



Everything We Need to Know Is Onboard

By Michael McCall

...the cruise ship industry has profited by explosive growth

“It’s not far to never never land, no reason to pretend, and if the wind is right you can find the joy, of innocence again...

Sailing, takes me away to where I have always heard it could be.

*Just a dream and the wind to carry me, and soon I will be free.”**

Can you hear the music? Do you remember the flowing, dreamlike melody and Christopher Cross’s simple, eloquent and potent lyrics of prescription? For anyone who has enjoyed the water, it may be difficult for this incantation not to engender a yearning, a certain emotional pang, a sudden, if subtle, urgency to escape the everyday world for the wind and the waves.

For more than twenty years, the theme park industry (that gave birth to so many of our companies and careers) has been applying our entertainment skills to products with such labels as *urban entertainment*, *location based entertainment*, *entertainment retail*, and more recently, *brand experiences*. We have been admirably and creatively struggling to define and deliver more urban entertainment experiences that take the public away to where they have always heard it should be. Yet, after years of effort by the best and the brightest, on bold, branded projects such as Sony Metreon and Disney Quest, these urban destinations have either greatly disappointed or simply disappeared. During this same period of time, however, the cruise ship industry has more than flourished; it has profited by explosive growth, multiplying more than tenfold. The market clearly embraces the cruise ship experience,

and we terra firma-types may do well to pay attention.

Cruise ships have been riding the wave of not only demographics, but of psychographics, the consumer yearnings that are many times silent, unconscious, but nonetheless, powerful forces in search of fulfillment. Cruise ships fulfill those yearnings with what might be thought of as an “AASE of Hearts” strategy, providing an Accessible, Active, Social, Escape.

Accessible – To our harried, affluent society, time is the most scarce commodity and consumers demand products and services that are, indeed, quick and easy to consume. Cruise ships provide prepackaged getaways, requiring little planning effort other than making the decision to go. As a volume-based business, cruise ship vacations are financially

accessible as well, with ample value provided, at an affordable price.

Active: While cruise ship vacations are relaxing, at the same time they are very active. They provide Do-The-Theme leisure, in sharp contrast to theme park-centric experiences that place guests in a passive entertainment paradigm. Moreover, cruise ships are filled with recreation, and physical fun provides both an emotional and physical release of tension. And, many cruise lines market and cater to niche affinity and enthusiast groups that focus a significant portion of their vacation on the recreation of their predisposed affections.

Social: The more we play at home, the more we play alone; yet, humans are social creatures yearning for shared experiences and communication. Cruises are not only physically immersive, they are also socially immersive, interjecting a boat load of strangers into a series of shared experiences, who, many times, emerge as fast friends.

Escape: Cruise ships are so expansive that they easily encompass a ton of varied fun, while keeping the outside world at bay. Consumers want to escape as often as possible; to quickly and thoroughly leave their cares behind, to physically travel a moderate distance in order to be emotionally transported a million miles away. Beyond being physically enveloping, cruise ships are internally consistent, conceptually true to their “Floating Resort” brand promise. Lastly, cruise ships are immersive via divine design, surrounded by the absence of theme in a Zen-like, less is more bliss, moment as the sea provides an escape from staccato, urban everything to an undulating, aquatic nothing.

Cruise ships deliver what people want. However, lest you are still not convinced that cruise ships are floating object lessons of how land-based leisure may be successful, consider the following, and you may at least consider them to be formidable competition. In this era of both increased value on hearth & home comforts, and more regional and frequent vacation-breaks, cruise lines are now bringing the experience to the people, for even shorter durations, with embarkations to the Bahamas from the likes of Baltimore, and cruises from New York to nowhere. Now that’s (urban) entertainment.

No, it’s not far to never, never land, and there’s no reason to pretend.

*Sailing lyrics by Christopher Cross