduction of the "*Condo in Paradise*" program, gross bookings increased 168 percent – nearly five times the increases the company had been generating prior to the launch of the program.

Expansion: American Airlines had selected several wholesale vacation companies to compete in its effort to launch a superior Hawaii condominium vacation program. "*Condo in Paradise*" continued to expand, with results by far outpacing all competitors, and was so successful it evolved into American's international AAloha Condo vacation program.



CASE HISTORY

- Synopsis:** Comprehensive research uncovers consumer attitudes, changes marketing and creative direction to reverse downward trends
- Company:** **RENO & LAKE TAHOE
(RENO-SPARKS CONVENTION & VISITORS AUTHORITY)**
- Situation:** For years, frequent visitors to Reno were found to say that Reno was "more friendly" than Las Vegas. The Reno community embraced this notion and created commercials that called Reno "twice as friendly" (which was considered a reference to the dual communities of Reno and Lake Tahoe). Advertisements and commercials told potential visitors that "crowds were smaller, lines were shorter." Despite spending millions in advertising over a period of years, the number of visitors had declined for three consecutive years, hotel occupancies declined, gaming revenues were declining or flat, motel occupancies were off substantially, and tax revenues were seriously lacking.
- Action:** As Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer, I commissioned a study which asked travelers what was important in making their *initial* decisions to visit a gaming destination. Reno indeed was seen as friendly; however, "friendly" had little or nothing to do with influencing an initial destination decision for a casino resort vacation! The concept of "small" was a definite turn-off – when selecting a casino resort destination, potential visitors *wanted* crowds, they *wanted* noise, they *wanted* excitement and they *wanted* the idea that where they're going is a popular, exciting place where there's always something happening. Since Reno's own commercials told potential visitors that "crowds were smaller, lines were shorter," it told those potential visitors *not* to visit Reno because it didn't have what they were looking for!
- Results:** Armed with this research, I engineered a dramatic repositioning of Reno advertising and development of "The Ultimate Playground" as a strategic positioning platform, with a creative theme that told potential customers to "Come to Play." What followed was the best six-month period in Reno/Tahoe history in increases versus prior years ...
- Visitors increased 8 percent during the second quarter
 - Hotel/motel occupancy increased by 6 percent to an average of 83.7 percent
 - Occupied rooms increased by 99,271 additional room nights, or 7 percent
 - Gaming and tax revenues both increased accordingly



Play Reno. Bright lights. Fun Spots.

Day or night, indoors or out, summer or winter — the action's in Reno and Lake Tahoe.

We start with unforgettable scenery, sunshine and weather that makes Reno/Tahoe the country's all-season playground.

Then we add indoor fun and games to test your skill and raise your excitement level. In our showrooms and cabarets, you'll sit back and watch the stars come out. In our restaurants, you'll dine and go to heaven.

We're event-full, too, with Hot August Nights, National Championship Air Races, the wildest, richest rodeo in the West, the Great Reno Balloon Race and festivals galore.

In Reno/Tahoe, you'll find more ways to have a good time than any other place under the sun. No wonder Rand McNally rated us #1 for fun in the USA!

Which is another way of saying Reno/Tahoe is the ultimate playground.

See your travel agent or call toll-free 800-FOR-RENO for reservations at more than 70 hotels/casinos and first-class motor inns.

And come to play!

RENO & LAKE TAHOE
Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority

And hot slots!

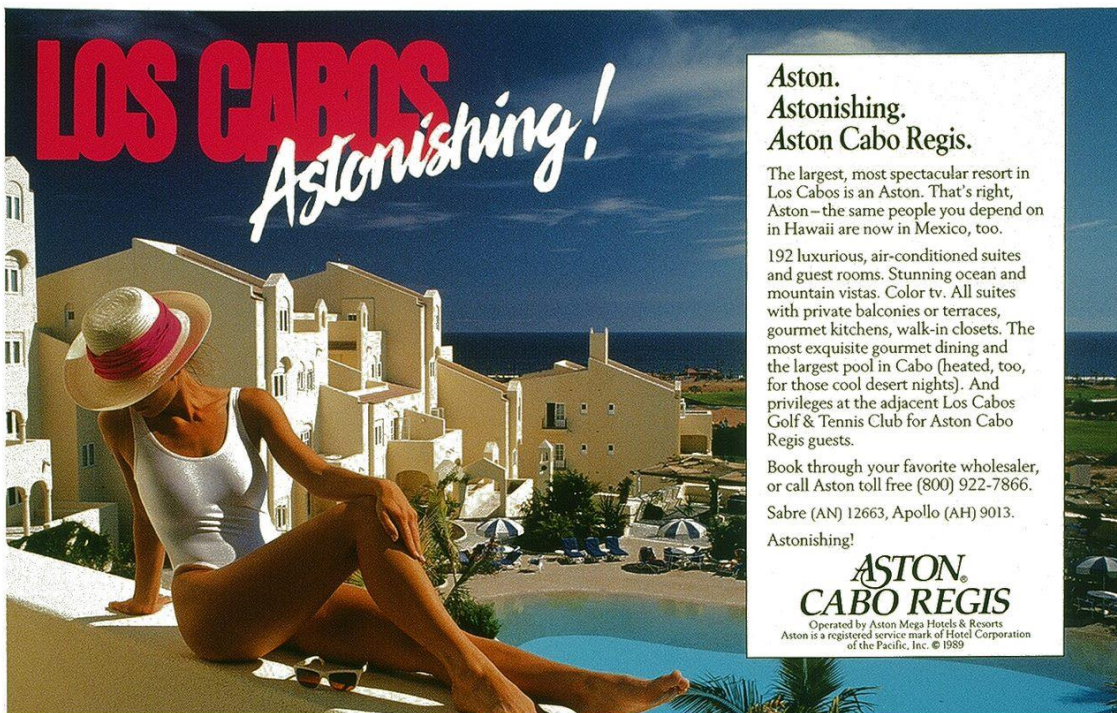
CASE HISTORY

- Synopsis:** Use of high-tech amenities and new strategies to breathe new life into brand that was seen as old and stogy
- Company:** **HOWARD JOHNSON HOTELS & RESORTS (CENDANT CORP)**
- Situation:** Howard Johnson was seen as a somewhat older and stodgier hotel brand than many of its newer competitors, and we needed to breathe new life into the brand. Hotel occupancies were flat at best, and loyalty among our key target audience (families traveling with children) was eroding.
- Action:** To provide an incentive to families traveling on vacations and generate excitement among both consumers and hotel managers, I created *Kids Go HoJo* and entered into a three-way strategic alliance which combined Howard Johnson with Sega of America – at that time the number two video game company in the USA – and American Express, which was seeking to expand Card usage into the leisure area. We the “adopted” Sega’s Sonic the Hedgehog – leading edge, high tech, computerized, modern -- and designated Howard Johnson as the official hotel for Sega video game fun. Most importantly, Sega provided Game Gear video games and a variety of game cartridges at no cost to every hotel in our system. We bombarded consumers with value-added incentives ...
- Kids always stayed free, helping their parents save money
 - Kids got free FunPacks with games, toys and puzzles featuring Sonic the Hedgehog
 - Kids got to play Sega Game Gear video games free
 - Kids who joined the *Kids Go HoJo* FunClub got a free subscription to Sega's *Visions* magazine
 - Adults received discounts on Sega video games with the American Express Card
 - Families using American Express Cards received free discount books worth hundreds of dollars
- Results:** *Kids Go HoJo* became the most successful, most imitated (within two years, at least nine other brands launched similar programs) and the most award-winning family marketing program in the mid-level hotel segment. It was named the best international traffic-building promotion of the year by the Council of Sales Promotion Agencies, and the best consumer promotion of the year by the International Specialty Advertising Association. Additionally, *Kids Go HoJo* advertising was honored with awards from the American Hotel & Lodging Association and the Hotel Sales & Marketing Association International. Even more importantly ...
- 1) Call volume to the reservations center increased 19 percent
 - 2) According to D.K. Shifflet & Associates (250,000 annual interviews), Howard Johnson was ranked number one among all mid-level hotels in both total leisure and total family room nights, plus number one in increases in value perceptions, service and satisfaction in the mid-level and increases in unaided brand awareness among all mid-priced hotels
 - 4) Increases in occupancy at Howard Johnson properties were 2½ times better than those attained by either Days Inn or Ramada, and twice as high as Super 8 (all Cendant brands)
 - 5) Howard Johnson recorded the highest increase in revenue-per-available room among all Cendant brands, and nearly twice as high as the average for all hotels in the industry as a whole



CASE HISTORY

- Synopsis:** Developing a new theme, logo, and personality for a major line extension and international expansion of a 40-year-old brand.
- Client:** **Aston Hotels & Resorts**
- Situation:** Long known as the Hotel Corporation of the Pacific, this Hawaii-based hospitality brand became Aston Hotels & Resorts in honor of its founder and president, Andre S. Tatibouet, as the company expanded its operations to include condominium and resort management in addition to hotels. The company then made a major strategic decision: To expand beyond the comfortable shores of Hawaii, where it had become the islands' largest condominium management company with more than 2,000 units on four islands. Aston selected advertising veteran Barry J. Parrish to lead his agency team in the company's foreign expansion. In addition, he was charged with developing a theme which would set Aston apart from its competition, be easily recognizable and memorable, and most of all which would be uniquely Aston's and not copyable by other resort companies.
- Solution:** Creating an additional blend of words, I created the "*Astonishing!*" theme for Aston resorts. Because the theme utilized the Aston brand name, it could not be usurped by competitive hotel companies, and thus fulfilled the objective of being uniquely Aston's. Additionally, the theme applied to virtually all Aston resorts, as there was something unique and *Astonishing* about them – whether in architecture (Aston Cabo Regis in Los Cabos), concept (Aston Genesis Wellness Resort in Salt Lake City), location (Aston Kaanapali Shores on Maui), amenities (Aston Waikiki Beach Tower on Oahu) and many others. Thus, unlike many campaign themes, the product actually fulfilled the promise of the theme and was supportable by each resort.
- Results:** The new "*Astonishing*" theme developed by became Aston's most recognizable theme among travel agents (Aston's prime target) in the company's 40+ year history, according to *Questex* research, and was adapted for use among all Aston properties, including those on Maui, Oahu, Kauai and Molokai, as well as in Mexico, San Francisco and Salt Lake City. Aston continued use of the *Astonishing* theme for more than 25 years, making it one of the oldest and most durable themes in the hospitality industry.



LOS CABOS
Astonishing!

**Aston.
Astonishing.
Aston Cabo Regis.**

The largest, most spectacular resort in Los Cabos is an Aston. That's right, Aston – the same people you depend on in Hawaii are now in Mexico, too.

192 luxurious, air-conditioned suites and guest rooms. Stunning ocean and mountain vistas. Color tv. All suites with private balconies or terraces, gourmet kitchens, walk-in closets. The most exquisite gourmet dining and the largest pool in Cabo (heated, too, for those cool desert nights). And privileges at the adjacent Los Cabos Golf & Tennis Club for Aston Cabo Regis guests.

Book through your favorite wholesaler, or call Aston toll free (800) 922-7866.

Sabre (AN) 12663, Apollo (AH) 9013.

Astonishing!

**ASTON.
CABO REGIS**

Operated by Aston Mega Hotels & Resorts
Aston is a registered service mark of Hotel Corporation of the Pacific, Inc. © 1989

CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Expanding marketing power through barter funding in lieu of cash for a major cruise line

Client: **CUNARD CRUISE LINES**

Situation: Terrorism, hijackings, bombings, kidnappings and other negative influences had seriously impacted Cunard's marketing efforts, and resulted in severe reductions in available funding. In order to maintain its presence and provide additional support for alternative products, Cunard sought to displace cash expenditures with a combination of cash and barter. Although Cunard and its national advertising agency had successfully traded for broadcast time in the past, the cruise line found itself in a difficult position as magazines which had previously been purchased on an all-cash basis refused to accept a cash/barter system for the same or less space through the national agency.

Action: I developed a combined cash/barter program in which Cunard was able to increase its national magazine schedules while significantly reducing its cash expenditures by utilizing unused or excess cruise cabin capacity on a trade or barter basis.

Results: I initiated a buying program for Cunard in specified magazines – including the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *New Yorker*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Town & Country*, *House & Garden*, *Modern Maturity*, *Travel/Holiday* and many others – all of which had previously been purchased by Cunard for 100 percent cash. My expertise and buying ability resulted in Cunard reducing cash expenditures by 47.5 percent (saving more than \$2 million!), maintaining all previously scheduled advertising and expanding to critical new publications despite funding cutbacks.



CASE HISTORY

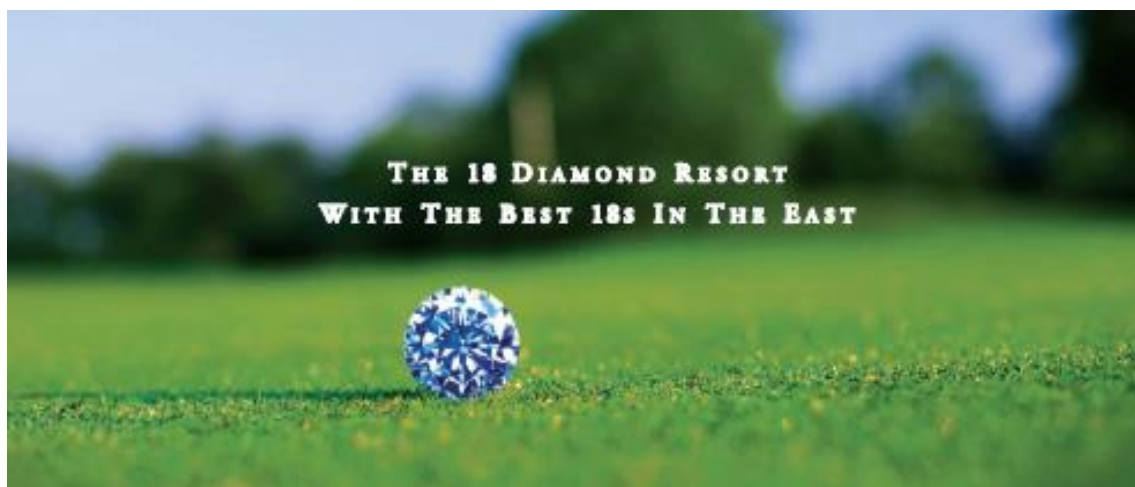
Synopsis: Developing a destination branding strategy to expand the scope of marketing efforts, increase awareness and establish product differentiation

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.



CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Strategic and tactical advertising combine to create maximum impact and exceed sales expectations

Client: **THOMSON/APPLE VACATIONS**

Situation: Thomson Vacations (now Apple Vacations) began as a charter tour operator to the Bahamas, Caribbean and Mexico from three Midwestern gateways. In its second full year, summer season sales to sun destinations (Jamaica, Bahamas, Mexico, Florida) and Europe were up more than 40 percent. This pattern was repeated again the following summer. Thomson historically had been a regular advertiser, but had never coordinated strategies and tactics to allow the strengths of each medium or each commercial/advertisement to build on each other.

Action: When I began working with Thomson, I saw a need to establish and coordinate four distinct strategic phases of the marketing program: (1) Continued brand name identification and destination selling, for which television and radio were utilized; (2) Target audience impact emphasizing the range, price and value of Thomson products, for which magazines were utilized; (3) Hard-sell retail activity designed to generate immediate action, and (4) On-going continuity with tactical emphasis on needs specified by load factors, hotel commitments, etc.

Results: Because of the beginning of a turn-around in the economy and the strength of the dollar abroad, Thomson believed that summer sales would be up 55 percent versus the prior year – outpacing previous summer increases by 15 points. However, as we moved from phase to phase of the new campaign, summer sales started earlier than in previous years, gained momentum faster, and by September 1 were up 150 percent – or 2½ times more than the previous year. Expressed differently, the new strategy for Thomson helped the company sell more vacations in one summer than in all three previous summers combined!



CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Off-season cooperative marketing builds sales for multiple partners within an established brand

Client: **HILTON HOTELS CORPORATION**

Situation: The four Hilton-owned and branded hotels in the Chicago area were suffering the usual off-season (summer, or non-convention) doldrums, which compounded the traditionally soft weekend period for urban hotels, as well. At the same time, each hotel faced severe budget limitations, and none individually could afford to launch a major promotional effort. The hotels had relied primarily on traditional price-cutting to attract summer and weekend business. With new competition springing up all around from such companies as Hyatt, Westin, Holiday Inns and Marriott – which all had significant budgets to help launch and establish their presence in the marketplace – the Hilton group's lack of competitive budget was made even more extreme.

Action: I recommended and implemented a cooperative program which combined the resources of all four hotels for the first time. Equally important, I negotiated with and attained media placement virtually exclusively on a barter or trade-for-rooms basis; barter, in fact, accounted for 80 percent of program funding. I led the agency team in working with the individual hotels to develop a series of package promotions. Magazine, newspaper, television and radio advertising were created with the theme "Wherever you Chicago, there's a Hilton for you" which ran in nearly a dozen surrounding Midwestern communities.

Results: The results of this campaign astounded both the client and the agency!

Package sales for the Palmer House increased 56 percent; for the Conrad Hilton, 75 percent; for the Arlington Park Hilton, 26 percent; and for the O'Hare Hilton, more than 600 percent, with the O'Hare Hilton actually exceeding the Palmer House in total package sales for the first time ever over a protracted season! Total room nights sold via the package promotion campaign increased proportionately – overall, up 62 percent for the combined hotels versus the previous year!



CASE HISTORY

Synopsis: Strategic partnerships combine to move brand from a “low price” to a “value” positioning, introduce new product and increase revenue per customer

Client: **FIRSTOURS (CARLSON TRAVEL GROUP)**

Situation: For 60 years, Firstours had marketed low-cost city and event vacation packages to a variety of U.S. destinations with good success, moving roughly 30,000 passengers per year. Firstours then entered the Hawaii market with low-cost packages, and expanded to Mexico a year later. The company suffered two major set-backs: (1) The Hawaii Express, its low-cost airline for Hawaii, went out of business and TV news programs delighted in showing stranded Firstours passengers at the Honolulu airport, and (2) a supplier of Super Bowl tickets ceased operations and, for the second time in a two-week period, Firstours' clients were shown on TV news being stranded without getting what they paid for.

Action: I created "The Whole Hawaii Catalog" and worked with Firstours to attain cooperative marketing agreements with United Airlines, Hyatt Hotels and other major, nationally known suppliers – all designed to create a "quality by association" impression, negate past difficulties and move from a “low price” to “value price” positioning. A complete media and promotional program, including broadcast, newspapers, consumer and travel trade magazines, publicity, brochures, direct mail, consumer sweepstakes and others all were designed to link Firstours as closely as possible to the well recognized, highly respected airline and hotel partners. Firstours also followed the my "Whole Hawaii Catalog" recommendation in expanding its product mix to include air-inclusive vacations, "land-only" packages, escorted tours and multi-island vacations.

Results: Within one year, Firstours not only retained its base of Hawaii business but increased passenger volume by more than 60 percent and, more importantly, increased sales per passenger with its upgraded product line by 70 percent – which meant a total dollar volume increase of 165 percent! As a result, Firstours became one of the nation's top 10 Hawaii wholesaler vacation companies while operating from only seven gateway markets.

