

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — With public sentiment shifting into ready-to-travel mode, the partnership behind [Count On Me NC](#) reports that the statewide public health initiative and [companion safety campaign](#) have measured up to their promise of helping businesses operate safely and encouraging customers to do their part to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Data show success across a spectrum of goals, from the number of businesses that completed Count On Me NC training in best safety practices to public awareness of the principles at the heart of the campaign, said Wit Tuttell, director of [Visit North Carolina](#). The initiative was spearheaded by the [N.C. Restaurant & Lodging Association](#) with participation from Visit NC, [N.C. State Extension](#) and the [N.C. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

“Thousands of restaurants, hotels and other businesses from all 100 North Carolina counties took advantage of the free online training,” Tuttell said. “People checked the Count On Me NC website nearly half a million times to identify participating attractions and businesses. Our animated commercial about the importance of masks, social distancing and frequent hand-washing proved effective in reaching millions of state residents and prospective travelers from nearby states. As we return to our mission of inspiring travelers to explore North Carolina, we have confidence in the ongoing value of Count On Me NC.”

Launched in spring 2020, [Count On Me NC](#) centers on evidence-based training that provides signage and other display items to businesses that complete the course. Consumers can recognize the commitment to safety whenever they see the sea-green logo, and they’re also called to do their part to curb the spread of COVID-19 by wearing masks, waiting 6 feet apart and washing their hands frequently.

As of March 1, 65,336 people from North Carolina businesses had completed safety training sessions created by N.C. State Extension. Nearly 4,000 unique participating businesses added their information to the [searchable database](#) at Count On Me NC website and its [Spanish-language counterpart](#). Visits to the website reached 479,932.

In addition to connecting safety-conscious consumers and businesses, Count On Me NC targeted North Carolina residents and prospective travelers from contiguous states in a public safety campaign that used a light-handed touch to remind people about responsible behavior in the face of COVID-19. The campaign included public service announcements and other visual assets featuring an animated character named Sunny who’s chased by a coronavirus-type bug until the message is heeded.

“Sunny was the perfect ambassador at a time when the public was weary of all the heavy pandemic news,” Tuttell said. “People responded to the character and the finger-snapping jingle they heard on TV, on the radio, online, and in such unexpected places as the gas pump and restaurant bathrooms.”

Over the course of the campaign, Visit NC tracked Count On Me NC awareness and public behavior. Tuttell noted that as more people heard the message, mask wearing rose from about 60 percent to nearly 80 percent of state residents reporting a commitment to wearing masks whenever they left home.

“Regardless of other factors that might have contributed to that commitment, the message from Count On Me NC was part of an important conversation,” Tuttell said.

Other measurements of success:

- The campaign generated 1.5 billion in earned impressions on social media.
- Paid media impressions totaled 284,575,344 from audio, digital/mobile, YouTube, print, Connected TV, broadcast TV/cable, YouTube and digital Out of Home placements.
- One in four North Carolina residents was aware of the campaign.
- Awareness among residents 18 to 34 years old reached 40 percent, a statistic Tuttell deems significant because the age group is viewed as critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19.

“Count on Me NC is a great example of a public-private partnership that helped reinforce the three W’s,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. “The campaign helped build awareness in the tourism and hospitality industry that people could take action to stop the spread of COVID-19. We want to continue to strengthen our economy while keeping people safe, and it is on all of us to make that happen.”

Tuttell sees the campaign’s lasting value as people show greater readiness to travel. A recent study by MMGY Global indicates that more than 60 percent of North Carolina residents plan to travel by car to in-state destinations within the next three months. Even with more people being vaccinated against COVID-19, Dr. Cohen and other health officials say masking, social distancing and other behaviors remain important to controlling the virus.

“Safety is at the heart of [Drive-Thru Vacations](#), our response to the urge to hit the road,” Tuttell said. “This new campaign highlights places to experience from the car and directs travelers to attractions and businesses with Count On Me NC certification. As long as COVID-19 remains a threat, ‘travel safely’ will be our mantra.”

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