Incentive travel

Overview and case study of Canada as a destination for the UK market

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The role of incentive travel is discussed and the potential of the UK (generated) incentive travel market is examined. The study focuses on Canada as an incentive travel destination for the UK market, and reports the results of a survey of UK incentive travel organizers. Canada appears to have much to offer as an incentive travel destination, but its image and tourism product benefits need to be clearly defined and projected in order to be able to compete better with other long-haul incentive travel destinations.

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The UK (generated) incentive travel market appears to have experienced rapid growth during recent years in the number of user companies engaging in incentive travel schemes, in the number of incentive travel organizers (providers) and in the value of the industry. Correspondingly, the competition among national tour operators (NTOs) to attract this market has become fierce. There are over 40 NTOs vying for market share, and it is believed that the majority of these have dedicated staff and resources.

Canada has been faced with a declining VFR (visits to friends and relatives) market and a rising deficit on the balance of payments. The Tourism Section of the Canadian High Commission and the Ontario Regional Tourist Office therefore expressed interest in increasing Canada's penetration of the UK incentive travel market. In 1989 research was undertaken with a view to ascertaining the value of the market and assisting in formulating decisions regarding product development and promotional strategy. This paper presents the main findings of the research. The discussion is based upon a review of the literature pertaining to incentive travel, together with an analysis of primary data collected from in-depth interviews with 14 UK incentive travel organizers during 1989. The study centres around Canada's potential as an incentive travel destination for the UK market.

Background

Within the areas of sales and marketing management, incentives (financial, merchandise, travel, etc) have been utilized for some time as a means of motivating individuals to achieve and sustain exceptional levels of performance - and to recognize and reward such effort. Several studies undertaken within the UK have examined the effectiveness of travel as a motivational tool for salesforce personnel and/or dealer networks.\(^1\) Research from these studies has focused upon either the users (both purchasers and recipients) or providers of incentive travel.

Hastings et al surveyed the participants in an incentive programme and sought information on matters such as their perceptions of different kinds of incentives and their willingness to increase their sales level in order to qualify for various incentives.\(^2\) Over 2000 questionnaires were sent to all sales associates employed by a major life insurance company, and a response rate of 54% was obtained. Different incentives were

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\(^{2}\) Hastings et al, op cit, Ref 1.
evaluated by respondents as either a major incentive, a minor incentive or no (real) incentive. The survey demonstrated clearly the attraction of travel – this is classified as a major incentive by the highest proportion of respondents. Lower ranked incentives included household goods, business goods, retail vouchers and recognition certificates. Not surprisingly, respondents indicated that they would be willing to increase their sales achievements in order to qualify for incentive rewards:

The rank order of the intended sales percentage increases for the incentives was practically identical to the rank order given for the extent to which each of the incentives was considered to be a major incentive. Hence . . . travel . . . [was] the [incentive] for which respondents expressed the most willingness to increase their sales achievements.3

The above ranking is supported by incentive experts who regard travel as more attractive and effective than other types of incentives because of the exclusive and unique experiences which money alone cannot buy, i.e. creating events or activities which are exceptional for a group but could neither be purchased nor made available to an individual traveller. These may include staged events, treasure hunts, costume parties and gala evenings ‘themed’ to the venue.

Definitions of incentive travel

Incentive travel is one of the three major segments of business-related travel. Mill and Morrison describe the incentive travel segment as a ‘hybrid’ because it is ‘a type of pleasure travel that has been financed for business reasons. Thus, the persons on incentive trips are pleasure travelers and the purchasers are businesses.’4

A user company which engages in an incentive travel programme views it as both a motivational and management tool. Some definitions focus on the former aspect while others concentrate on the latter. For example, Wason cites a definition which incorporates the motivational aspect of incentive travel when he quotes Incentive Travel World Magazine:

Incentive travel . . . uses the promise, fulfilment and memory of an exceptional travel related experience to motivate participating individuals to attain exceptional levels of achievement in their places of work or education.5

An alternative definition of incentive travel which lays more stress on the management aspects of incentives is provided by Westwood, who defines incentive travel as ‘offering the reward of a visit to a highly desirable destination in return for meeting clearly defined and attainable objectives within a fixed programme period’.6

Reasons for incentive travel

Businesses may engage in incentive travel for a variety of reasons:

• to attain business objectives through individual and/or group targets;
• to facilitate communications and ‘networking’ opportunities, particularly with company executives;
• to foster corporate culture and social interaction;
• to generate enthusiasm for the following business period;
• to foster loyalty to the company.

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6Westwood, op cit, Ref 1, p 24.
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Each of these points is now elaborated upon.

Business objectives

The Society of Incentive Travel Executives (SITE) lists over 10 business objectives, but corporations usually have one or more of the following in mind when purchasing incentive trips:

- increasing overall sales volumes;
- increasing sales of specific product(s);
- increasing sales of a high-profit product;
- reducing high inventory;
- introducing new product(s);
- balancing seasonal sales variations;
- gaining new accounts/reactivating 'old' customers;
- decreasing credit exposure;
- obtaining more store displays and supporting consumer promotions.

Companies should, of course, allocate most of the incentive money that is available to the most important objective(s) to be achieved. Allocating rewards in this way is simply a form of "weighting", but it does have important implications for directing selling effort towards those targets that are considered to be in the best interests of the organisation. In general, companies establish individual or group targets at different levels in order that each sales representative, dealer/distributor or employee has a realistic chance of meeting and, hopefully, exceeding his/her target. It is important that these targets are discussed and agreed with the participants in order to ensure clear understanding and commitment. Each level has its own reward; for example, a weekend break in London, four days in Paris, or 10 days in the Orient.

Communications and 'networking' opportunities

An incentive trip can facilitate meaningful communications among the participants themselves and, particularly, with management. It should signal the beginning of an intense phase of communications - a special phase during which management acknowledges the importance of each individual's contributions and reinforces the value of sustained, superior performance. It is also an opportune time for management to seek new ideas and marketing intelligence from its top performers.

Corporate and social interaction

Incentive programmes designed for sales representatives, dealers or distributors bring together people who have been working independently throughout the previous business period. An incentive trip offers excellent opportunities to convey a sense of 'belonging' to the corporation and encourages team spirit and camaraderie.

Generating enthusiasm

An incentive trip must not only be viewed in terms of the positive feedback it provides to the participants, but also 'what it achieves in the way of fresh enthusiasm and new business generated during the following months. It is an excellent moment to announce or reinforce business objectives and also to inspire and excite the top performers. Thus, an incentive trip can be as much a vehicle for 'feedforward' as for 'feedback' to the participants.

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7Society of Incentive Travel Executives, 'Incentive travel in the USA', Travel and Tourism Analyst, September 1986, pp 26–36.
8See G. Holmes and N. Smith, Sales Force Incentives, Heinemann, Oxford, 1987, p 60.
9See R. Graham, "Reinforcing the importance of achievement...continuing communication with winners and qualifiers", INSITE, Vol 2, No 5, 1989, pp 20–23 and 32–33.
Fostering loyalty to the company

Hampton notes that:¹¹

It is generally upheld in the motivation industry that only the top 10 per cent of a company's salesforce will work to their full potential and that the lowest 10 per cent will barely reach a satisfactory level. Incentive travel is aimed at the remaining 80 per cent producing average results, and whose performance is likely to improve, providing that they perceive the reward as valuable.

However, incentives are also necessary to retain key sales representatives (the top 10%) within the company; incentive travel can counteract 'head-hunting' by competitors.

Fostering loyalty to the company also extends to the dealer network, but manifests itself differently. Manufacturers which offer the 'best' trip as perceived by the participating dealers are likely to experience increased business. Some incentive experts believe that within certain sectors of industry a company's market share will vary according to the trip offered.

Users of incentive travel

A study undertaken by SITE in the USA indicates that incentive travel is used by virtually every major industry, but just a few of these industries account for most of the market in terms of value. Expenditure on incentive travel in 1985, ranked in order of industry importance to the market, is given in Table 1. It can be seen that the insurance industry is by far the largest user of incentive travel, but electronics/radio/television, automobile parts, and cars and trucks are also very important users.

In the UK the pattern of user-ship differs only slightly. Automobile manufacturers and motor support sectors (tyres and parts) are the principal users of incentive travel. The leading UK car makers spend as much as $1.5 billion or more a year on programmes for their sales forces and huge dealer networks (Ford, for example, has approximately 1200 UK dealers and Rover has 1400). Other major user industries/sectors are: computer and office equipment manufacturers, insurance companies, food and drinks manufacturers (particularly breweries), off-highway equipment manufacturers, building materials firms (eg double-glazing) and pharmaceutical industries.

Incentive travel programmes are still primarily targeted to marketing and sales management. However, there has been a noticeable movement towards companies involving non-sales persons in incentive travel schemes; these schemes usually involve attainment of the corporate objectives of cost reductions and efficiency improvements.¹² It is expected that within a few years the ratio of sales to non-sales programmes in the UK will narrow to nearer 50:50.

Potential of the UK incentive travel market

In attempting to ascertain the potential of the UK-generated incentive travel market, a host of obstacles is encountered. First, although statistics on UK residents travelling abroad are grouped according to purpose of visit, incentive travel is not one of the categories; furthermore, the Department of Employment cannot verify whether incentive travel is captured under holiday or business travel. Second, in 1984 the
British Tourist Authority (BTA) commissioned its last study of the UK conference and incentive market. Since then, budget cuts and a new corporate policy have put an end to these government issued reports. Third, owing to the competitive nature of some firms using this reward system, certain companies are reluctant to disclose the nature of their programmes or the amounts spent. Finally, employees rewarded with incentive travel are heavily taxed on their prize (up to 40% depending on the employee's salary level). In some cases, companies absorb employees' tax costs. It is even more difficult, therefore, to put an accurate value on the industry because firms may either include or exclude tax rebates to winners.

Since 1984 several studies have been conducted to determine the potential of the UK incentive travel market. The most significant and comprehensive one to date was carried out by Westwood, wherein incentive travel organizers and companies which were potential users of incentive travel were surveyed. A response rate of 36% was obtained for the former survey and 22% for the latter. Based on the data collected from the incentive travel organizers' survey, Westwood was able to provide a 'glimpse at the overall value of the market ... Calculations from the data showed it to be in the vicinity of £147 million in 1984. This information is based on the turnover of incentive travel organizers only and a base of 105 firms. It was not possible to draw any conclusions for total incentive travel expenditure from the company survey as some companies included expenditure on all incentives (ie, merchandise and travel).

Incentive Travel World Magazine also undertook a survey of incentive travel organizers (in 1986), but obtained a response rate of only 90%. The value of the UK incentive travel market was determined to be in the region of £120-150 million, which is in line with the Westwood estimate of £147 million.

A further survey was carried out by Incentive Travel World Magazine in 1989, and this time they obtained a much higher response rate (77%). The 36 respondent companies operated 1332 incentive travel movements and carried 98,055 participants. The average group size was 74 people and the average amount spent per person was £735. Most of these companies reported substantial growth over their 1988 figures.

Although classified as group travel, incentive trips are considered to be at the 'upper' end of this market. It is not unusual for a company to finance an incentive trip for a group of 30 to 100 winners at, say, £1200 per person to a long-haul destination. Incentive travel is therefore regarded as a highly lucrative market.

Research objectives and methodology

The objectives of the survey research included:

- ascertaining product benefits and features associated with incentive travel;
- identifying Canada's strengths and weaknesses as an incentive travel destination from the perspective of the UK market;
- evaluating some of the current promotional material for Canada and identifying areas for improvement.

Qualitative marketing research was undertaken in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with UK incentive travel organizers.
participants were drawn from the Incentive Travel Association of the United Kingdom (ITA:UK) – a readily identifiable group purposely selected to form a discriminating sample. Most of the ITA:UK members were located in the London/Southeast catchment area, and, of these, 14 executives agreed to be interviewed.

In analysing the responses of the incentive travel organizers, common themes or patterns emerged, and these are discussed in the next two sections.

**Evaluation of Canada as an incentive travel destination**

The incentive travel product may be analysed in terms of attractions, facilities and accessibility. (These criteria are used to evaluate tourism products in general because of their composite nature.) Burkart and Medlik define attractions as:

> those elements in the tourist product which determine the choice of the tourist to visit one destination rather than another. They are factors which generated a flow of tourists to their location.

Tourist facilities, on the other hand, are:

> those elements which do not normally themselves generate tourist flows but whose absence might deter the tourist from seeking the attractions. The facilities complement the attractions. They are basically utilitarian, even though they contribute significantly to the tourist's enjoyment.

Lastly, accessibility can be interpreted in terms of:

- mode of transport available both to and within a destination;
- the travelling time required;
- the cost of travel;
- the combination of comfort, speed and reliability.

It is generally believed that a destination is considered suitable for the incentive travel market when it is in the mature stage of the tourism product life cycle. This means that the destination should possess a sufficient number and mix of attractions, its infrastructure should be highly developed and it should have good accessibility. Other important factors include adaptability to a variety of audiences, image, competitive pricing and favourable currency exchange rates.

Table 2 analyses Canada according to the criteria deemed essential for a successful incentive travel destination, and those of a generic tourism product. The table incorporates information both from the literature review and from the interviews with incentive travel organizers.

Table 2 shows that Canada has both strengths and weaknesses as an incentive travel destination. Canada’s sophisticated city products, exceedingly good outdoor life and variety of sporting activities lend themselves to the incentive travel market. According to the respondents, this combination allows for a variety of styles in designing an incentive programme, wherein, for example, a contrast between city and resort experiences can be offered.

The most common theme to emerge from the interviews was Canada’s potential as an incentive destination, especially in view of new trends which have emerged during the past few years. One is the move away from the beach holiday in favour of a more sophisticated incentive experience, drawing out the extraordinary elements of a destination, ie

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Table 2. Product analysis of Canada as an incentive travel destination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourist</th>
<th>Incentive</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>product</td>
<td>travel product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>Historical sites</td>
<td>Several 'colonial' historical sites, but too far apart. Few places of historical or cultural significance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scenery</td>
<td>Outstanding scenery. Clean environment but lack of beaches (as in sun, sand and sea holidays).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unique cultural appeal</td>
<td>Multicultural (European-type influences). Yet Canadian culture is perceived as being similar to US culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment/nightlife/cuisine</td>
<td>Canada is perceived to be boring and lacking in exciting nightlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety of sights and activities</td>
<td>Wide variety of winter and water sports/activities offered – an increasingly important aspect of an incentive trip programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Not reliable, especially in the spring and autumn (peak periods for incentive travel).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>Quality hotels and meeting facilities</td>
<td>World-class hotels available in major centres and resort areas, yet there is a perception of too little concern for international standards of quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good local destination management companies (DMCs)</td>
<td>Good DMCs available but not well known to incentive specialists in the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Available transport to and within the destination</td>
<td>Good accessibility. Airlines becoming more flexible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value for money</td>
<td>Perceived to be expensive to travel to and within Canada. Canada is considered a medium- (east coast/central region) to long-haul (west coast) destination from the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasonable travel time</td>
<td>Important aspect as many firms do not wish all their top sales representatives/dealers to travel on the same aeroplane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Promotability and image development</td>
<td>Positive image of Canada as a nation – weaker image as a holiday destination. Lack of public awareness. Perception of Canada as dull and boring – not a motivating or emotive image for an incentive destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Favourable currency exchange rates</td>
<td>Yes. However, there is the perception that the Canadian dollar is at par with the American dollar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptable to a variety of audiences.</td>
<td>Yes. Different venues and theme evenings are available (e.g. Klondike days). Yet more creative and imaginative events required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Canada perceived as a safe holiday destination – becoming increasingly important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those unusual or unique factors that are characteristic of the destination.19 Another trend is the emphasis upon active rather than passive involvement by the participants in an incentive programme. Participation in activities, sports and events has increased for two reasons: first, such exercises are enjoyed more by ‘winners’; and second, they develop team building skills. Finally, there is an increasing demand for incentive programmes which are both tailored to the clients’ needs and which create a unique experience for the participants. As the salaries of likely incentive programme participants are high, developing exclusive travel experiences which money alone cannot buy has become necessary.

From the travel organizers’ point of view, Canada promises many incentive opportunities. However, convincing the client and participants of this is very difficult because of their low awareness of Canada and its predominant image as a destination for VFR tourism. One respondent elaborated upon this point as follows:

Places which excel in the incentive travel world are those which already have an established image with holidaymakers. America, for example, has a massive amount of promotion for Florida and you’ll find lots of incentives going to Florida, in the same way as you have lots of holidaymakers going to Florida.

He further explained:

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As far as Canada is concerned, leisure travel between the United Kingdom and Canada has historically consisted largely of people visiting friends and relations, rather than going on package holidays. There have been a certain amount of fly-drive holidays, but there has not been a promotion of Canada as a holiday – an inclusive holiday – destination in the same way that there has been of the United States. Until Canada becomes more of a package destination, if you like, I don’t think that’s going to change a great deal.

In jointly-funded travel market research conducted for Tourism Canada and the United States Travel and Tourism Administration, Market Facts of Canada noted significant changes in the UK outbound holiday market during the period 1988-89.20 These include the following:

- a strong growth in actual and intended long-haul vacation travel with the size of the target market essentially doubling;
- the USA increasing its share of long-haul vacation trips from 40% to 48%, with Canada’s share remaining constant at 16%;
- the number of times the USA was mentioned as a most preferred destination increasing from 21% to 27%, with, again, Canada remaining steady at 10%.

Trends in the UK outbound holiday market also indicate a growing preference for long-haul travel to the Far East/Asia and Australia/New Zealand in addition to the USA, as indicated in Figure 1.

How strongly trends in the British pleasure travel market indicate likely trends in the UK incentive travel market is difficult to measure. Many of the incentive specialists interviewed believe that until the British public becomes more interested and aware of Canada as a holiday destination, the country will continue to be a ‘hard sell’ as an incentive travel destination. As one travel organizer commented, ‘Canada is just not one of the destinations that [participants] think of as being at the top of their list; so they’re not likely to either ask for it or be that excited if we put it forward’.

The image issue

It follows that Canada needs to project its image more and improve its promotion in order to put the ‘dream’ into the incentive winner’s mind...

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Initially. As indicated by the survey responses, Canada often loses out to a destination that has a stronger, more clearly-defined image. The competition may not have as good an incentive product, but because it has the ‘right’ image it will be selected by the client.

Ashworth and Goodall refer to this type of situation as a mismatch between demand and supply images:

Naive (demand) images represent tourists’ perceptions of whether destinations contain the holiday attributes that they consider necessary for a successful holiday . . . these images [can be] compared with whether or not the destination actually contains those attributes (which a factually accurate supply image would reveal).  

One of four situations may exist.

- positive demand and supply images;
- positive supply image but negative demand image;
- positive demand image but negative supply image;
- negative demand and supply images.

From the respondents’ point of view, Canada as an incentive travel destination appears to fall within the second category. The discrepancy between a positive supply image and a negative demand image leads to potential participants rejecting such a destination on account of the low evaluative image. ‘The destination area therefore needs to improve both the targeting and the nature of its promotional image.’

Similar to other types of travel products, incentive destinations may easily become substitutes for one another unless imbued with distinctive benefits or unique selling points (USPs). It is not a simple task either to develop or to promote them. As Holloway and Plant explain, ‘If the product is not really new – if it is only an attempt to emulate existing products on the market, offering no appreciable advantages over what is currently available – it stands a poor chance of success.’

Canada’s greatest competitor in this respect is, of course, the USA.

Competition

USA. Canada is often assumed by the British to be similar to the USA, not only because of the geographical proximity but also because of its economic and cultural domination by the USA. Hence it is not surprising that during the in-depth interviews with UK incentive organizers, the USA was often referred to as a point of comparison when discussing Canada. When asked why people perceive Canada to be similar to the USA, the following responses kept recurring:

- Both countries are ‘English-speaking’ with similar accents.
- Both countries make up the North American continent with a land border as opposed to a water border separating them. (From the UK perspective, a land border is not as definitive.) Both Canada and the USA are vast countries with similar topography.
- Modern architecture and skyscrapers characterize both American and Canadian cities.
- The basic culture seems to be the same in both countries – for example, common sports prevail, such as baseball and (American) football.
- Both countries have dollar currencies.
- Both countries are of the same age and perceived to have a similar history.

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Such strong similarities between the two countries give rise to a rather uniform image from the perspective of the UK market.

Certain advantages can be gained, however, from Canada’s proximity to the USA. Experience suggests that it is easier to sell Canada as an add-on to an incentive trip to the USA. Incentive organizers have discovered that although participants do not look forward to visiting Canada as much as the USA, after experiencing both destinations, they tend to express a preference for the former. Therefore, initially, it may be necessary to ‘bait’ the client with the USA in order to market Canada as an incentive travel destination. Once the group has experienced Canada, it may be possible to follow-up with future trips solely to this destination.

Europe. New opportunities in Eastern Europe and increased competition thanks to the creation of the Single European Market in 1992 are predicted. Regarding the former, the countries of Eastern Europe will need time to adapt and improve their outdated infrastructure and poor ground handling arrangements before becoming a major competitor for incentive travel movements. Concerning the latter, the Canadian Tourism Research Institute forecasts that long-haul travel will experience fast growth, owing to the improved economic climate expected from a united Europe after 1992.

Promotion of an incentive travel destination

Promoting a destination will, of course, be influenced by the level of overseas representation of a tourist organization. This varies considerably in accordance with the resources of the country, the nature of its competitors’ activities and the characteristics of the product it promotes.

Similar to private enterprise, the aim of tourist organizations is primarily to increase market share. However, unlike the commercial sector, the role of an NTO is viewed more as ‘facilitator’ than ‘seller’. The marketing effort of an official tourist organization is one of influence and persuasion rather than control – a very different perspective from that used to explain commercial practice.

Ashworth and Goodall point out that, ‘In practice, much official (destination area) tourism promotion is “defensive”; that is, endeavouring to correct or counter-balance images obtained elsewhere.’ When a destination such as Canada has an image problem, the tourist office must decide whether to maintain the traditional image, slightly modify it or dramatically change it. The dilemma, therefore, is whether to project the simple, recognizable and expected image based on well-known symbols (e.g., moose, mountains and mounties), or to convey potentially less acceptable and more complex images which indicate a more varied tourist destination. On the one hand, ‘the image built up of a destination in a market takes years to achieve.’ Yet, on the other hand, rather than reinforcing existing patterns, should not the present-day Canadian ways of thinking and a more multicultural image be used as ‘an instrument for encouraging the tourism industry in new directions’?

Another controversy surrounding the image of a destination is whether the official tourist image should prevail over the image held by the tourist or some third party company. Dilley argues that ‘the success of any image is something that only the relevant tourist authority can

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decide, as only the country producing the brochures and projecting the
image knows what it wants from it. 32 Nevertheless, it is recognized that
the official image is not the most important source of ideas about a
tourist destination held by the potential visitor. The latter’s image of a
destination is influenced and shaped more by the news media, personal
experience and personal contacts than by the publicity emanating from
the tourist destination itself.

Embacher points out that, ‘The promotion of a country’s tourism
image is generally a matter not of creating an image from nothing but of
transforming an existing image’. 33 He further states:

[The aim of the promotional effort should be] to transform negative and
indifferent attitudes into positive ones and consequently to convert positive
reactions into a dynamic attitude in order to provoke action . . . The marketers
should . . . develop a picture of the desired image which may even be in contrast
to the current image. The desired image must be feasible in terms of the
country’s present reality and resources . . . and must also be relevant to the
target group at which the promotional campaign will be addressed. 34

The gradual transformation of Canada’s traditional image into a more
cosmopolitan one is reflected through television advertising of recent
years and promotional print. In advertising targeted to the UK pleasure
traveller, beautiful scenery, art and culture, outdoor activities, shopping,
dining and colonial historical sites have been included. One major
theme which has been communicated is that of Canada as a destination
which offers variety or ‘a world of possibilities’. This has been undertaken
with a view to increasing awareness. In the incentive travel
market, it is in the areas of quality promotional videos and print, and
public relations, that a tourist organization can excel in marketing a
destination.

Promotional videos and print

The survey respondents strongly recommend that videos be produced
by tourism offices to support their ‘sales pitch’ to the client and to
convey a ‘feel’ for the destination. Videos are emotive. Since Canada is a
vast country, it was thought that each region should be presented on a
separate video and with sufficient detail. If this is not possible, an
incentive video for Canada would suffice – containing a few minutes on
each region – but care would need to be taken to ensure it was not too
wide-ranging. In cases where clients do not have video equipment in
their office or home, a good slide presentation is required.

However, there is still strong reliance upon promotional print as a
tangible representation of the destination. Brochures perform a product
substitute role, particularly during the period between purchase and
consumption. A brochure ‘establishes expectations of quality, value for
money, product image and status’. 35 It also becomes a document to be
viewed several times to stimulate expectations of the forthcoming trip.

Public relations

‘Personal communications channels derive their effectiveness through
the opportunities for individualising the presentation and feedback.’ 36
In general, personal influence and communications carry the greatest
weight where the product is expensive, risky or purchased infrequently
and where the product has a significant social status. Nowhere in
tourism is this likely to be more applicable than in the incentive travel
market, where companies finance trips at vast expense in order that

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32 See p 64 of R. Dilley, ‘Tourist brochures and tourist images’, The Canadian Geog-
33 J. Embacher, Austria’s Image as a Summer Holiday Destination, unpublished MSc
34 Ibid, p 15.
35 Op cit, Ref 28, p 178.
36 See P. Kotler, Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation and
participants may be made to feel that they have won something unique and valuable.

Within the UK incentive travel market, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon 'networking'. Public relations can contribute strongly to increasing awareness and stimulating interest in a destination, influencing the incentive trade and building the corporate image in a way that reflects favourably on the product.

Although public relations has become a vital aspect of the communications strategy for the UK incentive travel market, it is unlikely to stimulate a noticeable increase in attracting incentive groups to Canada unless at the same time a vigorous advertising campaign is initiated. In order to heighten awareness of the country and to increase its share of the UK pleasure travel market and, hence, the incentive travel market, promotion in the form of advertising may be the only way forward.

Conclusion

Canada offers great potential as an incentive travel destination. Incentive travel organizers consider the destination to possess strong selling points in terms of scenery, culture, infrastructure, modern conveniences, possible programme variety, facilities for sports activities (ranging from 'easy' to 'strenuous') and personal safety. Furthermore, opportunities exist for creating two-centre programmes; this may take the form of, say, combining a city and resort experience, two cultural experiences (English/French), or two countries - Canada and the USA (eg Boston/Quebec City–Montreal; Seattle/Vancouver–Whistler; New York/Toronto). However, both Canada's image and its tourism product benefits need to be clearly defined and projected; otherwise, Canada as an incentive travel destination will continue to be easily substituted by other destinations and remain a 'hard sell'.

Canada competes with other long-haul destinations – in particular, the USA, the Far East and Australia/New Zealand. Awareness of and interest in these latter countries has certainly increased in recent years, with the result that there has been a considerable increase in the volume of UK holiday (particularly inclusive tour) travel to these destinations. According to the incentive executives interviewed, a growing interest in these countries has also been expressed by the UK incentive travel market. This lends support to the argument that an incentive travel destination will become successful once the country is an established (inclusive tour) holiday destination.

Although the UK incentive travel market appears to be lucrative, increased competition, the demand for a quality product and the requirement for a sophisticated promotional campaign means that tourist offices need to be particularly astute in targeting this market segment. Incentive travel is both a 'people' and an 'idea' business. Thus, effective public relations and professional, exciting, promotional print and support material, videos and slide presentations are essential requirements in a communications programme for the incentive travel market.

The number of VFR tourists from the UK to Canada is continuing to fall; at the same time more British tour operators than ever before are offering Canadian programmes. Also, interest in Canada as an incentive travel destination has recently increased substantially, and the Canadian High Commission in London reports a sharp rise in the number of
incentive trips being held in Canada. The outlook for Canada as an incentive travel destination thus appears to be highly positive.

However, considerable caution needs to be exercised when predicting future growth in the incentive travel market. The recession of the early 1990s together with the 1991 Gulf War show the extreme vulnerability of this particular tourist segment to economic and political factors. In a recessionary period, the first perk to be cut back is foreign travel; and even if incentive travel is continued, there is a tendency for group sizes to be reduced and for trip durations to be shortened. During the Gulf War many companies cancelled international travel for their entire workforces, but even when the war was over companies were more reluctant than before to send their best sales forces, management and other key personnel abroad.