

POSSIBILITIES OF USING ONLINE COMMUNICATION IN DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Communication is an inseparable part of activities of any business subject. Evidently, that applies to destination management as well. Advanced destination management can't do without quality communication. It is necessary to pay due attention to communication so that it can be effective. That means to monitor also new trends and possibilities that modern life offers in the sphere of communication. More and more the emphasis is put on online communication, which has become a phenomenon of our time and in many cases replaces traditional ways of communication gradually. The paper deals with contemporary communication trends and focuses on the tourism sector, specifically on the problems of its management. It examines particular means of online communication and possibilities of their use in destination management. It also explains the situation in the Czech Republic by way of an analysis concerning online communication of particular destination management organizations working in the Czech Republic and by evaluation of its status quo. On the basis of observed results it then put suggestions how it would be possible to make this communication more effective.

Key words: destination management, tourism, communication

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Introduction

Communication with customers is a very important element of the marketing mix for every business undertaking. This is true also for those undertakings that have not been established for the sole purpose of doing business however their activities are related to business activities. This is the case for majority of destination management organizations.

Current communication includes also the traditional communication means; however, such communication means may not be sufficient for the existing highly competitive environment. The modern times require utilization of other, more progressive, communication means that shall be able to respond to topical communication trends.

There are a number of such up-to-date communication means available there and they are mainly related to the online environment. High quality web pages are the fundamental requirement for successful communication, however web pages must be also extended by other communication channels. These channels are primarily social networks that become more and more utilized also for communication. Social networks allow for image making and brand promotion.

Social networks can be very well used in tourism and that is true mainly for the destination management area. Social networks are an excellent media for communication of information as well as a great tool for presentation and introduction of individual destinations since they work with photographs and videos to a large extent.

This paper focuses on the utilization of online communication in destination management. It deals with possibilities offered by online communication, both with the already existing means and any new trends. It deals also with the current situation in the Czech Republic and it presents results of a survey. The objective of this survey was to find out what is the level of online communication in domestic destination management organizations and what internet communication means are most often used. The results of this survey could be used for recommendations how to improve such communication.

1 Online communication in destination management

Online communication or in other words communication via Internet has a number of forms. Web pages, e-shops, e-mails, social media and other forms belong among online communication means. Social media can be further grouped into specific groups, for instance social networks, various types of blogs, discussion forums, shared multimedia and similar. According to Janouch (2014) all groupings are misleading because services very often overlap each other in their functions and possibilities.

Undertakings active in the tourism sector generally start with web pages and with time they develop also other means of communication since their experience with the use of internet technologies develops and they become aware of the advantages offered by the Internet (Burgess, Parish and Alcock, 2011).

Hristache, Paicu and Ismail (2014) are of the opinion that transparent communication with diversified audiences requires active use of social media. Monitoring the existing market situation by means of this media is, in their opinion, very important. They focus attention also to the fact that thanks to social media destination management organizations are better

capable to understand existing trends in demand because customers present here their preferences and their needs. Kavoura and Stavrianeas (2015) confirm this by claiming that destination management organizations as well as individual suppliers may make strategic use of social media to acquire valuable information from the interaction with visitors and they may very closely monitor discussed topics, complaints and any suggestions. This later provides them with clearer understanding of how the existing and any potential customers see the concrete tourism destination.

Alizadeh and Isa (2015) state that many national destination management organizations do not realize the potential and the possibilities of social media and that there exists a large space for improvement and for strategic use of social media. They recommend active participation in social media with the objective to attract the attention of potential visitors by innovative and attractive content, by sufficient information and by timely response to their interests and queries. They add that it is quite difficult to impress today's customers; they add that organizations resources are limited and at the same time there exists a large number of social media. This is the reason why it is essential to focus on those social media that have currently the biggest influence as well as on the question of which target audience we want to reach with what message.

Destination management organizations active on social networks should concentrate primarily on creating a more complex content based on detailed information about destinations that are complemented with attractive photographs, then also on stimulation of communication between users and naturally on constant updating of information (Ditoiu and Platon, 2012). According to Bednář (2011) it is essential to interlink presentations on social media with web pages since this manner of communication shall be more effective.

Akgün et al. (2015) stresses that for tourism industry the approach based on story telling for motivating visits to destinations can work, too. Key features of this form of writing are supposed to be the style, the narrative structure and own references. Lund, Cohen and Scarles (2018) add that social networks are a challenge for destination management organizations, since the brand of the destination is now more often created through social networks and by sharing tourist experience and stories than by using marketing tools and strategies. They recommend for such stories to have protagonists that are able to impress and to become role models social networks users can identify with.

Lyu (2016) refers to the fact that a large number of people may indirectly experience tourist destinations and various interesting experience via selfies from travels promoted by their friends on social networks. The travel selfies phenomenon has, according to Lyu, major

potential for destination marketing that must be used for creation of destinations' positive image.

Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Díaz and Espino-Rodríguez (2018) are convinced that in this new, digital world, it is essential to analyse clients' social media as well as the evaluation of a certain brand, of a company or of a certain tourism destination. Online communication by means of social media is, as they state, based on shared opinions and on customers' evaluations that can be both quantitative and qualitative. Fernández-Cavia et al. (2016) however claim that destination brand communication via social media is not yet fully standardized and professional and that online communication means are used in a tactical, not strategic manner.

Kavoura and Stavrianeas (2015) think that strategic integration of social media into destination management organizations' marketing programs as well as into marketing programs of individual tourism services providers and their effective utilization should be innovative and should lead towards developing relations with customers via co-creation of experiences which should lead to a strong relation to destinations. However it is necessary to understand the role of social media for online information search properly so that destination management organizations can use such media to their benefit (Roque and Raposo, 2015).

2 Online communication of destination management organizations in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic destination management organizations have come to existence after year 1989 and currently there is a whole number of such organizations on various levels. With regard to the need to make the whole situation more transparent the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic and the CzechTourism agency have developed rules for destination management organizations' activities. These rules have been translated into the Categorization of destination management organizations. Based on these rules destination management organizations are certified. First certifications took place at the beginning of year 2018.

In the Czech Republic 7 regional destination management organizations, 27 area destination management organisations and 2 local destination management organizations were certified as of April 11, 2019. The National level is represented by the CzechTourism agency. The CzechTourism agency publishes a list of certified destination management organizations. This list includes the name of the organization, link to its web pages and the date of its

certification. Based on this list and with the use of the published links to web pages a research has been executed. This research focused on destination management online communication at all levels, including the national level. Table 1 below summarises the findings of the research for all levels - the regional level, the area level and the local level.

It issues from Table 1 that the most often used online communication means of destination management organizations, besides web pages, is Facebook that is used by 97% organizations. Instagram is the second most favourite communication means with 61% share followed by YouTube with 47%. Newsletter feed is also often used (39%) and RSS technology is used a little less (22%). 14% of destination management organizations operate e-shops. Other used communication means are Twitter (14%), blog (8%), Pinterest (6%), Google+ (6%), LinkedIn (3%) and chatbot (3%).

Tab. 1: Online communication means used by destination management organizations in the Czech Republic

Communication means	Regional organizations	Area organizations	Local organizations	Total
Facebook	7	26	2	35
Twitter	0	5	0	5
Instagram	6	15	1	22
Pinterest	1	1	0	2
YouTube	5	12	0	17
LinkedIn	0	1	0	1
Google+	0	2	0	2
Newsletter	3	11	0	14
RSS	2	6	0	8
E-shop	1	4	0	5
Blog	1	2	0	3
Chatbot	0	1	0	1

Source: the author

Similar results regarding online communication means are returned after the analysis of the regional, the area respectively, destination management organizations. 100% of the regional and 96% of the area organizations utilize Facebook. Instagram comes second also in this case (86% of regional and 56% of area organizations), third comes YouTube (71%

regional organizations and 44% area organizations). 43% of regional organizations and 41% of area organizations offer Newsletter feed, RSS technology is offered by 29% regional and 22% area organizations. Using this comparison the biggest difference is visible between Instagram and YouTube, both are more often used by regional destination management organizations. In contrast to this, the area organizations use Twitter (19%). Twitter is not used by regional organizations at all.

Regarding local organizations, both use Facebook and one of them uses Instagram, other communication means have not been identified.

CzechTourism, the national destination management organization, was researched into separately with respect to its special position and it is not thus included in Table 1. The CzechTourism agency works with a large number of online communication means. These means are web portals, but also social media. The agency uses separate web pages to support domestic tourism (there are 8 such webs) and to support incoming tourism (7) and there are also B2B web pages (3). Regarding social media the agency itself utilizes Facebook, it has even two profiles on Facebook, then it utilizes also YouTube, Twittter, Pinterest, Instagram and three social networks that are popular in the source markets for the Czech Republic, such as Russia and China (Vkontakte, Weibo, Youku). Various CzechTourism's projects have separate profiles and accounts such as Kudy z nudy/"The Way Out of Boredom"/ (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter), European Quartet (Twitter, YouTube), Czech Specials (Facebook) or Czech Convention Bureau (Facebook). The CzechTourism agency also offers, as a matter of fact, Newsletter feed and RSS technology.

A couple of notes must be added to the above-mentioned analysis. With destination management organizations using Instagram social network attention was given also to the fact how they incorporate the Stories function. This function allows to create and to publish short videos. It issues from the research that apart from the CzechTourism agency this function is more or less used by 57% of regional destination management organizations and by 33% area destination management organizations. Under this research also some errors were identified, for instance dysfunctional link to a Facebook profile, dysfunctional blog or dysfunctional link to Google+ social network that had been already abolished. In some cases there is missing link between the social media and the web pages of the organization. Two of the researched organizations are linked to the higher-up regional organization and thus they share certain communication means (e-shop, newsletter, RSS), one of them shares even the Facebook profile and the accounts on Instagram and YouTube.

Destination management organizations on all levels work with various types of videos; the content and the overall quality levels of such videos were not evaluated under this research. In contrast to that, none of the organizations use application Snapchat also allowing for sharing of text messages, of pictures and videos though only for a certain period of time.

Modern technology, such as chatbot, is worth a special observation. Chatbots represent one of the forms of artificial intelligence and they are used for simulation of human communication. Their popularity currently quickly rises up. As it is demonstrated in the executed survey, up-to-date technologies are not so widely used for destination management organizations' communication. However there is one exception, one area organization offers this possibility on its webpages. It operates Chatbot Karel Klostermann that has been developed as a special project by Šumava region students and it is very successful. This Chatbot uses the personality of a famous writer Karel Klostermann who takes visitors on tour around Šumava via a chatting platform Messenger. Pardubice regional destination management organization also tries to make information search easier for its visitors. It operates a new function on its portal, Navigator Viki. However it is not a classic chatbot, it just tries to simulate a chatbot and thus it is not included in Table 1 either.

Conclusion

Destination management is important for successful development of tourism in individual destinations. Destination management organizations on all levels must communicate with visitors to individual destinations, both with the existing and the potential. For this end they use a number of communication means. This paper focuses on utilization of online communication means that are becoming more and more important.

The executed survey has showed that web pages as well as social network Facebook are the regular communication means of destination management organizations in the Czech Republic. Instagram and YouTube are also often used. The CzechTourism agency works on the national level very well with online communication means. Organizations on the regional and on the area levels also strive to use online communication possibilities, in many cases very actively. As expected the situation is a little bit better on the regional level than on the area level. Local destination management organizations work the least with such communication means. This is most likely related to the financial situation of the individual level organizations. However it is possible to say that new technologies are entering also into

destination management and destination management organizations start to employ them for their communication activities.

Regarding recommendation for the future destination management organizations should choose communication means that correspond to their target groups. For instance Facebook gets “older” and younger users orient themselves more toward Instagram. Young audience has also other applications, such as for instance Snapchat that is popular in the USA and thus slightly problematic for use in our conditions. A trend to be observed is large popularity of videos that can be used on web pages as well as on various types of social media. A big opportunity is also the involvement of UGC (user generated content) that can increase brand confidence as well as the employment of influencers who provide authenticity to the presented content. High quality content remains to be the essential requirement, both for web pages and for social media. However, the content itself would require another separate research.

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