

MARKETING STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract: The strategic marketing planning in sustainable tourism is a complex step, which involves successive specified stages. In this process, it must be considered that tourism activity implies many categories of participants, which are situated on different decision levels (services suppliers, tourism products producers and distributors, central and local public authorities). These categories of participants has often contrary interests and, more often, they does' nt consider the sustainable development principles in there's marketing planning activity.

Important step in practice implementation of sustainable development principles, tourism marketing activity concerns specific aspects (knowing tourism products and services' consumers' needs, creating products that will respond to these needs, supplying to consumers' categories the information that refers to these products etc.).

Through its specific character, through high number of implied participants and different decision levels, the strategic tourism planning has some particularities.

Reference element of any business plan, the marketing plan is the central element for direct and coordinate marketing effort (Kotler, 1997, pp. 137).

Structured, on its turn, by considering the action's direction (as well strategic perspective (main marketing activity' s objectives, adequate strategies, going from market analyze) as operational perspective (underling marketing tactics corresponding to the analyzed period), an adequate marketing plan allow to the economic organizations to respond in a good way to market opportunities, to obtain the wished results, to get an advantaged positions reporting to its competitors.

In sustainable tourism' marketing strategic planning, the particularly aspects that intervenes comes first from the multiplied planning' levels:

- Superior organizational level (that establish the mission, long terms general objectives, development strategies, resources, activities etc.)
- Strategic business unit (that involves separate planning, separate management, and own competitors)
- Functional level (that refers to organizations functions, for each function is realized separated planning; for example, on marketing function level, for each product is realized another plane).

Considering the tourism policy is formulate on central governmental level, the tourism activities involves tourism products assembling process involves more services suppliers categories, the tourism products formulation and distribution process it the tourism operators' task (tour-operators, retailing travel agencies, and those tourism products' consume its realized on some tourism destinations which whom local communities has specific interests), in the strategic marketing planning process must be considered all those participants' interests.

The strategic marketing planning process is a difficult work to do, and conforming to general marketing theory and practice, involves more steps to do, as the following (Balaure, etal, 2005, pp. 414):

- Defining the organization' mission;
- Developing organization' business plan;
- Defining marketing objectives;
- Defining the marketing strategy;
- Implementing the marketing strategy;
- Monitoring and evaluating the marketing strategy' implementation;
- Revaluing the marketing strategy.

The mission represent the reason why organization exists, in some clients' group conditions, and those clients' needs (Certo, 2002) and its goal is to clarifying the direction that the organization will be fallowed, specifying the business' nature through a product or process' association, apt to satisfy o specific consumers' need (Căprărescu, 2005, pp. 37).

The mission is expressed by mission statement (Kotler, etal, 1998, pp. 108), and if it wants to be imprinted into the collective memory, it must be maintained a long time (except the cases where, from different necessary reasons, it must be modified).

The mission statement must be formulated on every tourism economic organization' level (services supplier, tour-operator, travel agency) and, in specialists opinion, must fulfill certain criteria: defying firm/SBU activity domain, identifying the specific competences and the way that firm can be considered as unique on the market, defying its market position and identifying the main competitors, identifying the clients, employees, owners/ share-holders and local communities' needs and establishing in a clear way the future directions of work (Stăncioiu, etal., 2005, pp. 19).

To underline the firm's management preoccupations concerning the incorporation of sustainable tourism principles into the strategic marketing system is to include the aspects concerning social and environmental responsibility into the mission statement.

Going from declared mission, tourism firms elaborate the business plan, tool that allows specifying the global business goals, the activity domains where it will be action and the target market.

Firm's general goals can be specific for certain essential domain, from which: market position (reporting to it's competitors), innovation, physically resources, benefits, management' performance and development, employees' attitudes and performance and social responsibility (Drucker, 1974).

Derivate from global business' goals, the marketing' objectives can be:

- Of quantitative nature, referring on market-share, value of brand, sales and profits associated to these sales
- Of qualitative nature, that can refers to improving products, products lines, brand or firm's image its self, to keeping actual clients etc. (Balaure, etal., 2000; Balaure, etal., 2005, pp. 416).

In case of a certain tourism destination, defining short and long-term goals, based on a good and strong cooperation with other stakeholders in the community, sustainable tourism business can be better understood.

Before to establish the marketing's objectives that it wants to achieve, the tourism firm must realize an internal and external environmental analysis, that is named marketing audit.

That involves identification and analyzing the firm's internal and external environmental factors, in a specific order, considering the impact that they can have on the achievement of its sustainable tourism objectives.

Concerning the external environmental analysis, the success or the failure in progressive towards sustainable patterns of tourism depends on an all network of forces, such as (Middleton, Hawkins, 1998; Balaure, et al., 2005, pp. 418):

- New developing technologies
- Structure of distribution channels
- Competitor's actions
- Political, social and environmental attitudes
- Legal and regulatory frameworks
- Market determinations/consumer motivations
- Suppliers and public.

Studying these areas, can be reveal new opportunities for the business (for example, new target-markets, like in the case of environmentally responsible tourists, new services suppliers, that has an offer which responds on sustainable tourism demands, new attractions or new resources that can be used in sustainable conditions etc.) or threats (such as environmental degrading by mass-tourism, which associates negative perceptions and can have a strong impact on the long-term sustainability of the products, firms or on that tourism destinations).

The information obtained by these studies will influence marketing strategies on each target-market and will guide the operational marketing step for the tourism firm.

The internal environmental analysis means a situational analysis of the overall resources of the firm that can also enable a business to identify its strengths and weaknesses in terms of environmental performance and sustainability.

This analysis includes the identification and evaluation of some specific factors action, such as (Middleton, Hawkins, 1998, pp. 93):

- The financial resources
- The personnel
- The operations management
- The corporate image and branding
- The location
- The buildings, the sites, the equipment and the production capacity.

The strengths refers on all advantages that are possessed by a certain tourism organization (in conditions which refers on sustainable development), which can lead to identifying and developing of some certain distinctive competences in terms of the products and services offered, target markets served, technologies and equipments used, location, skills and knowledge of employees, performing management etc.

The weaknesses analysis it means to identify and to describe factors that can limits the activity of the tourism organization (in one or more of the functional areas of the firm) and that might be detracting from a firm's image (such as the tourism products' quality, the inappropriate advertising messages, financial instability etc.).

Once the process of defining marketing objectives is done, next steps that must be effectuated in marketing strategic planning process refers on marketing strategy formulation and implementation.

The tourism firm's marketing strategy appoints the definite lines of its behavior, reporting to its marketing environment, reunites its market and its marketing-mix specific components and the marketing strategy formulation suppose corresponding

marketing strategies formulation for market, products and/or services, prices, distribution and marketing communication, human resources and physical evidence (Balaure, et al., 2005, pp. 422).

The essential component of marketing strategy is market strategy whose formulation is based on five elements that refers to: organization's reactions on physiognomy and marketing environment dynamics, the way of demand manifestation for organization services and/or products, the organization's behavior conform to marketing environment dynamics, the organization's attitude concerning the market structures and development alternatives that are choused (Balaure, et al., 2002, pp. 317-321).

Market strategy is very important because is concerning with reaching the market with the product. This step can be done by two ways (Firth, 2005, pp. 26-27):

- Taking the product to the market, which involves using a performing distribution system, to take the sustainable tourism product to the market (and may involves a business forming new cooperative relationships with travel intermediaries to distribute the product)
- Getting the market to the product, which involves marketers choosing appropriate tools from the promotional mix to reach potential tourist market with relevant images, messages and information about sustainable tourism product alternatives.

The marketing strategy implementation process concerns the identification and unfolding of all these activities that can allow to achieve the proposed marketing goals, or, in another way, all these activities that allow the organization to surpass the actual position and to get the proposed position, expressed in economic, financial and marketing terms, concordant to sustainable development principles.

This step is structured by reporting to marketing-mix component elements, the tourism firm taking in consideration activities that can refers to next referential elements:

- Products/services that are offered by the firm
- Prices of the offered products/services
- Products/services distribution
- Marketing communication
- Implied and used human resources
- Processes and physical evidence of the organization (location, equipments, activities, etc.).

As a matter of fact, the activities that are necessary for marketing strategy' implementation, preceded by proposed marketing objectives, and accompanied by the budget (expressed in technical, financial, human, informational and time terms), representing the marketing plan's content, whose components include marketing programs (tools that allow to plan and to fallow the implementation process for each category of activities included into marketing plan).

Through monitoring and evaluating marketing strategies, that are projected in sustainable development issues, it fallows the progress towards achieving these goals, the operations that can maximize the tourism organizations' ability to remain competitive on a global market, assuring, in the same time, the physical, social and cultural environment' integrity for the tourism destinations where these firms operates.

Control and evaluation of strategy implementation process and reevaluation of marketing strategy are the last steps of strategic planning process. There's role is to monitoring the proposed activities and getting necessary correction, when the environment evolution requires readapting of those activities.

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