ANALYSIS OF CROATIAN FIVE STAR HOTEL WEBSITES AS A TOOL FOR MANAGING HOTELS

JAKOVIC, B[ozidar]; HERCEG, T[omislav] & VLAHOV, R[ebeka] D[anijela]

Abstract: In Croatia, tourism is one of the most important industries. Hotels have a significant role and represent a degree of a tourism development as the main accommodation facilities. In this paper, the analysis is focused on a specific market niche, with the highest level of price discrimination. Croatian five-star hotels websites were examined in a model of marketing and commercial activities. The results show that high-categorized hotels have very good websites, i.e. price discrimination is also implemented in the hotel market web activities. However, there are ways how the hotel management could improve the market segmentation; hence we provide some recommendations at the end of this paper.
Key words: Hotel Websites, Hotel management, Price discrimination, quantitative methods for market analysis, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION – INTERNET AND HOTEL WEBSITES

Internet is a worldwide network that enables entirely new business opportunities in all industries as well as in tourism. Hotels are also using the benefits of the Internet, usually in the form of their own websites, their window in a digital way of doing business. Many authors in their papers investigate the Internet, Web technologies and how hotels use all the advantages of the Internet and present their offer of accommodation units, but also the other attractions they offer. Many analysis were made, and here will be mentioned some of them.

Websites are primary access points that enable enterprise knowledge management. A typical enterprise portal often has a hierarchical subject catalogue associated with categories of relevant documents, and/or a search engine combined with other services and interactive content. With the rapid advancement of Web technologies throughout the globe, valuable electronic business information written in almost all natural languages are now become widely available (Chau & Yeh, 2005).

The Internet has been, and will be, widely used by the hotel industry in general. Tso and Low investigating the hotel room rates offered on different online distribution channels. The empirical results indicated that the website of a local travel agent offered the lowest rates on all distribution channels and for all hotel categories (Tsoa & Low, 2005).

It has become necessary for hoteliers to take advantage of the huge opportunities generated by Internet technology by establishing their own websites for online promotions and purchases. Three main dimensions engage the perceptions of travelers: information quality, time, and sensitivity content. (Wong & Low, 2005).

Websites evaluation is an old research subject and has been extensively studied. A majority of these researches mainly focused on the numerical or categorical data (Wang & Zhou, 2009).
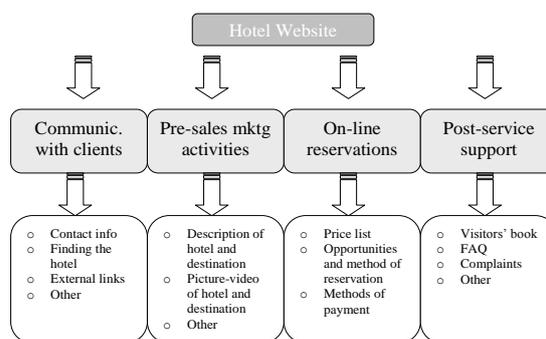

Fig. 1. Marketing and commercial activities on the websites (Pejić Bach et. al., 2005)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Marketing and commercial activities offered on hotel websites have a significant impact on the hotel's business results. According to Pejić Bach et al. (2005) the basic groups of Web business activities are: communication with clients, pre-sales marketing activities, On-line hotel reservations, and post-service support as it is shown in figure 1. The research analyses the Croatian hotel websites with particular regard to those basic groups of Web business activities. Authors made similar research but they include also 3 star and 4 star hotel websites.

As the basis for conducting this research was the list of categorized hotels in the Republic of Croatia published on the Web site of the Ministry of Tourism (2010).

All the data were collected from the websites of the hotels covered by this research. The data collection was in the period from 20 August 2010 (the beginning of the research) to 30 August 2010. There were used descriptive statistics methods, as well as inductive conclusions.

3. FIVE STAR HOTELS IN CROATIA

According to hotel categorization in 2010 in Croatia there was a 581 hotel. The majority of hotel facilities (53,87%) belong to the three-star category, while only 3,96% belong to five star categories. In Croatia there are 23 five star hotels offering 4293 rooms with 8190 beds. Most of them are in county Dobrovačko-neretvanska (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). The first survey has shown that all of Croatian five star hotels have their own website. Using a data base containing data for the 23 Croatian five star hotels, a survey was conducted on how much new technologies are used on hotel websites. Most accommodation capacities in Croatia are in small family hotels and pensions which provide a service tailored to the needs of particular guests.

Forms of post-sales activities	Share of hotels which have the stated element on their websites
Visitors' book	21,74%
Other content	47,83%

Tab. 4. Post-sales activities on Croatian five star hotel websites on 2010

Another discomforting statistic is the visitors' book. Only 21,74% of hotels have a visitors' book. 47,83% of hotels offer some additional content, such as additional promotional material, the possibility of word-of-mouth advertising, adding the pages to *my favorites* so the user can return to them later, or downloading the hotel brochures in .pdf format, etc.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL HOTEL WEBSITE

The conducted research analyzed the websites of five star hotels in Croatia. As expected, the results were pretty good since the research sample were high-categorized hotels. The fact that a 82,61% of them have computer reservation system deserves praise. Hotels should create a central hotel website that will pool available information, serve as promotion service and serve as active generator of hotel business. They should use a new Internet technologies and one of them are Web 2.0 technologies. Web 2.0 is the network on which individuals contribute to the development and distribution of tools, contents, and software applications over the Internet. This concept enables a huge increase in the complexity of e-commerce development. Various innovative business models have emerged from the largely spread-out technological concept, providing different values to customers as well as service providers (Shang et. al., 2009). Another interesting possibility is the development of mobile applications for smart phones like the iPhone, Android mobile phones, etc. Hotels should develop applications that their visitors could download on their mobile phones for free and thus get all the information that they may be of interest on hotel and all the services they provide. Further research should be done for other categories of hotels as well as a detailed analysis of the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the hotel business. Also, future analyses should be done from the perspective of customers.

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4. RESEARCH RESULTS

In this study it was found that 23 Croatian five-star hotels have their websites. All of them have a clearly identified name, telephone, address and e-mail on their website. Furthermore, all the websites have a description of the hotel, pictures of hotel, rooms and facilities, while about 70% of the hotels have a description of the destination where the hotel is situated. Newsletters are offered by 47,83% of hotels. Video content on the websites of Croatian five star hotels is scarce, included in only 21,74% of the websites (Table 1 and Table 2).

Visitors are especially interested in the prices of accommodation and services offered by the hotels. The large number of price lists in Euro (91,30%) shows that most hotels are mostly interested in foreign tourists. Surprisingly high result is that even 82,61% of five-star hotels have an on-line hotel reservation system where the visitor immediately sees if there are vacancies and where he can pay for his accommodation immediately (Table 3).

Forms of communication with customers	Share of hotels which have the stated element on their websites
Contact data	
Name	100,00%
Telephone	100,00%
Telefax	95,65%
E-mail	100,00%
Address	100,00%
Finding the hotel	
Map showing the position of the hotel	78,26%
Description of the route to the hotel	56,52%
Distances from the hotel	73,91%
Distances from the destination	30,43%
Other	
External links	69,57%
Special features (hotel history)	69,57%

Tab. 1. Communication with customers on Croatian five star hotel websites on 2010

Forms of pre-sales marketing activities	Share of hotels which have the stated element on their websites
Description of the hotel and destination	
Description of the hotel	100,00%
Description of the destination	69,57%
Pictures and visual material	
Pictures of the hotel	100,00%
Pictures of the facilities	100,00%
Pictures of the rooms	100,00%
Video films	21,74%
Other	
Special offers	82,61%
News	78,26%
Newsletter	47,83%

Tab. 2. Pre-sales marketing activities on Croatian five star hotel websites on 2010

Aspects of on-line reservation	Share of hotels which have the stated element on their websites
Price list	
Price list in EUR	91,30%
Price list in HRK	47,83%
Price list in other currency	26,09%
Possibilities and methods of reservation	
Enquiry for reservation	100,00%
E-MAIL	4,35%
FORM	13,04%
CRS	82,61%
Payment method	
Payment cards	73,91%

Tab. 3. On-line reservation on Croatian five star hotel websites on 2010