

Developing a tourism marketing plan in a changing world

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Anyone who even briefly watches the news cannot help but be aware that the world is changing rapidly, and the tourism and travel industry continues to face numerous challenges. From hostilities in the Middle East to the up and down cost of fuel, from tsunamis in Asia to crime waves and kidnappings in Latin America, tourism officials often find themselves "hostages" of current events.



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Tourism, and its travel and hospitality-related industries, often base their business designs on market share, product improvement, and other non-customer-centric designs. As tourism becomes an ever more competitive industry, general managers and tourism executives are facing the need to develop new and innovative marketing strategies.

These strategies make the customers' needs the centre of tourism marketing. For example, a mere ten years ago, few tourism marketers saw the issue of travel security as an integral part of their marketing plans. In today's world visitors worry about how safe they are and may factor in security in their decision to choose or reject a specific location. Societal changes in the family, use of personal free time, and new travel tastes mean that a different set of marketing questions must be continually asked if new areas for profit are to be sought.

Present travel trends would dictate that customer-oriented and customer-centric service go a long way in determining successful marketing efforts. These changes are creating shifts in the tourism professional's mindsets. Included in these changes are: customers' priorities taking precedence over product, management spending more time with guests, and the need to move from a purely quantitative analysis to a combination of qualitative and quantitative.

Here are several tourism marketing ideas and points to consider:

Do not fight yesterday's competition. Travel and tourism have undergone major shifts in the last ten years, yet often tourism professionals are still fighting old wars. For example, your competition of ten years ago may have been a community that lies a short distance from yours. Due to airline pricing and competition and the rise of travel phenomena

such as cruises aimed at specific market segmentation a community's competition may be not the next town, but any place in the world. It is wise to think about how former competitors may become future allies.

Determine if current customers are the same as those of yesterday. The world has gone through a number of major sociological shifts in the last decade. For example, business hotels now must deal with the fact that single-parent business people often need to travel with their small children or the fact that there is a growing number of single fathers who are the primary caregivers. In that case, the "child" is as much the "customer" as is the parent. In a like manner, time is often now more valuable than money. The shift from "monetary deprivation" to "time deprivation" means that in many prime tourism attractions customers may no longer bulk at spending more money to avoid long lines or other time-oriented stress-producers, such as downtime at airports.

Analyse your customers by segmenting them into as many groups as possible. Niche marketing has always been a tourism buzzword, but tourism has never known as many 'niches' as it does now. Analyse your customer base from not only the traditional social-statistical categories of: age, gender, and income, but also by looking at behaviour models, forms of travel, spending patterns, amounts of time that can be allotted to vacations, and psycho-demographic profiles. Then try to determine what you have to offer, and which customers will pay a priority price. For example, many parts of the tourism industry forget that issues of safety are critical. A decision concerning the amount and quality of the security that a hotel or attraction provides must be seen as an integral part of a marketing plan.

Analyse not only the groups may purchase your product, but also which groups may not be interested in what you are selling. By understanding and segmenting your "non-customers" you can determine into which markets your business has its best chance for expansion, and which markets need to be forgotten for the moment. Ask yourself what are your non-customers' travel priorities.

Consider in your list such qualities as:

- Issues of safety
- Value and price
- Quality of service
- Time it takes to deliver your service
- Amount of hassle involved in visit
- Stress levels
- Your product's prestige level
- Shopping opportunities

Then determine how your non-customers rank these priorities. How does what you have to offer differ from what these non-customers want? Can you make cost-effective modifications that will permit penetration into these new groups without losing your current customers?

Try to determine and then rank what it is that your customers seek. For example, are your customers seeking price

over quality-of-product or quality over price? How important is time and speed of delivery-of-service? People's priorities are very different in an amusement park, a sports centre, and a spa. Determine what you can do to become the first choice of the segment that you seek to attract. Ask yourself what your competitors do better than you, then determine if it is cost-effective to compete in that category.

Determine what are the components in your business where you can make the greatest profit. For example, food is often sold at attractions, airports, and hotel vending machines for a higher price than it is sold at an in-town supermarket. Analyse these secondary parts of your industry to determine where additional profit can be earned. For example, older travellers will often value service while younger travellers often seek economical prices over good service.

Never forget that when we travel for pleasure we seek memories, not nightmares. Too often tourism-related businesses create stress rather than relieve it. For example, a guest arrives late and his hotel room is still not ready. Any good marketing plan should include an overall assessment of your customer service. Determine your customer services weaknesses (rudeness, poor information, lack of bad weather activities) and fix them before you move onto the next stage of developing a marketing plan.

Find new markets. The days of marketing to the citizens of only one nation are coming to an end. Make your tourism business fit into the international world of travel. Develop multi-lingual services, information brochures, and advertising. Set your hours of operation to the needs of the international traveller. Never translate literally and avoid translation software. Often major faux pas are committed by a literal translation.

Read [the original article](#) on eTurboNews.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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