

BUS TOUR BASICS

compiled by Ann Weisman after the Western States Tourism Policy Council Conference, Albuquerque, 12/02

AMERICAN BUS ASSOCIATION SPEAKER

People are taking shorter vacations, closer to home. They are very interested in “learning” vacations and cultural experiences.

MOTOR COACHES

- Operators are mostly small family businesses
- A motor coach carries 30 – 57 passengers. They have raised floors and luggage bays.
- There are approximately 40,000 coaches in the US
- Are the #1 people mover in the US
 - 850,000,000 passengers in 2000, which is 200,000,000 more than the airlines
 - They do Amtrak’s annual load in 2 weeks
 - 40% are students under 25
 - 40% are 65 & older
 - They need to attract baby boomers who don’t ride buses
- 4000 companies
 - 90% have fewer than 25 buses
 - 75% have fewer than 10 buses
 - Each bus supports 5 jobs
 - These companies provide the following services (some may provide more than one service)
 - Charters 96%
 - Tours 33%
 - Sightseeing 25%
 - Airport Shuttles 19%
 - Contract Commuters 17%
 - Scheduled Trips 12%
 - Private Commuter 3%
- Motor coach visits support 1,000,000 jobs in US tourism
- Industry grew at a rate of 5 – 7% a year through 2000; went down 10% after 9/11

ECONOMIC IMPACT

- One overnight visit is worth \$5,000 to \$11,000 per motor coach to a destination. The study of Lancaster PA, New York City, and Washington DC is on the American Bus Association web site.

- Each motor coach takes 25 cars off the road (environmental concern). [Though I don't information on comparative pollution of 1 motor coach to 1 car.]
 - Reduces congestion (as in national parks)
 - Motor coach gets 160 passenger miles per gallon (2.8 – 5.3 miles per gallon for the vehicle)
- Industry brings tourism and local economic growth to rural attractions

NATIONAL TOUR ASSOCIATION SPEAKER

This organization is for those involved in tour operator package travel.

- 4000 members
- 650 tour operators, 700 destination marketing organizations, 2650 suppliers
- Packaged travel in 2001 was a \$166 billion industry worldwide
- \$99 billion by North American travelers in the US
 - Average daily cost with group packages was \$188
 - At an average of 35 in a group, the cost was \$6580 per day per group

ATTRACTING TOUR OPERATORS AND GROUPS

Tour Groups

- Have clear targets, which are easily identifiable
- Are resource friendly – groups tend to be more responsible
- Are happy campers – travelers are very satisfied with their tours

How to Attract Them

- Coordination & Collaboration: Think, plan, and act outside your own scope. Work together, don't compete. Coordinate within your region to develop a package.
- Develop a multi-faceted marketing plan.
- Be a student: learn about tour operators and group traveler preferences and expectations.
- Analyze your assets – what do you have to offer? Then verify with tour operators that this is something they can sell.
- Provide experiential travel to the travelers – to stop and do things – give them unique opportunities
- Asset Creation: Create selling points. Festivals and events can be important attractions.
 - What do you have and what special interest group would be interested?
 - What can you provide in infrastructure: food, lodging, bathrooms, airline service, motor coach parking, etc.
 - Can you train employees of the service providers on how to provide courteous service to tourists?
- Market smart: allow lead time.
 - Give the tour operator at least a year's notice. 18 – 24 months is preferable.

- If an operator prints his promotional brochure (for the coming year) in September, he needs your information in June. You need to have firm information to give him. So you may need to start putting things together in January or even earlier.
 - Remember that the tour operator is your sales agent. Give him the materials and complete information he needs. You are his information source!
- Service, Service, Service: Understand the importance of relationships which are forged by quality service. The tour operators entrust their customers to you. If the customers are unhappy, the tour operators are unhappy. Be sure to check out the hotels & restaurants to make sure the quality & service will be first-rate. Make sure local businesses will allow tour participants to use their restrooms while shopping or looking in their stores. Etc.
- Provide all the basic information.
 - Example: bus driver needs to know where to dump the bus toilet.
 - Example: These restrooms (at X location) can accommodate X people in X minutes.
- Tour Operator Economics: bear in mind factors such as tiered pricing structure.
- Tour operators must receive better rates than the general public. This allows them to price their tours competitively.
 - Comp policies: one free room for each 20 paid for.
- Advocacy: be willing to get involved in the issues as they arise.

INDUSTRY WEB SITE INFORMATION

www.tia.org -- Travel Industry Association

www.buses.org -- American Bus Association

www.ntaonline.com -- National Tour Association