

EQ[®] Up Close: Case Study Series

British Columbia's Regional Approach to EQ[®]: From Strategy to Tactics to Results



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Wickamish Inn
Totino, British Columbia

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The EQ research is helping to shape the future. It informs product development, promotions and advertising, and partnerships, and can be strategically aligned to create a strong, unified, brand presence based on what travellers are seeking.

There is no other equivalent source of consumer traveller research in British Columbia, that is available to businesses, and regional and community destination marketing organizations. This is an affordable way to access leading edge research, produced by Environics for the CTC, that comes with CTC support and help to enable people to apply the research to their business and destination.

Joint Regional Observation

Case Summary

In May 2011, the Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) invested in a Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) Explorer Quotient® (EQ®) license to inform their 10-year strategic planning process and guide their product development and marketing investments. Eleven months later, a second regional destination marketing organization in British Columbia, Tourism Vancouver Island (TVI) elected to purchase a regional EQ license.

Central to the decision for both organizations to invest in the EQ research was a desire for a truly customer-centric approach to inform all aspects of their decision-making, assist their stakeholders, and channel investments in product development and marketing aligned with travellers' attitudes, values, and motivations. Preliminary insights confirm that the EQ has filled an important research gap and is informing the strategic, operational and tactical activities of the organizations. It is also fostering a new collaborative environment for partnerships and learning with their community destination marketing organizations (CDMOs) and tourism businesses.

Introduction

The British Columbia (BC) EQ Case Study demonstrates how effectively regional destination marketing organizations, community/city destination marketing organizations, and tourism businesses can collaboratively advance tourism, based on credible visitor research information.

In May 2011, the TOTA led the way in British Columbia to accessing leading edge, award-winning consumer research to inform their 10-year strategic planning process and guide their product development and marketing investments. By purchasing an EQ® license from the CTC, they gained access to rich consumer research and resources to help them understand the types of experiences visitors are seeking. For over a year, TOTA has been applying this knowledge within their organization and stakeholder activities to advance product development, image selection, community tourism development, and inform marketing campaigns at the tactical level. Now in their second year, TOTA is establishing sub-licensee agreements within their region. This will increase the distribution of information to city destination marketing organizations (CDMOs) that want to benefit from the CTC's consumer segmentation research based on psychographics.

In April 2012, TVI joined their TOTA colleagues and purchased an EQ license. Led by Oceanside Tourism's interest in accessing credible, affordable information for their stakeholders, they teamed up with TVI and took a grassroots approach to securing five CDMO partners to fund the license cost. This launched a new era of collaboration on Vancouver Island based on high quality consumer research.

As the worldwide competition for attracting travellers intensifies, the TVI and TOTA regions have embraced a collaborative, consumer-centric approach to managing their destinations with their stakeholders. The opportunity to position their regions based on their visitors' social and travel values, as well as the regions' particular assets and attributes of their culture, geography, and people, presents a way for them to celebrate what is uniquely, authentically theirs. Alignment, based on EQ customer profiles, will strengthen TOTA's and TVI's regional brands, support British Columbia's and Canada's brands and drive new business to operators in the regions.

The TOTA and TVI regions of British Columbia represent 30% of the province's tourism businesses¹ and 26% of tourism employment². In 2010, the Thompson-Okanagan region generated over \$1.7 billion, employed approximately 15,000 people and attracted 3.5 million visitors³. On Vancouver Island, in 2010, tourism generated \$1.4 billion in overnight expenditures to the region, employed 20,100 people, and attracted 3.8 million visitors.

EQ sub-licensed communities within the two regions include: Tourism Penticton, Tourism Sun Peaks, Tourism Shuswap, Tourism Vernon, Tourism Valemout, Tourism Wells Gray, District of West Kelowna, Tourism Victoria, Tourism Tofino, Tourism Mount Washington, Oceanside Tourism, and Vancouver Island North Tourism.

As in any jurisdiction, non-licensed businesses and communities have access to high-level research insights, industry workshops, toolkits, digital assets, and educational videos.



Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

¹ Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation (2012, May). *The value of tourism in British Columbia: Trends from 2000 to 2010*. A research report published by the provincial government. TOTA represents 13% of BCs tourism businesses and saw an 8% increase in growth between 2000 and 2010. TVI represents 17% of BCs tourism businesses and realized a 23% growth in the same 10-year period.

² Ibid. TVI represents 15% of tourism employment in British Columbia, TOTA 11%.

³ Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association (Nov, 2012). *Embracing our potential. A 10-year strategy for the Thompson-Okanagan Region*.

“The value of EQ is incredible. It gives us access to analytical data which there is absolutely no way we could afford ourselves. Having a real research-based approach to branding the destination and understanding our consumers is going to give the entire Thompson-Okanagan region, especially those that buy-in to a sub-license, a leg up as they target their activities and investments and respond to what today’s travellers are looking for.”

*Jessie Campbell, CEO
Tourism Penticton*

“EQ allows us to target our markets much better and be more efficient with the limited dollars we have. It’s a great opportunity to do outreach and help our stakeholders develop products and align their marketing messages. I like the concept of the EQ family, a tight-knit group that works together to understand and apply the research, share challenges, successes, and ideas. It is a tool to build community.”

*Blain Sepos, Executive Director
Oceanside Tourism*



Reasons for investing in EQ

The primary reasons for TOTA and TVI investing in EQ were to:

- Inform strategy and branding directions and decisions;
- Learn more about which experiences travellers are seeking, what motivates them, and how to strategically market to them in a more effective manner;
- Provide much needed access to consumer research and segmentation information that is current, credible, regularly updated, and relevant to regions, communities, and individual businesses;

- Stimulate new product development and partnerships;
- Improve marketing messages;
- Focus investments and partnership dollars; and
- Embrace a common approach to looking at their tourism potential focused on what travellers are seeking, rather than what businesses currently offer.

Benefits

"We saw the amount of consumer research we would have access to, and realized how incredibly useful it would be to enhance our current level of knowledge about the consumer and how to market to them in a much more strategically focused way."

*Denise LeGal, Marketing Manager
Tourism Vancouver Island*

EQ is not only changing the way Canada's tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations market and sell travel, it's helping to pinpoint the best customers to target, based on:

- What appeals to them, and what does not;
- What motivates them;
- Detailed insights on the types of experiences they are seeking;
- Media influences;
- Past travel behaviour and future travel intentions; and
- Traditional demographic information on gender, age, income, education, occupation, life-stage, and type of community in which they live.

As the Thompson-Okanagan region has been working with the EQ research for over a year, the benefits they are realizing are broader than their Vancouver Island colleagues who only recently purchased a license. Together however, both regions are realizing a variety of strategic, operational and tactical benefits.



"The EQ research is very comprehensive. It looks at the customer from many perspectives and helps us understand what types of experiences and activities will resonate with our visitors. The research goes well beyond the traditional exit surveys and consumer studies and provides unique insight for product development, packaging and marketing decisions."

*Jennifer Houillebecq, Industry Development
Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association*

Strategic Benefits of EQ:

- Informs strategic directions and brand positioning in ways that complement how the CTC positions Canada;
- Ensures access to research that remains current;
- Provides a competitive advantage through rich insights into travellers;
- Connects like-minded jurisdictions that speak the same language, and want to collaborate and partner on marketing initiatives;
- Allows regional sub-licensing to offset the additional cost of training and application to support their needs, and aligns with the RDMO;
- Integrates the former Travel Attitudes and Motivation Survey research into the overall EQ research, and
- Connects an EQ family of tourism destinations that can network to share ideas, tackle challenges, and benefit from a collaborative learning environment.

Operational Benefits

- EQ has established a common language that facilitates the selection and contracting of creative partners who understand the types of travellers to the region. Contractors are now being asked to understand EQ as part of any bid process. Aligning creative agencies, photographers and writers on the consumer profiles focuses their contributions and diminishes the potential they will move down different paths.

Tactical Benefits

- Directs marketing activity toward presenting the region through compelling reasons to visit and in ways that tap into travellers' emotions (rather than presenting primarily images of infrastructure and scenery);
- Ignites new conversations about product development and marketing based on the importance of emotions in planning, delivering, and communicating about travel;
- Stimulates new thinking about itinerary planning in regions where touring is a core activity;
- Improves alignment and narrows the focus of marketing activities;
- Generates more targeted consumer-facing messages, images, and videos;
- Aligned with Prizm⁴ geo-segmentation research with the ability to secure customized reports through Environics Analytics;
- Commercial EQ quiz provides a platform to build consumer database, and enables email addresses, attached to an EQ type, to be gathered;
- Creates an opportunity for regional EQ license holders to host a mini EQ family reunion for their sub-licensees to connect with each other, collaborate on collective strategies for using EQ, network, and build a community at the local level; and
- Sets the foundation for conversations that challenge some traditional behaviors of reinvesting in annual marketing activities *"because we've always done it that way."*

⁴ Prizm is a segmentation system developed by Environics Analytics that classifies US and Canadian households into 66 consumer segments based on demographics and preferences for a broad range of behaviours. By cross-referencing EQ and Prizm, EQ licensees can gain geo-demographic data on where their customers live as well as other behaviours, such as media use.

Implementing EQ

At the onset, both TOTA and TVI followed a very similar path after their decision to purchase a license. First they liaised with the CTC to obtain the detailed research, plan training workshops and determine their approach for sub-licensing. Next, they identified their principal EQ types and engaged staff in the research, then used the EQ quiz with visitors to validate if the types the staff chose as likely EQ traveller types matched the travellers who completed the quiz.

At this time TOTA is focused on the Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorers, Free Spirits, and Rejuvenators. TVI has identified Cultural Explorers, No-Hassle Travellers, and Free Spirits for high-end luxury experiences, and early EQ quiz results are also identifying Authentic Experiencers as a potential target type for them to investigate further.

EQ in Action

Below are three examples that demonstrate how the EQ research is impacting change.

1. TOTA's Strategic Application

Embarking on a 10-year regional strategy was a significant investment. Thus, ensuring the direction and decisions were grounded in current and relevant customer research was paramount. According to TOTA, EQ provided this insight. Shifting from a supply-based marketing approach, to one that builds community through a truly customer-centric approach, is at the heart of this strategic application.

Ultimately, the strategy is rooted in five experience-based themes⁵:

- Enriching local flavors;
- Identifying the iconic;
- Revealing the story;
- Expanding personal horizons; and
- Building authenticity.

These five customer-centric experience themes, informed by the EQ research, will be integral to advancing their strategy, working with industry partners and guiding marketing decisions.

⁵ Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association (Nov, 2012). *Embracing our potential*. A 10-year strategy for the Thompson-Okanagan Region.



© Tourism BC/Dan Weiskopf
Silver Star Mountain Resort, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

"EQ is the glue that holds things together. We have embedded EQ in our regional strategy and that's been a tremendous success. The retreat with the TOTA Board of Directors helped them understand the value of the research to our organization and regional businesses. They have since become evangelists for its use. Its enabled us to work closer with Travel Alberta, and we've just signed a memorandum of understanding with Jasper for joint marketing based on targeting common EQ types."

*Glenn Mandziuk, CEO
Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association*

2. A Resort Lens on EQ Building Partnerships to Better Enhance the Visitor Experience

At the Watermark Beach Resort in Osoyoos, EQ research has been useful in highlighting the motivations and experiences visitors are seeking in their visit. This has enabled them to look at their region through a new lens, and shift from a focus on selling room nights and packaging amenities within their control (e.g. bed and breakfast, spa package), to partnering with local attractions and working together to identify experiences that will motivate visitors to come and stay longer.

As Chair of TOTA, Ingrid Jarrett, Watermark's VP Business Development, was involved at the Board level with the regional strategy. During this process she gained insight regarding the value of the research and, equipped with this understanding, applied her knowledge to the Watermark Beach Resort.

"Our packages now include all sorts of partners. We promote them at the same time we promote our property. For example, by partnering with Covert Farms, we are able to enhance our visitors' stay by providing more enticing reasons to engage in the destination. Plus we combined our contact databases to leverage and promote each other."

"We are now working with over 30 experience partners; companies that have a mutual respect for the customer and the calibre of the experiences that they are seeking. It's amazing! When you focus on the customer and their motivation for travel, the benefits of collaborating, instead of competing, become obvious. We all benefit, especially our guests."

*Ingrid Jarrett, VP of Business Development,
Watermark Beach Resort, Osoyoos*

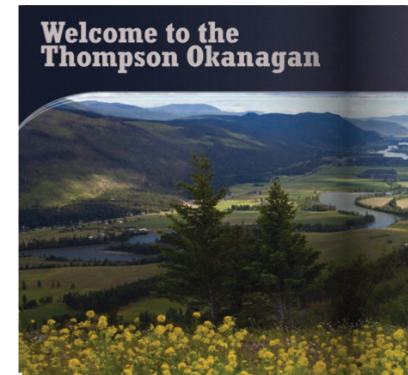
3. From Vacation Guide to Travel Experiences Guide: A Tactical TOTA Application

TOTA embraced the EQ research, including photo guidelines, media insights, and visitor data to completely overhaul their Visitor's Guide.

Creating the new **"Travel Experience Guide"** took real persistence in making the shifts required with their designers, writers, and photographers and getting them to focus on emotive aspects of connecting, engaging, and discovering the Thompson-Okanagan region, rather than presenting and talking about place-based attributes. Getting the right imagery and persuading stakeholders to embrace the new direction was also a big challenge. Through careful collaboration and coaching community business, the investment paid off enormously.

The refreshed *Travel Experiences Guide*, the largest in BC, ultimately oversold their advertising space. Rave reviews from stakeholders far exceeded anything achieved previously because of the emotions the new Guide evoked.

Year two is well on its way to success with 80% of subscribers having renewed their participation to be in the guide, well ahead of schedule. *"This speaks volumes to the value of the shift to align with the customer insights garnered from the EQ research"* states CEO, Glenn Mandziuk.



Before EQ: Vacation Guide



After EQ: Travel Experiences Guide

In brief, various elements of change included:

- The Guide's cover captured the unique combination of place and people that differentiates the region from elsewhere in British Columbia;
- The guide led with 44 pages of regional experiences to whet consumer appetites before providing the geographical listings and more traditional information; and
- It emphasized people enjoying, engaging, and having fun.

Good-bye to heavy place-based text ...

"Following the highways and byways, footpaths and trails of the Thompson Okanagan, you'll encounter a startling range of terrain and biodiversity."

And hello experience!



According to Howard Grieve, TOTA's Market Experiences Specialist (Northern Region),

"The best part was seeing how quickly the publication flew off the shelves. For example, at media marketplaces or trade shows, people usually say, 'I'll take a USB or send me the link.' Not this year. The guide was so appealing they opted for hard copy and started asking questions. We still have more work to do, but we're off to a great start and it was hugely influenced by the EQ research."

"We benefit by learning what other licensees have done. Just look at the changes to the Thompson-Okanagan visitor guide. They've done a great job, just seeing the imagery alone is phenomenal."

*Denise LeGal, Marketing Manager
Tourism Vancouver Island*

4. Other Tactics

A selection of EQ tactics TOTA has implemented include:

- Launching an EQ-based photo contest to create interest and secure new photographs;
- Using the EQ quiz to validate the types of travellers coming to the region;
- Incorporating messages that appeal to different traveller types in the website rotating banner;
- Applying EQ thinking to design of website landing pages; and
- Reviewing B-roll footage with a specific eye to what appeals to the EQ types.

Results

Investing in an EQ license is more than accessing a stack of research reports. It's about building capacity to align the brand and visitor experiences from the business level, to the community, region, BC and Canada based on what travellers want.

Looking ahead, some of the future indicators of success for the regions will be:

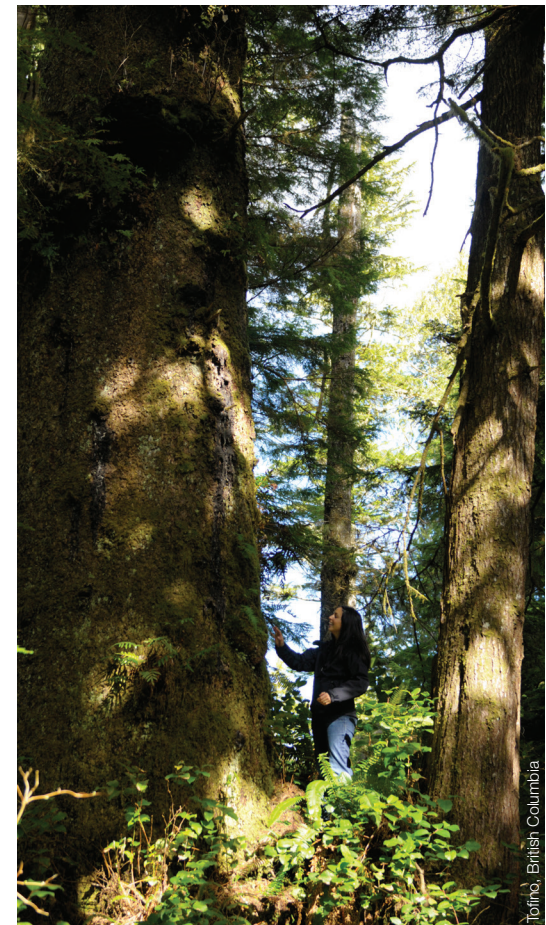
- Enhanced product development based on experiences;
- Strengthened alignment and messaging between communities and the regional DMOs;
- Co-investments in marketing campaigns, digital assets and call-to-action; and
- Marketing partnerships in Alberta and the Yukon (both of which are also licensing EQ), as touring is a major visitor activity and guests travel through multiple regions.

“When you shift your focus to EQ, it expands the potential of who you can work with in neighboring communities. It used to be that tourism entities viewed their neighbors as their competitors. Now we have a chance to deepen our understanding of the traveller together, and help Canada compete for visitors.”

*Ingrid Jarrett, Chair
Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association*

“With demographic and geographic data you can narrow your focus. With psychographic data we can hit the bulls-eye and be able to invest in the right places.”

*Jessie Campbell, CEO
Tourism Penticton*



Challenges

Key EQ challenges identified include managing the time commitment necessary for successful integration, such as:

- Understanding the cost of the EQ license is only the beginning. Integrating its use and application into the organization takes time and significant staff investments before results begin to show;
- Time spent securing sub-licensees to offset the license cost, means less time working within communities helping them apply the knowledge;
- Tackling the volume of research when few staff and stakeholders have a research background. Details on the research are useful, but insight on how to apply it to the destination and business would be better. The new summary versions [enhanced EQ Toolkit materials from the CTC] are going to be a significant asset when working with stakeholders; and
- Further, TOTA and TVI are geographically close to the EQ-licensed Alberta and the Yukon, but the immediate surrounding regions that connect travellers go through regions of BC that do not carry a regional EQ license. Ernst Flach, Executive Director, Global Marketing at the Canadian Tourism Commission notes that the CTC is in discussion with staff at the BC Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training to review options that would support the entire province accessing the research.

Bridging the Gap

The EQ approach presents a collaborative way of looking at a destination's potential. In BC, it is bridging the gap between two important provincial programs: the Community Tourism Foundations (CTF) program that assists communities to develop a multi-year tourism plan; and the Community Tourism Opportunities (CTO) program that assists with partnered funding to market tourism⁶.

EQ assists the regional destination marketing organizations in taking their community tourism plan and, based on a strong understanding of the traveller, more effectively using the funds from the Community Tourism Opportunities program with their marketing. It closes the gap from knowing what is in the community and how to market it, by adding the middle link - building knowledge, relationships, partnerships, and collaborative thinking about new tourism products and marketing focused on the traveller. The EQ process provides a level of sophistication and cross-pollination that promotes partnership and best practice sharing.

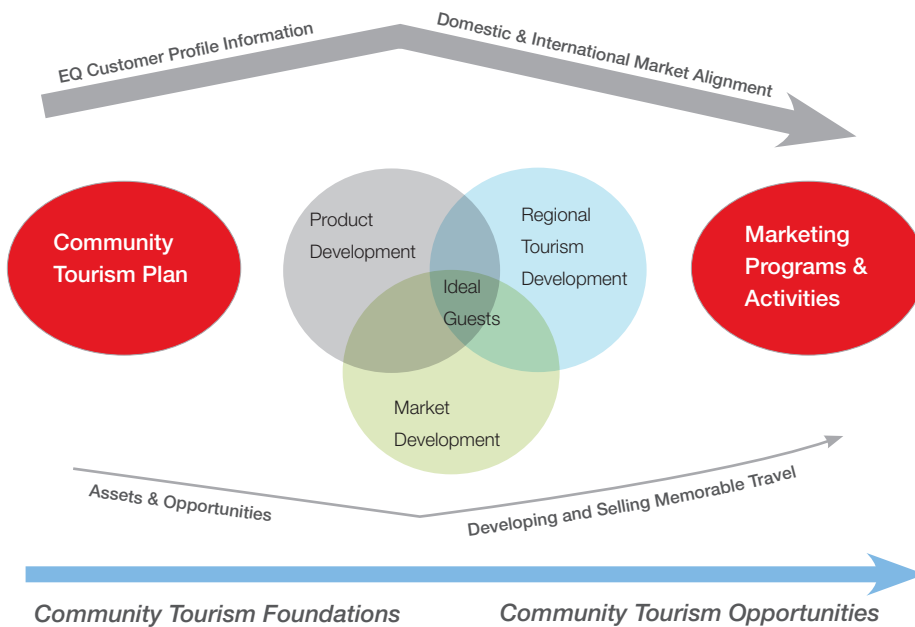
"When you start on the journey, you aren't really sure what your needs will be. For us, short stories and examples of how to apply the research, and practical examples that you can action or use to explain [EQ] to a stakeholder, would have been great at the beginning."

*Dave Petryk, CEO
Tourism Vancouver Island*

"EQ has completely reshaped the way we approach the community tourism operations program regarding marketing and branding communication campaigns."

*Simone Carlisle-Smith, Community Development
Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association*

⁶ For more information on these programs, see: http://www.jtst.gov.bc.ca/industryprograms/BuildingAndGrowingYourBusiness/Community_Tourism_Programs/CommunityTourismFoundations.htm



"[Previously,] there was very little information to help us understand our visitors, or look at product through a different lens, and we couldn't afford to do primary research on our own. EQ fast-tracked our understanding and the research will underlie the ongoing development of our five experience-based themes for our region."

*Jennifer Houiellebecq, Industry Development
Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association*

Future EQ Plans

TOTA and TVI will continue to implement, educate, collaborate, and communicate on the value of consumer segmentation information to leverage partnerships, stimulate new product development, and innovate on ways to entice visitors to enjoy Super. Natural. British Columbia.

Advice for Others Considering Using EQ

The overarching sentiment expressed in case interviews was that EQ is more than research information; it's a fresh approach to positioning a destination and its tourism business based on understanding what makes your customers tick.

A few parting thoughts gathered from case contributors:

"Give yourself time to wrap your brain around it. Don't treat it as a research report and let it collect dust."

"Have an HR plan attached to the investment."

"Be prepared for challenges changing mindsets and shifting paradigms. It takes time and not everyone will follow."

"Lead by example with partners that want to engage rather than try to sell to the masses. They will become your ambassadors."

"Plan to be in it for the long haul. After all, EQ is about intimately understanding your customer and collaborating with your industry colleagues."

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Researcher/Author

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