

30. Tourism in the Digital Era

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Introduction. The 21st century consumer is very different from previous generations. We are tech savvy and not only do we expect service quality, we want an experience to go with it. Given our unlimited access to information, we know what the gold standard is, and more importantly, we are open to sharing our experiences on social media and review platforms.

The appearance of the Internet and the incredibly rapid development of highly sophisticated computer and telecommunication technology have made the world a global village in a real sense. Communication network satellites provide the quickest and the cheapest data transfer to all parts of the world, a great agreement among thousands of computer systems that communicate with each other is represented by the Internet.

Development of information technology and the creation of computer networks and the Internet have enabled a new way of communication. The internet provides a better access to numerous sources of information around the world, as well as direct communication with all users.

The Internet has become a support to more complex and critical functions in tourism and hospitality industry and it contributed to its significant innovation. Due to the appearance of the Internet, there have been some changes in the tourism subjects business and those are the following: (1) Each serious subject in the tourism and hospitality industry has a website that can be classified into four broad groups: holding corporation identity websites, chains, concession and membership websites, websites of individual sites and facilities, and portals and vortals. Portal can be defined as a vehicle that offers a rounded set of services for specific well-defined group of users. Vortal is a website that provides information and resources about a particular and specific industry. (2) The Internet offers the possibility of expansion, rapid data transfer and flexibility (websites can always change, the changes are immediately visible and are not limited to space and time). (3) Contemporary business in tourism market is characterized by the implementation of various booking systems into business systems of travel agencies, hotel chains, airlines, car rental companies and other participants in tourism product formation. (4) Organization and distribution costs are decreased in various tourist subjects business conducting (travel agencies, hotel chains, independent hotels...). (5) New intermediaries on the Internet are created and traditional ones must change their role. (6) The Internet allows high-quality and effective market research and 'industrial espionage'.

Marketing is an integral part of conducting business in contemporary travel agencies, with the Internet becoming an essential part of media planning. The Internet provides readily available information to potential customers from around the world and it represents an important 'marketing and communication channel' that can effectively connect the subjects of offer and demand in contemporary tourism. The increasing competitiveness in the global tourism market demands of the tourist agency exceptional efforts and investments in promotion, resources, knowledge and quality in order to achieve satisfactory growth.

Conclusions. Internet technology is an important 'communication channel' between offer and demand in modern tourism. With the help of the Internet, there is an opportunity for all operators in tourism industry to successfully promote and sell services and products and to act in accordance with desires and needs of modern consumers.