

OnLine Case 7.2

British Tourist Authority (BTA)

The *mission* of the BTA is 'to strengthen the performance of Britain's tourist industry in international markets by encouraging people to visit Britain and encouraging the improvement and provision of tourist amenities and facilities'.

BTA objectives

The BTA has agreed the following long-term objectives:

1. Maximize the benefit to the economy of tourism to Britain from abroad.
2. Ensure that the Authority makes the most cost-effective use of resources in pursuing its objectives.

Resources are constrained by grants and the ability to agree joint venture projects; and therefore the benefits generated are inevitably limited. With more money benefits could be increased, but when do they become less cost-effective to create?

3. Identify what visitors want and stimulate improvements in products and services to meet their needs.
4. Encourage off-peak tourism.
5. Spread the economic benefit of tourism more widely, and particularly to areas with tourism potential and higher than average levels of unemployment.

Objectives 3, 4 and 5 may well prove contradictory. Moreover, there will always be considerable elements of subjectivity and value judgement in establishing priority areas.

Measures of corporate performance

BTA could be judged to be successful if visitors (business people and tourists) come to Britain, if they come both off-season and in-season (objective 4), if they spend increasing amounts of money while they are in Britain, if they spend in the preferred places (objective 5), and if they go home and tell other people to come – and over a period this increases the number of visitors and their expenditure (objective 1 explicitly and objective 3 implicitly).

These are all measures of effectiveness, whilst objective 2 addresses resource efficiency. However, there is a problem of cause and effect. While the criteria listed above can all be measured, the net contribution of the BTA cannot be so easily ascertained. Tourists and business people would still come, regardless of the existence of the BTA. In addition, many of the reasons for them choosing to come, or not to come, are outside both the control and influence of the BTA. The cause and effect of BTA initiatives is consequently very difficult to ascertain without extensive tracking studies, which can be prohibitively expensive. However, research in the early 1990s showed that at that time 27% of all visitors to the UK had visited a BTA office abroad.

It is believed implicitly that the activities undertaken around the world contribute to corporate objectives and performance, but often it is the activities (efficiencies) which are measured rather than the outcomes. Are particular promotions actually implemented? Are planned brochures published? Are desirable workshops and seminars attended? In fairness, despite the difficulties, BTA does attempt to measure the impact of the special promotions that it undertakes on the numbers of visitors to the UK.

British Tourist Authority <http://www.visitbritain.com>

Questions:

Can you suggest any other/better measures of performance than those mentioned? How difficult do you think it might be to track the effectiveness of the BTA?

How important do you see the BTA being in the run-up to the 2012 Olympic Games? People will be coming anyway, but is it going to be important to try and channel both their activities and where they stay? Should the BTA try and make sure that regions other than London benefit?