

## **Succeeding in tourism**

**A series of practical articles by Chris Elphick, Breadfruit Consulting, aimed at tourism SMEs.**

### **Article four – sustainable tourism and new ideas**

Over the next few weeks I will focus on the challenges and opportunities facing small businesses working in the tourism industry.

Even though sustainability is of concern to all businesses it is particularly relevant to the tourism industry. We have to think not only in terms of a sustainable business but a sustainable environment in which to operate.

Firstly, a sustainable business. In business it is impossible to be 100% sustainable as we do not know what external economic or political factors could cause us severe problems. All we can do is to prepare as best we can for a sustainable future. That means we must consider:

- A clear vision of where we are heading with our business.
- Business planning that is future focused and taking us towards that vision.
- Recruiting, training and keeping a winning team of exceptional people.
- Consistently exceeding the expectations of our customers by delivering awesome service all the time.
- Developing a culture of continuous improvement by eliminating waste and improving the value of the services we offer our customers.
- Delivering products and services that are memorable and designed to make people want to come back and bring their friends.
- Systems and procedures, including financial ones, that are fit for purpose, up-to-date and user friendly.
- Making sure we are prepared for a quick business comeback following a disaster – business resilience is not an optional extra.

Secondly, a sustainable environment. Most tourism businesses attract visitors because of where they are situated – middle of a city, remote rural area, idyllic island, middle of a village, on a lagoon, near a larger resort and so on. Those environments have to be kept as pristine and clean as possible. We are obviously not totally responsible but without them it is likely that customers will stop coming.

When we train our staff we must make sure that they understand that cleaning up outside is as important as a clean room or well-made bed.

Even the smallest operator can make a contribution towards a sustainable environment:

- Replace plastic immediately
- Refuse deliveries that include plastic
- Recycle glass and cans
- Have recycling bins in each room

- Reduce the number of times towels and bedding are washed
- Switch to environmentally friendly cleaning materials
- Keep your areas including beaches, walks, bush, waterfront clean and free from litter
- Serve local food cooked in local ways
- Consider alternative sources of power – solar, wind.
- Network and collaborate with other local businesses to share resources and ideas. Join a local tourism or business group.
- Read the newspaper to see what donor funded programmes could help you – climate change is a big user of donor money.
- Train your staff to understand why these things are important.
- Reduce the use of white rice and excess sugar, especially in fizzy drinks
- Promote healthy activities for staff and guests
- Reduce the use of fuel for vehicles and boats

It is not good enough to say, 'what can I do, I'm only a one-person operator'. If we all do one thing every day towards a sustainable environment, then we will soon make a difference!

Finally, sustainability requires us to focus on the future and on finding new ways of doing things – new ideas. One new idea a day will make an enormous difference to your business, your staff, your customers and your environment – remember ideas could come from staff, suppliers, the community, other businesses and, of course, customers. Letting your customers know that you are focused on sustainability is a good marketing strategy – they will tell others and they will be supportive. If you can, use the web! There are thousands of good ideas out there – we do not have to keep reinventing the wheel.

Sustainable is not an optional extra – it is a business essential and without it we are likely to be out of business very quickly.

If you have any tourism issues you would like me to cover during this series, please contact me.

Coming next, employing friends and family.

**Chris Elphick is Partner in Breadfruit Consulting, supporting the development of a range of businesses and organisations in Melanesia and other parts of the Pacific. He is an experienced trainer, coach and business mentor and has years of experience of working with Small & Medium Enterprises. He and his partner Hazel Kirkham live in Vanuatu and are involved with tourism operators and their businesses in several Pacific countries.**

**Breadfruit Consulting have partnered with Fiji Entrepreneur to develop mentoring services for new and young entrepreneurs.**

**If you have an issue or query related to this article, please contact Chris at [chris@breadfruitconsulting.com](mailto:chris@breadfruitconsulting.com) or text to +6785500556**