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RECREATION MARKETING: THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

BY

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ABSTRACT

The traditional approaches to marketing services leads to ineffective results. New approaches based upon understanding interactions among the employees and customers are essential. This understanding must then be related to the intangible benefits and outcomes from these interactions.

RECREATION MARKETING: THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

Effective and continuous marketing is necessary for all products, but is especially important for recreation and hospitality industries. More effective and efficient marketing will become more important for a number of reasons. First, increasing competition for people's leisure time and budgets will complicate that task of attracting new customers and retaining existing ones. Many of the recreation industries which experienced rapid and profitable growth in the 60's and 70's, e.g., downhill skiing, are now leveling off and many, especially the smaller operations, are showing decreased profits. These industries will be forced to develop new and more customer oriented marketing strategies. As a manager of a Michigan ski resort recently put it, "Used to be whatever we did we would grow. No more, now it's all marketing."

Fragmentation of once relatively homogeneous recreation markets will make market segmentation and target marketing much more important. It is likely that recreation markets will become more, not less heterogeneous over time. Also, the increased costs of marketing, especially promotion, will require that recreation businesses design more cost effective promotional strategies with an emphasis on education and specific information and less on promises. Recreation businesses and agencies will also have to direct more attention at evaluating their marketing and promotional strategies and expenditures. In order to evaluate, they will need to develop holistic marketing strategies which specify target

markets and include measurable objectives.

Despite the growth and importance of recreation and tourism, and the increased interest in marketing recreation, in both the private and public sectors, there has been relatively little progress toward the development of recreation marketing theories, concepts and methods. Recreation marketing is still very much in its infancy. I believe there are a number of reasons for this lack of progress. First, there still remains a great deal of confusion with respect to what marketing entails. Many recreation businesses still consider marketing and advertising to be synonymous much in the same way that public recreation agencies confuse marketing and public relations. As a consequence, few businesses or agencies have attempted to develop or implement comprehensive marketing strategies.

Another reason for the lack of progress is that many recreation industries are comprised of small businesses many of whom mistakenly believe that they don't have enough money, time, information, or expertise to develop and implement a marketing strategy. As a result, their marketing is frequently haphazard, often consisting of several advertisements and brochures updated annually to reflect fee changes. There has also been very little effort directed at evaluating the effectiveness of various recreational "marketing strategies." There remains a strong reluctance on the part of businesses and agencies to set aside either the money or time for evaluation. They would rather invest the money in another ad or a thousand more brochures. This attitude is not limited to small recreation businesses. There are major companies and state tourism promotion agencies which have not evaluated their marketing or promotional strategies. As a consequence we know relatively little about why certain strategies succeed or fail. Progress is difficult without this information.

Finally, and most importantly, we continue to rely on theories, concepts and methods that have been used to market manufactured goods. We continue to market recreational experiences much the same way that we market refrigerators and television sets. Little attention has been directed at the important difference between marketing tangible manufactured products and recreational experiences. Important concepts relating to the marketing services have not been used to design recreation marketing strategies. We have also, for the most part, failed to incorporate into our marketing strategies what we have learned through research about why people recreate, how they make recreational choices, and what contributes to quality recreational experiences.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND PHYSICAL GOODS

Recreation and tourism marketing is different from marketing manufactured goods in a number of important respects. First, most recreational experiences, especially outdoor recreation, must be consumed/experienced on site. The product cannot be produced, stockpiled, and then transported to a distribution point more convenient to customers. Instead customers must travel to the production point.

Travel also frequently represents a significant portion of the time and monetary cost of participating in recreational experiences. Often travel time and cost far exceed the costs at the site.

Recreation businesses and agencies need to understand that they are not marketing a facility, program, or even a combination of facilities and programs but rather, a recreational experience. According to Clawson (1964) recreational experiences are almost always much broader than the activity experience at the site. Recreational experiences involve five distinct phases including: (1) anticipation and planning, (2) travel to the recreation site, (3) on-site experiences and activities, (4) travel back home, and (5) recollection. Too many recreation businesses and agencies have failed to recognize the important role marketing can play in improving the off-site elements of the experience.

Most people participate in more than one activity and visit more than one business/location while on recreational trips. Rarely can one business provide the variety of activities and facilities people need or desire. It is the package of facilities and programs that frequently attracts people to a recreation/tourism area. The quality of the recreational experience can be significantly influenced by contacts visitors have with employees of support businesses, e.g., gas stations, retail stores, and community residents. This makes cooperative marketing between businesses and between businesses and public recreation providers very important. Too few recreation businesses have recognized this and instead continue to engage in costly competitive marketing and promotion. As a consequence their marketing efforts frequently end up cancelling each other out.

Recreation marketing also differs from the marketing of manufactured goods in that recreational experiences share many of the same characteristics of services. Recreational experiences, like services, are special kinds of "goods" that are intangible. A service is an activity that has value to a buyer as opposed to an object, thing or device.(16) Recreation and services are ephemeral and experiential in nature. They can be experienced but not possessed; there is no transfer of ownership to the consumer/participant.(33) Recreational experiences cannot be felt, tasted or touched in the same way as physical goods. Nor can they usually be examined, demonstrated and trial tested prior to purchase/participation. Tangible clues to assist in evaluation and selection of recreational businesses/facilities/areas are usually difficult to come by. This makes recreational choices inherently more risky and difficult.(18, 22) The intangibility which characterizes recreational experiences and services require a very different and expanded approach to marketing(9, 15) It also justifies some serious rethinking about the way in which many recreational experiences are promoted.

Recreational experiences are also similar to services in that they are first purchased, and then produced and consumed at the same time. Manufactured goods on the other hand are produced, sold, and then consumed.(2, 28) They can be examined and quality tested before they are sold to the customer. If they are defective they can be recalled and corrected. The fact that production, delivery and consumption of

recreation experiences are simultaneous means that it is crucial that quality control is comprehensive and continuous. There is little opportunity to recall a defective service/experience before it reaches the consumer and negatively impacts on their satisfaction and repeat purchase decisions. Therefore, quality control should be considered an important recreation marketing task.

Not only are recreational experiences produced and consumed simultaneously, but the customer is actively involved in the production of his/her own experience.(9, 11, 16) The quality of the experience is in part dependent on their own performance. Their skill level, selection of activities, attitude and behavior will all influence the quality of their own experience. Because customers serve the dual role of consumer and producer, production of recreational experiences cannot be standardized and it is difficult to guarantee a consistent level of quality. Standardization of recreational experiences is made more difficult because quality is influenced by weather conditions, the behavior of other visitors, and the actions, attitudes, and behavior of employees.

The intangibility and lack of standardization which characterize recreational experiences makes it more difficult for people to evaluate the quality of an experience before they purchase/experience it.(4, 7, 18). It also makes comparisons between recreational offerings more complex. The risk associated with decisions regarding repeat purchases/visits is less, but still exists. The uncertainty associated with recreational decisions is further compounded by the fact that it is difficult and often impossible to return a poor quality recreation experience once it has been purchased and experienced. Special occasions, e.g., honeymoons, annual vacations, are one time experiences. Travel costs and time constraints often prevent persons from taking advantage of money back guarantees or free repeat visits if they are dissatisfied.

The difficulty associated with evaluating a recreational experience and the irreversibility of a bad decision has a profound effect on the types of sources of information people utilize when making recreation and vacation decisions. When selecting a recreation/vacation location people rely to a greater extent on word-of-mouth promotion. They also search for tangible evidence/information to substantiate the promises made in advertisements and promotional material. Marketing studies conducted in Michigan consistently find that recreationists/tourists usually consult more than one source of information and rely more heavily on word-of-mouth.(25, 35, 36) The difficulty in appraising and comparing between recreational offerings also results in greater brand loyalty. Once people find a recreational business/area, e.g., campground, charter boat, that satisfies them they are likely to return time and time again. Greater brand loyalty and reliance on personal sources of information requires certain marketing adjustments.

Recreation experiences also differ from most physical goods in that they are instantaneously perishable commodities.(16, 20, 22) Recreational experiences cannot be inventoried during periods of low use to accommodate excessive demand in other periods. Unless operated on a

reservation basis only, it unlikely that capacity will match "demand." A camp site or room not occupied is lost forever; the lost revenues cannot be made up regardless how good the remainder of the season. Campgrounds and hotels also forfeit revenues from persons turned away during peak demand periods. Often they also lose potential future business from those customers or potential customers they are unable to accommodate. Therefore, strategies for reducing peaking (irregular demand) should be major components in recreational marketing strategies. Kotler (19) refers to the marketing task of trying to smooth irregular demand fluctuations as synchromarketing.

Another characteristic shared by both service businesses and recreation businesses/agencies is the difficulty in accurately determining the cost of producing units of the service/experience. It is equally difficult to estimate demand curves or price elasticity of demand. This makes traditional methods, e.g., break even analysis and marginal cost, of establishing prices extremely difficult.

RECREATION MARKETING

In most instances the important differences between recreational experiences and physical goods mentioned above have not been recognized or incorporated in the development of recreation marketing strategies. These differences require the development and application of non-traditional theories, methods and tactics. Marketing in recreation businesses/areas is not as narrow, or well defined a function as it is for manufactured products.

Marketing of physical goods is frequently carried out by marketing professionals employed in a marketing or sales department, or outside marketing firms, e.g., advertising agency. According to Goonroos (16) it is a distinct function that separates production (producers) from consumption (consumers). Most of the marketing effort is directed at influencing buying decisions. Considerably less attention is aimed at the consumption or post consumption phases described by Goonroos.(16) Conversely, all employees of recreation businesses are engaged in marketing to some extent, and should be viewed, trained and managed as marketing representatives. The marketing and production of recreational experiences goes on simultaneously; they are inseparable.(22, 34) Marketing in recreation businesses and agencies should begin with the initial promotional contact and continue throughout the recreational experience including the initial decision stage, purchasing process, and consumption and post consumption phases of the experience.(see Figure 1) Marketing activities should also be directed as much, if not more, at satisfying and retaining customers as it is with attracting new ones.

Recreation businesses cannot limit their marketing to the traditional four P's approach (McCarthy, 1964) which characterizes most product marketing. Recreation businesses, organizations, and agencies must simultaneously engage in three different but related types of marketing - traditional marketing, interactive marketing, and internal marketing.(see Figure 2) Traditional marketing and interactive marketing

are aimed primarily at customers while internal marketing is directed at employees. All three share the same primary objective -that being to achieve marketing objectives through customer satisfaction.

TRADITIONAL MARKETING

To do an effective job in marketing recreation businesses, agencies and organizations must develop and implement a marketing plan. This includes establishing marketing objectives, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their offering, performing environmental and market analyses, selecting target markets, establishing target market objectives, designing a marketing mix-product, price, place/distribution and evaluating the effectiveness of different elements of the plan. The basic framework for a marketing plan and many of the components/steps are similar for recreational experiences and products. However, the differences between recreational experiences and other products requires a different approach to designing the marketing mix.

Product/Service Mix

Intangibility, lack of standardization, simultaneous production, consumption and evaluation, and role of the consumer as both consumer and producer makes the design of recreational offerings complex. Recreation business and agencies need to generically define their offerings based on desired customer benefits. For example, campground owners need to recognize that they are in the recreational lodging business, not the campground business. Recreational lodging involves much more than a campsite and toilet facilities. In the same vein, park departments are not in the business of developing and managing parks. They are, or at least should be, in the business of designing, managing, and marketing recreational spaces. These recreational spaces can be on land, underground or underwater, or on roof tops. Similarly, they should think in terms of providing outdoor dining areas and not limit themselves only to traditional picnic areas. Customer oriented definitions of recreational offerings will usually lead to offerings that better match customer needs and wants, and are, therefore, easier and less expensive to market.

A number of articles dealing with service marketing recommend methods which recreation businesses and agencies can potentially utilize to better ensure that their service offerings are more customer oriented. Shostack (34, p. 247) recommends service blue printing which entails: (1) diagramming all components of a service so they can be clearly and objectively seen, (2) identifying points subject to inconsistency or execution problems, and (3) setting customer oriented execution standards. Lovelock (23) and Czepiel (10) advocate customer service audits consisting of: (1) research and monitoring to identify customer needs and wants, (2) identification of elements important in determining

customer satisfaction, (3) designing service-level standards, and (4) designing technology and tasks to satisfy those standards. Other methods will be discussed later in the section on the interactive marketing.

Distribution/Location

As previously mentioned, most recreational experiences must be consumed on the site, where they are produced, as they are produced. Recreation businesses must design and manage a reverse distribution system instead of traditional distribution systems. Recreation marketers must be concerned with facilitating and improving the quality of travel to and from the site/business. Instead, many recreation businesses and agencies have chosen to ignore the fact that travel experiences and cost often have a significant influence on repeat purchase/visit decisions.

The primary objective should be to make the business/facility more accessible by making travel more pleasurable and, if possible, less time consuming and/or expensive. There are many strategies businesses can implement to enhance accessibility including: (1) providing assistance on travel arrangements, (2) including travel in package deals, (3) providing accurate directions and maps, (4) providing estimates of travel time and distance from different market areas, (5) recommending the most direct or most scenic routes, and (6) identifying attractions along different travel routes.

Price

Price is one of the most visible and tangible elements of a recreation businesses marketing mix. In spite of its importance, many recreation businesses do not devote enough attention to developing their pricing strategies. Some of the most common pricing mistakes include: failing to establish the role of prices in the marketing mix; basing prices solely on costs, or what the competition is charging; failing to recognize that while some people are price sensitive others place greater emphasis on factors such as quality and convenience, and; failing to regularly evaluate and adjust prices.

People usually want to know prices before they make a commitment to buy a product or service. Because of the intangibility of recreational experiences, people often associate price with quality. Potential customers may not select a facility that charges and promotes prices significantly below the "competition" because they assume it to be of lower quality. There is both an upper and lower threshold on recreation demand curves, above and below which segments of the market will not buy the service. Given this fact, recreation businesses should promote and provide evidence of the value of their offering, not just its prices.

The marginal cost of an additional recreational visitor is often very minimal. This provides recreation businesses with a unique opportunity to differentially price their offering(s) to deal with

peaking problems and encourage visits by different market segments, e.g., older folk. When establishing prices recreation businesses and agencies should give much greater consideration to pricing strategies which encourage: off season and non peak period business; first time visitors; longer stays; group sales, and; the sale of package deals. Recreation businesses need to do more pricing experiments to determine which strategies are effective.

Promotion

Recreational experiences, like services, are difficult to evaluate and promote because of their intangibility and lack of standardization. According to Shostack (34) services are already abstract and difficult to assess. The same is true of recreational experiences. It is not always obvious to potential customers what a recreational experience will entail or what benefits they will realize. This has its greatest effects in the process of trying to get new customers.

Difficulty in evaluation forces consumers to rely on different clues and processes when evaluating services.(40) Effective service promotion involves making the service less abstract and more tangible. Services should be made to appear as tangible as possible. Levitt (20) contends that intangible promotional promises must be "tangibilized." Other authors (16, 34) insist that credible representation of intangibles in a function of establishing non-abstract manifestations of them.

Promotion of manufactured goods often places emphasis on creative abstract associations. Recreation businesses, agencies, and organizations should place greater emphasis on making their offerings more tangible and easier to evaluate by providing specific information which supports claims made in their promotion. The key is not only to provide specific information but also link it to customer benefits. For example, if a campground wishes to promote itself on the basis of security, it should include specific information, e.g., on-site manager, around the clock patrols, to substantiate these promises. Unfortunately, recreation businesses often spend considerable money hiring graphic artists and copy writers who make their product more abstract and intangible.

A number of authors have written about the importance of pre-purchase perceptions on customer evaluation and satisfaction with services (16, 22, 38) Satisfaction with recreational experiences is heavily influenced by the difference between their perceptions of what they would experience and what they actually experience. The larger the discrepancy between expectation and what they experienced, or perceived than experienced, the greater their dissatisfaction.(2) Recognizing this, recreation/tourism promotion should communicate favorable but realistic impressions of what customers can expect. The quickest way for a recreation business to produce a dissatisfied customer is to make promotional promises that are impossible to honor. A customer who thinks he/she has been tricked into traveling 500 miles to stay in a luxurious recreational resort only to find a few rustic cabins, a pond, and a leaky

row boat is unlikely to be satisfied. His/her complaining is also likely to negatively impact on the experiences of other customers and the morale and productivity of contact employees who must deal with the complaints.

One of the principal objectives of promotion is to differentiate a business and its offerings from the competition on attributes/characteristics important to potential customers. A key to effective recreation marketing is to create and communicate to customers, a differential advantage. The difficulty associated with comparing recreational offerings makes this especially important. There is a significant lack of innovativeness in recreation and tourism promotion. Too much of the recreation promotion imitates the style and messages of the competitors rather than being unique. As a consequence it provides little information on which customers can compare different offerings and businesses. Recreational businesses need to concentrate on developing promotional themes and messages built on attributes or characteristics on which they are different than the competition, and are also important to their target markets.

Word-of-mouth promotion is by far the most important source of customers for most recreation businesses, especially small businesses. Customers often place greater reliance on word-of-mouth communication than on advertisements. Although customers secure information about recreation businesses/facilities from both nonpersonal and personal sources, studies in Michigan consistently find that recommendations and comments of other persons generate a significant percent of visitors for many recreation businesses and areas.(25, 36)

Recreation businesses should develop and implement strategies designed to stimulate word-of-mouth promotion by satisfied customers. This should be an important part of their overall promotional strategy. They should take a more active role in managing word-of-mouth promotion by customers. The surest way to generate positive word-of-mouth is to deliver a consistently high quality experience. In addition, recreation businesses should take greater advantage of peoples eagerness to talk to anyone who will listen about their recreational experience, e.g., fishing trip. Satisfied customers should be encouraged to tell friends and acquaintances about the business or facility. As an example, one charter boat operator in Michigan sends each customer a short video tape of their fishing experience to show to their fishing friends and at club meetings. Another supplies a master angler cap, with the name of his boat on it, to persons who successfully land a fish. A number of recreation businesses in Michigan offer cash bonuses, or price reductions, to customers who successfully attract other customers to their businesses. Several businesses have been so successful at stimulating word-of-mouth promotion that they have significantly reduced expenditures on nonpersonal promotion.

Recreation businesses also need to work at generating word-of-mouth promotion by persons who reside nearby and the employees of supporting businesses, e.g., gas stations, retail stores. To accomplish this requires that they market themselves within their own communities. One of the objectives of hospitality seminars in Michigan is to acquaint local residents and employees of support businesses with what recreation

facilities/businesses have to offer. Some seminars have included visits to the different facilities. A number of Bed and Breakfasts in Michigan have sponsored open houses to better acquaint residents and businesses with their establishments.

Point of purchase displays/signage and information are important, but frequently overlooked, components of a recreation business promotion. Recreation businesses often spend a considerable portion of their promotional budgets to attract visitors but little on marketing to customers once they have arrived. Effective and aesthetically pleasing on-site promotion, e.g. signs, displays, can promote additional on-site purchases and influence consumer behavior. It can also enhance customer satisfaction by assisting customers in making better use of their time, avoiding mistakes, and selecting those activities which will maximize their on-site experience. It can also increase employee productivity by reducing the amount of time they spend answering repetitive questions. Recognizing the importance of point-of-purchase promotion is not enough. A point-of-purchase strategy should be an integral part of the overall promotional strategy.

One of the inherent differences between services and recreational experiences, and most goods, is that there is no transfer of ownership. Customers often don't have anything tangible to bring home to remind them of their experience and maintain a tangible link between them and the business. Also customers often have difficulty evaluating or confirming the quality of services and recreational experiences even after they have experienced them.

Post-purchase promotion/communication, e.g., thank you letters, newsletters, holiday greetings, is often an effective way to develop and maintain ongoing relationships with customers and by doing so create greater brand loyalty. Post-purchase communication can also positively reinforce the quality of the experience. Positive reinforcement can be important in influencing repeat purchase decisions. Post-purchase promotion can also be used to stimulate/enlist feedback from satisfied and dissatisfied customers which can be useful in continuously improving the companies offering. Presently, at least in Michigan, the majority of recreation businesses direct virtually all their promotion at attracting new customers and little, if any, at maintaining lasting customer relations. A significant number don't even maintain up-to-date mailing lists of their customers.

INTERACTIVE MARKETING

Eigler and Langeard (11) developed a model of a service business which identifies three primary interactions which are important in determining customer satisfaction with services. They include: customer-employee interactions; customer interactions with the environment where the service is produced and delivered, and customer interactions with other customers. The model is also a valid representation of the interactions which influence the quality of recreational experiences. Since people seldom confine their trip

activities exclusively to one recreation business/site recreation businesses must also be concerned with customer interactions with community residents and employees of support businesses. Eigler's and Langeard's model has been adapted in Figure 3 to show the important interactions associated with a camping experience.

Managing these customer interactions to achieve marketing objectives is an important marketing task. Resources that have an impact on the quality of customer interactions should be viewed and managed as are marketing resources. Goonroos (16) and others (11) refer to the management of these interactions as interactive marketing. According to Goonroos, interactive marketing is approximately the same as planning, motivating, and managing the buyer seller interactions.

Interactive marketing is based heavily on the recognition that resources involved in customer interactions are, because of their effect on customer satisfaction and repeat purchase decisions, revenue as well as cost generating resources. Successful interactive marketing is dependent on the firms/agencies ability to identify crucial interactions and manage those interactions to maximize customer satisfaction. Too often recreation businesses manage the resources that effect customer interactions based on traditional efficiency criteria alone.

Customers - Employee Interactions

There are numerous references in the service marketing literature concerning the importance of the dual marketing and production roles played by customer contact employees in service firms.(2, 6, 8,) Employees are many times the key to a quality recreational experience. Frequently, the recreational experience is judged in part on the appearance and behavior of the employees they come in contact with. So much so, that customers often cannot distinguish between the experience and the employees who produce and deliver it.(34) A number of marketing studies conducted for different recreation industries in Michigan consistently find that hospitality is a primary concern of recreation customers.(25, 36)

Although several articles have dealt with industrialization of services (21) and moving more towards high technology-low customer contact recreation, most authors agree that employees will remain an important ingredient in service/recreation offering. Sasser and Arbeit have said that people are, and will continue to be, an essential part of most services for the relevant future.(31)

Management of the customer-employee interface is an important marketing task.(27) Employees of recreation businesses and agencies that come in contact with visitors serve multiple functions. They bear the responsibility of producing, delivering, and marketing the service desired by the customer. According to Bell (1), service technicians perform the basic service task, educate the customer as to the behavior that will maximize user satisfaction, receive and react to consumption feedback, and modify the offering to meet special needs or requests. To

accomplish this employees must be sensitive to and able to read customer needs/wants; technically able to modify the product, and; be given a certain degree of flexibility by management to do so.(1, 3, 13) Berry contends that the communication interface between employees and customers is one of the most crucial elements of service marketing.

Because of the importance of customer-employee interaction it is important that employees of recreation/tourism businesses and agencies are customer conscious and sales minded as well as being technically competent. Despite this fact, few recreation businesses have placed enough emphasis on maximizing the marketing role played by employees. A majority of recreation businesses continue to view, manage and train their employees as production workers and fail to recognize their important role as marketing representatives. This is again due in large part to the fact that traditional product marketing concepts and approaches continue to be utilized to market recreational experiences.

Customer-Environment Interactions

Most recreational experiences must, as stated several times previously, be consumed on the site where they are produced. This means that environment plays a crucial role in determining customer perceptions and satisfaction with a recreational experience. Often recreation businesses fail to recognize the important marketing implications of design. The external appearance of a hotel or restaurant has as much or more to do with a decision to use the service as any other marketing factors. A recent survey of charter boat customers found that eleven percent of the customers made a decision as to what boat to charter based on the boat's appearance.(25)

The physical environment can play a major role in influencing the reality of services in the customers mind.(34) Appearance and design features can also create a positive impression which will improve customer attitudes toward employees and other customers.(39, 40) Design features can also help reassure customers that their choice of a recreation business/area was a good one. Although design and maintenance is not usually considered to be a marketing task, Shostack (34) argues that management and design of the environment should be one of a service marketers highest priorities. According to Zeithamal (40) given the importance of physical facilities as indicators of quality, the marketer should manipulate these cues to his/her own advantage.

Design features also have a major impact on the quality of customer reactions. Poor design can negatively effect both customer satisfaction and employee productivity. Poor design can cause customer disorientation and amelioration.(39) It can also reduce employees productivity by making it more difficult to perform their technical tasks and by increasing the amount of time spent dealing with confused and/or dissatisfied customers.(34) Design features can improve customer interactions by enhancing accessibility and convenience, reducing contact between incompatible activities and visitors, facilitating important customer-employee and customer-customer interactions, and reducing real

or perceived congestion.

Design of recreational environments should be based as much on marketing objectives as it is on engineering and physical criteria. Creation of the environment should not be left exclusively in the hands of architects, landscape architects, or interior designers. Design professionals should be informed before they begin their work about the businesses marketing objectives and target markets, the image the firm wants to communicate, critical customer interaction points and desired outcome of these interactions, and how the business wants customers to feel and behave (Upah and Fulton, 1985, 34, 39). This means that recreation businesses and agencies must have a marketing strategy developed before the design phase can begin.

Customer-Customer Interactions

Recreationists and tourists not only have a significant role in determining the quality of their own experiences, but their attitude and actions can also impact on employee morale and productivity, and the quality of the experiences of other visitors. Noisy, discourteous or constantly complaining customers can cause delays, negatively impact on employee attitudes, and disturb other customers. Therefore, the mix and behavior of customers is an important determinant of customer satisfaction and should be a primary marketing concern.(16) Attracting a compatible and complimentary mix of customers can significantly improve the experiences of customers and the attractiveness of the business/area.

Attracting the desired mix of customers means that market segmentation and identification of target markets is especially important in recreation marketing. Poorly designed ambiguous promotion which makes a general appeal to all tourists, skiers, or campers, rather than being aimed at specific target markets, often attracts persons who will not be satisfied with the facilities, or may conflict with the majority of customers. Promotional material should provide information which clearly communicates what businesses and areas have to offer. Pricing strategies can also be designed to discourage visits by persons who might conflict with the target market segments.

Recreation businesses must manage the conduct of customers toward other customers, facilities, and employees. This includes developing and enforcing rules which specify procedures for interaction with other customers and with employees. Customers should be informed about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior through the use of signs, printed material and through contact employees. Emphasis should be placed on education rather than enforcement. Businesses should market compliance by making customers aware of the reasons and benefits to them, e.g., reduced delays, safer experiences, associated with various procedures and rules.

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Figure 1

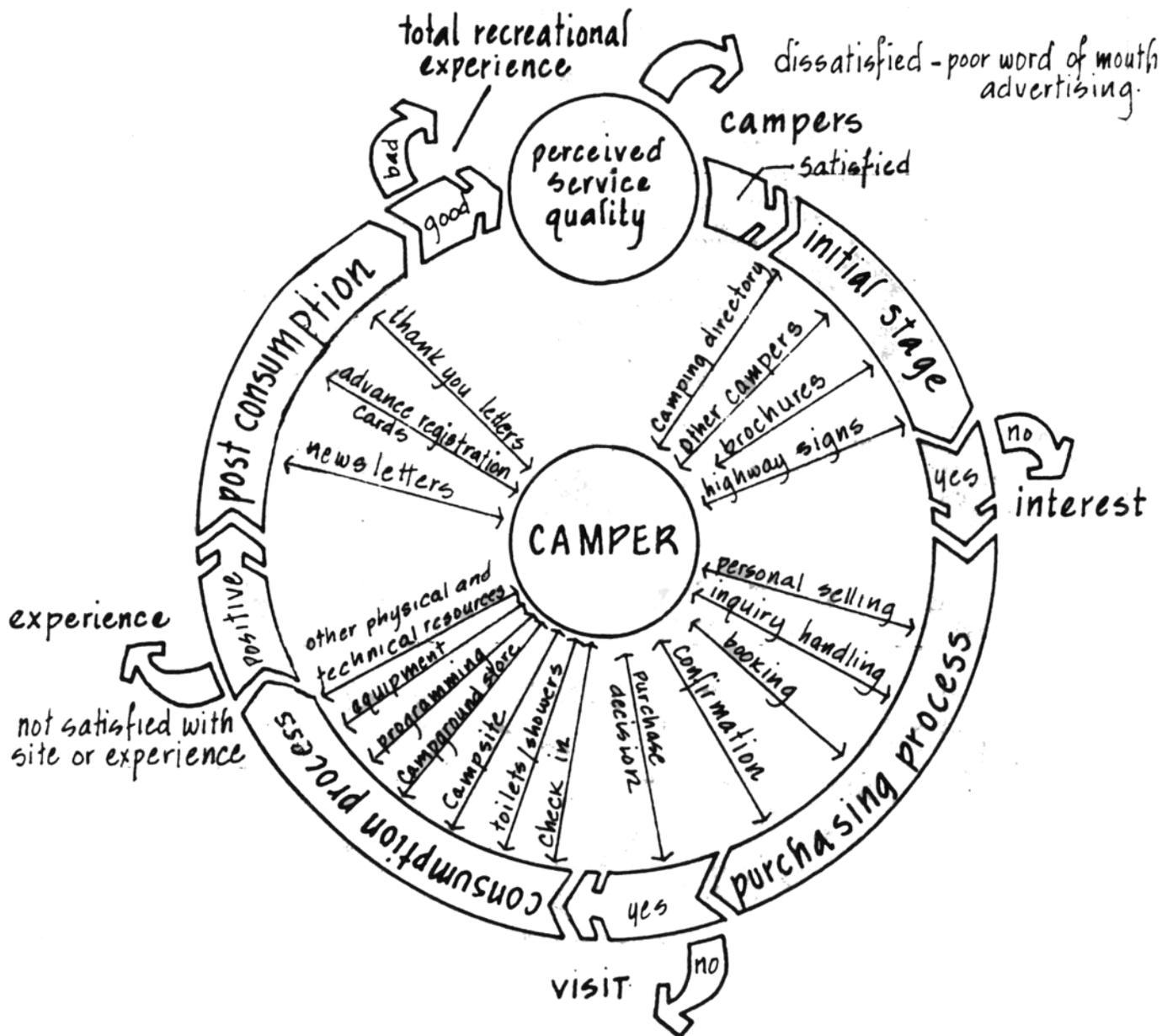


Figure 2

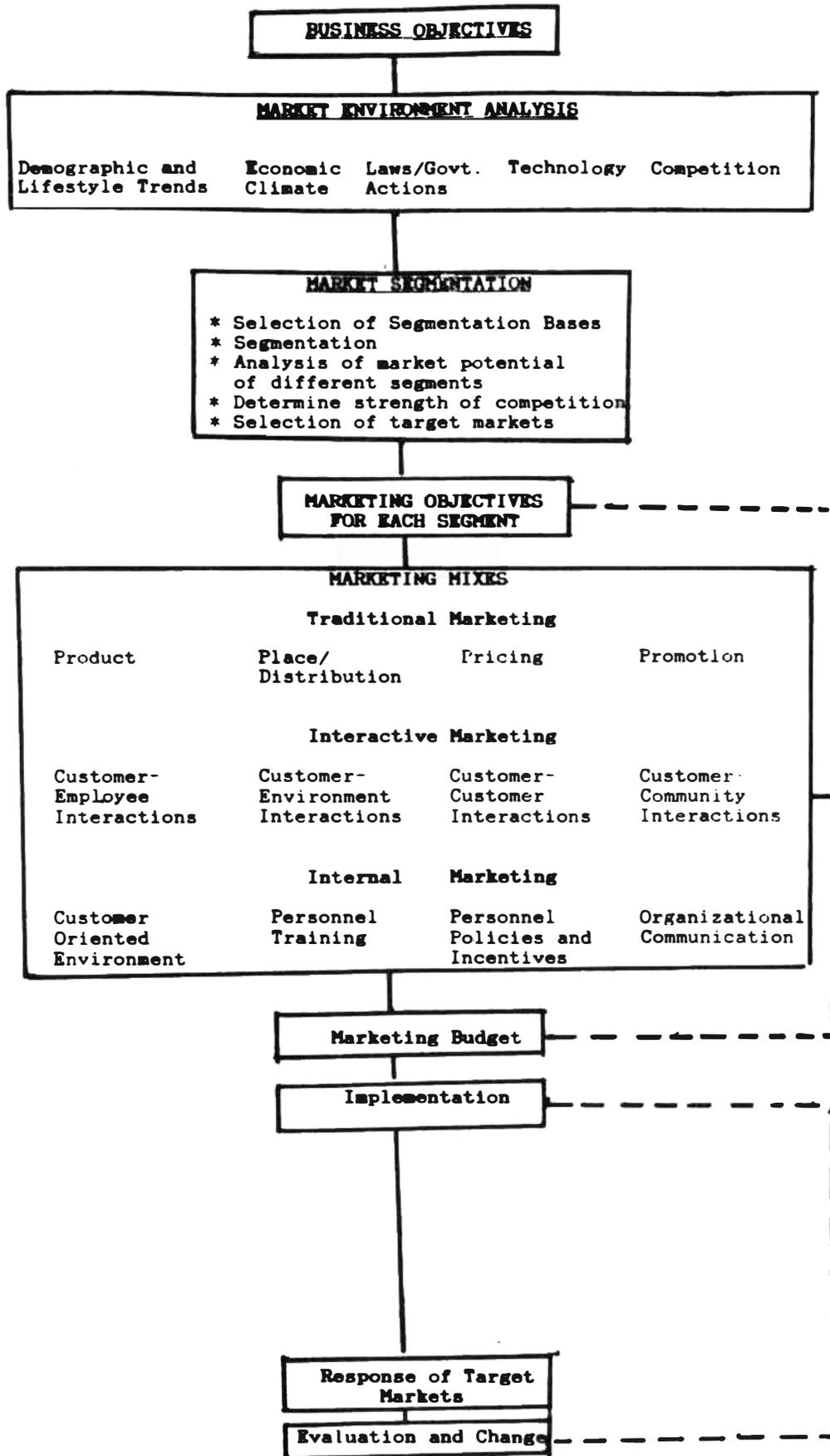


Figure 3

Customer Interactions

