



**PILCH & BARNET**

**MARKETING REPORT**  
**2023 | Q3 July - September**

# GOAL

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission’s marketing goals in Q3 2023 included:

- Promote travel along the Great River Road
- Highlight the Great River Road Network of Interpretive Centers
- Maintain current visitors and encourage repeat visits along the Great River Road
- Drive traffic to the [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://experiencemississippiriver.com) website
- Promote summer events along the Great River Road

# STRATEGY

Tactics used to accomplish these goals were implemented across the Mississippi River Parkway Commission’s marketing channels, including e-newsletters, the Great River Road website, social media (Facebook and Instagram), a promotion, and more.

# TACTICS

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## At A Glance

### Website

- Q3 2023 numbers were down slightly from Q3 2022 in all stat categories, likely due to the traffic difference between the 2022 Drive the Great River Road sweepstakes and the 2023 Drive the Great River Road photo contest.
- The “Order a Map” page was the most visited page (7.67% of all website traffic) and Facebook was the top source of referring traffic (16.65% of all site acquisitions)
- Chicago, IL was top metro area (14.22% of all users); 55-64 was the top age group (25.7% of all reported users)

### E-Newsletters

- The e-newsletters continued to top industry averages in open rates and click rate
- Added more than 2,000 new subscribers

### Social Media

- Strong growth and engagement on Facebook and Instagram thanks to a strong advertising campaign
- Fall color and scenery continue to be among most popular topics for posts

### Online Store

- 10% discount applied to all product items on the Great River Road online store as we celebrated its 10-year anniversary

### 10-State Events Campaign and Giveaway

- Continued event promotion campaign and giveaway

highlighting summer events along the Great River Road

- Completed Summer Fun on the Great River Road Giveaway (\$100 gas card monthly giveaways in July & August)
- Conducted two social media ticket giveaways (Sunken Lands Songwriting Circle (Arkansas) and RippleSippi Music Fest (Minnesota))

### Drive the Great River Road Promotion

- Gained 314 fans on Facebook
- Gained 468 E-newsletter subscribers
- Receive 408 photo entries
- Conducted 7 social media giveaways on Facebook and Instagram (Great River Road merchandise)

### 2023 Annual Meeting

- Prepared agendas, handouts, packets, name tags, materials, slides
- Prepared awards/recognition, supplies, meals, speakers
- Processed registrations, invoices, receipts
- Annual Meeting held Sept 20-22

### Fulfillment

- Fulfilled 3,349 map orders

### Additional

- Q4 content calendar created

## TACTIC: Website

### Website Analytics Takeaways

#### Notable Stats

##### Top Pages

The [/interactive-tools/order-a-free-great-river-road-10-state-map/](#) page was the most visited specific page of interest with 10,019 views and accounted for 7.67% of all website views

The [/the-great-river-road-the-best-drive-in-america/](#) page was the second most visited specific page of interest with 9,339 views and accounted for 7.15% of all website views

#### Acquisition

Organic Search accounted for 55.91% of all website users and was the highest channel of acquisition traffic (32,699 users)

- This means that the majority of users found the website through search engines like Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc, by searching for keywords that related to the content on the website.

Google was the #1 overall source of organic traffic and accounted for 51.85% of all site user acquisitions. (29,885 Users)

Facebook was the #1 overall source of referring traffic and accounted for 16.65% of all site user acquisitions. (9,597 Users)

#### Metro Areas

Chicago was the #1 metro area/city of visitors to the website and accounted for 14.22% of all website users. (5,255 Users)

- The most visited page of interest from this metro area was the [/locks-and-dams-of-the-upper-mississippi](#) page. (791 views)

#### User Demographics:

The top reported age group of users was 55-64. (25.7% of reported site users)

- Boomers ages 58 - 67 born between 1955 - 1964 are more likely to travel than any other of today's age groups.
  - Average 27 travel days per year
  - \$44,370 Average income
  - Usually have a budget set aside for travel, book longer stays, prefer active relaxation activities (golf, hiking, massages, wine tours, etc.), Bucket listers, more likely to stay at a repeat accommodation

## Device Usage:

**61.2% of reported users viewed the site on mobile devices (industry standard for mobile devices is 53.74%)**

### This Year vs Last Year Stats:

This year stats vs last year at the same timeframe

- 59,958 Users this year vs 71,720 Users last year
- 130,552 Views this year vs 176,895 Views last year
- 72,975 Sessions this year vs 98,798 Sessions last year

The top 5 pages this quarter and year

- Homepage 19,816 views
- /the-great-river-road-the-best-drive-in-america/ 10,019 views
- /the-great-river-road-the-best-drive-in-america/ 9,339 views
- /locks-and-dams-of-the-upper-mississippi/ 6,075 views
- /river-attractions/ 5,831 views

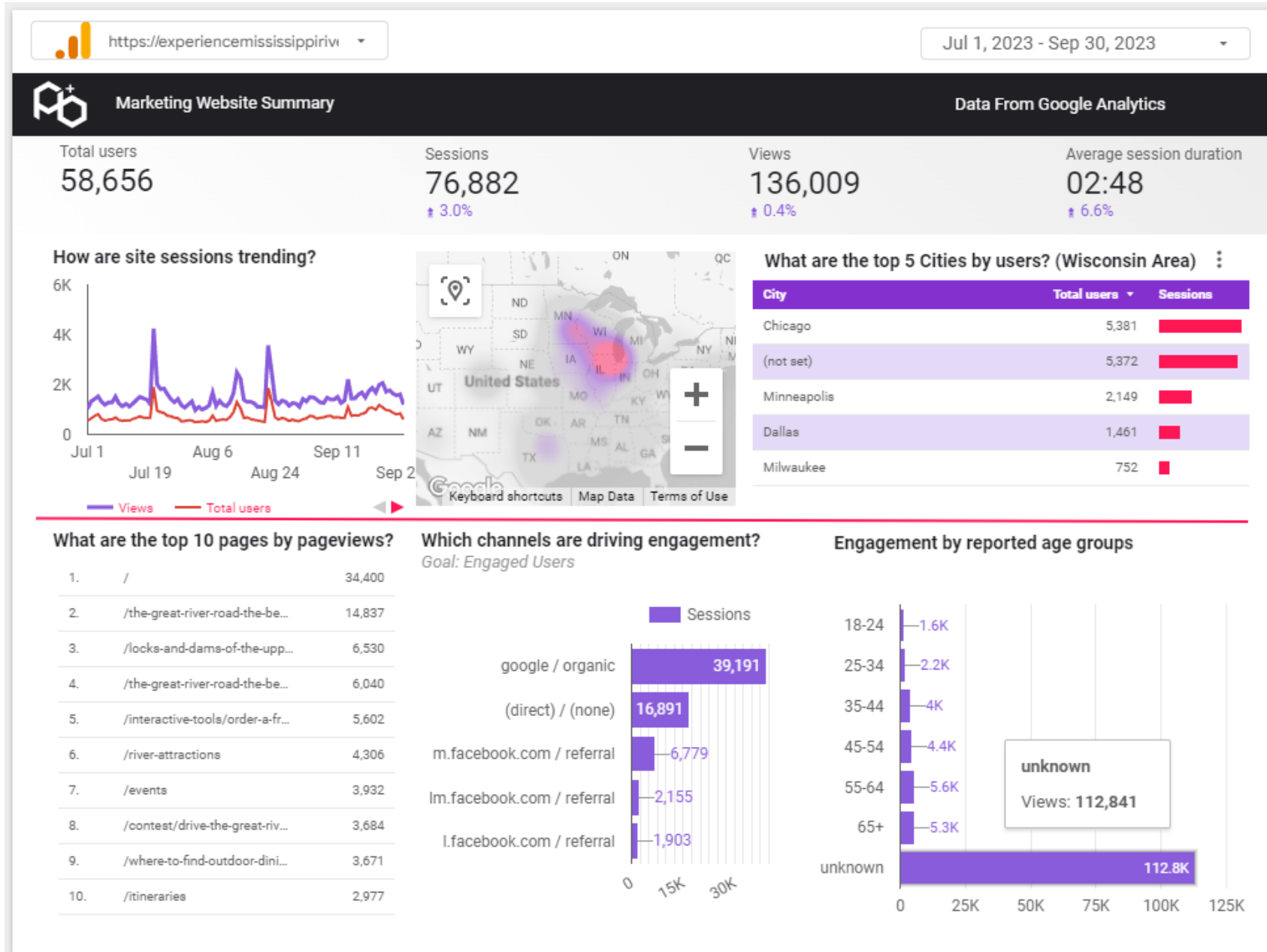
The top 5 pages last year for this same timeframe were

- Homepage 16,593 views
- /contest/drive-the-great-river-road-all-american-road-sweepstakes/ 12,775 views
- /thank-you-for-entering/ 10,764 views
- /the-great-river-road-the-best-drive-in-america/ 9,339 views
- /interactive-tools/order-a-free-great-river-road-10-state-map/ 8,660 views

This year the website had lower overall views, users and sessions compared to last year during this same timeframe.

- Last year during this time frame the /drive-the-great-river-road-all-american-road-sweepstakes and related pages accounted for around 25,000+ pageviews. This year's promotion was a photo contest that generated less traffic (3,312 views ) during Q3. Although the photo contest did not bring in high traffic volumes it was a successful campaign as it added much-needed new photography to the photo library.

# Website Analytics Stats



## Web Maintenance

- Monthly website checks
  - Tested and updated links as necessary
  - Checked copy and photos, ensured content was current
  - Monthly Mailchimp check to ensure lists are performing/functioning correctly
  - Renewing Instagram Tokens: Refreshing long-lived tokens before expiration, ensuring granted feed app permissions
  - Scanned the site for malware
- Analytics monitored weekly

## Website Updates

- Fixed duplicated promos showing on homepage
- Looked into error message from MRPC mailchimp app
- Made several updates to the events section on the homepage

## TACTIC: E-Newsletters

### Takeaways

The Great River Road travel e-newsletter performed well in Q3, adding more than 2,000 new subscribers and exceeding industry averages in open rate and click rate.

The most popular e-newsletter in terms of opens and clicks was the August edition, which highlighted outdoor dining options along the northern states of the Great River Road.

### E-Newsletter Stats

Subscribers

**49,442**

Average Open Rate

**38.33%**

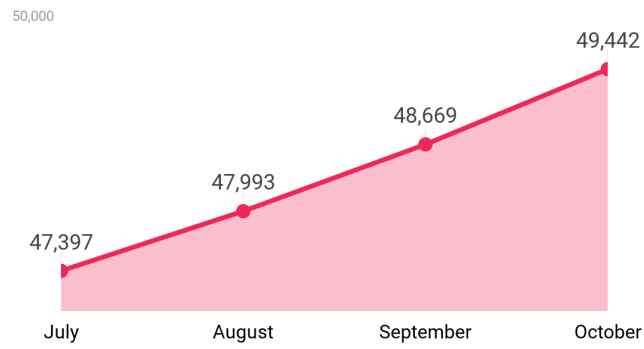
industry average: 20.2%

Average Click Rate

**3.23%**

industry average: 2.2%

### Subscriber Growth



Top Performing E-Newsletter | Blast date: 8/22





Recipients

**49,653**

Opened

**20,434**

Clicked

**2,313**

## II E-newsletters Stats

External Tourism E-newsletter			
Article/Subject	Open Rate	Click Rate	URL
Where to cool down along the Great River Road (7/20)	40.0%	3.7%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Where to find outdoor dining on the Great River Road (8/22)	41.4%	4.7%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Share your Great River Road photos for a chance to win \$250! (9/14)	33.6%	1.3%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Internal E-newsletter to Members			
Article/Subject	Open Rate	Click Rate	URL
MRPC Q3 Update (8/24)	39.5%	5.6%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Annual Meeting E-newsletters			
Article/Subject	Open Rate	Click Rate	URL
Act now: Register today for the 2023 MRPC Annual Meeting (7/18)	35.0%	2.4%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Act now: Register today for the 2023 MRPC Annual Meeting (To TN) (7/26)	80.0%	20.0%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
MRPC Meeting Hotel Block Ends Soon (8/4)	35.7%	3.0%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
Act now to save on registration & hotels for the 2023 Annual Meeting (8/29)	35.6%	1.7%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>

Thanks for attending the Annual Meeting – we want to hear from you! (9/28)	38.6%	4.3%	<a href="#">View newsletter</a>
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**TACTIC: Social Media**

**Takeaways**

The Great River Road’s Facebook and Instagram accounts performed well in Q3, increasing fan numbers and fan engagement, thanks to social media advertising dollars and a series of giveaways to promote the summer events campaign in July and August and Drive the Great River Road Month in September.

**Facebook Takeaways**

The Facebook page added more than 1,000 fans in Q2, despite the fact that a page likes ad wasn’t running (this is attributable to our other social media spending as well as the summer events giveaway and the Drive the Great River Road Month photo contest). The most popular post of the quarter--boosted by advertising dollars--was a link to an article on the [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://experiencemississippiriver.com) site about planning a fall color getaway.

**Instagram Takeaways**

The Instagram account performed very well in Q3, adding more than 750 fans and seeing significant engagement, thanks to our robust advertising efforts. Mississippi River scenery, especially fall color posts, continue to perform well.

## All Combined Social Media Ads Stats

Type of ad run	Amount spent	Result
Drive traffic to <a href="http://experiencemississippiriver.com">experiencemississippiriver.com</a>	Facebook: \$360.20	3,515 landing page views
Boost Facebook posts (including summer events campaign)	Facebook: \$529.98	6,948 post engagements, 502 link clicks, 3,017 landing page views
Boost Instagram posts	Instagram: \$374.31	932 link clicks
Boost posts - Summer event social media ticket giveaways (FB)	Facebook: \$50	419 post engagements
Boost posts - Drive the Great River Road Month social media giveaways (GRR merchandise on FB & IG)	Facebook & Instagram: \$349.85	3,009 post engagements, 181 link clicks
Boost posts - Drive the Great River Road Month photo contest	Facebook & Instagram: \$749.81	1,140 page views, 331 link clicks

Combined Ads People Reached

**624,724**

Combined Ads Paid Impressions

**1,135,756**

Combined Ads Engagements

**10,376**

Combined Ads Link Clicks

**12,289**

# Facebook Overview

## Facebook Stats

Facebook followers

**84,418**

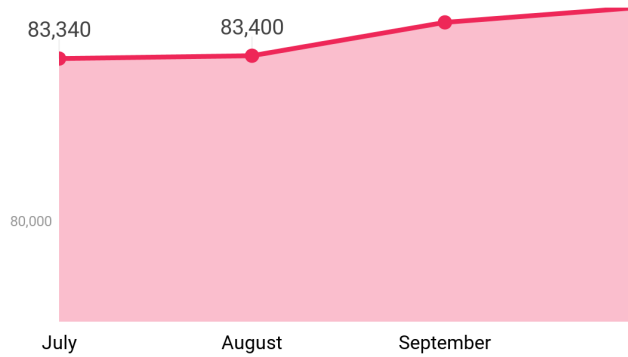
New Facebook followers

**+1,078**

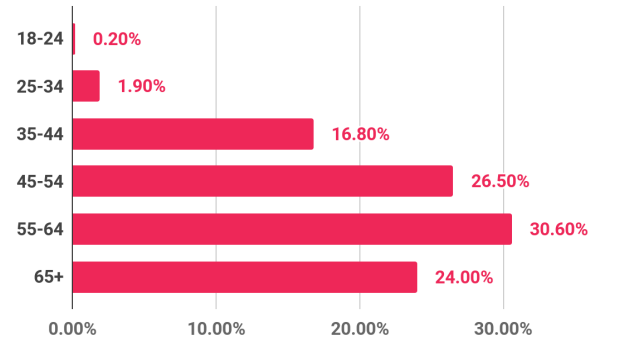
Facebook updates

**54**

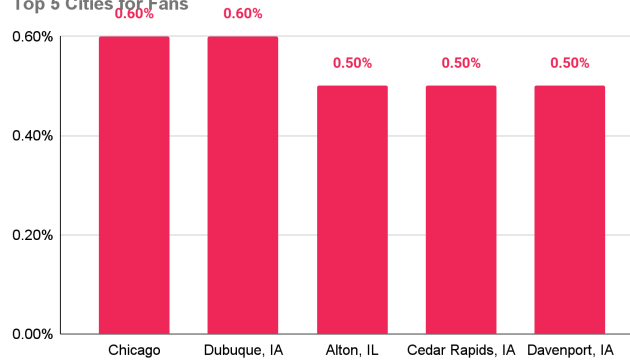
Follower Growth



Follower Demographics

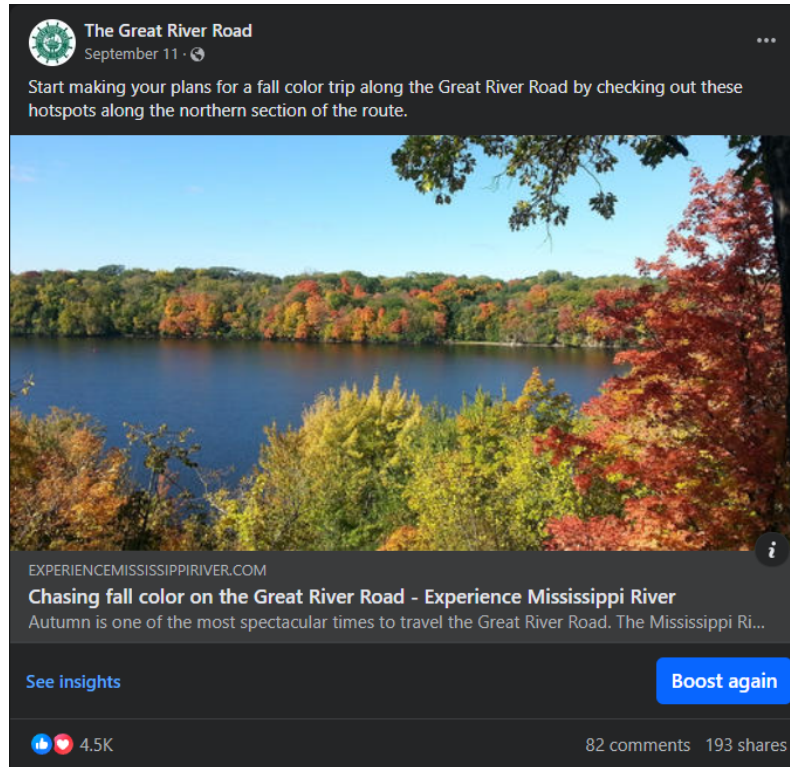


Top 5 Cities for Fans



## Facebook Posts

Top Performing Post | Date: 9/11



People Reached

**155,623**

Organic Reach

**6,795**

Paid Reach

**148,367**

Post Reactions

**4,715**

# Instagram Overview

## Instagram Stats

Instagram followers

**5,467**

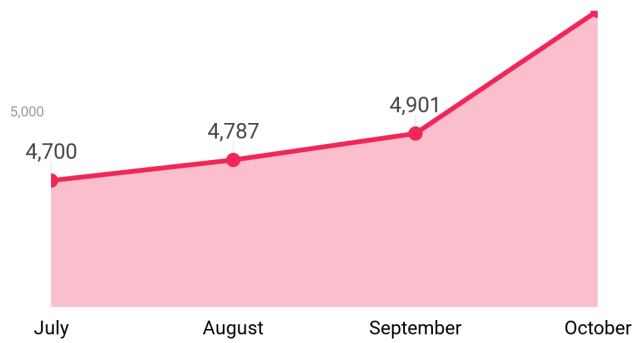
New Instagram followers

**+767**

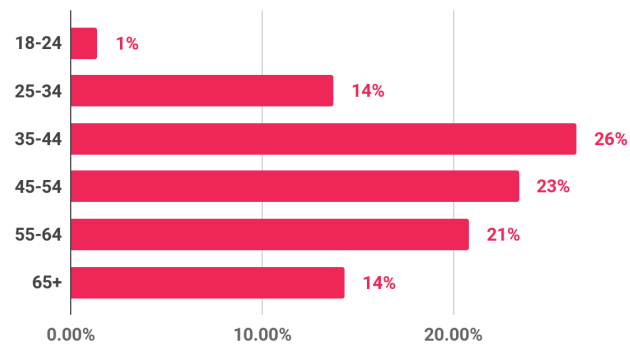
Instagram updates

**17**

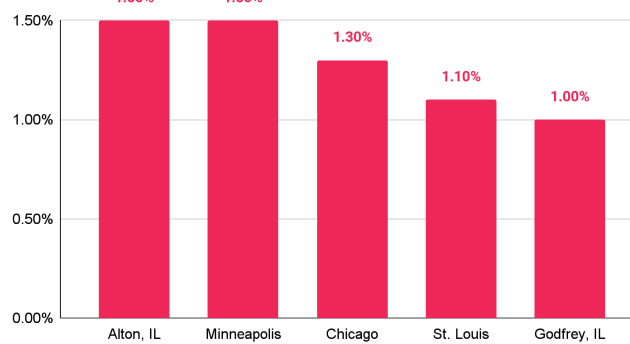
Follower Growth



Follower Demographics

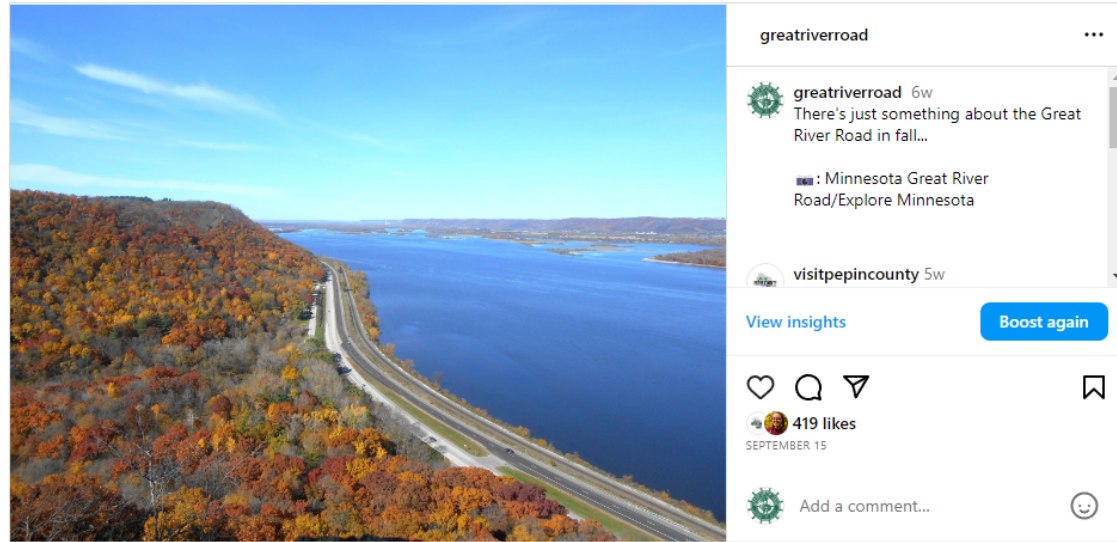


Top 5 Cities for Followers



## Instagram Posts

Top Performing Post | Date: 9/15



Accounts Reached

**16,423**

Engagements

**419**



## TACTIC: Online Store

### Takeaways

- For the month of September a 10% discount was applied to all product items on the Great River Road online store as we celebrated its 10-year anniversary.

## TACTIC: 10-State Events Campaign and Giveaway

### Takeaways

We launched a new campaign that put a focus on Great River Road summer events (Memorial Day to Labor Day) with a push to a new webpage where viewers can select from state and month to view events. Additionally, we launched a monthly giveaway for a \$100 gas card (drawings will take place in July, August, and September) and social media giveaways for featured events. We also created a form to collect event info (event name, date, location, description, event website, etc.) and event images for promotion.

Campaign Period: Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend

### Goals:

- ❖ Bring attention to the Great River Road through variety of shared events
- ❖ Collect event listings
- ❖ Collect event photos for future promotional use
- ❖ Create reporting with large numbers, such as entries, collection of events, web and social traffic, co-op ad participants

## Quick giveaways

- Conducted two social media ticket giveaways (Sunken Lands Songwriting Circle (Arkansas) and RippleSippi Music Fest (Minnesota)); each post received \$25 in social media advertising
  - Sunken Lands Songwriting Circle
    - Gave away two sets of two tickets to August 12 event
    - Ads ran July 13-16
    - Winners: Greg Janke and Rosa Harris Schill
    - Post/ad performance:
      - 6,465 accounts reached (5,657 organic, 988 paid)
      - 397 post engagements (139 reactions, 29 comments, 21 shares, 210 clicks)
  - RippleSippi Music Festival
    - Gave away two tickets to August 26 event
    - Ads ran August 21-21
    - Winner: Scott Wirta
    - Post/ad performance:
      - 4,935 accounts reached (2,851 organic, 2,270 paid)
      - 18 link clicks, 14 comments, 7 shares, 90 post reactions

## TACTIC: Drive the Great River Road Promotion

### Takeaways

- Contest landing page pageviews during the time of the promotion: 3,211 pageviews
- The combined contest pages accounted for 3,613 pageviews during the time of the promotion and accounted for 8.29% of all website page views
- Page traffic stats from links included on the contest/thank you page
  - Homepage 5,646 pageviews
  - Celebrate Drive the Great River Road Month 4,440 pageviews
  - Great River Road receives All-American Road designation 187 pageviews
  - The Great River Road – The Best Drive in America 2,863 pageviews



All-American Road

SEARCH

GREAT RIVER ROAD RIVER ATTRACTIONS ACTIVITIES & RECREATION INTERACTIVE ITINERARIES

# DRIVE THE GREAT RIVER ROAD

## PHOTO CONTEST

**Step 1: Like us on Facebook**

**Step 2: Enter the Contest**

Name \*

First Last

Email \*

Zip code \*

Maximum of 5 characters. Currently used: 0 characters.

Share your photo \*

Where was this photo taken? Please provide a short description.

How did you hear about this giveaway?

**Share your scenic Great River Road photos & you could win \$250!**

September is Drive the Great River Road Month, and we need your help to show off what makes this All-American Road so special.

Share your best scenic photos from along the Great River Road and the Mississippi River, and you could win \$250 in spending money for your next Great River Road trip!

Submit your photos by **September 30**, and we'll pick 5 favorites for fan voting on our Facebook page on October 2-9. (Plus, all 5 finalists will receive a free lifetime Great River Road Champion membership valued at \$500!)

Share your Great River Road photos & start planning your next Great River Road getaway today!

## Description

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary in 2023, Drive the Great River Road Photo Contest launched September 1 and was tied into the ongoing promotion of September as Drive the Great River Road Month while generating attention toward the All-American Road status.

The campaign will focus on traveling the Great River Road All-American Road with a focus on those features that support the intrinsic qualities identified in the state's AAR nomination applications. These features are points of interest, sites and events.

## Drive the Great River Road Photo Contest

To help build the Mississippi River Parkway Commission's photo library and obtain user-generated content, we launched a photo contest. We asked fans to share their favorite scenic photos along the Great River Road. Fans were entered into a drawing for a \$250 gift card. One winner was selected via Facebook Likes voting.

We split the contest into three segments:

1. Photo submissions via [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://experiencemississippiriver.com)
2. Create a Facebook album ( finalist images - selected by the National office)
3. Voting mechanism (Facebook Likes) will be used for fans to select the top image

## Objectives

- Continue the promotion of September as Drive the Great River Road Month
- Promote the features that support the intrinsic qualities identified in the AAR applications
- Promote the 10-state map
- Increase website traffic
- Increase awareness to online store
- Build social media following and increase engagement
  - Gained 314 fans
- Build photo library using photo contest submissions
- Increase e-newsletter subscribers and engagement
  - Gained 468 subscribers
- Receive 250 photo entries (408 total entries)

## Prize

The finalist images won a Lifetime Champion Membership valued at \$500. The top voted image will receive \$250.

## How did you hear about the sweepstakes?

- Great River Road social media | 74.51% | 304
- Great River Road e-mail/newsletter | 15.44% | 63
- Great River Road website | 9.07% | 37
- Facebook | 0.49% | 2
- Travel Best Bets Website | 0.25% | 1
- Great River Road map | 0.25% | 1

## The winner

- Grand prize winner:  
Jeff Grotte  
7537 Edmonson Ave. NE, Monticello, MN 55362
- Finalist #1 (lifetime Champion membership)  
Holly Alexander  
5033 Irene Dr., Harrisburg PA 17112
- Finalist #2 (lifetime Champion membership)  
Marty McKay  
623 Division St., Alton IL 62002
- Finalist #3 (lifetime Champion membership)  
Emily Burton  
W10898 E Lake Dr., Stockholm, WI 54769

## Entries by States

- Wisconsin | 12.03% | 49
- Iowa | 11.31% | 46
- Illinois | 10.3% | 42
- Missouri | 7.12% | 29
- Minnesota | 6.14% | 25
- Louisiana | 2.46% | 10
- Texas | 1.72% | 7
- South Carolina | 1.47% | 6
- Tennessee | 1.47% | 6

- Indiana | 1.47% | 6
- Mississippi | 1.23% | 5
- Ohio | 0.98% | 4
- Pennsylvania | 0.74% | 3
- Arkansas | 0.74% | 3
- Kentucky | 0.49% | 2
- Michigan | 0.49% | 2

## Quick giveaways

- Conducted seven social media ticket giveaways on Facebook and Instagram throughout the month (prizes were Great River Road merchandise); each giveaway was supported by \$50 in social media advertising
  - Facebook giveaways
    - T-shirt (9/1-9/4)
      - Winner: Ed Weinberg, Mt. Morris, IL
      - Post stats: 4,532 total reach (4,399 organic, 151 paid), 170 reactions (likes/comments/shares)
      - Ad stats: 1,687 total reach, 643 engagements
    - Sweatshirt (9/5-9/8)
      - Winner: Jamie Lampshire Taylor, Buffalo, MN
      - Post stats: 8,087 total reach (7,887 organic, 198 paid), 129 reactions (likes/comments/shares)
      - Ad stats: 4,151 total reach, 746 engagements
    - Hat (9/12-9/15)
      - Winner: Susan Owen Yoder, Martinsville, IN
      - Post stats: 2,341 total reach (2,066 organic, 302 paid), 119 reactions (likes/comments/shares)
      - Ad stats: 3,601 total reach, 765 engagements
    - Coffee mug (9/19-9/22)\*
      - Winner: Susan Chamberlain, Kingston, IL
      - Post stats: 4,315 people reached, 441 post engagements
      - Ad stats: 2,522 people reached, 385 post engagements
    - Long-sleeved T-shirt (9/26-9/29)
      - Winner: Alissa Lane Stallion, McKenzie, TN
      - Post stats: 4,315 people reached (1,430 organic, 2,912 paid), 472 post engagements
      - Ad stats: 2,522 people reached, 385 post engagements
  - Instagram giveaways\*\*
    - T-shirt #1 (9/12-9/15)
      - Winner: Marcy Oerly, California, MO
      - Post stats: 3,636 total reach, 86 engagements

- Ad stats: 3,078 total reach, 87 link clicks, 139 post engagements
- T-shirt #2 (9/26-9/29)
  - Winner: Deborah Boles, St. Charles, MO
  - Post stats: 4,291 total reach, 57 post engagements
  - Ad stats: 3,869 total reach, 94 link clicks

\*detailed stats for this post were unavailable on Facebook

\*\*Instagram ads have different goals than Facebook ads, hence the different stats

Note: Facebook spam (comments on posts that were mimicking our giveaways, linking to spam sites, and in some cases posing as the Great River Road online store) increased significantly when we ran these weekly giveaways on the Great River Road page. This resulted in many comments after the first couple of giveaways asking if this was spam/citing our page as a spam account/etc. (We message those people who commented to reassure them that we were indeed a valid page/account.) This spam continues to show up on our page today, though it's more of the spam link variety than the fake contest or fake Great River Road online store variety. Running this many Facebook giveaways (one a week) during the month may have opened us up to these spammers; in the future we may want to cut back on the number of social media giveaways to 1-2 during the month instead of the seven that we ran (though Instagram did not see an influx of spammers, to be fair).

## TACTIC: 2023 Annual Meeting

### Takeaways

- Prepared agendas, handouts, packets, name tags, materials, slides
- Communicated with speakers
- Ordered and prepared awards/recognition, supplies, coordinated shipping
- Processed registrations, invoices, receipts
- Followed up with individuals who did not register
- Coordination with hotel staff on meal and room logistics
- Annual Meeting held Sept 20-22

## TACTIC: Fulfillment

### Fulfillment

**3349**

## TACTIC: Meetings

- 7/17 - Met with Pilot
- 7/18 - Culture and Heritage committee
- 7/28 - Transportation committee
- 8/1 - Met with IL-MRPC
- 8/4 - Met with IL-MRPC
- 8/15 - Annual Meeting planning meeting
- 9/20 - 9/22 Annual Meeting

## ADDITIONAL

### Content Calendar

- Created Q4 content calendar detailing social media posts, e-news topics, ad budgets and goals.

### Miscellaneous

- Transfer stripe & paypal funds to bank account
- Reconciled financials
- Completed state's requests for additional paperwork to process state dues
- Coordinated state's map needs
- Updated Interpretive Center signage needs form into a PDF in addition to the already posted online form
- Created presentation for Pilot to use while attending TN commission meeting
- Communicated with former MRT board member and MRPC technical member, Ruth Hawkins, regarding MRT history
- Processed prizes for promotion winners