



Web Technology in Travel Agencies

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the opportunities for travel agencies in relation to the World Wide Web (WWW). The WWW coupled with Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) has the potential to radically change the nature of the Travel Agent's business by providing on-line booking for customers twenty four hours a day, information and graphics on demand, and the facility for agents to access a wider variety of information sources and bargains. Hence, travel agents would be less dependent on the Whole sale suppliers they are currently tied to. In addition, a model of Web technology diffusion is used to determine the pattern of technology adoption in travel agencies. Our survey of travel agencies found that a large percentage were either not using the WWW or had no plans to do so. Those that used the WWW had introduced the technology without much planning, especially at enterprise level. The diffusion of Web technology has much in common with that found in a study of an Australian university. Because of the lack of planning the potential of Web based electronic commerce.

Keywords:—GDS, BPR, electronic commerce, information technology, OIS.

I. INTRODUCTION

Both the travel and tourism industry and Web based electronic commerce are changing rapidly. The global gross output of travel and tourism was estimated at US\$3.4 trillion and is expected to double by 2005. The World Wide Web (WWW) is also growing at a rapid rate. Latest estimates of Internet users range around the 120 million mark Organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the business potential of engaging in electronic commerce over the WWW. The WWW supports electronic commerce in four major tasks.

- Attracting new customers via marketing and advertising.
- Serving existing customers via customer service and support functions.
- Developing new markets and distribution channels for existing products.

- Developing new information based products.

This paper explores three main areas in relation to Web technology adoption in travel agencies.

A. Web Technology in Travel Agents

The travel industry is an intensive user of information technology (IT) for reservation, accounting and inventory management functions to the types of systems used by travel agents as:

- Global distribution systems (GDS) such as Galileo, Sabre and Amadeus which are used for reservations, information search, client management and reporting.
- Organizational information systems (OIS) which are used for accounting, reporting, record management and billing. IT has helped in reducing costs and improving service to customers. Travel and tourism is an industry sector that is highly dependent on up-to-date, accurate information. There are potential problems associated with travel agents having multiple software systems that are not interconnected. For example, data may become difficult to transfer from one system to another.. When selecting a GDS they should look for user-friendly systems having the potential to interconnect with their OIS. However, their study did not consider the WWW, and how it could be integrated with the GDS and OIS.

B. The need for planning

- Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) looks at enterprise processes, those that cut across business units.

The information systems built for specific functions or units have often become out-dated because new processes transcend what was often seen as a compartmentalized set of functions. The need for business process redesign comes about because of the following:

- Rapidly changing technologies
- Shorter product life-cycles;
- Increased competitive pressures and the increased demand for quality products and services;
- Inefficient use of organizational resources due to organizational change, or lack of change.

For travel agents, the changing technology and increased pressures and demand for quality service would appear especially apposite.

C. Aims and objectives

This paper examines a range of issues related to travel agents and their use (or lack of use) of the WWW. The areas being examined can be classified according to three broad areas.

1. The take-up rates of Web technology in travel agencies.
2. A model of Web technology diffusion is tested on the travel agencies used in the survey.
3. The type of strategy that the agents used for the decisions relating to the adoption of the WWW.

Specifically, we want to see if travel agents use a simplified form of BPR or whether they approach the Web in an unplanned bottom-up approach. We examine the approaches used

by travel agents according to the following characteristics of BPR identified by Hall

- BPR involves a radical level of change.
- A clean slate approach should be adopted as a starting point.
- BPR involves a great amount of time.
- Top down participation is needed for re-engineering success.
- BPR involves a great amount of risk.
- The major driver of change in BPR is information technology.
- The change brought about by BPR involves both cultural and structural change.
- Our study identifies the major obstacles and perceptions that have prevented some agents from tapping into Web based electronic commerce.

The various forms of Web based electronic commerce that agents use are also examined. Since the travel industry and Web technology are changing rapidly, the emphasis has been put on the strategy of technology adoption in the study.

II. FUTURE SCOPE

This research could in the future explore how decisions are made to adopt the WWW within travel agents. It could examine if the decisions are heavily influenced by the manager's attitude towards the Internet or IT in general. The decision may be influenced by social pressure from the wider industry sector to connect to the Internet, or it may be heavily influenced by scarcity of resources (money, time and expertise). It would also be interesting to replicate the study each year to find the take-up rate of Web technology and the uses of various forms of electronic

commerce. Certain travel agents could be selected to try to distil principles of good practice.

III. CONCLUSIONS

On the surface, travel agencies would seem to provide the perfect context for BPR. Web technology has the potential to transform how agencies do business with their customers and suppliers. They certainly have enough threats as a business sector to take both the technology and the planning of its introduction seriously. The actual results of the survey are perhaps very surprising when viewed in this light. Travel agents have not whole-heartedly embraced the WWW. This can be seen from the Web adoption rates, uses of the Web, and perceived levels of benefits. Travel agents appear to be doing little planning in relation to the WWW and very little of what could be classed as BPR. The reasons for this are partly due to the fact that most agencies are small businesses run by an owner manager. The impetus for any sort of BPR would have to come from this person. Web technology diffusion in travel agencies can be summarized by being owner/manager led, not instigated because of any perceived crisis, or the implementation driven by staged crises.

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