

Strategic Plan Implementation

Implementing a strategic plan is perhaps the most important phase of the strategic planning process as a whole. Months of planning can all fall to pieces if the plan isn't carried out in a fashion appropriate to the cause itself. One important aspect of the strategic plan is the marketing plan a particular company has. In order to maximize profits and pinpoint business, a company must know who its target audience is and convince them to purchase a particular product or service. One company that I feel has failed in the implementation of their strategic plan with regards to marketing is the Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Colonial Williamsburg is comprised of two separate companies: the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) is the non-profit side of the operations, while the Colonial Williamsburg Company (CWC) is the for profit side. The reason why Colonial Williamsburg appears to run two separate companies on paper is because they need to appear to be non-profit in order to avoid paying certain taxes.

According to Colonial Williamsburg's employee orientation program, the target market for Colonial Williamsburg products and services is more educated and affluent people, typically middle aged, and they come from a specific five state area (Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York). Just about all of their advertising dollars have been spent to try and lure this select group of people to visit Colonial Williamsburg. What Colonial Williamsburg doesn't realize is that most of these people tend to be annual visitors anyway, regardless of advertising efforts.

Any front line employee at Colonial Williamsburg will tell you that clients within the ideal target market are very few and far between. The majority of people who do end up visiting Colonial Williamsburg are younger families, many of whom are traveling with small children and are really in the area to visit Busch

Gardens. These families also tend to be less affluent than expected by the marketing department, therefore don't want to spend a lot of money to visit attractions other than the ones they initially planned to visit.

Because of specific budgeting activities, much of Colonial Williamsburg's non-profit revenue comes from ticket sales and large donations from private parties. Because the budget is so finite, there is a particular ticket mix quota Colonial Williamsburg ticket agents must adhere by. The mix for Colonial Williamsburg ticket agents is as follows:

- 40% One Day (Capital City) Passes
 - \$36 plus \$9 to visit the governor's palace
- 45% Two Day (Governor's Key) Passes
 - \$48, includes governor's palace
- 10% Annual (Freedom) Passes
 - \$59, includes governor's palace
 - 50% discount given for evening programs
- 5% Annual (Independence) Passes
 - \$75, includes governor's palace
 - Free evening programs

It is to be noted that with this particular ticketing mix, the ultimate goal is to sell as few one day passes as possible while selling as many two day and above passes. This ticketing mix does not include tickets in partnership with other attractions, of which Colonial Williamsburg ticket agents are discouraged from mentioning or selling.

When the marketing department implemented this ticketing mix structure, they relied on the guest service supervisors to enforce the plan. Each supervisor deals with her employees differently, and some supervisors choose to not enforce the ideal ticketing mix goals. Because of this, Colonial Williamsburg has struggled to break even each year and is in considerable financial trouble.

Most of the revenue used to pay Colonial Williamsburg Foundation employees actually comes from Colonial Williamsburg Company operations. Because CWC's hotel properties and retail operations are so profitable, they are able to pay both CWC and CWF employees higher wages than other area employers. However, these higher wages, combined with dwindling tourist visitation is hurting the foundation more than it is helping.

One decision that management has made to further hurt Colonial Williamsburg's financial situation was by making the CW visitor center, which was and still is 100% owned and operated by Colonial Williamsburg, a regional visitor's center for both Jamestown and Yorktown. In gearing up for the 400th anniversary of the landing at Historic Jamestowne¹, Colonial Williamsburg has set out to train CW exclusive employees on all of Jamestown's products and services. This is a bad decision on the point of management due to the fact that CW employees are discouraged from selling partnership tickets, and the amount of information most employees are required to know ends up being too great. Thus, guests don't end up getting a proper experience from their visit, and employees and supervisors end up getting more frustrated than needed.

Colonial Williamsburg is in a lot of financial trouble and things must be changed in order for them to continue to thrive as they have for so many years prior. The first thing that should be done is market to all potential clients in the area, not just a select few ideal candidates. This would create more awareness for Colonial Williamsburg and offer an educational alternative to visiting Busch Gardens.

The second thing that should be done is to combine both the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the Colonial Williamsburg Company. Having a non-profit status on the Foundation is taking a considerable toll on finances. While it might look good to be non-profit, Colonial Williamsburg should ideally switch to either government funding (by becoming a state or national park), or switch to a more tourist-centered for-profit agency.

¹ Historic Jamestowne is spelled with an "e" at the end, whereas the town of Jamestown has no "e" at the end.

The last thing that should be done is to change the structure of supervisors with regards to ticket agents. Instead of having one head manager with several supervisors who handle most of the work below her, they should switch to more of a shift lead position and have everybody report to the head manager. This would eliminate the discrepancies between what the supervisors do and what actually should be done. The admissions department as a whole is not very large, therefore it should not be an issue to make a switch of that nature.

Colonial Williamsburg has always been a leader in the living history museum industry. However, due to changing tourist taste, as well as a poor economy, visitor ship has declined drastically. In order to thrive once more, Colonial Williamsburg needs to drastically change how it markets it's product, as well as how they manage some of their departments. Only then will they be able to maximize profits as well as customer satisfaction.