

Chapter 8.5

Digital Imaging Trek: A Practical Model for Managing the Demand of the Digitally Enabled Traveller

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the concept and activities of the digitally enabled tourist and the impact such as tourist has on the travel and tourism industry. It summarizes the existing and emerging technical environments that encourage the use of hand held digital recording devices and personal Internet communications. Additionally, it looks at ways tourists publish and exhibit digital visual and written artifacts of their travel experience. The chapter introduces general types of digital communication infrastructure to be considered by the industry to create an experience to support this type of tourism. The authors hope that further understanding of the digitally enabled tourist will inform travel professionals to better facilitate commerce and practice in the industry.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has had a great influence on the tourism and travel industry. In recent years digital communication platforms and technologies have evolved and become accessible to a wide mainstream audience of tourists and travelers. Organizations engaging in travel and tourism commerce need to understand this wave of innovative behavior among their customers. From cell phones to high speed wireless Internet connection to the variety of creative ways customers have applied digital technologies—the travel and tourism industry is being widely affected by these emerging trends in information and communications technologies (ICT). Is the digitally enabled traveler the wave of the future? How will companies and services shift business models to optimize the experience of people with digital

devices? Are there commercial opportunities embedded in these? What does a traveler need to know to keep current with changing technologies? It is critical that services providers and travelers alike stay informed, because one thing is certain, technological innovation and change will be a constant companion for the travel and tourism industry.

This chapter provides insight into technology trends that will be helpful to the practitioner, student, educator and the tourist-travelers themselves. Being prepared to meet the new demands of customers will provide rewarding experiences for parties on all sides of the tourism equation.

BACKGROUND

Since the wide spread use of the telephone in the 1920s, information and communications technologies (ICT) have had a great influence on the industry of tourism. In the 1990s, the wide spread use of powerful desktop computers, enterprise wide systems, and the World Wide Web (WWW) continued to transform the way business was conducted in all facets of the travel and tourism. While ICTs have had a dramatic impact on the mechanics of tourism business practices, the virtual explosion of new inexpensive digital communication technologies is transforming the experience of tourism from the traveler's point of view.

The new generation of hand held mobile technologies, the expansion of wireless (WiFi) networks and the surge in digitally hosted social interchange services present new opportunities for engaging all sectors of the tourism industry. This new generation of technologies also presents new challenges to the industry to structure services with the digital service users in mind.

New services that provide online collaborative and social interaction through the World Wide Web now shape and influence vast communities of millions of online customers. Traveler-cen-

tered mobile technologies are increasingly used for many activities embedded in the tourist and traveler experience. This chapter will explore the model of the digital imaging trek and the digitally enabled traveler as a way to structure experiences to satisfy the demand of the technically savvy traveler in a world of advancing mobile technologies and online services. It also will provide basic technical background about the devices and infrastructure that drives these technological innovations.

Understanding the use of advanced hand held devices from the traveler's point of view is becoming more critical to tourism industry providers. Both new and veteran professionals in the tourism industry need to think about how these technologies influence the customers' choices, activities and ultimately their economic decisions about tourism. Customers have eagerly adopted the cheap and easy to use digital technologies. Tourism professionals need to understand the role mobile digital technologies play in the expanding global tourism field. For customers, mobile digital technologies are helping to shape the experience of tourism from initial research of a destination, through the reservation process to the final visual record of the experience.

Mobile digital technologies include a wide array of products that are inexpensive and easy to use. When mobile digital technologies are used to shape a tourist's experience they become powerful digital communication tools reaching out to an infinite audience of like-minded users on the World Wide Web. New products in cellular telephony, visual still imaging, motion and sound recording, wireless digital connections to the World Wide Web and the services on the World Wide Web, all converge to offer a digital environment unlike any before it. The combinations of these technologies are dynamic, unique and ever expanding. These digital technologies are in a constant state of enhancement—services become faster, devices become more powerful and feature-rich, and prices come down. This

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