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CASE STUDY

Captain Cook Cruises, Sydney

Engaging with Japan

Sydney, New South Wales

Captain Cook Cruises has been operating on Sydney Harbour for over 43 years and in November 2011 moved from family to private ownership and now offer a broader range of products in locations such as Adelaide and Kangaroo Island through to Townsville and the Great Barrier Reef. The company has been dealing with international markets for over 40 years, initially starting with travellers from North America and Europe. Captain Cook Cruises now provides experiences to travellers from over 20 countries, and the Japanese market was the first Asian market that the company targeted as part of its international strategy.

Captain Cook has recognised the importance of the Japanese market for some time and according to Richard Doyle, Head of Sales and Marketing at the national office in Sydney, it has become a high yield market which tends to seek a high quality experience.

'At Captain Cook Cruises we have built a high end cruise ship specifically for the Japanese market which has gained popularity with dining cruises and honeymoon programs. This addition has also been valuable when targeting other international markets, so it has been a worthwhile addition to the business.'

Richard explains that when working with the Japanese market,

'building a relationship is the way to build business'.

In the beginning, the company invested heavily in building relationships and meeting with wholesalers and Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs) in Australia and staff from Captain Cook Cruises would attend many of the trade missions and marketing events in Japan. Once key business relationships have been established it is not necessary for staff to attend as many events in Japan but they do still fly to Japan bi-annually to attend selected events so they can maintain relationships and investigate other opportunities.

In order to better engage with the Japanese market, Captain Cook Cruises employs a Japanese speaking sales manager who works with all their distribution partners on various packages such as groups, schools, package tours or special interest. The company has also adapted its social media strategy for the Japanese market and launched a new website with a Japanese landing page that provides details of their cruise and dining products. Using the website, Japanese customers can make online bookings. Other marketing strategies include having



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collateral for the Japanese market. New brochures translated into Japanese were presented at the 2013 Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE). The brochures did not include prices but they more importantly focused on the product and experiences so distributors would have collateral with strong visual images, written in Japanese to show future clients.

‘One of the competitive advantages of Captain Cook Cruises is its consistency of product offering and delivery. Although competitors may have dropped their price, the consistency of our product delivery has been a strong strategic point and the market has responded well to it,’ Richard says.

Creating small differences to set your business apart is another tip that Richard recommends. On dinner cruises, a singer will perform a song in Japanese which is always well-received by Japanese guests. Keeping Japanese travellers comfortable is also very important. A critical part of the cruise experience is Japanese speaking wait staff who enable Japanese travellers to communicate effortlessly. They can also make their own requests with ease, adding greatly to their comfort level.

It is important to be aware that the Japanese are different from other markets in terms of their psyche, and each market in Asia is different. For this reason, Captain Cook Cruises employs three sales managers to look after the Asian region.

When it comes to complaints, Japanese customers who have had an issue with their experience will often complain when they go back to Japan and the complaint will be directed to their travel agents who will then inform Captain Cook Cruises.

Richard recommends having in place strong processes in case something does go wrong. Captain Cook Cruises has created a checklist of processes including the role of specific staff members and in some cases the sales manager will contact the agents to explain what has happened. This is also part of maintaining a strong relationship with distribution partners and ensuring that complaints or problems are dealt with appropriately to minimise any risk to brand reputation.

‘When you’re starting out, it is important to understand the market including distribution channels and life cycle and you should get your product into brochures’ Richard explains.

‘Lead times from different channels can be up to 6 or 12 months and there are various levels of entry including packages, groups, schools, media, online, and special interest. It is also a good idea to work with Tourism Australia and your state or local tourism organisation as they may be able to offer assistance to engage with the Japanese market.’

A good starting point is to be included in major packages offered by ITOs and work together with them to promote your destination. Captain Cook Cruises has worked with ITOs to lift the value of one of their new destinations, Kangaroo Island Partners at both ends have made efforts for the Japanese market such as providing Japanese speaking wait staff onboard cruises and tour guides for island activities.

Richard emphasises that you need to maintain your price integrity, value proposition and consistency in delivery, and that if you invest your time in targeting a market you should understand that it’s not just for today or tomorrow - you need to view it as the next ten years.

Richard’s top tips

- Be aware that each market in Asia is different
- When working with the Japanese market, building a relationship is the way to build business
- Quality service delivery and safety is highly important to the Japanese market – ensure you are consistent when working with this market
- Ensure that you understand the market including distribution channels and life cycle and aim to get your product included in brochures
- Create small differences to set yourself apart
- Work with Tourism Australia and your local state tourism organisation
- Take a long term view to investing your time today