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MARKETING PLANS FOR CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAUS:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by  
Kelli Kennedy

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 20, 2002

Approved by

Date Approved 7-5-02

## ABSTRACT

Kennedy, Kelli      Marketing Plans for Convention and Visitors Bureaus: A Content Analysis, 2002, Larry Litwin, Master of Arts Degree

The major purpose of this study was to identify convention sales marketing and public relations trends by conducting a content analysis of the tactics in CVB convention marketing plans. By identifying both the common and unique public relations elements in marketing plans, CVBs can draw a relationship between public relations tactics and the success of reaching their mission statements in their own marketing plans.

Five cities' convention and visitors bureaus in the Eastern region of the U.S. were selected. These cities are Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. The researcher obtained three complete marketing plans, one telephone interview and one marketing plan summary. The researcher then constructed a matrix by which to analyze the trends in the marketing and public relations tactics.

The following conclusions were found:

- (a) Familiarization trips appear to be the most obvious trend. Four out of five marketing plans included this as a tactic.
- (b) The CVBs' web sites were not included as a marketing or public relations tactic.
- (c) No methods of feedback were identified in four out five marketing plans.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Kennedy, Kelli      Marketing Plans for Convention and Visitors Bureaus: A Content  
Analysis, 2002, Larry Litwin, Master of Arts Degree

The major purpose of this study was to identify convention sales marketing and public relations trends by doing a content analysis of the tactics in CVB convention marketing plans. The results showed that familiarization trips are the most obvious trend, web sites are not included as tactics and no methods of feedback or evaluation are identified in four marketing plans.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM, THE REASON FOR THE STUDY AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Every major city has a convention and visitors bureau (CVB) that markets its city to convention and meeting planners. Its goal is to attract conventions, meetings, expositions and tourists to the city, which feeds the city's economy. When creating a public relations and marketing plan to attract convention planners, a CVB must take many aspects of its demographic make-up into consideration. The CVB must completely understand its specialty markets, multi-cultural markets and strengths as a city. It must also know how to market the city to accomplish the CVB's individual mission and goals.

Conventions, meetings and expositions are the 23<sup>rd</sup> largest contributor to the U.S. gross domestic product (Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2002, p. 16). The American Society of Association Executives stated that, "Nationally Americans are forming more than 1,000 new associations each year and locally conventions, meetings and expositions are estimated to contribute more than \$500 million to the local economy" (Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2002, p. 16).

A recent survey by Meeting Professionals International found that overall, CVB usage has increased more than 19 percent (Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2002, p. 16). However, many meeting planners don't understand the value of a CVB (Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2002, p. 16).

## I. THE PROBLEM

Although each CVB's goal is to market its city as a destination for conventions, meetings and tourism, each CVB uses a unique combination of public relations, advertising and publicity strategies. Cities of similar sizes, capabilities and geographical locations are in tight competition with each other. They must create effective public relations and marketing plans that clearly distinguish them from their major competitors.

The importance of the study is to thoroughly compare CVB public relations and marketing plans of cities with similar characteristics to determine the similarities and differences in objectives, strategies and tactics. More specifically, the study will compare the frequency and types of public relations tactics among the marketing plans.

What are the similarities and differences in the objectives, strategies and tactics in public relations and marketing plans of cities similar in size and geographical location?

## II. THE REASONS FOR THE STUDY

The findings could identify convention sales marketing and public relations trends in CVB convention marketing plans. By identifying both the common and the unique public relations elements in marketing plans, CVBs can draw a relationship between public relations tactics and the success of reaching their mission statements in their own marketing plans.



### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A premise of this study is that cities of similar size and geographical location follow public relations and marketing plans with many of the same objectives, strategies and tactics. It was also assumed that along with the common components, the study would find some strategies and tactics unique to one CVB.

### IV. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study began with the broad scope of the 10 largest cities in the U.S. This included Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, Houston and Chicago. However, Danielle Cohn, public relations director at the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, recommended that any differences found in the marketing plans would be more significant if the study included cities of similar size and geographic location. The chosen cities were Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Atlanta. Cohn also suggested narrowing the number of cities in the study from 10 to five.

New York, Houston or Los Angeles are not included because their plans would differ from the selected cities. Most of these differences would be insignificant because of the cities' characteristics.

When Baltimore was asked for its marketing plan, it did not reply after several attempts to make contact with the CVB. Chicago was then included in the study. However, Chicago submitted a summary of its marketing plan, rather than the entire plan.

Rather than considering the cities' entire public relations and marketing plans, the study will focus only on CVB sales and marketing tactics. Also, since many cities have more than one entity working together for the total marketing effect, the study was narrowed to CVB's sales and marketing plans. These entities may include tourism marketing associations and other agencies and associations. Although these organizations contribute to achieving cities' global objectives, they are not competitors.

A last delimitation of this study is that all results are as perceived and interpreted by the researcher.

## V. DEFINITIONS

Public – A group of people with a common interest.

Vertical Market – A market for a product that is used in one (or few) industries.

E-marketing – Marketing through the Internet.

Total Room Nights – The total number of nights a group books in a hotel during its convention, meeting or exposition.

Congresses – Promote a city as a convention destination to specific industries.

Market Segment – A group or sector within a heterogeneous market consisting of consumers or organisations with relatively homogeneous needs and wants; those within a market who will respond to a given set of marketing stimuli in a particular way.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to the Convention Industry Council, the U.S. meetings industry accounts for \$96.4 million in annual business. Approximately 100 million people attend 1.2 million conferences, seminars, corporate meeting trade shows and conventions. Because of the large contribution this industry makes to the U.S. economy, the researcher determined what elements in a convention sales and marketing plan, specifically public relations strategies and tactics, are common and what elements are unique in marketing a city as a convention city.

Preceding the study, the researcher conducted a search for related literature. This formative research includes interviews and an Internet search of web sites, databases, and newspapers. It must be noted that little related literature was available on this topic. Also, some CVBs provided more information than others on their particular industry and product. Although the researcher interned at the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, the researcher was not partial to that CVB in this study. The marketing plan provided the information cited in this section.

The research began with a database search from Rowan University's Campbell Library. The researcher used ABI-Inform, Lexus-Nexus, NJ VALE, ProQuest, Infoseek and Yahoo to find articles on each city as well as the convention industry.

Key terms included: convention industry, meeting planners, convention marketing, Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, Greater Boston Convention &

Visitors Bureau, Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation, Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau.

The researcher also used the CVB's websites and marketing plans to learn more about each city and its local convention industry.

### **The Convention Industry**

With a \$96.4 million meeting industry for 2000, cities and regions are in tight competition. The pressure to create a marketing concept that encompasses all the elements of a city's attractions, quirks and one-of-a-kind offerings grows every year. According to Alastair Morrison, director of the Purdue University Tourism and Hospitality Research Center, the number of U.S. city or regional visitors bureaus has increased from 250 to 1,600 since 1950.

The International Economic Development Council states that, "for any given business relocation or expansion, an estimated 15,000 cities, regions or communities are in contention, and that's only in the U.S." (Gardyn, 2002, p.35).

An effort to attract more associations forces convention and visitors bureaus to step up their marketing campaigns. John Marks, president and CEO, San Francisco CVB says, "Technology has advanced meeting planning at a price that's been both hefty and worth it. To make things easier for our customer base, we've put out costly bells and whistles into our technology. We're trying to drive distribution of information through our Web site, which provides more than 200 pages of information about San Francisco, but some people still want the information on print, and for those, we still print our visitors' guide. Thanks to our investment in technology, though, we've greatly improved

the speed in which we can work with meeting planners” (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65).

The senior vice president of the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association agrees with the benefits of speed and efficiency the Internet offers CVBs. However, he has also found, “We’re still viewed as the experts on our cities, and while you can find a portal that can give you a lot of information on a given destination at something-something-dot-com, there’s still respect for bureaus in general as credible sources. Our clients still seem to prefer to work with people. A portal doesn’t have a name or a culture or a relationship with the customer” (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65).

Deborah Sexton, vice president of the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, predicts that, “the single most influential factor in the meetings industry will probably be the Internet and all of its associated technology” (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65).

Another trend that seems to be catching on is the association-CVB relationship. Reint Reinders, president and CEO of the San Diego CVB, believes, “Associations and CVBs need to collaborate by sharing information about our customers and their behaviors” (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65). The San Diego CVB created a customer advisory board as a channel for two-way communication and collaboration.

Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau vice president of convention sales Tim Hermann believes strongly in the need for open communication between association and CVB. He states, “Large city events run very efficiently when customers understand that a CVB is the destination expert and its mission is to provide clients with the logistical and communication support needed for a successful meeting” (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65).

Reinders points out the possibility of these two trends competing with each other, resulting in the extinction of one. He says, "The threat of becoming irrelevant will make bureaus seek more effective alliances with associations to the betterment of the meetings industry" (Romano & Bennett, 2001, p.65).

### **Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Philadelphia is the fifth-largest city in the U.S. and the second-largest city on the East Coast ([www.pcvb.org](http://www.pcvb.org), 2002). Nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population lives within a four-hour drive of the city. Philadelphia is 100 miles south of New York City, 145 miles north of Washington, D.C., and 55 miles west of the Atlantic Ocean. It is the fourth-largest media market in the U.S.

The PCVB's mission is to market Philadelphia as a convention, meeting and tourist destination to national and international audiences. The Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the welfare of Philadelphia by bringing an increasing number of conventions and leisure travelers to the city. The PCVB was founded in 1941, and incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1942. In 1965, it was pronounced the "Official Tourism Promotion Agency" for the City of Philadelphia. Today the PCVB has 65 employees who sell and service conventions, the travel trade and its membership.

The PCVB's overall objective continues to be to increase visitation, along with its inherent economic benefits, to the entire region.

The PCVB has 231 total meetings and conventions, including 27 city-wide conventions, booked for 2002. This is its biggest convention year ever ([www.pcvb.org](http://www.pcvb.org),

2002). This record year for Philadelphia will generate 750,657 total room nights and \$270.7 million in delegate spending ([www.pcvb.org](http://www.pcvb.org), 2002).

The Multicultural Affairs Congress, a division of the PCVB, integrates the multicultural community into the hospitality industry. Its Board of Directors consists of culturally diverse representatives of Philadelphia's business, government, cultural, hospitality and civic communities ([www.pcvb.org](http://www.pcvb.org), 2002). Multicultural conventions have made up 10 percent of all room nights booked since 1996. Since 1987 the conventions and meetings MAC booked has increased business by about 240 percent and contributed \$5 million in economic impact ([www.pcvb.org](http://www.pcvb.org), 2002).

The Philadelphia Sports Congress has attracted major sporting events and conventions to Philadelphia since 1987. PSC acts as a facilitator and resource to conventions and meeting planners by working with the area's professional teams, universities, facilities and corporate communities. Some of its main events are the ESPN X Games, the NCAA Men's Basketball East Regional, the World Dragon Boat Races, U.S. Gymnastics, the 2000 Women's Final Four and the 2002 MBA All-Star Game.

### **The Washington, DC Tourism and Marketing Corporation**

The Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation is Washington, DC's primary destination marketing organization. WCTC contributes \$10 billion to the local economy each year ([www.washington.org](http://www.washington.org), 2002).

### **Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau**

Chicago hosts 35,000 conventions, trade shows and meetings each year ([www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM](http://www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM), 2002). The more than 4.4 million attendees

spend about \$5.3 billion ([www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM](http://www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM), 2002). Chicago has spent the last few years revising and improving the city so it would become a top convention and tourism destination. The campaign, “Chicago: We’re Glad You’re Here” uses signage and buttons to welcome convention and trade show attendees. Labor rules relaxed, overtime pay improved and plans for a dedicated bus lane between McCormick Place and downtown were announced. The McCormick Place Complex is the largest convention center in North America, with more than 2.2 million square feet of exhibit space.

Other advantages Chicago offers are two major airports, a new 2,500-car enclosed parking garage at McCormick Place, ability to handle conventions, trade shows and meetings of all sizes in various facilities and 78,000 sleeping rooms in the immediate Chicagoland area ([www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM](http://www.chicago.il.org/WHYCHOOSE.HTM), 2002).

### **Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Thirty-six percent of visitors to Boston and Cambridge Hotels are corporate groups. The average daily spending of a delegate is \$342. A delegate’s average length of stay is four days. In 2002 Boston will host 2.79 million convention and meeting visitors (bestcities.net, 2001).

### **Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau**

The Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) supports Atlanta’s \$3.5 billion convention and tourism industry ([www.atlanta.net](http://www.atlanta.net), 2002). One of the top five



meeting destinations in the U.S., the ACVB acts as the liaison between meeting planners, tour operators and individual tourists and the 1,500 ACVB member organizations.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD AND MATERIALS

#### Data Needed

The research defined from what department in a convention and visitors bureau a public relations and marketing plan would be requested. After anticipating what kind of information and materials each department would provide, it was decided that the convention sales department would provide the most useful material.

#### Sources of Data

The study was limited to CVBs in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta.

#### Tools and Techniques

The convention sales offices of the Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta convention and visitors bureaus were called. Sales and marketing plans were requested. Follow-up calls were made two weeks after the original requests.

Philadelphia's plan was used to establish the protocol for a content analysis. As each plan was received, it was compared to the protocol. Each similarity was recorded, as well as any different components.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Direct Customer Sales**

Chicago and Philadelphia included market-based sales deployment and vertical market deployment.

Atlanta, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia indicated that they use familiarization trips.

Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia included in-market sales missions.

Boston and Philadelphia indicated that they use industry-trade show participation.

Philadelphia indicated that it uses a health care committee and a multicultural committee. Boston and Philadelphia indicated that they use a sports committee.

Boston and Washington, D.C. included the Hispanic market as an emerging market. Boston indicated that it identifies the International market as a growing market.

Washington, D.C. uses road shows in New York, Chicago and San Francisco to promote its convention center.

Boston uses joint CVB customer receptions.

Boston and Washington, D.C. use an advisory board targeting convention center groups.

Washington, D.C. indicated that it uses telephone solicitation.

Boston and Washington, D.C. indicated that they use an ongoing direct-mail campaign.

Washington, D.C. included attending two international events.

Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. indicated that they attend meetings and trade shows.

Boston indicated that it makes an effort to book conferences that use at least 1,000 or more sleeping rooms as well as smaller, single hotel conferences.

### **Customer Information Management/Research**

Philadelphia indicated that it uses the Destination 3000 account management system for account management, customer profiles and data warehouse.

Washington, D.C. indicated that it uses an internal database and focus groups consisting of association, corporate and SMERF markets.

Boston and Washington, D.C. indicated they use an external database.

Boston and Washington, D.C. indicated that they partner with local hotels, airlines and CVB membership to identify markets.

Washington, D.C. included the use of market-specific publications.

Washington, D.C. indicated that it uses a Group Rooms Control Report.

Washington, D.C. indicated that it uses C.E.I.R. research.

Boston indicated that it uses comparative research reports such as TIA's Travelscope, Metropoll I-IX and Flaspolder Rose.

### **Customer-Focused Technology**

Philadelphia web-enabled customer feedback for convention center feedback, hotels and destination.

### **Targeted Customer Advertising**

Philadelphia indicated that it uses e-marketing in the form of a targeted quarterly newsletter, segmented by market.

Boston indicated that it uses e-marketing by encouraging the use of meetingpath.com.

Philadelphia indicated that it uses print advertising in major trade show publications.

Boston indicated that it uses event creation.

### **Customer Service**

Chicago and Philadelphia indicated that they use destination management, management of the customer experience, a citywide welcome program and product and services research.

	Atlanta	Boston	Chicago	Philadelphia	Washington, D.C.
<b>Direct Customer Sales</b>					
Market-based sales deployment			X	X	
Vertical market deployment				X	
Familiarization trips	X	X	X	X	
In-market sales missions		X	X	X	
Industry trade show participation		X		X	
Committees					
Health Care				X	
Sports		X		X	
Multicultural				X	
Emerging Markets					
Hispanic		X			
Growing Markets					
International		X			
Road shows promoting convention center					
New York					X
Chicago					X
San Francisco					X
Joint CVB customer receptions		X			
Advisory Board targeting convention center groups		X			X
Telephone solicitation					X
Ongoing direct mail campaign		X			X
Attend two international events					X
Meetings and trade shows		X		X	X
Effort to book conferences that use at least 1,000 sleeping rooms		X			
Effort to book smaller single hotel conferences		X			
<b>Customer Information Management/Research</b>					
Destination 3000 account management system				X	
Account management				X	
Customer profiles				X	
Data warehouse				X	
Internal database					X
External database		X			X
Focus groups of association, corporate and SMERF markets					X

	Atlanta	Boston	Chicago	Philadelphia	Washington, D.C.
Partner with local hotels, airlines and CVB membership to identify markets		X			X
Market-specific publications for identification					X
Group Rooms Control report					X
C.E.I.R. research					X
Partner with hotels, airlines and CVB members to target international meeting planners		X			
Comparative research reports (ex. TIA's Travelscope, Metropoll I-IX, Flaspolder Rose)		X			
<b>Customer-Focused Technology</b>					
Web-enabled customer feedback				X	
Convention center experience				X	
Hotels				X	
Destination				X	
<b>Targeted Customer Advertising</b>					
E-marketing				X	
Encourage use of meetingpath.com		X			
Targeted quarterly newsletter, segmented by market				X	
Print advertising in major trade show publications				X	
Event creation		X			
<b>Customer Service</b>					
Destination management			X	X	
Management of the customer experience			X	X	
Citywide welcome program			X	X	
Product and services research			X	X	

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

The researcher evaluated five convention marketing plans from convention and visitors bureaus. Chicago, however, agreed only to contribute a brief summary of its plan. One tactic was identified by four marketing plans- familiarization trips. Two tactics were identified in three or more of the marketing plans. These tactics include in-market sales missions and attending meetings and trade shows.

Several tactics were identified in two of the marketing plans. These tactics include market-based sales deployment, industry trade show participation, designating sports and Hispanic committees, forming advisory boards, using an ongoing direct mail campaign, using an external database, implementing destination management, customer experience management, a citywide welcome program and products and services research.

Tactics identified in only one of the marketing plans include vertical market deployment, designating an international committee, promoting at road shows in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, holding joint CVB customer receptions, soliciting by telephone, attending two international events, making an effort to book conferences that use at least 1,000 sleeping rooms, making an effort to book smaller, single hotel conferences, using Destination 3000 account management system, using an internal database, using focus groups consisting of corporate and SMERF markets, using market-specific publications for market identification, using a Group Rooms Control report, using C.E.I.R. research, partnering with local hotels, airlines and CVB membership to identify markets, using comparative research reports, using web-enabled customer



feedback about hotels, convention center experience and destination, E-marketing including meetingpath.com and targeted quarterly newsletters segmented by market, placing print advertising in major trade show publications and using event creation.

What does this study tell us about the contents in a convention and visitors bureau in the eastern region of the U.S.? First, either CVBs do not include their Internet sites in their marketing plans, or they do not consider them as a marketing or public relations tool. All five of these CVB web sites allow the viewer to access information and inquire about booking conventions. Although convention sales representatives do much of the selling face to face, web sites offer very specific and persuasive material to association members who seek to book a convention, meeting, exposition or trade show.

Second, only two marketing plans identified committees for growing and emerging markets. CVBs probably use general tactics for these market segments; however, it is possible that such new market segments need designated committees.

Additionally, only the Philadelphia CVB identified a method for two-way communication. Its marketing plan included web-enabled customer feedback. Most CVBs concentrated their attention on communicating to its markets, but only Philadelphia included a method for feedback that could be used for evaluation. All other marketing plans used the previous year's sales as a benchmark for the following year's evaluation and predictions.

Since four CVBs identified familiarization trips in their marketing plans, the researcher concludes that convention sales rely primarily on face-to-face communication. Public relations text books cite this as the most effective form of communication.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has several suggestions for other studies related to this subject based on the conclusions of this study:

1. Gathering only complete marketing plans from selected CVBs. The researcher was only able to obtain complete marketing plans from three CVBs. A convention sales representative for the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau reported that the Atlanta CVB does not produce a written marketing plan. She cited guidelines and a few specific tactics that sales representatives use. The researcher interpreted this information into marketing plan tactics. The Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau agreed to contribute a summary of its marketing plan that outlines strategies and tactics it uses. The researcher also interpreted this summary into marketing plan tactics. However, the researcher didn't know if the summary excluded additional tactics.
2. Comparing marketing plan components to tactics that the CVB actually does. This would be a different kind of study than the researcher did in this study, but CVBs may use tactics that were not included in their marketing plans. The problem that presents is that another CVB's marketing plan may include that tactic, and it would be concluded that the first CVB doesn't use this tactic in its convention marketing efforts.

3. Conducting a post-September 11 study. Because of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorism attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., many CVBs may have altered their marketing plans. Immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, industry analysts predicted that conventions and tourism would decrease. Indeed, several associations canceled or rescheduled their conventions, meetings, expositions.
4. Sending content analysis of each marketing plan to its respective CVB for approval of thoroughness. The researcher used her own interpretations of the marketing plan components. The study could have been more accurate if a convention sales representative reviewed the content analysis done by the researcher. Tactics that the researcher overlooked could be included in the content analysis to make the study more accurate.
5. Conducting a follow-up study to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing plan in reaching the convention sales mission of the CVB. The researcher didn't follow up with the CVBs in this study to evaluate which tactics were most effective and least effective. The researcher also couldn't determine which of the CVBs reached their convention sales mission from use of its public relations and marketing plan.

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