

CRUISE: THE GROWING POPULARITY OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT



It was already mentioned in the Cruise Report 2009 by Carnival UK: trends are showing that more travelers prefer user-generated content as main source when searching for information on cruises. Companies need to adapt their concepts in terms of electronic information provision if they want to keep their customers.

Today many potential cruise passengers or repeat **customers go online** to do most of their pre-booking research. Many cruise company websites offer a huge pool of data including information about the fleet, itineraries and the company itself. But there are big differences in website design. Some websites are easy to access and very user friendly, others are totally overloaded and difficult to understand.

Some websites provide every single piece of information one could wish for and other websites provide rather a simple copy of the company's brochure. The problem might be that not every company knows how useful the internet can be in terms of marketing.

A website should rather complement the brochure instead of being only an electronic copy. Some people discuss whether or not the paper-based brochure might be totally replaced by the internet by some point of time. But fact is that at the moment both, the brochure and the internet exist and therefore should be coordinated to facilitate the best product presentation possible.

As the internet seems to become main source of information it is crucially important for cruise companies to bear all possibilities and opportunities in mind that come with this medium. Customers today do not only look for electronic brochures when using the internet. They want all additional information they can get.

Due to the fact that **still lots of people are new to cruising** they need more than pure descriptions. Quite often for them it is not easy to imagine what a cruise will be like and they are not sure if it is really the right kind of vacation for them. So they start asking friends or family about experiences and they start searching the net where they find a huge pool of user-generated content in forms of blogs, video portals, holiday-check websites and many more.

Websites like facebook.com, studivz.net and holidaycheck.com are commonly used today to exchange holiday experiences. And while some cruise companies already feature videos or virtual ship tours to give potential cruise customers better insights the question remains why they do not include platforms for customers to exchange their experiences. Having those forums in house would facilitate the companies to control the quality of user-generated content and maybe even to use them for claim management.

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