Chapter 50
Advertising in Games:
Advergaming Applications in the Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

Traditional marketing communication techniques are of diminishing effectiveness and marketers have developed creative applications to attract consumers. Advergames can be seen as an attractive and new marketing tool that increases product, brand and company awareness. Advergames are a form of branded entertainment that features advertising messages, brand logos, brand products and trade character in a game format. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the qualities and potentials of the advergames as an advertising and marketing communication tool for the tourism industry. First, an overview of the various definitions of advergaming is provided, as well as a review of existing literature regarding its effectiveness. The study next examines the advergaming applications in the tourism industry using SWOT analysis. The study concludes with a discussion of the needs, challenges and opportunities faced in marketing tourism products by advergaming.

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of brands in electronic games or the brand as the game (advergaming) is not a new marketing practice. However, the growing frequency of placements across genres and platforms and the shifting power (and cash) from brands to developers and publishers has resulted in a recent flurry of publicity and legitimacy of practice. Analysts predict that commercial placements in games will become a five billion dollar industry and it will start gauging effectiveness of game brand placements. Interest in this marketing technique is driven, in part, by changes in media use, particularly among males who report playing games more than watching television. Other factors include technological advances that allow consumers to zip, zap, and TIVO traditional advertising. These trends have prompted a shift in budgets among global companies – such as Coca-Cola- from broadcast advertising to video game placements (Nelson, Keum, & Yaros, 2004).

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Advergames can be a powerful tool to build brand loyalty and capture crucial data about existing and potential customers. They consist of unique interactive games with a suite of advertising creative built in. By combining games and ads, it's possible to improve branding, boost product awareness and collect detailed data about participants. Branding concept is also an important issue for tourist destinations. In terms of destination branding, which is claimed to include a selection and strategic combination of 'a consistent mix of brand elements to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building', advergames are seen as conceptually new and an innovative channel of communication especially to reach well defined target markets.

Given the importance of this marketing communication practice in many sectors, it is surprising how little is known in tourism industry applications, and examples from this industry and its applying advantages and weaknesses, threatens, opportunities in tourism industry. So the aim of the paper is to provide an understanding of the qualities and potentials of the advergames as an advertising and interactive marketing communication tool for the tourism industry. First an overview of the various definitions of online games, online gamers, advergaming, and its types is provided, as well as a review of existing literature regarding its effectiveness and advergaming examples from the tourism industry. The study next examines the advergaming applications in the tourism industry using SWOT analysis. The study concludes with a discussion of the needs, challenges and opportunities faced in marketing tourism products by advergaming.

ONLINE GAMES, ONLINE GAME TYPES AND ONLINE GAMERS

Online Gaming is defined as 'Gaming that require the use of a PC and internet connectivity, either played online or downloaded and played online later, capable of supporting either single player or multiple players (eTechnology Group, 2007, p. 6; Steiner, 2008).

Online games can be classified based on the number of players (eTechnology Group, 2007, p. 15; Steiner, 2008, p. 4):

- Based on the number of players the different types of online games are Single Player, Multi-Player, Massively Multi Player Games (MMOG's) and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG's). *Single player games* are where the user plays against the system. *Multi Player games* are based on the bandwidth and the type of the game, many players can play it simultaneously, where their geographic location does not pose a constraint on playing against others. MMOG is an extension of *Multi-Player online games*, these games can be played by hundreds often thousands of players at the same time. The number of players that an MMOG can support depends on the server. MMORPGs *(Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games)* are further extension of MMOGs. These games are designed to go on and are not dependent on who comes and who leaves. These games are complex virtual worlds where each player assumes a virtual character often called an "Avatar"- An online role. Players band together and form clans and exhibit all the characteristics of the real world.

By analyzing their principal purposes, games can be classed into one of three wide-ranging categories (Alvarez & Michaud, 2008):

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