

Developing Visitor Profiles at an American Cultural/Heritage Tourism Attraction: A case study of the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial

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Introduction

Overall in the United States tourism is big business. Based on a study conducted by Mandala Research, LLC (2013) cultural and heritage tourism visitors spend \$994 per trip compared to \$611 for all U.S. travelers. Overall economic impact numbers translate to approximately 118 million adult cultural / heritage tourism travelers generating approximately \$192 billion annually to the U.S. economy (Mandala, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (2011) a cultural-heritage traveler is defined as an individual having participated in one or more of the following activities: (1) art gallery / museum; (2) concert / play / musical; (3) cultural heritage sites; (4) ethnic heritage sites; American Indian community; (5) historical places or (6) national parks.

In order to assist cultural / heritage tourism operations the National Trust for Historic Preservation (2011) developed five guiding principles that can be implemented using four basic steps. The principles that should be followed include: (1) collaboration; (2) finding the right fit; (3) make sites and programs come alive; (4) focus on quality and authenticity; and (5) preserving and protecting. These five principles can be facilitated using four steps: (1) assessing potential; (2) planning and organizing; (3) preparing, protecting and managing; and (4) marketing for success. This brief case study will examine the collaboration effort between a major southeastern university and the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial.

Management Dilemma

In 1999 a research project was conducted for the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial. The desired result was to develop a visitor profile that could be used for marketing and promotion purposes. Visitor profile information collected included demographic information and an inventory of visitor preferences. As a follow-up to that project, the original PI was contacted during the fall of 2010 to update the profile information gathered in 1999. The Director of Marketing for the memorial requested the same information be collected and updated. The destination manager requested the follow-up analysis in order for the information to be used with the development of a new strategic marketing and promotion program.

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Background

The USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial arrived in Wilmington, NC on October 2, 1961 and was strategically placed on the riverbank across from downtown Wilmington, NC. It was the first battleship constructed in sixteen years when the keel was laid in October of 1937. It earned 15 battle stars in World War II while participating in every major naval offensive in the Pacific. The USS North Carolina Battleship currently serves as the memorial to North Carolina's World War II veterans and the 10,000 who died during the war. Today the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial is a self-sustaining non-profit organization, operating as a memorial, a host for community events, and a rental venue. The USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial is completely funded by visitor dollars. This dependence on visitorship has driven the management group of the memorial to always evaluate consumer preferences in order to maintain enough revenues to keep the memorial open and operational.

Visitor Profile Information

The visitor profile development required gathering information from visitors of the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial. In order to obtain a high level of participation all visitors of the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial were approached and asked if they would participate in this study. Participants were offered a survey in one of two formats: (1) paper and pencil or (2) electronically using an iPad. Data was collected for a period of one year, two weekends per month during normal business hours of 9am – 5pm. Over the data collection period 626 surveys were collected and analyzed for this case study. Data analysis for this case study was conducted using various statistical techniques using SPSS 20.0 software.

Table 1 contains complete demographic information of surveyed patrons to the USS NC Battleship Memorial. Based on the results using exploratory factor analysis techniques four constructs were identified. The four constructs identified were: (1) first impressions; (2) employee interactions; (3) ambient conditions; (4) overall quality attributes. Cluster analysis was then conducted and two cluster groupings were identified: (1) highly satisfied and (2) moderately satisfied.

Composite scores were formulated and used by summing individual responses to each of the variables within a particular construct. This method was implemented for all composite scores reported. First impressions were made up of seven variables with a maximum

Table 1

**Demographic characteristics of visitors to the North Carolina
Battleship Memorial**

Trait	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female		53.0
Male	332	46.5
Marital Status		
No		49.5
Yes	310	50.0
Children		
No		52.1
Yes	326	47.3
Ethnicity		
African-American		6.4
American Indian or Alaskan Native	40	1.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	8	1.3
Caucasian	8	72.2
Hispanic / Latino	452	2.2
Other	14	2.4
Employment Status		
Full-time		65.5
Part-time	410	5.8
Unemployed	36	3.8
Student	24	8.9
Retired	56	10.4
Homemaker	65	4.8
Education		
Grade School		2.9
High School	18	23.2
College graduate	145	24.1
Graduate school	220	13.3
Income level		
\$0 - \$50,000		24.1
\$50,000 - \$75,000	151	18.5
\$75,000 - \$100,000	116	16.8
\$100,000 - \$200,000	105	12.8
Above \$200,000	80	8.9
Age		
Under 20		5.4
20-29	34	23.8
30-39	149	17.3
40-49	108	21.6
50-59	135	15.3
60-69	96	10.5
70 or older	66	3.5
n = 626 – some individuals did not supply demographic information	22	

composite score of 63. The mean score for highly satisfied patrons was 56.79 while moderately satisfied patrons reported a mean composite score of 41.51. Variables included: (1) reception / greeting; (2) reception area; (3) reception employees; (4) physical condition and welcoming appeal; (5) grounds; (6) availability of reception employees; and (7) signage to memorial. The employee interactions construct was comprised of seven variables and had a maximum composite score of 63. The mean score for highly satisfied participants was 57.44, while moderately satisfied participants mean score was 41.21. Variables for employee interactions included: (1) knowledge; (2) flexibility; (3) availability; (4) employee dress; (5) farewell greeting; (6) handling of problems; and (7) attitude and friendliness. It was found that employee interaction, had the greatest difference in terms of overall satisfaction among the respondents.

Ambient conditions were made up of eight variables: (1) check in process area; (2) appearance and décor; (3) facility maintenance; (4) hours of operation; (5) facility cleanliness; (6) appearance of reception employees; (7) gift shop selection; and (8) HVAC and had a maximum composite score of 72. The mean score for the highly satisfied patrons was 65.72, while moderately satisfied patrons mean score was 51.12. The final construct of overall quality attributes were comprised of five variables and had a maximum composite score of 45. The total mean composite score for highly satisfied patrons was 42.27, while moderately satisfied patrons mean composite score was 34.53. Variables included: (1) Overall visit to memorial; (2) level of product quality; (3) level of service quality; (4) value; and (5) feeling of safety and security. Other areas that were examined to formulate visitor profiles included personal travel patterns and preferences. Other variables found to be more important to highly satisfied visitors when compared to moderately satisfied visitors were: (1) self-respect; (2) sense of accomplishment; (3) security; (4) warm relationships with others; (5) self-fulfillment; (6) being well respected; (7) sense of belonging; (8) fun and enjoyment in life; and (9) excitement. The visitors that experienced some or all of these daily life items during their tour were on average highly satisfied with their overall visit/tour.

Implications

The director of marketing found the results of the case study to be potentially valuable to their efforts to develop new marketing and promotional materials. Areas of immediate interest to the management team included: (1) increased training of employees because of their impact on overall customer satisfaction and (2) improvement of first impression variables. This case study also provided a framework based on the five principles for how a culture / heritage tourism operation could bring vitality to a community. This case study displayed an example of the first step (collaboration) presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The results of this case study could be

used by the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial operators as a beginning to implementing the four steps of: (1) assessing the potential; (2) planning and organizing; (3) preparing, protecting, and managing; and (4) marketing for success.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial.
- What are the visitor profiles of the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial?
- How do these compare to culture / heritage tourism visitor profiles?
- What are the key needs and expectations of visitors to the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial?
- Can the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial meet all the needs of all their visitors? Why or why not?
- How can a manager or marketer use this information?
- How will this information impact operations? The marketing plan?

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