

THE INFORMATION MIX FOR EVENTS: A COMPARISON OF MULTIPLE CHANNELS USED BY EVENT ORGANISERS AND VISITORS

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ABSTRACT

An effective information distribution strategy is important for the success of an event, but is there a match between the information distributed by event organisers and the sources used by attendees? This paper integrates supply and demand-side perspectives on the information mix by presenting data from interviews with event managers and a survey of visitors at four events in Wellington, New Zealand. The information mix for events is characterised by the use of multiple channels by both organisers and visitors. There are gaps between the information channels identified as important by organisers and those used by attendees. The significance of previous experience and word of mouth were not fully recognised by organisers, whilst traditional print and broadcast media and the Internet were not utilised by visitors to the extent suggested in interviews with event organisers. Comparisons are also made between the information search behaviour of visitors at different events, and between local residents and tourists.

KEYWORDS

Events, information sources, distribution channels

INTRODUCTION

Information sources are essential for visitors to find out about an event, they contribute to the success of an event, and organisers need to ensure they develop an effective and efficient information strategy to attract their target audience (Shanka & Taylor, 2004). Information is the first stage of distribution (Buhalis, 2001), the linking of supplier and consumer. Information attracts the visitor (Hall, O'Sullivan, & O'Sullivan, 2003), making them aware of the product, motivating the visit, and giving them the basis on which to make a decision over attendance. There are multiple channels available for the distribution of event information, including brochures and flyers, broadcast and print media, the Internet, travel companies, and word of mouth. Given the competition within the events sector, it is important to understand the information sources used by event attendees, the factors which influence an event organiser's decisions over which information channels to use, and whether there is a match between the information mix distributed by organisers and that used by attendees.

Recent research on distribution channels has begun to establish the complexity of the distribution mix, both in general (Frazier, 1999) and for specific tourism sectors. The 'Innovation in New Zealand Tourism through

Improved Distribution Channels' project at Victoria University of Wellington, of which this current research is part, has highlighted this complexity and the use of multiple channels by suppliers and visitors (Pearce, Tan, & Schott, 2004; Pearce & Tan, 2004). In relation to the distribution mix for tourism attractions in Rotorua, Pearce & Tan (2006, p.256) identified "a diversity of channel structures and practices, both across the range of attractions examined and within the distribution strategies of individual enterprises", concluding that "the distribution mix is very mixed". As one element of distribution, the mix of channels used for information is also complex. Research with independent tourists in Rotorua and Wellington (Pearce & Schott, 2005) established that visitors use a wide variety of different information sources to find out about transport, accommodation, and attractions/activities, with differences between the locations, sectors, and domestic and international visitors.

There is a distinct body of knowledge on tourists' information search behaviour which has focused on "determinants, information sources, decision making, and segmentation" (Pearce & Schott, 2005, p.51). Despite the attention within tourism studies, there is a lack of research on the information sources used within an event context (Shanka & Taylor, 2004). Two exceptions are case studies by Shanka & Taylor (2004) and Gitelson & Kerstetter (2000) which examine information search behaviour of visitors at individual events. Shanka and Taylor's study (2004) of attendees at the Taste of the Valley festival in Western Australia found that word-of-mouth sources were of most importance, followed by newspapers, radio, road signage, television, and the Internet, with one fifth identifying a range of other sources. There were significant differences in information search patterns on the basis of age and place of residence; thus, they concluded, event marketers need to adopt different promotional tools to reach different event audiences. Whilst Shanka and Taylor's research demonstrates the range of different information channels used by visitors, respondents were asked to identify a single information source so it is not evident if they used more than one source. By comparison, Gitelson & Kerstetter's research (2000) at an arts festival in Central Pennsylvania alludes to the potential complexity of the information mix for events, with their respondents being able to indicate the use of multiple information sources. They also found differences in the information sources used by local and non-local attendees: locals were more likely to use the local newspaper, personal experience, and the official event program guide; non-locals were more likely than locals to use friends and relatives for information. Most respondents were repeat attendees and personal experience was the major source of information for both groups.

Whilst these two studies aid our understanding of visitors' use of information sources, they focus only on the demand-side and do not explore the range of options an event organiser has when investing their marketing budget in an information mix strategy. The current paper attempts to extend the research on distribution channel complexity by investigating the information mix for events. With multiple channels available for organisers and visitors, is there a match between the information distributed by event organisers and the sources used by attendees? It brings together the demand and supply-side perspectives by drawing on interviews with a selection of event organisers in Wellington, New Zealand, and a visitor questionnaire survey conducted at four events in the same destination.

METHOD

The 'Innovation in New Zealand Tourism through Improved Distribution Channels' project aims to develop a more systematic understanding of the diversity and complexity of distribution channels for New Zealand tourism and examine ways of increasing their effectiveness with regard to particular markets, regions and forms of tourism. One element of the project has focused on the distribution of events in the capital city, Wellington, and the surrounding region. Events are a key element of the economic and tourism development strategies of this destination (Go Wairarapa, 2005; Positively Wellington Tourism, 2004).

To collect data on the range of information channels used by event promoters, interviews were conducted with the organisers of six individual events, two professional event organisers and representatives of two

public sector organisations, all of whom produce multiple events throughout the year (see table 1). The events were all leisure-based and held in the Wellington region. They represent a range of sizes, types and organisational structures, and their diversity enabled the examination of a range of information mix strategies. In addition, the two regional tourism organisations (RTOs) in the area were also interviewed to give a destination perspective. Interviews were sought with the manager or marketing manager, and covered the nature of the event and its market and the distribution channels used, including the provision of information to potential visitors. In some cases respondents did not allow the attribution of quotes or details, thus not all points in the text are referenced to specific examples.

Table 1: Event organisations interviewed

Events	
Cuba Street Carnival	Bi-annual street carnival (free entry)
Martinborough Fair	Twice-yearly art and craft market (free entry)
New Zealand International Arts Festival (incorporating Writers and Readers Week)	Bi-annual arts festival (ticketed)
New Zealand International Sevens	Annual rugby tournament (ticketed)
Toast Martinborough	Annual wine festival (ticketed)
Wellington Dragon Boat Festival	Annual sporting tournament (free entry)
Professional Event Organisers	
Avenue Events	Range of events including the Wairarapa Balloon Festival
Capital C	Range of events
Multiple event organisations	
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa	Range of small and large scale temporary exhibitions and events (both ticketed and free entry)
Wellington City Council	Range of small and large scale events (community events mainly free entry)
Regional Tourism Organisations	
Go Wairarapa	
Positively Wellington Tourism	

This supply-side perspective is integrated with demand-side data and the similarities and differences between the information sources used by attendees at different events are drawn out. Data was collected using a visitor survey conducted at four events which took place within Wellington City over a two-month period in summer 2004; these were chosen to illustrate different types of events. The New Zealand International Sevens is an annual two-day professional rugby tournament; 2004 was the fifth time the event had been held in Wellington. The three-week New Zealand International Festival of the Arts is held biannually; 2004 was the tenth Festival and the programme included drama, music, dance, comedy, literature and visual arts. A distinct part of the NZ International Arts Festival is the Writers and Readers Week (WRW): forty writers talks and seminars. The above three events were all ticketed; the fourth, the annual Wellington Dragon Boats Festival had free entry for spectators, with corporate, social and educational teams paying to compete in the tournament. 2004 was the sixteenth year of the competition.

Surveys are a well-used tool for collecting data from event visitors (Smith, 2004) although they are not without their critics (Seaton, 1997). While a comparative approach can overcome some of the limitations of case study research (Nicholson & Pearce, 2000; Smith, 2005), it does introduce additional methodological challenges. As with other comparative studies of event visitors (for example, Auld & McArthur, 2003; Nicholson & Pearce, 2000, 2001), some variations in survey administration and sampling procedure were experienced due to the layout, time schedule, and atmosphere of each event (Smith, 2004). At three events – the NZ International Sevens, NZ International Arts Festival, and Wellington Dragon Boat Festival, data was collected via a face-to-face interviewer-administered survey. Visitors were intercepted as they arrived at the venue (NZ International Sevens and NZ International Arts Festival) or were at the event (Wellington Dragon

Boat Festival). Trained student researchers approached the next passing visitor once their previous questionnaire survey had been completed. This sampling procedure generated a broad cross-section of respondents within the constraints of an event venue location. The inclusion of a fourth event, the Writers and Readers Week, necessitated revisions to both survey design and administration. The nature of the event (a tight timetable of writers talks) in a venue with relatively limited access meant a face-to-face survey was impractical. The survey was redesigned and administered as a self-completion, drop-return questionnaire.

The survey asked attendees about the three aspects of event distribution (Buhalis, 2001): information search, reservation and purchase, and packaging. Information forms the first stage of distribution and for open access events, such as the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival, this may be the only element of distribution as there are no tickets or event packages to sell. A total of 2079 questionnaires were completed: 301 at the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival, 420 at the NZ International Sevens, 955 at the NZ International Arts Festival, and 403 at the Writers and Readers Week. The survey data was coded and analysed using SPSS. Findings are presented to illustrate similarities and differences between the events; statistical differences are tested using chi-squared.

FINDINGS

This section begins by examining the supply-side perspective and identifies the range of channels used by organisers to distribute information about their events. The focus is on the distribution of information to the event audiences or spectators, rather than event participants, and the reasons for selecting, or rejecting, particular channels are discussed. The demand-side data from the four events is then presented to illustrate the range of information channels used by event attendees and the sources judged by visitors to be of most importance are highlighted. Similarities and differences between the events are also examined. The paper concludes by bringing the two perspectives together and considering the extent of match between the information distributed by event organisers and the sources visitors actually use.

Channels for Information Distribution

Event organisers use multiple information channels to reach their target audiences and this in itself is a challenge:

“Once upon a time you really needed the newspaper and radio and then suddenly you needed television and it goes on and on. And in actual fact probably the most difficult thing is that there is no one [channel] that you can use.” [New Zealand International Arts Festival]

A variety of factors influence the choice of particular promotional channels: purpose, target audience, cost effectiveness, and partnerships. However, most events do not conduct research on the choice or effectiveness of channels, instead relying on: “past experience [and] gut feeling” [Martinborough Fair]. Those using ticketing agents access their databases for post-event evaluation, for example the origin of out-of-town visitors.

A major challenge for events is reaching their target market and gaining cut through in a crowded market place. Directed and tactical marketing are key:

“...getting better information into people's hands, more direct information about the event and not cluttered or not incorporated into a whole lot of other bumf.” [Positively Wellington Tourism RTO]

The nature of the event and the target audience are key factors influencing the choice of channels; Te Papa, the national museum, contrasted the marketing channels used for two exhibitions with different target audiences:

“We've got a show like Start Up which was technology-based, then we do lots of email marketing [...] The Queens Festivals [exhibition] we were aiming at the much older market so we did nice

information-rich pamphlets that people could hold and look at and see rather than email; we didn't do much radio for that."

Marketing strategies may be in a number of phases with different aims or targeted to different groups. For example, the NZ International Sevens has two phases of marketing: "one is based around promoting ticket sales, and one is based around dressing the city". Immediately before an event, radio is seen as the most successful channel: "Radio advertising is very call to action. It's come here, do this now" [Te Papa]. Visual marketing tools such as banners, posters, bus shelters, and branded vehicles are important in attracting attention and 'hyping' the event. Word of mouth from those involved in the event (previous visitors, participants and staff) also generates awareness:

"...your best mechanism for marketing is having successful events that people really want to go to and word of mouth gets around pretty fast." [Positively Wellington Tourism RTO]

Print media can be a call to action but also enables more detailed information to be delivered. Those events using flyers and brochures or printed programmes rated these as their most important marketing tool.

"Radio is far more useful for probably developing a bit of hype but not very good at giving people much information. Whereas print advertising in [the local newspaper] the Dominion Post or whatever, you can talk about where the performance will be, what times they'll be on, all that sort of stuff. So it depends on the sort of message you want to communicate and how you want to do it." [Wellington City Council]

For niche events, direct marketing can be significant, however many events and specialist organisations lack the databases needed to make this effective. Exceptions were those events using ticketing agencies, and those with individual or corporate membership bases.

Within an information source channel, decisions are made on which provider to use. While the choice of company may be limited (for example, there are only two major radio networks in New Zealand), multiple brands enable events to target a particular niche market. For example, as a cultural event with a broad appeal, the Cuba Street Carnival focuses on stations with a family or music focus. The Dominion Post newspaper dominates the Lower North Island catchment, however other print options were also used, both specialist magazines to target a lifestyle niche, and local, often free, newspapers, due to the lower advertising costs and wide readership:

"We've ditched The Dominion [Post] because of the costs; for a quarter page or even an eighth of a page in The Dominion I can run the ad for a week in one of the locals. [...] People will read the local giveaway paper and one of those goes into every household in the greater Wellington area." [Martinborough Fair]

The potential distribution reach of a marketing tool is important; most Wellington events focus on a local or regional catchment area. Getting information and awareness for tourists is more difficult and is primarily undertaken at the destination:

"Well I guess you look at places where they're going to be. Everybody's got to stay somewhere. What are they going to be reading while they're here? Are they likely to listen to the radio? Maybe not because they're going to be sort of just visiting. Or are people staying with friends? So all of those kinds of things. If they're staying with friends, well maybe they would listen to radio, some listen to radio advertising. Or would they look and read the newspaper? We have a large print

around town in posters and billboards so we would do another round of poster paste up and make sure it's visible for people and in their faces when they're here." [Te Papa]

Whilst the Internet has potential to reach a wider market, including tourists, this tends to be used as an information source rather than as a promotional tool. Regional Tourism Organisation and Council 'What's On' listings publications include an online component, and multi-media and e-channels were seen as a future growth area for marketing and distribution.

Cost is an underlying factor determining the choice of information mix. Television was seen as a suitable channel for events with mass-market appeal:

"...as long as you're not in a cluttered time of year, [television] can be one of the more important ways of cutting through for your larger events." [Positively Wellington Tourism]

However, it was usually rejected as too expensive. The need for television when the event was likely to sell out was questioned, as was its effectiveness for more specialist niche events:

"We reject TV because of the cost and we don't need to pay that sum of money because we're already selling out." [Toast Martinborough]

One option being used is to partner with the RTO and include events as part of destination marketing television campaigns. Sponsors were another key partner, both for editorials and preferential advertising deals, and through access to the sponsor's distribution network. For example, the Genesis Wairarapa Balloon Fiesta organisers use the distribution network of their naming-rights sponsor, a power company, and a promotional flyer and discount coupon is included with customers' statements: "bill inserts [are] great because it doesn't cost us anything". Similarly, the NZ International Arts Festival uses its gold sponsor, and the naming-right sponsor of the New Zealand Post Writers and Readers Week, to distribute brochures through the national network of Post Shops: "so [the Festival] is reaching every single town basically [...] There's a national interest which is fantastic".

It is evident that organisers have a range of information sources they can use and that multiple channels are employed to promote the event to potential attendees. But which of these channels do visitors actually use?

Information Search by Attendees

In the visitor survey respondents were asked to identify from a list all the sources of information they had used to find out about the event. They were then asked which was the single most important source they used. Attendees at the four events used a wide range and multiple information sources to find out about the events; 2024 respondents answered this question and gave a total of 5581 responses (table 2). Each event has a different strategy to raise awareness of the event and provide information to potential attendees. A chi-square test determined there is a relationship between main information source used and the individual events ($\chi^2=1243.89$, $df=30$, $p=0.000$). The information search patterns for each of the four events are thus compared and the differences between the behaviours of local and tourist audiences are also highlighted.

Information sources were grouped into four categories (see table 2): previous experience, event-generated information, third parties, and by chance. The latter two categories were of minor importance and below they are considered together under 'other information channels'.

Previous Experience

Previous experience and knowledge of the event was a key information source. At the NZ International Sevens 80.3% of respondents had drawn on their prior knowledge or experience of the event, and for 34.8% this was the most important information source. The events all attracted large numbers of repeat attendees (table 3). Three-quarters of NZ International Arts Festival and Writers and Readers Week respondents had attended at least one previous festival, and almost three-fifths of Wellington Dragon Boat and NZ International Sevens respondents were repeat visitors. Not surprisingly, levels of repeat visitation were highest amongst local residents, although many domestic tourists were also loyal attendees. With the exception of the NZ International Sevens, repeat visitation rates were higher than those identifying previous knowledge or experience as an information source used. This could suggest that whilst previous experiences are important, they need to be supplemented by additional information search for each new attendance. This is particularly the case for festivals where the programme will change each year. Respondents also drew on the experiences and knowledge of others through word of mouth. This was the most important information source used by Wellington Dragon Boat Festival attendees (24.1%), and the second most important source at the NZ International Sevens (28.5%).

Event-Generated Information

Each event produced a mix of information and promotional materials, including brochures, advertising, street banners and posters, websites, and direct mailings. As part of the same organisation, distribution of NZ International Arts Festival and Writers & Readers Week were similar: for both, programme brochures were produced and these were the main source of information used. 69.3% of NZ International Arts Festival attendees had used the brochure, and for 45.7% of respondents it was the most important information source. At the Writers and Readers Week, two brochures were available: the general NZ International Arts Festival brochure contained an overview of the Writers and Readers Week event, the later release of a specific Writers and Readers Week brochure gave more detailed information and a booking form. 84.5% had used the Writers and Readers Week brochure and 77.6% the more general Festival brochure; either or both of the brochures had been the most important source for 63.6% of respondents. As noted by one respondent: "Arts Festival brochure for intro/WRW for detail".

Promotional channels such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, posters and banners, were all significant in raising awareness of the event, but not highly rated as the most important source of information. Media sources tended to be supplementary information sources; as indicated by a Writers and Readers Week respondent: "Brochure [most important] - newspaper was reinforcement and provided reviews". The Internet was not highly used despite all the events having a dedicated website and the three ticketed events having online booking available through their ticketing agent. Only 18.9% of Writers and Readers Week attendees had used the Internet, dropping to 15.3% for the NZ International Sevens, 10.2% for the NZ International Arts Festival, and only 1.3% for the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival.

Other Information Channels

As the only free-access event, discovering the event 'by chance' was significant at the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival; 25.1% said they had simply passed by, and for 19.1% this was the most important source. At this event, education and work associations were also important as many spectators had links to the participating teams. Whilst small numbers at each event identified tourism-related sources (including accommodation and transport providers, travel agents, guidebooks, and the visitor information centre), overall these were rarely used.

Local Residents and Tourists

In addition to analysing across the four events, comparisons can also be made on the basis of origin of attendees ($\chi^2 = 275.239$, $df = 20$, $p = 0.000$). This can highlight whether certain channels are more important

Table 2: Information Sources Used by Attendees at Four Wellington Events

		Wellington Dragon Boat Festival		NZ International Sevens		NZ International Arts Festival		Writers and Readers Week		Total	
		Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of all respondents using source
		n=299	n=549	n=411	n=1246	n=938	n=2601	n=376	n=1185	n=2024	n=5581
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Previous experience	Previous knowledge/experience	20.1	47.5	34.8	80.3	12.8	54.9	5.9	37.0	17.0	55.6
	Word of mouth	24.1	41.5	28.5	63.7	8.8	30.0	9.8	32.2	15.3	38.9
Event-generated information	Brochure	0.3	1.0	0.0	3.6	45.7	69.3	63.6	*	33.1	63.1
	Newspaper/magazine	7.0	13.0	9.5	43.6	7.2	37.8	3.5	21.5	7.0	32.3
	Radio/TV	5.7	14.4	15.6	55.0	5.7	28.1	1.6	14.1	6.9	29.0
	Internet	0.3	1.3	3.4	15.3	3.0	10.2	2.4	18.9	2.6	11.6
	Direct Mail (inc. membership mailing)	0.3	0.3	2.4	3.6	11.7	17.1	12.8	28.5	8.3	14.0
	Other event-generated information (inc. posters, banners, being involved in event)	6.7	17.4	4.1	31.9	2.8	23.2	0.5	0.5	3.2	19.8
Third parties	Education/Work	12.7	16.4	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.2	0.0	1.1	2.7	4.2
	Tourism-related	3.7	5.7	0.5	3.4	1.1	3.9	0.0	0.0	1.1	3.4
By chance	By chance/passing by	19.1	25.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	2.8	4.0
Total		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0	
Main information source: $\chi^2 = 1243.89$ $df = 30$ $p = 0.000$											

Writers and Readers Week Respondents were able to indicate which brochure they had used: the general Arts Festival brochure and/or the WRW brochure.

Table 3: Repeat Event Attendance

% of respondents who had previously attended the event	Local residents		Domestic tourists		International tourists		All respondents	
		n		N		n		n
Wellington Dragon Boat Festival	69.3%	205	47.4%	57	15.4%	39	58.1%	301
NZ International Sevens	64.4%	236	54.9%	153	19.3%	31	57.6%	420
NZ International Arts Festival	80.3%	748	68.0%	169	21.1%	38	75.8%	955
Writers and Readers Week	80.5%	282	75.9%	108	54.5%	11	78.6%	401
All respondents	76.3%	1471	63.2%	487	21.8%	119	70.1%	2077

for reaching different types of visitors (table 4), although it should be noted that NZ International Arts Festival respondents dominate the aggregated data (45.9% of all respondents) compared to attendees at the other events (NZ International Sevens 20.2%; Writers and Readers Week 19.4%; Wellington Dragon Boat Festival 14.5%). Local residents accounted for 70.9% of the combined sample, domestic tourists 23.2%, and international tourists 5.9%. Not surprisingly, compared to international tourists, a greater proportion of locals and domestic tourists had previous knowledge or experience of the event, and more had received direct mailings, usually as members (or 'friends') of an event. For locals and domestic tourists event-generated sources were of most importance, with print and broadcast medias both being well utilised. For international tourists, word of mouth was most important, and more of these respondents found an event simply 'by chance', usually this was the free-access Wellington Dragon Boat Festival. Both domestic and international tourists made more use of the Internet, and, compared to local residents, a greater proportion identified it as the most important source.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The information mix for events is characterised by the use of multiple channels by both organisers and visitors. Limited budgets, competition for audiences and a crowded market place create challenges for organisers deciding how to best promote and distribute information on their event. A variety of factors influence the mix of channels chosen: the purpose of the marketing campaign, the target audience(s), the cost effectiveness of channels, and partnerships an event can utilise. Given these constraints, and the competition for event audiences, do the channels used by event organisers match with the information sources actually used by visitors?

By bringing the demand and supply side perspectives together it can be seen that there are some gaps in the information sources provided by organisers and used by attendees (table 5). Event organisers highlighted the importance of 'call to action' channels such as radio advertising, printed media, and a visual presence in the destination. However, whilst promotional channels such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, posters and banners, were used by many event attendees, they were not highly rated as the most important source of information. Visitors were asked about the information sources they used to find out about the event and general awareness-raising tools such as these may not have been recalled as clearly by respondents as those sources used for more detailed information about the event. Nevertheless, organisers must work to ensure the effectiveness of their spending on these channels. One option being used is to partner with the RTO and include events as part of destination marketing television campaigns. Sponsors were another key partner, both for editorials and preferential advertising deals, and through access to a sponsor's distribution network. As the NZ International Arts Festival demonstrated, using a sponsor's established distribution network (in this case New Zealand Post's national chain of retail outlets) can provide a wide geographical coverage. Organisers of events with brochures and printed programmes rated these as their most important marketing tool; this is supported by the demand-side data from the NZ International Arts Festival and Writers and Readers Week. Given its importance, devising a successful distribution strategy for the brochure is crucial.

Event organisers saw the Internet as a key component of their future information distribution strategies. However, the audience behaviour identified here suggests that whilst the Internet is being used it is a supplementary rather than primary source of information. It is of more importance to tourists than local audiences. The fast pace of technological change means consumer behaviour and use of these channels is also rapidly changing. For example, in 2006 traffic to the NZ International Arts Festival website tripled, with over 4,000 people also subscribing to an email newsletter, and the site won its designers an international 'Webby' award (Allen, 2006).

Membership databases are significant information distribution channels for events. Managing and developing the relationships with these groups is important for generating attendance, as well as income generation and

Table 4: Information Sources Used by Local Residents and Tourists at Four Wellington Events

		Local Residents		Domestic Tourists		International Tourists		Total	
		Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source	Main source	% of respondents using source
		n=1435	n=4087	n=469	n=1270	n=119	n=223	n=2023*	n=5580*
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Previous experience	Previous knowledge/experience	17.7	57.9	18.3	58.0	4.2	19.3	17.1	55.7
	Word of mouth	11.8	36.2	21.3	46.3	32.8	42.9	15.3	39.0
Event-generated information	Brochure	36.7	68.0	26.2	56.1	15.1	31.1	33.0	63.1
	Newspaper/magazine	7.8	35.6	4.5	26.4	6.7	16.0	7.0	32.3
	Radio/TV	6.5	29.9	9.2	30.9	3.4	10.1	6.9	29.0
	Internet	1.4	9.5	5.3	16.6	5.9	16.0	2.6	11.6
	Direct Mail (inc. membership mailing)	9.4	15.5	6.6	11.9	2.5	3.4	8.4	14.0
	Other event-generated information (inc. posters, banners, being involved in event)	3.3	22.9	3.0	12.4	3.4	11.8	3.2	19.8
Third parties	Education/Work	3.1	4.5	1.5	3.2	2.5	3.4	2.7	4.2
	Tourism-related	0.5	1.7	0.9	5.1	10.1	16.0	1.1	3.4
By chance	By chance/passing by	1.8	2.9	3.2	3.8	13.4	17.6	2.8	4.0
Total		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0	
		Main information source: $\chi^2 = 275.239$ df = 20 p = 0.000							

* Totals differ from table 2 as one respondent did not supply details of their place of residence

Table 5: Comparative Summary of Findings

Information Channel		SUPPLY Information sources distributed by event organisers	DEMAND Information sources used by event attendees	Match?	Implications for event organisers
Range of channels		Multiple channels to reach target markets	Use multiple sources of information		
Event-generated information	Print & broadcast media Visual presence in destination	Important, particularly as an awareness-raising call to action	Used but not rated as the most important	Mismatch of importance – more highly rated by organisers than attendees	Although not rated as most important by attendees, still needed to raise awareness so requires effective spending strategy
	Brochures	For complex programmes (e.g. festivals) – most important channel	For complex programmes – most important information source	Match	Need to ensure effective distribution strategy for brochures (e.g. through partnership with sponsors)
	Internet	Key to future distribution/information mix	Used as a supplementary information source. More important for tourists	Partial match - neither events nor attendees are widely using the Internet but organisers see future growth potential	Ensure that investment is matched by attendee's online use. Greatest potential for reaching non-local markets
	Direct mail/ membership databases	Very significant for those with membership databases	Important for events with membership base (e.g. festival friends)	Match	Potential for future development of membership relationships, including season ticket holders and ticketing databases
Previous Experience	Prior attendance and word of mouth	Recognised but not necessarily as part of information mix	Most important, especially when high level of repeat visitation, but needs to be supplemented by other information sources	Mismatch – more highly rated by visitors than organisers	Requires focus on service quality
Third parties	Tourism-related channels	Very limited, focus on distribution to tourists at destination	Limited use, even at destination	Match – little use	Potential for development (e.g. Visitor Information Centres), however, difficult and costly to effectively reach tourist markets at origin
	Education/work links	Distributing information through participants can reach spectators	Important when supporting friends, family & colleagues as participants	Match – at participation events	Further develop distribution through participants
By chance		Significance recognised for free events	Important for free, open access events	Match – at free events	Hard to predict visitor numbers (and operational implications) so need to supplement with other channels

community support. For those without membership or friends groups, there is the opportunity to use ticketing agency databases, although this removes some of the control over data access from the event itself. Free-admission events rarely have either source, however the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival illustrates that marketing through event participants, in this case dragon boat crews, can boost spectator numbers. Also at the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival, one-fifth of spectators said passing by and discovering the event by chance was of most significance, suggesting that other information sources were not used. For these events, future research could examine more fully the role of on-the-day information sources such as street signage.

Many event visitors are repeat attendees and/or receive information through word of mouth recommendations. Whilst it is usually necessary to complement knowledge through previous experience with additional information sources, ensuring a quality visitor experience at the event has implications for future visits. When asked about promoting their event, organisers did not explicitly discuss the role of past experience or knowledge, although the relationship between the importance of service quality, visitor satisfaction, and repeat visitation has been established by O'Neill, Getz, & Carlsen (1999).

Reaching non-local visitors is difficult, and as with Gitelson & Kerstetter's study (2000), word of mouth recommendations are important to tourists. There was very limited use of tourism-related information channels; accommodation and transport providers, travel agents, guidebooks, and the visitor information centre were mentioned only infrequently. For those events aiming to attract a tourist audience, a distinction needs to be made between distributing information in advance to tourists at their point of origin, or waiting until they are at the destination. Elsewhere in the larger distribution channels project Pearce & Schott (2005) found that independent tourists to Wellington (and Rotorua) tended to wait until they were 'at destination' before purchasing attraction and activity products. For sell-out events, such as the NZ International Sevens, capacity constraints would mean that these last-minute purchasers were likely to be disappointed, so a wide distribution strategy for pre-event information becomes more important, as does the need to integrate information with the second stage of distribution: booking and payment.

By taking a comparative approach it has also been possible to compare between the information mixes used by visitors at different events. There was a statistically significant relationship between the main information source used and the individual events. In addition, the relative importance of each type of information channel differed between visitors at the four events. Whilst some of this may be put down to the information mix the organisers chose to use, other factors may include the proportion of repeat visitors, the origin of attendees, the profile of visitors (see Smith, 2005), and the nature of the event (open access compared to ticketed; free compared to charging; and the demand for tickets, including likelihood of an event selling-out). In line with previous comparative research (for example, Nicholson & Pearce, 2000, 2001), whilst there were some similarities, overall the behaviour of attendees at different events – in this case their information search behaviour - was not homogenous. Event organisers, and future researchers, must therefore be aware of this heterogeneity and the limitations of generalising the findings of one study to other events.

This research has demonstrated that the information mix for events is complex, with the use of multiple and diverse channels. For free, open access events, distribution is focused solely on information as there are no tickets or packages to sell. For ticketed events, a distribution strategy is more complicated and also needs to encompass the means of reservation and payment, and potentially the additional bundling of the event and other products, such as transport or accommodation. Further analysis of the event organiser interviews and visitor survey will develop these themes and more fully consider the complexity of event distribution, and the factors that influence the structure, operation, and effectiveness of event distribution channels.

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