

# Nevada tries to make tourism website more engaging

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Tourism Commission was feeling a little better about TravelNevada.com 2.0 after its brand consultant told members they'll be tweaking the state's tourism website after a lukewarm response to its mid-April debut.

Representatives of Burson-Marsteller, the New York-based consultant the state is paying \$3.2 million over two years, told commissioners Wednesday they are working on fixes to the website that should be completed by the end of July.

"I must say it's a dramatic improvement," said Commissioner Christopher Baum, who heads the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, after getting a preview of the changes.

"It's a dramatic improvement in terms of navigation, in terms of visuals, in terms of intuitive ability to find things that are of interest to travelers," Baum said. "In a perfect world, it would have been the first version we launched, but I'm delighted that we're getting to a version now that we can all be happy with. It's dramatically better on virtually every level."

Tourism leaders statewide complained that a portion of editorial content that had previously been accessible on the website was gone or difficult to find. Burston-Marsteller's contracted website designer said one of the fixes planned is to restore some of the previously available content.

"We went too far in trip planning than rich narratives and other editorial content," said Louis Hernandez in his presentation to the commission.

Some critics have complained that information about events was outdated and that the site's functionality declined. Others were concerned about whether an out-of-state vendor was best qualified to develop the website. The website revisions also came at a time when the state unveiled its new brand, "A World Within. A State Apart," which also was panned.

Tourism Commission Director Claudia Vecchio defended the brand, saying there would always be detractors and that it just needed more time for the public to appreciate it.

While commissioners were satisfied that improvements were under way, they were delighted by early reports of site metrics showing that visits to the page and increases in the number of requests for more information were on the rise, thanks primarily to the state's strong social media presence.

Michelle Stevenson told the commission that Facebook posts about the state more than tripled in the last year and the dwell time on Nevada's page was well above industry averages. The state agency focused on social media, spending minimally on more expensive television and traditional media advertisements.