

california

CALIFORNIA TRAVEL & TOURISM COMMISSION

2007
QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

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Smith & Company
Marketing/Research/Planning

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OVERVIEW

In January and February of 2007, CTTC embarked on a comprehensive qualitative research project with Smith & Company and MeringCarson. The purpose of this study was to explore and refine California's communication strategy, engaging in a direct dialogue with leisure travelers to ensure the State's brand platform remains differentiating, relevant and motivational on a visceral level. While California's brand advertising has been continuously tracked from a quantitative standpoint over the past decade by D.K. Shifflet & Associates and Strategic Marketing & Research, Inc. (SMARI), qualitative research of this scale has not been undertaken since 1997.

Current Communication Strategy

Leverage California's unique lifestyle and attitude by emphasizing the "California Attitude" – the notion that Californians put pleasure first and live life to the fullest. Californians are youthful, wacky, fun, inviting, laid-back, hedonistic, pleasure-seeking people.

As a traveler, the benefit is that when you vacation in California you get to live like a Californian (be Californian) if only for a short time.

METHODOLOGY

Two phases of qualitative research were conducted with leisure travelers.

PHASE I (January 5-24, 2007)

245 In-the-Moment Interviews with Leisure Travelers in California

- Objectives:
 - Uncover reactions to all California has to offer travelers and identify communication “opportunity areas.”
 - Engage travelers while they were experiencing California to observe if they were, quite literally, living out the core strategy.
 - Use key learning to inform Phase II research.
- English and Spanish-speaking Interviews:
 - 13% in-state
 - 47% out-of-state
 - 40% international
 - Note: fewer in-state visitors possibly due to cold weather snap during fieldwork

PHASE II (February 12-21, 2007)

12 Focus Groups with Past Visitors and Prospects in Key Primary Domestic (Seattle) and National Opportunity (New York, Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago) Markets

- Objectives:
 - Expose focus group respondents to “opportunity areas” to gauge their potential effectiveness at differentiating California.
 - Uncover both rational and emotional responses to help refine California’s positioning.
- Group Segmentation:
 - By seasonal travel period – Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter
 - By visitor age – 30-39 years and 40-54 years
 - By demographic criteria – mixed gender, mixed marital status, with/without kids, household incomes of \$75K+, some college education

FINDINGS

PHASE I

In-the-Moment Interviews

The in-the-moment interviews highlight California's strengths. The State is seen as beautiful, geographically diverse and remarkably large, with an attractive climate (despite record cold temperatures during the fieldwork period), an amazing number of things to do and see, and a unique mix of culture, history, food and entertainment. Californians are viewed as friendly, welcoming, accommodating, casual, easy-going, happy people. Importantly, travelers appeared to thoroughly enjoy visiting the State, finding it delivered on expectations and, for some, exceeded them. California continues to delight multiple-visit travelers.

Some weaknesses were identified including the sheer size of State – while it is appreciated, it can be somewhat daunting for travelers. Additionally, traffic/congestion/smog (primarily relating to Southern California) and cost were also mentioned.

The in-the-moment interviews yielded four consistent areas of interest for respondents that reinforce the current strategic direction.

ABUNDANCE	OPPORTUNITY/DISCOVERY	FREEDOM	UNIQUE LIFESTYLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awe-inspiring• Everything imaginable in one place• Ultimate playground• Great range/choice of things to see, eat, drink, experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anything is possible• Pioneering spirit• Place where many trends start• Place where one can experience/ discover new things	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progressive place, very open-minded• Where one can express themselves and behave a little differently• Lifestyle and weather combine to give visitors freedom of choice to do what they want, when they want	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique to California and different than anywhere else• Happy, friendly, open, welcoming, laid-back, non-judgmental, highly individualistic, good balance of work and play, healthy, active, beautiful

These themes were explored in Phase II of the research to determine if any of them resonated with consumers and which were unique and ownable claims for the State.

PHASE II

Consumer Focus Groups

Several projective techniques were used to uncover the deeper, more emotional connections consumers have with California. Many of the same exercises were conducted in the '97 focus groups providing direct contrast to the '07 learning. The exercises consisted of the following:

1. Pre-group homework "postcard" exercise where consumers were asked to describe their vacation experience to someone back home.
2. Pre-group "personification" exercise where consumers were asked to describe California as if it were a person.
3. In-group "collage" exercise where consumers used images and words from popular magazines to depict the ideal vacation experience.
4. In-group "collage" exercise where consumers used images and words from popular magazines to depict the California vacation experience.
5. In-group "drawing" exercise to sum up what made California unique from other destinations.
6. In-group exercise to describe California to a space alien, depicting the State to someone who had never been to earth.

Regional differences that arose in the groups related primarily to geography and social issues. For longer haul markets (New York, Atlanta and Chicago) distance from California is seen as an obstacle making it a planned versus spontaneous trip (which it is for Dallas or Seattle). Chicago, New York and Seattle are more upscale in nature, sophisticated and well-traveled, while Atlanta and Dallas tend to be more conservative and view California more stereotypically. Despite these differences, there was significant common ground across all groups.

Consumers' reasons for not visiting California are rationally, not emotionally driven.

When asked why they had not been to California or returned, the most commonly cited reasons, particularly for the further away markets, was the expense, the distance (especially if there were kids involved) and the time commitment. For longer haul markets, the State is not seen as a getaway destination. Additionally, the vast size of California was seen as too daunting when trying to decide where to go and what to do, especially if consumers were unfamiliar with the State.

The research largely reinforced past learning on what consumers perceive to be the ideal vacation experience.

The collage exercises reinforced that, from a broad perspective, consumers still desire the following elements:

- Change of Scenery
Experiencing a distinctly different environment
- Romance/Reconnect
Renewing relationships, romance and intimacy
- Pampering/Indulging
Treating one's self, being catered to, being excessive without the guilt
- Discovery
Experiencing new things, new sights, discovering how the locals live
- Escape/Freedom
Release from day-to-day routine, can be anyone I want to be
- Fun
Laughter and spontaneity
- Beyond the Norm
Partaking in new and different activities, things you can't do at home
- Rejuvenate/Recharge
Taking pleasure in the moment, quiet time



Collage compilation board for "Ideal Vacation" exercise

Regarding seasonality, the most ideal Spring/Summer vacations revolve around the beach and the most ideal Fall/Winter vacations include snow, comfort (fires, comfort food, etc.) or escaping the cold depending upon place of residence.

In terms of California's key differentiating rational and emotional attributes, the remaining projective techniques (postcard, personification, drawing and space alien exercises) combined confirmed much of the learning from the '97 qualitative research. The new '07 learning provides nuances to the State's positioning and strategic direction to give California a more unique and powerful brand platform.

Due to California's diverse and abundant offerings, the State was still seen to be synonymous with and deliver on the ideal vacation experience.

Most importantly, it continues to over-deliver on the intangible, more emotional drivers that lead to consumers' mystique of and connection with California.

The exercises revealed that, from a rational standpoint, California is recognized for a wide range of exceptional attributes: scenic and natural beauty, idyllic weather/climate, entertainment, cuisine, people, geography, topography amenable to outdoor pursuits, sheer size, range of attractions and things to do, icons, fabulous wealth/affluence, and a distinct food and wine culture.



From the "drawing" exercise

"I am taking a 'food vacation' to Los Angeles. Why LA? LA is one of the best 'food cities' in the USA and also the world. In particular, LA has the best sushi in the entire world, outside of Japan."

[Seattle past visitor – from the "postcard" exercise]



From the “drawing” exercise

New learning reveals that Hollywood, food and wine, and select icons are viewed as an integral part of the California lifestyle.

There were several key differences in the '07 learning when compared to past qualitative learning.

- Fewer landmarks were considered to truly be icons. Motivating icons were limited to the Golden Gate Bridge, the Hollywood sign and the California coastline (the longest, longest coast). Additionally, California’s sun is also seen as an icon.
- The culinary travel theme was much more pronounced than in the past. While the global culinary travel theme continues to drive consumers interest in food and wine, in California it is now seen as part of the lifestyle and not merely an activity that you do on vacation. The State is given credit for having the best culinary experience because it has several core differentiators that separate it from other states – organic, fresh, sustainable, home-grown (literally on premise), innovative, climate-driven, pioneering and diverse.
- Though California is still viewed as liberal and progressive, the perception of the State as a “wacky, land of fruits and nuts” was far less pronounced than in the past.
- There is much greater emphasis on the State’s wealth and affluence.

“I have a lifestyle that even celebrities envy. I just turned half a century and, for my 50th birthday, I bought myself a brand new black Bentley GT. Tonight I’ve asked our chef to make our favorite meal – filet mignon, asparagus tips and mashed potatoes, with a bottle of Cristal. Life is good.”

[Dallas prospect – from the “personification” exercise]



From the "drawing" exercise

- Fascination with Hollywood, the entertainment business and celebrities has never been greater.
- The sheer size of the State and the breadth of its offerings, while highly positive in most respects, is considered overwhelming and to present challenges when contemplating a trip to California.

The exercises, largely designed to get consumers to depict California in more emotional terms that truly differentiate the State, confirmed that the strategic direction has never been more solid. California's brand character and true differentiator – the "California Attitude" – is more relevant and motivating than ever before.



ABUNDANCE/LAND OF CONTRASTS

California is a place that has more of anything you can name than any other state. It is described as a multi-layered experience comprised of a blend of different attitudes, climates, and cultures where one can experience “extremes” not found anywhere. From LA/Hollywood’s glitz and glamour to San Francisco’s sophistication to Napa/Sonoma’s rustic elegance.

“Mr. California seems to be a different person each time I interact with him. Sometimes he seems a city type, sometimes a rugged outdoor type... He drove in with the top down on his convertible, wearing sunglasses, and drinking bottled water. When he left, I saw him drive away in an SUV, eating potato chips, and wearing a baseball cap. I just can’t figure this guy out.”

[Atlanta prospect – from the “postcard” exercise]



THE GOLDEN STATE

The idea that California is the “Best of America” – the best of all that is good in life and a place where dreams come true. It possesses the best scenery, best food and wine, best indulgences (hotels, spas, etc.), best climate/sunshine, best and longest coastline.

“It’s everything that we’ve divided into smaller-defined states on the east coast under one governor. Like the weather, trends move eastward from California – it can truly set the tone for the rest of the U.S... It keeps the rest of us distantly fascinated. It’s everything all in one.”

[New York past visitor – from the “space alien” exercise]

This new learning provides the State with a refined and more powerful position.

Different than the '97 findings, consumers in '07 described the State's key assets as not just diverse, but as abundant and superlative in nature. They believe that California has the most (diversity) and the best of what life has to offer. "Abundance" as a position distinguishes California from other states (that also claim diversity) and provides a competitive advantage that only California can own.

"Abundance of anything. You can shop and find anything. You can do any sort of activity you can think of. There's abundance of land. If you want to go to the desert, you can go. You can take it to a lot of levels."

[Seattle past visitor – reaction to "opportunity themes"]

The current brand platform – the "California Attitude" – is still highly motivating and differentiating.

The current research also reinforced the notion that the California lifestyle, or "California Attitude" (Californian's unique approach and attitude toward life), is not only unique, but also highly desirable and motivating for leisure travelers. Consumers want to experience the State's lifestyle, either from an observatory or participatory standpoint. They can see things they would not in their regular environment and try things that are out of the norm. They want to become a Californian, if only for a short time. The California lifestyle was also described as an envious lifestyle, something that consumers had voyeuristic desires about, and a place they had to see or experience for themselves to really believe it.

"You go to California to be whatever you want to be."

[Dallas prospect – reaction to "opportunity themes"]

California is associated with luxury and trend-forward lifestyle brands.

When asked to name brands that would be associated with California, consumer responses fell into five main categories: automotive, fashion, entertainment, technology and food/wine products. The most frequent mentions tended to be luxury brands reflecting the perception that California is a wealthy state.

- Car culture: BMW, Mercedes, Lexus, Lamborghini, Maserati, Porsche, Rolls Royce, Mustang, “convertibles”
- Fashion trendsetter: Juicy Couture, Oakley, Gap, Prada, Versace, Gucci, Armani, Kenneth Cole, Chrome Hearts, Rodeo Drive
- Technology leader: Cisco, Google, Apple, Yahoo
- Entertainment epicenter: Disney, Paramount, Capitol, Universal
- Food and wine capitol: In ‘n’ Out Burger, sushi, Odwalla, Ghirardelli, Robert Mondavi
- Not-exactly mainstream America: Birkenstock, Sketchers, Craigslist.com, flip-flops, tofu, Quicksilver, Prius

The current television spot – “Do you feel lucky?” – was seen to sum up California’s key assets and unique lifestyle.

California’s current television spot – “Do you feel lucky?” – was also tested across all markets. The spot received highly positive reactions and was considered compelling and motivating.

“They were happy to be there, they were living large. Diverse, entertainment, beach, skiing – bang, bang, bang. It just hit you. It put enough in your mind to make you want to look and want a little more.”

[New York past visitor]

“Go there, relax and find yourself again.”

[Chicago prospect]

The Internet is a key tool in selling California.

Leisure travelers now utilize the Internet as a primary planning tool as compared to the '97 study. Search engines such as Google and Yahoo are often the starting point, as well as sites like Travelocity, Expedia, Hotels.com and Priceline. Once the destination is selected, many consumers indicate they undertake city-specific searches, but few reported visiting official state websites suspecting they were biased or had an agenda. In order to dig into a destination, most preferred to interact with their peers on sites like Trip Advisor.

In terms of selling or packaging California to consumers, four key hot buttons arose.

- Plan it for me
- Match a trip to my interests
- Give me the inside scoop
- Give me a deal

When asked what types of information about California would be most useful and how it should be presented, consumers specified the following:

- Trip itineraries by traveler type (families, groups, couples, etc.)
- Trip itineraries based on favored activities (wine lovers, foodies, events, etc.)
- Regional tours (Wine Country, Central Coast)
- Concierge service to customize vacations to suit individual proclivities
- Event calendars, entertainment guides, top-rated restaurants, access to California's truly unique and unusual offerings, what's hip, "insider" information
- Logistical help (time needed to tour a region, drive and travel time between cities, best routes, various modes of transport available)
- Travel incentives (discount on hotels, airlines, car rentals, meals)
- Unedited traveler commentaries and reviews
- Comprehensive list of restaurants, hotels, tours...not just those that pay to be advertised on the site

Available for download at <http://www.visitcalifornia.com/research>:

- 2007 Qualitative Research Executive Summary
- In-the-Moment Interviews Video
- Focus Groups Video