

# The Marketing Mix for Museums and Leisure Attractions

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The following article reviews the elements of the marketing mix appropriate to a small to medium sized museum or visitor attraction.

## 1. Introduction

The techniques and tools available to market a museum are wide ranging. A marketing strategy should identify the appropriate techniques for the target markets.

## 2. Press Advertising

Press advertising as a medium has to be treated with care by a museum. Often response to an advertisement is poor, although it is difficult to measure. Local press can sometimes be useful for promoting special events, and at the opening of a new museum or a major new element within a museum it may even be worth taking a special feature.

Where press advertisements are taken, it is useful to code the advertisements if they invite a written response or, alternatively, money-off coupons attached to the advertisement are a way of measuring its effectiveness as people arrive at the museum.

The national press is very expensive and, for a museum whose aspirations are regional, it is not easy to envisage a situation where national press advertising will be justified.

The specialist press, such as tourism newspapers etc, are again difficult to measure in terms of effectiveness. However, they are aimed specifically at one of the target markets and an advertisement often leads to editorial mention. Beware of those with extravagant claims of Tourist Board support and Tourist Information Centre outlets; often this has proved not to be the case, and it is worth checking with the Tourist Board before taking an advert. A view should also be taken on the reliability of their distribution if it is a free-issue paper. Publishers should be chosen who have a good track record and Tourist Board officers and other attraction operators can often offer advice. It is also worth checking back issues to determine the level and quality of support for the publication from other advertisers.

## 3. Advertising in Tourist Publications

The Regional Tourist Boards, the English Tourist Board and other agencies have many publications aimed at the tourism market. It is worth considering any which are aimed at specific segments in which the museum is interested:

- tour operators
- schools
- day trips

However, it should be ensured that the coverage of the museum catchment area is good both in the content of the publication and in the coverage of its distribution.

More caution should be exercised in taking advertisements in other tourism publications whose main purpose is to sell holidays. These have been found to be less effective for museums as they are, to a large extent, read by people who are planning their holidays, often several months before their visit. It may be advantageous in the early years of a new museum to advertise in these publications to the extent that they would help to establish the museum in the minds of the trade, tourist boards and other bodies promoting and supporting tourism in the area. This would also be true in the case of a museum re-launching itself in the market place. These publications are usually well read by the accommodation operators who advertise in them; thus they provide a useful channel of information. They are also well read by Tourist Board officers, tourist information centre staff, and opinion-formers in the tourism industry.

It is important, for information purposes, that the museum is mentioned in the local guides although it is difficult to identify how much business guides such as this generate.

#### **4. Radio and Television Advertising**

For many museums, television advertising can be an effective, though very expensive way of reaching a large audience quickly. However, in the case of a small museum, the costs of advertising may well be out of reach. However, it is a powerful medium, well worth investigating to establish whether there are any special deals offered to small companies, new advertisers, etc.

Local radio may be useful in raising awareness and, compared with television, it is relatively inexpensive. It is important to enter into negotiation with any radio company to get the best cash deal.

No opportunity to get free coverage on either radio or television should be missed.

#### **5. Outdoor Poster Advertising**

This is probably not worth considering unless there is a particularly relevant location for a hoarding, possibly on one of the main access routes. Sites of this nature can be expensive and the cost of the print for a one off display would probably be prohibitive.

#### **6. Mail shots**

This is a valuable marketing tool for specific market segments. It is important to have a good database which is up-to-date and with a contact name wherever possible so that mailings can be directed to a person rather than an institution or firm. They can be used to good effect for:

- schools

- coach operators
- club and society organisers
- accommodation providers

In the latter case they can be used for news, special information and invitations to visit the museum.

The contents of mail shots must be specifically aimed at the target market and a mechanism to measure response should be designed in wherever possible.

## **7. Leaflets and Hanging Cards**

These are the main promotional tool for most museums, aimed, in the main at the staying rather than the day visitor market. Leaflets should be printed in considerable quantity and are intended to be made available free of charge in tourist information centres, accommodation and anywhere else that potential visitors gather.

As a rough guide, the quantity of leaflets required is about twice the target annual attendance, although a number of museums considerably exceed this ratio. It may well be found that for a small museum with limited attendance expectations, extra leaflets are required to cover the wide catchment area thoroughly throughout the year.

There is great competition in leaflet racks for space, so the design of the leaflet must have sufficient impact to catch the eye amongst dozens of other leaflets. It is also important that the title is at the top of the front page so that, when the leaflet is racked, the name of the museum can still be read. The paper quality should be sufficient to make the leaflet rigid enough not to flop when racked, and the usual leaflet size is either one third A4 or A5. Leaflets of other sizes have more problems in gaining space in racks.

An increasing number of attractions are now providing specially produced leaflet holders so that their leaflets can be displayed prominently where only a horizontal surface is available, for example: shop counters, tables in hotel receptions, mantelpieces in guest houses. It is unlikely though, that this would be possible within the budgets available to a small museum.

Most attractions complement their leaflet with the production of a hanging card designed for hotel notice boards, coach company sales offices, tourist information centres, community centres, sports and social clubs, village halls and any other location which is prepared to display it. It has the advantage that it may last in a location for a whole season and will not run out as leaflets will. Again, as with the leaflet, the hanging card may have to compete for space and attention with a considerable number of items of print and therefore needs to be eye-catching. Ideally it should be rigid enough to hang with one drawing pin without curling and should be at least A4 size. If it is smaller than this it will not easily stand out and, if it is much larger, it may well be rejected in many locations for taking too much space. It should fit into a standard envelope size without folding.

The distribution of the leaflets and hanging cards, either by mail or by personal delivery is just as important as their production. It is also costly and time consuming. It is important to get the right person to undertake the distribution of leaflets as this can then become a valuable public relations exercise with accommodation operators and information centres. It can often be a particularly useful task for enthusiastic (and presentable) volunteers. It is useful for the distributor to carry invitations for operators displaying the literature, or their staff, to visit the museum.

In outlying areas, literature distribution can also be undertaken by post, but this should not replace a personal visit by a distributor in areas where this is economic.

Commercial distribution services are available, although they are not as good in PR terms. They may be valuable in a start-up situation as they would provide an experienced service and take the load from the operator in the early days. It could also be worth considering sharing a distributor with one or more complementary attractions as long as the distributor is not overloaded with too great a variety of leaflets. This could be counter productive as it considerably slows down the distribution process.

Bedroom browsers are an initiative promoted by the Tourist Boards in conjunction with commercial publishers. Under this scheme, leaflets produced by attractions are supplied to the publishers of the browser. They bind the leaflets together with leaflets from other participating attractions into a booklet which is then distributed free of charge to all Tourist Board accommodation members for placing in guest rooms or accommodation units.

## **8. Web sites**

Web sites provide the opportunity for detailed and up to date news of events, latest acquisitions to be promoted. They can be linked with other web sites such as tourist boards, complementary attractions etc. They are far more than just a brochure on screen and can provide the opportunity for past, present and future visitors to interact with the organisation. For museums, they can be the means for archives to be made accessible to a wide range of interested parties. A "regional museum" can quickly become a national asset if it chooses to invest the time in putting some or all of its records "on line". It is of course important for the web address to be featured on all printed matter and in all advertising.

## **9. Promotions**

### **9.1 Special events**

These will probably not be needed in the first year of a new attraction. The opening of the new attractions will be, in itself, a major event and will probably absorb much of the marketing resources.

There are two main types of event:

- one, such as exhibitions, aimed at the public, to draw those who may not otherwise visit or to attract back those who have been before. This

requires hard work, a major budget, extra marketing and more organisational effort.

- the other, an event mainly aimed at gaining media coverage to promote the museum/attraction, such as a personality opening a new feature, a record attempt, etc. This needs careful organising and timing to:
  - meet media deadlines
  - offer them the shots they want
  - provide well written and appealing press releases
  - ensure the presence of a good number of media representatives
  - avoid clashing with paying visitors
  - avoid, where possible, clashing with other major stories

## **9.2 Special Offers**

There are two main types of special offer

- those initiated by the museum
  - to increase numbers at specific times
  - to spread the load at peak times
  - to get feedback on an advertising campaign
  - to increase the per capita spend
- those organised by an outside agency, eg: confectionery manufacturer, tourist board, magazine publisher, etc, where the offer is aimed by them at their customers to improve their sales. In return, the publicity and the special offer encourage visits to the museum. The advantage of this type of promotion is that there are no set-up costs for the museum and the cost is directly linked to the response in that costs are only incurred (by honouring the offer) when the customer arrives.

## **10. Media Relations**

One of the most cost effective elements in marketing an attraction is the publicity gained by free media coverage.

It is most important that good relationships be built up with news editors, feature editors, journalists, photographers and cameramen working for the local media or who work on a freelance basis for the national press.

They should be fed with press releases on anything of interest and they should feel that their interests are being looked after.

If there is a reception, they should be invited to join the guests (although they may often not have the time). All the background information on the event, the museum and the people involved, should be readily available in the form of a

press pack. This should also include large black and white photographs, preferably taken by a photographer recognised by the NUJ.

Space should be made available, close to any action, for cameramen, sound recordists and journalists, with the right view (and the right background - ideally with the museum name in shot).

A desk should be available in case they want to write the story immediately and a telephone should be available for journalists to phone in stories.

## **11. Public Relations**

Any activity which raises the public's consciousness of the museum and improves its image falls under this heading. Activities may include

- speaking at meetings of voluntary bodies, eg: WI, Rotary
- handling complaints tactfully and rapidly
- involving the museum in community activities

Many of the other elements of public relations are considered under separate headings.

## **12. Corporate Image**

This relates to the way in which the museum is represented visually in signs, letterheads, captions, print, and promotional and publicity material. The corporate image should be determined as part of the design process and incorporated within the overall development. It should also be used in all marketing activity so that a consistent image of the museum is projected.

## **13. Trade Relations**

Good working relationships and personal contact should be built up within the tourism industry to keep a strong, positive image in the minds of others who affect the business. These include

- accommodation providers
- other attraction operators
- coach operators
- the travel trade
- official tourist guides
- trade organisations
- the Regional Tourist Board

## **14. Point of Sale Marketing**

An important element within the overall marketing mix is the marketing which takes place on site - at the selling point.

The design of the museum and the effectiveness of the corporate image are relevant here as first impressions are vital. However, probably more important is the welcome the visitors receive: it is the reaction of the first member of staff encountered that sets the tone for the rest of the visit.

The personal welcome, the design standards and the corporate image should also extend throughout the site and are particularly relevant in the other selling area - the shop. The right point of sales presentation can make a significant difference to the turnover.

## **15. Reception Facilities**

Normally the first point of contact for visitors, the reception facilities have a number of important functions for the museum. They

- set the tone for the rest of the visit
- indicate the quality and standards of operation of the museum
- provide the initial welcome for the visitor
- charge admission and sell guide books
- provide information on the museum

It is essential that the reception area of the museum sets and maintains high standards. If this is achieved visitors will move on to the museum in anticipation and with enthusiasm, and not with trepidation.

## **16. Staff Training**

As stated in the previous sections, the approach of staff to visitors is vital. Many have natural charm and courtesy, but even these need guidance.

Good staff training is essential for the benefit of both staff: to improve job satisfaction and customer: to improve the experience. This is true for all staff in contact with the customer, not just the reception staff.

## **17. Coach Driver Incentives**

This is a difficult problem, which will have to be tackled at an early stage in the life of the museum. Many attractions depend on coach parties and often the drivers have considerable discretion as to where they take their passengers.

Some attractions pay the drivers a cash sum. This is not a recommended approach as there is

- No control on the cash from the business's point of view
- No control on the recipients; drivers could get paid whether or not they have been instrumental in the party visiting the museum
- A possibility of arguments on eligibility

Drivers can, however, be an important source of business. It is important to recognise three different types

- The driver carrying a party to a destination which has been pre-booked by the party
- The driver of a service bus
- The driver bringing a coach party at his discretion

The first two types of driver deserve care and respect, but the third type can affect business levels directly and needs, and often expects, particular attention.

One effective mechanism to reward the drivers of this last type is to give the driver the party discount if he takes the trouble to organise his visitors into a group and collect their admission fees so that he can pay for them as a party. In this way he will be eligible for the party discount which he can then pass back to his passengers, or not, as he wishes.

All drivers should be treated as well as possible; they can be good ambassadors for the museum. Ideally, they should be provided with:

- A drivers' waiting room or area where they can relax, eat and, possibly, watch television while waiting for their party
- free admission to the museum
- access to a phone - a pay phone is acceptable (should they not have a mobile telephone!)
- information on the museum to take back to base

## **18. Souvenir Guidebook**

While normally perceived as a sales item, the guidebook is an important marketing tool

- it carries information about the museum in an appealing form and is often passed by the purchaser to people who have not visited the museum
- they are often kept for a long time
- it can be displayed and sold in other outlets away from the site (although in relatively small numbers) and can be placed in public libraries
- it is a valuable promotional tool for incorporating in press packs, passing to coach operators, and leaving as complimentary copies in hotel lounges
- it is a useful gift for visiting officials, tour organisers, trade delegations and others

## **19. Merchandising**

Retailing offers a major opportunity to promote the museum.



Souvenirs carrying the name of the museum sell well and are seen by others. They should be available in a wide price range but they must be well designed, in the corporate image and of good quality. The promotional message is counter productive if the souvenir fails to please when the visitor returns home.

Souvenirs relating to the museum will have a particular value.

Paper bags, carrier bags and till receipts should all reflect the corporate image and provide an opportunity to promote the museum.

Corporate identity/image is a subject in itself - for more information consult Nick Booker of Booker & Hopkins Associates [nick@bookerhopkins.co.uk](mailto:nick@bookerhopkins.co.uk)

**Note**

Article prepared with the assistance of Ian Rutherford

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