

CHAPTER 3

IMAGE AND MARKETING

Even though World Heritage Sites are by definition celebrated locations that command attention and draw visitors, it is still important that administrators work to project a public image for the site and target a market for publicity efforts. This chapter reviews many ways to create an image for a site and to get exposure.

Professional marketing advice is readily available and recommended. There are people who know how to get critical information into the hands of potential travelers all over the world, so that their expertise is useful. They can help the site administrator attract all of the visitors that the site in question can appropriately accommodate without turning it into a cheap carnival. They can help sell the site with dignity and balance scholarship with fame, purity with popularity.

Critical Imaging and Marketing Decisions

Many World Heritage Sites have been marketed for years as international tourism destinations. They are regarded as prime earning sites by the tourism industry. They are also major sources of income for their owners who need the admissions and other income money with which to maintain these special sites.

The site administrator, must address three important questions concerning the marketing of the site to the public:

- 1) Are the true values and significance of the site being projected in the current Master Plan and in previous marketing efforts?
- 2) Is there a legitimate need for any further, large-scale, commercial marketing of the site?
- 3) If the site needs to be marketed, what is the controlling image to project to the public? (The site's fragility? Its quality? Its attraction for anyone?)

To answer the first question is a relatively simple matter. Check the nomination documents of the site, and the World Heritage Committee's acceptance of it to the List. The true values and significance of the site will be clearly described. (For example, "the tallest," "the oldest," "the last remaining," etc.) This should be the focus of all presentation, interpretation and promotional efforts. There may well be more popular stories that have

grown up around the site (Alexander the Great marched here, Cleopatra was born here, Gary Cooper made a movie here, etc.) but these should be treated as subsidiary stories.

The second question is also easily answered. The site may already have enough visitors, so the task for the administrator is to give serious consideration to the effects of further commercial marketing. How many visitors can the site absorb? What route should tourists take? Which types of tourists are most appropriate and desirable? Future marketing efforts must emphasize conservation -- the methods of restoration.

To answer the third question above, the following topics need to be given careful and thoughtful consideration.

Creating and Projecting a Public Image

Each site will have one or more compelling historic features that are the basis for its entry on the World Heritage List. This is the strongest tourism feature of the site, and a scholarly statement about it appeals to most visitors. Include some of this scholarship as part of national and international advertising. Furthermore, the process of conserving key features of a site is an important attraction. Is there danger that the dome might collapse in an earthquake? Is there rising damp? Did the 19th-century restoration actually damage the foundation? Such questions and the answers are of special interest to visitors.

At the same time, it is important to analyze the site for a deeper and more diverse range of interests. Are there many layers to the history of the site? Is it significant to more than one religion or nation? Does it figure in a famous work of literature? Is it irrevocably associated with an era of history or a towering individual? Is it part of the path of pilgrims, or along the route of explorers or conquerors? Did a particular artist or architect have a decisive influence? These points of interest can extend or widen the marketing opportunities.

Airlines, hotels and restaurants will have a wide range of stories to draw from to attract visitors. These features also provide much material for exhibits, publications and souvenirs. In no circumstance should stories be invented, nor should part of the site's history be ignored or deliberately obscured. The truth is attractive, deception is easily discovered and a site's reputation can suffer.

Marketing the Image

World Heritage Sites have gone through a rigorous nomination process and generally the primary and secondary features are all a part of the record. There is, and there should be, a dignity to the presentation and the marketing of World Heritage Sites. Their conservation is a serious process and their protection provides an important gift to future generations. Be sure to communicate these qualities, and hire experienced and qualified marketing specialists to help.

It is a complicated task to create a clear and concise public image. The site has international significance as well as national importance. It is situated in a particular environment; people live near it, next to it or even within it. Paramount is the protection of the site, and any plan must take into account all these factors. It is best that visitors arrive with a realistic understanding of the site and its situation so that they are prepared for both its magnificence as well as its problems -- the stunning sunsets as well as the crowds, the unparalleled architecture as well as the noise of the marketplace.

Marketing professionals are subject to a site manager's guidance. Armed with a clear vision, they will develop over-all marketing concepts; craft a dignified and popular logo; place stories or information in magazines, newspapers, specialized newsletters and travel guides; prepare press kits for researchers and writers. These professionals often are already working under some arrangement with the national tourist office. It is essential for good site management to reach out and establish a partnership or a special relationship with these tourism offices.

Legal Advice

Through the tourist offices, site administrators can get legal advice on protecting the site's authorized logo and images. It is unproductive to try to restrict the site, but it is important to have the best help in negotiating all media contracts, agreements and royalty rates.

Press Relations and The Press Kit

Travel magazines, travel sections of major newspapers and tourism industry newsletters are among the most widely read and important print media in which to market a site. Publishers, editors, reporters and writers should all be especially welcomed at the site and provided with an effective and informative press kit. The written and published products of such visits has the potential to reach millions of people in a worldwide audience. Ideally a press kit should include: a site brochure; a one-or-two page fact sheet about the history and international significance of the site; the site's priority conservation issues; a map showing the location of the site in relation to the surrounding area (or, for large sites, a simple site map); a listing of the times it is open to the public; one or two high-quality black and white photographs (with photographer credits and permission to reprint); a list of upcoming public events; and a sheet with complete names, addresses and telephone numbers for those seeking further information. The contents of these press kits should be updated at least once a year.

Many writers will visit the site as part of "familiarization tours" organized by national tourism offices, airlines, tour companies, etc. Make sure the site is on the itinerary of such tours. Contact the organizers and make the necessary arrangements.

Television and radio staff search for usable features. It is important to cooperate with the electronic media but equally important not to let them

over-run the site during production. Be sure to make legal arrangement regarding credits, royalty and distribution.

Feature Books, Movies and Videos

The image and popularity of a site can be enhanced by making available to visitors the books, movies and videotapes that feature the site. Often famous authors -- Agatha Christie, Somerset Maugham, Paul Thoreaux -- have used World Heritage Sites in travel books or in fiction. Stock these books at the site, as well as lavish coffee-table picture books that project a fine image. They are expensive to prepare and best left to private publishers to produce. Many current and earlier movies have included scenes at World Heritage Sites and, if available on cassettes, they should be stocked for sale to visitors. Videos about the site have become almost a basic requirement for any visitor attraction. These are commercially produced, and bids should be submitted to be sure the best product is produced. Cassettes of television documentaries are now available and can also be stocked if they are relevant. There are differing electronic formats for these cassettes, and care should be taken to order what customers want and can use in their equipment when they return home.

International Museum Exhibits

The opportunity to participate in international museum exhibitions can be fruitful. Increasingly, large exhibitions of works of art are being organized for international tours. The "Festival of India" and the "Festival of Indonesia" were marked successes organized to send selected art pieces to major museums in Europe, Japan and America.

Such exhibitions are prestigious, serious and scholarly efforts undertaken at great expense. Moving art pieces always involves a risk, but these relics can be superb ambassadors to increase international exposure for your site. The licensing of the rights for reproductions of items included in such exhibitions -- jewelry, small sculptures, images, etc. -- can also be an important source of income.

Postcards and Posters

Postcards and posters are splendid, profitable and reliable marketing tools if they are well produced. It is not necessary to have a whole rack of choices. A few good ones will suffice. (It is amazing how many bad postcards there are in the world.) Get experienced and qualified firms to submit bids on postcards and posters. Have professionals help select the pieces that best present the image that you want to project.

Travel and Trade Exhibitions

Major international travel-trade shows are held annually in Berlin, London and Chicago. Numerous others are held at regional, national or state levels. These are buyer/seller trade shows where the national tourist office (NTO) presents the travel products of the country to international tour organizers. These are important visitor-generating events and expensive to attend. Hence it is vital that administrators make sure their sites are represented in the show by their respective NTOs. Even NTOs may find these shows expensive and often they join forces with a regional trade association (for instance, the Pacific Asia Travel Association, PATA) or political associations (such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN) in booking exhibition space at major shows.

A World Heritage Site can be a good selling asset for the NTO. They should welcome cooperation and input. Make sure the NTO promotion properly represents the site's marketing image.

Commercial and Corporate Alliances

In some situations it is possible to appropriately and advantageously fit a site to the commercial marketing interests of corporate officials. They should be asked to make a substantial financial donation, or provision of needed equipment or supplies, in exchange for photographing their product on site, making a television commercial or filming a movie. Again, it is important to have expert help to negotiate the best possible contract; the contracts can be intricate and the dollars are in the details.

Special Events

Anticipate that the site may be expected to host a variety of special events. Planned and conducted in a professional and sensitive manner, such special events can be significant marketing opportunities. They have the potential of introducing your site to important and influential people -- political, diplomatic, corporate and private. Have a plan that sets the limits of what the site can handle and what is professionally acceptable. Some special events will be welcome, some must be rejected and others may be unavoidable. Some religious festivals, national rallies or commemorative services may logically belong at the site. A fund-raising event may be staged to benefit the site or some other national cause. Perhaps a special exhibition relating to new discoveries may be held at the site, or some entertainment entrepreneur may want to rent the site to stage an opera, a pageant or a reception/party for conventioners.

Be in charge. Set the limits. Have a plan. Analyze the problems and the opportunities of your site. Know ahead of time what is right and what would be inappropriate. Set visitor limits and maintain them. Don't compromise in the face of local political and economic pressures.