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**Tourism Promotion and the Branding of Golf Tourism**

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**Abstract**

How will tourism demand and supply just evolve 'naturally' over the next 10 years? Will change be incremental, perhaps moving slowly from what is now to some new state – a future that we cannot accurately predict? It is important that suppliers in tourism adopt sound business principles to understand the nature of the market and to develop their change strategies.

This paper focuses on tourism promotion and relates issues in tourism promotion to niche markets. It stresses competitive environments for mature tourism destinations in relation to changes in distribution. It uses niche markets and the concept of customer experiences to judge supply for golf tourism.

Pitted against a market and promotional environment which is characterised by speed of change – and uncertainty in how changes in www representation and success will impact on promotional relationships - has tried to show that golf branding – as an example of niches – requires its own specialist approach. The examples, drawn from Scotland, show that it is not only awareness of the need for focus and co-ordination to develop strategy that is important. Key factors to develop a 'bottom-up' approach include a high element of industry involvement and development of co-ordination across business functions in reaching the market.

## **Introduction**

In developing promotional strategies in tourism it is important to ensure that money is spent in ways which adds value to marketing strategies: usually this value added is measured by an estimate of how it targets visitors to the destination and can influence their purchases. This presentation takes, as an example, golf tourism and some of the issues that may affect the development of the market and discusses some developments in development of golf.

## **Global golf**

*Golf is now a global phenomenon*

Estimates of participants vary: between 50 and 60 million golfers worldwide playing 40,000 courses (Price 2003): up to 25 million golfers in North America and 5 million in Europe (VisitScotland, 2002, Price 2003). Increasing participation in emerging Asian markets positions it as a globalised leisure pursuit.

*Golf is iconic*

Golf attracts high media coverage; it has its own TV channels which together with associated media coverage means that reaches huge global audiences, making it very attractive commercially. Golf sponsorship is given both for the staging events and for personal endorsements and advertising. The power of the celebrity and consumer aspiration gives it a power outside its immediate sport as in the 'Tiger economy': Tiger Woods is one of the world's highest income sportspeople. In 2003 he earned £44.1 million. £3.5 million came from prize money for playing golf: the bulk of his earnings came from corporate sponsors including Nike, Accenture, American Express, Heuer and Disney (Smith, 2004).

Nevertheless it is still currently a post of the west and for the affluent: the USA has around 67% of players and 37.5% of courses and Europe follows with 4000 courses (Price 2003). Even in Europe different nationalities are at different stages of development as regards levels of participation and playing abilities. Whatever its actual importance in terms of the game played in different parts of the world, the game has transcended its base market to become a force in the wider world of consumers.

## **Golf Tourism**

*Value at destinations*

The power of golf within tourism can be significant. In Scotland, for example, around 400,000 UK and international visitors took holidays specifically for the purpose of playing golf (2002). UK golfers generated around £105 million spending and an additional £240 million in tourism spend was generated by one million trips where UK visitors played golf as part of their trip. Together with the £100 million brought by the international visitors this accounts for over 10% (£445 million) of all tourism spend. (VisitScotland, 2003, 2006). As golf therefore represents only a part of the market it has, within Scotland and indeed at other destinations been treated as a niche market.

*Competition*

However, while Scotland's status as 'The Home of Golf' gives it an advantage against other destinations there are big challenges for businesses that target this market. Niche it may be, but it is very competitive. Golfers now have great choice, with more and more countries, resorts, golf courses and hotels in the market and making aiming at the market. Scottish weather shortens the tourism season and actually deters some visitors! In the summer months demand often outstrips the supply at some of the courses when visitors most want to play. This drives up green fees. Also, the heritage of tourism means that while there are quality courses and

resorts there is some which is not of high quality or run professionally for a visitor market. This makes it very important that suppliers understand the dynamics of this market.

### Niche markets and tourism niches

*What is a niche?*

Niche markets have no single definition. A survey of sources and authors revealed that the following points about niche markets are emphasised

- Producer related factors
  - Focused on a particular function/set of functions
  - It can be reached by targeting messages, promotions etc
  - Target through customisation
  - Potentially (highly) profitable
  - Lacks economies of scale
  - May not suit large companies
- Consumer related factors
  - It involves relatively small group of customers
  - May confer a (perceived) unique benefit(s) or advantage(s) on those that consume it

It is held that a major success factor in meeting a niche is to make it distinctive. The relationship of this distinctiveness to the promotion and wider elements of the marketing mix relative to the niche's positioning in the market place may be summed as follows: -

*'Positioning is concerned with the identification, development and communication of a differentiated advantage which makes ... products and services perceived as superior and distinctive to those of its competitors in the mind of its target market'* (Payne, 1993: P95).

Thus, a niche requires a *distinctive* message: not only about its functional attributes and competitive features but also about the advantages that a particular alternative confers on participants.

### Tourism niche

When examining work done on tourism niches markets and their promotion, academic literature is at a relatively initial stage: currently conceptual definitions of tourism niches give way to examples of market niches, their development etc. In this way niches are differentiated from mass tourism markets but given a gloss of homogeneity when it comes to analysing them and considering business and promotional techniques. Thus, in a comprehensive 'state of the art' exposition of niche markets Novelli (2005) identifies 19 possible niches, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Hypothesised market niches in tourism

Special Interest tourism	Traditional and Culture based tourism	Activity-based tourism	Future niche tourism
Dark	Cultural & Heritage	Adventure	Ethical
Gastronomic	Research	Small ship cruising	Space
Genealogy	Peripheral	Sport	Virtual
Geotourism	Tribal	Volunteer	
Photographic		Wildlife	
Transport			
Youth			

A cursory examination of Novelli's niches reveals that tourism niches can be differentiated by different factors including:

- Cultural criteria
- Scientific criteria
- Nature of participation: active/passive (including thrill seeker)
- Demographics
- Role (e.g. volunteer, leisure, group)
- Ethical standpoint of participant

This list is far from exhaustive but shows, as one might expect, the wide diversity that exists in tourism once people stop thinking 'mass' and start thinking of it as a set of segmented markets. What also appears to be the case is that there is not sufficient conceptual work yet accomplished on the nature of niche markets and how suppliers should relate to them.

### *Golfing Niches*

Given the criteria which may be applied to identify niche markets it is clear that there are several niches within the overall concept of golf tourism. For a start it is possible to distinguish between the nature of the golfing experience. Put simply three types of experience may be presented: holiday, business and event golf.

- *Holiday Golf* takes place when the golfer uses their own time and satisfies their own particular interests. This broad category encompasses those who (i) go on holiday to play golf and (ii) those who play golf as part of their holiday, but who not plan it as the most significant feature of their trip but place it within a mix of other main interests.
- *Business Golf*. For convenience they are here separated into Incentive Golf Tourism – usually where specific packages are offered to specific participants on behalf an particular organisation and conference/other corporate golf which may be the focus of an event or an add-on to a larger occasion.
- *Event Golf* is here defined as competition focused activity that is publicised and promoted as such which offers prizes and titles. Events may be amateur, professional or both and the main niches may be divided into those that spectate and those that participate.

Organising the market into these niches may be criticised. Significantly they do not directly segment by the type of advantages they confer on the tourists. Also they miss age, gender and country of origin factors. These inadequacies are noted and admitted. However, for current purposes the segments above do provide sufficient evidence to show that within the general ambit of golf tourism different niches exist which not only exhibit different requirements and purchase behaviour, but which will require their own promotional strategy. It is therefore time to consider how niche markets should relate to their markets.

### **How are markets going to change and how should businesses organise?**

Two things are particularly important when considering change. It is important to understand firstly the nature of change and secondly the business of change: how will business need to evolve to meet changes in their environments.

### *Nature of change*

One set of authors who present a challenging view of the future and the role of organizations in meeting their markets are Ridderstråle and Nordstrom (2002). They see the creation of new niches as a major development in affluent economies of the West. In fact, because of the 'change and change again' society and the fast pace

of technological change they suggest that a prime management aptitude is 'unlearning' – i.e. forgetting the past. To succeed in the future Ridderstråle and Nordstrom's managers must:

- think fresh/ not be captured by the past
- focus the firm
- encourage innovation.

Certainly we should be cautious about extravagant claims about the change and the future. Social change happens more slowly than technological change and the pace of take up of new technology is slower than its production or possibilities. For example, tourism in Portugal has not always shown an upward trend over the last 10 years. Ridderstråle and Nordstrom may overstate the speed of change we are all faced with: and certainly it is likely that 'fast change' will happen in parallel with 'slow change'. Amongst suppliers, there will be winners and losers amongst both those who cater for new/fast changing and existing/evolving markets – whether these are destinations or organisations. The dot.com mania of the late 1990s and early '2000' 'new economy' killed a lot of wild dreams and speculation. But change will not automatically mean demand for more of the same – it might mean 'less of' certain activity as you replace customer segments, business models and ways of doing business through change and innovation. It is perhaps in this way that change will mean that suppliers do things in new ways – in ways that they influence the future.

*Do 'overarching' business models help us meet niche markets?*

In a world where abundance and choice are the rule competition for the tourist € comes from our tourism packages and other areas of activity altogether. There many choices for the consumer – amongst computers, in entertainment, and when you buy a motor car. Suppliers struggling for attention through branding, advertising, product placement, sponsorship, direct marketing and permission marketing - to name a few. The development of global markets is sometimes accompanied by calls for greater standardisation of within world markets where people purchase because they are buying into image and lifestyle features. Other see the possibility of globalisation of allowing niche markets greater prominence as global audiences will allow a critical mass to be created where none previously was possible.

In fact, there seems to be a lag between general business models and the development of niches. Ohmae (1985) cautions the need to adapt global strategies to local conditions. Segal-Horn (2002) states smaller, national organisations will survive only if deliver long term competitive advantage compared to their larger, multinational rivals. Porter (1990) who advocates that models of competitive advantage *should* incorporate specific industry characteristics such as economies of scale, differentiated technologies, differentiated products together with country resource advantages (as advocated in his competitive 'Diamond' analysis to explain international excellence). His earlier work (Porter, 1980) provides 13 different competitive dimensions to start an analysis of a firm's position. In relation to niche, which he calls 'specialization' the following dimensions are especially relevant:

1. **Brand identification:** the degree to which brand is seen to drive customer preferences
2. **Push versus pull:** the degree to which the supplier wishes to develop brand identification with the ultimate consumer directly versus the support of distribution channels selling its product
3. **Channel selection:** the choice of distribution channels, ranging from company owned channels to speciality outlets etc.

4. **Vertical integration:** the extent to which value added comes from its forward or backward formal (exclusive or otherwise) relationships with other suppliers (with apologies to Porter)
5. **Service:** the degree to which the supplier provides ancillary services with its product-line (core activity)

These seem to omit two very important factors in tourism

- A sense of place: a destination is a mix of many different choices and businesses. To what extent does the niche product need to capture the essence of the destination as well as the focus of the niche market? This sentiment is partly echoed by Kotler et al (1993) who assert that, as the borderless economy develops, so the place (e.g. region/country) emerges as an important new actor in the development process and broader social domain. Urry (1996) mentions the need to be sensitive to 'the local sense of place' while Hall (2000) similarly raises issues of 'place marketing' in ensuring destination distinctiveness.
- Elements of co-operation in tourism: given the fact that there will be a number of businesses involved in providing for the niche, what is the framework for co-operation that exists? Tourism suppliers are both independent and interdependent at the same time. This independence often comes from a functional division within the tourism industry – a golf tourist not discriminate between the coaching, green fees, caddying to the dining to the travel to the swimming when she relaxes. To her it will be part of the one experience. So it is important that marketing overcomes these functional differences.

In relation to sport and tourism niching has become important in media coverage with sports channels including dedicated golf channels (Sky Digital 423 in the U.K.). Thus it is possible to add to a range of specialist printed media for golfers a 24-hour niche channel.

#### **Tourism Promotion and country branding: a sense of place**

A phenomenon of the last 20 years has been the development of place branding. Cities to countries from amateur attempts to the use of many highly paid marketing consultants much attention has been paid to the 'niche' a destination can server in the globalised marketplace.

However, to put destination branding in context from the standpoint of marketing and promotional strategies: while branding has recently become a subject of interest it is only one of a number of activities that may be undertaken by national tourism organisations including: research, representation in markets of origin; organization of workshop and trade shows; familiarization trips; production of travel manual; support with production and distribution; participation in joint marketing schemes; information and reservation systems; support for new products; trade consortia; consumer assistance and, finally general advisory services to the industry (Middleton and Clarke, 2001: P342-346). Some authors hold branding as perhaps the most powerful marketing weapon available to contemporary destination marketers confronted by increasing product parity, substitutability and competition (Morgan and Pritchard, 2002: P11).

In marketing terms a brand represents a unique combination of product characteristics and added values. Values can be both functional and non-functional: they can take on meanings which are closely linked to the (destination) brand and where consumer awareness may be conscious or intuitive (Macrae et al, 1995). Brand advantage is secured by communication which highlights the specific benefits of the product/destination, culminating in an overall impression of a superior brand

position to that of competitor destinations. Thus brand managers position products so that they are perceived by consumers to occupy a niche in the marketplace occupied by no other brand – the value of a successful brand lies in its potential to reduce substitutability. Brand managers differentiate by stressing attributes that match their target markets’ needs more closely than other brands and they then create a product image consistent with the perceived self-image of the targeted consumer segment (Shiffman and Kanuk, 2000). The destination brand approach assumes that when consumers make brand choices about products/destinations – they are making lifestyle statements since they buying into not only an image but an emotional relationship (Sheth, Mittal and Newman, 1999): ‘consumers enrobe themselves with brands, partly for what they do, but more for what they help express about their emotions, personalities and roles (Chernatony, 1993, P178).

In this way a country becomes a distinct tourism destination (or set of destinations) that can be shown to be interesting, exciting and have the power to sway consumer choice from other purchase options. In other words it not only creates awareness of the destination, but it is claimed, also influences purchase decisions. Positively.

Much work has gone into the theory of branding tourism destinations. For example in the UK, which is a complex destination with a high element of intangible features (e.g. culture) and different distinctive locations the brand is organised into. Brand winners are places rich with emotional meaning, have great conversation value and hold high anticipation for potential tourist: examples include India, Cuba, Vietnam, South Africa. Brand losers are places with little meaning, virtually no conversation value and zero anticipation value. It is a balance between tangible features and emotions and brand personality.

**Table 2: Brand architecture – examples from the UK**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Positioning</b>	<b>Rational Benefits</b>	<b>Emotional benefits</b>	<b>Personality</b>
<b>Britain</b>	Island of traditional heritage and the unconventional	Tradition, heritage. Landscape, Arts and culture, people	Stimulated by the enriching – many paradoxes. At ease in a friendly, open culture	Solid but accessible. Cold in appearance but deeply friendly. Ordered yet quirky. Traditional yet innovative
<b>London</b>	City of pageantry and pop	Diverse, culture, arts, pageantry, heritage, nightlife, music, glamour, shopping. Safe, cosmopolitan. Fashion leader	Liberated by vibrancy of London. Stimulated by the wealth of heritage and culture of a great city	Open-minded. Casual. Unorthodox. Vibrant. Creative.
<b>Scotland</b>	Land of fire and stone	Rugged, unspoilt wilderness. Dramatic scenery. Romantic history, heritage and folklore. Warm and feisty people.	Feel in awe of the elements in Scotland; embraced by the warmth of the people. Rejuvenated by the experience of Scotland	Independent. Warm. Mysterious. Rugged. Feisty

Source: Based on British Tourism Authority research and branding: Table derived from Morgan N., Pritchard A. and Pride, R. (Eds): Table 2.5 pp 34-5

The UK examples show some of the problems involved. Often there are difficult issues to balance: e.g. a location personality which appears cold/formal but which is

'deeply friendly'. Also, there may be differences between what is claimed nationally and what is appropriate at a local level. Hence, in the matrix Britain/UK is 'Friendly' while Scotland is 'Mysterious'.

These approaches, whatever their intention tend to give a destination an overall image which plays well on an international stage. When related to particular tourism resources and markets it is integrative rather than specialist – it can only ever set the background rather than, on its own. This view is further supported by the fact that spending on promotion is relatively limited (see Appendix 1). In 1997 Australia, the top tourism destination country spent US\$ 30 million on advertising. Obviously this does not compete with the likes of large, international companies. Amongst the warriors in the recent Football World cup were Adidas ('Impossible is nothing'), Nike ('Just do it'), Puma ('Always be yourself') and Reebok ('I am what I am') (all slogans taken from company websites in June 2006), which meant that Germany in 2006 (just as Portugal when it hosted Euro 2004) capitalised on the value of football to its national images – so did commerce. But even their promotions will pale when considering how much the really large companies spend: Procter and Gamble, the largest global advertiser spent US\$5.8 billion in 2002 on promoting its messages (Sorrell, 2004).

There are many benefits which can accrue to destination through successful branding. For example, in addition to the successful branding of countries such as New Zealand, branding (with associated advertising and promotion) may help counter negative images of a destination or reassure potential visitors on security and safety standards. However, the nature of destination branding, however much diversity it brings into its image of the destination, is essentially a promotional strategy which is made independent of the industry that provides the tourist with the experience at that destination. Suppliers essentially need to fit their marketing activity around the destination image: in this sense destinations branding can be seen to be 'top down'.

### **Changes in tourism promotion routes: assessing the impact of the Internet**

Given the breadth of the marketplace and the alternative paths in reaching potential tourists promotion has always provided suppliers with a variety of alternatives from direct supplier-to-customer to using specialist intermediaries, including destination management organisations and national tourism organisations.

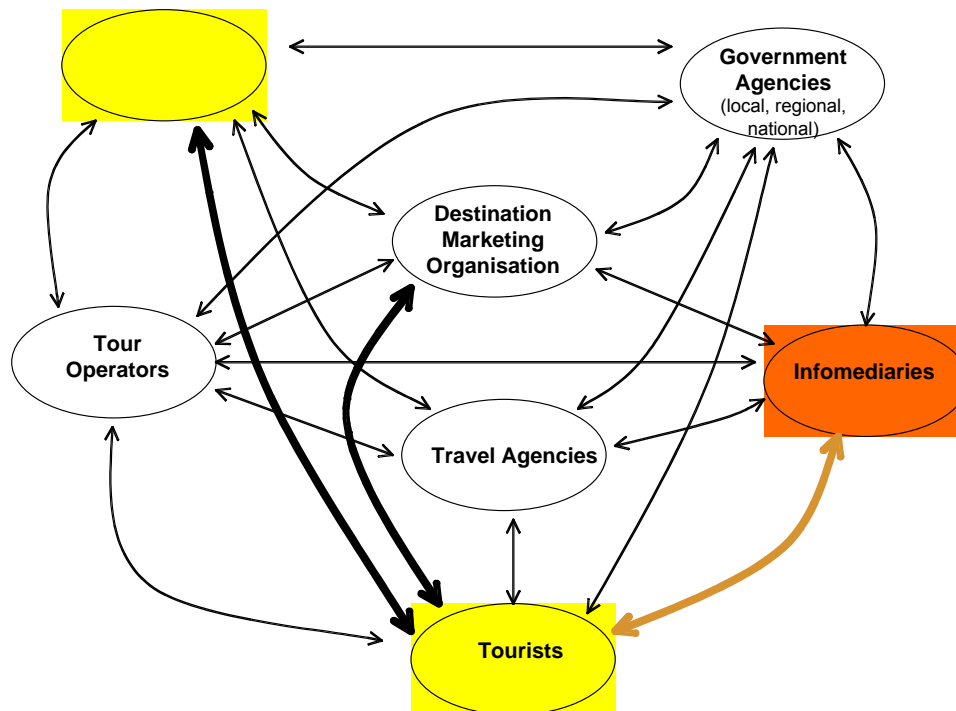
Currently there is an impressive increase in the use of the Internet in tourism marketing. The following figures give an indication of the penetration of Internet users in 2005: worldwide over one billion users and over 230 million in the European Union: in the UK nearly 38 million (62.4% of the population); Portugal (57.4%); China has 111 million users – only 8.4% of the population!

The communication possibilities arising from this (increasing) 'connectivity' allowing direct relationships between suppliers and their customers and clients are large with potential cost savings arising from better targeting, lower promotional costs and dismediation in the supply 'chain'.

#### *Communicating with customers: many options*

In practice what does all this access mean to the development of marketing strategies and promotional strategies? Certainly there are many changes stemming from the internet, including the creation of 'infomediaries'. But is not necessarily replacing all previous means of communications – it is adding to them. Allowing easier comparison between suppliers on one level: but how real are these advantages?

Figure 1: Choice and Complexity: Promotional Paths in Tourism



Source: based on Middleton and Clarke (2001)

Complexity surrounding supplier positioning on the Internet currently stems from three factors: (i) search choice at a general level; (ii) the different types of infomediaries and (iii) the speed of Internet change.

*Search choice at a general level*

A Google search on 'golf holidays' produced 30.7 million responses, 'golf holidays Scotland' gave 9.7 million hits and a search on 'golf holidays Portugal' created 7.2 million hits. (25 June 2006). It is possible to narrow searches but current technology still allows for much repetition and little targeting. So, for example 'corporate golf holidays Portugal' still produces 1.020 million hits.

It would be naive to think that this choice will be of great interest to many consumers. Businesses just do not know how to use the Internet properly yet. That is what is lying behind all the developments in knowing how to charge businesses via search engines such as Google. The Internet currently can be seen in contradictory terms: of course it is enormously helpful in many respects – but it is not settled. Used some ways it is confusing. What is sure is that its will grow and change search and purchase behaviour. What is uncertain is HOW it will do this and the balance between social, economic and technological factors.

*Different types of infomediary*

Infomediary is a term which masks a number of different types of operation. For example, on a broad definition of tourism infomediary, the following types of supply may currently be seen: -

- Integrated travel sites: sites which offer a range of different components for purchase

- Travel Holiday sites: sites which concentrate on holiday packages for purchase (at times these may be difficult to differentiate from some of the presence of larger integrated tour operators)
- Single company sites offering their own packages for purchase: these range from large sophisticated sites allowing specifications, reviews, purchase and purchase tracking
- Industry alliance sites: alliance and joint sites (e.g. airline)
- Destination management companies: again these alter through the range of content and the services provided from information provision to high levels of interactivity.

In addition, intermediaries may follow different strategies. The market positioning of Priceline USA is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Positioning of travel infomediaries: USA, 2006



Source: Priceline management, June 2006

The conclusion to this section is that consumers are faced with a different set of organisations and they will need time to learn what is best obtained from the different portals relative to their situation and requirements.

#### *Dynamic infomediaries: birth and consolidation*

Many of the infomediaries that were around in 2002 have been absorbed by former competitors. For example, take Travelocity's portfolio. Travelocity, which is part of Sabre (originally GDS) operates multiple businesses in 12 languages. Wholly-owned European brands include 1ski, a2btravel.com, all-hotels.com, Arte Udland, bargainholidays.com, Box Office, deckchair.com, exhilaration, ferrybooker.com, First Option, flight4less, Gemstone Travel Limited, Globepost Travel Services, holidayautos, holidayhotels, holidaysandmore, ifyouski.com, medhotels.com, Odysia, onlinetravel.com, Resfeber, TATC / ITIC, travel4less, travelbargains, Ticket Service, Travelprice, travelselect.com, and travelstore.com. In Asia-Pacific their wholly owned brand is Zuji. (Source: <http://www.sabre-holdings.com/ourBrands/travelocity.html> June 2006). However, their website is out of date: the company purchased [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com) in 2005, adding to its travel presence in Europe.

Financially, it is not all plain sailing: intermediaries still do not turn in high profits. Intermediaries' needs to develop profile results, for example, on Expedia online spending £14.6m on media advertising in U.K. alone for the year ending March 2005 (Keynote, 2005) in order to create consumer awareness. Most of this spend is through 'old' media! Recently the US parent Expedia's profit fell 51 percent on higher expenses and warnings of lower demand (New York Times, May 12, 2006).

Given all this activity it is interesting to note that in the U.K. industry the number of travel agency and tour operator businesses in the UK have been increasing over the recent past: in 1998 they numbered 6,211 businesses and in 2004 there were 6,544 (National Statistics, 2005)

### *Conclusion*

Thus being on the web is no panacea for marketing promotion strategies: everybody should be on the web but position on the web is important. It is how a business uses the web and integrates this into its overall development that is important: this should be allied to the supply-side issues of increased expertise and innovation as advocated by Weiemair and Peters (2003) advocate in their analysis of Austria's tourism.

### **The Scottish tourism product**

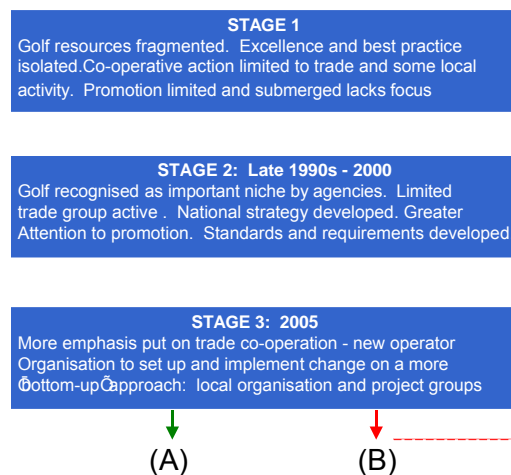
It is estimated that there are 550 courses in Scotland – about 500 facilities as some operators run more than one course. These are variable in scale and quality. About 100 facilities are of excellent/good quality: many of these of international standard. However, many others are run by members' clubs a few of which are only marginally interested in tourism. Around 75 facilities are of good quality and a reasonable size, often inland and keen to be involved. Scotland also has 150 smaller, more remote courses, keen to attract tourists, but lacking the financial and professional base to develop a tourism niche. Finally, there are those facilities that cater for local markets: 175 courses and 70 golf ranges (Golf Tourism Scotland, 2005). Scottish golf presents a wide variety of standards and business practices, albeit that Scots claim it as one of our own inventions, along with, for example, modern economics (Adam Smith), steam engines (James Watt), telephones (Alexander Graham Bell) and TV (John Logie Beard). The provenance of Scotland as 'The Home of Golf' – the slogan of VisitScotland (the national tourist board) - may be disputed by some, but there is no doubt that it became popular in the late middle ages/early renaissance period.

Thus the golf tourism 'package' has a heritage but it also much more: a varied ownership and a very variable quality which means that range of golfing experiences cover a very broad spectrum. Currently members' club committees run 65% of facilities, 10% are municipal and 25% are commercial (Price 2003). In terms of marketing and selling the Scottish golf tourism are around 34 mainly UK-based operators that market Scottish golf plus other operators, large and small that market Scottish golf outside the UK. Of course, there are many others who are directly involved in golf tourism: notably accommodation providers (from resorts to Bed and breakfast establishments), transport operators to and within Scotland, specialist retailers and so on.

### *Developing the niche*

This section looks at the development of strategies for developing and marketing the niche.

Figure 3: Stages of golf tourism development in Scotland mid1990s - 2006



### Stage 1

As recently as ten years ago a leading expert asserted that there was no national strategy for golf tourism in Scotland and, therefore, no concerted approach to product development or marketing (Williamson, 1996). This stage may be characterised as not so much niche tourism, but fragmented effort. Many components of the market were communicating and co-operating with other business with which they shared an interest but arrangements tended to be short term with limited strategic focus. The period was typified by a lack of specific market information. Where co-operation did happen it was mostly at a trade level with local in-coming tourism specialist operators Scottish Incoming Golf Tour Operators Association (SIGTOA) - which developed as an organization to share information and resources and also to lobby for greater attention to be given to golf. There was also some co-operation at local level between providers of different golf tourism components (cross-selling) and referral/joint marketing. While difficult to quantify as there is little reliable information, this stage was when Scotland lost market share to competitors – in particular to Ireland, which was perceived as offering better value (through greater professionalism and more active and focused promotion) to many potential golf markets: Scotland's golf promotion was in a wide number of hands and gave a range of different messages to markets. Meanwhile the national tourism organization promoted the country on a broader basis.

### Stage 2

This stage sees recognition of tourism as a niche market as part of the NTO's increasing emphasis on the market elements of tourism activity. Through a partnership with other public agencies it explored the economic importance of the niche (in order to gain government and agency support) and developed a strategic focus for the niche through a mix of co-operative and business related measures.

*A New Strategy for Scottish Golf Tourism* was launched in 2000 by VisitScotland, on behalf of a public/private sector collection of interested organisations: though none of them operated or controlled a golf facility. The report was instrumental in identifying not only the current impact of golfing tourism in Scotland, but also drew attention to its main markets and its competitive position among golf destinations. Its six objectives include an increase in the quantity and value of golf tourism, its spread amongst less known locations and over less popular seasons and that product development meets market needs. Pillars for the achievement of these objectives constituted: -

- Regional Golf Development Groups to bring public and private sector together at regional levels to develop marketing initiatives
- Training initiatives with staff in all areas of tourism to ensure increased awareness and service delivery for golfing visitors and others aimed at improving the management of courses in terms of business planning and financial management
- Promotion through a comprehensive website for golf tourism under '*The Home of Golf*' catchphrase
- Encouragement and support of new and improved quality golf course infrastructure and visitor facilities
- Development of events strategies. These to provide local interest and, longer term, to secure high profile events (e.g. championships) for Scotland.  
(Source: [www.scotexchange.net/KnowYourMarket/Golf/sqtr-00.htm](http://www.scotexchange.net/KnowYourMarket/Golf/sqtr-00.htm), accessed 17 September, 2003)

The strategy was supported by the appointment of a National Golf Tourism Officer and the introduction of a national golf tourism survey, to be undertaken nationally. Both these measures have been implemented and have provided useful data and support at a general level.

The marketing initiatives are interesting: national promotional strategies would take more attention to activity tourism; a dedicated website was developed for golf tourism allowing potential visitors direct access to a range of golf and related data which could be used for trip planning, pricing, contacting specialist operators and so on. There was also an increased research base: a reliable consultant was commissioned to monitor the use of golf courses on a national and regional basis. This data is freely available to all providers through an industry website meant that market data was of much higher quality. This annual survey is still in operation.

Extra energy was put into attracting major events: however, Scotland lost to Wales in capturing the Ryder Cup for 2010 in a well-publicised scramble: instead it won the 2014 Ryder Cup (at Gleneagles).

Price (2003) has critiqued the overall strategy by a number of criteria including the fact that too much emphasis on high quality as 75% of Scotland's golf facilities are not appropriate to compete in the international golf tourism market. This tendency to sell better the resource appears to have limited the attention given to improve the underlying quality of the resource and appeal to a wider range of golfing markets.

Apart from greater attention given to the need to form regional tourism groups to develop marketing at a local level, no structural changes to golf development and promotion were made. SIGTOA remained the represented industry body though its role had expanded, given the new strategic focus that golf tourism had developed. In fact the development of local/regional initiatives was very patchy and many in the industry felt uninvolved in the development of the niche.

In retrospect stage 2 can be typified as (i) an awareness of the importance of the niche and the dangers it was facing by external forces and (ii) producing a response, based on market analysis and destination benchmarking that co-ordinated public agency actions. The response also developed a top-down strategy which emphasised marketing and promotional strategy based on what was felt to be there – with an underlying message (of high quality) which Price (2003), for one, considers unrepresentative or aspirational.

### Stage 3

Scotland's golf strategy is now entering a third stage which involves a greater industry input and a redesign of the golf strategy. This is represented by the creation of a new trade body to co-ordinate and represent the niche: Golf Tourism Scotland (GTS) which replaced SIGTOA (though the association remains as a trade organisation for its core members). GTS is a fee-paying trade organisation which includes private and public sector organisations. Thus rather than just holding membership to specialists *within* the niche to include suppliers and organisations that are involved *across* the niche. Details of sectors covered and membership are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Membership of Golf Tourism Scotland, 2006**

Sector	Members
Hotels	52
Resorts	11
Golf Courses	26
Tour Operators	35
Transportation Companies	17
Golf service Providers	12

Source: GTS website ([www.golftourismscotland.com](http://www.golftourismscotland.com), June 2006)

Its goals reflect the previous strategic priorities of Stage 2 with an increased emphasis on strategic connections being made between private sector and public agencies in the formation of promotional and development of the niche. It is intended that by the end of 2007 there should be 300 members and that GTS should be financially self-supporting (it currently attracts subsidy from the public agencies). However, its position in promotion is ambiguous. It does not have any promotional budget, though it wants to provide a positive influence on the marketing of golf. There will be a limit to what it can do in respect on a purely co-operative basis. Priorities for the medium term include: -

- Increasing levels of golf development in the regions
- Working on delivering the Ryder Cup 2014
- Developing a National Tourism Forum with an emphasis in monitoring and developing strategies
- Developing a members' forum to exchange information and ideas
- Skills development

Stage 3, therefore, is typified by a switch in the organisational arrangements for the development of the niche. It puts more emphasis on a 'bottom up'/industry led approach. It is to be hoped that the industry will be able to take route A – this would allow it to develop industry-based initiatives which successfully work to attract the range of markets coming to Scotland. In this route implies that private and public sectors can harmonise promotional strategies so they can successfully compete internationally. Route B, on the other hand, implies that the niche will fall back into a reliance on the public sector.

One particular problem that remains is the promotion of golf. GTS is clear in its statements it does not wish to create its own strategies that could create an extra layer of bureaucracy. This is a great aim: but how is going to ensure that the various promotional campaigns and events add value to what is happening at industry level. This will be a major issue for the membership of the new organisation.

*Targeting a niche within a niche*

It is important to remember that ‘Golf Tourism’ is itself a broad term and that it involves several different market orientations. Here, based research (Scott Porter, 2003) is a brief analysis of key factors relating to one segment – Business Golf Tourism. What I want to stress here is the need to ensure customisation and the importance of relationship building.

The segment chosen is corporate/conference golf. In Scotland these events are booked for up to years in advance and will always need a customised package. In general they can be distinguished between those that want a particular high quality or iconic golf course and others which do not place such a high premium on this aspect. Other factors are shown in Table 4, below.

Table 4: Broad factors influencing destination choice for meeting/conference related Business Golf

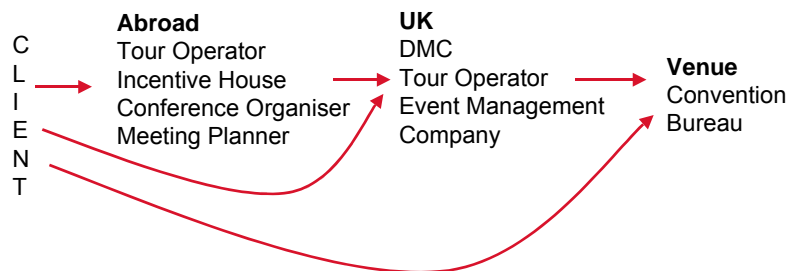
Aspect	Importance
<b>Budget/cost</b>	Important (less so if ‘icons’ are chosen)
<b>Ease of Access</b>	Direct air important; overall travel time; ease of access within Scotland (to venue and between venues)
<b>Security</b>	Becoming more important
<b>Venue</b>	Business facilities; Accommodation; Leisure facilities
<b>Activities</b>	On/off site; variety; flexibility
<b>Atmospherics</b>	Heritage, Scenery

Source: Derived from Scott Porter Research and marketing Ltd (for VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise), May 2003

[http://www.scotexchange.net/research\\_and\\_statistics/nichemarkets/new\\_golf\\_tourism\\_june\\_04\\_main\\_p1/new\\_golf\\_tourism\\_june\\_04\\_research\\_1.htm](http://www.scotexchange.net/research_and_statistics/nichemarkets/new_golf_tourism_june_04_main_p1/new_golf_tourism_june_04_research_1.htm)

The level of interest in the destination and package was seen to affect the general image of the destination and general trends in fashions for golf within their markets as well as the values associated with venue/destination/activity and the sponsors and previous good experience with those associated at the destination. The availability of high quality information about the product is important: firstly, because several intermediaries may be involved (see Figure 4); and, secondly because the packages must be customised on a one-to-one basis.

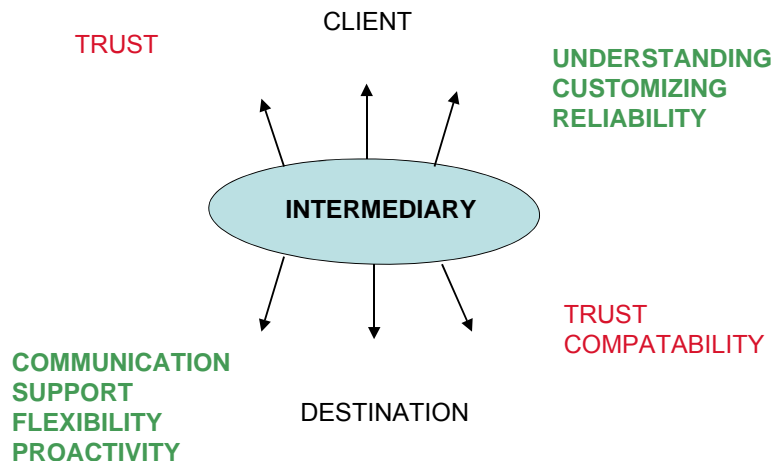
Figure 4: The decision chain for business golf



Source: Derived from Scott Porter Research and marketing Ltd (for VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise), May 2003

In all this activity the social context in business-to-business relationships is important. Closing a deal is influenced by the trust and confidence that is established between the client and the venue or intermediary, that there is openness about what can and cannot be delivered and that the seller is able to advise the client on what is appropriate. This is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Business Golf – driven by relationships



Source: Derived from Scott Porter Research and marketing Ltd (for VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise), May 2003 (see full reference in Figure 3)

## Conclusion

This paper has just scratched the surface of issues on branding and golf. It has discussed issues of branding destinations and the specialist approach required when considering distinct tourism niches. Pitted against a market and promotional environment which is characterised by speed of change – and uncertainty in how changes in www representation and success will impact on promotional relationships - has tried to show that golf branding – as an example of niches – requires its own specialist approach. The examples, drawn from Scotland, show that it is not only awareness of the need for focus and co-ordination to develop strategy that is important. Key factors to develop a ‘bottom-up’ approach include a high element of industry involvement and development of co-ordination across business functions in reaching the market.

Niche tourism markets have become fashionable as a means of countering a view that tourism is mass-market phenomenon. However, when it comes to conceptualising what a tourism niche is and how businesses should approach it there is no fixed view. To date tourism niche markets identified fall into various different types where marketing and promotional strategies will require very different approaches. Appraisal of general business management literature indicates that, while niches have the potential to be profitable (niche means rich!) suppliers must carefully consider elements of brand identification, channel selection, integration/partnerships with other suppliers, and high service level. Yet this general literature rather excludes issues of place marketing (destination branding) and developing sustainable supply innovation in order to meet competitive threats.

A brief review of destination branding, raised important issues of what visitors and purchased and how they make their decisions when considering a destination. The review concluded that it was difficult to ensure that niches got an adequate place in these campaigns. This coupled with the lack of funding in relation to spending by major consumer brands means that destination branding may not be considered a prime factor in the development of a country's niche portfolio.

For golf the Scottish context, with its relatively large number of suppliers, variable standards and inconsistent business orientations raise significant challenges which other destinations may not encounter to the same extent. However, all will face relentless changes in the business markets, the need to establish close relationships of trust and commitment between related businesses/clients as well as the visitors themselves. In meeting these matters businesses will need research and knowledge at a niche level: something which public bodies may find difficult to do. Therefore, in addition to general tourism statistics and any specialist market research which the NTOs can finance, it is important that all suppliers in the niche develop their market 'knowledge base'. This will cover data on their current customers characteristics and preferences which can be used to develop business-to-business contacts and greater flexibility, choice of appropriate marketing distribution channels (e.g. intermediaries) as well as feeding up to allow destination campaigns etc 'hard' data on the niche.

Thus it is clear that branding cannot be considered isolation. Branding must be linked to the marketing contexts and this must include the overall plans for product development. These should include ensuring that the 'core' product includes the types of experiences that customers perceive as giving value, moulding golf to meet marketing imperative and the development of *new* niches – for example adventure golf and higher rates of women's participation.

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## Appendix 1

Challenges of destination marketing top national tourism organizations' advertising spend, 1997

Country	Advertising spend (US\$ millions)
1. Australia	30
2. Thailand	26
3. Cyprus	17
4. Spain	17
5. France	16
6. Puerto Rico	16
7. Brazil	15
8. Portugal	13

Source: Morgan, N. And Pritchard, A. Pride, R (Eds) p 13