



## Visitor Marketing

### Description

Visitor marketing is the promotion of attractions, products, services and/or destinations (e.g. a site or a region) to attract visitors. Visitor marketing includes 'de-marketing' used to discourage visitors from attractions, destinations and activities to avoid particular times such as the high season when facilities are crowded, and social marketing to change visitor behaviour. Visitor marketing can occur at international and national levels. It also is common at regional, district, area/local and site levels, and for products and services, individually or collectively.

### How and when the tool is used

Visitor marketing can be used to manage visitors as a tool that shapes demand for and use of a product, service or destination. Through careful promotion, visitor marketing can be useful for managing:

- the number of visitors who come to a destination;
- when and how visitors arrive;
- visitor expectations and satisfaction levels when they get there;
- visitor behaviour at the destination;
- how visitors share their experiences with others after their visit.

Visitor marketing, as a form of information-based management, is closely related to other information tools: e.g., [interpretation](#) ❄️, [signage](#) ❄️ and [visitor centres](#) ❄️.

There are a wide range of methods employed in visitor marketing. These are constantly changing, given new technologies and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of various options. Some of the more common methods of visitor marketing are:

- web pages, for national, regional, district, local and product-specific marketing;
- brochures, which are usually employed on two levels. Some brochures involve regional and area-based marketing and include a mix of information related to products, services and regional attractions. Other brochures are employed at the individual product levels or for packages of products;
- advertising, which can be directed at the national, regional, district, local and product-specific levels, and can make use of the full range of media;
- word of mouth, which is often the most effective form of visitor marketing, but is also within the influence of operators. That is, if visitors have a good experience, they will share a positive message, and vice versa.

Given that marketing entails a large cost for national and regional tourism organisations, local promotion groups and individual tourism operators, evaluation of visitor marketing activities is important. Evaluation generally aims to discover which marketing approaches successfully achieve the desired outcome (for instance, attracting the best visitors or promoting behaviour or attitude change) and which ones do not.

Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of visitor marketing strategies include:

- monitoring internet penetration rates and numbers of internet bookings made for a particular product or destination;
- informal checking by individual operators of the effectiveness of different marketing investments, for instance by asking visitors where they heard about the product or destination;
- formal collection of information from the visitor at the destination, for instance through visitor surveys;
- monitoring visitor satisfaction to measure how accurately their experience has matched expectations, using [visitor satisfaction surveys](#) ❄️.



## **Application**

Visitor marketing has developed from being the means to attract visitors to a product or destination, to being used strategically to more effectively manage natural environments. Applications of visitor marketing include:

- marketing directed towards a segmented target audience; that is, attracting certain sorts of visitors to particular products or destinations. Targeting may be according to visitor characteristics such as age, sex, income, levels of education, travel experience, fitness, country of origin, level of relevant interest, expertise or knowledge, or life cycle stage;
- social marketing, which could be used to change how people behave, or influence their attitudes towards a destination. Social marketing is increasingly being used in a number of management areas including environmental management. For instance, regional councils are using social marketing techniques to change people's behaviour around recycling and other environmentally responsible behaviours. Social marketing is beginning to be used in the management of natural areas for tourism to change visitors' attitudes to aspects of the natural environment and to encourage responsible behaviour;
- 'de-marketing' techniques, which are used to discourage the use of a product or destination by visitors in general or particular targeted groups. De-marketing is also used to discourage the development of certain types of products in an area that might attract less desired visitors or create undesirable impacts.

De-marketing is one tool that can be used for destination management, particularly when used alongside other marketing techniques. Used in this way, it can help to achieve a balance between attracting visitors and gathering revenue and ensuring environmental sustainability. De-marketing was introduced in the early 1970s, but did not gain a following in visitor marketing as a means for environmental management until much later.

More recently, de-marketing has been used in contexts where demand is high, for example at destinations that are 'over-used', or in the development or promotion of ecotourism. In these instances, de-marketing can be employed to limit visitor numbers or discourage use of products or destinations at particular times. Marketing strategies, including social marketing, are also used to divert visitors to other products or destinations more suited to their expectations, advise more appropriate visitation times, or provide information about more environmentally responsible behaviour at the destination.

## **Our evaluation**

Marketing, including de-marketing and social marketing techniques, can be used to help put management tools such as [recreational specialisation](#) and [crowding management](#) into practice. Recreational specialisation recognises that visitors can be distinguished by general to specialised interest and low to high involvement, and that each level of specialisation carries distinctive behaviours, orientations and expectations. Marketing and de-marketing techniques can be used to influence choices of places and experiences that match with visitors' level of specialisation. This application needs to be based on detailed information about the behaviour and attitudes of visitors and the visitor experiences that will satisfy them using a visitor satisfaction survey.

Market segmentation also helps manage visitors in natural environments. Market segmentation involves grouping visitors by particular characteristics, for example by socio-demographic features such as age or income, or by preference such as intended use of the destination. This allows the operator to better understand the expectations of particular visitor groups, to be able to market more directly and in ways that are more appropriate to each group, and to better match the destination and the visitor.

Marketing in general is an increasingly expensive activity, which means that over time visitor marketing will need to become more sophisticated and targeted. This will require careful monitoring of the effectiveness of different techniques so that operators can take best advantage of increasingly flexible media.