

## Destination 'Demand Generators' Require Partnerships, Not Agendas - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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'Demand Generators'. What a wonderful phrase, coined by Jonathan Tisch, Chairman and CEO of Loewes Hotels. He was referring to what drives Visitors to our Destinations, in this case New York City, but applicable anywhere.

During a television interview with Charlie Rose, resplendent commentator, Mr. Tisch was the essential insightful interviewee, discussing his new book, family members, hotel successes, various charities and the like, but the phrase, 'Demand Generators' resonated with this viewer.

Ultimately, this is how we build our presence in the Destination marketplace. It may be as simple as our natural setting - our beaches, rivers, mountains, and canyons. Or, how we have cleverly crafted business from nature's bounty - ski slopes, white river rafting, golf, hiking, bird watching, berry picking. Perhaps, we have created institutions of historical or cultural value - MOMA, the Taj Mahal, Machu Pinchu, the Tate Gallery, Museum of Fine Arts, Old Quebec City, The Great Wall of China. The landscape may be punctuated even further with reasons to visit - fine restaurants, theater, even medical and eco tourism. Such a wealth of resources to promote, enticing Visitors to our town, city, region, state or even country. Then, why does the effort become muddled. It is such a big 'pie', enough slices for all, with seconds available, too.

Destination relationships can become too nuanced, political or outright hostile. We forget we are all in this together, both the private and public sector. Indeed, dollars are at work, but to the benefit of whom? Constituencies must be served, not my job, he/she did it. Where lies the accountability, who does what, and, most importantly, who manages the synergy required to make the Visitor's Experience of our 'generators' one of delight rather than misery.

Synergism captures the essence of what must prevail to have dynamic business success in your Destination. By its very definition, synergism represents the combined, simultaneous, correlated actions of diverse entities to work together, where the total effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

In the world of Tourism we must overcome enormous barriers - political, economic, social - to provide an environment which inspires the Guest/Visitor Experience, where rhapsody is the memory. Every business/service which "touches" a visitor has a role and obligation to further that Memorable Experience. A simple end result, but the means always get in the way.

Any analysis should start with a typical Visitor's "touch points", starting with arrival. First impressions set the tone. In your airports, often Immigration and Customs Officials are the initial "Ambassadors" our Visitors encounter. A smile and "enjoy your stay" can set the proper mood. Then, drifting through the airport, prompted by signage, directionals, kiosks to our transit: busses, taxis, courtesy vans or rentals - the next contact points. This is a wonderful opportunity to represent our Destination benefits, resources and unique character. Also, you have a captured audience!

If we arrive by our own automobile, what greets our senses? The city landscape, street signs, posters and billboards. Perhaps we have asked a policeman for assistance or even John Q. Public. We may park in a lot, walk, take a cab or subway - our senses are on alert. Impressions are being indelibly implanted. And, finally, we reach our Destination within the Destination - hotel, restaurant, business setting, entertainment venue. Now, we see how well our hosts perform. We interact with the Desk Clerk, the Restaurant Hostess and server, the ticket taker, the peanut vendor, the Retail Sales Associate.

We are either assaulted or assuaged by their performance, and that is only the service aspect. What about the sensations imbued by the products and the facilities? What level of cleanliness, condition, and attractiveness have we absorbed, hopefully enjoyed or avoided. It is just not specific Hospitality business related. We may need sunglasses, a bottle of water, a quick haircut, even medical attention, or send a fax and cash a check.

The Guest/Visitor Experience is impacted by all the above and of course a great deal more. The public and private sectors mingle and intertwine, they are part of this mosaic we create, which can be a piece of junk or a delight. There simply is no room for agendas or arrogance - we are all in this together. A spectacular stay at Hotel 'Z' is diminished by poor service at Guiseppe's Bistro. An elegant 'night on the town' is negated by a surly cab driver. The maze of traffic, fumes, and pace at your airport diffuses the elegance and peace of your museums. A Remarkable Experience is a fragile commodity, yet it does require synergy, and we are all players.

We need leadership, creative and energetic men and women to direct with integrity our National/State Tourism Offices, CVB's and Tourism entities, Chambers and Associations, not to mention our Mayor's Office, Police Force, Utilities, and even hospitals and banks. They need to engage their membership, constituencies and employees - this is a partnership.

Several years ago I was invited to give a presentation to the Hartford (CT) CVB, discussing the value of Quality Assurance as an effective marketing tool. The forum was geared to a planning session for a major weekend celebration in this Destination, ascending. Around the table were hospitality leaders, newspapers, transit officials, police, arena operators and the like - each sharing their roles and concerns in coordinating all the features/contingencies which make for success. Other Destinations, as we know, do not communicate, not only on an on-going daily basis but also externally in the face of disaster. Consider New Orleans and Aruba.

We need to solicit what our Visitors think about our Destination. We cannot substantiate development strategies without research and "feedback" on an ongoing basis. We need to demand some consistency of service, product and facility condition throughout our community of providers. Training and Development activities for our Ambassadors, those who actually

provide and accentuate the Experience, must be constant, emphasizing Customer Service. The Experience business is driven by that memorable relationship. Take nothing for granted. Invest in all your Ambassadors, optimize their behaviors, create a standard of excellence, and become distinctive.

As we further define and build our Brand, based upon our 'Demand Generators', we must be honest, prepared to deliver what we say we will. Our message must be creative and fresh. Above all, we must be accountable, embrace our differences and share our successes. There are no excuses! The Tourism Landscape is fragile. Bad news travels quickly. We have been granted the cornucopia of Destination splendors, and we all are stewards of the Visitor Experience. If all parties are interacting and integrating their significant resources, a Destination celebration is in order.

The author believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Memorable Experience. Seek solutions at: [www.hospitalityperformance.com](http://www.hospitalityperformance.com).

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