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## The Image and Perception of Silver Springs Commercials Among Cincinnati, OH Residents: A Report of Focus Group Findings

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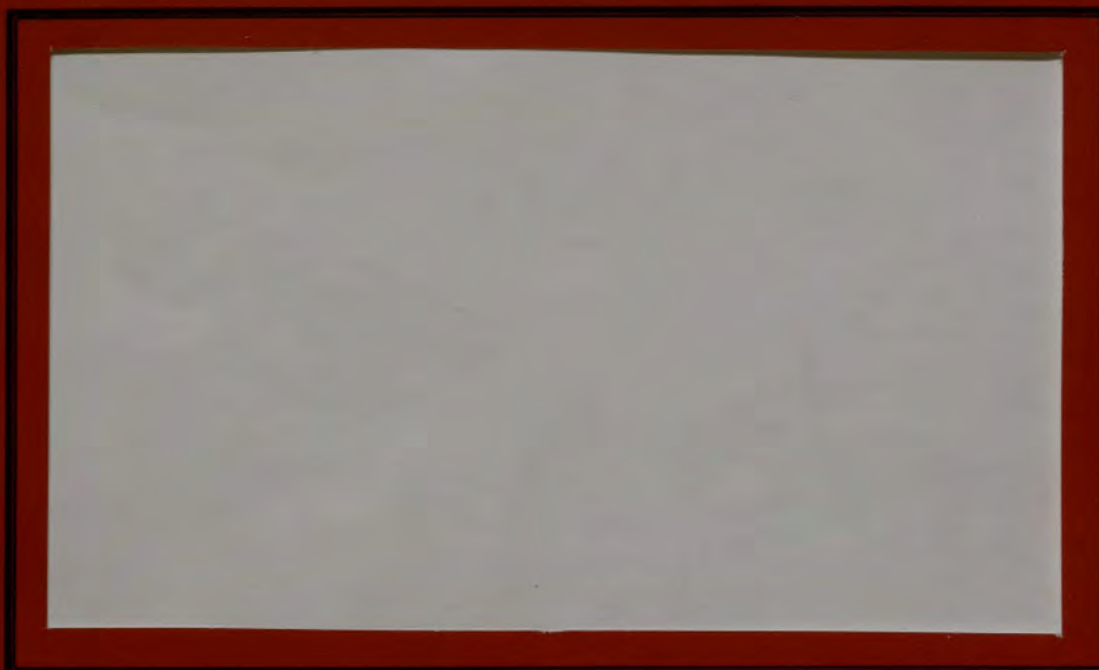
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*TO FACILITATE THE INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC BY PROVIDING...  
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**THE IMAGE AND PERCEPTION OF  
SILVER SPRINGS' NEW COMMERCIALS  
AMONG CINCINNATI, OH RESIDENTS:  
A REPORT OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**

Prepared for:

Silver Springs Management

by:

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## GENERAL:

The major aim of the focus group was to identify main areas of concern regarding the impact of the five Silver Springs commercials to be broadcasted in the State of Ohio.

Twelve residents of Greater Cincinnati participated in the two-hour focus group. Four participants were males and eight were females. Their ages ranged from 16 to 60, and they represented an array of ethnic groups. The participants also had a varied educational background from high school diplomas to college advanced degrees. This cross section representation of the population allowed different opinions and perceptions by the various participants.

The focus group interview took place on May 6, 1987 at the Cincinnati Technical College located in Central Parkway minutes from the downtown area. Participants were recruited by the Institute's staff in local shopping malls and other public places.

Please note that the majority of the respondents heard of or visited Silver Springs.

## METHODOLOGY:

The methodology used in the focus group was the "Funnel Approach" in which broad topics were introduced first by the moderator and as the discussion progressed, the topics were narrowed down to the major area of concern, the new Silver Springs Commercials. This approach was adopted to create a tourist-leisure atmosphere among the participants, before any conversation about Florida attractions, in particular Silver Springs was introduced.

During the market testing phase of the discussion, each commercial was shown twice. At the end of the evening, the five commercials were shown again before final conclusions were made by the participants.

## FINDINGS:

### Leisure activities preferred by the participants:

The participants divided into two major groups: The first group consisted of those participants who preferred to spend their leisure time away from home, primarily going on vacation (week-ends away" "going to Florida once a year" "going to the beach"). The second group consisted of those people who spend their leisure time with activities not necessarily associated with "get-away" like sports activities, movies, socializing with friends, shopping, reading, and studying.

### Vacation travel behavior (preferred activities):

The ocean and beaches were a favorable vacation activity among Ohio residents, this was not surprising due to the geographical location of the state. Other favorable activities on vacation were dining out, sightseeing (for example, churches and big cities), visiting attractions, shopping, as well as outdoor activities like playing golf.

Please note that one respondent said that spending time with the family was an activity that is enjoyed most on vacation.

### Preferred destinations:

Travel out of town was relatively limited to short week-ends to near by locations like Lexington or to the ocean, primarily Florida and the Carolinas.

The East Coast, was also mentioned, and even though Williamsburg was a favorable destination, it was associated with the ocean ("not to far from the water"). California was mentioned but not discussed.

It is interesting to note that Florida was the only destination that was described in detail of either attractions (Disney, Busch Gardens, the Gulf coast) as well as activities ("a lot to see").



### Florida Vacation:

The majority of the respondents visited the "sunshine state." Those participants who visited Florida have been to Daytona Beach, Pompano Beach, Pensacola, Orlando, St. Petersburg, Ocala, Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Panama City, Ft. Lauderdale, Ft. Myers, and Clearwater. Some participants did not specify particular destinations and said that they have been "all over" or to regions like the panhandle, the Gulf, and so on.

It is interesting to note that many participants associated Florida visit with family and friends they have there.

Florida was associated with vacation image like sunshine and sand, attractions or "entertainment centers" (Disney World, EPCOT, Sea World) "lots of activities" "lots of people and tourists," "golf courses," "great seafood," hotels and shopping centers.

Some associated Florida with non-tourist images like: heat, humidity, dolphins, transient population, geriatrics ("slow drivers") and Miami Vice (Don Johnson).

### Florida Attractions:

Disney theme Parks were not mentioned immediately followed by Sea World, Busch Gardens, Cypress Gardens, the dog races, Jai Alai, and Silver Springs.

### Silver Springs:

The discussion of Silver Springs originated from the topic of Florida attractions. Some participants visited Silver Springs and thought it was "beautiful" and recalled the glass bottom boat.

One participant compared Silver Springs to a similar attraction, Rainbow River, and described it at length reflecting higher enjoyment than in Silver Springs.

Some participants associated Silver Springs with promotion: They recalled billboard advertising on the way down to Florida (Georgia border), brochures in hotel lobbies (even in Ohio) and welcome centers, TV commercials, and magazine advertising (Southern Living and Better Home and Gardens).

One respondent associated Silver Springs with movies that were made there and said that her family "took daddy to Silver Springs" to see where the movies were made.

Another respondent associated Silver Springs with an old established attraction that she could remember 20 years ago on her honeymoon.

After describing the park and its features (based on the AAA Florida guide and Silver Springs brochure) the five commercials were shown to the respondents.

#### **SILVER SPRINGS NEW COMMERCIALS:**

##### 1. "Testimonials:"

The park was perceived to cater for families with young children, but not to single middle aged adults: "...not an attraction for myself" said a divorced lady in her late thirties, or "...my little kids would be interested" said a mother for two young kids.

The park was also perceived to be attractive to senior citizens, but not for teens. According to one participant who has three sons, teenagers like "high thrills" like water skiing.

Even though the participants were informed that the commercials they were about to see are in a development phase, the animated commercial was perceived to be suitable for "Saturday morning TV."

The park was perceived to be a relaxing place for a break after the intense activities at the Disney complex.

Some people were confused as to the interaction with animals, in particular the line "you can reach out and touch the animals, you're that close." The participants wanted to know more specifically what they were going to do with the animals. It is important to note that not all people love animal interaction ("...It would not be for me..." One lady said that "...I am cosmopolitan, and the closest I am going to get to a fish is in an aquarium...")

In general, the participants did not understand what was the aim of the commercial. "...It did not show anything..." said one, and a housewife who visited Silver Springs said "...I did not think it was a good representation of it at all..."

Most of the participants did not like the animal noises in the background, nor the voices of the man or the woman, however, they thought that the announcer was good, in particular at the end of the commercial.

To some participants the learning and educational aspects of the park were missing.

Finally, to those who knew Silver Springs, the glass bottom boat was a strength in the commercial.

## 2. "Parking Lot:"

The beginning of the commercial was perceived as a major strength of the commercial. The participants also liked the single voice of the announcer rather than "...jumping from one person to another..."

The idea of the glass bottom boats and the "intimate jungle cruise" had a mixed reaction, in particular they were not sure what the "intimate jungles cruise was: "moonlight cruise in the jungle?" "going back to the jungle?". In addition, some wanted to see what do you see from the boats.

It appears that the glass bottom boats should have been emphasized more since "...animals you can find anywhere..." One participant was enthusiastic about an experience he had at Rainbow Springs where he was taken by a motor boat to the source of the springs and the experience was "cool and refreshing."

With regard to the animals, the commercial did not reveal the visitor-animal interaction, and it seems that the participants wanted to find out about it. Some people thought it was very important to have a contact with the animals and an example from the New England Aquarium in Boston was given.

As to the target market of the park, the participants perceived the park to appeal to older people (the "10,000 years ago" connotation) or families with kids. However, it is important to note that none of the participants recalled any children in the commercial.

Once again, the middle aged group with no children did not find it appealing mainly because the lack of "fast pace."

## 3. "Endorsement:"

The very first criticism was the tone of voice of the "Florida man." The participants did not like the southern accent ("Dollywood accent" or appeal and suggested Don Johnson instead.

The commercial was more diversified and people recalled the antique cars and the sliders at Wild Waters. The available choices were regarded as a positive feature.

The logical development of the commercial features seemed contradicting to some of the participants, in particular the shift from the Wild Waters to "It's like Florida used to be and



isn't anymore..." In one instance the commercial tries to promote an amusement park (Wild Waters) and immediately after it tries to promote the return to the "good old Florida." Did Florida used to have water parks in the past?

Some confusions were recalled with regard to the glass bottom boat. The Florida man was talking about the "famous glass bottom boats," but the participants recalled a canoe! It appears that some people do not know what a glass bottom boat is and were disappointed to see a man paddling a canoe.

A teenager participant did not like the idea of bending down and drinking some water, even though the Springs seem to have clear water. With respect to "clear water" some elaboration of the term appeared to be necessary.

In addition, some comments were made about the actual location of the park. The information "near Ocala, just off I-75" was not complete and people were more interested to know where is Ocala! Some suggestions were made to mention Ocala as an attraction on the way to Orlando ("Here's an attraction before you get to Disney") or to associate Ocala with north Florida where it is cooler.

With regard to the climate, it was important to some participants to know how hot it is down in Silver Springs, and this dimension should be added to the commercial.

Another issue that was raised in this commercial was the "after hours" activities of the park. "Do you have to leave the Springs before dark?" "What there is to do in Ocala? fine restaurants? Jai Alai?" Some participants wanted to know more about Ocala as a tourist destination.

Some positive comments were made about the old connotation of Florida. The "It's like Florida used to be and isn't anymore, except here" was more favorable than the previous commercial's "10,000 years ago." One participant offered to add "and it's still is" to the "It's like Florida used to be."

Finally, the commercial seemed to appeal to a wider market than the previous two: "kids," "senior citizens," and "families with older kids."

#### 4. "Grandpa and Danny:"

The participants were quite disappointed to find out the single dimension of the park ("They took it back to one dimension"), featuring a park that appeals to grandparents and grandchildren. Although it was perceived a good commercial for these target markets, people missed the glass bottom boats, the water slides, the cars etc.

With regard to the commercial's features, it was suggested that more grandparents and grandchildren will be featured as well as additional animals rather than the deer ("I wouldn't drive all the way to Florida to see a deer!"). Consequently, the park was not perceived to be in Florida, and more "Florida features" were recommended to be added to the commercial.

The participants liked the last part of the commercial and the tone of voice, The commercial was perceived to portray Silver Springs as a place that you go back to (grandpa is coming back), but the time span between visits is too long (Did grandpa waited 40 years to bring Danny or did he visit the park several times before he brought his grandson?).

Some participants perceived the commercial to be "too fairy tale." Grandparents are not as old anymore, and the commercial need to be "appealing to my age," said a younger grandma.

Finally, some suggestions were made about showing in the commercial the places in the park where movies were shot.

#### 5. "Memories:"

The participants liked this commercial over all the previous four, and were happy that they finally "got to see the glass bottom boat!" The commercial was also leaving some opportunity for imagination. There might still be some things in the park that may be attractive to the visitors.

Misunderstanding was recorded again about the visitor-animal interaction. People wanted to know more what animals could be touched and what animals could not. The safety element seemed to be missing.

Finally, some people perceive the Florida portrayed as a retirement place, and if you do not have older grandparents or family in Florida, you need not come to Silver Springs.

The "don't miss" it message at the end of the commercial was regarded in a positive manner and Silver Springs was perceived as place worth stopping.



## FINAL DEBATE OVER THE FOUR COMMERCIALS:

An informal vote for the most appealing commercial was taken among the participants. The most appealing commercial was commercial #5, followed by commercial #3. A synthesis of the messages in both commercials would seem most appropriate.

Respondents liked commercial #5 because of the positive appeal of the park, the comprehensive coverage of all the park's features (It hit all points"), the "more reality" appeal like reference to Disney, vacationing, etc. The commercial also suggested that "repeat business" concept and was perceived to be more sentimental. A major strength of the commercial was that the glass bottom boat was shown.

Some criticism were raised with regard to commercial # 5, in particular to the absence of the water park. Although the directions to the park were more explicit, some still wanted to know where is Ocala ("Two and a half hours north of Disney?")

Respondents liked commercial #3 mainly because of the wording, but did not like the accent. "...Somebody else was missing, somebody like Bill Crosby..."

With regard to the least favorable commercial, commercial # 3 was a "complete turn off" mainly because of the accent, drinking water out of the river, the non-logical order it was out (Wild Waters and immediately the "like Florida used to be."

Some liked least commercial # 4 mainly because the exclusive reference to grandparents and grandchildren, and the lack of excitement of an attraction worth visiting ("I can stay in Ohio to see a deer")

Some participants liked least commercial # 1 because of the lack of enthusiasm to visit a natural park so far away as well as the tone of voices.

The final approach was to ask the respondent to suggest an ideal commercial for Silver Springs. The respondent suggested to include the following features:

1. The glass bottom boat.
2. The water park.
3. Petting zoo.
4. Antique cars.
5. The natural aspect.
6. Precise location.
7. The non-congested non-polluted aspect.
8. More people.
9. Time element: hoe long are you going to spend in the park?
10. The vacation and traveling plans to Disney World.