'Safari Around the Clock': Marketing Mix Innovation

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Abstract

Purpose

An increasing number of marketers support the idea that places can and should be marketed as brands. Yet despite growing interest in place branding, most research on place image focuses on large geographical and political units such as cities, regions and countries, with relatively little investigation into tourism destinations such as zoos, museums, shopping centers, and sport facilities. This paper aims to explore leisure branding through a case study of a leading leisure organization, the Zoological Center in Tel Aviv - Ramat Gan, Israel, popularly known as the Safari.

Approach

Information was obtained by way of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The objective was to gain both a current and historical perspective.

The paper analyzes the Safari's three marketing strategies over the years, culminating in a sub-branding strategy that has succeeded in significantly increasing the number of visitors and the income of the Safari, and made it one of Israel's most attractive destinations in the leisure sector.

Originality/value of paper

This paper relates to the change of the brand concept from a zoo to a safari and how new products are developed to target different segments. The implications developed here show how an attraction such as a zoo, which can sometimes be interpreted as a homogeneous type of experience, hence the implication not to revisit, can develop more "experienced based products" and other different types of experiences to the same as well as different segments.

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Place Image

Marketers already realize that places can and should be marketed and treated as brands (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2004; Ward, 1998). These marketers define the concept of "place image" as the sum of the beliefs and impressions people hold about a place (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993), derived from its geography, history, cultural attractions (e.g., art and music), famous citizens and other features (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).

In order to attract tourists, factories, companies and talented people and to find markets for their exports, many governments aAround the world have invested vast sums in creating a competitive advantage over other locales (Gilmore, 2001; Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesincee, 1997; Porter, 1989). In recent years, countries such as Thailand (Nuttavuthisit, 2007), Costa Rica, Moldova (Florek and Conejo, 2007), Ireland (O'Leary and Deegan, 2003; Gould and Skinner, 2007), Turkey (Kemming and Sandikci, 2007), Spain (Gilmore, 2001), Britain (Gilmore, 2001; Hall, 2004), Yugoslavia (Hall, 2002), Australia (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999) and New Zealand (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2003) have undertaken campaigns to reposition themselves and promote a positive image. States or regions that are putting efforts into marketing include Wales (Pritchard and Morgan, 1998), Western Australia (Crockett and Wood, 2000) and Florida (Brayshaw, 1995). A number of cities have redesigned their images as well, notably several cities in the UK: Glasgow (Daskou, Thom and Boojihawon, 2004), Manchester (Ward, 2000), Bradford (Trueman, Klemm and Giroud, 2004) and London (Hopper, 2003; Anholt, 2006).

While most research on place image focuses on large geographical and political units such as cities, regions and countries, the concept of place image applies equally lower down the spatial scale (Ashworth and Voogt, 1994) to leisure tourism destinations such as museums, shopping centers, and sport facilities. According to Caldwell and Freire (2004), there are differences in how people perceive different types of places. Countries, for example, are so functionally diverse that they are perceived in terms of the representational parts of their brand identity, whereas regions and cities, being smaller in scale, are perceived more from a functional point of view. Perhaps

paradoxically, marketing a leisure tourism destination is much more complex, since the number of attributes (physical and human) associated with leisure tourism are very limited.

Leisure Brand Images

A review of the literature on leisure brand image reveals several brand image attributes, which can be classified into five categories: economic class or status, physical environment, activities and facilities, brand attitudes, and people (Hankinson, 2005). Economic attributes include, for example, level of commercialization (Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993) and price (Etchner and Ritchie, 1993). Physical environment covers external facets of the leisure destination or its setting, including how heavily the site has been developed (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); how attractive or pleasant it is (Embacher and Buttle, 1989; Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993); how busy or crowded it is (Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993); the climate and natural beauty of the area (Embacher and Buttle, 1989; Etchner and Ritchie, 1993); and the level of security visitors can expect (Etchner and Ritchie, 1993). The activities and facilities category includes content-related elements such as quality and types of food offered (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); suitability for children (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); tourist facilities and infrastructure (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); accessibility (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); and level of adventure (Etchner and Ritchie, 1993). The brand attitudes category can be defined as the destination's overall appeal (Embacher and Buttle, 1989). The final category, people, encompasses intangible cultural factors such as the types of people attracted to the place (Embacher and Buttle, 1989); its trendiness (Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993); possible language barriers (Etchner and Ritchie, 1993); and cultural distance between visitors and staff (Etchner and Ritchie, 1993). By promoting or enhancing any of these attributes, marketers have the ability to create a clear and sustainable image for a given leisure destination.

Despite growing interest in place branding on the part of goverments and other stakeholders at national, state, regional and local levels (Kerr and Johnson, 2005), there has been relatively little academic investigation into leisure brand image. This gap in the research is arguably a serious omission, both in general and, specifically, in the area of wildlife attractions, zoos and safai parks (Dibb, 1995). This paper aims to explore leisure branding from the perspective of a leading leisure organization, the

Zoological Center in Tel Aviv - Ramat Gan, Israel, popularly known as the Safari. Beginning in the 1980's, the Safari had to cope with a merger situation that ultimately led its management to adopt a uniqe branding strategy in the leisure sector. The current paper analyzes the Safari's three marketing strategies over the years, culminating in implementation of a sub-branding strategy that has succeeded in significantly increasing the number of visitors and the income of the Safari, and made it one of Israel's most attractive destinations in the leisure sector.

Approach

The purpose of the study was to better understand the branding strategy of the Safari and the strategic approaches through which new sub-brands were created over the past several years. For this reason, the research methodology was based on both oral interviews and collection of written data. The first phase comprised semi-structured interviews (60-120 minutes each) with the CEO, marketing manager, education manager and spokesperson of the Safari, held over four days in October 2007. The second phase involved the collection and review of documents – financial reports and visitor satisfaction surveys – from the past six years. These documents shed light on the Safari's marketing process and, in particular, the changes implemented in its marketing strategy between 2004 and 2007.

The Branding Strategy of the Israeli Safari

The Zoological Center Tel Aviv - Ramat Gan opened to the general public in 1974 as an African animal park. In 1981, a modern zoo was established in the middle of the park, populated with animals brought from the former Tel Aviv Zoo, which had closed. The combined African Park and zoo are popularly known as the "Safari". The African Park and the zoo within occupy 250 acres and include 1,600 animals of different species: 68 species of mammals, 130 species of fowl, and 25 species of reptiles. The Safari is the largest animal collection in the Middle East and is unique in the world, because of the large herds of mixed species of African animals that roam the spacious African Park.

A review of the marketing approaches employed by the Safari from its earliest days until the present reveals three different branding strategies. The first two branding strategies constituted the marketing infrastructure for creating public awareness and a

foundation for the Safari's countrywide reputation. The third strategy can be called a marketing revolution, which branded the Safari for all intents and purposes as Israel's leading leisure time attraction.

First branding strategy: 'The Safari – Africa in the Heart of the City'

When the Safari become the largest zoo in the Middle East, its management decided to brand the new organization as the largest zoo in the country located in the heart of a vibrant city ('an urban safari'). The essence of a visit to the new safari was predicated primarily on the experience of being amidst so many different kinds of animals and so many animal herds. The objective was to attract both families living close to the country's main metropolitan area (greater Tel Aviv) and families coming from other parts of the country, particularly on weekends, to the city positioned at the center of the state. The 'Safari – Africa in the Heart of the City' concept was put across mainly through ads in daily newspapers and billboards appearing in the country's largest cities. The campaign's results were extremely positive: During the zoo's first year of operation, over ten thousand visitors passed through its turnstiles. At this stage the Safari's administration did not make wide use of distribution channels except for a booking center. They continued to base their efforts on a broad billboard campaign and word of mouth.

Second branding strategy: 'Safari – All Ages Catch the Excitement'

In 2002, the zoo's new management reexamined the 'Safari – Africa in the Heart of the City' concept. The idea to re-examine the Safari's current marketing strategy was based on the results of a survey of 850 inhabitants from the Tel-Aviv metropolitan area that took place in 2002. The results of this survey indicated that the Safari was ranked only seventh as the most attractive leisure place in the metropolitan area. Also, the findings of this survey indicated that only 42 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement that the Safari is a pleasant experiential leisure place and its entrance fee was justified.

 The new administration felt that this concept had outlived its usefulness and that the zoo should be moved in new directions, especially in light of the appearance of new zoos in other areas of the country which had two advantages over the Safari: these zoos allowed visitors to get closer to the animals, through petting and feeding corners; and they were able to draw more young people who did not own cars (which are

obligatory for a safari). The process of reexamination and study was done in cooperation with the zoo's employees as well as with outside consultants. Sorting through the various ideas suggested by employees in a structured brainstorming process led to a new concept, which culminated in the creation of a sub-brand called 'Safari in the Morning'. The idea behind this step was to leverage the existing brand via a line extension strategy. In a line extension, the parent brand (Safari) is used to brand a new product ('Safari in the Morning') that targets a new market segment within a product category currently served by the parent brand (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The tactic of marketing both a brand leader and a sub-brand attracted two central audiences: families, which visited the safari primarily on weekends and holidays (responding to the parent brand); and organizations catering to young people, such as camps and nature/science clubs (responding to the sub-brand). In order to market this new concept the administration chose to re-brand the safari using the slogan 'Safari – All Ages Catch the Excitement'. At this point it was necessary to advertise in fliers and directly to camp directors, via sales representatives who met with directors and sold them on the newly rebranded Safari. At the same time, management began building a new experience based on a planned tour that integrated a morning story hour about the different animals on the site, and that allowed visitors to interact more closely with the wildlife and the safari environment. The new experience, dubbed 'Safari in the Morning,' enabled a more intimate meeting between young visitors and the safari's inhabitants (in contrast to ordinary visits, where families travel through the Safari on their own with no explanation other than that provided in a printed map and guide).

Third branding strategy: 'Safari 'Around the Clock'
In 2004, following the impressive success of the new branding strategy, with its appeal to two market segments simultaneously, the Safari's management decided to broaden its marketing and add other sub-brands. To ensure that the various sub-brands would not overlap, a small team comprising the Safari's general manager, marketing manager, spokesperson and educational manager was formed to examine the range of potential products. After a careful assessment, it was decided to re-brand the Safari under the concept 'Safari 'Around the Clock'. This new concept included four sub-

brands: 'Safari in the Morning' (which already existed), 'Safari at Sunset', 'Safari at Night' and 'Safari at Midnight' (Table 1). Each of these four sub-brands contributed to reinforcing the parent brand. The 'Safari in the Morning' sub-brand was awarded the slogan: "It doesn't get any wilder or more fascinating"; 'Safari at Sunset' was given the slogan: "Get the most out of those quiet moments before night falls"; the slogan for 'Safari at Night' was: "A safari by moonlight"; and the slogan for 'Safari at Midnight' was: "A wild and thrilling expedition".

'Safari in the Morning'

The company's management sought to update this existing sub-brand (which had been launched during the Safari's second branding period) so that it would complement the three new sub-brands while keeping its distinct character. The management's idea was to give visitors an experience based on four principles. These were: (1) Exposure to the work of the animal keepers. The keepers' job is an especially difficult and important one, requiring close contact with wild animals, hard work, and dedication, so that the animals will thrive and reproduce. (2) Respect for animals. One of the safari's main roles is to teach its visitors to respect animals and to educate them about how important it is to care for and nurture them. (3) The link between wildlife conservation and prevention of violence. The management believed that by exposing their visitors to the work of all the safari's different departments – work aimed at protecting, preserving and revitalizing animal species from all over the world – parents and children would learn to refrain from violence. According to this principle, a tour of several hours through the safari would demonstrate to visitors the immense love and close relationships between the animal keepers and their charges – and would offer an example of non-violent interactions that visitors could take with them out into the real world. (4) The bond between parents and children. The objective was to enable parents and children to spend unique quality time together, and foster a closeness that would remain after the visit ended.

Accordingly, management built a unique tour based on these four principles, including a guided train tour through the safari. During the tour, the guide stops at the night enclosures of some of the animals, including gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants, and keepers demonstrate how they release the animals into their yards and the visitors' zone. Visitors see up close how the animals are fed and participate in

feeding a few of the animals, such as baboons and pelicans; at the same time, they learn, how the keepers monitor the behavior and health of each animal. The tour ends with a lavish breakfast on the edge of the lake at the center of the safari. The tour takes about three hours and runs for eight months a year, throughout Israel's long dry season. Taking into consideration that the target audience is families with young children (ages 3 and up) and camp groups, management markets this tour using the emotional-social catchphrase: "It doesn't get any wilder or more fascinating." The message is conveyed to potential customers through media such as the Internet, general newspapers, radio and billboards, as well as through word of mouth and fliers. From customer satisfaction surveys taken after every tour, it appears that the most effective advertising source is word of mouth. Nonetheless, the safari management allocates significant resources for billboard ads, which currently show a family of elephants (a picture carefully chosen to convey a sense of love and intimacy). Bookings are arranged through two main channels: a booking center and contracts with camp organizers (generally made a year ahead).

'Safari at Sunset'

This sub-brand focuses on the same values, and the same target audience, as the 'Safari in the Morning.' Here, too, visitors are given a chance to become intimate with the animals by seeing them led between their yards and enclosures (in this case the animals are returned to their nighttime cages). Visitors observe keepers feeding the animals that eat in the late afternoon/early evening, such as the wolves and barn owls. The tour ends with an early evening meal in the area known as the 'African village,' adjacent to the zoo's rhinoceroses, hippopotami, zebras and other animals. The aim during the meal, as throughout the tour, is to create feelings of closeness between the visitors and nature. The tour takes about two and a half hours, starting from 16.00, and runs for eight months during Israel's dry season. Because most customers are young boys and girls taking enrichment courses, advertising through the general media is avoided in favor of promotional avenues such as the Internet, word of mouth and fliers. The picture on the ads and fliers, like that for the 'Safari in the Morning,' was chosen to convey the values of love and intimacy (the current ad shows a group of animals – rhinoceroses, hippopotami, ostriches and storks – at sunset). The slogan "Get the most out of those quiet moments before night falls," in conjunction with this

picture, contributes to the idea of togetherness. Most tours are arranged ahead of time through community centers offering enrichment classes for adolescents.

'Safari at Night'

The experience imparted by the third sub-brand is completely different from that of the two described above. The objective here was to focus on showing two main audiences the fascinating nightlife of the animals in the safari. For adolescents (junior-high and high-school youth), the idea was to create an educational-experiential tour that would enrich their knowledge about biology and zoology. The second target was employees of high-tech companies interested in an unforgettable social, educational, and sensory experience. For these purposes, the Safari created a tour that reaches places most visitors never get to see. Slowly and quietly, visitors travel by train into the lions' quarters, finding themselves barely a meter from the lions' den. Another station is the hippopotamus enclosure – considered one of the zoo's most dangerous spots because of these animals' extreme aggression. Other highlights include a visit to the taxidermy rooms and meetings with the zoo's top managers. In contrast to the child-oriented tours, which are led by a relatively large number of professional guides, the night tour guides are considered the most veteran and professional and are carefully selected following an extended training program. The tour starts aAround 20:00, lasts two and a half hours, and runs through the eight months of Israel's dry season. The Safari administration is aware of the appeal of this tour, and accordingly invests great efforts in advertising, particularly in the financial newspapers and in leisure and tourism magazines. In addition, Safari sales representatives make direct pitches at professional exhibitions, via a short film and promotional materials. The picture used in advertising this tour shows a number of animals against the backdrop of a luminescent moon.

'The Safari at Midnight'

Of all the sub-brands, the last one is alone in focusing on a single target audience – adults, and in particular, couples. Here visitors enjoy an intimate tour centered on the mating habits of the animals, with explanations by guides specially trained in the subject. Participants are taken on a walking tour of the zoo that includes visits to the bats, wolves, anteaters and barn owls, animals that mate at night. The tour begins at 11:00 p.m. and takes about two and a half hours. Marketing of this sub-brand is

through the Internet and word of mouth. The only promotional channel is the booking center.

Take in Table 1

Table 1: Features of the 'Safari 'Around the Clock' Strategy

Features	Safari in the Morning	Safari at Sunset	Safari at Night	Safari at Midnight
Marketing concept	"It doesn't get any wilder, more fascinating or thrilling"	"Get the most out of those quiet moments before night falls"	"A safari by moonlight"	"A wild and thrilling expedition"
Visit experience (social value)	- Exposure to the work of the safari's animal keepers - Respect for the animals - Wildlife conservation and prevention of violence - Bonding between parents & children	- Exposure to the work of the safari's animal keepers - Respect for the animals - Wildlife conservation and prevention of violence - Bonding between parents & children	Get to know the animals' fascinating nightlife	- Trace the intimate aspects of the animals' lives - Enhance the bond between husbands and wives

| Features	Safari in the Morning	Safari at Sunset	Safari at Night	Safari at Midnight
Attractions	Helping care for animals with the Safari's keepers.	Helping care for animals with the Safari's keepers.	Entering the animals' living areas	Getting acquainted with social relationships in the wild
Target audience	Ages 3 and up, families, children, camps	Ages 3 and up, families, children, adolescents, camps	Adolescents, groups of employees from high-tech companies	Married and unmarried couples (young and old)
Promotion	Internet, word of mouth, fliers, general newspapers, radio, billboards	Internet, word of mouth, fliers	Direct advertising to unions (fliers and financial newspapers) and Internet	Internet, word of mouth
Distribution channels	Booking center, camps	Booking center, camps, enrichment groups	Unions	Booking center

Results

The success of the sub-brands strategy of the Safari is reflected in terms of both number of tours (Figure 1) and income. Between 2004 and 2007, the number of organized 'Safari in the Morning' tours increased from 55 to 67 per year, and income rose by 27%. During the same period, the 'Safari at Sunset' more than doubled its annual tours (from 34 to 79), and income rose by 39%. The 'Safari at Night' saw a rise from 118 tours in 2004 to 141 four years later, and a growth in income of 12%. The biggest success story by far was the 'Safari at Midnight' sub-brand: In the three years from 2005 to 2007, the number of tours increased from 3 to 53, and income grew by

570%. In general, the four sub-brands increased the income of the parent brand name by more than 20% overall between 2004 and 2008. In addition, another study was carried out in late 2007 that was similar to the 2002 survey. Eight hundred fifty inhabitants from the Tel-Aviv metropolitan area were surveyed in order to determine whether the 'Safari Around the Clock' branding strategy was successful. Whereas the findings of the former study that took place in 2002 indicated that the Safari was not placed as one of the five most attractive leisure places in this metropolitan, the findings of this study indicated that the Safari was in the top rank of favorite and attractive places in the metropolitan area. Also the findings of this survey indicated that 76 per cent agreed with the statement that the Safari is a pleasant experiential leisure place and its entrance fee is justified. These opinions showed a significant, positive change from the survey undertaken in 2002. Thus, the change can be attributed to the re-branding campaign.

Take in Figure 1

Figure 1: Growth rate of the four tours (sub-brands) during 2004-2007
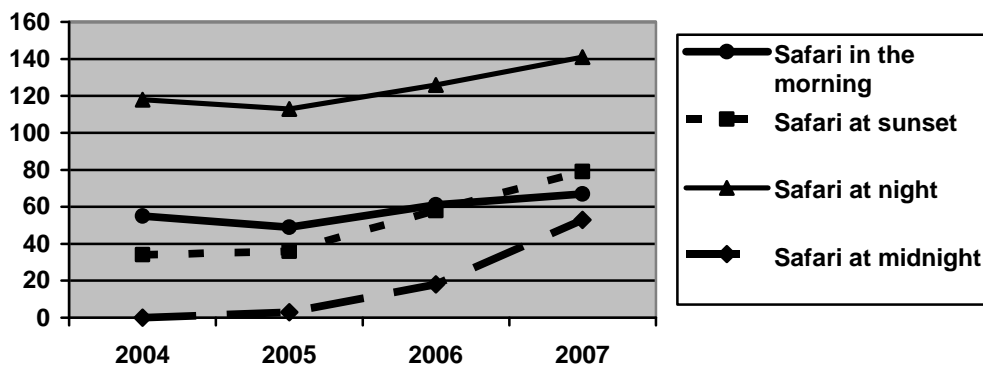
Practical implications

Over the past few years, branding research has seen growing interest from researchers and practitioners; yet most of this research focuses on countries, regions and cities. Yet due to the large investments made by developed countries in leisure-time culture and in creating diverse tourist attractions such as museums, theaters, movie houses,

shopping malls, sports arenas and zoos, the study of leisure destinations is most certainly important.

This case study demonstrates how using the strategy of sub-branding enabled a known brand to attract new customers while keeping the brand modern and up-to-date. The study shows that new product offerings for a brand can incorporate new features and other attributes to satisfy the needs of new customers as well as the changing desires of existing customers (Keller, 2003, p. 668). This case may serve as a model for places marketers, and especially leisure-time businesses confronted with ever-stronger competition. Today, businesses must battle both direct competitors who market the same service (packaged differently) to customers always on the lookout for new and innovative experiences, and competitors who bypass marketers by offering alternative services and new attractions. For the sub-brands strategy to work, leisure-time marketers must ensure that new products indeed do not overlap, by offering visitors a different experience at each sub-brand-related attraction. Furthermore, marketers must take care to use an integrated marketing communication strategy that exploits several marketing channels, each conveying a different message customized to precisely fit the target audience.

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