



Pre-task 2:

Targeting Niche Markets in Tourism

Flanders as a Festival Destination

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1 Introduction

In this paper, we describe the targeting of the niche market of Flanders as a festival destination. First, we clarify the approach VisitFlanders uses when targeting niche markets, namely affinity marketing. Second, we explain the impact of festivals on tourism in Flanders, by means of the success of the project 'Flanders is a Festival'. Finally, we illustrate a best practice of a Belgian festival: Tomorrowland.

2 Different form of segmentation

2.1 Affinity marketing

Affinity marketing is different from normal segmentation, because this approach does not divide the market into stereotypes such as age or spending habits. Instead, it links tourism products or destinations to affinities, common values and interests¹. As Catherine Dardenne of VisitBrussels stated: "*Affinity marketing makes it possible for commercial and cultural partners to understand how to target easily the audience they want to reach, and communicate with them.*"

2.2 Family holiday versus shopping trip

The stereotypes of normal segmentation marketing can sometimes be too limiting for the target group. For example: a married woman of 35, with two kids, will probably be seen as a woman who goes on family holidays in the summer. But what if she would like to go on a shopping trip with her friends? What if she has to go on a business trip for work? Thanks to affinity marketing, the married mother will be seen as more than just a woman who loves family vacations.

3 Flanders as a festival destination

3.1 Festivals in Flanders

Flanders is the ultimate place to experience the festival atmosphere during the summer. Together with Brussels, these regions have the most festivals per inhabitant in the world. A festival summer in Belgium is: more than 300 festivals, 16.500km² of festival ground, more than 1000 bands playing, more than 2000 hours of live music, and thousands of volunteers². There are even more than 5 million people that visit Belgian festivals every year³.

¹ Presentation by Catherine Dardenne, VisitBrussels on September 30th 2015.

² Visit Flanders (w.d.).

³ De Federatie van Muziekfestivals in Vlaanderen (w.d.).

3.2 Attending a festival⁴

Festivals can be divided into different categories, such as film, art and design, literature, sport, and many more. The most popular theme is music (pop, rock, classic, jazz). It is estimated that over 10 million people travel internationally each year for the main purpose of attending a music or cultural festival. Moreover, the time limit of festivals encourages tourists to take advantage of the opportunity to visit the city or region of the event.

According to a research of Institute of Tourism made in 2009, the largest proportion of culture-motivated visitors visits cultural events (46%), followed by cultural-historic sites (34%) and museums (30%)⁴. For the majority of visitors (41%), the main purpose of the trip is 'attending the event'.

3.3 Impact of Festivals on Tourism in Flanders

All tourists have their own desires to fulfil. Not only during a festival but also experiencing a 'before' and 'after' makes a festival worthwhile. As Lea Winkeler from VisitFlanders said: "*Events are becoming more important than heritage.*"⁵ Because a festival offers different attractions such as culinary experience, the best music and much more, it gives tourists the opportunity to explore an entire Flemish package in one place.

According to 81% of Belgian marketers, focusing on one target group is not the right approach anymore. They say that affinity marketing is the new best approach. The experience of different themes attracts tourists. This is one of the reasons why Flemish festivals are attracting a more international audience. For example, during the 2015 edition of Rock Werchter, festival tourists came from 95 different countries to attend this festival⁶. But do festival tourists spend a lot of money on tourism in Flanders? On the one hand, they spend a lot on everything concerning the festival experience. On the other hand, they are very budget minded while staying in Flanders before and after the festival.

However, this does not mean that Flanders does not benefit from festivals. In the long term, people visiting festivals in Flanders are a great source of promotion. The image of Flanders grows and more people get to know Flanders as a tourism and festival destination. Festival organizers try to stimulate tourists to visit Flanders by giving them a free tourist guide and program. They even offer an all-inclusive package. A well-known package "The Belgian Journey" offers early visitors a Belgian tourist experience including several attractions such as beer tasting, benefiting the Flemish tourism sector. Also hotels have seen a growth in stays during the festival season⁷. For example, during the Gentse Feesten (2015), a music and theatre festival in the city of Ghent, Belgium, hotels were occupied for about 75-80%, peaking during the weekends⁸. This shows that festivals contribute to Flanders' tourism.

⁴ Tourism, Festivals and Cultural events in time of crisis (2012).

⁵ Hoefkens, K. (14 August 2010).

⁶ Belga (25 June 2015).

⁷ In 2015 the hotel sector had more than 20 000 stayovers thanks to Tomorrowland.

⁸ Verstraete, 27 July 2015.

3.4 Flanders is a Festival⁹

'Flanders is a festival' was a successful project of Tourism Flanders in 2012. This project invited 94 key influencers from 13 countries to visit festivals in Flanders. These influencers wrote articles about the Flemish festivals and Flanders as a tourism destination, using pictures, videos and stories. Their articles created a media value of €30.000.000,- and had a maximum reach of 12.000.000 readers. A few other points of interests that were described in the evaluation of 'Flanders is a Festival' were:

1. The cooperation with tourism board offices abroad stays very important in order to promote festivals, also in the future.
2. Major festivals like Rock Werchter and Tomorrowland are a lever for the international less known festivals (e.g. Maanrock, Couleur Café).
3. Community management, whereby VisitFlanders works together with the partners and the festival visitors, is top of the bill. It is important to spread the necessary information, before and during the festival. VisitFlanders has to be able to react on every message they send out via apps, hotspots or Twitter. Also the bloggers are constantly communicating their followers. This is a great lesson for the future. The surprising effects that the bloggers experience, like the diversity of a festival, is passed on to followers.
4. VisitFlanders will keep inviting the key influencers. Moreover, they will keep combining the music bloggers with the more classic travelling bloggers, because VisitFlanders has experienced that both have a positive impact.
5. In the upcoming years VisitFlanders will keep on cooperating with tourist board offices abroad for the promotion of festivals.

4 Tomorrowland as a best practice

4.1 The festival of Tomorrowland¹⁰

Tomorrowland is one of the world's biggest electronic music festivals in Belgium. It takes place in Boom, in the province of Antwerp. Tomorrowland is not only a festival, it is an experience. For example, it is known for its visually stunning stages. The organizers put a lot of effort into the festival, and even the smallest details are worked out carefully. In 2005, the very first edition of Tomorrowland took place at De Schorre (a field in the city of Boom) with only 9.000 visitors. Nowadays, 180.000 visitors from more than 200 countries gather in De Schorre. As a result of the popularity of Tomorrowland, the festival expanded to the USA (TomorrowWorld) and Brazil (Tomorrowland Brazil).

4.2 Cooperation between VisitFlanders and Tomorrowland

In 2013, Tomorrowland had the idea to organize a Belgian day on the day before the festival. They executed this idea in cooperation with VisitFlanders and created the 'Belgian Journey'. The first edition took place in Antwerp. An 'overall experience' was offered, and the people got the chance to discover the city. The 2015 edition was organized in Brussels, the capital of Belgium, attracting 4.000 visitors of Tomorrowland. The Global Journey

⁹ Toerisme Vlaanderen (2012).

¹⁰ Tomorrowland (2015).

Packages offer Tomorrowland visitors the very best service, covering the trip from the take off until the journey back home. Packages include transport, stay, entrance fee and extra's. Tomorrowland even offers the opportunity to create an own package, according to personal preferences. It is an ideal opportunity for young people to get to know Belgium. VisitFlanders is very happy with this cooperation. This kind of events puts Flanders on the map. Moreover, all festivalgoers are considered to be international ambassadors. VisitFlanders hopes that the festival visitors go back home with a positive view of Belgium, and that they share their story with friends and family. This could cause even more people to feel the need to visit Flanders.

4.3 Impact of Tomorrowland

4.3.1 Accommodation

Every year, Tomorrowland is sold out. This means that more than 100.000 people are coming to the city of Boom. Of course, these people need a place to sleep and not everyone likes to sleep on the campsite. This is why every year, months in advance of the festival all surrounding hotels are fully booked. Not only close by the festival, but also in the surrounding cities, like Mechelen (+/- 15km from Boom). Hotels benefit from this situation and increase their room rates during the festival, in order to make maximum profit. Festivalgoers whom book a hotel are not coming from Belgium, but also from countries like Australia, Japan and America.

4.3.2 Transport

During Tomorrowland, the public transport companies provide extra services. For example, the SNCB (National Railway Company of Belgium) provides extra trains to the city of Boom. It is even possible to buy a special e-train ticket for Tomorrowland. When you arrive at Brussels Airport (BRU) or Brussels South Charleroi Airport (CRL), you can take the Dreamville Airport Shuttles. Besides, it is also possible to make a reservation on one of the Tomorrowland Shuttles. Those will drop the festivalgoers off right in front of the main entrance of the festival, and they will bring you home safely after the festival.

In cooperation with Brussels Airlines, visitors of Tomorrowland can book a Tomorrowland flight. There are four different packages, for example the Magical Experience, with special DJ's and Tomorrowland atmosphere during the flight. Festivalgoers who book this flight, will also get the first Tomorrowland Newspapers, and many other surprises. A dedicated Global Journey Crew will get the passengers into the mood for the festival. The costs for the flight are around €1.000,-.

4.3.3 Economy

Tomorrowland has a lot of impact on the Flemish economy. More than 30 companies support the festival, if the festival would be abolished then these companies would suffer. One of the companies is Brussels Airlines. Like described above, this airline brings thousands of people from all over the world to the festival with special charter flights. Last year, 70.6 million euro was delivered to the Flemish economy. The biggest expenses were transport and residence. VisitFlanders also recognizes the importance of the festival. This is why they promote Flanders abroad as a festival destination.

4.3.4 Cities

Brussels organizes special activities during Tomorrowland. For example, Manneken Pis gets to wear a nice Tomorrowland costume for one day, designed by Tomorrowland. In the end,

a lot of tourists spend the night in Brussels. Global Journey Packages, created by Tomorrowland and VisitFlanders, can even bring more visitors to Belgian cities. The first Global Journey Packages brought Tomorrowland visitors to Antwerp, where they could visit important places like The MAS (Museum aan de Stroom; a museum with stories about Antwerp and the rest of the world), and the Diamond museum. Also fun activities, like a bike tour through the city, were organized. This summer (2015), the Belgian Journey was organized in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. This time, the activity attracted 4.000 visitors of Tomorrowland. The entire tour was in the magical atmosphere of Tomorrowland. VisitFlanders treated the festivalgoers in Brussels with a tasting of three typical Belgian beers, and a visit to the comic strip museum. The festival visitors also learned to paint with chocolate and took a tour in the capital. Afterwards, they could attend a pre-party in the city centre of Brussels. Thanks to the Belgian Journey, festivalgoers can taste a piece of the Belgian culture.

4.3.5 Culinary experience

Food festivals are a growing trend in Flanders and are a niche among the festivals. Toppers like 'Culinaria', 'Flanders for Foodies' and 'Antwerpen Proeft' (Antwerp Tastes) expand every year and attract more and more visitors. The popularity of this niche contributes to the festival food experience of Tomorrowland. Besides typical festival food, like hamburgers and fries, more special food stalls are present. Each year, Tomorrowland invites top chefs to make signature dishes and other specials for the festivalgoers. Tomorrowland chooses these chefs not only for their Michelin Stars, but also for their rock and roll image. Chefs like Sergio Herman appeal to a younger audience and get the international festivalgoers interested in the Flemish culinary culture. By combining the culinary aspect with a music festival, Tomorrowland can offer quality for the festivalgoers that they normally don't get at other festivals. This quality can help stimulating people to come back to the festival.

4.4 Future of Tomorrowland⁶¹²

After ten years, Tomorrowland has become a global phenomenon. How did this happen? Important factors are the electronic dance music, the food, the magical atmosphere, and probably also a good marketing strategy. The organization tries to attract many visitors by keeping the quality of the festival as high as possible. Tomorrowland invites star chefs to cook, builds a camping that has the appearance of a magical village, offers a chapel if you want to marry, provides a pool to chill, and more, in order to live up to the expectations of a high demanding international public. By creating an overall experience, their target group not only consists of youngsters, but of people of all ages and interests.

Fans of Tomorrowland are very passionate about the festival. Regularly, thoughtful messages are posted to keep the passion high throughout the year, even if the festival itself is months away. But it is not only Tomorrowland that keeps alive the hype on social media. The countless 'People of Tomorrow' also post on social media about the festival. The same applies to Tomorrowland artists, who regularly express their love in the famous 'Throwback Thursday posts'. These are messages with images that are posted every Thursday on social media. New is also the Tomorrowland Hymn. Hans Zimmer - German composer and record producer - and Tomorrowland combined forces for the creation of a classical hymn that premiered during the 10th anniversary edition of Tomorrowland. The

¹² Mariën, S. (3 December 2014).

10-minute-long composition takes listeners on a magical journey, that embodies the mythical qualities, magical atmosphere and international character of Tomorrowland. What will the next years bring?! Nobody knows. The organization is always very secret about this. The only thing that is sure, is that every year Tomorrowland's organization tries to blow the visitors' socks off with new, spectacular decorations, artists and merchandising.

5 Conclusion

Thanks to the professional support and promotion of Flanders' tourism organization VisitFlanders, and the success of Belgian festivals, the niche 'festivals' has accomplished international fame. The festival Tomorrowland is a good example of this. In the last years, this festival grew from a festival to a full experience. Not only during the event are festivalgoers experiencing the Tomorrowland feeling, but also during the ticket sales and during the journey to the festival. This experience is not only targeting young people, according to the traditional form of segmentation, but attracts people from different backgrounds, for example people that like the festival's music or people that just want to be part of the experience. This is an example of affinity marketing, which is the new best approach to segmentation, according to Belgian marketers. In other words, addressing people according to interests or values is more effective than according to age or spending habits.

The fact that the Tomorrowland experience attracts a diverse and international audience, is a big opportunity for Flanders. The cooperation of VisitFlanders and Tomorrowland resulted in interesting products that both added value to the experience of the international festivalgoers, and helped to promote Belgium on an international level. In this way, Belgian festivals have a positive impact on local and national tourism. Not only hotels and tourist attractions benefit from the popularity of festivals, but also companies like Brussels Airlines and SNCB (the Belgian railway company) get more customers. Because of the increasing popularity of festivals, their positive impact on tourism is even more likely to grow.

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