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INVESTIGATING THE LEISURE AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

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INVESTIGATING THE LEISURE AND TOURISM INDUSTRIES

The leisure and recreation industry

Leisure: time spent when not working:

- ⌘ Retirement
- ⌘ Holiday or time off (about 40% of the population don't take holidays; lack of money limits choice when it comes to leisure)
- ⌘ Unemployment

Recreation: anything which entertains you, from passively watching TV, to activities like weight-training. As individuals, we all have different ideas about recreation, and there's an amazing number and variety of job opportunities - though employees are working for the benefit of those who aren't, i.e. in their customers' leisure time. Leisure and tourism is one of the biggest growth areas this century, and means big business.

Leisure and Recreation Needs

Physical activity, whether for health reasons or just for fun. Many people look forward to new experiences, even a challenge. You can try something for a laugh, or if competitive, take it more seriously. Some really want to be an expert at sport; that can demand all your time AND money.

Social needs: voluntary work, being part of team, going shopping with your mates.

Personal satisfaction falls between the two, whether enjoying a good book or your team-mates' applause when you score the winning goal. To excel at a physical activity gives you an enormous sense of well-being.

Main Leisure and Recreation components

Arts and Entertainment: opera, theatre and drama (professional and amateur; cabaret; dance etc.); film, video and TV; music and concerts.

Theatre can be divided into commercial theatres and those which are grant-aided. There are about 600 theatres in the UK, approximately one sixth in London, half of them in the West End. There's also a huge variety of venues (pubs, schools etc.) used for performance, as well as arts centres and civic halls. Dance includes ballet, usually lumped together with opera, but there are also multi-cultural companies. Opera is expensive and not exactly well-loved; concerts are far more varied, accessible, and popular, from pub bands to Wembley arena. Cabaret, variety and special events just about cover all other forms of light entertainment; although much of this is traditional, it includes alternative comedy. Amateur entertainment (music and drama) which involves the community is often grant aided.

Heritage: including private and specialist collections. Not just dusty museums and ancient monuments - much has been re-vitalised, especially with the growing concern for conservation. Purpose-built attractions preserve and re-create the past.

Sport and physical activities, also products (equipment and clothing) and services (providing refreshments) involve a number of Government bodies (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests). There are always plans for future developments: encouraging participation (young people; women; 45-59 age group) and increasing the number of facilities. Indoor facilities include health clubs. Outdoor Activities: extreme sports (bungee jumping) to enjoying natural resources: taking photographs, i.e., it can be very energetic or for relaxation. Spectating is equally popular. Play is largely concerned with facilities for children, from parks to fairgrounds or Theme Parks, involving various organisations: LEAs, after schools clubs, Scouts etc. This is likely to become a growth area, with the increasing need for childcare, including such activities as crafts and painting.

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Catering and Accommodation; the former may be an activity in itself, i.e. visiting a restaurant for a special occasion, but is mainly part of leisure facilities. Since travel broadens the mind, more people going abroad has resulted in a growing interest in international cuisine, and, more recently, continental style café bars flourishing in most cities. Accommodation (hiring out for parties, exhibitions, conferences etc.) is also wide ranging, often required all year round: overnight stays or a month long holiday, from tents and caravans to luxury hotels or staying in a stately home.

Main travel and tourism components

Travel services (pleasure)

Facilities range from tour operators to tourist attractions, in several categories, with services provided by three principals:

- ⌘ Travel agents
- ⌘ Tour operators
- ⌘ Travel organisations, such as airlines.

Cheaper travel means people are more adventurous.

Incoming and outgoing tours: people from abroad visiting the UK, people from the UK going abroad. Plus people from the UK travelling in the UK (domestic).

We tend to go abroad for either culture or fun (or both) but most people visit this country because of its heritage. Tourists can buy a package deal (tour operators), book via a travel agent or make bookings themselves directly with service providers.

Visitor attractions may be inclusive or an optional extra. Another expanding industry, whether revamping museums or creating swimming pools with a choice of sophisticated facilities.

Information service: the necessary details to make the most of leisure:

- ⌘ Accommodation and catering
- ⌘ Travel arrangements (timetables etc.)
- ⌘ Local attractions.

Effective promotion means more business. Tourist information centres cover about a 50 mile radius.

Holiday attractions: sightseeing (whether a stroll in the park or a slog around a huge stately home)

Catering; Accommodation: see above

Transport: flight or on foot - what services are laid on? Every means of transport has a specific route (e.g. railways) and 'off the beaten track' may defeat you if it involves plane, train, bus and walking. Convenience is a priority though some forms, like pony-rides, are arranged for enjoyment.

Local Leisure and Recreation facilities

Information about theatres can be found in Yellow Pages, or visit your local library.

Halls vary in size, and the purpose for which they are used; concentrate on one in regular use - ask the local council or library for a list.

Museums may house a local collection or concentrate on local history or some other specialism. Sometimes, there are entrance fees; opening times may be limited.

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Heritage sites now tend to have both recreational and educational purposes, e.g. preserving the industrial past by re-opening mills.

Natural environment features with leisure potential. Where scenery attracts visitors, facilities are important, but so are keeping such areas 'unspoilt'.

Catering and accommodation provision. Most towns have at least one main hotel and several smaller, plus guest houses and places offering bed and breakfast. There will also be various restaurants and pubs.

Parks' facilities vary, whether designated sports (tennis courts) or grassed play areas. They employ staff (maintenance and security), staying open until dusk.

Play areas are set up by community groups as well as local councils, with equipment provided.

Tracks: stadiums, parks, sports grounds, educational institutions etc.; use is sometimes restricted to members or students.

Sports centres, swimming pools and activity centres. Again, a wide variety, but not all of them provide many facilities or equipment. Some operate a membership system.

Travel and Tourism Facilities

Travel Agencies book virtually any kind of holiday, anywhere. Prices vary; big chains tend to be cheaper, while some specialise. They offer plenty of information and provide other services, e.g. booking tickets for events.

Tourist Information Centres provide information (local and regional) - promoting the local area is up to the tourist board.

Tour Operators have direct sales offices for their own range of holidays. Coach operators: tours (local to international) and guide services.

Tourist Attractions: locals tend not to notice their own landmarks (or know little about them), but most places have something which attracts visitors.

Catering and Accommodation; some for locals or for business purposes, otherwise specifically for visitors. The former predominates for short-stay, the latter for longer trips (up-market areas have hotels rather than camp sites etc.)

MAIN PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Sports participation and spectating

Spectators purchase refreshments, souvenirs etc., along with entrance tickets; numbers do not appear to be affected by the amount of televised sport. Sometimes this involves overnight stays; annual events boost an area's tourist industry.

Outdoor activities

Urban and rural; organised and informal - people who come to enjoy the scenery. Often involves catering and accommodation.

Play applies to adults (bingo) as well as children; includes traditional pursuits (funfairs) and technological: amusement arcades.

Travel: applies both for business and pleasure.

Catering and accommodation: a variety of products and services will be offered in each establishment, as well as differing from others in the same area.

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Entertainment: suggests a less active role than 'play', i.e. spectators: cabaret to circuses, and again, in a huge choice of venues.

Agency and information services: privately owned or set up by the local council; the former are more likely to be specific to one particular place while the latter aim to attract visitors to the area.

Own Leisure and Recreational Needs

Physical Activity: Whilst some people excel at several sports, this does not appeal to everyone. If so, pick something you least dislike and find out about taking it up: costs; times availability etc.

Social Interaction: friends have interests in common - not necessarily activities but just going for a drink etc.

New experiences: challenge; personal satisfaction

Plenty to try, though some are not cheap and others require lots of time and energy. There's usually something to suit most people.

INVESTIGATING JOBS IN LEISURE AND TOURISM

Range of Job Opportunities

- ⌘ Arts and Entertainment; sports and physical activities; outdoor activities; play; heritage; catering and accommodation
- ⌘ Travel services; incoming and outgoing tours; transport; visitor attractions; catering and accommodation
- ⌘ Information services and marketing
- ⌘ What in the world?
- ⌘ Stand-up comedian; dj; ice-cream seller in a cinema
- ⌘ Museum display designer; sales assistant in an art gallery shop
- ⌘ Physiotherapist; golf professional; engineer in a Theme Park; clown
- ⌘ Working as a guide or in a summer camp abroad.

You need to be smart (in both senses), good with people, have a pleasant personality and loads of common sense and patience. Consider your skills and qualifications. Are more required? What advice and information do you need?

Initial employment

Your decision should be based on the following:

- ⌘ Advice
- ⌘ Circumstances; interests; opportunities
- ⌘ Tasks; skills; qualifications.
- ⌘ Career: Training? Studying? Clearly defined career path?

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Circumstances and interests

How many hours will you be working; will you have to travel; how much are you paid? Assess your likes and dislikes e.g. 'one man band' or 'team-player'; uniformity; ambitions. Strengths and weaknesses: are you better dealing with children or the elderly? Is your health good? What about your own interests? Decide which areas seem most interesting, or at least, eliminate those which do not appeal.

Opportunities: ask around - people in the know tell you more than the information from an organisation.

Main purposes

Advertisements provide details such as job title and description; necessary skills and qualifications.

Tasks and responsibilities

These are detailed in the job description, and should match your own interests, circumstances, skills etc. Note that you can be responsible for something (looking after keys) or to somebody (reporting that they've gone missing).

Main skills and qualifications

Vocational skills i.e. practical abilities rather than 'a calling', as formerly (e.g. nuns), using computers.

Core skills are the basics, applicable to any kind of job: problem solving; using computers etc.; 'transferable skills' are used in different situations (time management).

Qualifications

- ⌘ Vocational qualifications usually refer to GNVQs (Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced): carrying out tasks. NVQs (Level 1-5) check competence in doing these tasks. Their practical nature appeals to employers.
- ⌘ Academic: concentrate on knowledge; GCSEs etc. are still highly regarded in business.

Obtaining skills and qualifications

Plenty of possibilities e.g., full-time study or jobs with day-release. You can be trained on the job or as part of a Government youth training scheme, via Training and Enterprise Councils (TECS) or at Skills centres (libraries, college etc.).

Sources of advice and information

Careers advisors (including careers conventions) match your skills and ambitions with the right vocational area.

Reference materials: associations; businesses in the industry; trade newspapers and magazines

Other informed sources: job centres (information about training courses; further advice); private agencies; personnel departments; schools and colleges.

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PLANNING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN LEISURE AND TOURISM

Personal information and producing a CV

Personal details: name; address; telephone number; date of birth.

Always cite the most relevant skills, qualifications and experience for a particular job, especially when applying for more than one; keep a supply of CVs handy so you can write off straight away for anything promising (file with the copy of the application form). Likewise, send copies of references, keeping the original for the interview.

Referees: obtain permission first: good choices are: previous employers; teachers; professionals (family doctor).

Subjects studied; qualifications/awards: prioritise the most relevant.

Experience/achievements (work and training): list the most recent first. NB: sometimes it's more important to be good with your hands, sometimes to be able to think on your feet.

Other achievements: no matter how proud of something, stick to what's applicable.

Personal qualities: include those which have improved as a result of training.

Personal interests: show an interest in specific areas.

Leisure activities: concentrate on those likely to be useful for the job in question, whether you're a homebird or always out and about.

Main ways to find out about job vacancies

Advertisements: local media (newspapers, radio); trade press; job centres; notices.

Professional advisers: careers teachers; employment agencies (government run and commercial; the latter charge fees); other informed sources. More information is now available on computer databases, but word of mouth/networking is one of the best ways of getting a job and progressing in your career.

Main stages in recruitment

This starts when organisations place advertisements.

Application form filling is a necessary evil - take a photocopy and use for a practice run, to ensure you get it right, and have a record. Presentation and accuracy are vital - it's rather like taking an exam, only this time, you already know the answers. When ringing up for a form, make a note of all the necessary details. Again, rehearse first.

Interview. Be prepared:

- ⌘ Check where you are going
- ⌘ How you will get there
- ⌘ How long it takes.

Being presentable and punctual are essential, particularly if your interviewer is the boss. Stay calm and be polite; remember, this is not a giant step into the unknown - the questions are based on your application form. Read up about the organisation; note (and rehearse) some pertinent questions, NOT just how much they're going to pay you. Always make the most of interviews - how often do you get the chance to talk about yourself at length to other people and have them listen to every word?

Selection: If you don't get the job, try ringing to find out more, though you may not receive a satisfactory answer. Most of the time, it boils down to too many applicants. You may not even be notified - so would you have enjoyed working there anyway?

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Appointment: a date will be set for you to start your job. Your references will be checked; sometimes a medical examination is required.

Presenting personal information

Letter of application: what job; outline skills and qualifications (enclose CV); why you are applying - try to stick to one side of A4. Employers can tell plenty from envelopes: incorrectly addressed, illegible, or with Homer peering around one corner.

Write and request application forms when they are available. NB: some companies produce professional CVs (avoid those advertising their services using the word 'CV's'), but they're not difficult to compile: two sides of A4; a summary (NOT your life history): relevant; positive; well presented.

Record of achievement: a more elaborate CV, often dating back to school; it can be a folder which also includes certificates, references etc.

Appropriate sources

Information on vacancies: don't be disheartened if you're not immediately successful - there are plenty of places to look: careers office; job centre; local media etc. Beware of those with a high staff turnover (other than Christmas or the holiday season), even if that's handy when you urgently need cash. Advertisements sometimes specify a number of hours but always check - you could be in for a shock once you've started working and happen to spot that the following week's rota has you down for twice as long.

Information on skills needed; further training: check whether you should first apply for some training; plenty of courses are available, widely advertised.

Careers advisors - if they don't have the answers, they'll know somebody who does.

Reference materials: leaflets about various organisations and books (career guides).

Other informed sources: people who are employed in leisure and tourism have plenty of insider information, though it could put you off, as well as kindling your enthusiasm.

EXERCISE: Make a list of a variety of six jobs in the leisure and recreation facilities in your area, then compare with those in the nearest town/city or village i.e. contrast between rural and urban provision.

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INVESTIGATING CUSTOMER SERVICE NEEDS IN A LEISURE AND TOURISM FACILITY

Benefits

Organisation: more profit, repeat sales; better reputation.

Self: job satisfaction (both employer and customers appreciate your work), bonuses and job security.

Customers expect a good standard of service, to feel they are in a safe environment and that their belongings are secure. They then tell all their friends, which makes the facility more popular - nearly three-quarters will NOT come back if they're unhappy with the staff on their first visit.

Effective Customer Service

Meeting their needs

Customers want to be made to feel welcome, good service and accurate information. They expect to pay a fair price (certainly no more than in other facilities), which should be correctly calculated, without having to add on anything later which you'd forgotten. Stress the benefits of the products/services: quality; convenience; prompt delivery; after sales service etc. Special needs: not just the disabled, but also language difficulties or families with babies and young children.

Ensuring Health and Safety

Customers, yourself, your colleagues and the security of the facility (including keeping information confidential). Some activities are obviously more dangerous than others, but you also should be aware of potential risk, e.g. a fire in the building, and co-operate with your employer by reporting it; also repairs. Staff must be properly trained, especially in emergency procedures, knowing how to look after equipment. They should never interfere with it or misuse it.

Ensuring Security

A perennial problem, it applies to the staff's belongings as well as customers' and in all environments. It's not just theft, but other hazards, especially fire. Facilities utilise a range of security measures: mirrors; tags; intercoms; ID cards; automatic systems, and should have adequate alarms. All employees must heed security rules, ensuring cash etc. is locked away. Organisations sometimes employ staff who are specially trained in security measures, including guards to take money to the bank.

Factors affecting customer service

Availability of resources: human (computer access means more information, but it takes longer to retrieve); physical (facilities and equipment: phones to pamphlets. Includes security, e.g. lockers); financial (the advantages of hiring or buying etc.). Lack of money is the main cause of problems, and a knowledge of funding is now increasingly desirable. Poor marketing is detrimental when potential customers remain unaware of what a facility has to offer.

Staff skills

First impressions count, particularly with new customers. Trained staff possess qualifications and experience, and acquire various skills, not least that of knowing when a customer wants assistance or when they are 'just looking'. They should be helpful and informative, to offer advice - or know somebody who can.

Customers' expectations

When customers are satisfied with products and services, facilities know they have the right things on sale; feedback is essential. Restaurateurs despair of knowing whether menus are just what the customer ordered, because they're always told the meal is fine.

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Design of facility governs what amenities can be offered. It is important the building fits into its surroundings and that full use is made of it, satisfying customer requirements. All kinds of things have to be considered: type of lighting (not overly bright nor too dim); the colour of the carpets; conveniently sized toilets. The reception area is particularly important, so that customers find it welcoming.

Occasions

Expected customer contact

Customers are usually dealt with by receptionists or guides and need the right information (timetables etc.), possibly something outside the facility, e.g. the nearest bus stop. New employees tend to be wary of dealing with customers, reluctant to answer the phone etc.

When customer contact is not expected

Whether administrators or cleaners, they should have some idea what to do when coming into contact with customers, maybe somebody who's got lost.

Main types of services

Providing information

Usually verbal, backed up by handing over the appropriate literature. However, different people require different levels of assistance: beginners in a sport complex; disabled people; parents. Customers expect employees to know all the answers, especially during coaching, but are unlikely to have much patience with new staff.

Providing advice may be either general or more specific, e.g., for using certain equipment.

Providing assistance can be for all sorts of requests, often practical: borrowing the phone book, giving directions.

Dealing with complaints

Road rage is one thing but nasty customers are far more common. Whether as a result of something on their part (turning up late) or something like theft, staff always observe the golden rule: 'The customer is right' (and not 'the customer is a right soandso.'). Make notes and read them back to double-check you have all the facts. When making suggestions about a solution, keep it practical and never make rash promises. Apparently, about 10% of customers are never satisfied, but we all know people in our family like that. One thing to keep in mind (and make you feel better), is that when complaints are properly handled, i.e. put to the test, the customer is more loyal than somebody who has never complained.

Product-related service

- ⌘ Selling: e.g. food and drink, T shirts
- ⌘ Coaching: may be carried out by somebody who specialises in more than one sport.
- ⌘ Running outdoor activities: like coaching, this requires plenty of preparation.
- ⌘ Making bookings: must be followed correctly, whether in advance, because of limited space, or on the door; separate facilities include ticket agencies.
- ⌘ Serving food and drinks

These are automatically expected to be provided anywhere, and at the double, whether snacks (including vending machines) or meals, the latter noting dietary requirements. Customers celebrating a special occasion will appreciate staff who help to make it memorable. On the other hand, staff sometimes have to do shift work, which can be inconvenient, or take on jobs like cleaning.

Customers

Individuals: often have the most money and leisure;

Groups: clubs mean repeat business; this may entail 'perks' i.e. discounts.

Different ages: a child who enjoys a particular activity is likely to keep it up as an adult. In most cases, it's more appropriate to use everyday language rather than technical terms.

Different cultures: trained staff will take into account dress code, religion etc., and things like body language, to avoid causing offence.

Non-English speaking: not necessarily from outside the UK; information may be displayed in different languages, although this is not yet universal. Any effort to speak to customers in a foreign language is usually appreciated.

Specific needs: range from vegetarians to pregnant women (or both), and require consideration and tact. These may also entail help for the disabled (ramps), those with literacy problems (reading notices); numeracy (making payments).

Methods of communication

Necessary skills: listening; concentrating; asking more questions, if necessary; staying calm; being responsible, patient and polite; keeping yourself well-informed and up-to-date. Speak more slowly and clearly than you would when chatting to your friends. The aim is to satisfy customers' needs: information; advice; confirming or changing bookings; checking details; special requests; complaints.

Whether in person, on the phone or in writing, courtesy and helpfulness are always required. Being polite does NOT mean acting as if re-united with your long-lost best friend; customers find overly friendly staff as off-putting as those who do a realistic Basil Fawlty impersonation. People from other cultures and the elderly in particular can be offended by informality.

Face to face

Customers expect staff to be smart and pleasant: maintain eye-contact and smile, using your common-sense, i.e. no big grins when dealing with a complaint, even if it does sound funny. Regional accents have gone from being taken for granted to being more acceptable than talking in a posh voice, but speaking 'proper' English is essential i.e. no dialect, slang or definitely no swearing. Similarly, when providing information; some people need spoon-feeding, detailed instructions in words of one syllables, others just a rough idea, and they can manage, thank you very much. Most difficult of all, people who can't explain properly exactly what they're looking for. In all cases, repeat back to them what you've been told to ensure it's correct, especially details like phone numbers and addresses.

Telephone

The most flexible means of communication since a response is mostly instantaneous: asking and answering questions; placing and receiving orders; buying and selling. However, whilst chatting on the phone is a daily essential for some people, others would sooner put a bad-tempered lobster to their ear. A good telephone manner is an essential skill, balanced between being efficient and nattering away; when callers are prone to ramble on and on, you need to know how to end the conversation without upsetting them. Customers expect a prompt reply (under six rings; conversely, when you ring up, allow plenty of time for somebody to answer) and for you to pay attention; always make notes, to ensure accuracy. You can also buy time by offering to ring them back - providing that you do so as promptly as possible.

Make notes beforehand of what you need to say or find out, explain who you are when they answer the phone, and why you're ringing. Check whether it's convenient for them to talk, then that everything is in order at the end of the conversation, or whether anything needs following up.

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Written communication

The best way to give you time to sort everything out first, and revising it afterwards: memos (for requests; instructions; providing information); leaflets, newsletters, press releases, notices, letters; reports.

The standard layout for reports using recorded speech i.e. 'The client's request was discussed with the facility's supervisor...' is as follows: heading/introduction/summary of contents; method (how it was carried out); findings/results; conclusion; recommendations (if any). Letters (first person i.e. 'I have discussed your request with our supervisor....'): introduction; description/explanation; summing up. Both of these can be adopted for most written communication.

When answering letters:

- ⌘ Confirm or acknowledge receipt (i.e., in a case where you need time to sort out a query)
- ⌘ Solve problems
- ⌘ Request information.

The language you utilise varies according to the recipients and their status: customers; individuals; colleagues; superiors. Letters nowadays have the technology to make the most of a 'reader-friendly' approach (Dear Mags, we're REALLY delighted to tell you - you're a WINNER!!!), so a lot of mail is instantly junked into the bin. Generally, this is the most formal means of communication, and make no mistake, presentation, spelling, wording, are VERY important. Like all staff members, they should immediately create a good impression; customers are put off by sloppy writing, and immediately assume that the products and services are also second-rate.

Poor communication is one of the main causes of complaints, and a serious one since it means loss of business and a bad reputation.

PROVIDE SERVICE TO LEISURE AND TOURISM CUSTOMERS

If identifying customer service needs is unsuccessful, they are dissatisfied and go elsewhere, giving the facility a bad reputation. Needs range from car parks to health and safety aspects: first aid box on the premises.

Information, advice and assistance: pay attention and ask questions, even do some research if necessary, for more complicated matters. A positive attitude does wonders for customer care.

Specific products and services: if not available, alternatives should be offered. Special offers etc. should always be pointed out.

Prompt service: when a facility is busy it is important that there are enough staff on hand to maintain efficient service and sort out queries. Working well as a team is essential.

Effective customer service

You will be observed in six different situations: three in leisure and recreation, three in travel and tourism.

Meeting customers' needs

Ensuring health and safety; ensuring security (customers, self, colleagues and facility)

Customers

Refer to page three for description of different types

Communicating clearly with customers

Refer to page three for description of the three methods.

Problems

Products, services, facility

- ⌘ Flaws with products and/or services or when they are to a poor standard; wrong information; the facility itself, which may not be properly maintained.
- ⌘ Ability to deliver effective customer service.
- ⌘ Staff who have not been properly trained.

Unreasonable customer expectations

Some people are never satisfied. Fortunately, there's a positive aspect to complaints; once properly dealt with, it ensures that matters are put right. Most organisations will do their best to keep existing customers happy, since it is much easier to retain them than it is to obtain new customers.

Dealing effectively with customers

Complaints should never be dismissed or trivialised; unless you are absolutely furious, it does actually take a lot of effort to force yourself to make a complaint - no matter how justified. Staff should be sympathetic, listen without interrupting and remain calm. Note the details and check the main points, without blame or excuses, then outline a solution and carry it out. Refer upwards, if necessary.

Customer care

Emergencies; accidents; complaints; responsibilities (including when to refer to the appropriate person). Service needs (double-booking). It is most important to pay close attention in these situations, to avoid repeating any mistakes.

MAINTAIN CUSTOMER RECORDS AS PART OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer Records are essential for effective customer service.

Information: personal and financial details, which are confidential (health problems, bank account).

Enquiries and requests: staff at reception should be able to satisfy customers' needs with up-to-date knowledge of the facility and personnel, plus accurate information, including events, prices, timetables, staff and customers etc. Plus the unexpected requests; some customers expect you to know everything - and to be able to read their mind if they have trouble explaining themselves. Staff should make an effort to remember the names of regular customers and recognise their voices on the phone. They must always preserve customer confidentiality.

Initial enquires are usually formal, but it's usual to be relaxed with regular customers. First impressions count; when a new customer approaches reception, they should contact the best person to deal with the situation and offer the customer a seat, something to read and refreshments while they're waiting. If there's a lengthy delay, staff should then try to find somebody else to help, or make an appointment.

Sales (e.g. till rolls, receipts, invoices). Helps avoid over-stocking or running out of supplies. With a computer, mailing lists can be utilised to provide customers with information about future events and special offers, and also to obtain feedback, vital for supply and demand.

Complaints: records help to avoid a recurrence, formulate company policy and satisfy customer needs. Accurate accounting avoids problems with calculations.

Storage and Retrieval

In other words - filing. This is the most boring job which everyone hates BUT if not done properly, causes amazing chaos. Any doubts about where something should go, don't guess, ask. However, if you think of something to improve the system, make a suggestion; you'd be surprised how many different ways there are to file papers, inevitably according to what is most convenient to each person. Such papers should be kept separately and sorted into order, with the most recent on top. Some files require no further attention but for those which do, a reminder system needs setting up, plus cross references, if required e.g. if borrowed by another department. It simplifies matters if filing is done on a daily basis, records kept in closed and locked drawers. Papers can eventually be sorted (usually after at least a year, more likely two) to check which may be discarded.

Paper-based system

Forms, cards, books, stored in files, binders, cabinets etc. Simple or pre-printed forms ('given format') can be used for enquiries and requests or bookings. All records can be arranged in a variety of ways, even a combination (customer reference number, within each subject: badminton, weightlifting etc. in a Sport Complex) depending on which is most convenient: alphabetical; numerical; chronological; geographical (useful for monitoring sales in different regions); subject order.

Numbers may come under alphabetical, i.e. at the beginning, or as spelt, e.g. 72 would be under 's'. Cross-reference: is vital e.g. for tracing a file which has more than one name. To keep track of files, whenever they are borrowed, an 'out' card is inserted, providing details of the exact location: where; what; who.

Computer based system

Although smaller organisations may use paper, this is becoming more usual, whether centralised i.e. read only, providing information on a terminal, or with terminals in each department, with access for input. Microfilm, commonly used in libraries, reduces storage space and preserves old and valuable documents. Although all systems are prone to human error, databases have many advantages:

- ⌘ Quicker and easier to use
- ⌘ Take up less space (avoiding duplication)
- ⌘ More secure
- ⌘ Flexible (information can be combined, listed, analysed and kept up to date).

Confidentiality of information

This is the aim of the Data Protection Act, set up in 1984.

Customer information: private details e.g. finances, should never be divulged nor discussed in front of other people.

Enquiries and requests: often require following up and may lead to bookings.

Sales: always of interest to those in a similar line of business (who could then under-cut the facility) and customers (where profits are exceptionally high)

Complaints: any publicity would not be good for the facility's reputation)

Private information should never be revealed without proper authorisation and proof of identity. All the above details are kept away from public access, locked in cabinets or protected by computer password and/or user code (and back-up disks), particularly when this may affect health and safety. Never leave

personal information lying around on desks or up on computer screens.

Health and safety: customers; self; colleagues

Health and safety rules must be adhered to; regularly monitoring ensures everyone is kept up to date, helping to avoid accidents. Dust can result in eye injuries, whilst excessive use of computers may cause repetitive strain injury. Other accidents are caused by carelessness: tripping over piles of records waiting to be filed. Flammable materials are a major fire risk.

Recording systems

Paper-based: using books and ledgers. Vital to keep writing and presentation as legible and accurate as possible

Computer-based: software packages e.g. spreadsheets for numerical data, simplifying payments.

Problems

Completing records

Forms are a necessary evil but you eventually learn to follow the format. Accuracy and legibility are essential; block capitals and black pen are recommended. Forms completed by customers should be double-checked - they may still be illegible. They may then not be updated - computer records can be deleted by accident. Records are simplified by using headings for all necessary information, to narrow the field if details are incomplete. We tend to use our own short-cuts for making notes but all staff should be able to follow completed forms.

Storing and retrieving records are most often hampered when items are misfiled (usually carelessness or spelling mistakes) or go missing; files should be kept intact, even when it's just one relevant piece of paper, that's easier to misplace.

Maintaining confidentiality

All records must be stored safely. Never pass on information over the phone; when dealing with customers in person, you need proof of identity.

Maintaining health and safety

Report any problems or potential risks to the appropriate person.

Appropriate person

Know who you should refer to if you're not equipped to deal with any problems. Colleagues with specific skills or responsibilities may also have dealt with particular customers before. They can sort it out themselves or advise you on what to do or how to avoid that problem in the future. Supervisors are more experienced (and carry more clout with customers), though they sometimes also refer you on the best person to deal with something, especially when technical, like a faulty photo-copier.

EXERCISE: Mr. C. has good cause to complain - this time. His weekly booking for squash (paid in advance) has been omitted. What will you say to him? The customers queuing up? Your boss? The person responsible?

MAJOR UK VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

Main types of attractions

Recreation: The Countryside Commission was set up in the 1960s to encourage these facilities, which include the 11 national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty in England and Wales. Many recreational activities are water-based; others include: camping; rambling and climbing and tourist resorts. The parks are largely maintained by Government grant, plus entrance fees, profits from the sale of products and services etc. Tourist resorts have an enormous amount of visitors because of the number and variety of their attractions.

Culture and Entertainment

Major attractions can be found in areas throughout the UK, from London to Scotland (including Wales).

Heritage sites: including buildings (castles, museums, churches and stately homes), plus areas of historical interest (Stonehenge).

Galleries: displaying works of art (paintings, sculptures, textiles etc.). Usually found in cities, often more than one, dedicated to different periods or genres.

Theatres: those in most towns and cities are purpose-built but many types of building (and outdoor areas) can be utilised for performance, from warehouses to pubs.

Children's attractions

Theme parks, probably the most popular, may not be open all year round. The entrance fee usually allows unlimited use of all the rides but some are not suitable for young children.

Zoos; farms; leisure pools; children's museums. The last of these is rapidly growing in popularity; combining education and entertainment appeals to most parents.

Main features, products and services

The appeal of visitor attractions is often enhanced by built features (children's playgrounds; theme parks etc.); purpose-built attractions are usually located near heavily populated areas, easily reached by road and rail. Visitor attractions may be built around a natural feature, particularly sandy beaches, but also nature trails, marinas etc.

Size is also important, whether the seating capacity of a theatre, the number of hotels in a resort or the area of a national park. As is variety, so that all kinds of visitors, with all kinds of interests, are fully catered for: children entertained, adults educated.

Additional services. Along with food and accommodation, not to mention souvenir shops, these include such things as lifts and wheelchair access and the hire of scooters and wheelchairs for the disabled; multilingual guides; educational materials. Family services: a range of facilities especially for babies and young children, e.g. high chairs.

Location

Either urban or rural, near densely populated areas or areas of natural beauty; both should be easily accessible with good road and rail links.

Population centres: potentially, thousands of visitors, especially since plenty of other facilities will be found there. Major transport routes are more important for attractions which are not close to population centres - they may also need to have longer daily and seasonal opening times. The position on the UK map would also benefit attractions, when in an undeveloped area with lots of potential or, conversely, one which is becoming popular. Specialised attractions appeal to dedicated visitors (e.g. train spotters) even if access is not straightforward.

Needs of different visitors

Sometimes the reason for the visit (see below), or as a result of the visit (more refreshment areas). Visitors invariably need the following:

- ⌘ Information
- ⌘ Attractions and facilities
- ⌘ Catering and accommodation (other than day trips).

The largest group of visitors are those from the UK staying overnight; in the next largest group, UK visitors on day trips number about the same as overseas visitors.

Visitors' needs also vary according to age; purpose of visit (entertainment or educational); specific requirements (dietary).

Additional services: food; accommodation; family facilities; wheelchair access; lifts for disabled; multilingual guides; sales; educational materials.

Types of visitor

Depends on the amount of time, energy and money required. Similarly, according to which group of visitors: adults; families; from the UK; outside the UK.

Appeal of attractions to different visitors

History: there's something for any enthusiast anywhere in the UK: castles, churches and other buildings. Interestingly, the vast majority of museums have been established only since the 1950s - about 50% since 1970.

Landscape: escapism - from busy city life, even back into childhood. Many areas are developed and offer more attractions, thus becoming more popular, but less unspoilt.

Recreation: ranging from resorts to the national parks, the more variety an attraction can offer, the more popular it becomes.

Entertainment: opera to karaoke.

Cost: all visitors expect value for money, starting with entrance fees.

Ease of access: travelling to an attraction and getting into it, then having to queue up.

Specific interests attract a loyal following and a high level of repeat business.

For most visitors, the most important elements in choosing a particular attraction are cost and access; destinations must be within easy reach of road and rail. As regards entrance fees, different rates apply to individuals and groups, with special offers or discounts for family tickets as well as the elderly, unemployed, students etc. It may even be free to go in, or the entrance price covers most other costs.

Transport Links

The road network is the usual means of transport (well over three-quarters of visitors): cars; bicycles, buses and coaches, including trams. Roads link attractions to other attractions; centres of population; other facilities; accommodation services.

Although the rail network covers the country, a change of transport may be required, again, depending on how close the station is to an attraction; sometimes this is circumvented by a free bus or coach service. However, it may limit visitors' experience, when they are unable to explore a certain area. Nonetheless, rail travel is increasingly encouraged by the Government, in a bid to solve such problems as congestion and pollution.

Air travel is becoming more popular, making it faster and cheaper to go abroad; domestic flights are also more common because of their convenience. The location of the airport, however, means some attractions will be more accessible than others.

Ferries are used to cross lakes and rivers as well as seas, and are often regarded as an enjoyable means of travel, as well as being practical (and essential in isolated areas).

Costs of visits

A balance is required between something being profitable and visitors feeling they've got value for money. Entrance fees are often tiered: individuals; families; concessions, but do not always include all the facility's attractions, although 'all-in tickets' are popular, because of the convenience. Sometimes, two organisations join forces, to the benefit of each; discounts are also often membership perks.

Individuals: usually rated according to age.

Family Groups: when the majority of visitors to an attraction, facilities emphasise value for money and prices are calculated accordingly e.g. free for babies, even children.

Special concessions: sometimes restricted (seasonal; certain times of day), although this also aims to boost slack periods. Most attractions offer concessions to the disabled; pensioners; unwaged; students; members.

INVESTIGATING LOCAL VISITOR INFORMATION MATERIALS

Main types of visitor

People travel for pleasure, business or personal reasons - often a combination. To carry out the necessary research, you will need to study books and other publications, as well as visiting Tourist Information Centres etc. and talk to the employees.

Adults are usually the most common visitors, requiring specific and/or general information. Their needs may differ from families, perhaps being more cultural, whether museums or theatre or country houses, to enjoying the solitude of a local beauty spot.

Families prioritise their children, and tend to be interested in resorts and theme parks, seeking entertainment and/or education.

UK-based visitors (including residents and those from other parts of the country): day trips; visiting friends and/or family; weekend or mid-week break; main holiday.

Outside the UK. People come here from all over the world, predominately Europe and America, largely because of our heritage; there's a growing interest in tracing ancestors. These visitors usually head for the major cities rather than remote areas or resorts.

Information needs

Location: maps are essential but can be kept simple, showing just the major roads.

Times: helps visitors plan their stay, including the time spent travelling.

Prices: are the starting point for most people; they won't visit places when they can't afford it, and expect value for money

Availability: not all areas have a full range of attractions; activities or facilities - and not all of these are available year round. Sometimes closure is temporary e.g. maintenance.

Facilities: from choosing a hotel which offers all kinds of amenities to those in a specific attraction. Most visitors like to make the most of the experience and want to know what else is on offer nearby.

Events such as festivals (which have steadily increased in number) are often the main reason for visitors, who often return every year. These are widely promoted, particularly if out of season.

Services range from special events to facilities for the disabled; also includes promotion of the area via presentations.

Attractions (castles etc.): all publicity material is free, aiming to encourage visitors, though the quality varies. It will be distributed throughout the area, and also outside.

Types of information materials

Advertising is the most versatile since it can be read (newspaper) or seen (poster) or heard (radio). Leaflets (including brochures and handouts) are commonly used since they can be widely distributed, while posters, being visual, are good for attracting attention. Notices (maps; timetables; opening times; promoting events) tend to be more business-like, answering specific requirements with maps and timetables. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to assess which method is the most effective.

Main sources of information materials

Most places have a tourist information centre. In smaller areas, it may not be open all day, or every day of the week or all year round, but the staff provide a huge, varied amount of information, and make be able to make enquiries or bookings on behalf of visitors.

Libraries and town halls always have visitor information: posters, leaflets etc.

Some attractions have their own visitor information centre; bigger ones may incorporate a mini-museum or display area, a gift shop and a café or restaurant.

The media used to provide information

Press: newspapers (daily, weekly; local [including 'freebies'], regional and national) and magazines: weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly. When tourism is the main industry in an area, there is usually plenty of press coverage.

The cost of advertisements depends on their size, the number of times they appear and where they are published. It's more expensive using magazines, although that's aimed at specific markets as well as the general public. Careful targeting encourages visitors e.g. readers of a publication for animal lovers would be interested in a rare breeds farm. Other printed materials: from simple photo-copied posters to elaborate, glossy brochures.

Broadcasting is very effective; start listening in to local radio and you'll find there's lots of emphasis on what's happening in the immediate area. Cheaper than TV, besides the length of the advertisement and the number of times it is used, the time of broadcast has to be considered; if it's heard only at 3am, the only visitors to find out about it would be those having trouble sleeping. And they'd be too tired to go anywhere. Television is extremely expensive - not just the cost of the advert but making it as well. However, it's the most effective means of communication, since nearly every household has at least one set.

PREPARING VISITOR INFORMATION MATERIALS

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DRAFTING INFORMATION LEAFLETS FOR INCOMING VISITORS

Visitor attractions can be divided into recreational, cultural, entertainment and children's attractions, with the following intended audiences: UK, outside the UK (including those with limited English); families; adults.

The last 'audience' has different needs to families (more freedom, often more money) and may comprise a variety of groups: friends, old and young; people with a hobby in common; couples. To appeal to families, attractions tend to concentrate on facilities and services for children.

Significant information

Research will determine the targeted audience and what they need to know: location of the attraction (either a map or simple, clear directions); access (from outside the area as well as within); prices (including concessions); main features; products and/or services. The latter could be a very long list, so stress those of most importance to your audience, e.g. access for wheelchair users.

Appropriate language and layout

Note that pictures rather than words are more effective for those with limited English and also children. Don't forget that the latter are often the most persuasive when a family is deciding where to visit.

Five basic steps for successful marketing: attract attention, to interest the reader, who then desires the product/service. The conviction that it's value for money makes them take action i.e. buy what you're promoting.

Text should be used with care; packing in too much detail sometimes puts people off reading the whole thing. Use head-lines, sub-headings and information panels to make leaflets easy to follow. Images, whether photographs or symbols, are more useful in certain instances, as mentioned above. When more than one page, remember the front cover must be eye-catching, with brief details of the delights in store. The inside pages are more descriptive, whilst the back usually contains the basics and probably a map: price; times; directions etc.

Resources

Materials. The finished product may be quite simple (home-made on a piece of paper), or put together using technology and professionally printed.

Time. Take into account all the preparation involved: any research or checking up to ensure facts are updated and accurate, as well as production, from the first draft onwards. Keep it simple, and that'll allow some leeway should there be any problems.

Finance affects the quality of what is produced and the quantity. Costs of preparation and printing have to be considered; the latter depends on the print run, size, layout and contents (use of colour, 'complexity' [mixture of text and images], photographs, graphics such as maps etc.).

Skill: a truly professional result would call upon experts, e.g. a graphic artist. However, for a simple leaflet, the following come in most useful:

- ⌘ The ability to design
- ⌘ Write good English and edit
- ⌘ Work a photo-copier
- ⌘ Use a computer
- ⌘ Take photographs (artwork takes a lot of skill, otherwise drawings appear amateurish and spoil the whole look).

PREPARING VISITOR INFORMATION MATERIALS

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Preparation. Keep the printing costs in mind. This can sometimes be done relatively cheaply, either at school or even the facility, or you may have to go to a local printer. If the latter, get at least two estimates. Black and white is much cheaper than colour (and so are bigger print runs). You need to provide a master copy which must be good quality to ensure it reproduces properly - and no mistakes.

Print

Costs take into account the print run; size of leaflet etc.; layout; complexity. Although you won't be doing the actual printing, it's useful to know about it so that you can choose the most suitable method e.g. letterpress. You could make use of computer technology if you have access to laser printers; photocopying is becoming more sophisticated and it's cheap and flexible.

Final development

The facility may help you out by offering the services of their own design experts. More likely, you can call upon various departments in your school or college : IT; Art and Design; Media or Business Studies.

EXERCISE: Imagine a fantasy theme park and design a leaflet for it.