

THE ROLE OF BUZZ MARKETING IN THE MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract: *A continuous exchange of information which forms most of our purchasing decisions is going around us and with our participation. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that the supplying entities on the contemporary tourist market should use the power of those interpersonal contacts in their management processes. The buzz marketing essence has been explained, reasons for its development explained and its basic forms discussed. A special attention has been focused on the meaning of buzz marketing in the management of tourism destination. Based on the results of survey research conducted among tourists visiting Cracow in 2008-2010, a hypothesis was verified that the word-of-mouth opinions are of considerable importance in choosing a tourism destination.*

Key words: *Network of interpersonal contacts, buzz marketing, management, destination*

1. Introduction

Nowadays information about products (including those offered on the tourist market) is disseminated very quickly via a network of interpersonal contacts, invisible at first glance and often hard to identify. These relationships can play a huge role in taking a purchasing decision; thereby they affect the market success of companies and other supplying entities. Therefore they should not be disregarded, on the contrary: they are to be utilised in the management processes.

The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate a role of the network of interpersonal contacts in effective management in the tourism industry. The notion of buzz marketing has been explained, reasons for its development explained and its most important senders set out. Then the basic forms of buzz marketing have been presented. An important role of the word-of-mouth opinions in the management of tourism destination was proven with the use of survey research conducted among tourists visiting Cracow.

2. The essence of buzz marketing.

Buzz marketing (also known as word-of-mouth marketing or viral marketing) relies on a natural need of each person – a need to communicate, and makes use of the impact of some people's opinion on the behaviour of others. It is interpreted as a skilful and well-

considered use of a network of interpersonal contacts in marketing strategies. Another definition says it is the sum of all commentaries on a given product, delivered by customers within a given period of time with the use of any, often unofficial, channels of communication ([9], p. 87).

A huge role of buzz marketing in the modern economy results from three main reasons (more: [6]):

- “customers cannot hear you” – there is an incredible information noise on the market, excess of information transmitted by many senders, which results in the fact that a considerable part of the information does not reach the intended addressees;
- “customers do not believe you” – buyers reveal scepticism (distrust) in relation to advertising which is present everywhere (advertising spots interrupting each programme on TV, aggressive product placement in soap operas, numerous banners on Websites, spam etc.); taught by experience (learned realism), the customers do not believe the offerors’ advertising arguments; they are fed up with one-sided monologue, whereas they are waiting for a dialogue;
- „customers are closer and closer to one another” – thanks to modern means of communication (including the Internet) consumers communicate with a larger and larger number of persons at a quicker pace; additionally they have developed new tools of mutual transfer of information; in their behaviour on the market, sometimes even involuntarily, they rely on opinions of others, thus considerably reducing a risk of taking a wrong decision.

As early as in the 1960s E. Dichter stated that the following have the greatest impact on consumers’ purchasing decisions ([1]):

- opinions of the closest persons i.e. those who show disinterested sympathy towards the consumer (family, friends, etc.),
- opinions of the people from the same community the consumer belongs to (neighbours, collaborators, seniors, persons practicing mountain climbing, etc.),
- opinions of persons being authorities in a given area – and they are both the “recognised” authorities (physicians, celebrities, professors, etc.), and “ordinary” people who are experts in certain areas (e.g. cars, computers) and whose for opinion a consumer asks when taking a decision to buy a given product.

Any statement of those persons creates the so-called noise; but a negative noise disseminates much faster than positive – per each 23 dissatisfied customers there are 30,000 enemies who “spread” as a result of taking about a bad product ([5] pp. 235-236).

The idea of buzz marketing is to initiate a situation in which the customers themselves inform one another about the offer, to stimulate consumers’ conversations on the advantages and disadvantages of the product, to “give” reasons for discussions which will attract the largest number of participants or will give tools making it possible for the customers to conduct those disputes. Such an open dialogue (direct, spontaneous transmission) acquires credibility and receives trust of the company’s target environment, is the best recommendation and has a much stronger impact than a traditional

advertisement. Additionally, it must be emphasised that by provoking a consumer to talk about a product it is also possible to find out how they themselves evaluate the product, and this is very important information for any producer who learns at the source what must be changed, thereby what actions must be initiated as part of effective management.

3. The management of buzz marketing

Using buzz marketing in the management processes, many actions can be utilised. One of them is evangelist marketing or using the support of the so-called brand evangelists i.e. persons who are fully convinced to a given product and recommend it by themselves, without the need of any encouragement. These persons are extremely valuable for the company (more: [11] pp. 22-23). Since such an honest opinion is, in the consumer's eyes, the best recommendation because the product is recommended by someone who is really satisfied with it, and not someone who is paid for it.

Similar tasks are performed by opinion leaders, influential persons, also referred to as the "hubs." Among them, four types are differentiated ([7] pp. 93-94). The first are the so-called hubs i.e. persons who, of their own free will, look for information about a given good or service. On its basis they evaluate the product itself as well as a process of its sale or claim-making. They also establish numerous bi-directional relationships with other buyers, thereby they disseminate their opinions. Another type is megahubs i.e. representatives of the media (television, radio, and press), politicians, sportspeople, stars of the mass culture, etc. Apart from bi-directional contacts (like ordinary hubs), they have a huge number of contacts in the one-way mass communication model. The third type - expert hubs – consists of narrowly-specialised persons being authorities in a given sector. Enjoying special esteem, they constitute a reliable source of information for others. The last type is network hubs i.e. persons who stand out in a group due to their features and abilities. They reveal large social activity therefore their charisma is commonly noticed.

Also community marketing has a large potential. This is gathering an internet community interested in the same product in one forum. The Internet users can freely exchange their observations there and have access to information from product users.

Brand blogging has a similar mode of operation, consisting in writing a personal or company blog [12] i.e. a Website containing a specific number of separate, chronologically ordered, entries. Blogs usually make it possible for readers to add their comments. This tool is used to establish a more individual relationship with customers. Information published this way enjoys large trust of the Internet users. It is important, however, that messages include opinions, commentaries and comments of the offer addressees. This will make the customers feel appreciated, they will affirm to have a real impact on shaping the product and its image.

Another method is product seeding. It consists in providing a specially selected consumer group (e.g. passionate supporters, owner of opinion-making portals, influential clients) with full quality products for testing, together with samples for friends. It is

assumed that testers, having familiarised with the offer, will recommend it to the family, friends, Internet users, etc., thereby bringing about the dissemination of positive information, generating noise around the product and the company.

It is evident from the above that the management of buzz marketing involves using the network of customers' contacts, their social position and market knowledge, as well as access to the media in such a way as to propagate a certain manner of purchasing behaviours or model the consumers' preferences. Of course there are many more actions in this respect and newer and newer ones keep appearing, and which actions will be chosen by the offeror should be conditioned, above all, upon the specificity of their product and the market segment they want to reach.

4. The importance of buzz marketing in purchasing decisions in tourism (on the example of Cracow).

The purchase of a tourism product is connected with a decisively greater risk than of any other product. First of all, a tourist acquires something that that is not there yet, something they cannot see or try; they buy an abstraction, "dreams", something that does not exist yet. Secondly, the buyer cannot return a tourist product when they do not like it, since it disappears at the moment of creation (uniformity of the time of production and consumption). Even if they get a refund for the non-performance or improper performance of services, nobody is able to return the time lost they dedicated to a journey (and as a rule they will have another holidays only next year). And thirdly, a tourist cannot consume the product in the place of their permanent residence (because of the unity of place of production and consumption) – they have to embark on a trip, sometimes to very distant, unknown parts of the world, where it will be much more difficult for them to look for help and pursue claims ([10], pp. 11-12). All this makes a tourist, in the name of security, choose products proven by themselves. And since very often they feel like travelling to newer and newer places, commentaries and opinions of others (relatives, friends, acquaintances etc.) can reduce the existing risk for them. They will, therefore, persistently look for such opinions, establishing contacts with the tourists who have already made use of such products. While after their return they will themselves disseminate opinions, talking about their experiences, impressions and feelings. Summing up, the role of buzz marketing, understood as a network of spontaneous, direct contacts between customers, is very large in tourism and it cannot be absolutely disregarded in the management processes, also beyond tourism destination.

In order to empirically verify the thesis, results were used of survey research carried out in Cracow in 2008-2010 to the order of the City Office under the supervision of the Małopolska Tourist Organisation. The respondents were people visiting Cracow (more: [2] pp. 4-7; [3] pp. 6-8; [4] pp. 7-9). On the whole, in 2008 the survey covered 3285 persons, in 2009 – 3060 persons, and in 2010 – 3378 persons.

The analysis of replies received to one of the questions in the survey proves that the opinions of the family and friends are the most important source of information about

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Cracow as a place of tourism destination – about half of visitors make use of them before their arrival (figure 1). Additionally, an important role is played by the Internet (about one-fifth), but it is difficult to state explicitly whether in this case the city's promotional information is meant or opinions from internet fora and blogs, i.e. is also buzz marketing.

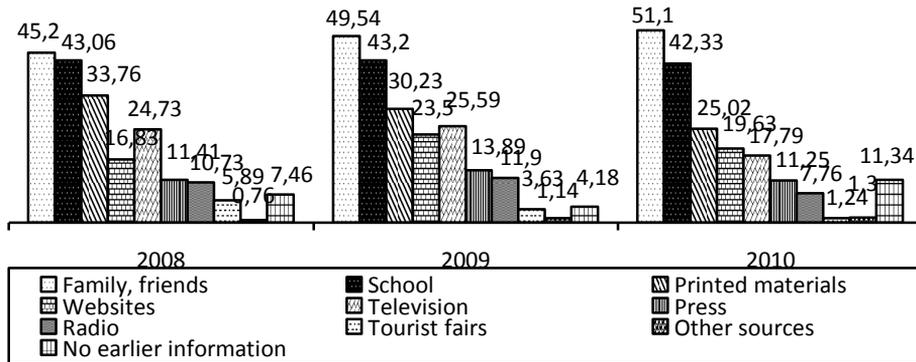


Figure 1 Sources of information about the city used by visitors in 2008-2010¹

Source: Own study based on research of the Małopolska Tourist Organisation.

It must be noticed that the role of word-of-mouth went up in the analysed period from about 42% to more than 51% – on the whole growth of 5.9 percentage points was recorded. A linear trend calculated on the basis of the data (also from previous years i.e. from 2003 – [8] pp. 249-250) shows a growing tendency – annually on average by 0.68 percentage points. Also the number of persons making use of information available in the Internet grew – from about 1/6 to about 1/5 (by 2.8 percentage points on the whole). Also in this case the tendency has a growing character – annually on average by 1.36 percentage points.

5. Summary

Buzz marketing is undeniably a very attractive action, taken up as part of the process of effective management. A given group of persons can be reached for a much lower price than in the event of traditional forms of promotion. It must be remembered, however, that in irresponsible hands the tool can create more harm than benefits. Hence it must be clearly remarked that guiding people into a conversation does not mean it can be controlled – the idea of buzz marketing assumes that simply consumers should not be prevented from expressing their opinions. Whereas some companies, under the banner of using buzz marketing, use tools contrary to its principles. They use, inter alia, internet amplifying i.e. they employ persons whose task is to pretend to be normal “forum members” and recommend a given product on various internet fora. Mailing and spamming are also used. These actions have nothing to do with buzz marketing. Not only are they unethical, but also very dangerous for the given company. Since in the event of

¹ The respondents could choose more than one answer, hence the shares do not add up to 100%.

discovering a person impersonating a customer, the company is exposed to losing its reputation, and its further actions will be in advance evaluated as dishonest.

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