

Ecotourism business models

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Abstract: Business models are perhaps the most discussed and least understood aspect of the web. There is so much talk about how the web changes traditional business models. But there is little clear-cut evidence of exactly what this means.

In the most basic sense, a business model is the method of doing business by which a company can sustain itself - that is, generate revenue. The business model spells-out how a company makes money by specifying where it is positioned in the value chain.

Key: business, web, ecotourism, site, buyer, seller

1 Introduction

Buyers with access to the Internet have certain opportunities that may affect what they purchase, when, and where they take their business. Using sites like [Google](#) or [Yahoo!](#), a buyer has the ability to search for a product or service; to compare sellers on important attributes such as price, quality, delivery and service; to read product reviews and consider the opinions of other buyers; and to do all of this quickly, cheaply, and with relatively little effort. This can be done regardless of whether or not the buyer chooses to complete the purchase online. Never before have buyers been able to know so much, so easily, about what they purchase and from whom.

Sellers can reach large numbers of consumers anytime day or night and can extend their business beyond the limits of geographic proximity more easily. Unconstrained by shelf space, sellers can list a large catalog of items and can quickly

adjust prices to reflect changes in demand. A seller, can eliminate intermediaries and engage buyers directly online to understand their consumption habits and track their preferences, and then use this information to configure customized products and provide personalized levels of service.

Data show that web users exhibit an extreme form of channel surfing (to draw an analogy from another medium, television). They can click through hyperlinks at a blistering pace, leaving only precious seconds for the web designer to entice them to stop, look around, and with minimal effort, find what it is they are searching for and make a purchase.

How a site is designed - typography, color, page layout, site hierarchy, to name just a few elements - can have an immediate and lasting impression on visitors. And it can keep them coming back. According to a study conducted by Forrester Research, three of four factors most likely to drive

repeat visitors to a web site were design related: ease of use, download time, and freshness. Eight of nine other factors tested came no where close in influencing repeat visitors. Similar results are found in terms of web users typical sources of frustration. A benchmark study of site usability suggests that improvements have been slow in coming, as sites seek to add more features.

To be certain, brilliant design can do little to mask a lack of content. But if you have something to sell, site design can make all the difference. A place in cyberspace must be built with the same attention to detail and architectural sophistication as the physical space in which people shop. The web presents similar issues: like the bank on the street corner that is built to look secure and trustworthy, a bank web site can use various design elements to convey a sense of security and trust - one that goes beyond the technical aspects of enabling secure transactions over the web.

Romanian sites specialized in ecotourism are relatively few. They have too many offers and design is not attractive. In terms of prices, they are almost as expensive as other destinations around the world that offers more attractive, better conditions of accommodation and much more ecotourism activities.

The following figure is an example of a specialized website on ecotourism Romanian. You can choose a region in which you wish to travel only in Romania. The offer is quite limited, is briefly presented details about the holiday and the prices are comparable to other international deals that are far superior in every respect.



The following figure is an example of a specialized website on ecotourism. It has an attractive design, you can learn more about what ecotourism means, one can read articles on the topic and finally attractive offers. The first step in choosing the offer is the destination that is easy to choose. Should be chosen first continent in which we want to travel, then country, region and then be chosen from the vast supply. Difficult choice because all offers are attractive and there is no person to find suitable offer for him.



Trust is the grease in the wheels of commerce. Without it everything would grind to a halt. Fortunately, most people - buyers and sellers - are both trusting and

trustworthy. But it is the few who spoil it for everyone else. So systems of commerce have evolved with various kinds of trust mechanisms to facilitate making transactions.

Even so, in a very short time, millions of individuals have come together on the web to buy and sell all sorts of items, large and small, cheap and expensive. No where is this more true than at eBay, where each day countless items are auctioned off among veritable "strangers". At the core of how this is accomplished is something common to all commercial systems: trustworthy behavior is rewarded and untrustworthy behavior is penalized by the traditional process of communicating experiences from person-to-person. In e-commerce, reputation itself becomes a valuable commodity.

The environment has become one of the most important criteria for today's traveler. Whereas comforts and luxuries once played the major role in a traveler's decision-making process, things have very much evolved since then. Today's tourists are willing to pay for the preservation of the natural and social environments they seek to explore.

Tourism, one of the fastest growing industries, is being accelerated by globalization. The fast growing aviation industry, the free flow of information and the decreasing costs of communication are all factors affecting the new emerging ecotourism industry.

However, there exists an important paradox: a tourist destroys what he is searching for, while he discovers it. Large tourism corporations have followed the trajectory of generic mass tourism for economical reasons.

Thus the great challenge of ecotourism is to sustain economic growth while ensuring the long-term protection

of the environment including both social and natural aspects.

The current market inefficiencies, such as the long value chains and the rigid structures tourism companies have created will allow for the small players to tap into the ecotourism market. By understanding the necessary adjustments, these emerging companies will have the opportunity to develop products and services that incorporate the new criteria that are in demand, creating more value for the end user.

The following principles should be followed by everyone who implements and participates in ecotourism activities:

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate
- Support international human rights and labor agreements

2 Community based Tourism

The aims are to enable participation from the local community in the development and operations of tourism with their consent and support. Another important feature is that a reasonable share of the revenues are enjoyed by the community. This type of tourism also maintains and respects the local culture, heritage and traditions. Often, community-based tourism actually reinforces and sometimes rescues these. Community-based tourism also implies respect and

concern for the natural heritage, particularly where the environment is one of the attractions.

2.1 Pro-poor Tourism

This type of tourism is set up in developing countries as a means to improve the local economy for local people. It enhances the linkages between tourism businesses and poor people, so that poverty is reduced and poor people are able to participate more effectively in tourism development. The aims of pro-poor ranges from increasing local employment to involving local people in the decision making process. Any type of company can be involved such as a small lodge or a tour operator. The most important factor is not the type of company or the type of tourism, but that poor people receive an increase in the net benefits from tourism.

3 Responsible Travel

This concept is the same as with ecotourism as tourists and businesses alike are expected to act responsibly in regards to the environment and local people of the destination. It focuses on the responsibility of the traveller to consider any possible negative impacts caused by their presence.

Many of the organisations listed in our directory place special emphasis on responsible travel. Browse through our **responsible travel directory** now.

Alternately visit another great responsible travel resource ResponsibleTravel.com - www.responsibletravel.com

responsibletravel.com is an on-line travel agent - based in Brighton, England - launched in 2001 for travellers who want more real and authentic holidays that also benefit the environment and local people.



Ecotourism means "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people" (the International Ecotourism Society 1992). Tourists get to experience more; the destination's nature, culture and people are treated with respect and consideration; local populations get their economy strengthened; and tour operators get more interested customers. To ensure that all those concerned get the best deal, people and nature need to be certified and the service providers labelled. The ECO-ROUTE project aims to put together a training package addressed to persons concerned with ecotourism. It also aims to introduce an ecotourism certification system on European level and to help local communities increase their capacity to apply such a system effectively.

4 Conclusion

Review of ecotourism activities and tourism labelling systems will be conducted in each pilot area and an inventory of criteria will be compiled across countries. The European experience beyond the participating countries will be added to create a comprehensive database.

- A proposal will be formed for a universal ecotourism certification system.
- A survey of entrepreneurs offering ecotourism activities in the pilot areas will

be carried out to explore their experiences, attitudes and aspirations.

- A package for non-formal learning will be put together addressed to ecotourism entrepreneurs to help them appreciate and apply the criteria for certification, thus increasing their capacity to enter a labelling system.

- A "task force" will be set up in each pilot area to mobilise the local entrepreneurs and public authorities to implement the proposed ecotourism certification system offering assistance and advice.

- Project activities and results will be widely disseminated through the project website, four regional workshops in the pilot areas and an international workshop in Sweden, promoting networks among interested organisations across Europe.

- A Good Practice Guide to ecotourism labelling will be produced, presenting how the criteria for an ecotourism certification system can be applied in different environments across Europe.

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