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E-MARKETING IN THE CREATION OF A TOURIST IMAGE OF THE ŁÓDŹ REGION

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the importance of e-marketing in creating the tourist image of the Łódź region. It presents the essence of image management as an important task for regions, due to the fact that images (and not the actual products) are subjected to evaluation, compared and selected. The image, being one of the most important elements of building competitive advantage in the market, is primarily used for distinction - setting oneself apart from many other similar territories. Due to the fact that the Łódzkie voivodeship is considered by the surveyed people as the least attractive of all Polish voivodships, a number of actions aimed at improving its image has been proposed and problems that require broad and deep research and studies have been identified.

Key words

E-marketing, internet marketing, territorial marketing, tourism marketing, image, tourist image, creating a tourist image, competitive advantage

Introduction

Internet marketing (e-marketing) is still an innovative method of getting to know customers and reaching out to them, which is gaining in popularity. Often, the definition of e-marketing is narrowed down only to promotional or image-based activities, with the exception of desk and field research that can be carried out via the Internet. Marketing is a form customer relationship management that translates into a company profit. Furthermore, marketing works in two ways: it aims to attract future customers by promising them added value, and aims to retain current customers by providing satisfaction. Marketing, therefore, is both financially and temporarily engaging, and using the Internet in marketing saves time and money.

The importance of territorial marketing in creating a tourist image

At present, the issue of territorial marketing, mainly in terms of the activity of territorial and local authorities, is very significant and frequently discussed. Few authors⁴¹ emphasize the importance of cooperation between companies, tourism and local government organizations, which is mainly related to low awareness or reluctance to cooperate on the part of one of the parties. Despite the obvious occurrence of interest groups, individual actions are easier to coordinate and verify later.

The Tourism Promotion Strategy for the years 2005-2013 assumes the support of tourist marketing, making the Polish Tourist Organization responsible. It may be intriguing that the creation of a coherent marketing message, which is one of the foundations of conscious tourism image development, is merely an indirect goal in the Strategy. Increasing the effectiveness of marketing activities remains the responsibility of Regional and Local Tourist Organizations, but in this part, the necessity of cooperation with tourist companies and organizations (or local government) is not emphasized. The strategy emphasizes the need to make use of not only traditional marketing tools, but it also notes the important role of on-line activities. The measurement of the activities and their effectiveness is extremely important (within the framework of Operational Objective 2 in Priority 3).

Attractiveness of the Łódzkie voivodeship to tourists

Analysis of research results on the attractiveness of voivodships to tourists, conducted in 2007 by PART⁴², indicates that the Łódzkie voivodship (next to Opolskie) was considered the least attractive among all Polish voivodships. More than 70% of the respondents declared that within the following two years, they did not intend to visit the Łódź voivodeship. This can be caused by, among others, the very unfavorable tourist image of the

⁴¹ A. E. Szczepankowski points to the need for local authorities to cooperate with tourism companies and organizations, since only such cooperation can generate a mutual benefit in the form of intensified tourist traffic. See: A.E. Szczepankowski, *Marka produktu turystycznego jako źródło przewagi konkurencyjnej regionu*, [in:] *Marketing w rozwoju turystyki*, J. Chotkowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Politechniki Koszalińskiej, Koszalin 2009.

⁴² Program rozwoju turystyki w województwie łódzkim na lata 2007-2020, PART, Warszawa-Łódź 2007.

voivodship, also on the Internet. On-line marketing can also be one of the fastest-growing remedies for the negative perception of the region.

The importance of image management in gaining competitive advantage between regions

At present, image is one of the most important elements of building competitive advantage in the market. Customers evaluate and compare on the basis of image and not the actual product. For this reason, shaping and managing the image becomes an important task for regions. The image serves primarily as a distinction, something to set oneself apart from other similar territories, regions, towns or villages.

Some authors⁴³ claim that territorial marketing activities fall under the exclusive competence of local and regional (communal, county or voivodship) authorities. However, it should be noted that although local government should play a dominant role in creating the image of the region, it is not the only entity responsible for this image. A. Szromnik defines territorial marketing as the philosophy of attaining the goals set, the market concept of managing a settlement unit that aims to meet the needs and desires of the inhabitants by the settlement units.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Basdereff points out that territorial marketing covers all the activities of public administrations and associations and companies operating in the region. This selection and inclusion of all identifiable stakeholder groups is crucial for a coherent image strategy.

The source of identity, or the basis of building the image of the region, is to a great extent its history. It should be noted, however, that this is not the actual story of what forms the basis of identity. Key in the context of the region's identity is rather the perception of its history by residents and local authorities. The image of Łódź, as a post-factorial city, is not related to the real history of the city, which was granted city rights in 1423 and which was a temporary seat of state authority in 1945. In the subjective image of the history of the region, the information that makes it easier to build perceptual simplifications and categorical extensions is the strongest. Łódź is perceived as an industrial city, the history of which dates back to the nineteenth century, since this element was significant for the development of the city.

Benchmarking for the region is indicated in each element of its operation. Comparing governance processes and the functioning of different regions to identify the best solutions is even becoming a duty. Only by adopting a specific reference point and recognizing "good practices" will the region be able to position itself effectively, which in turn is essential to building an image.

It is worth emphasizing that stimulating the creation of a favorable image of the region can generate significant benefits. Investors, tourists and politicians alike are more eager to cooperate or choose as a destination a region that they know and which, to some extent, evokes positive associations. The cost of acquiring a customer is much lower for regions that are positively recognized.

Due to increased competition among regions in pursuit of the limited market resources, image is one of the key components of competitive advantage. Apart from economic gains and price dictation opportunities,⁴⁵ or the increase in added value, the most important reason for creating the image of the region is for the customers to "buy us because it is us". The image of Kraków as a tourist attraction was not born in one day or as a result of a single contact with the name of the city. It is a result of many years of hard work in this field. Although tourist attractions in the Łódź region are still less known, it still has the chance to build a positive and strong image of an attractive tourist region.

It should be noted it is not necessary for a customer to have personal contact with a place to develop an idea and opinion. An image arises even as a result of unconscious contact with the brand, provided that the excitement that accompanies it is strong enough. S. Um and J.L. Crompton emphasize that consumers-tourists build their idea of a region by continual comparisons with other regions, but also encompass the entire region on the basis of contact with some part of it in their ideas.⁴⁶

⁴³ T. Markowski, Marketing miasta, [in:] Marketing terytorialny, T. Markowski (ed.), Komitet Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania Kraju Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2006, pp. 89-96.

⁴⁴ A. Szromnik, Marketing terytorialny. Miasto i region na rynku, Oficyna Wolters Kluwer Business, Kraków 2007, p. 16.

⁴⁵ J. Altkorn, Wizerunek firmy, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2004, pp. 10-29.

⁴⁶ S. Um, J.L. Crompton, The Roles of Image and Perceived Constraints at Different Stages in the Tourist's Destination Decision Process, [in:] Consumer behaviour in travel and tourism, A. Pizam, Y. Mansfeld (ed.), The Havorth Hospitality Press, New York 2000, pp. 81-82.

S. Pike argues that positioning against the competition is based on the refinement of the individual components, which he describes as "place attributes".⁴⁷ Usually, the attributes attributed to a region and to a city are different. The basic criterion for differentiation is the extent and concentration of a greater number of elements significant in tourist terms. In the case of Paris, the elements directly associated with the city are the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. In case of Kraków - Wawel and Sukiennice. Of course, any city can have more or fewer attributes (up to four). A region is a specific entity, because there are more attributes and it is more difficult to designate them. For this reason, it may be assumed that for a region, an attribute may be an entire city or some limited area, such as a landscape park.

Conclusion

There is a strong connection between the image itself, the image of the tourist destination and the tourist image. In B. Gotwald's concept, the tourist image is situated between the image of the tourist destination and the image in general. A *tourism destination* should be considered as a specific, territorial-restricted destination for a tourist's visit. Very rarely, an entire region is a tourist destination, due to the diversified nature of customer needs and the offer of individual locations within that region. An image, in turn is a concept, too broad in this case, because it captures the sum of beliefs and ideas of all potential customer groups regarding the region. Therefore, it seems desirable to distinguish the notion of a tourist image, which refers to the sum of perceptual reflections on a territorially restricted area, in which the sum of tourist values is distributed unequally, and the image of which becomes the result of impressions from individual potential, real and rejected destinations.

In conclusion, the problem is complex and difficult and requires research and study. It seems important to diagnose whether how e-marketing is utilized by companies and organizations in the tourism sector and by the local government and if it affects the tourist image of the Łódź region. A problem formed in such a way should not be merely an analysis of the e-marketing utilized by the local government. It should also not be limited to diagnosing the impact of e-marketing activities on the perception of the administration itself. It should be an attempt to identify all stakeholder groups and (based on benchmarking) describe "good practices" in this regard. On the other hand, in order to obtain the best possible results, the study should include companies, tourist organizations and local self-government units, the registered office of which is in the Łódź voivodeship and those with a scope of activities directly connected with the Łódź region.

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⁴⁷ S. Pike, Destination Marketing Organisations, Elsevier, Oxford 2004, p. 113.

E-MARKETING W KREOWANIU WIZERUNKU TURYSTYCZNEGO REGIONU ŁÓDZKIEGO

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie znaczenia e--marketingu w kreowaniu wizerunku turystycznego regionu łódzkiego. Ukazano w nim istotę zarządzania wizerunkiem jako istotnego zadania dla regionów, z uwagi na fakt, iż wizerunki (a nie realne produkty) podlegają ocenie, porównaniu i wyborowi. Wizerunek, stanowiąc jeden z najważniejszych elementów budowania przewagi konkurencyjnej na rynku, służy przede wszystkim dystynkcji – odróżnieniu się od wielu innych podobnych terytoriów. W związku z tym, iż województwo łódzkie uznawane jest przez badanych, za najmniej atrakcyjne spośród wszystkich polskich województw, zaproponowano szereg działań zmierzających do poprawy jego wizerunku oraz sformułowano problemy wymagające szerokich i pogłębionych badań i studiów.

Słowa kluczowe

wizerunek, marketing w internecie, e-marketing, marketing terytorialny, marketing turystyczny, wizerunek turystyczny, kreowanie wizerunku turystycznego, przewaga konkurencyjna