Chapter VIII
Official Tourism Web Sites and City Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Large cities are one of the most popular tourism destinations throughout the world. Business and leisure tourists visit these areas every year and before they travel there, they look for useful information on the Internet. This chapter analyses the tourism Web sites developed by Convention and Visitor Bureaus. These Web sites represent the official image of the city on the Internet and through them tourism organizations can organize the marketing and mix strategy. The chapter studies the concept of a city as a tourism destination, the organizations that manage tourist activities, and the right marketing strategies to be developed on these official Web sites. The strategy begins with the market research to select the right marketing segments and it continues with the right actions from a marketing mix perspective. It means different options in terms of product-destination exhibition, price policies, commercialization, and communication actions.

INTRODUCTION

Big cities worldwide are major international tourism destinations and millions visit them for business or pleasure. From historical cities with architectural heritage to newly created locations with huge skyscrapers, they attract visitors interested in varying aspects of each individual city, directly influencing the target location’s economy.

These cities can be seen as products competing at a global level, whose image on the Internet is reflected on official tourism Websites managed by the Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs). Consequently, in this paper, the importance of having an appropriate official tourist Website from a marketing perspective will be considered.

It is generally well known that Tourism is an intensive information sector. Evidently, due to distance, this sector has particular needs and ICT
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may help. Computer Reservation Systems (CRS) and Global Distribution Systems (GDS) have been good examples of ICT especially designed for (and by) the Tourist Industry. They provide information about transport and hotel vacancies. Nowadays, the Internet represents the most advanced technology and one of the best instruments for cities to promote themselves as attractive tourism destinations all over the world.

The inevitable relationship between Tourism and the Internet is becoming increasingly closer which means that more effort and research should be made in this respect. Similarly, more and more consumers use the Internet as their main tool to plan, book and pay for their holidays and trips.

For some time now, the Internet has identified a clear beneficial distribution platform for the tourist sector. For instance, data from a survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals confirm that 47% of the internet users in the European Union say that they have used services related to travel and accommodation in the three months prior to the survey in 2005 (Knauth, 2006). Many of these international tourists choose big cities as the main destinations for their holidays and researches have demonstrated that the Internet has become an important information source (Tjostheim & Tronvoll, 2002). In the light of this, naturally these cities have been prepared to host many tourists, mainly by creating Official Tourism Websites. The relevance of these Websites lies in the fact that a specific image and information on the city is given. Similarly, the most relevant Websites have also been provided with the necessary tools to include e-commerce and appropriate resources to communicate with tourists.

This paper will help CVBs to realize the importance of having the right image on the Internet, i.e. an Official Tourism Website of each city which is linked to their marketing strategy. The Internet and the World Wide Web are considered to be the right technologies to present the city to the target market of tourists and to develop a complete marketing mix strategy.

Over the next pages, the concept of Tourism destination and CVBs will be explained. In the first place, big cities are recognized as a main type of destination for leisure and business trips. Second, the possibilities that the Internet and the official websites offer from a marketing perspective are analyzed. In particular, the chapter refers to a) the opportunities to use the websites and the Internet to develop a complete marketing mix strategy starting with a Website for market research, b) the product and price strategy, and c) the repercussions of the Internet in the channels of tourism products and services. Now CVBs can commercialize local tourism services at an international level via their websites. Finally, the new promotion and communication framework linked to the Internet and World Wide Web are presented.

CITIES AS TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT MANAGE THEM

A tourism destination is a complex concept to define. Traditionally, it has been understood as a specific geographic area where tourism resources and products are located and to which tourists travel. However, some writers consider that the actual perception is more relevant whereby the concept is related to the consumer’s subjective perception, depending on travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level and past experience (Buhalis, 2000). For instance, Lisbon can be a considered a destination in itself for a business traveler whereas for someone traveling for leisure, Lisbon could be purely part of a trip encompassing Sintra, Cascais and Estoril.

Authors defending the first type of definition are Bull (1991) and Hall (2000). For them, a tourism destination is a country, a region, an island or a city as the main objectives for the consumers that visit them. On the other hand, Cooper et al. (1998) define tourism destinations as a group of facilities
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