

Slow Growth

I opened this business in leased property on the corner of West Bijou and Spruce Street, just west of an off ramp of Interstate 25 so it would be readily accessible to travellers driving either north or south through Colorado Springs.

On the plate glass front window were the large words "INFORMATION STORE" which caused people to do a double take, unsure exactly what such a 'store' sold. A smaller metal sign with 'Enjoy Colorado' hung on an antique-scroll frame on the corner of the building

Inside was a weather proof foyer opening into a large room with some Colorado mountain-scene photographs, display maps, and a counter where potential customers could sit across from a Travel Advisor. Who would determine what 'information' the customer was seeking, advise him or the family what the cost (based upon the advisor's time and materials- beyond the simplest maps and printed sheets) would be.

I had retained, at first, two 'advisors' - a fairly young man and a woman both of whom were very knowledgable about Colorado. And of course I filled orders myself too - both to service orders and learn how potential customers requested Colorado 'Information' besides what was the range of information requested.

Of course this was an unprecedented type of service, for all potential customers were used to getting 'free' information - often simple gas-station maps, or required to buy more comprehensive ones, or bought travel books or getting handfuls of promotional ad paid for materials, asking advice from

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Chamber of Commerce type people in the town, especially ones which had robust 'tourism' trade.

Thus some people who parked and went inside, tuned out the signs that explained the fee based 'service' and when they learned there was a cost, refused it and walked out. Others, intrigued, stayed to test us.

Somewhat to my surprise, local Colorado Springs people - many of whom had lived their entire adult lives in Colorado, became our clients too. For many of them had, over the years, visited every 'popular' tourist attraction, and were more interested in visiting out of the way places - sometimes getting there by jeep or by hiking. We were able to even produce a two sided, xeroxed, waterproof paper with specific highway map information how to get close to a fishing place, an extract of a county-scale map, then an extract of a USGS 1:50,000 map that would put the client within feet of the right side of a river. All on one, done to order, durable fold up pocket-sized sheet. Service usually cost less than \$10.

The president of a television company who had a cabin in the mountains near Dillon, ordered a 'coffee-table' packet that would inform his guests of every 'attraction' and point of interest within 5 miles of his cabin.

I once bragged that I could send a visitor up Ute Pass toward the high mountains either as a 'geological' trip, or 'wildlife' trip, or 'historical' trip. Same route - different way of 'knowing' or 'experiencing' it.

One a man with a wheelbound wife who knew the state well, having travelled over all it as 'business' ordered information for

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a sightseeing trip with his wheelchair bound wife, around the state but with information that would permit her to 'see' from the back seat of their car, the 'sight' to be seen - such as the overlook of the Gunnison Canyon. And not have to leave the car to be wheeled somewhere. With places to stay that accomodated disable people.

And a man in Nebraska called who wanted to take his son alone on an 'exiting' but not dangerous vacation in the wilderness, so the son could look up to him. He had considered water rafting alone. We quickly determined he was not skilled enough to do that without substantial risk. We pointed him to the Wet Mountain Valley with the Sangre de Christo range on its west, accessible places to stay and leave his car, and trek along the foothills for several days, while camping. The detailed information cost him \$25 - and he wrote to me saying it was the best and most perfect outing he had ever had.

And as gold came off the national standard, many people wanted to search for gold, panning it out for starters. We had to produce both maps, and even sold new gold pans for many who did not know where to buy such things. Not often in chain stores.

The concept was working, but I had to figure out a way to 'retrieve' and 'produce' tailored custom ordered 'information' more efficiently than pay my 'travel advisors' having to paw through files, and filing cabinets, and maps.

I wondered if mini-computers - I had heard about - were going to be my future answer.

But after two years, and several bank loans later it was clear

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this business was not going to grow fast enough, especially during winter, to pay all the bills and at least two employees.

So I closed Enjoy Colorado down, having learned what it would take to operate something like it later - and more broadly than just for travellers.

And the 1976 Centennial-Bicentennial beckoned me.

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