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MARKETING ANALYSIS FOR BONK KNOB SHOALS LOCATED IN
VAN BUREN COUNTY, TENNESSEE

by

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Part One

Introduction

Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville: these Tennessee cities conjure up images of Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton and Opryland, and of course, country music, gospel, and blues. But it would be unjust to look at the state on just these surface values. The name Tennessee originates from a Cherokee word “Tanasi” (Society for Science & the Public, 1937). While the meaning is unclear, historians speculate that it means winding-river and meeting or gathering place. And much like reality, the state is actually a great “meeting place” of many natural wonders.

In addition to the Appalachian Mountains, there are over 9,600 documented caves in the state (Nature Conservancy, 2012); Tennessee’s Ocoee River is rated among the top white water recreational rivers in the nation; and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park can be found there too. The proximity of natural landmarks to city lights is an interesting consideration for lifestyles of health and sustainability (LOHAS) tourism. LOHAS is a market segment consisting of people that are informed and aware, and behaves ethically when dealing with wellness and social issues, and environmental or ecological initiatives (Cortese, 2003).

Van Buren County in central Tennessee is a rural area in the Upper Cumberland region. It is roughly 100 miles from the nearest major cities, which includes Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. A few popular tourists destinations are located in Van Buren County. Amongst these destinations, Fall Creek Falls – the highest waterfall in the eastern United States – is surrounded by over 20,000 acres of National State Park. Cumberland Cavern, with 32 miles of underground system, is one of the most extensive caves in Tennessee. The recent nearby discovery of Rumbling Falls Cave – the state’s largest cave room – will hopefully increase tourist interest to the area.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide Alfred Crabtree, owner of Bonk Knob Shoals, with a marketing plan. Bonk Knob Shoals will be an upscale campsite nearby Spencer, TN in Van Buren County.

Statement of Objective

Bonk Knob Shoals is currently under development and the owner wants to gain insight to LOHAS tourists, so he can create a suitable business plan to attract people in that niche market. Marketing is a huge component of the business plan because Crabtree believes a significant amount of resources will be needed to increase tourism awareness of the upscale campsite, which is located in the Upper Cumberland region. By providing an analysis of the location and of the green tourism industry, Crabtree will be able to develop strategic marketing messaging that will effectively and economically reach his target demographics.

Sustainability is one of the main objectives of Bonk Knob Shoals and for the local chamber of commerce of Van Buren County, Tennessee. By understanding the LOHAS and green tourism segments, Crabtree can effectively tailor his advertising and marketing messages to attract these tourists. In addition, there is also a unique opportunity here for him to utilize green building practices as a way to not only fulfill his vision of owning an eco-friendly business, but also to be first in the Van Buren County travel market to implement this sustainable measure. Green building practices include the use of native landscaping, organic gardens, solar and wind power, wastewater composting, and sustainable and renewable building materials. Using sustainable building practices will only enhance the appeal of Bonk Knob Shoals. At the conclusion of this paper, Crabtree will be provided with marketing strategies that will attract tourists to the campsite.

Justification

In a report from Taylor (2006), sustainable tourism will grow 25% by 2012, taking the value of the sector to over \$450 billion a year globally. Eco-tourism in the U.S. will realize about 10% of that value. It is a growing travel segment that cannot be ignored.

In 2010, Van Buren County's population was 5,548. The county is 273.42 square miles with roughly 20 persons per square mile. Tourism plays a huge role in the economic sustainability of Van Buren County. In 2006, tourist activity in the county contributed \$7.74 million in direct tourist spending. This type of spending created 72 new jobs that year and generated enough tax revenue to support over 65% of the county's education system (University of Tennessee, 2007). In a report from 2009, leadership at Van Buren County recognized that Spencer – the county seat – and surrounding cities needed to do more to attract tourism to its town, especially through the use of the Internet and Web 2.0 (Connected Tennessee, 2006). Web 2.0 is a general term for web features that allows people to use the Internet to interact and interface with each other. Examples of Web 2.0 include social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and peer review sites like Yelp! and TripAdvisor.com. But to date, websites for Van Buren County's tourist attractions, and the Spencer city government, seem out-of-date and not at all appealing to site visitors.

Alfred Crabtree is interested in developing a unique outdoor experience named Bonk Knob Shoals on his 7.5-acre waterfront property, which is located next to Cane Creek. The Army Corp of Engineers defines Crane Creek as navigable water just a few miles downstream from Fall Creek Falls. His vision is to create a destination location where guests can participate in various activities on-site and in nearby areas such as: kayaking, hiking, rappelling, caving, fishing, field identification, and photograph. Not only does he want this place to be an alternative

destination – for tourists interested in sustainability, adventure and ecotourism – he also wants to develop leadership programs that empower people to experience new activities, go on new adventures, and overcome their mental and emotional challenges.

Constraints

Sustainability tourism data is not as robust or clearly articulated (i.e. measured) as traditional tourism data. Local tourism data is also limited to what is available from the Tennessee Department of Tourism and from the Van Buren County Chamber of Commerce. Terminologies such as sustainability, green building, and eco-travel are relatively new to the U.S. hospitality and travel industry. There is also a lack of consensus or understanding of what green travel really means to tourists; best practices and environmental standards are also inconsistent in the industry (Community Marketing, 2009). The sustainable travel market is described by Community Marketing (2009) as a spectrum of “green” that ranges from eco-travelers and geo-tourists, to backpackers and health and wellness tourists. Many traits and characteristics of each group overlap; so there is often confusion on what actually motivates tourists defined in each group.

Part Two

Introduction

This section of the paper builds a foundation for understanding lifestyles of health and sustainability (LOHAS) tourists, sustainable tourism, and the numerous interchangeable terminologies, such as eco-tourists and green travelers that are used to describe this growing niche market. Informed consumers who are conscious about health, wellness and the environment characterize the LOHAS market segment (Cortese, 2003). This segment is expanding, unlike the tourism industry as a whole, which has been suffering with the downturn of the U.S. and global economy the last few years. This growth is supported by technology innovations and lifestyle trends that make it virtually impossible for stakeholders in the travel industry to ignore.

LOHAS Overview

According to the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI, 2010), U.S. consumers spent almost \$300 billion in LOHAS related products and services in 2008. The study considered six main market sectors including ecotourism, or travel spent on excursions in nature. This sector saw a 36% growth from 2005 (NMI, 2010). It is a sector that seems undaunted by the tremulous economy; NMI projects another 16% in future growth. According to World Economic Forum (WEF, 2011), nature and ecotourism market is growing three times faster than the travel industry as a whole. Ecotourism is defined as: “An all nature-based form of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas” (World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 2010, p3). It includes minimizing negative impacts on the environment and supporting the sustainability of the community and environment through awareness and local economic benefits.

LOHAS Tourist and Market

Center for Responsible Travel (CRT, n.d.) identified over 55 million U.S. travelers as geo-tourists – people interested in nature, culture, and heritage tourism. In 2008, U.S. geo-tourists spent \$42 billion in global travel, or 15% of the total LOHAS expenditures. Of that amount \$24.4 billion is spent domestically on LOHAS travel. NMI (2010) breaks the LOHAS demographics into five specific consumer groups: LOHAS, naturalites, drifters, conventionals, and unconcerned. In order of the greatest concern of the environment to the least, LOHAS demonstrate the strongest attitude and concern for personal and planetary health over the unconcerned that have little concern for environmental responsibility or inclination for healthy living. While the U.S. has more unconcerned than other countries defined in the NMI study, 80% of U.S. adults are now somewhat engaged in environmentalism and conservationism compared to only 20% in 2002 (NMI, 2010).

While these adults are becoming more engaged with the environment and “going green,” they are also becoming more discretionary and discriminating. In a report from Community Marketing (2010), green travelers are traveling 5 to 8% more than 2009, but they are also weary of “greenwashing” that describes the deceptive use of public relations and or marketing to promote an organization’s environmental policies. Over 40% of the respondents look for third-party green audits or certifications when booking hotels (Community Marketing, 2010). They prefer referencing the Internet and Web 2.0, such as peer-review sites like LonelyPlanet.com and TripAdvisor.com, to traditional media, such as print, billboards, and self-accreditations (Roth, 2011). In a survey conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS, 2008), 60% of over 13,000 global consumers affirm that the Internet is their top source for up-to-date environmental issues. The second informational source is friends and family via word-of-mouth (Stichting Nederlandse

Vrijwilligers [SNV], 2009).

Why are U.S. tourists becoming more interested in eco-travel? Because there is a shift in thinking towards three general sentiments: green is the right thing to do; being green is practical; and green is trendy (TNS, 2008). In addition, three other lifestyle trends are affecting the tourism industry today: generational shifts, urbanization, and demand for authenticity (SNV, 2009).

Generational shift is happening where Generation Y and Millennials are slowly replacing Baby Boomers. Those two groups are conscientious consumers and are well informed on environmental and social justice issues. Urbanization causes air and noise pollution, urban stress, loss of green space, and handicaps people's ability to connect with nature and even with each other. Demand for authenticity arises when people start asking questions and wanting to know where products are sourced. They want to experience the "real" thing, and often do not mind paying more for the experience. According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIAA, 2003), there is a documented growing sentiment and interest of U.S. travelers about preserving the natural environment and area history and culture supporting these lifestyle trends.

While tourism overall in the U.S. has become more value-focused, 62% of the U.S. travelers feel that they have a better experience when their destination preserves its natural, historic, and cultural sites (Center for Responsible Travel [CRT], n.d.). Of the 154 million U.S. travelers surveyed by the TIAA (2003), 38% said they would pay more to work and stay with companies that strives to protect and preserve the environment, despite the economy; another 59% support better regulations of National Parks and public lands in order to preserve and protect the environment – which in turn, make their travel experience more "authentic." The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2010) identified key motivations and preferences to include a desire to be in wilderness and observe wildlife; to experience nature and local culture that is

strongly linked; to do outdoor activities, trekking, and sport related activities; and to have a quality, authentic experience.

Sustainability Overview

Research on sustainable tourism suggests that local residents' attitude towards tourism is related to the degree or stage of development of the community (Allen, Long, & Perdue, 1988). Sustainable tourism development can be divided in three parts: economic, environmental, and social. Economics is the exchange of money and goods between the tourists and the community; the environment as a sustainable interactivity between the community and nature; and social as the interaction of tourists and the community (Swarbrooke, 1999). Tourism development enhances a city's employment, revenues, tax receipts, and infrastructure (Lankford & Howard, 1994). A successful city is empowered by constituents that are able to lobby the state for more money to enhance the quality of life for the community.

More travel and hotel companies are adopting green and eco-practices to attract and meet the sustainability demand, but the U.S. still ranks in the bottom 25% globally in terms of environmental sustainability (Travel Industry Wire, 2011). There is room, however, for growth in creating a harmonized relationship between tourism and ecology. Right now, WEF (2011) calls this relationship a double-edged sword. While intimately related, environmental conservationism is generally sacrificed to satisfy a tourism-related service or recreational need. For example: loss of natural habitats pave way for resort development and facilities; wildlife is disturbed through sightseeing or activities related "eco-tours"; local food supply is disrupted through unsustainable food sourcing from corporate distributors; and production of greenhouse emissions like carbon dioxide from building operations continues to contribute towards global warming.

Current Efforts

Weissmann (2007) reported in *Travel Weekly* that top hospitality CEOs were eager to talk about green initiatives, but few CEOs could make direct connections between those efforts and profitability. Green efforts were not seen as a “commercially” driven enterprise. On the upside, in a report from *Condé Nest Traveler* that examined corporate responsibility, companies like InterContinental, Accor and Marriott are doing their share in creating effective social-responsibility programs (Elliott, 2007). Even though less than 1% of total sales go to charitable foundations, these hotel companies are focusing on ongoing programs and policy improvements to bring sustainability in their everyday, operational efforts because it makes guests feel good and empowers the employees (Weissmann, 2007). Not to mention, 74% of guests surveyed for the *Condé Nest Traveler* report expect their hotels to do good for the community and for the environment in the long run (Elliott, 2007). In this scenario, sustainability is looked as linkage versus leakage. Linkage connects the hotel property to the community and it contributes to the local economy and the wellbeing of the local ecology. Leakage means the hotel company is just focused on the bottom line and looking out for only itself.

There is an increased public awareness of environmental destruction and biodiversity loss (WEF, 2011). The United Nations, trade industries, and nature conservation organizations have developed goals and guidelines for tourism development, and strategies and tools for sustainability and conservationism. These standards call for companies and businesses to step up and become stewards of sustainability, and for consumers to become more aware of where resources are sourced. In fact, research shows that this environmental stewardship is taking place in both stakeholder groups (WEF, 2011). To create a sustainable change, all stakeholders involved in the process need to hold each other accountable. This is a paradigm shift dubbed

“smart tourism,” that places value on being ethical, inclusive and green, over “classic tourism,” which only considers market share and growth (WEF, 2011).

Tourism conservation and sustainability is slowly taking roots in the U.S. There are many initiatives in progress in California, Pacific Northwest and the West. In particular, this paper focuses on efforts taking place in Southeast U.S., specifically in Tennessee. To clarify, the Southeastern region consists of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Sustainability in Tennessee

Owners and operators in the industry play a huge role in the success of ecotourism and responsible tourism in the state. According to the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development’s Green Directory (n.d.), there are over 120 lodging facilities that qualified for “taking care of natural resources, history, and culture of Tennessee.” In the Upper Cumberland region, where Van Buren County is located, there are only three lodging facilities with this special designation, none in the county itself. According to the Tennessee Hospitality Association (2011), only 36 of these lodging facilities are certified by a third-party administrator. Regardless, sustainability is the greatest opportunity for the lodging industry since the introduction of limited-service, extended-stay, and focused-service hotels; and it is not a fad. The industry is poised to make permanent changes towards environmental sustainability (Scaggs & Hartmann, 2008).

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating scale is becoming modern vernacular in evaluating sustainable building practices and operations in the U.S. As of early 2011, there are 91 lodging properties that received LEED certification (U.S. Green Building Council [USGBC], n.d.). There are currently over 1,100 lodging projects underway that

are seeking LEED certification. There is an array of LEED certifications available for new buildings, existing properties, homes, commercial interiors, and many more. The certifying council considers sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality to provide a rating. LEED certification levels are certified, silver, gold, and platinum. The more points that an overall project achieves, the better rating it receives (USGBC, 2008). What many operators are noticing is that sustainable operations and maintenance programs quickly add up to substantial savings and cost reduction over time (Scaggs & Hartmann, 2008).

Other methods of responsible environmental practices include two other considerations: environmental and community. In terms of environmental consideration, sustainable design, energy efficiency, water management, biological conservation, and waste management works in tangent with one another. Sustainable design looks to incorporate recycled materials and locally sourced building materials in green building. Energy efficiency uses direct and indirect ways to obtain and conserve energy. This would include the use of solar or wind energy, passive lighting, and energy efficient appliances. Water management deals with wastewater treatment, reuse of gray water, the use of biodegradable chemicals and detergents, and water saving practices. Biological conservation considers integrating the natural landscape and native plants in erosion prevention measures. Waste management looks at lowering the use of landfill space, organic composting, and recycling (SNV, 2009).

Community consideration in tourism industry includes supply chain management and community relations. The concept of linkage versus leakage applies here. Sourcing locally helps the local economy by creating jobs, encouraging commerce, government involvement, and community pride. Donating surplus and gently used items to charities and hiring local workers

generate community goodwill and foster community relations.

Tennessee Tourism Overview

Tennessee has the most national parks in the Southeastern region, and it is second only to North Carolina with the number of annual visitors in 2010 (National Park Service, 2011). Travel and tourism is the second largest industry for employment for the state in 2010; almost 175,000 people work in that industry. It ranks number three in payroll based on total wages in 2010 at almost \$7 million (Department of Tourism Department [DTD], 2010).

The state has a sustainability statement: “The State of Tennessee is committed to a sustainable tourism effort to preserve and protect our state’s unsurpassed natural beauty while encouraging the growth of the tourism industry in Tennessee” (DTD, 2012). Strategically, the state committed to environmental conservation efforts in 2008 in order to revitalize tourism (U.S. Travel Association, 2009). Just to name a few notable efforts: National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations implemented a three year pilot program in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to help communities develop sustainable tourism projects; Chattanooga, TN was recognized as one of 12 cities nationwide driving sustainable efforts in the community; and Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge, and Nashville formed committees to establish goals and develop action plans to become greener cities.

Eighty percent of Tennessee’s visitors are leisure travelers, a percentage that has remained the same for the past four years since 2010. The predominant age groups of these visitors are between 18 to 34 years old and 35 to 54 years old. Incidentally, according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2002), a majority of U.S. eco-tourists are also in the same age groups. Most of the U.S. travelers originate from the Southeastern region of the U.S. They account for 73% of the total visitors to Tennessee. The late fall to early winter months of October

through December, and the summer months of June through August, represent the peak tourism seasons in Tennessee. Forty-one percent of Tennessee tourists are there for eco-travel, to sightsee, and to visit historic sites and national parks (D.K. Shifflet & Associates, 2010).

A study by Tourism Queensland (n.d.) on U.S. eco-tourists affirms common activities sought by this segment. Seventy-nine percent plan their activities around historical sites and 74% plan their activities around nature, ecology, and wilderness. Twenty percent plan their activities around walking and hiking; 14% plan them around camping. Undoubtedly, visitors come to Tennessee to enjoy the state's unbridled natural beauty and would be attracted to Van Buren County for all its offerings. But as stated earlier in the sustainability section, if the local government, community, and other stakeholders do not share common goals, tourism will have negative affects on commerce, conservationism, and on the community.

Van Buren County Tourism

Van Buren County is situated in middle-Tennessee known as the Upper Cumberland region. Although it is a rural county, its known tourist attractions include Fall Creek Falls, Rumbling Falls Cave, and Cumberland Caverns. According to the University of Tennessee (2006), tourism generated \$7.74 million in sales for the county, which was second only to agriculture. This industry created 72 jobs and subsidized over 65% of the county's school system and education budget (University of Tennessee, 2007). Van Buren County Chamber of Commerce recognizes a need to bring more tourists to the area; but at the same time, they lack the funds and state grants to support the infrastructure needed for a bustling commerce and tourism sector. It conducted a technology and tourism feasibility review in 2009, but to date, the county has not updated the functionality of the website or initiated any tourism projects.

For the purpose of this review, Van Buren County website is compared to case studies of

counties that used web technology to promote themselves as sustainable destinations. Townsend, Tennessee located in Blount County features a website that entices visitors with “low impact” vacations; and Gatlinburg, Tennessee in Sevier County has a web portal coordinated by its Chamber of Commerce that promotes a city that is “going green” (DTD, 2008). According to the DTD (2010), Sevier County generated over \$1.5 billion in tourism related expenditures and Blount County generated over \$271 million. If Van Buren County develops a robust website to attract sustainable tourists, it an opportunity that will increase tourism awareness to the area.

Conclusion

Through this literature review, the core demographics and primary market segmentation interested in sustainable tourism are identified. These tourists are willing to spend more money for authentic, “green” experience. They are inquisitive and are interested in the transparency of the supply chain to ensure that local communities are benefiting from their dollars. They are best reached through the Internet and by word-of-mouth. It is harder to reach them through traditional media because they are skeptical and weary of “greenwashing.” Third-party certifications are also important to these types of tourists. Independent endorsements are also more objective than paid advertising or unverified claims on company websites (SNV, 2009).

Van Buren County needs to nurture its tourism industry through synergistic planning that calls for collaboration, consensus building, and public participation (Commission for Environmental Cooperation [CEC], 2000). Discussion amongst stakeholders – constituents and government – must turn into action towards sustainable stewardship development. It is the best way to develop the local economy and showcase the natural beauty found in Van Buren County. This is made evidence by other Tennessee cities that got onboard with the state’s “green” initiatives; they are reaping the benefits for being recognized as sustainable tourism areas.

Part Three

Introduction

Alfred Crabtree, owner of Bonk Knob Shoals, plans to develop an upscale campsite on his property in Van Buren County. The property is about five miles from Spencer, the county seat. He owns a little over 80 acres of development land that is located a few miles downstream of Fall Creek Falls and the Falls Creek Falls State Park. He is sub-dividing and developing parcels of his property in an environmentally conscious manner by building individual homes with minimal intrusion and disturbance to the forest and waterways. One way to best describe the area is that it is a haven for outdoors enthusiasts such as fishermen, cavers, kayakers, hikers, ranchers and even hunters. Crabtree allocated 7.5 acres of his property for developing Bonk Knob Shoals. Not only are there onsite and offsite caving and hiking opportunities, the campsite is accessible to Cane Creek, one of the few stocked trout waters in Tennessee.

It is critical to establish and illustrate the sustainable building efforts at Bonk Knob Shoals before introducing the marketing analysis because of the prevalence of “greenwashing” in today’s marketplace. TerraChoice (2010) outlined “sins of greenwashing” that included: marketing practices that hides trade-offs and provides no proof; are vague in language and are not relevant to the service or product; and marketing claims that are just outright false. In context of sustainable building and tourism development, TerraChoice (2010) found that there are often vagueness and no proof to green claims. By establishing and legitimizing the sustainability efforts of Bonk Knob Shoals, and developing activities and products around outdoor activities and conservation efforts, those are truly the foundations in which to build a successful marketing and communications plan.

In keeping with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) sustainable

building guidelines and development initiatives, he will be sourcing timber from his own property and supplementing treated wood and building material that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). FSC is an independent, third-party certification group that evaluates and ensures that material sourced from forests are managed at high standards of social, environmental and economic issues. This means that wood does not come from controversial sources and that materials are recycled or reclaimed through a managed process (FSC, n.d.). His goal is to build a main lodging building around 5000 square feet to accommodate an office, kitchen, and mess hall or indoor activities room.

The main lodging building will be situated on a hill overlooking the river the actual campgrounds. There is a natural clearing around the location of the main lodge, so he will be incorporating solar panels and passive solar lighting techniques to power and heat the building. An example of passive lighting and heating is placing windows high on walls – like skylights – to allow more light and thermal heat during cold months, while creating ventilation and airflow during warm weather. Crabtree plans to use clay, straw, and natural materials to insulate the building from the heat and cold. If possible, he will also provide electricity from the solar panels to five guest lodges and an outdoor bathrooms outpost.

The bathrooms will consist of four shower stalls and four biomass toilets for the entire campsite. The water for the showers and sinks will be sourced from ground water reservoirs located on the property. Greywater from the lodges and bathroom will be lightly filtered through charcoal, stored and reused for Bonk Knob Shoals' organic gardens and landscaping. This is an example of a greywater system. Biomass or composting toilets turns human excrements to compost material. It is self-contained and uses very little water and aeration systems to create usable compost for gardens. Crabtree plans on using Envirolet, a brand of composting toilets on

market, for the campsite bathrooms.

The guest lodges will be 500 to 800 square feet cabins for individuals or groups that prefer traditional accommodations to tents and sleeping bags. It will be built similarly to the main lodge. Furniture and indoor décor will be sourced with low to no volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. VOCs contribute to indoor air quality and are a concern under LEED. Throughout the campsite, Crabtree also plans to use natural or organic cleaning supplies whenever possible, not only for indoor air quality but also for the campsite greywater system.

Campsite preservation through recycling and proper disposal of organic waste will be central mission to Crabtree for Bonk Knob Shoals. He plans to repurpose old outdoor equipment into furniture or landscaping additions; create organic composts out of campsite meals; and provide accessible receptors for the guests to recycle aluminum, glass, and paper. Part of his conservation efforts will include a brief introduction to all guests about preserving Bonk Knob Shoals through all these campsite efforts.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Bonk Knob Shoals is founded by Alfred Crabtree – a visionary and active outdoorsman. Crabtree has been living in Tennessee for over 15 years and belongs to many caving clubs, conservancy organizations, and community activism groups. He is the ideal “advocate” for the upscale campsite. This translates very well with marketing efforts when utilizing Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a general term for web features that allows people to use the Internet to interact and interface with one another. Prominent Web 2.0 platforms include: Foursquare – an application that allows people to “check-in” at places all around the world; Facebook – a networking, social media application; and Flickr – a website that allows friends to share photos with each other. Crabtree is not just an ideal advocate for Bonk Knob Shoals; he is passionate about this business.

This passion is verifiable, especially since he is an active member of many online caving and outdoor enthusiasts clubs and specialized blog sites for extreme adventure sports. Crabtree has a credible reputation and can use his existing membership on these sites to promote Bonk Knob Shoals.

This upscale campsite venture is also unique to the Upper Cumberland region. There are adventure and outdoors service outfitters 100 miles away in Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Nashville, but truly none like it nearby Van Buren County. In addition, there are no eco-certified lodging facilities in the region that is listed by the Tennessee Department of Tourism Development in its Green Directory. Crabtree identified the biggest competitors to be Fall Creek Falls' guided tours and activities center, and campgrounds in and nearby State Park. Services provided by Bonk Knob Shoals would be significantly different. Not only are there more amenities available on the campsite such as prepared meals, gear for any outdoors activities, nighttime entertainment, and expert guided trips, the whole experience from start to finish as a sustainable effort would be a key differentiator.

One huge challenge facing Bonk Knob Shoals is community. Van Buren County Chamber of Commerce has yet to establish a local tourism committee, despite recognizing a need to improve its tourism outreach efforts – especially online. In addition, there are no representatives on the state tourism board that represents the Upper Cumberland region comprising of 14 counties including Van Buren County (Clark, 2012). In rural communities such as in Van Buren County, tourism opportunities can help economically depressed counties. The general consensus, however, is that there are very little state funds that can be allocated for use toward growing that industry. The lack of community support and tight county budget also means fewer skilled people available to help operate Bonk Knob Shoals or attract tourism to the

area.

Bonk Knob Shoals has a huge advantage as a first in market of its kind in the Upper Cumberland region. By being the first, Crabtree can define the scope and target audience for this upscale destination campsite. But this is also a challenge because there are few local business models to look at for elements of success. Initially, the messaging and marketing campaigns will focus on Web 2.0 and industry specific online networks. In addition to these online outreach plans, Crabtree wants to do a phase of guerilla marketing of Bonk Knob Shoals in metropolitan areas within a 300-miles radius. Guerrilla marketing relies on unconventional promotions that are often unexpected. The objective is to engage and generate conversation. The message that is seen here is that proximity to city lights is not the advantage; the advantage is being far away from it. Also, guerilla marketing will help establish the upscale campsite's presence outside a digital realm. Ideas to engage in guerrilla marketing is putting up unconventional flyers and bumper stickers on community bulletin boards located in community centers, outdoors retailers, specialty bike and camping shops, and Appalachian Trail rest stops.

The services and activities offered at Bonk Knob Shoals will attract a wide range of tourists from corporate executives interested in leadership retreats to geo-tourists looking for off-the-beaten path natural wonders. There is something for everybody at Bonk Knob Shoals. Crabtree will also advertise to tourists looking for a destination experience – one that is unique, sustainable, and adventure-oriented. Ideally, these tourists are not only eco-tourists; they may also be avid hikers, cavers, or kayakers looking for challenges and a lifetime experience.

There are external factors that are threatening the success of Bonk Knob Shoals. The travel industry is still rebounding from the economic downturn in the U.S. This means that even eco-conscious travelers have low tolerance for high premiums, making price a central concern

(Community Marketing, 2010). The appeal to the upscale campsite may be that environmental sustainability is not just an abstract concept; there are concrete, visceral and practical services where guests can justify paying a premium for the experience. Other threats include “greenwashing”, or green skepticism. Most travelers surveyed by Community Marketing (2010) believe that sustainable practices in the travel industry still need work, and better clarification and certification systems are needed to bring general consensus to what is actually considered green travel. There are currently over 350 “green” travel certifications but very few that are based on legitimate standards. TerraChoice (2010) identified credible product eco-labels that include: Energy Star, EcoLogo, Greenguard, LEED, FSC, UL Environment, Fair Trade Certified, and USDA Organic. Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (n.d.) named Rainforest Alliance and Green Globe as credible organizations for green tourism certifications. In order to legitimize his business and service offerings, Crabtree will try to source products that carry credible eco-labels and apply for a tourism mark from the Rainforest Alliance. While it is a lengthy and costly process to get the Rainforest Alliance mark, this globally recognized organization provides subsidies for applicants seeking verification services for receiving the mark. At the end of the process, Crabtree’s efforts will only strengthen his business value and marketing message that Bonk Knob Shoals is a sustainable and environmentally conscious tourism operation.

Web 2.0

Social media, peer-review, and blogging sites have changed the way people communicate and how they receive information. Research published by Nielsen (2010) said people around the world spent over 110 billion minutes on Web 2.0, which averages 22% of all time spent online. Companies embrace Web 2.0 because it makes contact with the public more casually, and

communication is received with often less cynicism and corporate platitude (Pogue, 2008). Lifestyles of health and sustainability (LOHAS) travelers are influenced by each other (Cortese, 2003). Only 5% of the respondents surveyed by Community Marketing (2010) said they get their information from TV and radio advertising; only 21.4% use traditional media to gather information about green travel. Nearly 50% of all respondents use Web 2.0 travel sites like LonelyPlanet.com, TripAdvisor.com, and NationalGeographic.com to validate claims of environmentally friendly businesses and travel services. Dominant users of social media are between 35 to 49 years old at 28%. The secondary group of users is 18 to 34 years old at 27% (Nielsen, 2012).

Before launching into the digital space, Crabtree will finalize the value proposition and design a consistent look and feel of the brand for Bonk Knob Shoals. The website will be the digital “flagship” for the campsite. It is extremely important that the site is designed properly because when combined with social media, a company can either be exalted or become instantly vulnerable to peer-attacks and criticism for service and product issues and or having a confusing brand message. Online accounts will then be established on Flickr – a image hosting website, YouTube and Vimeo – video hosting websites, Facebook – networking platform, Foursquare – location-based networking site, Twitter – micro blogging service, and finally Blogger or WordPress – blogging site for journaling adventures at Bonk Knob Shoals.

Once these social media accounts are established, Crabtree will populate the sites with pictures and descriptions of the campsite services and amenities. Web platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, Twitter, Facebook, Blogger, and WordPress allow users to create skins, or customize the look and feel of each page. Having a consistent look that is also tweaked to appeal to various types of LOHAS travelers will be one of the keys to success with each platform. For example,

people between ages 18 to 29 years old use Twitter. These people live in urban areas and are predominantly Black (Smith, 2011). Having a Twitter page that is trendy, flashy, and exciting speaks volumes to attracting those demographics of Twitter users, compared to conservative and more professional oriented design that may be more appealing to mature users that dominate Blogger and WordPress.

When these Web 2.0 sites and forums are set up, accounts for LonelyPlanet.com, TripAdvisor.com, Yelp!, Flickr, Foursquare and Google Places can then be setup. It is important to have social media platforms populated with content before setting up the travel review sites. This is done so there can be various web outlets for people to interact and discuss Bonk Knob Shoals. Having these platforms and forums set up correctly will positively affect the credibility of the upscale campsite and its online SEO.

SEO is search engine optimization. In brief, Google uses keywords in the site content and tags embedded in each webpage, to determine the site's relevancy based on user search terminologies. For example, take the phrase "upscale campsite." The more Crabtree uses that phrase on his website, photo tags, blog entries, Twitter, and video descriptions, the more relevant Google will find Bonk Knob Shoals to be for that search terminology. SEO relies on organic search, so it is not the same as paid search or Google's paid program called AdWords. For the purpose of generating Web 2.0 driven traffic, Crabtree will be relying on organic search from these social media platforms to drive relevant traffic to Bonk Knob Shoals' website.

Developing keywords is an ongoing process. The more specific the keywords, the easier it will be to establish relevancy for Bonk Knob Shoals. Suggested keyword phrases include "leadership retreats in Tennessee," "guided caving tours," "adventure sports in Tennessee," "prime trout fishing in Tennessee" and "eco-friendly tourist operation" and "sustainable

campsites in Tennessee.”

In order to have a successful Web 2.0 program, Crabtree will have to constantly monitor, provide feedback, and respond to all questions and discussions on each platform. It is also important for him to update the sites with fresh content such as photos, blog entries, status updates and videos. When a company utilizes social media as part of its marketing strategies, the worst thing it can do is not have active presence on each of the platforms. Fortunately, there are many third-party software and applications that can assist with monitoring and linking content from platform to platform.

Conclusion

Having an authentic product and engaged owner is key to the success of Bonk Knob Shoals. The product ultimately dictates Bonk Knob Shoals’ value proposition and marketing messages. As research on LOHAS and ecotourism has shown, tourists may be price sensitive but are now becoming more concerned about social and environmental responsibility. Bonk Knob Shoals doesn’t rest on its laurels, for example on an intangible promotions pitch like “earth friendly.” It delivers a product and an experience that is truly environmentally conscious and sustainable.

Many of the U.S. Southeast’s natural wonders are located in Tennessee. There are enough famous landmarks, state parks, and well-known tourists attractions for visitors to justify a trip to the state. By establishing Bonk Knob Shoals and having an effective Web 2.0 program, Crabtree can be assured reasonable success of the upscale campsite if he can develop a unique product and services offerings and maintain active presence on social media. The challenge remains with the community and local government. If the state can provide more funding for tourism in Van Buren County, Bonk Knob Shoals will not be the only success story – many businesses will

follow suit and create a thriving tourism industry that is also rooted in the city's mission statement of creating a sustainable living for families and for the community.

Recommendations

Once Alfred Crabtree develops Bonk Knob Shoals and determines the value proposition and service offerings, he needs to apply to the Tennessee Hospitality Association for a green certification. The upscale campsite will then be listed in the state's green tourism directory, which is available online for tourists inquiring about sustainable Tennessee hotels, business operations, and attractions. After getting the state certification, Crabtree needs to apply to the Rainforest Alliance to obtain a globally recognized sustainable tourism mark. These certifications will legitimize the sustainability efforts at Bonk Knob Shoals.

After applying for the certifications, he will design the brand's look and feel, and gather pictures and videos for Bonk Knob Shoals' website and social media platforms. After developing the website, he will then set up each social media platform to increase organic SEO traffic and online awareness. Concurrently as he set up these platforms, he will list the upscale campsite on online travel and directory services such as TripAdvisor.com, LonelyPlanet.com, Foursquare, and Google Places. Listings usually take a couple weeks to confirm and be verified. While he is waiting for Bonk Knob Shoals to be listed, he should go online and informally introduce the campsite to adventure clubs where he is a member. Setting up a few free trips for friends and members of these online clubs will generate Web 2.0 conversations. This will also spark word-of-mouth advertising for Bonk Knob Shoals.

Being an avid adventurer and outdoors sportsman himself, Crabtree's can easily tap into the niche market consisting of LOHAS tourists. As Web 2.0 activities and peer-conversations grow online, he can develop a more targeted online keywords campaign geared towards his

secondary niche market – people seeking leadership retreats and tours specializing in personal growth.

Crabtree will need help maintaining all the social media websites. Daily maintenance such as uploading status updates, images, or videos is necessary for a successful Web 2.0 marketing effort. HootSuite is a popular social media management application that integrates many social media services into one dashboard or control panel. It is an intuitive application, so Crabtree can use it to monitor conversations and activities on Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare and WordPress. YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, LonelyPlanet.com and TripAdvisor.com would have to be monitored separately.

Guerilla marketing should be organized quarterly every year, so Crabtree can maintain an advertising presence outside the digital world. He can recruit camp guides and employees to post flyers that are printed on recycled paper onto bulletin boards located in related business services like outdoors retailers and nation parks. While it is important to reach the targeted demographics of Bonk Knob Shoals, it is also important to reduce waste. So, the primary marketing and communications efforts will therefore be directed online.

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