

ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN THE BULGARIAN HOTEL INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF THE BIJOU HOTEL

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ABSTRACT

The trends in the communicational policies and the good practice of positioning the leading tourist destinations are aimed at the distinction of the offered products, at the certain groups and campaigns for the imposition of a brand. In this sense Bulgaria must have a clear strategy for the features and the unique offers which form the identity of a destination. Our communicational campaigns must emphasize on the specifics, on the personal experience and emotions.

The purpose of this article is to prove that marketing communication is an effective way for the company to be represented, to have a good reputation, to build its image and to create the best conditions for its development.

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Introduction. Marketing communications are a system of relations. They are a public communication and unlike other ways of communication (technical, transport, etc.) they are characterized by the fact that the senders and the receivers of the information are people or a group of people. They are the relations between the company and the target audience(s) in the exchange process (having in mind all of its components – production, distribution, exchange and consumption) and with the marketing's means they are aimed at reaching the goals of both parties of the communicational process on a maximum degree – on one hand, for the company - establishing a stable position on the market and on the other hand for the target audiences - receiving more advantages from the situation compared to the amount of given efforts (financial and nonfinancial).

Marketing communication is the main link in the marketing mix and in particular in its part of promotion. The different communicational channels provide contact with the target audience in a different way. Every single one of them has its own quality and serves a different purpose. Together however they intensify their impact. The integration of the marketing communications allows the accomplishment of a number of business goals and the starting point is the customer.

Dealing with problems and creating a relationship, taking notice of opinions and critique, appreciating the customers' trust - those are just a part of the required professional reactions in the constant process of communication. The fulfillment of effective strategies and PR campaigns in the tourism requires a close management on the whole process of communication.

One communicational action is enough when it does its job without imposing or being noticed at all. The hotels in Bulgaria need more focused, energetic and innovative communicational activities. The creation of stories which cause curiosity and surprise with their uniqueness is an important part of the communication specialist's job. According to Karadzova (2014) „firstly it is very important the attention of the target audience to be caught. The channels and tools of communication should be chosen according to the audience's profile.“

Hotel industry and hotel product. The hotel industry is a business which aims to provide shelter for the tourists. It is characterized by specialized facilities, industrial technology, specific hotel staff and its own hotel product. It is relatively connected to other areas in the tourism business: restaurant industry, travel agencies, transport, etc. The hotel industry provides its facilities to the needs of the restaurant industry, trade service, travel agencies, etc. The size, structure, duration of the stay and rhythm of visitation of the tourist flow, all depend on the capacity, quality, structure, location and duration of the exploitation of the hotel's basis.

The technology, facilities and social sphere in the hotel industry are determinative for the tourism and they are caused by the nature of the customers' needs which have to be satisfied. Karadzova (2011) concludes that „the general structure of those needs is related to the common human hierarchy of needs but meant for the specific tourism travel circumstances.“

The tourism product of the hotel's complex depends on the type of facility, the category of each one, the location, the demands, etc. As a product it contains a stay for the night; a stay for the night with breakfast; half board; full board; sports - and cultural entertainment displays. The hotel product has five distinctive features: location, combination of means and amenities (which provide rooms, restaurant, lobby bar and other leisure facilities), the notion of it, services provided there and price.

Integrated marketing communications. The integrated marketing communications include direct marketing, PR, advertising, personal sales, promotions, etc. The communicational programs unite those forms in different combinations and they are dependent of the same logic which is connected to an exact tourist product, situation and audience, meaning that they are unconditionally tied to the marketing mix while thoroughly coordinates and mutually reconciles its elements.

The hotel organizations aim to generate the demands, to increase their product's sales and to establish their brand and image on the market through stimulating their customers and users.

– Direct contact

For the businesses that offer services such as “Bijou” hotel, the form of contact and communication between the users and the staff is direct. Jefkins concludes that:

In order for the hotel to take care of its guests and to cater to their demands, requires and expectations, it is necessary for them to know their audience, to find out who and what kind of people they are, what made them visit the facility, what interests do they have, what are their expectations, would they visit us again (Jefkins, 1993).

How could this customer information be gotten? In the hotel industry part of this information is received right after the registration of the guests via using their personal information and by the way the reservation is made. Although in almost every case the most harmless and unforced way to get information could be simply done only by:

– observation - the more experienced employees in the tourism can get a lot of information only by watching or observing the guest. The guest's luggage, clothes, posture, walk, manners, the people he/she is meeting, his/hers attitude towards them, his/hers tendency of eventual additional expenses for luxury and extravagance, if he/she is close-fisted, practical, etc., could be all a source of information;

– listening - having a direct contact or conversation with the guest is a great way to get information because usually that way they share more personal information about themselves. Although it could be interesting to listen to. The significant information is the one that is related to the working process, such as offering additional hotel services;

– dialog - in order to have a successful communication between the guests of “Bijou” hotel and the employees, it is very important for the staff to have the correct communicational skills and oratory. The relationships “employee - guest” are built on convictional communication and respect on both sides of the parties. The basis of this respect is politeness. When you are talking to a customer, your utterance should be proper and clear. The guests should be listened to very carefully and the approach towards them should be friendly, professional, with respect and concern, which will leave them with good impressions and a feeling of satisfaction from the received services.

It is a common practice for “Bijou” hotel to always keep a special database of its guests. That is the so called history of the guest which contains information about his personal preferences and eventual complains. The research upon the guest's opinion about the offered main and additional services, the quality and speed of service, the employees' politeness and precision, advice on the lack of services which could be helpful or potentially used by them, is all done by the help and usage of questionnaires. They are placed in each room of the hotel. On them, willingly, the guests could give their opinions, suggestions, advices, ratings, critiques and discontent. After they have been filled out it is necessary for the marketing department to research them or informing the related department which is being given a suggestion or critique. This is done in order the future stay of the guest to be more pleasant and satisfying, and also so he can be convinced that his suggestions have been noticed. That way the guest feels the hotel as his own home and the treatment towards him is personal as if he is one of the most important guests of the hotel.

The book of recommendations has a similar purpose. It is placed in the hotel's lobby, right next to the reception and in it the tourist groups or individual tourist could write their impressions from the stay and to give their suggestions or concerns about the offered services.

Communicational policy is one of the most important elements of the marketing mix because it practically offers information and creates the relationship between the customers and a certain organization, while also contributing to the elaboration of the organizations' product.

The communicational policy of “Bijou” hotel regarding the tourists (the most important audience) embraces not only the direct communication, but also the variety of tools used for influence upon the customers, which are grouped in the following fields: public relation services, advertising, direct marketing and personal sales.

– Public relation services

Public relation services are a communicational and an information process related to the establishment of a friendly environment. Each hotel has its own public relation services regarding the hotel's guests, employees, the people who create the public opinion (journalists, trainees, customer associations, etc.), the people who are on a business trip or with recreational purposes (potential clients), the media, suppliers, travel agencies, stockholders, etc. Black suggests that:

The realization of PR is simultaneously an art and a social science of analyzing the development and predicting its upcoming conditions, so that it could help the management of each firm or organization to plan and carry out programs who protect the interest of the organization and the public (Black, 1989).

Public relation services are: the general communicational efforts of a person or an organization oriented towards various present and future (potential) clients, the public, while products or services; degree of building a favorable attitude in the audience; the actions of the management that searches for an appraisal and the favorable influence upon the public's opinion of a person, product or organization by provisioning messages to the public without making direct media expenses; the tools for a mutual adjustment between the hotel and its potential guests; science of the public opinion and the relations between the hotel and the people. Anastasova says that:

The public relation services' mission is global – building up mutually favorable relations between an organization and its audience based on mutual trust. The public relation services' role in providing positive relations with the customers is complicated because the guest's attitude is determined by the circumstances, service, relations with the staff and his personal consciousness. There are a lot of ways of satisfying the guest and stimulating his desire to return again in the hotel (Anastasova, 2010).

The communication with the guests while they are in the hotel has to be a continuous process. The attracting of a new client is five times more valuable than keeping an old one or making him return. Furthermore a satisfied guest would recommend the hotel to other potential clients. That way the communication with the guests multiplies the profits.

Communication with the guests is one of the most important means in the public relation services. Only through communication we can truly understand what the guest is looking for and what we can do to satisfy his needs. The service must not only be good but it also has to exceed the expectations of the client.

Analyzing the opinion of our home tourists, we came up with some important conclusions about their experiences of the behavior of the „Bijou“ hotel staff and their various communicative and professional abilities. Survey data conducted in 2017 indicate that in this segment of tourists, it is noticed that 45 % had no problems at all during their stay at the hotel. This percentage is even higher than the percentage of German tourists (38 %) who were staying seamlessly at the hotel complex. As we have already proven, this speaks of a high level of communication between employees and guests and a good internal organizational policy. According to 83 % of respondents (Figure 1), employees are always ready to help and assist. Their information and communication skills are also high - 63 % identify it as very good and 37 % good. Zero is the percentage of those who have expressed their dissatisfaction. There is a quick fix on how to fix a problem. Bearing in mind that 45 % had no problems at all, the 48 % said they were satisfied with the quick reactions of the staff, were enough to testify to the client's approval. 70 % gave their very good judgment on the criterion of "courtesy of staff", which is close to the German rate of 75 %. We can not fail to note that while German tourists are experiencing a certain degree of resentment and dissatisfaction, in the other segment of respondents - this dissatisfaction is absent. As if the Germans are more critical and look at things in detail, while the Bulgarians are looking more and more at all. They are not so demanding and small negative things the German would necessarily notice, they do not notice them. This fact contributes to their effective communication with the staff because, on the one hand, the Bulgarian language is a native language and does not require concentration as the German one, on the other hand the tourists predispose to a more informal communication.

The type of communication at “Bijou” hotel also has an impact on the customer's adjustments and on the quality of the tourist product it offers. The big directional, illuminated sign situated in front of the hotel, with the proper signs and lettering, helps the tourists to be more oriented and also to always remind them of the facility. This way the tourists can make a first impression for themselves about the hotel. As for the communications in the facility itself, they can vary: the name plate (includes a name and a position) of the employees, directional plates and signs for the location of the rooms and facilities, informational panel containing all sorts of different and useful information for the guests, temperature panel for the weather and water, clocks showing four different time zones. All of the listed above are being used so that the guest can feel like being taken care of and making sure his stay is pleasant.

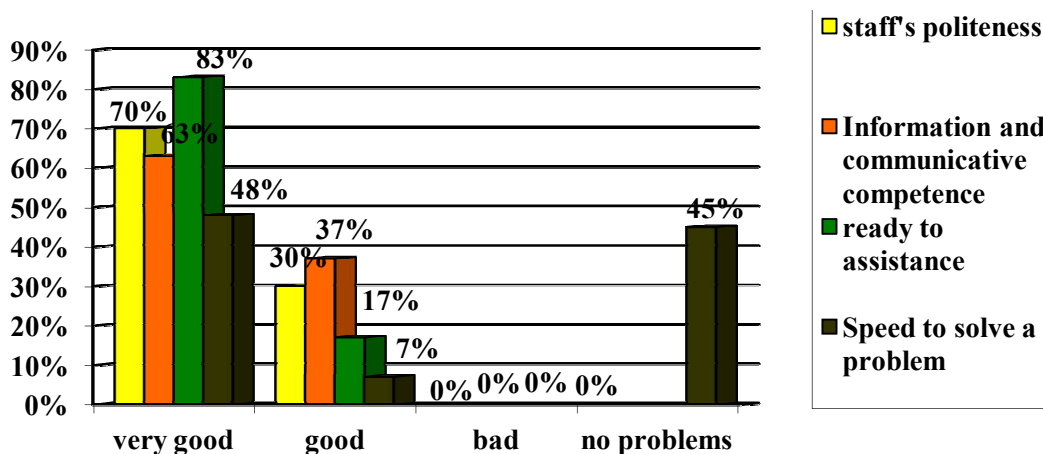


Fig. 1

– Advertisement

Advertisement is a part of our everyday life. Sometimes people receive it positively and sometimes not so much. Some advertisements inform us, convince us or make us laugh, while others bore us and sometimes even offend us. Karadzkhova (2014) concludes that „it is a paid form of an impersonal communication which is being carried via mass media: TV, internet, radio, newspapers, direct mail, public transportation and exhibitions.“

A lot of companies carry out a communicational policy without even having a clear estimation of their own abilities and the competitions' state. The advertisement, public relation services and promotions themselves can't create the identity of a product or to make its specific qualities known and popular. Anastasova shares the view that:

Usually the goals of the advertisement - encouraging activities are aimed completely towards the customers and they could be one of the following:

- To encourage or to accomplish the trying of the product;
- To encourage a second purchase;
- To cause enthusiasm and verbal recommendation from the customer;
- To reward the loyal customers by compensating part of their expenses;
- To keep the sales on a certain level even though the season is not that strong at the time

(Anastasova, 2001).

From the advertisers' point of view the advertisement is one of the unclear mechanisms for increasing the sales. When considering and forming the budget it is important to know that the advertisement is the most dynamic aspect of the expenses because it can't be calculated how much income in cash you make from it. The users are accustomed to the ads as they are a persistent part of their everyday life. They easily distinguish one another because all ads have an obvious source and they are made with a known procedure. There is a noticeable advertisement gluttony which increases the chance of the customers forgetting about the product and adopting the ads' message. The traditional forms of advertisement are at a drop rate, because the users have gotten indifferent towards them. The classic form of advertisement communication – from the seller to all possible consumers via media is slowly being drained due to the pressure of the new types of media. The famous advertiser Reeves (1994) notes that „it is not the advertisement that synthesizes the customers' demands anymore, it's the demands that synthesizes the advertisement“. The accent has moved to making ads with better quality of the marketing which reflects the customer's demands, hopes, needs, etc.

Various means are being used for the advertising of a hotel complex. According to past researches around 30 % of the hotel's guests have been informed, have found out and have made a reservation through a site or a published ad on the internet. This is why it is very important for the hotel to have a working and available internet page. The maintaining expenses for it are fairly low but the benefits of it are significant.

The main method of advertising the “Bijou” hotel is its web page: <http://www.bijouhotel.net/>. The page offers not only information in two languages (Bulgarian and English) and a rich gallery with pictures, but also information about additional services and ways to contact the hotel. For the tourist's convenience the web page offers a possibility of asking questions and making a direct reservation.

“Bijou” hotel is included in the catalogs for resorts in Bulgaria. There are included pictures of its interior, exterior, location and information regarding the variety of services it offers. Furthermore the hotel is included in catalogs of foreign tour operators. In the beginning of every summer a

representative of each operator brings a form to the hotel's manager which he has to fill out. This blank is the same each season but if any changes are made it helps for updating the information in the catalog. It is easier for a tourist to make a decision why they should choose specifically "Bijou" hotel because it is possible for anybody regardless if they are a guest of the hotel or just passing by, to take a brochure or a business card. The brochures are printed in Bulgarian, German and English language so that there could be a more effective communication with the foreign tourists.

It is necessary to use ads in the traditional media – press, radio and TV, in order to attract more tourists and to optimize the communicational policy towards them. One of the possible communicational channels is a package of printed informational advertisement in the periodical press including local, central and regional press. The main advantage of this communicational tool is the ability of direct advertisement.

Another communicational channel could be the electronic broadcasting devices such as TV and radio advertisement.

Internet is the newest means of communication and it gives us freedom to do so. Technologically it is a modern, unfamiliar and a more perfect challenge to the traditional media. Its' structure and specifics distinguish from those of the radio, TV and press and offer bigger opportunities for the development of the already existing advertising tools and techniques.

For a long time marketing and digital specialists have been talking about social media and how it can potentially make an impact on our lives. It turns out they were right for the most part of their predictions. In a recent report done by ComScore it was stated that users spend the greater part of their time on the internet browsing social media. A huge portion of our time is being spent on Facebook and according to ComScore one of every seven minutes we spend online is being tied to our activities on social medias or at least one of them – that being Facebook. Exactly because of the number of options and opportunities for communication and ways of receiving information through that platform, "Bijou" hotel has a profile in Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bijou-Hotel/113052132047117>

As we already mentioned most of society spends a significant amount of time on social media in front of the computer. People prefer to receive information directly through internet rather than travel agencies when looking for a place to go on vacation to. In order to be more convenient, "Bijou" hotel offers its' tourists the ability of making an online reservation through the following sites: <http://www.booking.com/>, <http://pochivka.bg/>, <http://bgnesebar.com/bijouhotel> and <http://www.relaxbulgaria.com/hotel-bijou-ravda>. An e-mail and a phone call are the only two things needed from the user so that they could be contacted back. It has been estimated in the course of a couple of researches that around 30 % of the tourists have decided to make an online reservation at "Bijou" hotel for the second or third time, which shows that the communication made is bidirectional and effective.

It is illustrated in figure 2 the percentage of ways of making a reservation in the hotel. The greater part (47 %) of the guests has chosen to make a reservation through a travel agency. Only 7 % is the difference between the ones who have chosen to make a reservation directly through the hotel (23 %) and the ones that have used its' website (30 %). This is clear proof of an effective communication between the hotel's staff and the guests and also between the employees themselves in the organization. The achieved intense communication between the different departments of the hotel and the potential clients has led to the making of a successful reservation and fortunate accomplishment of the guests' vacation.

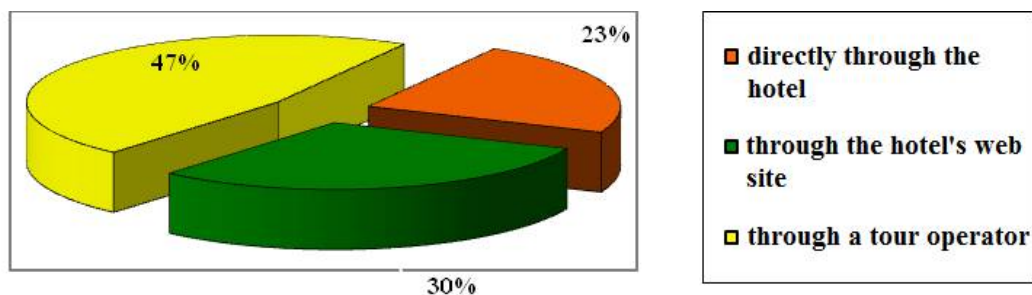


Fig. 1

– Direct marketing

In recent years a trend has been noticed concerning the enrichment of the forms of marketing aiming towards direct communication and stimulating the direct reaction of certain groups of customers, which all has led to the appearance and development of the direct marketing. This tendency reflects mainly on the marketing communications. One of the limitations of the traditional elements of

communication (mainly advertisement) is that they are in the form of a monolog from the advertiser to the anonymous mass user. According to Velev (1998) „Direct marketing is a combination of activities performed by the company-seller directed at a target audience and aiming at a generation of a reaction on the phone, through mail or a personal visitation and a sell.” Anastasova (2001) concludes that „the predominant part of the tourism companies who use direct marketing rely mainly on one of its tools – direct mail or telemarketing.“

The marketing practice shows that it is more effective to have a multistage campaign with more than one method for direct marketing. This is precisely what the essence of integrated marketing is. It is a marketing technique in which more than one tool of marketing is being used multiple times, aimed at generating the sales of a new product or increasing the sales of an already established one. In order to accomplish its goals, the direct marketing uses different tools which can be divided in two main groups – direct sales and direct advertisement. Direct sales are marketing means in which through one or a few trade workers a product is being sold directly to the users.

It is found that “Bijou” hotel is being advertised mainly through its website but other ways could also be recommended such as: direct mail, loyal customers’ program, etc.

– Personal sales

Personal sales are a verbal introduction of products, services or ideas during a personal conversation with one or more potential buyers targeted at stimulation for buying (or react to the idea), as well as helping them out when making a purchase.

Personal sales have a pure commercial meaning but they are not observed as an element of the market stimulation because their main meaning is communicational. They are a form of communication in which the sender presents the message directly to the receiver (or a group of receivers) without using another channel for messaging. Usually the communication happens face to face.

While advertisement is more effective in the initial stages of a customer’s reaction (it causes informing, interest), personal sales are more effective in the last stages – they stimulate a purchase and in this exact case – a reservation in “Bijou” hotel. Because of that the overall result of market stimulation is significantly higher when those two elements combine their actions. Besides, the advantages of personal sales compensate for the disadvantages of advertisement and vice versa.

The public relation services also can be combined with personal sales because on one hand the company’s staff takes part in different events related to public relation services and on the other hand the company’s good reputation and favorable attitude from society make the personal sales easier.

The making of a personal sales plan for “Bijou” hotel goes through the following stages:

– determination of the sales volume – based on the previous month, for every following one a plan is being made for an increase of beds sold, the number of rooms sold and increasing the number of sales of the more expensive rooms;

– alignment of the sales by place and time – an alignment of the sales is being made via the department of reservations and the sales made directly from the reception;

– determination of the rights and obligations of the seller in the channel – main obligation of all representatives of “Bijou” hotel is maintaining the hotel’s reputation, conscientious relation toward the given work and entrusted property and to strive for improvement of the service’s quality;

– systematization of the sales by products and services – while planning the sales it is necessary to take in consideration the offered to the clients services. The attitude towards each customer and his willingness to visit the hotel again are very important;

– budgeting personal sales – it includes planning of income and expenses. The planning in “Bijou” hotel is from top to bottom. The hotel’s manager approves the amount of expenses related to the functioning of the hotel: keeping merchandise in storage; expenses for transportation, monthly payment and social security for the employees; amount of expenses for advertisement – printing of brochures, leaflets, business cards, catalogs, etc.;

– specification of the indicators for choosing the staff - a main indicator are the results shown during the previous period, the guests’ reviews – praise and complaints, also – there are specific requirements for each position pursuant to the nature of it.

After those observations it is found out that the main advantages of the personal sales in “Bijou” hotel are the following:

– direct contact with the potential tourists and immediate feedback;

– ability of giving complex information and responding to objections;

– ability of changing the message according to the audience;

– strong stimulating effect and participation in the guest’s decision for vacation;

– lack of essential communicational noise – almost nothing and no one bothers the personal communication, there is also a lack of other outside messages (unlikely advertisement).

The receptionists at “Bijou” hotel are aware with the prices for an overnight stay during the low, mid and high season. They are also competent on questions about additional services and their price too. Because the administrators are one of the options for making a personal sale, it is very important to avoid giving away information or messages different than the one the other representative of personal sales (in the case of “Bijou” hotel - the hotel’s manager is the other representative of personal sales) has given because it leads to the unfulfillment of the company’s goals. Of course every trade worker is different, with different personal characteristics, knowledge and experience but both the administrator and the manager must have the same goal – the tourist product of “Bijou” hotel to be preferred by the guest and for him to be sure in his choice.

Conclusions. The future of the tourists business is impossible without open communication and approval of the key customer audience which wants the best quality services and the best service. That could be accomplished throughout planning and the realization of effective communicational programs in the tourism and it also requires optimal correlation of the consecutive stages of the practice.

The increasingly active execution of the concept for integrated marketing communications in the real practice means that they should be used in every activity related to sending out all kinds of messages which goal is to inform, convince or remind the potential users and society about the offered products, services and for itself, in which way a favorable representation is being made and the sales are being aided. This is exactly why the stimulation of the customers, the generation of demand for products and services, the increasing of sales – and therefore establishing as a trade brand and having the reputation of a Bulgarian tourist product, is all a part of the overall impact of the main communicational elements.

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