

Improving Tourism Event Marketing: A Way to Achieving Effective Organizational Performance

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Introduction

Different continents are blessed with different types of tourism attractions which make them different from other continents. In the same vein, Nigeria has different tourist attractions in different states. These include Ojukwu Bunker in Abia State, Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi, Oguta Golf and Resort in Imo State, Obudu Mountain Resort and Cross River, National Park in Cross River State, etc. We also have tourism events like new yam festivals in many communities, “iwa akwa” ceremony in Ehime, Obowo and some parts of Mbaise, Ibu Uzo in Mbaise, Oso Manwu in some parts of Ideato in Imo State. Sports events such as the Olympic Games, World Cup, and African Cup of Nations etc are world famous. These sites, sports and festivals cannot be well patronized and the necessary benefits fully derived if they are not properly marketed.

Therefore, this paper examines the various procedures that are necessary for any developed tourism project or festival markets to promote her products/services to large audience. The aim of every tourism event is to ensure improved performance, particularly in the areas of sales (patronage), productivity and profitability. It is pertinent to note that improved performance can only be achieved if we know what tourism event means, if we identify the products/services related to such an event, and if we take cognizance of the market segments and various consumer decision making processes (Kotler, Bowen and Maken 2006). Having a good marketing plan and proper evaluation of marketing effort will also help us to achieve success. Hence, this paper examines the benefits of this process to tourism project developers, consultants and tourism agencies.

Meaning of Event Marketing

Different authors have different meanings of the concept event marketing. Kotler *et al* (2006) see tourism event marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what

they need and want through creating and exchanging products and values with others. This definition portrays that human needs, wants and demands are involved in event marketing. Human need is a state of felt deprivation which includes basic physical needs for food, clothing, warmth and safety as well as societal needs for belonging, affection, fun and relaxation. There are also extreme needs for prestige, recognition and fame, and individual needs for knowledge and self expression. These needs are not invented by marketers but are part of the human makeup; human want in this context simply means how people communicate and express their needs. Hence, based on the fact that people have almost unlimited wants, but limited resources, they choose products that produce more satisfaction for their money. So when want is backed by buying power, it becomes demand. It is crucial to note that product is used here to refer to anything that can be offered to market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a need or want.

Lynn (2010: 86) views event marketing as the process of planning, executing the conception, pricing and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals. The above steps are invaluable in mapping and marketing tourism event (Bernard, Booms and Bitner 1998). Hospitality and tourism event is unique because of the characteristic services which the managers must be concerned with. Reichheld (1996) reveals that in order to achieve good human relations and improve marketing in hospitality establishment, the establishment must consider the intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability of their services. Intangibility here implies that unlike physical products, service cannot be seen, tested, felt, heard, and smelled before it is purchased. Variability indicates that quality depends on who provides it, his/her mood, and when and where it is provided. Inseparability here means that both the service provider and the customer must be present for the transaction to occur. The quality of service delivered cannot be separated from the quality of the service provider (the customer-contact employee). Perishability entails that once service is not sold/or rendered in any particular day, it cannot be stored or inventoried for a future period (Walker 2006, Cowell, 1994 and Brown 2010). The customer contact employees are intrinsic part of the products. The food presented in an event may be outstanding, but if

the service person is bad tempered, rude, has a poor attitude or provides unattractive service, customers will ultimately down-rate the overall experience. Thus, customers are part of the products and effort must be made to package and look after them through articulated human relations skills. Having good knowledge of all these characteristics will aid us in event marketing.

Lynn (2010) also added that execution of these services can occur in four main stages namely:

- Pre-purchase (email, telephone enquiry, and interactive websites).
 - Purchase/prevent (ticket sale, transportation, packing, queuing, security check and entry).
 - Event (seat allocation, food and beverage services, entertainment, performance, first aid, lost-but-found, information)
 - Post event (exit, queue, transport, online result, photograph).
- Therefore, adequate care must be taken to ensure that employees know how to apply these characteristics where necessary.

Process of Event Marketing

There are seven major processes involved in tourism event marketing, include:

- (i) Establishing the features of the event
- (ii) Identifying the customers (segmentation)
- (iii) Plan to meet audience needs and wants
- (iv) Analyze consumer decision making process
- (v) Establish price and ticket process
- (vi) Promote the event
- (vii) Evaluate marketing effort

i. Establishing the Features of the Event

Each event has a range of potential benefits to the event audience. They may include one or some of the following: entertainment, a novel experience, a learning experience, exciting result, opportunity to meet others, chance to purchase items, dinning and drinking, inexpensive way to get out of the house or work and chance to see some unique things. Knowledge of these benefits will aid planners as they package their events to satisfy the audience. This can be done through showcasing their products through advertisement; which will invariably arouse audience interest, make them to come and buy the goods/services and vis-à-vis earn profit through it (Norman, 1984).

ii. Identifying Customers

This simply means knowing your customers in accordance with their segmentation and interests. Market segmentation is the process of delineating a market into distinct groups of buyers who might require separate products and/or marketing mix (William & Struman, 1986). Hence, given the fact that audience have varied interests, it is proper to segment event components to satisfy them. For example an event like new yam festivals can be packaged along with activities like football match, handball, masquerade, cultural dances and exhibition and shown simultaneously or segmented so that people can go and watch their areas of interest. The event can equally be segmented into geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural areas to make it more systematic.

iii. Plan to Meet the Audience Needs and Wants

Once we have identified our customers segments or areas of interest, effort must be made to provide the audience with varieties in such areas. Example, people who came because of traditional dance and masquerade should be provided with different types of dances from various communities and different types of masquerades, respectively. This would lead to an increase in patronage, sales volume, profit and satisfaction of guests. In the same way the employees and employers will continuously be in business.

iv. Analyze Consumer Decision Marketing

Data gathered through consumer decision making aid the organizers of events to produce information which will be very useful in guiding promotional efforts. Information in the areas of proximity accessibility, economic situation and timing of events affect consumers decision making and these invariably need to be considered when, why and how customers mainly require an event to be held. Proper articulation and usage of this information will make the planners to have a large turnout, and sales, high productivity and enhanced profit.

v. Establish Price and Ticket Program

The price to attach to any tourism event must be well planned, calculated and packaged to suit the quality of services being rendered. The ticket must be printed, the services and products the render must

be inculcated (if the organizers have different packages), but where it is on a flat rate, all the ticket should have equal price. Some tickets may include all or any of the following services/products itself, accommodation and/or transport fare.

vi. Promotion of the Event

It is essential to note that few days or weeks to the event should be the best time for radio, and television advert. Other means of notification like billboard, text messages, and journal advert must be done early enough to get the concerned audience prepared for such activities.

vii. Evaluate Marketing Efforts

The effectiveness of all promotional efforts needs to be carefully monitored. With annual events, for example, customers' responses to the various types of promotion will guide promotional efforts in future years. For instance, it is necessary to evaluate the channels through which the customers received messages and what informed their decision to attend the event. This can be obtained prior to the event, during the event and after the event using quantitative approach. Analysis of these and other marketing processes will help us ascertain the areas that have not been properly handled and the corrections needed to make the event or such developed site move forwards.

Information gathered through event marketing process will aid the organizers have a good marketing mix to achieve the targeted performance. Figure 1 below shows the various effects of marketing mix. It illustrates the areas required in each sub-unit and which will finally help us to draw a marketing plan.

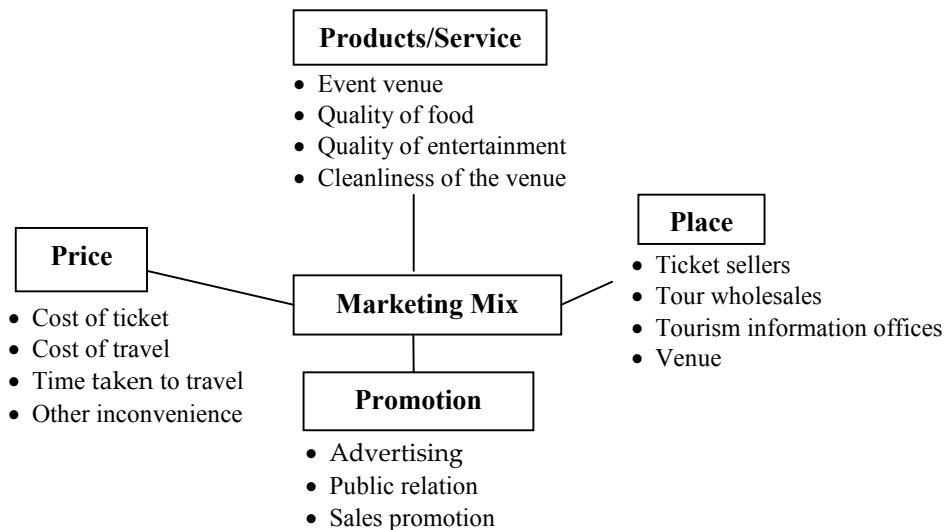


Fig. 1: Marketing Mix

Source: (Lynn 2010) *Event Management*. Australia Pearson Hospitality Press

Developing a Marketing Plan

After due consideration of event marketing processes, a streamlined marketing plan can be initiated. The steps that are usually involved in developing tourism event marketing plan are: analyze internal and external business environment, identify target markets, develop products and prices, plan the distribution system (ticketing), develop marketing objectives and develop action plans and budgets and monitor the success.

A) Internal Business Environment

These are all the factors that affect the business within the organization. For this analysis to be properly carried out, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) parameters need to be ascertained. There is need to know such core activities as customer base, business values and current business direction, current and past marketing activities, performance of the business to identify strengths, weaknesses and critical success factors, current capabilities and resources, including the need for specialist assistance. It is necessary to identify any underperforming products and services and analyse any report on reasons for underperformance, and record and report information and develop marketing action plans. Other internal

factors are client base, human resources available, financial capabilities of the organization, facility and equipment available, hours of operation, community, profit and e-business capacity. Proper analyses of all these will give the organizers the required data for developing a marketing plan.

(B) External Business Environment

These are seen as those factors that are not within the control of the organization. Some of the external business environments include:

- **The Economy:** Both domestic and international economies have significant effect on the event business. It is when these economies are strong, that leisure travelers have access to high disposable income and sport enthusiasts will travel vast distances to watch sports (Wagen 2006). It is therefore ideal to look at the stability of the economy and security before fixing any event. This is because this has a direct link with the rate of travel, sales, productivity and profitability of such organization.
- **Demographic Change:** Here, sex, age, occupation and educational level of people that patronize an event are always considered when developing marketing plan. Today, most tourism events involve people within the age limit of 18 – 60 years. Consequently, available facilities should be planned to suit this age range. If the event is well planned, advertised and packaged, it will attract many tourists. Productivity and sales volume will increase and huge profit is likely to be derived. In addition, if an event has a unit for children, facilities for such an age limit should also be provided.
- **Seasonal Factors:** In Nigeria, we have mainly dry and rainy seasons. Any person planning any event during rainy season must be cautious. In fact, most events held during this period should be indoors. Otherwise, the event needs to start and finish on time to allow people come and go home on time. Hence, if it is an event that has both indoor and outdoor services, it is best fixed during dry season. This will encourage high patronage which will lead to large sales and profit.
- **Social Cultural Change:** There are recent music, culture and concert that are modern that can be packaged along with old ones. This will attract large crowd. Recent changes in cultures and

norms in some communities should not be thwarted. This may attract a large turnout of audience and subsequently increase profit.

- **Technological Development:** The ability of the managers of organizations to adapt to changes in technology that are within and available during the period will help such organizations to prosper. For instance, the use of cable cars transport system by Obudu Mountain Resort (OMR) and their advertisement on television, newspapers, journals, magazines and internet made people all over the world to know the improved value of the products/services they provide. This has made large number of people to use OMR for their various ceremonies which in turn improved sales. Other external factors are competition, government activities, tourism trends, industrial relations, legislations and legal and ethical issues which must be taken into account. Some of these factors may affect the plans positively or negatively.

(C) Identifying Target Markets

Gee, Moken and Choy (1989) opined that planning is a cyclical process in which target market segments (customers) are identified, event are developed to suit their needs and the event is competitively positioned. Lynn (2010) pointed out that the aim is to develop a perception on the part of the customers that event is desirable, indeed more desirable than the products and services of competing organizations. The event should be planned so that it can attract different caliber of people.

(D) Develop Products and Prices

This stage explains how to develop a tourism event product, marketing plan and fix price through proper consideration of ages of people involved. It is essential to note that there is a difference between marketing and selling when developing products and services. Selling is only an aspect of marketing and it is primarily concerned with promoting the organization's products and services through sales calls (personal & telephone) and direct communication with customers by frontline staff. Marketing is a much broader concept, starting with analysis of internal and external environments, targeting specific markets and developing products that people will

pay for. Indeed, marketing involves ascertaining the needs and wants of the customers, creating the appropriate products/services to satisfy the customers and promoting and selling the products/services at a profitable level (Lynn 2010, Robert 1992).

Hence, if products/services are for the aged people, the venue must have a means of conveying them with wheel chair around and the price of the products/service should be relatively cheap because most of them are retired or are not working (Lele 1987 & Lynn 2010). If it is for children, all the attractions like gaming facilities, dummies and children's recreational facilities need to be provided. This will encourage the children to persuade their parents to take them to such site. But if it is for all ages, all facilities for all ages must be provided and market plan drawn to suit them. Managers of such of sites/events should be sensitive to price. Hence, the number of people that can patronize such events could be determined by the price, the products/services, their package, and this will invariably determine the productivity, sales volume and profitability.

(E) Plan the Distribution System (Ticket)

Ticketing is a key consideration in event planning (Wagen 2006). It is essential to note that it is not possible for the organization to have its staff at all the states, or countries where such tourists (market) are, but conventional ticketing agency can be used to ameliorate this problem. It is essential to note that commission need to be paid for each ticket sold. This will aid in fixing price and at the same time increase the sales volume and profitability of such organization. Also, online ticketing and door sales ticketing can also be used to achieve high performance (Lynn 2010).

(F) Develop Marketing Objectives

This stage explains the next line of actions that need to be carried after the product, price and positioning have been decided. Development of marketing objectives may include:

- Specific attendance by invitation only for guests, VIPs and celebrities,
- Two or three key television channels for publicity proper,
- Target 60% increase in sales over the previous year,

- Target 20% increase in patronage from national and international tourists
- Include children's segment in such site.

It is crucial to note that these must be done with time and they need to be measurable. This means that it should be possible to evaluate the stipulated targets within a given time frame. Progressive monitoring scheme must be designed to ascertain whether the marketing plan is working and modifications to the plans made if necessary.

(G) Develop Action Plans and Budgets

This stage examines the promotional items required to reach the target audience vis-à-vis the stipulated budgets for the event. Such promotions can come in a number of ways including: advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, merchandising and public relations. It is pertinent to note that, all things being equal, the higher the promotions, the more the patronage, sales volume and profit (James, 1989).

(H) Monitor success

This stage can also be called control and evaluation. It is meant to ascertain whether what is set/targeted has really been achieved. It can be done either formally or informally. Informal procedure may include meeting with staff to discuss customers' satisfaction with the event product, while ongoing analysis of sales figures provides valuable financial data on the event business. A market research company can be contracted to conduct formal research, surveying event attendees, using questionnaires

Conclusion

It is therefore concluded that tourism event marketing is invaluable as it aids planners to articulate viable marketing process and subsequently, a good marketing mix for tourism organizations. This invariably leads to better performance in the areas of customer satisfaction, sales volume (patronage), productivity volume and profitability of the organization. The following recommendations are therefore germane and these have been graphically represented in figure 2 below.

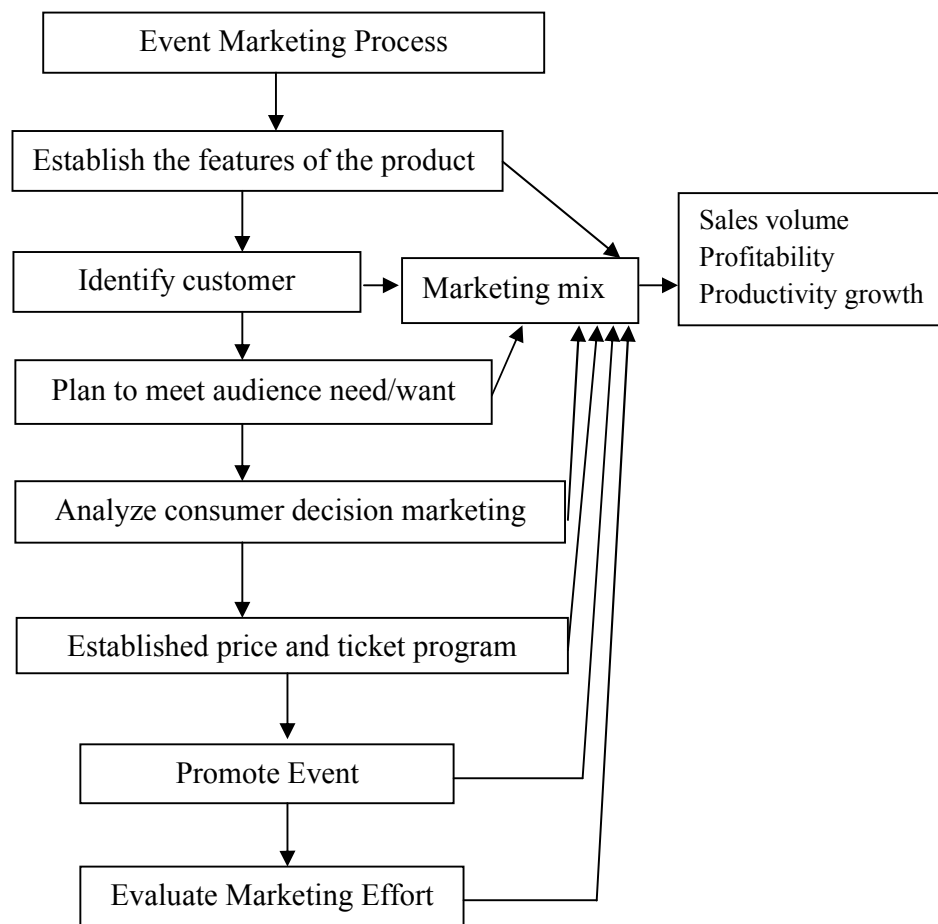


Fig. 2: Sequential Event Marketing Process

Source: Ukabuilu, (2014). Adapted from

- (a) Event managers must first establish the basic features of their products to help them in packaging such products/services to the target audience.
- (b) The customers must be properly identified so as to package the required products/services to suit them.
- (c) Analyze consumer decision making to know the right time to fix events/and the promotional tools to use.
- (d) Consider the age limit, source of income and class of people, nature of event before fixing price for tickets.
- (e) Consider the geographical and educational level of the audience before selecting the promotional tools.
- (f) Analyse your internal and external factors and maximize the areas you have advantages.
- (g) Monitor and control your results after each event and correct the ones that do not meet expectation

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