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# The web sites of international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the web sites of international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan. The evaluation system consists of three general user criteria: user interface, variety of information and online reservation. Results show that 50 percent of the total sample of hotels and tour wholesalers have already established web sites. Among these “user interface” was rated highest among the three categories. “Variety of information” received the lowest rating. More tourist hotels provide on-line reservation systems than do tour wholesalers. Results also indicate that the use of the Internet in Taiwan’s tourism/hospitality industry is primarily for advertising, not marketing. In conclusion, it is suggested that, in regard to Internet marketing, tourist hotels and tour wholesalers work closely with information industries. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Internet; Marketing; Web sites; Content analysis

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of the Internet has increased dramatically and many countries in the world have made efforts to improve their Internet services. Poel and Leunis (1999) believe that the Internet is an important channel of distribution for consumers. According to recent studies, the Internet is the most effective when used as an advertising and marketing tool (Hoof, Hubert, Collins, Combrink, & Verbeeten, 1995; Kasavana, Knuston, & Polonowski, 1997; Walle, 1996). It can be contended that the Internet is changing the daily lives of individuals, companies and organizations and the way they seek information. In addition, the validity of the Internet as an advertising and marketing tool has been proven (Kasavana et al., 1997).

In Burke (1997), the author found that a web site's content has a significant effect on advertising and marketing and that new systems for interacting with the Internet are becoming increasingly user-friendly, thus broadening the user base. The tourism/hospitality industry is beginning to use the Internet as part of its marketing effort (Connolly, Olsen, & Moore, 1998). In Taiwan, professional interest in using the Internet as a marketing tool is also increasing in the tourism/

hospitality industry (Yang & Wan, 2000; Yung, 1997/1998).

Although a number of research studies regarding web sites relating to the tourism/hospitality industry have been conducted worldwide (Countryman, 1999; Park & Sohn, 2000), few have been found that deal specifically with Taiwan. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the web sites of tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan using content analysis. Three evaluation criteria, user interface, variety of information and the presence or absence of an on-line reservation system were used and the contents of web sites were compared between hotels and tour wholesalers. The results of this study provide industry professionals with information with which they can build well-constructed and effective web sites.

## 2. Literature review

Addressability and responsiveness are two of the more important features of digital networked communication at the present time (Leighton, 1997). Studies focusing on the Internet have been conducted in recent years, particularly as it relates to advertising and marketing. Among all of the Internet's resources, the WWW functions the best in advertising and marketing. The

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Internet has proven to be an effective means of advertising, marketing, distributing goods, and information services (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

As previously proposed, the application of the Internet plays a very important role within the development of information technology (IT). Walle (1996) has indicated that there is an increasingly available supply of travel and tourism resources on the Internet encompassing a broader base of users and potential users. In general, the Internet can be used in two distinct (but not mutually exclusive) ways: first, as a source of data by which the user accesses resources purely to get information; and second, as a means of marketing and facilitating business transactions. The Internet is changing the ways in which the hospitality industry plans, controls, operates, and integrates a majority of its business activities, including its marketing activities (Kasavana et al., 1997).

Many researchers have used content analysis to evaluate the web sites of related industries (Murphy, Forrest, Wotring, & Brymer, 1996; Bell & Tang, 1998; Countryman, 1999). Murphy and his colleagues used five search engines to search hotel web sites in Florida and identified 32 different features from 36 hotel web sites that provide on-line reservations. They pointed out that using another browser would probably yield different results. The 32 features were divided into four categories: promotion and marketing, service and information, interactivity and technology and management. Countryman (1999) used content analysis to evaluate the official tourism web sites of all 50 states in the United States. Bell and Tang (1998) examined the effectiveness of the current Internet web sites from the user's perspective and claimed that 30 percent of the companies had facilities for conducting on-line transactions.

Many technical studies regarding the Internet have also been conducted. The tourism/hospitality industry is no exception, especially those companies concerned with IT. Yet, this has not been discussed widely in recent years. Cash, McFarlan, McKenney and Applegate (1992) have proposed a model showing how industry can use IT to improve both, a particular company's production as well as its marketing. The tourism/hospitality industry, in particular, depends on IT for the bulk of its business.

The use of Internet applications in the tourism/hospitality industry is a recent development. This study evaluates the web sites of tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Population and sample*

This study analyzed the web site content of 60 international tourist hotels and 78 tour wholesalers in

Taiwan. For the purpose of this study, an international tourist hotel is defined as a hotel that is rated three stars or higher. A tour wholesaler is defined as a travel agency with a minimum of US\$ 650,000 in capital. Two search engines Yam (<http://www.yam.com.tw>) and Kimo (<http://www.kimo.com.tw>), were used to search the web sites. The survey was conducted in a two-week period from June 1–15, 1999.

#### *3.2. Rating system*

Taylor (1986) describes three parts of the information process: the user, the interface, and the system. Taylor's Value-Added Model comprises six general user criteria (ease of use, noise reduction, quality, adaptability, time-savings, and cost-savings) that add value to an information system. Small (1997) believes that four of these six are particularly relevant to a web site's quality: ease of use, noise reduction, quality and adaptability. This study adopts Taylor's Value-Added Model, in conjunction with Small's (1997) findings, and adds comments from interviews with industry professionals to form the evaluation system. The evaluation instrument is divided into three categories of criteria: user interface, variety of information and on-line reservations. A 5-point rating scale was used to evaluate the categories of user interface and variety of information. The appendix provides an in-depth analysis of the rating scale. The yes–no evaluations were used in the "on-line reservations" criteria. Table 1 shows the rating system for evaluating web sites of hotels and tour wholesalers.

#### *3.3. Data collection*

In order to reduce bias in the evaluation process, two research assistants, whose expertise is in the field of hotel management and tourism management, examined the web sites of hotels and tour wholesalers, using an evaluation instrument. Each web site was evaluated by rating the overall excellence of user interface and variety of information on a 5-point rating scale. When the two ratings for each web site differed by one point or less, the average of the two ratings was taken as the final rating. When the two ratings differed by more than one point, then the two research assistants examined the web site together and determined the final rating. Fig. 1 illustrates the flowchart of the rating system. The difference between ratings by the two research assistants was more than two points for six hotels and five tour wholesalers. The two research assistants examined these 11 web sites together to determine the final ratings. Results show that 50 percent of the total sample examined had their own web sites. These consist of 30 tourist hotels and 39 tour wholesalers.

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