

SHORT TERM STUDY TOURS A CASE STUDY: MARKETING THE TWO WEEK STUDY TOUR

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how to market short term (2 week) study abroad programs to business students at a mid-size (14,000 student) mid-western, public university. Unfortunately the literature is relatively silent regarding marketing the study tour. The purpose of this paper is to begin a discussion on the topic. University courses are usually marketed by simply listing them in the university catalogue and students then select what they want or need without active involvement by the university, unless it is by the advising office. However this doesn't work as well for study tours. These require more active marketing due to the nature of the students. The study tour is very important both to the university and to the student. University business schools want both international business and experiential learning. Business schools understand that "a student in a professional program must be cognizant of international issues and possess the sensitivity to work in a diverse environment characterized by an alternative set of cultural, historical, political, social, religious, and economic issues," (Praetzel and Curcio, 1996, p. 175) and Toncar, Reid, Anderson (2005). In contrast to the need for this understanding a majority of students would not take a course in international business if it were not required, yet they perceived an international study tour much more positively (Albers-Miller, et al, 1999). Unfortunately students have many activities competing for their attention, from their coursework to sports to part-time jobs to internships. Students also have many misconceptions regarding study tours such as, they are expensive, foreign languages are required, and employers are ambivalent about the value of study tours for potential new hires. Hence active marketing of the study tour is required to overcome the abundance of misinformation for maximum student participation. The first step in marketing any product is to determine who the target market is and then develop an appropriate marketing mix. The target market in this case is business students who have seldom if ever traveled abroad. The committed international student/traveler will find a program appropriate for him or herself and hence need not be marketed to. The product, the study tour, consists of 3 parts - tourism, business professionalism and an academic focus. Tourism is vital because without it, full participation by students will not occur. Business professionalism contributes the link between theory and practice in that students have the opportunity to participate with business professionals not only in their offices but also in after hour business settings. The last area, an academic focus, is vital. Without sufficient rigor, not only will the student feel as though s/he did not receive something of value, the university will become disenchanted, perhaps seeing the experience as a vacation for academic credit. However, it is critical the rigor is balanced with an emphasis on the international experience. It is too easy to have students do work in their hotel rooms each evening but by doing so, the students miss the international experience. Data collection for pre-assigned research topics can be done during the day, but preparation and presentation are best left until after the students return home. This article will discuss marketing mix strategies to maximize the number of students who elect to participate in a two week study abroad tour.

Keywords: *Study Tours, Study Abroad, Marketing Study Tours*