

Restoring Tourism Destinations in Crisis: A Strategic Marketing Approach

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The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington on September 11 2001, followed just over a year later by the murder of almost 200 tourists in Bali and a rash of attacks against tourists in many parts of the world have symbolised an unfortunate association between tourism and political crisis in very recent times. For destination marketing organisations, events beyond their direct managerial control including acts of war, terrorism, crime waves, natural disaster, political instability and epidemics represent the most severe challenge to the marketability of a destination. Events such as September 11 and the 1990-1 Gulf War Crisis had global implications for the tourism industry. Many crisis events which logic would dictate affect one destination only often result in a collateral marketing crisis in neighbouring destinations.

Over many years the International Air Transport Association has developed well organised contingency plans for crisis communication and market recovery in the event of crashes and other disasters and problems which afflict the airline industry. The IATA contingency plans have been adopted by all IATA members and adapted to the specific circumstances of each member carrier.¹

Unlike the airline industry destination marketing organisations have not standardised their crisis contingency plans. This has resulted in a situation in which some DMO's are able to immediately and professionally respond to a crisis and implement a marketing recovery strategy whilst other either panic, retreat into denial or respond in an ad hoc fashion to a crisis.

The highly competitive nature of destination marketing globally and the economic significance of tourism for many nations requires tourism to be treated as a strategically important activity. Consequently a high state of preparedness is required to restore destination marketability in the event of a crisis.

The primary aims of this book* are:

1. Define a destination crisis and explain the distinction between a crisis and a tourism hazard. This is explained through the *Destcon* (Destination Condition) system in which the severity of a crisis and an appropriate response mechanism is broadly defined. *Destcon* is loosely based on the defence condition scale of military readiness system used by the US military.
2. Place the marketing dimension of crisis within its broader context. Marketing is a single element in the mix of post crisis restoration priorities which include infrastructure repair and reconstruction, medical treatment, security restoration, law and order, repatriation of victims and financial management just to name a few.

3. Outline and detail a marketing crisis management and a restoration process which involves addressing the concerns and interests of travel consumers from source markets, the travel industry in source markets, media, government and insurance companies in countries and regions which constitute the strategically significant source markets.
4. Development of an integrated travel industry infrastructure response to a destination crisis and a co-ordinated marketing recovery plan based on a broad alliances between the key elements of the destination's inbound market.
5. Illustrating, through eleven case studies actual examples of how specific DMOs have dealt with specific crises. The case studies were divided into specific crisis categories:
 - **Terrorism and Political Instability**
 - USA and Global Tourism crisis, September 11, 2001.
 - Egypt following events of terrorism targeted at tourists 1992-1997 with emphasis on the November 1997 Luxor massacre.
 - Israel's tourism marketing during political conflict 2000-2002
 - Fiji and the two coups 1987 and 2000.
 - Sri Lanka and tourism during civil conflict between the central government and the Tamil Tigers.
 - **Crime**
 - South Africa – turning a crime wave into a hazard.
 - Tasmania (Australia) restoring the Tasmania tourism market after the April 1996 Port Arthur massacre.
 - **Epidemic**
 - Britain's tourism marketing management of the Foot and Mouth outbreak 2001.
 - **Natural Disaster**
 - Turkey and its tourism recovery after the 1999 Izmit Earthquake.
 - **War**
 - Croatia's tourism recovery after the 1992-5 war with the Yugoslav Federation.
 - **Combination Crises**
 - Marketing the Philippines during episodes of terrorism, political instability, natural disasters

Each case study is analysed and assessed on the basis of the ability and the speed of each DMO to restore the market following the onset of the crisis. There are some case studies such as Israel and Philippines in which crisis situations have not been resolved at the time of writing. In cases such as Sri Lanka, Israel and The Philippines where crises have been either ongoing or long standing the chapters assessed the ability of the respective DMO's to maintain a viable market during the crisis event.

The core methodology of marketing crisis management involves influencing the perceptions of number of key interest groups which determine the propensity of people to travel from source markets.

These include:

The Media:

This author has not dealt with the matter of media with anywhere near the thoroughness of Christian Nielsen, "whose 2001 book *Tourism and the Media* focuses predominantly on the tourism industry's relations with media. Nielsen's book devotes a chapter on how tourism authorities should work with the media in dealing with "negative events".

In my own book I have made some basic observations on the nature of media coverage which include the media's predisposition to cover either negative or sensational events. This predisposition varies in intensity according to the targeted audience but as Rupert Murdoch, whose global media interests cover the full gamut of print and electronic media explains there are specific trigger words which make an item newsworthy.ⁱⁱⁱ These include crisis, conflict, catharsis, crime, corruption, conquest, catastrophe and scandal. The challenge for DMO's in the crisis management and restoration phases is to make recovery newsworthy and to conduct the relationship with the media as an ally rather than as an adversary. Media visits to a destination and a regular supply of honest and reliable information are amongst the many useful steps a DMO can take to work with the media. Effective websites which address and anticipate questions and concerns are an increasingly important public relations tool.

The media's significance is that it plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of a destination and is the most effective means of reaching the consumer.

The Travel Industry in Source Markets

The media plays a significant role in pull marketing (reaching direct to consumers) but the travel industry, especially retail travel agents, airlines and tour operators play a vital role in push marketing. A destination in crisis and recovering from crisis must treat the travel industry in strategically important source markets as a key ally in facilitating market recovery. Familiarisation tours targeted at influential travel professionals is an important tactic but maintaining regular and honest contact helps rebuild confidence in the minds that sell destinations.

The Nexus between Government Advisories and Travel Insurance

Government travel advisories are assuming a more significant role in shaping the perceptions of safety and security of a destination for both prospective travellers and the travel industry. There has been a traditionally close link between government travel advisories, the extent of travel insurance coverage and cost of travel insurance premiums for destinations which are regarded as risky by foreign ministries. This is a link which until recently has received minimal attention from DMOs. Yet it is a vital element of contingency and crisis management to develop a strong

consultative relationship with the government officials who determine the advisory affecting target destinations. The development of links between travel insurers and DMO's need to be consultative rather than confrontational.^{iv}

Dealing Directly with Consumers in Source Markets and Identifying the Core Marketsegments.

During a crisis DMO's need to identify and prioritise their message to those markets in accordance with their overall support for the destination. The Israel Ministry of Tourism has divided its marketing approach during its crisis into stalwarts, waverers and the discretionary market.^v During a crisis, especially a prolonged crisis, no market can be taken for granted. Consequently engaging the market is vital. While advertisements and media campaigns may be helpful a direct dialogue with opinion leaders in various market sectors becomes necessary. Many DMO's make the error of withdrawing from consumer contact during and after a crisis. A key to effective crisis and recovery marketing is to establish as much direct contact as possible.

It is also necessary to communicate the facts and deal honestly and directly with consumer concerns. Open and honest communication builds trust between the DMO and the consumer.^{vi}

The Core Principle of Effective Crisis Marketing

In the eleven case studies examined one clear fact emerged in successful crisismanagement and restoration marketing. Those DMOs who demonstrated a clear marketing plan and led an alliance involving all elements of the local tourism industry and those foreign organisations which serviced the destination were likely to experience rapid and full recovery. Turkey, Tasmania Fiji and Egypt were four destinations examined in this book in which tourism recovered quickly and strongly following a crisis.^{vii}

In these four cases centralised planning was accompanied by the development of a well co-ordinated alliance between the DMO, Airlines, Hoteliers, tour operators, Attractions and other key principals. In all these cases government played an involved and supportive role. Marketing recovery initiatives such as discounting, value adding and other incentives were coupled with government polices which encouraged tourism investments such as investor tax breaks and open sky policies.

When tourism crises which have a multi destinational impact there is a strong case to co-ordinate restoration marketing campaigns as a regional exercise. Following the Bali bombing of October 12 , 2002 the formerly defunct ASEAN tourism marketing organisation was re-established in November 2002 in response to government advisories in many Western governments cautioning their citizens against travel to SE Asia.^{viii}

Destination Marketing Authorities have proven their ability to overcome severe challenges to their marketability through the implementation of effective contingency planning. This book has sought to identify the most effective strategies and describe through the cases studies their implementation or lack of implementation in a range of recent tourism industry crises around the world.

References

- ⁱ Concil, A. (2002). *Crisis Communication Manual*. Tokyo Office: International Air Transport Association.
- ⁱⁱ Nielsen, C. (2001). *Tourism and the Media : tourist decision -making, information and communication*. Melbourne: Hospitality Press .
(This is one of the best works produced on the topic of media tourism relations.)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Author Interview with Rupert Murdoch . June 20, 1987. (I actually interviewed Mr Murdoch as part of my own doctoral dissertation dealing with the Arab–Israel conflict but his observations are equally valid for this topic and his opinion on what constitute newsworthiness is entitled to carry some considerable weight.)
- ^{iv} Beirman, D. (2001). Surviving Negative Travel Advisories. *PATA Compass*. December.
- ^v Greco, Noga Sher. (2002). *Israel's Tourism Crisis* . Power Point presentation to all Israel Government Tourism Offices. Internal Briefing. April.
- ^{vi} Quarmby, D. (2001). Fighting Fit An outline of the BTA strategy in recovering from the Foot and Mouth Crisis. *Overview Magazine* , London, July.
- ^{vii} During the course of my research I interviewed a range of DMO Directors who shared their strategic approach market recovery with me. They included Erdal Aktan (Turkey), Josia Rayawa (Fiji), Elhamay Elzayat (Egypt) and Malcolm Wells (Tasmania).
- ^{viii} www.ehotelier.com Accessed 07 November 2002.
- * Book due for release May 2003. Publisher Allen & Unwin.