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SUCCESS FACTORS IN THE ORGANIZATION OF TRIATHLONS AND RUNNING EVENTS. RESEARCH FOCUS ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Introduction

In North America and Western Europe numerous mass running events have been dynamically developing for many years. Relevant data amount to an incentive to analyze the phenomenon, as there can be observed annual growths of the number of events and participants reaching several dozen percent. Statistics confirm the adequacy of observing Central Europe and suggest a similar growth scenario for this part of the world. The emotional character of runs is developing along with the awareness of the need to treat them as a product, an undertaking which must be regulated and entails organizational, business and other objectives.

Success factors – discussion focus of client's satisfaction

By observing the market in Poland and many other countries we may take notice of an extremely dynamic growth of the number of participants. The reasons for this phenomenon are among others: a more significant, in comparison with the past, tendency among Poles to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle, popularity of running in western countries, and the growing availability of high quality footwear, clothes and accessories for runner, and the growing number of sizable running events, and relatively low costs of training, and the lack of strictly established requirements related to arenas. In the last several years the number of running events in Poland has increased every year even by 20-25%.

The measurement of clients' satisfaction is inextricably connected to the standard of services. Therefore, it is necessary to take notice of the quality of a service – in this case organization of a running event – and to define its clients. It may be seen as an oversimplification to assume that participants' satisfaction evaluation is one of the objectives, however, in a broader perspective we may include sponsors, VIPs, invited guests, family of participants and viewers in the group of clients or stakeholders. Defining these problems is related to establishing the research objectives, as we do not conduct the research for its own sake. In all cases the objective amounts to the basis for shaping a running event's quality.

The organizer, in order to meet clients' expectations, at the initial stage of preparation is obliged to identify potential recipients (possibly buyers, users and beneficiaries). At the next stage, it is necessary to define the recipients' needs and requirements.

Planning entails development of a running event's conception with its full specification. Accomplishment is the realization in accordance with the initial assumptions, which is followed by verification of its compliance with the model as well as by a proper analysis, in particular of the weakest elements. Moreover, it is significant to plan the next edition of the run. It is also important, in each of the aforementioned stages, to put emphasis on the client.

Research in clients' satisfaction should lead to gaining customers' trust as well as it ought to produce new adequate solutions taking into account clients' needs and expectations. Consequently, it will result in shaping and improving the administration's image. The research itself appears to be extremely difficult, though. The most significant roadblock is the fact that satisfaction is not a static phenomenon, but evolves in time. Furthermore, satisfaction is frequently the result of both clients' experiences and subjective impressions before, during and after the satisfaction is measured. The research problem in this aspect must be focused not only on the results, but, which is more important, on understanding the quality of the service provided by the organizer,

comprehending the differences between people observing the quality as well as it must concentrate on the adequacy of research methodologies.

Selected success factors of running events

On the basis of professional literature and experience, the first set of criteria related to running event participants' satisfaction was developed. The criteria were verified especially in order to eliminate the ones that are inadequate in reference to the analyzed event.

Participant satisfaction factors were divided into following categories: organization of the run, infrastructure, costs of participation, achieved results, packages and medals, self-organization of runners, communication, others.

In the frames of a given category there was a multisession identification of satisfaction factors conducted with the use of Ishikawa diagram:

- organization of the run: accessibility of information, beverages, catering in the finish area, track marking, accessibility of volunteers, deposit, toilet accessibility, organization of the start area, organization of the finish area, time measurement, photographic/video services, possibility of finishing the run with a child, attractiveness of the course, number of participants hindering the run, available beverages on the course, available energy food on the course, information about the completed distance, information about the time;
- infrastructure: assuring protection from unfavorable weather conditions, possibility of taking a shower, a parking lot;
- participation costs: admission, traveling costs, costs related to the necessary outfit, accommodation costs before and/or after the run;
- achieved results: achieving desired results, beating one's personal best, overcoming other participants;
- packages and medals: a start package, the price of the package, a rich package, a rich package/reasonable admission, a bib, a medal, designing the medal;
- self-organization of the runner: support from measurement devices (e.g. a watch, a heart rate monitor, a pedometer, GPS), mood and attitude (independent of the run), listening to music during the run, adequacy of outfit for the weather conditions, using mobile applications during the run, using energy gels, using isotonic beverages, diet prior to the run;
- information: accessibility of the information about the run on the Internet website, information about the completed distance during the run, information about the time during the run, information about the time at the finish line, contact with the organizer;
- others: satisfaction from the preparation of the run, conscientious realization of the training plan, presence of relatives, favorable weather, festive atmosphere, big number of participants, popularity of the run.

Conclusions

Among numerous factors which determine the quality of running events the aspects related to motivation, organization, infrastructure, schedule and others should be enumerated. Many participants indicate their goals – improving their achievements.

The motivations of athletes participating in running events are very diverse. It is the reasons that organizers should focus on many success factors.