Organic Growth Marketing Strategies in Hospitality Industry

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Abstract. Hospitality industry is the world’s fastest growing industry accountable of earning incredible profits in the international market. Though each region and nation faces its own challenges and can take advantage of particular opportunities, certain basic operating principles will allow the international hospitality industry to expand and prosper regardless of specific location.

In order to fulfill a strategic direction a hospitality business will need to consider various strategic methods. This may include the formation of an alliance and merger with, or the acquisition of another organization. Alternatively the organization may decide to achieve its selected strategy alone by growing organically. Organic growth represents the true growth for the core of the company. Achieving sustainable and profitable organic growth requires more than new ideas, innovation, and strong execution. Rather, organic growth exemplars embed a set of institutional capabilities and a growth culture that define the organization and that are key enablers to realizing advantaged performance.

In order to understand how hotel managers in Romania use organic growth principles in their organizations and how they overcome the growth barriers, a qualitative research was used to collect data from a sample of hotel managers. The central themes they were question about are: organizational structures and processes, role of people and leadership in their organization, reasons for growing, best ways for growing, measuring instruments for growing, risks of growing and what marketing strategies do they use to manage those risks.

Key words: organic growth, qualitative research, hospitality industry, tourism marketing
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1 Introduction

Hospitality industry is a major sector in the tourism industry, which, in turn is one of the most rapidly expanding fields in the service industry. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) consider travel and tourism the leading economic contributor to the world and national economies in terms of gross output, value added, capital investment, and employment and tax contributions.

According to the Euromonitor International report about Travel and Tourism in Romania published in January 2014, tourism’s contribution to Romania’s GDP for 2012 reached 2.4%. Considering the direct and indirect contribution of tourism to the national economy, it can be estimated to 4.5% of GDP.

Hotel business is an important service industry in most countries of the world, especially those attracting a large tourist trade. Hotels are the second largest sub-sector in the hospitality sector in turnover terms. In September 2013 Ernst & Young commissioned by The Brewers of Europe with support from HOTREC published a report about the hospitality sector in Europe. In this report is stated that approximately 31% of hospitality sector turnover in Romania is represented by hotels. The development of the hotel industry has been rapid and wide spread. Despite the decline in performance since 2008, there have been some encouraging signs for the sub-sector going forward. International hotel chains have increased competition and the standard of hotels in the local Romanian market, driving growth and innovation in the sub-sector.

For further years, it is very important for Romanian tourism to grow, generate income and increase contribution to GDP. The purpose of this paper is to identify marketing strategies that lead growth, especially organic growth, in a tourism organization, particularly in a hotel business in Romania.

Growth is the major objective of any business undertaking, particularly firms belonging to
private sector. Over the years, the term ‘growth’ has become a mantra in business. Every hotel company in the industry, irrespective of its size, location, and ownership, aspires to grow and expand. The hotels always plan to grow and expand their business in terms of increase in profitability, increase in occupancy rates, increase in market share, etc.

1.1 Definitions of Growth

Webster’s Dictionary defines growth as "an increase in size, number, value or strength" or "a company whose rate of growth markedly exceeds that the average in its field or the overall rate of economic growth". According to the businessdictionary.com, growth is "the process of improving some measure of an enterprise's success. Business growth can be achieved either by boosting the top line or revenue of the business with greater product sales or service income, or by increasing the bottom line or profitability of the operation by minimizing costs".

1.2 Need to Grow

Compared to international hotel chains, many independent hotels have low marketing budgets. There are plenty of reasons an independent hotel should ensure growth and become a true contender (Business Size and Growth, p.11):

- Survival – for many small business staying small might mean that costs are too high, so they need to grow in order to compete with larger rivals
- Gain economies of scale – as business grow in size they will enjoy economies of scale. This mean that the unit cost will fall and the profit will improve.
- Increase future profits – by growing and selling more, a firm will hope to rise profits in the future
- Increase market share – larger firms may be able to dominate the market. They might be able to raise prices or control part of the market.
- Reduce risk – risk can be reduced through branching into new markets and new products means that if one product fails, success in others can keep the company going.

But not every penny earned by the enterprise are all the same. Business growth is not the same, either through organic growth and growth by acquisition restructuring and other non-organic way.

2 Literature review

Assumed to be less costly, poses fewer cultural and adaptation problems and usually less visible in the event of failure, most companies generally used the organic growth model (Berg, 2011). Organic growth represents an opportunity to leverage a company’s core competencies to expand both revenue and profits. In organic growth companies focus on bringing innovation in the form of new products and services, identifying opportunities for existing offerings in new markets, or generating more revenue from existing offerings from current customers (Atkinson, 2007).

The findings on Evergreen Project are important when analysing business growth. The purpose of the study was to find the management practices that truly can help a company to be great – to achieve evergreen business success. Joyce, Nohria and Roberson (Nohria, Joyce and Roberson, 2003) identify eight general management practices strongly correlated with sustained business success. These essential management practices, in the authors’ own words, are:

- Strategy: Devise and maintain a clearly stated, focused strategy
- Execution: Develop and maintain flawless operational execution
- Culture: Develop and maintain a performance-oriented culture
- Structure: Build and maintain a fast, flexible, flat organization
- Talent: Hold on to talented employees and find more
Innovation: Make industry-transforming innovations
Leadership: Find leaders who are committed to the business and its people
Mergers and partnerships: Seek growth through mergers and partnerships

The study finds that the first four practices are the “primary management practices” representing the fundamentals of business, and the last four are “secondary management practices”. Sustained success is associated with high scores (e.g. excellence) in all four of the primary management practices and in any two of the four secondary management practices. From this examination emerged the 4 + 2 formula that is the heart of the publications from the Evergreen project: 4 + 2 equals business success.

The study identifies four firms per industry, tracking their performance over a ten year period: a “loser”, whose performance lagged throughout the decade, a “climber”, whose performance improved throughout the decade, a “tumbler”, whose performance rose for the first five years then dropped off for the remaining five years, a “winner”, whose performance led the industry by a significant margin throughout the decade. A “winner” demonstrate several characteristics related to growth:

- Begin by emphasizing acquisitive growth in the first five year period, but emphasizing organic growth in the final five years period
- Excel at disciplined execution
- Operate within formal structures that are flat
- Enhancing responsive decision-making
- Build performance-oriented cultures

Examining the impact that a firm's history has on the future of the firm is also important when discussing about organic growth. Firms pass through a series of developmental phases as they grow. In Evolution and Revolution of organizations grow (1972), Greiner position is that the future of an organization may be less determined by outside forces than it is by organization’s history. Five dimensions are identified as key to the development of this model. They are the age of the organization, stages of evolution, stages of revolution, and growth rate of the industry. Based on these dimensions, the five phases of development for growing firms are identified. Each of these phases begins with a period of calm (“evolution”) and ends with a management crisis (“revolution”). By considering the history of the firm (the previous phases), the management of a growing firm can anticipate the next crisis and better prepare to deal with it. Greiner identifies evolutionary periods characterised by dominant management style used to achieve growth (creativity, direction, delegation, coordination, collaboration) and revolutionary periods characterized by the dominant management problem that must be solved before growth can continue (leadership crisis, autonomy crisis, control crisis, red tape crisis, ‘psychological saturation’). Each phase is both an effect of the previous phase and the cause for the next phase.

In Smart Growth, Edward D. Hess challenges the commonly held beliefs that businesses must grow or die, growth is always good. Through his research, he concludes that there is no scientific or business basis for such beliefs in the real world. In fact, only a handful of companies have been able to sustain this kind of growth over time. Hess proposes that businesses learn to leverage “Smart Growth” which focuses on authentic earnings and growing “better, not bigger.”

Smart growth replace the axiom of growth “grow or die” with “improve to remain competitive“. The primary objective of smart growth strategy is to build an enduring business using authentic growth (selling more services and products to more customers, and operating more efficiently and productively) and managing all the risks created by growth. Smart Growth companies do make acquisition but those acquisitions are driven by strategic reasons (Hess, 2010).

The 6 keys to organic growth in Hess opinion are:

1. A simple focused "elevator pitch" business model which can be easily understood by the average employee;
2. A "small company soul" in a big company body — companies entrepreneurially structured with "ownership" cultures but with strong central "back office" controls over quality, risk, and capital;

3. Measurement maniacs — smart growth companies measure many financial, operational, and behavioural metrics daily and weekly, with transparency, frequent feedback, and the alignment of measurements and rewards;

4. Smart growth companies have highly engaged workforces with intense loyalty, high retention, and high productivity;

5. Smart growth companies are led by passionate home-grown, humble leaders who are intimately involved on daily basis in the details of operations; and

6. Smart growth companies are technology and execution champions.

3 Grounded Theory Approach about Organic Growth Principles in Hospitality Industry

Due to lack of information about organic growth principles in hospitality industry, I choose to use grounded theory procedures to gather useful information about the theme. Grounded theory is used to explore what lies behind a specific phenomenon (Glaser, 1992) in our case organic growth principles for hospitality industry. According to Wikipedia "Grounded theory method (GT) is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data. Grounded theory method is a research method which operates almost in a reverse fashion from traditional social science research". Because the nature of the research was exploratory and did not involve the testing of hypotheses, a qualitative methodology was chosen. Using grounded theory principles, the research followed a cyclical process — literature review, data collection, analysis, and development of theoretical ideas. An inductive method allowed patterns, themes and categories to emerge from the data analysis. By conceptualizing as well as describing, the procedure allows theory to be generated from the data rather than testing any pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

The place of the literature review in a grounded theory study is an issue of considerable debate in the research community. The identification of a credible research area before entry to the field is needed to satisfy the ethics committees, a point noted by Strauss and Corbin (1998). An exploratory review of the literature can usefully be undertaken prior to the final decision on the general focus and specific method of the study. The purpose of the initial review was to increase awareness of the existing knowledge base, and also to identify gaps (Hutchison, 1993) and avoid conceptual and methodological pitfalls. Given that most of the academic research on organic growth is highly specialized and narrow in scope, it was important to capture several perspectives on the issue. These general principles can be customized then to organic growth in hospitality industry.

3.1 Data Collections in Grounded Theory

After literature review a qualitative research was conducted. In terms of obtaining a suitable sample size in grounded theory, the grounded theorist does not decide on the size of the sample population before the study begins. Sample size is deemed to be satisfactory only when the key concepts that have been identified from the collected data have reached saturation point, in other words, when no new data emerges (Kirsty Hunter, Subashini Hari, Charles Egbu and John Kelly, 2005). In this study, I have gathered information using a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 7 owners/managers of hotel businesses in Romania. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer has a list of issues and question to be discussed but has some flexibility in the order of the topics covered and can allow the interviewee to collaborate on the issues raised. 7 owners/managers were carefully
selected to reflect the environment in hospitality industry. The interviewees were given assurance on confidentiality of data and identity. Upon completion, the interviewing notes were transcribed, shown and discussed with the interviewee for accuracy and completion. This process is repeated before conducting the next interview. The whole interviewing cycle took one month.

All 7 participants were in senior managerial positions in their respective tourism organisations. They had an average of 8 years industry management experience, ranging from 2 years to 25 years. 4 of the businesses were located in the city and 3 at countryside.

Each respondent was first contacted by telephone explaining the purpose and importance of the research. Once a respondent has agreed to participate, an internet link of the interviewing format was emailed to the respondent. Because of distance, I chose to have the interviews first via e-mail. Open-ended questions were used to define the area to be explored. The interview areas were establish after organic business growth literature review. Even though the title of the research theme was revealed („Organic growth in Romania hospitality industry”), respondents were not given additional information about what organic growth actually means. A follow-up telephone call was made couple of days later to ensure receipt of the document, to give the interviewees an opportunity to raise and clarify issues, and more importantly, to discuss details of written answers.

The grounded theory stipulates that the process on data analysis involves three coding. These are open, axial and selective. First, data from the interviews were analysed on a sentence by sentence basis using open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This means that since many questions were raised and discussed during the open coding, the interviewing notes are analysed based on a few key words. Relationships between these key words were identified and collated to develop axial coding. An axial coding refers to a process of collating key words in categories and sub-categories according to nature and properties. The final process of the grounded theory involves selecting coding. Categories and sub-categories that bear similar nature and properties are grouped, refined and reshuffled for re-grouping.

Summarizes details of the 7 cases are presented below:

**Respondent 1**

Respondent 1 runs an accommodation business for 8 years. Working with different kind of people was the most important thing when choosing this domain. Respondent 1 has tourism education background. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said „messy, is the word which best describe the actual situation. We don’t have a clear policy at government level and the owners/ managers don’t know, in their particularly case, what their plan is”. In Respondent 1 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania has a unique management and a proper way of understanding the local specific of the area it is located. The main principles Respondent 1 is following when managing are „honesty, commitment and attention to customers”. He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated using customer feedback and company profit and loss account. Respondent 1 also talked about risks that stop growth encountered in current activity: lack of proper and dedicated workforce, the black market, tax. He consider employees as the „business key” and use their abilities to better promote his business. He also use on-line marketing activities (Facebook, YouTube, web-site) and he attends different event to promote his business. As a future plan, he wants to be number 1 in Chamber of Commerce Top and on Tripadvisor guest evaluations for the area his business is located.

**Respondent 2**

Respondent 2 runs an accommodation business for 13 years. He chose this domain because is full of opportunities and diverse people and
situations. He talks about tourism as „a way of life”. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said „low, because there is no support from the state policies”. In Respondent 2 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania has quality and dedicated staff and services as classification shown. The main principle Respondent 2 is following when managing is „customer loyalty" and he refers to clients, suppliers and employees loyalty. He consider employees role in current activity „very important because they work directly with the guest. Smooth running of the process depends on employees". To marketing tools he uses are: on-line marketing activities (Facebook, website), customer loyalty campaigns and he attends different event to promote his business. As a future plan, he wants to increase the accommodation capacity and offer new services.

Respondent 3
Respondent 3 runs an accommodation business for 2 years. The main reasons for changing his former activity is the opportunity to work with different kind of people. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said that is very difficult to open a new business because is „very difficult to obtain all kinds of authorization”. In Respondent 3 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania has „involved and perfectionist employees”. The role of employees in hotel is important because each contribute to a good customer feedback. The main principles Respondent 3 is following when managing is „to give customers what I like and some extra". He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated using customer feedback. Respondent 3 also talked about risks that stop growth encountered in current activity: „clients may not appreciate the services offered and they might destroy something or don’t want to pay”. To marketing tools he uses are: online travel agencies, internet. As a future plan, he wants to build a bigger hotel/guesthouse.

Respondent 4
Respondent 4 runs an accommodation business for 25 years. Hospitality has been a passion of his youth and continues to be. His biggest desire is to apply what he learned in school and train people who really love tourism. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said „honestly, is down to earth. Specializations are only on paper. If you want to put into practice what you have learned you don’t have many chances. It seems that everyone knows about everything about running a business in tourism”. In Respondent 4 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania has „excellent services, relaxation and leisure facilities, and playgrounds for children. You have to cover all the client needs so he doesn’t need to leave your location”. The main principles Respondent 4 is following when managing are „professionalism, fairness, loyalty". He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated using customer feedback and market strength (how many years is the company active company in the field). Respondent 4 also talked about risks that stop growth encountered in current activity: taxes are the main barrier, „if you try to stay competitive and you lower prices, you don’t cover your expenses”.
He consider employees as „an important part of the company” because having carefully selected and motivated employees your service quality will improve. His marketing activity consist in using use on-line marketing, participate to fairs and sponsorships.

Respondent 5
Respondent 5 runs an accommodation business for 5 years. Respondent 5 has tourism education background. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said „although we have very beautiful natural resources, there is a lack of clear objectives about Romania image outside its borders”. In Respondent 5 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania is promoting authenticity and is keeping traditions alive but also has clear objectives. The main
principle Respondent 5 is following when managing are „treat your customers as you would like to be treated”. He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated using customer feedback (focus-group, regular meetings with most important clients etc.) and company operating profit. Respondent 5 also talked about risks that stop growth encountered in current activity. No having qualified workforce is a very important issue but, he said, „you can manage those risks by having clear work procedures and an excellent motivating programme”. He consider employees as the „business heart" In his opinion they should be „a competitive team consists on valuable experience and professional expertise, the right attitude and adaptability to the most diverse situations”.

He thinks that planning marketing activities and creating an agenda is very useful. He mention the following marketing activities: on-line marketing (company web-site Facebook, Myspace, Tripadvisor), organizing events and promotions, partnerships, participation in tourism fairs, inviting journalists and opinion makers to in-site documentation visit. As a future plan, he wants to „offer products and services whose quality-price ratio is very good, keeping its actual position on market and strengthen it”.

**Respondent 6**

Respondent 6 runs an accommodation business for 2 years. Promoting the beauty that our country holds was the most important thing when choosing this domain. He consider underdeveloped the actual stage of Romania tourism industry. In Respondent 6 opinion, the most important attributes of a successful accommodation structure in Romania are „cleanliness, location, and staff”. The main principles Respondent 6 is following when managing is „treat everybody with respect”. He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated „only if you have a target and not all the managers know what to measure”. He considers that „without a proper plan you can lose all the money you invested”. His business strategies is based on „building a great customer relationship”.

**Respondent 7**

Respondent 7 runs an accommodation business for 4 years. He was choosing this domain because he wants to be „a good host and contribute to activities that occur in his town". Respondent 7 has tourism education background. Talking about the actual stage of development in Romania tourism industry he said „disastrous lack of vision”. In Respondent 7 opinion, a successful accommodation structure in Romania has „great design, qualified staff and excellent management”. The main principles Respondent 7 is following when managing are „respect and courtesy". He said that growth in hospitality industry can be evaluated using hotel occupancy and customer rating on different websites. Respondent 7 also talked about risks that stop growth encountered in current activity: not having the right numbers of rooms (less that is asked) and poor promotion of the tourist area where they are located. He attends different event and fairs to promote his business but he consider that „word to month promotion is the best way to grow a hotel business”.

**3.2 Findings and Analysis**

The study helps understand how manager/owners of a hospitality business in Romania achieve organic growth. The grounded theory helped set the process of in-depth semi-structured interviews and literature review contributed to analysis of collected data. Some key direction for hospitality business organic growth were identified. This are fundamental to driving superior sustainable organic growth performance (see Figure 1).
4 Organic Growth Marketing Strategies in Hospitality Industry

Now we will take a more in-depth look at each building block. Each of these is the starting point for creating organic growth. The marketing strategies for organic growth occurs after setting objectives for all this building blocks.

1. Create a growth mind set
Creating a growth culture begins with orienting the organization toward the right mind-set – one that focuses on growth consistency and persistency. This also means:
- Aligning hotel strategy with country/ region strategy
- Having explicit goals for consistent organic growth for each level of management
- Continuously seeking and preparing to develop new opportunities while simultaneously leveraging existing competencies
- Understanding and managing risks
- Understanding the stage in business life cycle
- Developing a business brand orientated to growth

2. Customer experience - Deliver a customer experience that competitors can’t match
While most companies claim that they focus on the consumer, very few truly emphasize increasing consumer benefit – that is, delivering consumer value that the consumer is willing to pay for. Those companies that consistently deliver consumer benefit are able to translate this into sustainable top line growth, not only through increased volume uptake, but also through increased willingness to pay. This can be done by:
- Focusing on details that shape the customer experience
- Managing the whole picture from the customer’s point of view
- Building strong relationships based on trust, honesty and integrity
- Developing innovative product and services
- Using the particularities of the area to design hotel business

3. Performance measurement
Performance measurement is a fundamental building block of TQM (Total Quality Management) and a total quality organization. Reviewing the performance of an organization is also an important step when formulating the direction of the strategic activities. It is important to know where the strengths and weaknesses of the organization lie, and as part of the ‘Plan –Do – Check – Act’ cycle, measurement plays a key role in quality and productivity improvement activities. Here are some key factors to consider when performance in hospitality industry is measure:
- Identifying and measuring those critical organizational processes that are closely tied to organic growth
- Creating transparency with top-down goals/ targets and bottom-up measures and personalized responsibilities
- Considering the role of non-financial indicators, such as customer satisfaction, quality assurance, productivity, employee development etc., as they determine the competitiveness of a business as well as its ability to sustain profitability in the future
Linking productivity with customer satisfaction. Favourable feedback from customers through comment cards, online reviews, tips, and unsolicited remarks are viewed as vital indicators of productivity.

4. Processes - Drive efficiency through process-focused initiatives
Everything everyone does within an organization is part of a process. The same principle is applied in the hospitality industry. So if you want to improve what the organization does, then you have to focus on improving the process. This can mean:
- Restructuring to align the company’s resources better (outsource, shut down or sold off)
- Creating profit centres for the company
- Putting systems in place so that things work right every time and customers get the feeling
- Incorporating the right language regarding growth in all processes
- Becoming innovative and look at the overall process flow or system in terms of design, inputs, materials, maintenance, supervision, automation, training, teams, waste etc.
- Using new technologies e.g. SOLOMO Marketing (marketing tool that take advantage of mobile phone applications which combines location data with social marketing), software for hotel management systems etc.

5. People and culture
People and culture are the final piece of the organic growth puzzle. The values and enablers in the company’s culture and way of managing in order to embed growth into the company DNA. This can be achieved by:
- Leadership because growth leaders not only create but also accelerate the entire growth process.
- Encouraging risk-taking and tolerate failure
- Motivating the employees and promote learning
- Showing respect for all people, including employees

5 Managerial Implications
This research is valuable to management in tourism organisations in terms of strategic decision-making. There are certain advantages for hospitality business pursuing a development method of organic growth. The business is able to retain total control over the development route and direction. By doing so it can plan more effectively by making the most appropriate allocation of resources and more closely monitor the rate in which it wants the development to progress. The business is also able to retain all the gains that may drive from the outcome of the development route and direction.

Now that five key factors (growing mind-set, customer experience, processes, measurement, people and culture) have been identified in this qualitative study using grounded theory, possible strategies can be considered by the tourism industry.

6 Conclusion and Future Directions
From an academic perspective, this topic is significant because there aren’t studies which specifically examine the importance of organic growth marketing strategies in hospitality industry. The research also provides a potential starting point for quantitative research in this area. To complete the hospitality industry knowledge about organic growth in the hotels, intensive case studies about good practices in hotels will be conducted.

In the tradition of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which attempts to build or discover theory from data, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the factors that influence organic growth in hospitality industry. From a managerial perspective, the research has highlighted the post important principles which govern the organic growth integrated into hospitality marketing strategies.
Organic growth is not the inevitable result of a successful business model. All hospitality companies can become more skilled at growing organically with the business models they already have. But that requires active, engaged corporate leadership to create appropriate marketing strategies based on well define growing mind set, performance measurement, process focused initiatives, valuable employee culture, in order to deliver the customer experience that competitors can’t match.

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