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News

Tourism conference offered insights to new trends, innovative marketing

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, April 28, 2009 – Predicting future trends in any industry is challenging; when that industry is increasingly reliant on the latest technology and shifting consumer behavior for its success, the challenge becomes even greater.

The 2009 Manitoba Tourism Conference drew over 300 tourism industry professionals to the Winnipeg Convention Centre this past weekend for a series of discussions and workshops, highlighted by the insights of two of North America’s foremost innovative thinkers.

Peter Yesawich, Chairman & CEO of YPartnership, spoke on “Emerging Lifestyles and Travel Trends: Implications for Marketing Manitoba”. Yesawich, a frequent commentator on travel trends in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, and others, discussed the three main forces impacting travel today: technology, social values and demography.

Citing surveys of 2,500 American adults, and 2,600 “Nextgen” technology users, Yesawich said that today the internet directs two out of every three hotel reservations, and eight out of ten airline ticket purchases.

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He spoke of the next era being one of price transparency, as meta search engines provide consumers with the ability to not only comparison shop, but also, to know when a price is a good deal, and be notified when a price is about to be lowered.

Yesawich also spoke about “The Third Screen”, a reference to mobile devices that follow the first and second screens of televisions and computers. With meta search now available on mobile, he encouraged tourism operators to engage in “intercept marketing”: pushing out offers to mobile users when they are in a location ideally suited for the sale. “We can now get information in front of people at the time they want to buy”, he said.

Some of the social values that will drive future travel include a renewed interest in family, a trend that will see the growth of multi-generational travel. “Here is an organic market that is going to grow as far as the eye can see”, he predicted. He coined the term “Celebration Vacations”, as over 70 per cent of leisure travelers have taken a vacation to celebrate a special occasion, typically birthdays or anniversaries. These travelers typically plan their holiday further in advance, stay longer and spend more, he said.

Amongst the challenges for the Canadian tourism industry in attracting American visitors is that only 13 per cent of U.S. travelers want to visit Canada in the next two years, down from 17% in 2003. Their increasing interest in cruising – 44% want to take a cruise in the next two years – also poses a challenge for land based destinations.

The winners over the next two years may be those who address consumers’ feelings of “time poverty”; four out of ten adults don’t feel they have enough time. Yesawich spoke about “Speed Vacations”, which offer consumers a means to “hurry up and relax”. This lack of time gives rise to what Yesawich referred to as the “Radius of Marketing Efficiency”, the point at which marketing becomes less efficient if the time required to reach the destination exceeds four to six hours. “Accessibility is critical”, Yesawich said.

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Jeremy Gutsche, founder of Trendhunter.com and host of Trend Hunter TV, delivered an eye-opening presentation on “Thinking Differently About Trends and Marketing”. Gutsche, described as a “new breed of trend spotter”, “an eagle eye”, and “on the forefront of cool”, encouraged the audience of tourism attraction operators, hoteliers and others to embrace a culture of innovation. His “Culture of Innovation” framework gave audience members groundbreaking ideas related to perspective, customer obsession, tolerance for failure and creativity, and provided practical ideas to inspire companies to make their cultures revolutionary.

“The implications of new trends and innovation – not only in how people research, plan and book their travel experiences, but also in how they share those experiences – is hugely important for everyone involved in the tourism industry”, said Hubert Mesman, President and CEO of Travel Manitoba, the Crown corporation mandated to market the province as a tourism destination. “We’re thrilled to bring these leading trend experts to Manitoba to share their insights with our industry.”

Presented jointly by the Manitoba Hotel Association and Travel Manitoba, the conference also included a session with Celebrity Chef David Adjei, who spoke on the role of food in tourism. Adjei, best known for his work on the television show *Restaurant Makeover* and as a contestant on *Iron Chef America*, provided a cooking demonstration to attendees of the Centrex tradeshow, Manitoba’s largest tradeshow for hotels, restaurants, bars and foodservice, put on by the MHA.

“Food is certainly one of the important aspects of the hotel experience”, said Jim Baker, President and CEO of the MHA. “David certainly showed the audience how to create unique and delicious food.”

Other sessions included tips on expanding the festival tourism market, how to reach the youth market, and how to make tourism operations more “green” and sustainable.

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Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world. Manitoba's tourism industry contributes more than \$1.3 billion to Manitoba's GDP and directly sustains more than 13,000 jobs.

Travel Manitoba is a Crown Corporation formed to lead and stimulate sustainable tourism growth in Manitoba's \$1.1 billion tourism industry. In partnership with the tourism industry, the agency is responsible for tourism marketing, visitor information services, product development, research and public information.