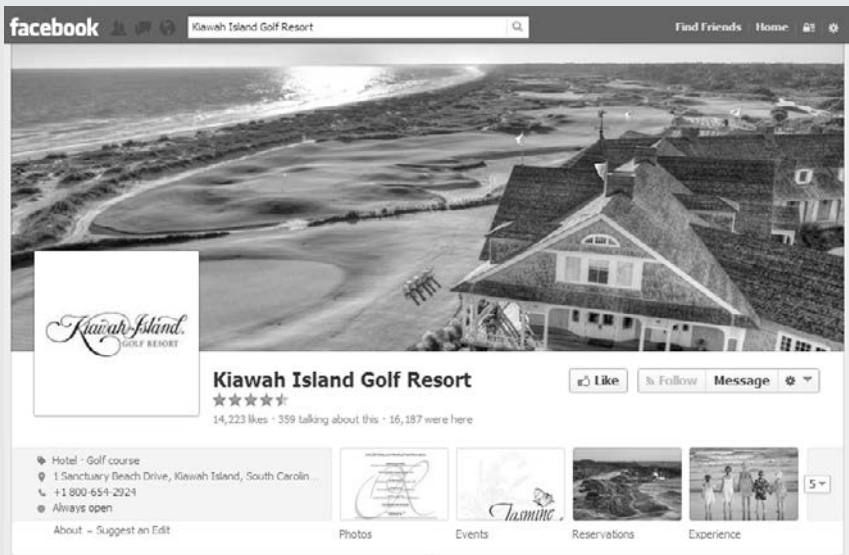


7 The Marketing of Golf Tourism: Marketing Communications

Spotlight: Embracing Social Media: Kiawah Island Golf Resort



Kiawah Island's Facebook Page

Located just south of Charleston, South Carolina, Kiawah Island Golf Resort is rated as one of the country's top golf resorts by *Golf Magazine* and *Travel + Leisure Golf*. It includes The Sanctuary – an AAA Five Diamond and Mobil Five Star-rated, 255-room hotel and spa – and 600 private villas and luxury homes. The resort has five championship golf courses, including The Ocean Course where the 1991 Ryder Cup, the 2007 Senior PGA and 2012 PGA championships were all hosted.

Social media has always played an important role in the marketing mix for Kiawah. In 2008 for example, Kiawah Island Golf Resort and Kiawah Development Partners (KDP) - the island's master developer and real estate company - launched a new interactive website. *KiawahMoments.com* was created by Dana Communications, the resort's agency of record.

This unique site brought Kiawah Island into the realm of social web media by inviting resort guests, property owners and residents to share their Kiawah Island experiences online. Dana's challenge was to meet diverse marketing goals—from attracting leisure guests to supporting luxury real estate sales—with a campaign that seamlessly promotes one destination. Dana developed KiawahMoments.com to integrate a social marketing forum into the campaign and reach a wide audience of Kiawah's target consumers.

KiawahMoments.com was designed to provide a place to capture and post real-life special moments for others to see and enjoy. Both the resort and the real estate company KDP used a “Capture Your Kiawah Moment” advertising theme to portray memorable experiences, tell a story and prompt readers to visit KiawahMoments.com for the rest of the story. The engaging, interactive site invited users to upload and share their experiences via videos, photos and blogs. The campaign won a 2008 Magellan Award from Travel Weekly, which honours best practices in travel. Capture Your Kiawah Moment was a Gold Award Winner in the Destinations–Advertising/Marketing Campaign category.

Since that first initiative, Kiawah's social media efforts have gone from strength to strength. The Resort is active on both Twitter (www.twitter.com/kiawahresort) and Facebook. Michael Vegis, Public Relations Director sees social media as a key part of public relations. “We use social media to reach influencers – we send all our golf-related press releases for example to the top golf bloggers.” Vegis also looks after the Facebook site, where visitors can keep up to speed with events on the island, download promotional literature, look at restaurant menus, and check out special promotional offers. But he relies on the restaurants on the island to make their own regular contributions: “Between a new mobile website, the blogs and our Facebook and Twitter efforts, we have our hands full” he said, “so we need our partners to make regular postings.”

Terri Hall, Web Manager at Kiawah Island Resort is responsible for the Twitter account. “One thing we have found is that people love to tweet about food – so when one of our chefs posts the catch of the day – we get a terrific response.” Golfers also like to tweet about their round on the famous Ocean Course. “We have a webcam on the 18th green, and we find golfers love to send messages to their friends or followers saying ‘look at me – I am just approaching the 18th green at the Ocean Course on Kiawah Island.’ This is all great publicity for us.” By the end of 2013, the resort had about 3,000 followers on Twitter and about 14,000 likes on the main Facebook page. “We use an internet service to monitor our social mentions and we can definitely say it is worth it” said Vegis. “At the end of the day, we are trying to drive people to our website to make a booking – that is the main goal of everything we do here.”

Sources: Interview with Mike Vegis and Terri Hall, 16 October, 2013.

Introduction

Effective communication with target customers is carried out by a variety of methods, referred to as ‘marketing communications’, and the Spotlight above highlighted the growing importance of social media for golf destinations. In many people’s perception, marketing is promotion, for promotion is the highly visible, public face of marketing. However, promotion is only one element of the marketing mix, its role being to convince potential customers of the benefits of purchasing or using the products and services of a particular organization. Promotions’ decisions will be determined by the overall marketing plan, as illustrated in Figure 7.1. Marketing objectives are derived from the strategic tools of targeting and positioning. The marketing mix is then used to achieve these objectives, and promotions are just one part of this marketing mix.



Figure 7.1: The role of promotions in the marketing strategy

The blend of promotional elements outlined in Table 7.1 is known as the promotional mix, and promotional management involves coordinating all the elements, setting objectives and budgets, designing programmes, evaluating performance, and taking corrective action. Promotion can be a short-term activity, but considered at a strategic level it is a mid- and long-term investment aimed at building up a consistent and credible corporate or destination identity. Promotion, when used effectively, builds and creates an identity for the product or the organization. Brochures, websites, advertisements, in-store merchandising, sales promotions, and so on, create the identity of the company in the mind of the consumer, and all aspects of the promotional effort should therefore project the same image to the consumer.

Table 7.1: The promotional mix used in tourism

Promotional tool	Tourism application
Advertising	Television, newspapers, magazines, billboards, Internet, brochures, guidebooks
Sales promotion	Short-term incentives to induce purchase. Aimed at salespeople, distributors such as travel agents, and consumers. Can be joint promotions. Include merchandising and familiarization trips.
Public relations	All non-paid media exposure appearing as editorial coverage. Includes sponsorship of events and causes.
Personal selling	Meetings and workshops for intermediaries; telephone contact and travel agents for consumers
Word of mouth	Promotion by previous consumers to their social and professional contacts. Often perceived by consumers to be the most credible form of promotion.
Direct marketing	Direct mail, telemarketing, and travel exhibitions
Internet marketing	Direct e-mail marketing, Internet advertising, customer service, and selling and market research

Perhaps one of the most important advances in marketing in recent decades has been the rise of integrated marketing communications (IMC): the unification of all marketing communications tools, as well as corporate and brand messages, so they send a consistent, persuasive message to target audiences. This approach recognizes that advertising can no longer be crafted and executed in isolation from other promotional mix elements. As tourism markets and the media have grown more complex and fragmented, consumers find themselves in an ever more confusing marketing environment. Tourism marketers must address this situation by conveying a consistent, unified message in all of their promotional activities. An IMC campaign includes traditional marketing communication tools, such as advertising or sales promotion, but recognizes that other areas of the marketing mix like the Internet are also used in communications. Planning and managing these elements so they work together helps to build a consistent brand or company image.

One final factor to consider in the promotional strategy will be the position of the organization in the distribution channel. For example, does a retailer (i.e. the travel agent) carry out its own promotion for the travel product, or does the producer (i.e. the tour operator or destination) have to promote the product in order to bring the public into the travel agency to buy it? This is known as the choice between push and pull promotional strategies. A push strategy calls for using the sales force and trade promotion to push the product through channels; the producer promotes the product to wholesalers, the wholesalers promote to retailers, and the retailers to consumers. In contrast, a pull strategy calls for spending a large amount on advertising and consumer promotion to build up consumer demand; if successful, consumers will ask their retailers for the product, the retailers will ask the wholesalers, and the wholesalers will ask the producers.