



How Destinations Lose Their Lustre, Visitor Traffic And, Ultimately, Their Reputation - By John R. Hendri

Brand Equity. What a great term. Most know about Brands - they are what we say they are, what the Consumer believes they are and then validated by the Experience.

Equity is not only the value and worth but also the doctrine of fairness. These definitions reflect the vicissitudes (unpredictable and variable changes) which challenge our Destination areas. We must be vigilant on our watch.

All our Destinations began with a vision, typically created around history, natural attractions or commerce. We wanted others to enjoy our uniqueness and location. We developed the infrastructure to house, feed, recreate and entertain those certain Visitors. And, we broadcasted our successes to the world. So much hard work and wisdom. Build and they will come.

And, they did travel, visiting us over the years, even some for generations. We kept the Experience fresh and steady, emphasizing our dedication to service, attention and care. But, subtle moves were in play. There were more Destination choices for people to make, tastes changed and our Consumer became highly sophisticated and informed. The landscape had morphed, and we needed to adapt.

Our challenges reflect the intricacies of our world. This is no time for hubris. With terrorism, people seek safety. With the price of gas and stress of air travel, people seek solace and value for that discretionary dollar. With our quest for talent to serve our visitors and guests, qualified and sufficient labor is crucial. Markets have changed, loosing hotel rooms in exchange for condo/time share conversions (like New York and Miami) or the move to more upscale (like Myrtle Beach). And, not to mention, the damage from natural causes and environmental shifts, such as hurricanes, tsunamis and fires. The Gold Coast of Mississippi rebuilds successfully, while New Orleans continues to falter with their rebirth. The digital frontier advances daily, numbing us all with a barrage of information. We will never see business as usual.

This brings us back to three key words: Brand, Equity, and Experience. These represent the relationship, the rapport we seek with our Visitors. We, the providers, should be balancing all our decisions, filtered through these precepts.

There is only one Destination which defies logic and gravity - Las Vegas - a fantasyland beyond Disney, but they represent some true genius with Brand, Equity and Experience. Firstly, they have the Brand down pat, and every 'player' there is part of the package with the marginal businesses pushed aside. They are incredibly innovative, with the message and the medium constantly changing, seducing and intriguing the Consumer. Our naughty inner child seeks excitement. There is no doubt that you will receive value with your visit to Las Vegas, even if you have little success at the tables. I have never heard someone say that they had a bad time there. But, Las Vegas is the anomaly, and their success came with a great deal of collaboration and commitment.

We in the real world can have success as well, perhaps not at the same scale. We need leadership, creative and energetic men and women to pilot with integrity our CVB's, Chambers and Associations. They need to engage their membership and constituencies - this is a partnership. We need to know what our Visitors think about our Destination. We cannot substantiate development strategies without

Revelstoke Tourism

research and 'feedback' on an ongoing basis. We need to demand some consistency of service, product and facility condition throughout our community of providers. A poor Experience at Guiseppe's Bistro and Bowling Mart dashes the excellence of a fine stay at Hotel Excelsior. Training and Development activities for our Ambassadors, those who actually provide and accentuate the Experience, must be constant, emphasizing Customer Service. As we define and build our Brand, we must be honest, prepared to deliver what we say we will. Our message must be creative and fresh. Above all, we must be accountable. There are no excuses!

If we are enthused and committed to Hospitality in our Destinations, no one else will do it for us - we are the front line. We have the capability, and usually challenge brings out the best efforts - collegial and synergistic - for this is a community effort. Build your Destination around Brand, Equity and Experience! After all, your reputation is all you have.

About the Author

The author believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Memorable Experience. Seek solutions at: www.hospitalityperformance.com