

Marketing plan

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Subject

Before developing a marketing strategy, the natural question is "What are we going to sell and promote?". In other words, it is necessary to determine the subject of the marketing plan.

Subject of this marketing plan is a transborder gastronomic route "The delicate taste of Karelia" developed within the project "Kalitka – the development of cross-border gastronomic tourism" funded by the Karelia CBC 2014-2020 ENI Programme. Within this marketing plan, its subject is referred to as the Gastro-route.

The Gastro-route is complex by its composition and cannot be categorized unambiguously in terms of marketing.

On the one hand, the Gastro-route runs through a specific area and brings together service providers on both sides of the border - in North Karelia, Finland and in the Republic of Karelia, Russia. From this perspective, the Gastro-route may be considered as a **specialized in gastronomic tourism destination**, which may be viewed either as a part of a larger destination - Euroregion Karelia, or as a tier for two tourist destinations – Finland's North Karelia and Russia's Republic of Karelia.

On the other hand, the Gastro-route is a collection of specific services of restaurants, transport companies, accommodations and other travel service providers that can be combined into travel packages. In this sense, the Gastro-route is a **tourist consumer product**.

As the destination so the tourist product may be the subject of a marketing strategy, but the strategies for these two kinds of subject differ. The marketing strategy for the product is developed according to the standard 4P pattern: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion i.e. product policy, pricing policy, sales policy, and promotion policy. The destination's marketing strategy focuses primarily on promotion policy.

Operator

The operator of the marketing plan is the organization or association of organizations that will implement the marketing plan. Since the object of this marketing plan is complex and ambiguous, its operator cannot be represented by single specific organization.

The subject of the marketing plan is transborder by its nature, and accordingly the organizations responsible for its implementation must be both Finnish and Russian. In addition, the marketing of a tourist route is a multicomponent task. The implementation of the various components of the plan is in the competence of different organizations - from commercial firms to regional authorities.

For the effective coordination of activities on marketing the Gastro-route, a specialized body is needed that would take over the functions of integrating the efforts, at least at the level of

communications. In international practice, the role of integrator of marketing activities to promote tourist destinations is implemented by DMO - Destination Management Organizations. In the Republic of Karelia, Russia, a DMO has not been established yet, however, its functions are to a certain extent performed by the Tourist Information Center of the Republic of Karelia. In North Karelia, Finland, Karelia Expert Tourist Service Ltd serves as a DMO.

Consumer value

From the consumer point of view, the gastronomic route as a service is primarily an opportunity to escape from the everyday routine - like any other tourist trip. In terms of Maslow's pyramid of needs, a gastronomic route, in general, satisfies primarily the need to get new knowledge and additionally the need in food. To be more specific, the consumer value lies in the opportunity to learn culinary traditions of Karelia new for a tourist, to gain new experience of visiting the historical life of the peoples of Karelia and experience new taste sensations from traditional Karelian dishes and products. This consumer value is unique and can be obtained by a tourist only on the territory of the Gastro-route, since it is connected precisely with Karelian traditions. Gastronomic routes are also offered in other regions, however, they use their own local cuisine traditions, that is, they are also unique, but essentially differ from the Kalitka gastronomic route and offer a different consumer experience and value.

Customer value of the Gastro-route must also be considered in the context of the tourism value of destinations on the territory of which the route lies - the Republic of Karelia, Russia and North Karelia, Finland. These destinations are well developed, have a high tourist attractiveness, and have an established tourist infrastructure. Tourists taking the Gastro-route will share opportunities and advantages of Karelias destinations.

The specific and unique feature of the Gastro-route is that it is trans-border. Tourists may gain gastronomic experiences in two countries - Finland and Russia - within the same trip. The opportunity for a tourist to cross the national border and compare tastes in two different countries generates positive emotions, adds tourist interest and therefore increases customer value of the route.

To sum up, the key selling points that reflect unique features of the route from the customer perspective are as follows:

- Original Karelian cuisine traditions
- Exquisite landscapes and natural environment of Karelias
- Rich cultural heritage of Karelias
- Location within well-established tourist destination with high customer value
- Crossing-the-border experience

Target audience

Defining the target audience of the Gastro-route is crucially important for to proper design the Gastro-route as a tourist product, its image and marketing strategy.

There were no special studies to identify Gastro-route's target customer profile, but interviewing tour operators allowed us to determine its main features.

The typical gastro-route traveller would be aged 35+, travelling with spouse/partner or within a small group of friends. He or she would be an experienced tourist having visited several destinations domestically and abroad within last years. Income level of the traveller would be average or above average. Gastro-route travellers having children aged 4 to 10 would take them to the trip if service providers offer amenities and animation for kids. Children of other ages are unlikely to participate in the trip. Gastro-route traveller would be moderate innovator by consumer type. He or she is committed to traditional values, while at the same time striving to gain new knowledge and emotions.

The geography of residence of potential Gastro-route travelers coincides, in general, with the geography of residence of tourists visiting the Republic of Karelia (Russia) and North Karelia (Finland). The largest group consists of residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia, as well as Helsinki and other cities in the southeastern part of Finland. In addition to this group, the target audience includes residents of the regions of Russia, Belarus and Finland. In addition, the target audience includes international tourists arriving in organized groups.

Actions required to define the target audience of the Gastro-route:

- ⇒ Conduct a monitoring and statistical analysis of the target audience, identify segments within the target audience.
- ⇒ Conduct a survey within the target audience and in-depth interviewing of focus groups with the aim to identify specific characteristics, values, lifestyle and consumption type, as well as consumer expectations from the Gastro-route of representatives of all major segments of the target audience.
- ⇒ Identify and test communication channels with major segments of the target audience.

Branding

According to the classic definition by American Marketing Association "A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers". Gastro-route's brand can be considered as the idea or image people have in mind when thinking about the gastro-route и формируют ожидания от travel experience по гастро-маршруту. Expectations of travel experience can be both practical (e.g. "I will taste a real traditional kalitka") and emotional (e.g. "I will be inspired with new culinary

ideas”). It is therefore not just the physical features that create a brand but also the feelings that consumers develop towards the gastro-route. This combination of physical and emotional cues is triggered when exposed to the name, the logo, the visual identity, or the message communicated. The brand must reflect the values that are communicated by the Gastro-route and are important to the target audience.

Branding is the process of creating and shaping a brand in consumers’ minds. Branding a gastro route as a specific marketing object differs from the content of the branding process for a 'standard' consumer product. The branding of a gastronomic route in terms of practical actions should be as follows:

- Formation of brand message: purpose, values, promise.
- Formulation of brand positioning statement.
- Formation of brand identity: name of the Gastro-route, tone of voice, visual identity design which includes the logo design, color palette, typographies etc.

The essential features of the Gastro-route brand are, firstly, that it has a parent - the brand of the tourist destination Karelia, and, secondly, that parents are two - the tourist brand of the Republic of Karelia, Russia and the tourist brand of North Karelia, Finland. Therefore, brand of the Gastro-route should take into account the values, message and identities of those two brands. In this regard, a certain challenge will be the fact that the tourist brands of both the Republic of Karelia and Northern Karelia are not yet fully formed.

The process of forming the brand for the Gastro-route is at an early stage (as of the end of 2020). One of the brand's elements has been identified - the name of the Gastro-route: “The delicate taste of Karelia”. To form the rest of the brand's elements, including visual ones, it is necessary to determine the purpose and values of the brand.

Actions required to develop a brand for the Gastro-route:

- ⇒ Identify the values that the Gastro-route can communicate as a tourism product and the consumer needs that the service providers can satisfy.
- ⇒ Evaluate composition and quality of potential consumer experience offered by Gastro-route’s service providers.
- ⇒ Compare the values and expectations of the target audience, on one hand, and Gastro-route's offer in terms of values and customer experience, on the other hand. The result of the comparative analysis should be the formation of a brand message: purpose, values, and promise.
- ⇒ Develop brand positioning statement.
- ⇒ Develop brand book and other brand identity elements.

Practical tools for promotion

Web-based front office

Web-based front office is a universal tool for promotion and can be used to promote the Gastro-route. Broadly speaking, web-based front office includes own website, blogs on third-party platforms, social media profiles, and other tools for promoting on the Internet.

Website. The main function of the Gastro-route's own website is a 'business card', that is presenting a visual image, presenting practical information and news about the Gastro-route, and providing feedback to tourists. The Gastro-route's website may host online booking tools and other interactive services, but this seems impractical as it can be more efficiently organized using third-party web platforms. The website will serve as the main landing page for tourists who want to get the most complete information about the Gastro-route and practical advice on travel arrangements.

When filling a website, special attention should be paid to visual content. It is important that the content is original, illustrates the unique essence of the Gastro-route and communicates the values and expectations identified within the Gastro-route's branding.

It is recommended to use search engine optimization (SEO) and, optionally, targeted ads tools to promote the website.

Social media. Social media profiles are a powerful and probably the most effective tool for direct Internet contact with potential customers. Gastro-route profiles should be created in those social media that are actively used by major segments of the target audience. Although no investigations have been made so far on the social media preferred in the target audience, it is safe to say that the most actively used ones in Finland and Russia are Facebook, VKontakte, and Instagram. In Russia, Odnoklassniki also enjoys a certain popularity, and Twitter is used globally, however, the relevance of using these two to contact the target audience of the Gastro-route should be estimated within the separate feasibility study.

Promotion strategy of the Gastro-route will have specific features for each social network, however, the strategy basics are the same for all social networks. They are, firstly, unique content that meets the interests of the target audience, and, secondly, regular generation of attention grabbing news entries. News can both reflect the "real life" of the Gastro-route, for example, the emergence of a new restaurant, or be "artificially created", for example, competition announcement among subscribers.

Actions required to create and maintain web-based front office:

- ⇒ Develop and discuss with all stakeholders the concept and functionality of the Gastro-route website. Prepare detailed terms of reference for the development of a website.

- ⇒ Create a website: develop a website engine, and fill the website with unique original content. The site must have English, Russian and Finnish versions.
- ⇒ Create Gastro-route's profiles on Facebook, VKontakte and Instagram. Investigate the feasibility of presenting the Gastro-route on other social networks.
- ⇒ Regularly generate news and post them on the website and social networks.

Mobile app

Mobile app is a powerful promotion tool as it provides the ability to deliver personalized marketing information to a user on a smartphone - a device with which a modern person constantly interacts and is guaranteed to pay attention to incoming messages. For a mobile application to become a communication bridge, the user must allow its installation on his/her smartphone, that is, the application must be of interest to the user. To be of interest for a customer, a mobile app must provide unique content and/or functionality and ensure high quality user experience.

A useful functionality of the mobile app that could be a tool for the promotion of the Gastro-route may consist in an interactive map with a presentation of all the gastronomic points of the route. This mobile app was created within the project by Forgis Oy and was named Kalitka.

In order for a mobile app to become an effective tool for promoting the Gastro-route, it must be installed on the devices of a sufficiently large number of users, that means the promotion is required for the Kalitka app itself. App promotion should be organized within the marketing campaign of the Gastro-route, for example, every Gastro-route ad includes QR code with a link to download Kalitka app. Additionally, it is possible to promote Kalitka app as an independent product.

Actions required to develop and promote the mobile app:

- ⇒ Develop a mobile application with an interactive map of the Gastro-route. The app must be developed for Android and iOS. Fill the map with gastronomic points. (This action was carried out by the project partner Forgis Oy).
- ⇒ Organize a systematic update of information about gastronomic points in the app.
- ⇒ Include an advertisement for the mobile app in the marketing campaign of the gastro route.

Promotion by opinion leaders

Marketing information aimed at creating a positive image most effectively affects the target consumer if it is translated by the person or community that the addressee trusts the most. For the

outside of the circle of personal communication the most trustworthy translators for a person are opinion leaders. As a rule, the opinion leaders are famous athletes, celebrities, politicians , popular bloggers/vloggers and other famous persons who set trends .

Different target audiences have different opinion leaders. The identification of opinion leaders for the target audience of the Gastro-route should be based on the common values that they share. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that opinion leaders sharing the same values in Russia and Finland are not the same. Therefore, to promote the Gastro-route in Finland and Russia, it is necessary to pick different opinion leaders. Perhaps the only person who is similarly recognizable in Russia and in Finland and who could be involved in promoting the Gastro-route is actor Ville Haapasalo.

Influence that an opinion leader may render on the target audience to promote the Gastro-route is a public mention of a positive assessment of the Gastro-route in the popular media or personal blog/vlog. The impact will be more effective if such a public message contains a description of the experience related to the Gastro-route received by the opinion leader personally. In this regard, it is advisable to organize a series of tours for selected opinion leaders with the conclusion of an agreement on public coverage of the Gastro-route.

Actions required to arrange promotion by opinion leaders:

- ⇒ Select opinion leaders who are associated with values shared by Gastro-route's target audience. Opinion leaders should be selected separately for Russian, Finnish and optionally for an international audience.
- ⇒ Organize tours for selected opinion leaders.
- ⇒ Ensure that opinion leaders' messages about the Gastro-route are published in popular media and/or their personal blogs/vlogs.
- ⇒ Refer to opinion leaders in the Gastro-route marketing materials.

Promotion in media

Conventional media – print magazines, TV, radio – are still actual as a promotion channel, however, the presence of the audience is steadily flowing to web-based media. Almost every conventional media resource now use worldwide web to contact its audience, that is, run its own web-site and presents itself in social media. Thus, the boundary between conventional media and web-based media is erased.

An effective marketing campaign in media is usually possible on a commercial basis. When designing an advertising campaign in media, the key problem is the choice of a specific resource (magazine, TV channel, thematic site) where the advertisement will be placed. Each resource has its own target audience determined by various criteria - geography of residence, interests,

occupation, lifestyle, etc. In addition, different media resources have varying degrees of coverage of their target audience. An ideal resource for advertising the Gastro-route will be one that, firstly, has the same target audience as the target audience of the Gastro-route, secondly, which has the maximum coverage of its target audience, and, thirdly, offers minimum cost per target customer contact.

Russian and Finnish segments of the Gastro-route's target audience are covered with different media resources. Resources on both sides of the border must be mass media thematically focused on gastronomic tourism, culture discoveries, ethnic cultures, and other related fields.

Actions required for the promotion in media:

- ⇒ Develop promotional materials for presentation in media resources.
- ⇒ Select media resources for ads placement.
- ⇒ Prepare and adjust ads content for each media resource.
- ⇒ Run marketing campaign in selected media.

Within the ENI project Kalitka, the Gastro-route was advertised in the Russian version of National Geographic magazine, as well as in regional news media and stories on regional television. For the future, it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the advertising campaign and continue it, taking into account the intermediate results, both in the Russian and in the Finnish information space.

Promotion at exhibitions and events

Presentation of the Gastro-route at tourism exhibitions and mass events aims at informing and raising interest of the professionals of the tourist market and, in addition, potential customers. The selection of exhibitions and events where the promotion of the Gastro-route will be carried out should be made based on the interests of the target audience attending them. The most obvious option for the presentation of the Gastro-route on the Finnish side is Matka exhibition. In Russia, a choice should be made from a number of thematic exhibitions – MITT, Otdykh Leisure, INTOURMARKET or others.

Actions required for the promotion at exhibitions and events:

- ⇒ Select thematic exhibitions where the Gastro-route is to be presented to professionals.
- ⇒ Develop promotional materials oriented particularly on tourist market professionals.
- ⇒ Select mass events attended by the Gastro-route's potential customers.
- ⇒ Develop interactive actions to be held at selected mass events.

Promotional video

Promotional video in the first place is part of the content of marketing materials within PR and advertising campaigns. At the same time, promotional video can be an independent tool for promoting the Gastro-route. Therefore, it is important to prepare a high-quality video for promoting the Gastro-route, preferably short and longer versions. Video must be sounded in English, Finnish and Russian languages. Video should be placed and promoted in youtube as well as social media and TV. Video can be also played at thematic exhibitions and events.

Promotion through experience

Promoting the Gastro-route through experience is generally similar to promotion by opinion leaders. The essence of this promotion method is to create a positive experience in the use of Gastro-route services for decision makers who can directly participate in the sales and marketing of Gastro-route tourist products. It is worth to organize a demo info-tour for representatives of travel agencies, tour operators and other organizations directly involved in the travel products sales chain. The goal of this promotion is not so much to promote an image of the Gastro-route, but rather to stimulate sales of specific tourist products of the Gastro-route. Thus, it is advisable to organize an info-tour for representatives of the travel industry at a stage when several tourist products have already been created and tested, which together can make up at least one tour along the Gastro-route.

Actions required for the promotion through experience:

- ⇒ Develop and test tourist products within the Gastro-route. Prepare tourist products offers for sale. Compose a demo tour.
- ⇒ Select organizations that would be the key players in sales and marketing of the Gastro-route's tourist products.
- ⇒ Arrange a demo tour for representatives of the selected organizations.