

Future Trends of the World Wide Web in the Food and Beverage Sector in Spain

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Extended abstract

1. Objectives

The general objective of this investigation is to study the possibilities and marketing implications of using the World Wide Web (also known as “WWW” or “the Web”) in the sale of products.

The specific objectives of the study are the following:

- To examine whether the Internet and more specifically one of its main components, i.e. the World Wide Web, constitutes an adequate environment - for a form of selling which does not include an outlet, premises or shop - and for distance selling of consumer products such as food and beverage for the Spanish market.
- To identify the main obstacles to the development of the World Wide Web as a commercial environment in Spain, and alternatively the factors which may encourage and support its growth.

- To examine the implications for the marketing strategies of companies that market their products in this new commercial environment.
- To examine the implications of the www on the future role of marketing intermediaries.

2. Background

At present the World Wide Web - the feature of the internet which has made the greatest contribution to the growth of the world-wide network of computers- provides us with a basis to predict the capabilities and possibilities which may be realised over the next decade. It may act as a training ground for companies that want to learn about new forms of technology and interaction with their final consumers.

Thanks to the interactive features of the WWW, this new medium provides an environment suitable for providing customer support, for creating a permanent dialogue with the customer and for exploring new selling opportunities.

However, despite the its commercial potential, the www has not yet provided us with a true alternative to the current marketing channels (such as retail store selling, T.V. home shopping, telemarketing).

3. Methodology

Given the short history of selling through the World Wide Web, the limited nature of research in the area, and the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework, the present study adopts an exploratory approach. It intends to examine the main determinants of marketing on the www, the relationships between these factors, and their potential effects on the marketing systems of companies.

The emergence and development of trade systems and marketing strategies for the World Wide Web has until now been limited within the state of Spain. This suggests that there would be great difficulty in finding a representative sample within the general population of users with a knowledge of these type of systems. Therefore this study

adopts the Delphi method, with the contribution of a panel of experts including professionals and researchers from the food and beverage and web sales sectors.

4. Expected Results

With this study, we expect to obtain a general perspective of the potential development of the Web as a channel for the marketing of food and beverages in Spain. This perspective will be generated by examining empirical data obtained in research with a group of experts in this field.

The analysis of the results will demonstrate trends in selling on the web compared with selling which utilises other technologies (television, CD-ROM, etc.) while taking into account the factors which have led to the commercial development of the Web. Furthermore, the study will identify the possible “web operators” in the food and beverage area as well as the competitive strategies that will be required in this new commercial environment.

5. Discussion

The main goal of this study is to contribute to the current debate on the capacities of the World Wide Web in the commercialisation of products and to examine the effects of this new trading environment on the functions of the market intermediaries.

In contrast to the widely held view of academics and professionals that marketing intermediaries will disappear from the channel this paper will attempt to demonstrate that a new class of middlemen will appear that will take advantage of the economies of scale and the wider reach of the World Wide Web.