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**The Impact of Competition on Operations in the Ski Resort Industry: A Case Study of
Blue Mountain Resorts Limited**

by

Bonnie J.K. Simpson

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Kinesiology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Human Kinetics at the
University of Windsor**

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In scholarly publications the view is widely held that competition is the dominant regulatory force of the capitalist market economy (Auerbach, 1988). The ski resort industry can greatly benefit from an in-depth understanding of how the process of competition impacts operations.

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how competition impacts operations in the ski resort industry by describing and explaining the management structures, processes, problems and challenges faced by Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. The single-case study was conducted in three phases: (a) access was negotiated and the methodology refined; (b) documents resort-wide were reviewed and interviews were conducted with the sales and marketing department; and, (c) interviews were conducted with further departments. Data was analyzed in light of the research questions and relevant literature utilizing NVIVO software.

The impact that competition has on operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited is discussed through resource-advantage theory (Hunt, 2000) which is found to be of value to the ski resort industry. A number of strategies are identified to address the challenges of competition. Finally, a number of recommendations for future research are identified.

DEDICATION

To my mom, for an inconceivable number of late night edits and your unwavering support every time I change direction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have influenced this work, either through life before Windsor or once I arrived here. I'd like to thank my parents John and Kathy Simpson foremost, for believing that, contrary to popular belief, graduate school can be a worthwhile pursuit. My brother Jonathan Simpson, because he's my big brother and life would be a whole lot different if he wasn't. My committee members Dr. Dave Bussiere, Dr. Simon Hudson, and Dr. Robert Boucher for their valuable time and input, and in particular my advisors, Dr. Vassil Girginov and Dr. Marijke Taks, for supporting the direction I wanted to take with this work, even when it wasn't convenient. To Jess Dixon and Dr. Scott Martyn, because when I couldn't find my advisors I could always find one of you. To the best administrative and technical team to ever have on your side, Diane Dupuis, Pat Amlin, Cathy Greenwell, and Silvia Jimenez. To Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, and particularly Dave Sinclair and Paul Pinchbeck, for allowing access to your world. To those who introduced me to the life of a ski resort employee, for which I'll forever be thankful: Joffrey Koeman, Kate Reid, Andrea Milne, and Craig Bolt. Finally my greatest thanks go to Christopher Duits, for supporting the move to Windsor and always having my back before I ever have to ask, like seriously, best boyfriend ever.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

While the 1970s were a period of extensive market and product expansion for Canadian ski resorts, the 1980s presented a decade that was characterized by industry consolidation and product management (Williams, 1993). Influenced by changing demographics, skier markets began to mature, and by the mid 1980s ski facility supply had in many regions outgrown demand, with many of the less well-managed ski destinations experiencing financial difficulties (Kottke, 1990). As a consequence of these changes, more than ever, Canada's resort operators are competing for both consumers and resources in order to gain a comparative advantage (Clifford, 2002). This competition has numerous implications for the industry including unprecedented levels of retail and real estate development; increased costs to the consumer; development of creative marketing strategies; changes in resort operating structures and policies; creation of partnerships; and investments in on-hill infrastructure. At a time when competition is heightened within the industry, an increased understanding of its impact is of great importance to industry practitioners and academics alike. It can provide useful implications for strategic planning and organizational decision-making, as well as future academic and industry research that will help foster a more sustainable ski resort industry in Canada and abroad.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how competition impacts operations in the ski resort industry by describing and explaining the structures,

processes, problems and challenges facing Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. The following objectives guided the study: (a) identify the impact of industry competition in relation to operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited; (b) detect valuable strategies for addressing the challenges of competition on Blue Mountain Resorts Limited; and, (c) determine the value of applying a management-based theory of competition to the ski resort industry.

The research was guided by the following questions:

- (1) What resources constitute the main competitive advantage for Blue Mountain Resorts Limited?
- (2) What resources either enable or constrain Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's desired competitive positioning?
- (3) What are the reasons for allocating resources as Blue Mountain Resorts Limited does?
- (4) How does competition impact resort operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited?

The Significance of the Study

The study builds upon previous research to develop an understanding of the impact of competition in the ski resort industry. Considerable research has been conducted over past decades to study various aspects of the ski industry. Little, however, has been done to examine the industry from a resort management perspective. It was the intent of this study to explore the value of applying a management-based theory of competition to the industry and establish whether such an application would result in data that could be beneficial to ski resort managers and should therefore be an area where

further research is conducted. A number of further significant contributions to both the field of ski resort management and the study of sustainable competitive advantage are made. The study provides resort managers with strategies they can adopt in an effort to address the challenges competition has on their organization. As well, it tests the propositions of the theoretical framework, as resource-advantage theory has not been thoroughly empirically tested. Finally, as far as can be ascertained, this is an original study that applies a holistic theory of competition to a single case in the ski resort industry.

Assumptions

In conducting this study, the following assumptions were made:

- (1) that the conceptual framework (p. 25) based on Hunt's resource-advantage theory (2000) provides a useful starting point for exploring the dimensions of competition at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited;
- (2) that a comparative advantage in resources at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited would result in a marketplace position of competitive advantage;
- (3) that the Blue Mountain Resorts Limited employees who were interviewed possessed the necessary information required for the purposes of the study and that they felt free to share this information; and
- (4) that the study, although case specific, allowed for the identification of data and results that, despite organizational similarities and differences, other ski resorts might be able to utilize in some manner.

Delimitations and Limitations

The ski resort industry involves many activities relating to competition which the study can not cover as a whole. The study is therefore delimited to the following:

- (1) A detailed examination of the impact of competition on one Canadian ski resort.

The study is limited by the following:

- (1) In qualitative research, data are generated and the researcher has to decide what to include and not to include in the research report. Despite putting in place a number of research procedures to ensure validity and reliability of the results ultimately, the researcher may, therefore, have left out some of the information that might have added to the quality of the report.

Organization of the Thesis Document

This chapter has provided an introduction and background to the study. A brief historical evolution of ski resorts is presented as well as the implications of the increased competition in the industry. The justification and the significance of the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study are also provided.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review on the ski industry, competition, and resource-advantage theory in particular. It provides the conceptual framework utilized in the study and highlights market segments, comparative resources, marketplace positions of competitive advantage or disadvantage, and environmental influences. Chapter 3 presents the research strategy, design, and methods that were used in collecting and analyzing the data for the study and concludes with a discussion of validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Chapter four provides an analysis and discussion of the study results, organized as per the conceptual framework by market segments, resources, marketplace position, and environmental influences. Finally, chapter five presents conclusions, a number of recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature Review Approach

The approach to the literature review will concentrate on one particular theory, resource-advantage theory (Hunt, 2000a; Hunt, 2000b; Hunt & Morgan, 1995), and be complemented by a current analysis of the Canadian ski resort industry. The analysis is informed through presentations made by key providers from Canada's resorts in the top industry forum, the Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show, held July 10 – 12, 2006 (see Appendix A). This approach will allow for a mutual interplay between theory and practice in order to provide a current, realistic, mutually enhancing, theory and practice-based view of the industry. Palys (2003) supports this approach by dispelling the myth of theory and practical data as separates, and encouraging their combined use to create a concrete research foundation.

Ski Industry Overview

In 2004, 3.8 million Canadians, 12 years and older, participated in one or more forms of skiing (alpine or cross-country), snowboarding, or a combination of these sports (Canadian Ski Council, 2005a). The Canadian Ski Council provides a list of 275 ski areas operating in Canada, while the Canadian Snowsports Association boasts a membership of 665 ski clubs and a total of 78,340 members (Canadian Ski Council). Over 39,400 certified instructors and coaches teach Canadians to ski and snowboard through an estimated 300 ski school programs each year (Canadian Ski Council). Ski areas have varied operating seasons, ranging from strictly on-snow winter activities to

four-season destinations. The range of providers for ski-related services includes the voluntary, public, and private sectors.

The nature of the ski industry (see figure 1) can be fundamentally broken down into six categories of providers: (a) resorts operators (destination, regional, local, ski clubs, weekend, and day use; providing a range of accommodation, food and beverage, and service components); (b) snowsports goods (incorporating roles of both manufacturers and retailers; providing equipment, clothing, and accessories); (c) development (of participants, staff, and industry guidelines; through volunteers, educational systems and programming, and industry associations); (d) tourism and hospitality (both public and commercial ventures; providing accommodations, services, and tourism organizations); (e) partnerships (including corporate sponsorships and government funding partners); and, (f) suppliers (of machinery, food and beverage, technology, and others).

With regards to resorts in particular, a number of classification systems are commonly used in the industry. Informally, resorts are frequently referred to as one of three types: breeder (developing new skiers), feeder (continuing development), and leader (destination) (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Small resorts, such as those located in metropolitan areas, whose primary purpose is providing people with an opportunity to learn to ski or snowboard would be breeder resorts. Feeder resorts are larger regional resorts where families participate regularly and a large variety of activities and programming are offered. Destination resorts are those that are known nationally and internally as vacation destinations. Formally, Perdue (1996) classified ski areas on the basis of lift capacity (vertical lift per hour) into the following: day-use areas,

weekend areas, ski clubs, local resorts, regional resorts, and destination resorts. Perdue's (1996) resort classifications have been adopted in figure 1 as resort operators.

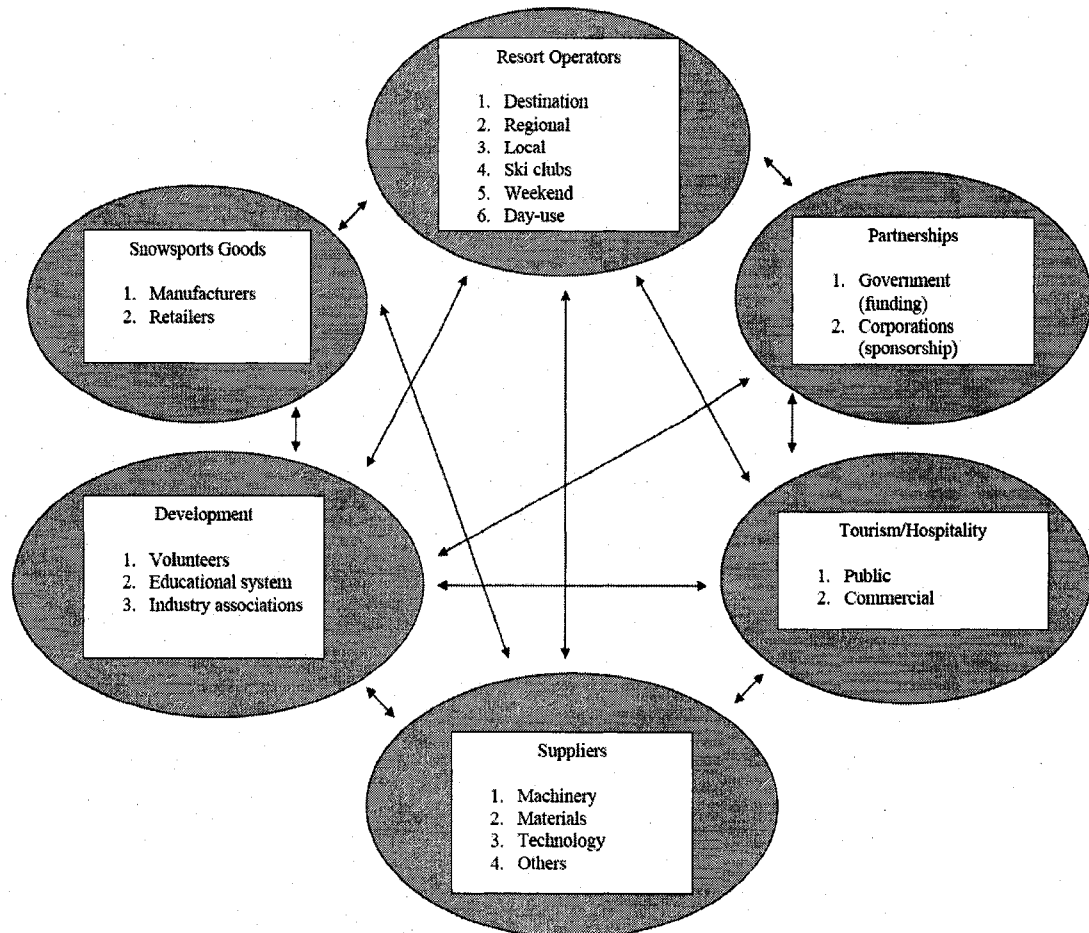


Figure 1. Providers and Interplay in the Canadian Ski Industry

Figure 1 also demonstrates the interplay between providers that represent relationships formed as organizations work together on initiatives to deliver their products and promote snowsports and winter tourism in general. As is illustrated in figure 1, when one particular element of this diverse industry is being considered, such as

a destination resort, one needs to be aware of many others. Clarkson (1995) bears in mind that we can look at an organization's environment to include various groups of stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as "persons or groups that have, or claim, ownerships, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future" (Clarkson, p.106). Each of the above stakeholders performs a key role in delivering the winter resort experience to the consumer and draws on a diverse range of resources that enable them to do so. Resorts ultimately compete for these resources, striving to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage over one another. Taking into account the diverse nature of the ski industry, it is unrealistic to expect that a single 'grand theory' can provide an explanation of the competitive situation of a myriad of different providers, hence the need for a case study research strategy.

Interpretation of Competition

In scholarly publications and economics textbooks the view is widely held that competition is the dominant regulatory force of the capitalist market economy (Auerbach, 1988). Such competition comes not only in a variety of forms and from a variety of directions, but it also takes place in a variety of arenas (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003).

Johnson (2005) argues that

competitiveness in markets is a matter of degree, and the observer's assessment of the degree of competitiveness in concrete instances will be heavily influenced by the observer's initial assumptions about the geographic extent of the market area and the breadth or narrowness of his definition of the good or class of goods that constitute equivalent products (p. 2).

While the nature of competition is complex, Porter (1998) views that “the structure and evolution of industries, and the ways in which companies gain and sustain competitive advantage in them, lie at the core” (p. 2). For this reason, a sophisticated understanding of these issues can provide an organization with the foundation on which all else is built (Porter, 1998).

Resource-Advantage Theory

The ski resort industry is large and diverse, embedded with many active competitive players and it is for this reason that Hunt’s (2000a) resource-advantage theory of competition provides a strong platform for exploring competition within the industry. The theory was developed from the roots of eleven competition research traditions, and was created as a general, evolutionary, disequilibria provoking process theory of competition (Hunt & Arnett, 2003). It provides an interdisciplinary strength, incorporating studies of marketing, management, economics, and general business (Hunt, 2001), and is a useful tool in understanding markets and competition (Hunt & Arnett).

Through the application of resource-advantage theory, it is possible to gain an understanding of the market segments that exist in the industry, the comparative resources being utilized, and a firm’s position of marketplace competitive advantage or disadvantage. As organizations are largely influenced by environmental factors, recognizing and understanding the role these factors play is also crucial to developing an overall understanding of competition. Figure 2 illustrates: (a) market segments, as they inform and impact resources; (b) resources, as they inform (c) marketplace position; and, (d) environmental influences, as they impact each of the other constructs. As resource-advantage theory posits, it is a position of competitive marketplace advantage, as a result

of a comparative advantage in resources, which leads to superior financial success. This is ultimately the goal for most firms, including those in the ski resort industry.

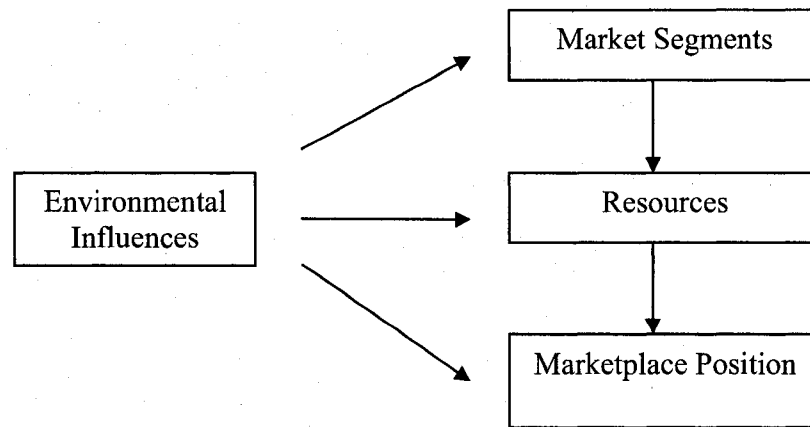


Figure 2: Resource-advantage Theory (adapted from Hunt, 2000a)

Resource-advantage theory is able to provide a realistic description of the competition process that incorporates realities ignored by other theories and overcomes many of their limitations. Examples of such limitations include differential advantage theory's view that the concept of the kinds of advantages that firms pursue are of a general nature, whereas resource-advantage theory adopts the more specific resource-based view that firms pursue comparative advantages in resources (Hunt, 2000a). On the contrary, Austrian economics restricts the concept of resources to a firm's tangible factors of production plus human capital whereas resource-advantage theory defines resources as both tangible and intangible entities (Hunt). Transaction cost economy theory's shortcoming is in that it "does not contribute to explaining why some firms are simply better than other at 'running a business,' that is, better at producing particular goods and services for particular markets" (p.101), and resource-advantage theory explains this

factor with the posit of heterogeneous resources (Hunt). Static equilibrium doesn't play a significant role in institutional economics, whereas it does in resource-advantage theory (Hunt); and similarly, many resource-based theorists view competition as an equilibrium-seeking process, which contrasts resource-advantage theory (Hunt). Finally, competence-based theory, although recognizing that firms learn, is built upon by resource-advantage by emphasizing how the process of competition itself contributes to organizational learning (Hunt).

In summary, resource-advantage theory incorporates four key constructs in a realistic description of competition that overcomes shortcomings of many other theories. These constructs are: the importance of market segments, comparative advantages/disadvantages in resources, marketplace positions of competitive advantage/disadvantage, and environmental influences. Each is examined in further detail below.

Market Segments

The first construct stressed in resource-advantage theory is the importance of market segments, defined as "intra-industry groups of consumers whose tastes and preferences with regard to an industry's output are relatively homogenous (Hunt, 2000a, p. 137)." It has been suggested that market segmentation is one of the most powerful strategic tools in the tourism industry (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2003). Sophisticated market segmentation approaches emphasize the winter segment and take a variety of information about the tourists into account. This appears to be a promising way to gain competitive advantage and should therefore be of great interest for the winter tourism industry (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2003). Many segmentation criteria have been suggested in literature

and these include geographic characteristics, demographics, psychographics, expenditure, benefits, activities, behaviour, product usage, and communication channels (Jang, Morrison & O'Leary, 2002; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000; Perdue, 1996). Each of these different segments will have diverse constraints and they will therefore require various marketing strategies (Hudson, 2000). Resource-advantage theory also views industry demand as significantly heterogeneous and dynamic, meaning that consumers' tastes and preferences within a generic product class (i.e., the ski experience) not only differ greatly as to desired product features and characteristics, but they are always changing (Hunt & Morgan, 1995).

Literature outlines that in Canada, both the Canadian Ski Council and academics have undertaken research to gain a further understanding of existing and potential market segments, consumer preferences, and barriers to participation in snow sports (Canadian Ski Council, 2004; Carmichael, 1996; Dilley & Pozihun, 1986; Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Hudson, 2000). Study results have indicated that skiers who have stopped participating in the sport represent the best target market for increasing participant numbers, highlighted best practices for converting beginners into life-long participants, and concluded that specific strategies are required for various segments (Canadian Ski Council). It has also been noted that it is important to have a clear understanding of both the constraining and facilitating factors to participation and purchase (Williams & Basford, 1992). The current state of the industry reflects that resorts are very much aware and concerned about both their existing and potential market segments, and are conducting research on practices to attract and retain these segments (Canadian Ski Council, 2006).

Comparative Resources

The second construct of resource-advantage theory posits that it is a comparative advantage or disadvantage in resources that will put a firm in a position of marketplace competitive advantage or disadvantage (Hunt, 2000a). Furthermore, that the life span (sustainability, which is established by factors internal and external to the firm) of a particular marketplace position of competitive advantage is determined by the life span of its associated resource (Hunt).

Resources are defined by resource-advantage theory as “the tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable it to produce efficiently and/or effectively a market offering that has value for some market segment(s) (Hunt, p. 138).” They include financial (e.g., cash reserves, access to financial marketing), physical (e.g., resort infrastructure, facilities, equipment, configurations, raw materials), human (e.g., skills and knowledge of individual employees), legal (e.g., trademarks, licences), intellectual (e.g., expertise, formulas, and discoveries), informational (e.g., knowledge resulting from consumer and competitor intelligence), organizational (e.g. culture, customs, shared visions and values, routines, working relationships), reputation (e.g., brand names) and relational (e.g., relationships with suppliers, customers, other stakeholders, and partnerships with other organizations) (Amis, 2003; Valentin, 2001). LeClerc, Schmitt, and Dube (1995) also discuss time as a resource, and suggest its importance to both organizations and consumers.

A set of criteria developed by Barney (1991) has become widely accepted with regards to what constitutes a resource, stating that resources must be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable, in order to offer a sustainable competitive

advantage. Table 1 offers a description of these resource criteria, as they will be utilized in the study.

Valuable	Must enable a firm to either conceive of, or implement, strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness
Rare	VALUABLE resources that are not owned or available to large numbers of other firms
Imperfectly Imitable	VALUABLE and RARE resources can only be sources of sustained competitive advantage if other firms cannot obtain them as a result of a) resource dependency upon unique historical conditions; b) a casually ambiguous link between the resource and sustained advantage; or, c) resource social complexity
Non-substitutable	No strategically equivalent VALUABLE resources that are themselves either not RARE or IMITABLE

Table 1. Resource Criteria (Adapted from Barney, 1991, pp. 105-106)

Noted is that not all resources are of equal importance or possess the potential to be a source of sustainable competitive advantage, and, that resources don't necessarily have to be owned, but simply available to the firm (Fahy, Farrelly & Quester, 2000; Hunt & Arnett, 2003). This is of particular concern with regard to resort industry partnerships (including sponsorships), where many resources become available to a firm as a result of cooperative efforts and affiliations with others.

The major factors affecting the life span of an advantage are mobility, complexity, interconnectedness, mass efficiencies, tacitness, and time compression diseconomies (Hunt, 2000a). Mobility refers to how easily a resource can be bought and sold while complexity refers to combination of resources involved. Interconnectedness means that (a) acquiring a certain resource might depend upon already developed other resources first, or (b) a given capability depends on the simultaneous presence of other resources acquired due to a unique path through history (Hart, 1995). Mass efficiencies require that some resources have a 'critical mass' before they can be effectively deployed, and tacit resources are skills that must be learned by doing and therefore cannot be taught. Lastly, time compression diseconomies reveal that some resources, by their very nature, take time to acquire (Hunt). Therefore, if a comparative advantage in resources stems from resources that are immobile, socially complex, interconnected, or tacit, or exhibit mass efficiencies or time compression diseconomies, then competitors will have difficulty acquiring, imitating, or developing a new resource that can neutralize a competitor's advantage-producing resource, making such a resource, to varying degrees, sustainable (Hunt).

A comparative advantage in resources can, however, be dissipated as a result of several internal factors: (1) a firm's failure to reinvest; (2) the presence of causal ambiguity; and, (3) a firm's failure to adapt. As a result of each firm's unique history in obtaining, deploying and dissipating resources, firms will differ from their competitors (Barney; Dierickx & Cool, as cited in Hunt & Morgan, 1995). Different resource assortments would suggest that firms should target different market segments and/or compete against different competitors (Hunt & Morgan).

Comparative advantages and disadvantages in resources within the Canadian ski resort industry have been examined, to some extent, by Hudson, Ritchie, and Timur (2004). The study identified some of the advantages and disadvantages resorts possessed and ranked the resorts on a destination competitiveness index. A total of 33 constructs were identified and 13 Canadian ski resorts were scored. The results highlighted an optimal match between the resources and capabilities available to a resort and the environmental influences surrounding a resort. An analysis of the top five ranked resorts reveals a number of commonly occurring strengths: marketing; culture and history; special events; awareness/brand/image; and safety and security. This commonality might be said to reveal these components as critical to a resort's success. This ranking index is, in itself, a resource for resort management to utilize in benchmarking themselves against competitors. Important to note, however, is that the ranking index only becomes a resource as a result of the study and it can therefore be said that research (or intellect) is the underlying resource providing the advantage.

Past studies have also explored why consumers chose a certain resort (Carmichael, 1992; Godfrey, 1999; Ewing & Kulka, 1979; Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993), and examined resources determined to be critical to the ski resorts, such as the natural environment (Sharma, Aragon-Correa, & Rueda, 2004). A study on climate change in Eastern North America, for instance, examined the future vulnerability of ski areas. The authors concluded that certain ski areas are likely to benefit from reduced competition brought about by climate-induced contraction in the industry, a finding that differed from earlier studies that failed to consider snowmaking as a climate adaptation strategy (Scott, McBoyle, Mills, & Minogue, 2004). This finding alludes to

the fact that although snowmaking is now common technology in the ski resort industry and is therefore, in principle, easy to imitate, it is also associated with very high initial and operational costs. For this reason it is likely to constitute a sustainable competitive advantage because many resorts will have difficulty in obtaining the financial resources required to implement the technology.

Such studies provide intellectual resources for resort managers that can be utilized to their advantage. Having knowledge on factors that influence a consumer to choose a certain resort is valuable in terms of planning and marketing targeted segments. Studies on natural resources, such as snowmaking, provide knowledge that is critical to long-term planning, as it can suggest, for instance, to what degree a resort should consider making an investment in snowmaking capabilities in the near or distant future. As a result of their usefulness, Canadian resorts should support the development of such research and other intellectual resources.

The current state of the Canadian ski resort industry reflects that resorts are concerned the greatest with relational, human, and financial resources (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). They are somewhat concerned with organizational, physical, reputation, and informational resources. Legal resources were not reflected as a concern at all. Resorts are concerned with relational resources as a result of a recent trend in the industry to develop corporate partnerships to fund resort activities and gain credibility with certain target markets. A current example of such a partnership is seen between Volkswagen Canada and Mount Tremblant in Quebec (Canadian Ski Council). The partnership provides Mount Tremblant with: (a) a sponsorship budget to produce events and animate the resort; (b) reduced costs through allocation of resort cars; (c) a leveraged media plan

(with combined press releases, etc); and, (d) an association with a good plan (Canadian Ski Council). Volkswagen gains include: (a) identifying their product line with Mount Tremblant clientele; (b) resort exposure; (c) association with prime sport and tourism attraction; (d) leverage on their own promotions; and, (e) visibility during main events (Canadian Ski Council). The partnership thus provides both parties involved with a multitude of benefits. This resource, however, is a development that many resorts are now aware of and are pursuing. It isn't, therefore, likely to represent a sustainable competitive advantage because of the ease in imitating or substituting corporate partnerships.

Human resource concerns, however, were mainly regarded as a critical resource, particularly human resource processes, i.e., the ability to hire quality employees. Techniques for recruitment and interviewing were discussed and it was evident that avoiding turnover and recruiting competent staff should be of high importance. The same could be said for organizational resources, as it was alluded to that there is a noticeable difference (to consumers) between a well-run and a poorly run resort (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). This was greatly reflected in consumer spending, as noted in a comparison of revenue gained versus consumer dollars spent. When measured against an unsuccessful group, a successful group of resorts incurred almost ten more dollars in revenue per consumer, and only one more dollar in expenses (Canadian Ski Council).

Finally, informational resources are an emerging trend in the industry, with a number of resorts showing an interest in utilizing research conducted by the Canadian Ski Council or on an individual resort basis. They are beginning to recognize the value of industry and consumer research, however, seem to see it more as a means to implement

immediate consumer-driven changes rather than as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Canadian Ski Council, 2006).

Marketplace Positions

Resource-advantage theory has, as its third construct, that marketplace positions of competitive advantage (or disadvantage) result in superior (or inferior) financial performance (Hunt, 2000a). The concept of positional advantage referred to means precisely occupying one of the three competitive positions (see figure 3 boxes, 2, 3, and 6) for the various combinations of a firm's relative (to competitors) resource-produced value for some segment and relative resource costs for producing such value (Hunt, p.138). Simply put, organizational decisions that seek to improve marketplace position should focus on increasing relative value or decreasing relative costs, or both.

		Relative Resource-Produced Value		
		Lower	Parity	Superior
Relative Resource Costs	Lower	1 Indeterminate Position	2 Competitive Advantage	3 Competitive Advantage
	Parity	4 Competitive Disadvantage	5 Parity Position	6 Competitive Advantage
	Higher	7 Competitive Disadvantage	8 Competitive Disadvantage	9 Indeterminate Position

Figure 3. Competitive Position Matrix (Hunt, 2000a, p.137, with permission)

Each position on the matrix represents a unique marketplace position of competitive advantage/disadvantage. As a result of these marketplace positions of competitive advantage/disadvantage, innovation, both proactive and reactive, becomes a natural outcome of the process of resource-advantage theory (Hunt, 2000a). Proactive innovation takes place by firms in the absence of occupying a position of competitive disadvantage, while reactive innovation is directly prompted by occupying positions of competitive disadvantage (Hunt). A resort industry example can be seen in the Vancouver-based company Intrawest. This organization was proactive in their strategy to build resort villages at base areas in order to capitalize on both real estate sales and destination visitor spending. As a result, many other companies, through a reactive innovation approach, have imitated this strategy in order to achieve the financial performance necessary to reinvest the large amounts of money required to compete with Intrawest in attracting consumers (Clifford, 2002).

As it would seem that the resort village concept was imitable (as per Barney's 1991 resource criteria), it would appear that this strategy provided only a temporary competitive advantage, not a sustainable one. Although other resorts may not have been able to directly imitate the Intrawest village concept, they have been able to create a substitute for the concept, similar village concepts that provide all the same conveniences to consumers. Competitors' actions that can potentially neutralize a resource's comparative advantage, such as Intrawest is currently experiencing, include (a) purchasing the same resource as the advantaged competitor; (b) imitating the advantaged competitor's resource; (c) developing a strategically equivalent resource; and, (d) developing a strategically superior resource (Hunt, 2000a). Current ski resort industry

concerns reflect that the village concept is vital in bringing families back to winter sports and creating a multigenerational gathering place. Also noted is that reinvestment in resorts and innovation with regards to marketing, activities, and events are critical in not losing market share (Canadian Ski Council, 2006).

Environmental Influences

Management literature suggests that an internal approach to competition is inadequate, and organizations need to consider those factors and influences that are external (Barney, Wright & Ketchen, 2001; Hart, 1995; Hunt & Morgan, 1995; Cheng, 2002). The fourth construct in resource-advantage theory proposes how well competitive processes work to foster productivity and economic growth is significantly influenced by five such environmental (external) factors (Hunt, 2000a). These factors include: (a) the societal resources on which firms draw (e.g., community 'infrastructure' capital, 'natural' resources, formal education, and labour force skills); (b) the societal institutions which 'form the rules of the game' (e.g., culture, the 'rule of law,' and moral codes); (c) the actions/characteristics of competitors and suppliers (e.g., their dependability and competences); (d) the behaviours of consumers (their tastes and preferences); and, (e) public policy decisions (e.g., patent, trademark, and antitrust policies) (Hunt).

Key to the understanding of these environmental factors is their influence on, not the determining of, the process of competition (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). Each factor has a particular influence on the process of competition, and how well the process works. In doing so, the factors determine the extent to which competition is vigorous (Hunt, 2000a).

The conduct and performance of each Canadian ski resort is influenced by these environmental factors in a unique way and current resort concerns reveal that resorts are both very much aware and concerned with sport lifestyles and the behaviours of their consumers (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). This is reflected in the marketing of the winter sports lifestyle to consumers and the belief amongst resort managements that the social benefits of visiting a resort are as important to the consumer as the physical benefits (Canadian Ski Council). Resorts seem to be somewhat aware of the influence of societal resources and the actions of their competitors, as these concerns were suggested minimally through competitor analysis and staffing concerns (Canadian Ski Council). Public policy decisions, however, were not mentioned and therefore currently seem to be of minimal interest to Canadian ski resorts (Canadian Ski Council).

It should be noted, however, that policy decisions at all levels of government are currently impacting the resort industry. This is revealed in Sport Canada's current Sport Participation Development Program, which has the objective to support national sport organizations and multi-sport/multi-service organizations in their efforts to increase current participation levels, recruit new participants and reduce dropout rates (Canadian Heritage, 2004, July 27). Support to winter snowsports in particular has existed over past years. Fifty thousand dollars was given towards the delivery of an entry-level program for alpine skiing in approximately 220 ski clubs across Canada and the hosting of eight festivals. Fifty-five thousand dollars was given for the delivery across the country of four programs by 377 cross-country clubs registered with Cross Country Canada or by community recreation centres and schools in remote areas not serviced by a cross-country club. Finally, \$40,000 was given towards the delivery of an introductory freestyle skiing

program in freestyle clubs and ski schools and a trampoline skills program through gymnastics clubs and schools to be promoted and implemented by an athlete development coordinator (Canadian Heritage, 2004, January 13).

Furthermore, policies evident in the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games agreement, such as the Federal Hosting Policy, will have an enormous impact on resorts wanting to host international sporting events. The policy clarifies the federal government's role in hosting events and provides a transparent decision-making tool for the government to assess proposals against strict criteria, including the net sport, economic, social, and cultural benefits to Canadians (Vancouver 2010, 2002).

In looking in greater detail at the ways in which ski resorts are influenced, societal resources include: the available infrastructure in the resort area; the natural resources in the geographical area; and the education system developing the predispositions and skills of future participants and employees, as well as training the labour force. Societal institutions, such as families, 'traditions' and morals, and sport lifestyles play a large role in resorts and their surrounding communities. Winter sports have a great tradition of being family-oriented and multi-generational. The extent to which a resort will be embraced and supported by the local community will be largely influenced by the degree to which the resort works within or against local morals and 'traditions.' The allure of the winter sport lifestyle is a strong marketing tool used by resorts to attract different segments and the 'lifestyle' branding can have great impacts on resort reputation.

Resorts are dramatically affected by the actions of their competitors and suppliers in terms of market offerings, pricing, and partnerships. Partnerships and affiliations are

often formed to provide assistance to the industry as a collective whole, and can have great impacts on industry participation and standards. Consumers are of great importance, as they are essentially the ones who will decide whether or not a market offering will succeed. How to reach consumers and know their preferences to keep them coming back is key information for a resort to obtain, as this information is constantly changing and varies amongst different market segments. Finally, public policy decisions can greatly affect the way a resort can operate as patents, trademarks, and antitrust policies make it difficult for competitors to imitate certain resources a resort might hold.

Conceptual Framework

Each of the above four constructs: the importance of market segments, comparative advantages/disadvantages in resources, marketplace positions of competitive advantage/disadvantage; and environmental influences, provide specific components. Each construct offers an analysis of competition that takes into consideration the role of the consumer and differentiated market segments, both the advantageous and disadvantageous resources available to resorts, what those resources mean in terms of a resort's competitive advantage and marketplace position, and all within the context of the external factors that will influence organizational operations. Although other research traditions take into consideration one or more of these constructs, as noted earlier, they also have shortcomings. Resource-advantage theory, however, incorporates all four to provide a holistic approach to competition. As a result, these constructs offer a framework in resource-advantage theory that is superior for the purposes of this study.

Resource-advantage theory does, nonetheless, have some limitations. It is a relatively new theory, therefore it is still being developed and, as mentioned previously, has not been thoroughly empirically tested (Hunt, 2000a). As well, it has been stated that the theory's definition of "the constant struggle among firms for comparative advantages in resources that will yield marketplace positions of competitive advantage for some market segment(s) and, thereby, superior financial performance" (Hunt, p. 135) provides only a single industry definition of competition (Heiser, McQuitty & Stratemeyer, 2005). Due to the diverse nature of the ski industry, however, it is necessary to look at the process of the competition in resorts specifically, as it is simply too great in size to look at the whole industry in relation to all others. This study, therefore, finds the single-industry definition to be acceptable. Also, it has been noted that resource-advantage theory has stated the concept of resources as both too general and too vague (Hodgson, 2000; Hunt, 2000b), and further sources on resources were therefore employed in developing the literature review.

Given the nature of the ski resort industry it was necessary for this study to break the industry down to a workable dimension. It is important, however, to maintain a holistic picture of the industry operations and for this reason the resource-advantage theory was applied to the ski resort industry through a case study research strategy, which involves an investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002). As a research strategy, the case study has been used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena – and has been a common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, social work, business,

community planning, and economics (Yin, 2003). This strategy provided constant interplay between the theoretical framework and one individual case in the ski resort industry, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin).

Conclusions of Literature Review

The competitive process and the structure of industry are central to economic life (Auerbach, 1988). In the diverse industry of ski resorts, understanding the process of competition represents a researchable gap that can offer greater comprehension and useful knowledge to resort operators. Through resource-advantage theory it will be possible to highlight the importance of grasping market segments and resources and their role in determining marketplace positions of competitive advantage without losing sight of the wider picture of the ski industry. A case study research strategy will provide the methods necessary to examine the impact of competition at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited in a holistic and realistic manner.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Following the theoretical premise of the study, this chapter offers the methodology which was employed in this inquiry. The approach utilized was, as is normal in social science research, a combination of both the theoretical and the pragmatic (Amis, as cited in Amis, 2003). The chapter further provides a description of the research design, research strategy, data collection and data analysis procedures, as well as addresses the issues of study validity, reliability, and ethics.

Research Design

Palys (2003), describing research design in a simply stated manner, asserts that “research design involves stating a game plan through which one can gather information that addresses one’s research purpose in a simple, elegant, and systematic way” (p. 71). Denzin and Lincoln (1994), looking at research from a more specific qualitative perspective, state that

a research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material. A research design situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives (p. 14).

Merriam (1988) notes that the “selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises, and by the end product desired” (p.

6). This study incorporates two common research objectives: *exploratory*, which seeks to achieve new insights and formulate research questions; and *descriptive*, which tries to adequately describe some person, situation, or group (Palys, 2003). Given the objectives of this study, a descriptive and interpretive case study was adopted.

The Nature of Interpretive Research

A number of writers have discussed the different approaches to discovering truth and doing research (Koech, 1995). V. Girginov (personal communication, September 22, 2005) noted that although there are several approaches to what you take reality to be, two have clearly emerged as the major inquiry paradigms in science. These are the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, about which Owens (1982) states:

They are different paradigms arising from different perceptions of such things as the nature of social phenomena and ways of understanding them.

Although the two paradigms tend to compete for legitimacy and support, they are, in fact, complementary methods of investigation, available for use in the knowledge production process (p. 3).

The positivist paradigm has traditionally been the dominant of the two traditions and represents the mainstream in a wide variety of social science disciplines (Palys, 2003). This paradigm is essentially associated with deductive thinking and a realist view that aims to uncover the facts and understand the laws or principles that account for those facts (Palys).

A growing recognition within the management discipline posits that the types of positivist methods traditionally favoured do not allow the capture of detail required to unambiguously uncover the sources of sustainable competitive advantage within a firm (Ram, 1996; Rouse & Daellenbach, 1999). Researchers have thus suggested that uncovering subtle and socially complex ways in which resources can contribute to a position of sustainable competitive advantage requires the use of qualitative methods and detailed case studies (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2001; Srivastava, Fahey & Christensen, 2001).

Based on such a suggested interpretive paradigm, this study sought to describe and explore the perspectives and experiences of one organization as it is impacted by competition in the Canadian ski resort industry. It adheres to the interpretivist view that there are multiple realities about the world and “the real world we encounter ‘out there’ is such a dynamic system that all of the parts are so interrelated that one part inevitably influences the other parts” (Owens, 1982, p. 6).

In interpretivist inquiry, qualitative methods are generally preferred as a “qualitative methodology allows the researcher to get close to the data, thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself” (Filstead, 1970, p. 6). Owens (1982), furthermore states that:

qualitative inquiry seeks to understand human behaviour and human experience from the actor’s own frame of reference, not the frame of reference of the investigator. Thus [interpretivist inquiry] seeks to illuminate social realities, human perceptions, and organizational realities untainted by the intrusion of formal measurement procedures, or

reordering the situation to fit the preconceived notions of the investigator. The qualitative nature of the resulting description enables the investigator to see the 'real' world as those under study it (p. 7).

Although this study is qualitative in nature for the most part, some quantitative data was utilized as well. The use of a majority interpretive, qualitative approach increases the amount of data that can be included in the study in comparison to a positivist, quantitative approach, where the reliance on a natural science model and a realist perspective influences the types of theoretical concepts and data considered legitimate for inclusion (Palys, 2003).

Research Strategy

As indicted above, a case study research strategy was utilized to examine the impact of competition at one Canadian ski resort. Such a strategy provides an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg, 1991). As Rouse and Daellenbach (2002) posit, research in organizations has a distinct advantage over research on organizations, in particular because it provides access to a broader set of data. The case study has been defined by Yin (1994) as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context utilizing multiple sources of evidence. Yin, Stake, and others (as cited in Tellis, 1997) have extensive experience with this strategy. They have developed vigorous procedures and when these procedures are followed, the

researcher will be utilizing methods as well developed and tested as any in the scientific field.

Furthermore, Merriam (1988) has outlined four essential characteristics of a qualitative case study that will be incorporated in the proposed study. The first characteristic, *particularistic*, means to focus on one particular phenomenon which in this case is the impact of competition in the ski resort industry. Secondly, *descriptive*, as the end product will include “a rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon” (p. 11). *Heuristic*, as the case will seek to illuminate the reader’s understanding of the impact of competition in the industry, bring about the discovery of new meaning, and extend the reader’s experience or confirm what is known. Finally, *inductive*, as reasoning from the derived data will lead to generalizations, concepts or hypotheses emphasizing that the “discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding, rather than verification or predetermined hypotheses, characterizes qualitative research” (p. 13).

Stake (2000) identifies three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic refers to the researcher having an interest in a particular case in and of itself, without want of generalisation of theory building. An instrumental case, rather, refers to an interest in a particular case with a view to examine an issue for insights. The specific case is important because it uncovers knowledge about the phenomena of interest, which may not be the case itself. Thus, the difference between the intrinsic case study and the instrumental case study is not the case, but the purpose of the study of the case. The third type of case is the collective case study, which involves collecting data from a number of cases to understand a particular phenomenon.

In the present study, an instrumental case study research strategy allows an in-depth investigation of the effects and implications of competition at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Although ski resorts will differ with regards to available resources, there are likely to be similarities across the industry and therefore, an instrumental case study was focused on the impact of competition to a ski resort's operations, rather than intrinsically on Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. A single-case design was utilized as it denotes a revelatory case in the industry. Finally, as one cannot isolate certain departments within a resort due to their interconnectedness, and as resource-advantage theory is itself holistic in nature, the ultimate aim of this study was a holistic, integrated description and heuristic interpretation (understanding) of the impact of competition in the ski resort industry.

Data Collection Strategies

Data for the study was gathered through semi-structured interviews and documentation analyses. The researcher was adequately prepared for the investigation as extensive relevant readings on the topic were completed. The top industry symposium (Canadian Ski Council, 2006) was attended as well, allowing the researcher to gain a solid overview of the industry. At this symposium, a total of 30 presentations were heard by speakers from across Canada and the United States (see Appendix A). Extensive notes were taken and compiled into a synopsis, which was then explored for common themes. This information assisted in developing questions and conducting interviews, as well as informing data analyses and discussion.

Phases of the Study

The study was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1. Preliminary meetings were held with the Vice President of Human Resources and Director of Marketing at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited to negotiate access and discuss and refine the methodology.

Phase 2. This phase involved searching for relevant documents and interviews with the marketing and sales department (refer to Appendix B for interview guide). The main objective of this phase was to paint a general picture of the nature of operations at the resort from the perspective of one department. The Contingency Framework for Strategic Sport Marketing (figure 4) was used throughout this phase to guide data collection.

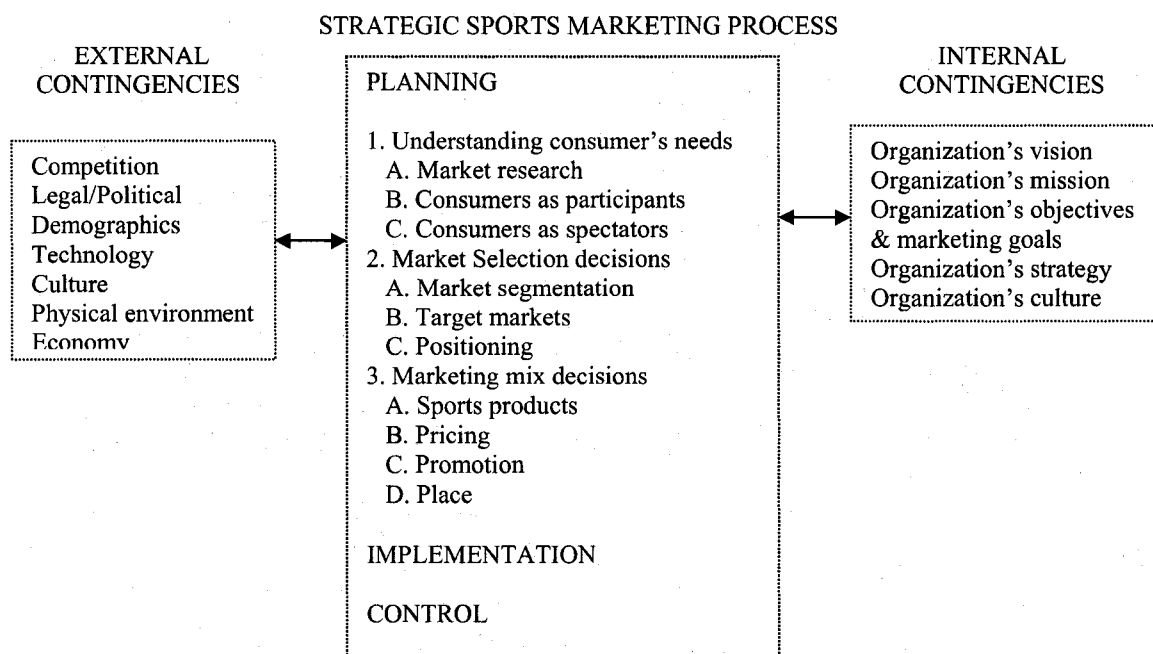


Figure 4. Contingency Framework for Strategic Sports Marketing (Shank, 2005, p.38)

Rationale for using Shank's (2005) framework can be established in that phase two data collection took place within the sales and marketing department. The framework provided a strong platform for considering aspects of the departmental operations, as well as the internal and external contingencies of the organization as a whole. It was utilized rather than Hunt's resource-advantage theory (2000a) because of the specific detailed outline for sports marketing. Similarities between Shank's framework and resource-advantage theory (Hunt) exist as well though. Both include the consideration of market segments, comparative resources, and external influences.

Phase 3. This phase consisted of a more detailed examination of further departments at the resort, including further documentation and interviews (refer to Appendix C for phase 3 interview guides). The interviews and documentation was determined as a result of data collected throughout phase two of the study.

Case and Participant Selection

Selecting the site at which to carry out the study was a combination of a need to find an organization that would satisfy certain preordained criteria, and one that would allow access to key personnel for the necessary data sources (Amis, 2003). Blue Mountain Resorts Limited fits several key criteria persistent to the issue under investigation including: (a) the resort's 50 percent ownership by Intrawest, a firm that has a strong interest in market research and would therefore have an interest in participating (Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, 2002); (b) the resort's close proximity to other public ski areas, denoting local competition (Canadian Ski Council, 2005b); and, (c) the resort's

consumer demographic, consisting of both local and destination consumers, allowing for the identification of trends common to both location and destination resorts (Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, 2002).

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited is Ontario's largest mountain resort (Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, 2002). The resort is a four-season recreational and conference facility destination is located 90 minutes north of Toronto. As this study considered only the ski operations of the resort, during the winter season specifically, over 600,000 plus visitors travel from mainly Southern Ontario and the surrounding northern United States to enjoy the facilities (Blue Mountain Resorts Limited). Located within 100 kilometres of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited there are approximately 9 private ski clubs and 4 public resorts, and a slightly further drive will increase the number of ski areas considerably (Canadian Ski Council, 2005b). Each club or resort offers consumers, at a minimum, the basic skiing amenities such as trails, lifts, ski school and racing programs, and food and beverage services.

Data Collection Methods

In this section the methods that were used to collect the data are presented.

Interviews

Interview participants were selected on the basis of their position of employment with Blue Mountain Resort Limited and the resulting knowledge of relevant issues. It was also important to keep interview numbers manageable in terms of time necessary to

collect the data, transcribe the interviews, and carry out a detailed analysis within a reasonable time period.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to allow for more in-depth inquiry or probing where necessary. After reviewing the relevant literature on competition and the ski resort industry, the researcher developed four semi-structured interview guides (one for phase two and one for each interview of phase three) that were used for the study (attached as Appendices B and C). Seven interviews were conducted in phase two, i.e., with: (a) Manager of Information and Reservations; (b) Manager of Advertising and Communication; (c) Manager of Events Marketing and Public Relations; (d) Manager of Revenue Management; (e) Director of Group Sales; (f) Director of Marketing; and, (g) Vice-President of Marketing at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. After the completion of phase two, three interviews were conducted in phase three, i.e., with the (a) Vice-President of Human Resources; (b) Vice-President of Hospitality (who also sits on the Blue Mountain Village Association Board); and, (c) Director of Mountain Experience.

All of the interviews were conducted on-site at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited and digitally recorded. Participants were ensured of confidentiality, introduced to prompts, reminded that the focus of the study was on winter operations, and briefed about the interview questions. Interview times varied between 21 and 70 minutes. The researcher also took notes of key points or further questions to be asked during the interviews. Interview responses were transcribed and softened with regards to repetitiveness and stumbling to protect the integrity of the participants.

Documentation

Relevant documents relating to market segments, enabling and constraining resources either owned or accessible to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, marketplace positions, and external influences were obtained and examined. A full list of documents reviewed can be seen in Appendix D. The selection of these documents was based on the researcher's (in conjunction with the resort) judgement as to their utility in achieving the purpose of the study. Documentation was intended to avoid wasting the time of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited employees with questions that are addressed in available text and confirmed information present in interviews.

Data Analysis

After the relevant information was collected from documentation and interviews, the data were then analyzed. Yin (2003) reveals that the analysis of evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies and consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define and describe the procedures of data analysis in qualitative research as follows:

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview scripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for

patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others (p. 145).

These procedures were utilized in each of the documentation and interview collection phases. Major themes were identified in light of relevant literature on competition in the Canadian ski resort industry and the conceptual framework. Specifically, data were analyzed and interpreted accordingly in response to the research questions and the four constructs of resource-advantage theory. Market segment analysis looked to uncover how markets were segmented, what markets were targeted, what markets were priorities, how they were prioritized, and how these decisions were impacting and informing the organizations resources and resource allocation. Resources were analyzed to uncover whether resources were supporting the target market direction and how resources are utilized. Marketplace position analysis sought to uncover whether resource allocations were executed in an effort to improve marketplace position (i.e., increase value or decrease costs) and how the organization views its competitive marketplace position. Finally, environmental influences analysis sought to uncover what factors and impacting operations and are being considered or overlooked.

The above content analysis was carried out on the data obtained from the interviews only, utilizing NVIVO software. NVIVO enables the researcher to highlight key points and assign visual codes to data, as well as collate information to explore and query evidence about relations between items, processes, and people. Content analysis was not carried out on documentation. Documentation data was used to inform the development of interview guides and to confirm information provided in interviews. With regards to coding, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers start with

some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and sub-themes as they continue. Taking this advice, a data analysis node tree (see Appendix E) was developed based on both the conceptual framework and the interview guides and altered throughout the coding process. A percentage of the data was coded for inter-observer reliability (Thomas & Nelson, 2005), with a score of 0.59. Although low, this score is rationalized by the number of coding changes made, as visible in Appendix E. All incongruent items were discussed until consensus was reached.

Research Validity and Reliability

As in all research, case studies must carefully consider ways to enhance each of construct, internal, and external validity, as well as reliability (Yin, 2003). To address construct validity in the proposed study a chain of evidence was established, and interview participants reviewed their responses to ensure accuracy. Once the interviews were transcribed they were returned to the respective respondents for validation purposes and to ensure that any inaccuracies, omissions, and errors were identified and corrected. Of the ten interviews conducted and returned to respondents, eight were considered valid with no changes. Only one interviewee made a significant change. As a result of there being only one interview changed, there is no reason to assume that the one interview not returned would not be valid.

Triangulation (utilizing multiple sources of data) was utilized as well to ensure validity. This combining of data collection strategies is typical when using the case study methodology and is argued as a necessary methodology by Denzin (1970) who believes that by combining multiple methods, the investigator is enabled "to forge valid

propositions that carefully consider relevant rival causal factors” (p. 26). It is generally regarded that when using triangulation the results yield higher validity, since complementary methods, such as interviewing, observation, survey methods, and document analysis capture a more “complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study” (Jick, 1979, p.603). This approach benefited the study in that the various strengths of the individual methods help to overlap and compensate for weaknesses in others.

Spence (2005) highlights several benefits that are inherent to the use of triangulation. The first is the overall strength of triangulation, which lies in the increased confidence one can have in the results. Second, new and innovative methods can be utilized to facilitate data collection and analysis activities. Third, in discovering divergent results, the investigator is able to enrich the explanations of the research problem. Finally, Jick (1979) contends that triangulation “...can potentially generate what anthropologists call “holistic work” or “thick description”” (p. 609).

Jick (1979) outlines ‘within methods’ as a specific type of triangulation that addresses internal consistency and reliability. This type of triangulation exists where multiple methods of collecting and analyzing data within one distinct research method are used (e.g., either quantitative or qualitative). In the current study, within methods triangulation will be utilized to comprehensively explore the impact of competition on operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Specifically, the Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show synopsis (Canadian Ski Council, 2006), data generated through the interviews, documentation, and previous research will be utilized to triangulate.

According to Yin (2003), external validity “deals with the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study” (p.37). This is typically accomplished through replication of the study beyond the original case study. Case studies, however, are not intended to be generalizable to a larger population, but rather may be generalizable to the theoretical propositions (Yin, 1994). Theoretic generalizability is present in interpretivist studies, such as the one proposed, where resource-advantage theory itself indicates that it would be applicable in a particular situation. That is, the parameters and constructs in the theory give an indication as to its range of generalizability (Meredith, 1998). This study is generalized back to the theoretical propositions in the conceptual framework, based upon resource-advantage theory. By doing so, this study provides an understanding of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited’s perception of the impact of competition on their operations.

Reliability, finally, aims to minimize the errors and biases in a study and the present study does so by developing a case study protocol (see Appendix F) to guide data collection procedures and a case study database to organize that data.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the University of Windsor Guidelines on Research Involving Human Subjects. Before proposing this study, approval to conduct the research was sought and obtained from the Research Ethics Board of the Office of Research Services. Permission to undertake the study was also sought in writing from the appropriate persons in the university and Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Permission to interview the participants was sought through email and

telephone. The researcher detailed the purpose and the process of the study to prospective interviewees and explained their rights as participants in the study. Participants were requested to indicate their consent by signing a consent form that detailed their rights as participants. The form, attached as Appendix G, also informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and assured confidentiality of responses where possible.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study results are discussed below in light of the conceptual framework and relevant literature, divided into findings regarding each of the four constructs: market segments, comparative resources, marketplace position, and environmental influences.

Market Segments

A number of results emerged from the analysis of market segments, beginning with how Blue Mountain Resorts Limited utilizes market segmentation. The majority of data indicated demographics (9 references), geographic (6 references), and activity type (5 references). In a broad sense, there was general agreement from respondents that “simply put, we’re looking for skiers and lodging guests” (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). These results identifying the most frequently used segmentation methods correspond to those suggested in the literature, particularly those from the Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). The reason for this is likely due to the fact that this information is quite easy to obtain from consumers.

Data also reported on the segmentation criteria of either fully independent travellers (FIT’s) or groups. Fully independent travellers are those consumers who travel as individuals, families, or small groups. They are marketed to by the mass efforts of the marketing department and typically purchase products through resort guest services (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006). Groups are those individuals which travel with a minimum of twenty persons, often with conferences. They are marketed to through the sales department, which employs separate sales staff

and different marketing tactics such as trade magazines (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006).

Data did not mention segmentation by the frequency with which guests utilized the product. This type of segmentation is referred to in literature as product usage segmentation (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Further systematic classification of usage could allow for a better understanding of the frequency of visits (i.e., casual or core enthusiasts) and affect product development, pricing, consumer relations, and target market prioritization.

Results indicated that there was a lack of clarity regarding how market segmentation information is used, including: discrepancies in what and how markets were prioritized; a lack of clarity on how, if at all, organizational programs were reinforcing target markets; and a lack of mention of beginner markets and the importance of beginner retention.

Discrepancies exist with regards to what and how markets were prioritized. When replying to whether certain markets are prioritized more than others, responses varied. One stated “I wouldn’t say so no” (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006). Another describes the 18-20 to 30’s market as “a huge priority for us” (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Thirdly, a respondent states that “weekend winters is very FIT oriented, family oriented...we want to make absolutely sure that we support the mountain” (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

Often target markets did not seem to align with or be supported by departments and service delivery. When asked about specific strategies departments had in place that

were reinforcing target markets, a number of respondents were able to give an example, such as mountain operations maintaining a terrain park facility suitable for all levels of users (Interview 8, personal communication, January 15, 2006). Others, however, were unaware of any linkage between their department and the targeted market segments, as evident in the following quote: “um I can’t say that we take into consideration the target market as it relates to [departmental] programs ... so I wouldn’t say that our programs are reinforcing that target market at all” (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

Finally, beginner retention has been the focus of much attention in the Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show literature (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). Ability level, however, was not reflected in the data as an important method of market segmentation. It was also not reflected as an area on which the resort is adequately focusing. Results indicated only one interview response that mentioned focusing on beginners and beginner retention. It would appear that although literature has indicated this as a very important market for the future of winter sports, there is still a disconnect between literature and practical implementation at this resort.

Comparative Resources

Quantitative results from interview data indicate that the resources perceived by Blue Mountain Resorts Limited employees as the resort’s main sources of competitive advantage include: the Village (111 mentions in 8 interviews), which although classified as part of the product, also draws on the relationship with the Blue Mountain Village Association created through the partnership with Intrawest and legal initiatives; the guest

experience (90 mentions in 10 interviews), which is classified as organizational strategy; and staff (48 in 8 interviews), classified as human resources, with a focus on mandatory supportive processes such as recruiting, hiring, and training.

The Village concept, developed by Intrawest and implemented via the Blue Mountain Resorts Limited/Intrawest merger in 2000, is a critical element of competitive advantage at Blue Mountain Resort Limited. Although the concept itself could be imitated, and has begun so at resorts in other provinces, it is still a one of a kind attraction in Ontario. More importantly though, with regards to ability to imitate the Village concept, is the legal aspect utilized in its development. Bill PR14 in the Ontario Legislative Assembly is more commonly known as The Blue Mountain Village Association Act, established 1999. As stated in the preamble:

Blue Mountain Village Association has applied for special legislation to require all persons having a real property interest in the Blue Mountain Village to be members of the Association and to be bound by its by-laws and to give the Association a right to enforce members' financial obligations to the Association by registering a lien against their real property located in the Blue Mountain Village (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 1999).

Essentially this means that every tenant in the Village is required to contribute to the costs of maintaining the Village and putting on special events. Guests staying in the Village, in fact, pay a 2% tax that contributes to the Village Association revenue. These costs, therefore, are not at the expense of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. As well, the responsibility of the Village does not lie solely in the hands of Blue Mountain Resorts

Limited as the Village Association plays a significant role in marketing the resort destination as a whole.

This approach has been very successful for Intrawest at a number of their Canadian resorts, including Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, Mount Tremblant, and Whistler Blackcomb (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007). It is not, however, without its challenges:

Ah the challenge is to keep that harmony right, and not everybody can do that okay and so [slight pause] ah it's a tight line ... well its politics right? But everybody has an inherent interest ... ah [slight pause] economics, it always goes back to economics (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

With regards to the guest experience strategy, this again is something that has come with the Intrawest merger. The resort is, however, currently experiencing a challenge in bringing this guest focus to the front lines. This challenge is illustrated in market research that reveals a low number of consumers who intend to recommend the resort to others (Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, 2006). As a result of this challenge, a new position of Director of Mountain Experience was created, with the hope that “what that does is it brings the focus the guest focus into the operations side and ah allows them to really drive the overall favourable number” (Interview 7, personal communication, December 4, 2006). This strategy has also impacted a variety of organizational processes.

This guest focus, however, is something that, according to Canadian Ski Council literature, all resorts seem to be striving to achieve (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). Fortunately for Intrawest, and therefore Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, they are years

ahead of the rest of the industry on this front and it is therefore providing them with a significant competitive advantage in servicing the guest (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

Finally staff, or human resources, is identified as the third most important element of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's competitive advantage. Although people are necessary to perform tasks, people are present at every resort and therefore any advantage gained will come from the recruiting, hiring, and training processes. Blue Mountain Resorts Limited recently underwent a major overhaul to

...recruiting processes, which we're now um checking the results of, this being the first winter that we used those new processes...they applied equally to all the employees across the resort. This required a structural change within HR where an extra recruiter and recruiting agent were hired and several different processes changed within HR (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

As well, a concentrated focus on supervisor and managerial training programs is evident.

A leadership program called 'front line leadership' was:

...resurrected from about twelve years ago. It's just a good quality leadership training program largely for those who are supervising the front line employee. We hadn't for the past few years really enjoyed a standardized training program that was really good quality and our ah employee opinion surveys said that if there was one area that we could improve in leadership skill would be the area (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

As a whole, the above results with regards to where Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's main competitive advantage lies are inconsistent with findings from Hudson, Ritchie, and Timur's (2004) study, which found that strengths in marketing, culture and history, special events, awareness/brand/image, and safety and security were the most critical components in ranking amongst resorts. Although both studies are based on self-perception of results, it is likely that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited would be considered strong in each of these aspects, however because they are elements that all resorts possess to some extent, they are not viewed by employees as elements of significant competitive advantage. It does, however, reveal that these are areas where resorts should possess strengths and therefore concentrate efforts.

Enabling Resources

A number of additional resources, although not mentioned as frequently in data, were found to be enabling Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's desired competitive positioning. These included: location, financial, relational, organizational and marketing strategy, lifts and snowmaking, conference centre facilities, informational, and intellectual.

As stated in one interview "the key attribute or um strength of any business is location" (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006). Location, classified as a physical resource, encompasses a number of characteristics that contribute to enabling Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's competitive positioning. Among these are the diversity of terrain and vertical height offered as a result of the Niagara Escarpment; proximately to major population bases such as the Greater Toronto and Golden

Horseshoe areas, as “we just happen to be higher than just about everybody else in our competitive set and those that are higher than us are ah farther away, so Thunder Bay, Calabogie Peaks, etc. are much more inaccessible to the major population base” (Interview 7, personal communication, December 4, 2007); “the unique combination of water and mountain, so the beach being close and the water being close is very important because already have cottages in the area and so then they can come here in the winter as well” (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006); and “the ease of getting here through the 400 is a competitive advantage because it’s very easy to get here versus, you know, some of the other destinations” (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). These characteristics contribute Blue Mountain Resorts Limited’s product offering of a large, diverse resort, located in an easily accessible, active community.

Financial resources were found in the data to be most crucial in terms of commitment to development, training staff, and marketing. With regards to development, major financial investments are required to build the real estate and retail developments on site, as well as to invest in lift structure and snowmaking. Staff training requirements range from front line service training, to long-term supervisory and managerial training programs and are an area that requires specific attention to put strategies in to motion. “Staffing is always an issue, from a just can’t get enough to having budget limitations and just not having the money available to pay the salaries for the people we need to effectively get what we need done” (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006). Financial commitment to marketing is stated as essential by one respondent as “the most critical resource is still being able to tell people that it’s here. The marketing

side of things, the pure advertising media dollars that go to driving the skier visit”

(Interview 7, personal communication, December 4, 2006).

Relational resources were found to be enabling through a variety of avenues, providing Blue Mountain Resorts Limited access to a number of resources they do not possess on their own. The relationship with Intrawest provided financial backing and the ‘know-how’ to bring the resort to the next level as a destination. Relationships with local businesses are fostered to provide ancillary products and services that are not provided by Blue Mountain Resorts Limited themselves. “The growth of other businesses around the area so, you know everything from La Scandinav, to dogsledding, to hummer tours, to all these things just combines to create a playground of winter activities” (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). The relationship with the Blue Mountain Village Association is critical in delivering events, providing services, and marketing the resort destination. Consumer relationships, particularly with pass holders are developed in an effort to increase loyalty and return visits. “The product line...the seasons pass one where we can actually get them into that community and really make them kind of loyal customers, that’s what a lot of the other places don’t have that we have” (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Finally, industry partnerships, such as those with the Canadian Ski Council and the Ontario Snow Resorts Association provide access to joint initiatives such as research, lobbying, and information sharing.

Organizational resources, including marketing strategy, enable a competitive marketplace position in a number of ways. The strategic focus on guest experience, and the recognition that all departments contribute to some aspect of that experience, has fostered a cooperative organizational culture. “Ultimately we provide part of the

experience, but human resources also provides part of that experience, marketing makes sure that people know about the experience we're providing, so none of it works without us interacting together" (Interview 8, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

Structural dynamicity was identified as an important element in dealing with challenges that result from environmental influences. The marketing "department is so dynamic and we've changed roles and added and deleted so many times that I feel that that's our strength, we're dynamic...we move with the times...so, I would tell you that we've got a good structure and I'll probably tell you that it's gonna change next year" (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). The tailoring of products to markets with a variety of value propositions, pricing, and promotions, has been effective in targeting certain market segments.

There's a big drop off from about 18-20 to about early 30's of people participating in the sport... there's a huge priority for us because um where that drop off is...with that as kind of a leading priority we've been able to tailor some of our products to the point where our graph doesn't have that huge drop off in it, it looks pretty flat (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

As well, the utilization of events has been instrumental in gaining exposure and market validation with certain target segments. "Corporate partnership, they sponsor events, they help make our events seem more valid, which help us reach our guests" (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Finally, a focus on rate development and FIT versus group yields has enabled intelligent decision-making.

Lifts and snowmaking are classified as part of the product, and are therefore an organizational resource as well. The growth of these services is attributed in the data to

the addition of the Village, as well as an over-all strategic investment in having the best on-hill product. The resort has committed to snowmaking and as a result is able to offer consumers the opportunity to participate in winter sports at many times when the weather doesn't cooperate. "Here at Blue Mountain we are very fortunate in that the company has chosen to make snowmaking a base product or base service provided...there's a locked investment in snowmaking every year because truthfully we know that mother nature isn't going to provide us the snow anymore, we need to put it on, we need to help her" (Interview 4, personal communication, December 30, 2006). An investment in lift infrastructure has also been necessary to deal with line wait times and up-hill capacity as the resort continues through a period of growth.

A third component of organizational resources, conference centre facilities as classified as part of the product. Conference centre facilities are an area where the resort has heavily invested in past years and plans to continue doing so. "...we've focused on conference groups very much. It complements you know the other season...that's the reason why we've put lots of millions of dollars in building conferences" (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007). Conference groups balance the resort in terms of consumer visits, providing year round revenue where seasonal aspects of the business do not.

Informational resources, such as market research conducted by the resort, has been vital in getting to know the consumers needs and wants. Technology has been vital in gathering such information, "as technology moves forward there's a much broader target that are actually interested in interacting with that type of community so, ah and talking about the web 2.0 experience and things like that...podcasting, interactive forums,

and um blogs...it allows you to understand the people that are interacting with your site” (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006). This is important information in order to be able to provide the appropriate products and services.

Finally, intellectual resources have been helpful in eliminating unnecessary costs and processes and increasing organizational efficiency. Such resources are known broadly as continuous improvement methodologies, generally defined “as a culture of sustained improvement targeting the elimination of waste in all systems and processes of an organization” (Bhuiyan & Baghel, 2005). “Intrawest about two years ago embraced the ah technology called lean six sigma, which is called, ah in these circles, operational excellence and ah essentially it’s a way of, it’s a method for analyzing and improving processes” (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007). Lean six sigma originates as a hybrid method of continuous improvement through which greater value to the consumer can be provided. Lean seeks to eliminate waste, while six sigma seeks to reduce variation (Bhuiyan & Baghel). Overall, the methodology seeks to maximize shareholder value “by achieving the fastest rate of improvement in customer satisfaction, cost, quality, process speed and invested capital” (George, as cited in Bhuiyan & Baghel).

Constraining Resources

Just as resources enable, a number of resources were found to be constraining Blue Mountain Resorts Limited’s desired competitive positioning, including: informational, organizational, physical, reputation, relational, and human.

Informational resources were found to be constraining through a number of ways. A lack of data was being utilized for decision-making, particularly with regards to

consumer services. "I think sometimes...we go a lot of times on gut feelings rather than on the data itself" (Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

Respondents expressed a desire for a holistic view of the guest, however current market information systems do not produce this. "There's a great deal of customer information in those systems, the problem is that it's not rolled up, it's not rolled up into one holistic view of the customer" (Interview 7, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

Currently, the resort pass sales system stores consumer demographic and contact information, while a binder of survey data is used to store market information.

Little research has been conducted on what elements of service are key in providing a positive guest experience. One respondent expressed a desire to "understand truly just what core service deliveries our customers want" (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). There was also a need expressed for methods that will provide clarity of corporate sponsor objectives. "The challenge...is understanding what their company wants to accomplish and knowing it before they even know it so that I can provide them solutions" (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Many respondents wish to obtain further information on pass holders, and there was much mention of day ticket purchaser information being inadequate. This was expressed in general in the statement "we know so little compared to what we should know about our consumers" (Interview 1, November 28, 2006). A lack of communication about the importance of retention rates and beginner retention was evident, as only one of ten interviews mentioned the concept. Finally, inadequate information was collected with regards to direct and indirect competitors. In summary, although Blue Mountain Resorts

Limited collects market information, as is consistent with the literature it was evident that this information is not being used to its full potential (Canadian Ski Council, 2006).

Organizational resources were found to be constraining through a variety of means. Data revealed internal confusion on the image of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, as to whether it is a volume or exclusive resort. When discussing the resort in general one respondent states “it’s expensive so that adds some sort of mystique and sex appeal to it” (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Another states “we are a volume resort...you always go back to, is it affordable?”(Interview 10, personal communication, January 16, 2007). These two statements demonstrate confusion regarding the resort’s image.

What the core product is was also unclear from data, as employees seem to lose track of the bigger picture. Respondents felt the resort lacked a guest loyalty and tracking program and the ability to interconnect resort businesses. A desire was expressed for “a very robust kind of guest loyalty, guest tracking program” (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Product constraints were seen in the lack of a ski card product for the casual visitor, and in product weather dependency. Discussing product extensions, one respondent states “I think the major product that we’re missing, that we have to go with but it’s a slippery slope to go down the road...the sort of package of tickets, buy a three packet three pack of tickets, the frequency card I think its called in a lot of places um that kind of product” (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Streamlining processes for both staff and guests, as per programs such as lean six sigma were noted as a priority for improving both the employee and guest experience. Future plans include taking “the lean six sigma operational excellence work and expedite

it in a big way” (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007). Finally, although recommended in the literature, no formal marketing or environmental audits are conducted (Berry, Conant, Parasuraman, 1991; Shank, 2005).

Physical resources are constraining competitive positioning through hill space, as the resort currently experiences extreme crowding in peak periods of business. One possibility for addressing this constraint is the development of some existing but previously unused terrain at the resort. It was noted that the orchard development “is needed to alleviate the congestion...but that it could certainly be used as a selling tool” (Interview 2, personal communication, November 28, 2007). Parking capacity is also a concern, “we’re in a parking crisis, we have been for a few years” (Interview 8, personal communication, January 15, 2007). Many consumers have difficulty and frustrations as a result of inadequate capacity, poor direction, and lack of maintenance. Accommodation is the final physical resource, as “availability is really the key variable because the lodging and the meeting room availability and utilization is going to dictate the acceptance of business or not. In our industry there is no cap on lift ticket sales, so quite candidly if that’s the only product they’re looking at buying, within reason we don’t cap that opportunity” (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006).

Reputation was revealed as a constraining resource in that it was perceived that the resort would benefit from an organizational branding and training exercise. [We need] “a really great piece of training with all of our employees and say, and get them instilled in that idea of look, you guys represent Blue Mountain, and this is where I think we fall down” (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). Tied in with

financial resources, money to commit to brand is an area of great importance. As stated by one respondent:

we have a brand that we're representing and we need to make sure that we're representing that brand, and it's easy for us when we're here everyday to overlook things but we need to pay attention to some of the things that have been happening on the resort and put a stop to them...people associate the Blue Mountain brand with quality and I think sometimes it's a bit of a lunch bag let down when they get here (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006).

Resource constraints were identified with regards to numerous relationships. For corporate, community, and industry partnerships, what is needed to foster the relationships is physical "office space so that we could meet with our partners and sit down with them and not always be meeting in restaurants because it just doesn't foster that same type of creative environment" (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006). An adequate focus on segmentation by product usage is lacking, as is a focus on consumer relations, and in particular consumer retention.

I think the thing I think we're missing is that loyalty kind of program and um I think that's a big concern for me is that we don't have something like that so we're not creating this community of, or there is a community out there of people that are Blue Mountain customers and they like Blue Mountain they come back every year, but we're not tapping into that, we don't know about those people we

don't communicate on a different way we communicate to the regular guest on their first time here (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

Finally, human resources were found to be constraining competitive positioning. Results indicate that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited is currently experiencing challenges with hiring, training, and planning processes. Difficulties in hiring and retaining seasonal and part-time workers were revealed. "We've found ourselves for the last three or four years um [slight pause] getting more and more desperate for seasonal staff" (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007). The importance of succession planning was not reflected, as one out of ten interviews mentioned the concept. Finally, although Blue Mountain Resorts Limited can be considered ahead of their competitors with regards to the guest experience, there are still challenges. Respondents revealed a strong desire for a more in-depth standardized employee training program, as well as an extensive management and executive training program. Particularly, a consistent training experience across the resort is lacking, which, as a result, is significantly impacting the resort's branding activities and inhibiting the guest experience focus.

I think it would be beneficial, and then again going with the you know one Intrawest and us being one, that it would be beneficial that all new hires received basic training together and then would branch off into each department after to get the specialized training for their position, but I think it would be beneficial to have just a common training session in terms of what the resort is all about, um what we're trying to accomplish (Interview 2, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

Resource Allocation

Data indicate that resources were being allocated for either one of, or as a combination of, two reasons. The two reasons being: to improve the guest experience, and to streamline systems and processes for both staff and guests. A combination of these reasons affected 75 percent of the new hires mentioned. In addition to new hires, a variety of structural changes, e.g. bringing guest focus to operations, and improving ways of getting information to consumers, also came back to one or both of these two reasons.

Resource allocation decisions made in an effort to improve the guest experience are consistent with the conceptual framework notion that gaining a comparative advantage in a resource (organizational strategy, providing the optimal guest experience) will improve marketplace position by adding relative value. Resource allocation decisions that are made in an effort to streamline systems and processes are also consistent with the framework, as such decisions seek to improve marketplace position through both a decrease in relative costs (cutting out unnecessary processes) and increasing relative value for guests through more efficient service (Hunt, 2000a). An example of such streamlining can be seen with regards to sales managers at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. As a result of a “quantifiable belief that across the Intrawest brand, sales managers were not being used to the fullest” an “extensive time management study to understand what their day composes of and targeted a 33% growth or increase in their daily selling time” was implemented (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006).

It is of interest that, although the importance of hospitality to the organization was often mentioned in the data, interview respondents did not mention it with respect to

resource allocation. Another area not reflected in resource allocation to the extent that a review of the literature would suggest it should be, is the targeting and positioning of market segments. Finally, it did not appear that there was a clear, transparent process used for resource allocation. The decision-making process for such allocations was stated by respondents as implicit, not explicit (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007). Resource-advantage theory (Hunt, 2000a) would suggest that a clear process for resource allocation, based on data and an analysis of the impact of the allocation on Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's marketplace position of competitive advantage or disadvantage, would be useful in achieving superior financial success.

Resource Sustainability

As stated earlier, the sustainability of a resource is based on four criteria: rare, valuable, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable. Although a number of resources, discussed above, contribute to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's competitive advantage, many of them do not offer a sustainable competitive advantage. Two resources, physical and relational, meet each of the sustainability criteria (Barney, 1991).

Valuable	Resort location – Improved effectiveness Partnership with Intrawest – Enabled efficiency and effectiveness
Rare	Resort location – Not available to other resorts Partnership with Intrawest – Available only to resorts in the Intrawest family
Imperfectly Imitable	Resort location – Dependent on unique historical (including geographical) conditions Partnership with Intrawest – Dependent on the unique history of both companies
Non-substitutable	Resort location – No strategically equivalent resource available Partnership with Intrawest – Not substitutable

Table 2. Sustainable Resources (Adapted from Barney, 1991, pp. 105-106)

Table 2 outlines why resort location and the partnership with Intrawest each meet the sustainability criteria. In further detail, the location of the resort, on the Niagara Escarpment and in an active, tourism-based community, as well as the resort's proximity and accessibility to the Greater Toronto Area, is a sustainable advantage. This location has enabled Blue Mountain Resorts Limited to improve effectiveness. Such a location is not available to other resorts, as the resort owns the land on which it operates. As well, location is dependent on unique historical and geographical conditions such as rock formations, and the purchasing of specific land. Finally, there is no strategically equivalent resource available.

The relationship between Blue Mountain Resorts Limited and Intrawest is the second sustainable resource. It has enabled efficiency and effectiveness within the resort as it has provided access to financial and intellectual resources that have been instrumental to the resort's growth. It is available only to those resorts within the Intrawest family. It is dependent on the unique histories of both companies. Finally, it is not substitutable.

As discussed in the literature review, a number of factors contribute to the lifespan of a resource (Hunt, 2000a). As a result of the difficulty of buying and selling either the location or relationship with Intrawest, these resources are not considered mobile. They are considered to be quite complex, as a consequence of the combination of resources involved. The interconnectedness of location depends on the simultaneous presence of other resources acquired due to a unique path through history, such as natural resources, community economic dependencies, and highway infrastructure. The interconnectedness of the relationship with Intrawest, on the other hand, results from its acquisition depending upon already developed other resources first, as Blue Mountain Resorts Limited was already an established resort prior to the merger. Lastly, as a result of time compression diseconomies, both location and a relationship such as the one between Blue Mountain Resorts Limited and Intrawest as resources will, by their very nature, take time to acquire. As a result of these various factors, it is concluded that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited can expect to experience a long lifespan from these two sustainable resources.

Importantly however, Blue Mountain Resorts Limited must commit to reinvestment in the resort, develop an awareness of causal ambiguity, and be prepared to

adapt as a comparative advantage in resources can be dissipated as a result of these internal factors (Hunt, 2000a). Presently the resort is doing so, through measures such as a continued investment in snowmaking and development of the Village, as well as a commitment to gathering informational resources on consumer behaviour (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006).

Marketplace Position

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited considers its competitive set to be ski resorts within the province of Ontario, and they consider themselves to be leading this set. They classify themselves as a feeder resort, as outlined in the literature review, and feel a responsibility to develop participants for the future of the sport (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). With regards to competitive positioning, figure 5 illustrates perceptions as per the competitive position matrix found in the literature review (Hunt, 2000a). The figure highlights where a competitive advantage was found with regards to relative resource costs and relative resource-produced value. As well, box 3 shows a number of ways through which further improvements in competitive positioning might be achieved.

		Relative Resource-Produced Value		
		Lower	Parity	Superior
Relative Resource Costs	Lower	1 Indeterminate Position	2 Competitive advantage in resource costs achieved through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with Intrust 	3 Reduced resource costs or increase value achievable through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of lean six sigma • Further improvements to the guest experience • Market research • Marketing information system • Parking improvements • Expansion of Orchard terrain
	Parity	4 Competitive Disadvantage	5 Parity Position	6 Competitive advantage in value achieved through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • The Village • Guest experience strategy
	Higher	7 Competitive Disadvantage	8 Competitive Disadvantage	9 Indeterminate Position

Figure 5. Perceptions of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's Competitive Positioning
(Adapted from Hunt, 2000a)

With regards to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's self-perception of competitive positioning, they clearly perceive themselves to be in a position of competitive advantage, meaning one of boxes 2, 3, or 6. This was reflected in documentation where it

was clear that department plans did not always complete an analysis of the competition (see Appendix D, i.e., Blue Mountain Resorts Limited fiscal year 2007 business plan: Human resources division; Business plan handbook child activity 2006-2007; Business plan handbook guest services and relations 2006-2007; Business plan handbook mountain operations 2006-2007). This was also reflected fairly consistently in interviews, where the question of what environmental influences impact the organization resulted in responses such as “um competition, there are resorts around here ah [slight pause] this may sound a little conceited but I don’t feel that we really have a lot of competition” (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006).

Resource-advantage theory would suggest that this is a potentially dangerous situation for Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Accurately and regularly being aware of direct and indirect competition, as well as substitute products or services, would allow the resort to better serve their customers and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of themselves and others as necessary for sound strategic planning.

Comparisons were made to competitors frequently, in 9 out of 10 interviews, although only with respect to certain aspects. These include: 11 references made to the Village and the fact that it is an original offering in Ontario; 8 to their industry leading snowmaking system; 5 to physical aspects such as terrain, hill span, and vertical; and 3 references to price. These results indicate that the Village provides the primary competitive advantage over others in Blue Mountain Resorts Limited’s competitive set, with snowmaking a close second. Also revealed is that resort employees reflect little on price comparisons to other resorts, which may be considered a critical determinant of value to consumers.

An improvement in marketplace position is hypothesized in the conceptual framework as either a decrease in relative resource costs and/or an increase in relative value (Hunt, 2000a). This concept of value is a critical one to ski resort management. The data revealed considerable mention of value and references to research on consumers' needs and wants, in line with the guest experience strategy. There did not, however, appear to be any specific research directed to developing a greater understanding of what it is that consumers value, and therefore how the resort can create increased value from their resources. This was noted as a weakness and communicated in the following quote: "...so we don't have a good understanding of what our, [pause] we think we have a good understanding, we don't have a pure understanding of what our customers value" (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Currently Blue Mountain Resorts Limited focuses many promotions on lower-cost products and develops product changes or additions based on guest type that they believe will add value. Resource-advantage theory (Hunt, 2000a) would suggest that these strategies would benefit from more research into understanding what the various market segments actually value.

The lean six sigma program that the resort has embarked upon, described on page 55, represents another approach to improve marketplace position by reducing costs without reducing value.

Finally, as reviewed in the literature, marketplace positions of competitive advantage and disadvantage lead to innovation, both proactive and reactive. Proactive innovation is evident throughout results with regards to the development of the Village at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, as a result of the involvement of Intrawest. [It's]

“infrastructure, a combination of recreation and retail offerings, um the ability to have so many businesses running in one spot, we’re not just a ski resort we have conferences, we have restaurants, we have bars, we have all these other things” (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Reactive innovation is, however, mentioned in the data, as the resort continues going through a phase of growth and development.

We’re moving from a defensive strategy to an offensive strategy, and although it sounds like very subtle change, we’re controlling the ship, we’re determining how we want to do things, we’re not reacting to what other people want. Um, we’ve been building up policies and procedures for how people will, in essence, play the game with us if they wanna come to the resort ... so that they play by our rules and that’s been incredibly important to us ... that’s been um a subtle change but a very significant change in how we do business with people (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006).

Environmental Influences

Environmental influences, also often referred to as external influences, will inevitably impact almost every aspect of an organization (Hunt, 2000a). At Blue Mountain Resorts Limited the number one referenced environmental influence was the weather. Eight out of 10 respondents mentioned weather first when asked what environmental influences impact their organization. Blue Mountain Resorts Limited’s strong investment in snowmaking has often been able to make up for a lack of winter weather. The 2006-2007 winter season, however, saw an exception, where warmer temperatures in December and January did not allow snowmaking. This required the

resort to delay the opening of mountain operations and to temporary shutdown over their busiest season. Such an event brought weather to the forefront of employee minds and the necessity of looking into options that will provide further weather-proofing of the resort product.

The general economy was often mentioned as a factor. One respondent, however, indicated that the success of the local tourism area as a collective effort was equally important. As well, the fact that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited is able to market itself as a regional 'get-away' resort means that it is well positioned.

Obviously the economy is always of a concern but some times if the economy is hurting a titch, because we're regional it can actually be a benefit...and I'm talking from the resort world not from the real estate world and all those things... people might be inclined to stay closer to home and so, is that a problem or is an opportunity for us if we price properly and do all those things (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006).

A third environmental influence raised by respondents was the various factors seen to be impacting the visitation rates from the United States, including the exchange rate, passport requirements, government relations, and citizen perceptions. All of which have led to a lower number of visitors from the U.S. "Requiring a passport to come across the border that ah that's a pretty big hurdle that we need to overcome from a US visit perspective" (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006). Other influences indicated in the data included: demographic changes, legalities, and social concerns. Each is discussed below.

The aging Canadian population was noted as it will have an impact on the consumer market as well as strengthen the importance of staff succession planning. Increasing immigration numbers and changes in the population's ethnicity represent excellent opportunities for the resort to tap into, however it is evident in literature that much work needs to be done to examine the barriers preventing these persons from getting involved in winter sports (Canadian Ski Council, 2006). The anticipated growth of the Greater Toronto Area, and Ontario in general, has potential to increase Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's consumer market (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). The growth in the local region, however, has presented Blue Mountain Resorts Limited with staffing challenges, as the low unemployment rate in the Georgian Triangle has caused increased competition for filling part-time and seasonal work positions (Interview 9, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

Legal influences are presenting a number of barriers to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Barriers to product development are noted, i.e., as a result of the resort's location on the Niagara Escarpment (Interview 5, personal communication, December 1, 2006). Communication, including consumer relations and information sharing is impacted through contractual and privacy legislation. "Legal is a big one because I'm doing a lot of contracts and things like this and privacy legislation affects what I'm doing and the ability to go to market with partners and use their contact lists and things like that" (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006).

Finally, social concerns included the perceived image of both the industry as a whole and the individual sports themselves. Such perceptions were identified as impacting recruiting and hiring. "This industry isn't known for its high paying salaries,

and I think that ah that's pretty evident among most people that are job searching and things like that so...[that's] always gonna be kind of a bump in the road for the hotel and tourism market" (Interview 3, personal communication, November 29, 2006). As well, the ability to sell sponsorships is impacted. "The perception of skiing and snowboarding in general in the environment [has an impact]. If it's sexy, if it's hot, if it's ah you know cool, because I'm selling this intangible product if it's hot and cool in the media then that's good for me because sponsors want to be a part of it" (Interview 6, personal communication, December 1, 2006).

An area that was not addressed in the data is the role that suppliers play in influencing operations. When respondents were asked about environmental influences, although twenty references were made to the competition, only one was made referencing a supplier. This would point to a possible undervaluing of the necessity of forming and nurturing supplier relationships. As well, public policy decisions and societal resources were minimally reflected as concerns. These results are consistent with those from the Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show literature (Canadian Ski Council, 2006), which noted that societal resources were minimally reflected and public policy decisions were not mentioned. This would suggest that these are two areas which ski resorts may be overlooking as environmental influences.

Finally, there was no mention made of a formal environmental analysis (often called scanning) being conducted at the resort. When asked directly, eight respondents were not aware of whether a formal audit was or was not conducted by the resort. An analysis of competition and potential threats is completed by individual departments in their strategic planning workbooks, but it is not done thoroughly or conclusively across

the whole resort. In fact, a number of departments failed to complete the competition analysis and listed only the weather as a threat. The lack of such an analysis is seen in informational resources utilized by the resort in strategic planning. The following quote provides an example: "...holistically on the lodging side of our business for the winter, I would have to say that we are somewhat weak in truly understanding the competitive landscape that is out there" (Interview 7, personal communication, December 4, 2007).

The above sections have outlined key findings with regards to market segments, comparative resources, marketplace position, and environmental influences. In answer to the research questions, the resources providing Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's main competitive advantage are highlighted, as well as those resources which are enabling or constraining Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's desired competitive positioning. It appears that a number of the elements contributing to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's competitive advantage have come about as a result of the merger with Intrawest, and therefore that relationship is the most critical resource in providing a sustainable competitive advantage that the resort possesses. A summary of the key findings is provided in figure 6.

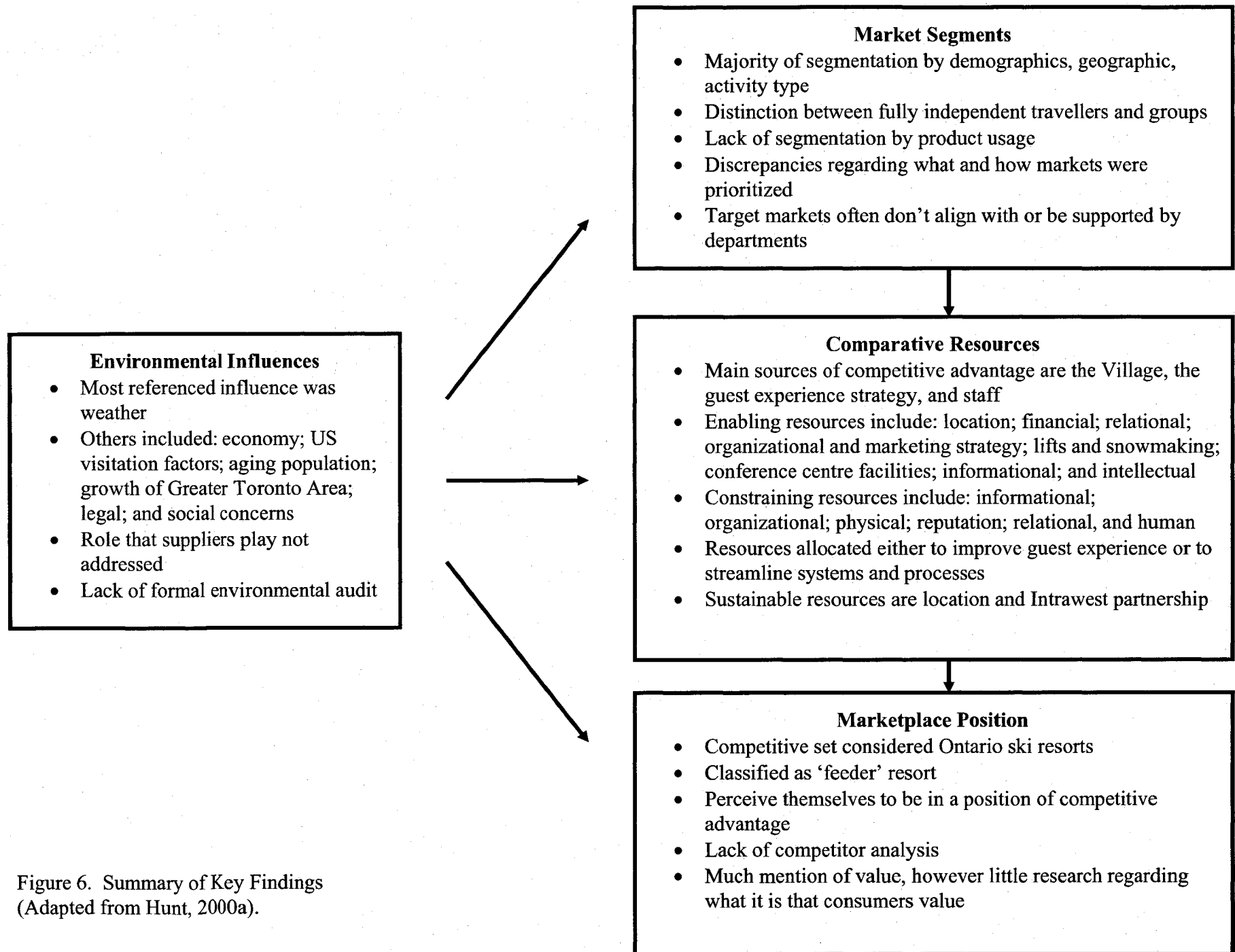


Figure 6. Summary of Key Findings (Adapted from Hunt, 2000a).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the first study objective, the conceptual framework highlights the impact that competition has on operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited through an analysis of the interconnectedness of each of the four constructs. It is revealed that the process of competition is impacting decision making and strategic planning at the resort, as Blue Mountain Resort Limited seeks to make decisions that will improve their marketplace position. It was found, however, that this was more often implicitly stated, and the resort would benefit from more explicit communication in decision-making.

As a result of these findings, a number of recommendations have been made to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited that serve to accomplish the study's second objective of providing strategies for addressing the challenges of competition to the organization. These recommendations are discussed in detail below.

With regards to market segments, the first recommendation is that a clearer alignment and regular re-evaluation be established and communicated between Blue Mountain Resorts Limited's priority target markets, consumer value, and the products and services being offered. It is further recommended that the products and services are not the only aspects considered, and that all departments at the resort evaluate themselves and establish clear goals by which to reinforce the targeted markets.

Secondly, to establish segmentation by product usage, the 'escalator' concept is offered as a tool in Appendix H (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Moving consumers up the escalator should be a well communicated and measurable goal tied to consumer retention, in particular beginners. Although much Canadian Ski Council (2006) research,

including that in which Blue Mountain Resorts Limited participates, explores the importance of beginner retention, there is clearly still a disconnect between theory and practice. Both upper management and middle management should be thoroughly briefed on the crucial importance of introducing beginners to the sport and their retention, and this needs to be recognized as a priority. The future of winter sports, and therefore the future of ski operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited is dependent on the development of new markets. Also stressed is the importance of communicating this information to the front lines and putting the focus on beginner retention into action.

As per product innovations, it is suggested that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited offer a 'ski card' product, noted as a frequency card in the results and discussion section. Popular at other resorts, this product would allow the day skier to purchase what is essentially a discount card. Concerns arose that such a product might interfere with or detract from season pass sales (Interview 1, personal communication, November 28, 2006). It is likely, however, that those who would purchase such a 'ski card' would not consider the season pass products, as they are skiing weekend days, rather than nights and weekdays. To be marketed largely to the weekend visitor, this product would be a draw for the consumer in the Greater Toronto and Golden Horseshoe areas, allowing lift tickets to be purchased at a slightly discounted price. From a resort perspective, the 'ski card' could create loyalty, increase return visits, fill a product gap that currently exists, and provide a mechanism for obtaining useful and currently desired information about day ticket purchasers. A purchase system is recommended that requires information such as where the consumer lives, contact information, demographic information, and tracking to reveal how many times and on which days the cards are used.

Key to future growth at the resort is addressing the major physical constraints currently being experienced. Although large investments are required, in order to increase occupancy and therefore sales, it is mandatory that the resort address its physical constraints. The orchard terrain expansion is the next big win on-hill, with the FIT consumer market requiring more and more hill space during the weekend time block (Interview 4, personal communication, November 30, 2006). Expanding terrain is the best option for getting more people on the slopes, and the orchard is a previously promised and unutilized asset. Parking, as well, is a crucial element. It is a key element of service and critical in providing the seamless guest experience thereby possibly increasing value. Whether expanding existing parking facilities, or developing new options and revamping the resort shuttle, this element will continue to grow in importance. In order to begin to address future planning, it is recommended that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited play a strong role in resort development plans regarding critical elements of service. One such example is closely monitoring the ratio of parking spaces to rental units and developing subsequent plans. Being prepared to adequately provide these basic service elements will go a long way to decreasing consumer frustrations, thereby creating a positive guest experience.

It is suggested that with regard to future informational resources, Blue Mountain Resorts Limited should continue their work with consumer surveys and joint-initiative research. Future research, however, should place a strong emphasis on understanding what the consumer values. Obtaining better information on this concept will allow for much better allocation of resources to improve customer satisfaction. Information on

what key elements of service are critical in providing an exceptional guest experience would also be beneficial.

With regards to corporate sponsorship, it is recommended that sponsorship objectives be clearly defined. Frequently identified objectives include generating awareness, improve image, reaching new target markets, increasing sales, building relationships, gaining competitive advantage, community involvement, brand positioning, and management interests (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Through discussion, questionnaire, or research, identifying which of these objectives the sponsor is trying to meet will go a long way in developing a sponsorship proposal that will meet the corporation's needs. Also critical, however, in validating the legitimacy of the sponsorship is the ability to evaluate the exchange. Although more likely to be credible if done by an external consultant, all objectives should be developed as specific, measurable, achievable, results oriented, and time bounded (SMART acronym), giving explicit direction to what the evaluation must be designed to measure (Crompton, 2004). Finally, with regards to corporate partnerships it is highly recommended that a private meeting space be allocated in which exchanges can take place fostering creative and collaborative energy.

It is suggested that the implementation of a formal internal marketing audit would be of benefit to the organization. Shank (2005) suggests that frequent marketing audits should be conducted to review performance and identify market opportunities and threats. For Blue Mountain Resorts Limited an approach is needed that accommodates the unique characteristics of services, has the versatility to be applied in a variety of service contexts, and addresses the following dimensions: (a) marketing organization; (b) existing

customer marketing; (c) internal marketing; (d) service quality; (e) marketing orientation; and, (f) new customer marketing (Berry, Conant, Parasuraman, 1991). Also suggested is the development of an extensive marketing information system, characterized as a collection of data that management uses in the development of marketing programs and when making marketing decisions (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). The essential characteristics that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited should consider in its development include: (a) data must be contained in one centralized system; (b) databases need to be integrated so that data from different sources can be compared and contrasted; (c) data must be retrievable in a form that is useful; (d) the system must allow for multiple users and simultaneous multiple access; (e) data security must be facilitated by design control mechanisms; (f) a protocol must be established to collect the necessary data; and, (g) storage capacity of the system must be able to handle the volume of anticipated data as well as the characteristics of the data (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Shank, 2005).

A formal environmental audit is recommended as well, in order to develop a true understanding of the constantly shifting environmental influences affecting the organization. Literature suggests that such an attempt must be made to acquire information on events occurring outside the organization to identify and interpret potential trends (Shank, 2005). It is suggested that an individual be identified as responsible for the analysis and ensuring that the retrieved information is analyzed and communicated effectively.

Lastly, the concept of branding was frequently raised throughout the interviews. It appears that Blue Mountain Resorts Limited would benefit from a resort-wide branding exercise, with a strong focus on staff training processes and creating a uniform

experience across the resort. Such an exercise will assist the resort in achieving the branded, consistent, positive guest experience that they are aiming for, and thereby improving marketplace position through an increase in the value of the experience.

With respect to third and final objective of the study, it is valuable to apply this particular management-based theory of competition to the ski resort industry. Resource-advantage theory was found to be applicable and useful in this single-case study in identifying and isolating components, as well as demonstrating their interplay. The study results provided management with a framework to identify internal discrepancies, constraining resources, and strategies to address challenges of competition. It is therefore suggested that research applying a variety of management-based theories are likely to be of benefit to ski resort management and should be further explored and developed utilizing a case-study research strategy.

Throughout the present study a number of further areas were identified where future research might be beneficial. The concept of value (i.e., what consumers value) was identified through triangulation as an area of which the industry currently lacks an adequate understanding. If value is regularly identified in market research as an important element to consumers, the industry needs to further develop their research and resulting knowledge. This knowledge will also inform organizational excellence strategies, as resorts will be better able to provide value to consumers, while eliminating costly services that are not valued.

Barriers to participation and beginner retention are crucial areas of research for the winter sport industry. As the Canadian population ages, it is vital that the industry concentrates on introducing newcomers to winter sports and ensuring a positive

experience so that they become lifetime participants. Although literature from the Canadian Ski Council (2006) clearly identifies beginner retention as a priority, the lack of mention from the present study reveals that this is an area where much focus is still needed.

As a result of the present study's success in achieving both academic and resort objectives, it is highly recommend that future partnering between educational institutions and resorts on research projects be pursued and encouraged. Particularly, market research presents many opportunities where projects can be created that will ensure great benefits for both parties.

Finally, although not an objective of the present study, it is noted that a holistic classification system for ski resorts does not currently exist. The diversity of the industry provides a barrier for such an accomplishment, however it is recommended that future research seek to develop a classification system that can encompass all ski resorts and clubs. A number of suggested criteria include terrain diversity, vertical, lift capacity, services offered, and number of beds (accommodation). Such a system would provide researchers with a method by which to select a certain type of resort to conduct focused research, rather than delivering diverse results that might not be applicable to all.

In conclusion, the impact that the process of competition has on operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited has been discussed through an analysis of market segments, comparative resources, marketplace position, and environmental influences. The application of the resource-advantage theory was found to be of value to the ski resort industry. A number of strategies were identified to address the challenges of

competition, for which recommendations have been made to improve marketplace position. Finally, a number of recommendations for future research have been identified.

APPENDIX A

Canadian Snow Industry Symposium and Trade Show 2006

Topic	Speaker Affiliation	Main Issues	Constructs Addressed
Moving Toward the Podium in 2010 Olympic Update	Whistler Blackcomb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Olympic opportunity to market our country and ski industry ▪ Opportunities for Canadian resorts as a result ▪ Major investments/changes in Whistler area 	Organizational, physical, financial, relational resources Societal resources and societal institutions
Moving Toward the Podium in 2010 Olympic Update	Canadian Snowsports Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Olympic Winter Games Snowsports Overview ▪ Mission is podiums, with a goal of 37 medals ▪ Addressing challenges 	Organizational, financial, physical, human resources
Moving Toward the Podium in 2010 Olympic Update	Alpine Canada Alpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alpine Canada Alpin's plan leading up to 2010 ▪ Challenges being faced ▪ Benefits to Canada for the 2010 games 	Intellectual, financial, relational, human, organizational resources
Moving Toward the Podium in 2010 Olympic Update	Canadian Freestyle Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CFSA's plans towards 2010 ▪ Details of the 'Own The Podium' program 	Physical resources
Moving Toward the Podium in 2010 Olympic Update	Alpine Athlete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goals for and preparation leading up to 2010 ▪ Resort mentality differences between North America and Europe 	Physical, financial, organizational resources Societal institutions
Profiting in the Off Season, Turning Downtime into Dollartime	Canada Olympic Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activities and programs that COP has developed to keep the park active year round ▪ Room for growth physically and in programming for mountain biking 	Physical and human resources
Profiting in the Off Season, Turning Downtime into Dollartime	Mont Saint-Sauveur International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MSSI summer ventures and activities ▪ Diversify range of activities ▪ Reinvestment critical in not losing market share 	Human, physical, financial resources Actions/characteristics of competitors & suppliers, behaviours of consumers Market segments Marketplace position
Profiting in the Off Season, Turning Downtime into Dollartime	Sun Peaks Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mountain biking demographic is changing ▪ Resorts have helped remould the sport ▪ Overview of Bike Parks BC 	Physical, financial, informational, relational resources Societal institutions,

			actions/characteristics of competitors & suppliers Market segments
Profiting in the Off Season, Turning Downtime into Dollartime	Blue Mountain Resorts Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer opportunities, challenges, and tips for success 	Financial and relational resources Behaviours of consumers Market segments
The Canadian Model for Growth: Part II – Diving into Specific Opportunities for Growth	RRC Associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of recent CSC research and conclusions 	Relational and intellectual resources Market segments
How Do You Stack Up? Why Some Ski Areas are Surpassing Others in Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	RRC Associates		N/A
How Do You Stack Up? Why Some Ski Areas are Surpassing Others in Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Chicopee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chicopee's goals, objectives, as part of CSC test site program Strategies for implementation 	Informational, financial, human, physical, organizational resources Behaviours of consumers
How Do You Stack Up? Why Some Ski Areas are Surpassing Others in Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Mont-Sainte Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation, implementation, and benefits of CSC demographic survey 	Organizational, informational, relational resources Behaviours of consumers
How Do You Stack Up? Why Some Ski Areas are Surpassing Others in Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Sun Peaks Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using market research to better your business Sun Peaks objectives, programs, and moving forward 	Informational, relational, intellectual, human resources Actions/characteristics of competitors & suppliers, behaviours of consumers
How Do You Stack Up? Why Some Ski Areas are Surpassing Others in Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Mount Washington Alpine Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs and research at Mount Washington Making the most of CSC research 	Informational, relational, financial, human resources Behaviours of consumers

Capitalize on the Similarities between the Golf and Snow Business in Canada	PLAY GOLF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of PLAY GOLF initiative ▪ Challenge similarities between golf and skiing 	<p>Relational, informational, physical, organizational resources</p> <p>Societal institutions</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Integrating Brand and Culture with Partners to Create the Ultimate Ski/Ride Experience	Big White and Silver Star Resorts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brand imaging is critical to corporations 	<p>Relational, reputation resources</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Integrating Brand and Culture with Partners to Create the Ultimate Ski/Ride Experience	Station Mont Tremblant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why form partnerships? ▪ What makes them work? ▪ Challenges you'll face 	<p>Relational, financial, reputation, intellectual resources</p> <p>Actions/characteristics of competitors & suppliers</p>
Integrating Brand and Culture with Partners to Create the Ultimate Ski/Ride Experience	Salomon Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>10 Steps to a Happy Resort Consumer</i> (A Simple Guide for Resorts & Brands to Work Together) 	<p>Reputation, relational, organizational, financial resources</p> <p>Behaviours of consumers</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Integrating Brand and Culture with Partners to Create the Ultimate Experience	West 49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ West 49's corporate branding strategy – overview of national and local programs 	<p>Reputation, relational, human resources</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Integrating Brand and Culture with Partners to Create the Ultimate Ski/Ride Experience	Intrawest Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivering the brand experience – How leading brands and ski areas are working together to grow our businesses ▪ Opportunities and barriers 	<p>Relational, reputation, human resources</p> <p>Behaviours of consumers</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Trump Says it Best – Hired or Fired – Picking the Right Employees for Your Business	Seasonal HR Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impact of a 'wrong' hire ▪ Defining your culture ▪ Recruiting/elements of job description ▪ Behavioural interviewing 	<p>Human, financial, organizational resources</p> <p>Societal resources</p>
Secure Borders and a Good Economy: Can We Have Both?	Jay Peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative ▪ Introduction of coalition and next steps 	<p>Financial resources</p> <p>Societal institutions</p> <p>Market segments</p>
Build Your Business, Know Your Markets	National Ski Areas Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trends and issues of consumer markets ▪ Past growth, the future, and the NSAA's direction 	<p>Informational, relational, financial, physical, human resources</p>

			Behaviours of consumers
A Look at the Economy as it Relates to Snow Business in Canada	Conference Board of Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bringing U.S. visitors to Canada will only get harder, focus on domestic markets 	Intellectual resources Market segments
Money, Power, and Youth: Tapping into the Tween/Teen Market	SBC Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of action sports collective and youth is huge There are a lot of opportunities for partnerships 	Reputation, relational resources Societal institutions, behaviours of consumers Market segments
Money, Power, and Youth: Tapping into the Tween/Teen Market	Youth Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generation was born to boomers and will be declining by 2010 All about service, how they are treated 	Intellectual Societal institutions, behaviours of consumers Market segments
Money, Power, and Youth: Tapping into the Tween/Teen Market	Park and Pipe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use them as a resource, get them involved Create events that are grassroots, accessible 	Human, informational resources Societal institutions, behaviours of consumers Market segments
Money, Power, and Youth: Tapping into the Tween/Teen Market	Mediacs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be honest to kids in your marketing Media savvy is not instinctive, its learned 	Societal institutions, behaviours of consumers Market segments
Money, Power, and Youth: Tapping into the Tween/Teen Market	Blue Mountain Resorts Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be 'real' in what you are selling Importance of imagery Focus on the lifestyle, not just the sport 	Human, informational, relational, organizational resources Societal institutions, behaviours of consumers Market segments

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide: Phase 2

1. Please provide a brief description of your position at Blue Mountain
2. Who are your primary and secondary target markets?
3. How are these markets prioritized?
4. What is your core product?
5. What are the most viable strategies for reaching your targeted segments and positioning the product in their minds?
6. What information would you like to know about your consumers that you currently don't have access to?
7. Can you tell me about a change (for instance to products, price, promotions, venues, procedures, or organizational structure) made for the upcoming season?
8. Why was it made and what did it involve?
9. What product extensions are currently being considered and why?
10. To your knowledge, is a marketing audit conducted annually? (If yes, who does it and what role does it play in your marketing/product strategies?)
11. To your knowledge, is an environmental scan conducted annually? (If yes, what factors are scanned?)
12. What external influences do you perceive as impacting ski operations at Blue Mountain? (i.e., Hunt classifies as societal resources, institutions, competitors/suppliers, behaviours of consumers, public policy; Shank classifies as competition, legal/political, demographics, technology, culture, physical environment, economy)
13. What does Blue Mountain have that sets it apart from other resorts and for each of them, how do you know this?
14. Which three things that set Blue Mountain apart would you say are most critical and where does Blue Mountain stand with regard to them? If you had a million dollars to allocate to one critical area, where would you put it?
15. Is your decision to put money in this particular area a result of a current weakness/deficiency or is it strategic?
16. What are the most critical resources in delivering your product to the consumer?

17. What resources are currently unavailable that you would like to see acquired?
18. What internal communication methods do you consider to be the most effective?
Least effective?
19. Do you feel the resort is looking to open new terrain as a result of a capacity constraint or because it will provide something new to promote?
20. On which departments (i.e., hospitality services, mountain operations, recreation and retail, finance, human resources, sales and marketing) do you feel Blue Mountain's organizational culture places the greatest value?
21. On which functional areas within the marketing department (i.e., info and reservations, systems, advertising and communication, events marketing and public relations, market research, group sales) do you feel Blue Mountain's organization culture places the greatest value?

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide: Phase 3 – Human Resources

1. Please provide a brief description of your position at Blue Mountain
2. BMR targets a number of specific market segments, (i.e., young families, the GTA population, youth) what specific strategies does HR have in place that support these directions?
3. What external influences are impacting human resources at BMR and how?
4. Can you tell me about a recently acquired resource that has changed the way you, as a department or as an individual, operate?
5. What was the decision-making process for acquiring this resource?
6. In your opinion was this decision making process consistent with the concept that the allocation of resources is determined by whether or not such a move will contribute towards an improved marketplace position?
7. Was this thought process implicit or explicit?
8. What resources are currently unavailable that you would like to see acquired?
9. If you were given one million dollars to allocate to any aspect of BMR as you see fit, how would you spend it?
10. What is the rationale behind your decision to spend it in this way?
11. Your FY07 Plan highlights 11 key services, which do you consider to be of greatest priority at BMR?
12. Which do you consider to provide the greatest value to BMR?
13. Resource sustainability is defined as being valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable, are there functions of HR at BMR that you believe meet these criteria?
14. In relation to other areas at Blue Mountain, how valuable do you consider human resources to be to the organization?
15. On which areas do you feel Blue Mountain's organizational culture as a whole places the greatest value?

Interview Guide: Phase 3 – Mountain Experience

1. Please provide a brief description of your position at Blue Mountain
2. BMR targets a number of specific market segments, (i.e., young families, the GTA population, youth) what specific strategies does mountain operations have in place that support these directions?
3. What external influences are impacting mountain operations at BMR and how?
4. Can you tell me about a recently acquired resource that has changed the way you, as a department or as an individual, operate?
5. What was the decision-making process for acquiring this resource?
6. In your opinion was this decision making process consistent with the concept that the allocation of resources is determined by whether or not such a move will contribute towards an improved marketplace position?
7. Was this thought process implicit or explicit?
8. What resources are currently unavailable that you would like to see acquired?
9. If you were given one million dollars to allocate to any aspect of BMR as you see fit, how would you spend it?
10. What is the rationale behind your decision to spend it in this way?
11. What elements do you believe are critical in delivering a positive guest experience?
12. Which do you consider to be of greatest priority at BMR?
13. Which do you consider to provide the greatest value to BMR?
14. Resource sustainability is defined as being valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable, are there functions of mountain operations at BMR that you believe meet these criteria?
15. In relation to other areas at Blue Mountain, how valuable do you consider mountain operations to be to the organization?
16. On which areas do you feel Blue Mountain's organizational culture as a whole places the greatest value?

Interview Guide: Phase 3 – Hospitality and Village Association

1. Please provide a brief description of your position at Blue Mountain
2. BMR targets a number of specific market segments, (i.e., young families, the GTA population, youth) what specific strategies does hospitality have in place that support these directions?
3. What external influences are impacting hospitality at BMR and how?
4. Can you tell me about a recently acquired resource that has changed the way you, as a department or as an individual, operate?
5. What was the decision-making process for acquiring this resource?
6. In your opinion was this decision making process consistent with moving towards an improved marketplace position?
7. Was this thought process implicit or explicit?
8. What resources are currently unavailable that you would like to see acquired?
9. If you were given one million dollars to allocate to any aspect of BMR as you see fit, how would you spend it?
10. What is the rationale behind your decision to spend it in this way?
11. Resource sustainability is defined as being valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable, are there functions of hospitality at BMR that you believe meet these criteria?
12. The Blue Mountain brand (reputation as a resource) is seemingly more developed on the ski side than the lodging side, can you speak to this?
13. In relation to other areas at Blue Mountain, how valuable do you consider hospitality to be to the organization?
14. On which areas do you feel Blue Mountain's organizational culture as a whole places the greatest value?
15. How was the village association concept developed?
16. What is the make up of the association?
17. How are decisions made?
18. What is the added value of having a village association?
19. Are there any challenges or drawbacks?

20. Do you feel the collaborative partnership (i.e., the village association) has an impact on BMR's marketplace position?

APPENDIX D

Documents Reviewed

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited brand statement 2006

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited winter 2006-2007 product brochures

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited employee handbook 2005-2006

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited organization chart (2006)

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited three year plan presentation (2006)

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited fiscal year 2007 marketing plan

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited fiscal year 2007 business plan: Human resources division

Business plan handbook retail 2006-2007

Business plan handbook recreation 2006-2007

Business plan handbook rentals 2006-2007

Business plan handbook child activity 2006-2007

Business plan handbook skier development 2006-2007

Business plan handbook guest services and relations 2006-2007

Business plan handbook mountain operations 2006-2007

Engineering budget 2005-2006

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited On-Resort Satisfaction Ratings 2005-2006

2005-2006 Guest profile

2005-2006 Ticketed visitor profile

2005-2006 Blue Mountain season pass holders

Season pass defectors 2005-2006

Pass holder satisfaction 2004-2005

January 2006 Pass holder survey

Net promoter 2005-2006 results

Blue Mountain Resorts Limited document: Poised for Growth 2005

Blue Mountain Destination Resort Economic Impact Analysis Final Report, June 2006

(Prepared by HLT Advisory Inc.)

General bylaw of Blue Mountain Village Association June 2005

Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation 2006-2007 Marketing Plan: Poised

For Growth

APPENDIX E

Data Analysis Node Tree

Note: Original nodes in plain font, adjustments after inter-reliability coding in **bold**, adjustments as coding continued in *italics*.

Interview Demographics

Gender

Male

Female

Interview Length

Short

Long

Department

Sales and Marketing

Hospitality

Mountain Operations

Human Resources

Village Association

Length of Employment

Pre Intrawest

Post Intrawest

*Study Phase**Two**Three*

Market Segments

Activities

Decision Making Capability

Psychographics

Demographics

Prioritized

Geographic

Skier Ability

Communication Channels

Expenditure

*Frequency of Visits**Duration of Visits**Guest Type**Group**Leisure (FIT's)**Season Pass Holders**Homeowners*

Resources

Reputation

Relational

Corporate Partnerships
 Village Association
 Community Partnerships
Consumer Relations
Industry Partnerships

Physical

Natural Environment
 Location

Organizational

 Marketing Strategy
 Product
 Goods
 Service
 Changes
 Experience
 Price
 Place
 Promotion

Structure
 Changes
 Culture
 Goals

Intellectual

Legal

Informational

Marketing Research
 Consumer
 Competitor
 Retention Rate

Human

Hiring
 Training
 Succession Planning
 Recruiting

Financial

Time

Environmental Influences

 Actions & Characteristics of Competitors and Suppliers
 Behaviours of Consumers
 Actions
 Needs and Wants
 Public Policy Decisions
 Societal Institutions
 Societal Resources
 Weather
 Other

Marketplace Position
Value
Competitor Comparison

APPENDIX F

Case Study Protocol

Overview/Background

Much research has been conducted over the past few decades to study various aspects of the ski industry. Little, however, has been done to examine the industry from a resort management perspective. It was the intent of this study to utilize Hunt's (2000) resource-advantage theory of competition to explore the impact of competition in the industry.

The study will make in a number of significant contributions to both the field of ski resort management and the study of sustainable competitive advantage. It will build on the little previous existing research to develop an understanding of competition in the ski resort industry and test the application of the resource-advantage theory to enhance a ski resort's competitive advantage. A single-case study research strategy will be utilized to examine one resort, Blue Mountain Resorts Limited.

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose - to develop an understanding of how competition impacts operations in the ski resort industry by describing and explaining the structures, processes, problems and challenges facing Blue Mountain Resorts Limited

Objectives - (a) identify the impact of industry competition in relation to operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited; (b) detect valuable strategies for addressing the challenges of competition on Blue Mountain Resorts Limited; and, (c) determine the value of applying a management-based theory of competition to the ski resort industry

Study Scope and Methodology

Instrumental single-case research strategy of one ski resort, Blue Mountain Resorts Limited. Study will consider only the winter operations of this four-season resort.

Case Study Issues/Relevant Readings

A general theory of competition (Hunt, 2000)

Questions

(a) What resources constitute the main competitive advantage for Blue Mountain Resorts Limited?

- (b) What resources either enable or constrain Blue Mountain's desired competitive positioning?
- (c) Why are resources allocated in such a manner?
- (d) How does competition impact resort operations at Blue Mountain Resorts Limited?

Measures

- Market segments
- Resources
- Marketplace Position
- Environmental Influences
- Quantitative coding counts

Data Sources

- Documents
- Blue Mountain Resorts Limited employees

Data Collection Methods

- Guided interviews
- Document review

Data Analysis Strategy

- themes, subthemes, node framework developed and content analysis

Field Procedures

- Access to case study site to be gained through contacts in the resort area, leading to proper contact at Blue Mountain
- For help, if needed, go to committee members or other faculty
- Time schedule – to be completed by spring 2007

Guides

- Interview guides (Phase 2 & 3)

Checklists for Documents to be Collected

- Business plan workbooks for each department, or similar documents if not available.

- Organization chart
- Market research

Analysis

- Read for themes
- Creation of node tree
- Coding
- Adjustments to node tree throughout
- Utilize NVIVO
- Referencing back to case study database

Reporting

Audience - For the purposes of reporting the case study, two separate documents will be created for different audiences. The first will be written as a final report on the study to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited, the second as a dissertation to the thesis committee.

Outline - The reports will both be written utilizing linear-structure. Chapters will include: overview and background, review of literature, methodology, findings, and discussion. The report for Blue Mountain, however, will minimize technical jargon and references to theory, concentrating instead on the findings and discussion of the study.

Procedure for report verification and review – interviewees will review their transcripts for validation.

APPENDIX G



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: ***The Impact of Competition on Operations in the Ski Resort Industry: A Case Study of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited.***

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Bonnie Simpson and Dr. Marijke Taks from the Kinesiology Department at the University of Windsor. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Bonnie Simpson at simpsonb@uwindsor.ca or Marijke Taks at mtaks@uwindsor.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how competition impacts operations in the ski resort industry by describing and explaining the structures, processes, problems and challenges facing Blue Mountain Resorts Limited.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an informal meeting (introduction, explanation) of variable duration, possibly through email or by telephone
2. Participate in an **audio taped** semi-structured interview (duration 30 – 75 minutes)
3. Review your transcribed interview for accuracy (10 – 20 minutes)

Meetings/interviews will take place in your workplace and within the months of November – December 2006.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

It is possible that individual employees may feel uncomfortable disclosing information that will discredit the performance of the company and this could be considered emotional harm.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

It is anticipated that the study will result in findings/data that will be useful for the resort in the future. ***The subjects themselves will not receive any direct benefit***, however their employer will have access to all results/findings from the study and these are likely to improve resort performance therefore indirectly benefitting the subjects.

The benefits of this study to the resort industry include an enhanced understanding of how competition affects their operations.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The subject will not receive payment for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. It is possible, however, that as a result of your role in the organization others may be able to identify your comments.

A nondisclosure form has been signed by both the University and Blue Mountain Resorts Limited maintaining confidentiality until April 30, 2008. Written records and audio tapes will be secured in a locked office at the University until the study is complete. Upon study completion the dissertation will be deposited in the Graduate Studies Office and the rest of the material will remain property of the researcher and the University of Windsor, to be disposed of according to practices established by the Faculty of Human Kinetics.

Interviews will be audio recorded and the subjects will be required to review their interview for accuracy prior to data analysis. The tapes will be accessible only to the researchers and will be erased after the completion of the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

A final report with study findings will be submitted to Blue Mountain Resorts Limited upon completion of the study, whether or not this information is made accessible to subjects is to be the decision of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

Do you give consent for the subsequent use of the data from this study? Yes No

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: lbunn@uwindsor.ca.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study ***The Impact of Competition on Operations in the Ski Resort Industry: A Case Study of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited*** as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

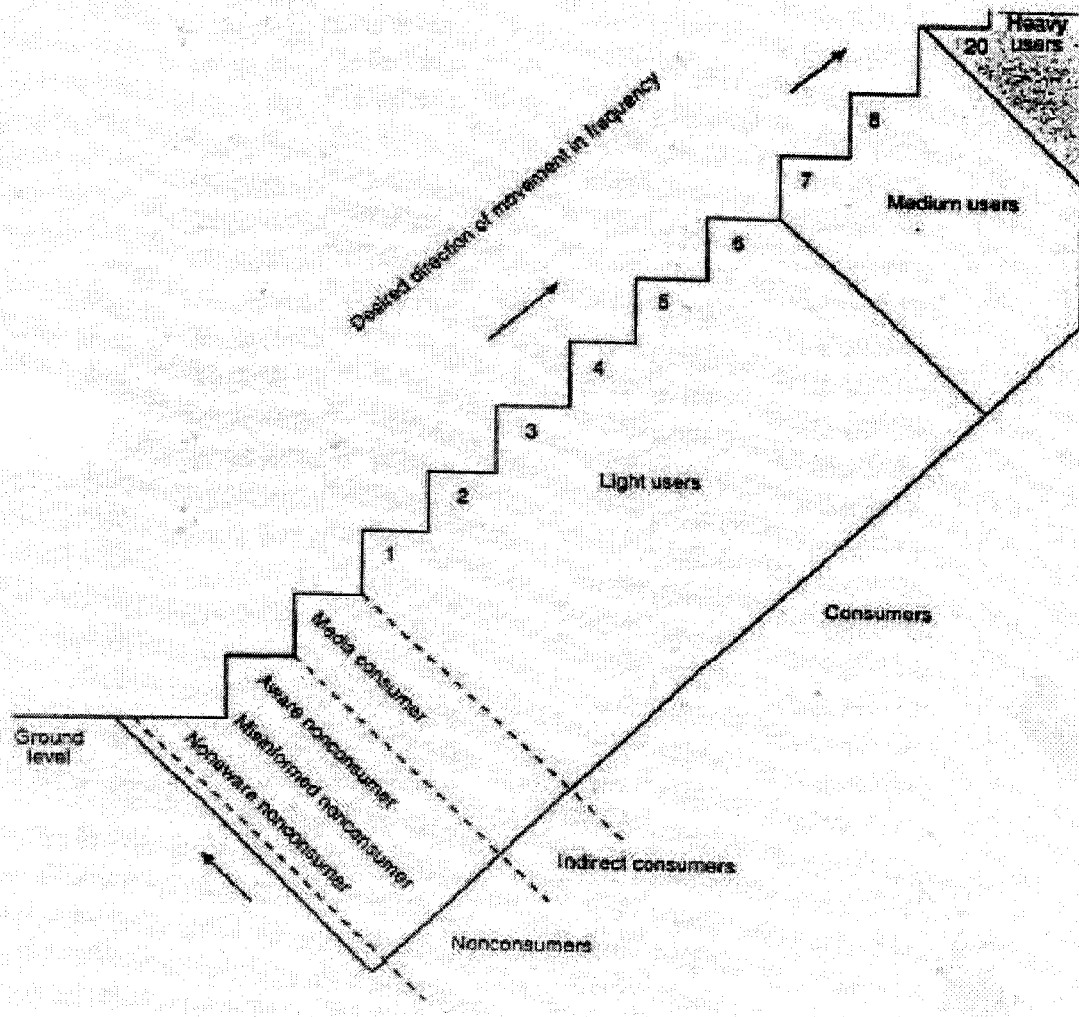
These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX H

Escalator Concept



Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton (2000, p.36)

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Canadian Ski Council. (2006). *Canadian snow industry symposium and trade show: Synopsis of presentations* (Blue Mountain, ON, July 10 - 12, 2006). Mississauga, ON: B. Simpson.
 Simpson, B. (2006). *Final report on the impact of competition on operations in the ski resort industry: A case study of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited*. Written for Blue Mountain Resorts Limited.

PRESENTATIONS:

Simpson, B. (2006, March 22). *Determining the value of applying a management-based theory of competition to the ski resort industry*. Poster presented at the 1st Annual Kinesiology Research Day, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON.
 Simpson, B. (2007, March 31). *Determining the value of applying a management-based theory of competition to the ski resort industry*. Poster presented at the 7th Annual Sport Management Student Research Colloquium, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON.
 Simpson, B. (2007, May 30 – June 2). *The impact of competition on management in the ski resort industry: A case study of Blue Mountain Resorts Limited*. Presentation at the 22nd Annual Conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Fort Lauderdale, FL.

AWARDS:

President's Award for Academic Excellence – University of Windsor 2006
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