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WHAT TRAVELLERS WANT

Embracing the Niche Market Triad


Steve Gillick

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08 SEP 2014: Cheryl appeared to be the quintessential shopping fanatic. For the first few days in Kenya all we heard was “when are we going to get to the markets?” Finally on the third day, we stopped at a crowded open-air gathering, where

an assortment of cooking utensils were spread-out on blankets. Several vendors were haggling with clients for fruit and vegetables, while others busily brushed flies from the fish and meat that lay exposed on wooden tables. Cheryl was in seventh heaven.



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Armed with toys for the kids in the market, a camera and a huge smile, she disappeared into the throng for a short time, only to sigh when she rejoined the group, “this is perfect. It’s the only way to immerse yourself in a destination and relate to the people. Can I stay here longer?”

Dennis was in his early 50’s when he and his wife decided to join an adventure tour in Thailand. Like the rest of us they slept on the floor of a tribal community house (despite the fact that bats flew in and out of the open windows throughout the night); they slept on the jungle floor(despite the fact that someone found a scorpion under one of the sleeping bags); they trekked dusty trails, ducked under a waterfall, rode an elephant, ate a rooster that had kept us awake since 3:30 am, and

entered a whisky drinking contest at a make-shift Karaoke bar in the middle of nowhere. On the last night, Dennis told everyone that it was a shame he waited for over 50 years to take an adventure trip. "I'm convinced", he said "it's the only way to get into the spirit of the destination".

While both of these situations occurred over ten years ago, it was a trend then and still growing exponentially today, that special interest travel (niche markets) grab people and lead them not only to a destination but further journeys within that destination that they may not otherwise have discovered.

Niche markets provide a portal to gain insight into the heart of a destination and therefore they structure a travel experience and lay bare the destination in the eyes of the traveller. And the beauty of it all is that each individual traveller defines what kind of insight they want to achieve and what, to them, constitutes the 'heart' of the destination. It could be the people, or the culture, mountains, crafts, music, food, or the fact that they can buy masks or running shoes or postcards. And for many travellers it doesn't stop there. Niche interests blend into the enjoyable pursuit of TMT—Travel Multi-Tasking—that combines many wishes, goals and activities into one vacation experience.

The emphasis on travel selling these days is to differentiate your talents from all the others. This immediately conjures up the word specialization but beware: this does not mean your specialty lies in collecting specialty certificates and plastering your walls or your website with every conceivable mutation of travel product and service on the market. In fact, the net result of all that 'collecting'

is that you are back to being a generalist (not that there's anything wrong with that). But if you wish to truly specialize, you need some fine-tuning.

Many travel agents ask their clients about their travel preferences: likes, dislikes and dreams. Some do this through surveys, some through gamification or contests and some through actual one-on-one discussion (which is the preferred method). When they come to a consensus about what their clients want, they merge this with their own travel styles, loves, passions and business sense, and they arrive at a winning specialty formula. Inevitably this involves niche market—special interest—travel. This is what Cheryl and Dennis succeeded in discovering 10 years ago, and many travellers in all generational groups are looking for these days.

The Niche Market Triad

Niche markets allow travellers to open doors and step into a destination. They are a way of providing travellers with the opportunity to 'walk in our shoes'; see things from our perspective; taste our foods, learn about our culture, get into our head-space and then return home with a feeling of satisfaction, accomplishment and...value.

For the traveller this means...that the old adventure travel admonishment to "bring back only memories" gets thrown out the window. The traveller brings back experiences, friends, social media contacts, photos and videos, education, excitement and destination-engagement.

Example: I've written before about the niche market of Markets and their attraction. If you can arrange—either on a schedule, through a

suggestion or subtly through ‘serendipity’, for your clients to visit the market area in town, they’ll see people selling, shopping, carrying goods, arranging displays, bargaining for sales, smiling, arguing and relaxing... and then there are the colours, smells, different kinds of foods or products and the opportunity for interaction. Many travellers find this to be the ultimate experience in learning about a destination.

Another example may be ‘architecture’—which provides a destination portal that reflects art, creativity, simplicity, complexity, teamwork, building methods, history, construction materials, history, mythology, design, symbolism and more. Architectural visits to New York City, Djenné, Matmata, Takayama and Cartagena are so incredibly different but yield similar benefits for the traveller in terms of education, culture, awe and dream fulfillment.

For the Travel Agent this means...

that you need to engage your clients in the many options that travel offers. Those who take the time to do this—and to dig deep by asking questions and probing, will be rewarded when they discover what the client really has in mind for their visit to The Maldives or Tunisia or New Orleans. And once you are able to make a value-suggestion, followed by a value proposition, the result may range from client testimonials, referrals and repeat business to more niche market revelations and further revenue enhancement.

To stimulate your creative processes check out the website, www.specialtytravel.com which lists roughly 312 travel niche markets (and without doubt there have to be at least 150-200 more).

For the Destination this means...

tourism with a purpose. Visitors arrive in order to satisfy travel cravings. It means that the destination has done its homework by practicing CRM and having an active “let’s discover our visitors” campaign that seeks to unveil what they really want (or wanted) to do. This in turn helps the destination to review and if necessary improve on those features, and then assist travel agents in marketing the destination to clients, past, present and future.

The Niche Market Triad plays on the notion of revealing the keys that open the true nature of a destination to those who seek rich experiences and the desire to indulge their senses. This holds true for travellers, travel consultants and destinations. All you need to start the process is ask questions, listen to the answers and then inject those thoughts and dreams into the travel equation.





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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