UNEP

MARKETING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS

REGIONE TOSCANA

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INTRODUCTION

I am very proud to write this introduction for several reasons: first of all this, the work that the Region of Tuscany began several years ago on the subject of sustainable development culminates in this report and at the same time a new phase of our work commences with it. In Tuscany we are very conscious of the risks that high impact tourism can bring, so we have tried to create the conditions that will allow growth of the tourism sector while respecting the environment and its resources.

We have implemented many initiatives involving all tourism actors: from incentives for acquiring environmental certifications; to support for promoting and marketing of our diverse tourism products, to special funding for upgrading tourist services; as well as by creating the *Benvenuti in Toscana* (*Welcome to Tuscany)* protocol for tourism service suppliers which, in addition to increasing consumer protection, aims at integrating tourism, local identity and local culture. Furthermore, the annual *Euromeeting: European Regions, Tourism and Sustainable Development* conference*,* organised in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, has made Florence a privileged venue for discussing good practices in sustainable tourism at the European and international levels. The experience we have developed through *Euromeeting* has allowed us to cooperate with many important organisations who share our views on sustainable tourism. I am referring, in particular, to our collaboration during the 2004 edition of *Euromeeting* with the United Nations Environmental Programme and the special workshop *Marketing sustainable tourism products: challenges and opportunities* on to how to link supply and demand for sustainable tourist products. This workshop brought together a group of the field's leading experts for an in depth examination of the sustainable tourism market: from a detailed analysis of demand and therefore consumer requirements, to the role of intermediaries (tour operators, travel agencies, e-booking systems, etc.), to the tools for generating and influencing demand (information, tourist guides, etc.).

This report not only documents the many valuable contributions of these experts and international operators, but goes a step further to propose some practical considerations on how to reach consumers who are interested in sustainable tourism products and how businesses can move towards supplying those products. Our intent is, therefore, that this publication may become a small "knowledge base" for everyone - entrepreneurs, operators, institutions and consumers - who are concerned, as we are, that the tourism sector continues to develop, but in harmony with each local environment and identity.

Susanna Cenni
Regional Minister for Tourism and Commerce
Region of Tuscany

FOREWORD

World consumption expenditures, both private and public, have grown at an unprecedented rate, propelling considerable advances in human development. However, the environmental and social 'gains' achieved by adopting good environmental and social practices in business are being wiped out by this exponential growth in consumption. Clearly then today's environmental and social crisis can't be solved only by tackling the production cycle, but consumption patterns also need to be firmly addressed.

The concept of 'sustainable consumption' is not new. Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted by the delegates to the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, includes a chapter dedicated to the need for reorienting consumption toward more 'sustainable' patterns. The definition of 'sustainable consumption', officially adopted in 1995 by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, calls for 'the use of services and related products which responds to basic needs and brings a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations.

Sustainable consumption and cleaner production are the two sides of the same 'sustainability' coin that meet at the level of the product or services. But only if 'sustainable production' is matched by 'sustainable consumption', can we ensure that the sustainability gains are not erased by continuous growth in consumption. A 'virtual' cycle will then set in by guaranteeing 'market rewards' to those businesses that have adopted innovative practices to make their operations environmentally and socially sustainable, thereby encouraging more and more businesses to start adopting sustainable practices, until sustainability becomes a common playing field.

In tourism today there are many recognised business leaders that have integrated sustainability into their core business. However, sustainability has not yet been mainstreamed into the production of tourism related services. Many surveys carried out mostly at national level on the willingness to pay for more sustainable tourism products indicate that there is a growing sensibility on these issues, but product selection and purchasing is mostly not yet related to sustainability factors. The result is that many business leaders that have 'taken the road' of sustainability are not experiencing any real reward for their responsibility towards the host environment and communities.

The United Nations Environment Programme and the Region of Tuscany have joined forces to better understand the barriers that prevent demand and supply for sustainable tourism services from meeting, the main challenges for the promotion and distribution of services that claim to be 'sustainable', and the role that 'tourism distribution channels' could play in strengthening the demand/supply link for sustainable tourism products.

The workshop on *Marketing sustainable tourism products: challenges and opportunities* was convened in Florence, Italy on 5th November 2004 during the *4th Euromeeting*: *European Regions, Tourism and Sustainable Development* which is organised annually by the Region of Tuscany in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union. We invited key representatives of the identified 'distribution tools' to share their perspectives on what could be their role in supporting wider distribution of 'sustainable tourism suppliers'.

We also involved representatives of the most traditional distribution channels in the tourism industry such as travel guides, tourism fairs, internet agents, tour operators, as well as consumer associations for their potential role in mobilising large number of consumers towards better products. This report summarises the rich and inspiring contributions made by these experts.

We consider this report as just a first step. We wish to continue the discussion and move forward to take action to improve the link between supply and demand for sustainable tourism products, as we believe that only by creating a real, strong and stable demand for sustainable products, will production make a real shift towards sustainable 'production' patterns.

Paolo Bongini
Region of Tuscany

Giulia Carbone
United Nations Environment Programme

SUMMARY

Many businesses nowadays are working towards incorporating sustainability into the core of their products. Quite often these products are the result of a well thought sustainability concept, and yet the entrepreneurs behind it fail to reach the marketplace, because they lack marketing expertise and knowledge of the tourism industry's distribution channels. These tourism companies, and particularly small firms from developing countries, suffer from poor targeting, market segmentation and positioning, low consumer product knowledge, and consumer risk perception.

Distribution channels are key to increase the exposure of sustainable suppliers, and to capitalise on the latent market demand for sustainability by changing behaviour in non-sustainable firms. Each channel has strengths and weaknesses which are reviewed with a range of examples showcasing good practice. These channels are analysed from the point of view of the supplier for equity, cost-benefit, market penetration and normalisation potential. The results show that few channels have high equity, but many of them offer a good cost-benefit ratio, hence efforts are needed to provide opportunities for businesses. The market penetration and normalisation potentials show the channels with the greatest overall scope.

Policies should encourage industry associations and individual distribution channels to introduce sustainability criteria for their suppliers. A stepped approach could first introduce criteria where eco-savings can be made, and where sustainability is part of the quality evident to the client, as well as customer education. This first step aims to allow companies with low access to training and know-how to repay their investment through the eco-savings, and develop a proactive culture. A second step would require industry associations to introduce more complex standards such as labour and other fair trade specific issues, as well as deepening into the many aspects of sustainability that the clients may not notice during their visit, but will have great importance to the long term wellbeing of the destination.

Destination management organisations and tourist boards are useful to create destination brands and can act as sales portals. They can strengthen their role by setting standards and providing training. Tour operators are key sales channels that allow tourism companies to sell large volumes, usually at a lower price than if selling direct. Large operators, but also increasingly smaller ones are setting sustainability standards for their suppliers as well as support mechanisms. Guidebooks are very successful marketing tools but they require products to be unique and a long lead time, and as such are mid- term investments. These guidebooks should make the criteria for inclusion more explicit, emphasising sustainability. Media can be a powerful tool for consumer education and the challenge here is to feed interesting unique stories to the press that change consumer behaviour, as suchfor example a public relations clearinghouse on sustainability would be an attractive tool.

Certification schemes are increasingly setting standards for tourism firms and providing guidance, but their implementation is not widespread and with low equity and low consumer recognition they are a tool for business to business lobbying. As such the recommendation is to experiment with their implementation. Travel fairs are useful venues to for learning about the market and renewing contacts but their negative cost-benefit means they are not accessible to most, and they should, therefore, be seen more as events to educate suppliers on marketing, and be packaged by tourist boards as part of training for developing companies. Internet retailing has the potential to reach a broader market but for the inexperienced tourism firm much training is needed, with priorities such as managing risk perception of consumers if operating their own website, to possibly paying high commissions for discounted last minute travel sites. More regulation of internet retailing will increase consumer trust and particularly help small firms. Finally, consumer organisations are powerful brands to endorse products, but as in the case of guidebooks, are mid-term investments and require clearer sustainability criteria, as well as a stronger contribution to consumer education.

METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The report reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the tools and channels available to promote and distribute sustainable tourism products. The distribution and promotion channels chosen were destination management organisations and tourist boards, tour operators, guidebooks, media, certification schemes, travel fairs, internet retailers and consumer organisations. These were chosen because of their turnover, and their potential to reach markets and contribute to mainstream sustainability in the tourism industry. Each tool has been analysed by focusing on the following aspects:

1. Description of the tool. How can each tool be used to promote sustainable products? Quality, legal and systematic obstacles amongst others.
2. Supplier equity. What does a tourism company have to do to be promoted through each channel? What characteristics do these companies need to have? Can all suppliers access it?
3. Market penetration potential. Markets targeted by each channel. Social demographics, size, growth, purchasing behaviour.
4. Cost-benefit analysis. Is this a cost-effective method to market sustainable tourism products?
5. Normalisation potential. How effective can each tool be to move sustainable tourism from a niche to a mainstream product? Forecast of sustainable tourism products each tool could be marketing (either in total, or as percentage of the company's portfolio).

UNEP and the Region of Tuscany convened a workshop on *Marketing sustainable tourism products: challenges and opportunities* during the *4th Eurometeeting Conference* in Florence on 5th November 2004. Key representatives of the selected 'distribution tools' were invited to share existing efforts in promoting sustainable tourism suppliers, and perspectives on what could be their role in more effectively supporting 'sustainable tourism suppliers'.

In alphabetical order, the speakers at the workshop were Piegianni Addis (Kel 12 - on outbound tour operator), Sylvie Blangy (TUKTU Consultancy - on travel fairs), Chuck Bell (US Consumers Union - on consumer organisations), Jeremy Garrett (NaTour Communications - on marketing communications), Marcello Mariotti (Hello Tuscany - on inbound tour operators), Andreas Museler (LTU Touristik - on outbound tour operators), Malcolm O'Brien (Lonely Planet Europe - on travel guides), Caroline Ofroegbu (Alliance Internationale de Tourisme & Federation Internationale de l'Automobile – on consumer organisations), and Ronald Sanabria (Rainforest Alliance – on certification).

Prior to the aforementioned workshop, UNEP called a preparatory meeting to share experiences between firms and explore joint initiatives. We would like to thank the following experts who participated in this meeting together with the speakers outlined above: Ellen Bermann (Ventaglio), James N. Holleran (Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne), Ulrike Rheinberger (Oko-Institut), and Matteo Montebelli (Touring Club Italia).

In preparation for the workshop participants were interviewed by telephone, based on a previously distributed set of questions. Alongside preparations for the event in Florence, further telephone and face to face interviews were conducted following the same lines of enquiry with Dr Heba Abdel Aziz (Ministry of Tourism, Sultanate of Oman), Taha Al-Mahbashi (Yemen Tourism Promotion Board), Mohamed Al Sonidar (Yemen's General Authority for Tourism Development), Anke Biedenkapp (Reisepavillon), Simon Calder (The Independent), Justin Francis (), Richard Hammond (freelance journalist), Richard Hearn (Inntravel), Dale Hudson (IMEX), Thomas Husson (UNEP), Michael Lomotey (The Good Alternative Travel Guide), Birgit Rettig (independent consultant), and Jennifer Seif and Jenny Tholin (Fair Trade Tourism South Africa). The first draft of this report was consulted during December with the participants of this workshop and the experts interviewed, as well as with Constantinos Andriotis (Hellenic Open University) and Graham Miller (University of Surrey). The final editing was done by Karen Schwartz (Leeds Metropolitan University). The report has been printed through the courtesy of the Region of Tuscany.

MARKETING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS

Many entrepreneurs fail to understand the nature of the tourist industry as a marketplace, and assume that because they have an authentic and exciting tourism product, clients will find them. Many donors and policy makers also make the same mistake, funding conservation projects expecting that tourism will generate sufficient revenues for the long term survival. Underestimating the challenge, as well as the cost of distributing tourism products is a key reason why new tourism ventures fail, and why many donor projects do not survive beyond the initial subsidised period. The challenges mentioned here apply in the majority both to sustainable and non sustainable tourism products.

Reviewing the key stages of a marketing plan provides some background to this report. The first stage is a thorough analysis of the market, resources, competitors and the business environment. The second stage is to decide on the strategic choices of how to segment markets, to determine the markets to be targeted, and to plan an appropriate product positioning. The latter part is to determine the marketing mix, which in its most basic sense means how the product will be offered to tourists, the price that will be charged, how the product will be communicated, and how it will be distributed. It is through examining the requirements of these promotion and distribution channels that projects and firms face the reality check of what the market wants.

Figure 1. Key stages of the marketing plan

ANALYSIS
Market
Resources
Competitors
Environment

STRATEGY
Segmenting
Targeting
Positioning

MARKETING MIX
Product
Price
Promotion
Distribution

Box 1. What is a sustainable tourism product?
The concept of a 'sustainable tourism product' is here understood broadly as meaning those that use resources in an environmentally responsible, socially fair and economically viable way, so that users of the product can meet their current needs without compromising future generations from being able to use the same resources. Measuring sustainability is a complex issue and the criteria vary according to the product type and local conditions. Deciding what is ultimately sustainable for a particular community is a balance between local circumstances and expectations and best practice in technology and environmental management.

Three key issues are highlighted below that influence the success of marketing efforts by tourism companies. Many of these cannot be solved by individual tourist firms or even through collaboration at a destination level; it is however important to be aware of them to consider how they will affect the promotion and distribution of tourism products.

Targeting, segmenting and positioning

Poor market research, which is often the result of limited data availability coupled with unrealistic expectations of occupancy levels in low and shoulder seasons, cripple small business start-ups. These businesses tend to have limited understanding of consumer behaviour, particularly for international markets. Tourist boards share the responsibility of providing such information and delivering training as well as joint marketing services to reach the markets.

There are many examples of sustainable tourism products that are not viable because the supplier has failed to understand market needs, often through a failure to engage the industry in product development. This is sometimes the result of agencies working with host destinations that have suffered the negative impacts of unsustainable development, and then fail to involve operators, on whom marketing success often ultimately depends.

Resource based instead of market led. Sustainability means authenticity, which in turn suggests that the tourism product should not be changed just to please tourists. But in doing so tourism products often do not take into account the expectations of tourists and the needs of tour operators.

Targeting international markets. Too many businesses expect international markets to become the key source of income. This should be balanced with filling a good percentage of the capacity with domestic and short haul regional markets. This is partly to mitigate a destination's exposure to the vagaries of international tourism trends, but also because advertising in regional markets is almost always more cost effective.

Sustainability as unique selling proposition. Marketing on the basis of sustainability is not going to suffice for most tourist segments and products, even when sustainability could be at the core of the product itself, and could be one of the determining attributes that the tourist looks for. For the vast majority of consumers, sustainability will only be a consideration when other criteria, such as price, choice of accommodation and availability of activities have all been satisfied.

Sustainability as part of quality. In the past, too many sustainable products in tourism and elsewhere, have performed worse in the basic quality attributes. Tourists are willing to purchase sustainable once the basic attributes of product quality are met. The win-win products in the sustainable, organic, fair trade sectors are those that provide added value.

Consumer product knowledge

If a tourist market knows the product well, the type of promotion can emphasise characteristics of the product or place that are meaningful to the tourist, whereas first time tourists will need more information about the product as prior knowledge cannot be assumed. Also repeat tourists are more likely to buy directly from suppliers that first time tourists.

Inexperienced product users. Tourists that buy a certain type of holiday for the first time are more open to education, but it is also less likely that their behaviour will be in-keeping with that of locals. First time tourists on a package such as trekking, diving or homestays have specific awareness raising and education needs before and during their experience, that will mark their behaviour for future trips. The product and the message to these first time users will need to be tailored to emphasise safety and customer care, whilst also communicating the need for cultural sensitivity and respect - insofar as tourism involves interactions that necessarily include an active and a passive experience.

Price sensitive first time visitors. Many tourists experiment with destinations, visiting just once, making it hard for the service providers to communicate product quality, and relying on price alone to secure sales. Uniqueness and authenticity need to be reinforced for these first time visitors who lack the knowledge to demand them for themselves. Information sources that can be trusted such as travel guides and signs of quality for example are good vehicles to reinforce such messages.

Repeat clients encourage sustainability. Repeat clients are more likely to appreciate the unique characteristics of a place, usually related to sustainability. Lack of loyalty to destinations often means service providers do not see a short term benefit from providing the required services of quality, as those tourists leaving will not come again, and others just as gullible will follow.

Risk perception

Tourists often do not want to book directly with service suppliers because they perceive risk. Small firms are perceived as more risky because they do not have strong brands to support them, and for this reason they will need to work in partnership to ensure purchases. Sustainable tourism products will have to work on reducing the perception of risk, by tackling the following:

Risk of the unknown. A large volume of internet sales at present are repeat sales once the client knows the business, and they are mainly for airline tickets, car rental and hotel rooms in global companies with standardised products. This increases when travelling to countries for the first time, particularly when these countries are very different to the country of origin of the tourists.

Risk of fraud. Secure purchasing systems that can give confidence to clients are necessary for small tourism firms to sell directly. At the moment a large percentage of direct sales are with large firms. The perception of potential fraud from giving credit card details to companies outside the tourists' home country is high, also raising concerns about data protection and the possibility of identity theft.

Risk of virtual companies. Tourists are less likely to want to book with small companies because of the perceived threat that these might not be real companies, the client has paid in advance for the service but once they arrive at the destination the company does not exist. Small tourism firms need the backing of stronger brands to provide reassurance to the client that they are sound companies. Retailing through a link at the national tourist board, or having the backing of consumer organisations can provide the kind of quality assurance that will increase bookings.

Risk of no consumer protection. Purchasing directly from tourism suppliers means that clients will not have the same legal protection as when they purchase a product from a tour operator in their own country. This is clearly the case in Europe, where the Travel Packages Act places responsibility for the quality of the product including health and safety on the tour operator. There is little regulation and only very limited consumer protection against false claims made on the internet by direct suppliers.

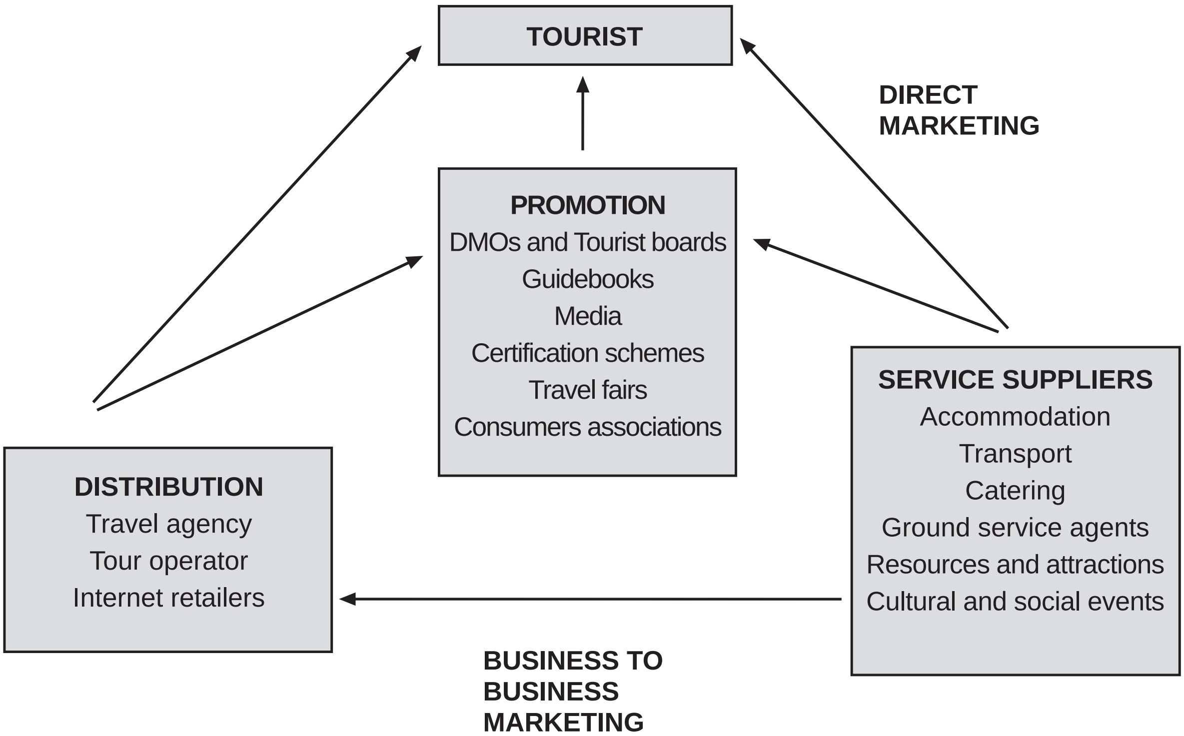
DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS: CURRENT PRACTICE AND PROSPECTS

The tourism marketplace is made up of a large number of tourism service suppliers trying to reach a multiplicity of tourist markets. They do so targeting the tourists directly, developing positive messages about their product through promotion channels, and working with intermediary distribution channels that will sell a range of services tailored to the market's needs. Figure 1 maps out key players in producing, promoting and distributing tourism products, inevitably there are many organisations that do both, and they have been placed according to their core function. There are two commercialisation strategies:

Business to consumer (B2C). Tourism service suppliers can use a range of direct marketing channels such as database and internet marketing to attract tourists. The advantage is having a greater control over the message sent and the type of tourist attracted. The disadvantages are that this is done at a greater financial risk, with potentially high start up costs. Box 2 includes a summary of main channels for direct marketing.

Business to business (B2B). The main focus of this report is for suppliers to trade through intermediaries that take the role of either selling individual services, packaging them or doing the marketing and booking. Tourism suppliers benefit from outsourcing the cost and risk of marketing. The advantages are diversification of markets that reduce risk, a potentially secure level of business, and fixed commissions that facilitate financial planning. The challenges are less control over marketing messages, markets and income streams.

Figure 2. Mapping the marketing promotion and distribution channels.



Most often, tourism suppliers combine the two: direct (B2C) and via distributors (B2B). In the latter case, intermediaries are used to provide a baseline level of business that ensures minimum occupancy rates or load factors, which provides a contribution towards fixed costs of capital repayment and salaries. Direct marketing is used to capture repeat visitors, particular market segments and for specific promotions. The balance between the two types of marketing is determined by how entrepreneurial the company is, the availability of knowledge and funds, and the interest of intermediaries to work with it. Promotion strategies are the consequence of the distribution strategy, with some of the promotion tools listed in figure 1 being used to generate direct sales, or to increase the interest of distribution channels in working with these suppliers. This section reviews the potential and challenges faced by different promotion and distribution channels to contribute to the marketing of service suppliers that are sustainable.

While eight distribution and communication channels are reviewed here, some of these (particularly tour operators) are much larger than the others, whereas some of them only have an impact on a niche market, or are highlighted here because of their potential for the future.

Box 2. Direct marketing channels

Database marketing. This is more likely for national than for international clients, and few small companies hold databases of past clients. These can work with specialist outbound tour operators to be included in their client reminder newsletters, usually generated as part of database marketing tactics, by providing up to date copy on the product and destination.

Internet marketing. Service providers frequently try to promote individual products without any co-ordination. Too often, suppliers perceive all others as competitors, when in fact key consumer motivators are ‘choice’ and ‘range’, which means that products are only enhanced by demonstrating links to other local products and suppliers. Whereas some confident travellers would be happy to seek out extremely remote products, many would prefer to know that they form part of a more substantial product cluster in the chosen destination.

Affiliate marketing. One of the most effective forms of marketing is for suppliers to establish relationships with other organisations, often unrelated to tourism, who can market their products to their own customers. This might be through special interests, such as wildlife, heritage or sports, or through particular groups, such as clubs and associations or faith groups. Sometimes these can be arranged simply by identifying that a satisfied customer is involved in a particular group and that they would be enthusiastic about promoting the product to fellow members.

Joint marketing portals. National and regional tourist boards and incoming tour operators need to pull together different services through joint marketing portals. Selling individual products, however sustainable, will not get tourists to a destination. To be meaningful, these products need to be grouped by their appropriateness to specific market segments and price ranges.

Repeat business and word of mouth. Established companies fulfil a large percentage of their capacity through repeat business, as it generally accepted that it costs five times as much to gain a new customer as to maintain an old one. At its most sophisticated, this can involve a powerful multi-media CRM (customer relationship management) system, but it can simply be the good practice of maintaining a record of all customers’ (and enquirers’) contact details - albeit subject to relevant data protection legislation, which should not be underestimated.

Destination management organisations (DMOs) and tourist boards

DMOs are agencies or marketing consortia (normally publicly funded, sometimes supplemented by membership subscriptions) that promote a ‘destination’ to outbound tour operators and both domestic and foreign consumers through a variety of media, and provide information on local products and suppliers. Sometimes, suppliers (e.g. subscribed members) receive preferential treatment.

The challenge for destinations is to identify the environmental constraints and impacts of tourism development, and to then engage local destination suppliers, buyers (foreign and domestic) and all visitors in embracing sustainability as a key element of the tourism proposition. The opportunity is to make excellent environmental management part of consumer motivation, in order to help ensure the sustainable development of tourism.

Some destinations have marketed themselves as being totally sustainable, although in reality this often reflects an emphasis on natural heritage, rather than indicating product sustainability. Tourism New Zealand's campaign "100% Pure New Zealand" is a good example of this approach, where this DMO concentrates on presenting a consistent message to position New Zealand as a sustainable destination. See http://www.newzealand.com/travel/

There are examples of tourist boards giving additional promotion to firms that have met certain standards of sustainability. Places as far apart as Scotland and Costa Rica are promoting companies certified as sustainable, either by highlighting certified suppliers with an additional logo in their promotional material or by creating a separate dedicated brochure for sustainable products.

Oman's Ministry of Tourism, which is responsible for developing and promoting the country's tourism product, has designed a policy that places 'sustainable tourism' at its heart. But, whilst many foreign tour operators are enthusiastic about 'ecotourism', sustainability of the product is not really a consideration - their key requirements are the availability of air-conditioned tourism facilities, 4x4 vehicles and 5 accommodation. Local expertise is generally focused on the physical environment, rather than an appreciation of the cultural and social dimensions of sustainability in tourism.*

The challenge for DMOs is often less about marketing sustainable tourism products, but more about raising awareness of what the sustainable development of tourism means for suppliers, which in turn will help to ensure the more sustainable development of tourism products. Remarking that the term "'responsible tourism' is more meaningful to suppliers", Oman's Dr Aziz stated that the development of "the responsible tourism sector is one of the guaranteed ways of achieving sustainable development for the Sultanate of Oman." Thus the motivation for sustainable tourism products is national self-interest, and the opportunity is to encourage and facilitate more sustainable supplier practices. Oman is working to achieve this outcome through a programme of training and awareness raising, and by offering preferential terms to suppliers that adopt more sustainable practices. The former will be achieved through a national training programme, primarily targeted at tourism SMEs, whilst the latter will involve a schedule of discounts on marketing activities, including attendance at international tourism fairs.

There can be other priorities that DMOs must tackle before they can even begin to focus on sustainability issues, but such circumstances can bring benefits, allowing DMOs to approach product development as a 'blank canvas'. Although it has a tremendous product, Yemen has been the subject of much negative publicity in recent years and has been considered by tour operators and consumers alike to be too outlandish a destination for mainstream tourism. This means that the focus has been to rebuild the country's image as a viable tourism destination. In fact, this challenging marketing environment also enables Yemen to highlight the sustainability of its products, adding real value to the destination. This involves all the usual marketing activities, such as organisation of familiarisation visits for journalists and tour operators, production of promotional media in paper and electronic formats and attendance at major international tourism fairs.

With a particular emphasis on cultural and nature-based tourism, the main themes being promoted are 'ecotourism' and activity tourism, especially diving, deserts, mountains and climbing, which are attractive to tour operators. With 70% of visitors coming from the MENA region (Middle East & North Africa), the Yemen Tourism Promotion Board (YTPB) is focusing on several key foreign markets and plans to develop a new multi-lingual website. This will be in Arabic, English, French, German and Italian and in the future also in Japanese and Russian, in order to communicate directly with the consumer. According to the YTPB's Director, "sustainable tourism is fundamental, because it helps the economy of Yemen through the creation of jobs and investment; tourism is Yemen's future". With many diverse products and micro enterprises, YTPB's challenge is simply to "get Yemen into tour operators' brochures".

Marketing sustainable tourism is not simply a marketing exercise, but requires integration across all social and economic sectors. Thus, echoing the approach of Oman's Ministry of Tourism, Yemen's General Authority for Tourism Development (GATD) is focused on the sustainable development of tourism. Observing that Yemen's tourism product is essentially its "environment and culture", the GATD stated that the challenge is to keep this "intact", because "if changed, then Yemen loses". The aim of sustainable tourism is therefore to "encourage investors, reduce poverty and preserve cultural and natural heritage". However, since there is limited understanding of 'sustainable tourism', the GATD puts a lot of energy into engaging key stakeholders, especially community representatives, to promote the principles of sustainable tourism. It will support those communities that choose tourism as a development strategy, but critically, it will also respect those that *choose to resist tourism. When introducing foreign investors, it will encourage them to promote local employment, and to use local food and building materials, again adding value to the product and helping to satisfy consumer demand for the 'authentic' local product.*

Natour Communications has run a series of short online campaigns to change the negative perception of Venezuela as a tourist destination, using a database of over 8,000 e-mail addresses of travel agents, operators, media interested in the natural world and tourism. The campaign consisted of between 8 and 10 issues over three months depending on the specific messages, to promote the country's natural attractions and activities, and generating interest for a familiarisation trip for 24 international media and operators

Familiarisation visits ('fam trips') bring invited press and selected operators to destinations to sample the product. These are especially of value to emerging destinations and to showcase new products in more established destinations. Tourist boards tend to sponsor and support these, and in some instances run them. Typically a fam trip takes 8 to 12 weeks to set up because it requires targeting participants, raising awareness, organising logistics and tailoring the trip to their particular needs. Natour Communications run a fam trip to the Caribbean island of Trinidad coinciding with the 3rd annual Shandy Carib Adventure Festival to showcase adventure, nature and cultural opportunities. See www.natour.us/trinidad.

Tour operators

These are organisations that sell holidays and travel products to consumers, taking a commission or margin on the product (or package of products) sold, which they have purchased from suppliers or are selling (as an agent) on behalf of suppliers. Additional income is gained through the sale of other travel-related products, such as travel insurance and foreign currency. In some cases, they will establish a 'partnership' relationship with their suppliers, working collaboratively with them on destination management, product development and direct marketing activities.

The key tool for tour operators is the 'service agreement', the contract between operator and supplier, whether an airline, accommodation or excursion provider or ground handler. It defines the service standards, including quality as well as health and safety requirements. The results of customer satisfaction questionnaires in areas such as food, facilities, staff and overall quality, often determine bonuses being added or compensation being paid if the supplier varies significantly from the required standard.

Some tour operators are starting to introduce environmental standards, but with only limited consumer demand, few are yet willing to link these to contractual obligations and financial penalties. The general approach is one of encouragement, with operators identifying key suppliers that might need to improve their environmental performance and are consequently offered mainly training and advice, and in fewer instances financial incentives.

A large proportion of the work done by large tour operators to improve the sustainability of their service providers is by promoting the economic advantages of reducing water, waste and energy costs through being more environmentally friendly. There are fewer examples of tour operators engaging their suppliers in improving their socio-economic records, for example by providing better labour relations, support to communities or the use of local produce. For many specialist tour operators, sustainability is part of the product quality sought by tourists. In this case there are few examples for supplier development, but usually because a minimum sustainability requirement was part of the selection criteria.

Most tour operators are not likely to pay a higher price to their suppliers for sustainability. Generally they argue that sustainability is an element of the expected quality, and that it will also bring (in particular in the area of environmental practices in the accommodation sector) major cost savings.

Supplier development initiatives are generally voluntary, with few examples of tour operators making them mandatory. Several large tour operators have reported that between 10 and 25% of suppliers have met the voluntary 'sustainability related' standards (for example Kuoni Switzerland, TUI, MyTravel Northern Europe, First Choice, Hotelplan). Tour operators are most successful in convincing long-term suppliers, and those that are owned or managed by the same parent company.

Few tour operators highlight those suppliers that are more sustainable in their brochures (see TUI Germany as an example). The Reiseanalyse 2002 survey in Germany showed that tourists demand such information, but it is likely that many tour operators will not want to do so until a certain volume of their products have met the necessary standards, and they can send a positive reassuring message to the market.

The large German tour operator LTU Touristik distributed 16,000 environmental management manuals to accommodation suppliers in German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Greek. Impacts are rated by time and cost required to make a significant improvement. The manual is the result of long term development involving suppliers and destinations, and LTU Touristik requires feedback from hoteliers on the manual's usefulness and the hotels' performance. Hotels implementing this manual best are those managed by LTU itself and those where LTU brings a high percentage of their business.

Hello Tuscany promotes to young people a positive experience of sustainable tourism: the Summer Camps in Tuscany. Summer camps seem to be a very pleasant experience, since they combine the attraction of natural parks, a real interaction with a beautiful environment, and with local people with their own historical traditions.

Kel 12 is a small Italian tour operator specialising in adventure holidays mainly in Africa, even though their presence is now widespread everywhere from the Sahara to China to South America. It promotes the marketing of sustainable tourism products by working with destination agencies that share the same philosophy, including sustainability as purchasing criteria, running conservation and community projects in the field, and engaging consumers in projects. Examples of projects include protecting part of the Gabon forest, buying the rights on territories instead of the concessions involved in cutting wood, as well as a Sahara project to prevent accumulating big amounts of plastic waste using plastic tanks for water instead of plastic bottles.

The Dutch Tour Operator Association ANVR requires members to appoint and train a responsible tourism coordinator; develop and implement a responsible tourism policy; report annually to ANVR on at least one sustainability measure per each of five areas (accommodation, transport, recreation/ excursions, consumers information and internal sustainability); and not offer travel products that are forbidden according to the developed list of irresponsible travel products. Similar requirements are being introduced in the UK through the Federation of Tour Operators.

Guidebooks

Most guidebooks are produced by independent commercial publishers. Although some guides might be openly commissioned as marketing tools by individual travel companies, guidebook publishers are generally independent of the travel industry. They identify products and destinations, giving objective opinions (both good and bad), and are sold to consumers, including conventional tourists and business travellers. These guides rely on the quality and objectivity of their messages to be trusted by travellers. Additional revenue can be earned from advertising and the production of associated online editions, but the most trusted guidebooks keep their information independent from commercial ties.

Freelance travel writers are commissioned to write individual books. In general, the appointed writers receive a very specific brief by the guidebook editing team, which outlines the guide, the structure to follow, including the characteristics of the companies to be included in the guide. The authors also receive (in particular if their task is an 'update') all the information collected on the country and in particular on hotels and tourism services that they will have to personally review. The briefs are developed taking into account the specific target audience. In general however, travel guides are increasingly including sustainability charters, as well as sections on environmental and socio-economic issues at the destinations.

These writers research hotels, restaurants and attractions following the criteria of the travel guide according to their market positioning and unique selling proposition. Many guidebooks emphasise unique, exciting and interesting products that are aligned to the principles of sustainable tourism, although few will use explicit criteria for the selection of what towns and companies are to be included, and the final decision depends on space and a balance between different destinations and types of product. Sustainability is often referred to as far as it is part of the exciting and unique attributes that the independent tourist is seeking.

The companies publishing traditional guidebooks are evolving to produce customised guidebooks, spin-off guides and unique travel information, licensed use of web engine or travel information, and to selling photographs. Travel information is now not only coming in the typical guidebook form, but also increasingly in electronic form, whether on websites or in phone/PDA formats. All of these provide new niche opportunities for tourism companies and destinations.

Highly professional guidebooks are now also being produced by non-governmental organisations and campaign groups, for which the motivation is development assistance, rather than commercial profit. The focus is increasingly shifting to the consumer, since publishers are discovering that these publications meet a market need, giving objective (and entirely non-commercial) advice on obscure community-led tourism products, offering consumers access to 'authentic experiences' with less of the more negative aspects of tourism. By being produced by not-for-profit organisations, consumers treat contents as a strong seal of quality assurance, which helps increase sales of sustainable tourism products, which in turn promotes best practice in tourism and across the industry.

As in the case of travel media, the ability to be included in a guidebook depends on whether the product can be presented as being exciting, quirky and unique. Sustainability is sometimes the reason why a product is interesting, but the message has to be tailored with the tourist experience as the centre of attention. The guidebooks support sustainable tourism products within the limits of having to honestly report about quality of the services provided, and when a company with a sustainable ideology provides sub-standard services, this has to be highlighted.

Over 100,000 Lonely Planet travellers use the electronic Thorn Tree travellers' bulletin boards on a regular basis, where travellers can exchange information on destinations and experiences, and plan their next adventure. This makes Lonelyplanet.com a vibrant heavily trafficked global travel resource. Lonely Planet also sends a monthly email newsletter to thousands of readers.

*Lonely Planet's Shoestring guides have a large readership amongst young people travelling for the first time. These guides include extensive information on responsible behaviour in their travels, and the choices of places to visit reinforce this philosophy. Lonely Planet has however been questioned for publishing a guide that encourages tourism to Burma (*Myanmar (Burma). *8th ed., 2002.), despite their claims that the guide raises awareness and supports the type of firms that will least support financially the oppressive regime.*

Sustainability is at the core of Lonely Planet, although this has so far happened more intuitively than strategically. The company is now examining how they formalise their commitment to sustainability. Their French branch has produced an Ethical Charter, and Lonely Planet Europe would consider explicit sustainability guidelines for both their authors of guides, and for the suppliers of services to be featured. In their own forecast they estimate that in 10 years, 40 to 50% of the products listed in their guides could have verified sustainability credentials.

Tourism Concern, which "campaigns for ethical and fairly traded tourism" is currently planning the third edition of its The Good Alternative Travel Guide*. Working through its large international network of tourism stakeholders, known as the 'Fair Trade in Tourism Network', it is able to identify a wide range of sustainable tourism products, including community-based tourism initiatives primarily and responsible tour operators. With access to extensive language skills, the organisation is not constrained by having to communicate in English, and is able to research many products in often remote and marginal destinations. Products that pass a preliminary review are sent a questionnaire (in an appropriate language), which is used as the basis of assessment and to determine which products meet sufficient criteria of fair trade and responsibility to be included. There is no fee for inclusion, although there is some income from advertising, and those that are rejected are offered advice and guidance on best practice, since "the objective is to change the industry". Two hundred products were included in the guide's second edition, of which 10,000 copies have been sold, and which is supplemented by promotion at trade fairs and online listings. Tourism Concern's website receives 9,000 unique site visits each month, making this a highly effective medium. Feedback from suppliers has been extremely positive, with over 100 new suppliers contacting Tourism Concern in the past twelve months seeking inclusion in the next edition, reflecting the recommendations and value placed on the medium by existing suppliers.*

*According to Tourism Concern, the guide is particularly valued by suppliers, because the organisation "shares information across its network", promoting best practice and contributing to the development of 'fair trade in tourism'. Whilst for consumers, who are "a bit more socially responsible" and "want to take a different kind of holiday", its value is that it is "not just a marketing tool", but is "*effectively *a certification scheme". Some consumers seek product endorsement, whilst suppliers recognise the benefits of working with an independent organisation with fifteen years of international network experience. Insofar as the guide is a tool for normalising sustainability and promoting best practice, Tourism Concern describes the guide's contents as "tourism that's developed in the context of sustainable development".*

Media

Media includes the travel section of mainstream newspapers and consumer magazines, as well as dedicated travel magazines. Most income comes from advertising revenue, whilst the content primarily consists of stories, reviews and features about particular destinations and products. Newspapers also offer commercial opportunities through affiliate marketing initiatives (endorsing and featuring holiday offers in the newspapers for a commission for the newspaper instead of paying a price for the advert). The travel pages of newspapers are the key promotional channel for specialist tour operators other than word of mouth.

But, just as the point of newspapers is to sell news, the point of travel journalism is to promote travel. Therefore, according to *The Independent*, sustainability is "not an issue", because ultimately "people want to go on holiday, even if they want to travel more *thoughtfully*". The newspaper has certain values, which means that it will tend to encourage community-led tourism and promote small guest houses, cycling and public transport, but it also has a commercial need to gain advertising revenue, which cannot be constrained by considerations of sustainability, on which there is no specific policy. The editorial view is that for consumers, the theme of 'sustainable tourism' is "boring... like travel insurance", but that at the same time 'sustainable tourism products' are generally "more interesting", (said the freelance journalists interviewed for this report).

Travel pages of newspapers have a small team of staff editors that commission the work from freelance editors, who have to pitch ideas that are original, new, interesting and also good ideas for holidays. Freelance writers look for ideas that will sell. Funnelling interesting stories from the tourism provider and the travel media is the gap. Training tourism companies on how the media operates, and how to identify the relevant freelance journalists with the right stories is crucial.

Original, quirky, interesting stories of exciting and unique places to go and things to do have the greatest potential to be featured in the travel pages. The emphasis sought by freelance journalists and travel editors is on why these are good holidays. Giving money to charities, investing in schools, saving turtles all play a part in the feature, but not in the opening paragraphs. In doing so the media contributes to consumer education in a more subliminal way. A feature on the importance of responsible tourism per se would only be a story once, while this way there is a way to keep communicating the underlying principles.

Tourism firms need to plan the message to be communicated, emphasising first why it is exciting and unique. They require thinking from the point of view of the consumer, and not focusing first on conservation, and they first have to make an interesting travel proposition.

Messages need to be newsworthy, so products are easiest to be featured when they are new. For products that have been on the market for some time, companies need to think of ways to reinvent messages in the public relations tradition to ensure their products have maximum exposure. For example, the UK project promoting bicycle routes 'Sustrans' had already received extensive exposure for their work in the 1990s, and yet they are being featured again for introducing public artwork along their routes to attract more families to cycling. Celebrities visiting a sustainable tourism company and supporting the cause is another way of getting repeated exposure.

Several newspapers run travel awards that highlight good practice and have become great marketing methods for the few companies winning. *The Times* dedicated four pages to the winners of their Responsible Tourism Awards (organized by the online travel agent responsibletravel.com, in association with *The Times*, World Travel Market and *Geographical*

Magazine). Many independent tour operators use their winning status to promote themselves, and a number of sustainable tourism products have dramatically increased their bookings and reputation through winning one of these awards.

The Guardian *newspaper in the UK runs a monthly column called The Green Light, featuring responsible holidays, based on market research that identified a gap in the market. "Go diving with octopuses" was the incentive to read about an Earthwatch project in Costa Rica monitoring octopuses and their habitat.*

The tour operator Discovery Initiatives was featured in two mainstream UK television travel programmes, The Holiday Programme and Wish You Were Here. In both cases the productions were well received and stimulated a great deal of interest. The Holiday Programme feature was further repeated in at least one revised format suggesting recognition by the producers of the value of this type of holiday.

Certification schemes

Certification schemes highlight sustainable tourism products. They have a dual function of helping tourism suppliers to raise their sustainability standards, and providing market mechanisms to increase trade gained from having the brand of the ecolabel. There are over 60 initiatives, targeting mostly the accommodation sector, and mainly in Europe. Most of them have started since the mid 1990s, with 20 more in development at present.

These schemes have the dual role of increasing industry performance by providing guidelines on how to be more sustainable, directing applicants towards sources of help and in some cases providing advice directly, and at the same time providing marketing benefits. As the certification programs grow, they are promoting the certified companies to both distribution channels and to consumers.

However, there are too many labels, with few certified products each, to have an impact on the market. Consolidation of current labels for international recognition, and repositioning of the labels as being an extension to traditional product quality (particularly for ecotourism markets) are obvious avenues forward. In only a few instances will sustainability be a unique selling proposition that can be meaningfully branded.

The certified product is not meaningful to the consumer for two reasons: firstly, lack of awareness, and secondly, the perception that it does not have significantly different attributes. Consumers cannot tell from the available information whether a certified product is better than the average product, on the points that matter to the tourist. The small number of certified companies, and the fact that the basic quality attributes are very different (a 5 star hotel and a guest house can have the same environmental label) means that choosing providers based on an ecolabel is not likely. This is partly attributed to the fact that certification programs have no in-house marketing or communications specialists.

VISIT is the acronym for 'Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability In Tourism', the result of 10 ecolabels uniting forces to raise standards across Europe and to benefit from the economies of scale of joint marketing and lobbying. See http://www.yourvisit.info

The EU funded project Tourlink supports tour operators to standardise their sustainability checklists with those of certification programmes. This will create more transparent and cost-effective distribution systems for certified companies, and reduce technical barriers to trade from multiple but similar standards. See http://www.fto.co.uk/ and http://www.pmztoerisme.nl/

Green Travel Market offers tour operators a tool for receiving reliable, up-to-date information on more sustainable tourism products currently available on the market, screened for quality and sustainability. Amongst others it includes over 1000 certified accommodation providers in Europe. See http://www.greentravelmarket.info

The Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas aims to make sustainable tourism firms more competitive by providing market advantages through certification. The goal is to involve 175 enterprises in certification by 2007. Technical assistance to suppliers to date includes 21 trainers trained, 507 entrepreneurs trained, and 1686 introduced to best management practices through seminars. This effort is being implemented in four pilot countries by Rainforest Alliance-Costa Rica, Alianza Verde in Guatemala, the Ecuadorian Ecotourism Association (ASEC),and Programme for Belize. See http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2004/tourismnetwork2.html

FTTSA (Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa) has developed a certification scheme. It is relatively new and has so far only certified seven products, which are mainly accommodations, but it also includes a game reserve and a township tour. Ten more products are currently under review. Tour operators have indicated that the scheme needs at least twenty products to gain critical mass, and FTTSA expects to have certified twenty-five by May 2005. It does not certify tour operators, as their product range is "too complex". Products are assessed against criteria in eight areas. These are business information, human resources, procurement, community initiatives, social initiatives, environmental initiatives, business policies and the motivation for applying for FTTSA certification.

Some foreign tour operators are encouraging their suppliers to register, which will provide additional revenue and contribute to critical mass. FTTSA is involved in a lot of B2B marketing activities to promote products to foreign tour operators and to promote the scheme to regional tourist boards - and thereby reach more products. The website is currently only in English, but FTTSA also has plans to include basic information in Dutch, French, German and Swedish. Its view is that sustainable tourism products have a "very niche" market, but that "the niche will grow" and that 'fair trade in tourism' is not just a marketing tool; tourism products increasingly need to become more sustainable - and this includes fair terms of trade, environmental management and social responsibility. See http://www.fairtourismsa.org.za

Consumer and trade fairs

Travel and tourism suppliers ranging from individual products to national tourist boards use fairs to present their goods and services to travel trade buyers and consumers, including prospective tourists and business organisations. Key sectors of the fairs market include leisure tourism, independent travel and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions although in North America and Asia Pacific, the 'C' is usually 'Conventions'). The number of specialised fairs addressing the topic of sustainable, eco and responsible tourism is increasing, while traditional national fairs are developing these themes as well by offering specific events or pavilions and forum of discussions. Individual companies are unlikely to attend many fairs, particularly small providers, for cost reasons. Learning about the market is useful, particularly at the early stages of developing a company. The majority of firms will not be able to justify the cost, even when they are selling under the umbrella of the national tourist board's stand.

Business travel, as evidenced by the MICE sector, has traditionally not been considered particularly relevant to sustainable tourism, but this is changing. With the growing importance of 'corporate governance' in business and the associated shareholder exposure to corporate risk, buyers are increasingly seeking out suppliers that have strong sustainability credentials, and are asking to see companies' environmental policies and evidence of 'corporate social responsibility'.

The Centre for the Promotion of Imports for Developing Countries, an agency of the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sponsors community based tourism and NGO's under certain conditions and provides marketing assistance prior, during and after the Vakantiebeurs' Fair in Utrecht, Netherlands, such as brochure and website design and negotiation skills, as well as organising meetings with relevant tour operators.

Reisepavillon is the alternative travel fair running annually in Hanover, Germany, attracting 250 stands from 50 countries in 2004 (the 13th year of operations, up 10% from 2003). There is a high exhibitor turnover, with 39% of new exhibitors, and 20% of non returns. Networking of experts provides the edge to this fair, with parallel meetings and project briefings by associations and institutions such as Ecotrans, Bund für Umwelt - und Naturschutz, Viabono, WWF, Naturfreunde and GTZ, the German Agency for Environmental Co-Operation. GTZ supports the fair by organising the industry networking and training event, Tourismus Forum International (TFI), and also bringing 20% of the stands by showcasing developing ecotourism projects from developing countries.

Consumer fairs such as Chicago and New York have rebranded from specialist adventure shows to more mainstream to attract a broader public and companies. In doing so they have attracted first time buyers for specific product types such as adventure and eco tourism because the fairs showcase products not usually found in travel agencies, with actual sales made on the show. These fairs are days out, with 22,000 people paying USD 15,00 each to enter the New York Adventure and Travel Expo.

The activity holidays and shortbreak tour operator Inntravel organises a day long travel fairs where suppliers from all over Europe are invited to the UK to meet directly with customers. The fairs are held every three years in different parts of the country, with the most recent in December 2004 in North Yorkshire. About 120 suppliers (including hotel owners, restauranteurs and service providers such as ski-hire companies) presented their products and services to 1000 customers and potential customers. Attendance is by ticket only because of the high demand, although tickets are free. Inntravel staff – including directors, product managers and sales staff are on hand to answer enquiries and take bookings.

IMEX is the leading MICE fair held each year in Frankfurt, with three schemes to showcase best practice and to promote corporate social responsibility in its sector. These are gaining in prestige and each year attract a growing number of applications. The Programmes of Purpose Award for Social Responsibility "recognises meeting organisers who have put together meetings or incentives benefiting the local community – undertaking charitable acts can be inspirational to participants as well as lastingly beneficial to the community concerned". The Environmentally Responsible Meetings Award (in association with IHEI and Oceans Blue Foundation) "recognises environmental awareness amongst meeting organisers, highlighting the opportunities that now exist to stage business tourism events in 'green-minded' venues, whilst also planning an agenda in which sustainability issues have been taken fully into account". The Free Wild Card Places is one of the most innovative awards, enabling emerging destinations with MICE potential to participate and access new markets.

Internet retailers

These are on-line retailers, in some cases complementing conventional operators and agents, but usually they are a global distribution system for mainstream products. This category also includes holiday auction sites and over-branded in-house websites used to sell distressed stock. There are very few sites that are selective and control their product according to strict quality criteria, and sometimes they act as 'matchmakers' between suppliers and operators. Retailers act as sales agents and sell products direct to consumers, and also via travel agents. Income is mainly from commission, and also advertising revenue and registration fees.

The distinction between 'matchmakers' and 'sales agents' is both practical and legal. Whilst both might gain a commission from the transaction, a 'matchmaker' introduces potential clients to suppliers (and sometimes vice versa), whilst an 'agent' sells the tourism services of a supplier directly to customers, although consumers might be under the impression that they are dealing directly with the supplier.

Internet retailers can also be divided into two categories: high volume-low margin and low volume-high margin. The large internet retailers compete on price and supply a commodity market, whilst the many small ones focus on specialist products, particular niche markets or are dedicated to a small number of suppliers, sometimes in a single destination. The smaller retailers therefore gain tremendous expertise, but at the expense of a balanced portfolio, which would reduce their exposure to the risk of an unexpected fall in their chosen field.

The websites of vertically integrated tour operators, such as TUI, Thomas Cook and MyTravel, and those of other large tourism service providers, such as international hotel groups, airlines and car hire firms, are not considered here. This is because such websites are an extension of conventional retailing, rather than representing a specialist distribution channel.

However, unlike holidays booked through tour operators (whether online, by telephone or through a travel agent), consumers will often not have the same protection provided them by the Council Directive on package travel, package holidays and package tours (90/314/EEC of 13 June 1990). Thus, whilst the larger internet retailers have developed fairly comprehensive contractual and regulatory frameworks that offer a measure of protection to consumers, the smaller ones have adopted a more precautionary approach, to protect both their customers and their own businesses. Many have therefore adopted more of a 'matchmaking' role, so that their legal agency (and liability) is limited, but their ability to freely make a much wider range of specific recommendations is enhanced. Consumer confidence in the smaller retailers thus becomes a function of commercial independence and transparency.

One of the fastest growing internet retailers is the UK-based responsibletravel.com, which has grown by 250% each year since its launch in April 2001. It acts as an ‘introducer’ for suppliers, matching suppliers to customers and also bringing together suppliers and operators. Its 260 suppliers in 140 countries are known as ‘partners’ or ‘members’ and between them offer 2,000 individual products; its customers are primarily in English-speaking markets, with 80% in the UK, but this is changing.

Every supplier is carefully screened and each product must fulfil specific criteria that include environmental, social and economic policy. This process typically takes 7-10 days. All partners must have the capacity to respond to email enquiries in English within 48 hours. Each partner pays an annual fee, which ranges from nothing for community-led enterprises to more than £5,000 for the largest tour operator, plus commission per converted enquiry, which is never more than 10%. The company insists that it is “not a middle man, because the supplier knows best”. Thus, it generates booking enquiries for its partners, who are then responsible for converting these into sales.

With a strapline inviting visitors to “Find 1000’s of holidays to 100’s of places not ravaged by mass tourism”, the company distinguishes itself from the larger internet retailers, like lastminute.com and Expedia, both of which have huge brand recognition but which lack the capacity to deal so individually with customers. Its objective is to “market responsible tourism as a different and better product than less responsible tourism”. Many of responsibletravel.com’s “best sellers are wildlife trips, walking holidays ... [and] more adventurous family holidays”. Given that such products are nowadays in fact very mainstream, this indicates that the online marketing of sustainable tourism is no longer a niche activity. A leading UK tour operator has reported that it achieves more sales through responsibletravel.com than through any other internet retailer. Consumers of such products however inevitably require a lot of information which only the supplier can furnish.

A customer identifies a product through the company’s website (with every page individually subjected to highly sophisticated search engine optimization) or through one of its increasingly numerous newspaper supplements, sends an enquiry (via the website) to the supplier, who responds with full information and booking details. Such a service could not be offered by large retailers, if only because enabling such communication would put their commission at risk, but it is part of the unique proposition of responsibletravel.com. This process is, of course, subject to audit which is possible for a relatively small operation.

Known primarily as a B2C agent, responsibletravel.com is particularly proud of some of its B2B activities: enabling tiny community tourism businesses to engage with leading international tour operators, helping numerous journalists to identify some excellent sustainable tourism products, generating significant PR opportunities and additional business for its members. It has rarely lost a member, because it offers good value for money and has created a community of suppliers and customers that value authenticity and the direct approach. Apart from offering all the usual add-on products, such as flights, travel clothes and insurance, the company also offers ‘Tips for responsible travellers’.

Consumer organisations

Consumer organisations promote the rights and interests of their members, through product testing, policy lobbying and conducting information campaigns. Consumer organisations whose mandate is to protect consumer rights are increasingly showing interest in the sustainability of products as part of their overall quality, and as such are reporting quality and sustainability standards to their members. These communicate and distribute a range of information to their members that influences purchasing behaviour, and in many cases they also provide holiday accommodation and booking services. Consumer organisations’ recommendations to their members are powerful marketing tools because of high member loyalty and because their assessments are perceived as independent.

In addition to general consumer organisations, there are ‘membership’ associations such as automobile and caravanning associations. The Alliance Internationale de Tourisme (AIT) and the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA) have more than 42 million members in Europe, and 100 million plus members globally. They are champions of the ‘mobile consumer’, with the focus of their public policy agenda being sustainable mobility, road safety, consumer protection and testing, environment and tourism. Their work has focused on increasing the quality and safety of driving, and within this, driving holidays. These clubs promote cleaner emissions, reducing road congestion and increasing safety.

Figure 3. The target market of automobile and caravanning consumer association magazines.

CLUB	Membership	Magazine	Circulation	Page (€)	Websites
AIT/FIA, BE		**"Mobility"**	3.000		www.aitfiabrussels.com
					www. aitfiaeurotest.com
ADAC, DE	14.887.019	**ADAC Motorwelt**	14.887.019	99.840	http://www.adac.de
RACC, ES	963.531	**RACC Magazine**	850.000	6.000,00	www.racc.es
RACE, ES	364.019	**RACE Magazine**	400.000	7.680,00	www.race.es
AMZS, SI	100.528	**Motorevija**	100.000	2.500,00	www.amzs.si
NAF, NO	426.824	**MOTOR**	420.000	8.000,00	www.naf.no
AA, UK	13.244.935	**AA Magazine**	11.984.819	25.000,00	www.aanewsroom.com
Caravan Club, UK	315.455	**Caravan Club**	315.455	N/A	www.caravanclub.co.uk
TCS, CH	1.476.951	**Touring (DE, IT, FR)**	1.417.554	13.000,00	www.tcs.ch
ACI, IT	1.100.000	**ACI**	1.100.000	N/A	www.aci.it
		HP Trasporti	150.000		
TCB, BE	504.023	**Touring**	520.000	9600/7.200	www.touring.be
OAMTC, AT	1.524.400	**Auto Touing**	1.453.468	20.700	www.oeamtc.at
ANWB,NL	3.864.112	**ANWB Kampioen**	3.752.296	45.000	www.anwb.nl
		Auto&verkeer	3.752.296		
HAK, HR	140.000	**HAK Revija**	140.000	1.300	www.hak.hr
TOTALS	**39.227.252**		**40.920.433**		

Promoting sustainable tourism has to be seen within the remits of both organisations. For automobile clubs this means they are information providers within the mandate of consumer protection. They have enormous media resources and reach with strong brands and reputations. The ADAC association in Germany is considered more credible by young people than the Church and Green Peace, while in the Netherlands three out five households have ANWB membership. The services these consumer organisations provide to their members include hotel guides, camping and caravanning guides, maps, holiday guide books and route planners amongst others based on the clubs' own inspections, evaluations and assessments which take some sustainable practices into account.

Camping and caravanning associations, in particular, have engaged with a range of environmental actions for their own sites, and setting criteria for other sites. In the UK the Caravan Club has an alliance with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds as 11% of CC members are members of RSBP. AIT & FIA conduct environmental audits for camping and caravan sites, support for the new European tourist accommodation Eco-label, and the monitoring of European Bathing Water Quality.

The Consumers Union (USA) is considering sustainability certification as the criteria for including tourism suppliers in their travel directory. This is within their organisational remit of providing unbiased product testing and consumer information to protect the interests of consumers. Their publications have 6 million subscribers in the United States alone, and are part of the Consumers International global network of 250 organisations in 110 countries.

The Alliance Internationale de Tourisme & Federation Internationale de l'Automobile would consider a policy to increase the coverage of sustainable tourism issues in the magazines of their national member associations within Europe.

The Camping and Caravanning Club (UK) operates over 100 club sites, and is starting to operate franchised sites. With over 400,000 loyal members, the club provides one of the strongest camp site brands. One of their most recent acquisitions in the Lake District has been renovated to the gold standard in the Cumbria for Excellence 2004 awards in the Caravan Holiday Park category, and was quoted by The Guardian *newspaper as possibly the greenest camp site in the UK.*

ANALYSIS

Traditionally governments, inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations have encouraged sustainable tourism by focusing mainly on the supply side of the tourism industry, or on promoting responsible citizenship through consumer education, with the aim of increasing demand. Matching supply and demand is the missing link. Specific policies should then be designed to support the linkage between sustainable consumers and sustainable tourism products by strengthening the opportunities offered by the various distribution tools.

The four issues used to assess each of the eight distribution channels under consideration are designed to indicate the relative value of each tool. It is generally recommended that policies should be based on the ability to promote change of tourism suppliers that is equitable, with potential for market penetration, a positive cost-benefit analysis, and normalisation or mainstreaming potential. Individual promotion and distribution channels have been analysed against these attributes, with results in table 2.

- **Supplier equity**: High/Low - 'High' indicating that this tool/channel is extremely accessible on fair terms to a wide range of suppliers

- **Market penetration potential**: Strong/Weak - 'Strong' indicating that this tool/channel has significant reach (B2B or B2C)

- **Cost benefit analysis** (supplier perspective): Positive/Negative - 'Positive' indicating that the receipts and other business benefits produced by this tool/channel can reasonably be expected to outweigh any costs associated with participation

- **Normalisation potential**: Strong/Weak - 'Strong' indicating that this tool/channel has the potential to be used to promote and encourage a more sustainable development and environmental management of travel and tourism products

Supplier equity

Equity, understood as the ability of companies to have the same opportunities to access knowledge, loans, distribution channels, and to promote their products, is the first attribute used to analyse these tools. Public sector intervention in the marketplace has usually been justified on the basis of promoting equal access. Policy makers should promote equitable tools, and contribute to the equity of the different tools, because otherwise the danger is that only a few privileged companies will be able to market themselves as sustainable, through no fault of the remaining companies.

Destination management companies, tourist boards and guidebooks have the highest level of equity in as far as all companies can have the same access to use these channels. Communicating and distributing through tour operators and internet retailers have varied equity because it depends on the ability to set commercial relations with them, and to accept the commissions they charge. Media, travel fairs and certification schemes have low equity, because they require capital investment usually with little guarantee of return, only few companies can be featured, or there are no schemes available.

Training at an early stage is crucial to support product and destination planning. Marketing training will help to set realistic targets, and to create more level playing fields that will make all instruments more equitable. Policies should support companies and destination management organisations to learn about their markets, particularly about expectations and purchasing patterns, and how this affects the marketing and service delivery. Development plans should be realistic and market the marketable, as part of a plan for sustained and balanced growth.

Figure 4. Analysis of marketing channels for policy implications

Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis (supplier perspective)	Normalisation potential
Destination management organisations and tourist boards			
High. This depends entirely on DMO or tourist board criteria. Some are beginning to develop criteria that will give preferential terms to suppliers that meet specific sustainability criteria.	Varied. Depends on DMOs' marketing skills and funding, and product attractiveness. Inevitably, also affected by global reputation and consumer trends Whilst products like 'ecotourism' have a specific niche, the market for 'sustainable tourism products' is subordinate to that of the destination.	Varied. Participation contributes to critical mass, which in turn enhances the destination. But, beyond the facilitation of introductions, a product must be *good enough* to attract tour operators and consumers, and also satisfy the agency that it is worthy of promotion.	Strong. But only as long as the agency recognises that the 'sustainable development of tourism' is essential to tourism growth, and takes action to promote this approach. There is little incentive for products to be developed sustainably, whilst DMOs do not require it.
Tour operators			
Varied. Because of economies of scale, small (and often more sustainable) suppliers may not be supported by tour operators. Imaginative marketing and the 'right' product might be sufficient, but often the market is too price-sensitive for smaller suppliers to compete. Whilst mass market operators and many high street agents (operating on very tight margins) will tend to focus on larger suppliers, niche tour operators and specialist travel agents usually prefer more unique and smaller suppliers.	Varied. Whilst some products, such as international hotel groups, might be available through thousands of agents and operators around the world, many smaller products might be only available through one, if any at all. The survival of some products can entirely depend on being featured by a particular operator, whilst for others being featured by a tour operator is entirely incidental.	Positiva (usually). As long as the terms of trade are fair, a supplier featured by a leading tour operator or travel agent will benefit from significant marketing support and could gain considerable business as a result. But, without a long-term commitment, there is no guarantee that the supplier will receive continued support. Therefore, unless a supplier is at the same time investing in other distribution channels, the apparently efficient relationship could turn out to be a false economy.	Weak. Some operators actively encourage their suppliers to implement policies that promote environmental management and CSR, as it is in the interests of good business. But most lack the resources (human and financial) to invest in their partners' sustainable development and often maintain that it would be inappropriate for them to 'interfere' in their suppliers' operations. The promotion of sustainable tourism requires the personal commitment of senior management. A few tour operators and travel agents are producing information on sustainable tourism for their customers, and are also encouraging their suppliers to take similar initiatives.

Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis (supplier perspective)	Normalisation potential
Guidebooks			
High. As long as there is a guide to the destination, any product could be featured in it. The challenge is for the product to stand out against its competitors. The increasing number of guidebooks published by NGOs is providing a new opportunity for suppliers, whom the NGOs consider their primary focus - rather than the consumers that buy the books.	Strong. The leading guidebooks to any destination can make or break a product. If a guidebook creates a market, then the challenge is simply to deliver a quality service and value for money, and thereby encourage loyalty and promotion by word of mouth.	Positive. As long as the guidebook endorsement is accurate and positive, then the marketing is the cheapest available. But it can take 2-3 years from research to publication, which means that suppliers must at the same time invest in other channels.	Strong. Publishers can be extremely influential. Guidebooks that have recognised the negative impacts of unbridled tourism growth (to which they may have contributed) often adopt a policy to encourage more sustainable tourism. To gain inclusion, suppliers respond by developing their own sustainability policies and credentials. Some publishers (particularly NGOs) are effectively running a certification scheme by applying very strong selection criteria.
Media			
Low. Other than by paying for advertising (including advertorials) or providing ‘free holidays’ to journalists, it is largely a matter of luck (or good connections) that determines which products are featured. Many travel journalists are allergic to press releases. New travel award schemes provide significant opportunities for small suppliers, but there can always only be one winner!	Varied. Whilst features about emerging destinations can have a significant impact on the market, consumers (particularly in the UK) are becoming increasingly unexcited when they see yet another feature about Chiantishire. It is the story about a ‘quirky’ product that captures the consumer imagination.	Positive. If a product has gained coverage without advertising or other investment, then the marketing can be an extremely powerful tool, albeit within a relatively well-defined readership; depending on the publication, this could range from a couple of thousand to several million.	Weak. The media can influence consumers. However, whilst many travel articles include the odd reference to sustainability, the primary aim of travel journalism is to promote travel. Most consumer research indicates that the vast majority of tourists go on holiday to ‘get away from concerns’ and frankly don’t care, and journalists don’t want to irritate their readers by dwelling on such issues.

Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis (supplier perspective)	Normalisation potential
Certification schemes			
Low. Few companies have access to the technical and marketing know-how provided by certification. Many companies will not have the knowledge or time to prepare for verification, even if there are medium to long term benefits.	Varied. The message of certified companies is not strong enough to make a significant difference in the marketplace when targeting consumers. More potential for business to business market penetration, where ecolabels can provide added value to tour operators, with examples of some committed firms collaborating with certain ecolabels.	Varied. For most firms in developing countries, there are more immediate short-term business survival priorities. There are very few examples of entrepreneurial certified companies selling directly. The bulk of the market through large international tour operators can use certification as a pre-scan for risk assessment, making it more appealing to investors.	Varied. Investor expectations will over time influence larger suppliers and distribution channels to introduce sustainability criteria, which in turn will promote the use of certification.
Travel fairs (B2B and B2C)			
Low. The cost of attendance is prohibitive for most suppliers, with attendance at some requiring a budget of more than €50K. Space at a small consumer fair might be less than €500, but this is on top of the delegates' travel expenses and the cost of producing marketing material for the event. Some fairs offer discounts to certain categories of supplier, but this is rare.	Weak. The opportunity to win new business, except perhaps in the MICE sector, is limited. Whilst fairs do provide opportunities to test new products, in many cases they are simply a way of renewing relationships by meeting in person.	Negative. 'Making deals' is the key motivation for attending, and many suppliers treat fairs as an efficient way of meeting all their key customers together. But for many exhibitors, the biggest benefit is the chance to see their competitors in action.	Strong. With so many competitors gathered together, they are a captive audience for the promotion of new trends. Buyers (particularly in the MICE sector) increasingly require high environmental standards, and the steady rise in applications for new environmental awards indicates that suppliers understand this.

Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis (supplier perspective)	Normalisation potential
Internet retailers			
Varied. In order to sell products on most websites, suppliers simply need to pay the commission, which can be as high as 40%. But to be featured on specialist websites, where commission might be just 5%, suppliers need to meet strict criteria.	Strong. Suppliers can achieve high sales through mainstream sites, but generally only through 'deep discounting'. Critical market can be gained through specialist websites, but not in the same volume. he test is whether the site manager has the online marketing skills to ensure consistent market penetration.	Varied. For achieving sales, this channel can be an extremely cost-effective medium, although products can lose their identity on some of the larger sites, which diminishes brand value. Products that gain a listing on some of the smaller, more specialist sites can gain access to a ready market and also reach a whole new group of operators and partners, enabling a high return on investment.	Strong. Mainstream sites have shown little enthusiasm for promoting more sustainable tourism policies amongst their suppliers, and are failing to use the influence that they have. But the specialists are showcasing best practice (and emphasising the benefits of registration) and this is encouraging other suppliers to adopt similar policies. Some retailers are providing feedback to suppliers that fail to meet their criteria, in order to help them improve their business practices.
Consumer organisations			
Low. Whilst any supplier could potentially be the object of scrutiny for a consumer group, in practice they will tend to be those that are identified as being examples of bad practice. Some consumer groups might focus on a small number of *best practice* examples for the purposes of comparison, or as constituents of a certification scheme.	Varied. Some associations 'punch above their weight', exerting influence on consumers and on both the public and private sectors far beyond what might be indicated by the size of their membership and range of stakeholder representation. But often, characterised as marginal, 'single issue' and unrepresentative campaigning organisations, they have little ability to change industry practice, beyond small niche sectors.	Positive. A supplier championed by a leading consumer group as an example of best practice can receive tremendous benefits, including extensive media coverage and interest from the most responsible tour operators and government agencies. Benefits come from the perceived objectivity (independence) of the consumer group. These bodies also offer considerable affinity marketing opportunities.	Weak. Consumer organisations might be able to contribute to 'the agenda', but ultimately change and normalisation of sustainability in travel and tourism will be determined by the industry, insofar as it recognises consumer interest and the associated market implications. Organisations that *appear* to influence policy and to 'have an ear' for industry generally only achieve such status by sacrificing independence.

Market penetration potential

Some distribution channels have the potential to make a considerable contribution towards changing the behaviour of the market they target. For all these markets, the greatest potential is to change behaviour in the adventure, ecotourism, nature tourism markets where sustainability is part of the quality of the product both experienced and expected, as the potential market is already sympathetic to the philosophies of sustainable tourism.

DMOs and tourist boards rarely reach the actual markets, although increasingly internet marketing portals are achieving where print publications failed. These are custodians of the destination brand and as such can create interest in a certain destination. Providing an internet sales portal that allows efficient bookings increases the potential for market penetration. Suppliers can achieve considerable market penetration through tour operators, with many examples in the past of over relying on few operators, that subsequently meant suppliers losing entrepreneurial skills and self-control. Travel guides are important marketing tools because they reach a large number of people within one given target market, and the readership of these travel guides use the information to make purchasing choices. However, individual suppliers need to consider working with travel guides as a mid-term investment, as there is no guarantee that they will be featured, and there is a considerable lead time between preparing information and the publication date. The media can generate short-term interest in specific destinations and provide a boost to companies starting with creative, unique concepts. But media has a short self life and cannot be relied on.

Certification has limited potential for market penetration at present because the marketing know-how as well as resources of certification programs are insufficient to reach consumers. The focus should therefore be on business to business marketing and lobbying tour operators that certified products can guarantee sustainability. While progress is being made in this respect, it is too early to say what the potential actually is. Travel fairs have very limited potential for market penetration, particularly business to consumer. They are better tools to reaffirm current working relationships with distribution channels, and to learn about market trends. Internet retailers also have a high potential for market penetration, although this depends on the type of product and market targeted, and there is often a high commission to pay for internet retailers. “Dynamic packaging” that allows consumers to pick and choose different components of a holiday from the same travel site to form a personalized package. Finally, direct marketing has good potential for niche marketing, and to encourage repeat purchases.

Companies should think about promoting to the domestic market, and the extension of current products, before trying to attract new “hard-to-reach” international tourists. Donor-funded projects in particular should be realistic about the ability to generate markets from small interventions. Many funded projects cannot be self-financed in the long run through poor understanding of market needs, simply incorporating tourism as a form of income generation for conservation projects without developing the necessary skills, or market-led product planning which sets unachievable expectations.

Cost-benefit analysis

Cost-effectiveness is the third key issue reviewed here to consider the suitability of different tools. These are considered both from the point of view of government intervention as well as the investment for tourism companies.

DMOs and tourist boards are cost-effective ways for small firms to market themselves, membership costs are usually low for the service received as these organisations receive central funding to contribute to their fixed costs. Most governments undertake economic impact assessments that suggest that public sector investment in marketing functions generates a return on investment into the economy through tourism revenues in the region of 8 to 1. Policy makers are also increasingly being asked to contribute to the running of certification programs, as an extension of their duties in quality assurance. The challenge here is that all these programs require substantial subsidies, and despite individual examples of good practice, the impact on the market is not sufficient to justify the investment. These certification programs need to move towards being self-financing. In the same way, many travel fairs require subsidies and growth is hindered by the potential benefits they can deliver, and by how many fairs one company can attend.

Distribution tools that do not require public financial support include tour operators, guidebooks, and internet retailers. Marketing to tour operators is also a cost-effective method to reach markets. There are directories of outbound operators for most key markets, and the national tourist boards of the destination country should provide the necessary market intelligence to support targeted campaigns. In the same way, marketing to internet retailers is cost-effective if the company can survive with the commissions charged, and if reasonable yield management arrangements are made. Guidebooks are a cost-effective method for unique products with a high chance of being included. However, as there is no control of how the product is featured, the supplier might not agree with how they are portrayed. Getting a good review in the media can make a significant difference to the launch of a product. But spending too long on a media campaign could be cost ineffective if the product does not have uniqueness. Finally, direct marketing can be cost-effective for specific markets and to capitalise on consumer loyalty.

Figure 5. Most cost efficient to least cost efficient, and potential market reach

1. Develop webpage	$800 to $8,000	potentially millions
2. Online campaign	$5000 to $12,000	10,000 media & professionals
3. FAM/Press Trip	$15,000 to $30,000	thousands of travellers
4. Trade Shows	$5,000	potentially thousands

Source: Natour Communications.

Normalisation potential

The last key attribute considered in analysing the suitability of different instruments is their ability to effectively be a tool to move sustainable tourism products from niche to mainstream.

DMOs and tourist boards have a great opportunity to mainstream sustainable tourism, as long as they can manage the process of giving preferential treatment to companies meeting the standards, and to encourage others to work towards them.

Normalisation or mainstreaming potential depends on the ability of these distribution channels to reach niche markets that appreciate sustainable tourism products. In this sense the number of tour operators, internet retailers, guidebooks, travel fairs, travel sections in the media and certification programs either fully or partly dedicated to sustainable tourism is growing fast. However, their volume of operations is still comparatively low.

Sustainable tourism, ecotourism, fair trade tourism claims are not regulated, and a good part of the mainstreaming potential comes down to the ability to bring in criteria that are measurable and verifiable, without increasing the cost of the product beyond the customers' willingness to pay. There are examples of individual distribution channels implementing these criteria in their chains of supply, mainly voluntarily, and focusing more often on the environment than social issues.

CONCLUSIONS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Distribution channels in the tourism industry are the key element in any market-led policy to mainstream sustainable tourism practices. There are examples of good practice from each of the distribution channels to contribute to promoting sustainable suppliers. There is also evidence that distribution channels can do more within their commercial remit to market sustainable tourism products.

Focusing only on the business case for sustainability is unlikely to achieve considerable shifts in industry performance, and a certain amount of enforcement coupled with a better understanding of the moral and corporate social responsibilities for such change is necessary. Three scenarios for strategies are presented to illustrate how different approaches will lead to different policy recommendations. It seems likely that a combination of all three by different agents will help to move the sustainability agenda forward. Possible levers for change have been identified for each of the three scenarios outlined here.

1. The concept needs to be made fashionable: it needs to become a lifestyle value. Industry leaders will take the lead, with the support of the media, opinion leaders, travel guides, and forward thinking distribution channels. A segment of the market will always be at the cutting edge. **Policy makers can contribute by showcasing best practice, transfer of best practice and encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour of industry leaders.**
2. Information needs to be more widely available and presented in a less dogmatic and more impartial way so consumers can make up their own minds. The concept needs to be demystified first. Consumer organisations, retail outlets and promotion channels will take the lead. All stakeholders must be engaged; none can be excluded. **Policy makers can contribute by creating transparent communication mechanisms that allow the market to identify sustainable practices.**
3. Business to business marketing is the strategy to normalise, not business to consumer. In some instances consumers will not need to know that products selected are of higher sustainability. Large tour operators will take the lead by implementing corporate social responsibility as good business practice, and also to protect their companies from NGO pressure, shareholder concern and government legislation. **Policy makers can contribute by engaging tour operators in discussions for industry self-regulation, and incentives for supplier development as part of supply chain management.**

To this effect, three recommendations are highlighted for the benefit of government, donor, industry association and inter-governmental organisation policies to promote tourism distribution channels to give preference to sustainable tourism products.

Mainstream win-win solutions. Develop policies expecting tourism distribution channels to give preference to suppliers that can prove their sustainability, when these sustainability practices can lead to eco-savings, and when sustainability is part of quality. The reason for promoting these aspects first is to take into account the business realities of both suppliers and distribution channels. The challenge of such policies is for governments to ensure that all tourism firms have a reasonable opportunity to reach these requirements, and as such, these policies need to be supported with training on marketing, quality, operations management, finance as well as sustainability to support small and medium-sized enterprises. The criteria available to test eco-savings and sustainability-based quality are widely available and there are sufficient experiences in implementing these both from the supplier and the distribution channel to support the feasibility of this recommendation.

Support other aspects of sustainability. Support suppliers in improving sustainability aspects such as going beyond legislation on labour standards and other elements of sustainability not visible to the client, but nevertheless crucial to the long-term wellbeing of tourist destinations. There are fewer examples of good practice in this respect, and policies need to take into account the feasibility of small firms introducing standards that might require investment as well as specialist knowledge, therefore the introduction needs to be stepped and support measures to correct market imperfections will be needed. Policies should focus on demonstration projects and feasibility studies for specific national or regional needs. These policies need to be coupled with further testing market mechanisms to encourage distribution channels to give preference to these products.

Expect consumer education. Policy makers should reinforce the need for consumer education to increase demand for sustainability. Both distribution and promotion channels have responsibility for creating messages that support good practice and explain to the consumer the benefits of making sustainability choices. In practice, sustainability is often not a unique selling point, and communicating it as part of the sales transaction is not commercially beneficial. However, distribution channels should explore the full range of communication opportunities, often in partnership with tourist boards, press, and suppliers themselves, and use the added quality from sustainability to generate consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Consumer organisations and communication channels have the responsibility to generate interest, to educate consumers on expecting sustainability by default, to find distribution channels, and where relevant, individual suppliers that can provide sustainable services and sell direct to the consumer.

The policy mix to be used to achieve these goals will depend on the resources of the agency, the possibilities for collaboration, and the circumstances of the country or destination for application. Table 3 summarises the analysis and the key recommendations for tourism firms to use these distribution channels, to set the context for recommendations for industry (tourism companies trying to use those channels to promote themselves) as well as for policies for the distribution channels themselves (with support from governments and the industry associations).

Figure 6. Summary of analysis and recommendations on promotion and distribution tools to support marketing of sustainable tourism products.

	Supplier equity	Market penetration potential	Cost-benefit analysis	Normalisation potential	Industry recommendation	Policy recommendation
DMOs & tourist boards	High	Varied	Varied	Strong	Destination brand Sales portal	Strengthen. Provide training
Tour operators	Varied	Varied	Positive	Weak	Volume at lower price	Industry driven standards
Guidebooks	High	Strong	Positive	Strong	Mid term investment	Criteria for inclusion
Media	Low	Varied	Positive	Weak	Education consumer	Public relations clearinghouse
Certification schemes	Low	Varied	Varied	Varied	B2B lobbying	Experiment
Travel fairs	Low	Weak	Negative	Strong	Education supplier	Evaluate effectiveness
Internet retailers	Varied	Strong	Varied	Strong	Risk mgmt or commission	Regulate
Consumer organisations	Low	Varied	Positive	Weak	Mid term investment	Sustainability criteria

Interventions should focus on supporting favourable market conditions to develop sustainable products, identify them, and encourage access to the marketplace. Voluntary initiatives include training, facilitating communication, guidelines, creation of virtual market places, and certification as part of highlighting best practice. Providing economic incentives includes taxes, subsidies and grants, tradable rights and permits, and product and service charges can all support normalisation. In certain circumstances, regulation in the form of legislation and industry association membership bylaws will be necessary. The range of tools to be implemented will depend on the severity of the impacts faced and the local conditions. There are specific priorities for each distribution and communication channel. These will not be appropriate in every country, and often two or more actions will be needed to make a difference.

DMOs & Tourist Boards

Promote best practice by offering additional resources and marketing support to the most sustainable suppliers, and enabling the less sustainable to improve.

Encourage entrepreneurship and dynamism in marketing. Facilitate access to information and technical know-how. Enable partnerships and work in collaboration with other local stakeholders.

Preferential treatment to sustainable companies. Prepare a package of additional benefits that the DMOs and tourist boards will provide to companies that can prove their sustainability, including a range of marketing advantages. Provide training and other support measures to increase equity in being able to guarantee sustainable performance.

Tour Operators

Support the progressive introduction of industry-wide standards for sustainability through supply chain management.

Set minimum standards. Measure the impacts of suppliers cause and engage suppliers in setting achievable standards of sustainability. If possible work with tour operator associations to set industry-wide standards.

Engage suppliers to improve. Suppliers should be supported to improve performance to meet the desired standards. Training is the most common method.

Reward good performance. Provide benefits to suppliers that meet the standards set, in line with the incentives laid out at the outset of the process. More secure income streams, with foreseeable contracting conditions and fair prices are key.

Guidebooks

Support making public criteria for inclusion in these guidebooks that include sustainability requirements. Communicate these to DMOs and tourist boards to cascade down to individual firms.

Sustainability criteria to selection. Travel guides receive large amounts of requests from companies to be featured. There is sufficient interest to introduce sustainability criteria that reinforce the philosophy of the company and act as a filter, as well as incentive for companies. Providing such criteria in the travel guide’s website would help companies to see there is a commercial benefit to consider sustainability issues.

Beyond the feel good factors. Most travel guides include interesting tourism projects and companies in destinations based on the authentic tourist experience they can deliver. This in itself is already contributing to marketing sustainable tourism products. There is room to further select these suppliers based on sustainability criteria that the tourist will not see (for example water and energy efficiency, or use of biodegradable cleaning products to name some), but the guide author knows it would make a difference to the destination long term, such as how the supplier manages its operations, particularly water, waste and energy, as well as local job creation.

Media

Facilitate a public relations clearinghouse of newsworthy stories for the press. Provide training on media requirements for tourism firms.

Promote best practice. By featuring case studies of good environmental management and sustainability, internet retailers are able to 'quietly' educate consumers about some of the issues, whilst marketing sustainable tourism products, and at the same time can spread best practice, by sharing information across a wide network of dispersed suppliers.

Certification schemes

Experiment with standard setting and implementation considering carefully requirements for sustainability standards from distribution channels. Monitor equity consequences for small firms, and overall cost-benefit. Constantly review and raise criteria, as technology and management improves.

Prioritise business to business marketing. The unique selling proposition of certification is the guarantee that products are sustainable, based on transparent criteria and an independent verification. Distribution channels should give preference to certified products in their supply chains when these meet all the pre-requisites of quality, price, location, availability and others that might be pertinent to each distribution channel. There are several current projects comparing tour operator requirements and certification standards in line, and considering supplier development needs.

Postpone business to consumer marketing. Certification has not been so far an effective marketing tool to promote to consumers. The current labels are not sufficiently strong to be meaningful, channels used to promote them are not cost effective and do not reach the consumer in the tourist generating countries. Funds spent on business to consumer marketing of ecolabels will have a low return on investment for the foreseeable future. Considerable funds will be needed on consumer education as well as the development of stronger brands.

Travel fairs

Evaluate their effectiveness and rethink the purpose of participating. Provide a full marketing crash course around participating at fairs and offer it at competitive prices as part of industry training on a rotation basis. Encourage best practice through award schemes and preferential terms.

Industry meeting and training. Promote access to trade fairs for developing tourism firms as part of a training package on product development and marketing run by tourist boards or donor agencies. Increase awareness of the benefits and costs of participation to trade fairs to not set unrealistic expectations.

Internet retailers

Regulate and provide quality assurance schemes. Showcase best practice and feature case studies that illustrate the value of sustainability.

Facilitate introductions. Internet retailers have the opportunity to bring together suppliers and customers and also suppliers and tour operators, enabling market access for many small products in often remote and marginal destinations.

Promote best practice. By featuring case studies of good environmental management and sustainability, internet retailers are able to 'quietly' educate consumers about some of the issues, whilst marketing sustainable tourism products, and at the same time can spread best practice, by sharing information across a wide network of dispersed suppliers.

Consumer organisations

Lobby to introduce sustainability criteria as part of quality assessments. Showcase sustainable firms in association magazines. **More sustainability criteria.** Publications on quality of tourism facilities, such as Automobile Association hotel quality gradings, should include sustainability criteria. This should take place in a stepped and progressive way, in line with society's increasing expectations of quality.

Promote best practice. Like other communication channels, consumer organisations have a role in promoting best practice and educating consumers as to why this is better for both tourists and the destination visited. More information about sustainable holidays and destinations can be included in travel sections in consumer organisation magazines, for example a regular column on green destinations and where appropriate, on green transport to holiday destinations.

About the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics

UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE) helps decision-makers in government, local authorities, business and industry develop and implement policies that:

- promote sustainable consumption and production;
- encourage efficient use of energy;
- ensure adequate management of chemicals;
- incorporate environmental costs.

UNEP DTIE activities focus on raising awareness, improving the transfer of information, building capacity, fostering technological cooperation, partnerships and transfer, improving understanding of environmental considerations into economic policies, and catalyzing global chemical safety.

The UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE), with the Office of the Division in Paris, is composed of one Centre and five Branches:

- **The International Environmental Technology Centre (Osaka and Shiga)**, implements integrated waste, water and disaster management programmes, focusing in particular on Asia.
- **Production and Consumption (Paris)**, which promotes sustainable consumption and production patterns to contribute to human development through the market.
- **Chemicals (Geneva)**, which promotes sustainable development by catalyzing global actions and building national capacities for the sound management of chemicals and the improvement of chemical safety worldwide.
- **Energy (Paris)**, which promotes energy and transport policies for sustainable development and encourages investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- **OzonAction (Paris**), which supports the phase-out of ozone depleting substances in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to ensure implementation of the Montreal Protocol.
- **Economics and Trade (Geneva)**, which enhances the capacities of countries to integrate environmental considerations into economic and trade policies, and promotes the greening of the finance sector.

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About the Region of Tuscany

Tuscany, characterised by a productive network of primarily small enterprises which are deeply rooted to each local territort, is a one of Italy's most dynamic regions. Tuscany is also the homeland of an immense cultural, historical and natural patrimony which constitutes a wealth of tourist resources which have made it one of the world's most well-known tourist destinations.

Considering that Tuscany welcomes 37 million tourists a year (number of overnight stays) and the risks in terms of environmental impact that these numbers can generate, the government of the Region of Tuscany has placed sustainability at the core of its policies for the tourism section as well as for all other sectors of Tuscany's economy. The Regional Government is one of the main actors in encouraging the development of sustainable and cooperative tourism by searching for new solutions, by creating networks of tourism operators, by using European structural funds to improve the quality of tourism facilities, by utilizing its own funds for providing incentives for obtaining environmental certifications, for upgrading the quality and sustainability of tourist services, for promotion and marketing.

Since 2001 the Region of Tuscany has organised the *Euromeeting: European Regions, Tourism and Sustainable Development* conference, in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and with the endorsement of the Enterprise Directorate-General of the European Commission, as an opportunity for meeting and discussing subjects related to sustainable tourism. Over the years, many international institutions including the World Tourism Organisation, the Assembly of European Regions, the National Geographic Society, the United Nations Environment Programme, European regional and local authorities, industry associations, trade unions and tourism enterprises have participated in *Euromeeting*. We now possess a network of influential contacts and a patrimony of ideas and good practices that we would like to consolidate through a permanent network dedicated to carrying on the debate concerning sustainable tourism, the environment and its resources, and especially on the following subjects:

- theoretical/scientific analyses and surveys aimed at local territorial systems
- sector and integrated planning tools
- projects or integrated programmes that have produced concrete structural interventions and relevant managing experiences
- territorial and destination marketing actions
- professional training actions
- european interregional cooperation
- cooperation with developing countries.

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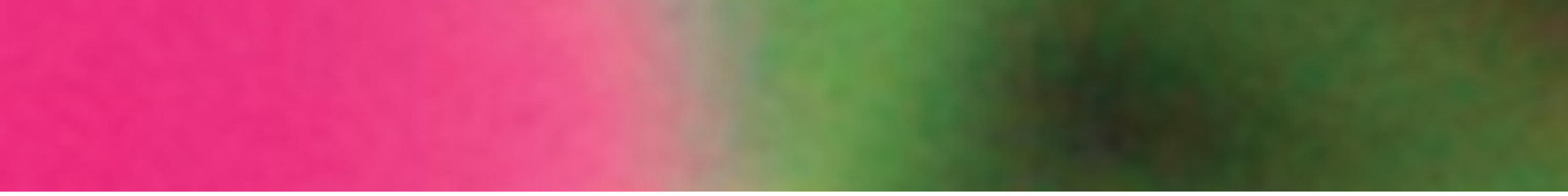

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