

by Kenneth Caplan (1994 Issue)

### The Psychology of Change

If you cut through all of the various reasons why people take vacations or pursue tourism activities of any kind, the single underlying feature is the desire for change -- change from the pace and routine of life; change for the sake of new experiences; change for the opportunity to expand knowledge and understanding of the people, places and customs that define who we are in relation to others.

Probably the most successful purveyors of change in the world of tourism are Disney Corporation and Club Med, both of which have created formulas that transport tourists and vacationers to settings where time is inconsequential, where most responsibilities are catered to or eliminated, where the image of enjoyment is high concept and where fantasies replace the realities of life. Each of these enterprises has developed a unique way of packaging its products and promises, and each is a master in the art of delivering change.

Ontario's tourism industry is at a watershed in its evolution. Global market restructuring and advancing technologies have triggered a recession that is propelling changes in virtually every business sector. As tourism businesses chart their ways through these difficult times, they are encountering far stiffer competition, a more discriminating customer base, and changing lifestyle values in the population at large. For Ontario's tourism sector, a quantum leap into the market-driven business realities of the 90's is now essential.

### A Global Perspective

We live in a global village, as Marshall McLuhan put it. Today's travellers are better educated and more informed than ever before. They are electronically "tuned-in", conditioned by slick marketing, and equipped to make value judgements based not only on their grass-roots experience, but on international travel as well. To live in a global village means that even the smallest Ontario community is a competitive player on the world stage.

Tourism is a high visibility business. Just as consumer products compete on a supermarket shelf for recognition, towns and cities now strive to achieve awareness in local, national and international markets. For tourism, the strategies of image packaging have become a

prerequisite to effective marketing and an essential positioning technique to register the "must-see", "must- do!" concept in the minds of customers.

In order to push the "hot buttons", tourism marketers have to reach beyond the practicalities of information to create more visceral relationships with their customers locally, nationally and internationally. Club Med for example, urges its clientele to leave their money at home and be free of responsibility in a cash free resort. What better "hot button" to push than financial freedom?

Club Med originated to provide a basic vacation opportunity for French army veterans and their families after the second world war. From that concept grew today's international vacation giant, and although Club Med is now comprised of resorts that offer every conceivable luxury, the most aggressively promoted aspect of Club Med's image continues to be the quintessential grass hut on a desert island. Facts are not reality. Perception is!

## The Image Package

Tourism is an industry in which the products and the providers must present a unique point of view both in image and substance. Beginning with the development of a strategic plan, the image package must be designed to include a strong identity, theme and rationale, a means of involving the consumer with the product, and an invitation to "buy-in".

From the point of view of public sector tourism, an image strategy acts as a beacon to the marketplace to promote the features, values and advantages of the destination, It also provides the public visibility and sense of common purpose that is essential to gain the support of constituents for the objectives of the program.

While it may be true that the same level of financial resources are not generally available to public sector tourism planners as to consumer product marketers, the same planning techniques apply.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Caplan, President of Kenneth Caplan and Associates Limited, is an Image Management consultant specializing in corporate and public sector marketing. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and a past President of the Society of Graphic Designers of Ontario, Kenneth Caplan has been instrumental in shaping the visibility of businesses, institutions and public sector organizations in Ontario and across Canada. A recipient of numerous awards, he has crafted image programs for TD Bank's Green Machine, The Toronto Stock Exchange, The Canadian Cancer Society, the City of Thunder Bay, North York, Dundas, and Blind River among others. A frequent lecturer on marketing at the Ontario College of Art, Kenneth Caplan has also served on the judging panel of the EDCO marketing awards.