Comparing Credibility: A Website versus Publicity

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ABSTRACT

Websites and publicity in mass media are two commonly used marketing elements. However, it is unclear whether exposure to a website or publicity is most effective at influencing behavior. This research compares the effectiveness of a magazine publicity article and a tourism destination website on the choice of a spring break destination. Based on this analysis, a website is no more credible than a publicity article; nor does an Internet site create a more favorable attitude or greater purchase intent than does magazine-based publicity. Magazine articles emerged as equally effective as websites for most variables. This study shows that traditional magazine articles can still influence Millennials. Even with a study population of college students who use web resources more than most other populations, the web was not superior. This study reveals that both publicity and a website are important parts of the tourism marketing mix and suggests specific applications.
Keywords: Publicity, Websites, buzz, Millennial market, Travel marketing

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The service sector of the economy is significant and growing. Globally, the contribution of service industries to gross domestic product is 64 percent (World Factbook, 2008). While few industries in the United States are robust given the current economy, services are the exception and are expected to add jobs while manufacturing, mining and agriculture will continue to decline (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Within the service economy, hospitality and tourism comprise a significant segment. Although travel has decreased in the economic downturn, the expectation is that it will rebound in response to demand from both ends of the demographic spectrum. Seniors traditionally travel in retirement and Baby Boomers are just beginning this life stage. In addition industry expectations are bolstered by Millenials' thirst for adventure and experiences. This article explores how a tourist destination can effectively market to this younger demographic.

Many consumers--especially the coveted Millennial market, have become increasingly skeptical of overt marketing messages. As a consequence, less obvious commercial messages can be a more

effective marketing strategy. Examples include many Internet websites and publicity, which most consumers view as less commercial message sources. Other than anecdotal observations, there is little research comparing the two. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine the effectiveness of these two frequently used resources. Specifically, the ability of an Internet website and a magazine publicity article to impact information search and purchase intent in the selection of a spring break destination will be examined.

Information Search

How potential tourists search for information is one of the most frequently examined topics by tourism researchers. Extant knowledge suggests that potential travelers seek out information from a variety of sources in an effort to reduce risk (Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998). Moreover, information from sources without an obvious commercial tie such as friends and family are seen as more credible (Gartner, 1993; Nolan, 1976; Crompton, 1979). Similarly, publicity is more persuasive than advertising (Loda and Coleman, 2005). Finally, the addition of the Internet to the communications mix has had a significant impact on information search from both demand and supply perspectives.

This research will look at a tourism destination website and a magazine publicity article to see if these two frequently used information sources have equal impact on perceived credibility and ultimately purchase intent. Because of the intangible nature of the service sector (especially tourism), and the economic and psychological risk associated with destination selection, promotional credibility is considered critical. Moreoever, as tourism promotional budgets continue to come under increasing pressure, the need for tourism research to be more relevant to practitioners is also more pronounced (Gretzel, U.,Yuan, Y. and Fesenmaier, D., 2000; Li, X. and Petrick, J., 2008). This study, therefore, will examine whether there is a way for tourism marketers to create synergy and improved effectiveness with a strategic print publicity and (Internet?) web media combination.

The article first presents a problem statement and then reviews literature concerning websites and publicity as information sources. Next, it explains an experiment that compares the impact of the two resources on the following variables: credibility, message strength, attitude, and purchase intent. The results of the experiment are presented, followed by a discussion and suggested specific applications for tourism marketers.

Problem Statement

Beritelli, Bieger and Laesser (2007) note that research concerning the Internet as an information source lacks comparison with other sources. Instead,the Internet is studied as a stand-alone medium, rather than in context with other media that tourists use when planning their travels. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine an Internet website in context with another trusted information source, publicity in the form of a magazine article.

With respect to publicity an exploratory study conducted by Dore and Crouch (2003) underscores its value to travel marketers. The authors reported on the extent and role of publicity programs in the promotional strategy of ten national tourism organizations. They observed that publicity programs conducted by destinations are often "deliberate, planned, methodical and coordinated with a clear set of objectives" (p. 137). Moreover, some subjects reported receiving a greater annual value from their publicity programs than from any other promotional strategy. More importantly for this study, the authors noted the need for further research that examines the impact of publicity with other forms of messages, as well as studies that explore consumer behavior issues especially the effect of publicity on destination choice. Similarly, Chang and Thorson (2004) found synergistic effects between television advertising and the web, and also called for additional research comparing the web with other areas such as publicity.

Publicity as an Information Source

While publicity is often cited as an effective promotional strategy, research is not prolific. Kotler (1993) defined publicity as editorial space, rather than paid space, in either print and broadcast media, to promote a product, place, or person. With publicity messages the sponsor may not be readily identified. Gartner (1993) proposed a typology of media and other influencers he termed "image change agents" that impact the image formation process. Within this typology influencers are rated as "low," "medium," or "high" on credibility, depending on how obvious it is that the message is commercially sponsored. Change agents with less obvious commercial ties, such as magazine articles, are rated higher on Gartner's credibility scale than are advertisements or brochures with obvious commercial sponsorships. Fodness and Murray (1999) state that the heaviest use of magazines and newspapers is as contributory sources in ongoing information searches. However, in their studies the researchers made no distinction between advertising and publicity or editorial space when referencing newspapers and magazines as travel information sources.

Vogt, Stewart, and Fesenmaier (1998) not only confirmed traditional sources such as information from friends and family but also distinguished between advertisements and articles in magazines and newspapers, i.e., publicity, when they assessed information sources used for trip planning. Of eleven sources, the highest rated for finding information on a place to visit for the first time were a person's own travel files followed by friends and family and highway welcome centers. The fourth and fifth most likely used sources were magazine articles and newspaper articles. It is important to note that the contents of the highest rated source, personal travel files, are unknown but speculated by Vogt et. al. (1998) to be "a variety of paper or electronic clips such as magazine and newspaper articles, guidebooks, brochures, maps, handwritten notes, and postcards sent by friends," (p. 84). Therefore, magazine and newspaper publicity articles are likely among the highest rated sources of destination information.

The marketing literature reports many anecdotal cases concerning the effects of publicity on marketing campaigns (Jin, Suh, and Donavan, 2008). For example, Jin (2003) concluded that publicity has a facilitative function and that pre-exposure via publicity increases recall of subsequently promoted brands. Loda and Coleman (2005) found that publicity outperforms advertising on four variables: credibility, message strength, attitude, and purchase intent. The authors suggested the publicity-then-advertising sequence as the most persuasive marketing mix. This paper reports the results of a new study by these authors using the same dependent variables but comparing a website with publicity rather than publicity and advertising.

The Internet Brings Change

"Arguably, the greatest agent for change in destination marketing is technology," (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary, 2006). Moreover, "the digital revolution has changed almost everything about how the tourism industry does business," (Gretzel, et. al, p. 152). Not surprisingly, the majority of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have websites with varying levels of complexity and interaction (Palmer and McCole, 2000). Several researchers have addressed whether marketing on the web is different from marketing using other forms of media but no clear consensus has emerged (Evans and Wurster, 1999; Gallagher, Foster and Parsons, 2001; Zeff and Aronson, 1999). However, tourism marketers do agree that an Internet presence is almost mandatory. Moreover, considerable research exists concerning what makes for an effective website. Some of that research addresses the critical issue of the web's perceived credibility.

Web Credibility

When they compared the Internet with other sources of media, Flanagin and Metzger (2000) reported that, in general, subjects found information from the web to be as credible as information from other mass media except newspapers. Credibility varied, however, depending on whether

subjects were seeking reference material, news, entertainment, or commercial information. Two elements were found to hurt the perceived credibility of a website: commercial implications and amateurism. In contrast, an online study of over 1,400 respondents found that the following factors positively impact people's perception of credibility: real-world feel, ease of use, expertise, trustworthiness and tailoring (Fogg, et al., 2001).

A key finding of a study by Satitkit and Everett (2001) that analyzed New Zealand travel agent websites was that designers could enhance trust among website users by providing links to other sites that contain relevant information. In examining the credibility of information sources in tourists' information search behavior, Cho (2001) discovered that tourism websites ranked as the most credible external information source. However, in Cho's study, when subjects were asked to rate ten information sources including magazines, newspapers and the web, the authors did not distinguish between editorial and advertising messages in the print media. Chen's research of tourism websites (2006) yielded information consistent with that of the broader marketplace. Chen concluded that these elements--design (physical appearance, color, layout, graphics), functionality, usability, efficiency, reliability and likeability—significantly influence trust and credibility in a tourism website.

Kim and Fesenmaier (2007) found that of six factors tested only inspiration, usability, and credibility showed significant evidence of impact on DMO website persuasiveness. Their study examined the influence of factors on first impressions in terms of favorableness of fifty official state tourism websites in the United States. Yoo, Lee and Gretzel (2007) looked at source factors in e-word-of-mouth. Their experimental study suggested that authority cues increase perceptions of credibility as well as local residents' recommendations. Potential tourists also consider cues associated with source characteristics as important. In a qualitative meta-analysis of success factors for DMO sites, Park and Gretzel (2007) found "trust" to be one of nine factors synthesized from previous studies. Trust encompasses brand recognition, consistency, intentions and credibility.

More recent research into the persuasiveness and credibility of websites has found significant differences in actual DMO sites and in the elements that comprise those sites. For example Loda, Teichmann, and Zins (2009) demonstrated two points: (1) not all websites are equally persuasive, and (2) a significant difference exists in DMO website credibility. The two specific elements that contributed to credible website elements were information on attractions and accommodations, both of which contributed to a perception of high message credibility among subjects who viewed DMO sites. More organic elements such as web cams a did not increase a DMO site's credibility.

Theory and Message Sequencing

The ways in which consumers process and integrate various sources of information are well studied. To examine this issue, researchers often use the expectancy-value (EV) theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). This is a model of reasoned behavior or central route processing wherein consumers carefully consider message content (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In such cases, persuasive communications, i.e., message acceptance, depend on the degree to which consumers accept message claims (Smith and Vogt 1995). Factors influencing message acceptance include perceived credibility and message strength (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

The EV model identifies the degree to which attitudes are changed by persuasive communication (Smith and Vogt, 1995). In contrast, Anderson's (1971) information integration theory describes how information from different sources, i.e., websites and publicity, is combined in forming evaluations. This theory suggests that the sequence of exposure to information is important. In their integrated information response model, Smith and Swinyard (1982) propose that consumers' belief strength can be affected by message sequencing. Initial contact with a credible message creates "a powerful information base for attitudinal development," (p. 84).

Lord and Putrevu (1993) predicted the potential sequencing impact of publicity with advertising. They asserted that multiple promotional messages could interact to yield advantages for the publicity-then-advertising ordering rather than the advertising-then-publicity sequence. They called for specific research to confirm and better understand these potential sequencing effects.

Using the EV model as a theoretical framework, Loda et. al. (2007) provided empirical support for Lord and Putrevu's predictions. Indeed, the publicity-then-advertising sequencing created significantly higher mean scores than advertising alone for credibility, message strength and purchase intent, and was most effective at persuading potential tourists to visit a specific destination. The current study replicates this research but contrasts the effects of a magazine publicity article, not with advertising, but rather with the new marketing tool that now dominates destination marketing--a DMO website.

Comparing a website with a publicity message is significant because are both are highly credible message sources and no prior research was found comparing them. Both a website and magazine article can contain a unique element, third party endorsement, which approximates word-of-mouth – the most credible of all information sources. Prior research into the power of publicity reveals that such messages imply the endorsement of journalists who compose the message (Detwiler, 1974; Oskamp, 1991). Similarly, websites often allow travelers to post comments and give feedback, "creating a new method of communication that is similar to word-of-mouth," (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts, 2007, p. 35).

HYPOTHESES

According to Smith and Vogt (1995), the amount of persuasion occurring from a promotional message depends on the extent to which consumers undergo message acceptance. Factors that influence message acceptance include perceived *credibility* (i.e., truthfulness and accuracy) and *message strength (*i.e., weak or strong reasoning in message claims), two dependent variables tested in this study. Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) model of reasoned behavior asserts that attitude leads to behavioral intent. Attitude toward the brand and purchase intent are common variables of marketing research projects (Hallahan 1999). Therefore, *attitude toward the destination* (i.e., a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably) and *purchase intent* (i.e., a stage of motivation that precedes behavior) are also studied.

Message stimulus is the independent variable and consists of two parts: information source (i.e., publicity article or website) and message sequencing (i.e., publicity-only, publicity-then-web, web-only, or web-then-publicity). Because no prior research was found comparing websites with publicity, there is certainly no clear consensus either on the relative superiority of publicity versus websites or their sequencing effects. However, because the Internet is of such magnitude to "change almost everything" (Gretzel, et. al., 2000), this research adopts the assessment that a DMO website is more effective than a magazine publicity article. The hypotheses, then, are:

> H1: There will be greater perceived *credibility* for web-only than for any other message sequence.
> H2: There will be greater *message strength* for web-only than for any other message sequence.
> H3: The website only group will experience a more favorable *attitude* toward the destination than will those who view any other message sequence.
> H4: The website only group will report stronger *purchase intent* than will those who view any other message sequence.

METHODOLOGY

This research was part of a larger study that was conducted as an experiment in the form of a post-test only control group. To explore the hypotheses, five experimental groups were exposed to five different message sources or combination of sources. They were: a) web-only b) publicity-only c) web-then-publicity d) publicity-then-web and e) a control group. The post-test-only group design assures that subjects are not biased by previous exposures through pre-tests (Kirk, 1982). University student subjects were chosen because they generally represent a homogeneous group that travels frequently (Jamrozy, 1996).

Measurement Scale Development

All measures used seven-point scales adapted from those used by Smith and Vogt (1995). *Perceived credibility* used three Likert-type scales asking how truthful, accurate and credible a specific stimulus was to the respondent. These measures were developed by Darley and Smith (1993). *Message strength* was measured with a three-item scale developed by Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983). This scale asks subjects to rate message claims from weak to strong, based on whether the messages in the materials were seen as easy or not easy to understand, had strong or weak reasons or were clear or unclear. *Attitude toward the destination* was measured globally with three semantic differential scales (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1967). Subjects used bipolar attributes to rate the destination as good, positive, and interesting. *Purchase intent* was measured with two seven-point scales developed by Smith (1993). The questions asked how likely the respondent were asked to select the destination, and how likely he or she would be to recommend the destination to a friend. Responses ranged from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely."

There were eleven total measures generating a Chronbach's Alpha of .881, well within acceptable range (Nunnally, 1978). For all multi-item measures, mean scores were combined and averaged to generate one statistic for each dependent variable. Following exposure to the treatment, data were collected to measure the four dependent variables.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was implemented at two universities in the southeastern United States. A sample size of 337 student subjects (a minimum 30 per group after removing prior visits) allowed the central limit theorem to apply, assuring normal distribution for each group (Salkind 1994). As Smith and Vogt (1995) did, involvement was encouraged of all groups. To create this mental processing, subjects were asked to consider themselves persons with the time and money for a vacation such as a spring break trip. They were instructed to read the materials carefully, told to form an evaluation of the destination, and informed they would be asked some questions about the destination later. Each participant was randomly assigned a booklet containing a magazine publicity article or instructions to access a DMO website. Subjects could spend as much time as needed to become thoroughly exposed to stimulus materials. Next, the dependent measures were collected (subjects were not allowed to turn back to the stimulus materials). Following exposure to the treatment, data were collected to measure the four dependent variables.

Product and Attribute Selection

The methodology for this experiment is consistent with the Loda and Coleman (2005) study. However, this replication differs in the type of stimulus used (website rather than advertising) and it uses actual rather than fictitious stimulus materials. In 2007, fictitious materials were developed to look like a one-page advertisement and a one-page article in a popular shelter magazine. The message within the two stimuli concerned the same destination attributes. Both were elaborately

pretested until subjects in a pilot study rated them equally persuasive (using a scale of one to ten, where one is "not at all persuasive" and ten being "extremely persuasive").

In the current study, an actual DMO website and magazine publicity story are used as the independent variables. In the actual media environment, publicity stories and websites do not cover the exact same attributes. Authentic marketing materials were used to better represent how consumers learn about potential vacation destinations. Memphis, Tennessee was chosen as the test destination because of the authors' interest, and the appeal of the city's rich musical heritage to a student population.

The Memphis promotional stimuli were presented as they appeared in the actual campaign. The publicity story was duplicated in color, and presented as it appeared in the March 2007 issue of *Southern Living* magazine. Those who viewed the website were instructed to log onto the official DMO site produced by the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau. Members of five experimental groups were then randomly exposed to one of these treatments: publicity-only, website only, publicity-then-web site, web site-then-publicity, and no treatment (control group).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Those who reported a previous visit to Memphis were removed from the analysis, yielding a final data set of 180 subjects. A series of one-way ANOVA tests then identified areas of significance. Results are presented in Table 1. The only dependent variable to show a significant difference was message strength ($F=2.75$, $p=0.045$). None of the remaining three hypotheses that tested credibility, attitude toward the destination, and purchase intent was significant.

Table 1
ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for dependent variables (minus control group)

DV	Treatment	F	Sig	M	SD
Credibility		.192	.902		
	Pub-only			5.30	.845
	Pub-then-web			5.31	.880
	Web-only			5.25	.909
	Web-then-pub			5.18	.775
Message Strength		2.75	.045		
	Pub-only			5.08	1.13
	Pub-then-web			5.62	.742
	Web-only			5.57	.823
	Web-then-pub			5.34	.818
Attitude toward destination		.329	.805		
	Pub-only			5.06	1.26
	Pub-then-web			5.31	1.18
	Web-only			5.29	1.14
	Web-then-pub			5.22	1.04
Purchase intent		.485	.693		
	Pub-only			3.23	1.11
	Pub-then-web			3.54	1.22
	Web-only			3.47	1.17
	Web-then-pub			3.36	1.23

A series of independent t-tests reveals significant areas of difference for the message strength variable (see Table 2). These differences are between subjects assigned to view the web-only and

publicity-only treatments and those who viewed publicity-only and the publicity-then-web sequences. This significance is apparent in the means plot (Figure 1).

Table 2
Areas of significance for the message strength variable

Treatment	M	Treatment Group	M	p
web only	5.57	pub only	5.08	.019
pub then web	5.61	pub only	5.08	.010

The prior contrasts do not take the control group into consideration. For both attitude toward the destination and purchase intent, all comparisons were significant when the control group was present. Restated, there were no significant differences between subjects who viewed a website and those exposed to a publicity story, except with the control groups, i.e., those who viewed no message.

Figure 1
Means plot of message strength
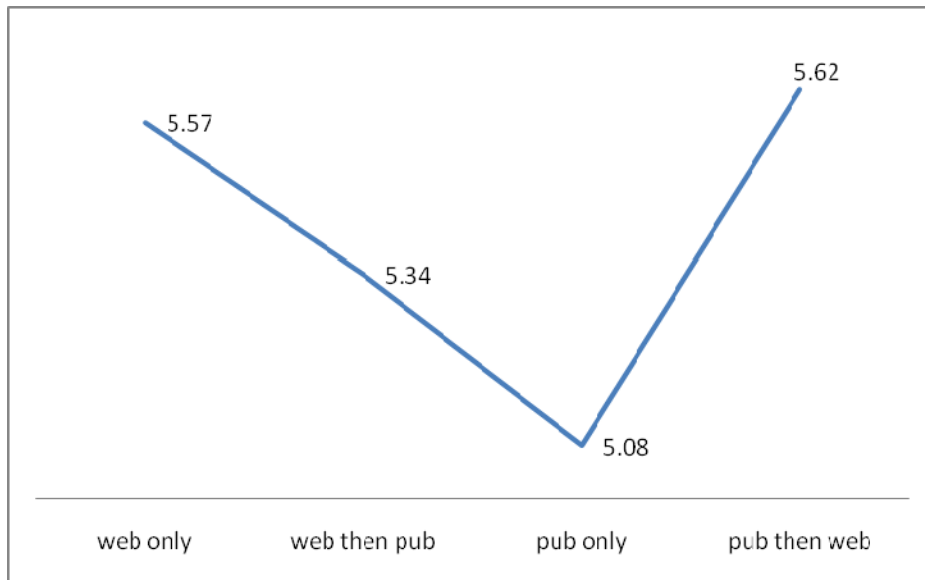
Note: Message strength was measured on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An analysis of the results in Table 2 confirms that the publicity-then-web sequence produces a mean for message strength that is significantly higher than the mean for publicity-only. Similarly, with treatments presented alone, the mean for web-only is also significantly greater than the mean for publicity-only. This result may reflect the reliance and familiarity Millenials place on the Internet. As a consequence, one might assume that college students would find messages contained in a website to be more powerful than those in a shelter magazine. The more interesting observation is the effect of the publicity-then-web sequence which produces the highest mean of the four treatments. It suggests that the role of publicity may be to drive Millenials to a related website. It also supports the conclusion of Jin et al (2008) that publicity serves a facilitative function and enhances recall during subsequent messages.

Based on this analysis, however, a website is no more credible than a publicity article, nor does a website create a more favorable attitude toward the destination or greater purchase intent than publicity. The finding of no difference between a website and a publicity article on credibility is not surprising as both already rank among the highest in terms of credible information sources. While this research does not settle the issue of which is most credible, it seems to underscore the importance of both resources, which previous research has noted. With respect to the variables attitude and purchase intent, it is important to remember that all comparisons for both variables were significant when contrasted with the control group. In other words, seeing a website or a publicity story alone or in any sequence made a significant difference in the respondents' attitudes about the destination and their intent to go there compared to seeing no marketing message.

This study extends existing knowledge about how potential tourists accept and respond to media by comparing a tourism website to a publicity article. This issue is important because of the wide use of web pages and publicity in destination marketing, and the high credibility perception of both information sources. The current study also adds to the body of knowledge about how consumers integrate different message sources. Although the practice is widely used in marketing, no other sequencing studies were located that combined websites with publicity. In today's cluttered media environment, it is important for tourism marketers to know if publicity and websites impact each other. Lastly, the present study, part of a larger study and a replication of a previous one comparing publicity and advertising (Loda and Coleman, 2005), supports the practice of a publicity-lead sequence. In the 2005 study, the publicity-then-advertising sequence was the most persuasive. In the current study, the publicity-then-web sequence received the highest mean score for every variable tested, and was significantly higher for message strength.

In conclusion, findings for the message strength variable point to the superiority of the website to a magazine publicity article. Specifically, the web-only condition yielded a higher mean than the publicity-only did. Moreover, in terms of the two sequencing conditions, only the publicity-then-web treatment was significantly higher than publicity only. However, for the majority of variables, a website, seen alone or seen first, did not create significantly higher mean scores than publicity. In summary, this research seems to confirm the importance of developing an integrated marketing communications strategy that includes a website and publicity when appealing to spring break travelers to visit Memphis.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING PRACTITIONERS

There are various applications from this study that can assist tourism marketers. This is especially timely as contemporary tourism research has been characterized as lacking in relevance to tourism marketing practitioners principally because of a gap between research and real world practices. (Li and Petrick, 2008). As Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier (2000) state, "Knowledge creation is useless if the knowledge is not processed and transferred, so that active learning can occur," (p. 155). The applications from this research are presented from the vantage point of a tourism marketing practitioner, in an effort to process the knowledge gained here and transfer it to promotional environment. If, as this study appears to indicate, that it makes no difference whether potential visitors learn about a destination on a website or by reading a publicity article, what can marketers take away to improve destination promotion? The following applications are written in a style more suitable for marketing practitioners.

Do not rely solely on technology-based media to reach the youth market.
So much of the attention in marketing today is directed to new media and the Internet. While certainly important, this study shows that traditional magazine articles can still move Millennials. According to the Magazine Publishers of America (MPA) (2009), seventy-five percent of teens read magazines and adults age 34 and younger read more magazines than adults older than 34 . MPA also reports that magazines drive web search more than any other medium. The current study points

to the importance and strength of magazine publicity to the conversion of potential customers to a tourism destination. Results support the use of the traditional print medium when trying to influence young adults.

Have the best website you can.

This research supports the widely held principle that a website is important in tourism marketing. Marketers must study how to create a good site (there are many research articles in the tourism literature), and constantly work to better it. Measure which parts of a promotional site get the most hits and use customer feedback to make those parts even better. For those parts that get few hits, assess why they are less effective and make modifications – or delete them from the site entirely. Employ dedicated experts to build and manage your site. Follow tourism trends to know which destinations are successfully attracting a target market similar to the one you are targeting. Then go to their website to see if they are employing strategies that might be right for you to consider. Finally, use synergy: promote your website address prominently in all of your promotional materials.

If a tourism marketer doesn't have a planned and organized publicity effort, she should start one.

The current study finds that publicity can move the needle in a destination's favor just as much as a website can. This suggests an organization should put as much effort toward generating publicity as it does in its website. Tourism marketers who do not have organized publicity efforts as part of their integrated communications mix could be passing up a powerful marketing strategy. From observation and conversation with tourism marketers, it seems that some don't understand how to create or "get" publicity. What follows is some concrete advice on how to generate publicity for a destination. Moreover, this advice can be tailored for any business or industry.

1. *Build a viable media list.* Make sure you watch and read media outlets where you would most like to generate publicity. Make note of reporters or authors' by-lines who cover the type of stories or author columns similar to what you would like to see about your destination or organization. Add these names to a special contact list. Also decide on geographic areas to target; buy and keep current a good media list.
2. *Put together a solid press kit.* A publicist's job is to make it easy for the media to cover your destination. A good press kit is the foundation of this effort. It should contain a fact sheet, quality photographs, and a couple of well written general stories. You should prepare both hard and electronic versions. Also consider making video resources available, especially for tourism destinations.
3. *Study editorial calendars.* The advertising department of most magazines and newspapers can supply you with a 12-month editorial calendar for that publication. This outlines special themes or sections for planned coverage as well as associated deadlines. Publications need editorial content as well as advertising for these planned topics. Call to find out the editor for a section that interests you, and supply a press kit and other germane content.
4. *Send a series of news releases.* Just as consumers usually need to see advertisements more than once, these authors have noted the same to be true of journalists. A series of three news releases (sent a week or so apart) seems to break through the clutter and generate better results than a single or sporadic efforts. Distribute electronically to your mass media list; include regular mail for your special contact list.
5. *Follow-up with phone calls.* Call your top prospect list when they are not on deadline. Have polite but pithy remarks ready (about 10 seconds) concerning the release you just distributed. You may be surprised how many reporters say they are interested in the idea, don't recall receiving the information and ask that you send it again. This time they will be watching for it.
6. *Generate news.* The media love facts and figures. Conduct surveys of general interest that put your destination in a positive light. These surveys can be done on serious subjects, or in an obviously lighthearted manner (i.e., the Memphis DMO could conduct and release results of a specific survey about Elvis, Blues music or barbeque).

7. *Conduct familiarization tours.* Invite the media to come visit you, and host them on an interesting tour of your destination. This is a tried and true strategy, but it can be expensive for you or for the media.

8. *Organize media tours.* Instead of asking the media to come to you, go to them. Select influential markets with many media outlets of importance to you. Put together an interesting 10 minute desktop or laptop presentation with news and story ideas about your destination. Media are often receptive to people from out of town who ask for 15 minutes of their time. You can usually meet with five to ten different media organizations in one day. Leave them with a copy of your presentation and your press kit. Positive results are likely to follow.

As the above advice infers, tourism marketers must designate resources for publicity. Pursuing publicity is a process that occurs over time. Too often, responsibility for publicity is consigned to the back burner as more pressing chores get priority. A resource devoted to publicity is necessary, either through a dedicated staff person or through an agency relationship.

Lead your effort with publicity.
These research results indicate that it can be an advantage to start your campaigns with a publicity effort, and then have potential customers view your website. Consider ways to help make this happen. For example, have a publicity effort kick-off your campaign, and include in that effort a promotional offer that is detailed on your website.

Limitations and Conclusion

There are several limitations associated with this research. First, it was conducted in a laboratory setting with college students as subjects. In reality members of the Millennial cohort are more demographically varied and likely do not encounter destination messages in this manner. Second, while actual marketing materials were used in the study in an attempt to reflect real world practices, the selection of a shelter magazine may not be representative of the publications that Millennials most likely consult. Finally, this study is limited to one print publicity article and one DMO website and measures only four dependent variables. A comprehensive comparison of publicity and an Internet website cannot be covered sufficiently in a single study.

Future studies might address other settings and other populations or other products. The impact of influencers such as actual word-of-mouth, advertising, video messages, mobile media, electronic short message service, and other sources used by tourism marketers also should be incorporated. Longitudinal research should also be considered as it is more likely to capture real behavioral change rather than purchase intent. In summary, this research seems to confirm the importance of a website to tourism marketing. It also suggests that both a website and publicity are important elements in an integrated marketing communications strategy designed to attract spring break travelers to Memphis.

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