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COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES OF EVENTS PLANNING COMPANIES IN CURITIBA

Marcos Rogério Maioli^I

Mestre em Turismo
Instituto Federal do Paraná - IFPR
marcos.maioli@ifpr.edu.br

Adriano Stadler^{II}

Doutor em Administração e Turismo
Instituto Federal do Paraná - IFPR
adriano.stadler@ifpr.edu.br

Carlos Marcelo Ardigo^{III}

Doutor em Engenharia de Produção
Universidade do Vale do Itajaí - UNIVALI
marcelo.ardigo@univali.br

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ABSTRACT

This article shows how two companies from Curitiba (in Paraná, Brazil) that operate in the events managing market use their management skills to empirically use the competitive strategies Ansoff and Porter prescribe and serve their customers while facing changes in their market. The main outcomes can be found in the way they use their strategies to withstand against their competitors, the threat of substitute services, the bargaining power of both customers and suppliers and the threat of new entrants, and also in the way they use expansion and diversification strategies. The present work is divided into introduction, theoretical grounds of tourism, events, competitive strategies of Porter and Ansoff, the characterization of the companies studied, the methodology used to present the results and conclusions.

Keywords: Competitive Strategies, Event Management. Tourism Event.

^I MSc em Turismo e Hotelaria da UNIVALI – Universidade do Vale do Itajaí, graduado em Turismo pela UFPR, professor do IFPR – Instituto Federal do Paraná e-mail marcos.maioli@ifpr.edu.br

^{II} DR. em Administração e Turismo pela UNIVALI, Graduado em Administração e professor do IFPR – Instituto Federal do Paraná email adriano.stadler@ifpr.edu.br

^{III} Prof. DR. Carlos Marcelo Ardigo, UNIVALI, marcelo.ardigo@univali.br



1 INTRODUCTION

This work aims to identify the differences and similarities between the competitive strategies adopted by two event planning and managing companies that perform in similar ways and organize fairs, conventions and conferences in Curitiba, PR. To that end, the questionnaire incorporated a construct based on Porter and Ansoff's theory of competitiveness, thus indicating which dimensions of competitiveness are major contributors to their ability to remain on the market with their management styles and planning.

A large number of companies justify assigning special relevance to research that aims to outline their competitive strategies and the reasons behind their success and survival. This very large economic sector is a big source of jobs, income and taxes. It accounts for 4.32% of Brazil's GDP.

Several works have analyzed the competitiveness of tourism companies, and a search for the keywords "events", "tourism", "competitiveness", "strategies", "eventstourism", "strategy" carried out on the CAPES, CVT, EBSCO, Emerald, Estudios y perspectivas en Turismo, RBtur, Sage, Science Direct, Scielo and Spell databases yielded 259 articles, reports, dissertations and theses published between 2010 and 2015. None of those works, however, deal with competitiveness of events planning and managing companies.

The present work is therefore justified theoretically-empirically by the shortage of literature and field research on those companies. In the same way, the growing body of scientific publications on the tourism sector, which is presented in periodicals and conferences, lays bare the need for a closer look into tourism organizations' competitiveness.

2. THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION

2.1. Tourism

Tourism deals with the movement of people Sancho (2001) looking for places endowed with some sort of attractions, it has an economic impact and contributes to economic



diversification of localities, regions and countries Goeldner, Ritchie and McIntosh (2002). It attracts investments, promotes local development, increases tax collection, creates jobs and raises incomes. Those benefits and the businesses that are expected to generate them are fiercely fought for.

According to Beni (1998), there are as many definitions of tourism as there are authors dealing with the subject, which is considered a force of demand and not a mere industry Lickorish and Jenkins (2000) and is known to impact both tourists and local inhabitants. It favors human, social and educational development Rejowski and Costa (2003). "Tourism is a combination of all the goods and services that travelers seek or buy in the preparation and realization of their travels." Lickorish and Jenkins (2000 p. 49), encompassing multiple activities that share liberation and pleasure as their essential goals (Rejowski and Costa 2003). WTO – World Tourism Organization (1998) calls tourism a situation where one neither carries out economic activities nor lives in a place for more than a year.

3

Dealing with supply, Beni (2003) informs us that touristic supply is composed of tangible and intangible elements that can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group comprises the raw material of the tourism activity, the so-called original touristic supply. The second supply group is composed of the derived touristic offer, which brings together the set of companies that provide tourism services.

More generally, Balanzá and Nadal (2003, p. 65) posit that "Supply consists of those goods and services necessary to fulfilling the tourist's needs." Mota (2001 p. 72) complements the aforementioned explanations and emphasizes the fact touristic supply is "composed of a set of attractions, which are a public and private responsibility. Tourism is a joint action, capable of creating and maintaining a global product, constituting an organized and integrated supply in the socio-economic context it is embedded in."

2.2. Events

Among the many areas the tourism sector comprises, the events business, as Britto and Fontes (2006) defined them, organize the various types of events that are held in the most



diverse places and are influenced by marketing efforts performed by many different sectors. Poit (2006 p. 19) states that "its realization obeys a timeline and one of its goals is the interaction between its participants, public, individuals and entities."

The events themselves are as varied and differentiated as it is allowed by the creativity of those who plan and manage them. Thus, if one wishes to understand the definition of events, one first needs to understand many other concepts for, as Bahl says (2004 p.17), "events involve a very large and wide range of possibilities for the formulation of tourism products for the promotion and the rescue of social and cultural activities of a locality."

An event is a meeting, at a previously selected place and at a previously scheduled time, of people who share interests and goals to be fulfilled Zacchaeus (2003); Getz (2008); Zoboran (2012); Kane (2013); Stadler, Arantes and Rodermel (2013). It counterbalances the harmful effects of seasonality Zan (2011); Canton (2002); (2003), stimulates the wider economy Carneiro (2011) and creates jobs Reis (2013), promotes local and regional development Ziakas and Costa (2011).

Besides economic considerations, it also instructs, trains and encourages Ferreira and Wada (2010) people, organizations and governments, which improves the global knowledge of diversified segments that need help to improve the understanding of different people of the world, particularly their understanding of each other and tolerance of what is unlike them Canton (2002).

On the other hand, for example, it also seeks to improve the general knowledge of brands because companies are excellent platforms of communication Zan (2011) that try to increase their market shares Getz (2008), which leads to increased demand for products and services from business operating in economic sectors such as trade, industry and services, including informal businesses Zanella (2003).

Several studies have found improvement of the reputation of companies and other entities from before their participation in Cesca events (1997). The explanation is, from a local point



of view, participating in some kinds of events signals commitment to and cooperation with the community Canton (2002), Jarvis and Blank (2011).

According to Green et al (2010), besides, of course, the "interest created by media coverage (before, during and after the event), an event creates opportunities of contact and interaction with another culture. The more the event is promoted, the more the local community can insert local cultural aspects into the events and add value to its products and services.

Usually limited in duration and with clear objectives, but lacking any established periodicity Lawson (2000), events bring together people interested in the same themes, which makes them good alternatives to marketing. Not only that, but, according to Ferreira and Wada (2010), some kinds of events can be used to instruct, train and encourage people and companies, both public and private. It is no wonder that festivals and special events are becoming increasingly common around the world: they have significant economic, socio-cultural and political impacts on the places that host them Smith (2005).

Events help companies and brands to communicate what they do, aiming for a bigger market share Getz (2008), and can also be considered an option for leisure Andrade (2002); Canton (2002), as they sometimes provide the local population with social and recreational activities Reid, (2011), and can even strengthen community pride Allen et al, (2008).

The events sector is made up of a wide range of companies that plan and manage events around cultural, scientific, promotional, educational, entrepreneurial, religious, social and governmental themes, just to quote a few.

The most part of data on the events sector in Brazil has been made available by the II Economic Sizing of Brazil's Events Industry (2013), a survey carried out by SEBRAE-Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Companies and ABEOC Brasil- Brazilian Association of Events Companies. It was taken by more than 2700 Brazilian events organizing businesses. According to the survey, the events market in Brazil has grown around 14% per



year. Data from 2013 show that the sector's revenue reached R\$ 209.2 billion, which equaled a 4.32% share of Brazil's GDP (gross domestic product).

In 2013, Brazil hosted approximately 590,000 events, with the participation of 202.2 million of people and with an average expenditure of R\$ 161.80 per event, totaling R\$ 99.3 billion. Companies that engaged in planning and/or managing events profited R\$ 59 billion (II Economic Sizing of the Brazilian Events Industry, 2013).

This report also showed that there are in Brazil 9 million seats in places for the realization of events and 10 million square meters dedicated to hosting events. Events venues' occupancy rate was 53.12% for seats and 48.01% for square meters.

The report also obtained data on jobs in the events sector which shows the sector is very relevant. The sector is responsible for 132,034 direct jobs, 1,761,374 outsourced jobs and, according to the multiplier criterion of employment used by the industry Brazilian tourist that indicates the existence of three indirect jobs for each direct job, and 5,680,257 indirect jobs.

6

2.3 Competitive strategies

Historically, use of the word "strategy" is directly linked to the military field, inasmuch as the term itself is derived from the Greek word "strategos", which meant what the general did Oliveira (1991).

According to Ansoff (1977 p. 99), the "historical origin is to be found in military art, where it is a broad, ill-defined concept of a military campaign to apply large-scale forces against an enemy." The word ended up being used by companies to designate ways to face the existing competition from other companies, seeking to develop competitive strategies faster than their competitors Hamel and Prahalad (1995).

The term "strategy" has been used by companies to face the changes that happen in environments such as economy, society, technology, demography, which can affect their bottom line and may even threaten their very survival.



For Porter (2004 p. XXVI) "It is, in essence, the development of a broad formula for how a company will compete, what its goals should be and what policies are needed to accomplish these goals."

In their study, Bott, Silva and Sasaki (2006) posited that "strategy can be understood as a pattern in a sequence of actions, that is, consistency of behavior, regardless of it being intentional or not."

In his studies, Mintzberg (1990) mentioned ten schools of thought that dedicate themselves to the field of strategy. Three of these schools are of a prescriptive nature, which seek to make the organization align itself closely with the strategy, that functions as conceptual design (the Design School), as the planning (Planning School) and as the competitive positioning (Positioning School).

The other schools presented by Mintzberg (1990) are the Entrepreneur School, in which the strategy is a visionary process, the Cognitive School, in which the strategy is a mental process, the Learning School, which indicates the strategy as the result of an emerging process, the Political School, which posits that the strategy arises in the midst of power struggles, the Cultural School, which postulates an ideological process, the Environmental School, that sees strategy as a passive process, the last school is the setting where all the steps of the process of the strategy are integrated.

Competitive advantage is linked to the capacity or circumstance that gives the organization a relative advantage over its competitors, because as the environment changes, organizations must revise their strategies, seek out new information in order to withstand fierce competition and improve performance as the environment changes.

For Crouch and Ritchie, (1999 p. 140), the concept of competitiveness is "relative and multidimensional", and, for Porter (1989 p. 36) "the strategy of a business unit is the path to the competitive advantage that determines its performance."

The existing competitiveness models are not linked to a specific economic sector and are generic which can be adapted to various economic areas. Such an example is the Porter



Diamond Model of the Competitiveness (1990). Among the models already linked to the tourism sector, we can mention models centered on tourist destinations such as Dwyer and Kim's (2003) model.

Grönroos's (2003) view stresses quality as one of the key factors that lead to business success, for it is a competitive advantage and that advantage raises the quality and value of products and services, which means that business success belong to those who give attention to quality when they provide services and products.

Within the company one needs to define quality in the same way customers do, otherwise wrong steps may plague the quality programs and money and time may be invested poorly. It should always be noted that what counts is the quality as customers perceive it. (GRÖNROOS 2003, p. 85).

The limitations of the present study are related to - and are consequences of- the dearth of data on event planning and/or managing businesses. An informal survey of many professionals who work at events in Curitiba, including those of the CCVB Curitiba Convention and the Visitors' Bureau, yielded uniform results: there are no reliable numbers available, and managers see their long-term planning efforts hindered by ignorance.

8

2.3.1 The model of Porter's competitive strategies

Porter's Model (1990) seeks to explain that competitive intensity of an industry is determined by five decisive forces: rivalry between competitors, threats of substitution, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers and threat of new entrants.

Porter (1990) makes it clear that a firm can be competitive resorting to generic strategies: leading in total cost, differentiation and focus. Those strategies tackle effectively the challenges the environment poses to the company and maintain profitability.

Although Porter's model is widely used, there are criticisms such as that of Mintzberg (1988), who states that lower costs do not always mean a competitive edge because the industry's returns will also be lower.



Another criticism is the one from Barney (1991), who considers Porter's theory too generic and based on wrong assumptions, namely that the attributes and resources available to all industries are similar when we know that companies are actually heterogeneous.

According to Vasconcelos and Cyrino (2000), the theory ignores internal characteristics as the resources existing in the skills the company already developed and relegates these characteristics to a secondary role.

2.3.2 The model of Ansoff's competitive strategies

Ansoff (1991) indicates that there are two types of competitive strategies that can be used by companies: expansion strategies and diversification strategies.

The expansion strategies: are linked to market penetration, to the development of markets and to the development of products.

The strategies of diversification: are linked to opportunities of diversification, may they be horizontal, vertical or concentric. Then, the companies seek to diversify because their goals can no longer be reached with the existing set of products and markets the expansion defined.

2.3.3 The companies interviewed

Company A was founded in 1986 and deals mainly with fairs, conventions and conferences. It has 5 employees working directly. Its director has 30 years' experience in his role and has been working in the events sector for 35 years. He earned undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Business and Finance. He classifies company A's management style as a family business.

Company B was founded in 1990 and also deals with fairs, conventions and conferences. Its Director has 20 years' experience in his role, earned undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in his sector and has 8 employees working directly for the company. She, too, calls the company's management style a family business.



3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative research, belonging to the positivist paradigm, so that the research strategy will be the case study, which according to Yin (2001 p. 163) is a study:

"which allows an investigation to preserve the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycle, organizational and administrative processes, changes in urban regions, international relations and maturation of economic sectors."

This study sought to learn about the reality of more than one organization, so that the study of multiple cases will be used as the research strategy.

After selecting companies to be interviewed, the primary data were obtained by questionnaires in the survey style, with closed-ended and open-ended questions addressed to 2 companies handling graduation ceremonies in Curitiba, PR from November to December in 2015.

For the creation of the questionnaire, the constructs of the theories of competitiveness of Porter (1986) and Ansoff (1977) were used.

Based on the items obtained through bibliographical research, it was possible to select relevant items to evaluate the management styles of the companies, which led to the creation of the data collection instrument: a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire, made up of 7 closed-ended questions and 7 open-ended questions.

The questionnaires were applied in personal interviews with the highest in management of each company.

The data were organized according to a univariate analysis that, according to Hair et al (2005), analyses the "distribution of a single variable" and makes it possible to do a case study.

The analyses related to the survey questionnaire point to the items related to the competitiveness of event services, in order to respond to the general and specific objectives of this study.



4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

When asked about how the current market is, both companies say they know the market in which they operate and they can indicate the competitive advantages of their competitors.

When asked about the size of the market, company A said there are lots of competitors and all the players have about the same strength when it comes to size and power. Company B expressed no opinion about those matters. With respect to the substitute services, each company agrees it offers other services besides those that comprise its core services so that they can remain on the market.

Regarding customers, company A has stated that they know about the services they intend to adopt. Company B goes further and says customers actually play the companies against one another and try to pressure companies into lowering their prices to close the deals.

When asked about the suppliers' bargaining power, company A said that the services it needs are controlled by a few vendors. Without their cooperation, the company cannot offer a competitive business. Both companies said that their services' quality hinges heavily upon the quality of the suppliers' services and that also without the suppliers they could not offer a competitive service. It is noteworthy that both companies evaluate their suppliers' performance after every event they manage.

According to company B, it has worked with its current suppliers for many years. When asked about the new entrants, both companies say there are many new companies providing services that are part of their core businesses. Company B points out that those new entrants usually have amongst their staff former company B's workers. According to company B, the biggest barrier to entry new companies face in their market is the grand scale of the services they are expected to provide.

Regarding the company's management history, company A said its expansion adhered to the following: when it became clear a service was low-profit or there was too many competitors providing it, the company sought new niches.



Dealing with this topic, company B said it tries to keep on top of the environmental changes and seeks new developments that will allow it to offer the customers new services to customers. The company says it is aware it cannot always prevail through offering lower prices.

When asked about how diversification strategies contribute to its management, company A's management has said it cannot depend on any single segment of its market. It has been asserted by the managers that they cannot be held hostage to only one segment of events, also that the update of the company is related to the emergence of the new, it asserts that its innovations are motivated by emergence of new technologies that can make their product/service obsolete.

Both companies, A and B, agree that over the years customers have been changing, forcing companies to keep themselves up to date. Company B also said that, its product can be replaced; it needs to be as the product is replaceable and seeks to stay ahead of the competition.

5. CONCLUSION

Hosting events contributes to and helps the economy of a locality; city or region because it creates jobs, raises incomes and increases tax collection. Besides that, hosting events in times of little inflow of leisure tourists counters the harming effects of seasonality. Events demand the cooperation of many workers with different skills.

This work shows us the main managerial decisions related to the competitiveness that the event planning businesses resort to as they try to remain in the top of the market. Those decisions can be studied empirically and be classified according to nomenclature that researchers of the subject can understand. Such an effort helps to fill the gap we found when we noticed the dearth of theoretical work dealing with tourism companies.

The competitive strategies proposed by Porter and Ansoff can be found in the way company A and company B work. Their managers are very experienced and say which strategies the



company has resorted to when it faced environmental changes, which strategies the companies use more often and which ones are more effective.

This way, we can see that studying the applicability of existing competitive strategies in a company presents the manager with useful signs he/she can use to make decisions today because the ones we mentioned here have already been tested in the history of tourism companies.

The answers from both companies show us that a company's success or survival is directly related to how it faces the obstacles and the normal changes that everyday management goes through.

It is understood that, due to an increasingly fierce competition between companies, businesses that base their decisions on strategies that had already been consolidated have stronger long-term survival factors.

The main application this work may have is the reproduction of its methodology in researches dealing with other companies profiles like the ones the present work studied. It can be useful as a reference for future studies. The theories of competitiveness allow us to formulate generalizations about different phenomena related to the subject that contribute to their practical uses. Ultimately, theories can only be refuted or confirmed when they can be applied to real companies.



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