

9 Ways to Excite Enthusiasm about a Destination

Steve Gillick

The historical connotation of the term 'enthusiasm' related to someone who was affected by a *rush* of divine wind (from which we get the word 'inspiration'). Over the centuries, the idea of 'enthusiasm' came to mean intense enjoyment, passionate interest and extreme excitement.

Travel agents use the term 'enthusiasm' to refer to the concept of experiencing a 'rush', but today that feeling is most likely caused by our endorphins (those brain cells that produce feelings of elation) going into hyper-drive. The challenge is how to transfer those feelings of 'enthusiasm' to our customers, particularly when we are talking about a destination. Here are 9 ways to excite your customers.

- 1) **Knowing:** There is a science in knowing or appreciating the concept of what a destination is all about. We are not talking about any specific destination...just destinations in general. Travel trainers and tourist boards often reduce a destination to a formula:

(when to go) + (where to go) + (where to stay) + (what to do) + (what to eat) = destination.

But the very idea of a destination is the sum of all the parts that include location, people, culture, language, history, food, attractions, accommodation, transportation, weather, nature, politics, music, the arts, and more. Once a travel agent learns to separate themselves from the static descriptive formula (see above) and embraces the more dynamic approach, then they are on the right track not only to generate their own enthusiasm for a destination, but to start spreading it to others.

- 2) **Positivizing:** To make a point, I've changed the word "positive" into a verb. 'Positivizing' describes the act of looking at destinations with a sense of wonder, enchantment and mystery. Some travel agents talk about spreading 'infectious enthusiasm' about a destination; meaning that their excitement cannot be contained and it just over flows when the agent is talking about the benefits of travel to a particular country or city. Others talk about 'infusing positivity' into their sales; meaning that they relate the destination to the client's needs and toward the ideal of exceeding expectations. Travel agents should strive to become dynamic positivists.
- 3) **Understanding:** Every travel agent personifies their own travel brand. This means that your reputation, your business and your attitude is based on what you do with your career and how you positively implement your credentials. And those credentials may include your professional designations, education, countries visited, past experiences, your person-ability, as well as whether you embrace a career in which you live, sleep and breathe travel, or whether it's just a day job. Branding yourself as a career travel **professional** sends a powerful message to your clients and can instill them with confidence and enthusiasm to work with you on a repeat basis.
- 4) **Picturing:** Marketing mavens talk about the importance of photos, videos and graphics in presentations, websites and brochures. Pictures inspire the imagination and fire up enthusiasm, especially when a travel agent can show some digital photos from their own travels, or a short video that showcases images that reflect the clients' interests. For instance if a client wanted to visit The Maldives for relaxation and water activities, then scenes of blue waters, atolls, over-the-water bungalows and underwater shots of scuba diving or snorkelling, would capture those interests and allow the client to imagine themselves at the destination. Mentally mapping activities has long been a coaching technique for athletes. It works for travelers too.

- 5) **Describing:** The power of words can inspire daydreams of escape from the daily grind. You can go to a thesaurus or the internet to drum up a list of descriptive words to transform 'Great views' into 'stunning vistas' and thereby build up word pictures in the mind of the client. But you can also simply and honestly describe your feelings when you personally experienced a destination. Example: "The golden temples and stupas of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon were absolutely amazing; where every time you turn a corner you see something totally different that takes your breath away". For a client who is curious to experience Myanmar, and also has an interest in photography and culture, you have just provided a verbal, picturesque testimonial that will set them off in enthusiastic daydreams of their upcoming vacation.
- 6) **Researching:** Use your database to inspire enthusiasm. Target-market clients who expressed an interest in a particular destination. Send out a flyer or newsletter to feature 'specials' or new products and services that respond to your clients' interests. Try to use the opportunity to show your personal side. Travel is a people-centric business. Sometimes (and this depends on the client) informality, humour and personalizing an email or newsletter can go a long way in grabbing a client's interest and capturing their travel imagination.
- 7) **Listening:** Enthusiasm can be captured by a travel agent and transmitted to clients, through the art of listening. A client returns from a trip to Cape Town and talks about the amazing restaurants, nature drives, township visits, and breathtaking views from Table Rock. A supplier talks about a resort in St. Lucia that overlooks the Pitons and provides views of spectacular sunsets. Both of these reports can become part of your treasure house of enthusiastic and inspiring anecdotes that help to stir up the travel endorphins of your clients.
- 8) **Nichifying:** Niche markets are gold mines for generating enthusiasm. Case in point: I collect masks and have been known to select destinations just to ogle, learn, appreciate and sometimes purchase indigenous masks: South Africa, Kenya, Guatemala, Mexico, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Malaysia, British Columbia, and more. Masks capture my imagination and bring me happiness. That is the same effect of the fulfillment of a niche interest on many travelers, whether it's fashion, flowers, food, flutes or flocks. Satisfying your clients' niche interests ignites their enthusiasm.
- 9) **Gamifying:** The use of fun and games can grab the attention of travelers and sometimes change their attitude toward a destination from skepticism (will this be a waste of my time?) to enthusiasm. Use your website, Facebook page and newsletter to feature a trivia quiz or a crossword or a word search or 'send us your funniest travel road sign' or just post a fun questionnaire E.g. This month we are featuring Japan. Answer the three questions and win a travel bag from XXX supplier:
 - Have you eaten Fugu in Fukuoka?
 - Have you seen the Tyrannosaurus Rex in Naha?
 - Have you sampled shochu in Sapporo?

Fun—and showing you know how to have fun—is an important component of enthusiasm and positivity.

It is ironic that sometimes, the main products we sell in the travel industry—destinations—are often the least understood by travel agents. In a world where clients flock to the internet to research, and then turn to a travel professional to make sense of the horrendous amount of

information available, travel agents not only need to master the art of the destination, but also to transmit their enthusiasm about the destination to their clients. Identifying a travel agent as the source of enthusiasm, locks in that crucial client-agent relationship, and positively stereotypes that travel agent as the only trusted source for future travels and future business.

Are we talking about you? Are you getting enthused?