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GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Lessons from the 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremonies

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30 JUL 2012: Officially, 205 countries are participating in the 2012 Olympics in London. What a golden opportunity for new, aspiring travel agents, as well as tried and true professionals, to get involved with the daily competitions. Your

clients will be watching the events on television, reading about them in newspapers, and talking about them at the proverbial water cooler. How involved do you plan to get? This is a golden opportunity for industry professionals to talk the talk of destinations with their clients, as well as the success and disappointments that the global competitors experience during the competition.



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Case in point: How many actually watched (live, on television, or on several public screens set up in various urban centres) the Opening Ceremonies?

Danny Boyle, who many know as the director of such films as *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Trainspotting*, did an amazing job in creating an opening ceremony that was historical, musical, classical, humorous, poignant, fiery and memorable. What followed was the march of the individual teams, (www.bbc.co.uk/sport/olympics/2012/countries), each led by an exuberant flag bearers, many in some kind of representative costume, and

representing a travel educators'/ travel students'/travel professionals' and travellers' dream come true! Thinking of going somewhere different this year or next, here was a list of countries to titillate your curiosity. And of the 205 introduced, how many did you immediate connect with: picture where the country is located, think of some of the tourism features for your clients, recall the language spoken or whether this country was on one your clients' 'must-see' lists. Did any of you run to Google to look up countries you never heard of before?

Searching for Nauru

Well, shyly stated, I did. I am proud of the fact that I was familiar with 99% of the countries, but when they introduced Nauru, I was challenged but curious. I imagine that if I sold travel to the South Pacific, or studied where Australians tend to travel, I would have known Nauru, but somehow this nation has escaped my attention until now.

The Republic of Nauru, the world's smallest republic, formerly known as Pleasant Island, is in Micronesia and is a member of the United Nations. There is a Nauru Tourism website (www.discovernauru.com) which lists the main activities on this coral gem, as deep-sea game fishing, scuba diving, swimming, walking on the green belt that circles the island, walking to the pinnacles that make up the remains of a phosphate mine, and shopping for arts and crafts.

So destination awareness was one 'take-away' from watching the Olympic opening event. What else? As an application to the travel industry we saw that

- **A huge number of the 70,000 Olympic volunteers participated in the opening ceremonies.** Volunteerism provides an opportunity for students, job-seekers and just plain old keeners, to get involved. When you consider holding a travel event, large or small, consider putting out the call for volunteers to help with the details. And as we learned from the Olympics 1) take the time to lay out your expectations 2) train your volunteers well so that they feel good about the job they are doing as well as in meeting your needs and 3) thank your volunteers for taking the time to help and for doing such a great job.

- **The opening ceremonies were three hours and 45 minutes from start to finish.** Talk about organization to the max! Well the lesson is, whether your event is 15 minutes or a three day boot camp, you need to be organized, rehearsed, and have contingency plans just in case something goes wrong. With \$43 million dollars on the table, do you think that if it rained during the opening ceremony they would have announced a postponement or cancellation? (That's a rhetorical question)

- **Feature your stars.** During the Olympic ceremonies we were treated to a number of famous Brits, from Queen Elizabeth II to Rowan Atkinson and from Daniel Craig to David Beckham. No one is expecting you to rein in the Queen (!) for your product launch but the invited suppliers, your top sales performers, your most successful CRM practitioner and, for that matter, all your staff are the stars that need to be featured, as they are the ones who are front and centre in servicing your clients.

· **Music speaks words.** The opening ceremonies featured Britain's love affair with music through the centuries, particularly the British Invasion of the 1960's that continues to this day. The final act of Paul McCartney leading the 80,000 audience members and the 10,000 + athletes in the chorus of Hey Jude was a memorable way to create a global love-in spirit (world wide audience estimate was 40.7 million).

Every event that you hold, every business meeting you attend, every trade show, phone call, and even every sale needs a fitting conclusion. Singing a tune may not be appropriate (however I still recall Scott Koepf concluding a rousing talk at a Royal York Hotel Cruise event many years ago by singing "If I Were a Rich Man" ♦ and If I can remember this after 10 years, it must have been pretty effective). Your conclusion may be a closing line, a thank you, a contest give-away, a business card with your contact information, the promise of a personal follow-up after the event, a reward of some kind (food and drink is always popular) or a sincere handshake to all who attended.

So for those who watched the Olympic Opening Ceremonies, here's hoping that you took some good business lessons from the very entertaining event. For those who taped it (and it seems like lots of people 'said" they did this), then get out the popcorn, turn on the VCR and watch the ceremonies with new insight. And for those who missed the event altogether, then take some time over the next two weeks to watch this global sports competition (as well as the Paralympics that follow):

· **From a destination education point of view:**
Listen to the names of the countries when

announced and play the “this is what I know about that country” game by yourself or with your friends and family.

· **From a conversation point of view:** “I understand you are interested in a trip to Germany. Did you happen to catch the tennis match where Julia Goerges of Germany defeated Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland in the 1st round match?” And by the way, do you enjoy tennis and is it important that your hotel has a tennis court?

· **From a fun, contest point of view:** Guess which country will win the most (or least) number of gold/silver/bronze medals and win a book about that country or a meal featuring that country’s food or even a discount on booking a trip to that country.

· **From the point of view that you are selling the planet earth:** Whether you are a fan of the Olympics or not, it is a global event that speaks the language of travel and tourism to millions of people, some (or many) of which are your past, present and future clients.

It’s a golden opportunity!





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

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