BRAND LOYALTY AS INDICATOR OF FEE SUPPORT BY DESOLATION WILDERNESS VISITORS

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that unique wilderness camping segments can be derived from measures of brand loyalty, and then test for differences among groups for support of fees. Following a marketing approach, previous knowledge about the fee program and attitude toward the organization are also explored in relation to customer satisfaction indicators. This type of analysis is imperative to understanding the proportion of visitors who will remain customers, as well as understanding the effects of communication tools on the public's response to the programs.

METHODS: Using methods described by Watson, et al. (1998), traditional marketing measures of brand loyalty include number of past trips to Desolation and other wilderness areas; whether Desolation was the prime reason for a visit to the Tahoe area; willingness to substitute other places and experiences; and satisfaction with most recent experience, all Desolation visits, and other wilderness experiences. Fee support was based on: 1) Whether the fees were "a good thing," 2) Likely future visits to Desolation, 3) Purchase of annual camping passes, and 4) Plans for future visits either longer or fewer in number. Knowledge of the fee program and attitude toward the Forest Service was measured also. Most of these measures were five-point scales on the survey instrument, however for the analyses presented here, scales were simplified into two or three response groups.

RESULTS: Three unique brand loyalty levels were found. Table 1 shows there are Desolation loyal visitors, a low to moderate loyalty group, and a wilderness loyal group. Each group represents about 1/3 of the camper population at Desolation Wilderness.

Table 1. Brand Loyalty Clusters

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	Desolation Loyalty (n=186)	Low/Moderate Loyalty (
Overnight trips to Desolation	13.3	3.0
Number of wilderness areas:		
Only one area visited	14.5%	31.3%
More than 10 areas visited	7.5%	0
Scale: 1 (positive) to 5 (negative):		
Greater satisfaction from wilderness than other places	1.4	2.1
Greater satisfaction from visiting Desolation	1.9	3.1
No substitute for Desolation	2.1	3.3
No place comparison to Desolation for my time	2.4	3.6
Desolation is major reason for visiting forest	1.9	3.1
Overall trip satisfaction	1.3	1.3

Table 2 shows the strongest supporters for the fees were the low/medium loyalty group (66%) and wilderness loyalty group (66%) who knew about fees before they arrived at the Desolation. The lowest support came from wilderness loyal visitors who learned about the fees when they arrived on-site (48%). Positive attitudes toward the Forest Service made a difference in whether visitors believed the fees were a good thing. For those who think positively of the Forest Service, from 62% to 73% of the three loyalty groups agreed the fees are a good thing. For those who think negatively of the Forest Service or are neutral, from 41% to 48% of the three loyalty groups agreed the fees are a good thing (Table 3).

*Note: Columns in all the following tables equal 100% with neutral left out.

Table 2. Overall, the Desolation Wilderness Camping Fees Are a Good Thing

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	56%	66%	66%	63%	49%	48%
Disagree	16	12	20	15	16	27

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.044
Knowledge only p=.128

Knowledge by clusters: before p=.030; on-site p=.360

Table 3. Overall, the Desolation Wilderness Camping Fees Are a Good Thing

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral/Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	62%	70%	73%	41%	48%	46%
Disagree	11	8	12	29	22	35

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.044
Attitude only p=.00
Attitude by clusters: positive=.219; neut/neg. p=.381

Future use of Desolation across all three loyalty groups appears to be strong (see Tables 4 & 5). Longer stays are not likely due to the fees (Tables 6 and 8), though as much as one-fourth of wilderness loyal visitors may visit less in the future (Tables 7 and 9).

Table 4. Use the Desolation Whether I Have To Pay Camping Fee or Not

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	86%	80%	82%	75%	73%	73%
Disagree	6	11	9	10	14	16

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.494
Attitude only p=.151
Attitude by clusters: positive=.577; neut/neg. p=.869

Table 5. Use the Desolation Whether I Have To Pay Camping Fee or Not

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	85%	80%	81%	80%	77%	80%
Disagree	7	12	8	8	9	14

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.494
Attitude only p=.600
Attitude by clusters: positive=.645; neut/neg. p=.477

Table 6. Because of the Desolation Camping Fees, My Stays Will Be Longer (more nights)

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	5%	7%	4%	15%	5%	0%
Disagree	47	54	55	48	47	64

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.146
Attitude only p=.644
Attitude by clusters: positive=.320; neut/neg. p=.031

Table 7. Visit Desolation Less because of the Camping Fees by Knowledge

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	13%	15%	20%	15%	26%	27%
Disagree	70	68	62	68	54	51

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.318
Knowledge only p=.162
Knowledge by clusters: before p=.554; on-site p=.574

Table 8. Because of the Desolation Camping Fees, my Stays will be Longer (more nights)

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	7%	8%	4%	10%	5%	1%
Disagree	42	49	56	57	56	61

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.146

Attitude only p=.092
Attitude by clusters: positive=.219; neut/neg. p=.267

Table 9. Visit Desolation Less because of the Camping Fees

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	15%	16%	21%	14%	21%	23%
Disagree	68	71	60	67	56	56

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.318
Attitude only p=.090
Attitude by clusters: positive=.520; neut/neg. p=.715

The Desolation loyal group is much more likely to purchase a local annual pass than the other two loyalty groups, and these differences are even more pronounced in the group who learned about the fees before leaving home (Table 10) and those with more positive attitudes toward the Forest Service (Table 11). Purchase of a California Wilderness annual pass appears to be more popular than a Lake Tahoe/Eldorado National Forest pass or a U.S. Wilderness pass (Tables 12-15).

Table 10. Likelihood of Purchasing Lake Tahoe/Eldorado National Forest Annual Pass

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	51%	31%	29%	53%	41%	43%
Disagree	26	39	49	27	36	33

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.037
Knowledge only p=.667
Knowledge by clusters: before p=.023; on-site p=.957

Table 11. Likelihood of Purchasing Lake Tahoe/Eldorado National Forest Annual Pass

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	57%	41%	26%	39%	24%	39%
Disagree	23	29	54	31	53	36

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.037
Attitude only p=.223
Attitude by clusters: positive=.004; neut/neg. p=.418

Table 12. Likelihood of Purchasing California Wilderness Annual Camping Pass

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	54%	54%	56%	73%	52%	77%
Disagree	28	31	31	20	24	18

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.703
Knowledge only p=.386
Knowledge by clusters: before p=.905; on-site p=.281

Table 13. Likelihood of Purchasing California Wilderness Annual Camping Pass

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	60%	59%	55%	52%	50%	65%
Disagree	24	21	30	30	38	28

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.703
Attitude only p=.432
Attitude by clusters: positive=.874; neut/neg. p=.519

Table 14. Likelihood of Purchasing U.S. Wilderness Annual Camping Pass

	Knowledge Before			Learned On-site		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	24%	29%	40%	44%	29%	52%
Disagree	50	44	39	25	43	26

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.215
Knowledge only p=.067
Knowledge by clusters: before p=.312; on-site p=.535

Table 15. Likelihood of Purchasing U.S. Wilderness Annual Camping Pass

	Positive Attitude toward Forest Service			Neutral or Negative Attitude toward Forest Service		
	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness	Desolation	Low/Med.	Wilderness
Agree	29%	31%	50%	27%	29%	34%
Disagree	43	40	30	50	46	42

P levels on Chi-Square
Clusters only p=.215
Attitude only p=.477
Attitude by clusters: positive=.182; neut/neg. p=.964

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: These results help us understand the split support for this wilderness fee program. The small number of customers who indicate less future visitation should cause any organization concern. Desolation loyal customers are the most likely to buy an annual camping pass for the Lake Tahoe/Eldorado National Forest and are less likely to agree that the fees are a good thing. In some of the outcome measures examined here, public information or communication programs about fees appear to change customers' attitudes and behaviors, particularly for purchasing a Tahoe-specific pass and thinking that fees are a good thing. Furthermore, broad public relation and image programs that attempt to change attitudes toward the agency appear necessary to influence reactions to fees.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: The USDA Forest Service can think of wilderness campers as a customer base including individuals who are very loyal to one specific National Forest, individuals who are very loyal to wilderness, and individuals who are less loyal to one Forest or wilderness. These three groups have somewhat different reactions to the fee program. Future fee programs need to consider these customer groups when pricing daily usage, permits, group fees, and annual passes. Creating several different forms of

payment may reduce the number of lost customers. For those individuals who are less loyal (fewer trips to Desolation and other wilderness areas and more likely to substitute some other place for Desolation), offering annual passes and other benefits might encourage more frequent usage and make these customers more loyal in the future. Many of the top performing organizations and businesses in the United States manage their customers in two groups - those who are very loyal and everyone else (who they hope to make loyal). Loyalty is often the necessary condition for customer demand to be maintained when slight price changes occur.

REFERENCES

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