

# Marketing Tourism – Content Still Rules

In this fast pace modern Internet world, companies are fighting with Internet marketing weapons to appear first, and in the process, can quite often tarnish their own reputation. MKG Hospitality's Michael Komodromou looks at the importance of proper Internet marketing in travel and tourism, changes over the last year and what should be the next major trends within the industry.

There is no doubt; the Internet has changed travel and tourism forever. It was one of the first industries to be transformed by the Internet, and as a channel of distribution, has become one of the most successful. From researching travel options, comparing products and prices, reading reviews, sifting through portals to purchasing. Consumer or business-to-business, all are increasingly relying on the Internet.



As to be expected, such a success rate encourages greater competition. These days, having a website is not good enough. Everyone is already trying to sell something online – product, service, advice; information overload. The Internet is flooded with websites, and new entries on a daily basis. Hence the increasing value of Internet marketing.

Try and get a good understanding of what your clients search for when looking for your product. Then adapt your internet marketing to revolve around this, consistent with an overall business philosophy, brand and concept.

The key to driving success will always be the website's content. Quality content that will stimulate the marketing AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), and trigger real activity and real hits, as opposed to just being ignored. Your content should drive interaction and what I like to call internetxuality, i.e. other sites (and other media) utilising your content and sourcing your website.

At MKG Hospitality, this is one of our most powerful online abilities. We have access to Europe's largest hotel database, HotelCompSet, with hotel supply and rankings, as well as key performance indicators such as Occupancy Rate, Average Daily Rate and RevPAR. With such information we are able to monitor and benchmark market trends, and via press work and online networks, release observations and newsworthy information, including text, graphs, tables and statistics. This then gets picked up and released to other third party websites, as well as other media. Thus our messages, and of course our brand gains added credible exposure.



Many suggest that if your website is not search engine optimised it is just like having a phone number but not being listed in the phone book. Very true. Your website and brand must be easily located. Internet presence is crucial, otherwise no traffic equates to no sales, no results. But what is always neglected is the actual value of your presence. In other words, a certain standard and quality. Keep it professional, and avoid clogging, spamming and faking – information that is annoying can easily do more harm than good. This also of course applies to e-mail marketing, where spam is more associated.

### **Online Social Coherence**

Internet marketing has expanded to a multilevel campaign, following the now ‘standard’ organic Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) procedures of written content, keywords, titles, descriptions, meta tag and links, as well as search engine marketing (SEM) – the practice of buying paid search listings – such as pay per click, paid placement, contextual advertising and paid inclusions.

Over the last year we have seen the boom of interactive-type web 2.0 marketing, including wiki pages, social networking sites, review websites, blogs, forums, XML/RSS feeds and universal content, i.e. images, video, podcasts and maps. Popular sites that spring to mind include the likes of Wikipedia and Wikitravel, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube. Again, more and more are now using these, so in reality how will you stand out and be unique? More to the point, are these a waste of time? In a busy environment, what resources do you allocate for such social marketing techniques. Well, leading companies now have specific positions that focus on these tools (together with Internet Marketers and SEO specialists), whilst new expert social website consulting firms have emerged.

Certainly, affiliation to these sites is excellent for generating exposure and primarily for linking back to your own website – SEO purposes. Many are also a point-of-research that prompt a booking, particularly the likes of TripAdvisor.

However, these tools are constantly being abused. All too often travel companies write their own reviews on Facebook, hotels on TripAdvisor. What’s worse, they write negative reviews on their competitor’s page, which then of course gets instantly rebutted – web war games. Credibility is diminished as consumers become entrapped in this somewhat falsifying channel of information.



Something to be wary of – maintain quality standards and professionalism. If you are to use such tools, obviously be authentic and ethical. But in such an uncontrollable environment, I suggest the best weapon is to be creative. Again, emphasis is on content. Focus energy and resources here, inspiring interests and creating awareness.

### **A Changing Medium**

Indeed, the Internet has become the new TV of the day. The rate of change with the Internet is also remarkably faster than the rate of change with conventional media. One year with the Internet is the equivalent to ten years in conventional media. Things move quickly with this medium; new technologies, new concepts, innovations, inspirations and new approaches.

Of course travel and tourism marketers (and of all industries really) must still balance and use all media. Print for its tangibility, TV for emotional connection and radio for its mobility. But at some point over the next year or so, these will all be unravelled by the Internet. Marketers who embrace this early will remain ahead of the pack and on top of all rankings.

The future is clearly pointing towards two trends: mobile Internet marketing, which combines the benefits of all media, and Web 3.0.

Mobile technology is essentially moving the Internet everywhere. The number of web-enabled phones in Europe will rise to more than the number of PCs, whilst more time will be spent on the Internet than watching TV – this is already the case in Western Europe. Indeed, the potential of mobile applications and mobile eCommerce is vast, and soon to be very lucrative.

Take the recent Volcano chaos in Europe. Mobile Internet kept people updated with flight status and any news. Access to mobile Internet was also a good starting point for those seeking alternative travel arrangements and then even making new bookings. Business travellers are also the perfect example of requiring connectivity whilst on the move.

Meanwhile, Internet experts believe the next generation of the Web – Web 3.0 – will make searching tasks smarter (faster and easier). Instead of multiple searches, you can type a complex sentence or phrase. The Web 3.0 browser will analyse your response, search the Internet for all possible answers, and then organise results accordingly.

The browser will act like a personal assistant, learning what you are interested in. The more you use the Web, the more your browser learns about you and the less specific you'll need to be with your questions. Eventually you should be able to ask open questions like "where should I go for my summer holidays?" Your browser will consult its records of what you like and dislike, take into account your current location and price expectations and then suggest various options.

The more relevant your website's content is, or more importantly web concept is to such searches and in relation to other engine crawling factors, the more your holiday options will appear in the results.

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