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Title	'Hold your nose -you're going underwater': An integrated experiential approach to marketing in the heritage sector
Authors	Leighton, D
Type	Conference or Workshop Item
URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/12744/
Published Date	2008

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**International Cultural and Event Tourism
Alanya, Turkey, 5th-9th November 2008**

**‘Hold Your Nose- You’re Going Underwater’: An Integrated Experiential
Approach to Marketing in the Heritage Sector**

Abstract

This paper explores experiential marketing from the perspective of cultural heritage attractions operating in a highly competitive leisure and tourism marketplace. The paper explores the rise of the heritage industry in the UK and the urgent need for sites and attractions to find a competitive edge in a complex and over supplied marketplace. As public funding has been eroded and whole sectors of the cultural industries have been propelled into competing in the open market alongside sophisticated visitor attractions that operate along clearly defined commercial lines, the need for relevant and responsible marketing of our heritage has become imperative and experiential marketing may provide the means to attract and retain an increasingly discerning visitor. The paper goes on to explore heritage as a consumption based experience and cites evidence of the adoption of the experiential paradigm by a number of sites and attractions. Barriers to the adoption of the experiential paradigm are also identified and explored. An integrated approach to experiential marketing is proposed, whereby visitor environments, interpretive planning and marketing communications are utilized in combination to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The analytical basis for the evaluation of an integrated experiential approach is provided through a case study of an award winning visitor attraction in Bristol, UK, Brunel's ss Great Britain. The paper concludes by proposing a diagnostic model for practitioners taking forward an integrated experiential approach as a potentially timely and effective marketing strategy.

Keywords: experiential marketing, visitor experience, heritage management.

Introduction

As tourism, leisure and hospitality have become major economic activities cultural heritage attractions have sought to develop marketing strategies that will ensure their capacity to attract visitors and to continue to thrive both now and in the long term. This is a significant challenge for cultural heritage attractions for whom successful marketing is both a unique privilege but at the same time an enormous responsibility. If successful our physical patrimony is preserved for future generations, ensuring social inclusion and access for all; if unsuccessful we risk the alienation or even destruction of irreplaceable assets. Given this operating scenario, it is essential that marketing in this sector is relevant, responsible and above all sustainable.

The leisure and tourism marketplace, however, is undergoing rapid change and is over-supplied. Whole sectors of the heritage and cultural industries in the UK previously funded by the public sector have found themselves propelled into competing in the open market alongside sophisticated tourist attractions that operate along clearly defined commercial lines (Leighton 2007a). Visitor attractions seek uncontested market space that will take them away from fierce competition whilst at the same time needing to identify a long term survival strategy. The solution to their problem may lie in the adoption of an experiential approach to marketing the heritage site or attraction (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, Schmitt, 1999), whereby consumer interest is not restricted to purely functional benefits but to the consumption of a total experience. The tourism sector has been surprisingly

slow to adopt an experiential approach, focusing on traditional marketing concepts and product based offerings (Williams 2006) and within the tourism sector heritage attractions have progressed at an even slower pace. Indications over the past few years are however that heritage attractions that have moved away from a traditional product focus toward an experiential approach have succeeded in maintaining or even increasing visitor numbers in the face of adverse market conditions, for example The Science Museum in London and Stonehenge (VisitBritain 2006). By engaging visitors through means as diverse as multi-media, drama and live performance, these organisations may have located a potential strategy for survival.

Nevertheless, the adoption of an experiential, consumption based approach to heritage is problematic. The appeal of the heritage lies in the priceless museum collection, the magnificent monument or the imposing building (Leighton 2007a) There are significant barriers in the UK to adopting an experiential approach in the shape of stakeholders such as funding bodies, conservation groups, civic trusts and local, national and international government. There are also innate tensions between commercial objectives and curatorial goals, between visitor access and preservation, between scholarship and entertainment.

The aim of this paper is to explore experiential marketing as a potential marketing strategy for heritage sites and attractions competing in the wider leisure and tourism marketplace. It explores the nature and scope of the heritage industry, heritage as a consumption based experience and cites evidence of adoption of the experiential paradigm by a number of sites and attractions. It identifies levels of engagement with experiential marketing and raises questions regarding autonomy in decision making and the sustainability of an experiential approach. It proposes an integrated approach to experiential marketing whereby visitor environments, interpretive planning and marketing communications are utilized in combination to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. A case study of an historic ship, Brunel's SS Great Britain, provides the analytical basis for this evaluation. The paper concludes by proposing a diagnostic model for practitioners considering the adoption of an integrated experiential approach.

Heritage

Heritage in its simplest form may be defined as '*things inherited; a nation's historic buildings etc*' (Oxford English Dictionary,1997), embracing the preservation of buildings, sites and artefacts for handing on to future generations. Increasingly though, the consumption of heritage is viewed as an experiential process, whereby history is selectively packaged to suit the tastes and expectations of a discerning and sophisticated public. Herbert (1995) notes that visitors to historic sites are looking for an experience '*a new reality based on the tangible remains of the past. For them this is the very essence of the heritage experience*'.

Consumption of the past is variously described as a 'contemporary quest for history' (Goulding 1999) or a desire to escape from the present (Lowenthal 1985). The experiential aspects of heritage are evident and yet most of the marketing of heritage sees it conceptualized as a product or a commodity. In reality it is multi-faceted, embodying notions of scholarship, culture and personal identity. This study takes the heritage

offering as its focal point within the leisure and tourism context, and presents the marketing of heritage in terms of its potential for imaginative interpretation and presentation for popular consumption.

In order to contextualise this paper, it is useful to consider the nature and scope of the international heritage sector. The modern heritage spectrum is generally held to comprise three main strands: urban areas which include castles, palaces, ancient monuments, cathedrals, town halls, industrial archaeology, historic transport, museums, galleries and parks; rural areas, which include areas of outstanding natural beauty, rural industries and crafts, national parks, historic houses and designated heritage villages; performance related attractions that draw on heritage themes such as festivals, events, pageants and carnivals. Chronis however (2005) identifies ten consumption categories for the past which broaden this traditional perspective and redefine the scope of the industry. These categories are: retro-style objects such as cars furniture and toasters; collectibles such as antiques and coins; past narratives such as books and movies; historical societies; family histories such as photos and videos; one-of-a-kind-artefacts such as personalized memorabilia; heirlooms such as jewellery; genealogies; heritage events such as re-enactments and festivals and heritage sites (or retrosapes) such as museums, monuments and historic towns. The case study for this paper- the ss Great Britain- is a ship, a form of historic transport and museum combined, and is an example of such a retroscape.

The emergence of the heritage industry

The heritage industry is big business worldwide and forms a key part of the world's cultural and tourism industries. In the UK there are around 402 million visits annually to tourist attractions (British Tourist Authority 2003), representing a gross revenue of around £1210 million. Demand has increased and supply has increased exponentially (Middleton, 1996). Some one thousand new attractions have opened in England alone since 1979, representing one third of those in existence (Herbert, 1995). The beginning of the 1990s saw a new museum opening every fortnight (Brisbane and Wood, 1996) as more and more leisure attractions from theme parks to shopping malls competed vigorously for the same customer's leisure pound .

Towards the end of 1996 this level of growth peaked but four years later, the dawn of the new millennium brought another wave of new cultural attractions such as the Millennium Dome and the London Eye (now the UK's most visited charging attraction). Publicly funded heritage sites and attractions have been struggling to survive in the face of dwindling government grants and National Lottery income. In 2001 the combined effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease saw a reduction in international tourists to the UK, and both urban and rural visitor attractions suffered badly as a result. The final blow came later the same year in the form of free admission to the UK's national museums. The consequences for those heritage attractions that levy admission charges have been severe, many have struggled to survive and some have failed, such as the Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield. The consequences for other charging heritage attractions in having to compete with free national museums have been equally severe. Given these dramatic external changes in the marketplace within the space of a few years, those tasked with marketing the heritage in this climate face a huge

challenge. A report commissioned by The English Tourist Board (Action for Attractions, 2001) confirmed an alarming picture of supply outstripping demand, admission prices rising faster than inflation and rising consumer expectations, noting in particular an increasing need for 'interaction and involvement'. A key recommendation of the report was a focus on increase visitor satisfaction through presentation, interpretation and new technology.

In terms of heritage attractions in particular, much of the heritage in the UK lies in the charitable and voluntary sectors where organizational cultures and operating practices are entirely different from those that are publicly or privately owned (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998). For example, the National Trust owns more than 10,000 buildings and cares for more than 700 miles of coastline, 92% of its staff are volunteers and faces an annual maintenance bill of 190 million pounds (The Sunday Times, 22-7-07). Visitor centric approaches may not be appropriate or may be difficult to implement in an organization such as this and may be at odds with the strategies for conservation and preservation that lie at the core of its mission.

Towards an experiential approach

Meanwhile, within the marketing literature approaches to visitor behaviour have been undergoing an evolutionary change. As early as 1982 Holbrook and Hirschman highlighted the need to move away from conceptualising consumer behaviour purely in terms of information processing and a subjective experience, and yet most of the literature up to the late 1990s has perpetuated this cognitive approach. Marketing in the leisure and tourism sector has tended to be product or supply focused, emphasising the importance of product features and benefits-such as the collection, the site or the architecture as the basis of the visitor offering (Leighton 2007a). There are a number of potential flaws in this approach but the most significant lies in the lack of recognition of the role and expectations of the visitor as an active, skilled and discerning participant in the consumption process. Traditional models of consumption have tended to treat consumer behaviour somewhat narrowly, as a rational, problem solving process rather than considering the more hedonistic reasons for visiting (McGuiggan in Manzenac, 2001).

Pine and Gilmore first introduced the notion of experiential marketing in 1998 and later defined it as 'when a person buys a service he purchases a set of intangible experiences carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages to engage him in a personal way' (Pine and Gilmore 1999 p2). Experiential marketing involves organisations in the creation or co-creation of innovative visitor experiences that are meaningful to the visitor as individual rather than simply commodified.

Moreover, an experiential view of consumer decision making may be a better representation of consumer choice where less tangible, hedonistic variables may be significant predictors of behaviour (Leighton 2007). The twenty first century consumer demands a value-for-money 'edutaining' (Robinson, 1994) and worthwhile experience but expects at the same time to be 'entertained, stimulated, emotionally and creatively

challenged' (Schmitt, 2000). In seeking an 'experience', the intensity of the experience may be more important to the visitor than the purpose (Ryan, 2002); all experiences may not be of equal validity and any experience will not necessarily do. Motivational research is essential if we are to fully understand the visitor experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) identify four realms of experience: education, entertainment, escapist and esthetic. These are overlaid with two bi-polar constructs, consumer participation (ranging from active to passive) and connection (ranging from absorption to immersion). The realms are not mutually exclusive and the richest experience for visitors would be one which encompasses several or even all of the realms, such as Disneyworld where a visit to the Animal Kingdom theme park provides entertainment in the form of rides and shows, education in the form of conservation demonstrations, escapism in the form of an attack by 'poachers' during a jeep safari, and the esthetic where the activity becomes more passive in nature such as the visitor simply looking at the animals.

Turning to the heritage sector in particular, the heritage offering comprises many different elements, all of which form part of the overall visitor experience (Holloway and Robinson, 1995, Swarbrooke, 1995). These elements include the anticipation of the visit, the journey there, the time spent at the site or attraction, the journey home and the memories of the visit. As such the visit represents a service encounter with the visitor engaged within it, as actor rather than spectator (Pine and Gilmore 1999). This co-creation of value is further perceived by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) as an 'experience space' where organisations enable visitors to develop experiences that suit their own needs and level of involvement.

Implementing experiential marketing

Involving the visitor as participant or co-producer requires careful consideration of the heritage offering and visitor perceptions. Interpretation is the vehicle that bridges the gap between the site or artefact and the visitor, defined by Tilden (1957) as 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information'. On the one hand this includes the creation of authentic heritage places, such as open air museums, but on the other the antithesis of the first: the use of elaborate state-of-the-art technology to create a novel historic experience (Lumley, 1988). An example is the Jorvik Centre in York, UK, where visitors travel in a time car to experience the sights, smells and sounds of Viking life. Other interpretive techniques include interactive multi-media, such as those at the Winston Churchill Exhibition at the Cabinet War Rooms in London where visitors are totally immersed in a huge interactive table of key dates in the famous man's life, one minute bombarded with sweets as rationing comes to an end and the next witnessing the explosion of the table as Hiroshima is re-enacted. Live interpretation has emerged as a key method in recent years whereby actors perform to or interact with visitors to interpret objects by providing them with a human context (Price, 1993) and can range from historic re-enactment through to theatre, storytelling and role play.

These interpretive methods correspond to Arnould et al's view (1998) of 'ways in which the environment is presented and interpreted' as 'communicative staging'. The focus is on the narrative construction of the experiential product, as opposed to 'substantive staging', 'the physical creation of contrived environments' where the focus is on the use of objects and the environment itself.

Organisations such as those cited above that have embraced the opportunity to create designed visitor experiences have generally been successful in increasing visitor numbers, although not all will disclose actual visitor data. Critics would argue that interpretation in such attractions has become sanitised, entertaining and inauthentic in order to appeal to popular tastes (Goulding, 2000, Robertshaw, 1999, Hewison, 1987). In substituting 'escapist, commodified leisure for authentic experience' (Goulding, 2000) they have 'fostered conformity, passivity and political indifference among participants turned spectators' (ibid)-the very opposite of what the experiential paradigm potentially provides. This raises questions regarding the opportunities visitors have to engage at anything other than a superficial level. Are heritage attractions providing the 'experience space' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) for visitors to co-create an individual and personalised experience or simply a formulaic, prescribed experience?

Barriers to experiential marketing

Given that there may be good reasons for pursuing an experiential approach to the marketing of heritage, there are very real constraints and barriers to experiential marketing in the UK heritage sector. Very few organizations have the luxury of autonomy in their decision making and are subject instead to a range of stakeholder influences that may mitigate against or even preclude the adoption of an experiential approach. Boards of trustees within a museum for example may exert a significant influence on the way it is marketed, external funding may be contingent upon the achievement of objectives that have little or nothing to do with visitor access and more to do with scholarship, and aristocratic owners may prefer to hold the visiting public at arms length. There are innate tensions throughout the sector between commercial objectives and social inclusion, between income generation and access for all, between consumption of the heritage product and its preservation.

Kotler (2002) sounds a word of warning to those heritage attractions that are in danger of losing sight of their core competences - 'rich experiential happenings alone are not a sufficient condition for success' and 'rich museum experiences definitely help build successful museums but the experiences have to be all embracing (covering services, programs, facilities, safety, the entire gamut of museum operations)'. Museums must take care to deliver the same, seamless services marketing experience as any other service provider, taking care of each 'moment of truth'(Carlzon, 1987) along the way. Above all, Kotler argues, 'museums should stay museums', core to their offering should be enlightenment and visitor entertainment should take place 'on the margins'. However this is not so easy to achieve in practice. The UK government's social inclusion agenda and the deliberate targeting of under represented visitor groups by museums reliant on funding streams with predetermined performance indicators linked to broadening access

and participation, mitigates against 'museums staying museums' and favours instead an inclusive, populist approach to interpretive practice. A potential solution for the museum lies in blurring the boundaries between enlightenment and entertainment in one all-engaging experience and may represent a more realistic stance in today's climate of increased competition and dwindling financial support from central and local government.

However, as Williams (2006) points out '*simply having an intrinsically, inherently experiential offering is very different from actively marketing that offer in an experiential manner*'. For example, a content analysis of promotional literature of four new heritage attractions in the UK (Boniface, 1995) revealed the repeated use of key words and phrases. These included 'thrill, challenge, stimulate', 'play an active part', 'see, hear, feel and do', 'sights, sounds and smells'. Similarly, a subsequent content analysis of promotional literature and websites for a further three new heritage attractions identified language and images suggestive of an experiential approach. (Leighton 2007). Based on The Lowry (Salford, UK), The Imperial War Museum North (IWMN) (Salford,UK), and The Eden Project (St Austell,UK), the analysis revealed the visitor portrayed as collaborator, with visitor engagement and 'provocation' (Tilden, 1957) emerging as dominant themes in the literature, casting the visitor as actor within the experience. But these studies assume that the use of key words and phrases in marketing communications is synonymous with a commitment to experiential marketing, when clearly this is not necessarily the case. In any event marketing communications is only one element of the mix. Moreover, an experiential approach may not be sustainable for all organizations or even desirable in the long term. An organization may adopt an experiential approach only to move away from it in subsequent years, as demonstrated in a case study of the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds,UK (Leighton 2007). For the purposes of this paper, a single case study was selected for analysis as an exemplar of best practice in its commitment to a strategic and integrated experiential approach.

Research design and methodological critique

The objective of this paper is to explore experiential marketing as a potential marketing strategy for heritage sites and attractions competing in the wider leisure and tourism marketplace. An inductive research approach was therefore adopted for the field study, whereby observations of the empirical world would enable explanations and theories to be constructed (Gill and Johnson 1997). Within an ideographic framework, a multi method approach was adopted, using observational techniques and a single, semi-structured, depth interview. Participant observational techniques were selected in order to capture information on visitor flow around the museum and ship, visitor behaviour, social interaction and unsolicited visitor comments.

A pilot observational study was carried out via an online, virtual visit in order to identify those areas of the museum where observation might usefully take place and also to test the efficiency of the data gathering form. This enabled the researcher to optimize the amount of time available for data gathering, but it is also acknowledged that it excluded certain parts of the museum from the study.

Following the pilot observation, the observational study was undertaken by the researcher over a two day period during summer 2007, focusing on visitor behaviour, social

interaction between visitors themselves and between visitors and Mr Brunel (first person live interpreter playing the part of the ship's designer) and also on visitor comments (unsolicited and overheard). Some of the observational data was discussed at the interview. A depth interview was chosen for this study since this would facilitate an understanding of the meanings attached to issues in contexts that had not been structured in advance by the researcher (Easterby – Smith et al 2003). By developing an understanding of the respondent's world, their beliefs and opinions surrounding the concept of experiential marketing and its application to this particular heritage attraction it was hoped to identify themes and issues that might have a broader relevance and application for incorporation into a tentative diagnostic model.

As with all interviews, the selection of key informant was crucial to the research design. The Head of Marketing and Communications was identified as the most appropriate individual for interview, although it was recognized that other individuals such as the Director and Head of Interpretation also contributed significantly to strategic marketing policy and planning.

The selected research design, whilst yielding useful empirical data is subject to limitations and restrictions. Observational techniques are useful in locating the researcher within the context under observation and the non-intrusive nature of the method minimises any interference in the behaviours of the observed visitors, but there are clear constraints associated with the method. Not least is the theory-laden nature of observation (Hanson 1958), whereby prior theories influence what we take to be factual observations. These theories may be generated in the case of this study from the extant literature or from the researcher's previous empirical studies. Secondly, there are issues of reliability, such as the degree of chance occurrence rather than real behaviour. This could be minimized through multiple observational studies, but this was not practicable here.

Interviewer bias is another potential problem with both the observational study and the interviews. The interviewer might be more likely to impose their frame of reference on the interviewee(s), both when the questions are asked and again when they are interpreted. However, whilst this is acknowledged as a potential weakness of the study, it is counterbalanced by the researcher's ability to gain the trust and agreement of the key respondent.

The case study findings are presented initially in narrative form, but are then applied to the proposed diagnostic model in order to provide an evaluation of its potential utility.

Case Study- Brunel's ss Great Britain



Figure 1.ss Great Britain (Mandy Reynolds)

Brunel's ss Great Britain is a UK heritage attraction with an amazing story to tell. The ss Great Britain was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and her supersized iron hull made her the biggest, strongest ship ever built. When she was launched in 1843 she had the most powerful engines of any ship, could carry enough fuel to get to America and also featured an innovative steam powered propeller. Covering more than a million miles at sea, the great ship carried emigrants from Liverpool to Melbourne in the 1850s, troops to the Crimean War, the first England cricket team to Australia in 1861 and was converted to a sailing ship, supplying British warships with coal in the first world war; she was then scuttled in the Falkland Islands in 1937 before being salvaged in 1970 and towed back to Bristol to the dock where she was originally built, to be welcomed by 20,000 local residents who lined the harbourside.

In the same year Brunel's ss Great Britain was established as a trust. It receives no government support. It has three income streams – ticket sales, venue hire and fund raising but has to cover ongoing conservation costs of over \$1 million per year. Its mission is *'to preserve the ship, the ss Great Britain, and her building dock for all time for the public benefit of all, and to place the same upon public display as a museum for the enhancement of public understanding and appreciation of her social, commercial,*

scientific and technological context and significance'(www.ssgreatbritain.org/trust accessed june 2007)

By the late 1990s it became obvious that the ship was at serious risk from corrosion and in 2001 the Heritage Lottery Fund backed a £10 million scheme to save the ship (the total cost was £11.3 million). The relaunch of the ship and dockside museum took place in 2005. Since 2005, Brunel's ss great Britain has succeeded in attracting 200,000 visitors per year and has won a staggering number of awards, including Visitor Attraction of the Year 2007, the Gulbenkian Prize for Museums and Galleries 2006 and Best Industrial Museum 2007.

Case study findings (narrative)

The ship itself is encased in glass to conserve Brunel's iron, and the first part of the visitor experience involves going 'underwater' to the dry dock beneath the great structure. Visitors are instructed 'hold your nose you're going underwater' and suddenly the object is transformed into an experience. Standing beneath the bow and beneath the glass, the ship appears old but above the glass it is pristine and ready to sail. Once back above water level, visitors collect a ticket and then enter the dockyard museum where they experience a reverse chronology. The first stage involves an object rich, product focused learning experience featuring an interactive steering game and other interpretive devices such as video, audio and a dressing up box. Children are guided through by their own character in the form of Sinbad the cat, who poses a set of tricky questions such as 'why are propellers better than paddles?' At each of four 'timegates' the visitor can collect a unique stamp on their ticket, which effectively demarks the four timezones into which the museum is split. At the final gate the visitor must choose how to make their voyage to Australia- as a first class passenger, as a steerage class passenger, as Sinbad the ship's cat or as a marine archaeologist, collecting the appropriate audio guide and hearing the announcement 'today is a day that will change the rest of your life' as they step into the role of a Victorian passenger. This stage of the visit, which involves exploring recreated spaces such as the promenade deck, the engine room and first class dining saloon is almost entirely experiential, with audio material taken from diaries and letters of original passengers. The experience is enhanced with sound (eg animals on deck, a mysterious talking toilet), themed aromas (newly baked bread, disinfectant in the surgeon's cabin, fresh vomit in steerage) and subtle appeals to engage with the everyday lives of passengers such as a noticeboard with requests for writing paper and 'lost and found' items. The audio guide conjures up a vivid picture of life on board, from the birth of babies and the onset of serious diseases to the apparent suicide of Captain Gray. The auto triggers at key points for the audio guide ensure that the most important pieces of information are not missed, but numbers arranged on the ship in the style of cabin number plaques, allow visitors to access more information if they wish. During the observation, not all visitors chose to use the audioguide, which is also available in a choice of languages, but most did and especially older visitors and intergenerational groups. As the observation was conducted in summer, visitors were seen to picnic on deck and to interrupt their audioguide during this time, giving them the opportunity to discuss their visit. This use of and interaction with the deckspace mirrored that of original passengers whose photographs are displayed around the vessel. Perhaps more importantly

it reduced the potential for visitor isolation often attributed to the use of autoguides and allowed visitors to co-create an individualized experience. Similarly visitors were seen to take mobile phone photographs of the ship and of each other, endorsing the role of mobile phone photography in personalizing and recording the visitor experience (Leighton, 2007b). The appearance of Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself provides an additional dimension to the visitor experience. Providing excellent first person interpretation, he wanders around the ship and the dockyard museum engaging visitors in conversation – which again is individualized according to nationality, age and interest- and generates even more excellent photo opportunities.

The interpretive strategy employed by the attraction is consistent then with an experiential marketing approach. Phase one of their marketing strategy centred on the re-launch but the second phase is clearly focused on a sustainable commercial drive and to this end current and planned marketing initiatives are aimed at broadening the visitor base and providing a rich and individualized visitor experience. Once visitors have paid for an initial visit they can revisit as often as they like during the year without charge (‘Travel Back in Time Again and Again’), generating opportunity spend at each visit as well as advocacy. Events such as murder mystery dinners and the promotion of the ship as a wedding venue have succeeded in attracting visitors from new adult market segments, alongside family events such as Vile Victorian Trails, Sinbad Sea Chest art workshops and Extreme Knotting .Over 15,000 education visits are made each year and some of the children’s individual interpretation of artefacts can be seen in the form of laminated panels in the dockside museum.

It is evident that the adoption of an integrated approach to experiential marketing has proved highly successful for a visitor attraction that might initially be considered to have a limited, local appeal. Interpretive planning, marketing communications, pricing and visitor orientation combine to provide a compelling and absorbing ‘retroscape’ where visitors also have the scope to create their own individualized experience in the ‘experience space’ (Pralahad and Ramaswamy 2004). There are clear implications for innovative experience design in other parts of the heritage or wider tourism sectors in terms of the proven success of this integrated experiential approach.

Diagnostic Model

In order to ground the preceding discussion, this paper proposes a diagnostic model for heritage practitioners for use in analysing the potential for an integrated experiential marketing focus.

Figure 2 illustrates the application of the case study findings to the proposed model

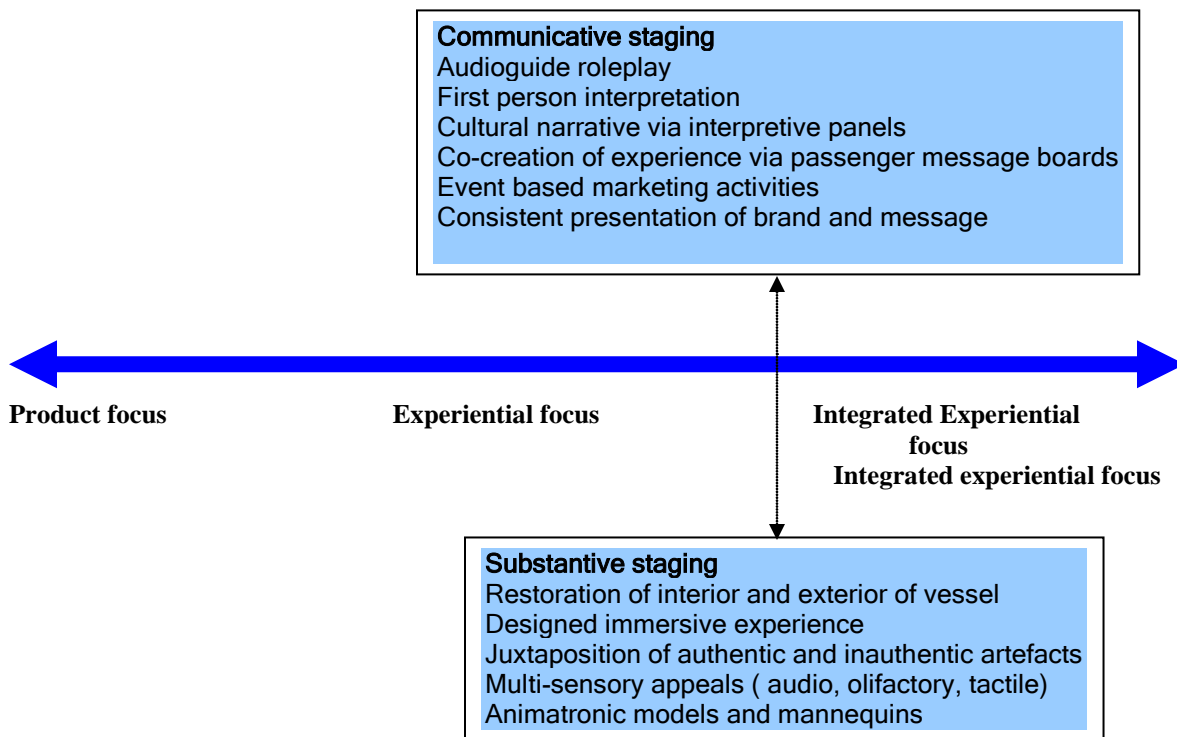


Figure 2. Integrated Experiential Marketing Continuum (after Arnould et al 1998)

At one end of the continuum is the product or supply focus, which may be entirely appropriate for those heritage organisations devoted to scholarship and learning, and with no remit or resource to allow visitor access. It may also suit those organisations for whom conservation or preservation of a rare site or fragile environment takes precedence over a visitor focus. Toward the other end is the experiential, consumption based approach, appropriate for many new, purpose built heritage attractions that have a strong commercial orientation and can provide the necessary means of visitor engagement and support. An integrated experiential approach is still further along the continuum, with both substantive and communicative staging (Arnould et al 1998) contributing to the achievement of a fully integrated approach. A place at this end of the continuum is achieved by those organisations who commit to understanding visitors' expectations of the experience and market as a cohesive whole the designed environment, its presentation and interpretation, the communications mix and message. In terms of the ss Great Britain, secondary research together with data from observation and interviews has identified both communicative and substantive staging contributing to the achievement of a fully integrated experiential approach. Some elements of communicative and substantive staging are suggested in the model above but the lists are by no means exhaustive, and it

would be useful to develop these further with a view to prioritising issues for investment and further development. These might include, for example, online virtual reality representations of voyages in the form of computer games that precede, succeed or even replace an actual visit (communicative staging), the recreation of actual onboard events through storytelling or drama workshops (substantive staging) or the development of complementary merchandising ranges based on events or characters from the ship's archives (communicative and substantive staging).

Initially, however, the challenge for those tasked with marketing the heritage is to identify the optimum place on this continuum, given that there may be significant barriers to the adoption of their chosen approach. The selected position will need to be compatible with their organisational structure, culture and operating objectives. Determining the optimum position will rely on achieving an understanding of the motives and behaviours of both visitors and non-visitors, and the complex interactions between the visitor and service provider. An attraction may be inherently suited or else designed to fit a specific niche along the continuum, but may also need to be re-positioned along the continuum in line with its heritage offering, its life cycle stage, changing conditions in the leisure and tourism marketplace, stakeholder influences and changing visitor expectations. Communicative staging and/or substantive staging may be used to enhance an experiential marketing focus and to draw the attraction toward an integrated experiential approach, if this is deemed appropriate, but it may not be. It is also possible that the continuum could be extended to encompass more than a single dimension and further empirical research would assist in developing additional dimensions for consideration.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the context of the UK heritage industry, placing it within the sphere of a wider market for leisure and tourism consumption. The need for some visitor attractions to move beyond a product or supply based approach to marketing has been investigated in light of intense market competition coupled with the need to capture uncontested market space. The potential for adopting an experiential, consumption based approach to heritage marketing has been highlighted and more specifically the potential for an integrated experiential approach. Such an approach has been explored through analysis of a single case study, the ss Great Britain. The case illustrates vividly the potential for developing integrated experiential heritage offerings that utilize designed visitor environments, interpretive planning and marketing communications to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Such strategies will assist in meeting the rising demands and expectations of an increasingly discerning range of visitors in a ubiquitous leisure and tourism marketplace.

The paper proposes a diagnostic model for practitioners seeking to identify an optimum marketing focus. The continuum provides a broad range of possibilities ranging from a product focus through to an integrated experiential focus, with the 'communicative staging' and 'substantive staging' possibilities proposed by Arnould et al (1998) enriching the experiential approach. The task of the practitioner is to select a position for the heritage site or attraction on this continuum. Whilst identifying the best strategic fit for the organisation, care must be taken not to sacrifice authenticity for entertainment, or to design an 'experience space' that confines the visitor to a formulaic, standardized

experience. Practitioners must also be mindful not to cloud the stated purpose of the museum, gallery, monument, site or artefact by providing an experience that is separate from, rather than integrated within the product itself. These are some of the issues that need to be addressed if heritage attractions are to market themselves successfully in the face of increasing levels and types of competition. The responsibility for marketing this sector is heavy given that the product is our physical patrimony. It is essential that strategies are relevant and effective in order to ensure the survival of cultural assets for future generations.

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