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**TOURISM
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT
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**Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of
the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries**



**THEMATIC
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I



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



PROMOTIONAL INTERNET MIX: THE CASE STUDY OF TRAVEL AGENCIES IN BELGRADE

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Abstract

Promotion, as one of the instruments of the marketing mix, has the goals of creating product awareness, enhancing interest, providing additional information, and developing a positive image of the product / service or company. The promotional mix includes: means of advertising, personal sales, sales enhancement, public relations, sponsorships, direct marketing and Internet marketing. These elements familiarize the target audience with the characteristics of products and attractiveness of services and of the benefits that they bring to customers. Internet is becoming more and more prevalent in the tourism industry as it is used for various forms of promotion. The advantage of this medium is that travel agents, at relatively low costs, can expand their market. Starting with the fact that effective promotion in conjunction with other marketing activities is the key to success of travel agencies, this paper is a contribution to assessment of the magnitude of its impact. In this paper we especially analyse specific promotional activities of travel agencies on the Internet.

Key words: *promotional mix, Internet marketing, travel agencies, marketing mix, tourist offer*

JEL classification: Z33, Z32, M37

Introduction

Although it is not the only aspect of the marketing mix, promotion is one of the key marketing activities. Promotion is one of the four central instruments of the marketing mix, along with product, price and distribution. Promotion is a function of informing, persuading and

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influencing consumers about the purchasing decision. The basic elements of the promotional mix that available to marketers can be divided into techniques of direct and mass communication, as promotion is also a communication mix. As for techniques of mass communication, marketing activities are aimed at the market as a whole. However, in recent years promotion that is targeting individuals is increasingly used, which is referred to as direct communication (Jobber & Fahy, 2006, p. 33). The techniques of mass communication include: advertising, public relations and publicity, sales enhancement and sponsorship. The techniques of direct communication are classified as: selling in-person, direct marketing and Internet marketing (Popesku, 2009, p. 126).

The promotional mix connects all forms of communication in a compact unit. When company management decides on the total amount of money that will be allocated to promotion, the next step is related to disseminating it on individual elements of promotion. These elements must be carefully combined into an appropriate, effective promotional mix, which should be coordinated with other instruments of the marketing mix. Decision about the promotional mix is very complex, because in addition to knowing the unique characteristics and cost of each promotional resource, the manager must take into account the interdependence that exists between certain forms of promotion, the complexity of the relationship between the promotional and marketing mix and more. In practice, it is not always easy to achieve.

When they develop the promotional mix, managers must take into consideration the following factors: the available financial resources for promotion, product characteristics, characteristics of the target audience, the phase of the product lifecycle, readiness of the buyer to purchase, the selected promotion strategy and the nature of the competition (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 557).

The role of promotion, as well as the promotional mix that will be implemented, changes in individual stages of the product life cycle. The nature of the promotional mix largely depends on the total budget for promotion, therefore financially strong companies have a lot of choice and a variety of combinations. Promotional mix design is dependent on time and the kind of products or services offered (Senić, 2006, p. 201). Thus, for example, the constant changes in demand and the desire for new products and services that would meet it have an impact on the continuous modernization and improvement of service quality in tourism

(Vujović et al., 2012). As pointed out by Vukotić and Vojnović (2016), to be different is a risk in the business world, and also in tourism, but it is also the fuel for development if it proves effective. There are a large number of stakeholders participating in the tourism industry. The imperative of location has always been important. All tourists must have their destination - a place they travel to. Likewise, the preferences of tourists are changing. Stefanović and Gligorijević (2010) provide an excellent example of how the opening of a new, modern, fast road can completely devalue what was, until recently, a very attractive and highly frequented tourist area. In addition, the construction or modernization of a road towards an under-valued tourist area may lead to a significant increase of interest in it. Also, for instance, revitalizing the village economy and the level of sustainable economic and social development and long term prosperity can influence tourism (Glavaš-Trbić & Maksimović, 2013). One of the factors of influence can be accessed developing entrepreneurship (Maksimović et al., 2016).

Two central, broad perspectives, which were the basis for our consideration in this paper are: marketing on the one hand and tourism on the other. Then we focused our attention on the marketing mix, specifically on a tourism product or a travel offering. The next step that we presented in this paper is the promotional marketing mix, in general. However, the core discourse is precisely about Internet marketing, and computer-supported marketing in the creation of high-quality tourist services. The final part of our work deals with the promotional Internet mix as used by travel agencies. We analysed eight websites of tourist agencies which have their headquarters in Belgrade. Based on the initial theoretical elaborations and these examples, in the last part of the paper we gave conclusions.

Developing the optimal promotional mix

The initial premise that we analyse in this paper is the marketing mix. It is a combination of marketing instruments, with which the company adapts to the requirements and characteristics of the target market in order to achieve the expected level of sales in the target market.

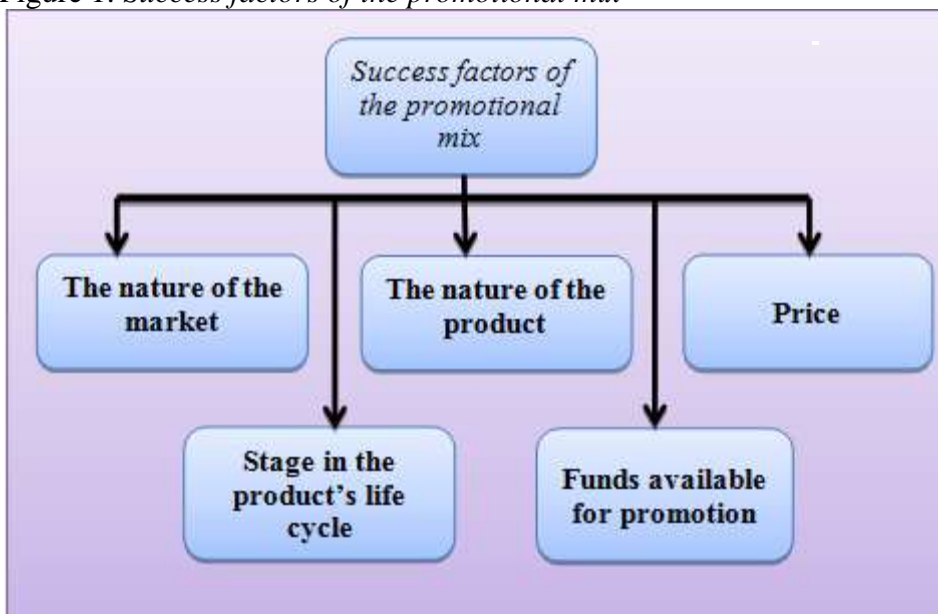
Instruments of the marketing mix consist of the four Ps: product, price, promotion and distribution (*place*). When it comes to managing marketing services, marketing mix has an additional three elements:

people, process and physical environment, which describe the 7P mix (4Ps + People, Physical Evidence, Process).

When it comes to tourism, then the marketing mix refers to the destination. Bakić (2010) points out that optimizing the marketing mix instruments of tourist destinations should be seen as a marketing decision to optimally allocate resources in order to create consistent and, above all, complementary combinations. This is done on the basis of a meaningful alignment between orientation toward achieving maximum results, understanding the needs of consumers (tourists) as well as changes in the economy and society.

Several factors affect the success of the promotional mix: the nature of the market, the nature of the product, stage in the product's life cycle, the price and funds available for promotion (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Success factors of the promotional mix*



Source: *Stamatović & Vukotić, 2009.*

The role of promotion in tourism is particularly pronounced at the stage of potential customers' decision about the purchase of a specific tourism product. The decision on the purchase of tourist products, specifically on participation in tourist trips, is not primarily affected by specific features of certain tourist destinations but, above all, by the alignment of the

primary attributes / characteristics of the destinations with the psychological and other needs of tourists (Popesku, 1991, p. 116).

Rating the performance of online promotion is the latest challenge facing marketers (marketing managers). In the beginning, these efforts were based on visits to certain websites, but it soon became clear that this was not rational. Rather, it proved not important to count the number of times a website was visited, but to count how many people actually have made purchases on it. An important assumption that definitely should not be ignored is that consumers tend to choose advertising that they want to view on the Internet, unlike with traditional media, broadcast or printed, where consumers are automatically exposed to advertising. On the other hand, people who create commercials point out that advertising on the Internet have value for those who click on it to get direct information (Silver & Ansted, 2004).

Computer-aided marketing in the creation of high-quality travel services

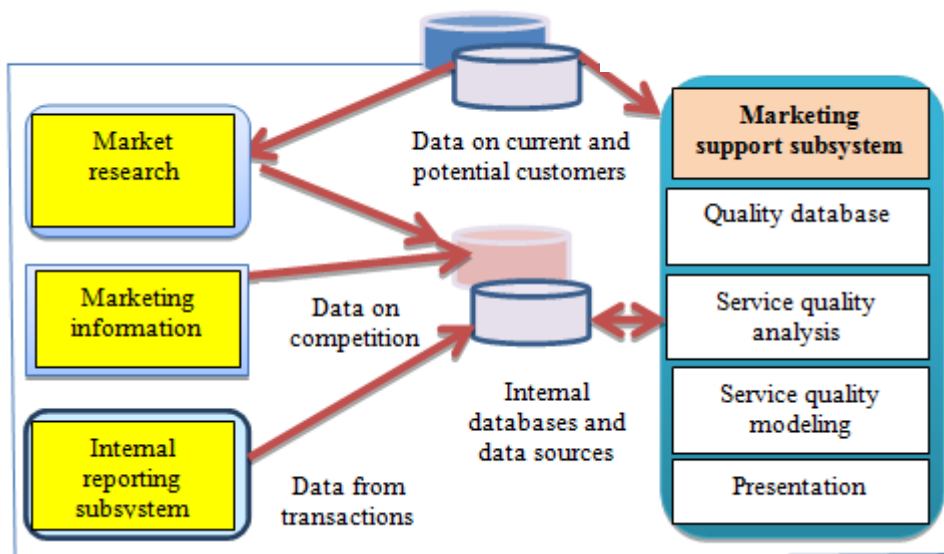
In the tourism market, competition is occurring among "equals" with similar demand preferences and comparable products.

Basic activities of information systems support relate to: which tourist services to offer, what price to set for the services, where to market the services and which channels to use to advertise the service. As pointed out by Vojnović and his associates (2012), in tourism, promotion is the most complex, most interesting, and most demanding component. It is used for advertising and sales of tourist services.

Advantages of promotion via the Internet in the tourism industry and beyond, according to Ubavić (2015) are: the ability to generate direct sales, providing extensive information to consumers, collecting information for market research, creating the image of a product / service / destination, encouraging consumers to try the product / service, support to other forms of promotion, etc. As the main drawbacks of promotion over the Internet the same author cites the lack of universal criteria to measure the effectiveness of this form of promotion, as well as the different level of development of information technologies in different parts of the world.

The marketing information system in tourism is graphically presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *The marketing information system in tourism*



Source: *Vojnović et al., 2012.*

Creating and developing a global approach to the tourist offers was made available by computer reservation systems and the global distribution network. This occurs through travel agencies because of their access to automatic booking systems (Cvijanović et al., 2016). In addition, the franchise business model, which is frequently adhered to by travel agencies that, thanks to the Internet, can quickly send their advertising messages to targeted customers. Electronic communication within the franchise system, combining the simplicity of e-mail with the possibilities of the Internet, enables all necessities of franchisees to be easily and efficiently delivered electronically, at an insignificant cost (Stefanović & Stanković, 2014).

In the remainder of this paper we analyse the eight websites of travel agencies based in Belgrade. Travel agencies are listed in alphabetical order. When choosing an agency for research, we were guided by the principle that the travel agency should be reputable, while everything else was randomly selected. Because we were limited by number of pages, for the purposes of this study, we were forced to carry out, hopefully, still an objective selection.

Websites of travel agencies in Belgrade

Websites of Serbian travel agencies are usually more or less transparent, consisting of an impactful front page with delimited types of travel arrangements by the time sequence (summer and winter), geographical determinant (Europe's cities and increasingly other European travel, intercontinental travel), the type of arrangement (cruise, wellness tourism). Also, the division of offers into those with and without transport, as well as the classification of transportation is mostly supported. Summer and winter travel is divided by countries and regions with all the agencies and the division by accommodation category is steadily increasing. There is also the quick search option which uses the specified elements (type of transport, location, time, object), all of which significantly simplifies the search for users.

In addition to the front page there are pages about the agency, travel insurance, general conditions of travel, subagents and an agency's contact page. The address of the agency and all its branches with telephone, e-mail address, Facebook and twitter contacts are displayed in several places which are clearly indicated throughout the site. Almost all sites have the ability to get in touch through social networks. Most sites have a so-called newsletter, where users type in their e-mail, so that they can regularly receive the latest promotional materials. Some agencies have pages on recruitment, promotions and the like.

Websites differ mainly in graphic design, transparency, detail, and layout of information, as well as the general impression they offer. Few websites present their offer specifically. A major difference are websites dedicated to younger categories of tourists, that have varied colours and images, modern design and site-structure (less different offers, less destinations and more pictures, clips, music, etc.). In addition to subagent websites, which normally mimic the principal's website, several agencies have basically the same, or a very similar type of website. By viewing the home pages of these websites, there is the impression that a few web designers designed all of them, so 3-4 groups of websites can be delineated by design, with a very similar structure, that is not necessarily a minus, with several independent creations. The modernization of the conceptual design of websites as agencies are striving to get closer to potential customers can be observed, providing customers with more relevant information, through descriptions, images, videos and direct links to the hotel, thus facilitating the selection.

The appearance of websites and presentation of information on them should continue to be improved, and errors that already exist should be corrected (some agencies offer travel destinations for which they have neither the price nor the facilities for the upcoming periods, an indication of residual facilities and destinations from the previous period, which are not deleted, giving contradictory information about the price or the location of the object in the description and price lists). These objections are less noticeable and the agencies' efforts to raise quality of their services can be seen on the websites, in order to occupy a better position among the competition.

1. Argus tours

Site design is streamlined compared to the previous period, animated images and text was inserted slideshow and graphics were improved, but there is still insufficient transparency of the front page with too much information on one page, which does not fit into a harmonious whole.

Site loading speed is quite satisfactory, regardless of the number of text information on the home page. In terms of graphics, the site is lagging behind contemporary possibilities. The colours are drab and unattractive, and the background is white, all of which gives off a monotonous impression.

The home page gives the impression that the agency is dealing with summer holidays and traveling around European capitals in comparison to other forms of tourism.

The descriptions of offers are clear and precise, with comprehensive and complete explanations. Trip dates are delimited by current vacancies, (which is not often the case on agencies' websites), which facilitates the users' decision on the reservation.

There are photos of destinations, links to accommodation websites, their geographic maps, GPS coordinates, all to provide better access to accommodation, the exterior and interior of facilities and the destination itself. There are no video clips or reports about the destination or destinations.

Visitors to the site can also make reservations and purchase of plane tickets for all destinations, which has lately become an indispensable standard for sites of major agencies.

To conclude, this is a relatively good site, but it could work on graphic design, and further modernization and on the improving of overall transparency and integrity.

2. Belvi travel

Site design is modern, changed from the previous year, both in structure and in the mode of displaying the content of the offer. Site pages are divided according to the most basic divisions of the offers, and the home page is designed in kind. Home page load time could be faster.

In graphic terms, the site is correct, with warm colours, basic moving images related to the pages of the site, with the selected destinations and facilities of the overall offer on the home page. Descriptions of offers are clear and precise, with a comprehensive and complete explanation. There are photos of destinations, links to accommodation websites, their geographic maps, for better access to accommodation and the destination itself. There are no video clips or reports about the destination or destinations.

From the offer on the home page it can be seen that this is the agency that has its own specific arrangements, but also cooperates with other agencies in the creation of joint tourist offerings.

There are banners and links to other sites, possibly sponsors or advertisers that are not all very beneficial to potential customers of the agency.

Good, interesting, simple and clear site, with prominent most interesting elements of the agency's offer.

3. Big blue

Website design is modern, with moving images and text (slideshow) and good graphics, with a wealth of information and different divisions of the tourist offer of the agency, on the homepage and the sub-pages, and although brimming with content, all is packed in a relatively harmonious whole, lacking only a little more elegance.

While the basic characteristic of the home page is a very large amount of information given through pictures and text, the page loading speed is satisfactory. Colours on the site are basically colour tones from the agency's logo, with attractive graphics and most important elements clearly indicated (special rates or discounts).

The home page gives the impression of a large agency, which deals with all aspects of travel and tourism services.

Descriptions of offers and hotels are clear and precise, with comprehensive and very complete explanations. There are photos of the destination, a really satisfactory number of photos of properties, as well as links to websites of hotels and apartments and their geographic maps, for better access to housing and the destination itself. On the site it is possible to make a booking arrangement with the exact calculation per object, accommodation services, mode of transport and duration of stay. Prices are repeatedly shown, in a number of types of comparative price lists. Unfortunately, there are no video clips about destinations or accommodation.

The offering on the home page implies that this is a serious agency which deals with all aspects of tourism and travel, which invests a lot in the creation of their specific arrangements, but also cooperates with other agencies (especially Kontiki travel) in the creation of joint tourist offers. There are banners and links to other sites, which are mainly useful for travellers.

It is not possible to make a reservation or to purchase of air tickets directly on the site, although this can be done by contacting the agency through e-mail and phone.

Good, interesting, very informative and relatively readable site (which could be improved a bit), with prominent elements of the overall offer on the home page.

4. Filip travel

The site has a contemporary, modern design, with moving images and text (slideshow) and good graphics, with plenty of information about the offer of the agency that was presented by main divisions, all of which seems transparent.

The site loads quickly, and the colours are attractive and dominated by blue and green, the agency's colours are beautifully matched with attractive pictures and searchable offers by several terms.

Descriptions of arrangements and hotels are comprehensive with precise explanations. There are photos of the destination, with detailed information on it, as well as video clips on the destination, which is rare for the sites of other agencies. Given a large number of photos of properties, as well as links to websites of hotels and apartments and their geographic maps, for better access to housing and the destination itself. On the site it is possible to make a booking arrangement with the exact calculation by accommodation, type of service, mode of transport and duration of stay. The advantage is that the calculator immediately displays the availability of accommodation in the required period.

The offer on the home page implies that this is a serious agency which deals with all aspects of travel and tourism that really updates its site and harmonizes it with the time in which the offer is presented. It is noticeable that a lot was invested in the creation of specific offers, which is proudly stated.

On the site it is possible to make a reservation of air tickets, and there are banners through which one can connect to other useful sites for travellers. There are e-catalogues of offers, which are very well done and which can be viewed on the front page, which is characteristic of only a few of websites analysed.

A good, balanced and interesting site, with a sufficient number of the most interesting information.

5. Kontiki travel

Website of a contemporary design, with excellent graphics. It has the largest number of moving images (slideshow) from all the other sites, with a wealth of information and the different segments of the tourist offer of the agency, across the pages and the home page. The site with the highest number of pages and with most types of offer categories on the front page. In addition to the abundance of content, everything is blended into a harmonious whole.

The basic characteristics of the home page, next to the attractiveness and good graphic design, is an extremely large amount of information given through banners, images and text, and various overviews, but despite this abundance of data, the website's loading speed is relatively satisfactory. Colours are basically the colours of the logo of the agency, as with most other websites, with attractive graphics and with the most important element (discounts or special prices) clearly indicated.

The home page really gives of the impression of a large agency, which deals with all aspects of travel and tourism services.

The descriptions of offers and deals are comprehensive and with very complete explanations. There are photographs of destinations with a slideshow, as well as video clips for each destination, with an adequate number of photos of the accommodation, as well as links to websites of hotels and apartments and their geographic maps, for better insight into the destinations and accommodation facilities.

As a significant advantage in the presentation of their offers, compared to other agencies, stands out the existence of a significant number of hotels and video clips. The website offers the television show "The World at a glance" on its YouTube channel, as well as their newsletter "The World at a glance," which significantly contributes to the reputation of the agency, and to the easier selection of offers by the passenger.

On the site it is possible to make a booking with the exact calculation by mode of transport, building, type of accommodation service, and duration of stay.

From the website it can be determined that it is a large agency that deals with all aspects of tourism and travel, and which invests heavily in creating its specific arrangement, but that also cooperates with other agencies (especially Big Blue) in the creation of joint tourist offers.

It is not possible to make a reservation or purchase of air tickets directly on the website, although it can be done through the agency via mails and phone.

Very good and interesting site. Very informative and well laid out, indicating the selected elements of the agency's complete offer on the home page, which also has unique features compared to the competition.

6. Odeon

Good site, interesting design, with moving images and text (slideshow) and good graphics with complete information about the offer of the tourist agency, which is presented on the home page with basic categories, all of which seem transparent.

The colours are attractive and cheerful which, in addition to a distinctive presentation, via stickers with destinations, contributes to the attractiveness of the site. It is normal that the colour of the logo is strongly represented, as it is with most agencies but it is not noticeable.

In addition to the initial differences in the presentation of the destinations compared to most other agency sites is the presentation of accommodation, by destination, in different form from the others. For each, basic information is given and in most cases a very attractive picture, and then hotels are presented with detailed information, pictures and links to their sites, for users to get better acquainted with the characteristics thereof. Prices are given separately, in separate price lists, which could be a criticism, because you cannot ever see the object and the price for the required period at the same time.

Another drawback is that the site is not updated frequently, so information and images of destinations and hotel backlog from previous periods, which are not included in current offer, are still shown.

Also one of the rarer sites with video clips on its YouTube channel. In addition to a unique presentation of its offer, it has e-catalogue with it, which is very well made.

Website gives the impression that it is a serious agency covering all forms of tourist travel, with many of its specific offers and accommodation. Through the site, booking plane tickets for all destinations can also be done.

Attractive and good site. Very informative, with prominent elements of the agency's complete offer shown on the home page, which does not look cluttered, but on the contrary - very transparent.

7. Oktopod

A modern site, very nice and contemporary design, with moving images and text (slideshow) which highlights the exclusive facilities offered by the agency and good graphics with complete information about the offer of the agency sorted in several ways, according to the basic categories, all of which operates transparently.

Warm, cheerful and attractive colours site with a unique presentation, also stickers with destinations, are contributing to its attractiveness. Within the destination, the accommodation facilities are also on a sticker, sorted according to their categories, making it easier to search.

Descriptions of offers and hotels are complete with basic information. There are photographs of properties, as well as links to websites of hotels and apartments and their geographic maps, for better insight into the destinations and accommodation facilities. Very often there are video clips of hotels.

From the offer on the home page we can see that this is an agency that works with other agencies in the creation of joint tourist offers, but that also has a specific offer of accommodation facilities and arrangements.

Beautiful, informative website with an attractive offer nicely presented, all of which gives off a harmonious impression.

8. Viva

The website design is different from other agency websites. Site loading speed is quite satisfactory, but in terms of graphics it lags behind contemporary possibilities, the colours are drab and unattractive, orange, which is the colour of the agency prevails, and because the surface is white, it gives off an unattractive impression.

Website pages are not divided by types of tourist travel, as with most other agencies, but by areas such as: blog, gallery, destinations, the agency contact. No slideshow, but instead there are moveable and fixed stickers with destinations. There are no negative comments on the information, because in addition to the aforementioned stickers, which contribute to faster price discovery, the home page provides an overview of the entire offer. The range of the offers is separated in many ways, on

the home page, which is only a little cluttered, but still viewable, but it is not assembled harmoniously enough.

Navigation through the presentation of offers is very easy and logical, because everything is categorized by type of offer, by countries, destinations, means of transport and also by rentals. Data on travel and hotels is accurate. There are photos of destinations, with detailed information on them, as well as video clips of destinations, a sufficient number of images of accommodations, with descriptions, maps and hotel sites themselves. Pictures and descriptions of the hotel can be reached by clicking on price lists, the name of the facility, as well as on a separate page with banners of hotels.

There is special page on the site with a gallery of different video materials about destinations and activities of the agency and offer presentations. There is also a page with the blog, rich text representations of offers and activities and travellers' reviews on them.

From the site it can be seen that this is a serious agency covering all forms of tourist travel, with a particular mode presentation, which invests a lot in its image.

Booking of plane tickets for all destinations and monitoring of promotional activities of most airlines can be done through the website. There are banners and links to other useful sites for travellers.

Informative site with detailed and comprehensive illustrated offers, which needs a little fix in graphics, which would provide it with attractiveness and transparency.

Conclusion

Internet use in the tourism industry has multiple advantages. Internet is a new communications medium that significantly contributes to the improvement of all aspects of business communication through efficient and effective search, exchange of information and improvement of connectivity and interactivity. The benefits that the tourism industry has from Internet are reflected through: lowering costs, increasing the size of the market (the whole world) and the possibility of constant communication with potential tourists. In addition, unlike traditional

media for the transmission of information, the Internet provides many new features.

By a search of the Internet, users can reach websites of travel agencies, which thereby carry out the promotion and sale of their offers. It can be observed that the agencies are increasingly investing in the modernization and the graphic layout of their sites and in their information accuracy. This is one of the conclusions that are uncovered after the analysis of eight renowned travel agencies based in Belgrade.

The encouraging fact is that tourism in Serbia is following the demand of the times. The websites of tourist agencies in Belgrade that we analysed are becoming more attractive and easier to read. Divided into several pages, with the home page generally containing agencies' offers, classified according to several basic categories. They mainly present through slideshows. Information about offers is precise and detailed, they all have plenty of photos, a lot of them video materials as well. There is an option of abbreviated search of destinations and a price calculator, as well as the possibility of free subscription to newsletters and promotional offers. Every website offers the possibility to contact the agency via e-mail and through social networks. Many offer the possibility of booking airline tickets and other travel services.

There are several groups of sites that resemble each other, but increasingly there are those that in a specific way represent the offer, trying to improve their appearance, both in graphic terms, and in the presentation of its offer, achieving mutual satisfaction for the agency and its customers

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