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# Critical Success Factors in the Promotion of Sustainable Rural Tourism by Destination Marketing Organisations: A Study of Ballyhoura Fáilte

*Louise Nugent and Siobhán Lynch*

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## Abstract

With the Irish tourism industry maturing, destination marketing organisations (DMOs) must meet tourists' changing expectations. For rural tourism destinations, the challenge lies in ensuring that they obtain a position of sustainability in the Irish tourism industry (Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, 2011). Due to the highly volatile nature of the Irish rural tourism industry, treating rural tourism like any other product does not comply with the new approach to destination marketing management, which considers the resources available, the environment, the tourist, and the residents themselves (Buhalis, 2000; Pike, 2008).

The aim of this study is to carry out a comprehensive review of extant literature to identify the critical success factors in destination marketing management and assess how these success factors compare with the practice of destination marketing management by a small rural destination management organisation (DMO) in Ireland, namely Ballyhoura Fáilte.

The paper finds that Ballyhoura Fáilte has been largely successful in identifying and carrying out the CSF activities that are vital to drive strategy and ensure sustainable competitive advantage. This paper also proposes a full set of Critical Success Factors (CSFs), or essential tasks, important for ensuring the long-term success of DMOs.

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, Destination Marketing Management, Destination Marketing Organisation, Sustainable Rural Tourism, Ireland.

## Introduction

DMOs who treat destination marketing management (DMM) as a primary function tend to experience a sustainable competitive advantage for their destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Ritchie and Crouch also suggest that a focus on DMM will enable a DMO to perform better in the areas of increasing tourism expenditure, attracting visitors, providing satisfying memorable experiences, enhancing the well-being of the destination's residents, as well as preserving the natural capital of the destination.

Traditionally, destination marketing management concentrated on improving visitor numbers and treated tourism like any other product or service (Buhalis, 2000). However, this approach failed to recognise the requirements and boundaries of each individual destination. This often led to the failure of DMOs in applying all of the components of a destination marketing management strategy. Therefore, to gain a sustainable competitive advantage, Buhalis (2000) and Pike (2008) argue that a DMO must adapt a societal marketing strategy. A societal marketing strategy occurs when marketing is considered as representative of "the process of matching destination resources with environmental opportunities, with the wider interest of society in mind" (Pike, 2008:27). This means that, for a DMO to promote and market their

destination successfully, an integrated approach must be adopted which considers the resources available, the environment, the tourist, and the host community.

This paper proposes a set of critical success factors (CSFs), or essential tasks, that must be carried out by a rural, Irish DMO to ensure that sustainable competitive advantage is achieved.

### **Ballyhoura Fáilte (DMO responsible for marketing Ballyhoura Country)**

Ballyhoura Country is situated in the south-west region of Ireland, on the borders of counties Limerick, Tipperary, and Cork. The Ballyhoura area is home to the mountain ranges of the Ballyhouras and the Galtees. The region offers walks, way-marked looped walks and nature trails, archaeological villages, heritage sites, angling and bird watching activities, while also being a centre of excellence for mountain biking.

Ballyhoura Fáilte is a cooperative destination marketing organisation (DMO) with the strategic objective of developing marketable products based on the strengths and resources of the Ballyhoura Country. These products also aim to be compatible with the goal of enhancing sustainability. Ballyhoura Fáilte looks to increase visitor numbers, the average length of stay and revenue yield, while spreading tourism activity throughout the Ballyhoura Country.

### **Destination Marketing Management Strategy**

Destination marketing management is largely responsible for identifying potential revenue streams for a DMO. This is achieved by specifying the intended target market, product and services to be offered and by formulating related action plans necessary to increase market share (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). However, due to their growing complexity, destinations are known to be one of the most difficult entities to market and manage (Buhalis, 2000; Fyall & Garrod, 2005). The challenge for a DMO is ensuring that the destination reaches a position of sustainable competitive advantage. However, this requires a DMO to clearly comprehend the challenges emerging from within the tourism industry. Gretzel *et al.* (2006) identify six important challenges for a rural DMO, these include adapting to technological changes, managing changing consumer expectations, moving from destination marketing to destination management, confronting new levels of competition, recognising creative partnering as the new way of life, and finding new measures of success.

### **Critical Success Factors (CSFs) in the development of a Destination Marketing Management Strategy**

Middleton *et al.* (2009) argue that there are five key components that must be present in a destination marketing management strategy. These components are goals and objectives, positioning and branding, strategies and programmes, budgets and reviews, and evaluations. However, Pike (2008) and Buhalis (2000) argue that segmentation and targeting have been overlooked and should be added as key components.

To compete effectively and efficiently within the tourism industry, it is necessary to recognise the CSFs that will ensure successful destination management. These CSFs can be used to explain why destination marketing management strategy efforts are successful or unsuccessful within a particular rural destination. CSFs can also motivate a DMO to take all necessary factors into account when developing an effective and sustainable strategy (Rainisto, 2003). There are many common elements that successful DMOs have adopted, it is these common factors that this research develops into CSFs. Morgan and Pritchard (2004)

and Baker and Cameron (2008) suggest that the CSFs should be grouped into four phases: strategic orientation, destination identity, stakeholder involvement and implementation, review and monitoring.

## **Phase One – Strategic Orientation**

Literature suggests that the DMO must initially orientate itself strategically so that it has a full understanding of the tourism market in which is operating.

### **1. Investigate Tourism Industry and Identify Level of Competitiveness Within**

Grant (2005) believes that a successful destination marketing management strategy should be designed around a deep and respectful appreciation for the industry and its competition. It is also essential for a DMO to continually review and investigate the key trends affecting their industry (Gössling *et al.*, 2009).

### **2. Set Realistic Goals and Objectives**

Sustainable competitive advantage can be developed from a DMO's distinctive competences (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). A DMO can strengthen its destination marketing management efforts by setting values and goals that reflect these competences. The DMO must conduct an appraisal of resources (Grant, 2005) and set a statement of corporate values, this will allow it to exploit its internal strengths, resources and capabilities (Johnson *et al.*, 2011).

### **3. Quantify and Segment the Market**

Market segmentation allows a DMO to tailor their strategies more effectively. It also allows the DMO to focus on the needs of a particular market and to become the best in catering for that group (Pike, 2005). In order to segment the market successfully, Dolnicar (2008) suggests that the DMO must select segmentation criteria, group tourists into segments by assigning each tourist to the respective segment, profile each segment, and conduct a managerial assessment of the usefulness of each market segment and then formulate targeted DMM activities. Dolnicar points out that, in doing this, the DMO must ensure that each member within a particular segment is as similar as possible and that each segment is as different as possible from other segments. The DMO must also ensure that the segments selected for targeted marketing activities match the strengths of the destination.

## **Phase Two – Destination Identity**

Middleton *et al.* (2009), Cai (2002) and Leisen (2001) have debated different key components that must be present to ensure success in relation to formulating a destination's identity. The argued components include the destination brand, image, position within the market and the marketing mix. Therefore, this phase will incorporate the CSFs that a DMO must consider when developing an identity for their destination.

### **4. Develop a Suitable Destination Brand and Image**

The destination's brand and image are used to differentiate a destination from alternatives (Qu *et al.*, 2011; Leisen, 2001). According to Cai (2002), the following criteria should be used by a DMO: (a) the DMO must carefully choose one or more brand elements to serve as a trademark and they must ensure that this trademark reinforces a strong and consistent brand association; (b) they must then assess the gap between the perceived image of the destination and the image that the DMO wants to project; (c) they must build the desired image into a

brand identity using marketing programmes, marketing communications, and by managing secondary associations.

### **5. Obtain a Correct Position for the Destination**

According to Pike (2012), very few tourism destinations and products are unique and there is an ever increasing risk of a destination becoming substitutable. He states that a DMO must differentiate itself by correctly positioning their destination into tourists' choice sets. However, the DMO must remember that how people relate to any destination's brand and image will ultimately depend on the individual's choice sets.

### **6. Develop the Marketing Mix to Reflect the Destination's Brand**

Buhalis (2000) maintains that a DMO must consider all areas of the marketing mix. This will allow the DMO to approach the segmented market with a variety of offerings that meet tourists' needs, wants, and desires. However, Buhalis also asserts that the DMO must ensure that the chosen marketing mix is one that reinforces the destination's image, brand, and desired position.

The DMO product must have a deliberate focus that directly seeks to influence the visitation of potential tourists and raises awareness for future visits (Page and Connell, 2006). The DMO must emphasise their destination's uniqueness over all others. As tourism is price elastic, the DMO must be concerned with offering a pricing structure deemed to be fair and value for money in the eyes of the tourist (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). For a DMO to ensure effective distribution of the product offering, a combination of both online and offline distribution channels must be used. The DMO must find an optimal marketing distribution mix that reduces costs while meeting the needs of potential tourists.

According to Middleton *et al.* (2009), the DMO must use a dedicated communications proposition that serves to reinforce the destination's brand, image, and position. They believe that as this element is responsible for the communication of the promise being conveyed, it is essential that the DMO addresses new and innovative forms of communication channels.

## **Phase Three – Stakeholder Management Strategy**

The identification of the right stakeholders, and the development of targeted communications to meet the needs and expectations of those stakeholders, will lead to a higher level of commitment and support for the DMO (Bourne, 2009).

### **7. Identify All Stakeholders**

The DMO is required to identify all people, or groups, who may have an interest in the planning, delivery and/or outcomes of the destination marketing management strategy (Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Freeman, 1984). Therefore, the DMO must identify who their stakeholders are, how much influence they have and how much interest they have in the success of the destination.

### **8. Understand Stakeholders' Level of Influence and Power**

As not all stakeholders will hold the same level of power and interest, the DMO must understand the level of involvement of each stakeholder (Johnson *et al.*, 2008). From this, Johnson *et al.* believe that the DMO will be able to relocate and effectively manage the required resources to target the key stakeholders more efficiently. They state that DMOs must prioritise their

stakeholders on a Power/Interest Matrix, explaining that a stakeholder's position on this matrix will guide the actions the DMO should take with each stakeholder.

### **9. Create a Stakeholder Management Strategy and Communications Plan**

The DMO can now be concerned with generating a stakeholder management strategy and communications plan to ensure stakeholders are fully satisfied (Johnson *et al.*, 2008). This will also allow the DMO to actively increase participation between the DMO and relevant stakeholders.

## **Phase Four - Implement, Monitor and Review**

Without successful implementation and constant monitoring and reviewing, the best strategies are often of little use, according to Grant (2005). Therefore, success in terms of the DMO's ability to achieve results, and their effectiveness in inspiring loyalty and commitment among stakeholders is critical to the success of a destination marketing management strategy.

### **10. Set a Realistic Budget**

Due the current economic recession and the lack of a common model for determining an appropriate level of funding (Pike, 2004), DMOs are being forced to raise their own funds and set tighter budgets (Collins & Buhalis, 2003). This is necessary to ensure the objective of maximising potential profit achieved, accompanied by the best possible allocation of DMM resources (Kumar, 2006).

### **11. Review and Monitor Factors Affecting Destination Choice**

A DMO must understand the process of destination selection and the choice sets that potential tourists use when deciding to visit a destination (Decrop, 2010). This will assist the DMO in the communication process with tourists (Levy and Duverger, 2010) and will lead to a reduction in cognitive dissonance for the tourist. By understanding these choice sets, coupled with the attributes tourists consider when making a destination choice, DMOs will be equipped with the ability to target and segment the market more efficiently and effectively (Decrop, 2010).

### **12. Perform a Review and Evaluation of Activities**

Failure to translate strategic goals into a practical guide is one of the main shortcomings in strategy implementation (Pike, 2008). In order to effectively review and monitor destination marketing management efforts, Horan (2010) suggests that the DMO must: (a) conduct a performance review to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the DMO in reaching their objectives; (b) develop benchmarks for comparing outcomes; (c) measure the output of each element of the strategy in terms of various performance indicators; (d) cautiously observe tourist satisfaction levels; (e) continually monitor the host community's reactions to tourists; (f) be aware of any infrastructure developments that are necessary in the area; (g) establish whether or not the costs incurred in developing and implementing the strategy are justified by the benefits gained.

### **13. Measure the Success of the Destination**

A DMO must ensure that their destination is being marketed as a mental concept that exists in the tourist's mind and not as just another geographical location (Lewis-Cameron and Roberts, 2010). It is recommended that the DMO uses Bornhorst *et al.*'s (2010) five key measures of destination success to evaluate the success of the destination as a whole and the implications

of the chosen strategy. These measures are: economic success, marketing effectiveness, product and service offering, quality of the visitor's experience, and internal stakeholder interaction.

## **Research Methodology**

The methodology adopted for this study was determined by the previously discussed CSFs as they emerged from an examination of extant literature. The aim of the study was to carry out a comparative evaluation of Ballyhoura Fáilte's current destination marketing management strategy and the CSFs. This facilitated an assessment of whether the CSFs emerging from literature concur with strategies being employed by a DMO. To achieve this, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used.

To facilitate a deep exploration of the research topic qualitative research took the form of an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the manager of Ballyhoura Fáilte. An interview guide containing a list of specific questions was used during the interview and the interview was recorded. This line of questioning ensured that all the necessary topics were appropriately covered. However, a flexible approach to the line of questioning allowed for additional questions to be developed throughout the course of the interview as recommended by Blumberg *et al.* (2008). This allowed the respondent to guide the interview in different directions and to generate new sub-topics that had not been previously identified. The CSFs outlined earlier were used to guide the questioning.

A community survey was also conducted in five different demographic regions among members of the business community, including accommodation providers, activity providers, and retailers. This allowed for an examination of the relevant elements of the research topic from the viewpoint of the host community and provided their opinions on the DMM efforts within the Ballyhoura Country. Purposive sampling (non-probability), whereby judgement and knowledge were used to identify who would be in the sample, allowed the researcher to overcome the problems of high sampling costs and the unavailability of a practical sampling frame (Blumberg *et al.*, 2008). The five different demographic locations chosen for this study included Kilfinnane, Kilmallock, Galbally, Charleville, and Mitchelstown. Questionnaires were administered among local business people on a face-to-face basis, following a structure that encompassed both structured and semi-structured questions. Twenty questionnaires were distributed within each of the locations and analysis was carried out using SPSS software.

## **Research Findings**

Findings indicate that there is a correlation between the literature's CSFs and the CSFs identified by the primary research. While the literature (secondary research) identified thirteen CSFs, the findings of the primary research supported only twelve of these.

### **Phase One: Strategic Orientation**

According to the findings of the secondary research, there should be three CSFs considered by a DMO in this phase. Findings from the primary research support this premise.

#### ***CSF One: Investigate Tourism Industry and Identify Level of Competitiveness Within***

Findings from the qualitative research show that Ballyhoura Fáilte has a profound understanding of the environment. The interview conducted with Ballyhoura Fáilte confirms that they regularly conduct investigations into the tourism industry. In 2009, a cluster study was

conducted within the Ballyhoura Country to investigate and highlight all possible areas where tourism could be increased within the area. Ballyhoura Fáilte has recently commissioned a detailed project in partnership with Limerick Institute of Technology to monitor visitor numbers and analyse their impact on the region. A second partnership between Ballyhoura Fáilte, Fáilte Ireland and Coillte, has also commissioned a study which aims to provide Ballyhoura Fáilte with accurate readings on visitor numbers. A further study with Fáilte Ireland will allow Ballyhoura Fáilte to investigate the impact of the mountain bike trails in the region. Ballyhoura Fáilte has incorporated results from the cluster study into their current strategy. They are currently looking to continue this trend with the strategic recommendations arising from the recently commissioned studies.

**CSF Two: Set Realistic Goals and Objectives**

Qualitative research suggests that this CSF is vital to the success of Ballyhoura Fáilte. Ballyhoura Fáilte’s overall aim is “to generate energy within communities and to increase visitor numbers and support and encourage any businesses to prosper or develop all in a sustainable way” (Somers, 2011). From this aim, the following set of tourism related objectives have been outlined for the Ballyhoura region:

- *To increase tourism within the Ballyhoura region in a sustainable way.*
- *To support communities and social inclusion.*
- *To support jobs.*
- *To support communities in having a better lifestyle and living.*

(Somers, 2011)

These findings are reinforced by the results of the community survey. Table I provides the strategic objectives of the Ballyhoura region in order of importance, as perceived by the host community.

<b>Strategic Objectives</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. Increase Tourist Numbers	81%
2. Improve Economic Success	54%
3. Improve Product and Service Offerings	49%
4. Develop the Visitor’s Experience	48%
5. Increase Marketing Efforts	30%
6. Engage with Stakeholders More	15%

**Table I:** Strategic Objectives as identified by the Host Community

The aims and objectives of Ballyhoura Fáilte are underpinned by the distinctive capabilities of the organisation and the Ballyhoura Country. They are also being reinforced by the opinions of the host communities. This is assisting Ballyhoura Fáilte in formulating their unique identity.

### **CSF Three: Quantify and Segment Market**

Primary research supports the inclusion of this CSF. Qualitative research shows that the segmentation criteria chosen for Ballyhoura Country are based on activity driven tourism. According to Somers (2011), a cluster study carried out in 2009 identified possible tourism areas to be developed within the region and one of the areas revealed was mountain biking. To capitalise on this recommendation, over one hundred kilometres of specially designed mountain bike trails were developed on the mountains.

As a result of attracting this customer segment, visitor numbers have increased to nearly 40,000 per annum. This number of visitors is projected to increase year on year. Somers also points out that Ballyhoura Fáilte has identified other segments:

*Kilmallock, for example, would be a very historical town. We would support Kilmallock in looking at all the historical sites they would have, and support them in working with the office of Public Works in developing those sites and making them more accessible to the public.*

(Somers, 2011)

Ballyhoura Fáilte has been very successful in quantifying and segmenting the market to date. However, they have recognised the need for a continuous assessment of each segment. This continuous assessment will allow them to increase the tourist numbers in the future.

Responses to the community survey indicate that much of the business community is aware of the segmentation criteria used by Ballyhoura Fáilte. Almost 55% of respondents felt the region's main market segment is composed of cyclists and walkers, in other words, activity based tourists.

## **Phase 2: Destination Identity**

Both the literature review and the primary research support the inclusion of three CSFs in this phase.

### **CSF Four: Develop a Suitable Destination Brand and Image**

Qualitative research findings again concur with the findings of the literature review, in that, the development of a brand image around activity is of vital importance to a destination. Ballyhoura has developed a strong brand image around activity based tourism. This, along with the consistent use of their leaf logo, is used to differentiate the destination from alternatives.



**Figure 1:** Ballyhoura 's Brand and Image  
**Source:** [www.visitballyhoura.com](http://www.visitballyhoura.com)

However, according to Somers (2011):

*The Ballyhoura brand is very well known in the Ballyhoura region but when you travel outside the Ballyhoura region people do not seem to really know where the Ballyhoura Mountains are.*

Therefore, despite its strong brand imagery, Ballyhoura Fáilte must be concerned with ensuring that the current brand image is being portrayed locally, nationally and internationally.

Findings from the community survey also suggest that respondents would like the region to be promoted more widely on a national and international level, indicating that they feel that the brand is not widely recognised (see CSF Six).

**CSF Five: Obtain a Correct Position for the Destination**

According to Somers (2011), Ballyhoura Fáilte has carefully positioned itself as the market leader for activity based holidays, particularly cycling holidays. Responses to the community survey support this assertion. Over 50% of respondents see Ballyhoura primarily as a destination aimed at tourists interested in activity based holidays, especially cycling and walking.

Destination Type	Percentage
1. Cycling	55%
2. Walking	52%
3. Area of Natural Beauty	43%
4. Area of Historical Importance	27%

**Table II:** Community Perceptions of Ballyhoura as a Tourist Destination

### CSF Six: Develop the Marketing Mix to Reflect the Destination's Brand

Qualitative research indicates that Ballyhoura Fáilte is very focussed on its marketing mix. For example, Ballyhoura Fáilte is responsible for managing the mountain bike trails, as well as other products and services. To increase its attractiveness locally, nationally and internationally, the grading of the trails by level of difficulty is the next area of concern for Ballyhoura Fáilte. This will allow Ballyhoura Fáilte to increase the overall experience and to improve the products and services on offer. With many of the activities available within the Ballyhoura Country being provided free to the public, Ballyhoura Fáilte believes that they have recession proof products and services as all of the ten National Walking Loops, drives and the mountain bike trails are free, while parking is the only service that has to be paid for.

The host community was also asked about how Ballyhoura Fáilte's use of the marketing mix is affecting the region's competitive advantage. Respondents felt that marketing Ballyhoura Country as a single entity offers potential tourists many things that competing destinations do not. For example, thirty six per cent felt that the region offers a greater overall experience. Twenty eight per cent felt that the area offers better products and services, while sixteen per cent felt that the area now offers greater value for money. Figure 2 illustrates this information and shows that Ballyhoura Fáilte and the community are working towards the same goals.

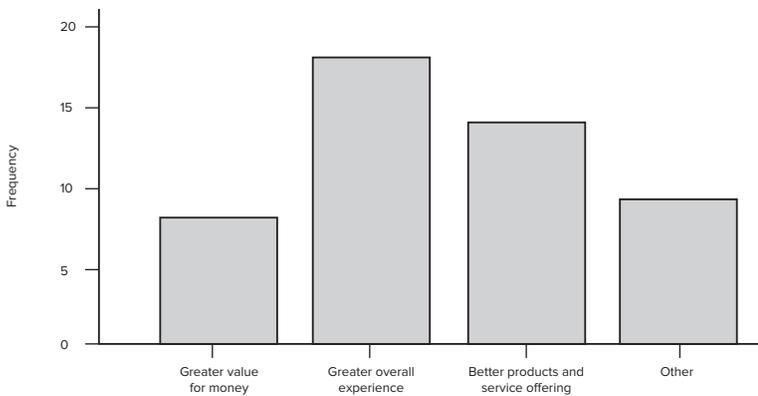


Figure 2: Ballyhoura Country's Competitive Advantage

Also, Ballyhoura Fáilte is currently developing a dedicated communications proposition that serves to reinforce the chosen destination brand, image, and position. Ballyhoura Fáilte has identified that seventy per cent of marketing energies should be focussed on the mountain bike trails and related activities. The remaining thirty per cent should then be evenly divided among all remaining activities. This is due the fact that the mountain bike trails are in the growth stage. Currently, *“ninety per cent of talking to potential tourists is done through social media rather than through larger magazines”* (Somers, 2011).

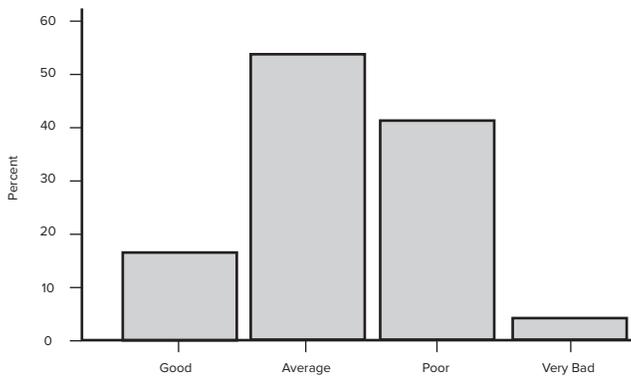
However, there is still a certain amount of promotional material that goes through magazines, but the cost of advertising in this medium is very expensive. To combat this expense, Ballyhoura Fáilte has identified fifteen key journalists and, in particular, key bloggers to visit the Ballyhoura Country. Somers (2011) states that *“We [Ballyhoura Fáilte] feel that if we get these key journalists down to write about it, social media will be huge”*.

However, Ballyhoura Fáilte has acknowledged the need for more print material.

*When people come down to the area they want the print material. They want to be able to put it into their pocket. Our print advertising needs to not alone give information but it needs to be useful to them as well.*

(Somers, 2011)

As a result of this recognition, Ballyhoura Fáilte is currently evaluating how effective its print material is. They are looking to add value for the visitor by using more effective promotional material. These findings correlate with the opinions of the host community. Figure 3 provides an overview of the answers the host community gave when asked how well they felt the Ballyhoura Country was being marketed and promoted. Fifty four per cent of respondents thought it was average, thirty four per cent thought the marketing was poor, and two per cent felt that it was very bad. This is compared to only ten per cent feeling that it was good. Not one respondent thought the marketing of the Ballyhoura Country was excellent.



**Figure 3:** How Well the Community Feels Ballyhoura is being Marketed and Promoted

When asked how they felt the marketing efforts of the Ballyhoura Country could be improved, many different responses were given. Table III provides a summary of the four most common responses.

Marketing Effort Required	Percentage
1. Increase awareness in the local community	52%
2. Increase the number of national advertising campaigns	36%
3. Increase the usage levels of social media	35%
4. Use more promotional material for various products and services	33%

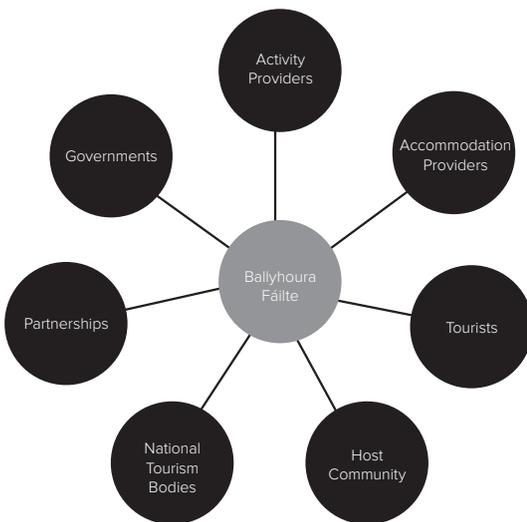
**Table III:** Community Perceptions of Ballyhoura as a Tourist Destination: How Ballyhoura Fáilte Can Improve Marketing Efforts

### Phase 3: Stakeholder Management Strategy

In this phase, the inclusion of three CSFs is supported by both secondary and primary research.

#### **CSF Seven: Identify all Stakeholders**

Ballyhoura Fáilte agrees that in order to communicate efficiently it must identify all stakeholders. Figure 4 illustrates the stakeholders it has identified.



**Figure 4:** Ballyhoura Fáilte’s Stakeholder Map

#### **CSF Eight: Understand Stakeholders’ Level of Influence and Power**

Table IV illustrates that Ballyhoura Fáilte currently analyse its stakeholders’ position on the Power/Interest Matrix. The matrix illustrates that the most influential stakeholders are activity providers, accommodation providers, and the national tourism bodies, and Ballyhoura Fáilte recognise that it must engage with them fully. Tourists to the area must be kept satisfied,

while partnerships should be kept informed to ensure that no major issues arise. The host community and the government must also be continually monitored.

<b>Level of Interest</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>Power</b>		
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host Community</li> <li>• Government</li> </ul>
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity Providers</li> <li>• Accommodation Providers</li> <li>• National Tourism Bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourists</li> </ul>

**Table IV:** Ballyhoura Fáilte’s Power/Interest Matrix

Findings from the host community survey indicates a strong feeling of inclusion in the strategy development for the area, with 72% of respondents indicating that they have been asked by Ballyhoura to take part in the development of their area at some point.

**CSF Nine: Create a Stakeholder Management Strategy and Communications Plan**

Ballyhoura Fáilte has developed a stakeholder management strategy and communications plan for the next two years. This plan will allow Ballyhoura Fáilte to invite stakeholders to visit the Ballyhoura Country. This will allow Ballyhoura Fáilte to take these stakeholders on familiarisation trips and to provide them with information on the products and services available within the area. A network evening has also been highlighted in the stakeholder management plan. This network meeting will allow the activity providers to meet and engage with accommodation providers. This will ensure that the accommodation providers are aware of all the activities that are currently available within the area.

When the host community was asked how they would like to be communicated with thirty eight per cent failed to respond. However, Table 5 provides a summary of the interesting points made by the host community.

<b>Improvements To Communication Efforts</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. Regular Meetings with the Host Community	53%
2. Increase Communication through E-Letters, Newsletters, and Social Media	34%
3. Ask the Community for Ideas	32%
4. Better Advertising	12%

**Table 5:** How Ballyhoura Fáilte Can Improve Community Communication Efforts

However, ninety per cent of respondents from the community survey believe that their community is not being effectively communicated with. Ballyhoura Fáilte has recognised that the involvement of the host community will be vital to the success of the Ballyhoura Country. They have also acknowledged that this is one area that needs improvement (Somers, 2011).

#### **Phase 4: Implementation, Monitoring and Review**

The secondary research identified Implementation, Monitoring, and Review as the third phase of CSFs that should be incorporated into a DMM strategy. Interestingly, however, the findings of literature review and the primary research did not correlate across all four CSFs in this phase.

##### ***CSF Ten: Set a realistic budget (Removed)***

The literature review suggested that Ballyhoura Fáilte should be concerned with setting tighter budgets as a result of the economic downturn. However, in practice, this is not happening as Ballyhoura Fáilte's budget is determined by grant aid and this is currently unaffected by the economic climate. In essence, Ballyhoura Fáilte has little control over their budget and, therefore, this CSF cannot be supported by the primary research and hence will be removed from the CSF set.

However, the partnerships that Ballyhoura Fáilte forms can influence their budget. Currently, they are looking to form a partnership with the organisation responsible for the development of the mountain trails in Northern Ireland, the Tourism Countryside Alliance. This partnership will allow them to secure additional funding under the North-South Partnership. This partnership will also entitle Ballyhoura Fáilte to additional EU funding which will allow Ballyhoura Fáilte to combat any budgetary constraints that may arise in the future. Therefore, CSF Nine - Stakeholder Management Strategy is of key importance in controlling the budgets for DMOs like Ballyhoura Fáilte.

##### ***CSF Eleven: Review and Monitor Factors Affecting Destination Choice***

Research revealed that Ballyhoura Fáilte would like to look at having a continuous survey system set up at the trails. Although this is not currently happening, Ballyhoura has already recognised that reviewing and monitoring are of major importance to them.

##### ***CSF Twelve: Perform a Review and Evaluation of Activities***

Primary research findings indicate that this is an important CSF. Ballyhoura Fáilte reviews and evaluates their activities by reviewing and monitoring visitor numbers and their impact on the local region.

Ballyhoura Fáilte places importance on evaluating the impact of festivals and events on the local area. In each six month period, Ballyhoura Fáilte will provide funding and different supports to approximately forty festivals in the region which contribute about fifteen million euro to the local economy. Below is just one example of a festival that Ballyhoura Fáilte has lent its support to. It also shows the impact of the festival on the local economy:

*Glenroe Harvest Festival started three years ago just after an under eights hurling match on a particular weekend on September. The local community approached Ballyhoura looking for support because it wanted to develop the festival a little bit further. So two years down the line, the Glenroe Harvest Festival is one of the predominate festivals in the region. It has an impact on the local economy of probably ¼ of a million euro. It would have approximately 10,000 visitors over the week and there are over a hundred volunteers in the community involved in arranging the festival.*

(Somers, 2011)

### **CSF Thirteen: Measure the Success of the Destination**

Primary research also supports this CSF. Ballyhoura Fáilte looks at best practices from other destinations such as Leader areas and other rural areas. They examine the best practices in these areas and see what is working very well.

*Ballyhoura Country seems to be the leader in what it does in relation to promoting tourism and promoting all the work it does in communities. There are a lot of other areas that look at what Ballyhoura Country is doing.*

(Somers, 2011)

Ballyhoura Fáilte currently measures its own success in accordance with Bornhorst *et al.*'s (2010) five key measures of a destination's success. These measures include economic success, marketing effectiveness, product and service offering, quality of the visitor's experience and stakeholder interaction.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, findings from the primary research correlated with findings of the secondary research, that is, by incorporating the CSFs associated with each of Baker and Cameron's (2008) and Morgan and Pritchard's (2004) phases of a destination marketing and management strategy, a DMO is more likely to be successful in developing a competitive and sustainable image and position. These proposed CSFs are presented in Table VI overleaf.

### **Phase 1: Strategic Orientation**

- CSF 1: Investigate Tourism Industry and its Level of Competitiveness
- CSF 2: Set Realistic Goals and Objectives
- CSF 3: Quantify and Segment Market

### **Phase 2: Destination Identity**

- CSF 4: Develop Suitable Destination Brand & Image
- CSF 5: Position Destination Correctly in Marketplace
- CSF 6: Develop Marketing Mix to Reflect Brand

### **Phase 3: Stakeholder Management Strategy**

- CSF 7: Identify all Stakeholders
- CSF 8: Understand Stakeholders' Influence and Power
- CSF 9: Develop Stakeholder Management Strategy & Communications Plan

### **Phase 4: Implementation, Monitoring & Review**

- CSF 10: Review & Monitor Factors Affecting Destination Choice
- CSF 11: Perform Review & Evaluation of Activities
- CSF 12: Measure Success of Destination

**Table VI:** Destination Marketing Management CSFs

The analysis of the interview with Ballyhoura Fáilte suggests that this rural DMO has been successful in carrying out the essential CSF activities that are needed to ensure sustainability within the Ballyhoura Country. Ballyhoura Country, and therefore Ballyhoura Fáilte, is currently a market leader and it wants to expand the total market usage while maintaining its current position. It will achieve this by identifying that a continual investigation of the tourism industry is a must. Ballyhoura Fáilte has also been successful in ensuring that the vision and objectives of the organisation are underpinned by the capabilities of Ballyhoura Fáilte.

However, Ballyhoura Fáilte must recognise that there are certain areas in which improvements can be made. Ballyhoura Fáilte has concerns with ensuring that the brand image is consistently being portrayed locally, nationally and internationally. They are also currently looking to develop a dedicated communications proposition that serves to reinforce the destination's brand, image, and position. Other areas of improvements include stakeholder identification, involvement and communication, and engagement levels with the national tourism bodies.

Although the current destination marketing and management strategy of Ballyhoura Fáilte is effective, this study has identified several issues as priority for the future strategy. These issues include the reinforcement of the destination's brand and image, the improvement of the overall visitor experience, and the implementation of their stakeholder management strategy and communication plan.

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