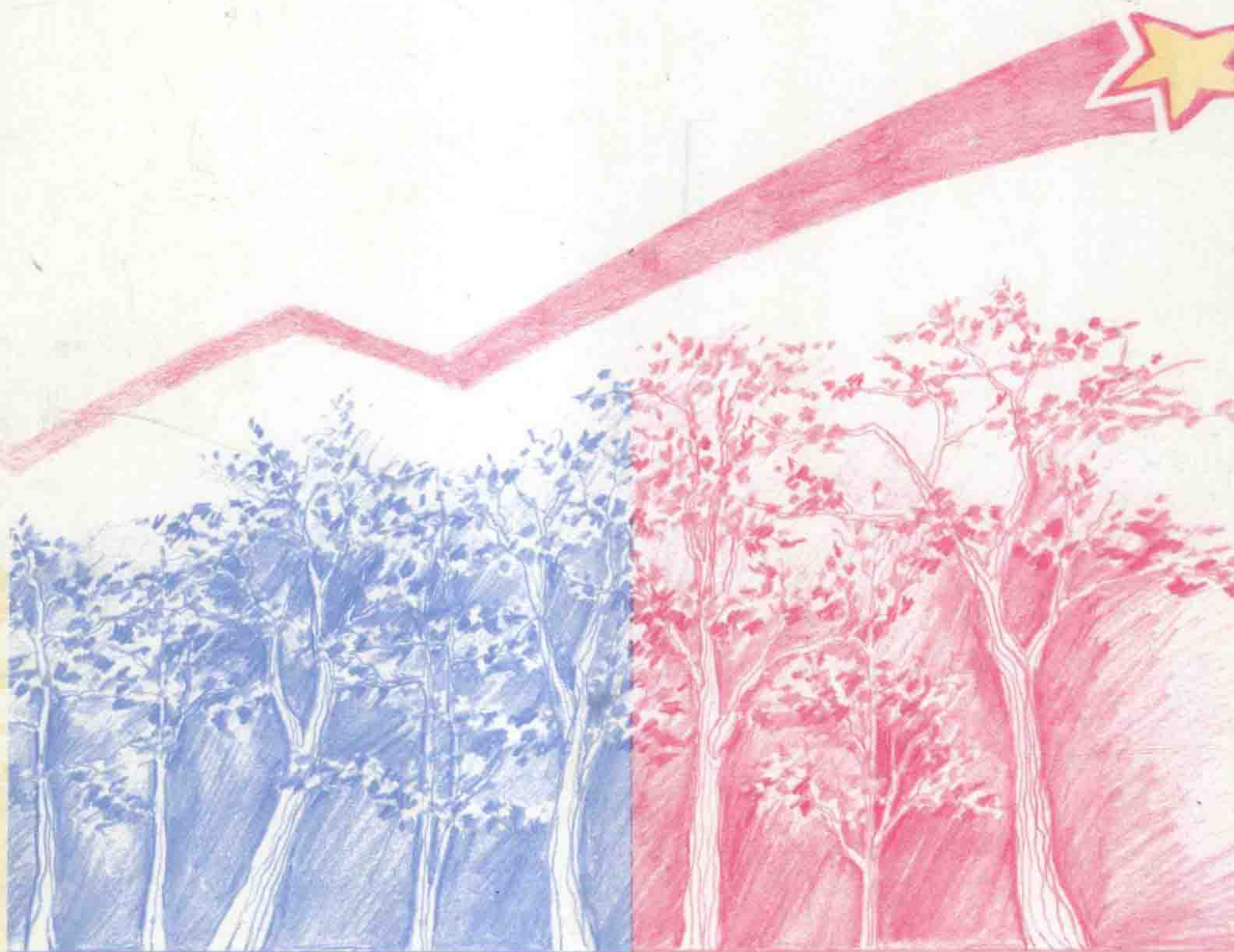


MARKETING FOR PARKS, RECREATION, AND LEISURE



Ellen L. O'Sullivan

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State College, PA**

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Marketing for parks, recreation, and leisure programs and services is both an old and relatively new endeavor. Since our beginnings, practitioners have been striving to design programs and services to meet the needs of people. That process has been heightened by the growing diversity within people and their subsequent needs as well as escalating competition within the industry.

I am but a continual learner of the marketing process as it evolves within our profession and as such am grateful to those individuals who over the years have contributed to this learning process. While I am hesitant to list those individuals making such contributions for fear of overlooking someone, I feel the need to acknowledge my appreciation to the individuals named:

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Introduction

It's the glow of achievement on the face of a six year-old as he dives into the deep end of the pool for the first time as well as the look of wonder in the faces of the children experiencing the magic of Disney World. It's a simple walk through the woods for a world-weary adult as well as the tremendous feeling of escape and relaxation brought about by vacationing at a remote resort. Park, recreation, and leisure pursuits encompass a vast array of experiences taking on different purposes and meanings for each participant. Those differences in purpose and meaning which make marketing such a vital phase of our operations at this time.

In the earliest stages of our development as a field, recreators strived to plan for and with people to meet their leisure needs and interests. This was marketing. In the ensuing years, marketing assumed a connotation more closely aligned with selling or promoting our parks, programs, and services.

The leisure industry has come full circle. The ever-increasing variety of needs and interests inherent within the leisure experience, coupled with the escalating fragmentation of lifestyle groups and the rapid growth of competition, has reaffirmed the role of marketing within parks, recreation, and leisure.

Marketing is not just a group of highly-trained sales representatives. It is not just the publication of sophisticated promotional pieces. Marketing is the development of open spaces, recreation activities and leisure experiences carefully designed to reach out and attract specific groups of users by addressing their needs and interests.

Marketing for parks and recreation starts with people. It involves identifying and understanding subgroups of users. It consists of knowing and understanding these subgroups of users most completely and goes well beyond the usual focus upon age, gender, or income. Marketing addresses a myriad of questions. How do these people live, work, and play? What needs or benefits are they hoping to address through recreation participation?

For this industry, marketing consists of carefully considering decisions related to program and service elements within our control. It involves a concerted effort to select and include specific choices related to time, setting, personnel, price, and a host of variables associated with the design or construction of a park, program, experience, or service. Its purpose is to design and offer such programs and services that have been tailored to meet the needs of these subgroups we wish to attract to our organization.

Marketing for parks, recreation, and leisure involves the entire organization or delivery system, and should not be considered the responsibility of one department or person within that delivery system. Marketing is the orientation of a delivery system towards its user groups. The ongoing activities within that operation are designed to provide continued feedback and contact with patrons.

Yes, marketing is far more than selling or advertising. It involves an entire orientation toward increased knowledge and service of the user groups in a delivery system—not necessarily an easy task. The use of marketing within this industry relates to today's successes in terms of participation, and speaks to tomorrow's viability as delivery systems must continue to modify and adapt to meet the ever-evolving leisure needs and interests of the people we serve.

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Chapter One

Marketing–The Process for Parks, Recreation, and Leisure

Common Concerns of Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Delivery Systems:

- The director of a small, municipal recreation department studies general marketing and wonders how to apply it to her department.
- A private swim club facing declining membership considers the role marketing may play in its future.
- A major theme park confronted with growing competition considers increasing the role of marketing within its organization.
- A large, urban fitness center feels confident that extensive advertising campaigns satisfy their marketing requirements.

Marketing–What It Is and Isn't

Marketing is a term used extensively in today's world. Mention the word marketing and it conjures up different images and meanings. To some people the term is synonymous with sales, and they envision a sales representative knocking on doors with a high-pressured sales pitch. To others, the term immediately suggests Madison Avenue and advertising agencies designing high-powered ads to sell products.

While both of these concepts, sales and advertising, are integral parts of the marketing process, they do not serve as accurate or complete definitions of marketing. Marketing is a far more complex and extensive process than these examples suggest. It consists of a myriad of different activities conducted as part of the ongoing operations of an organization. While there are a plethora of different definitions for the term, marketing is generally defined as *human activity directed towards satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes* (Kotler, 1980, p. 21).

As indicated by this definition, marketing is far more inclusive than solely being limited to sales or promotional techniques. The process of marketing consists of a host of activities designed to identify the needs and wants of potential consumers and to encourage these individuals to become involved in the exchange process. This exchange process may involve a simple monetary transaction as in payment of a registration fee or purchase of a travel package. When related to parks, recreation, and leisure, this exchange process may become more complex as leisure delivery systems attempt to encourage potential users to exchange discretionary time and money in exchange for participation in a recreation program or service.

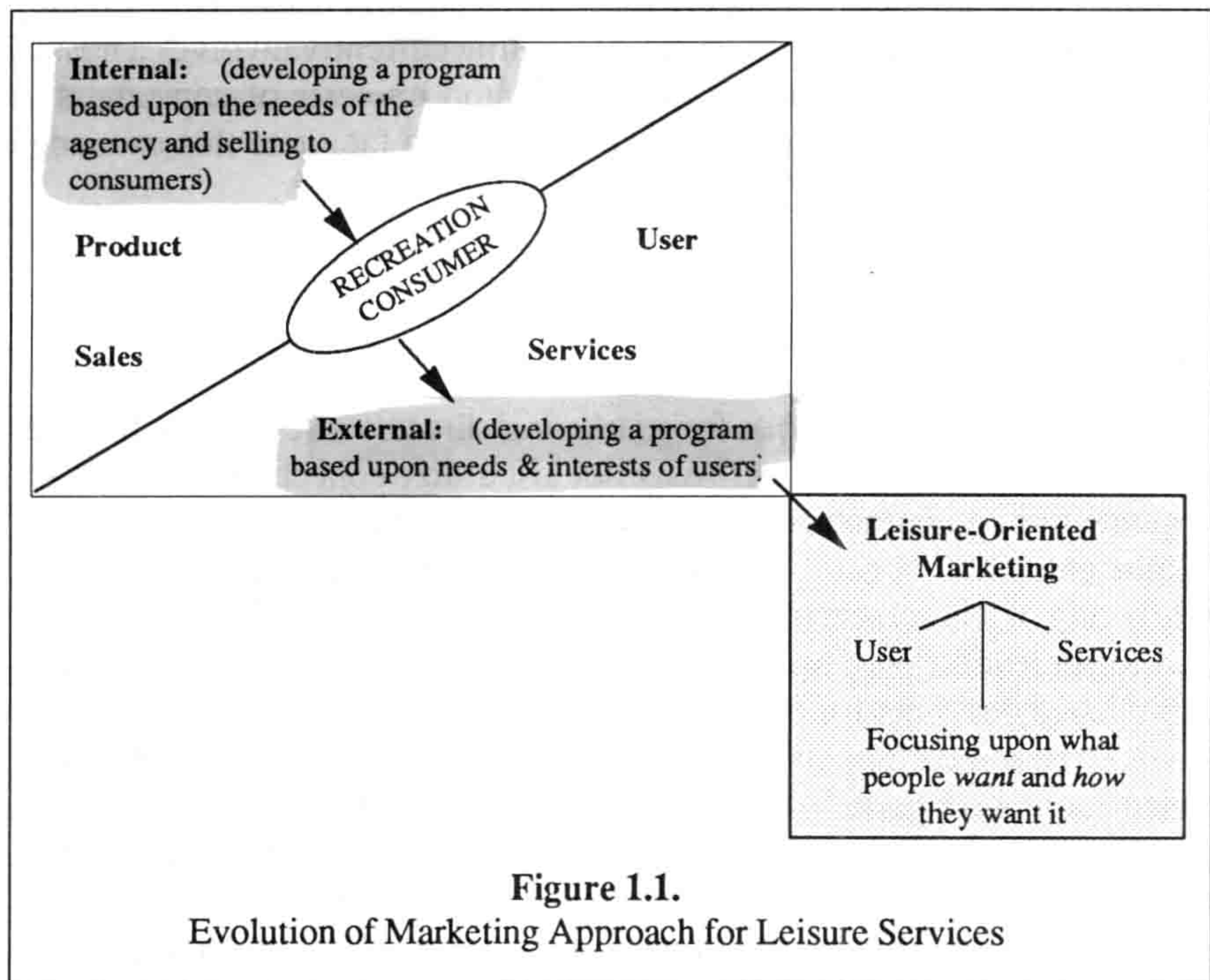
As with any process, the concept of marketing has evolved over time. Marketing initially dealt specifically with the manufacture of products. This product orientation focused upon increasing outputs while reducing costs (Lefebvre and Flora, 1988, p. 301). Park, recreation, and leisure agencies practicing this orientation attempted to increase the range and number of programs and services while reducing the per capita expenditures associated with them. Programs and services were structured to be both basic and general with success related to the numbers of people involved or served.

Following this product-based era, marketing changed its focus to take on a sales orientation. This sales orientation was directed towards convincing consumers to purchase a particular product through the efforts of sales representatives or promotional campaigns. This stage of evolution of marketing is responsible for the image of advertising and marketing as being one and the same process. Commercial delivery systems created sales staffs to facilitate the purchase of their services by potential users. All types of delivery systems, including the public and nonprofit sectors, flooded their users with promotional materials.

A commonality shared by these two orientations, product and sales, was the emphasis upon the agency. These two orientations focused upon those programs and services the agency desired to provide for its users. This created a *push* relationship between the delivery system and the consumer (Lefebvre and Flora, 1988, p. 301). The organization created a program and then pushed that program at the consumer.

However, recent economic and societal factors have caused the process of marketing to evolve still further in response to changing times. Marketing is now perceived as having a customer or user-orientation. With this approach the focus of marketing is shifted and the aim of marketing is to investigate and understand consumers in order to design a product, program, or service specific to their needs or wants.

This is quite a different orientation from the initial approaches to marketing that addressed either the development of a product or the sale of that product. Those two orientations reflected an *internal* approach to marketing, since they addressed the needs of the organization as opposed to the needs and wants of the consumers. The customer or user orientation differs significantly from the other two orientations because it causes an organization to take an *external* approach and to look outward at the needs and interests of the user in an effort to *pull* them to the agency (Figure 1.1).



Based upon the customer/user orientation, marketing for parks, recreation, and leisure has evolved even further to incorporate a services marketing approach. Whether running in a road race or taking the family to an amusement park, participation in recreational pursuits cannot be compared with the purchase of a box of cereal. Lovelock maintains that if users need to be physically present and must spend time while the service is performed, then their satisfaction will be influenced by services marketing (Lovelock, 1984, pp. 49-51). Since the vast majority of recreational and leisure pursuits

meet the criteria outlined by Lovelock, the process of marketing for such organizations needs to be influenced and modified by this attention to the individual and his relationship with that service.

Marketing is a complex and creative process that can significantly impact upon an organization. Yes, it involves the design and creation of a program or service. It also requires the promotion of those programs and services to both current and potential customers. Although it incorporates some elements of both the product and sales orientations, the process has significantly evolved. Today marketing directs its attentions towards people. Who are they? What are their needs and interests? How do they want these needs and interests met? Marketing currently involves a host of activities employed to ascertain the needs and interests of consumers in order to design specific programs and services to facilitate this exchange process.

Why Marketing for Parks, Recreation, and Leisure?

Why construct a framework for marketing directed exclusively towards parks, recreation, and leisure? Why not just utilize concepts developed for organizations manufacturing products or delivering other types of services? While elements of general and services marketing are relevant for the marketing of leisure services, there are factors related to the leisure industry and to recreation participation patterns that require adaptations of these established concepts for parks, recreation, and leisure.

Recreation participation is not the same as purchasing a box of cereal. Since recreation participation involves consumption as opposed to just purchase, the marketing process needs to reflect that reality. Recreation consumption also differs from other forms of service patterns. One cannot equate participation in recreation activities with involvement with other service providers such as doctors, banks, insurance companies, or dry cleaning establishments. The exchange process differs, since one is attempting to motivate people to exchange discretionary time and money for participation in recreation programs and services.

Recreation is a basic human need but as such it is still a voluntary endeavor requiring the expenditures of discretionary time and money. How people choose to use their discretionary time and money and for what outcomes is a complex decision related to the individualized and specialized needs of the consumer. What is play to one person may be perceived as work by another. People seeking escape and relaxation are not seeking

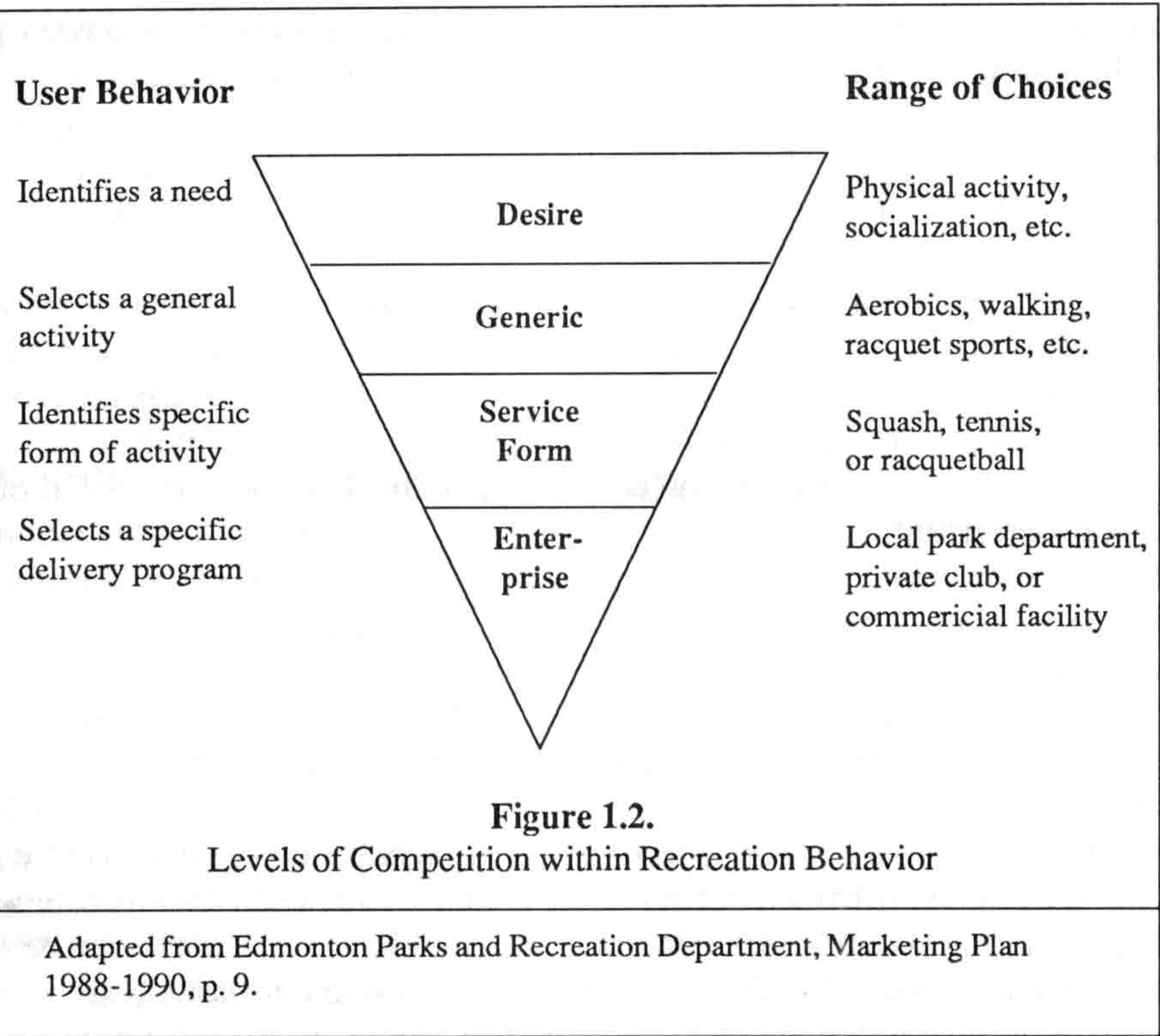
the same sort of activities as those desiring socialization and a sense of belonging. The variations among needs and wants to be satisfied along with time and money elements to be exchanged create a unique and complex marketing approach. These complexities are best addressed through a framework of marketing designed specifically for parks, recreation, and leisure.

These unique and complex choices related to recreational patterns play a significant role in the economy. Recreation consumption and subsequent expenditures are big business. The travel industry alone is estimated to be the second largest retail industry in the United States, second only to retail grocery operations. Recreation is no longer considered a nonessential or extra life pursuit. A recent study completed by the Roper Organization ("USA Snapshots," 1990) indicated that when people are asked to assess the importance of leisure and work in their lives, increasing numbers of Americans rank leisure as more important than work.

Since recreation and leisure may be of increasing importance to Americans, and because such activities are perceived as being pleasurable and attractive, it would on the surface appear as if marketing for such services were unnecessary. An overview of physical fitness levels in this country coupled with patterns of substance abuse indicate that while people may recognize the need for constructive use of leisure time, they are not necessarily capable of fulfilling these needs through actual participation. A marketing process developed specifically to target these consumers and better meet their needs is clearly necessary at this point in time. People have needs and wants that can be met through recreation experiences but appear to have difficulty exchanging time and money to resolve these needs in a positive manner.

A third area that clearly delineates the need for a marketing approach specifically related to parks and recreation is that of competition. This reference to competition differs from the kind of competition normally associated with most industries. When addressing competition within the leisure industry, such competition can be characterized as any competing use of time. The Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department (1988, ch. 6, p. 9) in Canada classifies competition as follows: desire, generic, service form, and enterprise (see Figure 1.2, p. 6).

Desire as a level of competition relates to needs people are seeking to satisfy in their discretionary time such as socializing as opposed to exercising. There are a plethora of needs people can seek to redress during leisure time, and the selection of one over another is indeed a matter of competition.



Generic competitors are the second level of competition and gives rise to other vehicles for satisfying the identified need. If a person feels the need to socialize that person can choose to go to a bar, visit with friends, or attend a club meeting. Exercisers can also select from a variety of endeavors, such as walking, swimming, or racquet sports.

Once the individual has identified the need to be resolved and has made choices about the appropriate vehicle, competition continues to be a factor. This third level of competition is referred to as *service form*. If the person needing physical activity has decided upon racquet sports as a means for satisfying that need, there are several service form competitors from which to choose. Will the person select squash, tennis, or racquetball?

The selection of tennis as the service form now gives rise to enterprise competitors. *Enterprise* competitors refers to actual organizations offering the same form of services. This is generally what people refer to when they address competition. Will the would-be tennis player join a private club, rent time at a commercial tennis facility, or use the public courts in a nearby park?

Competition, when referring to recreation participation, is a complex process and cannot be limited to an examination of other organizations offering similar types of programs or services. These four levels of competitors clearly shape the marketing process for parks, recreation, and leisure.

Marketing is not just marketing. While concepts and elements inherent within a general marketing approach are applicable to parks and recreation, there are a number of factors which suggest that a framework or process of marketing adapted specifically for the leisure industries is appropriate.

Marketing for parks, recreation, and leisure needs to be developed with an external approach whereby the organization looks outside to identify the needs and wants of consumers. In addition to this consumer/user orientation, leisure marketing must incorporate elements of services marketing. Besides discovering *what* people need and want to do in their leisure time, one must also identify *how* they wish to participate.

Overview of the Process

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the marketing process for parks, recreation, and leisure delivery systems. Key concepts related to this process will be identified as well as a framework for understanding the interrelationship between these concepts that will be explored more fully in later chapters.

The very first element in this marketing process devised for parks, recreation, and leisure delivery systems is *people*. Leisure delivery systems have traditionally existed to meet the leisure needs and interests of people. This orientation and expertise provides such organizations with a head start in the marketing process. *The plan-with-people-as-opposed-to-for-people* approach that has provided a foundation for this movement will be an asset to an organization desiring to implement marketing into its system.

For marketing purposes, those people served by a recreation organization are referred to as *target markets*. Target markets are people desiring programs or services. This part of the process enables a delivery system to identify clusters or subgroups of users with similar needs and interests. Once identified, these target markets or subgroups of individuals then provide the basis upon which the organization can design and implement programs and services.

There are two steps within the target marketing process: identification and selection. Target markets are most often identified on the basis of common descriptors. The common descriptors appropriate for most park

and recreation organizations are: leisure needs and interests, geographic, sociodemographic, behavioral, and synchronographic factors. Subgroups of users or potential users are identified on the basis of these descriptors.

Once these target markets or clusters of people with similar needs and interests have been identified, the organization proceeds to the second step of the process. This second phase of the target marketing process relates to the selection of target markets. Leisure delivery systems do not necessarily choose to select all target market groups identified.

While public departments or nonprofit organizations may select target markets on the basis of their organization's mission, private and commercial establishments would be more likely to focus upon one or several target markets that would be appropriate and profitable for them. For instance, an urban park district may select all people residing within a five-mile radius of a community center as its target market, while a resort in Florida might select upper-middle class, single adults from the northeast as its target market.

The identification and selection of target markets is usually the initial step in the marketing process and performs a critical function. Who are the recreation consumers? What do we know about them? How do they live, work, and play? What are their needs and interests? It is essential that leisure delivery systems conduct this phase of the process carefully, since it will be closely related to the effectiveness of the additional steps in the marketing process.

A marketing concept that is relevant to both target marketing and the entire marketing process is *positioning*. Positioning refers to the perception target market groups may have of an organization or of the programs or services offered by an organization. A travel agency specializing in European vacation packages needs to know how it is perceived by target market groups. Is the agency perceived as only booking European vacations and unable to arrange for a trip to Hawaii? Are its travel packages perceived as being fully structured, with little room for spontaneity? These perceptions can significantly influence relationships with current or potential target market groups.

The next step in the marketing process is the *manipulation of the marketing mix variables*. While the term marketing mix variables may not be a familiar one to people in this field, most recreators may already possess experience and expertise in this area. Marketing mix variables refer to those elements involved in the construction or design of a program or service. They are essentially tools and techniques utilized by park planners or recreation programmers expressed in marketing terms.