

Rules for Successful Tourism Marketing

Summary of Presentation by Roger Brooks*

Tourism is an important economic activity because it brings in dollars from outside the community. It continues to be a fast growing sector and is typically included among the top three industries in the country. In addition, tourism provides a "front-door" to non-tourism economic development efforts such as business recruitment.

Roger Brooks, a nationally recognized expert in tourism development spoke about rules for success at the 2004 Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism in Green Bay. Many of his rules apply to the tourism marketing efforts of small city downtowns and business districts. Presented below is a summary of his keynote address titled *15 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism*.

1. Success Begins With a Good Plan

Creating a Tourism Development & Marketing Plan is the first rule for successful tourism. The plan should include several details like product development, upgrades and improvements, repositioning and/or branding, attractions and events, visitor amenities and services, marketing and public relations, public/private partnerships, recruitment, funding and budgets, and organizational responsibilities. The plan should integrate existing comprehensive plans and economic development and Main Street efforts.

2. Importance of Front-line Sales

Your front-line employees can be your most valuable sales team. This is because they establish the first contact with the customer. The front-line employees should be knowledgeable about your community and should promote other stores, attractions and amenities to visitors to keep them in the area longer.

3. Critical Mass

In order to attract and keep visitors in your community, there must be several retail and dining establishments within walking distance. Shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is one of the top activities for visitors.

An average rule of thumb for rural communities is to have nine retail stores and four dining/treats establishments within two or three blocks.

4. Turn Negatives Into Positives

Almost every community and attraction has its challenges. Think creatively on how to convert these negatives into positives. You can then attract people to your area using clever promotional tactics. For example, when an article in the Washington Post labeled Battle Mountain, Nevada the "Armpit of America", the town took a positive spin on that title by having an annual event sponsored by Old Spice drawing thousands of visitors.

5. Be Unique

In order to be successful, you must be worth the trip. A visitor must be able to differentiate you from the competition and you must strive to be creative and set yourself apart from others. Being unique will make a visitor travel the extra distance.

6. Telling Stories

Museums and interpretive centers should always tell stories, not just display artifacts. Stories can keep visitors in the area longer, which means additional spending. Visitors also remember stories, and captivating stories are told and passed on to others. More people pick destinations by word of mouth than any other method.



7. Four-Times Rule

People are willing to travel a distance if you offer something that appeals to them. There should be enough for visitors to see and do in your area. In general, you should be able to keep visitors busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

8. Marketing vs. Product Development

Before you market your community, make sure it is appealing to customers. If your product is not of great quality, then your marketing efforts are wasted. Product development should always be a top priority, and it never ends. Having a good mix of product development and marketing is also important.

9. Selling the Experience

Always sell the experience associated with an activity and not the place. If you are using pictures in your marketing campaign, avoid using scenic images. Scenery lasts in the mind for only a few moments. Instead, use images of people laughing and having fun. Viewers are more likely to remember images that include people's emotions.

10. Branding

Even at the community level, branding is critical for success in tourism. Branding is much more than just a logo; it is what sets you apart from your competition, it is your image and your value. Do not try to be "all things to all people."

11. WOW Photography

Nothing sells tourism like great photography. Photographs used for tourism purposes should have a "wow" appeal in the viewer and should make the viewer want to go to the place depicted. As mentioned earlier, you are trying to sell an experience and your photos should evoke emotion in the viewer. Photography should be the key element in brochures, public relation efforts, and especially on the web.

12. Close the Sale

Most communities and attractions spend a significant amount of money on advertising. The primary "call to action" in advertising is to get the potential customer to call and get a brochure, or for them to visit your web site. If this is the case, the brochure and web site should be good enough to close the sale. Otherwise, your advertising effort is largely wasted.

Pay attention to certain small details while advertising. For example, for brochures, the best colors to use are red and yellow as these colors get the viewers attention. In addition, most brochures end up in racks along with scores of other brochures and the top three inches is all that is visible to the potential customer. Keep this in mind when designing brochures.

13. Public Relations

Even though you need both, publicity is much more important than advertising. Implementing a professional public relations campaign can have several benefits: it will build brand, improve your image, increase credibility and will provide a greater return on investment than advertising alone. Public relation is how you build your brand and advertising is how you maintain your position. Studies show that for every \$1 invested into a public relations campaign, you get a \$3 return.

14. Effective Web Sites

According to a Nielsen/Netratings study, nearly 75% of the U.S. population has access to the Internet from home. In addition, 94% of Internet users make travel arrangements using the Web. The Internet is by far the number one resource for planning travel and vacations.

If you have a tourism related web site, can your potential customers find you easily on the Web? How does your web site compare with the competition? Make the online experience interactive for the customer and remember to promote attractions, not just the place or your organization. Several thousands of dollars spent on web site development and maintenance is not a waste of money. You can even make sure your web site is displayed at the top of a Web search by paying a fee.

15. Frequency in Advertising

Frequency is more important than variety in placing advertising. People viewing your advertisement should develop Top of Mind Awareness (TOMA). For example, when the words "fast food" are mentioned, most people think of McDonalds because they make a good use of frequency in advertising.

Source: Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism. March 14-16th, Green Bay, Wisconsin. Presentation based on book, *The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism*, written by Roger Brooks and Dr. Maury Forman.

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