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**SEGMENTING THE VISITOR MARKET BY THE TIMING
OF THEIR ACTIVITY DECISIONS**

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ABSTRACT

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

other counterparts, and spent, on average, nearly twice as much as those that made their activity decisions prior to leaving home. Implications for marketers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

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

impacts, a destination area can refine its marketing plan and adjust its productivity in generating new revenues for the destination.

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

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

county's visitor attractions by Perdue and Pitegoff's (3) typology.

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

METHOD

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

A total of 3,391 visitor parties were contacted as they entered visitor zones to the attractions (e.g., entrances to festival grounds, all corridors to street festivals). Nine hundred eighty nine (29%) of the 3,391 visitor parties were determined to be non-residents of the county. One member of each 989 non-resident party was asked to participate in the study by filling out a contact card. A mailed questionnaire was sent to these individuals within the week

following their attendance. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a second copy of the questionnaire was sent to non-respondents. This survey approach yielded a response rate of 55% (546 subjects). This research design is similar to that used by Long and Perdue (2).

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

RESULTS

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

Further analysis revealed several important insights (Table 3). First, respondents who made their activity decisions after arriving in the county were typically a part of the long haul market. These visitors on average traveled greater distances from their home to reach the destination. Second, visitors who made their activity decisions after arriving in the county stayed significantly longer

than the other counterparts. Third, visitors who made their decisions to participate in visitor opportunities once they have arrived in Alachua County spent, on average, nearly twice as much as those that made their decisions prior to leaving home.

IMPLICATIONS

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

Based upon the small promotional allocation directed at the group who decides to visit the county and then upon arrival decides what to do and see, efforts aimed at influencing their decisions are currently being left to chance. As a result of these findings, the areas' attractions will allocate more resources to deliberately target this market with promotional activities designed to get them out of their hotel rooms (or friends and relatives homes) and interacting more with area businesses. Much of the adjustments

will be aimed at in-tour media channels (e.g., visitor guides at hotels, restaurants, attractions) and campaigns designed to inform residents who in turn may influence their guests.

These findings do not suggest promotional activities should be shifted away from those designed to influence potential visitors at their home. The sheer number of those that make their activity decisions prior to their

trips contributes much to the total economic impact. These results however highlight the potential of in tour promotional activities in influencing non-resident decision making. Furthermore, a likely bi-product of in-tour promotional efforts may be an increased likelihood of more residents choosing to recreate within rather than out-of-county locations, thus increasing in-county travel expenditures.

REFERENCES

1. Florida Department of Commerce, Florida visitor study. Tallahassee, Florida, 1991, author.
2. P. Long and R. Perdue, The economic impacts of rural festivals and special events: Assessing the spatial distribution of expenditures. Journal of Travel Research, Vol. 28(1), pp. 10-14, 1990.
3. R. R. Perdue and B. E. Pitegoff, Methods of accountability research for destination marketing. Journal of Travel Research, Vol. 28(1), pp.45-49, 1990.

TABLE 1

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

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

TABLE 2
TIMING OF SUBJECTS ACTIVITY DECISIONS BY ATTRACTION TYPE
N= 546

Percents of Column Totals				
	attraction	festival	special eve..	Totals
before trip	40.95%	79.76%	59.09%	71.48%
enroute	10.48%	1.67%	9.09%	3.66%
after arriving	48.57%	18.57%	31.82%	24.86%
Totals:	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 3: ANOVA TABLE
TIMING OF ACTIVITY DECISIONS BY TRIP CHARACTERISTICS
AND EXPENDITURES

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Timing of Activity Decisions</u>			<u>F</u>	<u>p</u> ≤
	<u>Before Trip</u>	<u>Enroute</u>	<u>After Arriving</u>		
Distance Traveled (in miles)	186 <i>a</i> *	357	737 <i>a</i>	12.13	.0001
Length of Stay (in nights)	1.04 <i>a</i>	.65	6.32 <i>a</i>	10.12	.0001
Total Expenditures	\$95.54 <i>a</i>	\$79.60 <i>b</i>	\$173.31 <i>a,b</i>	18.26	.0001
Expenditures on Food & Supplies	\$18.45 <i>a</i>	\$16.00	\$70.31 <i>a</i>	5.43	.0046
Expenditures at Eating & Drinking Places	\$23.93 <i>a</i>	\$25.35 <i>b</i>	\$66.87 <i>a,b</i>	26.54	.0001
Expenditures on Paid Forms of Lodging	\$12.30 <i>a</i>	\$16.84	\$35.14 <i>a</i>	7.77	.0005

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