

VISIT

WINONATM

MINNESOTA

Facebook Live

Facebook Live

What:

We believe that people increasingly want to connect to human beings, not companies – even in destination marketing.

So to deepen our engagement with our followers (87% of whom do not live in Winona), we began a promotion in late July 2018 in which we invited Facebook followers to nominate and vote on locations to determine where we would do a Facebook Live episode from that week.

We promised we would go wherever they sent us – and we meant anywhere – and as you will see, they had a little fun with that...



Initial Results:

Between July 20, 2018 and June 8, 2019, we reached 290,400 people, had 163,000 views, and received 44,700 engagements

Six Years In:

It would take too long to calculate the total reach, views and engagements, but they are massive and it has become a cornerstone of our social media marketing.

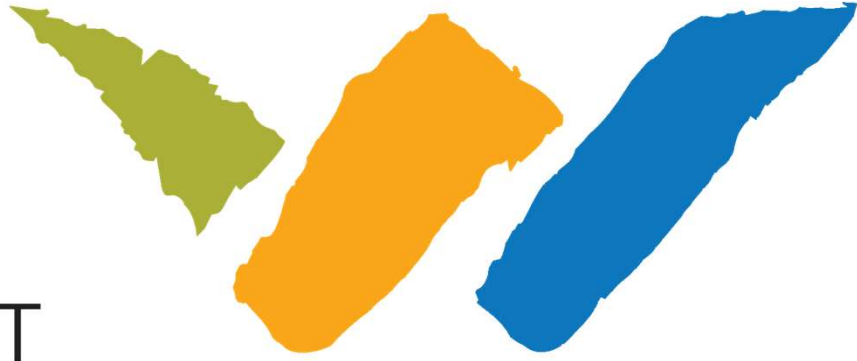
Considerations:

Preserve the purity of it by refusing to let it be pressured, bartered or monetized.

Be consistent – commit to a certain frequency then do it.

Invest in GOOD microphone equipment and be prepared for poor phone signals.

Remember who the audience is – former and potential visitors – and don't do ANYTHING they wouldn't be interested in seeing.



VISIT

WINONATM

MINNESOTA

Facebook Live


Old Brand: Stodgy



spectacular BEAUTY, remarkable ARTS AND CULTURE,
outdoor ADVENTURE


Visit Winona
HISTORIC ISLAND CITY

LET US COUNT THE WAYS
Winona's stunning natural beauty has us spellbound. We lose ourselves in 10 county bike loops, 100 miles of hiking trails, a national canoe trail and miles of scenery that's absolutely breathtaking, especially with fall color blazing. The best news — you're invited!



EPIC FALL EVENTS!
August 15–October 12:
Revisiting Twain's Mississippi: Photographs
September 12–14:
Great Dakota Gathering
September 25–28:
Boats and Bluegrass Festival
November 15:
Tundra Swan Watch Bus Tour

VisitWinona.com • 800.657.4972



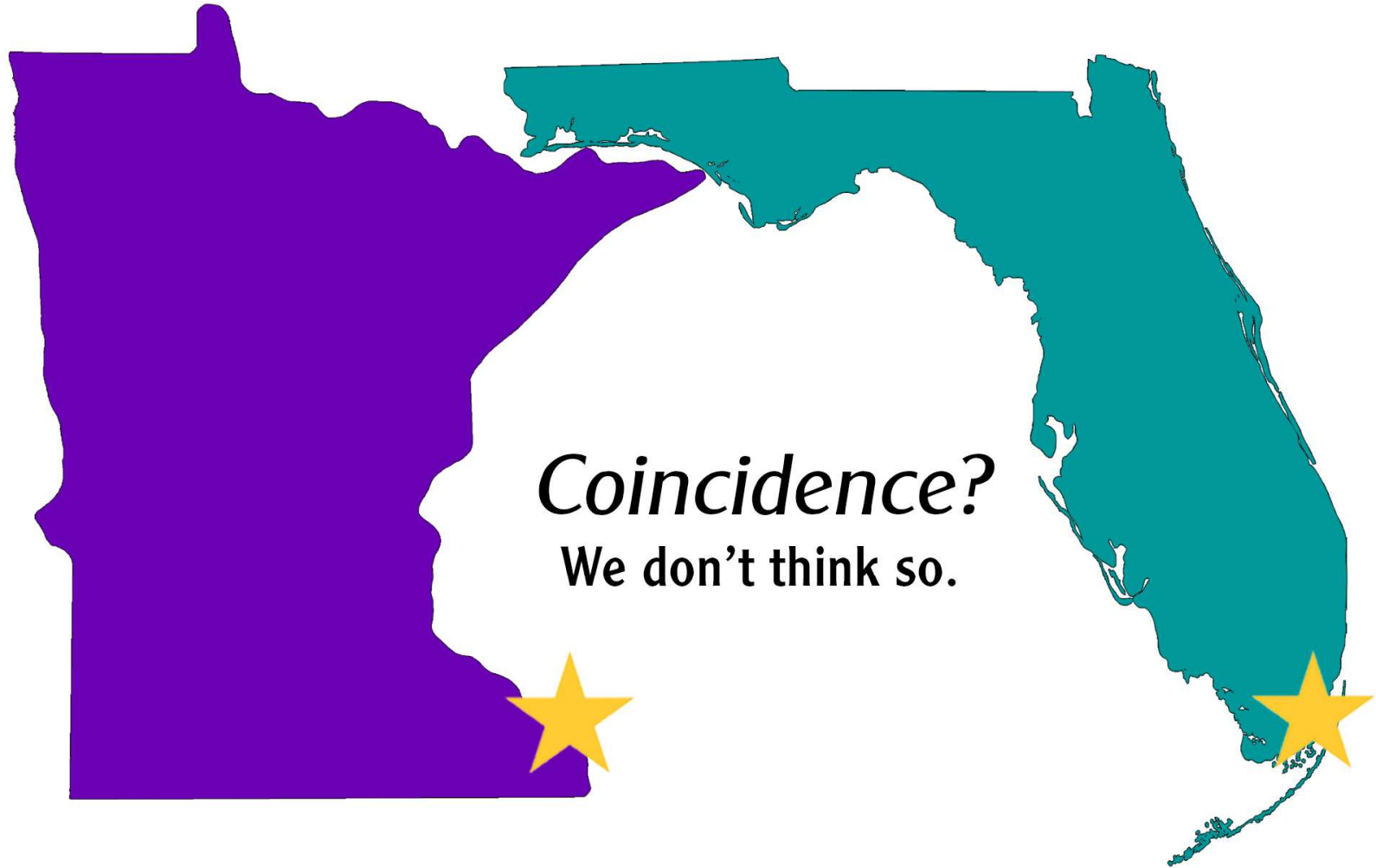
Yawn.

The Miami of Minnesota

Why?

- On average, it's the warmest city in Minnesota according to Weather Almanac
- Located on the state's border exactly where Miami is
- Miles of sand beaches on the Mississippi River
- Because locals think it's funny





Coincidence?
We don't think so.

Winter of 2018/2019: Testing the Waters



Winona
The Miami of Minnesota

Come play with us.
It's Fun!

See why

m EXPLORE MINNESOTA
VISIT **WINONA** MINNESOTA

The poster features a winter scene with a snowy beach and a frozen lake. A woman in a bikini is walking away from the camera, carrying a large, bright pink flamingo-shaped inflatable ring. Two men are in the water, one of whom is holding a paddle. In the background, there is a rocky hill with a stone tower on top. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with a mix of bold and regular fonts.

Winona

The Miami of Minnesota

Come play with us.
It's Fun!

[See why](#)

VISIT WINONA MINNESOTA

mi EXPLORE MINNESOTA

Winona

The Miami of Minnesota

Winter is more fun here

VISIT WINONA MINNESOTA

mi EXPLORE MINNESOTA

Winona

The Miami of Minnesota

Winter is more fun here

VISIT WINONA MINNESOTA

mi EXPLORE MINNESOTA

Winona

The Miami of Minnesota

Winter is more fun here

VISIT WINONA MINNESOTA

mi EXPLORE MINNESOTA

Spring of 2021...

Tourism was heading towards a stampede. But...

Question: How does a little DMO with a little budget run with the bulls in the giant world of advertising without getting trampled?

Answer: Be so outrageous that your marketing does its own heavy lifting.

To heck with the naysayers.

Our answer:



The Plan:

Buy the domain www.mngators.com

Fill it with outlandish copy about a totally fictitious alligator-riding attraction in Winona, the Miami of Minnesota

Create even more outlandish images of happy people riding alligators to go with the copy

Give people a good, well-deserved laugh after COVID

Launch it on April Fool's Day 2021 (because we were chicken and needed a little bit of cover in case it completely failed)

Stock art and Photoshop were our friends







A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a dark swimsuit, is smiling broadly while holding the head of a crocodile in the water. The crocodile's head is on the left side of the frame, with its mouth slightly open. The water is a deep blue-green color. The text 'Swim with GATORS' is overlaid on the image. 'Swim' is in a large, yellow, cursive font. 'with' is in a smaller, yellow, sans-serif font. 'GATORS' is in a large, green, blocky font with a textured, scale-like appearance.

Swim
with
GATORS

GET TICKETS NOW



Bring the family and experience the magic of reptiles!



The majesty of the reptilian world. You can only experience it in Winona, Minnesota.

That's right, there's only one place left in America where you can legally swim with alligators. **Minnesota Gators™** in Winona, MN has the only Alligator Petting Zoo license in the entire United States!





SAFE*, FUN & AFFORDABLE EXPERIENCES FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Your kids will never forget the magic of feeding an alligator by hand, riding on the back of our albino alligator Prince, or even getting in the water and swimming next to alligators while our friendly trainers chum up the water in a feeding frenzy!

*All parents must sign a waiver absolving Minnesota Gators from all legal responsibilities, including the loss of limbs, bleeding, and/or death.





GET YOUR VISIT WINONA SHIRT!

“I swam with alligators in Winona, MN”

Fabric: Fine Jersey
100% Combed Ring-Spun Cotton
Neck: Crew neck

Binding: Set-in Collar 1x1 Baby Rib. Side seamed.
Label: Tear Away

\$29.99 + shipping

[SHOP NOW](#)



Besides a big laugh, we got:

- International speaking gig for City Nation Place
- National press coverage
- Statewide press coverage
- Regional press coverage
- 2,300 website visits
- 14,350 Facebook engagements
- 650 Facebook shares
- 722 new Facebook followers
- A few phone calls about where to find the alligators

Our cost: \$800

The exposure: Priceless (thanks for that slug, Visa)

A gator gag can only carry you so far, but the Miami of Minnesota found its legs and quickly became part of our brand story.

HEAD SOUTH
TO THE **MIAMI** OF MINNESOTA

IT'S MORE FUN HERE

m1 EXPLORE MINNESOTA

VISIT **WINONA**™
MINNESOTA


VISITWINONA.COM

As we worked to diversify our imagery, our girl got some clothes on and appeared in more ads for all seasons.

*Note: Ads with the “Head South” header ran in Minnesota, where we are in the southeastern corner.

Outstate and niche marketing carried different headlines.

HEAD SOUTH
to the **MIAMI OF MINNESOTA**

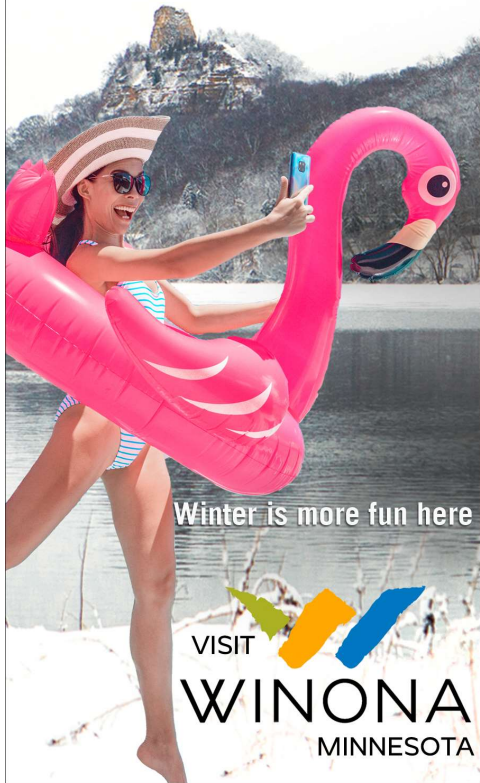
FALL
IS MORE
FUN HERE

VISIT
WINONA
MINNESOTA

VISITWINONA.COM
m EXPLORE
MINNESOTA

HEAD SOUTH

to the **MIAMI** of Minnesota



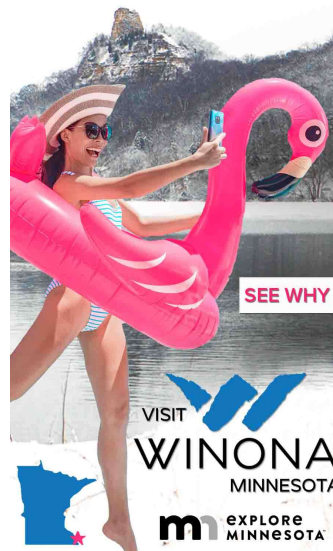
WINTER is more fun

in the **MIAMI** of Minnesota



WINTER IS MORE FUN

in the **MIAMI** of Minnesota



HEAD SOUTH

to the **MIAMI** of Minnesota



HEAD SOUTH

to the **MIAMI** of Minnesota



HEAD SOUTH

WINTER IS MORE FUN HERE

TO THE **MIAMI** OF MINNESOTA

Winona IS the warmest place in Minnesota, but there's a lot more going on here than a few extra degrees and our sense of humor about it. New and legendary restaurants, an astonishing fine art museum, unique, trendy shops, plenty of ways to stay entertained with festivals and music, plus 10,000 acres of public land for you to play on to your heart's content. And we've got all the scenic beauty you can handle. It's paradise. Really.

Come find out why people love Winona.
You're going to want to stay.

WE CAN'T MAKE WINTER IN MINNESOTA
WARMER, BUT WE CAN DEFINITELY
MAKE IT MORE FUN.

m EXPLORE
MINNESOTA

VISIT
WINONA[™]
MINNESOTA

VISITWINONA.COM/WINTERFUN



Yeah. We went
all the way.

The truth is, by this
point, we were
undeterrable. People
were in love with our
zany brand and we
were in love with them
being in love with us.

April Fools Day
became an “event.”



2022 - The Challenge:

Keep the Miami of Minnesota April Fools thing going without it getting tired.

Diversify to something besides alligators.

Don't get fired.

So for 2022 we bought the domain www.MiamiofMinnesota.com and spread our wings – literally – to a new attraction...

**Fly with
*Flamingos!***



New website, more outrageous attraction claims...

A \$500 boost on one post brought more than 16,000 clicks on Facebook in a few days.

Plus:

5,400 reactions

430 comments

3,800 website visits



COOL URBANITY + OLD WORLD CHARM + BREATHTAKING BEAUTY

HEAD to WINONA

the MIAMI of Minnesota

The fun is real. The alligator park isn't.



m EXPLORE MINNESOTA

VISIT
WINONA
MINNESOTA



VisitWinona.com

COOL URBANITY + OLD WORLD CHARM + BREATHTAKING BEAUTY

YOU WILL LOVE WINONA

the MIAMI of Minnesota

Just 30 miles north of La Crosse on the beautiful Mississippi River with jaw-dropping scenery, festivals, live music, and foodie bliss.

P.S. The fun is real. The alligator park isn't.



m EXPLORE MINNESOTA

VISIT
WINONA
MINNESOTA



VisitWinona.com

Shop
Dine
Play



Holiday weekends are
more fun in Winona



The **Miami** of Minnesota

STAY & PLAY FOR UP TO 30% OFF!

Score unique gifts when you cruise our local shops and the artisan markets that pop up around Winona during 100 Miles of Christmas.

While you're here, see the Nutcracker ballet, live music of every kind, a WinterFest celebration, a lighted parade, and decorated store windows in a Victorian downtown prettier than a snow globe.

Our lodging partners have joined together to roll out the welcome mat with a rare sale that will drop rates as much as 30% that weekend. You must contact the property by phone and mention 100 Miles of Christmas to receive the sale price. Go to visitwinona.com/100miles for details.

Visit Winona
160 Johnson St.
Winona, MN 55987

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Winona, Minn.
Permit No. 6

7th Street Retreat

Receive 20% off best published rate

AmericInn of Winona by Wyndham

Receive 10% off best published rate

Days Inn by Wyndham

Receive 10% off best published rate

Express Suites Riverport Inn

\$89.99 + tax (standard room); \$109.99 + tax (Queen or King mini-suite)

Fairfield Inn & Suites

Receive 10% off best published rate

Plaza Hotel & Suites

\$89.99 + tax (standard room);
Guests will also receive \$2 off any
entree at River City Grill

Scrappin on the Ranch

\$400/weekend: 12/2021 through 2/2022
based on availability

Village House Inn

Receive 10% off entire house rental
(2 night minimum stay)





April Fools
2023

The Gator Gauntlet!

\$1,000 Boost =

Reach: 241,000

Engagements: 46,600

Clicks: 21,500



2024...





We started building a library of images that we could mix and match for digital and print ads.

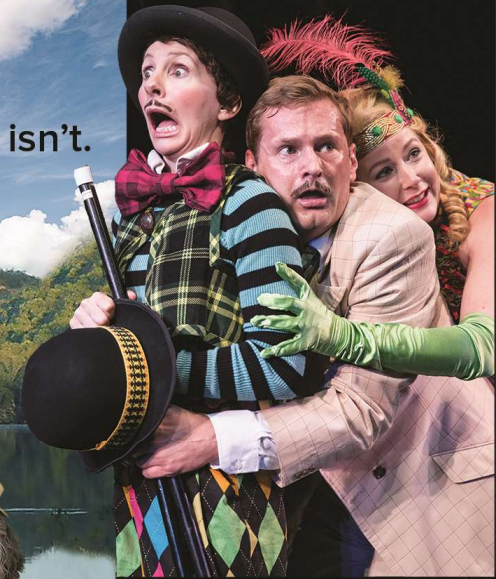
HEAD to WINONA

The MIAMI of Minnesota

The fun is real.
The alligator park isn't.



Need a Playdate?



Get tickets now for the
Great River Shakespeare Festival

June 20-July 31 in Winona

Celebrating 20 years of plays
performed by a national cast the
way Will himself would have wanted.



VisitWinona.com

VISIT
WINONA™
MINNESOTA

mi EXPLORE
MINNESOTA

GRSF.org



It changed the tourism landscape in Winona



Using 2019 as a baseline metric, we experienced:

A 56% increase in overall web traffic comparing 2019 to 2022, as well as a 58% increase in new users and a 40% increase in page views.

A lodging receipts increase from \$399,000 in 2019 to \$456,000 in 2022, with the same number of hotels reporting and similar ADRs.

Compared to the same period from 2018 to 2019, monthly lodging receipts from June 2021 to May of 2023 broke records 19 of those 24 months. We are on track to do that again in 2023.

Our annual operating budget increased from \$450,000 in 2019 to \$650,000 in 2023, with very little reserve spending.

Bonus:

99.99% of Winonans love this branding and they are our best ambassadors

We are now frequently mentioned in regional and national tourism round-up articles as the best city for this or that – organizations that never mentioned Winona before 2021.

Other benchmarks:

After introducing the Miami theme, merchandise sales went from 25,000 in 2018 to \$37,000 in 2019

As of June 2024, we have already doubled that number.

Partnership sales increased from \$59,000 in 2019 to \$86,000 in 2024.



Bottom Line for Both:

- 1. People want to laugh
- 2. People want to deal with people, even in tourism
- 3. People will respond when you don't take yourself too seriously
- 4. People CRAVE something different