

TUTORIAL 11 THE INTERNET, WEB 2.0 AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY



This tutorial has been produced by The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse as part of the complete online education program, Tourism e-kit

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THE INTERNET, WEB 2.0 AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Reading time: 20 minutes

Prerequisite: n/a

This tutorial summarises the state of The Internet, web 2.0 and the tourism industry and its implications for small and medium tourism businesses.

1) ABOUT ONLINE TOURISTS

a) How do tourists search online?

People are looking for information with the intention to buy. 80% of users start their search on a search engine: if they can't find you they won't book you!

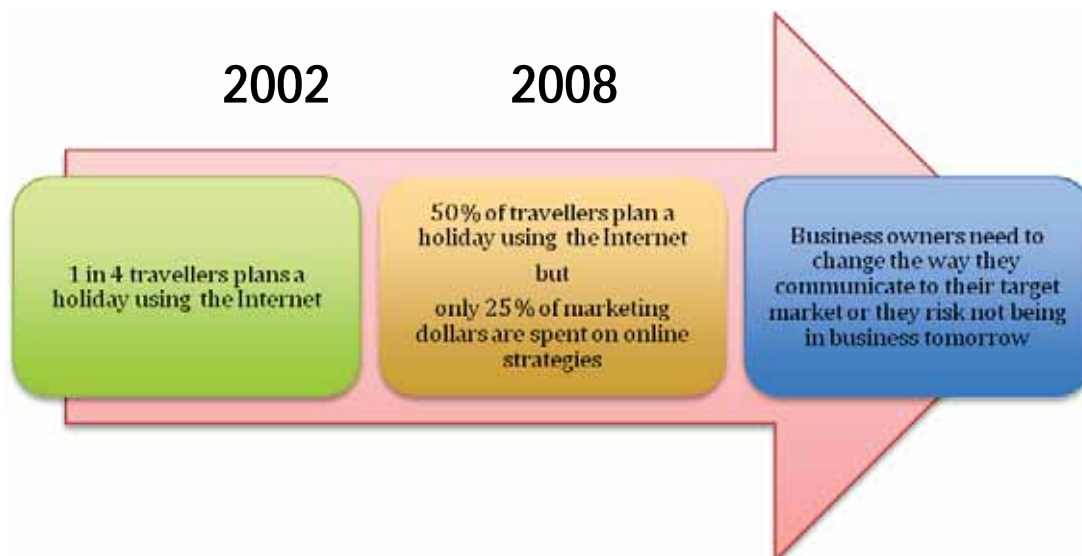
They want to be engaged in an online experience, and are after websites that allow them to feel they are experiencing what they are reading about. They want to access information that answers their questions; otherwise they will leave the site. Finally, they want to be able to book easily. If they can't book online or establish contact via email or telephone, they will leave.



Photo credit: <http://flickr.com/photos/hjl/>

b) Evolution of online holiday planning

The statistics below reveal an important change in holiday planning patterns. However, operators are not fully capitalising on these travellers who are using the net to plan their trip.



2) IMPLICATIONS OF WEB 2.0 FOR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

“Web 2.0” describes a growing trend towards online content made by web users, rather than traditional publishers. It is an umbrella term used to describe online technologies that facilitate interaction and exchange of information online.



Marketing your website using web 2.0 technologies is crucial in order to respond to the need of the web 2.0-savvy traveller. However, you will first need to assess how your target market uses each technology to decide on how to integrate it into your online strategy as each technology necessitates a different approach.

Below is an example of how aspirant divers could search for a dive course using web 2.0 avenues.

They browse the video-sharing site YouTube for diving footage so they can picture what their future scuba diving experience in North Queensland could be like. They then ask for more advice on online discussion groups such as the Lonely Planet Thorn Tree, TripAdvisor forum on scuba diving blogs or discussion forums. They book online on the website that gives them the most information without having to pick up the phone. Once the holiday is over, they post their photos on the photo-sharing site Flickr, write a review about their accommodation on TripAdvisor, report on their experience on the forums where they initially asked for advice, and recommend or advise against your tour business to other members of their online community.

The above example illustrates that a basic brochure-like website is not sufficient to attract the web savvy traveller. As a business owner you need to rethink your online strategy and ensure it incorporates the required web 2.0 technologies.

3) KEY CONSIDERATIONS TO SUCCEED IN THE WEB 2.0 ERA

To succeed online, you need to:

- Have a website that meets the needs of the demanding target market.
- Work with the web 2.0 tools to increase your online presence, manage your online reputation and

integrate these tools within your website whenever possible.

- Be present on third-party distributor sites such as Wotif, Stayz, and Last Minute as they have a bigger reach and will rank high in search engines for mainstream keywords.
- Remember that first impressions are often made online via search results that point to third party reviews of your product or to an external video or blog post. Pay attention to and closely monitor every page on which your product is listed. Set up Google alerts to do so.

a) Website requirements

Consider your website as your most dependable and untiring salesperson. **Just like your voice on the phone when talking to a customer**, it needs to be fresh, easy to understand, provide timely information and encourage your customers to make contact with you (what is called a conversion).

On any given day, a well planned and search engine optimised website will attract anywhere between 30 to 100 new and unique visitors. In comparison, your phone might only ring 3 to 20 times a day.

A QUICK CALCULATION REVEALS THAT FOR 1 PHONE CALL YOU RECEIVE ON ANY GIVEN DAY THERE ARE FROM 5 TO 10 OTHER PEOPLE WHO SHOULD VISIT YOUR WEBSITE.

Fill out the table below to calculate your phone call to website viewing ratio. How do you compare to the average? If the ratio is low (less than 5), your website is not performing at its optimum level. If you are below average, read paragraphs b) and c) which will outline the possible causes.

	Average	Your business
A Average number of phone enquiries received during a day:	3 to 20
B Average number of daily unique new visitors to your website*: <i>*If you cannot tell how many people visit your website per day, refer to the Google Analytics tutorial to install tracking on your website.</i>	30 to 100
B/A: For every phone call I get , people visit my website	5 to 10

b) Small and medium tourism businesses' websites are not visible to the searcher

It is regrettably very common that tourism businesses' websites are not visible to the online searcher. It means that they do not appear on search engine listings when "ready to buy" travellers are looking for a product that they offer. This is due to the fact that these websites are not written in a format which search engines are capable of understanding. In other words, they are not "search engine optimised". Search engine optimisation is a manual process that has to be performed on every site.

Imagine Gemma Davies searching on Google for a "romantic escape near brisbane". You are the owner of a luxurious country bed and breakfast one hour from Brisbane and it seems to be the perfect match. However, when Gemma uses Google, she doesn't find your website! This is because your website is not optimised for the keywords that Gemma is using.

IF YOUR WEBSITE IS NOT OPTIMISED FOR SEARCH ENGINES, IT IS JUST AS IF YOU HAD A PHONE NUMBER BUT WEREN'T LISTED IN THE PHONE BOOK.

c) My website is not converting visitors into sales

If your website is attracting many visitors who unfortunately leave without contacting you or making a purchase, you are then confronted with what is called low conversion rates. People visit your site but they do not make a purchase (or convert).

Most of the time, this is due to the content and structure of the website not meeting the needs of the web user. For instance, your visitors cannot find their way around the site or they cannot find answers to the questions they might have.

The web is the first point of contact between the customers and your organisation. **If an Internet user visits your website, you need to ensure they are positively surprised by your online presence.** You should review every page and ensure it meets all the requirements and answers all the questions a customer might have.

In order for the client to convert, your website's copy needs to replicate the sales pitch you would deliver to a client on the phone or in person. See the following paragraph to learn how to do so.

4) DO I NEED TO BE INTERNET SAVVY TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

No, not at all. Today's online marketer is a dynamic **people person**, and being a tourism operator you are very well suited to this role.

However, you will need to dedicate time and effort to **adapt your website as often as you adapt your product**, and respond to emails as quickly as you would respond to a phone enquiry. Time is of the essence as web surfers are impatient.

There are no programmer skills required to be self-sufficient in online marketing. You are still going to market your product to a human. The only difference is that you will do it through digital mediums such as website, photos, videos etc.

Below is a chart illustrating how to successfully transition from a non web-environment to a web environment. You can print it and keep it by your computer as a reminder for when you work on your website and web strategy.

Non Web environment

Web environment



<p>Sales Pitch How to transfer enthusiasm and knowledge</p>	<p>Your tone of voice and the language you use is adaptable to each client</p>	<p>Use words, images, videos, sound: cater for all your target markets</p>
<p>How customers picture themselves experiencing your offer</p>	<p>Customers use your words and the sounds they hear to imagine what your product is like</p>	<p>Customers can only rely on what they see on your website and read about you on the Internet (TripAdvisor)</p>
<p>How customers can book</p>	<p>They can book directly with you. You let them know the availability and they pay by credit card over the phone</p>	<p>They want to be able to book direct or expect a very quick email response (less than 24h)</p>
<p>Customers' gut feeling & decision making</p>	<p>Their feeling is strongly based on how they are being treated on the phone</p>	<p>Their feeling is strongly based on what they can find about you online (your website or what others wrote about you)</p>

5) RELATED MATERIAL

a) Related tutorials

- Initial assessment of my website
- Web strategy: assessment and components
- Target market 101
- Search engines 101
- Critical components of optimising a website
- Understanding inbound links to my site
- Sourcing inbound links
- Customer reviews and TripAdvisor
- Google tools
- Google Analytics

b) Related website

None at this time