United we stand, divided we fall: Strategies for engaging customers in Corporate Responsibility Programs

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Key words: Corporate responsibility, guest/customer compliance, interpretation, social and sustainability marketing

Many tourism corporate responsibility programs require the support and/or compliance of guests or customers, yet little attention has been paid to the design of strategies to encourage this compliance. Research in the areas of tourist interpretation, social marketing and sustainability marketing has all addressed aspects of this issue across a range of situations. A review of this literature is used to generate principles for the design and implementation of effective strategies to support customer compliance with CR programs in tourism businesses. Implementation of these principles is demonstrated through two contrasting holiday scenarios. Suggestions for extending CR strategies beyond the immediate confines and concerns of individual tourism businesses are also presented.

Scenario One: The Rossi Family Takes a Holiday

The Rossi family has scoured the internet for weeks, and has finally booked a family room at a Pacific island resort that has its own access to the beach and a kids club. After a long flight, they are delighted to find the hotel bus waiting for them at the airport. Even better, there are no other passengers so the family can spread out. The kids are soon asleep, but Mr. and Mrs. Rossi admire the local scenery and point out people working in the fields.

They ask the bus driver about the local economy and way of life but as he hasn’t been there very long, he can’t really answer their questions.

When they arrive at the resort Mrs. Rossi comments on the beautiful fountains and lush gardens - this as an oasis compared to the dusty streets outside and she makes a mental note not to venture outside the resort gates. On the reception counter, the Rossis notice a sign saying the resort supports the local communities by holding nightly performances of traditional dances in the lobby. The receptionist notices their interest and tells them the resort is designed in traditional style and even has a shop that sells local artefacts.

The Rossis sigh in contentment as they settle into their room – the air-conditioning is icy cold and the TV is playing a welcome video about the resort. Mrs. Rossi fills up the spa bath and notices that Antonella has already taken all the little bottles of toiletries for her collection – never mind, house-keeping will replenish them all tomorrow. She digs in her suitcase for her favorite spa salts and gets in, regularly topping up the water when it goes cool. The kids and Mr. Rossi have a quick shower in the other bathroom, leaving the towels in a soggy heap on the floor like they do at home. Mrs. Rossi asks them to hang them up for
re-use but Mr. Rossi scoffs and says it doesn’t matter; the staff will just give them new ones anyway. He tells her to stop fussing – they’re on holiday!

The Rossis are thrilled to find that dinner is a seafood buffet. Mr. Rossi piles his plate high – this stuff costs a fortune at home so he’s going to get his money’s worth! Mrs. Rossi looks at his plate and sighs – she knows he’ll never manage to eat it all. She wonders what the local people eat apart from seafood, how they catch it and whether there are any local legends about sea creatures. She’d ask the staff but the only one who seems to be a local resident is the gardener, and he was always busy mowing the grass and hosing down the paths.

The story of the Rossi family is a fictional one meant to highlight typical activities and decisions made by many tourists whilst on holiday. It includes a number of issues that many tourism businesses seek to address when developing and implementing corporate responsibility (CR) programs and strategies. While these scenarios use a resort setting, the guiding principles are broad enough to apply to a range of tourism businesses including accommodation, food and beverage, transport operators and commercial attractions such as theme parks.

Introduction

The contribution of human actions to rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity and destruction of natural habitats is well documented by scientists and popular media. Impacts on cultural traditions, community lifestyles and social wellbeing have also been highlighted. It seems logical to presume that the resultant widespread public awareness of these issues would lead people to adopt environmentally and socially responsible behaviors, yet research across a range of areas shows this is often not the case. This phenomenon is variously called the awareness-behavior, attitude-behavior or intention-behavior gap (Moraes, Carrigan & Szmigin, 2012) and has been described in the areas of health (Hansen, Skov & Skov, 2016); sustainability action in general (Steg & Vlek, 2009); and ethical or responsible consumption in general (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014; Moraes et al., 2012; Moscardo, 2013). In a tourism context this same gap has been identified in general tourism (Juwan & Dolnicar, 2014), in transport decisions (Antimova, Nawijn & Peeters, 2012; Mair, 2011; Gossling, Scott, Hall, Ceron & Dubois, 2012); in accommodation (Rahman, Park & Chi, 2015); and in ecotourism (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011; Hughes, 2013). While common, it is important to note that this awareness/intention–action is not universal - studies do report a proportion of people whose actions are consistent with their stated values, attitudes and intentions (cf. Baker, Weaver & Davis, 2014; Chen, 2015; Lee & Moscardo, 2005; Radwan, Jones & Minoli, 2012). There is, however, a clear need to develop effective management strategies that go beyond simply informing tourists of CR programs to encourage and support higher levels of tourist engagement with CR programs.

A steadily increasing number of tourism businesses are implementing policies to reduce energy and water consumption; decrease their reliance on non-durable goods; and limit emissions that negatively impact on air, water and soil quality (Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009).
Common practices include installation of energy-efficient lighting and equipment; keycards to operate lights and air conditioning; water efficient fittings; towel reuse programs; waste sorting; and using sustainable sources of energy (Bohdanowicz, Zientara & Novotna, 2011; Bruns-Smith, Choy, Chong & Verma, 2015). In addition to environmental responsibility, many businesses also consider their social and cultural responsibilities, developing CR programs around staff employment and support programs, use of local goods and services, and support for local or other community initiatives and causes (Bruns-Smith et al., 2015; Kucukusta, Mak & Chen, 2013). Implementation of these initiatives and campaigns is often accompanied by programs that engage, train and manage staff (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011).

Guests and customers, however, are rarely directly targeted in the design and development of CR programs (Baker et al., 2014; Coles, Fendlova & Dinan, 2013; Kucukusta et al, 2013). This is problematic, as customer compliance is likely to play an important role in determining the success of CR programs. As noted at Cornell’s Roundtable on Sustainability, education of both employees and customers is central to the successful implementation of ‘green’ programs (Cornell University, 2010). The reluctance to directly engage with tourists in CR processes results from several pressures. Firstly, many businesses focus on ensuring that the programs fit into the larger business system, especially with staff and suppliers (Esty & Winston, 2009; Wood, 2010). Secondly, there may be a tendency for tourism managers to see communication with tourists as part of the traditional marketing function and thus not part of CR. Thirdly, and arguably the most commonly reported factor, is a concern that tourists might see the quality of their experiences and services as being compromised by CR activities (Kang, Stein, Heo & Lee, 2012; Levy & Park, 2011; Radwan et al., 2012).

There is evidence that many customers are skeptical of claims made by businesses about their CR programs (Baker et al., 2014; Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2015; Elving, 2013; Jeong, Jang, Day & Ha, 2014; Rahman et al., 2015). This can lead to claims of greenwashing, making businesses reluctant to discuss their activities too publicly in case they are criticized for what they do not do (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015). Esty and Winston refer to this as the problem of “perfect being the enemy of good” (2009, p. 250). There is also some evidence that consumers do not associate environmentally responsible options with luxury (Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010). A recent study by Miao and Wei (2013), for example, found that in hotel settings, hedonic motives (those related to receiving direct pleasure, excitement and comfort) were the strongest predictor of environmental behavior. Guests were unlikely to engage in behaviors that were perceived to require effort, take time, or detract from their comfort and enjoyment. Studies also show that tourists deliberately seek relief from a variety of responsibilities while on holiday and so may want to avoid CR programs altogether (Barr & Prillwitz, 2012; Cohen, Higham & Reis, 2013).

On the flip-side, there are reports that consumers can hold positive attitudes towards CR programs (Bruns-Smith et al., 2015; Chen, 2015; Jeong et al, 2014; Prud’homme & Raymond, 2013) and that CR programs can contribute to guest satisfaction (Cha et al., 2015; Bloise, Mack & Pitts, 2015). Some studies also report that guests do not see CR action as onerous or detracting from their holiday experience (Radwan et al., 2012; Chen, 2015; Han, Hsu, Lee &
Sheu, 2011). It is clear from these conflicting findings that guest compliance is a complex issue, one that is likely to be context specific and influenced by situational factors such as information, support, and access to facilities that enable the required action. For tourism managers the question is: what specific information and support is needed to encourage guests and customers to adopt actions that comply with their CR initiatives?

This question is not unique to tourism - considerable research and evidence has already been collected in other areas. A recurring criticism of tourism research and practice is the tendency for researchers and managers in tourism to ignore ideas, information and strategies from other disciplines (Bramwell & Lane, 2012; Moscardo, 2014a). This tourism-centricism means that tourism practice often lags behind other sectors (Moscardo, 2015a) and that there is unnecessary reinvention of research and explanation. The aim of this paper is to review what is already known about consumer CR compliance and effective customer communication and use this to develop a set of guidelines, recommendations or principles for the design of more effective CR customer compliance support programs in tourism. This latter objective is both consistent with the goals of BEST EN and suggestions for improving management practice in CR (Jameson & Brownell, 2012; McDonald, 2014).

**Developing Principles from Research and Theory to Support Sustainability Action**

Research into responsible and ethical consumer behavior has been conducted across a wide range of areas including public education around pro-social and pro-environmental actions (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin & Schroeder, 2005), now sometimes referred to as social marketing (Lefebvre, 2013); cause related marketing (Adkins, 2003); ethical consumption (Newholm & Shaw, 2007); the emerging area of sustainability marketing (Belz & Peattie, 2009); and, within tourism, the area of interpretation (Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008). The present paper examined major reviews and books, and relevant research studies published in the last five years to identify consistent themes about the factors that contribute to effective customer engagement in CR programs. Three areas were found to be particularly useful and complementary – interpretation research, social marketing and sustainability marketing.

Research into tourist interpretation has been predominantly conducted in the less commercial areas of tourism including protected natural environments such as national parks, cultural heritage settings such as historic precincts and museums (Moscardo, 2015b). In these settings information and informal education about environmental and sociocultural issues is often expected and sought by tourists (Falk, Ballantyne, Packer & Benckendorff, 2012). Given that visitors to these sites are usually seeking a positive leisure experience, there is a general consensus that persuasion is a better option for tourist management than coercion (Mason, 2005). Research in this area provides valuable insights into attracting visitors’ attention, increasing awareness and understanding of sustainability issues, and encouraging visitors to change the way they think about their actions (Hughes, 2013; Hughes, Packer & Ballantyne, 2011; Powell & Ham, 2008). There has, however, been criticism that this research tends to focus on behavioral intentions rather than actual behavior, that it ignores barriers between intention and action, and that it assumes it is
possible and desirable to make people pay focused attention to all their actions in tourist setting (see Moscardo, 2014b and Hughes et al., 2011 for reviews).

Research in social marketing and public education around various pro-environmental, public health and pro-social behaviors takes a wider view than interpretation research and has focused on the barriers between intention to engage in desired behavior and actually doing so (Glasman, 2006; Leiserowitz, Kates & Parris, 2006; Peattie, 2010; Steg & Vlek, 2009). While this area offers valuable insights into bridging the gap between intention and action, it is usually conducted in situations where governments have considerable control over the setting and conditions, as well as the power to coerce people into action using fines and penalties. Such options are not usually appropriate for tourism settings where the tourists or guests are a) at leisure and not likely to respond positively to coercion and b) have the ability to choose another service provider or destination that does not apply penalties or restrictions. The emerging area of sustainability marketing recognizes the commercial and competitive dimensions of customer management that are not typically considered in the areas of interpretation or social marketing. Taken together these three areas can be used to develop principles to guide the design and implementation of effective tourist CR compliance strategies.

There is considerable agreement across the range of research areas about the elements required in any strategy linked to sustainable or responsible action. The relevant research and theory can be summarized into six main steps necessary to support tourist, guest or customer engagement with CR initiatives (see Figure 1). These steps are also consistent with the main components of the most commonly used theories in social marketing and interpretation: the Theory of Planned Behavior, Norm Activation Theory and Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Lufts & Hahn, 2014). The factors listed in Figure 1 also include variables identified in studies of responsible tourist behavior (Antimova et al., 2012; Barr, Gilg & Shaw, 2011; Blose et al., 2015; Han et al., 2011; Juvan & Dolsinar, 2014; Mair, 2011; Miller, Rathouse, Scarles, Holmes & Tribe, 2010; Rahman et al., 2015).
Using research findings and guided by the steps outlined in Figure 1, a set of principles to support tourist compliance with CR programs is presented in Table 1. These principles are discussed in more detail in the following sections before being incorporated into a second version of the Rossi family holiday scenario.
Table 1: Principles for Effective Tourist Compliance Strategies

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Create consistency across the whole business

An ongoing challenge for improving the sustainability of businesses is the integration of sustainability principles and ideas of corporate responsibility across the entire business structure and culture (Baumgartner, 2014; Esty & Winston, 2009). Many businesses begin shifting towards greater corporate responsibility by developing sustainability and/or corporate responsibility as a separate function or department, rather than as an element or goal to be embedded across all aspects of the business. This makes it difficult to have consistency in action and messages (Benn, Dunphy & Griffiths, 2014). Inconsistent actions across a business can prompt customers to be skeptical about the extent to which the business is serious about its responsibilities. This has been found to be a major barrier to customer willingness to support CR programs (Baker et al., 2014; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010). To illustrate, resort guests will be less likely to comply with requests to limit their personal water use and use recycling systems for waste if they see that the business has inefficient garden watering systems and staff are not separating waste for recycling.
Customers need to observe and believe that the whole business is committed to CR programs if they are to develop the trust necessary to alter their own actions (James, 2010). Seeing staff engaging in CR programs also provides modelling of the desired behaviors (Antimova et al., 2012; James, 2010) which acts as both source of social support for customer action and a reminder to customers that the CR programs exist (Lulfs & Hahn, 2014).

Use appropriate themes to connect elements

The idea of having consistency across all elements of a business can also be extended to the idea of consistency between the business and the focus of its CR efforts. The concept of fit from cause-related marketing is an important one here (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015). Fit can be defined as the relevance and clarity of the relationship between the elements of the business and focus of its CR programs (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Cha et al., 2015). CR programs need to be about issues and actions that are linked to each other across all aspects of the business. It is important that these links are logical because research suggests that the closer and clearer the fit, the more likely customers are to support the CR programs (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015; Elving, 2013). Furthermore, CR programs that focus on local issues (Blose et al., 2015), address immediate or current problems (Russell & Russell, 2010), and demonstrate a proactive rather than reactive stance (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) are more likely to be supported by customers. It would be difficult, for example, for an ultra-modern inner city North American hotel with marble floors and polished concrete walls to generate support for a rainforest orangutan conservation project in Indonesia because there are no obvious connections between the hotel’s design, its raison d’être and the cause it supports.

The idea of fit is similar to the concept of themes in tourist interpretation. Themes allows customers to link the different elements together. Effective themes are specific, stimulate interest and enable customers to make connections between the issue and the desired response. Basically, themes provide the “big picture” by helping consumers understand and connect the different elements (Ham, 2013). As an example, CR programs supporting the education of females in a community to enhance their employment prospects might provide customers with the opportunity to donate goods such as paper, pens and books; participate in activities at the local school; assist with childcare for younger siblings; provide donations for girls’ uniforms; buy a bicycle for the teacher; give unwanted books and other resources to the school library; and/or supply groceries for school lunches. These actions all logically fit the theme, encouraging customers to be supportive.

Understand and connect to customers

Research consistently shows that individuals assimilate new information by relating it to something they already know (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Customers bring with them a wealth of pre-existing knowledge, experiences, expectations and preferences that CR programs need to take into account – what do customers already know, what are they expecting, what are they interested in or what do they care about, and how can we influence them to
change their behavior? A core process in social marketing is to identify and profile market segments before developing communication campaigns (Steg & Vlek, 2009). This information is fundamental to building personal connections and designing messages and campaigns that have meaning and personal value to customers (Ham, 2013; James, 2010). If a business has many different types of customers, Jameson and Brownell (2010) suggest the use of multiple techniques and different media to allow for a variety of connections with different people.

To illustrate, if your business is supporting the Bayaka tribe in Central African Republic and your customers don’t know anything about African tribes, the environmental threats facing these communities, and/or the erosion of tribal culture due to logging and conservation programs, they are unlikely to be moved by a simple request to make a donation. To be effective, your CR program would need to incorporate techniques to emotionally and cognitively connect customers with the issue or cause your business is supporting. This could include providing customers with examples of customs and traditions that are being eroded; telling stories about the Bayaka tribe – family structure, diet, lifestyle – through the eyes of particular characters in the tribe; providing opportunities for customers to ask questions; and designing activities and discussion points that encourage them to reflect on their own views, opinions and personal experiences.

Attract and engage customers

Because humans as a species instinctively pay attention to differences and changes in their environment, using questions, surprise, intriguing visual images and emotion can all help to attract customer attention (James, 2010). Similarly, people tend to mentally “switch off” in tourist and holiday settings that have repetitious signs, exhibits and/or information. This is worrying because if customers are not paying attention, it is impossible to effectively communicate with them. It seems logical to assume that programs that incorporate different media, messages and/or actions that are novel or interesting are more likely to capture attention than run-of-the-mill programs. Multi-sensory experiences (smell, taste, touch, listen) are also particularly effective in this regard.

Organisations need to be creative and design engaging programs that customers want to support. For example, if your business is supporting native honey bees, you might plant flower beds in your driveway, run nature photography competitions and treasure hunts based on flowers, offer sustainable gardening demonstrations and events, run colouring-in competitions, install rooftop hives that supply your onsite restaurant, offer cooking lessons using local honey, and have a chart showing how much honey the onsite hives produced per month. These multi-sensory activities support the CR program by providing added value and an element of fun that is likely to spark interest and engagement.

Stories are another effective way to engage with customers and guests (Moscardo, 2010; Jameson & Brownell, 2012). Stories are universally accepted learning mediums that enable organisations to describe the issue being addressed, why it matters, and the positive outcomes of particular actions. Research shows that stories combined with promotion of
the organisations’ CR programs through websites, signs and brochures is likely to be more effective in attracting guests’ attention, interest and support than lists of facts or scientific descriptions (James, 2010). Organisations can also encourage guests to upload stories about their participation to social media networks, creating a resource that can be used to further extend awareness and support (Jameson & Brownell, 2012).

Carefully structure CR communication

Research in sustainable tourism (cf., Miller et al., 2010) and social marketing (cf. Belz & Peattie, 2009; Lulfs & Hahn, 2014) indicates that while tourists and consumers may be very aware of various environmental and social issues, they may be confused about the contributing factors and how to address these issues. Messages and communication about CR programs need to be organised in a way that is easy to access and follow. This should include information about the issue, its severity, and contributing factors (Baker et al., 2013). Research also highlights the importance of emphasizing the personal responsibility of consumers and the difference their actions will make (Antimova et al., 2012; Baker et al., 2013). Guests are unlikely to donate to a cause or participate in environmental/social initiatives and programs unless they have received some information about the issues in question, the reasons for the initiative, and the expected local and/or ‘big picture’ impact of their participation. For example, guests may be willing to support a hotel CR program in principle, but not believe that actions such as turning off their air-conditioning or having shorter showers will have any impact (Lee & Moscardo, 2004). Without specific explanation, they may struggle to see the link between their individual behavior and broader conservation goals and may consequently choose not to participate (Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes & Dierking, 2007).

The framing of instructions is also important. Available evidence supports using positive messages that highlight both the benefits for others if the customer participates and personal losses if they don’t. Incorporating information that suggests the action is socially desirable is also effective (Blose et al., 2015; James, 2010). Examples include “join 75% of our guests” and “don’t miss this opportunity to help.” Any stories and information about the ‘who, what and why’ of CR programs should also be accompanied by clear instructions about the specific behavioral responses required from customers.

Consider Customer Capabilities and Limitations

Figure 1 illustrates that ability precedes action. A number of factors can intervene between a person’s intention to act and their actual behavior (Moscardo, 2013). Several of these are related to a persons’ capacity to take the desired action; namely, the skills and abilities required to successfully complete the activity; access to resources such as time and money; and confidence in one’s capacity and ability to be effective (Steg & Vleg, 2009). A CR initiative must match the capabilities of the target audience if it is to be effective.

As an example, an urban hotel may hope to reduce their carbon footprint by offering guests the use of bicycles for local travel during their stay or discounts for using local public transport.
transport. Guests who have not ridden a bicycle in many years and/or have little experience of using public transport in a large and unfamiliar city may not have the skills or confidence to take up these options. It’s not that they don’t wish to support the initiative — they simply do not have the required skills or confidence. Offering a range of options aimed at targeting different skills and abilities is one way to overcome this problem. In this example, it may be possible to offer guests a choice of bicycle, public transport or contributing to a carbon offset scheme.

**Design systems that support convenience**

According to Steg and Vleg (2009) it is important to support informational strategies with what they call structural strategies that help make the desired activity both convenient and easy to do without paying much attention. A recent major shift in focus in the areas of persuasive communication, social marketing and behavior change is the recognition of the importance of habit and attention (Baker et al., 2013; James, 2010; Steg & Vleg, 2009). This shift is based on the idea of dual processing (Kurz, Garder, Verplanken & Abraham, 2015). Psychologists often distinguish between two types of thinking and behavior:

- one which is routine, habitual and pre-conscious in its nature. This type is guided by heuristics, requires little attention or focus, and is based on minimal processing of the specific environment. It is variously referred to as shallow, peripheral, heuristic or mindless; and

- one which is deliberate, consciously controlled, based on systematic attention to, and processing of, information available in the specific environment. This type is variously referred to as deep, central, systematic or mindful (Kurz et al., 2015).

This distinction is important as actions that are routine or habitual are guided by very different cues and cognitive processes than actions that are deliberate and consciously controlled. The two types also require different management strategies (Hansen, Skov & Skov, 2016; Moraes, Carrigan & Szmigin, 2012).

Programs targeting habitual behavior require careful consideration of the extent to which systems and facilities make it easy for guests to comply. New technologies such as smart sensors that automatically switch lights, heating and cooling on and off depending on the presence of guests will increase energy efficiency and remove the need for customer compliance. These technologies are not necessarily available or appropriate for every business situation; however, so it is important not to rely solely upon technology to solve CR compliance problems. Changes to other systems and processes to support customer convenience can also be considered. For example, simply providing smaller plates at a restaurant buffet may be sufficient to reduce food wastage without customers perceiving any change to their experience and without them having to make conscious decisions to change their behavior (Steg & Vleg, 2009).

For tourism CR programs that rely on the active participation of guests, a different approach may be required. A consistent finding from research in sustainability marketing is that
customer convenience is critical in gaining support for more environmentally and socially responsible products and services (Belz & Peattie, 2010). If we are designing for convenience, participation should be the easiest or most convenient option — it’s probably best to have a system that requires customers to actively opt out rather than opt in. For example, it is common to see signs in hotels telling guests that leaving towels on the bathroom floor signals they need washing while hanging them up signals the guest is happy to re-use them. This approach assumes that people are paying attention to both the signs and their own behavior. This may not be the case. An alternative is to tell guests that all towels, regardless of where they are left, will be hung up by cleaning staff for re-use and that they will be replaced every third day unless guests actively inform staff otherwise. Provided there are appropriate guidelines for cleaning staff to change obviously dirty towels, clear options for guests to opt out of the program, information explaining the system and its benefits for guests with concerns, it is likely that many will comply with little thought or concern (Hansen et al., 2016).

Provide prompts at critical points

Linked to the point above, sometimes customers may not be paying attention to the target behavior because it is habitual, part of an easily established routine or because they are distracted by the need to pay attention to other matters (Han et al., 2011). There is evidence that people who would normally engage in environmentally responsible behaviors at home do not necessarily engage in those behaviors while travelling (cf. Barr & Prillwitz, 2012). Some researchers have suggested that this reflects guests’ desire to escape everyday routines and engage in indulgent activities (cf. Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). While this may be true for some, it is also possible that the responsible behaviors at home are habits that are prompted by cues in that environment; shifting to a tourist environment removes these cues. This combined with distractions such as having to navigate unfamiliar locations and making decisions about travel activities and plans might mean that everyday habits are not activated.

A solution to this problem is to use prompts to remind people and cue the desired behaviors (James, 2010; Lulfs & Hahn, 2014; Mair & Bergin-Seers, 2010). Effective prompts occur close in both time and place to the point where the behavior is required and offer clear, simple structure and positive frames of reference (Kurz et al., 2015). Prompts typically take the form of small signs placed close to critical points such as on bathroom sinks for turning off taps and near doors for turning off lights and heating/cooling when leaving the room (Bruns-Smith et al., 2015). Research into the effectiveness of safety warning signs (cf. Wogalter, 2006) and interpretive signs (cf. Moscardo, Ballantyne & Hughes, 2007) provides details on formatting and design principles for these types of prompts. Alternatives to signs could include the use of mobile apps linked to smart sensors that alert customers at critical times or places to remind them of the desired actions (Negrusa, Toader, Sofica, Tutunea & Rus, 2015).
Develop and use feedback systems

Prompts for CR behaviors can also be linked to monitoring and feedback systems. People find it much easier to adjust behaviors when they can directly link their action to outcomes (James, 2010). The use of systems that allow guests or customers to monitor their own performance in areas related to CR programs, such as energy usage, is a way to both remind guests to pay attention to their behavior and to encourage desirable actions. Monitoring systems that allow customers to track their own individual performance are likely to be the most effective option as there is a clear and immediate personal link (Negrua et al., 2015). Where such systems are not appropriate, the use of monitors that provide information on the performance of the business or its customers as a group may still be useful in encouraging guests to pay attention to the relevant CR actions (Moscardo, 2013).

Offer appropriate incentives and rewards

Positive feedback on water and energy use or level of support provided for social causes can also act as a type of incentive. Incentives are rewards for engaging in desirable behaviors and are very effective in encouraging sustainability and responsible actions (Blose et al., 2015). Incentives can be financial (such as discounts and refunds) or gifts such as free services or small tokens. Evidence suggests that direct financial incentives are less effective than gifts and tokens (Rudez, 2010). To be effective, incentives need to be offered relatively soon after the desired action is performed, available at various levels, and generally small in value (Blose et al., 2015).

Extending CR Programs beyond the Immediate Confines of the Business

The principles and examples provided above are focussed on guest compliance with CR programs that operate while the customer is within the business and its immediate surrounds. It is also possible to consider extensions of CR programs both before and after any individual trip or visit. In terms of pre-visit options, communications with customers could highlight actions that they can take before arriving to support the businesses’ CR programs, such as selection of transport. Organisations could also provide information about their on-site CR programs, as studies show guests are already making ‘green’ choices. For example, Han, Hsu, Lee and Sheu (2011) claim that consumers are increasingly choosing to stay at eco-friendly hotels over others, while Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) predict preferences for green hotels are likely to increase. Similarly, guests with favourable attitudes towards performing eco-friendly activities in their everyday lives and positive images of ‘green’ hotels are more willing to stay at green hotels and recommend them to others (Han et al., 2009). By providing information on their CR programs, organisations could make themselves more attractive and competitive.

While some attention has been paid to these pre-visit options, very little consideration has been given to what guests do once they leave the site or business. Developing ‘best practice’ strategies for on-site compliance is critical, but it is also timely to contemplate how businesses can support their guests’ behavior into the future. If Corporate Responsibility
programs are to have significant impacts, they also need to encourage people to make positive behavioral changes in their home and work environments.

Principles and guidelines for prompting the long-term adoption of CR behaviors have yet to be developed, but longitudinal studies in ecotourism settings suggest that post-visit support in the form of educational materials, online resources and regular reminders (emails, social media stories, site updates) all help to support long-term environmental behavior change (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011; Hughes, 2011). Providing prompts and opportunities for individuals to reflect upon their experiences and to assimilate new information and actions into their everyday routines is also important (Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011). It seems likely that CR programs with a social component would also benefit from these strategies.

Scenario Two: The Rossi Family Takes a More Responsible Holiday

The Rossi family has scoured the internet for weeks, and has finally booked a family room at a Pacific island resort that promotes its CR credentials and has been positively reviewed by a number of ecotourism travel websites. After a long flight, they are delighted to find a local taxi driver waiting for them at the airport. The kids are soon asleep, but Mr. and Mrs. Rossi admire the local scenery and point out people working in the fields. The taxi driver has lived on the island all his life and happily tells them stories about the local villagers and their way of life.

When they arrive at the resort Mrs. Rossi comments on the native gardens – she’s seen these plants growing wild on the roadside and is surprised to see they can be incorporated into garden beds. She makes a mental note to wander round the nearby suburbs to look at people’s gardens. On the reception counter, the Rossis notice a sign saying the resort supports the local communities by providing a bus with a local guide who runs tours to the nearby villages. These tours offer opportunities to meet the locals, learn about their traditions, and choose from a range of activities including craft workshops, fishing tours, cooking classes and visits to the school. The resort also collects donations of money and goods on the villagers’ behalf. The Rossis are impressed – they have already spoken to several local employees in reception and the dining room who seem very happy to share stories about their island home.

The Rossis sigh in contentment as they settle into their room – the fans are whirring and the sea breeze wafts through their room. They were skeptical about this option – whenever they go somewhere hot they usually have the air-conditioning on the coldest setting 24/7 to cope. But surprisingly, the breeze is quite cool and refreshing. A quick phone call to reception could get their air-conditioning turned on to their preferred setting but they doubt they'll need it. Mr. Rossi sees on the in-room sensor that the level of their energy usage has barely moved. He reminds them of the hotel’s energy saving initiative – maybe if they don’t use the air-conditioning, they’ll save enough electricity to get the promised discount off their bill!
Time to get ready for dinner! Mrs. Rossi notices the spa bath with the little sign next to it informing them of the hotel’s pledge to limit their use of the local villages’ water supply. She loves spa baths but has been impressed by the hotel’s commitment to the local communities. She has a quick shower instead, using the locally produced toiletries in the large glass dispensers on the bench. The kids and Mr. Rossi have a quick shower in the other bathroom. They are tempted to leave the towels in a soggy heap on the floor like they do at home, but notice the sign about the local water supply and hang them up for reuse instead. The hotel seems to have a strong commitment to the local people – it would be a shame not to support this.

The Rossis are thrilled to find that dinner is a seafood buffet. Next to the buffet is a stack of small dinner plates and a sign reminding guests that multiple trips are possible so they need only take as much as they’ll eat. The Rossis love seafood and are entranced when the chef comes to their table to tell them how it was prepared in the traditional way. Mrs. Rossi smiles - she’s feeling right at home here. Perhaps tomorrow they’ll book a tour to one of the local villages that the hotel sponsors – Mr. Rossi can go on a fishing tour while she and the kids can visit the school and learn some craft. Marco is keen to meet someone his own age and Antonella’s heard from one of the hotel staff that the school even has a Facebook page – this would be a perfect opportunity to make some local friends and keep in touch after their holiday!

Conclusions

In 2013, the UN World Tourism Day forum coined the phrase ‘one billion tourists – one billion opportunities’ to highlight the industry’s potential to influence the environmental behavior of tourists worldwide. The cornerstone of this claim is that because of its size and reach, tourism can make a real contribution to preserving the world’s natural and cultural resources (UNWTO, 2013). If, however, tourism businesses are to fully capitalize on these opportunities, they will need to develop customer-centric programs that encourage and support the on-site adoption of environmentally and socially responsible behaviors. The set of evidence-based principles discussed in this paper provides some initial guidance for businesses wishing to adopt a holistic approach to designing, developing and implementing Corporate Responsibility initiatives. This is consistent with the main themes identified for future CR research, namely, the need to describe the extent and nature of CR adoption within businesses, to explore internal barriers to CR adoption and to argue the case for more CR in tourism (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Coles et al., 2013; Garay & Font, 2012). While still relatively new, it is envisaged that with time, Corporate Responsibility programs that focus on both employees and guests will be de rigueur in tourism businesses.

References


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Proceedings of the 16th Annual Building Excellence in Sustainable Tourism Education Network Think Tank 403
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