

Does B & B Management Agree with the Basic Ideas behind Experience Management Strategy?

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This paper reports the results of an exploratory study conducted using a sample of Bed and Breakfast operations in four mid-western states related to "experience" management strategies. Seventeen experience management strategies were developed (Smith, 2001) related to five areas of interest: strategy, design, use of technology, operations and people. Owner-operators of these tourism/hospitality related small-businesses were asked to express their views on each of the strategies. The first section of the paper provides background information on the development of the strategies based on recent literature related to the concept of an "experience economy," especially in the tourism and hospitality industry. The focus of the review is on the application of these concepts to the small business, family-owned, segment of this industry. Following the background information, the seventeen strategies in the form of propositions are presented. This is followed by a description of the exploratory study and the results of the study. The final section of the paper presents discussion and implications for future research and for practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

The focus for many researchers in the study of operations management has moved from products in manufacturing to services in service firms and service industries. Some services research has moved to the flow of information in service firms. Another emerging focus of study in certain service firms is the "experience." Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) argue that experiences represent the next step in the evolution of an economy as products and services become increasingly commoditized. Creating value in such an environment requires staging memorable experiences that unfold over time.

Experience is a broad term that can refer to any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from a person's participation in daily activities. We experience things all the time, no matter what we do. For our discussion here, however, we focus on "experience" created as an economic entity in a setting deliberately designed by the service provider. This "experience" is an emergent phenomenon. It is the outcome of participation in a set of activities within a social context. Therefore, it needs to be conceptualized and studied in relation to these activities and the social context in which it occurs (Gupta & Vijic, 2000). Customers always have an experience, whether good, bad or indifferent, whenever they purchase a product or service from a company. The key is how effectively the company can manage the experience (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). The context defined for this study is the management of tourism venues owned and operated by small, family-based businesses, especially those located in middle America.

What distinguishes experience from both products and services is the active role that customers/guests are given in creating their own use environment. Experience providers do not design the delivery system merely to influence all customers in a particular predetermined manner. They create an experience that is facilitated by a detailed understanding of the nature of all the activities that engage a customer during use of a product or service. They also design enough flexibility in the system so that customers who have difference knowledge structures and preferences can each create their own unique use environment during interaction and, therefore, their own unique experience (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

Venue management of tourism destination sites should assure, through strategy, design, use of technology, operations and people, that each guest who visits the site goes away with a personally satisfying, unique experience. There exists a widely dispersed set of literature related to tourism in general. This literature resides in a variety of disciplines and must be carefully culled to be of value to the present research project. Here we limit our review of the literature to material that relates to American travel destination sites, generally operated as small, or family-owned and operated, businesses as well as small public and private organizations. Larger, major corporate or international operations will be reviewed only where they clearly provide useful examples for the smaller destinations to be featured in this research program.

Hunt and Layne (1991) acknowledged the problems of defining travel and tourism saying that travel was the most accepted term until 1987 and since that time tourism has been the accepted term used to "singularly describe the activity of people taking trips away from home and the industry which has developed in response to this activity" (p. 11). Shames and Glover (1989) had earlier similarly posited the notion that the "service experience" of tourism is a "social experience" and as such involves "human interaction" whose "nature or form is determined by the culture or cultures of the interacting individuals" (p. 2). The evolved definition of Smith and Eadington (1992) simply states that "tourism is in fact a significant social institution" (p. xiii).

Building on the work of Lieper (1990) and Gunn (1994), Mill and Morrison (1998) characterized tourism as a system rather than an industry because of the interdependency in tourism, the open system nature of tourism, and complexity and variety in all aspects of tourism. The tourism system, they suggest, is like a spider's web—touch one part and reverberations are felt throughout the system. New concepts and phenomena are always arriving in tourism. The system is not a rigid form, but rather it is dynamic and constantly changing. There is enormous variety of approaches, such as hundreds of specialized tours and packages, as well as a virtual laundry list of destinations and attractions from which to choose.

The World Travel & Tourism Council estimates that travel and tourism expenditures will grow to nearly \$2.6 trillion by 2010, a rate of approximately 3.9% per annum (WTTC, 2000). A growing number of persons are choosing their leisure time travel destinations based on review of the web-based information available to them to peruse. Forrester Research estimates that by 2003, 65.5 million leisure trips will be booked online, an estimated \$29 billion market (McQuivey, 1998). Many of the destinations for travel and tourism in the United States are operated by small and family-based businesses and organizations affiliated with local

governments or not-for-profit entities. This study is focused on this niche of the much larger tourism industry.

A USTTA (United States Travel and Tourism Administration) in-flight study reported by McIntosh and Goeldner (1995) provides a useful list of activity choices by travelers. Categories of activities include attractions, gaming, recreation, entertainment, festivals and events, publishing, education and shopping. A more detailed list is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Activity Choices by Travelers
(from a USTTA in-flight study)

• theme park	• entertainment park	• amusement park	• animal park
• museum	• scenic railway	• historic farm	• scenic overlook
• resort complex	• historic site	• botanical garden	• arboretum
• plantation	• hall of fame	• water show	• zoo
• sports complex	• cultural center	• state park	• national park
• county park	• outdoor theater	• transportation exhibit	• Native American reservation

Further, innovation creates new attraction categories regularly at what seems to be an accelerating rate. These various attractions will be referred to as “destination sites” or “venues” for purposes of this report.

PROPOSITIONS

Strategy

Each destination site must examine its own strategy and goals to determine the appropriate action plan required to achieve success in the experience economy. Some may already be very well positioned to provide meaningful experiences to all or most guests. Disney World, for example, has developed an array of possible experiences for guests to choose – they may even choose totally different experiences each time they visit. Many may be partially prepared but have not yet reached their full potential. Rainforest Restaurants have developed nicely themed locations, but fall short in terms of a variety of experiences from which each customer can choose their unique, interactive experience. Others will find that they must begin their efforts from the ground floor and work in stages to achieve even modest levels of success in this approach. Many attractions and hospitality operations, often run as small businesses, for example, are still striving for consistent levels of customer services, and have yet to broaden their offerings to include additional experiences.

Customer assessments of the outcome of service encounters are frequently referred to as one form or the other of the following emotions: angry, irritated, dissatisfied, satisfied or delighted (e.g., Chase & Aquilano, 1995; Johnston, 1995). This suggests that before the service provider considers strategies to induce “meaningful experiences,” they assure themselves that they are providing current customers with service encounters that at least satisfy, if not delight, their customers.

Proposition S-1: *Venue management strategy should provide at least satisfactory levels of service to all guests.*

Kellogg, Youngdahl, and Bowen (1997) presented the service customer's value chain that consists of four elements: preparation, relationship building, information exchange, and intervention. Service providers will gain competitive advantage and move toward higher levels of customer satisfaction by providing opportunities for customers/guests to effectively participate in these four elements as an integral part of their service provision.

Proposition S-2: *Venue management strategy should provide opportunities for guests to effectively prepare for their visits.*

Some of this preparation can be achieved through effective use of the venue web-site on the Internet. Content materials may include brief readings and links to other information that provide background for guests prior to arrival. Groff (2000) provided an overview of this process in his review of the official tourism sites of several states.

Proposition S-3: *Venue management strategy should assist in building positive relationships from first encounter with guests.*

Since that first encounter may just as likely occur at the venue web-site on the Internet as face-to-face at the destination site, it is important to consider use of interactive elements on the venue web-site, as well as appropriate greetings and welcome activities at the venue. Web-site elements might include a discussion forum, chat room, or an email listserv type of experience opportunity. For example, Groff (2000) noted that the Nebraska site had a note from the Governor, "a nice touch that says the state considers this site important (p. H-1)."

Companies that are successful in creating experiences not only engage customers in activities during their first visit (or contact) but also design the environment so that each subsequent visit (on-line or in person) enriches the original experience. Customers learn more about the customs and procedures with each visit, and they become more comfortable with the layout and arrangement of objects and accessories. Some companies provide loyal customers with memberships that provide financial incentives for repeated purchases and a sense of belonging to the community. These incentives, however, work only if the experience design is properly implemented. (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

For example, Silver Dollar City, an Ozark Mountain theme park in southern Missouri, has a variety of admission and membership options that are structured to encourage repeat visits during the year. They also provide several different festivals on the grounds during the year to offer variety to those visitors who do return. Each visit becomes a unique experience based on the options that are available during that visit, along with the normal wide variety of activities on site throughout the year.

Proposition S-4: *Venue management strategy should provide early and effective opportunities for guests to exchange information regarding the destination site and activities available at particular times during the year.*

Information exchange should be made available in multiple ways in multiple places. Again, the venue web-site is a critical place to begin. This will help prepare the guest, as noted earlier, provide additional information as the guest plans the trip, and should continue to be available to answer questions after the destination site visit. On site kiosks should also be considered in the appropriate situations for provision of information as needed.

Proposition S-5: *Venue management strategy should provide effective opportunities for guests to intervene and make suggestions and modifications in their activities when they perceive a service failure may occur.*

Feedback and questioning opportunities should be built into the experience environment. This way, when ever and where ever a potential service failure may come to the attention of the guest, an appropriate mechanism is in place and ready to meet the needs of the guest. It should even be proactive, to solicit feedback, so that any potential problem is identified and handled at the earliest possible time.

Design

The expected continued growth in the use of the Web and the Internet makes it critical for tourism destination attractions to create, design and execute effective web-based information making optimal use of available technology. As a growing number of persons seek to achieve a unique, personal experience from each of the leisure time travel destinations they choose, it becomes the responsibility of operators of the destination attractions chosen to provide the environment for that unique, personal experience for each guest.

As noted earlier, Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that experiences represent the next step in the evolution of an economy as products and services become increasingly commoditized. Creating value in such an environment requires staging memorable experiences that unfold over time. This may start with a destination web site that provides just enough of the best kinds of information during a virtual experience prior to the trip. This will give the prospective visitor to the physical destination site the opportunity to enhance that memorable experience while a guest there.

Organizations that have successfully implemented a clearly articulated concept of central activity in their experience designs include Club Med (i.e., participative, all-inclusive vacation), Disney World (i.e., escape to a fantasy world), and Benihana (i.e., Japanese food with flair). All other elements of their design serve to reinforce their central activities such as employee-customer interactions (e.g., theme park design and cartoon characters at Disney World). Peripheral activities at Disney World play a supporting role (e.g., commemorating the visit with merchandise), but they are designed to be pleasurable and to require minimum effort. Goods purchased at Disney shops are delivered to visitors' nearby hotel rooms (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

The central activity should be planned in great detail so that it occupies all the senses and fully engages the customer. Tools, objects, and accessories should be located according to their function and the frequency of their use in the central activity. Their organization should follow the "logic of the shop"; that is, their order should follow the order of subtasks of the

central activity (Keller & Keller, 1996). They should be displayed so that they are visible and easy to use. Peripheral activities, however, should be organized to require minimal engagement, leaving free time and energy for the central activity. Their purpose should be to compliment, commemorate, and enhance the experience created by the central activity (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

A good example of the interaction of customer use environment, props, and interaction with these, the service provider personnel and other guests is the Renaissance Festival (Minnesota) described by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Handsome knights and fair maids greet visitors to the twenty-two acre domain of the King and Queen by handing out a *News of the Realm* on simulated parchment that invites visitors to enjoy the day's activities. Throughout the day various merrymakers in Renaissance costume—magicians, jugglers, peddlers, singers, dance troupes—frequently accost guests (many of them clothed in period costumes as well) with the express intent of ensuring that they, their companions, and everyone else within earshot have a wonderful time. Among the numerous categories of activities in which guests delight—and that could apply to any experience—are the following:

- *Period demonstrations*: armor making, glass blowing, bookbinding and so forth
- *Crafts* that guest perform themselves: brass rubbing, candle-making, calligraphy
- *Games, contests* and other *challenges* for which prizes are awarded: archery, giant maze, Jacob's ladder
- Human- and animal- powered (never electric—this maintains the experience in the context of the time-period of the Renaissance being portrayed, not the present) *rides*: elephants, ponies, cabriolet
- *Food*: turkey legs, apple dumplings, Florentine tea
- *Drink*: beer and wine, but also—an admitted concession to modern concessions—soda and coffee
- *Shows, ceremonies, parades*, and various and sundry *revelry*: magicians, puppetry, joust

Proposition D-1: *Venue management design will focus on a central activity with a variety of supporting peripheral activities.*

Educational information can be built into the design of the tourism destination sites as well as their web sites. The two should be built to complement one another. For example, a heritage site may be enhanced by designing more educational information into the on-site displays. This allows the guest to interact more, therefore, enhancing the experience of the visit. The experience may be further enhanced by placing additional educational information on the web site. This may be read prior to the physical visit to the site, allowing better preparation by the guest, which will tend to increase the positive experience opportunity. Further, the information will continue to be available on the web-site, so, the guest may wish to read the information after the visit as well perhaps, to further enhance the entire experience.

Proposition D-2: *Venue design and destination web-site design should provide complementary information to enhance the visitor experience opportunity.*

In addition to adding positive cues to enhance the guest experience, it is also critical that the design minimize or eliminate any negative cues to the guest (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The author had a recent "experience" with this phenomenon. A privately owned historical heritage venue in the Ozark mountains of Arkansas was filled with a wealth of valuable artifacts displayed in a reasonably good manner. The proprietor told tales in a dramatic fashion that enhanced the value of the experience of being there. However, much of the periphery of display areas and even some of the secondary displays were filthy dirty. In fact, it appeared that no efforts had been made to keep things clean that could have been achieved with minimal effort. This filth and dirt clearly detracted from an otherwise excellent display of artifacts and dramatically presented information.

Proposition D-3: *Venue management design must ensure that negative cues are not allowed to detract the guest from the positive design achievements.*

Use of Technology

Use of technology can be implemented to create or improve interactivity of either the venue or the web site of the venue. Interactivity may take some of the forms noted in the Renaissance Festival example, above, for example, or on-line in the form of a discussion forum, a threaded discussion opportunity or a chat room, perhaps. Technology is often most effective when it is not immediately obvious to the guest. The guest simply wants an experience from the activity. Interactivity supported by appropriate technology will accomplish that.

Proposition T-1: *Use technology to create interactivity between and among the guests and the various elements of the tourism destination site.*

Each customer/guest can use tools in a different way and can interact with the facilitators and other customers differently. The customer brings his or her knowledge and skills to the activity and creates an experience that is different from the experience of any other customer (Gupta & Vijic, 2000). LEGO toy pieces are now found displayed at various attractions where people, young and old, can use them to make forms related to the various displays at the attraction. (See additional discussion in Gilmore and Pine, 2002.)

Creating successful experiences rests on creating a context that is adaptable to peculiarities of each individual customer (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

Proposition T-2: *Venue management can use telecommunications technology to communicate with guests before, during and after visits to the destination site to meet the unique needs of each guest.*

The Osmond Family Theater in Branson, MO, used multiple forms of technology and media, including video, laser lights, sound systems and video screens to provide a unique theater experience. This experience was enhanced by an interactive web site and a free subscription e-mail newsletter. The newsletter, for example, kept fans informed of past, current and future events and activities of the family and the theater. It kept the audience involved. (The author's spouse has been an active participant).

While privacy issues must be considered and handled appropriately, venue management that does use technology effectively can enhance guest experiences by tracking customer preferences. These kinds of opportunities are now available to many smaller venues that were not available even a very few years ago. Information such as seating preferences, preferences for certain types of memorabilia or collectibles to offer, and preferences for certain types of events or festival activities might be examples.

Proposition T-3: *Technology can be used by venue management to track customer preferences as well to further enhance the guest experience.*

Operations

A crucial aspect of creating a successful experience is to design the setting (e.g., physical environment, tools and objects, layout and flow of traffic) that facilitates activities and to train "leaders" or "guides" to familiarize customers with rules and norms, encourage social interaction, and help customers find their way in the environment. The task is to design a setting that enables participants to learn by engaging in activities, interacting with others, and using these tools rather than to influence individual mental structures by shaping the service according to an idea of customers' tastes and preferences (Gupta & Vijic, 2000). Variety is not the same as customization. Variety means providing a mix of goods and services with the hopes that some customers will come along and purchase them. Customization, on the other hand, means providing experiences in response to a particular customer's desires. Customers do not want choice (by this viewpoint); they want exactly what they want. They will seek out the provider that can and will do that (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Proposition O-1: *Venue management should operate in a manner that provides each guest a use environment that opens opportunities for involvement with the setting, their people, and the other guests for optimal interaction, learning and engagement with the offerings of the venue.*

Integration of the web site with the process and venue follow-through using people as the best asset of the destination site will increase the potential experience value of the venue. For example, a rural farm tourism site might offer a variety of hay rides for certain occasions. The web site might not only list the offerings but show pictures of the rides using different carriages, sleighs or wagons being pulled by horses, mules, oxen, tractors or trucks. People at the site would be available to offer the chosen conveyance with appropriate commentary or environmental enhancements upon arrival of the guests at the venue. Chase and Dasu (2001) found that providing customers with the opportunity of choice also builds commitment on the part to the service provider.

Proposition O-2: *Venue operations should be integrated throughout the process, from pre-planning, through execution, then follow-up activities.*

It is hard to copy a successful experience because experience is an emergent phenomenon created during an interaction. The specific attributes of individual elements of an experience setting do not have the same significance outside the context. Creating an experience depends on how these elements fit together and how will they are adapted in continuing interactions

with customers. Such interactions always are complex and rich in potential outcomes and in the impact they have on customer perceptions (Gupta & Vijic, 2000).

Proposition O-3: *Venue management should continue to strive for new experiences for each new occasion and not attempt to reproduce a prior experience.*

People

The primary role of people, as facilitators, is to enable customers to learn by doing and to help them acquire the appropriate norms and procedures by participating in activities. It is very important to respond to the specific needs and desires of individual customers. At Disney World, all of the workers, including the street cleaners, are trained to provide customers with necessary guidance. Disney assigns top priority to training and nurturing employees to make them believe in the concept and to connect emotionally with guests (Rubis, 1998). The facilitators undergo intense culturalization during a long process of careful selection, training, mentoring, and reinforcement of values by peers. Because the employees sustain interactions with customers for a long time, there is not a single "moment of truth," as we have become accustomed to in many service operations. Instead, employees are "onstage" at every moment. We are all familiar with the Disney approach here. Employees are "cast members" who wear costumes and are each cast in roles. Such a culture strengthens identification with the company and internalization of the organization's values.

Proposition P-1: *Venue management strategy should ensure that the people employed in the process are provided the cultural orientation and training appropriate to the guest offerings of the venue.*

Family owned and operated venues have unique opportunities and face unique problems in providing meaningful experiences for their guests. Involved family members will likely be very committed to the situation or while uninvolved family members don't participate. Recruitment and selection of other workers is a challenge for many family businesses, and tourism businesses hoping and expecting to provide special experience for guests face these added obligations. Identifying the correct people to complement the family members will determine if the goals of the destination site will be met.

Proposition P-2: *Venue management should recruit and select people to work at the venue who will complement the philosophy of ownership.*

Even people who are well recruited and properly selected need on-going training in the culture and philosophy of the organization. Staging of appropriate use environments for the guests of tourism attractions can only be properly conducted with people who fully understand the process being undertaken. Guests quickly sense and respond negatively to people working in the venue who are not in tune with the balance of the organizational operations.

Proposition P-3: *Venue management must assure that people in the organization receive continuing training in the culture, philosophy and values of the attraction.*

EXPLORATORY STUDY

To provide an initial response to these seventeen experience management strategy propositions, a sample of fifty bed and breakfast (BnB) operators in four states was asked to express an opinion on each of the propositions as stated. This convenience sample was a subset of a larger technology diffusion longitudinal study. These businesses are typically operated by a couple or by an individual. Some of these businesses have additional employees, some do not. Many of these BnB operations offer various tourism activities in addition to the hospitality accommodations, others of them do not. The implications of these differences are noted below, related to the results of the study relevant to the various propositions in each category. Table 2 provides descriptive information on the BnB sample.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Information on Sample Population

Is there majority ownership by a female?	Yes – 42.6 %	No – 57.4%
Is there majority ownership by a minority person?	Yes - 4.3%	No – 95.7%
Gender of principal decision-maker?	Female	61.4%
	Male	34.1%
	Both	4.5%
Age of principal decision-maker?	Under 25	0.0%
	25-34	6.3%
	35-44	10.4%
	45-54	33.3%
	55-64	43.8%
	65 and over	6.3%

Each operator was asked to evaluate each of the statements on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means disagreement with the statement, and 7 means agreement with the statement. They were asked to use a 9 if the statement did not apply to their situation or they did not care to respond. The responses of 9 were left out of the analysis, so n (the number of useful responses) ranged from 36 to 50 across the seventeen propositions. Some respondents also provided comments, some of which are noted below.

RESULTS

Results of the study are presented in the five categories noted above: strategy, design, use of technology, operations, and people. Table 3 summarizes the results related to the strategy propositions.

TABLE 3
Summary of Responses to Strategy Propositions (%)

Proposition	Disagree-1	2	3	4	5	6	7-Agree	Mean	n
S1	6.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	8.0	82.0	6.48	50
S2	0.0	4.0	2.0	0.0	26.0	8.0	60.0	6.12	50
S3	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	8.0	88.0	6.76	50
S4	0.0	2.0	4.1	6.1	14.3	12.2	61.2	6.14	49
S5	0.0	2.1	6.4	2.1	17.0	23.4	48.9	6.00	47

For proposition S-1 (Venue management strategy should provide at least satisfactory levels of service to all guests) there was strong support among the study group. Eighty-two percent agreed entirely with the statement and the mean response was 6.48. Proposition S-2 (Venue management strategy should provide opportunities for guests to effectively prepare for their visits) received a bimodal response from the study participants. Sixty percent entirely agreed, but twenty-six percent rated it a 5, for a mean of 6.12. Proposition S-3 (Venue management strategy should assist in building positive relationships from first encounter with guests) received the highest support of any of the seventeen propositions tested, with a mean of 6.76. Two-thirds of the respondents agreed entirely with this statement. Sixty-one percent agreed entirely with proposition S-4 (Venue management strategy should provide early and effective opportunities for guests to exchange information regarding the destination site and activities available at particular times during the year, with a mean rating of 6.14. Proposition S-5 (Venue management strategy should provide effective opportunities for guests to intervene and make suggestions and modifications in their activities when they perceive a service failure may occur) received the least support of the five strategy propositions, with a mean rating of only 6.00. Three did not reply. However, while no one disagreed entirely, a little less than forty-nine percent agreed entirely. The design proposition results are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Summary of Responses to Design Propositions (5)

Proposition	Disagree-1	2	3	4	5	6	7-Agree	Mean	n
D1	7.7	10.3	7.7	12.8	17.9	12.8	30.8	4.85	39
D2	2.0	2.0	0.0	8.0	12.0	18.0	58.0	6.12	50
D3	2.5	0.0	2.5	2.5	30.0	12.5	50.0	5.95	40

The first design proposition D-1 (Venue management design will focus on a central activity with a variety of supporting peripheral activities) received the second lowest support among the seventeen tested. This was one of only two propositions to get less than 5 in the mean response: 4.85. Only 39 of 50 respondents understood it or felt they could provide an evaluation.

Proposition D-2 (Venue design and destination web-site design should provide complementary information to enhance the visitor experience opportunity) received a mean

response of 6.12, with fifty-eight percent rating it a 7 (agree entirely). On proposition D-3 (Venue management design must ensure that negative cues are not allowed to detract the guest from the positive design achievements). Of the forty who did, there was again a bimodal response: fifty percent rated it a 7 (totally agree), while thirty percent rated it a 5 - didn't feel strongly one way or the other, but wanted to reply. The three Use of Technology strategy responses are summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Summary of Responses to Use of Technology Propositions (%)

Propositions	Disagree-1	2	3	4	5	6	7-Agree	Mean	n
T1	5.0	0.0	10.0	7.5	30.0	15.0	32.5	5.33	40
T2	2.1	6.4	10.6	19.1	17.0	12.8	31.9	5.09	47
T3	2.1	0.0	10.6	6.4	19.1	8.5	53.2	5.79	47

Proposition T-1 (Use technology to create interactivity between and among the guests and the various elements of the tourism destination site) received a mean response of only 5.33. Similar to the previous proposition, ten declined to respond, with a bimodal response from the remaining 40 of thirty-two and a half percent rating it a 7 (totally agree), and thirty percent rated it a 5. Comments on this proposition suggested that "interactivity...among the guests" was not a goal of many of the operators, and possibly was not even considered desirable. For proposition T-2 (Venue management can use telecommunications technology to communicate with guests before, during and after visits to the destination site to meet the unique needs of each guest) the forty-seven persons who responded were widely dispersed on this proposition as well, with a mean of 5.09, third lowest rating of the seventeen propositions. Less than thirty-two percent agreed entirely with the statement. Proposition T-3 (Technology can be used by venue management to track customer preferences as well to further enhance the guest experience) had the highest acceptance level among the Use of Technology strategies, with a mean of 5.79. Over fifty-three percent agreed entirely with the statement. A summary of responses to the Operations strategy propositions is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6
Summary of Responses to Operations Propositions (%)

Propositions	Disagree-1	2	3	4	5	6	7-Agree	Mean	n
O1	0.00	2.3	9.1	9.1	15.9	15.9	47.7	5.77	44
O2	2.3	2.3	7.0	14.0	14.0	11.6	48.8	5.65	43
O3	10.9	4.3	19.6	15.2	30.4	8.7	10.9	4.20	46

Proposition O-1 (Venue management should operate in a manner that provides each guest a use environment that opens opportunities for involvement with the setting, their people, and the other guests for optimal interaction, learning and engagement with the offerings of the venue) received the most support among the Operations strategies with a mean response of

5.77. While no respondent disagreed entirely with this proposition, less than forty-eight percent replying agreed entirely. On proposition O-2 (Venue operations should be integrated throughout the process, from pre-planning, through execution, then follow-up activities) nearly forty-nine percent of the forty-three respondents agreed entirely with the statement. However, proposition O-3 (Venue management should continue to strive for new experiences for each new occasion and not attempt to reproduce a prior experience) received the lowest mean response of all seventeen strategies, with a mean of 4.20. Sixty-five percent of the 46 respondents rated it a 3, 4 or 5, with only eleven percent rating it a 7 (totally agree).

Table 7 provides a summary of the responses to the people strategy propositions. 12 to 14 participants, otherwise responding, gave these last three propositions on people a "9," no response, most likely because they had no employees. There were several comments to this effect. For those who did respond, there was general support for the propositions.

Table 7
Summary of Responses to People Propositions (%)

Propositions	Disagree-1	2	3	4	5	6	7-Agree	Mean	n
P1	2.8	0.0	2.8	5.6	8.3	13.9	66.7	6.25	36
P2	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.8	2.6	78.9	6.50	38
P3	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.5	8.1	75.7	6.49	37

Proposition P-1 (Venue management strategy should ensure that the people employed in the process are provided the cultural orientation and training appropriate to the guest offerings of the venue) received a mean rating of 6.25 from the 36 (the lowest response rate) who did reply. Two-thirds of these respondents rated it a 7 (entirely agreed), these being from those with employees, presumably. On proposition P-2 (Venue management should recruit and select people to work at the venue who will complement the philosophy of ownership), nearly seventy-nine percent of the 38 responding rated it a 7 (entirely agree). No one rated it a 2, 3 or 4, although there was one respondent who entirely disagreed with the statement. Finally, for proposition P-3 (Venue management must assure that people in the organization receive continuing training in the culture, philosophy and values of the attraction) support was strong, at a mean of 6.49, with nearly seventy-six percent of the 37 responding, rating it a 7 (totally agree). Again, as for P-2, no one rated it a 2, 3 or 4, although there was that one respondent who entirely disagreed with the statement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper has presented an exploratory study related to a set of propositions regarding venue management strategies for tourist destination sites owned and/or operated by small or family-based businesses in middle America. Particular emphasis was placed on the literature related to creating a use environment for guests that will generate feelings by the guests that they had a unique "experience" from the visit to the destination site.

The exploratory study presented here had a number of limitations that may restrict the generalizability of the propositions without further testing, of course. Several of these

limitations were mentioned in the text, above. The sample was very limited and was restricted to one class of operations as part of a convenience sample. A number of the responses indicated that the participants were not adequately prepared to deal with some of the terminology introduced in the propositions, or at least not in the way it was used. A broader sample of tourism industry representatives would be very valuable. On the other hand, general support was received for a great number of the propositions, as presented, from this sample of respondents, which is gratifying.

Study participants were not given the defining paragraphs to read, only the propositions. It is speculated that some of the BnB operators were confused by the term "effectively prepare," and not wanting to skip the questions, gave a middle rating. It is possible that some BnB operators in the study did not wish to consider the possibility of a "service failure" in their environments. The concept of "central activity" versus "supporting peripheral activities" seemed to confuse some of the participants in the study. On more than one question, the study participants were at a disadvantage, not having seen the paragraphs of explanation included in this paper. Comments suggested they consider the visit to their venue as a "central activity" only, implying there are no "supporting peripheral activities." This may suggest an opportunity for some educational activities on experience management strategies. The use of the phrase "negative cues" was apparently very confusing to many of the study participants, based on comments made. The generally negative or neutral response seems to relate to the BnB experience - many people return to a particular BnB because they will get the SAME positive experience, again and again. They do not want, and the operators do not expect to provide, a "new experience" on each visit.

A number of large service organizations have attempted to provide this "experience" level of satisfaction for customers/guests. Results have been mixed. Continued research is needed to identify successes and failures and assess the causes and effects of each. This paper has suggested that smaller operations might also be able to adopt and successfully employ these techniques and goals, with particular attention to the tourism business segment operated by small businesses. Additional studies across a broad spectrum of the industry will be pursued.

Cases studies of selected individual tourism-based small businesses are planned to move to the next stage in the development of these concepts. The wide variety of tourism offering may preclude widely generalizable results. However, these studies will have the potential to provide workable results for a large number of other venues.

Further studies based on large organizations' operations should continue to be followed to further inform operators of small business-based destination venues of possible options to consider, as well.

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