

Chapter 8

Internet Management for Communication–Distribution Interaction as a Means to Maximize Customer Consumption Experience: The Volagratis Case¹

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ABSTRACT

The new online applications described as Web 2.0 or Social Media have a significant effect on consumer behaviour and contribute to an unprecedented customer empowerment. This issue has an important influence in many fields of activity, especially ones of the Web's most successful areas, i.e. tourism. The purpose of this chapter is to recommend the Internet as a "point of synergy" in the "promo-distribution" process of tourism. The Internet is a tool that customizes digital content to support consumers' decision making and maximizes customer consumption experience. Despite the lack of extensive research, the corporate world seems to embrace the Web 2.0 concept, which so far appears to be a promising tool for building customer loyalty and strong consumer-relationships that create value for e-retailers. The research tests the models proposed in a case study, which could be considered a core contribution, both in terms of practical implications for corporations, and in academic research.

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INTRODUCTION

Current organization trends are moving in a direction capable of communicating with customers through emotions, in order to involve them both in the purchase process and to satisfy their needs. Indeed, “consumption is an experience deriving from the interaction between a subject – the consumer – and an object – a product, an event, an idea, a person, a place, or any other thing within a given context” (Addis et al, 2001). In this perspective, a reconsideration in an interactive key of customers relations becomes thus imperative for firms to grasp opportunities of development and ensure survival. Accordingly, the wide diffusion of new technologies in communication and business has changed how consumer and product/store knowledge has to be managed and represented digitally. This issue has an important influence in many fields of activity, and this is particularly true for tourism, one of the most successful areas on the Web. Our research prospects an original conceptualization of marketing strategies and operational policies in order to examine and reconstruct the dynamics of “integrated” marketing when identifying potential interaction between communication and distribution for tourism. The main contribution of this study has been the elaboration of the “point of synergy” model, a tool for understanding how tourism industry organizations can create competitive advantage by applying, optimizing and coordinating new technologies (Barney, 1991). The “point of synergy” model has great innovation potential and is a relevant example of knowledge “contamination” where elements of communication are integrated with distribution by means of typical technology tools. In the model, new technologies constitute integration of intelligence, exchange, cross-fertilization, and links between elements, with a role of strengthening development and competitive synergies, knowledge development and relative benefits. Thus, through the Internet users achieve new extremely involving shopping

experiences. The Internet facilitates the building, maintaining and strengthening of stakeholder and external relationships (Bennett et al, 2001) in order to create a virtuous circle of “customer satisfaction, attractiveness and business value” (Singer & Cacia, 2009). Besides, in modern systems the customer oriented perspective ends up prevailing over the production system, enables greatly “access to the customer” and establishing lasting relations with him. Said relations seem to represent the prerequisite for ensuring an organization’s competitive advantage. Customers no longer fall within a generic definition of public, passively assisting a show performed by the firm, but they live a gratifying experience if they finding the suppliers organized according to their personal taste. This highlights the role and the opportunities presented by interactive technologies to customer consumption experience. Evolutionary trends in terms of marketing could lead to more and more customized products and processes. All communication vehicles tend to become distribution instruments and vice versa: therefore, means of communication such as Community and Social Networks could become effectively means of distribution. Finally, the research tests the model proposed, i.e. a case study of the Bravofly group, potentially a core contribution in terms of practical implications for corporations.

1. THE COMMUNICATION AND DISTRIBUTION CHAIN IN TOURISM

According to Siano (2001), the communication mix depends on the intersecting of two elements: “communication object” and “final recipients of communication flows”. The different communication areas can be classified by these elements. The main factors affecting communication are: the nature of the market, the product, and the firm’s financial assets. Consequently, communication can be defined as a circular process involving many factors, regardless of specific areas of

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