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TRAVEL COUNSELORS FOCUS GROUPS

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Ministry of Tourism & Recreation

Research Section

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APPENDIX

Travel Counselors Discussion Outline
Telephone Counselors Discussion Outline

B K R ND

The Ontario **Ministry** of Tourism and Recreation (**MTR**) commissioned **Gillian Tuffin** Research Ltd. to conduct travel counselor focus groups. Past studies indicated that travel counselors' opinions reflected those of the general public. Travel counselors' opinions will be explored after each season. The findings from the winter season were summarized in the interim report Issued **in** May. 1988. This report summarizes the findings for the summer campaign, highlighting travel counselors' opinions on advertising, publications, travel trends and opportunities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were:

- i) To learn travel counselors' perceptions of current market activity in Ontario in the 1988 summer season.
- ii) To explore the travel **counsellor's** evaluation of MTR's servicing function.
- iii) To gauge the consumers' level of knowledge of MTR's publications program.
- iv) To establish whether or not the demands of the first time caller/visitor are different from those of the repeat caller/visitor. and the nature of those demands in the summer season.
- v) To evaluate the travel counselors' perception **of** the appropriateness of the consumer summer publications.
- vi) To examine factors influencing the effectiveness of the current summer advertising.

METHODOLOGY

Four focus groups were conducted to collect opinions and impressions of the summer program and **service** offered by MTR. Two groups were conducted with counselors from travel centres. one with permanent staff and one with seasonal staff. The following locations were represented:

- Cornwall (P),
- **Sarnia (P,S)**
- **Barrie** (P)
- Niagara Falls (P),
- Windsor (**P.S**),
- Toronto (P),
- Prescott (S).
- Kenora** (S),
- 1,000 Islands (S),
- Fort Erie (S),
- Kingston/401 (S),
- Hawkesbury** (P).

(P = Permanent staff. S = seasonal employee) .

Two groups were also conducted amongst telephone travel counselors based at MTR's Toronto headquarters. One group was conducted amongst permanent, full-time employees or contract employees, the majority of whom had at least two year's travel counseling experience. The second group was held with seasonal employees, all but one of whom were working for **MTR** for the first **time**.

It should be noted that the sample represented a wide range of Ontario travel **centres**, together with 6 permanent telephone travel counselors and 10 seasonal telephone counselors. The sample, therefore, was representative of travel counselors as a whole.

The groups were conducted in a focus group facility equipped with one-way mirror, and were tape recorded for subsequent report writing purposes. The groups were conducted on July 12 and 13. 1988.

REPORT FORMAT

Traveller centre counselors were dealing with drop-in travelers already on vacation in their areas enroute to another Ontario destination. in addition to some "local" traffic. In contrast. the telephone travel counselors were **more** likely to be dealing with individuals planning a holiday or weekend getaway. Thus. their perspective on the travel market was a little different. **However**, there was a high degree of consistency between the information requests and changes noted by both groups of counselors. This report highlights any differences expressed by travel **centre** counselors versus telephone travel counselors: when the term travel counselor is not qualified. the views expressed represent those of both travel **centre** and telephone counselors.

A brief summary of the highlights from this study follows this introduction. Then. a **more** detailed commentary is presented, illustrated, where appropriate, with verbatim quotations from individual respondents. Copies of the travel centre counselors and telephone travel counselors discussion outlines used in this research can be found in the Appendix.

HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS

CURRENT MARKET ACTIVITIES

As in the winter phase of this **study**, a high degree of consistency was noted in the comments made **by** travel centre counselors and telephone travel counselors relative to the key information requests of summer visitors and callers.

The most frequent requests were for information on, and maps of, specific cities and areas. **in** particular:

Toronto.
Ottawa,
Niagara Falls. and
"Cottage Country".

Accommodations **of** all kinds were the second major area of interest. Telephone and travel counselors identified a particular increase in requests for camping information, and for provincial parks reservations information. In addition, such requests were said to be coming earlier in the year than in previous **summers**.

Camping requests were generated from several distinct groups **of** people. Younger families from the U.S. and Canada were looking for cheaper alternatives to hotels and motels. Older, retired couples in campers or RV'S were looking for a leisurely way to tour the province. Young singles were looking for an inexpensive, fun vacation.

Potential visitors who balked at the potential intimacy of staying in **someone's home**. but wanted a more personalized style than a hotel at a lower cost than an exclusive resort. requested the "Country Inns" booklet in a search for accommodation. This segment was also said to be increasing.

Finally, travelers visiting the cities were wanting to stay in the hotel/motel chains but **were** anxious to get as good a rate as possible, raising the need for a publication dealing with summer packages, akin to the **Winter** packages book.

- The increase in family travel led to increased demands **for** specific Information on children's activities. Travelers wanted literature on Wonderland. **amusement parks**. water parks, beaches and other children's attractions. **Quebecers**, in particular, traveling with **younger** children found the lure **of** Wonderland irresistible and wanted further information on children's **activities**.
- Travel counselors in both the head office and the Individual centres reported interest in area specific activities for adults. too. Vacationers were less willing just to "tour". they wanted to "do things" and needed more detailed literature on **local events**, attractions. and activities. Interest in historical sites was a × particular area **of** increased interest. Counselors identified a trend to **more** active involvement in a vacation and a lessening Interest in just sitting by a lake or on a beach.
- Finally, requests from summer visitors about fishing spots were

Counselors **also** listed increasing requests for information on canoeing, biking, **hiking**, and other outdoor pursuits.

- . Travel **centre** counselors identified an increase in European travelers versus previous years, especially **in** bus tour groups.
- . Both travel **centre** and telephone counselors perceived an increased interest in Ontario **from** U.S. residents **of** states further afield than **the** normal border states.

Counselors also noted a trend to increased. **and** earlier, vacation planning, with campsites being booked in May and accommodations guides requested six to eight weeks prior to a trip. However, the less prepared, less informed and "last minute" travelers **still** existed.

- . Travel counselors identified a demand for some improved products. services and publications to enhance MTR's current range. These included:
 - Information on Bed and Breakfast accommodations. instead of the current Association listing.
 - Summer packages information, with an emphasis on economical rates and package deals.
 - Bus tour packages, to overcome the problem of only being able to hand out a limited quantity of literature to one bus group,
 - Children's activities guides,
 - A child's travel kit to relieve the tedium **of a** long car journey,
 - Increased information on hiking and biking trails, outdoor and adventure activities,
 - Information on ferry and bridge tolls and schedules,

- . A limited role for **VCR** tapes in the travel centres was seen. Counselors foresaw timing and practical problems with operating any visual aid program. especially in the busy summer months.
- . Travel counselors stressed the need for all **MTR** publications to be available as early as possible prior to the start of the summer season.

THE TRAVEL **CENTRE** AND TELEPHONE TRAVEL COUNSELOR SERVICE

- . Counselors believed television, newspaper and magazine advertising were **prime** sources of consumer awareness **of** the 1-800 number **and** of travel **centres** themselves.
- . Highway **signage** also played a key role in creating awareness of the travel **centres**, as **did** Customs offices, and word of mouth advertising.

Additional awareness sources **for** the telephone travel service number were cited as:

- consulates.
- automobile associations,
- Ministries.
- travel agents and travel clubs,
- telephone and 1-800 directories. and.
- word of mouth.

Counsellors admitted that their **early** summer season service could be rated a little less **highly**, based on the need to train **new** seasonal staff: information requests could take a little longer to answer.

Permanent staff agreed that their ability to help plan a detailed vacation itinerary for every caller or visitor was hampered by the sheer volume of requests. They accepted that their winter service could be viewed as a little **more** personalized than their summer service. Nonetheless, they reported few consumer complaints"

- . Counselors believed their high opinion of their service was justified. **based** on direct verbal consumer feedback and via letters and comments written in visitors books. **Their** task was made easier by the high quality, **free literature that MTR produced, which** generated extremely positive comments.
- . **Telephone** counselors perceived the **U.S. traveller, in particular,** would view their service even more positively if the dispatch and delivery period for information requests could be reduced. In addition, the lengthy period on hold in the busiest season also caused some annoyance.
- . Travel centre counselors also reported **traveller** impatience with the line-ups **in** the busy periods. but no other service improvements were noted.
- . The better informed, better planned summer travelers described by telephone travel counselors were typified as:

Another emerging travel **group** identified by telephone counselors was said to be:

U.S. travelers from the southern States.

more affluent.

interested in "**nice**", rather than "cheap" accommodations. and. older couples.

Seasonal telephone counselors identified another travel group who were typified as uninformed or **ill** informed. The group was comprised of U.S. callers who were:

middle and lower income.

- less educated.
- families with children.
- curious about what Canada looks like.

This group could represent future potential travelers to Ontario: they appeared to have no immediate plans for a **trip**, but could be enticed by the literature to plan a visit In the future.

Travel **centre** counselors claimed their profile of visitors varied across the season. In the early **summer**, the typical visitors were:

couples.

- retired or "Golden Aged",
- affluent.
- planning to spend a month in the province.
- possibly returning to Canada after 30 **or** 40 years,
- towing a camper or in an RV.

The early season visitor was also typified by the business **traveller**.

The high summer season travel centre **visitors** were:

- families.
 - 30's and 40's age range,
with two or three pre-teenaged children,
 - interested **in** children's activities.
planning to camp or stay in less expensive accommodation,
 - from Quebec, the border States. or Ontario.
- . Travel **centre** counselors also noted an increase In visitors from the southern states of the U.S.A.
 - . Both travel centre and telephone counselors claimed a high level of repeat visitors and callers. Repeaters were identified **by**:
 - detailed publications knowledge.
 - specific information requests.
 - physical knowledge of the travel **centre's** facilities, and,
 - their own claims of previous contact.
 - . Counselors claimed the key difference between summer and winter travelers was the family orientation of the summer travelers. This, in turn, led to increased demands for "things to **do**". The summer of 1988 was also said to represent an increase in younger families traveling together versus previous years, looking for campsites and cheaper accommodations and outdoor pursuits.

PUBLICATIONS AND ADVERTISING

- . AS in the winter groups, travel counselors **played** back nothing but favorable comments on the quality and quantity of **MTR** publications available.
- . Travelers were pleasantly surprised that the literature was complimentary, a fact that counselors had to stress. U.S. travelers were not accustomed to receiving free literature.

Counselors **did** express a **general** requirement to add Prices. or an indication of price ranges. to the Events and Accommodations guides. while recognizing the difficulties of ensuring such prices were up-to-date.

Counselors also suggested that the Accommodations guide **be** organized **by city** within travel association regions. and that all **MTR** publications utilize the regional numbering **system**.

A general request was also **made** to consider organizing the "**Summer Events**" booklet by city within region. too. Counselors believed it was more logical to go to an area and then look for events and attractions to visit. rather than vice versa.

- . New publications. or new L-listings. **were** requested to **cover**:
 - Individual Bed and Breakfast establishments. not just an Association listing.
 - canoeing,
 - hiking and biking.
 - more exciting adventure vacations.
 - historical sites.
 - bus tours.
 - propane and gas stations.
 - beaches. pools. water parks.
 - children's activities,
 - farm vacations.
 - ethnic districts **of** the major Ontario cities.
 - senior citizens attractions. and.
 - detailed city guides.

Travel counselors stressed the need for publications to be as complete as possible, and to be **available** as early as possible.

French, German, Japanese, and Spanish versions of the **Traveller's** Encyclopedia were judged desirable.

Travel counselors credited **MTR** advertising with making travelers aware of the 1-800 number, the travel centres, and the existence of specific publications.

The permanent travel counselors claimed the public did not respond as favorably to the new "**Ontario, Incredible!**" campaign as to the old, familiar "Yours to Discover" campaign. Seasonal staff did not play back negative comments about the new campaign, recognizing that it represented a shift forward.

- . **All** counselors praised the insert program as an effective vehicle for creating awareness of Ontario and highlighting its appeal over competitors.
- . Travel counselors saw the Atlantic provinces and New England as **major** summer competitors, appealing to the desire for peace and quiet and a cottage by the water.
- . Quebec was said to be a competitor **of** increasing note for U.S. visitors. Frequent requests for information on "Toronto and Montreal" were heard by telephone counselors, believed to be the result of increased Quebec advertising and promotion in the U.S.

Alberta **and** B.C. were said to be emerging as competitors by telephone counselors, in that more awareness existed in the Border States after the Olympics: however, the sheer distance eliminated them as destinations for a two week automobile holiday.

- . Ontario itself appeared different **from** other areas because **it** offered a combination **of** holiday pursuits: peace and quiet and city alternatives. In addition. in almost every location, Ontario **offered** a range **of** 'things to do". **Summer** travelers appear to be seeking more active vacation options. in line with the trend identified in the winter research.

DETAILED FINDINGS

A. CURRENT MARKET ACTIVITY

1. Yost Frequent Summer Information Requests

a) **Maps and City** Information

Travel counselors claimed the most frequent summer requests were for information on specific cities and areas. in particular.

- Toronto.
- Ottawa.
- Niagara Falls. and.
- "Cottage **country**".

Such requests were often as vague as a question like:

"...**tell** me what to do in Ottawa." or.

"...we are going to Toronto for the weekend.
what can we do?" or.

"I am **going** to Ottawa. I want to know about
the attractions. I want maps of Ontario.
maps of Ottawa."

The travel counselors. faced **with** these general requests. tried to probe to find out the type of activities the **caller** or **traveller** **might** be interested in. and provide them with the appropriate literature and information. They often attempted to find out. too. whether the **traveller** required help with accommodations. Telephone counselors claimed this kind of inquiry sometimes led the caller to feel as if he were being interrogated: on other occasions. it **led** to requests for the Accommodations guide and Camping book. Counselors pointed to this as an example of how skillful a counselor had to be at eliciting information on the publications which could be most useful to a caller. While travel **centre** counselors reported a similar reluctance **by** visitors to divulge information on their vacation plans. this was often based on a fear that additional brochures would add significant costs. Once visitors knew the publications **were** free. they **were** more **likely** to ask for **help** in accommodations as well as area attractions and maps. In the summer time. however. there were also those travelers who just wanted the maps for their **journey** and their destination. They did not have time for anything else. they were anxious to continue with their journey. As one counselor reported:

"They want the road maps: people come in and say. "Can I have a road map?" and they're gone out the door before you can even ask them. "Would you like an Accommodations guide? or, Can I give you a sightseeing guide?", they are gone. It is surprising how people are in such a hurry."

b) Accommodations

Amongst the counselors included in this series of focus groups, maps and specific city **information** were the most frequent summer requests. followed by accommodations requests, specifically for camping. Counselors on **MTR's** permanent staff claimed that interest in camping, both in tents and trailers, had been increasing steadily over the past two or three seasons: they highlighted camping as a vacation trend that could be serviced with even more publications. As noted in the winter season groups, requests **for** campground information, and for provincial park reservations, appeared to be starting earlier in the year. Counselors in this study claimed there appeared to be the same trend towards earlier planning with frequent camping inquiries in May and June. However, there were still a large number of travelers who called in the last week of June, looking for camping spaces in a provincial park on the July 1st weekend, and who could not understand why all spaces were booked.

No one individual profile emerged of the "camper". There were several different groups of people identified as requesting camping information, ranging from the traditional family group to young singles and older, retired travelers. It was claimed that camping offered an inexpensive alternative for the family who,

"...**just** wanted to get away for a week."

Such families were often in their 30's, with young children, and were likely to be "local". Families from **Welland**, **St. Catharine's**, and the Niagara **region** were likely to drop into their travel centres to **collect** camping information. Visitors from the U.S. also wanted camping information: they were said to be a little **older**, into their 40's with correspondingly older children. They wanted to know about the campsites, especially the availability of shower facilities, in addition to information on the extent of bears. U.S. callers were more likely to ask whether or not they should **bring** guns for protection!

Not all campers were interested in tents: **many** had camper vehicles. especially the older. retired couples traveling from the U.S.. who intended to take a leisurely vacation touring the province. While this group was highlighted as important for **Fall** travel requests. they were also represented in the **summer**.

"I find that the older couples that come in are retired. and are in an RV. Generally, we have to route them all the way to **Kenora** because they are going to be there. They are going to go right across Canada."

The last group, the younger singles, were looking for campgrounds in provincial parks for a social weekend. Younger males wanted to know the "popular" spots, since,

"...they want a party,"

and were particularly interested in the various alcohol bans in the parks. In addition, camping facilities in **Collingwood** and **Wasaga Beach** were frequent requests. While the young singles tended to telephone to check this information, the **family** groups and older couples were just as likely to drop into a centre or to call the toll free number. Individual centres varied in the proportion **of** the different groups they encountered, although in **Barrie**. all three of these groups appeared to be represented in terms of camping requests,

"I would say that does not agree with what we **find** in **Barrie**. It is a really good mixture of age groups. The **young** couple that you have mentioned is equally balanced **in Barrie** by the seniors and the people with an older family."

In addition to an increase in **the** number of requests for campground information. other types of accommodation requests had also increased this summer. Frequent demands for "Bed and Breakfast" had been heard, mainly from **□**iddle aged couples who were vacationing alone. leaving their **children** behind. While this represented a cheaper form of accommodation, counselors felt that money was not the only motivation. Travelers had heard that "Bed and Breakfast" offered a more personal, different accommodation experience, and **was** recognized as a European phenomenon. Middle-aged, U.S. travelers were anxious to experience the difference.

'*People don't want major **hotels** anymore. There was a time when you would be asked for the chains. they wanted a chain hotel. now people want Bed and Breakfasts. I think that is the European influence. "

"There seem to be a lot of people trying "Bed and Breakfast" for their first time lately. They say that they have heard about it from a friend. **. . .Particularly** from the States, they say that they have heard about it from their friends who went to Niagara-on-the-Lake and stayed in a "Bed and Breakfast", how good it was."

Associated with the trend towards more personal, "Bed and Breakfast" accommodation was the increased interest in staying in country inns. These often represented a cheaper alternative to resort accommodations, and offered the more friendly, personal accommodation experience but they stopped short of the intimacy associated with living in someone's house. Travelers did not have to worry about conversing with the host at breakfast and doing the dishes. Country inns offered, "...**a** little bit of finesse for an American, " who wanted a change from the motel chain style.

Travelers still wanting the more traditional hotel accommodations were visiting the major cities. These tended to be younger- to middle-aged couples with children who were looking for an inexpensive hotel or motel downtown, with a pool, for \$20 to \$30 per night. They were often dismayed at the cost of chain accommodation. and especially miffed when they had to go on and make their own reservations! The absence of a specific summer packages booklet. with discounts for hotel rooms. was mentioned as a potential area for improvement.

c) Children's Activities

Travelers from the U.S.. Quebec, and within Ontario were **all looking,**

"...**for** things to do with the children."

"...for a day's outing,* or.

"...**for** a beach for the children.*"

Irrespective of the final destination of the **holiday**, and the **length** of the vacation, visitors and callers were anxious for information on children's activities and places of interest for children.

Wonderland did, of course, top the list of specific inquiries for children's activities, and was frequently volunteered as a potential outing by counselors. Television advertising for Wonderland by McDonald's, by Wonderland itself. and in the **MTR** spots. promotions via McDonald's restaurants. and word of mouth have all stimulated interest in Wonderland. Telephone counselors answering the French language lines in Toronto claimed an overwhelming number of their inquiries were related to Wonderland. As one counselor said.

"There is such enthusiasm when **Quebecers call** about it, that ad is like a drug with those **people**, they are really enthusiastic."

U.S. callers were also drawn to Wonderland. They had heard of,

"...this big amusement park somewhere up there,"

and wanted to combine a visit to Toronto with a visit to Wonderland. Hence, their requirement for a hotel '*close by".

Finally, Wonderland had an inherent appeal to recent immigrants to Canada. It was close enough to Toronto to satisfy the demands for a day's outing. Recent immigrants from Europe, Asia and the Caribbean, like many **Quebecers**. had no real experience of theme parks. and Wonderland offered a very different. exciting image. As noted above. the bulk of inquiries about Wonderland came from families with children in the 2 to 10 year old age range. However, there were also the younger singles, in their 20's. **from** Quebec, who were attracted by the prospect of a fun weekend away.

While Wonderland was the most frequently mentioned "activity", there were also requests for information on African Lion Safari and Marine Land. Both these **were** perceived to be day trips from Toronto. and were frequent requests from "locals". Travel counselors might suggest these as side trips if they were involved in discussions of a **traveller's** route but. as many lamented. the volume of calls and visitors **in** the summer months reduced the time they could spend truly counseling each individual on their holiday plans.

d) Area and Adult Activities

Not all families with children wanted activities that catered solely to children. There was a requirement for attractions that **would** appeal to the whole family, since **adults** and **children all** had a requirement to,

"...do something for the day."

Travel **centre** counselors spoke of travelers arriving with the request.

"...**what** can we do within an hour and a half of here?"

Such travelers had crossed from the U.S. and wanted to do something "Canadian" for the day. Counselors in Niagara Falls frequently encountered the need to plan a day's activities for a U.S. family in their area. while counselors at the eastern border crossings suggested trips to Ottawa. Any travel centre could be faced with two or three business people arriving and asking what to do for the day. Counselors had to be able to provide local area activities.

Such requests were not always as vague as those outlined above. An increasing interest was being expressed in historical sites and counselors suggested a **more** specific publication could be helpful in this area. Requests **for** information on Upper Canada Village, Black Creek pioneer Village, and forts were said to come from both **U.S.** and Quebec travelers. While telephone counselors could usually provide more specific information than that provided in the **Traveller's** Encyclopedia, they claimed they had to go through their files and frequently telephone the caller back. This slowed down the response **system** and was felt to be a **big** enough area of interest to warrant a specific publication.

e) Fishing

Inquiries about fishing rules and regulations, good fishing spots, and fishing associations were mentioned more by telephone counselors than by travel centre counselors. Presumably, the preponderance of border crossing point **centres** would explain this bias. Fishing inquiries came largely from older men. usually from the Minnesota, Erie areas. Counselors claimed that such callers had often been to Ontario fishing spots before, but were considering new venues and wanted up-to-date **licence** and regulation information.

`*The majority of cases is men coming up fishing, and it is some place that they have been coming to for ten years and going to that same lake. And they are thinking **of** trying another one this time. They ask if you can send down some information, or they want the new fishing regulation guide."

Serious fishermen usually knew what they wanted: however, telephone counselors also had to deal with callers who had a vague image of Ontario as a vacation destination that combined both outdoors and city pursuits. U.S. couples wanted to find a vacation spot in Ontario that would allow the husband to fish, the wife to **visit** a shopping mall. and the children to swim at the beach. Counselors were offering such callers information on stocked ponds in conservation areas that could be close enough to Toronto to satisfy the other family member's needs.

While the five topic areas reported on above represented the most frequent summer information requests, counselors also listed hiking and biking and other outdoors activities as frequent areas of inquiry. Weather conditions, road conditions, and customs regulations rounded out the general list of frequent inquiries.

2. Observation on the Typical Summer Traveller

The range of visitors and callers that travel counselors interfaced with is extremely varied. and defining a typical visitor or caller is difficult. In the previous section. counselors **did** pinpoint "typical" demographic profiles for callers and visitors who most frequently requested specific information. Counselors also offered some general perspectives on the typical travelers and callers. For example. travel centre counselors claimed that there was a perceptible increase in European travelers in the 1988 summer season, especially bus tours from France. Counselors from different centres mentioned.

"...bus loads and bus loads."

more than in previous years. In addition, bus tours of both students and senior citizens from the U.S. appeared to be on the increase.

In Toronto. in particular. an increase **in** oriental visitors and German visitors was noted. Such visitors were frequently equipped with some information on Canada, obtained from overseas consulates and embassies, but stopped in at a travel centre to augment their supply.

The representatives from travel centres at the U.S. border crossings points claimed the majority of their visitors were from the border states: Michigan, Ohio, New York, and Illinois. Similarly, telephone counselors mentioned these as frequent points of inquiry. However, both travel centre and telephone counselors had noted an increase in travelers from the southern United States: Texas, Georgia, and Virginia were all mentioned. These travelers were identified as new in 1988, often wealthier, with more time to spend on . vacation.

The other new characteristic noted in 1988 by the permanent counselors was a trend to increased vacation planning. Counselors noted that more travelers had accommodations booked before they arrived in Ontario. Travel **centre** counselors wondered whether some had already called the 1-800 number and received an Accommodations guide and arranged their bookings. **At** the travel **centre**, these travelers wanted to pick up routing information and publications on area attractions and activities.

"What I found a trend this year, compared to last year, I found a lot more already have accommodations booked this year. "Do you need information on accommodations?" "No. we have it booked already." What is surprising me this year is that they have already got it booked: last year we had "I've got two weeks off, what can we do? **Plan** out **my** vacation for me for two weeks, lady, and I want this, this and this." Now they seem to be a little bit more organized. I don't know whether it is because of our inserts and they are getting a few names, or..."

This thought was echoed by other counselors who agreed that,

"...**people** are much more prepared than they used to be."

Telephone counselors had noted similar. earlier requests for information, with campsites being booked in May rather than **July**, and travelers requesting information six to eight weeks prior to their departure. rather than the week before.

There were, however, still the "last minute" groups. Telephone counselors spoke of callers being annoyed that an information kit would take two weeks to reach them when their planned departure date was only a week away. Travel counselors told tales of U.S. visitors crossing the border for their vacation in Ontario without even a map of Ontario, with no accommodation reservations, just a burning desire to go to Niagara Falls and a request for,

"...a map of Canada."

This latter group of less prepared, less informed visitors was more likely to be annoyed, too, at the need to use Canadian currency and stamps rather than their U.S. dollars **and** postage stamps. They were more likely to criticize the Canadian metric system and expect Canadians to **somehow** look different. While travel counselors did believe the size of the uninformed **traveller** group was shrinking, it was still a **sizeable** minority of travelers, requiring expert assistance and information.

3. New Product and Service Opportunities

In the course of discussing frequent information requests, suggestions for new products and publications to improve **MTR's** service to the traveling public were isolated. Reflecting the increased interest in a wider range of accommodations options, several counselors expressed a desire for a "Bed and Breakfast" guide. The current listing of "Bed and Breakfast" associations was of very limited use to the traveling public. Travelers were dismayed to find the **MTR** listing just pointed them to another organization to contact, of limited usefulness when they needed immediate accommodation for the next few nights.

The listing was a little more useful to telephone callers. some of whom had time to go on to contact the relevant area organization, but it still generated complaints. Travelers expected **MTR** to provide a list of "Bed and Breakfast"* establishments, just like they **did** for campsites, resorts and hotels. Travelers and less experienced counselors did not fully appreciate the difficulties involved in ■aintaining a listing of individual enterprises like Bed and Breakfast establishments. They were responding more to the information requests of the traveling public, who wanted an alternative to hotels, motels. or **campsites.**

Counselors did point out that they told travelers they could buy a guide from the local bookstore if they **did** not have time to contact the Bed and Breakfast Associations: travelers found this advice somewhat incongruous, given the **wide** range of other free publications available via **MTR.**

Several more experienced counselors were aware of the practical difficulties associated with a Bed and Breakfast listing: they pointed to the seasonal nature of the business, the difficulty of imposing any minimum standards, and the difficulty of compiling one accurate and complete listing. Nonetheless, **if** the demand for this type of accommodation continues to increase. it **could** warrant a renewed investigation of its feasibility. In the meantime, however, less experienced and seasonal counselors may need the reasons behind the lack of an establishment listing **re-emphasized.**

Counselors **in** travel **centres** also highlighted the need for special information kits for bus tours. This was raised **by** the counselors in the winter focus **group** sessions, too. The limit of ten maps, encyclopedias, and guide books per coach appeared arbitrary and discriminatory to bus tour members. Visitors **did** not appreciate why they should be treated any differently from travelers in cars or campers. **As** they perceived it,

"They are as much a tourist as the other **guy**. (Bus tour members) are going to come back with their families. He is spending as much **money** as the single **traveller**, so why shouldn't he get the same service?"

Counselors spoke of the bad impression that the treatment of bus tours could create. They felt the eyes of the **whole** tour group staring hostilely at them. As one woman said,

"You try to compensate, but you **still** feel like they are being slighted **somehow**."

Some even chose the arrival **of** a bus tour as the time for their washroom break, to avoid possible confrontations. One counselor spoke of the degree of discomfort such encounters could generate: bus tour travelers got **really** upset and **centre** counselors resorted to giving out the head office telephone number to the tour **co-ordinator** so that the complaint could be passed on. Clearly, it is not practical to stockpile huge quantities of materials for bus tours, but counselors felt consideration should be given to the development of a "bus tour package".

Travel counselors were expected to be able to provide visitors and callers with detailed Canada Customs regulations. This was not a service they believed they should be able to offer but, nonetheless, travelers were annoyed when they could not answer customs questions. Possibly, information kits sent out by the telephone **centre** could emphasize the need to check customs regulations at their point of border crossing. **Centres** were also not equipped to handle information requests for maps of other provinces or the border U.S. states. Travelers did not understand why an Ontario travel **centre** did not hand out Quebec or New York State maps: consideration could be given to stocking the relevant maps for the adjoining province at border crossing **centres** to enhance the image of the helpfulness of the service generally.

Whilst the areas mentioned above were sources of **traveller** irritation, counselors did not feel they should or could help in these areas. In several other areas, however, travel counselors would appreciate more specific publications or additional publications. As noted in the opening section, the requests for children's activities and outings were high in the summer of 1988. Counselors would like a "Children's Activities" booklet or L-list,

"...with the water parks, amusement parks.
something that would be geared to children to
show the **traveller** where they are going. .."

A natural corollary of a publication for children was believed to be a kit to occupy children, both in the travel **centres**, while parents were obtaining information. and **in** the car. to help relieve the tedium of the journey. Counselors suggested,

"**Maybe** they could have a booklet with different puzzles and stuff for different ages, like a **colouring** one for kids, a dot-to-dot and a word search, like our incentive games. Put something like that together, and it would cover **all** ages."

Such a kit would augment the stickers and buttons already handed out to children.

Other areas of inquiry that counselors believed could justify L-listings included ferry and bridge information. Travelers wanted to know crossing times, costs, **and** the rules and regulations relating to vehicles on ferries and cycling **over** bridges. Similarly, more literature on cycling was requested. Counselors noted an increased interest in bicycle paths, cycling along the Bruce Trail, and general requests for scenic bicycle routes. L-lists for biking and hiking routes would be welcomed.

The frequent inquiry for "something to do" in a particular area led counselors to suggest a more complete Events guide for each area. Counselors themselves knew of local festivals or new **theatres** that were not included **in** any of the **MTR** publications. They recognized that they themselves were remiss in not following up with the local organizers to ensure inclusion in the next booklet. but suggested.

"...some way to advertise. or to get letters out to the various travel associations. to reinforce the fact that we do have the Events guide and to pass the word and encourage submissions. "

As a complement to literature in the travel **centres**, it was suggested that VCR tapes or films could be used to tell the **traveller** a little more about a specific location or route. Films were already in use in the Eaton **Centre** facility, and the representative from that travel **centre** believed visitors appreciated the experience.

"After they have seen the film. they like it very much . It gives them a general feeling of the place (Ontario). Pictures are worth more than a thousand words, going through the Encyclopedia with pictures is fine. but seeing the movies. it gives them a sensation of different places."

While it **was** felt that a 15 minute general movie might be acceptable in Toronto, representatives of the other locations claimed any tape could only be 5 **minutes** long, and should be area specific: for example.

"...**what** to do on the way to Niagara Falls," or,

"...the local attractions... just little clips."

Short, localized feature **films** could augment the printed information, but counselors foresaw a range of practical implications. Counselors did not want to encourage visitors to view the centre as an entertainment booth: they feared an influx of children and seniors looking for a cool spot on a hot day watching movies! They also foresaw scheduling complications **if** one visitor wanted to see the Niagara Falls tape whilst another was interested in the Nation's Capital tape.

There was a general perception that the counselors were busy enough in the summer months without the additional headache of scheduling and playing video tapes. They appeared to want more printed literature to hand out on the area attractions in preference to visual aids. They also noted that such a service could have more use in some **centres** than in others. and should be looked at on a local **basis**.

The requirement for a Bed and Breakfast guide has already been noted: counselors also noted a need for a summer packages book, similar to the existing Winter Packages book. but emphasizing economical accommodations and discount deals with hotel or motel chains. Counselors claimed that the existing resorts book was only really of use to those travelers to whom "...**money** is no object," an increasingly rare species. The majority of travelers who wanted hotel or motel accommodations, rather than camping or Bed and Breakfast, were looking for economical rates.

"Very rarely **do** I get someone in my **centre** who is not looking for a deal. Everybody comes in and says, '*I want a nice, cheap place to stay," and that is the number 1 request."

Counselors were aware that some hotel and motel chains offered deals throughout the year, but they could only spend time telling travelers about them when there were no line-ups. They perceived a summer packages booklet would be in great demand. They also recognized that such a booklet would have to be available at the very beginning of the summer season to send out to telephone callers to enable them to **make** reservations far in advance. Indeed. this led to a general statement that all summer publications be issued in **March or** April to cater to the trend to increased planning by many travelers.

Counselors reported that summer travelers wanted and expected to be able to use the travel centres as reservations desks. a point noted in the winter sessions as well. While this is clearly not a practical consideration, it led counselors to repeat the request for publication of toll free numbers whenever possible to assist the **traveller.**

B. THE TRAVEL CENTRE AND TELEPHONE TRAVEL COUNSELOR SERVICE

1. Source of Awareness of the Service

Counselors in both the travel and telephone centres believed advertising was a prime source of awareness for their service. They included both television and newspaper advertising in this category, along with magazine advertising in U.S. publications like Gourmet Magazine and The Smithsonian. Travelers obtained the 1-800 number from the advertisements, and subsequently called, or they held on to the newspaper and used that as their reference point at the centre.

"...advertising on television. and I know a lot of Americans come in and they have newspapers and they have all of the publications. they say, "I want this and this and this."

As in the winter months. many summer travelers become aware of the centres just by seeing signs on the highways. Representatives from travel centres at border crossings. in particular, felt their visibility was good.

"In Sarnia. when you come off the bridge, we are right there. There are signs."

"Generally, at all of the border crossings or on the major highways we are noticeable."

The currency exchange service at border crossings also encouraged travelers to stop in for information.

Telephone travel counselors knew that advertising was a key source for the 1-800 number, but they also believed their number was disseminated by:

- consulates,
automobile associations.
the Ministry of National Resources,
the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Canadian Tire Travel Club,
- travel agents,
- telephone directories, and
1-800 directory in the United States.

In addition, successful dealings with a travel counselor encouraged word of mouth referral of the 1-800 number, and of travel centre locations.

Travel centre counselors believed their counterparts at the telephone centre recommended that travelers drop in at the centre nearest their destination to pick up more local information. In addition. Customs officers at the border were known to recommend visits to the travel centres. Finally, **travel** centre staff themselves recommended visits to other centres to augment their local knowledge. As one counselor stated.

"We generally refer people to the other centres because you are limited on certain areas. sometimes you just don't get enough of a certain brochure so you try to get them to stop in, even for directions, or more individual brochures on that area."

2. Assessment of Service Levels

Travel **centre** and telephone counselors agreed that the service they were able to provide the traveling public was excellent. Representatives from both counseling services claimed.

"...we bend over backwards for them,"

in trying to provide information. As a travel **centre** counselor said.

"I think our service is **excellent**. I think our Ministry does a tremendous job. I really do. Obviously there is room for improvement, but I think I would say borderline **excellent**."

As this respondent indicated, any service is capable of improvement, and several counselors recognized that. at the **beginning** of the summer season in particular, the service rating might not be quite as high. The high seasonal information demand necessitated seasonal staff: these individuals were less well versed in the literature available. and took more time to service visitors or callers. **In** addition, seasonal staff may not be resident all year round in the area they are employed in and. hence, detailed local knowledge could be more limited. Seasonal telephone staff admitted that,

"It takes you longer than you expect to look something up... and they (the caller) are in a bad mood."

By the time this study was conducted, counselors generally believed their ability to service had risen back to the excellent level. The only limitation to their service was time: as they said.

"...we just have to get through as fast as we can."

Some counselors were a little frustrated by the need to service the public so quickly. They felt they gave out all the required literature. but often wished they **had more** time to spend with each visitor to maximize their travel enjoyment.

"We are too busy. and we don't have the time. We can certainly give everybody **all** of the literature, but we don't have the time to spend with them to help them to plan their vacation and give them the level of service that they might need."

Some counselors tried to spend time, wherever possible, with travelers who really needed help or who were planning a lengthy, province-wide trip, but the overall **volume** of traffic made such specialized service difficult. Similarly, telephone **counselors** spoke **of** dealing with very specialized information requests from callers that required call backs: for example, the listing of Bridge Clubs in **Barrie** was not always immediately on hand. Such callers **were** called back, often much to their surprise and delight.

"If you do call them back, they are **really** polite, and I have gotten some Americans who have said "**You** are so polite, your service is great."

Direct feedback, as quoted above, was one way telephone counselors found out that their service was great. They also had letters from travelers who appreciated their help. More frequently, consumer feedback came at the time of the call. **Quebecers** noted their appreciation that someone in Ontario spoke French, as the following quotation from a telephone counselor highlighted.

"Quebecers love our service, I think. When you **do** a French **call**, they are so appreciative that they have found somebody that speaks French in Ontario that in the comments, it makes you so proud. and **you** just go onto the next call. They make it really worth it sometimes, they are so appreciative."

Similarly, U.S. callers favorably comment on the service they receive from telephone counselors versus counselors in other provinces of Canada or in U.S. states.

Another counselor spoke of the **new** initiative to help the physically challenged by asking,

"...**if** You have any special needs."

in the course **of** a call. The physically **challenged** picked up on this phrase and really appreciated the attempt to help.

Counselors from the travel **centres** often had more concrete proof of positive public opinion via the compliments in their Travel Centre guest books. Travelers appreciated the friendly service of the **staff**, the time spent helping them, and the quality of the information they received.

"We get a lot of people who have been through Customs, it is hostile. Then they are on the 401, traffic is awful, they are not really having a good time. and they come in and you smile and chat with them and ask them where they are going, how their trip has been. They seem to love the personal contact. We get some people who **will** just stand around and talk to you and tell you their plans, and afterwards they leave and they are so happy. **It** is a **really** personal aspect, it really goes a long way."

Despite all the positive comments on the travel counselor service, telephone counselors raised one continuing problem: the length of time it took to send publications to callers. Canadian callers were a little more tolerant of the postal system, but U.S. callers were often dismayed to find the dispatch and delivery process could take two weeks. Similarly, callers wanted faster access on the telephone: they disliked the long wait on **hold**, and were often distressed when they finally reached a counselor. Finally, some callers expressed irritation at the length of time it took to access specific information. They assumed the travel counselors were using a computerized database to call up information: they **did** not appreciate the manual nature of the help they were receiving.

"A lot of people assume that we have this database and they just wonder what it's taking us so long. We have to flip from one page to the next: this lady today was looking at **Bracebridge** and Ottawa, and she was asking me about one place, and then she would flip to the other one, so I would flip my book and then she would ask me something on the other one again. It was awful. It really makes you **feel** like a buffoon, flipping from one page to the other."

Overall, however, counselors maintained that the general consumer opinion **of** their service level was excellent.

3. The Summer Caller and the Summer Visitor Profile

a) The Summer Caller Profile:

References have already been made to the type of callers typically encountered by the summer travel counselor staff. Counselors reported that the trend was towards a better informed individual who was well organized and wanted to plan a summer trip. Such callers were expecting good service and, when they experienced the professionalism of the counselors, went on to take advantage of their knowledge. Such callers were typified as the middle to lower income groups who were looking for inexpensive trips and outings, and activities that were affordable for a family of four or five. These callers were rarely interested in resorts or expensive side excursions: they wanted to camp or stay in cheaper motel type accommodations. They were described as,

...sensible. middle income families, "

probably with children in the 8 to 12 year old age range. Such callers were from the border states, or could be local Ontario residents, too.

An Increasing proportion of telephone requests had come this past summer from further afield in the U.S. As counselors said, they tended' to "stick out" more because they were asking for nice accommodation, not necessarily cheap accommodation. This type of caller represented a **small** proportion of callers, but could represent the start of a new wave of Ontario visitors.

At the other end of the spectrum. the typical telephone caller was described in the same demographic terms as the first group identified above. that is. middle to lower income families with younger children, but was grossly ill-informed or uninformed. It tended to be the seasonal telephone counselors that drew this picture of the typical summer caller. They claimed callers asked whether or not they needed winter clothing in August, and whether or not they would see snow. Such less informed callers **were** wanting information on Ontario.

"...**just** to see what it looks like,"

and were less likely to be callers with specific plans to visit the province.

One of the better informed groups of callers and Ontario visitors was identified as the true fisherman. Older, male sportsfishermen from the border states had often visited Ontario before, and did not need much counseling. They had specific requests on the new regulations or **licencing** rules. Even obviously better educated Americans were lacking in accurate knowledge of Ontario but, now that Ronald Reagan had visited Toronto, they believed it was acceptable **for** them, too. They called to obtain information, frequently knowing little **more** than that Toronto was in Canada.

b) The Summer Visitor Profile:

The profile of visitors to the travel **centres** varied across the summer season. Several **centres** claimed the early summer visitors were typically couples in their 50's and 60's **who** were from the border U.S. states. They were touring without children, often in a camper or **RV**, and appeared to be quite affluent. They planned to spend a month touring Ontario, probably their first Canadian trip. A minority of these had visited Ontario once before - possibly on their honeymoon 40 years earlier. As one counselor said, she felt she had seen every second honeymooner from 40 years ago across the past summer months.

Another visitor encountered in the **early** season was the business **traveller**. Such people often dropped in for a map of the area for their current trip, but often picked up literature for a later, planned trip. It was claimed that business conventions in Toronto could lead to subsequent holiday trips with the family.

The profile of centre visitors changed again once school was out in mid-June. From then until Labour Day, the typical travel centre visitor had a young family in tow, hence the emphasis on children's activities and attractions. Visitors **from** Quebec fitted this **mould** too: they were couples in their 30's and early 40's, who were not especially well off, often accompanied by two pre-teenage children. They frequently wanted to camp, although they often looked for help with backup accommodations, in case the weather turned bad.

In addition to the inevitable requests for Wonderland information, such **Quebecers** were keen to obtain information on cheaper activities like museums and historical sites.

Visitors from the U.S. displayed a similar profile. They were characterized as working couples in their 40's, with two children, often heading to Toronto and wanting to stop off en route. They, too, were interested in camping, often towing a camper behind their car. The escalation of hotel rates over the past few years was claimed to have prompted the revived interest in camping.

Such profiles clearly do not reflect all the groups patronizing the travel centres, and individual centres would have particular profiles peculiar to them. For example, the seasonal counselor for the 401/Kingston centre spoke of the younger singles who dropped into his location en route to Toronto for a fun weekend. All that these individuals required was a map. Overall, the summer visitor profile reflects a family-oriented visitor, irrespective of their point of origin.

Interestingly, telephone and travel centre counselors claimed a considerable proportion of their callers and visitors were repeat callers and visitors, especially among the Ontario travelers, although the specific location had a major impact on likely repeat rates. The major indicator of prior experience with a travel counselor either on the telephone or in person was prior knowledge of a specific publication. Repeaters asked for the 1988 version of the Travelers' Encyclopedia or the new Accommodations guide: they had clearly had access to the previous version. They also tended to have a better idea of other information they might need, evidenced by comments like.

"Oh, we picked one up last week, or we got one of these last year and it was really helpful." and.

"**They** have been before on conventions. the next year they **will** cone on their own. They **will** pick up some more information and **say**, "I am now on my own and I would like to see more things with my family". There are a lot **of** American couples."

Repeat visitors **wanted** to know directions to specific places. opening times for specific attractions, and would be receptive to suggestions for a wider range of activities and excursions. In contrast. the first time visitor would gladly take the whole range of general publications. and for the American first time visitor in particular, would need detailed help with distances, **customs**, and **currency** in Canada.

Repeat visitors could be identified by the way they easily accessed the self-service literature racking system. Others were pinpointed by the fact that they knew the layout of a specific **centre**, and did not need to ask saff where the facilities were.

Finally, some summer visitors were asking staff for the "old decal" in place of the new "Ontario, **Incredible!**" sticker. Such visitors had clearly visited a travel centre before. even if not that particular one.

Two of the four **groups** contained permanent or contract employees who had been working for MTR across the past winter and summer season. and were able to comment on the differences between summer and winter visitors. The key difference was the family orientation of the visitor and caller profile: summer represented **family** vacations. with some traveling **by** older couples at the start of the season. In contrast. winter visitors and callers wanted weekend **getaways** without the children. and ski-weekends for singles. in addition to the family ski trip. The high cost of skiing as a family leisure pursuit militated against this as a casual. unplanned family pursuit that would require assistance from a travel counselor.

The winter conditions themselves also dictated that **local** visitors and callers were a more important segment of business. picking up literature on local events and weekend getaways.

Counselors who had worked in previous summer periods claimed that 1988 was primarily characterized by the increase in the number of younger families traveling. In addition. they noted more planning of vacations with an increase in people knowing what they wanted to do and with accommodations already booked. Such accommodations tended to be at campsites, Inns. and Bed and Breakfasts. The increasing cost of hotel **rooms** and resorts put these accommodations beyond the reach of the average **summer** family traveling with two **or** three **young** children.

C. PUBLICATIONS AND ADVERTISING

1. MTR Publications

Without exception. travel counselors praised the publications issued by MTR. based on the feedback they obtained from visitors and callers. Counselors said travelers.

"...think they are great,"

"...love them." and.

"...are overwhelmed."

Such positive comments were based on an assessment of the literature as informative and complete, presented in an attractive. **colourful** and quality manner. As one seasonal employee at a travel **centre** said.

"I've never heard a negative comment about any of our publications. Not one. All positive, beautiful. gorgeous . . . **never** negative."

Time and time again, counselors referred back to the surprise travelers from the U.S. expressed at finding no costs associated with the publications. It was inconsistent with their American experiences. **As** one said.

"...**they** can't believe they're free."

Several seasonal counselors claimed **they** had to reinforce the fact that the literature was free. since.

"**You**keep handing them stuff and explaining it to them. and their face is going white, they are thinking they have to pay," and.

"You are talking to **people** who are conditioned to paying \$2 for a road map, and I am showing the lady the Encyclopedia and her husband is saying "**Maybelle**. do you really need that?'"*

They realized that they needed to slip in '*one little sentence' about the fact that all the literature was free to relax the travelers and to ensure that all questions were asked. Once this point had been clarified. travelers appreciated the information even more, and the time the counselors spent with them.

Permanent staff repeated the need to train new staff to tell visitors the publications were free: there was a distinct reluctance to ask further questions **if** the **traveller** was sub-consciously adding up the cost attached to each question.

"I think sometimes it limits them. You give them the Encyclopedia, you give them the Accommodations. I think at that point you should **say** that they are all free because otherwise it stops them from asking questions. They are saying, "This girl is racking up the bucks, if it is going to cost me a dollar for this. 2 bucks for that. I am not going to ask any more questions because she is going to give me all of these booklets.'"*

Despite the positive feedback, counselors **did** highlight some areas of possible change or improvement to the publications. For example, there was a general requirement to acid prices, or at least an indication of price ranges of establishments and events listed in several of the publications. Counselors spoke of repeated calls or visits from travelers to check out prices of admission once brochures **and** booklets had been received. Counselors recognized the difficulty of ensuring up-to-date pricing, but felt that some pricing system could be worked out for the Camping and Accommodations guide, if only to indicate "cheap", "average", and "**expensive**".

Counsellors in both the travel centre and the telephone centre groups queried the listing system in the Accommodations booklet. It was felt that alphabetical listings by town within travel association 'regions would be the most appropriate, irrespective of the grading system. This would assist the **traveller** to book accommodation along his route in the most logical manner. As the quotations **below** illustrate. opinions were divided on the need to segregate the graded and ungraded properties. However, all agreed that alphabetical listings within travel regions was the best method of overall categorization.

"I don't have any difficulty with the grading, they can do that if they **like**, but I think that they should be listed alphabetically under the community."

"I think they actually do themselves a disservice when doing that for the bigger towns, like Toronto. I've often had people ask **for** places that were in the graded systems, but they looked at the main alphabetical section and missed the graded property."

Counsellors did make the point that this **system** would require the use of the MTR travel region **number** system across all publications and maps. This was a universal request. irrespective of any change in the Accommodations guide. As one counselor said.

"I think we have asked for that for **two** years.
and they keep on saying "Yes, we will put it on."

One previously requested change that had been made. and was appreciated by counselors, was the move to the listing of abbreviations on each page of the Accommodations guide. Travelers and counselors did not have to keep referring back to the key. making their use of the guide quicker and easier. One or two suggestions were made **favouring** the use of symbols rather than the current alphabetical abbreviations, but this was not a major request.

The Summer Events booklet was a popular booklet, although several counselors agreed.

"It is too bad it wasn't set up by
community. . like what is going on in Kingston
this weekend. **A** lot of people don't care
what kind of event it is. they just want to
do something with other people."

This comment would seem to be consistent with the increased demand noted earlier for events in specific areas. While it was recognized that a minority did use the booklet to look specifically for "Arts and Crafts Shows", it was accepted that most people chose a vacation area and then looked for attractions and activities: they did not travel in pursuit of a series of events. Counselors believed there could be value in having the booklet available by city within region, possibly with a reference **book** organized by event, for use by the travel counselors.

Whichever way the **Events** booklet is published in future years. counselors stressed the need for it to be available right at the start of the summer and to be as complete as possible.

The "Dining At Country Inns" publication was said **by** several counselors to have increased in popularity. This appealed to middle aged couples looking for a more personal. less formal type of accommodation. It appealed to.

"...**your antiquey** Bed and Breakfast sort."

"...history buffs who appreciate an old home." and.

"...a little classier, more sophisticated person."

It was recognized that accommodations of this **type**.

"...aren't really that cheap,"*

but fulfilled a need for more personal. different kinds of vacation experiences. **Yuppies** and the upper middle classes were more likely to **favour** this publication. and would welcome an accompanying list of antique stores.

As noted earlier, there was an increasing demand for camping literature to help isolate accommodation at the lower end of the price scale. Counselors did request that pricing should be added to this booklet, together with more detailed information on periods of operation. Similar requests were heard for booklets on houseboat rentals, cottage rentals, and any other less expensive holiday accommodation. Counselors again stressed the need for those publications in **April** and **May**, since by June or July.

"...they are too late. **I** would find those books more valuable in the spring."

There were suggestions for new L-listings to address new areas of interest. There were suggestions for:

- Bed and Breakfast establishments, for,

"...people on a budget. They don't really want to pay a lot.. they realize that they're paying the big bucks for amenities like the saunas and the **pools** and the restaurants. but they don't really need that. They're on a budget and they want to know that they're going to get a room and breakfast for the night."

Specialty shopping areas, ranging from antique stores to factory outlets,
canoeing, with maps included.
hiking. with maps of routes,
bicycle trails, with maps of scenic routes.
more outdoor fitness pursuits generally,
historical sites,
bus tours, both "local" and long distance,
propane and gas stations.
beaches, **pools**, water parks,
children's **activites**.

"...**specifically** for children, children's events, places to see. So that you could give them something to hold onto. The **Traveller's Encyclopedia** does not always tell you that this **is** good. travelers want to be held by the hand **and** to be **told** "This is for kids. your kids will like this."

"When people phone for Upper Canada Village and ask what else is there for kids. and you mention the prehistoric world with the big dinosaur park and some of the other attractions in Prescott and that area. they get so enthused, you wished you almost had something like a Children's Encyclopedia,"

- farm vacations,
- ethnic areas in major cities.
- more detailed senior citizen's guide,
- more detailed city guides.

None of the current publications were felt to be redundant. Counselors may have little use for a particular L-list in their own area, but **someone else** in the group always found it useful. Counselors agreed, however, that the "Adventure Vacation" L-list should be over-hauled and some "spark" added to it. Counselors mentioned pursuits like hot air ballooning, sky diving, jet-foiling, parachuting, and wind surfing, which were believed to be increasing **in** popularity and could be said truly to represent adventure vacations. The trend towards more active, outdoor pursuits was not currently represented in **MTR** literature.

"People are getting a heightened **awareness** of an adventure vacation and they **are a lot** more adventurous than the things that **we** are giving. Adventure for them is not going out and finding a rock. like rock hunting: it is wild and adventurous things like jet foiling in New Zealand down a mountain gorge. We have the white water rafting. but I think that is as far as we really go into the daredevil type things. I think that is more what people are looking for when they get that kind of guide."

While counselors would like to see a fuller range of publications. most could be published in English only. It **was** claimed the **Traveller's** Encyclopedia was the essential candidate for translation into a wider range of languages. French, German, Japanese and Spanish were the major languages considered necessary.

2. MTR Advertising

Both telephone and travel centre counselors claimed that travelers.

"...will talk about the T.V. ads they have seen."

The "Yours to Discover" campaign is still remembered by travelers, some of whom still quote the commercial slogan. Permanent travel **centre** staff believed consumers were less aware of the new "Ontario. **Incredible!**" campaign. and reminisced fondly about the impact of the "Yours to Discover" campaign. They did not think people liked the new campaign.

"People are not mentioning "Ontario. Incredible". Whereas with "Yours to Discover", they were singing the song and they thought that was **really** nice and whether it was because it was **colourful** or what. I don't know."

"(The old campaign) became part of their language: when they left our **centre**, they would say to us. "We are off to discover'"."

Counselors themselves claimed to prefer the old campaign, criticizing the new posters and signs as dark and dull. The highway sign was criticized as,

"...**just** plain **black** and white: there **might** be some red in it, it is ugly, .."

They similarly criticized the bumper sticker. claiming travelers disliked the new one.

"Whereas before adults were quite pleased to have the "Ontario, Yours to Discover" flag sticker, they are not going to have that **popsicle-coloured** sticker on their car."

Permanent counselors admitted that some of the ambiguity of the "Ontario, **Incredible!**" message had dissipated over time, with only infrequent mentions now of the dual interpretation of the phrase. Seasonal counselors were more accepting of the new campaign. recognizing that.

"...we can't just go on discovering."

The following quotation illustrates the experience of one seasonal telephone counselor: this would seem to be more typical of the reactions of the public as gauged by the segment closest to them. the seasonal telephone staff.

"I got compliments last week from New York. I wrote them down. from an older man and a couple of younger people, and they were just raving on about the commercials and how great they were, and they were so funny, and they just run into the living room to see the commercial when they hear the song playing, and I think that really prompted them, that really gets their curiosity going."

Little mention of specific newspaper advertisements was made. although both telephone callers and drop-in visitors did refer to newspaper advertisements. U.S. **visitors** were known to visit a centre clutching an article or an advertisement. wanting more detail on a specific place or event, No one advertisement **was** singled out.

3. The Competition

The travel centre and **telephone** travel services. the advertising campaigns. and the publications all combine to woo visitors to Ontario **from** the U.S.. Quebec, and other Canadian provinces. Travel counselors perceived Quebec to be offering increased competition to Ontario amongst U.S. travelers in the recent past, based on increased advertising and promotional activities in the border states. Counselors reported increased requests for information on "Toronto and Montreal", although frequently callers were puzzled at Ontario's Inability to provide **Montreal** information.

The Eastern provinces of Canada were **also** seen to represent a threat to Ontario. both for "**locals**" and U.S. travelers. The Atlantic provinces were promoting their region as one of peace, quiet, and friendship. accompanied by good food. The New England states offered a similar promise. Counselors believed that if a caller or visitor **could** not find a quiet cottage on a quiet lake in Ontario, then he would travel to the Eastern seaboard and find one there.

The Olympic games in Calgary have helped promote Alberta as a possible competitor to Ontario in the eyes of U.S. residents. There is also interest in "the **Mall**". and a belief that it is a short drive from the border crossing point between the States and Ontario. Fortunately, the distance will deter many from venturing West once they understand the mileage involved.

"There's a lot of competition from Calgary because of the Stampede: people got interested in it through the Olympics, so there's a bit of that. too. I have people **calling**. "Can I go to Calgary in the same day," and they want to do both. They've heard of Ontario, because it's very close, and Calgary they've seen on T.V., and now they'd like to know a bit more about it."

Travel counselors **perceived** the continuing **appeal** of Ontario to be in the combination of vacation experiences it offered. Travelers appreciated that.

"We have the only clean air in the world. and we have the only clean water in the world. They will come across and tell us this. They have come for the air and the water and the outdoors activities. "

In addition. Ontario was known to have big cities that offered all the amenities and attractions of **big** cities elsewhere - except being more safe to walk in and peopled by friendly Canadians. Many would-be U.S. visitors had met Canadians in the States and had been impressed by their tales of Canada. In essence. potential visitors to Ontario for the first time wanted to work out the difference between Canada and the U.S., since.

"There **really** is a feeling that there is a difference here, and they want to figure out what the difference is."

Travel counselors acknowledged that many telephone callers had already decided to visit Ontario before they called the 1-800 number: the travel counselor in that situation could help ensure a more enjoyable vacation by providing as full a range of literature and as much advice as possible. Similarly, U.S. or Quebec travelers who had crossed the border were **already** committed to a vacation in Ontario. **Travel** centre counselors again **saw** their role as ensuring the **traveller** had the best vacation possible. and would want to return. They perceived **a** need for some more specific information packages to help meet the emerging trends towards more family travel and more active pursuits.

APPENDIX

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of research, tape recording, one-way mirror.
Emphasis on obtaining travel **counsellor's perceptions of caller's opinions, not their own opinions.**
Emphasis on obtaining information on the current summer season.

2. Introduction of participants:
name, length of experience as a telephone travel counselor, **any** other work locations for **MTR.**
- **length** of experience as a travel counselor.
- most enjoyable aspect of their job.
[This section is intended as a warm-up to allow participants to get comfortable with the group environment. **Given** that respondents know each other, this will not **take long.**]

B. CURRENT MARKET ACTIVITY: SUMMER

1. **What have been the most frequent travel information requests this summer?**
FOR EACH REQUEST WE WILL ESTABLISH:
- **Who** makes these requests?
Have there been more of these requests **this summer versus last summer?**
- why?
Do these requests represent new travel trends in terms of products, destinations, shifts in demand?
- Would this type of request be replacing another type of request?

2. **What are the most frequent problems that telephone counselors hear from summer callers?**
- **Who** raises the problems: type of person. location. **type of holiday, etc.**
- Are these problems that are "new" this summer; or are they the same problems that telephone travel counselors hear every summer season?

3. Are there any information requests or problems that telephone travel counselors are not able to provide information for, or to resolve? Do these represent opportunities for Ontario, e.g. should MTR be offering new summer products and services that other provinces or the U.S. currently offer?

c. **THE 1-800 NUMBER**

1. How do summer callers learn about the **1-800** number?

Word-of-mouth?

Advertising?

Travel Centres?

Directory?

Recommendation?

Other?

Do counselors feel the 1-800 service complements the Travel Centre service? Why and how or why not?

Do counselors suggest the use of the Travel Centres to summer callers?

Why and how? Why not?

2a) How do they regard the service they are able to offer the summer caller?

- Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor?

Reasons for their assessment of the 1-800 telephone service will be explored.

b) How do they think the summer caller regards the service they offer? Reasons for opinion will be explored.

c) What changes or improvements do they think summer callers want or have callers asked for?

Hours/days of operation?

More or different literature?

Quicker Service?

Other?

0. THE SUMMER CALLER

1. Who is a typical summer caller?

- Age? **Family** composition? Interests? **Activities**?
- **Where is** he/she calling from? Do they know **Ontario**?
- **Destinations** asked about? Have they made previous trips to the area?
Previous trips to **Ontario**?

Telephone counselors will be asked to profile typical **summer** callers. We may need to develop different personalities to cover the range of different callers dealt with.

2. What is the range of knowledge apparent across the summer callers?

Are some better informed than others?

What makes a caller **better** informed?

- Previous use of 1-000 **#**? How do they know a summer caller **has** used the **1-800#** before?
- Previous experience at a Travel Centre? How do they know summer callers have visited a Travel Centre?
- Wider travelled?
- Membership of travel club?
- Subscription to magazines?
- Education?
- Advertising?
- Other?

3. What are the differences between first time summer callers and repeat summer callers?

- Destinations asked about?
- Detail required?
- Locations called from?
- Age/Sex/Interests?
- Other.

4. What proportion of summer callers are repeat callers?
Do the information requests of a repeat summer caller differ from those of a first time caller?
- Destinations?
 - Detail required?
 - Place of origin?
 - Age, sex, family composition?
 - Other?

5. What do they see as the major differences between summer and winter callers?

E. THE PUBLICATIONS

1. What do travel counselors think the summer caller thinks of the summer publications they send out?
Good or poor, overall, with reasons.
How much feedback do they get from callers on previous literature received?
Which ones have summer callers commented on?
2. Do counselors feel the summer publications meet the needs of the consumer?
Why or why not?
- Detail,
 - Frequency of issue,
 - Topics covered,
 - Format/colour/layout/size, etc.,
 - Information gaps?
 - Other.

[ISSUES RAISED ABOUT THE PUBLICATIONS WILL BE DISCUSSED WITH REFERENCE TO THE SPECIFIC SUMMER PUBLICATION, WHERE APPROPRIATE, ALTHOUGH WE WILL COVER PUBLICATIONS IN A GENERAL SENSE, RATHER THAN EXPLORING INDIVIDUAL PUBLICATIONS.]

3. What else do they think summer callers want in summer publications from NTR?
What changes or improvements would callers want to see?

4. Which is the **most** popular summer publication? Why'?
- Which is the least popular summer publication? Why?
- Which is the one they **use/recommend** most?
- Which is **used** least? Why?
- Do these **represent** changes **in** trends or **do** they represent opinions of the publications?
- If they **had** to recommend,
- a) **MORE** PUBLICATIONS, which types and why? Do these reflect new trends?
- b) **LESS** PUBLICATIONS, which **types** and **why**? Do these reflect fading trends?
- [IF NOT RAISED , MULTI-LINGUAL PUBLICATIONS , MORE INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS, AND PUBLICATIONS FOR NEW PRODUCTS WILL BE EXPLORED.]

F. ADVERTISING

1. How aware do they think summer callers are of **MTR** advertising?
- What particular advertising do they know the public recalls?
- Did they get any response to the newspaper advertising? What **did** the public think of it?
- Did they get any response to the T.V. campaign? What did the public think of it?
- Are any other ads mentioned?
2. What do counselors think the caller perceives the message of **MTR** advertising to be?
- What do they think the public understands **from** It?
- How do the telephone counselors judge **an** effective advertisement?
- What recommendations would travel counselors have for **MTR** about advertising, based on their contact with summer callers?
- T.V. versus newspaper versus magazine versus other?

SUMMATION

1. What new travel trends are travel counselors seeing this summer?
2. What consumer needs do they feel are not being met?
3. What new products or services could be offered by **MTR** for the summer caller?
-

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of research, tape recording, one-way mirror.

Emphasis on obtaining travel counsellor's perceptions of visitors opinions, not their own opinions.

Emphasis on obtaining information on summer.

2. Introduction of participants:

- name, length of experience as a travel **centre** counselor, any other **work locations for MTR,**

- **length** of experience as a travel counselor,

- most enjoyable aspect of their job.

[This section is intended as a warm-up to allow participants to get comfortable with the group environment. Given that all respondents know each other, and may have participated before, this will not take long.]

B. CURRENT MARKET ACTIVITY: SUMMER

1. What have been the most frequent travel information requests this summer?

FOR EACH REQUEST WE WILL ESTABLISH:

Who makes these requests?

Have there been more of these requests this summer versus last summer? why?

Do these requests represent new travel trends in terms of products, kinds of destinations, shifts in demand?

Would this type of request be replacing another type of request?

2. What are the most frequent problems that counselors hear about from travel centre visitors?

- Who raises the problems: type of person, location, type of holiday, etc.

- Are these problems that are "new" this summer or are they the same problems that travel counselors hear every summer season?

3. **Are** there any information requests or problems that travel counselors are not able to provide information for, or to resolve? Do these represent opportunities for Ontario, e.g. should **MTR** be offering products and services that other provinces or the U.S. currently offer?

c. **THE TRAVEL CENTRES**

1. How do summer visitors learn about the travel centres?

Word-of-mouth?

Advertising?

Telephone?

1-800 number?

Recommendation?

Passing by?

Other?

Do counselors feel the 1-800 service **and** the Travel **Centre** service are complementary? Why and how or why not?

Do counselors suggest the use of the 1-800 number to callers and vice versa? Why and how? Why not?

- 2a) How do they regard the service they are able to offer visitors in the summer?
- Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor?

Reasons for their assessment of the Travel **Centre** service will be explored.

- b) How do they think the visitor regards the service they offer? Reasons for opinion will be explored.

- c) **What changes** or improvements do they think summer visitors want or have summer visitors asked for?

Opening days/times?

More or different literature?

VCR tapes?

Other?

0. **THE SUMMER VISITOR**

1. **Who is a typical visitor in the summer season?**

Age? Family composition? Interests? **Activities?**

Where is he/she calling from? Do they know Ontario?

Destinations asked about? Have they made previous trips to the area?

Previous trips to Ontario?

Counselors will be asked to **profile typical summer visitors**. We may need to **develop different "personalities"** to cover the different areas and visitors represented in these groups.

2. **What is the range of knowledge apparent across the visitor groups?**

Are some better informed than others?

What makes a visitor better informed?

Previous experience at a **Travel Centre**? How do they know a visitor has visited a Travel Centre before?

Wider travelled?

Previous use of **1-800 \$**? How do they know a visitor has used the **1-800#** before?

Membership of travel club?

Subscription to magazines?

Education?

Advertising?

Other?

3. **What are the differences between first time visitors and repeat visitors?**

- Destinations asked about?

- **Detail** required?

- Place of origin?

- **Age?**

- **Sex?**

- Interests?

- **Other.**

4. What proportion of summer visitors are repeat visitors?
Do the information requests of a repeat summer **visitor** differ from those of a **first** time summer visitor?
 - Destinations?
 - Detail required?
 - Place of origin?
 - Age, sex, family composition?**
 - Interests?
 - Other?

5. What **do they** perceive to be the **major** differences between summer and winter visitors?

E. **THE PUBLICATIONS**

1. **What do** travel **centre** counselors think the summer visitor thinks **of** the summer publications available?
Good or poor, overall, with reasons.
How much feedback do they get from visitors on the literature?
Which ones do visitors comment on in particular?

2. **Do counselors feel the** summer-oriented publications meet the needs of the consumer? Why or why not?
 - Detail,
 - Frequency of issue,
 - Topics covered,
 - Format/colour/layout/size, etc.,**
 - Information gaps noticed?
 - Other.

[ISSUES RAISED ABOUT THE PUBLICATIONS WILL BE DISCUSSED WITH REFERENCE TO THE SPECIFIC PUBLICATION, WHERE APPROPRIATE, ALTHOUGH WE WILL **MAINLY** COVER PUBLICATIONS IN A GENERAL SENSE, RATHER THAN EXPLORING INDIVIDUAL PUBLICATIONS.]

3. What else do they think **summer** visitors want **in** summer publications provided by the travel **centres**? What **changes** or improvements do they think visitors want?
-

4. Which is the most popular **summer** publication? Why?
Which is the least popular summer publication? Why?
Which **is** the one they use/recommend most?
Which is **used least? Why?**
If they **had** to recommend,
a)MORE PUBLICATIONS, which types and why? Do these represent new trends?
b)LESS PUBLICATIONS, which types and why? Do these reflect fading trends?
[IF NOT RAISED, MULTI-LINGUAL PUBLICATIONS, **MORE** INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS, AND PUBLICATIONS FOR NEW PRODUCTS WILL BE EXPLORED.]

F. ADVERTISING

1. How aware do they think visitors are of **MTR** advertising?
What particular advertising do they know the public recalls?
Did they get any response to the summer newspaper advertisements? What did visitors think of **them?**
What response was there to the T.V. campaign? How does this compare with other provinces?
Are any other ads mentioned?
2. What do counselors think the visitor perceives the message of **MTR** advertising to be?
What do they think the public understands from it?
How do counselors judge an effective advertisement?
What recommendations would travel counselors have for **MTR** about advertising, based on the knowledge they have learned from visitors?
T.V. versus newspaper versus magazine versus other?

SUMMATION

1. What new travel trends are **travel centre** counselors seeing this summer?
2. What consumer needs do they feel are not being met?
3. What new products or services could be offered by **MTR** for the summer visitor across the summer season?