

Chapter 4.19

WEB 2.0, Social Marketing Strategies and Distribution Channels for City Destinations: Enhancing the Participatory Role of Travelers and Exploiting their Collective Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

During the last decades, the use of Web 2.0 applications for the generation, dissemination, and sharing of user-generated content (UGC) and the creation of new value added services are enormous. Web 2.0 tools have tremendously changed the way people search, find, read, gather, share, develop, and consume information, as well as on the way people communicate with each other and collaboratively create new knowledge. UGC and Web 2.0 are also having a tremendous impact not only on the behaviour and decision-making of Internet users, but also on the e-business model that organizations need to develop and/or adapt in order to conduct business on the Internet. Organizations responsible to market and promote cities on the Internet are

not an exception from these developments. This chapter aims to inform city tourism organizations responsible for the development of city portals about (a) the use of the major Web 2.0 tools in tourism and their impact on the tourism demand and supply; and (b) the ways and practices for integrating the use of Web 2.0 into their e-business model and e-marketing practices.

INTRODUCTION

During the last years, the number and use of numerous Web 2.0 tools, whereby Internet users produce, read and share multimedia content (User Generated Content, UGC), is mushrooming (eMarketer, 2007a). It is estimated (eMarketer, 2007b) that 75.2 million USA Internet users currently use UGC, and this is expected to increase to 101 million by 2011.

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eMarketer (2007c) also found that over 25 million USA adults regularly share advice on products or services online.

The Web 2.0 technologies and applications (e.g. tags, RSS, blogs, wikis, podcasts, etc.) are considered as the *tools of mass collaboration*, since they empower Internet users to collaboratively produce, consume and distribute information and knowledge. In other words, Web 2.0 tools do nothing more than realizing and exploiting the full potential of the genuine concept and role of the Internet (i.e. the network of the networks that is created and exists for its users). This has tremendously changed the way people search, find, read, gather, share, develop and consume information, as well as on the way people communicate with each other and collaboratively create new knowledge (Sigala, 2008). UGC and Web 2.0 technologies are also having a tremendous impact not only on the behavior and decision-making of Internet users, but also on the e-business model that organizations need to develop and/or adapt in order to conduct business on the Internet (Bughin, 2007).

The tourism industry is not an exception from such developments. On the contrary, as information is the lifeblood of tourism, the use and diffusion of Web 2.0 technologies have a substantial impact of both tourism demand and supply. Indeed, more than ¼ of Internet users have used a weblog to review information about a destination or travel supplier in the last 12 months (Harteveldt, Johnson, Epps & Tesch, 2006), many new Web 2.0 enabled tourism cyber-intermediaries have risen challenging the e-business model of existing online tourism suppliers and intermediaries who in turn need to transform their e-business model and e-marketing practices in order to survive (Adam, Cobos & Liu, 2007). As the Internet plays an important role for the e-marketing of city destinations (Sigala, 2003; Yuan, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2006), Web 2.0 tools and applications also create both threats and opportunities for organizations developing and maintaining destination management systems and portals. In this vein, this chapter aims to in-

form city tourism organizations responsible for the development of city portals about: a) the use of the major Web 2.0 tools in tourism and their impact on tourism demand and supply; and b) the ways and practices for integrating the use of Web 2.0 into their e-business model and e-marketing practices.

WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN TOURISM: USE, IMPACT AND APPLICATIONS IN CITY MARKETING

RSS (Really Simple Syndication)

Definition, Features and Use

RSS allow users to subscribe to a webpage for receiving new content, e.g. subscribe to receive online distributions of news, blogs, podcasts etc, and so, RSS allows the creation of links and interactive communication amongst other Web 2.0 applications and users. This is done either through a news aggregator (similar to an email inbox) or a news reader (a web-based environment) (Winer, 2005). By doing so, one does not have to visit each individual website that he/she is interesting to read any new information, but rather the RSS feeds all new updated information to the users' RSS reader. RSS readers enable Internet users to gather and read all new information that is customized to the user's profile within one consolidated message. Many free RSS exist on the Internet, e.g. FeedDemon, NewsGator, Rojo, software on the website of Google™, MyYahoo®, etc.

RSS allows new communication and interaction modes with information (Figure 1) (Farmer, 2004). In e-mail, the control of the communication channel is held entirely by the instigator of the communication. Consequently, e-mail communication is characterized at times by flame wars, antisocial behavior and feelings of intrusion by the participants, while the information artifact is transitory, unfixated and not archived except in indi-

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