

# Meta-Evaluations of Performance Audits of Government Tourism-Marketing Programs

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*A meta-evaluation is an assessment of evaluation practices. Meta-evaluations include assessments of validity and usefulness of two or more studies focused on the same issues. This article describes specific recommendations on how to achieve effective performance audits of government tourism-marketing departments and programs, as well as how to achieve effective tourism-marketing programs.*

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## INTRODUCTION TO META-EVALUATION

In 1969, New York established the first state auditing and evaluation unit. Now, 61 such government departments exist in the United States, at least 1 in each of the 50 states (Brooks 1997). Each of these auditing offices are assigned by their state legislatures the authority and responsibility to conduct financial audits and performance audits of government departments and their specific programs. The mandate of these auditing offices is to provide answers to the following issues:

- Is the audited department spending funds legally and properly in accordance with its legislative mandate, are the department's accounting and internal control systems adequate, and are the department's financial statements accurate?
- Is the department managing its operations efficiently?
- Is the department achieving substantial impact in effectively accomplishing its goals?

Thus, the auditing work done for state legislative branches includes two major categories of audits: (1) financial audits and (2) performance audits. Some state audit manuals distinguish between program, operations, and management audits (e.g., The Auditor 1994). For example,

*a program audit focuses on how effectively a set of activities achieves objectives. A program audit can be stand-alone or be combined with an operations audit. An operations audit focuses on the efficiency and economy with which an agency conducts its operations. In Hawaii the term management audit is used often to refer to an audit that combines aspects of program and operations audit (Hawaii 1987, 1993). A management audit examines the effectiveness of a program or the efficiency of an agency in implementing the program or both. (The Auditor 1994, pp. 1-2)*

An audit is "inherently retrospective, concerned with detection of errors past—whereas many evaluative techniques can be applied retrospectively, concurrently, or prospectively" (Pollitt and Summa 1997, p. 89). While additional differences between audits and evaluations have been described (see Pollitt and Summa 1997), the Association of Governmental Accountants emphasizes that

policy makers [want] reliable facts and sound, independent professional judgment, and they care little about . . . terminology. They use terms like performance auditing and program evaluation interchangeably. Their greatest concern is that they get answers to their most pressing questions about the performance of government programs and agencies. (AGA Task Force Report 1993, p. 13, quoted in Brooks 1997, p. 115)

Thus, while recognizing that some differences may be pointed out, we use the terms *performance auditing* and *program evaluation* interchangeably.

## META-EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

Scriven (1969) created the term *meta-evaluation* to mean an evaluation of evaluations. Meta-evaluations have three central objectives. First, meta-evaluations are syntheses of the findings and inferences of research on performance—both on the managing and effectiveness in achieving goals of programs. Thus, meta-evaluations help increase our knowledge and insight about what works well and poorly in managing programs.

Second, meta-evaluations are reports on the validity and usefulness of evaluation methods. They include guidance in the methods useful to use for evaluating.

Third, meta-evaluations may provide strong inference on the impact and payback of enacting specific decisions. Consequently, the findings in meta-evaluations help to justify and increase the confidence of legislative members and

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program managers in designs and implementation of specific decisions. This third objective meets the instrumental-use criterion for evaluations described by Cook (1997): "Would those who pay for evaluation be satisfied if it created enlightenment but did not feed more directly into specific decisions? I'm not sure they would" (p. 27). Related to a travel decision, Campbell (1969) provided a detailed meta-evaluation that fulfills this third objective in summarizing multiple studies on the impact of the legislated requirement to wear safety helmets by motorcyclists.

Thus, presenting bad news is not the focus of a meta-evaluation. The focus is on increasing useful "sensemaking" (Weick 1995) and reducing "knowing what isn't so" (Gilovich 1991) in evaluations. Sense making is creating, examining, and revising plausible explanations of events that have occurred; sense making is always retrospective: "People can know what they are doing only after they have done it" (Weick 1995, p. 24). Auditing is one category of sense making.

Most retrospective processes cause problems: "People are extraordinarily good at ad hoc explanation" (Gilovich 1991, p. 21). However, humans are biased strongly in favor of misinterpreting incomplete and unrepresentative data. "A fundamental difficulty with effective policy evaluation is that we rarely get to observe what would have happened if the policy had not been put into effect [implemented]. Policies are not implemented as controlled experiments but as concerted actions" (Gilovich 1991, pp. 41-42). Without training, we rarely make and implement plans to find evidence disconfirming our beliefs. This observation applies to government tourism-marketing programs. For example, the tourism evaluation literature on the impacts of government tourism-marketing programs does not apply research designs for gathering disconfirming evidence (e.g., the use of control groups of persons not exposed to the marketing program to compare with marketing treatment groups; see Woodside 1990).

Kotler (1997) defined a marketing audit to mean

a comprehensive, systematic, independent, and periodic examination of a company's—or business units' [or, policy program such as government tourism-marketing programs]—marketing environment, objectives, strategies, and activities with a view to determining problem areas and opportunities and recommending a plan of action to improve the company's marketing performance. (P. 777)

He reported,

Most experts agree that self-audits lack objectivity and independence . . . the best audits are likely to come from outside consultants who have the necessary objectivity, broad experience in a number of industries, some familiarity with the industry being audited, and the undivided time and attention to give to the audit. (P. 777)

He continued by stating,

The cardinal rule in marketing auditing is: Don't rely solely on the company's managers for data and opinion. Customers, dealers [i.e., firms carrying manufacturers' product lines], and other outside groups must

also be interviewed. Many companies do not really know how their customers and dealers see them, nor do they fully understand customer needs and value judgments. (Kotler 1997, p. 779)

Similar to Scriven's (1974) "Key Evaluation Checklist," Kotler (1997) provided checklists, rating forms, and open-ended questionnaires useful for the marketing audit he described (see pp. 776-82). Kotler's "Components of a Marketing Audit" open-ended questionnaire is focused on evaluating the behavior of markets, customers (or clients), competitors, distribution and dealers, facilitators and marketing firms, and publics. His audit form includes questions relating to valuing how well the executives of the audited organization are scanning the organization's stakeholders (e.g., markets, industry, customers, and competitors), planning decisions, implementing these decisions, and assessing profitability and costs.

A review of the marketing and strategic management literature (e.g., Buzzell and Gale 1987; Clifford and Cavanagh 1985; Huff 1990; Kay 1995; Kotler 1997) and theories of program evaluation (Bellavita, Wholey, and Abramson 1986; Brooks 1997; Chen and Rossi 1983; Patton 1997; Scriven 1995; Shadish, Cook, and Leviton 1991; Stake 1980; Stake et al. 1997; Weiss 1972, 1987; Wholey 1977, 1983) leads to the following propositions. Performance audits of government tourism-marketing programs that include the following traits are most likely to result in achieving the goals of government and public stakeholders:

- Comprehensive by including both (post)positivistic and relativistic research methods and both objective and subjective views of realities
- Valuing both program activities and results
- Done using a "partnering" (Wholey 1983) approach by a "working party" (e.g., as applied in Australia 1993) of representatives of three or five organizations assigned full-time to perform the audit

The perspective of accepting both objective and subjective realities is an example of applying Weick's (1979) recommendations for sense making.

In environments where multiple contingencies arise, responses that are appropriate at one point in time may be detrimental at another. Cause mappings (see Huff 1990) valid at one point in time may be invalid at another. Flexibility to deal with environmental changes is maintained if opposed responses are preserved. (Weick 1979, p. 220)

Advanced database-marketing strategies include several characteristics, including the following features:

- learning the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of customers and entering them into a database;
- having online computer files for each individual customer that can be accessed when a customer telephones or contacts the tourism department by e-mail;
- creating active two-way communication strategies that include outbound contacts with customers beyond the one time of requested brochures—based on knowing individual customer's leisure travel preferences and behavior; and

- creating special member benefits for uniquely valuable visitors—such as a frequent-visitor programs found in many industries.

Even though their widespread use by government tourism-marketing programs has not occurred (Woodside and Sakai 1999), examples of such database marketing strategies exist in many travel-related industries, for example, car rental firms, credit card companies, and airlines.

In Figure 1, five specific activities are summarized that occur, or should occur, in a government tourism-marketing program. These activities include administering, scanning, planning, implementing, and assessing the performance quality of activities and program system outputs. Including details on each of the five activities in a performance audit is a useful step toward achieving comprehensive evaluations of government tourism-marketing programs.

### Evidence of Scanning and Interpreting

Scanning includes both formal and informal collecting and interpreting data on the behaviors, attitudes, and intentions of relevant stakeholders: clients (e.g., households believed to be prospective visitors, known inquirers requesting the advertised free literature offer, and households known to have visited the state recently), suppliers (including legislative and executive branches supplying funds and program objectives), competitors, distributors, internal marketing staff, and additional parties (e.g., advertising agencies and industry representatives). Evidence of lack of formal scanning of stakeholder groups, especially potential customer markets, is an indicator of poor performance, arrogance, and the lack of management expertise. Daft and Weick (1984) noted that patterns of scanning, interpreting, and learning vary across organizations as a function of their willingness to act in order to learn and their willingness to accept that the environment is difficult to analyze.

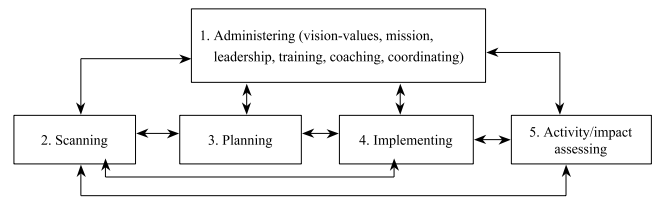
Related to the issue of formal scanning of relevant stakeholders, the issue of interpretation includes whether a formal overall evaluation of the tourism-marketing program and “products” (i.e., state tourism services, benefits delivered, and visitor-perceived trip value) has been completed. In short, have program managers completed a formal overall evaluation of the program’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—a SWOT analysis? Is an annual SWOT analysis report prepared annually based on new scanning data?

### Evidence of Planning

A formal, annual marketing plan includes the following:

- an executive summary (usually prepared in 2 to 4 pages);
- a statement on the current marketing situation, including a SWOT and issue analysis, and the decisions and outcomes of segmenting markets and customers to identify potential visitors most likely to be influenced by the state’s tourism-marketing programs (4 to 6 pages);

**FIGURE 1**  
**DECISIONS AND ACTIONS OF STATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENTS**



- objectives that have been converted into measurable goals—to facilitate implementation and impact measurement (1 page);
- a marketing strategy—including a “what if” analysis and indicating the major decisions in the plan, for example, target markets and advertising strategy (e.g., “a 200-page, fact-filled visitor’s information guide will be prepared, and the offer for the free guide will be featured in all advertisements”) (6 to 10 pages);
- action plans/programs—present the details and schedules of what is to be done by whom, when, and how, as well as additional, related, special-events marketing activities (4 to 6 pages);
- projected cost-benefit analysis—including the estimated expenditures by visitors in the state and state taxes collected resulting from implementing the tourism-marketing program (2 pages); and
- controls—indicating how the planned activities will be monitored to ensure performance and details of the methods used to measure the net impacts of the tourism-marketing program on inquiries, intentions, visits, revenues, and taxes (4 pages).

Does formal planning (i.e., a written statement explaining what you are going to do and why) really matter? Believing the answer to be obviously yes, to ask the question seems surprising. However, examining this issue is important—especially since the available reports of government audits do not describe the creation of written formal plans for the tourism-marketing programs (e.g., see Australia 1993; Hawaii 1987, 1993; Minnesota 1985; Missouri 1996; North Carolina 1989; Tennessee 1995).

Armstrong (1982) conducted a meta-evaluation of all published research on evaluation of formal planning. In his evaluation, Armstrong asked, What is the value of formal planning? His analysis indicates the following:

Formal planning was superior in 10 of the 15 comparisons drawn from 12 studies, while informal planning was superior in only two comparisons. Although this research did not provide sufficient information on the use of various aspects of the planning process, stakeholders [in the formal planning process] provided mild support for having participation. Formal planning tended to be more useful where large changes were involved, but, beyond that, little information

was available to suggest when formal planning is most valuable. (Armstrong 1985, p. 582)

*The usefulness of written reflection.* An annual written plan would benefit from including a “retrospective commentary” (in 2 to 4 pages). In this retrospective commentary, answers to the following issues should be provided:

- How does what happened last year affect our current strategic plans and action plans?
- What was planned last year that was executed well as well as poorly? Why?
- What was planned that did not get done? Why?
- What got done (i.e., noteworthy events) that was unplanned? Why?
- What did not get done but should have been planned and done? Why?

By including a retrospective commentary, program managers force themselves to reflect—to examine last year’s annual marketing plan and ponder for a few moments about what happened and why (not necessarily, what things that went well and poorly, and why). Without a retrospective commentary, last year’s annual plan may never get noticed, or used, after it is written. Weick (1995) provided telling comments in advocating reflection, “Reflection is perhaps the best stance for both researchers and practitioners to adopt if the topic of sensemaking is to advance” (p. 192). He further observed that

people can know what they are doing only after they have done it. . . . The creation of meaning is an attentional process, but it is attention to that which has already occurred. . . . Only when a response occurs can a plausible stimulus then be defined [to explain its occurrence]. (Pp. 24-26)

This meta-sense-making view fits with the theory and empirical work in strategic management by Mintzberg (1978). Mintzberg defined strategy as observed patterns in past decisional behavior. Retrospection and research similar to Mintzberg’s studies on realized strategies lead naturally into mapping strategy (see Huff 1990) and program evaluation using strategy mapping tools (e.g., Stubbart and Ramaprasad 1988). Consequently, retrospection may be viewed usefully as a valuable major tool for both sense making and program evaluation theory and research.

Figure 2 is intended to be a useful sense-making tool for retrospective analysis—in comparing planned strategies with realized strategies. Note that the bottom right-hand cell reflects the use of future perfect thinking applied to the immediate past: what did not happen that was unplanned but might have (should have) occurred?

In one study on using future perfect thinking for sense making, Boland (1993) gathered a group of film-lending executives in 1980, provided them with accounting reports prepared for 1982 to 1985, and asked them to imagine it was July 21, 1985, and then to discuss what the film service had become and why. Boland reported that a major outcome of the study was that, in trying to understand what had been done in an imaginary future, participants discovered that they had an inadequate understanding of an actual past. The study uncovered disagreements about the nature and meaning of

past events that people did not realize had impeded their current decision making (from Weick 1995, p. 29).

Compared with not using such a sense-making tool, answering the issues raised in all four cells in Figure 2 promotes reflective thinking and likely will result in more useful, deeper sense making. “All the mysteries become clearer [and some are solved] when we pay more attention to how people plumb the past and to what outcomes they have *in hand* [italics added] when they do so” (Weick 1995, p. 185).

## Evidence of Implementing

Assuming that Mintzberg (1978) was correct in proposing that realized strategies rarely are the same as planned strategies, both program administrators and performance auditors need to attend to what actually was done. Implementing includes accomplishing and not accomplishing the completion of events scheduled in the marketing plan. Implementation questions include the following:

- What was done?
- By whom?
- Where?
- When?
- How was it done (i.e., the detailed steps and with what observed levels of skills)?
- What occurred next (i.e., the event chain following the event)?

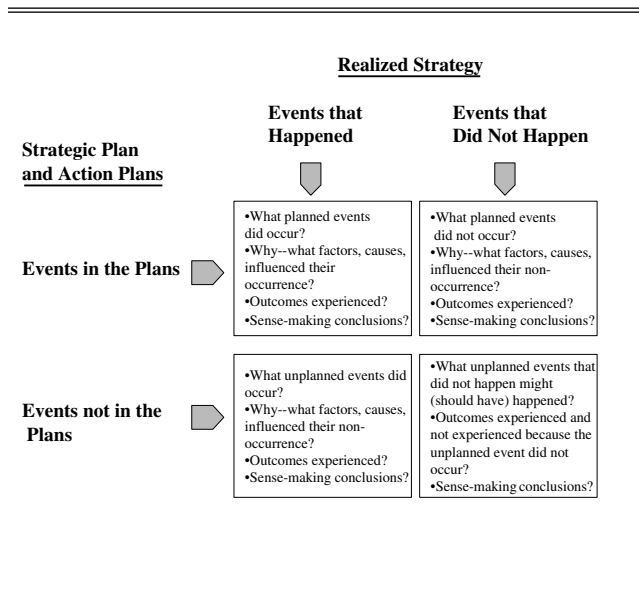
Marketing implementation has been defined to mean the process that turns marketing plans into action assignments and ensures that such assignments are executed in a manner that accomplishes the plan’s stated objectives (see Goetsch 1993; Bonoma 1985; Kotler 1997). This definition is narrower and prescriptively oriented for effective marketing implementation to capture our view that marketing implementation is accomplishing specific acts.

For purposes of sense making and performance auditing in program evaluation, three concerns about implementation are central: (1) learning the details done and not done in the streams of behavior that were actually implemented, (2) comparing these realized actions with the actions planned in the marketing plan, and (3) learning the immediate and downstream outcomes to the observed stream of implemented decisions and behaviors. The intended shift here is from prescription toward description.

For both program management and program evaluation, specific issues to be examined for describing implementation include the following points—implementation mapping, critical incidents, coaching and coordination, and nonevent analysis:

- Have service-performance-process maps (see, e.g., Shostack 1987) or causal policy maps (see, e.g., Hall, Aitchison, and Kocay 1994) been created that accurately describe implemented behavior, including the downstream events occurring as a result of implementations? Such mapping tools help us to learn the intricacies and nuances that have occurred in recent implementations.
- What critical incidents (see, e.g., Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Price, Arnould, and Tierney 1995) occurred during the implementation of the program?

**FIGURE 2**  
**SENSE-MAKING TOOL FOR PREPARING**  
**RETROSPECTIVE COMMENTARY OF**  
**THE ANNUAL MARKETING PLAN**



What were the immediate and downstream influences (outputs) of these critical incidents? What combination of events (inputs) resulted in the critical incident?

- How many times did on-the-job coaching and coordination actions occur during program implementation? How many times did senior program executives and middle managers participate in online implementation of day-to-day activities in different departments of the program? Weekly, monthly, quarterly, once per year?
- What events did not occur that were unplanned? Which of these unplanned nonevents would have likely resulted in substantial favorable versus unfavorable outputs for the program?

In summary, three points are emphasized. First, use ethnographic research tools to describe what is happening. Several worthwhile implementation research tools are available for creating “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) of realized strategies. Such tools are being used in several industries (e.g., consumer-packaged goods and tourism service firms) to achieve deep understanding—improved sense making—of implemented strategies (see Arnould and Wallendorf 1994 for detailed examples). These tools are helpful for both program administrators and performance auditors.

Second, in reviewing available performance audits of the tourism-marketing programs (Australia 1993; Hawaii 1987, 1993; Minnesota 1985; Missouri 1996; North Carolina 1989; Tennessee 1995), little evidence is found in using such tools. These audit reports include neither detailed descriptions of the activities actually performed nor the policy maps of the decisions implemented.

Third, the argument that members of the legislative branch will not read such thick descriptions of implementation misses the more important point: the reason for implementation research is to improve sense making and decision

making among program administrators and performance auditors. Meta-evaluation of implementation research helps to overcome Cook’s (1997) impression: “My impression, perhaps mistaken, is that we evaluators are less deliberate and systematic than others in accumulating substantive findings and in drawing inferences about the programs and classes of programs that seem to work best” (p. 48).

The U.S. findings of empirical studies on the reading and use of performance audit reports are consistent for both state and federal legislative members. The evidence is remarkably clear: these reports will not be read by legislators, with few exceptions (for a review of these studies, see Patton 1997, especially Chapter 1). Even when read, little to no impact results from legislators reading these reports. If the reports are going to be read and used to cause improvements in program performance, several stakeholders need to “buy in” to the findings, conclusions, and recommendations in the report. Possibly the only effective buy-in, performance-auditing tool that works is Wholey’s (1983) partnering approach. The Australian (Australia 1993) performance audit is the one example found of this partnering approach applied to tourism-marketing program evaluation.

### Impact Assessment of the Performance Quality, Conformance Quality, and Quality in Use of Program Activities and Program System Outputs

The term *performance quality* refers to the program’s effectiveness and efficiency in delivering benefits to stakeholders, including clients (e.g., tourists and prospective tourists), public and tourist industry–related firms (in the form of improved services, wise use of tax-funded program expenditures, and increases in revenues and taxes paid by tourists), legislative and executive brands, and program managers and operators. Performance quality is distinct from conformance quality; conformance quality refers to product manufacturing and service delivery that meets mandated standards. Also, performance quality is distinct from “quality in use,” that is, customer beliefs about the quality of the services they experienced. See Garvin (1987) for a discussion on the multiple dimensions of quality.

All three dimensions of quality are useful for evaluating the impacts of tourism-marketing programs. Quality-in-use data (i.e., customer beliefs about quality experienced) have been collected in government-sponsored evaluation research of tourism-marketing programs (e.g., see Dybka 1987 for a Canadian study on U.S. residents’ quality-in-use beliefs about their visits to Canada). The level of conformance quality is described in at least one state tourism audit study: the North Carolina 1989 audit report describes the nondelivery of the advertised visitor guide to 93,221 inquirers requesting the guide.

Achieving multiple indicators in measuring each of the three dimensions of quality is possible. Indicators for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of activities and systems in a tourism-marketing program are summarized in Table 1.

Four indicators of efficiency and six indicators of effectiveness are included in Table 1. Effectiveness refers to the performance quality of the activity, the quality in use of the program, and the value of revenues generated from the program (sales and taxes resulting from the government

**TABLE 1**  
**IMPACT ASSESSMENT INDICATORS OF TOURISM-MARKETING PROGRAMS**

Indicator (variable measured)	Effectiveness Indicators	Efficiency Indicators
1. Conformance measures: activities done in compliance to standards set (e.g., mandated) the first time in every instance activities attempted?		X
2. Cost-benefit analyses, for example, comparisons of cost per inquiry (CPI) ratios of different media vehicles used in the advertising campaign?		X
3. Return on investment or net profit estimates, where net profit equals total tourist-related taxes minus government costs for the tourism-marketing program?		X
4. Revenues for tourist-related industry firms generated due to the tourism-marketing program?	X	
5. Revenue per inquiry (RPI) estimated from tourism-advertising conversion studies?	X	
6. Government revenues (taxes) generated from tourism-related industries due to tourism expenditures?	X	
7. Tourist visits to the county, state, or country due to the tourism-marketing program?	X	
8. Quality-in-use measure of tourists' beliefs of quality of services experienced during their visits and their intentions to return and/or recommend visiting?	X	
9. Ratio-of-ratio comparison, for example, CPI/RPI?		X
10. Tourist awareness, attitude, and intentions to visit?	X	

tourism-marketing program). Efficiency refers to conformance quality, profits, and ratio of comparisons of results due to the program.

The first indicator in Table 1 refers to conformance measures, such as the one described earlier. The second measure is cost per inquiry (CPI), which is equal to the cost assigned to running a given advertisement in a given media vehicle in a given time period divided by the total inquiries generated by this ad placement. Also, CPI estimates are reported sometimes in comparing tourism ad placements in competing media vehicles (Woodside and Soni 1990) and competing categories of media (see, e.g., Woodside and Ronkainen 1982). Estimates of the net profit to government resulting from tourism-marketing programs are available in the tourism program evaluation literature (e.g., Minnesota 1985; Woodside and Motes 1981; Woodside 1996).

Tourists visits generated due to the government tourism-marketing program (the seventh indicator in Table 1) are estimated by research sponsored by the program managers for most programs. However, the performance audit report for Minnesota (1985, p. xii) notes that such research was *not* being linked to the return on investment for Minnesota's tourism advertising campaign.

Faulkner (1997) offered an additional indicator of tourism marketing performance that is not included in Table 1. He advocated computing two difference-score indexes: (1) a "market bias index," that is, the share of a particular market compared with the share of a destination's visitors overall; market bias equals zero if the two measures are equal; and (2) an "index of change" in the visitors received from each market relative to the change in that market overall; this change index equals zero if the growth rate of visits from an origin is equal to the overall growth rate of trips made by that origin. Faulkner (1997) displayed the computed indexes for each origin in two-dimensional exhibits.

Faulkner's approach is not recommended for measuring tourism-marketing performance. Using indexes based on difference scores causes severe measurement problems; most psychometric experts recommend that difference scores not be used (see Teas 1993). For a given origin, no estimates of market share or rate of growth are provided by

such indexes. No measure of impact (e.g., effect size) of the tourism-marketing program is provided by such indexes. Thus, for Australia as a destination, to conclude that Japan has a market bias index equal to 5.3 and an index of change equal to 0.6 provides little information and misleading conclusions about the value of the Japanese market. The impacts of presence versus absence of specific marketing actions and expenditures on market share and change are not included in such index analyses.

Also, market share is *not* a particularly useful dependent or independent variable in performance measurement. "You're better off if you create and develop [profitable market] niches" (Clifford and Cavanagh 1985, p. 17). If you do focus on market share, the focus should be on judging the impact of changes in market share relative to your destination's two key competitors with and without the presence of specific market actions in your tourism marketing program. For example, the following steps might be used with market share as the dependent variable. (1) Identify 10 specific markets by a combination of origins and lifestyles. (2) Estimate market shares for your destination for each of the 10 markets for the 3 years prior to administering marketing actions to specifically attract visits from 5 of the 10 markets. (3) Randomly assign 5 of the 10 markets to receive unique marketing programs to attract visitors from these markets to your destination; the other five markets represent "control" markets—they receive no unique marketing programs to stimulate visits. (4) Continue to estimate market shares for each of the 10 markets for the year that the marketing actions are implemented in the five randomly assigned markets. (5) Continue measuring market share for fifth and sixth year even if the marketing actions are implemented only in year four. (6) Estimate the effect size of the impact of the marketing actions on market share using multiple regression analysis.

Figure 3 summarizes the results of a hypothetical example of following these rules. Note in Figure 3 that market share for Destination X averages about 5% during Years 1 through 3 for both the five treatment group markets and the five control group markets. The average market share for X is close to 11% during Years 4 through 6 for the treatment group markets exposed to unique marketing actions in these

markets. However, the average market share for X is still about 5% during Years 4 though 6 for the five markets in the control group. An analysis of the findings in Figure 3 for Competitor Y confirms the view that the marketing actions performed by X during Years 4 though 6 influenced market shares: Y's market share declined systematically in Years 4 through 6 compared with previous years in the treatment group markets but not the control group markets.

*Scientifically measuring the impact of advertising and marketing on visits.* The Minnesota (1985) performance audit of the state's tourism-marketing program includes knowledge of positivistic research for valuing results. For example, the Minnesota audit identifies severe shortcomings of return-on-investment (ROI) findings in the budget requests made by the tourism-marketing program director; these shortcomings are described in the Results section of the report. The ROI findings communicated widely by the program director were based on the results of a conversion research study. Following the tourism season in Minnesota, a questionnaire was mailed to inquirers asking if they had visited Minnesota.

Two shortcomings noted in the audit report are worth emphasizing here.

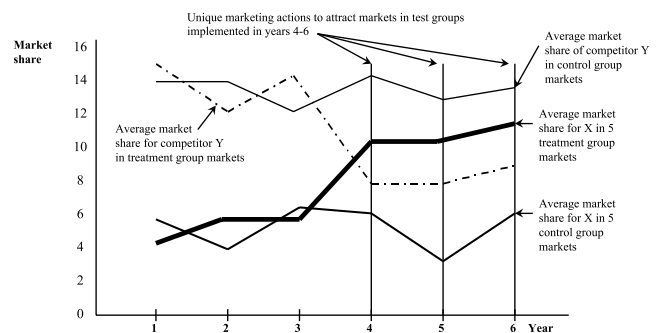
The study assumed that all persons who said they had vacationed in Minnesota had come as a result of the office of tourism's promotion campaign. As a result, the study overestimated the return on investment because many would have undoubtedly vacationed in Minnesota regardless of the tourism promotion campaign. Furthermore, even for those who did not decide until after receiving tourism brochures, it is difficult to measure how much influence the brochures and advertising had on their vacation planning.

The study did not attempt to measure how many people vacationed in Minnesota as a result of the state's advertising campaign even though they did not request information from the tourism office. In addition, the study did not attempt to measure future benefits due to repeat visits or word-of-mouth advertising. (Minnesota 1985, pp. 91-92)

Unfortunately, the Minnesota (1985) performance-audit report does *not* indicate knowledge of true and quasi experiments for separating the impact of advertising from other factors on visits and expenditures (the positivistic theory valuing results and the empirical studies of Campbell 1969; Banks 1965; Ramond 1966; Caples 1974). In fact, the Minnesota (1985) performance audit reinforces the inaccurate and harmful myth that "it is not possible to separate the effects of tourism promotion from many other factors which affect tourism or travel spending, such as changing vacation preferences and changing business vacation patterns" (p. 90). True experiments are designs used to make such separations scientifically; such designs are used widely in medical research (e.g., Salk and Sabin polio vaccine drug tests in the 1950s; see Woodside 1990) to separate the impact of a new drug from other influence factors. Such true experiments are used widely for measuring the unique impact of advertising on purchases; Caples's (1974) work is the landmark contribution on this topic.

Unfortunately, the use of true experiments has never been reported for measuring advertising effectiveness or

**FIGURE 3**  
**EFFECT ON MARKET SHARES FOR**  
**DESTINATION X AND COMPETITOR Y OF**  
**THE MARKETING ACTIONS BY DESTINATION X**



Note: In this hypothetical example, systematic increases in market share for X are associated with the introduction of the marketing actions in Years 4 through 6 in the treatment markets versus Years 1 through 3; in the markets in the control group, no systematic change in market share for X occurred during the 6 years. Systematic market share decreases for Competitor Y occurred in the treatment group but not the control group. Such findings represent strong evidence that the marketing actions implemented by X were effective in increasing market share for X and decreasing market share for Y.

efficiency by government tourism-marketing programs (Schoenbachler et al. 1995; Woodside 1990). The most likely reasons for not using these scientific designs to measure impact include the following: (1) lack of training and knowledge of the program evaluation literature in general among both program managers and performance auditors, especially lack of knowledge of the literature on measuring advertising effectiveness; (2) the argument that the research costs are prohibitive—a false argument because true experiments can be built into the planned advertising campaign; the costs of running a true experiment are no greater than the research costs of conversion research studies; (3) comfort with conversion research methods and “aided recall” advertising effectiveness studies; and (4) fear and high perceived risk of using another type of research study—especially if the results might indicate the advertising had little impact on increasing visits that would not have occurred without the advertising.

Using a true experiment, scientifically estimating the separate impacts of both exposures to scheduled media-placed ads (e.g., TV, magazine, radio, and newspaper ads) and the visitor information guide is possible. Such measurement includes estimating several influences: (1) being exposed versus not being exposed to the advertising, (2) being exposed versus not being exposed to the visitor's information guide (VIG)—the brochure material offered free in the advertising if the prospect inquires, and (3) the interaction effect of both being exposed and receiving a VIG versus the additive effects of ad exposure only plus VIG exposure only. The required true-experiment design to measure these impacts includes purposely *not* exposing some identified prospects to the ads and the VIG, while exposing other, identified prospects to the ad only or the VIG only or both the ads

and VIG. Woodside (1996) offered a detailed real-life example of such effectiveness and efficiency estimates for a tourism marketing campaign for Prince Edward Island, a Canadian province.

### Evidence on Administering

As shown in Figure 1, evidence on administering refers to vision values, mission, training, coaching, and coordinating. Evaluations of success and failure in business organizations conclude that these issues are important (see, e.g., Clifford and Cavanagh 1985; Scott 1998). In a large-scale U.S. study of most successful midsize companies, the senior executives in these firms “set forth vividly the company’s guiding principles—defining the ways value is to be created for customers, the rights and responsibilities of employees, and, most important, an overall affirmation of ‘what we stand for’” (Clifford and Cavanagh 1985, p. 13). According to Clifford and Cavanagh (1985), “Philosophy and values are hard to measure—but their value can’t be overstated. A statement of beliefs alone will not, of course, make a successful enterprise. Credos are an articulation of culture—not a substitute for it” (p. 13).

Clifford and Cavanagh (1985) provided some concepts for measuring vision and values:

- Earned respect—sense that the enterprise is special in what it stands for
- Evangelical zeal—honest enthusiasm
- The habit of dealing people in—communicating just about everything with everybody
- View of profit and wealth creation as inevitable by-products of doing other things well
- Leadership—executives show extraordinary commitment to the business, often to the point of obsession

Related to these concepts and the issues of training, coaching, and coordinating, specific actions can be taken by program executives to achieve high levels of occurrence and to learn their impacts on the four variables shown in the middle of Figure 1. The senior program executives might ask the following:

- Do we have a written statement of vision and values unique for our state’s tourism-marketing program?
- Do our employees, visitors, and legislators perceive us to have evangelical zeal?
- Do we communicate just about everything with everybody?
- What formal training programs have employees and executives completed this past year? What impacts have been made from their participation in these training programs?
- Are we coordinating enough? Are we meeting weekly to coordinate and for sense making? How often do executives communicate personally with prospective visitors and actual visitors?
- Have managers completed formal training on measuring program performance?
- Are managers and employees sometimes uncertain about what they really know about markets, prospective visitors, visitor behavior, and attitudes? Or, do

they think and act as if they have the answers, and external data on markets and customers are unnecessary?

What activity results in improving coordination and sense making? Answer: participating, sharing, and revising thoughts—in meetings. Weick (1995) stated that sound sense-making practice requires that

people need to meet more often. That implication arises from the reluctance with which people acknowledge that they face problems of ambiguity and equivocality, rather than problems of uncertainty. . . . What will help them is a setting where they can argue, using rich-data pulled from a variety of media, to construct fresh frameworks of action-outcome linkages that include their multiple interpretations. The variety of data needed to pull this difficult task are most available in variants of the face-to-face meeting. (Pp. 185-87)

Thus, tourism program evaluation needs to measure how often team meetings are held in the various departments of the tourism-marketing program and among senior executives of the program. Do outcomes of such team meetings include written reports of things agreed on, actions to be done, and who will do these actions?

### WORK OF THE PERFORMANCE AUDIT TEAM

For a comprehensive performance-audit report, evidence would be included that the work of the program evaluation team comprised data collection and interpretation on all five issues summarized in Figure 1. This proposition is summarized in Figure 4.

Note that Figure 4 includes a sixth topic area: “Scanning Other States and Industries by the Audit Team to Learn Best Practices.” It is suggested here that a comprehensive performance audit include such scans by the audit team.

A comprehensive meta-evaluation would include commentaries on

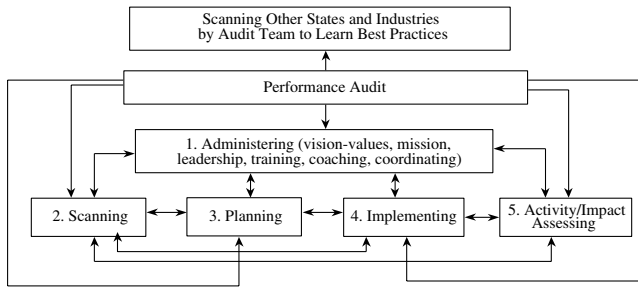
- the theory in use as displayed in each performance audit report,
- the scanning done by the audit team of other states and markets,
- the comprehensiveness of the performance audit reports, and
- the subsequent impact of each performance audit report.

Figure 5 summarizes such comprehensive work by meta-evaluation researchers. Note that the box at the top in the middle of Figure 5 refers to scanning by the meta-evaluation research team of other meta-evaluations (e.g., the meta-evaluation by Armstrong 1982).

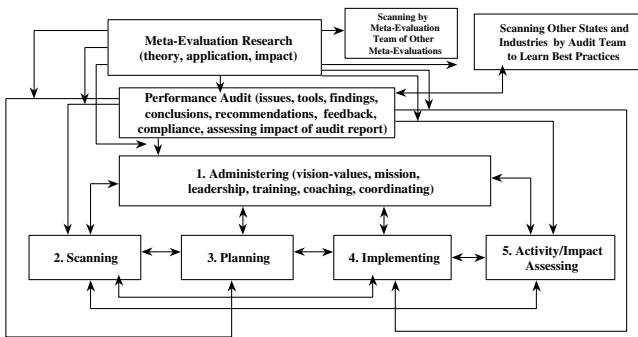
Reviews of additional meta-evaluation research studies on issues in program evaluation are likely to result in additional insights and nuances for theory and practice of program evaluation. Damson’s review (reported in Patton 1997) of the legislative use of 21 program evaluations is another example of scanning to uncover other meta-evaluations.



**FIGURE 4  
PERFORMANCE AUDITS OF STATE TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENTS**



**FIGURE 5  
META-EVALUATION RESEARCH OF  
PERFORMANCE AUDITS OF STATE  
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENTS**



**DISCUSSION: ADOPTING A  
MORE USEFUL PERFORMANCE  
AUDITING PARADIGM OF  
TOURISM-MARKETING PROGRAMS**

Based on the theories of performance auditing and the practices noted in performance audits of government tourism-marketing programs, four suggestions are offered for improving such performance audits. These suggestions are intended to be a composite practical model of performance auditing of government tourism-marketing programs.

**Suggestion 1: Embrace Continual  
Formal Training in Program Evaluation**

Continual formal training in program evaluation theory and method is necessary for both auditors and executives of

tourism-marketing programs. A major finding of the present meta-evaluation is the absence of references and understanding of program evaluation knowledge and literature by the program evaluators and tourism-marketing executives.

In most available performance audits of government tourism-marketing programs, limited reference is made that the auditor followed standard accounting audit procedures. Detailed descriptions of the coverage in accounting audits are not provided in such reports. More important, theoretical ground of what constitutes sound marketing practice and performance outcomes needs to be included in tourism-marketing audits. Sound performance audits build on a framework (i.e., a mental model or set of assumptions) of what constitutes sound tourism marketing practice.

Theoretical and practical foundations of program evaluation knowledge (see Shadish, Cook, and Leviton 1991) are needed in government tourism-marketing audit reports. Consequently, the epistemology for doing sound performance audits and implementing sound marketing strategies can be addressed. The 1985 Minnesota audit and the 1993 Australian reports come closest to explicating an epistemology of evaluating tourism-marketing programs. Embracing formal training in program evaluation likely should include reading seminal works in program evaluation (e.g., Shadish, Cook, and Leviton 1991) and scientific evaluating methods of marketing actions (e.g., Banks 1965; Caples 1974). Reading meta-evaluations of tourism-marketing evaluations should be useful as well. Acquiring deep knowledge about the literature on program evaluation leads to building sound explicit models of program evaluation beyond the naive approaches in use in unwritten implicit models.

**Suggestion 2: Audit Both Program  
Activities (Implemented Strategies)  
and Impacts on Planned Objectives**

For several reasons, measuring outcomes only is not good enough. Unfortunately, outcome measurement of tourism-marketing programs is done without planned control-group comparisons. The relatively larger sizes of environmental factors may make systematic program influences difficult to uncover. Sampling and nonsampling errors may occur in measuring outcomes that degrade the information and increase the level of “noise” in the outcome data. Finally, convincing evidence of impact is more likely to be found using multiple indicators of performance focused on what actions were taken with what outcomes.

Program performance measurement needs to be inclusive of both process and outcome. The core issue should be raised as to whether the program made a difference: did the government’s tourism-marketing program generate visits that would not have occurred without the program? The other core issue should be included in the performance audit: what actions were implemented in administering, scanning environments, planning, implementing, and self-assessing of performance?

Based on the work of Senge (1990) and others (e.g., Kotler 1997), creating an explicit, written plan of activities helps to improve thinking and action. Writing an annual marketing plan forces executives to make explicit their implicit models of how tourism-marketing strategy is done effectively. Writing a marketing plan requires reflection and deepens sense making (see Weick 1995). Important

implementation details that are often overlooked are more likely to be included in written versus verbal plans. Dramatic improvements in systems thinking can be achieved only by detailed mapping of the actions and feedback loops—knowledge that can be gained in preparing detailed written plans.

“Thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) of what was done in the planning and implementing of the tourism-marketing program should be an integral part of the performance audit. Such thick descriptions should include information on whether a written annual marketing plan was prepared. If yes, the quality of the plan should be assessed in the audit. Details on what actions were implemented and the degrees of fit of the implemented strategy with the planned strategy should be included in the thick description. Also, the program participants in implementing the strategy should be asked to evaluate their actions and actions not taken that should have been taken.

While participants are asked to generate a lot of data in program evaluations, rarely are they directly asked to evaluate the program, to judge its adequacy, to advise on its continuance, discontinuance, dissemination or modification. Rather than evaluating programs, participants are usually asked about themselves and their own adequacy. We are thus wasting a lot of well-founded opinions. (Campbell 1988, p. 374)

Applying the old saw, “God is in the details,” requires learning the details about implementation unlikely to be known or reported by senior program executives—as well as details about how implementation could have been done better.

Qualitative assessment of activities serves to confirm and extend evaluation of quantitative results. Designing both evaluation methods into performance audits would be likely to confirm the major findings on their shared dimensions. Adopting this suggestion should include embracing the following view by Campbell. If *disconfirmation* of findings on shared dimensions is found,

we should consider the possibility that the quantitative procedures are in error. If I will concede this, why would I be reluctant to see the qualitative procedures used without the quantitative? It is because I believe that the quantitative, when based on firm and examined qualitative knowing, can validly go beyond the qualitative, and can produce subtleties that the qualitative would have missed. (Campbell 1988, p. 375)

### Suggestion 3: Use a Multitheory-Based Paradigm for Performance Audits of Tourism-Marketing Programs That Includes Stakeholder Participation

Adopting a new paradigm that includes stakeholder participation in designing the audit includes several dimensions. First, Stake (1980) provided a well-developed theory with rationales for adopting what he refers to as a “responsive evaluation.” Second, one of the core rationales by Stake was also expressed by Campbell: stakeholders are likely to provide unique and valuable information on implementation problems and opportunities—as well as creative insights on improving the planning of next year’s tourism-marketing programs. The third suggestion is to imply partnership, not

audit leadership, by the executives of the tourism-marketing program. The focus of such an audit becomes less on passing judgment on the lack of planning and poor performance of individuals and more on documenting the strategy paradigm implemented in the current tourism-marketing program—and comparing the strategy implemented with alternative, potentially more effective and efficient, strategies.

### Suggestion 4: Transform Government Tourism-Marketing Strategies from One-Shot Transactional to Multiple-Step Relationship Marketing

The dominant strategy paradigm in use in government tourism-marketing programs includes one contact only with inquirers responding to the offer of free literature. After fulfillment of the requests, the names, addresses, and related information (e.g., media vehicle source) are discarded. No efforts or budget is planned for development of an ongoing relationship with the inquiring prospective visitors. No additional contacts are made after mailing the free “linkage advertising” (Rapp and Collins 1988) literature. Database marketing is rarely being practiced in government tourism-marketing programs, even though some departments may provide inquiry names to industry trade associations.

Several rationales can be used to justify transforming the tourism-marketing programs from this transactional paradigm to a relationship-marketing paradigm. First, inquirers are persons who have identified themselves as having a high interest in buying the product (i.e., visiting the destination). Even if most do not buy during the current buying season, the strong potential exists that some may be converted into product buyers (i.e., visitors) if contacted more than once during the next two buying seasons. This proposition can be tested scientifically—with test and control groups—and the profitability of multiple contacts with customers can be estimated.

Second, substantial image and linkage advertising has been expended to identify inquirers by names, addresses, and inquiry sources, as well as to fulfill their requests for information. Estimating the long-term net benefits from these expenditures is impossible if no database is created and used that contains detailed information by individual customer files.

Third, because of the advances in computer technology and reductions in software costs, the cost of data handling and storage has declined dramatically during the past three decades. Bulkeley (1993) made this point dramatically,

High-end pc’s with two-gigabit hard drives—20 times faster than the 100 megabyte drives most home users buy now—can hold several million customer names on hardware that costs about \$10,000 now. The software to manage such data starts as low as \$15,000. (P. B6)

Fourth, the strategy paradigm for database or “maximarketing” is well developed now (see Rapp and Collins 1988; Woodside 1996). Most large private enterprises have transformed their marketing strategies to database marketing, for example, Sears, Nordstrom, General Motors, Papa John’s Pizza, Pfizer, Schwab, and Delta Airlines. Consequently, transforming a government tourism-marketing program to database marketing does not have to be a shot in

the dark: many firms in many industries completed the transformation years ago.

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