

# Good practices for web presences strategies of tourism destinations

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## Abstract

Increasing success of social networks among users and widespread experiences of companies and organisations on Web 2.0 spaces, calls for flexible web presence strategies that are able to manage an increasing number of changes in technology and behavioural changes of users. The main challenge for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) is to design a comprehensive online presence through the use of social networks and websites. To this end it is assumed that an analysis of the web presence strategies of similar destinations could help to identify good practices that integrate Web 2.0 tools and facilities. Preliminary results of a study comparing the web presence strategies of two DMOs are given. The research approach adopts a systematic process that evaluates the evolving web presence strategies of the two destinations, describing the main good practices identified.

**Keywords:** DMO, website quality, good practices, official and semi-official presences

## 1 Introduction

The Web presence strategy of a DMO – even for a small destination - should go beyond the B2C (Business to Consumer) and the B2B (Business to Business) websites, including some of the most successful Web 2.0 spaces and tools (in the large on- and off-line literature, see, for example (Travel Daily News, 2010)). In this respect, DMOs have to make a number of decisions that address: ‘which’ social networks they are adopting; which document sharing websites they will invest in; and ‘how’ to be present on the identified spaces. Data reported on the use of the Web 2.0 websites in the tourism sector confirm increasing numbers (European Commission, 2010 [July 20, 2011]; Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu> [July 20, 2011]; World Tourism Barometer, 2010 [July 20, 2011]). Even though the majority of DMOs use social networks, they often lack updated information on the large variety of Web 2.0 functionalities and communication services to support their promotional and commercial goals. In other words, DMOs have to identify good practices on such functionalities and services to mitigate the risks resulting from too early or too late adoption. They also have to answer questions related to the adoption of such tools as RSS, widgets, mobile apps, interactive maps, Twitter lists, etc.

There are very few comprehensive and systematic studies in this area, in particular for small/medium DMOs that identify the best web spaces to invest in. Large destinations have been investigated in (Au, 2010), that report an Australian case; a comparison of European national destinations is also reported (Mich & Kiyavitskaya, 2010). The goal of the study, which preliminary results are given in this research note is to describe local DMOs web presence strategies, focusing on social networks, and the use of other communication functionalities to identify good practices for smaller DMOs. The web presence strategies of DMOs in Italy and Canada at destinations with a similar tourist offer and tourism demand have been chosen for comparison.

To support a systematic analysis, the web presence framework introduced in (Mich, 2010) has been adopted. This framework includes a web presence matrix as well as a map of the official and semi-official presences for the DMOs. A qualitative analysis of each presence that includes the Facebook fan page, the Twitter profile and the YouTube brand channel of a DMO, assists in identifying a first set of good practices to improve the web presence strategy of a given DMO.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The second section will briefly introduce DMOs included in the study. Section 3 gives the preliminary results and Section 4 gives some examples of the good practices identified, classifying them in three categories.

## **2 The study**

The tourism destinations analysed in this study include the province of British Columbia in Canada and the province of Trentino in Italy. The tourist offer of these regions is similar, with both destinations offering alpine, lake and sport attractions and activities for visitors. The size of British Columbia is much greater than Trentino in terms of its physical area. Even so, both DMOs represent leading tourist destinations in their respective countries, attracting largely regional markets as well as small percentage of international visitors. Both case studies are analysed through a systematic analysis of their overall provincial and sub-regional destinations. To identify good practices of the two DMOs, the study analysed the following spaces in the DMOs web presence strategy: the official B2C website and social networks, as well as the web 2.0 websites, e.g., YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) or Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>) for sharing videos or pictures. For each of these spaces the main data were gathered (e.g., the registered members, published posts, last official update, etc.). Once these data were gathered a web presence map was drawn illustrating the most interesting strategies.

## **3 Results**

For British Columbia (BC), there are 6 sub-regional destinations, or local DMOs managed jointly by Tourism BC and the local regions. In Italy there are 14 local DMOs in province of Trentino, which is managed by the provincial DMO, Visit

Trentino (VT). For both British Columbia and Trentino the DMOs correspond to geographical areas and they are official DMOs according to ‘government’ strategies.

A first analysis was conducted to check if these DMOs use the three most popular social networks websites, according to the top list given by Alexa ([www.alexa.org](http://www.alexa.org)) that include Facebook (FB, [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), YouTube (YT) and Twitter (TW; [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)). Table 1 and Table 2 summarise the results for BC and VT, respectively.

**Table 1.** Official presences on social networks of the destinations of BC (July 2011)

<i>DMO</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>FB</i>	<i>TW</i>	<i>YT</i>
Tourism British Columbia	<a href="http://www.hellobc.com">www.hellobc.com</a>	y	y	y
Vancouver, Coast Mountains	<a href="http://vcmbc.com">vcmbc.com</a>	y	y	y
Vancouver Island	<a href="http://www.vancouverisland.travel">www.vancouverisland.travel</a>	y	y	y
Thompson Okanagan Tourism	<a href="http://thompsonokanagan.com">thompsonokanagan.com</a>	y	y	n
Northern British Columbia	<a href="http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/nbcta/nbctg10/#/0">www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/nbcta/nbctg10/#/0</a>	n	n	n
Cariboo Chilcotin Coast	<a href="http://www.landwithoutlimits.com">www.landwithoutlimits.com</a>	n	n	n
Kootenay Rockies	<a href="http://www.krtourism.ca/home">www.krtourism.ca/home</a>	y	y	y

According to these tables, the majority of destinations have an official presence on FB; but also YT and TW are widely used. A further step of the study was aimed at conducting a more detailed analysis of the websites of each DMO. For this step the quality of the DMO’s B2C website was analysed to identify tools, functionalities or services that are being used to improve interactions of the DMOs with users and their engagement with the online spaces (namely, RSS, newsletter, mobile applications, widgets, interactive maps, and if it uses other social networks).

As for the quality of the websites, results were quite good. For the website of VT other studies confirm that Trentino has one of the best regional websites in Italy (see Baggio et al., 2011; Sfodera, 2011). Also, the quality of all the local DMOs websites of VT has improved compared to results of a 2007 evaluation. On a scale of very high, high, medium, low, applying the standard table based on the 7Loci meta-model (Mich, 2010a) we have 5 very high, 4 high, and 5 medium. However there is a weak link between them and VT: one of them has no link in the homepage to it (just the logo). There are similar results for BC, where there was 1 very high, 4 high, 2 medium. The Tourism British Columbia website includes a ‘Share this’ function that links the site to ten different social media networks and functionalities, including email, Digg, LinkedIn and Google Buzz. They also have a ‘Blog you BC Travel Trip’, a mobile app, ‘Near Me BC’ and a special offers page that provides a list of discounted products. An issue of relevance for all DMOs in the study is the number of languages they website offer to an user: VT offers 8 languages, however they correspond to weakly contextualized versions; all the other but one have a German version; one has only the German version beside the Italian one; the other have both English and German; Val di Fiemme and Valsugana have three more languages, but only one is the same (NL). For BC, the Tourism BC website offers 5 languages in addition to English. Both destinations have percentage of international tourists (higher in winter than in summer) that necessitate the use of multiple languages.

Regarding the official presences on social networks other from FB, TW and YT, we have found that some DMOs use Flickr (3 for BC; 3 for VT), but it is not used frequently by any of them. 4 DMOs of VT give a links to Trivago ([www.trivago.com](http://www.trivago.com)) and TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.org](http://www.tripadvisor.org)) whereas Tourism BC does not give links to any of these sites. A future analysis will investigate how ‘lively’ these presences are using suitable metrics (see for example, indexes described in (Baer, 2010)). All the information will be integrated in a web presence matrix and used to draw a web presence map.

**Table 2.** Official presences on social networks of the destinations of VT (July 2011)

<i>DMO</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>FB</i>	<i>TW</i>	<i>YT</i>
Visit Trentino	<a href="http://www.visittrentino.it">www.visittrentino.it</a>	y	y	y
APT Trento, Monte Bondone e Valle dei Laghi	<a href="http://www.ap.trento.it">www.ap.trento.it</a>	y		
APT Rovereto e Vallagarina	<a href="http://www.visitrovereto.it">www.visitrovereto.it</a>			
APT Val di Fiemme	<a href="http://www.visitfiemme.it">www.visitfiemme.it</a>	y	y	y
APT Ingarda Trentino	<a href="http://www.gardatrentino.it">www.gardatrentino.it</a>	y	y	y
APT Val di Fassa	<a href="http://www.fassa.com">www.fassa.com</a>	y	y	y
APT Terme di Comano, Dolomiti di Brenta	<a href="http://www.visitacomano.it">www.visitacomano.it</a>	y		y
APT San Martino di Castrozza, Passo Rolle ...	<a href="http://www.sanmartino.com">www.sanmartino.com</a>	y	y	y
APT Madonna di Campiglio, Pinzolo, ...	<a href="http://www.campigliodolomiti.it">www.campigliodolomiti.it</a>	y	y	
APT Valsugana Scarl	<a href="http://www.valsugana.info">www.valsugana.info</a>	y	y	y
APT Valli di Sole, Peio e Rabbi	<a href="http://www.valdisole.net">www.valdisole.net</a>	y		y
APT Altopiano di Pinè e Valle di Cembra	<a href="http://www.visitpinecembra.it">www.visitpinecembra.it</a>			y
APT Val di Non	<a href="http://www.visitvaldinon.it">www.visitvaldinon.it</a>	y	y	y
APT Altopiano di Folgaria, Lavarone e Luserna	<a href="http://www.montagnaconamore.it">www.montagnaconamore.it</a>	y	y	y
APT Dolomiti di Brenta, Paganella, Andalo ...	<a href="http://www.visitdolomitipaganella.it">www.visitdolomitipaganella.it</a>	y		y

Finally, the study highlighted that many DMOs do not use simpler and consolidated tools like the newsletter, RSS, etc; for example, none of the DMOs of BC offer RSS (one says it will come) and only 4 of VT do; mobile applications are offered by 3 websites in BC and by two in Trentino; more widespread is the use of interactive maps (offered by 2/3 of the analysed DMOs); less frequent is the WebTV. Results confirm those in (Milano et al., 2011) and other studies that show a limited usage of Web2.0 tools and functionalities.

## 4 Good practices

The qualitative analysis of the web presences of the DMOs in BC and Trentino has allowed this study to identify a number of good practices that at a first instance can be classified in three groups: organisational, technical and relational.

Examples of organizational good practices are the following:

- Social media ‘room’: used as intermediate space to allow the DMOs to maintain a control on content and improve their visibility and image (see VT).
- Public list on Twitter: used to give a list of all the local DMOs that have a presence (profile) on Twitter (see @visittrentino/apt and @TourismBC/lists/memberships).

Technical good practices are the following:

- Yahoo answers: gives the user a space on which looking for suggestions, unstructured information that cannot be given on the website; helps the DMO to monitor users sentiment, expectations, gaining control in respect of un-official spaces. (VT).
- Intuitive names of the semi-official presences: for example, <https://www.facebook.com>HelloBC> for BC vs. <http://www.hellobc.com>. Not followed by Thomson Okanagan (<http://thomsonokanaga.com> vs <http://www.facebook.com/totabc>).

Relational good practices are to increase the relations with and among the users:

- Engagement initiative: as for example ‘Passo dopo Passo’ (step after step), on the Val di Non website; Share your tip for a BC trip, on TourismBC website.
- SMS to registered tourists to inform them of events in the destination (Comano).
- My<destination>: to create personal travel guide (e.g., ‘Comano pack’)/Account Log In to plan your trip (e.g., TourismBC).

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