

Attracting tourists for the Portuguese rural way: Database Marketing for Planning and Development

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Abstract

More and more, marketers are turning to tailored and targeted marketing to individuals. This is now possible through new technology with sophisticated database management systems and immense amounts of historical and purchased information on individual preferences and purchase behavior. This tendency is particularly appropriate for the industry of the tourism. This paper seeks to discuss and propose an application of database marketing adapted to the tourism in Portugal as well as to give evidence of the benefits of his use in the rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural Tourism; Database marketing; Portugal

1. Introduction

Many rural regions in the developed world are in a state of severe crisis. The challenges to the development of these rural areas include economic uncertainty and decline, unemployment, and population decline (Pacione, 1984). Many of the initiatives being undertaken to stabilize and strengthen rural economies include the tourism component. Rural regions could have a natural advantage over urban areas. Tourism, by its nature, tends to distribute development away from industrial centers to those regions of the country that have no development.

The benefits to rural regions from tourism include factors such as participation in a rapidly developing industry, access to a wide range of relatively inexpensive job creation opportunities, diversification of local economies, significant economic multiplier effects, protection of the environment, conservation of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the rural environment.

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There is a growing trend towards rural tourism. Various reports indicate that tourism of this nature is expected to grow by approximately 25% to 30% annually (Oelrichs & Prossner, 1992). In Portugal, tourism in rural areas grew by about 9% in the number of establishments and in capacity increased by 10% from 2004 to 2005. (DGT, 2005) Research speculates that people tend to strongly believe that rural areas are parts of a better physical and social world, a world that they would like to experience (Bowen, 1992). The search for a reunion with the balance between man and nature leads more and more people to a particular type of tourism: rural tourism.

This article explores the characteristics of demand and supply of Portuguese rural tourism with the aim of identifying the main advantages of the application of marketing databases. These advantages are related to the ability to discover market niches, assign value to customers and determine their life cycle, thus being a precise tool for implementing marketing strategies for the sector.

2. Rural Tourism

2.1 CHARACTERISTICS AND POTENTIALS

Tourism is characterized by one of the most significant phenomena of the time in which we live, reaching global proportions and definitively influencing the political, cultural, economic and social fields.

Since the sixties and seventies, Europe has experienced a trend of specialization in the tourist offer, both due to the emergence of new demand motivations and the saturation of traditional tourist models.

The new social structure, the consequences of mass tourism and the increase in awareness of respect for the environment has created a favorable climate for the emergence of more individualized, specialized and environmentally friendly forms of tourism. For tourism, the environment represents a resource, and also a great opportunity.

The climate created by a society in continuous change, ecologically increasingly conscious, which seeks a new quality of life and aware of the negative effects of mass tourism, has laid the foundations for the resurgence of tourism in rural and natural areas.

The resurgence of rural tourism is related to several reasons:

- There is a new demand for different forms of holidays, characterized by higher environmental quality and the choice of new tourist destinations.
- Weekend trips are increasingly important.
- There is a crisis in agriculture.
- There is pressure from the European Union for the development of rural tourism.
- It is considered that rural tourism can boost the rural economy.

The dissemination of experiences from other countries, the agrarian crisis and the availability of public financial resources have given rise to the development of *Rural Tourism programs* in most Portuguese regions in the last decade.

Portugal is a country with a unique tourism potential, with exceptional attractions for the formulation of creative and innovative tourism products. The market has positioned new types of tourism products such as rural tourism, agritourism, tourism and adventure, ecotourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism. On the other hand, the appearance of items related to this type of products is frequent and marketing has highlighted this phenomenon as an important indicator of tourist demand that asks for environmental and ecological quality.

The most widely used definition of rural tourism is that which includes rural tourism as a tourist activity carried out in rural areas, consisting of an integrated supply of demand-driven tourism whose motivation is contact with the rural environment and local society (Commission of the European Communities).

According to the General Directorate of Tourism, rural tourism is defined by the family accommodation service provided in private rustic houses that, due to their design, construction materials and other characteristics, are integrated into the typical regional architecture.

The hectic and stressed life of modern society is mixed with high workloads, pollution, physical discomfort, lack of cultural identity, unhealthy diet, insensitivity, "cold" relationships and many other factors that lead individuals to question themselves about the quality of life they lead today, remembering the "good old days" of childhood or the calm and healthy way of life of their ancestors.

This search for a reunion with the balance between man and nature leads more and more people to a special type of tourism: rural tourism.

UNWTO estimates that the rural tourism market offers great potential. In the UNWTO publication. "Tourism: Overview 2020; world forecasts and profiles of market segments", indicates that 3% of all international tourists seek rural tourism on their trips, which represents 19 million tourists, not including domestic tourism. Although there are no statistics on the overall level of domestic tourism, it is considered to be at least higher than international tourism and in the case of rural tourism this proportion will be even higher. The same source indicates that rural tourism is experiencing an annual growth of approximately 6%, two points above the average global growth rate of tourism.

2.2 THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF RURAL TOURISM

2.2.1 TOURISM PRODUCTS

The concept of tourism product is related to a set of goods and services, united by relationships of interaction and interdependence, which make it extremely complex.

The product is the central element of tourism marketing since it represents the offer that is made to tourists, current or potential, so that they can satisfy their needs and desires.

The singularities of this tourist product distinguish it from industrialized goods and common trade, as well as from other types of services. One of the most striking

characteristics is that it is an immaterial product – intangible – whose residue, after use, is a life experience.

The heterogeneity of demand means that expectations regarding the services to be provided are highly diverse, making their assessment subject to the most diverse interpretations.

As it is a good with a particularized consumption experience, the tourist product cannot, unlike tangible goods, be evaluated according to its weight, size, shape or color. It is represented to potential customers through descriptions and photos, and what induces the customer to buy are the promises of satisfaction. The way in which the product is presented, or the promise is portrayed, in advertising and promotional actions, is fundamental to the purchase decision.

Some singularities of the tourist product fit perfectly into rural tourism. They are:

- To be an abstract consumer good, that is, immaterial and intangible;
- There must be spatial and temporal coincidence of the sale and provision of the tourist service with its consumption;
- There is a need for customers to be present at the production site;
- To make storage impossible;
- Complementarity between its components;
- Concentration of tourist activities in space and time;
- Instability of demand;
- Heterogeneous demand.

The rural environment is no longer essentially agricultural. Agrarian political property, reconciled with society's purchasing patterns, has been imposing on the rural environment the need for transformations.

The provision of services, and especially tourism, has been making it possible, in many cases, for people to stay in the countryside and contributing to the return of individuals with experience in agriculture, who have tried new possibilities of survival in the cities.

With the growth of the sector, many enterprises, even without structure and preparation, simply "open their doors to tourism". Such initiatives frustrate those who offer, work and consume rural tourism, since only the rural property in its "raw" state cannot be considered a true tourist product.

Many properties have tourist resources, that is, they have great potential for the development of rural tourism, which cannot really be made available to tourists. For this to be done, there is a need to transform these resources into attractions, structuring and organizing various activities.

A beautiful waterfall cannot be understood as a tourist resource if it is located in a place of difficult access, where there is no indication and signage, where the main points of danger and difficulty have not yet been identified and related, in short, when it is still in a "raw" state. To be understood as a tourist attraction, the tourist resource needs to be formatted, aiming to provide the visitor with a wonderful and safe experience of contact with nature.

However, a structuring does not mean an artificialization of the experience, decharacterizing the place, making it a "country club". The formatting of rural tourism is about framing pure and rustic beauty into something that can be consumed by people with little or no experience in the rural environment, but eager to participate in the visited routine.

Therefore, rural tourism can offer rusticity and simplicity, with quality. The simple environment allows the experience to be valued, but a balance must be balanced between local characteristics and visitors' desires for comfort.

Another extremely important characteristic in the conception of rural tourism and that must be considered seriously and responsibly is the great interest of the public in actively participating in the activities carried out on the property visited. Rural tourism is a form of active and non-contemplative tourism, that is, people want to experience the day-to-day life of the place visited, starting to feel like intimate people of the locality and having the opportunity to practice rural activities, as well as live with the observed reality, actively interacting in the life of the local community.

This coexistence can even provide the establishment of bonds of friendship between visitors, owners and employees, which is not uncommon in many enterprises.

In the formatting of rural tourism products, it is essential to consider another factor: the surrounding region.

The attractiveness of a rural itinerary contemplating several farms is much greater than just one farm trying to satisfy all the needs of the tourist.

The involvement of a larger number of people in an organized way in the formatting of the product gives credibility and enriches what is offered, making it possible for visitors to spend longer periods in the region without feeling demotivated due to the lack of diversity.

There are many successful experiences in Portugal, where enterprises from the same region and with common interests come together and form an association to facilitate the development of rural tourism.

2.2.2 RELATIONS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND HISTORY

The fundamental basis of rural tourism is related to the natural and cultural heritage, and the relationship of the tourist activity (business) with this heritage has to be developed in order to value and conserve it.

In old properties, the cultural richness is enormous, and can be identified in different ways. However, it should be noted that although the historical factor is an extra attraction in terms of rural tourism, the existence of other attractions is always welcome.

The desire to know the ways of life of other peoples and communities is not always accompanied by due respect, due awareness of the value and legitimate interest on the part of visitors, which enhances the occurrence of negative impacts.

In cases where tourists adopt this attitude, prevailing respect and interest, culture becomes one of the great attractions of rural tourism, with emphasis on the following cultural elements: handicrafts, gastronomy, traditions, history, architecture and typically rural leisure activities. Consequently, the impacts of these factors will be positive.

Rural tourism can be a vector of development or negative impacts for the property or region in which it is developed. The way it will be developed will define its performance and its relationship with natural and cultural factors. Therefore, actions must be structured that make it possible to maximize the chances of success and minimize negative environmental, social and cultural impacts.

2.2.3 VALUING THE RURAL

Rural tourism can be one of the vectors of local development as long as decisions are made at the local level, and that local communities take ownership of the benefits generated. It can thus be a way of valuing the territory and rurality itself, because at the same time that it depends on the management of local and rural space for its success, it contributes to the protection of the environment and to the conservation of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the rural environment.

With the development of this type of tourism, the countryside will gain more and more appreciation and identification with its culture, appreciating its popular wisdom and encouraging the rescue of its traditions. The nostalgia of those who have lived in the countryside or heard stories from relatives and friends about the "simple and pure" life of the rural environment values this way of life, which until recently was seen as a symbol of backwardness and a reason for shame.

With the development of rural tourism, the actors of rural daily life will once again be proud of their lives, of being able to show their activities and customs.

3. Tourism Marketing and its Importance for Rural Tourism

Initially, marketing thinking focused on large-scale consumption plans. However, marketing is increasingly present in service companies, particularly tourism.

In addition to creating strong tourism brands, a country needs to manage them professionally, as if they were a product. This is one of the key components of revenue to attract an increasing number of visitors, especially in times of intense competition. The demand for rural tourism must be supported by a strong marketing strategy in terms of planning.

Recently, service marketing has provided remarkable development. A set of circumstances has generated a need to apply marketing to services. The dynamism of the sector, the intensification of the competence of the services often generated by the lack of regulation, as well as the existence of a more demanding and segmented demand in the search for reliability of a service provision adapted to specific needs, are factors that mobilize the use of marketing as a way of setting objectives to increase the demand for rural tourism.

Of the special circumstances that have been enhanced in the tourism sector, through the application of Tourism Marketing, some can be highlighted, such as:

- Competence in this market has increased significantly;
- European countries have increasingly focused on holiday preferences for this type of tourism;
- the motivations, tastes and preferences of the demand have undergone major changes;
- the continued development of new destinations, types of offers;
- the importance of new technologies, which facilitate promotion and marketing techniques.

In order to structure the needs to be met in the context of rural tourism, it is crucial to identify and define the primary activities associated with a good marketing service in rural tourism.

In fact, I would like to highlight five sectors: trade; transport and communications; credit and insurance institutions; cultural services and finally a miscellaneous rental service.

Rural tourism is faced with many complex elements, which are radically different from other consumer sectors in its marketing activities. The strong dependence on strategic positioning of tourism companies from large economic groups and the concentration of a large part of marketing activities and resources in the control of distribution channels leads to great shortages in the area of research in rural tourism marketing.

To attract demand to rural tourism, it is necessary to find out what tourists want, develop services appropriate to their expectations and needs. Provide information about existing offers and present options for how the service or expected vacation can be purchased; so that customers recognize a high level of satisfaction and at the same time the tourist company obtains a benefit that allows it to achieve its objectives (Días Martín, 1997).

As the authors portray (Witt and Mouthino, 1989), tourism marketing is the process through which tourism organizations select their target, current and potential audience. The way in which communication is carried out in order to ascertain and influence needs, desires and motivations. The importance of adapting tourism products to the needs of the parties involved is also highlighted.

The presence of Marketing databases plays a differentiating role in capturing information, so that the communication policy to be adopted is effective. In many situations, it can be seen that Portuguese rural tourism grows without guidelines, which translates into the predominant existence of traditional structures.

There are evident signs that tourists are increasingly looking for nature as a place for vacations, whether for exclusive rest or to live new experiences. A *boom* in rural tourism in Portugal will only be verified from the creation of an adequate infrastructure in order to provide a large number of tourists in the segment.

If we analyze the transport factor, conditions are certainly being created for the growth of the sector. The costs inherent to travel should also be considered as determinants and

strategic with regard to the development of rural tourism. As an example, it can be assessed that either a middle-income family in Portugal, or another of our European partners, will be able to experience rural tourism in the country with good conditions, as long as costs are reduced.

The importance of the existence of marketing databases for rural tourism is considered a progressive engine as a guideline that allows the needs of customers to be adapted to the organization that promotes tourism. It is an important and competitive milestone, characterised by increasing globalisation in the tourism sector.

Portuguese rural tourism tends to develop in regions with lower population density, so it converges further into the interior of the country. It often takes on characteristics that are the opposite of conventional summer tourism, where the main poles of attraction are located near beaches. The coast has in some cases been the victim of anarchic development, lacking quality and safety. As far as rural tourism is concerned, the objective is precisely to provide a panoply of services and products that can characterize regions, customs, among other offers, which translates value into the tourist. One of the factors that can prevent an anarchic development of this type of tourism is the presence of appropriate databases for rural tourism marketing.

3.1 ANALYSIS OF RURAL TOURISM DEMAND

Tourism marketing actions must be geared towards meeting the needs of tourists, in order to achieve the objectives of tourism organisations as well as to know the users of the information in the campaigns and who are the consumers of rural tourism.

The demand for rural tourism can be made up of two major travel groups. Domestic and international trips.

Traditionally, international tourism has been considered to be the most important part of demand, as it increases greater benefits (higher spending through economic power). In the study of this type of market, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of tourists, what their motivations are. (Esteban Talaya 1996), establishes four types of motivations.

First of all, I present the physical ones, they are those in which tourism contributes to physical and mental balance. Then, the cultural ones awaken the desire to know other customs, to expand knowledge; interpersonal are those in which tourism is an instrument of emotional development, thanks to the establishment of new relationships, visits to family and friends. There are also social motivations, whose tourism allows individuals to achieve social benefits, due to the fact that they belong to a certain social class.

The study of tourist behavior as a consumer has received particular attention from researchers and through several works. The holiday decision-making process is analysed, considering the influence of the various internal and external factors that condition the behaviour of tourists, in relation to rural tourism.

In neighboring Spain, the General Secretariat of Tourism carries out studies on the behavior of tourists, as well as the way they are grouped. It is important to have a clear perception of whether the country's residents tend to go on holiday in Portugal, in this

case or abroad, as well as what factors may be directly associated with the decision to choose to do rural tourism.

Increasingly, tourism is no longer approached as a large, homogeneous market. Segmentation in tourism is increasing. Santos (1992) related the impact of socio-economic changes and trends in terms of the tourism market. He concluded that segmentation is the key to the tourism market, so for the case of more specific tourism such as rural, it makes a good market segmentation even more essential.

Nowadays, it is increasingly possible to visualize, as time goes by, the emergence of individualized groups to the detriment of standardized groups. Indicators of this phenomenon are aspects such as the boom in ecological tourism, the increase in large-scale tourism and the importance of active and thematic tourism.

Knowing consumers makes it possible to establish their leisure objectives, allowing the company to direct its actions, building a certain product, message, means of dissemination, price, as well as the channels for the promotion and distribution of information to the respective segment.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE RURAL TOURISM OFFER

The tourist offer takes into account different variables. Resources are needed, related to nature, history, culture, among others. The sum of these resources and associated services will result in tourism products capable of meeting the expectations of a given market segment. The combination of these products with a price, a distribution channel and a promotion (communication) will result in the tourist offer: the set of services that can be purchased for a certain price to enjoy a specific place and time, which allows you to live a complete vacation experience.

The design of the right product is, without a doubt, the most important activity of marketing. If we have a tourist product that the market does not want, neither the best promotional campaigns, however original and brilliant they may be, nor perfect distribution, nor price adjustments, will get consumers to buy it, at least repeatedly. On the other hand, if the product satisfies the consumer, the only thing we need is that the rest of the marketing actions are correct and coherent to ensure success in the market.

Tourism in rural areas must meet at least two conditions:

- Put quality products on the market
- Correct marketing

The tourist offer must be perfectly inserted in the rural environment and subject to the control and direction of the local village itself, serving as a means for its social and economic promotion, avoiding emigration.

The main benefits in rural areas are, among others, that tourism prevents or reduces the rural exodus, creates jobs, diversifies the local economy, enhances the consumption of local products, takes advantage of existing facilities, does not require the abandonment of traditional activity, improves the quality of life, preserves the environment and maintains cultural traditions.

On the other hand, the rural tourism offer satisfies certain needs of consumers generated by the shortcomings of city life. Rural tourism brings consumers contact with nature, tranquility, reasonable prices, knowledge of traditional ways of life, family care, quality gastronomy, socio-cultural exchange, etc.

The rural tourist offer in Portugal must adapt to the demands of demand, but it must be taken into account that the tourist offer is not only composed of natural resources, but also of a set of accommodations, facilities, leisure structures, as well as natural and architectural resources existing in areas with a predominantly agricultural economy. In this sense, it is still possible to say that the Portuguese rural tourist offer is rich and varied in terms of natural and architectural resources.

4. Application of Database Marketing for Rural Tourism

From the perspective of marketing as a business function, the objective of communication is to make the product available to the consumer in the necessary quantity, at the time he needs it and in the place where he wishes to be purchased, implying at the same time the performance of a set of activities such as information, promotion and presentation of the product at the point of sale in order to stimulate its purchase.

The conventional way of looking at consumer behaviour – particularly in the tourism and leisure sector – is becoming obsolete. Consumer buying habits are no longer predictable through the creation of segments and their description in terms of average characteristics. There is a change in the tourist operational chain, with a tendency to concentrate demand through the media.

Increasingly, *marketers* are beginning to experiment with direct, targeted communication with customers. This communication has been made possible by new technologies that use sophisticated database management systems that allow access to large amounts of historical and purchase information that reflect the preferences of individuals. This trend is particularly appropriate for tourism marketing in general and rural marketing in particular.

The philosophy of electronic marketing is affecting the distribution and promotion of tourism products. In some countries they are becoming more and more accustomed to buying tourist products directly from producers.

The internet has made a revolution in the field of tourism promotion and distribution. If a customer decides to search on the internet on his own, he can find hotels, campsites, hostels, rural houses, companies of transport activities, catering, etc.

More and more establishments that use the network to offer their services and products multiply day by day. The goal of many companies is to sell directly to the customer, avoiding intermediaries and commissions. According to the UNWTO, travel sales occupy the third place of the best-selling products in the network.

The Internet, as an instrument for computerized information management, represents a unique opportunity, especially for very specialized tour operators, who focus their offers on very specific segments of the market and compete according to a deep knowledge of their needs.

As rural tourism is aimed at a very specific market segment, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the possibilities that the internet opens up to market rural tourism products is great. Your client type is difficult to motivate through traditional institutional channels. Portuguese rural tourism has to take this reality into account if it wants to be successful in a market with these characteristics.

4.1 DIFFICULTIES IN ADAPTING THE DATABASE TO RURAL TOURISM

Small rural tourism enterprises are rarely in a position to take over the market segments on their own. When these small companies come together, they concentrate their actions, namely promotion and distribution actions, so that they can compete with the large ones.

Currently, rural tourism suffers from a series of difficulties that produce inefficiencies in its form of communication. To overcome inefficiencies, the European Union's line of action in rural policy establishes that integrated management must be taken into account, that is, there must be coordination between public and private tourism-social development agents in the area, so that demand has access to supply quickly and simply.

The individual promotion of each tourist initiative leads us to a situation of organized chaos in which demand is not free to choose due to ignorance of the offer.

A degree of coordination in the rural tourism sector is necessary to increase the efficiency of the distribution channel that increases every day, supported by the implementation of new technologies that enable the joint management of information and improvement of the quality of it.

The importance of marketing databases in the tourism market has become strategic and rural tourism is, as we will see, one of the areas where this instrument can acquire greater importance as a source of competitive advantage.

Today, a market of individuals, individually addressable and open to interactive communication, has led to a revolution in the market. Although large-scale productive economies favor large groups with strong brand identities. The emergence of a know-your-customer economy is encouraging the emergence of a generation of smaller, more flexible service providers who can establish healthy relationships with their customers. The future has become the property of companies that can use the new two-way communication channels provided by marketing databases to create customer-based relationships by building an honest and intelligent dialogue.

The main principles of this dialogue are:

- Past consumer behavior is the best predictor of their future behavior
- A purchase is just one event in the consumer's life. Calculating the true value of the consumer implies calculating their *Lifetime Value*

- Customers are more important than non-customers
- Certain customers are more important than others
- Customers are likely to share certain characteristics

4.2 HOW THE COMPUTER IS CHANGING MARKETING

Essentially, the computer has enabled marketing to have 3 extraordinary powers: the power to record, the power to find, and the power to compare.

As the storage capacity of computers has become faster and more economical, it has become possible to build a customer record with an increasing degree of detail.

The computer's ability to find means that selections can be made from the individual or by manipulating a variable or a set of variables that characterize him.

The power of the computer to compare means that information stored about an individual in one or more databases can be combined. For example, the computer can compare a list of elderly people and a list of golfers. Whenever this comparison reveals the same name on both lists, it becomes possible to identify and record that person as an "elderly golfer".

4.3 MARKETING DATABASES FOR RURAL TOURISM

When it comes to establishing marketing strategies, rural tourism companies can choose between direct or indirect distribution. In the rural tourism offer, in general, direct distribution has been chosen, without the use of travel agencies or tour operators.

Direct distribution is mostly used for the sale of rural tourism, where the service provider, through its resources, assumes the different distribution functions.

Direct marketing can be an appropriate strategy for rural tourism companies, and can be particularly important in retaining frequent customers. These loyal customers may constitute a small percentage of the total customers, but they are the source of most of the profits. In other words, customers who repeat their holidays in rural tourism resorts are the basis of profitability.

In order to start a direct marketing process, either through a *newsletter* or through promotional pieces, it is necessary to initially build a database. A very effective strategy can be to develop a questionnaire to apply to current and/or potential customers that can be filled out quickly and that includes an offer that can boost response rates. A set of useful information about customers can be stored. At the very least, up-to-date information on where and when customers like to travel (inland, coast, north, south, Christmas/New Year, summer, Easter, winter) and their budget preferences. Thus, whenever a rural tourism association or a company with several infrastructures wants to advertise a particular program or promotion, it can easily do so in a selective way.

The direct marketing send should always include a letter that personalizes the promotion. The existence of a response mechanism can allow you to capture information about customers' lifestyles and lives, highlighting things like a marriage, childbirth,

retirement, and other changes. From this information, a rural tourism company can develop targeted offers, such as extreme holidays, cultural holidays or holidays for two, among others.

4.4 ADVANTAGES OF MARKETING DATABASES IN RURAL TOURISM

Marketing databases can increase marketing productivity in three ways:

- Get *feedback* on the campaigns developed. We can know if an individual has received a communication and if they have responded and purchased our product. Marketing programs can now be redefined through a process of testing and re-testing until something close to the optimum can emerge.

- To identify and reach lucrative niche markets that are too small to be served through mass marketing. This is particularly important for rural tourism. Individuals particularly oriented towards this type of tourism can be identified for individualized direct promotions.

- To make possible a change in terms of product development strategy: generic tourism products and services to products tailored to specific markets and for particular customers. Mass tourism makes few compromises in terms of the heterogeneous tastes of customers, fundamentally seeking economies of scale.

Rural tourism should seek to send the customer individualized offers collected from a menu of products tailored to the market. Marketing databases make it possible to achieve this goal.

5. Conclusions

Portuguese rural tourism is seen as a source of resources for agricultural properties, through the adaptation of land structures to receive tourists, in order to offer conditions for them to enjoy the natural and historical resources inherent to the property, which are not possible to find in the urban environment. In this way, a new option is seen for the increase in the level of income, with a high percentage of added value, mainly due to the possibility of producing and selling the products, without an intermediary, on the property itself. It can be said that this symptom of pluriactivity revitalizes the business of agricultural properties and provides the tourist, who comes from the urban environment, mainly, with contact with the rural environment. Thus, the integration between the experiences of the city and those of the countryside is generated.

That said, it is stated that there are several marketing strategies to improve the conditions of the rural sector and, therefore, it is necessary that producers initially have a totalitarian view of the environment (systemic vision) and, through this, envision new opportunities. It is then necessary to carry out planning in a judicious and careful way, observing the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, taking advantage of opportunities and preventing threats.

The internet is the largest distribution channel for products in this sector, although still with very small proportions in relation to the volume of hotel reservations sold. This is a distribution route that can lead to important development for the sector since it removes

many of the barriers that existed for business-customer communication, through the obstacles created by geography, time zones and location.

The application of new information management technologies with marketing databases can bring significant gains to enterprises in rural areas.

The benefits of using marketing bases for rural tourism can be defined in a very simple and graphic way with a bridge that leads the producer to his consumer. Through these information management tools, destinations and rural tourism enterprises will be able to find a way to identify target customers , the best communication channels to contact new markets, attract and retain customers, obtain fair prices, adjust demand and supply, in order to define strategies for the development of this sector.

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