

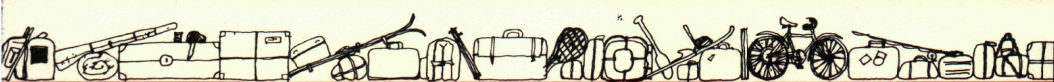
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Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
Tourism Information Series No. 9
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September 1986
8 pages

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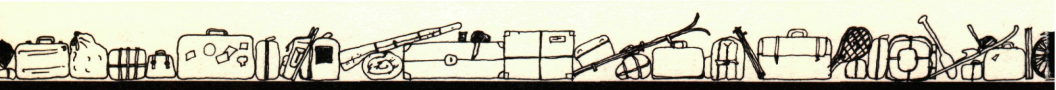


Tourism information series no. 9

Cooperative Extension Service
Michigan State University
Extension Bulletin E-1938
September 1986
60¢

Managing Tourism Information Systems





MANAGING TOURISM INFORMATION SYSTEMS

By Maureen H. McDonough and Gary A. Ackert



Whatever the activities of a community or business, they each communicate something about the community or business to consumers. Consumers receive this information through many different sources, or channels. These channels combine to form information systems which are always functioning, regardless of whether you are managing them or not. If you represent a community or business, it is extremely important to know how to manage information systems to make them work for you.

The purpose of this bulletin is to define information systems, to discuss why it is important to manage them, and to provide you with some ideas on how to manage them.

WHAT IS AN INFORMATION SYSTEM?

In general, an information system consists of all the ways that people communicate with others. Systems are composed of information channels. These channels may be formal or informal, personal or impersonal, and public or private. Information channels are used in different ways and combinations by different people, businesses, and communities.

A tourism information system is a specific type of information system. It consists of all information channels used in a business or community to promote itself as a tourism attraction. These information channels include commercials, ads, brochures, repeat visitors, employees, friends, and relatives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISM INFORMATION SYSTEMS

There are three characteristics that all effective tourism information systems have:

- 1) Each channel in the system has its own function. Travelers use different channels to get different kinds of information. An example is deciding where to go on vacation. A person may consult a friend or family member for that decision, but in deciding what to do when he/she gets there, the person may talk with a repeat visitor or employee at the destination site.



2) All the information channels used in the system relate to each other. A tourism information system is like a novel because it has many different parts tied together by the theme. Even though a system's channels serve different functions in providing information, they are all tied together by the projected message.

3) All channels used in the system are interdependent. A tourism information system functions like a puzzle. The different pieces of the system, the channels, are used to communicate with tourists. If any of the puzzle pieces are missing, the puzzle's picture is incomplete. If one or more of the channels used is not dispersing information effectively, or if the information dispersed does not relate to the rest of the system, then the system will not effectively communicate its whole message.

If one or more of these characteristics is missing from a tourism information system, then its message will be inconsistent and ineffective.

WHAT ARE THE PARTS OF A TOURISM INFORMATION SYSTEM?

We have covered the fact that a tourism information system is made up of different related and interdependent information channels. But what are these channels? Examples of these channels include:

- State promotional messages,
- Regional tourist associations,
- Travel information centers,
- Individual business promotion,
- Employee knowledge,
- Brochures, signs,
- The community's visual image (appearance):
 - storefronts, billboards, etc.
 - its hospitality
 - community awareness and pride,
- Other travelers,
- Repeat visitors.



While this list is not exhaustive, it gives you some idea of what can be used as channels. The only limitation is your imagination in how you present your message.

WHY MANAGE YOUR TOURIST INFORMATION SYSTEM?

There are three major reasons why it is necessary to manage information systems. The first reason is that travelers need organized information so that it becomes easier to acquire information and make decisions. They do not want to, nor have time to, sort through information that is confusing and disorganized. The easier it is to get information, the more comfortable travelers feel and the more enjoyable the trip will be for them. Travelers who are satisfied with their trip will be more likely to return and to tell others about the good time they had. By managing your information system, you can make it easy for travelers to get the information they want.

The second reason to manage tourism information systems is to present your theme and identify it to travelers in a clear, concise, and consistent manner (See Extension bulletin E-1957). By managing your information system, you have some control over what information travelers receive and through what channels. This way you can make sure that all the delivered information relates to your theme, and you are better able to develop continuity and coherence throughout your system.

The third reason why it is important to manage tourism information systems is that they play an important role in community development. This is especially important in tourism because travelers see the community as a whole, rather than as individual parts. People base their image of a community on the information received from the community's information system. A community's image (see E-1957) is important because tourists often become future investors and residents in communities that they find attractive. You want to be able to manage your information system so that the image you want is projected.



HOW CAN YOU MANAGE YOUR TOURISM INFORMATION SYSTEM?

There are a variety of tools that you can use to manage your tourism information system. Here we want to deal with the four that experts believe are the most effective. These tools are most effective when used together, but they can be used individually:

- 1) Establish a committee or organization to manage your tourism information system. It should control what information is used and how it is distributed throughout the system. It should also be responsible for evaluating the system's effectiveness.
- 2) Establish a set of standards, or guidelines, for deciding what, how, and through what channels information will be presented. This will help ensure that information used will accurately reflect your community's identity and theme and that it reaches the right target market.
- 3) Develop community co-operation in the system. Explain the benefits of being involved in the system to local businesspersons and to community residents, and develop community awareness and pride.
- 4) Consider Zoning—A community's appearance plays a significant role in its tourism information system. A tourist's image of a community is significantly influenced by its appearance. Zoning can be used to make sure that a community's appearance will have a positive influence on its image.

Zoning provides the following advantages. It gives you control over "street level environment," meaning things such as sidewalks, shopping malls and centers, town squares, and the avenues of access and travel to and through each. Zoning gives the control needed to maintain adequate amounts of space for people to move freely in, around, and through these areas.

Zoning can also be used to manage the outward appearance of your "street level environment." All structures constructed, such as storefronts, signs, etc., can be required to reflect your community's identity and theme. (See Extension bulletin E-1957). Zoning also allows you to save older, historical buildings while allowing for the development of surrounding property.



There are two types of zoning: predated design features, and transfer of rights. Predated design features can be used as incentive zoning or as mandated design features. With incentive zoning, developers are granted building privileges for including a predated design feature(s) in the building design. Mandated design features require developers to include a certain predated design feature in the building. Transfer of rights is used to transfer the rights to development of a particular piece of property from one developer to another.

When using zoning, the zoning commission, or board, must be easily accessible and flexible. Then, when changes in zoning regulations are needed, they can be made.

WHAT WILL A TOURIST INFORMATION SYSTEM DO FOR YOU?

A well organized tourism information system will benefit local businesses, the community, and local residents as well as travelers. It helps area residents and travelers locate recreation activities, sites, and service outlets. It helps build community pride and establish long term ties with satisfied visitors. It will also avoid confusion and other problems that can result from poorly oriented, directed, and managed travelers, such as traffic problems.

This bulletin was written to help you understand what a tourism information system is, why it needs to be managed, and to give you some ideas on how to manage it. But managing one is not easy, and it does not happen over night. It takes a lot of long range planning, and foresight, as well as some expertise and being able to stick-to-it to overcome any obstacles encountered.

Other Sources

- How To Promote To Bring People Back Downtown. Downtown Research and Development Center, 270 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016.
- Managing Design and Development Downtown. U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C., March, 1983.

