

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN



Worldwide experts have determined that the tourism sector has experienced tremendous growth over the last decade, and it is estimated to be 10% of the global gross domestic product. One region which is most dependent on tourism is the Caribbean; its future development, social, environmental and economy rest heavily on the promotion of this industry. As indicated by David Scowsill in his document “Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism 2015, the Caribbean has the world’s thirteenth largest number of tourism industries and is the region’s first employment generator after the public sector.

On the subject of competition in the tourist industry, the Caribbean Region faces challenges from other destinations located in medium and long distance range, such as China, Dubai, India, United States, and Europe. According to a speech delivered by Honourable Richard Skerritt (Former President of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO)) at the CTO State of the Industry Conference held in Saint Kitts and Nevis, these destinations join the Caribbean in actively seeking more customers from the same markets.

In light of this situation, it is important to highlight the strategies that are being used by countries with effective tourism industries. A well-known example is Dubai, a country which has successfully demonstrated to the world that a tourist destination can be created out of nowhere, even in a desert, positioning itself as a shopping destination with huge malls and an airport hub. This provides the Caribbean with evidence that it must better position itself as a strong attractive destination with a difference in comparison to its competitors.

This means that the Caribbean must have a more strategic and effective application of technology in promoting their region as a tourist destination. If they do, it will lead to an influx of international tourists, as well as produce significant changes in the economic and social structure of the Region. In fact, since tourism promotes and markets activities that take place far from the customer, and since it is the largest global industry, it could potentially be the most important consumer of the computer industry (according to the article “Good Tourism Marketing” published in Madrid, Spain this year).

Additionally, nowadays, the promotion of the tourism industry in the Greater Caribbean Region can be more effective through a number of mechanisms used in the digital era. Travel services and travel agencies have had to change and adapt to technology since they play a key role in the business world, and since they are focused on the best approaches to attracting customers to visit the Caribbean as a tourism destination. Using digital technology has increased competitiveness, rather than relying only on the magazines and promotional brochures that have been used for decades. Humanity's future has been transformed with key changes that have created a future generation of consumers with new needs and demands. These changes include better technological connectivity, a vital tool that has changed and will continue to change the shopping experience and services for people, including those planning to visit a tourist destination. This increase in technology includes smart phones and various other applications that allow immediate access to potential customers who can evaluate tourist destinations, thereby revolutionizing the vacation experience of tourists.

It is expected that the continuing trend for the next few years in relation to tourism promotion on an international level will be newly developing technology. Future generations of tourists will be expected to choose their destinations through innovative reservation interfaces on the web. An innovative example is Robotiker, a system based in Technology System General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) and the Universal Mobil Telecommunications Systems (UMT), which is being designed by the Technological Center Specialized in Information, Technology and Telecommunications. Robotiker allows one to obtain a high standard of communication and quick access to information and tourism information services. The object of this future project is to not only equip the tourist with information by means of the internet, but also offer personalized travel guides which will allow customers to visualize predefined routes around cities, including information on points of interest, all in accordance with the customer's profile. For example, the tourist's profile could include relevant information such as whether they are traveling alone or with children, or whether they are accompanied by a disabled person, etc. These controls would be transparent to the user, as indicated by Spanish expert Juan Miguel Moreno, who has advised various countries in Central America and the Greater Caribbean on the effective use of innovative technologies.

An article published on the CTO State of the Industry Conference held in Saint Kitts and Nevis states that a priority is the sustainability of the tourism sector and the environment, as well as the introduction of new technological strategies for promotion of Caribbean tourism on the international stage. They must have public institutional support and sufficient investment which would cause a cultural exchange among the Greater Caribbean and countries of other continents, thereby strengthening tourism.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight that international tourism promotion of the Greater Caribbean Region is being forced to adapt and strengthen their strategies. This includes slogans used to create a unique identity of the destinations and their tourism attractions, not only of the heavenly beaches but also taking into account the promotion of the gastronomy, handicrafts, and the folklore of the Caribbean. One must bear in mind that the most important strategy is to position the Region as an internationally-competitive destination, attracting tourists with a greater awareness of sustainability, helping to increase foreign exchange earnings, and projecting the best image of the Caribbean utilizing the digital age and taking into account the competitive differences of the other destinations of the World.

Therefore, training and forums in the Latin American and the Greater Caribbean Region have been implemented by qualified training experts in the field of digital and technological tourism. These forums transmit the latest trends that are being implemented, with the aim of generating a higher level of competitiveness among destinations due to an increase in globalization as well as to new generations interested in the technology that will allow them to immediately assess the tourist destinations that they want to visit.

In this regard, the ACS has provided training courses in 2014 and 2015, related to the use of communication technologies, focusing on areas of promotion and marketing for Small and Medium Enterprises, specifically with the Artisans of the Greater Caribbean sector. Artisans from Barbados, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, Granada, St. Kitts and Nevis, among others have benefited.

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