

Tourism Management Institute Hot Topic: Crisis, What Crisis? Funding our Destinations

This year, TMI's 2018 Hot Topic, held on 18th May at the Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, focused on the very hot topic of funding in the tourism sector, in particular for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs).

This author was given the opportunity to demonstrate Acorn's new T-Stats Pro (www.t-stats.co.uk) system, which is being used by several DMOs across the UK to track their destinations and benchmark amongst each other. But this was all done within the context of showing how important data is for successful funding applications, attracting inward investment, and generating funds for cash-strapped DMOs.

Funding Applications: there is a wealth of advice out there for completing successful funding applications: *tailor the application to the finder, make sure your budget adds up, research the topic thoroughly, assume the funder knows nothing, avoid jargon and buzzwords, and don't provide too much information* - these are some of the most common. However, more than anything else you need to show: *what difference will you make?*

And to do that, you need to track. Tracking is the strongest tool available for showing change. Those destinations that track, usually monthly, attributes that make up their visitor economies, such as occupancy rates, visits to attractions, footfall, website visits, the weather - the list can include almost anything, and varies from destination to destination - are able to instantly spot when tourism takes a turn for the better or worse. Having a tracking tool that is an integral part of a DMO's day-to-day operation gives a strong message to potential funding sources: they are able to clearly show the cause and effect of invested funds.

Inward Investment: investors, such as accommodation operators and visitor attractions, are data hungry when looking for a destination to invest in. Typically, they will want to know historical occupancy trends, visitor numbers to attractions, footfall trends in key locations, and attendance at events. And they will want this information bang up-to-date to enable them to use it for forecasting, and ultimately determine if their investments will be profitable.



Equally, small businesses wanting to invest in their businesses will often need to borrow from banks and will require figures to obtain loans. If DMOs are able to provide a tracking tool for these businesses to use, not only will they (the businesses) have the data they require when they need it, but DMOs can use this data to better understand changes in their destination and provide more effective planning and marketing.

DMO Funding: and finally, data is money! So, if a DMO has all this data, all in one place, that is accessible (such as on the Cloud) to anyone they wish to share it with, and up-to-date, it will have value! And data can be sold not just once but again and again. This may not solve all the financial worries of a DMO, but it will certainly help.

So, to quote Professor Edwards Deming: *In God we trust. All others must bring data.* Being prepared with a well-established tracking tool will reward, time and time again.