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Managing the Selling and Marketing of the Destination

Managing the annual marketing and sales planning process

Managing a destination as an event venue and conducting marketing activities building its position in this area constitutes the main part of the realisation of a convention bureau mission. Concentrating on the meetings industry requires, above all, direct sales – these are activities based on relations and real time contact. It would seem that the specificity of the meetings industry requires operations only in the B2B sector, but in fact convention bureaus usually undertake activities addressed at consumers, event participants, as the target recipients. Thus, a success-oriented convention bureau must master marketing both by means of traditional mass consumer marketing as well as by direct sales. To perform these activities well requires good planning.

The reason for the existence of convention bureaus is the sale of destinations (states, regions, towns or cities). The art of being a modern leader is managing image-building activities (or brand-building activities) as well as sales activities. Consequently, managing destination marketing starts with creating an annual plan to guide the marketing. It is the first step in the annual cycle of the marketing and sales tasks of convention bureaus.

An annual plan derives from the mission of convention bureaus and the resulting strategic and operational objectives. The plan and concrete actions must unequivocally result from the bureaus' mission. Even the best plan is useless if it is not compliant with the mission, because in the end the convention bureau will not achieve the established goals. A well-devised plan is important as it propels and determines every step taken

by a convention bureau in the target market. The annual plan is a result of a process which includes a review of previous actions taken and their effects (analysis of success and errors), assessment of the present and projections of the future with the use of indicators adopted at the stage of developing convention bureau strategy. The final plan should contain a few key elements:

- ◆ Identification of target markets,
- ◆ Target share of these markets,
- ◆ Strategy for reaching target markets,
- ◆ Communication activities,
- ◆ Sales targets defining success.

Past – present – future

Review the past

Similar to any process of establishing goals, the first step is determining what worked well in the past and what was not completed or what activities were not undertaken. Such a review enables the convention bureau leader to commence talks on establishing objectives with people in charge of particular operation areas. Irrespective of whether people responsible for the sales reached their targets, exceeded them or failed to achieve them, a review of the past is a starting point for a discussion of assumptions for the following year. What is crucial at this stage is finding adequate indicators. Using them for measuring the performance level of particular people, and the bureau as an organisation, provides the possibility to verify the organisation operations and management efficiency, but only if the indicators were properly defined, i.e. adequately matched to the selected operation area and if they measure real and achievable results. Therefore, the factors influencing the selection and definition of the indicators are also of the utmost importance. A crucial aspect, both in the establishment of objectives and defining the indicators, is the analysis of trends in the industry, referring to forecasts and tendencies which, even if only in theory, determine the direction of changes in the meetings industry.

A review of marketing and sales activities undertaken must take into account the influence of three factors and a detailed assessment of each of these factors is the basis for the formulation of the annual plan (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Factors which need to be analysed when devising the annual plan for a convention bureau

Factors	Tasks
Competition's activities and initiatives	<p>Examining serious changes in the activities and initiatives undertaken by the competitors of the convention bureau shows what is most significant in the context of their annual plan, whether they provide free space or larger discounts to attract events which previously did not even consider those destinations? Whether other destinations lowered hotel room prices, increased tourist tax, offered taxi drivers a training on client service, increased advertising budget, etc.?</p> <p>Detailed analysis of lost beauty contests, in particular when conducted in the context of a competitor's offer on the basis of which a given destination acquired the organisation of the event</p>
General trends in economy, industry and market segment	<p>When assessing trends in the entire economy and particularly in the target segments of the market, changes may be identified which influence the formation of the relevant environment</p> <p>The obligatory starting point in creating a marketing plan is economic analysis – the analysis of good economic situation or recession in its particular segments which have a direct and indirect influence on the meetings industry. The next step should be the analysis and assessment of the situation of the meeting industry, both on the global as well as regional or even local scale</p>
Change of clients' needs, behaviours and expectations	<p>A review of clients' reactions to marketing campaigns and promotional actions may shed some light of the efficiency of such activities</p> <p>Marketing programmes and sales promotions should be verified from the perspective of both their individual effectiveness and the entire influence they have. Are they coordinated well enough to promote the same promise of the brand? Do they intensify one another or does a lack of cohesion mislead the addressees? Do they reach the target group?</p>

Analyse the present

The next step in developing the marketing plan is conducting a situation analysis in order to assess the current state of economy, competitors, suppliers and clients at the local, regional or even global level. General economic, social and political trends have an impact on marketing plans: in an economic recession business trips and conferences will be less frequent; if the gas or oil price increases, the recreational industry may report a drop of profits; if a disaster occurs, it is highly probable that the following year or for a few years after the event, the expected performance will