

E-destinations: Global Best Practice in Tourism Technologies and Applications

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Abstract

The emergence of ICT enables consumers to search for destinations worldwide more easily, making it necessary to constantly improve the web presence and social media used by destinations. This study firstly aims to benchmark global destinations with regards to their level of implementation of technologies and applications. Secondly, global best practices for e-destinations will be identified with the help of a detailed content analysis of destinations' website presence and social media applications. At the same time, the industry perspective about e-destinations will be taken into consideration in order to get an insight into the future and vision for destination management systems and website presence. By this means, a variety of factors will be analysed that can facilitate the consumers' search on the destination's websites before, during and after a holiday. The study contains best practice recommendations for destinations' web presence that should be implemented in order to sustain their future online success and competitiveness.

Keywords: Tourism technologies and applications, DMO, destination marketing, best practice, benchmark and e-destinations

1 Introduction

The tourism industry experiences a shift from offline to online travellers. An increasing number of consumers worldwide are not dependent on travel agencies anymore to look for information and inspiration for their next holiday. Instead, consumers make use of the Internet, Web1 and Web2 and browse online for inspiration about their potential next holiday destination (ETC 2012). This in turn leads to tourism destinations worldwide becoming the focal point of attention for consumers' decision making process. However, many destinations worldwide struggle with this process as their Internet and online presence might still be quite basic (Buhalis 2000). Extensive research has been made regarding emerging technologies and social media. Gradually the tourism industry is making use of the knowledge available is implementing these new and innovative technologies and applications (Mintel 2011). Destination Management Organisations (DMO) worldwide are increasingly investing into their online presence and refer to destination management systems (DMS) in terms of assisting destinations with these functions due to their lack of technological understanding. DMS therefore help DMOs by providing a variety of products such as content management systems and databases to support their web and social media presence. Throughout the years, DMS systems became increasingly complex and are based on emerging technologies in order to help destinations become strong and competitive destinations of the future (Buhalis 1993; Wang 2008). Within the tourism industry, DMOs have lead to high interest by

academics in terms of their fast developments through technology and the constant global competition to implement and improve emerging technologies and applications. However, little research has been conducted about global best practice e-destinations and limited attempts have been made to benchmark and rank global e-destinations in terms of their performance and technologies and applications used (WTO 2005 & WTO 2008). This study aims to discover global best practice examples for the use of technology and applications in e-destination marketing. There is a clear need for creating a framework to constantly benchmark e-destinations worldwide in order to identify destinations' strengths and weaknesses in terms of their use of technologies and applications. By this means, DMOs get to know their position within the global ranking and can ensure staying competitive in the future.

2 Theoretical Background

The success of any DMO is highly dependent on ensuring that the different stakeholders' interests and perceptions of a destination are harmonised in order to be able to achieve a joint goal (Manente & Minghetti 2006; NDou and Petti 2007). Through the move from offline to online travellers, the web and social media presence of destinations are crucial as e-Destinations serve as platforms where consumers can be inspired, get all the information about a potential trip to a destination and eventually book the holiday (Pan & Fesenmaier 2003). A DMS system can assist the DMO in achieving these set goals in terms of improving the destination's web and social media presence by using computer and communication technologies (Wang 2011). Although, there are a variety of free tools available, especially through the emergence of Information and communication technologies (ICTs), a lot of DMOs are still dependent on the knowledge and expertise of DMS providers and benefit of an improved web presence after the implementation of a system (Wang and Russo 2007).

There are a number of theories in the tourism literature about measuring website effectiveness, primarily for consumer-oriented websites in the tourism industry. For DMO websites only limited research is available which makes it necessary to adapt new theories and approaches in terms of measuring and comparing tourism websites worldwide (WTO 2005). The AIDA Concept and the 2QCV3Q Meta Model are two theories recommended by the World Tourism Organisation that enable destinations worldwide to become aware important factors or categories of the future which ensure their website is being effective (WTO 2008). However, these factors or concepts primarily focus on assessing broad technical issues such as navigation, accessibility, findability or technical performance but do not try and identify or compare differences in the use of technologies and applications. For destination managers worldwide, finding out about their performance within a global ranking can be seen as the main area of interest. Augmented reality, gamification, location based services and virtual realities are only a few of these technologies that will gradually be implemented by destinations (Buhalis and O'Connor 2005; Hamill et al 2011). Web-based destination marketing aims at attracting, engaging and retaining users in order to trigger repeat visitation of the destination's web presence. Although benchmarks have been made aiming at evaluating the effectiveness of websites, most of these studies focused on particular areas of websites (Park & Gretzel 2007). There is a need to analyse the effectiveness of the whole tourism product relating to destination's

integrated technologies and applications supporting the consumer's experience before, during and after a holiday.

3 Methods

The primary purpose of the study was to benchmark global e-destinations according to critical success factors of the future in order to establish best practice examples in terms of their use of technologies and applications. This study will help to close a gap in the destination marketing research. Therefore the methods chosen were a benchmark study of 30 international tourism destinations as well as a qualitative online exploratory survey.

3.1 Benchmark

Qualitative data was collected in the form of a comparative benchmark analysis of the way in which international destinations implement Web 1 and Web 2.0 applications and technologies. The research was web based as the information was available online. Benchmarking can be defined as “the search for the industry best practices that will lead to superior performance” (Camp, 1989 p.68). In the tourism industry, changes through technology can evolve quite quickly which makes learning processes in the form of benchmarks crucial in order to make comparisons within the industry. These comparisons can be analysed and can help the identification of strengths and weaknesses of tourism destinations. By this means, new and innovative ideas can be found (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2001). A total of 30 destinations were chosen for the benchmark analysis. As this study is based on a project in collaboration with the ATDW (Australian Tourism Data Warehouse) 10 of the destinations were given beforehand in the form of Australian States and Cities; the remaining sample of 20 destinations was chosen on the basis of articles, industry discussion and expert opinion as global best practice (see Table 1).

Table I. Destinations to benchmark

Sample selection	Destinations
Given by ATDW	Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia
Articles, industry discussion and expert opinion	Australia, Puerto Rico, NYC, California, Las Vegas, Montreal, Sweden, Germany, Vancouver, Hong Kong, British Columbia, New Zealand, Canada, Thailand, Singapore, UK, Norway, South Africa, Cape Town, Austria

For the analysis, the official English versions of DMO websites were visited; the links and URLs of these are given in the individual benchmark tables. A benchmarking framework was developed based on characteristics that should be analysed and measured according to the findings of the literature review. Different stages were identified and subordinate criteria implemented into the benchmark table:

- before holiday: inspire, inform, engage

- during holiday: facilitate at destination
- after holiday: remember, share and engage

The benchmark analysis examined 180 factors for each individual destination. All features within the framework were defined in advance in order to guarantee an objective evaluation within the benchmark. The existence or non-existence as well as the execution of certain characteristics was observed, noted with a “yes” or “no” and rated within the framework. A 5- point scale was used in order to express the level of adoption of the characteristics by the destinations. The scale can be described as: 1- very limited, 2 – limited, 3 – average, 4 – advanced, 5 –very advanced. In addition to the rating, comments were provided within the benchmark tables in order to state observations and justification for the rating. After calculating the average score of each factor in the framework, the study compared them with the individual destination scores. A colour scheme was then implemented in order to depict the results more visually.

3.2 Exploratory online survey

The second part of the method consisted of an online exploratory questionnaire that aimed at getting an insight into what industry considers the destination management systems of the future, global best practice e-destinations, technologies and applications. An exploratory design was seen as the appropriate method as it helps develop new ideas and is particularly useful when investigating a new field or area in which the research conducted is limited (Cooper & Schindler, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2011). To obtain qualitative data and not solely give respondents a choice of answers, the questionnaire consisted of 8 open-ended questions and information about the participant. The sample consisted of 50 international respondents by using snowball and purposeful sampling. Links to the online survey were distributed to a wide range of industry experts and tourism professionals through the authors’ Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Xing accounts, blogs, and announcements via e-mail to colleagues, the IFITT Board and TRINET Board. In addition to that discussion and announcements were started in 47 LinkedIn groups and in the traveldailynews.asia.com. All answers of the survey were kept anonymous and were analysed by using content analysis. During the content analysis, the transcript of answers was coded and reoccurring themes and topics were being identified and analysed.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of the benchmark analysis

Before Holiday -Inspire

Within the inspire phase, most international destinations scored above average. Within the benchmark, a few observations can be easily made when looking at the overall level of implementation of technologies and applications for the purpose of inspiring consumers. There is a general gap considering the implementation of interactive technologies within the destinations’ web presence. Only Montreal has integrated a virtual tour around the city in a highly creative way. Webcams can be a

good way for travellers to have a look at different places or attractions within a destination in real time.

Key evaluation factors	Average scores	AU	ME	SY	PE	BR	AD	NYC	PR	CF	LV
Web 1.0 / Destination website											
Visibility of website on search engines	4.33	0.67	-0.33	-0.33	-2.33	0.67	-1.33	-0.33	0.67	0.67	0.67
Findability of website	4.57	0.43	0.43	0.43	-2.57	0.43	-2.57	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43
SEO effective	4.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-3.07	-0.07	-2.07	-0.07	0.93	-0.07	-0.07
organic or sponsored links	3.87	0.13	-0.87	0.13	-1.87	-0.87	-0.87	0.13	0.13	0.13	-0.87
language switch	3.10	1.90	1.90	0.90	-2.10	-2.10	-2.10	-2.10	0.90	0.90	0.90
how many languages?	3.10	1.90	0.90	-0.10	-2.10	-2.10	-2.10	-2.10	-0.10	-0.10	1.90
eye catchers on website	3.90	1.10	-0.90	-0.90	0.10	0.10	-0.90	1.10	1.10	0.10	0.10
videos	3.30	0.70	1.70	-2.30	-2.30	-0.30	-2.30	-2.30	-0.30	-0.30	0.70
interactive videos	1.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13
images	3.77	0.23	-0.77	-0.77	0.23	0.23	-0.77	1.23	0.23	0.23	1.23
diversity of images	3.73	0.27	0.27	-0.73	-0.73	1.27	-1.73	0.27	1.27	-0.73	1.27
interactivity on website	2.13	0.87	-1.13	-1.13	-1.13	-1.13	-0.13	-1.13	0.87	0.87	0.87
links to social media?	3.47	0.53	-0.47	0.53	0.53	1.53	0.53	1.53	-0.47	-1.47	-0.47
which social media applications?	3.83	-0.83	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	1.17	0.17	0.17
destination blog linked to website	2.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	3.00	-1.00	3.00
live webcam	1.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	3.87	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13
strong first impression	3.53	1.47	-0.53	-0.53	-0.53	-0.53	-1.53	0.47	1.47	-0.53	0.47
audio sounds	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
general impression of visual appearance	3.53	1.47	-0.53	-0.53	0.47	-0.53	-1.53	0.47	1.47	-0.53	0.47
information available for different themes (activities, geography, interests...)	3.37	0.63	-0.37	-0.37	-0.37	-0.37	-0.37	0.63	1.63	-0.37	0.63
Can consumers get an understanding of the types of holidays that are possible in the destination?	3.23	0.77	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-1.23	-0.23	1.77	-0.23	0.77
virtual reality application	1.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10
accessibility of website by using smartphones	3.73	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	1.27
features for people with audio impairment	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
features for people with visual impairment	1.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43	1.57	-0.43
Web 2.0											
real time social network feed from Facebook	2.00	-1.00	2.00	-1.00	-1.00	2.00	-1.00	-1.00	2.00	-1.00	-1.00
real time social network feed from Twitter	2.03	-1.03	-1.03	0.97	-1.03	1.97	1.97	-1.03	1.97	-1.03	-1.03
are consumers sharing their videos to inspire other travellers?	2.43	0.57	1.57	-1.43	-1.43	1.57	-1.43	-1.43	0.57	-1.43	1.57
regular C2C input	2.90	0.10	0.10	0.10	-1.90	-1.90	-1.90	1.10	0.10	0.10	1.10
are other travellers recommending the destination	3.03	-0.03	-2.03	-0.03	-2.03	0.97	-0.03	0.97	-0.03	-0.03	0.97

Only one destination out of 30 is currently making use of that. Interactivity is another factor in the benchmark that the majority of destinations have neglected. New Zealand is an excellent example for that as users can scroll down and interactively move through different landscapes and situations. Travellers can click and read additional information and experience what kind of holidays they could have in the destination. All destinations should also reassess their current use of social media channels and might want to consider new and upcoming channels such as Pinterest that experience enormous growth and might be of growing importance. In general, destinations' social media sites need to be integrated into the web presence in order to improve the level of interactivity and connectivity. Virtual reality applications are another inspirational tool that should be considered by successful destinations of the future. So far, most destinations in the benchmark are underutilising the emerging technologies.

-Inform

Key evaluation factors	Average scores	AU	ME	SY	PE	BR	AD	NYC	PR	CF	LV
Web 1.0 / Destination website											
Range of information services	3.50	1.50	-0.50	-0.50	-0.50	-0.50	-0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	-0.50
descriptive information	3.47	1.53	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	0.53	0.53	0.53	-0.47
interactive information	1.40	1.60	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	1.60	-0.40
news feed about destination	1.77	-0.77	-0.77	-0.77	-0.77	1.23	-0.77	2.23	1.23	-0.77	-0.77
are special events pointed out to travellers	3.23	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	0.77
events calendar	3.20	1.80	-0.20	0.80	-0.20	0.80	-0.20	0.80	-0.20	0.80	0.80
Maps about destination	3.23	-0.23	-0.23	-1.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-2.23	-0.23	-0.23
level of interactivity of maps	2.57	0.43	-1.57	-1.57	-1.57	0.43	0.43	-1.57	-1.57	0.43	1.43
topic related images	3.57	0.43	-0.57	-0.57	-0.57	0.43	-0.57	0.43	0.43	-0.57	0.43
photo gallery	2.90	2.10	-1.90	1.10	-1.90	2.10	-1.90	-1.90	1.10	0.10	2.10
videos about specific information	3.30	0.70	-0.30	-2.30	-2.30	1.70	-2.30	-2.30	0.70	-2.30	0.70
different topics	3.30	0.70	-0.30	-0.30	-0.30	-0.30	-0.30	-0.30	0.70	-0.30	0.70
online guide about destination	1.97	-0.97	-0.97	2.03	-0.97	2.03	-0.97	-0.97	-0.97	2.03	2.03
accessibility information	2.30	-1.30	1.70	1.70	-1.30	-1.30	1.70	1.70	0.70	0.70	-1.30
accessibility guides	2.17	-1.17	1.83	0.83	-1.17	-1.17	1.83	1.83	-0.17	-0.17	-1.17
usability of website	3.93	1.07	1.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	1.07
are all links working	3.87	1.13	1.13	1.13	-2.87	1.13	1.13	1.13	-2.87	-1.87	1.13
easy navigation within the website	3.97	0.03	1.03	1.03	-0.97	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	1.03
clear structure	3.97	0.03	0.03	1.03	-0.97	0.03	0.03	0.03	1.03	0.03	1.03
personalisation of website possible	1.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13
interaction with destination possible	3.17	-0.17	0.83	-0.17	0.83	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	0.83
virtual tours	1.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80
customisation possible	1.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17
such as families, couples, groups...	2.13	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87	-1.13	-1.13	0.87	0.87	-1.13	-1.13
does the destination have a blog	2.4	-1.40	1.60	0.60	-1.40	-1.40	-1.40	-1.40	2.60	-1.40	1.60
route planner	1.80	2.20	1.20	0.20	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80
public transport tool	1.17	-0.17	1.83	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17
itinerary planning tool	2.03	1.97	-1.03	-1.03	0.97	-1.03	-1.03	0.97	-1.03	-1.03	2.97
interactive idea generator	1.40	2.60	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	-0.40	3.60
recommendations by other travellers	1.27	2.73	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27	-0.27
online audio guide about attractions	1.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20	-0.20
links to industry	1.97	1.03	1.03	1.03	1.03	-0.97	-0.97	1.03	-0.97	-0.97	-0.97
links to hotels	3.27	0.73	-0.27	0.73	0.73	-0.27	-1.27	-0.27	-2.27	-1.27	0.73
links to airlines	2.77	0.23	0.23	0.23	-1.77	0.23	-1.77	-1.77	1.23	-0.77	0.23
links to transport providers	2.97	1.03	1.03	0.03	-1.97	0.03	-0.97	0.03	0.03	0.03	-0.97
plug in of other applications on website	1.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47	2.53	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47
plug in weather application	2.67	-1.67	1.33	-1.67	1.33	-1.67	1.33	0.33	1.33	1.33	1.33
plug in transport application	1.17	1.83	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17	-0.17
Web 2.0											
do travellers share information on social media sites?	2.83	0.17	0.17	0.17	-1.83	0.17	-1.83	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
photo gallery on social networking sites	3.33	-0.33	0.67	-0.33	-0.33	-0.33	-0.33	-0.33	1.67	-0.33	0.67
approachability of destination in social media	3.23	-0.23	-0.23	0.77	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	0.77
problem solving	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
do travellers share experiences with other users?	2.63	1.37	-1.63	0.37	-1.63	-0.63	-1.63	0.37	0.37	0.37	1.37

Within the inform-phase, most international destinations are not using the technologies and applications available to their full potential. This entails that most global destinations are still behind what would be possible for them to achieve. It is crucial for these destinations to improve their general level of interactivity. Creative and new ways need to be found in which virtual tours, recommendations and planning tools such as route planners can be implemented in order to deliver adequate help in the planning stage of potential travellers. With the help of new technologies, the more advanced online destinations within the benchmark can become efficient one-stop shops whereas all other destinations can catch up on technologies in order to stay competitive.

-Engage

Key evaluation factors	Average scores	AU	ME	SY	PE	BR	AD	NYC	PR	CF	LV
Web 1.0 / Destination website											
communities for potential travellers on website?	1,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	1,70	-0,30	-0,30
live chat for questions	1,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	2,90	-0,10	1
Can travellers read and write reviews on website	1,53	2,47	-0,53	-0,53	-0,53	-0,53	-0,53	-0,53	1,47	-0,53	1
Accessibility of destination representatives	2,93	0,07	-0,93	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,07
Are there security and privacy policies	4,57	0,43	-1,57	0,43	0,43	0,43	0,43	0,43	0,43	0,43	0,43

All destinations within the benchmark should improve their implementation of technologies and applications in order to engage consumers prior to their visit. Destinations could improve their efforts by implementing communities for their users and provide them with virtual spaces in which they can discuss, engage and share. Sweden is an excellent example for a destination that has created a community website for travellers and fans of the destination. Community members can upload videos, images and stories and share them with other travellers who “love” Sweden or discuss different topics in a variety of forums and groups. This is an excellent opportunity for destinations to encourage travellers to become ambassadors for the destination. Another example for consumer engagement is the provision of spaces where users can read and write reviews within the destination web presence. Thailand has the section “Real Experiences” within their website dedicated to travellers where videos, images, travel stories and insider tips can be uploaded for other travellers to read and be inspired.

During Holiday -Facilitate at destination

Key evaluation factors	Average scores	AU	ME	SY	PE	BR	AD	NYC	PR	CF	LV
Web 1.0 / Destination website											
Downloadable information	2,07	0,93	-1,07	-1,07	-1,07	1,93	-1,07	-1,07	-1,07	0,93	-1,07
Brochures	2,63	0,37	-1,63	-1,63	1,37	1,37	-1,63	-1,63	0,37	0,37	1,37
Printable version of websites	2,50	1,50	0,50	0,50	0,50	-1,50	-1,50	1,50	-1,50	-1,50	-1,50
Guides for smartphones	1,87	-0,87	3,13	-0,87	-0,87	-0,87	-0,87	2,13	2,13	-0,87	-0,87
Downloadable apps for iPad, iPhone, Blackberry, Android	2,97	1,03	2,03	0,03	-1,97	0,03	-1,97	0,03	1,03	0,03	-1,97
events calendar	3,37	0,63	1,63	0,63	0,63	0,63	-0,37	0,63	-0,37	0,63	0,63
Booking/ reservation tools available for accommodation	2,43	-1,43	1,57	1,57	1,57	-1,43	-1,43	-1,43	-0,43	-1,43	1,57
Reservation tools for attraction tickets	1,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	2,73
Reservation tools for events tickets	1,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17
personalisation of website possible	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
help line in destination (phone or Skype)	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
last minute or special offers	2,87	0,13	1,13	0,13	1,13	-1,87	-1,87	0,13	0,13	1,13	1,13
RSS feed	1,67	-0,67	-0,67	1,33	1,33	-0,67	-0,67	-0,67	-0,67	-0,67	-0,67
context based services	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
location based services	1,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	-0,33	2,67
gamification	1,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13
treasure hunt	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
augmented reality app	1,13	-0,13	3,87	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13	-0,13
map app	1,37	1,63	1,63	-0,37	-0,37	-0,37	-0,37	1,63	-0,37	-0,37	-0,37
transportation finder	1,40	1,60	1,60	1,60	-0,40	-0,40	1,60	-0,40	-0,40	-0,40	-0,40
downloadable mp3 audio guide	1,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10	-0,10
personalised itinerary planner	1,83	1,17	-0,83	-0,83	-0,83	-0,83	-0,83	1,17	-0,83	1,17	3,17
Are personalised itineraries downloadable?	1,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	1,70	3,70
Weather forecast on website	2,60	-1,60	0,40	-1,60	1,40	-1,60	2,40	1,40	0,40	0,40	1,40
Experience finder by traveller types?	1,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30
Search by type of experiences possible?	1,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	-0,97	2,03	3,03
Search for keywords on website	4,13	-0,13	-0,13	0,87	0,87	0,87	-3,13	-0,13	0,87	0,87	0,87

This is an important stage in which destinations can implement tools and technologies in order to facilitate the travellers' stay in the destination. These tools can be in the form of online maps, downloadable information or applications for travellers to download during or prior to their visit. Some destinations have maps and tools already implemented into their website; however the majority of destinations are still in an early phase. Most benchmark scores within the "facilitate at destination"-phase were fairly low, indicating the fact that destinations fail to take advantage of the emerging technologies. This is therefore an area of interest for destinations aiming to become more competitive by implementing booking tools for accommodation. Most destinations have not integrated booking and reservation tools for events and restaurants yet. Best practice examples for that are Las Vegas, Sweden and Vancouver. Mobile technologies in the form of destination applications and location based services are another area destinations should look into. All destinations worldwide should invest in and improve the personalisation of the content of the website as well as the integration of personalised itinerary planners. The tourism industry experiences a trend towards the search for more unique and personalised experiences within a destination. Thailand is an excellent example for that as the web presence contains a number of user generated videos, images and stories regarding unique experiences that travellers can experience in the destination. Offering separate sections within the website for different special interest groups such as families and business travellers or different experiences depending on the traveller types are two other opportunities already executed by Germany and Canada. There is a need for new and creative ways in which destinations make use of the existent technologies.

After Holiday -Remember

Web 1.0 / Destination website											
Loyalty programme	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Sign-up for a destination newsletter	3,00	-2,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	-2,00	1,00	-2,00	0,00	1,00
Podcasts	1,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23
Personal trip basket for information	1,70	-0,70	-0,70	-0,70	-0,70	-0,70	-0,70	2,30	-0,70	2,30	2,30
Storage of personal itineraries	1,57	-0,57	-0,57	-0,57	-0,57	-0,57	-0,57	2,43	-0,57	2,43	3,43
Online shop available	1,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	3,70	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30
Online competitions on website	1,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	1,73	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27	-0,27
Sign-up for personal account on website	1,90	-0,90	-0,90	-0,90	1,10	-0,90	-0,90	1,10	2,10	3,10	-0,90
Storage of itineraries and information possible on account?	1,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-0,30	-1,30	3,70	-0,30
Online campaigns	1,23	2,77	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	1,77	-0,23	1,77

The benchmark demonstrates that all destinations fail to take full advantage of the technologies and applications available in tourism. For travellers to remember their stay in the destinations and encourage repeat visits, a newsletter with the latest information, events and offers is necessary to further build on the destination-traveller relationship. Personal accounts available for travellers within the website are another crucial tool for destinations. Users of these accounts can store information and personal itineraries which can serve as triggers for repeat visitation of the destinations' web presence by users and their friends and ultimately of the destination itself. Thailand is an excellent example as the destination has implemented a variety of podcasts for users to download with a wide range of information. New York City has integrated an online shop selling clothes and other merchandise for travellers to remember the destination.

Blogs											
number of followers	1,23	-0,23	2,77	1,77	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23	-0,23
number of blogs	2,20	-1,20	1,80	1,80	-1,20	-1,20	-1,20	-1,20	1,80	-1,20	1,80
types of comments	1,17	-0,17	2,83	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17	-0,17
level of interactivity	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
implementation of user generated content	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00

4.2 Results of the online exploratory survey

The survey was answered by 50 international respondents consisting of academics, students as well as tourism professionals. When asked about the future of online destinations, several categories could be identified: technology, mobile applications, reviewing websites, one stop shops, social media and knowledge. Although the growing importance of online destinations is recognised by the tourism industry, there are still differing opinions regarding what will be key technologies of the future. It is evident that social media, location based and mobile empowered (SoLoMo) marketing will be a critical success factor. Interactivity and implementation of mobile technologies in the form of mobile apps and sites as well as the integration of reviews, social media and booking opportunities become crucial for destinations' web presence. Another area of interest was to find out about future developments that might impact on online destinations. Two different views on developments were distinguished; some respondents feel that there is an information overload on websites, creating the need for destinations to prioritise. Other respondents feel the need for more advanced technologies altogether by implementing augmented realities, GPS and language services. Social media, mobile and interactivity are key developments that will impact on online destinations in the future. The exploratory questionnaire also aimed to establish the industry point of view towards destination management systems (DMS) of the future and potential system features. The main findings emphasise the need for authenticity and getting a full understanding of the customers. Consequently, the DMS should integrate features that enable destinations to integrate different information, booking tools and eCRM (customer relationship management). DMS should aim to get conversions rather than click through rates and integrate new technologies in order to constantly monitor the system's success. The best destination system of the future should support all functions from the inspiration to the after sales phase. However, the survey also identified a number of challenges that DMS need to overcome. These are trust between the system and the tourism stakeholders as destinations should monitor the impact of the online presence in order to justify the implementation of a DMS system. Although the costs of implementation of a system can be quite high and very often there is a lack of know-how within the destination, the benefits need to be demonstrated in order to justify the necessity of implementing a DMS system and emerging technologies. Some respondents however propose that many destinations are still in an early stage of adoption and basically need to "catch up" with the more technological advanced destinations. Different stages of e-destination and their development also correspondent to different approaches towards stakeholder engagement. Offline tools such as face-to-face meetings and workshops are still considered to be useful and effective but the future engagement of stakeholders will move more and more online. Social media is seen as the biggest engagement tool for destinations, especially Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; however it becomes evident that strategies should be in place regarding targeting different groups and the channels used to reach them. Providing dedicated

areas within the web presence for different stakeholder groups is also seen as a necessity of the future. When asked specifically about destinations use of social media in terms of engaging consumers, a three stage approach was considered best practice by the majority of respondents. These are “listen, interact and share” as destinations need to get to know the consumers they are dealing with rather than broadcast. Then destinations can interact with consumer to create a buzz and provide them with targeted information, keeping in mind that different social media channels should be used to interact for different purposes. Ultimately destinations can then share images, videos and information in social media channels but avoiding information overload.

4.3 Global best practice destinations

The top 10 destinations within the benchmark study were identified based on the average scores achieved. As all of these scored high average scores, the destinations’ web presence can be considered best practice in the use of technologies and applications.

Table II. Top 10 Global e-Destinations

Ranking	Benchmark study	Individual destination scores (out of 5)	Variation to average destination score (2.21)
1	Thailand	2.61	+0.4
2	Montreal	2.52	+0.31
3	Las Vegas	2.51	+0.3
4	Vancouver	2.48	+0.27
5	Hong Kong	2.46	+0.25
6	Puerto Rico	2.42	+0.21
7	Australia	2.39	+0.18
8	Norway	2.38	+0.17
9	UK	2.34	+0.13
10	Melbourne	2.31	+0.10

5 Conclusion

Developments of budget cuts for tourism destinations are common worldwide, making it crucial for DMOs to make well-considered investment decisions. The findings of this study demonstrate that all destinations within the benchmark still underutilize the wide range of technologies and applications available. Some destinations can be identified as best practice examples due to their use of certain technologies and applications. There are other areas in which these destinations can improve in order to sustain their future success of the web presence. No destination could be identified as fully utilising the ICT potential which implies a general need of DMOs to rethink their use of emerging technologies and set priorities in terms of which areas they can improve. This can then help destinations to become leading destinations in terms of different and interactive tools that are being implemented. In general, there is a need for additional research in this area as this study could only look at a limited amount of destinations. Additionally, there are constant changes in terms of destinations’ web presence and technologies that are implemented. Further research will be conducted and the benchmark will be updated constantly in order to

ensure its future credibility. In addition to the benchmark and exploratory survey, additional input from industry experts of different areas of the benchmark is crucial for future research. However, the technologies and applications of the future are already available. Destinations need to assess their usefulness and ultimately implement them into their web presence in order to enhance their competitiveness.

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