User Generated Content on Destination Marketing Organisation Websites

A study of the viability of Destination Marketing Organisations incorporating User Generated Content into their websites

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for a Higher Diploma in Business in eBusiness

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I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment of the program of study leading to the award of Higher Diploma in Business in eBusiness is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

"Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) or tourism boards have no God-given right to exist and could be rendered obsolete by a slew of factors that are changing the way consumers seek information on destinations and buy their travel. Many factors were affecting the way destinations marketed themselves and some could become irrelevant, particularly in the face of new websites such as the social networking portals where consumers were “telling the truth” about places and experiences.”

Destination Marketing Organisations have a dual mandate to support the local tourism industry in its many guises by marketing the predefined destination to potential visitors, and to provide timely and relevant information for consumers who are considering or planning to visit their destination. Traditionally, they were recognised as an unbiased source of information for consumers, a one-stop shop for all information relating to a particular destination. However, the information that they provide is always completely positive and glosses over the negative aspects of a destination such as lousy weather or sub-standard accommodation.

The evolution of user generated content and the growing popularity of independent travel review websites has changed this. Potential visitors have now more options than ever to find unbiased information online about destinations that they would like to visit. The Destination Marketing Organisation has lost its place as the first port of call for travellers when planning their holidays and many DMOs are now trying to combat this by integrating user generated content into their websites.

However, the dual mandate of the DMO makes this extremely challenging. The potential to harm individual tourism businesses by allowing users to post negative comments about their business must be balanced with the growing requirement of the traveller to have access to this information.

This study develops an overview of the travel industry and the evolution of Travel 2.0. The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the integration of user generated content in destination marketing organisation websites and provide some recommendations on best practise in this field.

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Olivia - you're a super *

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Executive Summary

Building online communities through the integration of user generated content is a challenge for all organisations. The applications themselves are technically easy to integrate but how to encourage people to use the applications and more importantly use them in a way which is beneficial for the organisation is a much greater challenge. For Destination Marketing Organisations, this challenge is even greater due to the restrictive environment in which they exist. Their dual mandate to serve both the interests of the consumer and the local tourism industry makes it extremely difficult to integrate User Generated Content to a level which satisfies both parties.

Survey results have shown that content quality issues, legal obligations and opposition from local tourism trade partners are the main challenges which face DMOs in integrating user generated content. Many DMOs do not feel that they have adequate resources to address these challenges and others are still bewildered by the evolution of user generated content and have not yet decided on the best method for them to harness it.

An analysis of the approaches taken by VisitDublin.com, VisitBritain.com, DiscoverOhio.com and MySwitzerland.com suggests that MySwitzerland has found the best approach for integrating user generated content on their site. They are harnessing the content of third party review sites instead of trying to build their own communities and it is proving to be a successful approach for them. This requires far less resources from the Swiss Tourist Board as the content which they receive is already moderated and it is tapping into an existing community rather than trying to create one from scratch.

Best practises for DMOs who have yet to enter this field include integrating third party content rather than trying to build a new community, threading this content throughout the website so it supports the content provided by the
DMO, and overcoming the opposition from trade partners by emphasising their right to reply and highlighting the positives of user feedback rather than the negative.

The questions which this dissertation seeks to answer are:

- what unique challenges must DMOs overcome in integrating User Generated Content to their websites?
- how are DMOs already overcoming these issues,
- what are the best practises for DMOs who have yet to enter this field.

This dissertation will provide an overview of the evolution of Web 2.0 including User Generated Content, outline how the travel industry has embraced the world wide web, and define DMOs and their functions. Results of a survey undertaken with a number of DMOs will be analysed along with a comparative analysis of the user generated content on DMO websites and finally a number of recommendations will be provided based on the findings of this research.
Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Tourism Ireland is the official marketing organisation for the Island of Ireland overseas. It is currently working on an enhancement program for www.discoverireland.com/gb which will allow the incorporation of User Generated Content into their website. However, the exact method of doing this is still unclear. As an official Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) funded by the Irish Government and the British Exchequer, the Irish tourism trade are important stakeholders in Tourism Ireland, and a primary function of Tourism Ireland is to provide a platform for all Irish trade to sell to overseas consumers. Tourism Ireland also has a duty to consumers to provide all the information that they need to plan their trip to Ireland and recognises the value of providing a community area where travellers can share ideas on their holidays to Ireland. However, it is necessary to find a balance between allowing people to share tips and advice but also ensuring that this doesn’t have a negative impact on any members of the Irish trade.

As a member of the eMarketing Department in Tourism Ireland, the researcher decided to undertake this project to discover what challenges other DMOs are facing in integrating user generated content to their websites, evaluate how other DMOs are overcoming these challenges and finally provide a set of recommendations to guide Tourism Ireland in their integration of user generated content.
2.1 Literature Review

This chapter focuses on what has been written about the evolution of Web 2.0, the embracing of the internet in the Travel industry, and will provide a definition of DMOs and their functions.

2.2 Evolution of the Internet to Web 2.0

The World Wide Web was originally developed to allow internationally dispersed teams to share information, and for the dissemination of information by support groups. However, its creator Tim Berners Lee had "a highly personal vision of the Web as a powerful force for social change and individual creativity." The web was written in HTML code which was a language known to a limited group of people, and pushed information to users rather than allowing the user to interact with it. The web was "owned" by corporate entities that controlled a one-way flow of information. Companies created websites which were online versions of their catalogues and in the very early versions, did not even allow online purchasing. However, over time and with new applications, the consumer began to gain a much stronger voice on the web, and led to the phenomenon which is known today as Web 2.0.

2.2.1 Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a term which can be used to describe the next generation of Web applications. The phrase was coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004 and has since become the defacto term used to describe the evolution of the web. There is no definitive definition of Web 2.0 but O'Reilly Media have defined a list of 7 core competencies to define Web 2.0 companies:

2 http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/Weaving/
Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability
Control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them
Trusting users as co-developers
Harnessing collective intelligence
Leveraging the long tail through customer self-service
Software above the level of a single device
Lightweight user interfaces, development models, AND business models

The diagram below outlines some of the main difference between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0

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One of the cornerstones of Web 2.0 which most people can relate to is the ability of individual users to add and amend content on live websites. This is referred to as User Generated Content and is defined as follows:

"User-generated content (UGC) refers to various kinds of media content that are produced or primarily influenced by end-users, as opposed to traditional media producers, licensed broadcasters and production companies. These include digital video, blogging, podcasting, mobile phone photography and wikis. In addition to these technologies, user-generated content may also employ a combination of open source, free software, and flexible licensing or related agreements to further diminish the barriers to collaboration, skill-building and discovery."  

The above quote is taken from Wikipedia which is one of the leading examples of a User Generated Content website. All of the content on this site is created and edited by users rather than professional website designers.

2.2.2 User Generated Content and Social Media Websites

Many sites are now built around user generated content and are referred to as community or social media websites. Social media websites have a number of factors in common:

Participation - they encourage users to share their ideas and provide feedback
Openness - they encourage voting, feedback, comments and sharing of information. Security protected content is frowned upon.
Conversation - information is shared in a conversation rather than in a one-way monologue
Community - encourages the formation of communities around common interests e.g. music, holidays, technology

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4 www.kriskrug.com

5 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated_content
Links - thrive on their ability to link to other sources of information and to combine different media forms in one place.

Some of the most popular social media sites make use of:

**Web Logs** (commonly known as Blogs) - entries are made in the form of a journal and provide commentary on a political subject or quite often function as a personal online diary.

**Podcasting** - audio and video files that are available to download and can be listened to/ watched on a computer or MP3 player

**Wikis** - websites which allow the user to add or edit content and act as a communal database of information. The most popular of these sites is Wikipedia

**Forums** - areas for online discussion, usually around specific themes or topics.

**Content Communities** - communities which organize and share particular types of content e.g., photos, videos, audio files. With the rise in availability in broadband, it has never been easier for consumers to upload and view multimedia content online.

There are numerous other technologies such as MashUps, RSS Feeds, AJAX and Tagging which are all part of the Web 2.0 phenomenon but for the purpose of this project, I will limit User Generated Content to the above.

The growth of these sites over a very short period of time has been exceptional. The figures below speak for themselves:

**Worldwide Blog Growth** (source: Technorati)

- January 2004 - less than 2 million blogs
- July 2004 - 3.5 million
- January 2005 - 6 million
- July 2005 - 12 million
- January 2006 - 24 million
- July 2006 - 50 million
October 2006 - 57 million

**Worldwide Online Video Growth** (source: ComScore via Reel Pop)
October 2005 - less than 25 million online video views per day
January 2006 - 125 million online video views per day
July 2006 - 700 million online video views per day

**United States Online Video Viewers** (sources: eMarketer; US Census Bureau via Business 2.0)
2003 - 52 million (32% of U.S. Internet users; 19% of population)
2004 - 69 million (41% of U.S. Internet users; 25% of population)
2005 - 89 million (51% of U.S. Internet users; 32% of population)
2006 - 107 million (60% of U.S. Internet users; 38% of population)
2007 projection - 123 million (67% of U.S. Internet users; 43% of population)
2008 projection - 137 million (73% of U.S. Internet users; 47% of population)

**MySpace.com registered users** (sources: MySpace, Blog Herald, Business Week via Joe Suh)
May 2004 - 2 million
April 2005 - 12 million
October 2005 - 33 million
January 2006 - 48 million
July 2006 - 90 million
November 2006 - 131 million
February 2007 - 160 million

This extraordinary growth has pushed many of these sites into the list of most visited Websites in the World.

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The reason for the success of these sites is "that they have embraced the power of the web to harness collective intelligence."\(^7\)

2.2.3 Creating Online Communities

Web 2.0, a catchphrase for the latest generation of Web sites where users contribute their own text, pictures and video content, is far less participatory than commonly assumed. A tiny 0.16 percent of visits to Google’s top video-sharing site, YouTube, are by users seeking to upload video for others to watch, according to a study of online surfing data by Bill Tancer, an analyst with Web audience measurement firm Hitwise.

Similarly, only two-tenths of one percent of visits to Flickr, a popular photo-editing site owned by Yahoo Inc., are to upload new photos, the Hitwise study found. The vast majority of visitors are the Internet equivalent of the

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\(^7\) Morgan Stanley Presentation; Web 2.0; 11/08/2006

\(^8\) [Link](http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html?page=2)
The implementation of user-generated content applications on websites is a relatively simple process which requires less and less specialist knowledge. More and more companies are integrating these applications on their websites but how many of them are actually seeing real benefits from them? As the quote above outlines, the real challenge for companies who wish to embrace Web 2.0 is not the integration of the technologies but the harnessing of these technologies to build social communities.

Many companies believe that if some activity is online, "it" will be cheaper, "it" will happen faster and "it" will be easier, no matter what "it" is. This often leads to mistaken assumptions that cause companies to miscalculate the amount of planning and effort needed to build and sustain an online community.

**Assumption #1: Goals and expectations: Who needs them?**

Many companies jump into setting up an online community because it is the latest "must-have" marketing tool. However, before attempting to set up an online community, the following questions should be considered:

- How will the online community advance our organization's mission? Be as specific as possible.
- What are reasonable expectations for the online community?
- What other online communities are addressing similar issues? How will ours be different? Will tapping into an already established online community address our online community-building goal?
- What are the topics to be discussed? How will we keep the discussion focused?
- What is the time frame for the discussion? Will it be a one-time event or will we host ongoing discussions?
- What will our organization do with the information once the discussion ends?  

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9 http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSN1743638820070418?pageNumber=1

10
**Assumption #2:** Everyone will want to participate in our online discussion. Research has shown that only about 1% of visitors to websites which allow user generated content actually make a contribution to the website. Users of community websites typically follow the path below before becoming active members of a site:

The typical member starts off in the passer-by/stranger quadrant, and then moves over to lurker status once they start having repeated visits to the community. Once a lurker comes “out” of the shadows and begins participating they enter into the participant quadrant. This is where they are both showing up and participating. By the time a member reaches the “evangelist” quadrant, they are quite adamant in their support of your community - even fanatical at times.\(^\text{1}\)

Jakob Nielsen describes the participation in online communities using the 90-9-1 rule:

- 90% of users are lurkers (i.e., read or observe, but don’t contribute).
- 9% of users contribute from time to time, but other priorities dominate their time.
- 1% of users participate a lot and account for most contributions: it can seem as if they don’t have lives because they often post just minutes after whatever event they’re commenting on occurs.\(^\text{2}\)

**Assumption #3:** Building and maintaining an online community doesn’t take much time or staffing.

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\(^\text{1}\) [http://www.benton.org/publibrary/practice/community/assumptions.html#goals](http://www.benton.org/publibrary/practice/community/assumptions.html#goals)


Adding User Generated Content applications to a website is a relatively easy task. However, companies who believe that this is all they need to do, will usually fail in their endeavour to create an online community. Once the technology is in place, the community needs to be fostered and encouraged to grow. This places huge requirements on the personnel within a company who assume the role of moderators/hosts of the community. Their role includes the following:

- A host is like a host at a party. You don't automatically throw a great party by hiring a room and buying some beer. Someone needs to invite an interesting mix of people, greet people at the door, make introductions, start conversations, avert fisticuffs, encourage people to let their hair down and entertain each other.

- A host is also an authority. The host is the person who enforces whatever rules there may be, and will therefore be seen by many as a species of law enforcement officer.

- A host is also an exemplar. Good hosts model the behavior they want others to emulate: read carefully and post entertainingly, informatively, and economically, acknowledge other people by name, assume good will, assert trust until convinced otherwise, add knowledge, offer help, be slow to anger, apologize when wrong, politely ask for clarification, exercise patience when your temper flares.

- A host is also a cybrarian. Good hosts nurture the community memory, pointing newcomers to archives, providing links to related conversations, past and present, hunting down resources to add to the collective pool of knowledge -- and teaching others to do it. Well performed voluntary cybrarianship is contagious.

- A host can be a character in the show, but the show is collaborative improvisation, with the audience onstage.
All hosts are members of a community of hosts. You can't host communities without communities of hosts.\textsuperscript{13}

This requires a huge amount of time from the community host/moderator and this time pressure will grow in line with the success of the community.

**Assumption #4:** We don't need a promotional strategy for our online community.\textsuperscript{14}

On the 19/05/07, there were 90,300,905 active registered domain names worldwide.\textsuperscript{15} Users will not find a website or community in all this clutter unless it is actively promoted. Existing users of a website need to be encouraged to embrace new functionality on the site and incentivised to become a part of the community.

There are a number of steps which companies can take to encourage greater participation in their online community by all members and not just the 1% who are active members:

**Make it easier to contribute** - introduce simple click star rating reviews rather than requiring each users to write a review

**Make participation a side effect** - e.g. Amazon.com “people who bought this book, bought these other books” recommendations. Users create recommendations in the act of using the site rather than going to a specific space on the site and consciously writing a recommendation.

**Edit, don’t create** - Provide templates for users to work with. This is much less daunting than having to create something from scratch.

**Reward participants** - this will motive users to contribute more to your site.

**Promote quality contributors** - differentiate between the people who provide valuable contributions and those who provide little insight.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} \url{http://www.rheingold.com/texts/artonlinehost.html}
\textsuperscript{14} \url{http://www.benton.org/publibrary/practice/community/assumptions.html#goals}
\textsuperscript{15} \url{http://www.domaintools.com/internet-statistics/}
\textsuperscript{16} \url{http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html}
2.3 The Online Travel Industry

"According to TIA, approximately 101 million travelers are already on the Internet, and a majority of them (78%) are looking at a variety of online resources when researching, planning and booking trips. While the number of online travelers is expected to remain steady, eMarketer projects total online sales of leisure and unmanaged business travel in the US to grow from $65 billion in 2005 to $122 billion in 2009."

The developments in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the Internet in particular have revolutionised the entire tourism industry, generating new business models, changing the structure of the tourism distribution channels and re-engineering all processes. (Vich-i-Martorell, 2004).

2.3.1 History of Online Travel

The Travel Industry first began to take notice of the Internet as a possible marketing channel in 1996. However, communication with consumers was only via email and instant bookings were unheard of. In April, Marriott Hotels manager of marketing automation Peter Dennis sums up the mood of the travel industry, saying the web is "overhyped" and is a "mess and a navigational nightmare". In July 1996, there are 1864 travel suppliers listed on Yahoo. However as the year progressed, more travel enterprises took the plunge into the online world and in November 1996, Aer Lingus became the first airline to auction seats on the Internet on flights from the UK. In 1998, Figures from the Association of Independent Tour Operators show half of its members have access to the Internet, yet far fewer have a website themselves. When it comes

17 WebTrends: Passport to Success; The Essential Guide to Marketing Analytics for Travel
18 Gabriel Angel Vich-i-Martorell; The Internet and tourism principals in the Balearic Islands, Tourism and Hospitality Research. London: Mar 2004. Vol. 5, Iss. 1; pg. 25, 20 pgs
19 http://travolution.co.uk/Articles/2006/09/22/504/Timeline+-+1996.html
to agents, many are still to sign up to Internet access. A further issue is the lack of consumer trust in purchasing online with 65% of consumers believing that Internet shopping is unsafe.\(^{20}\) In November 2000, First Choice Chief Executive Peter Long declares that “Nine months ago, us old-economy companies were all going to die because we were all going to be taken over by the web companies. The whole thing is nonsense. Some of the business plans of Internet start-ups are unbelievable. There is no foreseeable reason why they are going to work. They are wasting their time.” However, this pessimism is not a reflection of the industry as a whole. In February, TripAdvisor.com and online travel agent Orbitz are launched in the US and in September, Travelocity.com installs a chat facility on its site to enable up to 3 friends to chat while checking out holidays on the site.\(^{21}\) Opodo is launched in 2002 backed by 9 European airlines and a number of acquisitions take place including the purchase of Travelselect.com by Lastminute.com. The ability to allow users to create their own package holidays on the web is pioneered in the UK in 2002, but the name dynamic packaging has yet to be coined.\(^{22}\)

Worldwide, travel-related spending in 2005 accounts for a third of all web expenditure and, even if many in the industry were slow to realise the Internet’s potential for selling holidays, they are now beginning to grasp it. The dynamic packaging industry was worth between £108 million and £162 million in 2004, representing between 2.5% and 3.8% of the whole UK market. In April 2005, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers gives the go-ahead to a dot-travel domain name, with the aim to act as a badge of trust for online agencies.\(^{23}\) Deloitte have recently issued a report which states that “travel has been one of the most popular products sold online for some years, accounting for 40% of total online retail revenue. Airlines lead the pack with a 62% share of the online travel market, followed by hotels with a 14% share.”\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) http://travolution.co.uk/Articles/2006/09/22/500/Timeline+++-2000.html
\(^{22}\) http://travolution.co.uk/Articles/2006/09/22/498/Timeline+++-2002.html
\(^{23}\) http://travolution.co.uk/Articles/2006/09/22/495/Timeline+++-2005.html
\(^{24}\) http://www.breakingtravelnews.com/article/20070511083232274
It is predicted that by 2010, a quarter of all European internet users (60M) will buy travel online. In the US online travel spend will grow from $85 billion in 2007 to $104 billion in 2010 and from 2007, at least 30% of all travel revenue will be generated online.25 The travel industry has been an early adapter to internet commerce and the impact of technology on the industry has been extraordinary.

2.3.2 Travel 2.0
In keeping with its position as an early adopter of technology, the travel industry has integrated Web 2.0 principles to the extent that the phrase “Travel 2.0” was coined by PhoCusWright to describe this integration. Travelocity.com was far ahead of their peers when they introduced a chat facility on their site to allow 3 friends communicate while booking their holiday together in 2000. The setting up of TripAdvisor in the same year was another step on the ladder towards Web 2.0. Today TripAdvisor, which allows users to post reviews, pictures and journals from their holidays, is recognised as one of the leading Web 2.0 companies. TripAdvisor is considered to be one of the largest travel communities in the world hosting more than 5 million reviews and opinions that cover over 200,000 hotels and travel attractions. This web site provides recommendations for hotels, inns, resorts, vacations, travel packages and many more. The great thing about this web site is that it provides real advice from travellers that have visited the places they reviewed.26

Travel 2.0 is all about “empowering” users, encouraging travellers to create content online to be shared with other readers, and intertwined with the official content offered by an established travel vendor. As the online travel market matures, users are no longer content just to find the lowest price or

25 Presentation by Mindshare Interaction to Tourism Ireland 26/04/2007
26 http://www.aboutus.org/TripAdvisor.com
read destination information written by marketers. Now more sophisticated online users are looking to take control and identify the perfect trip.  

2.3.3 Web 2.0 Applications in the Travel Industry

Popular Web 2.0 applications used in the Travel industry are:

Blogs - Among users who seek information on the Internet, more than a quarter have visited a blog to review information about a destination or travel service supplier in the last 12 months. This pattern reinforces the emerging relevance of travel communities as an information source. Popular travel blogs include www.igougo.com, www.43places.com, www.ivebeenhere.co.uk

Podcasting - many cities now include podcasts of walking tours on their websites, which can be downloaded and listened to while following the tour of the city. Yahoo! Podcasts and iTunes also have a number of podcasts for different destinations.

Wikis - Wikis allow users to join together and create a travel guide for different destinations. If the user feels that comments are biased or unbalanced, they can edit the content of the wiki to reflect this. www.wikitravel.org, www.world66.com, and TripAdvisor wiki all contain destination guides created by users.

Forums - Traveller forums within community sites provide concrete information in their questions and answers. Any user who asks a question here can possibly receive thousands of answers. One of the first and best online forums is the Lonely Planet’s Torn Tree. Many users live by the advice which they receive from their peers on these forums.

28 Reactive White Paper: Web 2.0 for the Tourism and Travel Industry
Content Communities - With the rise in availability of broadband, the potential for video usage on the internet has increased dramatically. Companies can now provide a more in-depth picture of their products to consumers, and consumers can upload their home videos and share their holiday experience. A new site www.travelistic.com has recently been launched which bills itself as the YouTube for travel. www.flickr.com allows travelers to share their photos online. Ireland is one of the most popular tags on Flickr with over 500,000 photos attached.

2.3.4 User-Generated Content on Destination Marketing Organisation Websites

For the purpose of this dissertation, tourist destinations are considered; "a defined geographical region which is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning".  

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are the marketing bodies responsible for the promotion of these tourist destinations. They are usually government agencies with a remit to support the local tourism industry by marketing the defined area as a tourism destination. However, their make-up varies greatly with some DMOs having a membership base and a greater remit to serve these members while others are completely government funded and have an equal remit to local industry and visitors to their destination.

Some examples of DMO mission statements are as follows:

Dublin Tourism

_We are the official tourist board for Dublin, with responsibility for the marketing and promotion of tourism in the Dublin region. We’re a state-_

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appointed, not for profit (commercial) agency with a membership of more than 1300 businesses, drawn from the region’s leading tourism related organisations. Dublin Tourism also operates five walk-in Tourist Information and Reservations Centres which are open 364 days a year, and five Visitor Attractions in the region.30

Discover Ohio
The Division of Travel and Tourism markets the Ohio tourism experience through four pillars of focus:

History and Heritage - provides an overview of the tremendous array of historical sites and heritage-related activities throughout the state. These offer visitors the chance to learn about an enormous range of history that took place in Ohio including ancient Indian burial grounds, wars, abolitionists and the Underground Railroad, U.S. presidential sites and homes, religious sects and aviation pioneers - just to name a few.

Ohio Outdoors - introduces the spectacular Ohio landscape to soft adventure seekers, hunters, fishermen, birders and anyone wanting to connect with nature.

Family Fun - for what Ohio is possibly best known. Theme parks, zoos and waterparks provide families with myriad vacation opportunities. Families also can enjoy some of the quirky aspects of Ohio such as the world’s largest cuckoo clock, the Wyandot Popcorn Museum, or the Barber Museum - just to name a few.

Arts and Culture - showcases the state’s vibrant cities and cultural activities. Boasting world-renowned symphonies, award-winning restaurants, highly-rated lodging properties and spectacular events, Ohio offers the urban traveller tremendous choices.31

30 http://www.visidublin.com/about/
31 www.discoverohio.com
Switzerland Tourism

Switzerland Tourism is the national marketing and sales organization for Switzerland, the ideal country for travel, vacations and congresses. ST is entirely devoted to all visitors and works in close collaboration with tourism partners and suppliers at home, and their subsidiaries abroad. Together, we do our best to make sure that your stay in our country turns out to be a truly unforgettable experience.  

The above 3 statements all make differing references to their stakeholders. VisitDublin mentions their membership of more than 1300 businesses and makes reference to their Visitor Centres which service the needs of visitors while in Dublin but does not mention their duty to online visitors.

The division of Travel and Tourism in Ohio focuses on their offering to the visitor and does not mention their industry partners.

MySwitzerland gives the visitor and the local tourism industry equal prominence.

Compete estimates that Consumer Generated Content (CGC) influences over $10 billion a year in online travel. With consumers finding CGC more credible than they do professional reviews or information from travel companies, CGC has emerged as a critical source of travel information. 

The importance of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content in the Travel Industry has been outlined above but how does it fit in with DMO websites? Are DMO websites currently including User Generated Content or is there a conflict of interests between protecting the local travel industry and providing the best possible information to consumers?

33 http://www.etcnewmedia.com/review/default.asp?SectionID=10&OverviewID=4

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Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the techniques that were used to research the dissertation topic. It outlines the research methodology adopted, provides a justification for the methodology used and states some limitations of the methodology used.

The research approach adopted was primarily quantitative in nature, namely an online questionnaire.

The purpose of this research is to measure the level of User Generated Content on Destination Marketing Organisation websites and the challenges which DMOs have faced in integrating these applications.

There are two different methodological approaches to research - quantitative and qualitative. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses and neither one can be held to be better than the other. According to Veal (1997) a quantitative approach relies on numerical evidence to draw conclusions about a particular area and to generalise the gathered information. The quantitative method can derive data from questionnaire surveys, from observation or from secondary sources. Veal (1997) further argues that for the quantitative approach to be reliable, it is often necessary to study a relatively large number of people and to use computers to analyse the data.

The qualitative approach to research is generally concerned with gathering a great deal of 'rich' information about relatively few people rather than more limited information about a large number of people.34

A mainly quantitative approach was adopted by the researcher for this dissertation. The adopted research enabled the researcher not only to quantify the level of integration of UGC on DMO websites but also attitudes to the integration of UGC on DMO websites.

3.2 Data Collection Method

In planning a research project it is advisable for the researcher to first consider whether it is necessary to go to the expense of collecting new information, that is, to gather primary information, or whether existing data and information that is secondary data, is already available on the research project.

A fundamental part of any research project is to explore the existing published and unpublished sources of information for related research. Such information is generally referred to as secondary data (Veal). The data can be drawn from academic or non-academic sources and may be quantitative or qualitative in nature (Clark et al 2001).

There is a wide range of information available re the use of UGC in the Travel Industry but nothing specifically relating to its use by DMOs. The researcher was therefore obliged to undertake some primary research.

The Primary Research was gathered using an online questionnaire. This questionnaire was created using www.esurveyspro.com which allows users to create unique questionnaires and collects the response data online. The link to this questionnaire was emailed to 112 DMOs worldwide on the 21/03/07, 02/04/07 and a final reminder was sent on 11/04/2007 (list of DMOs in Appendix 1). The questionnaire was also submitted to the European Travel

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Commission's New Media Working Group. The New Media Working Group is made up of Marketing Executives from National Tourism Organisations (NTO) within the European Union who have a special interest in the integration of New Media by NTOs. The response rate to this questionnaire from both sources was very low with just 32 questionnaires completed, 5 of which were spoiled so the total number of respondents analysed was 27. The results of the questionnaire were analysed using a combination of the SAS analytics tool, JMP and Microsoft Excel.

The questionnaire aimed to create a profile of the DMOs who participated in the survey, the degree to which these DMOs had integrated or chosen not to integrate UGC applications, the challenges which they faced in integrating UGC and any methods used to overcome these challenges.

3.3 Research Limitations
The low level of response to this survey should be kept in mind when considering the following results. The respondents were predominantly National Tourism Organisations located in Europe so the results will be skewed towards their particular environment.

The researcher omitted to include a question re the number of repeat visitors to the DMOs website. This is an important question as it is very difficult to build a community on websites which do not have a high level of repeat visitors. Most users visit DMO websites while planning their holidays but rarely return to the site afterwards. The Tourism Ireland website, www.discoverireland.com, which attracts approximately 14,000 visits per day, has an average repeat visit rate of 1.4.
Chapter 4

Research Analysis

4.1 Type of Destination Marketing Organisation
For the purpose of this dissertation, I have divided DMOs into National Tourism Organisations, Regional Tourism Organisations and City Tourism Organisations. I also provided an “Other” option but was able to recode these replies into the above categories. The majority of participants were National Tourism Organisations followed by City Tourism Organisations.

Figures 4.1 Type of DMO

4.2 Dedicated eMarketing Team
The importance which the individual organizations placed on their web presence was indicated by the establishment of a Dedicated eMarketing/Internet Department in the organization.
When cross analysed with the Type of Destination Marketing Organisation, it is noted that most respondents did have a dedicated eMarketing / Internet Department which highlights the importance on the internet for all of these organizations.

4.3 Primary Stakeholders
For the purpose of this survey, stakeholders were defined as “parties that have an interest, financial or otherwise, in your organization”. The purpose of this question was to determine whether DMOs felt a greater obligation to their members/trade partners or to the consumers who use their sites.
Figure 4.3 DMO TYPE x PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

The results show that most DMOs felt an equal obligation to providing a top-class website for visitors to their destination but also protecting the interests of their trade partners. However, the number of respondents who cited their Tourism Trade partners as their primary stakeholders was slightly greater than the number who chose Consumers. A number of respondents in the Other category cited their local government department as another of their primary stakeholders.
4.4 Number of Visitors to the Website and Number of Registered Visitors

The majority of respondents had more than 100,000 visitors to their websites per month.

Encouraging users to register on the website is a very simple method of engaging with the consumer and of providing a more personalized service to them, even at a later date if this functionality is not presently in place. It also provides DMOs with greater information re the interaction of the consumer with their website. A majority of respondents did not have a registration option on their website, but of those who did, it was very successful with more than 50,000 registered visitors to their sites. This is in proportion with the number of visitors to the website per month - respondents who had more than 100,000 visitors to their site, also had a higher number of registered visitors to their sites.
4.5 User Generated Content

The primary focus of this research is the integration of User-Generated Content on DMO websites. For the purpose of this research, User Generated Content was defined as any information which is added to a website by the users of the site, including but not limited to blogs, podcasts, videos, photographs, wikis and discussion forums. Many respondents cited user reviews/testimonials as content which their users can add to their site so this was added as a separate category in the analysis of results.

Of all respondents, more than half (59%) do not include any form of User Generated Content on their website. Of those who do have some form of User Generated Content on their website, the addition of photographs is the most popular format.
User-Generated Content on Sites

The number of visitors to the website does not influence the presence of User Generated Content as those websites with smaller numbers of visitors are equally as likely to have integrated some form of User Generated Content as those with larger numbers of visitors.

Figure 4.5.2 NR OF VISITORS TO SITE X INCLUSION OF UGC
National Tourism Organisations are slightly more proactive in the addition of User Generated Content to their websites although this is in keeping with the greater number of responses from National Tourism Organisations.

4.6 Reasons for Not Integrating User Generated Content
For those organizations who have not yet integrated User Generated Content to their websites, a number of reasons were suggested as to why. This question was completed by 16 respondents and the most common reason suggested was lack of resources.
A number of respondents completed the Other option with comments such as “As we are re-designing our portal we plan to include a user generated content in the near future” and “We're considering it”. This suggests that many DMOs are aware of the benefits of User Generated Content but haven’t yet decided on how best to harness it for their site.

4.7 Restrictions to the addition of User Generated Content

Many websites have restrictions in place which users must abide by before their content can be added to a website. These restrictions are usually in place to protect the website which is hosting the content.
The most common form of control applied to the addition of User Generated Content is moderation by employees before the content is published. This ensures that only approved content is published and nothing libellous or controversial can be added to the site.

4.8 Challenges Encountered in the Addition of User Generated Content

Legal Obligations are a huge concern for DMOs when adding User Generated Content to their websites. Content issues including Libellous content added, Spam Posts and Offensive Postings are also among the top 5 challenges which respondents must overcome.
Figure 4.8.1 Challenges to the Addition of UGC

Opposition from Trade Partners is a bigger challenge for City Tourism Organisations than for other DMO types. This reflects the fact that many City Tourism Organisations are membership based.
4.9 Method of Overcoming Challenges

The purpose of this question was to identify possible solutions to the challenges which DMOs face in integrating User Generated Content on their websites. 18 respondents skipped this question which was the highest number of respondents to skip any question. The most popular response among those who responded was the “Other” option and many of them suggested here that they are still trying to determine the best way to deal with this. Some of the respondents’ comments included “this is a problem we are heavily working on” and “not yet tackle the problem due to more pressing development work.”
4.10 Conclusions of Primary Research
The results of the Primary Research highlight the difficulties which DMOs face when integrating User Generated Content on their websites. For most DMOs, it is an area which they are still exploring and many have yet to decide on the best method for them to harness the potential of User Generated Content. The quality of the content which users generate, and the legal obligations of the organisation re comments on their websites, are the primary areas for concern.

4.11 Comparative Analysis
The primary research above has shown that most DMOs are still hesitant to integrate User Generated Content. However, there are a number of DMOs who are leading the field in this area and who are recognised as being best in class. They have taken the leap of faith that is required to integrate User Generated Content on their sites and have had varying degrees of success with this. A comparative analysis has been undertaken to review the different methods used. These sites were chosen as recognised best in class sites, and to cover a cross section of DMO types i.e. City Tourism Organisation, Regional Tourism Organisation and National Tourism Organisation. The performance of the User Generated Content section of each site has been benchmarked against generic travel review sites, www.TripAdvisor.com and www.igougo.com over a set period of time (1 month).

TripAdvisor® is the largest travel community in the world, with more than 5 million unbiased reviews and opinions, covering 250,000+ hotels and attractions. With more than 20 million unique monthly visitors worldwide (source: comScore Media Metrix, July 2006), TripAdvisor® features real advice from real travellers and easy access to major online travel sites.37 The world's leading online travel community, IgoUgo's 350,000 members offer what guidebooks can't: hundreds of thousands of opinions on destinations across the globe, plus suggestions and photos for everything from cheap eats

37 http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about_us.html
and luxury accommodations to must-see attractions and worthwhile day trips. The site was launched in June 2000 and now has 300,000 reviews covering 4000 destinations.\textsuperscript{38}

4.11.1 Dublin

VisitDublin.com is the official marketing website for the city of Dublin. They run a Message Board on their website, where registered users can ask questions and reply to other users' queries. Messages are published without moderation but may be removed or edited once noticed or brought to the attention of the moderator. There were 3924 messages on the board on the 08/05/2007. This is the total number of messages which have been added to the board since its inception back in 2003. Many of the messages are not tourism related but are from people seeking to move to Dublin and the average number of responses to messages is 3.

From the 06/04/2007 to 08/05/2007, the number of messages on the VisitDublin Message board increased from 3895 to 3924. Over the same period, Dublin reviews on TripAdvisor.com grew from 7570 to 7867 and on IgoUgo.com grew from 150 to 152.

\textsuperscript{38} http://www.igougo.com/about/
4.11.2 United Kingdom

www.visitbritain.ie is the official tourism website for Irish people who wish to travel to the UK. They have recently revamped their site and introduced a number of User Generated Content options. These include Favourite Destinations and Holiday Ideas which encourage users to submit journal type entries from their trip to the UK, and Travellers Tips which encourage users to submit tips in a few short lines which will interest other travellers. The content is submitted in an email of approximately 300 words and VisitBritain will have “the right, without payment, to use it and make it available in VisitBritain’s publications (including print and CD Rom) and to publish it on the Internet at www.visitbritain.com.”
It would appear that the content which is currently in this space has been seeded by VisitBritain to encourage users to submit their own personal tales. During the period of analysis, there have not been any additions to this section of the site while over the same period, 33 reviews have been submitted to TripAdvisor.com and 6 reviews have been added to IgoUgo.com.

4.11.2 United Kingdom User Generated Content

4.11.3 Ohio

The tourism department in the state of Ohio in the United States of America have also just recently integrated User Generated Content on www.discoverohio.com. They have created a space for users to share their stories, videos and photos. Photos of up to 3MB can be uploaded directly to the site and stories can be entered online but they do not appear immediately which suggests that they are moderated before being published. The addition
of video to the site is via YouTube - users must first upload their video to YouTube and then paste the relevant link from YouTube to the video section on www.discoverohio.com.

From the 06/04/2007 to 08/05/2007, there have been no additions by users to the discoverohio.com site. However over the same period, 3 reviews have been added to TripAdvisor.com and 4 reviews have been added to Igouugo.com.

![Ohio User Generated Content](image)

**Figure 4.11.3 Ohio User Generated Content**

### 4.11.4 Switzerland

The Swiss Tourist Board site [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com) has been recognised in the DMO field as leading the way in the addition of User Generated Content. It was one of the first National Tourism Organisations to allow user generated hotel reviews on their site. Initially, it tried to create its own community of
reviews but has since integrated hotel reviews from an independent review site [www.hotelcheck.ch](http://www.hotelcheck.ch). It allows users to add their videos to the site (although on the 20/05/07, there is only 1 video in this section which has not been added by the MySwitzerland Team) and also has a community site ([http://myswitzerland.igougo.com/myHome.asp](http://myswitzerland.igougo.com/myHome.asp)) which is powered by IgoUgo.com (there is no obvious hyperlink from [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com) to this site).

From the 06/04/2007 to 08/05/2007, 208 hotel reviews were added to the MySwitzerland.com site, 19 reviews were added to the TripAdvisor.com, and 1 review was added to IgoUgo.

![Switzerland User Generated Content](image)

Figure 4.11.4 Switzerland User Generated Content
4.12 Conclusions of Comparative Analysis

Of the 4 sites analysed above, MySwitzerland has had the most success with integrating User Generated Content to its site. It is the only site which has competed with the Independent Third Party sites with respect to the amount of new user generated content on its site over a defined period.

It has done this by harnessing the content which already exists on other travel review websites, and cloaking this content in the MySwitzerland.com brand. This has allowed it to have a well populated User Generated Content sections on its site which in turn encourages new visitors to also add their content to the site.
Chapter 5

Recommendations

Survey results have shown that content quality issues, legal obligations and opposition from local tourism trade partners are the main challenges which face DMOs in integrating user generated content.

5.1 Legal Obligations

The main legal concern for DMOs when allowing users to add content to their site is that they may be held liable if the user defames an individual business or body. The case of Totalise plc v The Motley Fool Ltd (2001) and Godfrey v Demon Internet Ltd [1999] set the legal precedent for defamation on discussion boards.

In Totalise plc v The Motley Fool Ltd [2001], the defendants operated a website containing discussion boards where members could post material. 'Z Dust' made numerous postings which called into question the plaintiffs solvency, suggesting that it was on the point of collapse and called into question the competence of its management. The Plaintiff contented that these statements were defamatory and sought disclosure of the name and address of 'Z Dust' and all documents in the possession, custody and control of the defendants which related to 'Z Dust'. The defendants removed the postings and barred Z Dust from using the site but refused to disclose Z Dust's identity on the grounds of privacy and data protection laws and it was not clear that the plaintiff intended to sue for defamation.

Z Dusts postings were defamatory and it was ordered by the court that his identity be disclosed to the plaintiff. The Court stated "I consider that there is considerable force in ..[the] argument that those who operate websites containing discussion boards do so at their own risk".

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"If it transpires that those boards are used for defamatory purposes by individuals hiding behind the cloak of anonymity then in justice a claimant seeking to establish the identity of the individuals ... ought to be entitled to their costs".

In Godfrey v Demon Internet Ltd [1999] the service provider was held liable for defamatory comments made on a newsgroup site they hosted as they refused to remove the offending statements when asked to do so by the plaintiff. The liability of service providers is set out in the EC(Directive 2000/31/EC) Regulations 2003 which provide that an intermediary service provider will not be liable where they are a mere conduit of the defamatory material.39

This means that DMOs who allow users to provide reviews of individual tourism product providers on their site cannot be held liable as they are a mere conduit of the defamatory material on their site. They can only be liable if they refuse to remove the offending statements from their website if notified that it is defamatory. They may also have to disclose the identity of the person who made the statement.

5.2 Content Quality Issues
Users adding libellous postings, offensive comments and spam posts are 3 of the main challenges which DMOs face when they allow users to add content to their site. However, careful moderation can eradicate this threat. Many communities are self-moderating and will immediately delete themselves or alert the site moderator to any content which falls into the above 3 categories.

39 Information Technology Law Notes HDBT1 NCI – Louise O'Reilly
5.3 Opposition from Trade Partners
Opposition from Trade Partners can be negated by highlighting the benefits of positive comments to their business and emphasising the benefits of quality customer feedback to them. If users feel strongly enough about their experience at a property, they will post their comments somewhere on the web. If they post these comments on a DMO website, the property owner will be aware of what is being said about them and will also have the opportunity to immediately reply to these comments and provide a more balanced view.

5.4 Conclusions
Tourism Ireland should consider following the practices of MySwitzerland.com and harnessing existing user generated content rather than trying to create their own. The comparative analysis of DMO websites has highlighted the difficulties which DMOs face in generating user generated content for their websites and the low level of repeat visitors to DMO websites makes this a very real challenge. Utilising third party user generated content, requires far less resources from the DMO as the content is already moderated by the provider and it is tapping into an existing community rather than trying to create a new unique community.
## List of DMOs

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Appendix 2
User Generated Content Survey
User Generated Content on Destination Marketing Organisation Websites

This survey aims to analyse the challenges faced by Destination Marketing Organisations in incorporating User Generated Content on their websites and how different DMOs have overcome these challenges. For the purpose of this survey, User Generated Content includes any information which is shared on a website by the users of the site, including but not limited to blogs, discussion forums, photographs, video and discussion forums.

1. Name of Organisation (optional)

2. Type of Destination Marketing Organisation:
   - National Tourism Organisation
   - Regional Tourism Organisation
   - City Tourism Organisation
   - Other (please specify)

3. Does your organisation have a dedicated eMarketing/Internet department?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Who are your primary stakeholders/parties that have an interest, financial or otherwise, in your organisation?
   - Tourism/Trade Partners
   - Consumers
   - Other equally important
   - Other (please specify)

5. Approximately, how many visitors enter your site each month?
   - Less than 1,000
   - 1,000 - 5,000
   - 5,001 - 10,000
   - 10,001 - 50,000
   - 50,001 - 100,000
   - 100,001 - 500,000
   - More than 500,000

6. Approximately, how many visitors have registered to use your website?
   - No registration option on the site
   - Less than 500
   - 501 - 1,000
   - 1,001 - 5,000
   - 5,001 - 10,000
   - 10,001 - 50,000
   - More than 50,000

7. (b) Does your website include user-generated content? If so, please tick the type(s) of user-generated content on your site below:
   - No user-generated content on the site
   - Blog
   - Podcasts
   - Video
   - Photographs
   - Discussion Forums
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