

Travel and Tourism Research Association

Strategic Plan

For the Years 2010 – 2014

Approved June 13, 2009

TTRA Strategy 2009-2013

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Executive Summary

TTRA since its formation has a strong membership base within the four main constituencies of the profession, namely: academics; practitioners; research vendors and users of research. Membership levels have been reasonably stable in recent years, while the balance between the professional categories has varied in composition over time. While financially more secure than 10 years ago, the business model is not sufficiently robust to ensure sustainability as demonstrated by recent variable year on year performance. In addition the organization faces particular short to medium term challenges as a result of the current global economic environment.

The Vision

TTRA to be a leading organization supporting the global community of practitioners, educators and users of research engaged in transforming, sharing and applying tourism research knowledge and practice worldwide.

Strategic Objectives

In order to achieve this vision, the following strategic objectives must be achieved.

- Remain relevant to each membership segment
- Increase membership, especially internationally
- Improve the range of value added services to members
- Develop the appropriate educational programmes to support the ongoing development of the profession
- Ensure financial sustainability and continue to develop organisational structures, processes and support resources
- Heighten TTRA's public image and reputation.

Main Implications

To achieve these objectives, TTRA's structures need to be strengthened and resourced appropriately.

In addition, leveraging the talent in the membership of TTRA in the implementation of the strategic objectives will be necessary.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Travel & Tourism Research Association (TTRA), formed in 1970, is an association of tourism research and marketing professionals with over 650 members worldwide. Membership falls into four categories: academics/educationalists; practitioners; research providers/consultants and users of research.

The purpose of this document is to update the previous strategic plan 2004-2008 and to provide strategic guidelines for the advancement of TTRA over the coming 5 years.

1.2 Terms of reference

The Board of TTRA discussed the continued strategic development of the organisation at its fall 2007 meeting and commissioned a small committee to develop a draft strategy following a review and consultative process. The process included discussion at Executive and Board meetings in 2008 and 2009.

1.3 Acknowledgements

The committee tasked with the review included:

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2. CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

2.1 The External Environment

The International Travel Market

The past number of decades has seen continued growth in demand for travel worldwide, while the patterns of travel flow, the demographics of travellers and the range of travel experiences on offer evolved with some noticeable shifts in source markets and destinations.

International tourism demand has changed substantially over the past decade. Several factors have been influencing demand:

- ❑ increasing prosperity;
- ❑ changing demographics and lifestyle patterns;
- ❑ lower real term travel costs;
- ❑ the emergence of experience-based travel; and
- ❑ Increasingly accessible travel information and web-based booking mechanisms.

However, the current global economic recession, volatile oil prices, and concerns about the environmental impact of travel and tourism, combine to create an unprecedented complex threat to the pace and shape of future tourism.

The critical unknown at this time is the depth and duration of the current recession. It would appear that patterns of demand will be altered substantially with significant contraction of travel, at least in the short term, together with shifts in the relative importance of source markets and destinations around the world and within market segments.

While other external factors such as the threat of terrorism, wars, political instability, oil prices, environment and health considerations, will continue to impact demand, a restructured global economy and financial services industry will be the key determinant of travel demand and flows.

The demand and supply shocks being experienced throughout the global travel and tourism industry has particular implications for TTRA, at least in the short to medium term. The potential and actual membership market is experiencing downside impacts including attendance at meetings and conferences. Both of these impacts have implications for the membership and financial health of associations such as TTRA.

The Travel Industry

In recent years, the industry has changed and evolved rapidly. The current global recession can be expected to see many of the traditional business models for operators within the sector change significantly driven by changing demand patterns, economies and the application of new technologies impacting communication and distribution channels. The emergence of virtual or on-line distributors has resulted in a reduction in other intermediaries.

Consolidation is one of the most marked changes in recent times with mergers and acquisitions in several sectors including airlines, hotels, cruise lines, tour operators, and virtual travel agencies.

Growing need for research and analysis

The changing demand and travel flow patterns together with the series of external shocks impacting business performance has created a growing need for timely, quality research to inform business decisions.

Destinations are also increasing seeking performance data and analysis as both public and private sources of funds demand greater accountability, performance measurement of effectiveness and justification of marketing programmes.

The challenges of the new order of changing consumer power using new distribution channels also creates a significant demand for behavioural and impact research.

Industry Personnel

The changing travel and hospitality industry is also demonstrating new requirements for personnel education and development.

Personnel within the industry are now drawn from a wider background than the traditional travel and hospitality formation as other disciplines are recruited to match the changed business environment.

Conclusion

In summary, while the nature and structure of international tourism is undergoing fundamental change, the future prospects for the industry are very positive. International tourism and business organisations all a resumption of growth in demand for leisure and business travel, although the rate of growth and travel patterns will vary by region and over time.

The potential for TTRA also expands with opportunities to attract membership from a wider geographical area and from a broader range of disciplines and job functions.

2.2 Assessment of TTRA's strengths and weaknesses

The Membership

TTRA is emerging from a membership consolidation phase with improved income from membership dues based on recalibration of membership categories and improving retention rates. However, the overall trend has not been one of growth in membership.

The organisation has undoubtedly a dedicated core membership with high penetration levels in selected sectors, including academics, state and city tourism organisations. Penetration level within the private business sector is not correspondingly high other than amongst the key research vendors catering to the state and city tourism marketing community.

The international membership while consisting of a loyal following spread around the globe, particularly in Europe and Australia has not shown growth in recent years. TTRA has to date failed to achieve any significant penetration in major sources of global travel, including Asia/Pacific region and the Hispanic world.

While growth potential continues to exist within North America the greater opportunity would appear to exist outside of the continent, provided TTRA can offer a value for money differentiated 'product' together with the appropriate organisational and administrative support systems. The credibility of TTRA as an 'international' organisation rests on its success in being relevant to a global membership.

TTRA's longer term sustainability will depend on achieving an optimum mix of member profiles based on professional category, age, career stage and nationality.

Benefits of TTRA Membership

Networking is consistently rated the top benefit from membership, with the annual conference a prized benefit for attendees. However, on average less than one in four effectively avail of this opportunity on an annual basis by attending the annual conference. Chapter and regional conferences together with online and other channels of communication broaden the scope of the networking opportunities.

Recent research indicates that perception of the value of the benefits vary by membership category, occupation, career point and research training, with a clear dichotomy between academics and practitioners. The former rate TTRA as an important facilitator of scholarly networks, together with providing opportunities for recognition and publication. Practitioners value the output of networking provided by TTRA as an opportunity for business exposure and profiling with the potential to generate commercial relationships.

TTRA is also valued as playing a significant role in capacity-building of a community of tourism researchers.

Membership Challenges

TTRA faces three specific challenges in respect of its membership if it is to sustain its vision as a truly global professional body:

- Expansion – the ability to attract new members, particularly from areas of the world where penetration is currently weak
- Retention – the continuing ability to retain membership by remaining relevant to the needs of the various segments of the profession
- Engagement – the need to broaden the opportunities for membership engagement within the context of globalization, changing business environment, professional aspiration of members and competing professional organizations.

Recent Developments

TTRA has in recent years has made significant progress in adopting on-line technology for regular communications and networking together with on-line sales opportunities.

Recent developments have also improved the efficiency of the organisation as well as providing more user-convenient interface for administrative functions, including membership subscriptions, conference registrations, and balloting.

Most recently the organisation has carried out a major review of its corporate governance policies.

Funding Model

The current funding model, largely dependent on the yield from the annual conference, which in turn is largely determined by sponsorship income, has proven to be fragile and insecure. This has led to considerable year-on-year performances irrespective of membership levels or conference attendances.

Furthermore, recent trends in sponsorship would suggest that a continued reliance on once-off annual event sponsorship is fundamentally flawed.

A more robust and secure funding model is required to put the funding of organisation on a more secure and predicible footing.

Administration & Servicing

The current resources of TTRA are limited – largely a function of limited financial resources and partly determined by an established modus operandi. A particular challenge for TTRA is one of efficiencies of scale.

The introduction of new information technologies can be expect to yield administrative efficiencies and allow for the re-direction of resources to delivering improved membership services.

Conclusion

TTRA can continue to expand to serve by a large and growing membership around the world provided it can deliver a unique and highly valued set of opportunities and services.

In addition to an expanded membership, sustainability will depend on a stable and securely funded organisation with the necessary management and service delivery mechanisms.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
The current base of 650+ members is the largest current cohort of travel research professionals	Profile of TTRA is weak outside North America
Strong sub groups exist within TTRA notably academics and state/city tourism organisations	Opportunities for engagement varies across sectors and geographic regions
Recent advances in administrative procedures and yield from membership dues	Fragile financial structure and minimal resources
Goodwill exists internally within the membership	TTRA has low penetration amongst the practitioner community advising the travel and tourism industries worldwide
There is a wealth of experienced members from within TTRA, supported by an ambitious leadership group	Weak segmentation of engagement opportunities, benefits and communications
Networking is top rated benefit for majority of members	Traditional organisational structure and programs may not necessarily be most appropriate for expanded market opportunities

3. VISION & MISSION

3.1 Vision

TTRA to be a leading organization supporting the global community of practitioners, educators and users of research engaged in transforming, sharing and applying tourism research knowledge and practice worldwide.

3.2 Mission:

- act as a leading professional organization of providers and users of travel & tourism research
- Serve as a primary resource to the industry.
- advocate standards for research and analysis,
- promote training & education of professionals, and
- Promote quality travel and tourism research and marketing information.
- TTRA goal is to be member centric

3.3 The Way Forward

In order to achieve this strategic vision, the following strategic objectives must be achieved.

- Remain relevant to each membership segment
- Increase membership, especially internationally
- Improve the range of value added services to members
- Develop the appropriate educational programmes to support the ongoing development of the profession
- Ensure financial sustainability and continue to develop organisational structures, processes and support resources
- Heighten TTRA's public image and reputation.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2009-2013

The strategic objectives and the supporting actions proposed are as follows:

Strategic objective 1 – Increase membership, especially internationally

1.1 – Ensure optimum retention levels amongst membership

1.2 – Expand membership in a number of key sectors, including new information technology and management consultant professionals.

1.3 – A structured pro-active recruitment campaign for new members in selected geographic areas outside North America

1.4 – Continuously monitor member and non-member perceptions of TTRA, its image, benefits and value for money.

1.5 – Further explore partnership / joint membership arrangements with other non-conflicting professional organisations serving similar constituencies.

Strategic objective 2 – Improve the range of value added services to members

2.1 – Review and enhance the current benefit packages for each membership category.

2.2 – Where necessary develop benefit packages for sub-groups, including international members dispersed around the globe.

2.3- Monitor membership satisfaction levels on ongoing basis

Strategic objective 3 – Develop the appropriate educational programmes to support the ongoing development of the profession

3.1 – Promote formal educational qualifications in conjunction with recognised bodies

3.2 – Deliver Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes and workshops to meet the needs of members

Strategic objective 4 – Ensure financial sustainability and continue to develop organizational structures, processes and support resources

- 4.1 *Re-engineer the funding model to lessen exposure to annual conference and sponsorship income by creating new secure income streams.*
- 4.2 *Re-examine the role, functions, composition and size of the Board, including the Executive Board, to ensure compliance with best governance practice and appropriate representation of various constituencies.*
- 4.3 *Upgrade the management and administrative support structures and functions to facilitate a wider membership base.*
- 4.4 *Explore ways to support and strengthen Chapters in addressing local membership's needs.*
- 4.5 *Review the appropriateness of Chapter structures to cater for a widening geographical membership base*

Strategic objective 5 – Heighten TTRA's public image and reputation

- 5.1 *Improve TTRA's media profile (domestic and international)*
- 5.2 *Develop 'branded TTRA product(s)' to heighten awareness and establish platform of professional respect.*
- 5.3 *Exploit speaker platform opportunities to publicize TTRA role and its member's contribution to travel and tourism research.*

Recognizing the limited financial and other resources available to TTRA, a prioritized schedule based on a particular focus for each of the next 5 years is proposed overleaf.

5. CONCLUSIONS

TTRA has significant potential for growth.

Growth will require a broader membership base together with the acquisition and utilization of resources, both financial and human, to better match the association's needs to exploit future potential.

A professional organisation is only as strong as its membership and particularly the activity-levels of its membership. TTRA needs to maintain and enhance its member centric philosophy including improving contemporary member benefits and engagement opportunities.