

Channelling interested consumers to another source of information or contact was seen as a way of converting interest into sales as well as taking the pressure off the posts to provide information at the consumer level.

At the same time, the view was expressed that post staff should have more direct input into the advertising media schedule and timing, in order to provide the advertising agency with the local media knowledge that could identify better placement opportunities.

▶▶ **Consumer Servicing Is Seen As Critical**

Direct consumer servicing was the issue that ranked highest on the "needs" list of American-based operators. Despite the advertising, consumer awareness of Canada as a tourism destination is extremely low; consumers simply do not ask for Canada when they go to their local travel agent for a travel experience.

At the same time, the 1-800 links to provincial tourism authorities are not working. If the phone is answered at all, and even if the advice is good, the time between request and delivery of information is so long (average six weeks) that the spontaneous motivation on the part of the potential traveller has disappeared. No information, brochures or other collateral is available through the posts even though the posts are the first logical point of contact for someone interested in Canada.

Anecdotally, while in New York, Review Team members witnessed several "potential" tourists interested in Canada attempting to get information through the direct phone lines to the provinces – to no avail. They did not leave the post unsatisfied; they left the post angry.

When the question of consumer servicing arose with the Canadian and American-based operators, all expressed a willingness to discuss the issue from a perspective of direct financial participation. For example, there are almost two dozen one or two-person Canadian tourism-focussed operations in New York City working more or less independently from each other. However, combining forces to strengthen direct consumer support may not be achievable in any practical manner without a very creative strategy and the leadership necessary to make it happen.

▶▶ **Air Travel Links Act As A Real Barrier**

The ability of the posts to help develop new tourism business opportunities is directly hampered by the inadequacy of air links between major American cities and potential Canadian destinations. In some cases, existing air links are poor, with limited service or seat capacity; in others, such as Atlanta, non-stop air links simply do not exist.

▶▶ **Canada's Image Deteriorates As You Move South**

The image of Canada and the awareness of the Canadian tourism product deteriorates in direct proportion to the distance from the Canadian border. Much, if not all, of the Tourism Canada advertising is directed to promoting Canada's image in the United States and raising the level of consumer awareness of what Canada, generally, has to offer. Since most of this effort is directed to the border states, efforts to educate and support the travel trade are rather limited in the long-haul destinations (eg. airline, tour, long-stay).

While this makes the task of the post staff doubly difficult, because they have no umbrella support, it also ignores market potential that could generate real dollar value for the Canadian industry. Clearly, there is a real job to do to educate the industry while, at the same time, increasing consumer awareness levels. This seems to be a high value-added opportunity of which Canada is not taking advantage.