

TORONTO BRUCE TRAIL CLUB

MARKET RESEARCH PROJECT

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Background

In the last decade or so, the membership of the Toronto Club has declined from about 4000 to around 2800.

In June 2013, the Club Board of Directors held a strategic planning session and much concern was expressed about this decline in membership. The Board decided to engage a professional market research firm to determine the level of awareness of the Bruce Trail and the Toronto Club in the Greater Toronto Area.

A request for proposal was drafted, finalized and issued to four firms. Proposals were received, reviewed by the Board and in early 2014 the Toronto Bruce Trail Club awarded the contract to the Toronto-based market research firm, Ipsos-Reid.

The study was designed to research four primary topics:

1. Awareness of the Bruce Trail Conservancy and the Toronto Bruce Trail Club
2. Interest in joining (or not) the Toronto Club, or other similar organizations
3. Awareness of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere and the need for its protection
4. Interest in hiking or similar outdoor activities.

The research was conducted in the City of Toronto, Halton Region, Peel Region and York Region from May 15th to May 23, 2014. The total survey sample resulted in 899 completed questionnaires. The respondents were between 18 and 90 years of age. Forty-eight percent were male and 52% were female.

This article provides a summary of the findings of the Ipsos-Reid survey.

Interest in Hiking and Walking Trails

There is strong interest in hiking and walking. Forty-four percent of the sample had hiked or walked a trail in the last two years and forty-eight percent planned to do so in the next 12 months. The strongest interest was from those aged 18 to 34, in the Halton Region and/or with higher incomes. There was also a high level of interest from persons involved in related activities such as tree planting and among south Asians in the GTA.

Awareness of the Bruce Trail

The Bruce Trail was named by seven percent of the survey respondents as where they hike most often. The Trail was the only location for hiking that was spontaneously mentioned by name. The Bruce Trail is the best known trail in Canada. Sixty-three percent of the sample was aware of the Trail, compared with 30% who knew about the Oak Ridges Trail. However, there appears to be a lack of knowledge of the Bruce Trail and a desire to know more. Of those who were not aware of the Trail, 60% expressed a willingness to know more. Even among those who were aware of the Trail, 70% want to know more about it.

Awareness of the Toronto Bruce Trail Club

Only 14% of the respondents were aware of the Toronto Club. Of the two adjacent clubs, Caledon Hills was known by 14% and the Iroquoia Club by 7%. Even in the City of Toronto, only 14% knew about the Club. Again, there was a noticeably higher level of awareness about the Club among south Asians in the City. Awareness of the Conservancy, at 33%, was significantly higher than it was for any of the three clubs.

Membership in Hiking/environmental/conservation and related clubs.

The level of membership in these types of clubs is quite low. The sample group was asked if they currently were a member, or had ever, been a member, of any of 24 clubs whose names were provided. Two percent were currently members of the Toronto Bruce Trail Club and 6% were past members. A number of other clubs, such as Nature Canada, Toronto Outdoor Club and the High Park Club, had the same percentage of current members as we do. World Wildlife Fund had the highest percentage of current membership at 4%

Cancelling Membership

Three quarters of past Toronto members have cancelled in the last 3-4 years. Unfortunately, the reasons are not clear but appear to centre around being too busy to participate, lack of time or the person had moved out of the area.

Niagara Escarpment

A significant proportion (77%) of the survey respondents had heard of the Niagara Escarpment, which of course is the major focus of the mission statement of the Bruce Trail Conservancy. However, only 23% of them knew about the United Nations designation of the Escarpment as a World Biosphere Reserve.

Interest in Joining the Toronto Bruce Trail Club

Thirty-five percent of the survey participants were interested in joining the Club for hiking purposes but even more (42%) were interested in joining for environment purposes. The same percentage (42) of the sample were interested in joining the Conservancy for environmental

reasons. The participants were asked why they were not interested in joining the club. Other than simply not interested, there was no dominant reason but those given included: too expensive, no time to hike, prefer hiking on my own, and prefer other activities.

Conclusion

The Ipsos-Reid report made the following three major recommendations.

1. There is a need to build awareness of the Bruce trail and the connection to the Niagara Escarpment and the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve designation
2. The Toronto Club needs to make people aware of what the club has to offer; communicate information about our hiking program (especially bus hikes); reinforce the fact that membership has a major environmental component and look at our competitors for ideas about acquiring members. We should target the City of Toronto, Peel Region and the Asian community.
3. Use the relatively high level of awareness of the Bruce Trail Conservancy to attract people to the club by putting more emphasis on the environment and the World Biosphere Reserve.

The Ipsos-Reid report is 37 pages long with an enormous amount of data. The Board of Directors of the Toronto Bruce Trail Club has established a new committee, the Member 4000 Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to analyse the report and develop an overall marketing plan to increase awareness of the Club, the Trail and the Conservancy in the GTA with the objective of reversing the decline in membership. The Board has established an objective of 4000 members by 2020, hence the name of the Committee.