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Applying Public-purpose Marketing in the USA to Protect Relationships with Public Lands

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Abstract

As domestic and international recreation demands on federal lands in the USA continue to increase, there is a growing need for commitment of revenue to provide services and meet stewardship mandates. With increasing demand and testing of methods to provide needed resources, the relationships between the public and public lands are changing. One force of that change has been a tendency towards more business-like approaches to managing public lands in the USA, including the use of marketing and customer fees. A recent test for applying marketing principles to the establishment of fee policies for Forest Service lands entailed active engagement by scientists, managers and planners, marketing consultants and key members of the public. A proposal has emerged to blend marketing activities with protection of public land resources through a focus on relationships, trust, commitment and social responsibility.

Outdoor recreation Trends on Public Land in the USA

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) sponsors efforts to assess trends in outdoor recreation demand and supply in the USA. The most recent report (Cordell, 1999) provides a summary of recent knowledge about current participation levels and anticipated trends. These national trend data are produced from surveys of households in all regions of the USA and have been ongoing since 1960. A brief summary of the findings is useful in setting the

stage for examining the importance of public-lands marketing in the USA.

Current participation levels

Cordell (1999) found that 95% of the US population reported active involvement in some type of outdoor recreation activity over the past year. The most common activities reported for that part of the US population over the age of 16 were viewing and learning activities (e.g. walking – 67%, viewing a beach or

waterside – 62%); trail, street and road activities (e.g., sightseeing – 57%, biking – 29%); and social activities (e.g. family gatherings outside – 62%). These activities do not occur solely on federal or even public lands, but public lands are popular for these activities, though availability is widely variable across the country, with much greater access to public lands in most parts of the West and in Alaska.

Some activity levels that are of particular interest to public-lands managers and of greater potential impact on public lands include 29% of the population aged 16 or over who fished over the past year, 26% who camped overnight (9% in recreation vehicles, 15% in tents on developed sites and 14% in primitive conditions), 48 million people (23% of the population) hiked and 9% hunted. Only 8% backpacked, 8% downhill skied and 4% rode snowmobiles.

Projected trends to 2050

The activities that are projected to grow at the fastest rate (number of participants) between now and the year 2050 are cross-country skiing (95% increase), downhill skiing (93% increase), visiting historic places (66% increase), sightseeing (71% increase) and biking (70% increase). Those that are projected to grow at the slowest rates are rafting (26% increase), backpacking (26% increase), off-road driving (16% increase), primitive camping (10% increase) and hunting (projected to decrease by 11%). These lower rates of increase are near the projected population-increase rates, though some regional differences are anticipated. Among the factors believed to be contributing to these shifting trends is a general ageing of the population of the USA, a continuing shift to a metropolitan population base and changes in ethnic and racial background (Johnson, 1999). Eighty per cent of the population growth over the next 25 years is expected to be from within current minority groups. The US population is currently 75% white, 12% African American, 10% Hispanic, 3% Asian and less than 1% American Indian (Johnson, 1999).

International visitation trends

O'Leary (1999) describes tourism as the third largest industry in the USA and in a constant state of growth, despite fluctuations in relationship to exchange rates and other economic factors in various countries of tourist origin. Over the last decade the growth in numbers of international visitors to the USA has been about 66%, to nearly 46 million visitors in 1997. These visitors are contributing nearly US\$100 billion dollars to the economy of the USA currently. Visitors have come predominantly from Canada, Mexico, Japan, the UK and Germany (listed in order of decreasing dominance). Visitation is expected to continue to grow at a rate of 3–4% annually over the short term, though this increase will come increasingly from Asia and South America. O'Leary (1999) describes US public land-management agencies as uncertain how to approach international visitation. These agencies have seemed to oscillate between marketing of opportunities to the international visitors and keeping them at a distance to protect the resource.

Major challenges in meeting demands

Pandolfi (1999), Chief Operations Officer of the USDA Forest Service at the time, suggested that finding financial resources to meet this growth in demand for domestic outdoor recreation activities and international tourism will become a critical issue in the future. To meet these needs, Pandolfi (1999) suggests that the Forest Service apply the principles of sound, private-sector marketing to provide satisfying outdoor recreation products and services for the public and charging fees to recover the costs of these services. Packaging recreation activities on public lands as 'products' for 'customers' has been proposed as the way of the future to obtain acceptance of charging fees and, therefore, meeting the demand for increasing recreation services. Pandolfi suggests acceleration of research aimed at understanding what recreation visitors want and how satisfied they are with what they experience. These comments typify current public-agency tendencies in the USA to try to address recre-

ation demands through the application of the fundamental concept in the commercial world of building brand loyalty as a reflection of satisfied customers (Pandolfi, 1999).

One of the most significant changes in land-management policy in the USA, aimed at trying to meet this anticipated increase in outdoor recreation demand, has been the introduction of recreation fees on a broad scale on federal lands. In 1996, the *Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions Act* established the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. The USDA Forest Service, the US Department of the Interior (USDI) National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management were authorized to test recreation user-fee programmes on a temporary basis, with at least 80% of proceeds staying at the individual projects where the money is collected. Past fee-collection authorization has generally only allowed fees to be charged for developed recreation areas and the revenues have generally been transferred to the general treasury of the US Government, not used specifically for providing services at the place where the fee was charged. Fees have not previously been charged for dispersed recreation participation. Extending this programme to include wilderness, picnicking and many of the more casual, non-consumptive recreation uses of public lands has also introduced a major change in delivery of services to the majority of visitors.

In a review of recent recreation-fee research, Watson and Herath (1999) highlighted seven major barriers to agencies taking more businesslike approaches to providing the financial resources needed to meet increasing demands:

1. There is concern that taking a purely consumer-economics, business point of view in pricing and administering fee programmes is counter to the collective movement that has established an extensive system of outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands in the USA. If revenue generation and efficiency dominate our public land-management decisions, we are not acknowledging people as stakeholders in the intended purpose of these lands and the societal values associated with access to these places.

2. Taking a businesslike approach may substantially alter the perception of stewardship responsibilities that many agencies have worked hard to create within the public. Intentionally changing roles to buyer and seller, versus those of stakeholder and stewards, raises concern that there may be severe impacts on benefits intended from public lands. Agencies have worked for decades to foster the development of a land ethic among the public. Stewardship implies personal acceptance of responsibility, a commitment to the resource, a commitment to other users and a commitment to future generations who will benefit from our actions.

3. It seems that the public is most supportive of charging fees to accomplish the stated purpose of public lands. Sometimes fees are supported to recover the costs associated with the development of facilities, if facilities are an integral part of that place (e.g. boat ramps in order to enjoy the benefits of boating on a lake), and sometimes they are not (e.g. bathrooms in association with wilderness access). Vogt and Williams (1999) found that visitors often supported maintenance of current conditions in compliance with the purpose of the public place over development and improvements that increased capacity for uses or use levels not compatible with the intended purpose.

4. A tendency to ask visitors who have paid the fee if they find the experience worth the price they paid for it provides a false sense of public response to the fees. Findings of displaced visitors (Schneider and Budruk, 1999) due to fees when studying visitors to non-fee sites, indications of lack of trust and support by non-participants in community studies (Winter *et al.*, 1999) and national surveys that show more support for using taxes to meet increasing demands for some recreation activities than for charging fees (Bowker *et al.*, 1999) are often in stark contrast to manager reports from interaction with satisfied customers who have paid the fee and receive the benefits of a specific visit.

5. It remains unclear who is most affected by fees on public lands. The fear of exclusion of low-income people is partly resolved by examination of the sociodemographics of public-lands visitors. There are many obstacles

to accessing much of the public-domain land besides the fee. Therefore, More (1999) concentrates more on those on the income margins within our current societal structure. Those most affected by fees may be within the dominant user group, not the minority group with low incomes. With the very low income currently under-represented on public lands, however, policies that further reduce their access seem irresponsible.

6. There has been a lack of systematic evaluation to adequately judge the effects of fee policies on visitors (Absher *et al.*, 1999). An alarming lack of rigorous scientific investigation has created a situation with conflicting sources being commonly referenced in debates over recreation fees. The amount of revenue generation can hardly be discounted, but the cost of producing those revenues is seldom considered. In one exception, Richer and Christensen (1999) demonstrate that the dominant pricing and fee policy implementation procedures do have costs involved, but forgoing some of the potential for revenue generation can provide societal benefits.

7. A more exact role needs to be defined for research in establishing and testing policies aimed at meeting the anticipated shifts in recreation demand. If fees are necessary to meet these demands, adequate review of existing research should be an integral part of making the decision about how fee policies will be implemented. In addition, since knowledge is not perfect, science must be involved in establishing monitoring and evaluation processes to determine if policies achieve the stated objectives. Scientists must be involved in setting objectives, obtaining public input and consideration of alternative management solutions. Without close relationships between science and management, science will remain reactive to policy shifts, with a resultant negative public opinion and pleas for help in solving problems after they have been created (Watson, 2001).

Blending Marketing with Protecting Public Lands

In 1998, the USDA Forest Service convened a national team of scientists, managers and plan-

ners to test the principles of marketing to enhance management of current programmes of the agency and prepare for future demands on natural-resource programmes. This team agreed that a marketing approach would also meet public-purpose mandates if it: (i) helped identify and address the public's needs and expectations; (ii) yielded additional financial and other resources to accomplish the agency's work; (iii) facilitated achievement of quality standards for work accomplished; (iv) enhanced the efficiency of the Forest Service in accomplishing work and making decisions; (v) supported efforts of the agency to accomplish its mandated public purpose with respect to the lands they manage; and (vi) maintained or increased public support for the agency and its programmes. These criteria for success flow largely out of an examination of the marketing literature and an effort to integrate private-sector marketing applications with the mandated public purposes attached to public lands. A case study application of 'public-purpose recreation marketing', described more fully in Borrie *et al.* (2002), illustrates application of a market-segmentation method that is compatible with public-land stewardship. A description of the underlying proposed framework for public-purpose marketing follows.

Marketing in the Public Sector

Crompton and Lamb (1986) suggested that marketing is an appropriate approach for government and social-service agencies to analyse public needs and gain support for their programmes. They acknowledged that many public agencies were beginning to experiment with marketing and they stated their intent to increase acceptance of marketing tools and concepts through the 'marketing of marketing itself' (p. 33). Recent literature offers a foundation for a marketing approach to meet the criteria listed above, focusing on relationship (not transactions), trust, commitment and social responsibility.

Relational marketing

In the past, marketing has largely focused on methods to generate revenue-producing trans

actions between customers and providers of products or services. For most of the history of marketing, creating or increasing customer satisfaction with this transaction has been the primary emphasis (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999), with repeat purchases being the primary measure of success. But Webster (1992), Kotler (1995) and others have described a fundamental shift towards relationship marketing, which acknowledges the importance of relationships to long-term business success. Morgan and Hunt (1994) discussed the importance of paying attention to all relationships that a business has, including those with suppliers, buyers and both lateral and internal partnerships. For the purposes of marketing in the public sector, and particularly for providing guidance for market segmentation, a focus on relationships between the managing agency and the public as primary stakeholders (both customers and partners) is a feasible and appropriate conceptual framework to guide data collection about the public and guide other aspects of marketing and policy development.

A discrete transaction with a customer is said to have a distinct beginning, short duration and sharp ending by performance (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987). A relational exchange, on the other hand, builds from previous agreements, is longer in duration and reflects an ongoing process. When providing services for the public through the development of programmes on public lands, the more appropriate view of 'customer service' would probably be as the development or fostering of a relationship between the members of the public and the places that have been established on their behalf as public lands. The role of the public-land management agency is as stewards of that relationship, and that relationship should be the focus of any marketing effort undertaken by the public agency.

Several definitions of relational marketing exist (see Berry, 1983; Jackson, 1985; Paul, 1988; Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Doyle and Roth, 1992), orientated towards desirable relations with different types of groups (i.e. suppliers, buyers, partners, etc.). Most recently, Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined relational marketing as 'all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and main-

taining successful relational exchanges' (p. 22). Morgan and Hunt (1994) emphasize theoretical and empirical research on commitment and trust as the primary influences on successful relational marketing. Support for public-agency actions also depends on confidence in efforts that recognize responsibility to current and future generations and efforts to meet the public purpose (legislation or policy mandates), versus vested-interest demands.

Trust and commitment

Anderson and Narus (1991) acknowledge that not all customers desire the same relationship with a producer of goods or services. They suggest that an organization may need to pursue both transactional and relational marketing simultaneously, and that customers may exist on a continuum of transactional to collaborative exchanges. In the public sector, however, members of the public are, by definition, involved in a collaborative relationship, with the stewardship agency taking responsibility for implementation of public policy. While we are suggesting that a collaborative relationship exists for all people, we do acknowledge that the level of commitment or involvement with the services provided by an agency and the level of trust instilled among members of the public may vary substantially. Relational marketing suggests that a focus on understanding variation in commitment and trust will be paramount in developing and implementing public policy to meet the mandates or purpose of public lands (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999).

Trust is widely viewed as an essential ingredient for successful marketing relationships (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Berry, 1995). Trust is indicated by a willingness to rely on an exchange partner. While much of the research reported has investigated factors that influence trust in a single salesperson, some recent marketing research has specifically examined a customer's trust in the organization providing the product or service for the consumer (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). As of 1993, Moorman *et al.* (1993) reported that very little

research had attempted to understand the factors that affect trust in marketing relationships. Emphasis has been primarily on measuring associated factors, such as perceptions of sincerity, effort in establishing a relationship, goal congruence and expectations for cooperation.

Until very recently, studies of trust in organizations or institutions were virtually unknown (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995). Historically, trust and studies of trust were limited to the interpersonal dimension. Only in the modern era has social trust become a topic of interest, accompanying our movement towards a more complex society. Two dominant views of trust held by an individual for a social institution have emerged. The more traditional view is that trust is based on confidence in competence, objectivity, fairness, consistency or predictability and caring, or the perception of goodwill (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995). Based upon the belief that the level of knowledge necessary to make that traditional view of trust judgements accurate is generally not attainable due to the increasing complexity of social systems, Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) suggest an alternative view. In their view, people judge the similarity of values they hold to those expressed by an agency. Trust is then quantified in terms of perceptions of shared values, direction, goals, views, actions and thoughts (Winter *et al.*, 1999).

Commitment, also a strong influence on relationships between providers and customers, has been defined by Gundlach *et al.* (1995) as having three components: (i) an instrumental component or investment; (ii) an attitudinal component or psychological attachment; and (iii) a temporal dimension, indicating that the relationship exists over time. A relationship commitment requires that an exchange partner believes that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Cook and Emerson (1978) characterized commitment as a central factor in distinguishing social from economic exchange. Even the concept of brand loyalty, which was initially thought to be indicated only by repeat purchases (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), is now more likely to be defined as commitment to a particular brand, and is

sometimes sought by establishing perceived commonality in values between the purchaser and the providing organization (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Social responsibility

Even in corporate-America marketing, the concept of social responsibility has taken on a new emphasis in the development of products and in research on customer attitudes (Drumwright, 1994). The adoption of non-economic criteria in customer decision making (criteria other than price or relationship between price and quality) has led to greater understanding of how some purchase decisions pose social dilemmas and prompt moral reasoning (Drumwright, 1994). Samli (1992) focuses entirely on the private sector and those who want to make a positive profit picture but who also care. In the public sector, it is mandated that the public agency care. It must care about the stakeholders and it must care about the public purpose of the places and resources it manages. Gaski's (1985) position, that marketing with social responsibility was undemocratic, certainly did not adequately consider the growing energy aimed at marketing in the public sector at the time. In recent years, Smith and Alcorn (1991) and Smith (1994) have heralded a tendency towards acknowledgement of social responsibility in marketing as marketing's greatest contribution to society. While Drumwright (1994) indicates that there are some questions about the motives for businesses to adopt an element of social responsibility in their marketing strategies, in the public sector social responsibility is required in the delivery of services and mandated by the legislation and policy that guide a public agency.

Public-purpose marketing

The use of marketing principles by public-recreation land-management agencies poses both a threat and a promise to the people who depend on them for pleasurable outdoor experiences and protection of the public-land base. The most serious threat comes in the form of

a focus on these experiences as a transaction and the temptation to focus too much on measures of on-site satisfaction and repeat visitation as indicators of success. Although it has been previously suggested that 'the goal of government ... service agencies is to provide satisfaction to their client groups, which is exactly the same goal pursued by private sector organizations' (Crompton and Lamb, 1986, p. 37), we suggest that marketing focused on a simple transaction with the public as a customer is too limited. Instead, promise more probably lies in a positive focus on the purpose of these land-management agencies that have been assigned the relatively weighty responsibility of representing the values of society in making policy decisions. Focus on the relationship between the public and these public-recreation land-management agencies, with emphasis on trust, commitment and social responsibility, should be a guiding principle when employing marketing principles in the public sector.

Discussion

The use of trust, commitment, social responsibility and support for public purpose as segmenting variables in marketing studies successfully yields distinct and valid market segments (Borrie *et al.*, 2002). Using trust, commitment, social responsibility and support for public purpose to develop market segments means that managers can ensure appropriate communications with the general public and a focus on long-term relationships: that is, public-purpose marketing, as described in this chapter, can help in the development of messages that foster, not undermine, the relationship between the public and the public-recreation manager. The tailoring of messages to different public audiences is an important expression of the responsiveness of the agency. Public-land management agencies have been entrusted not only with the stewardship of the land but also the public purpose and mandate for that land. Marketing methods should reflect not only the values of the public but also the trust that has been placed with the agency. Public-purpose marketing is well suited to help recreation managers be good

stewards of the relationships they have with the public.

It is worth highlighting how public-purpose marketing for recreation emphasizes an appropriate relationship with the public. First, it should be noted that all publics should be included in these procedures, not just the currently recreating public. The management of recreation lands serves many off-site and symbolic values in addition to the benefits gained by visitors. Managers also have obligations to recognize and preserve both bequest and option values: that is, not only should marketing efforts be tailored and communicated to all constituencies, but they should also be reflective of the opinions of both supportive and non-supportive publics and of recreating and non-recreating publics. Public-purpose marketing also resolves the dilemma that managers face regarding international tourists. Rather than a focus on satisfying visits, a focus on building relationships between foreign visitors and the natural resources of the USA can have a positive international influence to the benefit of all people. A lofty goal of using our interpretative, educational and experiential programmes to create and improve the relationship between people and natural resources in all countries is compatible with other US international programmes.

Furthermore, public-purpose marketing is aimed at accomplishing objectives by treating all members of the public more like owners and stakeholders than as clients and customers. In emphasizing the long-term relationship between the public and the recreation manager, rather than the provision of individual satisfying recreation experiences, managers avoid the dangers of building inappropriate expectations. Public-land management agencies probably cannot, and should not, compete with private entrepreneurs, and the use of marketing terminology certainly runs the risk of triggering that association. Instead, public-purpose marketing intrinsically endorses notions of duty, service and a continuing presence. The maintenance of a public constituency for public-recreation management will require an approach to marketing that does not send messages (both literal and implied) that confuse the relationship between the public and the agency. The more

the agency looks and sounds like a private operator, the more the agency will be expected to focus on extremely high standards and approaches to providing short-term satisfaction, such as those used by companies such as Disney, possibly at the risk of failing in long-term resource-management mandates. Public-recreation managers should carefully compare the appropriateness of Disney's approach to designing and prescribing the visitor experience (Borrie, 1999) with the mandate of public-land management.

Public-purpose marketing endorses an approach to judging and monitoring the quality of the recreation experience that focuses less on immediate satisfaction and more on long-term relationships to the place and the managing agency. Success is more defined by the development or fostering of the relationship and less by the matching of short-term outcomes with preferences. This reflects a trend in recreation research away from a multi-attribute, commodity view and towards a more meanings-based view (Williams *et al.*, 1992). Measuring the success of public-recreation management entails more than counting the number of satisfying experiences, if not only because there are many factors beyond the control of managers that influence the achievement of those experiences. Research and management performance goals may soon become more focused on measuring these relationships and understanding communications, land-management practices and collaborative planning procedures that influence these relationships.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to present a feasible and appropriate framework for the application of marketing principles and approaches to public-recreation management in response to the need to balance increasing demands with mandates to protect the resource. In doing so, it has presented a logical and valid approach to marketing and fostering relationships that can be adopted and applied in further situations. The collection and analysis of marketing data can have a profound influence on planning and management

decisions and this chapter lays the groundwork for an approach that reflects both public demands for services and public-policy mandates.

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