

2014

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Recommended Citation

Schroeder, Ashley; Pennington-Gray, Lori; and Bricker, Kelly (2014) "Lessons Learnt from the Westgate Shopping Mall Terrorist Attack in Nairobi, Kenya: Involving the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions Sector in Crisis Communications," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 6.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/D7872V>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol2/iss1/6>

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Lessons Learned From The Westgate Shopping Mall Terrorist Attack In Nairobi, Kenya: involving the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions sector in crisis communications

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The terrorist attacks in Nairobi Kenya have been widely disseminated by the world media, thus, affecting the long-term interests of stakeholders. The tourism industry is made up of a vast number of these stakeholders, with the operating sector alone including the accommodation, tourism services, transportation, entertainment, food services, adventure and outdoor recreation, attractions, meetings, incentive, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE), and travel trade sectors. Within each operating sector, there is also a variety of different stakeholders in various segments and organizations. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine tourism crisis communications surrounding the Westgate Shopping Mall attacks in Kenya. The main research question which guided this study was: Did tourism communications surrounding the Westgate Shopping Mall attacks follow best practices for tourism crisis communications? Accordingly, this paper used participant observation to highlight communications surrounding the attacks from the perspective of a conference planner and a conference attendee.

Key Words: terrorism, tourism, Kenya, message, communication lessons.

Introduction

Tourism is an important industry for Kenya's economy; generating 14% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing 12% of the country's workforce (WTTC, 2013). The tourism industry falls only behind tea and horticulture in terms of foreign exchange earnings (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a). Magical Kenya (2014) describes the destination as being like no other in the world, offering a variety of natural attractions, historical sites, and a rich culture. The country's wilderness and wildlife are main tourist draws (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism,

2013a). Despite the tourism industry's major contributions to Kenya's economy,

the sector remains relatively underdeveloped, compared to other tourist destinations, in terms of the number of tourists, yield and diversity of experience (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a: 20).

Accordingly, the tourism industry has been identified as a sector which is essential to Kenya's development (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a). However, there are several constraints to the growth of Kenya's tourism industry. For example, the Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism

(2013a) has recognized that ‘the security situation in the country remains a significant hindrance to further developing the (tourism) sector’ (p. 18). Accordingly, several of the identified growth constraints are related to the destination’s safety and security. In particular, actual and perceived concerns about safety and security, the media’s coverage of the destination, and travel advisories related to travel to the destination, all pose threats to the growth of Kenya’s tourism industry (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a).

Kenya’s tourism industry was recently faced the constraint of safety and security when a major terrorist attack occurred in the country’s capital - Nairobi. On September 21, 2013, al-Shabaab supporters attacked the Westgate Shopping Mall, a premier shopping centre popular with wealthy Kenyans, expatriates, and tourists. The terrorist attack ended on September 24 (Howden, 2013), resulting in 67 deaths and 240 injuries (Magical Kenya, 2013a). The Associated Press reported that at least 18 foreigners were among the casualties: from England, France, Canada, Trinidad, the Netherlands, Australia, Peru, India, Ghana, South Africa, and China (AP, 2013), while several American citizens were among the wounded (Kosner, 2013). The crisis received extensive international media coverage, catapulting the destination into the homes of a large number of prospective tourists. Thus, Kenya’s tourism industry was under increased pressure to respond to the crisis. However, as will be discussed later, the tourism industry was mainly silent during the crisis and tended to proceed with business as usual in their communications.

While the terrorist attack itself lasted 80 hours (Howden, 2013), the negative impacts on Kenya’s tourism industry and, consequently, the country’s economy are expected to be long-term. Moodys estimated that the crisis would result in a \$200-250 million loss in Kenya’s tourism revenue and a 0.5% decrease in GDP growth (Kushner, 2013).

The purpose of this paper is to examine tourism crisis communications surrounding these attacks by focusing on the main research question which guided this study: ***Did tourism communications surrounding the attacks follow best practice for tourism crisis communications?*** Accordingly, this work used participant observation to highlight communications surrounding the event from the perspective of a conference planner and a conference attendee. The analysis is described and then recommendations for developing and implementing a comprehensive crisis communication process are provided.

Background

MICE Tourism

An emerging operating segment of the tourism industry is meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE). MICE consists of:

activities based on the organization, promotion, sales and delivery of meetings and events; products and services that include corporate, association and government meetings, corporate incentives, seminars, congresses, conferences, convention events, exhibitions and fairs (UNWTO, 2014, p. 4).

MICE tourism has grown in recent decades (UNWTO, 2014) and has become a significant operating sector of the tourism industry (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). The United Nations World Tourism Organization touts the MICE sector as being among the main sectors which have contributed to tourism development, as well as the production of income, employment, and investment (UNWTO, 2014). Thus, it not surprising that destinations are seeking to grow their tourism industries and to differentiate themselves from competitors, in part, by targetting MICE tourism (UNWTO, 2014). From a destination perspective, MICE tourism also decreases seasonality, produces greater tourism receipts on average, and increases brand awareness (UNWTO, 2014). External factors, such as the increased focus on developing a knowledge economy, have also contributed to the growth of MICE tourism (UNWTO, 2014).

According to Meetings Kenya (2014), the destination has a long history with MICE tourism, dating back to 1973. Since then, Kenya has been the host destination for high profile international and national conferences and events (Meetings Kenya, 2014). More recently, as part of Kenya’s priority for tourism development, the country recognizes MICE as being a growth sector which is needed in order to make Kenya a top ten long-haul destination (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a). The country considers the MICE sector to have ‘untapped tourism potential,’ which makes it a key opportunity for Kenya’s tourism development (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013a, p. 32). In terms of infrastructure, Kenya already has a conference center (Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi) and eight additional venues which are marketed to the MICE sector (Meetings Kenya, 2014).

Crisis communication among tourism stakeholders

The tourism industry is made up of a vast number of stakeholders. The operating sector alone includes the accommodation, tourism services, transportation, entertainment, food services, adventure and outdoor recreation, attractions, meetings, events, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE), and travel trade sectors (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Within each operating sector, there are also a variety of different stakeholders in various segments and organizations. In addition, world and national travel industry associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), world and national government tourism offices, state and provincial government tourism offices, local and city government tourism departments, local and regional tourism associations, and state and provincial travel industry associations are also important stakeholders in tourism planning and development, as well as tourism marketing (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Given the large number of stakeholders within the tourism industry, the responsibilities of the stakeholders may be indistinguishable or may coincide (UNWTO, 2014). As a result, communication amongst tourism stakeholders can be challenging in good times, with various stakeholders communicating diverse messages to the same audience (UNWTO, 2014). This is also the case in Kenya, with the Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism (2013a:18) having acknowledged that

the policy environment presents a mixed picture and is not sufficiently conducive to the development of the (tourism) sector.

In times of crisis, communication among tourism stakeholders becomes remarkably more challenging (Pennington-Gray, Schroeder, & Gale, 2014), as stakeholders must decide how to respond to the crisis in a timely manner. Therefore, it is essential that a communication network which includes all tourism stakeholders is developed prior to a crisis (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014). Developing the network prior to a crisis can help to ensure that all tourism stakeholders receive and, thus, are able to provide accurate and timely information to tourists (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014).

One segment of the tourism industry which is often forgotten in times of crisis is the MICE sector, particularly those who are traveling to participate in conventions and exhibitions. Crisis information that is relevant to the MICE sector must be communicated to the key points of contact for the attendee (e.g., organizer, tour guide, group leader, meeting planners, venue manager). It is these people who the attendee

will turn to for information if a crisis arises. Thus, it is important that these key contacts are included in the tourism stakeholder communication network (i.e., TARN- Tourism Area Response Network), even prior to any crisis.

A system that determines the line of communication among stakeholders needs to be clearly established prior to a crisis. Then, communication to all relevant key contacts will enable a better, more accurate flow of information to the consumer/tourist in the event of a crisis. It is the responsibility of the tourism stakeholder communication network (i.e., TARN- Tourism Area Response Network) to convey information to meeting planners during the different phases of a crisis so that this key contact can provide accurate information to aid the attendee with critical decision-making regarding their safety. For example, meeting planners must decide whether to postpone or delay the meeting or to proceed with the meeting as planned. Further, meeting planners require accurate and timely information so that they can inform their visitors about the situation at the affected destination.

Methods

To address the main research question of this manuscript, participant observation was used. In particular, one of the authors was the Conference Chair of The International Ecotourism Society's (TIES) Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (ESTC) and the President of TIES and one of the authors was an ESTC participant, both were in Nairobi during the time of the terrorist attacks. Interaction with key MICE actors and documentation of the communication process was recorded as the crisis unfolded. A key advantage of participant observation is that the actors are observed in their natural setting (Plummer, 2012). Further, the analysis of other tourism crisis communication materials were presented based on a review of official statements from the President of Kenya, the Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, and the destination management organization- Kenya Tourism Board (under the name of Magical Kenya). The communication by various actors was summarized and a recommendation for more effective tourism crisis communication was presented based on principles of effective tourism crisis management outlined by Pennington-Gray, London, Cahyanto, and Klages (2011) and Pennington-Gray, Schroeder, and Gale (2013).

The Case of the Westgate Shopping Mall Terrorist Attack

At approximately 12:30pm on Saturday September 21, 2013, gunmen began to attack the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya with grenades and gunfire (Howden, 2013). Reports from individuals inside of the mall during the attack indicated that the ‘gunmen also rounded up people, asked questions about Islam that a Muslim would know, and told the Muslims to leave’ (AP, 2013). This was an ongoing crisis, as the terrorists continued to set siege on the Westgate Shopping Mall for several days. At 10pm on September 24, approximately 80 hours after the initial attack, during a television address, the President of Kenya stated that the attack had finally ended (Howden, 2013). The al-Shabaab terror group claimed responsibility for the attack on Twitter (Howden, 2013) and indicated that ‘foreigners were a ‘legitimate target’’ (AP, 2013). In the end, at least 18 foreigners from England, France, Canada, Trinidad, the Netherlands, Australia, Peru, India, Ghana, South Africa, and China were casualties of the terrorist attack (AP, 2013). Given that the terrorist group specifically targeted tourists and that a number of tourists were physically affected by the attack, Kenya’s tourism industry was under direct attack.

While the Westgate Shopping Mall was under attack, two conferences were set to be held in Nairobi. The Africa Hotel and Investment Forum (AHIF) was to be held at the Intercontinental Hotel from September 23-25, while the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (ESTC) was to be held at the Safari Park Hotel from September 24-27.

Response by the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference

At the time of the initial attack, the ESTC Executive Board and meeting planners were already in Kenya. A majority of the delegates, on the other hand, had not yet traveled to the destination. As the crisis unfolded, the executive board knew they had to make a quick decision regarding the status of the conference, as well as the message that they would provide the attendees. The first step to determining the direction that the board would take was to try and gather as much information as possible about the safety of the venue, as well as the number of attendees who were onsite versus those who had yet to travel. Members of the executive board along with the meeting planners gathered as much information as they could from key sources. These sources of information included hotel staff, the country contact that they were dealing with

for the conference, Magical Kenya’s (i.e., Kenya Tourism Board’s) website, and tour operators’ websites. At the end of the information gathering stage, only the front desk staff provided any information to the ESTC Executive Board. The message from the front desk staff was

we are assessing the situation on an ongoing basis, it is an isolated incident which is confined to the mall; however, we are heightening security around the hotel.

All other sources for information came up empty. However, internally, the Safari Park Hotel was adamant about ensuring the safety of guests and conference attendees and went into high security mode. This included creating processes for conference attendees that were unprecedented. For example, conference badges were changed daily, with attendees presenting photo identification; a metal detector was installed to enter the conference venue; security was added to all entrances to the hotel and conference grounds, and elevated to 24/7, with vehicle checks for explosive devices at the entrance etc. Further, all conference participants were encouraged to remain on the grounds as much as possible and to avoid the region of Nairobi where Westgate Mall was located, if they were to venture outside the grounds. All of these processes were put in place well before attendees arrived, and board members walked through all areas of the conference grounds to visually assess the implementation of these plans.

As a result of the information search process and conference venue safety and security plan, the board met and crafted a message to be emailed out to the attendees and posted on their website on September 22 (the day after the initial siege and two days prior to the opening of ESTC). The ESTC’s message, presented in the appendix, first expressed the organization’s sympathies to the families of the victims, then suggested that the conference would continue as planned, and provided information about what participants should do as they traveled to Kenya (ESTC, personal communication, September 22, 2013). An additional concern was getting from the airport to the hotel. Therefore, the message also suggested using the pre-arranged transportation for the conference (ESTC, personal communication, September 22, 2013). Finally, the message recommended following the ESTC’s Facebook page, as well as a suggestion to following the travelers’ embassy and state departments, for updated information on the situation (ESTC, personal communication, September 22, 2013). Importantly, the decision was made to move forward with the

conference. The primary reasons were first and foremost to support Kenyans in resisting terrorist attempts to determine their destiny; secondly, the ESTC Board felt that a cancellation would have a tremendous negative impact on Kenya's economy and would send the wrong message to the tourism community; and lastly, the conference wanted to support Kenya and the attempts by its President, to not issue travel advisories against Kenya (BBC, 2013).

Responses by the President of Kenya

The President of Kenya provided regular updates throughout the Westgate Shopping Mall terrorist attack, the first of which came on the initial day of the attack (Capital FM, 2013). President Kenyatta's statements on September 21 and 22 focused on providing updates to the situation, condemning the attackers, and declaring that the government would defend the nation (Capital FM, 2013; Magical Kenya, 2013b). The President's first mention of tourism came during a news conference on Sunday, September 22 (BBC, 2013). In his television appearance, President Kenyatta requested that other nations do not issue travel advisories against Kenya in reaction to the terrorist attack (BBC, 2013). The President made it clear that his government was dedicated to ensuring that this attack did not have a detrimental effect on Kenya's tourism industry and, subsequently, the nation's economy. Notably, statements and updates related to the terrorist attack were not provided on the news section of the official website of the President of Kenya (www.president.go.ke); there is a gap in updates to the news section from July 17 to December 27, 2013.

Responses by the Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism

The Ministry of Tourism's response came on September 22, the day after the attack began (Magical Kenya, 2013c). In an official statement, the Cabinet Secretary, Mrs. Phyllis Kandie, provided tourism-related updates (Magical Kenya, 2013c). Specifically, on behalf of the tourism industry, the Cabinet Secretary offered her condolences to the victims of the attack and declared that normal activities were going on throughout the country (Magical Kenya, 2013c). The Cabinet Secretary went on to pledge that the destination was safe for foreigners to visit and that the tourism industry was doing everything they could to ensure the safety and security of all tourists (Magical Kenya, 2013c). She also mentioned that all tourism businesses were operating normally (Magical Kenya, 2013c). A specific statement was tailored to the MICE

sector, welcoming the attendees of AHIF and ESTC to Kenya (Magical Kenya, 2013c). Consistent with the President's message, the final statement was tailored towards other governments and urged that they support Kenya by not issuing travel advisories following this 'isolated incident which has been brought under control' (Magical Kenya, 2013c).

The Ministry of Tourism's website (<http://www.tourism.go.ke/>) was not updated with information or statements related to the Westgate Shopping Mall terrorist attack. The 'latest news' section of the site has not been updated since September 17, 2013, several days prior to the attack. In addition, Facebook was not used regularly by the Ministry of Tourism to provide crisis communications. The Ministry of Tourism posted one Facebook update on the final day of the attack, which stated: 'Kenya is safe: Cabinet Secretary Ministry of E.A Affairs Commerce and Tourism says in regard to the West gate Mall Tragedy.<http://www.ntv.co.ke/news2/topheadlines/impact-of-westgate-attack-on-international-investment-and-tourism/>' (Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism, 2013b). The post was linked to a news segment which focused on Kenya's MICE tourism. In particular, the news segment featured statements from the Cabinet Secretary and event participants currently in Nairobi on the importance of supporting Kenya's tourism industry during this crisis in terms of not cancelling the AHIF and ESTC and also not issuing travel advisories due to the 'isolated incident' at the Westgate Shopping Mall. Notably, there has not been a new post on the Ministry of Tourism's Facebook page since the aforementioned post on September 24, 2013 [*Editor's note, this is still the case in October 2014*].

Responses by the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB)

The Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), the destination management organization, remained largely silent during the terrorist attack. In response to the attack, KTB uploaded two press releases on their official website (www.magicalkenya.com) on September 22, the day after the attack had begun. Each of the press releases, however, was a direct copy of government officials' statements on the attack. One of the press releases was a copy of the President's update on the terrorist attack (Magical Kenya, 2013b), which was not directed at either the tourism industry or the tourist. The second press release was a statement from the Cabinet Secretary of the Ministry of East Africa, Commerce and Tourism (Magical Kenya, 2013c). Both of these press releases were discussed in the previous sections.

KTB did not make a direct statement on behalf of the tourism industry until the day after the attack had ended, September 25 (Magical Kenya, 2013a). In their official response, KTB recapped the President's statements from his live television interview which was held on the previous night (Magical Kenya, 2013a). After the recap, the next section of the statement focused specifically on the MICE sector. In the 'Tourism events' section, KTB went on to confirm that several events would be held, as planned, in the coming month and recognized that ESTC and AHIF were currently being held in Nairobi (Magical Kenya, 2013a). KTB also sought to reassure MICE tourists of their safety by detailing post-crisis initiatives, including assuring attendees that KTB staff and tour operators would be at the airport to help with security clearance for the October events, mentioning that the Tourist Police Unit would be used for FAM trips, and that venue security had been heightened (Magical Kenya, 2013a). KTB also provided tourist-specific safety and security tips, such as registering with the local embassy (Magical Kenya, 2013a). Lastly, KTB stressed that the safety and security of tourists was a top priority and that Kenya was ready to welcome tourists to the destination (Magical Kenya, 2013a). The final section of the statement focused on 'Kenya Tourism Board Efforts' (Magical Kenya, 2013a). In this section, KTB mentioned their philanthropic initiatives, as well as that they were working with the media to get out the message that the destination was safe (Magical Kenya, 2013a). KTB also mentioned that they would work to provide up-to-date information

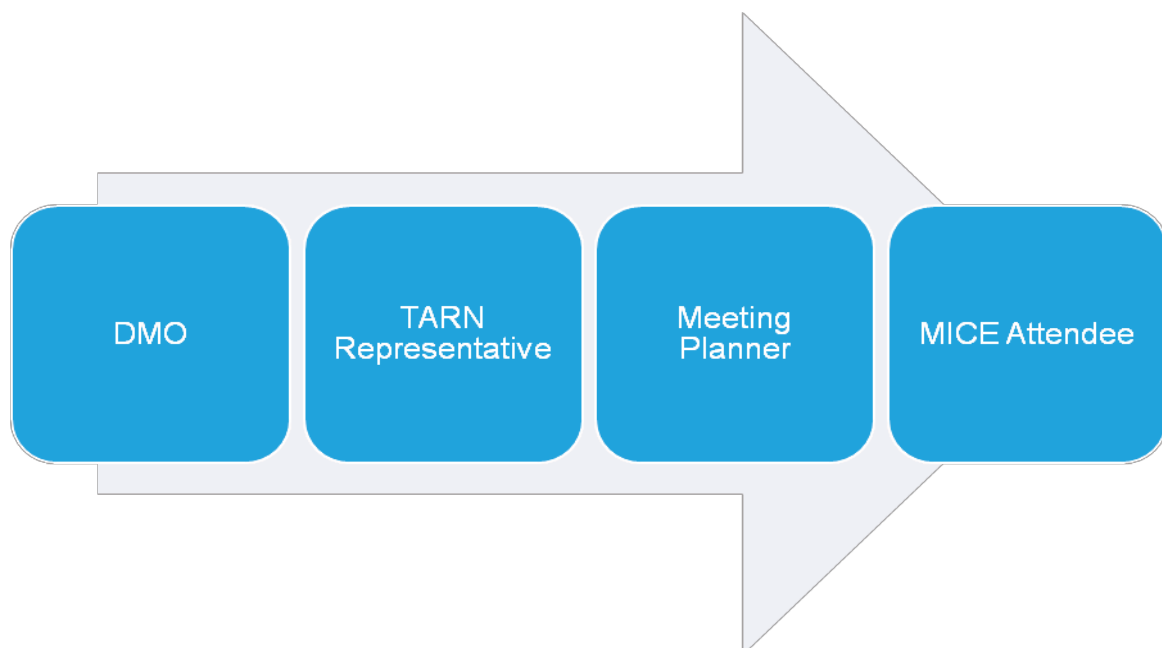
about the destination to MDRs (market development representatives) (Magical Kenya, 2013a). Notably, the press release section of Magical Kenya's website has not been updated since this statement on September 25, 2013. [*Editor's note, this section of the website appears to have been removed - October 2014*].

KTB also did not actively update their stakeholders about the crisis on their Facebook page. KTB did not make any Facebook posts during the time of the attack (September 21-24), despite having a track record of making regular postings. The day after the attack had ended, KTB did share a photo from Richard Branson's page which stated: 'Our thoughts are with all affected in Nairobi – now is the time #Kenya needs our support. I'll be visiting the country soon <http://virg.in/kya>' (Kenya Tourism Board, 2013). This was the only mention of the terrorist attack by KTB on their Facebook page and was a plea for the tourism industry and tourists to support Kenya in this time of crisis. The following day, September 26, KTB returned to making regular, non-crisis Facebook posts.

Recommendations for Improving Tourism Crisis Communications

Two major results of this case are clear. First, 'timing is everything'. The longer you wait to make a response, the less credible you are and the more likely it is that others will take that responsibility from you. Second, a 'coordinated, consistent message is critical.' All stakeholders need to be made aware of the

Figure 1: Line of communication for the meeting planner who is hosting groups in the destination when a crisis ensues



consistent message that is going to be communicated by the tourism industry of the affected destination. Lack of coordination in the message makes for inconsistencies in the messages communicated by different tourism stakeholders, which ultimately can lead to confusion in the marketplace and lack of trust.

First, it is important that the tourism industry comes out with a clear message quickly in the event of a crisis. This message is the first go-to information source for stakeholders and shows that the tourism industry is an important crisis information source. The initial message can be a simple message which merely states that the tourism industry is monitoring the situation or it can be more detailed with suggestions for the tourist (e.g., evacuation procedures, contact your embassy, etc.). However, the lack of a message creates confusion for all stakeholder groups, as well as disbanding all credibility. The timing of the initial response needs to be quick and the key spokesperson for the tourism industry must continue to provide ongoing, up-to-date information tailored towards specific stakeholder groups.

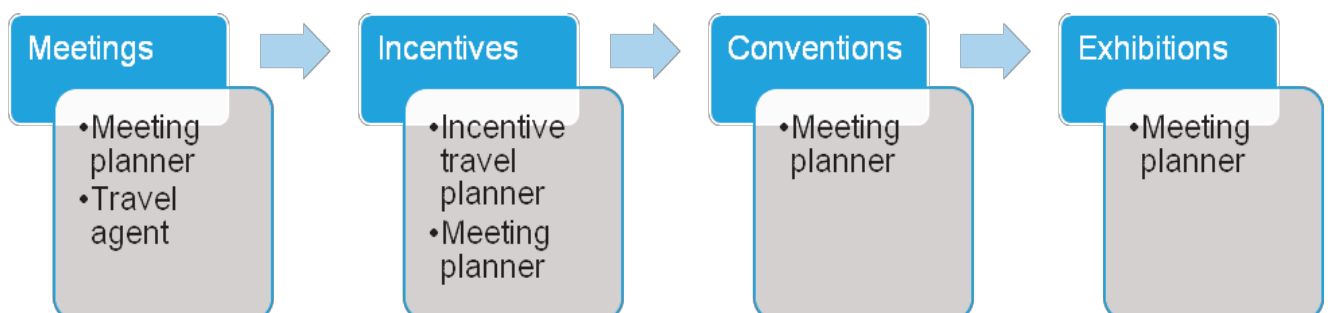
Second, the main challenge for the meeting planner during the Westgate Shopping Mall terrorist attack was a lack of a clear and concise message by the tourism industry. Accordingly, one of the main questions which evolved from this case was: how can meeting planners be more responsive to their customers if a crisis ensues just prior to or during a meeting, convention, or exhibition? This challenge can be met by the adoption of a Tourism Area Response Network (TARN), which highlights the need for both internal and external coordinated messages (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014).

The TARN should be established prior to any crisis and is essentially a network of all tourism stakeholders (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014). Identifying the flow of crisis communications among stakeholders is an important part of the TARN and helps to ensure the timely delivery of a coordinated message on behalf of the industry.

The proposed line of communication to ensure that the MICE segment is included in crisis communications is provided in Figure 1. It is recommended that the DMO is responsible for coordinating the tourism communication network (TARN) and serves as the gatekeeper for crisis information. The DMO is then responsible for contacting a pre-arranged contact person (e.g., head of the tour operator association) to work with all MICE events that might be occurring in the destination just prior to or during the time of the crisis event. This TARN representative would communicate the agreed upon message from the TARN to the individual meeting planners in the form of an email, phone call, or person-to-person meeting. This formalized communication message from the key contact would aid in the funneling of a unified message to all stakeholder groups so that better decision-making could be made by the individual attendee (e.g., cancel or attend, go home or stay). Thus, upon receiving information from the TARN representative, the meeting planner is responsible for relaying the message to their attendees.

In the event that the representative for the TARN (e.g., tour operator association key contact) is not able to connect with the meeting planners, other key tourism representatives need to be updated with information so

Figure 2. Point of contact for MICE tourists in the destination when a crisis ensues



that additional avenues for information may be utilized. Therefore, a contingency plan needs to be set for the key contacts in the line of communication in the event that the TARN representative for the MICE sector is not able to connect with the sector to ensure the delivery of a timely, coordinated message. Figure 2 outlines possible points of contact that the MICE attendee might come in contact with to receive updated information to aid in decision-making. Different types of MICE visitors may turn to different key contacts. Thus, it is important that all of these informants are provided with up-to-date information. For example, a meeting planner might be hosting a group of corporate travelers. This type of traveler may seek crisis information from their travel agent, in addition to the meeting planner. Additionally, in the case of incentive travel, travelers may seek information from the travel planner. As a result, the TARN must seek to provide information to travel agents and incentive travel planners which can be communicated to MICE travelers.

In order to reach key contacts, it is recommended that the DMO utilize their website as a clearinghouse for information. Therefore, it is recommended that the DMO website be updated with tourism-specific, up-to-date information regularly. It is also recommended that the DMO of the affected destination provides updates tailored towards: (1) tourism stakeholders (TARN), (2) visitors at the destination (Pennington-Gray et al., 2011). This can be done by adding a 'travel update' section to the DMO's website which links to a page dedicated towards providing real time tourist-specific updates on the crisis situation (Pennington-Gray et al. 2011). It is essential that the messages communicated via the DMO website are consistent with that of the TARN because the DMO website should be the go-to source for information for the TARN. Therefore, the DMO must invest an appropriate amount of time in providing updates to their various stakeholders (Pennington-Gray et al., 2011) in an effort to reduce the crisis effects on the destination's tourism industry.

In conclusion, if a crisis were to occur, attendees are likely to turn to meeting planners and other key contacts for information and advice on how they should proceed. If a communication system which includes all tourism stakeholders (TARN) is not established prior to a crisis, meeting planners may not be updated on the situation. As a result, meeting planners may not be able to advise attendees on recommendations for how to proceed in a timely manner. Therefore, it is essential that the tourism industry prepare ahead of time and actively seek to include the MICE segment in crisis communications.

By doing so, destinations can help to mitigate potential long-term effects on MICE tourism in the destination.

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APPENDIX A : ESTC13 update (email correspondence with conference participants)

September 22, 2013 1:30 PM (Nairobi)

Dear TIES ESTC Conference Participants,

Our thoughts are with the families and victims of the tragic incident at the Westgate Mall.

We recommend the following as you travel to Nairobi, Kenya:

Please register yourself with your respective Embassy or High Commission. The link to the entities in Kenya is as follows: <http://www.embassypages.com/kenya>

We also recommend that you pre-arrange your travel to and from the airport with our conference transport company. They have given us a discounted travel rate of \$35 each way. This way you will avoid the troubled area in Nairobi.

The contact for this transport is:

Email: Paul@letsgosafari.com

UNIGLOBE Let's Go Travel

Mobile: (254) 722 331899/733 873625

Landline: (254) 20 4447151/4441030/4446052/4443360/4447217

Skype: Paulalgt

Remember to 'friend us' on [Facebook](#) and monitor the social media sites and your Embassy and State Department sites for continuous updates.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO E-MAIL

In less than one week, we look forward to welcoming you to Nairobi, Kenya for the ESTC13. Below are some friendly reminders and updates for you to check out before you leave for the conference:

ESTC13: The Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference

WHAT: Four days of knowledge-sharing, networking and fun!

WHERE: The ESTC13 venue is the Safari Park Hotel (P.O Box 45038 A 2, Nairobi, Kenya)

WHEN: Tuesday, September 24th - Friday, September 27th (with pre-conference and post workshops the days before and after)

WHO: [Hundreds of tourism professionals from over 40 countries](#)

CHECK LIST FOR DELEGATES

Know What to Expect: Check out the conference schedule at this link: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org/estc13-program>. You can download the print program as well.

Have You Booked Your Hotel Room? If you haven't reserved your hotel room yet, there are still rooms available through Let's Go Travel. TIES will be providing morning and evening shuttles for delegates staying at: La Mada Hotel, the School of Monetary Studies and the Hennessis Hotel. The Safari Park does have rooms for booking at this time, however the conference pricing is no longer available. More information about hotel options visit: www.ecotourismconference.org/hotel-reservation.

Flying into the Nairobi Airport? Look for the Kenya Tourism Board desk for answers and guidance once you arrive. No worries, the airport is 'business as usual' since the recent airport fire, you will be through customs in no time!

Plan Your Airport Transportation: For those arriving at the Nairobi Airport, Let's Go Travel provides an affordable shuttle to and from the individual hotels for \$35 each way. To book your airport transport, e-mail Paula at: paula@letsgosafari.com.

Don't Forget! A water bottle to be used at the refill stations throughout the conference. Bug spray, for the warm evenings in the outdoors.

Wondering What to Wear? The overall dress code for the ESTC is Business Casual. Don't forget to check the [local weather](#).

- Technical Field Sessions (Sept 24th): Comfortable shoes and clothes for walking.
- Kenya Community Showcase (Sept 24th): African Attire. The venue is indoors and outdoors, please prepare for the possibility of a cool evening.

- **Vamos a Festa: Brazil Night (Sept 26th):** Evening Attire. The venue is indoors and outdoors, please prepare for the possibility of a cool evening.
- **Celebration of Cultures (Sept 27th):** The dress code is 'Cultural'! Please wear something that represents your culture or heritage. You may also bring an item that showcases your country, region or city. The venue is outdoors on grass.

DON'T MISS THESE...

Prize Drawing: All registered delegates are eligible for the special prize drawing at Celebration of Cultures on Sept 27th. Don't miss your chance to win one of the amazing prizes courtesy of our sponsors: an 8-day safari in Botswana, free tickets to the ESTC13 and others! You must be present to win; another reason not to miss the evening networking event on Friday!

Technical Field Sessions: Hoping to see the best practices in the field? Plan to attend one of the technical field sessions. Options include:

- **Nairobi National Park**
- **David Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage and Giraffe Center (yes, you can kiss a giraffe)**
- **Karura Forest**
- **Lake Nakuru National Park**
- **Day In and Around Nairobi**

For more information: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org/tours-safaris-and-technical-field-sessions>

To sign up... either e-mail Paula: paula@letsgosafari.com OR sign up live at the Uniglobe table next to the registration desk on Monday, September 23rd from 8:00-17:00.

OTHER CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

Pack for a Purpose: Looking to give back to the Kenya community, to thank them for their hospitality and have extra space in your bag? Donate items to our partner Pack for a Purpose at the conference for more information about the supplies they are searching for, who things go to and the communities supported check out: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org/support-a-local-project>

ESTC Training Programs: There's still time to sign up for the various pre- and post- conference workshops.

Travelife for Tour Operators– Sept 23-24

Authentic Ecolodge Planning and Design– Sept 24

Travelife for Hotel Auditors– Sept 28-29

Learn more and RSVP at: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org/estc-training-programs>

TIES Member Meeting: Join us at TIES Member Meeting (Thursday, Sept 26th, 8:00-9:00), and meet TIES team and your fellow TIES members! All are welcome.

ESTC Orientation: Is this your first ESTC conference? Do you want to know what to expect or what hidden gems lie in the program? Or have you attended before but just want to start the conference out right? Make the most of your networking experience! Join us for Orientation (Tuesday, Sept 24th, 17:30).

SHARE & CONNECT

Social Media: Join the conversation on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ESTC.Tourism), Twitter (twitter.com/estc_tourism), hashtag #ESTC13 & LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2419396).

TIES-EXCHANGE: TIES-EXCHANGE is a social networking platform for ecotourism and sustainable tourism professionals from around the world. ESTC12 attendees receive free access to TIES-EXCHANGE, so you can connect with each other before and after the conference. If you haven't already, you can create your profile here: <http://www.exchange.ecotourism.org/?xqi=2lo77htVSigd8k>

OTHER QUESTIONS?

Review the frequently asked questions (www.ecotourismconference.org/frequently-asked-questions) or contact the ESTC team at estc@ecotourism.org.