Users are DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

HOW CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT IS CHANGING THE FACE OF TOURISM MARKETING
Users are doing it for themselves:
how consumer-generated content is changing
the face of tourism marketing

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This booklet is a summary of the full report Consumer-generated Web-based Tourism Marketing, containing references, methodology and detailed findings from the two phases of the project. This is available for free download from the STCRC website www.crctourism.com.au/bookshop.
Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) is established under the Australian Government’s Cooperative Research Centres Program. STCRC is Australia’s largest dedicated tourism research organisation, with over $187 million invested in tourism research programs, commercialisation and education since 1997. The aim of STCRC research is to underpin the development of a dynamic, internationally competitive and sustainable tourism industry. STCRC is a not-for-profit company owned by its industry, government and university partners.

STCRC falls under the Commonwealth CRC program, which aims to turn Australia’s research and innovations into successful new products, services and technologies, making our industries more efficient, productive and competitive. The program emphasises the importance of collaboration between business and researchers to maximise the benefits of research through an enhanced process of utilisation, commercialisation and technology transfer.

STCRC’s objectives are to enhance:
- the contribution of long-term scientific and technological research and innovation to Australia’s sustainable economic and social development
- the transfer of research outputs into outcomes of economic, environmental or social benefit to Australia
- the value of graduate researchers to Australia
- collaboration among researchers, between researchers and industry or other users
- efficiency in the use of intellectual and other research outcomes.
Overview

About the research
With the rising popularity of sites that contain content submitted by real travellers (e.g. TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, and social networking sites such as MySpace and YouTube), the ways that travellers search for, view and evaluate travel information is potentially changing.

This study investigated how travel-related User-Generated Content (UGC) websites (also known as Web 2.0 sites) were being used by consumers. The study captured traveller perceptions with respect to how such sites impacted on their information search and travel behaviour.

Understanding this impact on behaviour can help tourism and destination marketers develop more effective e-business strategies and relationships with their existing and potential customers.

What the research covered
The study examined:
• what form travel websites are taking
• how they are incorporating UGC content
• what specific UCG sites online consumers consider and how they use them
• how useful they find these sites compared to other travel information sources
• the influence UCG travel sites have on travel behaviour
• the implications of consumers’ use of these sites for the marketing of tourism services and destinations.

Methodology
The research for this project consisted of a website analysis and an online survey of users. Phase one involved the analysis of 30 tourism and related websites (based on a search of key travel sites containing Web 2.0 features that were suggested by Tourism NSW), representing a ‘snapshot in time’ of travel-related websites.
Phase two involved a 10 minute online survey undertaken in December 2007. A link to the survey was included in an email invitation to Tourism NSW’s database of email subscribers, with an incentive prize included to encourage responses. The response rate was around 12% and there were 12,544 responses usable for analysis.

**Who will be interested in the research**
Tourism operators, state tourism websites, destination marketing organisations, accommodation providers and online content providers.

**How to use the research**
This research can be used to inform new strategies and actions that can be potentially translated into practical results for organisations that might adopt the findings. It is a particularly useful tool for:
- understanding changes in consumer behaviour relating to research and trip planning
- identifying the most popular sources of UGC and tracking them
- devising or expanding online marketing strategies for attractions, destinations and accommodation
- successfully incorporating UGC into existing websites
- developing awareness of the impact of UGC being posted on key sites.
Snapshot of Key Findings

Tourism operators and destination marketing organisations cannot ignore the rising popularity of websites containing UGC or the role that they may play in the travel planning behaviour of consumers. These sites can provide information that influences booking plans and can cause travellers to alter their travel plans.

The study found that:

• The most common UGC features are the ability to book flights, accommodation and rental cars.

• There are two major types of UGC—those made through general 'blogs' and those made via reviews of particular travel products.

• The majority of consumer reviews were for accommodation, though some reviews were also for attractions or destinations as a whole.

• Although these sites are rising in popularity, they are not yet considered to be as credible or trustworthy as existing sources of travel information (such as state tourism websites) but are an additional source of information.

• Travellers prefer websites that allow them to enter ratings (up to 5 stars) for individual travel experiences. These are typically well known, have more features and usually only allow UGC reviews rather than general blog comments.

• Many consider that existing travel sites, including state tourism websites, should incorporate UGC features.

• However, any attempt to integrate UGC features into existing websites should be done with the concerns of travellers in mind. Contributors should be asked to provide some profile information to enable readers to make informed decisions about how relevant postings are to their own situations.

• All travel operators and tourism organisations involved in marketing destinations and products need to be aware of what is being said about them on the prominent UGC sites.

• However, they must not attempt to manipulate content or embellish postings by masquerading as real travellers. Many users are astute enough to see through these tactics and form negative opinions about organisations that tamper with UGC.
About User–Generated Content

Web 2.0
The term ‘Web 2.0’ refers to the second generation of web-based services that have gained massive popularity by letting people collaborate and share information online in previously unavailable ways. With Web 2.0 any individual can post their own content, opinions, videos, audio or imagery to the web for other users to see and respond to. Since Web 2.0 has begun to change the way consumers engage with information on the Internet, the terms ‘User-Generated Content’ (UGC) or Consumer-Generated Media (CGM) are commonly used to highlight the pivotal role that individual consumers have in submitting, reviewing and responding to online content. Another common term is ‘social networking’.

Participants in the online survey were given the following definition of UGC:

Figure 1: Definition of UGC for survey participants

What is User-Generated Content?
A growing number of websites are incorporating features which enable the user, such as you, to contribute their own content enabling people to communicate about special interest topics or products or services through the Internet. Such content is commonly referred to as ‘user-generated content’. In relation to travel and tourism, some examples of user-generated content include:

- ordinary people like yourself sharing their opinions about travel destinations, attractions and accommodation properties through blogs (weblogs) or other discussion forums
- travellers submitting photos or videos to the Internet to share their travel experiences with other online users (including family, friends or total strangers who may be interested)
- consumers posting reviews of accommodation properties to sites such as tripadvisor.com
- people using social networking sites such as MySpace.com, facebook.com or YouTube.com to share travel information.

Adoption of these sites is rapidly increasing. The proportion of consumers worldwide who are now ‘posting content’ to the Internet has grown rapidly, with approximately 24% submitting photos in 2006 and over 7% keeping a personal blog.
Users are doing it for themselves

About User-Generated Content

Table 1: Key types of Web 2.0 UGC sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Web 2.0</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs (Weblogs)</td>
<td>Web pages that contain newsgroup-type entries, involving text, images and links to other ‘blogs’ in a chronological order with the newest posting listed first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikis</td>
<td>Websites that allow the user to easily add, remove, edit and/or change its content to suit their individual preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>The blogging of audio content (i.e. MP3 format) which is accessed on a user-demand basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
<td>Spaces such as MySpace and YouTube, that allow a group of friends, peers or like minded individuals to communicate, chat and share information on topics of interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Travel 2.0: UGC in the tourism context

When translated into the travel and tourism content, Web 2.0 is commonly referred to as Travel 2.0. A Travel 2.0 site allows users to contribute words, images, reviews and travelogues.

The use of online sources of information in the travel planning process is now well entrenched. Over 200 million travel related searches are carried out each month on the Internet and some 95% of Internet users rely on information from the web as part of their travel information search process. But there has been limited research on the information search process and decision making behaviour related to online vacation planning.

The travel industry has had a varied response to the emergence of UGC. While travellers appear to be embracing the concept, travel industry members are still unsure of how to respond. However, given the critical role that the Internet now plays in the information search stage of the itinerary planning process, interest in integrating user content into travel sites is growing.
In a comprehensive study of online travel planning, researchers reported that consumers seek information related to 10 key sub-decisions: travel partners, the destination, expenditure required, activities, travel dates, attractions to visit, transportation providers, length of trip, rest stops and food stops (Pan & Fesenmaier 2006).

Given that UGC sites are effectively one type of Internet source that travellers can be influenced by, it is likely that the types of impacts these sites have on the consumer are similar in scope to the effect of more traditional travel sites. Ultimately UGC sites have the potential to influence the viewers’ decisions in any of these areas.

**How UGC influences behaviour**

Marketers now have much less control over what messages reach consumers about their products. A US-based report by iProspect and Jupiter Research found that approximately one-third of consumers were influenced by social content sites when making purchase decisions. While these sites may not necessarily make consumers decide to purchase, they can have an impact on a company’s reputation. The degree of integrity, expertise and honesty related to the content that is posted online has an important impact on the level of influence of UGC on the consumer.

Based on the various studies done to date, UGC can provide the following benefits to businesses:

- increase the likelihood of consumers having a good opinion of a business
- improving the search engine ranking of websites that contain UGC
- enhancing cross selling opportunities for different products/services
- providing the ability to convert consumers from ‘observers’ to ‘purchasers’ due to the trustworthiness of consumer reviews
- increasing consumer loyalty to websites that contain UGC to the ongoing development of content and dialogue on key issues
- providing relevant and up to date consumer feedback on products and services.

*Source: Adapted from Donnelly (2006); Universal McCann (2006)*
Web 2.0 and the Travel Industry

What form travel websites are taking
There is a diverse range of sites emerging that contain user-generated content related to travel and tourism. These range from generic social networking sites such as MySpace.com which contain travel sections through to individual blogs that have been created by avid travellers to showcase destination reviews globally.

Table 2 contains a sample of well known Web 2.0 travel sites, including those analysed in this study. The researchers categorised these sites as either Commercial (providing consumer the ability to make up to 5 star ratings), Commercial (with no ratings available) or Non-commercial.

Table 2: A sample of popular Web 2.0 Travel sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name (Address)</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMERCIAL SITES – 5 STAR RATINGS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip Advisor (<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epic Trip (<a href="http://www.epictrip.com">www.epictrip.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IgoUgo (<a href="http://www.igougo.com">www.igougo.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely Planet’s Bluelist (<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist">www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orbitz (<a href="http://www.orbitzinsider.com">www.orbitzinsider.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapsack (<a href="http://www.mapsack">www.mapsack</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Tourist (<a href="http://www.virtualtourist.com">www.virtualtourist.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip Up (<a href="http://www.tripup.com">www.tripup.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelocity (<a href="http://www.travelocity.com">www.travelocity.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedia (<a href="http://www.expedia.com/destinations">www.expedia.com/destinations</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo Travel (travel.yahoo.com)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TravBuddy (<a href="http://www.travbuddy.com">www.travbuddy.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STA Travel Blogs (<a href="http://www.statraveljournals.com)">www.statraveljournals.com)</a></td>
<td>Comm – 5 star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMERCIAL SITES – NO RATINGS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr Travel (<a href="http://www.flickr.com/travel">www.flickr.com/travel</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gusto (<a href="http://www.gusto.com">www.gusto.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelistic (<a href="http://www.travelistic.com">www.travelistic.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lobby (<a href="http://www.thelobby.com">www.thelobby.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayak (<a href="http://www.kayak.com">www.kayak.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit Victoria (<a href="http://www.visitvictoria.com">www.visitvictoria.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely Planet TV (<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.tv">www.lonelyplanet.tv</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmap (<a href="http://www.schmap.com">www.schmap.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip Hub (<a href="http://www.triphub.com">www.triphub.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del.icio.us (<a href="http://www.del.icio.us.com">www.del.icio.us.com</a>)</td>
<td>Comm – No rating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON-COMMERCIAL SITES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This Place I Know (<a href="http://www.thisplaceiknow.com">www.thisplaceiknow.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikitravel (<a href="http://www.wikitravel.com">www.wikitravel.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Blog (<a href="http://www.travelblog.com">www.travelblog.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Rants (<a href="http://www.travelrants.com">www.travelrants.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips Log (<a href="http://www.tripslog.com">www.tripslog.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube Travel (<a href="http://www.youtube.com/travel">www.youtube.com/travel</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Carious (<a href="http://www.vcarious.com">www.vcarious.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World 66 (<a href="http://www.world66.com">www.world66.com</a>)</td>
<td>Non-commercial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main way people found out about travel UGC sites was through Google (76%), ‘by accident’ while looking for travel information online (45%) or by referral from family or friends (33%).
How travel websites are incorporating UGC

Currently most UGC online related to travel tends to revolve around hotel and accommodation booking sites such as tripadvisor.com, though an increasing amount is appearing about destinations.

Other providers (travel agencies, hotel chains, airlines and travel critics) are beginning to embrace UGC. The major UGC players in the online travel market are targeting travellers who are no longer interested in (or trusting of) more traditional travel information sources such as travel guides.

Some providers are now incorporating UGC into their own web strategies to better engage with travellers and potential guests.

The study found two major types of UGC comments being made: those through a general ‘blog’ (which were more common overall) and those made via reviews of particular travel products (which were more common in commercial 5 star websites).

Most of the comments involved expressing an opinion and updating others on events or activities. Most of the review comments fell into the categories of ‘updating others’ and ‘expressing opinions’ as with general UGC blog comments. Overall, the commercial 5 star websites exerted more control over how UGC content could be entered, usually by a review.

Figure 2: Adoption of UGC by travel providers

- Foders has introduced UGC content to its online travel guides, enabling real hotel users to add commentary along side its usual travel writers.
- Frommers has established its site realtravel.com to combine information from travel industry experts with real content from real travellers.
- Starwood Hotels is promoting itself through ‘Second Life’, which is an online community selling ‘virtual land to virtual residents’.
- STA Travel has established an area in its website where travellers can communicate through postings, reviews, sharing of images and video content.
- Avis has set up its own blog site www.wetryharder.co.uk in the UK market.
- Tourism British Columbia encouraged staff to initiate blogging on the state’s tourism website and later expanded this to accommodate independent reviews posted by individual travellers. Operators have noted increased visitation, credibility and loyalty.
UCG sites consumers consider and how they use them

Almost half the participants in the research had visited some form of site containing UGC and around one-third had used UGC sites to help search for information about travel destinations and accommodation options. The results of the survey suggest that travellers are accessing a wide-ranging selection of sites that contain UGC as part of their trip planning process. UGC sites are mainly used when a destination has been chosen and the traveller is searching for accommodation options or trying to narrow down the choice of destinations.

While the most prominent sites appear to be the popular travel sites such as Trip Advisor and Lonely Planet, the number of UGC sites being used by travellers is large. Existing UGC users appear to rely on these types of sites predominantly to search for information about travel destinations and accommodation options, so it’s not surprising that other popular sites used by participants in this research included WotIf.com and LastMinute.com. Of particular interest is the relatively lower reliance on social networking sites such as MySpace, YouTube and Flickr. While some 45% of study participants had used these sites, many did not consider them particularly useful compared to specialist travel sites.

How useful do consumers find these sites?

While UGC sites are being reviewed and considered by a large proportion of travellers during their trip planning process, they are not necessarily considered as the most trustworthy or useful source of travel information. A comparison of the relative levels of trust held between various sources of information shows that non-UGC sites, such as state tourism websites or airline sites, are considered more trustworthy than UGC, followed by specialist travel sites (many of which do contain UGC) such as Trip Advisor and Lonely Planet. Most of the sites considered more useful were commercial 5 star websites where the UGC comments tended to be a review rather than part of a general blog.

The popular social networking sites such as MySpace, YouTube and Flickr are considered less trustworthy in terms of the information provided by people on these sites about travel destinations and products. It appears that the ‘social’ nature of these sites is recognised by most users and the information on them is not given as much consideration as other sources when making final travel decisions. Similarly, comments made by people on pure blogs which aren’t specialist travel sites, are not trusted by most people. These sites are more commonly used by travellers to communicate and share stories amongst a network of known friends and peers, rather than being considered as credible sources of travel information by the average consumer.
Figure 3: Trust in UGC

- Non UGC sites such as Qantas and Tourism NSW recorded the highest agreement that they were honest and truthful.
- Lonely Planet, Trip Advisor and Explore Australia were also highly rated in terms of being trustworthy.
- People were less trusting of the social networking sites Facebook, MySpace and YouTube.
- Social networking sites were also held in lower regard when compared to other travel UGC sites and/or state tourism websites.

While information provided by state tourism websites is clearly considered the most important and reliable source of online travel information, participants in this study felt it was useful when travel operators responded to UGC posted online. Similarly, most people felt that existing state tourism websites could be enhanced by incorporating functions to allow real travellers to contribute UGC to them.

More than 80% of respondents also reported that they preferred consumer reviews over a hotel provider’s description of themselves. Interestingly, however, almost 60% of respondents indicated that they considered it favourable when a travel supplier responded to comments made on TripAdvisor.com.

The influence of UCG sites on travel behaviour

Sites containing UGC are perceived as being useful by people who use them. More than half of the study’s participants suggested that they would factor in the influence of UGC when making their final decision about where to visit during a trip. Less than a third of travellers, however, would actually change their existing travel plans because of the influence of something they read via UGC.

It appears that information obtained via UGC is generally used by travellers after they have already chosen what destination they will visit, and when they are in the process of searching for accommodation. While some users are considering UGC at the stage when they are trying to choose a final destination out of their short-listed options, most are using UGC to assist with accommodation selection.
Figure 4: Impact of UGC on consumer behaviour

- UGC is becoming a powerful ‘conversion’ tool as it reassures travellers about their travel choices.
- 15% of respondents always use UGC sites when travelling, while 64% occasionally use them.
- Some 30% of respondents state UGC sites are ‘very influential’ when booking online travel, a further 50% say they have ‘certain influence’ and 20% do not find them useful at all.
- UGC sites are generally being used once the travel search process has been narrowed down.
- In an online survey of more than 800 travellers by Nielsen/Net Ratings, more than half the respondents indicated that user-generated reviews provided on sites such as TripAdvisor.com were the most reliable source of travel information.
- According to IgoUgo the integration of user-generated content into travel websites has been found to increase booking conversions by 10%.
- TripAdvisor is the most popular UGC sites for travellers.

Overall, the degree of influence that UGC sites appear to be having on prospective travellers appears to vary depending on how much credibility and trust they place in the content which is posted by individuals to these sites.

**Authenticity on UGC sites**

One of the most contentious issues surrounding the impact of UGC sites on consumer behaviour is the extent to which consumers actually trust the information about products and services that is posted on these sites. Given that is not always easy to identify and assess the profile of the person who has posted information on blogs and other social networking sites, the reader cannot easily gauge the credibility of the information provided.

In the early days of Internet chat rooms and recommendation sites, marketers responded to this by advocating that firms could contribute successfully to these sites by disguising themselves as real consumers. However, more recent thinking suggests that faking the identity of user-generated content is an unwise strategy due to the loss of trust and credibility that results.
One of the important issues is ‘who’ should be responsible for driving user-generated content sites. At one end of the spectrum, businesses can establish their own blogs or other UGC sites and encourage consumers to contribute to them. At the other end, the establishment of UGC sites can be left to independent third parties who are entirely removed from the products, services and businesses that are discussed.

An experimental survey of 490 online consumers found that the use of online recommendations greatly influenced the consumer’s product choice, but there was no difference in the level of trustworthiness given to recommendation sites that were hosted on non-commercial third party sites compared to commercially driven sites. This suggests that it is the degree of integrity, expertise and honesty related to the content posted online that will determine whether or not UGC influences the consumer, rather than who actually initiates and operates the site (Senecal & Nantel 2004).

With the emergence of UGC, marketers will need to adopt a substantially different approach to their online marketing strategies, resisting the temptation to try and control the consumer dialogue, and instead facilitating ways that travellers can share their stories with others. Essentially if brands, destinations or any other type of business try to control what consumers are saying, it is likely to have a negative effect on the consumer’s response.

**Design features of successful UGC websites**

Just as there has been little research into the impact of Web 2.0 sites on traveller decision-making, so is there minimal research on the technical and functional design effectiveness of these sites. While the study did not specifically analyse the design features of the 30 selected sites, it is useful for tourism marketers to be aware of the importance of website usability if they intend to develop their online marketing strategies and include UGC.

With their high degree of user interactivity, UGC sites potentially bring a new design dimension to online user behaviour and website use. Arguably, the website design features of such sites, with their focus on user-generated content, should be highly usable. Usable websites are easy to learn, allow tasks to easily be remembered, are intuitive and promote efficient use of the web space. There are noted benefits from making websites as usable as possible, coming from the improved visitor experience. The usability website features used in this study are noted in Table 3.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usability Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No splash page</td>
<td>The website splash page as a visual design feature purely used for embellishing the look of the site should not be used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No frames</td>
<td>Frames are a poor design feature that can impart poor website functionality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Logo present</td>
<td>All websites need to use a business logo or representative emblem in the appropriate position on each website page. The logo should be used as a means of returning to the home page via a link.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The About Us page</td>
<td>Websites need to always have an ‘about the company’ component to address a trust element that is associated with online publishing. It should be used by all organisations regardless of size, affiliation or commercial type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The search feature</td>
<td>The search feature is a fundamental website design element that all users appreciate and expect to find on large websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Privacy policy</td>
<td>When organisations collect data via their website it has become an expected convention to include a privacy policy that is easily identifiable and accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Body text—adjusts for screen size</td>
<td>Good website design uses relative sizing of text in the construction, allowing each page layout to be easily adapted for different screen sizes and browser windows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Unvisited links—blue</td>
<td>In relation to website navigation, the standard convention is to use blue links for unvisited web pages and a less saturated non-blue for unvisited links.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Visited links—non-blue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Download</td>
<td>Individual web page download time should be less than 10 seconds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Summarised with modifications from Nielsen and Tahirs 2002)
The Implications for Tourism Marketing

The study findings suggest that tourism operators and destination marketing organisations cannot ignore the rising popularity of sites containing UGC or the role that they may play in the travel planning behaviour of consumers. Moreover, these sites can provide information that influences booking plans and can cause travellers to alter their travel plans.

The study found that:

• There are two major types of UGC—those made through general ‘blogs’ and those made via reviews of particular travel products.

• The most common UGC features are the ability to book flights, accommodation and rental cars.

• The majority of consumer reviews were for accommodation, though some reviews were also for attractions or destinations as a whole.

• Although these sites are rising in popularity, they are not yet considered to be as credible or trustworthy as existing sources of travel information (such as state tourism websites) but are an additional source of information.

• Travellers prefer websites that allow them to enter ratings (up to 5 stars) for individual travel experiences. These are typically well known, have more features and usually only allow UGC reviews rather than general blog comments.

• Many consider that existing travel sites, including state tourism websites, should incorporate UGC features.

• However, any attempt to integrate UGC features into existing websites should be done with the concerns of travellers in mind. Contributors should be asked to provide some profile information to enable readers to make informed decisions about how relevant postings are to their own situations.

• All travel operators and tourism organisations involved in marketing destinations and products need to be aware of what is being said about them on the prominent UGC sites.

• However, they must not attempt to manipulate content or embellish postings by masquerading as real travellers. Many users are astute enough to see through these tactics and form negative opinions about organisations that tamper with UGC.
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Further information
The full report for this research project: Consumer-generated Web-based Tourism Marketing, containing references, methodology and detailed findings from the two phases of the project, is available for free download from the STCRC website www.crctourism.com.au/bookshop.

References
To be advised.
Users are doing it for themselves: how consumer-generated content is changing the face of tourism marketing
• Travel and tourism industry
• Academic researchers
• Government policy makers

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