

UK Visitor Information Research

Research carried out by MSS Marketing Research in 1996 and 1997 for the Wales Tourist Board underpins the rationale set down ten years ago by This Week Publications before introducing their first tourism newspaper for visitors in 1988.

The research shows that leaflets and brochures together continue to be the information formats most encountered by visitors during their stay. However, although there are many superior examples, these formats were considered to be only 60% effective by respondents. Meanwhile, those respondents who

'Arrival is a key time for the tourist industry...'

had used Tourist Information newspapers considered this format to be 100% effective. Although the research sample was too small in this instance to reach any firm conclusions, the current proliferation of leaflets and brochures over all other information formats may be preventing a better understanding of the forces at work in this vital area. A spokesperson for the Wales Tourist Board also commented, for example, that respondents might have used a tourism newspaper but referred to it as a brochure or leaflet.

In response to a separate questionnaire, however, visitors predicted that they would make *greater* use of local papers in future.

The research also demonstrates that holiday accommodation establishments are in an advantageous position to provide visitors with much-needed information upon their arrival when, *'planning for the holiday really starts to happen'* and *'enthusiasm for information is at its peak'*.

Arrival is a key time

The research report goes on to say that, *'Arrival is a key time for the tourist industry in terms of information provision, to maximise opportunities for revenue expansion. Enthusiasm, even though still coloured with large doses of British caution, peaks at this stage.'*

Letters received from accommodation operators by This Week Publications confirm these findings; to quote:

'We are often asked for a more compact list of when, where and what's on in North Wales. After reading the Summer issue of 'This Week' we need look no further. And what a bonus! On the back page a very detailed map.' (Llanddulas Chalet Park, Llanddulas)

'We have been here for sixteen years and 'This Week' is the best thing we've ever had to give out to visitors for information on what's going on in the area.' (Trefach Caravan Park, Pembrokeshire)

Word of mouth

Verbal information was quoted as one of the most powerful sources whilst on a holiday or visit. *This Week* believes that an important function of tourist newspapers is to inform staff as well as visitors, enabling accommodation providers to pass on powerful word-of-mouth information to their guests, scoring good brownie points for their establishments in the process.

It follows then that tourist information newspapers and accommodation providers, in combination, can provide peak effectiveness in the distribution of visitor information.

Return visit decisions

The research also gives formal recognition at last to the extent that information provision during visit can positively affect return visit decisions and spur the recommendation process. As a result of information gathered during their visit 75% of visitors *'...felt they had been able to do more during their visit than expected.'* says one of ►

Maps have a major part to play in information provision...

the reports. It goes on to say that: 'This is an extremely important finding and suggests that encouraging information gathering during visits, in as many instances as possible, would be highly beneficial to both visitors and the tourist industry in Wales.' By making visitors more aware of activities available during visit, participation will be encouraged, visits will become more enhanced, thus increasing the likelihood of word-of-mouth recommendations.

Advantage of maps

Maps have a major part to play in information provision the research acknowledges. By helping visitors to quickly get their bearings whilst on holiday and to locate more easily the attractions and activities that interest them, maps become an item of value not readily discarded. As such, along with magazines and brochures they are, according to the research, in the list of 'durable' information taken home by visitors. This again assists the recommendation process.

Ten years on

The Wales Tourist Board's *Visitor Information Survey 1996* and *UK Information Research 1997* have come ten years on from the Board's *1987 Survey of Staying and Day Visitors to Wales* upon which *This Week Publications* based its original rationale for the visitor newspaper which they went on to introduce in 1988.

Maps which formed an integral part of the newspaper from the start have recently been updated for the *Wales Holiday Tourism Trails* initiative based on the twelve new marketing

areas of Wales. *This Week* will now use the new research to drive home the message and to help develop a much wider campaign to market in particular Wales' visitor attractions more effectively. For this they propose inviting attractions to form powerful marketing consortia based on the twelve marketing areas and to stop leaving things to chance.

The emphasis will be on full integration, replacing inefficient distribution with modern merchandising, providing accommodation operators with more effective means of imparting information to their guests, and loyalty schemes to prompt return visits to complete the full sales cycle.

Fertile ground

The during visit (aftercare) market with its captive audience of visitors has always been fertile ground for *This Week* – to influence visitor activity, inspire repeat-visit decisions and generate recommendations.

More recent investment in digital mapping has enhanced these strengths and provided visitor attractions and events operators in Wales with a powerful marketing edge over their competitors. Information on the new mapping is available from *This Week Publications* who would be pleased also to receive any views or comments on this summary.

Copies of the new research reports referred in this summary are obtainable from the Wales Tourist Board at their address shown below.

Newspapers score again

Based on a 2,336 visitor survey, 13.1% of staying visitors to North Wales in 1996/7 first found out about their accommodation from a newspaper or magazine; a 20% increase on 1995 already up 24% on the previous year.

Meanwhile, based on a 1996/7 sample of 1,966 visitors to attractions in North Wales, the number of visitors that had heard about the attractions they had visited from sources that include tourist newspapers, was over double that of the previous year.

At North Wales Tourism's 1997 half-yearly meeting *This Week* once again topped the league table for highest number of copies of any leaflet or brochure distributed via North Wales TICs. The visitor newspaper, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, was also the single most-distributed item of print via North Wales accommodation providers.

In total 1.7 million copies of *This Week* and *Freedom of Wales* were distributed in 1997 covering the twelve new marketing areas of Wales.

During 1998/9 the newspaper will be celebrating its 10th anniversary with discounts and special promotions, including a *150 Things to Do in North Wales* campaign in conjunction with North Wales Tourism and North Western Trains which celebrates 150 Years of Railways in North Wales.

This Week will also sponsor a new tourism showcase at the *National Eisteddfod of Wales*, from Bridgend in 1998 onwards.

Visitor Information Survey 1996

Quantitative research carried out between 10th August–19th September 1996 amongst a total of 1,192 visitors at 9 locations: Cardiff, Brecon, Tenby, Aberystwyth, Cardigan, Barmouth, Rhyl, Llandudno, Betws-y-Coed, Caernarfon)

UK Information Research 1997

Qualitative research carried out in July 1997 amongst 6 focus groups in key target areas for visitors to Wales: Manchester, Reading and the West Midlands.

Both reports are available from the Wales Tourist Board, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Street, Cardiff CF2 1UY Tel 01222 499909 Fax 01222 485031



This Week and *Freedom of Wales*

For more information on these titles which constitute the national tourism newspaper of Wales, please contact:

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