

Tourism expert: People have the money to travel

By Kathryn Reed

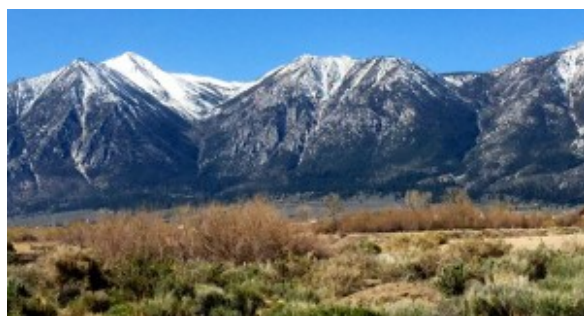
MINDEN – People are employed, they are willing to spend and they are saving. Saving for a vacation is what travel industry officials are hoping.

These economic trends are good for tourism, according to Brian London.

London was the keynote speaker April 16 at the Nevada Commission on Tourism's Rural Roundup at the Carson Valley Inn.

"What is something they are saving for? Vacation. That means there is no wrong time to start promoting your destination. Start now to inspire them," London told the crowd of a couple hundred tourism officials.

London is a travel industry analyst who used to work for the agency responsible for marketing Florida.



Tourism reps from rural Nevada – which includes the Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe – are participating in the annual multi-day travel conference. Photo/LTN

Tourism is Nevada's No. 1 industry. The state agency is focusing its pitch on Millennials, the 79 million people between the ages of 20 and 34.

London spoke to the need for destinations to know their demographic and what those people want. It doesn't mean neglecting one segment over another, but it does require knowing not all sectors have the same wants and needs.

"You have to change or you won't be speaking the language of your customer," London said.

He believes Boomers will be the driving force in the travel industry for the next two decades. They have the time and money for travel, and control more than half of the discretionary spending by people in the United States.

They are mostly interested in touring, resorts, casinos and golf – all things Nevada can offer in abundance. They are also less into active sports and recreation, and more into sightseeing and fine dining.

Millennials are attracted to locations with events and to cities. They want to be part of something and then to share it with others.

"Photos are their favorite information currency," London said. "They grew up with technology. They want instant access. They don't ask if there is WiFi, they assume you have Internet available."

If lodging properties, restaurants and the destination itself is not using photos and video as teasers, Millennials are likely to look elsewhere.

Gen X'ers, the group in between, are into the outdoors and theme parks. They want bonding and a connection with family.

Millennials represent 28 percent of the travel market, Boomers 26 percent, Gen X 20 percent, Gen Z and Older 13 percent each,

according to London.

London is a strong proponent of businesses paying attention to online reviews. He said average daily rates increase at hotels that respond to complaints. It shows the property cares. It's called reputation management.

Keeping track of trends is critical, too. London suggested businesses – even the larger destinations – look at reports publicly traded companies file with the Securities and Exchange Commission. This is because they have to tell investors how they are going to spend their money. A tidbit – Hilton is building 245,000 new rooms this year. This is a clear indication they are bullish on the lodging sector – aka travel market.