

The Usage Of Internet Technology For Marketing: Perspectives From Local Entrepreneurs Of The Small And Medium Hotel Organizations In Langkawi

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Abstract

Small and medium hotel organizations (SMHOs) are recognized as one of the major businesses in the tourism industry. They usually provide employment benefits to the host community, expand local economy and therefore very important to accommodate tourism demand. Taking example of SMHOs run by local entrepreneurs in Langkawi, this paper proposed that the internet is one of the most important tools for these organizations to market their products and services to a global market. It explored the perceptions of local entrepreneurs in Langkawi about utilizing the internet and analyzed the impact of this technology to their marketing strategy. This paper also highlights that internet technology provide a wide range of benefits to the entrepreneurs in terms of distributing information, establishing customers' relationship program and competing against big hotel companies. In the case of Langkawi, it was evident that the local entrepreneurs did not utilize the internet to its fullest potential and they were still adapting to this new technology as part of their marketing tool. By employing a qualitative method and using face-to-face semi-structured interviews as a form of data collection, SMHOs operators were interviewed to examine the function of the internet for their organizations. The findings indicated that factors such as lack of ITs skill and limited financial resources were some of the issues that might slow down the progress of internet usage among SMHOs on the Island.

Keywords: *Internet marketing, hotel industry, Langkawi Island, hotel websites*

Introduction

The Internet is changing the way tourism and hospitality businesses are conducted. It is considered as an extremely important new technology that changes the old rules of how the businesses are performed (Porter 2001). Currently, major businesses and individuals are connecting with the Internet to communicate, perform transaction and to search for valuable information. This technology evolves in a relatively fast pace and becomes the one of the powerful marketing tool. According to Vich-i-Martorell (2002), the tourism industry has tremendous opportunities in reaching a growing number of the internet users and turn them into potential customers. A report published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)(2000) also proposed that destinations and businesses must be on-line to be successful in their tourism marketing strategies.

In view of the current internet usage among global society nowadays, it is imperative for the entrepreneurs to be proactive and innovative in utilizing such technology. Tourism related entrepreneurs particularly those who own small and medium hotels have to take advantage of this power internet technology in order to expand their businesses globally. Therefore, this paper

addresses how the internet is being used among small and medium hotels entrepreneurs and whether the usage of the internet is very effective for marketing their products and services. It also provides recommendations on how to implement online marketing strategies for increasing number of customers to the hotels. Using Langkawi Island as a case study, this paper explores the way the internet being utilised by local entrepreneurs for marketing their hotels especially by looking at the content of their hotel websites, the information provided and the impact of having the website to their hotel or chalet businesses.

Small and medium hotels

Small and medium hotels are one of the growing business segments in tourism. According to Friel (1999), the majority players in the tourism and hospitality industry are consisting of small and medium hotels with little is known about their marketing strategies. Buhalis and Main (1998) also reported that hotels or accommodation establishments globally are small or medium-sized which run by local businesses that employ members from the host society. Since the majority of tourism businesses are consist of small and medium hotel enterprises, it is imperative for researchers to study how these particular organizations market their products and services. Morrison and King (2002) have emphasised that the marketing roles of small and medium hotels should not have been neglected particular in order to enhance the competitiveness of tourism destination and tourists' experience.

In the UK and mostly European countries, the impact of small and medium size hospitality organizations run by local entrepreneurs (SMHOs) to the countries is very significance in terms of providing employment to the local people and expanding the economic opportunities for the host society (Buhalis and Main 1998; Martin 2004). In Malaysia, small and medium enterprises are getting wider attention from the government and other relevant stakeholders. A lot of incentives and assistances are provided by the local authorities to encourage this entrepreneur activity. Financial assistance as well as training are provided by the government to promote local entrepreneurs to participate in this profitable sector.

Case study: Langkawi Island

Langkawi is considered as a treasury island for Malaysia tourism destination. As an archipelago island comprises of 104 islands with a total land area of 478.58 square kilometres, the island is blessed with abundant natural resources and beautiful sand and beaches. About two third of the island is covered by hills and highlands. With the attractive natural environment features coupled with the unique historical and cultural background, the island provides a great opportunity for developing one of the major island destinations in this region. The development of the island as a tourism destination was started since 1983 and it had been declared as a duty free port in 1987. In 1990, Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) was established to spearhead the island tourism development under the supervision of Malaysia's Ministry of Finance.

Most of the hotel operators on Langkawi Island are depending upon travel agents and tour operators in a tourist's home country such as European countries, Australia and other part of regional markets such Japan, India and the Middle East. Therefore, by participating in the Internet marketing, small and medium hotel entrepreneurs are able to bypass the intermediaries such as travel agents and to significantly reduce the distributions costs. This cost saving and the opportunity of getting more international tourists may contribute to a high revenues for this budding entrepreneurs.

An extensive review of the literature shows that no research is conducted on the role of the Internet for marketing tourism and products and services in regards to a developing tourist island destination in Malaysia such as Langkawi. To date, there is no information available to justify the usage of the Internet as an effective marketing and promotional tool for small and medium hotels on Langkawi island as a developing tourist destination. However, Othman et al. (2001) in their study on market orientation practices among small and medium hotels in Langkawi Island revealed that those properties practice market orientation in their operation and business. However, there is no indication of what are the tools to be used in improving the marketing strategies for hotel operators in the island.

According to Langkawi Development Authority's statistic (2003) on tourist arrivals to Langkawi Island by region for year 2002 (figure 1), 69% of the visitors are within the Asian countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. Based on the figure 2, tourists' arrival from developed regions such as North America and North Europe contribute significantly less than other regions such as Asian countries. However, according to UNCTD (2000), the use of the Internet among population in developed countries for purchasing tourism products is increasing dramatically. It is an opportunity for small and medium hotel entrepreneurs to promote their products and services through the Internet and improve their position in the global market. As a result, they need to integrate the Internet as part of their marketing strategy to stimulate more international visitors especially to those tourists who may come from developed countries.

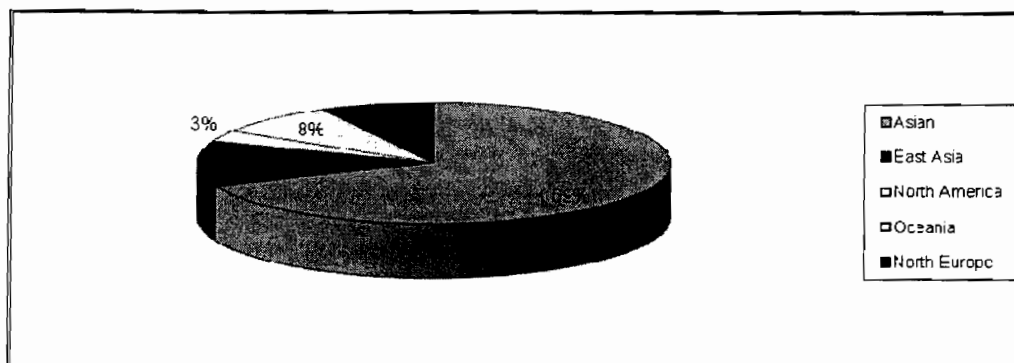


Figure 1 Tourist arrivals to Langkawi by world region (2002)

Source: Langkawi Development Authority (2003)

Langkawi Island is very popular among western markets and Malaysia is increasingly promoting the destination as one of the major attractions for international and local tourists (WTTTC 2001). The government is aggressively promoting the island as a tourism destination by improving the tourism facilities and inviting private investors to develop the island as a popular destination. For the last ten years, about 320 million ringgit (approximately US\$84 million) has been invested to improve the infrastructures and public facilities of the island (Kayat 2002). In year 2000, there were approximately 1.8 million tourists visited the island which included more than 200,000 foreign visitors (Rahim 2002). According to Rahim (2002), the total number of hotel rooms as of year 2002 was 6500, which include five and four star hotels as well as small hotels and chalets.

Othman et. al 2001 suggested that small and medium hotels are very important and are received special attention from the government for serving mostly domestic markets. With strong support from the government, it is perceived that operating small and medium hotels will become one of the popular tourism entrepreneurship activities for the Bumiputera. Small and medium hotels (SMHOs) that are described in this paper may include budget hotels and motels,

inns, resorts, chalet and bed and breakfast type accommodation. Based on previous studies, the SMHOs are associated with one or more of the following characteristics (Anckar and Walden 2001; Buhalis and Main 1998):

- Having room less than 50
- Employing less than 10 employees
- Operating in the lower reaches of the market
- Having often located in tertiary locations such as island or highlands

Based on above mentioned criterias, Langkawi is considered as one of good locations for setting up small hotels and chalets to stimulate the tourism industry. With the establishments of many SMHOs on the island, many tourists from domestic and international markets are given more alternatives of choosing for places to stay. According to hotel and motel list provided by the Tourism Ministry (2004), there are 69 hotels inclusive of five and four star resorts and hotels, motels, chalets and other small accommodation providers available on the island. Of the 69 establishments, more than 50% belong to small and medium hotel local entrepreneurs. Based on survey of list of the Internet sites for Langkawi's small and medium hotels, most of this organization provide a website and email address for corresponding with the customers.

Growth of Online Marketing

The growth of information communication technology has resulted in the new way of doing marketing for the hotel industry. According to Dev and Olsen (2000), the Internet and information technology are one of the driving forces in shaping up the new marketing strategy for the hospitality industry.

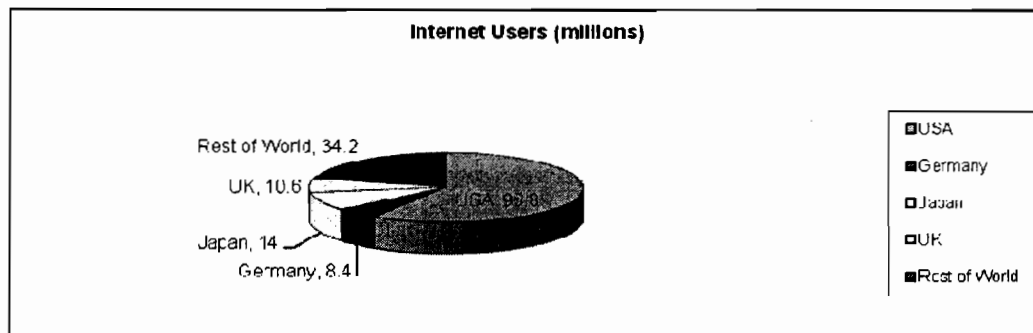


Figure 2 Number of Internet Users from the countries that spend the most on tourism
Sources: NOP Research Group, Gfk, NielsenRatings, Nikkei as cited in WTO (1999)

The number of Internet users is increasingly growing due to a rapid improvement in information communication technology. According to WTO (1999), the top four countries that spend the most on hospitality and travel industry consist of 79% of the world's present Internet population (128.8 million users)(Refer to figure 2). Based on figure 2, it is also reported that four countries which include USA, Germany, Japan and United Kingdom are among the biggest internet users. Therefore, small hotel sector have tremendous opportunities in capturing these markets by doing online marketing.

The Importance of Internet marketing for SMHOs

The role of the Internet especially World Wide Web for small and medium hotel organizations (SMHOs) are increasingly important as a marketing and promotional tool. Using Internet technology, local hotel entrepreneurs are gaining competitive advantage in marketing their facilities and services, providing information interactively with the customers and expanding the booking channels (Connolly et al. 1997). Theoretically, the Internet and world wide web, as pointed out by Lau et al. (2001) can assist marketers in reaching out a broad customer base, locating target customers, identifying their needs and communicating with them at a relatively low cost. The Internet also provides great opportunity for hotel operators in collecting and gathering market research in an efficient way for tailoring their products and services for a particular target market (Leong 2000). A study conducted on the US lodging managers (Hoof and Combrink 1998) suggested that the Internet will become an important marketing tool that contributes to the hotel's competitiveness' strategy.

Why do people purchase online?

Local entrepreneurs need to know reasons why people buy online especially those who purchase hospitality related products such as hotel rooms and airline tickets. Knowing the factors that motivate people to buy tourism products on the internet may assist them to make decision regarding their marketing strategies.

There are three main reasons that motivate people to browse through the Internet and make purchase decision.

The three factors can be summarised as follows:

Convenience: Due to 24 Internet access worldwide, customers can check relevant hotel products and services from any place at any time. Presently, many hotels feature an online booking which help customers to make room reservation and receive booking confirmation instantly.

Information: With more hospitality related products and services are listed on the Web, there are abundant of detailed travel information to choose from. Most of the hotel sites provide images of their room configuration, place of interests, facilities and amenities that can be utilised by their customers. Such detailed information can enhance customers in making decision for their travel plan.

Price: Due to less investment in traditional marketing and promotional plan and in the absent of the intermediaries, selling hotel products and services in the Internet will be much cheaper. Therefore, customers are expecting better price considering that airlines phone reservations services that refer the customer to the Internet for lower prices.

Issues and Challenges

Most of the small and medium hospitality enterprises are lagging behind in utilizing such strategy due to financial constraints and lack of knowledge among hotel owners and operators (Christian 2000). Furthermore, as stated by Enz (2003), in general, hotel industry is still struggling in coping with the implications of the Internet through global networking to the organizations in term pricing their products and services. Hotel managers also do not utilize the Internet to its fullest potential especially for marketing purposes (Hoof and Combrink 1998). Despite all the barriers, most hotels are embracing the technology for marketing their products and services. Using the Internet in marketing hospitality products and services is considered as a

strategic move to increase brand awareness and market share. By developing and managing a website, hotel operator will be able to reach potential markets in promoting their facilities and outstanding features (Leong 2000).

Despite the wide range of benefits to the customers and hotel operators, the Internet poses several challenges to both parties in term of web accessibility, information accuracy and security issue and rising costs. For example, due to too much features being loaded through an individual hotel website, retrieving information through the web can be very slow and frustrated to the customers. Information also needs to be constantly updated in the web page to secure the most current information available to the potential customers.

The Internet and small and medium hospitality enterprises

A survey on literatures also revealed that there is an increasing trend among small and medium hotel entrepreneurs for adopting Internet technology for their organization (Wood 2001; Domke-Damonte and Levsen 2002). These studies explained that the practice of Internet marketing among small hotels enable the owners to gather specific information about the industry and to analyse their major competitors. Small hotels can develop their web site primarily for disseminating information about hotel facilities and features and providing an option for customers in making online booking and direct inquiry. Using a web site, entrepreneurs will gain competitive advantage in term of providing products and services to a global market with a relatively cheaper cost (Domke-Damonte and Levsen 2002). On the other hand, by browsing through the Internet, potential customers will be able to make informed decision on their travel plan, and to identify a rich variety of offers of travel choices that suite to their personal requirements.

Advantages and disadvantages of Internet marketing for small and medium hotel organizations

As discussed in the literature, internet marketing has specific advantages to that of traditional marketing. Murphy et al. (1996) explain that the Internet provides source of information to the wide base of market segmentation in a most efficient way, which influence the customers in making booking decision. As a result, information can be tailored specifically to a particular segment based on customer's needs and expectations for hotel products and services. Using a website, hotel operators have the opportunity to provide detailed information about facilities and services for online customers. Furthermore, through Internet facilities, hotel operators can communicate directly with the customers without having to establish any intermediary. By bypassing intermediaries such as travel agents and tour wholesalers, there will be a decreased in transaction and commission costs which enable hotel operators to offer lower prices in the web (Hudson and Lang 2002).

The Internet provides opportunity to the consumers in making choices and selection based on information available on a particular website and they are free to make their purchase decision. For example, if a potential visitor is not happy with the price and facilities offered by a particular hotel in the web, he can search other hotels available in the web and make further arrangement. Buhalis (1998) described that the Internet empowers consumers to develop and purchase their travel itinerary. It gives them flexibility in term of seeking travel information instantly, inexpensively and interactively from any place which has the Internet access.

The Internet provides a great opportunity for small and medium hotel operators to market their products and services to a global audience and to give access to a great a number of people (Buhalis and Licata 2002). By providing such facilities, customers from around the world can

make direct inquiry to a particular hospitality establishments on a 24 hour 365 days a year basis and this has given the opportunity to the operators to establish customer relationship program (Buhalis and Licata 2002). Internet access also assists business organizations to position themselves to a global market, and small business entrepreneurs which are trying to expand their businesses globally can do so without having major capital and resources (Paul 1996). Therefore, in the case of small and medium hospitality operators, the Internet provides them with a powerful strategy to compete with other giant companies and establish their market share to a global audience.

The demographic profiles of Internet users reveal that most of them are highly educated, upwardly mobile and have more time and discretionary income (Gregory and Koithan-Louderback 1997). As reported by Morgan et al. (2001), the current users of the Internet are likely to be well educated, more affluent and more middle class. This market segment as identified by (Marshall (2000) as cited in Morgan et al. (2001), is the core of the travel and hospitality consumer base. Therefore, attracting this particular market through the Internet enables hotel operators to capture an upscale market which can contribute to a high bottom line.

The Internet is definitely a powerful tool for hospitality marketing. However, there are disadvantages to the operators to utilize the Internet as part of their marketing strategies. Despite its capabilities to be one of the most effective marketing channels for hospitality operators, the cost of having a website is increasing significantly (Morgan et al. 2001). Therefore, it is imperative for entrepreneurs to control and monitor the impact of having websites to their bottom line (Hudson and Lang 2001). One of the major concerns of having a website and performing transaction through the web is about security for financial transactions (Wei et al. 2001). In a research reported by Teo (2002), one of the major impediments for customers in committing with online purchasing is the risk of financial loss due to unsecured transaction. Furthermore, customers are still unwilling to give detailed information on their personal information as well as providing a detailed credit card for payment. As a result, many of potential visitors prefer to make a reservation through travel agents and appreciate human interaction and personal advice (Morrison and King 2002). In this case, issues such as security and personal privacy of online buying are very critical and need to be addressed properly in order to encourage customers in making purchasing online. It is imperative for businesses to work and improve their brand equity to enhance customers' trust and willingness for performing transaction online (Teo 2002).

Marketing over the Net is beyond the control of the owners which has resulted in an ineffective marketing strategy (Paul 1996). The net clients are so broad and diverse and targeting a certain group of market may be difficult. The company website also may be exposed to computer hackers which can jeopardise the transaction and information obtained from the customers. For example, the Sheraton hotels experienced a massive profit lost when the hackers booked every room in the world for them and cancelled the reservation made by online customers (Paul 1996). Such incidents will further deteriorate the customers' trust and relationship with the hospitality operators in performing an online transaction in a near future.

Despite the Internet capabilities of improving ability to target consumers who are interested on a particular products and services, it is a challenge for the entrepreneurs operators to drive traffic or Internet users to view their independent web sites (Christian 2000). Besides, with over a billion pages web sites on the Internet especially the hospitality and travel web sites, it is increasingly difficult for hotel operators to attract more market segments to engage with their business online. As suggested by Christian (2000), the intended viewers or customers can only access the company's websites if they are informed of the web address accordingly. Otherwise, the online marketing strategy is not effective for hospitality enterprises who want to establish a new products and services and create brand awareness.

Methodology of the study

This paper is based on a research conducted for investigating the role and usage of the Internet for marketing hospitality products and services among small and medium hotel entrepreneurs in Langkawi. In addition, it critically analyzes the effectiveness of Internet technology as a marketing and promotional tool for this small hotel sector. A purposive sampling technique will be adopted and the study population will be small and medium hotel organizations located on Langkawi Island, Malaysia. According to hotel and motel list provided by the Tourism Ministry (2004), there are 69 hotels inclusive of five and four star resorts and hotels, motels, chalets and other small accommodation providers available on the island. Of the 69 establishments, more than 50% belong to the SMHOs. Due to the novelty of online marketing practices among small and medium hotel owners in Langkawi and small number of respondents, in depth qualitative interviews was considered to be the most appropriate to explore and investigate the current practices on internet marketing among the organizations. Applying a semi structured interviews, closed and open-ended questions, enables a researcher to collect consistent collection of information and facilitate a detailed responses and in depth data collection compare to quantitative surveys (Morrison and King 2002). In conducting the in-depth interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire is prepared as a guideline

Limitations

This research was based on a limited number of samples which consists of four respondents among small and medium hotels entrepreneurs on Langkawi Island. The research was also conducted on a specific geographical location which could not be generalised to any part of the world. As an exploratory research, it should not be over generalized to the entire population even to small and medium hotel organizations. As suggested by Wei et al. (2001), the issues and concerns facing hospitality operators in the uses of the Internet could vary across countries, regions and organizational structures.

Out of thirty respondents that being contacted for the project, there were four small and medium hotel and resort properties agree to participate for this research. Based on the telephone conversation with all identified respondents, more than half of them currently do not have a hotel website. This low response rate could be due to low level of awareness among respondents on the issues being studied and lack of knowledge about online marketing. Besides, most of these small and medium hotel organizations such as chalets and small hotels seemed to be difficult to be in contact with due to unavailability of the owners or operators in charge. It is observed that most of small and medium hotel organizations on this island were not interested in the project, as they perceived not to be able to gain anything from it.

Analysis/results

Role and usage of the Internet as a marketing tool for small and medium hotels organizations

The respondents were asked to explain what are the important roles of internet marketing to their organizations. Generally, all respondents agreed of the important role for the Internet to disseminate information and for marketing purposes especially in targeting international market. One respondent mentioned:

We really need the internet to target international market.... The internet also important for advertisement. Hotel needs to go ahead with the internet.

All four respondents mentioned that the Internet is a significant tool for distributing information to their target market. Furthermore, more detailed information can be channelled through website for customers to access everywhere in the world without spending much on traditional advertising.

Information is very important for customers to decide on where is their preferred destination. Based on the information provided to them, budget travellers would be more informed in selecting small and medium hotels that suit with their financial and holiday needs. As convinced by the other respondent:

First of all, website is where the guests have all information about the hotel first hand. Some people do not believe what the travel agent said. Information is very important.

Using the Internet for targeting international market

Generally, all respondents expressed their positive attitudes towards using the internet as part of their marketing strategy in targeting international market. For example, most respondents seemed to positively agree about the significant of the internet when doing promotion for the international tourists:

... We need the internet because the resort does not depend only on local market. With a website we receive a lot of inquiries from foreigners. Local people usually use telephone and do not use the internet to communicate with us. However, foreigners always use email to communicate with us about the resort.

Problems and issues of using the internet as a marketing strategy for SMHOs.

Based on the transcribed data from the interviews, it is observed that most of the respondents were experiencing several barriers in implementing the internet or a website to market their products and services. Despite all of the respondents seemed to agree with the benefits of the internet to their hotel organizations, all of them apparently did not utilise the internet to the fullest potential.

The following section highlights three main problems that occur to the managers/owners when implementing the Internet to their hotel organizations.

Lack of IT skills among operators/managers

All of the respondents expressed their views in terms of difficulties in handling hotel website due to lack of knowledge and skills in using the internet.

....(Internet) is a waste. Managers are not using it regularly. I am the only person who can open the website and in charge of that. Not back up personnel. It is a waste because nobody monitor the internet and give attention to it. Maybe we have limited knowledge about it, lack of skills and not all the time have access to the internet

...We do not have a key person who knows about the internet. We really need outside people who really know about the internet/website. But we have a limited budget.

Limited financial resources

All of the respondents also seemed not be able to confirm whether they have enough financial resources to develop a website or to implement internet marketing in targeting international markets. Even though they were convinced that the internet is a powerful tool in promoting hotel products and services, due to limited funding from the owner, their marketing effort would be minimal.

...We need a functional website such as online reservation and online credit card payment. Our resort website does not has that kind of facility yet. As a budget hotel, we have a very limited budget. We are hoping that the cost for developing a hotel website is not too expensive.

We actually do not have a specific budget for the Internet to be part of our marketing strategy. It depends on the owner... We received a lot of bookings from travel agents and I guess that is why we do not spend much on developing a resort website.

Discussion and Implications

Based on this small sample of small and medium hotel organizations on Langkawi Island, it seemed that entrepreneurs of small hotels were still adapting to this new technology. All of the respondents seemed to agree that the internet provide great assistance in marketing their hotels for the international market. However, based on the result, number of room reservations that come through the internet were very small and thus owners of these hotels were not so impressed by having a website.

This study also had found that owners of small and medium hotel organizations are seemed to struggle with the internet in terms of utilising and monitoring the website and email for marketing purposes. From the interviews, all respondents did not have a separate department to manage the website and not many managers who were knowledgeable to supervise the IT section. Furthermore, due to the limited financial resources, the progress of implementing online marketing among small and medium hotel organizations on Langkawi island are relatively slow. This finding is in agreement with Anckar and Walden's (2001) findings which suggested that due to lack of IT skills and limited financial resources among SMHOs, internet marketing are growing into slow pace for this particular hospitality sector.

From the study, the most important usage of the Internet for small and medium hotel operators in Langkawi is to deliver information and promotional activities for customers. However, the benefits of utilising the internet as a marketing tool are yet to be realised and are not utilised to its fullest potentials. Due to lack of IT skills and decentralised marketing department among managers of these hotel properties, integrating the internet and website as part of the marketing tool is a challenge for SMHOs. As mentioned by the respondents in this study, the purpose of having a hotel website are confined to advertising and disseminating information to global market as well as local tourists. This finding would seem to show that there are a relatively limited knowledge and skills among small and medium hotel entrepreneurs, in terms of using the internet for marketing their products and services.

From this research, the most important usage of the internet for small and medium hotel operators in Langkawi would appear to advertise and promote about hotels' products and services for the international tourists. In terms of strategies, based on the findings, it appears that small and medium hotel entrepreneurs in Langkawi are currently at the beginning stage of the implementing internet marketing, which at this stage, the most important reason to have a website

is to distribute information to potential customers. Furthermore, there is no department in charge or the key person who is knowledgeable and has the necessary skills to establish online marketing. Therefore, from this study, it seems possible the entrepreneurs do not establish any strategy yet in utilizing the internet as part of their marketing plan.

Recommendations

As the internet is becoming the lifeblood of the hospitality industry, it is very importance that local entrepreneurs to implement and integrate the right online marketing plan for their organizations. Having a website does not guarantee the success of online marketing for the hotel industry. It is noted that from this study, the advantages of the internet for SMHOs in Langkawi are yet to be used to its fullest potential. The perceived limitations of the internet for distributing information and providing online bookings are some perceptions that need to be corrected. As recognised by the recent research on internet marketing for the hospitality industry, the uses of the internet are limitless, especially for targeting a broad range of internet users. Therefore, local entrepreneurs who are thinking of implementing online marketing for their organizations should consider the following recommendations:

- Entrepreneurs need to define and establish their online marketing objectives. They should clearly identify the target market and acknowledge their limitations in terms of skills and resources for targeting global audience.
- Customers generally look for a website address in order to browse for the information about potential hotels for their vacation. Therefore, to compete with other big hotels, local entrepreneurs need to provide a hotel website and to promote the website through newspapers, hotel brochures, magazines and press to encourage customers to visit the site and eventually to have potential reservations.
- The contents of their hotel websites need to be accurate and up to date for customers to have detailed information on particular hotel products and services. The website address should be registered with the top internet search engines such as *Yahoo!* and *Google*, and if possible, the address needs to be positioned on the top ten list of those search engines.
- It is recognised that from this research, lack of IT skills and financial resources are among barriers that hinder the progress of internet marketing within small and medium hotel organizations in Langkawi. Therefore, owners of this hotel segment need to look for training and additional fund to boost their online marketing plan

While these recommendations may be useful to speed up and enhance the online marketing plan for the SMHOs in Langkawi, the success of the implementation depends upon the commitment of the hotel owners or entrepreneurs. The implementation also depends on the individual hotels' available resources, amenities and services with their target market in order to receive optimum benefits from internet marketing.

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