Monograph: Information Technology in the Tourism Industry 
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Guest Editors: Antonio Guevara-Plaza, Andrés Aguayo-Maldonado, and Roman Egger

2 Presentation: Information Technology, a Powerful Tool for Tourism — Antonio Guevara-Plaza, Andrés Aguayo-Maldonado, and Roman Egger

7 Specific Inter-Cultural Features in On-Line Distribution — Roman Egger, Mario Jooss, and Sabine Schmeisser

14 Context-based Matchmaking to enhance Tourists’ Experiences — Carlos Lamsfus, Christoph Grän, Auirke Alzua-Sorazabal, and Hannes Werthner

22 Testing Delivery Systems in Transnational Virtual Learning: The Vocational Management Training for the European Tourism Industry (VocMat) Case Study — Cathy Guthrie and Lluis Prats-Planagumá

30 Technological Tools to support Online Marketing: SEGITTUR’s Role — Carlos Romero-Dexeus

33 Technological Innovation, a Challenge for the Hotel Sector — Patricia Miralles

39 Technology Map: Bringing R&D+I Benefits to SMEs in the Tourism Sector. The Case of TOUREG Project — Mateo Amengual-Rigo, Jaime Bagur-Mora, Sandor Van der Meer, and Anne-Laure Debrux

UPNET (UPGRADE European NETwork)

48 From Informatic Spektrum (GI, Germany, and SI, Switzerland) Health Informatics
Large-Scale Antibody Profiling of Human Blood Sera: The Future of Molecular Diagnosis — Andreas Keller, Nicole Ludwig, Sabrina Heisel, Petra Leidingen, Claudia Andres, Wolf-Ingo Steudel, Hanno Hower, Bernhard Burghet, Matthias Hein, Joachim Weickert, Eckart Meese, and Hans-Peter Lenhof

CEPIS NEWS

55 Selected CEPIS News — Fiona Fanning

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Technological Tools to support Online Marketing: SEGITTUR’s Role

Carlos Romero-Dexeus

The purpose of this article is to present the latest technological tools which SEGITTUR, Spain’s State Company for the Management of Tourism Innovation and Technology, has developed in recent years to support the online marketing of tourist services offered by Spanish firms over the Internet. Some of these tools are included on Spain’s official tourism promotion portal, Spain.info, such as the Booking Centre Directory (Segitturhotels) and the Travel and Offers Search Engine (Segitturdiscover). Other tools were developed independently, such as the Marketing Platform or www.unsitioideal.com. All of them aim to provide the sector with access to a promotion and marketing channel with tremendous potential and to significantly reduce the intermediation and positioning costs which would be incurred if these tools did not exist.

Keywords: 2.0 Communities, Internet, New Technologies, Offers, Online Marketing, Search Engine, Tourism, Tourist, Tourist Promotion, Trips.

1 Introduction

The Spanish Sociedad Estatal para la Gestión de la Innovación y las Tecnologías Turísticas, State Company for the Management of Tourism Innovation and Technology (SEGITTUR), was created at the end of 2002 as a way of using new technologies in the promotion of tourism. SEGITTUR’s mission is to develop new technologies related to tourism, and to promote their use among the sector’s stakeholders in order to place Spain in a leading position worldwide as a tourist destination, while helping improve the competitiveness of Spanish companies and resorts.

To this end, SEGITTUR uses new technologies to complement Turespaña’s work in promoting and marketing Spanish tourism abroad, as is the case of the management of Spain’s tourism portal, Spain.info. Based on this platform, SEGITTUR has developed a whole range of initiatives and technological tools to help enhance the visibility of the Spanish brand, ensure that the image tourists perceive online is one of reliability and quality, and enable tourists to access the entire spectrum of existing tourist services.

Specifically, the targets SEGITTUR pursues through its projects are:

- To foment the use of new technologies in the tourism sector, especially in the field of the Internet
- To enhance the efficiency of the tourism sector by generalizing access to the new technologies
- To support online marketing of Spanish tourist services and products
- To contribute to the online promotion of Spain as a first rate tourist destination

With these objectives in mind, SEGITTUR believes that, in the specific case of online marketing, the Internet offers the sector an unparalleled channel for any tourist service provider, regardless of its size and geographical location, to reach tourists directly wherever they may be, in equality of conditions, and with lower intermediation costs.

The main advantages which this marketing channel brings companies and destinations which provide tourism services can be summarized as follows:

- Rapid adjustment to market needs; companies can add products to their catalogues or remove them online, or change prices and descriptions according to demand.
- A reduction in costs; companies save on the distribution cost.
- Size of the target public; online sales through a website can be made anywhere in the world. This means that the potential public is the same size as the number of Internet users: over 1,400 million worldwide, making the Internet the best and largest showcase in the world – a global supermarket.
- Creating relationships; through existing applications (e-mails, forums, 2.0 communities, etc.), companies can create and maintain relationships with their customers rapidly and instantaneously, which is an extremely valuable source of information for the sector.
- Coexistence in time and space; with online sales, the business can be open 24/7 anywhere in the world.

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Information Technology in the Tourism Industry

The main online marketing tools on which SEGITTUR has worked and is working on now are set out below.

2 Spain.info, Spain’s Official Tourism Portal
SEGITTUR manages Spain.info, Spain’s tourism portal <http://www.spain.info/> (see Figure 1), which leverages the new technologies for publicizing, promoting and marketing the country’s tourism. One of the most remarkable features of the portal is the large number of visits it receives: over 30 million a year.

At Spain.info, tourists can find travel ideas that are aligned with their own particular interests (if they are travelling with children, if they want to learn the language, if they want to do sport, etc.), together with the latest novelties in various areas, such as new health and beauty techniques or adventure tourism activities. They will also find information on interesting events which they can attend during their stay and suggestions which vary according to the time of year. The portal includes a multimedia section, with images, videos, recordings, virtual visits, guided tours, 3D panoramic views and other interactive tools.

Tourists can plan every aspect of their trip on the web, since they have access to detailed updated information about accommodation (hotels, apartments, camp sites, country hotels, whether they allow pets, etc.); places of interest (museums, monuments, spas, golf courses, ski resorts…), and services (transport, street maps, tourist offices, embassies…). Spain.info also provides flight information and the possibility of booking hotels online (over 2,000 hotels), hiring a car, or contracting a wide range of activities and tourist products through its offers search engine.

The portal also contains a wealth of practical information about what you need to know when you travel to Spain, such as entry requirements, timetables, approximate prices, the documents required for driving, sailing, etc. Tourists can also choose to receive regular e-mail messages with the news and reports published on Spain.info. Today, over 100,000 users worldwide subscribe to the portal’s newsletter.

All the Spain.info content is translated into several languages, and the information is adapted to the various international markets, with specific versions of the portal for each country. There are currently 17 portals in different languages which address the specific markets of Germany, Austria, United Kingdom, United States, France, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Holland, Japan, China, Canada, Portugal and Brazil.

3 Segitturhoteles: Booking Centre Directory
SEGITTUR developed and manages this tool which integrates booking centres for accommodation and hotel

![Figure 1. Spain.info, Spain’s Tourism Portal Home Page.](image-url)
Information Technology in the Tourism Industry

chains on Spain’s official tourism portal, Spain.info. The directory currently lists more than 2,000 establishments and provides tourists with the possibility of booking their accommodation in Spain online. Transactions are not conducted through Spain.info, but directly on the booking systems of the companies, associations or institutions which subscribe to the project.

One of the main advantages of this initiative for tourists is that the booking is made from a single point, while they are also offered different booking centre options for the same accommodation. When users have chosen the establishment on Spain.info, they make the reservation on the booking centre web page and then, once they have completed the transaction, they return to Spain’s tourism portal.

In order to ensure correct customer service with guarantees of reliability and quality, the booking centres in this directory have to meet a set of requirements in terms of the product offered, the booking terms, and the way the booking is made.

These requirements can be summarized as follows: given Spain.info’s international approach, the portal of a member booking centre must be in at least one foreign language; it must comply with current legislation; it must be able to confirm bookings in real time; it must inform users of the terms under which bookings, changes and cancellations are made; and it must guarantee payment security and provide a customer care service, among other things.

The main advantage which this booking tool provides for the sector in comparison with other distribution channels on the Internet is the support which the Spain.info tourism portal provides, with a large number of visits, lower distribution costs, and control over the marketed product and the price shown. All of this is underpinned by an international promotion campaign, which has been run in over 13 languages in more than 20 countries, with a minimum offer of 16 different products through over 53 different channels.

4 Segitturdiscovery: Travel and Offers Search Engine

This is a space in Spain.info for publishing individual tourist programmes, by which is meant a set of activities and services in the same package, organized by a travel agency or by the service provider included in the programme. Its interest lies in the possibilities it offers for both the travel agency sector and the end customer, since it opens up a world of possibilities for organizing a trip to Spain.

The service provider chooses the sections of the portal where they wish to publish their offer (art and culture, resorts, gastronomy, nature, sport, fiestas, etc.) and has an exclusive search engine for complementary tourist activities.

Tourists can look for information through the exclusive offers search engine, where the search can be narrowed down by the type of activity desired, geographical location, or date. Booking requests are sent from Spain.info directly to the supplier, who is responsible for completing the sales process with the tourist.

The main advantage this tool has for the sector is the guarantee that publishing these offers on Spain’s official tourist portal implies, a portal which receives nearly thirty million visits a year, along with the possibility suppliers have of choosing the sections in which they wish to publish their programmes. All of this is underpinned by an international promotion campaign which reinforces all the communication work.

The service also allows users to maintain control over the product marketed and the price shown.

5 Unsitioideal.com

The project Unsitioideal.com (<http://www.unsitioideal.com/>) ("un sitio ideal" is Spanish for "an ideal place") was conceived to promote the use of new technologies in the accommodation tourism sector. To this end, various tools and services were developed to enhance companies’ competitiveness.

Among other options, Unsitioideal.com offers Web page creation, domain maintenance, user support services and self-management of the website. This provides establishments with a comprehensive tool which enables them to promote and manage their business. In addition, they have the added value of the brand created and the advantage of forming part of a specialized portal, which increases their visibility and their access to potential demand. Thanks to the page’s advanced search engine, tourists have ready access to all available accommodation.

With this project SEGITTUR also supports the marketing of accommodation, with advice on communication with customers and joint promotion and marketing projects, loyalty-building campaigns, and programmes for positioning in search engines.

6 Segittureserve: Marketing Platform

This is based on the development of a technological platform for the integrated management of tourist bookings from which the stakeholders of the tourism sector within the system can manage the whole of their inventory on the Internet and, under SEGITTUR’s guidance, control and monitoring, offer it to all the tour operators and Internet users.

The system promotes the creation of various booking centres which may be associations of suppliers, town and city councils, private entities… Each booking centre can connect consumers directly with suppliers without the need for intermediation. In addition, there is also a professional version which facilitates dealings between suppliers and intermediaries with a differentiated treatment in terms of rates and functionalities.

In conclusion, we would highlight the fact that all of these initiatives arose from the need for Spain’s national tourism authority, through SEGITTUR, to respond to the technological revolution sparked by the Internet in recent years, which has transformed the way the stakeholders of the sector relate to one another, their services and their end customers, rewriting the rules of the game and expanding the playing field in which we had been used to competing up until now.