Health Tourism

Lecture 10
Reaching of consumers, marketing communication, promotion and branding

Rich fat man has become an oxymoron, and poor and fat have become synonymous.
(Pilzer, 2008:18)

- The marketing of health tourism is almost like any service industry’s marketing,
- **with one exception**: it involves some kind of health element, which is one of the most personal, therefore sensitive aspects.
- Health tourism specifically builds on trust.
1. Marketing communications

Holloway (2004) and others (e.g. Kotler et al., 2005) summarized the determinants for marketing communication strategies and tactics as follows:

- **The nature of the product**.
  - Tourism products are not homogeneous and this is particularly true in the case of health and wellness tourism.

- **The target at which the communication is aimed**.
  - Both ‘push’ or distribution channel-oriented; and ‘pull’ or final customer-oriented communications are heavily used in health and wellness tourism.

- **The stage in the life cycle in which the product is to be found**.
  - This determinant has very close links with the ‘nature of the product’.

- **The situation in which the marketer finds him or herself in the market-place**.
  - Health and wellness tourism, especially those forms that are not site-specific, are highly competitive and the market, especially in the luxury segment, is the whole world.

- **The budget for the promotional strategy**.
  - This determinant, as in all forms of tourism, very much depends on the available resources, the strategy objectives and the media selected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Challenges for Health and Wellness Tourism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive level (i.e. making customers aware of the products and services)</td>
<td>Fading labels&lt;br&gt;The proliferation of use and the erosion of the term wellness devalues original products and confuses customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective level (i.e. creating an emotional response to messages)</td>
<td>Demolishing barriers&lt;br&gt;A significant part of the market takes with a pinch of salt anything that is called wellness and believes that it is not for him or her, but for the rich and famous (and often they are right, too)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural level (i.e. making customers act in the aspired way: to make a purchase)</td>
<td>Compound segmentation&lt;br&gt;Segmentation takes place based on numerous factors: from basic factors such as age or gender (e.g. men or young people), to very complex ones such as lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Holloway (2004).
Links between Health Product Development and Targeting. 
*Source*: Smith and Puczkó.

Table 10.2 Customer Likes and Dislikes in Spas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Top 10 Most Commonly Booked Spa Services</th>
<th>Most Disliked Experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aromatherapy massages</td>
<td>Having to appear naked for treatments, or to use a mixed sauna without bathing suits or being bathed by strangers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facials</td>
<td>Receiving hard-sell tactics to spend more on spa or beauty products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local ‘signature’ therapies</td>
<td>Treatments derived from chocolate or other dessert ingredients</td>
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<td>Manicures</td>
<td>Any evidence of lack of cleanliness or poor hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedicures</td>
<td>Being ushered out speedily once their treatment is over</td>
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<tr>
<td>More ‘creative’ treatments</td>
<td>Pretentious spas which seem to prefer clients with perfect bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayurvedic massages</td>
<td>Having to make small talk with over-familiar staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexology</td>
<td>On arrival, finding the hotel spa fully booked with locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body wraps</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hydrotherapy programmes</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Case Study: Royal Spas of Europe

- Eight historic spa towns (used to be nine with Loutraki in Greece) with very different, but still somehow similar characteristics joined together and started the Royal Spas of Europe partnership.
- The members are
  - Archena (Spain)
  - Baden-Baden (Germany)
  - Bad Neuenahr (Germany)
  - Bayreuth (Germany)
  - Budapest (Hungary)
  - Marienbad (Czech Republic)
  - Naantali (Finland)
  - Sárvár (Hungary)
- The Royal Spas of Europe initiative aims to meet the highest quality requirements.
- For this reason a set of criteria were set, which has to be met by any member, for example health, wellness and fitness services, thermal facilities, medical care, infrastructure, standards of hotels, and cultural events.

2. Branding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples from Health and Wellness Tourism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>What can it offer?</td>
<td>‘Healing’ (functional benefit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Escaping’ (emotional benefit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>What does it stand for?</td>
<td>‘To create innovative and enriching experiences in a sustainable environment’ (Six Senses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>The behaviour of the brand</td>
<td>‘Our girl with local experiences’ (Arizonaspagirls.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason to believe</td>
<td>Evidence – why this is better?</td>
<td>‘Evidence based healing effects’ (Hungarian National Tourist Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand essence</td>
<td>What is it about – in one line</td>
<td>‘Limitless Well-Being’ (European Spa World)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Smith and Puczkó.

- Major international brands, especially hotel chains (e.g. Four Seasons, Marriott, and Hilton) all stretch their existing and well-established brands over new products, that is spas and wellness centres.
- Branding, such as planning or management, can take place at national, regional, local, and site level too.
4. Branding at local and operator level

- It is a little easier to create and maintain a brand for a site or for an operator.
- Health destinations often have their own organization responsible for destination management and marketing.
- International spa and hotel chains, however, have made progress in creating their own brands, based on health services, for example:
  - Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide (managing brands such as Westin, Le Meridien, W Hotels, Sheraton, St. Regis and The Luxury Collection)
  - Six Senses has created a family of brands.
  - Spas at One & Only Resorts are "...in blissful sanctuaries of tranquility, where the body is resorted and the soul is soothed".
    - Just as each One & Only resort, where guests can enjoy a whole concept of 'Pathway of Wellness, ...
    - Each pathway includes:
      - A 90-minute spa treatment
      - A 60-minute class, and
      - Spa cuisine
  - AMResorts in Central America developed three brands for health and wellness visitors:
    - Secrets Resorts & Spas (adults only)
    - Dreams Resorts & Spas (scenic locations, full service spas and fitness centres – Unlimited Luxury)
    - Sunscape Resorts & Spas (families, couples, friends – Unlimited Fun)
- Marriott and Renaissance also offer wellness services in many of their hotels all around the world.
Danubius Hotels

- The largest hotel chain in Europe specialized mainly in health-oriented hotels (Danubius Hotels Group), has recently re-branded some of its hotels.
- Members of that hotel chain which are located primarily in medical tourism-oriented destinations in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, were labelled as ‘Danubius thermal’ hotels in Hungary and ‘hotel balnea’ in Slovakia.
- The new brand (for nine properties in four countries), ‘Danubius Health Spa Resorts’ or DHSRs, following the upgrading and diversifying of the on-site health facilities in the hotels, fits more the expectations of the demand and can represent the brand assets of the hotel chain.
- The six elements of the brand are Natural Resources, Medical Expertise, Therapeutic Treatments, Well-being & Relaxation, Fitness & Beauty, and Spa Cuisine.
- The hotel chain has opened its membership based on fitness centres under the brand of Danubius Premier Fitness (ten properties in two countries), whereas the beauty and cosmetic unit is branded with The Emporium Wellness & Beauty label (four properties only in Hungary).

(Danubius Hotels, 2008)

5. Packaging, distribution and pricing

- As a general rule, wellness tourists seem relatively happy to purchase pre-selected packages within which there is some flexibility and freedom of choice.
- For example, spa visitors may select a pampering and relaxation package to which they can add further treatments or fitness activities.
5. Packaging, distribution and pricing/ cont’d

- Tour operators and health insurance companies tend to have a varying role in the packaging and distribution of health and wellness tourism products and services.
- Travellers can find information about health and wellness offers via the following distribution channels:
  - **General tour operators**
  - Some **independent and smaller tour operators** specialized in wellness tourism or medical tourism.
  - **Specialist operators**
  - **Health insurance companies,** because of better prices, more efficient or faster treatments, may cover treatments that are not at the home place of the insured.
  - Both **general travel search engines** (e.g. Yahoo!Travel) and **specialized ones** (e.g. Spas of America, or SpaFinder)
  - General and specialized **fairs and exhibitions**
  - **Lifestyle clubs and societies** of the trainer or leader can be a source of information about where-and-what to do.

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Conclusions

- Reaching for health and wellness tourists can differ from standard approaches in tourism.
- The very personal and sometimes very risky nature of the services makes the selection of applicable communication strategies and tactics challenging.