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University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jeremy Burnett entitled "An Examination of Consumer Opinions Regarding Hotel Websites." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management.

Carl J. Pfaffenberg, Ph.D, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Carol Costello, Ph.D, Ann Fairhurst, Ph.D.

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Dr. Anne Mayhew
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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An examination of consumer opinions
regarding hotel websites

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jeremy Burnett
August 2003

DEDICATION

For George, we miss you.

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ABSTRACT

Internet reservations are a growing portion of the distribution channels in the hotel industry. With this growing area of marketing and sales of hotel rooms comes a need for clarification of the needs of both the hotel and the consumer.

This study examines consumer preferences and opinions about the features and functions available on hotel websites with respect to the type of website used by the consumer. Two researcher developed survey instruments were used in this study. The first survey process identified and refined the features and functions to be examined through a series of interviews with users of online travel products. The second survey instrument elicited information from consumers of hotel website products and services. This instrument was posted to the World Wide Web and responses were solicited via e-mail in an attempt to garner responses from individuals familiar with the internet. The focus of the research was to find out if users of five distinctly identified types of websites showed any associations with or differences among their opinions and preferences and the type of website they primarily used.

With few exceptions, the consumers showed no association with or differences among their opinions and preferences with respect to the type of website they primarily use. The exceptions, though few, primarily related to a function of either the technology as it related to the type of website or the business model of the site type. This finding provides early guidelines for developing successful websites.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For most people, the Internet exists. It just is. Few people are aware that the birth of the Internet can be traced directly back to the 1957 Soviet launch of Sputnik. President Eisenhower's administration responded with the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the lesser known Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). NASA's mission was to pursue the exploration of space and aeronautics. Other avenues of research were left to ARPA (Biersdorfer, 2000). ARPA commissioned the construction of ARPAnet in July of 1968. The purpose of this project was to connect computers at various research institutions. By the fall of 1969, the Stanford Research Institute, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah were connected to this network (Miller, 1999).

Other scholarly networks developed over time. The Computer Science Network (CSNet), the New York State Education and Research network (NYSERnet), and the Southeast University Research Association network (SURAnet) all connected different scholarly institutions for research purposes. One marked difference existed in SURAnet. SURAnet effectively became the first Internet Service Provider (ISP) by allowing anyone to become a part of their network, specifically, commercial industry. Eventually, all of these networks were connected and have become the Internet as it is known today. In large part, this can be attributed to the work of Tim Berners-Lee who created the HyperText

Transfer Protocol, or http, used today to communicate on the Internet (Ricart, 2000). Based on this communications protocol, two programmers at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana created a graphical browser called MOSAIC. In 1994, these programmers joined a small company, Netscape, and created a browser by the same name, commonly used to search the Internet today. Microsoft soon followed with the creation of Internet Explorer, and so began the browser wars (McCracken, 1999).

The Internet was originally intended for the transfer of information, via electronic mail (e-mail), through file transfers, or with the aforementioned browsers (Ricart, 2000). Industry saw this as a promising marketing channel. The first commercial Web pages were posted as online brochures to get information to the general public electronically. Second generation websites offered the ability to purchase products and services online with the click of a button. Total Internet sales for all products and services in 1996 were estimated at \$518 million. Travel and related products and services were believed to have accounted for half of all online purchases in 1997 (Connolly, Olson & Moore, 1998). The growth rate of online purchasing was so dramatic that estimated online travel sales in 1997 was \$1.6 billion, three times the total online sales just two years before (Sellers, 1999). By 2001, sales of online travel products were estimated at \$19.3 billion (Jupitermedia).

As noted previously, early websites and many current sites were nothing more than electronic versions of brochures. This conveyed the idea that traditional marketing and advertising rules should hold true for Internet marketing

as well. Moreover, the Internet has made possible the notion of interactive marketing. Brochures cannot respond to the person reading them, nor can television advertisements book a room reservation for an individual watching a hotel commercial in their home. A website can perform both of these tasks. Some of the old marketing dogma may still be relevant, but new rules need to be established for this contemporary marketing arena (Roberts, 2000). The primary purpose of this research was to begin to explore some of these new rules. Does flashy animation on a website help sell hotel rooms better? Do consumers really want to purchase a room online or does the website primarily serve as an informative piece.

Existing scholarly research and publications were in short supply regarding the use of the Internet in the hospitality industry. In fact, Purdue University's Lodging, Restaurant and Tourism Index indicates that neither the heading Web nor website was used prior to 1996 (Van Hoof & Combrink, 1998). Hence, a second reason for this research was to assist industry and academia by providing scientifically validated references and conclusions.

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the different types of hotel websites and consumer perceptions of the features and functions offered by those sites. The independent variable in this study was the type of website used for information searching or product purchasing. The website types, or segments, are discussed in detail in the review of literature. The dependent variable was consumer perceptions of website features and functions. To accomplish this purpose, a two-stage research process was

utilized. The first step made use of the Delphi process to more narrowly define the dependent variables, consumer perceptions of website features and functions. Stage two utilized the ideas defined from the Delphi interviews and quantified the results through the use of a survey.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

OVERVIEW

This section included a discussion of various literature as it related to this study; however, existing published research was limited. The first half of the section examined the independent variables in this study. The last half of the section was devoted to a discussion of the ideas behind the dependent variables which have been defined as part of the research.

WEBSITE TYPE

There are five types of lodging Internet marketing and sales sites:

1. Global Distribution System based sites
2. Hotel chain sites
3. Third party reservations sites
4. Reverse auction sites
5. Independent hotel sites

Each type varied in how the rooms were marketed and, if possible, booked. Also, they differed in the financial resources available to them. Notably, the same hotel could and did appear in more than one segment (Burns & Burns, 1999).

The first segment reviewed were those sites powered by Global Distribution Systems (GDS) (Burns & Burns, 1999). A GDS is an existing worldwide network that gives authorized users the ability to book airline

reservations, car rentals, hotel rooms, and other travel services electronically. Historically, access to these systems was the sole province of airline ticketing counters, hoteliers, and travel agents. A number of GDS systems exist, including Apollo, SABRE, and Worldspan. These systems were developed from airline owned electronic distribution channels. For example, Worldspan was developed and implemented by Northwest Airlines. These electronic distribution channels were expanded in the 1990's to add hotel room, car rental, and other travel related services (Emmer, Tauck, Wilkinson, & Moore, 1993). Current GDS powered hotel websites are simply interfaces to these different, legacy systems.

Sites using a GDS provide to the end-users what was once only available to their travel agent. Expedia, a Microsoft partnered company, operates one such site which is connected to the Worldspan GDS (<http://www.expedia.com>). Another example is travelocity.com which is connected to SABRE (Burns & Burns, 1999).

The advantage of these sites for hoteliers is that hotels listed with a GDS are, in most cases, automatically listed on the accompanying website. This additional service provides another marketing and distribution channel for the hotel. The drawback to this setup is that global distribution systems list mostly chains and hotel referral associations, since these are generally the only organizations with the financial means necessary to be a member of the GDS system. Generally, small chains and independent hotels are not financially able to be in this service segment (Burns & Burns, 1999).

The next segment of websites reviewed were those operated by the hotel chain, referral association or corporation; hotel chain sites. Hilton, Marriott, Holiday Inn and Choice all operate reservation systems on their websites. Reservations are made instantly with guaranteed rates and confirmation numbers given just as if the guest had placed a call to the toll-free reservation line. In fact, the reservations are routed to the individual hotels in the same manner as reservations made via the reservation centers (Burns & Burns, 1999).

Due to the high cost of belonging to a GDS, or establishing and maintaining your own site, many companies have started reservation sites that cater to the smaller and individual properties. These third party reservation sites list each hotel's information and sends reservations directly to the property through personal computers with Internet connections. While some systems totally automate the process for the property, many hotels manually transfer reservations to the property management system. Examples of these types of websites are Worldres.com and Inntopia.com (Burns & Burns, 1999).

Reverse auction sites, such as Priceline are the "name your own price" websites (<http://www.priceline.com>, 2000). Potential guests list a rate they are willing to pay for a reservation. The site compares that rate to a database of enlisted hotels. If a match is found, then the site reserves the room (Burns & Burns, 1999). The drawback to this service is that consumers must be flexible in where they stay. They are able to define an area within the city they wish to stay but cannot choose a specific property desired. The price that is bid determines the hotel that matches (<http://www.priceline.com>, 2000).

Independent hotels, small chains or even hotels within larger chains often choose to have individual websites. These independent hotel websites can range from full-featured sites with online booking capabilities such as the MGM Grand, Las Vegas (<http://www.mgmgrand.com>, 2000) to the Arsenic and Old Lace Bed and Breakfast Inn website (<http://www.bbonline.com/ar/arsenic/index.html>, 2000) which offers only information about the property. These websites have been effective in establishing the independent hotel presence on the Internet.

CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF THE WEBSITE FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

As discussed previously, hotel websites offer a wide range of services and features. Determining the right mix of marketing and sales features for a website can be just as daunting a problem as determining marketing strategies for any other medium. Emerging technologies further complicate the matter by adding technical decisions to the model of Web design process (Palmer & Griffith, 1998). Roberts (2000) puts forth a model for marketing success as illustrated in Figure 1. The first stage of this process is an analysis of the consumer and some market intelligence. Stage two is the development of some market insight that comes from the previous step. Next, the focus of the marketing plan is developed and refined. This focus finally leads to the implementation of a successful marketing plan delivered to the consumer for feedback and further calibration.

The focus of this research was on customer feedback and calibration of

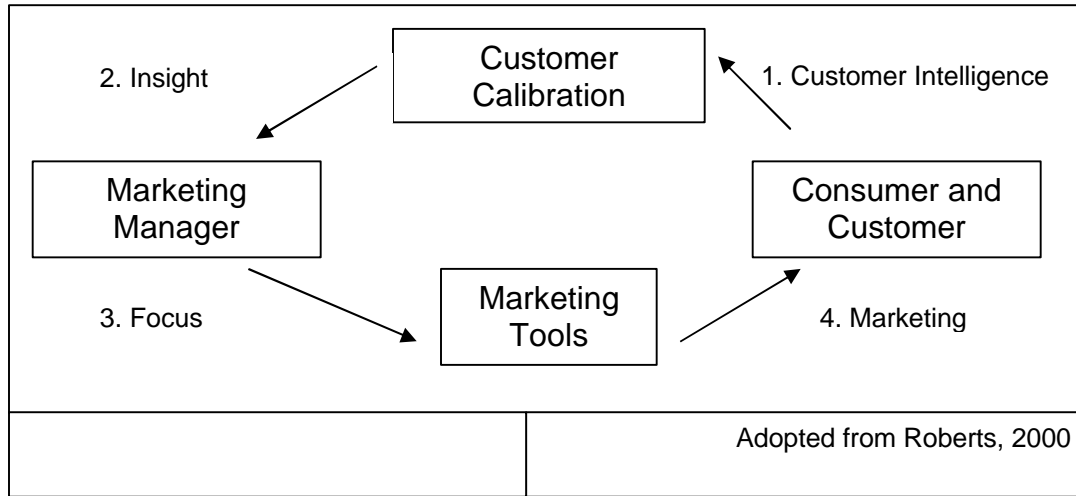


Figure 1: A model for developing new markets

that feedback. That involved garnering information from the consumer to provide the insight into what consumer wants and needs exist in the marketplace.

Utilizing Palmer's & Griffith's (1998) emerging model for Web marketing, Figure 2, in this study allowed for the identification of specific traits desired by consumers in the market. Simply stated, this model depicts the union of the marketing functions and the technical characteristics of an Internet site.

Information intensity is defined as the amount of information necessary in a company's product offering to the market. If one factors in the concept of information intensity, then the model for Web marketing becomes more meaningful. This includes everything from the amount of information required to develop a product or service to the information needed to use or consume a product or service. Hence, this is a determinant in the effective ability of an organization to utilize the Internet for sales and marketing. Companies with low information intense products will formulate their marketing strategies differently than companies that have high information intense products. An insurance company, a high information intensive company, can use the direct communicative properties of the Web to replace or bypass the middleman. In contrast, more tangible products with lower information intensity, such as Goodyear tires, can use the Internet to support existing marketing efforts (Palmer & Griffith, 1998).

Major characteristics for discussion in the emerging Web model are the product/ value chain, product support, customer communication, and media richness. These characteristics provide a forum to discuss the information

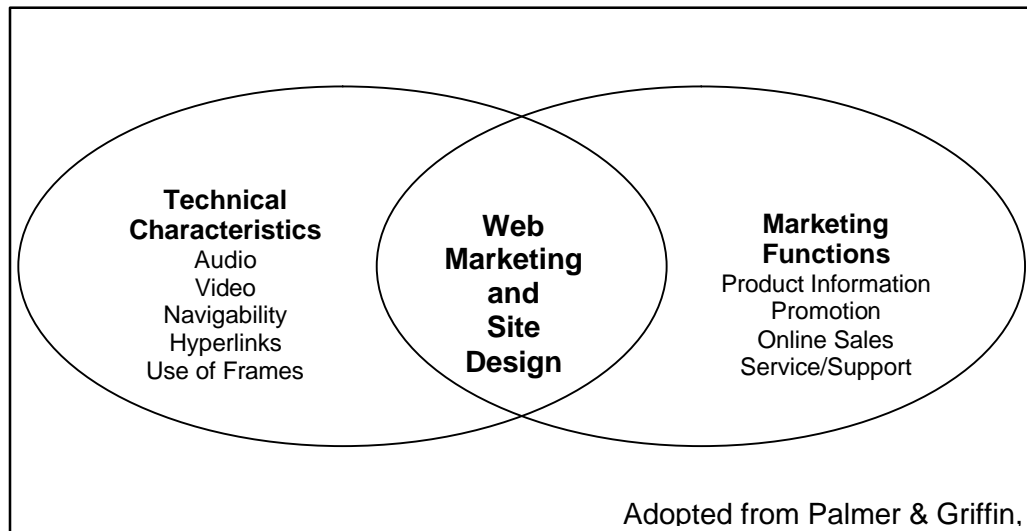


Figure 2 : Emerging Web Marketing Model

intensity intrinsic to products and services. Products with low information intensity will need to market themselves on the Web differently than those with higher information intensity in respect to each of these characteristics (Palmer & Griffith, 1998).

One illustration, based on the product and product value chain, was noted in the insurance company example. Another example, based on the combined traits of product support and customer communications is Microsoft software versus the aforementioned Goodyear tire. The information intensity inherent to a major software giant such as Microsoft requires extensive consumer product support. In fact, the Microsoft site offers online help, product updates, and a knowledge base. Also, software and related computer files are available to download from the site (<http://www.microsoft.com>, 2000). Goodyear has information about selecting the right tires for certain vehicles and uses. Also, it has information about tire maintenance and care (<http://www.goodyear.com/us/>, 2000), but the Goodyear site does not maintain the wealth of knowledge that the Microsoft website offers.

In the information intensity continuum implied by Palmer and Griffith (1998), hotels can be a relatively information intense product. If most potential guests have never visited the city or even the region where the property is located, then the product would need to be relatively information intensive. Such would be the case with many destination and resort properties. Conversely, if the hotel tends to be a regular stop for businesspeople, as with highway based, corporate market hotels, then the degree of intensity is lessened somewhat.

Palmer and Griffith (1998) list some key characteristics that a website's content should be judged upon: multimedia use, site navigability, promotional activities, sales, delivery and product support. The Palmer and Griffith research showed that few companies used multimedia to enhance the website. Neither did many sites use online sales or promotional activities. Product support was the most frequently used feature in the studied websites.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher intended to identify and quantify the characteristics of various hotel websites that were important to consumers. The research hypothesis is that there is no statistically significant difference in consumer perceptions of website characteristics among the five different types of hotel websites. The research was conducted in two stages. Stage one entailed using the Delphi process through a series of interviews to identify the characteristics of a hotel's website which impact consumer purchasing behavior. Stage two quantified the characteristics identified in stage one into a survey instrument.

STAGE ONE – THE DELPHI PROCESS

As stated earlier, little research existed about this topic. Therefore, no good model was available to follow for a survey instrument. The researcher decided to utilize a methodology to develop a set of features and functions to explore with the survey instrument. The Delphi process was used to clarify and define the consumer perceptions of various hotel website characteristics. The Delphi process interview group consisted of seven persons. One of the participants was a hotel industry information technology expert. The remaining participants were persons that were identified as or identified themselves as regular Internet users who had purchased and/or researched hotel products on the Internet within the past year. The participants were asked a pre-scripted set of open-ended questions based upon the characteristics established by Palmer

and Griffith (1998). These characteristics were the product/value chain, product support, customer communication, and media richness characteristics. Specific examples of these are multimedia use, site navigability, promotional activities, sales and delivery, and product support.

A Delphi process of individual interviews was used. Each participant was interviewed in person or via telephone. Analysis of the results included a frequency of responses and response types. Since not all people use the exact same words to respond to open ended questions, the researcher collapsed similar wordings into a single response. For example, one interviewee may have discussed graphics and another images. These two terms were collapsed into one group, images. These results were reduced or expanded upon to build the final set of dependent variables for the quantitative portion of the study. The Interview form is included in Appendix A.

STAGE TWO – THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument needed to be accessible online. The instrument was posted on the Web and tested for technical verification. Subsequently, an e-mail list was obtained to solicit responses for the survey instrument. Then, potential respondents were sent e-mails requesting their participation in the study.

The first set of questions on the survey instrument ascertained the respondents' familiarity with purchasing and/or researching hotel products and services on the Internet. Respondents were asked questions regarding their

opinions on the type of website they used most and, hence, were categorized into one of the five independent variable types. The second series of questions dealt with the respondents' opinions about the variables defined from the Delphi process in stage one. These questions were grouped into pairs, first asking respondents to rate the importance of each website feature or function, and, second, asking them to identify whether or not the feature or function would affect their purchasing decision. Responses to the first of each paired question were given using a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "very unimportant" to "very important." Answers to the second question in each pair were given with "yes" or "no." The "yes" or "no" responses revealed whether or not that factor would have an effect on a purchase decision. Finally, the questionnaire included limited demographic questions in an attempt to describe the sample of Internet users participating in the study. A final copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Each potential respondent was sent an e-mail. The mass e-mail was sent out over the weekend beginning on Friday, June 23, 2000. This e-mail served as a cover letter. A copy of the e-mail can be found in Appendix B. Each e-mail contained the Internet address, or Universal Resource Locator (URL) for the survey instrument. Certain e-mail systems allowed the user to click the URL to connect to the survey instrument site. Others had to copy and paste the address into their browser. Instructions for both contingencies were included in the content of the message. Completed surveys were downloaded electronically

into a data file that was imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 9.0, for analysis.

Frequency tables were constructed for each of the basic demographic questions as well as the website type classifying question. All of the questions regarding features and functions of the hotel web sites were asked in pairs. First, the survey asked the respondent to rate the importance of each item on a Likert scale. Then the respondents were asked to indicate if the item's presence would affect their purchasing decision, yes or no. By following that design, the analysis of the data also looked at each item twice. The yes/no questions were evaluated with a Chi Square procedure. The Likert response type questions were assessed with a one way analysis of variance, or ANOVA procedure.

The sample of potential respondents was chosen from an e-mail list that was purchased from an online provider of such services. The e-mail list was a targeted list that included persons that had indicated interest in receiving information about domestic United States travel. This list was obtained from Webmasterszone.net, and it contained 250,000 e-mail addresses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

RESPONSE RATE

Of the 315 responses received, 93 were eliminated as duplicate responses. These duplicate responses were most likely the result of respondents resubmitting the survey by clicking on the submit button a second time if they did not receive the successful response screen immediately. Another 73 responses were eliminated as incomplete because not all of the questions were answered. Due to the nature of the download process, there was no way the researcher could determine which of the survey's 58 questions were actually answered, if a technical glitch prevented the download of all of the 58 answers, or if both situations occurred. This left 149 valid responses for statistical analysis.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The first two questions asked respondents about their experience with hotel websites. Question 1 asked how many times the respondent had purchased hotel rooms online in the past year; while question 2 asked how many times the respondent had researched a hotel online and then booked the room nights in another fashion . Interestingly, over 38% of the respondents stated that they had, in fact, not purchased a hotel room online in the past year while over 86% of the respondents had researched rooms online and then purchased them in another fashion (Table 1).

Table 1: Conventional and Online Travel Purchase Frequencies.

Website type used						
Frequency of Purchases	GDS Websites	Chain Websites	Hotel only Websites	Reverse Auction Websites	Independent Hotel Websites	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Online Purchase Frequency						
0	39.1%	40.7%	22.2%	36.4%	37.9%	38.3%
1	19.6%	0.0%	11.1%	9.1%	10.3%	14.1%
2	13.0%	20.4%	33.3%	9.1%	17.2%	17.4%
3	6.5%	5.6%	11.1%	0.0%	3.4%	5.4%
4	4.3%	1.9%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%
5-10	10.9%	14.8%	0.0%	9.1%	13.8%	12.1%
11+	6.5%	3.7%	11.1%	36.4%	17.2%	10.1%
Conventional Purchase Frequency						
0	17.4%	9.3%	0.0%	27.3%	13.8%	13.4%
1	26.1%	14.8%	11.1%	9.1%	17.2%	18.1%
2	17.4%	18.5%	33.3%	9.1%	20.7%	18.8%
3	17.4%	13.0%	11.1%	0.0%	6.9%	12.1%
4	4.3%	13.0%	0.0%	9.1%	10.3%	8.7%
5-10	13.0%	20.4%	33.3%	0.0%	13.8%	16.1%
11+	4.3%	11.1%	11.1%	45.5%	17.2%	12.8%

Participants were asked which type of hotel website they used most often (Table 2). The majority of respondents, 67.1%, used GDS based websites or Chain websites while only 6% of respondents claimed to have used reverse auction sites.

General demographic information about the respondents was also gathered. The respondents' ages were distributed evenly across the range as shown in Figure 3. Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents, 88%, had at least some college. The income levels of the respondents described in Table 3 were distributed evenly with the exception of incomes of less than \$20,000. This category represented less than ten percent of the respondents. As Table 3 shows, the respondents were approximately half female and half male. Table 3 also indicates that over seventy percent of the respondents were Caucasian. Table 4 reveals that almost two-thirds of the respondents usually travel for pleasure. Finally, less than half of the respondents reported that they travel fewer than five times a year while the majority of the respondents indicated that they traveled six or more times annually (Table 4).

INFERENCE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The null hypothesis was that there was no link between customer preferences and the five types of web sites. Therefore; the alternate hypothesis was that there was a link between customer preferences and the five types of web sites. The researcher selected a significance level of 0.10.

Table 2: Type of web site used most often to research and/or purchase hotel rooms.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
GDS Websites	46	30.9	30.9
Chain Websites	54	36.2	67.1
Hotel only Websites	9	6.0	73.2
Reverse Auction Websites	11	7.4	80.5
Independent hotel Websites	29	19.5	100.0
Total	149	100.0	



Figure 3: Age of respondents to online survey instrument

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Website type used						
	GDS Websites	Chain Websites	Hotel only Websites	Reverse Auction Websites	Independent Hotel Websites	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Educational Level						
Some High School	6.5%	1.9%	11.1%	9.1%	10.3%	6.0%
High School	8.7%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	6.0%
Some College	17.4%	31.5%	11.1%	18.2%	20.7%	22.8%
College Degree	21.7%	27.8%	33.3%	27.3%	37.9%	28.2%
Post Graduate Work	17.4%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	13.8%	14.1%
Graduate Degree	28.3%	14.8%	44.4%	45.5%	13.8%	22.8%
Income						
< \$20,000	8.7%	5.6%	44.4%	0.0%	10.3%	9.4%
\$20,000 to \$39,999	17.4%	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%	13.8%	16.8%
\$40,000 to \$59,999	23.9%	24.1%	0.0%	0.0%	31.0%	22.1%
\$60,000 to \$79,999	19.6%	25.9%	11.1%	36.4%	13.8%	21.5%
> \$80,000	30.4%	22.2%	33.3%	63.6%	31.0%	30.2%
Gender						
Male	60.9%	53.7%	55.6%	36.4%	44.8%	53.0%
Female	39.1%	46.3%	44.4%	63.6%	55.2%	47.0%
Ethnicity						
Caucasion	76.1%	88.9%	55.6%	54.5%	72.4%	77.2%
African-American	6.5%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%
Asian-American	6.5%	5.6%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	4.7%
Hispanic	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	1.3%
Native American/ Eskimo	0.0%	1.9%	11.1%	18.2%	6.9%	4.0%
Other	8.7%	1.9%	33.3%	18.2%	13.8%	9.4%

Table 4: Frequency of and reason for travel.

Website type used						
	GDS Websites	Chain Websites	Hotel only Websites	Reverse Auction Websites	Independent Hotel Websites	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Usual Travel Reason						
Business	32.6%	40.7%	22.2%	9.1%	37.9%	34.2%
Pleasure	67.4%	59.3%	77.8%	90.9%	62.1%	65.8%
Trip(s) taken per year						
<5	50.0%	44.4%	44.4%	27.3%	27.6%	41.6%
6 -10	32.6%	35.2%	44.4%	9.1%	37.9%	33.6%
>10	17.4%	20.4%	11.1%	63.6%	34.5%	24.8%

CHI SQUARE ANALYSIS

The Null Hypothesis in the Chi Square procedure is that there is no association between the type of web site that the respondents used and whether a particular feature or function of that web site would affect their purchasing decision. Further, the alternative hypothesis is that there is an association between the type of web site used by respondents and whether a particular feature or function of that web site would affect their purchasing decision. Interestingly, only five of the features and functions allowed for the rejection of the null hypothesis with a p-value of less than 0.1 and therefore revealed an association with the type of web site used by respondents. Those features and functions are (1) the presence of a map to the hotel, (2) listing of the hotel's room rates, (3) download time of the first page of the website, (4) overall download time, and (5) assurance of a secure transaction.

Respondents were asked if the presence of a map to the hotel would affect their purchasing decision. The Chi Square analysis for this question resulted in a p-value of 0.016. With an established significance level of 0.1, the null hypothesis that there is no association between the type of website used and the consumer preference for this feature was rejected. Table 5 shows that hotel only reservation site users and independent hotel site users seemed to have their purchasing decisions affected less often by the presence of a map to the hotel.

Participants also responded about the affect of a listing of room rates on purchasing decisions. The Chi Square p-value for this question's data was

Table 5: Chi Square Frequencies; impact of the presence of maps to the hotel on online purchasing decision.

Website user type	Response frequency type	Response	
		Yes	No
GDS Websites	Count	27.0	19.0
	Expected Count	22.2	23.8
Chain Websites	Count	28.0	26.0
	Expected Count	26.1	27.9
Hotel only Websites	Count	4.0	5.0
	Expected Count	4.3	4.7
Reverse Auction Websites	Count	7.0	4.0
	Expected Count	5.3	5.7
Independent hotel Websites	Count	6.0	23.0
	Expected Count	14.0	15.0
Totals	Count	72.0	77.0
	Expected Count	72.0	77.0

0.007. Again, the null hypothesis is rejected. Table 6 shows that GDS based website users and Chain website users appear to have their purchasing decisions affected more often by the listing of a hotel's room rates.

Respondents were asked if a short download time on the first page of a web site would impact their purchase decision. The Chi Square analysis of this question resulted in a p-value of 0.063. The null hypothesis was rejected and the results are highlighted in Table 7. Reverse auction site users and independent hotel website users purchasing decisions were less often affected by the download time of the first page of the website.

The next feature queried of respondents was if a short download time would impact their purchase decision. The Chi Square analysis of this question resulted in a p-value of 0.002. Table 8 shows that GDS based website users and Chain website users seemed to have their purchasing decisions more often affected by the overall download time of the website.

Respondents indicated the impact of the availability of a secure transaction on their purchase decision. The Chi Square analysis of this question resulted in a p-value of 0.012. Table 9 shows that the availability of a secure transaction seemed to affect the purchasing decisions of GDS based website users and Chain website users more often.

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA)

The null hypothesis for the Likert response type questions was that there is no difference in the reported importance of a website's features and functions

Table 6: Chi Square Frequencies; impact of the presence of listings of room rates on online purchasing decision.

Website user type	Response frequency type	Response	
		Yes	No
GDS Websites	Count	42	4
	Expected Count	37.7	8.3
Chain Websites	Count	47	7
	Expected Count	44.2	9.8
Hotel only Websites	Count	5	4
	Expected Count	7.4	1.6
Reverse Auction Websites	Count	6	5
	Expected Count	9.0	2.0
Independent hotel Websites	Count	22	7
	Expected Count	23.7	5.3
Total	Count	122	27
	Expected Count	122.0	27.0

Table 7: Chi Square Frequencies; impact of a short download time for the first page of the web site on online purchasing decision.

Website user type	Response frequency type	Response	
		Yes	No
GDS Websites	Count	25	21
	Expected Count	21.9	24.1
Chain Websites	Count	30	24
	Expected Count	25.7	28.3
Hotel only Websites	Count	5	4
	Expected Count	4.3	4.7
Reverse Auction Websites	Count	3	8
	Expected Count	5.2	5.8
Independent hotel Websites	Count	8	21
	Expected Count	13.8	15.2
Total	Count	71	78
	Expected Count	71.0	78.0

Table 8: Chi Square Frequencies; impact of a short download time on online purchasing decision.

Website user type	Response frequency type	Response	
		Yes	No
GDS Websites	Count	27.0	19.0
	Expected Count	21.0	25.0
Chain Websites	Count	30.0	24.0
	Expected Count	24.6	29.4
Hotel only Websites	Count	1.0	8.0
	Expected Count	4.1	4.9
Reverse Auction Websites	Count	2.0	9.0
	Expected Count	5.0	6.0
Independent hotel Websites	Count	8.0	21.0
	Expected Count	13.2	15.8
Totals	Count	68.0	81.0
	Expected Count	68.0	81.0

Table 9: Chi Square Frequencies; impact of some assurance of a secure transaction on online purchasing decision.

Website user type	Response frequency type	Response	
		Yes	No
GDS Websites	Count	43.0	3.0
	Expected Count	37.4	8.6
Chain Websites	Count	44.0	10.0
	Expected Count	43.9	10.1
Hotel only Websites	Count	8.0	1.0
	Expected Count	7.3	1.7
Reverse Auction Websites	Count	6.0	5.0
	Expected Count	8.9	2.1
Independent hotel Websites	Count	20.0	9.0
	Expected Count	23.6	5.4
Total	Count	121.0	28.0
	Expected Count	121.0	28.0

among the five types of websites respondents used most often. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis stated that there is a difference in the reported importance of a website's features and functions among the five types of websites respondents used most often.

As shown in Table 10, only three of the features and functions rejected the null hypothesis with a p-value of less than 0.1 and therefore revealed differences in the reported importance of a website's features and functions among the five types of websites respondents used most often. Those features and functions were a listing of room/occupancy tax rates, the presence of animated pictures of the hotel, and the length of time required to book a room online.

When a one way analysis of variance indicated a significant difference between groups, a post hoc test is required to detail precisely where the differences were. The least significant differences test was used as the post hoc evaluation tool for this study (Table 11). GDS based website users indicated a listing of the taxes was less important than did reverse auction site users or independent hotel website users. Chain hotel website users indicated tax rate listings were more important than did 3rd party website users. Finally, third party website users indicated that tax listings were less important than did reverse auction website users or independent hotel website users.

Reverse auction website users indicated animated pictures were more important than did GDS based website users, Chain website users or third party website users. Independent hotel website users indicated the animated

Table 10: One way analysis of variance (ANOVA); importance of the respective feature/ function to the consumer.

Feature/ Function	Mean	F value	Significance
Ability to book room online	3.45	.927	.450
Still pictures of the outside of the hotel	3.73	1.245	.294
Still pictures of the hotel lobby	3.30	1.982	.100
Still pictures of hotel rooms	3.76	.425	.791
Maps to the hotel	3.64	1.208	.310
Written direction to the hotel	3.54	.216	.929
Listings of local attractions	3.54	1.220	.305
Listing of hotel amenities	3.76	1.308	.270
Listing of hotel features	3.85	.097	.983
Listing of room types	3.75	1.977	.101
Listing of room rates	4.24	.522	.720
Listing of room availability	3.97	.461	.764
Listing of room/ occupancy taxes	3.23	2.124*	.081*
Listing of hotel phone number	4.07	1.204	.312
Listing of an e-mail address	3.60	.396	.811
Listing of an e-mail address	3.56	.248	.910
Printable booking confirmation	4.01	.395	.812
Rewards and incentives	3.29	.555	.696
Animated pictures	2.50	2.336*	.058*
Animation	2.36	.999	.411
Short download time; first page	3.89	1.333	.261
Short download time	3.86	.200	.938
Secure transactions	4.23	1.168	.327
Length of time to book	2.52	2.323*	.059*

*Significant at the 0.10 level

Table 11: Consumer ratings of importance of various functions/ features of hotel websites.

	GDS Websites	Chain Websites	Hotel only Websites	Reverse Auction Websites	Independent Hotel Websites
Listing of room /occupancy tax rates ^e	2.93 ^{ab}	3.33 ^{ac}	2.56 ^b	3.64 ^c	3.55 ^c
Animated pictures of the hotel ^e	2.33 ^a	2.35 ^a	2.11 ^{ab}	3.27 ^c	2.90 ^{bc}
Length of time it should take to book a room online ^f	2.20 ^{ac}	2.56 ^{acd}	2.44 ^{abcd}	3.18 ^b	2.72 ^{bd}

^{abcd} Means followed by different letters within rows differ at p<0.1.

^eScale: 1=Very Unimportant, 2=Unimportant, 3=Neutral, 4=Important, 5=Very Important

^fScale: 1="<2 minutes", 2="2-4 minutes", 3="4-6 minutes", 4="6-8 minutes", 5=">8 Minutes"

pictures were more important than did GDS based website users or chain website users. Reverse Auction website users indicated the importance of the amount of time needed to book a room higher than did either GDS based website users or Chain based website users. Finally, Independent hotel website users indicated the time needed to book a room higher in importance than did GDS based website users.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The results of the inferential statistical analysis of the responses showed that very few of the questions presented before the respondents exhibited ties between the question's content and the type of website primarily used to research or book hotel rooms. While not yielding statistically significant differences, this finding is still significant. This would suggest that consumer preferences stay fairly consistent across the various types of websites used to book hotel rooms. The exceptions being those identified by the analysis in the prior chapter.

In the Chi Square analysis, it was determined that users of GDS and chain sites rated the listing of room rates as affecting the purchase decisions more often than expected. This could be related to the specific consumers that would use these sites. Unlike the reverse auction sites, that most definitely will not list room rates, or many independent hotel sites such as bed and breakfast properties that may want the potential consumer to call to find out about rates, most consumers expect to find rates on a hotel's website. They are, in many cases, researching comparable hotels with rate being a primary factor in the comparison.

Another finding of the Chi Square analysis was that the consumers using reverse auction and independent hotel sites said that the download time of the

first page of the site affected their decision to purchase less frequently than expected. Download time is a function of several variables, primarily file size of the page, connection speed and bandwidth of the user and connection speed and bandwidth of the site being accessed. Many customers may realize that the independent hotel sites may not be able to afford higher quality servers with better speeds and bandwidths. In light of that potential realization, these customers may be more patient in waiting for these sites to download. Following that logic, customers that are using reverse auction sites are bargain shoppers and also realize that they are required to wait for an hour or more before their bid is acted upon. That patience may also translate into waiting for the initial page to download and open for these sites too.

In contrast to the above statements, users of global distribution system and chain operated websites stated that the overall download time affected their purchasing decision more often than expected. This stark difference could be attributed to the idea that these customers, while still probably price conscious, are less so than the reverse auction site users. In other words, these consumers are willing to pay a little more for the room and are expecting better services for that price.

When considering secure transactions, users of global distribution system and chain operated sites stated more often than expected that their purchasing decision would be affected by positive assurance that their transactions would be secure. It would seem as if all users would want reasonable assurance of a secure transaction. Therefore, the author was not surprised that none of the

website type users indicated that their purchasing decisions would be affected less often than expected.

Additional analysis revealed that users of global distribution system sites stated that a listing of applicable room and occupancy tax rates was less important to them than users of either reverse auction or independent hotel sites indicated. The same statement is true about third party reservation users. They viewed the listing of applicable taxes as less important as compared to users of either reverse auction or independent hotel sites. It is axiomatic that users of reverse auction sites are price conscious. It is a logical deduction to say that those users would then be quite concerned about taxes applicable to their stay, especially when some municipalities charge different tax rates dependent upon whether the hotel is located in a city, county or even the type of hotel (Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, 2003). This variability could, from the consumer's standpoint, make the lower rated hotel room more expensive than one with a higher rental rate because of differing tax rates and defeat the purpose of looking for a less expensive room.

When looking at the issue of animated pictures, users of reverse auction sites considered the presence of animated pictures of the hotel more important than users of global distribution system sites, chain operated sites or third party reservation sites. Additionally, independent hotel site users viewed the presence of animated pictures to be more important than did global distribution system or chain operated site users. Animated pictures can provide individuals with a more rich feeling of a location than still pictures can. It would then seem as if most

website users would want animated pictures. However; animated pictures are also much larger files than still pictures and take longer to download. All of the reverse auction site users stated that they earned \$60,000 or more annually and 75.8% of independent hotel website users responded that they earned \$40,000 or more annually. Additionally, 72.8% of reverse auction website users stated they had at least a college degree and 65.5% of independent hotel website users responded likewise. With high levels of education and income, the reverse auction and independent hotel website users may have high speed Internet access that alleviates the issue of longer download time for animated pictures.

Since reverse auction website users must wait for their bid on a room rate to be answered, it would be expected that users would rate time required to book a room lower in importance than other users. In fact, reverse auction site users see the length of time required to book a room as more important than global distribution system users or chain operated website users. At first glance, this is opposite of what one would expect. The reverse auction site users may be rating this factor higher in importance because they are reflecting their frustration in having to wait for bid returns. They may be expressing their desire for shorter booking times.

Independent hotel site users also view time to book a room as more important than global distribution system users do. This may also be an expression of a desire for shorter booking times. Many of these independent hotel sites do not even have the capability to book a room online. This greatly increases the time to book the room and may be the reason for this result.

SUMMARY

As stated earlier, most of the questions asked of consumers yielded no real associations or differences with respect to the type of website the consumer uses. This would indicate that most of the rules associated with a successful hotel booking website should be applicable to most any other hotel website, regardless of the type of website. Successful attributes for hotel websites will need to be identified through additional research. Using this framework, website designers should be able to design successful websites for hotel companies based upon successful attributes of other hotel booking websites. This concept is subject to the few exceptions discussed above regarding specific areas. Further studies should take place to confirm or deny the results of this research.

LIMITATIONS

In completing this research, the author encountered several challenges. This was to be expected in any endeavor, but there are several that bear mentioning in this text. All of these challenges related to the technologies involved. Sending a mass e-mailing requesting that people fill out an online survey requires three things, a list of e-mail addresses, a software program to send the e-mails, and finally a mechanism for collecting the response data. A list of e-mail addresses to send the e-mails must be obtained. This is usually done in one of two ways. Some vendors sell e-mail lists and others will send the e-mail to their list. The latter is usually much more expensive than the former

because those vendors provide the e-mail service as well. In an attempt to minimize costs, an e-mail list was purchased.

Using a purchased e-mail list meant that the researcher had to send out the e-mails from the University's e-mail server. The software system used to send the e-mails overloaded and temporarily shut down the University's e-mail server. In the resulting confusion, two main things happened. One, of the e-mails that had been sent, it became impossible to pinpoint the exact number of those e-mails that had been lost in the queue while waiting to be sent out when the server shut down. Secondly, the researcher's web site that contained the electronic survey instrument was shut down since it was linked to the e-mails being sent out. Consequently, of the e-mails that did reach the intended recipients, an undetermined number of potential respondents were unable to access the survey instrument and fill it out. This series of events contributed to the extremely low response rate.

As a result of using the University's computing infrastructure for sending out the bulk e-mails and hosting the web based survey, a mechanism had to be developed to collect the data electronically. The web based survey had to be coupled with a program to process the amounts of data being collected via the survey instrument. The researcher enlisted the aid of University staff to write this program code. Extensive time was spent with the information technology staff writing, testing and rewriting this code.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
Delphi Interview form

Questionnaire sheet for Delphi study of online booking consumer opinions

Pre-interview checklist.

Be sure to tell participants.

1. your participation in this study is completely voluntary
2. if you have any questions about your rights as a participant please feel free to contact

Carl Pfaffenberg
1215 W. Cumberland Avenue – 220c JHB
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville TN 37996-1900
(865) 974-6243

or

The Compliance section at (865) 974-3466

3. All individual results from this study will be kept private and anonymous. Only Aggregate findings will be studied and presented. Therefore you are at no risk in participating.
4. Your answering of the following interview questions indicates your voluntary participation in this study.

1. Tell me things that you think are important about a hotel website.

2. Can you tell me things about the online reservation system that are important in your purchasing decision?

Note: The above questions are intended to elicit open ended responses that will reveal certain key words that will be recorded and quantified. Should the responses be limited, the following list of probes would be employed:

1. Graphics or Visual impact of site
2. Navigability or Intuitiveness of site
3. Download time of site
4. Transaction time of site
5. Multimedia features of site
6. Interactivity of site
7. Reward or bonus features of site
8. Security of site
9. Ease of purchase process of site
10. Offer alternative dates, rates, room type on site

APPENDIX B:

Cover sheet for survey instrument; sent as an e-mail to potential respondents

Cover Letter sent to potential respondents

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am e-mailing you because you have indicated interest in travel and online shopping. You have been selected to participate in an online research project about Internet-based hotel reservations. The purpose of this project is to provide the academic community and industry with a better understanding of the consumers' wants and desires in regards to website design for hotels. It is the hope of the people involved with this research that this is the first step to improving service to you through providing your ideas and opinions to industry.

If you would like to participate in this study then please visit the website listed below to fill out the survey. The survey should take only 3-7 minutes to fill out.

<http://web.utk.edu/~jeremy/hotel>

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact

Carl Pfaffenberg

1215 W. Cumberland Avenue - 220c JHB

The University of Tennessee

Knoxville TN 37996-1900

(865) 974-6243

or

The Compliance section at (865) 974-3466 All individual results from this study will be kept private and anonymous. Only aggregate findings will be studied and presented. Therefore you are at no risk in participating.

Thank you for your participation,

Jeremy Burnett

MS Candidate; The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

APPENDIX C:
Online survey instrument

Thank you for filling out this survey. Here are some items for your information before you begin.

1. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary
2. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant please feel free to contact

Carl Pfaffenberg, Ph.D.
1215 W. Cumberland Avenue - 220c JHB
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville TN 37996-1900
(865) 974-6243
cpfaff@utk.edu

Or

The Compliance section at (865) 974-3466

3. All individual results from this study will be kept private and anonymous. Only aggregate findings will be studied and presented. Therefore you are at no risk in participating.

Your filling out of the following survey questions indicates your voluntary participation in this study.

Once again, thank you.

1. How many times have you purchased hotel rooms online in the past year?

0 1 2 3 4 5-10 11+

2. How many times have you researched hotel information on the Internet and then booked the room(s) in another fashion (800 reservation center, travel agent, etc.) in the past year?

0 1 2 3 4 5-10 11+

3. What type of web site do you use most often to research and/or purchase hotel rooms?

The online travel agent that carries hotels, airlines, and rental cars - examples, expedia.com or travelocity.com

Hotel chain web sites - examples, holiday-inn.com, choice-hotels.com or hyatt.com

Online hotel only booking sites - examples, www.inntopia.com or www.worldres.com

Auction type site - example Priceline.com

Independent hotel sites - examples Luxor, Las Vegas or a bed and breakfast

The following questions deal with the importance of the features and functions found on hotel web sites.

4. How important is the ability to book a room online to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

5. Will the ability to book the room online impact your decision to purchase the hotel room?

Yes

No

6. How important are still pictures of the outside of the hotel to you.

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

7. Will the presence of still pictures of the outside of the hotel impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

8. How important are still pictures of the hotel lobby to you.

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

9. Will the presence of still pictures of the hotel lobby impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

10. How important are still pictures of the hotel rooms to you.

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

11. Will the presence of still pictures of the hotel rooms impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

12. How important are maps to the hotel to you.

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

13. Will the presence of maps to the hotel impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

14. How important are written directions to the hotel to you.

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

15. Will the presence of written directions to the hotel impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

16. How important are listings of nearby attractions (parks, restaurants, theatres etc.) to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

17. Will the presence of listings of nearby attractions (parks, restaurants, theatres etc.) impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

18. How important are listings of the hotel's amenities (free continental breakfast, room service, concierge floor etc.) to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

19. Will the presence of listings of the hotel's amenities (free continental breakfast, room service, concierge floor etc.) impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

20. How important are listings of the hotel's features (swimming pool, parking, inside corridors, etc.) to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

21. Will the presence of listings of the hotel's features (swimming pool, parking, inside corridors, etc.) impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

22. How important are listings of the room types to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

23. Will the presence of listings of the room types impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

24. How important are listings of the room rates to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

25. Will the presence of listings of the room rates impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

26. How important is a listing of room availability to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

27. Will the presence of a listing of room availability impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

28. How important is a listing of room/occupancy tax rates to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

29. Will the presence of a listing of room/occupancy tax rates impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

30. How important is a listing of the hotel's phone number and physical address to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

31. Will the presence of a listing hotel's phone number and physical address impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

32. How important is a listing of an e-mail address to contact for questions to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

33. Will the presence of a listing of an e-mail address to contact for questions impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

34. How important is a listing of an e-mail address to contact for questions to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

35. Will the presence of a listing of an e-mail address to contact for questions impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

36. How important is a printable confirmation of the reservation to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

37. Will the presence of a printable confirmation of the reservation impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

38. How important are rewards and incentives to book online (frequent flyer miles, discounts) to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

39. Will the presence of rewards and incentives to book online (frequent flyer miles, discounts) impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

40. How important are animated pictures of the hotel to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

41. Will the presence of animated pictures of the hotel impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

42. How important is animation on the web site to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

43. Will the presence of animation on the web site impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

44. How important is a short download time on the first page of the website to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

45. Will a short download time on the first page of the web site impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

46. How important is a short download time to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

47. Will a short download time impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

48. How important is security for transactions to you?

Very Unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very important

49. Will the appearance of some type of assurance of a secure transaction impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

50. How long should it take to book a room online?

< 2 minutes

2 - 4 minutes

4 - 6 minutes

6- 8 minutes

> 8 minutes

51. Will a short time required to book a room impact your decision to purchase the hotel room online?

Yes

No

The following questions are designed to garner some information about you. Answer only questions that you feel comfortable answering.

52. How old are you?

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56 +

53. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

Some High School

High School

Some College

College Degree (2 or 4 yr)

Post Graduate Work

Graduate Degree

54. What is your annual gross income range?

Less than \$20,000

\$20,000 to \$39,999

\$40,000 to \$59,999

\$60,000 to \$79,999

\$ 80,000 or higher

55. What is your gender?

Male

Female

56. What is your ethnicity?

Caucasian

African-American

Asian-American

Hispanic

Native American/ Eskimo

Other

57. For what reason do you usually travel?

Business

Pleasure

58. How many trips do you take each year? (trips that include at least one overnight stay in a hotel, motel or other commercial lodging facility.)

< 5

6 - 10

> 10

VITA

Jeremy Clayton Burnett was born in Bolivar, TN. He was raised there and graduated from Bolivar Central High in 1990 with honors. Jeremy attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where he received a B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Administration in 1998.

Jeremy accepted a faculty position with Southwest Tennessee Community College in 2000 as Program Chair and Instructor of Hospitality Management and currently serves as the Interim Department Chair of Accountancy, Office Administration, and Career Studies. Additionally, Jeremy is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Recreation, Tourism and Hospitality Management.