

THE SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING STRATEGY (SEM) IN E-TOURISM : A CASE STUDY OF THE FRENCH OTA (ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY) VOYAGE PRIVE

Laure Evrard



Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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Laure Evrard

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Supervisor :

Prof. Maria-Conceição Santos, Department of Marketing, Operations and Management

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Abstract

With the arrival of the Internet, the tourism has taken a big step in its existence. Online Travel Agencies have made their appearance. The customers have in general various steps throughout their buying process. On these steps the visibility and the top position of the name of the travel company is a key factor success.

In order to attract clients and respond to their expectations, to implement an SEM strategy (Search Engine Marketing strategy) is one of the most important strategy for an online website to adopt. In other words, it is a strategy that will show the company how to increase the website visibility on web pages such as Google Search.

This thesis aims to analyse the importance of the SEM by an exploratory study that includes two stages. First, by a survey to describe the consumer behaviour when booking online travel reservations. Second, by deep interviews and information in order to analyse a case study of an online travel agency, where I work.

From the survey submitted to a sample of consumers, it was observed that they are mostly looking for good opportunities (good prices, high quality of product). From the deep interviews to the managers of the French OTA (Online Travel Agency) Voyage Privé, it was observed the importance of putting in action the SEM tools, such as commercial animations in the home page, buy keywords so that the webpage will be in top results, or having a very active and visible participation in the social media.

Keywords : E-tourism, Online Travel Agencies (OTA), Customer's behaviour, SEM, SEO, SEA, Voyage Privé

JEL: M31, Z3

Resumo

Com a crescente utilização da Internet, o sector do turismo desenvolveu-se muito. As Agências de Viagens Online cresceram. Os consumidores passam por diferentes passos no seu processo de decisão para a compra e reserva de um pacote turístico. Nesses passos, a visibilidade e colocação cimeira do nome da agência é um factor crítico de sucesso.

De forma a atrair clientes e responder às suas expectativas, a implementação da estratégia e ferramentas SEM (Search Engine Marketing strategy) é fundamental para um website. As opções das ferramentas e o seu uso adequado é fundamental para que a empresa online possa aumentar a visibilidade em motores de busca como o Google search.

A presente tese visa analisar a importância do SEM, através de um estudo exploratório que passa por duas fases. Primeiro, um estudo descritivo através de um questionário submetido a consumidores, descrevendo os seus hábitos enquanto procedem a reservas online de viagens. Depois, entrevistas em profundidade e recolha de informação para um estudo de caso de uma empresa de viagens on-line, para a qual trabalho.

Pelo inquérito submetido a uma amostra de conveniência de consumidores, observou-se que procuram em geral boas oportunidades (bons preços, elevada qualidade de produtos). Pelas entrevistas em profundidade com os responsáveis da empresa francesa OTA (online travel agency) “Voyage Privé”, observou-se a importância atribuída às acções SEM, tais como colocar animações, vídeos comerciais no webpage, comprar palavras chave afim de que tenha uma visibilidade cimeira. Também a participação e visibilidade activa nas redes sociais.

Palavras-chave : E-tourism, Online Travel Agencies (OTA), Comportamento do Consumidor, SEM, SEO, SEA, Voyage Privé

JEL: M31, Z3

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Introduction

The technology nowadays is going faster and faster. To illustrate this fact, these numbers speak for themselves : according to the UN Millennium Development Goals Report (2012), it took 35 years for the radio to reach 50 million people, 13 years for television to reach 50 million people, 5 years for the Internet to reach 50 million people and only 6 months for Facebook to reach 100 million people. Nowadays, the Internet is a big part of people's life. You can basically do anything you want thanks to the Internet : it can be simple things such as listening to music and find cooking recipes, or it can be more complex things such as planning vacations or talking to people who live thousands of kilometres from you.

Thus, companies had to adapt to this new tool. Many industries took advantage of this opportunity. It is the case of the tourism industry that used internet as a tool to reach more people (Rallet, 2001). The common name given to the tourism through internet is e-tourism. E-tourism is the digitisation of all the processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries that enable organisations to maximise their efficiency and effectiveness (Buhalis, 2003).

Currently, websites enable customers to obtain information and advice, compare prices, and book their airline tickets, hotel rooms and other services.

By working in a French company specialised in e-tourism, I could notice the process of the company in order to catch the interest of the customer. Thus, I wondered what this process was and how a company could adapt its strategy regarding this matter. So I came with this title as a dissertation : “The Search Engine Marketing Strategy (SEM) in e-tourism : a case study of the French OTA (Online Travel Agency) Voyage Privé”.

This dissertation will be divided in 4 main parts. The first one will be an overview of the e-tourism market, and what is said in the literature about it. The second part will be about the buying process in e-tourism. The third part is a proposal of a conceptual framework. Finally, the last part will be about what SEM strategy the OTA company can use with the example of Voyage Privé.

I/ Overview of the e-tourism market

In this section, we will focus on the e-tourism market. What are its trend and challenges ? Who are its players ? We will then talk about the Search Engine Marketing (SEM) strategy, how it is presented in the literature, and finally focus on the French e-tourism market as the case study company is on the French market.

1.1 The e-tourism trend and challenges

The tourism sector has been fast, and has been changing for a number of years due to the digitalisation and expansion of new technologies. Mobility, artificial intelligence or even messaging, the trends for the year 2018 in terms of e-tourism are numerous and will focus primarily on the customer experience.

In terms of e-tourism, the trends are numerous and the technologies continue to evolve over the years. The customer experience is now at the heart of the challenges and everyone tries to give the customer an experience that he will remember in a positive way.

If the challenges are numerous, two essential elements stand out: the simplicity of use and the singularity of the customer experience (M. Ladiray, 2018). Indeed, the easier your website will be, the better your chances of selling your product. Also, it is important to impress consumers to beat the competition. The first axis is, before the dream, the promise of a change of scenery and without constraint. To do this, communication campaigns are based on digital and modern content that will be shared on social networks (G. Quillaud, 2016)

Now, the goal is to think of intuitive, original solutions that can save a lot of time.

Artificial intelligence as new media

The Artificial intelligence in e-tourism is important as it can be considered a tool to help e-tourism players to communicate about their product and as it can optimise the logistic and make the customer win some time.

If artificial intelligence has been driving tourism players for several years now, many companies or actors have now taken the plunge.

Whether on a cultural site, in transport or even during a visit, it allows the visitor a total immersion through visuals increasingly accurate and sharp.

For Basile Segelen, co-founder of Timescope, virtual reality kiosk, this technology "is a way to communicate in a different way" (Tourisme & Digital : Voyage au cœur des tendances. Unigo website, 2017). It is now a real media whose content is taken as information.

In contrast to a "classic" medium, virtual reality brings an experience that calls for different emotions in the user. The result would be that the impact is greater, and the person feels that they have experienced something (P.C. Hamana, 2018)

Create link via messaging

Messaging is definitely THE emerging trend in 2017, which materialise through many solutions in 2018 (P.C. Hamana, 2018). Create a link with the customer is an important aspect. If the customer gets a quick answer to its inquiry, he will be more inclined to enjoy your website and your products.

More and more, you can see on website artificial chats (chatbots). However, with the high use of social media, creating a chatbot on Messenger (Facebook) is one of the next steps for many actors.

The goal: to save the customer time by responding as quickly as possible to his request and create a "direct link", even if it is artificial.

The mobile, poorly exploited tool

The mobile is today the first screen used by people, in front of the television and the computer. Tourism stakeholders have understood this and, for example, Amadeus has invested more than 4 billion euros in R & D since 2004. However, according to Frédéric Cavazza, consultant, the mobile is still little or badly used (FredCavzza.net – 2017).

Indeed, according to him, the trend of mobile applications is, for example, completely obsolete. "An app is more than 30,000 euros and it is very unprofitable because there are too many today. No one downloads it" he says.

The goal in 2018 is to focus on the following issues: customer service, valuation of the offer and loyalty. To do this, many tools are available including social networks, geolocation or even Google to improve shopping and offer innovative uses.

Partnerships to simplify the customer experience

All-in-one solution : the user does not want to have to go through 20 mobile applications or platforms to get from point A to point B.

This demand has been heard since many tourism stakeholders, especially in the transport sector, have come together to facilitate the customer journey, especially for business travellers.

Indeed, like the SNCF, BlablaCar, RATP or even Transdev, the various players in the sector want to set up a common database, to simplify the course and at the same time counter the

growth of Google in the sector. For example, if you go on the SNCF website (Oui-voyages), you can not only look for trains, but also a flight, a car, a bus, a hotel, etc...

1.2 The e-tourism players

In this section, we propose to identify the different actors in e-tourism, to show their role and comparative advantages compared to traditional actors in order to better understand the Internet's challenges in the distribution of tourism products. In fact, seven categories of actors have been identified as either suppliers, intermediaries or information giver (L. Hikkerova, 2010).

We will see later on how these players interact with each other afterwards.

Suppliers

Suppliers are representing the product in itself (carriers, hotels, car rental companies, etc.)

For the suppliers, the direct distribution of their products online brings several advantages by allowing them :

To reduce distribution costs, especially ticketing costs (i.e. low-cost airlines such as SkyEurope or economy hotels such as Formula 1). There is no longer any commission to be paid to intermediaries on this type of sale. But the significant investment costs to create and maintain the sales infrastructure and the operating costs are far from negligible,

To preserve the integrity of the brand by controlling the sales process and associated services. For example, ordering certain menus is not possible in the booking of a flight by an online agency,

To have a better control of selling prices and limit dependence on intermediaries and discount agencies which negotiate prices and commissions,

To ensure better promotion of sales,

To attract more affluent customers through an enhanced presentation of the offer, and enhancing the value of the product.

GDS (Global Distribution Systems)

Global Distribution Systems (GDS) is a worldwide travel booking management software (hotel, camping, plane) for tour operators. Created by the airlines, their initial objective was to design and market a technical tool allowing agencies to reserve air tickets by having access to different rates and availabilities.

With Internet technologies, their role have been challenged as airlines have been able to sell their products live, and tour operators have opened websites to destinations of traditional travel agencies. Thus they had to reinvent themselves by becoming partners of online agencies, creating their own online agency or buying virtual agencies that were looking for capital to grow. There are three main GDS in the world :

Galileo has acquired the online agencies GTA, OctopusTravel, Ebookers, CheapTicket and Orbiz.

Sabre owns Travelcity, Odysia, Lastminute and Zuji.

Amadeus holds Opodo, Karavel and Vivacances. They have also diversified into the business travel market by offering companies the ability to access GDS via the web to organize their travels.

They did not abandon their core business and their diversification allowed them to extend the functionalities and contents of their technical reservation tools. Thanks to the acquisition of GTA, Galileo now offers more than 20.000 hotels with worldwide booking.

Tour operators

A tour operator is an organisation responsible for assembling several services from its suppliers (airlines, hotels, coach operators, restaurants, guides, etc.) and sell them at an all-inclusive price (or “packaged” price).

It combines services that it buys at negotiated prices, by negotiating itself or through receptive agencies (on-site travel agencies) and anticipates customer demand by offering its brochure packages.

The negotiation of prices of services included in the package is facilitated by the large number of partners that the tour operator owns.

An example of tour operator can be Thomas Cook.

Traditional travel agencies

Traditionally, the travel agency serves as an intermediary between travel creators (such as airlines, tour operators, car rental companies or insurance companies) on the one hand and the clientele on the other hand.

The travel agency is in the form of a point of sale (or counter) which can be unique or multiplied into branches scattered throughout the territory according to its importance and its commercial policy.

The travel agency can also be generalist and cover all tourist demand or specialised in targeted services such as the United States, China, Israel, Japan or Scandinavia.

Independent or emanating from a tourist group, the travel agency may have vocation to the organisation of static holidays - taking care of the routing and the hotel service - or, on the contrary, of circuits (safaris in Kenya, in Tanzania, tour of the American national parks, cruise in the Greek islands, on the coast of Brazil, etc...).

The role of the travel agency is not only limited to the sale of services and it brings an added value through direct contact with the tourist

According to a recent survey carried by PhocusWright in 2017, the physical shops are sharing 57% of the French market where the online market is 43%.

The Phocuswright's French Online Travel Overview Twelfth Edition study was conducted through 90 interviews of European companies, from different sectors, made in July 2017: airlines, TOs, rail carriers, OTAs, technology suppliers.

Virtual travel agencies

Also called Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). These "mega-agencies", such as "Ebookers", "Voyage Privé", "Expedia" or "Voyages-sncf.com", are distributors selling mainly via Internet and telephone. By offering a wide range of products, they allow to compare offers from different suppliers and choose the best offer. They also distribute the products of tour operators, sell their own packages (train or plane tickets, overnight stays, car rentals etc.), and offer customers the possibility to compose their own journey (dynamic package). The dynamic package is in fact a tailor-made product that allows a differentiation of the offer.

Virtual travel agencies typically attract consumers through exclusive offers or lower prices than traditional providers. They operate mainly on the same business model as traditional agencies (sales of suppliers' products on a commission basis) using sales techniques and specific pricing strategies (discount specialists or auctions, for example). Some agencies also adopt for certain products the brokers' business model, which consists of mass purchasing of products, such as a wholesaler, and then retailing them.

Income generated by this activity is riskier (risk of loss in the event of non-resale or resale at a price lower than the full cost of the product) than income from the intermediation activity where the agency receives commissions on the sales.

The main problem of virtual agencies is their lack of visibility to Internet users given the immensity of the Internet network. This situation is even more worrying for them that the customer has access with a simple click of mouse to a rich and varied offer of tourist products.

This situation forces them to invest in advertising to develop their image and to enter into partnerships with sites generating audiences or intermediaries providing business (see section on strategies implemented by e-tourism companies).

“Quotters”

Their objective is to aggregate and compare the offerings of the various distributors. Quotters, unlike brokers, do not realise the transaction, they are information givers who act solely for informational purposes. This is to be put into perspective as we distinguish between "distributors" and "customer-oriented" quotations.

The first category plays the role of businessman, like MonNuage.fr. The advantage for the customer is that he does not need to enter multiple travel requests from different distributors. The customer fills a request by which MonNuage.fr questions its partners. The website then transmits to the prospect several offers that the customer can compare. The main disadvantage for customers of this type of approach is the independence of these intermediaries from distributors. There is the temptation to favour a distributor if the latter pays a better commission, and they only pass on customer requests to their partners (problem of completeness of supply). On the other hand, customer-oriented quotations, price comparison sites such as Trouvto-voyages.com or intelligent agents, are looking for the best offer available on the Internet according to user preferences. Here the problems encountered are of a different nature. On the one hand, distributors can block access to their sites to intelligent agents.

Indeed, some distributors do not wish to be on the same linear line as their competitors. But this risk factor is unlikely, because this is technically difficult to achieve, and by this action, they are automatically excluded from a potential market. On the other hand, the economic viability of this approach is far from clear as the customer must pay the service either directly or indirectly (advertising or selling related products).

The portals

Websites such as AOL, Altavista, Yahoo or Netscape have popularised the portal concept. For these websites, it is a matter of putting online a package of services to attract and federate Internet users. Traffic Generator, they offer the ability to buy links (or keywords) to redirect Internet users to merchant sites to the advertiser. For example, buying keywords on Google for Last Minute.com was until September 2007 (the date where they started outsourcing their online strategy) focal point of their marketing policy. This situation leads the e-commerce websites to a certain dependence on Google whose pricing policy has sharply increased in recent years.

Currently, the platform that everybody is talking about is AirBnb.

Originally, it was a platform for renting and booking of private homes. For years, this system has been used so that the individual tenant feels like "at home". Marketing mainly conveyed this message and image. There was no competition for hoteliers.

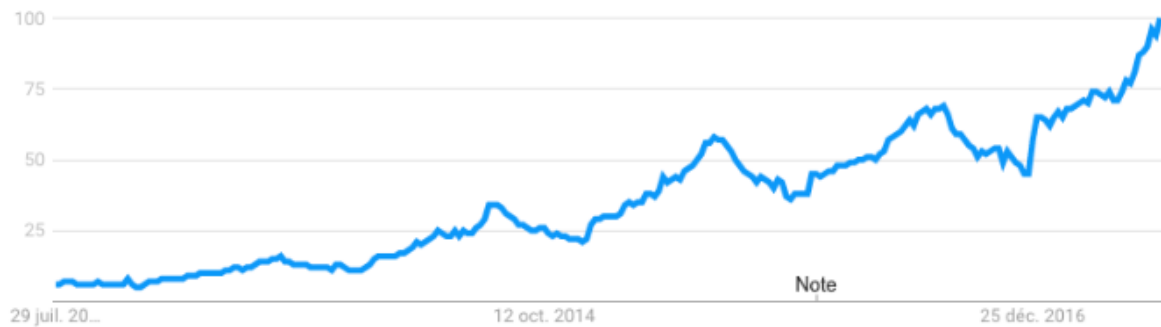


Figure 1 – The number of searches for the word AirBnB on Google (<https://trends.google.com/trends/>)

Even if the searches for the word “AirBnb” increased a lot in two years’ time, it did not necessarily affect others :



Figure 2 - The number of searches for the word AirBnB on Google compared to Booking (red) and Expedia (yellow).

As we can see on this graphic, the boom of AirBnb did not necessarily affect other companies (i.e. Booking).

Companies such as Airbnb or BlaBlaCar are also called “collaborative” companies.

Here is a small table that review who are the main actors on the e-tourism market and how they interact with each other :

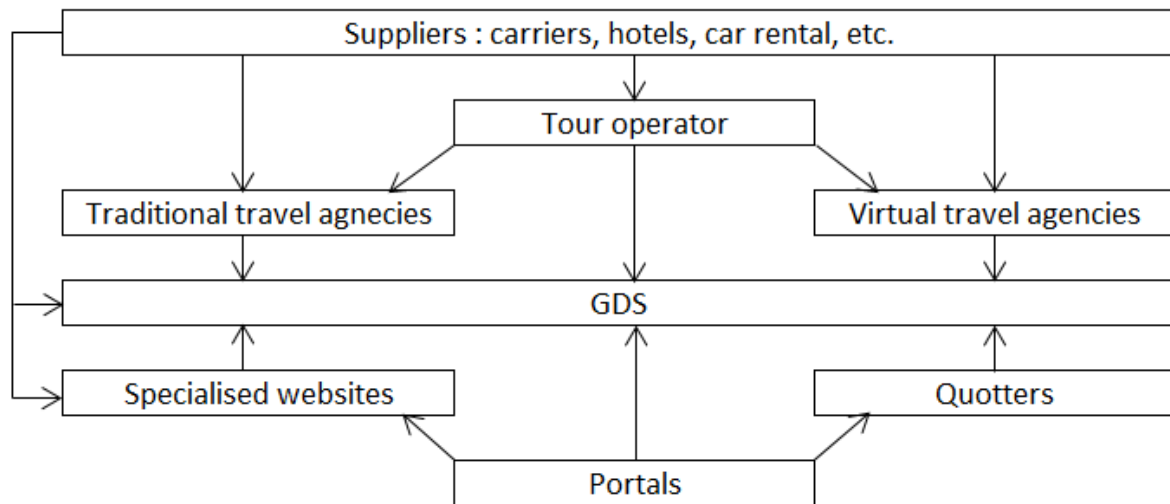


Figure 3 - Online distribution of tourist products (Hikkerova, 2010).

1.3 The Search Engine Marketing importance on e-tourism

SEM strategy (Search Engine Marketing) = SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) + SEA (Search Engine Advertising) + SMO (Social Media Optimisation).

In E-commerce, the research can be either internal by using personal knowledge and experiences or external by using the opinions and experiences of others (families, friends, experts, etc.), public sources, comparisons, or to sources dominated by marketers. The goal for the company here is to stand out from the competition. They can either stand out by lower prices or they can either stand out by higher quality of products or services.

According to Hoffman and Novak (1996), the navigation experience itself is a source of gratification. Obtaining the information sought, the speed with which the user has reached it and the weakness of the cognitive resources mobilised to do so will generate a positive valuation of the navigation experience (Dandouau, 2001).

The SEM strategy is the basis of Inbound Marketing logic. When you do a search online, do you usually look at the 2nd page of results ? It is most likely that you will not. Generally speaking, if you have not found what you are looking for before, you will review your choice of keywords.

Indeed, the SEM strategy (which includes SEA and SEO) has witnessed a big growth in the past years. Indeed, 62% of search engine users only click on links on the first page of the search

result, and less than 10% are clicking on a link that appeared after the 3rd page of the search result (Malaga, 2008).

Thus, one of the most important strategy an online website has to adopt is to implement an SEM strategy (Search Engine Marketing strategy). In other words, it is a strategy that will show the company how to increase the website visibility on web pages such as Google Search.

Indeed, more and more internet visitors are coming to a website thanks to a Search engine (i.e. Google), and not through a direct link. Search engines now occupy a prominent position in the online world (Dou *et al*, 2010).

The majority of users search for information on a regular basis, and more than half of Internet traffic begins with a search engine (Dou *et al.*, 2010). Promoting a site involves increasing the number of links. The significance of SEO is that it increases the volume of traffic directed to individual sites from search engines (Kisiel, 2010).

As the position occupied by the website within the search engines has a great influence on its traffic. If the website is efficient, it quickly converts visitors into customers. This in the era when digital takes a decisive importance, this SEO can even depend on the health of entire business.

So what strategy should a company adopt to be "best placed, for as long as possible" ?

There are two marketing concepts that are really important in order to answer this question : the Search Engine Optimisation strategy (also known as SEO) and Search Engine Advertising strategy (also known as SEA).

The first one is considered natural referencing and the second one is considered as paid referencing, according to the website SEO.fr

SEO (search engine optimization) is the set of techniques to naturally improve the positions of different pages of a website in search engine results for given keywords.

SEA (search engine advertising), often practiced on Google Adwords, involves running your text ads with a link to your page or website in the search engine results. Thus, a website will be artificially ranked and it will be charged a certain amount with each click of a user, amount depending on the bid that was placed on the corresponding keyword. The more competitive a keyword, the more expensive it is. On Google, the notification "ads" indicates that the link has been sponsored.

Both techniques have advantages and disadvantages.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
SEA	Allows to be ranked well	Very expensive
	No lost of time to write contents regularly and in large quantity	Dependency of the amount you will pay to be on the top 3 of a page
SEO	Gratuity (free process)	Involves the creation of regular and significant content (i.e. blog posts)
	Very effective	Requires a lot of Work and time

Figure 4 - Advantages and disadvantages of SEA and SEO.

To resume, in order to improve the traffic of an e-commerce website, it is important to regularly publicise original content and not just product records that one could see on any online sales website.

To do this, the company has to implement a blog part on the website : it is then easier to talk about the products sold by the company, publishing tests, comparatives, videos, etc. It is also recommended to publish articles on some competing products, even if the company does not sell them on its website : a customer who does not necessarily know the company or the products could thus land on the website by searching for a competing product.

SEO techniques are designed to manipulate the site's content and meta tags to improve the website ranking and attract more incoming links from other sites.

Quality content published regularly will contribute to your SEO in the search engines, and thus improve the traffic and growth of your e-shop.

The SEO strategy can be completed with the SMO one, also known as Social Media Optimisation.

Social networks are a great opportunity to share your content. Their use is essential because some of the visits to your site will come from this channel. You will increase your SEO, because the more your pages are seen, the more Google favours them. The more Google favours them, the more they are seen, and here you are in the middle of a virtuous circle.

In this context, paid advertising on social networks is worth considering, as it will give your posts and your content a better visibility (the example of a "boosted" Facebook post). Again, the paid solution is valid, but no long-term success will occur without good natural content.

Small academic precision, this paid advertising enters the box SMO and not SEA, the latter being focused only on the purchase of keywords directly on the search engine.

1.4 The e-tourism French market – overview and demand

French e-tourism continues to nibble on the ground, slowly but surely. E-tourism represents more than 38% of the value of e-commerce in France., according to the 12th edition of the study "European Online Travel Overview", carried out by Phocuswright in January 2017.

On the French market, the online penetration rate is 45% in the journey in 2016 (against 49% at European level), all terminals combined. The market is expected to grow by 8 points each year, until 2020, where it will grow by 5 points. Online travel agencies (OTAs) are growing, although many suppliers are pushing them to develop direct sales via the Internet.

The overall volume of on-line bookings is continuing to grow at a rate of 5-6% per year, reaching 20.8 billion Euros in 2017 (corresponding to 45% penetration rate). At this time, online agencies share about 44% of the pie, against 43% in 2015, according to the study. It is expected a 52% penetration rate in 2020.

The mobile continues its breakthrough, and it is a euphemism to emphasize it. While travellers always rely on their smart phones, tablets and other tablets to consult tourism sites in a mobility situation, mobile transactions are in turn democratized, on simple products, to low baskets: train and train tickets plane, car rentals, etc.

In 2017, 24% of the volume of online business is passing through a mobile terminal, the report continues. Research largely exceeds this percentage, due to the low conversion rate on small screens.

Booking.com consolidated its dominant position in 2017, according to Phocuswright, by representing 20% of all hotel bookings (online and offline). Despite sometimes tense relationships with some web hosts, the hotel booking giant trustees 40% of the sales made by the OTAs, twice more than its immediate competitor eDreams and Odigeo. This percentage is expected to climb to 46% in 2020, according to the research firm. Note that the survey excludes Voyages-sncf.com (French train company website and most visited online tourism website in France) from the perimeter of online agencies.

According to the "Observatoire des Usages Internet de Médiamétrie" study of April-June 2016, nearly 36 million Internet users have made online purchases in the first half of the year 2016, representing more than 4 out of 5 Internet users (79.8%). This represents nearly 1.3 million cyber-buyers more than a year ago.

In the ranking of the 10 most visited online tourism websites in France, in the 1st and 2nd position are Voyages-sncf.com and Booking, which stand out with respectively 6.6 million and 5 million unique visitors each month.

Collaborative economy is again represented with Airbnb, which ranks third, with 2.4 million visitors, but also with BlaBlaCar, in fifth position, just behind Air France.

Google made a report in 2016 and what is to come in 2017 (see the link to the report in the bibliography). The Google report highlight three tendencies for the tourism in France : the destination becomes difficult to sell and to attract people due to the numerous terrorists attacks that happened in France since 2015, and some incidents that could have happened to some tourists (i.e. : a bus full of Chinese tourists have been attacked with rocks in Paris in August 2016). According to the Google report, a new search trend has increased, which is “Is it safe to travel to Paris now ?”. Moreover, Google report highlight that the “domestic demand” is strong, meaning that a lot of French tourists are visiting other parts of France, they stay within the country. The inbound demand (French tourists visiting French areas) corresponds to a 24% growth in 2016 while the outbound one (Foreigners visiting French areas) corresponds to a 17% growth in 2016.

The report also shows that the number of travels bought through digital media is increasing. Here is the share of leisure travellers who used the internet for their research or purchase (source : Google report, 2016):

- France : 94%
- UK : 94%
- Italy : 94%
- Switzerland : 93%
- Belgium : 90%
- China : 89%
- Israel : 88%
- Germany : 86%
- Canada : 86%
- USA : 86%

II/ Buying process in e-tourism

2.1 The cyber purchaser buying process

The online shopping decision process differs from the one commonly known as offline.

The customer's buying process was firstly defined by several researchers (Nicosia, 1966, Howard and Sheth, 1969, Engel and Blackwell, 1982, Bettman, 1979 and Anderson and Vincze, 2000) as a five-step procedure : the identification of the problem, the search for information, the evaluation of possible alternatives, the purchase, the analysis of the results. However, these steps could also be applied later to the online shopping decision, as I explain below.

Identification of the problem (needs or desires)

This is the first step in the decision-making process, which is the starting point for the act of purchase (Campbell, 1998). According to this researcher, the need is defined as a sense of necessity or deficiency. It corresponds to a state of deprivation of something necessary to maintain an existing situation. While desire is synonymous with envy, love, fantasy and attraction, it is a motivational disposition to discover the pleasure of owning a product or service. The identification of needs or desires is defined by the Maslow hierarchy of needs. They are influenced by many kind of needs such as physiological, safety needs, esteem needs, etc. On the internet, this desire or need can be caused by an emailing, by interstitial banners etc.

The search for information

The consumer proceeds in the second place to the search for information about the products able to satisfy and to meet his need or desire. This is the result of a comprehensive research on these products followed by a critical evaluation of the information collected.

A recognized feature of the Internet lies in its ability to provide information. Indeed, the Internet allows consumers to access many rich sources that save time (Alba et al., 1997; Kwack et al., 2002). According to these authors, the Internet should even prove superior to specialty stores and department stores, in terms of the amount of information it can provide. Indeed, the Internet makes it possible to gather many sources of information (sites of brands, distributors, consumer groups, forums, etc ...) and compare them. Sites of comparison between signs are even one of the specificities of the Internet.

Later in the process, the customer will evaluate the product bought. In the search for information, this step also appears as the customer will highly read comments about what he is looking for (in the case of e-tourism, comments about the hotel, the destination, etc.).

According to Hoffman and Novak (1996), the navigation experience itself is a source of gratification. Obtaining the information sought, the speed with which the user has reached it and the weakness of the cognitive resources mobilized to do so will generate a positive valuation of the navigation experience (Dandouau, 2001).

Evaluation of possible alternatives

The cyber-purchaser in this step compares the different market alternatives. It establishes criteria for evaluating the specificities of merchant products by using the different environmental characteristics, promotions and accessories offered by the merchant (Abdellatif, 2013). This phase can either lead to the later stage of the social trade process or return to the previous stage and conduct more research.

Customer will look for a certain criterion, such as price, time spent in transport, destination, etc. It is important to note that on the Internet, payment always remains a small brake to customer's purchase. It is then for companies to play on the concept of trust. If you have implemented everything on your e-commerce site so that the consumer is reassured at the time of his purchase and so that he has confidence in you then there will be no difficulty that the latter passes to the online payment.

The perceived risk, linked to an involvement in the act of purchase creates a need for information (Dandouau, 1999) which generates a search for information. The main purpose of the latter is therefore to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. However, all forms of procurement do not provide information that is useful and necessary to reduce risk. Distance selling can transmit this useful information only through a medium. For cyber-consumers, this phase has become simpler thanks to the expansion comparators platform on the web. In the same way, many blogs now offer product tests, product comparisons and reviews, which makes it easier for users.

Volle (2000) points out that the consumer can begin his search for information from several input keys (for example: product category, brand, use). This consumer can then easily physically reconcile the information, unlike the store where this information can be disseminated through the department or the store or even at several points of sale. The interactive capability of the media then gives the Internet a considerable advantage over other means of sales as regards the evaluation of alternatives.

The use of the Internet may therefore aim to reduce the perception of asymmetry of information and increase the feeling of having examined all acceptable options (Gilovich and Medvec, 1995). The information to be collected is often less time consuming and less expensive in terms

of efforts to be obtained on a website than in a store (Helme-Guizon, 2001). The search for information on the Internet can therefore easily replace the visit of several stores in order to compare the ranges of products offered, prices and conditions of purchase.

Purchasing decision and purchase

After collecting the different information on the product that meets the consumer's needs and comparing the various market alternatives, the latter will make his choice and make his decision. The purchasing decision is generally influenced by the entourage : family, friends, friends, experts, business partners, etc.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the last step in the decision-making process in the social E-commerce. It is the consequence of the purchase. This is the most important step in assessing the satisfaction of a buying experience. On the social networks this evaluation can be manifested by the criticisms and the comments made by the online-buyers. Reviews have a positive relationship with the quality of the shopping experience. According to Eliashberg and Sugan (1997) the number of reviews and positive reviews increases future sales and causes the merchant's recognition. Online reviews can be divided into three categories: consumer reviews (people sharing their experience of the product), expert reviews (people that have a knowledge of the product thus can have more credibility in what they are saying) and sponsored reviews (generally companies selling the product remunerating someone to share a review). Although expert opinions are expected to have the greatest impact on client decision-making, in reality, user-generated informal notices and comments most affect the opinions of online-clients (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997). Companies should therefore encourage the customer to generate and comment on social networks.

The consumer, who has become a pro-active consumer through online notices, can recommend a company or a product in a positive or negative way. It is therefore important for every merchant, beyond the act of purchase, to understand whether individuals are really satisfied and whether they are ready to talk about them. Since word-of-mouth is a particularly powerful channel of diffusion (J.A. Czepiel, 1974), it is a question of merchants surfing the trend by watching what is said on its brand.

2.2 The social networks as an important source of information

Initially reserved for Socio Professional Category +, young people and men, the Internet seems to be democratizing and reaching most categories of individuals. Despite this, disparities exist between countries, as well as between regions (Paul DiMaggio *et al.*, 2001)

Since socio-demographic criteria are no longer sufficient to identify Internet users, it seems appropriate to rely on more attitudinal criteria vis-à-vis the Internet. For this we can use the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This model, developed by Davis (1993) and Davis *et al.* (1989), is an adaptation of the TRA model (Theory of Reasoned Action, Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and user. The purpose of the TAM model is to highlight the determinants of the acceptance of an information system in general, capable of explaining the behavior of the user through the different available technologies and through the population of users (Davis *et al.*, 1989). This model attempts to explain how external factors influence beliefs, attitudes and intentions about the use of the instrument. Since the emergence of the Internet, this model has of course been applied to this new type of information system (Karahanna and Straub, 1999, Childers *et al.*, 2001, O'Cass and Fenech, 2003).

The results of these studies show that utility is the main determinant of intention to use technology for a certain task, ease of use and use-related amusement being secondary. Since then, the model of Childer *et al.* (2001), proposed in the context of the use of commercial sites on the Internet, showed a somewhat greater importance of the fun related to the use.

Social networks are considered as a considerable source of information that can influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Leitner and Grechenig, 2009). Thus, several research studies have shown that the social content generated by users has an impact on the consumer's decision-making process. The emergence of these social networks has introduced a new set of components for the E-commerce environment. These components are organized around six categories (Fisher, 2010) : social purchase (when you inform on a social networks what you buy), ratings and opinions (marks and comments let by customer on a product), recommendations (when the customer recommends the product), forums and communities (customers or potential customers exchange through a forum), social media (use of social networks) and social advertising (when the company make its advertising through social media).

III/ Conceptual framework and methodology

3.1 The framework proposition

As a framework, I analyse **what factors can influence the OTA firm choice of the SEM strategy**.

Thus I could identify **independent variables** : the e-tourism customer search needs (speed, deep and quantitative information, good and trusty quality) ; the Internet tools and media (social media, word of mouth, virtual reality, videos and other formats available) and finally the industry players partnership (extension of the networking players number, sharing of the offer and benefits).

Those variables will influence the **dependent variable** that is the SEM strategy of the company (the SEO choice and practice tools, the SEA choice and practice tools, the SEM choice).

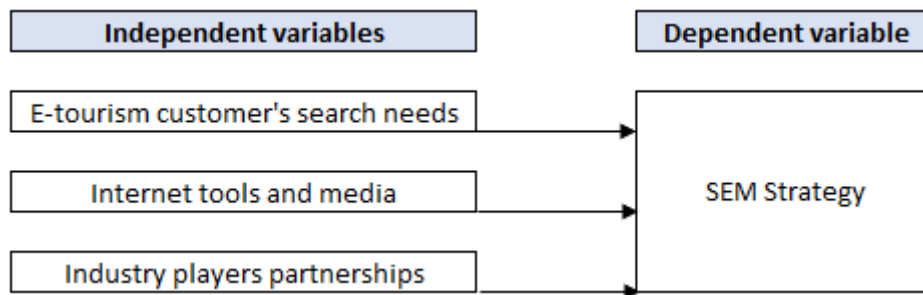


Figure 5 - framework proposition

Thus, here are the propositions :

- Customer's search needs have an impact on the SEM strategy of the company
- Internet tools and media have an impact on the SEM strategy of the company
- Industry players partnerships have an impact on the SEM strategy of the company

In order to illustrate those propositions, I conducted an online survey as well as some interview within the company I am working at : Voyage Privé.

3.2 The methodology

For this part, I sent an online questionnaire to as many people as I could. Counting on the word-to-mouth, my goal was to get at least 200 answers so that the sample was important enough to analyse and get a more precise idea of what the online buying process of the sample was like.

In total, I received 226 answers.

I had no constraints regarding gender, age, socio-professional category, country of origin, etc. for this questionnaire. So it was easier to send it to as many people as possible.

I sent it through the mean of social media, emails, and for a few of the answers I went in the streets asking to people haphazardly.

My questionnaire was divided in 4 parts. The first one was personal questions to people who answered, in order to know more about them : what they do for a living, where do they come from etc. Then I try to know a bit more about their use of the Internet : to what frequency do they use it, which websites do they visit, etc. After that, I focus my questioning more on the e-tourism : do they buy anything related to tourism online, which website do they use the most, how long do they take to buy something, what is the maximum amount they are willing to pay for a travel bought online, what kind of assistance do they prefer, etc. Finally, the last part is more oriented towards the future : what improvement would they like on e-tourism websites ? So now, we will analyse the results of the questionnaire.

3.3 The survey

As I explained, the first part is dedicated to get to know more about the sample : what is their age, what they do for a living, which part of the world do they live in.

Age of the sample

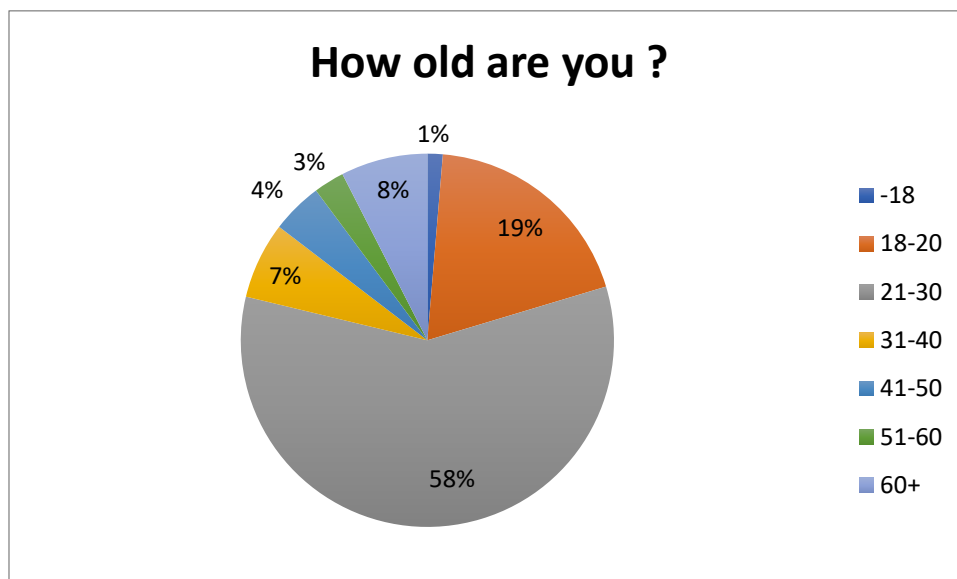


Figure 6 : Questionnaire result : age of the sample

My sample was mainly a “young” target : 78% of them were age maximum 30 years old (representing a total of 178 answers). This sample was interesting to me, because I was thinking that the category that answered the most (21-30 ; 18-20 and 60+) were the most likely to buy

travels for different reasons : young people for the thirst to discover new places, older ones to occupy their retirement. We will see later if this assumption was right or not.

Gender of the sample

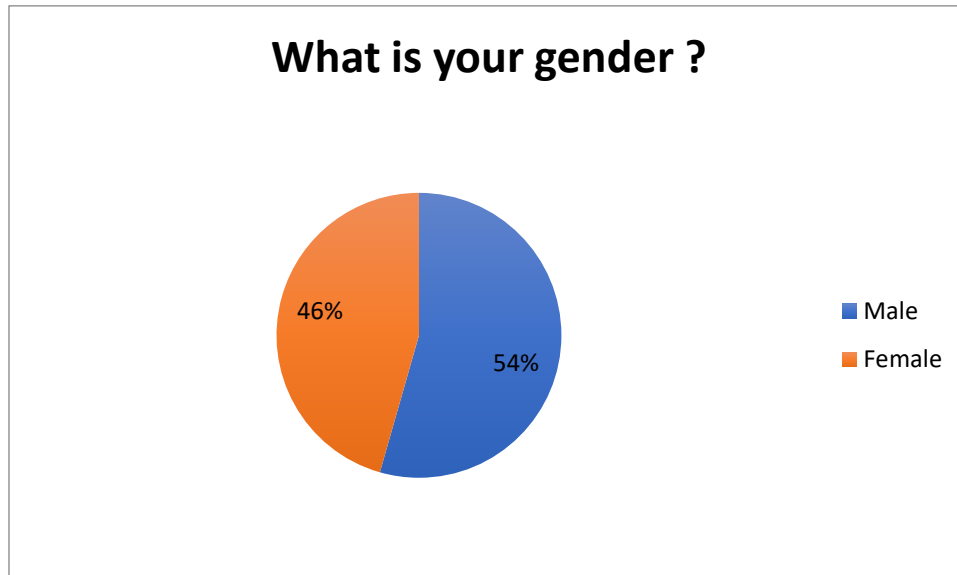


Figure 7 : Questionnaire result : gender of the sample

As you can see, my sample is mainly a masculine sample (123 answers against 103 answers for females).

Socio professional category of the sample

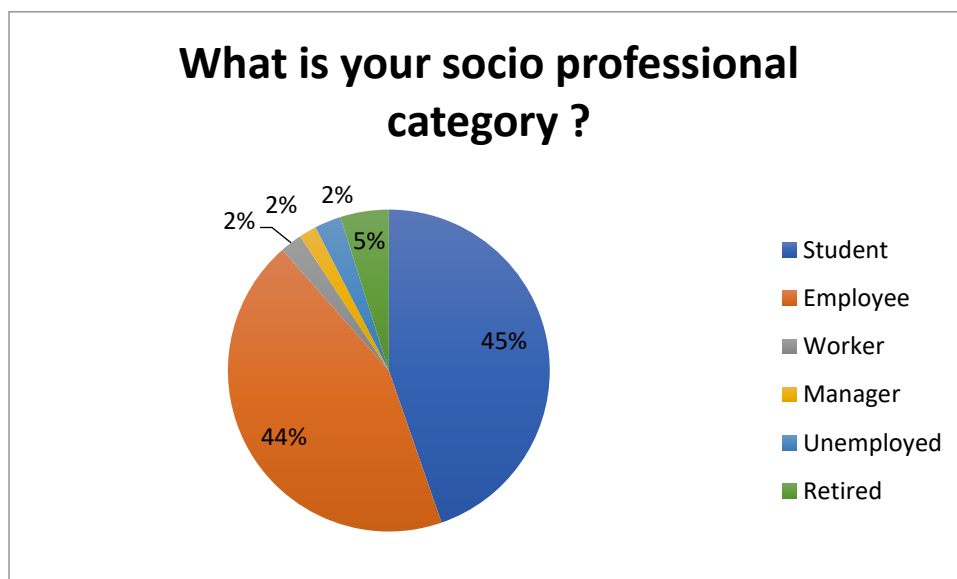


Figure 8 : Questionnaire result : socio professional category of the sample

As you can see, most of the answers were made by students (101 answers) and employees (99 answers). 5% are retired people and the rest (6%) are workers, managers or unemployed people. I was thinking that the sample was still good for my analysis given that people earning money such as employees, managers or people who were retired were most likely to be the target of online travel agencies. However, I was a bit sceptic to the lot of students who answered my questionnaire. Indeed, they have no income, thus I was thinking that they were not buying any travels.

Which part of the world do the sample live ?

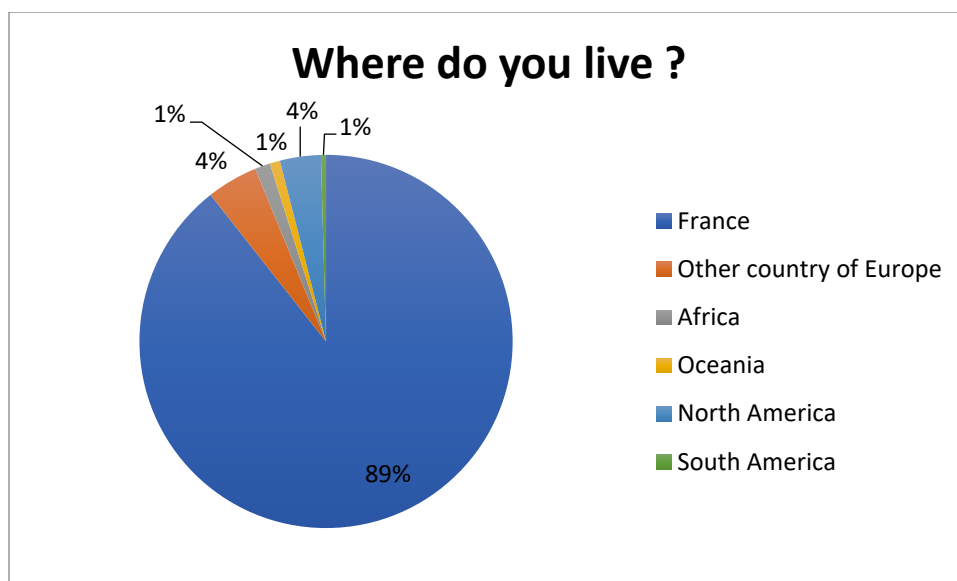


Figure 9 : Questionnaire result : where the sample live ?

My sample is mostly a French sample (202 answers), which is good given that it is the main target of the French website Voyage Privé. I also have a few people who are living in other European countries and in North America (respectively 10 and 8 answers). As Voyage Privé has also subsidiaries in other country of Europe, the 10 people who answered that they live in another European country might know the website Voyage Privé.

Now that I know a bit more about the sample, I would like to know more about their use of the Internet.

How often do the sample uses the Internet ?

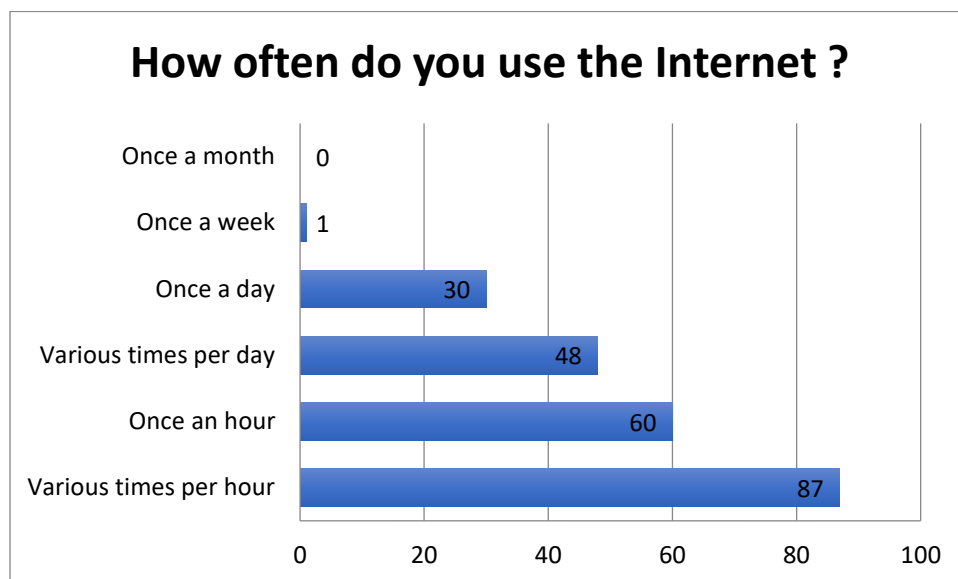


Figure 10 : Questionnaire result : how often do the sample use the Internet ?

We can see that my sample is very active on the internet. They use the Internet various times per hour, probably through the smart phone device. Except for one person, they are all active at least once a day on the Internet, proving that Internet is now a part of people's daily life.

Which kind of activity do the sample use the Internet for ?

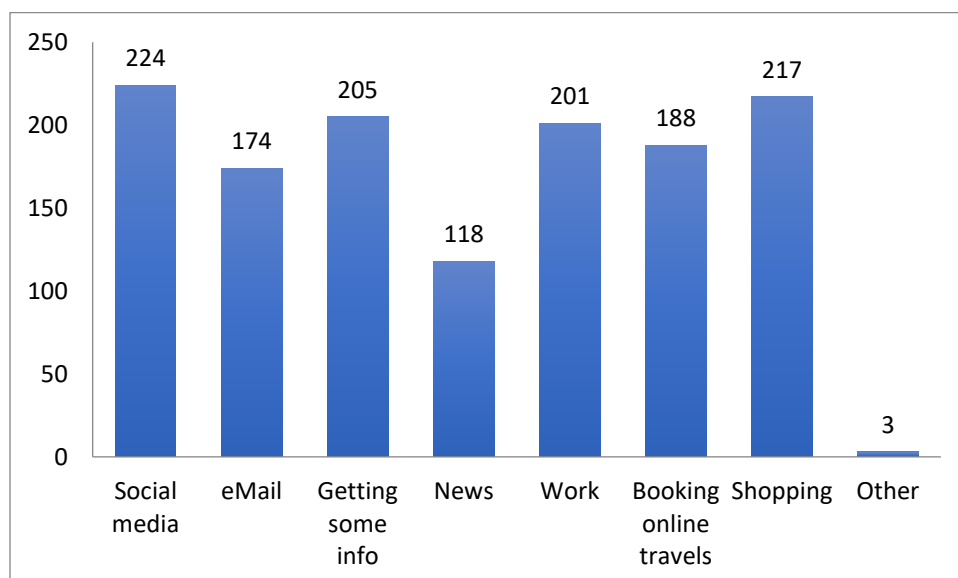


Figure 11 : Questionnaire result : Which kind of activity do the sample use the Internet for ?

For this answer, various responses were allowed. As you can see, except for two people, they are all using the Internet for social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.). Two

points that are important here are the 205 people who answered “getting some info” (91% of the sample). It is an important data, because as we saw in the previous part of this paper, getting some information about the product the customer is going to buy is part of their buying process. Thus, your website has to be extremely clear in order to keep the customer on your webpage and for him not to go somewhere else.

Finally, 217 people already booked online travels (with one important note : in this answer, I included travels but also train or plane tickets). However, I had a space in the questionnaire where people could write any information they felt was useful for me to understand better there use of the online shopping and some people indicated that they still prefer to buy to an actual shop (for example at a train station) or by phone, being afraid of all types of fraud the Internet can offer.

Now that I know more about their customs of Internet using, I want to know better about their knowledge in e-tourism.

Which e-tourism website do the sample use ?

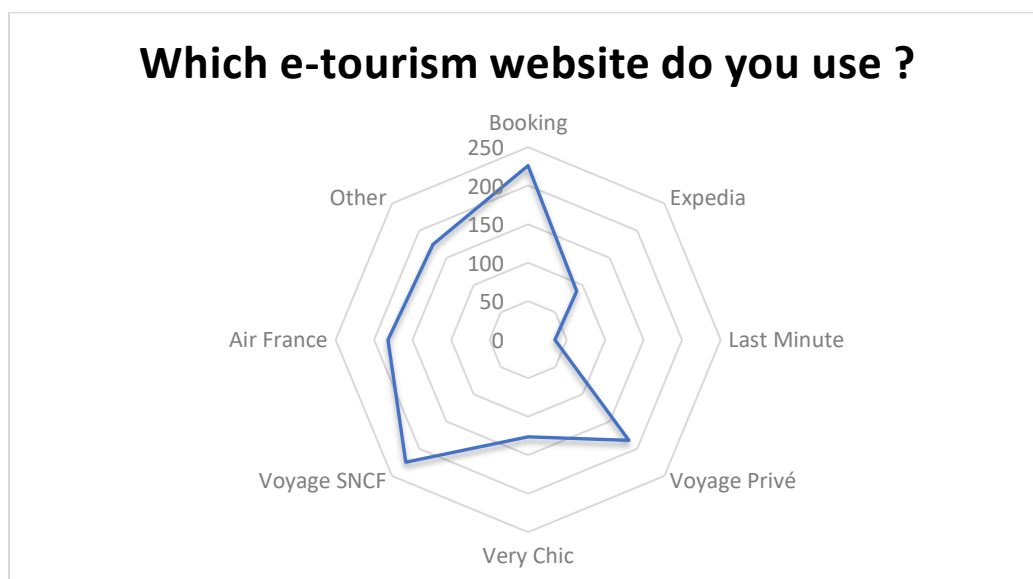


Figure 12 : Questionnaire result : Which e-tourism website do the sample use ?

For this answer, the sample could answer various times, but I precised that the answers should be the ones they were using the most frequently, and not the ones they know about. Every answers were followed by a “why ?” question in order to understand better what the website could offer the customer, why was this website in particular used, etc.

It is not a surprise to see in first position Booking followed by Voyage SNCF (French train tickets). Regarding Booking, the first reason is that it is one of the easiest way for people to find

a hotel as you can only put a destination and many propositions will be shown to you. And it is then easier to compare which hotel suits you best. The other reason is the presence abroad. It enables you to book easily a hotel in another country even if the currency or language is different, etc. Regarding the reason why the people use Voyage SNCF, the answer is simple : SNCF currently have the monopole of train transportation in France.

What is surprising is that Voyage Privé comes at the third place. I initially thought that Air France would be the third ones, but instead, people prefer a low-cost company for their plane tickets or to buy directly on comparative websites such as Skyscanner.com (mostly people who answered other are giving this kind of answer). Voyage Privé was selected various times for their large choice of destinations, the possibility to have some “luxurious” trips packaged for a very good price.

Last Minute is the last one. The down size of the website is that it is less convenient to use than Booking, thus people prefer the latter.

How long do the sample take to buy a travel ?

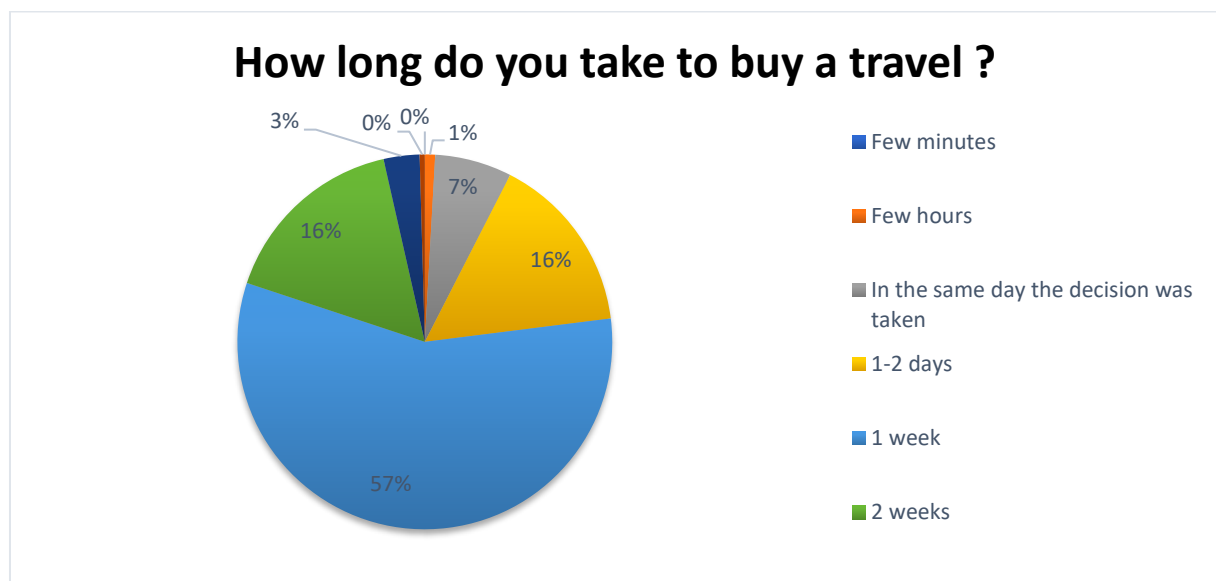


Figure 13 : Questionnaire result : How long do the sample take to buy a travel ?

As you can see, a large majority of the sample is taking a week between the moment they decided to buy something and the moment they buy it. Then it is divided into 1-2 days and 2 weeks. In other words, 89% of the people are taking at least a day to buy something. The duration depends on the amount of the travel.

How much is the sample willing to pay for a travel booked online ?

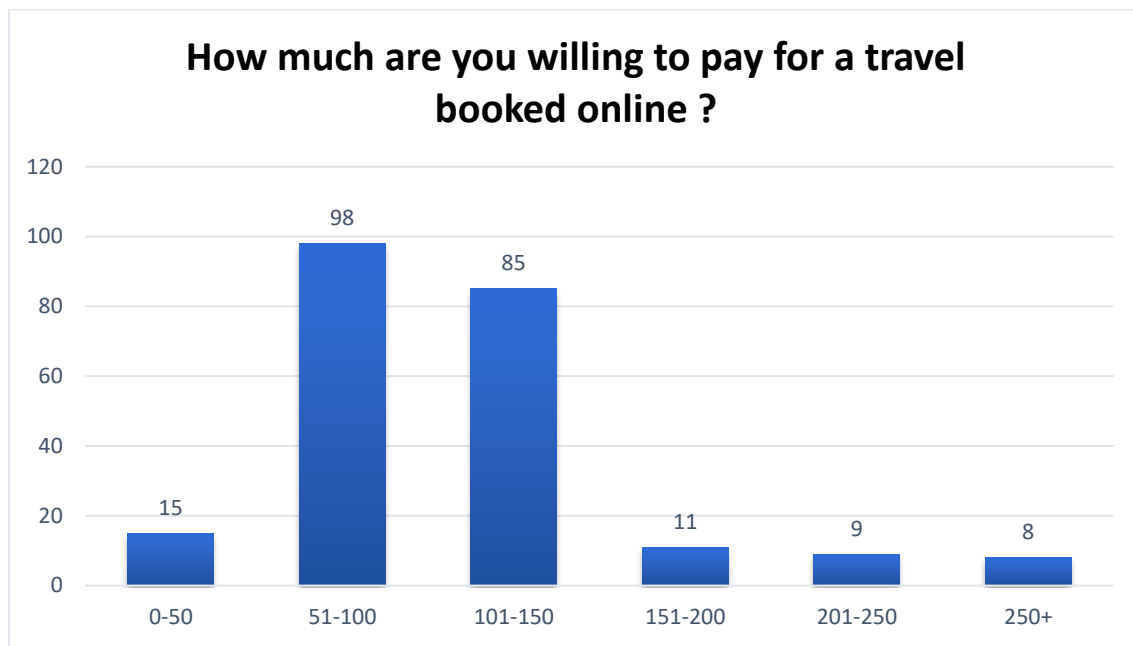


Figure 14 : Questionnaire result : How much is the sample willing to pay for a travel booked online ?

In this question, I gave the example of a weekend get-away. This question enabled me to highlight that people prefer watching about the cost, whatever the quality will be. Indeed, with the arrival of website that propose the customer discounts, the customer becomes more and more sensitive to low prices.

This result echo the answers regarding why people prefer to book plane tickets on low cost companies websites or on comparative websites.

Only a few answered above 150 € (28 people out of 226) meaning that these people prefer the quality of the getaway (maybe a hotel more luxurious, or a place more expensive, etc..).

It is important for a company such as Voyage Privé to find a balance between the quality of the product they sell and the amount they will sell it. Because even though people are more price sensitive, it does not mean that they expect a lower quality. As I said above, website that propose discounts to the customers (i.e. : Groupon) has enabled people to get access to better quality services (for example, a 5* hotel) for a price that they would not normally pay.

When the sample book online, what is the actions they usually do before booking ?

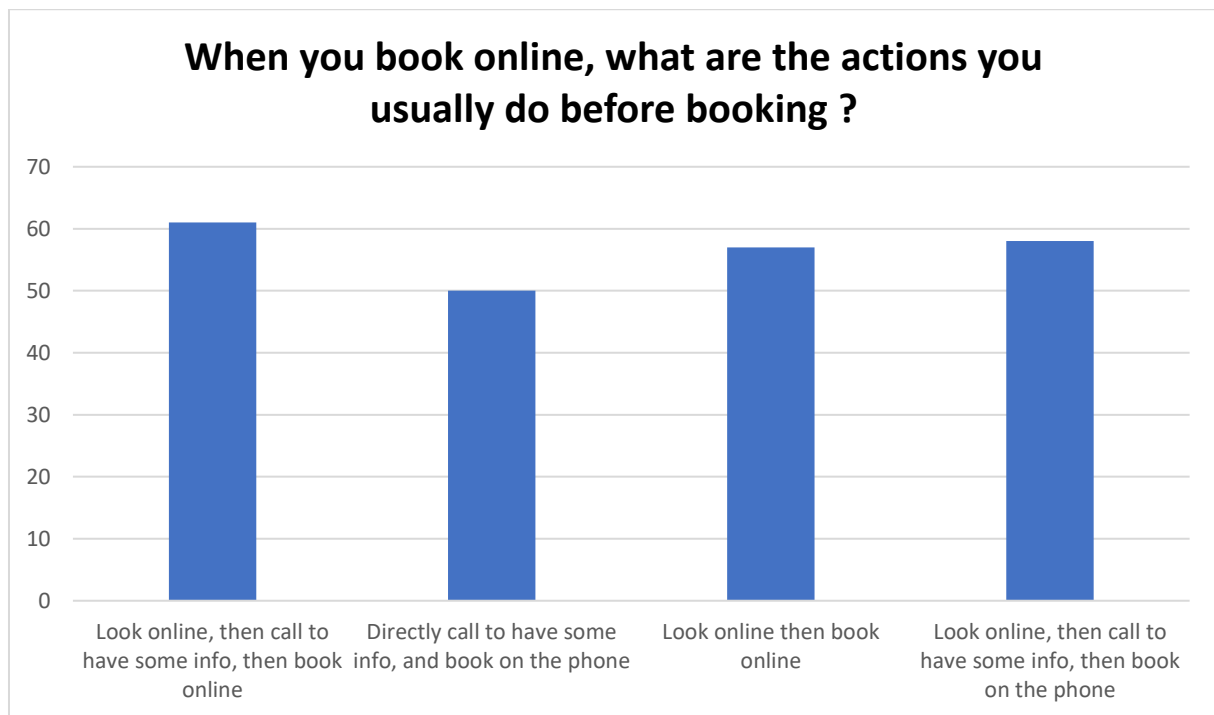


Figure 15 : Questionnaire result : When the sample book online, what is the actions they usually do before booking ?

Each question was followed by a why question.

Two answers were directed to an online behaviour (booking on the website) and two answers were directed to an offline behaviour (booking by phone).

As you can see, the results are extremely tight. 52% of the answers have an online behaviour when they book online. This observation surprised me as it is the same thing my company observed. Our part of online sales is around 55% and the part of offline is 45%. I previously thought that people would be easily scared of paying by phone for various reasons : phone calls are usually a premium rate number so you will pay more, you usually do not know who you are calling (more and more companies have call centres such as Voyage Privé who has Télé Performance in Lisbon), and giving your credit card numbers can be fearful to some people, even if it is more and more secured.

For most of the people who answered, the first step is still to look online, to do some research and to get as much information as you can. Then the ones who prefer booking online will do as such (some of them call either way to get some additional information) and the ones who prefer booking on the phone will do as such.

On a scale from 1 to 10, how much do the sample trust an online website ?

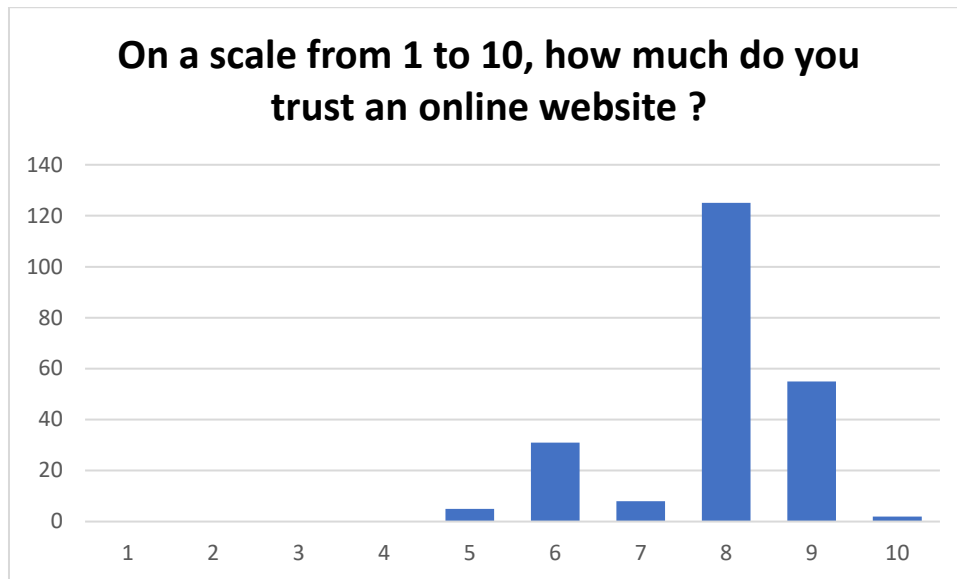


Figure 16 : Questionnaire result : how much do the sample trust an online website ?

In this question, 1 represent the answer “Not trusting” and 10 represent “Trusting completely”. As you can see, for most of the people, they are trusting an online website (182 people out of 226 answered between 8 and 10). The reason for that is that now payments are more secured (with the arrival for example of the 3D Secure Payment). I also believe that with the internet, you can find a lot of consumer reviews. So you easily know if a website is trustworthy or not. Now that I know more about their way of using these website, I want to know more about what they think can be improve to those websites. This part is an open question.

Most of them were suggesting a way to bench other offers at the same time, like a comparative website, to gain some time.

Many are saying that the clarity of the website or of some offers are not always good. To counter this, the company can put more pictures, or pictures of better quality ; they can also synthesise the offers the best way they can. I learned in this job that people do not like to read when there is too much information. They are looking for a clear yet precise description of what they will buy. Some websites have indeed too much text or are not clear enough.

Also, many people found that a lot of websites were too pushy with them. The example that came often in the answers were about Booking. They are putting a lot of message that are similar to the marketing of the shortage. A lot of messages such as “high demand”, “only x rooms left”, “recently booked”, etc. people are finding it anxious.

Some are wondering what the future will bring to these companies. I found it an extremely relevant question. As we saw, with the arrival of the Internet, the tourism sector took an

important turn in its existence. And we can expect that new technologies will bring something more to the sector : arrival of the virtual reality, etc.

The questionnaire was answered by numerous people and I found that many information was confirming what I read in the books or what I observed at my work.

Thus, this questionnaire helped me to understand more about the customer behaviour online and can be a key for an OTA to understand it as well and to adapt an SEM strategy.

3.4 The case study

Voyage Privé is an Online Travel Agency (OTA). Entrepreneurial adventure launched in France in 2004 by Denis Philipon, accompanied by David Bastian, Christophe Serna, Sébastien Tricaud and Alexandre Fontaine, Voyage Privé Group is now the 1st Independent Group of E-tourism in Europe.

Basically, they are selling journeys in France, in Europe and all around the world in the form of a package (i.e. hotel + breakfast + flights) to an advantageous price. They are mainly selling through the mean of flash sales, promotions and last minutes, but they also have some “catalogue” offers that are the same throughout the year with no reduced prices.

An OTA is by definition an agency that provides, on a stand-alone or package basis, travel products and services provided by airlines, accommodation providers, car rental companies, destination service providers and other travel product and service companies. Its distribution channel is of course the internet, but it can also have an offline channel through the mean of call centres.

Yearly turnover of the company is 530 million Euros and it employs 400 people. The company has offices in Aix-en-Provence, France (headquarters) but also in Spain, in England, in Italy, in Poland, in Belgium, in the Netherlands, in Switzerland and in Germany.

To understand the success of the company, here are a few numbers. Voyage Privé was ranked in 2008 in 8th position of the French e-commerce sites thanks to a frequentation of three million visitors. In 2010, it was the third French online travel site, behind Voyages-sncf.com and Promovacances.

In 2010, the company announced the doubling of its turnover which would be around 200 million euros. In 2013, the turnover would be around 400 million euros.

The site announces 6.5 million active members worldwide in 2010. This figure is estimated by the site to 11.5 million members and 4 million customers worldwide for the year 2013.

The company employs 150 people in France in 2010 and 260 people in 2011. In 2013, it employs 350 people, 200 of whom work at Aix-en-Provence headquarters.

Moreover, in May 2016, Voyage Privé Group announced the acquisition of Splendia : the leading provider of luxury hotels and villas.

This acquisition enables Voyage Privé to expand its high-end hotel offer and now allows its customers to book specific hotels and luxury villas outside of its private sales periods. In addition, this acquisition allows Voyage Privé to acquire a CMS (Content Management System) technology and connectivity that is essential for developing relationships with hoteliers.

The website offers a selection of stays and leisure for destinations in France and around the world, at negotiated prices for its members.

According to a survey of November 2016 carried by l'Echo Touristique, a French journal of tourism, Voyage Privé is the Online Agency the most used by French people (7,59/10) in front of Voyages SNCF and Expedia.fr

IV/ What strategy to adapt by OTAs : the example of the website Voyage Privé

In order to answer to this question, I interviewed three people working at my company. The first two people are working in the marketing department, more specifically the SEO and SEA of the company (Yael Romano, SEO supervisor and Alexandre Siahou, SEA and Marketing supervisor). The third one is working on the production department, as a product manager (Marion Beaux).

So first, I will talk about what is done in my company in regards to the Search Engine Marketing strategy.

According to Mrs Romano and Mr Siahou, it is too difficult to capture customer's attention during their first step of their buying process, which is the identification of their needs. However, it is during the comparison phase that they can capture their attention thanks to Google but also thanks to comparison websites.

According to them, what is important is to track the customer to understand its need and its buying process : if you can understand it, then you can make him stay or at least make him come back (retargeting).

According to my colleagues, the most important is the data. You can get it thanks to website such as Google Analytics. In the case of Voyage Privé, the site centric website used is Eulerian Technologies.

This tool allows to measure and to analyse the impact of the digital campaigns. You can find here various data that are crucial to the marketing team in term of understand the customer's behaviour. In fact, you can know from where they come from (is it from a search engine link, is it from a website that will relay the offer the website is selling, how long did the customer stayed on each page visited, did the customer come once or numerous times, etc.).

Regarding the mobile strategy, it has been proven, as I said above, that the more the price of the product is expensive the less people will buy through a smart phone device. It is the case in the tourism sector, so the mobile is not a big strategy for them. However, in the report of Google mentioned above, it is highlighted that 53% of people using a mobile device are leaving the page if it is charging more than 3 seconds. It is where Voyage Privé is trying to get better in term of mobile strategy as their page on mobile are charging for 5 to 10 seconds in average.

Also, thanks to a tool like Eulerian Technologies, they can better understand cross device. For example, a customer that will go on mobile to search, then go on a computer to buy the product. It is important for them so that they can adapt their strategy on each device.

In term of budget, according to them, 70 to 80% of the marketing budget is spent on Google, and the SEA budget is around 2 million Euros.

When I asked them if they believed some companies could do with only SEO strategy (meaning natural referencing), they answered that with the market nowadays and high competition, it was impossible to do without a SEA strategy. Indeed, in an ideal world, you could differentiate yourselves without having to pay, but the competition is extremely high in this sector, so you need to pay to appeared at the top of the search results, so you can take advantage on your competition and attract more customers to your website.

Finally, one of the important strategies according to them is the affiliation, meaning that other website will share your offers. For example, one of the main one for Voyage Privé is called Voyage Pirates. They are extremely active on social networks such as Facebook and can almost double the number of visits just by themselves. However, one of the inconvenient of that strategy is that you have no idea how many of these websites are doing it, so for a big part of visits of your website, you cannot exactly know where they are coming from.

Then I interviewed Mrs Beaux who oversees the product.

According to her, one of the big strategies of Voyage Privé is the mailing. Indeed, voyage Privé is a “closed” website : you have to register to be able to go on the website. This strategy enables Voyage Privé to get a huge database. Thus, mailing is important.

The work of Mrs Beaux is to know about the product : what is working, what product is highly demanded, which region, which country, etc. She analyses this thanks to many KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) that she can get through the tool Eulerian Technologies. For each sales, she is surveying how many people came on the webpage of the sales, how many did start to enter the booking process, how many people actually bought something, etc.

So for example, once I click on this link, I will generate one visit on this sale.



Figure 17: screenshot of an offer on the Voyage Privé website

Thus, Eulerian will count 1 visit for Lux Lisboa Park 4*. Then, when I will click on the “continue” button below, Eulerian will count 1 sale basket started.

SANS VOL | **AVEC VOL ✈**

À partir de **263 €** /pers*
au lieu de ~~375 €~~
pour **3 nuits**

À partir de **298 €** /pers*
pour **3 nuits**

⏏ Durées disponibles: **3 à 7 nuits**

NÉGOCIÉ POUR VOUS !

- En chambre Standard avec balcon
- En formule petit déjeuner
- Verre de bienvenue
- 25 minutes de massage relaxant
- Dégustation de vin, fromage et charcuterie
- Accès à la piscine et au centre de fitness
- Transferts aéroport / hôtel gratuits à réserver auprès de l'hôtel
- Vol au départ de Paris, la province, Bruxelles, Genève et Zurich

DERNIÈRES PLACES

TRANSPORT
Sans vol
MODIFIER

DURÉE ET DATE DE DÉPART
Sam. 5 Août - 3 nuits (4 jours)
MODIFIER

PARTICIPANTS

Adultes: 2
Enfants (2-11 ans): 0

263 € /pers*
au lieu de ~~375 €~~

Continuer

Figure 18: screenshot of the detail of the offer on the Voyage Privé website

And finally, if I actually buy it, Eulerian will count 1 sale for this product.

It is how the product manager will follow the performance of the product : for example if a person visit the page of the product, but does not go through the next step, meaning going to the booking process, then you can ask yourself why this person did not stay ? Was the date he was looking for not available ? Was this date too expensive compared to other dates ? Was the offer not negotiated well enough, meaning the product does not satisfy the customer ?

Thanks to this analysis, the product manager will be able to do a list of tops and flops of the products.

Moreover, another strategy to answer to the customer's expectation is to plan some “commercial animations”. As an essential component of the web marketing strategy, commercial animation boosts the e-commerce traffic throughout the year. Its goal is to bring qualified visitors with an unprecedented, exclusive or promotional promise. To increase your effectiveness with your target audience, commercial animation must be consistent with the world of your online store. A commercial animation plan is then strategic to define the key periods of your sector and to organize at best each action. Indeed, a dynamic online store will

be more frequented than a frozen page and will give a positive image of the business. Hence the challenge of web animation as a means of creating traffic and, ultimately, turnover.

For example, Voyage Privé during the summer will have an operation dedicated to the Mediterranean destinations :



Figure 19: screenshot of a commercial animation on the Voyage Privé website

Or an operation dedicated to the family, which regroup hotels family friendly :



Figure 20 : screenshot of a commercial animation on the Voyage Privé website

It is really important to put these animations in the home page, otherwise many customers will not see the operation and will go somewhere else (even though they could have found what they wanted on your website).

Once the commercial animations are decided, it is time to attract more customers thanks to this commercial animation.

Firstly, as we saw, you can buy keywords so that your webpage will be in top results. But one of the best solutions to attract the customer when there is an animation is the mailing strategy.

There are 6 different levels to succeed a mailing strategy :

1st level - Mass Campaigns

These are identical e-mail messages sent to all contacts in the database. The content is not at all customized according to the expectations or behaviour of the contacts. They are therefore quicker to implement and are not targeted and the results may be poor.

2nd level - Segmented campaigns

A contact database can be easily segmented based on the interaction of contacts in the campaign. For example, a different message will be sent for contacts that have never clicked in messages. And they will receive communications at a different frequency than the contacts that click.

3rd level - Targeted campaigns

In order to send truly targeted e-mail messages, an analysis of clicked links is useful. In this way, the following campaigns can be adapted according to the information that concerns the majority of contacts. The messages then just start to be customized.

4th level - Customised campaigns

Campaigns are centred on contact. Criteria such as geographical area, age, type of products purchased, interests are used to define individualized content for each person. For this purpose, inserts with dynamic content are set up and they will adapt to each contact. They will then receive truly relevant e-mail messages.

5th level - Multichannel campaigns

Once the sent e-mail messages are customized, make sure that the contacts receive information about different channels. For example, if the prospect or customer has agreed to receive SMS, the company must not hesitate to send him his personalised offer via the e-mail channel and via SMS.

6th level - Interactive campaigns

This level is reached when there is a real dialogue with the contact. That is to say when it gives its opinion on the various communications received. The company can then take advantage of

it to improve and improve. At this level, a true confidence is created with the contact and he will not hesitate to advise you to his entourage.

In the case of Voyage Privé, the mailing strategy is both a masse and a segmented one. Indeed, as Voyage Privé is a closed website (you need to register in order to see the offers of the website), the company has a big database to its disposal.

Thus, it is easier for them to do a masse strategy of e-mailing. They know for sure that people who subscribed to the website are at least interested by the concept of receiving some information about interesting travel deals.

Moreover, it is easier for them to keep their database updated. They can thus segment their mailing strategy by knowing the customer's habits. For example, it is current for them to send a mail to a certain part of the database saying things like "as you consulted this offer, we thought you could like this one", in order to give a sense of personalisation and advice to the customer and to maintain or gain his loyalty.

The newsletter sent is also tracked by tools like Eularian Technologies : how much people actually clicked on it, which offer got more visit, etc.

Finally, in order to answer to client's needs, they also use a tool named "Prediggo". This merchandising software allows e-merchants to manage the highlighting of products on their site and to personalise the pages that view the users according to their tastes and their preferences. Some sites do this manually, but Prediggo provides a solution that automates it.

So, for example, in the case of Voyage Privé, if a customer is looking for a travel in South of France, the software will put on top of the webpage the product that will most probably interest the most the customer. By doing that, the customer will be less likely to go somewhere else to find something he wants.

This is what Voyage Privé does currently to answer at best to the needs of the customers, and to capt them at the early stage of their buying process. However, there is still a lot that can be done in this area.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, tourism is one of the sectors that have been the most heavily impacted by the evolution of tools, uses and digital contents. Thus, the term “e-tourism” was created. The term "e-tourism" encompasses the various activities of the tourism sector on the Internet and via e-commerce.

Behind the term "e-tourism" are hidden all activities related to online tourism. As far as the user is concerned, e-tourism therefore consists in collecting information on a travel destination, as well as booking an online stay or comparing the offers of several airlines.

Today, in France, nearly eight out of ten tourists prepare their holidays on the Internet, and one out of three is behind the screen of their computer or mobile device to buy their stay. Faced with the digital revolution, tourism professionals have no choice but to adapt.

We saw that the customers have in general various steps throughout their buying process, which are : the identification of the problem / need of the customer, the search for information, the evaluation of possible alternatives, the purchase, the analysis of the results.

In order to understand better the customer's behaviour when buying online, I chose to do an online survey and the results matched what I could read about it or what I learned at my work. The age is mostly young people, who are using the Internet at high frequency, mostly for social media but also to shop online, to get some information, to work or to book online travels (Booking, Voyage SNCF, Voyage Privé, etc.).

They are mostly looking for good opportunities (good prices, high quality of product).

With the development of e-shops and automated online sales solutions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get out of the mass. But despite the strong competition, it is always possible to bet on e-commerce by adopting an adapted and intelligent marketing strategy.

One of the most important strategy an online website has to adopt is to implement an SEM strategy (Search Engine Marketing strategy). In other words, it is a strategy that will show the company how to increase the website visibility on web pages such as Google Search.

There are two marketing concepts that are really important in order to answer this question : the search engine optimization strategy (also known as SEO) and search engine advertising strategy (also known as SEA).

I decided to take as an example the company I am working for : Voyage Privé.

Voyage Privé is an Online Travel Agency (OTA). They are selling journeys in France, in Europe and all around the world in the form of a package (i.e. hotel + breakfast + flights) to an advantageous price. They are mainly selling through the mean of flash sales, promotions and

last minutes, but they also have some “catalogue” offers that are the same throughout the year with no reduced prices. Yearly turnover of the company is 530 million Euros and it employs 400 people. The company has offices in Aix-en-Provence, France (headquarters) but also in Spain, in England, in Italy, in Poland, in Belgium, in the Netherlands, in Switzerland and in Germany.

This thesis made me wonder and so I suggest and future research subjects from this study : what is the future of these Online Travel Agencies ? With the arrival of new technologies, such as virtual reality, these agencies could completely reinvent themselves. Maybe they could give the opportunity to customers to create their own package of travel, etc.

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