Promoting Green Tourism: the Future of Environmental Awards

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ABSTRACT

Awards and labels can help consumers choose more environmentally benign tourism products and encourage more attention to the environment by producers. As in other areas, however, there is an increasing clutter of environmental awards and labels in tourism. Concerns exist about the value and appropriateness of some claims associated with these. This paper reviews and assesses environmental awards in tourism and recreation using comparative analysis. Sixteen awards relating to manufacturing, forestry, tourist attractions and tourism companies are appraised under the classifications of focus, criteria, certification system and results. Having identified the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches it is concluded that the time is ripe to rationalise awards and labels in the tourism industry and that an environmental management systems approach provides a flexible template to fulfil such a need and drive the agenda of environmental improvements in the industry. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of encouraging environmental awards and labels set against the uncertainties surrounding such credentials provide the context and issues that lead to the formulation of the research question of this article: What are the features of a good environmental award in tourism that should drive developments in this area? The method deployed to address this question was to conduct desk research, using secondary sources to compile a comprehensive list of environmental awards which included their distinctive features and characteristics. This data was then subjected to content and comparative analysis. Content analysis enabled the construction of a framework for the recording of the data in the results section. Comparative analysis was used to appraise the key strengths and weaknesses of the awards in the discussion section. The conclusion points to the benefits of using an environmental management systems approach administered by an independent awarding body and the need to rationalise the existing clutter of environmental awards and labels in tourism.

THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

Context and issues

Environmental concerns have been increasing steadily since the early 1970s (Caldwell, 1991; Dunlap, 1991). They were voiced initially by scientists, then by non-profit organisations and later by the wider public. At the end of the 1990s opinion polls suggest that a point has been reached where most of western society...
shows concern about the environmental impacts of current development (Peattie and Charter, 1994; Wong, Turner and Stoneman, 1996).

Such public concern, in broad terms, means that consumers would like to think that the products they purchase do not harm the environment. However, this does not itself guarantee purchase of environmentally benign products. Purchasing decisions are influenced not just by environmental credentials. Product quality and price are crucial factors and here environmental improvements may result in limitations to technical performance and increases in price. Each consumer will decide on their ‘shade of green’, depending on how important good environmental performance is to their purchase behaviour. Although environmental concern is growing it has still not reached the point where customers want to shoulder environmental costs in the same way they expect companies to do so (NCC, 1996b). Additionally consumers can rarely identify by themselves the effects that different products have on the environment. Hence the growing need for companies to make environmental claims about their products — to justify higher prices associated with environmental improvements and to provide consumers with environmental information.

Favourable environmental credentials also can be beneficial to organisations in other ways. They can improve relations with the public sector, non-profit organisations, trading partners and company employees and result in financial benefits. For example, they may improve staff relations. Secondly, being environmentally aware can mean gaining corporate advantage through enhanced image. Thirdly, there is a wide array of financial benefits arising from good environmental practices, including improved access to public funds, higher selling prices and cost savings (Miller and Szekely, 1995; Hartman and Stafford, 1997; Tsai and Child, 1997).

It is interesting to note that there are few direct benefits from environmental responsibility such as eco-savings and recycling revenues. Rather, many benefits arise from being seen to be operate in an environmentally friendly manner. The most obvious of these are an increase in market prices and access to new markets. Because of this, being seen to be green without incurring the costs of actually being green can be tempting.

The concept of a green product is one that is easier to use than to define. In loose terms a product or service can be said to be green when it is beneficial to the producer and consumer without harming the environment. The difficulty starts when a company attempts to measure the negative effects of their activities on the environment. Even in the cases where measurement seems possible, the next difficulty arises at agreeing the criteria to be considered and the threshold levels of unacceptable effects.

Manufacturing industries have targeted improvements in energy use and reductions in waste and emissions that harm the environment. They have also been the first to clean up their act. Utilities, oil, gas, mining and chemical companies achieve good ratings in the Index of Corporate Environment Engagement (Financial Times, 1996). In contrast the financial sector has some of the lowest scores. Tourism traditionally has been considered a relatively green industry, with the exception of its transport and land development implications, and for this reason it has only recently become an area of concern.

Eco-tourism, green tourism and soft tourism are used to signify environmentally friendly tourism but have different focuses and meanings. Often such claims use terms ‘which lack accepted or standard definitions, or employ extravagant language to wash the emptiness of the claim being made’ (NCC, 1996a). For example, the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council has defined eco-tourism as ‘an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities’ (Scace et al., 1992, p. 14). This is different from what many tourists might understand from the term.

These terms are used for two purposes: first of all, to tell customers that the holiday destination they are going to is beautiful and unspoilt. Eco-tourism is mostly used to label nature holidays to exotic destinations (Wight, 1994). Second, green tourism claims can be used to signal that tourism operations taking place in that area do not harm the environ-
ment. By labelling it as eco-tourism ‘the industry is happy because it can legitimately open up new areas for the more discerning (and expensive) range of the market, and tourists can enjoy the holiday they want with a clear conscience’ (Wheeler, 1998). Yet only half of the eco-tourism product and management claims in the World Congress of Adventure Travel and Ecotourism were supported by factual details, and none of the advertisers made cash contributions to conservation (Buckley and Clough, 1997). Promoting one thing but selling another is considered unethical (Wheeler, 1993; New Scientist, 1994; Horner and Swarbrooke: 1996), and is another case of being seen to be green.

A key problem then is that few consumers understand environmental claims, and many claims are not regulated. Brands and labels are used by customers to form an opinion about the environmental soundness of such products. It is common in the tourism industry, however, to include descriptive information about tourism products and eco-denominations for tourist products such as green, soft, sustainable or eco-tourism in the form of ‘quasi-ecological labels’ (Mihalic, 1996). The result is that many of the claims made on products are ‘unverifiable, and/or vague, woolly, specious or misleading. Most are accompanied by a bewildering range of logos and symbols’ (NCC, 1996a).

An independently, impartially run environmental award is probably the only way of formalising an environmental claim. There are a growing number of awards that relate to the environment explicitly, or implicitly as part of quality management. Certainly, defining and applying quality levels is difficult in the service industry (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). This is especially so for tourism with its diverse industry of small players, operating in different countries with different development priorities and administrative frameworks. Even in the best of cases, attempting tourism industry-wide standards will lead to inconsistencies (Ding and Pizam, 1995). Furthermore, environmental quality is hardly regulated within tourism. Health and safety issues are well established, with clear examples in passenger transport and food quality in restaurants. There are also established quality grading systems in the accommodation and catering industries. The global environment, however, plays a minimum role in any of these internationally acknowledged standards.

Therefore important emerging issues are how to encourage the tourism industry to be environmentally responsible, how to make the potential customer aware of those companies that achieve certain threshold levels and how to ensure reliability of environmental claims. It is these issues that lead to the formulation of the following research question. What are the features of a good environmental award in tourism that should drive developments in this area?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Overall a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach (Walle, 1997) was dictated by the nature of environmental awards in tourism. For some sectors it is possible to use an experimental approach to an assessment of environmental labelling. This is the case for energy saving characteristics of domestic appliances and the volatility of paints. The relationship between tourism and the environment, however, is much more fuzzy. Here, awards are couched in qualitative rather than quantitative descriptors.

Data were gathered to form a comprehensive list of environmental awards by desk research from secondary sources. Four specimen sectors were selected. First, manufacturing industry was included because it is the area where most progress has been made in setting up awards that can run across industries and countries. Second, awards in the forestry industry were included because recent developments have reshaped the timber industry in relation to sustainable and multipurpose use of valuable natural resources. Third, awards to sites that are tourism and leisure attractions were included. The emphasis in this case was to include awards relating to managing land and water for recreation where the award is given to a site rather than a company. Finally, schemes for tourism companies were gathered. Over 100 awards relevant to the UK and other European countries were listed. Although not exhaustive, this process teased out a comprehensive list of awards.
These data were then subjected to content analysis. The purpose of this part of the exercise was to provide a framework in which data could be recorded so as to facilitate subsequent analysis. The objective of content analysis was to analyse the characteristics of the awards with a view to discerning common features to enable a classification to take place. Four key characteristics were established — focus, criteria, certification and results. First, the award’s focus indicates its basic philosophy, its purpose and the target audience that it aims to influence. Second, each award will have some criteria, more or less defined, that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve the award. Third, the method used to verify and certificate criteria-compliance is of crucial importance in determining the award’s reputation and standing. Finally, the result of the award is of importance, particularly the form of the award, its recognisability and the possible use organisations can make of it.

A process of data reduction was then undertaken in order to obtain a more manageable yet representative data set. A short list of 16 award schemes from across the four sectors was reached by subjectively choosing the more established, more representative or more recent awards. Two awards currently in development have been included — Tourism Ecolabelling and Green Globe / SGS, as these will influence the near future of tourism awards. Also, two now defunct awards relating to multiple use of forests are included — The Dulverton Flagon and The Centres of Excellence Award. Both were instrumental in widening the views of the timber industry to include recreation and the environment. Finally the short list of 16 awards was subject to comparative analysis and critical review to enable the key strengths and weaknesses of the awards to emerge in the discussion section. The purpose of this step was also to clarify the content for a generic award that could be used by the tourism industry.

RESULTS

The shortlist of sixteen awards are classified in Table 1.
Table 1. Classification of awards reviewed

1. ISO 14001 (International Standards Organisation)

Focus Environmental management system designed for all types and sizes of organisation and to accommodate diverse geographical, cultural and social conditions

Criteria The main principles are:
- Establish an environmental policy appropriate to the organisation
- Identify from the organisation’s activities environmental impacts of significance
- Identify the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements
- Identify priorities and set appropriate environmental objectives and targets
- Establish a structure and programme to implement the policy and achieve objectives and targets
- Facilitate planning, control, monitoring, corrective action, auditing and review activities to ensure both that the policy is complied with and that the environmental management system remains appropriate
- Be capable of adapting to changing circumstances

Certification Accreditation is given by an environmental verifier. There are four stages to assessment:
- The desk-top review
- The initial site visit
- The assessment visit
- Certification and registration.

Result The organisation is granted accreditation to ISO 14001.

2. EMAS. Eco-management and audit scheme (EC)

Focus Specified industrial sectors, presently mining and quarrying; manufacturing; power supply; waste treatment and local authorities

Criteria To encourage managers to develop good practice and improve environmental performance. The four areas of potential improvement are:
- Product design
- The processes used during manufacturing
- The type and amount of energy and raw materials used
- Any direct effects the manufacturing process has on the environment
- This is achieved through a seven-stage process: environmental policy; review; programme; management system; audit; environmental statement; validation

Certification The environmental statement is evaluated by an accredited verifier, who then produces a report and submits it to the Competent Body. The Competent Body checks with the enforcement authorities before giving the organisation permission to use a Statement of Participation

Result Permission to use a Statement of Participation.

3. EU Ecolabelling Scheme (UK Ecolabelling board)

Focus The aim is to establish a voluntary eco-label award scheme for clean products

Criteria are set for products ranging from washing machines to soil improvers, toilet paper and light bulbs. Although the list is increasing, no criteria for the service industries are yet available

Criteria It aims at promoting the design, production, marketing and use of products that have reduced environmental impact during their entire life cycle; providing consumers with better information on the environmental impact of products

Certification Assessment by the competent body from the product’s country of origin

Result Any product to which the eco-label is awarded is recognisable by the logo representing a daisy.

4. Duke of Cornwall’s Award for Conservation in commercial forestry (Royal Forestry Society of England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Focus UK-based commercial woodlands and forests (those producing timber)

Criteria Management that is sympathetic to the landscape and likely to conserve and enhance the wildlife interests in them consistent with the primary purpose of timber production

Certification Two fold: firstly, by a written statement to be submitted to demonstrate how wildlife and landscape are respected; secondly, sites are judged by an inspection visit

Result Best performance trophies, medallion, certificate and cash prize.
### 5. The Dulverton Flagon (Timber Growers Association) (finished)

**Focus**  
UK-based timber producing woodlands and forests

**Criteria**  
Demonstration of the principles of the TGA Forestry and Woodland Code by combining good environmental practice with timber production. The specific categories within the code are recreation, access, timber production, employment, landscaping, archaeology, soil conservation, biodiversity (wildlife and invertebrate management), water conservation and community involvement

**Certification**  
Certification takes place through visits by regional team judges. These analyse not only the woodland quality, but also its management

**Result**  
Prize to the best management in England, Scotland and Wales each year.

### 6. FSC Principles and Criteria of Forest Management (Forest Stewardship Council)

**Focus**  
Designed for forests managed for the production of wood products. The FSC aims at a worldwide coverage of timber producers

**Criteria**

1. Compliance with laws and FSC principles: Forest management shall respect all applicable laws of the country in which they occur, and international treaties and agreements to which the country is signatory, and comply with all FSC Principles and Criteria.
2. Tenure and use rights and responsibilities: Long-term tenure and use rights of the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established
3. Indigenous people’s rights: The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognised and respected
4. Community relations and other worker’s rights: Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities
5. Benefits from the forest: Forest management operations shall encourage the efficient use of the forest’s multiple products and services to ensure economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits
6. Environmental impact: Forest management shall conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes
7. Management plan: A management plan — appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operations — shall be written, implemented, and kept up to date
8. Monitoring and assessment: Monitoring shall be conducted to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody, management activities and their social and environmental impacts
9. Maintenance of natural forests: Primary forests, well-developed secondary forests and sites of major environmental, social or cultural significance shall be conserved
10. Plantations: They should complement the management of, reduce pressures on, and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests

**Certification**  
Inspections carried out by FSC accredited certification bodies that are themselves evaluated and monitored to ensure their competence

**Result**  
Labelling of forest products from certified forests with FSC Trademark.

### 7. Woodmark Scheme (Soil Association)

**Focus**  
Any commercial timber operator (processor, manufacturer, importer or distributor) as well as all operators upstream of those seeking certification

**Criteria**  
The Woodmark concentrates on the whole ‘Chain of custody’, rather than the single operator. Operators are assessed on the basis of:

- Fair labour, health and safety
- Economic gains aimed at local people
- Environmentally sound plant and equipment
- Not mixed warehousing
- Not mixed transport

**Certification**  
The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) runs the accreditation process

**Result**  
Woodmark certification for sustainably produced timber.
8. Smart Wood (The Rainforest Alliance)

Focus: Well-managed and sustainable sources of timber and companies that sell certified wood

Criteria: Companies are required to prove that wood used or sold comes from sources that meet six criteria:
1. Develop a formal plan to ensure good, long-term forest management
2. Minimise the damage they do to remaining forests during harvesting
3. Protect local biodiversity and watersheds
4. Prevent overcutting of popular timber species
5. Respect rights of local communities and workers
6. Plant trees on degraded or cleared land, with an emphasis on native species and ecosystem restoration

Certification: Smart Wood staff, advisors and consultants, together with local specialists
Certification is based on field assessment and peer review, after the submission of an application

Result: Benchmark-based award, at different levels (sustainable source, well-managed source and conditional certification). It can be used for marketing purposes.

9. Green Flag Park (Institute of Leisure and Amenities Management, ILAM)

Focus: An award is made to individual UK-based public parks

Criteria:
* Environment: Are a variety of habitats supported? Is conservation encouraged? Is information relating to nature and conservation acquired?
* Community: Does the park contribute to the locality? Are facilities suited to the needs of the community?
* Landscape: Is the park aesthetically pleasing? Are active and passive recreational opportunities provided?
* Safety, cleanliness and accessibility: Is the park a safe place? Is the park well maintained? Is the park well managed?

Certification: Assessed by site visits and desk analysis of application, against pre-defined criteria

Result: Eligibility to fly the green flag at the park.

10. Blue Flag (European Union)

Focus: Beaches and marinas, at present within the EU but expanding

Criteria: Concentrates on three basic issues with 26 criteria
The three issues are:
* Quality of water used for bathing
* Orientation of environmental education and information activities
* Order and safety of beaches and marinas
The criteria include the following:
* No visible hydrocarbon pollution
* No gross pollution, visibly sewage related or otherwise
* To display publicly on, or close, to the beach up-dated information on water quality and sampling point location
* First Aid must be available
* Adequate sanitary facilities available
* No industrial or sewage discharges that may affect the beach

Certification: Site assessment through testing, conducted by country-based verifiers

Result: Beaches and marinas that pass the benchmark standards can use the flag for the duration of the period of assessment.

11. Open Space Management Award (ILAM)

Focus: Organisations responsible for publicly accessible parks or open spaces in the UK

Criteria: Award given on the basis of the imaginative improvement of the open spaces’ environment, and given for the most innovative management scheme undertaken

Certification: Best performance award, plus possibility of commendations. Judged by a panel comprising of ILAM and Horticulture Week members, on the basis of 1000 word submission of the management scheme. Judging may also include site visits

Result: Sites-specific plaque retained by the winner.
### 12. The Centres of Excellence Award (Forestry Authority in England) (finished)

**Focus**
Multipurpose-use woods and forests within the UK

**Criteria**
Demonstration of highest management standards in at least one of the following:
- Improvement in the quality of the landscape
- Creation of benefits for wildlife
- Provision of access
- Environmentally sound timber production

**Certification**
Site visits by 11 regional Forest Authority managers

**Result**
Best performance award in each of the Forestry Authority’s 11 regions quarterly, and a national yearly winner (1992 to 1996 programme). Each award is kept for 5 years. The certificate is kept on site and can be used for promotion.

### 13. Tourism for Tomorrow (British Airways / The Conservation Foundation)

**Focus**
Tour operators, hotels, national parks and heritage sites, and other tourism services

**Criteria**
Projects must demonstrate success in one or more of the following:
- Degree of innovation
- Leadership and role model
- Relationship to the local community
- Management of visitor numbers
- Contribution to preservation and/or renovation of the built environment
- Approach to the natural environment, including conservation, pollution and waste control, architecture, technology and infrastructure
- Contribution to sustainable tourism

**Certification**
Enter submission with 1500 word summary and up to five colour slides to demonstrate how project meets the award criteria. An independent panel of judges selects winner and two highly commended projects for each of five regions of the world

**Result**
Awards presented at an annual ceremony held in London.

### 14. Tourism Ecolabelling (Consortium of local authorities / University of Galway / Udarasgaeltacht) (in development)

**Focus**
Local authorities representing prospective tourist destinations

**Criteria**
Successful schemes need to meet natural environment quality indicators, cultural environment quality indicators and EU environmental regulations. Criteria are still not fully defined

**Certification**
Benchmark system, although it is still not clear how it will operate

**Result**
It is expected to become an environmental quality mark for regions to market themselves as tourist destinations.

### 15. Green Globe/ SGS Certification (in development)

**Focus**
The travel and tourism sectors. At the moment it is being tested in the hospitality industry

**Criteria**
Meeting Agenda 21 principles for the travel and tourism industry. These have been defined by the WTTC as concern for the community, the ecosystem and sustainable consumption of resources

**Certification**
Continuous improvement system benchmarks. On-site assessment as well as environmental management systems verification

**Result**
A certificate will be issued, although its use limits are still not defined.

### 16. The 1995 European Prize for Tourism and the Environment (finished)

**Focus**
Supply-based award, focusing on enhancing environmental awareness in tourist destination development and management

**Criteria**
Three broad, open parameters were used:
- Constraints faced by the destination at geographical, financial, political, environmental, climatic, etc., level
- Efforts made by the destination to overcome such constraints (projects, methodological approach, etc.)
- Results obtained by the destination in relation to constraints and efforts

**Certification**
Destinations to write a report stating the three parameters mentioned relating to their site.

**Result**
Single prize plus eight special jury prizes.
pay the extra cost. Influencing consumers can be costly, because the target market is much greater, harder to influence and to monitor.

Several awards focus on whether the process followed to carry out day-to-day activities is environmentally friendly, rather than looking at the outcomes. Environmental management systems (EMSs) follow this approach, on the grounds that it is very difficult to directly test the environmental impacts caused by a company. Rather, it is easier to control the management of the sources of such impacts. Monitoring of processes followed requires records of activities and methods to determine the reliability of such records. Although this system has its limitations, such as the need for a complex measuring and reporting system, it also has at least two advantages. First, EMSs put the pressure on running the company properly, rather than mere compliance with the award organiser’s expectations. Second, the only way to certify sustainable timber production, for example, is by monitoring the production process because testing the final product will not provide appropriate information. This is similar for the tourism industry, where most of the outputs do not yield environmental data, hence the need to focus on production processes and their associated environmental effects such as emissions, waste and energy consumption.

Criteria

Some awards are based on a single most important issue. Others attempt to capture several relevant issues that complement each other. Finally, there are awards that allow the recipient a relatively open agenda to demonstrate why they should be presented with an award.

In single issue cases there are awards within industries where one major problem stands out from the rest. Chlorine-free paper or CFC-free aerosols are some examples. Similarly, some awards are organised around a theme that the organiser wants to promote. The Phil Drabble Award for Commitment to Youth, organised by the Forestry Authority, recognised the best forest educational programmes. Single issue awards will be less likely to be responsive to changes, and once the issue has been tackled the award will be redundant. A problem with some single issue awards is that the public can be misled to believing that good performance on that one indicator signifies an overall environmentally sound management.

One method to deal with the weaknesses of single issue awards is to assess more issues, so the target organisation is assessed more comprehensively. For example, the Green-Flag Park award assesses the environment, community involvement, safety and cleanliness of the site. Multiple-issue awards will be good for those industries where it is important to keep a balance between factors such as resource use against preservation. The major weakness is that they cannot always be applied across complex industries or different countries, because what is relevant in one sector or country might not be in another.

It is because environmental matters are often so varied and site-specific that some awards take an open perspective and require applicants to set their own environmental agenda, from which they generate their own performance criteria. These awards will focus on the management ability to respond to site-specific issues. This flexible approach encourages innovation and commitment. The Tourism for Tomorrow Awards and the European Prize for Tourism and the Environment are examples here, as are EMSs. As the emphasis is on environmental principles rather than specific criteria, open criteria awards can be transferred across industries and countries.

However, several weaknesses need to be considered. First, open criteria do not guarantee that the applicant tackles all pertinent issues. Secondly, the certification of an open system will be more costly, because local conditions need to be researched. Third, the organiser will have greater difficulties justifying the awards given. Fourth, prospective recipients might be discouraged from applying owing to the lack of specific criteria. Fifth, although such awards are transferable across industries and contexts, consumers might not understand how very different industries can receive the same award.

Certification

It is usually the organiser, or in large opera-
tions a verifying company, that will certify award recipients. Some awards, however, run self-certification systems. Only external certification will be reviewed, as this is the format used by all 16 awards analysed. Most external certification takes place through site visits, documentary evaluation or a combination of both. Usually awards require an initial written application, which will generate an agenda for the site visits.

Site visits result in a snapshot of the state of the site. Emphasis is placed on the physical evidence of the organisation and its resources on the day testing takes place. This method is also used to assess small organisations that do not keep records of their activities. The main limitation of site visits is that the assessor can only obtain a snapshot of what is happening on the day of the visit, and must assume that this is representative of the rest of the year. A second limitation is that it is more costly than desk research. Site visit awards can only cope with a small number of applicants, which lessens the meaning of the award, otherwise applicants need to go through a screening process, and therefore only best practice can be awarded.

Documentary evaluation requires an organisation to produce tangible evidence of good management. This is mostly written but may use photographs and other methods. The advantage of documentary evaluation is the cross-comparability of information, both between sites and over time. Environmental management systems follow this approach. Many tourism players, however, are small and cannot afford to produce such documents, even when the environmental management of the company or site is sound. Another criticism of document-based certification is that the information provided might oversell the positive characteristics of the management, while hiding other issues.

Results

Awards can be given for achieving three things. First, for being the best performer, or one of the best. Second, an award can be given to any organisation that meets certain standards pre-specified by the organiser. Third, organisations can receive an award by improving their past performance.

Best performance awards are prizes to the top performing companies, normally run around an event and public presentation. The Centres for Excellence Awards, the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards and the European Prize for Tourism and the Environment are some examples. Prizes are a good method to single out leadership and role models when the industry needs examples. These are often easier to run because the organiser only has to justify the choice of a winner against the other players, rather than showing the ranking of all the applicants. Applying for a best performance award is in general cheaper for the prospective recipient, because most costs are taken care of (e.g. The Dulverton Award) as the organiser often runs the event as a public relations exercise.

Benchmark systems are a natural progression from best performance prizes, because they acknowledge all those companies that reach a minimum level of performance. Examples include the Blue Flag Scheme and most ecolabelling systems. Benchmark systems allow for grading performance and giving awards accordingly, in the same way that hotels are awarded from one to five stars. In general, these will be more expensive than best performance systems.

An alternative method is to reward organisations that can demonstrate improvement in their environmental performance. Although minimum entry standards normally will be expected, each recipient competes only against themselves, instead of other organisations. Continuous improvement awards are assessed mostly through written evidence of a plan-do-review process. This system is very responsive to industry changes and specific needs of the organisation, and helps companies to understand environmental management as a progressive concept. Organisations applying for these schemes are committing to a long-term willingness to improve. The European Union Environmental Management Audit Scheme, EMAS, is probably the best example of a continuous improvement scheme.

A drawback for recipients is that they need to be in the programme for a prolonged period before gaining an award to enable improve-
ments to be monitored. Other disadvantages include the difficulty in agreeing the required level of improvement. This system also allows inconsistencies between recipients' performance, which can confuse consumers.

CONCLUSIONS

It may be only a question of time before legislation provides consumers with the right to know about the environmental impact of products before purchase. In the UK, the Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions is taking action to ensure claims are genuine by standardising claims, as well as greening companies by encouraging them to apply for environmental award schemes. In 1996 it published a consultation paper regarding a standardisation system to validate environmental claims (DoE, 1996), followed by a policy framework of actions to increase the weight of environmental issues in product choice (DoE, 1997). In the USA, The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has concluded from its consultation process on Guidelines for Environmental Marketing Terms that such guidelines level the marketers' playing field, cut deceptive claims and promote national consistency (Ottman, 1996).

Currently, tourism and open land management awards are not developed as thoroughly as they are in the manufacturing or timber production industries, where timber certification has stimulated sustainable timber production. At present, tourism and recreation award schemes are a suppliers' game, an internal competition between limited core players. In addition to the awards analysed here there are at least another 60 relating to tourism, most of which are either too regional or too specific for the tourist to know about, understand or take much notice of. Such awards are often single issue based, and in most cases these issues do not play a part in tourists' choice frame. Most of the awards in tourism and recreation promote best performance and these can create the awareness necessary to show the way. However, the tourism industry is rich in examples of sound environmental management, and efforts should be directed towards a stronger commitment from all the industry players.

In view of these findings a comprehensive award is needed that all tourism and leisure companies can try to achieve, and for which they will gain clear benefits. The award needs to be administered independently from key industry players in order to avoid criticisms of 'seen to be green' and introduce necessary rigour. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) criteria set the standards here. Present systems are not reaching the prospective tourist or influencing their purchase behaviour, often because of lack of consumer recognition. Award organisers need to unify their efforts and rationalise their product to ensure a broad industry and geographical cover, providing an overall umbrella award that consumers recognise, together with the support systems to transmit the message. Economies of scale will bring marketing branding and cost benefits. In the tourism industry it is not only important to streamline the number of organisers, but to internationalise them. The National Consumers Council concluded that 'international standards on environmental claims are still in prospect, but perhaps many years away' (NCC, 1996a).

The only method to cover the whole tourism industry regardless of site specific differences is an environmental management systems approach using ISO 14001 and EMAS frameworks adapted for the tourism industry. Table 2 summarises the salient features of such an award. An EMS provides a broad repertoire of advantages including a bottom-up approach, flexibility, leadership and adaptability, as well as allowing for a top-down regulatory framework. The EMS requirement to generate a system to manage the environment from within the organisation requires self-knowledge and self-help, and environmental considerations are internalised. Environmentalism does not just become an external hurdle to jump over to obtain an award. Evaluating performance against a self-imposed set of targets means that the EMS puts an emphasis on improvement and on process, rather than rigid and uniform criteria. The main drawback of this system is that it requires close monitoring by experts, because each company’s EMS will be site specific. This will in turn demand a strong commitment from the industry itself, because it implies documentation and higher
application costs than more simple methods. Although EMSs are relatively new to the tourism industry, there are pre-feasibility studies for ski resorts (Todd and Williams, 1996) and forest areas (Tribe, 1998), which may provide the basis for generic systems for tourism and recreation.

REFERENCES


Table 2. Generic tourism environmental award

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Global environmental management system (EMS) designed for all types and sizes of tourism organisation to accommodate diverse geographical, cultural and social conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>A continuous environmental cycle of plan–do–review must be established to include:</td>
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<td>• Environmental policy appropriate to the organisation</td>
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<td>• Site/organisational review to establish environmental issues</td>
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<td>• Programme of environmental targets</td>
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<td>• Operationalisation of programme</td>
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<td>• Audit and review of effectiveness of EMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>• An organising body independent of, but supported by, key stakeholders administers the awards</td>
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<td>• Organisations’/sites’ EMSs are verified by accredited environmental verifiers, based on documentary evidence and site visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Global Award/Flag with wide consumer recognition, industry support and environmental credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


