Introduction
The amusement park industry offers a variety of attractions to a very large and diverse market. With everything from high-flying roller coasters to cartoon and movie character based offerings, theme parks have created a very successful market that has been on the rise for many years. However, like everything else, companies have seen their good times as well as their bad. It seems as though Six Flags may be on the decline in an exhausted market.

Notwithstanding increased attendance on an annual basis, including the sharp decline of their teen market, the amusement park industry has been affected greatly by harsh economic times. Specifically, Six Flags, Inc. has become the epitome of this trying industry. Despite an increasing attendance rate over the years, Six Flags has seemed to dig itself into a hole that it cannot seem to get out of. Their debt-load has handcuffed them to the verge of bankruptcy. Their inability to increase attendance to the point of improved profitability and debt-reduction has helped lead this company toward potential failure.

The significance of an increased attendance rate in 2008, (up to 25.3 million from 24.9 in 2007) yet still reporting a net loss of $207 million for the fourth quarter of 2008 is very big (abc2news.com, 2009). This signifies the tremendous amount of trouble Six Flags is currently in as their biggest point of profitability, attendance, has not been enough to dig this company out. This indicates that a drastic change of direction is in need for Six Flags, Inc.

Research Objectives
The objective of this project is to develop a marketing plan that will help Six Flags regain its strength in the amusement park industry. Six Flags needs to reposition itself not only to dramatically increase their attendance rate, but also allow for cheaper prices and not depend on expensive, debt-increasing roller coasters as their main source of attraction.

We hope to gather information that will help determine what the best direction is for Six Flags and how a new marketing initiative could help increase attendance, sales and also reduce dependencies on attractions that will potentially increase Six Flags’ cost and debt.

The international market for theme parks is very promising and could pose a new direction, not only for Six Flags but many other theme parks as well. While the wide array of entertainment and attractions have carried Six Flags through many decades, markets rise and fall within every industry. Six Flags needs to identify the potential in rising markets. This is why we will be focusing our marketing plan not only on increased attendance in the U.S., but also on how Six Flags can take advantage of developing markets in order to gain significant market share through first-mover advantage.

Research Methodology
The research we will conduct will consist primarily of secondary research, and we are considering the option of performing primary research with the implementation of a short survey. The secondary research will focus on not only the firm Six Flags, but the entertainment industry as well as other existing competitors. Market conditions and trends will also be analyzed. Research will be derived from articles, published works, and statistical data.

The survey under consideration would be both quantitative and qualitative, utilizing questions measured with the likert scale for quantitative purposes and open-ended questions for qualitative. As the decline in attendance of the teen market is a greatly contributing factor to Six Flags’ overall drop in attendance, the survey would be directed towards youth aged 14-18 years. We would seek a potential sample size of 50 participants. This sample would be contacted at high schools and randomly chosen to participate. Each survey would be kept anonymous. In addition, we may offer an incentive for each participant such as putting them in a drawing to win one free admission to Six Flags. However, as targeting and persuading this age group to complete surveys is extremely difficult, we may move forward with the use of secondary research solely.

A very short, (but to the point) introduction on each survey can be as follows:
Hello,

We are a group of marketing students at the College of Business, San Francisco State University. Your input will be very helpful for us to conduct our research project on Six Flags theme parks. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

Research Tasks and Timeline

Table 1 below describes the tasks (work in progress) and timeline for the project.

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<th>Table 1: Timeline Activities for the Six Flags Project</th>
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<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
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| **Phase 1:** The starting point (Feb. 28-Apr. 6, 2009) | • Research existing literature on Six Flags’ theme parks.  
• Compose a list of research questions to be answered during the research process.  
• Identify Six Flags’ key problems and formulate objectives for a comprehensive marketing plan.  
• Perform secondary data research in order to gain a better perspective about Six Flags’ problem(s). Resources will include newspapers, magazines, and internet websites.  
• Compile a database of all existing Six Flags’ locations. Identify other competing theme parks for additional research.  
• Organize a list of at least 20 credible resources, including reliable websites. |
| **Phase 2:** Combining the findings & results (Apr. 7-20, 2009) | • Analyze all data gathered.  
• Support findings with primary research by conducting survey studies in order to have more complete and accurate data.  
• Distribute 50 surveys to Six Flags’ target market(s).  
• Tally all survey results into a database.  
• Communicate all data gathered from primary and secondary research and get approval from each member in the team.  
• Combine the findings to get the final output in a logical manner. |
| **Phase 3:** The Final Project (Apr. 21-May 5, 2009) | • Prepare the Six Flag’s marketing plan report which will include a final set of recommendations.  
• Design and implement a professional group presentation based on the marketing plan report.  
• Rehearse group presentation. |

Research Questions

1. How can Six Flags increase their attendance overall?
2. How can Six Flags increase sales per visitor?
3. How can the company leverage their debt of over $2 billion without filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy?
4. Who are Six Flags’ target markets?
5. How can they reposition themselves to the new version of the teen market?
6. How can they increase their value offering while keeping prices low for their customers in an economic recession?
7. What is Six Flags’ revenue model; what is their source of income?
8. What is the history of the company; the core ideas, ownership, growth and development?
9. Some Data:  
a. Number of parks; national and international  
b. Portion of parks dedicated to families, to teens, to adults
c. Allocation of human resources into different activities (development, finance, accounting, marketing, management etc.).

10. What is Six Flags’ positioning?
11. Activities, events, and special attractions organized for visitors
12. Qualitative description of the typical visitor to determine preferences
13. Competitors and their strategies for increasing attendance
14. Recommendations to strengthen the teen market and to increase attendance overall. (List internal changes that are made or required to entice teens.)

Outline of the Marketing Plan (Final Paper)

I. Introduction
II. Literature Review
III. Business Model of Six Flags
IV. Empirical Analysis: Research Methodology
   a. Advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary research
   b. Target sample (who, how many, and how they were chosen)
   c. Procedure (describe the process of conducting surveys; process of answering research questions)
V. Empirical Analysis: Findings
   a. Situation Analysis (based on primary and secondary research)
      i. SWOT analysis
      ii. Competitor analysis
      iii. Customer analysis
      iv. Company analysis
VI. Identification of Problems/Opportunities
VII. Managerial Implications and Recommendations
   a. Market Focus
      i. Marketing objectives
      ii. Target market(s)
      iii. Differentiation
      iv. Positioning
   b. Marketing Programs (the 4Ps of the marketing mix)
      i. Product strategy
      ii. Pricing strategy
      iii. Promotion strategy
      iv. Place (distribution) strategy
VIII. Implementation (financial data & projections) and Control
IX. Conclusion