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A major question facing ski area managers is whether their objectives reach the consumer. The effectiveness of management is not always reflected by the financial statement at the end of each ski season. Furthermore, profits from a specific time period may not reflect changes in skier attitudes of the product. Product image is an asset which should be accounted for in the total profit and loss statement. Customer attitudes of the ski product must be considered a part of the total evaluation of management.

As the scale of ski areas increase, either by expanding vertical transport feet (VTF) capacity or by adding complementary services to the system, greater complexity in management organization is created. Organization within ski areas has become complex, and greater management is necessary. As a result of the increase in scale, the attitude of the skier may be discounted because of the allocation of management time being devoted to organization and operations rather than the total skiing experience. Management must analyze the skiing product from the consumers point of view. This bulletin is designed to stress the importance of, and provide a method for, evaluating the skier's attitude.

Major Performance Centers

A ski area has several definable management units which can be identified. The United Bank of Denver, in conjunction with the Economic Study Committee of the

SKI-AREA MANAGERS:

Do Your Objectives Reach Your Skiers?



The personal relationship of the ski school to beginning skiers is an important component of ski area's image.

National Ski Area Association has divided ski areas into several major performance centers: ski lift, ski school, cafeteria, ski shop, ski rental shop, accommodations, real estate, other i.e., convention centers, golf courses, etc.

Each operation can be treated as a performance center with associated costs, revenues, and the servicing of the skiing consumer. Traditionally, each performance center is analyzed for its profit-making ability. Lacking is the attitude of the consumer toward the product or service provided, i.e. the product's image. This quality contributes greatly to a stable market for a ski area.

Quality is a difficult component to measure since it is viewed through the perspective both of the producer (management) and the consumer (skier). However, it is the skier who purchases the product or service generated

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by the ski area operator and his or her management team. Therefore, quality must be measured from the skier's perspective to effectively evaluate performance centers. Both profit and skier attitude can be compared and correlated. The comparison can therefore be related to management objectives and to view the relationship between attitudes and profits.

The performance center approach, however, fails to recognize the way one center complements another. The goal is to maximize overall profit and improve image. This objective is not necessarily achieved by maximum profits at all centers. For example, reduced ski lift tickets can complement other performance centers and actually maximize overall profits.

SKIER ATTITUDE

How to best measure skier attitudes is subject to question. Yet a ski area manager must tackle the measurement problem. One way to analyze specific performance centers and their components is through a self-administered questionnaire.

Where a questionnaire is completed is important in evaluating the attitude of the skier. If a questionnaire is filled out at the ski facility, the skiing environment may strongly influence his/her objectivity to individual performance centers.

With this consideration in mind, greater reliability in evaluating skier attitude is probable at the skier's residence or local ski organization. There, the skier reflects back upon his/her favorable or unfavorable experiences collected from a previous visit or visits to a ski area. The accumulation of experiences at a ski area weighs heavily on the preference for one area over another.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Creation of a questionnaire is the next step in measuring the skier's image of the product. When designing the questionnaire, five major objectives should be kept in mind: 1) that all individual performance centers are incorporated into the questionnaire, 2) that all components of each performance center are identified, 3) that the questions are clearly stated, 4) that the responses to the individual questions are both closed and open-ended, and 5) that the design of the questionnaire allows for the analysis of data or responses by a definable category i.e., skiers ability, group association, age, geographic location, etc.

Each performance center should be identified and the specific services within each center included in the questionnaire. The following is a sample questionnaire designed to evaluate the skier's attitude of each of the performance centers as well as general characteristics of the skier. Each ski area may incorporate more or fewer performance centers. It is intended to be used only as a guide.

SAMPLE

Consumer Attitude Survey of a Ski Area

Please answer the following questions by checking the box that most nearly describes your feelings or supply a short answer where applies. Remarks are welcomed. Also, please check your skiing ability, and record age, and years of skiing.

YEARS OF SKIING _____ AGE _____ BEGINNER _____
 NOVICE _____ LOW INTERMEDIATE _____ INTERMEDIATE _____
 ADVANCED INTERMEDIATE _____ ADVANCED _____ EXPERT _____

	SATISFIED	INDIFFERENT	DISSATISFIED	REMARKS
1. What is your opinion of the Ski Lift Facilities ?				
a. Lift lines	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Ski lift equipment	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Loading areas	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Unloading areas	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Lift attendant's attitude	_____	_____	_____	_____
Remarks:				_____
2. If you have had skiing instructions at this location what is your opinion of the Ski School ?				
a. Instructor's attitude	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Skiing techniques taught	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Personal attention	_____	_____	_____	_____
Remarks:				_____
3. What is your opinion of the Cafeteria Service at this facility?				
a. Speed of food & beverage service	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Variety of foods & beverages	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Rest and eating area facilities	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Attitude of cafeteria personnel	_____	_____	_____	_____
Remarks:				_____
4. If the Cocktail Lounge is utilized, what is your opinion of its operation?				
a. Bartender's attitude	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Atmosphere within the cocktail lounge	_____	_____	_____	_____
Remarks:				_____

	SATISFIED	INDIFFERENT	DISSATISFIED	REMARKS
5. If you use the Dining Facilities what is your opinion of the operation? a. Variety of menu b. Speed of service c. Attitude of waitresses d. Quality of food Remarks:				
6. What is your opinion of the Ski Shop ? a. Variety of goods b. Attitude of salespersons Remarks:				
7. What is your opinion of the Ski Rental Shop ? a. Condition of equipment b. Personal attention in fitting equipment c. Attitude of rental shop attendant d. Availability of proper equipment e. Speed of service Remarks:				
8. If Lodging Accommodations were required, what is your opinion of your overnight stay? a. Reservations system b. Accommodation services & facilities c. Attitude of accommodations staff Remarks:				
9. What is your opinion of the Security of your personal property at the ski area? Remarks:				
10. What is your opinion of the Slopes & Trails in relation to your skiing ability? Remarks:				
11. What is your opinion of Slope Maintenance and Grooming ? Remarks:				

	SATISFIED	INDIFFERENT	DISSATISFIED	REMARKS
12. What is your opinion of the Parking Facilities ? a. Are there adequate spaces b. Can you enter and exit easily c. Are they well controlled Remarks:				
13. What is your opinion of the Ski Patrol ? a. Are they concerned about you b. Have they assisted you after a skiing mishap c. Have they displayed medical competency d. Is the ski patrol's attitude favorable Remarks:				

14. What is your favorite Michigan ski area?

Reason: _____

15. Which ski area do you use most frequently?

Reason: _____

16. Please discuss any problem that you feel exists at the ski area, i.e. prices, conditions, facilities, etc.

17. If you were managing this ski area, what changes would you make?

18. In what city, county, and state do you reside?

City _____

County _____

State _____

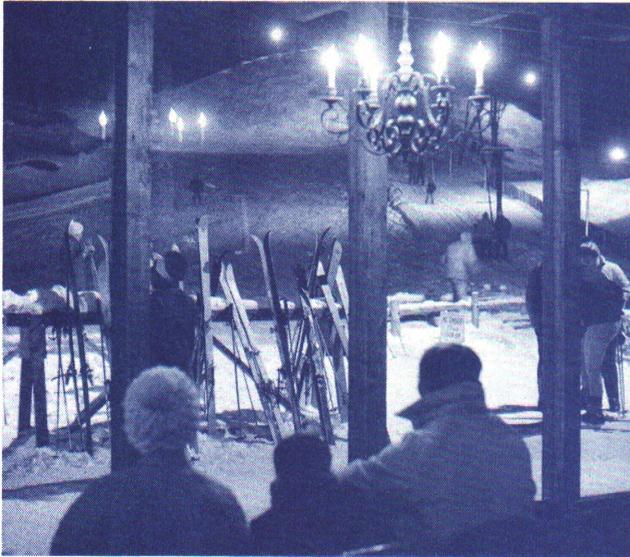
If you would like to be put on this ski area's free mailing list, please fill out and leave attached to the questionnaire or cut off and send it with the enclosed postage paid return envelop.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



Rest area facilities at a ski complex allow the visitor to relax and observe the skiing experience.

The design of the questionnaire should take into consideration how a manager wishes to categorize and analyze the data. The data can be categorized by skier ability, group association, age, geographic location, or by any definable class. The importance of the categorization is that specific performance centers can be related to a characteristic or characteristics of the skier. Once a relationship between a performance center and an aspect of the skier has been evaluated, the ski area manager may adjust management policy in order to improve skier attitude. Furthermore, the manager may simply determine who is using his ski area and which performance centers are most critical to its total operation for a specific market.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the questionnaire can be by simple percentage calculation of close-ended responses. The calculations can either be evaluated on the percent satisfied or dissatisfied basis, e.g. 85% of respondents dissatisfied with security services.

Open-ended responses to specific performance centers can be categorized and ranked by most frequently occurring comments. These comments can help isolate common problems. It allows the skier to analyze in further detail each of the performance centers.

Analysis can include all respondents regardless of skier characteristics. This will reflect the overall attitude of all skiers at a given ski area. General management policies can be evaluated in relation to the total operation of the facility.

To gain a more specific analysis, the respondents can be categorized by a skier characteristic, specifically skier ability (beginner, novice, low intermediate, intermediate, advanced intermediate, advanced, expert). Each ability level can be evaluated in relation to specific performance

centers. A specific ability level may show greater demands in efficiency of a performance center or an aspect of that center. For example, beginner and novice skiers may be very sensitive to the attitude of the lift attendant since this is a critical personage associated with the skiing experience. Also, the attitude of the ski school instructor can affect the beginner. There may be a total rejection of skiing if the first experience does not match a preconceived skiing image and outdoor experience. It must also be recognized that the novice or beginner is the building block for the skiing market. The novice or beginner must be satisfied for an area to continue in growth.

Category analysis by group affiliation may further indicate specific demand on performance centers. A Western New York survey has indicated that primary and secondary school ski organizations registered dissatisfactions in cafeteria service, rest, and eating facilities. College ski organizations were critical of slope characteristics, mainly grooming and snow-making near loading and unloading areas. Adult ski organizations recorded dissatisfactions with ski reports, dining facilities, and line control. These observations only pertain to a specific ski area and should not be assumed for all ski areas. The importance of this example is to show that category analysis can be related to performance centers by group affiliation.

Information from the analysis of the questionnaire helps to pinpoint current skier attitude problems. From this, management can concentrate corrective effort toward performance centers. Skier attitudes related to profits within each performance center allows a ski area manager to effectively evaluate his facility. Furthermore, profit declines within a center may be alleviated quickly if skier attitude sensitivity is determined prior to a management crisis. Hopefully, this bulletin will stimulate ski area managers to consider the importance of information feedback from that all important consumer.



The condition of slopes and trails on a previous ski visit weighs heavily on the decision to return to a specific ski area.