

# Thornton W. Burgess Society

Client Visit: Summary & Analysis

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### **Client Background**

The Thornton W. Burgess Society, a non-profit educational organization that operates three facilities on Cape Cod, has a long and storied history, which has its roots firmly entrenched in family, a love of the environment and its conservation and tradition. The organization was founded in Sandwich, MA in 1976 to carry on the revolutionary work of author/naturalist Thornton W. Burgess and has since evolved and branched out into myriad special programs and offerings – all infused with the ethos that educating people, and especially children, about the environment is most important, as children are the future caretakers of the earth.

An important part of the society's 30-year plus history that must be taken into account is the 171 children's books and approximately 15,000 newspaper columns (short stories) that Burgess wrote throughout his life. Something that intimately helps to represent the dedicated nature of the organization, as both an environmental champion and as an educational venue for family, is the story of how these children's books and stories came to be. After Burgess' wife died in labor he was then left to care for his son alone. One of Burgess' and his son's favorite activities to do together was to have Burgess read bedtime stories to the boy. After going through all the Beatrice Potter books and many others, Burgess, now working in Boston, would write his own short stories and send them home to his son in Chicago. Burgess, who grew up in small town Sandwich MA became increasingly interested in the perils that animals face in their natural habitats.

He built up his knowledge of environmental issues and would therefore put various animals in his son's stories as the main characters. This is the birth of Burgess the author, environmental pioneer and conservationist.

The Burgess Society operates three facilities on Cape Cod: The Green Briar Nature Center, the Thornton W. Burgess Museum and the East Sandwich Game Farm. The Nature Center is one of the most popular facilities as it contains the Gift Shop, the Jam Kitchen and educational facilities. The organization has many programs and classes for children and families as well as for the "Green" community at large; they are active in Cape Cod school districts (e.g. Project Life) and they also offer such natural environments to visit and share with family as the Wildflower Garden, the Game Farm and nature trails. Memberships are a large part of the organizations' business as well.

Importantly, the organization is a strong and vital part of Sandwich's' history and local DNA because of many different reasons that will become important to stress in this campaign. But one salient tie that is imbued in its nature is that the society itself came to be when Sandwich was looking for "Leading Sons" in 1974 and soon unveiled an exhibit and a celebration for the 100-year anniversary of Burgess' birth – naming him a 'Leading Son' of Sandwich, MA.

### **Client Needs**

After meeting with our clients; Connie Tarvis, the society's Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Gene Schott, a military historian and the society's Executive Director and Irina Macphee, trustee and Marketing Committee member, the class examined their marketing/PR needs, strengths and weaknesses of their organization, as well as the opportunities that marketers can address to the organization's advantage. First and

foremost, the society's strengths include a long history of altruistic activities and programs geared toward Sandwich and the surrounding counties. It has roots in the community. For over 30 years the Burgess Society has been educating children about the natural world (e.g., with books, summer programs), supplying natural foods (jams), supporting and offering a quiet place to experience nature (e.g. Migratory Bird Acts, bird sanctuaries), and all this before the current "Green" craze and natural way-of-living became in vogue. Our clients are intrinsically trendsetters and this fact especially must be promoted and utilized in our campaign. The society is also one of a kind on Cape Cod. This fact will help in positioning.

Unfortunately, the Burgess Society also has some weaknesses that are indeed inhibiting them from accomplishing its noble organizational and business objectives. First, it needs to improve and update its well-worn and in some cases, inaccessible grounds and make it into a full-fledged, streamlined, recreational venue, and then of course, to advertise this to the targeted demographics (naturalists). Also, as all non-profits in these daunting economic and pervasively mediated times, the Burgess Society needs to increase its revenue and visibility and amplify its positioning. In terms of increasing revenue, and even awareness, Connie Tarvis was adamant about finding ways in which to find and then appeal to a more "well-healed" crowd. The clients mentioned that most of their memberships and subsequent donations come from local, less well-off citizens of Sandwich and people that already know of the society. This is a weakness. Therefore, they need to increase awareness of the organization so wealthier individuals, families and philanthropists who are currently unaware of the society will take notice, create word-of-mouth and ultimately, donate money.

The clients also mentioned that in terms of marketing/PR, they are having difficulty in determining which of the three facilities and offerings they have, to then go ahead and feature. This problem is tied into the fact that the 27 member board of trustees is filled with passionate and protective volunteers who are deeply invested in different aspects of the Burgess Society, and “where can we make the most money” is a counterpoint to keeping the small, homey feel of the Burgess Society. Gene said “The Burgess Society means many different things to many different people,” which illustrates this problem. Another weakness is related to the fact that, although its Jam is quite popular, and produces revenue for the society, and the tools and the materials on hand are representative of the society’s home-grown nature, not enough product is produced to make a solid profit.

In terms of marketing/PR and the Burgess Society there are also opportunities, such as a traveling book tour, that can be addressed and that will aid in accomplishing its business objectives.

### **Analysis**

Based on our client’s visit and specifically listening to their needs and vision for the near future, as well as taking into account the internal political and external economic environments. Their needs include a researched, fresh and defined, marketing plan, that they can take and implement now and in the future to get the society noticed in the right circles and in the desired direction (i.e. “further down the Cape”). This also includes information and tactics “that will make the institution better,” as Gene said. These two suggestions are related and will combine to help increase visibility and revenue.

Next, because they want to be seen as “the place to go” for environmental and educational information on the Cape, the organization needs to both be able to increase its visibility and positioning through advertising, PR and social media, so they do spring up in people’s minds who are thinking about “Going Green,” and they also need to increase their revenue so as to expand and improve their programs, offerings and facilities to be on the cutting edge and provide people with the answers they are looking for once the Burgess Society *is* on their radar. It’s a self-reinforcing circle and strategy.

Finally, the organization needs innovative but practical ways to increase the sales of their popular jams and children’s books but also to keep the small, homemade feeling of the products and the organization itself.

### **Recommended Goals/Objectives**

Three, specific and measurable objectives for this campaign that will address our clients’ main issues and in turn, help to accomplish their business objectives are as follows. The first objective is to, through advertising/PR, increase the overall web traffic to the Burgess Society’s website by 40 % and specifically increase the number of people who subscribe to its Email Newsletters by 20 %. Next, increase the endowment from \$340,000 to \$380,000 in one fiscal year. Also, related to this objective is to increase memberships/donations from new demographics and new people who have never been members, specifically the wealthier cliental. Perhaps with a goal of 400 new memberships in 6 months, making the total 20,000 members in 6 months. Once this occurs the money will be there to begin to revamp and/or expand the educational programs in the school districts and in-house classes, which will aid in increasing

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awareness and authority. The third objective is to increase the production of the retail product (jam).

### **Next Steps**

The next steps for the class (campaign) to take to help accomplish these objectives are to research and analyze the non-profit educational organization market and the target demographic (wealthier cliental) mentioned in this analysis and by our clients. The class must find the activities and the messages that speak to the target market on a day-to day basis and discover what other successful organizations in this space have done that may have worked. Then, the class should create an advertising/PR campaign with these findings in mind. Next, the class should audit the website to see if improvements can be made, such as in ease of use and in providing relevant, fresh “Green” content. Next, we should research how to grow a retail product, especially taking into account our client’s special needs/concerns, and then, after discussing with the organization, begin to implement our findings and choose a concrete (but adaptable if necessary) direction to follow.