

**INTERNET MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: A CONTENT
ANALYSIS OF THE WEB SITES OF GRADED SOUTH AFRICAN
LODGES**

BY

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DEDICATED TO MY DAD:
You've always been my inspiration

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ABSTRACT

INTERNET MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE WEB SITES OF GRADED SOUTH AFRICAN LODGES

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Marketing communications is regarded as a common function of all Web sites, even if this is not the express objective of the site. As no previous research specifically considered these issues, this study examined the extent to which lodges graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa effectively use their Web sites as online marketing communications tools.

A content analysis was used to investigate the Web sites of graded lodges according to a list of evaluation criteria based on the elements of the marketing communications mix (i.e., advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling).

A number of specific online marketing communications techniques that could be employed in a tourism firm's Web site were identified from an extensive literature review for each element of the marketing communications mix. The extent to which these specific techniques were employed in the Web sites of the graded lodges was then determined. The findings show that the graded lodges are not using their Web sites effectively as online marketing communications tools for communications with their target audiences.

Comparisons were also made between the three, four and five star lodges to determine whether differences were present in their Web sites based on their star grading. Overall, the lodges did not differ much in terms of the online marketing communications techniques that they employed and only slight differences existed.

The main recommendation for this study is that the managers of South African graded lodges include as many of the 30 online marketing communications techniques investigated as possible in their Web sites.

This study was limited as it only focused on lodges that have been graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa and the findings cannot be generalised to all South African lodges or to other types of accommodation establishments. Potential reasons for the inclusion/exclusion of these techniques, whether the lodges maintain their Web sites themselves, what specific techniques Web site visitors regard as important and the fact that the researcher was the only coder of the sites were also limitations of this study that could be overcome in future research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

E-commerce:	Electronic commerce
E-mail:	Electronic mail
E-markets:	Electronic markets
E-newsletters:	Electronic newsletters
E-postcards:	Electronic postcards
FAQ:	Frequently asked questions
Hypermedia CME:	Hypermedia computer-mediated environment
IMC:	Integrated marketing communications
IP address:	Internet protocol address
TGCSA:	Tourism Grading Council of South Africa
The Net:	Internet
Top- level domain:	TLD
URL:	Uniform Resource Locator
Web site:	Site
WOM:	Word-of-mouth
WTO:	World Tourism Organisation
WTTC:	World Travel and Tourism Council
WWW or Web:	World Wide Web

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most basic concepts in marketing is the *marketing mix* (George, 2001:9; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:23). The marketing mix has traditionally consisted of four elements. These elements - product, price, place (distribution) and promotion - are commonly referred to as the “four Ps” (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:57-58; Belch & Belch, 2004:8). One of the basic tasks of marketing is to combine these four elements into a marketing programme to facilitate the potential for exchange with consumers in the marketplace (Belch & Belch, 2004:8). This study focuses on one of the four Ps, namely *promotion*.

The promotional element of the marketing mix is the element that communicates the benefits of the firm’s offering to the target market and persuades them to purchase it (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:57). This element plays a key role in the marketing mix because it is essential to the successful implementation of the other three elements (Semenik, 2002:18).

Although the “four P” characterization has led to the widespread use of the term *promotion* for describing communications with prospects and customers, the term *marketing communications* is preferred by the majority of marketing practitioners and educators (Shimp, 2003:3). For this reason, this study uses the term marketing communications rather than promotion.

A review of the literature indicates that some authors refer to marketing *communication* whereas others refer to marketing *communications*. Nevertheless, a number of recent sources refer to marketing *communications* (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399; Belch & Belch, 2004:8-9; Semenik, 2002:7-8; Shimp, 2003:2-3). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term marketing communications rather than marketing communication was employed.

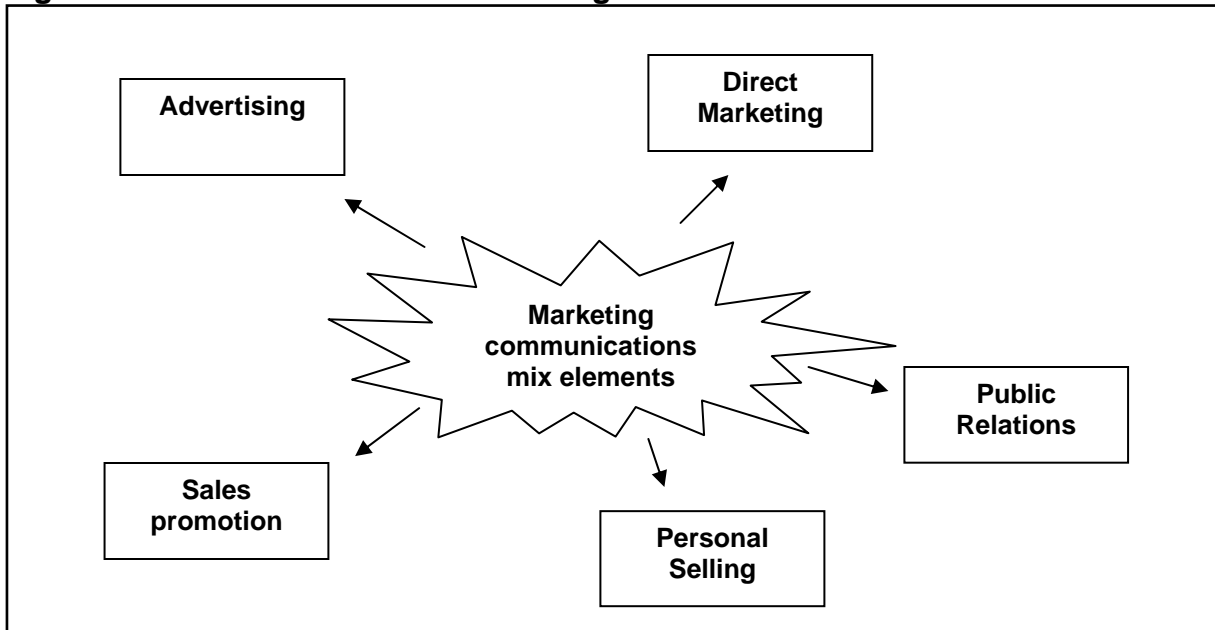
The topic of marketing communications is a critical component of modern marketing. It is a vital aspect of a firm's overall marketing strategy and a major determinant of its success. It has even been claimed that marketing and communications are virtually inseparable and that marketing is communication, and communication is marketing (Shimp, 2003:2-3).

Marketing communications is the collective term for all the communications functions used in marketing a product (Duncan, 2002:15). Although implicit communication occurs via the various elements of the marketing mix, the majority of a firm's communications with the marketplace takes place as part of a carefully planned and controlled marketing communications programme. The basic tools/elements used to accomplish a firm's communications objectives are generally referred to as the *marketing communications mix* (Belch & Belch, 2004:16).

Authors differ with regards to the elements that comprise the marketing communications mix (Du Plessis, Bothma, Jordaan & van Heerden, 2003:3; Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff & Terblanché, 2004:315; Rowley, 1998:384; Semenik, 2002:8; Shimp, 2003:4-5). Traditionally the marketing communications mix was comprised of four elements, namely *advertising*, *sales promotion*, *publicity/public relations* and *personal selling* (Belch & Belch, 2004:16). Recently, the marketing communications mix was expanded to include *direct marketing* as well as *Internet or interactive marketing* as major elements that modern-day marketers use to communicate with their target markets (Belch & Belch, 2004:16).

Armstrong and Kotler (2005:399) more recently indicate that the above mentioned elements are included in the marketing communications mix. Internet marketing, however, is excluded (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399). Taking this into account, the traditional marketing communications mix elements together with direct marketing, formed the focus for this study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The elements of the marketing communications mix



Source: Adapted from Armstrong and Kotler (2005:399).

Although many firms treat the marketing communications mix elements in Figure 1 as separate activities, current marketing philosophy holds that integration of these elements is imperative. The philosophy and practice of carefully coordinating a brand's different marketing communications elements is referred to as *integrated marketing communications*, or simply IMC (Shimp, 2003:6).

The IMC concept has been defined in a number of ways by different authors (Belch & Belch, 2004:9-11; Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:9-10; Semenik, 2002:23-23; Shimp, 2003:8). Armstrong and Kotler (2005:401), for example, recently described *integrated marketing communications* as: "...the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organisation and its products".

From this description it is clear that, if implemented properly, IMC produces stronger message consistency and greater sales impact. It also improves the firm's ability to reach the right customers with the right messages at the right time and in the right place (Kotler, 2003:311).

The Internet has become an increasingly important marketing tool and has had a dramatic effect on approaches to marketing and communications strategies (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:1055). As a marketing communications tool, the Internet is a new and highly powerful medium which cannot be ignored (Briggs, 1997:129). It is thus important that marketers incorporate electronic media as an integrated element within the overall marketing communications mix (Hoey, 1998:36).

Due to its unique capabilities, the World Wide Web (WWW or Web) presents a fundamentally different environment for marketing activities than traditional media. Conventional marketing activities are thus being transformed as they are often difficult to implement in their present form in an Internet environment. This implies that there is a need to reconstruct traditional marketing activities in forms more appropriate for this new medium (Hoffman & Novak, 1997:63).

This study focused on the different elements of the marketing communications mix shown in Figure 1 and examined ways in which these traditional elements could be “reconstructed” in an Internet environment for online communications with a firm’s target market.

Web sites are the most common manifestation of the capabilities of the Internet. Some Web sites have only one or two main objectives, while others may have several. Nevertheless, a common purpose of all Web sites is marketing communications, even if this is not the express objective of the site (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:349).

Taking this into account, this study focused on marketing communications in an Internet environment and specifically investigated ways in which the elements of the marketing communications mix could be employed via a tourism firm’s Web site.

One of the main advantages of the Internet is that firms are provided with high global visibility and have access to customers from around the world (Rao, 1997:231; Timmers, 2000:12). The South African tourism firms attract and thus need to communicate with both domestic and international tourists (Bennett, Jooste & Strydom, 2005:2; Middleton, 2001:5-7). As tourism

firms are able to reach consumers from around the world by means of the Internet, it can be deduced that communicating online with a large, geographically dispersed target market may be greatly beneficial for these firms.

A lack of understanding of how to capitalise on the opportunities that the Internet can bring is one of the major obstacles faced by members of the South African tourism industry. A large number of Web sites have been developed for tourism firms with little or no regard for overall business aims and challenges and, as a consequence, deliver little or no contribution to the bottom-line (WildNet Africa, 2004).

This study, therefore, investigated ways in which the elements of the marketing communications mix could be employed via a Web site in relation to the South African tourism industry. This research aimed to investigate a number of online marketing communications techniques that firms in this industry could include in their sites in order to communicate more effectively with their online target audiences and, ultimately, bring about an increase in overall profits.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

South Africa not only possesses a wide range of features that makes it an attractive tourism destination (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1996), but tourism also plays a significant role in the South African economy (Burtenshaw, 2005; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005:6).

Destinations are the reason why tourism exists and there are a number of components that must be present for a destination to function (Keyser, 2002:168). One of the most important components of a destination is *hospitality* (Lubbe, 2003:7). *Hospitality* refers to commercial activities which offer consumers accommodation as well as food and beverage services (George, 2001:18; Keyser, 2002:178). This research focused on *accommodation* as part of the hospitality sector of the South African tourism industry.

Previous studies in a tourism and hospitality context have evaluated Web sites of accommodation establishments according to certain categories of evaluation criteria in various countries. Table 1 below indicates the different categories of evaluation criteria, the type of accommodation establishment, as well as the geographic scope used in these previous studies.

Table 1: Previous studies that evaluated Web sites of accommodation establishments

Categories of evaluation criteria	Type of accommodation establishment	Geographic scope	Previous study
Web sites were evaluated according to site design characteristics (i.e., interactivity, navigation and functionality) and site marketing practices.	Luxury hotels	Turkey	Baloglu & Pekcan (2006:171-176)
Web sites were examined based on seven criteria, namely impression, content usefulness, accuracy, navigation, accessibility, online reservations and timeliness of information.	Top 25 limited-service chain lodging operations	United States	Ham (2004:295-308)
Four categories, namely technical aspects, user friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness were used to evaluate the Web sites.	Bed-and-breakfast establishments	United states	Kline, Morrison & St. John (2004:253-267)
Three general user criteria (i.e., user interface, variety of information and online reservations) were used to evaluate the Web sites in this study.	International tourist hotels and tour wholesalers	Taiwan	Wan (2002:155-160)

As highlighted above, a common purpose of all Web sites is marketing communications (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:349). Nevertheless, none of the studies listed in Table 1 have focused on the Web site specifically as a marketing communications medium. Hence, this study attempted to address this gap.

This study investigated ways in which the different elements of the marketing communications mix could be applied via a tourism firm's Web site. The Web sites of tourism firms were then evaluated according to a new list of evaluation criteria, based on the different elements of the marketing communications mix.

As noted in Table 1, previous studies that evaluated the Web sites of accommodation establishments were conducted in Turkey, Taiwan and the United States of America (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Wan, 2002:155-160). As far as the author could determine, no similar studies have been conducted in South Africa. This highlights a further gap that has been addressed in this study, namely that limited research concerning this topic has been conducted within a South African context.

Quality control is an important management concern in the hospitality sector. The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) was established to define standards and administer a star grading system in the hospitality and accommodation industries. This grading system is based on a star classification ranging from one to five stars (Keyser, 2002:185).

The TGCSA grades hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses, **lodges**, self-catering establishments, backpacker lodges, caravan and camping sites, as well as country houses (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45).

As far as the author could determine, no previous research has specifically focused on evaluating the Web sites of *lodges* as an accommodation establishment. This study, therefore, also addressed this gap and evaluated the Web sites of all the lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA. The minimum lodge accommodation requirements set by the TGCSA are presented in Appendix A.

Taking the above into consideration, the problem statement and research objectives formulated for this study are presented below.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even though marketing communications is a common purpose of all Web sites (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:349), no previous research has examined ways in which the marketing communications mix elements could be applied via a tourism firm's Web site.

A number of previous studies (cf. Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Wan, 2002:155-160) have evaluated Web sites in a tourism and hospitality context. These studies have evaluated the Web sites of accommodation establishments in various countries based on certain categories of Web site features.

None of these studies evaluated the Web sites from a tourism and hospitality perspective based on the *elements of the marketing communications mix*. These studies were also not conducted within a *South African context* and although other accommodation establishments were investigated, no previous research specifically investigated the Web sites of *lodges*. Hence, this study attempted to address these three gaps.

Taking the above into account, the main aim of this study was to examine the Web sites of lodges graded by the TGCSA, based on Web site features classified under the elements of the marketing communications mix, from a South African perspective. This was investigated to determine the extent to which graded lodges effectively use their Web sites as online marketing communications tools.

It is important to note that the specific Web site features investigated in this study are referred to as *online marketing communications techniques*.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Considering the problem statement presented in section 1.3, the following specific objectives were formulated for this study:

1. To identify, through a review of available literature, a number of online marketing communications techniques for the various elements of the marketing communications mix (i.e., advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling) that could be applied via a tourism firm's Web site
2. To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to **advertising** were employed by the Web sites examined in this study

3. To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to **sales promotion** were employed by the Web sites examined in this study
4. To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to **public relations** were employed by the Web sites examined in this study
5. To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to **direct marketing** were employed by the Web sites examined in this study
6. To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to **personal selling** were employed by the Web sites examined in this study
7. To compare the three, four and five star lodges to determine whether differences exist with regards to the online marketing communications techniques employed

In order to achieve these objectives, the following specific **research questions** were formulated for each of the marketing communications mix elements investigated in this study:

ADVERTISING

- Research question 1: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide ***links to other sites?***

SALES PROMOTION

- Research question 2: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study ***offer something free?***
- Research question 3: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer ***coupons, discounts and/or special offers?***
- Research question 4: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study indicate that the lodge is ***connected to a loyalty programme?***
- Research question 5: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer visitors the opportunity to ***win something*** through promotional competitions?
- Research question 6: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include ***online games?***

PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Research question 7: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a ***frequently asked questions (FAQ) section?***
- Research question 8: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a ***press centre?***
- Research question 9: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include ***press releases?***
- Research question 10: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a ***photo gallery?***
- Research question 11: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study enable visitors to ***register to receive the firm's electronic newsletter?***
- Research question 12: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include ***testimonials or an online guestbook?***
- Research question 13: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide visitors with the option to ***recommend the site to a "friend"?***
- Research question 14: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide visitors with the option to ***send electronic postcards*** via the site?

DIRECT MARKETING

- Research question 15: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a ***telephone number?***
- Research question 16: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a ***fax number?***
- Research question 17: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a ***physical address?***
- Research question 18: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a ***postal address?***
- Research question 19: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an ***e-mail link that activates the visitors own e-mail software?***
- Research question 20: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an ***online response form?***

- Research question 21: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a **site map**?
- Research question 22: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a **search index**?
- Research question 23: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer visitors a **virtual tour**?
- Research question 24: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a “**What’s New**” **section**?
- Research question 25: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a **calendar of events**?
- Research question 26: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide **local weather information**?
- Research question 27: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a **location map** with directions to the lodge?
- Research question 28: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide **jokes and/or cartoons**?
- Research question 29: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study allow visitors to view the site in **multiple languages**?

PERSONAL SELLING

- Research question 30: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an **online booking facility**?

1.5 IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Previous studies have evaluated Web sites in a tourism and hospitality context according to various categories of evaluation criteria (see Table 1, p. 6). However, although marketing communications is a common purpose of all Web sites (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:349), no previous studies have investigated the manner in which the marketing communications mix elements could be applied through a tourism firm’s Web site. This study is, therefore,

important from an academic perspective as it addressed this gap that had been identified in the literature.

This study is also important as it was conducted within a South African context. Although previous studies have evaluated the Web sites of accommodation establishments in other countries, no previous research has evaluated the Web sites of South African accommodation establishments (see section 1.2). This study is thus also important as it addressed another significant gap, namely that limited research concerning this topic has been conducted in a South African context.

Although Web sites have been investigated in relation to other types of accommodation establishments, as far as the author could determine, no previous studies have focused specifically on the Web sites of *lodges* (see section 1.2). This study specifically investigated lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA. Hence, this is the third gap that was addressed in this study.

This study can also be considered to be beneficial from a managerial perspective as this research can assist the owners, managers and/or marketers of graded South African lodges to better understand what specific features they can include in their Web sites. Including more of these specific features can aid in increasing the effectiveness of their Web sites as online marketing communications tools.

Research suggests that the growth of Internet access among the world's citizens will continue to explode (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:482-483). This further contributes to the significance of this study as the Web sites examined here are able to reach and communicate with both a domestic and international tourist market.

1.6 DEFINING THE KEY TERMS

This study involved a number of key concepts, namely *Internet marketing*, *marketing communications*, *the elements of the marketing communications mix*, *Web sites*, as well as *lodges*. The manner in which these key terms have been defined for the purpose of this study is considered below.

Internet marketing: Internet marketing can be described in a number of ways (see section 3.3.1). This study employed the definition by Imber and Betsy-Ann (in Ngai, 2003:24) who define *Internet marketing* as: "...the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of both buyers and sellers".

Marketing communications: The term *marketing communications* can be best understood by examining its two constituent elements, namely marketing and communications (Shimp, 2003:3).

Marketing refers to: "...the set of activities whereby businesses and other organisations create transfers of value (exchanges) between themselves and their customers". Marketing is more general than marketing communications. However, much of marketing involves communications activities. *Communications* can be described as: "...the process whereby thoughts are conveyed and meaning is shared between individuals or between organisations and individuals" (Shimp, 2003:3).

Combining these terms, Shimp (2003:3) defines *marketing communications* as: "...the collection of all elements in a brand's marketing mix that facilitate exchanges by targeting the brand to a group of customers, positioning the brand as somehow distinct from competitive brands, and sharing the brand's meaning – its point of difference – with the brand's target audience".

All communications efforts of a firm should be carefully planned and controlled. This is usually done by blending the different elements of the marketing communications mix into a consistent and coordinated marketing communications programme that best suits the needs of the particular firm (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399; Belch & Belch, 2004:16). For the purposes of this study, the elements of the marketing communications mix are defined as follows:

Advertising: Advertising has recently been defined in a number of ways (see section 5.2). It is apparent from these definitions that the main difference between advertising and the other marketing communications mix elements is that it is impersonal and communicates with large numbers of people through paid media channels (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399; Belch & Belch, 2004:16; Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:604; Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:31; Kotler, 2003:312; Lamb *et al.*, 2004:316; Semenik, 2002:9-10).

This study focused on the Internet. Therefore, a definition for Internet advertising was considered in this study (see section 5.2). Semenik (2002:10) defines *Internet advertising* as: "...a form of advertising in which the message is carried over the Internet rather than [through] traditional mass media".

Sales promotion: For this study, *sales promotion* was defined as: "...short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399).

Public relations: A definition for public relations within a marketing context was employed for this study (see section 5.4). *Public relations* was defined as: "...building good relations with the company's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image and handling or heading off unfavorable rumours, stories and events" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399).

Direct marketing: This study considered *direct marketing* to be: "...a system of marketing by which organisations communicate directly with target customers to generate a response or

transaction”. This response may take the form of an inquiry, a purchase, or some other form of action on the part of the targeted recipient (Belch & Belch, 2004:463).

Personal selling: Considering a tourism and hospitality context, *personal selling* was defined as: “...an interpersonal process that involves the seller engaging in some kind of face-to-face or direct contact with prospective consumers in order to persuade them to make a purchase or booking” (George, 2001:247).

Web site: A *Web site* was defined as: “...a collection of related Web pages and associated items, such as documents and pictures, stored on a Web server” (Shelly, Cashman & Vermaat, 2003:2.09).

Lodge: As the focus of this study was on lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA, the Council’s definition for a lodge was employed. The TGCSA defines a *lodge* as: “...an accommodation facility located in natural surroundings. The rates charged are usually inclusive of an experience offered at the lodge (e.g., game drives, battlefield tours). In general, food and beverage services are provided for all meals” (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2004a).

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design applied in this study has been described based on the classification scheme provided Cooper and Schindler (2003:146-151). Taking this scheme into account, this was a *formal study* and purely *descriptive* in nature. A *monitoring* (i.e., observation) process was applied as data was collected following a content analysis approach and there was no attempt to elicit responses from anyone. As this study merely reported what was found during the data collection period and there was no attempt to control or manipulate any of the variables, an *ex post facto* research design was followed.

This was a *statistical study* as numeric inferences were made based on a census of Web sites that are independently owned by graded lodges. This study was also *cross-sectional* as research was only carried out on one occasion and the research took place under *field conditions* as it was conducted under actual environmental conditions.

The target population for this study consisted of 197 Web sites independently owned by lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA. The list of lodges investigated was based on the list provided on the TGCSA's Web site on 2005-07-02.

The measuring instrument in this study was a code sheet which was compiled based on an extensive literature review. This study investigated the presence or absence of specific online marketing communications techniques in the Web sites of graded lodges based on this code sheet.

All the Web sites included in the population were accessed by typing in the Web site address (URL). Data was then collected by means of a *quantitative content analysis*, following a similar approach used in previous studies (see section 6.4). Data was collected from the home pages of the graded lodges during a period of one month in September 2005.

A simple coding system was applied for entering data where the number 1 was allocated where the online marketing communications technique was present and the number 0 was allocated where the feature was absent from the site. Field editing was not necessary for this study as the Web sites could be accessed at any time where the necessary facilities were available. Central editing was, however, applicable in order to detect obvious errors that may have occurred during data entry (see section 6.6.1).

The data was captured and analysed in Microsoft Office Excel 2003. The findings have been reported by means of frequency tables which represent the frequency distribution for each variable of interest. Frequencies and percentages were used to show how frequently the online marketing communications techniques were employed in the Web sites investigated.

Comparisons were also made and reported between the three, four and five star lodges. This was done to determine whether differences existed with regards to the online marketing communications techniques employed in the Web sites of graded lodges based on their star grading.

One and two star lodges were not included in these comparisons as only one Web site was included in the population for one star lodges and only four sites were included for two star lodges (see section 6.3.1). Hence, it was not feasible to include these two star grading categories in the comparisons.

1.8 DEMARCATION OF STUDY

This study specifically focused on lodges. Other types of accommodation establishments in the tourism and hospitality sector of South Africa were thus excluded. In addition, only lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA who have their own independent Web site were investigated. The Web sites of non-graded South African lodges were excluded.

This study focused on graded lodges as *profit-driven* organisations and did not consider Web sites for non-profit organisations. The focus of this study was thus on *firms*, which implies that the lodges are profit making organisations. It is important to note, however, that when quoting directly from the literature, other terms for profit-driven firms, such as companies, organisations and businesses, were also sometimes used.

The tourism industry distinguishes between domestic and international tourism. *Domestic tourists* are people who travel within their home country (e.g., a South African travelling inside the borders of South Africa). *International tourists* travel outside their own country of residence for less than a year (e.g., a German travelling in South Africa) (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:4; Middleton, 2001:5-7).

The Web sites of graded lodges examined in this study can be accessed by both South African consumers (i.e., domestic tourists) as well as consumers from other countries (i.e., international tourists). Hence, this study considered that these Web sites cater for both a national and international tourist market and that the online marketing communications techniques investigated should be employed to communicate with both these markets.

A distinction is drawn between travel for different purposes, namely *leisure and recreation* (including holidays, sport, culture and visiting friends and relatives), *business and professional* (including meetings, conferences, missionary work, incentive and business tourism), as well as *other tourism* purposes (including study and health tourism) (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:4).

This study did not distinguish between tourists who travel for different purposes. This is because this study merely noted whether certain online marketing communications techniques were employed in the tourism firms' Web sites and these techniques could be used to communicate with all tourists, despite their travel intentions.

Although electronic marketing does not yet have the potential to entirely replace traditional marketing efforts, it should be regarded as a valuable and complementary tool that should be used to create value for consumers (Harridge-March, 2004:297-309). This is confirmed by Briggs (1997:129) who asserts that the Internet should not be seen as a replacement for other promotional activities, but rather as an expansion of existing ones.

In the light of this, it is important to note that this study did not take the view that the Internet should replace the traditional elements of the marketing communications mix. This study argues that the Internet should be included as a valuable and complementary tool that can be used to communicate with the target market.

Following the approach used in previous studies that evaluated tourism Web sites of accommodation establishments (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Ham, 2004:295-308; Wan, 2002:155-160), the online marketing communications techniques (i.e., Web site features) investigated in this study were grouped into five categories based on

the five elements of the marketing communications mix shown in Figure 11 (see chapter 7, p. 173) and defined in Chapter 5.

This classification scheme was primarily developed to improve the interpretation of the study's findings. However, these five categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are the five categories presented as the only possible classification scheme.

The reader may well argue that a specific technique, such as testimonials, could be placed into two different categories - advertising or public relations. Testimonials are often regarded as a form of advertising (Yeshin, 2000:154), but can also be a public relations tool in which messages are spread in the form of word-of-mouth communications (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:430-434). Furthermore, the reader may also disagree with the current categorisation of techniques and argue that a specific online marketing communications technique should be placed into a different category. The possibility of such differences of opinion is acknowledged.

From a managerial point of view, the classification of a specific online marketing communications technique is of secondary importance. Managers should rather consider that all online marketing communications techniques – regardless of the category in which they have been placed in this study – should be blended into the best mix to support the firm's online marketing communications initiatives (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399).

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1: Introduction, background and objectives of study

The first chapter provides an introduction and background to the study and presents the problem statement and objectives. The importance and benefits of the study are highlighted, the key terms are defined and the research design and methodology are briefly described. The study is also demarcated. The chapter concludes by providing an outline of the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Tourism, marketing and the Internet

This chapter highlights the significance of tourism in South Africa. It discusses tourism as an industry, activity or system as well as supply and demand within the context of tourism. The hospitality sector and accommodation is next considered followed by an introduction to the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, its functions and grading system. A number of issues related to Internet marketing and tourism is also considered.

Chapter 3: The Internet and marketing: an overview

This chapter provides an introduction to the Internet and explores the role of the Internet in marketing.

Chapter 4: The Internet as a marketing communications medium

Chapter 4 explains the communications process and presents a new communications model for a hypermedia computer-mediated environment. The interactive potential of the Internet as well as the potential of the Internet as a marketing communications medium are discussed. A number of advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium for tourism firms is also considered.

Chapter 5: The Internet and the elements of the marketing communications mix

The different elements of the marketing communications mix and how the Internet influences these elements are addressed in this chapter. The ways in which the elements of the marketing communications mix could be applied via a tourism firm's Web site are considered and support is provided for the research questions formulated for this study.

Chapter 6: Research design and methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology employed and considers the manner in which the data was collected. Validity and reliability in relation to this study are considered and the manner in which the data was prepared, analysed and interpreted is discussed. This chapter concludes by highlighting ethical considerations concerning the study.

Chapter 7: Research findings and conclusions

The empirical findings and associated conclusions of this study are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 8: Implications and recommendations of study

This chapter provides managerial recommendations and recommendations for future research. The limitations of this study are also discussed.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the focus of this study. It provided an introduction and background to the study and presented the problem statement and objectives. The importance and benefits of the study were highlighted. The key terms were defined, the research design and methodology were summarised and the demarcation of this study was discussed. This chapter also presented an outline of the structure of the rest of the dissertation.

The next chapter forms the beginning of the review of literature that has been carefully synthesised to provide support for this study. The following chapter revolves around tourism, marketing and the Internet.

CHAPTER 2: TOURISM, MARKETING AND THE INTERNET

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The significance of tourism in South Africa is highlighted in this chapter. This is followed by a discussion of tourism as an industry, activity or system, as well as an overview of supply and demand in a tourism context. Next, the hospitality industry and accommodation is briefly discussed and the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), its functions and grading system are considered.

Internet marketing in relation to tourism is also discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the role of marketing and the Internet in tourism. Previous research regarding Internet marketing in a tourism context is also highlighted.

2.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's resource base for tourism is phenomenal and the country's tourism attractiveness lies in its diversity. A range of features contribute to making South Africa an attractive tourism destination. These include accessible wildlife, varied and impressive scenery, unspoiled wilderness areas, diverse cultures (in particular traditional and township African cultures), a generally sunny and hot climate, a well-developed infrastructure and virtually unlimited opportunities for special interest activities, such as whale-watching, white water rafting, hiking, bird-watching, bush survival, deep-sea fishing, hunting and diving (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1996).

In addition to this, unique archaeological sites and battlefields, the availability of excellent conference and exhibition facilities, a wide range of sporting facilities, good communication and medical services, internationally known attractions (e.g., Table Mountain, Cape of Good Hope, Sun City, Kruger National Park and the Garden Route), as well as unrivalled

opportunities to visit other regional internationally known attractions (e.g., Victoria Falls and the Okavango Swamps) make South Africa an almost complete tourist destination (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1996).

In a speech, the former Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr Mohammed Vali Moosa, mentioned that South Africa is one of the best performing international tourism destinations in the world (Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2002). In addition, South Africa dominated Travel and Leisure's 2004 World's Best Awards where five of the top 10 hotels in the world were South African accommodation establishments. The results, which were based on a readers' survey, revealed South Africa as the "hottest" destination in travel today. Taking these results into account, Prudence Solomon of South African Tourism declared that "...South Africa is a fabulous destination with a world-class tourism experience" (The Star, 2004:11).

The results of Travel and Leisure's readers' survey showed that Singata Private Game Reserve in SabiSands was voted the best hotel in the world, heading the top 100 properties. This is the second time that a South African accommodation establishment has been so honoured (Mala Mala Game Reserve won in 1997). The other top hotels on the list included Londolozi Private Game Reserve (fourth), Bushman's Kloof Wilderness Reserve (fifth), Mala Mala Game Reserve (seventh) and Phinda Private Game Reserve (eighth). South African hotels also dominated the African and Middle East category of the World's Best Hotels with Singata Private Game Reserve in first place, followed by Londolozi Private Game Reserve (third), Bushman's Kloof Wilderness Reserve (fourth), Mala Mala Game Reserve (fifth), Phinda Private Game Reserve (sixth), Cape Grace (eighth) and Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve (tenth) (The Star, 2004:11).

The significance of tourism in South Africa is also evident from an economic point of view. According to the latest Travel and Tourism Economic Research report for South Africa, as presented by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2005:6), South Africa's travel and tourism industry was expected to generate 191.3 billion of economic activity (i.e., total demand) in 2005. The industry's direct impact included 522 054 jobs (i.e., 4.0% of total

employment) and 58.7 billion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (i.e., equivalent to 3.9% of total GDP).

However, since travel and tourism touches all sectors of the economy, its real impact was expected to be even greater. South Africa's travel and tourism economy directly and indirectly was to account for 1 100 460 (i.e., 8.3% of total employment) and 136.1 billion of GDP (i.e., equivalent to 9.0% of total GDP) in 2005 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005:6).

In addition, the latest figures available for the number of foreign travellers who visited South Africa indicated an increase of 7.7% during September 2005 compared to the same month the previous year. This figure increased from 561 142 in 2004 to 604 263 in 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2005:1).

2.3 TOURISM AS AN INDUSTRY, ACTIVITY OR SYSTEM

Tourism can be described in three ways, namely as an *industry*, an *activity* or a *system*. These definitions are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Lubbe, 2003:3). The three ways in which tourism can be described are now briefly elaborated upon.

Tourism can be described as an **industry** because one can measure its economic impact. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) defines the travel and tourism industry as: "...the network of businesses that are engaged in the transport, accommodation, feeding, entertainment and care of the traveller" (Lubbe, 2003:3). For the purposes of measurement, the WTTC distinguishes between the supply and demand sides of the tourism industry. On the *demand* side they include consumer, business and government travel expenditure, while on the *supply* side, tourism is viewed as the sum of all inputs required to produce an industry's goods and services for the traveller (Lubbe, 2003:3).

Mill and Morrison (1992:7) declare that tourism is not an industry, but rather an **activity** engaged in by people who travel. This "activity" encompasses everything from the planning of

the trip, the travel to the place, the stay itself, the return, as well as the reminiscences about it afterwards. Tourism also includes the activities which the traveller undertakes as part of the trip, the purchases made and the interactions that occur between host and guest. Hence, it is all of the activities and impacts that occur when a visitor travels.

This is supported by Lickorish (1994:4) who describes tourism as being “...a complex trade covering all movements of people outside their own community for all purposes except migration or regular daily work”. This author argues that it is not a single industry, but rather a movement of people, a demand force. The view that tourism is an activity is further confirmed by Bennett *et al.* (2005:4-5) who claim that “...tourism is deemed to include any activity concerned with the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places they normally live and work, and their activities during the stay at these destinations”.

The view that tourism is an activity is further apparent from the general definition of tourism provided by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO). The WTO (2002) defines tourism as: “...the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”.

Tourism is also regarded as a **system**. In this case, tourism is composed of both *supply* (which focuses on tourism as an industry) and *demand* (which focuses on tourism as an activity). Supply and demand are linked through marketing, research, distribution, global and national tourism firms and transportation. The environment affects supply and demand. This is because the environment reflects historical, current and future legislative, technological, social and economic trends (Lubbe, 2003:3).

Therefore, tourism can be viewed as a *system* where all these components relate to one another and are interdependent. Within this system, the components of tourism are not strictly separated into supply and demand sides. Instead they are viewed as a set of interrelated parts in which the entire system is affected by changes (Lubbe, 2003:3).

2.4 UNDERSTANDING SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM

Demand is the term applied to the portion of a market that is interested in purchasing a product and has the means and desire to do so (Dickman, 1999:200). The main determinants of demand for travel and tourism can be summarised under eight broad headings, namely economic factors, demographic factors, geographic factors, socio-cultural attitudes towards tourism, mobility, government/regulatory factors, media communications as well as information and communications technology (Middleton, 2001:54). These aspects are not elaborated upon as they do not form part of the main focus of this study. Nevertheless, three main aspects regarding demand for tourism, namely tourist motivation, market segments and tourist flows are briefly highlighted below based on the explanations provided by Lubbe (2003:5-6).

Tourists take holidays in the hope that these holidays will satisfy, either partially or wholly, various needs and desires. It is the task of the marketer to transform needs into desires by making the individual aware of the various ways in which his or her needs can be satisfied. *Travel motivation* happens when the individual decides that a travel experience will satisfy a specific need or needs and is comprised of two components that interact: on the one hand, there are individual needs, an awareness which provides the impetus for seeking satisfaction (i.e., motives or “push factors”); on the other hand, there are travel destinations, products or services that are perceived to have the ability to satisfy those needs (i.e., “pull factors”) (Lubbe, 2003:5).

The success of any destination can only be exploited if the tourism firm understands its target (or tourist) *market segments*. It is essential that planners have a sound knowledge of their markets or potential markets so that they can plan for the right product to be provided to the right people at the right time and at the right price. This ensures that planners will select destinations that avoid providing too much or too little (i.e., a factor which implies that there should be a balance between demand and supply) (Lubbe, 2003:5).

There are also a range of factors that influence the *flow of tourists* to various destinations. For example, political instability, currency fluctuations and an increasing crime rate can negatively affect a destination, while popular events, historical happenings and outstanding marketing has the potential to heighten the demand for certain destinations (Lubbe, 2003:6).

Supply refers to the quantity of items or products available to the market. Many firms produce or supply a variety of facilities, products and services for the enjoyment, comfort, entertainment, movement and consumption of tourists (Keyser, 2002:167). These firms can be grouped into five main sectors, namely attractions, accommodation and catering, transport, destination organisations and travel organisers or intermediaries (Keyser, 2002:167; Middleton, 2001:11).

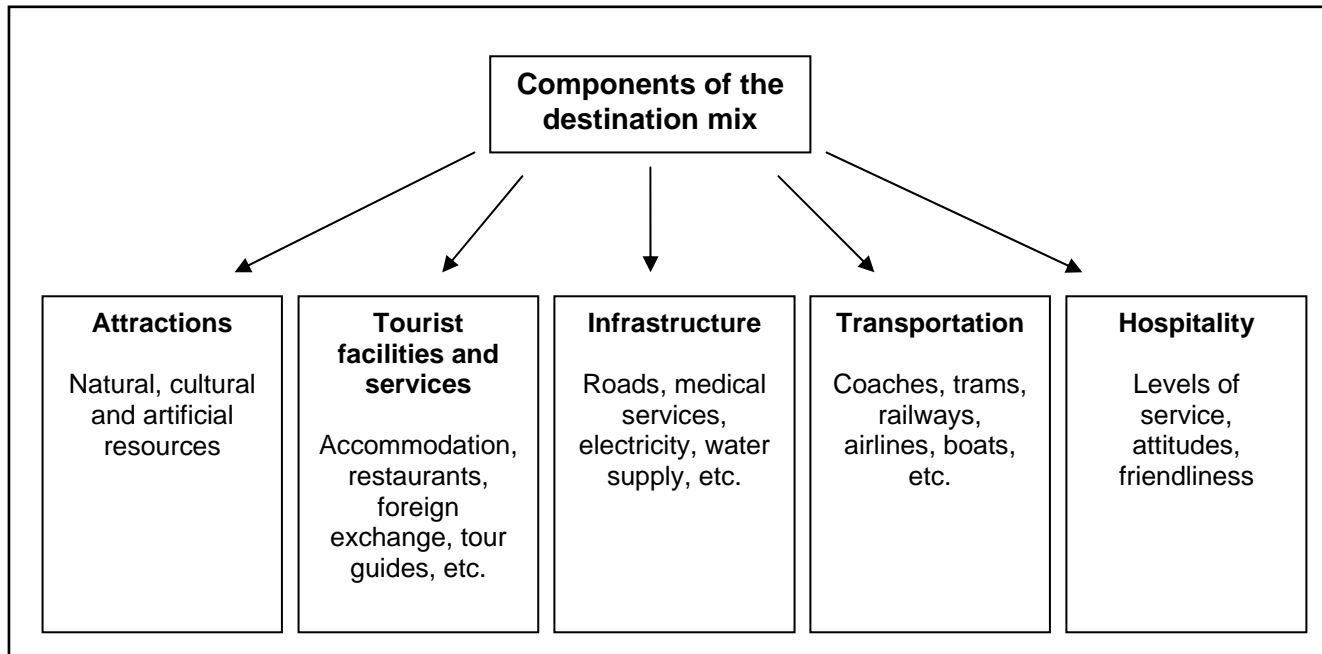
These five sectors are not further elaborated upon as this study only focuses on the *accommodation and catering sector*. This sector is further discussed in section 2.5.

Tourism supply consists essentially of what the tourism industry offers the tourist. The *destination* and those that “*package*” it to meet the needs of tourists form the foundation of what makes it attractive to potential tourists (Lubbe, 2003:6).

Destinations are referred to as the “reasons” why tourism exists. Their images and the positive perceptions that people have of places draw tourists from tourist-generating areas or markets to destinations along certain routes (Keyser, 2002:168). George (2001:290) defines a *destination* as: “...a place, including a physical or perceived location, consisting of primary and secondary attractions and supporting amenities that entice people to visit. Basically, it is where offerings designed to meet tourist needs are located”.

Destinations typically comprise a number of components or elements that combine to form the *destination mix*. These elements include *attractions, tourist facilities and services, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality* (Keyser, 2002:169). Figure 2 graphically portrays the various components of the destination mix and also provides examples of the aspects that relate to each component.

Figure 2: Components of the destination mix



Source: Adapted from Keyser (2002:169).

The first four components are tangible, whereas the fifth element (i.e., hospitality), refers to intangible, human-related aspects of the destination. In order for a destination to function, all of these components must be present. Individual firms providing accommodation services (e.g., hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, lodges and guest houses) thus form part of one of the components of the destination mix, namely tourist facilities and services (see Figure 2).

It is important to note that the *hospitality* component in the destination mix (see Figure 2) can also refer to the *accommodation and catering sector* (i.e., one of the five sectors which tourism firms can be grouped into as noted above) (Keyser, 2002:169). As this study focuses on accommodation establishments (more specifically lodges) that are provided for tourists at various destinations, a brief discussion follows that revolves around the hospitality sector and accommodation. The other components of the destination mix are not considered in this review.

2.5 THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR AND ACCOMMODATION

The term *hospitality* is used to refer to the sector of the tourism industry that provides food and shelter to the tourist (Keyser, 2002:178). Keyser (2002:178) states that the hospitality sector comprises two parts, namely accommodation and catering (or food and beverage services). This is confirmed by George (2001:18) who declares that: "...hospitality includes those commercial activities which offer consumers accommodation, meals and drinks when they are away from home".

These two parts may exist as independent operations (e.g., a self-catering accommodation establishment and a restaurant) or they can be interlinked as part of one establishment (e.g., a hotel with a banqueting division). For certain hospitality establishments (e.g., large hotels with breakfast rooms and restaurants) the two components are inseparable (Keyser, 2002:178).

The term *accommodation* refers to the temporary home of a tourist (Keyser, 2002:168). Some tourists prefer a more luxurious, all-inclusive type of accommodation, while others are satisfied with the bare essentials. Accommodation may range from hotels of an international standard to bed-and-breakfast establishments, self-catering apartments and camping grounds. Many tourists often stay with friends and family to avoid accommodation expenses (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:43-44).

Accommodation is also classified as being either serviced or non-serviced (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:44-45; Middleton, 2001:388-389).

Serviced accommodation implies that staff are on the premises to provide some services (e.g., cleaning, laundry services, meals and bars, as well as room service). The availability of such services, even if they are not utilised, is included in the price charged. This category includes hotels, motels, guest houses, farmhouses, game lodges, bed-and-breakfast establishments and any other type of accommodation that provides services (Bennett *et al.*,

2005:44; Middleton, 2001:388-389). This study focuses on lodges and thus accommodation, for the purposes of this study, falls under this category.

Non-serviced (or self-catering), on the other hand, implies that sleeping accommodation is provided, but it does not include any additional personal services. Even though it is possible to obtain some of these services, they are not included in the price charged. Examples include camping sites, caravanning, apartments, chalets, timeshare, rented flats and any other type of self-catering establishment (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:44; Middleton, 2001:388-389).

An important managerial concern regarding accommodation establishments is *quality control*. The accommodation sector is highly competitive and, like any industry that markets a product in a highly competitive environment, it has to be aware of issues of quality. Due to the fact that accommodation plays such an important role as a temporary “home” for the tourist, many countries have introduced grading systems to regulate quality (Keyser, 2002:183-185).

Grading systems serve to protect the interests of tourists. An official grading system also assists tourists to assess the variety of accommodation establishments they may find at a destination. The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) implements a voluntary grading system for accommodation establishments in South Africa (Keyser, 2002:183-185).

As this study focuses on lodges that have been graded by the TGCSA, the functions of the TGCSA as well as the manner in which it grades accommodation establishments are discussed below.

2.6 THE TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA, ITS FUNCTIONS AND GRADING SYSTEM

The TGCSA was established in September 2000 by the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism with the main purpose of improving the quality of tourism establishments in the South African tourism industry (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45; Dicey, 2004). The Council is drawn from




sub-sectors in the tourism industry, including the Tourism Business Council, the Southern African Tourism Services Association, Provincial Tourism Authorities and the South African Tourism Board (Keyser, 2002:185).

The national star grading system developed for South Africa has been based on extensive international research as well as market research in the industry. These “stars” signify quality around which consumers can make a “value for money” assessment on where they want to stay based on the impartial and independent assessment of a grading body. International trends indicate a move away from structured and inflexible grading schemes to ones that are focussed on customer expectations (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45; Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2004a).

The TGCSA has secured the exclusive use of the “star” symbol to denote standards in the tourism industry in South Africa. Establishments are assessed and given a “star” rating. These ratings differ for serviced and self-catering accommodation (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45).

As this study focuses on serviced accommodation (see section 2.5), Table 2 contains a brief description of what each star level used by the TGCSA represents for serviced accommodation (i.e., hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses, lodges and country houses).

Table 2: The national star grading system for serviced accommodation establishments

Star grading classification	Description
	Fair to good (acceptable/modest) quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care. Clean, comfortable and functional accommodation.
	Good quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
	Very good quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
	Superior (excellent) comfort and quality with a high standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
	Exceptional quality and luxurious accommodation (matching best international standards). Highest standard of furnishings, flawless service and meticulous guest care.

Source: Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2004a).

The objective of the national grading scheme is to assist in the improvement of the overall quality of accommodation and services in South Africa. The aim is *not* to police or impose strict and inflexible guidelines on graded establishments (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2004a). The TGCSA aims to work together with establishments in improving quality in the tourism industry. The TGCSA's vision, mission and objectives are provided in Appendix B.

Traditionally only hotels were graded in South Africa, and they were compelled by law to register as such. However, this has changed. Today, all types of accommodation including bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses, lodges, self-catering establishments, backpacker lodges, caravan and camping sites, as well as country houses, can be graded (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45).

Establishments are assessed according to the type of accommodation they provide. From an accommodation establishment's perspective, it is of critical importance to be graded and classified by the TGCSA as the grading is an indication of the quality of service delivered (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45). The criteria according to which lodge accommodation is graded can be obtained from the TGCSA's Web site (www.stargrading.co.za/).

As this study focuses on Internet marketing in a tourism context, the next section considers Internet marketing and tourism.

2.7 INTERNET MARKETING AND TOURISM

This section considers the role of marketing and the Internet in tourism. It also highlights previous research that examined Internet marketing in a tourism context.

2.7.1 The role of marketing and the Internet in the tourism industry

Tourism can be traced back for centuries. However, due to the fact that the elements of the tourism product and the conditions of the marketplace have changed, there has been a

corresponding requirement for a change in business methods. This has stimulated the use of marketing practices in the tourism industry (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert & Wanhill, 1993:223). Marketing is considered to be a subject of vital concern in travel and tourism because it is the principal management influence that can be brought to bear on the size and behaviour of the global tourism market (Middleton, 2001:4).

The key to the significance of marketing in tourism has been the level of economic growth throughout the twentieth century, which has led to improvements in living standards, an enlargement of the population, as well as increases in discretionary time (Cooper *et al.*, 1993:224). These developments have, in turn, stimulated an increased demand for tourism products and services.

One popular conception of marketing is that it primarily involves sales. Other perspectives view marketing as mainly revolving around advertising or retailing activities. Market research, pricing or product planning are other popular aspects that are considered when describing marketing. Although marketing includes all of these activities, it encompasses more than just these individual elements (Belch & Belch, 2004:7; Lamb *et al.*, 2004:4-5).

Marketing has two facets. First, it is a philosophy, an attitude, a perspective and a management orientation that stresses *customer satisfaction*. Second, it is a set of activities used to implement this philosophy. The American Marketing Association's definition encompasses both perspectives and defines *marketing* as: "... the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational goals" (Lamb *et al.*, 2004:5).

Tourism marketing, on the other hand, is defined by George (2001:19) as: "...the process, through which a tourism company first anticipates consumer needs, then manages and satisfies those needs to achieve sales. It is also the way in which the company identifies what consumers want and makes sure that those requirements can be met in a profitable and efficient manner, and in a way that satisfies consumers on a long term basis".

The accommodation product can be regarded as an *experience*, since it involves physical elements (food and drink), sensual benefits (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste), as well as psychological benefits such as the perception of status, comfort, relaxation and satisfaction. The accommodation product thus exhibits a number of unique characteristics, which makes it difficult to manage and market (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:46).

George (2001:19) claims that the main difference between marketing in tourism and hospitality and that of other service sectors is that the marketer is competing for the consumer's spare time and disposable income. *Disposable income* refers to the consumer's income that remains after tax payments. This money can be spent on essentials (e.g., food and shelter), non-essentials (dining in a restaurant) or it can be saved (PortfolioPoint, 2004). Therefore, *all* marketers and not only tourism marketers are competing for consumers' disposable income.

Taking this into account, one should perhaps rather argue that the main difference between marketing in tourism and hospitality and that of other service sectors is merely that tourism marketers compete for a consumer's spare time.

People don't need a holiday, rather, they desire one. This implies that the task of the tourism and hospitality marketer lies in creating value and promoting the desired experience so that consumers buy from them and not from their competitors (George, 2001:19).

The majority of the tourism and hospitality industry's products and services are intangible, perishable, emotionally appealing and people-oriented. In addition, exposure to the products and services are typically brief. As such products and services are intangible, consumers rely heavily on information about the product or service before they buy (Zhou, 2004:6).

The impact of the Internet on the tourism and hospitality industry has been significant and will continue to grow in importance (George, 2001:206). As the hospitality and tourism industry is an information-rich industry, it has become one of the natural lead industries on the Internet (Middleton, 2001:158; Zhou, 2004:6).

Tourism suppliers, travel agents and tour wholesalers have quickly adopted the Internet as a marketing tool and as an effective means to reach their customers (Lubbe, 2003:222). The Internet as a marketing communications medium also provides tourism firms with a wide range of benefits (see section 4.6).

There appears to be a clear trend towards the growing reliance on the Internet for marketing communications and sales in tourism (Tierney, 2000:212). The number of travel and tourism Web sites is booming (Lockwood & Medlik, 2001:32; Tierney, 2000:212). Consumers are in favour of a seamless automated process, which would enable them to obtain information about a holiday, and book tickets and accommodation all at once (Lockwood & Medlik, 2001:32).

2.7.2 Previous research relating to Internet marketing in a tourism context

As this study focuses on Internet marketing in a tourism context, a literature review was conducted in order to investigate previous research on this topic. A number of general themes were identified from this review. These are highlighted below.

The first theme revolves around the *search behaviour* of online travel consumers. A number of issues examined under this theme include: whether consumer search in electronic markets is substantially different from search in conventional markets judged by the objectives and amount of research; the relationship between tourists' use of the Internet in comparison to other information sources and their characteristics; reasons for the slow adoption of online bookings; as well as the past, the present and the future of online information search (Jang, 2004:41-47; Klein, Köhne & Öörni, 2004:27-39; Luo, Feng & Cai, 2004:15-25; Öörni, 2004:3-14).

Research concerning the *online travel community* was another common theme that became evident. Perspectives of how virtual communities in the tourism industry can be defined and interpreted have been examined and issues related to the functions of virtual communities have been explored from the member's viewpoint (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002:407-417).

Members' general participation in and active contribution to an online travel community, have also been investigated (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004:709-722).

Travellers' selection criteria and expectations of traditional travel agents were examined and compared with their methods of purchasing travel arrangements, including those who purchased online, offline or both (Wolfe, Hsu & Kang, 2004:51-62). College students' online travel behaviour in vacation planning through selected travel Web sites is a further area that has been explored (Bai, Hu, Elsworth & Countryman, 2004:79-91).

One study evaluated differences in perception of utilitarian and social value on the Internet between broadband and narrowband users. The study also explored the relationship of utilitarian and social value on the Internet in the context of online travel purchase behaviour (Beldona, Kline & Morrison, 2004:63-77). Further research on this theme provided a holistic perspective for examining online tourists by integrating the study of individual, organisational, industrial, societal and technological aspects of electronic business (Sigala, 2004:93-102).

E-complaint behaviour of online consumers in the travel and tourism industry was another important theme. These studies investigated aspects relating to the fact that Web technology now enables customers to express their concerns and negative experiences over the Internet (Lee & Hu, 2004:167-181; Shea, Enghagen & Khullar, 2004:145-165; Tyrrell & Woods, 2004:183-190).

The Internet enables consumers to make online reservations/purchases and has thus brought about a new factor for service marketers to consider in the form of online service quality. The role of the *Internet as an intermediary and perceptions of online service quality* is a further theme that is considered in various studies (Feng, Morrison & Ismail, 2003; Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2004; Kim & Lee, 2004:105-116; Law & Lau, 2004:117-131; Miller, 2004:133-142; Smith & Rupp, 2004; Tsai, Huang & Lin, 2005:787-796; Van Riel, Semeijn & Pauwels, 2004:475-493).

A number of studies have emphasised that the design and development of a Web site affects the success of the site. Thus previous research has also investigated *Web site design and development within the travel and tourism industry* (Jeong & Choi, 2004:193-204; Lee, Sung, DeFranco & Arnold, 2004:205-223; O'Connor, 2004:225-330).

The final theme identified in relation to Internet marketing in a tourism context concerns *Web site evaluation within hospitality and tourism*. Various studies evaluated Web sites in this industry according to a wide variety of criteria (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Cai, Card & Cole, 2004:219-227; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Morrison, Taylor & Douglas, 2004:233-251; So & Morrison, 2004:93-118; Wan, 2002:155-160).

A number of these studies examined the Web sites of accommodation establishments according to various categories of evaluation criteria in various countries (see Table 1, p. 6). This study evaluates Web sites of graded South African lodges based on certain categories within a tourism and hospitality context and, therefore, falls under this theme. This stream of research is considered in more detail in chapter 5.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter emphasised the significance of tourism in South Africa. It revealed that tourism can be regarded as an industry, activity or system. A discussion was provided that concerned supply and demand in the tourism industry. This chapter also considered the hospitality sector and accommodation and introduced the TGCSA, its functions and grading system.

Internet marketing in relation to tourism was considered and the role of marketing and the Internet in tourism have been highlighted. Previous research concerning Internet marketing in a tourism context was also briefly reviewed and general themes concerning research on this topic were identified. The next chapter provides an overview of marketing and the Internet.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTERNET AND MARKETING: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the Internet and then explores marketing and the role of the Internet.

3.2 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERNET

This section defines the Internet and its components, highlights the main benefits of the Internet and considers the significance of the Internet in current business and marketing practices.

3.2.1 Defining the Internet and its components

It is apparent from literature that a wide range of definitions exist that serve to describe the Internet (George, 2001:205; Kleindl, 2001:8; McLeod & Schell, 2004:63-64; Rensburg & Cant, 2003:210). Nevertheless, Bothma (2000:3) states that the *Internet* (or simply referred to as the Net) is most commonly defined as: "...a world-wide interconnected network of computer networks".

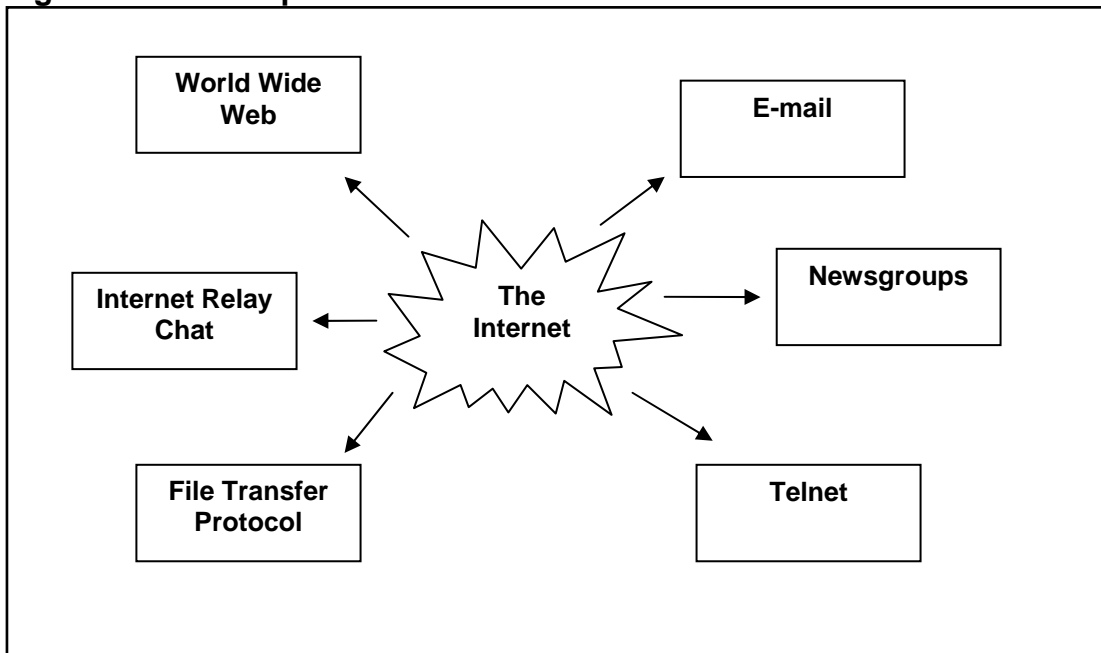
The World Wide Web (WWW) is an important component of the Internet (Bothma, 2000:1-2). The Internet and the World Wide Web (or Web for short) is often used in the same semantic context (as is the case in this study). It is, however, vital to understand that the Internet and the World Wide Web are essentially different things (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:210).

While the Internet incorporates the networking infrastructure and protocols that allow computers to communicate with each other, the Web represents a user-friendly, point-and-click environment that serves as an *interface* to the Internet. The Web provides a graphic way

of organising and viewing information available on the Internet (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:210). Together, the Internet and the WWW provide the opportunity to find information from all over the world (McLeod & Schell, 2004:64).

In addition to the WWW, Bothma (2000:1-2) highlights further components of the Internet, namely *electronic mail (e-mail)*, *newsgroups*, *file transfer protocol (FTP)*, *Internet relay chat (IRC)* and *telnet*. Figure 3 provides a graphical illustration of the various components of the Internet. These elements are discussed below.

Figure 3: The components of the Internet



Source: Adapted from Bothma (2000:4).

Electronic mail (e-mail) is a form of digital message that is transmitted via a computer network (Bothma, 2000:4; Shelly *et al.*, 2003:109). The Internet is most commonly used for sending and receiving electronic mail (Bothma, 2000:2).

Newsgroups (also known as Usenets) can be described as online discussion groups that function on an e-mail-like bulletin-board basis and are dedicated to particular topics. Thousands of newsgroups exist which cover just about every kind of subject imaginable (Bickerton, Bickerton & Pardesi, 2000:296; Bothma, 2000:2).

File transfer protocol (FTP) is an application for the purpose of transferring files across the Internet (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:291). It is an Internet standard that permits file uploading and downloading with other computers on the Internet (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.29). FTP is most often used as an attachment with an e-mail (Kleindl, 2001:26).

Internet relay chat (IRC) is an interactive real-time chat service where two or more people can “talk” to each other using a text-based messaging service (Bothma, 2000:2). This is referred to as a synchronous service in the sense that, when two persons are chatting with each other, they are physically sitting at their respective computers at that time (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:217).

Telnet allows a computer to connect into other computer systems, in essence becoming one of their terminals (Kleindl, 2001:26). It is, therefore, a way of connecting one’s computer through the Internet to a remote computer located somewhere else in the world, so that one’s computer becomes a terminal of the remote computer (Bothma, 2000:2).

As highlighted in the introduction to this study, Web sites are the most common manifestation of the capabilities of the Internet (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:349). A *Web site* is defined as: “... a collection of related Web pages and associated items, such as documents and pictures, stored on a Web server” (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.09). A *portal* is also a Web site. However, it is designed to provide an inventory of links and content that focuses on a specific target audience (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:297).

Appendix C provides a brief history of the Internet and as well as a discussion that explains how the Internet works.

3.2.2 The main benefits of the Internet

It is clear that the Internet provides a large number of benefits for firms and society today (Bothma, 2000:18; Timmers, 2000:7-29). Nevertheless, Rensburg and Cant (2003:210) highlight three main benefits of linking together these millions of computer networks around

the world. These comprise communication, information and conducting business and are briefly considered below.

The Internet is a **communications tool** that enables cheap, fast and effective communication between a firm and its various publics. The Internet is also an **information tool** that enables firms to gather information about their various stakeholders and to share vast amounts of multimedia information with them (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:210).

The Internet additionally provides a method of **conducting business** which implies that the Internet can be used as both a marketing tool and as a business tool. As a *marketing tool*, the Internet can be used to advertise products, transact sales, brand a firm and research markets, as well as collect information about customers, markets and marketing intelligence. As a *business tool*, the Internet can be utilised in a wide variety of ways, for example, to provide customer support, integrate suppliers and customers into the supply chain, bring about cost savings through automation and integration with backend legacy systems, improve customer relationships and enable electronic billing and payments (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:210).

3.2.3 The significance of the Internet in current business and marketing practices

The explosion in the worldwide growth of Internet usage forms the heart of the so-called “New Economy”. The Internet has been *the* revolutionary technology of the new millennium and has provided firms and consumers with the benefits of connectivity. The Internet enables consumers and firms to access and share vast amounts of information with just a few mouse clicks (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:483).

Several sources highlight the importance of the Internet in contemporary business and marketing practices (cf. Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:484; Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:16-20; Darby, Jones & Al Madani, 2003:106; Harridge-March, 2004:297; Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:45; Ngai, 2003:24; Rowley, 2004:24; Timmers, 2000:3-19).

Just a few years ago firms used to ask themselves whether or not to move their business to the Internet. Firms no longer ask themselves that question and there can be no room for a firm to exist without somehow being connected to the Internet (Lichtenthal & Eliaz, 2003:4).

Retail businesses today face a significant challenge with a potential impact not encountered since the industrial revolution – surviving in a business model that includes the Internet (Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002:42). It is apparent that the Internet as a new communications medium is changing the way in which firms conduct business, just like the telephone and fax before it (Sterne, 1999:21).

A large number of countries around the world (including South Africa) are embracing electronic commerce (e-commerce) in an attempt to gain upon its potential benefits (Darby *et al.*, 2003:106). Some of the dominant South African online retailers include Pick 'n Pay Home Shopping, Kalahari.net, Woolworths Inthebag, Netflorist, Cybercellar and Streetcar.com, with the MWEB ShopZone dominating the market in online shopping malls, followed by Digital Mall (World Wide Worx, 2004). The emergence of e-commerce has created a new business paradigm; one that presents marketers with noteworthy opportunities and challenges (Webb, 2002:95).

Despite the wide adoption and rapid development of the Internet, it is still in its infancy (Zhou, 2004:8). Nevertheless, when considering the tourism and hospitality industry, it is significant to note that the technology that has brought about the Internet is undergoing rapid changes and every new development in technology gives rise to new opportunities and solutions for this industry (Zhou, 2004:8).

The Internet is changing the way in which consumers access travel information, plan their trips and purchase tourism products and services. The hospitality industry is always among the first to adopt new technology and innovations. Thus, it is not surprising that the industry is among the top markets in the use of the Internet. It is apparent that an increasing number of people are using the Internet for travel information, planning, reservations and booking (Zhou, 2004:12).

For tourism and hospitality firms, the Internet can be used as a means for communication, commerce, marketing, as well as information distribution and research (Zhou, 2004:8). This study focuses on marketing and the Internet in relation to tourism. Therefore, the following section explores marketing and the role of the Internet.

3.3 EXPLORING MARKETING AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET

This section provides a brief understanding of Internet marketing and highlights the manner in which the Internet can be utilised as an effective marketing tool. The effects of the Internet on the elements of the marketing mix are also briefly discussed.

3.3.1 Understanding Internet marketing

Imber and Betsy-Ann (in Ngai, 2003:24) define *Internet marketing* as: "...the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of both buyers and sellers".

Internet marketing is also referred to as *electronic marketing* or *e-marketing* (Darby *et al.*, 2003:110), *online marketing* (Janal, 2000:13-16), *Web marketing* (Sterne, 1999:1-5) as well as *cybermarketing* (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:1-20).

Firms can utilise the Internet for marketing in three main ways. First, it can be used to provide information concerning the firm and its offerings. Second, the Internet allows for the purchasing or reserving of products and/or services with delivery through mail or courier. Third, the Internet allows for transactions and provides the physical delivery of products to the consumer. However, only specific product categories can be delivered via the WWW, for example, software and certain kinds of services (Pilo & Funk, 2005:112; Van den Poel & Leunis, 1999:250).

Wilson and Abel (2002:85-94) discuss a range of critical issues involved in utilising the Internet as an effective marketing tool. These authors identify five levels of Internet use which they categorise as either *business enhancement* or *revenue enhancement* techniques.

Business enhancement techniques include aspects related to communication, market research, as well as brand building (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

Effective *communication* is the lifeblood of most firms. E-mail and discussion groups are frequently used communication methods on the Internet (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

The Internet provides a vast amount of information and much of it is available at no cost. The Internet thus provides a means of *market research* in the form of secondary data as firms are able to use the Internet to find out what their customers want, as well as what their competitors are doing. Discussion groups can also be used to conduct primary market research. They are an excellent way of identifying a target market and determining what that target market is doing (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

Many firms also utilise the Internet as a business enhancement tool in the form of *brand building* through their Web site. This type of site is used to present information about the firm and its offerings. In its simplest form, this involves taking the firm's existing marketing literature and posting it to the Web site. More complicated forms include current news, forums, articles and information for customers on various topics of interest, investor information and corporate mission statements (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

Revenue enhancement techniques revolve around e-commerce and e-organisation (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

E-commerce refers to buying and selling processes supported by electronic means, primarily the Internet. Electronic markets (e-markets) are "marketspaces", rather than physical marketplaces. Sellers use e-markets to offer their products and services online. Buyers use

them to search for information, identify what they want and place orders using credit cards or other means of electronic payment (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:485).

An e-commerce site would typically offer the same information as the “brand building” Web site, but would additionally enable users to purchase products, services or information online (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

Finally, a firm is regarded to be a true *e-business* or *e-organisation* when the majority of its revenue is being generated from the Internet, all major processes are connected with the online environment, the business is set up to run 24 hours a day, it reaches a global audience and has a centreless networked organisational structure rather than a hierarchical organisational structure (Wilson & Abel, 2002:85-88).

One of the most basic concepts in marketing is the *marketing mix* (George, 2001:9; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:23). In order to achieve effective marketing communications through a Web site, it is first necessary to focus on the basic “building blocks” of the marketing mix (Hoey, 1998:33). Hence, the next section presents the different elements of the marketing mix and briefly highlights the manner in which the Internet influences these elements.

3.3.2 The Internet and its effect on the elements of the marketing mix

This section presents the traditional “four P” marketing mix as well as the expanded “seven P” marketing mix for services. The manner in which the Internet influences the various elements of the expanded marketing mix is briefly discussed.

- **The traditional “four Ps” marketing mix**

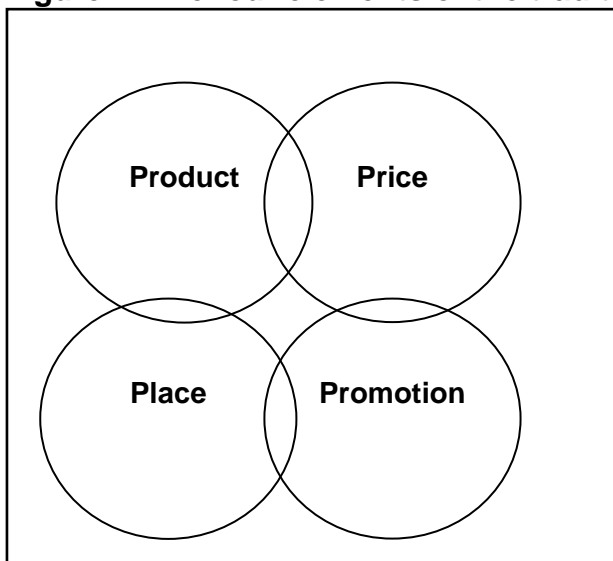
The concept of the marketing mix was developed by Borden in 1965 who described the marketing manager as: “...a mixer of ingredients, one who is constantly engaged in fashioning creatively a mix of marketing procedures and policies in his efforts to produce a profitable enterprise” (Palmer, 2000:21).

The marketing mix is a conceptual framework that highlights the principal decisions marketing managers make in configuring their offerings to suit customers' needs. It can be used both to develop long-term strategies and short-term tactical programmes (Palmer, 2000:20-21).

Armstrong and Kotler (2005:57) describe the marketing mix as: "...the set of controllable, tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market". These authors explain that the marketing mix consists of everything the firm can do to influence the demand for its product.

Traditionally the marketing mix has comprised four elements, namely *product*, *price*, *promotion* and *place* (see Figure 4) based on McCarthy's four Ps (Dennis, Fenech & Merrilees, 2005:179; Palmer, 2000:21-22).

Figure 4: The four elements of the traditional marketing mix



Source: George (2001:9).

The notion of a mix is that all the components are related to one another and depend on one another to some extent. The marketing mix philosophy also implies that there is an optimal mix of the four factors for a given market segment at a given point in time (George, 2001:9; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:23).

The traditional marketing mix has been criticised for omitting or underemphasising certain marketing activities. One important criticism concerns extensions to the marketing mix for services (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:58).

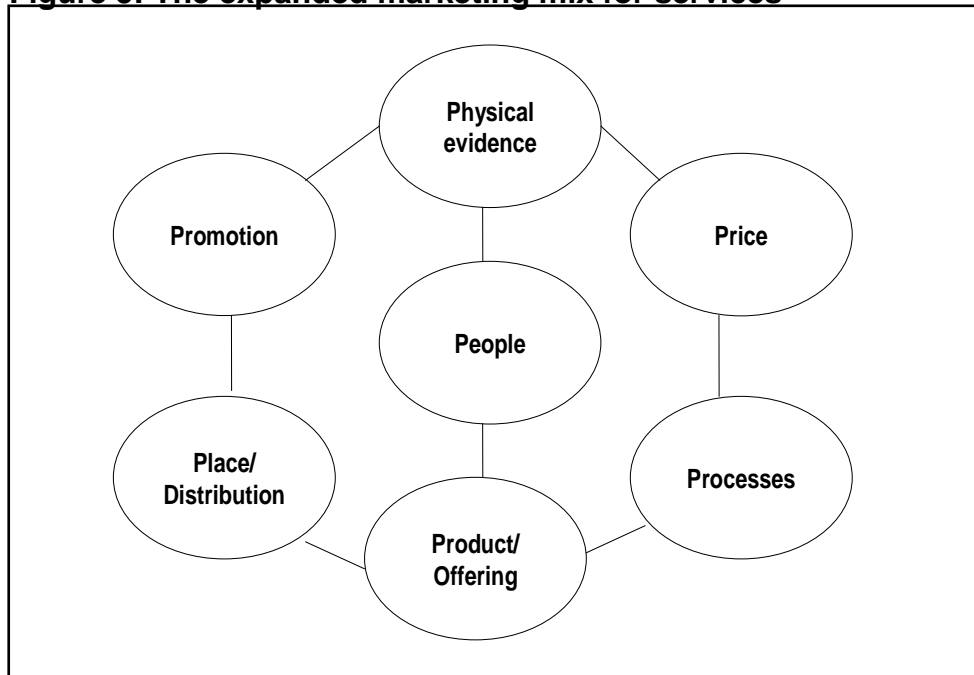
- **The expanded marketing mix for services**

Careful management of product, place, promotion and price are also essential to the marketing of services. However, the strategies for the “four Ps” require some modifications when applied to services (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:23-24).

Services possess a number of characteristics that make them different from products. These include intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:12-24). This had led services marketers to conclude that they can use additional variables to communicate with and satisfy their customers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:24).

The acknowledgement of the importance of these additional variables has led services marketers to adopt the concept of an expanded marketing mix for services (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:24). This expanded marketing mix was originally devised by Booms and Bitner in the early 1980s (Middleton, 2001:94). These authors added three additional Ps, namely *people*, *physical evidence* and *process* to the traditional marketing mix (George, 2001:9; Middleton, 2001:94). Figure 5 below provides a graphical illustration of the expanded marketing mix for services.

Figure 5: The expanded marketing mix for services



Source: George (2001:27).

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:18) describe the Internet as being just “one big service”. They highlight that all firms that operate on the Internet are essentially providing services - whether they are giving information, performing basic customer service functions or facilitating transactions. Thus, all the tools, concepts and strategies applicable for services marketing and management have a direct application in an Internet or e-business world. Taking this into account, the manner in which the Internet affects the additional three Ps for services marketing is also considered below.

- **The Internet and its influence on the expanded marketing mix for services**

Marketing communications (i.e., promotion) forms an essential component in the marketing mix and this study specifically focuses on this element. The Internet in relation to marketing communications is considered in chapters 4 and 5. Marketing communications is thus excluded from the discussion below that concerns the manner in which the Internet influences the elements of the expanded marketing mix.

The manner in which the Internet influences the other six elements of the expanded marketing mix, namely product, place, price, physical evidence, process and people, is now briefly considered.

Product: The product refers to the goods-and-services combination a firm offers to a target market (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:57). Rather than being something that a firm has to sell, a firm's product can also be thought of as "customer value and benefits" and refers to the bundle of services and satisfactions wanted by customers (Dennis *et al.*, 2005:181).

The implications of the Internet for products are diverse and considerable. The Internet not only enhances the augmented product (e.g., after-sales service), but a variety of new products exist only as a result of the Internet (Darby *et al.*, 2003:109).

Examples of these new products include Internet software packages (e.g., Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer) that have been developed specially for the Internet (Webpro, 1997), as well as a range of Internet services (e.g., ADSL) (GamCo., 2005). Students are even able to obtain their degrees via the Internet through institutions such as eDegree (www.edegree.co.za).

Even though it is impossible to undertake transactions for services where the physical proximity of the customer is necessary, such as hairdressing or dentistry, customers can still commit interactively to consuming such services by, for example, booking and paying for an appointment in advance over the Internet (Harridge-March, 2004:302).

Place: Place refers to all the firm's activities that make the product available to target consumers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:57). According to Dennis *et al.* (2005:180), "place" is equivalent to "convenience for the customer" and recognises customers' choices for buying in ways convenient to them. Electronic markets provide buyers with an additional distribution channel through which they can buy products (Strader & Shaw, 1999).

Harridge-March (2004:304) highlights that the ability of a Web site to establish contact with and subsequently serve customers has been hailed by many as a cost-reducing way of distributing goods and services direct from the provider to the consumer. This is supported by Wilson and Abel (2002:90) who assert that the single biggest advantage of selling over the Internet is the efficiency and cost savings of product distribution.

The Internet offers a direct distribution and delivery method for many information, software, entertainment and financial service products. Traditionally, trading firms have gone to considerable lengths to avoid direct competition, often developing unique distribution channels to gain competitive advantage. However, collaboration or Web-based communities will be one of the realities of trading and marketing online in the future (Darby *et al.*, 2003:109).

Multi-channel retailing means that the consumer is able to shop in a number of modes. This implies that the consumer is able to examine goods at one channel, purchase them via another and finally pick them up (and possibly return them) at a third channel (Berman & Thelen, 2004:147).

Although the concept of multi-channel marketing has existed for years, the recent pressure to add an online presence has driven more and more retailers and cataloguers to become multi-channel entities (Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002:42). Taking this into account, Duffy (2004:359) contends that multi-channel marketing will be an essential strategy for successful firms in the future.

Price: The price is the amount of money that customers have to pay to obtain the product (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:57). The Internet makes price comparisons by buyers easier and more efficient (Robins, 2000:258). The Internet also enables customers to be more informed about products and prices due to the wealth of choices and pricing information available (Wilson & Abel, 2002:90). This leads to increased price competition (Darby *et al.*, 2003:108).

Price implies “cost to the customer” and represents the total cost that customers will pay. For example, in the case of “bricks-and-mortar” retailing, customers have to pay their own transport costs to reach the retail outlet. For “clicks” electronic retailing, there are also the costs of carriage and perhaps taxes to be added to the quoted prices. The costs involved in accessing the Internet are also a factor to consider in electronic retailing (Dennis *et al.*, 2005:181).

There is a predominant belief that price is the main motivator for consumers when choosing a particular Web site (Constantinides, 2004:120). Customers generally state and behave as if price is the most important factor in drawing them to a site (Reibstein, 2002:473). However, research concerning the role and importance of the online price contradicts this belief (Constantinides, 2004:120).

Morganosky and Cude (2000) showed that many consumers shop online mainly for convenience and saving time rather than for price. Further aspects that consumers value when shopping online include greater accuracy of billing, a more peaceful experience, easier comparison shopping, better ability to monitor spending and facilitating planning. As price can sometimes be perceived as the value the customer puts on the product being available, it is essential that customers perceive that they are getting value for money in what is being offered, which may include convenience, efficiency and excellence (Bevan & Murphy, 2001:279-289).

A further significant aspect with regards to pricing for multi-channel retailers, concerns the fact that customers expect pricing consistency across channels (Levy & Weitz, 2004:100-101). When consumers have a perception that prices should be lower when buying online than in-store, this can cause problems when consumers buying through other channels realise that they are paying more than online consumers.

Physical evidence: Physical evidence comprises all aspects of the firm’s physical facility as well as other forms of tangible communication (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:150).

Physical symbols such as brochures or furnishings cannot be seen and touched in the virtual world as there is no physical entity and, therefore, in the virtual environment, marketers employ “virtual evidence” instead. This may be seen by the customer as a combination of graphics, brand or third-party endorsements, as well as the pre-, during- and post-transaction reassurance sought by wary customers (Harridge-March, 2004:303). A firm’s Web site and the way in which it is designed, as well as the information contained therein, may thus contribute to providing a form of physical evidence for the online consumer.

Process: Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:25) describe process as the actual procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the service is delivered (i.e., the service delivery and operating systems). The Internet enables firms to make their service delivery system flexible, thus adding customer value which can be exploited to gain competitive advantage (Ahmad, 2002:26).

Allowing the customer to access a firm by means of interactive media, changes the service process fundamentally. Such access alleviates the need to travel to a “bricks-and-mortar” store, assists pre-purchase searching and removes the personal interaction inherent in telephone marketing or traditional retailing (Harridge-March, 2004:302).

According to Evans, Wedande, Ralston and van’ t Hul (2001), the process of paying remotely is still subject to customer concerns. However, Harridge-March (2004:302-303) argues that such fears are gradually being eroded by the promotion of “safe-site” symbols. In addition, Robins (2000:256) declares that within the virtual environment the user, rather than the firm, is in control of the process by which he or she accesses the service.

People: People are all human actors who play a part in service delivery and thus influence the buyer’s perceptions (i.e., the firm’s personnel, the customer and other customers in the service environment) (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:24). With online marketing there is no personal interaction between a customer and the provider, or between a customer and other customers. Trust, therefore, has to be generated by other means, such as through communications messages and brands (Harridge-March, 2004:303).

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an introduction to the Internet and explored marketing and the role of the Internet. The manner in which the Internet influences the expanded marketing mix was also considered. The Internet in relation to marketing communications was not discussed. As this study specifically focuses on this element of the marketing mix, the following chapter examines the Internet as a marketing communications medium.

CHAPTER 4: THE INTERNET AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As this study focuses on marketing communications, this chapter begins by explaining the communications process. This is followed by the presentation of a new communications model for a hypermedia computer-mediated environment.

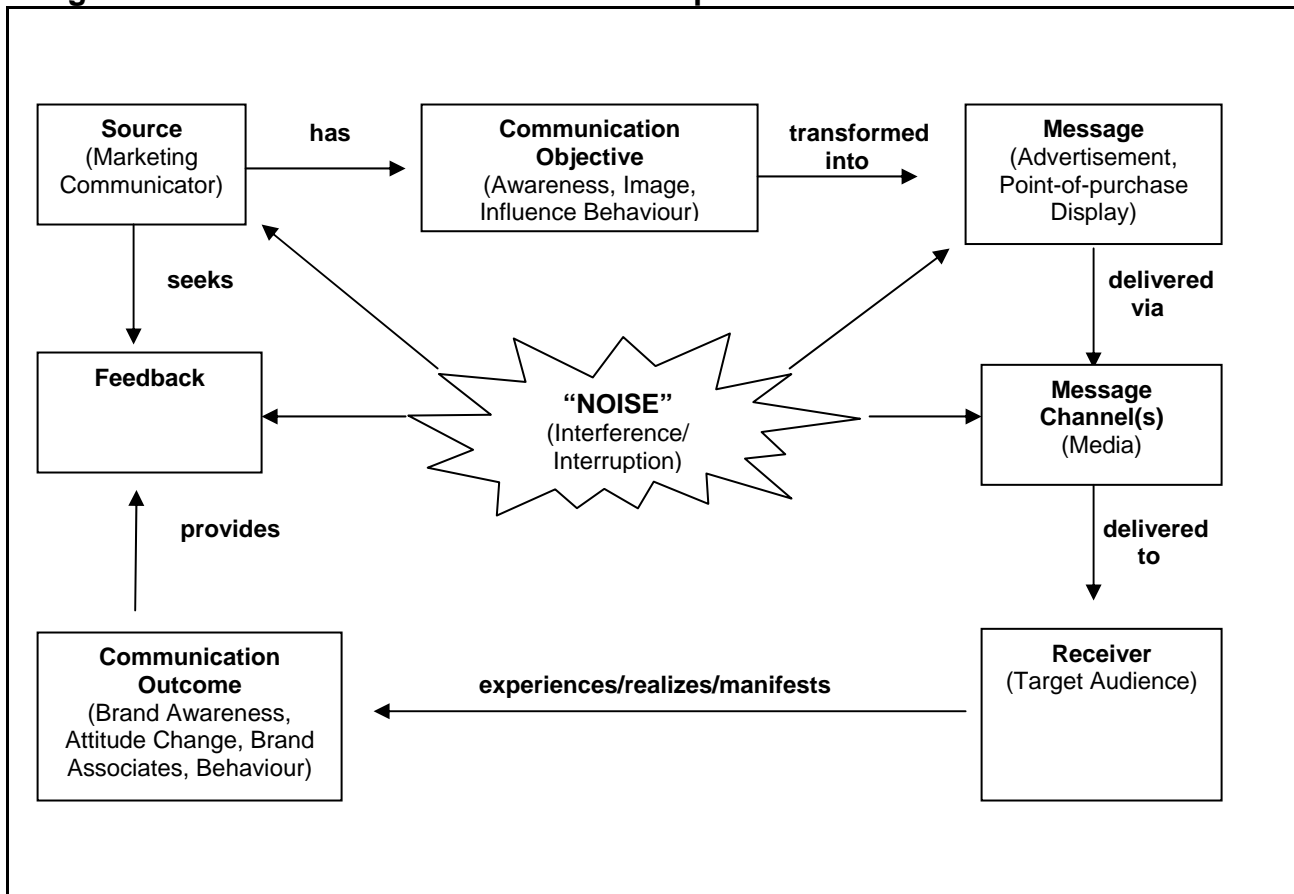
The interactive potential of the Internet is then discussed and the potential of the Internet as a marketing communications medium is considered. There are a number of benefits and shortcomings of the Internet as a marketing communications medium for tourism firms. Hence, this chapter concludes by highlighting a range of the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium in a tourism context.

4.2 THE COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS

This study revolves around the different elements of the marketing communications mix. All of these elements are essentially combined in the best manner for a firm to *communicate* with its target audience (Belch & Belch, 2004:16). Therefore, as this study revolves around communications, the communications process is presented below.

Shimp (2003:81-83) states that all communications activities typically involve eight elements, namely (1) a *source*, who has a (2) *communication objective*, which is transformed into a (3) *message*, which is delivered via a (4) *message channel (medium)* to a (5) *receiver*, which experiences a (6) *communication outcome*. That outcome represents (7) *feedback* to the message source and the entire process is subject to interference, interruptions, or, in general, (8) *noise* (see Figure 6). These elements are briefly described below.

Figure 6: Elements of the communications process



Source: Shimp (2003:82).

The sender or **source** of a communication is the person or firm that has information to share with another person or group of people. In marketing communications, the source is a communicator (e.g., an advertiser or salesperson) who has thoughts (ideas, sales points) to share with an individual customer, prospect or an entire target audience (Belch & Belch, 2004:141; Shimp, 2003:82).

The source *encodes* a message to accomplish the communications objective. *Encoding* is the process of putting thoughts, ideas or information into symbolic form. The sender thus puts the message into words, pictures and/or sounds so that it can be understood by the target market (Belch & Belch, 2004:141; Duncan, 2002:125; Shimp, 2003:82).

The **communications objective** in the communications process refers to the clear idea of exactly what should be accomplished (e.g., creating brand awareness or influencing behaviour) (Shimp, 2003:82).

The **message** contains the actual information that the source aims to convey. It refers to the symbolic expression of what the communicator intends to accomplish. Advertisements, sales presentations, package designs and point-of-purchase signs are some of the various forms of marketing communications messages (Belch & Belch, 2004:141; Shimp, 2003:82).

The path through which the message moves from the source to the receiver is the **message channel**. Communications channels can be personal or non-personal. With *personal* channels there is direct interpersonal contact with target individuals or groups (e.g., salespeople, friends and family members). With *non-personal* channels, there is no direct contact between the sender and receiver (e.g., print and broadcast media) (Belch & Belch, 2004:143; Shimp, 2003:82).

The person or group of people (target audience) with whom the source attempts to share ideas is known as the **receiver**. In marketing communications, receivers are generally the prospective and present customers of a firm's product or service. Some forms of marketing communications may also be directed at other parties (e.g., retail partners). A receiver *decodes* the message to understand its meaning. Decoding refers to the process that the receiver goes through in order to understand a message by interpreting what the words, pictures and/or sounds in the message mean (Duncan, 2002:125; Shimp, 2003:82).

Feedback affords the source a means of monitoring how accurately the intended message was received and whether it accomplished its intended objective(s). Feedback allows the source to determine whether the original message reached the target market as intended or whether it needs to be altered. The feedback mechanism, therefore, offers the source some measure of control in the communications process (Shimp, 2003:82).

Finally, as a message moves through a channel it is subject to the influence of extraneous and distracting stimuli. These stimuli interfere with or interrupt reception of the message in its original form. Such interference and distortion is known as **noise** (Shimp, 2003:82). Noise may occur at any stage of the communications process. Errors or problems that occur in the encoding of a message, distortion in a radio or television signal or distractions at the point of reception are all examples of noise (Belch & Belch, 2004:145).

Firms communicate with their customers through various media. Traditional marketing communications media vehicles, such as broadcast (television or radio) and print (newspapers, magazines) flow one way, from the sender to the receiver. In most traditional advertising, the message will be carried by the media without face-to-face communications. This takes place without any or only limited forms of feedback. The Internet, however, has the potential to alter this traditional view of advertising and communications media (Hoffman & Novak, 1996:50; Kleindl, 2001:55).

The manner in which the Internet alters the classical communications process is discussed in the next section and a new communications model for a hypermedia computer-mediated environment (CME) is presented.

4.3 A COMMUNICATIONS MODEL FOR A HYPERMEDIA COMPUTER-MEDIATED ENVIRONMENT

The new model underlying marketing communications in a hypermedia CME is a “many-to-many” model that places *hypermedia* at the centre of the communications process (Kleindl, 2001:55). *Hypermedia* can be described as a combination of hypertext and multimedia (University of Exeter, 2004).

Hypertext refers to a non-sequential method for reading a document displayed on a computer screen. Rather than reading the document in a sequence from the beginning to the end, the reader can jump to topics by selecting a highlighted word or phrase embedded within the

document. This activates a link, connecting the reader to another place in the same document or to another document. The resulting matrix of links is called a web (Florida Community College, 2002).

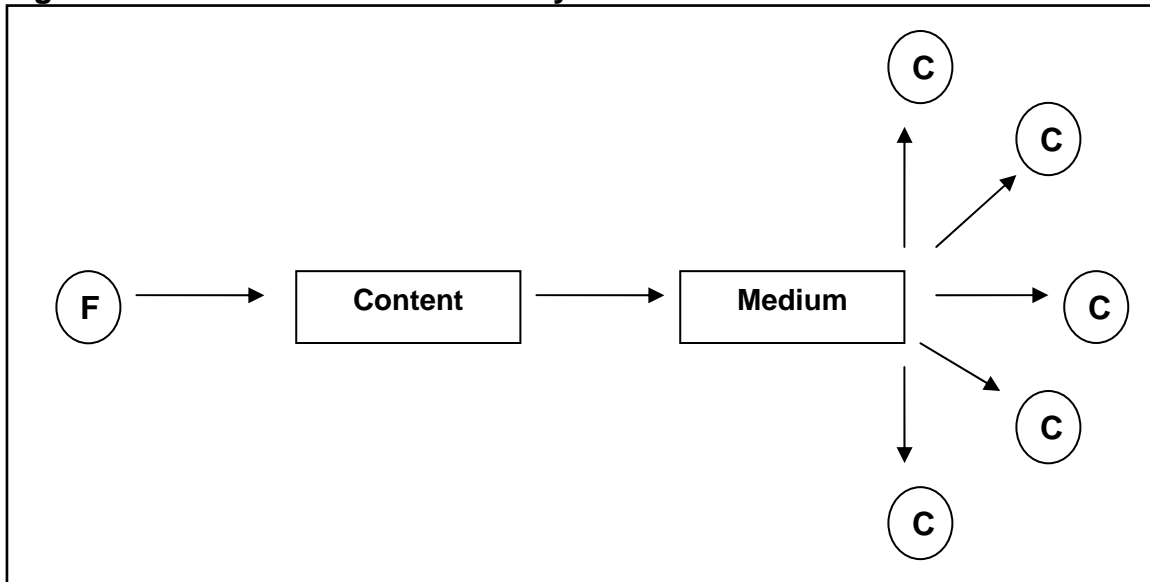
Multimedia, on the other hand, is described as any application that combines text with graphics, animation, audio, video, and/or virtual reality (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:l.16).

Hoffman and Novak (1996:53) describe a *hypermedia computer-mediated environment (CME)* as: "... a dynamic distributed network, potentially global in scope, together with associated hardware and software for accessing the network, which enables consumers and firms to (1) provide and interactively access hypermedia content (i.e., "machine interactivity") and (2) communicate through the medium (i.e., "person interactivity")."

Hoffman and Novak (1996:52-54) outline a series of three communications models that serve to identify several unique characteristics of hypermedia CME's such as the Web. These three models are now discussed.

Hoffman and Novak (1996:52) first present a simplified model that underlies many traditional models of mass communication (see Figure 7). The primary feature of this model is a one-to-many communications process, where the firm (F) transmits content through a medium to consumers (C). Depending on the medium (i.e., broadcast, print or billboards), either static (i.e., text, image and graphics) and/or dynamic (i.e., audio, full-motion video and animation) content can be incorporated. No interaction between consumers and firms is present within this model. Virtually all contemporary models of mass media effects are based on this traditional one-to-many model of the mass communications process.

Figure 7: The traditional one-to-many model for mass media communications



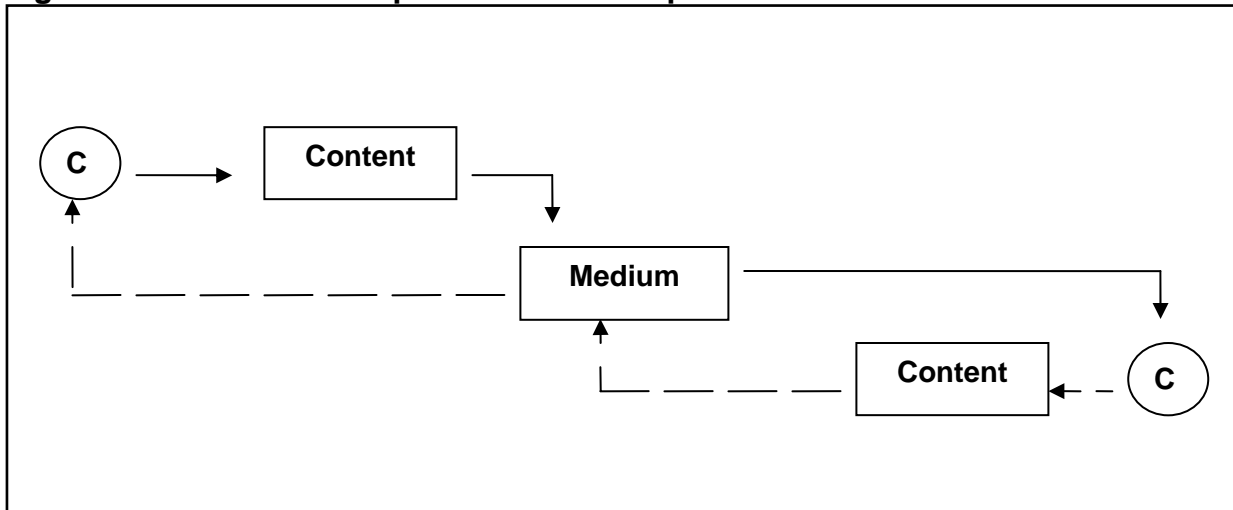
Note: F=firm; C=consumer

Source: Hoffman and Novak (1996:52).

Interpersonal communications (also known as personal communications) differs from mass communications in that it involves two or more people communicating directly with each other face-to-face, person to audience, over the telephone or via e-mail. This method of communications is effective as it enables individualised presentation and feedback (Kotler, 2003:308-309; Lamb *et al.*, 2004:324).

Hoffman and Novak (1996:52-53) also present a simplified model of interpersonal and computer-mediated communications that is based on traditional models of communications from receiver to sender (see Figure 8). The solid and dashed lines in Figure 8 indicate that communication flows through a medium for two distinct persons. This model incorporates a feedback view of interactivity. Although Figure 8 reveals one-to-one communication between two consumers, the model can be easily extended to represent many-to-many interpersonal communication (i.e., teleconference, face-to-face group meetings or online chat rooms).

Figure 8: A model of interpersonal and computer-mediated communications



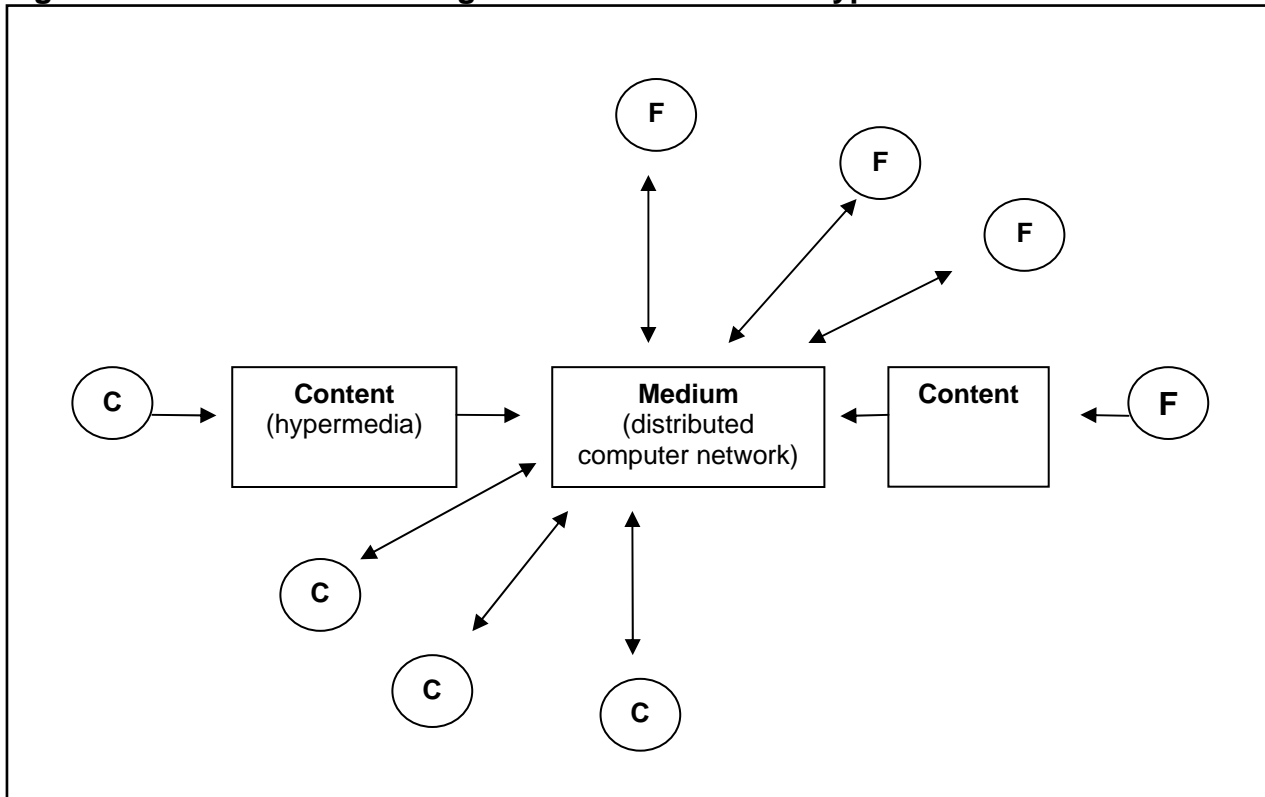
Note: C=consumer

Source: Hoffman and Novak (1996:52).

Person-interactivity is the key feature that distinguishes Figure 8 from Figure 7 (Hoffman & Novak, 1996:52-53). It is important to note that with Figure 8, interactivity can occur between people either *via a medium* or it can be *unmediated* (as in the case of face-to-face communications). In this case, the medium is only important as a conduit (i.e., as a means of connecting the sender and receiver) and to the extent that it contributes to or interferes with the transmission of the messages from sender to receiver (Steuer, 1992:77-78).

Taking the two communications models presented above into account, Hoffman and Novak (1996:53) then present a new many-to-many communications model for a hypermedia CME (see Figure 9). The content in Figure 9 is hypermedia and the medium is a distributed computer network.

Figure 9: A model of marketing communications in a hypermedia CME



Source: Hoffman and Novak (1996:53).

Figure 9 differs from Figure 8 in that interactivity can also be *with* the medium (i.e., machine interactivity) in addition to *through* the medium (i.e., person interactivity). This model suggests that the primary relationship is not between sender and receiver, but rather with the mediated environment in which they interact.

The new many-to-many model for a hypermedia CME allows feedback from others involved in the communications channels. All customers can communicate with each other and with firms. This communication is also not time dependent as with face-to-face communications (i.e., a customer can create a Web site or post a message and leave it for others to see) (Kleindl, 2001:55). The Web is a meeting place where anyone can communicate with anyone else following the many-to-many *interactive* model (Rowley, 2004:26).

The interactive potential of the Internet within a hypermedia CME is briefly discussed in the next section.

4.4 THE INTERACTIVE POTENTIAL OF THE INTERNET

One of the most dynamic and revolutionary changes in the history of marketing is being driven by advances in technology and developments that have led to the dramatic growth of communications through interactive media, particularly the Internet (Belch & Belch, 2004:20).

Interactive media allow for a back-and-forth flow of information where users can participate in and modify the form and content of the information they receive in real time (Belch & Belch, 2004:20). Unlike traditional forms of marketing communications such as advertising, which is one-way in nature, the new media allow users to perform a variety of functions such as receive and alter information and images, make enquiries, respond to questions, and make purchases (Belch & Belch, 2004:20).

Interactive media have four major characteristics that distinguish them from mass media. These include: (1) they can target individuals as well as customer segments, (2) they enable customers and prospects to respond to a firm's communication, (3) they are more measurable and accountable than mass media, and (4) they demand more attention than mass media because of the personalised brand messages they carry (Duncan, 2002:422).

Although the roots of online marketing still lie within the traditional marketing concepts, it branches out in a most important manner to encompass interactivity (Janal, 2000:21). Among the various characteristics of the Internet, interactivity is certainly a defining and distinguishing feature not found in traditional media (Tse & Chan, 2004:369).

Darby *et al.* (2003:110) assert that the Internet's potential for interactivity enables greater effectiveness in many aspects of online marketing. These include Web advertising, building brand image, building customer loyalty, providing information, providing customer service, selling, public relations and market research.

A static display of text and graphics, even good graphics, is not sufficient to engage most visitors or encourage repeat visits. Web sites must *do* things. In particular, a firm's site must

find ways to involve visitors with fast, useful and easy-to-use interactive tools (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:79). Sterne (1999:6) supports this when he points out that one of the most important aspects to remember in building a successful Web site is that a Web site is not something people read, it is something they do.

Ghose and Dou (1998:369-374) studied interactive functions and found that the greater the degree of interactivity, the higher the Web site's attractiveness. Interactivity in a Web site can take many forms including, customer support activities, market research activities, personal choice helpers, advertising/promotion/publicity activities, as well as entertainment activities.

Chakraborty, Lala and Warren (2003:52) identified that the ability of a Web site to perform transaction-related tasks (e.g., making purchases and order tracking) are also an important facet of interactivity. Constantinides (2004:118) mentions that interactive elements contribute to a positive customer experience by both reducing uncertainty during the online transaction and the cognitive dissonance experienced thereafter.

Interactivity via a firm's Web site can thus be conceptualised into two dimensions, namely transaction-related and non-transaction-related. *Transaction-related interactivity* focuses on prospects' and customers' activities that culminate directly in a transaction (e.g., the ability to place orders, make payments and track orders).

Non-transaction-related interactivity, on the other hand, refers to activities that do not directly lead to a transaction (e.g., the ability to interact with other users and the ability to compare competitors' product features) (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2003:52). Regardless of whether or not interactivity leads directly to commercial transactions, customers consider such activities important (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2003:52).

Future research in a South African context could explore whether South African online consumers consider both transaction and non-transaction-related interactivity activities to be important and thus contribute to increasing the Web site's attractiveness.

The interactive potential of the Internet contributes to the uniqueness of the Internet as a marketing communications medium over other media (Coviello, Milley & Marcolin, 2001:18-33). The next section considers a number of aspects that relate to the potential of the Internet as a marketing communications medium.

4.5 THE INTERNET AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM

As a medium, the Internet has the potential to combine the characteristics of many other media (Duncan, 2002:417). It offers capabilities similar to those of newspapers and magazines (text and graphics), radio (sound) and television (video) in one concise package (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231). It offers by far the richest and most diverse content of any medium that has ever existed (Duncan, 2002:417).

Although it can be argued that, due to its interactive potential, the Internet is largely a “pull” medium (Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000:150; Rowley, 2004:26), it is also a “push” medium (Semenik, 2002:307-308).

Traditional marketing communications media (particularly broadcast media), are push technologies. With **push marketing** tactics, the marketer delivers communications messages to the target audience at the marketer’s choosing, retaining control over when, where and how the advertising message is delivered (Semenik, 2002:307-308). Push technologies follow the one-to-many communications model (see Figure 7, p. 59) and are linear. Communications messages are thus “pushed” to the target audience (Rowley, 2004:26).

Internet marketing incorporates the concept of push marketing and develops its own unique set of push marketing techniques using Internet technologies. According to Webopedia (www.webopedia.com), a Web-based Internet dictionary for Internet technology, the word *push*, in an Internet environment, means to send data to a customer without the customer

requesting it. Technically, the Web is based on a *pull* technology where the customer browser must request a Web page before it is sent (Zhou, 2004:108-115).

E-mail is the oldest and most widely used push technology on the Internet. It is a push technology because one receives e-mail whether one asks for it or not (i.e., at least in theory), as the sender pushes the message to the receiver. Other examples of Internet push marketing techniques include search engines, banner advertising, interstitials, online promotions, affiliate marketing programmes and online sponsorships (Zhou, 2004:108-115). These aspects are considered further in chapter 5.

The Internet also follows **pull marketing** tactics. With pull marketing, permission is requested from the target audience to send a marketing message (Semenik, 2002:307-308; Zhou, 2004:115). Pull marketing is thus also referred to as *opt-in* or *permission marketing* (Zhou, 2004:108).

Opt-in marketing empowers users to explicitly request information from Internet marketers by means of e-mail, electronic newsletters (e-newsletters) or other Internet communications tools for targeted information or advertising from firms. E-mail and e-newsletters (see section 5.5.3 and 5.4.3) are two of the most popular opt-in marketing tools (Zhou, 2004:115).

In the past, marketers have controlled the content and flow of information (i.e., it was a one-way communication). The new many-to-many model within a hypermedia CME (see Figure 9, p. 61) shows how consumers can now be in greater control of information about products and services and not only receive information, but also provide information to the firm and other online consumers (Semenik, 2002:36).

Online customers can decide *when* to get the information they seek, as well as decide *what* information they want from the Web site (Bothma, 2000:103). This is supported by Lubbe (2003:222) who mentions that the Internet is now creating the opportunity for consumers in the tourism industry to gather their *own* information, compile their *own* itineraries and make their *own* travel arrangements and bookings. By directly communicating with the relevant

suppliers, consumers are able to view and then purchase products and services without ever having to consult a travel agent.

The Internet is regarded as a perfect marketing tool for the tourism industry (Lubbe, 2003:221). A Web site tries to attract people by pulling them in with the promise of content, while e-mail pushes its message into a previous visitor's mailbox (Zhou, 2004:103).

The Internet as a marketing communications medium presents tourism firms with a wide variety of benefits, but is also not without its shortcomings. The advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium are considered in the next section.

4.6 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE INTERNET AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM

The Internet as a marketing communications medium has a number of advantages and disadvantages for tourism firms. The advantages of this medium are first highlighted followed by a discussion of its disadvantages.

The advantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium for tourism firms include:

Target marketing: The Web has the ability to target very specific groups of individuals with a minimum waste coverage. In the business-to-business market, the Internet resembles a combination of a trade magazine and a trade show, as only those who are most interested in the firm's offerings will visit the site (Belch & Belch, 2004:504; Rao, 1997:231). For the consumer market, through personalisation and other targeting techniques, Web sites are becoming more tailored to meet the individual's needs and wants (Belch & Belch, 2004:504).

Message tailoring: Due to precise targeting, messages can be designed to appeal to the specific needs and wants of the target audience. The interactive capabilities of the Internet make it possible to support one-to-one marketing with increased success in both the business and consumer markets (Belch & Belch, 2004:504-505).

The benefits that firms are able to achieve through one-to-one marketing and the ability to personalise their online activities include customer loyalty, competitive advantage, lower marketing costs, ability to identify most profitable customer relationships, additional revenue from premium services and the ability to adapt and improve their Web sites, products and services (Allen, Kania & Yaeckel, 1998:85).

Interactive capabilities: The fact that the Internet can support two-way interaction between the Web site and the visitor is one of the greatest differences and benefits over traditional media (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rowley, 2004:25-26). Because the Internet is interactive, it provides strong potential for increasing customer involvement and satisfaction and almost immediate feedback for buyers and sellers (Belch & Belch, 204:505).

Sales potential: Visitors are able to interact with a firm's Web site to create exactly the configuration of information, products or services they desire. These products or services can then immediately be downloaded or ordered (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:486; Belch & Belch, 2004:505). Purchasing online is easy, private and convenient for consumers. It is predicted that online sales will continue to grow in the future for both business-to-business and consumer segments (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:486).

The Internet serves as a direct distribution channel that allows tourism marketers to reach consumers without using a travel agent. Today millions of rands in tourism and hospitality offerings are booked on the Web (George, 2001:206). The Internet is also particularly useful for last minute bookings because it is possible to buy products on-line and directly, when booking agents and receptions are closed (Briggs, 1997:132).

Multimedia: Internet media provides full support for multimedia applications. The Web makes it possible to exchange audio and visual information as well as text messages. Thus, on the WWW, a product can not only be seen and explained; it can also be heard and demonstrated (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Duncan, 2002:417; Lubbe, 2003:221; Rao, 1997:231).

Hotels, tour operators and destinations will benefit from imaginative and practical multimedia presentations of their products. Internet users are able to download video images of facilities and destinations via the Internet. They can thus obtain a clearer picture of what to expect from an accommodation establishment or destination before making a reservation (Briggs, 1997:32; Sweeney, 2000:363).

Accessibility: The Web makes it possible for the customer to have immediate access to information 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days per year (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Lubbe, 2003:221).

Speed: For those requesting information on a firm, its products and/or service offerings, the Internet is the quickest means of acquiring this information (Belch & Belch, 2004:505). Information travels across the Internet almost instantaneously in and to most parts of the world (Duncan, 2002:417).

Information access: Internet users are able to find a wealth of information about firms, products, competitors and virtually every subject imaginable over the Internet. They can find a plethora of comparative information, such as product specifications, costs and purchase information. Links to other relevant sites (see section 5.2.6) will also direct them to even more information if so desired. Good Web sites often provide more information in more useful forms than even the most solicitous salesperson can (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:486; Belch & Belch, 2004:505; Duncan, 2002:417).

A major advantage of the Internet for the tourism industry is its ability to disseminate a virtually immeasurable amount of tourism information online, both for travel professionals and the general public (Dickman, 1999:402).

Infinite space, dynamic and flexible: Unlike conventional media, there is no limit to the amount of space on the Internet. Firms are able to publish information on the Internet with no limitation to the number of pages as well as any extra printing and publishing costs. Internet media is also dynamic in that last minute changes and additions can be made to this information with little effort. Information can also be updated and expanded at a relatively low cost (Ainscough & Luckett, 1996:3; Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:487; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231).

Global access: The Internet allows for high global visibility. Firms have the capacity to reach a maximum number of customers and provide them with information about their firm and products instantly (Ainscough & Luckett, 1996:3; Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:487; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Lubbe, 2003:221; Rao, 1997:231).

Compared with traditional media, access opportunities on the Web are equal for all players, regardless of size. The Internet as a marketing communications tool is thus especially beneficial to smaller firms who wish to expand their business globally, but do not have the capital or resources to do so (Kiani, 1998:188; Wilson & Abel, 2002:88-89).

Previously, due to budget constraints and market limitations, small businesses in remote areas had difficulty marketing their services to potential customers. With the Internet, however, geographic location is no longer a constraint. A bed-and-breakfast establishment in a small town, previously unknown to outsiders, can now reach potential customers by having its own Web site or having products and services listed on a Web portal (Zhou, 2004:6).

Complement to IMC: The Internet both complements and is complemented by other IMC media. It thus serves as a vital link in the integrative process (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:487).

Despite these advantages, the Internet as a marketing communications medium is not without its weaknesses. The main disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium include:

Active decision to visit: A practical limitation of the Internet is that the user must actively decide to visit the Web site. Unlike radio and television, there is an element of choice in using the Internet rather than an element of surprise. There is thus no guarantee that anyone will visit a firm's Web site (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:562).

Online competition: There is intense competition in an Internet environment because a firm's Web site has to compete with millions of other sites, all of which are trying to attract and retain visitors (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:562).

Privacy: Customer privacy has become one of the burning issues of the Internet. Privacy issues generally revolve around security and privacy of sensitive customer information related to online sales and services transactions, the collection and use of customer data and statistics, as well as the protection of a customer's right to privacy (Bothma, 2000:8; Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:465-466). Internet marketers should be careful not to impinge upon the privacy of others. Firms should abide by the policy on privacy as issued by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (see www.iab.net) (Belch & Belch, 2004:506).

Download time: It may sometimes take a long time to download information from the Internet. As the number of Internet users increases, the download time increases and some sites may even be inaccessible as a result of too many visitors. The current development of broadband access technology is, however, helping to reduce this problem (Belch & Belch, 2004:505).

Irritation: A number of studies have reported that Internet users find certain Web tactics to be irritating. Studies have shown online consumers' discontent with aspects such as clutter, e-mail SPAM, as well as pop-up and pop-under advertisements. These irritating aspects

discourage Internet users from visiting sites that employ these tactics (Belch & Belch, 2004:504-506).

Poor reach: Even though the number of Internet users is constantly on the rise, its reach is still far behind that of other media such as television. As a result many firms have turned to traditional media to support Internet communications in order to achieve reach and awareness goals (Belch & Belch, 2004:506).

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explained the traditional communications process and presented a new communications model for a hypermedia CME. The interactive nature of the Internet was discussed and the potential of the Internet as a marketing communications medium was considered. A range of advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium for tourism firms were also presented.

The next chapter considers the Internet and the different elements of the marketing communications mix. It also provides support for the research questions that have been formulated for this study.

CHAPTER 5: THE INTERNET AND THE ELEMENTS OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MIX

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the manner in which the Internet can be used as a marketing communications medium for firms in the tourism industry. This chapter, specifically, considers ways in which the different elements of the marketing communications mix, namely *advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling* (see Table 3), can be applied in an online environment via a firm's Web site.

Table 3: The elements of the marketing communications mix

The marketing communications mix elements include:

- Advertising
- Sales promotion
- Public relations
- Direct marketing
- Personal selling

A number of specific online marketing communications techniques that could be employed in a firm's Web site is presented for each of the elements listed in Table 3. These techniques are summarised in Table 11 (see p. 173). It is important to note that this study focuses specifically on techniques that can be included in a tourism firm's own Web site and not on broader issues related to Internet marketing communications in a tourism context.

This chapter begins by considering the Internet in relation to advertising. The next section defines Internet advertising and the importance of attracting visitors to a Web site is highlighted. A number of ways in which firms could attract visitors to their sites is then considered. The manner in which Web site traffic and advertising effectiveness is measured is also examined in the next section.

5.2 INTERNET ADVERTISING

The Internet is regarded as an advertising medium similar to broadcast or print (Belch & Belch, 2004:496). A range of definitions for advertising has been proposed. A few recent definitions are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Definitions of advertising

Definition	Source
"...any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor".	Armstrong & Kotler (2005:399)
"...any paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor".	Belch & Belch (2004:16)
"...any non-personal form of mass communication about a product or service, paid for by an identified sponsor".	Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> (2003:31)
"...any form of paid communication in which the sponsor or firm is identified".	Lamb <i>et al.</i> (2004:316)
"...a paid, mass-mediated attempt to persuade".	Semenik (2002:9-10)

The key difference between advertising and other forms of marketing communications is that it is impersonal and communicates with large numbers of people through paid media channels (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:604). Nevertheless, as this study focuses on the way in which advertising can be applied within an Internet environment, a definition for Internet advertising is employed.

Semenik (2002:10) defines *Internet advertising* as: "...a form of advertising in which the message is carried over the Internet rather than [through] traditional mass media".

Tourism and hospitality advertising enables principals (e.g., tour operators, attractions and hotels) to reach people (target markets) in their own homes or in other places, and to communicate messages intended to influence buying behaviour. Tourism and hospitality marketers are now also making greater use of the Internet as a vehicle for advertising their offerings (George, 2001:235).

Online advertising serves a useful purpose, especially as a supplement to other marketing efforts. It will, however, not soon rival advertising through the major television and print media in terms of advertising expenditure (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:501). Nevertheless, it is expected that Internet advertising will in future account for a growing proportion of overall advertising expenditure (Cartellieri, Parson, Rao & Zeisser, 1997:291).

South Africa's total Web advertising was estimated at R150 million in 2005, an increase from R45 million in 2000. However, with an estimated R14 billion advertising market in South Africa, Internet advertising represents less than 1% of the total advertising spend, compared to an average of 2% internationally. Taking this into account, it is evident that there is much room for improvement in South Africa with regards to Internet advertising (Parkin, 2005).

Although online advertising is still in its early stages in South Africa, leading advertising agencies are now using an integrated approach, bringing online advertising into the marketing communications mix, to provide maximum advertising reach to their respective clients. South African online advertising is thus beginning to grow its share of local advertising spend (Business in Africa Online, 2005; Parkin, 2005). In addition, Russell Hanly, chairperson of the South African Online Publishers Association (OPA), claims that the South African online advertising industry is now starting to reflect growth trends seen in the United States, Asia and Europe (Business in Africa Online, 2005).

Chapter 4 considered the Internet as a marketing communications medium. A range of advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a marketing communications medium were highlighted (see section 4.6). This has implications for tourism firms with regards to online advertising. One of the major disadvantages of online advertising is that the user must actively decide to visit the firm's Web site (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:562). Tourism firms need to consider this when using the Internet as an advertising medium.

The importance of attracting visitors to a firm's Web site is discussed below and a variety of ways in which visitors could be attracted to a firm's site is then considered.

5.2.1 The importance of attracting visitors to a firm's Web site

There is no point in having a Web site if nobody ever gets to see it. The importance of attracting visitors to a firm's Web site is constantly emphasised in the literature on Internet marketing (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:45; Geissler, 2001:497; Kiani, 1998:185-191; Kleindl, 2001:61; Rowley, 2004:28; Simeon, 1999:297-308).

Geissler (2001:497) found that a "build it and they will come" approach is not valid in the increasingly competitive arena of Web marketing. In addition, Kiani (1998:185-191) asserts that a policy of "build it and they will come" might work in the marketplace, but it does not work in the marketspace. Unlike direct and traditional mass marketing, digital marketing requires consumers to voluntarily visit a Web site. Hence, Internet marketers need to actively attract users.

This view is further supported by Kleindl (2001:61) who notes that traditional media gain attention by designing messages with enough impact to attract and hold the audience. The messages are repeated numerous times. A Web site differs from traditional media in that the receiver must actually use the Internet to link to the Web page content. An individual will not be exposed to the intended marketing message unless he or she is actively viewing a Web site (Kleindl, 2001:61).

Ainscough and Lockett (1996:45) assert that promoting one's products or firm over the Internet can be an extremely cost-effective method to reach potential customers worldwide. However, once the Web site is online, firms must initially wait for customers to come to them. In light of this, an important consideration for an Internet marketer is how visitors will find their way to the site (Thelwall, 2001:114). This is a crucial question because the effectiveness of an online initiative depends on the number of potential customers that access the site.

Simeon (1999:297-308) developed the *attracting, informing, positioning and delivering* (AIPD) approach as a method for evaluating commercial Web sites. The main assertion of this approach is that, in order for a firm to develop or maximise the strategic potential of its site, it

should enhance and integrate the site's overall capacity to attract, inform, position and deliver. Simeon (1999:297-308) posits that after establishing a presence on the Internet, one of the primary objectives of a new Web site is to *attract* a variety of interested parties to visit the firm's online presence.

Rowley (2004:28) contends that although, similar to an advertisement, a Web site can be used to inform, persuade and remind customers about a firm or its products, its impact will be minimal unless other strategies are adopted to draw visitors to the site. Simply building a Web site is not sufficient to create a Web presence. Marketing communications activities associated with a Web site also need to be designed to attract visitors and thereby achieve a satisfactory marketing outcome.

Taking the above into account, it can be deduced that it is essential for firms to understand how to effectively attract their target audiences to their Web site. Awareness of the site should be created through every means possible (Geissler, 2001:493). Table 5 summarises several ways in which firms could attract visitors to their Web sites.

Table 5: Means of attracting visitors to a firm's Web site

Ways in which firms could attract visitors to their Web site include:

- Publishing the URL in other media
- Stimulating positive word-of-mouth communications about the site
- Listings on search engines
- Online advertising:
 - Banner advertisements
 - Sidebar advertisements
 - Interstitials
 - Floating advertisements
 - Unicast advertisements
- Links to and from other sites:
 - Reciprocal links and banner exchanges
 - Sponsorships
 - Affiliate programmes

The various ways in which firms could attract visitors to their Web site are now discussed. It should be noted that this study specifically focuses on *techniques* that could be employed in a

tourism site to support Internet advertising. Future research could investigate other issues related to Internet advertising in the South African tourism and hospitality industry.

5.2.2 Publishing the URL in other media

One of the first steps in drawing an audience's attention to a Web site is to include the site's Uniform Resource Locator (URL) (i.e., the Web site address) in other media (Kleindl, 2001:61). Since visitors can be directed from offline marketing communications activities to request additional information or order online, a firm should promote its URL in every piece of marketing communications material that it produces (Sweeney, 2000:437). The more exposure the firm's URL receives, the more likely it is that people will remember it when they go online (Sweeney, 2000:437).

This is confirmed in a study by Geissler (2001:492) where Web site designers were asked which other media they would recommend to make customers aware of a site. The designers agreed that any materials that include the firm's name should also include the Web site address to facilitate consumer awareness thereof. In addition, Ainscough and Lockett (1996:45) claim that the time that firms have to wait for customers to reach their site once established, can be considerably shortened by giving the Web site address in traditional marketing communications materials.

Pardun and Lamb (1999:93-99) investigated the presence of Web addresses (URLs) in traditional print advertisements through a content analysis of 1 249 advertisements from the top 20 magazines in the United States market (ranked by revenues). They found that only 42% of the advertisements included Web site addresses. Future research could replicate this study in a South African context.

As this study focuses on online marketing communications techniques that could be employed in a Web site, the extent to which the lodges include their Web site addresses in

other media is not investigated. Future research could, however, explore this issue in a South African context.

5.2.3 Stimulating positive word-of-mouth communications about the site

As was highlighted in section 4.2, the communications *channel* is the method by which communication is transmitted from the source or sender to the receiver (Shimp, 2003:82). At the broadest level, communications channels comprise two types, namely non-personal and personal (Belch & Belch, 2004:143).

Non-personal channels carry messages without interpersonal contact between the sender and receiver. These are generally referred to as mass media or mass communications because the message is sent to many individuals at once (Belch & Belch, 2004:143).

Personal channels, on the other hand, refer to direct interpersonal contact with target individuals or groups (Belch & Belch, 2004:143). Salespeople serve as personal channels of communications when delivering their sales message to a buyer or potential consumer. Social channels of communications such as friends, neighbours, associates, co-workers or family members, are also personal channels. They often engage in *word-of-mouth (WOM) communications* which is a powerful source of information for consumers (Belch & Belch, 2004:143).

With WOM, consumers usually spread the brand message and discover products themselves. This could result in positive or negative WOM communications. The idea, however, is to harness the power of positive WOM communications (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:431; Duncan, 2002:558).

Positive WOM is a critical element in the success of a new product or service. Unfavourable WOM, on the other hand, can have disastrous effects on new product adoption, because

consumers generally tend to place more weight on negative than on positive information when making evaluations (Shimp, 2003:169).

People generally interact with family members, friends and work associates daily or on a regular basis. These interactions are referred to as “strong ties”. People also interact with other people where communications may not be as frequent or strong (e.g., interactions with a shop assistant in a clothing store or two couples sitting next to each other on a game drive). These are “weak” ties (Shimp, 2003:167). WOM communications take place through both these strong and weak ties where information is exchanged about popular topics such as new products, new restaurants or recently released movies (Shimp, 2003:167).

In addition, due to the great potential of WOM to influence consumers’ attitudes and actions, many marketers have found that it is essential to proactively influence what is said about their brands, rather than hoping that positive WOM is occurring (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:431; Shimp, 2003:169). Marketers refer to this deliberate stimulation of spreading positive brand messages as “creating the buzz”. The terms *guerrilla marketing*, *viral marketing*, *diffusion marketing* and *street marketing* are also used to refer to proactive efforts to spread positive WOM information and encourage product usage (Shimp, 2003:169).

Visitors can be attracted to Web sites through both traditional and online WOM communications (Semenik, 2002:311). WOM that takes place via the Internet is referred to as *viral marketing* (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:500; Duncan, 2002:558). Viral marketing is elaborated upon further in section 5.4.4.

Although WOM is a way in which a firm’s brand or Web site is “advertised” among consumers, traditional advertising is usually described as being any “paid form of non-personal communications” (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399; Belch & Belch, 2004:16; Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:5).

WOM is not necessarily paid for and can also take place by means of interpersonal communications. Many authors thus regard WOM as a form of public relations rather than

advertising (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:431; Duncan, 2002:558). This study follows the same approach. The manner in which positive WOM can be encouraged through a firm's Web site is thus discussed under public relations (see section 5.4) rather than advertising.

5.2.4 Listings on search engines

Internet users can find Web sites online by advertising in the form of search engines that are "paid for" (Semenik, 2002:309; Sweeney, 2000:43). A *search engine* is a software programme that finds Web sites and Web pages (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.12). Search engines are particularly helpful in locating Web pages about certain topics or in locating specific pages for which one does not know the exact Web site address (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.12).

When using a search engine, a user simply enters a word or phrase, known as *search text* or *keywords*, in the search engine's text box. The user then clicks the search button and the search engine displays a list of *hits* or Web page names, which contain the search text (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.13). Figure 18 in Appendix D illustrates where the search text "South African graded lodges" has been entered into the search engine's text box and the search button. Figure 19 in Appendix D shows the hits that were obtained from entering this search text.

- **Types of search engines**

There are three types of search engines, namely those that use Web spiders (or bots), search directories and Meta search engines (Kleindl, 2001:62; NCSI, 2002).

Some search engines use Web spiders to collect information from sites. *Web spiders* are software robots (or bots) that "crawl" through the Internet looking at Web sites. They collect site information and send it back to the search engine database, allowing information to be retrieved (Kleindl, 2001:62).

These search engines are ideal when one is looking for a specific topic or a particular document, Web site or meaning of a concept (NCSI, 2002). Examples of search engines

using “Web spiders” include Google (www.google.com), Hotbot (www.hotbot.com), Fast Search (www.alltheweb.com), Looksmart (www.looksmart.com) and Altavista (www.altavista.com) (NCSI, 2002; Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.12).

The readers of Search Engine Watch have recently voted Google as the “Most Outstanding Search Engine” for a fourth time. Google has, therefore, earned a well-deserved reputation as the top choice for those searching the Web. This crawler-based search engine provides both comprehensive coverage of the Web along with great relevancy (Sullivan, 2004).

The second type of search engine is *search directories*. Directories only include links to Web pages that have been screened and catalogued by human beings (Kleindl, 2001:62; New Media in Business Ltd, 2000). These directories are lists similar to the Yellow Pages, with links and Web site information organised according to specific content (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:315).

Although search directories may be beneficial for doing general searches, their databases are limited and may omit a significant portion of the vast information available on the Web (Semenik, 2002:309). Yahoo! was launched in 1994 and is the Web’s oldest search directory (Sullivan, 2004). Other examples of search directories include Academicinfo (www.academicinfo.net), Librarian’s Index (www.lii.org) and WWW Virtual Library (www.vlib.org) (NCSI, 2002).

There are also a number of South African search engines and directories. Examples of these include *Ananzi*, *Aardvark*, *Brabys*, *EasyInfo*, *Aha.co.za* and *WoYaa* (Online Promotions & Graphix, n.d.). *Ananzi* and *Aardvark* are considered as the most popular South African search engines (Intus, 2004).

The third type of search engine is *Meta search engines*. These search engines do exhaustive searches by sending requests to several search engines simultaneously (NCSI, 2002).

Meta search engines are good for simple searches, particularly if search terms are distinctive or unique. They are useful when one wants to do a search in a hurry to find a few relevant sites quickly (NCSI, 2002). Examples of these search engines include Metacrawler (www.metacrawler.com), Dogpile (www.dogpile.com) and Mamma (www.mamma.com) (NCSI, 2002).

When most Internet users use search engines, one of the first 10 results returned by a search engine is usually good enough to meet their needs (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:204). For this reason, it is important that a firm's URL/details appear in the first 10 search results to obtain maximum Web exposure and increase the number of visitors to the firm's site.

- **Obtaining top search engine rankings**

Firms are able to obtain top rankings in search engine results in two ways (Figure 20 in Appendix D illustrates these two approaches). First, some search engines allow firms to bid on keywords. The site listing of the high bidders for a keyword or group of keywords will be displayed higher on the list of search results (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:177).

The second approach involves selling and displaying a keyword-triggered text-only advertisement on the results page. This advertisement appears only when a certain keyword is searched by the user. Even though it is not known how often people using search engines see these advertisements in the far right hand column of the search results page, this approach has great appeal as the advertisement only appears to users that have searched for a particular phrase. This "self-selection" approach is more effective and possibly more cost-effective than simply displaying advertisements at random to any user who may be exposed to information they may not necessarily be interested in (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:177).

Because search engines are used to *find* Web sites and Web pages over the Internet, they are not techniques that can be included in the Web sites examined in this study. Aspects concerning search engines are, therefore, not included in this study.

Future research in South Africa could examine the extent to which South Africans use search engines to find various sites, which search engines (both national and international) are most popular among South African Internet users, and how effective search engines are in attracting visitors in the form of paying to have listings come up first in the search engine's results or by paying to place simple text advertisements alongside the search results.

In addition to publishing the URL in other media, stimulating positive word-of-mouth communications about a site and using search engines, online advertisements could also be used to attract visitors to a Web site. The different online advertising formats are discussed in the next section.

5.2.5 Online advertising formats

There are a number of different forms of Internet advertisements. Examples of these include banner advertisements, sidebar advertisements, interstitials, floating advertisements and unicast advertisements. These different formats are discussed below.

- **Banner advertisements**

Banner advertising is the most common and most recognised form of online advertising (Sweeney, 2000:264). Banner advertisements are advertisements that firms buy and place on other online advertising vehicles such as search engines, chat rooms, online magazines and other Web sites (Janal, 2000:296).

Banner advertisements are usually small rectangular advertisements that appear on a Web page (Harris, 2005a). They exemplify the application of old offline advertising techniques to the Internet and have been described as “electronic billboards” that come in a variety of shapes and sizes (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:197).

Standard formats have been developed for banner advertisements by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (www.iab.net). The IAB specifies eight different banner sizes

according to pixel dimensions. A *pixel* is the smallest unit of colour used to make up images on a computer or television screen (Harris, 2005a). Figure 21 in Appendix E shows a typical banner advertisement, while Figure 22 illustrates the eight different banner sizes specified by the IAB.

Banner advertisements are, to a certain extent, similar to traditional print advertisements, but they have the added ability to bring a potential customer directly to the advertiser's Web site (Harris, 2005a). Taking this into account, the primary goal of the Web marketer is to provide enough advertising information to get users to click on the advertisement, which takes them to a Web site or to a special section in a site (Allen *et al.*, 1998:241; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:174).

A second important objective of banner advertising is to build brand awareness through repetitive impressions made on a Web user (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:174). Banner advertising also provides marketers with the ability to enhance product perceptions, increase purchase intent and generate high volumes of traffic to a Web site quickly and cost effectively (Channel One, 2000:53).

Currently two major formats of banner advertisements exist, namely static (also referred to as simple or billboard) banners and media rich (also known as animated or interactive) banners (Allen *et al.*, 1998:241; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:174; Newman, Stem & Spratt, 2004:273). *Static* banner advertisements are interactive, but without movement. *Media rich* banner advertisements are more interactive, utilising multimedia animation, sound and movement within the banner (Newman *et al.*, 2004:273).

There are a number of advantages of Web banner advertising versus other forms of traditional advertising. For example, one is able to control who sees which banner advertisement, if a banner advertisement is not performing it can be changed on the same day, and one is easily able to test multiple advertisements and receive rapid or even real-time performance data (Allen *et al.*, 1998:241). These benefits contribute to making banner advertising very attractive to Web marketers (Allen *et al.*, 1998:241).

Despite these benefits, advertisers concluded that banner advertisements were not as effective as full-page magazine advertisements or 30-second television commercials (Brain, 2005). Nevertheless, due to the incredible glut of advertising space and the communications potential of the Internet, a number of other online advertising formats have been developed in addition to simple banner advertisements (Brain, 2005). Some of the other online advertising formats are highlighted below.

- **Sidebar advertisements**

Sidebar advertisements (also known as skyscrapers) are tall, skinny advertisements at the side of a Web page (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:499). These online advertisements are similar to banner advertisements, but are vertically rather than horizontally placed (Brain, 2005). As these advertisements are vertical, the height of a sidebar advertisement can often reach 600 pixels or more. These advertisements are generally 120 pixels wide (Brain, 2005). Figure 23 in Appendix E illustrates a typical sidebar advertisement.

Brain (2005) claims that a sidebar advertisement has more impact than a banner advertisement for at least two reasons. First, a sidebar advertisement is usually two to three times larger than a banner advertisement. Second, one cannot scroll a sidebar advertisement off the screen. With a banner advertisement one can scroll just 60 pixels down and the advertisement is gone. A sidebar advertisement, however, remains on one's computer screen much longer. Because of this increased impact, sidebar advertisements have a higher branding power and a higher click-through rate than normal banner advertisements (Brain, 2005).

- **Interstitials**

An interstitial is an online advertisement that “pops up” in its own window between changes on a Web site (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:499). Two types of interstitials include pop-up and pop-under advertisements (Brain, 2005).

A *pop-up advertisement* obscures the Web page that one is trying to read so one will have to close the pop-up window or move it out of the way. *Pop-under* advertisements are similar but

are placed underneath the content one is trying to read and are thus less intrusive (Brain, 2005). Figure 24 in Appendix E illustrates a typical pop-up advertisement and Figure 25 in Appendix E shows a typical site with two pop-up advertisements that obscure the home page.

Pop-up and pop-under online advertisements may annoy users because they clutter the desktop and take time to close (Brain, 2005). *Pop-up blockers* are programmes that prevent pop-up advertisements from displaying. Both the Google and Yahoo toolbars include the ability to block pop-ups. Internet users are also able to download free pop-up blockers (e.g., STOPzilla and Panicware) from the Internet (TechTarget, 2005). Even though users have the ability to “block” these types of online advertisements, Brain (2005) contends that interstitials are more effective than typical banner advertisements.

- **Floating advertisements**

These online advertisements, also known as *tickers*, appear when one first goes to a Web page. They “float” or “fly” over the page for anywhere from five to thirty seconds. While they are on the screen, tickers obscure one’s view of the underlying Web page. They can also block mouse input (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:499; Brain, 2005). Figure 26 in Appendix E shows a screenshot of a typical floating advertisement for a Norton software product.

Floating advertisements are being used more frequently for several reasons. First, tickers definitely get the viewer’s attention. This is because they are animated and can even include sound. Second, similar to television advertisements, they “interrupt the programme” and force one to watch them. They can also take up the entire screen. Hence, from a branding viewpoint, they are regarded as being far more powerful than banner advertisements and sidebars. Floating advertisements cannot be ignored and have a high click-through rate (Brain, 2005).

- **Unicast advertisements**

A unicast advertisement is basically a television commercial that runs in a pop-up window (Brain, 2005). It is animated, has sound and can last anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds. This form of online advertising has roughly the same branding power as a television commercial,

however, they offer the added ability for the Web user to click on the advertisement for more information. Brain (2005) claims that people do, in fact, click on these online advertisements at an amazing rate. Examples of unicast advertisements can be found at www.unicast.com.

A firm's Web site is its online presence. When tourism firms place advertisements on other tourism-related Web sites, people interested in the firm's offering are encouraged to click through and visit the advertiser's site (Sweeney, 2000:260). The online advertising formats discussed above are typically designed to lead the visitor to a particular Web site. The graded lodges investigated in this study may place these advertisements on *other* Web sites in order to lead visitors to their own site.

This study focuses on online techniques that can be implemented *within* the Web sites of the graded lodges investigated. For this reason, aspects relating to the different online advertising formats are not examined in this study. Future research could determine the extent to which the lodges and other tourism accommodation establishments in South Africa use these online advertising formats as a form of Internet advertising to attract visitors to their sites.

Firms could also attract visitors to their Web sites by placing links on other sites as well as within a firm's own site. This aspect is now discussed.

5.2.6 Advertising by means of links to and from other sites

A *link* is a connection between a location on a Web page and another location on the same or a different page on the Internet. When a user clicks on a link, the location connected to the link is displayed. Text links are often underlined and shown in blue. Graphics can also be linked. When the mouse is pointed at a link, the mouse pointer usually changes to a pointing hand (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:315).

There are a number of ways in which firms promote themselves online by providing links to and from other sites. These include reciprocal links and banner exchanges, sponsorships, as well as affiliate programmes.

- **Reciprocal links and banner exchanges**

Reciprocal linking is an online technique in which firms place links on each other's sites. It implies an "I'll-link-to-you-if-you-link-to-me" approach. *Banner exchanging* is a variation of reciprocal linking which means "I'll put your banner on my site if you'll put my banner on your site". Both of these techniques increase the likelihood that people will find a firm's site (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:177).

- **Sponsorships**

Other types of Web advertisements include sponsorship or co-branded advertisements integrating a firm's brand with the editorial content of the Web site (Kleindl, 2001:63). Many firms gain name exposure on the Internet by sponsoring special content, such as news or financial information, on various Web sites. The sponsor pays for showing the content and, in turn, receives recognition as the provider of the particular service on the site. Sponsorships are best placed in carefully targeted sites, where they offer relevant information or service to the audience (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:500).

- **Affiliate programmes**

An *affiliation* is a link from one site that takes visitors to some other site (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:178). Affiliate programmes, also known as *associate programmes*, are arrangements in which online merchants pay affiliate sites a commission to send them traffic. These affiliate sites post links to the merchant site and are paid according to a particular agreement (Harris, 2005b).

Tourism firms could, for example, join an affiliate programme such as Amazon.com. In this case, a properly encoded link is placed on the tourism firm's site that directs a visitor to the Amazon.com site. When the visitor decides to purchase an item from Amazon.com, the tourism firm receives a percentage of that sale (Sweeney, 2000:292).

It is important for tourism firms to provide links to and from other sites (Sweeney, 2000:367) and this aspect is now discussed.

Given that tourism firms, especially those in an accommodation context, function within larger geographic regions, it is important for individual firms to be linked to a Web site of the larger regional destination. For example, if a businessman has to go to Cape Town for a conference he may not know where the nearest guest houses are situated. He may then visit a larger geographic site such as www.capestay.co.za (which he could find by means of a search engine or word-of-mouth). This site provides him with a list of guest houses in Cape Town and connects him to the Web sites of these guest houses where he can obtain the required information.

This study examines techniques that can be employed *within* the Web sites of the lodges rather than on other sites and thus does not examine this aspect. Despite this, it is also important for the lodges to include links to other sites within their own sites.

When considering the information that firms need to include on their Web sites, marketers should as a general rule, provide added value to their visitors by providing links to other relevant sites. Firms should list information sources on the Internet that their visitors will find interesting (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:235; Janal, 2000:79-84).

In relation to the tourism industry, Sweeney (2000:367) notes that a firm should provide links to other tourism sites that would be of interest to its target market. She points out that when people plan their vacation, they are always interested in knowing what else there is to do in the area they will be visiting. Figure 27 in Appendix F provides an example of a Web site of a lodge that provides visitors with links to other sites.

One of the most basic principles of Web design considers that firms should place reciprocal links on their sites as these links aid in driving traffic (Procknow, 1998:88). Madu and Madu (2002:251) identify that one of the features that should be included in designing a Web site to ensure e-quality, is to provide links to other relevant sites. One of the main reasons for

placing links on a firm's site is because other sites may deal better with some issues of interest to the user and there are often things that the user may want to know and seek in order to be satisfied with a virtual service operation (Madu & Madu, 2002:251).

Even though promotion by means of placing links on other sites may be greatly beneficial, Joergensen and Blythe (2003:53) point out that there is a disadvantage to this form of online promotion as it provides visitors with an opportunity to leave the firm's site. Nevertheless, the provision of links to other sites has also been identified as an important *traffic-sustaining technique* that ensures return visits to a firm's site and increases the time visitors spend on a site (Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:45-58).

The above discussion suggests that tourism firms should advertise online by placing links in their own sites that link to other sites. For this reason, the current study examines the extent to which the lodges investigated provide links to other sites. The first research question for this study, therefore, is:

Research question 1: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide links to other sites?

It is important to note that the current study does not distinguish between the different types of links placed on these sites (i.e., reciprocal links, banner exchanges, sponsorship links or affiliate links), but merely investigates whether these sites provide links to other sites or not. This study also does not determine the number of links that are placed on a site, but merely investigates whether or not the lodges employ this online advertising technique.

5.2.7 Measuring Web site traffic and advertising effectiveness

As marketers spend money for their communications in numerous media, the need to determine the effectiveness of these expenditures becomes increasingly important.

Measuring the effectiveness of the marketing communications programme is a critical element in the marketing communications planning process (Belch & Belch, 2004:620).

This study revolves around the Internet, which is a relatively new medium in comparison to more traditional media. Hence, a number of ways in which Web site effectiveness can be measured is briefly considered. Two forms of measuring Web site effectiveness, namely *traffic effectiveness* and *online advertising effectiveness* are now elaborated upon.

- **Measuring Web site traffic effectiveness**

Specialised software allows Internet marketers to monitor the levels of traffic at a site (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173). One way to measure traffic to a Web site is in the form of “hits”.

Hits to a site refer to the number of times that another computer has requested a site or a particular file on a site (Sweeney, 2000:262-263). Janal (2000:176) argues that *hit* is a very misleading term as a person would normally assume that a hit refers to a person visiting a Web site. In reality, however, it merely means the number of times a file on a Web page has been accessed (Janal, 2000:176). For example, when a user requests a page with four graphical images, it counts as five hits. Therefore, although the site may have generated five hits, only one person visited the site.

The number of hits to a site is thus regarded as an ineffective measurement technique (Janal, 2000:304; Sweeney, 2000:262-263). This is supported by Bickerton *et al.* (2000:208-209) who states that it would not be wise to define the quality of Internet development simply by the number of hits the site appears to elicit. A more effective approach would be to use hit rate figures together with the number of enquiries or leads one receives from the Web site.

A **lead** is counted when somebody goes to a firm’s site and makes an enquiry via e-mail or by completing an online response form, which provides the firm with customer information that qualifies them as a potential buyer (Sterne, 1999:265).

Janal (2000:188-189) highlights three ways to measure advertising effectiveness with regards to leads. The first approach is the *cost per lead* model that takes the amount of money spent on advertising and divides it by the number of leads generated. The second measure is *sales per lead*. Using this method, one takes the amount spent on advertising and divides this by the number of orders received. The third approach is the *profit per sale* where one takes the money spent on the advertisement and divides it by the profit per order.

- **Measuring results from online advertisements**

Palanisamy (2004:45-74) points out that *advertising effectiveness* is important as marketers need to know whether their advertisements have affected the target audience. A number of methods can be used to test the effectiveness of online advertising. Two common approaches are to measure the number of times an advertisement is viewed, or to measure the frequency with which users “click through” a banner advertisement to view additional information about a product or service.

The number of times a page containing an advertisement is visited is sometimes reflected in the price charged for advertising space (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173). When someone views a page that contains a banner advertisement, it is called an *impression*. Thus, if a person visits a page six times, this will generate six impressions (Sweeney, 2000:263). Impressions, therefore, refer to the number of times a reader is exposed to the sponsor’s banner image (Janal, 2000:304). This is measured as the **cost per thousand impressions** (known as the **CPM**) (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173).

Although this measurement reveals the business of the site where the advert is located, it does not show how many visitors to the site took notice of one’s advertisement (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173).

The second approach concerns the “click-through” rate. When viewers click on a banner advertisement and go to the site advertised, it is called a *click-through* (Sweeney, 2000:262). The **click-through rate (CTR)** is designed to tell one how many visitors to the site took notice

of one's advertisement. A CTR figure thus reveals how often visitors clicked on one's advertisement to connect with a further source of information (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173-174).

A third approach in measuring online advertising effectiveness is measuring the level of direct **sales** generated by an online advertising campaign. This provides the ultimate evidence of the effectiveness of the campaign, and allows one to create figures for the cost of customer acquisition. It is, however, important to note that this approach can only be used for products that are appropriate for online selling (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:173).

Armstrong and Kotler (2005:501) mention that many marketers still question the value of Internet advertising as an effective communications tool. They declare that even though costs are reasonable compared with those of other advertising media, Web surfers can easily ignore such advertising and often do. In addition, Sweeney (2000:259) mentions that there have been numerous studies concerning banner advertising over the last couple of years. Some claim that banner advertising works, while others are not so positive.

It is not the aim of this study to determine the effectiveness of online advertising. Nevertheless, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of online advertising in a South African context. Future research could also make comparisons with other studies to determine whether differences exist concerning online advertising effectiveness from a South African perspective in relation to other more developed countries.

The second marketing communications element considered in this study is sales promotion. The following section highlights a variety of online marketing communications techniques which firms could include in their Web sites with regards to sales promotion.

5.3 ONLINE SALES PROMOTION

Sales promotion has been defined in a number of ways. A few recent definitions are provided in Table 6. For the purposes of this study *sales promotion* is defined as: "...short-term

incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service” (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399).

Table 6: Definitions of sales promotion

Definition	Source
“...those marketing activities that provide extra value or incentives to the sales force, the distributors, or the ultimate consumer and can stimulate immediate sales”.	Belch & Belch (2004:21)
“...includes communications activities that provide extra value or incentives to end-consumers, wholesalers, retailers or other organisational customers and can stimulate immediate sales”.	Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> (2003:6)
“...consists of a diverse collection of incentive tools, mostly short term, designed to stimulate trial, or quicker or greater purchase, of particular products or services by consumers or the trade”.	Kotler (2003:18)
“...consists of all marketing activities – other than personal selling, advertising and public relations – that stimulate consumer purchasing and dealer effectiveness. Sales promotion is generally a short-run tool used to stimulate immediate increases in demand. Sales promotion can be aimed at end consumers, trade customers, or a firm’s employees”.	Lamb <i>et al.</i> (2004:323)
“...the use of incentive techniques that create a perception of greater brand value among consumers, the trade, and business buyers”.	Semenik (2002:383)

Sales promotion should *add value* to a product or service. This is something over and above the normal product offering that might make buyers stop and think about whether to change their usual buying behaviour, or revise their buying criteria (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:653).

Kotler (2003:309) states that sales promotional tools offer three key benefits, namely *communication* (gaining attention that may lead the consumer to the product), *incentive* (incorporating some concession or inducement that gives value to the consumer) and *invitation* (including a distinct invitation to engage in the transaction now). Sales promotion can also be used for short-term effects, such as emphasising product offers and boosting sales (Kotler, 2003:309).

Firms have found the Internet to be a very effective medium for disseminating sales promotions (Belch & Belch, 2004:498). One of the main benefits of the Internet in this regard is that Web pages are relatively easy to update and are flexible. Hence, it is possible to target

offers on various products or over a defined period via a firm's Web site (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:1072). Offers can be changed instantly and customers' response to sales promotions can be assessed through this medium (Wilson, 1999:45-47).

Firms are able to effectively employ a number of online sales promotional techniques via their Web sites. Issues examined under sales promotion in this study include offering something free, offering coupons, discounts and other special offers, loyalty programmes, as well as promotional competitions. These aspects are now discussed.

5.3.1 Offering something free

Janal (2000:27) asserts that if *location, location, location* are the three magic words of real estate, then *free, free, free* are the three magic words of the Internet. Sweeney (2000:32) similarly contends that people love to get something for nothing.

Janal (2000:27) claims that if a firm offers people something free, they will visit the firm's site, participate in a survey or try its products. Sweeney (2000:32) in addition mentions that offering something free is a good way to obtain a great deal of traffic to a firm's tourism site.

Samples are offers of a trial product and are the most expensive, but most effective way to introduce a new product (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:425). If a firm's product is downloadable, online marketers should make free samples available to users. This will enable users to try products before purchasing them (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:99; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564).

One song from an album, a chapter of an e-book or a 30-day free trial version of a software programme offer the same potential benefits as free samples given out at a retail store or through the mail. Users test the samples and then, hopefully, come back for more (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:97).

It is likely that visitors to a firm's Web site would have their own personal computer at home or have access to one at the workplace (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564). Computer users enjoy accessories that liven up the computer environment. For this reason, firms should consider offering free computer-related accessories, such as screen savers, screen backgrounds and sound files that advertise the firm's products or services via their Web site, as this is a good form of sales promotion (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564).

Sweeney (2000:359), however, argues that if a tourism firm wants to draw visitors to a site, then the firm should be less inclined to give away mainstream items, such as screen savers (unless it was a graphic of the tourism firm), shareware games and utilities. She notes that one should rather try to give away something that only people interested in the tourism firm would want. Figure 28 in Appendix G provides an example of a tourism Web site that offers visitors something free.

It is evident from the above discussion that people love getting things free. Offering something free via a tourism firm's Web site, therefore, has the potential to generate a variety of benefits for a firm. Taking this into account, the current study examines the degree to which the Web sites of the graded lodges investigated in this study offer something free. Thus, the second research question is:

Research question 2: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer something free?

It is important to note that the reference to "offer something free" in research question two only includes incentives that can be placed in a Web site to encourage repeat visits to the site or possibly establish future communications with prospects or consumers. This research question does *not* include offering a visitor the chance to win something and thereby obtaining something free (this is investigated under promotional competitions in section 5.3.4).

5.3.2 Coupons, discounts and other special offers

If a firm's product or service is not downloadable, the firm could offer printable coupons for discounts or samples that users can send in or take to a local retail outlet (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:99). Online coupons and discount vouchers are an attractive form of online sales promotion. These can be changed regularly and at a low cost to encourage repeat visits (Sweeney, 2000:360).

Armstrong and Kotler (2005:425) describe *coupons* as certificates that give buyers a saving when they purchase specified products. Marketers are cultivating new outlets for distributing coupons. These include electronic point-of-sale printers and "paperless coupon systems" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:425).

Many firms offer discount coupons via the Internet (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:203). These coupons can be used online or can be printed out and used at traditional "bricks-and-mortar" outlets. Coupons can be an attractive marketing technique because they encourage product trial and provide a way of selectively discounting prices to the most price-sensitive customers and those who are willing to visit a Web site and print out a coupon (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:203). It is becoming common practice to download and print coupons. It is also a measurable demonstration of a Web site's effectiveness (Harridge-March, 2004:299).

When considering the tourism industry, Sweeney (2000:360-362) states that offering electronic coupons is an effective way to encourage people to visit one's tourism firm. Providing coupons online makes it easy for tourists to receive them and will encourage prospective customers to visit one's location. Coupons also reduce the tourism firm's overall operating costs because people print the coupons on their own printers.

In addition to coupons, firms can also promote other discounts or "special offers", such as premiums and price packs, through their Web sites.

A *premium* is an offer of an additional item of merchandise or service, either free or at a lower price, which serves as an extra incentive for purchasers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426; Belch & Belch, 2004:535). A game lodge could, for example, include free game drives in the price or offer a free glass of wine or beer with meals at their restaurant.

Price packs (also called *cents-off deals*) offer consumers savings off the regular price of a product. Price packs may take many forms including discount vouchers (e.g., a bottle of shampoo with a discount voucher attached), offering more of the product (e.g., the shampoo bottles contains 20% more for the regular price) or have items bound together at a reduced price (e.g., two bottles of shampoo for the same price or a shampoo and a conditioner in a single package at a reduced price) (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426; Belch & Belch, 2004:535). A lodge could, for example, have a special offer where four people can stay at the lodge for the price of two if they make their reservations via the Internet or over a certain period of time.

Harridge-March (2004:299-300) points out that some firms offer *price incentives* to promote Web purchases rather than “bricks-and-mortar” visits in an attempt to convert customers to Internet shopping. Janal (2000:171-172) declares that customers will return to a site if they know that it offers coupons, discounts, rebates or other money-saving incentives. This is supported by Sweeney (2000:360) who states that people will repeatedly return to a tourism site if they know they will find good deals there.

Figure 29 in Appendix G shows how “special offers” are promoted on the home page of the Kent Tourism Alliance Web site. When clicking on this link, special offers promoted via this site include discounted rates on accommodation during a certain period, discounts on tickets to museums in the surrounding area, special prices on meals at certain restaurants and another sales promotion offers a free glass of wine on a certain night of the week.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that offering coupons, discounts and other special offers via a Web site may be beneficial to tourism firms. This provides support for the third research question:

Research question 3: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer coupons, discounts and/or special offers?

It is important to note that this study does not distinguish between coupons, discounts or other forms of special offers. This research merely examines the extent to which the lodges promote forms of special offers on their Web sites.

5.3.3 Loyalty programmes

Loyalty programmes (also known as patronage rewards) refer to cash or other rewards that are offered to those who are regular users of a particular firm's products or services (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426). A popular example of this is airline frequent traveller programmes. These programmes reward customers with mileage that they can use to receive free flights with the airlines (Sweeney, 2000:376).

In a Web environment, many firms "pay" customers with points redeemable for merchandise and services in exchange for reading and responding to e-mails, visiting partner sites, buying merchandise or completing online surveys (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:203).

It has been found that attracting a new customer is five times as costly as retaining an existing one (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:514). An existing, loyal customer is thus far more profitable than a new one (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:203). Rewarding existing customers in such a way that they are encouraged to remain loyal is thus a good marketing tactic.

Many firms have extended their loyalty programmes to the Web. For example, it is becoming common practice in the airline industry to award customers with points for booking online. Loyalty programmes offered via Web sites can, therefore, also aid in reducing customer acquisition costs (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:203).

There are many programmes available through which tourism firms can reward customers for their repeat patronage (Sweeney, 2000:376-377). The “WILD card” loyalty programme is an example of a loyalty programme that caters for the South African tourism and hospitality industry. The WILD card, a joint initiative by South African National Parks, Cape Nature Conservation and Msinsi Resorts, is powered by Infinity (a leading South African loyalty and smart card management company) (South African National Parks, 2005).

The WILD card programme offers members numerous benefits including free entrance into certain parks, reserves or resorts, as well as CashBack rewards from many Infinity partners countrywide on travel, adventures, accommodation, airlines, car hire, tours, leisure, dining, entertainment and attractions (South African National Parks, 2005).

It is important that loyalty programmes be advertised on a firm’s Web site. Visitors may be doing research on where to stay while on vacation and will be more willing to stay at a location if they know they can receive points or other benefits with their loyalty programme (Sweeney, 2000:376-377). The lodges investigated in the current study may participate in similar loyalty programmes. This information should, therefore, be included on the lodge’s Web site.

From the above, it is evident that being connected to a loyalty programme could be greatly beneficial for tourism firms. If a lodge is in some way connected to a loyalty programme (i.e., participates in or has its own loyalty programme), this should be advertised on its Web site. Taking this into account, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 4: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study indicate that the lodge is connected to a loyalty programme?

A limitation of this research question is that it is not known which of the lodges included in this study do in fact participate in loyalty programmes. Nevertheless, this research aims to identify whether the lodges investigated indicate this information on their Web sites.

5.3.4 Promotional competitions

This section considers promotional competitions via a firm's Web site. Before this aspect is discussed, it is first important to note that the Lotteries Act controls promotional competitions (South Africa, 2003:3-5).

The Lotteries Act defines *promotional competitions* as: "...any game, scheme, arrangement, system, plan or device for distributing prizes by lot or by chance, conducted for the purpose of promoting the sale or use of any goods or services" (Kingdon, 2003).

It is essential that anyone who is directly associated with the management or execution of a promotional competition take note of section 54 of the Lotteries Act, which became effective on 2 May 2003, and the published regulations in respect of promotional competitions, which were promulgated on 16 May 2003 (South Africa, 2003:3-5). Refer to Appendix H for the regulations regarding promotional competitions. It is thus important to point out that should graded lodges make use of promotional competitions and enable visitors to participate via their Web sites, they would also have to keep these regulations in mind.

Forms of promotional competitions that could be implemented via a tourism firm's Web site and are considered in this study include contests, sweepstakes and games. These forms of promotional competitions are discussed below.

- **Contests and sweepstakes**

Contests and sweepstakes are increasingly popular consumer-oriented promotional tools. Marketers are attracted to contests and sweepstakes as a way of generating attention and interest among a large number of consumers (Belch & Belch, 2004:537).

Contests and sweepstakes are forms of promotional competitions that give consumers the chance to win something, such as cash, holidays, or goods, by luck or through some form of extra effort (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426; Kotler, 2003:320).

A *contest* is a promotional competition where consumers compete for prizes on the basis of skills or ability. A firm may, for example, run a contest where participants are requested to submit an entry and provide an answer to a question, make a suggestion or create a jingle. The winners are usually determined, based on a panel of judges that selects the best entries (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426; Belch & Belch, 2004:537; Kotler, 2003:320). Contests are very popular online, particularly when prizes are involved (Sweeney, 2000:32).

A *sweepstake*, on the other hand, is a promotional competition where winners are determined purely by chance (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:426; Belch & Belch, 2004:537; Kotler, 2003:320).

Breitenbach and Van Doren (1998:564) assert that in order to keep visitors interested, Web sites should contain a section that focuses on contests and sweepstakes. They claim that most people welcome the opportunity to win something and that this technique encourages multiple visits as well as positive word-of-mouth communications among the Internet community. In addition, when considering the tourism industry, Sweeney (2000:365) argues that contests and competitions are excellent Web traffic builders.

Sweeney (2000:365) mentions that a number of tourism sites hold contests on a weekly or monthly basis to encourage repeat visits. Running contests is an effective way to acquire more information about one's target market by requesting information on the entry form. If a firm wants to attract potential customers from its target market, it should give away something that relates to its tourism operation (e.g., two nights free accommodation).

In light of the above, this study aims to determine whether the Web sites investigated in this study offer visitors the chance to win something by means of contests or sweepstakes. From this, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 5: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide visitors with the opportunity to win something through promotional competitions?

It is important to note that this study does not distinguish between different forms of promotional competitions (i.e., contests and sweepstakes) that are implemented via the Web sites, but merely investigates whether the Web sites do in fact offer visitors the chance to *win something*.

- **Games**

Games are regarded as another form of promotional competitions (Belch & Belch, 2004:537; Shimp, 2003:550). Duncan (2002:576) defines a *game* as: "...a sales promotional tool that has the chance element of sweepstakes but is conducted over a longer time". Games can include instant winners (e.g., scratch-off cards) or they can occur over a longer period and require more involvement with consumers (e.g., collecting game pieces that need to be put together) (Belch & Belch, 2004:537).

In general, promotional games can create excitement, stimulate brand interest and reinforce brand loyalty (Shimp, 2003:552). The marketing advantage of a game is that customers must make repeat visits to the dealer to continue playing. Brand games have become popular ways to promote brands on the Internet (Duncan, 2002:576).

Breitenbach and Van Doren (1998:564) postulate that firms should allow Internet users the opportunity to engage in interactive games, puzzles and activities as these are excellent techniques to engage the younger user as well as adults. They claim that sites which provide entertainment have an advantage over sites that do not.

Cox and Koelzer (2004:100) mention that almost any product or service can serve as the basis for a game or puzzle. Janal (2000:81) adds to this by pointing out that Web sites should include "fun stuff". Sterne (1999:178-180), however, notes that firms offering fun and games via their sites face two challenges. First, the "fun" must be related to one's product and, second, there must be a certain degree of value in offering this form of "fun".

Within a tourism context, Sweeney (2000:373-375) declares that an increasing number of tourism Web sites feature fun activities and games. A firm can host anything from a tourism

trivia contest to having guests play an interactive game with other visitors. Sweeney (2000:373-375) also notes that the game should be related to the target market. For example, if a tourism operation caters for family vacations, children's games may be appropriate or if one has a golf-resort, golf-related games or simulators can be included on the site.

As suggested above, including forms of games in a Web site may be beneficial to tourism firms in a number of ways. Although a game is regarded as a form of sweepstakes, games are not included in research question five. This is because, although the definition for a game includes an element of chance or odds of winning (Belch & Belch, 2004:537), the person may only stand the chance of winning the *game* and not necessarily win a *prize*. A separate research question is thus formulated for games:

Research question 6: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include online games?

It is important to note that this study does not distinguish between online games where the Internet user only wins the game without winning a specific prize, or where they actually win a prize by playing the game. This study merely investigates whether the lodges incorporate online games in their Web sites.

Sales promotional activities and ways in which they could be implemented via a firm's Web site have been discussed above. The third promotional element examined in this study is public relations. This element of the marketing communications mix and techniques that could be employed in a firm's Web site in relation to this element, are discussed in the next section.

5.4 ONLINE PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations is found in every firm and institution, irrespective of whether the firm or institution wants it (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:34). The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines public relations as: "...the management through communication of

perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders” (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:36).

Public relations and marketing are two functions that are often confused. Although both public relations and marketing deal with organisational relationships and employ similar processes, techniques and strategies, these functions differ with regards to their goal. While public relations has the goal of attaining and maintaining accord with the many different social groupings on whom the firm depends in order to achieve its mission, marketing has the goal of attracting and satisfying customers on a sustained basis in order to achieve an organisation’s economic objectives (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:46).

This study focuses on public relations within a marketing context. For this reason, this study employs a definition for public relations in relation to marketing. A number of authors have defined public relations in the context of marketing (see Table 7). This study employs a recent definition for marketing public relations by Armstrong and Kotler (2005:399) who define *public relations* as: “...building good relations with the company’s various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image and handling or heading off unfavorable rumours, stories and events”.

Table 7: Definitions of public relations

Definition	Source
“...the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance”.	Belch & Belch (2004:23)
“...building good relations with an organisation’s publics and stakeholders by creating favourable attitudes, building a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories or events”.	Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> (2003:6)
“...involves a variety of programs that are designed to promote or protect a company’s image or its individual products”.	Kotler (2003:18)
“...the marketing communications function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies areas within the firm that the public may be interested in, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance”.	Lamb <i>et al.</i> (2004:321)

Definition	Source
“...communication that can foster goodwill between a firm and its many constituent groups”.	Semenik (2003:15)

Major public relations tools include news, speeches, special events, buzz (i.e., WOM) marketing, written materials, audiovisual materials, corporate identity materials and public service activities (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:430-434). A Web site is also regarded as being a good public relations vehicle (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:430-434; Rensburg & Cant, 2003:213).

The Web site is, however, a unique public relations medium because it is the firm who owns the channel. Firms thus have control over the messages that are communicated to the public via their Web sites. This contrasts with the traditional case where firms used public channels, over which they had no control, to disseminate a message (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:213). Despite this, online marketers must be careful not to make unfettered claims via their sites that might otherwise have been challenged in the public domain (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:213).

There are a number of ways in which firms can utilise the Internet for public relations purposes. This study only focuses on specific public relations techniques that tourism firms can employ within their Web sites.

Issues examined under online public relations via a firm’s Web site include a frequently asked questions section (FAQ), online press centres, press releases and a photo gallery, electronic newsletters, as well as techniques that encourage positive word-of-mouth communications among consumers. These aspects are considered below.

5.4.1 Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Several researchers have pointed out that an effective Web site should include an FAQ section (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:565; Rensburg & Cant, 2003:215; Sterne, 1999:65-

66; Sweeney, 2000:3). An FAQ section is a page that has been created with a number of questions that are regularly asked by prospects or customers and are answered in a friendly, informative manner (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:236).

An FAQ section is beneficial for firms as it provides customers with useful and pertinent information concerning the firm and its products or services. Customers and prospects are able to sift through the questions other customers have asked before posting their own. Users can also find solutions to problems they face at any time of the day or night, from anywhere around the world. This assists in reducing customer frustration with regards to having to wait for the proper time of day, waiting on hold, explaining the problem two or three times to two or three different people, and then waiting for an answer (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:236; Sterne, 1999:65-66; Sweeney, 2000:3).

Firms must, however, be careful when including this feature in their sites as an FAQ section full of acknowledged problems with the firm's products may reflect a very negative image (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:237). Despite this, if done well, it provides a customer forum for a firm's customers and will add great value to a firm's site. An FAQ section might even be the highest value part of a firm's site (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:237).

Previous studies that examined tourism Web sites identified an FAQ section as a significant feature that should be included (Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

Taking the above into account, it can be inferred that incorporating an FAQ section in a tourism firm's Web site can be greatly beneficial. For this reason, this research determines whether the Web sites examined in this study include an FAQ section. This serves as the basis for the following research question:

Research question 7: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section?

5.4.2 Online press centres, press releases and a photo gallery

To support online public relations, a Web site should contain a link to the press centre, which can also be referred to as the media centre or pressroom (Janal, 2000:323).

A press centre provides visitors with a variety of information about the firm. Major sections could include latest news about the firm, a press release archive (headlines should be sorted by date and topic with links to the full text), annual reports, product/service information, financial reports, a press file of media extracts about the firm, contact information and biographies of key members of the management team (Haig, 2000:134-135). An online press centre on a firm's Web site is a particularly useful resource for journalists as they can obtain a great deal of information about the firm via its site (Haig, 2000:134-135).

Sweeney (2000:3-4) notes that tourism firms should consider including a press centre, which could include all of their press releases, background information on the firm, information on key personnel, articles that have been written about the firm and a gallery of relevant pictures that the media can use, as well as a direct link to the firm's media person.

Figure 30 in Appendix I illustrates a link to the press centre on the home page of a tourism Web site. The press centre in this site contains links to press releases, a photo library as well as useful documents.

Taking the above into account, this study investigates the extent to which the Web sites of the lodges include a press centre as a form of online public relations. Considering this, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 8: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a press centre?

Although tourism Web sites may not contain a press centre, they often include press releases and/or a photo gallery (which typically form part of a press centre) (Sweeney, 2000:3). Press

releases provide information about the firm and aid in creating favourable publicity and a photo gallery assists in tangibilising the firm's service offering for the online consumers so they have a better idea of what they can expect from the lodge (Haig, 2000:134-135; Janal, 2000:323; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Sweeney, 2000:3-4).

Previous studies that have evaluated Web site effectiveness in the tourism industry have identified press releases and a photo gallery as important features that should be included in a site (Douglas & Mills, 2003:269-293; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233).

Taking this into account, this study examines the extent to which the lodges investigated include press releases and a photo gallery. Hence, the following two research questions are formulated:

Research question 9: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include press releases?

Research question 10: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a photo gallery?

5.4.3 Electronic newsletters

Newsletters are usually a form of written material that is prepared by public relations employees to reach and influence their target markets (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:430-434). Firms are discovering that the Internet is an excellent way to distribute information that has traditionally been the focus of newsletters (Semenik, 2002:457). Newsletters distributed via the Internet are generally referred to as *electronic newsletters* (or *e-newsletters*) (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:214-215).

An e-newsletter uses the same technology as e-mail (i.e., it is essentially an e-mail service). The difference, however, is that an e-mail is usually a short, specific and directed message, while an e-newsletter is longer and contains more detailed news that relates to the firm. E-

newsletters are usually focused on a particular topic, may consist of several sub-topics and pages, and are sent to a number of readers simultaneously, usually based on an e-mailing list (i.e., a customer database) (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:214-215).

In general, topics discussed in newsletters have a greater impact than online advertisements. It has been found that banner advertisements have low click-through rates. However, the same banner advertisement in a newsletter can generate many times the activity as recipients subscribed to, and thus chose to receive the newsletter. Therefore, the self-selected recipients' interest level and responsiveness will be much greater than that of the general Web-surfing public (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:237-238).

A common way in which Internet users can subscribe to receive a firm's regular e-newsletters is via its Web site. This is illustrated in Figure 31 in Appendix I.

It is important that e-newsletters contain information or news that is of value to a customer. Although it is often assumed that the majority of customers are negative to electronic communications, most customers are quite willing to receive e-mail or an e-newsletter as long as it is relevant to them (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:347). Since the recipient elects to receive the e-newsletter and values the information, the firm is more credible in his or her mind (Allen *et al.*, 1998:79).

An advantage of e-newsletters is that they have the capability to enable customers to unsubscribe to receive e-newsletters themselves. This prevents customers from getting annoyed with a firm's direct mail campaigns. Marketers should provide customers with this option with every newsletter that is electronically mailed. The automation of the system also implies that the firm does not have the cost of removing customers who unsubscribe from the firm's mailing list. In this way, once the mailing list is set up, it is very easy and economical to maintain it (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:210).

If e-mail is the universal application, then newsletters sent via e-mail might be the universal marketing tool. In a newsletter, one has the ultimate tool to reach one's customers, vendors,

employers, investors, dealers, prospects and anyone else interested in the firm. Newsletters are also a cost-effective means of sales and marketing communications on the Internet. This is because, unlike newspapers that cost money to print and send, e-newsletters can be sent at a relatively small fee or even at no cost (Janal, 2000:211-212).

E-newsletters can be sent in a text format (which looks like any other piece of e-mail that one receives with no pictures or sounds) or it can be sent in a HyperText Markup Language (HTML) format that can be colourful, contain pictures and even banner advertisements. Both these types of e-newsletters can also contain hyperlinks to direct people to the firm's Web site (Janal, 2000:212).

Rayport and Jaworski (2003:175) state that regular newsletters can be sent via e-mail to inform subscribers about new features, changes to a site, special offers or corporate news. Bickerton *et al.* (2000:210) further declare that if e-newsletters are properly implemented, this is an effective means of creating dialogue with a firm's customer base. With regards to the tourism industry, Sweeney (2000:537) notes that a newsletter should be scheduled monthly so that prospects or consumers are exposed on a regular basis to the firm's name and information.

From the above, it is evident that distributing e-newsletters are beneficial as a form of online public relations for tourism firms. The following research question is, therefore, formulated:

Research question 11: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study enable visitors to register to receive the firm's electronic newsletter?

5.4.4 Word-of-mouth communications and the firm's Web site

Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been discussed previously (see section 5.2.3). It refers to messages that are spread among consumers about a firm's products, brand or Web site (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:431; Duncan, 2002:558; Semenik, 2002:311).

As was highlighted in section 5.2.3, *viral marketing* refers to the way in which communications spread on the Internet (Duncan, 2002:558). This study revolves around the Internet, thus WOM (or perhaps “word-of-mouse”) in the form of viral marketing is considered in this section.

Positive WOM is powerful because of its high level of credibility (Duncan, 2002:558). Research has shown that the more favourable information a potential product adopter has received from peers, the more likely it is that the individual will adopt the new product or service (Shimp, 2003:167). In addition to its credibility, its diffusion is extremely fast. The transmission of WOM messages is also comparatively inexpensive (Welker, 2002:6).

Despite these advantages, one shortcoming of WOM is that marketers are not able to control its content (and possibly also negative judgements, statements or claims), as well as the timing of the campaign (Semenik, 2002:441-442; Welker, 2002:6). However, as mentioned above (see section 5.4), the Web site is a unique public relations tool as it is the firm who owns the channel. Firms thus have more control over messages that are communicated via their Web sites in relation to more traditional forms of WOM communications (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:213).

Testimonials in a Web site, e-mail and sending electronic postcards, are all ways in which online consumers could communicate with each other, thus generating positive online WOM. Hence, this study examines testimonials, the way in which e-mail communications could be encouraged, as well as providing the option to send electronic postcards as forms of online public relations techniques via a tourism firm’s Web site.

- **Testimonials**

While searching for information on the Internet, online consumers may be exposed to firms which they previously did not know existed. They may thus question the credibility of these “new” firms. The inclusion of testimonials in a firm’s Web site may assist in bridging this gap as reading satisfied customers’ statements about a firm’s products and services can help

convince prospects to invest in the firm and ultimately assist the firm in selling its product offering (Janal, 2000:69).

As tourism firms are essentially selling experiences rather than physical products, comments from previous tourists that are posted on a site may assist in convincing consumers to visit a particular destination. Visitors to the site may view these testimonials as being more credible than other forms of online marketing communications.

A common way in which tourism Web sites include testimonials from previous consumers is in the form of an online guestbook. Figure 32 in Appendix I illustrates a tourism Web site that includes a link to its online guestbook on its home page.

Previous studies that have evaluated Web sites in a tourism context have identified that testimonials or an online guestbook are significant techniques that should be included (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Douglas & Mills, 269-293; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

Considering the above, it is evident that including testimonials or an online guestbook in a Web site may be beneficial for the lodges investigated. These features may ultimately assist in convincing visitors to stay at a particular lodge. For this reason, this study examines the extent to which the lodges investigated include testimonials or an online guestbook in their Web sites. Hence, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 12: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include testimonials or an online guestbook?

- **Encouraging e-mail communications via a firm's Web site**

The new many-to-many model for a hypermedia CME makes it possible for online consumers to communicate directly with other online consumers (see Figure 9 in section 4.3, p. 61). This is usually done by means of sending and receiving e-mail messages (Kleindl, 2001:55). In

addition to including testimonials in sites for public relations, firms are also able to encourage e-mail communications between consumers via their Web sites.

Armstrong and Kotler (2005:500) note that when sending e-mail messages in the form of viral marketing, the message must be so “infectious” that consumers would want to pass it along to their friends. This is confirmed by Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry and Raman (2004:333-348) who examined the motivations and behaviours of those who pass along e-mail messages. These authors found that an important motivation for passing along e-mail messages is that the message must either be important or it must contain something that the sender thinks the other person will like.

It is not the aim of the current study to examine South African consumers’ motivations for passing along e-mail messages. Future research could explore this area. This study considers techniques which tourism firms could employ in their Web sites to encourage e-mail communications between consumers.

One way in which firms could encourage WOM via their Web site is to provide visitors with an option where they can recommend the site to a “friend”. In this case, an online consumer can recommend the site to another party that they think may be interested in the site via e-mail by effortlessly clicking on a link on the site (see Figure 33 in Appendix I for an example).

When the visitor clicks on the link, a page opens (see Figure 34 in Appendix I for an example). Here the visitor simply fills in a few details, clicks on the send button and an e-mail message is sent to the party that may potentially be interested in the Web site or a section contained therein. The person receiving the e-mail will also view the e-mail message as being credible as it comes recommended from a “friend”.

This study, therefore, examines the extent to which the lodges investigated provide this option in their sites. Considering this, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 13: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide visitors with the option to recommend the site to a “friend”?

- **Sending electronic postcards**

Another way in which firms could encourage e-mail communications via their Web site is by providing visitors with an option to send electronic postcards (e-postcards) via e-mail (Janal, 2000:161). Figure 35 in Appendix I shows a tourism site that provides visitors with this option. Visitors can create original postcards that can be e-mailed to their friends and family. When this postcard is e-mailed, it is identified as originating from the firm’s Web site and contains the firm’s logo as well as a link to the firm’s Web address, thus creating exposure for the firm (Sweeney, 2000:372).

This feature is particularly attractive for tourism sites as these postcards can contain pictures that may generate favourable publicity for the firm and be distributed amongst consumers. A lodge could, for example, include e-postcards with pictures of the lodge or pictures of a spectacular view from the lodge. These postcards could ultimately aid in stimulating a desire to visit the lodge among people who receive them. The pictures could also create conversation points and may even lead recipients to eventually visit the lodge.

Offering e-postcards via a firm’s Web site is a good way in which firms could generate repeat visitors to the site as well as encourage new visitors to the tourism firm (Sweeney, 2000:372).

Offering visitors the opportunity to send e-postcards via the Web site can thus be a beneficial technique that can be employed by the lodges investigated. Hence, this study examines the extent to which the lodges offer visitors the option of sending e-postcards via their Web site as a form of viral marketing. This provides support for the following research question:

Research question 14: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide visitors with the option to send e-postcards via the site?

The fourth marketing communications element examined in this study is direct marketing. The following section focuses on direct marketing and considers ways in which this marketing communications element can be applied online via a firm's Web site.

5.5 DIRECT MARKETING AND THE INTERNET

Direct marketing has been described in a number of ways (see Table 8). This study employs a definition by Belch and Belch (2004:463) who define *direct marketing* as: "...a system of marketing by which organisations communicate directly with target customers to generate a response or transaction. This response may take the form of an inquiry, a purchase, or even a vote".

Table 8: Definitions of advertising

Definition	Source
"...making direct connections with carefully targeted individual consumers to both obtain an immediate response and cultivate lasting customer relationships".	Armstrong & Kotler (2005:399)
"...organisations communicate directly with target customers to generate a response and/or transaction".	Belch & Belch (2004:18)
"...is a process of communicating directly with target customers to encourage response by telephone, mail, electronic means, or personal visit".	Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> (2003:7)
"...the use of consumer-direct channels to reach and deliver goods and services to customers without intermediaries".	Kotler (2003:323)
"...is an interactive system of marketing that uses one or more advertising media to effect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location".	Semenik (2002:9-10)

Direct marketing differs from the other marketing communications elements in that the direct marketer usually seeks a direct response. The objectives of the programme are normally aimed at stimulating specific behaviours (e.g., test drives, votes, contributions and/or sales) (Belch & Belch, 2004:467). Not all direct marketing activities, however, seek a behavioural response. Firms may also use direct marketing to build an image, maintain customer

satisfaction and inform and/or educate customers in an attempt to lead to further actions (Belch & Belch, 2004:467).

Direct marketing is an aspect of total marketing (i.e., it involves marketing research, segmentation and evaluation) that uses a set of *direct-response media* such as direct mail, telemarketing, interactive television, print, the Internet, and other media (Belch & Belch, 2004:463). As this study focuses on marketing communications techniques that could be included in tourism Web sites, only techniques that could be employed in a firm's site to support direct marketing activities are considered.

This section focuses on ways in which a firm's Web site could encourage direct communications between a firm and its prospects and/or customers in order to generate a response or transaction.

This discussion highlights the importance of providing the firm's contact information on its Web site. This is followed by considering the manner in which the firm can encourage online communications targeted at individuals via its site. Aspects relating to e-mail-based marketing directed at groups are also considered. The Web site as an electronic catalogue or brochure is examined and a number of differences and benefits of a Web site in comparison to traditional print catalogues or brochures are highlighted.

5.5.1 Providing the firm's offline contact information via its Web site

Firms and consumers are able to communicate directly with each other for direct marketing purposes by using a number of offline tools such as telephone, fax and direct mail (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:399). Even though these offline tools do not specifically need the Internet in order to function, certain information (such as telephone numbers or postal addresses) is necessary in order to establish communications using these tools.

Firms can support offline communications by providing contact information on their Web sites. By providing this information, a response may be generated (see the definition of direct

marketing above). A prospect or consumer may, for example, enquire telephonically about the firm's product offering and this may eventually lead to a purchase. Hence, this study classifies offline contact information as an online direct marketing technique.

Geissler (2001:493) found that the home page of a Web site should contain only the "essentials". A firm's contact information is regarded as one of these essentials. This information can appear directly on the home page or as a separate contact page (indicated by an icon such as a "contact us" link). Although e-mail is a form of contact information, this form of communication takes place online and is thus considered in section 5.5.2.

Forms of offline contact information that should be contained in a firm's Web site include the firm's telephone and fax numbers, as well as its physical and postal address (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76; Sweeney, 2000:23). This information is particularly important for the tourism industry. Consumers may, for example, need to contact the firm to confirm reservations or require the physical address to reach the destination.

Previous studies that evaluated tourism Web sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267) identified that it is essential for firms to include their offline contact information (i.e., telephone numbers, fax numbers as well as physical and postal addresses) in their Web sites.

Taking the above discussion into account, the following research questions are formulated:

Research question 15: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a telephone number?

Research question 16: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a fax number?

Research question 17: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a physical address?

Research question 18: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a postal address?

In addition to providing offline contact information in its Web site, a firm can also encourage online communications between the firm and individual consumers via its Web site.

5.5.2 Online communications targeted at individuals through a firm's Web site

Firms can encourage communications targeted at individuals via their Web sites in the form of e-mail. This may ultimately lead to generating a response from consumers. E-mail allows a computer user to type a message and send it to another user. The message can arrive in seconds and the recipient is then able to edit and return it (Sterne, 1999:16).

E-mail assists firms by permitting the free flow of information without the barriers of time and space as people are able to send and receive e-mail at any time (Janal, 2000:200). It is cheap to transmit e-mail messages because even if a person is sending an e-mail to another party overseas, the person still only pays for a local telephone call (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:346).

E-mail has become the preferred communications medium of firms. It represents a powerful, fast and cheap way of communicating with customers, suppliers and between staff (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:346). E-mail marketing can be used to communicate with individuals or with groups of people (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:229). Ways in which firms could encourage individual e-mail communications via their Web site are now considered.

Consumers are able to communicate with a firm via e-mail regarding questions, comments, suggestions or complaints they may have in relation to the firm's products or services. This is the simplest form of e-mail marketing. When firms respond to each of these messages individually, this assists in creating one-to-one relationships with consumers (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:563; Janal, 2000:200).

Strauss and Hill (2001:63-73) explored firms' responses to genuine complaints via e-mail and consumer reactions to these responses. Their findings revealed that 47% of the firms responded to complaint e-mails and that this resulted in higher customer satisfaction, purchase likelihood and other perceptual measures (i.e., satisfaction with the response to the complaint, likelihood of repurchase, perceptions of the firm's concern, the firm's credibility and consumer preference for e-mail communications).

It is not the aim of the current study to examine the extent to which South African tourism firms respond to e-mail messages or to investigate South African consumers' reactions to these responses. This can be explored in future research.

The extent to which the lodges investigated provide offline contact information in their Web sites is considered in research questions 15-18. Online communications can also be encouraged via a firm's Web site and this online communications may also ultimately lead to generating a response from the online consumer. Hence, this study also investigates this issue.

Firms can encourage visitors to the site to communicate online with the firm via their Web site in two ways. First, firms can provide a link to an e-mail address on a Web page (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76). In this case, when the visitor clicks on the link, his or her own e-mail programme is activated. The visitor then types in a question, comment, suggestion or complaint to be sent to the firm. An *e-mail programme* refers to "...software that is used to create, send, receive, forward, store, print, and delete e-mail messages" (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.26).

Enabling visitors to the site to communicate with the firm via e-mail may be beneficial for tourism firms because consumers can quickly and easily send an e-mail to the firm at any time. In addition, considering that the tourism firm's Web site can be accessed by an international market, communicating via e-mail is beneficial as this is an easy and relatively inexpensive form of communication.

Second, firms can provide visitors with an online response form (see Figure 36 in Appendix J for an example). Visitors to the site can easily enter their enquiry on to these forms and simply click on the “submit” button. The form is then automatically sent to the firm without the use of the visitor’s own e-mail software (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:209; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76).

Response forms are beneficial to firms as they are easy to create and use. They also serve as a means of obtaining additional consumer information (e.g., full name, telephone number or postal address) which can be added to a firm’s database for future communications (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:209; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76). These forms may be particularly beneficial for tourism firms in the accommodation sector, because online consumers can use these forms to conveniently make reservation enquiries.

Previous studies on the evaluation of Web sites in a tourism context have revealed that providing a direct e-mail link for further information, as well as an online information request forms, are significant features that should be included in a Web site (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

From the above discussion, it is clear that encouraging individual online communications via a firm’s Web site may be beneficial for tourism firms and may ultimately result in generating a response or transaction from the consumer. This provides support for the following two research questions:

Research question 19: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an e-mail link that activates the visitors own e-mail software?

Research question 20: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an online response form?

In addition to e-mail for individual online communications, firms can also communicate with a mass audience by means of e-mail with the ultimate aim of generating a response from the recipients. This is now considered.

5.5.3 E-mail-based marketing directed at groups

Firms can engage in e-mail-based marketing where e-mail messages are sent to groups of people. In this case, groups may consist of previous customers, frequent customers, prospects or some other identifiable group (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:229).

These e-mail marketing campaigns should typically contain material that interests the target audience, has value for the recipient and builds on the positioning of the firm, product or service. These campaigns should be planned to help achieve overall sales and marketing goals. Some of the most common messages revolve around product, service or firm announcements, press releases, newsletters, short tips or periodic messages, surveys, sales and special offers as well as Web site updates (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:237).

There is an overlap between e-mail marketing targeted at groups for direct marketing and the other elements of the marketing communications mix discussed thus far (i.e., advertising, sales promotion and public relations). With mass e-mail marketing, all of these elements support each other.

The firm is being promoted (or advertised) by sending e-mail messages directed at groups and is “paid for” by the firm. These e-mail messages can also communicate special offers in the form of sales promotion. E-mail messages may also contain information for public relations purposes in the form of press releases or be sent in the form of an e-newsletter. Nevertheless, as these online messages can ultimately aid in eliciting a response from the receiver (see definition of direct marketing), for the purposes of this study, e-mail messages directed at groups, are classified under direct marketing.

Direct e-mail marketing has a number of advantages over traditional direct mail. First, online consumers still receive the same information as they would through the post, yet more rapidly and conveniently to a computer at their home or place of work. Second, e-mail is more eco-friendly because it involves no paper wastage. Third, the cost of sending bulk e-mail messages is marginal in comparison with traditional direct mail. Finally, e-mail also offers potential for targeted and personalised communication (George, 2001:246; Merisavo & Raulas, 2004:498-499).

Although it is highly probable that the attention of the consumer is achieved, it is very easy for the receiver to discard the mail at the click of a button, perhaps without even opening it (George, 2001:246). “Spamming” is a further crucial issue that e-mail marketers must consider.

Wilson and Abel (2002:91) describe *spamming* as an attempt to deliver a message over the Internet to someone who would not otherwise choose to receive it. Hence, *spam* refers to unsolicited and unwanted commercial e-mail messages. It is the electronic version of junk mail (Belch & Belch, 2004:500; Shimp, 2003:419). One of the most objectionable aspects of spam is the intrusion on privacy (Sipior, Ward & Bonner, 2004:60).

The former Marketing Federation of Southern Africa (MFSA) was an independent body set up and paid for by companies in the marketing industry to ensure that its system of self-regulation worked in the public interest (Marketing Federation of Southern Africa, 2004). In relation to Internet marketing, the MFSA Code of Practice set out guidelines which companies had to adhere to regarding unsolicited e-mail marketing.

Successful e-mail marketing is closely aligned with *permission marketing* where Web users agree to receive e-mails from firms (Semenik, 2002:319). The consumer agrees or “opts in” to receive messages on topics of interest rather than receiving messages that are unsolicited (Shimp, 2003:419). “Opt-in” refers to the fact that people can willingly subscribe and unsubscribe to e-mail services. An opt-in e-mail marketing campaign is perhaps one of the best means for a firm to reach its target audience (Sweeney, 2000:167).

Permission marketing allows firms to target only those individuals who have expressed an interest in the firm and helps to avoid spamming and privacy concerns (Kleindl, 2001:67). One should *a/ways* obtain the permission of the recipient before e-mailing anything. It is also vital to allow consumers to unsubscribe themselves (or “opt out”) from one’s mailing list if they choose to do so (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:236; Sweeney, 2000:167). Research question 11 (see section 5.4.3, p. 111) also follows this approach of permission marketing.

5.5.4 The Web site as an electronic catalogue or brochure

Catalogues can be traced to the birth of direct marketing. The first catalogue was published in 1667 by an English gardener (Semenik, 2002:359-360). Catalogues describe and usually picture the products offered by a manufacturer, wholesaler, jobber or retailer (Duncan, 2002:611).

Traditionally a catalogue has been defined as: “...a printed bound piece of at least eight pages, selling multiple products, and offering a direct ordering mechanism” (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:466). This definition is now considered to be outdated as an increasing number of catalogues are becoming electronic (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:466). In addition to the traditional hard copies, catalogues are now also available on the Internet for both end-consumers and business-to-business customers (Belch & Belch, 2004:475).

In a tourism and hospitality context, George (2001:257) defines a *brochure* as: “...a free publication such as a pamphlet, information, or publicity booklet that promotes the tourism and hospitality offering to enable potential consumers to make a choice”.

Prospective consumers are able to view the same information available in brochures via the Internet (George, 2001:260). They can view information on a Web site (usually accompanied by photographs, maps and the company logo) and even print the pages if they wish. A Web site can, therefore, be regarded to be an “electronic brochure” (George, 2001:260).

Taking the above discussion into account, it is clear that both catalogues and brochures provide prospects or consumers with some form of information about the firm's offering. In addition, Holloway (2004:323) notes that the holiday brochure of a direct sell tour operator is not much different from a catalogue and is designed with similar characteristics. For this reason, this study does not distinguish between catalogues and brochures. As a Web site can provide consumers with this information electronically, this study takes the view that a Web site can be regarded as an electronic catalogue or brochure.

The information provided in catalogues or brochures (and thus also on a Web site), is a way in which firms communicate directly with target consumers. This may ultimately lead to generating a response or a transaction from the consumer.

Due to the potential of the Internet as a marketing communications medium (see chapter 4), the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure has a number of differences and benefits in comparison to traditional print catalogues/brochures. Hence, this study considers a range of issues in relation to the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure for a tourism firm. These issues, which include navigation, virtual tours, additional information as well as viewing the Web site in a preferred language (see Table 9), are considered below.

Table 9: Issues relating to the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigation (i.e., a site map and a search index)• Virtual tours• Additional information<ul style="list-style-type: none">- "What's New" section- Calendar of events- Local weather information- Location map- Jokes and/or cartoons• Viewing the Web site in multiple languages |
|--|

- **Navigation**

One of the main differences between a Web site and traditional print catalogues/brochures is that prospects or consumers have to navigate ("find their way") around the sites. With

traditional print catalogues/brochures, prospects or consumers can simply page through the catalogue/brochure.

A Web site, however, is made up of hypertext. With hypertext, the reader can “jump” to topics by selecting a highlighted (i.e., hyperlinked) word or phrase embedded within the document. This activates a link and connects the reader to another place in the same document or to another document (Florida Community College, 2002). The ease with which prospects or consumers can navigate around a site and find the information they are looking for, thus becomes an important issue for a Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure.

Two techniques that can be used to aid Internet users in their navigation of a Web site are a site map and a search index. A *site map* is similar to a table of contents. If it is designed similar to an organisational chart, it provides a good overview of the site (Procknow, 1998:88). With a *search index*, also known as a *site-only search engine*, visitors to the site can type in a word or phrase related to what they want to find, click on the *search* button and a list of options will appear from which to choose (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:135).

Appendix J provides an example of a tourism Web site that contains a site map (see Figure 37) as well as a tourism site that contains a search index (see Figure 38).

Site maps are usually text-based or graphic-based lists that name and provide links to all of the site’s pages and their content (Sweeney, 2000:26). Incorporating a site map is one of the basic guidelines of designing an effective Web site for marketing. This feature is especially important for first time visitors to a site as it helps them to find their way around the site (Procknow, 1998:88).

Sweeney (2000:26) mentions that site maps make it easy for users to access the information they are looking for without causing them much frustration. Janal (2000:77-78) furthermore notes that including a flowchart or site map in an firm’s Web site is an important factor that distinguishes great and poor sites.

When considering Web sites from a tourism perspective, Sweeney (2000:26) mentions that for very large sites (i.e., those sites consisting of more than eight to ten major sections) it is advisable to include a site map that users can access from any page on the firm's site. Procknow (1998:88), however, argues that every site, no matter how large or small it is, should include a site map.

A search index is a feature that assists Internet users in finding what they are looking for on a site (Cox & Koelzer, 2003:135). Dholakia and Rego (1998:724-736) found that there was no correlation between search indexes and hit rates. Despite this, Joergensen and Blythe (2003:49) argue that this does not mean that firms should ignore search indexes. Even though search indexes may not generate traffic, they do assist visitors to find the information that they are looking for on a site and should be an important consideration for the user-friendly design of a Web site (Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:49).

González and Palacios (2004:313-328) assessed the Web sites of the top 200 Spanish firms. These authors examined navigability as an important category in determining the efficacy of commercial Web sites. They identified that Web sites should contain a permanent site menu to allow for rapid access to the different sections from every page as well as a keyword search function to enable users to locate available interesting items in the firm's home page.

Previous research relating to the evaluation of Web sites in a tourism context have also identified a site map and a search index as important features that should be included in a Web site for ease of navigation (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

From the above discussion it is clear that including a site map and a search index in a firm's Web site may be beneficial. Taking this into consideration, the following research questions are formulated:

Research question 21: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a site map?

Research question 22: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study include a search index?

As highlighted in section 4.6, one of the main benefits of the Internet as a marketing communications medium is that it provides full support for multimedia applications (i.e., it can provide pictures and text as well as sound and video) (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Duncan, 2002:309; Rao, 1997:231).

A feature that can be included in a Web site that requires the use of multimedia is a virtual tour. This feature, which is particularly suitable for tourism accommodation establishments, is considered below.

- **Virtual tours**

Offering Web site visitors a virtual tour of the tourism firm's accommodation establishment is an online technique that encourages traffic to a firm's site. A *virtual tour* could be as simple as a picture tour through the different rooms of a country inn or as complex as a complete streaming video showcasing the accommodation at which the tourist would be staying (Sweeney, 2000:363).

Virtual tours enable people to see what the tourism firm has to offer. A bed-and-breakfast establishment may, for example, offer a virtual tour that takes visitors through every room. In this way visitors know exactly what to expect when making a reservation. This technique provides visitors with a comfort level and all the information they need to make a reservation (Sweeney, 2000:363).

There could, however, also be a downside to this. Virtual tours could focus on only the most beautiful rooms and the most stunning views which only a few guests actually get to see. This

could inflate consumer expectations and lead to disappointments if the expectations are not met. It is, therefore, important that online marketers offer a realistic picture of what to expect through virtual tours placed on their Web sites.

Previous research regarding Web site evaluation in a tourism context, indicate that a virtual tour is a significant feature that should be included in a site (Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

Taking this into consideration, it can be deduced that it may be beneficial for the lodges investigated to include a virtual tour in their Web sites. Hence, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 23: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study offer visitors a virtual tour?

As was noted previously (see section 4.6), another main advantage of the Internet as a marketing communications medium is that there is no limit to space on the Net. Information can also be updated easily at a relatively low cost (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231). This implies that a tourism Web site can provide additional information that visitors to the site may value, which can be updated on a regular or daily basis. Such up-to-date information may aid in attracting visitors to the site and induce them to return.

Forms of additional information that are appropriate to be included in a tourism firm's Web site are now considered.

- **Additional information**

Firms can include additional information for prospects and/or consumers in their Web sites that they could not necessarily include, update or implement cost-effectively in a traditional catalogue/brochure. Forms of additional information examined in this study include a "What's

New” section, a calendar of events, local weather information, a location map, as well as jokes and/or cartoons. These aspects are now considered.

- **“What’s New” section**

A “What’s New” section provides online consumers with up-to-date information concerning the most recent happenings (Sweeney, 2000:357-358). A game lodge could, for example, provide information on the birth of lion cubs or provide a picture of the new chalets that have just been built. A “What’s New” section can also highlight new aspects related to the Web site itself, such as page updates or recent features/additions to the site (Sweeney, 2000:357-358).

The presentation of current information and timely happenings is vital to include in a firm’s Web site. Visitors need to know that there is something to be gained from visiting the site and a “What’s New” section adds incentive and interest (Kasavana, 2002:176). A tourism firm should include a link on the home page of its Web site to the “What’s New” section so that visitors do not have to search through the entire site to find out what is new (Sweeney, 2000:357).

Previous studies that concerned the evaluation of tourism Web sites identified a “What’s New” section as an important feature that should be included in these sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21). Taking this into account, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 24: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a “What’s New” section?

- **Calendar of events**

A calendar of events in a tourism firm’s Web site is another online technique that provides visitors with information that may not be as practical to include in traditional catalogues/brochures and aids in encouraging repeat visits to the site (Sweeney, 2000:365).

Customers can be kept informed of events related to the tourism firm or the surrounding/local community by including a comprehensive and current calendar of events in the site. This calendar of events should always be kept up-to-date to be of value to visitors (Sweeney, 2000:364-365).

A calendar of events for a hotel may, for example, show upcoming events such as conferences, conventions and shows. A calendar of events in the local community is also particularly appropriate for tourism firms. These events inform the firm's visitors of what they can do in the particular area during their stay (Sweeney, 2000:364-365).

Past research that revolved around the evaluation of tourism Web sites highlighted that a calendar of events is a significant feature that should be included in these sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21). Considering this, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 25: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a calendar of events?

- **Local weather information**

Providing a *local weather report* is also a form of additional information that is appropriate to include in tourism Web sites (Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

Tourists may want to return to the site regularly to check on weather conditions. This information could influence their decision to visit the tourism firm or assist tourists in knowing what kind of clothing to take along during their stay. Providing local weather information may thus be a beneficial technique for the lodges investigated. Hence, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 26: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this research provide local weather information?

- **Location map**

A *location map* is an important piece of information for tourists as they have to travel to the accommodation establishment where they will be staying. A location map provides travellers with directions on how to reach their destination.

A location map in a firm's Web site has a number of advantages over a location map printed on traditional print catalogues/brochures. As the map appears on the Web site, it is easily accessible to consumers at any time. It can also aid in reducing printing costs for the firm as consumers print these maps from their own computers.

Previous studies on Web site evaluation in a tourism context have identified a location map as a significant information feature that should be included in these sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293). Taking this into account, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 27: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide a location map with directions to the lodge?

- **Jokes and/or cartoons**

Tourism firms often include jokes and/or cartoons in their Web sites. This is done to attract visitors to the site and encourage them to keep returning (Sweeney, 2000:371-373).

As was highlighted above (see section 5.3.4, p. 103), a firm's Web site should include forms of entertainment as sites that provide some form of entertainment have an advantage over sites that do not (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564; Janal, 2000:164).

González and Palacios (2004:313-328) evaluated the Web sites of the top 200 Spanish firms. When considering the communicational content of a firm's Web site, these authors identified that Web site visitors often look for entertainment elements such as jokes and cartoons.

When considering forms of entertainment that may be attractive for tourism Web sites, Sweeney (2000:371-373) points out that people love to laugh and that jokes are a popular feature that should be included in a tourism site. She additionally notes that displaying relevant cartoons is one way of keeping a site dynamic and fun.

Taking the above into account, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 28: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide jokes and/or cartoons?

The final issue considered under the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure revolves around the fact that a Web site can reach the global market which speaks a variety of languages.

- **Viewing the firm's Web site in multiple languages**

As was highlighted previously (see section 4.6), a major advantage of a Web site is that it has the potential to reach the global market and provide it with instant information about the firm's offerings (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231). It is reasonable to infer that international visitors to a tourism Web site may speak a variety of languages.

Previous research on Web site evaluation in a tourism context has identified that providing visitors with the option to view the site in a preferred language is important for tourism Web sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Ham, 2004:295-308; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

Considering the above, this study examines the extent to which the lodges investigated provide visitors with the option to view the site in a foreign or preferred language. The ability to view a Web site in a language that international visitors are more comfortable with may also influence their decision to stay at a particular lodge. Hence, the following research question is formulated:

Research question 29: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study allow visitors to view the site in multiple languages?

The final marketing communications mix element considered in this study is personal selling. Aspects relating to personal selling and the Internet are discussed in the next section.

5.6 PERSONAL SELLING AND THE INTERNET

Personal selling has been defined in a number of ways. A few recent definitions are provided in Table 10. This study employs a definition for personal selling in relation to tourism and hospitality and defines *personal selling* as: "...an interpersonal process that involves the seller engaging in some kind of face-to-face or direct contact with prospective consumers in order to persuade them to make a purchase or booking" (George, 2001:247).

Table 10: Definitions of personal selling

Definition	Source
"...personal presentation by the firm's sales force for the purpose of making sales and building customer relationships".	Armstrong & Kotler (2005:399)
"...a form of person-to-person communication in which a seller attempts to assist and/or persuade prospective buyers to purchase the company's product or service or to act on an idea".	Belch & Belch (2004:23)
"...the oral presentation of a product, service or idea to one or more potential customers in the hope that a transaction will take place".	Du Plessis <i>et al.</i> (2003:152)
"...is a situation in which two people communicate in an attempt to influence each other in a purchase situation".	Lamb <i>et al.</i> (2004:323)
"...the presentation of information about a firm's products or services by one person to another person or to a small group of people".	Semenik (2002:9-10)
"...person-to-person communication whereby salespeople inform, educate, and persuade prospective buyers to purchase the company's products or services".	Shimp (2003:4)

Personal selling differs from the other marketing communications mix elements presented thus far in that the messages flow from a sender (or group of senders) to a receiver (or group of receivers) directly (usually face-to-face). This *direct* and *interpersonal communication* allows the sender to immediately receive and evaluate feedback from the receiver. The

message can also be adapted to address the receiver's specific needs and wants (Belch & Belch, 2004:599).

There are three main methods of personal selling in a tourism and hospitality context, namely internal, external and telephone selling (George, 2001:248). These three methods are discussed below.

- **Internal selling**

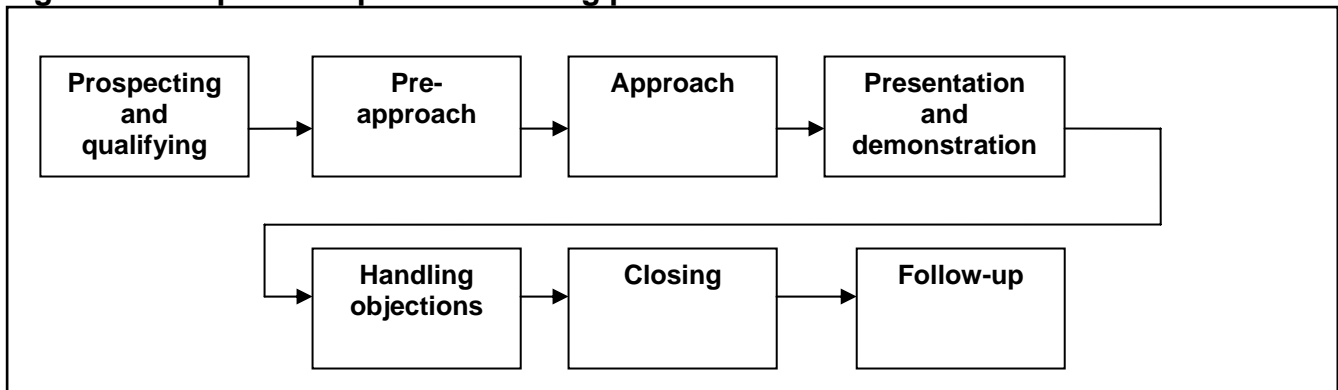
Internal selling refers to efforts made *within* or at the firm to obtain a sale. These are face-to-face transactions such as a travel agent selling a holiday, a waiter recommending a dessert (also known as up-selling or suggestive selling), or a receptionist describing the hotel facilities. These transactions typically take place “over the counter” or at the point of purchase (POP) (George, 2001:248).

- **External selling**

External selling refers to face-to-face presentations to prospective consumers *outside* the firm or in the “field”. Examples of this selling method include hotel representatives who call on corporations to book conference facilities and large numbers of rooms, as well as sales representatives of airlines, cruise lines and tourism firms who visit travel agencies in the hope of selling offerings. This is an expensive and time consuming selling technique because it involves employing and training a sales force that follow a series of personal selling steps (George, 2001:249).

The process involved in external selling is an active process (carried out by a sales representative) and consists of a number of steps. Armstrong and Kotler (2005:456-459) explain that the personal selling process comprises seven steps, namely *prospecting and qualifying, pre-approach, approach, presentation and demonstration, handling objections, closing and follow-up* (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Steps in the personal selling process



Source: Armstrong and Kotler (2005:399).

These seven steps are briefly discussed based on the discussion by Armstrong and Kotler (2005:456-458).

Prospecting and qualifying: This refers to identifying qualified potential customers. Approaching the right potential customers is crucial to selling success and the salesperson often has to approach many prospects to obtain only a few sales (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:456).

Pre-approach: This is the step in which the salesperson learns as much as possible about a prospective customer before making a sales call (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:457).

Approach: The salesperson meets the customer for the first time. The salesperson should know how to meet and greet the buyer and get the relationship off to a good start. The salesperson's appearance, opening lines and the follow-up remarks play an important role in this regard (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:457).

Presentation and demonstration: In this step the salesperson tells the "product story" to the buyer. The salesperson highlights the customer benefits and shows how the product aids in solving the customer's problems (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:457).

Handling objections: Customers almost always have objections during the presentation or when asked to place an order. In this step the salesperson seeks out, clarifies and overcomes customer objections to buying (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:458).

Closing: This is the step in the selling process where the salesperson asks the customer for an order and tries to close the sale (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:458).

Follow-up: The last step in the selling process is where the salesperson follows up after the sale. This is done to ensure customer satisfaction and repeat business (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:458).

- **Telephone sales**

This method (also known as “telesales”) involves using the telephone to promote offerings. This may be initiated by the salesperson, which is known as “cold calling”, or it may be initiated by consumers making a booking or enquiry (George, 2001:249).

Cold calling (i.e., where the sales representative randomly calls prospective consumers) is generally regarded by consumers as being irritating and intrusive. Telephone sales have become an important part of external selling and are particularly effective after a consumer has shown interest by, for example, responding to an advertisement. It is usually the receptionist’s role to carry out personal selling over the telephone. Nevertheless, it is important that all staff be trained in correct telephone etiquette (passive selling) (George, 2001:349).

It is apparent from the above that the different methods of personal selling, whether face-to-face or conducted over the telephone, require the presence of two or more people who communicate with each other in real time (i.e., at the same time). The interactive potential of the Internet (see section 4.4), makes it possible for online consumers to communicate with online firms or other consumers in real time (Belch & Belch, 2004:20).

The Internet makes it possible for online consumers to communicate with a firm's representative while online. This communication can be achieved through electronic media (typing back and forth), audio media (similar to a telephone but through the Internet), or video conferencing (audio and video) (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:563). This type of real time communication, however, would be more appropriate for larger firms, as the costs involved in having an employee available to speak to at anytime may be expensive for a firm.

In relation to the tourism and hospitality industry, perhaps only larger regional sites (e.g., www.ccafrica.com and www.travelsa.co.za) to which individual accommodation Web sites are linked, would consider including this communications option for online consumers. Many of the graded lodges investigated in this study are small firms and it would not be feasible to include such a feature in their sites. This aspect is, therefore, not investigated.

Even though the Internet has the potential to facilitate real time communications, the Web by its very nature is impersonal and is designed more for sales support and generating enquiries than for making direct sales (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003:1072).

As this study concerns marketing communications over the Internet, the manner in which the traditional personal selling process discussed above (see Figure 10) can be applied in a Web environment is now briefly considered.

Within a Web environment, one could deduct that the first three steps of the personal selling process (i.e., prospecting and qualifying, pre-approach and approach) for the salesperson fall away. Nevertheless, this study argues that the online consumer takes on these roles. By examining a firm's Web site, the online consumer can qualify him or herself as a potential buyer, learn about the firm's offering, and if he or she decides that the firm's offering can satisfy his or her needs, approach (or contact) the firm.

Regarding the fourth step in the personal selling process (i.e., presentation and demonstration), the firm's Web site can be used to present and demonstrate the firm's offerings online. The Web has become a primary source of information and online consumers

can obtain a large amount of information about a firm's products and services by means of its Web site (Belch & Belch, 2004:499). This study argues that all of the online marketing communications techniques that can be included in a firm's Web site discussed thus far are all techniques that can be used to present and demonstrate the firm's offerings for online consumers.

The Web site can also be used regarding the fifth step in the personal selling process (i.e., handling objections). The information contained in a Web site may assist in handling consumers' objections by providing them with "answers" to their concerns about purchasing the product or service. Providing offline contact information as well as a means of contacting the firm online in a Web site (see section 5.5.1 and section 5.5.2), can also aid in this stage of the personal selling process as online consumers can contact the firm directly for further enquiries about the firm's offerings.

This study argues that all of the online marketing communications techniques discussed thus far provide online consumers with some form of information. As the above mentioned techniques are investigated under the other elements of the marketing communications mix, they are not considered under personal selling. It is, however, important to note that all of these techniques should ultimately support the selling process.

Regarding the sixth step in the personal selling process (i.e., closing), it should be noted that although there is no salesperson to physically ask the customer for an order, the Web site has the ability to accept purchase orders (Semenik, 2002:480). As highlighted previously (see section 3.3.1), the direct selling of goods and services over the Internet is referred to as *e-commerce*. A large number of Web sites now offer visitors the ability to make online purchases through the site (Belch & Belch, 2004:494-506).

Traditional salespeople may see the Internet as a threat to their jobs. They may also feel threatened with regards to compensation and incentive plans and may, as a result, even try to dissuade customers from accessing the firm's Web site (Belch & Belch, 2004:499; Semenik, 2002:493-494). Nevertheless, the ability to accept purchase orders is one of the main benefits

of the Internet for both consumer and business-to-business markets (Belch & Belch, 2004:494-506).

Sweeney (2000:3) explains that by incorporating an online reservation system in a tourism firm's Web site, the firm is facilitating their efforts to increase reservations because they are providing customers with what they want (i.e., the means to make a reservation at a time when they are ready and willing to). This author notes that if a tourism firm does not have an online reservation system, potential customers would probably find another site online offering what they are looking for where they can and will complete the transaction and the firm would have lost a potential customer.

Previous studies on Web site evaluation in a tourism context have identified an online reservation or booking facility as an important feature that should be included in these sites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227; Ham, 2004:295-308; Wan, 2002:155-160).

Taking this into account, this study examines the extent to which the lodges investigated provide an online booking facility where customers can make a reservation through the firm's Web site. The final research question formulated for this study is thus:

Research question 30: To what extent do the Web sites investigated in this study provide an online booking facility?

The final step in the traditional selling process involves follow-up. In an Internet environment, the firm could e-mail the consumer with different types of information confirming the sale. For example, a lodge could confirm the dates and the number of people who will be visiting and also mention that they are looking forward to their stay. It is not the focus of this study to determine which of the lodges do follow-up with regards to online purchases (whether the follow-up takes place electronically or telephonically). This aspect is thus not investigated in this study.

As there is no real-time interaction between the online consumer and the salesperson, the term “personal selling” may not be appropriate within an Internet environment. The Internet has the ability to provide online consumers with information about the firm’s offering and also has the ability to accept purchase orders. The term “facilitating the sale” would, therefore, be more suitable than “personal selling” in the context of this study.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the different elements of the marketing communications mix, namely advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling. The manner in which the Internet influences these elements was also considered.

A number of online marketing communications techniques that could be employed in a tourism firm’s Web site for each of these elements were highlighted and the associated research questions formulated for this study were also presented. The online marketing communications techniques examined in the current study are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11: Online marketing communications techniques examined in the current study

Elements of the marketing communications mix	Associated Web site techniques investigated in the current study	Research question	Page number
Advertising	Links to other sites	1	90
Sales promotions	Offer something free	2	96
	Coupons, discounts and/or special offers	3	99
	Connection to loyalty programme	4	100
	Win something	5	102
	Online games	6	104
Public relations	FAQ section	7	107
	Press centre	8	108
	Press releases	9	109
	Photo gallery	10	109
	Registration to receive e-newsletter	11	111
	Testimonials/online guestbook	12	113

Elements of the marketing communications mix	Associated Web site techniques investigated in the current study	Research question	Page number
	Recommend site to a “friend”	13	115
	Send e-postcards	14	115
Direct marketing	Inclusion of offline contact details in the form of a telephone number, fax number, physical and postal address	15-18	118-119
	E-mail link (own software)	19	121
	Online response form	20	121
	Site map	21	128
	Search index	22	128
	Virtual tour	23	129
	“What’s New” section	24	130
	Calendar of events	25	131
	Local weather information	26	131
	Location map	27	132
	Jokes and/or cartoons	28	133
Multiple languages	29	134	
Personal selling	Online booking facility	30	140

The next chapter provides details of the research design and methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research methodology employed in this study. The manner in which the data was collected is noted. Validity and reliability in relation to this study is considered and the manner in which the data was prepared, analysed and interpreted is discussed. Ethical considerations in relation to this study are also briefly highlighted.

6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of a study highlights what is to be done in technical terms (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:146-151). The research design applied in this study can be described based on the classification scheme provided by Cooper and Schindler (2003:146-151). This scheme, inter alia, takes into account the degree of research question crystallisation, method of data collection, researcher control of variables, the purpose of the study, the time dimension, topical scope and the research environment. These aspects are now elaborated upon.

Pure or basic research "...aims to solve perplexing questions (that is, problems) of a theoretical nature that have little direct impact on action, performance, or policy decisions" (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:12). This study aimed to provide answers to a number of research questions that were theoretical in nature. It did not attempt to provide answers to specific practical questions related to action, performance or policy needs. Therefore, this study was classified as **basic research**.

Cooper and Schindler (2003:146) state that a *formal study* "...begins with a hypothesis or research question and involves precise procedures and data source specifications. The goal of a formal research design is to test the hypotheses or answer the research questions posed". This study began with a number of research questions (see section 1.4, pp. 8-11),

followed precise procedures in collecting and analysing the data and reported findings in a numeric format (see chapter 7). The goal of this study was also to answer the research questions posed. Hence, this study was a **formal study**.

A *monitoring process* is a method of data collection where “...the researcher inspects the activities of a subject or the nature of some material without attempting to elicit responses from anyone” (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:147). This study investigated Web sites through observation without attempting to elicit responses from anyone and thus followed a **monitoring process**.

With an *ex post facto design*, researchers have no control over the variables in the sense of being able to manipulate them. They are only able to report on what has happened or is happening (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149). As this study did not attempt to control any of the variables in order to manipulate them and merely reported what was found, the study followed an **ex post facto design**.

When research is concerned with finding out *who, what, where, when, or how much*, then the study is descriptive (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149). The objective of this study was to examine the Web sites (*what*) of all lodges graded by the TGCSA (*who*) in an Internet environment (*where*) during the month of September 2005 (*when*) to determine the extent (*how much*) to which they employed specific online marketing communications techniques (*what*) in their sites. Therefore, this study was a **descriptive study**.

A *cross-sectional* study refers to research that is only carried out once and represents a snapshot at one point in time (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149). This research was only carried out on one occasion and represents a snapshot of the extent to which graded lodges employed specific online marketing communications techniques at that specific point in time. Hence, this was a **cross-sectional study**.

Statistical studies are designed for breadth rather than depth. They attempt to capture a population’s characteristics by making inferences from a sample’s characteristics (Cooper &

Schindler, 2003:150). This study was designed for breadth rather than depth. It attempted to describe the extent to which graded lodges employed specific online marketing communications techniques via their Web site in numeric terms. As this study made numeric inferences based on the Web sites investigated, this study was classified as a **statistical study**.

Research that takes place under *field conditions* refers to research that is conducted under actual environmental conditions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:150). This study took place in an Internet environment and was thus carried out under actual environmental conditions with no manipulation of variables taking place. Therefore, this study was conducted under **field conditions**.

The next section considers the sampling design applied in the study.

6.3 SAMPLING DESIGN

This section defines the target population, describes the sampling method used and provides details of the sample that was realised. Implications of applying a census as the sampling method for this study are also briefly discussed.

6.3.1 Definition of the target population

A *population* refers to the total collection of elements about which one wishes to make some inferences. A *population element*, on the other hand, is the subject or unit of analysis on which the measurement is being undertaken (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:179).

The target population for this study consisted of all the lodges graded by the TGCSA who have their own independent Web sites.

A list of the graded lodges was obtained from the TGCSA's Web site on 2005-07-02.

After examining this list, it was found that some of the lodges appeared twice on the list. It was also apparent that in certain instances the same lodge had been classified according to different star grading criteria (i.e., some lodges were graded as both a one star and a three star, or as both a three star and a five star lodge). To clarify this matter, these lodges were contacted telephonically in order to determine their correct star grading classification through conversations with employees or managers.

After these errors were corrected, there were 292 graded lodges, ranging from one star to five stars. From this list of 292 graded lodges, 248 provided a Web site address. Table 12 indicates the total number of graded lodges and the number of graded lodges that provided a Web site address for each of the star grading categories, based on the list provided by the TGCSA on 2005-07-02.

Table 12: The number of graded lodges and those with a Web site address

Star grading category	Number of graded lodges in category	Number of graded lodges that provided a Web site address
One star	5	1
Two star	6	4
Three star	81	67
Four star	124	100
Five star	76	76
Total	292	248

Source: Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2004b).

A number of the lodges operate under a single tourism firm and, therefore, provided the same Web site address. Table 13 illustrates the number of cases in which graded lodges that operate under a single tourism firm provided the same Web site address.

Table 13: The number of graded lodges that provided the same Web site address

Star grading category	Number of graded lodges that provided the same Web site address
Three star	2 lodges = 1 Web site
Four star	2 lodges = 1 Web site 3 lodges = 1 Web site
Five star	6 lodges = 1 Web site 3 lodges = 1 Web site 2 lodges = 1 Web site
Total	18 lodges = 6 Web sites

The 18 lodges presented in Table 13 operate under a single tourism firm and share a Web site with other lodges operating under the same firm. These 18 lodges, therefore, do not have their own Web sites and are represented only by six Web sites.

Because these Web site addresses were repeated on the list, a total of 12 Web sites (i.e., 18-6=12) had to be deducted from the 248 Web sites (see Table 12) included in the target population for this study. This resulted in a total of 236 Web sites that were to be investigated in this study.

In order to determine whether the remaining 236 Web sites were owned by the particular lodges, these Web sites were all accessed. It was found that 29 of the Web site addresses provided by the lodges led to other tourism Web sites. These sites promoted lodges that are not graded by the TGCSA, as well as other types of accommodation establishments (e.g., hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses and country houses).

This implied that these 29 lodges did not have their own independent Web sites but contained a page in another “larger” tourism site such as TravelSA (www.travelsa.co.za) or Legacy Hotels (www.legacyhotels.co.za). For example, the Web site address provided for Hlumu Lodge was that of the TravelSA Web site. This site contained a page with information about Hlumu Lodge (e.g., general information, room information, contact information and a map with directions to the lodge), but Hlumu Lodge did not have its own independent Web site.

The aim of this study was to investigate **independent** Web sites owned by graded lodges. Therefore, the 29 lodges that did not have their own independent Web sites were also excluded from this study. Table 14 presents the 29 lodges that were excluded because the lodge did not have its own independent Web site.

Table 14: The number of graded lodges excluded as they only contained a page in another tourism site and did not have their own Web site

Star grading category	Number of graded lodges excluded
One star	0
Two star	0
Three star	12
Four star	10
Five star	7
Total	29

The 29 Web sites in Table 14 thus also had to be deducted from the list of 236 sites, resulting in a total of 207 graded lodges with their own independent Web sites.

During the process of accessing the listed Web sites to determine whether they are independently owned by the lodge, two further issues became apparent. First, it was found that a number of the Web sites were “under construction” (i.e., in the process of being developed or redesigned) and could not be accessed. Second, there were a number of sites, which after numerous attempts during a three week period could not be accessed and continually showed an error message that read “this page cannot be displayed”. These sites were thus also excluded from this study. Table 15 shows the total number of these Web sites that could *not* be accessed.

Table 15: The total number of Web sites that could not be accessed

Star grading category	Web sites that could not be accessed
One star	0
Two star	0
Three star	2
Four star	5
Five star	3
Total	10

These 10 Web sites were also subtracted. The target population for this study thus consisted of 197 accessible independent Web sites that are owned by graded lodges.

Table 16 below summarises the above discussion.

Table 16: A summary of how the 197 Web sites included in the target population was obtained

Total number of Web sites based on the list provided by the TGCSA on 2005-07-02	292
Minus:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lodges that did not provide a Web site address • Web site addresses that were duplicated • Web sites that were excluded because they were not independently owned by the lodge • Web sites that could not be accessed 	44 12 29 10
Total number of Web sites investigated in this study	197

Table 17 below indicates the total number of Web sites investigated in this study per star grading category (see Appendix K for a complete list of the lodges and Web sites investigated).

Table 17: The number of Web sites included in the target population for each star grading category

Star grading category	Total number of Web sites included in target population
One star	1
Two star	4
Three star	58
Four star	82
Five star	52
Total	197

6.3.2 Sampling method

In order to collect accurate data, all the elements in a population can be examined. When data is collected from the entire population, this is referred to as a *census* (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:179; Du Plooy, 2002:100).

Due to certain constraints (e.g., time, budget and geographic distances) a census is often impractical. Therefore, a sample is usually drawn from the population (Du Plooy, 2002:100). The basic idea of *sampling* is that by selecting some of the elements in a population, one may draw conclusions about the entire population (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:179).

It is evident that the population for this study was small (i.e., 197 Web sites were included in the target population). As data could be collected from the entire population, there was no need to draw a sample and a census was considered feasible for this study (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:181; University of Pretoria, 2004:45-46).

6.3.3 Realised sample

The target population for this study consisted of 197 independent Web sites owned by lodges graded by the TGCSA (see section 6.3.1). However, a limitation of the Internet is that it is not always possible to access certain Web sites or certain pages of a Web site.

Even though all of the 197 Web sites were accessed during July 2005 (to determine whether the site was independently owned by the lodge), some of these Web sites could not be accessed during the data collection phase in September 2005.

While attempting to access the Web sites during the data collection phase, it was found that two of the sites were “under construction”. The home page of one of the sites revealed that the site contained errors and it was clear that not all the information contained in the site could be displayed. Four of the sites required a special programme to view the entire home page or site. However, this special programme was not indicated on the site nor made available to be downloaded. It was thus not possible to see all the information (or links) available on the site. These seven Web sites were thus excluded from the study.

It was also found that one of the lodges was for sale. This site only contained information that a potential buyer would be interested in. Hence, this site was also excluded from the study.

Considering the above, eight Web sites were excluded from the target population for this study. A sample size of 189 Web sites (i.e., $197-8=189$) was thus realised. Table 18 indicates the total number of Web sites that were investigated for each star grading category.

Table 18: The total number of Web sites investigated for each star grading category

Star grading category	Number of Web sites investigated
One star	0
Two star	4
Three star	49
Four star	79
Five star	57
Total	189

One Web site was included in the target population for one star lodges (see Table 17, p. 150). However, this site was “under construction” and could not be accessed after numerous attempts during the data collection phase. Therefore, no one star lodges could be investigated in this study.

As was mentioned in section 6.3.2, this study attempted to conduct a census. It is, however, apparent from the above discussion that data could not be obtained from the entire population as eight Web sites could not be accessed during the data collection phase.

Nevertheless, a very large sample size, representing 95.94% of the target population, was realised. Data could be collected from almost the entire population (of the 197 Web sites included in the target population, 189 were investigated). As the difference between the size of the population and the realised sample size was so small, for practical purposes, **the realised sample population was treated as a census and not as a sample**. This has a number of implications for the study which are considered in the next section.

6.3.4 Implications of treating the realised sample as a census

This section highlights a number of implications resulting from the fact that the realised sample was treated as a census.

- **Sampling and sampling error**

Sampling implies that certain population elements will be excluded from the sample. This exclusion leads to *sampling error*. **Sampling error** is the difference between a result based on a sample and that which would have been obtained if the entire population were studied (i.e., the “true” population value). Sampling error occurs whenever a sample is drawn by *whatever sampling procedure* and is a function of a sample’s size (i.e., as the sample size increases, sampling error decreases) (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:12-13).

There are two types of sampling error - one where the extent of the sampling error can be accessed and one where it cannot. With a **probability sampling** procedure, each element in the population has a known, non-zero probability of being included in the sample (i.e., sample elements are selected by chance and this chance is known for each element being selected). Consequently, one is able to apply the *laws of chance* (i.e., probability theory) and estimate

how likely it is that the sample reflects the “true” situation in the population (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:183; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:13).

On the other hand, with a **non-probability sampling** procedure, the selection of sampling elements is left to the discretion of the researcher and is subjective. There is no explicit model (such as probability theory) which could be used to assess the degree of sampling error (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:183; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:13).

The main difference between a probability and a non-probability sampling method, however, is not that the former will always produce a more representative sample than the latter. Rather, it is that with a probability sample, a *statistical evaluation* of sampling error can be undertaken thus enabling the researcher to assess how *likely* the sample is to be unrepresentative and by how much. Such an assessment is *not* possible with samples drawn by non-probabilistic methods (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:13).

The realised sample for this study was treated as a census. This implies that there was no sampling error. Therefore, it was not necessary to carry out a statistical evaluation of sampling error (as is the case with a probability sampling method), as “true” population values were reflected because data could be collected from the entire population.

- **Statistical and practical considerations in determining the sample size**

When selecting a sample, it is important to determine whether the sample accurately represents the population parameters. There are a number of practical and statistical considerations involved when determining the sample size. These include the degree of variability, precision, confidence and the use of sub-samples for cross-classification (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17).

A key statistical consideration in sample size determination is the degree of **variability** in the population (i.e., the more heterogeneous the population, the larger the sample size required to capture the diversity in the population) (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:181-182; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17; Du Plooy, 2002:100-106).

A second statistical consideration is the desired degree of **precision** associated with population estimates based on sample data (i.e., the greater the precision required, the larger the sample size needed). Precision is measured by the *standard error of estimate* which is a type of standard deviation measurement - the smaller the standard error of estimate, the higher the precision of the sample (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:181-182; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17).

A third statistical consideration for sampling error concerns the desired degree of **confidence** associated with any estimated made. The confidence level must be calculated with a standard tolerable error (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17; Du Plooy, 2002:100-106).

A final statistical consideration concerns the extent to which the intended analysis will involve the use of sub-samples for **cross-classification** purposes and/or the use of statistical techniques which assume a minimum sample size to produce meaningful results (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17).

Since the realised sample for this study was treated as a census, “true” population values rather than estimated values were reflected. Practical and statistical considerations were thus not considered in this study.

In addition to the above, when selecting a sample, two further requirements in the form of internal and external validity need to be met regarding the size and type of sample drawn (Du Plooy, 2002:100-106). This aspect is discussed in section 6.5 below.

6.4 DATA COLLECTION

This section describes content analysis as a data collection technique, highlights previous studies that applied content analysis in a Web environment and explains the content analysis approach used in the current study.

6.4.1 A description of content analysis as a data collection technique

Data collection techniques may be grouped into two categories, namely *quantitative* (i.e., collecting data in the form of numbers) and *qualitative* (i.e., collecting data in the form of words or pictures) (Neuman, 2000:33).

This study employed “content analysis” as the main data collection technique. A *content analysis* is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:142).

Content analysis is used in various types of communications research, including the analysis of mass media content and transcripts of group discussions or in organisational communication by analysing memos, electronic mail, transcripts of meetings and policy documents (Du Plooy, 2002:191).

Content analysis enables a researcher to discover features in the content of large amounts of material that may otherwise go unnoticed. This technique may be used for exploratory and explanatory research, but is most often used in descriptive research (as is the case in this study) (Neuman, 2000:34).

Du Plooy (2002:191) highlights the units of analysis that have been used in the past by content analysts. These include:

- Physical units, such as the medium of communications, the number of pages, size and space in print media, time duration in broadcast media and nonverbal codes in interpersonal communications;
- Syntactic units, such as paragraphs, sentences, phrases, clauses or words;
- Thematic units, which are repeating patterns of propositions or ideas related to issues such as sex, violence and AIDS; and
- Propositional units, such as questions, answers, statements, assertions or arguments.

Content analysis has also been applied to the Web (Ehlers, 2002:204). An analysis of 19 studies that applied content analysis techniques to the Web found that this stable research technique can be successfully applied to a dynamic environment such as the Internet (McMillan, 2000:80-98). This provides support for using this technique in the current study.

There appears to be disagreement in the literature on whether content analysis is a qualitative or quantitative research technique. Some authors classify content analysis as being qualitative (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:102; Struwig & Stead, 2001:11), while others regard it as being quantitative (Neuman, 2000:33-34; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:140-141).

A third group of authors regard content analysis as being *both* qualitative and quantitative. This is because one crucial step in a content analysis is to tabulate the frequency of each characteristic found in the material being studied (Du Plooy, 2002:194; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:142-143).

Kumar (1999:10) explains that a study is classified as **qualitative** if its purpose is primarily to describe a situation, phenomenon, problem or event; the information is gathered through the use of variables measured on nominal or ordinal scales (i.e., qualitative measurement scales); and if an analysis is done to *establish the variation* in the situation, phenomenon or problem *without quantifying it*.

Alternatively, if one wants to quantify the variation in a phenomenon, situation, problem or issue, if information is gathered using predominantly quantitative variables (interval and ratio scales), and if the analysis is geared to ascertain the *magnitude of the variation*, the study is classified as a **quantitative** study (Kumar, 1999:10). Examples of quantitative aspects of a research study include: “How many people have a particular problem?” or “How many people have a particular attitude?” (Kumar, 1999:10).

This study aimed to determine how many Web sites contained a specific online marketing communications technique. This information was gathered using quantitative variables and

the frequency and percentage with which each technique was employed in the Web sites was calculated. The findings are also reported in a numeric format (see chapter 7). Therefore, this study regarded the research technique to be quantitative and thus a **quantitative content analysis** was applied in this study.

The definition of quantitative content analysis thus applies to this study. This study employed the definition provided by Kerlinger (in Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:141) who defines a quantitative content analysis as: "...a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables".

6.4.2 Previous studies that applied content analysis in a Web environment

Several previous studies have applied content analysis in a Web environment within a tourism and hospitality context. Some of these studies are highlighted below.

Baloglu and Pekcan (2006:171-176) used content analysis to analyse the Web sites of luxury hotels in Turkey in terms of site design characteristics and site marketing practices. Wan (2002:155-160) evaluated the sites of international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan by means of a content analysis based on three general user criteria, namely user interface, variety of information and online reservations.

Ham (2004:295-308) investigated the effectiveness of the Web sites of 25 top limited-service chain lodging operations in the United States by means of a content evaluation approach according to seven criteria, including impression, content usefulness, accuracy, navigation, accessibility, online reservations and timeliness of information.

Cai *et al.* (2004:219-227) evaluated the Web sites of 20 tour operators in the United States that focus on tours to China according to their content delivery performance. Their study focused on the presence or absence of a feature in these sites based on a content recording

or code sheet. Frequencies and percentages were then used to report the occurrences of expected features. The current study followed a similar approach.

Although not specifically related to tourism, two previous studies by Carroll (2002) and Ehlers (2002:204-206) followed a content analysis approach similar to the approach employed in the current study.

Carroll (2002) examined the manner in which the top 500 Irish firms use the Internet as a communications tool by performing a content analysis on each of the firms' Web sites. Ehlers (2002:204-206) followed a similar approach and performed a content analysis on the Web sites of 34 South African organisations to ascertain (1) how these organisations use their corporate Web sites for communication purposes, (2) if they integrate dialogic public relations in their sites and (3) to determine which stakeholders are targeted by Web communications. Both these studies made use of code sheets to gather data and reported the findings by means of descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages).

A content analysis is beneficial over other research techniques in that it is cost effective and avoids the many disadvantages associated with survey research (Carroll, 2002). This provides further support for employing this research technique in the current study.

6.4.3 The content analysis approach applied in the current study

This section considers the code sheet as the measuring instrument for this study, provides details of the context unit and time frame for data collection and highlights the five steps in applying a content analysis technique.

- **The code sheet as the measuring instrument**

As was highlighted in section 6.4.2, the content analysis applied in the current study was based on a similar approach employed in previous studies by Cai *et al.* (2004:219-227),

Carroll (2002) and Ehlers (2002:204-206). These studies evaluated the presence or absence of certain features in Web sites based on a code sheet.

Data for this study was collected using the code sheet shown in Appendix L. This code sheet was used as the measuring instrument in this study. The code sheet was made up of a number of *coding units*.

Coding units refer to the smallest segments of content counted and scored in a content analysis (McMillan, 2000:82). The coding units in this study consisted of a number of specific online marketing communications techniques that could be included in a tourism firm's Web site.

Since it was not the aim of this study to replicate previous research, an existing code sheet was not used. The code sheet for this study was specially compiled based on an extensive literature review. Each coding unit was identified from the literature review in the form of a research question. Table 19 summarises the support from the literature for each coding unit examined in this study.

The first column in Table 19 lists the five marketing communications mix categories examined and the second column provides the research question(s) formulated under each category. The third column presents the coding unit (i.e., specific online marketing communications technique) that was analysed based on the research question formulated. The final column shows the section in the literature review that supports the inclusion of this coding unit.

Table 19: Support from the literature for each coding unit examined in this study

Marketing communications mix category	Research question*	Coding unit analysed	Support from literature
Advertising	1	Links to other sites	Section 5.2.6
Sales promotion	2	Offer something free	Section 5.3.1
	3	Coupons, discounts and/or special offers	Section 5.3.2
	4	Connection to loyalty programme	Section 5.3.3
	5	Win something	Section 5.3.4

Marketing communications mix category	Research question*	Coding unit analysed	Support from literature
	6	Online games	Section 5.3.4
Public relations	7	FAQ section	Section 5.4.1
	8	Press centre	Section 5.4.2
	9	Press releases	Section 5.4.2
	10	Photo gallery	Section 5.4.2
	11	Registration to receive e-newsletter	Section 5.4.3
	12	Testimonials/online guestbook	Section 5.4.4
	13	Recommend site to a “friend”	Section 5.4.4
	14	Send e-postcards	Section 5.4.4
Direct marketing	15	Telephone number	Section 5.5.1
	16	Fax number	Section 5.5.1
	17	Physical address	Section 5.5.1
	18	Postal address	Section 5.5.1
	19	E-mail link (own e-mail software)	Section 5.5.2
	20	Online response form	Section 5.5.2
	21	Site map	Section 5.5.4
	22	Search index	Section 5.5.4
	23	Virtual tour	Section 5.5.4
	24	“What’s New” section	Section 5.5.4
	25	Calendar of events	Section 5.5.4
	26	Local weather information	Section 5.5.4
	27	Location map	Section 5.5.4
	28	Jokes and/or cartoons	Section 5.5.4
	29	Multiple languages	Section 5.5.4
Personal selling	30	Online booking facility	Section 5.6

*See section 1.4, pp. 9-11 for the research questions formulated for this study

During data collection, it was merely noted whether a specific coding unit (i.e., online marketing communications technique) was present or absent from a Web site. Where a specific coding unit was present, a “yes” response was indicated on the code sheet and where the coding unit was absent, a “no” response was recorded. The “yes” and “no” responses were numerically coded as 1 and 0 respectively.

A space was also provided at the end of the code sheet for further notes regarding the online marketing communications techniques employed in a specific Web site. A separate coding sheet was completed for each of the 189 Web sites analysed in this study.

An important issue in measurement concerns measurement quality (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:32-34). The validity and reliability of measurement in relation to this study is discussed in section 6.5.

- **The context unit and time frame for data collection**

When considering data collection and coding for a content analysis, it is also important to determine the *context unit* and the *time frame* in which the data is collected (Ehlers, 2002:205; McMillan, 2000:82).

The **context unit** is the body of material surrounding the coding unit. Many researchers use the term “unit of analysis” to refer to the *context* from which coding units are drawn. Defining the context unit or unit of analysis represents a unique challenge on the Web (McMillan, 2000:82).

The home page is regarded as an ideal context (or unit of analysis) because many visitors to a site decide whether they will continue to browse the site based on their first impressions of the home page. Coding an entire site could also be extremely time-consuming and introduce biases based on the size of the site (Ha & James, 1998). Taking this into account, the **home pages** of the Web sites investigated formed the units of analysis for this study.

In relation to the **time frame** of data collection in a Web environment, it is evident that changes can be made to the content of a Web site relatively quickly and easily. Therefore, it is important that data be collected in a Web environment in a short time frame to ensure that all the coders analyse the same content (Ehlers, 2002:205; McMillan, 2000:85).

Research on 19 studies that applied content analysis techniques revealed that the most rapid data collection reported was two days and the longest was five months. The majority of the

studies, however, collected data over a period of one to two months (McMillan, 2000:80-98). Taking this into account, the data for this study was collected over a period of one month during September 2005.

McMillan (2000:81-82) suggests five primary steps that researchers should consider when applying a content analysis technique. These steps include formulating the research question and/or hypotheses, sampling, data collection and coding, training coders and checking the reliability of their work, and analysing and interpreting the data (McMillan, 2000:81-82).

These five steps are briefly considered below. The manner in which these steps were applied in this study is highlighted. The discussion is based on the discussions provided by Ehlers (2002:205-206) and McMillan (2000:81-82).

Step 1 - Formulating the research question: McMillan (2000:81) notes that the advent of the Web has stimulated many new research questions. A list of research questions were formulated for this study. These questions revolved around the extent to which specific online marketing communications techniques were employed in the Web sites of graded South African lodges (see section 1.4, pp. 8-11).

Step 2 - Sampling: The population for this study was defined above (see section 6.3.1). As mentioned previously, the population for this study was small and a census was, therefore, conducted.

Step 3 - Data collection and coding: This step in the research process revolves around defining categories which concern two primary units of measurement, namely coding units and context units, as well as determining the time frame in which the data is collected (Ehlers, 2002:205; McMillan, 2000:82).

As was explained earlier in this section, the coding units in this study consisted of a number of specific online marketing communications techniques that could be applied in a tourism firm's

Web site. The units of analysis were the home pages of the Web sites investigated and the data was collected during a period of one month in September 2005.

Step 4 - Training coders and checking inter-coder reliability: Placing a unit of analysis into a content category is called *coding*. The individuals who do the coding are called *coders* (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:152).

More than one coder is generally used in a content analysis to reduce bias in the evaluation process (Wan, 2002:156). The number of coders involved in a content analysis is typically small (i.e., generally between two to six coders are used). Careful training of coders is a vital step in any content analysis and usually results in a more reliable analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:152).

Although this was a limitation of this study (see section 8.4), the researcher was the only coder of the Web sites. This is because the population was small, it was relatively easy to gather the data (it was merely noted whether specific communications features were present or absent from a site), as well as for other practical purposes. It was thus not necessary to train coders and check for inter-coder reliability. This aspect is further considered in section 6.5.

Step 5 - Analysing and interpreting the results: The final step in the research process involves the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the coding process. The fact that Web-based content was analysed did not change the basic procedures of data analysis and interpretation used in content analysis (McMillan, 2000:82). The manner in which the data was prepared, analysed and interpreted in this study is considered in section 6.6 and the findings are reported in chapter 7.

Du Plooy (2002:192) explains that in applying content analysis, the specified procedures followed must be systematic, validity must be ensured, the content must be quantified as numeral values or percentage frequencies, and the meaning has to be interpreted in the context in which the research problem originated.

The above section explained the specific and systematic procedure in which data was collected for this study. Section 6.5 considers validity and reliability in relation to the content analysis applied in the current study and section 6.6 highlights the manner in which the content has been quantified and interpreted.

6.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY IN RELATION TO CONTENT ANALYSIS

Data was collected for this study following a content analysis approach. Validity and reliability are two crucial considerations for any content analysis study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:156-160). This section thus considers validity and reliability in relation to content analysis.

- **Reliability**

If a content analysis is to be objective, its measures and procedures must be reliable. A study is **reliable** when: "...repeated measurement of the same material results in similar decisions or conclusions" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:156).

Inter-coder reliability refers to levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument. If the results fail to achieve reliability, this implies that something is amiss with the coders, the coding instructions, the category definitions, the unit of analysis, or some combination of these (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:156).

As mentioned above (see section 6.4.3), the researcher was the only coder of the Web sites. The Web sites were thus analysed according to the coding sheet following a consistent approach by one researcher. There was, therefore, no confusion regarding coding instructions, the category definitions and the units of analysis among other coders.

The researcher compiled the literature review to obtain an understanding of the topic investigated in this study and also defined the categories and units of analysis for this study. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the researcher possessed an adequate

understanding of the issues investigated in this study and should have accurately analysed and coded the Web sites.

Considering the above, it is concluded that this study was reliable as the same material was measured repeatedly resulting in similar conclusions.

- **Validity**

In addition to being reliable, a content analysis must also yield valid results. **Validity** is commonly defined as: "...the degree to which an instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:159). By claiming that a measure is valid, it is implied that it is also reliable (i.e., a measure cannot be valid unless it is also reliable) (Du Plooy, 2002:124).

Validity raises a number of concerns in content analysis. Firstly, validity is closely connected with the procedures used in the analysis. If the sampling design is faulty, if categories overlap, or if reliability is low, the results of the study would most likely possess little validity. In addition, the adequacy of the definitions used in a content analysis bears directly on the question of validity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:159).

In relation to the *sampling design* for communications research, it is important that the requirements for internal and external validity are met. The **internal validity** of a research design concerns the extent to which the design can account for all the factors that may affect the outcome of the hypotheses to be tested or research questions to be answered. **External validity**, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which conclusions can be generalised to the "real world" (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85).

Factors that threaten the internal and external validity of a research design are influenced by the *time dimension* of a study which can either be cross-sectional or longitudinal (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85). As this was a cross-sectional study (see section 6.2), internal and external validity is considered from a cross-sectional perspective.

For a cross-sectional design, a number of factors contribute to *internal validity*, namely constructing reliable measuring instruments, drawing random samples, the unobtrusiveness of the measuring instrument and/or the researcher's behaviour so that neither the measurement nor the researcher disrupts, directs or intrudes on what is being researched and the effectiveness of manipulating the independent variable (especially in experimental research) to be assured that it produced an effect on the dependant variable (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85).

A reliable measuring instrument in the form of a code sheet was compiled for this study (see section 6.4.3). As this study conducted a census and "true" population values were reflected, it was not necessary to draw random samples and carry out statistical evaluations (see section 6.3.4). A specific and relatively simple procedure was followed to complete the code sheet as the researcher merely had to note the absence or presence of a specific communications feature in the Web sites investigated. The researcher carefully completed the code sheets and took all reasonable precautions to ensure that the correct data was entered and did not attempt to manipulate any of the variables. Therefore, the sampling design was considered to be internally valid.

Factors that contribute to the *external validity* of a cross-sectional design include drawing a representative sample from the population, conducting research in real-world settings as well as avoiding multiple measurements or treatments of a single subject, thereby avoiding interference factors such as fatigue (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85).

A census was conducted for this study, thus the population was accurately represented. Research was also conducted in actual environmental conditions (i.e., in an Internet environment). As Web sites rather than human beings were investigated, interference factors such as fatigue were not applicable for subjects being investigated. However, interference factors on the part of the researcher may have come into play and the researcher may have committed observational, coding or analysis errors.

Nevertheless, considering that the other requirements for external reliability were met and that all reasonable precautions were taken on behalf of the researcher when coding and analysing the data, this study is also considered to have external validity.

As this study was considered to be both internally and externally valid and was regarded to be reliable, this study was also considered to possess validity.

The majority of descriptive content analyses (as is the case in this study) rely on *face validity*, also sometimes referred to as *content validity* (Du Plooy, 2002:125; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:160). This validation technique assumes that an instrument adequately measures what it claims to measure if the categories are rigidly and satisfactorily defined and if the procedures of the analysis have been adequately conducted (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:160).

The above discussion highlighted that the measuring instrument should have measured what it was supposed to measure and that specific procedures of analysis were followed. Therefore, it is concluded that this study possessed content validity.

6.6 PREPARATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

After data is collected, researchers generate information by analysing the data. Data analysis usually involves reducing accumulated data into a manageable size, developing summaries, looking for patterns and applying statistical techniques (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:87).

This section first discusses the editing and coding of the raw data. The method of analysis and statistical techniques used in this study are then considered.

6.6.1 Editing and coding the data

Editing refers to the process of detecting errors and omissions, correcting them where possible and certifying that minimum data quality standards have been achieved. Two forms of editing include field and central editing (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:455).

Field editing is where the researcher checks for errors that may have occurred during the stress of data collection soon after the data have been gathered. The researcher may have used *ad hoc* abbreviations and special symbols. It is often difficult to complete what was abbreviated or written in shorthand or noted illegibly if the entry is not corrected so that it can clearly be read on the same day. With an interview, respondents are often re-contacted if there are entry gaps or if the answer is unclear. This is done rather than the merely guessing what the respondent “probably would have said” (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:455; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:40).

Central editing, on the other hand, is when ambiguous, inconsistent or missing data is dealt with and one is usually not able to clarify the problem with the appropriate respondent (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:455; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:40).

Field editing was not necessary for this study as the Web sites analysed could be accessed at any time. Nevertheless, central editing was applied to detect obvious errors that may have occurred during data entry.

Coding involves assigning numbers or other symbols to responses so that the responses can be grouped into a limited number of classes or categories (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:456). The coding units for this study (i.e., online marketing communications techniques) have been discussed previously (see section 6.4.3). As was highlighted in section 6.4.3, a simple coding system was applied for entering data where the number 1 was allocated where a specific coding unit was present and the number 0 was allocated where it was absent from the site.

Once the data had been captured in Microsoft Office Excel 2003, the data set was checked for coding errors. An examination of the minimum and maximum values for each variable in the data set indicated that only these values (i.e., 1 and 0) were included. There thus appeared to be no coding errors.

6.6.2 Method of data analysis and statistical techniques used

The focus of any analysis takes one of three basic forms, namely description, estimation and hypothesis-testing (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:64-65).

With a **descriptive focus**, the aim is to paint a summary picture of the sample (or population) in terms of the variable(s) of interest. There are a number of statistical techniques that can be used to undertake descriptive analysis. These are referred to as **descriptive statistics** (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:64-65).

With an **estimation focus**, the aim is to use the information one has on the *sample* to estimate the situation that is likely to exist in the *population* as a whole. The fact that a sample is used implies that the information is incomplete because it is not based on the entire population (i.e., the information is distorted by sampling error and does not perfectly reflect the situation in the population). However, with probability sampling (see section 6.3.4), it is possible to assess the likely sampling error and incorporate it in calculations of the population estimates, ending up with **confidence intervals** for the latter (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:64-65).

With a **hypothesis-testing focus**, the aim is to test specific propositions concerning the variables of interest and use the evidence provided by the sample to draw conclusions regarding these propositions for the population as a whole. As a sample is drawn based on a probabilistic approach, sampling error is also feasible in this case. In order to determine whether “true” differences are reflected in the population rather than merely sampling error, **significance tests**, which are statistical techniques designed to help determine whether the

sample results are likely to hold in the population as a whole, are conducted (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:64-65).

This study did not attempt to make estimates or test hypotheses based on a sample of the population. Therefore, confidence intervals and significance tests were not conducted for this study. This study rather followed a descriptive focus and because a census was conducted, “true” population values were reflected.

The starting point in a descriptive analysis is the construction of a **frequency distribution** for each variable of interest. This indicates in absolute or relative (i.e., percentage) terms how often the different values of the variable are actually encountered in the sample (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:65).

A *frequency table* is a simple device for summarising data (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:488). A frequency table is drawn up based on a frequency distribution for each variable of interest and shows how often different values of the variable are encountered among the units of analysis. Absolute (simple counts) and relative (percentages) frequencies can be used to describe the data (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:65).

Previous studies that applied content analysis to Web sites made use of frequency tables to analyse and report data (Carroll, 2002; Ehlers, 2002:272-288). This study followed a similar approach.

The content analysis data was captured and analysed in Microsoft Office Excel 2003. The results were then reported by means of a frequency distribution for each variable of interest (i.e., each online marketing communications technique). Frequencies and percentages were used to show how often the different values were encountered (i.e., how frequently each online marketing communications technique was used in the Web sites investigated).

Comparisons were also made between the three, four and five star lodges based on the frequencies and percentages. This was done to determine whether differences were present

regarding the online marketing communications techniques employed by graded lodges based on their star grading.

One and two star lodges were not included in these comparisons. Only one Web site (which could not be accessed during the data collection phase) was included in the population for one star lodges and only four sites were included for two star lodges (see Table 17, p. 150). Hence, it was not feasible to include these two star grading categories in the comparisons.

It is important to note that although comparisons were made between the lodges, this study did not conduct statistical significance tests for these comparisons as the findings were based on census data.

6.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Data was collected from Web sites that are publicly accessible on the Internet. Any person with the necessary Internet facilities can gain access to these sites at any time. Therefore, it can be deduced that all of these lodges “volunteer” the information on their Web sites for any interested party to see. Hence, as this information was publicly available and this study had no intention to “harm” any of the lodges, this study was considered to be an ethical study. The data collection approach employed in the study was also approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

6.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the research methodology employed in this study and considered the manner in which the data was collected. Validity and reliability in relation to applying a content analysis approach for this study was considered and the manner in which the data was prepared, analysed and interpreted was discussed. Ethical considerations of the study were also briefly highlighted. The next chapter presents the research findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical findings and associated conclusions of the current study. Findings and conclusions are provided for each of the research questions and research objectives investigated in this study. Considering the main findings, a conclusion is provided for the overall research problem investigated in this study. Findings and conclusions are also presented for the comparisons made between the three, four and five star lodges.

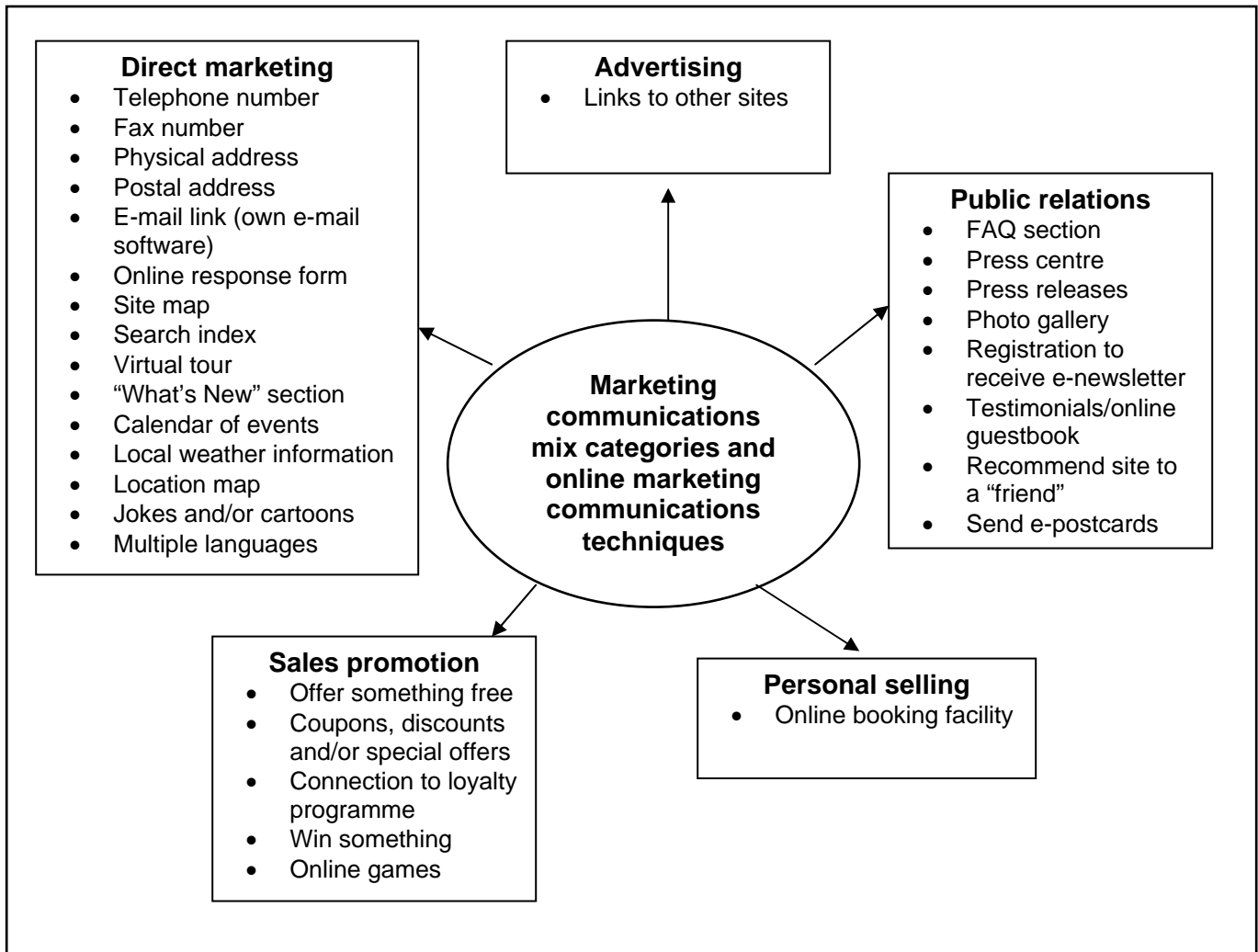
7.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the Web sites of graded lodges according to certain categories of communication features to determine the extent to which these lodges use their Web sites as effective online marketing communications tools (see section 1.3, pp. 7-8).

The five categories of communication features examined in this study coincided with the five elements of the marketing communications mix (i.e., advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling). For the purposes of this study, specific online marketing communications techniques were classified under each element of the marketing communications mix based on the definitions provided for each element in chapter 5.

The resulting five categories and the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with each category are presented in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11: The five marketing communications mix categories examined in this study and the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with each category



The frequency and percentage with which each of the online marketing communications techniques (see Figure 11) were employed in the Web sites investigated were calculated. The findings and conclusions of this study are reported based on these values.

Table 20 below presents the frequency and percentage with which each of the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with the marketing communications mix categories were employed in the Web sites investigated.

Table 20: The frequency and percentage with which the specific online marketing communications techniques were employed in the Web sites investigated

Categories and online marketing communications techniques	Frequency with which technique was employed (n=189)	Percentage with which technique was employed (n=189)
ADVERTISING		
Links to other sites	73	38.62
SALES PROMOTION		
Coupons, discount and/or special offers	48	25.40
Offer something free	15	7.94
Connection to loyalty programme	2	1.06
Win something	1	0.53
Online games	0	0
PUBLIC RELATIONS		
Photo gallery	91	48.15
Testimonials/online guestbook	42	22.22
Registration to receive e-newsletter	21	11.11
Press releases	15	7.94
Recommend site to a "friend"	10	5.29
FAQ section	5	2.65
Press centre	4	2.12
Send e-postcards	2	1.06
DIRECT MARKETING		
Telephone number	187	98.94
Fax number	178	94.18
Physical address	171	90.48
E-mail link (own e-mail software)	171	90.48
Location map	169	89.42
Postal address	144	76.19
Online response form	67	35.45
Site map	43	22.75
Virtual tour	31	16.40
Local weather information	25	13.23
Multiple languages	19	10.05
"What's New" section	15	7.94
Calendar of events	8	4.23
Search index	4	2.12
Jokes and/or cartoons	0	0
PERSONAL SELLING		
Online booking facility	5	2.65

To determine which specific marketing communications mix category was most frequently employed, the average percentage with which each category of techniques was included was also calculated. This average was calculated by summing the percentages of the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with a specific category (see Table 20) and then dividing the answer by the number of techniques in the category. These findings are presented in Table 21.

Table 21: Average percentages calculated for the five marketing communications mix categories (n=189)

Marketing communications mix category	Average percentage
Direct marketing	43.46%
Advertising	38.62%
Public relations	12.57%
Sales promotion	5.14%
Personal selling	2.65%

Taking Table 20 and Table 21 into account, the findings and conclusions of the current study are discussed below. As was mentioned previously (see section 1.4, pp. 8-11), a number of specific research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives investigated in this study. Findings and conclusions are first presented for the research questions and then for the research objectives.

The findings and conclusions for the research questions and objectives are discussed in the order in which the online marketing communications mix categories and specific online marketing communications techniques that comprised these categories were most frequently employed (see Table 20 and 21).

For the purposes of this study, the findings and conclusions are reported in the following manner:

- Categories or techniques employed by **75% - 100%** of the Web sites are referred to as **frequently employed**;

- Categories or techniques employed by **20% - 50%** of the Web sites are referred to as **moderately frequently employed**; and
- Categories or techniques employed by **0% - 20%** of the Web sites are referred to as **not frequently employed**.

Since none of the marketing communications mix categories or specific online marketing communications techniques were employed by between 50% and 75% of the Web sites investigated, it was not necessary to report findings and conclusions in relation to this range of percentages.

7.3 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS INVESTIGATED

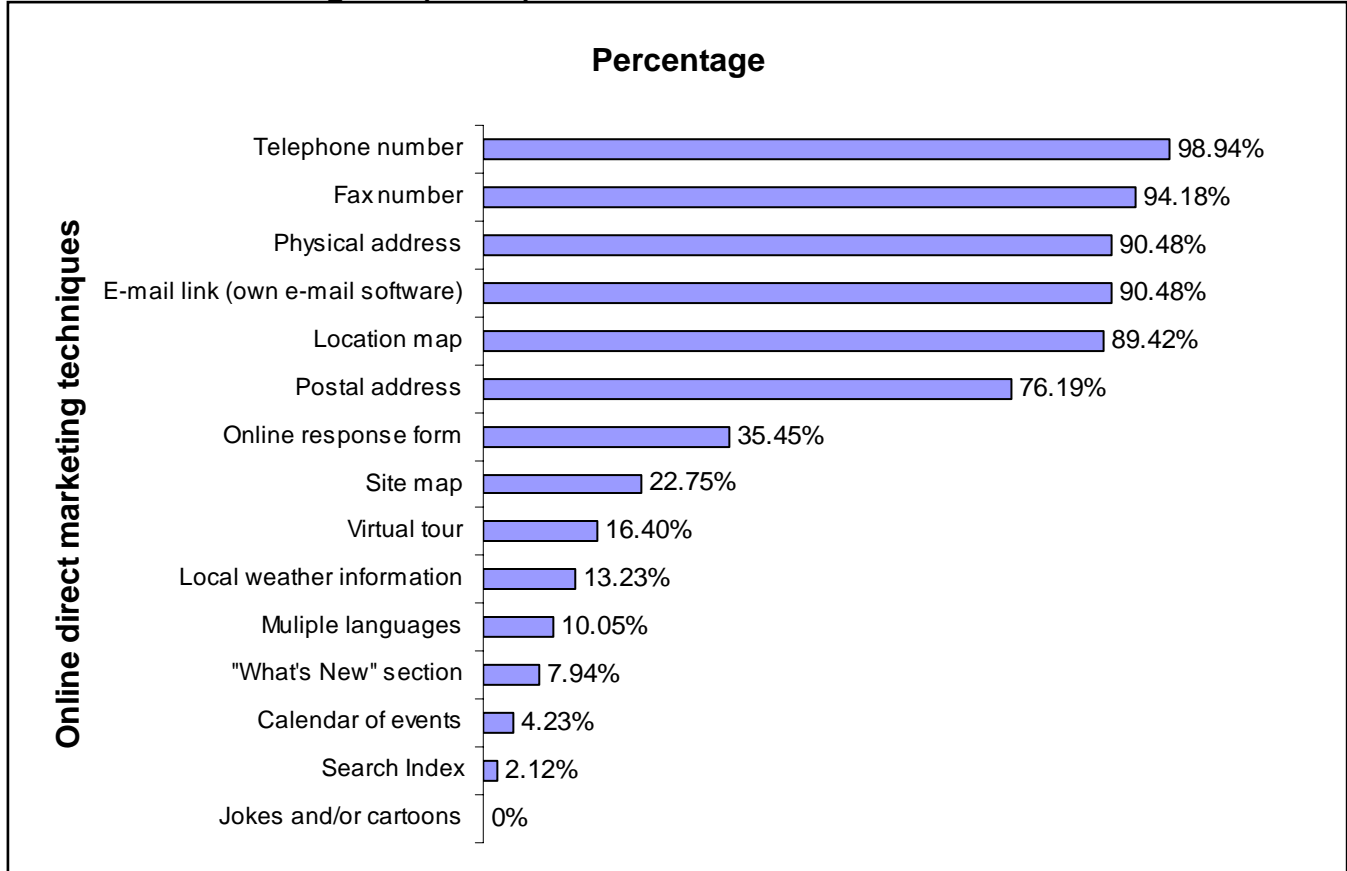
This section presents the findings and conclusions concerning the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with direct marketing, advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling.

7.3.1 Findings and conclusions in relation to direct marketing techniques

Research questions 15 to 29 were formulated for direct marketing (see section 1.4, pp. 10-11). These research questions concerned the extent to which graded lodges provided offline contact information (i.e., a telephone number, fax number, physical address and postal address), an e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software, an online response form, navigational aids (i.e., a site map and a search index), a virtual tour, forms of additional information (i.e., a "What's New" section, a calendar of events, local weather information, a location map and forms of jokes and/or cartoons) or enabled visitors to view the site in multiple languages.

Figure 12 below illustrates the percentage with which online marketing techniques associated with direct marketing were employed by the Web sites examined.

Figure 12: Percentage with which online direct marketing techniques were employed in the Web sites investigated (n=189)



Findings and conclusions regarding research questions 15 to 29: More than 75% of the Web sites investigated provided offline contact information (i.e., telephone number, fax number, physical and postal address). It is, therefore, concluded that providing offline contact information was frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

An e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software was provided by 90.48% of the Web sites. Nevertheless, only 35.45% included an online response form for online communications via the firm's Web site. Considering these percentages, it is concluded that an e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software was frequently employed whereas an online response form was only moderately frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.

In relation to navigational aids, 22.75% of the Web sites included a site map. However, only 2.12% included a search index. Hence, it is concluded that a site map was moderately frequently employed in the Web sites. A search index, on the other hand, was not frequently employed.

Only 16.40% of the Web sites included a virtual tour and only 10.05% offered multilingual capabilities. It is thus concluded that these techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

When considering additional information that can be included in the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure, 89.42% of the Web sites provided a location map with directions to the lodge. Therefore, it is concluded that a location map was frequently employed.

The other techniques investigated that provide additional information were included by a much lower percentage of Web sites - 13.23% provided local weather information, 7.94% included a “What’s New” section and 4.23% provided a calendar of events. None of the Web sites included jokes and/or cartoons. It is thus concluded that the aforementioned techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in the current study.

Although not specifically investigated in this study, the following was noted concerning certain online direct marketing techniques:

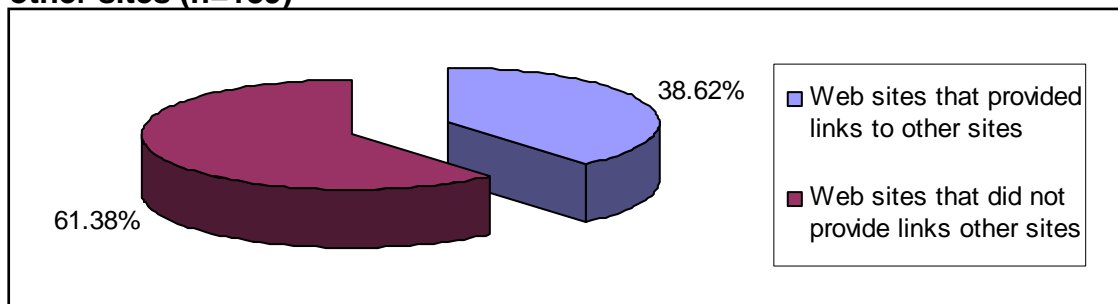
- Although eight of the Web sites did provide their e-mail addresses, there was no hyperlink that would automatically activate the visitor’s own e-mail software. Visitors who wished to communicate with these eight lodges via e-mail would have to open their e-mail software themselves and then physically type in the e-mail address provided on the Web site.
- During the data collection phase it was evident that the majority of the Web sites did not contain a large number of pages and it was thus not difficult to navigate around these sites. A reason for this could be that many of the graded lodges are small firms and, therefore, do not have very complicated Web sites.

7.3.2 Findings and conclusions in relation to advertising techniques

Research question 1 was associated with advertising and concerned the extent to which the Web sites provided links to other sites (see section 1.4, p. 9).

Figure 13 graphically illustrates the percentage of Web sites that provided/did not provide links to other sites.

Figure 13: Percentage of Web sites investigated that provided/did not provide links to other sites (n=189)



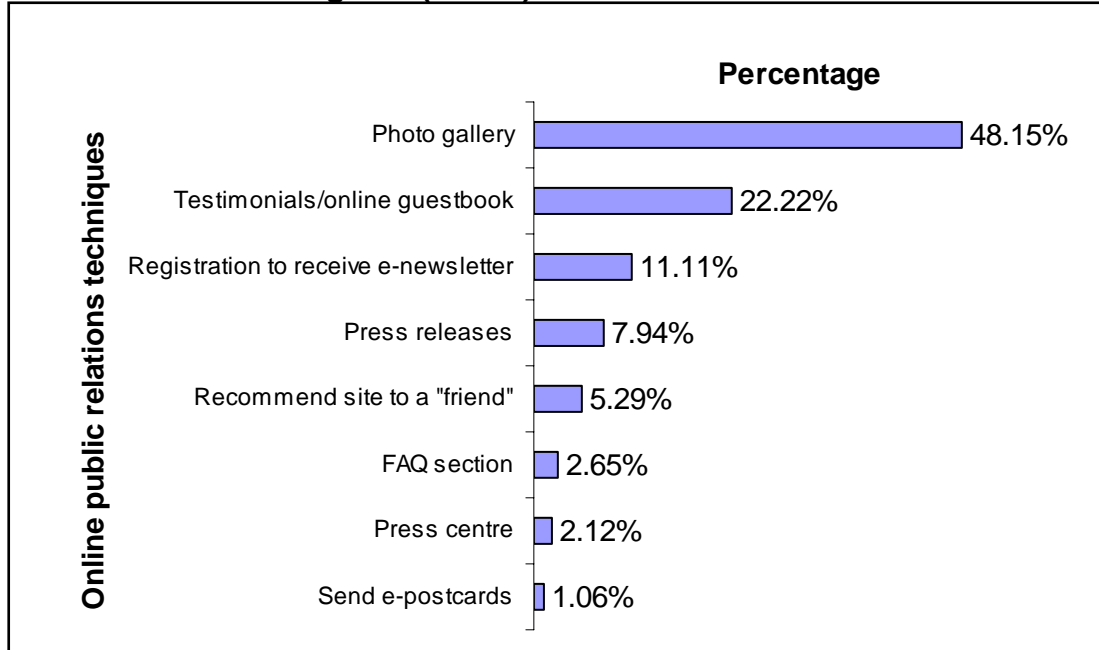
Only 38.62% of the Web sites provided links to other sites. Hence, it is concluded that links to other sites was moderately frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.

7.3.3 Findings and conclusions in relation to public relations techniques

Research questions 7 to 14 (see section 1.4, p. 10) were formulated for public relations and concerned the extent to which the Web sites of graded lodges included an FAQ section, a press centre, press releases, a photo gallery, registration to receive the firm's e-newsletter, testimonials/online guestbook, the option to recommend the site to a "friend" and the option to send e-postcards via the Web site.

The percentages with which online public relations techniques were employed in the Web sites of the graded lodges are shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Percentage with which online public relations techniques were employed in the Web sites investigated (n=189)



Findings and conclusions regarding research questions 7 to 14: A photo gallery was included by 48.15% of the Web sites and was the most frequently employed online public relations technique. Despite this, as only 48.15% included this technique, it is concluded that a photo gallery was only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

Testimonials/online guestbook was the second most frequently employed online public relations technique and was included by 22.22% of the Web sites investigated. Considering this percentage, it is concluded that this technique was also moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.

The remainder of the techniques associated with public relations were employed by less than 15% of the sites. Only 11.11% enabled visitors to register to receive the firm's e-newsletter, 7.94% included press releases, 5.29% enabled visitors to recommend the site to a "friend", 2.65% included an FAQ section, 2.12% had a press centre and 1.06% provided visitors with the option to send e-postcards. Thus, it is concluded that these techniques were not frequently employed by the Web sites investigated.

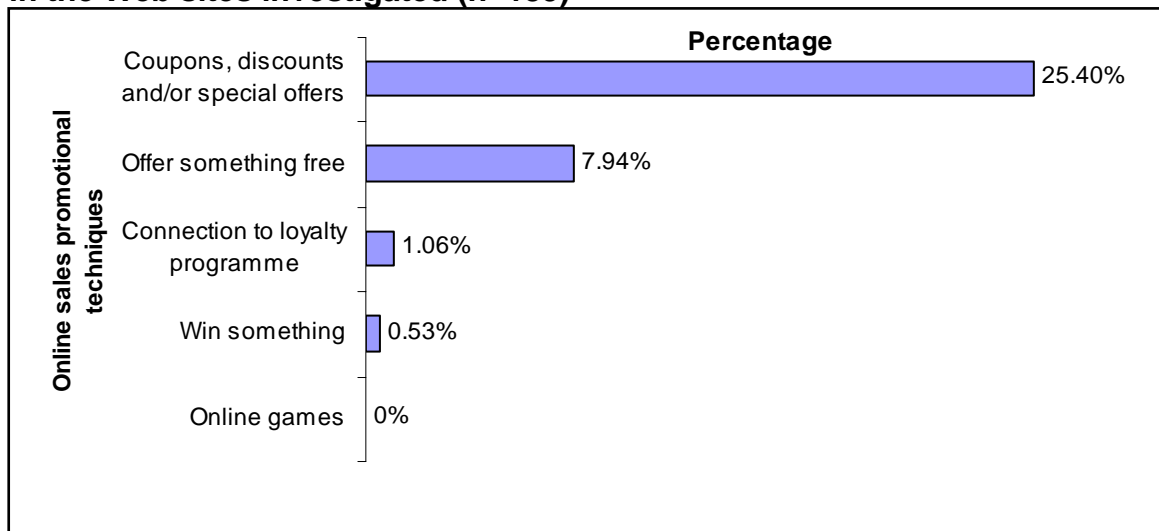
As highlighted above, a press centre and press releases were not frequently employed in the Web sites. A reason for this may be because many of the lodges are small firms. They, therefore, may not have had any articles published about them in the press. Nevertheless, although not specifically investigated in this study, it was evident that many of the lodges did provide their own form of “news”. This was often included in the form a wildlife or ranger’s report (also often referred to as a ranger’s diary) (refer to Appendix M for an example).

7.3.4 Findings and conclusions in relation to sales promotion techniques

Research questions 2 to 6 (see section 1.4, p. 9) were formulated to achieve the research objective for sales promotion. These research questions concerned the extent to which graded lodges offered something free, offered coupons, discounts and/or other special offers, indicated that the firm was connected to a loyalty programme, offered visitors the opportunity to win something or included online games in their Web sites.

Figure 15 below graphically portrays the percentage with which online marketing communications techniques in relation to sales promotion were employed by the graded lodges investigated.

Figure 15: Percentage with which online sales promotional techniques were employed in the Web sites investigated (n=189)



Findings and conclusions regarding research questions 2 to 6: The promotion of special offers was the most frequently employed online sales promotional technique and was included by 25.40% of the Web sites. Nevertheless, considering this percentage, it is concluded that coupons, discounts and/or special offers was only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.

The remainder of the techniques associated with sales promotion were included by less than 10% of the Web sites. Only 7.94% of the Web sites offered visitors something free, 1.06% indicated that the lodge was connected to a loyalty programme, 0.53% offered visitors the opportunity to win something and none of the Web sites incorporated online games. Hence, it is concluded that the aforementioned techniques were not frequently employed.

Although not specifically investigated in this study, the following was noted regarding specific online sales promotional techniques:

- This study did not distinguish between coupons, discounts and other special offers. Nevertheless, it was noted that none of the Web sites offered coupons. Only discounts and other forms of special offers were promoted by the Web sites examined.
- Even though only 7.94% offered visitors something free and this technique was not frequently employed, those sites that did offer something free offered consumers an online brochure or other documents that could easily be downloaded and printed. Two of the sites also provided visitors with the option to download free screen savers and wallpapers.
- It was not known which of the graded lodges participated in, or had their own loyalty programmes (see section 5.3.3). An e-mail was thus sent to all the lodges requesting this information. Where lodges did not provide an e-mail address or did not respond to the e-mail message, this information was either obtained from a recent edition of the Wild in Africa quarterly magazine published by Infinity or via telephonic conversations with owners, managers or employees of the lodges. It was found that 17.46% of the lodges were connected to a loyalty programme. The owners, managers or employees of the lodges generally commented that because they are small firms, they do not believe that it

is feasible for them to be connected to a loyalty programme and this could be a reason why only 17.46% of the lodges are connected to a loyalty programme. Nevertheless, only 1.06% of the lodges indicated this on their Web site.

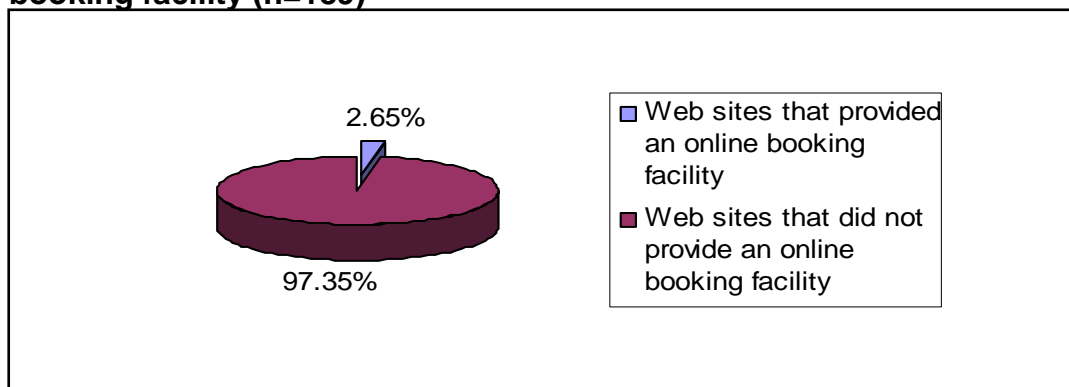
- Only one of the 189 Web sites investigated offered visitors the opportunity to win something via the site. This was in the form of a competition in which visitors could purchase a ticket for R5 000 and the winner of the “lucky draw” would receive a lodging unit adjacent to a game reserve.

7.3.5 Findings and conclusions in relation to personal selling techniques

Research question 30 (see section 1.4, p. 11) was formulated for personal selling and concerned the extent to which the Web sites of the graded lodges provide an online booking facility.

The percentage of Web sites that provided/did not provide an online booking facility is indicated in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16: Percentage of Web sites investigated that provided/did not provide an online booking facility (n=189)



Only 2.65% of the Web sites provided an online booking facility for online reservations and payments via the site. Therefore, it is concluded that an online booking facility was not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

It was noted that of the five Web sites that included an online booking facility, only two of the sites enabled consumers to book directly via the site. The other three sites connected to a third party's site which could be used to make online reservations.

In addition, although not specifically investigated in this study, it was found that even though only 2.65% of the lodges provided an online booking facility, 65.10% of the Web sites provided visitors with an "online booking enquiry form" (see Figure 39 in Appendix N for an example of an online booking enquiry form).

Prospects and/or customers complete these online forms by providing certain information (e.g., name, telephone number, e-mail address, arrival and departure dates, number of guests, type of accommodation and other special requirements). By clicking on a "submit" button, these reservation enquiries are immediately sent to the lodge. The lodge can then establish further communications with the prospects or customers.

The next section provides findings and conclusions for the majority of the research objectives investigated in this study.

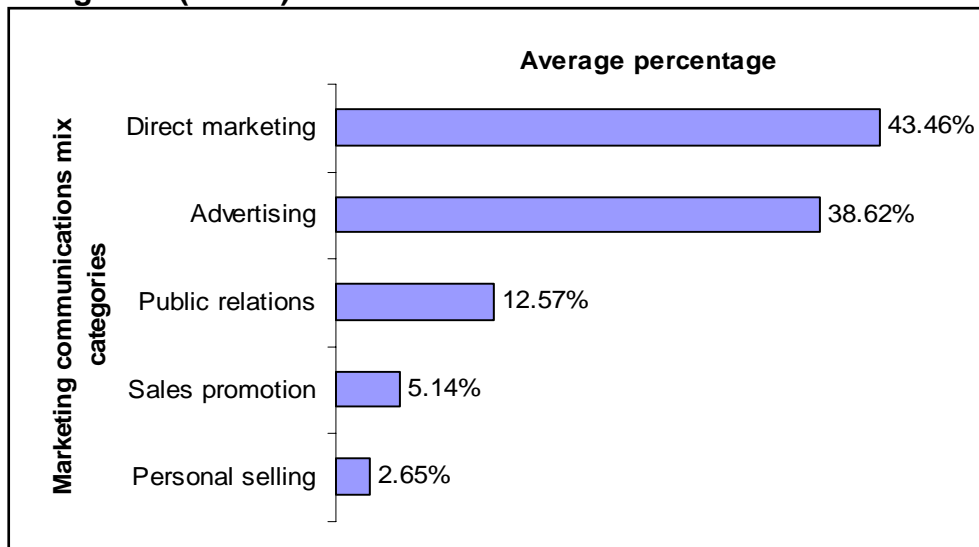
7.4 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES INVESTIGATED

Seven research objectives were formulated for this study (see section 1.4, pp. 8-9). The first research objective concerned identifying, through a review of available literature, a number of specific online marketing communications techniques that could be associated with the marketing communications mix categories (i.e., advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling) and could be applied via a tourism firm's Web site. This research objective has been achieved in the literature review in chapter 5.

This section provides findings and conclusions for research objectives two to six. Findings and conclusions for the seventh research objective is provided in section 7.7.

Research objectives two to six revolved around the five marketing communications mix categories investigated in the study (i.e., direct marketing, advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling). The average percentages with which the five marketing communications mix categories were employed in the Web sites examined have been summarised in Table 21 (p. 175). Figure 17 below graphically portrays these percentages.

Figure 17: Average percentages calculated for the five marketing communications mix categories (n=189)



The findings and conclusions for research objectives two to six investigated in this study are provided below based on the average percentages shown in Figure 17. These percentages are again interpreted according to the interpretation scheme presented above (see pp. 175-176). In terms of this scheme, the findings and conclusions are reported in the following manner:

- Categories or techniques employed by **75% - 100%** of the Web sites are referred to as **frequently employed**;
- Categories or techniques employed by **20% - 50%** of the Web sites are referred to as **moderately frequently employed**; and
- Categories or techniques employed by **0% - 20%** of the Web sites are referred to as **not frequently employed**.

7.4.1 Findings and conclusions for direct marketing

Research objective: *To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to direct marketing were employed by the Web sites examined in this study*

Direct marketing techniques were the most frequently employed in the Web sites investigated and were employed by 43.46% of the sites. Nevertheless, considering this percentage, it is concluded that online marketing communications techniques associated with direct marketing were only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.

7.4.2 Findings and conclusions for advertising

Research objective: *To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to advertising were employed by the Web sites examined in this study*

Online advertising techniques were employed by 38.62% of the Web sites and advertising was the second most frequently employed marketing communications mix category. Considering that only 38.62% of the Web sites included online advertising techniques, it is concluded that online advertising techniques were also only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.

7.4.3 Findings and conclusions for public relations

Research objective: *To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to public relations were employed by the Web sites examined in this study*

Online public relations techniques were employed by 12.57% of the Web sites and were included by a slightly higher percentage than sales promotion and personal selling. Nevertheless, considering this percentage, it is concluded that online public relations techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

7.4.4 Findings and conclusions for sales promotion

Research objective: *To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to sales promotion were employed by the Web sites examined in this study*

Online sales promotional techniques were employed by 5.14% of the Web sites investigated in this study. Therefore, it is concluded that online marketing communications techniques associated with sales promotion were not frequently employed by the Web sites investigated.

7.4.5 Findings and conclusions for personal selling

Research objective: *To investigate the extent to which online marketing communications techniques in relation to personal selling were employed by the Web sites examined in this study*

Only 2.65% of the Web sites included online personal selling techniques and this was the least frequently employed marketing communications mix category. Hence, it is concluded that online marketing communications techniques associated with personal selling were not frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.

Taking the above into account, it is evident that all of the categories of techniques were used by less than 50% of the Web sites investigated. As less than half of the Web sites included these categories, it can be concluded that overall, none of the marketing communications mix categories were employed to a great extent in the Web sites investigated in the study.

The specific online marketing communications techniques that comprised the five marketing communications mix categories were also ranked, regardless of the category that they were classified under in this study. This is considered in the next section.

7.5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE RANKING OF THE SPECIFIC ONLINE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES REGARDLESS OF THEIR CATEGORY CLASSIFICATION

This study ultimately aimed to assist the owners, managers and/or marketers of graded lodges to better understand what specific techniques they can include in their Web sites to improve the effectiveness of their online marketing communications with their target audiences.

It is evident from the literature review that it is beneficial for tourism firms to include all the specific online marketing communications techniques investigated in their Web sites. In addition, as explained previously (see section 1.8, p. 18-19), this study merely classifies the specific online marketing communications techniques into the five marketing communications mix categories for investigative purposes. These five categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are the five categories the only possible classification scheme.

Taking the above into account, the specific online marketing communications techniques, regardless of their category classification, were ranked to determine which specific online marketing communications techniques were the most frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.

Table 22 ranks the specific online marketing communications techniques investigated, regardless of their category classification. This table is divided into three sections based on percentages. The first section indicates techniques employed by 75% to 100% of the Web sites, the second section shows techniques employed by 20% to 50% of the sites and the third section shows techniques included by 0% to 20% of the sites. As was noted previously,

none of the online marketing communications techniques were employed by between 50% and 75% of the Web sites investigated.

Table 22: A ranking of the specific online marketing communications techniques regardless of their category classification

Online marketing communications techniques	Percentage with which technique was employed in Web sites (n=189)
1. Techniques included by 75% - 100% of the Web sites	
Telephone number	98.94
Fax number	94.18
E-mail link (own e-mail software)	90.48
Physical address	90.48
Location map	89.42
Postal address	76.19
2. Techniques included by 20% - 50% of the Web sites	
Photo gallery	48.15
Links to other sites	38.62
Online response form	35.45
Coupons, discounts and/or special offers	25.40
Site map	22.75
Testimonials/online guestbook	22.22
3. Techniques included by 0% - 20% of the Web sites	
Virtual tour	16.40
Local weather information	13.23
Registration to receive e-newsletter	11.11
Multiple languages	10.05
Offer something free	7.94
Press releases	7.94
"What's New" section	7.94
Recommend site to a "friend"	5.29
Calendar of events	4.23
FAQ section	2.65
Online booking facility	2.65
Press centre	2.12
Search index	2.12
Send e-postcards	1.06
Connection to loyalty programme	1.06
Win something	0.53
Online games	0
Jokes and/or cartoons	0

The findings and conclusions regarding the ranking of the specific online marketing communications techniques, regardless of their category classification, are again reported where techniques employed by 75% to 100% are regarded as frequently employed, those included by 25% to 50% are moderately frequently employed and techniques included by 0% to 20% are not frequently employed.

Taking Table 22 into account, the following findings and conclusions are noted regarding the ranking of the specific online marketing communications techniques, regardless of their category classification:

- A telephone number was employed by 98.94% of the Web sites representing the highest percentage obtained for all 30 techniques investigated. It is thus concluded that providing a telephone number was the most frequently employed online marketing communications technique.
- Providing a fax number, an e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software, a physical address, a location map and a postal address were all techniques that were employed by more than 75% of the Web sites. Therefore, it is concluded that the aforementioned techniques were frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.
- A photo gallery, links to other sites, an online response form, coupons, discounts and/or other special offers, a site map and testimonials/online guestbook were employed by less than 50% of the Web sites but at least 20% of the sites. Hence, it is concluded that these online marketing communications techniques were moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.
- The remainder of the techniques were employed by less than 20% of the Web sites and two techniques, namely online games and jokes and/or cartoons, were not included at all. It is thus concluded that the remainder of the online marketing communications techniques investigated were not frequently employed in the Web sites examined.

This study examined 30 online marketing communications techniques that could be employed in the Web sites of graded lodges. Only six of these techniques were frequently employed

(i.e., included by 75% to 100% of the Web sites) and only six techniques were moderately frequently employed (i.e., included by 20% to 50% of the Web sites). The remaining 18 techniques investigated were, therefore, not frequently employed (i.e., included by less than 20% of the Web sites). Hence, **20%** of the online marketing communications techniques were **frequently employed**, **20%** were **moderately frequently** employed and **60%** were **not frequently employed** in the Web sites examined.

These findings indicate that the graded lodges are underutilising the majority of the online marketing communications techniques investigated in this study. These firms could substantially improve the effectiveness their online marketing communications with their target audiences by including more of the online marketing communications techniques in their Web sites.

Considering the findings and conclusions presented in the above three sections, the overall conclusion for the research problem investigated in the current study is considered next.

7.6 OVERALL CONCLUSION FOR THE RESEARCH PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

The main aim of this study was to examine the extent to which graded lodges use their Web sites as effective tools for online marketing communications with their respective target audiences. This was investigated by the determining the extent to which the graded lodges employed specific online marketing communications techniques associated with the five marketing communications mix categories (see section 1.3, p. 7-8).

The findings of this study indicated that only two of the marketing communications mix categories (i.e., direct marketing and advertising) were moderately frequently employed. The other three categories (i.e., public relations, sales promotion and personal selling) were not frequently employed by the Web sites examined. This study considered categories employed by 20% to 50% of the Web sites to be moderately frequently employed. However, 20% to

50% are still relatively low percentages. It is evident that none of the marketing communications mix categories were frequently employed.

In addition, only 20% of the specific online marketing communications techniques were frequently employed, 20% were moderately frequently employed and the remaining 60% were not frequently employed. The majority of the online marketing communications techniques investigated in this study were thus not frequently employed by the Web sites examined.

Taking the above into account, it is concluded that the Web sites of graded lodges do not employ the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with the five marketing communications mix categories examined in this study to a great extent. The graded lodges are thus not using their Web sites effectively as online marketing communications tools to communicate with their target audiences.

7.7 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE THREE, FOUR AND FIVE STAR LODGES

The seventh research objective of this study concerned comparing the three, four and five star lodges to determine whether differences existed regarding the online marketing communications techniques employed in their Web sites based on their star grading (see section 1.4, p. 9).

As was mentioned previously (see section 6.6.2), only the three, four and five star lodges were included in the comparisons. It was not feasible to make comparisons for one and two star lodges due to the small number of Web sites in these two categories.

It was also noted in section 6.6.2 that this study did not make estimates or test hypotheses based on a sample drawn from a larger population. Therefore, even though comparisons were made to determine important differences, statistical significance tests were *not* conducted as these comparisons were based on census data which reflected “true”

population differences. Statistical significance tests are only relevant in cases where comparisons are based on sample data.

The percentage with the specific online marketing communications techniques were employed in the Web sites was calculated separately for the three, four and five star lodges. These findings are presented in Table 23 below. As jokes and/or cartoons as well as online games were not included in any of the Web sites examined, these techniques are not included in Table 23.

Table 23: The percentage with which the specific online marketing communications techniques were employed in the Web sites of three, four and five star lodges

Categories and online marketing communications techniques	Percentage with which technique was employed by three star lodges (n=49)	Percentage with which technique was employed by four star lodges (n=79)	Percentage with which technique was employed by five star lodges (n=57)
DIRECT MARKETING			
Telephone number	97.96	98.73	100
Fax number	93.88	89.87	100
Physical address	89.80	91.14	91.23
Postal address	79.59	73.42	78.95
E-mail link (own e-mail software)	89.90	88.61	97.74
Online response form	46.94	35.44	28.07
Site map	20.41	22.78	26.32
Search index	2.04	1.27	3.51
Virtual tour	8.16	15.19	26.32
“What’s New” section	10.20	6.33	8.77
Calendar of events	4.08	5.06	3.51
Local weather information	4.08	20.25	12.28
Location map	87.76	93.67	89.47
Multiple languages	8.16	11.39	10.53
ADVERTISING			
Links to other sites	30.61	37.97	45.61

Categories and online marketing communications techniques	Percentage with which technique was employed by three star lodges (n=49)	Percentage with which technique was employed by four star lodges (n=79)	Percentage with which technique was employed by five star lodges (n=57)
PUBLIC RELATIONS			
FAQ section	4.08	2.53	1.75
Press centre	0	2.53	3.51
Press releases	4.08	7.59	12.28
Photo gallery	30.61	51.90	59.65
Registration to receive e-newsletter	6.12	13.92	12.28
Testimonials/online guestbook	16.33	25.32	24.56
Recommend site to a "friend"	4.08	7.59	3.51
Send e-postcards	2.04	1.27	0
SALES PROMOTION			
Offer something free	2.04	11.39	8.77
Coupons, discount and/or special offers	22.45	27.85	26.32
Connection to loyalty programme	0	1.27	1.75
Win something	0	1.27	0
PERSONAL SELLING			
Online booking facility	0	2.53	5.26

The average percentage for the marketing communications mix categories was also calculated separately for the three, four and five star lodges. This was done by summing the percentages with which the specific online marketing communications techniques were employed for each marketing communications mix category for the three, four and five star lodges and then dividing this by the number of techniques in each category. These findings are presented in Table 24 below.

Table 24: Average percentages calculated for the marketing communications mix categories for the three, four and five star lodges

Marketing communications mix categories	Average percentage for three star lodges	Average percentage for four star lodges	Average percentage for five star lodges
Direct marketing	45.92	46.65	48.34
Advertising	30.61	37.97	45.61
Public relations	8.42	14.08	14.70
Sales promotion	6.12	10.45	9.21
Personal selling	0	2.53	5.26

It would not be appropriate to refer to *significant* differences between the lodges as statistical significance tests were not conducted. Therefore, this study rather refers to **slight differences** and **important differences**.

It is evident from Table 23 that in the majority of cases there were only very small differences (i.e., differences of **less than 10%**) between the three, four and five star lodges in the extent to which a specific online marketing communications technique was employed. This study regarded these differences to be *slight* differences. Only *important* differences of **10% or more** are reported for the comparisons.

Findings and conclusions are presented in this section regarding **important differences** between the three, four and five star lodges for the marketing communications mix categories examined in this study, as well as the specific online marketing communications techniques that comprised these categories. The specific online marketing communications techniques were also ranked, regardless of their category classification, for the three, four and five star lodges and these findings and conclusions are also considered.

7.7.1 Findings and conclusions regarding comparisons between three, four and five star lodges based on marketing communications mix categories examined

Considering the average percentages for the five marketing communications mix categories shown in Table 24, there were no important differences present, except for advertising. The three star lodges had an average percentage of 30.61% whereas the five star lodges had an average percentage of 45.61%. An important difference of 15% thus existed between the five star lodges and the three star lodges for advertising.

The five star lodges employed advertising techniques (i.e., provided links to other sites) by 15% more than the three star lodges. Therefore, it is concluded that five star lodges employed online advertising techniques more frequently than the three star lodges.

7.7.2 Findings and conclusions regarding comparisons between three, four and five star lodges for specific online marketing communications techniques

A number of important differences were also noted regarding the specific online marketing communications techniques employed by the three, four and five star lodges (see Table 23). These findings and associated conclusions are highlighted below:

- An online response form was included by 46.94% of the three star lodges, 35.44% of the four star lodges and 28.07% of the five star lodges. An important difference of 11.5% thus existed between the three and four star lodges and an important difference of 18.87% was present between the three and five star lodges. Despite these findings, it cannot be concluded that lodges of a lower star grading included an online response form more frequently than lodges with a higher star grading as an important difference was not present between the four and five star lodges. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the three star lodges included an online response form more frequently than the four and five star lodges.
- A photo gallery was included by 59.65% of the five star lodges, 51.90% of the four star lodges and only 30.61% of the three star lodges. An important difference of 29.04% was thus present between the five and the three star lodges and an important difference of 21.29% existed between the four and three star lodges. As an important difference did not exist between the four and five star lodges, it cannot be concluded that lodges of a higher star grading included a photo gallery more frequently than lodges with a lower star grading. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the four and five star lodges included a photo gallery more frequently than the three star lodges.
- A virtual tour was included by 26.32% of the five star lodges, 15.19% of the four star lodges and 8.16% of the three star lodges. Therefore, an important difference of 11.13% was present between the five and four star lodges and an important difference of 18.16% existed between the five and three star lodges. As an important difference did not exist between the four and three star lodges, it can again not be concluded that lodges of a higher star grading included this technique more frequently than lodges with a lower star

grading. It is, however, concluded that the five star lodges employed a virtual tour more frequently than the four and three star lodges.

- Local weather information was included by 20.25% of the four star lodges. However, only 4.08% of the three star lodges included this information. An important difference of 16.17% was thus present between the four and three star lodges. It is thus concluded that the four star lodges provided local weather information more frequently than the three star lodges.

7.7.3 Ranking the specific online marketing communications techniques for the three, four and five star lodges regardless of their category classification

To determine whether there were clear differences regarding the specific online marketing techniques employed between the three, four and five star lodges, the specific techniques were also ranked for the lodges based on their star grading.

Table 25 ranks the specific online marketing communications techniques regardless of their category classification, for the three, four and five star lodges. The first column indicates the specific online marketing communications techniques and the second, third and fourth columns show the ranking and percentage for the three, four and five star lodges respectively. Jokes and/or cartoons as well as online games were again not included in this table as these techniques were not employed by any of the Web sites investigated.

Table 25: A ranking of the specific online marketing communications techniques regardless of their category classification for three, four and five star lodges

Online marketing communications technique	Three Star		Four Star		Five Star	
	Ranking	% (n=49)	Ranking	% (n=79)	Ranking	% (n=57)
Telephone number	1	97.96	1	98.73	1	100
Fax number	2	93.88	4	89.87	1	100
E-mail link (own e-mail software)	3	89.80	5	88.61	2	97.74
Physical address	3	89.80	3	91.14	3	91.23

Online marketing communications technique	Three Star		Four Star		Five Star	
	Ranking	% (n=49)	Ranking	% (n=79)	Ranking	% (n=57)
Location map	4	87.76	2	93.67	4	89.47
Postal address	5	79.59	6	73.42	5	78.95
Online response form	6	46.94	9	35.44	8	28.07
Photo gallery	7	30.61	7	51.90	6	59.65
Links to other sites	7	30.61	8	37.97	7	45.61
Coupons, discounts and/or special offers	8	22.45	10	27.85	9	26.32
Site map	9	20.41	12	22.78	9	26.32
Testimonials/online guestbook	10	16.33	11	25.32	10	24.56
“What’s New” section	11	10.20	18	6.33	13	8.77
Virtual tour	12	8.16	14	15.19	9	26.32
Multiple languages	12	8.16	16	11.39	12	10.53
Registration to receive e-newsletter	13	6.12	15	13.92	11	12.28
FAQ section	14	4.08	20	2.53	16	1.75
Press releases	14	4.08	17	7.59	11	12.28
Recommend site to a “friend”	14	4.08	17	7.59	15	3.51
Calendar of events	14	4.08	19	5.06	15	3.51
Local weather information	14	4.08	13	20.25	11	12.28
Offer something free	15	2.04	16	11.39	13	8.77
Send e-postcards	15	2.04	21	1.27	17	0
Search index	15	2.04	21	1.27	15	3.51
Connection to loyalty programme	16	0	21	1.27	16	1.75
Win something	16	0	21	1.27	17	0
Press centre	16	0	20	2.53	15	3.51
Online booking facility	16	0	20	2.53	14	5.26

The main finding considering Table 25 it that the three, four and five star lodges did not differ much in terms of the online marketing communications techniques that they *most or least frequently* employed.

Five techniques, namely providing a telephone number, fax number, e-mail link that activates the visitor's own software, physical address and a location map were *most frequently* employed by all the lodges regardless of their star grading classification. Similarly, enabling visitors to send e-postcards, providing a search index, indicating the firm's connection to a loyalty programme, offering visitors the chance to win something, press centres and providing an online booking facility were the techniques *least frequently* employed by all the lodges regardless of their star grading classification.

In addition, it is evident from Table 25, that the same important differences (i.e., a minimum difference of 10%) were present for the same specific online marketing communications techniques (i.e., links to other sites, online response form, photo gallery, virtual tours and providing local weather information) as indicated in section 7.7.2 above. As these findings and conclusions have been considered previously, they are not repeated here.

7.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the empirical findings and associated conclusions of the current study. The main and/or most interesting findings and conclusions presented in this chapter are summarised below.

In relation to this summary, it should be kept in mind that for the overall research problem investigated, marketing communications mix categories and specific online marketing communications techniques, percentages of 75% to 100% were regarded as frequently employed, 20% to 50% as moderately frequently employed and 0% to 20% as not frequently employed.

7.8.1 The main findings of the study and conclusion for overall research problem investigated

The findings of this study indicated that none of the marketing communications mix categories were frequently employed by the Web sites examined. In addition, only 20% of the specific online marketing communications techniques investigated were frequently employed and 20% were moderately frequently employed. Therefore, the majority (i.e., 60%) of the online marketing communications techniques were not frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.

Considering these findings, it is concluded that the graded lodges are not employing the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with the five marketing communications mix categories examined to a great extent. Therefore, they are not using their Web sites effectively as online marketing communications tools.

7.8.2 A summary of the main findings and conclusions for marketing communications mix categories investigated

Regarding the marketing communications mix categories examined, the findings of this study showed that direct marketing techniques (43.46%) were the most frequently employed. This was followed by advertising (38.62%), public relations (12.57%), sales promotion (5.14%) and personal selling (2.65%).

Two of the marketing communications mix categories (i.e., direct marketing and advertising) were thus moderately frequently employed and the other three categories (i.e., public relations, sales promotion and advertising) were not frequently employed by the Web sites examined in this study.

It is evident that none of the marketing communications mix categories were frequently employed and although two of the categories were moderately frequently employed, they were still only included by 43.46% and 38.62% of the Web sites which are relatively low percentages. Therefore, it is concluded that the graded lodges did not employ the marketing communications mix categories investigated to a great extent in their Web sites.

7.8.3 A summary of the main findings and conclusions for specific online marketing communications techniques investigated

This section summarises the main findings regarding the specific online marketing communications techniques associated with direct marketing, advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling.

Direct marketing:

- Over 75% of the Web sites provided offline contact information (i.e., telephone number, fax number, physical and postal address). These techniques were thus frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.
- An e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software was provided by 90.48% of the Web sites and was, therefore, frequently employed. An online response form for online communications via a firm's site, however, was only employed by 35.45% of the Web sites and was thus only moderately frequently employed by the Web sites investigated.
- Considering navigational aids, 22.75% of the Web sites included a site map. This technique was, therefore, moderately frequently employed. However, only 2.12% included a search index and was thus not frequently employed by the Web sites examined.
- Only 16.40% of the Web sites included a virtual tour and only 10.05% offered multilingual capabilities. Hence, these techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

- In relation to additional information that can be included in the Web site as an electronic catalogue/brochure, 89.42% of the Web sites provided a location map with directions to the lodge. A location map was thus frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.
- Considering the remaining techniques that provide additional information only 13.23% provided local weather information, 7.94% included a “What’s New” section and 4.23% provided a calendar of events. None of the Web sites included jokes and/or cartoons. Therefore, it is concluded that these techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in this study.

Advertising

- Only 38.62% of the Web sites provided links to other sites. This technique was, therefore, moderately frequently employed by the Web sites investigated in this study.

Public relations

- A photo gallery was the most frequently employed online public relations technique and was included by 48.15% of the Web sites. Nevertheless, a photo gallery was only moderately frequently employed by the Web sites examined in this study.
- Testimonials/online guestbook was the second most frequently employed online public relations technique and was included by 22.22% of the Web sites. This technique was thus also only moderately frequently employed by the Web sites.
- The remainder of the techniques associated with public relations were included by less than 15% of the Web sites examined. Only 11.11% enabled visitors to register to receive the firm’s e-newsletter, 7.94% included press releases, 5.29% enabled visitors to recommend the site to a “friend”, 2.65% included an FAQ section, 2.12% had a press centre and 1.06% provided visitors with the option to send e-postcards. These techniques were, therefore, not frequently employed by the Web sites.

Sales promotion

- Coupons, discounts and/or special offers was the most frequently employed online sales promotional technique and was included by 25.40% of the Web sites. Nevertheless, this technique was only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites investigated.
- The remainder of the techniques associated with sales promotion were included by less than 10% of the Web sites. Only 7.94% offered visitors something free, 1.06% indicated that the lodge was connected to a loyalty programme, 0.53% offered visitors the opportunity to win something and none of the Web sites included online games. Hence, these techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites examined in this study.

Personal selling

- An extremely small percentage (2.65%) of the Web sites provided an online booking facility for online reservations and payments via the site. An online booking facility was, therefore, not frequently employed in the Web sites examined in this study.

7.8.4 A summary of the main findings and conclusions regarding comparisons between the three, four and five star lodges

It is important to note that only important differences (i.e., minimum differences of 10%) were reported regarding comparisons between the three, four and five star lodges. The main findings and conclusions concerning the marketing communications mix categories, specific online marketing communications techniques and the ranking of the specific online marketing communications techniques, regardless of category classification, are highlighted in this section.

Findings and conclusions regarding marketing communications mix categories:

The only important difference that existed regarding the marketing communications mix categories was in relation to *advertising*. Online advertising techniques were included by 45.61% of the five star lodges but only 30.61% of the three star lodges. Therefore, an

important difference of 15% was present between the five star lodges and the three star lodges for advertising.

The five star lodges employed advertising techniques (i.e., provided links to other sites) by 15% more than the three star lodges. Therefore, it is concluded that five star lodges employed online advertising techniques more frequently than the three star lodges.

Findings and conclusions regarding online marketing communications techniques:

The following important differences were noted between the three, four and five star lodges regarding the specific online marketing communications techniques investigated:

- An online response form was included by 46.94% of the three star lodges, 35.44% of the four star lodges and 28.07% of the five star lodges. An important difference of 11.5% thus existed between the three and four star lodges and an important difference of 18.87% was present between the three and five star lodges. Therefore, the three star lodges included an online response form more frequently than both the four and five star lodges.
- A photo gallery was included by 59.65% of the five star lodges, 51.90% of the four star lodges and 30.61% of the three star lodges. An important difference of 29.04% was present between the five and the three star lodges and an important difference of 21.29% existed between the four and three star lodges. Hence, it is concluded that the four and five star lodges included a photo gallery more frequently than the three star lodges.
- A virtual tour was included by 26.32% of the five star lodges, 15.19% of the four star lodges and 8.16% of the three star lodges. An important difference of 11.13% was present between the five and four star lodges and an important difference of 18.16% existed between the five and three star lodges. It is thus concluded that the five star lodges included a virtual tour more frequently than the four and three star lodges.
- Local weather information was included by 20.25% of the four star lodges and only 4.08% of the three star lodges. An important difference of 16.17% was present between the four and three star lodges. It is, therefore, concluded that the four star lodges provided local weather information more frequently than the three star lodges.

Findings and conclusions regarding the ranking of the online marketing communications techniques regardless of their category classification:

The three, four and five star lodges did not differ much in terms of the online marketing communications techniques that they *most* or *least frequently* employed.

Providing a telephone number, fax number, e-mail link that activates the visitor's own software, physical address and a location map were *most frequently* employed by all the lodges regardless of their star grading classification.

Similarly, enabling visitors to send e-postcards, providing a search index, indicating the firm's connection to a loyalty programme, offering visitors the chance to win something, press centres and providing an online booking facility were *least frequently* employed by all the lodges regardless of their star grading classification.

The final chapter considers implications and recommendations in relation to this study.

CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers managerial recommendations in relation to the findings and conclusions of the current study, provides recommendations for future research and also highlights a number of limitations of this study.

8.2 MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations for the owners, managers and/or marketers of the graded lodges investigated in this study. The literature review in chapter 5 supports the notion that all of the online marketing communications techniques investigated in this study are beneficial for tourism firms. Therefore, the main recommendation concerning this study is that South African managers should include as many of the online marketing communications techniques as possible in a tourism firm's Web site.

Recommendations in relation to the five marketing communications mix categories and specific online marketing communications that comprised these categories (see Figure 11, p. 173) are presented below. These recommendations are provided, taking into account the findings of the current and similar past studies, as well as the benefits that the specific online marketing communications techniques may produce for tourism firms.

8.2.1 Recommendations in relation to direct marketing techniques

Technique: **Offline contact information (i.e., telephone number, fax number, physical and postal address)**

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.1, pp. 117-119):

It is essential to provide offline contact information in a tourism firm's Web site as this information enables potential guests to communicate with the firm, which may eventually lead to a purchase (or booking). Providing this information may also result in increased customer satisfaction as customers can use the information to contact the firm to obtain answers to questions, problems or concerns they might have (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Geissler, 2001:493; Ham, 2004:295-308; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Sweeney, 2000:23).

Main findings:

- Offline contact information was provided by more than 75% of the Web sites investigated in the current study making it among the most frequently employed online marketing communications techniques used by the graded lodges.
- Similar past studies also showed that offline contact information was provided by more than 75% of the Web sites investigated and was thus frequently employed (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227; Ham, 2004:295-308).

Recommendations:

Considering that providing offline contact information in a firm's Web site may lead to an increase in sales and enhanced customer satisfaction, and considering that the majority of the Web sites in the current and past studies included this information, it is suggested that all graded lodges provide offline contact information in their sites.

In December 2005 it was estimated that only 9.9% of the South African population are Internet users (Epnnet, 2006). As such a low percentage of the population are Internet users, it is deduced that South African consumers may not yet be as comfortable in using the Internet for communications in comparison to more traditional methods. They may thus still prefer to contact the firm via offline methods (e.g., by means of telephonic conversations or requesting a price list to be sent via fax). Providing offline contact information may, therefore, be particularly important considering the South African market.

Offline contact information of graded lodges does not change regularly. It can also be added relatively easily and inexpensively to a Web page. It is thus recommended that all graded lodges, regardless of their size, include offline contact information.

Technique: An e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.2, pp. 119-121):

Prospects and/or customers are able to communicate with a firm via e-mail regarding questions, comments, suggestions or complaints they may have concerning a firm's offerings. This is a relatively easy form of communications between online consumers and a firm, which can take place from anywhere around the world, at anytime and at a relatively lower cost in comparison to more traditional forms of communications (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:563; Du Plessis *et al.*, 2003:346; Janal, 2000:200).

Main findings:

- An e-mail link that activates the visitors own e-mail software was included by 90.48% of the Web sites in the current study and was one of the most frequently employed online marketing communications techniques.
- Past studies also showed that more than 75% of the Web sites included this technique and was thus also frequently employed in previous studies (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227; Ham, 2004:295-308).
- Although eight of the Web sites in the current study did provide e-mail addresses, there was no hyperlink that would automatically activate the visitor's own e-mail software. Visitors who wished to communicate with the lodge via e-mail would thus have to open their e-mail software themselves and then physically type in the e-mail address provided on the Web site.

Recommendations:

Web sites have the ability to communicate with customers from around the world (Rao, 1997:231; Timmers, 2000:12). Both domestic and international tourists can use a firm's Web site to communicate with a firm online and this communications takes place relatively easily,

at anytime, from anywhere (where necessary facilities are available) and at a relatively low cost.

Although South African consumers may still prefer to communicate with a firm offline, this technique may be particularly beneficial for the graded lodges considering that their Web sites also cater for an international market (see section 1.8, pp.17-18). Considering the benefits of online communications, it would be more practical and more cost-effective for international consumers to communicate with graded lodges online in comparison to more traditional offline methods.

Taking these benefits into account and considering that high percentages (i.e., over 75%) of the Web sites examined in the current and past studies included this technique, it is recommended that all graded lodges include an e-mail link that activates the visitor's own e-mail software. It is important that the lodges do not only provide their e-mail address in their Web sites. They should always provide a link to their e-mail address that automatically activates the user's e-mail software. This makes it easier for visitors to communicate via e-mail and eliminates potential errors that may prevent communications (e.g., typing errors that occur when a visitor physically types in the firm's e-mail address).

Technique: Online response form

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.2, pp. 119-121):

Online response forms can encourage online communications as these forms provide a quick and easy method for online consumers to communicate with a firm. They are also easy to create and serve as a means for a firm to obtain additional customer information (e.g., full name, telephone numbers, e-mail and postal addresses) which can be added to a firm's database for future communications (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:209; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:76).

Main findings:

- An online response form was included by 35.45% of the Web sites in the current study and by 43.75% in a similar past study (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21). This technique was thus moderately frequently employed in both the current and the past study.
- When comparing three, four and five star lodges in the current study, the three star lodges included an online response form by 11.5% more than the four star lodges and by 18.87% more than the five star lodges. The three star lodges thus included an online response form more frequently than both the four and five star lodges.

Recommendations:

Online response forms may encourage Web site visitors to communicate with a firm as these forms are quick and easy to use. Response forms are also beneficial for firms as consumers provide certain personal information when they complete these forms and this enables the firm to communicate with these consumers in the future.

Online response forms were only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites in both the current and a previous study. Nevertheless, it was surprising to find that the three star lodges included this technique more frequently than both the four and five star lodges. One would expect lodges of a higher star grading to include more sophisticated techniques in their Web sites. Taking this into account and considering the benefits of an online response form for a tourism firm, all graded lodges should include an online response form in their Web sites to encourage online communications between consumers and a firm and vice versa.

Technique: Navigational aids (i.e., a site map and a search index)

Benefits of these techniques (see section 5.5.4, pp. 125-128)

Site maps and search indexes are beneficial as they assist visitors in finding their way around a Web site and contribute to the user-friendliness of the site. Visitors can thus easily access the information they are looking for (Cox & Koelzer, 2003:135; Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:49; Procknow, 1998:88; Sweeney, 2000:26).

Main findings:

- A site map was included by 22.75% of the Web sites in the current study and was thus moderately frequently employed. A search index, on the other hand, was only included by 2.12% and was one of the least frequently used techniques. A site map was included by 20.63% more of the Web sites in comparison to a search index as a navigational aid.
- In relation to navigation around the Web sites of the graded lodges, it was noted during the data collection phase that these sites did not generally contain a large number of pages and were not very complicated. It was thus not difficult to navigate around the majority of the Web sites examined in the current study.

Recommendations:

Site map - Site maps were included by 22.75% of the Web sites in the current study and were moderately frequently employed. It has been argued that only large Web sites (i.e., those with more than eight to ten major sections) should include a site map (Sweeney, 2000:26). However, others are of the opinion that *every* Web site, no matter how large or small it is, should include a site map (Procknow, 1998:88). Taking this into account, it is recommended that all graded lodges include a site map in their Web sites to ensure ease of navigation.

Search index - The literature indicates that ideally all firms should include a search index in their Web sites as a navigational aid (González & Palacios, 2004:313-328; Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:49; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267). A search index, however, was among the least frequently employed techniques in the current study. A reason for this may be because as many of the lodges are small firms, they have relatively simple Web sites and it is thus not difficult to navigate around these sites.

All graded lodges should include a search index in their Web sites. However, taking the above discussion into account and considering that a site map was substantially more frequently employed (i.e., included by 20.63% more of the Web sites) in comparison to a search index, it is recommended that the graded lodges first incorporate a site map as a navigational aid before they include a search index. Nevertheless, where graded lodges have more

complicated Web sites (i.e., they consist of more than eight to ten major sections) and are more difficult to navigate, it is essential that a search index be included together with the site map.

Technique: Virtual tours

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.4, p. 128-129)

Virtual tours enable Web site visitors to better visualise a tourism firm's offering. In comparison to merely including still photographs of the interior and exterior of various rooms at the property and pictures of the surroundings, virtual tours more effectively tangibilise the service experience for online consumers and reflect the unique personality of the accommodation establishment. Virtual tours provide visitors with a comfort level as they have a better understanding of what to expect from an accommodation establishment. This technique is also beneficial as it aids in encouraging traffic to a tourism firm's site (Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Sweeney, 2000:363).

Main findings:

- A virtual tour was included by 16.40% of the Web sites in the current study and was not frequently employed. In contrast, one previous study showed that almost all of the Web sites (96%) included a virtual tour (Ham, 2004:295-308).
- The five star lodges included a virtual tour by 11.13% more in comparison to the four star lodges and by 18.16% more in relation to the three star lodges. The five star lodges thus included a virtual tour more frequently than the four and three star lodges.

Recommendations:

A virtual tour was not frequently employed in the Web sites investigated in the current study. A reason for this may be because a virtual tour requires greater skills and resources to incorporate. This may also be the reason why the five star lodges included a virtual tour more frequently than the four and three star lodges.

As many of the lodges are small firms, they may not have the expertise to include a virtual tour in their Web sites or the financial resources to outsource this function to a third party and, therefore, did not include this technique. On the other hand, smaller lodges may not be aware of this technique and of its associated benefits.

Nevertheless, considering that a virtual tour was included in almost all of the Web sites examined in a past study and considering that this technique provides visitors with a comfort level by tangibilising the service experience for the online consumer, it is recommended that the lodges include a virtual tour where sufficient resources are available to do so. These virtual tours should clearly show what the rooms (or accommodation where the visitor will be staying at) look like and provide visitors with a clear idea of the surrounding areas. These tours should create an accurate representation of what to expect from the lodge in order to avoid disappointed customers with high expectations.

Smaller lodges that lack the resources to include a virtual tour should at least include pictures of the rooms and surrounding areas in a photo gallery (see section 8.2.3) which could aid in tangibilising the service experience for the online consumer so that they know what to expect from the lodge.

Technique: Multiple languages

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.4, p. 133-134)

Web sites have the potential to reach and communicate with a global market (Ainscough & Luckett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231). It is evident that international visitors to a site may speak a variety of different languages. By enabling international visitors to view the site in a preferred language, they will better understand the contents of the site. If international visitors easily understand the information contained in a Web site, this may ultimately influence their decision to stay at a particular location.

Main findings:

- Only 10.05% of the Web sites in the current study enabled visitors to view the site in a preferred language and this technique was thus not frequently employed.
- One previous study found that 80% of the Web sites examined included this technique and it was thus frequently employed (Ham, 2004:295-308). In contrast, another past study found that none of the Web sites offered multilingual capabilities (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21).

Recommendations:

Although offering multilingual capabilities was not frequently employed in the Web sites examined in the current and a similar past study, it was frequently employed in another previous study. In addition, enabling foreign visitors to view a Web site in a preferred language may result in an increase in international visitors to a tourism firm. As the Web sites of the graded lodges cater for an international market (see section 1.8, pp.17-18), it is recommended that all the lodges include this technique.

The Web sites in the current study that included this technique provided visitors with the option to view their sites in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. The graded lodges could consider enabling visitors to view their site in these languages. In addition, the graded lodges could determine which foreign visitors most commonly visit their location and enable visitors to view their Web sites in their preferred languages.

Technique: **Additional information (i.e., a location map, local weather information, a “What’s New” section, a calendar of events, and jokes and/or cartoons)**

Benefits of these techniques (see section 5.5.4, pp. 129-133)

A major advantage of the Internet as a marketing communications medium is that there is no limit to the amount of space on a Web site. Information can also be updated easily at a relatively low cost (Ainscough & Lockett, 1996:3; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:561; Darby *et al.*, 2003:108; Rao, 1997:231). Tourism firms are thus able to include additional information

in their Web sites that tourists may value, which cannot easily be included or updated cost-effectively via more traditional print media.

Forms of additional information that should be incorporated in a tourism firm's Web site include a location map, local weather information, a "What's New" section, a calendar of events and jokes/and or cartoons.

Location map: A location map is important to include in a Web site as tourists have to reach the particular location where they will be staying to experience the service offering. Tourists can access the location map online at any time. As consumers are able to print the location map from their own computers, this would also aid in reducing costs for the firm (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293).

Local weather information: Providing local weather information may be beneficial for tourism firms as customers may visit the firm's Web site regularly to check on weather conditions. This information may influence a consumer's decision on when to visit the location. It may also assist them in knowing what clothing to take along, which may ultimately aid in enhancing their experience while staying at the lodge. This would thus bring about an increase in customer satisfaction (Douglas & Mills, 2004:269-293; Morrison *et al.*, 2004:233-251).

"What's New" section: The presentation of current information and timely happenings in a firm's Web site is beneficial as visitors need to know that there is something to be gained from visiting the site. A "What's New" section, therefore, adds incentive and interest (Kasavana, 2002:176).

Calendar of events: A calendar of events is beneficial to include in a tourism firm's Web site as it provides information that customers may value and ensures repeat visits to the site (Sweeney, 2000:364-365).

Jokes and/or cartoons: Web site visitors often look for entertainment elements such as jokes and cartoons. These elements aid in keeping a Web site dynamic and fun and, therefore, attract visitors to a firm's Web site and encourage them to keep returning (González & Palacios, 2004:313-328; Sweeney, 2000:371-373).

Main findings:

- **Location map** - A location map was included by 89.42% of the Web sites and was one of the most frequently employed techniques in the current study.
- **Local weather information** - Local weather information was included by 13.23% of the Web sites investigated in the current study and was not frequently employed. The four star lodges also provided local weather information more frequently than the three star lodges. One past study showed that this information was not included in any of the Web sites investigated (Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227).
- **“What’s New” section** - A “What’s New” section was included by 7.94% of the Web sites in the current study and by less than 15% of the Web sites examined in past studies (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21; Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227). This technique was thus not frequently employed in the current and previous studies.
- **Calendar of events** - Only 4.23% of the Web sites in the current study included a calendar of events and only 10% of the Web sites in a previous study included this technique (Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227).
- **Jokes and/or cartoons** - None of the Web sites investigated in the current study included jokes and/or cartoons.

Recommendations:

A location map was frequently employed in the Web sites in the current study. A location map also provides important information for tourists as they have to reach the location and is information that does not need to be updated on a regular basis. Therefore, it is recommended that all graded lodges include a location map that can be printed from a visitor's own computer.

On the other hand, the other forms of additional information (i.e., local weather information, a “What’s New” section, a calendar of events and jokes and/or cartoons) should always be kept up-to-date to be of value to visitors (Sweeney, 2000:357-377). Considering the benefits of including this information for a tourism firm (highlighted above), ideally all graded lodges should include this information.

Local weather information was not frequently employed in the current study and the four star lodges provided this information more frequently than three star lodges. A reason for this could be because this information needs to be updated daily and the smaller lodges may not have the resources to keep this information up-to-date. Nevertheless, providing local weather information may be particularly beneficial for the lodges as these Web sites cater for an international market who may be interested in knowing what type of weather conditions to expect.

Even though the lodges may not have the resources to physically update this information themselves, they could provide a link to a third party’s site (e.g., www.weathersa.co.za, <http://iafrica.com/weather/> and www.mweb.co.za/weather) where the visitor could obtain this information. Therefore, all the lodges should provide local weather information in their Web sites. If this information cannot physically be included by the lodges, they should provide a link to another site where visitors can obtain this information.

A “What’s New” section, a calendar of events and jokes and/or cartoons was also not included frequently in the Web sites examined. A reason for this could again be because this information needs to be updated on a regular basis (i.e., approximately every one to four weeks) and the lodges may not have the resources to do so. If the information contained in a Web site is not up-to-date, this will create a negative impression of the firm (Haig, 2000:63-64).

Taking this into account, it is recommended that only where the lodges have the time and resources to keep this information updated, that this information be included. It would be

better to exclude this information rather than create an unfavourable image of the firm if information is no longer relevant.

8.2.2 Recommendations in relation to advertising techniques

Technique: Providing links to other sites

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.2.6, pp. 87-90)

Providing links to other sites adds value to a Web site as it provides visitors with additional information that would be of interest to its target market. This technique also aids in driving traffic, ensuring return visits and increasing the amount of time that visitors spend on a site (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:235; Janal, 2000:79-84; Joergensen & Blythe, 2003:45-58; Madu & Madu, 2002:251; Procknow, 1998:88; Sweeney, 2000:367).

Main findings:

- In the current study, 38.62% of the Web sites provided links to other sites and this technique was thus moderately frequently employed.
- When comparing lodges based on their star grading, the current study also revealed that 45.51% of the five star lodges included links to other sites compared to 30.61% of the three star lodges. An important difference of 15% was thus present between these lodges and the five star lodges used this technique more frequently than the three star lodges.

Recommendations:

Providing links to other sites was only moderately frequently employed by the Web sites in the current study and the five star lodges included this technique more frequently than three star lodges. Nevertheless, marketers should as a general rule provide links to other sites as this is one of the most basic principles of Web site design (Janal, 2000:79-84; Procknow, 1998:88).

Taking the above into account and considering that this technique adds value to a firm's Web site through its many benefits, it is suggested that all graded lodges provide links to other sites that may be of interest to its target market.

All the graded lodges could, for example, provide a link to the TGCSA's Web site where visitors can read the minimum requirements for a lodge based on their star grading and then know what they can expect from the lodge.

Many of the Web sites investigated in this study included links to sites that provided transport information (e.g., airline or car rental sites), regional information, information that informs tourists of what else there is to do in the surrounding area, South African tourism sites (e.g., South African Tourism Services Association and South African Tourism), other larger tourism sites on which the lodge is listed and other sites that promote South African accommodation establishments. The graded lodges could consider including similar links in their Web sites.

It is also important that graded lodges frequently check whether these links are still functioning properly. This is because visitors may become frustrated if they visit a Web site where the links do not work and this reflects poorly on the firm (Sweeney, 2000:209).

8.2.3 Recommendations in relation to public relations techniques

Technique: **Techniques that encourage positive online word-of-mouth communications (WOM) via a firm's site (i.e., testimonials/online guestbook, the option to recommend the site to a "friend" and the ability to send e-postcards)**

Benefits of these techniques (see section 5.4.4, pp. 111-115)

Encouraging positive WOM is beneficial for firms due to its high level of credibility, its extremely rapid diffusion and relatively inexpensive transmission of messages. In addition, research has shown that the more favourable information a potential product adopter has received from peers, the more likely it is that the individual will adopt the new product or service (Duncan, 2002:558; Shimp, 2003:167; Welker, 2002:6).

Testimonials/online guestbook, providing the option to recommend the site to a "friend" as well as enabling visitors to send e-postcards are ways in which positive online WOM communications can be encouraged via a firm's Web site.

Testimonials/online guestbook: Online consumers may question the credibility of a firm if they are exposed to a firm for the first time on the Internet. Reading satisfied customers' statements about a firm's offering can help convince prospects to invest in the firm and ultimately assist the firm in selling its product offering (Janal, 2000:69). Tourism firms are essentially selling experiences rather than physical products and comments from previous tourists that are posted on a site may assist in convincing consumers to visit a particular location.

Recommend site to a "friend": Research has shown that people only pass along e-mail messages if the sender thinks that the message is important or knows that it is something that the receiver will be interested in (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005:500; Phelps *et al.*, 2004:333-348). Providing visitors with the option to recommend the site to a "friend" via a firm's Web site can be beneficial for firms as this is an easy way for visitors to inform others about the site. Since the message comes from a "friend", the receiver will view the message as being credible and, in turn, regard the firm as being more credible.

Send e-postcards: Positive online WOM can also be created for a tourism firm by enabling visitors to send e-postcards. When online consumers send e-postcards, it is identified as originating from the firm's Web site, contains the firm's logo, as well as a link to the firm's Web site address. This creates exposure for the firm (Janal, 2000:161; Sweeney, 2000:372). This technique is particularly attractive for tourism firms as these e-postcards can contain pictures of the accommodation establishment and its surroundings which could stimulate a desire to visit the location among people who receive them. Offering the ability to send e-postcards via a tourism firm's Web site is also beneficial as it is a good way in which firms can generate repeat visitors to the site and encourage new visitors to the firm (Sweeney, 2000:372).

Main findings:

- **Testimonials/online guestbook** - Testimonials/online guestbook was included by 22.22% of the Web sites in the current study and was thus moderately frequently employed. Previous studies found that this technique was not frequently employed and

was included by less than 15% of the Web sites investigated (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21).

- **Recommend site to a “friend”** - Only 5.29% of the Web sites in the current study provided visitors with the option to recommend the site to another person who may be interested in the site and this technique was not frequently employed.
- **Send e-postcards** - Only 1.06% of the Web sites in the current study enabled visitors to send e-postcards and this was one of the least frequently employed techniques.

Recommendations:

Although testimonials/online guestbook was not frequently employed in past studies and was only moderately frequently employed in the current study, it is suggested that all graded lodges include testimonials/online guestbook in their Web sites as this technique assists in increasing the firm’s credibility which may ultimately result in an increase in sales.

This technique is also suggested for all graded lodges as it merely involves placing certain information in a Web site and is thus relatively easy to incorporate. This information also does not need to be updated on a very regular basis (i.e., daily or weekly). The graded lodges could simply take positive comments from previous visitors and post this on a Web page linked to the home page.

Providing visitors with the option to recommend the site to a “friend” and to send e-postcards were not frequently employed in the current study. A reason for this may be because the lodges may not be aware of these techniques and their associated benefits. On the other hand, these techniques do not merely involve placing specific information in a Web site and require greater skills to implement. This would require a greater investment on behalf of the firm to incorporate. As many of the lodges are small firms, they may not have a great deal of resources to invest in their Web sites and thus did not include these techniques.

Considering the benefits of these techniques, ideally all the graded lodges should include these techniques. Nevertheless, taking the above discussion into account, it is recommended that the lodges include these techniques where sufficient resources are available to do so.

Where the lodges do not have sufficient resources to enable visitors to recommend the site to a “friend” or to send e-postcards, they should at least include testimonials/online guestbook in their Web sites as a form of online WOM communications that aids in increasing the firm’s credibility.

Technique: Registration to receive the firm’s e-newsletter

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.4.3, pp. 109-111)

E-newsletters are beneficial to firms as recipients subscribe to and thus choose to receive them. As recipients chose to receive e-newsletters, they value the information contained therein and view the firm as more credible. Recipients can also unsubscribe to receive e-newsletters themselves and the firm does not have the cost of removing customers who unsubscribe from the mailing list. E-newsletters can be sent at a relatively low cost. Since they are sent regularly, recipients are continuously exposed to the firm’s name and information. E-newsletters can be sent in a simple text format or contain pictures, banner advertisements and hyperlinks that direct recipients to the firm’s Web site (Allen *et al.*, 1998:79; Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:210; Cox & Koelzer, 2004:237-238; Janal, 2000:211-212; Sweeney, 2000:537).

Main findings:

- Only 11.11% of the Web sites in the current study enabled visitors to register to receive the firm’s e-newsletter and this technique was thus not frequently employed.

Recommendations:

A potential reason why the Web sites of the graded lodges did not enable visitors to register to receive the firm’s e-newsletter could be attributed to the fact that many of the lodges are small firms and, therefore, do not send out a regular newsletter. Nevertheless, considering the benefits of e-newsletters for firms (see above), where graded lodges do distribute newsletters on a regular basis, they should make these available electronically and enable visitors to register via the firm’s Web site to receive the newsletter via e-mail.

Appendix O provides an example of Mopane Bush Lodge's newsletter for February 2006 which was e-mailed to their mailing list. Although many of the graded lodges may not currently send out regular e-newsletters, it is suggested that more of the lodges send out similar e-newsletters on a regular basis to create online exposure for the firm.

Technique: Press centre, press releases and a photo gallery

Benefits of these techniques (see section 5.4.2, pp. 108-109)

Although tourism-related Web sites may not contain an entire press centre, they often include press releases and/or a photo gallery (which typically form part of a press centre). Press centres, press releases and photo galleries provide information that can be included in a tourism firm's Web site to support the firm's public relations efforts. This information is beneficial for tourism firms as it provides visitors with a variety of information about the firm. This information can also be used by journalists and the media to generate further positive publicity for the firm (Haig, 2000:134-135; Janal, 2000:323; Sweeney, 2000:3-4).

Main findings:

- **Press centre and press releases** - Only 7.94% of the Web sites in the current study included press releases and only 2.12% included a press centre. These techniques were thus not frequently employed in the current study and a press centre was also one of the least frequently employed techniques.
- **Photo gallery** – A photo gallery was included by 48.15% of the Web sites in the current study. Although this technique was only moderately frequently employed, it was the most frequently employed online sales promotional technique. In addition, when comparing the lodges based on their star grading, 59.65% of the five star lodges, 51.90% of the four star lodges and only 30.61% of the three star lodges included a photo gallery. An important difference of 29.04% was thus present between the five and three star lodges and an important difference of 21.29% existed between four and three star lodges. Therefore, the four and five star lodges included a photo gallery more frequently than the three star lodges.

Recommendations:

Press centres and press releases – A press centre and press releases were not frequently employed in the current study and a press centre was among the least frequently employed of all techniques. A reason for this could be that as many of the lodges are small firms, they may not have had any articles published about them in the press. Nevertheless, where articles have been published, the graded lodges should include these in their Web sites. If the lodge has a press centre, the press releases should form part of the press centre, alternatively press releases can be included on a separate Web page linked to the home page.

Although not specifically investigated in this study, it was found that although the majority of the lodges did not include a press centre or press releases, many of them did provide their own form of news. This news generally contained information about recent events that occurred at the lodge and was often included in the form of a wildlife or ranger's report (see Appendix M for an example). Therefore, where it is not feasible for the lodges to include a press centre or press releases as articles have not been published concerning these firms, it is suggested that the lodges provide their own form of news to support online public relations via their Web sites.

Photo gallery – A photo gallery was only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites examined. The four and five star lodges also included a photo gallery more frequently than the three star lodges. A reason for this may be because a photo gallery requires greater skills to implement in a Web site than merely including information in a simple text format. Nevertheless, greater skills would be required to incorporate a virtual tour in comparison to a photo gallery. This is because virtual tours require the use of multimedia and is accompanied by moving graphics and/or sound. A photo gallery, on the other hand, merely involves including still pictures.

A photo gallery also aids in tangibilising the firm's service offering for the online consumers and provides them with a better idea of what they can expect from the lodge (Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267). Therefore, it is suggested that all the lodges include a photo gallery in their

Web sites. This photo gallery can, for example, include photos of the interior and exterior of the various rooms of the lodge, the surrounding area and employees.

Technique: FAQ section

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.4.1, pp. 106-107)

An effective Web site should include an FAQ section as it provides customers with useful and pertinent information concerning the firm and its offerings. As this information is available online, visitors can sift through common questions or comments that other customers have asked and obtain solutions to similar problems they face at anytime (where necessary facilities are available) from anywhere around the world. If an FAQ section is properly implemented, it provides a forum for a firm's customers and will add great value to a firm's site. An FAQ section might even be the highest value part of a firm's site (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:236-237; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:565; Rensburg & Cant, 2003:215; Sterne, 1999:65-66; Sweeney, 2000:3).

Main findings:

- Only 2.65% of the graded lodges included an FAQ section in their Web sites and this technique was not frequently employed in the current study.
- One previous study (Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227) found that an FAQ section was included by 55% of the Web sites and another study indicated that this technique was included by 80% of the Web sites investigated (Ham, 2004:295-308).

Recommendations:

Although an FAQ section was not frequently employed in the current study, this technique was included by a substantially greater percentage (i.e., at least 50% more) of the Web sites in previous studies. An FAQ section can also be implemented in a Web site relatively easily and cost-effectively and as these are common questions, this information does not change on a frequent basis. In addition, considering the many benefits of this technique as well as the fact that the literature suggests that this technique may form the highest value part of a firm's site, it is recommended that all the graded lodges include an FAQ section in their Web sites.

8.2.4 Recommendations in relation to sales promotional techniques

Technique: **Coupons, discounts and/or special offers**

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.3.2, pp. 97-99)

Online coupons and discount vouchers are beneficial for firms as they can be changed regularly at a low cost, are a measurable demonstration of a Web site's effectiveness, reduce operating costs as they can be downloaded and printed from a visitor's own printer and can easily be received by online consumers. Providing online coupons or promoting discounts, rebates or other money-saving incentives offered by a firm will ensure that customers return to a tourism firm's Web site as they know they can find good deals there. These special offers may also encourage tourists to visit one's location (Harridge-March, 2004:299; Janal, 2000:171-172; Sweeney, 2000:360).

Main findings:

- Coupons, discounts and/or special offers were included by 25.40% of the Web sites in the current study and this was the most frequently employed online sales promotional technique. Nevertheless, this technique was still only moderately frequently employed.
- A similar past study (Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227) also indicated that special offers were included by 35% of the Web sites examined and was moderately frequently employed.

Recommendations:

Special offers were only moderately frequently employed in the Web sites examined in the current and a past study. A reason for this could be that the graded lodges did not promote special offers during the data collection period. On the other hand, these firms may not include offer special offers as part of their overall marketing strategy and, therefore, do not offer special offers at all.

Nevertheless, considering the benefits of promoting forms of special offers via a tourism site, it is suggested that whenever graded lodges offer forms of special offers, these should be promoted on their Web sites.

Technique: Offer something free

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.5.4, pp. 96-97)

People love to get things at not cost. Offering visitors something free via a firm's Web site will encourage people to visit the firm's site, participate in a survey or try its products. This technique also aids in obtaining a great deal of traffic to a tourism firm's Web site (Janal, 2000:27; Sweeney, 2000:32).

Main findings:

- Only 7.94% of the Web sites in the current study offered visitors something free and this technique was not frequently employed.

Recommendations:

The graded lodges did not frequently offer something free via their Web sites. Potential reasons for this may again be that the lodges are unaware of this technique and its benefits or because this technique does not simply involve including specific information in a Web site and requires greater skills and thus a greater investment from the firm to incorporate.

Considering the benefits of this technique, all graded lodges should ideally offer visitors something free via their Web sites. Although many of the lodges are small firms and may not have abundant resources to invest in their Web sites, they should determine the most cost-effective manner in which they can offer something free via their sites. The Web sites investigated in the current study offered consumers an online brochure or other documents that could easily be downloaded and printed as well as free screen savers and wallpapers. The graded lodges could consider including these free offers in their Web sites.

Technique: Indication of connection to a loyalty programme

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.3.3, pp. 99-100)

Web site visitors doing research on where to stay while on vacation may be more willing to stay at a location if they know they can receive points or other benefits from a loyalty

programme (Sweeney, 2000:376-377). Indicating this information on a tourism firm's Web site may thus result in an increase in sales.

Main findings:

- Only 17.46% of the graded lodges were connected to a loyalty programme. Nevertheless, only 1.06% indicated this on their Web site and this was one of the least frequently employed techniques in the current study.

Recommendations:

Indicating that the firm is connected to a loyalty programme was one of the least frequently employed techniques. Nevertheless, including this information may ultimately lead to an increase in sales for a firm. It is thus recommended that if graded lodges are connected to a loyalty programme, this should always be promoted on their Web sites

Technique: **Promotional competitions (i.e., the opportunity to win something by means of contests and/or sweepstakes and engage in online games)**

Benefits of these techniques (see section 5.3.4, pp. 101-104)

Providing visitors with the opportunity to participate in the firm's contests and sweepstakes online, as well as engage in online games, are beneficial to tourism firms in the following ways:

Contests and sweepstakes: Promoting contests and sweepstakes via a firm's Web site and enabling visitors to participate in these competitions online are beneficial for tourism firms as they keep visitors interested in a site because most people welcome the opportunity to win something. Including this technique may also aid in attracting visitors and encourage multiple visits to a firm's site. Running contests is also an effective way to acquire more information about one's target market by requesting information on the entry form (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564; Sweeney, 2000:365).

Online games: Firms should allow Internet users to engage in interactive games, puzzles and activities via their Web sites as promotional games create excitement, stimulate brand interest and reinforce brand loyalty. Web sites that provide entertainment have an advantage over sites that do not. The marketing advantage of a game is that customers must make repeat visits to the firm's Web site to continue playing (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998:564; Shimp, 2003:552; Sweeney, 2000:373-375).

Main findings:

- Only 0.53% of the Web sites in the current study provided visitors with the option to win something via the site and none of the Web sites included online games. These techniques were among the least frequently employed techniques investigated.

Recommendations:

Contests, sweepstakes and online games were among the least frequently employed techniques investigated in this study.

Only one of the 189 Web sites provided details of a contest. A reason for this could be that the graded lodges did not offer contests or sweepstakes during the data collection phase. Alternatively, as many of the lodges are small firms, they may not offer contests and/or sweepstakes as part of their overall marketing strategy.

A reason why online games were not frequently employed could be because this technique requires additional skills to incorporate in a site than simply including specific information and, therefore, requires a greater investment on behalf of the firm. As many of the lodges are small firms, they may not have capital to invest to include such a technique in their Web sites.

A further reason why both these techniques were not frequently employed in the Web sites examined could be because the graded lodges are unaware of these techniques and their associated benefits. Considering the benefits of these techniques (highlighted above), ideally all graded lodges should include these techniques.

When graded lodges offer contests and/or sweepstakes, this should be promoted on the firm's Web site and visitors should be able to participate in these promotional competitions online. The prizes of the contests and sweepstakes should also be related to the tourism firm (e.g., the lodges could offer a free weekend at the lodge) (Sweeney, 2000:365).

Online games should also be included by all the lodges. However, considering that many of the lodges are small firms and may not be able to invest in incorporating this technique in their Web site, it is suggested that where the lodges have sufficient resources, they should include online games. These online games should be related to the firm (Sterne, 1999:178-180). For example, if the lodge is located in a game reserve, the game could involve spotting the big five or completing a crossword which contains clues of animals.

Where lodges do not have sufficient resources to include online games, they should provide other forms of entertainment that are relatively easier and more cost-effective to include. For example, the lodges could include jokes which merely involves including specific information in the site and is relatively simple to include.

8.2.5 Recommendations in relation to personal selling techniques

Technique: Online booking facility

Benefits of the technique (see section 5.6, pp. 134-140)

One of the main benefits of the Internet is that it has the ability to accept purchase orders (Belch & Belch, 2004:494-506). Tourists are thus able to make reservations and payments directly via a firm's Web site. Incorporating this technique may also prevent tourism firms from losing potential customers who may find other Web sites online that provide them with the ability to make online reservations (Sweeney, 2000:3).

Main findings:

- Only 2.65% of the Web sites in the current study provided an online booking facility. This was also one of the least frequently employed techniques by the three, four and five star lodges.
- One previous study (Cai *et al.*, 2004:219-227) found that 20% of the Web sites included an online booking facility and none of the Web sites investigated in another past study included this technique (Benckendorff & Black, 2000:11-21).
- Although not specifically investigated in this study, it was noted that although an online booking facility was only employed by 2.65% of the Web sites in the current study, 65.10% provided an “online booking enquiry form” which can be used by visitors to make reservation enquiries.

Recommendations:

According to the ACNielsen Global Online Consumer Confidence Study, one tenth of the world’s population (i.e., over 627 million consumers) are shopping online. Across the globe the most popular items purchased on the Internet were *books* (34%), followed by *videos/DVDs/games* (22%), *airline tickets/reservations* (21%) and *clothing/accessories/shoes* (20%). *Hotels/reservations* (14%) were also among the top ten of the most recent items purchased by online consumers (i.e., over 86 million consumers had made hotel and/or tour bookings) (ACNielsen, 2005:1-10).

South Africa did not feature among the top 20 countries in terms of Internet purchases. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that hotel and tour reservations were commonly purchased online in Finland (30%) and Spain (27%) (ACNielsen, 2005:1-10).

An online booking facility was not frequently employed in the current and past studies. Nevertheless, in order to prevent losing potential consumers by not providing them with the ability to make online reservations, the lodges should ideally include this facility within their Web sites. This may be particularly important considering that the Web sites of South African graded lodges also cater for an international market.

An online booking facility does not merely involve including certain information in a Web site. It requires greater skills and thus capital to incorporate. As many of the lodges are small firms, they may not be able to invest in including this feature in their sites. However, where this is not feasible, it is suggested that the lodges include a link to a third party's site (e.g., www.travelsa.co.za and www.nightsbridge.co.za) where online consumers can make reservations at the lodge over the Internet. Where this is still not possible, the lodges should at least include an online booking enquiry form for online reservation enquiries.

The lodges should also respond to these enquiries on the same or at least the following day to ensure that they do not lose potential consumers to other firms who respond rapidly to reservation enquiries. The lodges should also always respond to these enquiries as it will create a negative image for the firm if they do not respond at all.

Taking the above into account, the next section summarises the aforementioned recommendations into three categories.

8.2.6 A summary of the recommendations for online marketing communications techniques into three categories

The recommendations regarding online marketing communications techniques contained in the previous section can be grouped into three categories, namely 1) those techniques that should be included in the Web sites of all the graded lodges, 2) those techniques that should be used if the lodge meets a specific requirement and 3) those techniques that should be used where a graded lodge has sufficient resources to invest in their Web site.

The discussion in section 8.2 has provided support for dividing the online marketing communications techniques into these categories. Table 26 below summarises the recommendations for the specific online marketing communications techniques into the three categories.

Table 26: A summary of the recommendations for online marketing communications techniques into three categories

Classification of recommendations regarding online marketing communications techniques into three categories	
<p>1. Techniques that should be included by all the graded lodges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offline contact information • E-mail link that activates visitors' own e-mail software • Online response form • Site map • Multiple languages • Location map • Local weather information • Multiple languages • Links to other sites • Photo gallery • Testimonials/online guestbook • FAQ section • Offer something free
<p>2. Techniques that should be included where the graded lodge meets a specific requirement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search index – A search index should be included after a site map has been included and where the site is complicated (consists of more than eight to ten major sections). • Registration to receive e-newsletter – The graded lodges would have to send out a regular newsletter to include this technique. • Press centre and press releases – Articles would have to be published about the firm in the press to be able to include this in the firm's Web site. • Coupons, discounts and/or special offers – The lodges would actually have to offer special offers for them to be able to promote this via their Web site. • Connection to loyalty programme – The lodge would have to run its own or participate in a larger loyalty programme to be able to promote this via their Web site. • Contests and sweepstakes – The lodge would have to run contests and/or sweepstakes to be able to allow visitors to participate in these promotional competitions online.

Classification of recommendations regarding online marketing communications techniques into three categories

<p>3. Techniques that should be included where a graded lodge has sufficient resources to invest in their Web site</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual tour – Where it is not feasible for a lodge to include a virtual tour, they should at least include a photo gallery that aids in tangibilising the firm’s service offering. • Additional information (i.e., a “What’s New Section, a calendar of events, jokes and/or cartoons) – If this information is no longer relevant, it would create a negative impression of the firm. Therefore, although ideally all the lodges should include this information, if the firm is not able to regularly update the information to ensure that it is still relevant to its target market, it should rather not be included. • Recommend site to a “friend” or send e-postcards – If lodges do not have sufficient resources to include these techniques in their Web sites, they should at least include testimonials/online guestbook to support online WOM communications via the firm’s Web site. • Online games - If lodges do not have sufficient resources to include this technique, they should try to include other forms of entertainment that can be included relatively easily and more cost-effectively in the Web site (e.g., include a new tourism joke every one to four weeks). • Online booking facility – Where the lodges do not have sufficient resources to include an online booking facility, the firm should include a link to a third party’s site where online consumers can make reservations and payments. Where this is still not feasible, the lodge should at least include an online booking enquiry form.
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8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This section highlights a number of recommendations for future research. Some of these recommendations specifically relate to the findings of the current study, while a number of recommendations have also been identified in the literature review.

Recommendations for future research which relate to the findings of the current study

- Future research could replicate this study and investigate the Web sites of non-graded South African lodges. Comparisons can then be made to determine whether differences exist regarding the online marketing communications practices of graded and non-graded lodges.

- This study could also be replicated to investigate Web sites of other serviced accommodation establishments (i.e., hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses and country houses) that have been graded by the TGCSA. Comparisons can then be made to determine whether differences exist between the online marketing communications techniques used by other graded serviced accommodation establishments and the graded lodges examined.
- Future research could examine the reasons why graded lodges included or excluded specific online marketing communications techniques in their Web sites.
- Whether the lodges investigated manage their Web sites themselves or whether this function is outsourced to a third party can be examined in future research. It can then be determined whether this relationship influences the online marketing communications techniques included in the Web sites.
- Future research could determine which specific online marketing communications techniques actual Web site visitors or online consumers regard as important.
- Future research could also determine whether there are additional or perhaps emerging techniques that should be included in a tourism firm's Web site.

Recommendations for future research identified in the literature review

- Future research could explore whether South African online consumers consider both transactional and non-transactional interactivity activities as important in a Web site and if these activities contribute to increasing the Web site's overall attractiveness (see section 4.4).
- South African research could investigate the Web presence in traditional print advertisements. This could be done by following a similar approach used previously where a content analysis was conducted of advertisements in top magazines to determine which of these contained a Web site address (see section 5.2.2).

- Future studies could examine the extent to which tourism firms (as well as the graded lodges investigated in the current study) include their Web site addresses in various other media (see section 5.2.2).
- Future research could explore a number of issues in relation to search engines from a South African perspective. Example of these issues include examining the extent to which South Africans use search engines to find various sites or information they are looking for, which search engines (both national and international) are most regularly used, as well as how effective is it for firms and other organisations to pay to obtain high rankings in the search engines or place text advertisements alongside the search results (see section 5.2.4).
- Further studies could examine the extent to which tourism firms (as well as the graded lodges examined in the current study) employ various online advertising formats as part of their overall Internet advertising strategy (see section 5.2.5).
- The effectiveness of Internet advertising could be evaluated in a South African context. Comparisons could also be made to examine whether differences exist regarding online advertising effectiveness from a South African perspective in relation to more developed countries (see section 5.2.7).
- South African online consumers' motivation for passing along e-mail messages is another area that could be explored. These findings could also be compared to similar international studies to determine whether differences exist (see section 5.4.4).
- The extent to which South African tourism firms respond to e-mail messages and consumer reactions to these responses is a further topic that could be explored in future studies (see section 5.5.2).

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This section highlights a number of limitations of the current study that should be considered:

- This study is limited to one specific sub-section of the South African tourism and hospitality industry, namely to lodges graded by the TGCSA. It is, therefore, not possible to generalise the findings to all South African lodges or to other types of accommodation establishments.
- This study merely determined whether graded lodges included specific techniques in their Web sites. The study is thus limited in that it did not investigate potential reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of these techniques.
- This study did not investigate whether the lodges manage and maintain their Web sites themselves or whether this function is outsourced to a third party, such as a Web design firm. This relationship may have influenced the findings of this study.
- The literature review supported the notion that all the specific techniques investigated in this study should be included in a tourism firm's Web site. However, this study was limited in the sense that it did not investigate which techniques actual Web site visitors or online consumers regard as important.
- Although an extensive literature review was conducted, this study was limited to 30 specific online marketing communications techniques. There may be other emerging techniques that were not included in this investigation.
- The fact that the researcher was the only coder of the Web sites was a limitation of this study as ideally more than one coder should be used in a content analysis to prevent bias in the evaluation process.

8.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Considering the findings of this study, this chapter provided recommendations for the owners, managers and/or marketers of graded South African lodges. Recommendations for future research were also provided and a number of limitations of this study were highlighted.

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APPENDIX A

**- MINIMUM LODGE ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS AS SPECIFIED
BY THE TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA -**

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR A LODGE AS SPECIFIED BY THE TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

1. GENERAL

1.1. SAFETY AND SECURITY

- A high degree of general safety and security should be maintained.
- All reasonable precaution must be taken to secure the personal safety of guests and prevent damage to or theft of their possessions.
- Information on procedures in the event of an emergency should be clearly displayed. This information should be in English and if possible multilingual (depending on the establishment's market). Procedures for summoning assistance, in particular after hours, should also be available.
- There should be a responsible person on site and on call 24-hours a day.
- There should be adequate levels of lighting for guest safety and comfort in all public areas, including stairwells and car parks (this need not be electrically generated lighting).
- All unit entry doors to a common area or the exterior should be equipped with a locking device that permits a guest to lock the door when leaving the unit as well as a device to lock the door from the inside when the guest is occupying the unit. Surface mounted slide-bolts may be considered to be appropriate locking devices in certain properties. The style and nature of the property will be considered (i.e., canvas tents need not have any form of locking device).
- If not provided in guest rooms, a safe should be provided at reception for the secure storage of guest valuables.
- Once registered, guests should have access to the establishment at all times.

1.2. CLEANLINESS AND COMFORT

- A high standard of cleanliness should be maintained throughout the lodge.
- The lodge should be comfortable and fit for the purpose intended.

1.3. STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

All premises are expected to comply with all relevant statutory and local government regulations. Assessors may request that relevant documentation, certificates and so forth be presented at the time of the assessment. This includes, *inter alia*:

- Proof of provincial registration (if applicable);
- Business registration which entitles the establishment to legally operate;
- Public liability insurance;
- Compliance with local authority regulations including;
 - Fire safety certificate;
 - Compliance with building regulations – in particular with regards to accessibility.

1.4. ACCESS

- Establishments should be open every day of the year, unless closed for refurbishment or if it offers only seasonal accommodation.
- Appropriate service and facilities should be available on all days that the establishment is open.
- There should be no discrimination to accepting guests based on their race, ethnicity, physical or mental condition, etc.

1.5. COURTESY

- The highest standard of courtesy should be shown to guests at all times.
- Guest complaints should be dealt with courteously and promptly.

1.6. MARKETING, RESERVATIONS AND PRICING

- There should be friendly and efficient service appropriate to the style of the establishment.
- All enquiries, requests, reservations, correspondence and complaints should be handled promptly and courteously.
- It should be made clear to all visitors what is included in the prices quoted for accommodation, meals and refreshments, including service charge, surcharges, levies and so forth.
- A brochure or leaflet detailing the property's pricing structure should be available on request. Prices should include VAT.
- Guests must be notified if the price agreed at the time of booking has changed.
- Full details of the establishment's cancellation policy should be made clear to guests at the time of booking. Details of any in-house policies, for example, no smoking, should be communicated at the time of booking.
- The amenities, facilities and services provided by the establishment should be described fairly to all visitors and prospective visitors, whether by advertisement, brochure, word-of-mouth or other means.

2. BUILDINGS

2.1. EXTERIOR

- All grounds and gardens (if any) under the control of the operator should be neat and appropriate.
- The exterior of the property must be well maintained in a sound and clean condition.
- There should be appropriate signage to direct guests to the main entrance as well as clearly visible and neat property identification signage.
- All paths should be well lit (electricity, candle light, etc.) and directional signage should be provided to guide guests to annexes (if guests are guided by staff members to annexes, then permanent signage may not be necessary). It may also be appropriate for guests to be provided with torches in lieu of lighting.

2.2. MAINTENANCE

- The interior and exterior of the building/s, including all fittings, fixtures and furnishings must be maintained in a sound and clean condition and must be fit for the purpose intended.

3. BEDROOMS

3.1. HOUSEKEEPING

- All bedrooms should be cleaned daily and all beds made daily.
- All linen, including duvet covers, should be changed for each new guest.
- All bed linen, including duvet covers, should be changed at least every 5 days. This period may be extended for environmental purposes AND with the guest's consent. Soiled linen should be changed as soon as possible.

3.2. BEDROOM SIZE

- All bedrooms should have sufficient space to allow freedom of movement for guests and access to all furniture in the room.
- It should be possible to open all doors and drawers fully.

- The ceiling height for the major part of the room should be sufficient for a 1,8m person to move around without stooping.

3.3. BEDS

- All beds are to be of sound condition and should have a secure headboard or equivalent where appropriate to type of bed (a continental pillow may suffice for the headboard).
- All mattresses are to be comfortable, be of sprung interior, foam or similar construction and be fitted with mattress protectors or under blankets.
- Single beds should comfortably accommodate an average sized adult and double beds 2 average sized adults.

3.4. BEDDING

- All bedding should be clean and sufficient in quantity (dependent on climatic conditions experienced in the region of the establishment).
- There should be at least one blanket and one pillow per sleeping space with additional blankets and pillows available on request. Duvets are also acceptable. All sleeping spaces should have an undersheet and topsheet. There should be a pillowcase on each pillow.
- Beds should be covered with an appropriate bedspread or quilt, unless an appropriate duvet/blanket cover is provided.
- The exposed part/s of each bed should be in an appropriate condition and visually attractive; alternatively they should be hidden from view by appropriate bedding ("skirt", valance or bedspread).
- Non-allergic pillows and duvets should be available on request.

3.5. BEDSIDE TABLES

- All permanent-sleeping spaces intended for adult occupation should have a bedside table. Twin beds may share a bedside table located between the 2 beds (these may be double beds). If rooms/beds are largely sold for single occupancy, one bedside table and light may be appropriate. A dressing/writing table may double as a bedside table.

3.6. WINDOWS AND LIGHTING

- There should be one window/opening to allow natural light and adequate ventilation. If the window cannot be opened, a ventilation system must be provided.
- All bedrooms should be well lit – gas, candle, etc. Lights may be considered appropriate for lodges. The extent of the illumination in the room will be dependent on the type of lighting provided. There should be sufficient illumination for reading purposes.
- If electrical lighting is provided there should at minimum be a main light. All bulbs should have a shade or cover (unless decorative).
- There should be a bedside and/or bedhead light for, and controllable by, each person (the number of people typically occupying a room should be considered when determining the appropriateness of bedside lighting). Twin beds may share a bedside light. A double bed may have one shared bedhead light.
- Emergency lighting should be provided (i.e., candle, candlestick and matches).

3.7. CURTAINS

- If appropriate, curtains, blinds or shutters should be provided on all windows and doors to afford both privacy and/or the exclusion of light. This may not be necessary for private rooms that are not visible to other guests, rooms or staff members.
- If appropriate, consideration should be given to providing additional privacy (e.g., net curtaining or blind).

3.8. HEATING/COOLING

- Establishments located in regions that experience a high average temperature should have well ventilated guest rooms. Alternatively, a mechanism to generate additional airflow should be provided.

3.9. FLOORING

- Flooring may vary considerably and any fit-for-purpose flooring may be appropriate. Ease of cleaning and hygiene should be considered when evaluating flooring.

3.10. CLOTHES/STORAGE

- Each room should have a wardrobe or clothes hanging space with sufficient good quality hangers per person.
- In addition, there should be adequate drawer or shelf space.

3.11. DRESSING/WRITING TABLES

- There should be a dressing, writing table, chest of drawers or equivalent in the room (the objective is to provide the guest with space to place items and/or a work surface). It may be appropriate for the dressing/writing table to double-up as a bedside table.
- Ideally there should be a mirror adjacent to the dressing/writing table and lighting intensity should be adequate (if appropriate given the nature of the lighting provided).

3.12. SEATING

- At minimum there should be one chair in the room.

3.13. BEVERAGE FACILITIES

- Tea/coffee making facilities should be provided in guest rooms unless a self-service tea/coffee beverage buffet is available (this may be a vending machine) or appropriate room service is provided.

3.14. TELEVISION AND RADIO

- Optional

3.15. TELEPHONES

- Telephones in guest rooms are optional. However, for safety and security purposes at minimum each room should be fitted with a means of alerting management.
- Where telephones are provided guests should be informed of charges on request.
- All in-room telephones should display the property's telephone number, reception or switchboard number and the room extension number.

3.16. MISCELLANEOUS

Each bedroom should have:

- Waste bin
- Ashtray (if smoking is permitted)
- A clean drinking glass per permanent sleeping position
- Sufficient conveniently located power sockets for the safe use of all electrical equipment (if electricity is provided)

4. BATH/SHOWER ROOM

4.1. EN-SUITE/PRIVATE BATH OR SHOWER ROOMS

- Each room should have either an en-suite bathroom or alternatively a private bathroom. Shared bathroom facilities may be considered appropriate given the context in which the accommodation is provided. Preferably there should be no more than 4 guests per shared bathroom.
- A private bathroom is one solely designated for the use of one room. The bathroom should be reasonably close to the bedroom and lockable. Access to the bathroom via public areas (lounge, etc.) is not acceptable.

4.2. HOUSEKEEPING

- All bathrooms should be cleaned daily.
- All bathroom linen should be changed at least every 5 days. This period may be extended for environmental purposes AND with the guest's consent. Soiled linen should be changed as soon as possible.

4.3. BATHROOM SIZE

- All bathrooms should have sufficient space to allow freedom of movement for guests and access to all fittings.

4.4. FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Each bathroom should have:

- A bath or shower
- Washbasin with mirror in close proximity
- Toilet
- Soap dish/holder/dispenser
- Toilet roll holder and toilet paper
- Waste bin
- Adequate ventilation (e.g., an extractor fan or opening window)
- A towel rail, towel shelf or equivalent
- Clean water for bathing should be available at all reasonable times
- A clean hand and bath towel for each guest
- Fresh soap for each new guest

4.5. LIGHTING AND WINDOWS

- All bathrooms should be well lit – gaslights, candles, etc may be considered appropriate. The extent of the illumination in the room will be dependent on the type of lighting provided.
- All windows in the bathroom (if present) should either consist of tinted/opaque glass or of material that ensures guest privacy or alternatively should be covered with an opaque curtain, blind or shutter. This is not necessary if guest rooms are private and not visible from other guest rooms, walkways and so forth.

5. PUBLIC AREAS

5.1. RECEPTION AREA

- A central meeting and/or reception area should be provided.
- A means of summoning attention when reception is not attended should be provided.

5.2. SEATING AREA

- A sitting area should be provided which is available throughout the day and evening with sufficient comfortable seating.

5.3. DINING AREA

- At least one dining area should be provided for the service of breakfast and other meals. This may be a temporary or permanent structure.

5.4. PUBLIC TELEPHONE

- A telephone (at reception or elsewhere) should be available for public use. Alternatively, a high frequency radio or other means of appropriate communication should be available, particularly for safety and security purposes.

6. SERVICES AND FOOD AND BEVERAGE

6.1. RECEPTION

- Reception or host facilities should be available at all reasonable hours during the period that the lodge is open. A message taking service should be available.

6.2. PORTERAGE

- Assistance with luggage should be available on request.

6.3. MORNING CALL

- Guests should be able to request an early morning wake-up call if there is no alarm clock in guest rooms.

6.4. FOOD AND BEVERAGE – GENERAL

- The establishment should make lunch and dinner available if located in an area where no alternative meals can be obtained.
- Staff should demonstrate adequate levels of product knowledge and provide efficient service.
- All food should be hygienically stored, prepared and presented.

6.5. BREAKFAST

- At minimum a continental breakfast (or other appropriate breakfast, for example, traditional) should be available (buffet style is acceptable). This may be outsourced.

6.6. BEVERAGE SERVICE

- Beverage services are optional. However, guests must be able to purchase beverages – if this is not available in the vicinity of the property then the property must sell beverages to guests.

7. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR 4 AND 5 STAR LODGES

7.1. GENERAL

- For 4 and 5 star lodges a higher level of general ambience and spaciousness will be required in all areas of the lodge, for example, spacious public areas, bedrooms with no narrow areas, and so forth. Some account may be taken of limitations in older or historic properties.

7.2. BEDROOMS

- Room size must be comfortable and adequately accommodate all the furniture provided.
- The bedroom should have at least two seating chairs.
- If appropriate and fit for the purpose, televisions must have a remote control and a wide choice of channels should be provided (pay TV is appropriate).
- Air-conditioning or fans and/or other forms of heating or cooling must be provided where extreme day and/or night temperatures are experienced. 5 star properties should have air-conditioners in each guest room (or equivalent cooling facilities).
- There should be a hairdryer in 5 star rooms.
- In areas where malaria occurs, adequate protection against mosquitoes in the form of mosquito nets, window gauze and/or insecticide should be provided in each guest room.

7.3. BATHROOMS

- A range of quality guest amenities should be available.
- A bath and shower should be available. The shower may be over the bath. All new purpose built 5 star properties should have a separate bath and shower in guest bathrooms.

7.4. SERVICES AND FOOD AND BEVERAGE

- There should be a served beverage service in the public lounge and/or bar area.
- Guest laundry service is preferable (need not be 24 hour but suitable to guest requirements).

APPENDIX B

**- VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TOURISM GRADING
COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA -**

TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA: VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION

It is the vision of the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa to provide:

- A quality assured experience in South Africa
- Consumer confidence and choice
- A marketing tool to draw consumers

MISSION

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa:

- Is in the business of setting up and managing a grading system for the entire tourism industry
- Is focused on ensuring that the grading system is developed from a customer's perspective
- Is focused on supporting the needs and interests of the industry by developing an industry friendly consultative system of grading
- Is focused on promoting tourism and community involvement

OBJECTIVES

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa has the following objectives:

- Grading must lead to an improvement of standards in the industry
- To embrace the best of established practices, where possible and relevant
- The system is to be independent, credible and understood locally and internationally
- The system needs to be accessible, affordable, market driven and voluntary
- Grading to extend to all tourism facilities/amenities
- Grading must assist in the transformation of the tourism industry

APPENDIX C

- A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTERNET AND HOW THE INTERNET WORKS -

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTERNET

Sheth, Eshghi and Krishnan (2001:2) mention that the birth and growth of the Internet can be linked to four major developments. This section briefly highlights these developments.

The Internet, also known as the “International electronic network” was first created in the late 60s and 70s by the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense (Paul, 1996:27; Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2). The U.S. military wanted to be sure networked computers could communicate with each other even if some of them went offline (i.e., if they were destroyed in a nuclear attack). They needed a network that would not be vulnerable to a direct hit on a central point of control. In September 1969, the message, “Are you receiving this?” was sent from Boulter Hall at the University of Carolina at Los Angeles across a four-node network which included computers at UCLA, Stanford Research Institute, UC Santa Barbara and the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The Internet worked (Sterne, 1999:11-12).

The real growth, however, came in 1985 after the National Science Foundation connected six supercomputer centres with a high speed “backbone” that allowed the scientists to move digitised data across the network by means of a simple system known as e-mail. As these digitised messages could be transferred at a high speed and much lower cost than telephone or ordinary mail, the number of host computers that make up the Internet grew rapidly (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2).

The second major development concerned the advent of the WWW in 1989 (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2). The WWW made access to the information on the Internet more graphic and more user-friendly, incorporating a range of multimedia features (Bothma, 2000:10).

The third major development occurred in 1993 and revolved around the creation of *browsers* (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2). A *browser* is a programme (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer) that one uses to read information published on the WWW (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:288). The

widespread availability of the browsers in 1994 transformed the Internet from a way to run computers from a distance to a two-way global super-highway (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2).

The advantage of having a vast amount of information at one's finger tips has attracted the large numbers of people to the Internet today, numbering hundreds of millions (Bothma, 2000:10). According to Computer Industry Almanac Incorporated (CIA), the worldwide Internet population for 2004 was approximately 934 million. It is further predicted by CIA that this figure will increase to 1.21 billion in 2006 and to 1.35 billion in 2007 (Jupitermedia Corporation, 2005).

In addition, once business had discovered the Internet, the Web started to grow at an exponential rate (Sterne, 1999:14). The real driving force behind the growth of the Internet came with the commercialisation of the Internet in the early 90's. Not only could firms publish all of their information on this global network, but they also began to advertise and sell their products and services on the Net (Bothma, 2000:10).

The vast amount of people and businesses accessing the Internet has brought about the fourth major development which concerns bandwidth (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2). *Bandwidth* is a measure of how fast data and information travel over transmission media. Thus, higher-speed broadband Internet connections have a higher bandwidth than dial-up connections (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.05).

Telephone lines have proven to be extremely inadequate for handling large amounts of data at high speed. As a result, telephone and television firms are scrambling to build new transmission capabilities (Sheth *et al.*, 2001:2). These new transmission capabilities revolve around developments in *broadband* media which have the capability to transmit multiple signals simultaneously at high speeds (Shelly *et al.*, 2003:9.32).

Taking this into account, Sheth *et al.* (2001:2) are of the opinion that faster *broadband access* is the fourth critical phase in the evolution of the Internet as a commercial medium and mention that this development is currently underway.

HOW THE INTERNET WORKS

There are a number of components that are essential in the functioning of the Internet. These include: human-friendly addressing and the domain name system, packet switching, routing and transmission control protocol (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:30-33).

With so many computers connected to the Internet, it is important that each computer be uniquely identified. For this reason, every Internet-connected computer is assigned a unique **Internet Protocol address** (IP address) (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:30-31).

An *IP address* is a unique number consisting of four parts that identifies a computer on the Internet (e.g., 198.108.95.145). As it is difficult to remember such numbers, **domain names** were invented to alias them. This implies that if one's Internet site is moved from one computer to another and thus the IP address changes, the Internet is still able to reference one's site via the alias domain name (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:293).

A *domain name* is the main part of an Internet address, including its extensions (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:313; Netlawtools Inc, 2000). For example, in the address <http://www.tala.co.za/game.asp>, "tala.co.za" is the domain name.

Domain name extensions (suffixes) indicate the *top-level domain* (TLD) to which the name belongs (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:313). For example, the TLD in the address <http://www.tala.co.za/game.asp> is ".co.za" indicates that the site is based in South Africa.

As is the case in the example above, the domain extension can indicate the country where the site is based (Cox & Koelzer, 2004:313; Shelly *et al.*, 2003:2.08). In addition, there are also a number of other TLDs and Table 27 provides a list of current top-level domains. This list includes original top-level domains as well as newer top-level domains which have recently been adopted by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Table 27: Current top-level domains

Original Top-Level Domains	Type of Domain
Com	Commercial organisations, businesses and companies
Edu	Educational institutions
Gov	Government agencies
Mil	Military organisations
Net	Network providers
Org	Non-profit organisations
Newer Top-Level Domains	Type of Domain
Museum	Accredited museums
Biz	Businesses of all sizes
Info	Businesses, organisations, or individuals providing general information
Name	Individuals or families
Pro	Certified professionals such as doctors, lawyers and accountants
Aero	Aviation community members
Coop	Businesses and cooperatives such as credit unions and rural electric coops

Source: Shelly *et al.* (2003:2.08).

The Internet also requires an efficient way to transfer large amounts of data across a complicated network. **Packet switching** has become the fundamental technique that computer networks use to ensure fair access to shared network resources. Instead of being transferred over a network in their entirety, files are broken up into data *packets*. In this way, the transfer of a large file does not delay the simultaneous transfer of a smaller file (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:31-32). This process is made possible by the *Internet Protocol* (IP) which is the programme that all computers connected to the Internet must run to be able to communicate with each other (Bickerton *et al.*, 2000:293).

These packets then need to be routed to the appropriate destinations in an environment that consists of many different networks. Special purpose computers, known as **routers**, connect the thousands of computers that make up the Internet. Routers serve as intermediaries between networks (i.e., they direct traffic and translate messages so that different network technologies can communicate with one another) (Rayport & Jaworski, 2003:33).

The final Internet-enabling technology highlighted by Rayport and Jaworski (2003:33) is the **transmission control protocol (TCP)**. These authors explain that often, routers will route too many packets to a network so that the network is unable to accommodate and process all of the data. When this occurs, the network is forced to discard some of the packets. Without the TCP, these discarded packets would never reach their intended destination.

Bearing these components in mind, Sterne (1999:14-15) provides a simple explanation of how the Internet works. This explanation is briefly summarised.

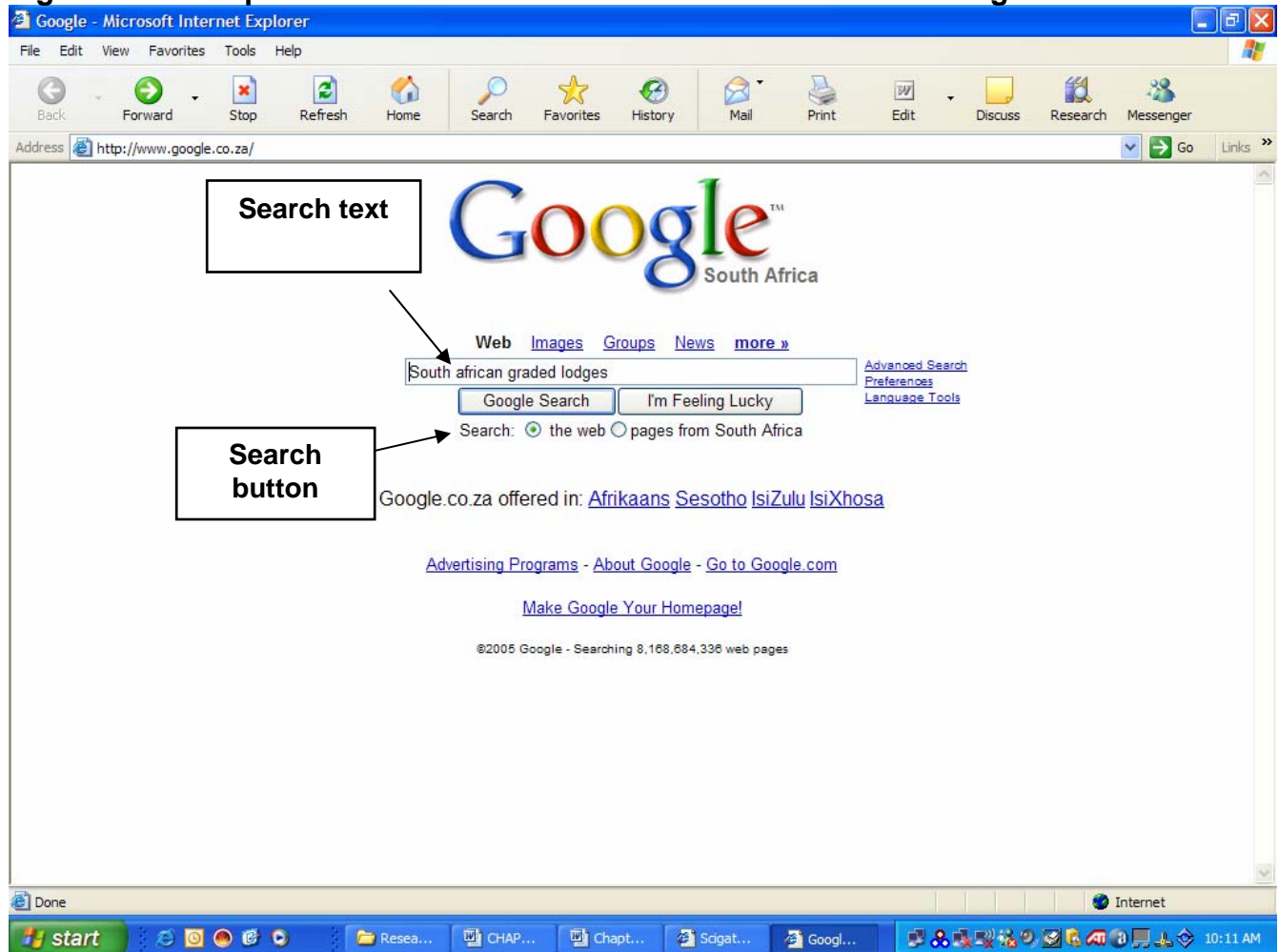
When one sends an e-mail message across the Internet, the network protocol chops it up into packets of information. Each packet includes the “from” address and the “ship-to” address. Every computer on the Internet acts as a post office. It receives each packet, reads the addresses and determines whether to keep the packet or pass it along.

These packets travel individually from one computer to the next in very different geographic places and may take many different paths to reach their destination. While computer A is sending a steady stream of packets to computer B, machine B may suddenly be called to run another programme at the same time. B will then send a message back to A telling it to stop sending packets for the moment. A then starts to send packets to C. It is likely that machine B and C are in very different geographic places. They will also send packets across to whichever machine is ready, willing and able to accept them.

The destination computer collects all the packets and reassembles them into a cohesive message for delivery to one’s mailbox. As the destination machine receives packets, it sends word to the originating machine that it has or has not received all of them. The originator can then resend missing packets, and eventually the e-mail or Web page is complete.

APPENDIX D
- ILLUSTRATING ASPECTS RELATED TO SEARCH ENGINES -

Figure 18: Example of search text and search button on a search engine



Source: Google (2005a).

Figure 19: Hits obtained from typing in the search text “South African graded lodges”

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying Google search results for the query "South African graded lodges". The browser's address bar shows the search URL. The search results page includes the Google logo, search input field, and navigation links. The results are categorized under "Web" and show "Results 1 - 10 of about 34,700 for South African graded lodges (0.17 seconds)".

A box labeled "Hits" is overlaid on the page with arrows pointing to the following search results:

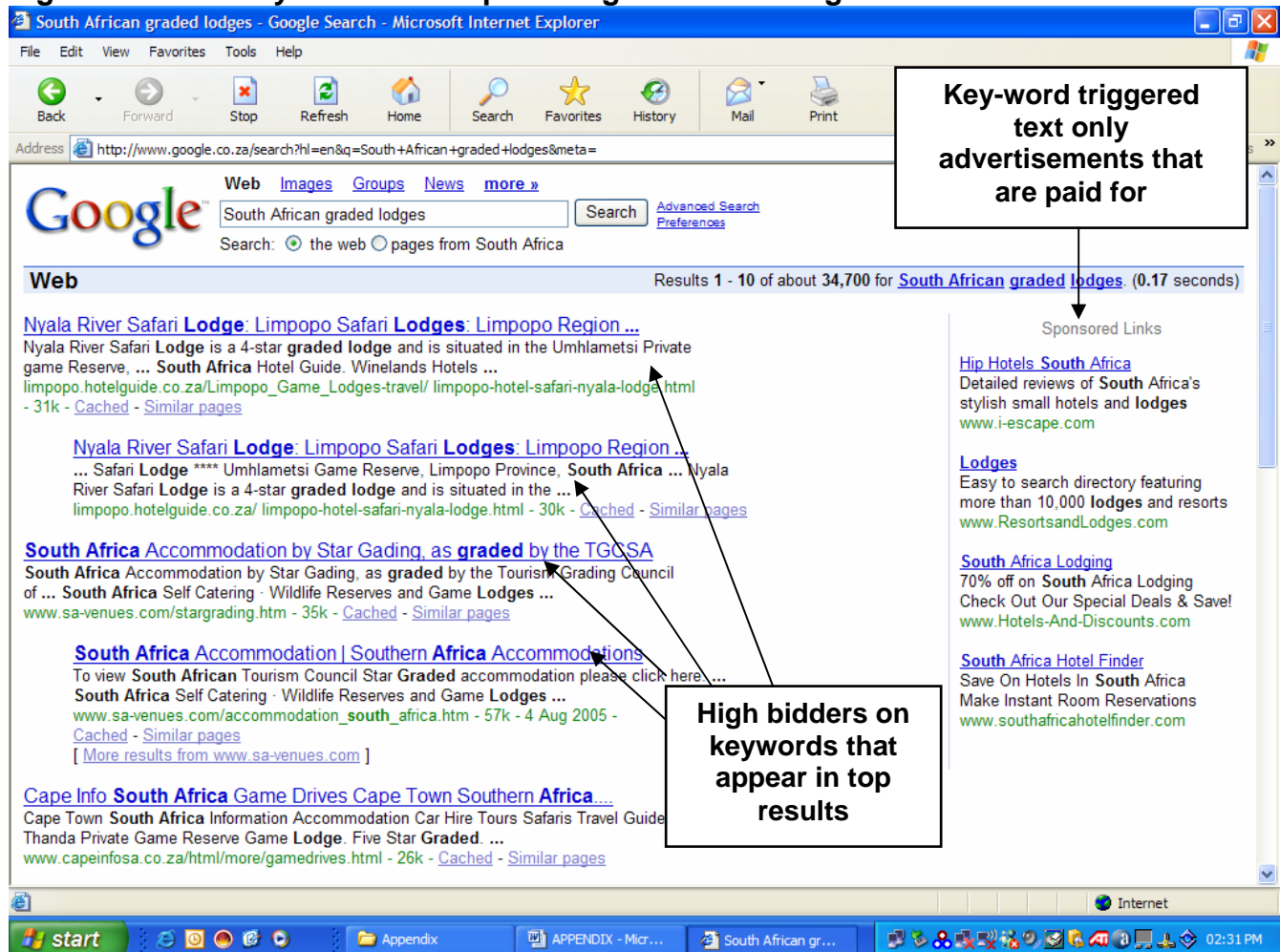
- Nyala River Safari Lodge: Limpopo Safari Lodges: Limpopo Region ...**
Nyala River Safari Lodge is a 4-star **graded lodge** and is situated in the Umhlametsi Private game Reserve, ... **South Africa** Hotel Guide. Winelands Hotels ...
limpopo.hotelguide.co.za/Limpopo_Game_Lodges-travel/limpopo-hotel-safari-nyala-lodge.html - 31k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- Nyala River Safari Lodge: Limpopo Safari Lodges: Limpopo Region ...**
... Safari Lodge **** Umhlametsi Game Reserve, Limpopo Province, **South Africa** ... Nyala River Safari Lodge is a 4-star **graded lodge** and is situated in the ...
limpopo.hotelguide.co.za/limpopo-hotel-safari-nyala-lodge.html - 30k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- South Africa Accommodation by Star Gading, as graded by the TGCSA**
South Africa Accommodation by Star Gading, as **graded** by the Tourism Grading Council of ... **South Africa** Self Catering · Wildlife Reserves and Game Lodges ...
www.sa-venues.com/stargading.htm - 35k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
- South Africa Accommodation | Southern Africa Accommodations**
To view **South African** Tourism Council Star **Graded** accommodation please click here. ...
South Africa Self Catering · Wildlife Reserves and Game Lodges ...
www.sa-venues.com/accommodation_south_africa.htm - 57k - 4 Aug 2005 - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
[[More results from www.sa-venues.com](#)]
- Cape Info South Africa Game Drives Cape Town Southern Africa ...**
Cape Town **South Africa** Information Accommodation Car Hire Tours Safaris Travel Guide ...
Thanda Private Game Reserve Game Lodge. Five Star **Graded**. ...
www.capeinfo.co.za/html/more/gamedrives.html - 26k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

On the right side of the page, there are "Sponsored Links" including:

- Hip Hotels South Africa**
Detailed reviews of **South Africa's** stylish small hotels and lodges
www.i-escape.com
- Lodges**
Easy to search directory featuring more than 10,000 lodges and resorts
www.ResortsandLodges.com
- South Africa Lodging**
70% off on **South Africa** Lodging
Check Out Our Special Deals & Save!
www.Hotels-And-Discounts.com
- South Africa Hotel Finder**
Save On Hotels In **South Africa**
Make Instant Room Reservations
www.southafricahotelfinder.com

Source: Google (2005b).

Figure 20: Two ways to obtain top rankings in search engines



Source: Google (2005b).

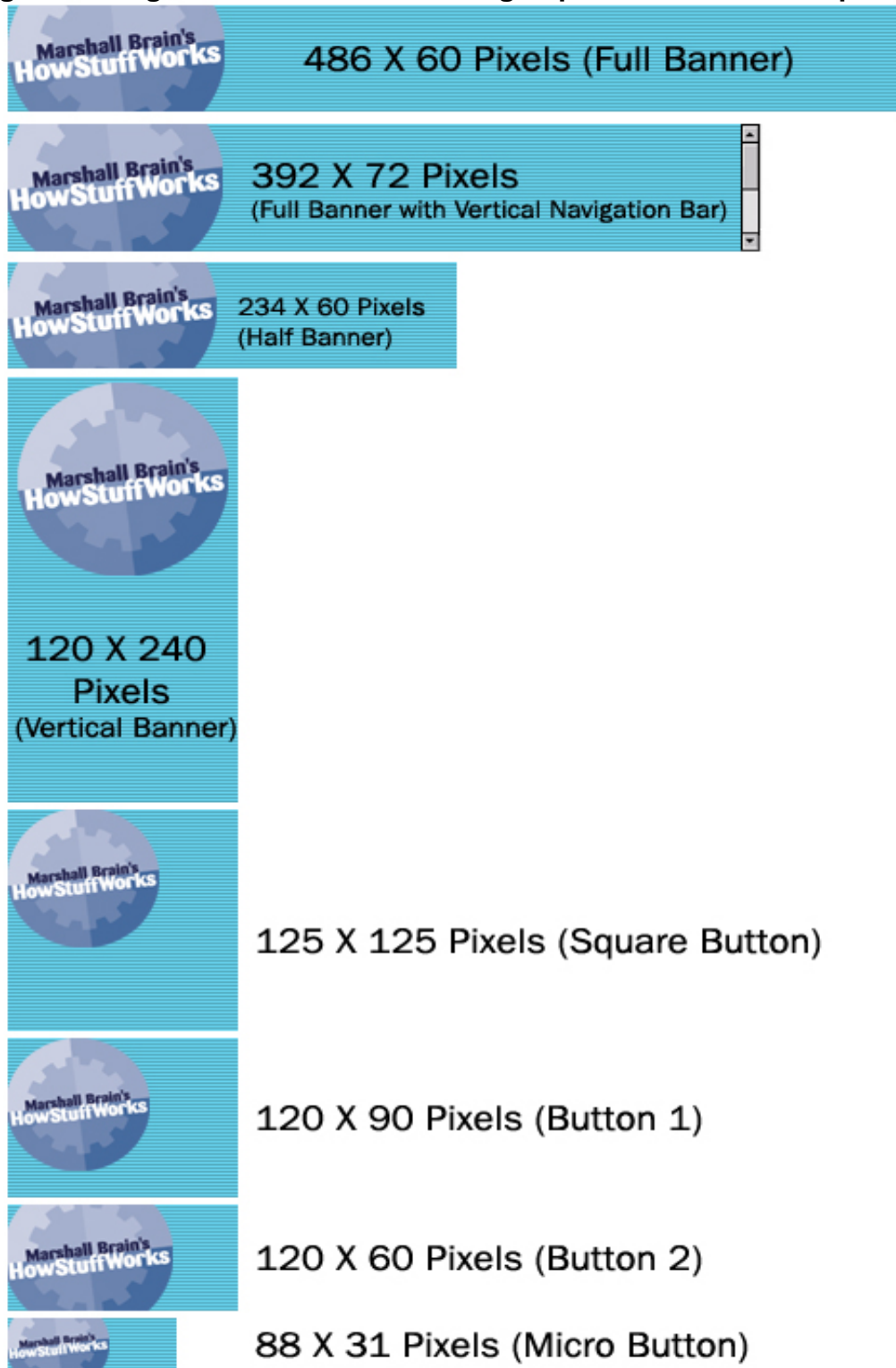
APPENDIX E
- ONLINE ADVERTISING FORMATS -

Figure 21: A typical banner advertisement at the top of a Web page



Source: Brain (2005).

Figure 22: Eight banner sizes according to pixel dimension as specified by the IAB



Source: Harris (2005a).

©2000 How Stuff Works

Figure 23: A typical sidebar advertisement

The image shows a screenshot of a website sidebar advertisement. The main content area features an article titled "How Light Propulsion Will Work" by Kevin Boncor. The article discusses microwave-propelled lightcraft and includes a photo of a satellite dish. A callout box labeled "Sidebar advertisement" points to the right-hand side of the page, which contains a promotional banner for a book collection. The banner advertises a "FREE SHIPPING" offer for a collection of books, including titles like "ArtWork", "Classic", "Classics", "Classics", "Classics", "Classics", and "Classics". The price is listed as "\$24.99" and the total value is "A \$300 Combined Retail Value". The banner also includes the text "Daily Stuff" and "Order on the Day".

How Light Propulsion Will Work
by Kevin Boncor
Tell a friend about this article!

Rate This Article

Microwave-propelled Lightcraft
Another propulsion system being considered for a different class of lightcraft involves the use of microwaves. Microwave energy is cheaper than laser energy, and easier to scale to higher powers, but it would require a ship that has a larger diameter. Lightcrafts being designed for this propulsion would look more like flying saucers (now we're really heading into the realm of science fiction). This technology will take more years to develop than the laser-propelled lightcraft, but it could take us to the outer planets. Developers also envision thousands of these lightcraft, powered by a fleet of orbiting power stations, that will replace conventional airline travel.


Photo courtesy NASA.
Microwave-powered lightcraft will rely on orbiting power stations.

A microwave-powered lightcraft will also utilize a power source that

Only \$24.99
FREE SHIPPING

A \$300 Combined Retail Value
\$24.99

Daily Stuff
Order on the Day
Order on the Day

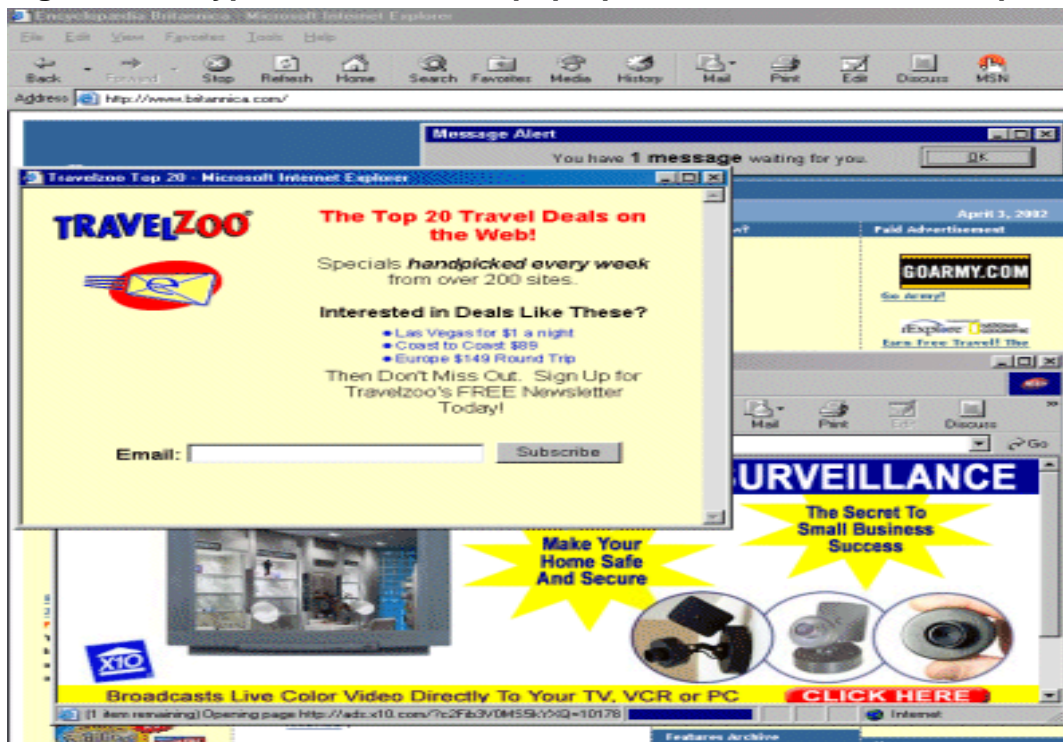
Source: Brain (2005).

Figure 24: A typical pop-up advertisement



Source: Brain (2005).

Figure 25: A typical site with two pop-up advertisements at the top of a home page



Source: Brain (2005).

Figure 26: Screenshot of a typical floating advertisement for a Norton product



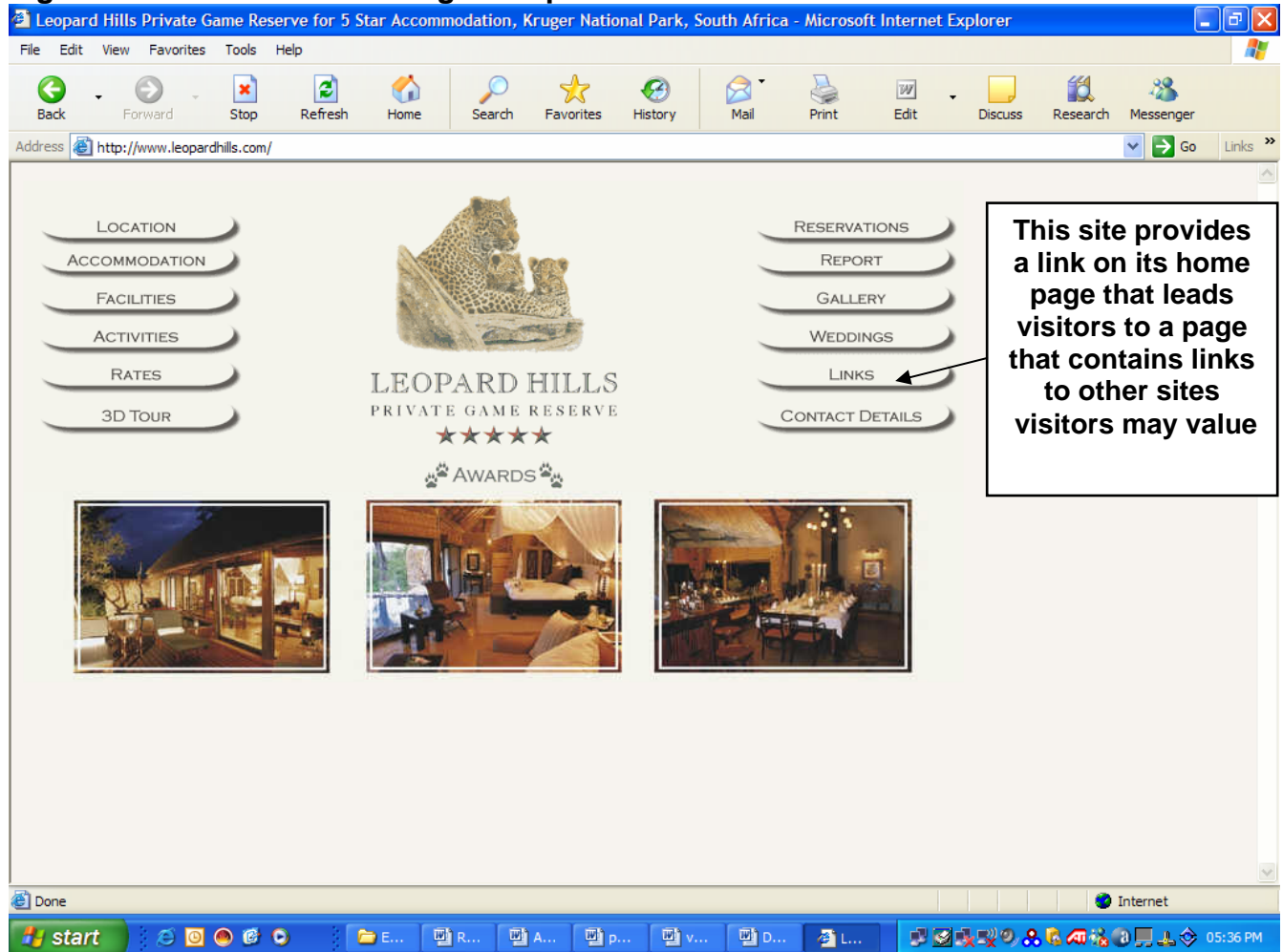
Note: This advertisement is completely animated with four or five moving parts. The advertisement plays for about 15 seconds. This example does have a “close” button, so there is a way out of this advertisement. Many floating advertisements do not have this feature.

Source: Brain (2005).

APPENDIX F

**- EXAMPLE OF A WEB SITE OF A LODGE THAT PROVIDES LINKS TO
OTHER SITES -**

Figure 27: A Web site of a lodge that provides links to other sites

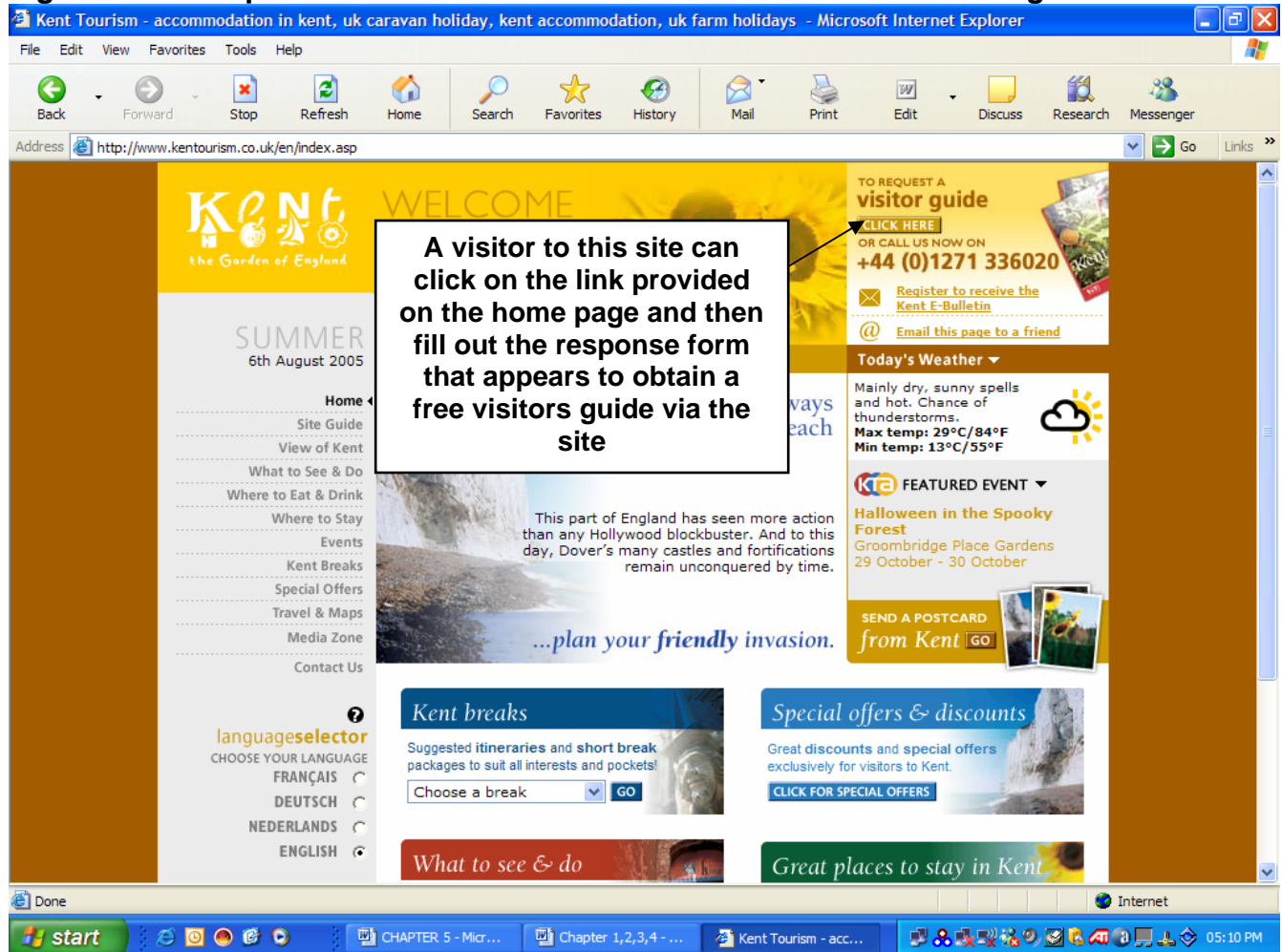


Source: Leopard Hills Private Game Reserve (2005).

APPENDIX G

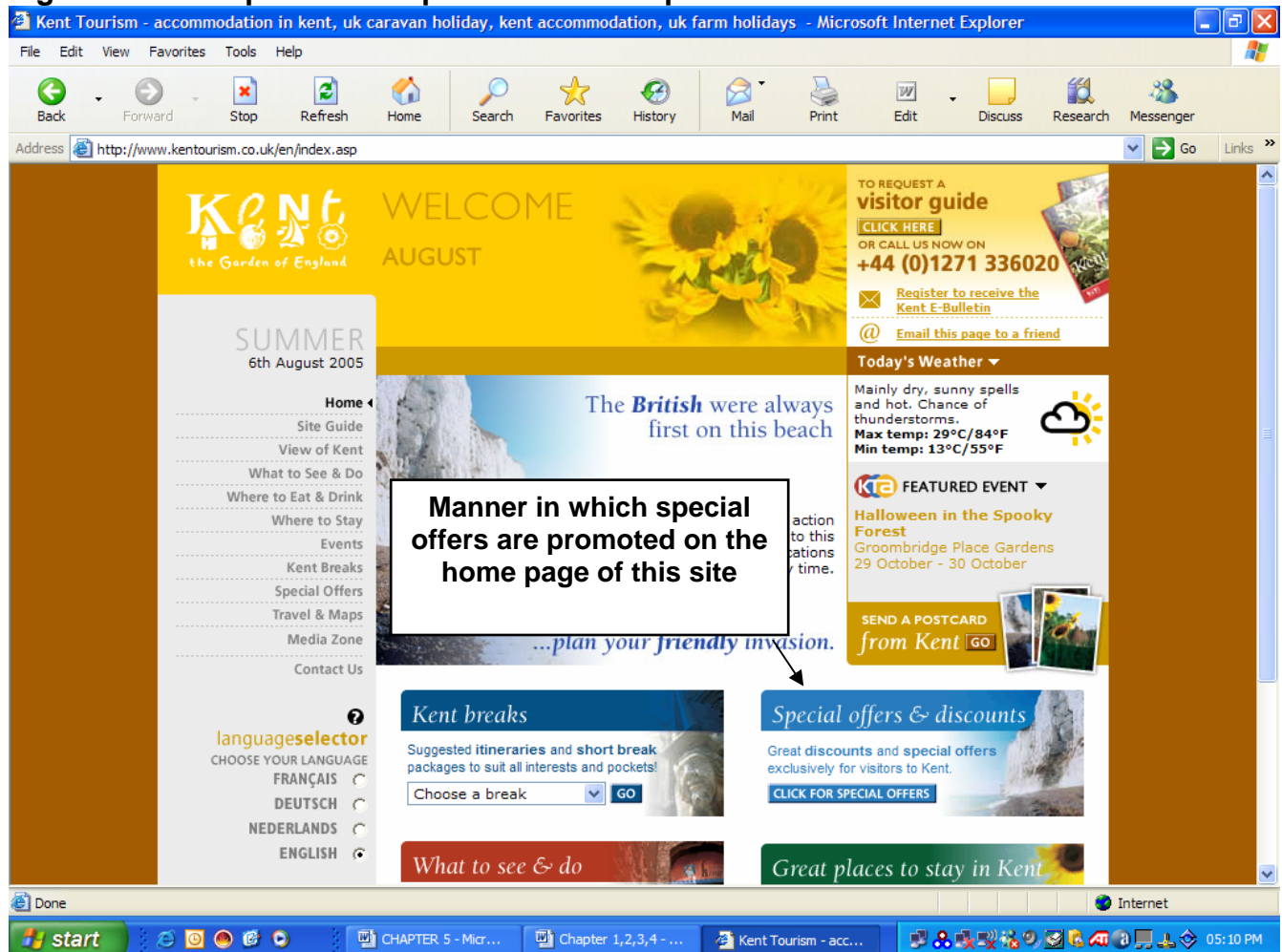
**- EXAMPLES OF ONLINE SALES PROMOTIONAL TECHNIQUES VIA
TOURISM WEB SITES -**

Figure 28: Example of a tourism Web site that offers visitors something free



Source: Kent Tourism Alliance (2005).

Figure 29: Example of how special offers are promoted on a tourism Web site



Source: Kent Tourism Alliance (2005).

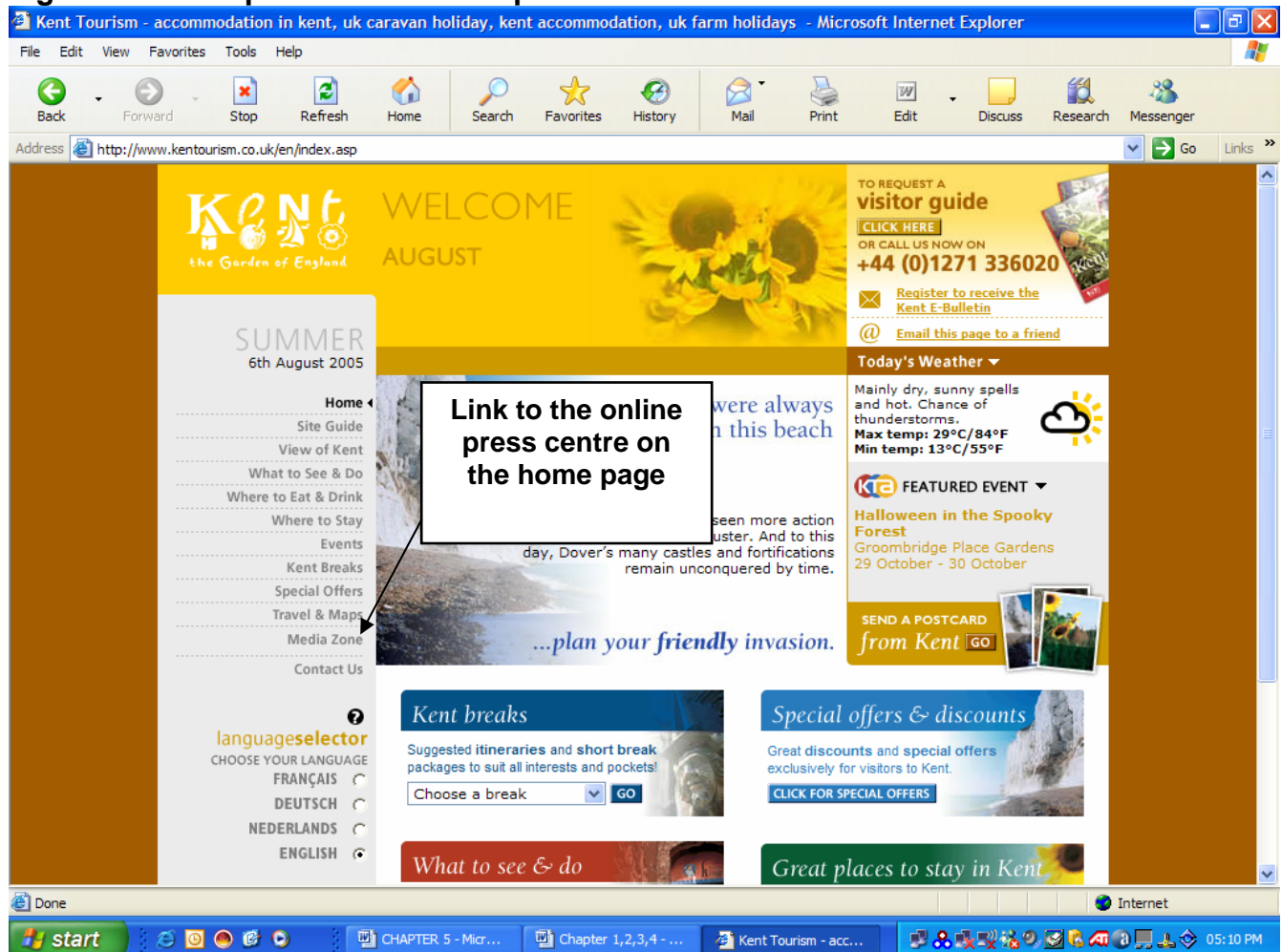
APPENDIX H

**- REGULATIONS REGARDING PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS AS SET
OUT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY IN THE
GOVERNMENT GAZETTE OF 16 MAY 2003 -**

APPENDIX I

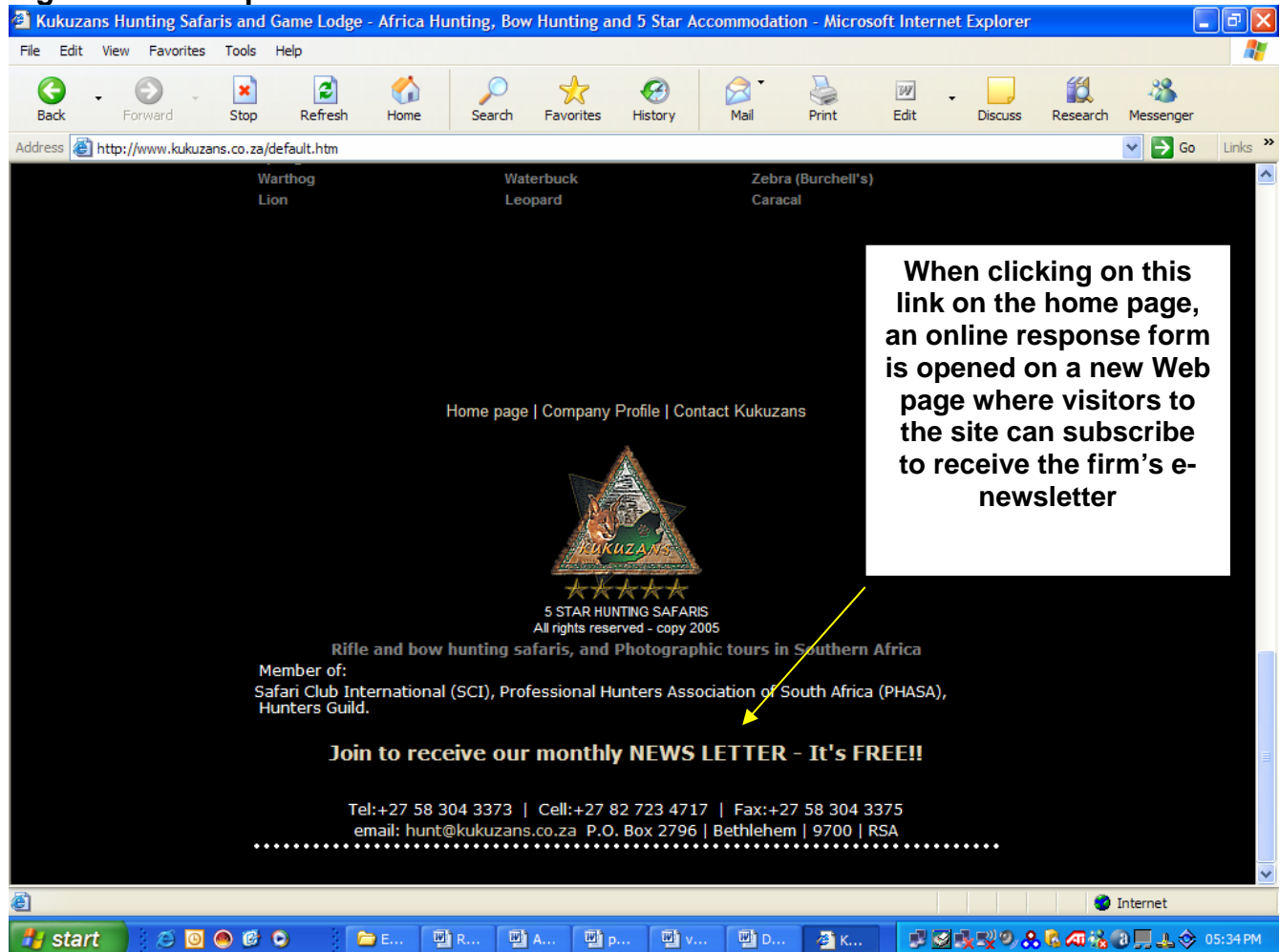
- EXAMPLES OF ONLINE PUBLIC RELATIONS TECHNIQUES VIA TOURISM WEB SITES -

Figure 30: Example of a link to the press centre on a tourism Web site



Source: Kent Tourism Alliance (2005).

Figure 31: Example of how visitors can subscribe to receive a firm's e-newsletter



Source: Kukuzans (2005).

Figure 32: Example of a Web site of a lodge that includes an online guestbook



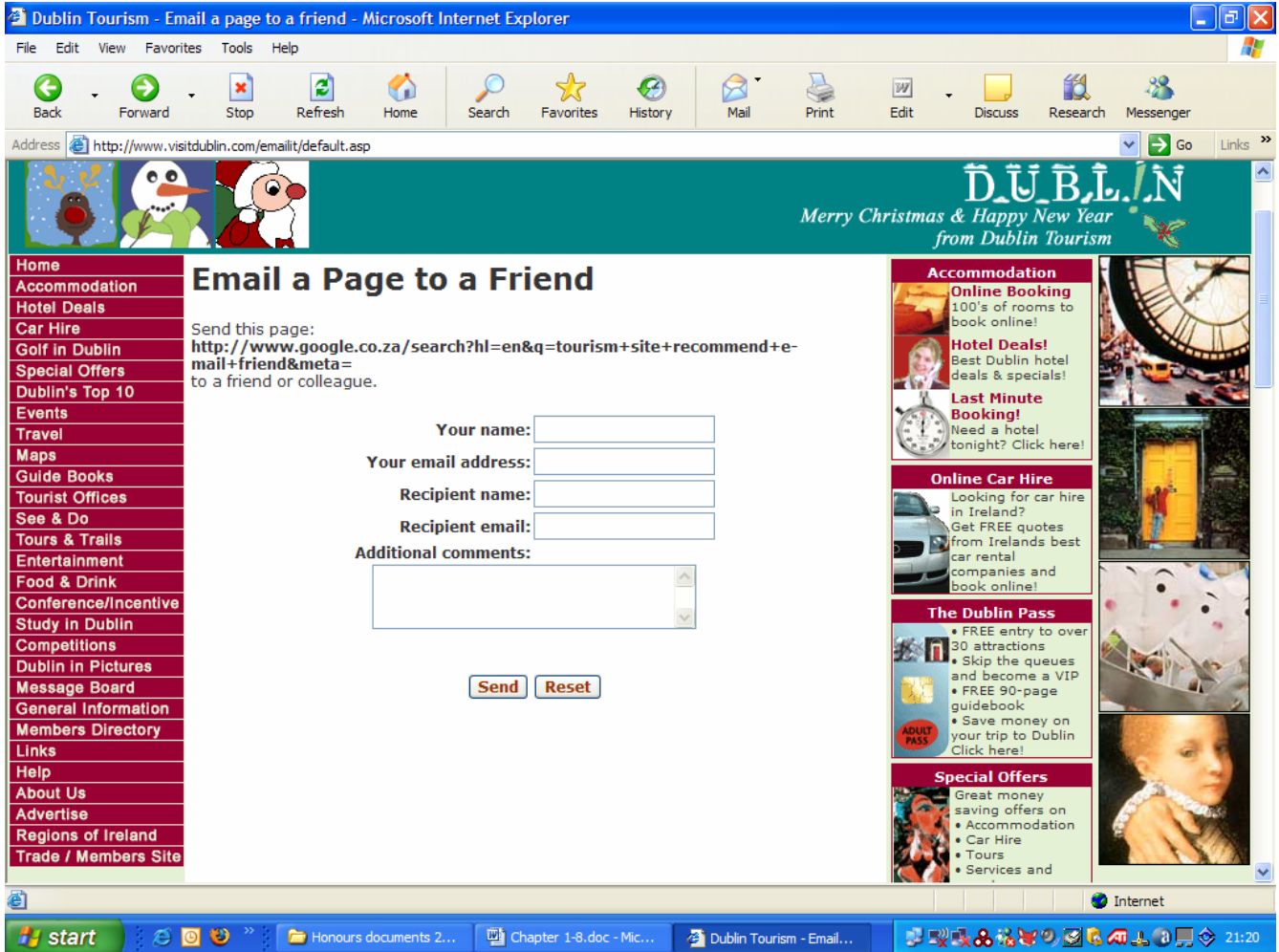
Source: White Elephant Lodge (2001).

Figure 33: Example of a Web site enabling visitors to recommend the site to a “friend”



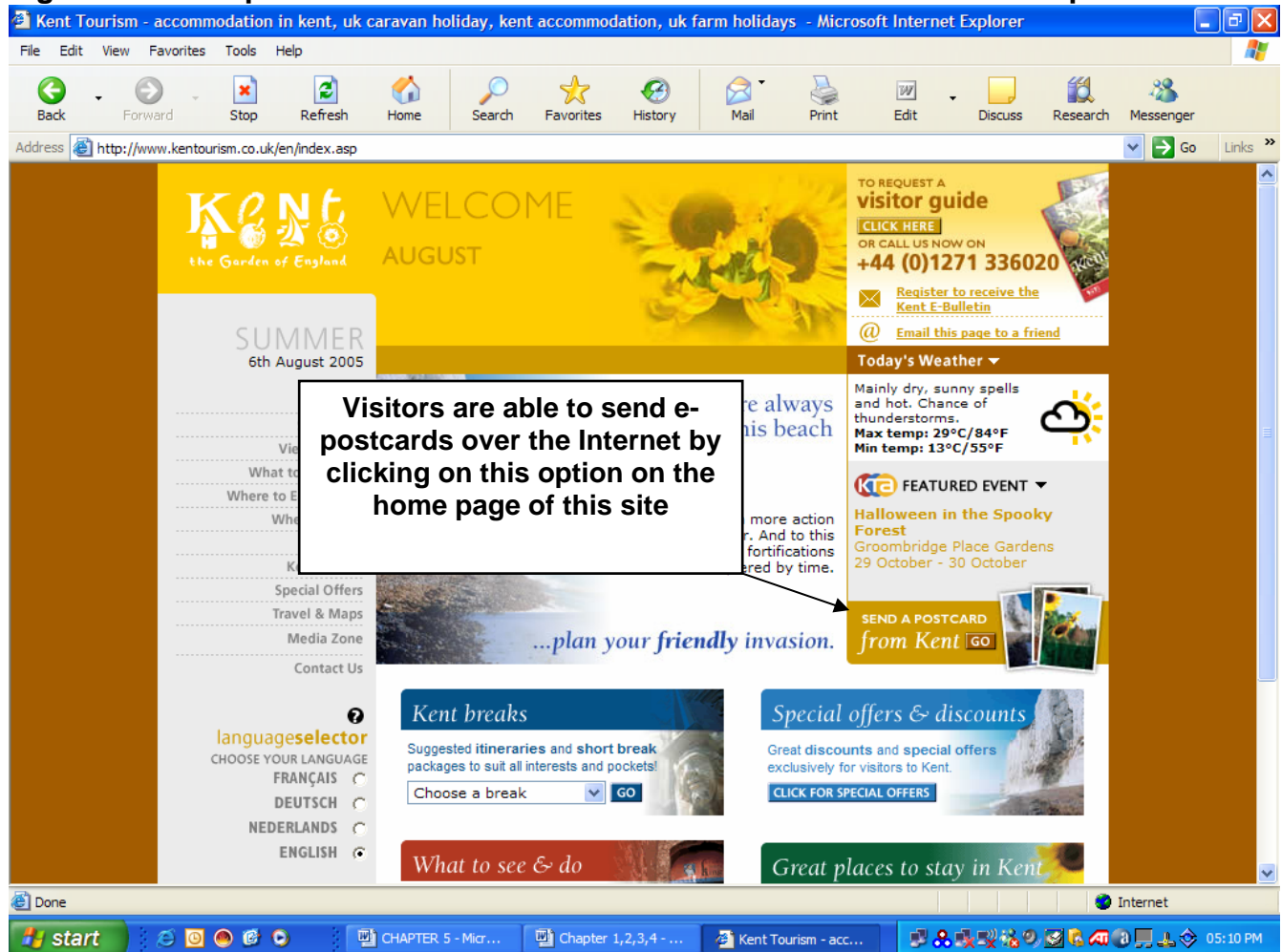
Source: Dublin Tourism (2005a).

Figure 34: Example of a Web page that opens on a tourism site when a visitor clicks on the link to recommend the site to a “friend”



Source: Dublin Tourism (2005b).

Figure 35: Example of a Web site that enables visitors to send electronic postcards



Source: Kent Tourism Alliance (2005).

APPENDIX J

- EXAMPLES OF ONLINE DIRECT MARKETING TECHNIQUES VIA TOURISM WEB SITES -

Figure 36: Example of an online response form in a tourism Web site

CAMORHI LODGE -- ONLINE ENQUIRIES

Please Note: Information must be supplied in the fields that are red.

Title: Select Name:

Name of Business:

Position Held:

Cellphone Number:

Telephone Code: Number:

Fax Code: Number:

Email Address:

Physical Address:

Code:

Date from: Date to: For Accommodation

Accommodation: Select

Question / Enquiry:

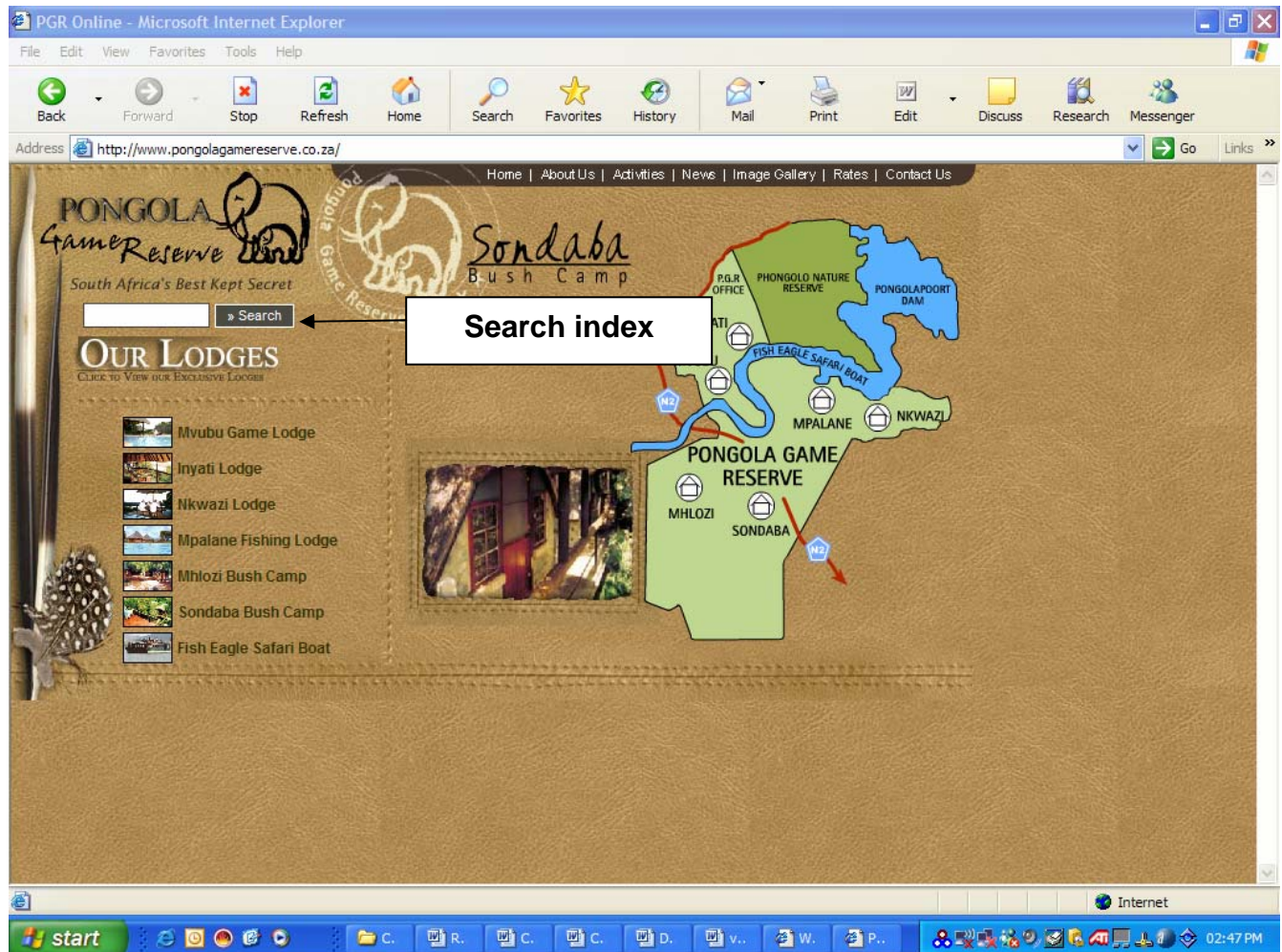
Source: Camorhi Lodge (2005).

Figure 37: Example of a site map in a tourism firm's Web site



Source: Sabi Sabi Luxury Game Lodge (2005).

Figure 38: Example of a search index in a tourism firm's Web site



Source: Pongola Game Reserve (2005).

APPENDIX K
- LIST OF GRADED LODGES AND WEB SITES INVESTIGATED -

LIST OF LODGES GRADED BY THE TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA AND WEB SITES INVESTIGATED IN THE STUDY

One star

1. Cosmo Leisure Country Lodge & Conference Centre <http://www.cosmoleisure.co.za/>

Two star

2. Aloe Grove Guest Farm <http://www.aloegrove.co.za/>
3. Awimaweh <http://www.awimaweh.co.za/>
4. Eagle Falls Lodge <http://www.eaglefalls.co.za/>
5. Wickers Riverside Estate <http://www.wickers.co.za/>

Three star

6. Bayala Game Lodge <http://www.bayalagamelodge.co.za/>
7. Bergbries Guest Lodge <http://www.bergbries.co.za/>
8. BJF Game Ranch <http://www.bjfranch.co.za/>
9. Bona Bona Game Lodge <http://www.bonabona.co.za/>
10. Bushveld Lodge – Executive Lodge <http://www.bushveldlodge.co.za/>
11. Camorhi Game Lodge <http://www.camorhilodge.co.za/>
12. Croc River Lodge <http://www.komatipoort.co.za/crocriverlodge/>
13. Croc Lodge & Function Venue <http://crocolodge.co.za/>
14. Dream Lodge <http://www.sharkbrother.co.za/dreamlodge/>
15. Ekukhanyeni Christian Retreat & Guest House <http://www.ekukhanyeni.co.za/>
16. Emdoneni Lodge <http://www.emdonenilodge.com/>
17. Fairey Glen Nature Reserve <http://fairyglen.co.za/>
18. Golden Leopard Resorts (Bakgatla & Manyane) <http://www.goldenleopard.co.za/>
19. Hannah Lodge <http://www.hannahlodge.co.za/>
20. Hongonyi Private Game Lodge <http://www.hongonyi.co.za/>
21. Indabushe Eco Lodge <http://www.indabushe.com/>
22. Ingwe Game Lodge <http://www.ingwelodge.com/>
23. Ingwenyama Conference and Sport Lodge <http://www.ingwenyama.co.za/>
24. Intundla Game Lodge <http://www.intundla.co.za/>
25. Karukareb Wilderness Reserve <http://www.karukareb.co.za/>
26. Kwa Mbili Game Lodge <http://www.kwambili.com/>
27. Kwamahlal Lodge <http://www.kwamahlalodge.co.za/>
28. Langberg Guest Farm <http://www.langberg.co.za/>
29. Leribisi Lodge & Conference Centre <http://www.leribisi.co.za/>
30. Malala Lodge <http://www.malalalodge.com/>
31. Matsamo Cultural Park <http://www.matsamo.com/>
32. Matumi Game Lodge <http://www.matumi.co.za/>
33. Modderfontein Guest Lodge <http://www.mglodge.co.za/>
34. Moresonranch.co.za <http://moresonranch.co.za/>
35. Mountain Pastures Private Game Reserve <http://www.sanvalley.za.com/>
36. Mseni Lodge <http://www.mseni.co.za/>
37. Mtonjaneni Lodge <http://www.mtonjanenilodge.co.za/>
38. Mugaba Game Lodge <http://www.mugaba.com/>
39. Nongoma Lodge <http://www.nongomalodge.co.za/>
40. Noorspoort Guest Farm <http://www.noorspoort.co.za/>
41. Nsele Game Lodge <http://www.nsele.com/>
42. Old Joe's Kaia Country Lodge <http://www.oldjoes.co.za/>

- 43. Phumula Lodge <http://www.phumula.co.za/>
- 44. Pinnacle Point Hotel and Spa <http://www.grgamelodge.co.za/>
- 45. Roy's Lodge & Safaris <http://www.royslodge.com/>
- 46. Roydon Private Nature Reserve & Lodge <http://www.roydon.co.za/>
- 47. Seasands Lodge & Garden Cottages <http://www.seasands.co.za/>
- 48. Tangala Authentic Safari Camp <http://www.tangala.co.za/>
- 49. Thanda Nani Lodge <http://www.thandanani.com/>
- 50. The Country Lodge <http://www.thecountrylodge.co.za/>
- 51. Thunzi Bush Lodge <http://www.thunzibushlodge.co.za/>
- 52. Tshukudu Game Lodge <http://www.tshukudulodge.co.za/>
- 53. Tulani Safari Lodge <http://www.tulanisafarilodge.co.za/>
- 54. Umlani Bush Camp <http://www.umlani.com/>
- 55. Witsand Nature Reserve <http://www.witsandkalahari.co.za/>
- 56. Zebra Bush Lodge <http://www.zebralodge.co.za/>
- 57. Zingela Indlela Lodge <http://www.zingela.co.za/>

Four star

- 58. Akeru Safari Lodge <http://www.akeru.co.za/>
- 59. Amanzingwe Lodge <http://www.amanzingwe.co.za/>
- 60. Amathunzi Game Lodge <http://amathunzi.co.za/>
- 61. Babanago Valley Lodge <http://www.babanangovalley.com/>
- 62. Beethoven Lodge <http://www.beethoven.co.za/>
- 63. Blyde River Canyon Lodge <http://www.blyderivercanyonlodge.com/>
- 64. Botlierskop Private Game Reserve <http://www.botlierskop.co.za/>
- 65. Buffalo Hills Game Reserve & Lodges <http://www.buffalohills.co.za/>
- 66. Buhala Game Lodge <http://www.buhala.co.za/>
- 67. Bushfellows Private Game Lodge <http://www.bushfellows.co.za/>
- 68. Bushwillow <http://www.bushwillow.com/>
- 69. Camp Figtree <http://www.campfigtree.com/>
- 70. Cranes Nest Mountain Lodge <http://www.crane.co.za/>
- 71. De Ou Waenhuis Game Lodge <http://www.plumariafrica.com/>
- 72. Ditholo Lodge <http://www.dithololodge.co.za/>
- 73. Djuma Bush Lodge <http://www.djuma.co.za/>
- 74. Ekuthuleni Lodge <http://www.ekuthulenilodge.com/>
- 75. Elephant Hide of Knysna Guest House <http://www.elephanthide.co.za/>
- 76. Entabeni Game Reserve <http://www.entabeni.co.za/>
- 77. Ezulwini <http://www.ezulwini.com/>
- 78. Fairview River Lodge <http://www.tzaneen.com/fairview/>
- 79. Falaza Game Park <http://www.falaza.co.za/>
- 80. Finfoot Lake Reserve <http://www.finfoot.co.za/>
- 81. Fugitives Drift Lodge & Guest House <http://www.fugitives-drift-lodge.com/>
- 82. Game Lodge Klein Bolayi <http://www.gamelodgebolayi.com/>
- 83. Garonga Safari Camp <http://www.garonga.com/>
- 84. Gazebo Safari Lodge <http://www.gazebo.co.za/>
- 85. Genius Loci Game Reserve <http://www.gl.co.za/>
- 86. Hartland Mountain Lodge <http://www.hartland.co.za/>
- 87. Hippo Hollow Country Estate <http://www.hippohollow.co.za/>
- 88. Hitgeheim Country Lodge <http://www.hitgeheim-addo.co.za/>
- 89. Hluhluwe River Lodge <http://www.hluhluwe.co.za/>
- 90. Hog Hollow Country Lodge <http://www.hog-hollow.com/>
- 91. Hulala Lakeside Lodge <http://www.hulala.co.za/>
- 92. Idube Private Game Reserve <http://www.idube.com/>
- 93. Iketla Lodge <http://www.iketla.com/>
- 94. Inverdoorn Game Reserve <http://www.inverdoorn.com/>
- 95. iZapa Bush & Game Lodge <http://www.izapa.co.za/>
- 96. Ka'ingo River Lodge <http://www.kaingo.co.za/>

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| 97. | Kagga Kamma Private Game Reserve | http://www.kaggakamma.co.za/ |
| 98. | Kariega Game Reserve | http://www.kariega.co.za/ |
| 99. | Karukareb Wilderness Reserve | http://www.karukareb.co.za/ |
| 100. | Komati Gorge Lodge & Wildlife Reserve | http://www.komatigorge.co.za/ |
| 101. | Kuname River Lodge | http://www.kuname.co.za/ |
| 102. | Lakenvlei Forest Lodge | http://www.lakenvlei.co.za/ |
| 103. | Lakeside Lodge | http://www.lakesidelodge.co.za/ |
| 104. | Lalibela Game Reserve (Lentaba Lodge & Mark's Camp) | http://www.lalibela.co.za/ |
| 105. | Lapeng Lodge | http://www.lapenglodge.co.za/ |
| 106. | Leopard Mountain Game Lodge | http://www.leopardmountain.co.za/ |
| 107. | Letsatsi Game Lodge | http://www.letsatsigamelodge.co.za/ |
| 108. | Limpopo Safaris View Lodge | http://www.limpopo-safaris.com/ |
| 109. | Mabalingwe | http://www.mabalingwe.co.za/ |
| 110. | Makalali Private Game Lodge | http://www.makalali.co.za/ |
| 111. | Malapo Country Lodge | http://www.malapo.co.za/ |
| 112. | Masodini Game Lodge | http://www.masodini.co.za/ |
| 113. | Misty Mountain Reserve | http://www.misty-sa.co.za/ |
| 114. | Mongena Game Lodge | http://www.mongena.com/ |
| 115. | Monwana Lodge | http://www.monwana.com/ |
| 116. | Mopane Bush Lodge | http://www.mopanebushlodge.co.za/ |
| 117. | Mopaya Safari Lodge | http://www.mopayasafari.co.za/ |
| 118. | Nkonka Bush Lodge | http://www.nkonkabushlodge.co.za/ |
| 119. | Nkorho Bush Lodge | http://www.nkorho.com/ |
| 120. | Palm Dune Beach Lodge | http://www.palmdune.co.za/ |
| 121. | Phuza Moya Private Game Reserve | http://www.phuzamoya.co.za/ |
| 122. | Pondoro Game Lodge | http://www.pondoro.co.za/ |
| 123. | Ratelfontein Game Reserve | http://www.ratelfontein.com/ |
| 124. | Savanna Private Game Reserve | http://www.savannalodge.com/ |
| 125. | Sefapane Lodge & Safaris | http://www.sefapane.co.za/ |
| 126. | Shakama Private Game Lodge | http://www.shakama.com/ |
| 127. | Spion Kop Lodge | http://www.spionkop.co.za/ |
| 128. | Tanda Tula Safari Camp | http://www.tandatula.co.za/ |
| 129. | Thaba Pitsi Nature Reserve | http://www.thabapitsi.co.za/ |
| 130. | The Bush House | http://www.bushhouse.co.za/ |
| 131. | The Feathered Nest Guest Farm | http://www.featherednest.co.za/ |
| 132. | Three Tree Hill Lodge | http://www.threetreehill.co.za/ |
| 133. | Tilodi Wilderness | http://www.tilodi.co.za/ |
| 134. | Trout River Falls | http://www.troutriverfalls.co.za/ |
| 135. | Tsitsikamma on Sea | http://www.tsitsikammaonsea.com/ |
| 136. | Umbani Private Nature Reserve | http://www.umbani.info/ |
| 137. | Valley of the Rainbow Country Estate & Nature Reserve | http://rainbowvalley.co.za/ |
| 138. | Whispering Pines Country Estate | http://www.whisperingpines.co.za/ |
| 139. | Zulu Nyala (Game lodge, Heritage Safari Lodge & Nyati/Ndlovu lodge) | http://www.zulunyala.com/ |

Five star

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| 140. | Amakosi Lodge | http://www.amakhosi.com/ |
| 141. | Shamwari Game Reserve (Eagles Cragg Lodge, Longlee Manor, Bushman's River Lodge, Lobengula, Riverdene, Bayethe Tented Lodge) | http://www.shamwari.com/ |
| 142. | Blaauwbosch Private Game Reserve | http://www.blaauwbosch.co.za/ |
| 143. | Budmarsh Private Game Lodge | http://www.budmarsh.com/ |
| 144. | Bushmanskloof Wilderness Reserve | http://www.bushmanskloof.co.za/ |

145.	Cybele Forest Lodge & Spa	http://www.cybele.co.za/
146.	Dawsons Game and Trout Lodge	http://www.dawsonslodge.co.za/
147.	Didimala Game Lodge	http://www.didimala.co.za/
148.	Edeni River Lodge	http://www.edeni.com/
149.	Etali Safari Lodge	http://www.etalisafari.co.za/
150.	Gasuta Lodge	http://www.gasutalodge.co.za/
151.	Gorah Elephant Camp	http://www.gorah.com/
152.	Grootbos Private Nature Reserve	http://www.grootbos.co.za/
153.	Highgrove House	http://www.highgrove.co.za/
154.	Hlosi Lodge	http://hlosilodge.com/
155.	Impodimo Game Lodge	http://www.impodimo.com/
156.	Inkwe Valley Game Lodge	http://www.inkwevalley.co.za/
157.	Itaga Private Game Lodge	http://www.itaga.co.za/
158.	Jaci's Lodges (Tree & Safari)	http://www.madikwe.com/
159.	Jatinga Country Lodge	http://www.jatinga.co.za/
160.	Kapama Game Lodge	http://www.kapama.co.za/
161.	Kings Camp Private Game Reserve	http://www.kingscamp.com/
162.	Klein Paradijs Country House	http://www.kleinparadijs.co.za/
163.	Kloofzicht Lodge	http://www.kloofzicht.co.za/
164.	Kukuzans Lodge	http://www.kukuzans.co.za/
165.	Leopard Hills Private Game Reserve	http://www.leopardhills.com/
166.	Lion Sands Private Game Reserve	http://www.lionsands.com/
167.	Lukimbi Safari Lodge	http://www.lukimbi.com/
168.	Lythwood Lodge	http://www.lythwood.com/
169.	Mabalingwe Country Club	http://www.mabalingwecountryclub.co.za/
170.	Madikwe Private Game Lodge	http://www.madikwehills.com/
171.	Makaranga Garden Lodge	http://www.makarangagardenlodge.com/
172.	Matamba Private Game Lodge	http://www.matamba.co.za/
173.	Mateya Safari Lodge	http://www.mateyasafari.com/
174.	Matumi Golf Lodge	http://www.matumigolfodge.co.za/
175.	Mhondoro Game Lodge	http://www.mhondoro.com/
176.	Mkuze Falls Game Lodge	http://www.mkuzefalls.com/
177.	Motswari Private Game Reserve	http://www.motswari.co.za/
178.	Nedile Lodge	http://www.nedile.co.za/
179.	Pakamisa Private Game Reserve	http://www.pakamisa.co.za/
180.	Rhunali Safari Lodge	http://www.madikwegamereserve.com/
181.	River Bend Country Lodge	http://www.riverbend.za.com/
182.	Royal Madikwe Luxury Lodge	http://www.royalmadikwe.co.za/
183.	Royal Malewane	http://www.royalmalewane.com/
184.	Sabi Sabi (Bush Lodge, Earth Lodge & Selati Camp)	http://www.sabisabi.com/
185.	Sabona Wildlife Reserve (Khanni Lodge & Tilney Manor)	http://www.sanbona.co.za/
186.	Sediba Private Game Lodge	http://www.sediba.com/
187.	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	http://www.shibulalodge.co.za/
188.	Shumbalala	http://www.shumbalala.co.za/
189.	Tau Game Lodge	http://www.taugamelodge.co.za/
190.	Thunda Private Game Reserve	http://www.thanda.com/
191.	Timamoon Lodge	http://www.timamoonlodge.co.za/
192.	Tinga Private Game Lodge	http://www.tinga.co.za/
193.	Tsala Treetop Lodge	http://www.tsalatreetops.com/
194.	White elephant lodge	http://www.whiteelephant.co.za/
195.	Witwater Game Reserve	http://www.witwater.com/
196.	Wooded Peaks Game Lodge	http://www.woodedpeaks.com/
197.	Zwahili Private Game Lodge	http://www.zwahili.co.za/

APPENDIX L
- CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE SHEET USED IN THIS STUDY -

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE SHEET

Ref No. _____

Name of lodge: _____

Web site address: _____

	Yes	No
Advertising		
1. Links to other sites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sales promotion		
2. Offer something free	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Coupons, discounts and/or special offers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Connection to loyalty programme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Win something	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Online games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public relations		
7. FAQ section	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Press centre	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Press releases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Photo gallery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Registration to receive e-newsletter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Testimonials/online guestbook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Recommend site to a "friend"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Send e-postcards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct marketing		
15. Telephone number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Fax number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Physical address	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Postal address	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. E-mail link (own e-mail software)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. Online response form	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Site map	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Search index	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. Virtual tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. "What's New" section	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Calendar of events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. Local weather information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. Location map	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. Jokes and/or cartoons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. Multiple languages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal Selling		
30. Online booking facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Further comments

APPENDIX M

**- EXAMPLE OF A WEB SITE OF A LODGE THAT PROVIDES ITS OWN
FORM OF NEWS -**

WILDLIFE REPORT PROVIDED BY KINGS CAMP PRIVATE GAME RESERVE IN DECEMBER 2005

T



KINGS CAMP
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Kings Camp Game Reserve

Tel: +27 (0) 15 793 1123

Fax: +27 (0) 15 793 3634

Email: lodge@kingscamp.com

Kings Camp Reservations

Tel: +27 (0) 13 755 4408

Fax: +27 (0) 13 753 3377

Email: reservations@kingscamp.com



WILDLIFE REPORT DECEMBER 2005



The lowveld bushveld is a remarkable and unique biome. During the last few weeks, it has undergone a complete metamorphic change. The wonderful rain that fell in the first half of December has transformed the dry and arid veld into a lush and green paradise. With the new sward of nutritious grass, game is plentiful. December is also the time of the baby animals with the arrival of numerous offspring of different species.

Hundreds of young impala lambs between 3-4 weeks old are looking very healthy after the early rains. Other plains game such as Burchelles zebra and Blue wildebeest are being seen in good numbers on the open plains. Kings camp appears to be the giraffe capital of Africa at the moment with herds of between 10 and 20 animals seen regularly. With the good rains, most of our dams have filled up nicely attracting hippos back into the area. Initially the hippos are nervous but soon settle as they realize that we pose no threat to them.



Lions

The Machaton pride.

The Machaton pride was blessed with the arrival of 3 new cubs. One of the adult lionesses gave birth to her latest offspring in thick vegetation along the Zebneen River bank south of Kings Camp. The cubs were only 10 days old at the start of the month and this means extra special care is taken in order to not add pressure to the mother or cubs. The den where the cubs are hidden at present is off limits for any vehicle for the time being. In due time the mother will eventually bring them out of hiding and introduce them to the rest of the pride and us as well.



The Sohobele lionesses.

These two young lionesses are also about to open a new chapter-motherhood. One of the lionesses appears to be in her last few days before she will give birth. They have now permanently established their territory in the Northern half of the reserve. We are very excited about the development of this new pride. I personally know the two females very well and have seen them grow up.

Leopard

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of our most the infamous leopardess, Java. It was finally confirmed during December after a long absence that she had died. The Java leopardess was without a doubt the most recognized and respected female leopard ever to roam the Timbavati. She stole all our hearts with her grace and beauty and will never be forgotten. During her last months she moved up in to the far north of the reserve where we have no traversing. The staff at the local camps kept me informed of her.



Movements and habits. The last visual of her was obtained by local staff that told me the following story.

Java was sighted in the early hours of the morning close to the staff camp. It appeared she was limping but this could not be confirmed as she was resting in tall grass. Later as the sun set, a clan of hyenas could be heard fighting in the distance. On arrival, they found Java in a terrifying battle with several hyenas. She stood her ground but not for long as they attacked her aggressively. Miraculously in a do or die event she somehow managed to escape by climbing into a large Marula tree. There she lay mortally wounded and died during the night still in the tree. Her body was removed from the tree the next morning and laid to the

ground so her spirit could roam Timbavati once again.

Mbali leopardess Cub

The well-known Mbali leopardess was dealt a severe blow in the beginning of the month. Her only remaining offspring, which was nine months old, was killed by the two Sohobele lionesses. This heartbreak incident took place along the Nharalumi River. I was told that the two Shobele females were resting during the late afternoon on the bank of the Nharalumi River.



The sun had already set when a loud bark from a bushbuck alerted the two lionesses to the leopard cub in a thicket nearby. In a flash, the lionesses were on the poor cub and killed her instantly. It is a tragic story for us all as this was Mbali leopardess first cub to live as long as 9 months. All her previous offspring have been killed by predators.

Elephants of Timbavati

Large herds of elephants are frequenting the lush green plains in the southern part of the Timbavati. They spend most of their time feeding on the protein rich grass. Their screams and trumpeting can be heard throughout the night. These mammalian giants can consume between 5-7 percent of their body weight daily. It realistically means that if an adult bull weighs five tons he can consume 350kg of food daily. No wonder they feed just about 16 hours a day.

A few young bulls also tried to get in to the camp during the first week of December. Fortunately, we knew what they were up to and could put a halt on their plans. They were after the succulent vegetation in the camp.

Vervet monkeys of Kings Camp

Our resident troop of vervet monkeys had new members joining the family.

The troop consists of one dominant male that leads the troop, two adult females and four youngsters. Two baby monkeys were born on the 21st and 23rd of Oct much to the delight of the other members of the troop. Regrettably, though one of the new arrivals died a day later.

The mother instead of leaving her dead baby then proceeded to carry it with her for 6 weeks. During this period, I recorded in detail every single interaction she had with other members of her troop. This type of behaviour is unknown to us. The mother instinct is obviously very strong. I have included several remarkable pictures which show the badly decomposed body of the youngster. At the end of 5 weeks, she would drop the body to the ground while she fed and as soon as I would approach she would grab it and make for the trees. She would also allow other members of the troop to inspect but not to touch it. At the end, all that was left was the skull and the vertebra of the baby monkey. She finally disposed of the remains only because it broke in to several pieces.



During the time I record this interesting interaction, I was amazed to see the sympathetic and compassion she had. After all they do belong to the order of primates just like us...

From the ranger team

The festive season is always celebrated in a unique manner for guests that visit Kings Camp during this special and celebrated time of the year. On behalf of Kings Camp, I would like to wish you Health, Happiness and Prosperity for the year to come.

From your Kings camp Ranger and Tracker team.

Patrick O'Brien
Head ranger
Kings Camp

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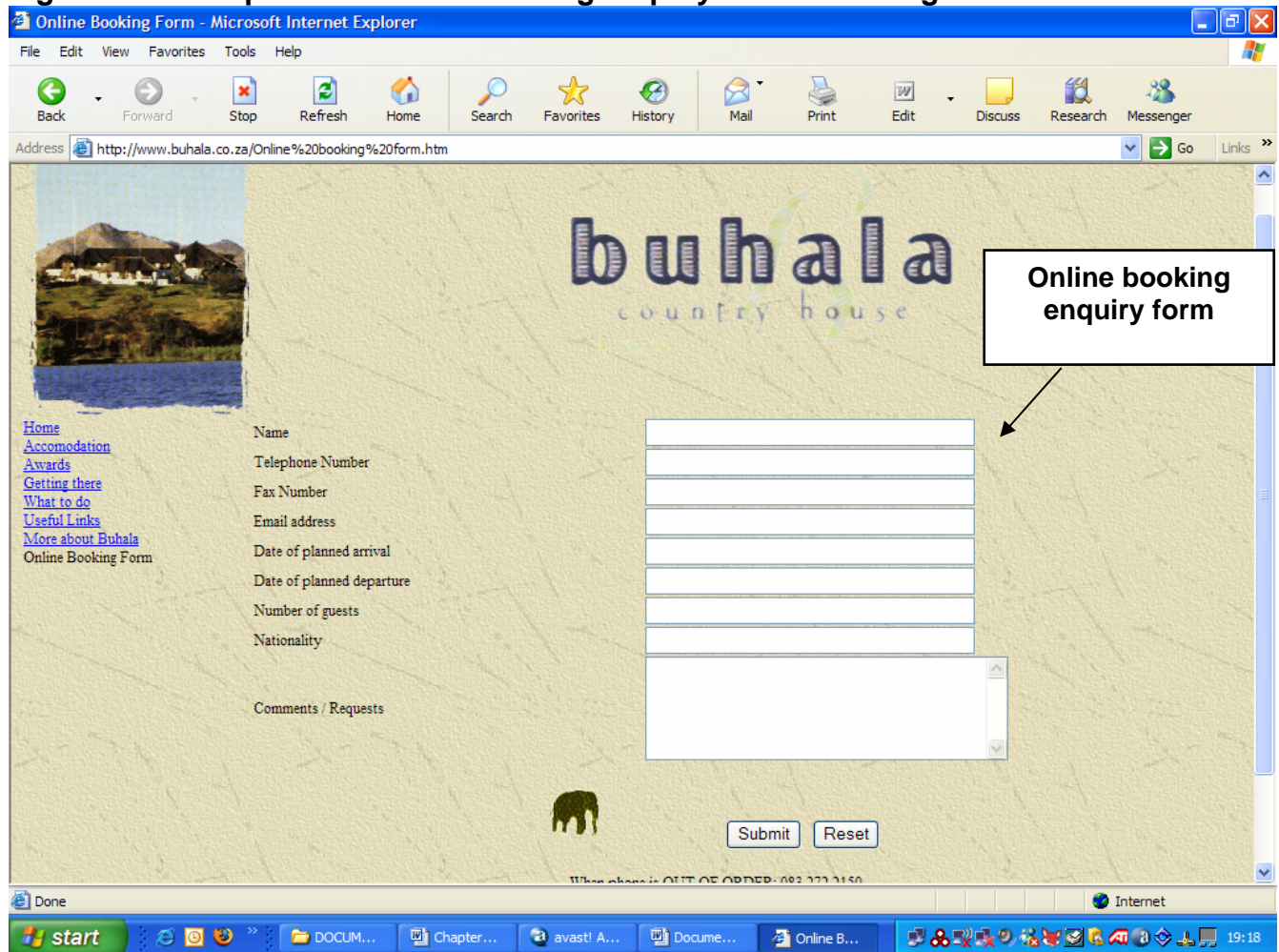
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Source: Kings Camp Private Game Reserve (2005).

APPENDIX N

- EXAMPLE OF AN ONLINE BOOKING ENQUIRY FORM-

Figure 39: Example of an online booking enquiry form via a lodge's Web site



Source: Buhala Country House (2005).

APPENDIX O

- EXAMPLE OF A RECENT E-NEWSLETTER BY MOPANE BUSH LODGE-

MOPANE LODGE'S E-NEWSLETTER FOR FEBRUARY 2006



NEWSLETTER February 2006

A New Year has begun and the rains are finally falling. At present, one can almost hear the sap rising and jubilant bird song has resounded all day. Everything is fresh and clean and we are thankful.

A New Year has brought some new faces to the team. Mopane Bush Lodge welcomes Moira and Andrew Rae and family to the reserve. They bring several years of lodge and wildlife management experience to Mopane, augmenting the close attention to detail and warm personal service that has characterised Paul and Rosemary's hospitality at the lodge. Two additional ladies have joined our dedicated lodge staff team. Pamela Moyo and Gift Moyo are two young and talented ladies who have added some sunshine to the kitchen, housekeeping and general service departments. We welcome them and wish them every success in their endeavours.

The Soutpansberg Limpopo Birding Route is gaining momentum and twitchers have moved from "vagrant" to "common" on the Mopane Bush Lodge guest list. A recent British birding group notched up a respectable 330 species over a one-week period with 126 of those ticked on a one-day excursion in the region surrounding Mopane Bush Lodge. The participants recorded several "lifers" (bird species seen for the first time in a person's life) and said that they thoroughly enjoyed their stay with us. They had the good fortune of seeing both lion and rhino on their birding forays into Mapungubwe National Park.

Mopane Bush Lodge played host to a film crew in January. The crew, producer, director and celebrity host stayed at the lodge for two nights and spent their days setting up for a five second "shoot" at the nearby Venetia mine. They came replete with the latest Nissan off-road vehicles. These vehicles are the focus of a Nissan sponsored ad campaign filmed at different adventurous locations on the 24th parallel. The "shoot" at Venetia involved an explosion forming the backdrop to the Nissan vehicle and driver. As you can imagine there was no room for error and only one take! The celebrity mentioned above was none other than Saba Douglas-Hamilton, host of BBC's Big Cat Diaries and daughter of Ian Douglas-Hamilton, Africa's foremost authority on elephant.

The latest news from Mapungubwe National Park includes both the natural and the supernatural. Several hundred traditional healers gathered late last year at the park's picnic site in preparation for a spiritual cleansing ceremony. A limited number of the more senior traditional healers climbed Mapungubwe Hill the following morning to appease the ancestors who are believed to hold sway over the archaeological site. We are told that this was a resounding success and any visit to this new World Heritage Site now has the blessing of the ancients.

Lions have made a surprise appearance in the national park and look to be calling it home from now onward. The five or six animals sighted a number of times on night drives recently are believed to have come from Botswana's Northern Tuli Game Reserve which lies on the opposite bank of the Limpopo. The cats probably crossed the dry riverbed at night and somehow negotiated the park's electrified fence. This event places Mapungubwe but a buffalo away from acquiring "big 5" status.

A recent census of the hyena and leopard populations was carried out using trip cameras. After analysing the photos and applying an extrapolation estimate the results were:

- v Brown Hyena 15,
- v Spotted Hyena 15,
- v Leopard between 25 and 30.

This data indicates an even split between the two species of hyena, which negates the old belief that the two species never occur together within the same area, and confirms the sightings of both species at Mapesu. The leopard result is surprisingly high for a park of just 200 square kilometres.

Hoodia Health Hydro & Spa is a welcome new addition to our region. This wonderful wellness establishment was recently developed on a property close to Mopane Bush Lodge and is proving to be quite popular. If a break away to our serene and relaxing piece of paradise doesn't quite relieve those stress related aches and pains, why not book a morning at Hoodia and enjoy a massage, reflexology or aroma therapy session.

A final thought with all of this wonder permeating the far northern regions of the greatest country God made, why are you not booked in at Mopane Bush Lodge for a **Mapungubwe Safari**? Come and rediscover the spirit of ancient Africa with us.

Paul, Rosemary, Moira, Andrew and the team.



Andrew & Moira Rae

MOPANE MOMENTS

It is difficult to recognise that exact moment. The moment when something takes on a meaning more profound, more real than one ever would have expected.

My wife and I joined the management team of Mopane Bush Lodge at the beginning of this year after almost two years “across the river” in Botswana. Our collective career has taken us from “big five” wilderness areas in the Lowveld to the splendour of the Eastern Cape and the harsh beauty of the Tuli Game Reserve. In all this time, raising three children and living through numerous adventures and a number of calamities, coming to Mopane was like coming home.

“What makes this place special?” you may ask. Well, you see, it's like this...it isn't just one particular thing. This place has a heart beat as ancient as the baobab. The very theatre of African ecology plays out all around you. The sunsets are painted for you seemingly by the very hand of God. The dust and

the wind as it breathes over the canopy of mopane speak of truths long forgotten. This is Africa and it will always beckon.

A wildlife profusion exists here, from the sedate yet curious Giraffe to the diminutive Steenbok. Kudu and Gemsbok strut their princely stuff and Impala leap through bush as if their very lives depended on it. Eland, Waterbuck, Wildebeest and Zebra are all denizens of this valley. The birds are everywhere and in dazzling array. Ostrich and Bustard, impossibly large and severe looking as they wander about. Bee-eaters, Rollers, Hornbills and Kingfishers glide and turn in the air bedecked in colours that they just don't seem to make anymore.

If you want to hear Africa speak to you, relax and renew your weary mind and return home understanding something of this wonderland and the lessons it seeks to teach us then you need to look North. Look to the confluence of two mighty rivers straddled by a new National Park and World Heritage Site called Mapungubwe. South of this lies Mopane Bush Lodge. Your search has ended.

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Source: Mopane Bush Lodge (2006).