

UNH News Release: To Market to 'Green' Consumers, Hoteliers Must See Forest and Trees, UNH Research Shows



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July 31, 2012

To Market to 'Green' Consumers, Hoteliers Must See Forest and Trees, UNH Research Shows

DURHAM, N.H. – Hotels looking to attract “green” consumers must not only practice sustainable business practices and be committed to sustainability as an environmental goal but should effectively communicate those practices to green consumers who exhibit specific behavior patterns and characteristics when compared with consumers in general, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire Whittemore School of Business and Economics.

“Green consumers are reasonably distinct in terms of identifiable characteristics and behavior patterns. Targeting specific marketing strategies to potential green consumers is likely to be more effective than directing these strategies to the entire population by assuming that all members of the population are potential green consumers,” said Nelson Barber, associate professor of hospitality management at UNH.

However, identifying these “green” guests can be challenging, according to Barber. Although industry research has shown that a significant percentage of hotel guests would prefer to stay in a hotel that cares about the environment, guests are not always that predictable. Barber noted that a study by a major national hotel operation had opposite findings: 75 percent of their guest respondents said they would not give up daily hotel room service activities. The study also found that guests pay less attention to the environment while traveling because they are not directly responsible for the costs of cleaning and utilities.

“So this dichotomy of opposed issues creates an interesting challenge for hotels. On one hand, hotels are trying to create and implement environmental policies, while on the other hand, hotel customers seeking services also expect to be pampered with hot water, high-pressure showers, freshly laundered linen, an ample supply of towels, abundant supplies of food and drink, and airport shuttles,” Barber said.

The research was conducted by Barber and is presented in the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research in the article “Profiling the Potential ‘Green’ Hotel Guest: Who Are They and What Do They Want?”

Barber found that green consumers tend to be more concerned for others and have a higher desire to work for the good of society than nongreen consumers. In addition, green consumers place a higher value on the restraint of actions that could upset or harm others and violate social norms. Finally, green consumers are less likely to be motivated to enhance their own personal interests and less likely to purchase self-serving products such as those associated with achievement or excess.

According to Barber, a successful green placement strategy targeted at green consumers draws on both functional and emotional green images. In terms of functional images, green consumers will look for tangible demonstrations of the hotel’s commitment toward green operational practices, such as a recycling program or those with LEED certification. On

the emotional side, green consumers will look for actions that are evidence of a hotel's commitment to the environment and sustainability, such as providing hotel guests with the opportunity to dine on food supplied by local farmers.

"The method of awareness demonstrated through the actions taken by a hotel is important, implying that providing environmental products with visible steps to conserving resources may create a higher degree of consumer loyalty," Barber said.

"The potential image of a green hotel, through the benefits and product preferences perceived, can be a powerful operational tool in attracting and retaining more guests. Incorporating the functional, environmental, and emotional benefits of green positioning into hotel operations is a prerequisite for the creation of a green hotel image," he said.

This analysis is based on a survey of 563 U.S. hotel patrons who were randomly selected by a nationally recognized marketing research firm.

The UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics offers a full complement of high-quality programs in business, economics, accounting, finance, information systems management, marketing, and hospitality management. Programs are offered at the undergraduate, graduate, and executive development levels. The school is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the premier accrediting agency for business schools worldwide. In January 2013, the business school will move into its new state-of-the-art facility and become the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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EDITORS AND REPORTERS: The journal article "[Profiling the Potential 'Green' Hotel Guest: Who Are They and What Do They Want?](#)" is available for download. For broadcasters, UNH Media Relations has an in-house ReadyCam broadcast studio available through VideoLink and an ISDN line.

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