

E-Tourism and the New Family Station Wagon

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INTRODUCTION

In its blandest definition E-Tourism can be defined as the analysis, design, implementation and application of IT and e-commerce solutions in the travel & tourism industry. It encompasses everything from travel information websites to tourists taking iPod® led tours of ancient cities. Lets not burry, just yet, the pocket tour book, as millions of these are still sold and paged through by travelers thirsty for the knowledge of what has gone before, where they should go to absorb that, and what to do when they get there, but the onslaught of electronic media is fast making them obsolete. This year, TripAdvisor — which bills itself as the world's biggest travel site and employs 1,800 staff — is on course to achieve revenues in excess of \$1 billion. This fact alone defines an intersection between entrepreneurship and E-innovation as it relates to E-tourism that is undeniable. While TripAdvisor is now a billion dollar enterprise lets not forget that several years ago it was a small group of entrepreneurs, with a new idea, that planted the seeds, for what has become one of the most widely used travel sites on the Internet.

BACKGROUND

With a definition of E-tourism in hand it hardly seems necessary to offer a definition of entrepreneurship, does it? What about E-Innovation? Do we all have a handle on that? E-innovation is one of those terms born in cyberspace, and it has a ubiquitous meaning. It can be a number of things to a number of different people. For the purposes of this discussion lets define it as any form of web based innovation that pursues a new idea, whether that idea is to provide content, pursue a different market demographic, or explore a unique delivery method for that content. Lets further confine our thoughts of E-innovation to the travel industry;

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while people travel for a variety of reasons let's be specific — we are talking about tourism.

As entrepreneurs and innovators look to this blossoming market opportunity, the question arises as to where innovation is most likely to spring up next. The birth of innovation in the tourism industry had its genesis in the wheel. The wheel was a very simple innovation that allowed people to start to navigate the planet. As 70 percent of the planet is covered with water the invention of the boat, and the sail further added to mobility. Followed by the steam engine of the industrial revolution, the automobile and then in 1907 the advent of powered flight. All of these innovations made tourism and travel more attainable but for most of us growing up, we were confined to the all mighty road trip, tucked into the back of the family station wagon. While the station wagon has been replaced by technology laden mini vans, a new virtual family station wagon has hit the cyber highways. Technology has made the world a much smaller place and whether you are traveling the world virtually or physically the Internet has become the go to place to do so. The Internet, an innovation in and of itself, has become a haven for serial entrepreneurs and innovators. But what is next? Nobody is re-inventing the wheel and innovation is getting tougher to pull off.

Innovation has become much more subtle. Some entrepreneurs are now looking to innovate simply via the content that they distribute. Content drives the interest in a website, it drives visitors, visitors are called hits, and in a simple model hits drive revenue. One fundamental thing about business has never changed - it is all about revenue. The analysis of what content to deliver on your site is purely a function of demographics, as is the case in any media based industry; whether we are talking about traditional print based media, or broadcast television. Demographics and content development are really about knowing your audience. Innovation can be as simple as pursuing a new demographic with a

new approach to the content. Conversely it could be an existing business innovating current services to provide a better experience. Etihad Airlines is showing innovation in their approach to family travel with the “Flying Nanny” service, that allows parents to better relax on long haul flights knowing their children will be getting that little bit of extra attention. Other passengers can relax knowing that someone will be ensuring the little travelers don’t get too out of sorts. Not all parents tend to their children, as we would like them to.

Bedecked in bright orange aprons, these mile-high Mary Poppins (who are trained in child psychology and behavioral development stages by Norland College in the UK) promise to provide a “helping hand” to families and unaccompanied minors. (Seim, 2013, p1)

While this is indeed an innovative approach to air travel this isn’t e-innovation. The advent of sites like travelingmom.com and kidstravelnews.com are attempting to answer the question of what’s next in the E-tourism world, by remodeling the family station wagon.

Travelingmom.com which has a complementary web brand called travelingdad.com, focuses on providing detailed trip planning information, and tips, for parents thinking about where to go and what to do with their kids on the family vacation. They employ a large number of guest bloggers, all of whom are traveling parents. These guest bloggers provide excellent talk tracks on where to go and what to do and add an element of diversity to the thought and intellectual content property that draws visitors to the site. Without doubt they are clearly successful in attracting visitors as they have a fair number of big box advertisers on the site. The presence of advertisers is a good indicator of a site that has healthy visitor traffic. Travelingmom.com is clearly innovative in that it fills a void that exists with respect to some much needed information for a specific demographic. Parents that want to be prepared for building family memories with the right vacation need a go to spot and travelingmom.com is fast becoming that place. It provides an information slice of the travel world that is vastly different than what TripAdvisor serves up. There is plenty of room on the E-tourism plate and if TripAdvisor is serving dinner, then travelingmom.com is serving desert.

Engaged parents have thirst for reliable advice on the family vacation and TravelingMom (and Dad) helps then understand what their kids might want to do, but the demographic is, without mistake, parents. Nobody knows what kids want to do better than kids. We all think that we remember what it was like to be a kid and that we can relate so well. The reality is probably very different. Kids know what they like and are happy to tell you, and of course, each other. Obviously we can’t always let them do exactly what they want, but if our goal is to ensure the little people in our lives are enjoying the family vacation then sites like KidsTravelNews (KTN) provides a very different and unique approach to providing that information. Clearly their demographic is uniquely positioned to entice kids. They appear to give serious thought to a generation that spends more time on-line than outside.

The story of media in young people’s lives today is primarily a story of technology facilitating increased consumption. The mobile and online media revolutions have arrived in the lives—and the pockets—of American youth. Try waking a teenager in the morning, and the odds are good that you’ll find a cell phone tucked under their pillow—the last thing they touch before falling asleep and the first thing they reach for upon waking. Television content they once consumed only by sitting in front of a TV set at an appointed hour is now available whenever and wherever they want, not only on TV sets in their bedrooms, but also on their laptops, cell phones and iPods®. (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010, p2)

Jennifer King, Executive Producer for Kids Travel News (KTN) explains: “Unlike other travel sites whose primary audience is Mom’s planning family vacations our content model is directed specifically at kids. Kids love content and furthermore they love to create content. We’ve spent the last 18 months generating a base line of content for a launch in the fourth quarter of 2014, but the kids will supply the real content. What makes us different is the way in which we have partnered with the tourism industry in a shared promotion model. Our camera crew visits a local tourism hot spot and asks a simple set of questions all based at getting to the single interest focus – why is this place fun for kids? At the end of the segment the tour operator will be able to upload to their own site, a professionally produced video in

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