



Getting on Board the Tourism Bandwagon: Part II

This is part two of a two-part technical leaflet examining audience from a marketing perspective. Part one explored where your audience comes from and marketing psychographics.

Length of Vacation

Time is the currency of the 21st century. Some workers seek time off instead of a pay raise, and some employers are seeking the benefits found in job sharing, allowing employees to work from their homes, or company-sponsored daycare programs. The norm in our society is two-income families or single-parent households. The average weekly leisure hours in the United States dropped from twenty-six in 1976 to seventeen in 1998. Workers are finding it more and more difficult to get away from their jobs for extended periods of time. In a society where time is a commodity, and parents feel guilty about spending more time at work than with their children, vacations are changing.

The tourism industry is experiencing a movement toward people taking shorter and more frequent vacations. Most families are not taking a two-week vacation once a year. Instead they are wrapping their vacation time around long weekends or adding a day or two onto a holiday such as the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving. This allows them to get away with their families more often. The length of vacation impacts the vacation destination. People taking a three- to five- day vacation don't tend to travel as far from home as those taking a two-week vacation. This is important to think about when deciding who your target audience is. Who might you be able to interest in visiting your museum, and where should you spend your precious marketing dollars?

The UFE (Unforgettable Experience)

Mass marketing is dying. Our supply-based economy is being replaced by an experience-based economy. These are the messages coming out of the marketing industry. Thirty years ago when parents held a birthday party for their child it usually meant baking a cake and having some friends over for a small party. Gradually things changed. Instead of baking the cake they bought a cake. Instead of the parent coordinating simple games at home like pin the tail on the donkey, she/he arranged for a clown or magician to come entertain the party goers. Today many parents are purchasing not just an object or service. They are purchasing an experience. They are purchasing birthday packages at a skating rink, fast food restaurant, or bowling alley where the cake, decorations, party favors, and entertainment are all coordinated to create one themed experience. They are attempting to engage the party goers, not simply entertain them.

National tourism organizations are seeing these same trends echoed in the tourism industry. Tourists want to buy experiences. When they put their money down for a vacation they want a

memory. The question then arises, what makes a memorable experience? What can your organization offer that will be a memorable experience?

There isn't one correct answer. What is a wonderful memorable moment for one person might be the worst experience of his/her life for someone else. A dedicated bird watcher is not likely to treasure many of the experiences a cross-country motorcycle enthusiast enjoys. This is why targeting your audience is important. Once you have decided on what portion of your potential audience to target, you will have a better chance of providing something that appeals to this audience. This doesn't mean that if you have something to offer both audiences you should market yourself to the bird watcher and ignore the motorcyclist. It does mean that you should seriously examine specific programs so you can decide if it would be more cost effective to market your May program to bird watchers and your annual August program to motorcycle enthusiasts. Each program or exhibit you put together is not going to seem attractive to every audience. This said, there are some general rules that apply to most audiences when creating memorable experiences for your visitors.

Personal Connections - Personal connections are important. Personal contact is decreasing in our society. People rely on phones, e-mail, voice mail, faxes, and on-line shopping instead of personal, face-to-face contact. If you called your phone company or utility company would a person answer the phone or an electronic answering system requiring you to wade through a series of choices while typing in your responses on your touch-tone phone? Have you received computerized calls from telemarketers? Have you picked up your phone only to hear a recording making a sales pitch?

This is the world that we live and work in. This is the world our visitors live and work in. People often look for just the opposite when on vacation. They want personal attention. They want someone to smile and say hello as they enter your museum, to chat with the clerk of the local grocery store as they make their purchase, to have direct contact with human beings. Positive personal contact can make or break many vacations. It often flavors all the vacation memories carried home. This becomes especially important when the value of word-of-mouth advertising is taken into account.

Kansas as a whole has a very good reputation for being personal and friendly. When an Amtrack train overturned in the middle of the night in one small community not only did the local volunteer fire department turn out in full force, but local residents got out of bed without being asked and opened the school for shelter, prepared food and coffee, and brought school buses to transport the people from the wreck to a shelter. Two years later people aboard the train still return to the community because of their initial experiences there. When commercial airline passengers were stranded in western Kansas during the terrorism attacks in September 2001 local communities went above and beyond what was required. Not only was lodging found for the passengers, but residents voluntarily brought in food, arranged for entertainment, and generally made the stranded passengers welcome in their communities.

It doesn't take major events like these to offer personal service. Each and every visitor to your site should feel welcome. Good customer service is vitally important. While Kansas is generally a friendly state, not everyone is a "people person." Make sure whoever greets your visitors is cheerful, friendly, and knowledgeable about your museum and community. A friendly welcome, personal recommendations about pieces to see in your museum, and helpful directions to other attractions or a local restaurant can all make the difference between a positive or negative memory about your site.

Involve the Senses - Involving people’s senses is another way to make an experience memorable. One memory that many visitors take away from the Titanic exhibit currently touring the country is touching a block of ice. Everyone has touched ice in their life, but touching a large block of ice in the context of this exhibit about people losing their lives among icebergs gives the experience a different meaning. It creates an unforgettable memory.

Food and smell are also integral parts of many memories that people carry with them. When you think of past holidays and local festivals do your thoughts include food? Do memories of the midway at your county or state fair include the taste and feel of cotton candy? One memory that remains with me from a visit to a museum in Victoria nearly twenty years ago was the smell of cinnamon and baking apples that drew me to the re-creation of an early twentieth-century kitchen. The stove wasn’t lit. No one was actually baking pies. The setting was simply a vignette set up to appear as if someone had just stepped out of the room in the middle of baking apple pies. The smell was of apple pies fresh from the oven. This memory still brings that scene to mind long after I’ve forgotten everything else in the museum.

Touch. Taste. Smell. Sight. Sound. All of these help us make memories.

Experience Realms – People are different. It’s a fact of life. Some people learn better by reading, some by writing, and others by listening. When it comes to having a positive experience some are passive and others active, some like to immerse themselves in an experience while others like to absorb it. The exploration and analysis of these personality traits is referred to as the “experience realm.”

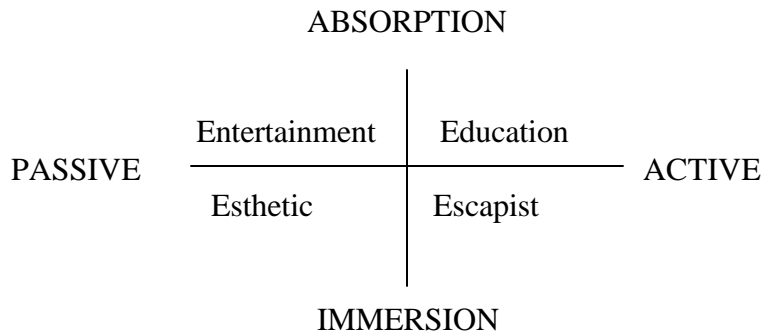
Passive and active refer to how a visitor prefers to participate in an activity.

Passive participators tend to observe but not affect, or influence, the activity.

People attending a symphony concert experience a concert by observing and listening.

Active visitors prefer to personally influence the event. People attending a

basketball game tend to go beyond observing and listening. They cheer and scream and clap and generally root their team on.



Absorption and immersion refer to the relationship between the environment and the visitor. People who like to absorb an event prefer to experience it from a distance. At major league ball games there is usually a place where a few select people have the ability to watch the game from a distance. They are able to view the game through windows, televisions are available so they can follow how the game is being covered by the sportscasters, and often refreshments are available at a bar. People who prefer to be immersed in an experience prefer being in the stands for the same game. They want to be surrounded by the sounds of wild cheering, the calls of the hot dog vendors, and the comments of the people sitting next to them. They want the opportunity to catch the fly balls that come into the stands. The sights, sounds, and smells of the game help create the experience for these people.

When you combine passive, active, absorption, and immersion, as shown in the chart on the previous page, the combination of how people relate to their environment and how they participate creates four types of experience realms.

- 1) Entertainment – People who fall into the passive/absorption categories like to watch and be entertained. This is the audience that Branson, Missouri, has marketed to and tapped into so well.
- 2) Educational – Those people who are active/absorption like to participate in an activity but still maintain some distance. One example of this would be people who like to take tours of historic houses or museums. They want to be there, to learn, to have some level of personal interaction, but they don't want to be too "close to the action."
- 3) Esthetic – The passive/immersion person likes to observe but from the midst of the action. People visiting a Civil War encampment might fall under this category. They want to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of the camp. They want to speak with the person portraying a surgeon about his role in the war. They still prefer to distance themselves somewhat from what is going on.
- 4) Escapist – These people are an active/immersion combination. They want to be transported someplace else. Theme parks and on-line chat rooms appeal to this type of person. These are the reenactors at the Civil War encampment or the "groupies" that spend all day there while looking forward to the day when they too can be part of the encampment and battles.

Conclusion

Examining your current and potential audience is truly the start of marketing your organization. People buy what they want. Explore this as you market your site. The tourism industry defines a tourist as someone traveling over one hundred miles to reach his/her destination. Don't automatically limit yourself to this definition when looking at your current and potential audiences. Whether your target audience drives in from across the state or from across town, you still need to offer them what they want. Many of the same ideas and principles used in the tourism industry apply to local visitors.

Examining your current and potential audience is only the first step to reaching visitors. You need to look at your organization too. What do you offer? What can you offer? Are you offering what people want? Are you matching what your audience wants with what you offer? Marketing is not simply selling what you have. Marketing truly is the process of planning, developing, and implementing all aspects of your programs, exhibits, and activities so that they satisfy the needs of your audience and your organization. In its simplest terms, marketing is matching what you offer (and how you offer it) to what your audience wants.