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“Wouldn't it be wonderful if....”?

Have you got an idea for something that would make your job easier? Perhaps information you're looking for, or a service that just doesn't seem to exist?

We're always open to new ideas for articles, new sections on the website or Tourism Network Meetings. If there's anything you'd like us to cover please do get in touch.

Many of our free services first came about when we heard some one say “wouldn't it be wonderful if... ” and then we did something about it. So tell you what you need and you never know what might happen.

Please call 020 8947 4053 or email susan@tourismnetwork.org

Susan Briggs
The Tourism Network
www.tourismknowledge.com

Wondering who we are? Find out by going to www.tourismknowledge.com/aboutTN.htm

Tourism Network Meeting:

The last Tourism Network Meeting was oversubscribed by 200% so when we release full details of the next one make sure you book early!

The next Tourism Network Meeting will take place in late April on the topic of how to get other organisations to do your work for you! “Influencing the Influencers” will be all about working with concierges, guide book publishers, incoming tour operators, information centres and Blue Badge Guides”. *We'll send you more details as soon as we've sorted the speakers and venue.*

The stunning Waterloo Gallery at Apsley House was completely full for the last Tourism Network Meeting on 7th March when VisitBritain talked about the Chinese and Russian markets. See what they said on www.tourismknowledge.com/visitbritain.com See also Roy Graff's article later in this issue.

VisitBritain's updated website and industry publications

If it's a while since you last used VisitBritain's industry website, take a look at the changes. The Tourism Network arranged industry focus groups to help ensure VisitBritain was offering the sort of information you need, in the way you need it. There are also several new free guides available to help you get the best out of VisitBritain's promotional activities. These include a general prospectus, details of global campaigns and specific market opportunities. More details on their website www.visitbritain.com/ukindustry

Targeting overseas' visitors without leaving home

Almost every tourism provider wants to get more business from overseas' visitors. And almost all of you have a limited budget. My

first years in tourism were spent doing what my mother refers to as “gallivanting” around the world promoting Britain to overseas’ visitors but it takes a lot of energy, time out of the office and of course cash to entice those visitors from overseas.

This brief article takes a quick look at ways of promoting to overseas’ visitors without the expense (or glamour) of travelling to find them. There are essentially two ways of doing this:

- a) get some-one else to do the work for you - preferably without paying them too much
- b) target visitors once they’re here

Get some one else to do the work for you

Yes, thought you’d like this option! The first port of call is to see what markets your regional tourist board (or marketing consortia) is targeting and systematically examine every way in which they do this so you can take advantage of their efforts.

With so many products to promote, it’s hard for the tourist boards to know everything they need to know about you and to promote your product every time.

By and large they focus most on products that are great examples of their key promotional themes - so make it clear where you fit in (don’t leave the thinking to them, they don’t have time), and products promoted by really nice and grateful people who appreciate their efforts or by really persistent people who simply don’t give up. The latter approach works but leaves a residue of resentment so perhaps try the nice guy approach first....

Familiarisation and press trips can work if you really take the time to follow up but there’s little you can do if the buyers and journalists aren’t up to scratch. Why not do a little research and make it easier for your tourist board to bring you the right people by

actually suggesting who you’d like to receive and how you’ll give the trip the “wow factor”? This doesn’t have to be expensive - something quirky can work equally well as pulling out all the stops.

And use the opportunity to get some local press coverage at the same time by sending captioned photos of the happy “delegation” to your local papers.

Work through websites targeting overseas visitors and don’t just ask for a link to your site - suggest where it’s appropriate to add one and offer to provide a reciprocal link.

VisitBritain’s new industry website www.visitbritain.com/ukindustry has plenty of details of how to target overseas visitors, including many free and low cost opportunities. With the right product and story, you can get your details featured in press releases sent to journalists around the world, be included in newsletters going to international travel trade and frequent Britain visitors.

Make sure your details appear on the consumer site www.visitbritain.com and within appropriate publications and make entries work harder. Think about every word in your 30 word product description and don’t be satisfied with using a photo you took 10 years ago.

Don’t just snap photos for publicity, set up the photo so it tells its own story. If you’re promoting restful stays in a nice hotel “dress” the room with the tools of relaxation - open book, glass of wine, discarded clothes - so potential guests can immediately imagine how it would feel to relax right there.

Target visitors once they’re here

This method doesn’t work quite so well for accommodation providers but other tourism businesses can target visitors once they’re here via tourist information centres,

piggyback promotions and the plethora of free visitor magazines that Mark describes opposite.

Once you attract visitors from overseas, it's important to make sure they either come back again or recommend you to their friends.

Take a look at the market profiles for each nationality on the VisitBritain industry website to make sure you understand the motivations, likes and dislikes of your visitors and can cater for them accordingly. Adapting your product in small ways can reap large returns.

A very simple way to encourage visitors to recommend you to their friends is to hand them free postcards (you can get 1000 full colour postcards printed for less than £95) ready stamped to reach their home country. If you make sure there's a short message about your product on the postcard and it's an attractive picture, you'll be offering a helpful service and using your visitors enthusiasm to promote your product on your behalf.

You can also encourage visitors to recommend you on referral sites such as www.tripadvisor.com that are widely used by savvy visitors before booking particular facilities. Apparently some tourism marketers are even so devious they register a hotmail address and recommend their own facilities... but you wouldn't stoop so low would you?

Susan Briggs
Susan@tourismnetwork.org

Free & Independent London Visitor Publications - which are the best for you to advertise in?

In addition to the numerous 'in-house' titles published and/or supported by VisitBritain and

regional tourist boards like Visit London, there are a number of independent publishing companies who have 'gone it alone' and use their commercial skills to reach those all important visitors once they are in London. The success of such publications depends equally on their distribution and filling gaps left by other publications or by the tourist boards.

It's worth noting that these publications have all survived the trials and tribulations post 9/11, foot and mouth, rail disasters and all that's been thrown at the industry over the past few years. Quite a remarkable feat, underlining the clear need for such publications, despite predictions of some industry figures about the demise of print.

Being the ex-publisher at Morris Visitor Publications I've tried to give a neutral outline of, 'who does what best' from the list of predominant titles below.

I can also add a small hint that should help you to decide which publications are best for you. Don't just rely on the rate card. Speak to some of those advertisers you find in the magazines below and simply ask them why they choose that publication and what others they use and why - then analyze that! Seems that in certain circumstances the trade 'gossip' is often well founded, I've certainly observed it's the case on this subject over the past few years!

So here's the line up of key titles that you can choose from. You should note that these are the *free* publications so there are no comments on the likes of *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard* supplements etc. The following outlines the basic options and how they may fit your target audience. I've included contact details for you to request rate-cards, distribution data and media information.

Here are a few pointers when deciding where to advertise:

1. Choose a publication that already has advertisers like you in it. More ads like you = good at reaching your audience.
2. Always enquire about editorial coverage. Some publications don't do 'advertorials' but many *will* support you with editorial if you advertise regularly. Loyalty works both ways.
3. Whenever possible place some workable response mechanism into your advertisement, for evaluation through the year.
4. You get seen by more people by being seen often, so consider whether the publication is monthly or bi-monthly and evaluate what total distribution you'll get.
5. If possible, book a series of ads. It will enable you to negotiate a better price and perhaps a better position or editorial.

Where London - A monthly magazine, reaching visitors primarily through leading London hotels, at concierge desks or in-room/lobbies. Has international familiarity as it is published for major cities throughout the world, that ensures most savvy travellers look out for it and are familiar with its content/layout. Good listings magazine, maps etc, interspersed with topical features. Tel: 020 7242 5222, alix.johnston@wheremagazine.com

Where London Map - Widely used, this popular annual map is 'given' by concierge's at many of London's leading hotels, most specifically in association with the Society of Golden Keys and has some attraction details around the map. Tel: 020 7242 5222, alix.johnston@wheremagazine.com

The London Guide - Monthly magazine with a unique distribution that primarily reaches visitors directly through its resourceful and extensive range of key distribution partners

providing high visibility and take up. The London Guide is an A5 magazine that provides timely information in an attractive format. Tel: 020 8740 2040, way@morriseurope.com

IN London - Bi-monthly luxury and lifestyle Londoncentric magazine, in-flight, airport lounges and in-room, at London leading 5* hotels, this catches the jet setters with the big wallets in an intelligent and informative publication matching the expectations of the upper end. Tel: 020 8740 2040, turner@morriseurope.com

Pocket London - Pocket London produces personalised guides to London and a shopping guide too, used for example, at the World Travel Market as well as bespoke versions for numerous other London businesses, events and locations. Tel: 020 7720 1166, rupert@pocketlondon.com

Welcome to London - Bi-monthly magazine about London and with features on days out around London, this magazine's primary distribution is in 2/3/4* hotels throughout London. Tel: 020 8297 4444, nick@welcometolondon.com

In the next newsletter we'll take a look at the other publications reaching visitors and evaluate how they can work for you in promoting your attractions and services pre-travel.

Mark Hendriksen
mark@tourismnetwork.org

Low cost airlines - make or break for your destination?

You would have to have been living in a cave, or had your passport revoked not to have travelled with one of the low-cost airlines that now crowd our skies.

This article takes a look at how low-cost airlines have changed the way we travel forever. As well as creating new and previously unheard of destinations that are now hot favourites, British destination managers clearly have to think about how to compete.

According to *Tourism News*, from 1998 to 2003, thanks in part to RyanAir and easyJet, low-cost intra-European air traffic grew by 600 percent, compared to just 10 percent growth for full-service airlines. Europeans who previously used airplanes only to cross the ocean are now taking them to visit friends and relatives, hunt for new homes in the sun, and turn the E.U.'s theoretical freedom of movement into a reality.

Not even high fuel prices and rising competition — factors suppressing current low-cost carriers' profits — seem to faze those pushing today's start-ups.

Joshua Marks, a 29-year-old Harvard Business School graduate, technologist and airline consultant, is teaming up with airline-industry veteran Ken Carlson on a start-up called for now, SkyLink Airways, is typical of the type of entrepreneur ready to take on the challenge. Its plan: low-fare international service, beginning with a route between the Baltimore/Washington airport and London's No. 3 airport, Stansted. The new carrier, which expects to get its government operating certificate this spring, will announce a new name to avoid confusion with another company.

With over seventy no frills airlines now operating across the European continent, Barcelona is not the only destination suffering from increased competition. Perhaps you have already been to Poznan, or Olbia, or flown to Vienna via Bratislava for a weekend break? I even know of people who fly to unlikely sounding destinations just because they have

never heard of them. This is all good news for these cities, because they now have a steady stream of would-be fun seekers knocking on their doors looking for things to buy.

The bad news for British destinations is that these potential leisure seekers are not spending their pounds in Britain, but abroad. At first glance, the playing field is not level: why does it cost more to go by train from York to London (over £100 if you book late), than flying to Nice for the weekend (for as little as £20) where the sun will be shining? There is also the glamour factor of boasting to your friends that you have just "popped over to Reykjavik, Prague or Oslo" for the weekend. What chance does Warwick, Brighton or London have?

How can British destination managers compete?

I wouldn't recommend starting a no-frills airline, or giving up just yet. Here are a few suggestions that may inspire you:

We tend to think that the airlines are just full of escaping Brits, jetting off for their weekend breaks abroad. What we perhaps don't appreciate, is that the airlines are very keen to have seats full, in *both directions*. You could ignore the domestic market altogether and simply target those hip and happening visitors from the 45-odd European destinations served by low cost airlines.

Lobby your regional tourist board (RTB) to work with these airlines. May sound obvious but I know of at least one tourist board covering a major airport that doesn't bother to work with it...

There is anecdotal evidence that hordes of Spaniards descend on Wales during the summer months to enjoy their golf without the oppressive heat of Spain. The Welsh are offering golfing packages, weekend breaks and links with specialist tour operators at www.golf.visitwales.com.

You might want to work directly with the airlines, finding out which operate you're your local airports and helping them fill their in-flight magazines and websites with well-placed editorial and competitions.

Perhaps you'd prefer to work to develop the domestic market to counter the competition from those overseas destinations? Since 9/11 most tourist boards have focused more effort on domestic marketing but it might still not be enough - you may have to lobby your RTB.

1. Promote the lesser-known parts of your destination to domestic markets looking for adventure and new places to discover.
2. Visitors often take weekend breaks to rest and get away from the rat-race, so promote spa or relaxing based weekends.
3. Think of themes, such as romantic breaks, great restaurants, sport or boutique hotels as hooks to hang your communication.
4. Or you could just play dirty and remind everyone how awful it is to have to be at the airport for that 5am check in and that we all speak English, after a fashion...

Low-cost airlines are here to stay, so let's start to work with them, like we would any national carrier or operator that has the potential to bring thousands of visitors to our cities and destinations across Britain.

Mary Tebje
mary@tourismleisure.org

Take advantage of a trend

We're all working in an ever changing market place but I wonder how many of us really consider key trends in the world around us, and try to adapt our products or markets accordingly?

I enjoy receiving the regular newsletters and information from organisations like www.HenleyCentre.com whose leading edge thinking spots trends we can all use. Here are a few ad hoc facts that they've uncovered. Could you somehow change the way you position your marketing to take advantage of one or more of these?

People have become much more aspirational

They want quality of life more than "things". 35% of UK adults say they'd rather spend their money on experiences rather than material goods; 60% say they haven't got enough money; 55% haven't got enough energy; 47% haven't got enough time; 35% haven't got enough space; 25% have already got too much information!

When asked which of these resources are the most valuable to them - time and energy are most popular responses. Can you help customers save time or make them feel energized? You're on to a winner if you can. But remember - you have to make it obvious how you'll do that.

Spending patterns have changed

The proportion we spend on services has increased from 34% to 49%. In the service sector people are willing to *pay more for an experience than for goods*. Good news for tourism and if you enhance your service and make it even more of an experience, they'll pay more!

But we shouldn't assume consumers can be "ripped off" - they still want to feel they are getting a good deal, even if they don't really know what one is! 60% of all consumers will try and find the lowest price for a holiday but only 26% know how much a holiday should cost!

In 1999 32% of all UK adults were willing to spend money to save time. Now it's 40% - fast growth in a short time and still growing!

20% of British adults would pay to jump the queue on the phone and 4% would even pay to jump a queue at a cash-point machine. So if nothing else, you know you might be able to sell your place at the front of the cash-point queue during the bank holiday!

Susan Briggs
Susan@tourismnetwork.org

China - hype or opportunity?

Almost 300 people wanted to come to our recent Tourism Network Meeting about the Russian and Chinese markets so there is clearly strong interest in this market. We've asked Roy Graff to give some of his insights on the market. He's just come back from 3 years working in China for Gullivers Travel and Octupustravel.com and speaks fluent Mandarin Chinese so is well placed to comment on the current opportunities.

There probably isn't one hotel, incoming operator, tour attraction or travel service provider who doesn't hope to cash in on the much hyped Chinese tourist bonanza.

China's population just topped 1.3 billion people. 150 million of them are financially able to travel abroad; outbound tourism has been growing at a phenomenal 26% annual average for the past 5 years, and could top 35 million in 2005.

Now that Britain has signed the coveted ADS agreement with China, are we about to be flooded with Chinese tourists who will visit all the UK attractions, spend thousands of pounds on travel and shopping and transform our travel industry?

Apart from the uncertainties associated with both the tourism industry and China politics,

answering this question requires separating hype from facts. Much about China remains shrouded in a fog of misunderstanding, a result of both the short time that China has had her doors open to the west and our own Euro-centric education and world view. To understand the Chinese travel market we need to understand not only China's modern economy and social structure but also her history and culture. This certainly can't be addressed in a short article, but we can look at the practical realities of this market.

Approved Destination Status is awarded by China's National Tourism Administration (CNTA) in a bilateral agreement sanctioned by China's Foreign Ministry. To date, China has awarded this status to 90 countries and territories. An ADS destination can be visited by mainland Chinese groups over 5 people for the purpose of leisure tourism.

The destination is allowed to open a tourism promotion office in China, advertise freely in the specified markets and cooperate with ADS licensed Chinese travel agents. However, it has no effect on other travel sectors such as FIT, business travel or study abroad and is limited to specific geographical markets in China, typically Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province.

The announcement of ADS for Britain came last February. It will take several months for the agreement to come into effect, which is wise considering there is much preparation work needed. The ADS agreement stipulates that the destination country prepare a list of authorised inbound suppliers and only these are allowed to receive the Chinese tour groups. VisitBritain has yet to compile that list or decide on the criteria, so forward thinking companies can take the lead and prepare themselves now to ensure they will be the first port of call for the tour groups from China. Even prior to the agreement taking effect, opportunities exist to attract business cum leisure groups and wealthy FITs.

Chinese tourists are eager to discover new destinations and bring back pictures and souvenirs of their travels. They are good shoppers and followers of trends. With the right product and service they will be an extremely lucrative market that has the power to drive UK's travel industry for many years to come. But we should consider the 89 other destinations competing for their custom, many of which have been actively promoting in China for several years. Chinese groups prefer to visit a multitude of countries in a single trip which makes EU a more attractive offer currently, with a single visa covering many countries.

As an industry we should lobby for an integrated policy on visa that will allow tourists to add Britain to their European itinerary. As individual companies we can start now to prepare an attractive product for Chinese visitors, understand what they like and what they buy, and importantly, how to market these products successfully in China. If you have not had experience with this market yet, some practical tips can get you started, but it is important to obtain updated information as much as possible - China moves too fast to encapsulate in an article:

Language- either hire a Chinese speaker or ensure your information is translated correctly. Mandarin Chinese is the official dialect, and simplified Chinese is used in Mainland China. Taiwan and Hong Kong use Traditional Chinese characters.

Food- while they may like to try local cuisine occasionally, comfort food when in a foreign land is still Chinese food. Breakfast items like soy milk, steamed dumplings or congee will be appreciated and Chinese restaurants that cook authentic food need to be on the itinerary.

Normally you can tell authentic restaurants by the number of first generation Chinese customers. In places with less choice, it is

necessary to work with the restaurant manager and chef on special menus for Chinese groups. You will get extra points if you find out the local specialty from their home province and provide it to them as a surprise half way through the tour.

Shopping- people who travel to Europe have usually already visited Southeast Asia and experienced high pressure shopping tours. Show them that Britain is different by allowing them freedom to shop with ease. They look for souvenirs that either cannot be found in China, or that are very expensive there, but reasonable over here.

Web- if you have a website, preparing a Chinese version will give your potential customers a glimpse of what you offer, and comfort in researching their trip in advance. Mirroring your site in China and paying attention to its design, is as important as the language. China's internet users have different tastes to western ones, and sites on overseas servers are often slow to access and sometimes unavailable altogether.

Prepare now for the Chinese market, and begin the process of building your brand in China.

Roy Graff

Owner - China Consulting on Tourism Action
roy@CContact.biz

Making your Mark

Public Art is having a big impact on the way in which the tourist destinations of the future are being created. What connects a statue dedicated to Linford Christie, sixty-six very large banners and a pump house on the A13 running through the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham?

All of them are public art objects and all are having an impact on the way in which we view the places in which they are located. Public art, which was once associated with memorials to the victors of long-forgotten battles, is increasingly a feature of regeneration projects. It is also in many places, at the heart of projects designed to give a renewed identity to areas undergoing major change. From the banners that line the streets in South Bank to the Angel of the North, public art has become an important part of what gives a destination its particular identity.

One of the most recent and spectacular examples of this trend is *B of the Bang*. 'Linford Christie was fond of saying "I'll be gone by the B of the Bang," about his quick, explosive starts. The 56 metre tall, 150 ton visual representation of Linford's words, in the form of the sculpture commemorates the Manchester Commonwealth Games. The sculpture is the tallest in the UK and is located outside the athletics stadium, which has now become home to Manchester City Football Club. This is an area of Manchester whose regeneration benefited from the Commonwealth Games, the new sculpture will undoubtedly help to keep it on the map.

The A13 trunk road has also been in the news a lot recently. This too is an area of potentially massive regeneration. Running through the Thames Gateway district to the east of London, and depending on the outcome of the decision of the International Olympic Committee, it may well be at the heart of one of the biggest developing destinations in Europe.



B of the Bang by Thomas Heatherwich Studios

Over the past few weeks, a range of apparently mysterious objects have been revealed along that part of the road which runs through the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Part of a public art project called *Arterial*, they create, according to the project's lead artist and architect, Tom de Paor, 'a journey through interlinking, imaginative landscape.'

Some of the projects are designed to entertain and intrigue, others also serve a more functional purpose.

Standing at six metres high, The Pump House is not just a show case for lighting but also a structure that contains the electronic control system for drainage pumps that ensure the adjacent underpass on the A13 is free from water.



Pump House, designed by Tom De Paor and lighting artist Clare Brew

Twin Roundabout is designed to 'reflect the 'epic' journeys of the commuters passing over the viaduct above as the road below rises out of the ground below to meet them on their journey.'



Twin Roundabouts designed by Thomas Heatherwick Studios.

All of these projects are designed to accelerate the sense of place being developed in this part of the capital. On one level they intrigue and entertain, on the other, they also give an identity to parts of the motorway that were previously bleak and undistinguished.

On South Bank, public art was used, at a time before the opening of both the London Eye and Tate Modern, to help give a sense of place, particularly to those parts of the area, which were architecturally undistinguished. The road running parallel to the Thames is

essentially the back entrance to the area, however for the majority of people attending concerts at the Royal Festival Hall and plays at the National Theatre, it is the route from Waterloo Station, that is the main gateway to this area. The South Bank Banners were therefore installed to give a sense of place to this route; to emphasise the fact that South Bank was a place for art - inside as well as outside - and to distract the eye from some of the less beautiful buildings along this route.



The South Bank Banners lining the route along the Thames. 33 artists, graphic designers & schools contributed to the design.

The banners were designed by thirty-three artists and graphic designers and selected through open competition. The banners are backlit and at night create the longest open-air art gallery in London. They not only bring colour and light to the area and, incidentally, have helped reduce crime by making the area feel increasingly safe.

A more down to earth project is the rest area for weary cyclists located to the side of the Oxo Tower.



Weary cyclists rest area designed by Gerry Judah.

In all of these places public art has become a way to engage the public, alert the media to change and help create a renewed sense of place and with it the sense of pride, which is essential for regeneration projects to survive.

Some projects like the Angel of the North received an initially hostile reception, others like B of the Bang appear to have got off to a really positive start. Either way the role of public art is set to continue at the heart of both regeneration and tourism projects.

Paul Lincoln

Marketing consultant in regeneration and tourism

p.a.lincoln@btinternet.com

London Development Agency announces successful bids for its skills and training funding

In September the LDA announced that it is to invest £3.5m over the next four years to improve recruitment and skills in the

hospitality, tourism and leisure industry in London.

Following research into what was needed, the LDA developed an action plan to work out how it could improve the range and quality of training and skills improvements in all areas of hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism.

The LDA then announced the opportunity to bid for funding for projects in four key areas: 1. recruiting people into the industry; 2. keeping key staff in the industry; 3. making companies more aware of the support that is available for them; 4. improving profitability by training and developing skilled staff.

All bids have now been submitted and the successful projects selected so the resulting training courses will begin in April. We'll shortly bring you details of what's now available and how you can benefit. For more info please contact **Jane Riches** on 0207 954 4130 or email JaneRiches@lda.gov.uk.

Politicians take note!

A "Think Tank" (where *did* that name come from?) headed by Ken Robinson for the Tourism Society has asked all the major political parties to make sure ten key points are included in the next Government's Tourism Policy. Here they are:

Funding for Tourism is an investment for Britain. Even the Treasury accepts that VisitBritain (VB) earns about a 26:1 return on public funds invested in Marketing Britain abroad, and 14:1 on funds invested by the England Marketing activities under VB's England Marketing Advisory Board (EMAB). The UK tourism balance of payments is abysmal. The strong pound encourages UK residents to holiday abroad and makes the UK a very expensive destination for visitors from overseas.

VB has received reduced grant in aid, in real terms, for over 5 years and is now having to take money from “established” markets (like the US) in order to fund activities in new markets. The Tax take derived by attracting more overseas visitors to the UK and persuading our citizens to holiday at home, is massive. More investment is justified and essential, primarily to underpin and improve England’s tourism; great more benefit to UK plc will result.

Tourism: effective co-ordination and cohesion. Since Labour abolished the national Tourist Board for England, and limited VB to a “marketing only” remit, the industry in England is both weakened and unsupported. Most tourism businesses are small businesses in competition with each other at the local and sub regional level.

The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are by design introverted and do not liaise effectively enough to ensure cohesion. Beyond leadership in Marketing, which VB and it’s EMAB are authorised to do, there are many other functional aspects required to inform, assist and help energise the industry to be effective, efficient and competitive, and to share best practise. At the regional and sub regional levels, strong and clear national policy guidance, and minimal but adequate funding for supporting services, are essential.

At the UK level, VB has a very difficult task trying to best facilitate and co-ordinate the independent spending budgets of Scotland, Wales, London and the richer England RDA’s. Fragmented and competing images are more likely to be overlooked by potential tourists.

Statistics. The production of adequate, accurate statistics is a national commitment, to the EU, and as defined under the UN/World Tourism Organisation specifications, by the ONS - and is the absolutely essential basis for measuring and monitoring this diffuse industry. Over the last few years the

statistics staff and competence previously evolved within BTA and ETB has been all but disbanded and funding for essential research has been cut.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport constantly restate their commitment to better research and have initiated the Tourism Statistics Improvement Initiative (TSII) that reported at the end of 2004. An inspection of DCMS by the Government Chief Scientist (under DTI) concluded that only if TSII’s findings were fully enacted would DCMS be fulfilling its commitments. Funding has been refused. Adequate funding is a top priority.

Sub-Regional Tourism. New Destination-focused arrangements are untested and not yet showing signs of working well enough, or providing overall coverage. Destination “Brand”-based” marketing may exacerbate mutual competition for the same business. Local networks must be re-invigorated and supported.

One key effect of regional devolution in England has been that the RDA’s have all but destroyed the settled but not fully efficient, Regional Tourist Board’s partnership structure. New arrangements vary across the Regions, and within regions. The funding disparity to RDA’s has exacerbated the problems - big budgets where there are few tourists, and little money where there is the greatest need to bring the industry and local authorities together.

Local Authorities - Tourism Policy. The fact that Local Authorities do not have a statutory responsibility for Tourism has made it a prime activity for cutbacks or discontinuing services. Information Centres and public toilets, and other essential services are closing in visitor areas. Local Authority leadership in expertise and Destination marketing is under threat.

Yet Tourism is vital to the social and economic well being of most communities.

Even though Local Authorities may have neither a statutory duty nor committed budget for Tourism, there should be a requirement on every Local Authority to produce and maintain a current Tourism Policy, to ensure the community knows what is planned, the needs of the industry are understood and there is guidance for development planning and local priority issues.

Effecting Quality standards. Improving the Quality of our tourism products requires that the industry is informed and inspired, and supported to achieve required quality goals. With most of the industry comprising medium and small businesses many of which are lifestyle businesses, financial incentives are required to stimulate reinvestment in asset improvements.

Quality Assurance schemes can play an important role, provided they reflect customer needs and are widely promoted to ensure they are understood. "Fitness for Purpose" does not deliver quality threshold requirements. Government has opted not to introduce statutory registration of accommodation with minimum quality thresholds, instead favouring a voluntary scheme.

The long-awaited, hopefully imminent, harmonisation of the motoring organisation and VB Accommodation Classification Schemes must be underpinned by a public information campaign. VB is to implement an "inspected only" rule for accommodation. Even so, this will not force poor quality, bottom-end operators in busy locations to participate or improve; only a statutory scheme will achieve this.

Skills. Better skills are a pre-requisite of being internationally competitive and equipping the industry for the future. The creation of the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the Hospitality, Travel and Tourism industries, People 1st, is a

good move, but other SSC's are also involved in elements of the sector, such as transport, leisure and cultural attractions. These SSC's will be competing to sell their services, to an industry in which commitment to training is fairly weak.

Further, there is no mechanism to co-ordinate provision and share best practice between the educational sector, the skills and training agencies, and private sector training suppliers. The transfer of responsibility for Business Links to the RDA's (who lack any co-ordinating network) will exacerbate this. Businesses should be incentivised to invest in training with a system of tax credits.

VAT. The high cost of tourism products in Britain is partly as a consequence of high taxation. Tourism is internationally competitive and the UK is at a disadvantage. The average rate of tax for tourist accommodation in Europe, our main destination competitor for overseas tourists and UK residents choosing to holiday at home or abroad, is 8%, compared to 17.5% in UK. Economic analysis has shown that if VAT on accommodation in UK was reduced to this level, the resultant tax take overall would not reduce, allowing for increased business that would result from such a 10% "discount".

Currently, some "cultural" attractions are eligible to be exempt from VAT, but such status not only causes great disparity between those that qualify and those that do not, it also means that any that choose exemption can no longer reclaim input tax, so it becomes uneconomic to be exempt. A low rate would overcome this and remove the disparity.

Make technology work effectively. The use of internet-based information and booking systems for tourism products has grown very rapidly worldwide, both for major travel companies and individual tourism businesses, to deal directly with their customers. Over the last few years the Government has

supported the evolution of the EnglandNet project (to enable interoperability between separate Destination Management Systems and to provide a platform for individual tourist products).

Recently, EnglandNet has been taken over fully by Visit Britain and is to be an adjunct to its marketing functions. This is a critical project, which requires heavy funding to establish the system and achieve efficient working, after which it will be relatively much less costly annually to maintain and update. Currently, the funding to VB is just adequate for the project's needs; it is important that Government keeps this under review and does not require VB to support this discrete function from other marketing grant-in-aid.

Government must take Tourism seriously. Government does not take Tourism seriously enough; this is not a party political point. Tourism, the world's biggest growth industry, is not even included in the title of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. DCMS sponsors a diverse portfolio of industry sectors, within which Tourism receives inadequate attention.

Whilst more bureaucracy is undesirable, Tourism has an under-resourced team of civil servants, poor continuity and very inadequate budgets. The Development of Tourism Act 1969 is defunct following devolution and other Government changes; it should be replaced by a suitable instrument to address the current challenges and the opportunities of the next 20 years.

Tourism needs the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer to acknowledge the real opportunities that tourism presents for social diversity, the economy, the sustainability of our cultural heritage, and for employment. The success of the UK tourism industry is crucial to our cultural and economic well-being. It is time the

Government gave tourism the priority it deserves.

We believe that there should be a major rearrangement of Government departments in order to accommodate the needs of the tourism sector so that they do not get lost in the at present oversized DTI but also should not be stranded as the Cinderella of Government within DCMS. Tourism needs a proper commitment from the Government commensurate with its economic importance to the country.

Tourism needs more understanding, and adequate committed support, to realise the potential of this diffuse and internationally competitive activity for Britain.

More info: [The Tourism Society](http://www.tourismsociety.org)
www.tourismsociety.org

Next month in the Tourism Network Newsletter...

Government funding for training - how it could benefit you and your business

Building a brand

Details of a series of special events

Great new packs to help you promote to people on your doorstep

Advance notice of the summer party...

And lots more we haven't thought of yet... if you've got any ideas or want to write an article please get in touch!

Susan@tourismnetwork.org