

On-Line Tourism Destination Marketing: Case Study Of Canadian Atlantic Provinces

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Tourism destinations are faced with increased and intense competition in marketing and would use all means to promote and attract tourists to their sites. The tourists' desire for pleasing experiences should compel tourist businesses to consider effective means of destination marketing. Many tourists are turning to the internet as a source for travel and tourism information from attractions to visit to accommodation to patronize. Advertising, brochures, web pages are among various ways of promoting the destination however potential travelers are relying on destination reviews by other travelers who have visited the destination. The measurement of this factor is often overlooked but is an essential factor in marketing strategies to effectively respond to positive or negative experiences of the destination image. Hence in order for them to succeed, they must have a sound online marketing and promote themselves in a unique way all in the effort of attracting tourists. This study investigates the extent to which four provinces in Atlantic Canada, namely, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia are marketing themselves on the internet to attract both domestic and international tourists and thus reaching out to the global market. The paper using a case study approach, identifies the factors in successful destination marketing and also explores the role and impact of traveler reviews to the four destinations using trip advisor as a virtual community and one of the most popular and reliable source of reviews.

Key words: attractions, Canada, destination, marketing, tourism

Introduction

The need to market a destination has been well-established as one of the essential management components required to ensure a competitive tourism destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Destination marketing has traditionally focused on image creation and promotion aimed at achieving growth in domestic and international visitation (Cox & Wray, 2011). Recent research shows that destination marketing should adopt a sustainable approach where marketing is integrated with sustainable destination management and development objectives to ensure the needs of both visitors and residents are met in regional communities (Cox & Wray, 2011; Buhalis, 2000). Web-based marketing has emerged as a vital, if not dominant, medium for tourism marketing. Indeed, the effective use of Web-based

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marketing activities is pivotal not only for marketing and promoting destinations but also for creating a competitive advantage for them (Buhalis, 2000). The key to successful online destination marketing efforts depends primarily upon the integrative application of destination information provision, communication mechanisms, e-commerce functions, and relationship building (Cobos et al., 2009; Wang & Russo, 2007).

On-line information users are typically younger and better educated than off-line information seekers (Bonn, Furr, & Susskind, 1999; Jang, 2004; Miller & Henthorne, 2006; Morrison, Jing, O'Leary, & Cai, 2001). World tourism officials have come to recognize the significance of the Internet in reaching and influencing the travel-conscious consumer (Miller & Henthorne, 2006; Douglas & Mills, 2004; Organization of American States, 1998; World Tourism Organization, 2003). Early on, Weber and Roehl (1999) predicted that the tourism industry would be one of the top product/service categories to be most influenced by the emergence of the web. For travel information, consumers have become more dependent on the web as an information resource and are turning to it in place of more traditional forms of advertising media, e.g., television and magazines (Jeong & Choi, 2004). A study conducted by Trip Advisor in 2007 revealed that (96.4%) of the respondents use the Internet as an information source for planning pleasure trips. Their most frequent travel planning-related online activities are: looking at other consumers' comments/materials (90%), printing out maps/directions (82.7%), reading travel-related blogs (64.2%), requesting printed materials/brochures (59.9%), and printing out coupons (40.7%).

A majority of respondents (92.3%) use virtual communities (Trip Advisor, Virtual Tourist, Lonely Planet, etc.) to find other travelers' online reviews. Many also use travel guidebook sites (Frommers, Conde Nast, etc.) (60.6%), online travel agency/auction sites (Expedia, Orbitz, Priceline, etc.) (58.1%), search engines or portals (Google, Yahoo, AOL, etc.) (51.5%), local destination websites (44.6%), state tourism web sites (29.7%), and company sites (27.9%). Meta-travel search engines (Sidestep, Mobissimo, Kayak, etc.) were only reported as used by 13.4% of the respondents. Other web sites respondents listed were specific travel-related review sites (e.g. *cruisecritic.com*), general review sites (*epinions.com*), blogs, newspaper/magazine sites, and travel expert sites (e.g. Rick Steves). Travel review readers also stated that other travelers' online reviews have a variety of impacts on their travel planning. Almost all of the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that other travelers' reviews influenced them in the following ways: learning about a travel destination, product or service (94.6%), evaluating alternatives (91.9%), avoiding places or services they would not enjoy (91.8%), and providing them with ideas. This paper examines the destination features of the four Canadian Atlantic Provinces (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia).

It also analyses the relationship and impact of those features and image induced by travelers reviews of the four destinations in Atlantic Canada. Finally, the paper seeks to identify the impact of on-line tourist information sources in promoting destination marketing.

Factors For Successful Destination Marketing

The success of a tourism destination in its approach to destination management can be influenced by a wide range of factors. As a dynamic and complex industry, destination managers need to be continually monitoring, reviewing and evaluating

tourism performance and management strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism in the destination. For instance, first, most of the tourist behavior models incorporated the search of external information as an important component (Bettman, 1979; Engel, Kollat et al., 1978; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Schmoll, 1977; Um and Crompton, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). Second, some studies have examined the influence of information sources on tourists' preferences and intentions (Mayo, 1973; Milman and Pizam, 1995). Third, other studies have centered on the relationship between information sources, destination selection and travel decisions (Baloglu, 2000; Bieger and Laesser, 2004; Capella and Greco, 1987; Chen and Gursoy, 2000; Eagles, 2000; Getz and Sailor, 1993; Gitelson and Crompton, 1983; Goossens, 1994; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Santos, 1998; Schmoll, 1977; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Um and Crompton, 1990; Wicks and Schuett, 1991, 1993; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Woodside et al., 2000; Woodside and Dubelaar, 2002). Finally, another important factor is image. Image plays an important role for destination marketers so as to differentiate their destination in this highly competitive market (Molina et al., 2010; Yilmaz et al., 2009). A well-differentiated and consistent image also is a key component to the success of modern-day branding (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Miller & Henthorne, 2008). Although the branding concept has not been widely discussed or applied in a tourism context to date, notable exceptions do exist. Finally, it is critical that the product be perceived as unique in a manner important to the consumer. The Unique Selling Point approach seeks to emphasize unique product attributes in a manner that is understandable, approachable, and accessible to the potential purchaser (Miller & Henthorne, 2008).

Tourism In Canada

Canada is a country with 10 Provinces and 3 Territories and is considered among the top destinations to go. Tourism is an important driver of economic activity in all regions of Canada. Tourism contributes as much to our country's wealth as agriculture, fisheries and forestry combined. In 2008, tourism activity generated over \$74 billion in revenues, represented 2% of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) and directly employed over 660,000 Canadians. The Canadian Tourism Commission developed a regional hub approach in 2011 to achieve greater consistency and effectiveness in marketing while remaining responsive to local market needs and opportunities. By taking a global approach to executional strategy and communications planning, the CTC strives to create a universal Canada travel brand, reflect the business practices for multinational sales and marketing and maximize available funding for important program activities.

The CTC focuses on those markets and consumer segments where there is the highest potential for return on investment, promoting Canada's tourism brand in the emerging and transition markets of Brazil, China, India, Japan, Mexico and South Korea, as well as the core markets of France, Germany, Australia, United Kingdom and the United States. This plan focuses on the need for Canada to stimulate international visitation. Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic shift in the profile of travellers. Currently, 80% of tourism revenue comes from domestic travellers, an increase from 65% in 2000. Relying on more than 80% of revenue from the domestic market reduces the large opportunity to generate international revenues as Canada's tourism industry becomes increasingly reliant on supporting regional and domestic tourism experiences at the expense of those experiences demanded by high

yield international travellers. This will over time reduce Canada's competitive set in global markets (CTC, 2012). Traveler's choice of 2011 by trip advisor highlighted the Top 25 destinations in Canada. Of the destinations listed, Halifax, Nova Scotia was number 9, Charlottetown, PEI was number 13 and St. John's Newfoundland was number 17. Many travelers often have to consider factors such as the weather, travel costs, attractions on offer and the overall marketing experience on the web to enable them consider travelling to a particular place. More internet users are heavily relying on the reviews section on various sites to decide whether or not to visit a particular location and so destination marketers cannot ignore or overlook this factor.

Study Areas

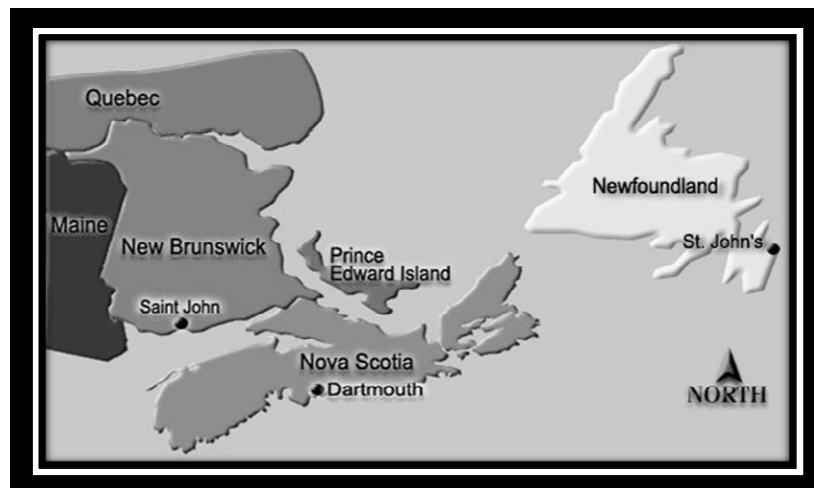


Figure 1: Map showing the 4 Atlantic Provinces
Source:www.listingsca.com. Retrieved on 4th September 2012

Newfoundland

Newfoundland and Labrador is located on the eastern edge of North America. With the North Atlantic Ocean at our doorstep, Newfoundland and Labrador is home to Iceberg Alley, one of the best places in the world to view icebergs. The island of Newfoundland covers 111,390 square kilometres (43,008 square miles) - an area that rivals the size of the three maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island combined. With the addition of the vast territory of Labrador, the province covers a total area of 405,212 square kilometres (156,453 square miles), and has more than 29,000 kilometres (18,000 miles) of unspoiled coastline. Though Newfoundland and Labrador is larger than some countries, it certainly doesn't feel crowded with a relatively small population of 510,000. When it comes to landscape, Newfoundland and Labrador is as vast as it is varied. On the west coast of Newfoundland, Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to the Long Range Mountains and North America's northernmost part of the International Appalachian Trail. Tongat Mountains National Park, located in Northern Labrador, encompasses a vast, untouched wilderness area and some of the oldest mountains in the world. In the Central Region, you'll find boreal forests, consisting of dense forests, marshes, and green meadows that extend all the way to Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador is known for its friendly people. Perhaps that's why, according to Macleans magazine, Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the Top 10 Friendliest Cultures in the World! The unique culture of Newfoundland and Labrador

is a product of our English, Irish, French, and Aboriginal heritage (*newfoundlandlabrador.com*).

Prince Edward Island - PEI

Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest and greenest province. The Island is a place of natural beauty where the air and water are fresh and clean (*tourismpei.com*). Prince Edward Island is located on the east coast of Canada and is connected to the mainland by the confederation bridge. The province is also called 'PEI' or simply 'the Island'. The capital city is Charlottetown. In July 2010, the province's population was estimated to be 142,266. This represents a 0.8 per cent growth since 2009. (*Source: Prince Edward Island Department of Finance and Municipal Affairs 2010*). The total land area of PEI is 5,656 sq km (2,184 sq mi).

New Brunswick

New Brunswick, the largest of Canada's three Maritime Provinces, is located under Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula and beside the State of Maine. According to 2006 census data, New Brunswick has a total population of 729,997. Saint John is the largest city in the province, with a population of 68,043; it is also the province's oldest city, while Fredericton, the provincial capital, has a population of 50,535. New Brunswick is Canada's only official bilingual province. About 33 per cent of the population is French-speaking. New Brunswick covers 73,440 square kilometres in roughly a rectangle shape about 242 kilometres (150 miles) from east to west and 322 kilometres (200 miles) north to south (*tourismnewbrunswick.ca*). New Brunswick's communities vary from its eight major cities, to its many attractive towns and villages located throughout the province that offer a wide range of attractions to visitors and residents alike.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia is one of Canada's three Maritime Provinces and is the most populous province in Atlantic Canada. The provincial capital is Halifax. Nova Scotia is the second-smallest province in Canada with an area of 55,284 square kilometres (21,300 sq mi). As of 2009, the population is 946,397, which makes Nova Scotia the second-most-densely populated province. Nova Scotia was already home to the Mi'kmaq people when French colonists established the first permanent European settlement in Canada and the first north of Florida in 1604. In 1867 Nova Scotia was one of the four founding provinces of the Canadian Confederation. Tourist bureaus portray Nova Scotia as a province whose true essence is found in primitive, rustic, and unspoiled traditions outside the process of modernization, and highlight all things Scottish. People with Scottish ancestry are the largest self-identified ethnic group in the province after Canadian (that population is 29.3% as of 2011). Nova Scotia's Culture is a mix of Acadian, Mi'kmaq, Scottish and African Nova Scotian foundations; a passion for the past; and an unparalleled love of a good kitchen party. From the spectacle of an Antigonish Highland Games to simple storytelling around a sacred fire to searching out your family tree in small town archives, there are endless ways to experience your own personal Nova Scotia (*novascotia.com*).

Methodology

A case study methodology was used to develop an understanding of four Atlantic Provinces with regards to destination marketing and the importance and impact of on-line traveler reviews of the destinations. The case study approach is considered to be a highly suitable research strategy to understand and develop in-depth understandings of internet process to help identify suitable marketing strategies from travelers' point of view. Data was collected from all official provincial tourism websites, travelers' website (Trip Advisor) as well as secondary research articles for literature review. The data was analyzed based on both positive and negative reviews from the travelers regarding the various list of attractions identified. Relevant statistical tables from Destination Canada, Statistics Canada and Canadian Tourism Commission were also obtained to show the trend of tourists' attraction and flow into the country.

Results And Discussion

Destination Features: Domestic Tourism

Table 1: Trips By Canadians In Canada

Country/Provinces	Person-trips (destinations)				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Canada	207,470	214,559	214,498	227,121	229,158
Newfoundland	3,068	2,939	3,006	3,256	3,500
Prince Edward Island	1,018	1,057	1,082	1,196	1,091
Nova Scotia	7,318	7,087	7,131	7,604	8,115
New Brunswick	5,254	5,349	4,937	5,358	5,458
Quebec	57,278	57,240	58,410	62,736	60,169
Ontario	83,036	86,903	84,995	88,412	90,174
Manitoba	7,275	7,294	7,109	7,935	7,984
Saskatchewan	7,874	8,164	8,028	8,464	8,624
Alberta	17,364	20,052	20,601	20,398	21,558
British Columbia	17,908	18,418	19,126	21,619	22,380
Yukon/NWT/ Nunavut	77 ^E	56 ^E	74 ^E	144 ^E	F

* Source: www.statcan.gc.ca accessed on 19/12/2011

*E use with caution *F Too unreliable

The four Atlantic Provinces according to Table 1 seem to have the least number of domestic tourists compared to other provinces in Canada with Nova Scotia in the lead while PEI has the least number of tourists. The story of Anne Green Gables which is known throughout the world could be strategically positioned and marketed to the locals and used as a unique selling point to attract domestic tourists. Newfoundland can use its unique English language, culture and heritage sites as marketing tools to get more traffic to the islands.

Table 2: International Tourism Arrivals

Province	2010	2011	%
Newfoundland	42,598	41,862	-1.7
Prince Edward Island	2,055	2,015	-1.9
Nova Scotia	175,115	181,782	3.8
New Brunswick	346,668	317,939	-8.3

CTC, 2011

With regard to international tourism arrivals (Table 2), New Brunswick has the highest numbers followed by Nova Scotia. Destination marketing is very successful in attracting foreign tourists in order to This could mean that more destination marketing strategies could be employed to attract international tourists to PEI and Newfoundland using cultural and heritage attributes.

Table 3: Top 10 Attractions In Canada

No.	Attraction	Province
1.	The Canadian Rockies	British Columbia/Alberta
2.	Niagara Falls	Ontario
3.	Pacific Rim National Park	Vancouver Island, BC
4.	Cabot Trail	Nova Scotia
5.	Baffin Island	Nunavut
6.	Vancouver/Victoria	British Columbia
7.	The Prairies	BC/Ontario/Saskatchewan/Manitoba
8.	The Rocky Mountaineer	British Columbia/Alberta
9.	Old Quebec City	Quebec
10.	Bay of Fundy	New Brunswick/ Nova Scotia

Source: www.DestinationCanada.info accessed on 21/10/2012

The Destination Canada (Table 3) has taken a look at Canada’s many unique attractions and picked these 10 to recommend to visitors to Canada – or to Canadians who wish to experience more of their own vast and beautiful country. Their picks have been made subjectively based on personal experience and extensive research. Other potential destination that could have easily been picked included the Viking trails and Green Gables in PEI. From the above table, only 2 of the attractions are in the Atlantic Provinces and these statistics are very low compared to other provinces like British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario areas.

The Role Of Traveler Reviews: Trip Advisor

Trip advisor is the world’s largest site which offer reviews by travelers categorized as excellent, very good, average, poor, or terrible and between 5 and 1 star. The current generation of travelers is well informed and want to well-equipped before they travel and as such rely heavily on experiences of other travelers/tourists who have been to the places that they would like to visit. The role of internet marketing therefore, cannot be overlooked as this could make or break the destination in terms of visitor numbers to a particular attraction. In this study, Trip advisor list various things to do (Table 4) while visiting the various provinces of the Atlantic Canada. The information on accommodation, restaurants, flights and holiday rentals are also available to travelers. Nova Scotia tops the list with the most notable number of attractions (307) and the most number of traveler reviews. This is followed by New Brunswick having 105 attractions.

The most prominent attractions in Atlantic Canada include: Signal Hill, St. John’s; Gros Morne National Park; Cape Breton Highland National Park, Cabot Trail in Nova Scotia; Happy Clammers, Basin Head Provincial Park in PEI and Hopewell Rocks and Roosevelt Campobello International Park in New Brunswick.

Table 4: Trip Advisor “things to do”

No	Destination	Attractions	Tours	Nightlife	Shopping	Traveler Reviews
1.	Newfoundland	123	45	12	9	216
2.	Nova Scotia	307	71	22	56	832
3.	PEI	110	28	14	16	323
4.	New Brunswick	135	28	8	5	428

When travelers are planning to visit a destination, Nova Scotia province has the highest number of attractions to visit and as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Trip Advisor Categories Of Attractions

Attractions	Newfoundland	PEI	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia
Landmarks/Historic Sites	40	34	36	67
Museums, zoos and aquariums	17	20	24	65
Parks, gardens and nature	20	5	30	45
Water and water sports	6	7	7	30
Sports, golf and outdoor activities	12	17	11	34
Education sites and libraries	4	1	2	17
Factories, wineries and breweries	4	5	14	14
Spa	5	0	0	8
Amusement/theme parks/arcades	1	8	1	6
Religious sites	2	0	2	5
Theatre, art and performances	9	8	5	11
Gambling	0	2	1	1
Military sites	1	0	0	1
Spectator sport	1	0	1	3
Other	1	3	1	0
Total Attractions	123	110	135	307

Conclusion: The Role Of Traveler Reviews

It is important to take into consideration the role that traveler reviews make into the contribution of destination marketing. Many travelers now rely on the word of mouth as some destinations have been found to do false advertising and hence many would prefer someone who has actually been there and had the experience of the destination in question to act as a guide or reference for others. Below are some of the reviews both positive and negative on the four Atlantic Canada destinations.

Positive Reviews

“Friendly destinations”
 “Interesting”
 “Safe”
 “Beautiful”
 “Clean”

Negative Reviews

“I take exception to the provinces TV advertising”
 “Expensive”
 “Unimpressive”
 “Not much to do – walking and taking photograph only”
 “Small museum; good way to kill time”

The tourism boards and marketing will have to pay attention to the customer needs and consumer trends in these destinations if they have to remain competitive. The destination will have to cultivate a culture of building relationships with their customers who are the tourists as well as service providers in these areas. The attractions should support and offer review sections for tourists and other service providers for constructive feedback to enable the destinations remain competitive and address any concerns that may arise in order to be more visible globally. In the final analysis, Canadian Atlantic destinations has a lot to offer and can succeed if proper marketing tools are enhanced so that tourist just don't travel to "kill time".

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