CHAPTER 14

Marketing communications

The advertising and promotion programme is the most visible activity of a tourism board and is certain to be received with mixed reviews by the community. Criticism is likely, and board members should develop thick skins.

Gee & Makens (1985, p. 29)

Aims

The aims of this chapter are to enhance understanding of:

- integrated marketing communications (IMC)
- the potential value of visitor relationship management (VRM).

Perspective

There is no shortage of ways in which a destination can be promoted, and in every destination community there will be a diverse range of opinions on the tactics that should be employed. Local tourism operators' views on promotional priorities will vary for a range of reasons, including: differing levels of professional experience in marketing and tourism, vested business interests in specific types of products and target markets, access to financial resources, and their position within local industry politics. To provide a structure for stakeholders, this chapter discusses the ways in which the DMO communicates the brand position in the marketplace, based on the five tenets of integrated marketing communications (IMC). Since a key concept underpinning IMC is developing profitable relationships with targeted customers, the discussion also focuses on the largely untapped potential for visitor relationship management (VRM) by DMOs.

Integrated marketing communications

Anyone who has worked within a DMO for any length of time will almost certainly have experienced the frustration of being surrounded by many different stakeholders offering conflicting advice. Criticism can emerge at any time and from many quarters, including the media, tourism operators, travel intermediaries, government officials and elected representatives, local residents, and even other DMOs. Occasionally, the feedback is made public, such as in the criticism by local government and tourism operators in Edinburgh aimed at Visit Britain for their 'ludicrous' non-promotion of the city's famous arts festivals (see Ferguson, 2003). Critics claimed that Visit Britain advertising focused on fringe festivals instead of major attractions such as the Edinburgh International Festival and Edinburgh Military Tattoo. However, the NTO argued that given that the city is always 'booked up' during major events, advertising funds were better directed elsewhere.

Clearly, dialogue is required with the business community and host population during marketing planning, and yet the DMO must be careful to avoid the trap of trying to please everyone. The emergent shift in thinking towards destinations as brands requires a management approach that focuses on developing relationships with customers rather than simply focusing on generating sales. One such approach is integrated marketing communication (IMC), which has emerged relatively recently in the marketing literature. The first IMC texts appeared in the early 1990s (see Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1993). A 2007 survey of the US Association of National Advertisers identified IMC as the highest-ranking issue for the next year (see www.ana.net). However, the topic has received little academic research attention to date in the destination marketing field, even

though the issue was raised three decades ago by Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield (1976, p. 182). IMC has been defined as:

> *… a process of managing the customer relationships that drive brand value. More specifically, it is a cross-functional process from creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them* (Duncan, 2002).

Inherent in this description are five important tenets that provide both opportunities and challenges for DMOs:

1. Profitable customer relationships
2. Enhancing stakeholder relationships
3. Cross-functional process
4. Stimulating purposeful dialogue with customers
5. Message synergy

Profitable customer relationships

One of the key goals in marketing is enhancing brand loyalty, which, as discussed in Chapter 10, is a critical component of consumer-based destination brand equity. The rationale for stimulating relationships with customers is that these will be more profitable over time than a series of one-off sales transactions, since the cost of reaching a continuous stream of new customers will outweigh the cost of keeping in touch with existing customers. The topics of destination loyalty, repeat visitation, and customer relationship management (CRM) have attracted relatively little research attention in the tourism literature.

The internet has impacted on the way firms interact with customers, with key issues being access, control, speed, globalisation, and automation (see Kincaid, 2003, pp. 58–59). Customers now have more access to information and therefore increased control of purchase decisions. The speed at which business happens has accelerated, and so customer expectations of how quickly transactions should take have changed. Globalisation has enabled more companies to do business outside their own country borders, enabling customers to shop around for the best deals. The people element has been removed in many transaction processes. The opportunities for, and challenges of, visitor relationship management (VRM) for DMOs are discussed in this section.

During 2006 there were strong calls from the government opposition in Bermuda for that country's NTO to move away from traditional advertising campaigns and invest more in CRM: 'We don't need to reach out to 90 million people on the eastern seaboard of the US, we need to get to them one by one' (www.travelindustryreview.com, 9/3/06). The STO for Victoria in Australia reported strong repeat visitation from some of the state's key markets (see Harris, Jago & King, 2005), such as New Zealand

(over 90% repeaters), Singapore (60%), and Japan (10%). Likewise, the STO for Queensland (2006) reported 93% of visitors from New Zealand had previously visited Australia.

VRM is an important area of research given the inherent advantages of repeat visitation and the limits to the extent that relationship marketing may be used by DMOs of destinations that host hundreds of thousands of visitors. Periodic destination marketing newsletter *Eclipse* devoted a special issue to CRM for destinations. *Eclipse* found only one NTO in 2003 that employed a specialist CRM senior executive.

Relationship marketing is the attempt to establish a long-term bond with the customer. This presents challenges for DMOs. Not the least of which is the difficulty in obtaining quality customer data from service providers over which they have no direct control. In 2002, for example, incoming BTA CEO Tom Wright announced a major customer relationship management strategy that would aim for 6 million active database records by 2006 (Marketing, 7/11/02).

In practice

In highlighting the limited degree of destination relationship marketing in practice, Fyall et al. (2003) reported two case studies. The first, Project Stockholm, is an example of an introductory attempt to engender more loyalty towards a destination, albeit without loyalty-building tools. The project is a cooperative initiative by the Stockholm RTO, Scandic Hotels, and SAS airlines, specifically targeting European weekend tourists. A benefit card was designed for the project, offering added value in the form of free local transport and discounts at shops and restaurants. The second was the Club Program developed to reward repeat visits to Barbados. The programme boasted 1700 members who had visited the island at least 25 times. Rewards have included luncheons hosted by the Barbados Tourism Authority and unofficial ambassador status. One of the key problems for DMOs highlighted by Fyall, Callod and Edwards (p. 654) was the expense of retaining single visitors in comparison to the predominant transactional marketing activities:

> *What thus appears sound in theory and operational in practice, particularly as a weapon to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace, is likely to remain in its implementation infancy for destinations for some time.*

Although the internet offers so many communication advantages, Research Snapshot 14.1 provides a rare insight into the extent to which RTOs are engaging in VRM. More research is required to assist destination marketers address the issue of how to initiate meaningful dialogue, at the right time, with the hundreds of thousands of potential repeat visitors, with whom they do not have direct contact.

Research snapshot 14.1 How do we target repeat visitors?

We are all spoilt by choice of available destinations, and so it is likely many places are substitutable. Therefore, successfully differentiating a destination at the time a travel decision is being made is arguably the greatest challenge faced by DMOs. Underpinned by the proposition that communicating with previous visitors will be a more efficient use of resources than traditional advertising, this paper reports an exploratory investigation into the extent to which regional tourism organisations (RTO) in Queensland, Australia, are encouraging repeat visitors from their largest market. Destination marketers face a unique set of challenges and impediments, relative to marketers of other products and services. The research highlights some of the issues that will inhibit VRM development by these RTOs for some time to come. A mixture of personal, paired, and group interviews were conducted with 17 management staff at 11 RTOs, focusing on two questions:

- To what extent is your organisation able to track repeat visitors?
- To what extent is your organisation attempting to keep in touch with visitors, to stimulate repeat visitation?

Key findings were:

- an inability to track repeat visitation
- little targeting of repeat visitation through communication with previous visitors
- the assumption that major accommodation operators were engaged in VRM
- acknowledgement of the need for a destination-level VRM system in the future.

While there was a general recognition of the potential for visitor relationship management (VRM), none of the RTOs had yet been able to develop a formal approach to stay in touch with previous visitors.

Source: Pike, S. (2007). Repeat visitors – An exploratory investigation of RTO responses. ***Journal of Travel & Tourism Research***, Spring, 1–13.

From a review of the CRM literature, it is suggested DMOs seeking to engage in relationship marketing should consider the following:

- **The selection of customers who offer maximum yield**. Selection criteria, which may prove problematic for a DMO due to data collection constraints, include frequency and volume of visits, spending patterns, and probability of future visitation.
- **Ensuring high quality service encounters**. This requires the marketing concept to extend to the entire destination. As with service standards, the DMO is reliant on the organisational cultures of the destination's many individual businesses. Initiatives include cooperative destination networks, visitor surveys, improving employee satisfaction, and a quality grading system such as Qualmark (see www.qualmark.co.nz). Almost 75% of tourism suppliers at New Zealand's 2004 TRENZ travel exchange were Qualmark accredited (*Inside Tourism*, IT490, 18/3/04).

- **Providing added value to selected customers**. The DMO must stimulate cooperative efforts to monitor and provide sources of value. For example, during off-season periods, communication could be made with previous domestic visitors offering bundled packages, at an advertising cost saving to the destination and a price saving to the traveller.
- **Developing a philosophy of nurturing long-term mutually beneficial relationships**. Clearly, however, the benefits of the relationship for the destination must outweigh the costs.

Enhancing stakeholder relationships/Cross-functional process

The responsibilities of destination brand management should not rest solely with the DMO. One of the greatest marketing challenges faced by DMOs, certainly in the implementation of IMC, is stimulating a coordinated approach among all those stakeholders who have a vested interest in, and will come into contact with, the target visitors. Ideally, what is required is an understanding by all stakeholders of what the brand identity is, what the brand image is, and what the brand positioning strategy is. The more that stakeholders have an understanding of the rational behind the brand strategy, the more effectively they will be able to integrate their own marketing and customer interactions. Clearly, it is too much to expect all stakeholders to do so, and yet in theory the approach represents a powerful opportunity to enhance the destination brand.

There are essentially three main reasons for DMOs coordinating a *cooperate to compete* approach among tourism operators. The first has been driven out of necessity to stretch the promotional budget. DMOs and tourism operators have recognised the value in pooling limited financial resources to create a bigger bang in the market place. The second major driver in developing a cooperative destination marketing approach has been a greater awareness that the traveller's experience of a destination can be marred by one bad service encounter. So, it makes little long-term sense for a small group of large visitor attractions to work on marketing and quality issues independently, if the mass of remaining small businesses become the weak link in the visitor's destination experience by failing to deliver. Thirdly, it has only been relatively recently that the concept of brand synergy has become the third key rationale for a destination's cooperative marketing approach.

In practice

Northern Tasmania Development, the RTO for Launceston and Northern Tasmania in Australia, provides an impressive online prospectus for tourism businesses (see http://www.northerntasmania.org.au). The 2007/08 prospectus set out the entire year's marketing programme, with indications of where tourism businesses could buy into six major campaigns: Big Tour campaign, Short Tour campaign, Short Breaks

campaign, VFR campaign, What's On in Tasmania, and Flinders Island campaign. The prospectus includes copies of the television commercials as well as brochure specifications.

Purposeful dialogue

Anholt (2002, p. 53) likened marketing to chatting someone up in a crowded bar:

> *In effect, you walk up to somebody you have never met, and have a few seconds in which to convince them you are worth getting to know better, and to win the chance of a longer conversation. Often a joke will do the trick, but if the bar is in Finland or Iraq (unlikely), where making strangers laugh is both difficult and unwelcome, a different opening gambit might be preferable. Either way, there are few countries and few people who will fall in love with a stranger who kicks off the conversation with a long list of his natural advantages, impressive family tree and key historical achievement.*

All marcom should be about purposeful dialogue with the target market. Marcom is the marketing element over which the DMO is able to exert the most control, and is therefore the focus of DMO activities. The purpose of marcom should be to enhance brand associations and market position, with the communication objective being to inform, persuade, or remind consumers about the destination. DMOs use promotion to either pull consumers to the destination or push them through travel intermediaries. In the competitive markets in which DMOs operate, innovative promotional ideas can very quickly be adopted by rival destinations, and so there tends to be a commonality of DMO activity.

Message synergy

The WTO (1999a) estimated that the breakdown of promotional budgets for NTOs was: advertising (47.1%), public relations (11.5%), promotional activities (28.9%), public information (3.7%), research (3.5%), and 'other' (5.2%). More recently, a survey of 10 NTOs by Dore and Crouch (2003) also found that consumer advertising (35%) represented the largest item in the promotional budget. This was followed by personal selling to the trade (23%), publicity and public relations (17%), trade advertising (12%), direct marketing (7%), sales promotion partnerships (5%), and personal selling to consumers (1%). IMC does not use any different marcom (marketing communication) tools. Ideally, the five key promotional tools of advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotions, and personal selling should be integrated to provide a consistency of message.

Advertising

Advertising is paid non-personal promotion of ideas or products by an identifiable sponsor (Kotler et al., 1998). The role of advertising is to stimulate the desired images of the brand in the mind of the consumer in such a way that leads to action. There are four generally accepted stages in the design and implementation of any advertising campaign:

1. Setting the objectives, which include those relating to sales targets and communication purpose.
2. Budget allocation decisions, for which methods include the affordable approach, % of sales, competitive parity, and objective and task.
3. Message decisions, including both the content of the messages and the type of medium
4. Campaign evaluation, including the communication impact and resultant sales.

Of these, it is arguably the message decisions that are most problematic for DMOs. Ward and Gold (1994) suggested that many destination advertising efforts lacked professionalism. In particular they pointed to a tendency towards wordiness in advertisements, which is better suited to direct mail communications, as well as a lack of identification of a USP. These criticisms reflect one of the themes of this text, which is the difficulty in promoting multi-attributed places to a dynamic and multidimensional marketplace. The purpose of all DMO advertising should be to enhance consumer-based brand equity. The segmentation and positioning strategy should therefore guide all message decisions. Ideally, advertising should be targeted and have a clear focus and point of differentiation. However, politics and substitutability combine to constrain the marketers of destinations. Morgan (2000, p. 345) cited this comment from an interview with the editor of *Advertising Age*:

> *When you look at the ads … you can see transcripts of the arguments at the tourist boards … the membership of which all wanted their own interests served … you can see the destruction of the advertising message as a result of the politics.*

In practice

An example of a DMO viral campaign is that of Tourism Queensland in 2007, which was started by a government press release by the Minister of Tourism. The consumer receives an email that has been provided by a friend who has seen the campaign website (www.whereelse.com.au). The friend is invited to enter a competition by clicking on a link embedded in the email. When entering

the competition the consumer is asked to subscribe the STO's e-newsletter, and to provide the email addresses of five friends. Each email address elicited gives the participant an additional entry in the holiday draw.

Brochures

The first destination travel guides were printed in France in 1552 (Sigaux, 1966). Since the establishment of the first DMOs, brochures have been a common form of destination advertising. Jeffries (2001, p. 72) suggested this may have been as much to do with providing tangible evidence to the local tourism industry of 'fair' exposure:

> *It may be the projection of a political and administrative entity and only coincidentally meaningful from the consumers' point of view, offering too much information in some respects and not enough in others.*

In the past, the production and distribution of the annual destination brochure has been the most important and expensive item in the promotional budget of many RTOs (Pritchard & Morgan, 1995). Pritchard and Morgan cited research by the ETB that estimated that only 5% of domestic trips in the UK used a travel agent. Without the influence of such intermediaries the role of the brochure has traditionally been important.

A key decision in the design of a destination brochure is its purpose, of which there are two main categories. The first role is to attract visitors to the destination. The design focus is on developing the image of the destination, and the brochure usually has the style and quality of a magazine, often with no advertising content. Distribution is external to the destination since brochures are expensive to produce, and will often be the primary sales aids used to service travel exhibitions and direct consumer enquiries. The second role is a 'visitors guide' designed as a directory of facilities and attractions to aid trip planning. This provides an opportunity for local advertisers to pick up a share of business from travellers at the destination. Distribution may take place both externally, such as in ticket wallets, and locally through the VIC and accommodation outlets. Often, for smaller RTOs the purpose will be to achieve both functions with one brochure due to a lack of funds and reliance on advertising revenue.

In practice

Visitor guides that are reliant on advertising are often controlled by private sector interests, saving the RTO time and money. However, in other cases ownership by the RTO can raise valuable promotional funds. For example, we used this approach at Tourism Rotorua

during the 1990s to raise over $100,000 annually to fund a television advertising campaign. The visitors guide then became the official destination brochure, used to service campaign responses, which made it easier for local operators to prioritise the multitude of advertising opportunities presented to them. The initiative also enabled the RTO to demonstrate to council funders the direct financial contribution of the private sector towards destination marketing. As was discussed in Chapter 2, generating such financial contributions is otherwise problematic, particularly for generic destination image advertising. This was not without political ramifications however, as one of the private sector destination guides went out of business as a result. The guide was produced by an elected local government official, who sat on the committee to which we reported.

There has been little published research about the role and effectiveness of brochures in traveller decision-making. Clearly more research is required; particularly given that this traditional form of information dissemination has been under threat since the arrival of the internet in 1996. A survey by Wicks and Shuett (1991) of tourism brochure producers in the USA, which included CVBs, found the majority reported that the sales aid was produced without any specific target market in mind. Likewise, Alford (1998) cited research commissioned by the English Tourist Board, which found that consumers were most likely to be influenced by the type of holiday or activity, whereas RTBs were promoting regions or towns. RTBs generally still produced the regional brochure as if trying to be all things to all people. Pritchard and Morgan's (1995) content analysis of destination image promotion brochures used by local authorities in Wales identified the following key features:

- An eye-catching image on the front cover designed to attract attention.
- A single graphic device on the front cover, such as a logo or symbol, intended to reinforce a campaign theme.
- Identifying symbols within the brochure to reinforce the presence of unique destination features.
- Multidimensional images to reflect the multi-attributed nature of the destination. The study identified 2000 images in 28 brochures, of which 70% were of scenery.
- An average 54%–46% ratio of images versus information.

Pritchard and Morgan's (1995) main criticisms of the Welsh brochures included a general lack of identifying a distinctively Welsh identity and a lack of images of people. They also found that most destinations were using similar images. An interesting example of this recently occurred in Australia. Morley and Stolz (2003, p. 3) reported the embarrassment of Gold Coast Tourism Bureau officials after the discovery that the destination had been inadvertently using a Sunshine Coast beach scene in 100,000 copies of the Gold Coast's 2003 *Holiday Guide*. In reference to the ensuing

national television coverage of the faux pas, the Sunshine Coast's RTO chairman responded: 'We appreciate all the publicity we can get.'

In practice

Davidson and Rogers (2006, p. 119) cited the innovative practice of the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau (www.seaglasgow.com) which prints visitor guides on a daily basis, with a printed 'best before' date: 'The premise for doing so is that DMOs own nothing but information: if they provide out-of-date information via their brochures, this compromises their services.' Similarly, during 2007, Northern Tasmania Development, in Australia, introduced customised downloadable brochures from their website (see www.northerntasmania.info).

Websites

According to a Travel Industry Association of America study, there were around 64 million American online travel planners using the internet in 2002 (TIA, press release, 12/12/02). This represented a dramatic increase over 1997, when an estimated 12 million Americans were planning and researching travel options online. 42% of TIA respondents indicated they did all or most of their travel planning online, up from 29% who did so in 2001.

Watson (2006) cited research from Carleton University in Canada, which estimated that internet users only take one-twentieth of a second to decide if they like the look of a website. Speaking at the 2006 British Travel Fair, E-consultancy training director Craig Hanna suggested that the majority of travel sites were 'atrocious' and lose business because they are difficult to navigate (www.travelmole.com, 6/3/06). Hanna cited research showing 67% of users click off pages because they encountered difficulties. Research Snapshot 14.3 provides some insights into what travel consumers want online.

Research snapshot 14.3 Destination websites – learning what consumers want

During 2005, USA-based Strategic Marketing & Research Inc completed an investigation of consumers' internet travel planning, and in doing so evaluated a number of state and regional DMO websites. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were used, including observation of web usage. Key results included:

- 61% of travellers 'always or often' used the internet in travel planning
- relatively few travellers visited destination sites
- most popular sites used were accommodation brands and travel brands such as Travelocity and Expedia

The research concluded that DMOs had not established a role for their websites. DMO sites were not regarded by travellers as being either the official source or sufficiently comprehensive. Recommended success factors for destination sites included:

- uncluttered homepage, as presented by Massachusetts
- clear directions to users, as provided by Missouri
- easy to navigate, as developed by Texas
- divided by types of trips rather than by geography, as achieved by Arizona
- place important information on the left-hand side, as the right-hand side and bottom are frequently overlooked
- suggested itineraries, as provided by Connecticut
- provide links to accommodation and attractions.

Source: Miller, D. (2005). Destination websites – Learning what consumers want. Presentation at the Travel & Tourism Research Association Conference, New Orleans.

In spite of the increasing access to information technologies (IT), such as the internet, DMOs often struggle to keep up with the rapid advances in IT and their implications for marketing. In summarising a workshop coordinated by the National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce for tourism and IT leaders to address this challenge, Gretzel et al. (2000, p. 154) argued that future success of DMOs was related to a change in approach rather than technology itself. That is, DMOs must learn to proactively adapt to change to enhance organisational viability:

> *Most of the problems organisations face today when designing and implementing online strategies stem from trying to fit everything into existing structures and models. It is suggested that DMOs need to redefine their nature of business and the underlying models and processes . . . Since the Web is ever-evolving and new challenges occur 'at the speed of thought', these changes should be directed toward increasing the organisational flexibility and openness to change.*

The workshop developed a number of principles for the development of web strategies by DMOs:

- A combination of online and offline advertising is most effective in utilising the potential of the internet.
- A website should not be viewed as a standalone advertising tool.
- Banners and cross-advertising should be used to control web traffic.
- The most important points of entry for users searching for tourism information are portals.
- A consistent advertising message across different media creates synergy between online and offline strategies.
- Internet marketing strategies should be based on personalisation, experience, involvement, and permission.

In practice

In 2007, Tourism Australia relaunched its Australia.com website as part of a strategy that places digital at the heart of the DMO's global push (see Livesly, 2007). The new site, which took over a year to develop, has been designed as a central gateway for travellers. The joint initiative between the NTO and eight STOs is the first of its kind where visitors are able to access information from STOs. An overlay map of Australia has been added to each STO site, so that visitors can move backwards and forwards between NTO and STO sites with ease. Due to the level of negotiation required to get the NTO and STOs working together, the site designer admitted it was 'the project nobody thought would happen'.

A key advantage of the internet for DMOs is the ability to develop sites specifically to cater for different segments. This partly overcomes the problem in destination branding of designing and communicating one destination brand for all markets. Niche advertising in traditional media can direct the target to the branded site. Examples include:

- The Finland Tourist Board's family website (see www.finland-family.com/eng/).
- Tourism Victoria's gay and lesbian site (see www.visitmelbourne.com/gaytravel).
- Tourism Australia's working holiday site (see www.work.australia.com).
- Visit Scotland's ancestral tourism site (see www.ancestralscotlant.com).

The domain name

It could be argued that online branding essentially begins with domain names, which have become a digital market akin to real estate. The proliferation of domain name registrations has been such that by 2000 all three-letter combinations, as well as 98% of English words, had already been registered (Keller, 2003). Intuitively, acquisition of the destination domain name, such as NewZealand.com, appears a wise move. However, Tourism New Zealand's purchase of the domain for NZ$1 million caused a political stir during 2003. Government opposition tourism spokeswoman Pansy Wong, a former director of the NTO, labelled the purchase rash, embarrassing, and made without a prior cost-benefit feasibility study. TNZ CEO George Hickton responded that the purchase was timely given the prediction by www.wordlingo.com that domain names would increase in value tenfold during the next decade. Hickton claimed that domain names were the most logical starting point for potential travellers seeking information about a destination, pointing to a claim by www.lee-online.com that 65% of all users type the URL into their browser, either by guesswork or memory. Minister of Tourism Mark Burton argued the move

Table 14.1 Non-travel-related destination domains

www.canada.com	**Canwest Global Communications Corporation**
www.brazil.com	Business portal
www.germany.com	Parked site
www.nigeria.com	Community and business portal
www.zimbabwe.com	News site
www.ireland.com	The Irish Times

was a 'sound investment' as a portal for tourism and business interests, and suggested the South African government offered $US10 million for SouthAfrica.com while Korea.com sold for US$5 million (*Inside Tourism*, IT448, p.1).

In this regard, one regional city in New Zealand was forced to pay NZ$100,000 to a porn site for the city's domain name. Other examples of destination domain names, belonging to a DMO or a private sector travel company, include: Australia.com, France.com, Italy.com, Fiji.com, and Scotland.com. However, as shown in Table 14.1 some major destination domains remain owned by non-tourism interests at the time of writing. Since 2004 a number of sites that were business portals are now travel related. These include, for example, www.usa.com, www.japan.com, www.brazil.com and www.wales.com.

Many consumers use major search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and MSN in the early stages of an online information search, and then click through the top listed search results. It has been suggested that almost 75% of online travel purchases begin with a search using a search engine (see Jarvis, 2006). Not everyone gets their online search right. Picture the surprise of a young British couple who boarded a flight for Sydney, as shown on their online air tickets, only to eventually arrive at the wrong destination (Montgomery, 2002). The couple thought they had purchased tickets to their dream destination, Sydney in Australia, but ended up in Sydney, Canada, 'a sleepy one-horse town in Nova Scotia with a population of 26,000'. Wade (2006) proposed five ways to optimise a website's search ranking:

1. **Target market analysis** A website's traffic patterns can be studied using software such as Webtrends, Urchin, Index Tools, or Clicktracks. Analysis of the most popular pages, which search engines deliver traffic, how long visitors stay on pages, and so forth can improve understanding of what visitors are looking for.
2. **Keyword research** Identify the keywords and phrases being used by the target audience. Again, software such as Alexa, Google, and Wordtracker(R) is available to analyse usage patterns of each term. The goal is to find terms that are frequently searched, but have low competition from competing sites.

3. **High-quality content with optimised writing** Write for the reader first, then rewrite by including the keywords. Incorporate keywords in the title, subheadings, as well as content, while keeping the text readable.
4. **Link building campaigns** Since search engines use links to determine site relevance, develop links with popular sites.
5. **Fresh content via news releases, articles and blogs** A site's ranking improves if content is freshened. News releases to reputable wire services will see distribution of the story to major search engine news systems. Also, hyperlinking keywords will increase the number of links to the site and therefore potentially higher search placement.

Yahoo! Search Marketing Regional Managing Director Craig Wax (2006) suggested that since keywords are the lifeblood of a search campaign, select 50 or more, based on the three stages of a buying cycle: research, shop, buy. Yahoo's keyword selector tool provides monthly data on popular keywords (see http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/).

Note: The International Federation for IT and Travel & Tourism (IFITT) promotes international discussion about information technologies in the tourism sector (www.ifitt.org). IFITT introduced the first scientific journal in this field (*Journal of Information Technology & Tourism*) and coordinates the annual ENTER academic conference (for reviews of the topics contained in the conference proceedings see Pike 2005, 2007, 2007).

Key points

1. Integrated marketing communication (IMC)

A market orientation is an outward-inward market-organisation approach, dictating marketing decisions that are concerned with designing products to meet the unmet needs of target consumers. However, most destination marketing has been limited to an inward-outward approach. DMOs are constrained by having no control over product development and must therefore focus on finding markets for existing products. IMC represents a relatively new approach to marketing. Key tenets of IMC are the development of profitable customer relationships, a cross-functional process, purposeful dialogue with customers, effective relationships with stakeholders, and synergy of messages. IMC represents the way forward for DMOs confronted by significant changes in the destination marketing paradigm.

2. The potential value of VRM

The purpose of all marcom is to enhance consumer-based brand equity. However, there has been relatively little research published in the tourism literature dealing with the potential of visitor relationship management (VRM). VRM represents an opportunity to gain marcom efficiencies by staying in contact with previous visitors who have the propensity for repeat visits. The core challenge inhibiting VRM adoption by most DMOs is that the destination marketer rarely comes into contact with actual visitors. Most visitor records are held by local accommodation houses.

Review questions

- In your own words, summarise the concept of IMC. What are the key challenges faced by DMOs in implementing IMC?
- What are the potential benefits for your DMO to engage in VRM? What practical steps could your RTO undertake to engage in VRM?