

Just the ticket!

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7 ways to increase the operational effectiveness of your park

The growing availability of the internet in private homes has provided new ways for park operators to improve their facilities, none more so than when it comes to ticketing, writes Peter van Lith.

Ticketing can benefit all activities in a park, here we will look not just at the use of entrance tickets but also how they may be used for show and restaurant seating, attraction reservation and to make electronic payments. The way a park's capacity is managed can be changed dramatically by the introduction of new concepts. Here are seven suggestions.

1) One ticket per family

Many parks provide a single ticket for every visitor. Although this makes it easy for families to split up and go their own way, issuing a single ticket for a whole family or group has the advantage that less tickets are used and that the family relationship is maintained when tickets are used to collect information.

Collecting information using tickets is a very useful way to gain an insight into the visitor flow in the park. When several attractions are equipped with ticket readers, important information can be collected. Maintaining the link between family members provides useful information about family behaviour that is hard to collect in other ways.

2) Electronic tickets

A ticket is regarded as evidence that a person or group has acquired the right to enter a certain facility. Usually this is done to simplify the entrance check at a place where an entrance fee or a reservation is due.

But tickets need to be verified and this costs time. Traditionally, tickets have been printed on paper or thin cardboard, but now several new means of ticketing are becoming available. The use of 'smart cards' is increasing and a single pass could serve to keep information about all entrance rights and payments made by a visitor.

A novel idea is to use the mobile phone, something that most people seem to carry these days. A visitor can dial a special number, provided by the park, to make a booking for some event in the park. Payments can be made electronically and in return some kind of identification is sent to the phone as a text message. This message can be a code that can be verified either by human means, in the form of an encrypted code known only by park personnel or an electronic barcode, readable by electronic means.

Reading passes, bar-coded tickets or telephone codes electronically will generally take more time than a manual check, but has the added advantage that entrance data is collected electronically. This data may prove vital to improve capacity management in the park.

Electronic devices like mobile phones and the Lo-Q device (which allows attraction reservation) will provide a whole new range of possibilities, increasing real-time information that forms a solid basis for improved capacity management.

3) Ticketing through the internet

By far the most interesting new way of issuing tickets is to allow customers to order their ticket at home through the internet. This approach has a number of advantages both for the park and the customer. By having customers use the internet, much less time is spent at the park entrance, reducing waiting lines on entry and reducing personnel cost.

Having people book in advance provides useful information about the expected visitor count in a park, which is excellent information for planning but may also provide useful to customers. For example, when looks like becoming a busy day, potential guests could be offered a reduction by accepting an alternative day, effectively spreading capacity to other, less crowded days.

Customers could even plan their entire day, by also reserving places on attractions and in restaurants. By providing pictures and sound information, the fun starts at home and a higher anticipation factor is created. Once in the park, visitors can spend their time in other facilities than the boring waiting lines.

4) Prepaid ticketing

When having paid the entrance fees upfront, customers will tend to ignore the cost of the entrance fee in their daily spending budget, increasing park turnover in the process.

5) Reservation tickets

Having some indication of a park and individual attraction's occupancy puts the management in a much better position to deal with capacity and plan staff availability accordingly. Visitors can be offered a reservation system using printed tickets or electronic tickets, further spreading capacity over an entire day.

And of course allowing visitors to spend their time elsewhere increases the experience and opens the opportunity for increased park turnover.

6) Show ticketing

Parks that have shows may well provide seating facilities, and guests could be allowed to reserve their preferred seats, as they would at a concert for example. Keeping the best seats for special customers, like season ticket holders or those with early reservations, provides addition benefits to customers.

7) Restaurant ticketing

When more is known about expected and real attraction occupancy, some measures can be taken to influence the flow of customers to restaurant

facilities by actively managing capacity of surrounding attractions and by offering discounts or preferred seating arrangements.

People who have made reservations may spend their waiting time in a restaurant and have a known window in which they can have a drink or a meal. By introducing special offers or by announcing waiting times for restaurants as well as attraction waiting times, visitors can be encouraged to visit a nearby restaurant, increasing park turnover.

In summary then, using the internet and new electronic ticketing systems will allow for the collection of important statistical information that enhances capacity management in the park. For their part, customers can be offered facilities to spread their time throughout the day more productively and this in turn will contribute to increased park turnover and an improved experience.

Peter van Lith is an independent consultant, specializing in advanced capacity management systems. He developed the Park Information Management and Simulation system that helps to provide ticketing and capacity management. He can be reached at peter@lithp.nl or via www.multimotions.com