Tourism is an industry that sells intangible experiences. Communication is vital to the success of tourism business since it is only through the effective use of communication can tourism marketers offer customers tangible cues about those intangible experiences. Tourists are individuals who want to escape from the routines of the mundane world. They want to experience ‘the other’ aspect of their selves not allowed to be expressed in the ordinary life settings. Such a conceptualization of the tourism phenomenon gives us clues about the type of communication that will be appreciated by tourists.

Leisure tourists, especially, dislike formalities of any sort. Hierarchically structured, grammatically proof, and elitist communication formats are known to engender aversion in the minds of them. While the aforesaid format may be somewhat acceptable among business tourists, even they want a pleasant air of informality in the treatment towards them. The key to success in communication with tourists is to exhibit a relaxed attitude while ensuring that the same is not misconstrued as carelessness, recklessness, or unruliness.

Traditionally accepted business communication formats reinforce hierarchy and structure, the demons modern people managers of networked knowledge organizations strive to overcome. The unique weapon in the hands of the crusaders of modern day organizations is social media: thanks to the revolutionary advances in the social media front and the popularity of mobile communication devices, business communication has acquired a social media friendly format. In the context of tourism business communication, purportedly objective third person narratives are increasingly giving way to patently subjective first person narratives: industry professionals consider it important to impress their persona to others rather than to keep the same insulated from their professional conduct.

Communication that Facilitates Understanding

It is age-old wisdom that communication is a means to facilitate understanding. But, the current views on how to use communication for facilitating understanding are drastically different from what we used to believe. It is widely held now that the power of communication to facilitate understanding increases in direct proportion to the degree of live interaction in the communication. Based on this view, for instance, live chats can help you reach understanding much faster than asynchronous emails. Likewise, communication styles that permit responses intermittently are considered more effective than those that permit responses only after the sender has completed transmitting his or her version in full. For instance, in a problem solving situation, a lengthy speech by the CEO of a firm highlighting the issues and his or her solutions do not do so much good as a semi-structured round table interaction among the concerned executives. Constant and live interaction helps to speed up the development of yet another important objective of communication: the development of shared meanings.

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion…” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.
Communication that Knows the Audience

Tourism is often portrayed as a rite of passage. Tourists go through various stages, each with different communication needs. A potential tourist is an information seeker. That means, they expect communication to be full of relevant information, say, on attractions, accessibility, and amenities available as part of a vacation. It is crucial to offer all the relevant information but at the same time steer clear of information overload. Most tourists are busy individuals in their routine lives and do not have the time or resources to swim through an ocean of information. Given the international nature of the industry, especially if you are dealing with international tourists, it is imperative that you employ foreign languages for communication. However, mechanically translating words and phrases into a foreign language has its own dangers: such translations often turn out to be offensive and culturally unacceptable.

Communication that presents information in multiple ways

Individuals are different and this difference is reflected in their preference for media. Some are fans of the print media while some like visual presentations with interactive content. Some learn explicitly from information presented with bulleted points while some others want to learn implicitly and experientially with information interspersed in realistic contexts. From a communication professional’s viewpoint, certain information can be transmitted more efficiently and effectively as a blend of audio-visual cues than either alone. In the initial stages of a negotiation, it is often better to have unstructured and informal communication styles for the liberal generation and quick dissemination of ideas. However, when such ideas are to be funneled down, when depth rather than breadth is needed, and when legal issues are to be tackled, more systematic and formal styles should gain in importance. In a firm’s communication mix, it will be great to have communication products that endear different senses and sensibilities.

Concluding Remarks

Since communication with different stakeholders and for different purposes demand different skills, it is important for students to have mastery over a comprehensive set of commonly used media and formats. Teachers of tourism should demonstrate how communication skills such as conveying information clearly in speech and writing, and listening carefully, contribute to the successful operation of a tourism business. In-house faculty effort towards this should be supplemented by inputs from industry professionals. Communication skills gained outside of the classroom are significant, too: many students gain a great deal of industry relevant communication skills during their internships, part-time jobs, or as volunteers for industrial events. Participation in extra-curricular activities such as speaking / writing / poster designing competitions also can boost and fine-tune the communication skills of tourism students.