

Inspiration From an Unlikely Source

During my morning ritual of scanning CNN news online, I noted the following headline "Read Nat Geo? Now get a sofa to match." As an avid reader of National Geographic Traveler magazine, I was intrigued about the latest marketing efforts of this highly esteemed organization. According to the article, National Geographic will lend its name to a new collection of furniture that takes inspiration from exotic locations. More than 2,500 items will debut later this month in North Carolina at the world's largest home furnishing trade show in the world. The entire collection will be unveiled in October. WOW!

Great you say! What does this have to do with our industry? I see all sorts of parallels that I will endeavor to explain here.

Let's look at this initiative from two perspectives, starting not with National Geographic, but with the furniture industry. According to the article, "The furniture industry suffers a lack of diversity." By utilizing a non-traditional partnership, the furniture manufacturer is attaching itself to a reputable brand (National Geographic) and in so doing, brings attention to its latest furniture collection. It also could attract a new set of customers who are not currently targeted clientele. Good move on their part!

What about National Geographic? Why would they hook up with a furniture company? The answer is in brand extension. It's about getting the brand into a different market and in so doing, introducing the NG name to an entirely different group of buyers. Now, not only can you purchase National Geographic magazines, books, videos, and maps, but you can also purchase NG furniture! Smart move on their part! Two smart moves equate to a win-win situation in my mind!

OK. But what does this have to do with us. I think there is a number of valuable lessons to be learnt here. They include:

- The need to diversify a product line. While the North American campground / RV industry is becoming more segmented in comparison to past years, I think it pales in comparison to the diversity found in parks in other parts of the world including Australia, New Zealand and Europe. We're not too quick to move into new revenue producing opportunities, resisting the need to move out of a pre-existing comfort zone. Diversification could result in the introduction of different and unique forms of accommodations. Many parks successfully introduced cabins to its offerings. Some parks brought in Yurts and achieved remarkable results. But why stop there? What other forms of accommodations can you successfully introduce into your park?

Diversification should not stop simply at lodging. Examine the reasons why you attract your current clientele base. Can you develop new reasons for them to come to you? Staying overnight may just be a bonus!

- The need to develop partnerships. Joining up with other tourism oriented businesses is a common marketing practice in our industry yet it is rare to see parks form non-traditional partnership arrangements. This technique requires "out of the box" thinking, and as such is not as readily apparent to some. Yet the sheer audacity of joining up with an unlikely partner can achieve wonderful results. The City of Toronto teamed up with two unlikely partners in its efforts to rid the city of its SARS image. The city hosted a one of a kind concert headlined by the Rolling Stones last July, and most recently solicited late night show host Conan O'Brien to come to Toronto and perform his Late Night with Conan O'Brien show for an entire week. Visitation to the city has increased in measurable terms as a result of these two efforts.
- The need to utilize branding as a business tool. Branding is becoming a very important marketing initiative as it provides you with the necessary qualities that set's your park apart from the competition. Early Egyptians first burnt insignias into their livestock to allow them to identify their own animals. The custom

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was passed on to ranchers who still brand their cattle for identification purposes. You should be doing the same?

National Geographic is a well-developed brand that has meaning to many people. To me, the name represents quality, knowledge and trust. It brings back memories of my youth. Your park brand needs to inspire the same - a distinct attribute that separates you from the rest, and in so doing conjures up positive memories from past experiences.

I hope to explore and discuss the issue of branding in the next series of articles. If anyone wishes to offer their comments on this article or on the impact branding has had on you, please feel free to get in touch with me. In closing, return to the front cover of this paper. Whose name do you see in the title? Doesn't the Woodall's name instill confidence