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Operator Issues - Working Together to Accelerate Growth

Over the last five years of presenting tourism workshops and mentoring businesses around the country I've discovered that there are many more opportunities for tourism businesses to work together more to grow the whole tourism sector and their share of it.

Here's a list of 10 ways tourism businesses can collaborate in order to grow their businesses more quickly than working in isolation.

Local Community:

1. Generating valuable local support and increasing the ability for locals to refer experiences to their friends and relatives is possible by working together e.g. a group of operators running an off-peak campaign to generate local awareness.
2. Environmental enhancement projects are becoming an expectation not just in tourism strategies but more importantly in the minds of our visitors. There's a lot of potential for groups of tourism businesses to work together on a local project that enhances the environment and reinforces the brand of the host region. Working together can increase the impact and lower the administrative costs of managing environmental projects.
3. Lobbying local government also becomes a lot easier when a representative group of tourism operators can speak with one voice. We have effective tourism lobbying at a national level but some regions would really benefit by establishing similar models locally. This might be as simple as a group of tourism operators scheduling meetings each year with councilors to outline the benefits tourism delivers to their district / city.

Product Development:

4. Creating more compelling and higher value products often requires a number of operators packaging their individual components. Packaging four products at a price of \$200 is going to be much more appealing to international tour wholesalers than four separate products of \$50 each i.e. it's easier to book and pay for. But don't stop there, sharing marketing, sales/distribution, media planning and reservations functions should mean more specialization, the ability to generate greater awareness and more sales.
5. Lowering the costs of advertising, attending trade shows, making sales calls is relatively easy to do particularly when working with complementary tourism businesses.

Creating Demand:

6. Informal referrals networks seem to be overlooked as tourism operators gain distribution through other traditional channels but its also important to work with a number of operators either locally or further afield (if you're an accommodation operator referring up and down the country). Imagine the difference it would make if you had an additional 6 tourism businesses referring you each year.
7. Generating media stories to build awareness of your product is often a collaborative process simply because there's greater critical mass and more

interesting story angles possible. A proactive group of tourism operators can work together not only in compiling a suggested itinerary for a journalist - they can also split the responsibility of writing media releases, organizing great images, creating a media database and then contacting media and following up.

8. Trade famils, like media visits, tend to be more appealing to prospective participants if there are a number of complimentary tourism operators involved. It's also possible to share costs such as airfares, accommodation and meals.

Sharing Information:

9. Market intelligence should be easy with the technology we have available but there are still many instances of tourism operators not being aware of upcoming events or opportunities. User friendly databases of events should be interactive for all tourism operators in a region to access and build.
10. There's an opportunity for local tourism operators to network much more with other operators at functions either formal or informal. Tourism operators can generate even more value for each other by giving feedback on experience quality and ideas for enhancement by way of a peer review - at the very least we all have a responsibility to let fellow operators know if they should be doing something to improve the quality of their experience.