

EVENT TOURISM: MONTANA CASE STUDIES THROUGH SURVEY KITS

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ABSTRACT

Event tourism is becoming more important for communities to attract additional visitors to their area. This paper discusses how the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research has developed a survey kit to help organizations showcase the impact of events to their community. These kits identify participant and attendee satisfaction and spending which in turn allows the organizer to demonstrate the impact even tourism has on their community. This sets the stage for sponsorship and support for future events in the area.

Key words: Event tourism, survey kit, Montana

INTRODUCTION

In an ever-increasing tourism marketplace, many destinations have turned to event tourism as one way to attract more visitors. As Getz (2008) concludes, events increase a destination's competitiveness and their importance is evident by the inclusion of events in marketing plans for popular destinations. According to Dickinson, Jones, and Leask (2007), the term 'event tourism' is complex and includes a diverse array of events based on type, size, and community impacts. While event tourism literature has previously focused on economic impacts (Hodur & Leistriz, 2006; Morgan & Condliffe, 2006), it is no longer enough to understand the economic impact of an event. It is also important for organizers to understand motivations and satisfaction of participants.

The purpose of this paper is to share a recently developed program whereby communities and event organizers can obtain data about their events. The survey kit by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), University of Montana provides information about special event attendees and the impacts those events have on their communities. Through the use of a survey template, who is participating in the event as well as attendees, their satisfaction with the event and/or community, and money brought into the community is obtained. The standard format for identifying these variables is used with all events and then a few additional questions are added or omitted to meet the specific community's needs.

METHODS

Since 2007, ITRR has implemented twenty of these kits across Montana. ITRR works with the organization who has ordered the kit to determine the best way to implement the survey. The methodology for collecting the data depends on the design and setup of the individual event. In some circumstances, volunteers are on the ground asking attendees questions with paper and pen. In this case, the location of data collection depends on whether or not the event has an entry point or if it is an open event- no specific entry point. For example, if there is no entry fee or perimeter around the event, the volunteers are placed at strategic locations to intercept attendees as they leave the event.

Other events have a list of participants' email addresses, and in this case the data is collected via web surveys. Some events use a combination of paper and pen for spectators at the event and a web survey for participants. For example, in this case individuals on site are asked if they are participating or spectating. Participants are emailed a survey; however, spectators are surveyed onsite. Once the data is collected, ITRR "cleans" the responses, analyzes the data, and compiles a report for the organization.

OUTCOMES

Data from the surveys have included sample sizes from 146 to 1,681 respondents (Table 1). Group sizes for these events range from 2.01 to 8.86 individuals per group. Expenditure data is only obtained from non-locals (out of county) and analyzed by in-state versus out-of-state spending. Average total group expenditures ranged from \$13,915 to \$1.2 million while recording the percent of respondents who spent in each expenditure category. In most

cases, this information cannot be extrapolated out to the ‘big number’ since event attendance is usually not available, however it still provides valuable information and makes the case for event tourism in Montana.

Table 1: Survey Kit Projects and Outcomes

Project	Year Completed	Survey Type	Community	Sample Size	Average Group Size	Average Reported Total Group Expenditure
Missoula Marathon	2007	Web only	Missoula	417	2.75	\$211,021.35
Havre Community	2008	Paper only	Havre	155	3.60	\$112,201.00
National Folk Festival	2008	Paper only	Butte	207	4.15	\$33,968.00
Evel Knievel Days	2008	Paper only	Butte	285	4.92	\$94,279.00
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival Study	2009	Paper only	Missoula	146	3.00	\$13,915**
Missoula Marathon	2010	Web only	Missoula	1,521	3.82	\$1,036,323.72
Montana Folk Festival	2011	Paper only	Butte	437	4.08	\$85,350.27
Missoula Marathon	2012	Web only	Missoula	1,681	3.60	\$1,202,970.11
Montana Folk Festival	2012	Paper only	Butte	844	4.05	\$118,203.00
Dragon Boat Festival	2012	Paper & Web	Kalispell	395	8.86	\$74,929.00
Dragon Boat Festival	2013	Paper & Web	Kalispell	505	7.52	\$145,097.00
Spartan Race	2013	Paper & Web	Kalispell	438	5.65	\$77,331.38
Trail Rail Run	2013	Paper & Web	St. Regis	160	2.01	\$18,855.77
Whitefish SkiJoring Races	2013	Paper only	Whitefish	157	3.17	\$14,338.00
Missoula Marathon	2013	Web only	Missoula	1,441	3.76	\$1,142,504.47
Montana Folk Festival	2013	Paper only	Butte	500	4.52	\$89,331.00
Whitefish Legacy Trail	2013	Paper & Web	Whitefish	327	2.79	\$25,350.00
Butte Community Intercept	2013	Paper & Web	Butte	267	4.05	\$93,012.00

DISCUSSION

The survey kit data has provided information that allows event organizers to strategize their marketing, improve their event, and use the spending data as a means for showcasing the impact to their community as well as obtaining sponsors for future events. Events are time consuming and generally utilize a large volunteer force to make the event successful. The data from the survey kit can be utilized in a cost-benefit analysis for the organization responsible for the event. It is invaluable to communities and organizations as a means to justify continuance of the event.

ITRR charges a very small fee (\$500-\$1,000) to implement this service. Most small towns and especially nonprofit organizations do not have the financial stability to pay for research. It was with this in mind that the template was built and the use of volunteers to administer the questionnaire on site was designed. The collaborative design of this research allows for a valid and reliable methodology that produces useable data. This survey kit idea can be replicated by other universities as a means to help support graduate students, pay for extra research equipment, or provide travel funds for faculty or a department. It is a win-win situation which helps solve problems, creates partnerships, and builds the research knowledge for students who are the up and coming tourism professionals.

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