

A BRAVE NEW WORLD?- SMALL SPECIAL INTEREST TOUR OPERATORS & INTERNET BASED MARKET RESEARCH AND MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Travel and tourism is now generally perceived to be the market with the biggest online potential, as travel sites prove among the most popular on the World Wide Web (WWW). Tourism is an information intensive industry that deals in intangible products. The intangibility of the tourism product is compensated for by the production of large amounts of information, thus travel and tourism marketing lends itself to the application of information technology. The WWW provides an unprecedented opportunity for small special interest tourism firms to gain access to international markets at relatively low cost. The full potential of the medium is not yet, however, utilised by most operators. This paper examines the role of information diffusion in small/medium tourism operations and discusses methods of increasing the penetration of an online presence. A case study of small/medium special interest tourism operator is presented to demonstrate the type of marketing and market research possible using the Internet as a medium.

INTRODUCTION

Travel purchases are some of the most popular of all web-based purchases, and travel web sites among the most visited sites on the World Wide Web (WWW) (Law, 2000; Govers, 2000; Sheldon, 1997). The success of a travel company's Web site in terms of visit numbers, is not, however, directly proportional to capital investment in the medium (Inkpen, 1998). A small but growing body of literature describes methods of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of electronic travel and tourism marketing. This paper aims to add to that literature by reviewing the ways in which the WWW is used by small/medium, special interest travel firms to conduct market research and subsequent marketing activities.

Recent changes in western societies' leisure patterns caused the development of increasingly customised and unique tourism products designed to meet the 'experiential' needs of some contemporary tourists (Fluker and Turner, 2000; Moore and Carter,

1993; Hall, 1992; Hall and McArthur, 1991; Krippendorf, 1987a, b). The result has been growth in special interest tourism (Weiler & Hall, 1992) in reaction to mass, packaged forms of tourism. This growth is manifested in an increase in specialised forms of tourism based upon leisure or recreation pursuits. Concurrent advances in information technology and growth in WWW usage have allowed smaller operators low-cost access to the international marketplace and previously unimaginable promotion and distribution efficiency.

This paper discusses the application of information communication technology (ICT), particularly the WWW, to the field of marketing and market research in small/medium special interest travel firms. Market research for a small surf tourism company is used as a case study. From this analysis more effective applications of ICT in marketing and marketing research are proposed

DISCUSSION:

Tourism: An Information Intensive Industry

To understand the opportunities for small special interest tourism operators in employing the use of the World Wide Web as a medium for marketing and market research activities it is useful firstly to examine the nature of tourism as it relates to the management of information.

The tourism industry is information intensive: it generates large volumes of information requiring processing and dissemination (O'Leary, 2000; Buhalis, 1993). Compared to other sectors of the tourism

industry Sheldon (1997) contends that travel agents, tour operators, and other travel intermediaries are the most information intensive sectors of the tourism industry as they have no tangible product of their own and deal almost entirely in information.

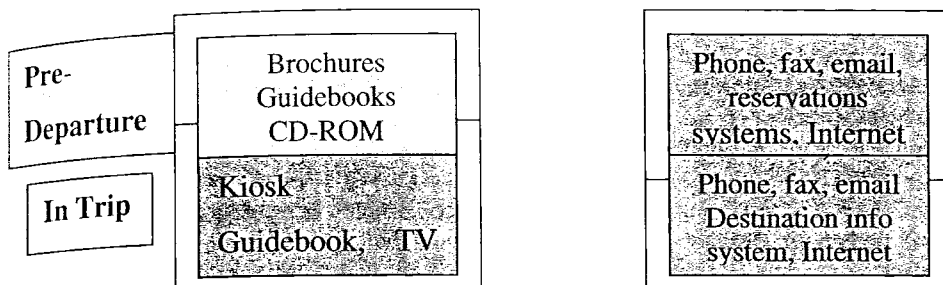
Sheldon (1997) among many others, states that travel and tourism is characterised by its heterogeneity, intangibility, perishability, time sensitivity, and geographic dispersion, which underpin the information intensity of tourism.

In providing a framework for the discussion of tourism information, Sheldon (1997) identifies four types based on whether information is of a static (eg a history of a destination) or dynamic or interactive (eg

product availability) nature and whether information is required before or after departure. Figure 1 shows the types of information generated and appropriate media for transmission.

Figure 1

Types of Tourism Information Media



Sheldon (1997 p.9)

Sheldon (1997) considers the Internet most useful in dealing with interactive (dynamic) information both before and during a trip: the WWW enables information to be easily up-dated and subsequently accessed by customers and suppliers at minimal cost. Other writers have found, however, that most travel websites provide largely static pre-departure information (Legoherel, Fisher-Lokou & Gueguen, 2000). The following section proposes two divergent paradigms of travel website which aid in understanding the ways an online presence can be utilised by small special interest tourism firms.

Two Concepts of Internet Marketing

Legoherel, Fisher-Lokou, and Gueguen (2000) contend that two concepts of Internet based marketing have developed. The first conceptualises a travel firm's web site as WWW-based version of a conventional catalogue consisting of text, colour photos, and graphics. Web sites are considered a complement to, or substitute for, conventional sources of static pre-departure information. The web-site visitor's interaction is limited, in this instance, to the passive role of finding and viewing the website (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996). This policy represents the current dominant concept of Internet marketing.

The second concept may be likened to an international exhibition room, providing space for customers to enter freely and ask advice from sellers. This alternative strategy involves dialogue with customers, and the provision of a customised, negotiated service in order to further encourage online purchases (Legoherel, Fisher-Lokou & Gueguen, 2000). Interaction is expanded from the passive role of the dominant concept to more active roles of in-depth study, commercial research, and potentially real-time interaction with sellers (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996).

Legoherel *et al.* (2000), and Hoffman and Novak (1996) suggest that ongoing development of asynchronous computer-mediated communication over the WWW may change the roles of buyers and sellers. This change is to take the form of 'true interactivity' and dialogue offered by improving information technology. Alba *et al.* (1997) predicted that WWW-based interactive communication will enable a relationship to develop between sellers and consumers that allows consumer expectations to be taken into account, and for help to be given during a search for information. This has occurred as an exploration of <http://www.landsend.com/cd/frontdoor/> shows.

Many tourism purchases represent high-involvement decisions. The evolution of this interactive style of communication, and encouragement of the active use of travel web sites is considered by some writers to be necessary in allowing in-depth commercial research, and subsequent reduction of the perceived risk of a tourism purchase (Legoherel, Fisher-Lokou & Gueguen, 2000; Walle, 1996). Marcussen (2002) predicts a significant increase in sales via the Internet in the future. This will be coupled with increased marketing activities concerned with enhancing dialog with customers, increasing availability of information to potential customers, and providing online purchase opportunities. This recent literature indicates that effective Internet marketing involves interaction with potential and actual customers, improved purchase opportunities, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, harnessing the powerful marketing research capabilities of a well-planned web presence.

Application of ICT to Travel Intermediaries

The marketing sector of the travel and tourism industry has evolved rapidly to exploit newly emerging information technology and associated advances in accuracy, efficiency and productivity since the introduction of Global Distribution Systems in the mid

1980s (Sheldon, 1997p.43). The electronic connectivity provided by information technology, particularly the WWW, has, in recent times, presented this sector with both opportunity and threat. Offering services on the World Wide Web gives travel agencies a much broader potential consumer base than a traditional walk-in travel agency (Sheldon, 1997p.58). However, the Web also provides an opportunity for customers to purchase tourism products directly from suppliers effectively bypassing the role of the PDS sector travel intermediaries (Dombey, 1998). Thus, pressure has been placed upon this sector to develop online marketing strategies, which provide greater perceived value than the potential savings of consumer purchases directly from a supplier.

ICT can be used by travel marketing firms to research products and destinations, to communicate with clients both through information presented on a Web home page and email, and to actively target groups and individuals and to widen a firm's distribution. Some travel agencies exist solely on the Internet (eg travelocity, travel.com, lastminute.com), providing exclusively on-line information and purchase opportunities.

Advances in multimedia technology have enhanced the ability of tourism firms to reduce the perceived risk of travel purchases by providing more realistic impressions of travel products, thereby helping to make the intangible somewhat more tangible. Logically this may lead to an increase in satisfaction as tourists are possibly better able to select products more likely to satisfy their needs.

Daellert (2000) suggests that tourists derive economic benefit from the information of other tourists by gaining access to high quality, low cost/free specialised information (Rastrollo and Alarcon, 2000), allowing the tourist to form a more accurate image of a destination. A pre-departure destination image that matches the actual experience will increase the probability of satisfaction with a tourist purchase (Dallaert, 2000). The logical implication of this information for travel websites is to incorporate a forum of tourist contributions, and <http://thorn.tree.lonelyplanet.com/thorn/topics.pl?Cat=&Start=sam> exemplifies this concept.

The World Wide Web and Small Tourism Firms

Both anecdotal evidence and the academic literature suggest that there is scope for competitive advantage to be gained by small tourism operators investing resources in developing an online presence (Ed Wright, 2001 pers. comm; Sweeny, 2000; O'Leary, 2000). In many cases such organisations are started by enthusiasts of the special interest concerned, often for reasons of life style. Thus, an understanding of the Internet and its potential power for small tourism operators is not always present and/or the operationalisation of an online marketing strategy is perceived as a prohibitively complex and costly exercise. However, advances in ICT have allowed

small tourism firms access to electronic networks previously inaccessible to them due to their prohibitive hardware costs. The Internet has provided such small firms with the opportunity to distribute information to an audience far more widely dispersed than has been available to them. A phenomenon that Sheldon (1997) contends is leading to a polarisation of scale in tourism industry firms: 'once small tourism operators have access to electronic markets their competitive position is likely to improve. They will be accessible to world markets in ways they never were before' (Sheldon, 1997p.208). This of course is based on the premise that their product is suitable for and in demand from world markets.

The next section traces changes in society and tourism demand, which shows a move away from mass, packaged, and passive tourist product towards those that provide a level of participatory interaction with host environments. The relationship between firms, which have emerged to fill such niche markets as they develop, and the World Wide Web is discussed.

Many writers in the 1980s claimed that socio-demographic changes in society lead to a change in tourism demand (Pearce, 1988; Krippendorf, 1987a, b; Stebbins, 1982). Pearce (1988) suggests that future tourism demand would place increased importance upon opportunities to participate, experience, and learn about destination region environments. Stebbins (1982) found that leisure is no longer seen by some in western society just as a way of escaping and recuperating from the stresses of employment, but rather as means to reinforcing personal identity, attaining personal fulfilment, and expressing individuality. Similarly, Krippendorf (1987a, b) suggests that travel motivations for some people are shifting from those with an emphasis on escape from the stresses of work, towards those seeking particular experiences and environmental and social contexts.

More recently these views have been supported by a growth in niche or special interest tourism (SIT) market segments, described by many writers from academic (Cho and Fesenmaier, 2000; Fluker and Turner, 2000; Moore and Carter, 1993; Hall, 1992; Hall and McArthur, 1991) and industry spheres (Travel Week, 2000a, b; Travel Digest, 2000; Rohlfis, 2000; Bayes, 2000). This increased demand for holiday customisation is also reflected in the marketing literature which traces a general move amongst sellers away from mass marketing to that which provides a more customised approach (Kotler, Brown, Adam and Armstrong, 1999).

Adventure tourism is just one of the many types of SIT driven by a particular interest and is generally defined in terms of perceived risk taking behaviour. For example the EIU Travel and Tourism Analyst (1992 p.38) defines an adventure holiday as "one that contains an element of personal challenge. through

controlled risk, daring and/or excitement, often in an inaccessible (wilderness) environment”.

There are many subsets of adventure tourism. One is surfing tourism, which for the purpose of this study is defined as tourism undertaken with the primary objective of providing opportunities to experience excellent surfing conditions. As is the case with many small niche special interest tourism types, surfing tourism sustains a variety of small to medium size operators. The World Wide Web presents both threats and opportunities for the marketing and marketing research activities of surfing tourism operators. In an atmosphere of increasingly customised tourist experiences and increasingly customised promotion and distribution services, Sheldon (1997 p.206) suggests that use of the WWW by the tourism industry and tourists alike should ensure that ‘tourists will have a richer travel experience as they discover smaller and more unique tourism facilities which may previously have escaped them’. Thus use of the World Wide Web for marketing and marketing research purposes appears to hold many benefits for small special interest tourism operators and the tourists that use their services.

Case Study: The Surf Travel Company

The case study briefly describes the practical application of ICT, particularly the World Wide Web, and the concepts discussed in section two of this paper, as tools for conducting marketing research and subsequent targeted marketing initiatives in small/medium sized special interest tourism organisation - The Surf Travel Company. A brief background of the organisation and the market it operates in is followed by an explanation of the aims and methodology of the marketing research undertaken. The results of the research are then discussed and a simple strategy for future application of this data as the basis of an online-targeted marketing initiative is suggested.

In Australia, a surfing tourism niche market developed through the 1980s, contemporaneous with Pearce (1988) and Krippendorf's (1987a, b) observations of the changes in society, leisure and tourism described in section 2. The Surf Travel Company (STC) is a Sydney based surf tour retail specialist (STRS), a sub-sector of the promotion and distribution sector of the Australian tourism industry. STRS firms promote and distribute travel products designed to satisfy the specific tourism leisure needs of travelling surfers (*c.f.* Stear, Buckley and Stankey, 1992), i.e. the opportunity to surf waves of an exceptionally high quality.

STC started operations in 1987, and is the largest STRS in the Australia. Over time, STC has built a reputable brand name and positioned itself as the leading operator serving the high yield end of the surf tour market. Its products are priced and constructed to target professionals who are ‘cash rich and time poor’ (Paul King, 2001, pers. comm.). Though it provides a wide range of products, and supplies information to

travellers on differing budgets, the professional market forms the core of STC's business.

In 2000, STC's website won the Australian Federation of Travel Agent's (AFTA) travel web site of the year award. Thus it may be assumed that the STC website represents good practice in terms of Internet marketing and marketing research, at least in the view of the AFTA judges. An interview (26.7.2001) with Marketing Manager, Ed Wright indicated practical experience with website design, maintenance and operation that reflected a reality slightly different to that espoused in the academic literature. Rather than completely embracing the value added components of websites suggested in the marketing literature such as links, chat facilities, and other services extra to the primary objective of the website (in this case stimulating conversions of inquiries to sales), STC are in the process of rationalising their website to focus browsers on selecting a tourism product and then requesting a quote.

Table 1 compares STC's performance with what Sweeney (2001) presents as the common objectives of travel firms' online presence.

Conducting Marketing Research and Collecting Market Intelligence Online

Marketing Manager, Ed Wright (2001, pers. comm.) believes that the most serious and yet easily addressed shortcoming of STC's web presence was the lack of a database and process for conducting marketing research and collecting marketing intelligence. In response to this a method of collecting and analysing data via the STC website, and of simply, easily and cost effectively carrying out marketing research via an online self complete questionnaires was devised by the authors. This section briefly describes the process of conducting marketing research online as the basis for the development of an online targeted marketing campaign. As the purpose of presenting the case study is to non-specifically demonstrate of the kind of marketing research possible through a small tourism operation's website rather than to formally present a particular research project, many details technical specific to this particular research initiative are omitted.

According to most, if not all marketing writers on the topic, all organisations stand to benefit from increasing their understanding of their market, and utilising this understanding to implement a strategy of targeted marketing (Morrison, 1989, 1994; Middleton, 1994; Croft, 1994; McGuire, 1999; Kotler, Brown, Adams & Armstrong, 1999, etc.). Given the paucity of secondary data available regarding the surf travel market, it was suggested that primary research is needed to provide adequate information upon which to base an effective targeted marketing strategy.

The marketing research conducted was undertaken to identify key characteristics of market segments suitable for the basis of an Internet based targeted

marketing strategy as it is widely accepted that market segmenting is effective (Morrison, 1989, 1994; Middleton, 1994; Croft, 1994; McGuire, 1999; Kotler *et al.*, 1999). Kotler *et al.* (1999), Middleton (1994), and Stanton, Miller and Layton (1991) all suggest that for effective segmentation to take place, market

segments need to be discrete, measurable, viable, accessible, actionable, and appropriate. They advocate segmenting markets based on a combination of characteristics determined through the following three segmentation bases. Who? What? Why?

Table 1
STC's Performance in Attaining Sweeney's (2001) Objectives

Common Objectives of Online Presence	STC's Performance
Taking reservations online Lack of this facility (even email reservation) may result in customers finding such facilities elsewhere	Plans for implementing online reservation and bookings through 'travel.com' were shelved. Currently only capacity to order the construction of a quote online. It is STC's belief that it is still too early to invest heavily in the technology upgrade required to link online with GDS systems.
Promoting tourism operation Can include FAQs, media centre (press releases, operation background, info on key personnel, articles, pictures for media, direct link to PR person)	The STC website includes a great deal of information about destinations and facilities though there is limited information available concerning key personnel and there is no media facility.
Selling products or services May need secure server, information about sale (returns, guarantees conditions etc), encourage repeat visits	Not available at this point in time. "You've got a website, and what you're using that website for ultimately, in the travel sense, the most you can hope at the moment is for someone to request a quote. They are not likely to be booking; they're not likely to be giving their credit card details. We are not far enough down the track to really ask consumers to do that yet. We have to know what we're doing first before we can ask them to do it." (Ed Wright, 2001 pers. comm.)
Creating and establishing brand awareness Memorable name and eye-appealing logo, good graphics, catchy slogan, consistent look and feel	The STC brand is well recognised amongst surfers with regular full-page advertisements in surfing magazines, contest and video sponsorship etc. Website reflects this branding.
Providing customer service and product support FAQ, special support web page, customers service support telephone number	It is hoped that the information contained on the STC website will reduce the number of non-converting telephone enquiries to STC sales staff. It is expected that customers will want to speak with sales staff familiar with the chosen destination.
Generating repeat traffic Current, interesting content; strategy for search engine submission, acquire links from other sites, develop mailing list, developing an online 'community'. Free offers, coupons, contests	Traffic to the STC website is very high, in excess of one million hits per year. As such repeat visitation is not as high a priority as encouraging conversions. As such added services are being rationalised to reflect this. "Every time you throw a new bit of information at them they tend to forget a little bit why they came there in the first place. If you've got 'WIN! WIN! WIN!' or 'Play the surfing game!', 'Check out the surf cam here' and all this sort of stuff every time you do that you're inviting them to go to another website – links by definition are a stupid thing to have. It's like 'great now we've got you here, go somewhere else'" (Ed Wright, 2001 pers. comm.).
Providing customer service and product support	It is hoped that the information contained on the STC website will reduce the number of non-converting

FAQ, special support web page, customers service support telephone number

telephone enquiries to STC sales staff. It is expected that customers will want to speak with sales staff familiar with the chosen destination.

The following key research question was developed to guide the marketing research. *What are the key identifying characteristics of groups within STC's market who respond in a relatively homogenous manner to marketing inputs?* This was then divided into three subsidiary research questions derived from the three segmentation bases referred to above.

1. Who are STC's clients?
2. What are the patterns of consumption of STC's clients?
3. Why do they chose to holiday in this way? (What are the motivations determining STC's clients' destination choice?)

Both qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken. Firstly interviews and brainstorming with STC management produced a list of provisional segments. In-depth interviews were conducted with known surf travellers. The results of the qualitative study were then used to guide the construction of a quantitative online questionnaire survey.

The online questionnaire was reached through the main menu page of the STC website by clicking of an animated 'gif' which flashed the appealing promise of 'win a trip to the Mentawais valued at \$3200', those completing the form were electronically entered into a

draw to win a berth aboard a surfing charter yacht in Indonesia. The 'competition' was advertised across most of the popular specialist surfing print media.

It was arranged with STC's Internet Server Provider (ISP) that on submission of the completed questionnaire the responses were sent to a specified email address. A program using the Adobe Go Live 4 software then transformed responses into appropriate values for statistical analysis, and pasted directly into a statistics software package. In this case Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used, however, depending upon the complexity of the statistical manipulations required Microsoft Access or EXCEL might be sufficient. Here, for example, percentage frequency analysis of results proved sufficient to determine trends across STC's Internet market - a function easily performed in Microsoft Access or EXCEL. Despite the length of the questionnaire, pilot surveying suggested that the lure of the prize draw and the speed with closed answer questions can be answered with pull down menus would lead to a high completion rate. Ultimately around 3000 replies to the survey were received within the period of the contest - approximately 4 weeks.

The first page of the questionnaire can be seen below in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Example of Completed Online Questionnaire

Name -	Jess Ponting
Age -	27
Phone Number -	9939 0859
<hr/>	
E - mail address -	jess.ponting@uts.edu.au
<hr/>	
Post code -	2096
<hr/>	
Sex -	male
<hr/>	
1. Where did you hear about the Surf Travel company -	Australian Surfing Life
<hr/>	
2. Select the response which best describes your situation -	young, single - independant
<hr/>	

3. I have been surfing for -

4. The term which best describes my surfing ability is -

5. My favourite sized surf is -

6. My last surf trip was undertaken -

As the data were analysed a picture of STC's web traffic and perceptions of what makes a good surfing holiday began to emerge. Broad trends of market socio-demographic segments became apparent as well as universal factors of importance. These trends are modelled against broad market segments (developed from the analysis of survey data) in Figure 3 below. As well as providing information about the surfing tourism market in general, the questionnaire captured personal details such as email address, preferred destination, budget, booking time etc, accommodation preferences, and asked website visitors to sign onto an STC news letter. Thus the STC gained useful data about its Internet traffic and potential market. As well, it has secured the email addresses of pre-qualified customers and further, secured permission to send solicited sales promotion material, which may be tailored to fit the market segments described in Figure 3 below.

The aim of the market research was to provide data to form the basis of an online targeted marketing initiative. In order for an effective system of storing and utilising information to be developed, a database capable of housing the information captured in this exercise needs to be designed. The most efficient model of online targeted marketing available to STC is to group their customer database into the segments proposed in Figure 3 and send periodic group emails to these groups containing sales promotions tailored to the known preferences of the market segments.

Clearly more sophisticated use of the available technology is possible. Specific profiles of each client on the database could potentially be developed with specific preferences including destination, budget, accommodation, surfing experience etc recorded allowing direct marketing of products most suited to individual clients at times they are most receptive to them. Furthermore, other customer relationship management techniques such as rewards for frequent users can be implemented.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that travel and tourism is an information intensive industry and

therefore industry has much to gain from the effective and efficient use of information technology. Large amounts of information are utilized to compensate for the lack of a tangible product. This information is often available on a travel operator's website. The literature reviewed for this paper suggests that two travel website concepts have developed resembling the features of an electronic brochure and a virtual trade show. The former is currently the dominant concept, yet is the model that utilises the least of the web's potential in terms of marketing and marketing research. Several methods of reducing the perceived risk of travel purchases and reaching a wider internet market were discussed and the conclusion drawn that small tourism operators particularly, had much to gain from using the world wide web as a medium for promotion, distribution and marketing research activities.

Drawing upon literature from the fields of marketing, leisure, and tourist psychology as well as the popular press and industrial sources this paper has taken the position that the nature of some tourism activity is changing to reflect the changes in developed countries away from mass consumption of homogeneous products and services to customised products more representative of the persona of the consumer. This process has seen an increase in the numbers of small special interest tourism operators. Such small niche operators stand to gain from access to larger markets than their current geographically constrained market provided at minimal cost via the Internet.

The case study presented a practical example of the application of appropriate ICT to conduct online marketing research and marketing activities. At the time of initiating research for this paper (mid 2001) there were no products readily available capable of carrying out the functions described in the case study. Since this time (less than a six month period) a variety of products and services have come onto the market to assist with marketing research via the Internet. Many firms now offer market research services using technology similar to that described in this paper. Software packages specifically designed to conduct marketing research over the Internet, analyse data and

Figure 4

Key Indicators of Market Segments Within STC's Market Most Appropriate for Internet Based Targeted Marketing

Universally Important Factors	1. Crowd Factor	2. Health Concerns	3. Quality of Natural Environment	
Segmentation Base	Grommet	Independent	Honeymooner	Family
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <20 years old * 35% body boarders * High School or TAFE/Trade Education * Other tourism = snow skiing/boarding, diving, backpacking * Don't travel with partner or family * Least travel experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 20-30 years old * Other tourism = snow skiing/boarding, adventure travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 26-35 years old (generally) * Often travel with partner * Wide range of other tourist activities * Regular surf traveller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Age evenly dispersed through age categories over 25. Slight spike at 36-40 years * Other tourism = snow skiing/boarding + high proportion of 'other'. Often 'family holidays'
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Low Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Travel to previously unvisited destinations/countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Preference for resorts * Wide range of preferred destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 84% length of stay < 2 weeks * Tend to return to same country, same surf break * Strong preference for resorts * Wide range of preferred destinations
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * New & Secret locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * New & Secret locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Range of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Personal safety * Range of Activities * Family facilities

Increasing surfing experience, income, budget, age, concern for health, accommodation, food quality, and local culture,



Decreasing mobility within destination region

produce reports are now readily available on the market (c.f. Perseus Development Corporation, 2001; Markettools.com, 2001).

Small special interest tourism operators are then well placed in a growing market, in a technological landscape, which has to some extent levelled the competitive playing field in terms of the ability of

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge the time and resources provided by Paul King, Owner/Manager of STC in interviews undertaken for this study and in providing the resources for the promotion and incentive associated with the online survey.

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- tourism operators to reach international markets. The technology exists to conduct sophisticated market research and collect powerful market intelligence over the Internet. Further, as demonstrated in section three of this paper, using simple database technology (eg Microsoft Access) a targeted marketing strategy may be developed and operationalised via the Internet.
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