

Post Disaster Marketing, What works?

An investigation into the most effective disaster
recovery marketing message



Research Report Prepared for Destination Gippsland Ltd
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Executive Summary

In the wake of the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires, Monash University researchers were appointed to undertake a study for Gippsland's Regional Marketing Organisation that aimed to identify the most effective post disaster marketing communications message.

This research report has been specifically prepared for those responsible for the marketing of Gippsland should the region experience a comparable disastrous event.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the type of disaster recovery message that is most likely to counter negative perceptions
2. To identify the type of disaster recovery message that is most likely to instil trust
3. To identify the type of recovery message that is most likely to encourage visitation
4. Investigate the relationship between the type of recovery message employed and the likelihood and time frame in which the tourist will visit / return to the region
5. Investigate the tourism market's attitudes towards destination promotion during and following a disastrous event
6. Explore the existence of demographically defined market segments that are more or less likely to respond to Gippsland's recovery marketing efforts

Findings

An experimental design was chosen to test nine commonly used disaster recovery advertising messages, as determined by past research and industry consultation. The context for this research was Gippsland and the 2009 Black Saturday Fires. Six thousand members of the intrastate tourism market were contacted via email and asked to view one of the nine advertisements and record their responses to the advertisement via an online survey.

A total of 672 usable responses were recorded and analysed using a variety of advanced statistical techniques. The following results were revealed:

- In the wake of a disaster, the majority of tourists will return to the destination within 12 to 24 months.
- Previous visitation (i.e. whether a visitor has visited the region or not) to Gippsland has minimal influence on the tourist's propensity to visit the region after a disaster.
- Regular visitors (five or more past visits) are more likely to return within 6 months of the disaster than irregular visitors (two or less past visits).
- In the event of a bushfire, the tourism market will prefer to visit Gippsland's coastal destinations such as Wilsons Promontory and Lakes Entrance.
- Post disaster advertising is more likely to capture the attention of those whose knowledge of the region is limited.
- The tourism market is not opposed to a destination marketing organisation continuing their marketing activities both during and following a disastrous event.
- An advertisement with a local celebrity-endorsed message is likely to be the most effective method of post disaster marketing communication for the Gippsland region.
- Messages promoting community readiness are most likely to generate emotional responses among the tourism market whilst punter testimonials are least likely to generate emotion.
- The effectiveness of a celebrity endorsed message will increase over time and is likely to be most successful in encouraging visitation 12 to 24 months after the event.
- Advertisement messages designed to encourage visitation via curiosity enhancement (i.e. regenerating landscape) are unlikely to encourage visitation.
- 'Open and ready for business' style messages are unlikely to appeal to tourists and are perceived as lacking credibility.
- Advertisements promoting discounts and special deals are considered by the tourism market as irrelevant and uninformative in a disaster context.
- Messages that attempt to alter the tourist's opinion or perceptions by suggesting that the region is relatively unaffected and it's business as usual are the least likely to capture the tourist's attention and the least likely to encourage visitation within 6 months.
- The promotion of festivals and events immediately or soon after a disaster has occurred is not the most effective post disaster communications strategy.
- Event promotion is more likely to encourage visitation 12 – 24 months after a disaster.

Drawing on the results revealed in this research, the following recommendations were proposed to inform Destination Gippsland's post disaster marketing communications.

- Marketing and promotional activities should continue over the course of the disaster recovery period. In the event of a bush fire disaster, the focus of immediate mass market advertising campaigns should be the region's coastal locations.
- Relationship marketing should also be the focus of the initial promotional activity. Operators need to be encouraged to maintain visitor databases, identify their loyal consumer base and within the initial six month period make contact with their regular clientele and encourage their patronage via either loyalty discounts or reassurance that their particular area / community is okay.
- Destination Gippsland should integrate celebrity endorsed messages that communicate community readiness into their post disaster recovery campaigns when promoting the region in its entirety. It is important that the chosen celebrity is recognisable by the intrastate market as having some affiliation with Gippsland so they are able to establish a clear relationship between the region and the celebrity. The advertising campaign should also be accompanied by Public Relations activity in the early stages of development – educating the market about the celebrity - product association early in the campaign.
- The celebrity endorsed campaign should be rolled out approximately 6 months after the event. It is recommended that this style of advertisement be the focus of advertising efforts 6 months post disaster and increase in exposure 6-12 months after the event.
- The message needs to be factual in nature and aim to convince the tourist that the destination as a whole is in good shape.
- Messages that promote the regenerating landscape should not be employed.
- Cooperative marketing activities should temporarily cease between affected and non affected bushland areas until those areas affected have recovered and are ready to accept visitors.
- Targeted recovery marketing campaigns are not essential as there is not likely to be any advertising response differences between those that have previously visited the region and those who have not nor are there any demographically explained response differences among the intrastate market.
- As phase one of this research revealed, generally, the tourists' perceptions of the Gippsland region in the event of a disaster are likely to remain intact hence there is no need for messages that attempt to alter them.
- Finally, it was recommended that Destination Gippsland move away from the promotion of events as a means of encouraging immediate visitation. A marketing strategy focusing on events is likely to be most effective 12 months after the disaster has occurred. The promotion of events immediately after a disaster is likely to be more effective in encouraging intraregional visitation as opposed to attracting those from outside the region.

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1.0 Background

Tourism has always been impacted by crises and disasters and no tourism destination is exempt from disaster (Beirman, 2006). A tourism disaster can be defined as a situation in which “a tourism destination is confronted with sudden, unpredictable, catastrophic changes over which it has little control” (Faulkner, 2001). Climate change appears to be causing an increase in the number and severity of natural disasters experienced in Australia and this has been identified as a major threat to the tourism industry. A major challenge for tourism destination marketers is the management of negative publicity that occurs at the time of a disastrous event. It is critical that those responsible for destination promotion are able to counter the effects of negative media attention by understanding how to best communicate with the tourism market when a disaster strikes.

The importance of a tourist’s destination image is universally acknowledged as it plays an important role in their destination choice. When a destination is struck by a disaster, destination marketers need to immediately commence their recovery marketing efforts to preserve their destination image. Given the need for a ‘quick fix’ solution, marketers often have to act quickly, without fully understanding the audience’s likely response to the messages they create.

Although there is not a great deal of information to guide disaster recovery campaigns, a review of previous disaster recovery attempts has identified a number of advertising themes that are commonly employed by those attempting to reach out to the tourism market during the recovery process. Table 1 presents these themes.

‘Business as usual’ (or ‘open and ready for business’) is one of the most common themes among post-disaster marketing campaigns. It has been used in a range of settings, from New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina (Pearlman & Melnik

2008), Far North Queensland in the wake of Hurricane Larry (Prideaux et al 2007), in the Maldives after the Boxing Day Tsunami (Carlsen & Hughes 2007) and in Canberra following the ACT bushfires of 2004 (Armstrong & Ritchie 2007). In all cases, the intention behind using this message is to counteract media reporting that gives the misleading impression that the entire destination is closed following the disaster.

Previous research has also identified the usefulness of appealing for solidarity from visitors, including messages such as “by visiting the Maldives you are helping us” (Carlsen & Hughes 2007) and “Canberra needs your support”.

The main aims of a post disaster recovery marketing campaign are to restore a positive destination image, correct negative images and in some cases, create a new image. Lehto, Douglas & Park (2007) suggest that the first marketing message should be to restore confidence in the minds of potential visitors.

This should be effective in persuading potential visitors that the destination is safe. Messages that have been used in other post disaster situations which stress confidence restoration include ‘our heart’s still going strong’, used to promote Canberra after the ACT bushfires in 2004 (Armstrong & Ritchie 2007) and ‘New Orleans – never better’ (Pearlman & Melnik 2008).

A further tactic previously employed is the use of curiosity enhancement to attract visitors (Sanders, Laing & Houghton 2008). Avraham and Ketter (2008) suggest messages that utilise words like ‘rejuvenation’ and ‘revitalisation’ and phrases that focus on the natural recovering landscape are likely to instil a sense of curiosity within the tourist, which may subsequently motivate them to travel to the disaster affected region.

| Type of message | Example/explanation |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Business as usual | ‘Open and ready for Business’ |
| Solidarity / empathy messages | ‘By visiting now, you are helping us’ |
| Community readiness | To overcome the tourist’s concern that they may not be welcome |
| Confidence restoration | ‘Still going strong’ |
| Punter testimonial | Message is endorsed by a someone who has visited the region at the time of or soon after the event |
| Curiosity Enhancement | Entice visitation by highlighting the beauty of a regenerating landscape |
| Short term discounts | Price reductions |
| Promotion of Events | Focus on scheduled festivals and events in the affected region |
| Celebrity Endorsement | Message is endorsed by a well known celebrity, communicating all or some of the above themes |

Table 1 – Previously Employed Advertising Themes and Messages

A number of disaster-affected destinations have used a pricing strategy to help them to recover following a disaster. These include discounts/price reductions or significant value-added in order to attract visitors. Lehto, Douglas & Park (2007) also point out that in some instances the product, infrastructure or facility has been damaged or is of lower quality than before the disaster, and therefore price reductions are required to reflect these changing circumstances. It is generally agreed that price reductions are not the preferred option, given that operators are likely to be suffering financially from loss of business already. However, it seems worth investigating whether price reductions would be effective in attracting visitors, as this would provide at least some visitation in an otherwise difficult situation.

Testimonials have been used successfully in a number of destinations. These can be either celebrity endorsements (suggested by Avraham & Ketter 2008), or testimonials from guests at the destination (used in the Maldives according to Carlsen & Hughes 2007). In the past, guest testimonials have been viewed as particularly credible by potential tourists (Carlsen & Hughes 2007) and therefore may be of considerable value to destinations trying to recover following a disaster.

Swerdlow and Swerdlow (2003) suggest that celebrity fame, bought or contrived, has certain advantages and risks. A celebrity-product association can capture a viewer's attention, increase the public's awareness of the product, and cause consumers to purchase the product endorsed. In contrast, celebrity-products associations can be very costly and risky based on the potentially volatile image, nature, and credibility of the spokesperson used. While celebrities have been used in the past to endorse destination recovery messages, little is known in terms of how receptive the tourism market is to this approach.

One final strategy that has been used in order to recover post disaster is product diversification. It has been suggested (Sanders et al 2008, Avraham & Ketter 2008) that festivals and events represent an excellent opportunity to encourage tourists to visit a destination, and can be a drawcard for visitors who may not have considered the destination before. The promotion of events is currently utilised by Victoria's tourism industry as a means of encouraging visitation to disaster affected regions, however, there is little evidence as to whether this message is effective.

This research will test these identified themes in order to assess which style of message is likely to be best received by the tourist.

2.0 Methodology

An experimental design was chosen to test the effectiveness of the nine disaster recovery messages featured above. The context for this research was Gippsland and the 2009 Black Saturday Fires. Nine mock advertisements (see appendix 1) were designed in alignment with the key message themes. The pictorial content, selected in consultation with Gippsland's destination marketing organisation, remained constant across the nine conditions.

The mock advertisement along with a series of questions designed to measure the campaign's effectiveness was distributed to respondents via an email broadcast. The questionnaire included scales to measure the different appeals of messages on respondents, known as 'ethos', 'pathos' and 'logos'. Ethos refers to persuasive appeals that concentrate on the advertiser, or source of the advert; pathos refers to the emotional appeal of a message; and logos refers to provision of information or evidence in a message that consumers can respond to.

The ethos scale includes items on credibility and trustworthiness of the advertiser, the pathos scale includes items on emotions and feelings that the advert stimulates and the logos scale includes items on how informative, factual or logical a respondent considers an advertising message to be.

A market research database comprising 6000 email addresses of people who live in the state of Victoria was purchased from a reputable database provider. The population excluded those who live in the Gippsland region as well as those shires directly affected by the 2009 Bushfires. The database only comprises details of those who have 'opted' to participate in marketing research studies and excludes those who are listed on the Do Not Call register.

Respondents were invited to participate in the study via a cover letter that outlined the purpose of the study and directed them to an electronic version of one of the nine advertisements which were randomly allocated across the sample population. A chance to win one of two Gippsland Short Break Packages was offered as an incentive for participation.

A total of 691 completed responses were received, and following data cleaning and screening procedures this resulted in 672 useable responses. Each advertisement was approximately equally represented in the responses with around 75-80 completed surveys per ad.

3.0 Results

This section presents the results of the statistical analysis performed to address the research questions central to the study. A number of supporting enquiries are also addressed to provide a thorough and detailed representation of the tourism market's likely response to Destination Gippsland's post disaster marketing efforts. Prior to performing the analysis a number of realism checks incorporated into the questionnaire were examined to ensure the advertisements designed for the study were operationally viable. 100% of respondents were in agreement that the advertisements employed for the study were typical of a tourism advertisement and representative of the kinds of advertisements they associate with Gippsland. All respondents also agreed that they were able to relate to their assigned advertisement in light of prescribed context – that is the hypothetical exercise that asked them to reflect on the advertisement and consider their decision to visit the Gippsland region at the time of or soon after the 2009 bushfires.

3.1. Demographic background of the respondents

Demographic information was requested from the respondents to firstly ensure we acquired a representative sample of the Victorian population and secondly to allow us to test for any demographically explained response patterns. Respondents were asked to provide details pertaining to their gender, age group, employment status, education and location – i.e. metropolitan or regional.

In relation to gender, females were somewhat over represented comprising 70% of respondents. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, there is a close to even split of males and females across the state of Victoria (www.abs.gov.au). Whilst gender bias is evident in this case, we believe that this does not challenge the study's validity as according to past research, females have a dominant role in the early stages of the holiday decision process (Mottier & Quinn, 2004).

Age groups were well represented across the sample with almost equal representation across the six age groups. Those aged 65 and above were the least represented comprising only 7% of respondents, however, we are confident that this is representative of the broader Victorian population where currently only 16% of residents are in this age category.

58% of the respondents were employed in either a full time (38%) or part time (20%) capacity and the remaining 42% were retired, studying, carrying out home duties or unemployed with each category being evenly represented. The ABS data for Victoria displayed a similar pattern, allowing us to confirm that our sample was comparable on this characteristic.

The respondent's educational achievement was of interest to the researchers as such information would allow us to test for any relationship between the respondents' educational level and their response to their assigned ad. The results suggested that the majority of respondents were reasonably well educated. 32% of respondents had completed high school, 25% had completed a TAFE qualification, 36% achieved a University degree or higher. Less than 2% had not completed high school.

The metropolitan vs regional distinction was of interest to the researchers as they wished to determine if there were any response differences between the two markets. Metropolitan Victorian residents comprised 71% of the sample, the remaining 29% being from regional locations. This was not surprising to the researchers, nor of any major concern as the study intentionally excluded Gippsland residents as well as those shires directly affected by the 2009 Bushfires - reducing the representation of regional Victoria when the sample population was originally drawn.

Overall, the researchers remain confident that the sample employed for the following analysis was representative of the Victorian population. Destination Gippsland and other interested parties can therefore assume that the findings and implications of this study may be applied to the broader intrastate tourism market.

3.2. Responses to the messages across all conditions

Despite this project's primary purpose: i.e. to identify the most effective message strategy, it is important to assess how the respondents interpreted the advertisements generally within the prescribed context. The findings below allow us to assess how the tourism market is likely to respond to print communication strategies 'generally' after a disaster such as the 2009 fires. In particular, we are able to understand:

- whether they are likely to, in this context, believe / trust the organisation delivering the message,
- how logical and informative they perceive the messages to be
- whether they are likely to be emotionally stimulated in response to the message.

These findings also provide an indication of how involved the respondents were in the task and their general attitude towards their assigned advertisement.

The mean scores, based on a scale of 1 to 5, (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), of the items used to measure these constructs are listed below.

| Item | Mean |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| The advertisement was believable | 3.74 |
| The advertisement was credible | 3.72 |
| The advertisement was trustworthy | 3.62 |
| The advertisement was reliable | 3.58 |
| The advertisement was dependable | 3.50 |

Table 2 Believability / Credibility of Destination Gippsland (Ethos)

The items in the table above represent what is known as the 'ethos' component of the Persuasive Disclosure Inventory. With the ethos component the persuasive appeals tend to focus on the source as opposed to the message. The mean scores are all above the scale mid-point of 3, suggesting that the majority of respondents trusted the source and believed what the advertisement had to communicate.

When observing the frequencies of these items, approximately 11% of respondents doubted the organisation, whilst the remaining 89% agreed that the source of the message was credible.

| | Mean |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| The advertisement was rational | 3.57 |
| The advertisement was informative | 3.56 |
| The advertisement was factual | 3.46 |
| The advertisement was knowledgeable | 3.46 |
| The advertisement was logical | 3.43 |

Table 3 Ability of the Ad to Inform (Logos)

In times of crisis, consumers, particularly those with a high need for cognition, tend to place a high priority on factual and informative information. Previous research in this area therefore recommends that marketing organisations present factual and logical messages to their tourism market in a bid to persuade them to return to the destination.

In terms of the messages designed for this research, again, as suggested via the mean scores presented in Table 3, the majority of respondents were in agreement that the advertising messages presented were rational, informative, factual, knowledgeable and logical. However, there was some variance among the nine conditions in terms of this component. Insight into where this variance lies is presented later in the section.

| Item | Mean |
|--|------|
| The advertisement affected my feelings | 3.63 |
| The advertisement touched me emotionally | 3.63 |
| The advertisement was stimulating | 3.62 |
| The advertisement reaches out to me | 3.55 |
| The advertisement was moving | 3.44 |
| The advertisement was exciting | 3.16 |

Table 4 Ability of the Ad to Evoke Emotion (pathos)

Post disaster, tourism marketing organisations often lean towards the empathetic theme in the hope that the tourism consumer will be motivated to visit the destination via their emotional driven need to assist the community to recover.

The pathos component of the response scale is specifically designed to test for the emotional and affective appeals of an advertisement. The means presented in Table 3 indicate that the advertisements were somewhat capable of generating some kind of emotional response among the respondents.

Whilst a significant number of respondents agreed that they were emotionally stimulated by the advertisement, this particular construct attracted varying responses when the nine advertisements were compared – details of which are presented later in this section.

| Item | Mean |
|--|------|
| This ad really made me think | 3.91 |
| I was involved in what the ad had to say | 3.67 |
| The message in this ad seemed relevant to me | 3.54 |

Table 5 Respondent's Level of Involvement

According to Teare, Mazanec, Crawford-Welch and Calver (1994) product involvement is likely to affect the consumer's receptivity to advertising and the type of cognitive responses generated during exposure to the available information sources.

For example, a tourism consumer's initial ad involvement may have a substantial influence on their ability to relate to certain marketing communications and it is therefore important in an exercise such as this to ensure that the advertisement was successful in generating sufficient levels of cognitive activity. Based on the means in Table 5, the scores out of five indicate that the advertisements were fairly successful in evoking thought and the majority of respondents were able to relate to the messages they communicated.

| Item | Mean |
|---|------|
| I like the advertisement | 3.77 |
| The advertisement is good | 3.74 |
| I felt positive towards the advertisement | 3.72 |
| I felt favourable towards the advertisement | 3.72 |

Table 6 Attitudes toward the Ad

Overall the respondents held a positive attitude towards the advertisement that they received. It was important to explore this particular construct to alleviate any potential bias that may have occurred when assessing the responses to the themes of interest to the study (i.e. trust, emotional response and ability to inform).

For example, if the respondent took an immediate disliking to the advertisement the chances of them engaging in further cognitive processing may decrease, which in turn could impact upon the reliability of the data. This is also an indication of how receptive the tourism market is likely to be to disaster recovery messages generally.

3.2 Post Disaster Communications and Visitation intention

Respondents were asked to indicate the timeframe in which they would have been most likely to return to Gippsland after the events of Black Saturday. According to the data, the majority of respondents would return to the region within 1 to 2 years after the event. There was little support for the 'within six month' period with most respondents feeling neutral towards this option. Neutrality was also strong towards the 6 to 12 month option – indicating that respondents were not certain as to whether they would visit during this time frame.

To confirm the existence of any underlying influences on the respondent's visitation intention, a number of additional statistical enquiries were made and the following questions addressed:

3.2.1 Are those who have visited the region more likely to return than those who have not?

A correlation analysis revealed that previous visitation has no influence on the time frame in which the tourist's will visit the destination post disaster, suggesting that those who have previously visited the destination will show no more immediate support for the region than those who have not in the event of a disaster.

3.2.2 Are regular visitors more likely to return than irregular visitors?

The analysis revealed that those who had visited the region five times or more were significantly more likely to return within six months of the event, whilst those who had visited the region less frequently (1-2 times) would be more likely to wait at least 12 months before they return. This finding suggests that perhaps the marketing communications have little influence on the regular visitors' decision to return – instead this group may rely on their existing knowledge of, and their attachment to, the destination as opposed to external knowledge sources distributed by the destination's marketing organisation.

Regular visitors may also have existing networks at the destination as a result of their frequent visitation - making them less vulnerable to exaggerated media claims that are known to contribute to consumer misperceptions.

3.2.3 Which advertising strategy is most effective in encouraging visitation within the presented time frames?

The celebrity endorsement advertisement proved to be the most effective advertising approach across all three time frames. For the 0-6 month time frame however, less than 50% of respondents who received this ad claimed they would be likely to visit the region within 6 months of the event. 55% of respondents who received this advertisement would visit within 6- 12 months and 75% would return within 12 -24 months demonstrating that the celebrity ad increased in its effectiveness in alignment with the increasing time frames.

There were some differences in terms of the lowest scoring advertisements across the three time frames. For the 0-6 month's timeframe, the condition designed to change attitudes and misperceptions (Ad 4) scored the lowest mean, signifying that the tourist remains sceptical, believing that within this short time frame the destination had not recovered, despite the message's attempt to alter their attitudes. The curiosity enhancement advertisement (Ad 5) was the least effective in encouraging visitation 6-12 months and 12 -24 months after the event. This latter result suggests that contrary to beliefs, tourists may not be that interested in the regenerating landscape.

3.2.4 Which location would they visit and when?

The most popular destination across all three time frames was Lakes Entrance, closely followed by Wilson's Promontory, hence suggesting that within a bush fire situation, tourists assume that it is safer to visit a coastal location. Further support for this assumption lies in the fact that Walhalla and Mount Baw Baw, both of which are surrounded by bushland, where the least favoured destination in this context across all time frames. One needs to acknowledge however that both of the more popular destinations may potentially be better known than the less scoring locations, particularly among those who are not that familiar with the geographical boundaries of the region.

3.3 Post Disaster Communication Response and Familiarity

To reveal whether the tourism consumer's level of familiarity with Gippsland had any influence on their response to the recovery marketing message, a statistical test referred to as ANOVA was performed. Statistically, the results revealed that there was no significant difference in terms of how the respondents responded to the ad and their level of familiarity. However, there was a notable difference in terms of the respondents' ability to relate to the advertisement and their knowledge of the destination.

Those that were less knowledgeable of Gippsland appeared to be more interested in the ad content, suggesting that those who had little knowledge of the region may have exerted more effort towards the cognitive processing of the information than those who were very familiar with the region.

3.4 What is the market's attitude towards marketing a region in the event of a disaster?

In the event of a disaster such as the 2009 Bushfires where lives and livelihoods were lost, destination marketing organisations are often uncertain as to how they should respond. Torn between the occupancy needs of their stakeholders, the community's economic dependence on tourism and the potential sensitivity of the tourism market due to their exposure to the tragedies endured by some residents, those responsible for marketing activity are unsure of how the tourism market will react to their marketing efforts. This study asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with the following statement 'In the event of a disaster, it is appropriate for a destination marketing organisation like Destination Gippsland to continue their promotional / advertising activities'. The responses to which are featured in the figure below.

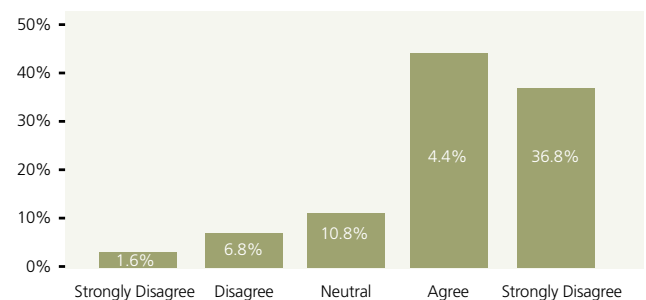


Figure 1 Attitude towards Marketing Communication at the time of a Disaster

The responses illustrated in Figure 1 suggest that less than 10% of respondents felt that it was inappropriate to continue to promote a destination in the wake of a disaster, while over 80% of respondents felt that it was appropriate. This finding therefore provides confirmation to destination marketers who find themselves in this position that the majority of the tourism market is in fact receptive of promotional efforts, both during and post disaster. This result also offers further support for the conclusions drawn in phase one of this bushfire research.

3.5 What message should Destination Gippsland employ in the event of a Natural Disaster?

A series of analyses were performed to identify the most effective post disaster communication message. The responses to these messages were determined via the respondents' level of involvement, attitude towards the advertisement, their trust in the source, the messages ability to inform and its ability to evoke emotion. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the nine ads in terms of these five attributes allowing us to confidently reveal the most and least effective post disaster promotional message.

The advertisement featuring the celebrity endorsed (Ad 9) message proved to be the most effective on four of the five determinants of advertising response. This was closely followed by the ad communicating community readiness (Ad 3) which proved to be the most effective condition in evoking an emotional response, which according to previous research can often lead to a travel decision.

The worst performing message however did vary in relation to the five response measures. The ready and open for business message (Ad 1) was the least appealing advertisement and generated the least trust and credibility, whilst the discounting approach was deemed the least informative. The testimonial condition (Ad 7) was surprisingly the least effective in generating any kind of emotion, however, one needs to acknowledge that the mean score was still over the midpoint of 3 – signifying that although comparatively this condition performed poorly, the respondents were mostly in agreement that they felt 'some' emotion.

Respondents rated the ad designed to alter the tourist's opinion towards the region, (Ad 4) as the least thought provoking, suggesting that the respondents struggled to relate to the ad. This could potentially be explained by the possibility that their opinions towards the region did not require altering – i.e. their perceptions remain positive despite the disastrous event.

3.7.1 The effectiveness of event promotion

Previous post disaster marketing attempts within Victoria have placed a significant focus on the lure of events. In a bid to provide some confirmation that this particular approach is effective, particular attention was placed on the advertisement that presented this message. In the wake of a disastrous event, 63% of respondents who received this advertisement stated they would be unlikely to visit Gippsland within six months of the disaster.

The results indicated that events are more likely to attract tourists to the region 12-24 months after a disaster, with over 70% of respondents claiming that they would be likely to come for these events within this timeframe.

Although respondents liked the event focused message and found it informative, given it was among the least likely messages to result in immediate visitation it is recommended that this disaster recovery marketing approach be reviewed.

3.6 Demographic Segments

As formerly mentioned, the researchers were interested in determining the existence of any demographically explained variances among the responses. That is, identify if gender, age, educational level and occupation has any influence on advertisement/ message preference, and intention to travel. Any statistically significant patterns among these variables would allow us to reveal any particularly responsive or non responsive market segments.

A number of statistical tests revealed no significant differences between these select demographic variables and those used to measure the tourist's ad response. This lack of significance indicates that the tourist's likely response to disaster recovery marketing campaigns and their intention to visit the region in the event of a disaster are unlikely to be determined by their demographic status. While this finding is non supportive of a targeting marketing approach, it does represent positive implications should the destination wish to take a mass marketing approach.

3.7 Summary

In summary, these results have provided valuable insight that can be used to inform Destination Gippsland's future marketing communications strategy should the region be faced with another disastrous event. The key findings revealed in the study are as follows:

- In the wake of a disaster, the majority of tourists will return to the destination within 12 to 24 months.
- Previous visitation (i.e. whether a visitor has visited the region or not) to Gippsland has minimal influence on the tourist's propensity to visit the region after a disaster.
- Regular visitors (5+ past Visits) are more likely to return within 6 months of the disaster than irregular visitors (less than 2 past visits).
- In the event of a bushfire, the tourism market will prefer to visit coastal destinations such as Wilsons Promontory and Lakes Entrance.
- Post disaster advertising is more likely to capture the attention of those who have little knowledge of the region.
- The tourism market is not opposed to a destination marketing organisation continuing their marketing activities both during and following a disastrous event.
- An advertisement with a local celebrity endorsed message is likely to be the most effective method of post disaster marketing communication for the Gippsland region.
- Messages promoting community readiness are most likely to generate emotional responses among the tourism market whilst punter testimonials are least likely to generate emotion.
- The effectiveness of a celebrity endorsed message will increase over time and is likely to be most successful in encouraging visitation 12 to 24 months after the event.
- Advertisement messages designed to encourage visitation via curiosity enhancement (i.e. regenerating landscape) are unlikely to encourage visitation.
- 'Open and ready for business' style messages are unlikely to appeal to tourists and are perceived as lacking credibility.
- Advertisements promoting discounts and special deals soon after a disaster are considered by the tourism market as irrelevant and uninformative.
- Messages that attempt to alter the tourist's opinion or perceptions by suggesting that region is relatively unaffected and it's business as usual are the least likely to capture the tourist's attention and the least likely to encourage visitation within 6 months.

- The promotion of festivals and events immediately or soon after a disaster has occurred is not the most effective post disaster communications strategy.
- Event promotion is more likely to encourage visitation 12 – 24 months after a disaster.

Based on a review of these findings and previous relevant research a number of recommendations have been put forward to inform Destination Gippsland's disaster recovery marketing strategy. These are presented in the following section.

4.0 Recommendations

Drawing on the results revealed in this research, the following recommendations are proposed to inform Destination Gippsland's post disaster marketing communications.

- Marketing and promotional activities should continue over the course of the disaster recovery period. In the event of a bush fire disaster, the focus of immediate mass market advertising campaigns should be the region's coastal locations.
- Relationship marketing should also be the focus of the initial promotional activity. Operators need to be encouraged to maintain visitor databases, identify their loyal consumer base and within the initial six month period make contact with their regular clientele and encourage their patronage via either loyalty discounts or simple reassurance that their particular area / community is okay.
- Destination Gippsland should integrate celebrity endorsed messages that communicate community readiness into their post disaster recovery campaigns when promoting the region in its entirety. It is important that the chosen celebrity is recognisable by the intrastate market as having some affiliation with Gippsland so they are able to establish a clear relationship between the region and the celebrity. The advertising campaign should also be accompanied by Public Relations activity in the early stages of development – educating the market about the celebrity - product association early in the campaign.
- It is recommended that this style of advertisement be the focus of advertising efforts 6 months post disaster and increase in exposure 6-12 months after the event when the tourism market is likely to be most responsive.
- The message needs to be factual in nature and aim to convince the tourist that the destination as a whole is in good shape.
- Messages that promote the regenerating landscape should not be employed.

- Cooperative marketing activities should temporarily cease between affected and non affected bushland areas until those areas affected have recovered and are ready to accept visitors.
- Targeted recovery marketing campaigns are not essential as there is not likely to be any advertising response differences between those that have previously visited the region and those who have not nor are there any demographically explained response differences among the intrastate market.
- As phase one of this research revealed, generally, the tourists' perceptions of the Gippsland region in the event of a disaster are likely to remain intact hence there is no need for messages that attempt to alter them.
- Finally, it is recommended that Destination Gippsland move away from the promotion of events as a means of encouraging immediate visitation. A marketing strategy focusing on events is likely to be most effective 12 months after the disaster has occurred. The promotion of events immediately after a disaster is likely to be more effective in encouraging intraregional visitation as opposed to attracting those from outside the region.

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Appendix 1



Gippsland, open & ready for Business - come, be inspired!



Gippsland needs you now more than ever, come and visit, support our tourism industry and let us inspire you



Gippsland, still going strong

Location 20% of Gippsland was affected by the Victorian bushfires. In fact, some of our most inspiring natural parks and landscapes remain untouched. At our coast, we open up the 60% of our coastline. It's business as usual.



Gippsland, come and see for yourself...

Gippsland's history, natural abundance and engineering feats that you can see and be inspired by. The fascinating landscape, history of the region, coast with the world's longest shipwreck - it's all here. This is the opportunity to experience the wonders of nature.



"If you want a peaceful country or coastal break at one of our most precious destinations, now is the time to go"

My family and I spent Gippsland's coastlines after the fires and it brought back those days when the coastline of Gippsland has not only offered a very special part of the region and best of the areas and attractions that we have always enjoyed. We were able to go swimming, fishing, hiking and participate in all the things we love. Gippsland is now like spring once again and the best tourism operators were happy to join us.

— David Jones, Business



Look what's happening in Gippsland in February

Our events calendar is full of fantastic reasons why you should be inspired by Gippsland this February. Whether you're a solo traveler, a family or a group, we have it all going on in Gippsland this summer.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Beach Day Beach Day is a celebration of Gippsland's coastline and the best of the region. It's a day of fun, games, music and more. It's a day to celebrate the beauty of our coast.</p> | <p>Beach Family Day Beach Family Day is a celebration of Gippsland's coastline and the best of the region. It's a day of fun, games, music and more. It's a day to celebrate the beauty of our coast.</p> | <p>Sea Trout and Silver Snapper Festival Sea Trout and Silver Snapper Festival is a celebration of Gippsland's coastline and the best of the region. It's a day of fun, games, music and more. It's a day to celebrate the beauty of our coast.</p> | <p>Beach Day Festival Beach Day Festival is a celebration of Gippsland's coastline and the best of the region. It's a day of fun, games, music and more. It's a day to celebrate the beauty of our coast.</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

Gippsland, ready to inspire you...
...we wouldn't invite you if we weren't ready

Gippsland is on Sale!

Put our website on to take advantage of our special promotional offers and save up to 20% on
accommodation, activities and food and wine packages. Find a variety of inspiring
packages starting from just \$200 per couple.

Denise Drysdale...one of our biggest fans

"It's a great bit of Gippsland and I was so fortunate
to be one of the founders of the region. Having
having just recently spent some time in Gippsland, I was
delighted to see that more of Gippsland's beautiful
scenery was being showcased and I'm proud."

Denise Drysdale

