

MARKETING OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC RELATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

Gabriela ARIONESEI

"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania
gabrielag@seap.usv.ro

Paul IVAN

"Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania
pauli@seap.usv.ro

Abstract

Nowadays, tourism destinations are more and more determined to build a unique and competitive identity and image in consumers' minds. Even though the marketing of tourism destinations has been awarded an intended purpose, in practice there is a lack of steadiness, sometimes an unexplained deficiency of empirical academic research. In some countries, many without "a tradition in tourism", building a marketing strategy for travel destinations is based on artificial and without substance images/perceptions of real and potential tourists. The paper describes the role of marketing in the domain of tourism, emphasizing the importance of public relations in the promotion process of the region of Bucovina.

Key words: Marketing; Marketing mix, Promotion, public relations, tourism destination Bucovina, tourism fair.

JEL Classification: M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

This study aims at highlighting how good marketing can create an ideal environment to promote a certain tourism destination. According to World Tourism Organization "tourism is one of the world's top job creators and lead export sectors, especially for developing countries" (www.unwto.org), such as Romania.

In the economic field, tourism occupies a special position. Concerning the Romanian tourism, there is presented encouraging information throughout the specialized papers, but no destination is described at its fully satisfactory performance, but rather as an incentive for multilateral organization in all sectors of national and international Romanian tourism, always relating it to most visited countries.

It is well-known that in commercial activities marketing is very useful, in the agricultural sector necessary and in tourism field essential. Good marketing is not an accident, but the result of careful planning and execution effort. Marketing practices are permanently improved and modified in all sectors of economy in order to increase chances of success. Still, "marketing excellence remains rare and difficult to achieve" (Kotler, Keller, 2008, p.42).

Theme Importance

Politically, today's tourism is seen as a factor of peace. Ties and contracts are more intensely mediated through the means of travelling, allowing a fuller understanding of the concepts and aspirations of countries, both in terms of their historical past and

present and their achievements in the cultural, social, economic background, strengthening the climate of trust and relaxation.

Socially, tourism is not only an instrument for discovering the knowledge of modern man, but it also provides a means of relaxation and psychological compensation to the harsh conditions that coveted civilization brings about.

Economically, tourism is proving to be a factor in the progress of national economy, with large and positive consequences for individual wealth. These features of tourism in the contemporary world explains his broad international and national development in recent decades and, together with a destination marketing plan, aim at making a significant contribution to the economic growth of world's countries.

For our country, engaged in the work of perfecting the multilaterally developed society, tourism (national and international), has become in contemporary Romania factor of progress, actively supported by state, organizations, institutions and economic agents.

Financial success often depends on marketing ability. Finance, production, accounting and other business functions will not count too much, if there is sufficient demand for touristic products and services, so that the stakeholders can make profit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the implementation of marketing in different types of services there can be defined the following areas of specialization:

- Tourism marketing;
- Banking marketing;
- Transport marketing;
- Telecommunication marketing;
- Marketing in public administration;
- Cultural services marketing;
- Health services marketing;
- Educational services marketing;
- Research services marketing;
- Nonprofit services marketing;
- Political marketing;
- Religious marketing;
- Sports marketing, etc.

According to specialized literature (Kotler, 2003; Nedelea, 2003a), marketing decisions generally fall into the following four controllable categories:

- Product;
- Price;
- Place (Distribution);
- Promotion.

The term "marketing mix" became popular soon after Neil H. Borden published his 1964 paper, *The Concept of the Marketing Mix*. Borden started using the concept in his classes in the late 1940's, after James Culliton had described the marketing manager as a "mixer of ingredients". The ingredients in Borden's marketing mix included product planning, pricing, branding, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling, and fact finding and analysis. E. Jerome McCarthy later grouped these ingredients into the four categories that today are known as the 4 P's of marketing, depicted below:

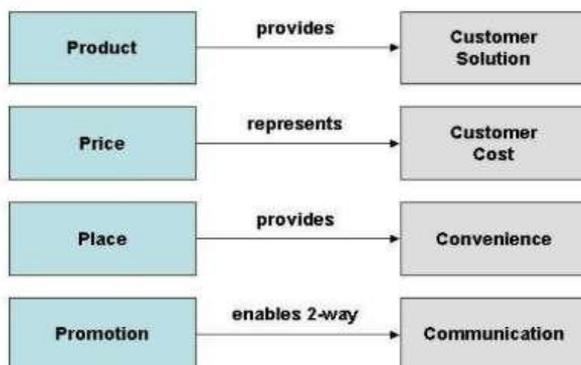


Figure 1 – Standard Marketing Mix

Source: <http://www.dineshbakshi.com>

1. The Marketing Mix

The marketing mix is a business instrument used in marketing. The marketing mix is very important when determining a product or brand's offering and is often synonymous with the four P's: price, product, promotion, and place.

Product - A product is seen as an item that satisfies what a consumer needs or wants. It is a tangible good or an intangible service. Intangible products are service based like the tourism industry, the hotel industry or the financial industry. Tangible products are those that have an independent physical existence. Typical examples of mass-produced, tangible objects are the motor car or toothbrushes. Marketers should consider how to position the product, how to exploit the brand, how to exploit the company's resources and how to configure the product mix so that each product complements the other. The marketer must also consider product development strategies (Needham, 1996).

Price - The price is the amount a client pays for the product, in our case, the tourism services. The price is very important because it is the determinant of the company's profit and, thus, of its survival. Modifying the price has a great impact on the marketing plan and, depending on the price elasticity of the product, often it will affect the demand and sales as well. The marketing specialist should set a price that complements the other elements of the marketing mix. In the situation of setting a price, the marketer must be aware of the customer perceived value for the product.

Promotion - represents all the means of communication that a marketer can use in order to provide information to different parties about the product. Promotion may contain elements such as: advertising, public relations (which we will further analyze), personal selling and sales promotion. Advertising covers any communication that is paid for, from cinema commercials, radio and Internet advertisements through print media. Public relations represent the context where the communication is not directly paid for and includes press releases, sponsorship deals, exhibitions, conferences, seminars or trade fairs and events. Word-of-mouth is any informal communication about a product by ordinary people, satisfied clients or people specifically engaged to create word of mouth.

Place - refers to providing the product at a place which is convenient for consumers to access. Place is synonymous with distribution. Various strategies such as intensive distribution, selective distribution, exclusive distribution and franchising can be used by the marketer to complement the other aspects of the marketing mix (Kerin, Hartley et al, 2001).

**PROMOTION THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS –
PART OF A GOOD MARKETING PLAN**

The role of presenting a touristic product to potential consumers goes to "promotion". Through creating various bridges between product and consumer and presenting the consumer a certain travel destination, the final aim is to determine the latter to buy it.

By promoting tourism we understand, therefore, the complex links between tourism and its potential beneficiaries, process, which using specific tools such as advertising, public relations and sales promotion, stands to determine the potential consumer to purchase the specific tourism product.

Being in a position to take action with a product with so complex features and constantly evolving - such as tourism destination - and a consumer so weakly motivated and a high elasticity of demand - as tourism consumer – the tourism market promoting destinations and places had recorded itself significant changes over the last periods of time. Tourism promotion is seen in a position to adopt marketing concepts, techniques and methods, focusing on potential customer requirements (Nicolescu, 1975).

In order to become more effective, tourism promotion exceeds the information function nowadays. It not only tries to attract consumers, convincing them that the offered tourism products meet the needs and preferences, but, using new tools such as public relations and sales promotion, tourism promotion adopts an active role, intervening in the very process of creating a tourism product, price determination and establishing distribution channels for the product.

The transition from the passive role of promotion to the active one is a structural change because of the importance of this promoting process, as a link between production and distribution sectors, on the one hand, and the tourism product consumption, on the other hand. That's the reason why today promotion takes the role of one of the most effective tools in tourism marketing and its use by organizations and business represents a key to success in the marketing field.

Promoting tourism aims to create all necessary conditions to sell the product. Therefore, whatever the instruments are and their specific mode of action, its purpose is unique. The purpose of this uniqueness is derived from the need to coordinate promotion efforts, coordination which will need to combine all promotion tools to achieve a maximum result.

Promotion is the direct method through which an organization communicates the product or service to targeted audiences. According to Brassington and Pettitt (2000), the main tools of promotion are:

- Advertising;
- Public relations;
- Sales promotion;

- Personal selling;
- Direct marketing.

Each of these tools has its own functionality, use of equipment and specific methods of action.

In tourism, public relations aim at maintaining a favorable image of a destination and at establishing connections with different types of audience able to develop and improve the touristic offer (Nedelea, 2010).

**RESEARCH ON PUBLIC RELATIONS IN
PROMOTING THE ROMANIAN TOURISM PRODUCT OF
BUCOVINA**

Places, cities, counties, regions and whole nations actively compete for attracting tourists, factories, company headquarters and new residents. In the category of marketers that promote destinations are included specialists for economic development, real estate agencies, commercial banks, local business associations, advertising agencies and public relations. In order to help high-tech industries to grow and to stimulate entrepreneurship, mayors of cities as Suceava promote tourism destinations through a series of public events, such as trade fairs, meetings, conferences, roundtables, conferences etc.

Our paper's case-study points out how the Tourism Fair of Bucovina, that took place in the period 12-14 October, 2012, succeeded in promoting the region Bucovina and its major destinations through public relations tool and was a real success for the locals and not only.

Bucovina is an important destination within Romania, in the North-East of the country. Due to the recent activities of promotion, advertising etc, it has become the choice of many Romanian and foreign tourists. Over the last few years, there was a pressure for a continue development of tourism within the region. Not only the government, but also the tourism stakeholders are making a major commitment to developing the sector, through various European funds based projects.

Representatives of 26 associations of tourism in Romania participated during the weekend of 12th to 14th of October, 2012, at the second edition of the Tourism Fair of Bucovina (www.monitorulsv.ro). The event took place in Central Park of Suceava, in front of the Administrative Palace. This major public event was organized by Suceava's Local Council, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Suceava, Suceava's County Prefecture and Suceava's Municipality, in partnership with the University "Ștefan cel Mare" of Suceava, Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți, Bucovina Tourism Association and Association "Produs în Bucovina".

Visitors of the event were able to meet the offers of active tourism, spa, rural, equestrian, cultural, religious tourism in the six areas of the

county: Suceava, Vatra Dornei, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Fălticeni, Gura Humorului, Rădăuți - Siret. The organizers had prepared artistic performances, demonstrations of craftsmen, travel seminars, initiation courses for active tourism, Tyrolean, via railroad, mountain biking, off-road, horsemanship and tasting traditional dishes of Bucovina.

The product that was promoted at the fair consisted of the region's resources for tourism, namely of nature and cultural heritage: 8 painted monasteries and churches which belong to UNESCO heritage and another 86 which belong to the national heritage, 92 creation and craftsman shops, archaeological sites: 14 museums and 4 memorial houses, tourism resorts of local and national interest, 22 national reservations and a large number of accommodation structures (Chaşovschi, 2006).

The research objective was to identify, through direct observation, the most important elements of a public relations tool, as part of a promotion plan inside a marketing strategy. The public relations were accomplished through the following programs of Bucovina Tourism Fair:

- *Bucovina Tourism Forum* which took place in the first two days of the event. It promoted the region through various speeches of the local officials, representatives of the Regional Development and Tourism Ministry, professors of the University "Ștefan cel Mare" of Suceava, president of *Club Voiaj Suceava* etc. The Forum was also attended by ten representatives of external partners of Suceava County, from North of France department, Chernivtsi and Ivano Frankivsk region of Ukraine, Chișinău, Republic of Moldova and Podkarpakie region of Poland;
- *Artistic and cultural programs* held in the centre of the town by different artists from Vatra Dornei, Fălticeni, Rădăuți etc;
- *Press conference* in the first and last day of the fair;
- *Visiting the stands of Bucovina's exhibitors* and acquiring knowledge about the traditions and crafts of the locals;
- *Participating at Bucovina's Evening – Contest of gastronomy* held at Hotel Gloria in Suceava;
- *Visualizing the films "Ciprian Porumbescu" and "Ștefan cel Mare"* in the Central Park;
- *Info trip "Rediscover Bucovina"* which took place in the second and third day of the fair between 8 a.m. and 9.30 p.m.;
- *Demonstrations of popular craftsmen*;
- *Exchange Contacts* organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Suceava;

- *Demonstrations of Tyrolean*, via railroad, Nordik walking, climbing techniques, mountain biking, all offered by Vatra Dornei's mayor;
- *The award session for the participants*.

Although each tool of Bucovina's promotion at the Tourism Fair was unique and brought about its advantages and disadvantages, we would like to point out the most important, from our point of view.

First of all, one of the most efficient elements of Bucovina's promotion was the *Info trip "Rediscover Bucovina"*. This type of action is relatively expensive, but the experience proves that foreign tourism agencies' documentation inside resorts and accommodation units represents the best way to promote their services (Nedelea, 2003a). This kind of trips must be well organized and closely followed because maintaining relationship with the guests is compulsory for the success of the marketing plan.

Secondly, inviting journalists and other opinion makers at a public event in the section called *Press Conference* or throughout the whole event represents an efficient tool of promotion. Still, we have to remark that not always the articles written after organized conferences contain the desired information, as the journalists are very difficult to control.

Further more, *demonstrations of popular craftsmen and other initiation techniques* in Tyrolean, via railroad, Nordik walking, climbing techniques, mountain biking etc made tourists to be interested in the tourism destination for a longer period of time, having in mind a possible stay in Bucovina for their next holidays.

For the gourmands and food-oriented tourists, *Bucovina's Evening – Contest of gastronomy* was an attraction, as they could taste Bucovina's traditional dishes.

The stands of Bucovina's exhibitors offered the visitors information about organizations and associations in tourism, tour operators, accommodation services, IT services and software for tourism, transport services, tourism for business, attractions, manufacturers, distributors, importers and exporters of goods and services for the hospitality industry and restaurants, cafes, bars, catering providers and other services in tourism. This promotion tool was very useful as it gave visitors the possibility to interact with specialized staff.

The *Tourism Forum* raised problems and questions about future investments in Bucovina region, registration of marks under the protection of OSIM. In the Forum, there were a series of seminars and conferences on various topics of interest in the tourism sector, so that participants were able to strengthen and develop business relationships with new strategies and partnerships for 2013, which will significantly increase the number of tourists in Bucovina.

Information and images about a tourism destination can be included in *films*, realized by

independent producers. Tourism promotion offices often participate at making these movies, supporting the activity of the producers and scenarists who accept that filming should take place in certain tourism destinations. In our situation, being given the specific of Bucovina's tourism offer, the two movies transmitted maximum of knowledge about the region.

Having taken into consideration opinions and feedback of guests, representatives of different institutions, organizers, exhibitors, mass-media representatives, we can conclude that the whole event was a success, the promoting tools fulfilling the initial tasks of the marketing strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

Advertising, promotional activities, public relations and direct marketing play an essential role in helping companies and organizations reach their marketing goals.

Often, people get confused about advertising and public relations. This confusion stems from the fact that the two activities are a unit of purpose (both aimed at promoting tourism product) and both sometimes use the same techniques, methods and media. Of course, public relations are a means of advertising, but a more subtle and sophisticated one than advertising itself.

It is certain that for Romania tourism is a big chance for fast developing and one of the possible ways of re-launching tourism is the development and implementation of effective marketing strategies and policies. Bucovina Tourism Fair could be an example of good application of marketing policies, starting with public relations tool. Our country is currently struggling with states like Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria which have already captured over 30% of European tourism holiday (Nedelea, 2003b), because their tourism offer is much better structured and tourism packages are cheaper than those of our country.

Bucovina Tourism Fair – second edition - was organized to promote tourism potential of Bucovina, and brought together tourism associations in the area, travel agencies from home and abroad, specialized higher education institutions, representatives of

foreign embassies in Romania, foreign tourism offices. Through the above mentioned public relations, its target was reached since Bucovina's image was significantly improved and many connections with different parties were established.

Creating events such as the fair of our case-study is, first of all, a matter of imagination. A special event organized to promote tourism destinations requires pro-active and oriented actions toward persuading audiences and costumers to think or act in ways that bring benefits to tourism agencies, accommodation units, regions etc.

Public relations programs must focus on promotion. A promotional plan can have a wide series of objectives, including: sales increases, new product acceptance, creation of brand equity, positioning, competitive retaliations or creation of a corporate image. Fundamentally, however there are three basic objectives of promotion. These are:

- To present information to consumers as well as others;
- To increase demand;
- To differentiate a product.

In our opinion, if we consider the specific role of the distributor of tourism products and the importance of customer satisfaction, public relations in tourism have here a much more important role than in other sectors.

All in all, since a commercial image can not be built in a few months and may sometimes require several years' efforts, the public relations practice must be based on the long term goals of the business or tourism organization, taking into account their general activity plan. This does not mean that public relations will have to significantly neglect immediate targets or those related to a medium term perspective, when it is established phenomena such as reducing interest for our tourism product, the appearance of some consumers resistance, the occurrence of an unfavorable image of our product in some sectors of the market or the manifestation of unfavorable impressions about our product's price.

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