

The New World of Travel 2.0: Application of Social Software in the Travel and Tourism Industry, and in Teaching a Sustainable Tourism Course

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Abstract

“Web 2.0” is a term used to refer to the emerging new wave of innovation on the Internet. Some see it as a second high-tech wave, marking the recovery from the technology and Internet “bust” at the end of the 1990s (O’Reilly 2005). Characteristics of Web 2.0 are:

- (1) data, information and technology are open source, rather than hidden under proprietary ownership;
- (2) new applications and web sites are making the global marketplace of ideas and products open to everyone, which is allowing new businesses can be established without the huge start up funds from venture capitalists that were common in the 1990s; and
- (3) these new applications and web sites are democratizing the tools of production, enabling greater diversity, allowing more customized streams of information and sales, and fostering the emergence of “a billion niche markets.”

These concepts resonate in trends that have taken place in travel and tourism, and the related term “Travel 2.0” is coming into increasing use.

Social software (sometime referred to as Social Media and New Media) are computer mediated forms of communication that can provide opportunities for collaboration, social networking, social learning, and community building. There are many different types of social software, and more are emerging all the time. Some social software is closely integrated with face-to-face socializing and professional networking, such as in a social club. The following are examples of the major types of social software currently in use:

- Blogs and Podcasts
- Collaborative software - Cooperative work environments / systems
- Instant Messaging
- Internet Relay Chat (chat rooms)
- Internet forums (bulletin boards)
- Folskonomy / Tagging
- Social network services (centralized)

- Social network search engines (decentralized)
- Social guides (recommend real world places/services)
- Social bookmarking (posting lists of favorites for others to see – furl, del.icio.us)
- Social Citations (sharing article references - for academics)
- Peer-to-peer social networks (file sharing – photos, blogs, instant messages,)
- Virtual presence (meeting in virtual/online worlds)
- Virtual worlds and Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs)
- Wikis / Collaborative real-time editing

It is unclear as yet what the best business models may be for using the new open source Web 2.0 technology. However, from the many examples cited above, that is not stopping people from trying. Some areas in which social software may be used to leverage long tail markets for business purposes include:

- **Listening to markets and consumers.** By providing a public sounding board or forum for consumers of a company's products, a company can demonstrate its transparency and trustworthiness. Businesses need to be open to being trashed by consumers, in order to both learn from them and to build their trust.
- **Creating user communities.** Social networks can be created through open source Web sites. Such a Web site would include reasons for people to feel a part of the community of other users. Users would need to feel that they are benefiting from belonging to the website.
- **Creating business alliances.** This is similar to creating a user community, but involves a community of businesses who are working together either formally or informally. This approach is also known as the “distributed business model.”

Most social software is not only conducive to internet-base marketing, but can also be readily applied to teaching tourism concepts. Social software continuously evolving in exciting ways that offer considerable opportunity to enhance online and hybrid classes.

The first part of this presentation will review how social software are being used in higher education teaching today. The second part of the presentation will describe my experience in using social software tools (with some focus on blogs, podcasts and wikis) for the last three semesters, culminating in a Spring 2007 course on “Sustainable Tourism Planning.” That course immersed the students in social media and sustainable tourism in a fully online class environment. Student challenges, successes and overall opinions of this experience will be discussed.

References

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