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"WELCOME TO" TAPES

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ABSTRACT

Tape cassette programs offer a means for travellers to conveniently discover highlights of an area on route or sufficiently prior to visiting a new place. College and university experts can prepare creditable content for such programs including items of interest such as demographics, language variations, music, cuisine, and notable historical sites. Such programs could enhance the travellers' general knowledge of new areas and guide individuals to discover qualities they might otherwise miss. Possible topics for these "welcome to" tapes are included with full recognition that the programs would vary from one area to another on unique features.

"WELCOME TO" TAPES

INTRODUCTION

Adult educator, Allen Tough, is often singled out as a researcher who has spent much of his professional career examining the learning adults do on their own, that is, learning independent of formal educational programs.(1) He and others in the field call this type of learning "self-directed." One way he illustrates his concept is by the type of "study" many people do as preparation for a trip.

Our most recent family vacation may serve as an example of potential self-directed learning going untaught, as many travellers' questions arose in the car trip about the area in which we were staying. These questions became much more specific the closer we got to our destination, in this case, Gulf Shores, Alabama. "What is growing in that field? There certainly are a lot of fields of that around here."...What do you suppose most of the people around here do for a living?" "How many of these people actually live here year round?" "Where do you suppose the natives go to buy fresh shrimp?" The point of this is, we, as a family, were ready to be self-directed learners. We had many questions we wanted

answered, but we would guess that most travellers do little or limited study preparation for their treks and holidays.

Information that we seek is scattered, and we often lack sufficient time to read and review what we might be able to locate in a library or from the local historical societies or Chambers of Commerce. Before our trip to Gulf Shores, we did talk to a few friends who had travelled to the same destination. The information they provided was typically elementary, simply assuring us that accommodations would be pleasant, the landscapes beautiful, and our general health, safety and welfare protected. The few brochures we received from the condominium management were commercial and brief. Their contents assured us we could conveniently meet our daily needs, but our knowledge of the community and the general area was not expanded. That is, brochures served a limited informational, but not educative purpose.

NATIVE SHORTCOMINGS

The lack of a limited accessibility to accurate data and information about the more frequently travelled parts of our country is rather astounding. Chambers of Commerce and Welcome Centers in many communities do a fine job distributing maps and supplying knowledge travellers seek, but the people who write in advance of their trips or actually visit these establishments represent only a small fraction of all visitors. Occasionally people rely on the so-called "natives" to answer questions on the spot. There are many shortcomings to this approach. First, "natives" often do not know the history of their communities, or the information they have has certain limitations. Further, we have found that lots of people employed in resort and tourist communities are not native to the area, and therefore, not very helpful.*

The opportunities for educational and commercial communities to cooperate in addressing the traveller's desire for information are exciting and needed. Adult educators, especially, should be intrigued with the problem, because it suggests an opportunity to bring the interdisciplinary resources of their institutions together with business and industry to mutually create an immediately useful educational program.

TAPE CASSETTES

What would be an effective and efficient format for such a program? For our family, and we assume for lots of others, a tape cassette would be ideal. We have already noted that one complaint for not gathering materials about vacation sites together is that they are scattered and require lots of time to sort and scan. Sometimes specific materials are nonexistent, so time-consuming searching is futile. Most people own or have easy access to a tape player. A twenty or thirty-minute tape could be crammed with enough information about an area to satisfy most of us

travelling self-directed learners. It could be prepared on a level appealing to all ages. We would suggest that the tapes stick to an educative mode and not be a vehicle for commercial messages. (If local business and industry wish to promote services and products, they can prepare specialized tapes for marketing. This would be different from the informative taped programs we propose here.) Certainly, such a tape could be "sponsored by" businesses with a credit preceding or following the program, without an advertising message.

PROGRAM DESIGN

How to design such a program and what types of information to include for each geographical area are clearly matters left best with media experts. College and university historians, sociologists, demographers, artists, writers, scientists, geographers, geologists, and so forth, could consult and help prepare content. Further to note on the tape that faculty from respected educational institutions were involved in the project would add credibility for those concerned about the sources of the information. The following list is a preliminary attempt to suggest topics that can be considered for inclusions in a "Welcome To" Tape:

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR "WELCOME TO" TAPES

Music	If certain music originated in the area or is unique to the area, the tape might actually include examples.
Cuisine	What do the local people eat? What foods are special in the area?
Fairs, festivals, races, special tours of homes or industries, parades, contests, celebrations	
Fleamarkets, farmers markets	
Founders	When was the town founded? By whom? Is the settlement interesting?
Nearby metropolitan areas	How far is it to Mobile?
Public transportation	Busses, cabs, airports, bike paths
Public parks and playgrounds	
Hospitals, pharmacies, police, other emergency facilities	

Old cemeteries

Churches

Architecture

Guinness-like information

Tallest-----, Smallest-----
Largest-----, Deepest-----

Chambers of Commerce,
Welcome Centers,
historical societies

Where are they?
What are the hours?

Factory outlets

Major business and industry

What is the local economic base?

Landmarks

Forts, waterfalls, statues, battlefields

Military installations

Safety

Are there any dangerous/poisonous
or harmful plants, animals, areas
one should know are risky?

Flora and fauna

What plant and animal life are abundant,
unique? Is there a botanical garden
nearby?

Population, land area

How many people live there? How many
square miles?

Mining

Can you pan for gold or search for
sapphires?

Banks and other financial
institutions

Where can I cash a check?

Post office

I need stamps for postcards

Theaters, museums, zoos,
civic centers

Are there any special collections or
shows here?

Farming, major crops, hunting
fishing

Do I need a special license to fish
or hunt?

Athletic and recreational
sites, lakes

Where can I launch my boat, ski, play
tennis?

Major newspapers, radio and
TV stations

Is there a weather station?

Activity hours, days, months,
Nightlife

When does the town roll up the sidewalks?
When is the fishfry? When does the off-
season start?

Language variations, folk-
lore, local color

Types of shopping facilities-
malls, boutiques, downtowns,
villages, marina shops

Temperature, climate, miles What kind of clothes should we take?
above sea level

College, universities

Institutes, seminaries,
monasteries

Notable books and other
creations describing the
area and people

SPECIAL FEATURES

The emphases in "Welcome To" tapes would understandably vary from one area to another. Some of the topics listed above would be excluded entirely for some communities because they would be insignificant. Although thirty minutes is brief, it is a reasonable span of time to expect people to listen to factual information. Some cassette sponsors might elect to use the reverse thirty minute side of the tape to provide details on the most unique and outstanding features of their area. In other words, a sixty minute tape could be prepared with options for a general orientation as well as more elongated features.

ENHANCED TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Some museums, libraries, and cities have demonstrated the popularity and effectiveness of the cassette tapes for guiding people about on "walking tours."** The cassette programs we propose are similar but more broadly-based, presenting a well-edited and accurate audio collage for a specified geographical area. Travellers could enhance their general knowledge about the people and places they encounter, select more readily the activities that appeal to their general tastes, and conclude their visits with a sense that they have made the most of their precious leisure time. Educators and their associates in business communities could embellish the best of their respective worlds in the cooperative production of "Welcome To" tapes. For scholars the production of content for tapes would enable the direct application of their knowledge to a public service program. Business and industry would recognize a return of their investment as the better informed travellers seek to explore and discover the special features described on these tapes, thus utilizing the products and services along the way. What we find and what we know

about an area may determine whether or not we return for other vacations.

IMPLICATIONS

Well done "Welcome To" tapes do have the potential to become "Welcome Back" tapes. It is human nature to repeat what we find familiar. The more "at home" a traveller feels in a new era, and the more knowledgeable he or she is, the more likely a return trip. Most of us are rather clumsy adventurers. We stumble to quaint and unusual places and events. These tapes can help eliminate the chance occurrences of finding the special features. Instead, the traveller will be guided directly to them.

*I asked a young man working in a grocery store in Gulf Shores if he could give me some tips on the best oyster bars around. That is, I wanted to know where local people might go to eat oysters on the half shell. He told me he did not know because he was not old enough to drink. I explained that I was not interested in drinking, but I was interested in finding good oysters. Then he explained he was not from the area.

**CC Inc. Auto Tape Tours of Scarsdale, New York produces automobile cassette taped tours for both national parks and cities in the U.S. and abroad. Examples of places for which they have produced tapes include Yellowstone National Park, Ireland, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania Dutch Country, California and Nevada. For more information on what they have to offer, write: CC Inc., Auto Tape Tours, P.O. Box 385, Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583.

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