

Chapter 24

Promoting Local Tourism through Local Government Web Site: An E-Government Application

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an attempt to investigate the current issues and development of the application of e-government in promoting local tourism industry for small and local cities and counties throughout the United States. The primary data for this study are collected through a comprehensive Web site evaluation. The objectives of this chapter are: (1) to examine the use of online tourism promotion implemented in local city and county Web sites across the United States, (2) to identify major issues and challenges for local governments in promoting local tourism online, and (3) to discuss the managerial implications for future research. The data collected from this study show that there is an emerging need for improvement in promoting local tourism through e-government application.

INTRODUCTION

The convenience of the Internet is one of the many attractive qualities. The Internet is not only convenient, it is efficient, fast, and is low in cost. E-mail, online bill payment, and individual websites are just a few examples of how the world is changing traditional functions to a more efficient means of completing task. In a recent online article, Anonymous (2006) illustrates the impact of the Internet on businesses, “*The Internet is helping companies*

to lower costs dramatically across their supply and demand chains, take their customer service into a different league, enter new markets, create additional revenue streams and redefine their business relationships”. It is imperative for businesses to be online. If a business is not providing online capabilities, it makes it that much easier for a competitor to have an advantage.

The Internet is also has improved the ability to serve customers more efficiently and is, therefore, more effective. Today a consumer is able to pay bills online, receiving mail (better known as e-mail), banking and shopping online then have it delivered.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-671-6.ch024

There are many advantages of shopping online such as (1) shopping from the comfort of your own home; (2) do not have to travel; (3) shop around both nationally and internationally for the best prices; (4) available 24 hours a day and everyday; and (5) people who are house-bound can have goods delivered to their doors. Many of these same advantages also apply to online banking. Not only do the consumers benefit from doing business online, but businesses also benefit from the new online capacity of: (1) opening their market to international trade; (2) reducing cost and staff; (3) providing services around clock at low cost; and (4) allowing small companies to compete with their large counterparts.

The application of the Internet in the operations of government has been termed as “e-government” and is becoming an important topic for government officials at all levels. E-government is becoming more necessary throughout all levels of governments. The local governments can provide its citizens with many useful new online services such as online bill payment, paying parking tickets, filing complaints, online forms, and et al. The benefits of e-government include “greater efficiency of the institutions concerned, improvements in public services, and political participation and transparency” (Haldenwang, 2004).

Whether society likes it or not, e-government is quickly becoming a necessary component with rapid growth. Many local governments have taken the initiative to have their own city/town website offering a vast amount of community and visitor information. By having this information readily available, they increase citizen involvement with the government. For the most part the advancement of e-government was increasing steadily, but over the past few years, the development has slowed down. For example, many local governments do not have updated their websites or created multi-lingual websites. Many of these functions are necessary to keep people informed and involved.

Currently, countries all over the world have

been adapting to this new IT and communication technology, Canada had been ranked the first in the E-government application, following close behind were Singapore and the United States ranked in second. In 2002, the advancement of e-government was at an all time high of 11.5 percent growth. That number is down to 5.6 in 2004. Recent trends have begun to show: (1) E-government advances are diminishing; (2) E-government leaders are reaping tangible savings; (3) Promoting use is taking hold, but the challenge remains; (4) The integration process is challenging; and (5) Personalization is emerging (Swartz, 2004). “In a recent report by the Pew Internet and American life project, more Americans choose to interact with their government via telephone, letter, and face-to-face rather than through online channels” (Swartz, 2004:pp#). Moreover, in order to increase citizen’s response for their local e-government websites, an effort has to be taken to make the sites easier to navigate.

In order for the application of e-government to be successful, a strong institutional base and infrastructure must be implemented in advance to allow a speedy process. Although many undeveloped countries are lacking behind in this area, there are still opportunities for them to exist. “*Beyond the immediate benefits of the new technologies, e-government should be taken as an instrument to promote good governance and to strengthen reform-oriented actors in politics and civil society*” (Haldenwang, 2004:pp 417-418).

This study is focused on the use of the Internet in promoting local tourism by the local governments throughout the United States to promote tourism. The information and primary data for this study are collected from a comprehensive evaluation of randomly selected local government websites across the nation, as well as related literature review and the Internet web searches. It is strongly believed that the information provided for tourism on local government websites can help local tourist industry and draw more visitors and investors to the area, as the online information such

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