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## Research reveals keys to successful interactive tourism web marketing

New research has revealed that almost a third of people think interactive web tools such as blogs, reviews and star ratings are 'very influential' in their holiday planning, with a further 50% saying these tools have 'certain influence' on their travel decisions.

The findings come as part of a report conducted by Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), analysing the power of interactive web tools, or user-generated content (UGC), in influencing consumer's travel plans.

The research involved the review of 30 prominent UGC travel websites and surveyed more than 12,500 Australian travellers who use the Internet to plan trips. .

The top four sites used by the survey respondents were Trip Advisor, Lonely Planet Bluelist , Expedia and Yahoo Travel. These sites all delivered two key features – a rating system for the tourist product or service and the ability for consumers to write a review of their experience.

These features were considered important both for those wanting to contribute to a UGC website and those seeking 'consumer feedback.'

Respondents also highlighted the importance of providing details on contributor profiles, such as their age, sex and location, to help find reviews of those with similar holiday and travel preferences.

A key concern for those using these sites was the danger that businesses could post fake entries. The issues of trustworthiness, reliability, accuracy and credibility were also raised.

Interestingly, 91% of respondents rated state tourism websites as being the most trusted source of travel information with 61% saying they felt these sites could be further enhanced with the addition of a UGC feature to capture the comments of 'real' travellers.

A number of potential business benefits were identified in the development of UGCs or having a UGC feature incorporated into existing sites. These include the ability to convert consumers from 'observers' to 'purchasers', increasing the consumer's opinion of a business, providing relevant and up-to-date consumer feedback and improving the web search engine rankings.

CEO of STCRC, Ian Kean says that the research provides options for tourism operators and destinations to develop more effective e-business solutions to maximise market share. "Tourism operators and destination marketing organisations shouldn't ignore the rising popularity of sites containing UGC content or the role that these sites are playing in the trip planning behaviour of travellers," Mr Kean said.

"These sites provide information that can not only influence final booking plans but in fact can result in travellers altering their existing plans. User-generated content presents a great opportunity for tourism operators and marketing organisations to hear from and communicate with their consumers."



# industry release

[www.crctourism.com.au](http://www.crctourism.com.au)

A copy of the industry booklet *Users are doing it for themselves* is available for free download [here](#).

The full research report, *Consumer-generated web-based tourism marketing* is available for free download [here](#).

Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) was established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres program in 1997, and has grown to be the largest dedicated tourism research organisation in the world.

STCRC was formed to underpin the development of a dynamic, internationally competitive, and sustainable Australian tourism industry.

In consultation with a broad cross section of stakeholders, STCRC undertakes research into the strategic challenges facing Australian tourism and produces reports, information, tools and products to improve business practices and inform policy development.

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