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Jack B. Samuels
Montclair State University

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MARKETING RECREATION AND FUNCTIONALLY RELATED
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: FACTORS INFLUENCING
PRODUCT AND SERVICE SUCCESS

BY

DR. JACK SAMUELS, COORDINATOR

COMMERCIAL RECREATION AND TOURISM PROGRAM
MONTCLAIR STATE COLLEGE
UPPER MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY 07043

ABSTRACT

The popularity of recreation as a marketing tool is being influenced by the personal involvement of participants and the positive outcomes from the experience. It is the direct association of products and services with the positive emotions that yields the greatest results. The macro trends that are causing these positive feelings are societal factors that will continue to influence the cultures well into the future.

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Can you foretell what will happen to recreational products and services in the future? Regardless of whether you are a practitioner or a layperson pondering the future can be a challenging task. You're invited to consider some of the pervading forces which shape the future of recreation and leisure products and services. Examine the macro and micro factor groups which contribute to the success or failure of these products and services and ponder where you should invest your time and/or money in the future.

There are five factors which appear to be exerting a pervading force on all recreation and leisure products and services in the 80's. These are far reaching macrotrends which will affect the success of all recreational products and services for the foreseeable future and should remain predominant well into the 1990's barring a far reaching sociocultural change in our society. These include: recreational narcissism, active vs. passive syndrome, "leisurized" marketing, high tech recreation, and the shift from success by default to success by excellence.

Recreational narcissism is the trend towards recreational activities

which are narcissistic in nature. Narcissism has been characterized as a phenomenon in our society in such books as Culture of Narcissism (1) and was put in a more positive light in Megatrends (2) as the shift from "institutionalized help to self help". This trend supports the continual growth of individualized recreational activities. High adventure activities and individualized sports should enjoy continued consumer acceptance during the next decade. Watch for continual growth and/or stability in the number of participants in such sports as skiing, scuba diving, jogging, weight training, mountaineering, sailboarding, recreational vehicles (particularly ATV's) and racquetball. Gambling is also likely to continue to grow as a recreational activity because of the opportunities it gives the participant to compete on an individual basis. There are, however, many other reasons for the growth of gambling which are activity specific.(3) Newly developed high adventure activities and individualized sports are likely to quickly gain in popularity. Look for a possible decline in interest in all team sports, which will largely continue to garner participant interest because of their professional opportunities and not because of their inherent values. Team sports, however, that also give the individual a chance for "individualized performance" such as team oriented adventure games also have good prospects. Examples of these include such games as those involving a paint pallet gun where you more or less go out in the woods and play capture the flag and an indoor version of this involving electronic laser guns which has been popularized by the television show "Laser Tag" as well as the franchised currently popular "Planet Photon" game centers.

There will be a continual movement of people from passive to more active recreational activities. The fitness craze is likely to stay with us for a long time. The participation of the public in active recreational activities will be continually prompted by our society's need to escape from it's high tech environment. Any activity which brings people together and arouses a feeling of oneness is also likely to survive. Spectator activities such as movies, circuses, plays, and sporting events must arouse strong emotional feelings in their audiences to be successful. Athletes and performers must reach out to the public to make them truly feel that they are a part of the event. This is Naisbitt's notion of high tech promoting the need for high touch.(2)

The "leisurized" marketing of virtually every product and service in our society is likely to continue. "Leisurized" marketing is the promotion of both recreational and non-recreational products and services via their association with or through the utilization of recreational activities. Think about how many products and services utilize some type of recreational activity in order to make their sales pitch. One of the more interesting recent advertisements utilizing this approach was the selling of a cigarette by touting that the cigarette featured a "leisure length". Other than the fact that the product is being associated with leisure it is difficult to define exactly what is a leisure length cigarette. The continual trend towards the "leisurized" marketing of all products and services indicates that any leisure services organization which approaches a company with a logical idea to co-promote their products and services with a recreation product or service is likely to succeed in obtaining a sponsorship. Likewise manufacturers will continue to seek out recreational events and activities which meet their product's image.

High technology applied to recreational products and services will continue to modify and improve existing products and services but will also bring about many new ideas in upcoming years. Swimming has become a whole new inland experience via the development of wave pools and other high tech water rides. Exciting new thrill rides have been developed for theme parks and robots are beginning to entertain us in restaurants and night clubs all over the world. Many of these provide new lower cost "programability" since the rides so called hardware can have its software changed. The changing of the software makes the experience an entirely new show at a much lower cost. High technology will also provide continual improvement for existing sports. Team sports are likely to become safer and safer. Such activities as scuba diving and skiing have become much safer and more enjoyable to participate in the past fifteen years resulting from the high tech improvement of equipment. A floating hotel is now under construction of the coast of Korea, an undersea hotel has opened in the Florida Keys and a hotel which simulates life in outer space is under construction in Oxnard, California. The continual application of high technology will provide some amazing recreational opportunities and developments in the years to come.

Is your recreation and leisure service or product delivery organization successful by default or successful by excellence? In an era where many recreational products and services have enjoyed overwhelming demand it was comparatively easy to succeed in the marketplace. As the number and variety of recreational products and services continue to increase competition will not only become more keen between various industries but also within each industry. This increased competition will cause recreation and leisure product and service delivery organizations to strive for excellence. Only those organizations with the most continually creative managements and the most highly trained personnel will be able to survive the pressures of the marketplace. There will be an increased need for professionally trained managers who understand the dynamics of leisure services. The consumer will benefit as we become an industry and public service which strives for greater excellence.

We have examined some of the major pervading forces which will affect the future of recreation and leisure products and services delivery, but what other factors enter into the success or failure of any specific recreational product or service? The following is a brief examination of the micro factors which are directly related to the consumers interest in a specific recreational product or service. (Note: There are additional factors which have been identified by this and other authors that can affect the success of the marketing of any product or service which are not discussed in this presentation. These factors are generally relevant to a greater extent to all products and services than the factors discussed below which are of greater relevance to recreational products and services.)

Through a continuing research project an attempt is being made to define factors which contribute to the success or failure of recreational products or services. Fourteen different factors have been identified which can be used to forecast the future of any recreational product or service. These include: historical similarity, newness, variation,

entry cost, sustaining cost, accessibility, physical exercise value, mental exercise value, risk perception, excitement, entertainment value, comfort, ease of participation, and team vs. individual participation. These are all factors to consider when evaluating the potential of any recreational product or service in the marketplace.

An examination of the historical similarity of any product or service in question should reveal any similarity the product or service has with past products or services that have been marketed. If something has been a long lasting success in the past and a similar product or service becomes available (perhaps with just a slightly new twist) it is likely that the new product or service will also be a long lasting success. If something exhibits a similarity to a product or service that has not enjoyed long lasting success in the past it is likely that it will only be of passing interest (a fad). Wave pools are likely to be successful for a long period of time because of their similarity to traditional swimming pools. Dance crazes such as disco are almost guaranteed to have short lived lives because they have historically followed this pattern for years.

How new or different is the product or service you are considering marketing? Entirely new products or services are privy to become fads, but they are not necessarily subject to the same levels of long lasting appeal. On the other hand items which are variations of previously marketed entities may find longer lasting audiences particularly if the new item is based on an item which has had a long history of success in the marketplace.

The entire cost of becoming involved with a particular recreational product or service as well as the consumers cost for sustaining participation also can play an important role in a product or services success. Products or services which have high initial costs may have difficulty attracting new people. The ski industry is one recreational industry that clearly has this problem and has recognized it. Each January ski areas collectively market days which are designed to give new skiers a chance to try the sport at a low cost. This marketing campaign removes most of the first day skier price shock from the sport. Many ski areas also offer special first day skier packages during the entire ski season. High cost recreational activities can have difficulty sustaining consumer interest if the consumer does not perceive that they are getting extraordinary enjoyment or satisfaction from them. SCUBA diving has a high drop off rate which is largely caused by the fact that the novelty of being underwater quickly wears thin for many divers. The SCUBA industry has tried to alleviate this drop off rate by encouraging novice divers to take up such underwater activities as treasure hunting, spear fishing, and underwater photography.

Accessibility is a major issue for the marketers of recreational products and services. Many ski areas have gone under largely due to poor location. A water park that is just five miles closer to a population center than a competing water park might enjoy a strong competitive advantage, especially if most other factors are equal. Recreational products which can be used anywhere in the World are far more likely to find mass markets than those which can be used in a limited amount of locations.

The opportunity or level of physical or mental involvement or benefit which can be afforded the consumer from a recreational product or service is very important to its success. One of the predominant reasons for the success of racquetball was that it provided the participant with a better and faster workout than tennis. Games and puzzles which have been particularly challenging to the mind have had greater success in recent years. Good examples include Trivial Pursuit and the puzzles which have been developed by Professor Rubik.

Risky recreational activities which provide some sort of unique thrill are clearly in vogue and are likely to continue to be popular. This is particularly true of activities which are risky, but yet enable the participant to greatly control the amount of risk they are exposed to. Many of the higher growth recreational activities including parasailing, riding ATV's (all terrain vehicles), jet skis, snow skiing, and SCUBA diving fall into this category.

It is very difficult to decide just how entertaining or enjoyable a recreational activity is for its participants. Judging the intrinsic recreational value of any recreational activity is very important to being able to read its market. If a television programmer had excellent judgment in this area he or she could make their network number one. There are no easy answers to how to make these judgments, however, a great deal more research and monitoring of what customers basically like and don't like in recreational products and services will become necessary as the market becomes increasingly competitive.

Participation in many recreational activities is limited by the potential participant's ability to learn the activity. The dramatic growth of aerobic exercise is due largely to the ease of learning and participating in the activity. The ease of participation in individual sports and other recreational activities as opposed to those which must be done in groups coupled with the strong narcissistic cultural trends in our society discussed previously in this article will continue to enhance the popularity of individual vs. team sports.

The factors discussed in this article are all of significance in predicting the success or failure of recreational products and services. Some factors are of greater significance than others. Continual research into the significance of these and other emerging factors are essential if we are going to better predict the market for recreational and related products and services.

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