

Tourism Operator Workshop 1: Promoting your Product

Presenters:

Kelly Maclean, Tourism WA
Tonia Cochran, Inala Nature Tours

Notetaker:

Pauline McMullan, FACET

Introduction:

One of the most challenging areas facing wildlife tourism operators is how to most effectively promote their offerings to potential customers, given strictly limited budgets. This workshop addressed how a small wildlife tourism business can strategically develop its marketing strategy, and gave practical tips on promoting wildlife tourism products.

Workshop details:

The session commenced with Kelly inviting the audience to put forward issues and/or problems associated with marketing their business or product, with the aim of finding some solutions to these.

The following points were raised:

- Accessing current & accurate statistics that are meaningful & relevant to business
- Problems with visitor numbers; despite having good product & location, operator done everything
- Need for promotion/ awareness of destination, individual product promotion not enough
- Seasonality: poor off peak/shoulder season at Ningaloo Reef. Have wildlife all year round, however main attraction is whale sharks resulting in a 3 month busy period.
- Balance – sales vs experience. Identifying the sustainable threshold to maintain visitor experience.
- Creating realistic but appealing promotion/expectations, that will penetrate the huge amount of marketing traffic.
- Need to correct negative perceptions. The perception that petrol prices are impacting on regional areas, is more a perception than reality.
- Need to correctly identify your target market(s) and segmentation, and identify appropriate yield.
- How to communicate with & understand target markets.

Kelly then presented a powerpoint presentation covering key issues relating to strategic marketing. She provided an overview of the key elements to successful marketing, Research, identifying Target Markets and the importance of Key Messages. She then gave an outline of the benefits and features of direct and online marketing and how Tourism WA/STO's can assist operators.

Some additional comments to Kelly's handout were:

- Even large companies with big budgets can get the market wrong & fail. Some key points being, stay true to your brand, know your market & address your customers needs.
- Undertake research to identify your target market and market segmentation. Profiling will assist communication with your market segments.
- Images are a powerful tool. Again it is important to undertake research to get it right. They need to be motivational but give realistic expectations.
- There are a number of ways to obtain research. Customers are generally willing participants. Small incentives work well.
- Key messages are important in getting across your point of difference. Once determined, these messages should be consistent throughout your marketing. Work with your client base to develop your key message.
- Consumers are time constrained and they have the ability to compare competitions via internet. Be clever and accurate with your direct marketing.
- Don't ignore your existing market. Develop potential for return visits and encourage referrals.
- Online Marketing – establish key words/messages & use them in your content or domain. Keep it fresh and establish links with reputable organisations and operators.

Tonia Cochran of Inala Nature Tours, Tasmania gave an overview of how her attention to detail, friendly approach and her use of personal direct marketing with her existing client base enables her to grow her business.

- It is important to know what you are promoting. Stay with your strengths and true to your brand.
- Specialise to give yourself a point of difference: what are your unique features?
- Define the characteristics of your market and tailor the experience and your hospitality to suit.
- Establish and meet expectations and needs. Don't focus on what you do, focus on what your customer wants. Importance of "undersell and over-deliver"
- Make certain client clearly understands what they will receive and at what cost

- See your customers as potential sales people. Keep in touch with them, make sure they know you care. After sales service and further promotion through “friendly gatekeeper” network
- Be confident and honest in your approach.

The participants were then asked to provide some solutions to the issues highlighted at the beginning of the workshop. There were:

- Ensure staff are well trained and have good product knowledge.
- Focus promotion on what is unique about your tour/product.
- Add value – create new products, events etc.
- Consider offering guarantees or refunds if not satisfied.

Price

- Ensure value for money
- Premium shouldn't be a dirty word
- Communicate price appropriately, no hidden costs
- “Sell” your product ... package the product to meet market segments
- Be clear & manage expectations

Offpeak & Shoulder Seasons

- Create relationships with customers/retailers/agents
- Provide alternatives
- Capitalise on repeat visitation
- Value add, product development
- Link with other operators
- Seek customer feedback, be relevant to customers needs
- Be positive, emphasise benefits
- Think outside the square
- Turn negatives into positives

There was a good response to the workshop from participants. The format of combining an overview of marketing principles, followed by a case study was well received. Broad issues were discussed and narrowed down to specific solutions.