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Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations

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Foreword

This handbook is the fourth in a series of joint publications by the European Travel Commission (ETC) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in the area of methodological manuals. The first three handbooks, *Evaluating NTO Marketing Activities, Tourism Market Segmentation – Maximising Marketing Effectiveness,* and *Tourism Forecasting Methodologies* have all been very well received by the international tourism industry, and we hope that this handbook will be equally well received.

The internet and other new technologies have changed the tourism industry in an unprecedented way, and to a degree that has not been seen in any other sector. The speed of change and development is fast, and keeping pace is becoming more and more of a challenge. Online information is now one of the primary influences on consumer decisions in nearly all major markets. And when figures show that 41% of all tourists arriving in Spain last year booked their trip through the internet – or that in the United States of America, in 2007 for the first time ever, the number of trips bought online exceeded those purchased offline, it is clear that the internet and new technologies have become a key competitive factor for both destinations and enterprises alike.

Much is going on in the technology arena today that is influencing the way consumers decide, buy and exchange information. And these changes are impacting on the way destinations and companies manage and market themselves. In a marketplace where consumers are becoming more demanding, distribution more transparent and supply increasingly competitive, keeping pace with the challenges will determine any player's competitive positioning.

We hope that this handbook will help destinations to improve the effectiveness of their e-marketing strategies and plans, enabling them to make the best possible use of information and communication technologies in marketing, and ultimately to be more competitive in the global marketplace.

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Acknowledgements

How to Use this Handbook

'Destinations' and 'DMOs'

We use the term 'destination' in this handbook when we refer to a place as a whole – a country, region, city or locality, and all its tourism organisations.

Where it is important to make clear that we are talking about a corporate, accountable body, we have used the term 'Destination Management Organisation' (DMO). A DMO may be a national, regional, city or local body.

Finding your way around the handbook

E-marketing is a very joined-up subject, so we have tried to make it as easy as possible to move around the book:

- You can dip into the book at any chapter

- There are frequent cross-references in the text to other relevant chapters, and to sections within chapters

- There is a glossary of terms and abbreviation at the end of the handbook

The wider picture

E-marketing is only one aspect, albeit an important one, of destination management, and the scope of this book does not extend to e-business as a whole. For this wider picture, see the World Tourism Organization publication *A Guide to Destination Management,* which includes a chapter with an overview of e-business and information management.

Keeping pace – further information, and online sources

The pace of change and development in e-marketing is fast and exciting, and no handbook such as this can aim to capture more than a current account of best practice. But there are enduring lessons throughout the book.

We have provided as many online and offline points of further reference as we can. These are given in some places in the text, as well as at the end of each chapter, and there is a list of references and bibliography at the end of the book.

Observing the law

There is now a substantial amount of law that governs aspects of e-marketing, but it varies from country to country and we do not cover this in the handbook.

There are many websites that provide guidance on internet law, such as www.isoc.org/internet/law (the internet Society) and those of legal firms such as www.out-law.com (Pinsent Masons, an international

firm). But you should always consult your own legal advisor in relation to each of the countries in which you operate.

Areas where it is wise to seek advice about legal obligations include:

• Privacy and data protection

• Ownership and intellectual property

• Software, including accessibility, domain names, and e-commerce

• Identification on websites and in e-mails

Executive Summary

This Summary is drawn from the 'Key Messages' sections that preface each of the main chapters.

Online information is now the primary influence on consumer decisions in nearly all major markets.

- E-marketing is only effective through full application of customer relationship management (CRM) with all target audiences – consumers, travel trade, media, and industry partners

- E-marketing provides excellent management information, enabling the calculation of return on investment (ROI) and comparison with offline methods

- E-marketing must be an integral part of a DMO's marketing programme, not a separate entity. Budgets for e-marketing should properly reflect its potential value to the destination, compared to off-line marketing

DMOs should play the key role in presenting information and imagery ('content').

'Content is king', so it is important to make it a primary and long-term investment:

- Market segment information should be used to decide the priority audiences and topics

- It is vital to be clear about the publishing channels to be used, and what formats these channels need

- DMOs should not attempt to collect and distribute all the content themselves; they should work with partners

- Images and video are becoming paramount, both to motivate and inform

- An open data platform to take in content and feed it out, and a good content management system with well-trained users, are both essential investments

Online social networks are a new and powerful arena for destination marketers.

Online social networks, and the user-generated content (UGC) which they stimulate, may become central to those holiday decisions that are based on recommendation:

- Destinations can and should actively encourage the creation of user-generated content about the destination, wherever it is published

- Equally, they should use it in their own communication channels, and integrate it with their own content

A winning website depends on a willingness to be of service, and attention to detail in building the site.

- Accessibility should be the basis of website quality

- Research-based guidelines should be followed to create an easy-to-use website that builds trust and identity

- Websites should aim to smooth the path right through the 'customer journey' of the internet user

- Testing should be an integral part of the design and development process, as well as part of the evaluation of existing sites

Website search engine optimisation (SEO).

The objective of 'natural' or 'organic' SEO is to see that each page of a website is ranked highly in search engines for the most important search terms. To achieve this:

- The website structure and coding must be search engine friendly

- The site must be filled with good, relevant and useful content that will make searchers happy – this is what the search engine ranking algorithms want to find

- Time and resources are needed to optimise text and meta data for target terms, to develop keyword-rich anchor text links within the site and page URLs, and to add a site map based on text links

- It will take time for the effects of optimising a website to be seen, and it is an ongoing task

The destination must be proactive in acquiring, understanding and activating new customers.

E-marketing is not just about operating a website:

- Customer relationship management (CRM) business processes and technology are at the core of all e-marketing, and enable a single coordinated view of customers across multiple communication channels

- Good customer data, wisely used, helps both the customer and the destination

- Sales campaigning and brand-building go hand in hand

Destination brands can be researched and developed effectively online.

The function of a brand – to be a promise of the value that determines customer satisfaction – is crucial in the online globalised world:

- Research can identify gaps in the way online images are seen and understood. Research can also measure the effect of branding work, and help in planning to project more coherent branding

- Brands are more dynamically made and re-shaped in the online world

- E-marketers have exciting opportunities to support their brand. The increased availability of broadband allows use of rich media, and this together with interactivity can offer a high-involvement experience for customers

Destinations should work towards making all their tourism products bookable online in real time.

- The United States of America remains the world leader in e-commerce. Europe is three to four years behind the United States of America, and Asia and the Pacific about the same again

- There are a number of alternative business models for DMOs for e-commerce. Not-for-profit DMOs would be wise to think twice before engaging in the demanding world of e-commerce without commercial partners

- Operating an open platform that aggregates the e-commerce offers of a number of commercial and public-sector organisations, in a customer-friendly manner, is an attractive option

- Nevertheless there is a vital role for DMOs to perform to help small businesses start an e-commerce service and to get it effectively distributed

Mobile devices with high-speed connections will soon be a major e-tourism communication channel.

The functions of mobile phones, PDAs (personal digital assistants such as Blackberries), MP3 players (such as iPods), and satellite navigation devices (such as TomToms) are rapidly converging and acquiring the capabilities of PCs:

- 'Content is king' will remain true: to profit from mobiles, destinations need to be able to offer timely, location-sensitive, personalised information and m-commerce deals

- Destinations should already be offering SMS, podcasts and mobile website services; and be offering product listings to Satellite navigation (Satnav) service providers

- In the longer term, mobile communication may even become more important than conventional PC-based communication

Interactive digital television provides accurate targeting and activation for brand development as well as for direct sales.

Interactive digital television offers a better picture, better sound and several forms of interactivity:

- Marketing can be targeted according to individual profiles

- Interactive advertising delivers direct sales, but can also communicate strategic messages and be used for brand development

- It is essential to know how viewers in the target market use the technology – and to meet their expectations about content as well as usability

- Video is becoming the most valued currency on the internet

- Advergaming and in-game advertising are becoming major marketing genres of their own

The internet provides important new opportunities for destination public relations (PR).

Public relations activity to create media coverage about the destination is probably already the single most efficient tool in every DMO's marketing toolkit, and the internet works very well further to extend this productivity:

- There is a whole range of constantly expanding online media in which the destination's stories can be placed

- E-mail, the web, and commercially-operated online travel PR services make it easy to communicate with the media globally, whether the journalists are concerned with offline or online media

- There are effective reporting and measurement services to determine the value of online PR coverage

- At times of crisis, e-marketers will be central to the communications required for management and recovery of the situation, and need to be well prepared

Destination sales support, for tour operators and travel agents who sell the destination, can be delivered efficiently online.

DMOs can give vital sales support online to tour operators and agents, which can leverage significant additional business by encouraging them to sell the DMO's destination rather than a competitor:

- To be effective, support materials and information need to be tuned to each major market and segment

- Websites, e-newsletters and online training are the main tools

A primary objective of most DMOs should be to build and operate partnerships with the tourism suppliers in the destination.

A fundamental characteristic of the internet is its ability to support the creation and exploitation of multiple partnerships:

• The destinations that have been most successful in partnership working via online media are likely to be the ones that develop and maintain the most effective product offers and marketing activity

• Almost all work to inform and enrol suppliers in DMO activities are conducted most efficiently online

• There are easily-reported key performance indicators to measure the contribution that online communication is making to successful joint working by the DMO with its tourism suppliers

There are attractive income sources for DMOs in carrying out e-marketing.

Not all DMOs may have a requirement to earn revenue from their e-marketing work to offset some of their operating costs. But for those that do, options include:

• Charging commission or fees on sales of bookings that the DMO generates for the tourism suppliers

• Running, sub-contracting, or finding a partner to run, a merchandise shop

• Charging fees for participation in a marketing activity or a package of activities

• Accepting ads that are delivered to the DMO website by Google or Yahoo

• Accepting display advertising on the website

Online research and evaluation can provide continuous measurement of success.

Senior management should take advantage of the excellent ability of e-marketing techniques to provide performance and evaluation information, in combination with more traditional marketing evaluation methodologies:

• E-marketing tools facilitate the testing and refinement of e-marketing actions, thus enabling continuous improvements in performance

• Different views of reports can be compiled for hands-on staff, managers and directors

• Online customer research may be undertaken continuously, but steps need to be taken to minimise user irritation and maximise response rates

• Transaction information from e-commerce is the ideal measure of return on investment, but may not measure all of the DMO's e-marketing investment

Chapter 1

E-marketing for Tourism Destinations – The Big Picture

Key Messages

- Web-based information is now a primary influence on consumer decisions in nearly all major markets

- It enables and requires high levels of innovation to gain competitive advantage

- The essence of e-marketing is about facilitating interaction with and between target audiences

- E-marketing is only effective through full application of customer relationship management (CRM) with all target audiences – consumers, travel trade, media, and industry partners

- E-marketing has a powerful role in enabling joint marketing with key partners

- E-marketing provides excellent management information, enabling the calculation of return on investment (ROI) and comparison with offline methods

- E-marketing must be an integral part of the marketing programme of a Destination Management Organisation (DMO), not a separate activity

- Budgets for e-marketing should properly reflect its potential value to the destination

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a strategic overview of e-marketing as part of the overall marketing planning of any DMO – whether a national, regional, city or local tourism organisation. The chapter has been written first and foremost aiming at chief executives and marketing directors.

The book as a whole is intended for all DMO e-marketing practitioners. It provides:

- A strategic context

- An introduction to some essential concepts and key trends, in both markets and technology

- Most of all, it provides practical advice on how to develop and implement an e-marketing strategy

The purpose of e-marketing is to exploit the internet and other forms of electronic communication to communicate with target markets in the most cost-effective ways, and to enable joint working with partner organisations with which there is a common interest.

The internet and interactivity is also permeating the traditional methods of communicating with customers, so the challenge for DMOs is to develop the infrastructure, the skill sets and the content to exploit the new opportunities through multiple channels, offline and online. If they are unable to do this and to add value in the services they provide, then they are likely to lose ground to their competitors.

1.2 The Benefits of E-marketing

The benefits of e-marketing are wide-ranging:

• Delivery of massive amounts of information in a user-friendly way (chapter 2)

• Brand-building (chapter 7) is a more recent benefit, made possible by the rapid spread of broadband connections, allowing users to experience dramatic imagery and animation, as well as enhanced communication and interaction

• Two-way interaction between the DMO, suppliers and customers, and between customers and other like-minded customers. These interactions are a theme throughout the handbook, and apply at all stages of the 'customer journey', a cycle of thoughts, decisions, and actions by the visitor before, during and after their visit

Figure 1.1 Customer Journey Wheel

Repeating
Recommending
Recollecting

Dreaming
Enthusing
Informing
Planning
Selecting

Booking
Travelling
Visiting
Enjoying
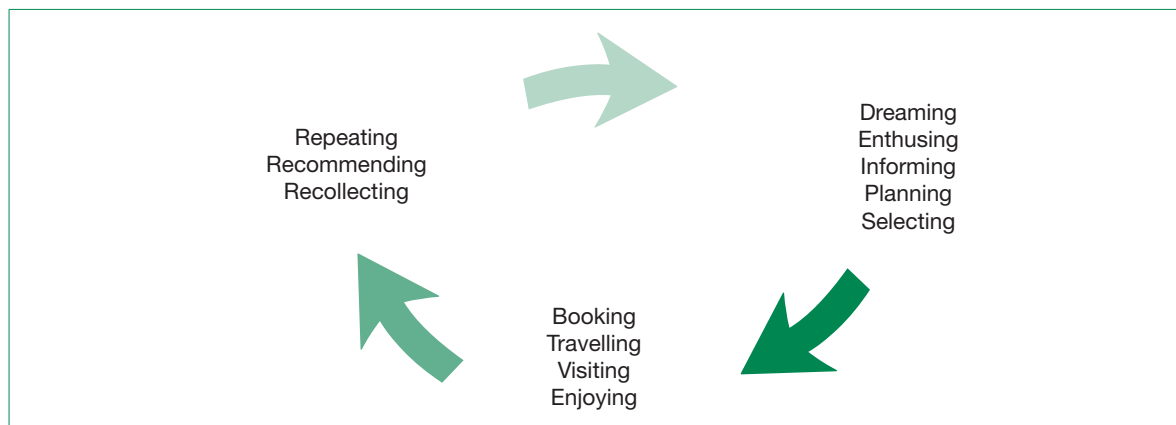
Source: TEAM, Tourism Consulting (2007)

• Joining promotional activity seamlessly with online purchasing (chapter 8)

• Cost-effectiveness in conveying information and products on sale directly, cheaply and at short notice to prime prospects, through the web (chapter 4), e-mail (chapter 6, section 6.4) and mobiles (chapter 9)

• The opportunity to work in harmony with offline marketing activities so that traffic can be driven in both directions, web to brochures or telephone, telephone to web and so on

• The facility to build integrated partnerships with other bodies, official and commercial, throughout the industry and outside it. Partnerships may work at many levels:

 – Sharing market intelligence within the industry

 – Promoting the DMO's marketing opportunities and operating cooperative marketing schemes

 – Gathering product data, via data feeds, and by hosting product data entry forms that suppliers can use to provide and update their information

 – New joint product development

 – An integrated and coherent approach to branding of the destination achieved jointly by national, regional, and local tourism organisations and by their public and private stakeholders

 – Partnerships may also be interactive partnerships of customers who have shared interests, such as golfers or walkers

• The ability for DMOs to engage with customers on a one-to-one basis, but also to use 'one-to-many' activities

1.3 Overview of E-marketing Techniques

E-marketing offers DMOs the realistic potential to reach a far wider audience than ever before. It encompasses a wide range of activities, and there are many techniques in use.

Table 1.1 Overview of the different e-marketing techniques at each stage of the 'customer journey'

Customer journey	Communications life cycle (DMO response to customer need)	E-marketing activity aimed at the customer
Dream and select	Creating awareness, meeting aspirations, arousing emotional interest, enthusing with specific ideas	• Brand projection and motivational content, including video on web and interactive TV • E-mail/viral promotions • Distribution of information through high profile intermediaries, such as Expedia, Travelocity, World Travel Guide, Concierge, and Rough Guide • Search engine optimisation (SEO)/promotion for key values, experiences and motivations • CRM with media and travel trade – to generate stories and images
Plan	Providing 'hard' information	• Information on, for example, transport, accommodation and events, etc. • Planning tools for use by customers on the web, including itinerary and route planners • Enabling social networking (chapter 3) for exchange of content • Special offers and promotions by e-mail
Book	Enabling booking	• Product search facility on web • Booking provided on destination website or facilitation of booking through third parties including comparison search engines with 'polling' for price and availability
Visit	Visitor services in the destination	• Interactive itinerary planner for visitors • Use of new media to tell stories – interpretation, recreation • Timely, location-based offers to mobiles by short message service (SMS, commonly called texting) or e-mail • Information and tools for use by information centres and other outlets • Distribution to hotel and holiday village bedrooms and reception areas, and other places such as shopping malls, via TV and kiosks
Post-visit recollection and recommendation	Maintaining the relationship through research and follow-up action	• Online research regarding customer's visit, satisfaction and potential for repeat visits (by type) • Enable visitor community (consumer to consumer – C2C), with user-generated content (reviews, blogs) – for example, collaborate with a specialised site like IgoUgo to 'mash' with consumer generated content • E-mail marketing (chapter 6). This activity should stimulate recommendations to friends and family, as well as repeat visits. It will do so by encouraging recollection (for example, buying books, souvenirs and merchandising); by satisfying the customer's wish to share (uploading pictures, adding reviews); and by providing stimuli for recommendations and repeats (what's new, events, special offers, competitions, games, virals)

1.4 Working in Partnership

The task of e-marketing can be shared, and it is vital to find strategic partners or to consider outsourcing to achieve a number of benefits:

• Meet the trend towards 'total lifestyle service' by working with a group of complementary product and service providers

• Acquire expertise

• Spread costs and risks

• Reach the maximum potential customers

It is now technically much easier for firms working in partnership to merge each others' content and functionality to achieve a better experience for the user. This practice is known as 'mashing' and is already commonly used in tourism, most obviously in making use of Google's mapping (chapter 3, section 3.5.1).

Partnerships are needed within the DMO as well within the organisation, marketing and information and communication technologies (ICT) departments should work together. Marketing should take the lead on defining requirements, while ICT should advise, organise the systems, and help to spot ICT trends and opportunities.

1.5 Market Trends

This section provides a synopsis of relevant market trend information. Detailed market trend information is provided in chapter 18.

1.5.1 Rapid Growth in the Use of the Internet

The current estimate of the global number of internet users is over 1.2 billion.[1] There has been substantial growth in all world regions, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, which, over seven years, has moved from third position (with about 100 million users), to top position with over 400 million.

Broadband, a critical factor in the use of the internet for tourism, has and will grow at a particularly fast rate.

Future growth will be driven predominantly by wireless usage, particularly in Asia and the Pacific.

1.5.2 The Internet Is a Major and Trusted Source of Travel Information

In all major markets worldwide, web search is now more important than personal recommendation.[2] Other research confirms the domination of the internet as a source of information. For example, in Europe, the internet is the most important information source, although the travel trade is still very important in terms of travel sales.[3]

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1   Internet World Stats (2007) (Online), available: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm (29-10-2007).

2   Global Market Insite (GMI) (2005), *Online Travel Sales & Marketing Divides Global Travellers on Usefulness & Quality* (22-5-2007) (Online), available: http://www.gmi-mr.com/gmipoll/release.php?p=20050622 (20-8-2007).

3   IPK (2006), *International, European Travel Monitor* (material provided by IPK by e-mail on 10-9-2007), http://www.ipkinternational.com.

1.5.3 Social Networking and User-generated Content (UGC)

Travellers are increasingly turning to their peers as a valued source of information, guidance and recommendation. User-generated content (covered in chapter 3) influences over US$ 10 billion a year in online travel sales, with consumers finding UGC more credible than professional reviews or information from travel companies. However, a majority of consumers do support a brand whose management themselves respond to consumer-generated reviews.[4]

An article in brandweek.com confirms this trend, saying that websites where consumers can read travel journals and reviews of hotels, cruise ships and attractions written by fellow travellers are rapidly gaining popularity.[5]

The effect of social networking is hugely increased through blogging and the use of tagging, both of which serve to enlarge the global community of users who are focused on a particular subject.

The power of social networking is also getting recognition from advertising executives. While they still consider search to be very effective and, indeed, the most effective online medium, social networking comes through very strongly, particularly if online video and blogs are combined with it.[6]

Another aspect of social networking is the enormous growth in the use of video. This is particularly helpful to DMOs in their task of communicating the essence of their destination remotely.

1.5.4 E-commerce in Tourism

The United States of America though still the leading world region for online commerce in travel in overall number of internet users (see chapter 18), is now well behind both Europe and Asia and the Pacific. This would appear to be primarily a function of the maturity of the market. The United States of America was the early adopter of the internet and substantial online sales took about five years to develop. Europe is following three to four years behind the United States of America, and Asia and the Pacific about the same again.

- In the United States of America, online travel buyers are increasingly going direct to the websites of the tourism suppliers, rather than using online travel agencies. The reason is that suppliers' sites have improved markedly and often now include 'lowest price guarantees', in a belated attempt to claw business back from the online intermediaries who dominated the market in the early years

- In Europe, the situation varies markedly between the different countries, with the travel agency share varying from nearly two-thirds in Sweden and Italy to well under a third in Denmark, Germany and France

1.5.5 Market Development Forecasts

- Expected continuing rapid growth in the use of the internet globally

- In the most mature market, the United States of America, it is clear that the speed of growth rate in online travel sales is now starting to reduce

- Continuing rapid growth in online sales may be anticipated in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in India and China, and in the more mature internet markets of Republic of Korea and Japan

4   Compete (2007), *Compete Consumer Generated Content Study Reveals Opportunities for Travel Marketers* (30-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.competeinc.com/news_events/pressReleases/182/ (20-8-2007).

5   Brandweek.com (2007), *Strategy: Travelers Go And Tell, Tourism Sites Show and Sell* (23-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.brandweek.com/bw/magazine/current/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003574747 (20-8-2007).

6   M:Metrics, Inc., copyright © 2006, M:Metrics, Inc. (2006) (Online), available: http://www.mmetrics.com.

- In Europe, there is potential for substantial growth in online commerce in Germany in the short term, and in Southern and Eastern European countries in the longer term

- In Russia, as the young grow older and the Russian economy improves, there will be increasing numbers of online shoppers. In 2006, the internet had become more and more popular among 18 to 24 year olds, while the number of users aged over 45 remained very low, increasing only slightly[7]

- South America, a relatively slow adopter of the internet, is likely to see substantial growth over the next few years, with the emerging major economy of Brazil as the main driver. Online commerce may take considerably longer to develop on a substantial scale

- Demographic studies of travellers in the United States of America, Europe and Asia and the Pacific all show the emergence of an older generation of travellers, 'baby boomers' (aged 45 to 60), who are healthy, adventurous and affluent, as well as internet savvy

- Thinking globally, India and China are undoubtedly the prime emerging markets over the next five to 10 years

1.6 Technology Trends

1.6.1 Convergence – At the Heart of the Revolution

The concept of convergence is not new. It has been clear for more than 20 years that data, sound and vision, previously captured and stored in completely different ways, could all be converted into digital (binary) form, enabling them to be handled in due course by the same device and sent across electronic networks. However, it is only in the past five years that the concept has become a commercial reality, with digital consumer goods available to the mass market.

According to Wikipedia, 'Convergence of media occurs when multiple products come together to form one product with the advantages of all of them. For example, the PlayStation 2 is not only a games console, but also a CD player, DVD player and internet connector. Mobile phones are another good example, in that they increasingly incorporate digital cameras, MP3 players, camcorders, voice recorders and other devices. This type of convergence is very popular. For the consumer, it means more features in less space, while for the media conglomerates it means remaining competitive in the struggle for market dominance. The announcement of a new cell phone that incorporates iTunes music songs is an example of media convergence in consumer electronics.'[8]

1.6.2 New Consumer Technologies

The huge increase in available bandwidth, particularly wireless broadband (along with parallel enhancements in processing power and memory capacity), is facilitating access to the internet via a variety of media devices. This opens up a 'new frontier' for large scale electronic distribution – to visitors travelling to and within destinations.

Driven by the ability to access the internet from multiple 'media gateways', the internet is becoming integral to telecommunications, broadcast and publishing media, so that it will become the primary means by which most visitors will:

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7   ETC New Media Review, (Online), available: http://www.etcnewmedia.com/review/default.asp?SectionID=11&CountryID=83 #online (23-10-2007).

8   Wikipedia (2007), Definition of Convergence (Online), available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_convergence (18-8-2007).

- Access information

- Access news, such as e-newspapers and magazines, TV and radio news

- Communicate, including e-mail, phone, video mail, video conferencing, and blogging

From the perspective of visitor information provision, the new media access devices of greatest relevance are:

- Mobile phone and personal digital assistant (PDA) for internet access by 3G or by WiFi. WiFi offers 'hotspots' that can cover a single room or many square miles overlapping with other hotspots, and allows PCs, phones or PDAs to connect to the internet. WiFi-enabled handheld devices, together with wide area WiFi network provision (including across whole cities) will be of particular interest in enabling low cost access to the internet for information and for voice over internet protocol (VoIP) calls

- MP3 technology to allow download of podcasts such as city guides, in audio and/or video form (chapter 9, section 9.12)

- Hand held and in-car devices that combine internet access and a global positioning system (GPS) that enables satellite navigation (satnav), to provide local route finding and itinerary planning, relating routes of travel to attractions and facilities (chapter 9, section 9.11). The combination of satnav and tourist information on hand-held devices has already begun and will be widely available in the medium term

- An important related development is the advent of 'location based services' – to communicate specific information to people, via in-car or handheld devices, when they are in a particular location – for example, for a DMO to provide information about a particular place of interest to people when they are in the vicinity; or to transmit advertising, such as special offers, that are specific to the location. Such services are likely to be widely available by 2010

- Fixed internet access points within the destination, which will become widespread

1.6.3 Multimedia Content Resources

It is now possible for a DMO to draw on a wide variety of third-party resources to supply live content for its website. Examples include:

- Google Earth or Microsoft Live Maps mapping

- Motoring, cycling and walking routes

- Weather forecasts

- News services

- Conditions for special interests, such as skiing, surfing and sailing

- Online carbon emissions calculators

- Currency calculator

- Games

1.7 State-of-the-art – 10 Keys to Successful E-marketing

The following table[9] sets out 10 key areas for action in e-marketing that should be part of every DMO marketing plan. This table is followed by another one that identifies the technologies required in order to implement action in these areas.

Table 1.2 10 key areas for action in e-marketing

1. Reach as many potential customers as possible
Key methods are: • Use of traditional media to drive customers to the destination website(s) for fulfilment • Search engine optimisation • Reciprocal links to the sites of partner organisations • Distribution partnerships: using online intermediaries to get your product in front of far more consumer eyes than you can reach through your own site • Compliance with guidelines for ensuring ease of use of the web by people with accessibility limitations (visual, audio and physical) See, mainly, chapter 6.
2. Maximise the lifetime value of customers, by maintaining the relationship via CRM
CRM is an essential process, with equally essential ICT systems to support it, for DMOs to understand the needs and decision making processes of their target markets, satisfy them and attract them back through every point of contact. Objectives include: • Keeping enquirers interested with personalised information during the lead time to conversion • Attracting visitors back • Encouraging and facilitating recommendations to others • 'Co-opetition': working with your (apparent) competitors See, mainly, chapter 6.
3. Join the social networking revolution, facilitating user-generated content
Social networking involves people exchanging information, images, views, and reviews on the web. Travel is a prime focus. It is not a new concept – Trip Advisor and IgoUgo have been around for years. Now it is exploding, with the emergence of major new players – MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Tagzania, Gusto, Wikia, Boardingate, RealTravel, blogs, podcasts and much more. There is the prospect of more extensive destination content than has ever been possible for DMOs to gather. It is a big challenge to DMOs, but also an opportunity. • How can DMOs themselves be part of the revolution? • Should they try to compete with, or can they partner with, the big players in social networking? • Can they use social networking to project and protect the destination's brand? • How can its value as an instant form of customer satisfaction research be maximised? • How can they encourage it and make it available at the right moment to potential customers? See, mainly, chapter 3.
4. Maintain high quality content
High quality content is the core asset for any destination – a key area in which a DMO can add value by serving a tourist with the right information at the right time. Most DMOs have websites for particular market segments; data and content need to be maintained day-by-day by different players. Content must be coordinated and shared within the DMO and with the destination's entire travel industry.

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9   Dr Roger Carter, TEAM Tourism Consulting (2007)

DMOs require a plan and a structure to obtain the right content, including user-generated content, supported by a good content management system. ICT provides the opportunity to import content and data from specialist providers, rather than reinvent it.

See chapter 2.

5. Create a compelling website experience

Primary considerations for destination websites are:

- The balance of content between the motivational and the practical (information)
- Site functionality key factors are:
  - Technical performance
  - Navigation
  - Interactive searching – answering enquiries dynamically
  - Travel and schedule planning (including itinerary and route planners, diary planners, and recommender systems)
  - Access to third-party services, such as weather forecasts, surfing or skiing conditions, and transport information
- Look and feel
- Usability
- The identity and trust conveyed by the destination site

See chapter 4.

6. Deliver sales (directly or indirectly)

It is the role of every DMO to take potential customers to, or through, the point of sale. Which should it be? To or through? National tourism organisations (NTOs) generally prefer to enable bookings by others, reflecting:

- Constraints on government funded organisations
- Lack of previous experience of sales
- The availability of partners who are able to do the job more effectively

DMO online reservation systems operate predominantly at the provincial, regional and local level. This usually reflects previous off-line activity and a commercial imperative to generate increased income.

As effective commercial booking channels become available for most destinations, the need for publicly funded booking engines diminishes, and the case grows for DMOs to offer open referral platforms (comparison engines), driving business to commercial systems.

See chapter 8.

7. Offer customised packaging

Dynamic packaging is the 'holy grail' for the travel trade – enabling the customer to create their own packages, by selecting components of their own choice, which are then paid for in one transaction. This is a key development that is driving the strategic planning of the major tour operators and online travel agents.

The concept is attractive but difficult for the DMO to offer, as it requires access to real-time inventory from multiple providers in different sectors. Instead, DMOs can work with travel trade partners, or adopt a less ambitious links approach, or opt for a travel planner approach.

See chapter 8.

8. Engage tourism businesses to get their inventory online

Many SMEs are reluctant or unable to provide inventory for online sales, for various reasons, despite the affordable systems that are now available. This creates problems for onward distribution via third parties and dynamic packaging, whether by the DMO or commercial intermediaries. Access to real-time inventory is the key.

There is a need for the DMO to undertake awareness raising activity, focusing on:

• The importance of the internet for future destination marketing, particularly for international business

• Techniques involved in e-marketing

This should be followed by training and ongoing business support.

See chapter 8.

9. Evaluate and benchmark performance, demonstrating return on investment

One of the primary requirements for DMOs at the present time is to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of websites. Methods include:

• Web analytics and metrics – data on the way your site is used

• Online surveys of users – reasons for using the site and reactions to it

• Expert audit and evaluation

• Laboratory testing

• Online experiments

Several of these methods enable benchmarking between competitor destinations. The UNWTO's Destination Web Watch has been set up to facilitate this.[10]

There is a 'Measures of Success' paragraph at the end of all the main chapters of the handbook, and chapter 15 identifies methods to evaluate other aspects of e-marketing.

To maximise the usefulness of evaluation:

• Define key performance indicators (KPIs) and obtain the right data from the outset

• Use models to translate indicators into economic impact at the macro level

• Ensure an effective mechanism to interpret and feed back results to marketing policymakers

See chapter 15.

10. Ensure effective electronic distribution of information to visitors 'en route' and in the destination

There are increasing opportunities for DMOs and others to distribute information and bookings electronically to visitors travelling to or within the destination. There are two broad areas:

• Via visitors' mobiles, PDAs, MP3 players, and in-car devices

• Through outlets 'on the ground' – notably internet cafés, hotel reception areas and bedrooms, shopping malls and petrol/gas station

'Location-based services' using satnav are already used to push specific information and offers to willing recipients in particular locations – interpretation, as well as sales.

These developments will have major implications for existing walk-in, telephone and printed information services within destinations.

See chapter 9.

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10   World Tourism Organization (2003), *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch* (Online), available: http://www.destinationwebwatch.org (18-8-2007).

1.7.1 New Technologies for E-marketing

Table 1.3 Supporting technologies required to implement the '10 keys'

10 keys for e-marketing	Principal technologies required
Reach as many potential customers as possible	• Search engine optimisation and paid-for search engine marketing • Distribution partnerships: web delivery and reporting systems to deliver content from product databases and the content management system
Maximise the lifetime value of customers	• CRM systems and e-mail marketing campaign management systems
Join the social networking revolution, facilitating user-generated content (UGC)	• Social networking software to enable UGC and customer-to-customer interaction
Maintain high quality content	• Structured product database systems • Content management system
Create a compelling website experience	• Content management system • Geographic information system (GIS) • Really simple syndication (RSS) • Hosting, bandwidth and maintenance to match best practice
Deliver sales (directly or indirectly)	• Booking engine and customer orientated booking processes; and/or • Comparison search engines with 'polling'
Offer customised packaging	• Dynamic packaging technology
Engage tourism businesses to deliver the inventory	• Automated data feeds into DMO database, from corporate partners including operators of SME property management systems • Industry extranet for manual data entry into DMO database
Evaluate and benchmark performance, demonstrating return on investment (ROI)	• Site performance measurement using web analytics tools • Online user surveys • Laboratory testing
Ensure effective electronic distribution of information to travellers and visitors	• Wide area network WiFi provision • SMS information and booking services to mobiles • Mobile websites • Satnav services • Podcasting • TV channel(s) for visitors

All these key areas will be further developed within the handbook.

Of these technologies, the majority have been available commercially (albeit at a high price) for many years, although constantly subject to improvement. However, some are relatively new in their application, notably:

• Dynamic packaging – to enable customers to choose and buy a number of different types of product in one transaction, the overall price of which may be different to the sum of the component prices

• Price comparison engines – involving polling technology that can search multiple databases to check price and availability

• Satellite navigation, particularly in mobiles (see chapter 9, section 9.11)

1.8 Management Information Dashboard

To conclude this chapter, consideration should be given to how to communicate e-marketing intelligence, in a timely manner and an easily assimilated format, to the various levels of management that need to see it.

The concept of management information systems is well established: to collect, collate and present key performance information.

New products are now available to enhance the presentation of such information. They are known variously as 'digital', 'enterprise', 'executive' or 'corporate' dashboards.

The concept is defined in Wikipedia as "a business management tool used to visually ascertain the status (or 'health') of a business enterprise via key business indicators. Digital dashboards use visual, at-a-glance displays of data pulled from disparate business systems to provide warnings, action notices, next steps, and summaries of business conditions." [11]

Figure 1.2 An example of a dashboard from the travel industry – an airline[12]

The effectiveness of such a tool will be totally dependent on the quality and relevance of the information being supplied. The use of electronic systems for marketing and other purposes does, of course, enable performance data to be gathered quickly, easily, and often in real time. The precise requirements for such information, and the methods of analysis and presentation (for example, the calculation of performance ratios) should be undertaken at the outset of any project.

Management information can be made more sophisticated by automatically highlighting negative or positive trends and, through the use of modelling techniques, predicting future trends.

A further example of a dashboard is illustrated in chapter 16, section 16.3. For further reading, refer to the end of chapter 16, section 16.4.2.6.

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11   Wikipedia (2007), *Definition of Digital Dashboard* (Online), available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_dashboard (20-8-2007).

12   From   http://www.enterprise-dashboard.com/2006/11/21/airline-executive-dashboards-business-intelligence-dashboard-contest-entries-revisited/ (1-10-2007)

1.9 Key Steps in Planning for E-marketing – A Summary

- Know your target: research the target market segments in terms of their preferred content, channels for information and booking

- Determine the role of e-marketing within your overall marketing strategy, in particular the balance of activity and budget between online and offline marketing, broken down by target markets, segments and by stage of the 'customer journey'

- Find partners, consider outsourcing, in order to:

  – Acquire expertise

  – Spread costs and risks

  – Gain other benefits of partnership – for example, working with complementary leisure providers to offer a total lifestyle service; or distribution to customers in your target markets

- Ensure that your marketing and ICT departments work together:

  – Marketing to lead on requirements

  – ICT to advise, provide hosting, integrate corporate systems, and to help spot trends

  – Joint marketing-ICT project management

- Keep up-to-speed with new technology and what it can do for you in practical terms

- Keep up to date with research on internet user behaviour, content quality criteria, and critical success factors

- Understand the interdependence of the ICT systems: product data stores, content management systems, CRM systems, various marketing tools such as for e-mail campaign management

- Take a medium to long-term perspective: your business plan should take a three-year view at least, and be revised annually

- Ensure excellence of management information, building the requirements into every aspect of your e-marketing (and the overall marketing) activity:

  – Build your corporate dashboard for timely management decision making

  – Use the technology, in conjunction with impact models, to provide reliable ROI data to guide your investment in e-marketing

- Identify key skills and competencies for staff managing and operating e-marketing activities

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 2

Content Is King – How to Build and Manage Content that Convinces the Customer

Key Messages

- 'Content is king', so make it a primary and long-term investment

- Social networks are a new and powerful arena for destination marketers

- Use market segment information to decide the priority audiences and topics and effectively reach them

- Be clear about which publishing channels you will use, and what formats these channels need

- Do not do it all yourself, work with partners

- Images and video are becoming paramount, both to motivate and inform

- An open data platform to take in and feed out content, and a good content management system with well-trained users, are essential investments

2.1 What Is 'Content'?

This chapter discusses how to build and manage quality content that will stimulate and satisfy the needs of end-customers. Other chapters cover how to present and distribute it – through various media, to various markets/segments.

'Content' means information about the destination – whatever format it is held in (for example, text, audio, images, video, and Flash animations). It is what the medium 'contains' rather than the format in which it is held, though this chapter covers both aspects.

Content for other important audiences is dealt with elsewhere (for the information services a DMO should offer the media see chapter 11, for the travel trade in the destination's source markets see chapter 12 and for what it should offer its own tourism supplier industry, see chapter 13).

2.1.1 Formats and Media

Content may be created in, and output to an ever-increasing range of media.

Table 2.1 Range of media used for content

Storage formats	Distribution media
• Text • Static images • Recorded audio • Recorded multi-media – video	• HTML webpages • Flash and other web formats • Wireless mark-up language (WML) for mobile pages • PDFs • Word and other formats of documents • Voice, for example via a contact centre • Radio • TV • MP3 files • Streaming video • E-postcards • Print

Content is stored separately from the various ways in which it is delivered – via the DMO's websites and other's, via print, contact centres, mobile phones, radio and TV. And although some of the information may be collected with a specific medium or target market in mind, the guiding principle is that wherever possible it should be capable of being formatted for any need.

2.1.2 'Data' and 'Editorial'

In daily practice, there is a distinction between data and editorial content. In many DMOs, staff and systems are more or less organised around this division:

- Product data (including geocodes), stored in structured databases, with a team originating or procuring the data, and monitoring the quality of it

- Editorial content created in, or imported into, a content management system (CMS), with web editors and marketers responsible for this

The division is practical, but it can lead to duplication unless the two teams work closely together, within the same overall marketing team. It is not recommended, for instance, to have the product data function in the ICT department.

2.2 Trends

The customer's first and favoured source of information seems likely to become user-generated content (UGC), so it has its own chapter, after this.

Do not, however, treat UGC or any other type of content in isolation: a holistic view on content-building is important.

Consumers have already adopted do-it-yourself video, and the sharing of it on sites like YouTube, in massive numbers. Video is likely to be the key destination tool for creating awareness and projecting brand values. Done well, it is powerful, emotive, personal and persuasive. The combination of UGC video and professionally-produced video will be the mainstay of online travel communication between destinations and their visitors, and between visitors. Applications will include:

- Documentaries

- Panoramic viewing of destination landscapes and towns

- Personal recommendations, face to camera, by previous visitors with the same profile – 'people like us'

- Endorsements by local people and local celebrities

- Pan-arounds of individual tourist attractions and accommodation

- Real-time webcams

The Visit London TV case study (chapter 10, section 10.4.4) is an excellent example of video presented to customers in different stages of the 'customer journey', in the context of the convergence of internet, television, video and gaming.

2.3 Objectives for Content

High quality and effective content should be a primary strength and tool of DMOs, and ought to be at the top of the things they are good at organising. This section sets out the objectives and quality criteria to aim for.

2.3.1 Marketing Objectives

The objectives of destination content in general should be to:

- Support the 'customer journey' – before, during and after the trip – by providing the necessary information services in each phase of decision-taking

- Help build the brand and sub-brands

- Underpin specific DMO marketing campaigns

- Be as inclusive and comprehensive as possible

- Produce the best increase in revenue and visits, at the times and places it is most needed

In addition, the content will be expected to:

- Provide the destination's tourism suppliers, and travel resellers, with material they can use themselves to enhance their own sales propositions

- Offer distribution partners complementary content that extends the destination's marketing reach

2.3.2 Strategic Issues

If you are responsible for content planning it is vital to be customer-focused rather than product-focused. But there are other issues to take note of:

- Clearly identified brand values that must be projected. Brand toolkits usually do this with a set of keywords, images, colours, and mood statements that describe the brand.[1] These should guide you so that the content you collect supports them and does not blur the brand message (chapter 7)

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1   Keywords that express the brand values, which may not be the same as the keywords necessary to optimise a website for search engines (see chapter 5).

- The needs of the various channels (those owned by the DMO, and those of important third parties) for content and its format

- The DMO's core strengths and resources in information collection

- The best partners with other strengths to complete the line-up. This can include exploiting the Web 2.0 principle of 'mash-ups' – the sharing of content (including user-generated content) and functionality by partners (chapter 3)

- The need for collection and distribution partners at national, regional, sub-regional, and local level

2.3.3 Understand the Customer and the Marketing Priorities[2]

Content for the end-customer about travel to, getting around, staying in, and enjoying oneself in a destination should be as comprehensive as possible. However, budget and time constraints require selection of priorities. These should be based on:

- Clear description and prioritisation of target market segments (chapter 6, section 6.2.3 and 6.2.4)

- Knowledge of the specific interests of the customers in each priority segment. The primary source should ideally be the data mining of the recorded interests of the target segments in the DMO's CRM system. Content planners should also refer to the value-based market segmentation systems that may be used by their DMO. These define the values that influence the style and type of experience people prefer, and the aspects of the product or service that people value

- Adoption of 'personas' to help to bring these target segments to life

- The DMO's priorities when different objectives compete for resources. Ask which objectives are most important:

  – Maximising revenue per visitor?

  – Maximising the number of visitors?

  – Dispersing them around the destination?

  – Dispersing them around the year, over the different seasons, or even by day of the week or time of day or night?

  – Supporting a particular area within the destination, or a particular product sector?

These potential conflicts in priorities will affect what kind of content you decide to concentrate on. The answers will depend on a clear pre-definition of national and regional tourism objectives, which in turn will define the DMO marketing objectives and consequently its overall marketing strategy, including its e-marketing.

The 'Interest' fields and other data in the CRM database (chapter 6, section 6.2.4) will help to give direction to these strategies.

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2   For further information see World Tourism Organization (2007), *Handbook on Tourism Market Segmentation – Maximizing Marketing Effectiveness*, UNWTO, Madrid.

Focus on the customer by adopting a 'persona'

"Adopting a 'persona' is an excellent way to focus on our customer", says June Li, managing director of ClickInsight Corporation.

"A persona is a profile of a representative customer. Personas put a human face on the customer, and remind us that we are writing and designing for people. They also help us to avoid creating a one-size-fits-all design with loads of features intended to satisfy everyone that in reality suit no-one very well. Using personas also helps us define the scenarios to be tracked by web analytics tools, and allows us to define the goals that the analytics should track.

To create personas:

• Understand your primary audience. Use your market segmentation profiles if you have them – such as 'Cosmopolitans', or 'Explorers'. Explicitly decide which groups of people are not primary but secondary

• Construct profiles in enough detail so that the profiles come alive

• Give each profile a name (Sue, Surinder or Sam)

• Find an appropriate photo

• Publish them; introduce them to the project team, stakeholders and sponsors

Each time there is an urge to discuss what 'the user' needs, wants or would do, refer to Sue, Surinder or Sam. Ask questions like: What words might Sue be looking for? What would Surinder do here? Would this cause a problem with Sam? If I do X to satisfy Sue, will Sam still be able to complete the task he needs to do? ... hmm... half the 'Sam' visitors don't seem to be completing the scenario as designed. What's getting in their way?

Personas are fictional descriptions of people – people with needs. Personas have a hidden power, widely untapped by marketing."

By courtesy of ClickInsight Corporation (www.clickinsight.ca).

2.4 Types of Information

2.4.1 What Kind of Information Do Customers Need?

Content and the information services a DMO offers should be as inclusive as possible and serve the customer in each phase of the 'customer journey'. The need to analyse the customer interests in the CRM database is noted above.

Table 2.2 Information areas

Inbound travel	• Rail, coach, air and sea: routes and carriers
	• Visa and passport requirements
	• Customs regulations
	• Currency: exchange rates, where to exchange
	• Local time zone
Local travel	• Air, rail, coach, bus and taxis: routes, prices, timetables
	• Advice on use of own car, rented car, car with driver

Local and current real time conditions	• Prices: guide to bargains and to commodities that are unusually expensive • Cultural advice: modes of dress, greeting, customs • Public holidays • Business/shop opening hours • Seasonal factors • Weather and weather forecasts • Availability of public toilets • Quality of sea water and ski slopes, surfing conditions • Traffic information • Congestion problems – roads, public transport, at attractions and events
Themes that reflect your brand	• Cultural • Outdoor • Sporting • Value-for-money
Locations, destinations	• Regions • Cities • Towns • Villages • Locations and natural assets such as beaches, scenic locations, parks, and ski slopes, etc
What to do	• Highlights of the destination • Attractions to visit: historical, cultural, scenic, sporting, etc • Places suitable for children • Sporting activities • Hobbies and interests • Culture • Folklore • Wellness • Events • Shopping • Culinary specialities • Locally-produced food and drink • Organic food • Eating out • Entertainment • Nightlife • Ready-made do-it-yourself suggested itineraries • Theme tours (for example, castles and gardens tours, gastronomic tours, walking tours, cycling tours, motor tours etc) • Paid-for tours, local excursions • Guiding services
Accommodation	• Hotels • Guest accommodation • Self-catering houses • Accommodation agencies • Holiday parks and villages • Camping and caravan parks • Campus accommodation

Accommodation	• Hostels
	• Boat accommodation
	• Spas
	• The DMO's own quality ratings (such as 'stars'), or recognised ratings of other organisations
Special features	• Facilities for families with young children
	• Facilities for youths
	• Facilities for groups
	• Sustainable tourism establishments
	• Accessibility: information and facilities for the disabled, seniors, those with young children
	• Facilities for bikers, walkers, skiers and other special interest groups
Links, contacts	

Chapter 4, section 4.7 covers the tools needed to help visitors find and organise this information online – such as public transport route planners, itinerary planners, maps, search facilities, and a list of Frequently Asked Questions.

2.5 Quality Control

2.5.1 Quality and Trust

Establishing identity and trust with the customer are vital in online marketing. These are qualities that are hard to establish and easy to lose. Content produced by the DMO therefore needs to be:

- Impartial

- Accurate

- Timely

- Attractive and motivational

Accuracy and timeliness are paramount: no information is often better than bad information.

This is true for text and pictures in the structured databases just as much as the editorial content. Images should be selected according to brand guidelines to project the destination correctly. Too many stock pictures featuring models, for example, may undermine trust.

Be transparent about who produced the content, whether generated by or based on the DMO's own work, or that of third parties. This applies to everything from weather forecasts and hotel reviews to blogs containing personal opinions. Advertorials and sponsored content should be identified as [Sponsored Article] or [Advertisement]. It should always be clear who is talking. Do not hesitate to use the logo of a partner where it is justified.

2.5.2 Style and Taxonomy Guides

Every organisation that publishes content should have an editorial style and taxonomy guide. The guide should deal with two broad areas:

2.5.2.1 Style

Style is about setting standards in the written word so as to achieve consistency and thus better clarity.

Style guides can include rules about preferred vocabulary and spelling of common words, abbreviations, use of capital letters and italics, and punctuation. For example, in this book we spell out numbers up to 'nine' and use digits from '10' onwards.

The style guide for web writing will differ slightly from the one for print (if there is one).

To ensure consistency across the destination's websites, every contributor to the sites should have a copy, and undergo a training session. Regular contributors should monitor their own style against the guide from time to time, and an overall editor should make spot checks at intervals.

Examples of the style guides of two well-regarded British media organisations are www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide[3] and www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide.[4]

2.5.2.2 Taxonomy

For e-marketers, taxonomy means the classifying of content into defined categories and subcategories.

The word taxonomy means consistently using the same words to describe the same thing. It is important whether words are used in unstructured editorial text or in fields in a database. For example, what is the difference, if any, between a 'spa' and a 'health centre'? If the meaning of the data fields is not clearly defined, results from internal and external search engines may not be right, and customers may be confused, especially when they are reading in a foreign language (see below section 2.6.2 on translating data fields).

Data fields should be defined and reviewed in conjunction with national and international standards.

Some content management systems include a facility to store items according to your own defined categories, but you will need also to apply the same taxonomy to your product database, both to the labels given to the data fields and to words used within the fields.

2.5.3 Quality Standards

For internal quality control, the DMO should set standards and then audit them at regular intervals – frequently if for volatile types of content, and annually for the rest. You may want to use an outsider to do this auditing for you, based on 'hard' and 'soft' standards, including:

- Agreed tolerance levels for typographical errors and factual errors per 1,000 words

- Accuracy of product data:

  - Placement of the right data in the right fields in the database

  - Proportion of known records that are updated at the correct intervals in the database

  - Accuracy and completeness of data entered into the DMO system by tourism suppliers. If the DMO or other bodies operate customer-facing quality rating schemes for accommodation and attractions (stars or other ratings), then the quality inspection should include assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the descriptions that they provide

- Timeliness – are time-sensitive items made available as far ahead as the customer needs them? Afterwards, are they de-activated promptly?

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3   The Guardian (29-10-2007).

4   The Economist (29-1-2007).

- Taxonomy – to follow the manual that sets out what words mean, precisely

- Copywriting – does this comply with guidelines for writing for the web (chapter 4, section 4.4)?

See chapter 15, for further information on measuring quality.

2.6 Storing and Managing Content

2.6.1 Make Product Data Retrievable

Data is no use if the customer cannot find it easily, so it will need to be retrievable by search facilities on your website that look at specified fields in your databases:

- Use database fields that allow you to relate the data item to others in the database, using product codes. Cross-refer these product codes to the customer 'interest' codes in the CRM database (chapter 6, section 6.2.4). This will be an important way for customer interests and content policies to be matched

- If the data comes from another owner, there may need to be a field that enables you to display the name or logo of the data owner

- Editorial can still be free and easy, but it must still be a data item, or series of data items, in the database. It can have any number of keyword associations

- Photographs and every clip of video should have a date, location name, geocode, topic keywords, short description, and long description. A picture caption should be written to form the basis of the alternate text (sometimes called the 'alt tag') if it is used on a website

All the data will need to observe your style and taxonomy rules.

Accurately coded data will also enable you to mash your data with partners, as in the example of the Yahoo Travel trip planner (section 3.5.1).

2.6.2 Create Multilingual Databases

Translation into the local language when a database item is displayed to a customer on your website needs careful preparation, working with a software architect.

- The name of the data item – the 'field' or 'label' – must be carefully defined in the DMO's local language according to your taxonomy rules. Then all the labels can be translated into all the languages used on your various websites. Take great care to use words in each language that have been equally carefully researched as being accurate and in line with international practice. Once done, this job need not be repeated

- Translation requirements can be minimised by careful design of the number and meaning of the database fields. This way, the labels do the work rather than the text which is in them. For example, if types of cuisine are an important factor in the destination's marketing, each cuisine should be a data field, instead of entering text denoting the cuisine into a single field

2.6.3 Geocodes, Geographic Information Systems, and Maps

Geocodes are the latitude-longitude coordinates of all the tourism products in your database. For destination websites, the search for and display of records usually depends at least in part on the geocodes.

The customer may have a preference for search results to be shown on a map, or as a simple text list. But in either case, the geocode is used for retrieval of geographically adjacent items that are otherwise not related – a restaurant near a self-catering cottage, for example.

An attractive optional extra is a Geographic Information System (GIS), software that enables the user to input, manage and output geographically referenced data. Typically, a GIS works in separate layers of map information such as roads, train stations, topography, beaches, hotels, or petrol stations.

A DMO website using a GIS will enable you to publish dynamic mapping, drawn from the database, on your site and to distribute this service to partner websites. Dynamic maps have user controls that allow the customer to select what they want to see – for example railways but not roads; or with castles and restaurants plotted on the map. Users can move across the map in any direction, zoom in and out, and see the information from your product database as they go along.

Licences for the geographic data, and the technical skills to build and run the user controls, can be expensive, so most DMOs will make use of specialists such as Google Maps, Mapquest or Multimap, unless they are part of a larger organisation with an in-house GIS team.

An example that makes maps a main platform for all its imagery and information is www.australia.com.[5]

With or without your own mapping, geocodes are thus vital:

*   For travel planning tools on your website

*   For mashing data from two or more sources

Be cautious about investing in static maps based on images. Unless they are confined to very simple schematic designs, they will need to be updated at regular intervals. Although they can be enlivened with Flash, they will lack interaction with the live product databases. (Chapter 3, section 3.5.1, has more about mashing and an example of how it works for mapping.)

Satnav is the prime example of how geocoded product databases can be used, and is perhaps the most important usage for the future. Destinations have the opportunity to ensure that the companies that provide information to satnav device vendors have all the information you would want them to offer about your area (chapter 9).

2.7 Content Management Systems (CMS)

A Content Management System (CMS) enables publishers to create, store and organise content, and to publish it to digital platforms. This may include their own and other people's websites, mobile phone websites and digital interactive television.

2.7.1 How a CMS Works

*   A CMS separates content and its presentation

*   Content comes from databases. These may be editorial content (often called 'articles') from the CMS database, or structured product databases containing media such as text, images, audio and video files, and document files. They may come from the DMO's own CMS and databases, or from those of external partners

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5   www.australia.com (29-10-2007).

- Presentation is carried out by templates, which are stored separately from the content

- It is the combination of selected content – usually several content items – and a selected template that defines how it is presented to the customer on any given platform

2.7.2 Benefits of a CMS

All reasonably complete CMSs will:

- Reduce the work needed to create and maintain a website. If text, a name or a picture needs changing, it is changed only once in the CMS system, even though it may appear in many different places

- Enable the destination to share content across a range of separate websites. These may include all your language/market/theme sites for customers, plus your sites for staff (intranet), the industry (extranet), and the media

- Allow many authors throughout an organisation to contribute and maintain content, without needing technical skills. Users can be given any combination of access and permission, so security and quality of the output can be controlled

- Maintain consistency of layout, by the use of standard input templates

- Help the users to insert metadata (tagging) for content items. This is essential for search engine optimisation (chapter 5), internal search, and accessibility. It also helps with site management, for example by noting the author and approval level, as well as quality control, for example by specifying the review date

- Help the destination to organise its content:

  – Editors should be able to see where a piece of content is to be used

  – Editors can look at a complete page and see where the pieces of content are coming from, even if they do not have rights to edit all the pieces

  – Items can be given an in-house name within the system that makes sense to the system users even though it may not to the outside audience, who will not see it

  – Relations between items can be set and will not be broken even if names are changed (which should be avoided nevertheless), because every item has a unique identifier within the system

  – Content can be annotated, with the notes being visible in some published versions but not others. For example, there may be a contact address in an organisation that is for staff use only. The template used for an intranet page can show this information, but the one for the customer-facing site hides it

- Allow the creation and amendment of templates for pages or parts of pages into which the content is fed. This provides consistency of style as well as saving time. The task usually requires more advanced skills

More sophisticated CMSs will:

- Provide a workflow system that defines the authoring and approval process for different kinds of user and content

- Provide staging before publishing, to synchronise interdependent new items

- Output the same content to other formats, for example to web, mobile device, or digital television

- Allow one site to be copied for other sites, using a master or 'parent' page or site to form the basis of a number of subsidiary 'child' sites (sometimes known as 'blueprinting'). The child can then be maintained in line with the parent. Local editors may change each of these child sites, perhaps to form a different language or market version, but changes that are made to the parent site will still cascade down. The editor of the child site will be alerted to any changes made and can accept, reject or amend them on their site as necessary

- Make version control easier, and provide 'roll-back' if needed, so that a site can revert to previous content, for example after an event. Audit trails will also record what content was authored and approved, when and by whom

- React to the website user actions, and serve content and presentation to rules set by the editor

- Provide management information to help plan the volume of work

2.7.3 Getting the Best out of Using a CMS

A CMS is essential for websites, but its introduction requires preparation, training and discipline among the staff who use it, especially concerning:

- Information architecture for the storage of items – this is not visible to the website user but is essential for the content and editing teams

- User and permission management

Installing a new CMS is beyond the scope of this handbook. But there are two points to remember:

- Start by being clear about what you want your CMS to do, not what the CMS might do

- The time and cost of implementing a CMS across the organisation is usually many times higher than the cost of the software licences

A CMS will usually need some customisation for your needs. If this is done by a third party or even by the system agent, any future versions of the software will require the same changes to be made again, and that will add significantly to costs.

Further information

Advice on choosing a CMS: http://www.cmsreview.com (27-10-2007).

News about CMS: http://www.cmswatch.com (27-10-2007).

CMS options in the market, how to get the best out of them, and training courses: http://www.e-consultancy.com (27-10-2007).

Quicksmart web usability digest, chaired by Stefan Karlsson: http://www.emojo.com/QuickSmart/Index.cfm (27-10-2007).

2.8 Building Content

2.8.1 Why DMOs Should Find Content Partners

A DMO is unlikely to have the resources to be able, on its own, to create and then maintain the range of content it needs. And even if it perhaps did, a self-contained DMO information collection and

distribution strategy is much too limiting when the internet's natural sharing capabilities are so huge, and still growing. For example, it is possible to use Google Maps on the DMO website, but equally possible to provide the DMO product data to Google Maps to use on their site. This is why a DMO should find content partners:

- Technically, tourism product data sharing is now easy and comparatively low-cost. There is no need for the data to be all in one place, provided that there are sharing agreements

- In most countries, the DMOs exist at national, regional, city and local level, and they each have strengths that they can apply to product data collection and management

- Major publishers and travel companies, whether their background is offline or online, have moved into gathering destination content. For example, Dorling Kindersley (DK) is to make its data available via multiple platforms. Among the DK content on offer are hundreds of travel guides covering all major destinations, maps and phrasebooks, from the *Eyewitness Travel Guides and Rough Guides* series[6]

- Often, national publishers with local publishing arms have the need, the resources and technical systems to aggregate data more easily than DMOs, even when there is a good partnership between local, regional and national DMOs

- The growth of UGC is a tremendous new resource (chapter 3)

2.8.2 How to Acquire the Content

DMO strategy should therefore be to survey the potential partners and then to divide resources between direct data collection and partnership-building.

Partnership working needs a commitment to create an open platform of shared content. This is a corporate issue for the DMO and relates also to its approach to e-commerce (chapter 8, section 8.7).

The platform will need to be:

- Designed for distributing the content as well as collecting it. It should be used by as many distribution channels – public and private – as possible. It should not be driven solely by a wish to build the DMO's website

- Designed to handle a flow of tourism product data in all directions – up from local sources, and down from central sources

In reviewing the types of organisation that might be potential content suppliers, factors will include:

- DMOs:

    – The DMO's place in the national tourism structure, and the respective current and potential abilities of local, regional and national DMOs to collect data. This will determine how much centralisation or decentralisation is best, in each product category

    – Most commercial and public-sector regional bodies will probably be better able to organise data capture and maintenance of information from independent SMEs such as tourist attractions and providers of specialist tourist services

    – Centralised head office action may sometimes be the quickest and lowest-cost option, especially to meet tactical needs when the marketers require a new topic to be covered at short notice

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6   Report by ETC New Media Review (2007) (Online), available: http://www.etcnewmedia.com/review/default.asp?SectionID=10&OverviewID=4 (26-8-2007).

- Commercial publishers:

  – Newspaper and magazine companies may have highly developed databases of events and places to serve their network of local, regional and national websites and publications

- National tourism suppliers:

  – Suppliers such as hotel groups can most efficiently pass their data to the national DMO, which can then distribute it to regional and local DMOs

  – Some national state-owned or voluntary groups may also be able to pass data in the same way (a Ministry of Culture, or a museums association, for example)

- Local and regional tourism organisations

Different business models may be needed for each topic:

- Produced in-house

- Contracted out

- Produced in partnership

- Bartered

- Bought

- Content distribution to partners for use by them on their websites and in other media, is covered in chapter 6, section 6.13

2.8.3 How to Acquire Geocodes

Many data gatherers generate geocodes from postcodes, but this method may be inaccurate, and will fail in some instances (mailbox numbers, for example), or may not exist at all (for a scenic spot).

- Make your tourism suppliers aware of the importance of knowing the exact geocode they want you to use – their car park entrance or customer front door for example, not the side entrance where the mail is delivered

- It can be captured by a handheld GIS device on site, or plotted manually, or imported from another database if you can be sure they have done it accurately

- Areas with designated boundaries, such as country parks, need to have their perimeter geocoded at intervals to form a 'polygon' of geocodes. This information is usually available from the local planning authority, but for areas created purely for marketing purposes, such as 'The Silk Road', it may need to be specially plotted. Tourist routes or trails also need plotting

2.9 Information about Accessible Visitor Facilities

It is not this book's task to look in detail at categories of information about access for people with special needs, and the needs will vary greatly from one destination to another. But all destinations should offer good information. This final section introduces one new initiative that uses online methods to improve the quality of data in this area.

2.9.1 What Does 'Accessible' Mean?

Accessibility is not just about helping disabled people, though this is obviously vital.

It is sometimes hard to decide whether it is a good idea to make a particular trip. For instance, 'Can we take the baby buggy everywhere around the building?' If you want to take young children, or if you are older and not disabled but perhaps rather infirm, or if you have a temporary or permanent disability, then you may need to think twice.

Without good information, you will not know whether there may be transport or architectural barriers, or if you can get the services you need.

This section deals with providing information for those with visual, aural, or mobility needs. The information may be about facilities – for example, ramps and hearing loops. Or it may be about services – for example, baby minding or children's menus. The objective is to help would-be visitors to decide whether to make a visit, and how.

2.9.2 Why Accessibility Information Is Worthwhile

- We should all believe in an inclusive society

- A welcome for all is the aspiration of all destinations

- In some countries, there is legislation covering access rights and this is likely to grow, so destinations should provide information about places that comply

- There is a growing need, and of course a commercial opportunity:

  – Those entering retirement are more active and often better off than their predecessors. They are likely to have travelled extensively in the past and will want to continue doing so when they have more time

  – The numbers of older people are large and growing rapidly. In 2000, there were 600 million people age 60+, triple the number in 1950. By 2050, there will be 2 billion. In the more developed regions, almost one-fifth of the population was aged 60 or older in 2000; by 2050, this is expected to reach one third. In the less developed regions, only 8% are currently over the age of 60 but by 2050 older persons will make up nearly 20% of the population. The fastest growing age group is those aged 80+; by 2050, one-fifth of older persons will be 80 years or older[7]

- The arguments are equally strong in all forms of tourism, for example for delegates at conferences or meetings

2.9.3 Information Collection

Information can be collected either by online questionnaires completed by the owner, or by inspection visits.

In some countries, there are already voluntary schemes. The ideal is for them to operate integrally with mainstream data collection and/or visits. They should cover access to accommodation, events, places to visit, toilets, and transport modes.

This example illustrates one workable online solution.

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[7]   UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economic Division (2002), *World Population Ageing 1950-2050* (Online), available: http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050 (03-08-2005).

One-Stop Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe (OSSATE)

OSSATE has been part of the European Union (EU) e-content Programme, with partners from Belgium, Greece, the United Kingdom, Austria, Norway, and Denmark.

One of its pilots defined what information was most needed, then collected information from businesses using an online questionnaire. The findings are displayed in about 35 fields on websites, covering serviced, self-catering and attractions databases:

Figure 2.1 OSSATE accessibility data displayed on the Leicestershire, England website (www.roomcheck.co.uk/ossate/CMS/property/2500036_.htm)

In future, this additional information will be collected as part of the mainstream data collection process.

It is a self-assessment process, so it is not entirely reliable. But the self-completion questions are designed to be as clear and unambiguous as possible. There are no standards or fixed criteria, just descriptive data fields, mostly with yes/no answers: for example 'Are there steps to the entrance?', with a yes/no answer. And 'If yes, how many?' No measurements, of doorway widths for example, are requested.

There are few costs, and so it is hoped to achieve near to 100% coverage for these product types. In pilots in 2006-2007, up to 85% of serviced accommodation returned the self-completion questionnaire, up to 40% of self-catering accommodation, and up to 46% of visitor attractions.

There is also a separate optional paid-for verification by experts, which does award a standard; this runs in parallel with the national optional star rating scheme. Visitors thus have a wide choice of places with self-assessed information, and a narrower choice of verified places.

OSSATE see their service as a first-step information source for customers, helping them to shortlist their options before they find out more, direct from the businesses.

Results are displayed on national and regional websites, and on www.europeforall.com and www.visiteurope.com.

By courtesy of Andrew Daines, VisitBritain. For more information see www.ossate.org.

2.10 Content – Measures of Success

- Open content platform established

- Priority target market segments identified, with personas, and reviewed annually

- All key product topics identified against CRM customer interests, and covered

- Video and picture libraries cover all destination topics, with tags

- Data and editorial hard and soft quality standards met (section 2.5)

- National, regional and local partners engaged

- Accessible information programme deployed

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 3

Social Networking
and User-generated Content (UGC)

Key Messages

- Social networks are a new and powerful arena for destination marketers

- Destinations should actively encourage the creation of user-generated content about the destination

- Equally, they should use it in their own communication channels, and integrate it with their own content

3.1 Why Social Networks and UGC Are so Important

Chapter 1, gives an overview of web 2.0, social networking, the growth of user-generated content, and travel 2.0.

People's initial travel decisions are driven chiefly by brand image and by recommendation. This chapter is about how recommendation has very quickly become a major online consideration for everyone in the travel industry, in the face of the new phenomenon of internet users taking ownership of the web, exploiting the medium for social networking, creating their own user-generated content and sharing it very widely.

For DMOs used to providing tourist information as a core part of their work, this is a challenge. It is impossible to forecast the extent to which UGC might replace the well-ordered databases of the DMOs. It is also difficult to forecast how much the social networks will supplant conventional distribution. Certainly UGC will utterly change their information function. In a 2007 survey, 73% of travel companies said they planned to invest in social media in the coming year.[1]

Personal recommendation is the underlying new value in social networking and UGC. It is the customer's first and favoured source of information. DMOs have usually steered clear of offering recommendations in the past because it might damage their perceived impartiality (both to the customer and the tourism suppliers) and thus their official status.

The best strategy is to work fully with the new trend so that it complements the effort that destinations themselves make to collect authoritative, well-structured information.

There are three drivers of user-generated content that destination content planners can make use of:

- Commercial UGC sites: There are major commercial website operators, owned by giant global companies, who have stepped in to host UGC in a structured way (such as TripAdvisor), and many smaller players too

- Tagging: Much of the UGC is tagged (section 3.9) by the users – thus potentially joining up blogs, ordinary websites, podcasts (chapter 9, section 9.12) and RSS feeds (chapter 6, section 6.13). And the users share this tagging among themselves. The tags oil the wheels of UGC

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1   Online Marketing Show (2007) (Online), available: http://www.onlinemarketingshow.co.uk/ (1-4-2007).

- Blogging: There are over 70 million[2] personal, community and business blogs (running your own blogs is dealt with in section 3.6 below, and corporate blogs in chapter 11, section 11.5.2)

3.2 Commercial Sites that Host Structured UGC

tripadvisor®
get the truth. then go.™

UGC sites are not a new idea. Travel sites like IgoUgo and TripAdvisor have been around for several years. And readers' book reviews on Amazon form a key part of the site's usefulness.

What is new is:

- The number of contributors

- The amount they are putting in (posting)

- The informal but very effective tagging facilities

- The breakthrough they have achieved as authoritative sources of recommendations and advice. Authoritative, because each author's comments are seen by other readers as a personal view, and there are many mechanisms that allow readers to sort the comments according to the type of people who made them – 'people like me'

A survey has found that travellers may trust user-generated reviews more than they trust travel agents' content: 20% of respondents said websites like TripAdvisor were the most reliable source of information. Only 12% said travel agents' own websites were the most reliable, followed by 11% who chose search engines.[3]

Examples of the structured UGC site model include:

- www.myspace.com, owned by News Corporation (June 2007), includes video channels from *National Geographic*

- Google's www.youtube.com had 16 million visitors and joined the comScore Top 50 for the first time (August 2006).[4] There's an active Travel & Places category – with 25 videos tagged 'Italian Lakes' for example (May 2007). There are local sites in the United States of America, Brazil, France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. There is no bar on uploading corporate videos, so YouTube should be on every destination's video distribution list

"Consumers trust information written by their peers, and use it to make decisions"

TripAdvisor

"TripAdvisor is all about real advice from real travellers", says Nathan Clapton, brand distribution director. "It is the world's largest travel community. In 2007, we doubled the number of reviews and opinions on our sites from 5 million to 10 million.

TripAdvisor Media Network, with nearly 30 million monthly visitors, offers easy access to everything you need and want to know about travel. We recently acquired six travel media sites to better meet all the needs of the travel community – SmarterTravel, BookingBuddy, CruiseCritic, SeatGuru, TravelPod, and TravelLibrary.

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2   Technorati Inc. (2007), *State of the Blogosphere* (Online), available: http:/www.sifry.com/stateoftheliveweb (1-5-2007).

3   Nielsen/NetRatings (2007) (Online), available: http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/ (1-2-2007).

4   comScore Media Metrix (2007) (Online), available: http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=982 (25-9-2007).

In a recent Forrester survey,[5] 87% of travellers said that they trusted consumer reviews. This was a higher level than any other form of marketing communication. TripAdvisor has rapidly grown in a few years to become the world's largest travel community by becoming the comprehensive source of real time information about all things travel."

The sites are now available in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian. All hotels are ranked by customer satisfaction through proprietary algorithm. In DMO terms, TripAdvisor is a travel guidebook for 28,000 destinations, providing quick answers and advice from fellow travellers as well as access to great deals from trusted travel partners.

Examples of TripAdvisor travel tools are:

- TripAdvisor is already using Google maps to plot its recommended hotels: see www.tripadvisor.com/Resources-g187147-Maps-Paris_Ile_de_France.html and follow the 'Map our Most Popular Hotels' link

- 'Traveller Network' helps you quickly to uncover a network of travel 'experts', people who you already know, so you can base your travel decisions on the opinions of those who share your travel tastes. The Network is designed to save time by helping users to prioritise from among TripAdvisor's more than 10 million reviews and opinions based on relevance to each user

- 'TripWatch' offers customised time-sensitive e-mail alerts about the specific hotels, attractions and cities requested by the traveller

TripAdvisor receives thousands of positive – and negative – reviews each week. Every review is screened prior to posting and there are proprietary tools to help detect fraudulent reviews. The legitimacy of review authors is also periodically confirmed.

TripAdvisor is making its reviews and ratings available on partner sites, for example on www.thomson.co.uk.

By courtesy of TripAdvisor (partners@tripadvisor.com).

Other examples of UGC sites are:

- Lonely Planet (http://haystack.lonelyplanet.com) lists properties picked and recommended by Lonely Planet, with customer reviews also added; and they are bookable on the site

- Pricelines (www.priceline.com) combines its own hotel star ratings and user reviews with reviews and extra listings of restaurants and attractions in 600 cities. Priceline plans free printable 'Travel Capsule' city guides, which are electronically delivered to customers who have booked trips. They include ratings and reviews

- Where Are You Now (www.wayn.com) is a global social networking site for travellers. Mostly used by younger age groups, it has several million subscribers who can exchange travel plans and journals, upload pictures, and arrange to meet, using e-mail, SMS, instant messaging, forums and chat

3.3 Targeting the Right UGC Communities

General-interest networks such as YouTube and MySpace have thousands of special-interest groups within them. There is some indication that substantial separate 'vertical' communities for special-interest groups are developing. TripAdvisor is already a 'vertical'.

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5   Base: 470 responses recruited from PlanetFeedback.com members (TripAdvisor, October 2007).

Facebook (www.facebook.com), in which Microsoft acquired a stake in 2007, allows users, through an application called Trips, to get in touch with other Facebook users to plan trips.

It seems likely that many more specialised communities will develop, within or independent of the major players. In tourism these may be about activities, destinations, or they may centre on lifestyle groups.

In considering demographic, lifestyle or other segment targeting, it is too early to say whether sites or sections within sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Tagzania, Gusto, Wikia, Boardingate, and RealTravel will develop clearly differentiated participants. If they do, they form target markets that take no account of national boundaries, but they are likely to be based on the language used.

Forrester Research[6] has categorised consumers based on how they use social media. European online consumers are broken down into those who publish (9%), comment (18%), network (1%), gather information (12%), listen (49%) and ignore all these activities (41%). French users are most likely to read blogs and reviews, while the Dutch are by far the most active users, publishing the most blogs and webpages. The Spanish like to comment and Italians gather information, while Germans are inclined to ignore most social media. The United Kingdom users are mainly networkers who prefer to visit social media sites and make occasional comments.

Social network users have little loyalty to sites such as MySpace and Facebook, another survey found,[7] with nearly half having profiles on multiple sites.

Networking sites have also been reported to be split along socio-economic divides.[8]

3.4 UGC Opportunities for Destinations

It has been estimated that nearly 70% of the digital universe will be generated by individuals by 2010, and that most of this content will be facilitated by an organisation along the way – on a network, in a data centre, at a hosting site, telephone or internet switch, or in a backup system.[9]

Publishers, businesses, governments, agencies and associations will be responsible for the security, privacy, reliability and compliance of the information they host.

DMOs, therefore, are in an ideal position. Their job falls into two parts:

• To encourage more UGC creation about the DMO's destination

• To make use of this content on the DMO's own website and other sites

> **Malaysia – "showcasing My Discoveries stories to draw click-through to a specific story"**
>
> Malaysia's target audience is potential travellers who do not yet know much about Malaysia but would consider travelling to Asia for an 'exotic' holiday.
>
> The global Malaysian Stories campaign started in 2003-2004 on CNN, with a global print title – TIME Magazine – and a dedicated website.
>
> Says Johar Adnan of Tourism Malaysia: "After 2004, instead of Malaysians providing information, we twisted almost 360 degrees by publishing stories from real travellers as they journey throughout Malaysia, detailing their personal experiences to share with fellow travellers."

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6   Forrester Research, http://www.forrester.com, reported by *Revolution*, June 2007.

7   Parks Associates, http://www.parksassociates.com, reported by *Revolution*, June 2007.

8   University of Berkeley, http://www.berkeley.edu/, reported by *Revolution*, June 2007.

9   IDC (2007) (Online), available: http://www.idc.com.

The My Discoveries theme on Tourism Malaysia http://malaysia.travel/consumer/discoveries was part of an MSN, Yahoo and Google online banner campaign across the globe, showcasing My Discoveries stories to draw click-through response to that specific story. Google Adwords drove attention to specific components of the stories, for example, honeymooning at Langkawi beach.

This was supported by a monthly e-newsletter: http://malaysia.travel/consumer/newsletter/default.asp.

"Destinations can only succeed if their website is treated as part of the above-the-line campaign," advises Johar. "Today, a website is no longer an information platform but rather a strong marketing tool to promote the country."

"Our aim is to create an online experience that compels the website visitor to take a trip, by entertaining and storytelling that can engage potential tourists while relaying information and emotion – a multimedia experience allowing them to view commercials as well as videos of real stories from real travellers who have journeyed through Malaysia."

Figure 3.1 'Real stories from real people' on the Tourism Malaysia website

Results

Since the launch in November 2005, page views increased from 7.6 million in 2004 to 11.5 million in 2005, and 20.2 million in 2006. In 2006, Discoveries was in the top 10 pages on the site.

By courtesy of Johar Adnan, Tourism Malaysia (www.virtualmalaysia.com).

Think hard before you embark on putting your own UGC functions into your site. Will you really attract a sufficient volume of user comment to make your site more attractive than one of the commercial sites? How quickly can you move compared to how rapidly they might develop? What promotional backing can you give it? Can you get plugged into the same social networks that they thrive on?

Before you plunge in, there are simpler and very cost-effective actions to consider:

3.4.1 UGC Opportunity No.1 – Encourage It

Online media work well for those who are identified as 'influencers'.[10] For influencers on the subject of air travel, the survey showed that the most important sources of information are websites (45%), e-mail newsletters (25%), website advertisements (24%) and search engines (20%), compared with magazines and newspapers (20%) and word of mouth (18%).

So encourage all your customers to be influencers and to create UGC recommendations, tips and information and to tag them:

- On your own website, ask customers to tag your pages. On every page, put clickable icons to the main bookmarking services that are prominent in your source markets. These will vary by market. So each of your own main source market websites should have its own selections of bookmarking services. (This is also yet another reason for having dedicated versions of the destination website in every market)

- Ask customers to remember to post their opinions on their favourite site. Encourage them to elaborate on their experience. A (very ambitious) example is the New York to Buenos Aires one-man motorbike trip chronicled at www.buenayork.com[11]

- If necessary, help to start up an 'unofficial' site and then link to it. Starwood Hotels, for example, links to an unofficial website (www.starwoodlobby.com) that was started by two Starwood customers[12]

- Make UGC a high visibility feature of your marketing campaigns

3.4.2 UGC Opportunity No. 2 – Host It or Mash It

[The wider aspects of online distribution are in chapter 6, section 6.13.]

There is a critical mass of UGC to be achieved before it is very useful. It needs to be recent and timely, and posted by 'people like me' as well as covering the right topic. There need to be several postings for it to be seen by the user as fully credible.

The emergence of huge global travel communities hosted by multi-national companies makes it a major challenge for destinations to attract a worthwhile amount of user participation in their own systems.

Even if there is no UGC host operating effectively in your key markets, it is likely to be best to try to create a partnership with a UGC site to which you can offer added value. Look for extra value opportunities for the customer:

- Mutual mash-ups – the UGC partner's content and yours, blended together to give the customer an improved service with more and better information (see 3.5.1)

- Reciprocal distribution of content, on both their site and yours and to third parties

- Even stronger customer reassurance through the visibility of both brands and their complementary strengths. In some cases, however, a partner may be more ready to accept your content if you are prepared to supply it in white label (unbranded) form. If the distribution is valuable enough, this could be worth doing

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10   Doubleclick (2006), *December 2006 Survey* (Online), available: http://www.doubleclick.com.

11   One Man, One Motorbike, from Buenos Aires to New York (2007) (Online), available: http://www.buenayork.com (26-8-2007).

12   Clement Wong, *Travel and Tourism Manager EMEA for Euromonitor International*, reported by TravelMole http://www.travelmole.com, July 2007.

One major travel company, Thomson (part of TUI), is already hosting destination and hotel reviews on the Thomson Holidays website (see TripAdvisor case study).[13]

Working with partners leads us on to our next subject, mash-ups.

Further information

Doubleclick (2006), *Influencing the Influencers: How Online Advertising and Media Impact Word of Mouth* (Online), available: www.doubleclick.com/us/knowledge_central/research/advertising (3-8-2007).

3.5 Mash-ups and Widgets Make New Experiences

3.5.1 Mash-ups

'Mash-ups' combine content from two or more different sources to create an enhanced service for the customer. They work when a business with some clever software and/or content wants to share it openly. The facility they provide is called an open application programming interface (open API), and it allows one computer programme to ask for services from another.

This even works for the public as individuals: companies such as Del.icio.us, Flickr, YouTube, and Google allow people to create their own combined services.

The most obvious opportunities for destinations are with mapping and UGC partners that have open APIs:

- TripAdvisor is already using Google maps to plot its recommended hotels (see TripAdvisor case study)

- Yahoo Travel's Trip Planner (http://travel.yahoo.com/trip) uses Flickr's open API to allow users to add in the photographs they have already loaded on to Flickr (Flickr is a UGC site that enables people to load, search for, sort and share their own and other people's photographs)

It is easy to see how destination data could enhance these and other UGC services and increase your profile.

'England Rocks'

This 'music map' uses Google Maps' API. Produced by Enjoy England, the domestic marketing brand of VisitBritain, it points to music venues, artist locations, and gig venues. A cool jukebox directory lets you flip through locations and musical notes, and you can listen to great tracks that are associated with each location.

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13 Directline Holidays (2007) (Online), available: http://www.directline-holidays.co.uk/Thomson-Signs-Deal-With-TripAdvisor-Thomson-Holidays-092 (26-8-2007).

Figure 3.2 Enjoy England "music map"

By courtesy of VisitBritain (www.enjoyEngland.com/rocks).

3.5.2 Widgets

'Widgets' – and especially travel widgets – are lightweight tools that the ordinary user can use on the site that provided the tool, or add to a convenient third-party site or their own blog. The term is used by computer programmers for the elements of their programmes (the check-box functionality on a webpage, for example).

Widgets are yet more evidence of how ordinary web users are steadily assuming the ability to create their own online presence.

Examples of widget applications are for car journey sharing (Facebook's Carpool offers this, for instance), travel to-do lists and weather comparisons. They can allow users to gather information on any chosen topic. Use of widgets spreads via social networking, and the widgets' contents are thus also spread.

Widgets allow destinations to create and distribute mini-platforms for comment and exchange of information on as many key topics as they wish.

> **Further information**
>
> Widgets for bloggers: www.widgetbox.com (26-8-2007).

3.6 How to Blog

3.6.1 First, Can We Define a Blog?

To many bloggers the attraction of running a blog (short for web log) is that it is whatever its author or group of authors want to make it. It is a platform that cannot be defined. But blog characteristics usually include:

- A diary format, in reverse order

- Unfiltered content, more about conversation than content. If it is moderated, it is not a blog

- Comments, from anyone

- Links to and from whatever the blogger is concerned with

- Short extracts – or sometimes more – of other people's content

- An informal, often anarchical tone

3.6.2 What Are Blogs for, and Are They Important for Destination Marketing?

A blog might seek to persuade, provoke, entertain, inform, be useful or just be a conversation between friends.

For destinations, blogs are important because:

- Two-thirds of blog readers do not realise they are reading a blog.[14] They do not distinguish between a website and a blog. Therefore if blogging is big, there is bound to be blogging about travel, and that will affect destinations

- Blogging is very big at present: in April 2007 there were 70 million blogs, more than double the number of a year before. About 120,000 new blogs were being created each day, and 1.5 million items posted to them every day, according to Technorati,[15] which tracks and indexes them for bloggers. Whether blogging is here to stay as a significant major channel is less certain

- Video, audio and photographs are used just as much as text, so blogs are in the media that are important to destinations. Video blogs are sometimes called vlogs

- Blogging is not a US-centric habit either – Technorati found that Japanese is the number one language at 37% of all blogs, English second at 33%, Chinese third at 8%, and Italian fourth at 3%. Farsi was a newcomer in the top 10 in 2007 at 1%

Figure 3.3 Technorati report of blog posts by language, Quarter 4, 2006 (%)[16]
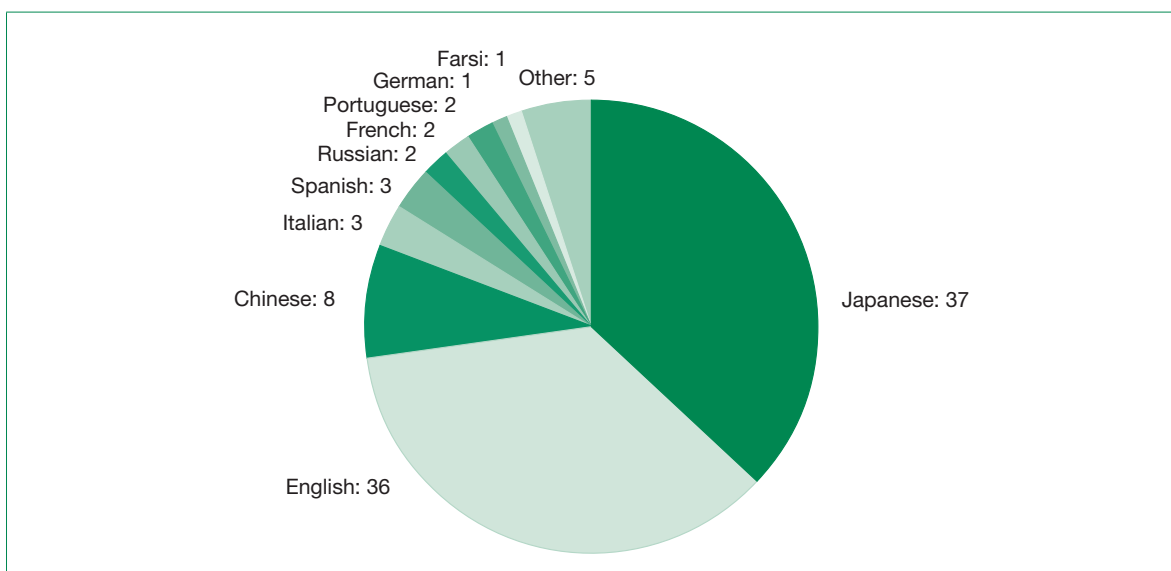
Source: Technorati, 2006

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14   Nielsen/Netratings (2007).

15   Technorati, Inc. (2007) (Online), available: http://www.technorati.com.

16   Technorati, Inc. (2007).

Although corporate blogs are a contradiction in terms for a true blogger, they can still help you to have a conversation with an audience in a way that is a genuine supplement to all the other communication channels in use.

3.6.3 The Benefits

If it is done well, each blog can:

- Be a direct channel between the destination and one of your target audiences. Keep each of your blogs to a well defined topic, event or audience; generalised content will just do what your main website should be doing, and not do it as well

- Provoke a real two-way conversation

- Help the DMO to perform its twin roles of co-ordinator and leader of the destination

- Provide immediacy – especially helpful when dealing with fast-breaking news or a crisis

- Present a human face for your DMO, and a perception as more honest and untouched by public relations spin

There are many parallels between blogging and viral marketing (chapter 6, section 6.8).

3.6.4 Best Blog Ideas

- Find a member of staff who is a genuine, frequent, and rather expert holiday taker in your destination. Ask them to blog about what they have done and are planning, and to invite others to contribute. This blogger could hand over to a new person every month

- Appoint a member of the DMO's frontline walk-in information office staff, who serves customers face-to-face every day, to recount their FAQs and the unusual and entertaining questions that tourist office staff always get asked. They can retell visitors' happy stories, provide tips on what is good, and advise on what needs avoiding

- Start a blog to support a specific campaign that has a very clear target group who can be invited into the blog via the DMO e-newsletter

- Sponsor a professional travel writer, who specialises in your destination, to start a blog

3.6.5 'Do's' and 'Don'ts'

- Do:

    - Be ready to start up when you have a hot issue, and drop it when it runs out of steam. Most blogs live and die quickly

    - Identify your blogs honestly as corporately-run, or they will soon be condemned by other bloggers as 'flogging' (fake blogging). Embedding them in the main destination website may be the most honest, and cheapest, option

    - Scrap the blog if you cannot create a new post once or twice a week, or attract one

    - Achieve the personal touch, or you will be duplicating other DMO communications

    - Empower staff to be your bloggers, but guide them carefully about how the brand values need to be projected

- Don't:
  - Be misleading – it will be quickly exposed through search engines and circulated by the blog community
  - Fall into legal pitfalls such as defamation that a corporate blog will need to take more seriously than an individual might

Examples of DMO blog are www.enjoyengland.com/blog and Holland.com which features stories of local residents at http://citybreaks.holland.com. A special-feature weblog promotes citybreaks at http://www.holland.com/uk/index.html?page=http://www.holland.com/uk/deals/calumbest/calumwinner.html.

DMO blogs have, so far, all tended to be written, edited and controlled by the DMO's own staff, and are some way from being true blogs that fully serve the desire for independent recommendations.

Further information

A Google-owned site gives an explanation of blogs and how to set one up: www.blogger.com (27-10-2007).

A free collection of online travel diaries for travellers across the world: www.travelblog.org (27-10-2007).

3.7 Make Wikis Work for You

3.7.1 What Is a Wiki?

Wiki is Hawaiian for 'quick'. Wikis allow anyone to create or edit web content, with links and easily-created new pages, and cross-links between pages in the wiki. They also allow the categories and sections to be edited. This instant publishing is in contrast to the long string of actions that are involved in traditional publishing, in print or on the web.

The biggest is www.wikipedia.com, and the largest in travel is http://wikitravel.org. Another example is www.world66.com.

3.7.2 How Can Destinations Use Them?

Wikis are a great opportunity for destinations:

- They allow visitors and would-be visitors to pool their knowledge

- DMO staff can contribute just as easily and legitimately

Visitors to Paris can, for example go straight to http://wikitravel.org/en/Paris,[17] click on the Edit link and start writing.

Actions for destinations:

- Identify the wikis that are important in each market

- Spend a little time enlarging, adding pictures, and perhaps correcting these wikis. Do not try to replicate your website, but at least ensure that the basics are there

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17   (26-8-2007).

- Probably more important, ask your customers to add to these wikis. Do it by mentioning them on your website and especially in your e-newsletters

- If there is no wiki that suits, start one of your own. It is an ideal opportunity for staff and friends to work on something together

Do not be too put off by reports of inaccuracy: a study by a British scientific journal found that Wikipedia comes close to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in terms of accuracy.[18]

3.8 Put Your Picture Up in More Places

Photo-sharing sites such as www.photobucket.com (part of News Corporation) and www.flickr.com (part of Yahoo) with their vast numbers of users are a good place for destination marketers to lodge some of their best pictures.

- As with other social networking site activities, accurate tagging, as well as good descriptive captions that link on to related topics on your own site, are the keys to getting distribution value. For example, there were 179,000 pictures on Flickr with a 'Kenya' tag, with 1,100 of these in the 'Masaimara' cluster. Flickr also allows geotagging; there were 200 geotagged pictures that also had a 'Kenya' tag.[19]

Use the same search terms that have been identified for your SEO campaigns: find photos that bring them to life, then ensure these terms are in the tags and descriptions

3.9 Tagging

Tagging is the attachment of searchable keywords by individuals or website owners to online content – pages, copy, or images. Users can tag their own content, or anyone else's.

Thus, tags are a social tool, allowing for example, members of a club, or a group of friends, or a team of researchers, to agree on a tag in advance.

Over a third of UGC is reported to carry users' tags. This 'social bookmarking' is one of the things that makes UGC (and any webpage for that matter) easy to use.

Bookmarking is especially useful for research, and for sharing research. Thus it is a natural way for customers to do their holiday planning and, after their trip, their album-making.

Tagging is equally important on regular websites. It lets the website user find, save and sort their own content and other people's:

- Users can make up as many one-word tags as they wish to assign to a bookmark, and rename or delete them later. There are no preconceived categories or folders

- Users can store and share bookmarks on a website, instead of inside their browser, so they can get to the tagged content from anywhere – at home, work, or on a friend's computer

- Bookmarks can be shared publicly, so that friends, co-workers, and other people can view them for reference, amusement, collaboration, or anything else. Or the bookmarks can be kept private

- Users can find other people's interesting bookmarks, and add those links to their own. Thus, everyone has access to the links that everyone else wants to remember, whether two people or 2,000

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18   *Nature Report* (2005) quoted by Wikipedia (Online), available: http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikipedia_and_Britannica_about_as_accurate_in_science_entries,_reports_Nature (26-8-2007).

19   Flickr (Online), available: http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/masaimara/clusters (26-8-2007).

- Geo-tagging with the latitude and longitude means that items can be plotted on maps and be associated in text lists. The geocodes can be generated automatically by location-sensitive mobile phones and uploaded with pictures to sites like Flickr, Photobucket and YouTube

'Tag clouds' allow users to navigate easily to the best combination of tags. The cloud displays all a site's tag topics, with the tags shown in sizes that reflect the number of users of the tag. An example of use of tag clouds and links to bookmarking services is the US site of the Netherlands Board of Tourism (http://us.holland.com). Users (normally registered users only) can add new tags.

Many sites provide a bookmark hosting service. Examples are www.digg.com, http://del.icio.us, and www.google.com/reader.

Further information

Reactive (2007), *Web 2.0 for Travel and Tourism* (Online), available: http://blogs.reactive.com/Request Whitepaper.aspx (9-8-2007).

3.10 Social Networking and UGC – Measures of Success

Examples of measures of success of social networking include:

- Number of visitors viewing UGC content on your site

- Numbers of visitors viewing UGC content on third-party sites where the DMO has a partnership arrangement

- Number of blogs identified or created as supportive of the destination, with volume of traffic where available

- Specific statistics on, for example, blog activity

- Tags

- Volume of tags created by users in DMO website

- Volume of tags that support DMO Search engine optimization (SEO) keywords that are present in UGC sites in key source markets

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Holland 2.0   'Join. Share. Learn. Grow'

With the Holland.com website http://us.holland.com, the New York office of the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) aim to build the most powerful web 2.0 resource for North American travellers to Holland.

Registered users are invited to join a mutually beneficial community. "The objectives of Holland 2.0," says Charel van Dam, NBTC's Marketing and PR Director for North America, "are to become the on-line community for the North American market for travel to and in Holland and for Holland lifestyle topics. We aim to provide a platform for consumers and trade, to share stories, ideas and services about Holland, and to increase actual travel to Holland."

How does Holland 2.0 work?

- Multiple feed system from the NBTC, the Dutch travel trade, visitors, XML feeds such as Flickr, YouTube, Google News, and YahooTravel, are all geared to provide the best, most accurate and up to date information available

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- Registered users can add content: articles, video and images. They can tag entries, subscribe, send messages to other users, and customise their own profile. They can also save favourite content in My Suitcase, which they can print as a brochure

- All new content is geo-tagged, placing it on the integrated Google Maps

- Navigation is mainly done through a tag cloud, an automated system indicating the most popular items on the site

Future developments

The island of 'New Holland' was launched in Second Life in September 2007. The island showcases some typical Dutch sites and has a strong connection to the 'first life' site http://us.holland.com

First results

- Overall, there are very positive reactions from both consumers and web 2.0 experts. The vast amount of information and images, and how they are presented, are experienced as great assets of the site. The tag cloud navigation is not always expected on a travel website and takes some time to get used to

- In the first two and a half months, the numbers were going up steadily; in September 2007 there was an increase of 24% compared to June

Figure 3.4 Tag cloud (left) on the home page of http://www.holland.com/us
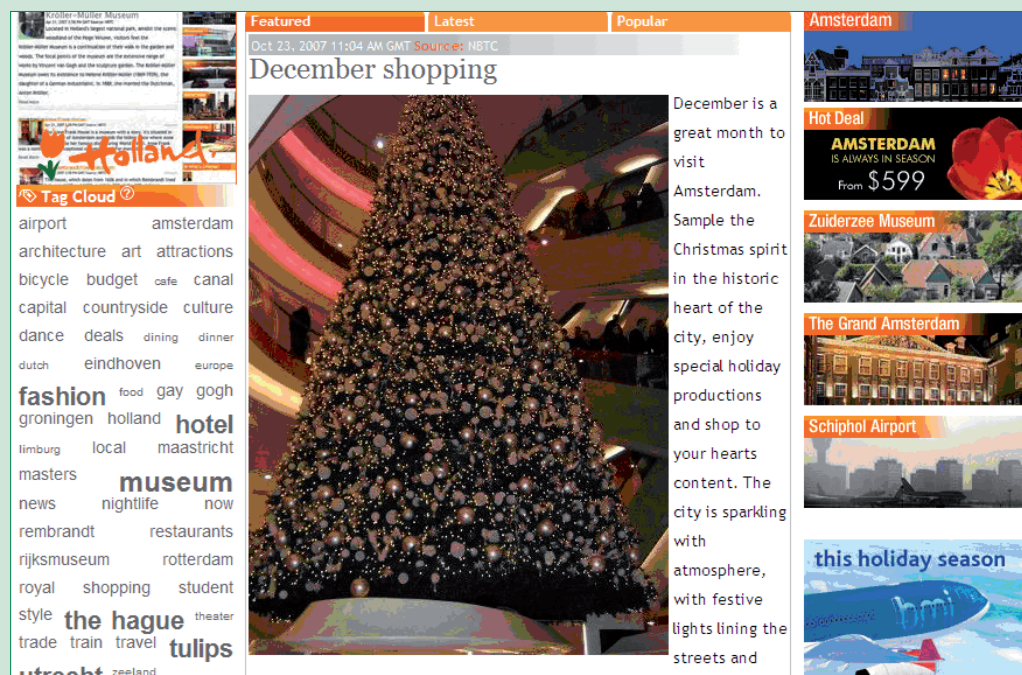
By courtesy of Conrad van Tiggelen, Director North America, and Charel van Dam, Marketing and PR Director of Director North America, NBTC.

See also References and Bibliography.

Make a Winning Website –
The Keys to Success

Key Messages

- Make accessibility the basis for website quality

- Follow research-based guidelines to create an easy-to-use website that builds trust and identity – or optimise your current site using the guidelines

- Create a website that smoothes the path right through the 'customer journey' or 'experience cycle' of the internet user

- Think in terms of services – delivered and fulfilled by the content and functionality

- Make testing a part of the design and development process, as well as part of the evaluation of existing sites

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about what makes a quality website, determines its effectiveness, and thus leads to success. Some aspects are illustrated here by examples and case studies. Others need more detailed treatment, given in following chapters.

These are the critical aspects:

- Accessibility

- Identity and trust

- Customisation and interactivity

- Navigation

- Search engine optimisation (SEO)

- Technical performance

All web activities are services, and winning websites provide the best service possible. Successful e-marketing starts with willingness to be of service. That is why this chapter introduces the concepts of:

- Information services

- Contact services

- Relationship services

- Transaction services

- Entertainment services

There is more information about these concepts and categories of quality and critical success factors in the UNWTO publication *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch*.[1] And plenty of advice and examples can be found below and in the following chapters.

4.2 Smooth the 'Customer Journey'

Your website should smooth the path through the 'customer journey' or 'experience cycle' – right through from dreaming about possible holidays, through to enthusing others to make the same trip, and maybe deciding to make a repeat visit (see chapter 1, section 1.2).

Your service should therefore encompass everything from the highlights of the destination and recommendations for those still in the decision-making process, through to uploading holiday pictures after the trip and buying souvenirs online.

Think in terms of services that make the journey easy and enjoyable. It is essential to building a winning website.

4.3 Make Accessibility the Basis for Website Quality

Accessibility means unrestricted access to a site for people and the devices they use.

To be a quality, user-friendly, successful website a site has to:

- Comply with the guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C WAI)

- Have valid markup (computer language or source code of the website) and interfaces that are accessible to all kinds of user, and all the devices they use

- Meet legal and best-practice standards in your country and the countries it will be used in

4.3.1 It Is Right for Customers, and It Is Good for Business

- All users need to be able to perceive, understand, navigate, interact, and contribute. This includes people of all ages with disabilities or reduced vision, hearing or memory. They are at least 10% of the population in most countries. And there is a rapidly growing market of older people

- Webpages that are fully accessible to users are usually also easily accessible to search engine crawlers or spiders such as Google's, which automatically index your site. They are likely to rate a site higher when it is properly accessible

- When your site is accessible it will take into account the visual, hearing, physical, speech, cognitive and neurological limitations, multiple disabilities and age-related conditions of users. It will also be usable in a variety of ways and will not be reliant on a single sense or ability of the user

4.3.2 Barriers to Avoid

There are many barriers you can avoid with good design and planning. For example, people who are blind rely on a screen reader. This is software that reads text on the screen and outputs it to a speech synthesiser, refreshable Braille display, or text-based browser or voice browser, instead of a reader.

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1   World Tourism Organization (2005), *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch*, UNWTO, Madrid.

There are clear guidelines produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), a non-profit organisation that connects research bodies, government organisations and commercial partners.

W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) works on technology, guidelines, tools, education and outreach, research and development (www.w3c.org/wai).[2]

Here are the design principles of WAI's most recent Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), version 2.0, and some examples of what they mean in practice.

4.3.2.1 Principle 1: Content Must Be Perceivable

WCAG guidelines:

- Provide text alternatives for all non-text content. This is the text that should appear when you roll your mouse over an image. Screen readers rely on it

- Provide synchronised alternatives for multimedia. For example, video must be described in text or audio

- Ensure that information, functionality and structure are separable from presentation. For example:

  - Fonts must be scalable

  - Coloured text, if used as a marker to emphasise a point, must not be difficult to read or prevent machine reading

  - Complex images such as graphs and charts must be adequately described

  - Tables need to make sense when read serially (in a cell-by-cell way)

  - People with poor vision who use extra-large monitors and associated functions should be able, for example, to increase font and image size, and override author style sheets. Style sheets describe how documents are presented on screens and in print. Cascading style sheets (CSS) are a widely used mechanism for adding style, such as fonts, colours, and spacing, to web documents

  - Pages need a consistent layout so that, when enlarged and surrounding context cannot be seen, they are still easy to navigate

- Make it easy to distinguish foreground information from background images or sounds. For example:

  - Provide good contrast between text and background

  - Make it easy for users to change the contrast by overriding the author style sheets

4.3.2.2 Interface Elements in the Content Must Be Operable

WCAG guidelines:

- Make all functionality operable via a keyboard or a keyboard interface. For example, it must be possible to turn off distracting visual or audio easily

- Allow users to control time limits on reading or interaction

- Allow users to avoid content that could cause photosensitive epileptic reactions

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2   (3-8-2007).

- Provide mechanisms to help users find content, orientate themselves within it, and navigate through it

- Help users avoid mistakes and make it easy to correct them

4.3.2.3 Principle 3: Content and Controls Must Be Understandable

WCAG guidelines:

- Ensure that the meaning of content can be determined. Do not use unnecessarily complex language (section 4.4)

- Organise content consistently from page to page and make interactive components behave in predictable ways

4.3.2.4 Principle 4: Content Must Be Robust enough to Work with Current and Future Technologies

WCAG guidelines:

- Use technologies according to specification

- Ensure that user interfaces are accessible or provide accessible alternatives

In summary, you, your developers, and your editorial team must avoid setting up these barriers and make sure that your site is open to the technologies used by people with special needs.

4.3.3 WAI Levels and Marks of Conformance

There are three WCAG 2.0 levels to which you can aspire, or which you may be obliged to comply with if your government demands it from you as a state-funded body. Each level entitles you to use a WCAG logo:

- Level A – sites that "achieve a minimum level of accessibility" and "can be reasonably applied to all web resources"

- Level AA – achieving "direct accessibility without requiring users or their user agents to do anything different from users without disabilities"

- Level AAA – aiming at enhanced accessibility

Figure 4.1 Example of logo indicating level of accessibility

For methods of evaluating your current performance, see chapter 15 which also has details of the UNWTO Destination Web Watch publication and website and how they can help you.

4.3.4 Meeting Government Requirements

In many countries there are laws about web accessibility. Refer to the W3C/WAI website www.w3.org/wai/policy/overview.html and consult your own legal advisor.[3]

4.3.5 Help on Your Site

You should provide an 'Accessibility' link at the foot of your homepage to, for example, guidance on how the user can change their browser settings.

Further information

World Wide Web Consortium, *Web Accessibility Initiative* (Online), available: http://www.w3c.org/wai (3-8-2007).

Slatin, J. M., Rush, S. (2003), *Maximum Accessibility. Making Your Website More Usable for Everyone,* Addison Wesley, Boston.

4.4 Write to Suit the On-screen Reader

If you were to ask yourself: "How will my audience read this text?" the answer would mostly likely be: "They will not."

It is an inescapable fact that users scan pages on the screen rather than read them properly. Only when they have arrived at detailed information that they were looking for will they start to read it fully.

4.4.1 Help Customers to Scan the Page

Thus, writing for the web is very different from writing for print media. To make text scannable:

- Headings and sub-headings must be meaningful and relevant to the content that follows

- Each new piece of information should have its own sub-heading

- Content should be in very short paragraphs. About 25 to 40 words is a good target. The space around each paragraph is important too

- Bulleted lists are very easy to scan and should be used when you can, but do not put too many in an unbroken list

- Use simple language:

  – Short words rather than long ones

  – Common words, not unusual ones

  – Plain words, not buzzwords and jargon (unless you are writing for enthusiasts in a particular subject)

  – Avoid acronyms, unless you explain them or they are commonly used by a specific audience

- Be brief and to the point – no hyperbole, waffle, flowery language, or gratuitous use of adjectives

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3   (27-8-2007).

After first drafting your text, aim to shorten it ruthlessly. It is surprising how easy it is to do. Lastly, use the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing.

4.4.2 The Inverted Pyramid Style

The traditional way of writing is to start with an introduction giving the subject and its background, then to introduce ideas, discuss them, and finally to reach a conclusion. This resembles a pyramid: it starts with a foundation that is built on, and ends in a conclusion where it all comes together.

When writing for the web, this is turned on its head, hence the inverted pyramid style:

- Start with the 'conclusion'

- Then give the ideas, reasons and additional information

- Finally, provide any background

The style is widely used in news journalism, but marketers who normally write for printed publications have been slow to follow it for the web, where it is equally essential.

This writing style is an important part of your site navigation: the reader can see immediately whether the content is of interest to them – whether 'it is worth it' to read on. If they think it is not, they are likely to leave the page to look elsewhere.

4.5 Build Identity and Trust

Trust has been defined as "the user's willingness to risk time, money and personal data on a website".[4] (Chapter 8, provides guidance for the transactional parts of the site.) The key for DMOs is to offer information that builds the deepest possible trust.

4.5.1 Vital Confidence Builders

Some destination websites are so anxious to project an attractive image that they fail to project their trustworthiness as an official organisation. Official sites can capitalise on their status:

- Choose the right URL (see chapter 17)

- Have a clear statement of the purpose of the site. A homepage strapline should support this role

- Use the official logo prominently on every page so that users see it whatever their entry page to the site

- Use the graphic design of the site to portray the destination attractively, but honestly. Users may distrust obvious stock photos that use models

- Keep the site accurate, up-to-date and thus authoritative

- 'Buttons' or other advertisements placed by third parties on the site, that might be mistaken for editorial, should be marked [Advertisement] in a small point size

- Do not link to sites, and do not accept advertisements, that are not in keeping with the purpose of the organisation and the destination's brand values

- Show the source of all third-party content, such as weather forecasts, e-commerce offers, or searchable databases. Do not pretend it is your own

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4   Nielsen, J. et al. (2001), *E-Commerce User Experience: Design Guidelines for Trust and Credibility* (Online), available: http://www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce/trust.html (27-8-2007).

4.5.2 About Us/Contact Us

Best practice, and in some cases legal requirements, for an 'About us' page (or similar title in the language of the site) may include:

•   Name of organisation

•   Location and postal address

•   Fax and telephone numbers

•   E-mail address

•   Opening hours

•   Profile or mission statement

•   Corporate registration details

•   Name and contact details of the person in the organisation responsible for site content

Be careful not to make the e-mail address readable by spiders; there are many alternative methods that are more or less satisfactory and you should consult your website developer. The most workable for DMOs is probably not to publish an e-mail address but to provide a form that the user must fill in and send from the site. The form should ask the minimum of simple questions and ask for the minimum of personal information.

4.5.3 Privacy Policy and Terms of Use of the Site

The privacy policy should state the purpose of personal data collection. The terms of use will include disclaimers and other statements. Both should be in the language of the site.

Take advice from your legal advisor about specific requirements for all these pages.

It is an accepted convention to group text links to <u>Contact us</u>, <u>About us</u>, <u>Legal</u>, <u>Terms of use</u>, and <u>Privacy policy</u> at the foot of every page of a site.

4.6 Ensure the User Can Contact You

Websites need contact services that allow users to get in touch with you as owner of the site. They also allow you to get to know more about their wishes, and should include:

•   A 'Contact us' link on every page. The link should open the form referred to in 4.5.2. It should not open the user's e-mail programme. Such a new window would blot out some or all of your site; present a dauntingly empty e-mail screen that does not invite a response; and will not be perceived as 'service'

•   A simple form to report errors or give feedback

On-site services that may avoid the need for users to make contact should include:

•   A 'Help' link for key tasks (which opens a small new window)

•   A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page. Make sure it is versioned for each country or language

E-newsletters and other marketing services are dealt with in chapter 6.

4.7 Provide a Travel Planner

The web is the most important information source for trip preparation. But it is difficult and time consuming for users to surf the many available webpages and then to gather up all the information they find.

There is a need for a way for users to unite diverse information, ideally with the site taking into account their personal needs and preferences.

Tools that do this have been called 'travel', 'trip' and 'itinerary' planners, or 'personalised' and 'dynamic' tour guides.

4.7.1 Features of a Travel Planner

There are two kinds of planner, and there is an argument for having both on your site:

- A planner that allows the user to collect items temporarily, view them and print them during that session. The user does not have to register and can use it on the spur of the moment. The disadvantage is that the content is lost afterwards. Such a planner suits people who act on the spur of the moment or who do not like giving personal data

- A planner that requires the user to register. Then the user can save information, and add to it during later sessions

Either model could have extra features:

- To allow the user to add/remove their own text comments

- A calendar into which users can put their items in date order, and rearrange them later if they wish

- A map of the tour that the user has compiled

- Presentation of nearby features the user had not chosen. It could present those that match the kind of interests the user has already chosen

- A good and comprehensive PDF and printer-friendly version of the user's plan

The registration model enables the site to offer more desirable features, such as easy ways to:

- Forward the plan to friends and family

- Allow friends and family to amend the plan

- Turn the planner into a diary or album after the visit, adding more text and the user's own pictures, so that they have an attractive record that they can send to friends. This has appreciable added marketing value for the DMO

Other points to remember:

- Give a very brief overview of the planner's functions and how best to use it, possibly using FAQs. But do not rely on people reading the instructions. The planner needs to be intuitive. It certainly needs usability testing before you finalise your design (see chapter 15)

- Offer the planner on every page and, if possible, keep its content, or a summary, visible

- Be consistent with the type of items that can be saved and the clickable icons or links with which the user can add to the planner

- Make the planner cover the whole site including theme or micro sites. Too often, visitors using a temporary planner lose collected items when clicking through to a theme site

"Conduct thorough user reviews before starting," advises Tourism New Zealand

"Our Planner went online in July 2005 after eight months of development," reports Jessica Ebrey, Online Manager at Tourism New Zealand.

"Up to now (April 2007) we have had more than 390,000 users, and although reactions have been enthusiastic, we conducted research in 2006 to understand the ease of use of the planner and to learn more about visitors' planning needs.

The research showed that users find the travel planner extremely useful, particularly those people who like to be organised. We would like to demonstrate the advantages of the planner better to people who do not want to be too structured, and we are working on this.

For destinations that have ambitions to develop a travel planner, I recommend conducting thorough user reviews before starting, and looking into mapping tools, for these have greatly improved recently."

Figure 4.2 The sign-up panel for Tourism New Zealand's travel planner appears on the right hand side of every page
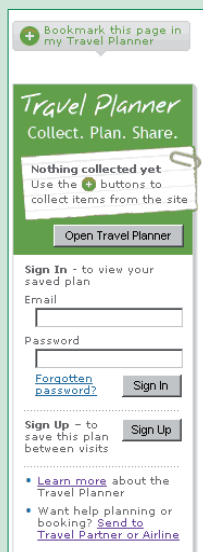
Users can bookmark pages or click on 'Add to travel planner' buttons positioned near descriptions of, for example, accommodation or attractions. The planner allows users to:

- Sort their collection by type (for example, activity) or by region

- Add their own notes

- Click to view the full details of collected items, and revisit bookmarked pages

- Plan a trip by dragging items into a calendar

- Once items are calendared, choose the option 'map calendar' to see where they will spend each day and the possible routes they could take

- View information on transport options between towns and cities

- View the collected items on a map

- Print their planner, including addresses and contact details of organisations that can provide more information once they have arrived

For more help, customers can send their plan to a tour operator – called a Travel Partner – who is expected to respond within three days. The partner can book flights to and within New Zealand, accommodation, activities, rail, bus or ferry tickets or arrange a rental car.

By courtesy of Tourism New Zealand (www.newzealand.com). [5]

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5   (5-5-2007)

4.7.2 'Recommenders' for a Personalised Tour

These planners recommend an itinerary, and may be based on the customer's specified preferences and constraints. The 'recommender' may be based on practical and product-based customer preferences. These may include budget, season, personal interests (gardens, walking, shopping, and so on), means of transport and type of party. The site will provide choices by filtering the site content, perhaps including content from external partners' sites.

The planner tool needs to be programmed according to a very well-researched understanding of the customer's wants, needs and lifestyles, matched to products that are known to satisfy these (sometimes unvoiced) preferences.

VisitEurope's travel planner

The VisitEurope portal site offers customised search and recommendations. It is based on the Trip@dvice interactive system described by Francesco Ricci and others in 2002.[6]

After filling in their preferences, users can plan a trip by searching for things to do, seek inspiration by browsing the suggested experiences, and store the chosen items. The travel planner finds the appropriate content for its recommendations by comparing a visitor's profile to the profiles of previous visitors who indicated that such content was of interest to them.

Figure 4.3 Alternative ideas offered to users by the VisitEurope site

By courtesy of the European Travel Commission (www.visiteurope.com).

4.7.3 The Future for Travel Planners

Web-based travel planners accessed via a PC are unlikely to meet the needs of customers during all the various phases of planning and carrying out their trip. The future will see further integration of web and mobile services, but at present, using a mobile can be a challenge. Research comparing travel planner applications in a mobile with a web environment has confirmed that it is still much faster to use the web on a PC.

However, now that mobiles with satnav mapping are already on sale, there is obvious potential for planning tools to extend to helping customers during their trip, not just before it (how to prepare for this is covered in chapter 9.

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6   Ricci, F. et al. (2002), 'ITR, A Case-based Travel Advisory System', in: Craw, S. and Price, A. (eds.), *6th European Conference on Case Based Reasoning, ECCCBR 2002,* Springer-Verlag, Wien – New York, pp. 613-627.

Ricci, F. and Werthner, H. (2002), 'Case Based Reasoning for Travel Planning Recommendation', *Information Technology and Tourism,* 4 (3-4), pp. 215-226.

The Dynamic Tour Guide of the city of Görlitz in Germany

The Görlitz Dynamic Tour Guide (DTG) is a mobile application developed by the University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz. Tourists can hire a mobile device, and quickly download the DTG via SMS, or via a link to their own phone or PDA.

DTG's Explorer Mode shows tourists a map with the current position of the visitor as well as a constantly updated list of sights within 100 metres. Selecting an item from this list or entering and staying inside a predefined area for more than 10 seconds triggers information presentation. This mode tries to mirror the traditional way of self-guided sightseeing, using a city map to identify, select and navigate towards attractions.

The Planner Mode tries to emulate a personal tour guide. It elicits personal preferences to rank all available attractions. It takes into account tour constraints, like duration, start- and end-point. Performing the proposed tour plan, the visitor receives audible navigation instructions via an integrated standard navigation package which also displays a map with the route.

To give customers the chance to plan their city tour in advance, the city and the university produced a web version of the DTG mobile guide.

Figure 4.4 Tour displayed on www.goerlitz.de/dtg[7]

Based on personal interests and constraints, and an optional inclusion of a restaurant, an individual tour is created, with a map, pictures and text for each attraction. Directions from one attraction to the next are given. The customer can modify the tour by adding or deleting tour items. The information is sent by e-mail as a PDF so that the customer can print it and bring it with them.

An average time of nine minutes was spent looking at the recommended tour, which suggests that users had a general interest in the recommendations made.[8]

By courtesy of Professor Klaus ten Hagen, Department of Computer Sciences, University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz, and Ulrike Gretzel, Assistant Professor and Director, Laboratory for Intelligent Systems in Tourism Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University.

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7   (11-5-2007)

8   Modsching et al. (2007), *Effectiveness of Mobile Recommender Systems for Tourist Destinations: A User Evaluation,* Interaction Challenges for Intelligent Assistants Papers from the 2007 AAAI Spring Symposium, AAAI Press, Menlo, Park, Ca. (in press).

   Kramer, R. (2007), 'Behavioural Impacts of Mobile Tour Guides', in: Sigala, M., Mich, L. and Murphy, J. (eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2007,* Proceedings of the International Conference in Jlubljana, Slovenia, 2007, Springer, Wien – New York, pp. 109-128.

4.8 Make the Navigation Easy

When asked: "Which factors or security features of tourism websites are important for you?" most people answer: "The site is easy to navigate."[9]

A website's navigation represents its information architecture – the structure of its content. How well you encourage users to navigate the content is one of the most important factors that determine the usability of a site.

Navigation should be as smooth as possible and should positively influence the user's frame of mind. Good navigation allows users to know, on every page:

*   What site am I on?

*   Where am I in the site?

*   What can I do here?

*   Where can I go from here?

*   Where is the information I am looking for?

4.8.1 Navigation Components

The most common components of site navigation are:

*   The global navigation – shown on every page

*   The local navigation – which appears only when you arrive in a particular part of the site, and takes you around it. This, too, usually appears on the left

*   The contextual navigation – links on individual pages that go to related pages. These are often embedded within text, or are lists of 'See also' pages, within the site or on an external site ('referral links')

*   Supplemental navigation – additional tools such as site maps and site indexes

Two further services are important:

*   A keyword search engine. The type-in box for this is best positioned in the top right corner of the page. Set it up with default words such as 'search site' that clear when the cursor is inserted

*   An easy-to-use site map. This is a list of the pages, showing all the main levels, and is compiled automatically from your content management system so that it is always up to date

4.8.2 Alternative Sites

You will also need to guide users to the correct site for their needs. This can be done (on every page) via:

*   Drop-down menu, or 'Change language' link, for choice of the country the customer is coming from, or language version

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Kramer, R., Modsching, M. and Ten Hagen, K. (2006), 'A City Guide Agent Creating and Adapting Individual Sightseeing Tours Based on Field Trial', *International Journal of Computational Intelligence Research,* 2 (2) (2006), pp. 191-206 (also Online), available: http://falklands.globat.com/~softcomputing.net/ijcir/1006a.pdf (27-8-2007).

9   World Tourism Organization (2005), *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch,* UNWTO, Madrid

- Text links at the foot of the page to separate sections or sites for <u>Business visits</u>, <u>Press</u>, and <u>Trade,</u> <u>About (DMO name)</u> or other separate sites (see chapter 11 for more on media sites, and chapter 12 for Trade)

4.8.3 Navigation and Links Principles

- The global navigation must:

  – Show on every page

  – Cover all content

- All navigation menus must be logical, consistent and easy to read

- Every page must have a 'Home' link or icon. This should not rely on a clickable site operator's logo

- If the site has a succession of deeper pages, provide 'breadcrumb navigation'. For example: Home>Regions>Cities>CityName>Nightlife. This shows the path, and users should be able to return up the path by clicking on any of the words. The separator can be either > or /

- If active icons (ones you can click on) are used, their purpose must be obvious and internationally recognised. OnMouseOver alt text must be provided for each icon, that is, text that becomes visible when the user moves the curser over the icon

4.8.4 Links and the Text You Use for Them

A web editor should be a lively lateral thinker – a good site becomes more powerful when referral links arouse the reader's interest to explore further and find new things. Links should support the user's train of thought, but also offer creative alternatives:

- Anchor text (actual text contained within the clickable link) must tell the user what the next page is about. The link text should be identical or very similar to the title of the page that it goes to. Never use 'Click here', because:

  – It does not comply with accessibility guidelines

  – It impairs search engine optimisation (see chapter 5)

- Links must change colour after they have been used so that the user can see where they have already been if they come back to the page

- Use 'More' or 'Read on' links or icons consistently

4.8.5 Destination Site Navigation

Further requirements for tourism destination sites are:

- A separate search facility for each of your product databases (such as hotels, events, tourist attractions). Normally it will be best to have a 'Simple search' page with limited criteria to choose from, and an 'Advanced search' to enable users to specify a range of detailed requirements. The selections offered will need ongoing testing with users

- Navigation to pages that meet the needs of those with special interests (for example, activities, sports, hobbies)

- Navigation to pages that meet the needs of different groups (for example, families with young children, group organisers)

- A 'Things of Interest near here' option which can appear alongside any page in the site

- A geographically-based search facility. There are several ways in which this can be done:

  – A menu-driven path such as Regions>Cities>Neighbourhoods. The pages at each of these levels can provide links to internal or external geographically-based pages – national, regional and local

  – A clickable map that works dynamically with your product database to display accommodation, attractions, events and other products on the map (see chapter 2, section 2.6.3 and section 2.8.3 for maps and geocoding)

  – Search facility using a postcode. This is most useful on a site for domestic users.

4.8.6 Testing and Monitoring

Your structure and navigation will need:

- User testing in its early design and build phases, and whenever changes are planned, with laboratory testing, and/or eye tracking

- Continual monitoring with the help of a web traffic analysis tool

See section 4.15.3 and chapter 15.

4.8.7 FAQs

Despite growth in search technology, a short FAQ section is still helpful if adapted for each market. This is in addition to search services driven from the databases, such as 'Ask Rosie' on www.enjoyengland.com.

4.9 Optimise the Site for Search Engines

The key indicator of a website's search performance is for important keywords and keyword phrases to produce a page 1 result in search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Because of the dominance of crawler-based search engines, a correctly optimised, and thus high-ranking site, is likely to be your most cost-effective marketing spend.

The following chapter 5 is therefore devoted to search engine optimisation (SEO).

4.10 Make It Easy to Use the Site

Good usability is the result of getting all the design details right that have been outlined above.

The ISO 9241 standard (www.iso.org) describes the 'ergonomic requirements for office work with visual display terminals', and has three usability elements:

- **Effectiveness:** the accuracy and completeness with which specified users can achieve specified goals in particular environments

- **Efficiency:** the resources expended in relation to the accuracy and completeness of goals achieved

- **Satisfaction:** the comfort and acceptability of a system to its users and people affected by its use[10]

These are fairly abstract definitions. The well-known usability expert Jakob Nielsen has five tests for usability:

- **Learnability:** how easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?

- **Efficiency:** once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?

- **Memorability:** when users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they re-establish proficiency?

- **Errors:** how many errors do users make, how severe are they, and how easily can they recover from them?

- **Satisfaction:** how pleasant is it to use the design?[11]

The only effective way to achieve the very best usability is to test it:

- Testing should be done before any newly-designed feature goes to the development stage, and be repeated before it is launched

- Good usability for one user group may not be for another. Test in each market that has strong cultural differences, and especially in those which use a different alphabet

- There should be a genuine readiness to make changes to the design

- The time and cost needed to make changes should be built into the project plan

- It should be an going process

For usability testing methods see section 4.15.3 and chapter 15.

Further information

Jakob Nielsen's publications on usability (see bibliography) and his website and newsletter Alertbox: http://www.useit.com/alertbox (27-4-2007).

Findings of research into user behaviour and other aspects of ICT, travel and tourism are presented by academics and consultants at the annual ENTER conference organised by the International Federation for IT, Travel and Tourism (IFITT). Their work is published in the ENTER proceedings and in the *Journal of Information Technology and Tourism (JITT)*. See http://www.ifitt.org (27-4-2007).

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10   Christophersen, T. and Konradt, U. (2004), 'Usability in E-commerce', in: Alber S., Hassmann V. and Tomczak T., *Digitaler Fachbibliothek Verkauf,* Symposion Publishing, p. 7 (in German) (CD-ROM), available: http://www.verkauf-aktuell.de (27-8-2007).

   International Organization for Standardization (ISO), http://www.iso.org (22-9-2007).

11   Nielsen, J. (2003), *Usability 101: Introduction to Usability* (Online), available: http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html (27-8-2007).

4.11 Provide an Integrated Service

Visualising the internet as a medium to offer and use services is an excellent basis for evaluating websites against proven best practice.[12]

The *Destination Web Watch* evaluation system analyses the content and services provided by a destination website in the context of the DMO's strategy, opportunities and constraints. The evaluation measures the site by the quality of the services it offers, in five general categories: information, contact, transaction, entertainment and relationship (see chapter 15, section 15.2, for details of the *Destination Web Watch)*.

4.11.1 Information Services

It goes without saying that design, presentation, images, text and other features must help achieve the destination's marketing objectives and brand values.

But if using Google provides an answer to everything, then what is the information function of a destination website, or any other intermediary?

The answer is to add value with information that is comprehensive, up-to-date, and unbiased. Equally, it is to enable the customer to sort through, select and assemble the information into formats that suit them as individuals.

See chapter 2 for further details.

4.11.2 Contact Services

These are direct contacts between the site owner and internet users. For example: a 'contact us by e-mail' option; a telephone 'call back' button; or, the support of a live person by web-based chat.

4.11.3 Transaction Services

Online real-time booking and paying for holiday services and allied merchandise is an essential element of the circle of services the website should facilitate, whether these are its own e-commerce services or those of partners (see chapter 8).

4.11.4 Entertainment Services

'Fun', such as competitions and games, can contribute to a positive experience of a site, and many offer both entertainment and information.

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12 Tiggelaar, B. (1999), *Internet Strategie. Concurrentievoordel in de Digitale Economie: Theorie & Praktijk,* Addison Wesley, Amsterdam, pp. 215-217.

Norway ski-jumps into online games

The official travel guide to Norway, www.visitnorway.com, offers two entertainment services: a game that explores Norway's biggest ski resort, and one set at a ski jump.

"We staged a workshop with Agens, a leading Norwegian advergaming company," reports Hans Petter Aalmo, VisitNorway's Portal Manager. "This identified five destination products as interesting pilots. We chose Holmenkollen Ski Jump to start with:

- It is a well known landmark and attraction

- Local partners VisitOslo and the Association for the Promotion of Skiing were interested, and co-financed the project with 10% each

- Agens strongly believed they could create an exciting and funny game around Holmenkollen that users would enjoy

The game was launched just before Christmas 2006 and was an immediate success. We set up a contest with some prizes. The game was voted game of the year 2006 by the game portal www.1001spill.no.

So far it has been played 42 million times by 6 million users from all over the world. A lot of the success of the game is because it is fun, easy, addictive and is not very time consuming. It is playable for all ages.[13]

Figure 4.5 Advergaming at http://skijump.visitnorway.com
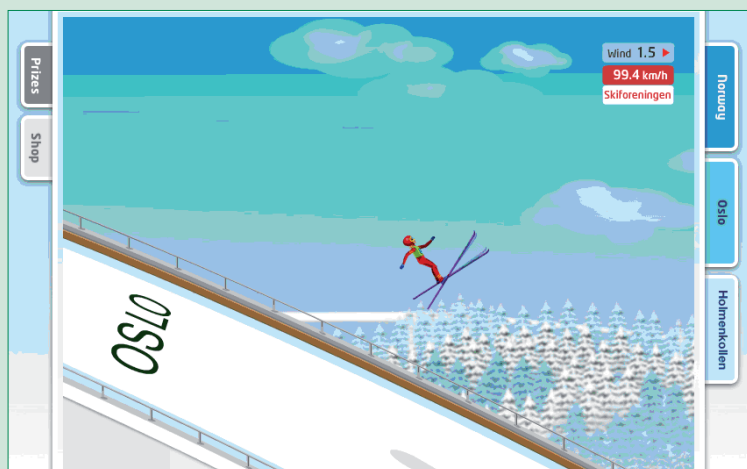
The next concept that Agens strongly believed in was a 'twin tip' skiing game. Twin tips are skiis that allow you to take off facing forwards, and land facing backwards. We asked Norway's biggest alpine destination, Trysil, to join us for a pilot. Trysil Twin Tip was launched in February 2007 and was also a major success, though not in the Holmenkollen league – the game is much more difficult and time consuming. So far it has been played more than 9 million times.[14]

Norway's advice on keys to success:

- Listen to the game creators. They are the experts in what the users enjoy

- Create a game that the users want to play – not just something you want to push

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13   Holmenkollen Ski Jump Game, available: http://skijump.visitnorway.com (26-10-2007).

14   Trysil Twin Tip Game, available: http://trysiltwintip.visitnorway.com (26-10-2007).

- Use subtle ads and links that the users will not hate

- Remember that this is branding and promotion, not sales

- Set up a contest. The prizes do not have to be big, but the users love them

- Involve local destinations and products

- Market the game – there are so many free internet games to compete with

- Be prepared for massive traffic

- Think through the server hosting – the domain strategy. Have scalable web servers

- Make sure the game does not take too much time to download

And things not to do:

- Do not bother to create a game unless it is on the user's terms

- Do not use the e-mail addresses you harvest to spam

- Do not always expect the game to be a hit

By courtesy of Innovation Norway (http://www.innovasjonnorge.no/default.aspx)

4.11.5 Relationship Services

Recruiting new customers is usually expensive and time-consuming. It is often easier to increase profits by selling more to existing clients. Destination websites can do this by encouraging site visitors to sign up for ongoing 'permission marketing' services that create and maintain long-term relationships.[15]

E-newsletters are one of the main vehicles for planned programmes to promote repeat visits, to attempt upselling and cross-selling, and to encourage recommendations to friends and family. The object is to turn existing customers into loyal clients and to maintain the destination website as the centre of a range of relationship services that achieve this (see chapter 6, section 6.4).

4.11.6 Combining the Services

It is this seamless combination of information, contact, transaction, entertainment and relationship services that distinguishes the internet from the off-line world. It is what makes it so successful:

- The user can look, choose, order and pay

- The destination can enhance its reputation and its relationship with the customer, as well as do business, all within one environment

An example is 'Incredible India', which combines information with entertainment, contact services, and the beginning of a relationship with the destination.

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15   Godin, S. (1999), *Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers,* Simon & Schuster, New York.

'Incredible India' knowledge quizzes

"Our contests are online for about two to three months as part of our domestic and international campaigns," says the Ministry of Tourism of India. "They revolve around regions, for example Jammu and Kashmir (28,727 entries), and themes like ayurveda health care (20,575) and yoga (26,742). The prizes are holiday packages to India.

They definitely drive extra traffic during the contest period, and the data is kept for future direct marketing."

Figure 4.6 Incredible India knowledge quiz

India's advice to other destinations is:

• Start with your best known place or theme. Then go on to new products, secret places and special themes

• Contests should reflect your destination's main campaign theme

• Contests should be country specific – depending on the profile of the potential tourist from a particular country

By courtesy of the Ministry of Tourism of India (www.incredibleindia.org).

4.12 Make Printed Brochures Work for You Online

Do not miss the chance to make online use of your printed brochures, if your destination produces them. There are two options:

4.12.1 Put Them On-screen in a Virtual Brochure

Virtual brochures or 'page-turners' give users the illusion of turning the pages of a brochure, on-screen. They make an attractive bridge between some customers' preferences for a brochure rather than reading on-screen. Also, they make good economic sense when they are created from the PDFs of a real brochure which was being produced anyway.

They are usually viewed on-screen in double page spreads. These are not fully legible at that size, but have an easy-to-use zoom button. The original printed brochure design can be adapted, with larger point sizes, but the expense of this may not be worthwhile if the content is being provided in conventional webpages anyway. Some virtual brochures are created dynamically from the main database, which may overcome this.

Virtual brochures involve large downloads and in the past were frustrated by slow dial-up connections, but with a good broadband connection they work well. They should be free-to-view.

Clever features include:

- Click-through to later pages (from an index, or map)

- Click-through to website pages including booking page (from text, pictures or perhaps from advertisements)

- Thumbnails of every page, running along the bottom of the screen

- A yellow 'post-it note' which the user can put in the screen margin to make a short cut to a particular page

Examples include: www.intellimag.com, www.visitbloomington.com/vguide and www.mullindesign.com/virtual (several examples).

4.12.2 Provide Them as Printable PDFs from Your Site

If you offer PDFs of brochures, take account of the limited quality and speed of many home printers, and tell customers on your website:

- The size of the file(s) and exactly what is in them

- Whether they will print adequately in black and white only

If the brochure is composed of two or more clear sections, make them into separate PDFs so that it is easier for the customer to print only what they really need.

4.13 Earn Revenue from Your Site

See chapter 14, for opportunities to earn revenue from display advertising, advertorial, affiliate marketing and other techniques.

4.14 Deliver Faultless Technical Performance

It is highly unusual for major sites to suffer from technical problems now, and destinations must measure up too. Problems not only frustrate impatient users, they may cause a loss of trust in the site and its owner – and a loss of traffic to rival sites that work better.

These are the basics that your developer should provide, and that your editing staff need to observe subsequently when they add new content:

- Pages must download quickly. If there is a good reason to keep a user waiting (for example, while an application downloads) then the user should be warned, and there should be a graphic indication that the download is in progress

- Logos and pictures should not exceed 20 Kb. They should download correctly

- All site elements should be compatible with the most recent versions of the most common browsers, such as internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, and Netscape

- Your site must use a web-compatible font

- Discuss 'liquid' web design with your designer, where the layout of the site is flexible and can be customised to the screen resolution and window size. At least, pages should load correctly in the most used screen resolutions

- External and internal links must all work

- The site must clearly indicate when additional software or plug-ins are necessary, and provide links to any necessary software

- Pages must print properly, or a printable version be offered

In addition, you must take every technical precaution to create safe interaction between the user and the DMO, such as for transactions (see chapter 8, e-commerce, section 8.10).

4.15 The Design and Building Process

4.15.1 A Structured Approach

Web projects need a structured approach in the same way as other ICT tasks. The project must:

- Bring together the necessary skills, expertise, resources and ideas

- Achieve project goals and deadlines and meet budgets

- Meet the destination's objectives, and the users' requirements in general and those of specific target groups in particular

- Allow for adequate usability testing that follows research-based guidelines. This means allowing time, budget, and appropriate stages in the building process

- Deal with change and new insights that arise during the project

- Have regular go/no-go moments to adapt requirements and review budgets

There are many books dedicated to project management, so the following aims only to suggest stages and to highlight some essentials and methodologies (chapter 16 covers monitoring and evaluating websites that are already online).

4.15.2 Possible Approaches

PRINCE 2, an acronym for 'PRojects IN Controlled Environments', is globally recognised as a standard method for project management, and it is worthwhile to study the framework it offers. It covers a wide variety of activities, assists project managers to identify and manage risks, and to stay within the 'business case'. It is most suitable for multi-discipline projects, combining in-house resources with external suppliers, as is typical for ICT-related projects.[16]

Project management frameworks typical for the design and development of multi-media applications feature three or more phases, depending on the complexity and type of the applications needed, for example:

- Pre-production phase:

    – Briefing

    – Concept development

    – Determining objectives and defining target groups

    – Determining the 'information domain' (the whole of the information to be stored, processed and presented)

    – Defining requirements and constraints

    – Drafting a global project description

    – Drafting a detailed project plan and budget

    – Developing mock-ups and/or prototypes

    – Debriefing

    – Go/no-go decision

- Production phase:

    – Gathering, selecting and structuring information

    – Developing scripts/storyboards/key user paths

    – Defining functions, navigation, site map, interaction and flowchart

    – Determining the naming conventions

    – Defining the media mix

    – Development of the design

    – Defining the asset list

    – Developing new mock-up and/or prototypes

    – Testing elements

    – Reviewing and, if necessary, adapting budgets

    – Go/no-go decision

    – Asset and media production

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16   See for more information the United Kingdom Office of Government Commerce site: http://www.ogc.gov.uk/methods_prince_2.asp (22-9-2007).

- – Application development

- – Assembly

- – Testing, bug tracking, and fixing

- – Go/no-go decision

- Post-production phase:

  - – Seeing to implementation

  - – Final testing

  - – Formal acceptance

  - – Training and support

  - – Maintenance and other follow up tasks

4.15.3 Usability Testing as an Integral Part of the Design and Development Process

(This section should be read in conjunction with chapter 15, section 15.7.)

We now have a thorough knowledge of the internet user's behaviour, wishes and requirements, and thus we have a large number of research-based guidelines for usability. Reliable testing is possible and should be part of the design and development process, as well as part of the evaluation of existing sites.

One of the most detailed and helpful guides for developing 'usable and useful websites' is offered by the US Department of Health and Human Services. This Step-by-Step Usability Guide takes you in detail through the tasks.

Figure 4.7 US Department of Health and Human Services' Step-by-Step Usability Guide (www. usability.gov/process.html)[17]
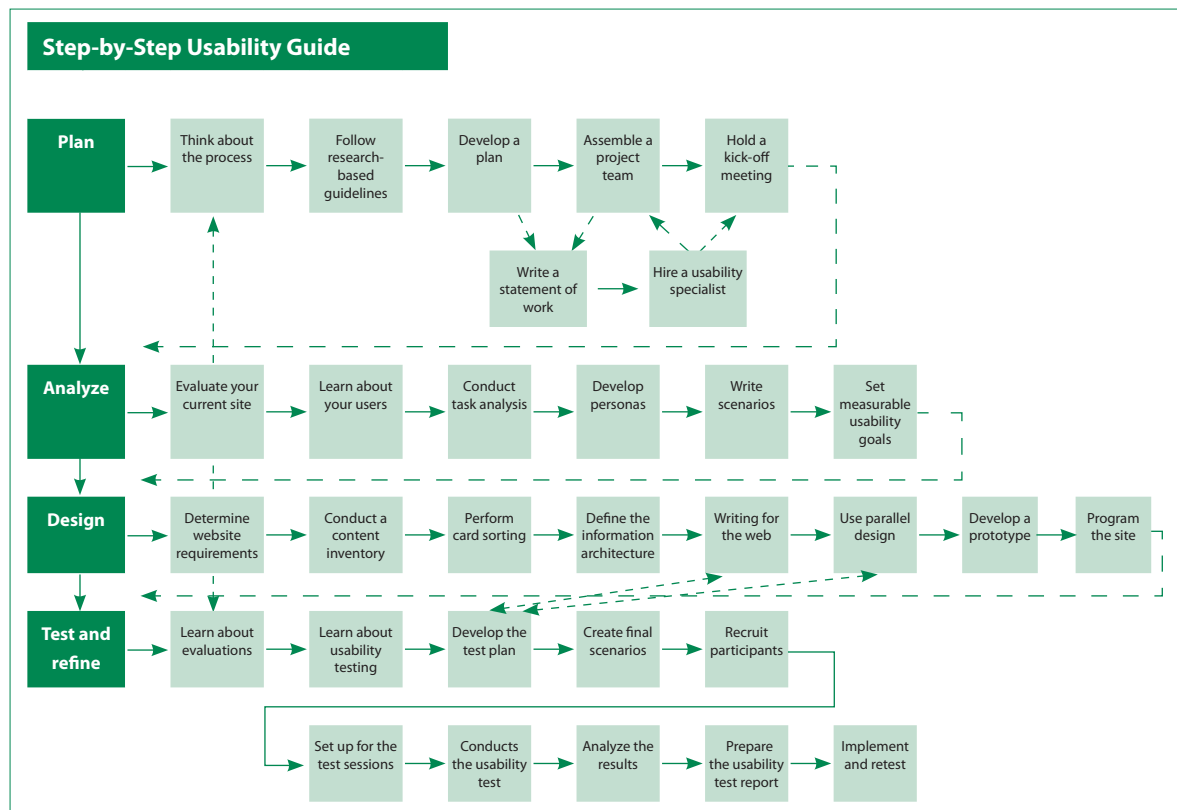
Examples of methodologies that can be used in the early phases of the project include:

4.15.3.1 Card Sorting

The project management group start with a list of all the items they want sorted, writing each item down on a separate index card. Then, give your users the cards and ask them to divide the cards up into piles, telling them that the cards should be grouped the way they (the users) think best. This method provides insight into how users group various topics and functions, and helps you to organise the information architecture and navigation at all levels.

4.15.3.2 Scenarios

A scenario is a short story about a specific user with a specific goal who is using your site. Scenarios are very useful, perhaps critical, in designing websites and usability testing of them. They provide insight into what content the site must have, and how to make it easily findable and accessible.

Write several scenarios: questions users might ask, and tasks they have to perform. Remember, for example, the questions that the site navigation has to answer easily, if not intuitively.

In a usability test, ask users to write down their own scenarios as well as giving them those you have written yourselves.

See chapter 6, section 6.2.5.5 for the case study "UtrechtYourWay" and the way this destination built all its communications and functionalities around scenarios.

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17   (5-5-2007).

4.15.3.3 Iterative Design and Prototyping

Create paper or digital prototypes to identify usability issues. Reiterate the prototypes (test, make changes, then test again) until the website meets the usability goals. 'Low-fidelity prototyping' uses simple drawings and mock-ups. 'High-fidelity prototyping' uses tools that show the prototype as close to the actual design as possible in terms of look and feel, interaction, and timing.

See chapter 2, section 2.3.3, for another useful technique, using 'personas'.

4.15.3.4 Testing with Users

Testing with and without users can be outsourced to specialist agencies. For those who wish to organise their own testing with users, the Australian Government Information Management Organisation (AGIMO), gives a checklist.

- Before starting:

  – Consider the different methods of user testing (either methodologies mentioned above, or others found below in 'Further information')

  – Define the goals of the user testing and identify what will be tested

  – Define what standards are acceptable and how results will be analysed

  – Develop a test scenario or script

  – Develop feedback questions

  – Determine how results will be collected

  – Consider testing the website throughout the process of creating the website

- Setting up the test:

  – Ensure that testing facilitators and support teams are prepared for their role

  – Ensure that testers are prepared for their role

  – Select testers carefully

  – Consider how many users will be testing the resources and the scale of the testing

  – Arrange for relevant people to observe the test

  – Organise a suitable venue and equipment

  – Conduct a 'dry run'

- After the test:

  – Debrief users and observers

  – Analyse and prioritise issues

  – Disseminate results and follow up[18]

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18 Australian Government Information Management Office (Online), available: http://www.agimo.gov.au/practice/delivery/checklists/testing (3-8-2007).

4.15.4 Further Advice

- ICT projects are notorious for going over the original budgets. It is wise to add at least 25% to your calculations for unforeseen expenses. But avoid this extra provision becoming general knowledge

- Draft detailed lists of wishes and requirements and include them in your tenders and contracts. Look fully through this handbook and the websites and literature referred to. Forgetting, for example, to include compliance with W3C markup (source code) standards and WAI guidelines, may make a partial rebuild necessary, and cost you dearly

- ICT related projects often get into troubled waters because too much has to be built at the same time. Make a three-year plan: describe the desired end result, and what is to be built in each phase

- Evolution, not revolution, is best. Avoid a 'big bang'. Radical changes can lose as much as they gain if you forget the learnings of previous years

- Make active use of the formal acceptance period in your contract with your developer. This might be two to four weeks or as much as three months, depending on what you negotiated into the contract. Use the period to test all markup and functionality aspects of the site

- Standards keep improving. You will need to monitor new developments for their relevance to your site, and to plan for ongoing upgrades in future years

> **Further information**
>
> For more on usability testing methodologies, see James Hom's Usability Methods Toolbox: http://jthom.best. vwh.net/usability/ (3-8-2007).
>
> World Tourism Organization (2005), *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch,* UNWTO, Madrid.
>
> AGIMO (Online), available: www.agimo.gov.au/practice (3-8-2007).
>
> W3C Markup Validation Service: http://validator.w3.org (3-8-2007).
>
> For useful advise about tendering and contracting – World Tourism Organization (2001), *E-business for Tourism – Practical Guidelines for Destinations and Businesses,* UNWTO, Madrid

4.16 Winning Websites – Measures of Success

The quality, effectiveness and thus success of your website can be measured with the help of the following methodologies:

- Expert audit and evaluation, providing insight into the 'percentage of perfection' that the website attains against quality criteria and critical success factors in categories such as accessibility, identity and trust, search engine optimisation and technical performance; as well as measuring the performance of information, contact, transaction, relationship and entertainment services

- Web analytics, allowing monitoring and measuring of the performance of the site as a whole and of individual features in terms of internet data, including web traffic data, such as page views, visits or sessions, unique visitors and response rates to (for example) competitions

- Online and offline user surveys, allowing the measurement of consumer satisfaction and the impact of the website on consumer decision making

- Online experiments and laboratory testing, allowing testing of a wide variety of usability, content and other aspects of websites

See chapter 15 and chapter 16.

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 5

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) – Getting Better Search Engine Results the 'Natural' Way

Key Messages

- The objective of 'natural' or 'organic' SEO is to see that each page of the site is ranked highly in search engines for target terms

- It is critical that a website structure and coding is search engine friendly

- Search engine ranking algorithms want to find websites that are filled with good, relevant and useful content that will make searchers happy

- 'White hat' search engine optimisers aim to achieve this recognition

- You must invest time in and resources in optimising text and meta data for target terms, developing keyword-rich anchor text links within the site and page URLs, adding a site map based on text links to the website

- Optimising a website is ongoing, and it will take time for the effects to be seen

5.1 What Is Search Engine Optimisation?

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via 'natural' ('organic' or 'algorithmic') search results. It means ensuring that a website is accessible to search engines, selecting key search terms to target, manipulating the site content, and fulfilling other critical success factors.

The objective is to see that each page of the site is ranked highly for the target terms when they are input to search engines.

SEO may be used as an alternative to, or together with, those areas of search engines that offer paid-for advertising, such as Google AdWords, where the advertiser is charged each time someone clicks into their site from the paid-for search engine listing (see chapter 6, section 6.5).

SEO requires an understanding of:

- How search algorithms (the formulas by which rankings are calculated) may work. But as these formulas are a closely guarded secret, understanding them usually means drawing conclusions based on search engine rankings

- How people using the web might search; chiefly the words or phrases they might enter into a search engine. Most people use at least two words and more than half now use three or more[1]

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1   Nielsen/NetRatings (2007), *Nielsen/NetRatings Announces June U.S. Search Share Rankings,* July 19 (Online), available: http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_070719.pdf (3-8-2007).

RankStat (2007), *Most People Use Two-word Phrases in Search Engines According to RankStat.com,* January 10 (Online), available: http://www.rankstat.com/html/en/seo-news1-most-people-use-2-word-phrases-in-search-engines.html (3-8-2007).

- How a website's coding, content, presentation and structure may influence the ability of search engines to navigate and parse ('spider' or 'crawl'), and index content

5.1.1 Which Search Engines Matter?

Originally most search engines were directories – categorised lists of websites maintained by human editors. But now the majority of searches are made on search engines which use 'robot' or 'crawler' technology to gather information. Directories still exist, however, and most major search engines still use editors to supplement crawler technology for some functions.

Globally there are three significant crawler-based search engines on which SEO is focused:

- Google: 53% of US-based searches

- Yahoo: 20% of US-based searches (Yahoo still runs a conventional directory as well)

- MSN: 13% of US-based searches, but as the default is Microsoft search, many of these may be accidental searches – such as a mistyped URL in the address bar[2]

Usage of search engines differs by market. In every market there are also many local or specialist search engines – some powered by the major providers above, others based on directory models rather than crawler technology. Some directories require you to submit your website.

A few examples referring to September 2007 statistics for the United Kingdom showed, the top four:

- ww.google.co.uk: 70% of searches

- www.google.com: 15% of searches

- uk.search.yahoo.com: 3.5% of searches

- www.uk.ask.com: 3.5%[3]

While February 2007 Netherlands statistics showed that:

- Google (.nl and .com) counted for 74% of searches

- Ilse for 14% of searches

- MSN for 3% of searches

- Yahoo for 4% of searches[4]

Consult local national sources of statistical research for search share rankings in each market, as well as companies that specialise in search engine optimisation and providers of web analytics.

Within this section we focus on optimising for the two major crawler-based search engines, Google and Yahoo.

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2   comScore Networks (2007), *comScore Releases January U.S. Search Engine Rankings*, February 21 (Online), available: http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1219 (14-8-2007).

3   Hitwise, http://www.hitwise.co.uk/datacenter/searchengineanalysis.php (28-10-2007).

4   Checkit, Nationale Search Engine Monitor, http://www.checkit.nl/newsitem_310.html (22-9-2007).

5.1.2 How Do Crawler-based Search Engines like Google and Yahoo Work?

To index a website, a robot or crawler starts from a known point of origin, follows links between webpages, and caches page text, content and other text or HTML based information as it moves about the web.

When a web user enters a search word or phrase, all pages containing the word or phrase will be returned in an order determined by the algorithm (ranking) process. In general, only the first two pages of results, at most, will be viewed by the user.

The entries shown in search results usually comprise a combination of:

- The HTML Title tag (<title>your text</title>) also referred to as the meta title or title tag

- The Description, that is the content of the HTML meta tag Description (<meta name = "description" content="your text">)

- The page URL

- Part of the text contained in the page itself

Google and Yahoo differ in their approach and from time to time this formula will change. It is therefore important to monitor how your pages appear in searches, and to adjust the part of the meta and/or page text that appears. How this combination appears may have a major impact on whether the searcher clicks on the entry.

Eye tracking studies show that when reading search engine results the amount of time spent on any but the top rankings is short. The optimisation goal is to achieve that high ranking on the first page of results.[5]

Recent Dutch research showed that users look for only an average 1.1 seconds at the top individual search results. The message they contain should therefore be clear and actionable.[6]

Figure 5.1 Heat map from user eye tracking

Red areas show where users looked the most; yellow areas indicate fewer views; blue shows least-viewed areas; grey areas did not attract any fixations.[7]

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5   Nielsen, J. (2006), *F-Shaped Pattern for Reading Web Content (Jacob Nielsen's Alertbox),* April 17 (Online), available: http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html (14-8-2007).

6   Helsdingen, J. van (2007), 'Consument kijkt slechts één tel naar resultaat in zoekmachine', *Adforesult,* (3) (in Dutch), pp. 64-65.

7   Nielsen, J. (2006).

5.2 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' of SEO

5.2.1 The Importance of Website Structure

It is critical that a website structure and coding is search engine friendly. Many complex tourism sites have barriers to search engine crawlers that mean their content is not fully indexed. These barriers include:

- Mark-up code, for example HyperText Markup Language (HTML), or Extensible HyperText Markup Language (XHTML), which does not validate to W3C WAI recommendations (see chapter 4, section 4.3)

- Flash introduction pages and/or Flash navigation. Flash is a programme with which animations can be created and though it is all right to use, it should be kept to page inserts

- Javascript navigation (commonly used to provide dropdown or rollover subsidiary navigation menus)

- Complex database URLs. These should be masked with conventional URL formats (see below, section 5.2.6)

- Relying on performing a search that cannot be replicated by search engines, to produce content from a database-driven site

- Frames construction. HTML frames divide content in independent windows or subwindows. These multiple views offer designers a way to keep certain information visible, while other views are scrolled or replaced. However, frames construction may form a barrier for crawlers

- Redirects and linking multiple domain names to one website. In the case of a redirect, the server transfers the internet user to a web address that is different to the one they specified or clicked on. These can be useful in certain circumstances, but may harm rankings if used incorrectly

These potential barriers to search indexing can be overcome by following W3C WAI accessibility guidelines. Accessible sites with extensive valuable text content are generally search engine friendly.

Check whether the deepest pages of your site are indexed by pasting the URL (without http://), or a block of text within inverted commas, into the search engine.

You need to solve the issues above before embarking on SEO.

5.2.2 'White Hat' versus 'Black Hat' Techniques

Every search engine wants to see the same thing – websites that are filled with good, relevant and useful content that will make searchers happy when they view the pages returned.

All engines base their ranking algorithms on this, and achieving this recognition is the aim of 'white hat' search engine optimisers.

So using tricks – known as 'black hat' techniques – to try to fool search engines may harm ranking permanently once they are discovered. These tricks include:

- Hidden text – for example text in the same colour as the background

- Keyword 'stuffing' – such as small text on the page footer repeating keywords and of no use to website users

- Creation of 'gateway' or cloaking pages created only for search engines

- 'Link farms' – sites that exist only for the purpose of developing link popularity

The basic rule is: where content, coding or links exist only to trick search engines into ranking pages highly, if they work at all they will not work for long.

Even if the pages are ranked as a result of these techniques, if they do not satisfy the searcher the short viewing time will be revealed to search engines through toolbars. And these sites run a real risk of having such pages, or even the whole site, removed from the index.

5.2.3 Targeting Search Terms – Pick the 'Low Hanging Fruit'

You can discover the search terms people use with the help of tools such as:

- Google Adwords keyword tool: https://adwords.google.com/select/Login

- Keyword Discovery: www.keyworddiscovery.com

- Word Tracker: www.wordtracker.com

Check the comparative competition level on each search term by inputting it to Google or Yahoo and noting the number of pages returned. Look for search terms that have a higher ratio of searches to number of pages returned, and that are most likely to produce business. You should also:

- Check the top ranking sites for each term to see how well they are optimised and how easy it would be to challenge their position. Use the Google toolbar www.toolbar.google.com to see what value Google places on each page returned; and check their link popularity on www.linkpopularity. com[8]

- Develop an understanding of the words visitors to your destination have used to search for information before or during their trip. Use visitor surveys and the search function in your website to gather this valuable information

- Select two or three relevant search terms per page, that are geographically specific (and therefore easier targets), achievable, and likely to produce site visitors who will turn into destination visitors

5.2.4 Optimising Text and Meta Data for Your Target Terms

The following instructions contain technical terms and references to HTML code. If present in the website, you can see them by clicking in the browser menu on 'View' and then 'Source' or 'Page source' (depending on the browser). If necessary, ask a webmaster or programmer for assistance when going through the steps the first time. Choosing the right content management system (section 5.2.7) will allow you to add important code yourself.

Step 1: write the page text intended for the site user:

- Provide useful and actionable information in an easy-to-read style (see chapter 4, section 4.4)

- Do not use graphics to display text. Search engines cannot read this, so persuade your graphic designers to use text even at the expense of the design

Step 2: re-edit so that your target search terms appear two or three times in the text of each page:

- Try to include these terms (without dividing the words up) in the anchor text (the actual text contained within the clickable link) and in headings and subheadings (using the HTML codes that signify header and sub header status – <h1> and <h2>)

- Place them as high up the page as possible

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8   All links in this paragraph available 3-8-2007.

- Include the destination region and country name in text on the footer of each page to help optimise search chances for the important geographical terms

Step 3: edit the HTML Title tag (approximately 10 to 65 characters) to include the target terms for each page as close to the start of the Title as possible:

- There are several schools of thought as to the ideal content for the HTML Title tag, which will be visible to site visitors at the top of the browser window (usually in blue), and should be a clear statement of what that page is about

- Make your official status clear in the HTML Title tag but avoid trying to use them purely for branding – and resist the temptation to just repeat keywords as it may make your site look less official and reliable, and it will not help optimisation

Step 4: edit the meta tag Description, again repeating the target search phrases for that page:

- The meta tag Description can be longer than the HTML Title tag and should be a useful and truthful description of the text content of the page

Step 5: in the meta tag Keywords (<meta name="keywords" content="your keywords">), add keywords that appear on the page and include those target search terms again:

- Meta keywords are not currently used by search engines, but this may change and it is good practice to include them. Make sure that all keywords in the meta tag Keywords are included in the text on the page, otherwise you may incur ranking penalties

Finally: add target search terms to at least one alternate text, commonly called alt tags, for a graphic on the page, preferably a clickable graphic (see also chapter 4, section 4.3.2.1 and section 4.8.3 on alternate text).

Remember, if you have different language versions then you must optimise in each language separately.

5.2.5 Developing Keyword-Rich Anchor Text Links within the Site

Many websites rely upon graphic buttons for global and core navigation menus. There is an SEO advantage to having text based links in menus, especially if they contain target search terms relevant to the content of the pages they lead to.

Make sure there are plenty of key search-term-rich text links between pages, whether or not the main menu(s) are text. The anchor text should contain the target search terms of the page it leads to.

Such links also provide useful alternative routes to key information for site visitors and can help improve accessibility compliance.

For example:

- Wrong: Click here to book luxury hotels in (destination) now

- Right: Book luxury hotels in (destination) online now

5.2.6 Page URLs Matter

The URL or address of a website page is important and should as far as possible contain target search terms for that page.

If a site is database driven, mask the database URLs with conventional page URLs. This is easier for clients to understand and is believed to increase the likelihood of search engines indexing all pages.

For example:

- Wrong: www.oursite.com/57429/22.bb.html/?profile=NDpMTOSbRGt+ty=234

- Right: www.oursite.com/accommodation.html

5.2.7 Choosing a Content Management System

Some content management systems (CMS) can be detrimental to ranking and optimisation.

Take care to choose a system which produces simple URLs that contain page titles – not numbers.

It should also allow you to:

- Update the HTML Title tag, meta tag Description and meta tag Keywords on an individual basis for each page

- Use the HTML header and sub header code <h1>,<h2> tags to signify important headings and to format text as italic or bold

- Add and edit alternate text to images

- Insert key search-term-rich links between pages and to other sites (see example above, section 5.2.5)

- Ensure changed URLs are properly covered with so-called 301 redirects – a search engine friendly method for webpage redirection that should preserve the search engine rankings for that particular page

- Create a so-called 404 ('page not found') reception page, which can include the clickable site map to assist the user

5.2.8 Sitemaps Based on Text Links

Sitemaps coded in Extensible Markup Language (XML) and HTML, and based purely on text links containing target search terms, will both assist the optimisation process and improve accessibility.

Creating an XML sitemap or submission to search engines will help ensure that the full site is crawled.

5.2.9 How to Develop Ranking and 'Authority' Status

All of the 'do's' and 'don'ts' above will help webpages to be indexed and returned with high relevance under searches using target search terms.

But you must work on the ranking of the site, too – especially in the highly competitive field of travel and tourism.

The objective is simple: the site should be regarded as the most useful source of information on the destination by the people who visit it. Achieving 'authority' status is the goal of every SEO exercise.

Search engines strive, through their algorithms, to reflect the views of real people. As well as having the best content online, you must address two factors that affect ranking in all major search engines:

- Frequency of updating

- Links from other sites

5.2.10 Update the Site Frequently

When a page is indexed by Google or Yahoo it is compared with the previous version cached. Where sites are regularly updated it is likely that they will be indexed more often. News sites like CNN may be indexed every few minutes; most sites are indexed at least monthly, but sites that are not regularly updated may seldom be visited by search engine crawlers and will not rank highly.

Conversely, regularly updated sites with timely information such as events and news seem to be more highly ranked in most searches.

5.2.11 Develop Links from Other High Ranking Sites

It is vital to develop relevant links, with keyword-rich anchor text, from other high ranking sites. Anchor text (the actual text contained within the clickable link) is extremely important in optimisation.

Volumes have been written about the importance of link popularity in ranking webpages, but the logic is simple:

- If more website editors choose to link to one site than another when wishing to point people to information, then that site ranks more highly

- This is especially true if sites linking to your site have a high ranking

- The effectiveness of these links is enhanced if the link on the third-party site has text contained within it that relates to the page it points to – just like the anchor text between pages on your own site

The important concept here is relevance – links into your site must provide relevant information for the visitors to the site providing the link. Therefore, when developing or requesting inbound links you should:

- Collaborate with sites that provide information which can be enriched by yours, and have a high page rank. Use the Google Toolbar to check page rank, and check that the page on which the link will appear is currently indexed by Google and Yahoo

- Work with partner sites (for example, your destination's arts and culture sites) and with high ranking travel sites, to develop linkages

Remember to develop links that come into relevant pages on your site:

- Do not have all linkage to your home page. For example: a tourist attraction that wants to provide where-to-stay details for visitors should lead to accommodation pages – not to the home page of the destination's site

- Develop anchor text for inbound links that is rich in target search terms for the page they lead to, and request your collaborators to use this text

- When offering reciprocal links, be doubly sure both sides of the arrangement link to relevant pages

- Avoid seeking placement on pages consisting mainly of links. One link among a few from a third-party page of content, to a relevant page on your site, is worth much more than a link from a page devoted to links

5.2.12 Take Care Redesigning Your Site

Destinations often take great pride in developing a new website, but if you already have good ranking for pages on your site, you run the risk of reducing your ranking if you change too much. A little and often is best.

When creating a new site to replace one that already ranks highly:

* Do not change your domain name

* Keep page URLs the same wherever possible

* Keep important and optimised text; and add to it rather than change it completely

* Keep meta data the same – at least the HTML Title tag and content Description (unless further optimisation is needed on poorly ranked pages)

* Transferring over the exact keywords from the old page to the new page is not currently necessary, but this may change if search algorithms change

Where page names are changed, make sure you implement 301 redirects and 404 landing pages (see above, section 5.2.7). That way the search engine will still find the appropriate content if it tries to re-index a page that has disappeared. And users following an old link will still get a result.

> **'Interactive communications' are the most effective trigger**
>
> Report findings show that, in travel, the most effective online marketing techniques that trigger consumer response are not the often ballyhooed paid media channels, such as pay-per-click search listings, banner ads, pop-ups and e-mail.
>
> Concentrate first on interactive marketing communications such as unsponsored search engine results (36%); e-mail recommendations by friends or colleagues (34%); links on websites (26%); and opt-in e-mails or e-newsletters (21%).[9]

5.2.13 Continuous Development

Optimising a website is an ongoing procedure and it will take time for the effects to be seen: as long as six to nine months in some cases. Google in particular will delay ranking a new domain.

The algorithms of search engines change continuously as search engines learn from the behaviour and feedback of searchers. Keeping up to date with developments and sharing knowledge is fundamental to continued success in this area.

Whether you outsource optimisation, or do it in-house, those responsible should have a clear programme of continuing professional development. This should involve joint working with others in their field, participation in forums, and online research through the resources provided by Google and others.

> **Further information**
>
> There are many useful forums and sites where SEO techniques are discussed, including:
>
> www.highrankings.com (3-8-2007).
>
> www.searchenginewatch.com (3-8-2007).
>
> www.google.com/webmasters (3-8-2007).

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9   Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) (2005), *Travelers' Use of the Internet, 2005 Edition.* See for an introduction: http://www.tia.org/pressmedia/pressrec.asp?Item=689 (3-8-2007).

5.3 Paid Listings and Pay-per-click

There are times when you may need to consider paid listings within search engines, but you should treat them as short-term tactics to help you to:

•   Achieve quick results while optimisation takes effect

•   Promote a website that is search-engine unfriendly due to lack of resources to rebuild; and/or owing to dependence on legacy systems

Paid-for search engine marketing is covered in chapter 6, section 6.5.

5.4 Search Engine Optimisation – Measures of Success

•   The ranking of the site in the results for target terms in the most important search engines in key source markets

•   Using web analytics, the traffic from search engines can be tracked and traced against targets and trends, measuring number of unique visitors and page views resulting from the target keywords and keyword phrases

•   Visits or sessions can be analysed in more detail, looking at aspects such as downstream activity that is of value, and bounce rates

See also chapter 16.

See also References and Bibliography.

How to Acquire and Develop Customers – Marketing Channels and the Use of Customer Relationship Management

Key Messages

- E-marketing is not just about operating a website: it makes full use of the wider internet

- Customer relationship management (CRM) processes and technology are at the core of e-marketing, and enable a single coordinated view of customers across multiple communication channels

- Good customer data, wisely used, helps the customer and the destination

- Sales campaigning and brand-building go hand-in-hand

6.1 Set Your Objectives for New Customer Acquisition

This chapter is about:

- Methods of acquiring new customers and activating existing customers, and thus producing extra sales

- Using internet channels that reach out beyond the destination's own website

These activities may be short, tactical marketing campaigns or sustained long-term programmes. They are likely to have their own themes and targets, and in general they supplement the daily e-marketing services provided by the destination website. E-newsletters, also covered here, may serve both regular and campaign needs.

They all, however, depend on sound customer relationship management (CRM) procedures and systems, and these are covered here as well.

6.1.1 E-marketing Campaign Objectives

Take into account your organisation's key roles. These may be:

- Branding: developing and projecting the brand in order to provide the industry with the best selling environment (see chapter 7 for the principles of branding). Usually, however, the two functions (branding and sales) go hand-in-hand in order to make the most of budgets. In the past, the internet could not contribute much to brand-building, but that is no longer true: broadband can convey rich imagery, and personal time spent on webpages has increased hugely. People do want to get in and out of individual pages quickly, but this fast pace and short attention span is becoming commonplace in most aspects of modern life and is therefore a part of the general environment for marketers rather than a specific characteristic of the internet. Two destination websites that use multimedia well to project the brand are www.lariojaturismo.com and www.australia.com

- Sales: capturing new contacts and helping the industry to convert them into new customers (and for some DMOs, increasing their own e-commerce sales)

- Improving customer retention: a chief aim may be to build more knowledge of existing customers as individuals, and to build stronger relationships with them

- Helping the industry to up-sell or cross-sell to existing customers

Once the roles and the priorities are clear, the DMO can apply standard marketing disciplines:

- Define and understand the destination's target segments. Describe them, their wishes and needs. Use the CRM database (see below, section 6.2.3), original research, and 'personas' (chapter 2, section 2.3.3)

- Decide the priorities among these segments. For example, are they first-timers or repeaters? If new customers, decide how important recommendations from previous customers are. (This chapter covers recommendation marketing, but see also chapter 3 on user-generated content)

Many DMOs are expected by their industry to go for brand-building and first-time visitors; it is felt that gaining repeaters is the industry's job. Other DMOs are expected to raise some of their budget from the industry and therefore need to do tactical short-term marketing that brings direct sales results.

Write a three-year marketing plan with work programmes for each year. Accept that even if you outsource your ICT requirements, the procurement and learning curve for e-marketing makes it difficult to work in one-year cycles. More continuity is needed for e-campaigning than for most offline campaigns. Revise the three-year plan annually. Set targets:

- Targets may be very general, such as brand awareness in a key segment in a key market; or very specific, such as number of customers in the CRM database, rate of growth, key fields captured, number of interactions with them, cost-per-action, or cost-per-acquisition (CPA)

- And targets may focus on one channel you use: for example, number of e-newsletters sent/received/ opened/clicked through

It is usually most effective to operate campaigns jointly with tourism suppliers. New contacts captured by the campaign can be followed up seamlessly online by the suppliers, at their own expense, to target first and repeat visits. But be sure to comply with the local data protection laws or codes of conduct.

6.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

6.2.1 What Is CRM?

CRM is the total of all the continuous business processes that allow us to record, understand and meet the needs of customers. CRM is about highly defined procedures and the software used to carry them out in an organised way. CRM is also a point of view: that the customer comes first in a marketer's thinking, not the product.

In the commercial world, the main CRM objectives of businesses are customer retention (63%), customer acquisition (59%), and improving brand awareness (39%).[1]

6.2.2 What Can CRM Do for Destinations?

Customers use a variety of offline and online media. They make telephone calls, read brochures, papers and magazines, watch TV, listen to the radio, look at posters, go to exhibitions, open mail shots, and walk into your enquiry offices. Online may be a major part of their lives, or a small part, or no part at all. Cross-media CRM should therefore be a key part of a DMO's business processes and the ICT systems that support them.

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1   Microsoft (2007), *April 2007 Survey.*

CRM provides:

- Customer data capture (customer acquisition) including details of transactions, if any

- The ability to analyse the customer data so that it can be actioned (customer knowledge)

- The means to communicate, on an ongoing basis, with customers to persuade them to travel (customer activation)

- A unified view of each customer, across all the channels used

The operation of the systems that support these business processes usually resides in the e-marketing team. The non-technical challenges for e-marketing CRM staff are:

- To gain acceptance, by online and offline marketers and customer service staff, of the hard and soft procedures and customer service standards that are necessary

- To provide training and support for them to apply the procedures and maintain their motivation

- To ensure adequate monitoring and feedback of performance

Before we examine how this should be done, we need to take a brief look at how customers are described by marketers:

6.2.3 One-to-one Relationships versus Market Segmentation

Segmentation by socio-economic and/or lifestyle values implies that customers will be assigned to groups. Each group will be defined in considerable detail in terms of CRM database fields.

This marketing practice might be thought to be at odds with the opportunity that the online channels now provide for one-to-one relationships to be developed. But market segmentation is an essential part of the continuous process of achieving initial contact with prospective customers, gathering intelligence about them, and gaining an understanding of them and their needs.

The destination should have precise definitions of its best target segments, which it can derive from a combination of original research, and analysis of the CRM database. Most destinations use one of the many commercial market segmentation systems. These may have a number of common items of data on which they depend, but the data is interpreted into different segment groupings. Examples of such segments are the 'Discoverers' and 'Cosmopolitans' in the Arkenford market modelling and research system.[2]

Destinations may need to import data from more than one segmentation system, so the database should support this.

6.2.4 Customer Data Fields

The CRM database fields may need to cover:

- Demographics – such as gender, age group, income, education, size of household, location, and occupation

- Psychographics – such as personality and emotional factors connected with buying patterns; is the purchaser likely to be an impulse buyer, for example?

- Lifestyle – the customer's choice of leisure and entertainment, interests and hobbies, and holidays

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2   Arkenford Ltd.

- Lifestage – for example, pre-teens, teens, families with young children, and empty nesters

- Values – for example, cultural and national

- Travel intentions – including when, how, and budget

- Travel group – for example, couple, family, extended family, or interest group

- Contact history – including recency, frequency, e-mail open rate, and amount of address data held

- Occasions – for example, wedding, anniversary, or football match

Some of this data will be explicit – given by the customer – and some will be implicit – deduced from their actions as a registered user of the website and a recipient and user of the e-newsletter.

Out of perhaps 50 or 100 fields, a very few will be identified as high priority for information capture. All campaign activity should be designed to acquire these, asking the customer for a little more each time that contact is made.

Further information

European Travel Commission and World Tourism Organization (2007), *Handbook on Tourism Market Segmentation – Maximizing Marketing Effectiveness*, UNWTO, Madrid.

6.2.5 CRM Business Processes and Technology

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Darren Austin, CRM Programme Manager, VisitBritain, for assistance in the preparation of this section.

The main functions that are needed may be split as follows:

- Storing customer data

- Maintaining the data

- Planning campaigns using the data

- Analysing the data and producing reports to steer strategy

6.2.5.1 Storing the Customer Data

Key requirements are:

- A user interface for contact centre staff – to look up records, update them, and create new ones. You will need to be able to change this interface as your needs develop; and to create versions of it for different markets

- A data capture system, for your websites and those of external partners, that can:

  – Feed their data straight into the database

  – Allow customers to update their existing records

- A system to import data from other sources – new records, and updates to existing records. These sources will include data from partners, and from campaigns that for other reasons did not use the main CRM system. Sources may include data from commercial market segmentation systems (see above, section 6.2.3). You will need:

- Every record to have a unique reference number

- De-duplication logic, and the facility to revise it from time to time. This is vital when working with partners, and co-ordinating activities of a head office with overseas offices

• A postal address checking procedure that compares incoming new records with each country's official national Postal Address File

• Passing of customer data from research surveys into the database, if data protection permissions have been obtained (see next section)

Further requirements are likely to include:

• Variations in the database between different source markets

• Business rules, configurable by administrative users, to manage the quality and consistency of customer data processed into the database

6.2.5.2 Data Protection

The database will also need to hold records for data protection reasons:

• Purpose of the data collected, as was stated to the customer, when they gave permission for its use

• The database needs the facility for records to have multiple 'owners' and multiple opt in/opt out permissions that relate separately to each owner

• The database must designate one post holder in the DMO who is responsible for compliance with data protection legislation:

- Within the DMO's structure this may be the overseas manager responsible for marketing in the country in which the customer is located, if that is known. Assigning the record to a country manager ensures that this person can apply the legislation and best practice of that country

- If the record was first collected by another arm of the DMO (for example a US record collected through the Canada website, or through a head office campaign) then the database still assigns the record to the country manager

6.2.5.3 Maintaining the Data

To keep customer records as up to date and accurate as possible, the CRM data needs:

• A regular (perhaps annual) cleaning programme, for each market or segment

• Ad hoc cleaning – typically, in advance of a major campaign. This may include:

- E-mail address validation

- Validation against the official national postal address file of each country

- Duplicate detection

- Checking against the national mailing, telephone, and e-mail preference services in countries where these operate. Preference services allow consumers to record in a central database, accessible to all marketing organisations, the services which they do not wish to receive

- Suppressing gone-aways, by using national change of address files and mortality screening (or local market equivalents)

- Profanity checking

6.2.5.4 Planning Campaigns Using the Data

Marketing staff will need to be able to:

- Examine the database and make pre-campaign counts of records that fit segments and other criteria (see above, section 6.2.4)

- Specify each segment that is to be mailed, drawing from a selection of database fields. There may be a large number of such segments. There will then be a number of different messages or content versions, one of which will be applicable to each target

  - A grid or hierarchy structure will be needed to organise this

  - It will need to be output in a form that will help sales staff to recruit the newsletter advertisers

- Extract campaign lists, with all the required database fields for each record, and send them to the e-mail and mobile marketing system (below, section 6.4.2). Alternatively, the records may be sent to a direct mail house for a postal mailing. The database record should be automatically flagged whenever a record is extracted

- Specify the fulfilment rules – for example, if the recipient clicks on a particular link, they are automatically flagged with a specific interest code, or receive a specified next e-mail

- Add other campaign information, such as costs and a return on investment calculation

- Handle customers who are newly acquired during a campaign, for example, fresh website registrants, or those enrolling for an event

- Feed research survey data (if not anonymous) from online questionnaires into the CRM database

6.2.5.5 Analysing the Data and Producing Reports to Steer Strategy

At different times, three types of report will be needed:

- Real-time reporting of campaigns

- Regular standard reports

- The ability to produce special reports (see below, section 6.4.3 for e-mail campaign reports)

Standard report formats should be set up in advance by the DMO and its CRM system supplier. These should enable DMO marketing users to carry out data analysis using an on-screen query builder that accesses the customer database. The system should allow the marketer to build up a report format from a menu of options. This should include the ability to receive cross-tabulated and matrix reports pulling on fields from the customer database.

You may want reports on:

- Database size, database growth, and proportion of records with key fields completed, shown as totals and by year-to-date, month-on-month, and year-on-year

- Views of the data at global level, by country of residence, region of residence, segment, or by other criteria

- Reports on data completeness – the number of records with valid values in high priority fields against your targets. Examples include enquiry contact method, enquiry campaign code, segment definition fields, interests, planned date of visit, and planned duration of visit

- Cross tabulation of interests versus segments

- Contact methods – the proportion of customer enquiries received via each channel

- Campaign response – the number of customer enquiries received in response to specific campaigns

- Actual visits – the number and/or percentage of customer enquiries with valid values in key fields such as actual visit duration and actual visit date

- Retail data – the volume, cost and types of products sold via your e-commerce system and merchandise shop, and dates

- Data quality:

    – Quality of address data against official national postal address files

    – Quality of customer profile data against business rules and/or lookup tables associated with each database field

- Generic requirements for standard reports may include:

    – The option to present reports in a graphical or tabular view

    – Automatic generation on preset dates or to preset time periods

    – Easy viewing by marketing staff and senior management

    – Automatic e-mailing to a defined list of users of links to the reports, at specified intervals

    – Passing key data live to the main executive dashboard. The dashboard (chapter 1, section 1.8) is a real-time graphic display for managers of performance against main Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), drawn from multiple databases across the organisation. The CRM database will be one of the most important contributors to the dashboard

Marketing staff will also need the ability to compile reports on an ad hoc basis to meet specific needs. These would draw on a selection of available key fields in the database, defined in advance with the database supplier.

You should discuss with the supplier the cost advantages of such a facility, and the processing and presentation facilities you might need, compared with paying for such reports as the need arises.

Further information

CRM management news: http://www.crm-daily.com (25-8-2007).

UtrechtYourWay: using event-driven communication to create value for customers and businesses

The UtrechtYourWay website, system, communication and business processes are based on the principle of event-driven communication – sending the right communication at the right time to the right person.

A CRM system is at the heart of the service. When a visitor to www.utrechtyourway.nl (and other sites promoting themes and destinations within the province) books a hotel, they are asked to give their interests (for example, shopping, fun4kids, culture and history) in order to receive tailor-made information.

They then receive an e-mail newsletter about events and things to do during their stay, according to their preferences, and another one 24 hours before arrival, welcoming them to the city and providing updates.

Museums, theatres, restaurants and others can make customised offers to the customer based on the profiles collected.

About 48 hours after checking out, a survey is sent to visitors asking whether they were satisfied with the accommodation, information and destination. Positive scores are stored with their profile. If there are negative ones, a warning goes out to relevant suppliers and is stored in the management system.

Customer profiles are extended and updated with information gathered about, for example, booking behaviour, preferred hotel, and money spent. More information is gathered through bi-annual profile update requests.

"Visitors feel the communication is one-to-one"

When there is no availability in the system at the hotel that the visitor prefers, it is possible to have the system 'knock on the door' of that hotel by means of an e-mail alert. The hotel has two hours to upload rooms. When that is done, the visitor is sent an e-mail alert informing them that the room requested is 'in option' waiting for him, and that he has two hours to confirm the reservation.

"All this is done automatically," says Ronald van den Hoff of consultancy and technology provider Cyberdigma; "and thus most cost-effectively. But visitors feel that communication is one-to-one and that the information is personalised."

"The future is in co-creation"

"Industry stakeholders feel their interests are taken seriously. There is an increased awareness that they are part of, and have to take part in, the branding of the city. Utrecht is not just a 5-star hotel. People come because of the combination of what the city has to offer. At the same time we give tailor-made information and serve niche markets.

The next step is publishing blogs by locals. The book *Blue Ocean Strategy* by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne (Harvard School Press) is a must: the future is in co-creation and value-based management."

Results

In five years of the system, hotel bookings alone have increased by 40%. And an average of 5,000-7,000 profiles are added to the CRM system each year, invaluable information for the DMO.

By courtesy of Utrecht Toerisme & Recreatie (http://www.u-tr.nl)

6.3 Choosing Campaign Media Channels

[Mobile marketing is dealt with in chapter 9; websites in chapter 4; website SEO in chapter 5; and media relations in chapter 11.]

The DMO should first consider the right balance of investment between the destination's own website and using third-party media to reach the desired audiences.

Usually the website receives the primary attention and money, as the shop window for the organisation and the destination. It is essential to have a functional website which captures the essence of the destination, a site that is always there, and is fully under your control. But do not let the website take over all your resources:

- You cannot fully target your prime segments just by hoping they will find your site, even with excellent SEO

- To make the most of the money invested in the website, it is sensible to invest in action to drive qualified visitors to it

- Customers are usually frequent users of a few sites, and they look for answers within their favourite orbits, or use search engines. So it is vital to go out to capture them if you can

The following sections outline the key offsite marketing techniques. The decision on the balance of onsite/offsite budgets should be driven by whether talking to existing customers is more important to the destination and the DMO than finding new ones.

Whatever the balance, remember to use the fundamental tracking benefits of online marketing. These enable you to monitor which channels deliver the most cost-effective site visitors and what actions these visitors take on your destination website.

6.4 E-mail Marketing

E-newsletters have only a limited role in finding new customers (via friend-get-friend services), but they have vital functions:

- First, they are the most useful tool to move existing customers on from their initial interest through to purchase and repeat purchase. Your CRM capabilities will determine the extent to which you can send accurate, personalised messages that do this

- Second, they are invaluable as a way potentially to share with your tourism suppliers the customers you already have. You will probably want to attract revenue from this from paid-for entries by suppliers (chapter 14)

- Third, e-mails are the most efficient way to maintain communication after the customer has gone home, in order to:

  – Help the customer to re-endorse their choice after the trip, confirm their satisfaction, and relive their holiday

  – Help the customer to pass on their good feelings and information to friends and family

  – Produce repeat visits, including cross-selling and upselling with new ideas that fit their profile as stored in the CRM database

- Finally, any good e-mail campaign management system will provide real-time reporting of results. This will enable you to fine-tune the selection of customers and content as you go along

6.4.1 Guidelines for the Content of E-newsletters

- The 'From' and 'Subject' line:

  – The DMO e-mail address, which will appear in the customer's inbox, should be one that the recipient knows and trusts. This is the most important factor in choosing to open an e-mail rather than delete it unopened.[3] Use both a personal name and an organisation name if you can. Do not use a real or invented name unless the recipient knows it. Do use something authoritative such as 'Editor@', not 'Info@'. Ensure the DMO name is very clear and kept consistent. Do not use a new campaign name that is not known to the recipient already

  – The 'From' address and 'Subject' line should jointly be authoritative, newsworthy, inspiring, relevant to the recipient, and have a call to action. Not all of these will be achievable every time! Keep the 'Subject' line to 40-50 characters maximum

- E-newsletters generate stronger emotions than websites because they drop into the recipient's personal inbox space. But they also face stiff competition for attention. So consider objectively whether the e-mail will be compelling to the recipient, not just to your own interests or those of your paying partner. The second most important reason for choosing to open an e-mail is that the previous one was thought valuable[4]

- The first few lines of text are the most important, especially when the recipient is using a preview pane in their inbox, or receives a pop-up alert of new e-mails. Thus it is best not to put a big image at the top

- Observe the W3C/WAI guidelines for readability (chapter 4, section 4.3.2.1)

- Think like a popular newspaper journalist:

  – Make it easy to scan. Only the very committed will scroll to the bottom

  – Give each story a headline (maximum five or six words), then follow it with a very short, sharp paragraph. No-one reads much on-screen. Anything longer than about 20 words should be on a new page reached via a link

  – A clickable 'Contents' list is a bit formal, but it works

- Keep the file size under 50Kb

- To avoid browser problems, do not use frames. Good e-mail campaign systems avoid frames anyway

- The HTML version should be printer-friendly

- The graphic design should reflect the design of the parent destination website, especially if much of the newsletter is linking to pages of the parent site for further information

- Sans serif fonts are more effective than serif, says a survey. The optimum for body text for newsletters (and websites) in 12 pt is Arial; in 10pt and 9pt it is Verdana[5]

Overall, e-newsletters need to build a relationship. Treat the recipients as individuals. Never use items that are wrong for the recipient: use the CRM database to send the right messages to the right people. Go for quality of messages and targeting, not for quantity. Even just a few unsubscribes should ring alarm bells.

Do not waste the first e-mail. The recipient will probably remember your destination name and open it, but the next one after that is up to you. Deliver some value to them.

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3   Return Path (2007), *February 2007.*

4   Return Path (2007), *February 2007.*

5   Wilson, R. F. (2001), *Web Marketing Today* (Online), available: http://www.wilsonweb.com (25-8-2007).

6.4.1.1 Tips for Ongoing E-mail Campaigns

- E-mail regularly enough for the recipient to get to know you and your e-mails; once a month is about right. If you have collected their intended travel date, then a series of progressively more frequent e-mails is desirable

- Get the timing right: if the market segment takes last-minute short breaks, 10 days in advance might be right. For a long-haul trip, start a year ahead, and build up the messages

- Consider sending your e-mails at exactly the time of day and on the same day of the week that the recipient originally subscribed: it can produce a 20% increase in click-through rates; 65% increase in conversion rates; and 45% increase in value of order[6]

- Achieve continuity – of emotive core messages, and of holiday planning information. Try to be sequential with information. Do not change the subject every time

- Aim to include a call to action in every e-mail that achieves new data capture and adds to your customer knowledge, progressively enabling you to personalise the relationship

- Encourage viral effects (see below, section 6.8) by including odd, amusing or interesting snippets that recipients will want to share – and include the call to action: 'Send this to a friend'

- Project the destination's brand values. For example, some official bodies tend to use impersonal terminology, which is not helpful if friendliness is a strong point for the destination. Have pictures of real people, and quotes from them – the newsletter editor, a recent visitor, a resident, a restaurateur, or a celebrity

- Make it very easy to unsubscribe. If too many recipients add you to their spam blocker, it will trigger blocking by servers of other recipients. If you choose to automate the 'unsubscribe', and make it a one-click process, it is still worth providing a confirmation message, or users will not entirely believe you have done it. If you really do have good alternative services for the customer, then consider having a two-stage unsubscribe process, to allow the recipient to choose to continue to receive communications on other subjects

- Do not rely on subscribers to keep your database clean: at intervals, ask them to re-validate the enrolment and their data (with a default to 'Continue')

6.4.2 E-mail and Mobile Campaign Management Systems

There are many systems on the market, which can either be installed in your own ICT system, or used as a service from an application service provider (ASP) – a web-based service that sits on the supplier's server. Their service should include:

- Design templates

- An easy-to-use newsletter compilation system for text, pictures, links and personalisation, with a document and image library. For HTML versions, it should observe the W3C/WAI guidelines for readability

- Importing e-mail addresses from other sources

- Delivery service:

  – Validating e-mail addresses by checking for syntax errors

  – Accreditation with anti-spam software at all the major ISPs in your source markets

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6   Silverpop (2007), *April 2007.*

- – A newsletter content checker to identify material that would score badly in the spam filters. For example, 'FREE' in the subject line may be caught

  – The ability to get the entire message through filters to different e-mail clients such as Outlook, Yahoo, Gmail, and AOL

  – Detecting targets that do not accept HTML e-mails, sending these text-only e-mails

- ICT and marketing support

6.4.3 Responses and Management Reporting

Choose a system that has evaluation reporting built in:

- Automated handling and reporting of undelivereds, bouncebacks, soft bounces (such as out-of-office or mailbox full) and unsubscribes

- Live reporting of progress towards key performance indicators (KPIs): how many have been received, opened, and links clicked on, with the timings of each, number of e-mails forwarded to friends – with cumulative data over a number of newsletters

Integration with the DMO's CRM system (see above, section 6.2) can offer massive further sophistication in targeting, personalised content, and reporting.

Other more advanced features include:

- Creation of a landing page or series of pages, which can be personalised. This function may be possible within your main website content management and CRM systems. (Section 6.9, below, has more on landing pages)

- Newsletter usability research

6.4.4 Newsletter Audit Service

The UNWTO Destination Web Watch e-newsletter audit service[7] includes a detailed survey of all the elements of e-newsletters:

- The subscribe page and process

- Settings and preference management

- The newsletter itself

- Unsubscribe process

The report also includes an action plan to improve the newsletter's effectiveness, and online access to Destination Web Watch in order to view your scores.

6.4.5 The DMO Corporate E-mail Signature

Finally, a word about routine e-mails sent by all the DMO's staff: do not forget that the corporate e-mail signature should be working hard too.

The UNWTO Destination Web Watch mystery shopper tests have shown that DMOs often fail to conclude their e-mail messages with the name of the organisation, strapline, link to website, and links

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7   World Tourism Organization, *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch* (Online), available: http://www.destinationwebwatch.org/services-page13931.html (25-8-2007).

to relevant pages in the site. The signature is also a good place for a one-liner that promotes a prominent forthcoming event.

Further information

Nielsen Norman Group (2007), *E-mail Newsletter Usability: 165 Design Guidelines for Newsletter Subscription, Content, Account Maintenance, and RSS News Feeds Based on Usability Studies* (download, US$ 398), (Online), available: http://www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters (25-8-2007).

The E-mail Doctor, guides and articles: http://www.emaildoctor.info (25-8-2007).

6.5 Paid-for Search Engine Marketing

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Mike Imrie of FSI Travel for contributions to this section.

Paid-for search or pay-per-click (PPC) marketing is the bedrock of most online marketing campaigns. In the United Kingdom market, for instance, it accounts for nearly 60% of online media spend across all sectors. It is widely regarded as the most cost effective method of generating qualified traffic, customer registrations and incremental sales.

PPC differs from search engine optimisation (SEO) (chapter 5) in that there is no technical process required to ensure placement on the search engine. PPC is a purely commercial exchange:

- The advertiser bids for a specific keyword

- Based on the price they are willing to pay, a text ad or sponsored link is ranked and displayed accordingly

- The advertiser pays the cost-per-click (CPC) fee each time a user clicks on their text ad

PPC can be bought from websites as well as from search engines. A network such as www.miva.com uses your chosen keywords to select the sites in its network on which to place your text ads, and then charges a PPC.

The following sections give general guidelines for setting up and running a successful search engine PPC campaign.

6.5.1 Buying Keywords

All the search engines allow you to buy keywords and have your web link listed in the search results on their site when the keywords are used. These results are shown as 'Sponsored links' or similar wording, and appear either at the top of the main search results or on one side.

The individual search engines give ample online information about their offers. Google sell keywords to advertisers as Adwords, Yahoo as Sponsored search, and Microsoft as Adcenter.[8] Always check their latest terms at the time you are planning PPC.

Effective PPC marketing needs diligent monitoring, analysis and optimisation to deliver the best return on investment.

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8   http://adwords.google.com/select/Login; http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com; https://adcenter.microsoft.com/ (9-8-2007).

6.5.2 Using an E-marketing Agency

Most destinations will be wise to employ an e-marketing agency to plan and manage their campaigns. This can include management of all keywords, listings, and bids across multiple outlets, with monitoring that allows optimisation of conversions and thus of Return on investment (ROI) across all PPC keyword campaigns.[9]

The agency will advise on:

- Keyword insights and selection:

    – Brainstorm the keywords relevant to your business from the customer's perspective

    – Use online tools such as Hitwise and KeyWord Discovery[10] to research search terms and synonyms. These are equally used for natural SEO (chapter 5, section 5.2.3)

    – Build a matrix of search terms

- Ad/sponsored link copywriting:

    – Testing a variety of headlines and body text

    – Setting up different ad versions to represent different keyword themes

- Dedicated landing pages:

    – Ensuring that relevant search terms and ads drive customers to equally relevant pages. Good landing pages achieve site stickiness and conversion (see below, section 6.9)

- Establishing bid thresholds and bid management. Agreeing daily, weekly and monthly budgets:

    – Managing the spread of traffic according to budget and the client's demand requirements

6.5.3 Campaign Management and Optimisation

Evaluation includes:

- Daily optimisation of high-performing key words and text ads

- Monitoring performance relative to day part. Time of day can impact on CPC and site conversion

- Monitoring performance relative to ranking. Often, a text ad delivers better ROI further down the rankings

- Feeding keyword performance back into the original insight and selection process

Monitoring can be set up to work in real time, subject to the cost of the system and manning of it. It is also important to feed back this knowledge into the destination website natural SEO work. Frequent analysis and testing is the secret of a robust PPC campaign.

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9   WebSideStory (2007) (Online), available: http://www.websidestory.com/products/search-engine-marketing/bid/overview. html (20-8-2007).

10   http://www.hitwise.com; http://www.keyworddiscovery.com (9-8-2007).

How swiftcover.com integrated PPC with offline campaigns

Swiftcover.com was the first online-only car insurance provider in their market, aiming to offer the customer speed and value.

2007 was a highly competitive year for car insurance, owing to increased spend online from the traditional brands and the impact of aggregator activity. The objective for their agency Steak Media was to think creatively about how to enable swiftcover to stand out amongst tough competition and gain maximum impact from the budget, particularly in PPC.

Rosalie Kurton, Head of Digital at Steak Media, reported: "The campaign demonstrated that there are lots of ways to successfully integrate online with above the line advertising so that the overall result is more powerful and the budget is maximised."

Objectives

The targets for online for Quarter 1 (Q1) of 2007 had increased 35% year-on-year to 14,000 and the CPA was reduced by a third. Maximising PPC was instrumental to achieving this as it accounted for over 60% of the budget.

In Q1, the media schedule included DRTV (direct response TV), brand TV, outdoor posters, a radio promotion and the online work (€ 7 million in total).

Steak Media's strategy was to link the online media closely to the above-the-line campaign, to enable the combined advertising to generate greater visibility and recall and ultimately drive more quotes and sales.

For PPC, the focus was on messaging, timing and targeting.

Messaging

After extensive copy testing in 2006 in PPC, the best performing message of "67% of people can save up to £ 346" was used as the lead message on TV. The theme of "no clucking call centres", developed by the ATL creative agency, was combined into the digital copy to promote continuity between what consumers were seeing on the outdoor posters and what they were experiencing online when they searched for the brand.

Timing

PPC timings and positioning were structured to provide maximum, consistent visibility whilst the TV and outdoor ads were running, so that customers could easily find a consistent message and route to sale. Specifically, we mapped TV slots by hour to our search campaign to increase our positioning on highly competitive terms such as 'car insurance', when users were most likely to have seen the TV ads. This enabled swiftcover.com to punch above its weight against key competitors with better known brands.

Targeting

In PPC Steak Media used local targeting through Google to tie in with selected geographical areas, and demographic targeting through MSN adCenter to reach more of the key audience – age 25+ – with male bias.

Results

"The results were an overwhelming success," said Rosalie Kurton. "We achieved 108% of the target and bettered the CPA by 10%. We also achieved the objective of a seamless and integrated campaign. As a specialist digital agency, Steak Media were able to fully integrate with their agency partners MWO (creative) and Spark (above the line media) to plan an efficient, successful and well rounded campaign."

Tina Shortle, swiftcover.com Marketing Director, reported: "The integrated approach, both in terms of creative and targeting, between online and offline media has demonstrated how consumer interest and conversion to sale can be dramatically improved."

Maximising exposure by synchronising TV, outdoor and search

The graph illustrates the design of the PPC budgets to mirror the above the line campaign, to exploit the campaign exposure and ensure that customers would have a complete 'customer journey' and find it easy to sign up.

Figure 6.1 TV, Outdoor (posters) and PPC working together
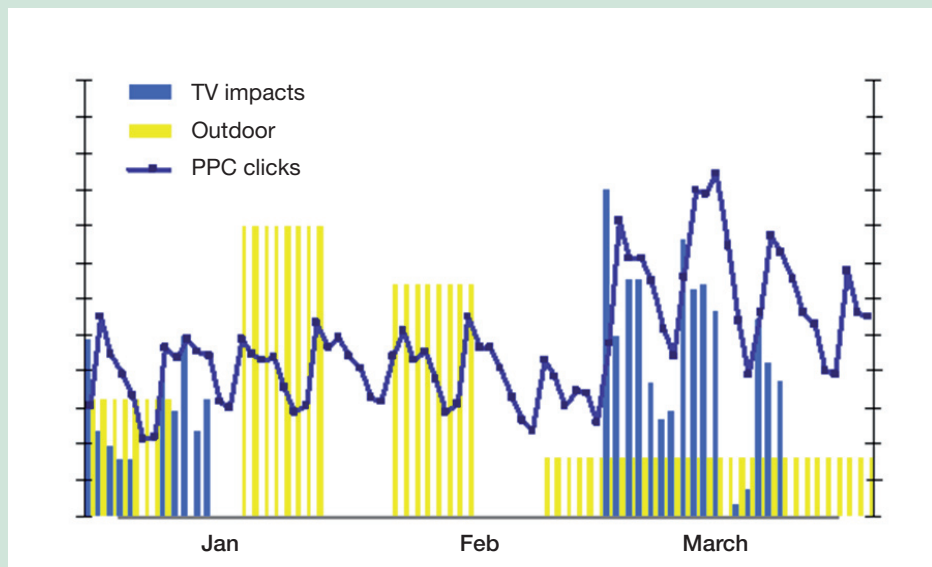
Expanding the campaign theme into the search copy

The search copy adapted and tested multiple pieces of copy that reflected what the creative work was saying. This promoted continuity of message, but also gave scope to stand out from competitors, by using quirky, interesting messages.

During the campaign over 40 different messages were tested, to compare click through rates and conversion rates. This was tied back to when specific messages were being promoted above the line. The combination of using these in conjunction with the other media was monitored.

48 Sheet poster:
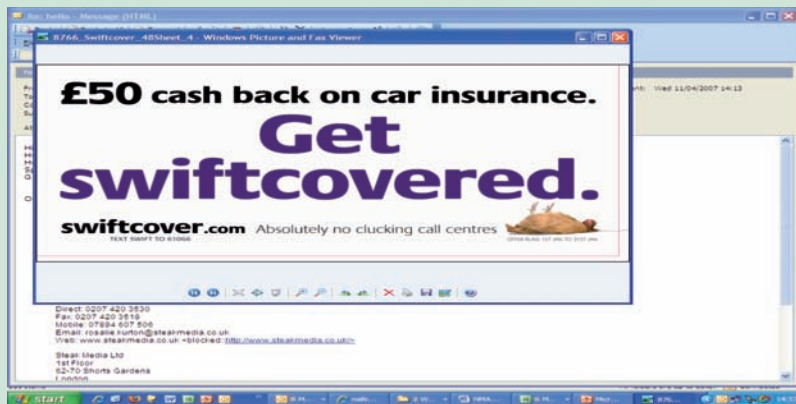
Search Copy:

Swiftcover – £ 50 cashback	**Swiftcover Car Insurance**	**Cheaper Car Insurance**
New Year Special Offer. Quotes in seconds. Get Swiftcovered today! www.swiftcover.com	Special offer: £ 50 cash back, only January. No clucking call centres www.swiftcover.com	Clucking Hell! Another £ 50 off your car insurance? Check out Swiftcover www.swiftcover.com

By courtesy of search marketing specialists Steak Media (www.steakmedia.co.uk) and their client, www.swiftcover.com.

6.6 Artificial Linking

It is worth buying links on other websites for traffic, but not for search engine rankings. Chapter 5 has advice on this.

6.7 Online Media and Advertising

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Mike Imrie of FSI Travel for contributions to this section.

6.7.1 Display Advertising

This is where online marketing really started – a replication of the print advertising model, but with the benefits of interaction, animation and tracking.

Online advertising is familiar to us as the border surrounding most web editorial that we read on commercial sites. However, the choice of media has become ever more sophisticated in order to remain an attractive option for marketers in the face of search marketing's rise to dominance.

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) has produced global standards and guidelines for online advertising.[11] Banners, buttons, skyscrapers, and other variations such as animated GIFs have long been the norm for online ads. The standards for the various types and sizes are at www.iab.net/standards/adunits.asp.

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11   Interactive Advertising Bureau (2004), *Standards and Guidelines* (Online), available: http://www.iab.net (22-8-2007).

6.7.2 Rich Media Ads

Broadband connections have made rich media the favoured option for online advertisers who seek to:

•   Build brand awareness

•   Generate direct response via a strong creative idea

•   Integrate online campaigns with creatively-driven offline campaigns. An example is www.lariojaturismo.com which featured the same stories as the Rioja TV campaign

The IAB standards for rich media are at http://www.iab.net/standards/richmedia.asp. Formats include:

•   Floating ad – a free-form ad appearing for a pre-set period of time. The ad may then disappear, or may leave behind an in-page static or animated ad, in banner, button or skyscraper format

•   Expandable ad – an in-page ad unit that expands when a user rolls their mouse over or clicks on the ad, revealing additional panels above, below or to the side of the original ad space. Imagery, messaging and interactive features can be included

•   Universal 100k – sometimes referred to as a 'polite banner'. This contains additional panels of imagery, messaging or interactive features, which are revealed when a user rolls their mouse on the ad or clicks on it, but the panels are contained within the original ad space rather than expanding across the page

•   Snap-back – when a page loads, this ad exposes the user to an expanded ad format which automatically reverts to a normal unit size after a pre-determined number of seconds

Rich media has significantly enhanced the impact of online advertising, but take care when choosing the format. Make sure you consider what the customer will be likely to respond to. There is always the potential for the ad to be so distracting that it frustrates their efforts to find the information they are seeking. There are clear differences in what is acceptable in different countries and market segments around the world.

As with any advertising, the relevance of the message is the key to building awareness and driving response. Do not be blinded by what the technology can do!

6.7.3 Ads in New Windows, such as Pop-ups

'Interstitials' are ads that load when the user has clicked to move to a new page. They may need to be closed before the page that was originally required appears. They are therefore intrusive and should only be used by destinations when it is essential to communicate an important message that cannot effectively be placed on a standard page.

Pop-ups are ads that appear without any action by the user, at a moment programmed by the site either when the background page loads or after a pre-set interval. The IAB guidelines are at www.iab.net/standards/popup/index.asp. Note that:

•   Full page pop-ups totally interrupt the user's train of thought and should be avoided. Smaller windows are acceptable, and often the norm, in some markets, especially the United States of America, but not in others

•   Many users turn on their browser's pop-up blocker, so they will not see your message at all. But this does not necessarily make pop-ups an uneconomic advertising option: only delivered pop-ups are paid for. They can produce high responses (and thus are sometimes charged at a high rate per thousand delivered)

•   Resentment directed at the advertiser may make them an unwise choice in many markets. Annoyance can be limited by presenting the pop-up only once in each session. Although they

are not recommended as good practice, many destinations do use them on their own site to enrol users into newsletters and online surveys

Pop-unders are like pop-ups, but are delivered minimised on the Windows taskbar, not appearing on the screen. They often go un-noticed by the user until all other browser windows have been closed. They are much less intrusive but may lose their relevant context.

6.7.4 Landing Pages

These are dealt with in section 6.9.

6.7.5 Media Buying, Design, Production and Campaign Management

Use an online advertising agency. A professional agency will go through the same creative process as any of the big offline agencies and they understand the requirements and benefits of interaction. They, and the sub-contractors they employ, have collective buying power, planning expertise, analytics tools, and experience in optimising the campaign as it goes along. It is likely to deliver better ROI despite their additional costs.

The IAB measurement guidelines are at www.iab.net/standards/measurement.asp.

6.7.6 Advertising Networks

Networks such as www.advertising.com have signed up large numbers of websites that wish to earn revenue from advertisements placed on their site. The network's technology allows advertisers to plan, place, track and adjust ad campaigns in real time. Again, it is wisest to ask your agency to select the best networks for your needs and to manage the campaign.

(Chapter 14, section 14.3.2 has more about advertising networks.)

6.7.7 Costs

Buying models are generally based on the traditional offline model, namely cost-per-thousand (CPM) impressions. But cost-per-click (CPC) is also offered by many media owners. The buyer will want to set a target for CPC, though the balance that is desired between sales targets and branding objectives will mean that the CPC target may be very different from one campaign to another. Factors that the buyer can control include:

- Ads can be served to specified positions on the sites they are delivered to – the homepage, a specific category of page, or run-of-site

- Ad servers can cap the number of ad impressions delivered to each PC viewing the same website, by using the customer's IP address (the address of their internet service provider) to identify them

6.7.8 Affiliate Programmes

Affiliation is perhaps the purest form of performance-based marketing. Affiliates are websites that are paid a fee whenever one of their site visitors moves via a link to another site, and the user then performs an agreed action there. The action that triggers the fee is usually a purchase, but can also be a registration, or a further specified click-through within the recipient site. The web analytics reports (chapter 16) of the recipient site must be set up to support this.

The recipient site (the affiliate programme organiser) provides programming code to the sending site (the affiliate) to enable the affiliate to use a variety of mechanisms to prompt the action (links, banners, buttons, e-mails, content feeds). The code can include a call for content such as current e-commerce offers, so that the offers are always up to date.

Thus the benefits of affiliate schemes are:

- For the affiliate programme organiser, it is a way to attract traffic and business from a number of other sites

- For the affiliate, it should also be a way to add to the service the site provides, by offering a convenient link to a useful, complementary service or product

Amazon is perhaps the best example of an affiliate marketer – many sites find it is editorially sensible to link to Amazon's bookselling service, and can earn some income in doing so. Another example is www.nethotels.com.[12]

Evaluation of success is built in: the programme organiser specifies their objective and only pays when it is delivered. It generates the biggest online expenditure after search marketing, with 60% growth in 2006, worth US$ 4 billion.[13]

The best payback is on transactions. For DMOs with e-commerce targets to hit, affiliate marketing is an essential element.

Many advertisers use an affiliate network rather than recruiting sites direct. Networks such as TradeDoubler, AffiliNet and Commission Junction[14] all have international offerings with account teams specialising in the travel and tourism sector.

It is important to manage the affiliates actively. An e-marketing agency that specialises in affiliate marketing should be employed to help design and run the programme:

- Ensure that the affiliates do not buy the same keywords that your own campaigns buy, or keywords which are sources of traffic for your website through its natural SEO – otherwise you will pay commission needlessly

- Identify top sites and pay commission on a sliding scale according to performance

- Provide effective selling tools – such as e-mailing kits, text links, and banners – and create versions for the different sectors

- Keep them motivated:

  – With promotional offers, competitions, and incentives for the affiliates

  – With news (preferably a regular e-newsletter) about your special offers to customers, such as seasonal and last-minute deals; enhancements to your site; and its overall performance in the market

- Actively recruit new affiliates:

  – With a link from your e-commerce pages to 'Become an affiliate' page

  – By sending your affiliate newsletter to key sites that are not yet affiliates

  – By contacting key webmasters direct

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12   NetHotels (29-10-2007).

13   E-consultancy.com (2007).

14   http://www.tradedoubler.com/pan/cms (3-10-2007); http://www.affili.net/Start/default.aspx (3-10-2007); http://www.cj.com (3-10-2007)

Affiliate marketing is elementary online marketing. There is no pretension to a creative process or to brand building: it is about performance. If a destination has specific registration, referral or sales targets to meet, then affiliate marketing should be tested. As long as the performance is judged against these targets then DMOs can make an informed decision about the role of affiliates in the online marketing mix.

How to gain more bookings from affiliates

Tiscover offers an affiliate deal to websites that link to the Tiscover site. Their Partnerprogramm offer says:

"Would you like to earn more money with your homepage? The Tiscover partner programme credits you with € 10 for every booking via your website! We offer the possibility to book about 25,000 hotels and other accommodations, from Sylt Island to Lake Garda.

In order to stimulate the visitors to your website to make bookings, a wide range of advertising media is at your disposal: click on text links or banners, and your clients will find our offers.

Since many offers are available as script, updates are not necessary."

By courtesy of Tiscover AG (www.tiscover.com).

6.8 Viral Campaigns

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Jacob Trampe Broch, Head of Marketing and Branding Department, VisitDenmark, for contributions to this section.

Viral marketing is the seeding of an item sufficiently amusing, new or valuable for people to want to forward it to others, producing a snowball effect. It can be designed to be spread via any online medium – a webpage, blog, chat room, mobile phone or e-mail. Virals are an online equivalent of word-of-mouth gossip. They may be text, a picture, video, a game, or an e-card.

They are a way of dropping an idea into a social community or a special interest group, informally, or anonymously, or even formally via a 'tell a friend' e-mail facility on your website or in your newsletter.

Overall, 37% of e-mail users have forwarded e-mails during the last six months.[15]

6.8.1 Advantages of Viral Campaigning

- It is efficient at gaining participation from first movers and trendsetters

- It is free distribution, perhaps to thousands, or millions

- Word-of-mouth recommendation can be very powerful

- It may increase your brand value. It is not usually a way to promote the DMO or destination logo, and it may be wise not to include it

- It is a good way to broadcast to a large, global audience

- It can boost the effect of both online and offline campaigns

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15   Jupiter (2006).

6.8.2 Disadvantages

• Once the viral is out there, there is no control over who sees it and how it might get changed, for better or worse

• There is no commitment to your brand values, and a high commitment to entertainment value

• There is a high risk if strong emotional propositions are used that may set off negative reactions

• There is a high risk that your creative work may be manipulated in unexpected and unwelcome ways

• You will need to avoid causing offence, and to observe the law. In the European Union (EU), for instance, the Distance Selling and Electronic Commerce regulations will apply, among other provisions

6.8.3 Subjects for a Viral

A successful viral needs something that is really amusing and entertaining. Thus, creative ideas and production costs may be high if an agency is used. The alternative is to adapt an existing campaign, or to stick to safer and easier ideas such as:

• Video/picture of the week, from a visitor's stay

• A daily comic comment, a wise saying, a line of poetry specific to the destination, or a one-liner from a visitor

• Contests and games, especially those that highlight the attractions of the destination, if it can be done in an amusing or unusual way

• Prize draws

Examples of two games that both have a powerful viral effect are the VisitNorway skiing games (chapter 4, section 4.11.4) and EasyJet's 'Ningotiators'.

A viral game that underlines a good deal

The Easyjet 'Ningotiators' game underlines to travellers that hotel prices can be a bargain. The game is to get your ninja into a hotel lobby using the cursor keys, then 'ningotiate' down to the lowest price. You win money-off vouchers if you get a good score. There is also a link to www. easyjethotels.com.

The game is well suited to being forwarded by gaming enthusiasts and to gain references on gaming websites and blogs.

Figure 6.2 Entry page to EasyJet game
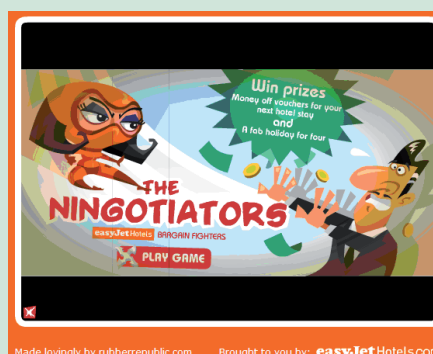
By courtesy of www.easyJetHotels.com.

6.8.4 Viral Distribution

To distribute the viral, techniques include:

- In or linked from your website and e-newsletters, including a 'tell a friend' facility

- Offered as an RSS feed (section 6.13.2, below) if there is to be a series of virals

- Offered as an MP3 download

- Launched on a blog

All these distribution methods should be tracked by reports that will need to be set up on the web analytics system (chapter 16):

- Offered as a mobile text or multi-media message – with tracking from your mobile marketing agency's system (chapter 9)

- Added as a video to social networking sites such as YouTube, Google Video, MySpace and Facebook

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Viral works in mainstream marketing

VisitBritain has a central e-direct mail (eDM) marketing engine. It allows each overseas office to develop market versions of the core campaigns at a cost of only about € 3,000. This includes tailoring the campaign for their market; application of translations; broadcast of the eDM to a seedlist; management of data; reporting; and creating banner advertising.

VisitBritain added a viral element to its eDM campaigns, asking recipients to 'Invite three friends to join you on an experience in Britain'. Another example was a food and drink campaign: 'Fill your hamper with foods that you can win for yourself and two friends.'

Figure 6.3 VisitBritain viral ask-a-friend data capture

By courtesy of VisitBritain (www.visitbritain.com).

6.9 Campaign Landing Pages, Calls to Action, and Data Capture

One of the basic benefits of online marketing is that conversion can be monitored and improved by establishing what kind of content and functions work best to generate whichever conversion is being sought. There is no need to concentrate on the volume of traffic you drive to the top of the 'sales funnel', on the assumption that weight of numbers will push enough users all the way through.

The purpose of a campaign landing page – the page that people will arrive at via a search engine or a link – is to convert click-throughs to a pre-set action. Instead of the click-through rate being the performance indicator, establish a clear call to action (or 'conversion event'), and make this the measure of success.

6.9.1 Calls to Action

There can be one, or several, calls to action on the same landing page, but it may be most effective if one of them is dominant.

Some ideas for calls to action are:

- Book or buy now (using the site's own e-commerce system, or by clicking through to a partner offer)

- Perform a particular search for a tourism product (such as an event to go to this weekend)

- Show interest, by spending more than (say) five minutes on the site or viewing more than 10 unique pages of content

- Buy a map, guidebook or other merchandise from the online shop

- Click through to a marketing partner's special offer

- Enrol to receive an e-newsletter

- Enrol for a mobile text service

- Register to use the holiday planner tool

- Win a prize in a competition or prize draw

- Play an amusing game that requires registration

- Download a PDF brochure

- Recommend us to a friend

- Complete an e-mail form to request a printed brochure or CD

- Call us

- Ask us to call you

The landing page needs to work hard to provoke these actions, and the web analytics system must be set up to count the actions (chapter 16). The actions are the real outcomes, the measures of success, of quality as well as quantity. The volume of click-throughs is merely the means to an end, however help you plan, implement and optimise your campaign.

Landing pages are perhaps the most important element in optimising conversion:

- The page that the user arrives on must contain clear reference to the channel that they have come from. If a user has clicked on a PPC ad that promotes 'great weekend break offers' then those words must be prominent on the landing page, with follow-on information also prominent. A survey of 150 United Kingdom and North American companies using e-mail marketing[16] showed that over 40% failed to repeat promotional copy through to the landing page. Only 45% of landing pages repeated copy from the original e-mail. In 30% of cases, the look of the landing page did not match the promotional e-mail

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16   Silverpop.com (2007), *June 2007.*

- Always make a separate landing page for each campaign message. The same survey found that 17% of companies sent customers to a homepage rather than to a unique promotional page. A dedicated landing page enables correct web analytics, ensures that user recognition is high and that the journey from offsite to onsite is as seamless as possible. It significantly improves conversion rates

- Different mechanisms should be tested (chapter 15, section 15.6):

  – Different design, copy, and animation treatments

  – Different data capture tactics – only one or two fields to fill in, for example, versus several

  – Use these variants to establish which mechanisms on the landing pages encourage the user to convert most effectively

- Most important, make sure there are no gaps between your advertising agency's web analytics tools and your own

Controlled testing and robust tracking are the two watchwords for online campaigns.

6.9.2 Keep Data Capture Barriers Low

There are simple rules for customer data capture:

- Give a good, very specific reason and benefit. Why should they want to hear from you again? Why should they want to contact you again? If it is an e-newsletter, for example, what exactly is it about, that will be right for me?

- Trying to secure lots of customer data may be good for your CRM database, but if you do not succeed in getting their e-mail address and an 'opt-in' permission, you have failed completely. So:

  – Do not be too ambitious. Keep to the job in hand. If you ask for more information, make it optional

  – Observe the very different cultural attitudes to personal data disclosure in different markets. The German customer will hesitate to supply data unless it is obviously needed to answer their immediate request. The US market is much more relaxed. Keep to just the e-mail address and opt-in if that produces the best initial sign-up rates

  – Aim to gather a little and often (especially by using e-newsletters)

- Observe the law in the customer's country

6.9.3 Other Barriers to Avoid

[Chapter 4, section 4.5, explains why and how to identify your organisation and state your privacy policy. The e-mail marketing section 6.4 above, and the e-commerce chapter 8, section 8.10, give more tips on gaining trust and commitment.]

Further steps to improve results include:

- For e-newsletter enrolment, say how often your e-mail will arrive. Do not leave them guessing, or thinking you will spam them every few days

- It annoys many customers if you presume that they want to receive e-mails about other things, and from other people. Do you really want to start the relationship by annoying the customer?

- Optional extras that are offered should have the radio button pre-set to opt-out, not opt-in

- In some markets the law may require this anyway

Always do user testing (section 15.7) on the sign-up page.

6.9.4 Managing Anti-spam

Apart from the measures that your e-mail campaign system will provide to help ensure that e-mails get through the spam filters, you may wish to add to a confirmation of enrolment e-mail, for example saying:

- 'Please take a moment to tell your computer that e-mails from name@organisation.com are OK, either by adding the e-mail to your address book or 'whitelisting' the e-mail through your spam filter. Then our e-mail service to you will not be blocked mistakenly.'

6.10 Walk-in Offices and Contact Centres

6.10.1 Walk-in Enquirers

Destinations spend a great deal of money to attract new customers, but often do little to capture data from the large volumes of visitors who call in at walk-in tourist offices during their trip.

Gathering basic CRM data from as many as possible of these existing but probably unknown customers should be a high priority. They should be excellent prospects for repeat visits, and if they receive a 'thank you for coming' e-mail from the DMO once they are back home, that is a good first step towards turning them into active recommenders as well.

Despite this, most offices let visitors walk off into the sunset, still unknown.

Staff at walk-in offices have a special opportunity and a special challenge. The staff should aim to treat e-communication as professionally as they treat face-to-face service. They can use their trusted status to ask for an e-mail address and an opt-in, but they have the difficult job of persuading the visitor that there are extra benefits to be gained. The staff need support, training, and to be able to offer clear benefits to the customer. The benefits may be:

- The chance to win something attractive in a prize draw or competition

- An internet terminal or WiFi for public use, but requiring a login

- An online holiday photo album service (an extension of your website's holiday planner service) which they can enrol for

- Local information services via texts to their mobile phone

Some of these incentives should be on offer at self-service screens, for customers who never come up to the counter.

For the sake of busy visitors and staff, data capture should be limited to e-mail addresses and/or mobile phone numbers, and data protection assents.

6.10.2 Take Advantage of Spare Contact Centre Capacity

If the DMO has a contact centre with sufficient capacity, the number can be promoted very boldly on your website and in your e-newsletters.

At quiet times, you may wish to offer a 'We will call you back' service. A lower-cost alternative is to invite the customer to e-mail the call centre, with a promise of an e-mail reply within a specified period.

Some website content management systems will allow you to set up such messages to appear on the site only at preset times that match your resources.

6.11 Encourage User-generated Content

[See chapter 3].

6.12 Virtual Worlds

6.12.1 What Are Virtual Worlds?

People can lead another life in 'virtual worlds' entirely created by the people who 'live' in them. The best known is Second Life,[17] developed by Linden Lab in 2003 as a computer game, which in June 2007 reported 7.7 million registrations and 5.2 million unique 'residents'.[18] Other worlds include There, Active Worlds, and there are niche worlds such as Zwinky for teens.

Participants in virtual worlds adopt and customise personalities called 'avatars' that use simulated 3D graphics. The avatars can walk, fly, or 'teleport' themselves. Teleporting is simply using a hyperlink to move to another virtual world location.

In Second Life, avatars can buy or rent a plot of land called an 'island', build residences and offices, gather information, shop and do business. Thus destinations have an opportunity to join in, find audiences, and project imagery and information.

6.12.2 Real Activities Happen in Virtual Worlds

The borders between Second Life and real life cannot be defined simply as 'virtual' or 'real':[19]

• Second Life's economy uses its own Linden dollars, but in many respects it is a real economy with real money (270 Linden dollars to the US dollar at July 2007)[20]

• Many real universities offer real lectures

• Companies like Reuters and Adidas, and organisations like the European Commission, opened their Second Life offices to give and gather information, build brands and try out new product and services

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17 Second Life has two versions: *The Grid for Adults* and *The Teen Grid for Under-18s.*

18 Second Life (2007) (Online), available: http://blog.secondlife.com/tag/economy (16-06-2007).

19 Second Life has been called a 'metaverse', the vision behind current work on fully immersive 3D virtual environments where humans (as avatars) interact with each other and with software agents. A metaverse uses the metaphors of the real world, but does not have its physical limitations.

20 Further details are at http://blog.tretiakmedia.com/2007/03/31/virtual-world-transition-what-sl-business-model-works-best-by-bill-nissim/.

- Hotel companies have tested new designs: Starwood Hotels tested a new loft-style hotel, with visitors able to walk into its virtual lobby nearly 18 months before it opened, and give feedback on a blog [21]

> **"A new frontier in customer and brand interaction is here"**
>
> Second Life is the first glimpse into the future of the internet, a future of Places, not Pages.
>
> Nic Mitham, K Zero.[22]

6.12.3 Opportunities for Destinations

A chief objective for destinations is to inspire and educate potential visitors. In Second Life, DMOs can build a virtual destination and show visitors around, provide information and exciting experiences, and encourage communities. Examples include:

- On its island, Galveston Island Visitor and Convention Bureau in South Texas built a replica of the real island complete with historical district, working harbour and a visitor centre

- The Fondazione Sistema Toscana is building a virtual Tuscany with landmarks such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa and Ponte Vecchio, with audio features educating the visitor about each one, and a shop where real Tuscan specialities can be ordered

- The Swedish Foreign Ministry opened an embassy in its 'House of Sweden'

> **"Second Life is a podium for First Life"**
>
> **The Hague's beach café in Second Life**
>
> An alderman's avatar gave a virtual press conference to open The Hague's island in Second Life, and gave a tour of the city.
>
> As one of the first Dutch municipalities on the internet, in 1994, they wanted to be the first in Second Life.
>
> "Second Life is a podium for First Life," said alderman Huffnagel. "Virtual The Hague will be built with partners. It is a place for testing new forms of services, marketing and technology: a place to discuss.
>
> In The Hague, people work for a better world: we host the International Court of Justice and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. So we wish to create a place to experience the freedom The Hague is working on, a place to learn about and discuss law, peace and safety. There will be 'virtual jurisdiction', with misunderstandings resolved at an 'international court' appropriate to the city's real role."
>
> Expatriates and visitors will find information and fun. Job seekers can find vacancies. On the beach, visitors can relax or play with a complimentary kite provided by the city.
>
> Second Life fits The Hague's 'click call face' policy: to provide as many services as possible via various channels to Dutch residents, expatriates and tourists.

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21 Jana, R. (2006), 'Starwood Hotels Explore Second Life first', *BusinessWeek,* August 23 (Online), available: http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/aug2006/id20060823_925270.htm?chan=search (28-8-2007). See also http://www.virtualaloft.com (28-8-2007).

22 http://www.kzero.co.uk (29-10-2007).

Avatars can find The Hague's island at 128.128.0.

Figure 6.4 The Hague beach café in Second Life

6.12.4 Treat Virtual Worlds as a Real Marketing Activity

For destinations, participation in virtual worlds is not a game: it is a marketing activity that needs a strategy and integration with other marketing activities.[23]

Consider the market reach of each virtual world in comparison with other media options. Taking Second Life as an example:[24]

- Note that the number of 'residents' (uniquely named avatars with the right to log in), which in September 2007 was nearly 10 million, is not the same as the number who actually logged in over the previous 30 days, which was nearly 900,000. How does this compare with the number of users of a major travel site on which you could advertise, and how many avatars might actually visit your island?[25]

- Take the profile of the resident into account:

    - The average Second Life age is 32

    - 55% are male and 45% female

23   Mitham, N. (2007), *Second Life Case Study. Tourism Sector. White paper.* http://www.kzero.co.uk (29-10-2007).

24   Second Life Economy (2007) (Online), available: http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy.php (23-9-2007).

25   For a sceptical report, see *Wired Magazine* (2007) (Online), available: http://www.wired.com/techbiz/media/magazine/15-08/ff_sheep?currentPage=1 (29-9-2007).

- – Top 10 user countries, by active avatars, are the United States of America, Germany, Brazil, United Kingdom, France, Japan, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, and Australia[26]

    - – In lifestyle terms, they tend to be 'Innovators' and 'Early Adopters', the latter being brand sensitive, from above average households, and with cosmopolitan networks

- • Promote the SLurl of your island in Second Life. A Slurl provides a direct teleport link to another location in Second Life. A SLurl link contains the co-ordinates of the island, avoids users making a mistake and gives potential new users of Second Life a chance to sign up. A SLurl looks like http://slurl.com/secondlife/<region>/<x-coordinate>/<y-coordinate>/<z-coordinate>/

- • Give – make it worthwhile for residents to come to your island, by offering valuable information and fun. Avatars are as fond of give-aways as their owners. Create virtual merchandising that can have a viral effect, and give it away at tactical points. Give free entrance to special events featuring, for example, VIPs on your island

On a smaller scale, there is the option of offering a tour around a city or architectural landmark, or even to build a beach café like The Hague's.

Further information

Second Life: www.secondlife.com (25-8-2007).

Doing business in virtual worlds, blog: http://metaversed.com (27-10-2007).

Virtual consulting and research: http://www.kzero.co.uk (27-10-2007).

Nissim, B. (2007), Virtual World Transitions. What SL Business Model Works Best? (Online), available: http://blog.tretiakmedia.com/2007/03/31/virtual-world-transition-what-sl-business-model-works-best-by-bill-nissim/ (27-8-2007).

6.12.5 Second Life – Measures of Success

- • Inbound traffic via SLurl

- • Blog activity

- • On-island traffic measurement

- • Outward hyperlink analysis

6.13 Content Distribution to Third Parties

Investing in good content only makes sense when it is put to work for the destination in as many places as possible. Extending the destination's reach to more places, by distributing your content to third parties, can be very cost effective:

- • It increases the media reach of the destination without spending huge budgets on advertising

- • It can use the marketing budgets and brand equity of the DMO's distribution partners to drive users to content that promotes and sells the destination

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26   Key Metrics (2007) (Online), available: http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy.php (25-8-2007).

6.13.1 What Are Your Assets and Liabilities?

First, consider what content you have that is likely to be of most interest to potential distribution channels:

- E-commerce-enabled tourism products

- Product information data (non e-commerce enabled)

- Editorial content (destination guides, thematic text, images, and video)

Then, check your assets:

- What do you have distribution rights for? Have you the right permissions from the content aggregators that supply you, and do they have permissions from each business? These should be routine data fields in the DMO product databases

- Is it of sufficient quality? (Use the checklist in chapter 2, section 2.5)

- Will distribution to third parties force you to do more work than at present to ensure the content is kept relevant and up to date?

- Is it updated regularly, and are the updates of immediate interest to users, such as events information? If so, the content is ideal for RSS distribution (see next section)

- In what formats can the DMO deliver it to partners? The DMO will probably have databases with good search engines; it might have extensive editorial content in a content management system that can deliver to outside channels (see chapter 3, section 3.5 for delivery via mash-ups)

- Is the DMO prepared to offer white label (de-branded) content? Some distribution partners will value your data with your branding clearly shown. Others will want to absorb it into their own brand proposition

6.13.2 Use RSS to Feed News Out and Bring It In

RSS stands for really simple syndication, or rich site summary.

It is a convenient service for individuals to choose to receive selected, customised items from websites whenever there are updates, without having to visit the site to collect them. It is also a way for websites to syndicate content to other sites. Both are automated.

Thus RSS is very powerful: it enables your own site content to reach out beyond its boundaries – to individual users and to other websites. (It is also a way to enrich your own site with the hot news of other sites.)

6.13.2.1 Distributing Your Website Content via RSS Feeds

When users are on a page of your site, RSS enables them very easily to choose whether to receive notifications from you on a given subject. Then their PC looks regularly at your site for new notifications, and brings back each one, timed and dated, with a headline and an opening sentence, and a link to the full content. The headlines can be viewed in various ways by the recipient, most commonly in the internet Explorer browser. It is automatic and almost instantaneous, so it is convenient for both the publisher and the user.

RSS extends your website all day every day. It is especially useful for destinations to tell people about new events and attractions. You should offer RSS feeds on as many clearly-defined subjects as possible, so that you can serve customers' specific interests. You should place the RSS button:

- On each page where the service is worthwhile

- And on a central list. An example is on the Visitdublin site (below)

Because every item has a link to your site, it helps to drive site traffic. And for customers it is a perfect aid to holiday planning.

Dublin's fair city feeds its customers

Visitdublin.com shows how, with the help of RSS, a website can keep users informed with feeds that can be customised by the user to their own preferences, outside the boundaries of the site. There is an RSS feed button on most pages, and also a central list at www.visitdublin.com/RSS/rss.aspx?id=295[27]

The feeds are accessed over 750,000 times per month.

Figure 6.5 Visitdublin.com page listing 50 RSS feed subjects that are available from the site

Figure 6.6 Extract from the Dublin Pubs RSS feed service. Each pub headline clicks through to the visitdublin site

By courtesy of Dublin Tourism (http://www.visitdublin.com/).

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27   (3-8-2007).

As with conventional media, syndicating means simultaneous publication, and in the case of RSS it is a multi-directional flow of content. RSS feeds are used not just by individuals: it is the main format for syndicating headline content to other websites, and receiving content in the same manner.

Once you set up the service, any website can take your feed:

- Headlines can be used by the receiving site with no further work done by them

- Alternatively, the recipient can gather the whole file and re-use it as desired

There is normally no special legal agreement – if you RSS it, you are happy for it to be used by anyone.

RSS is thus both a means of enriching your own site and distributing your content very widely, while still maintaining control of it.

6.13.3 Other Potential Distribution Channels

[The opportunities offered by social networking sites are covered in chapter 3.]

Depending on how your content is packaged up, there will be a wide range of potential distributors. Look for those where you can add value to their offer. They will be in your home market, in overseas markets, or in both:

- Travel websites such as Expedia

- Transport providers – airlines, coach companies, ferries, rail companies, car rental firms

- Travel and lifestyle e-zines (websites that aim to be online magazines);

- Portals

- Mapping companies such as Google Maps, who will accept DMO product data as an enhancement to their service on their own site, and provide potentially massive additional exposure to all your tourism suppliers. An example is http://maps.google.co.uk which includes VisitBritain 'EnjoyEngland' data, with links to the featured accommodation and attractions[28]

- Companies that produce and then host pan-arounds and video clips. Such services often host the content on their own server, so when your content team are looking for a supplier for the destination, ensure they seek a company that can provide the bonus of its own distribution network to other travel sites, the Global Distribution Systems (GDS), portals, search engines, corporate booking engines, and meeting planner sites

- News sites with travel sections

- Major hotel and attractions groups and major events organisers

- Other public bodies in allied sectors such as culture and sport

Tour operators that sell the destination in your source markets may seem an obvious channel. If you are their main destination, then they should be receptive. But if they sell a number of destinations they usually need a similar depth of information across all of them.

Commercial websites (tourism and non-tourism) will view the potential uses of your content in a very different way to other public bodies, or to travel and lifestyle websites.

A commercial distribution channel will seek a clear definition of the value proposition so that it can calculate the potential profitability of your content. How well does your bookable product fit in with

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28   http://maps.google.co.uk (7-10-2007).

theirs? If you have an extensive choice of guest accommodation, for example, it may be unique. Commission levels and volumes will be the main focus, which they will assess in relation to the amount of work they will have to do and how your product may improve or distract from their existing offers.

They may also be interested in magazine-style editorial content to help increase the retention of their visitors on their site and thus to improve conversion rates. But they may expect to charge you to place your content on their site – effectively a form of advertorial. They may resist offering any links back to your own site. So you must decide whether a paid-for editorial presence on their site will result in them sending more customers to your destination than you would achieve if you spent the money on advertising or PPC to drive traffic to your own site.

Content distribution calls for a holistic view of what is good for the destination rather than what is good solely for the DMO's website. A large portal with perhaps 100 times the traffic of the DMO's own site will be reaching new potential customers – but will they convert them at a lower cost?

Information and editorially driven sites (including those of other public bodies) are perhaps the best starting point for a distribution strategy, as they involve only low direct costs. Examples are www. visiteurope.com and www.caribbeantravel.com. Your destination content is likely to enhance the depth of their offering and in return it will increase your media reach – a simple exchange of benefits. They may also have content which they can offer in return.

Understanding the value proposition to each type of distribution channel will increase the chances of a mutually beneficial partnership.

6.13.4 Measurement of Distribution Value

Reports will be needed of the volume of each category of content delivered to partners:

- Normally, content should be delivered live from the DMO's own servers. The database or CMS servers need to be set up to report this traffic to each separate partner

- If data transfers are supplied, then the contract should include summary reports from the partner about the usage

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Further information

Web Marketing Today, website and e-newsletter: www.wilsonweb.com (25-8-2007).

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The 'customer journey', Caribbean style

 "Over the past few years, we have gone to great lengths to describe what we expect the visitor experience to be like in a successful Caribbean tourism industry in the next five years", says Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace, CEO of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO).

"We define quality service as 'anticipating the needs of our customers and providing for those needs before they ask for them, or before they know that they want them'.

We are driven by the creation of programmes that are intended to deliver those anticipated visitors needs. So, all the technology begins with the customer service experience that we wish to deliver. We will look at a piece of technology to determine whether it could provide some customer experience that could not be delivered otherwise.

Clearly e-commerce and the use of technology will be at the centre of all that we are proposing to do. e-commerce and technology is the great leveller in our business.

We firmly believe in the future set out below. By describing the outcomes that we expect, we are able to communicate our plans much more easily to our members. We have come to believe that in all these matters, the focus should be on the customer experiences that we intend to deliver, not on the plans that we intend to execute."

Figure 6.7 The 'Caribbean Experience'

• Click on "OurCaribbean.com"
• Caribbean music option
• Uses Caribbean branded credit card to order music + contributes to Caribbean fund
• Orders copy of Caribbean Travel and Life
• Connects to my Caribbean Secret Agent
• Looks at some tours
• Decides on GPS guided rental car or assigned driver
• Books the midnight Cruise
• Reserve all restaurant reservations for entire stay
• Downloads "learn the dance" video
• Opts to chats with other guests
• Signs up for "Meet the People" experience
• First copy of "Caribbean Travel and Life" arrives
• Completes Immigration and Customs forms on line
• Same music at airport on arrival
• All announcements by well known local people nice touch
• Clears through special line for "Caribbean Collectors"
• Greets Herman our taxi driver waiting outside
• Checks itinerary with driver
• Greeting by name on arrival at resort
• Escorted directly to room
• Greeting by Minister/Commissioner of Tourism on TV set in room
• Enjoys the web-cam appointment the next day
• "Fresh from the Caribbean" foods on all menus a big hit
• Enjoy the island tour by Herman + "plant" our tree
• Purchase Caribbean branded items at airport departure lounge
• Great farewell message in departure lounge nice touch from the PM
• On arrival home, video email from Minister thanking them for visiting, nice touch
• Second copy of "Caribbean Travel and Life" arrives
• Article by Caribbean writer on the revitalization of downtowns makes me want to go back
• Goes back to the website to buy more "Made in The Caribbean" souvenirs, more music, rum, coffee and some Sea Island Cotton clothing

By courtesy of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (www.caribbeantravel.com).

6.14 Acquiring and Developing Customers – Measures of Success

Each campaign should be measured separately:

- Measure inputs such as:

  – Customer database size (split by key customer segments)

  – Customer database growth against the targets you have set

  – Proportion of records with key fields completed

  – Number of contacts with customers per annum

  – These statistics will come from the CRM database (section 6.2.4 above)

- Measure results such as:

  – Numbers arriving and their expenditure as a result of campaigns

  – Return on investment

This information must be gathered by direct customer surveys (chapter 15, section 15.4) using samples from the CRM database.

The value of the reporting will depend on how thoroughly all the activities have been integrated into the CRM system (section 6.2 above).

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 7

Branding –
Project the Essence of the Destination

Key Messages

- The brand is a promise of value that determines customer satisfaction

- In an online globalised world, brand identity is more important than ever, and is more dynamically made and re-shaped

- Research can identify gaps in the way online images are seen and understood. It can measure the effect of branding, and project more coherent branding

- Rich media and interactivity can offer a high-involvement experience for customers

7.1 Essentials

This chapter aims at an understanding of how e-marketing activities and tools can be used to build and strengthen the destination brand.

7.1.1 E-branding Opportunities

E-marketers have exciting opportunities to support their brand:

- They can offer customers e-experiences to enjoy before they travel to the real destination

- The growth of online social networking means that customers are also providing e-experiences to their friends, relations, and wider online communities

- Bandwidth is no longer an obstacle for compelling imagery

- New research methods allow destinations to identify gaps in the way online images are seen and understood. These offer the chance to project more coherent branding

7.1.2 The Basics of Branding

E-marketers have a vital need for a strong brand: it is essential in order to establish customer trust online, and especially for e-commerce. So it is important for e-marketers to understand the basics of branding, online or offline:

- Brands are a 'promise of value' that determines customer satisfaction

- Destination branding is about how to project the essence of your destination consistently through brand language and audio-visuals, and to protect it through management of the customer's experience

- Brands create perceived images among customers, and should therefore offer a value-match or a link with their lifestyles

- In a globalised world, brand identity is more important than ever, but is also more dynamically made, particularly through the new technologies where images are created in a myriad of ways

- It is essential to find a midpoint between, on the one hand, establishing differentiation with customers, and, on the other hand, gaining consistency and communicability among industry stakeholders

Brand equity

The value of a brand to the owners is referred to as brand equity. Brand equity has been defined as a set of "brand assets or liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service".[1]

The assets and liabilities will differ from context to context, but can be grouped into five categories:

- Loyalty

- Name awareness

- Perceived quality

- Associations in addition to perceived quality

- Other proprietary assets such as trademarks or channel relationships

Based on this notion, Millward Brown Optimor,[2] in conjunction with *The Financial Times*, developed the BrandZ Top 100 Most Powerful Brands.[3]

Top brand in April 2007 was Google with a US$ 66 billion brand value, followed by General Electric and Microsoft.[4]

Anholt Nation Brands Index

Not specific to online, but interesting, are the Anholt Nation Brands Index, City Brands Index and State Brands Index.[5] These are analytical rankings of the world's brands, in which tourism is one of six characteristics that are studied, and which guide some destinations.

The analyses include a financial valuation of many of the listed brands, giving a unique perspective on the contribution a brand makes to the nation's economy.

The valuations of each country brand are calculated using a 'royalty relief' approach which estimates how much a country would have to pay to licence its brand from a third party.

See for more information www.nationbrandindex.com, www.citybrandsindex.com, www. statebrandsindex.com (21-9-2007).

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1   Aaker, D. A. and Joachimsthaler, E. (2000), 'Brand Leadership', *The Free Press,* New York, p. 17.

2   http://www.millwardbrown.com/Sites/Optimor (3-8-2007).

3   http://www.brandz.com (3-8-2007).

4   Millward Brown Optimor (2007), *Google Rises to the Top of the BRANDZ™ Ranking with a Brand Value of $66,434 Million* (Press release 23-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.millwardbrown.com/Sites/Optimor/Content/News/OptimorPressReleases. aspx (3-8-2007).

5   http://www.nationbrandindex.com, http://www.citybrandsindex.com, http://www.statebrandsindex.com (21-9-2007). See also Anholt, S. (2002), *Foreword Brand Management* (Specia Issue: Nation Branding), 9 (4-5) April, pp. 229-239 and Anholt, S. (2003), *Brand New Justice: The Upside of Global Marketing,* Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

7.2 Brands Need to Bridge Gaps

Intensified globalisation has made people footloose, and has created more competition between countries, regions and cities, requiring an answer to the question: 'Where is the sense of place?'

Globalisation has also created greater diversity in personal lifestyles, and traditional media are increasingly ill-equipped to build brand equity through emotional appeal.

There is a move away from the one-way 'push' process of mass communication, fixed channels and two-dimensional media, to brand image creation by a dynamic, interactive process of sharing, reflecting, selecting, debating and experiencing. It is happening with an increasing number and a variety of audiences, across an increasing number of media.

Branding has been about linking the product offering and the projected image to consumers' perceived images. However, destination branding, when building the host-guest relationship, should be much more than that.

Destination brands need to link the tourism product offering with:

*   Place identity, which includes:[6]

    –   Fixed elements such as location, natural environment, history and heritage

    –   Semi-fixed elements such as size, physical appearance (the infrastructure), and inner values

    –   Colouring elements such as symbols (heroes, logos, flags, language), behaviour, rituals, and communication

*   A projected image for the destination that also supports the way in which it positions itself internationally in terms of foreign policy, trade, investment, culture and education

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Dubai: gaps in online projected images

Two Gulf Wars, September 11 and ongoing lack of stability in parts of the Middle East have affected the Gulf region's image in the West. Dubai has tried to take advantage of this raised level of attention, to illustrate to the world the rapid development of the Emirate and the high level of modernisation, but at the same time not shying away from its identity and heritage.

In 2003, the Dubai Department of Civil Aviation ran a campaign reflecting both modern Dubai as a business hub and the respect for tradition, heritage and local culture. In 'Cultural Voyage Vignettes' which preceded the Dubai duty free and airport ads on CNN, they aimed to create a global awareness of the cultural identity of the people of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

However, research into the online projected image, through analysis of pictures and text on 20 Dubai-based tourism websites, shows that the private sector, and particularly the hospitality and transport sectors, seem to avoid references to the local culture and heritage. This was despite their abundance on the destination and (semi-government) tour operator websites.

Over 80% of the population, and most labour, as well as management in the private sector in tourism, are expatriates. This is one of the reasons why most of the projected online imagery is fragmented in nature. In addition, it is product based, showing facilities and activities.

The research shows that the way Dubai projected its image as a tourism destination lacked creativity and 'cross border' thinking between the tourism sectors, and therefore failed coherently to build a brand. Cooperation is essential not only between the public and private sectors in general,

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6   Noordman, T. B. J. (2004), *Culture in the City Marketing* (in Dutch), Elsevier/Reed Business Publications, Den Haag.

but also between industries, such as accommodation, transport and visitor attractions as well as intermediaries.

By courtesy of Robert Govers and Frank Go.[7]

Destination brands need to bridge the supply and delivery gap online by:

- Projecting authentic images that create the 'right' expectations

- Being culturally sensitive, realising that perceptions and therefore expectations are personal constructs of consumers with their own cultural, social, personal and psychological backgrounds and lifestyles

- Taking into account the experiential nature of tourism, emphasising emotional, multi-sensory and fantasy elements

- Offering e-experiences that 'test-drive' destination brands through motion pictures, peer-to-peer exchanges, interactive television, and virtual worlds such as Second Life, covered in chapter 6, section 6.12

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7.2.1 Research the Effectiveness of Brand Effort – Identify Gaps and Opportunities

Destination brands are created in a myriad of ways. Content published by the industry or users in blogs and reviews can add to, confuse or damage a brand.

New media, and particularly the internet, create opportunities for customers to experience the perceptions of others much more easily. Using a website, the customer is immersed in someone else's (the designer's) perceptions. Using a blog, the perceptions are those of another customer. A printed brochure, or a face-to-face conversation, produce the same effect, but the growth of various forms of rich media online is steadily increasing the immersive effect.[8]

Systematic research into a brand and into the effectiveness of branding efforts should include online content analysis. This involves the collection, description and analysis of images and the analysis of texts. This methodology, described in chapter 15, section 15.9, will help identify possible gaps and overlaps in your destination's images projected online, to guide E-marketing strategy.

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7   Govers, R. (2005), 'Virtual Tourism Destination Image: Glocal Identities Constructed, Perceived and Experienced', *Erasmus Research Institute of Management, Ph. D. Research in Management Series,* Vol. 69, Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University, Rotterdam.

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    Govers, R. and Go, F. M. (2005), 'Projected Destination Image Online: Website Content Analysis of Pictures and Text', *Information Technology and Tourism,* 7 (2), pp. 73-90.

8   See also Valck, K. D. (2003), 'Internet Communities as Marketing Instrument: About Their Origins, Myths and Harsh Reality', *Markeur,* (2), pp. 4-6; and

    Van het Klooster, E. et al. (2004), *Exploring Destination Brand Communities: A Business Model for Collaboration in the Extremely Fragmented Tourism Industry,* 17th Bled e-commerce Conference, Bled, Slovenia, June 21-23, E-commerce Center, University of Maribor, CD-ROM.

Flanders

There are some special opportunities when perceived images already concur with place identity, such as in the case of Flanders (the northern, Dutch speaking part of Belgium)[9] A survey of 900 respondents among the Flemish population showed their perceptions of Flanders' place identity to be:

- balues: introvert hedonists

- symbols: language, lion and flag

- heroes: Catholic Fathers Damiaan and Daems, and Rubens, the painter

- daily life: cafés/gastronomy and cycling

- regional products and dishes: fries, beer, chocolate, mussels and stew

- proud of: historic cities, language, hard working, educated people and old painters

An online global survey into the perceived image of Flanders published on www.travelerspoint. com asked the questions:

- Imagine that next week you will visit Flanders, tell us your story

- What do you think your experience in Flanders will look like?

- What images and thoughts come immediately to mind?

- What do you expect to see, feel, hear or taste?

The results showed that respondents link Flanders to:

	Respondents (%)
Belgium	54
Buildings (old/historic buildings/architecture)	23
Chocolates	22
Europe (European)	16
Culture (as in different, local culture)	16
History (historic)	16
Old (as in old town/buildings/castles)	15
Streets (cobbled/narrow/winding streets)	15
French	14
Never (never been there/visited/heard of)	14
Shop (shops/shopping)	14
Beer	12
Café(s)	12
Friendly (as in friendly people)	11

The overlaps are obvious, creating apparent opportunities for coherent branding.

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9   Researched by Govers, R. and the University of Leuven Graduate student Stéphane Léonard.
     Govers, R. and Go, F. M. (2005).
     Govers, R., Conversation by e-mail with the author (30-4-2007).
     Govers, R., et al. (2007), 'Promoting Tourism Destination Image', *Journal of Travel Research,* (In press).

7.3 Action Points for Destination Branding Online

The basics:

- Make sure the DMO's e-marketing work gets ongoing professional branding guidance. The opportunities and complexities of online rich media should make the e-marketer the chief customer of the DMO's brand management team

- Develop an online version of the destination's brand toolkit, and encourage your industry partners to use it as well

- Test, and go on testing, the online performance of all your brand language and visuals (chapter 15)

- Ensure that offline and online marketing strategies are consistent

- Use rich media to achieve a high-involvement experience for customers

- Make two-way use of user-generated content (chapter 3, section 3.4)

- Control the domain names that affect the brand (chapter 17)

Some development tasks:

- Create online communities where target customers and partner organisations get involved in the composition of the brand story[10]

- Create immersive experiences through interactive television or Web TV. An added benefit here is that you can value-match the audiences[11]

- Enter or create virtual worlds such as Second Life

7.4 Branding – Measures of Success

Systematic research into a brand, and into the effectiveness of branding effort, can be done using content analysis, measuring against key brand values:

- The alignment of text used in descriptions and stories given by those participating in a research project (see Flanders case study, section 7.2.1)

- The alignment to key brand values of text and images:

  – Used by the tourism industry offline and online

  – Used by consumers in user-generated content such as reviews and blogs

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10   Go, F. M. (2003), 'Experience Marketing: Implications for Business', *Markeur,* (2), pp. 24-27, p. 26.

Magala, S. J. (2001), 'Under Construction (Identities, Communities and Visual Overkill)', *ERIM Report Series,* Research in Management Erasmus Research Institute of Management, Rotterdam (Online), available: http://hdl.handle.net/1765/84 (27-4-2007).

Van het Klooster et al. (2004), Creating such a virtual community is not as easy as some of the popular marketing literature might suggest though. One cannot force the birth of a community, one can only feed it.

Valck 2003: p. 5: "For it is only through value-oriented, networked cooperatives and shared vision that a tourism brand community can evolve […] as a heterogeneous group of service producers who give a sense of homogeneity of experience to tourists through employing the same brand attributes during service production."

Gnoth, J. (2002), 'Leveraging Export Brands Through a Tourism Destination Brand', *Brand Management (Special Issue: Nation Branding),* 9 (4-5) April, pp. 262-280, p. 269.

11   See, for example, the Visit London case in chapter XX, The New Television. For several white papers and case studies on branding and interactivity Thinkbox, see http://thinkbox.tv/server/show/nav.413 (3-8-2007).

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See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 8

E-commerce for Destinations – Turning Enquiries into Sales

This chapter is about online selling of the destination's products and services – such as accommodation and tickets for events. Earning income for the DMO from sales of the DMO's own services, such as advertising on the DMO website, is covered in chapter 14.

Key Messages

- It is essential for destinations to work towards making all their tourism products bookable online in real time

- There are a number of alternative business models for e-commerce. Not-for-profit DMOs would be wise to think twice before engaging in the tough world of e-commerce without commercial backing

- Nevertheless there is a vital role for DMOs to perform to help small businesses start an e-commerce service and to get it effectively distributed

8.1 What Is E-commerce?

Put simply, e-commerce is a marketplace on the internet where buying and selling transactions are carried out. Like the traditional marketplace, there is a place – one or more websites – where this happens, so this chapter covers this aspect, known as distribution.

E-commerce also means being able to select, book and pay in 'real time' – so the system has to know that the product is available to buy at that moment. Systems can talk to each other in real time to enable this.

- Prices may be fixed, or they may be negotiable (the eBay model)

- For most small purchases in tourism, e-commerce depends on credit card payment

'E-business' is a wider concept, not dealt with here, that is sometimes used to mean e-commerce, but usually encompasses the whole concept of a business that works online. That includes everything such as purchasing, deliveries from suppliers, recruitment, partnership management, marketing, sales, finance, customer service, and management information and control.

8.2 Why Does a Destination Need E-commerce?

If we recall the 'customer journey' (introduced in chapter 1, section 1.2), booking is an essential part of the process:

Figure 8.1 Customer Journey Wheel – The position of booking in the cycle[1]
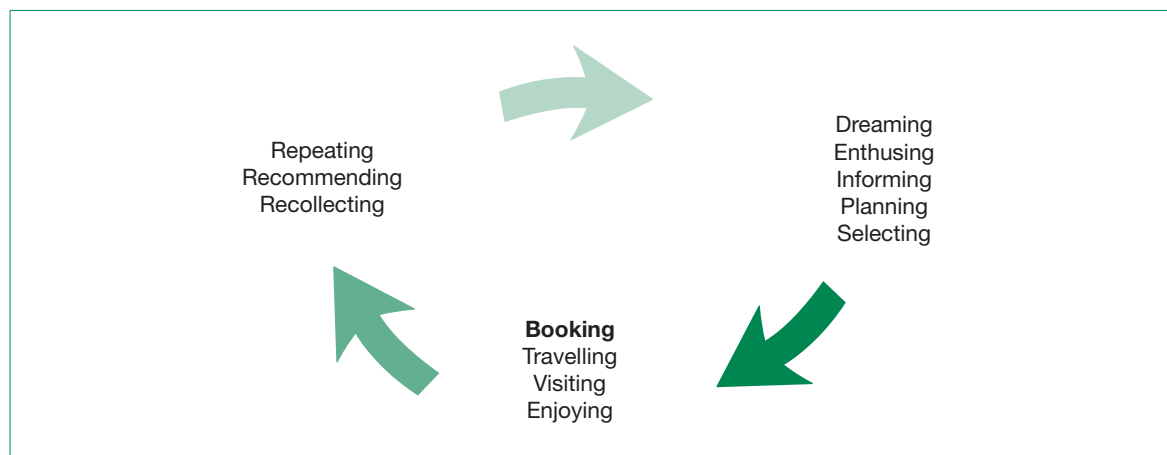
The objective in e-marketing is for the whole 'customer journey' to be lived online (apart from the trip itself!) if that is the customer's preference – and online booking is clearly an essential part of this.

8.3 What Product Categories Should Be Priorities for DMO Intervention?

8.3.1 Travel to the Destination

There is usually little need for travel to the destination to be offered as an e-commerce service by the DMO itself. DMO actions can include:

- Linking each of the destination website's overseas market versions to all the carriers that operate from that location to the destination

- Embedding a commercially-operated carrier search engine into the sites. This will normally provide most or all of the available carriers, and link to each carrier where the booking will be made. The DMO may earn some useful click-through revenue

8.3.2 Within the Destination

The aim should be to cover all the categories – public transport travel passes, local specialities such as ski passes, local car rental if the multi-national companies are not strongly present, boat charter, bike hire, guiding services, all categories of accommodation, tickets for visits, shows and events, restaurant bookings, loyalty cards and merchandise. Many of these miscellaneous items can be sold via a DMO merchandise shop (see below, section 8.12) if the product range is fairly simple.

8.4 How Does Online Payment Work?

For smaller businesses which do not have an in-house e-commerce system:

- The customer enters their credit card details on a page of the merchant's website (a hotel, for example)

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1   TEAM, Tourism Consulting (2007).

- The website encrypts the information before it is sent from the customer's browser to the hotel's website server, usually using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption

- The hotel's web server forwards the transaction to their payment gateway service, such as Worldpay or PayPal. This gateway service has provided the credit card form that the buyer has filled in

- The gateway forwards the transaction information to the hotel's bank (the acquiring bank)

- The acquiring bank then forwards the information to the bank that issued the credit card to the customer (the issuing bank) for authorisation

- The issuing bank sends a response back to the payment gateway (via the acquiring bank) with a response code to approve or decline the transaction

- The payment gateway forwards it to the website, where it is interpreted and a response is sent to the customer, on the website and usually also via an e-mail

The process should take only a few seconds. The banks settle up with each other separately, at the end of their settlement periods.

Some payment gateways such as PayPal (owned by eBay) allow customers to send, receive and hold money online, linked to their bank account, in a number of currencies.

8.5 Guiding Principles for Destination E-commerce

- The DMO should aim to ensure that all categories of business in the destination have access to an e-commerce system. Some DMOs have made bookings for accommodation the priority, because this may be the deciding factor for the visitor before they commit to the destination. But e-ticketing for major events and shows, multi-venue passes, and rail and coach passes, is often equally important

- Ideally, customers should be able to see a unified view of the price of all the products, and be able to book as many of them through the one view as will secure their decision to come. This is an essential role of a destination website

- Apply the 80:20 rule – that 80% of people use only 20% of the media. Thus the DMO should aim to have its inventory on the right 'shelves' in all the most important online shops. These should be the merchant's own website, and the sites of retail agents and wholesalers. The DMO should allocate just as much resource to achieving this distribution as to presenting the e-commerce service on its own site

- It must not infringe any state legislation that may apply. This may determine the business model (see below, section 8.8) to be adopted

If the DMO enters the e-commerce arena itself, it must have real commitment and ability to act commercially:

- About products – quickly adding, dropping and modifying the inventory

- About prices – working with a dynamic mixture of rack rates (published standard prices), discounts, and special offers. The internet is making prices increasingly transparent. Already, 59% of online consumers begin their shopping searches on aggregator sites that allow comparisons, rather than at merchant sites.[2] Most of these are not yet focused on tourism, but at least some parts of the travel and accommodation sectors are prone to commoditisation (choices made more on price than on distinguishing features)

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2   Bizrate Research for Shopzilla (2007).

- About marketing – re-positioning itself as a booking service not simply an information service:

    – Websites must have the booking service upfront on the homepage and throughout the site. For example, there should be a Quick Booking search box well placed on the homepage

    – Promotional campaigns must always put the booking service up front

    – Distribution of the service to sufficient third-party channels must be achieved to produce a viable volume of bookings. That means that the businesses (or at least some of them) need to agree to be distributed and that they are willing to pay the required commission per channel

Let us examine these channels.

8.6 Channels for Distributing E-commerce Offers

As in pre-internet days, there is constant competition online between those who sell direct and those who are intermediaries. Most individual tourism suppliers will opt to use both, and the DMO should be helping them in both.

Like the display in a walk-in shop, any e-commerce offer needs to be put in front of enough of the right potential customers. So it is vital to consider how much distribution can be achieved, beyond whatever your own website can provide, and at what cost.

8.6.1 Direct Sale

The first channel of distribution is when the merchant (a hotel, for example) acts as their own e-commerce direct seller. Every large business, and a rapidly increasing number of small businesses, now do this. In many countries it is made easy for SMEs not just by the e-commerce services of their DMO, but by companies that offer independent e-commerce systems to buy or rent, such as Guestlink or Frontdesk (see below, section 8.9).

Some may rely solely on buyers finding their website or being directed to it, but many also use other channels as well.

8.6.2 Via Resellers Who Sell Online Direct to the Public

If the customer's contract is with the reseller then the reseller is a tour operator. If the customer's contract is with each element (hotel, transport, and so on) that they are buying, then the reseller is a retail agent. Online, thanks to the growth of dynamic packaging, they now look much the same to the customer. Examples are eBookers in Europe, Orbitz in the United States of America, Expedia, Opodo, Lastminute, Superbreak in the United Kingdom, and Wotif in Australia and New Zealand. There will be different market leaders in each of your target markets.

These offers are often summarised in price comparison websites such as www.travelsupermarket.com.[3] Users of this site can compare prices of more than 3,000 Beb&Breakfast (B&Bs) in the United Kingdom from over 20 accommodation websites including SME specialist Eviivo (which runs Frontdesk, see section 8.9 below), as well as Laterooms, Active, Superbreak, eBookers and Opodo.[4]

The more specialist retail travel agents sell fully independent tours (FITs), whether bespoke or pre-packaged. Their sales outlets may include websites and walk-in shops. They may also have a central call centre, or distribute calls from a central telephone number to their shops. They buy their stock direct from hotels and carriers, and from wholesalers.

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3   Part of http://www.moneysupermarket.com (29-10-2007).

4   TravelMole (2007).

8.6.3 Via Wholesalers Who Sell to Specialist Retail Travel Agents

Wholesaler websites give retail travel agents an easy view of a large number of supplier websites' content, and allow the agent to pick and mix to assemble the FIT. Examples are www.travelcog.com and www.agents.octopustravel.com.

Online agents now sell local services that were previously only bought direct by the visitor locally. An example is Octopustravel, with 15,000 agents worldwide registered, up 68% in 2006.[5]

These wholesalers generally deal with any suitable business that will give them an allocation of rooms, so the DMO should find out which wholesalers are most active in their destination, and inform their hotels.

There is also a good opportunity for destinations and wholesalers to give or to take SME inventory from each other.

The hotel wholesaler

Jacob Online www.jacobonline.com has contracts with over 3,100 hotels throughout Europe, Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, North Africa and North America.

Jacob wholesales these hotels to over 600 tour operators and online retailers, who in turn sell them to their own end-customers – around 500,000 passengers per annum. Jacob's focus is on independent hotels and small local chains; almost all provide their rooms on allocation, and all at a net rate (without commission being built in) so that the reseller can add their own margin.

The reseller accesses the hotel information and inventory via a choice of two methods, both of which provide instant confirmed bookings:

- By real-time integration of the Jacob content into the reseller's own website or back office booking system. This uses an application programming interface (API)

- By simply logging into Jacob's own website as an accredited Jacob user, and making a manual booking

"We believe that our API service is the most reliable in the industry," says Jacob's Head of Sales, Denise Atkinson. "And because it can be integrated by our customers with inventory from their other sources, there is a good opportunity for tourist boards to use our content."

By courtesy of Jacob Online. Further information from sales@jacobonline.com.

8.6.4 Via the Global Distribution Systems

The global distribution systems (GDS) are Amadeus, Sabre, Galileo and Worldspan.[6] These are the linked computer systems that, before the internet arrived, allowed over 450 airlines, 50 major car rental companies and 'only' 37,000 hotels to be booked by around half a million travel agents anywhere in the world.

The hotels they sell are mostly those of the major chains. Costs for the travel suppliers in maintaining their ICT links to the GDSs are high, and so is commission on bookings to the GDS and the agent. They remain very strong for business travel – for example, the new Silverjet low-cost business-class airline expects 60% of bookings from agents via the GDS.

GDS distribution is highly significant for medium-size hotels and for groups of smaller hotels that have a common reservation system. Also, they help to power much of the content of the global website brands,

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5   GTA at ENTER (2007).

6   In July 2007 Travelport, already owner of Galileo, was seeking regulatory approval to acquire Worldspan.

especially those they own: Sabre owns Travelocity and LastMinute, for example, and Galileo's parent Travelport also owns Expedia and Octopus. An example of the onward distribution they achieve is that Octopus is providing hotel accommodation, and call centre back-up, on the 40 websites of Singapore Airlines.

Because most of the GDS product is in big hotels, there is a market gap for e-commerce services sold through the GDS that offer a good range of small, lower-cost accommodation bookable online in real time.

There is a huge opportunity for DMOs here, mainly at a national level, if they can meet the commercial and operational challenges, including the higher level of commission required. Individual SMEs find it is impossible to gain distribution through these channels by making a direct approach to the reseller – the reseller cannot afford the administrative and technical cost of managing a small amount of inventory. Instead, the reseller buys from an intermediary who brings together a large number of small businesses into one e-commerce system that the reseller's system can interrogate and transact with in real time.

8.7 Alternative Business Models for Destinations

Every DMO has a different business environment and should consider its own strengths and weaknesses when analysing the alternative models that are available. The options include:

- Not acting as an e-commerce trader, but promoting the destination in partnership with commercial e-commerce operators as tactical partners

- Appointing a single commercial partner to carry out the role as a strategic partner

- Entering into a joint venture with a commercial partner

- Running its own e-commerce system

- Not acting as an e-commerce trader, but connecting regional and commercial e-commerce partners' inventory to an open platform that can be interrogated by the DMO and its distribution partners

In the EU countries and in some other countries, you might need to ensure that you do not infringe state aid rules. You will need to be able to show that there is 'market failure', where the private sector is not adequately fulfilling an important consumer need, and that the service is in the public interest.

These business models are applicable equally to bookings for accommodation and e-ticketing for events and admission to tourist attractions.

Let us examine each of the business models.

8.7.1 Not Acting as an E-commerce Trader, but Promoting the Destination in Partnership with Commercial E-commerce Operators as Tactical Partners

The traditional, primary role of a DMO is that of promoting the attractiveness of the destination as a whole. Here, the DMO is working at the start of the 'customer journey' wheel (see above, Figure in section 8.2), developing and projecting the brand, providing ideas and inspiration for a possible trip.

In this role, if there are commercial e-commerce providers with a substantial line-up of offers, there is no need for the DMO to become an e-commerce operator itself. The DMO website can simply offer a search facility for information and guideline prices about suppliers (such as hotels, attractions, and events). The site user then selects one of the search results and opens the selected operator's own relevant booking page in a new window. There is also the opportunity to collect commission on click-throughs, or from resulting bookings if the receiving site can track them.

The limitations of this approach include:

- The e-commerce operators' offers may not add up to adequate representation of the whole destination

- The customer does not receive real-time price information, and is not given availability information, until they have consulted the third-party site. If the offer then does not suit them, or they wish to make price comparisons, they need to start again on the destination site

Thus, more direct intervention may be required.

8.7.2 Appointing a Single Commercial Partner to Carry Out the Role as a Strategic Partner

This option is a longer-term version of the previous one. The commercial partner provides the booking system and the inventory, and the DMO supports it with marketing. The partner needs to have, or to build up, a very strong line-up of destination product, and to have good customer service systems in place, including call centre back-up. Ideally, the commercial partner's content is fully integrated into the DMO's website.

8.7.3 Entering into a Joint Venture with a Commercial Partner

This develops the concept of the previous option from a contract between two entities into a long-term partnership. If the DMO's status gives it sufficient commercial freedom, it can itself be an active partner. However, the DMO's role may in effect be concentrated on the brand-building role only.

> **VisitScotland: a public-private partnership**
>
> VisitScotland, an agency of the Scottish Executive, formed a partnership company, eTourism Ltd that includes Tiscover as a technology supplier, shareholder and investor. Tiscover has 15 years of experience in the destination management systems market in Europe, the United Kingdom and South Africa.
>
> eTourism Ltd board members include representatives of VisitScotland, Tiscover, Partnerships United Kingdom (itself a public-private partnership) and an independent chairman. eTourism Ltd trades as VisitScotland.com. Since 2002, VisitScotland.com has delivered more than € 95 million in revenues to accommodation businesses in Scotland, and hosts over 12 million visits per annum.
>
> In 2006, the company took bookings worth € 30 million. Online sales continue to be the fastest growing area for booking revenue, with a 46% increase in 2006.

Figure 8.2 Accommodation search and booking has a prominent place on the homepage of www.visitscotland.com

By courtesy of VisitScotland.com.

8.7.4 Running Its Own E-commerce System

The administrative, commercial, marketing and technical challenges of this option are considerable. The DMO needs to ask itself:

*   Will it be duplicating the work of existing commercial e-commerce providers or regional DMOs offering e-commerce to SMEs?

*   Has it the market knowledge and organisational skill to sign up enough inventory that is attractive, competitively priced, and timely? Specifically, can it acquire and sell last-minute deals?

*   Has the DMO the experience and marketing muscle to sell the inventory competitively in the marketplace?

*   Is it prepared to devote marketing resource to short-term sales rather than long-term brand-building?

*   Can real-time availability be organised sufficiently easily with SMEs?

*   Can it distribute the inventory to third parties effectively enough to produce an economy of scale? Will the SMEs find the commission costs acceptable?

*   Has it the ICT expertise to build or buy in the necessary systems?

Denmark runs its own e-commerce system

VisitDenmark operates an e-commerce system through its wholly-owned company VisitDenmark Booking ApS. It offers 26,000 summer cottages as well as hotels and youth hostels. Their aim was to be the best website to book Denmark and to capitalise on the strong search engine performance of www.visitdenmark.com.

There is also distribution through their product websites such as www.Hotel.dk, the holiday house portal www.DanishHolidayHouses.com, and sites for Danish restaurants.

About 20 Danish partner sites use the booking engine, and together they enjoy around 1 million website visits per month with 4 million page views.

By courtesy of VisitDenmark.

"An open platform for suppliers and distributors in Queensland"

Visitor Information Centres (VICs) around Australia are faced with small budgets, they are often dependent on voluntary staff in older age groups, and used time consuming processes when working with mainly small to medium sized businesses. They needed to look at efficiencies that would assist customers and the local businesses, whilst keeping costs down and making use of their volunteers.

To process a booking, a VIC had to make phone calls to confirm that an SME could take the booking. If the supplier was not at home, this could take three or four calls to different suppliers. If the payment is taken, it is generally a manual system, or a computer system that requires the employment of an accounts person. Often, the customer pays a deposit to the VIC and then pays the balance to the supplier, and so has no full tax invoice. Alternatively, the customer pays the VIC in full, and the VIC then needs to process the payment to the supplier less the commission – requiring another resource.

The solution

"The regions of Queensland identified that they needed to create an open platform," advised David Phillips, chairman of the Queensland Regional Tourism Organisation. "They have commenced this in the Queensland Online project, which provides a truly open platform that suppliers and distributors can access in a commercially neutral environment in a very cost efficient manner."

The small regional visitor centre of Mackay is a good example of how it works. Mackay is a regional town where accommodation availability is limited and tourism funds very small. They implemented the Queensland Open Platform's 'Information Module', and with only a handful of suppliers to start with, they have been processing bookings on a daily basis with the money going direct to the supplier. There are no more multiple phone calls or manual processing of payments in-house, and the supplier receives the funds straight away. All this is done with no investment by the VIC, as it utilises the central services of Queensland Online.

This has saved time, money and streamlined their processes, and enables any tourism operator in the Mackay region to be bookable via this e-commerce solution.

Target

Mackay VIC's objective was to process bookings through to all the providers they have on the system.

Says Hannah Kochevatkin of Mackay Tourism: "Our choice was either to spend a considerable amount of money on a destination management system which provided more capability than we needed, or utilise the open platform approach of Queensland Online.

Now we can check availability, book, and pay online all within minutes. We know the supplier receives an e-mail confirmation and the booking appears on their system. So we can rest assured the message has got through to the supplier."

Results

"It is particularly great for Mackay because most of our suppliers are SMEs and at the Mackay Tourism Association we do not have big budgets, and we do not need someone to balance out the accounts when we process bookings through the system.

Not being tied up making phone calls, the VIC employees and volunteers are able to handle more customer enquiries."

By courtesy of David Phillips, Queensland Regional Tourism Organisation, Hannah Kochevatkin, Mackay Tourism Pty Ltd (www.mackayregion.com), and Shane Crockett and Jody Johnson V3 Leisure Management and Marketing (www.v3leisure.com).

8.7.5 Open Exchange Platform

In this model, the DMO does not act as an e-commerce operator, but connects regional and commercial e-commerce operators' inventory to one platform.

Every time an online booking request is received by the platform, it 'polls' (asks) for relevant inventory from each of the e-commerce systems run by other organisations that have chosen to connect to the central platform.

The technology has made this easier. It is still very expensive, but administratively it is likely to be less costly than running an in-house e-commerce system. It suits a destination that already has a number of existing e-commerce players and wishes to support them rather than duplicate them. It needs considerable administrative resource to make and maintain the contractual relations involved, possibly with a diverse range of e-commerce partners.

There are two essential features of the open exchange model:

- It should be open to any inventory aggregator that is willing to pay the connection cost (if it is not met by the DMO). The only, considerable, proviso is that the partners must all be subject to some shared quality control of the products, pricing and service standards. They should not be selling elsewhere at a lower price, for example

- The polling facility should be open to be used by any third party, normally one that provides valuable distribution on other websites. The sales commission deal with each third party may be different and will need agreement by each of the supplying aggregators and all their participants

There is the risk that some key players may not want to join, or that they may only provide their most expensive rates or dates that no-one wants. These problems can only be met by applying sufficient resources to marketing and distribution that proves, over time, that the platform is a cost-efficient way to gain extra sales.

VisitBritain national platform for connectivity and distribution

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Andrew Daines of VisitBritain for the contribution of this case study, May 2007.

Business model

VisitBritain consolidates and distributes the product data and e-commerce offers of around 60 partner organisations, and distributes this to its own websites and third parties. Transactions take place on the website of the e-commerce provider concerned, not at VisitBritain.

Consolidation

This involves assembly of a National Tourism Product Database (NTPD) from all parts of Britain. The data comprises:

- Structured product data (accommodation, attractions and events) collected by around 60 organisations

- Destination guides from national, regional and local DMOs

- Data can and does go in both directions, powering VisitBritain websites and some of those of the contributing partners

Sources for the product data

National, regional and local tourism organisations. These are the default sources for data for most tourism product. At May 2007 these accounted for over 90% of all product data. Each tourism product has a 'data steward', based on their geographic location, who is primarily responsible for getting the data to VisitBritain.[7]

National Product Owners (NPOs) – organisations that own 20 or more tourism units or product across three or more of the regions of Britain. NPOs can opt out of their data being supplied by one of the national, regional or local organizations, and work directly with VisitBritain. To date, only a few hotel chains have done this, although this is expected to increase.

Marketing groups – organisations that represent and market product, but do not own it, such as Active Hotels. Data from these organisations is used only if unavailable from other sources. An example is www.24hourmuseum.org.uk which has a database of nearly 4,000 cultural attractions and events, some of which are received through other sources, but the majority are not.

Most of the product data gets to VisitBritain via an interoperability gateway – mainly from compatible proprietary destination management systems (New Mind, New Vision, Tiscover, World.Net, IIS and Westhawk). Other databases have been made to be interoperable. Some organisations use VisitBritain's own data management application (DMA) to manage product data.

Ongoing development

The data fields are constantly refined:

- Images were recently added to the interoperability gateway

- In 2007, over 30 additional accessibility data fields will be added to the serviced, self-catering and attractions databases. These will be derived from the EU OSSATE project (see chapter 2, section 2.9)

Because VisitBritain works with many different partners, additions are a gradual process.

Legal agreements

VisitBritain has a suite of legal agreements covering aspects such as platform services (for example the Interoperability Gateway), data supply and polling services to manage the interests of VisitBritain and its partners.

E-commerce

The VisitBritain accommodation polling service maps product from the NTPD to those organisations that the product has appointed as its sales agent(s). This may be one or more organisations from one or more of the three types listed above.

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7   See http://www.enjoyengland.com/datastewards (29-10-2007).

Booking process

When a user on a VisitBritain site (or one powered by VisitBritain) is searching for accommodation to book, VisitBritain sends two messages to the relevant systems, based on the parameters in the product search:

- First, to determine which product is available

- Then, after the user has chosen a specific product, to re-confirm the availability and display the price

As an illustration, if the customer searches for all serviced product within 10 miles of the city of Bath for one night, two adults, on 7 August 2007, the following happens:

- The first message goes to all properties that are mapped to sales agents within 10 miles of Bath, and brings back the total number (up to 100) that have rooms available for the parameters entered

- After the customer has chosen the product, the system sends another message to the sales agents mapped to this product – in this case Bath Tourism and LateRooms. The system then displays to the customer the prices these sales agents offer, together with the room types available. The system allows the prices for the same product from the different sources to differ

Figure 8.3 Data consolidation and display on visitbritain.com

Figure 1: Data consolidation and display on visitbritain.com
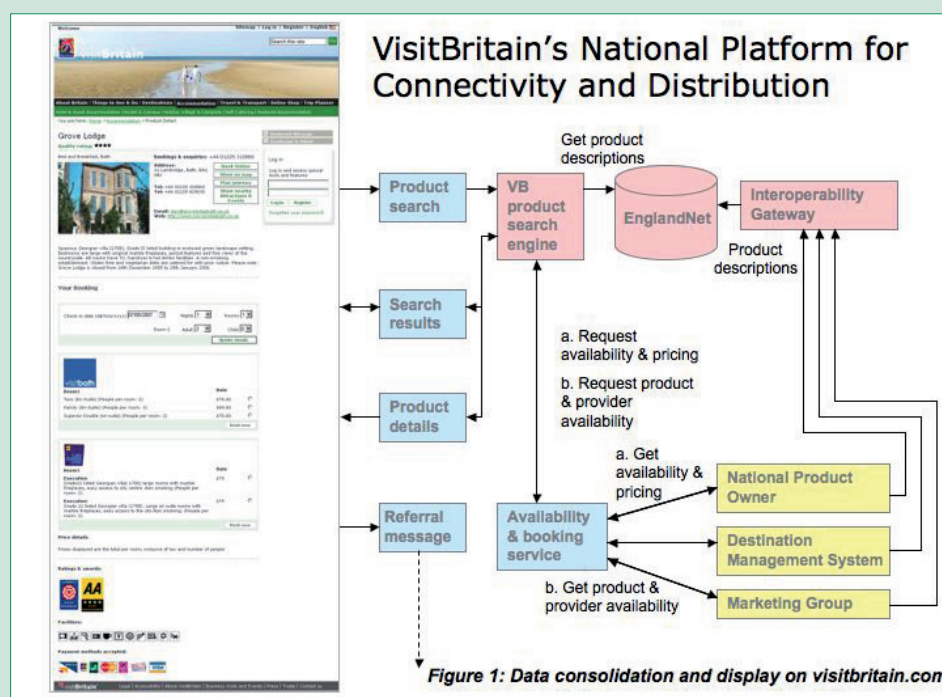
The customer then selects the room and sales agent to book through

Figure 8.4 Functions of e-commerce partner of VisitBritain
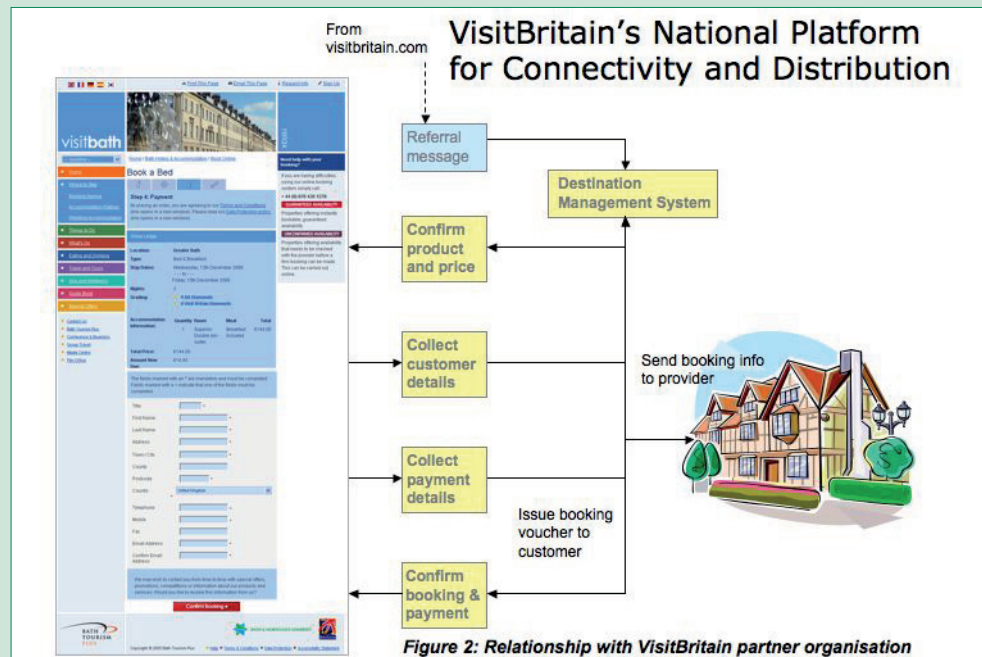
Figure 2: Relationship with VisitBritain partner organisation

Finally, the customer is taken to the sales agent site to carry out the transaction.

An extension of the service to cover attractions and events is in development.

8.8 Alternative Business Models Offered by E-commerce System Vendors

The options for the destination outlined above are further affected by the different business models offered by the commercial firms that provide ready-made e-commerce systems. These systems are usually as part of a suite of business systems tailored for DMOs, and called a Destination Management System (DMS) or a Destination E-business Platform. Most include e-commerce for all forms of accommodation as well as e-ticketing at attractions, for events and booking at restaurants.

The options for the supplier's role will vary in each DMO's country, but are likely to include:

- Technology supplier. This may involve hardware and software hosted by the DMO, or only software if it is hosted by the supplier – called an Application Service Provider (ASP) and used via the web. In either case, the DMO pays for the required hardware, setting up, and an annual licence, usually for a minimum term of two or three years. The DMO takes all the income

- The supplier shares in the commission that is taken by the DMO

- The supplier becomes an active trader, and handles e-commerce transactions. It may share some of the commission with the DMO. Tiscover is an example of a partner of this kind. The relationship may be formalised through a joint company (a public-private partnership), or just be a contract to supply the service

- The supplier also sells ancillary services direct to the individual businesses, often in close conjunction with the DMO. Guestlink and eviivo sell their services in this way

Different models may be required for, or result from, different destination requirements. If the DMO wants an e-business platform for a full range of operations, then it is best advised to adopt the straightforward client-supplier relationship. If the focus is only on e-commerce, then the other models come into play.

Tiscover – service provider or public-private-partner

Tiscover started in 1991 as an electronic tourism information system and is now a complete destination management system (DMS) provider, operating a large family of destination portals. The company also offers itself as a partner in public-private partnership (PPP) booking system operations.

The Tiscover DMS allows DMOs and accommodation providers to market their products and services online, both on their own individual websites as well as on the Tiscover portals (www.tiscover.com) and those of its partners. The system can also be used as a reservations management and CRM tool, and is ASP (Application Service Provider) based.

It has customers in Austria, Germany, Switzerland or United Kingdom (see above, section 8.7.3 for Scotland example), Italy and South Africa. Together, these cover about 2,000 regions and 25,000 accommodation units, most of them bookable online, with 1.3 million bookings and enquiries in 2006. Examples are the site of the Tirol Tourist Board (www.tirol.at) and Bournemouth Tourism (www.bournemouth.co.uk), both powered by Tiscover.

By courtesy of Tiscover (www.abouttiscover.com), e-mail office@tiscover.com.

As DMOs develop, especially at a national level, they may prefer to build up their own systems on a modular basis, using 'best of breed' modules for e-commerce, CRM, content management, and other functions. They may still use one company to handle the integration, and that company may supply some of the modules.

8.9 How to Get Real-time Inventory from SMEs

For an e-commerce system to be able to offer the customer an instant confirmed booking, the product on offer (a room or admission ticket, for example) must already be allocated to the system.

If the inventory is allocated to a DMO e-commerce system, the owner of an SME such as a guest house with only two or three rooms, or even with 10 or 15, will need frequently to add and subtract rooms. If the owner allocates inventory to more than one system (say a local and a regional system, or to a commercial system), it is even more difficult to manage. There have been various ways to communicate the allocation changes – using a web form; a fax matrix form; a touchtone telephone; a telephone interactive voice response system; even a telephone call. None of them have been entirely satisfactory, although many SMEs do continue to use the web form or a touchtone phone. The need for this manual intervention has been a considerable brake on SME e-commerce.

A better solution is for the owner to have their own electronic booking diary and for the destination system to be able to 'see' into it. An alternative is for the software to sit within the DMS and for the owner to be able to 'see' into it. With either model, there are now cheap and reliable systems that do this – and there are other advantages too.

The service provides, typically:

- A booking diary on the owner's PC and entirely under the owner's control

- Automated uploading of the inventory via the owner's internet connection to a central e-commerce system

- A booking engine, and immediate synchronisation whenever a booking is taken, either locally or by the central system, to avoid any risk of double bookings

- The owner can generate bookings from users of their own website by linking it to the system's web booking pages, which can feature the owner's own text and images

- Automated distribution of the inventory to other websites if the owner wishes (and will pay the commission)

It can also provide accounting, CRM and e-mail campaign facilities – in essence, a complete easy-to-use property management system.

Typically, the cost is about € 150 at installation. Some then charge around 5% commission on sales. There is no commission on the owner's own locally-inserted bookings from walk-in, telephone or postal customers.

There are many specialist e-ticketing system suppliers for booking tables at restaurants, entrance fees to attractions, tours, and seats at events. Specialists for B&Bs, guest houses, hotels, holiday villas and cottages, include, for example, Eviivo Frontdesk and New Vision's Guestlink in the United Kingdom.

Most will enable onward distribution to other travel and leisure websites. For example, one of the GDSs, Amadeus, is introducing a global destination services platform for travel agents to book local leisure and transport services in destinations. Amadeus Activities and Entertainment is planned for North America, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany and Italy. Destinations with sufficient coverage will be able to feed their inventory into it.

> ### VisitScotland's 'Web in a Box'
>
> The VisitScotland 'Web in a Box' service enables accommodation providers to set up and manage their own website and handle online bookings. It is targeted initially at small serviced accommodation providers. It provides:
>
> - A website 'layout assistant' tool to set up an attractive site using pre-designed templates
>
> - A data management tool for updating availability, prices and other information, for the provider's own site and VisitScotland.com simultaneously
>
> - A secure booking engine to take credit/debit card deposits for bookings
>
> To give greater global sales opportunities, the content and accommodation inventory on 'Web in a Box' sites is also available to customers searching VisitScotland.com and, in the future, on the Tiscover sites. It will also be bookable via the VisitScotland National Booking Centre and the local office network.
>
> No commission is charged for bookings made on the provider's site, but there is a processing charge to cover costs of 0.5%, on the total value of the booking.
>
> Commission of 8% is levied on online bookings made via the VisitScotland and Tiscover sites. The standard commission of 10% is levied on bookings through the National Centre and local offices.
>
> 'Web in a Box' can be purchased either as an enhancement to a VisitScotland marketing package, or as a stand alone product.
>
> By courtesy of VisitScotland.com. For further information e-mail webinabox@visitscotland.com.

8.10 Tips for Successful E-commerce

These tips assume that you know your markets and your products, and have successfully acquired the right products, at the right price, at the right time.

Use an established e-commerce system provider with a clear track record of successful 'shopping basket' design. Do not let your e-business developer do it unless they are e-commerce specialists.

8.10.1 Barriers to Establishing Trust in Your Service

Compared with traditional shopping, online shopping takes relatively little effort and enables customers to compare a large range of products. The downside is that online shopping is sometimes still distrusted.

The user might see four risks:

- "The site might be intending to deceive"

- "My personal information might not be safe"

- "The supplier might default on the transaction"

- "The transaction might not be safe"

Chapter 4, section 4.5, provides essential guidelines for building identity and trust in your website as a whole. The rest of this section covers the wider issues during e-commerce transactions.

8.10.2 The Shopping Basket – First Stages

Product search and navigation must be quick and easy before customers enter the e-commerce system, and also once they are in it:

- Ensure that prices appear early in the process – seeing the exact price is often the reason the customer has entered the check-out process. They may not yet have a commitment to buy: never add extra costs later in the process

- Never ask for personal information before you have offered the full product information and price. Do not ask for login or new registration until you have shown the customer what they can buy

- Work to keep the shopper comfortable in the shop – label each page and number it '1 of 5' to show them where they are in the purchase process; allow them to search for other things while staying in the shop; ensure pages load fast

- Be sure you are providing enough information, especially about accommodation. Study what information there is elsewhere on the web about your products; if you are providing less, you are less likely to secure the sale. Provide an easy way for your businesses to offer 'rich media' such as pan-arounds and video clips

- Once the item is in the shopping basket, provide a link to allow the buyer to go back to the information page if they want to

- Provide a thumbnail picture of the item in the basket to remind the buyer of what they have selected

- Provide 'Back' buttons on every page, and ensure customer data is not lost when they move back and forward

- Make error messages user-friendly: it should be the system's fault, not the customer's

8.10.3 Shopping Basket – When You Start Asking for Personal Information

- On the page where personal details are entered, state your default use of their data. Always allow total opt-out – and always link to a privacy policy page

- Make sure it is clear who the website operator is. State your official status. Give the proper title of the organisation, not just the e-mail address but the postal address (not a box number). Link to your About Us/Imprint/Impressum statement, do not rely on the customer finding it at the foot of the page. Pictures of staff are a great reassurance

- It is not the number of pages in the booking process that puts buyers off, it is how quick and easy each one is that matters

8.10.4 Shopping Basket – The Payment Method Page

- Offer payment by credit or debit card, or by PayPal

- Provide financial reassurance – show them that the organisation is real. Make clear how to contact you if there are problems. Say if there is telephone back-up. Display a well-known third-party security system for credit card details and personal information; use their logo – Verisign, HACKER SAFE, BBB and even credit card logos all help to reassure. Put them on the page where the credit card number has to be entered

- Put the cancellation terms on the page, or in a pop-up. Link to your full terms and conditions, and display these attractively in plain simple language

- Offer travel and cancellation insurance. This is a useful revenue earner for you in its own right, but it is also vital to offer it in order to be able to enforce your cancellation terms. It also provides the customer with essential reassurance about the risks of losing their money

- Avoid depending on cookies, otherwise users who have them turned off will fail to buy

- Be careful how you offer cross-selling or upselling – there is a risk they will never click that 'Buy' button

8.10.5 After They Have Bought

After-sales services are important too, and can add greatly to the value of the service – or spoil it if they are not well done:

- Take some trouble over the confirmation screen and the barcode if there is one for an e-ticket. Make it attractive and welcoming, to mirror the pleasure the customer should be feeling at this point

- Make it clear whether they should print the confirmation screen, and say on it whether you are also going to send an e-mail confirmation. Do not let the one duplicate the other without making it clear that the customer does not need to print both. If the e-mail contains extra information, say what it will be

- Add some value by providing how-to-get there advice and a map, or a link to the supplier's information page which gives this. It is also an opportunity to include a relevant advertiser

- Make sure the e-mail matches the confirmation screen in style as well as content

- Get customer feedback – through usability testing (see chapter 15, section 15.7), repeated as you refine your system and pages, and direct from customers. Test everything, from the shape, colour and position of buttons upwards

- Analyse where drop-out happens; offer an incentive to complete a short exit survey

8.11 Cost of Sale

Businesses will always give priority to direct selling online. With their own system (on the market from around € 150) they will pay no commission but only the credit card transaction fee of 1% to 2%. Most DMOs find that they can charge around 5% for their service, but this can be higher where overall service is strong.

To distribute via intermediaries costs up to 15% and even up to 30% if both a wholesaler and a retailer are involved, depending on the marketplace power of the distributor.

8.12 Selling Merchandise through an Online Shop

(Selling the DMO's own marketing services to your own industry is covered in chapter 14.)

Most DMOs are not primarily trading organisations and may be taking care not to duplicate what the private sector is already doing. But the DMO may have marketing objectives (quite apart from producing a net profit to plough back into promotional work) that require some intervention, including:

- Helping committed travellers before their trip, with printed maps and guides

- Offering mementoes after the trip that embed the satisfaction and memories, and provide gifts for friends and family that will endorse the traveller's destination choice to them

- Adding to the destination's CRM data

The shop may be outsourced wholly or in part, or be operated in-house. There are many off-the-shelf e-commerce shops available, such as Actinic.[8] You will need someone from a commercial e-commerce background to make a business plan, source the suppliers, distribute and market your shop.

Do not attempt to create an online sales facility for items or services that involve a large number of variables but a small overall volume.

For maps and guides, it may be easiest to describe them on the DMO site but to link to a site such as Amazon for purchase. This saves expense for the DMO and earns a little revenue from this 'affiliate' arrangement (for more on affiliate marketing see chapter 6, section 6.7.8).

The aim should be to:

- Minimise the amount of fulfilment done in-house, unless the DMO already has a low-cost resource for this. It is usually best done by the merchandise supplier or by a wholesaler

- Aim for a common core of inventory and a single e-commerce platform. However:

  – You will probably need to build versions for each country, language and currency

  – You will probably need to source some special inventory for each version

- Cover costs and, perhaps, make a profit; and distribute it as a branded or white-label service to carriers, incoming tour operators and other partners in order to extend your reach, and their own service, out further into key markets

A very simple alternative if there are already a number of online retailers that cover the product range you want to see featured on the destination site, is simply to link to their sites.

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8   Actinic, http://www.actinic.com (4-10-2007).

8.13 Selling Digital Downloads

You may want to charge for downloads – of maps or guides for customers, and of research reports for your industry partners – without investing in a fully-fledged shop, a payment gateway and a merchant account to take credit cards.

There are facilities that give each buyer a unique download URL that expires after a few days or after a certain number of download attempts. PayLoadz charges a flat monthly fee and works only with Paypal. ClickBank has a small set-up fee and modest transaction fees but includes a payment system. ShopSite Pro is more sophisticated but you do need a payment gateway and credit card merchant.

8.14 E-commerce – Measures of Success

Measures can be at a strategic and/or at an operational e-commerce level:

- Percentage of tourism suppliers in the destination that have access to a suitable e-commerce service. This measure should focus on those categories of supplier that contribute to the visitor's decision to make the trip

- If the DMO is directly involved in e-commerce:

  – Total page views of the entry page to the e-commerce system, in all DMO and third-party distribution channels (using web analytics, see chapter 16)

  – Look-to-book ratio (using web analytics)

  – Drop-out rate during the e-commerce process ('shopping cart abandonment rate', using web analytics)

  – Performance against benchmarks for customer ratings (using usability testing, see chapter 15, section 15.7)

  – Degree of customer satisfaction with the e-commerce service (using online surveys, see chapter 15, section 15.4)

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 9

Mobile Marketing – Exploiting the Essential Companion to Everyday Life

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Graham Cook, Head of Value Added Services at Orange Group, for advice in the preparation of this section.

Key Messages

- Mobiles with high-speed connections will soon be a major e-tourism communication channel

- To profit from mobiles, destinations need to be able to offer timely, location-sensitive, personalised information and deals

- In the longer term, mobile communication may become more important than conventional PC-based communication

- Destinations should already be offering SMS, podcasts and mobile website services; and offering product listings to satellite navigation (Satnav) service providers

9.1 What Is a 'Mobile'?

Mobiles include mobile phones (cell phones), personal digital assistants (PDAs, such as Palm Pilots or Blackberries), MP3 players (such as iPods), and satellite navigation devices (such as TomToms).

When you leave home, you remember your money, keys and mobile phone. It does not 'beam you up' yet, but it seems near to doing most other things.

Figure 9.1 Features that can be found in mobile devices[1]
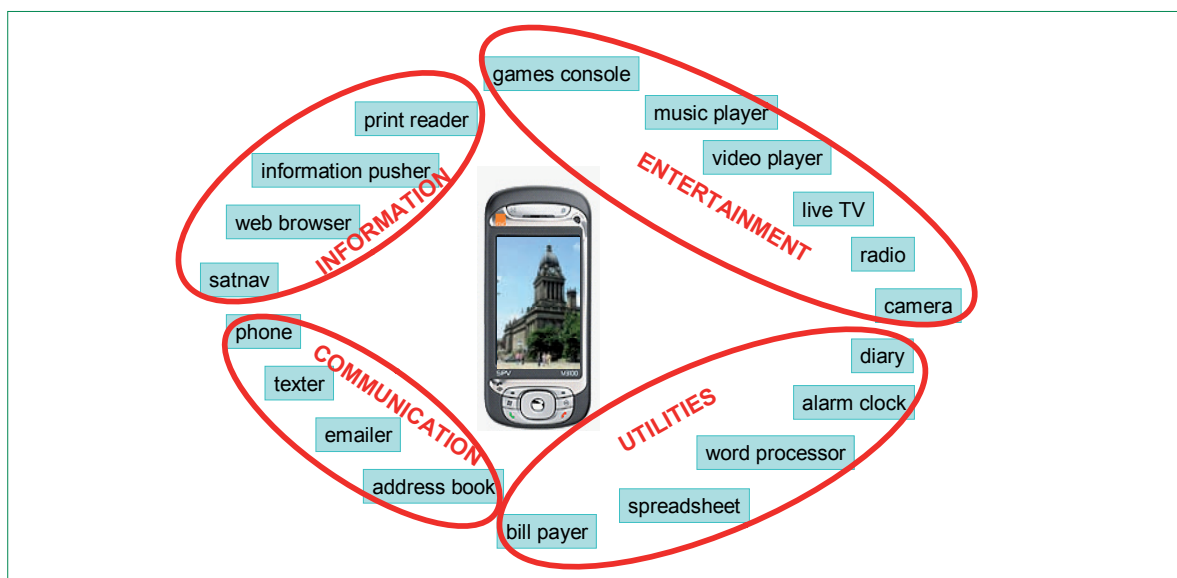
1   TEAM Tourism Consulting (2007).

Thanks to increasing convergence, many of these very different functions are beginning to be offered in a single device. Mobiles are fast becoming the 'Swiss Army knife' of everyday living. Examples of a combined phone, PDA and satnav are the Nokia N95, the Mio 701 sold in Belgium and the O2 XDA Orbit sold in the United Kingdom.

Because these facilities are becoming so easily available to everyone, mobiles seem likely to be a greater driver of globalisation than the PC-based internet has been so far. An exemple is the *Orange SPV M3100* sold in various European markets which includes e-mail, 128Mb internal memory, video messaging, web browsing, a camera and MP3 player.[2]

Figure 9.2 The Orange SPV M3100

9.2 Why Are Mobiles Important?

The impact of mobiles on tourism marketing could be greater over the next five to 10 years than that of the desktop PC, website and fixed-link broadband has been over the past 10 years.

Why? Because the mobile will be the most convenient channel for much of the communication that visitors and destinations want to maintain with each other.

- The mobile has already become almost everyone's indispensable personal companion, throughout the day, throughout the world. We now expect to keep in touch with family and friends when on holiday. On holiday in their own country, users tend to keep their mobile switched on, and, increasingly, anywhere in Europe, where roaming tariffs (charges for calling to or from another country) have already reduced significantly

- Its usefulness and 'comfort factor' has overcome the resentment that many people have felt about its intrusiveness, for young and old alike. And mobiles are personal; PCs are for work

- They are ubiquitous: in the street, on the beach, hands-free in the car, and (in Europe at least) on planes soon, too

- They know where they are, and can tell you about where you are if you wish

- Nearly 100% of visitors have one, in contrast with PC internet access which is enjoyed by less than half the population in many markets. Even in developed markets, fixed-link internet usage is expected to plateau at 60% to 80% coverage. And most visitors do not bring their PC with them

- When all the functions of mobiles can work fully across frontiers, contact made before the trip can be maintained during and after it. But mobiles are generally likely to be more important for providing customer service during a trip than for marketing to new customers before a trip

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2   Orange Group (2007).

• The networks have the opportunity to send content to mobile phones that is tailored to the subscriber database. This could be personalised, and may attract huge earnings from advertisers[3]

9.3 Are There Limitations?

At the moment, yes.

9.3.1 Slow Speeds

Many mobiles are relatively slow for data transfer (file attachments, or video downloads, for example) and cause some frustration if not on a fast 3G (third generation) network – which provides about 10 times the capacity of the older channels. It is a bit like PC dial-up compared with broadband.

GSM World reported 2.4 billion subscribers globally (quarter 1, 2007). Of these, 115 million were 3G, about 5%. But the number of 3G subscribers grew by 14% in the single quarter 1/quarter 2, 2007, to 131 million. In developed markets, the percentage is much higher – Asia and the Pacific, and Western Europe, account for over 95% of 3G connections. A summary of 3G connectivity is at http://www.gsmworld.com/technology/3g/statistics.shtml.[4]

Allied to speed is the following.

9.3.2 Availability and Price of the Connection

The cost to users of the network charges may be the main restraint on growth, not the devices. However, increasingly there are 'all you can eat' bundles which give customers all the data services they want for the same flat rate per month.

Availability will vary by country and location too. This will determine, in each key market, what kind of mobile travel marketing is worthwhile, from elaborate travel guides to simple text services. But prices are coming down rapidly in some markets.

9.3.3 Travelling Overseas

Leisure users often do not keep switched on when overseas. Operators are working with the regulators to make roaming tariffs simpler so that people feel more comfortable to take and make calls. Research has highlighted the fears of potential 'billshock' from calls received and made without real-time control over how the bill is growing. At the moment, customers tend to make fewer and shorter voice calls and do not accept all incoming calls. They also use texting, local SIM cards, calling cards or voice over internet protocol (VoIP).

But market evidence indicates that if offers are compelling and clear, then usage does increase – travellers do wish to use their phones more overseas, but need to be confident of the charges.[5] The networks are working hard on this.

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3   McIntyre, P. (2007), 'Marketers Drool over the Opportunities Presented by Mobiles', *Business Day* (Online), available: http://www.smh.com.au/news/business/mobile-phone-ad-market-worth-11b-by-2011/2007/08/29/1188067191356.html (30-8-2007).

4   GSM World (2007), *3GSM Statistics* (Online), available: http://www.gsmworld.com/technology/3g/statistics.shtml (30-8-2007).

5   Orange Group (2007).

9.3.4 Location Sensitivity

Usually you will want to be able to tell your visitor about things that are within a few metres as well as within a few kilometres. Most mobiles do not yet know where they are very accurately. However, built into every mobile device and network connection is the cell ID of the mobile device. At the very least this gives the traveller the opportunity to have the content they are browsing automatically localised or contextualised to some degree. And handsets with integrated GPS chips are now being mass marketed.

The rate of growth in portable navigation devices (satnav) is indicated by TomTom – they shipped 1.8 million in quarter 2 of 2007, up 118% year on year.[6]

Mobile services may not work in other countries, or may be very expensive. For some mobile services, but not all yet, there are international standards – the 'global system for mobile communication' (GSM).

You may therefore want to focus only on:

- The domestic market

- Pre-travel only

- Networks and countries where there is the best degree of cross-border working

The roaming alliances already in place provide greater cost control and the ability to 'roam like home' so that the destination's promotional shortcodes, and the user's browsing settings, are honoured when on another network.

An example is Freemove Alliance, created in 2003, stimulated by Orange and including TIM, T-Mobile and Telia Sonera. And many networks operate internationally, and can connect with often disparate networks so that the roaming experience is seamless.

9.3.5 Getting Users to Opt-in

DMOs cannot 'push' services to customers until they have signed up, and the likelihood of them finding your website on their mobile is pretty low. Customer data capture is the essential pre-requisite to mobile marketing just as much as for any other channel (see below, section 9.14, for more about signing up customers).

9.3.6 Screen Size

Tourism marketing is about imagery as well as information. There is a trend towards larger screens, but where it will stop in the gap between small phones and large PDAs is not clear yet. The likelihood is that the marketing pressures of the big brands of fast-moving consumer goods will drive up the size, and at the same time the technology will continue to drive down the weight.

9.4 Key Points for a Mobile Marketing Strategy

Read the rest of this chapter, then make at least a three-year plan – things to be done now, things to be planned now but done later, and things to be aware of but not to action yet:

- Get to understand what services customers most want via mobiles. It will not look the same as in other media, and it will not look the same in every country. Stay flexible and realistic:

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6   TomTom International (2007), *Investor Relations Press Release* (23-7-2007) (Online), available: http://investors.tomtom.com/ tomtom/press/2007/2007-07-24 (14-9-2007).

– Be ready to work only in selected countries and priority market segments

– Be ready to run simple text services, or sophisticated high-speed 3G services, according to your priority segments' preferences. For example, if the target is cool young urbanites, their mobiles will be their fashion accessory and they will be open to a higher-end mobile service

– Work on a small, pilot scale if the ROI does not look good yet

- Voice and automated or semi-automated services to the customer's phone are likely to become more important, not less, as dependency shifts from the PC to the mobile. So make voice services part of your mobile strategy

- Find and work with national partners. They will be essential to success, and can include:

– Mobile network operators

– Satnav vendors – satnav is likely to be the most important user interface for visitors wanting tourist information, so understanding how their businesses work is vital

– Transportation providers

– Ports and airports

– Publishers

- Remember that mobile marketing is different: it is about entertainment, about using a person's personal space, and about working within a short attention time

- Over the three-year period, work towards a satisfactory economy of scale that provides adequate ROI. Benchmark against other media – for example, the cost of an SMS service to visitors compared with a walk-in or telephone service

- Build up your CRM capabilities – they will be essential (see chapter 6, section 6.2)

In summary, do not sit and wait – mobile is becoming major. Start learning, start building up partnerships.

9.5 The Trends in More Detail

Mobile is moving on rapidly from just voice.

9.5.1 Web Usage

Web use via mobiles is forecast to exceed residential PC broadband simply through the sheer numbers of handsets in use – expected to be three billion by the end of 2007. One estimate in March 2007 indicated that 76% of handsets offered web access.[7]

- Reports of actual web usage in different countries varies greatly: from highs of 34% in France (reported by TNS),[8] down to lows of a mere 3% in Germany (reported by M:Metrics).[9] But the numbers are still huge compared with PC usage

- Another survey found that 29% of internet users in major European countries regularly access the web from their mobile, against only 19% in the United States of America[10]

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7   TNS Media and Entertainment (2007).

8   TNS (2007).

9   M:Metrics (2007).

10   Wireless Intelligence (2007).

9.5.2 Content

Users are uploading content created on their mobiles to social networking sites, video- and picture-sharing sites, blogs and personal webpages.

Social networking, as on ordinary websites, is now possible on mobiles. For example, Bebo's service will be rolled out with Orange worldwide so that mobile users can create personal profiles, upload photos, create and update blogs, and view other members' profiles, exactly as with Bebo online. This moves the customer on from PC-based networking to an 'anytime, anywhere' experience.[11]

9.5.3 Messaging

Mobile users already send more texts than they make voice calls. Text will remain important until multi-media messaging (MMS) becomes as fast and as good value.

Instant messaging (real-time rather than the forward-and-store process of a single text message) is growing. Virgin Mobile is an example in the United States of America, with Yahoo! Messenger. Global standards are being developed. This is potentially a major channel for visitor information delivery while visitors are on the move.

Location-sensitive services are getting better. For example, in London, BT Fusion offer '1,239 favourite places in London – eat, drink and explore'. Their partner was the London Evening Standard newspaper, and at the usual monthly rate it provides a near-converged service including a home hub, and very fast mobile surfing. Another 12 UK cities will be covered by this WiFi service.

9.5.4 Satellite Navigation (Satnav)

See below, section 9.11.

9.5.5 Speed

New mobile broadband technologies are being rolled out. High-speed 3G connections are spreading rapidly in developed markets, making downloads and uploads attractive for users.

High speed downlink packet access (HSDPA) and WiMax are different technologies but both result in much faster transfer of much more data. We know how broadband revolutionised the use of the web, and the same effect is heading our way for mobile. WiMax investment is huge – in the United States of America, US$ 3 billion will be spent by the number three network, Sprint, and its partners to cover 100 million people by the end of 2008.[12]

The download speeds of GPRS and alternatives are compared at www.gsmworld.com/technology/gprs/class.shtml.[13]

9.5.6 Developing Markets

Some developing markets have a higher propensity to take up advanced web-based services than Europe or the United States of America. Compared with the 20% to 30% in the United States of America and Western Europe who use the web, in Eastern Europe the figure is 54%; Asia and the Pacific 56%; and Latin America 63%.

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11   Orange Group (2007), March 2007.

12   CNET (2007), March 2007.

13   GSM Association, http://www.gsmworld.com (29-10-2007).

The lack of cash machines in India, for example, is thought to be driving mobile e-commerce.[14]

9.5.7 Advertising Revenue Has Built Up Rapidly

*   In the United States of America, Pepsi and Intel were anchor advertisers with Viacom's MTV Networks

*   In the United Kingdom, the '3' network, with paying clients such as Unilever and Microsoft, increased its free video to include news, comedy, celebrity gossip, animations and film, to sit alongside existing content such as music and mobile games

*   Nokia launched Advertising Connector in March 2007 to enable publishers and other third parties to deliver targeted ads

9.5.8 Mobile TV Has Arrived

Examples are:

*   Verizon in the United States of America, and a trial completed in Sweden

*   A 12-month test begun in March 2007 by the BBC in Britain with three TV channels and eight radio stations, via three mobile networks

*   In Europe, a mobile TV service is planned for the soccer championship in 2008. There could be 100 million mobile TV subscribers in Europe by 2010[15]

Although some have questioned the commercial viability of video even on the mainstream web,[16] the mobile networks are launching, or have launched, TV and video-on-demand (VOD) services.

Penetration will be low initially and content is still being developed, but destinations should plan to put more resources into multi-media content that looks good on the small screen – it will be a big growth area (albeit from a small base) in coming years.

9.5.9 Interaction with Print Media

Mobile phone cameras that can read codes are already used in Japan to enable McDonalds customers to download nutritional information; to allow people to download insurance quotes from magazines; and receive movie trailers from poster sites in the street.

The codes are square-shaped mosaics of black and white boxes that can hold much more information than traditional bar codes.

9.5.10 M-commerce

Barcodes have been used by Japan Airlines for domestic ticketing on mobiles for two years. Chiltern Railways in England sold 6,000 tickets in a three-month pilot that sent tickets to mobile phones – a multimedia message including a barcode which was scanned at the ticket gate.

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14   FAME – Forum to Advance the Mobile Experience (2007), February 2007.

15   AFP (2007), March 2007.

16   *Business Week* (2007), March 2007.

And NTT DoCoMo mobile users in McDonalds stores in Japan will be able to use an e-wallet – a mobile phone credit card and information capture service.[17]

9.5.11 In-car Systems

Cars now offer integrated radio, CD, DVD, audio streaming, hands-free phone, internet, satnav, live route guidance – and entertainment in the rear seats.

9.5.12 In-flight Mobile Use

Trials have been announced by a number of airlines, although one survey found that 59% of business travellers were not in favour.[18]

9.6 Which Markets, which Segments?

The following is a snapshot in July 2007 of mobile phone usage in some leading markets. However:

- The situation is changing very rapidly. For each of the countries you market in, you should check out www.etcnewmedia.com/review, the European Travel Commission's New Media Review, for latest information

- The network operators have the most data, and typically it is kept confidential. Nevertheless if a DMO can show that it can work with them to their advantage, they might share market data with you. Consult your own country's network operators, and ask them to consult their colleagues in each of your main markets

9.6.1 Percentage of Users with a Broadband Mobile Connection

Wireless internet access is forecast to account for 49% of all broadband subscribers worldwide by 2012, up from 17% in 2007. WiMax will reach 66 million worldwide in 2012, up from 4 million in 2007, a compound annual growth of 73%. Asia and the Pacific will be the leading region for WiMax by 2012. Mobile WiMax deployments in South Korea and Australia will drive the trend, along with fixed networks in India and Pakistan.[19]

9.6.2 Percentage Using Mobile for Web Surfing

There are significant variations in the use of mobiles to access the web.

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17   Wireless Watch Japan (2007), February 2007.

18   Barclaycard Business (2007), March 2007.

19   Informa Telecoms & Media (2007), *WiMAX Broadband Convergence: Emerging Fixed, Portable & Mobile Revenue Opportunities,* reported by *eMarketer* in May 2007.

Figure 9.3   Mobile web penetration across six countries in Europe and the Unites States of America, 2006 (%)[20]
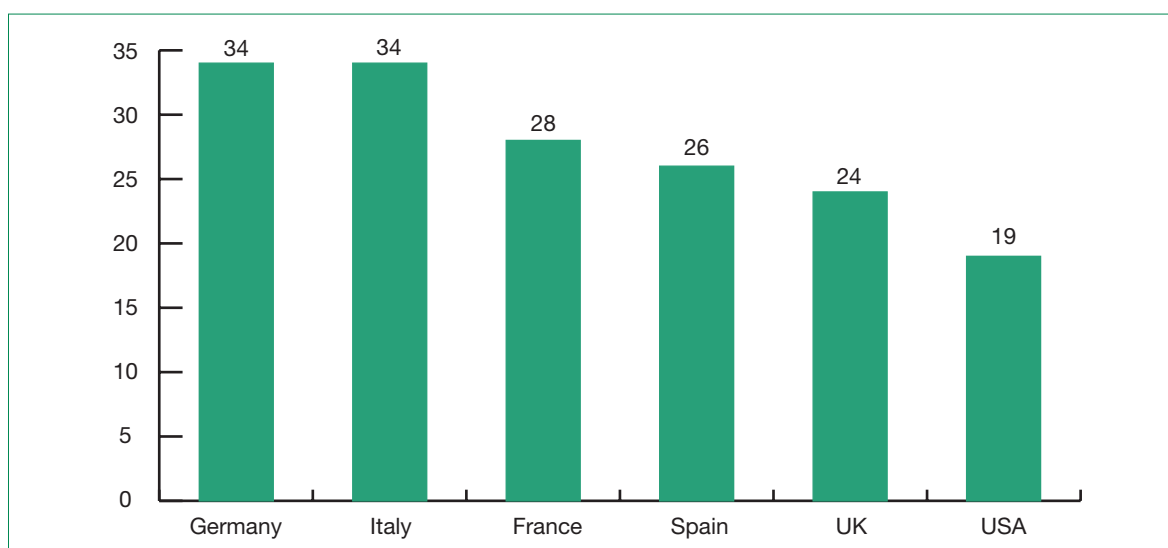
In 2004, only 36% of multimedia mobile phone users browsed the internet or downloaded e-mail. That figure rose to 56% in 2005.[21] In Japan, 92% of users went online via their mobiles.

Table 9.1   Multimedia phone users in selected region/countries worldwide who have browsed the internet and/or downloaded e-mail at least once a month on their mobile phone, 2005 (%)

	2004	2005
Worldwide	**36**	**56**
Japan	92	82
Eastern Europe and Russia	n. a.	70
Latin America	32	64
North America	28	60
Western Europe	26	45
China and Korea (Rep. of)	34	44
Australia and New Zealand	30	44
Scandinavia	42	41

Source: Kearney, A. T., reported by *eMarketer,* April 2006.

9.6.3   Use of 'Rich Media' Including MMS, Video, TV

In 2006, mobile video subscribers worldwide by region, were as following:[22]

- Asia-Pacific: 57% share of the total

- Europe, Middle East and Africa: 31% of the total

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20   comScore (2006), *Mobile Tracking Study for October 2006* (Online), available: http://www.comscore.com.

21   Kearney, A. T. (2006), reported by *eMarketer* in April 2006.

22   Infonetics Research (2007), *Mobile Video Devices, Services, and Subscribers,* quoted by *eMarketer* in May 2007.

- North America: 10% of the total

- Central and Latin America: 3% of the total

A survey in the United Kingdom in 2006 found SMS to be used by 85% of mobile phone users, with 35% using MMS, 26% using games and only 19% accessing the internet:

Figure 9.4 Mobile data/content-based activities of the United Kingdom mobile phone users in quarter 3, 2006 (% of respondents)[23]
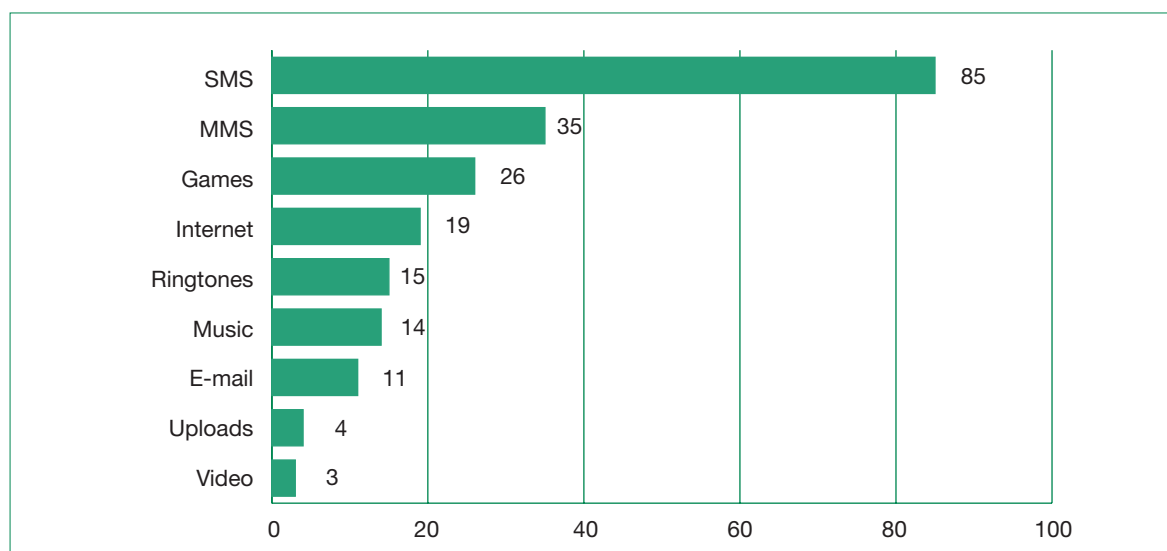
9.6.4 M-commerce

A report by Juniper Research[24] indicated that payments in the developing world made by mobile phone will reach US$ 22 billion by 2011. Most of the 204 million mobile phone users making payments with their phones by 2011 will use SMS (text-to-pay). However, over 52 million mobile phones will have contactless chips, which will let them make physical payments.

9.6.5 Demographics

In the United States of America 30 million people used a mobile device to access the web during January 2007 compared to the 159 million people age 13 or older who accessed the web from a PC (either at home or work).

In the United Kingdom, 60% of mobile web users are male, compared to 49% of PC web users.[25]

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23   Telephia (2007), reported by *eMarketer* in January 2007.

24   Juniper Research (2007), *Mobile Payment Strategies & Markets 2007-2011,* reported by *eMarketer* in July 2007.

25   Telephia and comScore (2007), *Study of Mobile vs. PC-based Internet Usage,* May 2007.

Table 9.2 Mobile web users in the United States of America, January 2007[26]

Age range	All mobile web users (%)
13-24	22
25-34	24
35-44	24
45-54	17
55-64	10
> 65	3

9.7 Summary of Action Points for Destinations

The remainder of this chapter suggests mobile e-marketing activities that destinations can act on now. It covers:

- SMS (texting) campaigns

- Mobile websites

- Digital guidebooks

- Satnav

- Podcasting

- Contact centres

- Signing up customers

- Content requirements

- Deciding on business models

9.8 Text Messaging Service (SMS) Campaigns

9.8.1 How It Works

A text messaging service (SMS) 'pushes' texts to a customer who has enrolled for a service. SMS is used by two-thirds of mobile handset owners.

Variations include:

- The user texts a keyword such as MEALDEAL to a given number (a five-digit shortcode) and receives a single automated response

- The user texts a keyword such as BROCHURE1 to a shortcode, with name, house number and postcode, to receive a free brochure by post

- The user subscribes to an ongoing automated message service. Many tourism destinations now offer such a service, but the scale of promotion and thus take-up of the service is typically very

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26   comScore (2007), May 2007.

small, often much less than 1,000 users. The management cost is therefore high in relation to the impact achieved. The conversion rate can, however, be very high if the offer is attractive, timely, and location-relevant. A retailer sending a special offer achieved up to 40% conversion in France[27]

- The user receives a pre-prepared message, sent manually by a contact centre in response to their text or voice call. This is the equivalent of a conventional walk-in tourist office service

- The user receives, unasked, an automated message sent by the mobile network service provider. This has to be carried out by the network provider, and is very rarely done; but it is ideal at airports when users first switch on

Texting discount vouchers to visitors

Parts of the movies *The Da Vinci Code* and *Pride and Prejudice* were filmed in Lincolnshire, England. Lincolnshire Tourism, the DMO for the county, wished to use the attention this would create to spread the benefits widely around the county.

They offered discount vouchers to visit attractions, in a pilot text campaign in a six-week period in the shoulder months, from mid September to the end of October, 2006.

Figure 9.5 Lincolnshire Tourism, SMS campaign leaflet front cover

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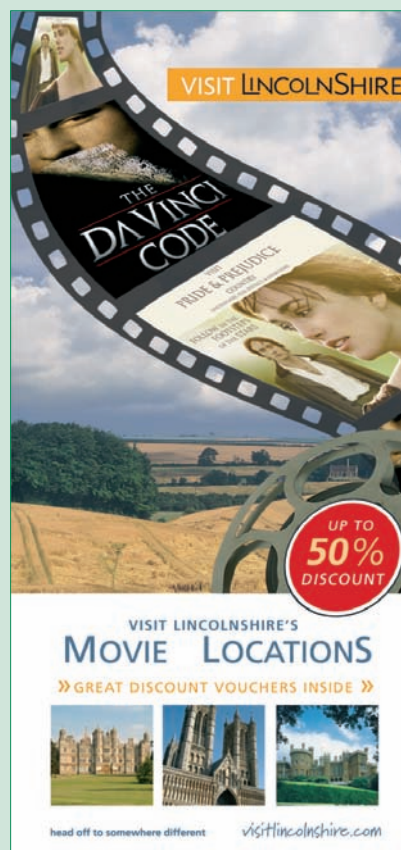
27   Handy Group, 2007.

Objective: The aim was to stimulate additional visits to the historic houses used in, or associated with, these Hollywood films.

In this pilot, awareness promotion was limited. It included web content (see www. visitprideandprejudice.com), e-newsletter blasts, and SMS alerts to Lincolnshire Tourism's existing database. There were also leaflets racked at the specific attractions involved, local tourist offices and local accommodation.

Texting method: "Customers were asked to text MOVIE to 84118," said David Jackson of Lincolnshire Tourism. "The SMS they received in reply contained a message which acted as the money-off voucher. This voucher then had to be displayed on arrival at the attraction in order to redeem the offers – two for the price of one, or a percentage discount."

Results: David concluded: "The pilot proved that the method works, with 120 vouchers requested and a very high proportion, about 100, redeemed at various locations. One participant, Burghley House, performed best despite only a modest discount being offered. It attracted an additional 120 visitors in the month.

The technology, supplied by our agency AD.IQ Global, worked well. The proposition to customers was right too, and the degree of support from the industry was good. However, significant promotion and marketing was beyond the scope of the pilot and therefore results were limited by the relatively modest awareness that we were able to create among the target market – visitors who live in or who are already visiting the region.

We are already running further campaigns, each with a particular focus. These have included the floral parade at Spalding; high quality local produce at pubs, restaurants, tea rooms and farm shops; and great days out. And we have had the confidence to plan a follow-up promotion based around attraction discounts and vouchers."

By courtesy of David Jackson, Lincolnshire Tourism (www.visitlincolnshire.com).

9.8.2 Multimedia Messaging

Multimedia messaging (MMS) is a different technology to texting; you can send still pictures, audio, video clips or rich text. Successful sending can be very difficult because the message needs to be configured for the receiving handset. Most recipients delete them unopened due to the cost they would incur in downloading them. Thus MMS is not advised as a format at present.

9.8.3 Campaign Costs

The cost threshold to use a specialist mobile marketing agency to set up and run a stand-alone text campaign is low: about € 2,000 to 2,500 per annum to rent a memorable five-digit short code and to set up keywords, plus about € 100 to 120 per thousand auto response texts. Some e-mail marketing agencies offer free use of a campaign system including keyword setup, auto response setup, delivery reports, advice and training.

A more sophisticated approach is to integrate SMS response with call centre, web and other sources into a destination CRM system. Costs are then in the range of € 7,000 to 30,000 per annum, depending on what services are needed (for CRM systems, see chapter 6, section 6.2).

It is advisable to run a small stand-alone campaign and then progress to a multi-media CRM-based campaign that attracts sufficient enrolments to be more economic.

The long-term objective is for the shortcode and entry-level keyword to achieve the same kind of prominence as the destination's domain name.

9.9 Mobile Websites

Almost all handsets now sold provide internet access. But before considering a dedicated mobile website, consult the main network operators in the countries that you wish to target. Ask them to help you assess:

- The proportion of handsets in use with larger and higher-resolution screens, and whether the users match your target segments. In Britain, for example, Sony Ericsson announced in April 2007 that the brand would focus on screen quality and browser functionality

- The proportion with high-speed 3G connection. In the United States of America for example, it was only about 10% by the end of 2006[28]

9.9.1 As a First Move

A very simple site that acts as a 'portal' is likely to be the best-value starting point. Your main website should NOT be the starting point, even if it is conveniently hosted in a content management system that can be set up to re-purpose your content for mobile. Quite apart from being far too complex for easy navigation on the small screen, the main site will not have the right priorities for the immediacy of mobile users' needs. Design the mobile site from scratch, with portal functions such as:

- A homepage that points users to all your services:

  – Call centre

  – Your SMS and RSS services (both of these should be about topical matters such as events and restaurants, and thus ideal for the visitor on the move)

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28   http://www.Chetansharma.com (4-10-2007).

- – E-mail enquiry service

- – Ordering brochures by mail

- – Downloadable walking tours, if any are available

• A very short menu of further information, including local walking and bus tours, and a Top Ten of places to visit, events, places to eat, and clubs. All these should ideally be offering added-value deals at certain times of day

• Links to a small selection of other mobile sites, especially of transport operators

The site should detect your browser type automatically. The www.visitdublin.com site, for example, detects an i-mode, WAP or PDA phone.

Innsbruck mobile tourist information service

Innsbruck Mobile www.innsbruck-mobile.at offers information on events, weather, sightseeing, accommodation and food and drink – part of a long-term programme that has researched user requirements throughout the 'customer journey'.

The concept includes the 'push' of information by the service, and the 'pull' of information by the customer. It pushes traffic updates to the visitor en route to the city, pushes a 'Good Morning' message with the weather forecast, and then allows the visitor to pull information while in Innsbruck. It finishes by pushing a feedback questionnaire and then a 'Welcome home' message.

Figure 9.6 Innsbruck mobile homepage

By courtesy of Wolfram Heopken, Director, ECCA – eTourism Competence Center Austria, and their partners.

Pocketoptimized.com has a list of mobile travel sites.[29] Not all can be viewed on a PC but among those that can be are:

• Wcities: http://pda.wcities.com is important. It is an example of a series of commercial city guides (see below, section 9.10, Digital guidebooks)

• Budapest: http://wap.budpocketguide.com

• Japan: www.japanvisitor.com/i_mode

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29   http://www.pocketoptimized.com (27-10-2007).

- LastMinute.com: http://mobile.lastminute.com

- Virginia Tourism: www.virginia.org/pda

- Restaurant Row: www.restrow.com/avantgo

To see how mobile-ready a website is, try the test at http://netsol.ready.mobi.

It is 'Handy' booking

The Handy Traveller m-commerce service offers mobile booking and secure payment for 37 low-cost airlines, 20,000 hotels, car rental as well as airport parking, holiday villas and apartments.

Users (in the United Kingdom) text 'handy' to 61177. There is no pre-registration or subscription required. The service is also available on i-mode in Ireland and is currently testing on i-mode in France, Belgium and the Netherlands (see www.handy-group.com and on mobile http://mobile.handytraveller.com).

Handy Group also has plans to offer white-label m-commerce services to destinations.

By courtesy of Michael Lacy, Handy Group.

9.9.2 Register a '.mobi' Domain

A '.mobi' top level domain (TLD) is not essential, but it shows commitment and protects the destination brand (see chapter 17 for factors to consider in selecting domains).

The consortium that controls the domain is mTLD Top Level Domain, Ltd, trading as dotMobi (http://mtld.mobi).

9.9.3 Advertise Your Mobile Site

Google and Yahoo are among the search engines that offer paid-for SEO for mobile.

Advertising contractors such as www.admob.com bring together publishers of mobile websites and advertisers. They can place paid-per-click (PPC) advertising and text-based links, with banners planned. Pop-ups should be avoided as too intrusive. In 2007, admob were serving around one billion advertisements per quarter, with over 600 million pages a month globally. Admob claim a recent campaign used only 0.4% of a campaign budget, yet delivered 40% of the traffic:

- PPC text-links sell at about € 0.30 to 0.40, varying according to bids by advertisers. Costs may be lower in countries where demand is lower. Targeting is determined by the type of handset, where they are and of course the site they are on. Click-through rates of 2% might be expected and can go as high as 8%

- Richer formats – video for example – are not felt to be viable yet as most users are still paying data tariffs by the kilobyte

- Tracking is less sophisticated than on the fixed web: unique users cannot be tracked via cookies, but online real time reporting shows how many times the ad has appeared (the impressions), the number of clicks generated and the cost of each click. Different advertisement treatments can easily be tested too

- Location-selected inventory has yet to reach a critical mass[30]

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30   AdMob, E-Consultancy.com (2007), April 2007.

'Start Pages' can be a source of traffic for your site. These are set by users as their default homepage and they then add links to their favourite sites. Examples of start pages are:

- Yahoo Front Page – enter '.m.yahoo.com' into your mobile or www.mobile.yahoo.com into your PC

- Pocket Optimized (www.pocketoptimized.com/pda) – a Polish site also with English and German versions

- Skweezer (www.skweezer.net) is not just a start page: it optimises non-mobile sites for mobile viewing on PDAs, but also works for smaller screens

Always seek the advice of an e-marketing agency that specialises in mobile marketing.

9.9.4 Take Advertisers on Your Site

Contractors like www.admob.com are both buyers and sellers if you wish to generate revenue by accepting other advertisers on your site.

> **Further information**
>
> Wöber, K. W., Ed. (2002), *City Tourism 2002 Proceedings of the International City Tourism Conference in Vienna, Austria,* Springer, Wien – New York, ISBN: 3-211-83831-7.
>
> Information on '.mobi' domains, and registration information: http://mtld.mobi (26-10-2007).
>
> The dotMobi blog: http://blog.mobi (26-10-2007).

9.10 Digital Guidebooks

See also chapter 4, section 4.7, for website-based tour planners.

A number of well-resourced commercial publishers now produce online destination guides, designed to run on PDA and some phones. For destinations, the questions to ask are:

- How well are the various locations and topics within my destination covered by these publishers, and how can we contribute to extending this?

- What distribution are they achieving? Can we market them in our online shop (see chapter 8, section 8.12)?

- Do we need to enter this market ourselves? Can we instead offer content to all such publishers? Do we need a closer partnership with one or more of them? Should our priority be local publishers who may know our destination best, or global publishers, who may get the best distribution?

- How can we add value most effectively? Should we offer non-commercial product data that enhances the commercial products that the publisher already lists? Or should we provide our own e-commerce products to them?

- Have we the publishing expertise needed to manage such a relationship effectively?

Mobile marketing and content aggregator organisations that specialise in content distribution via mobile include Enpocket, WIN, and Mobivillage. Other publishers in this arena include the networks themselves, in partnership with their content providers – Wcities, Fodors, Michelin, Columbus, Smart2go, and the motoring organisations such as the AA and ADAC.

The audiobooks publisher Audible has thousands of titles in United States of America and United Kingdom English, French, German and Spanish which can be downloaded to mobile phones, MP3 players and satnavs.[31]

Variations include:

*   XS2 – a talking interpreter and travel guide, offering guides to cities in Argentina, China, France, Netherlands, Spain and Thailand[32]

*   DK's Eyewitness Travel Guides website enables customers to assemble and organise their own guidebook from DK's archives, share it online with friends and family before the trip, download it, and add to it afterwards to make a shared album[33]

9.11   Satellite Navigation (Satnav)

Satellite navigation (Satnav) systems enable the user to follow a route from A to B, or search their way through a traffic jam, or to find the nearest restaurant.

The term GPS refers to the Global Positioning System of satellites which originated in the United States of America's satellite defence systems of the 1970s. The EU has a project, Galileo, for a similar satellite system.

Satnav maps are an ideal way to present tourist information to mobile device users. Points of interest can be presented to an accuracy of a few metres, enough to show a pedestrian on which side of the road the building or object is located.

As an indicator of the scale of adoption, the European and North American markets for portable navigation devices were expected to grow to around 21 million units in 2007.[34]

In-car satnav will be equally important as an information source for the front-seat passenger and when the car is stationary.

In the long term, satnav seems likely to become a principal 'gateway' to tourist information databases, and destinations should make it a high priority to achieve partnerships with satnav vendors and their content providers.

9.11.1 Touring Routes

Tourist routes are already offered to TomTom subscribers – covering 11 countries, with about four routes in each. They are downloaded to the subscriber's PC then copied to their PDA. An example is at www.tomtom.com/plus/services/routes.php.

TomTom also offers 'Points of Interest' that can be downloaded. These cover not just subjects such as speed camera and WiFi locations but also hotels, restaurants and cafes, and garages. In the Netherlands the motoring organisation ANWB's bike and walking routes are offered.

VisitBritain claims to have been the first national tourist office to provide all its data to TomTom users - 17,000 England quality-assessed accommodations, 5,000 attractions, and 500 local tourist information

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31   http://www.audible.com (27-10-2007).

32   http://www.xs2china.com/en/portal (27-10-2007).

33   http://www.travel.dk.com (27-10-2007).

34   TomTom International (2007), *Investor Relations Press Release July 23 2007* (Online), available: http://investors.tomtom.com/tomtom/press/2007/2007-07-24/ (14-9-2007).

centres in England. A demonstrator, with registration and download facilities, is at www.enjoyengland.com/gps.[35]

9.11.2 Satnav Vendors You Can Approach

You will need to identify the content specialists that most satnav vendors are likely to use as their partners. Some starting points are:

- www.garmin.com

- www.magellangps.com

- www.mio-tech.be

- www.navman.com

- www.tomtom.com

- www.viamichelin.com

Examples of two specialists, offering tours for walkers in the Netherlands, are www.ontrack.nl/ONTRACK/OT/trails/walk_gps/OTNLNL_regionmap.asp (click, buy and download walking and other destination tours), and www.gpstracks.nl.

9.12 Podcasting

9.12.1 What Is Podcasting?

A podcast is an audio, video or multimedia file that is downloadable from a website for playback on a mobile or PC. The user copies it from their PC to their MP3 player – an iPod or similar, or it could be a mobile phone or CD player with MP3 software.

It can be automated: users can subscribe to a series of files on a given subject. Technically speaking, this means taking an RSS feed. Then their PC's podcasting software automatically checks for new podcasts, and transfers them to their MP3. The service may be free or paid-for.

The user can usually also play the podcast on their PC (in their choice of media player) without bothering to download it.

9.12.2 What Are the Benefits?

For the customer:

- Audio podcasting is perfect for tours – walking tours, tours inside tourist attractions, and in-car guides. In the United States of America, for example, from 2007, 70% of cars will offer MP3 connectivity. Visitors explore more, understand more, and have a more rewarding visit

- The visitor can download them in advance. Additionally, for walk-in visitors, a tourist office or attraction can provide a download to the visitor's MP3 on the spot, or rent out a pre-loaded MP3 player

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35 TomTom International (2007), *TomTom News Sept 06 2007* (Online), available: http://www.tomtom.com/news/category.php?ID=4&NID=399&Lid=1&TT=7a1281a6%3Ababa37bd%3A00000000%3A00000000%3A00000000%3A00000000%3An0dstdlrjktpq2mh80d58cand7 (14-9-2007).

- Visitors can stop and start them as they wish, and some podcasts have chapter marks

For destinations:

- It will be another good use of your existing tourist information expertise

- It is another hook to increase customer data capture at your website, if the content is attractive enough. And, with permission, you can promote other services to these new users as well

- It is active, not passive, marketing: the subscription 'pushes' the information to the user unprompted, and the user can 'pull' individual downloads

- You can provide a menu of timely guides that gently directs visitors to what you want them to visit – thus helping to achieve active visitor management

- The podcast format can help to build user-generated content (see chapter 3, section 3.4). This is the web's fastest growing area. Podcasts are a convenient way for customers to upload their advice, contributing to building your destination community

9.12.3 What Are the Problems?

- For couples who enjoy sightseeing together, they both need to have an MP3 and to have downloaded the same files. The splitters that enable one MP3 to serve two sets of ear buds suit only the closest of friends!

- Marketing the service before and during the visit requires active promotion not just on the DMO website but through as many distribution partners as possible (section 9.12.8, below)

- In addition to audio podcasts, more motivational multi-media productions can be offered, but unless the user is carrying a powerful PDA they will not be able to view them on the move. Until mobiles get more sophisticated, with screens that can be viewed in bright daylight, it is better to offer this kind of content direct on your website for viewing on a PC

- Good podcasts do not need much technology but they do demand skill and dead-accurate research. So they are quite expensive to plan, record, and keep updated

- At the moment, there is unlikely to be a strong market for paid-for downloads

9.12.4 Who Listens to Podcasts?

Not everyone has both a PC and an MP3, or ever will have. Check your key source markets at www.etcnewmedia.com/review but if the youth market is important, go for it!

Globally, in 2007, only 13% listened to audio podcasts; up from 11% in 2006. Video podcast use was up from 10% to 11%; overall awareness grew from 22% to 37%.[36]

9.12.5 Where Are there some Good Examples I Can Listen To?

- Hungary – Frommer's bars and baths in Budapest www.frommers.com/articles/3653.html

- Dublin – walks, and a castle tour at www.visitdublin.com (follow their Multimedia link)

- Specialists such as http://ipod.wcities.com

- Singapore with maps – http://singapore.iguides.biz/default.aspx

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36   Edison Media Research.

9.12.6 I Still Have not Got a MP3 Player. How Do I Try It Out?

Most websites allow you to listen or at least sample them on your PC. If you want to download to an iPod, Apple's podcasting and music software (iTunes) is at www.apple.com/itunes/download. A full list of downloadable podcasting software such as NetNewsWire and Juice for all MP3 players is at www.podcastingnews.com/topics/Podcast_Software.html.

9.12.7 What Makes a Good Podcast?

Podcasts can be seriously boring! So think of it as 'soundseeing', and use a fun, lively professional broadcaster (preferably a local celebrity) to record them:

- Use a person who is a qualified tour guide to ensure a professional, practical itinerary

- Use the DMO's own information staff to research the facts

- Use ambient sound and music to bring it all to life

- Provide a map that customers can print out

Podcasts also make excellent holiday planning guides. For example, concise summaries of options for a visit are ideal for MP3 users at the gym or on the train.

9.12.8 How Can I Get Worthwhile Distribution for My Podcasts?

- Make sure your website users can find your podcast lists – link to them from every topic page that each podcast covers, not just from your information services section

- Make sure the podcast list page is SEO'd (see chapter 5)

- Integrate the podcast lists with the DMO's main product database so that information about the podcasts is updated dynamically on your site

Distribute beyond your own website: register them with podcast directories ('content aggregators') such as www.podcasting.net.

9.12.9 How Do I Produce My Podcasts?

Decide your key audiences. Check what other destinations are doing – what to copy, what to avoid, and how to improve:

- Always plan a series, with a new one at regular intervals, and aim to have a balanced menu of topics at any one time. Be ready to extend the most frequently downloaded topics

- Ask a production company for proposals. Costs can vary greatly – if you supply the script for a simple audio recording, prices could be around € 250 or less, but with music, effects and professional actors the price could be 10 times higher

- Consider raising funds from partners who want marketing support

- To do it in-house without professional help, browse www.jellycast.com or www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html

- Consider contracting-out or partnering the service with a specialist. Look for distribution first, then production. Remember that video will become more important. Publishers, such as Wcities at http://ipod.wcities.com, who power Yahoo travel guides, often have valuable distribution

An example shows how strong the demand can be if the content is appealing: LBC was the first United Kingdom radio station to charge for podcasts, and sold over 10,000 subscriptions, each at € 6 upwards per month. The service was expected to achieve € 150,000 revenue by spring 2007.

Further information

Podcast distribution: www.podcasting.net (28-10-2007).

Making a podcast: http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcaststechspecs.html (28-10-2007).

Background on podcasting: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting (28-10-2007).

9.13 Contact Centres

Mobiles are increasingly multi-media devices, but they will remain voice-centric. DMOs should be re-assessing the resource allocated to call handling in the light of the forecast continuing growth in use of voice, and how to manage the cost of a voice service by using supporting services that can be offered to mobile users.

Depending on whether your priorities are at the pre-sale or post-sale stage, the options include:

* SMS, podcast, RSS and e-mail services to mobiles, provided from the same contact centre as live voice services

* A mixture of free, low-cost and premium-rate services

* Call distribution to recorded (audio and video) information, via the keypad or interactive voice response (IVR)

Decide what the best opportunities might be:

* Marketing before the trip?

* Providing services during it? A live contact centre using all these channels will be likely to reach many more mobile-equipped visitors (before and during the trip) than a network of walk-in centres

* Promoting recommendations and repeat trips afterwards?

Mobile network operators are beginning to offer internet calls, using voice over internet protocol (VoIP), which will further accelerate the rate of growth.

9.14 Signing Up Customers

The first challenge is to be able to enrol enough users to make mobile marketing cost-effective.

Tips for success:

* Make your objective the achievement of a worthwhile volume of clean, validated customer data

* Do not plan stand-alone mobile campaigns: they should be part of the destination's multi-media marketing strategy

* Obtain commitment from each media channel for joint CRM

- Invest in your keywords (especially a 'gateway' keyword) and shortcodes. Choose them carefully, and then promote them consistently and continuously. Treat them as a permanent asset in the same manner as the destination domain name

- Get the same full backing for the gateway keyword and shortcode from your whole industry:

  – Those who advertise in the marketplace

  – Those who serve the visitor in the destination. They should treat the keyword and shortcode as the pathway to the destination's full range of information and customer care services. This includes shops, shopping mall owners, restaurants, attractions, serviced and self-catering accommodation, bus, coach, and taxi operators

- Find strategic marketing partners, especially those with helpful distribution channels and who have an interest in pointing their customers to the DMO information services via their own electronic information systems. These will include publishers with events listings, major venues, and transport operators

- To step up your customer capture, invest in sufficient CRM facilities so that you can:

  – Add a text sign-up option on your website homepage

  – Use your mobile campaigns to acquire e-mail and postal addresses

  – Enable walk-in tourist offices to capture customer data – they should be prime users

- Choose an SMS marketing company that provides good quality data capture. Otherwise not enough will be known about the subscriber to allow highly-relevant content to be served

- Make the invitation to sign up very simple, highly defined in terms of user interests, and timely. The offer must be specific, immediately actionable, and clearly guarantee protection of the user's data

- Approach your destination networks and airports for a message to be sent on arrival in the region, inviting enrolment to a menu of services

- Do not dismiss mobile advertising as an option. It is honest, and it capitalises on the DMO's brand strength as honest information providers. In a recent study, 18% of US respondents and 37% of European respondents said they were receptive to the idea of watching ads in exchange for free mobile content, and many said they had visited a website or requested more information as a result of a mobile ad

Finally, remember that the mobile is the customer's personal space, not your space – so treat it with respect. Be deft or do not do it. At an early stage, you must capture information that enables you to say something that has real appeal to that individual.

(There is more about customer data capture in chapter 6, section 6.9, and about establishing trust in chapter 4, section 4.5).

9.15   Content Requirements

9.15.1 For Pre-trip Marketing Offers

- Last-minute short breaks – flights, or accommodation, or both

- Brochure ordering service

- Voting for a favourite place within the destination and/or entering a prize draw or competition

9.15.2   For Services to Visitors on Arrival

- Discount offers at places to visit or events

- Special offers at restaurants, for example 'a drink when you show this code'; or at clubs, such as 'jump the queue with this code'

Pre-trip or on arrival, try to find partners who can monetise the service directly through sale of their own services. Examples are m-commerce consolidators for restaurant and concert bookings.

There are two areas where specially-tuned content will be needed – for texting, and for a mobile website.

9.15.3   Content for Texting

Running a text campaign is economical and the best starting point for mobile marketing. But it will still incur significant new costs to specify, gather, and maintain offers that are suitable for text delivery. These are guidelines:

- Develop specific offers, not 'might-be-helpful' information. Successful text campaigns depend more on sales promotion ideas than technology!

- Texting needs very tight targeting, so you need to know the target segment well. If you do not have this knowledge, then it is best to stick to major events that have broad appeal and strong demand. Look for events that have an elastic supply, so that offering a discount still makes commercial sense

- Find a commercial m-commerce partner to add greater value to your service and to contribute to your costs

- Except when using WiFi hotspots, location-sensitive accuracy may be only to the nearest 500 metres in urban areas, and much more in rural areas. Avoid sending information that is misleading. Information items and categories that are the least location-sensitive should be considered first, such as major events and places to visit

- Potential visitors who you know are considering your destination will be looking for travel and accommodation deals. They may be open to last-minute offers. Departure ports and airports for travel offers will need to be appropriate to their home location, which may not be where they are at the moment you send the text, so decide whether to send it on a weekday evening or at a weekend

- Those who have already arrived may appreciate deals for local tours, places to eat, speciality shops, places to visit and – possibly – places to stay

- Discounts are important but these do not need to erode peak-time revenue. Early-bird discounts at restaurants are effective, for example, as well as added-value privileges such as behind-the-scenes tours, briefings by experts, and skip-the-queue facilities

- Offers need to be simple, concise, timely and fully accurate in real time for the duration of the service

9.15.4   Content for Mobile Websites

For a simple entry-level portal site see above, section 9.9. Looking further ahead, essentials include:

- Pinpoint accuracy of geocodes for all your product data records (chapter 2, section 2.6.3). Not all your customers may like using satnav maps, but remember that geocodes are already the most

essential field in the destination product database to help respond to search queries and to relate nearby products to each other

- Ensure that the DMO product data includes links to user-generated recommendations. You may need a dedicated partner to achieve this, and to combine the data with your standard listings. Hosting sites such as Twitter and Kyte are growing fast

- Find partners with m-commerce offers, and work with them to develop a broader range

9.16 Business Models for Mobile Marketing

The DMO's options will be a balance between the opportunities of a commercialised service and the benefits of a public information service. Options include:

- Direct operation of information services (section 9.13 above)

- Additional distribution for your own e-commerce business, if you operate one

- Supporting the services that are offered by a private-sector operator, for example digital tourist guides; m-commerce for restaurant bookings; and transportation. The DMO's role may be simply to provide some of the product data that would enhance the operator's core product; or it may be a jointly operated and marketed service

Understand the networks' business drivers and how these could assist the destination. Which modes might they jointly invest in or assist with – calls, text, MMS, video, or web browsing?

For example, web browsing is becoming inclusive within the monthly charge, so offering premium content that the customer will pay extra for (perhaps € 2 to 5) could be attractive. These could be more localised weather reports, or a city guide.

Such premium services could provide a business model for DMOs and their national networks to work together.

Equally for text campaigns, revenues can be shared between operator and DMO. The DMO can set the charge and therefore their revenue. But the offering will need to be very compelling.

It may be easier to get to market by going through a content aggregator such as www.winplc.com to deliver an SMS or a mobile browsing service, although it will increase the cost.

9.17 Mobile Marketing – Measures of Success

- SMS campaigns:

  - Number of new customers captured – mobile number, e-mail address, or postal address – with validated data (using the mobile marketing database or CRM database)

  - Proportion of customers recorded with key CRM values captured (using the CRM database, see chapter 6, section 6.2.4)

  - Number of vouchers requested by users by SMS, number redeemed, and value of business.

- Mobile website traffic (using site analytics, see chapter 16)

- Number of podcasts downloaded (see chapter 16)

- Total numbers of push and pull contacts made per annum (using your mobile marketing agency's database)

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 10

The New Television – Convergence of Media: Interactive TV, Video, Internet and Gaming

Key Messages

- Interactive Digital Television (iDTV) offers a better picture, better sound and several forms of interactivity

- Marketing can be targeted according to individual profiles

- Interactive advertising can also deliver strategic messages, and be used for branding

- It is essential to know how viewers in your target market use the technology – and to meet their expectations about content as well as usability

- Video is becoming the most valued currency on the internet

- Advergaming and in-game advertising are becoming marketing genres of their own

10.1 What Is Digital Television?

Digital television uses digital signals (instead of analogue signals), that are compressed using MPEG-2, an acronym derived from the Motion Picture Expert Group that sets standards for audio and video.

This compressed signal can be transmitted via cable, terrestrial (via aerial), and satellite. Digital television in Europe is mostly encoded in the open Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB) standard and also allows higher resolutions for High Definition (HD) TV sets.

Digital television signals can also be transmitted via the internet using broadband ADSL/fibre optic. This is called internet Protocol Television (IPTV), a transmission standard which has yet to be established. IPTV enables broadcasters to offer personalised TV. Users can, via the interface, order programmes and films, pay for them, and control them (such as pause, play forward and back). This is one form of video-on-demand.

Once signals have been received by cable, satellite dish or aerial, the compressed digital television signals require decoding by either:

- A standard receiver with a decoder/set-top box

- A digital television with built-in decoder

- A PC fitted with a television card

Digital video recorders can be stand-alone or also be combined with a set-top box. They have a large hard disk allowing viewers to save a number of days' viewing via simple button presses or menus. Some providers like TiVo in the United States of America allow viewers to select what to recording by actor, director, genre or serial.

Special standards such as Digital Multimedia Broadcasting (DMB) and Digital Video Broadcasting – Handheld (DVB-H) have been developed for mobile phones and other hand-held devices to enable them to receive television signals.

This chapter uses the acronym TV for television and iDTV for interactive digital television.

10.1.1 Digital Television Technology Offers New Opportunities

For the viewer, digital television can offer superior vision quality and sound that gives CD quality, and a greater choice and flexibility within channels. For broadcasters and their destination clients however, it offers new marketing opportunities:

- The ability to deliver advertising targeted according to individual profiles derived from viewing, online and interactive activity, as opposed to the whole audience of a channel

- Time-based data can be broadcast, including information and transaction services like teletext and internet

- Signals can be encrypted for subscription-based services

10.1.2 A Little More Jargon: Web TV and Smart TV

The term Web TV is used for surfing the web, e-mail and chat via the TV screen. For this the viewer needs a telephone line and a Web TV internet service provider, a Web TV device, and a remote control or remote keyboard.

Special services allow websites to be viewed. A website has to be converted in a Worldwide TV Mark-up Language (WTVML) version, so that it loads correctly in a WTVML compatible browser and can be viewed on TV.

> "Video is becoming the most valued currency on the internet."[1]
>
> Adrian Swift, Director of Television with etv (Enteraction TV Limited)

The term Web TV is also used for downloading and watching video streamed via the internet. For broadband customers, there is no barrier to downloading video.

YouTube is driven by social networking.[2] But boundaries are blurring. Television networks and other companies use it to distribute trailers of new programmes and product presentations using viral methods (chapter 6, section 6.8); and Al Gore's Current TV in partnership with a variety of channels gives the opportunity to send in videos and influence what's on TV.[3]

Apple, Sony, Microsoft, Netgear and other companies are working on new ways of bringing internet video content to the television: SmartTV. Apple was the first to announce AppleTV, a set-top box for delivering downloaded movies, movie trailers, TV programmes, music, podcasts and pictures to the TV.

All are working hard to meld hardware and software with the aim of giving consumers access to video on all available screens – PC, TV, portable devices like iPod and PSP (PlayStation Portable) – and also to transfer those images from one device to the other at the press of a button.[4]

1   etv (2006), *The Future is Web TV* (Online), available: http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:Rq4xd-cGpNAJ:www.etv.tv/assets//content/Web%2520TV%2520whitepaper.pdf+%22 (22-5 2007).

2   http://www.youtube.com (22-5-2007).

3   http://www.currenttv.com (22-5-2007).

4   Edwards, C. (2007), 'Smart TVs: The Race Is on', *Business Week,* Jan.10, (Online), available: http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/jan2007/tc20070110_932613.htm?chan=search (22-5-2007).

   Holahan, C. (2007), 'Battle of the Web-TVs', *Business Week,* Jan. 11, (Online), available: http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/jan2007/tc20070111_281751.htm?chan=search (22-5-2007).

10.2 What Is Meant by Interactivity?

The term interactive TV is used for different kinds of technical and user interactivity:

- Interactivity with the TV set control

- Interactivity with programme content – to modify according to the viewer's preferences, from changing camera angles at will and calling up instant replays in sports events and live news, to guiding the plot in a drama

- Interactivity that is related to programmes and advertisements on TV either via the television provider or synchronised online. The latter is also called 'web-enhanced TV'

It is important to appreciate that users can interact with the producers of programmes and with broadcasting companies. This appreciation can help in understanding what is happening in the market, and in the rapidly changing field of suppliers and parties involved – broadcast companies, internet companies, producers, content owners and middleware developers, to name just a few.

iDTV can have a one-screen form that involves interaction on the TV screen using the remote control, or a two-screen – also called synchronised TV – whereby a website application or mobile phone server runs 'in synch' with the TV broadcast.

10.3 Enhanced and Interactive Services

10.3.1 Enhanced TV

Enhanced TV offers one-way services. There is no means of return communication from the user via a 'return path', only 'red-button' services, whereby the user can, with a push on the red button of the remote control, switch to additional information on the programme being viewed, or to extra channels, or view the Electronic Programming Guide or teletext.

Digital technology also enables enhanced teletext, now with easier-to-read fonts, the possibility of more than basic graphics, and a quarter-screen video of the related TV channel to enable the user to continue watching the programme.

10.3.2 Interactive TV

Interactive TV offers two-way services. The broadcast feed is combined with return paths such as SMS, standard phone calls, synchronised websites or directly via the remote control via the cable or a standard telephone line. Where transmission takes place via satellite, the return path is mostly via the telephone line.

This two-way interactivity allows viewers to feed back to the advertiser or broadcaster or to other viewers, depending upon the content.

Content and services offered include:

- On-demand TV and video-on-demand

- Play TV and Play Along TV: interactive video games on TV encompassing both single and multiplayer competitions (for example, Sega Channel, NTN system)

- Banking and retail TV allowing a broad range of ordering and shopping services

- Community TV, serving local geographic communities but also global virtual communities of people sharing the same interest. This includes international programming with automated language translations

- In-room internet TV: internet services available in hotel rooms allowing guests to leave their laptops at home, surf the web and e-mail home through the TV using the remote control or wireless keyboard

10.4 Aspects of Consumer Behaviour and Marketing

10.4.1 'Lean Back' Versus 'Lean Forward'

iDTV has been described as 'lean back' interaction. Users are typically relaxing together at home in the living room with a remote control in their hand to book, for example, their next holiday. This contrasts with the solitary 'lean forward' experience with a personal computer with keyboard, mouse and monitor.

The reality may be less simple. Younger video game players, for example, do not typically lean back if they are playing video games on their TV set, or lean forward when using their computer to play or to view videos. Younger generations are already used to the media multitasking that is also required for two-screen services.

10.4.2 Opportunities for Tourism

While analogue teletext was a success in the United Kingdom as a portal for selling travel and other products, it involved scrolling through tedious pages of text and did not allow direct booking.

iDTV offers similar advertising and promotional opportunities, but with enhanced vision and sound capabilities, more direct navigation options, and the technical opportunity for viewers to book their holidays via their television screen. This means that travel providers and destinations have the potential to produce entertaining and up-to-date information and provide the next step (purchase) in one convenient portal. Research results show that viewers who are experienced in using teletext will adapt more easily to iDTV.[5]

10.4.3 Marketing Aspects

Being able to watch what you want, when you want it, leads to increasing fragmentation of consumer markets. Marketers have already had to adapt their strategies as conventional TV broadcasting campaigns (spot advertising or sponsored programming, for example) have become less effective, due to the increasing number of channels:

- Consumers switching channels when ads appear that they are not interested in

- Younger generations spending less time watching TV and more on gaming, surfing and watching video on the internet

However, consumers who watch what they want, when they want it, constitute smaller, engaged and thus valuable audiences. They enable tailor-made and affordable campaigns aimed at the right people at the right time. And interactivity adds a new dimension to the consumer-advertiser relationship. Viewers

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5   Schweda, A. (2004), 'Independent International Traveller Evaluations of Traditional and Interactive Holiday Information Sources along Temporal and Utility Dimensions', *Information and Communication Technologies, Tourism 2004* (Proceedings of the International Conference in Cairo, Egypt), Springer, Wien, pp.151-160.

who interact with an interactive ad tend to be more interested in the product or service and can develop into valuable leads for the advertiser.

Interactive advertising requires a new approach to advertising strategy, with attention to narrow targeting and niche markets.[6] Agencies selling airtime, and other experts, advise on narrow or broader valuable audiences and have detailed information on customer profiles and lifestyles. They can guarantee an agreed percentage of the available target audience that will see a commercial or programme. This is called TV ratings or TVRs.[7]

10.4.4 Market Information

Market penetration of iDTV depends on the penetration or availability of transmission technologies involved; the organisation of the TV market (the role of public and commercial broadcasting companies and government control, for example); and other factors. Where governments have a hand in the industry, so-called 'switch offs' of analogue broadcasting services have often already been announced for the coming years.

See www.etcnewmedia.com/review, the New Media Review operated by the European Travel Commission, for detailed information and news on the availability of iDTV and consumer adoption.

London TV – the official channel for visitors and residents

"London TV is the official channel for London," says Tom Lenham, Director of Programmes. "It is produced by etv (www.etv.tv) on behalf of Visit London and is dedicated to highlighting the variety of events and attractions in the city, be it West End and fringe theatre productions, live bands, concerts and gigs, museums, clubs, restaurants, comedy nights, tourist attractions, sports or shopping. If it is going on in the capital, we cover it and get the news out there to visitors and residents alike.

The www.visitlondon.com website is our primary broadcast mechanism, directly targeting potential visitors during the consideration stage of their journey (those people choosing where to go on holiday or business).

The use of dynamic video has proved extremely successful in influencing the decisions of these travellers, and we have been careful to take a holistic approach to our broadband TV content."

Snappy and attractive short-form videos

"Our back catalogue of programmes has been re-versioned to provide a large amount of short-form videos, designed to deliver information and entertainment in a snappy and attractive manner.

We have been careful to design a system that appeals to a broad audience, and provides simple usability for all. We have a unique booking system to support each video. As a user views a video, a small window provides a link to further information about the subject matter, and gives the opportunity to book tickets directly without leaving the player.

This is an area of primary importance to Visit London, and is used as a device to bring the broadband TV content and web content together as one service."

TV and website work together

"Users can now watch a video for a particular restaurant, view its location, nearest station, and book a table directly through the player, often with just one click. This functionality has influenced

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6   See http://www.idigitalsales.co.uk/idspublications/index.cfm for several interesting white papers on interactive advertising (22-5-2007).

7   See for example http://www.idigitalsales.co.uk/advertisingenquiries/howItWorks.cfm (22-5-2007).

our production style. We no longer need to deliver complete information during a three-minute item – extra information is delivered by clicking a link which takes the user to a webpage with further details, contact numbers, travel information, and in many cases booking facilities.

This approach gives us the freedom to be creative with our content, and means that the whole experience for the user is both entertaining and informative. We have a colour coded channel system that is consistent with Visit London's brand communications, which helps the audience to recognise the key themes covered across the entire website."

From linear TV to web TV

"London TV originally aired on the Sky platform. However, research conducted in 2005 confirmed that linear TV was a less effective way to reach the target market and capture measurable data and commerce. That, combined with the increasing penetration of broadband, has meant that Web TV has become a viable distribution channel over the last 18 months.

It has proved so successful that we have recently withdrawn entirely from linear TV platforms in favour of becoming a pure digital content provider."
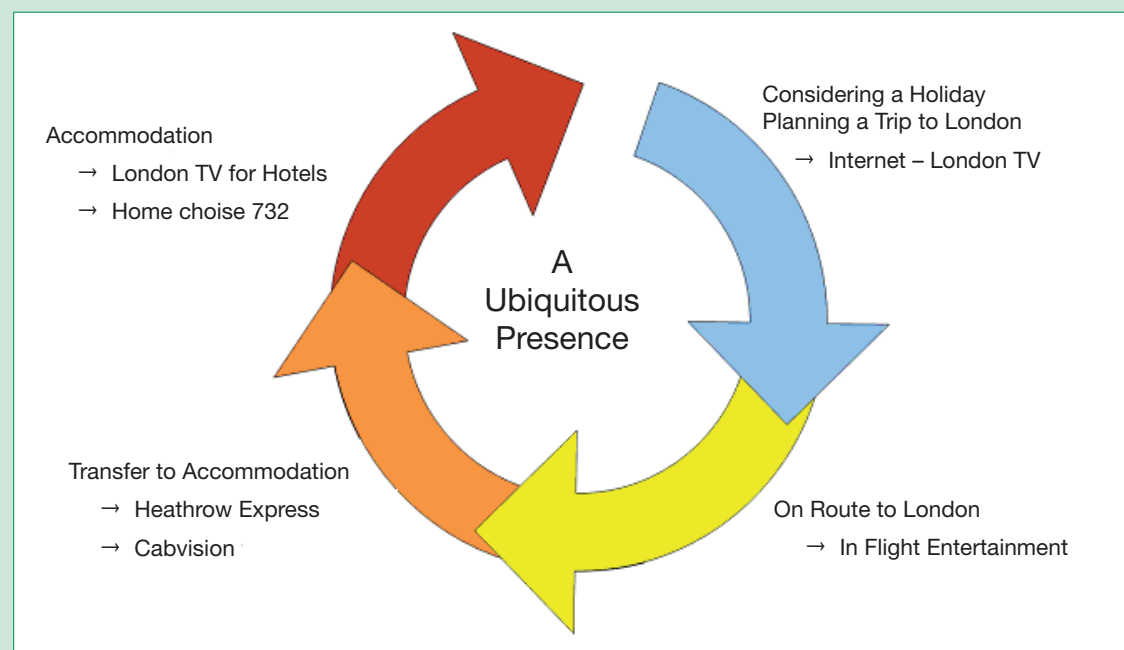
Annual audience of 30 million

"These new broadcast streams developed by London TV are distributed to an audience of approximately 30 million people per year. The key feature of our distribution strategy has been very simple: to provide viewers with touch-points at every stage of their journey.

In practice this means that we are able to deliver London TV to a viewer wherever they may be. The web service attracts them, and then they are greeted with London TV on their journey, via air, rail, or coach. Once in the destination, there is a service in their hotel room, and in the cabs they use to get around.

All this joins together to create a circle of ubiquitous presence."

Figure 10.1 Visit London's circle of ubiquitous presence throughout the customer journey

Accommodation
→ London TV for Hotels
→ Home choise 732

Considering a Holiday
Planning a Trip to London
→ Internet – London TV

A
Ubiquitous
Presence

Transfer to Accommodation
→ Heathrow Express
→ Cabvision

On Route to London
→ In Flight Entertainment

Closing the circle

The next stage of the customer journey is to close the circle by allowing users to upload their own videos, creating a global community. The key elements of London TV's distribution path include:

- London TV plays in the back of cabs using CabVision, reaching 1.4 million passengers per month. It is the default channel for this medium, so everyone travelling in a CabVision taxi will automatically be tuned into London TV. Viewing figures for Cabvision show a total viewing of 770,000 hours in the past year, of which 460,000 hours were taken by London TV. This represents a 62% market share on this platform

- London TV's hotel service plays in rooms across the capital. It directly targets an affluent audience, actively looking for ways to spend their money whilst in London

- London TV plays out in various forms on 67 inbound flights every day with British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, United Airlines and Sahara Air

- London TV is carried on all Heathrow Express trains from the airport into the capital, as well as shuttle services between all terminals

- London TV is actively seeking out new platforms, the most dramatic of which is IPTV. This system delivers TV via a phone line, enabling viewers to watch in a non-linear, interactive way on their TV sets. This is a tremendously exciting area, and London TV is carefully considering its approach to this. Opportunities include the recently launched BT Vision, NTL Telewest, and Sky's broadband delivery service

- London TV is also developing new methods for broadcasting on mobile telephones, PlayStation Portable (PSP) (see glossary) and iPods using a mix of downloadable content and location based services. The eventual aim is for a user to be able to call up a list of videos – for example, all museums within 400 yards of their location. They can then watch the videos, choose which ones to go to, and even be given directions – all via their mobile phones[8]

Figure 10.2 London TV on the web at www.visitlondon.com (26-4-2007)

By courtesy of Tom Lenham, Director of Programmes, Visit London.

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8   Lenham, 2007.

10.5 Interactive Advertising

10.5.1 How It Works

Interactive advertising gives TV audiences the chance to interact with broadcast commercials and offers great opportunities for advertisers. During the commercial, an interactive trigger, also referred to as the call to action (CTA), appears on-screen and prompts the viewer to press the red button on the digital remote control. Once this application has loaded, the viewer can navigate through the content on screen, interact, or enter details into preset fields. Dependent on the format (next section) this is done outside or parallel to the commercial.

The interactivity is used to:

- Convey additional information on screen

- Demand more information in the form of a video

- Capture customer data and generate leads by enabling the ordering of brochures and requests for telephone call-back

- Drive leads to dealers, industry partners, and travel agents

- Enable direct purchase

- Enhance the brand message

Research in the United Kingdom shows that potential tourists prefer to order a brochure from an ad rather than watch a video, as it does not disrupt watching the programmes. However, destination videos and the like are more at home in interactive TV retail areas which allow for a different viewing experience.

10.5.2 Formats, Standards and Tools for Interactive Advertising

At the time of writing, there are four main interactive advertising formats:

- Impulse Response: an overlay on the screen allowing viewers and advertisers to stay within the broadcast stream and the programme they are viewing

- Microsites also offer an interactive overlay. The TV screen is shown in a quarter-screen picture-in-picture format. According to Interactive Digital Sales (IDS), the advertising sales house of Virgin Media, which covers a variety of interactive TV channels, this format is "quite popular with travel advertisers as they are easy and cost effective to do as impulse response ads, but offer some more room for graphics and text, which is usually used for a logo and some more product description"[9]

- The formats Dedicated Advertiser Location (DAL) and Mini-DAL differ from the above by taking the viewer away from the broadcast stream to a 'dedicated' area. When pressing the red button of the digital remote control, the viewer enters an interactive application offering rich content using video and audio and interactive functionalities. A Mini-DAL is a smaller version of a DAL and consists often of one or two pages with text and graphics and audio[10]

In 2003, WML (Wireless Mark-up Language, a low-bandwidth mark-up language similar to HTML) became the standard for the formats Impulse Response, Microsites and Mini-DALs, and are now

9   http://www.idigitalsales.co.uk (16-8-2007).

10   IDS (2006), 'The New Medium Television. Demystifying IA', *Interactive Advertising Guideline* (Online), available: http://www. idigitalsales.co.uk/idspublications/index.cfm (22-5-2007).

supported by all main broadcasters. As DALs are more complicated, they often need a version of the computer language C.

You can choose to outsource the production process of the interactive part of your commercial, and it is wise to consult an expert agency on how to optimise it. However, there are easy-to-use content creation tools like OpenTV Author or Sky's WTVML Microbrowser.

10.5.3 What Does Interactive Advertising Cost, and How Do We Measure Effectiveness?

Aside from the cost of content creation and production, the costs of interactive advertising are similar to TV advertising costs and thus vary and depend on factors such as:

- Time of year, with prices fluctuating according to supply and demand and airtime. Airtime has to be booked with agencies, for example IDS

- The channel and the time of day

- The target audience

- The length of the commercial

The success of interactive campaigns is measured by:

- Response rates (if a return path is involved)

- The average time spent within the application once a campaign is in flight

This is sometimes supplemented by advertising effectiveness research consisting of phone surveys measuring recall, brand attitudes and purchase intentions. However, the Interactive Television Research Institute at Murdoch University in Australia also uses eye tracking and physiological measurements, such as galvanic skin response (GSR), to gauge viewer attention and arousal in their in-lab studies of interactive television advertising.[11]

10.5.4 Critical Success Factors

- Managing customer expectations of the call to action is of key importance to a successful ad: make clear to viewers what to expect, and fulfil these expectations

- Give people valuable and informative content

- Concentrate on the 'linear process': viewers need to be able to enter and exit an interactive ad seamlessly. The submission of information has got to be easy and you need to deliver them back into the main TV stream as soon as you can

- Asking more questions does not necessarily have a negative effect on response rates, but the type of questions are important: they need to provide the viewer with some return on their time, effort and sharing of their personal information

- People are afraid of spam. Make clear that their data will be used in this instance only and will not be passed to third parties

Digital media consultancies, specialised production companies and agencies that sell airtime know what works and what does not. Consult them on how to optimise your campaign.

Many of the call to action factors are shared with those in other online media (see chapter 6, section 6.9).

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11   http://www.itri.tv (22-5-2007).

10.5.5 Viewers Become Consumers

Interactive TV ads may inhabit the same space as conventional 30-second spots, but the similarities end there. Interactive advertising requires a fresh approach: "a mix of television-making skills and advertising skills. Extolling the brand, but telling a story […] engaging the audience in a conversation rather than just shouting a single message".[12]

With interactive advertising, the viewer is invited to participate in the advertising content, to make conscious choices and act on those choices. Viewers become consumers. "Whilst interactive advertising was initially marketed as a largely tactical, technology-led, response-driven mechanic, we are learning that interactive advertising can also deliver strategic messages and be used for branding communications".[13]

- Interactivity extends the time that viewers are exposed to a brand and potentially gives them a deeper brand experience

- The linear advertising process moves viewers down the purchase funnel, from awareness, to consideration, to intent to purchase or to take action

- Impulse response ads are simple and cheap to produce and can run for a long time

- Interactive TV offers a convenient return path for those viewers who do not wish to pick up the telephone or do not have access to a computer

- Interactive advertising delivers a pre-selected target audience, as only viewers with real interest are actually pressing the red button

- It is a wonderful opportunity to gather customer data and add to CRM databases

Research shows iDTV's tourism potential

"There are many ways in which the travel industry can use iDTV, including brand-building and generating leads", says Dr Anika Schweda of the Interactive Television Research Institute at Murdoch University, Australia.

"However, it's important not only to understand where your target market wants to travel, but also how they use the available technology."

Research in the United Kingdom market, says Dr Schweda, found that people with experience of teletext – rather than those with experience of the internet – were more accepting of iDTV as an information source for their travel planning. This was perhaps because teletext had more in common with iDTV's methods of interaction.

Short-haul travel did better than other offers, possibly because there are lower personal and financial risks if a short-haul trip does not meet expectations. The results may also have been influenced by the range of travel products available on iDTV services at the time of the research.

Lead generation via an impulse response ad model to stimulate brochure requests was better rated by participants than watching a destination video from the same ad or programme segment. This may be because impulse response models minimise interruption of the viewing experience, while 'telescopic' models, which allow the user to drill down to more detail in an advertisement, and possibly using destination videos, may be better suited to interactive shopping areas.

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12   etv, 2006.

13   http://www.idigitalsales.co.uk/interactiveadvertising/faqs.cfm (22-5-2007).

In either instance, the research showed that it is very important to meet a viewer's expectations about content as well as usability. Not meeting expectations reflects negatively on the brand and decreases the likelihood of the viewer returning to this source of travel planning information.[14]

By courtesy of Dr Anika Schweda, Research Fellow, Interactive Television Research Institute (ITRI), Murdoch University, Australia.

Hoseasons' brand advertising campaign

Hoseasons, the United Kingdom's leading self-catering specialist with over 12,000 places to stay throughout Europe, launched a five-month TV advertising campaign on the back of a major rebranding exercise.

The new TV commercial broke in December 2006, with a schedule of five bursts through until May 2007 – initially on the channels ITV1, ITV2 and digital and satellite, with later, tactical bursts on digital and satellite. The theme carried through to e-shots, mailings, inserts and classified advertising, as well as a major redesign for the 2007 Hoseasons brochures.

The new approach was developed after initial research showed that although customers and potential customers viewed the Hoseasons brand positively (with reliability and trust in particular scoring highly), perceptions had not kept up with the huge changes in the nature and quality of the holidays the firm offers.

Marketing Director Tim Fullam says: "We needed to revisit the way the brand was perceived, so that our core values of choice, freedom, family, value for money and professionalism came across in a way which positioned us as being contemporary, personable and aspirational, whilst still being seen as reliable – without being boring!"

Will Herschel-Shorland, Director of research agency Insight Track, which carried out concept research during the late summer of 2006 explains: "It was important to validate whether the campaign was 'on-brand' and on-message before committing substantial resources on production."

Tim Fullam says: "The new ad is more about mood and aspiration than specifically about our products. It shows a selection of fast-cut shots of families and couples enjoying the wide variety of types of holiday we offer, each contributing to the theme of freedom to choose exactly the kind of holiday you wish for."

The 30-second commercial carries a number of on-screen direct-response mechanisms. These include a phone number, text response number, website address and red button response for digital viewers leading to a microsite, as well as a prominent invitation to visit travel agents to find out more.

Marketing Manager Sarah Evans concluded: "In our experience we've found the simpler you can make this mechanism, the better it works."[15]

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14 Conversation by e-mail with the author 24-5-2007. See for more information Schweda, A. (2004), 'Independent International Traveller Evaluations of Traditional and Interactive Holiday Information Sources along Temporal and Utility Dimensions'. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2004* (Proceedings of the International Conference in Cairo, Egypt), Springer-Verlag, Wien – New York pp.151-160.

15 Based on: Hoseasons Press Office, News release. *Hoseasons Embarks on Major New Brand Advertising Campaign* (20-12-2006) and a conversation by e-mail with S. Evans, Marketing Manager Hoseasons Holidays (25-4-2007).

Figure 10.3 Still from the Hoseasons 2007 TV brand campaign

10.6 'Advergaming' and In-game Advertising

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to Professor Frank Go, Centre of Tourism Management, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam, for his assistance in preparation of this section.

Electronic gaming is worth € 20 billion a year and is bigger than the film industry. In the United States of America, for example, sales of video games and hardware jumped 46% in August 2007 from a year earlier.[16] The explosive success of gaming simulations has fuelled attention on their potential for narrative, learning and PR. Advergaming and in-game advertising are becoming marketing genres of their own:

- Advergaming uses video games to promote organisations, products and services

- In-game advertising promotes organisations, products and services in a game:

  – Static in-game advertising with fixed ads: virtual billboards and mostly product placement

  – Dynamic in-game advertising allowing alteration remotely by an advertising agency, and tailoring according to geographical location or time of day

According to Mike Musgrove of the Washington Post, it is not hard to see why game makers and advertisers might be attracted to each other: "Advertisers have been trying to connect with a hard-to-reach market of young men who are not spending as much time watching television while they invest dozens of hours cranking through a title like Need for Speed. Game publishers, meanwhile, are regularly looking for ways to offset their ever-growing software development costs without making their products more expensive".

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16 Reuters (2007), 'Sales of Video Games, Hardware up 46 Percent', *CNET News,* September 14 (Online), available: http://www.news.com/Sales-of-video-games%2C-hardware-up-46-percent/2100-1043_3-6207964.html?tag=topicIndex (22-9-2007).

Thorsen, T. (2007), 'US August Game-industry Haul Nearly $1B', *Gamespot,* September 13 (Online), available: http://www.gamespot.com/news/6178770.html?part=rss&tag=gs_news&subj=6178770 (22-9-2007).

The Microsoft-owned company Massive, market leader in in-game advertising, expects advertisers worldwide to spend 1 billion to € 2.5 billion on advertising in computer games. In 2006, Nielsen Media Research announced research and measurement of the use of computer games, a new service to the growing number of interested advertisers.[17]

VisitNorway, with advertising partners, has successfully used games to promote the destination (see chapter 4, section 4.11.4).

Digital Deadwood is an example of a virtual world that promotes a destination, Deadwood in South Dakota, at http://digitaldeadwood.com.[18]

10.7 The New Television – Measures of Success

The success of interactive advertising (also detailed in section 5.3) is measured by:

• Response rates (if a return path is involved)

• The average time spent within the application once a campaign is in flight

Additional research is done by:

• Phone surveys to address a variety of specific success factors and to measure consumer satisfaction

• Laboratory testing: eye tracking and physiological measurements to measure the impact of the ad

In-game advertising has seen rapid development of measurement services offered by third parties:

• Analytics technology that will pull data directly from video gaming devices

• Survey-based data from panels

The new media research firm Interpret LLC recently launched Gameasure, a new service designed to provide third-party measurement. Gameasure has been designed to track a variety of metrics for video games across multiple gaming platforms, such as user demographics, reach and frequency, and duration of play, according to Interpret.[19]

See also References and Bibliography.

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17   Musgrove, M. (2006), 'Advertisers Are Getting into the Game', *Washington Post,* March 2 (Online), available: http://www. washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/01/AR2006030102285.html?sub=AR (22-5-2007).

Tomesen, R. (2006), 'Nielsen Gaat Bereik Computerspelen Meten', *Emerce,* October 20 (Online), available: http://www. emerce.nl/nieuws.jsp?id=1738942 (22-5-2007).

18   (18-10-2007).

19   http://www.gameasure.com (9-9-2007).

Chapter 11

Online Destination Media Relations – How to Gain Online Coverage and Be Ready for a Crisis

Key Messages

- Media relations to create coverage about your destination is probably already the single most efficient tool in the organisation's marketing toolkit

- The internet works very well to further extend this productivity:

    - E-mail and the web make it easy to communicate with the media globally, whether the journalists are concerned with offline media or online

    - There is a whole range of constantly expanding online media in which destination stories can be placed

- Online media relations effectiveness can be greatly improved by observing simple guidelines when presenting material

- At times of crisis, e-marketing might be central to the management and recovery of the situation, and e-marketeers need to be well prepared

11.1 How to Target the Media Online

11.1.1 Use CRM Techniques

Media relations executives expect to build up relationships and trust with a large number of travel editors, their staff and freelances, in order to place the destination's stories.

CRM techniques (chapter 6, section 6.2) are thus equally essential for media relations, especially when working globally. The Media department should have a tailor-made version of the consumer CRM database. Start by drawing up a clear functional specification to the marketing or ICT department of the data capture, storage and usage requirements, so that you can efficiently analyse and re-use information about your contacts. The aim must be to have sufficient accuracy and depth of information to send the right stories to the right journalists, and to avoid being regarded as a spammer.

So media relations executives should be prime users of the DMO CRM system:

- Aim to build up a detailed knowledge of each travel media contact, their interests and their past outputs (in general and relating to your destination)

- As with the consumer CRM database, if you have overseas offices then they will need their own local version of the system, and the head office will need an overall view

11.1.2 Use External Online Expertise

If the DMO is just getting started with travel media relations in a new market, and if your resources are slim, the internet can be particularly helpful:

- Consider buying a subscription to a media contacts database such as Cision's Mediadisc

- Alternatively, the local market search engines will soon help you to build up a list of media, and then an e-mail request to each one will usually yield their local correspondent

- Give priority to the newswires – such as Agence France Presse, Press Association, and Associated Press. The key agencies will vary from country to country

- Finding the names and e-mail addresses of travel website editors and active bloggers in your target markets should be as important as identifying editors of printed publication, radio and TV

- You can also pay to have your stories distributed to travel editors and writers. There are associations of travel writers in many countries that offer this as a commercial service. There are also commercial companies such as Travmedia[1] that will send out your stories as e-mail alerts as well as listing them in their online newsroom. Destinations that subscribe to Travmedia also have their pictures displayed in the Travmedia online photo library, and have their own destination 'media centre'. You should be able to select distribution by world region and/or by travel industry sector

11.2 E-mail Communication

E-mailing your news releases direct to editors, journalists and freelances is perfectly acceptable if you observe a few rules:

- Do not send attachments. Put the story in the body of the e-mail. This is because some recipients' e-mail filters may not allow attachments; some newsdesks do not have leading-edge ICT facilities; and even if they do, a busy journalist might receive 200 e-mails a day and will not thank you for the chore of having to open your attachment

- Never send HTML e-mails. If your story is worth using, they will prefer to copy it straight from your plain text. This because HTML can include styles and formatting which the journalist will not want to import into their own document; they will already have their own set style

- Do not send pictures unless it is essentially a picture story. If you must, link to a webpage that includes it. Be cautious about embedding even a low-resolution version in the body of the e-mail, as some filters may then block the e-mail. Remember always to offer a high-resolution version

- Some of the usual rules of news release writing are even more important when the recipient will read it on screen:

  – Put the essential facts in the headline and opening sentence

  – Be brief

  – Use the 'inverted pyramid' principle of writing (see chapter 4, section 4.4.2)

- If the news release was composed on screen, print it to proof-read it. Do not rely solely on a spell checker

- Think how your e-mail will look in an editor's inbox. Have an explicit e-mail address such as PressOffice@VisitDestination.com, and an equally explicit 'Subject' line

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1   Travemedia (2007) http://www.travmedia.com (16-8-2007).

11.3 E-newsletters

If you produce a dedicated media e-newsletter, apply the same rules as for customer e-newsletters:

- When inviting a new media contact to enrol, send them a text e-mail with a link to a sample newsletter and to your sign-up page

- Allow them to opt in if they wish. Do not make opt-in the default

- Offer the choice of a text-only or HTML version, with text-only as the default

Offer customised versions for different markets, languages and kinds of writer (such as active sports, culture, family interests). Your destination's customer newsletters may be useful to some journalists especially if they can opt into a particular topic.

The DMO corporate crisis management plan (see below, section 11.7) should include the issue of an immediate media briefing using the newsletter.

(Chapter 6, section 6.4 has guidance on e-newsletter best practice.)

11.4 What to Put in the DMO Web 'Media Centre'

Create a section of the customer website that is dedicated to the media. Provide a direct link to it from the customer site homepage; it is usual to make the link as text words at the foot of the page, rather than in the main navigation, for example <u>Press Centre</u> or <u>Media</u>.

The core head office pages can be adapted for each market and language by destinations that are active in several markets, using your content management system.

The Media centre can include:

- RSS feeds, which should be for specific topics to which journalists can subscribe. RSS is a vital channel for communicating headline news to journalists (see chapter 6, section 6.13 for more on RSS feeds)

- Copies of recently issued press releases

- 'Hot news' – topical news and forthcoming major events

- DMO and industry media contacts, locally and at head office

- A 'text bank':

  – One-page summary descriptions

  – Ready-made feature articles

These should cover the destination as a whole; regions; customer segments such as the youth market; and interests, such as cultural tourism or golf.

- A visually compelling introduction to the destination – this may simply be a link to pages in the main site

- The DMO's corporate online image and video library (see chapter 13, section 13.2.1) should have special facilities for the media, with fast-track service, no fees, and an easy-to-search collection of selected images that correctly reflect the brand and have known appeal to editors. There should be a special catalogue of short sound and movie clips. Normally all material will need to be free of copyright

- Links to related resources such as movie locations identified by movie investment agencies

- Local market celebrity endorsement stories and pictures, including talking heads

- Corporate information designed to appeal not just to the travel media but to the business media. This could include an explanation of the destination's markets and brand positioning as well as the DMO's own policies and business plans. It could be dealt with by a link to the DMO's industry site (chapter 13)

11.5 How to Place Your Stories on Websites

11.5.1 Websites and Message Boards

To get an editorial mention on a third-party website, the initial task is the same as in offline media and is part of the same process. In each market you should:

- Decide which are the biggest sites or the ones that appeal most to the target segments. In every country, there are clear market leaders – news sites, or general portals

- Look for those with a travel channel. You may also target specialist sites for specialist campaigns and stories

- Assess how much destination news content they carry

- Find out who edits them

Some sites also present the chance to supply core content rather than, or as well as, news stories. Most destinations are not yet exploring these opportunities actively, as they fall between the PR and the marketing functions.

Participation in message boards on these sites may also be worthwhile in some markets.

11.5.2 Blogs and other User-generated Content (UGC)

Tactics for capitalising on blogs and UGC include:

- Try to identify key active bloggers and to notify them of new stories as you issue them. Do not expect them to use the story in its own right, but do give them a short summary of it. It is important to set up the news release as a webpage to which they can link. The link should be an HTML page and not to a Word document that could be edited by other people, or to a PDF. Some bloggers think PDFs load too slowly

- Respond to negative or inaccurate blogs. Demonstrate a willingness to accept and act on criticism. But avoid prolonging the discussion

- Start blogging yourself (see chapter 3, section 3.6)

- Ask newsletter recipients to blog about their visit after their return

- Ask visitors to contribute their experiences to TripAdvisor or other hosts of user generated content relevant to you (see chapter 3, section 3.4)

> **Further information**
>
> An explanation of blogs and how to set one up: www.blogger.com (owned by Google) (28-8-2007).
>
> A free online travel diary for travellers across the world: www.travelblog.org (28-8-2007).

11.5.3 PR Newswire Services

A newswire service will augment your press release distribution, with basic services usually at no charge. They will post it as a webpage. If you place your keywords in the headline, sub-headline and early lines of text, then news search engines will pick it up and the story will have valuable direct-to-consumer attention.

Include a call to action with a link to a dedicated landing page, and you can then measure results directly. Look for a service that has a track record in achieving good search engine optimisation. An example is www.prweb.com. There are ancillary services such as a link back to blogs that choose to link to your story; this encourages the blogger to make the link.

11.6 Work with Partners

Identify other key websites within the destination and set up reciprocal links, and participate in regional tourism portal sites such as www.visiteurope.com, www.visiteuropeancities.info and www.onecaribbean.org.

> **Further information**
>
> Software for PR management; free white papers on online PR (Online), available: www.vocus.com (28-8-2007).
>
> PR services in 10 countries, including monitoring: www.cision.com (28-8-2007).

11.7 Crisis Management

> "A crisis is an undesired, extraordinary, often unexpected and timely limited process with ambivalent development possibilities. It demands immediate decisions and countermeasures in order to influence the further development for the organization (destination) again positively and to limit the negative consequences as much as possible."
>
> Glaesser, D., 2006

Knowledge and skills to deal with crises have become a necessary part of tourism management. DMOs are expected to show leadership in times of crisis, and to have ready-made plans that limit the damage. Good crisis management techniques are vital to get tourists back to the destination as quickly as possible.

Because prompt and effective communication is so essential to crisis management, e-marketers will find themselves at the centre of such activities.

11.7.1 Be Prepared

Many destinations have a permanent tourism industry response committee. This may have agreed on a single communications clearing-house for offline and online channels – a media centre, with an appointed administrator and an appointed spokesperson. There may also be an emergency call centre.

The DMO's online role will need to include:

- Readiness for the worst-case scenario

- The online part of the overall crisis management plan, and business continuity plan, that has been worked out in advance

- Nominating, in advance, key e-marketing staff, available 24/7 if need be, with their contact details kept up to date. Do not assume it may affect senior staff only; for example, you will need the editors who use the content management system to make website changes

- A framework of possible online partners and procedures for cooperation:

  – Before any crisis, to visualise how the possible scenarios will affect online communication

  – During it

  – During the period of recovery

11.7.2 Prepare Your Channels of Communication in Advance

As with your online marketing work, channel management will be the core of the duties in a crisis. Advance plans are needed:

- To agree before it happens what online information partners and channels you will use:

  – To provide an inward flow of information about the crisis to key DMO executives, as the crisis first develops, and during it

  – To send out the DMO's own information to industry and customer audiences

- To have the capacity to push the maximum number of urgent messages online during the crisis in all the languages that visitors and potential visitors use, via:

  – Your e-mail newsletters; you may need to send out many more e-mails at once than your normal capacity

  – Your existing websites, with information updated hourly or daily, with a timeline on it so that it is clear that it is up to date

- To have the capacity to create and launch new websites, possibly with extensive and complex content, at short notice

- To be able to show precisely which geographical areas are affected and which are not:

  – Consider in advance how the maps on your website, and your geocoded product data, can support this

  – Give the distances between affected areas and other major areas

- To have sufficient server capacity and other technical aspects (usually the responsibility of the ICT department) to support vital CRM, website, and e-mail facilities

E-marketers should have a service level agreement with their ICT suppliers, internal and/or external. This will govern the amount of back-up and the cost of systems and personnel to cover the servers, networks, and bandwidth on which your websites and other communication systems depend. It should be agreed at a senior management level, and should take a worst-case scenario into account.

11.7.3 React Quickly to Prevent a Situation Becoming a Crisis

Be ready to be pro-active, not just reactive. Many events can be prevented from developing crisis proportions for your tourism industry if you act promptly with correct information, and if you ensure that it is fully distributed.

Prompt distribution of information depends to a great extent on how well you have enlisted the support of everyone in the industry in advance.

A flood or fire, for example, may be localised and of short-term impact, but media coverage can prolong and extend the damage if the record is not put straight. Be prepared to issue statements swiftly, through all the channels you have identified in advance. Statements should include:

*   Headline views of the likely impact

*   Geographical areas not affected

*   Industry assessments, with quotes from leading businesses

*   Background statistics

*   Contact for more information

11.7.4 SOS.Travel and the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN)

UNWTO realigned its various activities in the area of Risk and Crisis Management and used its rich experience gained through the recent disasters and challenges such as with the Indian Ocean tsunami, 9/11, and Avian and Human Influenza (AHI) while developing the www.sos.travel website, together with Microsoft, which was designed at its initial stage as the central platform for the AHI international activities for the tourism sector.

Gradually, this site is further expanded into a one-stop shop emergency platform for AHI and is destined to provide different interfaces for member States, the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN), which is composed of leading industry associations and organizations, international organizations and travellers.

The Tourism Emergency Response Network is convened and managed by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and comprises currently the following associations and organizations in the area of travel and tourism: Airports Council International (ACI), American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), American Hotel and Lodging Association, International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Council of Cruise lines (ICCL), International Federation of Tour Operators (IFTO), International Hotel and Restaurant Association (IH&RA), National Tour Association (NTA), Pacific Area Travel Association) (PATA), United Federation of Travel Agents Associations (UFTAA), Association of European Airlines (AEA), African Travel and Tourism Association (ATTA), Asociación Latinoamericana de Transporte Aéreo (ALTA), European Travel Commission (ETC) and Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA).

Further information

World Tourism Organization, *Crises Guidelines for the Tourism Industry* (May 2007) (Online), available: www.unwto.org/mkt/committees/recovery/crisis_en.pdf (28-8-2007).

Debbie Hindle, *Co-operation and Partnerships for Crisis Tourism Management* (May 2007) (Online), available: www.unwto.org/regional/europe/PDF/2005/moscow/Germ%E1n%20Porras%20_Presentation%202_.pdf (28-8-2007).

An example of a general national disaster planning advice website: www.ukresilience.info (28-8-2007).

11.8 Online Destination Media Relations – Measures of Success

Key performance indicators can include:

• Volume of editorial coverage

• Value of editorial coverage if it were equivalent paid-for advertising

Most DMOs subscribe to a conventional press clippings service in their key markets, and some then calculate the equivalent advertising value of the coverage.

These services now extend to news and general websites, e-zines, blogs and news wires. You can nominate specific sites to be added to their reading list.

Most important, some services include reports with calculations of value. These are supplied online, line by line, but also as summary reports. They will help you decide your future investment strategy for gaining online media coverage.

Additionally, DMOs can measure the number and nature of searches made on Google about any press release topic (or developing news story). The Google Alerts service (www.google.com/alerts) is free, and sends e-mail updates to you of the latest results that Google has given in its news, web, blogs and groups searches, in response to the search term you specify.

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 12

Supporting the Travel Trade
in Source Markets

Key Messages

- Online sales support for tour operators and agents can leverage significant additional business

- To be effective, support materials and information need to be tuned to each major market and segment

- Websites, e-newsletters and online training are the main tools

12.1 Working with Tour Operators and Travel Agents Who Sell Your Destination

(Communication with tourism suppliers such as accommodation providers and attractions in the destination is covered in chapter 13)

DMOs can give vital information and sales back-up online to travel companies that actively sell the destination in source markets, including the home market. Such companies are usually, though not always, based in the source market(s), or have a dedicated sales activity there. They may operate online and/or offline.

The primary tools for providing support to them are special areas of your websites, and e-newsletters – both of which can help and encourage them to sell your destination rather than a competitor.

12.2 Travel Trade Website

Create a dedicated section of your consumer website. An entirely separate site with its own URL is not necessarily a good thing – trade sellers need the consumer information too.

Provide a direct link to the section from the consumer site homepage. It is usual to make the link as a text word, at the foot of the page, rather than in the main navigation, for example **Trade.**

12.2.1 Website Target Audiences

Ideally, create a channel within the site for each of the main sales sectors:

- Tour operators selling in source markets who offer tours to and within the destination. There should be sub-channels for any specific products and/or segments that are of high importance (e.g. golf, diving, adventure tourism, etc)

- Retail travel agents

- Conference and meeting organisers

- Incentive travel organisers

- Exhibition organisers

If you have the staff resources, you should run content and language versions in each of the main countries in which you market.

12.2.2 Website Content

Content should include:

- Lists of destination-based incoming tour handling agents and destination management companies, split by specialisation as far as possible (by region, product and/or segment)

- A list, or a search facility, of tour operators and carriers, to assist retail travel agents located in the source market[1]

- Ideas for tour programmes: this can be a link to the suggested tour itineraries on your consumer site. If you have an itinerary builder tool on your consumer site, link to this as well

- Other links to your consumer site:

  - To the databases of accommodation, places to visit, major events, conference venues, and incentive destinations. Ideally there should be specially configured search facilities to filter out those that do not pay commission, and to show the most useful information, such as meeting room capacities, and facilities for groups

  - For travel information (such as visas and currency, see chapter 2, section 2.4.1)

- News of new developments opening, or due to open within the next two years

- If you choose to publish information about familiarisation visits that you are planning, provide an online application form and ensure that you ask for sufficient information about applicants to be able to filter them more easily

- Forthcoming industry events in the local market and at the destination

- Sales assistance that you provide, with links to:

  - Details of your marketing opportunities – to join you at exhibitions, and in other marketing projects – with online application forms

  - Branding guidelines and standard destination descriptions

  - Your photo library

  - Video clips

  - Market research information

  - Your e-mail or telephone trade enquiry service, if you offer one

  - An invitation to subscribe to your e-newsletter for the trade

Offer RSS feeds as well (chapter 6, section 6.13.2) on the relevant pages.

12.2.3 Key Tour Operators

Tour operators that specialise in your destination deserve special attention, including RSS feeds for events and activities information that will complement their offers.

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1   Retailers will also benefit if they are themselves listed in a 'travel agents' section on your consumer site for the source market.

12.2.4 Online Training for Travel Agents

Some DMOs offer training and accreditation to retail travel agents to become 'destination specialists'. This service is best delivered online, either direct by the DMO or in conjunction with a specialist company:

- Direct, an example is www.pv-pro.com, the training site of the Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board, Mexico

- With a commercial company, which may attract a wider range of agents, such as www.tauniv. com

12.3 E-newsletters for the Trade

It is best to provide quite separate newsletters for at least the three main categories of audience: tour operators and travel agents; conference and meeting organisers; and incentive organisers.

All these travel professionals need to keep their knowledge up to date, so the main objective will be to introduce new products and special offers from your home industry. There should be a brief note of each piece of news in the newsletter, with a click-though to the 'new developments' section in your website. Thus, in effect, the e-newsletter to the trade is an alerts service. Each newsletter reminds recipients of your trade pages at www.destinationdomain.com/trade.

- Brief but regular newsletters (monthly or quarterly) are better than long gaps between each – the object is to remind them that you and your webpages are there to help

- A well-established newsletter will also help in management of special events by getting information out promptly to key contacts

- In a crisis, the DMO's corporate crisis management plan (chapter 11, section 11.7) should include using the trade newsletter list to send an immediate briefing

Chapter 6, section 6.4 has full guidance on e-newsletter best practice.

12.4 Supporting the Travel Trade in Source Markets – Measures of Success

The following can help to measure the success of online sales support given to tour operators and agents in source markets:

- Trends in Trade website web analytics – page views, visits, unique visitors

- E-newsletter metrics – number of editions, number sent/opened/click-throughs

- Number and value of enrolments to events and marketing activities via online forms

- Satisfaction surveys of:

    – Industry newsletter recipients

    – Website users

See chapter 6, section 6.4.3 on Newsletter Reporting; chapter 15 on Measuring Success and chapter 16 on Web Analytics.

E-marketing with the Destination's Tourism Suppliers

Key Messages

- Almost all tasks to inform and enrol suppliers in DMO marketing activities are conducted most efficiently online

- There are easily-produced key performance indicators to measure the contribution that online communication is making to successful joint marketing by the DMO with its tourism suppliers

13.1 Objectives

(For a wider view of DMO adoption of e-business methods, see the World Tourism Organization publication *A Guide to Destination Management.)*

A primary objective of most DMOs is to build and operate marketing partnerships with the tourism suppliers in the destination.

It is equally an objective to encourage networking and marketing partnerships between suppliers, both within their own sector (heritage attractions, for example) and in addressing their shared market segments (youth groups, for example). Some industry sector bodies such as hotel associations already have their own channels, in which case the DMO can simply link with these.

E-marketers in the DMO thus have the duty to provide communication tools that enable these various cross-flows of information, dialogue, and action.

The basic tools for the purpose are:

- A dedicated industry-facing website (this chapter does not cover the DMO's internal intranet requirements)

- A service of alerts:

  – An industry e-newsletter, to provide a regular alert service to highlight new items on the website, and for corporate communications. It will also be a vital tool in times of crisis (chapter 11, section 11.7)

  – An RSS service (chapter 6, section 6.13.2) to provide feeds of all the relevant pages

13.2 Industry-facing Websites

Most NTOs use an open website for communication with their industry tourism suppliers. To gain maximum use, it is best not to use an extranet with the barrier of password protection. However, there are instances where a login or password protection is desirable:

- A simple login, not requiring a password but asking users to select their industry sector from a drop-down menu, will allow some measurement of the site's use

- If the DMO operates a membership or partner scheme that provides exclusive benefits, then the parts of the site that cover these benefits may need password protection. But there is a strong argument for allowing non-members to see what they are missing, so the best solution is to ask for a password only on order forms

The site should have its own domain name, distinctly different from the customer website domain. It should be where the industry discusses the destination's various issues and opportunities, and also where the DMO's own business issues are aired.

You should also provide a direct link to it from the homepage of the home-market version of your consumer site. It is usual to make the link as a text word, at the foot of the page, rather than in the main navigation, for example <u>Destinationname industry</u>. Be careful to use a word that distinguishes it from the <u>Travel Trade</u> pages aimed at the travel trade in the source markets.

Ideally, create a sub-channel for each of the main sectors:

- Accommodation

- Incoming and domestic tour operators

- Transport companies

- Places to visit and event organisers

- Meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions industry

Examples of well developed home industry websites are VisitBritain's www.tourismtrade.org.uk and Tourism Australia's www.tourism.australia.com.

13.2.1 Components of the Website

The main functions and components of the industry site should be:

- Product data input to the product database (chapter 2, section 2.6). This facility will need to be password-protected

- Marketing support services:

  – Market guides and research (free and/or saleable)

  – Destination branding guidelines and toolkit

  – Paid-for and free marketing opportunities offered by the destination organisation. Where the destination works in many markets, promoting a wide range of industry sectors, a 'Compile your own marketing plan' tool can be used

  – Image and video library. This may be run by a separate organisation, perhaps by a commercial firm under contract. The DMO may offer free use or lower fees for defined industry users and for the media. This may apply to part of, or the entire, library. It is best if the library can also host the image and video collections of other bodies, so that users can have a single view of the resources of DMOs at national, regional and local level, as well as those of commercial industry bodies and companies. The library should be well-indexed, with a search engine, and be fully SEO'd. Material must be easy to download, in a choice of resolutions, and must indicate any copyright obligations

  – Quality assurance schemes, such as for star ratings

  – Online training in tourism marketing planning, for example the South Pacific Tourism Organisation's tourism toolkit[1]

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1   http://nztri.aut.ac.nz/pacifictoolkit/pages/viewpage.php?page=10 (27-9-2007).

- News:
  - From the regions, cities, and local destinations
  - Business intelligence from source markets
  - From the product sectors (for example business tourism, heritage, youth, rural, seaside resorts)
  - From the DMO's own activities
  - 'Hot news'
  - Perhaps a moderated discussion forum
- Business start-up and development advice
- Diary of industry events, with links to the organisers' online booking forms
- Key contacts list
- An invitation to subscribe to your industry e-newsletter, and a library of previous newsletters
- Corporate information including constitution, funding, staff, and corporate plans

Examples of well-developed industry-facing websites are www.tourism.australia.com and www.visitbritain.org.

13.3 Online Tools to Find Marketing Opportunities and Research Resources

DMOs are making it easier for their potential industry partners to find and join the most suitable DMO marketing activities, and to locate market research documents.

How to join Hungary's marketing activities

The Hungarian National Tourist Office (HNTO) provides an online tool that gives up-to-date information about HNTO marketing activities and how to join them. Designed for tourism service providers as well as HNTO's own staff, it has a search facility at http://akcioterv.hungarytourism.hu and is updated continuously.

Interested partners can search for marketing activities by:

- Source markets (such as Austria, Belgium)
- Products (such as health tourism, meetings industry)
- Marketing tools (such as advertisements, fairs/exhibitions, brochures)
- Tourist regions of Hungary
- Target groups (travel trade or end-consumers)

"It is a powerful tool for attracting partners," says Dr Iván Róna, Chief Executive Officer of HNTO, "and it is also an excellent management tool. The non-public version of the action plan is managed by the responsible staff, including information about planning and decision-making.

"Since 2007, the system has been directly linked to the HNTO financial system, ensuring that the marketing costs of each action are controlled."

By courtesy of the Hungarian National Tourist Office.

13.4 DMO-Industry Social Networking Sites

As a supplement to the website, a destination social networking site would provide an excellent forum for exchange of current information and opinions, and for debate on current issues. Such a site could be a group within a consumer social networking site, or be set up as a stand-alone.

To be of value, it would have to achieve log-in each morning by a significant number of industry leaders and commentators, and would need activation, moderation and supply of relevant facts by DMO staff.

For more on social networking, see chapter 3.

13.5 Corporate Blogs

A corporate blog will not only provide focused communication with the industry but would also highlight the importance of blogging in e-marketing. This could be operated by the DMO's industry relations executive or by the PR department.

Best of all, it could be fronted by the CEO, helped by a close assistant, perhaps drawn from the corporate affairs team. The focus could be:

•   The CEO talking to other CEOs

•   CEO hotline for anyone in the destination industry

•   Major policy issues

For more on blogging, see chapter 3, section 3.6.

13.6 Working with Tourism Suppliers – Measures of Success

Online measures of the success of online communication in contributing to joint working by DMOs and the industry suppliers are based on similar methods (dedicated websites and newsletters) as for communications with the travel trade in source markets, and are therefore much the same in principle:

•   Trends in industry website page views, visits, and unique visitors

•   Volume, analysed by industry sector, of logins, if employed

•   E-newsletter metrics – number of editions, number sent/opened/click-throughs

•   Number and value of enrolments to events and marketing activities via online forms

•   Usage of image and video library

•   Number and frequency of industry entries in forums

•   Satisfaction surveys of:

    – Industry newsletter recipients

    – Website users

See chapter 15 for measuring success and chapter 16 on web analytics.

See also References and Bibliography.

Income Sources for DMOs – Raising Income from Your E-marketing Services

Key Messages

There are a variety of attractive options for DMOs that wish to raise revenue:

- Charging commission or fees on sales of bookings that the DMO generates for the businesses

- Operating a merchandise shop

- Charging fees for participation in a marketing activity or a package of activities

- Accepting ads on the DMO website

14.1 Revenue Sources

The DMO will probably want to earn revenue from its e-marketing to offset some of its operating costs. The main ways to do this are by charging commission or fees on sales of bookings that the DMO generates for the businesses; and by running, sub-contracting, or finding a partner to run, a merchandise shop.

Both these are dealt with in chapter 8.

Other methods, covered in this chapter, are:

- Selling display advertising or advertorial on your website or in your e-newsletter

- Earning commission by referring business to other websites

- Selling enhanced entries to your tourism suppliers

- Taking ads that are delivered to your website by Google or Yahoo

14.2 The 'Pros' and 'Cons' of a Commercial Approach

14.2.1 'Pros'

- Most important, you will be using the power of the internet to help customers make the leap from images and information to making a purchase

- Timely and special offers from advertisers add strongly to the usefulness of the website to customers

- Engaging directly with commercial partners and advertisers will bring new and valuable expertise, insights, and imperatives that will help to drive your DMO's success, and will help in developing public-private partnerships

- Showing that you have commercial income may help encourage the provision of additional public funding (though as noted above, the reverse may also be the case)

14.2.2 'Cons'

- Some of the commercial messages may not directly support a particular campaign message, and may add some distracting 'noise'

- Some advertisers' creative treatment may not be entirely aligned with the destination or DMO brand, however well it is checked beforehand

- In some markets, your status as an independent, impartial advisor may be compromised in the eyes of the customer

- Advertising clutter on your website and in your e-newsletter may affect their usability and thus make them less efficient

- Success in raising funds from the private sector may lead to cuts in public funding. There is certainly a need to ensure that the true costs of raising income are clear to the bodies that provide public funding

14.3 Carry Display Advertising on Your Websites

Space sold on websites is expressed by the size of the space and the number of page impressions that you expect to be able to deliver to an advertiser in a given period (the 'inventory'). In the simplest form, it is sold in cost-per-thousand impressions (cpm). There are many variations and refinements to this, notably to sell on a Cost-per-click-through basis (CPC).

The vehicles for the impressions can be advertisement spaces on websites and blogs, buttons, e-mails, RSS feeds, instant messaging or any other media you operate.

14.3.1 Display Advertisement Space on Your Sites

(The DMO as an advertiser is dealt with in chapter 6, section 6.7)

The industry standards for all the advertising formats that you might want to sell on your website are coordinated by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (www.iab.net).

Check the IAB site from time to time to see which ad sizes and shapes are most used and successful. IAB also sets guidelines for other aspects of interactive advertising, including terms and conditions, and for ad campaign measurement and audit.

Apart from deciding what spaces you might sell, and what prices to charge, you need to consider how the ads will be loaded on to your site, and how their performance will be reported back to the advertiser.

Manual loading by your own team will be ideal when:

- The DMO sells its advertisement space direct to the industry, perhaps packaged up with a selection of your advertising and marketing services

- The total amount of inventory is quite small

- You barter a number of marketing services with partners

- You charge a flat fee for a defined period or number of impressions, and do not provide live reporting

This will be what is called your 'premium' business.

14.3.2 Selling Space Via Advertising Networks

The remainder of the available estimated page impressions – your non-premium business – can be sold via third parties using their automated processes:

- Some of your key advertisers may be large scale advertisers who run campaigns across a number of websites, using an advertising agency to plan and run this for them. The agency will need automated serving of a variety of ads geared to the context of the page, the efficiency of each ad, and many other factors that rely on real-time online ad serving and reporting

- Your systems will not be able to provide this. The agency buys the advertising space from one or more advertising networks. Such networks enrol a large number of websites, usually in a specific vertical market, and then sell the combined inventory of page impressions. Serving and reporting is a highly sophisticated operation, and the networks can spread this cost

- You may opt to allocate a proportion, perhaps up to 50%, of your inventory to a network. They will expect to buy at a large discount – perhaps one-half or even one-third of your projected rate card

- There is another e-Bay style intermediary that makes it easier for the advertisers, networks, and website owners to do deals – an advertising exchange. Right Media, owned by Yahoo, and Doubleclick, owned by Google, are two market leaders. An exchange allows you to sell your inventory to the highest bidder in real time. You will then be selling to a range of ad networks – a better proposition for most destinations, who will be rather small players in this market

- You will be able to exclude named advertisers who you do not want to appear on your site, but after that it is an automated process with no overheads for you, so it can be very attractive if revenue is important to you. The advertisers specify keywords or topics (for example, 'travel in the Caribbean') and the network then selects appropriate sites from its portfolio, looking at the keywords on your site to do so. The advertisers on your site are thus intended to be relevant to your own content. If the network has no ads to place at any given time, it can place ads prepared by you to advertise your own destination (known as house ads)

Travel Ad Network (http://traveladnetwork.com) claims to be the major ad network in travel. Their portfolio of about 40 sites has about 100 million page impressions per month and includes the Rough Guides and Lonely Planet. This is about the same size audience as one of the industry leaders such as Yahoo Travel, MSN Travel or TripAdvisor. An example of a specialist network is http://adsales.bootsnall.com, covering the backpacking market and other sectors; it also allows geographical targeting.

There is also at least one ad network for blog sites – www.blogads.com.

Another option is to start your own destination network, signing up enough websites within the destination to achieve a worthwhile aggregate number of page impressions; and to ask an established network to host the service. This would lead to a lot of mutually beneficial bartering between attractions and accommodation websites.

14.4 Sell Advertorial on Your Sites

Just like offline advertorial, this is advertising that looks like editorial.

There is a win-win opportunity here: to gain useful extra information that your customers will appreciate, and to earn money.

There is also a lose-lose risk – to be carrying poor content that is bad for the reputation of the site, and which does not do your advertiser any good either.

So advertorial should always:

- Be written, or edited, by the DMO's own professionals, to the same high standards as your proper editorial. Do not accept badly written copy from any advertiser

- Show that it is sponsored, and by whom

- Be checked to ensure it does not become out of date

- Have proper navigation, to and from it

Advertorial is likely to be of most benefit to both parties if it is part of a campaign package. It will then be supported by other activities that drive traffic, and will be more likely to be adding valuable content to the site at the right time.

Advertorial may comprise a whole section of the site, in layers, with its own navigation but integrated into the main site. This will need its own SEO plan as well.

14.5 Work with other Sites that Will Pay You Commission

14.5.1 Embed a Major E-commerce Provider on Your Site

Such a partner must offer products that complement your own e-commerce operations. The partnership needs to be part of your wider content strategy, dealt with in chapter 2, section 2.8. Some examples are:

- A flights engine, which needs to be tailored to each of your market sites and should not require a login to do a simple search

- A car rental company

- A merchandise retailer

In each case, you would need to do a deal with the company concerned, to agree who pays the start-up costs and what level of commission you will get on their sales via your site. Chapter 8, section 8.7, e-commerce business models, deals with other aspects of this.

14.5.2 Join an Affiliate Programme

How an affiliate deal works is covered in chapter 6, section 6.7.8. Unless you already have a deal with a merchandise retailer, the most obvious option is Amazon, where you can earn commission by featuring books and maps on your site, with a click-through to Amazon if the user wants to buy.

But there are likely to be local online retailers in each of your markets that will welcome the exposure you can give them. To make this practical, your editors in each market will need your content management system set up so that they can manage it locally.

14.6 Sell 'Enhanced' Entries to Tourism Suppliers

It is relatively easy to offer the opportunity to businesses to pay to enhance, with extra pictures, text and other benefits, the free entry that they get in the DMO's product database. This is the database that powers the DMO's websites and which should be distributed further afield by the DMO's partners.

Never insist that everything in the database entry should be paid for – the result is likely to be an incomplete database that does not serve the destination's customers well. And the basic free entry should not be too limited just because you opt to sell enhanced entries. Two or three free pictures should be the norm, not a paid-for exception.

14.6.1 Benefits for Customers

More and better information than the DMO could afford to administer without the revenue.

14.6.2 Benefits for the Advertisers

Easy to arrange: manual loading of extra text and pictures is not likely to be cost-effective for either the advertiser or the DMO. If there is scope to attract hundreds of advertisers rather than just a few dozen, an automated system can offer:

- Online uploading of text, logos and pictures straight into the database

- Notification to a DMO quality checker that the material is ready for scrutiny

- Online payment

- An alert to the advertiser on a preset date before the enhanced entry runs out

- Distribution to all the DMO's relevant websites and partner websites

- The facility to update the entry at any time, just as they should be able to do for their free entry

14.6.3 Benefits for the DMO

- Improved content, both for their own websites and to offer distribution partners

- Administration can be mainly automated

Enhanced entries should also offer more advanced online promotion techniques such as 360-degree tours, in conjunction with a partner that organises it and delivers it from their own server.

14.6.4 Measures of Success

Advertisers will expect reports on the number of page views that their enhanced entries receive, and the number of click-throughs to their own site. Ideally advertisers should have online access to the DMO web analytics system, but if this is too expensive to set up, then a three- or six-monthly report from the DMO to the advertiser will be required.

If the advertisers participate in the DMO e-commerce system, then comparisons between advertisers and non-advertisers can be made.

Additionally, an online survey of advertisers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the facility should be carried out annually.

14.7 Accept Context-sensitive Ads on Your Site

Google Adsense, Yahoo Publisher, and MIVA MC are prominent examples of services that can place advertisements on to your site that are selected as relevant to the content of selected pages on your site, picking up your site keywords on a continuous basis.

It is possible to set this so that only appropriate advertisers are carried. MIVA also offer ads that are positioned within your page content. The service may also be suited to your industry-facing website.

Their services are fully explained on their own sites (www.google.com/adsense, http://publisher.yahoo.com and www.miva.com).

An example of a tourism site with Ads By Google is www.visitireland.com,[1] an independent site operated in the United States of America.

14.8 Make Money from Your E-mail Marketing

The majority of DMOs that publish e-newsletters include some pure editorial but most also carry a number of advertorials. These should always be newsworthy items that enhance the newsletter rather than disadvantage it. Observe the 'do's' and 'don'ts':

Do:

- Ensure your CRM system can easily provide reports to advertisers of the profiles of the list of recipients

- Make the e-newsletter part of a package, for the same reasons as for website advertorial

- Give incentives to the advertisers that most enhance the newsletter as a whole. This could be an extra e-mailing or a lower cost, or priority in the order of appearance

- Ask advertisers to keep to the designated theme of each newsletter

- Have a flexible price structure that makes it affordable for highly attractive products that you really need in the newsletter to reinforce the destination brand and to strengthen the sales proposition. Be ready to accept them as free editorial if necessary

- Help them to create their content

- Look for non-tourism partners with complementary brands, such as banks or sporting products. It may be possible to agree reciprocal inclusion of editorial material with click-throughs that can offer new data capture opportunities for both partners

Don't:

- Sell entries to people who clearly will not benefit

- Allow a clash of advertisers unless it is clearly helpful to the customer and the advertisers have agreed

- Accept copy that will disadvantage the customer, the other advertisers or the destination

And always put the recipient, the customer, first.

For full details of how to run e-newsletters, see chapter 6, section 6.4.

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1   http://www.visitireland.com (28-10-2007).

14.9 Income Sources for DMOs – Measures of Success

The chief measure is likely to be the net additional revenue after deducting time and software costs. Other Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) could include:

- Number of advertisers making using of the opportunities

- Sectors represented by the advertisers

- Negative/neutral/positive views of customers about the presence of advertisers on the websites, in the newsletter; the effect on customers' trust in the media; and their view on whether and how usability is affected

- Relative satisfaction of advertisers with the available options and their effectiveness

(See chapter 6, section 6.4.3 on newsletter reporting; chapter 15 on measuring success and chapter 16 on web analytics.)

See also References and Bibliography.

Measuring Success – Methods for Reporting of E-marketing Activity, and Continuous Measurement of Performance Quality and Outcomes

Key Messages

E-marketing has the facility to provide excellent performance and evaluation information:

- E-marketing tools facilitate the testing and refinement of online marketing actions, enabling incremental improvements. Often these adjustments can be made continuously, in real time

- Different views of reports can be compiled for hands-on staff, managers and directors

- Online customer research may be undertaken continuously, but steps need to be taken to minimise user irritation and maximise response rates

- Transaction information from e-commerce (the DMO's and/or that of partners) is the ideal measure of return on investment, but may not measure all of the DMO's e-marketing investment

Conventional methods (such as telephone, postal, personal interview and group discussions) can have substantial advantages over online surveys and should be used in conjunction with them.

15.1 Types of Measurement Reports

- The online marketing team require detailed reports on operational performance

- Senior management require regular reports on progress towards achieving strategic targets and measuring Return on Investment (ROI) – probably focused on a limited number of KPIs

Corporate dashboards that bring together live reports from systems across the organisation are referred to in chapter 1, section 1.8.

15.2 The Methods

The following tables provide a quick guide to the various methods and measures relating to each of the main types of web applications and aspects of e-marketing.

The text following the tables explains the methods, especially those to measure the quality and success of websites. Many of these methods are embedded in the working day of the e-marketer, and so are embedded in other chapters of the handbook.

This chapter draws on some of the methodologies developed for the UNWTO Destination Web Watch evaluation and benchmarking scheme. Specifically, it draws from the UNWTO report *Evaluating and Improving Websites – The Destination Web Watch* (www.destinationwebwatch.org),[1] which provides considerably greater detail on the underlying concepts and methods such as expert audit and evaluation and laboratory testing. It is essential reading for those involved in implementing measurement of website quality and success. It has a substantial bibliography of useful texts, which is not repeated here.

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1   UNWTO, 2005.

Other methodologies such as online experiments and web analytics have been given more attention in this book, in this chapter and in chapter 16.

See also chapter 4, section 4.15.3 on usability testing as an integral part of the design and development process.

In seeking to fulfil senior management requirements, this chapter should also be read in conjunction with ETC/UNWTO *Evaluating NTO Marketing Activities*.[2]

15.2.1 Evaluation of Specific ICT Applications

Table 15.1 Overview of methods available to evaluate specific ICT applications

Method	Summary
Websites (chapter 4) Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (chapter 5)	
Expert audit (including desk research, validation of code and testing of other technical aspects of the website)	The Destination Web Watch (DWW) assesses some 150 quality criteria and critical success factors for websites in six categories: • Accessibility and readability • Identity and trust • Customisation and interactivity • Navigation • Findability and search engine optimisation • Technical performance
Expert evaluation (including desk research, testing of technical aspects of the website, and mystery shopping)	This type of evaluation assesses the qualities of a site in terms of its performance in meeting the DMO's strategic requirements. The DWW Strategic Website Evaluation consists of more than 120 criteria. These relate to the presence, quality and performance of: • Information services • Contact services • Relationship services • Transaction services • Entertainment services
Web analytics	Web analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of internet data for the purposes of understanding and optimising web usage. Common reporting metrics are: • Page views • Visit or session • Unique visitor Web analysis tools provide a wide variety of information on visitor behaviour and can answer questions such as: • What are visitors doing on the site? • Which content seems to interest them? • What are they searching for in the internal onsite search? • What technology are visitors using and what implications does that have for web design?

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2   ETC-UNWTO, 2003.

Method	Summary
Online user surveys	Surveys made of users at the time of their visit to the site should include questions such as: • The type of information they were looking for and whether they found it • The importance of the different elements of a destination website to the respondent • Their rating of these elements in relation to the website in question • Their likelihood of re-visiting the site • Their likelihood of visiting the destination • The type of trip planned • Whether they have visited the destination before For ROI evaluation, there is a need for a follow-up survey, online or offline, to ask whether the respondent visited the destination, and trip details including spending, when they visited, size of party, where they stayed and for how long, and their likelihood of re-visiting in the future.
Offline user surveys (through traditional market research)	As for online user surveys – note especially the final paragraph above, where offline surveys are particularly appropriate.
Online experiments	May take several forms such as AB testing and multivariate testing (see section 15.6). Experiments can test the effectiveness of, for example: • Individual links – for example, wording or the icon or image that anchors the link • Webpages – different design, copy, and animation treatments including the number, the appearance and the position of the various elements • Whole websites – including the structure • Different data capture tactics – only one or two fields to fill in, for example, versus several Hence this method may establish which mechanisms on the site most effectively encourage action by the user.
Laboratory testing	In the DWW, an in-depth analysis of consumers' evaluations of websites is performed by reviewing: • Appearance • Navigation and clarity of site • Format of data posted • Page downloading time • Confidence in the site and the company • Confidence in the security of the site • Online forms • Special offers on the site • Search engine used To evaluate the efficiency of a particular website, the following variables are measured by the DWW: • Degree of difficulty of the task • Degree of accessibility of information posted on the site • The way in which the information is evaluated and understood by the consumer • Moments of frustration and doubt during navigation • 'Dead ends' (moments of 'going nowhere')

Method	Summary
E-mail marketing (chapter 6, section 6.4)	
Audit	The quality criteria and critical success factors used by DWW in auditing an e-mail promotion reflect: • Data protection and privacy regulations in the main tourism-generating markets • Regulations governing the sending of unsolicited e-mails in the United States of America and Europe • Good practice of permission-based marketing • Subscription, confirmation and personal settings management • Promotion of trust • Proven editorial techniques • Principles of technical performance • Good practices of newsletter management
Web statistics	Quantitative performance data can be obtained relating to measurements such as: • How many e-mails were sent and delivered • What percentage of subscribers opened each e-mail • Who opened and clicked through each e-mail • Which links generated the most click-throughs • How many and who removed themselves from your list In addition, there are CRM metrics relating to the list of contacts, such as the following: • Monthly increase in size of e-mail list • How it is growing (such as website sign-up, and forwarded e-mails) • Who is opting out • How many gift reminders or send-page-to-a-friend pages were sent each month • How many and what contacts have forwarded an e-mail to a friend • When a new contact joins your e-mail list Comparison with market leading destinations, and with commercial activity, particularly in sales orientated e-mail marketing metrics, will be particularly valuable.
Online user surveys	Similar to website evaluation surveys, but more focussed on issues such as: • Their rating of the e-mail communications/newsletters in meeting their needs – the overall appeal and the value of specific aspects • Previous or planned experience of using the destination website • Likelihood of visiting the destination • Wish to continue receiving e-mail communications from the DMO
TV Interactive Advertising (chapter 10)	
Laboratory testing (including eye tracking and physiological measurements, such as galvanic skin response (GSR)	Used to gauge viewer attention and arousal.
Telephone surveys	Used to measure recall, brand attitudes and purchase intentions.
Virtual Worlds (Second Life as an example) (chapter 6, section 6.12)	
Web analytics	If running an island, measurement of: • Slurl Analysis • Blog activity

Method	Summary
Second Life metrics	If running an island, measurement of: • On-island traffic • Outward hyperlink traffic Including: • Visits (inner/outer) • Unique visitors (inner/outer) • Average duration of stay • New or returning • Second Life map overlays • Simulation performance tracking Separate or additional measurement of conversion rates of: • Give-aways • Sales
Mobile applications (chapter 9)	
Metrics	Measurement of, for example: • Mobile website traffic • Number of podcasts downloaded • Total numbers of push and pull contacts
CRM database reports	• Number of new customers captured for SMS services • M-commerce transactions • Redemptions, for example of on-screen barcoded discount vouchers

15.2.2 Evaluation of Specific Aspects of E-marketing

Table 15.2 Evaluation methodologies

Method	Summary
Branding (chapter 7)	
Content analysis	Systematic research into a brand and into the effectiveness of brand efforts by the collection, description and analysis of: • Images • Texts
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (chapter 6, section 6.2)	
Statistics	Measuring of CRM database inputs such as: • Database size (split by key customer segments) • Database growth • Proportion of records with key fields completed • Number of contacts with customers per annum Measuring results such as: • Numbers arriving and their expenditure as a result of campaigns • Return on investment

Method	Summary
E-commerce (chapter 8)	
Web analytics	Pre-transaction and transaction measures, including: • Conversion (look to book) ratios (the rate of drop-off from start of booking process to completion) • Sales – gross and net • Net income per room-night sold
Online media relations (chapter 11)	
Press clippings services	• Reports • Equivalent advertising value
Google Alerts	• Free e-mail updates on and links to pages in websites, blogs and groups searches, as found by users, based on specified search terms
Advertising, Pay-per-click and other campaigns (chapter 6, section 6.5 onward)	
Ad server and website analytics	Real-time reporting, including metrics defined by the Interactive Advertising Bureau such as: • Ad display/Ad delivered • Ad impression • Ad click-through rate • Landing page arrivals • Number of designated campaign actions such as conducting a search, clicking through to a partner page, enrolling for an e-newsletter or ordering a brochure • Average time spent on the application
CRM database analysis	• Which of the visitor segments led to the highest conversion

15.3 Website and Newsletter Expert Audit and Evaluation

It is wise to use experts to undertake audit and evaluation of a website or a newsletter. It should be based on a set of accepted quality criteria and critical success factors, such as those that have been developed for Destination Web Watch (DWW) (www.destinationwebwatch.org).

The DWW website audit has been designed to provide DMOs with a quick and reliable tool to evaluate the quality of their websites. The DWW audit also enables a DMO to benchmark the performance of its site against other DMO sites.

The audit is non-sector and non-subject specific. It is an initial, sound assessment of the minimum standards a good website should meet.

The DWW audit assesses approximately 150 quality criteria and critical success factors for websites in key categories: accessibility and readability, identity and trust, customisation and interactivity, navigation, findability and search engine optimisation, and technical performance.

The criteria are based on sources including:

•   The guidelines and recommendations of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) that assures unrestricted access to the web for everyone, regardless of disability

•   Surveys of the factors which determine the apparent trustworthiness and usability of websites

•   Legal requirements in key travel and tourism markets

- The behaviour of search engine users

- The factors which may influence ranking in search engines

- The insights and experiences of people with practical, hands-on experience of making websites work

- Precise measurements of, for example, download speed and ranking in search engine result pages

For e-mail newsletters, similar audit and benchmarking services are available.

The in-depth strategy-based DWW website evaluation covers the qualities of the site as a destination marketing site, and judges the DMO's performance as an online marketer. The evaluation takes as its starting point what the DMO is trying to communicate and its overall marketing strategy.

The evaluation of online marketing activities is also undertaken in the context of knowledge of the political, financial and operational constraints within which the DMO is operating.

The content and functions of a website are evaluated in terms of the presence, quality and performance of information, contact, relationship, transaction and entertainment services.

15.4 Online Surveys

Online surveys, initiated by e-mail and on websites, are an excellent and immediate means of obtaining more information about customers. Like offline surveys, the information gained will depend on the sampling method:

- A survey form positioned on your own website will obviously be a survey of site users

- A survey form distributed via a link in an e-mail sent to contacts in the DMO's CRM database or part of it, can provide information about all customers irrespective of their previous or current contact channel with the DMO

- A form hosted by one or more third-party online media may enable the DMO to gain information about the market generally, or a segment of it

Online surveys are a tool to be jointly used by campaign managers (for customer data acquisition) and research managers (for longer-term and more structured research programmes). Usually they will be working closely together, and they will ensure that between them they do not 'spam' the customer with an excessive number of unrequested contacts.

15.4.1 Survey Types and Delivery Methods

Surveys can be:

- Yes/no opinion polls

- Single-question or one-page surveys

- More formal and extensive questionnaires

They may be delivered to the customer via:

- Voting button on the homepage of your site, or any selected pages

- Voting buttons embedded in e-newsletters

- Links from your site to separate webpages

- Pop-ups that appear on a designated page or pages on your site. These can be programmed:

  – To appear only after a pre-set period of time

  – Not to appear more than once in the same session

  – Not to appear if the site is re-visited

  – Not to appear if the survey has been attempted by the user

- Pop-unders that appear when the user agrees to participate in the survey, for completion on leaving the site

- Links from your e-newsletters to separate webpages

15.4.2 Survey Tools

15.4.2.1 Off-the-shelf 'Do-It-Yourself' Tools

There are cheap and easy do-it-yourself online survey tools available. You will need to find one that works in the language and culture of your target market. Examples are www.surveymonkey.com, www. constantcontact.com, and www.AreYouNet.com which offer French, Spanish, and English.

Look for a service that provides a comprehensive free trial of what is offered, and choose one that offers:

- Easy, intuitive survey compilation

- A library of questionnaire types that can be copied

- A comprehensive range of question options:

  – For questions and answers, such as single, multiple, rating scales, open-ended questions with and without prompts

  – Skipping of questions

- Alternative layouts

- Easy splitting of pages

- Branding of the questionnaire

- Fast real-time online testing, with quick return to the relevant compilation page

- Easy deployment of your survey with ready-made customer-friendly URLs, provision of code to create pop-ups, and e-mail notification and tracking

- Management:

  – Access to the management of the survey for a group of your collaborators. You may want to be able to set super-user control rights so that you have a main account and sub-accounts

  – No technical, hosting or maintenance jobs to do

A good 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs), prompt e-mail help and perhaps, at extra cost, telephone support, from the service provider.

- Results:

    – A variety of real-time online results formats with filtering and graphics

    – Easy downloading into Excel and SPSS or other popular survey analysis packages

- Low, flexible costs:

    – A monthly subscription (SurveyMonkey's is around € 20 for up to 1,000 respondents per month)[3]

    – No immediate loss of your data when you unsubscribe

    – Worldwide rights of use

The DMO's research department should have the necessary experience of practical social research including questionnaire design, and this needs to be combined with an e-marketer's knowledge of the use of the internet. It is equally important to have experience in translating the results into clear insights that can be actionable, if this kind of online tool is used.

Its chief benefit is that the operating cost is so low that it makes possible the ideal of continuous online research.

15.4.2.2 Go to a Bespoke Research Agency

All market research agencies now offer online techniques. You will almost certainly wish to use an agency if you need coordinated planning and delivery of research that uses a combination of methods – online, telephone, postal, personal interview, and group discussions.

Use an agency that specialises in tourism. Even where an online tool as described in the previous section is planned, but you do not have the capacity or skills to manage the survey, an agency with specialist tourism knowledge can manage the work on your behalf.

Such agencies exist in most markets. They can help you specify your requirements, then translate them into a research brief and manage a tender process for you. They may then go on to manage the project for you and analyse the results, if you wish.

15.4.2.3 Response Rates

A critical issue for any survey is the response rate – the proportion of those asked to participate that do so. A response rate of 35%+ is required to ensure that the respondents to online surveys reflect the profile of the users of the website in question. Ideally, the sample should be weighted to reflect known profile information for the users as a whole.

15.5 Offline User Surveys

Traditional market research techniques (telephone, postal, personal interview and group discussions) have substantial advantages over online surveys. These include:

- The potential to achieve higher response rates (and hence a more representative sample)

- More opportunity for follow-up surveys (some time after first contact with the user, to find out about the impact of e-marketing)

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3   US$ 19.95 (18-10-2007).

Offline methods are more appropriate for qualitative subjects and to gather information on more difficult subjects, such as spending, in order to determine ROI.

For multi-national research, it would be desirable to use an agency with branches or associate companies in at least the main source markets. For surveys of an international audience, telephone is likely to be the most cost-effective method.

Offline surveys need contact information – address or phone number. This is often not available from website users, unless the user has specifically provided it for the purpose, or in making a booking, or for the delivery of a brochure, and has given permission to be contacted for research or marketing purposes.

This is not the place to review the methods and practice of traditional market research, since there are many books and papers on the subject. Those who are interested should start with the Market Research Society of their own country.

15.6 Laboratory Testing and Online Experiments

Tracking user behaviour on an existing site can yield valuable insights.

15.6.1 Online Experiments

Online experiments can take several forms such as AB testing (also known as split path or champion-challenger testing) and multivariate or multi variable testing.

15.6.1.1 AB Testing

AB testing determines which is the better of two alternatives, A or B.

Visitors are randomly divided into two groups. Each group is shown a different version of a webpage to determine which version leads to higher conversion, average order value, application completion, or other target. For example, if you have to make a decision about which text would be best for a campaign, you can the send text A to 50% of your public and text B to the other 50%.

Then compare the differences in reactions of both groups. Comparing four different webpages would of course be an ABCD test.

AB testing is the easiest but often least valuable way to improve effectiveness. This is because it is seldom just one element that improves a page and thus improves measurable performance – for example the look-to-book ratio, where many page views and bookings are necessary to be able to derive conclusions.

15.6.1.2 Multivariate Testing

Multiple variable testing isolates the elements on a page and helps to find out what elements matter, and which combination is the strongest.

A multivariate test involves doing multiple AB tests on the same webpage. For the test, different alternatives of certain elements on a page, like an image or text link, are created. It is important to show each alternative independent from the others. If you show image A, it should be possible to combine this with text links A and B.

The output of these multiple AB tests is the cumulative conversion performance of each combination. Doing the tests separately would take much more time, and the advantage of multi variable testing over AB split testing is that you can nearly always find a recipe that outperforms the existing one. It is best to limit testing to three elements and not more than two alternatives, otherwise the number of combinations becomes too large, and deriving conclusive information is too difficult.

15.6.1.3 Advanced Testing and Automated Optimisation Using the Taguchi Method

The Taguchi testing method is seen as the most powerful and the most likely method to create a significant improvement.

"A Taguchi test cycle will regularly return 25% to 45% improvement"

"The Taguchi method was developed 50 years ago," says Matthew Roche, CEO of Offermatica. "It has been used with great success to optimise automobile and other product manufacturing. More recently, the Taguchi method was applied to direct mail and web applications.

The Taguchi method takes a number of elements on a page with one or more alternatives for each element and dictates exact combinations that will allow you to estimate the positive or negative effect of each element or alternative."

There are three aspects to this approach:

- First, by creating a 'best page' using the best performing alternatives for each element, significant improvement can be achieved

- Second, the length of the test cycle and the number of visitors required are surprisingly small

- And finally, since the 'recipes' are created using modular elements and alternatives, using special software solutions, Taguchi tests can be designed and executed in a surprisingly small amount of time

Taguchi tests have been run on e-mail, PPC ads and landing pages with great success. Where an A/B split test might create a 5% to 10% improvement, a Taguchi test cycle will regularly return 25% to 45% improvement and has been known to improve results by 100% or more. A test cycle includes:

- Two weeks of testing a large number of elements in just two alternatives to identify which elements increase the likelihood of converting a visitor to a customer

- A second test where the high-impact elements are tested with a greater number of alternatives

- A final test of the 'best recipe' against the original page

The test cycle takes from a couple of days to a month depending on traffic and variance and can be designed and run without significant quantitative marketing or statistics experience.

By courtesy of Matthew Roche, CEO, Offermatica.

15.7 Laboratory Testing

(This section should be read in conjunction with chapter 4, section 4.15.3, Usability Testing.)

Laboratory testing analyses the user-friendliness and functional effectiveness of websites.

The laboratory is usually a suite of rooms, including a control room from which the content of different websites can be sent to individual PCs located in another room or rooms.

Selected typical users are seated at separate PCs and each is asked to perform a series of tasks. An observer of each user records the user's decision-making processes as they navigate the site or sites in real time, noting their verbal comments and attitudes as well.

Afterwards, there will be a one-to-one in-depth interview, and later the researcher examines the log file to analyse the way in which they used the site.

By evaluating the variables which determine the efficiency of a particular website, including task difficulty, degree of accessibility of information and dead ends, the strengths and weaknesses of the website will be identified.

Respondents are recruited from consumer panels. A total of 30 customers should be sufficient to generate reliable and valid recommendations. In DWW, data is collected in four phases:

- Warm-up task

- The main experimental task

- Questionnaire

- Interview

The whole procedure of the four phases and the data collection usually takes about a month. The end result is a sound assessment of the user-friendliness and effectiveness of the website's overall navigation and functions.

Laboratory testing also has experimental aspects. Observation of customer behaviour in using a site may include the use of techniques such as eye tracking and heat maps (see an example in chapter 5, section 5.1.2).

A second objective of the laboratory test is an in-depth analysis of customers' own evaluations of websites, such as appearance, navigation and clarity of the site, and the format of the data on it.

Laboratory testing differs from online experiments because the test users can be accurately selected according to demographic and lifestyle profiles, whereas with online experiments only the IP address and the operating system of the user are known.

15.8 E-commerce Metrics

For DMOs that sell on their own site, or are sales partners with others, metrics and statistics are an essential tool in determining how many potential customers look, but decide not to book.

Combining metrics with the other methods outlined above, this will provide information to enable the destination to work towards reducing this figure.

It is important to be realistic: some of the best commercial websites have a look-to-book ratio of around 10%, whilst the better destination sites are at around 1%. A look-to-book ratio of around 0.1% is realistic in the early days for an information-based website that is just moving into online booking, though it is very unlikely to be commercially sustainable without improvement.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the site-booking process is best monitored using continuous metrics for:

*   The look-to-book ratio

*   The booking-commenced to booking-completed ratio (the abandonment ratio)

This should be followed by a combination of laboratory testing and online experiments.

Regular review and analysis of the commercial market leaders is generally a good guide for best practice.

Chapter 8, on e-commerce, has more guidance on this topic.

15.9 Other Methodologies

Academic and commercial research is continually developing and evaluating new measurement methodologies. There are too many to treat here, but there is an excellent (though not comprehensive) overview of methodologies at http://jthom.best.vwh.net/usability.

An example of emerging new methodologies is content analysis – the analysis of pictures and text in websites, but also in, for example, blogs, reviews and other user-generated content. It involves the collection of pictures and the identification and description of the actual objects in them. This is followed by identification of the arrangement (which objects are shown together, clustered) and finally the description of the surrounding context.

Text allows people to express themselves in any way they wish. But the analysis of text is particularly time consuming and subject to the biases of the reader. CATPAC, an intelligent programme that can read any text and summarize its main ideas, overcomes both these problems.

To analyse text in websites, a software package such as CATPAC is used to identify the most important words in the text and determine patterns of similarity based on the way they are used. CATPAC produces a frequency table and proximity matrix for the most commonly used words in the text.[4]

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4   Govers and Go, (2005).

Content analysis has particular relevance for background research for branding, understanding the way in which the destination is currently portrayed on the web. You will need the help of an expert in branding and content analysis to perform this research, to interpret the results correctly and identify discrepancies and coherency in the way the destination is projected.[5]

See also References and Bibliography.

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5   Suggested further reading: Schmidt, M. (n. d.), *Software Review: Catpac for Windows* (Online), available: http://www.mic. cbs.dk/marcus/GBPapers/25_Tourism/25_Software%20review%20Catpac.htm (5-10-2007)

Chapter 16

Web Analytics – Boost Your Online Impact with Data-driven Optimisation

ETC and UNWTO are grateful to June Li, Managing Director, ClickInsight, www.clickinsight.ca for contributing this chapter.

Key Messages

- Use web analytics to spot the weaknesses and hidden opportunities of your websites

- Invest not just in analytics tools but in people who can interpret the data so that you can act on it

- Focus on the trends and changes in the data rather than on the absolute numbers

- Aim to learn, experiment and progress gradually – from basic analysis, on to campaign reporting, and then towards integration of data sources so that customer behaviour is analysed holistically and acted on

- Show the door to anyone who talks about 'hits'

16.1 What Is Web Analytics?

What is the purpose of your website? How do you know if it is successful or not? Web analytics can help you find the answer, and do something about it.

According to the Web Analytics Association, "Web analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of internet data for the purposes of understanding and optimising web usage."[1]

16.1.1 What Is Internet Data?

Internet data includes website traffic data as well as data from usability studies, transactional database systems, customer entered data, online surveys and web server performance monitoring systems. Web analytics is not only about website traffic data, though web traffic data is indeed the backbone of a web analytics programme.

16.1.2 What Is Web Traffic Data?

As people download, register, buy online, or simply surf webpages, web traffic data is continuously logged in the background on web servers. More information about the different types of data collection follows in the next section.

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1   Web Analytics Association (WAA) (2007) (Online), available: http://www.webanalyticsassociation.org (24-8-2007).

16.1.3 What Are Web Analytic Software Tools?

There are over 50 vendors of web analytic software tools. The majority of these tools transform web traffic data into more useful information through segmenting, filtering, summarising and reporting on web traffic data. Other tools enable more advanced testing and analytics techniques, such as real-time multivariate testing.

Analysing web traffic data will help you find out 'what' is happening on your website. For the information to be useful, you have to find out 'why' your website visitors are behaving as they are. What is the root cause of visitors' behaviour? To uncover this, you need to listen to your customers, by supplementing web traffic data analysis with interviews, surveys and usability studies.

Therefore a successful web analytics programme should include these methods, in addition to web traffic data analysis.

No software tool is a silver bullet for success. Its value comes from the actions taken based on the insight that is derived from the output. Analysts (people, not tools) extract insight relevant to business goals. Effective processes use this insight to drive meaningful change by repeated steps and improvements.

16.2 Evaluating Outcomes and Uncovering Opportunities

When one first looks at web traffic data, it is very interesting to see how many visits there are, where people are coming from and what they are looking at.

Not long after, one asks, so what? This leads to another question – what is the purpose of the site? Why do we have a web presence? What are our goals?

Once goals are identified, you are on the proper path to wringing some useful insight from web traffic data:

- What are your goals in terms of website activity as a result of your acquisition campaigns such as SEO, online advertising, online editorials, offline advertising or paid search? Does web traffic data show the success of these campaigns?

- If the goal is to inform, does it appear that people are looking at the content you expect them to be interested in?

- If the goal is to retain past visitors, and you are using e-mail campaigns to keep the conversation going, does this appear to be working?

Which of these diagrams represents how visitors are transitioning from acquisition to conversion?

Figure 16.1 Visitor transition from acquisition to conversion[2]
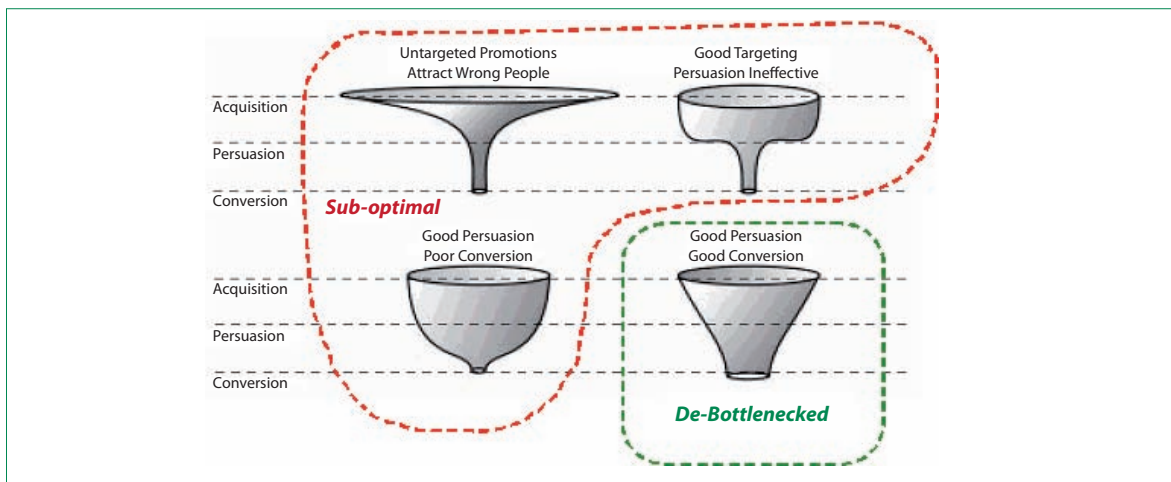
Once the question of the level of success has been answered, it is time to drill down and segment the data. Based on knowledge of the audience (visitors to the site), how might they differ? Geographically? Level of interest? Where are the differences, and what can we learn from them in order to improve our next campaign?

Look for patterns – understand what is happening – uncover new opportunities

An online travel agency, while analysing and segmenting their data based on geography, found that an unusual localised geography produced a high number of site visits, but a low number of purchases. The agency:

- Examined the transactional data from the packages that they did sell to this geography

- Asked themselves 'why is this happening?', and realised they had uncovered an untapped niche

- Produced additional travel pages aimed at this niche geography

The page visits then converted into purchases at a higher rate. The travel agency could not have predicted that this specific benefit was available, although they did expect to find insights like this in the data.

By courtesy of ClickInsight (www.clickinsight.ca).

Segmentation dimensions that may yield hidden opportunities are:

- Geography – see the example above

- Referring site – sites last visited before the visitor arrived at your site. Look at the page they came from to glean more about their interests

- Search engine keyword phrase – look at the page that visitors land on that leads to downstream activity that is of value. Is there an opportunity to create additional content of interest? Is there an opportunity to broaden your list of search engine keywords?

- Day and time – does valuable activity stem from weekday visitors, or weekend visitors?

- Technology – do visitors with higher resolution monitors and high speed connections look at different content? Are they more or less valuable to you? If more, how might the lower-technology visitors be disadvantaged by the way you have constructed your site?

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2   Sterne, J. (2002), *Web Metrics: Proven Methods for Measuring Website Success*, p. 216.

- Onsite search – what are visitors searching for once they are on the site? If they are using the site search engine frequently for content, when it ought to be easy to find via simple menu navigation, it might signal a usability problem. Searches that yield zero results should be analysed. Why are visitors searching for this on our site? Is this an untapped opportunity?

Further information

For more about how analytics can support brand building, acquisition, retention and customer service:

Peterson, T. (2004), *Web Analytics Demystified*, Celilo Group Media and CafePress, also available as an ebook (Online), available: www.webanalyticsdemystified.com (13-8-2007).

Sterne, J. (2002), *Web Metrics: Proven Methods for Measuring Website Success*, Wiley Publishing, Inc.

For more about analysing onsite search:

Inan, H. (2006), *Search Analytics: A Guide to Analyzing and Optimizing Website Search Engines*, available as an ebook, (Online), available: www.hurolinan.com/searchanalytics (13-8-2007).

For more information on Tourism Market Segmentation:

ETC/UNWTO, *Tourism Market Segmentation – Maximizing Marketing Effectiveness,* World Tourism Organization, Madrid, 2007

16.3 Web Analytics Is a Journey

Web analytics is a journey of ongoing learning, experimentation and optimisation, in a continuously changing terrain of shifting goals, markets and priorities. In such a dynamic environment, if you are just starting web analytics, learn how to advance one step at a time.

Do not buy the most expensive and complex tools on the market, or build a team of people quickly. Select your first projects for their ease of implementation and size of benefit.

The JupiterResearch web analytics maturity model is a useful framework. To successfully deploy web analytics and traverse the four stages of increasing maturity, three chasms must be spanned.

Figure 16.2 Three common barriers to analytics success[3]
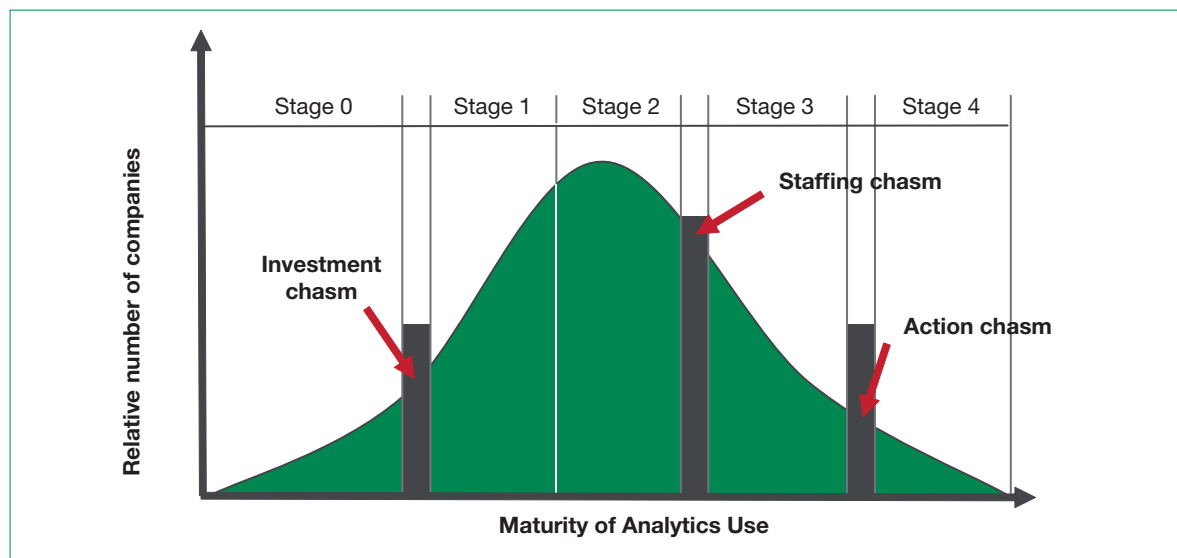
Source: JupiterResearch (8/05)

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3   Reprinted with permission of JupiterResearch, LLC, all rights reserved.

16.3.1 The' Investment Chasm'

The first chasm, which JupiterResearch called the 'investment chasm', is a barrier to getting started. Organisations do not want to spend much on a web analytics tool without certainty of benefits. Server log file software, such as AWStats, has been free for a while. Many organisations were strapped for technology resources, and the extra time and funds needed to support a log-file-analysis configuration was a barrier.

However, with the introduction of Google Analytics as a free service for small or Adwords customers, this investment chasm has largely been eliminated.

16.3.2 Stage 1 – Tracking Data and Reporting

Having invested in a web traffic tool, a DMO can review its traffic. If you are not selling online and your website is mainly a marketing site generating leads or inquiries, a product combination is a good start – like Google Analytics as a hosted page tagging tool, and the AWstats server side data collector to monitor search engine activity.[4]

In Stage 1, the basic analytics that should be looked at are:

- Where do visitors come from? Search engines, referring sites, direct access?

- What brought them to the site? Search keywords?

- What is the bounce rate? Do they arrive and stay, or do a significant number leave immediately?

- What are they doing on the site? Which content seems to interest them?

- If you have an internal onsite search, what cannot they find by browsing (see section 16.2 above)?

- What technology are your visitors using? Are there any implications for your site design?

Figure 16.3 Google Analytics is an example of a reporting dashboard commonly used by organisations at Stage 1

By courtesy of Google Analytics (June 2007).

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4   http://www.google.com/analytics/ and http://awstats.sourceforge.net/ (27-8-2007).

At this stage, the person doing the web analytics is probably a marketing or communications analyst, carrying out the work part time. The individual should report monthly on the key metrics, and also try to find opportunities for improvement, based on apparent unsatisfied needs.

16.3.3 Stage 2 – Analysing Campaign Results

In Stage 2, the organisation has decided to analyse the results of its web related campaigns and compare results against initial goals. Such campaigns might include organic search engine optimisation, paid search, online ads on third-party sites, e-mail campaigns, or offline promotion of an online landing page.

Results measurement is focused on a 'conversion event'. This term comes from the sales world, where the goal is to convert a lead to a sale. For DMOs that do not sell, the conversion event is any call to action that adds value (calls to action are covered in chapter 6, section 6.9.1).

Once the conversion events or calls to action are defined, select a few KPIs that allow progress to be tracked. KPIs which track the health of a campaign are typically ratios and percentages, and trended over time. For example:

* Natural (or 'organic') search – total number of visits, or specifics such as number of downloaded brochures

* E-mail campaigns – simple metrics such as number of e-mails opened, or specifics such as required CRM data successfully captured (see chapter 6, section 6.2.4)

* Paid search – total paid search visits, or specific action(s) carried out by the customer (see chapter 6, section 6.5)

Organisations at this stage often become dissatisfied with just reporting results. They want to find out what led to the results, and they want to drill down through the data and find opportunities to improve further. Questions they ask include:

* Which visitor segments who were exposed to the paid search campaign led to the highest conversion (for example, the highest number of e-mail inquiries)?

* In an e-mail campaign, which sections of the e-mail generated the most benefit, once the visitor landed on the website?

* Does natural search conversion vary with the day of the week?

* Do there appear to be visitor types who have browsing technology problems that we can fix?

* If there was a multi-channel campaign, such as print plus e-mail, which campaign appears to be the most beneficial?

For campaigns such as online ads, paid search and e-mail campaigns, if there is not a one-to-one allocation of landing page and link, server-side logs may be of limited use. Page tagging may be necessary to obtain campaign information in sufficiently rich detail for optimisation analysis.

At this point, analysts may find that the analysis, segmentation and drill-down capabilities of the lower priced tools cause analysis to be time consuming and painful. They may be offloading data into secondary spreadsheets for subsequent filtering and manipulation. They may find they have plenty of data but it is not giving them insights.

The organisation might therefore upgrade to a product with broader abilities for easier filtering and segmentation, custom reports and automated alerts.

16.3.4 The 'Staffing Chasm'

Lack of staff may also limit successful analytics. JupiterResearch found that organisations that have at least one full-time equivalent in staff get more benefit from their web analytics data. If analysts are stretched, with too many duties, they churn out reports but do not provide insightful analysis.

Figure 16.4 Relationship of staffing to use of analytics tools (%)[5]
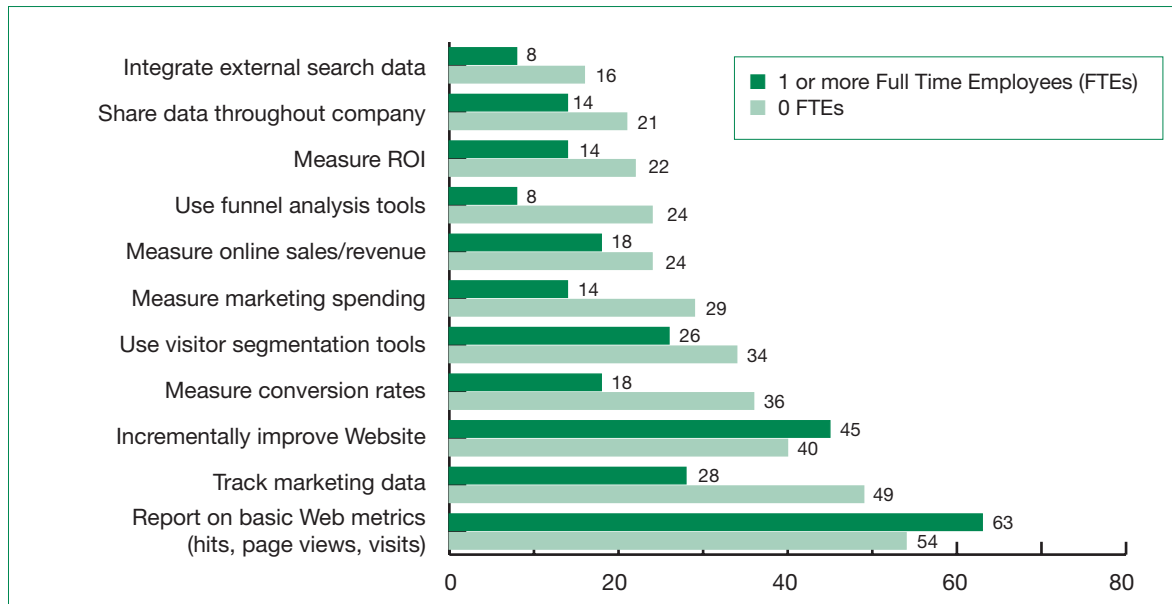
Question: Which of the following analytics components or tools do you use most frequently? (Please select up to three.) Which of the following best describes the most important current uses for your Web analytics product? (Please select up to three.)

Source: JupiterResearch Executive Survey (9/04), n = 51 (respondents from companies with 0 FTEs allocated to Web analytics, US only), n = 180 (respondents from companies with 1 or more FTEs allocated to Web analytics, US only)

16.3.5 Stage 3 – Effective Tactical Performance Reporting and Diagnostics

Having bridged the staffing chasm and provided the analysts with improved analysis tools, the organisation is able to carry on uncovering opportunities for improvement.

The organisation is no longer drowning in data. Analysts have the time to understand business needs for analysis. They now produce focused reports that show performance against pre-set goals. Their analyses highlight opportunities for improvement and are distributed throughout the organisation:

• Directors receive reports of three to five KPIs that show how online activities support overall goals

• General managers may receive more marketing-specific metrics

• Campaign teams see their own specific campaign metrics in addition to the higher level metrics

16.3.6 The 'Action Chasm'

Analysis at stage 3 is primarily backward looking. Yet another chasm now becomes evident. JupiterResearch calls this the 'Action Chasm'. Once an organisation bridges the action chasm, analytics is no longer diagnostic. Results from analytics drive future action and strategic change.

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5   Reprinted with permission of JupiterResearch, LLC, all rights reserved.

16.3.7 Stage 4 – Strategic and Closed Loop Optimisation

Organisations that have arrived at stage 4 use analytics data to drive decisions. Testing of communications options is common, either through split testing or multivariate testing. Organisations put the necessary resources into preparing multiple sets of content to be simultaneously tested, and roll out the winner promptly, system-wide. At this point, the organisation probably has teams of web analysts, with one central expert group.

Data that is collected from customer surveys, online surveys, competitive activity and backend transactional systems (e-commerce and CRM databases) are integrated to give a complete picture of visitor activity.

Organisations in stage 4 are beginning to look at behavioural targeting, serving different content to visitors based on parameters such as where in the world they are located, working hours versus evening, or weekend versus weekday. For example, someone looking at a hotel website during business hours might be a business traveller. Someone looking for information at the weekend or later in the evening might be planning a holiday.

Whatever route is decided, the organisation must evaluate the conversion outcome. Vendors that support testing are growing. Google's Website Optimizer is free. Some others are Optimost, Offermatica, Conversion Multiplier and Vertster.[6]

16.4 The Technology of Web Traffic Data Collection

We need to understand how data is collected because it affects the type, availability and accuracy of data that is available for analysis.

Different methods of data collection on the same website can result in different numbers, and confusion can result.

Another source of confusion is that definitions have not yet been standardised, although the Web Analytics Association is working with organisations such as the internet Advertising Bureau to standardise the language used.

16.4.1 Data Storage Options

Web traffic data can be stored by the DMO itself within its firewall, or be hosted by a third party. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages.

Storing data within the DMO maximises control of data privacy. Access is unrestricted and you own your data for as long as you store it. Data storage requirements, however, can grow quickly. Often, the data is collected on a separate server, and then moved to another server that is used to manipulate the data for reports and analysis. The servers that store and process data have to be managed, and this of course requires technical resources. The analytics software is typically purchased on a server license basis.

Having the data hosted elsewhere reduces the additional investment in server hardware and technical resource. However, there may be firewall issues with hosted services. External hosting may raise privacy concerns. And hosted service fees are ongoing, and typically geared to the amount of data collected. The data may only be stored for a limited time period, requiring the site owner to download and store data if they are likely to need it after the hosted storage period expires.

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6   http://services.google.com/websiteoptimizer/;   http://www.optimost.com/;   http://www.offermatica.com/;   http://www.conversionmultiplier.com/ and http://www.vertster.com/ (27-8-2007).

Hosted services will only support the page tagging mode of data collection (section 16.4.2 onward, below). Storing one's own data allows for both server log and page tag log files to be stored.

16.4.2 Types of Data Collection

Log files are the basis for web traffic data collection, the raw records of website visitor activity. Log files are logs of activity, and for web traffic data collection are created primarily in two ways.

16.4.2.1 Server-Side Data Collection

Server log files are created whenever the server that is delivering the website to visitors presents, or serves, a file to create a webpage.

- If a webpage has images such as pictures or logos, the server builds the page by loading each of these images into the proper location on the page

- Each image file generates a log. Therefore, one webpage can generate many log file records. These records are called hits and commonly reported in hit counters. Hits are comforting, big numbers, but absolutely meaningless for marketing analysis purposes because they count all activity and include both human and non-human activity. If you want your hits to rise, just add lots of invisible spacer images to your webpage!

- Server log files are triggered by people wanting to look at a webpage, or by a search engine robot or other type of automated crawler

16.4.2.2 Browser-Side Data Collection

Page tag log files are created by JavaScript embedded in the source code on a webpage.

- Page tag logs are therefore only generated when a browser loads a webpage and when the visitor's computer does not have JavaScript disabled

- Page tag logs typically measure only human traffic. Search engine or other automated crawler activity typically does not trigger the page tag JavaScript

The number of log files can differ. Simple page tagging measures the loading of the page in a browser. Therefore, a page that has 10 images will generate just one page tag log file. Simultaneously, the loading of this page can generate 11 server log files (10 image files plus the page html file itself).

There are other types of data collection, such as network packet sniffing, for specialised data analysis needs. Packet sniffers also create log files of their own. However, we will concentrate on the two primary types of log files – server log files and page tag files.

16.4.2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Server and Page Tag Data Collection

Because the methods of server and page tag data collection are fundamentally different, neither can be overwhelmingly said to be the best. What is best depends on the situation. The benefits of server log files may offset the disadvantages of using page tags, and vice versa. Which solution is the best depends on which advantages are most meaningful for a particular website.

Table 16.1 Advantages and disadvantages of using server and page tag logs

Server logs	Page tag logs
Advantages	
• Robot and search engine spider activity can be tracked • Completion of downloaded documents, pictures and videos can be accurately tracked • Historical data can be re-processed if necessary	• Client side activity, such as Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX) applications, Flash and form clicks, can be tracked • Counts activity at proxy servers and caches • Can process data in near to real time • Can track activity across multiple web servers and domains • Can track exit links (where a visitor exits the site) • Typically needs less backend technology resource to manage
Disadvantages	
• Will not detect activity on proxies or from cached pages. Traffic from these sources will be undercounted • Difficult to track visits across multiple servers or domains (micro-sites) • May over-count traffic. Significant effort is needed to maintain robot activity filtering • Cannot track client-side events such as AJAX, Flash and JavaScript • Cannot track exit links (where a visitor exits the site) • Reports are typically not available in near to real time, unless storage and data processing investment is significant • Typically, more in-house technology maintenance expertise and resources are required to manage log files and storage, compared to hosted page tagging services	• Does not track search engine spider activity • Does not accurately indicate download completion. Code is triggered when the download starts • Incorrect tagging can result in loss of data. Historical data 'not collected' cannot be recovered or re-analysed • Page tagging resource requirement can be significant on start-up, depending on web analytics objectives

16.4.2.4 Hybrid Data Collection

To attain the best of both server logs and page tags, some organisations opt for hybrid data collection. There are several possible ways to achieve this:

• Host both log files and page tags in-house, using one vendor that provides hybrid software. Examples are WebTrends, Unica NetInsight, and Clicktracks JDC/Pro[7] combination

• Use a combination of in-house and hosted services:

– Use a third-party external service provider for page tag log hosting. Use JavaScript to tag all documents or client-side events. Examples of third-party service providers are all of the three above plus Google Analytics, Omniture, Coremetrics, IndexTools,[8] and many more

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7   http://www.webtrends.com/; http://netinsight.unica.com/ and http://www.clicktracks.com/ (27-8-2007).

8   http://www.google.com/analytics/; http://www.omniture.com/; http://www.coremetrics.com/ and http://www.indextools.com/ (27-8-2007).

– Run a low-cost server log analysis package in-house (such as AW Stats or Google Urchin)[9] to measure robot and spider activity and track document downloads

Selecting the appropriate means of data collection depends on the DMO's goals. The goals determine which metrics are important, and hence which data needs to be tracked so that these metrics can be calculated.

16.4.2.5 Be Clear about the Terms Used

Confusion arises because server-side web analytics software is commonly referred to simply as 'log file analysis' or 'software'.

But page tags also generate logs, and the application needed to process page tag data is also 'software'.

When someone talks about log file analysis or software, ask them if they mean:

• Log files created by server activity or page tags?

• Software to analyse server logs or page tag logs, or a hybrid?

16.4.2.6 Definitions of Common Reporting Elements

In 2006, the Web Analytics Association completed standard definitions[10] for the following:

• Page view – the number of times a page (typically the page seen in a browser) was viewed:

  – Most web analytics tools allow the client to specify what types of files or requests qualify as a 'page'

  – Certain technologies including (but not limited to) Flash, AJAX, media files, downloads, documents and PDFs do not follow the typical page paradigm but may be definable as pages in specific tools

• Visit or session – an interaction, by an individual, with a website consisting of one or more requests for a unit of content (for example a page view):

  – If an individual has not taken another action on the site within a specified time period (typically 30 minutes), the visit (or session) will terminate. Different tool providers use different methodologies to track sessions. Ask your provider how this metric is computed

  – A visit typically consists of one or more page views. However, in the case of sites where interaction consists solely of file downloads, streaming media, Flash or other HTML content, a request for this content may or may not be defined as a page in a specific web analytics programme but could still be viewed as a valid request as part of a visit

• Unique visitor – the number of inferred individual people (filtered for spiders and robots), within a designated reporting timeframe, with activity consisting of one or more visits to a site. Each individual is counted only once for the reporting period. Factors to consider regarding unique visitor figures are:

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9   http://awstats.sourceforge.net/ and http://www.google.com/support/urchin45/bin/answer.py?answer=28710 (27-8-2007).

10 Web Analytics Association (2007), *Web Analytics Definitions – Approved August 16, 2007* (PDF document) (Online), available: http://www.webanalyticsassociation.org/attachments/committees/5/WAA-Standards-Analytics-Definitions-Volume-I-20070816.pdf (27-8-2007).

- Cookies (files that are stored by the website's server on the website visitor's computer) are used to enable the server to count the individual computers to which it delivers pages. Some organisations have privacy policies that prohibit the use of cookies. The cookie does not contain any personal information, but typically contains a random code whose sole purpose is to let the web server know that the user is a returning visitor with a code. The web server determines who the user is are by matching the cookie information with other data stored behind their firewall

- If cookies are not used, all visits are new and unique. In such a situation, unique visitors and visits are the same count

- Even when cookies are used, visitors can set their browser to refuse to accept them. Or they can be manually deleted, or be automatically disabled or deleted, most commonly through anti-spyware programmes

- Thus, to handle the potential for inaccuracy, it is wise to measure trends rather than absolute data

- The most accurate way of measuring unique visitors is to have an authenticated user login. However, this practice can deter visits unless there is genuine extra value to the visitor in logging in

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Further information

The technology of web traffic data collection:

Web Analytics Association (Online), available: www.webanalyticsassociation.org (13-8-2007).

Peterson, E. (2005), *Website Measurement Hacks*, O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Creation and presentation of KPIs:

Eckerson, W. (2006), *Performance Dashboards: Measuring, Monitoring and Managing Your Business,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Chapter 11 titled 'How to Create Effective Metrics' has an excellent 12-point framework.

Few, S. (2006), *Information Dashboard Design: The Effective Visual Communication of Data,* O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Stephen Few's website, for articles and examples (Online), available: www.perceptualedge.com (13-8-2007).

Peterson, E. (2006), *The Big Book of Key Performance Indicators* (E-book) (Online), available: www.webanalyticsdemystified.com (13-8-2007).

16.5 Understand the Website's Visitors as People

We have gone into significant depth about tools and technology because the variations in terminology cause confusion, and the technology can have a significant impact on analysis.

However, analytics is definitely not just about the tools.

People – the website visitors – need to be understood, so that the observed behaviour is analysed in an appropriate context, and the appropriate visitor goals are analysed. To place analysis in the appropriate context, the creation of personas (chapter 2, section 2.3.3) is recommended.

16.6 Invest in Skilled People

Web analytics tools are marketed for their features and capabilities. Many tools will say that they have numerous standard reports, but these are simply excellent starting points. Skilled staff is essential to analyse, and then present, the data.

To get to the insight that is needed to drive change, analysts must slice and dice the data, think about what they see, and interpret the results for the organisation to answer the important question, 'So what?'

It is a misconception that the numbers will speak for themselves and spur people to action. Action will not happen unless the information is communicated in a concise, compelling and persuasive manner.

Further information

Four web analytics courses are available 100% online from the Web Analytics Association via the University of British Columbia (Online), available: http://tech.ubc.ca/webanalytics (13-8-2007).

There is also a Squidoo list of courses, online and classroom, around the world. www.squidoo.com/webanalyticscourses (13-8-2007).

After a web analyst has completed training, a useful book to start up the analyst's practice is Kaushik, A. (2007), *Web Analytics: An Hour a Day*, Sybex, companion site (Online), available: www.webanalyticshour.com (13-8-2007). This book provides an analytics roadmap in bite-size pieces.

For more seasoned web analysts there is a course about setting up and running online split tests offered by MarketingExperiments (Online), available: www.marketingexperiments.com (13-8-2007).

16.7 How to Select a Web Analytics Tool

Too often, organisations buy or contract for a web analytics tool, and expend much effort coding the site or installing the software and perhaps buying new server hardware. Then they discover they cannot easily extract usable information that will help them improve their operations. Exasperated, they find themselves drowning in data but thirsty for information.

Selecting a website analytics tool is complex. Many different tools exist, supplied by an estimated 50 or more vendors. Problems that arise after installation are usually not the fault of the tool but due to an incomplete requirements analysis during the selection process.

So before considering which tool to pick, make sure you are clear about why, where, when and how the tool will be used. Be ready to manage the inevitable trade-offs amongst features, so that you select the tool that allows you to measure what is important to the DMO and works with its business, ICT infrastructure and constraints.

16.7.1 Define the Needs

Resist looking at the features offered by the various tools until you have defined the needs.

Factors that affect selection are grouped below in six categories. Use these questions as triggers to start developing your own evaluation criteria. Not all the factors apply equally to all projects, and you might think of more that are specific to your situation.

16.7.1.1 Business Needs

You will already have identified the high level business measurement goals and received executive commitment. Now, exactly what is it you need to measure and improve:

*   Content usage, search engine marketing, e-mail conversions, or online buying?

*   Tracking of forms or downloads?

*   Real-time access to detailed data? Or periodic, summarised reports?

*   Who do you need to send reports to, and how often? What will they do with the reports?

*   Are there partners, distributors, advertisers, or affiliates who need information?

*   How important is accuracy?

*   What are your future needs?

16.7.1.2 Resources

*   What is the total budget?

*   How many staff are planned to manage analysis of the data from a business point of view, and to circulate it on a timely basis?

*   If you are short of in-house business analysis resources, look for tools that are easier to use, intuitive, require minimal start-up training, have strong vendor start-up support, or a pool of vendor or third-party consulting services for ongoing analysis

*

16.7.1.3 Website Technical Architecture

*   Is the website static or are the pages dynamically generated by a database or other content management system?

*   Are there a lot of Flash-only pages?

*   Does the DMO policy allow the sites to serve cookies?

*   Will the corporate firewall block or allow hosted server scripts?

16.7.1.4 Availability of Internal ICT Support

Some tools require more technical start-up or maintenance support than others. Understand the difference in support requirements and capabilities for installed software and hosted applications. Both options require some technical support for installation and troubleshooting. Additional hardware, firewall modifications, webpage redesign or CMS changes may be required.

The availability and capability of internal support may influence which tool will deliver the best outcome for the project.

16.7.1.5 Level of Vendor Support Required

• How much support will you need during evaluation, start-up and maintenance?

• Is there a downloadable evaluation version or hosted demo available for a trial period?

• Is start-up or maintenance support part of the package, or an extra?

• Is ongoing or more advanced training available? Is training available online at any time, or periodically in person?

16.7.1.6 Linkages to other Information Data Sources

Does the DMO have to integrate web analytics data with other data sources to generate meaningful recommendations? Such sources may be your agency's search engine and ad campaign tools, and your own CMS, CRM, e-mail campaign management tools, and e-commerce system. This is an advanced requirement but one that needs careful consideration if it is a significant key to successful measurement.

16.7.2 Assess Web Analytics Tools Based on Defined Needs

Although consolidation amongst web analytics tool vendors continues, there are still plenty of options. Having identified the organisational needs, you should assess the tools in five basic ways:

• Type of application – is it server-side installed software, a hosted page-tagging application, or a hybrid?

• Reporting capability – availability of reports, ease of customisation, ability to automate report distribution, ease of data integration with other sources

• Scalability – for future expansion and growth, in the foreseeable future, perhaps two years

• Total cost – in addition to initial software purchase cost or hosted analytics set-up, include installation, training, support, maintenance and hardware. If the DMO seeks a proof of concept trial, be sure to include this cost

• Vendor track record – for reliability, support and service. If the project has complex or unusual needs, ask to speak to referees who have similar implementations

Some trade-offs will be necessary. But having taken the time to think through what will drive success in your web analytics project, you are well positioned to make informed trade-offs and select the best solution for your organisation.

Further information

Vendor guides are available from:

E-Consultancy (2006), *Web Analytics Buyer's Guide 2006* (Online), available: www.e-consultancy.com/publications/web-analytics-buyers-guide (13-8-2007).

MarketingProfs (2006), *Web Analytics Vendor Selector,* Online, Interactive Application for members (Online), available: www.marketingprofs.com (13-8-2007).

The analytics landscape is continually changing and it is a challenge to remain up to date. Client side technologies such as AJAX, mobile messaging, blogs, RSS and virtual worlds are new interactive capabilities for which measurement processes are still evolving. To keep in touch with developments, consider:

ClickZ, *Articles from Marketing Analytics Experts* (Online), available: www.clickz.com/showPage. html?page=experts/crm (13-8-2007).

Marketing Sherpa, Case Studies – subscribe to Best-of-Weekly summaries, sent by enewsletter. Detailed, quantitative case studies are open access (free) for seven days after initial posting (Online), available: www. marketingsherpa.com (13-8-2007).

Marketing Experiments, *Quantitative Case Studies, Examples of Tests and Training for Online Testing* (Online), available: www.marketingexperiments.com (13-8-2007).

Yahoo Tech Groups, *The Web Analytics Forum Discussion*. This is a very active forum. Use the Yahoo search feature to sort through posts (Online), available: http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/webanalytics (13-8-2007).

Web Analytics Association, Membership provides access to member-only resources. Membership pays for itself quickly in discounts at conferences (Online), available: www.webanalyticsassociation.org (13-8-2008).

Web Analytics Wednesday, *Networking for Analysts Around the World* (Online), available: www. webanalyticsdemystified.com/Wednesday (13-8-2007).

Emetrics Summit conferences (Online), available: www.metrics.org (13-8-2007).

Blogs:

Kaushik, A., *Occam's Razor* (Online), available: www.kaushik.net/avinash (13-8-2007).

Steif, R. (Lunametrics) (Online), available: http://lunametrics.com/blog (13-8-2007).

Pols, A., Dechamps Otamendi R. et al. (OX2) (Online), available: http://webanalytics.wordpress.com (13-8-2007).

Hamel, S., *Immeria – An immersion in Web Analytics* (Online), available: http://blog.immeria.net (13-8-2007).

Mason, N. (Applied Insights) (Online), available: www.applied-insights.co.uk/news/category/blog (13-8-2007).

Peterson, E. and Phillips, J., *Web Analytics Demystified* (Online), available: http://blog.webanalyticsdemystified. com/weblog (13-8-2007).

Li, J., *Share the Genie's Power* (Online), available: http://blog.clickinsight.ca (13-8-2007).

See also References and Bibliography.

How to Manage Your Domain Names – Choosing and Maintaining Domains that Support a Wide Range of E-marketing Activities

Key Messages

- Almost all above-the-line campaigns using TV, press, posters and print feature the domain name as a primary response channel

- Domains have a major brand-building function but also serve vital tactical requirements

- The selection of the domain is therefore a major strategic issue that needs a long-term view that avoids short-term compromises

17.1 What Constitutes a Domain Name?

A domain name is the address of a computer on the internet – text that corresponds to the unique numeric IP (internet protocol) address. It can be used for either a website, or for e-mail, or both.

A domain name such as www.spain.info is made up of the Top Level Domain (TLD) .info which is the part of the name that follows the final dot, and the sub-domain spain.

17.2 Choosing a Top Level Domain

The TLD can be either:

- generic, including: '.com', '.ne't, '.org', '.gov', '.travel', '.info', '.mobi'

or

- a country domain, such as: '.sk', '.at', '.au', '.us', etc.

Many destinations that market themselves globally have chosen a generic TLD such as .com rather than a country domain, but this does not prevent the use of a country TLD in each market as well as the generic TLD.

Beware of the .tv suffix, which belongs to the Pacific island of Tuvalu, though many television-related businesses use it despite this.

(For the '.mobi' TLD see Mobile marketing, chapter 9, section 9.9.2)

17.2.1 The '.travel' TLD

The '.travel' TLD is exclusively for the travel industry. It was not introduced until 2005, and by then the majority of destinations, as well as travel businesses, were already committed to using other TLDs, mainly .com and country-suffixes. So what makes it significant?

- It is distinguished from other TLDs in requiring authentication by independent third parties, including industry associations

- Most important for destinations, '.travel' has restrictions that limit registrants to names that they use or have rights to. National tourism offices, and convention and visitor bureaux, are two of the 20 defined categories. This does not prevent competition among destinations for domains – for example, www.holland.travel is owned by the Visitor and Convention Bureau in Holland, Michigan, United States of America

At present, destinations have bought their relevant '.travel' domain mainly to stop anyone else doing so, but appear to be re-directing it to an established domain and not using it for active marketing.

The '.travel' domain is a good option for new regional and trans-national destination marketing initiatives.

If public awareness of '.travel' becomes such that it is intuitive for customers to try it when guessing a domain, it may develop into a first-rank choice for destinations that are currently committed to another domain. Destinations may feel that they would prefer to follow rather than lead, so watch for its possible adoption by major global travel sites.

The administrators of '.travel' are Tralliance. They have their TLD information at www.travel.travel, and run a customer-facing portal at www.search.travel.

17.3 Choosing a Sub-domain

For destinations, the sub-domain can be the country name, region name or city name, or if that cannot be obtained, another word combined with it.

> **VisitBritain and Visitbritain.com**
>
> In 1997, the British Tourist Authority was unable to obtain the name Britain and instead launched VisitBritain.com.
>
> Later it bought from other owners the domains of further VisitBritain TLDs, and changed the organization's trading name to be synonymous with the domain name.

Key considerations in choosing a TLD and sub-domain combination are:

- It can be worth investing a large amount of money to get the right domain

- The name must be memorable, and it is best if it is intuitive to spell

- If it is likely to be miss-spelt, then the most common miss-spellings should be bought as well

- Avoid numbers, hyphens and underscores, but if it is possible that the customer might hyphenate the word, buy the hyphenated version too

- Try to guess what other people might guess it to be, and buy these.

- Buy the key language versions of your destination name

- Buy as many as possible of the domain names that are related to your defined keywords (see chapter 5, SEO, section 5.2.3); and/or buy names that combine keywords with your domain name

- Buy as many of the generic TLD versions as you can

- Buy all the country TLD versions that you might ever want to market in, or possibly use .com globally

- If your domain name and your DMO name are the same, it can add to the memorability of both

- Always involve your legal advisor right at the start

Many of these tips are also useful guidance in choosing shortcodes and keywords for mobile marketing.

ETC-UNWTO is grateful to Christian Maurer, Tourism Research Centre, IMC University of Applied Sciences, Krems, Austria, for inputs to the above.

17.4 Looking Up Domain Names

'Whois' is the term that refers to the information that is required whenever anyone registers a domain registrant's administrative and technical setting-up details.

For most domains, this information is readily accessible. For Whois information about country code (two-letter) TLDs, try www.Uwhois.com, and for others www.internic.net.

17.5 Campaign Landing Page URLs

A campaign landing page URL needs to reconcile two potentially conflicting aims:

- If the campaign involves offline media, a memorable URL and dedicated landing page will be required which can be advertised, and then be used to optimise tracking and conversion. This difficulty will not arise if the whole campaign is online, because the click-through URL need not be immediately visible to the user

- The DMO's marketing and branding manager should insist that the campaign spending should help to build up the core domain name awareness, rather than diminish it

This needs a consistent policy that can be maintained over time. The options include:

- Use a sub-directory such as www.destinationdomain.com/specialoffer

- Use a third-level domain such as www.specialoffer.destinationdomain.com

- Register a special domain such as www.destinationdomainoffers.com. This is perhaps the least preferred option as it may dilute the main domain awareness

17.6 Domain Name Management

If you have protected the main domain and any related domains as fully as possible, you may have 25, 50 or 100's of domains to manage. There are online domain management services such as www.safenames.net that will reduce the administration costs, ensure that domains do not lapse, and help you if you operate in several countries. A management service can provide:

- Facilities for the DMO to manage all the domains through one portal, including all the technical setting up and any necessary changes over time

- Central billing to the DMO

- Information about every country's registration requirements

- Legal presence or company formation in countries that require this, where the DMO cannot easily comply otherwise

17.7 If Someone Sets Up a Conflicting Domain

Ask your legal advisor to consider the options if someone sets up a domain that is designed to be confused with your own, or perhaps to damage it:

- You may be confronted with a site where someone wants to express their opinion of the destination or the DMO. If it is fair criticism then there will be no scope for action except to fix the underlying problem or to explain your position

- If it is libellous, misleading, an attempt at passing themselves off as being your DMO, or in bad faith, your legal advisor will decide on the best action

If there is a cyber squatter with a domain that is not being used but that you would rather have under your own control, and it is decided to try to buy them off:

- Do not over-estimate the value of the domain to them – what they hold is just one of about 20 million registered domains

- If you do buy the domain from a squatter, obtain a legally robust agreement that the squatter will not buy other domains in the future that might also affect the DMO's interests

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Further information

A user-friendly guide to domains: http://www.igoldrush.com (25-8-2007).

See also References and Bibliography.

Chapter 18

Market Trends

Key Messages

- Globally, there are over 1.2 billion internet users

- There has been substantial growth in all world regions, particularly in Asia and the Pacific with an increase from 100 million to 400 million users over seven years

- Continuing rapid growth, predominantly by wireless, may be anticipated in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in India and China, and in the more mature internet markets of the Republic of Korea and Japan

- In all major markets, web search is now the most used source of information for travel, more important than personal recommendation

- Online social networking is having a major impact: user-generated content (UGC) influences over US$10 billion a year in online travel sales with consumers finding UGC more credible than professional reviews or information from travel companies. Travel blogging and tagging is enlarging the global community of users

- In e-commerce, the United States of America remains the world leader. Europe is three to four years behind the United States of America, and Asia and the Pacific about the same again

- In Europe, there is potential for substantial growth in e-commerce in Germany in the short term, and in Southern and Eastern European countries in the longer term

- South America, a relatively slow adopter of the internet, is likely to see substantial growth over the next few years, with Brazil as the main driver. E-commerce may take considerably longer to develop

18.1 Internet and Broadband Penetration, overall and by main Markets

Figure 18.1 Number of internet users worldwide (in millions)[1]

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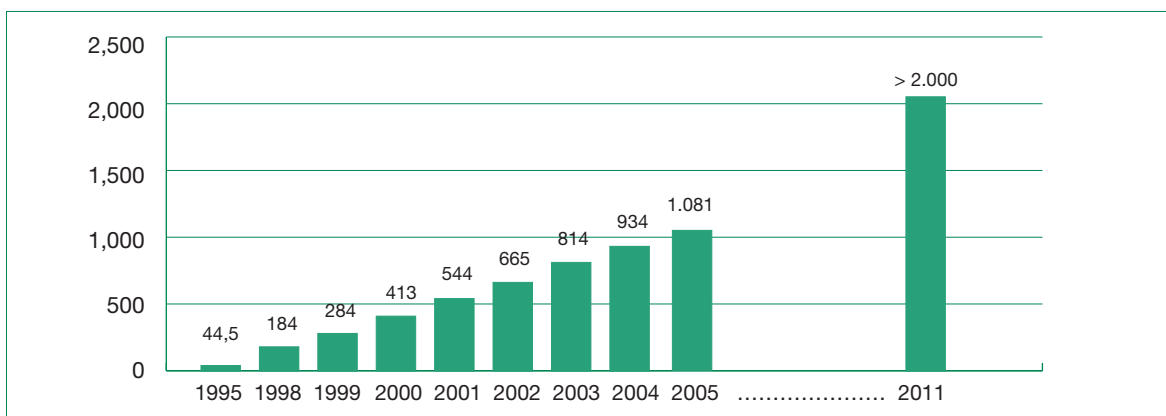
1   eTForecasts (2002 and 2006) http://www.etforecasts.com and Computer Industry Almanac (CIA) (2004) http://www.c-i-a.com (reported by ClickZ Stats). Both CIA and eTForecasts feature the same data (28-8-2007).

The current estimate of the global number of internet users stands at over 1.2 billion.[2] This represents a 225% increase compared with 2000. These 1.2 billion users account for nearly 18% of the worldwide population.

Figure 18.2 Number of internet users worldwide by region, June 2007 (in millions)[3]
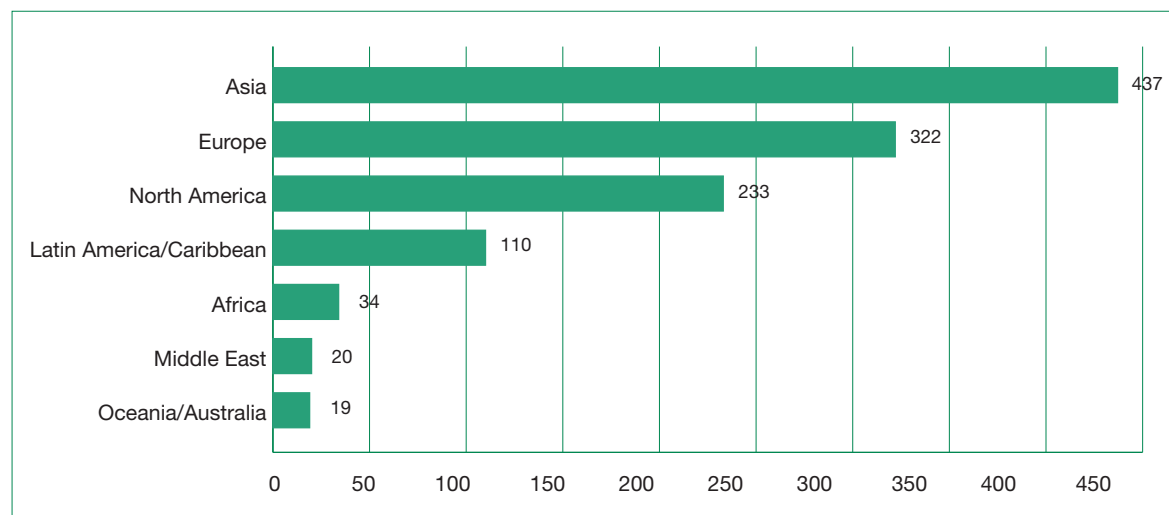
There has been substantial growth in all world regions, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, which, over seven years, has moved from third position (with about 100 million users), to top position with more than 400 million. In terms of level of internet usage however, North America stays in the lead with almost 70% of the population having access to the internet. Asia and the Pacific lag behind with only 12% of its entire population online.

Figure 18.3 Internet penetration by world region, June 2007 (%)[4]
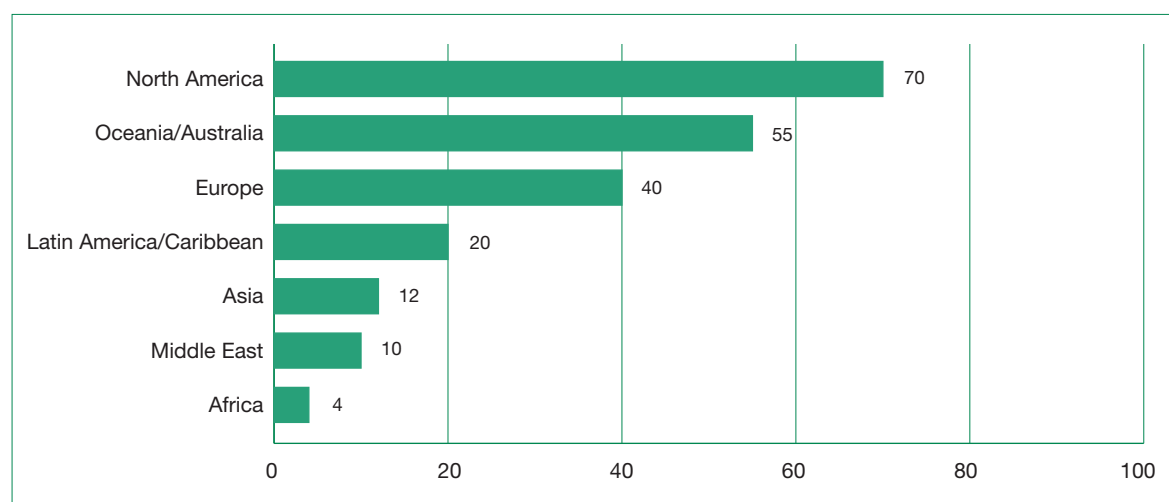
The top 15 individual country markets for internet use in June 2007, shown in the next figure, reflect the overall dominance of Asia and the Pacific. Since 2002, Indonesia and Mexico have come into the top 15, and India has moved up the list.

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2   Internet World Stats (2007) (Online), available: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm (29-10-2007).

3   Internet World Stats (2007).

4   Internet World Stats (2007).

Figure 18.4 Number of internet users, June 2007 (in millions)[5]
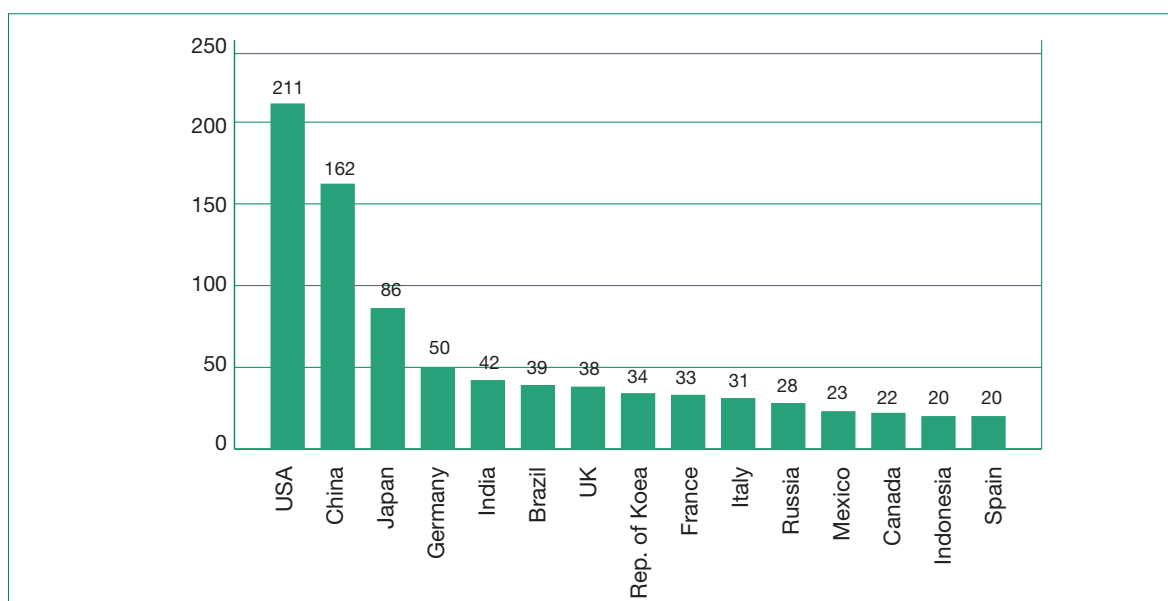
Figure 18.5 Countries with the highest internet penetration rate, June 2007 (%)[6]
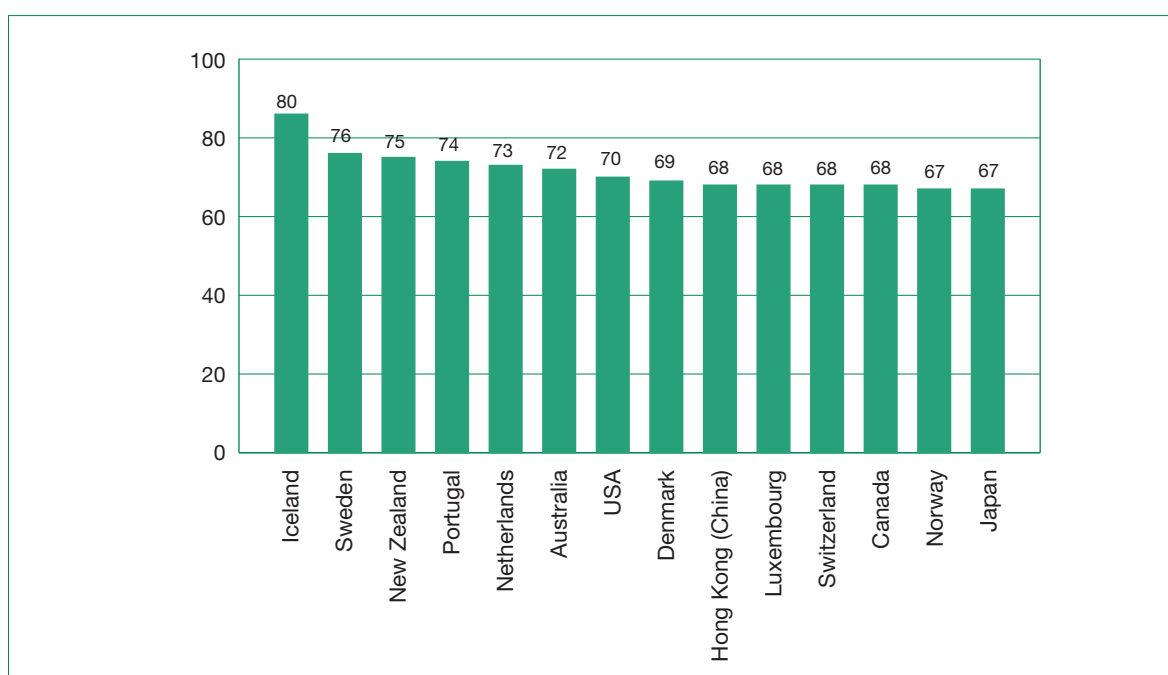
A key issue for maximising the opportunities of e-marketing is the availability of broadband. At the end of 2006, there were more than 250 million broadband households worldwide, representing about 11% of total households worldwide.[7] Forecasts suggest that by 2011, there will be about 500 million broadband households worldwide, with more than 100 million in North America alone.[8]

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5   Internet World Stats (2007) (Online), available: http://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm (20-8-2007).

6   Internet World Stats (2007) (Online), available: http://www.internetworldstats.com/top25.htm (20-8-2007).

7   eMarketer (2007) http://www.emarketer.com (28-8-2007).

8   TEAM Tourism Consulting's Prediction (2007), http://www.team-tourism.com (based on *eMarketer* data) (28-8-2007).

18.2 The Relative Influence of Online and Traditional Media on Consumer Choice

The following figure shows the sources used to support travel decisions in 2005 in 18 major world source markets.

Figure 18.6 Sources used to support travel decision, shown by source markets[9] (%)
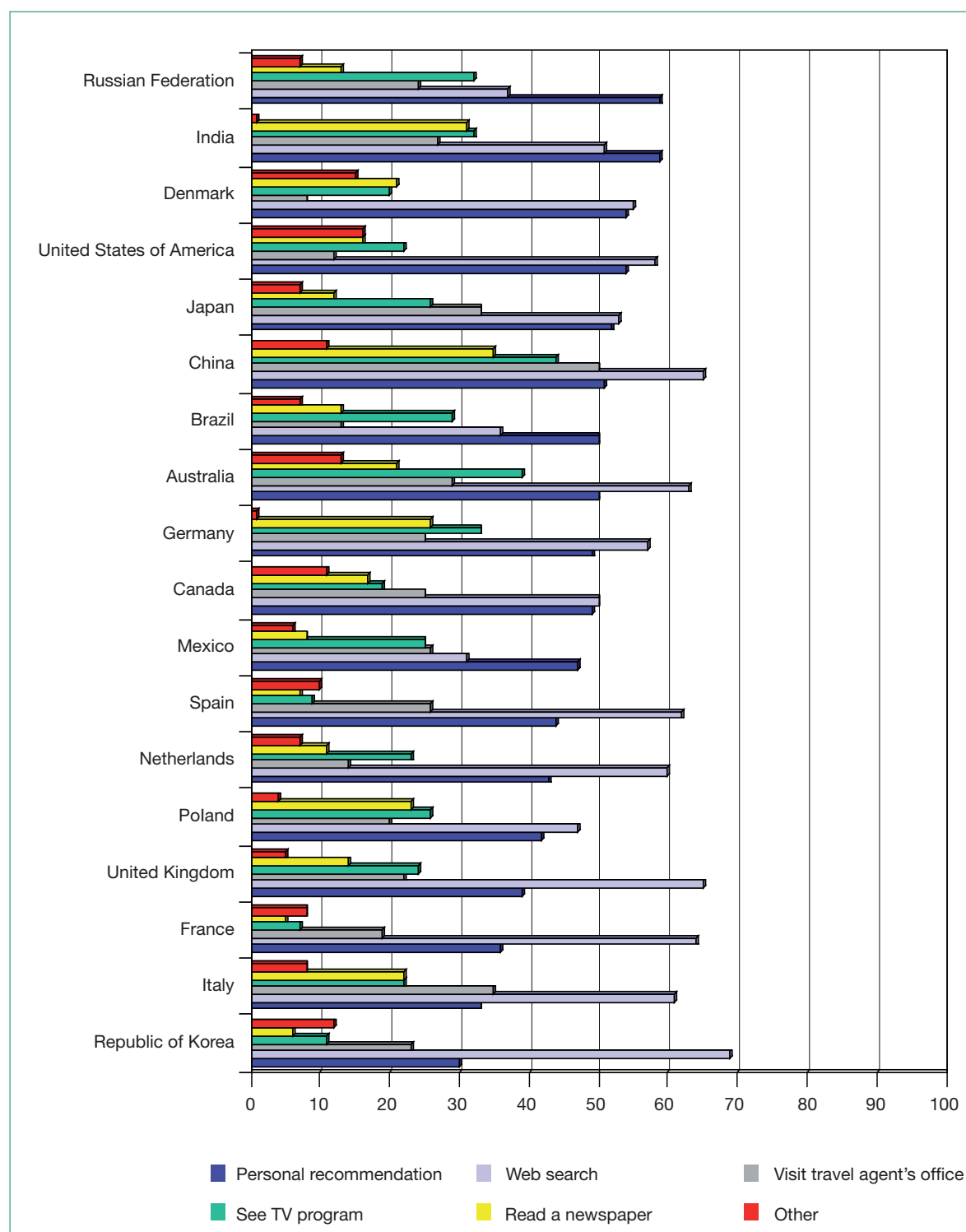
9   Global Market Insite (GMI) (2005), *Online Travel Sales & Marketing Divides Global Travellers on Usefulness & Quality* (22-5-2007) (Online), available: http://www.gmi-mr.com/gmipoll/release.php?p=20050622 (20-8-2007).

The survey showed that, in all but four of the markets (Russian Federation, Brazil, India and Mexico – all less mature markets), web search is now more important than personal recommendation, a remarkable situation.

In Europe, the internet is the most important information source, although the travel trade is still very important in terms of travel sales.

Figure 18.7 European outbound travel by information sources, 2006 (%) [10]
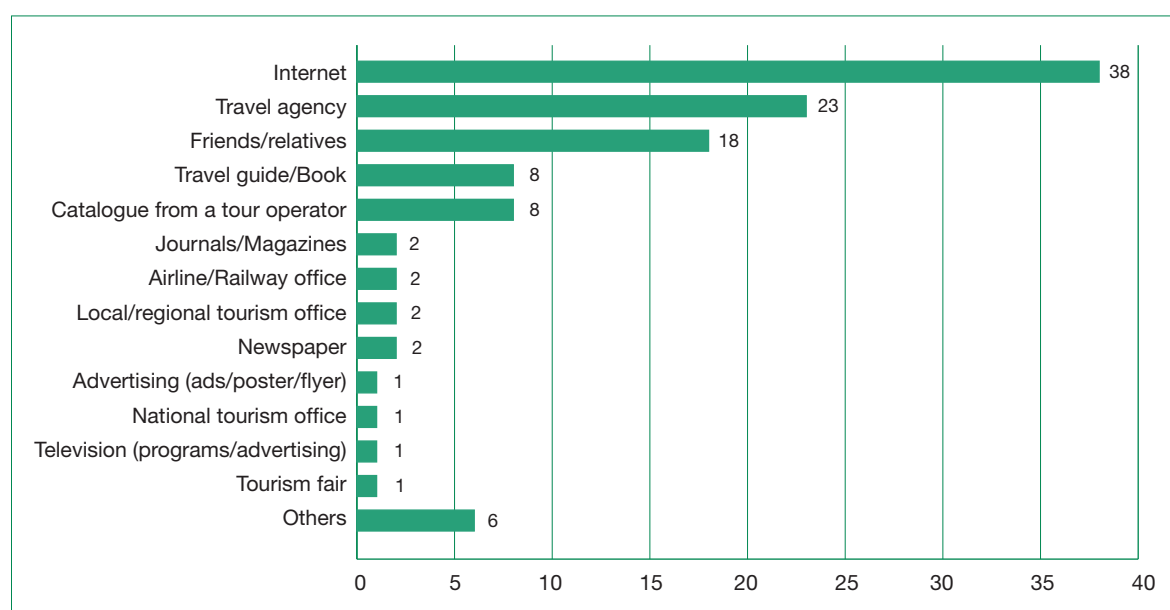
User-generated content (UGC) has also recently emerged as a critical source of travel information. Travellers are increasingly turning to their peers as a valued research source and they encourage travel marketers to use this resource as well. UGC influences over US$ 10 billion a year in online travel with consumers finding it more credible than they do professional reviews or information from travel companies. A majority of consumers also support a brand managed by people who themselves respond to consumer generated reviews.[11]

A brandweek.com article confirms this trend, saying that websites where consumers can read travel journals and reviews of hotels, cruise ships and attractions written by fellow travellers are rapidly gaining popularity.[12]

18.3 Relative Importance of Different Search Engines

We have seen the importance of internet search engines for accessing information for travel planning and booking. The next Figure demonstrates that in the United States of America, Google is by far the most important search engine in this respect.

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10   Multiple answers.

IPK (2006), *International, European Travel Monitor* (material provided by IPK by e-mail on 10-9-2007), available: http://www.ipkinternational.com (28-8-2007).

11   Compete (2007), *Compete Consumer Generated Content Study Reveals Opportunities for Travel Marketers* (30-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.competeinc.com/news_events/pressReleases/182/ (20-8-2007).

12   Brandweek.com (2007), *Strategy: Travelers Go and Tell, Tourism Sites Show and Sell* (23-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.brandweek.com/bw/magazine/current/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003574747 (20-8-2007).

Figure 18.8 Top 10 upstream search engines visited by US internet users before visiting travel websites, June 2007 (as a % of total visits)[13]
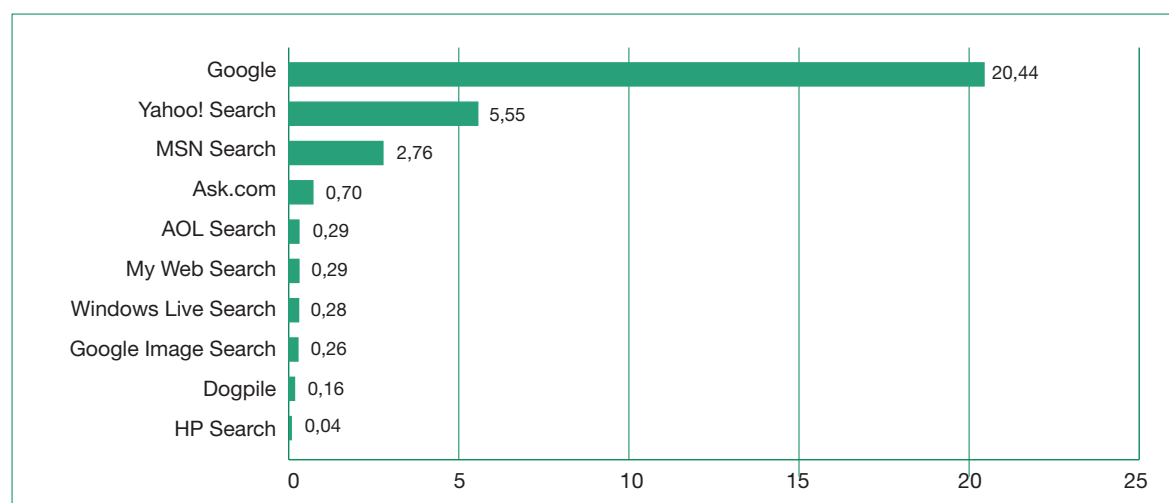
This may not be the same in every country, though the usage figures there are not specific to travel search, and should be applied with caution in our context.

Table 18.1 Search engine in the Top 15 Global Web Properties, total unique visitors (15+), month of February 2007 (in million)

Microsoft sites	507
Google sites	503
Yahoo! sites	459
Ask network	109
Lycos, Incorporated.	87

The next Figure demonstrates that there is a high demand for destination information among US internet users. For 50% it is a key feature that they require from a website.

Figure 18.9 Selected travel website features that make US adult internet users want to return to the sites, January 2007 (% of respondents)[14]

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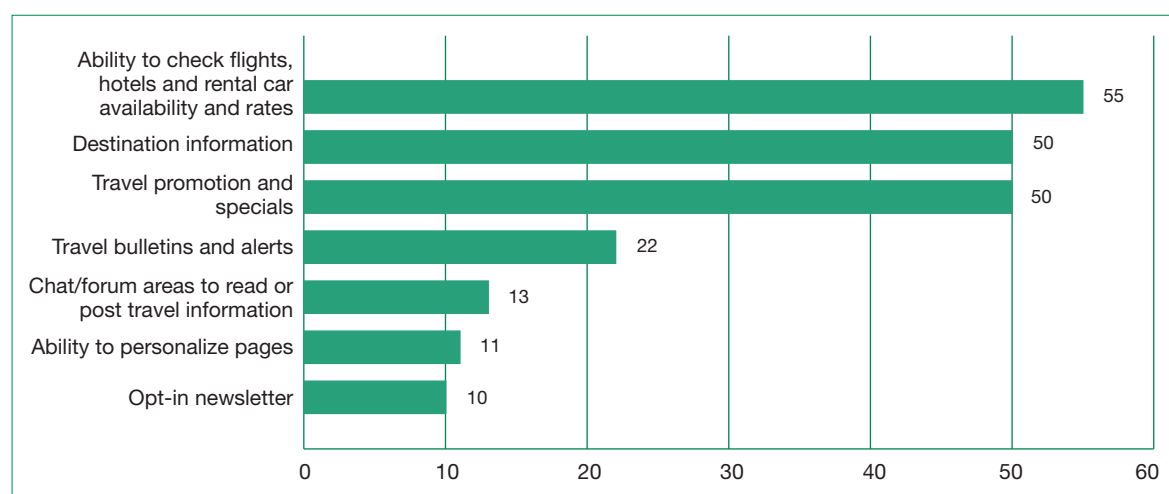
13   Hitwise (2007) (data provided by e-mail on 18-7-2007), http://www.hitwise.com (28-8-2007).

14   Burst Media (2007), Burst Media Finds Growing Use of Internet as Primary Travel Planning Resource (17-2-2007) (Online), available: http://www.burstmedia.com/about/news_display.asp?id=9 (20-8-2007).

18. 4 Social Networking and User-generated Content (UGC) – Including Blogs

One in four adult internet users in the United States of America regularly visit popular social networking sites.[15] UGC sites are also seeing huge gains in usage in other countries worldwide. For example, in the United Kingdom MySpace was up by 467% to 5.2 million unique visitors in July 2006 compared with the previous year, while Piczo rose by 393%, to 4 million.[16]

The figure below suggests that the use of UGC and social networking applications is higher among younger generations.

Figure 18.10 UGC and social networking application usage by mobile phone subscribers, October 2006 (%)[17]

Legend:
- Among those aged 13-17 years old
- Among those aged 18-24 years old
- Among all mobile suscribers
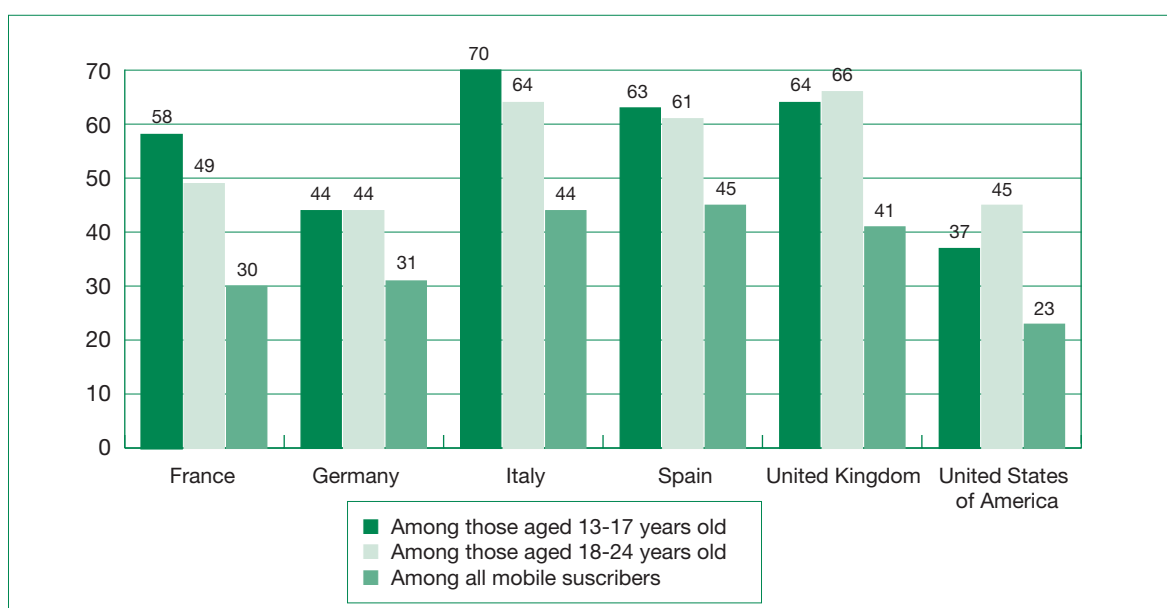
18.5 E-commerce in Tourism

In overall internet usage, the United States of America is now well behind both Europe and Asia and the Pacific. But it is still the leading world region for online commerce in travel. This would appear to be primarily a function of the maturity of the market. The United States of America was the early adopter of the internet and substantial online sales took about five years to develop. Europe is following three to four years behind, and Asia and the Pacific about the same again:

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15   iProspect (2007), *Search Engine Marketing Firm iProspec. Study Reveals 1 in 3 Internet Users Report Purchase Decisions Influenced by Social Networking Sites* (10-4-2007) (Online), available: http://www.iprospect.com/media/press2007_04_10.htm (20-8-2007).

16   comScore Media Metrix (2006), *Leading User-Generated Content Sites See Exponential Growth in UK Visitors During the Past Year* (11-9-2006) (Online), available: http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=993 (20-8-2007).

17   Includes: Instant Messaging (IM), chat, dating, photo messaging, video messaging, created own ringtone, watched video sent by friend.

M:Metrics, Inc., Copyright © 2006, M:Metrics, Inc. (2006) http://www.mmetrics.com (28-8-2007).

The link to the original source is no longer 'live' http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release_html_b1?release_id=194899 – it said on it Members of the press may cite research data or a portion of text provided that each is sourced to M:Metrics, for example, "Source: M:Metrics, Inc." or "According to M:Metrics, . . .". Copies of graphs, data tables or slides must include the following copyright notice affixed to all material: "Copyright © 2006, M:Metrics, Inc."

Figure 18.11   Online travel expenditure (leisure/unmanaged business travel) by regions in 2006 (in US$ billion)[18]
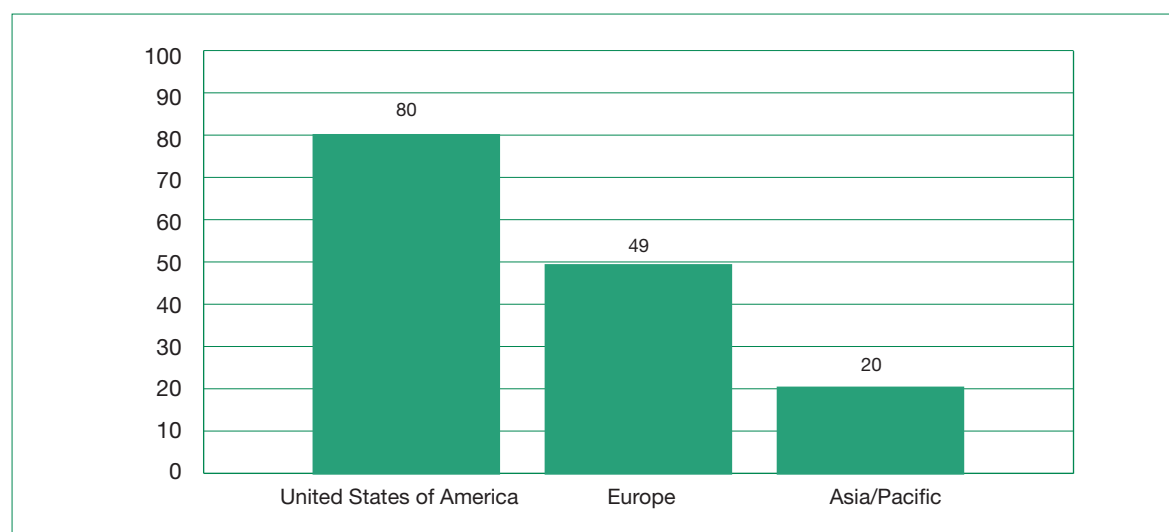
The same factor may be seen operating within Europe, as shown in the next Figure, which looks at the changing market share of European online travel sales by country. It shows that in 2004 in the early years of online commerce the United Kingdom, as the European early adopter of the internet, was also the market leader in online sales. Other markets, particularly Germany, caught up in the two years to 2006. The only other market to have lost share is France, which matured fast as a result of its long pre-internet experience with Minitel.

Figure 18.12   Market share of online leisure/unmanaged business travel sales in Europe, by market, 2004 and 2006 (%)[19]
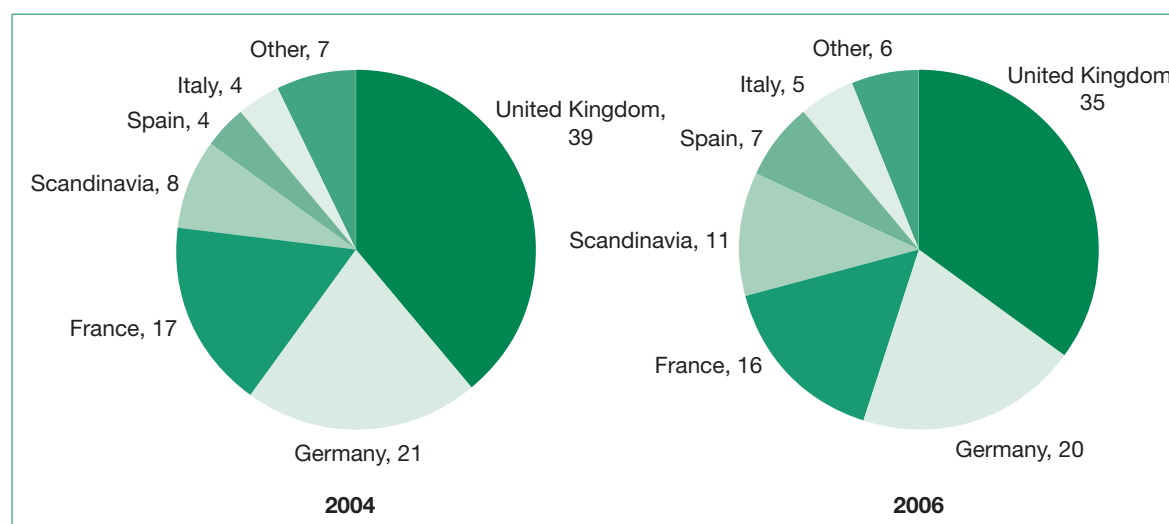
Note: Total includes the original 15 EU countries plus Switzerland and Norway.

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18   PhoCusWright Inc. (2007) (material provided by PhoCusWright by e-mail on 23-7-2007) http://www.phocuswright.com (28-8-2007).

19   PhoCusWright (2007), *European Online Travel Overview* (Third Edition) (material provided by PhoCusWright by e-mail on 23-7-2007), http://www.phocuswright.com (28-8-2007).

In 2006, 47% of all travel (leisure, unmanaged business and corporate managed) by US residents was booked online as opposed to offline. By 2008, the figure is predicted to reach 59%.[20] In the United States of America, online travel buyers are increasingly going direct to supplier sites, rather than using online travel agencies. In 2003, 53% of US online sales were conducted at online travel supplier sites as opposed to online travel agency sites; by 2005, the share had increased to 57%.[21] The reason is that supplier sites have improved markedly and often now include 'lowest price guarantees', in a belated attempt to claw business back from the online intermediaries who dominated the market in the early years.

In Europe, the situation varies markedly between the different countries, with the travel agency share varying from over two-thirds in Spain to a little over a third in France.

Figure 18.13   Online travel sales in Western Europe and the United States of America by distribution channel, 2006 (% of total)[22]
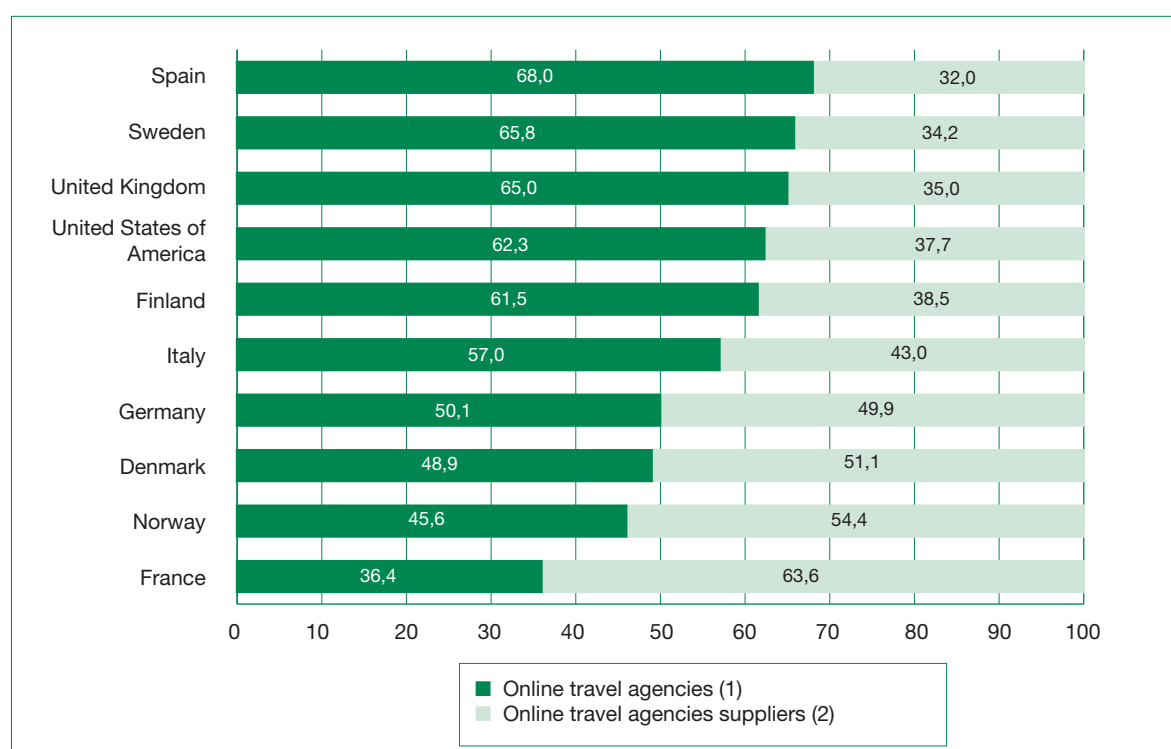
Note: (1) Online travel direct suppliers include travel accommodation, transportation, car rental, tourist attractions suppliers' online sales.

(2) Online travel intermediaries include OTAs and traditional travel retailers online platforms.

18.6 Market Development Forecasts

From the analysis in the previous sections, it is clear that we may anticipate continuing rapid growth in the use of the internet globally, as a result of continuing growth in the numbers of users, particularly using wireless devices. In the more mature markets, there will be increased intensity of use by consumers, with more purchasing online. However, in the most mature market, the United States of America, it is evident that the speed of growth in online travel sales is now starting to reduce.

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20 PhoCusWright (2007), *U.S. Online Travel Overview Seventh Edition* (material provided by PhoCusWright by e-mail on 23-7-2007) http://www.phocuswright.com (28-8-2007).

21 comScore Networks Inc. (2006), *comScore Study Finds 35-Percent Increase in Number of Consumers Visiting Travel Sites* (6-6-2006) (Online), available: http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=890 (20-8-2007).

22 Euromonitor International (2006) (material provided by Euromonitor by e-mail on 27-7-2007), http://www.euromonitor.com (28-8-2007).

Figure 18.14 Forecasts of number of internet users in key markets (in millions)[23]
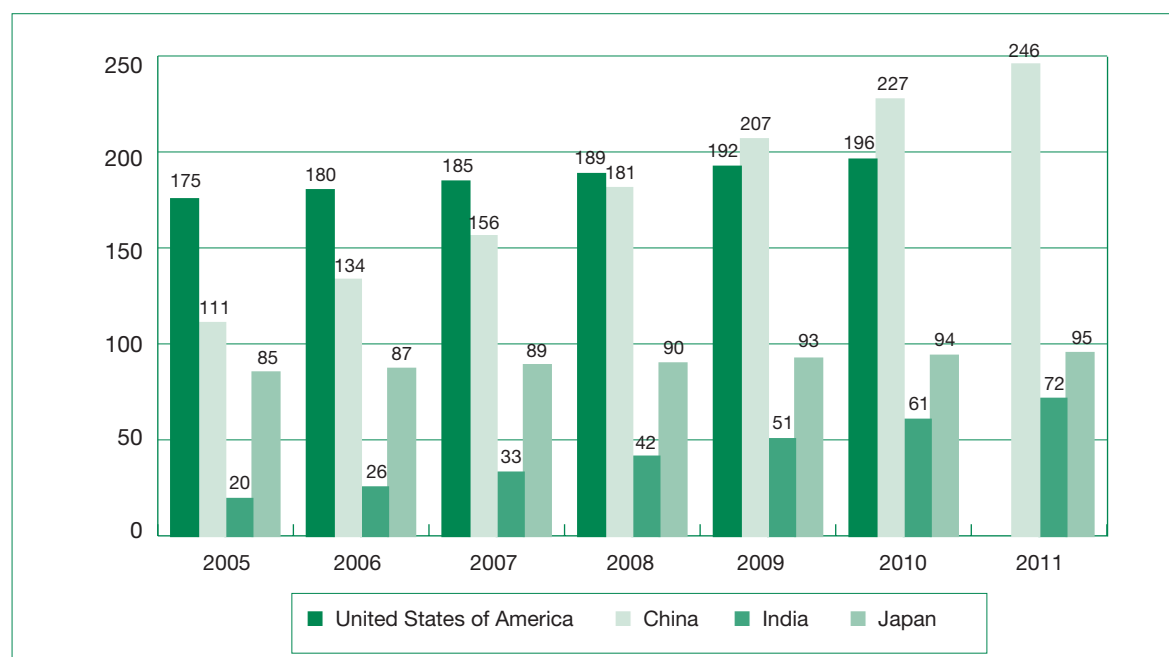
Continuing rapid growth may be anticipated in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in India and China and the more mature internet markets of the Republic of Korea and Japan. In Europe, there is potential for substantial growth in online commerce in Germany in the short term, and in Southern and Eastern European countries in the longer term.

South America, a relatively slow adopter of the internet, is likely to see substantial growth over the next few years, with the emerging major economy of Brazil as the main driver. Online commerce may take considerably longer to develop on a substantial scale.

Demographic studies of travellers in the United States of America, Europe, and the Asia and the Pacific regions all show the emergence of an older generation of travellers, baby boomers (aged 45 to 60), who are healthy, adventurous and affluent, as well as internet savvy.

Thinking globally over the next five to 10 years, India and China are undoubtedly the prime emerging markets, in terms of both the number and value of travellers overall, and the extent of online travel planning and booking activity.

See also References and Bibliography.

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23   eMarketer (2006 for US data and 2007 for the other markets) http://www.emarketer.com (28-8-2007).

Glossary and Abbreviations

Term	Definition
301 Redirect	Search engine friendly method for webpage redirection that should preserve the search engine rankings for that particular page.
404 Not found message	Page set up to tell a website user that what was requested from the website server could not be found. It can include a clickable site map to assist the user.
3G network	3rd-generation mobile network with many times the capacity of older channels.
AB testing	Research method to decide which is the better of two alternatives. Also known as split path or champion-challenger testing.
Advergaming	Using video games to promote organisations, products and services.
Aggregator sites	Sites that gather data from a number of other sites and allow comparisons.
Algorithm	The formula or set of rules by which a search engine calculates the ranking of the results of a search.
Alt (alternative)text	Text applied to images for use by assistive technology, such as braille displays or screen readers, and by search engines to interpret the meaning of objects.
Anchor text	Text that comprises a clickable link. For best usability and SEO and to meet accessibility guidelines, it should be identical or very similar to the title of the page that it goes to.
Application programming interface (API)	A set of commands, functions, and protocols which programmers can use when building software.
Application service provider (ASP)	Technology supplier that hosts the software and makes it available for use via the web.
Asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL)	Type of DSL where the upstream and downstream bandwidth are assigned different amounts of bandwidth.
Baby boomers	Older generation of travellers (aged 45 to 60), who are healthy, adventurous and affluent, as well as internet savvy.
Blueprinting	Use of a master page or website to form the basis of a number of subsidiary sites that can be maintained in line with the master.
Call to action (CTA)	On websites or in interactive television, an offer of service that is designed to trigger response by the customer.
Cascading style sheets (CSS)	A definition language, the part of the markup that instructs a browser how to display a web document. CSS defines style, such as fonts, colours, and spacing.
Content	Data and editorial that provides information about the destination, whatever format it is held in (for example text, audio, images, video, and Flash animations).
Content management system (CMS)	Enables a publisher to create, import, store and organise content, and to publish it to digital platforms.

Term	Definition
Contextual navigation	Links on individual pages that go to related pages. These are often embedded within text, or are lists of 'See also' pages, within the site or on an external site ('referral links').
Continuing professional development (CPD)	Ongoing training and development.
Convergence	When multiple media products and services come together to form one product and service with the advantages of all of them.
Cookie	File stored by the website's server on the website visitor's computer, enabling the server to count the number of individual computers to which it delivers pages.
Cost-per-action (CPA)	(Or Cost-per-acquisition), a fee paid by a website advertiser.
Cost-per-click (CPC)	Fee paid by the advertiser each time a user clicks on their advertisement, for example text, a banner, or button.
Cost-per-thousand (CPM)	A basis for advertisement tariffs.
Cross-selling	Offering additional items that are related or can be integrated with the item being sold.
Customer journey	A cycle of thoughts, decisions, and actions by the visitor before, during and after their visit.
Customer relationship management (CRM)	The total of all the continuous business processes that allow marketers to record, understand and meet the needs of customers.
Customer to customer (C2C)	Direct communication between customers, as on social networking websites and blogs.
Dedicated advertiser location (DAL)	In digital TV, an interactive application with rich content using video, audio and interactive functionalities, reached by the viewer by pressing the red button of the remote control. A Mini-DAL is a smaller version, often of one or two pages with text, graphics and audio.
Description	Content of the HTML meta tag Description (<meta name = "description" content =" your text">).
Destination management organisation (DMO)	Body responsible for the management, including marketing, of a tourism destination.
Destination management system (DMS)	A suite of business systems tailored for DMOs.
Digital multimedia broadcasting (DMB)	A digital radio transmission system for sending multimedia (radio, TV, and datacasting) to mobile devices such as mobile phones.
Digital Subscriber Line (DSL)	Technology bringing high-bandwidth information to homes and small businesses over ordinary copper telephone lines.
Digital video broadcasting DVB	A suite of internationally accepted open standards for digital television. DVB systems distribute data by a variety of approaches, including by satellite (DVB-S, DVB-S2 and DVB-SH; DVB-SMATV for distribution via SMATV); cable (DVB-C); terrestrial television (DVB-T) and terrestrial television for handhelds (DVB-H); and via microwave using DTT (DVB-MT), the MMDS (DVB-MC), and/or MVDS standards (DVB-MS).
Digital video broadcasting – handled (DVB-H)	Open standard for digital television for handhelds.
Directories	Categorised lists of websites maintained by human editors, and used by search engines and search directories.

Term	Definition
Domain name	Text corresponding to the unique numeric Internet Protocol (IP) address of a computer on the internet.
E-business	A business that works mainly or wholly online including tasks such as purchasing, deliveries from suppliers, recruitment, partnership management, marketing, sales, finance, customer service, and management information and control.
E-commerce	Buying and selling over the internet.
EU	European Union
European Travel Commission (ETC)	An association of 38 national tourism organisations in Europe.
Extensible hypertext markup language (XHTML)	Form of computer language that conforms to XML.
Extensible markup language (XML)	Computer language that allows structured data to be shared.
e-zines	Websites or e-mail newsletters that aim to be online magazines.
Flash	Programme with which animations can be created.
Frequently asked questions (FAQs)	A list of questions and answers available on a website, compiled in the light of the site owner's experience of the most frequent key questions asked.
Fully independent tour (FIT)	Tour programme assembled by a travel organisation for a client that is not part of a group tour.
Frames construction	HTML frames divide content in independent windows or subwindows. These multiple views offer designers a way to keep certain information visible, while other views are scrolled or replaced.
Galvanic skin response (GSR)	Research technique that gauges viewer attention and arousal caused by (typically) interactive television advertising.
Geographic information system (GIS)	Software that enables the user to input, manage and output geographically referenced data.
Global distribution system (GDS)	The linked computer systems that, before the internet arrived, allowed airlines, car rental companies and hotels to be booked by travel agents.
Global positioning system (GPS)	System that uses satellites to provide navigation services.
Global system for mobile communication (GSM)	International standards for mobile services.
High definition (HD)	Digital television broadcasting system with a significantly higher resolution than traditional formats (NTSC, SECAM, PAL).
High speed downlink packet access (HSDPA)	Fast data transfer system for mobile services.
Hypertext markup language (HTML)	Programming language for the web.
IAB	Interactive Advertising Bureau.
IFT	Institute for Tourism Studies
i-mode	Proprietary mobile internet access system of NTT DoCoMo, popular in Japan and adopted elsewhere, allowing e-mail and web surfing.
Interactive voice response (IVR)	Telephone technology that allows a computer to detect voice and touch tones using a normal phone call, and to respond with pre-recorded or dynamically generated audio to further direct callers.

Term	Definition
Internet protocol (IP)	Method by which data is sent from one uniquely-identified computer to another on the internet.
Internet protocol television (IPTV)	Transmission of digital television signals via the internet using broadband ADSL/fibre optic.
Internet service provider (ISP)	The provider of internet access to a user or group of users.
Interstitials	Advertisements that load when the user has clicked to move to a new page.
Inventory	Space sold on websites, expressed by the format of the space and the number of page impressions that are expected to be available for delivery to advertisers in a given period.
IP address	The address of an internet service provider.
ISO 9241	A standard that describes the ergonomic requirements for office work with visual display terminals and which includes usability elements.
Key performance indicator (KPI)	A target or measure chosen to monitor success in working towards objectives.
Link farm	Site that exists only for the purpose of developing link popularity.
'Liquid' web design	Flexible layout of a website that can be customised to the screen resolution and window size.
Mash-up	Web application that combines data from more than one source into an integrated experience.
Motion Picture Expert Group (MPEG-2)	Body that sets standards for audio and video.
MP3 player	Device for playing audio files encoded using MPEG1 layer 3.
Multi-media messaging (MMS)	A standard in mobile messaging that enables text, images, video and audio to be embedded in the message.
Multivariate or multi variable testing	Isolates the elements on a page and helps to find out what elements matter, and which combination is the strongest.
National product owner (NPO)	Tourism organisation that operates nationally, for example a hotel group.
National tourism product database (NTPD)	Aggregated data about all key product types in a destination.
OnMouseOver alt text	Text that becomes visible when the user moves the curser over an icon or other image.
Open application programming interface (Open API)	Service that allows one computer programme to ask for services from another.
Parse	Search engine process that breaks down website strings (code and text) into component parts.
Pay-per-click (PPC)	Payment made by an advertiser to a website owner when a user clicks on the advertiser's link.
Personal digital assistant (PDA)	Hand-held computing device such as a Palm Pilot or Blackberry.
PlayStation Portable (PSP)	Handheld game console produced by Sony.
Podcast	Audio, video or multimedia file that is downloadable from a website to a PC for playback on a mobile or PC.
Podcast directory	Podcast content aggregator.

Term	Definition
Poll	Process in which a computer, typically an e-commerce search facility, requests data from a number of partner e-commerce systems to meet information or booking request.
Prince 2	Acronym for PRojects IN Controlled Environments, a globally recognised standard method for project management.
Public-private partnership (PPP)	Venture that is funded and operated jointly by public and private bodies.
Really simple syndication (RSS)	Or rich site summary, an automated method for individuals to choose to receive selected, customised items from websites whenever there are updates, without having to visit the site to collect them; and for websites to syndicate content to other sites.
Redirect	In the case of a redirect, the server transfers the internet user to a web address that is different to the one they specified or clicked on.
Return on investment (ROI)	Gain on original investment, usually measured over time.
Roaming tariffs	Charges for calling to or from another country from a mobile phone.
Satellite navigation system (satnav)	Hand-held or in-car device that uses a global positioning satellite (GPS) receiver to calculate its position and to overlay this on to a map.
Search engine crawlers or spiders	Search engine software that regularly visits and records webpages, following links from page to page.
Search engine optimisation (SEO)	Process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via 'natural' ('organic' or 'algorithmic') search results.
Secure sockets layer (SSL)	Protocol for transmission of information in encrypted form over the internet.
Short message service (SMS)	Text message of up to 160 characters sent to and from mobile (cell) phones.
SME	Small and medium size enterprises.
Stickiness	Characteristics of a website that encourage a visitor to stay longer and to return.
Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card	Small removable card in a GSM phone that stores information such as the user's phone number, phone book and other information related to the subscriber.
Tag cloud	Visual display of content tags, usually as single words, in sizes reflecting the number of users of the tag.
Tagging	The attachment of searchable keywords by individuals or website owners to online content – pages, copy, or images.
Taxonomy	Classification of content into defined categories and subcategories.
Teleporting	In the Second Life virtual world, a hyperlink that provides instant transfer of an avatar from one object to another.
Third-party Intermediary (TPI)	Reseller, typically of hotel inventory.
Top level domain name (TLD)	The part of a domain name that follows the final dot.
TV ratings (TVRs)	Audience that will see a commercial or programme.
UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	A specialised agency of the United Nations.
Upselling	Offering a product to a customer in addition to the product they are currently purchasing.

Term	Definition
User-generated content (UGC)	Online content created by end-users rather than by destinations or media owners.
Video-on-demand (VOD)	Systems that allow users to select and watch video content over a network as part of an interactive television system.
Virtual brochure	Or 'page-turner'; software that gives web users the illusion of turning the pages of a brochure, on-screen.
Voice over internet protocol (VoIP)	Routing of voice conversations over the internet-protocol networks.
WAP	Open international standard for wireless communication. Its principal application is to enable access to the internet from a mobile phone or PDA.
Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)	Body responsible for improving the accessibility of the web for people, including those with physical disabilities, using a wide range of user devices.
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)	Part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).
Web TV	Access to the web, e-mail and chat via the TV screen.
'Whois'	Information required to register and set up a domain for use.
Widget	Small software applications that provide functionality and content online, distributed typically by being uploaded by users to websites and blogs.
WiFi	Wireless technology that enables devices such as PCs and mobile phones to connect to the internet.
Wireless Application Protocol (WAP)	An open, global specification that empowers mobile users with wireless devices to access and interact with information and services
Wireless markup language (WML)	Computer language designed for wireless applications.
Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access (WiMax)	Standards-based technology enabling the delivery of last mile wireless broadband access as an alternative to cable and DSL.
Worldwide TV mark-up language (WTVML)	Content format for interactive TV sites based on internet standards, and published by Sky as a common content format for interactive TV applications in Europe.
World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)	The main international standards organisation for the web.
XML	See extensible markup language.

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