



University of Bedfordshire

Faculty of Education, Sport and Tourism

Division of Tourism and Leisure

Institute for Tourism Research

Business Engagement for Experience Bedfordshire

Dr. Susan L. Slocum

Dr. Sally Everett

Dr Stephen Kozub

Conducted on behalf of

Experience
Bedfordshire

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Overall Recommendations of the Study

Recommendation 1:

Continue utilising Experience Bedfordshire as the tourism partnership organisation for Bedfordshire.

Recommendation 2:

Introduce a marketing campaign that increases awareness of Experience Bedfordshire and its initiatives to tourism businesses within Bedfordshire.

Recommendation 3:

Solicit more local businesses involvement through joint marketing, sustainable business development and industry intelligence initiatives.

Recommendation 4:

Develop a united branding image and strategy for Bedfordshire and include elements of its unique natural and historical attributes.

Recommendation 5:

Continue to develop and support green business practices.

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The vision for Bedfordshire:

“Luton and Bedfordshire will be recognised as places that have changed for the better. They will be known for their professionalism in hosting business visitors and in exploiting their location. Visitors will enjoy the variety of town and country, outstanding attractions and events and their increased spending will support good quality local employment”
(Tourism Growth Strategy 2007 – 2012, p.4)

1. THE BRIEF

Experience Bedfordshire is the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Dwindling resources, including reduced officer time and lack of partnership funding from the private sector, created the need to reassess the resourcing and financing of Experience Bedfordshire’s key marketing tactics over the next few years. This research project identified key strategic areas where the public sector can add value to the private sector offering, and which public sector services and activities are valued and needed by the sector.

Following the development of the Tourism Growth Strategy for Bedfordshire (2007 - 2012), a destination marketing organisation was established and managed by a multi-stakeholder Strategic Tourism Advisory Group (STAG). Each of the three local authorities in Bedfordshire contributed staff time and funding. Marketing initiatives included the Experience Bedfordshire website; a booklet profiling key tourism attractions and businesses; a national and regional PR campaign; and a programme of quality improvements (including Rest Assured in Beds).

Three years after the adoption of the strategy and development of the DMO, a lack of industry engagement with Experience Bedfordshire prompted a need to undertake robust and systematic research to explore barriers to business engagement and partnership. The findings will assist the client in a reassessment of the functions, funding and governance of Experience Bedfordshire. In order to achieve these aims, and ensure Bedfordshire’s tourism strategy is pursued within the most sustainable tourism development framework, there is an urgent need to identify and prioritise the business opportunities in Bedfordshire to meet the needs of new and growing markets. Greater competitiveness and sustainability of 'the competitive destination' (Ritchie and Crouch 2003¹) can only realistically be achieved via an awareness of destination’s performance and identifying the most appropriate avenues for future investment and business engagement. This research of current industry awareness, perceived challenges, best practice and levels of engagement of key industry leaders was achieved through extensive discussion with regional businesses across the tourism, leisure and hospitality sectors.

In particular, the strengths of the original tourism strategy and successes of Experience Bedfordshire are acknowledged whilst identifying and addressing the obstacles to business participation in its recommendations and strategies. In line with the current economic climate, new tourism trends and outcomes outlined in the brief, the team are aware of the need to ensure businesses are involved in responding to the key targets outlined in the Tourism Growth Strategy. This includes the need to appeal to modern visitor needs through an improved and research-informed business engagement strategy.

¹ Ritchie, J.R.B. and Crouch, G.I. (2003) *The Competitive Destination: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective*. CABI: Oxon, UK.

2. THE RESEARCH TEAM: INSTITUTE OF TOURISM RESEARCH

The required research is wholly aligned with the experience, knowledge and interests of the consultancy team which comprises practitioners and academic researchers with international expertise in leisure and tourism. The team members are qualified and experienced in tourism-related research including visitor impact and economic studies of development programmes; preparation and implementation of destination marketing strategies; sustainability consultancy; project feasibility studies; and stakeholder/business engagement.

The research team is based in Bedfordshire and therefore all team members have an in-depth, working and personal knowledge of the county and its diverse tourism offer, as well as some of its challenges and potential future opportunities. The team have built significant networks and relations with tourism businesses in the county and have developed an extensive understanding of local issues in this area. Engagement with local partners has further enabled the team to develop healthy and working relationships with support providers and businesses across the region. The team are fully committed to supporting Experience Bedfordshire (on behalf of Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, and Luton Borough) in its endeavours to secure increased business engagement for Experience Bedfordshire and are confident that the research findings project proposed will meet the needs of the client and deliver all of the key outputs identified in the original brief.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology seeks to ensure the approach was wholly in line with the overall aims and outputs stated in the brief, to develop research-informed recommendations that capitalised on the work to date by Experience Bedfordshire, whilst seeking to pursue an appropriate and systematic survey that will help develop and drive forward the initial strategy and vision laid out in the Tourism Growth Strategy (2007-2012).

A survey instrument was devised for the research project in order to meet the central objective of the study and additional priorities were identified in meetings with the Council. This strategy provided the basis for making recommendations for promoting future growth of the area's visitor economy; raising awareness of Experience Bedfordshire; identifying appropriate roles for the DMO; and provides a way forward in terms of future governance structure and business involvement.

3.1 A multi-method survey

The survey had two parts: (i) Web-based questionnaire; and (ii) Follow-up telephone survey.

The team used a multi-method survey including both closed and open ended questions. This research tool provided valid and robust quantifiable data for statistical analysis. In addition, it generated rich qualitative data capturing the views and ideas of regional businesses. Representatives of key stakeholders and groups were surveyed from the 'Horeca' sector (hotel, restaurant and catering); accommodation providers; outdoor recreation providers (e.g. outdoor centres, riding centres); local interest groups; conference facilities; visitor attractions and heritage sites managers; and event organisers and businesses. Focussing the survey on these sectors allowed us to identify areas of opportunity for tourism development alongside the associated challenges facing business in this area.

I. Web-based questionnaire

The team undertook extensive collaboration with the three unitary authorities to design and develop an interactive, easy to use web-based survey (Appendix 1) supplemented with input from the Experience Bedfordshire administrative team. The link to the survey was emailed out to all tourism businesses using the contact details provided by the Experience Bedfordshire database. The initial email contact occurred on 14 October 2010 with a follow up reminder email sent on 19 October 2010. Of the 233 contacts provided by Experience Bedfordshire, 10 emails were returned with invalid contact information. By October 26, 2010, there were 36 completed surveys (15%).

II. Follow-up telephone survey

Once the website survey had been advertised and promoted for one week, the team supplemented the recruitment process by contacting all non-respondents by phone. Two questionnaires were completed via phone, and messages were left for all other businesses to reiterate the objectives of the survey and encourage participation. The phone list included 34 duplicate numbers that were not recognised in the initial email sample and a further 21 disconnected or wrong numbers. Additionally, during the telephone survey stage, it was discovered that 27 participants had not received our initial email. This was due to a number of reasons including staff turnover where emails were addressed to a specific person in the company and the prevalence of corporate contacts which were not located in the local area. These 27 contacts were re-mailed questionnaire links using the updated email addresses. These corrections to the database will be sent to Experience Bedfordshire so that they may update their records.

In total, it is estimated that 168 contacts were made and 83 questionnaires were conducted (Table 1). There were six incomplete surveys (only section 2 completed) so these were removed from the final analysis. Therefore, the response rate for the questionnaire is 46.6%. It is generally acknowledged that the response rate to web-surveys is generally low (10%)².

Table 1: Survey Response Rates

| Date | Emails Sent | Responded |
|--|--|-----------|
| 14/10/2010 | 243 emails sent | 14 |
| 19/10/2010 | 233 emails sent | 22 |
| 27/10/2010 | 178 Phone calls made | 48 |
| | Total responses | 83 |
| | Deleted questionnaires due to incompleteness | 6 |
| | Total questionnaires completed | 77 |
| | Response rate | 46.63% |
| Contacts Provided by Experience Bedfordshire | 243 | |
| Undeliverable Emails | 10 | |
| Duplicate Contacts | 34 | |
| Wrong Phone Numbers | 21 | |
| Total contacts | 178 | |

² Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell;

4. RESULTS

The data was analysed using SPSS, a statistical software package that provides support for descriptive statistics. The open-ended qualitative answers were analysed using a manual version of coding and theme development³. The results are presented in three sections: (4.1) descriptive statistics, (4.2) qualitative responses, and (4.3) inferential statistics.

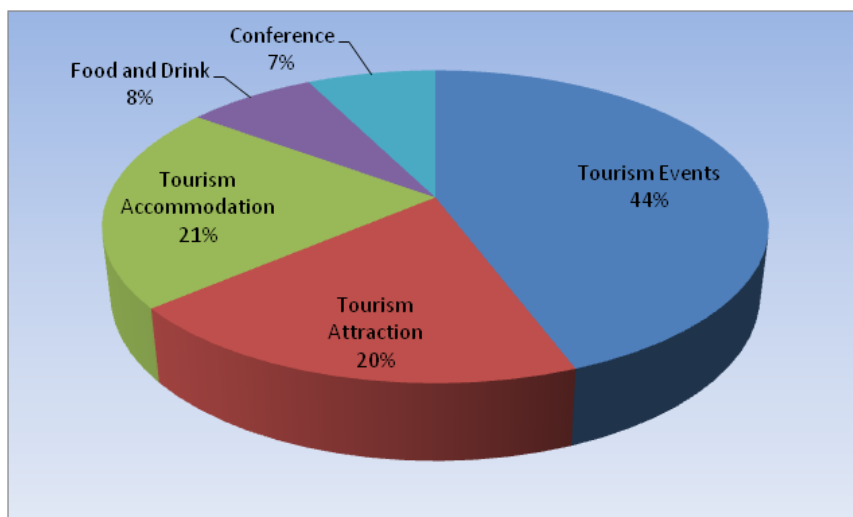
4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide a general overview of the responses and help to identify trends in the data.

I. Survey Respondents

Participants were asked to identify the tourism category that most accurately described their business (Figure 1). The largest category was tourism accommodation (36%), followed by tourism attraction (32%), food and drink (12%), conference (12%), and tourism events (6%). The remaining business category, classified as 'other', was represented by local government agencies (2%).

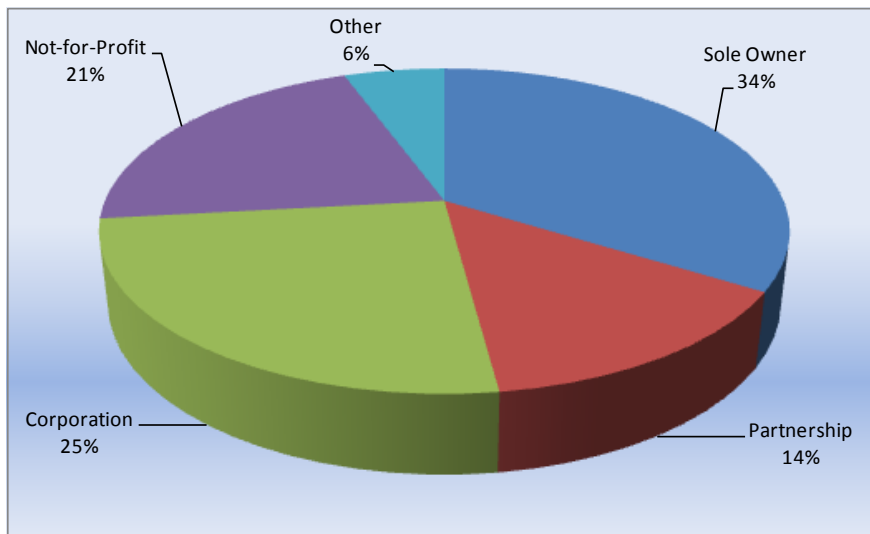
Figure 1: Respondents' Business Category



Participants were also asked to state the nature of their organisation's ownership (Figure 2). The majority of the organisations surveyed were sole owners (34%), followed by corporations (25%), not-for-profits (21%), and partnerships (14%). The other category was represented by government organisations (6%).

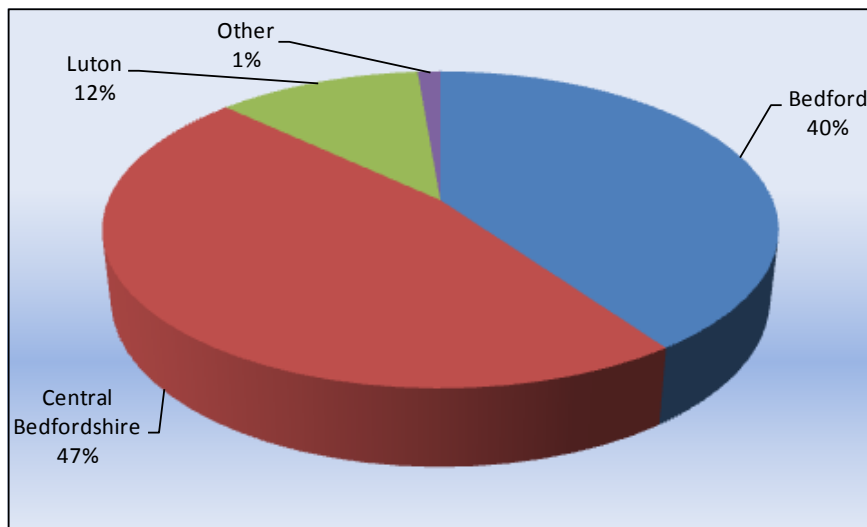
³ Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Figure 2: Respondents' Ownership Type



Participants were asked to state their local borough council (Figure 3). The responses included Central Bedfordshire (47%), Bedford Borough (40%), Luton (12%), and other (1%), which represented a single charity that reports to all three councils in Bedfordshire.

Figure 3: Respondents' Local Council Affiliation



Participant businesses have operated, on average, for 25.5 years within Bedfordshire. The businesses ranged from as new as two years to as old as 200 years.

II. Current Tourism Program Ratings

Participants were asked to rate their awareness, involvement, and satisfaction with a variety of Experience Bedfordshire initiatives (1 = not aware/involved/satisfied to 4 = very aware/involved/satisfied).

The participants rated most of the initiatives as low on the awareness scale and even lower on the involvement scale (Figures 4 & 5). The most highly rated aspects of Experience Bedfordshire (scoring 3 on awareness) were the Tourism Information Centre and staff (3.2) and Tastes of Bedfordshire (3.0). All the other initiatives were classified as somewhat aware (< 3.0) with the Adrenalin Hub

promotion scoring the lowest (1.3). All Experience Bedfordshire initiatives scored less than 2.0 on the involvement scale (somewhat aware) with the Tourism Information Centres (1.8) and Tastes of Bedfordshire (1.5) scoring the highest.

Figure 4: Levels of Awareness

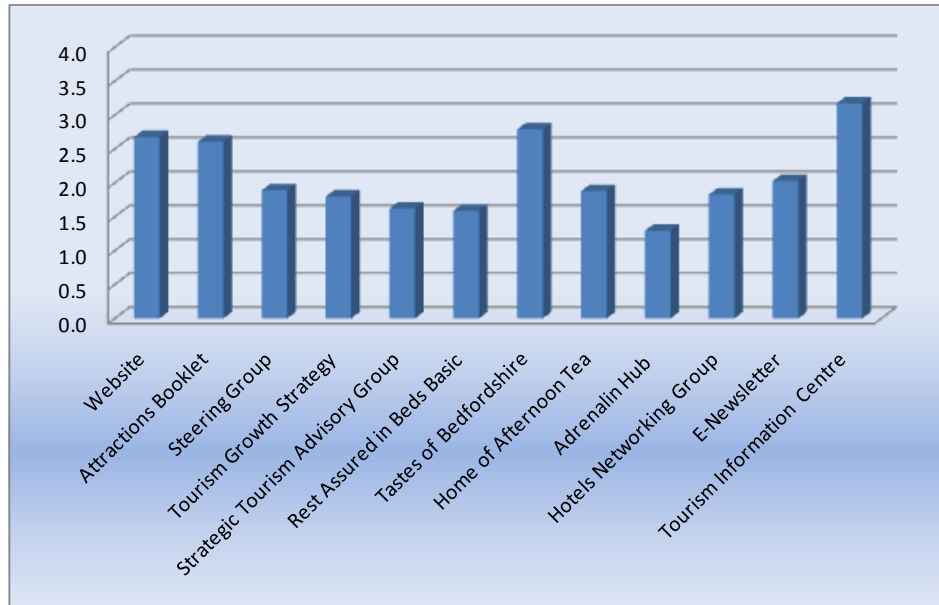
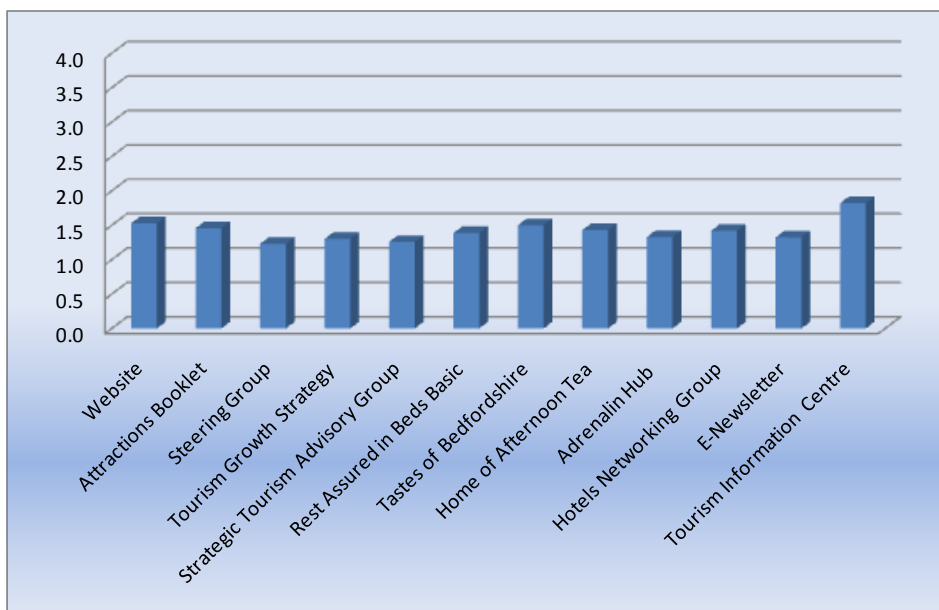
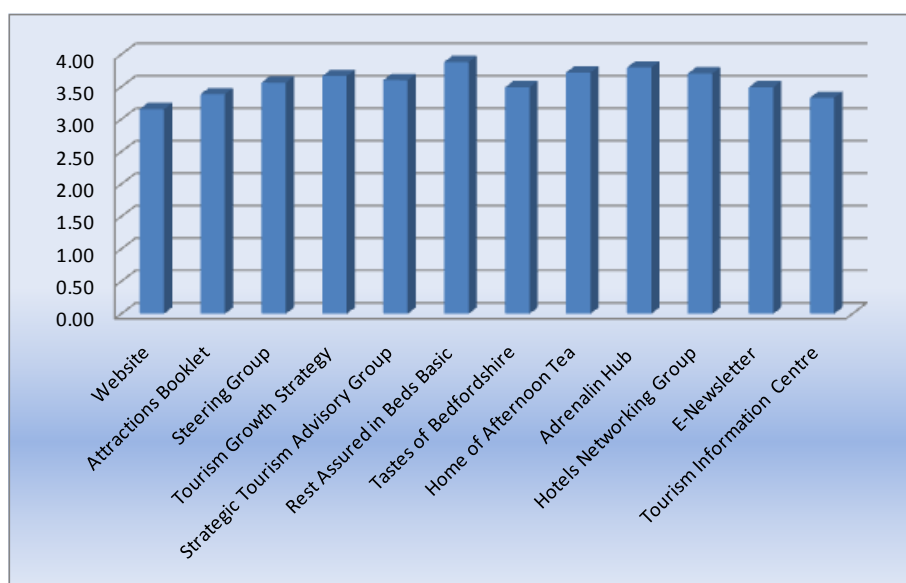


Figure 5: Levels of Involvement



However, those that were aware and involved with Experience Bedfordshire initiatives found them to be highly satisfactory (>3.0). The participants found Tastes of Bedfordshire (3.9) and the Adrenalin Hub Promotion (3.8) as the most satisfactory (Figure 6).

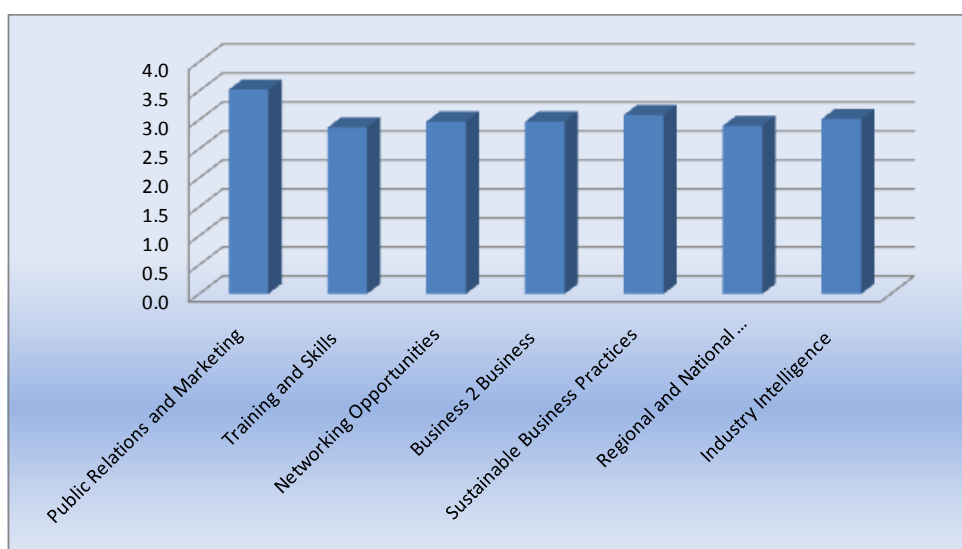
Figure 6: Levels of Satisfaction



III. Business Development

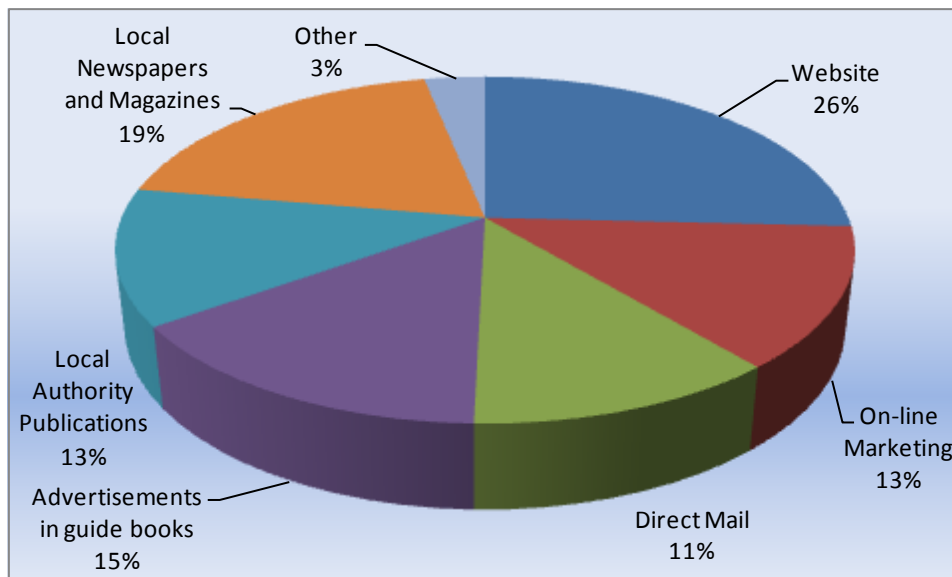
Participants were asked to rate the importance of a number of business development needs (1 = unimportant to 4 = very important). Public relations and marketing (3.5) were the most important aspect for the participants' businesses, followed by sustainable business practices (3.1) and industry intelligence (3.0). The remaining categories scored slightly below 3.0 (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Business Development



The most common marketing tool used by the participants for their tourism business was a company website (26%), followed by local magazines and newspapers (19%). The other categories consisted of a variety of media including radio advertising, national magazines, posters/leaflets/fliers and word of mouth (Figure 8). Dedicated marketing budgets were used by 57% of the respondents (mean = £19,100), with the minimum budget being £10 per year and the maximum budget being £150,000 per year.

Figure 8: Current Marketing Tools

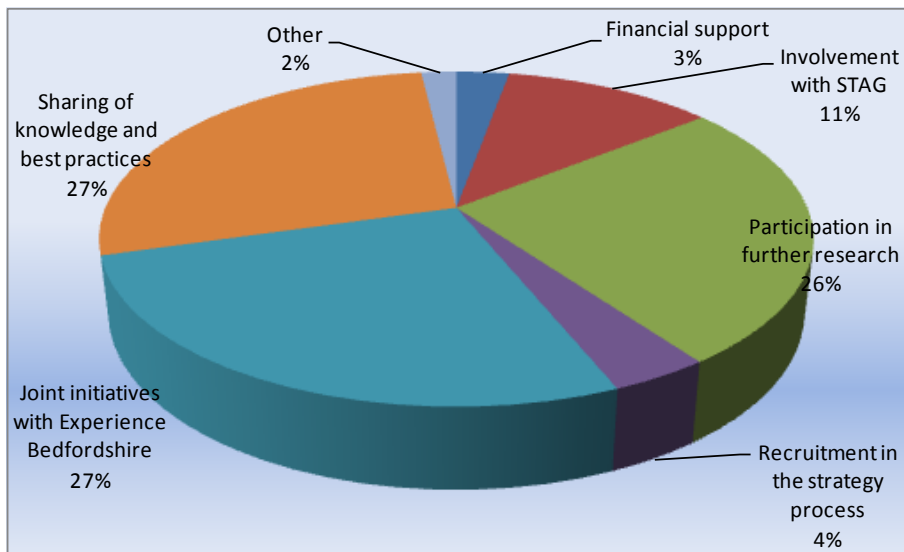


IV. Support for Strategic Tourism Development

Participants were asked if they would consider supporting Experience Bedfordshire in the strategic development of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination and then asked if they would support the formulation of another organisation to handle the strategic development of tourism for Bedfordshire.

First, participants were asked which type of support they were most willing to contribute. The participants felt that sharing of knowledge and best practice (27%), working on joint initiatives with Experience Bedfordshire (27%) and participation in further research (26%) were the best ways for their businesses to be involved. Involvement with the Strategic Tourism Advisory Group received moderate support (11%). Financial support (3%) and the recruitment of other tourism businesses to develop strategy (4%) were the least likely avenues of support. Types of support defined as 'other' included assistance in the promotion of golf to the area and support for the networking of accommodations and attractions (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Support for Strategic Development



The participants were generally against paying an annual membership fee to Experience Bedfordshire (73%), but those that were willing to pay (17%) expressed a willingness to pay at an average amount of £47 per year. The majority of participants were also against paying an annual membership fee to another organisation (68%). Those that were willing to pay (32%) expressed a willingness to pay of £46 per year for membership.

Businesses in Luton were most opposed to paying a membership fee for a central tourism partnership. The highest support came from Central Bedfordshire Council (Figure 10). Partnership and not-for-profit organisations showed the highest support for paying a membership (Figure 11). Attractions and conferences showed the highest level of financial support for a central tourism partnership (Figure 12).

Figure 10: Willingness to Pay Experience Bedfordshire by Council

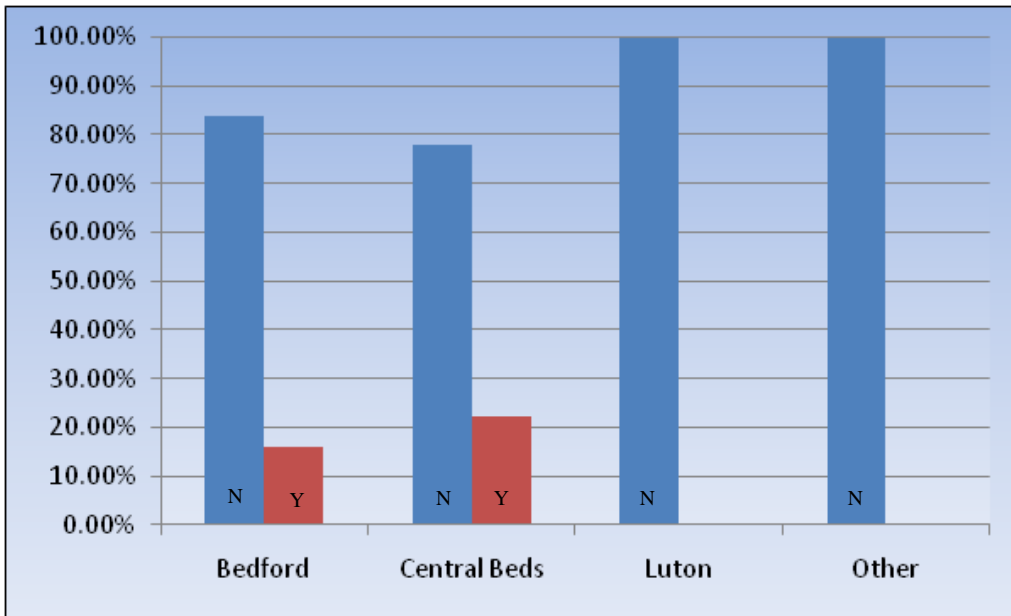


Figure 11: Willingness to Pay Experience Bedfordshire by Ownership Type

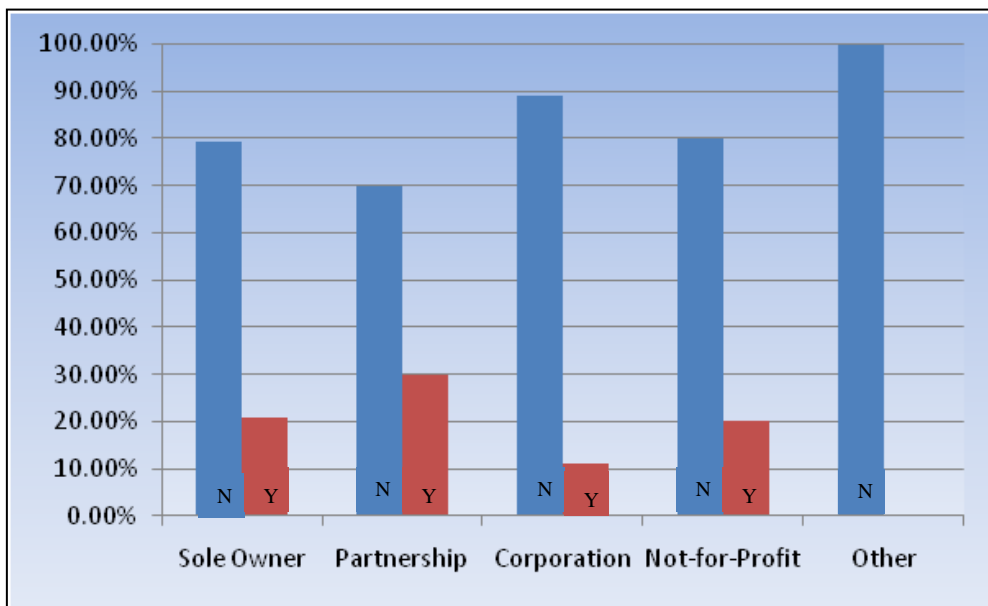
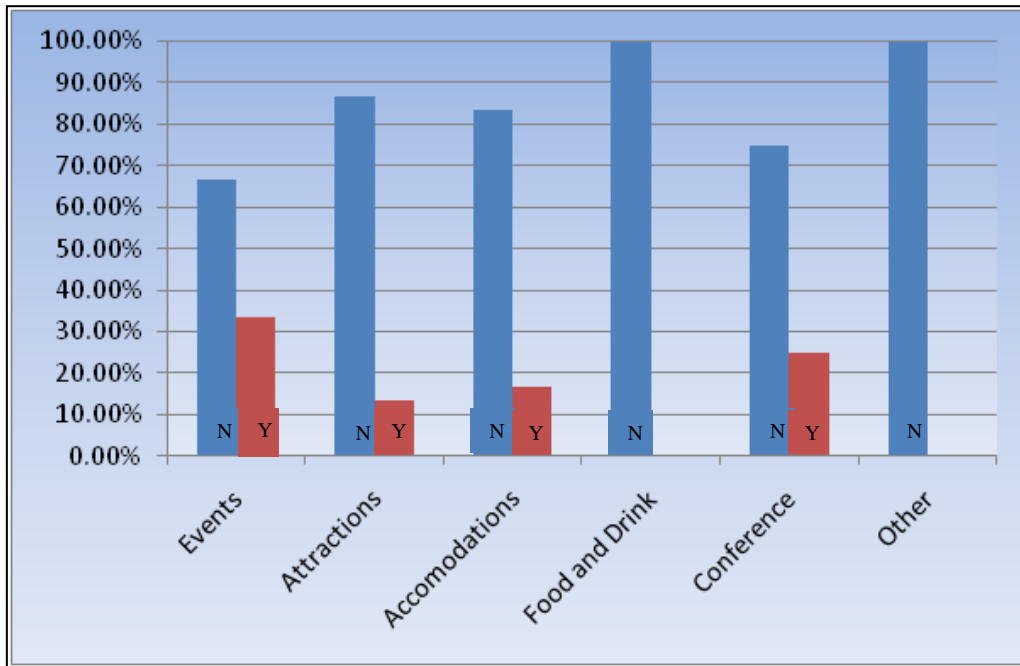
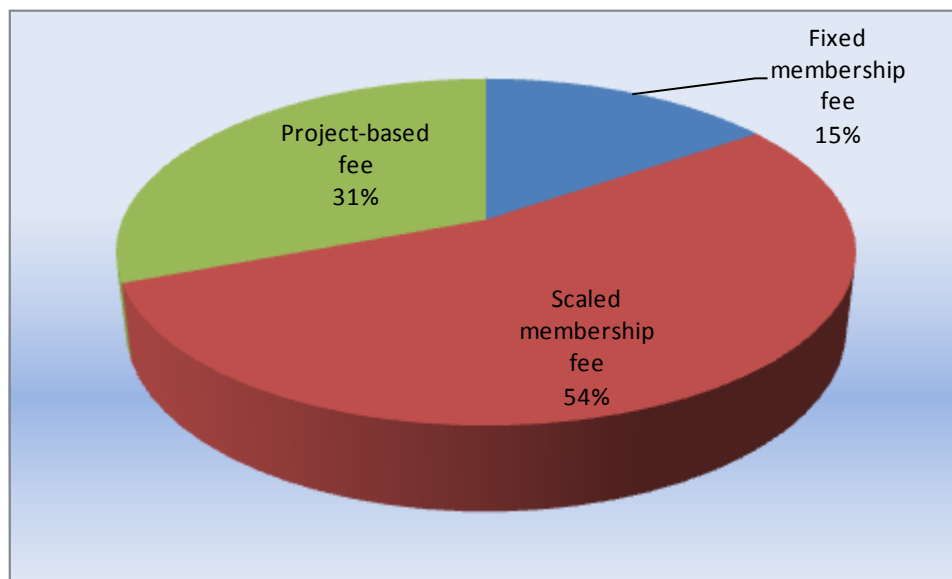


Figure 12: Willingness to Pay Experience Bedfordshire by Business Type



Most participants felt that Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership should ideally be funded by a scaled membership fee (54%) or a project-based fee (31%).

Figure 13: Tourism Partnership Funding



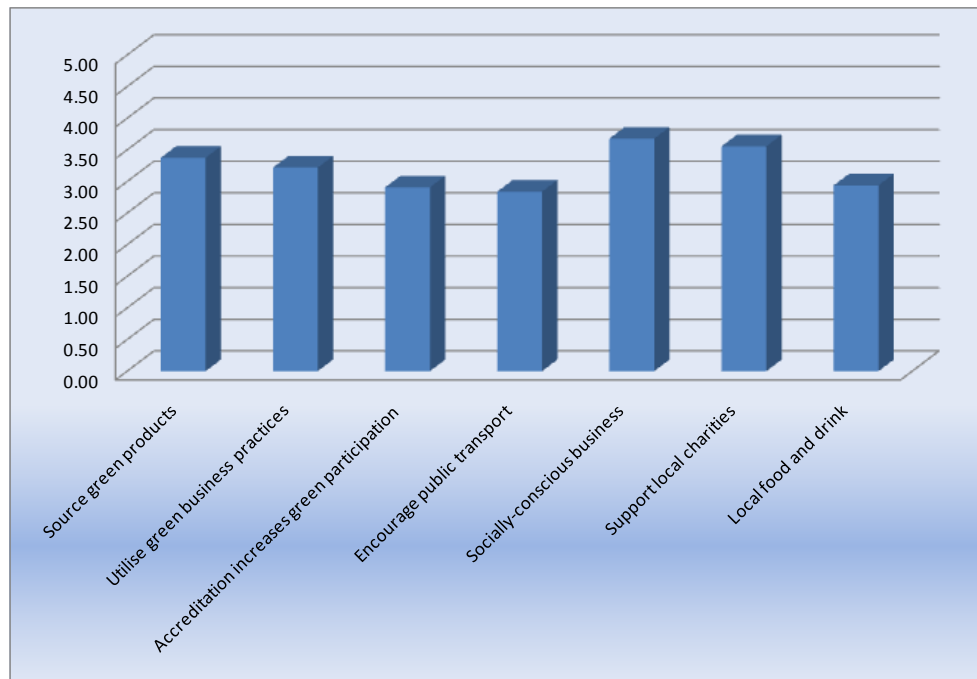
Slightly more than half the participants (55%) were willing to commit other resources, such as time, to Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership. On average participants stated that they would commit 21 hours per year.

V. Sustainability Practices

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a number of statements geared towards understanding their engagement in sustainability practices (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). All categories showed significant support for sustainability practices by the respondents.

Most businesses reported being socially-conscious (3.7), supporting local charities (3.6), knowing where to source green products (3.4) and utilising green business practices (3.2) (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Sustainability Practices



4.2 Qualitative Responses

A number of questions within the survey were designed to solicit open ended responses to supplement the quantitative data described above. These include comments on Bedfordshire’s image, improvements in the marketing of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination; Bedfordshire’s strengths; additional resources to be committed to Experience Bedfordshire or another local tourism partnership (above and beyond time and money); and how Experience Bedfordshire or another local tourism partnership should be managed.

I. The Bedfordshire Image

Respondents indicated that Bedfordshire is associated with a diverse range of images and attributes. Respondents identified a number of physical attributes with which Bedfordshire can develop a tourism destination brand. The open-ended responses were categorised into six themes: attractions, history, ambiance, natural settings, location, and negatives (Table 2).

Table 2: The Bedfordshire Image

| Attractions | Ambiance | Natural Settings | Negatives |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Animal parks (8) | Friendly (2) | River (5) | Not publicised (2) |
| Woburn Abbey (3) | Beautiful | Countryside (4) | Uninspiring (2) |
| River (3) | Charming | Rural (2) | Hard to park |
| Airfields (2) | Crafty | Parks (2) | Not great |
| Whipsnade (2) | Attractive | Hidden Beauty | Unknown |
| Shopping | Hidden | Open Space | |
| Gardens | Interesting | | |
| | Leafy | Location | |
| History | Multicultural | London (4) | |
| General History (3) | Small | Airport (2) | |
| Bunyan (2) | Surprising | Central (2) | |
| Howard | Undiscovered | Cambridge | |
| | Unique | Links | |
| | Welcoming | Accessible | |
| | | Starting Point | |

II. Marketing Improvements

Respondents made a number of recommendations to promote the marketing of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination. These open-ended responses were categorised into four themes: marketing media channels, promotion of attractions, Council responsibilities, and networking and partnerships (Table 3).

Table 3: Marketing Bedfordshire

| |
|---|
| Marketing Media |
| National T.V. campaign (3) |
| Improve the website. The categories are too broad (3) |
| Increased tourist information and awareness on the internet (2) |
| Better national publicity |
| Distribution of high class information in all media around country as a whole. (e.g. television adverts for Yorkshire) |
| A TV advert that features all the attractions in the area. Each attraction could pay for their slot, spreading the cost and making it affordable. |
| Promotions of major events |
| More regional campaigns |
| Targeted marketing to visitor source locations that support longer stay options |
| One good single publication of attractions and accommodation |
| |
| Promotion of Attractions |
| Emphasis on beautiful North Beds countryside, small market towns and villages (3) |
| A more positive and distinct character |
| Include attractions not owned by the council. |
| Sell the county more |
| Identity - perhaps "Bunyan's County" |
| Publicise its history & host more historical events |
| Emphasise the convenience of getting to other tourist destinations |
| Target family tree researchers |
| offset the image of urban Luton and its negative connotations |
| Improve the quality of the tourism offering |
| |
| Council Responsibilities |
| Parking and a tidying up of the town centre (2) |
| More funding (2) |
| Get rid of Toddington service area |
| 24 hour parking |
| Improve signage around the county to inform drivers to attractions (brown signage) |
| More communication with business owners |
| Return phone calls and answer questions |
| |
| Networking and Partnerships |
| Local tourist attractions need to 'buy in' to initiatives and commit financially |
| Very difficult but we need to get local buy in |
| It needs a focused plan and someone to pull all of us together to play a role in delivering it |
| To reach all the businesses and not just the chosen few |
| |

III. Bedfordshire Area Strengths

Participants identified a number of Bedfordshire characteristics that could be developed and promoted in order to enhance the visitor experience. These open-ended responses were categorised into three themes: attractions, promotions (Table 4) and improvements (Table 5).

Table 4: Strengths of Bedfordshire

| Attractions | Promotions |
|---|------------------------------|
| Countryside (8) | Access to London (8) |
| History (5) | Olympics (3) |
| Animals (3) | Bring Centre Parcs to BEDS |
| River activities (3) | Attractions |
| Riverside development (3) | Promote European coach trips |
| Local food and crafts (2) | Tailored visitor packages |
| Spy triangle (2) | |
| Broad range of experiences to suit all tastes | |
| Art facilities | |
| High quality environment | |
| Olympics | |
| Outdoor sports | |
| Culture and heritage | |
| Good accommodations | |
| Historic buildings | |

Participants also provided feedback on a number of improvements to facilitate the development of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination.

Table 5: Suggestions for Improvements

| Improvements |
|---|
| More communication with Experience Bedfordshire (2) |
| Better promotion |
| Better transportation from the station |
| Better parking |
| Create a friendlier atmosphere |
| Diversify offering |
| Educate locals to be ambassadors |
| Hidden Britain |
| Better coordination with the councils |
| Recruit family members of residents |

IV. Committable Resources

Participants were asked what types of resources they would be willing to commit to a joint marketing partnership including donations beyond financial and time commitments. The responses were divided into three categories. The most common response was to offer space for meetings and conferences, followed by the provision of personal expertise and a place to display leaflets.

V. Tourism Partnership Management

Participants were asked how Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership could best be managed. These open-ended responses were categorised into three themes: government, private enterprise, and other (Table 6).

Table 6: Management of Tourism Partnership

| |
|---|
| Government |
| Via existing council committee |
| Locally by each different town |
| As a service from the three local authorities, in order to develop and diversify the local economy. |
| |
| Privately |
| By a dedicated individual/team |
| By an unpaid members group |
| Public/private partnership |
| By small steering group |
| Elected representatives from each sector |
| By the members |
| By those who take part, with a board. |
| Jointly with tourism professionals and experienced providers |
| Composite management membership from all contributing bodies/individuals. |
| By unpaid work |
| Outsourced to a local company that can develop a commercial aspect to the project working in partnership with Experience Bedfordshire |
| Collectively |
| |
| Other Comments |
| By looking at very small organisations like ourselves to see what we could contribute |
| Don't waste money on unnecessary courses |
| Some way that allows it to be more open |
| By someone who's an expert in their area |
| It should be included in our licensing fees |

4.3 Inferential Statistics

Comparison of means and regression analysis were used to determine the characteristics of organisations that agreed to support Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership in the promotion of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination. Simple statistical tables are provided as an overview. For more detailed analysis, please see Appendix B.

I. Support for Experience Bedfordshire

A comparison of means (t-tests) was used to determine if awareness, involvement and satisfaction for current Experience Bedfordshire initiatives would encourage financial support by businesses for further Experience Bedfordshire initiatives. Awareness of Experience of Bedfordshire was a significant factor in differentiating between businesses willing to provide financial support from

those that were not. However, the level of involvement and satisfaction with current initiatives was not associated with the provision of future financial support.

Table 7: Support for an Annual Membership Fee to Experience Bedfordshire

| Would you consider paying an annual membership fee to Experience Bedfordshire? T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--|--------|----|-----------------|
| Total Awareness | -2.233 | 64 | .029* |
| Total Involvement | .486 | 62 | .629 |
| Total Satisfaction | .007 | 63 | .994 |

* Significant at the .05 level

Since awareness of Experience Bedfordshire initiatives was a key factor associated with businesses' willingness to support this tourism service, a comparison of means was utilised to determine any differences in terms of the specific initiatives offered by Experience Bedfordshire. In terms of differentiating businesses willing to provide support from those that would not, the greatest difference in awareness was evident for the Experience Bedfordshire website, followed by awareness of the Experience Bedfordshire Steering Group and the Experience Bedfordshire Attraction Booklet. There was no significant differences in the awareness of other Experience Bedfordshire initiatives which would encourage the payment of an annual fee to Experience Bedfordshire.

Table 8: Experience Bedfordshire Initiatives that Encourage Financial Support

| T-test for Equality of Means Awareness | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|--------|--------|-----------------|
| Experience Bedfordshire Website | -3.213 | 70 | .002** |
| Experience Bedfordshire Attraction Booklet † | -2.223 | 21.556 | .037* |
| Experience Bedfordshire Steering Group | -2.373 | 69 | .020* |
| Tourism Growth Strategy † | -1.287 | 70 | .202 |
| Strategic Advisory Group | -1.428 | 71 | .158 |
| Rest Assured in Beds Basic Accreditation Scheme † | -1.017 | 14.144 | .326 |
| Tastes of Bedfordshire | -.346 | 72 | .730 |
| Bedford, Home of Afternoon Tea † | -1.382 | 15.177 | .187 |
| Adrenalin Hub Promotion | -.415 | 71 | .680 |
| Hotels Networking Group † | -1.386 | 14.996 | .186 |
| E-Newsletter | .457 | 70 | .649 |
| Tourism information centre | .435 | 72 | .665 |

† = Equal variance not assumed
 * Significant at the .05 level
 ** Significant at the .01 level

A linear regression model was used to assess the degree to which levels of awareness, involvement and satisfaction in Experience Bedfordshire initiatives predicted the amount businesses were willing

to contribute annually to Experience Bedfordshire. The three factors did not make a significant prediction of the businesses' proposed contribution.

Table 9: Analysis of the Amount of Support to Experience Bedfordshire

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.579 | 23.168 | | .111 | .912 |
| | Total Awareness | .331 | .607 | .083 | .545 | .588 |
| | Total Involvement | .428 | .527 | .122 | .813 | .420 |
| | Total Satisfaction | -.063 | .318 | -.029 | -.199 | .843 |

a. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing?

II. Support for Another Tourism Partnership

A comparison of means was used to determine if awareness, involvement and satisfaction for current Experience Bedfordshire initiatives were associated with the willingness of businesses to provide financial support for another tourism partnership. No significant differences were found, therefore no further analysis was conducted.

Table 10: Support for an Annual Membership Fee to Another Tourism Partnership

| Would you consider paying an annual membership fee to another tourism partnership? T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--|-------|----|-----------------|
| Total Awareness | -.774 | 64 | .442 |
| Total Involvement | .806 | 62 | .424 |
| Total Satisfaction | -.062 | 63 | .951 |

* Significant at the .05 level

A linear regression model was used to assess the degree to which levels of awareness, involvement and satisfaction in Experience Bedfordshire initiatives predicted the amount businesses were willing to contribute annually to another tourism partnership. The three factors did not make a significant prediction of the businesses' proposed contribution.

Table 11: Analysis of the Amount of Support to Another Tourism Partnership

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 11.387 | 20.397 | | .558 | .579 |
| | Total Awareness | .400 | .541 | .115 | .738 | .464 |
| | Total Involvement | -.466 | .455 | -.156 | -1.023 | .312 |
| | Total Satisfaction | -.005 | .276 | -.003 | -.019 | .985 |

a. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing?

III. Commitment of Other Resources to Experience Bedfordshire or another Tourism Partnership

A comparison of means was used to determine if awareness, involvement and satisfaction for current Experience Bedfordshire initiatives were associated with businesses' willingness to commit other resources, excluding financial support, by businesses to Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership. No significant differences were found; therefore no further analysis was conducted.

Table 12: Commitment of Other Resources to Experience Bedfordshire or Another Tourism Partnership

| Would you consider committing other resources (e.g. time)? T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--|-------|----|-----------------|
| Total Awareness | -.981 | 64 | .330 |
| Total Involvement | .886 | 62 | .379 |
| Total Satisfaction | .797 | 63 | .429 |

* Significant at the .05 level

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to inform Experience Bedfordshire's long-term tourism development strategy as managed by the multi-stakeholder Strategic Tourism Advisory Group (STAG) and provide enhancements to Experience Bedfordshire's destination marketing initiatives. These recommendations are divided into three strategic areas: the organisation and management of a tourism partnership; the assessment of current programs in operation through Experience Bedfordshire; and an assessment of green business practices currently employed in the county.

5.1 Organisation and Management of the Tourism Partnership

One of the objectives of this study was to assess the local business perceptions of Experience Bedfordshire and to determine if this organisation is the best means for marketing Bedfordshire as a tourism destination. This research indicates that Experience Bedfordshire is perceived by local businesses as an appropriate organisation for promoting tourism development and marketing and provides little support for the establishment of another tourism partnership.

Recommendation 1: Continue utilising Experience Bedfordshire as the tourism partnership organisation for Bedfordshire.

However, there is little evidence that local tourism businesses will support a fee-based tourism partnership at this time. Due to the low involvement and awareness of programs, many tourism businesses have yet to realise the advantages of investing in a tourism partnership. This analysis shows that increased awareness of Experience Bedfordshire initiative, especially awareness of the Experience Bedfordshire website, the Experience Bedfordshire Steering Group, and the Experience Bedfordshire Attraction booklet, will enhance local support and potentially encourage paid membership in Experience Bedfordshire. Therefore, promoting the organisation and its initiatives to local businesses is vital for increasing community support and business involvement. The high levels of satisfaction with Experience Bedfordshire initiatives is an important message that can be used to promote further involvement by tourism businesses throughout the county.

Recommendation 2: Introduce a marketing campaign that increases awareness of Experience Bedfordshire and its initiatives to tourism businesses within Bedfordshire.

Businesses are willing to support Experience Bedfordshire through the sharing of knowledge and best practice, working on joint initiatives with Experience Bedfordshire and participation in further research. Therefore, utilising the local knowledge base and developing a more participatory approach to initiative development would be welcome by local businesses. The lack of local buy-in and supportive networking is seen as a weakness in the current offer by Experience Bedfordshire. Particular areas of increased networking interest include public relations and marketing, sustainable business practices and industry intelligence.

Recommendation 3: Solicit more local businesses involvement through joint marketing, sustainable business development and industry intelligence initiatives.

5.2 Assessment of Experience Bedfordshire Programs

The current Experience Bedfordshire initiatives received high user satisfaction ratings from those currently involved. However, the current marketing focus for the area promotes family and adventure fun (e.g. Experience Bedfordshire website). While this approach has been recommended in the Tourism Growth Strategy (2007-2012), the respondents believe Bedfordshire area strengths lay in its countryside, history, and natural settings. The respondents also believe that Bedfordshire does not have a distinctly united image to support the marketing of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination. The diversity in Experience Bedfordshire initiatives (e.g. Adrenalin Hub, Tastes of Bedfordshire, and Home of Afternoon Tea) needs a more closely aligned focus in order to present a united marketing message, which, in turn, can help unify local support of a tourism partnership.

Recommendation 4: Develop a united branding image and strategy for Bedfordshire and include elements of its unique natural and historical attributes.

5.3 Assessment of Green Business Practices in Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire businesses show strong support for sustainability initiatives within tourism. These include socially-conscious business practices, the support of local charities, and the sourcing of green products. Therefore, it is feasible to incorporate green business practices either into the overall branding of Bedfordshire as a tourism destination (to coincide for the natural and historical assets of the county) or as a networking opportunity to increase awareness, and therefore support, for Experience Bedfordshire initiatives. There are many avenues to promote green business practices, such as business certification schemes, profit improvement programs, and training seminars to encourage the greening of Bedfordshire tourism.

Recommendation 5: Continue to develop and support green business practices.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provided an in-depth look at stakeholder engagement within Experience Bedfordshire and its marketing initiatives. While dwindling resources has led to the need to reassess how the key marketing tactics of Experience Bedfordshire are to be resourced and financed over the next few years, this research has shown that private funding through local tourism businesses is not currently a viable solution. The strengths of the original tourism strategy and successes of Experience Bedfordshire were recognised, but attention to those successes have been inadequately publicised at the local level. This research suggests that increasing awareness of Experience Bedfordshire initiatives can lead to increased willingness on the part of business to support these services. Thus, the possibility of private financing, through scaled membership fees, may provide much needed financial resources for the DMO in the future. Therefore, it is our recommendation that a local awareness campaign be launched, with the key objectives to raise local business awareness and promote participation in Experience Bedfordshire initiatives. Furthermore, internal databases must be maintained and kept current as a means to regularly engage and inform local businesses. A cooperative approach to sharing information and best practice is encouraged.

Further research to support the ongoing promotion of Experience Bedfordshire includes the development of common marketing messages highlighting the unique rural countryside character of the area. By uniting the many successful initiatives under a single branding message, Experience Bedfordshire can better collaborate locally and develop a destination image that can be communicated to both tourists and local tourism businesses.

18 November, 2010



Appendix A - Questionnaire

INSERT QUESTIONNAIRE HERE

Appendix B – Statistical Report

Table 7: Support for an Annual Membership Fee to Experience Bedfordshire

| Group Statistics – Comparison of Means | | | | | |
|--|---|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Would you consider paying an annual membership fee to Experience Bedfordshire? | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| Total Awareness | 0 | 54 | 24.4630 | 7.73064 | 1.05201 |
| | 1 | 12 | 29.8333 | 6.50641 | 1.87824 |
| Total Involvement | 0 | 53 | 17.3396 | 8.90968 | 1.22384 |
| | 1 | 11 | 16.0000 | 4.04969 | 1.22103 |
| Total Satisfaction | 0 | 53 | 43.0377 | 16.28114 | 2.23639 |
| | 1 | 12 | 43.0000 | 14.01298 | 4.04520 |

| T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|------------------------------|--------|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|----------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Total Awareness | -2.233 | 64 | .029* | -5.37037 | 2.40454 | -10.17400 | -.56674 |
| Total Involvement | .486 | 62 | .629 | 1.33962 | 2.75667 | -4.17087 | 6.85012 |
| Total Satisfaction | .007 | 63 | .994 | .03774 | 5.08576 | -10.12534 | 10.20081 |

* Significant at the .05 level

Table 8: Experience Bedfordshire Initiatives that Encourage Financial Support

| T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|--------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Awareness | -3.213 | 70 | .002** | -.970 | .302 | -1.572 | -.368 |
| Experience Bedfordshire Website | | | | | | | |
| Experience Bedfordshire Attraction | -2.223 | 21.556 | .037* | -.646 | .290 | -1.249 | -.043 |
| Booklet † | | | | | | | |
| Experience Bedfordshire Steering Group | -2.373 | 69 | .020* | -.771 | .325 | -1.419 | -.123 |
| Tourism Growth Strategy † | -1.287 | 70 | .202 | -.348 | .271 | -.888 | .191 |
| Strategic Advisory Group | -1.428 | 71 | .158 | -.373 | .261 | -.894 | .148 |
| Rest Assured in Beds Basic Accreditation Scheme † | -1.017 | 14.144 | .326 | -.406 | .400 | -1.263 | .450 |
| Tastes of Bedfordshire | -.346 | 72 | .730 | -.120 | .346 | -.810 | .571 |
| Bedford, Home of Afternoon Tea † | -1.382 | 15.177 | .187 | -.588 | .426 | -1.494 | .318 |
| Adrenalin Hub Promotion | -.415 | 71 | .680 | -.101 | .244 | -.588 | .386 |
| Hotels Networking Group † | -1.386 | 14.996 | .186 | -.608 | .438 | -1.542 | .327 |
| E-Newsletter | .457 | 70 | .649 | .145 | .316 | -.486 | .776 |
| Tourism information centre | .435 | 72 | .665 | .120 | .276 | -.429 | .669 |
| † = Equal variance not assumed * Significant at the .05 level ** Significant at the .01 level | | | | | | | |

Table 9: Analysis of the Amount of Support to Experience Bedfordshire

| ANOVA Does Amount to Pay depend on Awareness/Involvement/Satisfaction | | | | | | |
|---|------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|-------------------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 1476.454 | 3 | 492.151 | .483 | .695 ^a |
| | Residual | 49891.471 | 49 | 1018.193 | | |
| | Total | 51367.925 | 52 | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Total Satisfaction, Total Involvement, Total Awareness | | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing? | | | | | | |

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.579 | 23.168 | | .111 | .912 |
| | Total Awareness | .331 | .607 | .083 | .545 | .588 |
| | Total Involvement | .428 | .527 | .122 | .813 | .420 |
| | Total Satisfaction | -.063 | .318 | -.029 | -.199 | .843 |
| a. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing? | | | | | | |

Table 10: Support for an Annual Membership Fee to Another Tourism Partnership

| Group Statistics – Comparison of Means | | | | | |
|--|---|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Would you consider paying an annual membership fee to another local tourism partnership? | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| Total Awareness | 0 | 50 | 25.0200 | 7.86231 | 1.11190 |
| | 1 | 16 | 26.7500 | 7.53215 | 1.88304 |
| Total Involvement | 0 | 49 | 17.5714 | 9.21502 | 1.31643 |
| | 1 | 15 | 15.6000 | 3.66060 | .94516 |
| Total Satisfaction | 0 | 48 | 42.9583 | 15.82478 | 2.28411 |
| | 1 | 17 | 43.2353 | 16.14980 | 3.91690 |

| T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|------------------------------|-------|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Total Awareness | -.774 | 64 | .442 | -1.73000 | 2.23641 | -6.19775 | 2.73775 |
| Total Involvement | .806 | 62 | .424 | 1.97143 | 2.44703 | -2.92011 | 6.86297 |
| Total Satisfaction | -.062 | 63 | .951 | -.27696 | 4.48979 | -9.24909 | 8.69517 |

* Significant at the .05 level

Table 11: Analysis of the Amount of Support to Another Tourism Partnership

| ANOVA ^b Does amount to Pay depend on Awareness/Involvement/Satisfaction | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|-------------------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 1022.674 | 3 | 340.891 | .449 | .719 ^a |
| | Residual | 35668.503 | 47 | 758.904 | | |
| | Total | 36691.176 | 50 | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Total Satisfaction, Total Involvement, Total Awareness | | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing? | | | | | | |

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 11.387 | 20.397 | | .558 | .579 |
| | Total Awareness | .400 | .541 | .115 | .738 | .464 |
| | Total Involvement | -.466 | .455 | -.156 | -1.023 | .312 |
| | Total Satisfaction | -.005 | .276 | -.003 | -.019 | .985 |
| a. Dependent Variable: How much would you consider contributing? | | | | | | |

Table 12: Commitment of Other Resources to Experience Bedfordshire or Another Tourism Partnership

| Group Statistics – Comparison of Means | | | | | |
|--|---|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Would you consider committing other resources (e.g. time) to Experience Bedfordshire or another tourism partnership? | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| Total Awareness | 0 | 41 | 24.7073 | 8.11555 | 1.26744 |
| | 1 | 25 | 26.6400 | 7.14073 | 1.42815 |
| Total Involvement | 0 | 38 | 17.8684 | 10.11066 | 1.64017 |
| | 1 | 26 | 16.0000 | 4.34511 | .85215 |
| Total Satisfaction | 0 | 39 | 44.3077 | 16.44473 | 2.63326 |
| | 1 | 26 | 41.1154 | 14.84406 | 2.91116 |

| T-test for Equality of Means | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|--------------------------------|-------|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|----------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Total Awareness | -.981 | 64 | .330 | -1.93268 | 1.97022 | -5.86865 | 2.00329 |
| Total Involvement | .886 | 62 | .379 | 1.86842 | 2.10830 | -2.34601 | 6.08285 |
| Total Satisfaction | .797 | 63 | .429 | 3.19231 | 4.00764 | -4.81633 | 11.20095 |
| * Significant at the .05 level | | | | | | | |

