



National Destination Marketing Organisations and Web 2.0

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of national Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO's) are already at an advanced stage in their use of the Internet for global marketing, sales and customer relationship management. The 'Visit Us' DMO Web portal, providing high value content, interactivity, functionality and online booking, has become a ubiquitous element of destination branding and destination marketing.

While very good progress has been made, the central theme of this article is that DMOs (and tourism businesses in general) should undertake a major strategic review and evaluation of their current online marketing activities. The main reason for this is the emergence and rapid growth of Web 2.0. While authors differ on the precise definition of 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2006; Högg et al, 2006) with some disputing the use of the term itself (Berners Lee, 2006), there can be little doubt that we are witnessing a fundamental and revolutionary change in the way that travellers use the Internet, their online expectations and experiences (Ellion, 2007; Schegg et al, 2008; Sigala, 2007). Rather than being passive recipients of 'brand messages', the new Web is characterised by information 'pull' rather than 'push', user generated content, openness, sharing, collaboration, interaction, communities, and social networking (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). The revolutionary nature of these changes is already having a profound impact on consumer decision-making and behaviour in global tourism (Continental Research, 2007). DMOs and tourism businesses in general will need to respond by developing and implementing innovative Tourism 2.0 strategies for building sustained customer and competitive advantage.

The response of leading European DMOs to the global marketing opportunities and threats presented by Web 2.0 is reported in this paper. A three stage research approach was followed covering the development of a Tourism 2.0 Model and measurement criteria based on the emerging literature in this area; use of these criteria to evaluate National DMO Web 2.0 adoption levels covering the 25 leading tourist destinations in Europe; and in-depth, semi-structured personal interviews with a representative sample of 12 out of the 25 DMOs.

TOURISM 2.0: LITERATURE REVIEW

A detailed review of the relevant literature revealed no previous study of the 2.0 response of National DMOs. The starting point, therefore, was to develop a Tourism 2.0 Model and measurement criteria for evaluating current 2.0 adoption levels.

Our Model of Tourism 2.0, shown in Figure 1, and associated measurement criteria, have been developed from five key strands of the previous literature including the general literature on destination marketing and destination branding (Blain et al, 2005; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Kotler et al, 2006; Morgan et al, 2002; Morgan et al, 2003; and Pike, 2004); online destination marketing (Daniele and Frew, 2008; Douglas and Mills, 2004; Gertner et

al, 2006; Park and Gretzel, 2007; So and Morrison, 2003; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006); customer empowerment and the customer experience (Buhalis et al, 2007; Hamill and Stevenson, 2006; Kang et al, 2008; Nykamp, 2001; Stevenson, 2008; and Thompson, 2006); the emerging literature on Web 2.0 (BAH, 2007; Boyd et al, 2007; Dearstyne, 2007; Hogg et al, 2006; Li and Bernoff, 2008; O'Reilly, 2006; Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Smith et al, 2007; Tapscott and Williams, 2006); and the literature specifically on Web 2.0 in the global travel and tourism industry (Arsal et al, 2008; Buhalis, 2003; Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Continental Research, 2007; Ellion, 2007; Gretzel, 2006; Kim et al, 2004; Murphy et al, 2007; O'Connor, 2008; Reactive, 2007; Schegg et al, 2008; Sigala, 2007; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003).

The Model comprises three inter-related elements – Web 2.0 Applications, Characteristics and Impact.

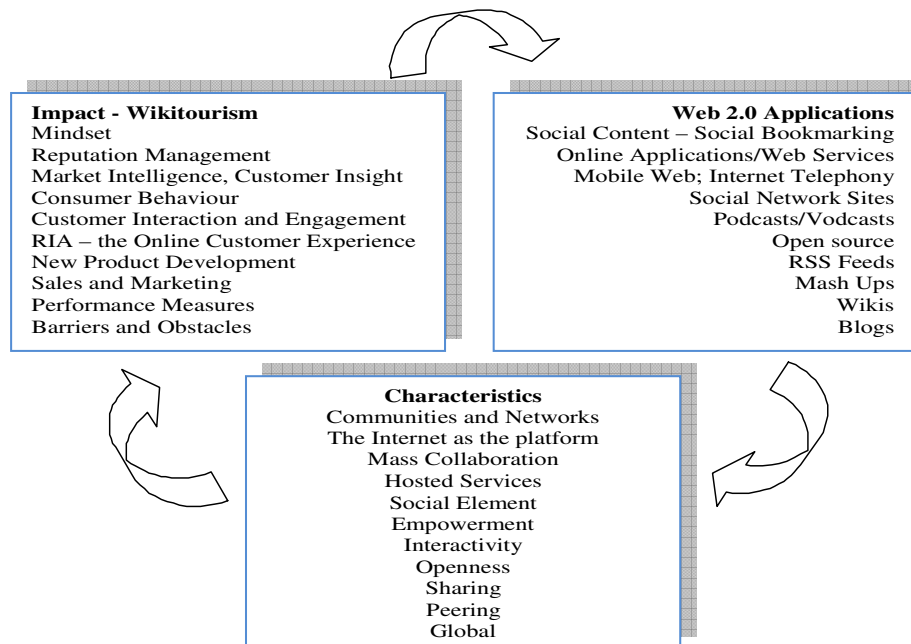


Fig. 1. Tourism 2.0 – Applications, Characteristics and Impact

MEASUREMENT CRITERIA AND RESEARCH APPROACH

DMO Web 2.0 Adoption Levels. Based on the literature overview presented above, twenty six criteria were developed to assess DMO Web 2.0 adoption (see Figure 2). Using these criteria, a detailed evaluation was undertaken of 25 Web portals covering the leading National DMOs in Europe; together with an evaluation of their participation in external 2.0 sites. The sample of DMOs studied comprised the 21 major destinations in Europe in terms of international arrivals (WTO, 2007). As the research was conducted in the UK, we also included the DMO Web sites of Scotland, England, Wales and the North of Ireland.

The coding guidelines and coding forms were tested through a preliminary examination of five sites to ensure category suitability, clarity of coding instructions and the overall

reliability of the coding forms. Since it is recommended that content analysis is performed by at least two coders (Krippendorff, 2004), the sites were independently evaluated by two of the current authors. Intercoder reliability, which refers to the extent to which the two coders agreed on the coding of the different criteria, was calculated at 0.96, which is well above the 0.80 acceptable level (Neuendorf, 2002). Following this, the few disagreements were resolved through a discussion between the two. The 25 sites were evaluated between the 7th and 11th of July 2008.

Web 2.0 Adoption on the DMOs Own Web Site	Official DMO Presence on External Web 2.0 Sites
User Generated Content (UGC) – Text, Images, Video, Wiki	Social Networking Sites – Facebook, MySpace
User Feedback, Opinion and Discussion (FOD) – Blogs, Forums, Ratings, Favourites, Online Chat	Multimedia Sharing Sites – YouTube, Flickr
Rich Internet Applications (RIA) - Web applications/widgets; Mapping mash-ups; Podcasts/vodcasts	Podcast Sites – iTunes
Folksonomies - Social tagging, Social bookmarking, Tag Cloud	Travel Blog and Review Sites – TripAdvisor, Igougo
Feeds - Content Feeds	Virtual Reality Sites – Second Life
Community - Social Network	Mapping Sites - Google Earth

Fig. 2. Web 2.0 Adoption - Measurement Criteria

RESEARCH FINDINGS

DMO Web 2.0 Adoption Levels

Based on the detailed evaluation of DMO Web portals and their participation in external 2.0 sites, the key research findings are as follows (see Table 1):

- Leading DMOs across Europe have made little progress in their adoption of Web 2.0 applications and technologies, either internally and externally. Only three of the DMOs studied were using more than a quarter of the applications available - Switzerland, England and Poland. Twenty two out of the twenty five DMOs used five or less of the available applications.
- In terms of the specific applications being used, DMOs are sticking with the ‘safer’ and ‘easier-to-implement’ 2.0 technologies such as mapping and weather widgets, avoiding applications which encourage user generated content, feedback, opinion and discussion. Only four sites had any form of user generated content. The very small number of DMOs providing content feeds, social tagging and bookmarking (folksonomies) was a surprising finding given the ease of implementation of these applications.
- DMO progress in engaging with external 2.0 web sites was even more limited. Only 7 DMOs had an official presence on Facebook, with none being officially represented on MySpace. Only six DMOs had started experimenting with multimedia sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr; with only two of these (Switzerland and England) having high value content, updated on a regular basis. The others were at a very early experimental stage. None of the DMOs were observed to have an official presence on the most popular

travel review and blog web sites. Only five offered podcasts via iTunes, with only two having a virtual destination on Second Life.

- Based on Table 1, three main clusters can be identified in terms of DMO Web 2.0 adoption levels. *Non-Starters*: DMOs with total scores between 0 and 2 representing no or very limited use of Web 2.0 technologies. *Cautious Adopters*: DMOs with total scores between 3 and 6 representing some basic but limited progress. *Progressive Adopters*: DMOs with total scores of 7 or more. Only three DMOs could be described as Progressive Adopters, beginning to encourage user generated content, opinions and feedback on the official portal site. The thirteen 'Non-Starters' had very few Web 2.0 applications on their own site and no presence on external Web 2.0 sites.

Personal Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior marketing personnel in twelve DMOs including one 'Progressive Adopter', six 'Cautious Adopters' and five 'Non Starters'. This helped to build a more detailed picture of the main issues and challenges facing DMOs at the early, experimental stage of using Web 2.0. Key findings can be summarised as follows:

- There is a growing level of awareness by DMOs of the global marketing and customer engagement potential of Web 2.0. Identified potential benefits included: 'ability to learn more about our customers', 'more interactivity, involvement and feedback', 'building a more realistic destination image through richer content' and 'an additional channel for targeting new customer segments'. A few DMOs remained sceptical about the potential of Web 2.0, adopting a 'wait and see' approach. There was also recognition of the 'downside' i.e. the potential impact on the brand 'because people can say what they like'.
- Major barriers to Web 2.0 adoption were identified. In order of importance, these were: 'resources' (7), 'organisational culture' (6), 'lack of strategic Web 2.0 direction' (6), 'scepticism about the potential benefits of Web 2.0' (5), 'political issues with industry stakeholders' (4), 'concerns about user generated content' (3), 'technology issues' (2) and 'legal concerns' (2) (number of respondents claiming that this was a major barrier or obstacle to future progress).
- The interviews provided some interesting insights concerning the performance and impact of early Web 2.0 initiatives. Several stated that Web 2.0 was particularly useful for developing better customer insight, improved segmentation and targeting. Positive impacts were reported by those DMOs who had experimented with User Generated Content, including both photo uploads and visitor feedback and comment. One DMO reported that it was receiving between 10 and 20 'quality' customer feedbacks per day on their site. Less success was reported with DMO controlled blogs. Several reported good publicity surrounding their involvement in external Web 2.0 sites, including Second Life.
- The majority of DMOs interviewed were planning or considering future Web 2.0 initiatives, although in most cases this was still very much at a basic, experimental level.

Table 1: DMO 2.0 Adoption

Rank	DMO	DMO's Website	Presence on external	Total
		Score	Web 2.0 sites	Score
<i>Progressive Adopters (>=7)</i>				
1	Switzerland	8	3	11
2	England	7	3	10
3	Poland	6	1	7
<i>Cautious Adopters (3-6)</i>				
4	Portugal	3	2	5
5	Scotland	3	1	4
5	United Kingdom	3	1	4
7	Austria	2	2	4
7	France	3	0	3
7	Germany	2	1	3
7	Ireland	1	2	3
7	Norway	2	1	3
7	Wales	2	1	3
<i>Non-Starters (0-2)</i>				
13	Croatia	1	1	2
13	Netherlands	1	1	2
13	Spain	1	1	2
13	Turkey	1	1	2
13	Ukraine	2	0	2
18	Bulgaria	1	0	1
18	Czech Rep	1	0	1
18	Hungary	1	0	1
18	Northern Ireland	1	0	1
18	Russia	1	0	1
23	Belgium	0	0	0
23	Greece	0	0	0
23	Italy	0	0	0

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion of this paper is that the leading National DMOs in Europe have been slow to respond to the global marketing opportunities and threats presented by Web 2.0. This supports Schegg et al (2008) who argued that only a few organisations in the tourism sector were leveraging the full 2.0 value proposition. While some progress is being made in 'experimenting' with various 2.0 applications, few DMOs have yet developed a clear vision or strategy for maximising the real potential of 2.0 for building strong customer and network relationships; for engaging with and energising online communities (Li and Bernoff, 2008). The lack of a coordinated and integrated strategic response is particularly worrying given the profound impact that Web 2.0 is having on consumer behaviour and decision-making in global tourism.

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