

Booklets in this series

Operational

- Time Management
- Managing Change
- Resolving Conflicts
- Meaner, Leaner, Greener
- Training for Small Tourism Firms
- Getting Bread Right
- Creating Effective Brochures
- Compulsory Purchase Orders—Making them work
- Festivals and Events
- Win, Win.
- Please hold the line.
- Contracts of Employment
- Health and Safety

Strategic

- Profiting from your Local Heritage
- Networked Learning for Tourism Professionals
- Employing Graduates
- Creating Effective Partnerships
- Meetings and Networks
- How Small Firms Grow
- Eggs And Baskets: Managing Market Risk

Learning Tourism

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Learning
Tourism

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Welcome to Learning Tourism

Learning Tourism is a two-year European Regional Development Funded programme which shares resources at Lancaster University with the wider community.

This series of booklets is just one element in the four activities which the project has outlined.

The others include:

- Free 'bite-sized' small-business consultancies to help the company grow;
- An interactive website, for the tourism industry to use - <http://www.learningtourism.lancs.ac.uk>
- Action Learning sets - essentially business clubs - will help like-minded business professionals come together in a relaxed forum to discuss issues from business rates, through to purchasing power, decoration tips, to menu alterations.

To find out more about how you can get involved please call
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You can send any thoughts, suggestions or criticisms about this series of booklets back to the team :

Comments on this subject

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Any suggestion for future topics of discussion?

.....

Have you visited our website?

Any comments?

Have you read any of the others booklets in this series?

Any comments?

Name

Company

Address

..... E-mail

Telephone number

Thank you for your comments.

Better staff

Networked learning for tourism professionals
Employing graduates
Training for small tourism firms
Please hold the line
Contracts of employment
Health and safety: the basics explained

Time

Employing graduates
Time management
Meetings and networks

Quality

Employing graduates
How small firms grow
Training for small tourism firms
Leaner, greener and meaner
Getting the bread right
Win, win
Creating effective brochures
Please hold the line
Festivals and events
Contracts of employment
Health and safety: the basics explained

Distinctiveness

Profiting from your local heritage
How small firms grow
Getting the bread right
Creating effective brochures
Eggs and baskets: managing market risk
Festivals and events

**PLEASE TAKE TIME TO GIVE FEEDBACK TO THE
LEARNING TOURISM TEAM ABOUT THE TOURISM
BRIEFING PAPERS ON THE SHEET TO THE RIGHT**

MAKING A DIFFERENCE**Aim and method**

The *Learning Tourism* project at Lancaster University was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to help small tourism and leisure firms improve their competitiveness. In a rapidly changing tourism sector, being responsive to new customer demands is vital. Competitive pressures force many firms out of business each year, yet finding the ideas, time and money to respond to change is always a real test of a manager's ability. This is especially true in small firms where these resources are tight.

Helping owner/managers with these problems was why *Learning Tourism* developed a series of 20 *Tourism Briefing Papers*. These are short accessible guides on how to handle some of the problems often faced by small tourism firms keen to improve their businesses. With only 20 guides, the series could not cover everything. The tourism industry is very diverse in terms of location, markets, activities and the challenges faced. Each guide was kept short enough to allow busy people to digest the material quickly. Therefore the advice was general and illustrated by practical examples, rather than tailored to each firm or covering every eventuality.

The selection of the authors for the guides was based on the need for communication to be two-way. Academic staff, who have researched these issues, have something valuable to tell managers, if only they can write clearly and appropriately. Equally, the academics need to listen to what experienced practitioners in tourism have to say as they reflect on their business careers, because that is the basis for the academics' theorising.

The papers themselves

So, the *Tourism Briefing Papers* are of two types. The seven 'strategic' papers were written by academics who have been able to stand back and reflect on the longer-term changes in tourism. Firms need not act immediately on these papers, but their ideas could form part of the background to every tourism firm's longer-term strategy for planning and investment. The 13 'operational' papers have a mix of university and industry authors who have all had considerable experience of working with a range of tourism firms. The operational papers are designed for quick wins and could – indeed should – be used soon, because they can improve most firms' competitiveness by helping implement practical solutions to day-to-day issues and introducing new methods of working. The 20 papers are listed at the end of this paper.

The full papers are all freely available from the *Learning Tourism* website at: <http://learningtourism.lancs.ac.uk>. Click on "Briefing Papers" on the homepage. They are available in three formats: RTF (which will print out with simple formatting on any computer); Publisher (for which you need the Microsoft Publisher program); and Adobe Acrobat PDF (for which you need that program and the paper comes out in the page order for a printed booklet).

Although each guide is deliberately short, the 20 papers together comprise many good ideas. This paper summarises the key points. Each paper was written independently of the others – to allow the authors to give their personal views on what works best, rather than following any predetermined line.

Encouragingly, many of the authors reinforced six key points for improving a variety of aspects of any small tourism business:

- doing things differently;
- efficiency;
- knowing your market and how it is changing;
- distinctiveness;
- quality and pricing;
- cooperation.

Doing things differently

Profiting from your local heritage
Networked learning for tourism professionals
Managing change
Employing graduates
Time management
Resolving conflicts
Meetings and networks
Creating effective partnerships
How small firms grow
Leaner, greener and meaner
Getting the bread right
Win, win
Creating effective brochures
Eggs and baskets: managing market risk
Please hold the line
Contracts of employment
Health and safety: the basics explained

Knowing your changing market

Profiting from your local heritage
Meetings and networks
How small firms grow
Leaner, greener and meaner
Getting the bread right
Creating effective brochures
Festivals and events

Efficiency

Networked learning for tourism professionals
Managing change
Time management
Creating effective partnerships
Training for small tourism firms
Leaner, greener and meaner
Win, win
Please hold the line
Contracts of employment

THE TOURISM BRIEFING PAPERS

Operational and strategic papers

Operational Papers

Time management (Gordon Clark)
Managing change (Gordon Clark)
Resolving conflicts (Nigel Watson)
Leaner, greener and meaner (Richard Joynson)
Training for small tourism firms (Viv Cuthill)
Getting the bread right (Andrew Whitley)
Win, win (Alan Heywood)
Creating effective brochures (Tara Sewell)
Compulsory purchase orders
Festivals and events (Tara Sewell)
Festivals and events (additional detailed advice) (Tara Sewell)
Please hold the line (Sue Young)
Contracts of employment (Katy Moussaada)
Health and safety: the basics explained (Sue Young)

Strategic Papers

Profiting from your local heritage (Ian Whyte)
Networked learning for tourism professionals (Susan Armitage)
Employing graduates (Luke Pittaway and Gordon Clark)
Creating effective partnerships (Nigel Watson)
Meetings and networks (John Urry)
How small firms grow (Mike Parsons and Mary Rose)
Eggs and baskets: managing market risk (Gordon Clark)

Themes of the Papers

Cooperation

Profiting from your local heritage
Networked learning for tourism professionals
Resolving conflicts
Creating effective partnerships
Training for small tourism firms
Compulsory purchase orders
Festivals and events

1) Doing things differently

Every paper advises firms to improve how they operate. The *status quo* for many firms is just not good enough to expand the business, or even to hold on to market share. It will not provide a decent return on investment, a good standard of living for the owner or finance re-investment to maintain standards. The guides show how quality can be improved in practice, and quickly.

2) Efficiency

No one likes to think of themselves as inefficient, but it is surprising how one can get into a rut and not see that one could use one's own time more effectively. Some businesses are so busy with daily tasks that they are unclear as to how profitable they really are, or could be. Staff training will often raise productivity without having to work any harder or longer – just smarter. Efficiency may come from a modest change like a better manner when answering the telephone or clearer contracts of employment for staff so future wrangles do not eat up time and cause ill will. Several of the papers show how to raise efficiency quickly and cheaply.

3) Knowing your market and how it is changing

It is obvious that society is changing and people's expectations of hotels, resorts and visitor attractions are rising. Astute competitors and the media will see to that. Several of the briefing papers show how to gauge what customers want and will pay for. Deep issues like why people travel and simpler ones such as what facilities guests expect all point to the need for researching the market.

4) Distinctiveness

Small firms often find it difficult to compete with larger ones that can offer a wider range of facilities and services at a competitive price. The small firm's solution, according to many of the authors, should be to specialise in something distinctive. This reduces the competition. It might be a product that the

mainstream does not think worthwhile because it is too small a market. It might involve adding detailed local knowledge of the area's heritage, through mini-packages of local tours and events, so prolonging visitors' stay. Personal service and real knowledge of the area can add value – the 'quality' comes from the staff as much as from investment in facilities. Or it could be a novel style of promoting your business that pulls people in. A distinctive product, provided it still meets a demand, can make small firms competitive, and several of the papers show how this can be achieved.

5) Quality and pricing

Being the cheapest in the sector may win business for a while, but it may be unprofitable and certainly will reduce one's ability to maintain or improve the business. Profitability may suffer in the longer term as will the business's sale value. A price war will soon impoverish all its competitors. The opposite danger is to raise quality and prices, and lose trade. The best, which few customers can afford when cheaper alternatives are acceptable, is an equal peril. The difficult balance must be struck between quality and price. Raising quality is often a good move, but the end result needs to be more profit from the remaining customers than are lost from the more price-sensitive who stay away. *Profitable quality improvement* is the aim, and several of the papers show how this can be achieved.

6) Cooperation

Cooperating with competitors may seem to go against the grain, but for small firms in particular it can give real benefits. Joint training courses and joint marketing initiatives for one's area or sector will let training and promotion budgets achieve more. Working with accommodation providers, transport companies and visitor attractions can create seamless packages for guests, and that increases everyone's turnover. A forum to discuss issues of common interest and to lobby for improvements can amplify the voices of individual small businesses. More radical still would be to benchmark each other's businesses, so one learns from one's competitors. So, quality standards should rise all round, benefiting everyone.

Contact us

If you want to discuss any aspect of these guides, do contact us at:

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