

Towards a framework for hotel website evaluation

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Abstract: -

The growing importance of tourism industry in world economy reflects on tourism growing importance in Croatian economy as well. Tourism industry represents one of the areas in which Internet technology has a significant influence changing some of the key industry premises. Hotel website offers new opportunities for hoteliers. But it is essential to hoteliers to evaluate their web presence and to compare their quality with competition in the marketplace. Building evaluation framework and procedure for this purpose is not simple task. This paper presents one possible framework for hotel website evaluation performed to evaluate the Web sites of Croatian high class hotels and their content. The study results show that management of Croatian top hotels is still using Web and Internet technology for presentation purposes solely and there is no conscious that its content needs to be managed well. It is obvious that Internet is still not adequately understood, accepted and integrated within hotel management in Croatia. The absence of the very basic information about the hotel and their offer, e-mail form request for reservation information illustrate this hotel management attitude.

Key-Words: - tourism, hotel web sites quality, survey, Croatia

I. INTRODUCTION

After a three-year period of stagnation beginning in 2000, international tourism has experienced spectacular growth. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO) in January 2007, international tourist arrivals reached an all-time record of 842 million in 2006, an increase of 4.5 percent over 2005¹. This rate of tourist growth is expected to continue through the remainder of the decade. Due to this expectation in many countries tourism industry gain high priority in economic development.

In Croatian economy tourism is one of the most important development factors, because directly or indirectly tourism creates around 22 % of total domestic product, and more than 40% of total export [11]. According to the Croatian national bank² in the first quarter 2008 revenue from tourism increases for 15.8 % [8]. The growth of tourist supply has consequences in growth of the competition on the market which influences profit margin in the tourist industry.

¹ According to the data obtained from the web page of Ministry of Tourism, <http://www.mint.hr/UserDocsImages/TOURISM-FINAL-2010.pdf> (accessed, January, 2008)

² Croatian National Bank, Year 2008. CNB BULLETIN • NUMBER 141, QUARTERLY REPORT, INTRODUCTION, available at <http://www.hnb.hr/eindex.htm?tsfsg=a90225eec04edefca4429995c680d39c>, ISSN 1334-0050 page 4. (accessed, December, 2008).

Developments in IT thus strongly influence tourism industry and some of benefits are [1]:

- Increasing sales;
- Diversification of goods and services;
- Speed responses to changes in market conditions;
- Increasing service quality;
- Increasing productivity and cash receipts;
- Receiving information;
- Obtaining and evaluating feedback.

For tourism industry, combination of human and technological elements can strongly influence competitiveness on the market increasing the quality of goods and services, decreasing distribution costs and improving customer service. Internet and web site presentation is an important information technology tool that can be used to achieve many business purposes [55], such as delivering a wide variety of information and services [2], business transactions facilitation [50] and better communication with customers [42]. The consequence of this conscious is growing number of companies Web sites regardless on company's size, trying to catch all or some of these benefits. But the web presence solemnly is not a guarantee of success. The goal of web presence is not just to attract visitor to the web site, but to turn visitor in repeat visitor and in the customer [2, 32, 42].

Previous researches conducted on the sample of 400 largest Croatian companies showed that their managers do not place the expected importance and significance on e-business development [41]. Though the potential objectives and benefits of e-business development were ranked very high, it became apparent that the e-business projects were focused on the simple and static web sites development in the form of on-line catalogues (supporting very simple ways of interaction and information exchange). At the same time, more advanced ways of e-business interaction and integration were mostly ignored. The amount of investment in e-business projects is still very low, whereby companies that participated in this study plan to spend less than 2% of IT budget for e-business initiatives, whilst only 13.8% of companies planned to invest more significant resources.

Therefore, we may expect that Croatian companies do not widely accept the Internet as a driver for conducting business transactions. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the usage of e-business induced processes in tourism and hospitality industry. As it was stressed that tourism is one of

the most important development driver for Croatian economy, it is of particular interest to investigate the quality of web sites content of leading hotels (4 and 5 stars) in Croatia. The major research question is: do the leading hotels in Croatia have the web sites of superb quality?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The business website must be designed very carefully and must take in consideration numerous elements which must resulted in visitor's satisfaction base on their positive experience. Customer satisfaction has been considered one of the most important marketing goals and plays very important role in the online business since it helps to build customer trust. According to Oliver (1997) customer satisfaction is defined as "the summary of psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with consumer's prior feelings about the consumer experience" [31]. In other words "satisfaction is ongoing evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition or consumption experience" [30], "builds customer trust" [9] and "leads to repeat purchases" [16].

The visitor negative experience will usually drive visitor to other competitive web site which is just click away [30], or even to go to physical store rather than to purchase on online [50].

The business project success depends upon successful web site design and effectiveness [19] many researches and practitioners have pointed out a list of items which presence is essential for website success.

Law and Wong [20] identified the three most important factors in successful website as being "different price ranges for products/services", "secure payment methods" and "user friendly systems". Kanayama, Ogasawara, and Kimijima [15] stresses that "content and usability are important in the context of efforts to rise the attractiveness of corporate website". Some other authors [12] stress a hedonic and utilitarian aspect that reflects the information and entertainment needs of users. For Sparkles and Thomas [39] a good website will contain information needed to enable buying decisions and it will have entertainment value. Sigala (2004) reassure that websites must provide adequate functional support³ to meet client needs at every stage of their decision process [11]. According to Tong, Duffy, Cross, Tsung and Yen (2005) "internet customers are pickier, more demanding and have higher expectations, therefore excellent electronic service should be provided in order to fulfill their expectations." [46].

Nusair and Kandampully (2007) identified six important dimensions that contribute to a successful web site [29]:

- navigability,
- playfulness,

- information quality,
- trust,
- personalization and responsiveness.

Navigability – user control of moving thru website by number of clicks. It should provide user-friendly environment and functions that enable visitors to find what they need easily.

Playfulness - include features such as animation, music, video and other multimedia effects.

Information quality – refers to amount, accuracy and form of information about the products and services offered on web site.

Trust – in an online context is "customer s based willingness to accept vulnerability in online transactions based on their positive expectations regarding future online store behaviors" [17].

Personalization – giving customers individualized attention and understanding the specific needs of the customers.

Responsiveness – promptly respond to customers inquires.

Ranganathan and Ganapathy (2002) concluded that an effective website should serve as a major source of information, providing complete information about products and services; allow quick access to information thru tools like search engines; and provide decision aids to help in evaluating alternatives [35].

A Forrester research has also indicated that still 18 out of 20 major online sites were found insufficient in terms of site design [26].

III. HOTEL WEBSITES

Communication needs in tourism, as service industry, are one of the factors of the key importance. Usage of new information technology enables different approach to potential clients. According to research from "Morgan Stanley & Co.", (US Investment, 1997) Internet offers a large business possibility in "travel" sector and on scale, "Internet possibility for different retailer's category" takes high third place, just behind financial and insurance services, and computer software and hardware selling" [49].

The Internet importance is very quickly recognized by tourist agencies, thus the number of Web based tourist agencies increases permanently. Through the web sites and advanced use of e-business these agencies are also extending their offer and increases number of their clients. Virtual tourist⁴, one of the most popular Web based agency visits each month [40] over 30 million visitors, while most popular Croatian Web based agency Adiatca.net⁵ records permanent annual visitors growth of 30.000, and total number of annual unique users increase to almost 150.000. Logging will be one of the fastest growth areas in the Internet from a value of \$ 9 billion in 2003 to \$ 17 billion in 2007 [52].

³ According to the data obtained from the web site of the Travel Industry Association, http://www.tia.org/researchpubs/itnl_research_itnl_tourism_overview.html (accessed, December, 2008).

⁴ According to the data obtained from the web site www.virtualtourist.com (accessed December, 2008).

⁵ According to the data obtained from the web site www.adriatica.net (accessed, January, 2008).

Information technology (IT) appears to be an integrative technology which enables vertical integrations within business systems [6], tending to cover as large number of participants as possible, shaping the so called value chain [30]. According to Huang (2005) “the Internet has force the hotel industry to change their business activities and management, including its marketing activities” [13]. One of the consequences of growing Internet usage in tourism is growing individualization of tourist offer, and thus applying Internet technologies in tourism infrastructure is not just simple question of marketing presence or just one more distribution channel. IT offers possibility of establishing direct connection between tourist offer in tourist destination and user of service. In this sense Internet becomes extremely interesting channel as a source of information and at the same time as a reservation system.

Thus integration of Internet technologies and business information systems of tourist agencies and specially hotels becomes one of the key elements for creating individual relationship towards guest, what becomes key element of company performance on the market with growing competition and customer expectation.

The customers are far more educated then they were several years ago and travel industry are facing new request from them, ability to put together their own trips online by combining one or more elements, instead of traditional procedure of buying vacation as a pre-package product without possibility to influence on their content. “Dynamic packaging enables customers to combine as well as basic elements as hotel + car + air, or it can be much more complex allowing inclusion of other entertainment or sports activities [11]”. Over 30% of on-line tourist travel buyers made a combination purchase of travel components using dynamic packaging technology, a 24% growth from year 2003 [33].

Promotion in tourism is especially important because the offer and demand are dislocated, what makes product/service presentation difficult. Potential customer first need to be informed about the destination and all their characteristics, specifications and advantages, followed up by promotion of product/service which is offered. Promotion in tourism have task to attract tourist to the specific destination and to inform tourist with destination offer. Thus key hotel promotional information must be combination of hotel offer and destination information.

Promotional activities in tourism do not differ from promotional activities in other industries, although they have some specifics in application. According to WTO the first two sources of information for potential tourist is tourist brochures and web sites [47]. Thus the absence of hotel Web site becomes serious obstacle in business for hotel of any size. Hotel Web page does not become not only distribution channel, but the important source of the very first contact with client.

There are several studies on evaluation of web websites in the travel and the tourism considering management view [7],

[53].

In current circumstances hotel management must be prepared for fast reactions due to turbulent environment in both economic, political and market conditions which are much more complex then before [51]. Thus the main factors affecting hotel success are globalization, technological developments, and changes in customer preferences, differences in competition among hotels, horizontal/vertical integration and legal applications [1].

Although hotels generally offer the same kinds of goods and services changes in customer expectations leads especially luxury hotels to fit the customer’s needs and wishes.

The large number of companies uses web to present static information about companies and their operations only [23], [53]. According to Chung and Law [7] “hospitality companies still do not have adequate knowledge to build a useful site, and many hotels have placed a lot of information onto their websites but do not include relevant information or arrange the information in an appropriate order”. But outdated information on the website can decrease the clients trust and thus can be negative for hotel’s image. The consequence is that hotel companies nowadays redesign their sites on a constant basis in order to use their fullest potential [3].

There are different opinions on what makes a tourism site effective and in consideration should be taken design, content and management and content quality or design perspectives [22, 32]. Term content refers to the information features or services that are offered on the website [14]. But content is not limited to the subject, products or services provided, and it includes “the solution and strategies employed to make it easy for the user to accomplish important tasks, such as information retrieval, search and navigation required in making a purchase, and obtaining feedback” [44].

Information providing is the website basic goal, and high “content quality is one of the top four factors contributing to repeat visits” [36] and influences the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience for the consumer. Term richness can be used to describe the nature of information, and defines depth of collected customer information as well as the ability of the media to improve human understanding by reducing uncertainty and ambiguity [24]. Information flow on e-market is greater faster and deeper and consequently richer in comparison with traditional market [38].

Rich media need to be used on hotel website since the hotel industry is considered as an information intensive industry [30].

Lu, Lu and Zhang (2002) showed that the level of regional economic development has a significant impact on the construction of the site [25]. Zafiroopoulos, Vrana, & Paschaloudis (2004) [53] examined and measured the quantity and type of information provided through hotel websites and found out that higher class hotels as well as chain hotels appear to be more active in offering information

services. Baloglu & Peckan (2006) utilized content analyses to analyze the websites of the selected group (four and five star) of hotels in Turkey in terms of design characteristics (interactivity, navigation and functionality) and site marketing practices on the internet [3].

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are numerous factors that influence and determine web site success, and lot of papers was written about the design of web sites regarding human engineering, user interface, business and usability perspectives [41]. The numerous web design checklists have been developed for the purpose of identifying design and evaluation criteria of web sites [51]. Web site represents just a front-end, "window" or entry point for far more complex e-business systems.

Despite a wide variety of web quality attributes used, researchers and scholars agree that the web quality is the most important determinant of user satisfaction. Delone and McLean (1992) suggested that the web quality model may be divided into information quality, system quality and service quality [9]. Information quality represents the quality of the information provided online by websites, system quality refers mainly to functionality features that can ease (or make difficult) users to interact with a website, while service quality is concerned with a quality of service which is provided by a website. In addition to these customer-focused models, the quality of the web sites can be evaluated from the software development side. Mendoza (2002) proposed an ISO/IEC 9126-based portal environment evaluation model [27]. Considering all these models and frameworks three common concepts appears to have the impact on web site efficiency: usability, functionality and reliability. Therefore, web site efficiency is a relative category by which we can measure its usability, functionality, and reliability. It commonly represents a set of attributes of that bear on the relationship between the level of its performance and the resources used (Calero, Ruiz, Piattini, 2005) [5]. Different researches developed instruments for measuring user-perceived web quality, and content analysis, but the key dimensions of B2C web sites is information content, design, security, and privacy [35]. Recent research argument that the driving force for hotel to establish their web sites include lower distribution cost and thus their higher profits, and a larger potential market [21], but half of the consumers have difficulties with contents of the web sites [32].

The successful performance of a hotel web site used in this paper is determined by the set of site dimensions, "facilities information", "reservation information", "contact information", "web site management" and "surrounding information" [21]. The dimension of the attributes followed the incremental functionality performance measurement model for this research is modified to simplify the research, and thus study focus on the functions of hotel web site, and point out the two main components of the Internet applied by hotel industry: World Wide Web (the web) and the e-mail.

As a hypothesis for study we assumed that hotel web page increases hotel competition possibilities as well as competition possibilities of destination. As the source of data we uses list of 64 hotels with four or five stars in Croatia from Web page of Ministry of sea, tourism, traffic and development.

Regional distribution

Counties (region)	4 stars hotels	5 stars hotels
Istria	10	0
Primorje – Gorski kotar	17	3
Zadar	2	0
Šibenik – Knin	1	0
Split – Dalmatia	14	0
Dubrovnik - Neretva	4	5
City of Zagreb	6	1
Lika – Senj	1	0
Total	53	9

Table 1. Hotels with 4 and 5 or more stars

We find out that 2 from 64 hotels (3%) does not have own web page, thus they are not considered in this research any further.

Contact information (62 hotel web pages)

Quality attribute	Number of hotels	%
Address	59	95%
Telephone number	62	100%
Fax number	58	94%
E-mail	62	95%
On line forum - guest book	13	21%
Newsletters	13	21%

Table 2. Contact information

Although basic contact information should be present even on a business card, some of them were missing on the web sites of Croatian leading hotels. It is interesting that the address of the hotel is not placed on 6 web sites (3%), fax number was not available on the 4 (6%) pages; e-mail contact was unavailable on the 3 (5%) sites. The guest book and newsletters are present on only 21% the web sites. Information about hotel facilities were incomplete in majority of cases, information was not present for category (24%), hotel description (5%), the direction to the hotel (56%), maps (44%), and video (11%).

Facilities information

Quality attribute	Number of hotels	%
Category	47	76%
Hotel - description	59	95%
Hotel – path to hotel	27	44%
Hotel – map to hotel	41	66%
Hotel - picture	61	98%

Hotel – room picture	59	95%
Hotel – content picture	57	91%
Video clips	7	11%

Table 3. Facilities Information

One of the key information for hotel and client, the category, was not mentioned on 24% of web sites. The lack of the other information may also worry; hotel description was missing on 5% web pages in the sample, path to the hotel on the 56%, maps on the 44%. The pictures of the hotel, room and content are more represented in the sample than maps. Multimedia in the form of video clips is neglected, and present on only 11% web pages in the sample.

Reservation information

Quality attribute	Number of hotels	%
Room rates	49	80%
Room rates eur	36	73%
Room rates KN	20	40%
Room rates kn only	13	27%
On line reservations CRS	29	47%
Payment options	13	21%

Table 4. Reservation information

Room rates in EUR are present on the 73% of web sites hotels, while 40%, of them are present in domestic currency (KN-kunas). There are number of web sites were room rates are presented in several currencies, mostly in kunas and EUR. Web sites with online computer reservation systems (CRS) offer usually much more different currencies, and also currency converter, which enable visitors to calculate room price in a very convenient way. Large number of hotels which present their room rates in EUR shows that majority of them is oriented towards foreign guests. On the other hand, room rates can be found on only 80% (49) of hotel web sites.

Although all of the high categorized hotels in the sample offer possibility for credit cards payments, only 13% of them mentioned this possibility on their web site.

There is considerably large number of the hotels without online reservations system (CRS). The room reservation can be mostly performed by filling on-line computer forms prepared for sending by e-mail. In that case visitor has to wait for the response (usually 24 hours) by hotel authorities. Such online registration forms usually lack of any control, and user can fill and send form with lots of mistakes, empty fields, or even completely empty form. Such practices represent the fact that Croatian top hotels don't find the e-business as a driver for business process automation and due to the lack of any control or trust mechanisms, visitors can consider them unreliable and uncomfortable for leaving personal data.

Surrounding information

Quality attribute	Number of hotels	%
Hotel - distances	19	31%
Hotel – destination distance	9	15%

Hotel – destination description	32	52%
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Table 5. Information about hotel surroundings

It is very important to inform web site visitors about hotel distance from e.g., beach, airports, market, and centre of the town, railway station, and bus station. Distance can be measured in miles, km, minutes to walk, drive etc.

The distance of the destination from other cities, or other attractive locations must be specified too. Only 31 % of the hotel web sites offer this information, while only 15% mentioned destination distance. Destination description is mentioned on little more than a half web pages in the sample.

Web site management

Quality attribute	Number of hotels	Percentage
Multilingual site	56	90%
English language	59	95%
Croatian language	51	82%
Links to other businesses	20	32%
News	12	19%
e-cards	9	14%

Table 6. Web side management

Web page of highly categorized hotels must be in different languages, but 9% of the hotels in the sample are represented to the clients in only one foreign language. Croatian and English language are present on 20% of the web sites that decides to present information in two languages; 6% has page on 6 languages, 14% has 5 languages; 23% has 3 languages. Web pages with 4 languages are dominant 28% and languages are usually Croatian, German, English and Italian language. English language is dominant on all web sites, and it is even more used than Croatian language. It is considerable since they are oriented mainly towards foreign guests.

Hotels use very few possibilities for promoting their web sites or services by downloading promotional materials or sending recommendations to the friends. Only 21 % of the hotel web sites offer downloads ad materials and only 14 % offers e-cards possibility.

Link on other pages exists on only 33% web pages, and this are mainly links to the web pages of business partners, Croatian National Tourist Board and local tourist board and to the pages with common information. News is published on only 20% web pages.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The sample for the research includes web sites of all the 64 top class hotels in Croatia (4 and 5 star hotels). The research comes up with the conclusion that 97% of the sampled top class hotels have the web sites. After considering and analysing research results, it may be concluded that Croatian top class hotels do not find e-business as a important or 'disruptive' innovation that can radically change the traditional

way of doing business. The most important objectives of building a hotel web site are promotional purposes (to introduce the hotel, its products, services and activities to customers, suppliers and partners) as well as the electronic communication with customers, suppliers and partners, while qualitative aspects of e-commerce or integrated e-business are of less priority.

As it was concluded for the Croatian large companies in general [40], the study confirms the assumption that Croatian top class hotels are not using e-business opportunities to the full and there is a significant gap at the adoption ladder. Furthermore, it was revealed that the quality of web sites measured with the set of dimensions (“facilities information”, “reservation information”, “contact information”, “web site management” and “surrounding information”) is inadequate, especially having in mind that the research sample were top class Croatian hotels.

Information about hotel facilities were incomplete, information was not present for category (24%), hotel description (5%), path to the hotel (56%), maps (44%), video (11%). Reservation information was uncompleted, missing or inadequate on numerous web sites. Room rates was not present on 20% web sites, on line reservations system (CRS) was missing on 53% web sites, on 27% room rates were presented in kunas only (domestic currency), and credit card payment possibility was mentioned on only 13% sites. Poorly designed computer reservation forms and simple e-mail communication with clients is dominant characteristic of reservation information offered by high class hotels in Croatia. The lack of control in forms is very important issue because it can be serious obstacle for visitor in leaving her/his personal data. Surrounding information, hotel distance from beach, airports, market, and centre of the town, railway station, and bus station was not mentioned on 69% hotel web sites. The information about destination was not adequately presented, distances from other cities were not presented on 85% sites, and destination description was not mentioned on 48 % sites. Web site management lacks from very important elements of communication with clients. It was surprising to find that 9% web sites of top categorized hotels are represented to the clients in only one foreign language. Download of hotel promotional materials was not present on 79% sites, 86% sites does not support e-cards possibility, links on other pages does not exist on 77% sites, and news is not published on 80% web sites.

On the other hand, researches and new trends show that Internet and e-business becomes key element in planning distribution channels. The major hotel brands in the USA increased their CRS reservation during 2006 for 8.4% [18] resulted in more than 81 million bookings. As hotels invest more in marketing online, bookings increasingly will be made directly through hotel and web sites. Virtual tours, information in a choice of languages and detailed comparison of rates, and availability for rooms, amenities and other services are now expectation. The photography and video that capture the ambience and beauty of a hotel, rooms and destination and local attractions that visitor want must be part

of web site information on language that guests most frequently use. Market Metrix Hospitality Index reported that hotel web sites, for the first time in the 2006, scored higher in satisfaction than popular travel web sites [4]. This increase, partially credited to improved navigation and booking ease. Thus the hotel web site emerging not only as an important source of reservations but place from which customer loyalty can be build. Since that demand for information multiplies hotel web and CRS information infrastructure is under strong pressure for accuracy, simplicity and good response time.

Hoteliers must be able to provide CRS with web browser serving as flexible entry point for customers. Thus any access to information is critical and it should be simple, accurate and fast of web information is critical, and they have to have complete control over web content, presented in multiple languages. Online customers must be fully informed about hotel offers, prices, activities and it should be aligned with the ability to interface to the third-party vendors, allowing complete itineraries to be built from a single point of contact [48]. The hotel web site should enable not only full and accurate information [43], but also information about pricing, and booking for on-site amenities like visits to the spa, and different destination activities like scuba diving, golf or horseback riding.

The competitive advantage for hoteliers is to meet the market key reservation distribution needs through access to various distribution channels and their proper management. It should result in process simplification and increase in bookings. New trends forces hoteliers to choose good technology and marketing partner that can help them to pay more attention to their guests. The potential guest must be convinced that hotel is right for him before stop looking and start booking. In this sense the hotel web site turns to be new hotel front desk, and becomes first contact point for building guest-hotel relationship.

The Long Tail⁶ does not hold only great opportunities for travel, tourism and hospitality, but also represents strong pressure for change. The large suppliers still dominate industry, relaying on complex, expensive and not easy to implement global distribution system (GDS). Large number of low cost and shareware packages provide capability for a small traveler supplier to accept and confirm reservations on line, from parking reservations, bed and breakfast reservation, flight reservation to traffic and cinema tickets. The emerging value of web sites is not only acquiring information but to aggregate them. Long Tail can only be sustained where the infrastructure exists to support. In many countries infrastructure is not fully capable to support virtual tourist and Long Tail needs. Thus the hotel and destination must closely

⁶ The term Long Tail is used to describe niche strategy of certain Internet based business that enables them to gain significant profit in selling small volumes of hard-to-find items to many customers, instead of selling large volumes of reduced number of popular items. The Long Tail may threaten established businesses, since it can reduce demand for most popular products. The Long Tail is based on the **Pareto principle** (also known as the **80-20 rule**) which states that, for many events, 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes.

cooperate because it is impossible to sell hotel without destination and vice versa. In this sense this question is not just matter of technology but what is more important the question of organization of information collection, its accuracy, partnership responsibility and good and manageable information flow. The supporting and developing Long Tail represents a great opportunity for new generation of aggregators and software developers but also makes strong pressure on tourist destination infrastructure and hotel infrastructure. Since the competition in industry rises, hoteliers have to use e-business and IT not only to gain access to the customer or to build their loyalty, but also to get instant knowledge of the rates the key competitors are displaying on their sites, allowing them to react quickly.

The hotels should adjust their information and management system to fit technological and market environment which is required on the global hotel market. The application of IT solutions requires significant investments, and this can be serious obstacle for single hotel management. Thus it is to be expected that hotels which is part of hotel chain will be in situation to implement required IT faster than single hotel. Serious obstacles can be in management consciousness about IT role and importance in successful management. The recent research⁷ investigating the IT literacy in Croatia, in comparison with other EU countries, illustrate rather low rate of Internet penetration (39%). Thus the Croatia lapse in Internet penetration not only after some countries in EU, Austria (67%), Germany (66%), Slovenia (61%), Slovakia (50%), Czech (49%), Estonia (69%), Latvia (59%), Poland (41%), but even behind EU average (47%).

Attitude towards IT usage

Computer confuses me, I would never be used on them	%
I do not agree	47
I do completely agree	33
I partly agree	20

Table 7. Positive attitude towards computer usage

The average Croatian citizen still has considerable obstacles in using IT. Over 53 % of them have some kind of limitations in this sense. The same research confirms that acceptance of Internet technology as an information source is still rather low.

Primary source of Information

When I need some information first I search on Internet	%
I do not agree	61
I do completely agree	26
I partly agree	13

Table 8. Acceptance of Internet as a fist source of Information

This proves that there are still lot possibilities for further Internet popularization. Some local activities performed lately

⁷ According to the GFK research available in Croatian at web page: <http://www.gfk.hr/press1/infopis.htm>, (accessed December, 2008).

in northern part of Croatia resulted in increased number of Internet users locally creating Internet free zones (city of Varaždin and Koprivnica).

Attitude towards E-commerce

Shopping over Internet makes life easier	%
I do not agree	85
I do completely agree	5
I partly agree	8
Don't know the answer	2

Table 9. E-commerce acceptance

The e-commerce acceptance is consequently rather low, and only 13% has a positive attitude to shopping over Internet. This could be changed in future as well, since practically all the banks presently active in Croatia strongly push e-banking initiative in order to lower its operating costs and increase client's base.

This research shows that people in Croatia are not very familiar with IT. This overall attitude towards IT and Internet can reflects also on the hotel management and hotel staff IT acceptance as well. Serious efforts must be done by Croatian authorities in the promotion of IT and Internet and on education in this sense as well. For the hotel industry in Croatia the very first step is to inform hoteliers about the current web significance in international hotel industry.

The Croatian tourist board has to take active role in this processes and to participate not only in simple information transfer about web's importance for hotel management, but also in enabling better flow of information between regional Croatian tourist board offices and hotel web management stuff. This could have significant influence on the hotel web site quality and accuracy. It could also increase the richness of hotel web site content and improve quality of information related with tourist destination.

The Croatian top hotel web sites must seriously reconsider their strategic business orientation, because this study shows that they recognition and adaptation of changes in market and technology is completely inadequate and lack from very serious problems. Internet and web is definitely not recognized in Croatian top hotels as mean of building strategic nor operational competitiveness.

According to the survey result it is obvious necessity for future research which must take in focus management attitudes and acceptance of IT in high class hotels.

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