

teaching note

Parks Canada's Rouge National Urban Park: An opportunity to showcase Canada's true nature

Case Summary

Recent social and demographic trends including increased diversity and urban population have resulted in declining visitation to national parks and protected areas. This case focuses on two opportunities for Parks Canada to address the issue: (1) Canada's first national urban park is being established in one of the most diverse communities in the Greater Toronto Area and close to the city of Toronto as a top Canadian destination; (2) Youth and visitors interested in nature-based activities are identified by Destination Canada as priority target markets. Rouge National Urban Park can be a gateway to Canada's national parks and protected areas for local visitors and tourists, considering that unlike other national parks, it is accessible to a large urban population. The case provides information on Parks Canada's current strategic direction with regard to increasing visitation as well as recent initiatives aimed at connecting with youth and new Canadians. The unique amenities and potential of the Rouge National Urban Park as an attraction for local visitors as well as tourists are also discussed. In addition, the case presents psychographic characteristics of the three main segments selected as Canada's preferred target markets. The information provided in the case will allow students to conduct a critical analysis of the current situation and identify strategic alternatives by adopting various tools (e.g. PESTLE, SWOT, stakeholder analysis) and theoretical concepts (e.g. unique value proposition, brand positioning, strategic partnership). The analysis will also inform the development of an action plan for implementing the most effective strategy.

Main Issue

How can Parks Canada accommodate the needs and expectations of tourists, specifically youth and millennials, without alienating its traditional Canadian clientele? How can the unique characteristics of the Rouge Park as well as the strength of Parks Canada brand be leveraged to increase visitation from these groups?

Target Audience

This case is primarily intended to be used in strategic management or marketing management courses for senior undergraduate students in recreation, leisure and tourism programs.

Teaching Objectives

Students can meet the following learning objectives by analyzing the case:

- Understand how organizations need to constantly monitor their environment and revise strategies to adapt to the changes, specifically social and demographic trends;
- Advance analytical thinking and problem solving skills by de-

veloping strategic alternatives to leverage opportunities and strengths;

- Understand the complexity of balancing the needs and expectations of different stakeholders and market segments as well as potential consequences of each strategic alternative; and
- Combine strategic thinking and long-term planning with a practical approach through developing an action plan that outlines specific steps, immediate changes and initiatives required for implementing the strategy and meeting long-term objectives.

Analysis of the Teaching Objectives and Theoretical Concepts

The case allows students to apply a range of different concepts and tools from the strategic management and marketing literature including internal and external analysis using SWOT and PESTLE models; stakeholder analysis; components of strategy (vision, mission, values, objectives); segmentation, targeting and positioning; strategic partnership and strategy implementation. The following questions will help instructors to focus class discussions on the intended teaching objectives:

- What is the main issue faced by Parks Canada? (ensuring future visitation and support)
- What environmental factors have contributed to the issue? (e.g. low visitation by children due to the increasing use of technology, limited visitation by minorities and immigrants, aging population, and increasing urbanization)
- What are Parks Canada's main strategic priorities and objectives? (One of the main strategic objectives is stated as "increasing revenue through more visitors and more revenue per visitor". In order to achieve this goal six strategic priorities are defined, as outlined in the case under "National Parks in Canada". Specific marketing initiatives include connecting with targeted groups through events and festivals; enhanced traditional and social media presence; and proactive tourism media relations)
- What are the key strengths and opportunities that can help the agency to address the issue? (e.g. Parks Canada's strong and historic brand, unique features and amenities of the Rouge National Urban Park, Park's close proximity to the GTA's diverse population and Toronto as a top Canadian destination, emphasis on nature in Destination Canada's positioning strategy, youth targeted as a key segment by both Parks Canada and Destination Canada)
- What are the strategic alternatives available to Parks Canada?
 - Would a partnership between Parks Canada and Destina-

tion Canada be a viable option? (the answer requires an analysis of strategic directions, strengths, and competencies of each organization and identifying potential areas for a win-win partnership)

- How can the establishment of Rouge National Urban Park help Parks Canada to connect with youth and millennials?
- Who are the key stakeholder groups that are affected by and/or can affect the implementation of the recommended strategy? What would be their potential reactions? (Rouge Park staff and volunteers, residents, local visitors, tourists, environmental groups, traditional Parks Canada clientele, new Canadians and youth are among stakeholder groups)
- What is your proposed action plan for implementing the strategy?
 - Does it require any changes in Parks Canada's strategic direction and organizational structure? (the current direction places very limited emphasis on the tourism aspect)

Recommended Teaching Approach

This case was used for a case analysis competition among senior tourism students. Participants, working in groups, had 3 hours to read and analyze the case, develop strategic alternatives, create an action plan for implementing their recommended strategy, and prepare a PowerPoint presentation for sharing the results. A panel of judges, including a senior Parks Canada advisor, evaluated the presentations.

Alternatively, the case can be discussed in a 90-minute class, where students work in groups of 4 to 5. A maximum of 5 to 6 groups is recommended. The case needs to be provided to the students in advance and analyzed as an individual assignment in preparation for the class. At the beginning of the class students will have 20 to 30 minutes (depending on the number of groups) to discuss and analyze the case in their groups. Then, they will be asked to share their thoughts with the class. Presentations should cover the main issue, at least two strategic alternatives (to encourage creativity), final recommendation along with a discussion on why it would be the best way to address the identified issue, and an action plan for implementing the recommended strategy. Teams will look at the issue from the perspective of external consultants presenting to Parks Canada senior managers (i.e. the rest of the class). Each presentation will take maximum 10 minutes, including the question period. Other students are encouraged to participate by asking questions or providing comments after each presentation, as Parks Canada senior managers would do. Using whiteboards or flip charts for recording ideas during the within-group discussion would facilitate presentations. At the end of the presentations the class can vote on the best strategy. The instructor may choose to adopt a more structured approach by providing students with some of the questions listed above.

Our experience shows that students may tend to over-emphasize

the use of social media in their recommendations, considering that the case is focused on attracting youth and millennials. However, it is important for students to be able to distinguish between tactics (or initiatives) and strategies and to understand that a social media campaign might not fully address the strategic issues faced by Parks Canada.

Suggested Readings

- Canadian Tourism Commission (n.d.). EQ Profiles, Retrieved 23 February 2016, from http://en.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/pdf/Resources/EQ/eq_profiles_ver2_2015_eng_lowres.pdf
- Canadian Tourism Commission (2014), Marketing Canada in an Ever-Changing World: CTC Corporate Plan Summary 2015-2019, Retrieved 23 February 2016, from https://en.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/pdf/Corporate_reports/2015-2019-corporate-plan-summary-with-us.pdf
- Hill, C., Jones, G., & Schilling, M. (2014), Strategic management: theory: an integrated approach, 11th Ed. Cengage Learning.
- Kotler, P., Bowen, J.T., & Makens, J. C. (2014), Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism, 6th Ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Parks Canada (n.d.), 2014-15 Report on Plans and Priorities: Retrieved 23 February 2016, from <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/plans/rpp/rpp2014-15/index.aspx#sec01>.