The Image and Perception of Silver Springs Commercials: A Focus Group Analysis of Columbus, OH Residents

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THE IMAGE AND PERCEPTION OF SILVER SPRINGS COMMERCIALS:
A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS OF COLUMBUS, OH RESIDENTS

Prepared for:

Silver Springs Management

by:

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GENERAL:

The major aim of the focus group was to identify main areas of concern regarding the impact of the four Silver springs commercials to be broadcasted in the State of Ohio.

Twelve residents of Columbus, OH participated in the two-hour focus group. Five participants were males and seven were females. Their ages ranged from early 20s to late 50s, and they represented an array of ethnic groups. This cross section representation of the population allowed different opinions and perceptions by the various participants.

It is important to mention that all of the respondents were experienced travelers and visited out-of-state destinations in the last two years. Among the visited destinations were Egypt, Europe, Caribbean, Maine, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Kentucky, Florida.

The focus group interview took place on 2/12/87 at the Columbus Technical Institute located in Springs Street, downtown Columbus. Participants were recruited by the Institute's staff in local shopping malls and other public places.

Please note that one respondent (female) recalled seeing one of the commercials on TV, but wasn't sure about that. In addition, one respondents (female) visited Silver Springs and enjoyed her visit.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology used in the focus group was the "Funnel Approach" in which broad topics were introduced first by the moderator and as the discussion progressed, the topics were narrowed down to the major area of concern, Silver Springs Commercials. This approach was adopted to create a tourist-leisure atmosphere among the participants, before any conversation about Florida attractions, in particular Silver Springs is introduced.
FINDINGS:

Leisure activities preferred by the participants:

The participants divided into two major groups: The first group consisted of those participants who preferred to be active and enjoyed sports activities like golfing, fishing, boating, tennis, swimming, biking or dancing. The second group consisted of those people who liked a more passive way of spending their leisure time like "relaxing," "reading" or "watching TV or VCR."

A small majority mentioned that they like to travel.

Travel out of town was relatively limited: shopping, visiting family and friends. Day trips were common among the respondents to a limited number of destinations in Ohio. Note that the word "vacation" was not mentioned.

Vacation travel behavior (preferred activities):

Shopping, sightseeing, seeing new things and how different people act were a priority among the participants. In addition, eating-out and "being busy all the time with activities" were also important. Some mentioned the "Sun and Sea" as important components of their vacation.

Mixing with other people at the vacation destination was important to some participants while others preferred to be secluded away from the crowds.

In general, the participants preferred to visit and experience natural over man-made attractions, however, shopping malls and museums seemed to have high priority.

Preferred destinations:

The availability of various activities at the destination was very important to the participants (for example: cruise lines, the Bahamas, Las Vegas, Central Florida).

Visiting remote and exotic places were also important: Egypt, a cruise to Alaska, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, South America, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland.

People were interested in something different,

"Depends on time of the year" was also an important factor when deciding where to go.
Florida Vacation:

The majority of the respondents visited the "sunshine state." Florida was associated with vacation images such as: Disney World, Mickey Mouse, sunshine, flowers, palm trees, leisure, Spring Break, Everglades, and "early reservations."

Some associated Florida with non-tourist images like: oranges, hurricanes, lizards, retirement, Miami Vice (mentioned a few times throughout the discussion).

Florida Attractions:

Disney theme Parks were not mentioned immediately. Water parks like Wet and Wild, WDW's Fort Wilderness were mentioned as favorable spots followed by EPCOT. Please note that the majority of the participants who did not visit EPCOT did not know about its features, however, "word-of-mouth" advertising of friends and relatives who had visited motivated people to go.

Cypress Gardens was perceived as a non-tourist attractions, while the Everglades were considered a place to be visited and a lot of people knew about it.

Silver Springs:

When the name of the park was originally introduced, some respondents said that the name did not "turn them on" and therefore they did not want to visit the park during their Florida vacation.

With regard to the image of the glass bottom boat attraction, some said that it was not unique to Silver springs since "everybody has it", However, the respondent who visited the park said that the Silver Springs glass bottom boat was a very unique experience and it was the best she has ever seen.

Those people who never visited or heard of Silver Springs perceived it to be "some type of a park" with trees and a lot of tropical vegetation. Silver Springs was also associated with water, springs, and water falls.

After describing the park and its features (based on the AAA Florida guide and Silver Springs brochure) the park did not appeal to a lot of people as a first priority of Florida's attractions.

Scheduling of shows, or the opportunity to choose between shows was important to some of the respondents, who initially perceived the park featuring its attractions with no precise timetable.
Silver Springs Commercials:

1. Ray Walker "Country:"

The music (country) was the major and toughest criticism: "It sounds like you would like us to go to Nashville" or "It sounds like a fried chicken commercial." Almost all of the respondents were in consensus that this music should not be associated with Florida, and that more current music or music that will be associated with Florida (some suggested Miami Vice) is more appropriate.

Some respondents said that the commercial did not tackle the important factor of admission price. They preferred to know how much it costs before they arrive at the Park's gate. Most people were willing to pay between $10 and $20, but never committed themselves to visit. However, some said that the price of an attraction should not be very low, so people will feel that there is not much to see and therefore will not be motivated to visit.

Finally, people were not convinced to go, and said that they would not make a special trip. They might visit Silver Springs on the way down to Orlando.

2. Lloyd Bridges:

The participants said that the clips were not as fast going as the previous commercial, that is, the pictures were not switched from one scene to another as quickly as in the Ray Walker commercial.

Some commented on the sentence that "It is the only place in Florida where you can see a man wrestling an alligator..." "That is not true." since "There are many other places in Florida that you can see these things."

The personality who sells the product was very important to most participants (Lloyd Bridges). Some people said that Lloyd Bridges was convincing and that "he made you believe that it is something special." With regard to the commercial personality, one lady commented: "do you know how many people Don Johnson could get to come down to Florida?"

The audio background of the commercial was also more appealing: people preferred to hear the birds and animals in the background rather than the country music.

This commercial took care of the "low admission price" for all day which was favorable information.
3. Lloyd Bridges:

This commercial was not as favorable as the previous one: "It did not give us information and it was not exciting."

Lloyd Bridges' tone of voice was not as convincing: He did not seem as sincere, and it looks like he read it from a film script.

Some wording like "Make friends with a free roaming society of monkeys." was criticized due to the fact that some audience (in particular children) will not understand this line.

This commercial shows many people taking the boat rides or watching the shows (for example, the snake show), and this may indicate a crowded park which will not appeal to many. However, the picture of the boat going down the river was very attractive.

The respondent who visited the park said that an important feature to include in the commercial was the petting zoo and the deer park, as well as the "beautiful gardens."

The commercial was not perceived to appeal to kids "but to their parents."

4. Lloyd Bridges:

The "value for money" concept was comprehended immediately, but some said it was too much: "He pushed the bargain too much."

The cars were included and it seemed to be important to many participants. Ohio is very famous for antique car collection: Antique Car Association is in Ohio.

Again, the tone of voice was not as appealing as the second commercial.

FINAL DEBATE OVER THE FOUR COMMERCIALS:

An informal vote for the most appealing commercial was taken among the participants. The most appealing commercial was commercial #2, followed by commercial #4. A synthesis of the messages in both commercials would seem most appropriate.

Respondents liked commercial #2 because of Lloyd Bridges tone of voice: "he was convincing", the exciting pictures: (monkeys jumping from the trees, snake show).

Respondents liked commercial #4 because of the antique cars shown, the value for money, less crowded image, more animals were shown other than snakes and monkeys (giraffe).
Finally, with regard to future intentions to visit, it appeared that the participants would like to go to Florida and see Silver Springs after the two-hour experience they had. However, respondents did not commit themselves although they said "the commercials definitely helped."