

Chapter 24

Visibility of the Airport Sector: Web 2.0 and Social Communication Networks

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the use of social communication media and Web 2.0 tools at airports to determine whether these technologies are being used as a means of raising the airports' visibility, enhancing their level of e-participation and improving corporate dialogue. In addition, the authors seek to determine which variables influence the use and development of these tools. The results obtained reveal a moderate use of Web 2.0 tools by airports, with the most noteworthy finding being their presence in social networks and the use of the latter as channels through which to increase e-participation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought about a transformation of society that has affected companies' organisation and management (Bonsón, Escobar, and Flores, 2006; Serrano, Fuertes, and Gutiérrez, 2007). Thus, applications based on Web 2.0 are changing relationships between

society and business. This situation means that customers are making increasing use of the Internet as a tool to express their experiences with organisations, and that potential consumers make purchasing decisions, for products or services, on the basis of the information found on the Internet.

In this sense, let us refer to the phenomenon of transparency, which is gaining increasing importance in society due to the constantly increas-

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ing demand for information. Numerous studies have shown that information is ever more highly valued within the community (Oyelere, Laswad and Fisher, 2003; Petersen and Plenborg, 2006; Birt et al., 2006; Lim, Matolcsy and Chow, 2007). The transparency of an organization depends on the degree or extent to which it explains itself to its stakeholders, and so the two phenomena, the development of new technologies and that of transparency, are closely linked today. Let us also refer to a concept that is rising fast in public view, namely e-participation. Generically, this includes the processes that facilitate and enhance the direct involvement in decision-making and in the generation of alternatives by those affected by such decisions, through the use of participatory channels based on ICTs, such as Web 2.0 or social networks.

As an evolution of Web 1.0, O'Reilly (2005) coined the concept of Web 2.0, based on the use of new technologies such as RSS channels, podcasting, mashups (combining existing applications), folksonomies (social indexing), widgets (mini Web applications) and resource-sharing environments (to store and share data online). And it is on this technological base that the social media have been developed, these being applications that offer services to online user communities, such as blogs, social bookmarking, wikis, multimedia sharing applications or social networks. All of these instruments facilitate collaboration, joint learning and the rapid exchange of information among users.

Any organisation can greatly improve its corporate Website by incorporating Web 2.0 services and technologies (Jiang, Raghupathi and Raghupathi, 2009), thus creating relationships with stakeholders who, with traditional means of communication, had previously been inaccessible or invisible (Hearn, Foth and Gray, 2009).

In this respect, the term "Enterprise 2.0" was introduced by McAfee in 2006, such term referring to the use of Web 2.0 applications in a business

context. Enterprise 2.0 illustrates how a correct implementation of Web 2.0 and its tools not only aids the socialisation among organizations but also improves the resolution of problems, the leveraging of experience, the generation of ideas and the knowledge of the public opinion (McAfee, 2009).

Along the same line, Mackeviciute y Iacubițchi (2010) suggest that Enterprise has a direct impact to key aspects such as communication, collaboration, cooperation and innovation activities. Likewise, diverse authors argue for the benefits of Web 2.0 in all types of business (Benkler, 2006; Bonsón, Escobar y Flores, 2008; Constanzo, 2009; Hwang, Altman, y Kim, 2009; IDC, 2008; Kupp y Anderson, 2007). Due to the enormous use of the Web 2.0 tools, the formulation of metrics to determine the impact of such tools and level of use has been initiated (Herget and Mader, 2009).

As a result of these changes, the Internet is no longer just another channel of communication, but has become a key factor for companies that pursue a higher degree of transparency and accountability; it enables information of all kinds to be offered as soon as the user requests it (Larrán and Giner, 2002), and at the same time facilitates interaction via different mechanisms of participation. However, although social technologies have generated a high degree of interconnectivity among users, allowing them to exchange all kinds of opinions and experiences (Vazquez, Saldaña and Celaya, 2009) many organizations continue to rely on communication and positioning strategies that ignore the advantages provided by participation in the blogosphere, by Wikipedia, by the publication of podcasts or videos, through Twitter conversations or by creating profiles on social networks like Facebook, MySpace or Xing.

We are thus faced with social change, in which a firm's positioning and its digital reputation on the Internet will play a key role in the knowledge society of the 21st century. Accordingly, the organisations that are most active and innovative in their communication policies will be most likely

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