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Site Selection Basics of Business-Group Travel to Minnesota Resorts

by Jon G. Fields and Thomas E. Pearson, Ph.D.

Introduction

The resort industry in Minnesota is a major contributor to the economic health of the state. Despite a steep decline in the number of resorts (4,000 in 1967; 2,000 in 1983; and approximately 1,275 in 1990), the industry is strong; the change in resort numbers was due largely to consumer preferences and regional economic conditions. For example, many Minnesota resorts shifted from dependency on the family vacation trade toward a greater dependency on business-oriented, group meetings.

Growth in group travel will continue to be important for Minnesota resorts, but information in this area has been lacking. In response to this lack of information, a market research study of major business groups who have used Minnesota resorts was begun in the winter 1989, funded by the Minnesota Extension Service of the University of Minnesota. A description of study methods appears at the end of this report.

Six segments of business-group travel were studied:

1. *Education*
2. *Government*
3. *Insurance*
4. *Manufacturing, wholesale and retail companies*
5. *Professional associations*
6. *Trade associations*

Each group answered questions about their group travel decision-making patterns, the timing of their planning, and what resort features they considered desirable. The research goal was to collect market information to be used by three groups:

***Minnesota resort owners/managers**—to develop their properties, target their customer groups, and plan their promotional activities*

***Rural chambers of commerce and convention bureaus**—to understand and define their roles and activities in promoting group business-group travel*

***Regional and state tourism agencies and organizations**—to direct their activities and support efforts in developing group travel to Minnesota resorts.*

This summary, Site Selection Basics of Business-Group Travel to Minnesota Resorts, *examines how business groups select meeting sites. Factors included in site selection, such as season, recreation, food service, sleeping accommodations and general facilities are discussed. A further discussion, titled* The Six Segments of Business-Group Travel to Minnesota Resorts, *is planned.*

The Decision Makers

Site-selection responsibility can differ from business segment to business segment (table 1), but an individual person is most often responsible for making the final site selection decision. Seldom, if ever, is the site selection responsibility given to outside consultants or travel agents.

Education, professional, and trade associations are the most likely groups to use a formal committee site selection process of the groups studied. Government groups indicated that in 25 percent of the decisions, some site selection responsibility existed outside of their immediate group. A few government respondents indicated that the site selection decision was sometimes based on a lowest bid process or by informal or unstructured committees.

Effective Sales Approaches

This portion of the study revealed that resort marketers should be sensitive to the degree of familiarity the decision maker has with the resort under consideration, and need to adjust sales efforts accordingly. The approaches reported as the most important to the decision makers can be summarized as follows:

When the resort is familiar, rely on:
1. Written proposals
2. Highly detailed brochures
3. Providing an inspection visit

When the resort is not familiar, rely on:
1. Providing an inspection visit
2. Written proposals
3. Highly detailed brochures

A complete list ranking the importance of various sales approaches based on familiarity and type of group is presented in table 2.

Use of Information Sources

Respondents were given a list of options and asked to indicate which they used to gather information about Minnesota resorts. A complete list of the results is presented in table 3. Four sources are much more important than the others. These are: (1) Direct contact with the resort, (2) Contact with the area Convention and Visitor's Bureau or Chamber of Commerce, (3) Minnesota Department of Tourism, and (4) *Successful Meetings* magazine.

Table 1. Site Selection Responsibility

Question: "When choosing a resort for your group event, who finally decides which resort will be used?"

	Educ	Govt	Insur	Mfg/Whol/Ret	Prof Assn	Trade Assn	Combined*
Total number of responses used in this study	40	71	70	160	69	38	448
Percentage of decision made by:							
Individual person	51	49	73	74	48	53	62
Formal committee (by vote)	41	26	24	18	43	39	28
Professional meeting planning consultant	0	0	0	1	2	0	1
Travel agent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	8	25	3	7	7	8	9

*All tables in this report have a "combined" column. The values in this column were calculated by combining the responses of all six market segments and computing one, overall figure. Since the sample sizes of the six segments are not equal, the combined figure is biased in favor of those segments that have given a larger number of responses. In other words, segments with fewer responses do not have equal representation (impact) in the outcome of this summary value. The difference between this combined rating and the individual segment's rating can be considered as the importance rating "error" that would have occurred had all the segments been considered homogeneous and market segmentation analysis not been performed. Reference to the combined values also simplifies the following discussions.

Table 2. Selling Approaches

Question: "How important are the following in selecting a Minnesota resort for your group event?"

	Educ	Govt	Insur	Mfg/Whol/Ret	Prof Assn	Trade Assn	Combined
When a resort is familiar:							
Written proposal	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2
High detailed brochures	3.5	3.0	3.2	3.6	2.9	3.2	3.3
Inspection visit	3.5	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.1
Referrals from within org.	3.5	2.8	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.0
Generalized brochures	3.4	2.6	3.3	3.2	2.6	3.0	3.0
Referrals outside org.	3.1	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.6
Resort owner contact	2.8	2.2	2.8	2.5	2.2	3.0	2.5
When a resort is not familiar:							
Inspection visit	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.3
Written proposal	4.2	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.3
High detailed brochures	4.1	3.7	3.7	4.2	3.7	3.7	3.9
Generalized brochures	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.3	3.2	3.6
Referrals from within org.	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.6
Referrals outside org.	3.6	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.2

Estimated Scale: 1.0 - 1.5 = Not at all Important, 1.6 - 2.5 = Of minor Importance, 2.6 - 3.4 = Somewhat Important, 3.5 - 4.4 = Very Important, 4.5 - 5.0 = A Firm Requirement.

Table 3. Information Sources Utilized

Question: "Which do you use when gathering information about Minnesota resorts for your group activities? (Check all that apply) Put a second check by the two most important sources.

	Educ	Govt	Insur	Mfg/Whol/Ret	Prof Assn	Trade Assn	Combined
Direct contact with resort	58	101	89	228	102	57	635
Resort's area Convention and Visitor's Bureau or Chamber of Commerce	20	29	46	74	34	26	229
Minn. Dept. of Tourism	12	38	27	64	24	13	178
Successful Meetings	16	28	28	60	30	15	177
Travel agents	1	5	26	69	10	4	115
Regional publications	12	15	45	16	7	7	102
In-house travel department	6	11	7	67	2	0	103
Minn. Resort Association	7	17	12	33	12	11	92
Newspapers	8	8	17	40	12	7	92
Hotel & Travel Index	1	11	8	28	8	3	59
Am. Auto. Assn. (AAA)	2	8	7	19	9	5	50

Estimated Scale: 1.0 - 1.5 = Not at all Important, 1.6 - 2.5 = Of minor Importance, 2.6 - 3.4 = Somewhat Important, 3.5 - 4.4 = Very Important, 4.5 - 5.0 = A Firm Requirement.

Seasonal Marketing Activity

The annual site selection cycles are considerably different for each business segment, though more predictable than might have been thought. For example, the professional association segment tends to make site selection decisions for winter meetings around July, while education groups tend to make such decisions around October (figure 1). Given that the site selection process must begin before the decision is made, the resort marketer must target specific groups for selected seasons and plan promotion programs well in advance of these decision cycles.

Since resorts are often interested in hosting groups only during specific seasons, this section of the report presents data on the various business groups studied on a comparative, seasonal basis.

Winter (January, February, March)

Although the number of events occurring in the winter is approximately 20 percent of the annual total, the percentage of total annual roomnights occurring for each segment during this season is lower, ranging from 8 percent to 24 percent and about 19 percent overall. (The largest **percentage** total annual roomnights does **not** necessarily indicate the largest target market.)

The number of sleeping rooms required per event fluctuates considerably from segment to segment, averaging about thirty-three rooms. The average number of meeting rooms required for each event indicates that between two and three meeting rooms are needed for each in-house group. The number of meeting rooms needed by resorts of various sizes can be estimated by the ratios of sleeping rooms to meeting rooms. Approximately, one meeting room is needed for every 15 to 16 sleeping rooms.

A survey question asking what distance groups were willing to travel asked for a **maximum** distance. During the winter season the education and insurance segments indicated a willingness to travel the greatest distance, about 200 miles. As the number of miles to a resort exceeds the resulting average, a decreasing portion of the potential group business from all segments is likely to travel the additional distance.

Spring (April, May, June)

All segments consider spring to be an important travel time. From 23 to 33 percent of the total number of events held during the year occur in the spring, and the percentage of total annual roomnights required ranges from 22 to 37 percent. The trade association market segment has the largest percentage of its total annual roomnights occurring in the spring with 37 percent.

The education, professional association, and trade association segment's percentage of total annual roomnights are about double their winter levels, and the insurance segment showed the greatest increase in its percentage of roomnights by almost tripling from winter to spring (8 to 22 percent).

The average size of events (number of sleeping rooms required) increased in the spring from what was reported for the winter, with the notable exception of the government segment which has gone down from 42 rooms to 34 rooms.

The average number of meeting rooms required in the spring increased from those required in the winter, with most spring segments needing an average of about three meeting rooms for each in-house group. The maximum number of miles groups are willing to travel by car or bus is about the same in the spring as in the winter for most segments. The one notable decline in this regard occurred in the education segment, going down from 207 miles in winter to 162 miles in spring.

Summer (July, August)

Major changes in both the percentage of annual events and the percentage of total annual roomnights occur by summer. For some segments these activity levels are near, or even below, those which occurred in winter, while others have gone up over both winter and spring.

The government, insurance, and manufacturer/wholesaler/retailer (MWR) market segments have the largest percentages of their total annual roomnights occurring in the summer with 26 percent, 45 percent, and 31 percent respectively. The percentage of roomnights declines from spring to summer for the education segment (22 to 9 percent), for the professional association segment (30 percent to 19 percent), and for the trade association segment (37 to 17 percent). This market volume figure has increased for the government segment (24 to 26 percent), for the insurance segment (22 to 45 percent), and for the MWR segment (23 to 31 percent). (Remember that the largest percentage does **not** necessarily indicate the largest target market.)

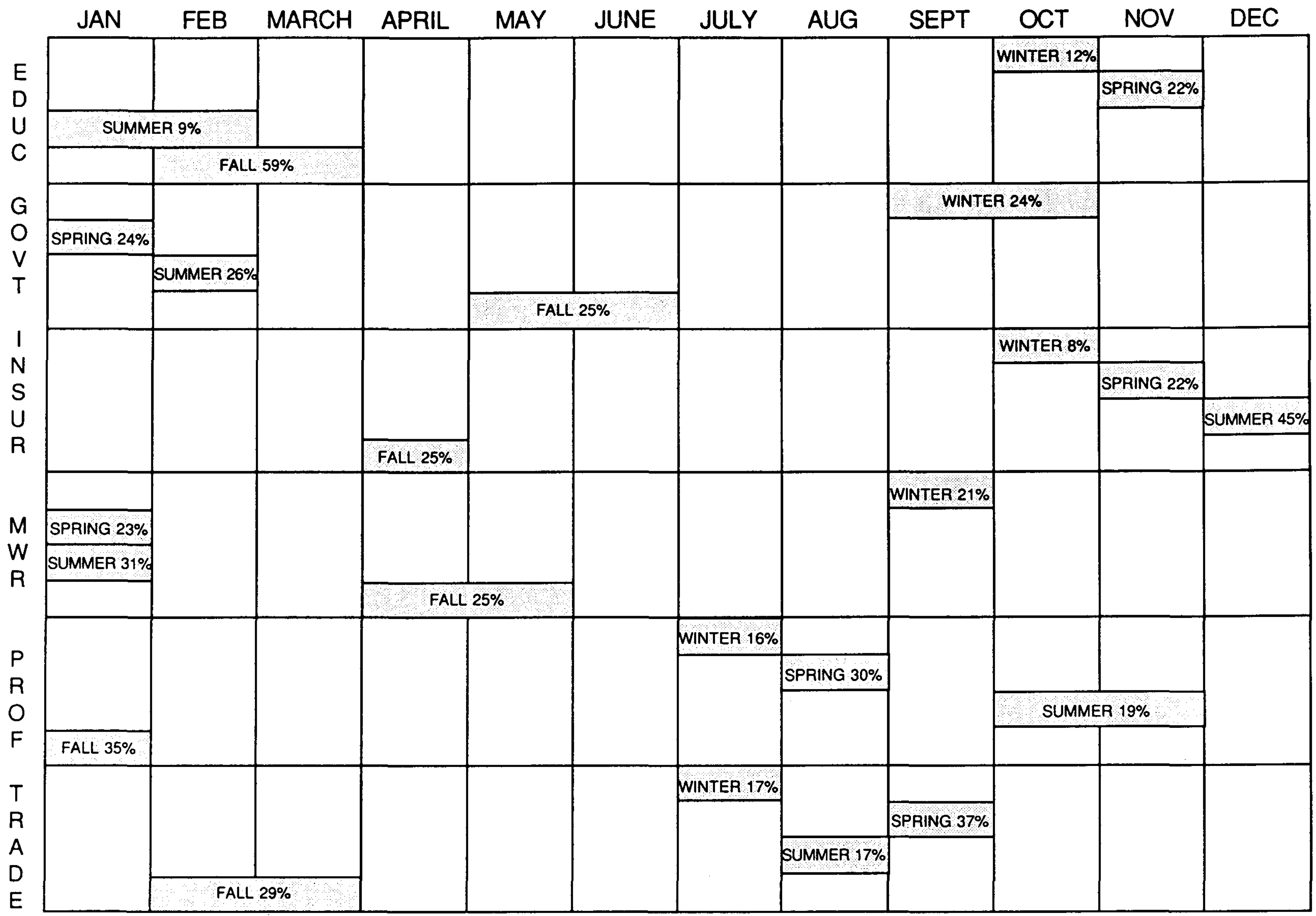
The average number of sleeping rooms required for these six segments is about thirty-three rooms per event during the summer, and the number of meeting rooms required is between two and three for each in-house group. The maximum number of miles that groups are willing to travel by bus or car stayed about the same in the summer as in the spring, with the exception of the education segment which increased an average of 51 miles.

Fall (September, October, November, December)

Fall market activity indicates that this is an active time for group business. The percentage of annual events for each segment which occurs in the fall ranges from 25 to 41 percent, while the percentage of annual roomnights ranges from 25 to 57 percent. The education and professional association market segments have the largest percentages of their annual roomnights occurring in the fall with 57 and 35 percent respectively.

In the fall, the education segment has the largest average size of event (66 sleeping rooms) and requires one meeting room for every twelve sleeping rooms. This number of meeting rooms is more than for any other segment during any season. The maximum distance the six segments are willing to travel by bus or car is about the same as in the summer.

Figure 1. Annual Site Selection Decision Timetable



Example: The education segment makes more of its site selection decisions for winter travel during October than any other month (upper right). Winter travel accounts for 12 percent of the education segment's annual market volume.

Recreation Alternatives

The importance of various recreation options in the site selection decision can be significantly different from segment to segment. Some generalizations are possible, however, and are discussed in this section.

All of the recreation options in figure 2 were considered to be "very important" (3.5 to 4.4 on a scale of 1 to 5). No recreation alternative received a combined rating which put it into the "firm requirement" range of 4.5 to 5.0 although some individual segments rated some recreation at this level. The highest of these individual segment ratings were for an indoor pool and were received from the professional association segment and from the education segment in the spring and in the fall seasons.

Using combined information, the recreation options shown in figure 2 are those which attained the highest importance ratings for each season.

Winter (January, February, March)

Recreation options that are specific only to the winter season do not rate higher than "somewhat important" in site selection decisions. This implies that there are reasons other than the availability of these winter recreation options that attract business groups to resorts during the winter.

The two cross country ski recreation options were rated almost exactly the same by all segments. Resorts should offer these two options in a combination if at all possible. The insurance, MWR, and professional association segments gave the highest importance ratings for the recreation options specific to winter. These three segments may be the most receptive to proposals that include winter recreation options, but recreation should not be the main focus of the proposal.

The availability of car plug-ins and a car starting service produced nearly identical results on a segment by segment basis. These two automobile-related options received higher ratings than other items. Reassuring group representatives that their participants will receive these automobile-related services in the winter is more important than many other factors surveyed.

The importance of having "high quality/variety of recreation facilities" received combined ratings that are nearly identical in all four seasons. The individual segment ratings for this factor fluctuate much more in the winter season than in the other seasons, however, indicating that the importance of recreation can change from season to season for a given targeted segment. In the winter season only the government and trade association segments considered high quality/variety of recreation facilities to be somewhat important while the other four segments consider this to be very important in the site selection decision.

In the winter the existence of an indoor pool and a whirlpool are each considered to be very important in the site selection decision, with combined ratings of 4.1 and 3.8 respectively. The education segment and professional association segment rank these options the highest, with professional associations considering an indoor pool to be a firm requirement in choosing a resort. A sauna is considered either somewhat important or very important by all groups, with a combined rating of 3.5.

Hiking/jogging trails in the winter are considered to be somewhat important with a combined rating of 3.2, but this option also has the largest differences between the segments ranging from 2.3 in the trade association segment to 3.5 in the insurance segment (a difference of 1.2). Large differences in segment ratings are also found in the whirlpool and the indoor pool recreation options.

Winter-fishing-related recreation options are considered to be somewhat important with the insurance, MWR, and trade association segments producing the highest ratings given. Indoor tennis is considered to be either of minor importance or somewhat important by all segments, with a combined rating of 2.9.

Spring (April, May, June)

Interest in a variety of recreation options rose considerably in spring compared to recreation options for winter. Recreation options were also much higher for summer and fall compared with winter.

The government segment indicates that high quality and variety of recreation

Figure 2. Recreation Options

Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
(Jan, Feb, March)	(April, May, June)	(July, August)	(Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec)
Indoor Pool (4.1)	Indoor Pool (3.8)	18-hole Golf (3.9)	Indoor Pool (3.9)
Whirlpool (3.8)	18-hole Golf (3.6)	Outdoor Pool (3.7)	Whirlpool (3.5)
Sauna (3.5)	9-hole Golf (3.5)	9-hole Golf (3.6)	
Whirlpool (3.5)	Fish Boat/Motor (3.5)	Outdoor Tennis (3.5)	

facilities is less important in its site selection decision than it is for the other segments surveyed. A review of the responses given by the government segment for the individual recreation options shows that this segment consistently ranks recreation alternatives lower than the other segments.

In the spring all six segments indicate that an indoor pool and a whirlpool are very important in the site selection decision. The availability of 18-hole golf and 9-hole golf also become very important during the spring. As these latter two recreation options become available in the spring, the importance of the indoor water recreation options decrease from that indicated in the winter season.

In the spring, the importance rating differences observed in the two golf options and in the outdoor tennis option are the largest of those found in the recreation options. The segment ratings for 18-hole golf ranged from 2.5 for government groups up to 4.2 for insurance groups (a difference of 1.7). A difference of 1.2 is also observed within both the 9-hole golf and in the outdoor tennis options, and a difference of .9 can be found in the fishing boats and motors option.

Summer (July, August)

Perhaps the most notable change that occurs from the spring to the summer season is the relative importance of the swimming pool options. In the spring the indoor pool was the most important recreation option surveyed, but in the summer it has dropped to seventh place (somewhat important), tied with pontoon boats and on-premises bait and tackle. Of 29 recreation options offered, the availability of an outdoor pool rose from ninth place in spring to second place in the summer.

In the summer, only the availability of 18-hole golf attained higher combined ratings than an outdoor pool. The ratings of 9-hole golf, fishing boats and motors, and outdoor tennis are also considered to be very important in the site selection decision. The availability of a whirlpool, hiking/jogging trails, pontoon boats, on premises bait and tackle, and an indoor pool are all considered to be somewhat important in the site selection decision.

During the summer, the importance ratings among the various group segments are quite different for several of the recreation options. For example, the availability of 18-hole golf received a "somewhat important" rating from the government segment while the MWR segment gave a rating of "very important." These ratings again show that segments have differences that should not be overlooked and that may be important during the selling process.

Fall (September, October, November, December)

In the fall season, only two recreation options had combined ratings of very important in the site selection decision. These were an indoor pool and a whirlpool. Several of the fall recreation options are somewhat important in the site selection decision, including 18-hole golf, 9-hole golf, hiking/jogging trails, fishing boats and motors, and outdoor tennis.

An indoor pool received the highest rating within the very important range from the education segment, and was in the middle of the very important range for the professional association segment. This option along with some of the others mentioned above also produced the greatest differences in importance ratings among the group segments. For example, the 18-hole golf option was of minor importance for the government groups, but was very important for the insurance groups.

Fishing boats and motors were of minor importance for the government groups but were very important to the MWR segment. The 9-hole golf option was of minor importance to the government segment but was very important to the insurance, MWR, and trade association segments. The results from the fall season recreation options again indicate that the various business-group segments are not homogeneous and should be considered individually when designing and implementing sales programs.

Sleeping Accommodations, Food Service, and General Facilities

The importance of various sleeping accommodations, room furnishings, food service considerations, and other general features and support services in the site selection decision can differ significantly from segment to segment. Some generalizations can be made, however, and are treated in the following discussion.

Winter (January, February, March)

Cleanliness of the sleeping rooms is strongly considered a firm requirement by all six segments. All segments also indicated that the availability of lodge units is very important in their winter site selection decision. By comparison, the availability of cabin units is of minor importance for each segment.

Several of the sleeping accommodation criteria helped to differentiate (segment) the group-business market. The government segment differs significantly from the other groups in its importance rating for executive units. The government segment considered these accommodations to be of minor importance while the other segments consider these somewhat important. The level of importance in the availability of handicapped units also helps to differentiate segments. The insurance, MWR, and the trade association segments considers handicapped units to be of minor importance while the other segments considers these rooms to be very important in their site selection decision.

All six segments agree that having telephones and televisions in the sleeping rooms are very important in their site selection decision during the winter season. Having fireplaces in the sleeping rooms, split bath areas, and having a view of the lake are somewhat important in the site selection decision by all six segments, except for the government segment, which considers this feature to be of minor importance.

Table 4. General Facilities and Support Services

Number of Responses =	Educ (36)	Govt (70)	Insur (68)	Mfg/Whol/Ret (157)	Prof Assn (69)	Trade Assn (36)	Combined (436)
General Facilities							
Quality of meeting rooms	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.6
Climate controlled meeting/activity rooms	4.5	4.7	4.3	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.5
On-site A/V equipment	4.4	4.4	3.8	4.3	4.4	4.0	4.2
Private (hosp.) room	3.1	2.9	3.7	4.1	3.4	4.1	3.6
On premises bar/lounge	2.9	3.3	3.4	3.8	3.3	3.7	3.5
Live band in bar/lounge	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.4	2.4
Private dance or entertainment room	2.2	1.9	2.0	2.4	2.5	2.8	2.3
Piano/cabaret/disco	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.2
Car plug-ins (winter)	3.4	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.8	4.4	3.2
Car starting service (winter)	3.5	3.0	2.9	3.0	3.8	4.3	3.2
Support Services							
Room reservation and coordination service	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.6
Menu planning	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2
Direct communication with setup staff	4.0	4.1	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.9
Grp-service support staff	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.6
All day/even. setup staff	3.7	3.6	3.2	3.6	3.8	3.6	3.6
24-hour desk service	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.5
Photo copy service	4.1	3.8	2.9	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.4
Recreation planning and coordination	2.9	2.6	3.4	3.7	3.1	3.7	3.3
Entertainment planning	2.7	2.3	2.9	3.0	2.7	3.0	2.8
Spouse/child recreation planning	2.0	1.7	2.1	1.8	2.3	2.6	2.0
Children's supervised play room	1.9	1.6	1.9	1.5	2.0	2.5	1.8

Estimated Scale: 1.0 - 1.5 = Not at all Important, 1.6 - 2.5 = Of minor Importance, 2.6 - 3.4 = Somewhat Important, 3.5 - 4.4 = Very Important, 4.5 - 5.0 = A Firm Requirement.

The government segment generally rated the sleeping room features lower than the other group segments.

All segments agree that the efficiency of restaurant service and service time flexibility around the group's schedule are each a firm requirement in their site selection decision. Having a private banquet room and the opportunity of ordering off a menu (versus having a pre-selected menu) are each considered very important in the site selection decision during the winter season. The existence of a 24-hour coffee shop/snack bar is considered somewhat important by all six group segments.

Spring (April, May, June)

As in winter, cleanliness of the sleeping rooms is considered to be a firm requirement by all the segments surveyed. They also agree that the availability of lodge units is very important in their spring event site selection decision, producing a combined very important rating (though lower than the combined rating observed for winter events). The availability of cabin units has a higher importance rating than observed in winter, becoming somewhat important rather than of minor importance.

All six segments show common agreement that having telephones in the sleeping rooms is either very important or a firm requirement in making the site selection decision for spring events. Air conditioning and televisions in the spring are also very important. A view of the lake, split bath areas, and private balcony/patio are all somewhat important in spring. The government segment generally rate the various sleeping room variables lower than the other group segments. All groups agree that the efficiency of restaurant service is a firm requirement, though this was less important for the two associations. Flexible service time around the group's schedule was very important for all segments as was availability of a private banquet room. The ability to order off a menu is considered somewhat important for all segments.

Summer (July, August)

During the summer there are fewer significant differences between segments during the summer than in the winter, spring, or fall.

Cleanliness of the sleeping room was a firm requirement for all six business group segments. All six segments also consider lodge units to be very important and that cabin units are somewhat important in their site selection decision. There is a significant difference, however, in the importance of executive units and handicapped units during the summer season. For example, executive units are very important to site selectors in the MWR segment, but are of minor importance to the education segment and the government segments.

Having a telephone in the sleeping rooms is a firm requirement for four of the six segments, and is very important for the education and insurance groups. Similarly, professional, trade, and government groups consider air conditioning to be a firm requirement while the other three consider it to be very important. Television in the sleeping rooms is very important to all six segments during the summer season.

Efficiency of the restaurant service is considered to by a firm requirement by the education, government, and MWR segments and was very important to the other three. Service time flexibility around a group's schedule is a firm requirement for the professional association segment and very important to the other segments. All groups consider a private banquet room to be very important in their site selection decision for summer events.

Fall (September, October, November, December)

Cleanliness of the room again emerged as a firm requirement for all segments surveyed. All six group segments surveyed have indicated that the availability of lodge units are very important in their fall site selection decision, while the availability of cabin units is somewhat important.

Executive units are somewhat important in site selection decision by most segments, with only the government segment indicating that they are of minor importance and the MWR segment indicating that they are very important.

All six segments consider having telephones in the sleeping rooms as either very important or a firm requirement, and having a television in the room is very important in the site selection decision for fall events. Having a refrigerator, split bath areas, a private balcony, a view of the lake, and a fireplace in the sleeping room are all somewhat important.

All six segments agree that the efficiency of restaurant service is a firm requirement, in the site selection decision for fall season events. Service time flexibility around the group's schedule is a firm requirement by three of the six segments, and the other three segments consider this to be very important. Having a private banquet room is considered to be somewhat important by the government segment, while all the others consider it to be very important. The ability to order off a menu and a 24-hour coffee shop/snack bar are somewhat important in the site selection decision for fall events.

General Facilities and Support Services

When asked for information on the number of handicapped rooms needed, only 21 of the 436 survey respondents provided information. The data provided indicates that three handicapped sleeping rooms would meet the requirements of approximately 75 percent of the groups that may use a resort would be satisfied.

Table 4 shows the results of the importance ratings for additional resort facilities and support services. This data is not evaluated on a seasonal basis. The six business-group segments had significant differences in the level of importance they reported for many of the variables surveyed.

The quality of the meeting rooms and having those rooms climate controlled are each considered to be a firm requirement in the site selection decision. On-site audio visual equipment, private hospitality rooms, and an on-premises bar/lounge are all considered to be very important.

Although the two winter, car-related items received combined ratings indicating that they are somewhat important, the education, professional association, and trade association segments consider these facilities to be very important in their site selection decision for their winter events.

Room reservation and coordination service received the highest combined importance ratings of the support service items on the survey, and are a firm requirement in the site selection decision for five of the six segments. The education segment considers this service to be very important.

Menu planning, direct communication with setup staff, having a group- service support staff, all day/evening setup staff, and 24-hour front desk service are all very important in the site selection decision for all six segments surveyed.

Conclusions

Since sites are most often selected by individual persons and secondly by committees, the resort marketer should learn about and fully understand the intricacies of the two selling approaches involved.

Use of the sales approach may vary from group to group and depends on whether the decision makers are familiar with a particular resort. For any of the targeted segments, priority should be placed on the written proposals and on the development of highly detailed brochures. Reports and brochures received the highest importance ratings of all items surveyed. An inspection visit policy and program should also be developed, especially to accommodate site selectors who are not familiar with the resort.

When site selectors are gathering information about resorts, the most important source of information is direct contact with the resorts. The resort marketer should make sure that the resort sales representatives are effective in communicating the necessary information and portraying the best possible image to site selectors. The researchers recommend that special consideration be given to the resorts' area Convention and Visitor's Bureau (or Chamber of Commerce), regional tourism publications, *Successful Meetings* magazine, and the Minnesota Department of Tourism as important information-disseminating outlets.

Proper timing of sales promotion efforts is important. Develop resort marketing plans well in advance and target them to the appropriate group segments during the appropriate times of the year.

Business-group market segments vary considerably in their planning periods, size of events, seasonal reservation patterns, meeting room requirements, distances they are willing to travel, and in other important ways. Take these differences into account when planning promotional messages and activities.

It was noted that the six business-group market segments surveyed differ in the importance they attach to various recreation options. During the winter season the indoor recreation activities are more important in the site selection decision than the traditional, outdoor winter recreation options. For example, the indoor pool, whirlpool, sauna, fitness room, game room, and indoor tennis each received combined importance levels higher than any of the skiing, snowmobiling, or other outdoor, winter recreation options.

Since the winter, outdoor recreation options are only of minor importance or somewhat important in the site selection decision for winter events, you may want to include these options in a proposal, but do not make them the main focus of the proposal. Instead, question each individual group representative to determine the real reasons they are considering a resort location for their event, and focus the main sales effort around those reasons.

Many recreation options received a combined rating of very important. It is therefore advisable to offer a wide variety of both indoor and outdoor recreation alternatives. During the winter, spring and fall, indoor pool and whirlpool facilities are important. During the spring, summer, and fall, outdoor recreation options such as golf, tennis, and hiking trails may be in demand.

You may want to design recreation options according to the preferences of the business segments you are trying to attract. This approach is especially well-suited for small resorts with few funds available for development. Likewise, resorts with more complete facilities and funding can improve those facilities that are of most importance to the segments they serve. In either case, understanding the business segments you are trying to attract can help you design your recreation facilities and promotional messages in a more efficient manner.

Cleanliness of the guest rooms is consistently a firm requirement in the site selection decision in all six segments surveyed. Resort managers must not take this critical factor for granted. Rather, they should make sure that guest room furnishings are being properly maintained and that those employees responsible for cleaning those rooms are properly trained and supervised.

The availability of lodge sleeping units consistently receive higher importance levels than cabin units. Although cabin units may be acceptable for some of the individual groups within these segments, there is a strong indication that the level of selling success will be higher for the resort which has lodge units available.

Efficiency in the restaurant, food service time flexibility around the group's schedule, and having private banquet room must all be provided in order to successfully attract group business. If staggering meal times in a dining room, or using a meeting room for banquets is satisfactory to the groups, that may be preferable to constructing a separate room.

The quality of meeting rooms, the climate control of those rooms, and on-site audio/visual equipment are three related criteria that are considered by all six segments as being very important or a firm requirement in the site selection decision. Proper attention from resort owners to provide good quality meeting facilities and equipment is essential.

The resort manager must provide several important support services, regardless of the segment that is being targeted. These include room reservation and coordination service, menu planning, a method which allows direct communication with the setup staff, and have a group-service support staff available.

To attract business-group travel, resorts must understand the dynamics of the site selection process. Resorts that use effective promotional methods and offer those amenities and other selection criteria important to the targeted segments will have a marketing advantage over resorts that do not.

Methodology

A total of 3,300 names and addresses of persons involved in making the site selection decisions were assembled from various organizations, agencies, and directories. Considering the age of some of the lists and directories used, an estimated 25-30 percent of the contacts were believed to be obsolete.

Of the 1,000 questionnaires returned 448 were used in the overall study while others were discarded because of invalidating responses, incompleteness, or sorted out for separate analysis. Since the selection of the names and addresses used in this study were not chosen randomly from the total population of business group travel site selectors, caution may be necessary when trying to apply the findings of this study to the population as a whole.

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Tourism Center
101-C Green Hall
1530 N. Cleveland Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone 612-624-4947
John Sem, Tourism Center Director

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Authors: Jon G. Fields, Ph.D. candidate, Consumer Science & Retailing, Purdue University, sales manager for ten years at a major Minnesota resort

Thomas E. Pearson, Ph.D., Coordinator Graduate Programs, Department of Restaurant, Hotel and Institutional Management, Purdue University

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