

Evaluation the Effectiveness of Golf Resort Websites: A Comparative Study of Golf Resorts in North and South

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Introduction:

For the past decade, the growth and development of the Internet has been remarkable, particularly in interactive marketing and advertising of websites. Millions of people use online Internet services every day from their homes to book their vacations (Travel Industry Association of America, 2002). Many golf resorts have established their own websites. However, the quality of these websites and their effectiveness still remains unknown. The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the websites for golf resorts in North Carolina and South Carolina from four critical perspectives: customer, technical, marketing, and communication of the nature of the resort. The results of this study can provide a benchmark for golf resorts to evaluate and design or redesign their own websites and will provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness of golf resort websites in these two states.

Methods:

This study adopted the modified Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach developed by Morrison, Taylor, and Morrison (1999) to assess golf resort websites in North and South Carolina. The evaluation criteria consisted of four perspectives of website effectiveness: customer aspects, marketing aspects, technical aspects, and golf resort aspects. Multiple items from previous website evaluation studies were used to capture the meaning of each aspect. Three evaluators were invited to perform the evaluation. Prior to the evaluation, a 20-minute training session was conducted to ensure that the three evaluators understood the definitions of each item on the instrument. The Kendall's Coefficient of concordance was used to determine the inter-rater reliability. A mean score was calculated for each of the four aspects and used to compare with the total points available. The higher the percentage, the more effective the website was considered to be. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the evaluation scores of the two groups of golf resorts in the two states.

Findings:

Overall, the golf resorts in North Carolina and South Carolina performed poorly in marketing effectiveness of their websites (especially in incorporating marketing research on their websites, providing multiple languages, and using partnership strategies), achieving

only 37% and 54 % of the total available points, respectively. The strengths of the golf resort websites in these two states were in customer aspects, such as site accessibility, site navigation, site attractiveness, and ease of contact.

The best performance golf resort website in this sample achieved 69% of the available points; the least effective golf resort website achieved only 46% of the available points. This finding indicates that there is considerable room for improvement on golf resort websites in these two states and that a gap perhaps exists in the general quality of golf resort websites. Golf resorts should upgrade their websites and make them become a more effective sales and marketing distribution channel.

There were significant statistically differences in the marketing aspects and technical aspects between golf resort websites in North Carolina and South Carolina. The websites of golf resorts in South Carolina were stronger in marketing aspects than were the websites in North Carolina and weaker in golf resorts aspects, such as availability of information, on-line reservations, on-line customer service, and use of multi-media. Golf resorts from these two states can indeed learn from each other. Both of them need to improve the marketing function of their websites to attract more golfers, and maintain their current competitive advantages.

References

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