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Developing a Sustainable Customer Experience Management Plan for Public Land Management

Because policy makers understood the necessity and value of nature and one's experience within it, the United States government set out to preserve forests, mountain areas, and other lands for current and future generations through the declaration and protection of public lands. The National Park Service (NPS), National Forest Service (NFS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) facilitate the protection, preservation, and usage of public lands. The organizations assist global citizens in co-creating an experience with nature, while continuing to preserve the public lands for future admiration and use.

The NFS, NPS, and BLM depend on high attendance or usage rates to receive the funding necessary to fulfill their missions. However, due to changing lifestyles and priorities, at least some public land usage rates (e.g. NPS) have been steadily declining (Warren 2006). This possibly disastrous trend must be reversed to ensure continuous political and economic support for the preservation of public lands.

This paper suggests that public land management organizations employ a marketing mindset and marketing tools. By creating a sustainable Customer Experience Management (CEM) plan, public land management organizations can truly understand their users, satisfy visitors' needs, and assure adequate usage rates.



Why Marketing?

The Importance of Marketing to Public Land Management Organizations

Marketing can be thought of as both a philosophy and a function. As a philosophy, marketing encourages individuals at all levels of an organization to understand what customers and society value. Customer value propositions may be understood by discovering the benefits customers seek and/or receive from an organization and its offerings. For example, they may receive functional, psychological, social, and other benefits. Societal value propositions are based on the well-being of consumers and their environment. For instance, people evaluate an organization's social and ethical footprint on future generations by analyzing their efficient use of resources and their ability to minimize negative effects. Collective evaluations of an organization's efforts form the basis of societal value propositions.

To implement a marketing philosophy, an organization develops plans and programs for

Mission Statements

National Forest Service Mission:

“To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”
(National Forest Service 2007)

National Park Service Mission:

“To conserve the scenery and the national and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”
(Keck 2007)

Bureau of Land Management Mission:

“To sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”
(Bureau of Land Management 2007)

reaching and interacting with customers. This is where marketing as a function comes into play. Organizations assist their customers in creating the value they seek (Lusch 2007). Marketing as a function can be thought of as an ongoing process of researching, analyzing, and developing and implementing a strategy to co-create value with their customers. In the research phase, marketers work with their customers to understand the benefits they can or may receive from the organization’s offerings. In the analysis phase, marketers define target markets and develop a positioning strategy. Implementing a marketing mindset throughout the entire organization focuses marketing programs (e.g., promotions, processes) on the consumer, the one for whom the land is preserved.

The mission statements of the National Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the

Bureau of Land Management all make mention of meeting the needs of “future generations” while preserving public land. Unfortunately, visitation numbers may suggest that public land consumers’ needs have been overlooked. For instance peak visitation to Yellowstone National Park, the first national park established in 1872, was in 1992. Around 3.1 million people visited the park that year, but that number had decreased by about one million by 2005 (Keck 2007). This may suggest that customer satisfaction is down or that cultural shifts have occurred where fewer people seek the benefits a nature experience provides. Either way, public land organizations must work to address the underlying issue of increasing or maintaining visitation levels.

Applying marketing tactics and a sustainable CEM plan should help public land management organizations understand how to assist their users in having the experiences they desire as well as communicate to potential users the types of experiences which are possible on public lands.

Developing a CEM Strategy with Sustainability as a GOAL

“Customer experience management (CEM) is the process of strategically managing a customer’s entire experience with a product or a company” (Schmidt 2003, 17). A CEM framework focuses explicitly on the customer. The approach allows organizations to gain insight into the customer’s experiential world. The customer’s experiential world consists of what the users consciously and

subconsciously think, feel, and do while engaged in an experience with nature on public lands. In strategically implementing a CEM strategy, organizations should seek to increase customer and societal value.

For a CEM process to be beneficial to public land organizations, it must be implemented with sustainability in mind. Sustainability focuses on the coordination of economic development, environmental stewardship, and community well-being concerns. Sustainable economic development meets current needs while also considering the needs of future generations. Environmental stewardship ensures conservation of natural resources and ecological integrity. And, community well-being focuses on

A Sustainable CEM Strategy

Focuses on the coordination of:

- **Economic Development**
Meet current needs while considering needs of future generations
- **Environmental Stewardship**
Ensure conservation of natural resources and ecological integrity
- **Community Well-Being**
Consider the quality-of-life available to all individuals with a focus on equal opportunity for all participants

the quality-of-life available to all individuals with a focus on equal opportunity for participation. Thus, sustainable practices integrate environmental, economic, and human and social goals in activities and policies.

Sustainable economic development concentrates on the balance and interdependence of social, environmental, and economic

Teaching by Example

The development of a sustainable CEM plan is a process. This paper aims to assist public land management organizations step through the process of designing and implementing a tailored CEM plan.

Examples of certain steps are provided throughout the paper to better illustrate the process. The examples are based on previously conducted research (See Alm, Hayford, Hoversten, and Magby 2007). The research focused on the consumption of one national park by one segment of consumers by means of one recreational activity; however, this process can be easily applied to different consumers partaking in a variety of activities (recreational and business) on all public lands.

The importance of the strategy lies in the process itself. The process of developing, implementing, and maintaining a sustainable CEM process can be employed by any public land management organization.

factors that affect all stakeholders (Arnould 2007). It is imperative that a CEM plan be implemented with all these factors in mind.

The suggested sustainable Customer Experience Management framework has five fundamental steps: understand customers through research, develop a positioning statement, create a brand identity, improve visitor satisfaction, and keep the edge. These steps will be explained more explicitly and applied as suggested to the management of public lands throughout the paper.

Step 1: Understand Customers through Research

Understanding and analyzing the experiential world of the customer provides a company or organization with key insights regarding the intricate needs, those obvious and latent, of their customers, as well as how to fulfill those needs. “Customer insight enables a company to position a product with the right features, appeal, communications, and customer interface” (Schmitt 2003, 54). To successfully understand the needs of the customers, the foundation of the entire CEM project, an organization must perform a series of tasks.

To begin, the organization must identify the target customer for the intended experience. Next, the expectations and usage patterns of consumers should be understood. To do this, the organization should track the entire customer experience along all the touchpoints between the customer and the organization, from simple awareness of the product to its purchase, usage, and disposal. The final step to understand the customer through research is to be aware of the competition, and examine how the competition can affect the customer experience by understanding substitutes and other demands on the consumers’ time. It is crucial that the public land management organizations complete this step successfully, for this is where the entire process of becoming customer-focused begins.

Identify the Target Customer

The process of segmenting and targeting allows an organization to effectively and profitably divide a market into identifiable groups of

comparable consumers who will respond to marketing mix tactics similarly. Segmentation only has value if it is related to consumer-product relationships (Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2004). The segmentation strategy which most appropriately addresses the consumer-product relationship is benefit segmentation. Benefit segmentation divides consumers based on the different benefits sought from the product (i.e., the land and its plant life and wildlife) and its consumption. The underlying belief of the benefit segmentation strategy is that “the benefits which people are seeking in consuming a given product are the basic reasons for the existence of true market segments” (Haley 1968). Each customer is seeking a different experience from the consumption of public lands. Every experience is personal; however, market segments can be differentiated by understanding the total configuration of benefits sought by different groups of consumers.

Understand Customers through Research

- **Identify the Target Customer**
Segmenting and targeting the market
- **Understand Customer Expectations and Usage Patterns**
Tracking experiences along touchpoints
- **Understand Substitutes and Other Demands on Customer Time**
Identifying direct and indirect competitors

Potential Segmentation Strategy

Remote Nature Experiences

Consumers belonging to the Remote Nature Experiencers desire to engross themselves in all nature has to offer, and display complete competence by doing so on their own terms. These consumers use public lands to escape from civilization and most of its remnants. Their experience is hindered by excessive people and instructions.

Guided/Assisted Nature Experience

Consumers belonging to the Guided/Assisted Nature Experiencers segment seek a more secure experience in nature. They require more directions, and see the “clutter” of signs and people as safety, not obstructing, but aiding in the experience.

These two segments help to define the general consumers of public lands, however benefits sought are much more complex and the market requires more specific segmentation.

Remote Nature Experiences

Discoverers – People who crave to go off the beaten path and discover nature on their own.

Adrenalines – People who seek an unguided nature adventure, and receive a rush from the thrill of the activity in which they are engaged.

Thoreaus – People who want to fully immerse themselves in nature and take it in as it comes.

Guided/Assisted Nature Experience

Groupies – Large groups, families, older individuals, and others who seek more security and structure in their nature excursions.

Learners – People who yearn for cognitive stimulation, and want to be educated about the sites they visit including their cultural heritage.

Tourists – The “list checkers.” People who simply want to see and absorb as much as they can as to check each experience off the list.

(Alm, Hayford, Hoversten, and Magby 2007)

Understand Expectations and Usage Patterns

Visitor experiences should be tracked at the touchpoints that exist between the company and the customer. A touchpoint is any point of contact between the organization and the customers. This contact can range from personal interactions with organizational employees to visitors’ encounters with the signs and trails on public lands. “Every time your customers see, visit, talk to or interact with your company, they are using a touchpoint” (Kohs 2007).

Understanding consumers’ expectations and land usage patterns allow for the opportunity to enrich the customer experience throughout the entire land consumption process. Essentially, consumers’ experiences on public lands are dependent on an organization’s ability to fully engage consumers in and allow them to co-create the experience.

Experiences are highly personal and memorable events, which require the organizations to create a connection with the customers. The co-creation of an experience means the organization sets the stage for an experience to occur with services and the land, but includes the users

to deliver uniqueness. Successful experiences are achieved when consumers are able to show competence and are granted control over their experiences. Each touchpoint offers the NPS, NFS, and BLM an opportunity to enhance the experience of the consumer if

Competitive Landscape

Direct Competitors: public lands and organizations that provide a comparable experience to what is being offered by the public land organization in question.

- Examples of direct competitors to camping in Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) include:

- National Forest Service lands
- Bureau of Land Management lands
- Private camp areas (KOAs)
- Concessionaire-operated campgrounds
- Other national parks that permit camping and are located near GTNP

Indirect Competitors: organizations that could provide an alternative to the experience that is being offered by the public land organizations.

- Examples of indirect competitors to camping in GTNP include:

- Nearby resorts, hotels, and rental cabins
- RV rentals and parks in and around GTNP

(Alm, Hayford, Hoversten, and Magby 2007)

appropriate information and props (e.g., signage, topography) are available during each stage of the consumption process.

Understand Substitutions and Other Demands on Consumers' Time

Visitors' decisions to consume public land controlled by NPS, NFS, or BLM can be affected by numerous direct and indirect competitors offering a similar experience to consumers. It is necessary for the organizations to be aware of their competitors and the effects they may have on consumers' desired and achieved experiences.

Step 2: Develop a Positioning Statement

The strategic connection between the research of Step 1 and the implementation phase of the entire CEM project comes when the experience value offered to consumers by the organization is communicated. Determining the value provided during the experience sets the course for the next three implementation steps of the CEM framework. "The [indication and communication of the value] effectively convey internally and externally what an organization, its brand, and its products stand for and what...they offer to customers" (Schmitt 2003, 87).

A company benefits by indicating the experience value as this articulates the value of a company, brand, or product to its customers. The determined value captures key insights on customers, helps coordinate marketing efforts, and suggests an implementation direction (Baker 2007a).

Positioning Statement

Positioning Statement Structure

To *(target audience)*, *(name)* is the brand of *(frame of reference*)* that *(differentiated benefit**)* because *(reason to believe)*.

* What product category the brand belongs to

** Promise, what the brand stands for in the customer's mind

Sample Positioning Statement

"To the Discoverers, the National Park Service offers the ultimate secluded, unguided, unique, and memorable experience with nature because the NPS manages the land and provides the necessary information that allows visitors to create their own trip and experience."

(Alm, Hayford, Hoversten, and Magby 2007; see also Braig 2007)

The most efficient and effective communication of the strategic connection between the experience value determined through research and the implementation phase of CEM is a positioning statement. A positioning statement is an internal statement of strategy that specifies the nature of the brand promise. The statement outlines the promise made to the customers by the organization by addressing three questions: who is the promise being made to, what is the promise, and why should the consumers believe the organization making the promise (Braig 2007).

Step 3: Create a Brand Identity

With the positioning statement built to show differentiation and what customers value, the brand identity must follow straight from this platform. The brand identity is "how the [provider] wants consumers to think, feel, and act with respect to their brand" (Kotler and Lee 2007, 114). In the case of public lands, the organizations' brands stand for the sustainability of and connectivity with nature.

The primary functions of a brand are to identify the provider of the good, service, or experience, signify quality, create competitive barriers, and secure price premium (Hunt 2007). A strong brand image can help achieve several marketing objectives of the organizations. According to Kotler and Lee (2007, 117), "Heightened awareness and understanding of the features, spirit,

Create a Brand Identity

- **Specify the Marketing Objectives the Brand Supports**
- **Internally Communicate an Ideal Brand Identity**
- **Differentiate the Brand Relative to its Competition**
- **Choose Brand Elements**
- **Secure the Brand's Future**
 - Instill in visitors the mission for public land management
 - Provide guidelines for usage of brand elements
 - Manage touchpoints
 - Ensure brand visibility
 - Track the brand's position in the minds of visitors over time

and personality of your brand may make all the difference in usage levels.” A brand image that is recognizable, trusted, and attractive can help ensure more consumption of the provided experience. A strong brand identity also serves to help consumers find what they are looking for, allowing them to make their decisions more easily and quickly, guaranteeing their satisfaction.

To create a desired brand identity, (a) specify marketing objectives the brand supports with the target audiences and the brand positioning in mind, (b) communicate an ideal brand identity, (c) differentiate the brand relative to its competition, (d) choose brand elements, and (e) secure the brand’s future (see also Kotler and Lee 2007).

Specify the Marketing Objectives the Brand Supports

The brand may be used to create awareness about the availability and possible usages of public lands, it may be used to persuade people to participate in natural experiences because of the benefits provided, and/or it may be used to remind current users of the benefits of natural experiences. Objectives should specify desired outcomes and should keep in mind the desired target audience(s) (step 1) and what they are being promised (step 2).

Internally Communicate an Ideal Brand Identity

The brand image created should trigger certain memories, images, words, and feelings in the minds of the customers. This image should help customers imagine successful experiences on public lands or help them recall successful co-created experiences in which they already have partaken.

Differentiate the Brand Relative to its Competition

The direct and indirect competitors determined in Step 1 of the CEM process are what the brand will be positioned against in the minds of the consumers. The positioning statement (step 2) should clearly show how the public land offering is different than what the competition offers. For instance, the mission for NPS is and always has been about preserving the land and providing visitors an experience with nature. This is what differentiates NPS, NFS, and BLM from the competition.

Choose Brand Elements

Brand elements are the colors, names, slogans, or logos associated with the brand. Brand elements should be consistent, complementary, and reflective of the previous decisions made regarding the target audience and the brand’s positioning. For example, the current logo of the NPS properly conveys the



organization’s positioning statement. By use of the arrowhead, mountain, tree, and buffalo, it is apparent that the logo represents the NPS’s mission to protect and share nature. It would also be appropriate for each park, forest, and land in their respective systems to have their own brand elements that signify individuality, yet still reflect the organization’s overall brand positioning. For example, Grand Teton National Park could have its own logo to accompany the NPS logo, linking it to the overall system, yet differentiating it from the other parks.

Secure the Brand’s Future

Once the brand identity has been created, it is important to maintain that identity (see also Kotler and Lee 2007).

Instill in visitors the mission for public land management. The brand should inspire visitors to do their part in preserving the land (e.g., clean up after themselves, leave the campsite better than they found it, etc.). All communications about the brand should reflect this theme.

Provide guidelines for usage of brand elements. An internal style manual should inform and assist others in reproducing and displaying the brand.

Manage touchpoints. Customers come in contact with the brand in many ways other than advertising. Touchpoints where visitors contact the brand include interactions with organization employees and partners (e.g., vendors in the park), online and phone experiences, and numerous points along each particular experience while using public lands (e.g., ease of parking, cleanliness and availability of restrooms, cleanliness of the land, etc.). The brand identity communicated to

Brand Elements

Brand elements are the trademarkable devices used to identify and differentiate the brand. They include:

- *Product Itself (public lands)*
- *Logos*
- *Signage*
- *Characters*
- *Brochures*
- *Colors*
- *Advertising`*
- *Sales Promotions*
- *Public Relations*

* Selected brand elements should be meaningful, memorable, likeable, attributable and adaptable to new products or services, and legally protectable.

visitors should be consistent along touchpoints.

Ensure brand visibility.

Appropriate and adequate exposure to brand elements is necessary for visitors to develop the desired perceptions of the brand and the organization itself.

Track the brand's position in the minds of visitors over time.

Conduct research to measure brand image. Establish a benchmark and then occasionally measure visitors' attitudes toward the brand (or brands) to make sure positioning is correct. If not, changes should be made and tests should be conducted again.

Be consistent. Consistency of positioning and brand identity over time leads to less customer confusion and a stronger brand image.

Step 4: Improve Visitor Satisfaction

The second key implementation of the positioning statement involves improving customer satisfaction. Improved customer satisfaction can increase usage, improve operational efficiencies, improve performance measures, and support future funding (Kotler and Lee 2007).

During this stage of the CEM approach, the company examines the “dynamic exchange of information and service that occurs between the customer and the company” (Schmitt 2003, 141). Once again, based on customer input, the organization must structure the customer interface to ensure information exchanges enhance the customer's experience.

The interface includes two primary types of exchanges, most successful when tailored to the needs of the individual customer

(Schmitt 2003). The first exchange is the *face-to-face* interface, which includes interactions that occur in the physical space and through the organization's employees. The second interface involves the *personal-but-distant* exchanges. The interactions in this interface occur over the phone, via fax, in writing, and in the electronic interface. The electronic interactions may be on an e-commerce site or by means of e-mail. By the very nature of this type of communication, the electronic interface is the least personal, although the customer may believe otherwise (Schmitt 2003).

Improve Visitor Satisfaction

1. Create an Internal Culture that Supports Great Service

- Show employees what being customer-focused means
- Provide a means for adequate training
- Empower employees to make decisions about how best to meet visitors' needs
- Develop evaluation and reward systems that provide incentives for employees to make the CEM process an everyday part of their job

2. Develop or Maintain Infrastructures and Systems to Assist in Service Delivery

3. Foster Relationship Building

With customer exchanges and interactions offering the public land management organizations the opportunity to connect with the customers and increase their satisfaction with their experience, it is imperative that the organization structure the customer interface correctly. Using what was learned about the target customers in Step 1

of the CEM process, indicating and communicating the positioning statement determined in Step 2, and reinforcing the brand identity as specified in Step 3, the organizations should be able to design a customer interface that will improve customer satisfaction and differentiate public land management organizations and their individual units from their competitors.

To accomplish the goal of improved customer satisfaction, the organizations should:

Create an Internal Culture that Supports Great Service

It is important for the public land management organizations to recognize the importance of employees, and the key role employees play as the faces of the organizations. Considering the significance of positive employee attitude, the organizations should focus their attention and resources on attracting, developing, encouraging, and maintaining the best employees they can find.

In thinking about hiring and supporting employees some basic principles should be applied.

Show employees what being customer-focused means. Directors and managers should lead by example. For example, conversations about visitor satisfaction should be a common occurrence in staff meetings.

Provide a means for adequate training. Professional development for new and existing employees should include training on the concepts and tools of CEM.

Empower employees to make decisions about how best to meet visitors' needs. Once employees understand what visitors' needs are and/or how to determine them, employees can be empowered to provide appropriate assistance to

meet the unique needs of each visitor. For instance, assistance could include information about what lands are available and how lands should be used appropriately.

Develop evaluation and reward systems that provide incentives for employees to make the CEM process an everyday part of their job. The CEM process is only effective if each and every employee realizes its potential contribution to the organization. Making the CEM efforts of each employee a part of the evaluation and reward structure ensures that CEM becomes part of the organizational culture.

Develop or Maintain Infrastructures and Systems that Assist in Service Delivery

Well functioning systems are another key to ensuring customer satisfaction. All customer contact points and procedures should be explored for potential improvements. Everything from maps and brochures, to websites, to trail signs, to interactions with employees should communicate the values of the organizations, and help in the co-creation of experiences with nature. Emphasis should be placed on making it easier for visitors to get the types of information and services they need to facilitate their experiences.

Foster Relationship Building

The relationship under consideration is that between the customers, the land, and the public land management organizations. In the creation of national parks, national forests, and other public lands, the organizations have cultivated the relationship between visitors and nature. The organizations' personnel can continue to foster these relationships by allowing for co-created nature experiences on pristine public lands.

Example: The Ideal Service Interaction

Each visitor of Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) has different expectations of proper service from the park employees. While camping in Grand Teton National Park, the members of the Discoverers segment expect a higher level of interaction with park employees during the planning and preparation stage of the trip, limited interaction during the camping trip itself, and the least amount of service interaction once the trip has concluded. Although desiring only a restricted amount of service interaction, the exchanges that do occur must always be informative.

The Discoverers require adequate information to make their camping experience a success. For this reason, GTNP employees must be extremely well educated about the land and animals, the park restrictions and regulations, and the areas that the segment would most like to visit. It is at this point that employee empowerment will be essential. Employees must understand the work they complete and the service they provide can directly affect the success of the consumer's camping experience.

Before the trip:

Consumers may call or e-mail requesting information about trail and weather conditions, current number of other campers in the area, safety information pertaining to the area, and any other pertinent information before heading out miles away from civilization.

Once on the trip:

Consumers desire to be left alone to discover nature to its fullest, and would most likely appreciate little to no human interaction. Passing an occasional park ranger will demonstrate to the campers that the NPS is active in protecting and preserving the public lands. However, if the consumer is unable to truly escape from society and its inhabitants, then their experience may be spoiled. Within constraints of rules, the park rangers should seek to enhance and never hinder the camping experience. Informing the campers about an excellent private area, the best place to view undisturbed wildlife, and possibly how to properly interact with nature will allow for the co-creation of a superior experience.

After the trip:

Consumers may wish to communicate to the park rangers about the successes and failures of their trip, what they encountered or saw, and any suggestions they may have to increase customer satisfaction. It is imperative for this opportunity to be provided, for it tangibilizes the visitor's connectivity with GTNP, the NPS, and nature itself. Encouraging visitors in this segment to share their insights and interaction with the organizations, illustrates to visitors that they have a stake in the condition of the national parks. This also increases their desire to preserve the lands, and provides the NPS crucial information about visitors' needs and how to fulfill them better.

(Alm, Hayford, Hoversten, and Magby 207)

The preserved land sets the scene, and the granted control permits the customers to realize their individual "moment of truth" that personalizes their trip in nature and their relationship with the land. The "moment of truth" for customers is the instant they feel that the experience has been a success and decide they would like to experience it again. It is the moment visitors personally decide their trips on public lands were "worth it."

In supporting the employees to deliver great customer service, ensuring that the infrastructure helps

service delivery, and fostering relationship building, public land management organizations can create the ideal service interaction. The ideal service interaction addresses the service delivery imperatives, and how to deliver service as expected.

Step 5: Keep the Edge

It is necessary for all companies to engage in continuous innovation to enhance the customer experience and keep pace with the competition, thus living up to the promise of its stated experience value (Schmitt 2003). The final implementation stage of the CEM process allows the organization to stay center stage in the consumer's lifestyle. Customer experiences are enhanced by innovations, for they increase the value of doing business with the company, improve the customers' lives by providing new solutions, and project an image of relevance. An innovative organization simply shows that it desires to build customer equity. Directors understand that the more an organization invests in new and existing customers, the more long-term return they will achieve (Baker 2007b).

Innovations should be developed with the intention of improving customers' personal lives. Innovations can take the form of new product developments or marketing innovations (Schmitt 2003). New product developments are considered major breakthroughs that can change the experiences of customers entirely. Small innovations to the existing products or customer interface can also improve the customer experience. Marketing innovations often demonstrate to customers the organization's creativeness in advertising and promotions, new product launches, special events, and other visible activities (Schmitt 2003).

Public land management organizations must engage in continuous innovation to sustain the brand and stay in the consumers'

Innovation Suggestions

The National Park Service must engage in continuous innovation to sustain the brand and stay in the consumers' lives. It is essential that the NPS integrate customer experience into the development process.

Product Development

Based on the idea that the active Discoverers seek to explore nature off the beaten path and discover things on their own, the NPS can offer a product that allows for an enhanced experience.

The NPS could offer Discoverers an unbeatable experience if they were to team up with a corporation such as Magellan to provide visitors the ability to rent a global positioning system (GPS) at the visitor center in Grand Teton National Park

- Equip GPSs with plotted points that the employees and experienced customers of GTNP feel the Discoverers would like to visit
- Visitors could rent out a GPS for a more challenging excursion not marked on the trail maps that few get to experience
- GPSs can also be offered for purchase at the visitor center if the consumers wish to plot their own favorite spots as to experience the perfect "moment of truth" on each camping journey
- Magellan would benefit from increased exposure to potential customers, frequent use of their products, and the association with the respectable National Park Service
- The NPS and GTNP would benefit from increased customer satisfaction in showing a desire to co-create the best experience possible for their visitors

Marketing Innovations

More innovative marketing efforts could convey to more potential consumers the significant experiences that can be provided by the consumption of national parks.

The sponsoring of events could offer the NPS a unique and affordable method to remain center-stage in consumers' lives. For instance, an event entitled *Show Us Your Moment of Truth* could entice Discoverers to visit GTNP for a competition in which the participants must set out on a secluded weekend camping journey to capture on film their "moment of truth."

- Enlist local outdoor gear and photography stores to donate items to create a prize package for the best image
- Local stores would profit from the demonstrated support of GTNP and the patronage of contestants preparing for the competition
- GTNP and the NPS would receive ample exposure, and attract many new and existing customers to the park – the collection of submitted photographs will act as personal testimonials to the experiences that can be had in GTNP
- If the event is well received, it can become an annual occasion and celebration of the National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park

(Alm, Havford, Hoversten, and Maehv 2007)

lives. It is essential that the organizations integrate customer experience into the development process.

Ensure Sustainability

As discussed earlier, sustainability involves the coordination of economic development, environmental stewardship, and community well-being. It is important that public land management organizations consider each of these factors and

their interrelationships within each step of formulating and implementing a Customer Experience Management plan.

Sustainable economic development meets the current needs of consumers, while considering the needs of future generations. Public land management organizations were originally created to maintain the integrity of the land for current visitors, and ensure its preservation for future visitors. Unfortunately, without proper funding, the

organizations may no longer be able to continue to appropriately conserve the land for the enjoyment of visitors. For proper funding, the organizations must have monetary support from the government, which requires increased usage rates. Becoming customer-centric by means of implementing a proper CEM plan is a step in the right direction.

Changing lifestyles have altered people’s views on visiting and using public lands, and the organizations must work to show consumers that an experience with nature is not only beneficial, but essential. Experiences in nature can provide consumers a sense of humility, responsibility, and self-identity. If the organizations can properly convey this message, attract visitors, and then co-create the ultimate experience in nature, those customers are more likely to be retained. Loyal customers lead to monetary and political support, ensuring that the public land management organizations will have the resources to meet the needs of current customers as well as those of future generations.

Environmental stewardship ensures conservation of natural resources and ecological integrity. This concern is in-line with the primary purpose of the preservation of the natural environment. Thus, these organizations already do a good job focusing on environmental stewardship. However, it may require more than just the organizations’ employees respecting and protecting the land.

The organizations represent the preservation and exploration of nature. Becoming customer centric and making the organizations’ brands distinct and more relevant to targeted customers not only provides a competitive advantage for public lands, but more

importantly, involves the customers and encourages in them a feeling of responsibility to protect and experience the lands. Each critical touchpoint and interaction such as visiting the website, communicating with employees, and personal encounters in nature, should foster a sense of responsibility in the visitors to appreciate the organizations’ brand’s values themselves and communicate them to others.

It is imperative that all be on the same level as the organizations’ employees regarding respect for the land and wildlife on that land. When a consumer visits a public land they should know how to treat the land and how to safely view wildlife. The organizations should try to instill in visitors a sense of environmental stewardship through their brands. The brands’ values are brought to life through the visitors who stay on trails when no one is around to watch, who pick up their trash, who do not camp in sites that are closed for re-growth, who do not feed or approach wild animals, and who are simply socially and environmentally responsible public land users. The employees who educate visitors and encourage them to perform these actions are also bringing the brand’s values to life, and are ensuring further environmental conservation.

Community well-being addresses the quality-of-life available to all individuals with a focus on equal opportunity for participants. Providing the highest quality-of-life for all stakeholders leads the organizations to consider their employees, customers, and the communities surrounding the public lands.

As addressed in *Step 4: Improve Visitor Satisfaction*, positive, productive employees are a necessity. For the employees to be beneficial to the organizations, they

must be respected and appreciated. Proper employee empowerment, encouragement, and reward systems can go a long way. Public land management organizations should be a desired place of employment, providing them a pool of the best, most productive and loyal employees from which to select.

The formulation and implementation of a CEM plan essentially aims at providing the highest quality-of-life to customers; however, focusing on equal opportunity for all participants is a major factor not previously addressed. As mentioned earlier, the co-creation of an experience with nature relies on the organizations’ ability to provide adequate information to visitors, and foster relationship building between the visitors and nature. Because the land is by definition *public*, it is essential that each consumer is provided the same opportunities. However, some visitors are more desirable than others and more effort can be exerted to attract the preferred target. For example, visitors who are respectful of the land and the wildlife are preferred. To attract this type of visitor, information must be tailored to be useful and beneficial. With proper communication and enforcement of rules and regulations, both visitors and public land managers should be able to achieve their goals.

Consumers visiting public lands are essential to the livelihood of gateway communities. Gateway communities rely on people visiting public lands to survive and thrive economically. For instance, national park visitors spend about \$226 million a year in Montana creating: \$96.9 million in personal income, 5,840 jobs, and \$113.5 million in value added by the region to the goods or services produced (Keck 2007). It is apparent that increased

public land usage is key to the livelihood of these local communities. The organizations should work closely with these communities to create a symbiotic relationship that benefits all. That is, gateway communities should be viewed as both customers and partners.

Conclusion

The execution of a Customer Experience Management plan is an analytical and creative process that is focused on strategy and implementation. The process challenges organizations to become completely customer-focused so as to differentiate the organization, build rich relations with customers, and ultimately obtain absolute customer experience satisfaction. Since the existence of public lands is reliant on loyal customers and their affect for the parks as well as their repeat patronage, it is especially important for the public land management organizations to become customer-focused and employ a CEM strategy.

Based on an understanding of the customer, implementing the determined experience value through creating a desired brand identity, increasing customer satisfaction, and keeping the edge will provide the organizations a means to become entirely customer-focused as to attract and retain customers. The suggested CEM strategy can help the organizations increase public land visitations to a desired rate, maintain the organizations and ensure citizens will always have the ability to discover life and themselves through experiences with nature.

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