

**MAJSKA KONFERENCIJA O
STRATEGIJSKOM MENADŽMENTU**

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STRATEGIJSKOM MENADŽMENTU**

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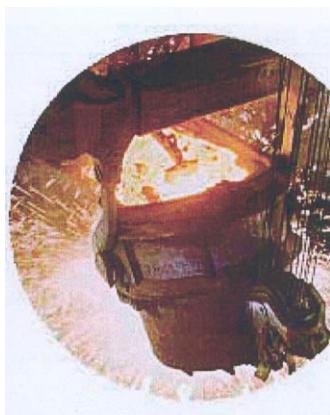
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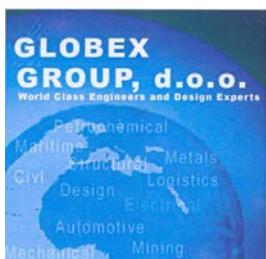


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MARKETING OF TOURISM BUSINESS AND UTILISATION OF THE INTERNET

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Abstract

The potential benefits of using the Internet as a marketing tool in the tourism industry have been already perceived. These benefits include cost-savings, speed, accessibility, communication of large volumes of information, customer convenience, improved customer relationship management, improved target marketing, and a world-wide reach for smallest tourism business. In this way, the Internet is tool which may assist small businesses in both their global and domestic marketing. Having a network of effective alliances, a high level of owner-manager involvement in the Internet marketing strategy, clear owner-manager vision are important to the successful use of the Internet for the marketing of small tourism businesses.

So, development of small business becomes an attractive focus area in addressing the problems of unemployment, low economic growth and the subsequent negative impact on social development in general.

But also important subject for discussion is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism business-nature-orientated tourism or rural tourism with essential concept to attract investment.

The customer orientation dimension facilitates the collection of information about customers as well as organisational learning, which is crucial during the planning and implementation of Internet marketing. A lot of results indicate that a network of effective alliances, the existence of a product champion in the business, and appreciation by the ownermanager of the broader business implications surrounding the implementation of the Internet for marketing, are important to the successful use of the Internet for the marketing of tourism services. Approach of the ownermanager also increase the importance of a market orientation as an important attribute for business success.

Keywords: *Internet, marketing, small tourism business, rural tourism, owner-manager approach and vision*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the global economy small businesses are playing a critical role in reducing unemployment, penetrating new markets and generally growing national economies. It follows that small businesses represent an important vehicle for addressing the challenges of job creation, economic development and social development. Tourism is an under-exploited sector with considerable potential for expansion, particularly given the high labour absorption capacity of small businesses¹.

Today, more often are studies that attempt to identify the non technology resources driving the successful use of the Internet for marketing tourism services, taking a resource-based view of the business. If these complementary resources can be identified, they can be used to leverage the

¹ Bengtsson, M., Boter, H. & Vanyushyn, V. 2003. ‘The challenge of building marketing channels via the Internet’. International Council for Small Business (ICSB) 2003 conference, 15-18th June 2003. Belfast, Northern Ireland.

use of the Internet for marketing, which in turn will contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage for small tourism businesses.

Conclusions of studies indicate that a network of effective alliances, the existence of a product champion in the business, and appreciation by the ownermanager of the broader business implications surrounding the implementation of the Internet for marketing, are important to the successful use of the Internet for the marketing of tourism services.

In spite of the Internet being uniquely equipped to provide dynamic and rich information to customers in an interactive setting, identifying the drivers of successful Internet marketing is proving to be challenging. Although it can be argued that the utilisation of the Internet for marketing is necessity for businesses, this information technology rarely has a direct impact on achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA)¹.

This approach to understanding the influence of information technologies on realising a sustainable competitive advantage implies that although businesses may have equal access to the Internet, they may differ in their access to complementary strategic resources necessary to optimally utilise this medium. One approach to appreciating the factors driving the successful deployment of the Internet for marketing is the resource-based view (RBV) of the business².

In this context, resource-based view is used as a means of identifying and empirically testing the complementary resources necessary for the successful implementation of the Internet for the marketing of small tourism businesses. RBV of the business is important as a way of understanding Internet marketing within the context of small tourism businesses. In following this approach, could be understand the extent to which small tourism businesses' unique, business-specific resources can contribute to the successful use of the Internet for marketing, and in this way, ultimately contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage.

So, the RBV of the business posits that a business is able to sustain a competitive advantage in respect of its competitors by owning certain resources. However, in order to use RBV theory to explain the drivers of Internet marketing success, it is first necessary to consider a theoretical link between Internet marketing and the RBV of the business.

The application of the RBV of a business is significant as means to understanding e-commerce performance³.

Assessing the success of integrating information technologies into the marketing of a business is the extent to which it contributes to the satisfaction of customer needs. This view implies that a resource may be a source of competitive advantage if it is valuable to customers or enables the creation of value for customers.

In the most of studies, one area which has eluded researchers in recent years is the extent to which the Internet may be able to provide or contribute to an SCA. In this context, it is argued that while the implementation of the Internet for marketing does not in itself constitute a SCA, this may be achieved through the relationships and linkages between this information technology and other business assets and capabilities.

2. INTERNET MARKETING

Most studies attempt to build on extant research which has attempted to identify the resources required to allow businesses to leverage generic information technologies (IT), such as the Internet, to enhance the businesses' returns. Also, the entrepreneur should have a vision of what the Internet

¹ Chaffey, D., Mayer, R., Johnston, K. & Ellis-Chadwick, F. 2000. *Internet marketing, strategy, implementation and practice*. Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall.

² Porter, M. E. 2001. 'Strategy and the Internet', *Harvard Business Review*

³ Rayport, J. F. & Jaworski, B. J. 2001. *E-commerce*. New York: Irwin McGraw-Hill.

can achieve, and a competency which implies that the ownermanager takes his vision further and actually acquires the technology and technical competencies to utilise this medium¹. The ownermanager manages the Internet within the context of the overall business and marketing activities on a continuous basis, which means a high level of involvement on the part of the owner-manager.

3. TOURISM MARKETING AND SMALL BUSINESSES

The tourism industry has been identified as one of the key industries for driving economic development and economic transformation in developing countries. The marketing challenges facing tourism businesses are unique in that these businesses cannot be promoted in isolation from their competing and complementary products. So, the tourism industry is part of the service sector and the tourism product is predominately a service offering, whereas much of the research on the factors driving the successful adoption of the Internet as a marketing tool have largely concerned physical goods.

Small businesses lack many of the resources typically available to larger businesses, and as a result find it difficult to compete with bigger enterprises in terms of reaching target markets using the conventional marketing techniques². The marketing practices of small businesses are influenced by factors as the traits of the owner-manager, the size of the small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME), and its stage of development, all of which impact on their marketing techniques. The Internet, with its ability to reach broad and diverse markets at a very low marginal cost, has the potential to contribute to the growth of this sector.

Also, it is important to identify the business-specific factors that influence successful Internet marketing in small tourism businesses.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNET MARKETING SUCCESS

The factors identified and empirically evaluated in the most of study are (a) the ownermanager of the tourist business acting as product champion: (b) ownermanager knowledge and (c) alliances³.

The factors are those that are associated with the implementation or use of the Internet as a business/marketing tool.

Taking a RBV of the business, are used three resources – “information technology resources”, “human resources” and “business resources”– to predict IT performance and business performance. These resources are identified as potential drivers of Internet-marketing success. Specifically, the owner-manager of a small tourism business acting as a product champion and the knowledge of the ownermanager, are complementary human resources, whereas alliances can be classified as complementary business resources.

a) Owner-manager as product champion

Owner-managers as product champion are the people who recognise the potential of a particular project and take the necessary action to implement the innovation. The embracing of the Internet by owner-managers as an important medium to achieve organisational goals is a critical factor in its adoption and successful utilisation.

¹ Rayport, J. F. & Sviokla, J. J. 1995. ‘Exploiting the virtual value chain’, Harvard Business Review

² Middleton, V. T. C. & Clarke, J. R. 2001. *Marketing in travel and tourism*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. <http://weblinks2.epnet.com/> - bib69up

³ South Africa. Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism 1998. *Tourism in gear: Tourism development strategy 1998-2000*. Pretoria: Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

Internet marketing is successful in small tourism businesses, so the owner-manager should act as a product champion in respect of this initiative. Research suggests that a product champion in respect of use of the Internet for marketing may be more important for small and medium sized businesses than for large businesses.

The importance of a product champion for the successful implementation of a new innovation cannot be questioned and the Internet is indeed one of the most significant new innovations of our time. However, extend this argument and distinguish between basic and advanced use of the Internet, arguing that the use of the Internet could be both a radical and incremental innovation. The importance of this distinction is that greater top management support is required for radical innovations. The importance of the owner-manager acting as a product champion is important in small tourism businesses because of the inseparability of production and consumption and the significant influence of the owner-manager in small businesses¹.

This conclusion is consistent with research done in respect of the successful adoption and implementation of information technology (IT) by small businesses, which found that management/owner enthusiasm in respect of the initiative, is a critical factor in its successful implementation.

The Internet, however, has many similarities to electronic data interchange (EDI) and in both cases having a product champion is important. Having the owner-manager as a product champion in a small tourism business will enhance the chances of successful Internet marketing in small tourism businesses.

In this context, ownermanagers did not need to be experts in information technology, a reasonable level of technical knowledge is important for its successful adoption and implementation.

The implications of an owner-manager acting as a product champion suggest that the owner-manager will have a vision of the potential of Internet marketing, which is an important component in achieving Internet marketing success.

b) Owner-manager knowledge

In order to integrate the Internet as a core tool for marketing, some authors posit that 'technical ability' is a competency that needs to be acquired by the ownermanager.

The owner-manager should implement all the technical attributes. The ownermanager of a small tourism business have to have the technical competence to implement the Internet personally, as much of the required knowledge could be sourced from his personal contact network². Reality often confirms this contention.

An exposed study which conducted research into the adoption of ecommerce by small and medium enterprises in Hong Kong, found that 69 percent of businesses with Web sites relied on outside service providers to design and maintain their Web sites. In this way, a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the Internet by the owner-manager of a small business is necessary for the successful implementation of the Internet for marketing, as often only the owner-manager appreciates the critical issues in a small business and is in a position to make informed decisions³.

The knowledge that owner-managers of small tourism businesses have of the Internet will be related to the successful use of the Internet for marketing purposes.

¹ Hill, J. & McGowan, P. 1996. 'Developing a networking competency for effective enterprise development', *Journal of Small Business & Enterprise Development*

² Haynes, P. J., Becherer, R. C. & Helms, M. M. 1998. 'Small & mid-sized businesses & Internet use: Unrealised potential?', *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications & Policy*

³ Mehrtens, J., Cragg, P. B. & Mills, A. M. 2001. 'A model of Internet adoption by SMEs', *Information and Management*

c) Alliances

Alliances can take a number of forms and include personal contact networks, social networks, business networks, industry and marketing networks. Alliances are used to describe these cooperative relationships. These inter-personal relationships take on importance for small businesses when utilising the Internet as a marketing tool.

Alliances play a crucial role in small business marketing by reducing uncertainty, facilitating trust and, in so doing, reducing the risk for all the parties. These networks are also used by small organisations to access market information, as small businesses often do not have the time or resources to buy market information or solicit the services of business consultants¹. They also have an influence on its decision-making. Thus, because small businesses may lack the specialised knowledge necessary for the successful planning and implementation of Internet technology to achieve their business objectives cooperative behaviours will expand their knowledge and overcome resource weaknesses in respect of Internet marketing².

Being involved in an alliance-type arrangement would enhance the chances of successful Internet marketing for a small tourism organisation.

In this way an alliance could indirectly impact on successful Internet marketing. With this in mind, the extent of alliances is positively related to the extent of the owner-manager's knowledge of the business implications of marketing over the Internet.

Owner-manager involvement

Another important thing is the involvement of the ownermanager in the everyday management of Internet marketing.

In small businesses, only the owner-manager has access to information and resources to make and implement appropriate decisions and this finding is particularly germane to small tourism businesses because of the inseparability of production and consumption³.

Thus, it is suggest that owner-manager involvement in the use of the Internet as a marketing tool will enhance the probability of successful Internet marketing in small tourism organisations.

In this way, one specific and the fastest growing sectors of the tourism business is nature-oriented tourism or rural tourism. The travel industry has enlisted the support of environmental organizations and park agencies and is promoting nature travel as the hottest 'environmentally correct' activity available."

These include the potential for this tourism niche to address the abandonment of the countryside, contribute to rural renewal, and even help to stem migration⁴.

In this context, for this kind of tourism and its promotion is used Internet and in this context by participating in the conference and conference's online chats, and other on-line news. The rural tourism conference is also valuable for access to international success stories, experiments, trends and statistics.

Using Internet and understand the meaning of the owner-manager's involvement in the day-to-day managing there are many other valuable models and step-by-step approaches which could help for assessing a community's or region's potential for rural tourism that would be helpful for business initiatives.

¹ Thong, J. & Yap, C. S. 1995. 'CEO characteristics, organisational characteristics, and information technology adoption in small business', *Omega*.

² Runge, D. A. & Earl, M. 1988. 'Gaining competitive from telecommunications'. Earl, M. (Ed.). *Information management: The strategic dimension*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

³ WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council). 2003. *South Africa: Travel & tourism a world of opportunity*. London: World Travel and Tourism Council.

⁴ www.planeta.com/ecotravel/links/ foundations.html; www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/awards.html.

5. CONCLUSION

The literature shows the significance of a product champion on the successful implementation of the Internet for marketing. The excitement, enthusiasm, passion and commitment with which the owner-manager embraces the use of the Internet for marketing, generates support for the project amongst employees of the business. This is particularly pertinent in high contact service businesses such as small tourism businesses where, given the inseparability of production and consumption, employees are an important part of the marketing communication process.

The empirical results from researchers could be used as a proved that alliances are an important determinant of successful Internet marketing. The importance of alliances with competing or complementary organisations lies with not only in their ability to access knowledge resources for the owner-manager, but also with the opportunities they present in terms of creating new products and opportunities. Small tourism businesses should not be too narrow in their approach to sourcing ideas and forming associations. Complementary businesses or service businesses not in the tourism sector may offer insights and notions that may not be established practice in a particular sub-sector of the tourism market and that may give a business some shortterm advantage in respect of its competitors with regard to Internet marketing. Similarly, businesses should maintain close links with regional tourism organisations as they frequently commission, or have access to research that may have a positive impact on the Internet marketing of small businesses.

Having an online marketing presence does not necessarily lead to improved marketing and concomitant financial rewards. Utilising the Internet for marketing in the small tourism business context, in addition to the financial investment, implies a certain level of emotional commitment by the owner-manager. This is particularly pertinent in high-contact service businesses such as small tourism businesses where, given the inseparability of production and consumption, employees are an important part of the marketing communication process.

The results confirm the significance of the owner-manager's involvement in the day-to-day managing of the tourism initiative as well as the importance the vision of the owner manager in respect of the promise of Internet marketing. This emphasises the point that simply implementing the Internet is no silver bullet. Successful implementation still requires a substantial contribution from the owner-manager as do most aspects of small business management. The reason for this is that in small businesses only the ownermanager has the vision and the authority to access and implement resources appropriately to ensure that the Internet marketing initiative is in congruence with the strategic direction of the small tourism business.

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