

3.13 Communicating with your customers

Advertising and promotion

Tourism marketing consists of market research, product and market development, establishing a distribution channel, pricing your product and communicating with your customers and potential customers. This last component, communications, is traditionally viewed as *Promotion*, one of the 4 Ps in the marketing mix. It is the area of marketing which most tourism businesses deal with on a day-to-day basis. It is normally the item that appears as *Advertising and Promotion* on a business' Income Statement – or as *Marketing Activities* in your marketing plan.

Know your target market

Marketing activities are aimed at telling your target market about your product. The only way to do this effectively is to have a clear picture of who your target market is. You have to know their habits and pastimes, what magazines they are likely to read, what radio stations they listen to and whether or not they are likely to research your product on the Internet. You have to determine if they are likely to make a decision to purchase your product before they leave home or after they arrive in the Yukon – and do your selling accordingly.

When, where and why

You must know when and where your customers make the decision to buy your type of product and what the *influences* are which help them decide. Children can be a major influence when buying decisions are made. If your target market includes families who are likely to travel with children, you may want to consider communication outlets which reach children as well as adults.

Setting objectives

Many business owners are tempted to skip directly to developing promotional materials without first setting their marketing objectives. This could be as fatal to the success of your business as proceeding without first defining your target market. Setting objectives provides you with direction and focus and helps you measure the success of your activities.

Develop an image

The first step in developing any promotional materials is to consider the theme or image you want to project. This image should reflect the ways you have positioned your product or business. This image should begin with your logo and be applied to all your business collateral – letterhead, invoices, business cards, signage, etc. This is one area in which you can get invaluable help from a professional advertising or design agency. The costs can be relatively high, but remember that a logo or *look* that accurately projects your business will work for you every time it is seen by a potential customer, selling the *idea* of your business even before the details are reviewed.

Making an impression

The impression your communication makes on the potential customer is as important as the details of the product you are offering. For instance, it has been shown in many tourism surveys that one principal customer concern is safety and security. Your communications can convey this important impression in a subtle way by using images which your target market will associate with safety and security. Professionalism is generally associated with safety and security, so including logos of any certification organizations with which you are affiliated will promote the idea of both professionalism and safety. Sometimes messages will be received by your potential customers in an emotional rather than intellectual way. The impression that your business, for example, is built on a long tradition and cultural practice in your own family or community, may help people relate to your product in a positive, emotional way.

Advertising budgets

Your budget for advertising and promotion will likely be related to the sales volume of your business. It would be common for a tourism business to have an advertising budget of approximately 2–3% of gross sales. So, for a business with sales of \$90,000, the annual advertising budget amount would be \$1,800–\$2,700. The fact is you do not get a lot of advertising and promotion for this scale of budget. It is essential that these limited advertising dollars reach the intended target market in order to maximize the chance of selling your product.

Stretching your budget

Cooperative advertising can often stretch your budget. By spreading the cost of advertising among several businesses, the cost per business tends to drop. Cooperative advertising is sometimes organized by government agencies; for instance, advertising at foreign trade shows. Industry Associations may offer cooperative advertising as a service to its members.

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Your promotional tools

The promotional tools you will use in your communications include direct sales, brochures and other promotional literature, Internet presence, signage, print media (newspaper and magazine advertising, directories) trade shows, television/radio and publicity.

We will briefly examine four of the most important of these.

Direct sales

These can be made by mail, phone, fax, Internet or in person. Stay focused on your most important target segment. Ensure that you're using qualified phone or mailing lists, based on your own customer tracking or on a meaningful characteristic of your target group. If the list is too large for a complete mailing, do a random mailing of 10%, or some other significant number. If you get a response rate greater than 7%, then increase your mailing. Direct sales are especially important when you are selling *directly* to tour operators or agents. These travel trade distribution channels should always be followed up with a phone call or personal visit.

Brochures and lure pieces

When writing and designing these, it is important to remember your themes and your audience. Try to develop copy that sells to a *feeling*. People want to read about the personal benefits they will receive, not just a list of features. When you give information, make sure it is accurate and real. A design firm or ad agency can be of great help here. Remember, if you are trying to appeal to an up-scale market, then your brochure must look that way too. If it has a *home-made* look, then it will deliver that same message about your business before anyone even reads a word.

Internet

This is the most popular way for consumers to research their travel plans and in many cases purchase their travel packages online. A considerable cost with having a website is the first time development cost. On-going maintenance costs and having your site carried by a server(s) are moderate costs in comparison. The keys to developing and designing your website are to make it easy to access, easy to upload, easy to navigate, have plenty of information for your visitors to make their decision, and ensure it is kept up to date. Check with Internet providers and agencies offering website development and maintenance in your area for more information.

Print media

Although the web has significantly surpassed print as a way to research travel, print is still a method of providing information that appeals to many. It is generally cost-effective, but requires proper timing, messaging and design. Timing is critical. You often need to be a season ahead with your communications plans. This will allow you to choose between all of the available media. *The Milepost* magazine, for example, requires ads to be submitted almost a year before publication. Local newspapers require only a few days advance submission of advertising materials.

Legal considerations

In your communications, there are legal requirements you must meet, designed to protect consumers from false or misleading advertising. Be certain that you can deliver what you promise in your ads. If there is some uncertainty, avoid specific details about products which you may not be able to deliver. You should also be aware of European and North American Consumer Protection legislation in regards to buying and selling travel products and packages.

Follow up

Be sure to check up on the effectiveness of your advertising. If possible, include some device in your ad that will tell you that people discovered your product through that particular communication. For example, a printed ad which includes a coupon for 10% off will give you an idea of the response rate from your ad. Monitoring your advertising performance and making adjustments will help ensure that you get the best value for your advertising dollar.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The 21 Most Powerful Copywriting Rules of All Time

J. Vitale, www.mrfire.com

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Dr. Jeffrey Lant, 1989, JLA Publications

Type & Layout—Are you communicating...

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S. Daffron and J. Byrd, 2006, Logical Expressions