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SEGMENTING THE VISITOR MARKET BY THE TIMING OF THEIR ACTIVITY DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe visitors to a Florida county and determine if a CVB’s promotional campaign strategies conformed with visitors’ need for information. The research focused on the timing of visitors’ activity decisions to assess whether promotional efforts were being channeled in ways that conformed to the timing of visitors’ information needs and decision making. Responses from 546 completed surveys revealed that 71.5% of the respondents decided which recreational activities they would engage in prior to leaving home; 3.7% made that decision enroute to the county; and 24.9% after arriving in the county. Further analysis revealed that respondents who made their activity decisions after arriving in the county were typically a part of the long haul market, stayed significantly longer than the other counterparts, and spent, on average, nearly twice as much as those that made their activity decisions prior to leaving home. Implications for marketers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There are several methods destination marketing organizations use to define and understand their visitor markets. Visitor markets are defined in terms of their: (1) socio-economic characteristics; (2) geographic origins; (3) trip motivations or purposes; (4) social psychological characteristics; and (4) the types of information they use in their trip planning decisions. Visitor profile information of this nature can be used to identify important segments of visitors. By understanding various market segments and their related
impacts, a destination area can refine its marketing plan and adjust its productivity in generating new revenues for the destination.

Alachua County lies in north central Florida. The county's tourism economy is similar to many destination areas in that it has not benefited from the major tourist development activities in areas such as Orlando and Miami-Dade County. The county's attraction base is composed of several natural and historical attractions, festivals and special events that have a strong local and regional appeal. Currently, the county ranks 22 among 67 Florida counties in terms of its $270 million recreation and tourism sales in a state where travel expenditures are estimated at $28.9 billion (1). As a way to increase income to these attractions and the county in general, the convention and visitors bureau (CVB) in cooperation with the area's visitor attractions have allocated significant resources for promotional campaigns targeted at non-resident markets. These marketing campaigns describe what to do and see, where to stay, etc. in the county. Specifically, the media advertising campaigns are designed to encourage people to travel to the destination and interact with the area's attractions and tourism-related businesses.

Perdue and Pitegoff (3) suggest that a destination's promotional activities can be organized into three general types. They are: (1) promotions aimed at influencing the potential visitor before they leave their home, (2) promotions aimed at influencing the traveler while enroute from their home to a destination area, and (3) those aimed at influencing the visitor after they arrive in the county. Table 1 exhibits the expenditures on specific types of promotional activities by the CVB and the county's visitor attractions by Perdue and Pitegoff's (3) typology.

In order to more effectively and efficiently promote the region to potential visitors, it is critical to identify not only the information sources that visitors use during their trip but also when the sources are used. The purpose of this study was to describe visitors to the county and determine if the CVB's promotional campaign strategies conformed with the visitors' need for information. The research specifically focuses on the timing of visitors activity decisions to assess whether promotional efforts were being channeled in ways that conformed to the timing of visitors information needs and decision making.

**METHOD**

For purposes of this study, three festivals, three special events, and five attractions (for a total of eleven) were randomly selected from all such visitor opportunities in 1991. Trained interviewers were discharged to contact all visitor parties during randomly selected days and operating hours of the festivals and attractions. Special events were randomly selected and interviewers were present from 1 1/2 hours prior to the curtain call.

A total of 3,391 visitor parties were contacted as they entered visitor zones to the attractions (e.g., entrances to festival grounds, all corridors to street festivals). Nine hundred eighty nine (29%) of the 3,391 visitor parties were determined to be non-residents of the county. One member of each 989 non-resident party was asked to participate in the study by filling out a contact card. A mailed questionnaire was sent to these individuals within the week.
following their attendance. Two weeks after
the initial mailing, a second copy of the
questionnaire was sent to non-respondents.
This survey approach yielded a response
rate of 55% (546 subjects). This research
design is similar to that used by Long and
Perdue (2).

In order to better understand the nature of
the visitor population and the experiences
they sought, respondents were asked to first
identify the recreational activities they and
their travel party members engaged in
during their visit. Respondents were also
asked to indicate the timing of their decision
to participate in these activities. This
sequence permitted an evaluation of whether
the CVB's promotional resources best
conformed with the timing of visitor needs
for such information.

RESULTS

Table 2 indicates that 71.5% of the
respondents decided which recreational
activities they would engage in prior to
leaving home; 3.7% made that decision
enroute to the county; and 24.9% after
arriving in the county. For comparison
purposes, Table 1 revealed that the
destination channeled 83.4% of its
promotional budgets in at home before trip
strategies, 11.8% in enroute promotions,
and 4.7 in after arriving strategies.

Further analysis revealed several important
insights (Table 3). First, respondents who
made their activity decisions after arriving
in the county were typically a part of the
long haul market. These visitors on average
traveled greater distances from their home to
reach the destination. Second, visitors who
made their activity decisions after arriving
in the county stayed significantly longer
than the other counterparts. Third, visitors
who made their decisions to participate in
visitor opportunities once they have arrived
in Alachua County spent, on average, nearly
twice as much as those that made their
decisions prior to leaving home.

IMPLICATIONS

Compared to visitors who decided to
participate in visitor opportunities before
they left their home, those that were
influenced after they arrived in the county
spent, on average, six times as long in the
county, spent approximately four times as
much on food and supplies bought in stores;
twice as much on food and beverages in
eating and drinking establishments; and
three times as much on paid forms of
overnight accommodations. These findings
do not suggest that the county's in-tour
promotional efforts influenced the visitor's
decision to stay longer and engage in
additional unplanned activities. The
findings simply identify an important
segment of visitors who made their generic
decision to visit the destination and after
arriving decided what they would do and
see. Furthermore, these findings offer
further insights into the county's long-haul
and long-stay market.

Based upon the small promotional allocation
directed at the group who decides to visit the
county and then upon arrival decides what
to do and see, efforts aimed at influencing
their decisions are currently being left to
chance. As a result of these findings, the
areas' attractions will allocate more
resources to deliberately target this market
with promotional activities designed to get
them out of their hotel rooms (or friends and
relatives homes) and interacting more with
area businesses. Much of the adjustments
will be aimed at in-tour media channels (e.g., visitor guides at hotels, restaurants, attractions) and campaigns designed to inform residents who in turn may influence their guests.

These findings do not suggest promotional activities should be shifted away from those designed to influence potential visitors at their home. The sheer number of those that make their activity decisions prior to their trips contributes much to the total economic impact. These results however highlight the potential of in-tour promotional activities in influencing non-resident decision making. Furthermore, a likely bi-product of in-tour promotional efforts may be an increased likelihood of more residents choosing to recreate within rather than out-of-county locations, thus increasing in-county travel expenditures.

REFERENCES


**TABLE 1**

1991 COOPERATIVE PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU AND ALLIED ATTRACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Promotions</th>
<th>1991 expenditures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At Home Before Trip</strong></td>
<td>$186,178.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ News releases to regional newspapers</td>
<td>+ AAA, Rand McNally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Advertisements in state and regional magazines</td>
<td>+ Sales trips &amp; trade shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Host travel writers from state and regional magazines</td>
<td>+ Regional television &amp; radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Advertisements in state and regional newspapers</td>
<td>+ Direct mail to regional markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Direct mail to travel wholesalers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enroute to Alachua County</strong></td>
<td>$26,433.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Directional signs off interstate highway</td>
<td>+ Banners, festival signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Brochure distribution at state welcome centers</td>
<td>+ Billboards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Regional coverage of brochures in welcome centers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After Arriving in Alachua County</strong></td>
<td>$10,584.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Posters</td>
<td>+ Local newspapers and radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Local TV</td>
<td>+ Direct mail to residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Promotions at regional airport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</strong></td>
<td>$223,195.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 2

**TIMING OF SUBJECTS ACTIVITY DECISIONS BY ATTRACTION TYPE**  
N = 546

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>attraction</th>
<th>festival</th>
<th>special eve.</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>before trip</strong></td>
<td>40.95%</td>
<td>79.76%</td>
<td>59.09%</td>
<td>71.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>enroute</strong></td>
<td>10.48%</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>after arriving</strong></td>
<td>48.57%</td>
<td>18.57%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>24.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3: ANOVA TABLE

TIMING OF ACTIVITY DECISIONS BY TRIP CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPENDITURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Before Trip</th>
<th>Enroute</th>
<th>After Arriving</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance Traveled (in miles)</td>
<td>186&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>737&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Stay (in nights)</td>
<td>1.04&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>6.32&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenditures</td>
<td>$95.54&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$79.60&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$173.31&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>18.26</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures on Food &amp; Supplies</td>
<td>$18.45&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$16.00</td>
<td>$70.31&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>.0046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures at Eating &amp; Drinking Places</td>
<td>$23.93&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$25.35&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$66.87&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>26.54</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures on Paid Forms of Lodging</td>
<td>$12.30&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$16.84</td>
<td>$35.14&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>.0005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Means within a row with the same alphabetical subscript are significantly different from each other at the .05 probability level using the Scheffe test for all possible comparisons.