

Technology

Bedding down in tourism

Darren Greenwood

The tourism sector is being transformed by technology.

After websites and booking/reservation systems made their mark, now there are handheld mobile devices.

And if you have no mobile device accessing the internet, it will still be available in hire cars, campervans and even buses.

Visitor attractions and accommodation providers also offer wireless or other forms of broadband. Furthermore, technology is transforming the bedrooms too.

Last week, Tourism NZ confirmed the growing use of mobile devices and social media was affecting its advertising.

"The use of new forms of technology has increased significantly, particularly in the use of wi-fi, laptops and tablets, smartphones and mobile phones with a New Zealand SIM card," Kevin Bowler, Tourism NZ chief executive said.

"There has also been a significant increase in the number of visitors engaging with social media to share their experiences in New Zealand, both during and post travel, with Facebook the most commonly used social media tool for sharing New Zealand holiday experiences.

"This illustrates the growing importance of digital technology within the travel industry. Tourism NZ has placed a large focus on developing our digital presence, undertaking extensive work on our consumer site newzealand.com to better meet visitor needs online," Mr Bowler said.

Tourism New Zealand claims 14 market-specific versions of its website, with four other languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean and German) in addition to English.

It has received 11 million visits over the past year, with half the website traffic coming from search engines and a growing quarter coming from social media sites and comments on blogs.

The volume from mobile devices and tablets had also increased by a third in the past six months, now generating 17% of total site traffic.

The website combines "official" Tourism NZ content with articles and listings, plus content from more than 7000 tourism businesses, allowing them to promote their businesses and accept direct bookings.

A social media strategy, using Facebook and the Weibo Chinese equivalent is also under way, encouraging visitors to recall their positive experiences online.

The Interweb goes everywhere

Hire a camper van and chances are it will now feature wireless internet.

Now even an ordinary bus may have wireless internet.

This week, iDataRoam and Inter City announced a free wireless service for its Auckland-Wellington buses, with other Inter City routes to follow.

Inter City general manager Sam Pate said the service was created because customers wanted to use their times on buses more profitably by emailing and updating their Facebook profiles while sitting on a bus.



BROADBAND BUS: InterCity Coachlines now offers wi-fi

Broadband changes bedroom behaviour

Technology covers every aspect of a hospitality business, according to Jan Strijker, the director of Auckland-based Brantas International.

The company supplies what it calls "in-room technology," guest internet billing systems, which also cover wi-fi as well as electronic/automatic minibars.

In-room controls also better managed energy consumption and also electronic doorlocks, capable of being operated using nearfield communications (NFC) and radio frequency chip technology.

Brantas International also supplies mediahubs and docking stations that allow guests to play their own music and video content.

Mr Strijker said his company had supplied internet billing systems to 3500 hotel rooms across New Zealand. Hotels such as The George in Christchurch use its room energy management system and various Novotel and Ibis Hotels use its Teleadapt mediahubs. The Langham uses its iPod docking system.

Accor said its innovation included new, more luxurious "MyBeds" and "Sweet Beds" at its



TELEADAPT: Allows users BYO entertainment

Sofitel and Ibis hotels.

Hotels like the Pullman in Auckland would offer a basic free wireless internet for email checking but the costs of providing wi-fi meant guests had to pay \$12 a day for a faster service.

Globally, Novotel has also worked with Microsoft to develop the "hotel room of the future," which allows the guest to control a room by body gestures and voice recognition. The rooms also feature a 30-inch tactile screen, which features applications from web browsing, board games and interactive maps. A pilot room was recently launched at a Novotel in Paris.

IdataRoam director Justin De Lille said his 3G connectivity company also offered a service to car hire firms, including Avis and Ace. But while buses would have a router by their dashboards, with cars, drivers would be able to hire a mobile internet-enabled device instead.

The Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand reported other innovative uses of internet and mobile technology.

Among them, Fox Glacier Holiday

Smartphones to disrupt sector

Smartphones like the new iPhone 5 look set to disrupt the travel industry, according to Gisborne motelier Stewart Haynes.

Mr Haynes is perhaps better known as the blogger Motella, who posts about industry issues, as well as politics.

He said accommodation providers needed to have their websites customised for mobile devices as this method of booking would soon become as significant as business attracted via desktop websites.

Such growth would also be fuelled by the use of last-minute booking apps like Stay Today, which recently announced a major expansion into Australia. Launched in July, Stay Today claims 60 hotel partners across New Zealand and Australia.

Mr Haynes also believes social media is increasingly important, with providers having to respond to websites like Trip Advisor, especially if unfavourable reviews are posted. Despite the potential for abuse, people did trust the website before making travel decisions.

Trip Advisor might even replace the official Qualmark rating system, just as "doorstop" travel directories were also declining in significance in today's online world, he said.

Park has a "live messaging" function on its website to answer potential visitor questions and make instant bookings.

Waihi Beach Top Ten Holiday Park has teamed up with an Auckland café, which offers ipads for customer use. Promotional material on the ipad front screens offer specific deals to capture the café's clientele.

AJ Hackett has free terminals in its visitor centre to let customers upload videos of their jump. And Tourism Radio uses GPS to provide localised information on attractions, accommodation and travelers to post information, comments and photos.

Technology always evolving

Flight Centre NZ said technology was constantly evolving.

For its corporate customers, this included a new FCM client portal, which gave clients secure access through the internet for booking tools, travel alerts, security information, guides and passport information.

FCM Locate is another new tool that gives customer reports on where clients are visiting, both in map form or within a timeframe. It also allows clients to be contacted by SMS or email.

Flight Centre Management has also integrated a last-minute booking option into its booking tool. Quickbeds gives clients greater choice to clients of more than 200 hotels and motels across New Zealand and 6000 across Australia.

Flight Centre also uses social media in its marketing, including Facebook and Twitter, national corporate sales manager Tate Crawford said.



PRINTOUT
Darren Greenwood

dgreenwood@nbr.co.nz

Security top cloud concern

Cloud computing has become the top priority for New Zealand IT managers, with security the top priority when selecting a cloud supplier. Software vendor Trend Micro staged its Evolve.Cloud security conference in Wellington this week, which also heard how cloud computing was transforming businesses at an accelerating rate. Analysts Frost & Sullivan said 57% of firms that were already using cloud-based platforms planned to increase their cloud budgets, with 18% increasing it by more than 20%.

WatchGuard in NZ opening

Security software company Watchguard is to open a New Zealand office in Auckland in the New Year. Australasia regional director Patrick Devlin was in Auckland this week meeting his distributor Exeed, several of Watchguard's 40 resellers, plus potential hires. The first couple of staff are likely to be engineers, before sales staff are recruited. Mr Devlin said sales of his Unified Threat Management (firewall, anti-virus, web filters intrusion prevention and application control) tools were growing 32% a year. Currently, New Zealand sales were dominated by the education sector but WatchGuard plans a push into the wider business sector, including finance, as it seeks more partners. Mr Devlin said the biggest IT threat to customers was misconfigurations of IT systems, suggesting risk was a management issue, giving a need for unified tools to tackle all types of threats.

BuddyBid 'a world first'

Auctioneer Webb's has launched what it says is the world's first auction platform hosted on Facebook. BuddyBid co-founder and Webb's managing director Neil Campbell said the application "lives within Facebook" and is "what happens when you cross Facebook and TradeMe." Rather than an auction open to all, the selling occurs between friends or friends of friends. "BuddyBid is providing a new kind of service that literally did not exist 48 hours ago. It is aimed at those of us who want to do business in a more trusted and transparent online setting," he said.

Credit first from Home Direct

Home Direct claims a first by offering multiple payment options, including credit applications and approvals online for its new shopping website. The 40 year-old business, noted for its door-to-door service, said 2000 products would initially be sold on its website, a number expected to double over the next six months. The new website has created 15 extra jobs and led to the doubling in size of its East Tamaki warehouse.

"Prepare for a dogfight in the cloud"

The Economist
October 6, 2012

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