9 Marketing and Branding the Contemporary Destination

Chapter objectives

After reading this chapter you will:

- Understand the process and outcomes of contemporary destination marketing
- Appreciate the importance of engaging with all stakeholders in contemporary destination marketing
- Understand the formation and characteristics of the destination image
- Be aware of strategic approaches to contemporary destination marketing
- Understand the formation and characteristics of destination brands
- Recognise the role that technology, particularly the Internet, can play in contemporary destination marketing
- Appreciate the structure and roles of destination marketing organizations
- Recognise that destination marketing is surrounded by a range of issues and questions relating to the ability of a destination to be marketed as the equivalent of a product or brand

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the marketing and branding of contemporary destinations. It demonstrates that one of the major issues for destination marketers is the destination image, yet this is something that is very difficult to influence and to change. The significance of the destination image shows that destination marketing is as much a strategic process as it is a tactical one. Indeed,

destination branding has to be viewed as a strategic activity as it is closely linked to the destination image and demands the close involvement of destination stakeholders in the design and acceptance of the brand (Garcia et al. 2012). Of course, this process is now facilitated by technology and the Internet provides a cheap and effective marketing medium for destinations, as well as the opportunity to develop destination portals which provide a sense of ownership for stakeholders. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) spearhead the technological developments for destinations and the marketing process generally; they act as umbrella marketing agencies and consolidate the role of destination partners. The chapter closes by identifying a range of key issues relating to destination marketing, including the role of the public sector, involvement of destination stakeholders, the very nature of the destination as a product and the question as to whether the theory of marketing can – or should – be extended to places and destinations.

Contemporary destination marketing and branding

Contemporary destination marketing and branding is both a process and an outcome (Pike, 2008). The process of destination marketing involves dealing with the complexities of destinations and their myriad stakeholders, whilst the outcome is the brand or image of the destination (Yang and Pizam, 2011). In other words a good destination marketer will focus upon two key operations. First, managing the destination's many stakeholders and networks; and second, formulating and managing the destination brand. Definitions of destination marketing clearly distinguish between the process of destination marketing and the outcome, as shown in Table 9.1.

Ward (1998) observes that place marketing dates back to the selling of the frontier to the American people in the mid-nineteenth century. Destination marketing came later in the late nineteenth century, when destinations sought to attract visitors in an increasingly competitive market. However, the actual term 'destination marketing' and the formal process of engaging in a disciplined marketing approach are more recent (Ashworth & Goodall 2012). They can be traced back to the 1970s when the advent of mass international tourism enhanced competition between destinations and prompted the beginnings of destination marketing as a practice. The concept continues to evolve and, increasingly there is a view that it is 'branding' that is the glue that holds the marketing of the destination together. Indeed, some now use the term 'destination branding' in place of 'destination marketing'. Tourism agencies are not alone in their practice of destination marketing – it is also practiced by urban planners who tend to take a broader, more holistic view and include economic and social objectives (see Chapter 8).

Table 9.1: Definitions of the process and the outcome of destination marketing

The process
'Destination branding is (the) process used to develop a unique identity and personality that is different from all competing destinations' (Morrison & Anderson 2002: 17)
'Place branding is an extremely complex and highly political activity that can enhance a nation's economy, national self-image and identity' (Morgan et al. 2004: 14).
Place marketing is 'the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience' (Gold & Ward 1994: 2)
Destination marketing can be defined as the promotion of appealing images to attract visitors to a defined destination area (Middleton, 2000, p378).
Selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it [a destination] through positive image building (Cai 2002: 722)

The outcome
'A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience' (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998: 17).
A country image is 'the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place' (Kotler et al. 1993).

Contemporary destination marketing operates at a variety of scales from the international to the very local. It is central to the activities of tourism organizations, delivering destination competitiveness and a range of benefits to the destination. These benefits focus around the issue of differentiation and competitiveness and include:

■ Securing the emotional link to, and loyalty of, visitors.

■ Coordination of the private sector and other stakeholders through cooperative marketing.

■ Acting as a base for promotion of other products such as investment, economic development, film, and TV.

■ Facilitating and encouraging the use of local products and design.

■ Facilitating seamless market communication of the destination.

However, to be successful, contemporary destination marketing must engage with the complexities of the destination itself, not only in terms of the necessity to be inclusive in the development of the brand, but also to get to grips with the nature of the destination product and the consumption process. Morgan et al. (2011) for example state that destinations are lifestyle indicators for aspirational visitors, communicating identity, lifestyle and status. Their consumption is a highly involving experience that is extensively planned and remembered,

in contrast to the purchase and consumption of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). A destination is therefore more than a product – it is the physical space in which tourism takes place, where communities live and work and is imbued with symbols and images of culture and history. It is also the space within which tourists and suppliers interact to deliver the tourist experience. This context makes destination marketing so different from marketing FMCGs and is illustrated by the following case study, focussing on a DMO that takes a 'whole of destination' approach to its operation.

Case study 9.1: Stakeholder involvement in destination marketing: Vienna's tourism strategy

Introduction

Tourism is an important economic sector for Vienna, indirectly and directly contributing 4.1% of GDP and almost 15% of all jobs. In a brave move, the city decided to involve all tourism stakeholders in its tourism marketing strategy, as well as broader aspects of tourism in the city. This was done through a crowd-sourced approach to developing the city's strategy for tourism to 2020.

Vienna's 'Tourism Strategy 2020' is a joint strategy document of the City of Vienna, the Vienna Tourist Board and the tourism industry. Using a crowd sourcing approach, the Vienna Tourist Board (VTB) co-created a shared and mutually accepted tourism marketing and strategic plan for the city, taking on board the views of all stakeholders, including tourists. This was achieved using technology-driven empowerment of local and global stakeholders to facilitate collaboration and active participation in the implementation of the marketing and strategy document.

Objectives

The vision of the VTB was to co-create a shared and a mutually accepted tourism marketing and strategic approach for the city, taking into account the agendas of the various stakeholder groups. The idea was to facilitate their active participation in the design and implementation process, partly in order to ensure mutual acceptance of the overall vision for 'Vienna 2020'.

Design and implementation

The design and implementation of the strategy unfolded over three stages:

Stage 1: Strengths and weakness analysis

The discussion about the future strategy began with a critical assessment of tourism in Vienna in 2013. Tourism experts undertook a SWOT analysis of Vienna as a tourist destination, identifying and weighting the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the city's tourism to the year 2020 and beginning to shape the first stages of the strategy.

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