

Packaging Places: Maximising the Potential of the Heritage Trail by Adopting an Experience Economy Perspective

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Abstract

Heritage trails are a unifying mechanism within the urban cultural tourism landscape and this paper explores these tourism products against the principles of experience design suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Content analysis of trail brochures and leaflets incorporated both qualitative and quantitative dimensions in order to ascertain whether these are positioned as products or experiences. The results indicate that whilst trails utilise some of the approaches recommended by Pine and Gilmore (1999) there is still considerable scope for improvement in terms of their positioning and presentational format, if they are to maximise their potential. The authors consider that the learning derived from this research could be applied to the marketing of other cultural products, since they often share common characteristics and similar goals.

Keywords

Cultural tourism, heritage trails, experience economy, marketing.

Introduction: The Experience Economy

The 'experience economy' is being hailed as the fourth economic offering (Pine and Gilmore 1999) in humankind's history. First we extracted commodities from the earth and during the industrial period we produced goods. The industrial economy then shifted to the delivery of services and now it has been suggested that these services are being re-packaged and presented as experiences. The difference between a mere service and an experience is described by Pine and Gilmore as follows:

Experiences are a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from good. Today we can identify and describe this fourth economic offering because consumers unquestionably desire experiences and more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting them (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 2)

The economic distinctions between goods, services and experiences are presented in more detail in the following Table 1:

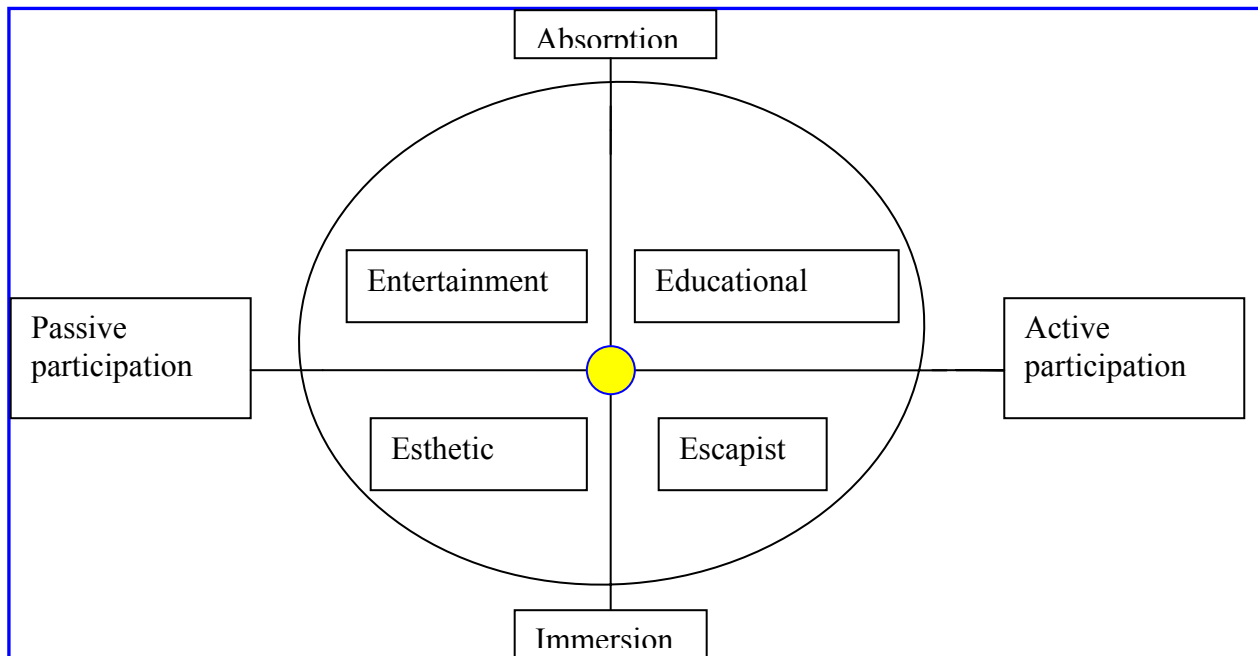
Table 1: Economic Distinctions: adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1998: 9)

Economic Offering	Goods/Products	Services	Experiences
Economy	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic function	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of offering	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key attribute	Standardised	Customised	Personal
Method of supply	Inventorised after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over duration
Seller	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	User	Client	Guest
Factors of demand	Features	Benefits	Sensations

Pine and Gilmore (1999) have suggested that meaningful experiences can be created by any type of service provider from airlines to banks, creating a closer link between the provider and the customer and giving the provider a clear marketing advantage.

Experiences, they suggest, fall into four distinctive realms: entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist. These realms are categorized according to where the actual experience falls along two dimensions: whether the experience requires passive or active participation and whether the experience results in the absorption or immersion of the participant (see Fig 1). Thus an experience which fully immerses the participant and involves active participation is in the escapist realm (for example mountain climbing) whilst a fully immersive but passive experience would be in the esthetic realm (for example visiting an art gallery). Experiences where participants are absorbed and active fall into the educational realm (for example attending a lecture) and those which are absorbing but passive, for example watching television, are to be found in the entertainment realm. Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) believe that the most compelling experiences are those that meet in the centre of their model (shown in yellow in Fig 1) – experiences that encompass all aspects of the four realms.

Figure 1: The Four Realms of Experience: adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1998:7)



They suggest a number of principles to assist service providers in designing memorable experiences. These principles include providing a compelling and memorable theme to assist the visitor in organizing their impressions, using positive cues that affirm the nature of the experience for the customer, provide memorabilia as a physical reminder of the experience and finally, engaging all four senses to stimulate participants and support and enhance the chosen theme.

Tourism and the Experience Economy

Although Pine and Gilmore are convinced that these principles can be effectively applied to any service provider it is apparent that this approach to the designing of experiences is one that is particularly relevant to the tourism industry and has of course long been embraced by the visitor attractions sector, with the Disney Corporation providing successful models of themed experiences since the 1950s (Bryman 1995). Lofgren (2003) suggests that the experience economy is integrative in that it makes no distinction between production and consumption and brings together 'tourism, retail trade, architecture, event management, the entertainment and heritage industries as well as the media world under a common umbrella' (p.241) thus reflecting post-modern de-differentiation (Lash 1990).

Although many would consider that tourism is simply the provision of services, one could certainly argue that experiences are at the very heart of tourism marketing and development as evidenced by a recent academic and practitioner conference that explored 'Entrepreneurship in tourism and the contexts of the experience economy' (Buhalis and Paraskevas 2002). England's national tourism organisation, Visit England, currently employ 'experience' as one of the three strands in their brand positioning of England as a holiday destination. They have identified three types of experiences that express the essence of the country : 'real experiences' (demonstrating

continuity, belonging and shared experiences), 'fun experiences' (incorporating adventure, socializing and diverse activity) and 'indulgent experiences' (expressed by accessible luxury, relaxing and pleasure). This essence of the England brand:

needs to be brought to life with real 'product' experiences to inspire people to enjoy England. By drawing on the essence to awaken our senses, we can all imagine unique experiences which capture the joy of a holiday in England (VisitEngland 2004: 8).

VisitEngland list a broad range of experiences, from enjoying a clotted cream tea in Devon, to tracing the footsteps of Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest and from getting lost in the maze at Hampton Court Palace to being part of the crowd at the Notting Hill Carnival.

As these examples demonstrate, popular cultural tourism activities are an important aspect of the UK's tourism offering. Cultural tourism is a major growth industry concerned with marketing diverse cultural products of both a formal and informal nature to tourists as discretely packaged cultural experiences (Craik 1995:87). This development has been driven by the democratization of culture and history, increasing levels of higher education and a maturing and consequent diversification of the tourism industry. According to Prentice (1996) popular cultural tourism is essentially experiential, often driven by the desire for insight rather than formal learning as a basis for understanding. Increasingly the 'experience hungry consumer'(Richards 2001:56) is turning to cultural tourism as a means of seeking self-realisation through engagement with authentic, emotional and spiritual experiences. This requires a process of dynamic co-production shared by tourism providers who delineate their offerings and consumers who utilize their cultural capital to mediate their imaginings and recollections as a means of producing a personal and unique tourism product (Prentice 2001, Cunnell and Prentice 2000, Richards 1996). Thus:

cultural tourism is the antithesis of so-called 'Fordist'- era production: the antithesis of producer-led standardized product offerings sold to accepting mass consumers. Consumers are instead invited to 'explore' and to 'discover' for themselves: personally to find surprises or 'hidden' worlds, to seek adventure, to admire grandeur, to share secrets, to sample flavours and to uncover mysteries...' (Prentice 2001: 10).

In an experience–economy there is no room for standardised coach-tours or purely didactic museum exhibits. Instead the visitor is encouraged to immerse, and perhaps find, themselves in unique self-tailored experiences.

The Heritage Trail and the Experience of Place

The discussion will now focus on the heritage trail which has been defined as a means of organizing the visitor experience by providing a purposeful, interpreted route that can be followed by foot, by car, bicycle or horseback and that:

draws on the natural or cultural heritage of an area to provide an educational experience that will enhance visitor enjoyment. It is marked on the ground or on maps, and interpretive material is normally available to guide the visitor (Silbergh et al 1994:123)

The antecedents of the heritage trail can be traced back to ancient pilgrim and trade routes and there is a long history of what Goodey describes as 'informed urban walking' (Goodey 1975:29). The popular illustrated *Picturesque Tours of England and Scotland* led visitors on prescribed

routes through areas with artistic and literary associations in the 1700s (Aitchison et al 2002) and these publications provided information for an interested middle class public keen to indicate their cultured tastes. These leisured visitors were engaging their mind and their artistic sensibilities and turned the act of walking into an acceptable recreational pursuit, thus 'the practice of walking long distances was liberated from its former connotations of need, homelessness and suspicion of criminality' (Ibid:53).

The enjoyment of guided or 'informed' walking is therefore certainly not new but as Goodey suggested in 1975, the specific development and promotion of self-guided trails by conservation bodies in that decade was a new phenomenon. In our present century a whole range of additional organizations are now interested in trails development including local authorities, tourism organizations, local development agencies and civic societies often working in partnerships to address common goals. It is easy to understand why such organizations have been keen to develop heritage trails as they are seen to be flexible, multi-faceted products with many benefits ranging from social and physical, environmental and cultural, and economic (Government of South Australia 2002). Thus heritage trails can assist in environmental conservation and visitor management (Weaver 1995), in economic development (Leask and Barriere 2000, Strauss and Lord 2001) and in contributing to a deeper sense of place and community (Cheung 2003, Patullo 1997).

First appearing in the UK as nature trails in the 1960-70s (DART 1978), they quickly developed to encompass a range of different heritage themes including architecture, famous people, local industries, historic events and wildlife. Currently the UK has a generous supply of trails with ongoing research by the authors identifying at least 1300 in England alone. Themes explored through trails are diverse including the fishing industry, the life and work of George Eliot, the history of the cinema and witchcraft. Trails are also diverse in terms of their scale with some walking trails taking as little as half an hour to complete and driving routes taking several days. With the growing strength of the urban tourism market, (Selby 2004) town trails are particularly popular and are frequently used as a means of interpreting architecture, historic buildings, local industries and famous local personalities. A number of towns in England have a range of different trails exploring different themes and communities within the town's history.

Given the trail characteristics described, it has become apparent to the authors that these products could be a very effective means of delivering the different types of experience outlined above in the brief review of the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999). If sensitively designed they can be used as a vehicle for making sense of places and they certainly hold much potential for theming regions by 'packaging' a series of linked sites with each package telling a distinctive story. Visitors' experience of place is much enhanced by the linking of formal tourism products (for example museums, historic houses, visitor centres) with informal products such as open-air markets, cafes and pubs which convey a vivid sense of local culture. Trails would seem to be an ideal way of linking these two types of visitor attraction to create a more holistic experience of place. Visitor research carried out on the Waterloo-Wellington Ale Trail in Ontario, Canada for example reported very positive feedback from visitors who had augmented the official trail with visits to restaurants and pubs (Plummer et al 2005).

With short-stay tourism to urban destinations continuing to grow, encouraged by the proliferation of low-cost airlines, trails can also provide a time-efficient means of getting to know a town environment within for example a weekend. With little available time to explore and make chance discoveries, visitors following a trail can be reassured that they have seen the key sights and have experienced more informal aspects of local culture along the way.

Despite the very clear potential that exists for heritage trails to augment the visitor experience, the authors argue that as these products are often conceived of as low cost tourism products promising an array of benefits, their contribution to the visitor's experience is often ignored. Consequently the authors suspected that trails developers are not always maximising the potential of their destinations as they often fail to observe the design principles suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Trails that are developed to incorporate both educational and entertaining themes and materials and which immerse the participant in the story have the potential to hit the 'sweet spot' at the centre of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) model (Fig.1) and could become truly compelling experiences rather than being simply functional products. The following methodology was therefore designed in order to analyse a sample of town trails against these design principles to ascertain how far they meet these criteria for effectively designed experiences.

Methodology

In order to assess whether trails are presented as 'products' or 'experiences', content analysis methodology has been utilised. These are analytical tools deriving from disciplines such as literary criticism, film studies and linguistics, which are increasingly applied to the investigation of text structures and the production of meaning in a marketing communications context (Hijmans, 1996).

Krippendorf (1980) identifies two aspects in relation to content analysis: framework and logic. For our purposes the framework are the brochures that present the self-guided trails to visitors and the elements inherent within their structure such as the trail story; map identifying stops on route; visual material and descriptions of the visitor attractions or sites. These structural elements were assessed against the key experience-design principles suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which include theming the experience and storytelling; type of appeal and use of sensory triggers, issues of authority and credibility; the use of positive cues and reinforcements; opportunities for visitor enrolment and engagement and customisation. Trail brochures are typically available free from Tourist Information Centres, located in town centres. Their format varies from sophisticated booklets with over 20 pages to simple double sided A3 sheets (approx) folded to enable the visitor to read easily whilst on foot. Production values are also highly variable spanning the spectrum from those that utilize expensive design and production techniques incorporating full colour photography and a glossy finish to others that are produced in black and white with few illustrations and hand drawn maps. This reflects the diversity of trails in size, scope and resources of their sponsors.

Logic is concerned with decisions relating to sampling, the processing methods used for inference and analysis and an assessment of the validity and reliability. There is no comprehensive database of trails within England or the UK and the market is highly fragmented. The authors undertook an audit of trails in England during 2003, by contacting all tourist information centres and conducting web searches. This process established that there are approximately 1,300 trails in operation representing a minimum of 95% of the total universal sampling frame. Of those, 750 have an explicit tourism marketing rationale and these formed the universe for sampling. A systematic sample of 10 % was drawn for content analysis and every 10th brochure was selected from the alphabetically arranged sample providing that it met the criteria of presenting an urban heritage trail focusing on the built environment. The literature emphasises the importance of ensuring that analysis is undertaken using similar contexts therefore, built heritage rather than natural heritage trails were selected. In those cases where this criterion was not met the researchers selected the next trail on the list.

A hybrid of processing methods were used in this study, these include: rhetorical analysis which is essentially stylistic analysis focusing on the organisation and presentation of the message in addition to the choices that the communicator has made and semiotic analysis of visual images and text to explore the iconic, indexical and symbolic meaning of the signs used in the brochures. Content analysis incorporated both qualitative and quantitative dimensions as a means of comparison. For some elements of the investigation such as coherence of the theme and rational v. evocative appeals, trails were scored on a numerical scale (0-5) to enable a mean value to be established. For other questions such as those relating to opportunities for enrolment, engagement and personalisation, occurrence was counted and are expressed as percentages with examples recorded for illustrative purposes. Semiotic conventions (language, tone of voice and creative execution) were recorded and these are discussed in the findings. Brochure analysis was conducted using a double blind process to make certain that the approach was replicable and to ensure the validity of the results.

Content analysis has provided a disciplined approach for assessing the usage of experience design principles and has enabled to researchers to suggest enhancements for consideration by trail developers. To triangulate the findings it would be beneficial to undertake user research to ascertain the efficacy of the experience economy approach and future projects will include this activity. One of the major difficulties encountered in this study has been selection of the specific style of content analysis as there are a vast array of approaches that can be employed, highlighting the need for the personal development of the researchers involved. From this exploratory study it is evident that content analysis skills can be applied to a wide range of cultural and tourism experiences and it is intended that these will be further refined over time. Of particular interest is the application of the experience economy principles to audience development since engagement and connection are at the heart of these activities, therefore, the authors will be adapting the methodology to study these activities in the future and in all likelihood using techniques practiced within the social science context.

Findings

Context

The urban heritage trails included in the sample are all located in English towns of various sizes and prominence, some being established tourist 'honey pots' whilst others are less well-established. However, there is a common tourism rationale underpinning their development.

These urban heritage trails have been categorised under the following groupings that reflect the themes presented in the trail story. These are town; historical; architectural, sculpture and public art; and 'other' (a category that includes a diverse range of themes). The historical category is broad, encompassing a number of sub-categories: people, events, mythology and literature. There are some overlaps between architectural and sculpture / public art trails categories. These are differentiated because architectural trails are usually developed around the legacy of a towns built heritage where as art and sculpture trails are often more contemporary and the public art displayed is likely to have been developed as site specific, for inclusion within the trail. The town trail is the largest but most difficult category to define, as the stories told use historical references to the development of the place and community, highlight buildings of architectural interest and are a means of loosely connecting formal and informal cultural products. Consequently they are often a 'catch-all' with a myriad of themes emerging, therefore, coherence depends upon the strength of place identity and the connections made between seemingly disparate elements.

Table 2: Trail Categories

Category	Percentage
Town	33
Historical	28
Literary	(6.7)
Event	(13.3)
People	(8.0)
Architecture	11
Sculpture / public art	11
Industrial	8
Other Food and drink; Religious; Cinema; Maritime	10

67% of trails encompass both formal and informal cultural products to enhance the visitor experience, where as the remaining 33% focus only on formal products. A breakdown of products incorporated in the trails is shown below:

Table 3: Inclusion of Formal and Informal Cultural Products

Formal products	Percentage	Informal products	Percentage
Church	71	Pubs / restaurants	36
Historic house	64	Leisure facilities	25
Monument	47	Shops	23
Architectural feature	42	Markets	17
Museum	33		
Plaque	23		
School	22		
Gardens	21		
Sculpture / public art	20		
Natural feature	17		
Visitor centre	7		
Other	18		

Storytelling

Telling a compelling story should be the aim of trail developers wanting to attract and satisfy visitors by providing a memorable experience. Some locations are rich in source material having architectural wealth, unique historical significance or association with a well known personality. Others do not have these 'natural resources' and have to construct a narrative based on more tenuous associations or use creative devices to establish identity. Regardless of the theme or inspiration, the findings suggest that success is dependent upon the following aspects: coherence of the story; storytelling genre; style and use of language; depth; credibility; sensory elements.

Coherence was scored on a numeric scale of 0-5 enabling a mean to be calculated. The researchers assigned a value by examining signs including symbolic dimensions (the story), the indexical aspects (connections and links between commentary points) and iconic characteristics

which are predominantly visual (including photographs; illustrations; panels; maps). Diachronic analysis which focuses on the relationships between the chain of events that form the narrative was also used. Overall the score was 2.3 but a highly polarised pattern of results emerged. 16% had a highly coherent story scoring between 4-5 on the scale. It was evident that where a distinctive proposition underpinned the narrative, the story was more compelling. Examples include: The Dick Turpin Heritage Route following in the footsteps of an infamous highway man; South Somerset Follies Trail with the strap line 'Share the secret'; George Eliot Country rich in authenticity, as it focuses on her life and places described by the author in her books; Dere Street Trail 'March with the Roman soldiers and discover archaeology without digging'

17% were classified as having no coherence and all of these represented the ubiquitous town trails where the accident of geography was the only unifying theme, consequently they scored low on indexical and diachronic criteria. There was simply no attempt to contextualise the commentary points within a frame of reference for the visitor or provide a distinctive impression. Whilst the researchers acknowledge that this can be difficult due to the lack of obvious stimuli some interesting examples of overcoming this problem were identified. Bolton, a declining manufacturing town in the industrial heartland of northern England has developed a trail focusing on elephants, a symbol that has been used by the town for two hundred years. The visitor is invited to participate in an elephant hunt, guided via the brochure to visit locations around the town where elephants can be spotted (architectural features on civic buildings, pub signs, metal pavement studs and public art exhibits). These can be recorded for posterity and provide a souvenir of the experience. The elephant theme unifies the story but also enables the trail provider to share with the visitor, moments in Bolton's history and architectural heritage as sub themes. Similarly Hull a traditional Fishing town have developed a Fish Trail in partnership with Seven Seas (manufacturers of fish oil). The proposition to the visitor is 'Finding the fish, exploring the city' – 36 varieties of fish have been created by artists from a range of materials including granite, slate red brick, bronze and steel and the visitor is encouraged to tick them off the brochure as they are discovered. Completion is awarded with a certificate, visitor details are captured (benefiting the tourism department and the sponsor) and entered in to a prize-draw. Both of these examples illustrate the effectiveness of iconic stimuli in providing a diachronic link between indexical elements.

Many of the town trails have a sub-theme such as architecture or their industrial heritage and for the most part this works well as it can link disparate elements. However some trails incorporated many sub themes and this is likely to cause confusion for the visitor and undermines the experience.

Providers that have thought laterally about their story often develop compelling trails. Bradford a town keen to build short stay tourism have developed a popular cinema trail that encompasses film locations, actors and directors associated with the town, film technology and built heritage (studios, cinemas and the film and television museum) to enable the visitor to discover a surprising story.

A wide range of storytelling genre was identified in the brochures, including biographical; historical; literary; travel and mythology. Humour was largely absent and the trails tend to adopt a worthy and educational style in communicating their stories – this could reflect the earnest research by enthusiasts (usually member of historical or civic societies) that is often the basis for the copy used in the brochures.

Language

67% of brochures use less than 1,000 words to tell the story and they rely on visual images to convey meaning. A further 23% use between 1,001 and 2,000 words, typically the additional word count highlights specific aspects with quotes from literature, biographies, historical research and technical details relating to building or manufacturing methods. The lowest word count was approximately 250 and the highest over 8,000. This was the most detailed and produced by the Letchworth Historical Society detailing the development of the Garden City Movement. It is likely that the intended audience is specialists interested in studying town and planning developments.

Dense text can be off-putting to the visitor exploring on foot as it is often difficult to walk whilst reading. Many of the brochures infer through design (story on one side of the unfolded sheet, map and commentary points are placed on the reverse) that the detailed story be read prior to commencing the trail and the map with associated commentary points uses sparse text simply to prompt the visitor at key observation points.

73% had less than 20 commentary points, the mean was 17 reflecting the design of urban trails, which typically follow a route lasting between 45 and 90 minutes.

The appeals used within the text were examined and scored on a numeric scale ranging from 0 = rational, to 5 = evocative. 47% scored 0 or 1 indicating the widespread use of rational appeals and only 5% scored the maximum.

Over two thirds of the trails sampled use didactic language to highlight the factual aspects of the story. Many employ a descriptive approach and often feature technical terms or make reference to other events and places, on the presumption that the visitor can access a sophisticated register and has prior knowledge. This was particularly evident among trails that had been developed by the special interest groups. None of the leaflets had the Crystal Mark to signify clarity. The use of experiential and action language was limited, examples identified included 'discover', 'experience', 'immerse', 'visualise', 'remember', 'taste'. This type of language is powerful in guiding the visitor's consumption of the experience. There was some evidence of evocative and emotive language used, however, this was the exception rather than the norm and largely confined to trails that featured public art or mythological themes.

The vast majority of brochures are written in the third person, which is consistent with the linguistic patterns previously observed. However, it was striking to find that a small number that used the first person had immediacy and are inviting to the reader as the extract below illustrates.

Greetings, I'm delighted that you want to accompany me, William Cavendish along my Cavendish Trail. While we stroll around Bolsover town we will stop and admire curiosities close to my heart. Normally I do the tour on Horse-back with a hint of manege in the square to show off to the good people of the town. Unhappily the horses are resting so I am resigned to touring on foot. Thankfully the whole tour takes only 40 minutes.

Extract: The Cavendish Trail, Bolsover

Those trails that invite the visitor to participate are highly affective and this personal style is characteristic of experience design good practice. Similarly these feelings can be reinforced

with the appropriate use of sensory language and triggers such as ‘taste’, ‘feel’, ‘hear’ and emotive techniques alluding to moods and previous experiences, however, these techniques were found in only 20% of trail literature.

Visual Devices

Trail literature uses both photographic and illustrative styles in almost equal quantities. Photographic images of architectural features dominate and these are both contemporary and historical (black and white / sepia) in origin, although the later have an atmospheric quality which may be appealing to visitors. Images showing people or communities are rare, save for the occasional glimpse of the trail follower with map outstretched. This is a missed opportunity for images of people create a bond that the visitor is unlikely to experience by looking at yet another medieval church or Georgian house. Similarly artifacts and portraiture is rarely included yet these can serve as powerful triggers transporting the visitor to times gone by. An example is the Bedford World War 11 Airfields trail, the copy is surrounded by images of a ration book, product packaging and photographs of iconic personalities from the era.

The use of harsh focus photography is the norm and is often used to highlight architectural detail. This approach is in keeping with the didactic language and instructional tone of many brochures. Soft focus shots are in the minority, but they are effective in creating an evocative mood for the prospective trail guest. Illustrations and line drawing are used extensively and can be used to recreate a sense of the past. Those brochures that featured hand drawn maps, illustrations and copy prepared by enthusiastic amateurs such as school children and members of the civic or historic societies have a certain folksy quality which is in stark contrast to the highly glossy and professional style adopted by some providers. Some trails incorporate information panels at commentary points, brass studs on pavements or and signage en route, but surprisingly these were not always shown in the brochures and providers may be missing an opportunity to connect the brochure with the experience on foot.

Eliminating negative cues and reinforcing positive cues

Given the methodology used it is difficult for the researchers to comment on the elimination of negative cues since this would have required that field research were undertaken to substantiate brochure claims. Clearly this was beyond the scope of this project. However, trail developers should consider the propensity for a mismatch between expectations created with literature and the reality of the experience on the ground. For example, if town centre road works are planned that involve digging up pavements on the trail route it may be advisable to suspend the trail until the works are completed.

The design principles literature emphasises the importance of harmonising impressions with positive cues and to some degree this can be achieved by tone of voice and the use of action and evocative language. The study also examined other aspects which can contribute to this outcome: the authority of the provider, evidence of research underpinning the trail story; the use of panels/ signage, special events and websites.

Most of the trails sampled have a highly authoritative tone of voice, since they are predominantly provided by local authorities (93%) and have usually called upon the expertise of other groups with specialist knowledge. A wide range of partnerships are in operation, including contributions from individual experts (academics, historians, artists, librarians, authors), historical groups and civic societies. To a lesser extent trails have commercial sponsors and

involvement with community groups such as schools, faith groups. These relationships are usually credited within the brochures and this confers a legitimacy on the story.

Just over half the trails included positive tangible cues in the form of either interpretive panels, evidence of research, signage, special events, websites and visitor centres. 43% had between 1-3 types of positive cues and a further 7% had more than 3.

Table 4: Types of Positive Cue

Type of cue	Percentage
Evidence of research	27
Panel	25
Visitor centre	21
Signage	12
Special events	12
Website (dedicated address)	7

Websites have the potential to provide trail developers with an effective low-cost platform for promoting the trail. However to the surprise of the researchers this was not widely used, although in many cases there were references to generic local authority sites or regional tourist boards.

Opportunities for Enrolment, Engagement and Personalisation

Enrolment

The literature suggests that enrolment is an important part of the visitor's consumption of experience since it ceremonially acknowledges the starting point and focuses both provider and guest as partners in the experience. Only 8 % of the trails feature any type of enrolment device or activity and this usually related to completion of a task on route.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) contend that "you are what you pay for" and emphasise that all experience providers should at least consider the merits of charging guests. They argue that this will have two benefits: first the guest will value the experience more highly and second, providers will be less complacent because experience enrichment strategies will be at the forefront of their thinking. For the most part trails in England that use the public highways and common land are provided free of charge, the same principle is applied to the trail brochure available from Tourist Information Centres since it is suggested that the additional footfall and economic impacts arising from visitors is sufficient to justify this provision. The disadvantage is that visitors may not value the experience, that providers will not have the resources to augment the experience and that evaluation of the offer cannot easily be undertaken.

Additional revenue earning opportunities appear to be a low priority for providers since memorabilia and souvenirs associated with the experience are not widely available. Only 9 % have publications or gifts available for purchase, however, revenue generation is not the only motivation for such offers – visitors have a psychological need to reinforce the memory of the intangible experience by taking home a tangible souvenir.

Engagement

Given that trails are self-guided, the visitor has a dual role as both provider and consumer of the experience. To achieve visitor fulfillment, the trail developer should consider devices and opportunities for enabling the visitor to encourage active engagement with the experience. 61% of trails provide additional opportunities these include: providing interpretive panels and exhibitions, links with visitor attractions; suggested further reading; events; self completion activities; and further points of contact.

Table 5: Opportunities for Engagement

Engagement device	Percentage
Visitor attractions	29
Panels and exhibitions	28
Further reading	28
Events	20
Further contacts	12
Activities on route	9

Opportunities for engagement are limited and unimaginative. Organising events can create excitement and provide a significant level of enhancement to the visitor experience but these are expensive and temporal. It was surprising that activities on route are seldom provided as these can be low cost but highly engaging mechanisms that provide opportunities for increasing absorption and active participation, they include quizzes, photo opportunities and treasure hunts. Two trails featured opportunities for visitors to take brass rubbings as selected commentary points, an excellent device since it also provides the guest with a memento of their experience.

Personalisation

For the most part trails are targeted at the generic visitor, there was almost no evidence of segmenting visitors and developing distinctive offers to suit different groups. Children and families, enthusiasts, local communities and international visitors are among those who have different needs and expectations of the experience and the differences did not appear to be reflected in the design of trails. There is a risk that if providers offer only one solution the can alienate large sector of the market.

Evidence of opportunities to personalise the experience were limited, nearly 50% provided no opportunities and a further 28% only provided one mechanism.

Table 6: Personalisation mechanisms

Mechanism	Percentage
Links with other trails	20
Alternative routes	15
Varying length of trail	15
Suggested stops	13
Levels of difficulty	4

Conclusions

Reviewing the findings in relation to Table 1 (Economic Distinctions) it is evident that heritage trails are conceived as products, with some attributes of services discernable. Developers make trails which exist on paper and occasionally on the ground, combining both tangible and intangible offerings. These products are largely standardised since opportunity for customisation or personalisation is limited. Brochures are produced and stocked in Tourist Information Centres (TIC) awaiting 'pull' through by visitors. Trails are mass-market offerings and are not targeted or differentiated by visitor needs and expectations, probably because no accurate data concerning usage patterns exists. For the most part trail stories are feature led, heavily reliant on a factual didactic approach. Brochures rarely make reference to the benefits accruing to the visitor or acknowledge the nature of the experience that they may be seeking.

If a provider wants to maximize the potential of their trail as a vehicle for making sense of place and increasing footfall by packaging visitor opportunity for insight and self-realisation, then a new approach is required. This necessitates that trails are developed as experiences using the design principles suggested by Pine and Gilmore. These should aim to provide opportunities for visitors to actively engage with authentic, emotional and spiritual experiences that satisfy across all four realms (entertainment; educational; esthetic; escapist).

The first design principle is concerned with providing a memorable and compelling theme. For trails a coherent story is essential, a wide variety of genre can be used but developers should aim to incorporate both rational and evocative appeals using a variety of linguistic approaches. The dominant didactic style should give way to experiential and action based language to entice and welcome the visitor, similarly graphical devices and sensory triggers can create an evocative mood. Multiple stories can be told providing the visitor with a range of options to reflect their interests.

Eliminating negative cues and reinforcing positive cues to harmonise impressions is another key principle. This can be achieved in a variety of ways but particular emphasis should be given to dedicated websites with space for visitors to share experiences and memories, maximizing the potential of media on route and involving the community at large.

The final three design principles are concerned with developing opportunities for enrolment, engagement and personalisation, it is against these criteria that existing trail offerings are falling short. Enrolment is a critical aspect for two reasons, firstly it enables the guest to be welcomed and secondly it provides an opportunity to capture data that can be used to enhance planning. Whilst it is acknowledged that many providers would be reluctant to charge for the trail – it could be augmented with additional benefits such as audio facilities, umbrella hire, instant cameras and commemorative trail album to encourage the visitor to value the experience. The trail could also be routed to bring the visitor back to the TIC, where trail completion can be celebrated and the visitor invited to write comments in a book.

Similarly engagement opportunities could be expanded and more imaginative. Why do not consider having identifiable volunteers along the route or commentary points at peak times, to add value with personal insights? Activities designed for children and special interest groups would also enhance appeal, extend the learning potential and provide mementos of the experience.

Opportunities for personalization are much needed. Visitors want to feel that their experience is unique, therefore, mechanisms that shift the balance of control from the provider to visitor may

be welcomed. Web technology encourages interaction and facilitates personalisation and service enhancements such as individualized route planning based on individual interests, a choice of engagement devices and links to further information reflecting trail themes could be facilitated easily and at low cost. This approach would avoid the bland offering for a homogeneous market as visitors could access contested stories and differing perspectives of place.

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