

CASE STUDY #4: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Strategic Communications & Integrated Marketing for a National Culinary-Travel Partnership

Executive Summary:

Strategic Communications & Integrated Marketing for a National Culinary-Travel Partnership

A global cruise line entered a multi-year, multimillion-dollar partnership with the James Beard Foundation (JBF) to elevate its culinary reputation and strengthen brand differentiation within the competitive premium travel market. Early analysis revealed that although the partnership held tremendous strategic value, the organization lacked an integrated communications and marketing framework needed to activate it effectively. Without a coordinated approach, the initiative risked becoming a limited PR effort rather than a meaningful revenue driver and enterprise-wide growth engine.

To unlock full value, the strategic communications and partner relations team repositioned the collaboration as a holistic, cross-functional marketing platform. A key milestone was negotiating an elevated sponsorship tier that delivered top-tier advertising visibility and exclusive access to the James Beard Awards—the nation’s premier culinary awards show and annual gala in Chicago. The negotiation also secured privileged engagement with celebrity chefs and emerging culinary talent, enabling high-impact experiential marketing, content creation, and premium customer activations.

The enhanced contract expanded lead-generation access to high-value culinary audiences across 15+ major U.S. markets through the James Beard Taste of America celebrity-chef event series. With this foundation in place, the team aligned Sales, Consumer & Insider Engagement, Marketing, and onboard operations around a unified narrative and shared objectives. Communications leadership developed the overarching story, ensured message consistency across all channels, and guided cross-functional teams through integrated campaign planning, creative execution, event communications, talent engagements, and co-branded storytelling.

National activation efforts culminated in a high-visibility launch at the James Beard Awards, followed by 15+ culinary events nationwide that leveraged chef talent and JBF equity to engage luxury travelers, top travel advisors, and industry partners. The integrated strategy generated 80,000 new customer emails in its first year, sold out culinary-themed voyages, and surpassed revenue targets by 10–15%.

This program became a flagship example of how strategic communications, disciplined partner stewardship, and integrated marketing can transform a marquee cultural partnership into a brand-defining commercial success.

Executive Presentation:

Strategic Communications & Integrated Marketing for a National Culinary-Travel Partnership

Project Context – Integrated Communications & Partnership Marketing

- Multi-year, multimillion-dollar national partnership with the James Beard Foundation to elevate culinary positioning
- High strategic potential but initially limited by lack of integrated communications and marketing alignment
- Risk of the partnership becoming a narrow PR effort rather than a scalable, revenue-generating brand platform

Key Strategic Moves

- Reframed partnership as an enterprise-wide marketing and brand-building initiative
- Negotiated elevated sponsorship tier with premium national advertising visibility
- Secured exclusive access to the James Beard Awards and top culinary talent
- Activated lead-generation access across 15+ major U.S. markets via JBF Taste of America events
- Unified Sales, C&E, Marketing, and onboard operations around a cohesive narrative and shared objectives

Integrated Marketing Execution

- Developed consistent internal and external messaging to maximize partnership equity
- Launched multi-channel campaigns: creative, content, events, talent activations, co-branded storytelling
- Established cross-functional communication rhythms and activation roadmaps for seamless delivery
- Executed 15+ high-profile chef-driven events nationwide to engage luxury travel audiences and trade partners

Outcomes & Impact

- Captured 80,000 new customer emails in Year 1
- Sold out culinary-themed and repositioning voyages
- Surpassed revenue targets by 10–15%
- Strengthened brand differentiation in the luxury travel segment
- Established the program as a flagship model for ROI-driven cultural partnerships

Key Outcomes & Metrics

- Negotiated elevated sponsorship tier with premium advertising visibility and exclusive access to the annual James Beard Awards & Gala and national JBF Taste of America culinary events
- Secured celebrity-chef and rising-talent access, expanding experiential and content-marketing
- Unlocked lead-generation access to high-value culinary consumers across **15+ major U.S. markets** through the JBF Taste of America event series
- Delivered **15+ high-profile national culinary events** activating the partnership across key luxury travel markets
- Generated **80,000 new customer emails** in the first year
- Drove demand that **sold out culinary-themed and repositioning voyages**
- Surpassed annual revenue targets by **10–15%**
- Established a flagship program that strengthened brand differentiation in the luxury travel segment

Business Use Case:

Strategic Communications & Integrated Marketing for a National Culinary-Travel Partnership

A global cruise line secured a multi-year, multimillion-dollar partnership with the James Beard Foundation (JBF) to elevate its culinary positioning and strengthen brand differentiation in a competitive premium travel market. Early assessments revealed that while the partnership offered substantial strategic potential, the organization lacked an integrated communications and marketing approach to fully capitalize on it. Without a cohesive plan, the initiative risked being underutilized as a limited PR play rather than functioning as a powerful, revenue-generating brand platform and holistic business growth engine.

To maximize impact, the strategic communications and partner relations team reframed the initiative as an integrated, enterprise-wide marketing opportunity. A cornerstone of this effort was assessing potential and negotiating an elevated sponsor tier that secured premium advertising visibility and exclusive access to the James Beard Awards—the Oscars of the culinary world—an annual, nationally televised awards show and gala in Chicago each May celebrating the best and brightest in food, drink, and hospitality. This negotiation delivered not only top-tier media placement but also privileged access to celebrity chefs and rising culinary stars, creating high-impact marketing and experiential opportunities for the brand.

The enhanced partnership contract also unlocked lead-generation access to high-value culinary audiences across 15+ major U.S. markets through the James Beard Taste of America celebrity-chef event series.

With this enhanced sponsorship foundation in place, the team drove internal alignment across Sales, Consumer & Insider Engagement, Marketing, and onboard operations—functions that needed a cohesive narrative and unified objectives to leverage the James Beard name and



notoriety and collaboration at scale. Our Communications Strategist crafted the overarching story, shaped internal and external messaging, and ensured that the James Beard partnership was understood and applied consistently across all customers- and trade-facing channels. The integrated marketing team activated multi-channel campaigns including creative development, content production, event communications, talent engagements, and co-branded storytelling. Cross-functional communication rhythms and activation roadmaps enabled clarity of roles, seamless execution, and effective partner stewardship.

Nationwide partnership activation efforts culminated in a national launch at the James Beard Awards and featured 15+ high-profile culinary events leveraging chef talent and James Beard visibility to engage top luxury travel consumers, travel advisors, agency leaders, and premium consortium partners. The integrated strategy ultimately generated 80,000 new customer emails in its first year, selling out culinary-themed voyages, and surpassing revenue targets by 10–15%.

The comprehensive partnership program became a flagship for the cruise line, raising the culinary bar for other luxury travel competitors and providing an ROI-centric example of how strong strategic communications, sophisticated partner management, and fully integrated marketing execution can transform a marquee cultural partnership into a brand-defining commercial success.

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