

WEB 3.0: THE EVOLUTION YOU MAY NOT NOTICE

The internet offers the consumer the ability to search and find information about the products or services that interest them. It has been 20 years since scientist Tim Berners-Lee first described his version of Information Management which subsequently became the world-wide web (www). Changes have since occurred to the www moving from information provision version Web 1.0 through to automatic data collection version Web 3.0. Consumers frequently adopt new technology at a faster pace than product or service marketers; there is no surprise in learning that Web 3.0 already exists.

Historically the world-wide web has been through a process of improvements designed to meet the specifications that Tim Berners-Lee expected. The beginnings of the www commenced with Web 1.0 known as the 'provision of' stage of the world-wide web followed by Web 2.0 known as the 'open communication' stage of the world-wide web. During the phase between these two stages the development of the web concentrated upon improving access for all consumers, allowing 'consumer-generated' content (CGC) to become widely published. This moved the ownership of material placed on the web from businesses to the consumer, Web 2.0 introducing blogs, wikis, social networking and similar publishing applications.

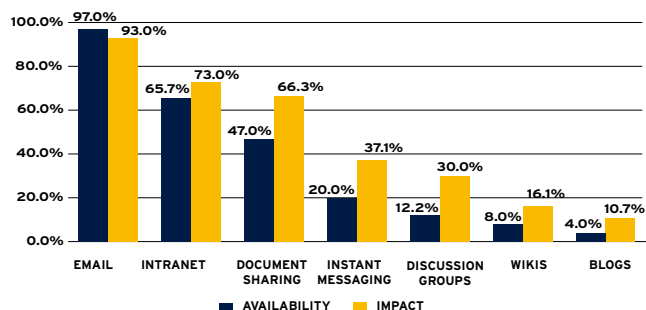
Web 3.0, which entered the vernacular in 2009, provides computer software with the intuitive ability to understand what search request is being proposed by the consumer. This intuitive ability allows the software to search the world-wide web for specific answers related to the search topic. Users of Amazon will recognise this as the browsing recognition software which analyses shopper buying preferences¹. For the consumer Web 3.0 will make internet browsing less complex, according to David Lankes, Associate Professor at Syracuse University's school of information studies², who advises that Web 3.0 is known as the semantic Web. Lankes advises that semantic is just a fancy word for bringing data together more easily and

quickly. This aspect is re-inforced by Tim Berners-Lee who considers that Web 3.0 will provide the consumer with intelligent agent software, filtering information and decision making for them³.

The new ability for the consumer to benefit from personal information compilation via the web does pose the question of how individual hotels will be perceived by the consumer during an internet search. Currently, with Web 2.0 there is the ability to research for user-generated content, but this is contained in separate websites often being the various on-line travel guides and research sites. When Web 3.0 becomes the standard for the internet then the user-generated content within the on-line travel sites will be able to migrate into the data developed from the search string originally entered by the consumer. This information may cause the consumer to reflect and consider which hotel or destination option to finally select.

Research by Cornell⁴ into how hotels use communication technologies shows that the internet impact for hotel managers ranks between the helpful to extremely helpful. This technology is gradually gaining acceptance in the hotel industry. What is clear is that the impact of the internet as a medium for communication greatly exceeds its current availability to hotel managers.

EXTENT AND IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY USE AMONG HOTEL MANAGER SAMPLE



Source: Cornell

It has been further established that the consumer will be affected by what information they view on the internet⁵ – which translates into occupancy concerns for a hotel or

¹ HSMIA, Web 3.0. Emerging Insights for Travel Marketers.

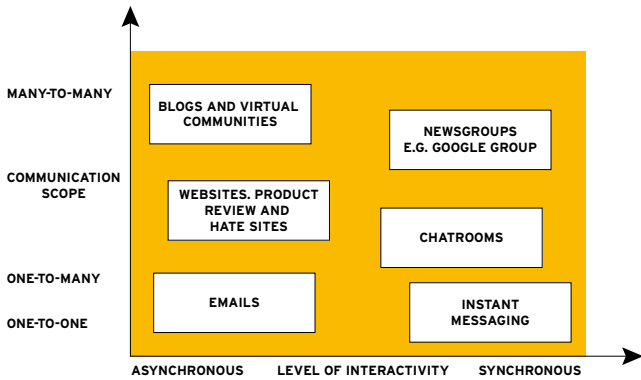
² Information Today, May 2009.

³ Adweek, June 15, 2009.

⁴ Brownell.J and Newman.A (2009) 'Hospitality Managers and Communication Technologies'.

⁵ Vermeulen.I and Seegers.D (2009) 'Tried and tested: The impact of online hotel reviews on consumer consideration'.

destination. A growing trend from the consumer is the willingness to publish their own travel experiences on the internet; accordingly this electronic format provides a wide audience with valuable information. Current electronic word-of-mouth communication channels are represented as below;



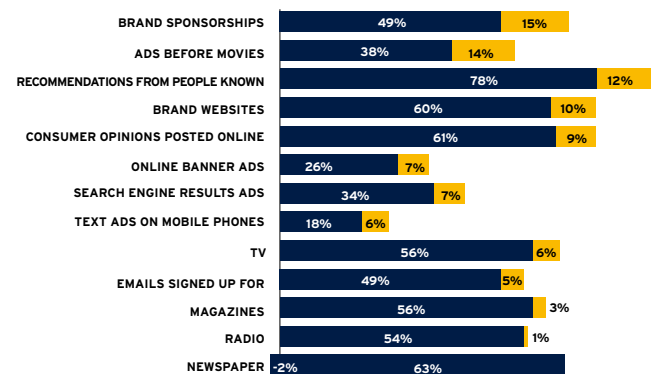
Source: Litvin

This multi-communication map demonstrates the adequate opportunity available to consumers to perform their own research to make their informed decision choices. A concern raised in the research of Litvin⁶ focuses upon the potential for the electronic word-of-mouth communication channel to act as an online opinion leader. This can occur where the consumer utilises the internet to seek destination information. According to the Travel Industry Association of America in 2005, 67% of U.S. travellers used the internet to search for options. Although the frequency usage of the internet is increasing, past consumer research has confirmed that the consumer is still relying on personal word-of-mouth communication. This has meant that the hospitality industry need not be as concerned with electronic word-of-mouth communication channels. With more consumers now performing research on-line there is considerable potential that the consumer will be influenced by information contained within travel sites. The research of Mack confirmed that college students surveyed considered personal word-of-mouth communication to be the most credible communication channel when compared with both corporate blogs and personal blogs. Accordingly a younger generation who are familiar with technology may

be challenging the established view of personal word-of-mouth communication. A component from this research shows that the students who actively contributed to blogs consider electronic word-of-mouth via this communication channel to be more credible, whereas students who do not participate in blog communication still prefer personal word-of-mouth communication.

With Web 3.0 bringing together a more consolidated searching ability for the consumer, it behoves the leisure industry to recognise a changing consumer pattern. The 2009 Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey does indicate that where personal word-of-mouth recommendation is still the preferred method for consumer choice, this is closely followed by both consumer opinion posted on-line as well as by brand websites.

FORMS OF ADVERTISING RANKED BY CHANGES IN LEVELS OF TRUST FROM APRIL 2007 TO APRIL 2009



Source: Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey April 2009/Base: All Respondents

E.g. Trust in brand sponsorships increased by 15% in April 2009 from 49% of respondents in April 2007

NB: Editorial content, billboards/outdoor advertising and online video ads not covered in April 2007 survey

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⁶ Litvin, S.W. Goldsmith.R.E and Pan.B (2008) 'Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management'.