

Relationships that Pay

How Receptive Tour Operators Can Help Build Your Business

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A RECEPTIVE TOUR OPERATOR IS A LOCAL TOUR COMPANY THAT MANAGES PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR INCOMING VISITORS, OFTEN FOR TOUR OPERATOR GROUPS. This month we will explore the importance of working with your receptives and how valuable they are in bringing you business.

One of the most effective ways to get the message about your tourism programs to the visitor market is to develop a relationship with the receptive tour operators in or close to your market. A basic understanding of how they operate and what the distribution system is will help.

At the top of the tourism food chain is the product. That is our shopping centers, plus hotels, airlines, attractions — anything that offers a product to the visitor market. We then “sell” our product, or offer value added, to the receptive tour operator, who takes a variety of products, packages them at a 30% discount and sells them to the tour operator/wholesaler. The tour operator then tacks on 20% and sells to the travel agent. For another 10%, you — the consumer — buy the package.

How the Receptive Tour Operator Operates

When a tour operator is planning an itinerary in a market they are unfamiliar with, they go to the receptive for product, since the receptive knows that market inside and out. Tour operators rely on the receptive operator to provide an interesting and unique experience as well as a smoother-run-

ning itinerary. Receptives offer a variety of services including multi-day escorted tours, guides, meet and greets, ground transportation and packages. From a shopping center standpoint, it is important to have a relationship with both the tour operator who sells your market as well as the receptive. When the itineraries are being negotiated and your name is brought up, if either party is familiar with you, your center is much more likely to be included. Also, that tour operator has the same goal as you — selling your destination!

How to Get the Names of the Receptives for Your Market

The best way is from your DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) such as your convention and visitor’s bureau. They will be able to provide you with a list of companies and contact information.

You can also access the membership of the Receptive Services Association of America. Log on to www.rsana.com and click on Members & Visitors from the home page. Go to Member Search (left side of page), then click on Regular Members. You do not even have to be a member of this association to access their list. This is a valuable organization,

and the dues are worth every penny. But you have to “work it” by attending their meetings, participating in the marketplace and volunteering for committees.

How to Market Yourself to the Receptive

There are a number of ways to introduce yourself to the receptives and work with them. What works best is a combination of the methods presented below. As with everything else about your tourism marketing program, it is all about relationship building. Of course, at this point it is assumed that you have your product in place and are ready to market to the receptive!

Marketplaces

Especially if this is new to you, probably the best place to start is by participating in the RSAA Annual Marketplace. This is held each year in January, alternating between New York City and Florida. The Marketplace brings together top receptives for a day of pre-scheduled appointments with you and other suppliers. As with other pre-scheduled trade shows, you must do your homework. Before requesting an appointment, make sure that receptive sells your market and is interested in a shopping product. Send e-mails to all the receptives you are interested in meeting to introduce yourself and ask that they also request an

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appointment with you (all mutual requests have priority). Appointments are brief, so have your talking points and visuals in order. And, of course, follow-up is crucial.

Also, find out if receptives are participating in any travel trade show you are participating in. For example, in recent years TIA has allowed receptives to be a part of their International Pow Wow show.

Sales Calls

An effective way to develop a working relationship with a receptive is to call for an appointment. Set aside a day for nothing but sales calls to receptives in an area. You will have more one-on-one time with them in their office. This is where you can really get down to business and negotiate a program. I prefer to partner with someone for these calls, such as a hotel.

“Since our guests are always asking the front desk and the concierge where to shop, it makes sense for us to develop a program with a shopping center. What better way to promote the program than by making sales calls with our shopping center partner,” explained Ellen Serra, director of sales and marketing for Comfort Suites in Ft. Lauderdale. Ellen and I have partnered on sales calls and in a booth at trade shows. It saves money and provides the tour operator with a more comprehensive package!

Many receptives work out of a regional office that markets the state or region, and not just the city. If no receptives are located in your city, your DMO

can tell you where they are. The highest concentration will be in cities like New York, Orlando, Miami and LA, but their responsibilities cover much more than that city. Also, some receptives are actually branch offices of tour operators from other countries such as England, Germany and Japan.

Sales Missions

Sales missions, sometimes referred to as sales blitzes, are really sales calls, but with a group of people usually organized by your DMO. Hotels and attractions are invited to attend, so you are with a group of potential partners. Most DMOs plan sales missions to different markets throughout the year. Some will include not only visits to their offices, but a reception and/or tabletop display area as well. Plan in advance which are for you by studying your DMO’s annual program of work or marketing plan as soon as it is available.

Training

I have developed close working relationships with several receptives who invite me every year to do an hour-long training session on our shopping center products to all their employees. This is effective because during your sales calls and trade shows you are only meeting with one or two people from a company and your information may not be passed to everyone! During the hour, lunch is served, and after the presentation we have time to brainstorm programs that would work best for that particular operator.

If you are invited to con-

duct a training session, make lunch arrangements for the entire office staff, even for those who cannot attend your training. If you are meeting in your own city, have one of your restaurants cater, and make sure everything is brought in that you need to serve, not just the food. Be creative with your menu choices, receptive operators are used to being “wined and dined!” Your goal is to provide something unique and memorable. And, of course, when the presentation is over, you are responsible for cleaning up.

The company may ask you to give your presentation several times to smaller groups so everyone is not out of their office at the same time.

North American Journeys

For three years now, North America Journeys (NAJ) has held marketplaces with the receptives on the West Coast of the US. A couple of months ago this marketplace was held in New York for the first time. I found it valuable because the ratio of suppliers to buyers greatly favored us. I was able to meet with over 20 receptives in one day. Plus, there was a half day of educational seminars. To read more about the summit, visit: thetouropoperator.com/naj-summit/about.htm

Fam Tours

Your DMO may organize fam tours (familiarization tours) with the receptives. Do whatever you can to participate and wine and dine the attendees. This is your opportunity to “shine” firsthand to the recep-

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Working With Receptives

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tives. RSAA recently hosted a fam tour of receptives that left from Grand Central Terminal. We participated with a brief presentation on our tourism programs, gave them a sales kit, and sent them to their train with a goody bag full of food.

E-mail Blasts

I use e-mail blasts regularly to remain in constant contact with the receptives we work with.

What Do Receptives Want From You?

The following:

- Coupon books, discounts or some type of incentive, translated for their markets.
- VIP treatment such as meet and greets, welcome packets, complimentary shopping bags, etc.
- Some will ask for an exclusive promotion for a special group – work with a retailer or restaurant for something like a complimentary cocktail or offer a shopping spree giveaway for the operator to promote.
- Responsiveness to their needs.
- Your printed materials such as brochures, directories, sample coupon books, images, your logo, etc.
- They may inquire about transportation, such as taxi fares from hotels to your center.
- VIP parking.

In summary, your receptives can be your best ally to help you market your visitor

programs. And, since they are in or close to your market, this can be very cost-efficient.

My next article will explore the student market. Student travel is becoming increasingly important and SYTA, the Student Youth Travel Association is celebrating its 10th year this year! The students themselves are saying their travel is not all about will be attending SYTA's annual marketplace in Boston this year and will report back on how best to reach this viable market.

We are continuing this series of articles on tourism every other month and would like to focus on some of the more innovative tourism programs. Please submit your programs to me, either via e-mail (Carolyn@CJFMarketingInternational.com), fax (732/545-3138) or mail. If possible, include samples of your graphics via e-mail. Full credit will be given to the person or team responsible for the program. Visit our new web site: cjfmarketinginternational.com ■

CJF Marketing International offers a range of services for creating and implementing strategic tourism, economic development and marketing programs for shopping centers, urban entertainment projects, downtown retail districts, communities and commercial properties globally. The firm also offers educational programs and seminars for corporate meeting planners, shopping center developers, communities and re-development agencies. Feinster can be reached by phone at 732/249-6080.

Signs that Get Results

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announcing “The Santa Set is Closed” creates a less fanciful mood than “Santa is Feeding His Reindeer.”

10. Use your sign vendor as a resource. Your sign vendor is also your partner. They can advise you on what has worked – or not worked – for other clients. Use them as a resource, not just a service provider. Leverage their experience with similar programs in other industries or malls. ■

Boyd is co-owner of Creative Source Design Group, a leading graphic design firm in Canton, OH, that specializes in creating marketing materials for shopping malls by using in-house designers and large format and short run digital printers. They help mall marketing directors design, produce and install posters, graphics, signs and other marketing materials. To learn more, visit their web site at creativesourcedg.com, e-mail info@creativesourcedg.com or call 330/479-8129.

Ad Review

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Mom from many of the retailers, plus individual store offers from 39 merchants, and a free glass candle garden with any Geneva Commons purchase of \$75 or more.

The current back-to-school direct mail brochure features three 20% off coupons, each valid at one of several dozen stores, plus a free sling backpack with \$50 or more in store receipts. Each seasonal campaign is further reinforced through print ads, on-site signage, in-store flyers and the center's website.

“Consistency works,” says Dodier. “Since we launched the campaign in 2005, we've seen a marked increase in merchant participation, both in incentive offers and seasonal photography submissions. Best of all, and most importantly, center sales per square foot have increased substantially since introducing this campaign.”

Dodier & Company tracks the effectiveness of each seasonal campaign by distributing survey forms to participating stores. The merchants report how many coupons were redeemed, what worked and what didn't for their individual store, and how satisfied they were with the program. ■