

Marketing in Food, Hospitality, Tourism and Events

A Critical Approach

Richard Tresidder and Craig Hirst

9 Ethics, Sustainable Marketing and the Green Consumer

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Ethics, Sustainable Marketing and the Green Consumer

■ Introduction

There is a growing trend within marketing to work towards a more sustainable agenda, in which the ethics of both the production, dissemination and consumption of marketing materials is becoming increasingly questioned. Sustainability has been a significant theme in THEF for a number of years, there is a long traditional of sustainable tourism experiences that range from trekking in undeveloped areas to visiting Center Parcs, while food production has developed clear links with the 'Fairtrade', organic and slow food movements. Meanwhile organisations such as Marriott Hotels have invested heavily in their green credentials and large events such as Glastonbury Music Festival have their foundations in raising money for charities. As such the notion of sustainability has become one of the central themes to experiences marketing and has seen the emergence of the green consumer. The theme of sustainability within experiences marketing can be seen to fulfil a number of objectives that can be broadly divided into two elements, the first is where sustainability is used as a means of product differentiation, adding to the brand value, reinforcing the credentials of the organisation, impacting on buyer choice. In other words it adds an economic value to the company's or organisation's product. The

second element is the impact the notion of sustainability has on the consumer's perception of products, how it makes us feel and ultimately how it makes us behave. This chapter will examine the greening of marketing has on THEF marketing.

■ The greening of experiences marketing

It is argued that current marketing practices have failed the sustainability agenda (Mitchell and Saren 2008), this failure may be seen to be the direct result of the paradox that exists between marketing and the concept of sustainability, marketing is fundamentally a commercial activity that encourages people to buy products, to purchase things they do not need or require, as Kotler states that marketing is:

...a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.

(2008: 7)

As stated previously experiences marketing needs to be understood as being different from other forms of marketing and as such, the above quote needs to also include the social and cultural practices that underpin the production and consumption of food, tourism, events and hospitality, and the impacts that occur within the generating and represented society and culture. Parsons and Maclaren (2009: 14) summarise the criticism of marketing as 'fueling consumption and encouraging materialism by stimulating wants as a means of satisfying human needs'. Sustainability on the other hand, is underpinned by notions of anti-consumerism, sensitive development and not encouraging waste etc. *Our Common Future* (Brundtland Commission 1987) provides one of the most useful and widely used definitions of what is meant by sustainability, the report defines sustainability as 'meeting the needs of the present without depleting resources or harming natural cycles for future generations'. As marketers we have to reconcile this paradox