Abstract: This paper examines the integration of entrepreneurial thinking and the elements of marketing strategy in attracting visitors to Grampian region’s castles, focusing specifically on the current tourist initiative of the ‘Castle Trail’. Firstly, the nature of a heritage tourism resource is highlighted. Secondly, the role of entrepreneurship in not for profit organisations is considered. Lastly, the paper explores the need to include entrepreneurial activities in the development of a marketing plan for maximising the potential of the north-east’s heritage tourism resources. It is demonstrated that this approach will allow for the creation of a fundamentally distinctive image that will contribute to the overall success of the initiative.

The central hypothesis is that the marketing of Grampian region’s prime heritage asset is at present inadequate and new initiatives are required to link marketing principles with entrepreneurial practice. This is supported by primary research findings, where it is demonstrated that a rethinking of the current strategy is much needed. The primary research consists of both interviews and questionnaires. The findings of this research are then combined with the findings of the secondary research, the literature review, and together they provide the framework for a number of recommendations.

These include the need to improve road signposting, to extend opening times, and make greater use of sales promotion. A more creative approach can also allow for greater exploitation of new opportunities, particularly in the context of the augmented product. The final conclusion is that there is significant public interest and support for promoting the region’s castles as a major tourist asset, but that at present the potential to promote the region is being clearly under utilised.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyse how entrepreneurial thinking and marketing strategy contribute to heritage tourism within the Grampian region of Scotland, with particular focus on the area’s castles. The north east of Scotland has many castles, which has led to the branding of Aberdeenshire as ‘Castle Country’. This aspect of the region’s heritage is
actively promoted by the Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board (1999), which in its 1999-2000 visitor guide emphasises that the region boasts around 70 different castles, ruins and great houses. It is also unique in that it offers Scotland’s only themed Castle Trail.

The intention is to give countenance to the theory that within the Grampian region the unique built heritage is an under-utilised asset. This is based on the hypothesis that the current marketing strategy for ‘Castle Country’ is simply not effective enough in attracting visitors and that a rethinking of current strategy, employing entrepreneurial ideas, is much needed in order to ensure future success.

There are currently ten castles and historic houses on the Castle Trail, and with one exception, all are owned either by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) or Historic Scotland (HS). For the record, they are:

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<tr>
<th>National Trust for Scotland</th>
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<td>Castle Fraser</td>
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and … Delgatie Castle which is privately owned.

A brief assessment of both organisations will be included, indicating what difficulties they are facing, and current performance reflected in visitor numbers to the castle properties that they manage. There will also be an assessment of what improvements can be made to the Castle Trail itself. For example, are adequate visitor facilities offered at the sites, are the sites easily accessible, and is there enough going on to encourage both new and repeat visits?

It should further be appreciated that while the basic principles of marketing apply, in practice there are special considerations to take into account when marketing heritage/tourism. It is recognised that in dealing with the marketing not of a commercial product, but of an intangible non-profit making service, a different approach is required.

It is for this reason that an entrepreneurial approach must be linked to an effective marketing strategy. The region clearly has much to offer potential visitors. The wealth of historic properties is a major tourist asset. Together
with an increasing public interest in ‘heritage’, this suggests that, given the correct entrepreneurial and marketing focus, the opportunity is there to develop a stronger brand identity for the region in a bid to attract more visitors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The secondary research for the study involves a review of relevant literature, including books, journal and newspaper articles, and promotional literature, such as guidebooks and information supplied by the Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board (AGTB), the NTS and HS. The primary research consists of interviews with the individuals responsible for marketing issues within two of these three organisations. A questionnaire was also given to members of the general public, in order to assess public opinion regarding the current promotion of ‘Castle Country’, and how this may be improved.

In order to gain the views of a cross section of the population, 50% of the sample was interviewed at castle sites across the region, and another 50% drawn from a neutral setting. The objective was to assess the opinions of individuals who already show an interest in visiting castles, as well as those of potential visitors. The visitors will indicate aspects of their visit they are happy or unsatisfied with, whereas members of the general public show if there is indeed a current lack of awareness/interest regarding the promotion of ‘Castle Country’.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Rise of Heritage Tourism

According to the Department of National Heritage, in 1996, heritage and an interest in the past had become one of the largest growth industries in the UK over the previous decade, attracting some 250 million visitors per annum, to a variety of sites. Indeed, Carr (1994) argues that the dominant reason for visits to Britain is to view heritage attractions.

Every country and every society has its own cultural inheritance and unique heritage. A succinct definition of the term ‘heritage’ is offered by Gold and Gold (1995) who argue heritage ‘comprises the valued legacy of previous generations; items from the past that embody tradition and which, by current evaluation are seen as worthy of retaining for the benefit of present and
future generations’. Heritage tourism is thus concerned with the educational and cultural enrichment aspects of tourism.

Newby (1994) has examined the relationship between heritage and tourism, arguing that heritage has been embraced by the tourism industry as a means of increasing the attractiveness, and thus the market potential of heritage sites. He maintains that the relationship between heritage and tourism forms a continuum along which there are three principal focuses, namely, coexistence, exploitation and imaginative reconstruction. The object of the latter is to ‘convert heritage into a tangible asset which can be actively marketed’. Similarly, exploitation occurs when tourism begins to employ a position of importance in the local economy and the cultural heritage becomes the basis for generating a cash flow.

Much of the current literature is firmly in favour of the viewpoint that a move towards a more commercial emphasis is becoming reflected in the heritage tourism industry, with commercial viability in heritage tourism sites becoming increasingly important. Public funding for conserving heritage resources is becoming more and more directly related to commercial performance, contributing to a situation of rising conflict, between heritage conservation and the commercial imperative to attain visitor numbers and targets. This accounts for the increasing importance of marketing and entrepreneurial techniques in selling heritage tourism.

Fladmark’s *Cultural Tourism* (1995) aims to address the basic question; what is the Scottish tourism product? Significantly, it is argued that ‘niche marketing will play an increasingly important role in the future of our industry’, and he also notes that ‘the future is full of opportunity. Scotland can become one of the great international tourism destinations of the next century, but it will only do so if we are quick to grasp the chances and create initiatives that build on our consumer appeal’.

McCrone et al (1995) in *Scotland the Brand – The Making of Scottish Heritage* argues that heritage is central to a nation’s self identity, exploring such issues as ‘commercialising the culture’, ‘manufacturing Scottish heritage’ and the ‘meaning of heritage’. A central theme is the argument that heritage is significant in Scotland because it rests on a national and cultural dimension.
In summary, tourism is one of the main ways in which a nation is represented to outsiders, and undoubtedly heritage constitutes an important element of the tourist experience. The heritage industry is also part of the wider tourist industry and is driven by a variety of business interests, most clearly manifested in the birth of various organisations devoted both to promoting and preserving heritage resources. When heritage is enlisted as a tourist asset, it should be promoted so as not only to attract and satisfy visitors, but also to generate income and employment, and to conserve the very heritage resources that it is promoting.

**MARKETING FOR HERITAGE TOURISM**

The marketing of heritage attractions concerns the delivery of products at fixed locations, and as Robinson et al (1994) highlights in the *Manual for Heritage Management*, customers will need to be persuaded that the product is one that they will travel to and buy. The marketing strategy adopted for a heritage attraction must be dependent on, or compatible with, its intrinsic historical aspects, its location, and its theme, all of which combine to shape the ‘product’. Robinson et al (1994) identifies the marketing process as relevant for heritage attractions and examines the principles of effective promotion for heritage properties. For most heritage sites, the fundamental marketing proposition can be defined by two important questions. Are there enough potential visitors who can be persuaded to buy the product in its present form? Or, must the product be modified to attract the required number or type of potential visitors?

The central role of marketing in the management and promotion of tourism is universally recognised. Laws (1991) highlights ‘at the base of an enterprise’s success is its ability to attract clients against competition from many providers, both of tourism and of other products or services, on which people can choose to spend their discretionary time and money’. Clearly, competition is what drives the need for an effective marketing strategy. This is further recognised by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) who highlights the concept known as ‘the value of difference’. According to this theory, ‘to compete for tourists, a location must become a destination. To compete with each other, destinations must be distinguishable, which is why the tourism industry requires the production of difference’. Undoubtedly linked to this is the commercial imperative for the tourist industry continually to deliver new and different destinations for the jaded ‘been there done that’ tourist.
In the case of visitor attractions, such as castles, which are providing a service, rather than a tangible product, the development of marketing strategy is commonly acknowledged as involving a ‘7 Ps’ approach. This takes account of people, process and physical evidence, in addition to the 4 Ps of product, price, place and promotion, in order to reflect the special characteristics of service marketing (Kotler, 1997; Wilmshurst; 1995).

Taking each of the elements in turn, the *product* is the most basic marketing mix tool, for the purposes of definition broken down into the core, actual and augmented product.

The core product represents the fundamental benefits that the consumer is buying. It can be argued that all of the castles within the region promote themselves as offering a combination of either a leisure or an educational experience. For example, at Castle Fraser and Crathes Castle, school visits are catered for and actively promoted. Exhibitions and interpretative displays are designed to be both educational and entertaining, although achieving the right balance is difficult. Some sites are clearly more ‘child friendly’ than others, most notably Crathes Castle, which offers an imaginative adventure playground for children.

The actual product consists of the physical and functional characteristics of the product that distinguish it from the rest. The augmented product can be defined as the additional services and benefits that are supplementary to the actual product. Each of the castles and historic houses within the region can be differentiated according to the additional facilities and services that they provide. For example, Crathes undoubtedly offers the widest range of facilities and services in comparison with the other castles in the region. In addition to the actual castle, there are regular events, an information centre, gardens, a NTS shop and exhibitions, well marked trails, an adventure area, a licensed restaurant, a ranger service, and special help and facilities for the disabled. These varied facilities offer entertainment for all the family, and no doubt account for the castle’s status as the most popular visitor attraction in the region. Other castles offer much less of an augmented product. For example, Dunnottar Castle, which also attracts many visitors each year, has extremely limited facilities and services. The castle site merely consists of the (albeit impressive) ruins of the castle, a car park, and a small kiosk selling guidebooks and postcards. No guided tours are offered, there is very little interpretation available on site, and there are no refreshment facilities available.
Price is an integral part of the product offer, and in the case of visiting castles, visitors must perceive good value for money if they are to be satisfied. All of the castles in the region charge an entry fee to visit. These vary from castle to castle, and are dependent on whether they are privately owned, or owned by either the NTS or HS. The most expensive is Crathes Castle. A family ticket there costs £13.50, which includes full admission to the castle, formal gardens and grounds. An adult ticket costs £5, and a child/concession ticket costs £3.40. A lesser fee gives access to the grounds only. Admission to the castle is by a limited ticket arrangement, whereby a limited number are available each day and entry may be delayed.

At other NTS properties that feature on the Trail, entry charges are the same. For example, at Castle Fraser, the adult entry fee to the castle and grounds is £4.40, and a concession is £2.90. A family ticket costs £11.70. Adult and school party rates are also available. Those who are members of the NTS, enjoy free admission.

HS also charges entry fees to its properties, but at a cheaper rate than the NTS. For example, at Duff House, admission for adults is £3, and the concession rate is £2. A family ticket costs £7. Admission to the grounds, the shop and tearoom is free. Again, members of HS enjoy free entry to the organisation’s properties, and also receive a 10% discount on all goods bought at HS shops.

Place is particularly important to the marketing of Castle Country. Without exception, the castles in the region are in rural and remote locations, which creates the problem of how to make a seemingly inaccessible product, accessible? Because the castles are generally regarded as inconvenient or ‘out of the way’ to visit, it follows that the information available about them needs to be authentic, and certainly not misleading or inaccurate in any way. While this holds true for all products, it is particularly important in the promotion of castles. Individuals are not able to sample the product beforehand and they frequently also have to travel long distances to reach the product, thus increasing the risk element for the consumer. Information must therefore be readily available and up to date, particularly regarding opening and closing times, and admission prices. Although considerable information detailing these facts is available, one has to know where it can be found! The obvious place to start is tourist information centres within the region. The tourist information office in Aberdeen has many leaflets and guidebooks dedicated to various properties
within the region, although there is generally more information available regarding NTS properties in comparison to HS properties. These leaflets are generally very helpful. They give directions to the locations of the castles, opening times, contact numbers for more information, and also a brief description of the castle properties.

*Promotion* is necessary to make the target audience aware of the existence of a product or service and the benefits that it confers to customers. In the case of heritage attractions, the purpose is to convey a ‘must see’ quality. According to Robinson et al (1994), the rule of producing an effective communication message is threefold. It must reinforce the attraction’s existence, demonstrate its relevance and create desire amongst the target audience. At present, the emphasis for the promotion of the Castle Trail is focused on advertising combined with public relations. Good advance PR is often more effective than huge sums spent on an advertising campaign. It not only builds awareness, but also adds credibility and holds down promotion costs. Sales promotion is a further tool used by both the NTS and HS in their membership recruitment drives. For example, the main benefit to be enjoyed by becoming a member of either organisation is that of free entry to the properties they own.

Personal selling and direct marketing are arguably less relevant for the purposes of promoting heritage attractions, although there is certainly scope for applying these methods to the marketing of heritage attractions, particularly with regard to the use of direct mail. An example is the use of mailshots to schools, in order to encourage visits from an important target audience for many heritage attractions.

In the case of heritage attractions, presentation is vital, and is reflected in all visual aspects of the attraction’s name, content, promotional message and location. This links to physical evidence, which refers to the tangible cues that support the main service product. In other words, the facilities, infrastructure and products used to deliver the service. Each contributes either directly or indirectly to the creation and quality of the overall service. It is particularly important because consumers of services often look for visual clues to the likely quality of a service by inspecting the tangible evidence. Thus attractions must appear inviting to prospective customers and provide adequate facilities in order to encourage visitors to spend their time and money at one particular attraction, as opposed to another. Specifically relating to promoting ‘Castle Country’, visitors are paying to
enter an historic environment, therefore they expect an historically authentic experience.

*People* may be service providers or customers, who participate in the production and delivery of the service experience. People add value and a dimension to the marketing package way beyond the basic product offering. In the promotion of heritage tourism, people such as tour guides and tourist information centre staff are integral to the service offering. A visitor would expect these individuals to be welcoming, knowledgeable and helpful. What the customer wants is good service, which includes responsiveness, reliability and assurance. It is thus essential that such people are well trained and dedicated to providing an enhanced visitor experience in order to ensure quality of service. Jobber (1995) highlights that a key to providing service quality is the understanding and meeting of customer expectations.

*Process* finally, refers to the ease with which visitors can both access information about visitor attractions and then experience them conveniently. In the tourism industry, this relates to the booking services for accommodation and tourist trips that the information centres provide, as well as access roads, parking and signposting.

**TOURISM IN THE GRAMPIAN REGION**

Within Grampian, several organisations are directly concerned with the promotion of heritage tourism. The Area Tourist Board (ATB) for the region is AGTB. Its primary function is visitor servicing and it is directly responsible for the many Tourist Information Centres in the region that provide tourist information, accommodation and other booking schemes. AGTB is regulated by the Scottish Tourist Board (STB), which was established in order to encourage people to visit Scotland and people living in Scotland to take holidays there, as well as to encourage the provision and improvement of tourist amenities and facilities.

Tourist development strategy is summed up by the STB (1995a) as ‘the optimisation of the economic benefits of tourism to the economy of an area whilst conserving its natural and man-made resources and having regard to the social and economic needs of the population throughout the area’. The ATB committees however, determine development and marketing activities locally, and AGTB is indeed responsible for bringing in the various ‘theme trail’ initiatives specified in the introduction.
Overseas tourists took approximately 200,000 trips to Grampian in 1995. They spent 1.3 million nights in the region (an average of 6.5 nights per trip) and their expenditure amounted to £47 million (an average of £235 per trip and £36 per night). In the more recent past, tourism within the region, like the rest of Scotland, has not witnessed any notable increase, and appears even to have suffered a decline. This is worrying, as prior to 1995, tourism witnessed a steady increase. Between 1983 and 1995, overseas trips increased from 120,000 to 200,000. Expenditure levels also rose and bednights increased by 18% to 1.3 million. (STB, 1995b).

Increasing concern at falling visitor numbers within the past two years, not only in Grampian but in Scotland as a whole, has prompted much concern as to what can be done to ‘rescue’ the Scottish tourist industry. Indeed, it has been concluded that Scots themselves have stopped holidaying in Scotland. There was a 22% drop in the number of Scottish tourists in 1999 and a 34% fall in the amount of money they spent. It is estimated that stay at home Scots spent about £154 million in 1997, thus a drop of 34% in spending is highly significant.

THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND AND HISTORIC SCOTLAND

NTS was established in 1931, for the purpose of ‘promoting the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and buildings in Scotland of historic or natural beauty’. It has since become responsible for the care of 120 different properties, including castles, historic sites, museums and places associated with famous Scots. It enjoys the support and commitment of a membership of around 250,000. As a charitable organisation it is almost exclusively reliant on donations and voluntary effort, with the majority of income coming from membership subscriptions, donations and legacies. The ethos of the organisation has become firmly established and built up around the concept of ‘keepers of the national soul’. According to McCrone et al (1995), the NTS interprets heritage as ‘inheritance’ and it is this philosophy which acts as a guideline for its working policy.

Historic Scotland (HS) is one of several government organisations concerned with heritage and its related aspects. It exists as an executive agency of the Scottish Development Department that is part of the Scottish Office, and currently receives 80% of its funding from the State. It was established in 1991 as ‘the government body that protects Scotland’s built heritage and helps everyone to see and enjoy it’. The organisation currently

Entreprenuership & Heritage Tourism: 79 - 100
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has 300 properties in its care, including both Edinburgh and Stirling Castles, and is very much concerned with preserving the ‘real’ artefacts of Scotland’s heritage.

THE CASTLES OF GRAMPIAN

‘Tucked beyond the hills, out of the destructive mainstream of Scotland’s history, many of Grampian’s castles flourished through the centuries. The north-east’s story in stone is told in the ancient fortresses and grand houses which make up Scotland’s unique Castle Trail. Follow the signposts on this circular route. They take you from, for example, mediaeval Kildrummy Castle, via the Georgian splendour of Haddo House by way of smugglers and Jacobites at Corgarff Castle and military adventurers at Leith Hall. Pick your castle and enjoy the bonus of touring en route through rural Aberdeenshire with its pleasing mix of rolling hills, woodland and farming country’. (1999-2000 Grampian Visitor Guide:14).

Much of the available literature relating to Grampian castles may be found in promotional brochures such as this, and from leaflets and guidebooks published by the NTS and HS. These provide information such as location, opening times, and admission prices accompanied by a brief description and history of each castle listed.

According to Smith (1990), ‘castles developed as the tangible response of a society under pressure from invasion and social change, forcing together the elements of home and fortress’. It is likely that Viking raiding activities stimulated the construction of the north-east’s first castles, although it was the Anglo-Normans who introduced castle building on a wide scale. The 16th century was the golden age of Scottish castles, with a surprising number associated in one way or another with the events revolving around the lives of Mary Queen of Scots and her son James. Castles therefore represent the tangible face of feudalism, and for obvious reasons of defence, most were built in inaccessible places. Even today with modern road systems, many are in remote locations, prompting a difficult challenge in promoting such heritage assets. Grampian region is home to numerous castles and historic houses. In addition to the ten featured on the official Castle Trail, there are many more, including Dunnottar Castle, Balmoral Castle and Crathes Castle. The Castle Trail itself is an 150 mile car based trail, promoted as featuring the best examples of the area’s castles in preservation. Responsibility for the Trail lies with AGTB in partnership with NTS and HS. Signposting is undertaken in partnership with Grampian Regional
Council Roads Department. The signposts for the Castle Trail are brown and white signs featuring a blue castle logo.

**PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS: Qualitative Interviews**

**Summary of a semi-structured in depth interview with Robert Lovie, Grampian Region Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the NTS.**

In the early 1980s it was realised that nothing was being done to promote the region’s rich heritage, and in 1984, GDTB made the decision to establish a Castle Trail, in order to create a specific marketplace identity. Prior to 1996, the NTS or HS owned all the castles featured. When the Trail was first established, all the castles featured were situated within the Gordon District boundary, as it was a GDTB initiative. Today the Castle Trail is promoted as being ‘Scotland’s Castle Trail’. Any privately owned castles within Grampian region can now feature on the Trail if they so wish, and indeed Delgatie Castle has recently been included.

The marketing budget for promoting the Trail is solely in the hands of AGTB, although both HS and the NTS each contributed £5000 towards the cost of the production and design of the new leaflet. The cost of producing the leaflet was also subsidised by placing a series of advertisements geared towards fundraising, and donations from the private sector. The tourist board was said to be slow to realise the opportunities lost from the lack of a promotional leaflet in the last three years, and if AGTB had not produced one for 2000, then the NTS would have, no matter what the cost.

Good press and P.R are vital however, and to achieve this, the NTS and HS must co-operate with the tourist board, while retaining their separate status and identities. Both the NTS and HS have large advertising budgets, although they differ slightly in their approach. For example HS concentrates more on media advertising, while the NTS concentrates more on the use of brochures and leaflets. Both however, believe in the value of the ‘direct distribution’ network in promoting their properties not only throughout the region, but also in the UK as a whole.

The Castle Trail was the first of its kind to be established in Grampian, and it was due to its initial success that subsequent tourist trails were established. There is presently however, a lack of interest and initiative in promoting the Trail. For example, there was no major launch for the first new leaflet of the Castle Trail in three years and Robert as PRO was given only three days notice to cover the promotion of the leaflet in the press.

The main improvements that the NTS would like to see include more signposting, particularly on the region’s A and B roads, and more ‘direct marketing’, especially at the ‘point of sale’.

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**The response from the Marketing Manager for Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board, Mr Alan Graham may be summarised as follows.**

The Castle Trail was established in order to capitalise on the rich built heritage of the former Gordon District and as a mechanism to encourage length of stay and visitor dispersal throughout rural Aberdeenshire.

The Trail has been successful in promoting the region, given that it has become a recognised product, helping to reinforce the brand identity of the region. Leaflets and other activity back it (it is also integrated into other AGTB publications, advertising, direct mail etc) with costs met by the scheme’s partners. Private sector advertising income also helps offset the print production costs.

In promoting the Castle Trail, typically similar segments to the region as a whole are targeted. These include socio-economic groupings AB, couples aged 45 and over, empty nesters and affluent greys from the UK (specifically those interested in great houses, gardens, sight seeing, walking, the NTS) NT members, Friends of HS, day visitors, and finally, independent motorists from Europe, mainly travelling as couples.
Quantitative Interviews

A total of 100 questionnaires were completed. 50 were conducted with members of the general public, and another 50 with visitors to castles within Grampian.

The general public sample

Of this sample, 35 were local to Grampian, 8 were from elsewhere in Scotland, 4 were from elsewhere in Britain and 3 were from overseas. Therefore, 70% of the interviewees were individuals from the local area.

In order to achieve a cross section of society, both younger and older individuals were approached. 10 respondents were aged between 16 and 24, 15 were in the 25-35 age category, and 14 respondents were between 35 and 50. A further seven were in the 50-65 age category, with only 4 aged over 65. 78% therefore, were below 50.

Twenty-two (44%) of the respondents had heard of the Castle Trail and 28 (56%) had not. Three suggested they had learned of the Trail from the press, seven from tourist information centres, three from promotional leaflets, eight by word of mouth, and six from other sources, including signs at the roadside.

Twenty people (40%) had visited a castle or historic house in the past 2 years. Ten visits however, were to Dunnottar castle, and three to castles outside the region. This makes Dunnottar second only in popularity to Crathes castle which attracted a total of 14 responses.

The 20 respondents indicated that their visits were for the following purposes. An interest in Scottish history/culture (11), an interest in castles/historic sites (11), part of a day out in the country (12), the fact that a special event was being held (3), the children or someone else wanted to go (4) and an interest in architecture (3).

In terms of value for money, the facilities on offer, and educational/entertainment value, individuals rated all three aspects as excellent, very good, or good. Very good was the favoured response, with 11 (55%) respondents rating their visit thus for value for money and 10 each (50%) for the other two variables.
Factors that had discouraged respondents from visiting any/any more castles in the local area ranged from ‘no interest in visiting’ (14) to ‘entry costs’ (10) and ‘unappealing image’ (10). ‘Little to do there’ attracted 9 responses, ‘not easy to travel to’ accounted for 5, and a ‘lack of clear signposting’ accounted for 4.

Fourteen interviewees, when asked ‘what would encourage you to pay a visit to a castle in the local area?’ again repeated that they had ‘no interest in visiting’, although 12 specified lower entry price, eight ‘more special events’ and five ‘organised tours’.

An overwhelming majority (90%) agreed that ‘the region’s castles are a valuable tourist asset’, with the remaining 10% undecided. 37 individuals (74%) agreed that ‘at present not enough is being done to encourage more tourists to visit the region’, 7 (14%) disagreed and 6 (12%) were undecided. 48 respondents (96%) further agreed that ‘tourism is important to the Grampian region’ and only two individuals (4%) were unsure. These 48 thought this was principally because tourism creates jobs and brings money to the area, and to a lesser extent that it promotes understanding of local culture and preserves the region’s history.

The majority of respondents would expect/find it easier to learn more about Grampian region castles from newspapers, leaflets, the internet, and direct mail, with the internet attracting the most votes (75% of respondents ticked the internet option).

**The castle visiting public**

This sample, by definition, is more representative of the target market and are therefore the best source of information on improvements which need to be made in promoting and marketing Castle Country to a wider audience.

Fifty questionnaires were completed at four sites, namely Crathes Castle, Castle Fraser, Leith Hall and Huntly Castle. 20 were completed at Crathes, and the remaining 30 divided evenly between the other three. This reflected the fact that Crathes attracts visitors on a much larger scale. It should also be noted that Crathes does not feature on the Castle Trail. Overall the intention was to achieve a cross section of castles in the region.

Thirty-six percent of visitors were local to the Grampian region, overseas visitors represented a further 32% of the sample, and 16% each came from elsewhere in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.
The largest single age group (30%) was between 35-50. The 25-35 category accounted for 24%, 18% each were aged 16-24 and 50-65, and finally 10% were over 65.

Sixty percent of respondents had heard of the Castle Trail before, while the remaining 40% had not. Most (40%) had learned of it from tourist information centres, word of mouth accounted for 35% and roadsigns a further 25%.

Sixty-six percent of the interviewees had visited another castle in the region in the last two years, whereas 34% had not. Other castles visited included those featured on the Trail itself, and also the popular response of Dunnottar, which accounted for a total of 12 visits.

The attempt to establish the purpose of the visit was thwarted, given that on the day the questionnaires were completed, there was a falconry display, taking place at Crathes. For the other castles, responses were divided between an ‘interest in Scottish history/culture’ and an ‘interest in castles/historic sites’.

The castle visitors rated the facilities, value for money and educational/entertainment value all very highly. Crathes attracted the highest ratings in all categories. Most visitors rated the value for money received as ‘very good’ and ‘good’, with each accounting for 45%, and 10% of visitors (at Crathes) rated it as ‘excellent’. 20% of visitors said educational/entertainment value was ‘excellent’, 60% ‘very good’ and ‘good’ 30%. Crathes undoubtedly had the widest range of facilities, and as such attracted the highest ratings. 38% said they were ‘excellent’. Overall, the ratings for all of the castles were ‘excellent’ (28%), ‘very good’ (46%), and ‘good’ (26%).

Inevitably what visitors enjoyed most at Crathes was the falconry display. The gardens there were also a popular. For the other castles, comments included ‘good displays’, ‘the surroundings/environment’, ‘offers a glimpse of the past’ and particularly in the case of Leith Hall most people commented favourably on the guided tour provided. When asked what they disliked most, the majority did not cite anything in particular. A number of respondents however, particularly at Crathes commented that it was too busy, and, as may be expected in Scotland, a number remarked on the bad weather!

Factors that had discouraged respondents from visiting any more castles included ‘entry costs’ and ‘not easy to travel to’. ‘Other’ was chosen by
some individuals to specify reasons such as ‘lack of free time’ or ‘competition from other leisure activities.’

Unsurprisingly therefore, ‘reduced entry charges’ specified by 75% of respondents, was felt to be a useful way to encourage more visits, and significantly from the entrepreneurial viewpoint, more special events was also a popular choice.

Tourism was unanimously believed to be important to Grampian, in equal proportion because of the economic and employment benefits and also the cultural and heritage benefits. There was also no doubt that the region’s castles were a valuable tourist asset. 76% however, believed that not enough was being done to promote tourism within the region. Only 4% disagreed, and 20% were undecided.

The internet was seen to be the best place to find out about the region’s castles, followed by leaflets, direct mail and newspapers in almost equal proportion.

Additional suggestions included longer opening hours, more promotion and advertising, clearer signposting, more facilities for the elderly, and pricing strategies to take account of families and groups.

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RESPONSES FROM THE TWO GROUPS

A number of differences were apparent between the responses given by the general public and those by the visitors. More visitors were aware of the Castle Trail, although the figure was still only 60%, indicating the need for improved communication. Also a significantly more visitors were from overseas, most notably at Crathes and at Huntly Castle. The castle visiting public was further able to name more castles in the region, and a higher number were members of either the NTS or HS.

In many respects, the answers to both sets of questionnaires were strikingly similar, particularly the questions relating to value for money, the facilities on offer, and educational or entertainment value. All were rated highly, although in many cases ‘good’ was the favoured rating as opposed to ‘excellent’, which highlights the need for action in order to improve the overall visitor experience.
An obvious and unsurprising deterrent to more visits is high entry costs, with another problem identified (by some) as an ‘unappealing image’. Again significant from the entrepreneurial viewpoint, the fact that there is often little to do was also highlighted.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The role of the marketer is to assess key issues, such as the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the product, potential areas for improvement, target audiences and the value represented by the product and price combination. The role of the entrepreneur is to seek out opportunities for expansion and increased appeal to a wider audience.

In the case of marketing heritage tourism, the ‘product’ in question is a service and therefore requires a distinctive marketing approach. For promoting ‘Castle Country’, communications techniques must be employed in order both to attract and satisfy particular target segments of potential visitors, and also to maximise tourism revenue for the region.

The basic heritage assets of a castle site combine to shape the overall product and how these assets are presented, and the experience and level of enjoyment that visitors receive, ultimately determine the success or otherwise of the visitor attraction. Thus, for marketing and entrepreneurial techniques to be most effectively applied, the product should be specifically designed to ensure that it will be attractive and informative to the target market.

Key aspects of the process include defining who the potential consumers/visitors will be, deciding what features the visitor attraction should have, how the assets can best be presented and what, therefore, the promotional image should be. In simple terms, it is all about matching the heritage product to its actual and potential markets.

The fundamental issue to address is whether the product can or should be modified in any way to attract the target market. The entrepreneur’s belief is that there is always scope for improvement. If needs be, improvements can be introduced slowly and on a trial basis.
It is recommended that in order to make the product more accessible, the opening times for some of the key sites are extended. More and better audio-visuals are also desirable, and interpretative facilities should be improved and updated to enhance the educational aspect of a castle visit. More attention could be paid to the social history of castles and the families who lived in them in addition to their military history. The guided tours on offer at both Crathes and Leith Hall are clearly favoured and this option should be extended to more castle sites. It is also recommended that an increased and varied programme of special events is organised for all the properties, and in this respect, innovative/entrepreneurial ideas are essential to maximise the overall potential through appealing to a wider target audience.

Innovative and original sales promotional ideas will include a variety of short-term incentives that will satisfy the business need for greater accountability within the marketing budget. Not only would the initiatives be useful for marketing the Castle Trail, they would also help to strengthen the partnership between the organisations involved. In order to encourage tourists and visitors to visit a number of castles on the Trail, as opposed to just one, reduced ‘multiple’ entry charges should be actively promoted. A scheme could be introduced whereby tourists have the opportunity to purchase in advance a pass valid for a specific time period, which would entitle them to either reduced or free entry to any of the properties featured. At the same time, tourists would receive a comprehensive guide, detailing directions, opening times and the facilities on offer.

Alternatively, or in addition, price incentives, for example ‘two for the price of one’ or half price entry at particular times, could be introduced at specific properties, particularly during the off peak season. These should be aimed at attracting people who would otherwise not visit, and also locals who have perhaps visited in the past but not recently, either because of high price or the expectation that nothing is new. Certainly this form of sales promotion should be more effective than permanently reduced entry charges to properties, which organisations such as the NTS simply could not afford to do.

If they are to have maximum impact, all the above measures will need to be advertised. Advertisements in the local press, as well as special interest magazines, should not only inform the reader of the promotion, but also encourage the reader to visit. Local press advertising offers flexibility, is fairly cheap, and gives good local market coverage, and as has been highlighted previously, the local market is an extremely important target
market, particularly in the off peak tourist season. Other media should also be explored, with both the internet and public transport providing worthwhile opportunities.

Several websites are already available that give information on the region’s castles. Both the NTS and HS have their own websites (www.nts.org.uk and www.historic-scotland.gov.uk) that offer information on all the properties owned by these two organisations. There is however, no specific mention of the Castle Trail at either website. Another two that contain information relating to the castles within the region are those offered by Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk and www.agtb.org.uk respectively.

The Aberdeenshire Council site contains a very limited amount of information on castles within the region. The AGTB website is a little more informative featuring a basic map of the Castle Trail, accompanied by a short description. Improvements are essential in order to provide greater access to information.

Overall, the websites were unimaginative, with no new information to be found. A fully comprehensive guide to castles within the region is necessary, which is imaginative, fun, interesting and appealing to all age groups. Forthcoming special events should be listed, and updated regularly, and accompanied by attractive images and photographs of the various castles. Indeed, a dedicated website could even allow people to enjoy a guided tour online, in other words a ‘virtual tour’. By clicking on various icons, visitors could choose to enter various rooms within a castle and have immediate access to information about what they are seeing/experiencing.

At the end of the 1999 season, a promotional leaflet for the trail was finally launched, following a three year absence. The timing was questionable in that the start of the peak season would surely have been more appropriate than at the end, but at least the leaflet was up to date, with good style and content. There was also a wealth of information about both the Trail and other tourist attractions and events in the region. It is simply now important that the leaflet is effectively distributed, kept up to date, and inclusive of incentives to visit.
Given scarce resources for advertising and the fact that so few people within the region are aware of the Castle Trail, it is clear that greater publicity is needed. Again, the entrepreneur’s flair for seeking out opportunities is called for. Press relations could be nurtured for a start, particularly with local journalists, with improved product publicity generated by providing more newsworthy information. Indeed, the Trail need not be written about in isolation, it could be linked to the economic impact in terms of jobs and income, as well as the growth of tourism as a whole. Not only will this have a stronger impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising, it is also more credible. Publicity surrounding the special event programme, including competitions, concerts, exhibits and grand openings, will be especially likely to reach and interest the target public.

Improved signposting is badly needed. Although the Castle Trail signs are distinctive, there are simply not enough of them and they are concentrated over a relatively small distance. For locals who are familiar with the region, this is not a problem, but for other UK and overseas visitors, it is more significant. More signposts should therefore be erected throughout the region, particularly on the minor B roads.

At present the Castle Trail is promoted as a car based tourist initiative. The potential exists to create better public transport links to castles within the region, as a means to attract more visitors. Unless visitors have access to a car, it is difficult if not impossible to travel to various castles within the region, located as they are in remote rural locations where public transport links are non existent. In the peak tourist season, a coach tour initiative specifically for the Castle Trail could be established on a trial basis enabling tourists to visit a series of castles in one day.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of the paper has been on the castles of Grampian region, and specifically the ‘Castle Trail’ tourist initiative. A literature review covered the rise of heritage tourism and marketing issues associated with promoting heritage tourism, along with an analysis of tourism within Grampian and a discussion of the Castle Trail. The primary research consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews, and questionnaires both to the general public and actual castle visitors. Analysis enabled a set of recommendations that formed the basis of a new marketing strategy, stressing the relevance and benefits of an innovative, entrepreneurial approach.
The results of the primary research supported the belief that there is low awareness of the Trail, and also underpinned a number of improvements that should be made.

It is concluded that the potential of the Grampian region to attract more visitors to its historic properties has not been fully realised, and that the region is presently underselling itself. The tourist literature available cites the uniqueness of the region in terms of the number of castles to be found. Public opinion is also supportive of the view that while the region’s castles do constitute an important tourism resource, not enough is being done to promote them as such. The recommendations focus on delivery of an improved product to maximise tourist revenue and to enhance the current status of the region’s prime heritage asset. A more concerted marketing effort, supported by a genuine entrepreneurial approach, seeking out and exploiting new opportunities, is vital.

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