

BOOK REVIEW



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eTourism: Information Technology for Strategic Tourism Management

By Dimitrios Buhalis. Pearson Education Limited <www.pearsoneduc.com> 2003, xxvii + 376 pp (glossary, index, figures, tables) \$59.00 Pbk. ISBN 0582 35740 3

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The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in strategic tourism management is becoming more necessary, making this book a timely and important one. The challenge, however, is that information can become rapidly obsolete because the field moves so fast. Buhalis has done an excellent job of incorporating concepts and ideas that will stand the test of at least a few years time, in addition to discussing more time-bound applications. His focus on strategic issues for tourism management and marketing, in addition to the specific industry sector applications of ICT, offers thorough coverage of the topic. The book is well organized and the schema at the beginning of each chapter are particularly useful for the reader. The volume has a rich array of resources with reading lists, websites, and case studies in each chapter. Keywords are highlighted to assist the learning process. In general, the book is well researched, logically presented, and very student-oriented.

The first of the book's two sections consists of five chapters. These cover issues, trends, and challenges associated with the use of ICT for strategic management. After an introductory chapter laying out the scope, terminology, and evolution of the topic, the focus shifts in chapter 2 to applications of the technologies. A useful discussion of value chains is accompanied by many examples of current strategies from the business literature applicable to tourism enterprises. Buhalis lays out the diversity of ICT applications to implement different strategic choices, including a discussion of the virtual corporation. Managers of tourism enterprises will find this discussion illuminating with its indepth discussion of applications for competitiveness. The next chapter delves into the overlap of different ICTs, including explanations of the telecommunication networks and the evolution of computer reservation systems (CRS), ending with a multidimensional framework for ICTs in tourism.

The last two chapters of this section focus on demand and supply. Chapter 4 examines the different needs of e-consumers and discusses how customer satisfaction can be improved with ICT. This is a difficult topic to address, because custo-

mers' preferences and behavior change so rapidly. The many tables presented here will soon be outdated, but Buhalis has augmented the statistics with discussions of underlying trends, which provide substance and longevity. Chapter 5 focuses on supply-driven e-tourism, especially the application of ICT to improve an institution's competitiveness. The author examines the particular challenges facing small and medium enterprises in using ICT. It is pleasing to see the topic of customer relationship management addressed, but the brevity of coverage of this important concept is a shortcoming. Chapter 6, the last one in this part of the book, discusses the distribution systems of tourism, their integration, and how ICTs are being applied to distribute tourism products more effectively. It is informative and is a strong conclusion to an excellent first section of the book.

The second section, consisting of seven chapters, examines the subject in the various sectors of the industry. The author focuses on airlines, hospitality operations, tour operators, travel agencies, and destinations. It could be criticized for the rather limited choice, clearly omitting such sectors as attractions, entertainment, meetings and conventions, gaming, transportation, and food and beverage. What is covered are clearly the most important ones, and the author provides much relevant information pertaining to those. The use of the term "e" before each sector (such as e-hospitality) is somewhat unclear. It has no specific meaning and leaves this reader wondering, "What is an e-airline or an e-hotel, anyway?"

The e-hospitality chapter focuses more on traditional chain hotels and guest houses and omits many different kinds such as timeshare, condominiums, and cruiselines. There is also very little discussion of the property management systems that are the backbone of most information processing in hotels, or of the network connectivity between hotel computer reservations systems, switches, and global distribution systems. The next two chapters cover tour operators and travel agencies, but they are briefer than one might desire. Both could have been expanded significantly, to perhaps include the different types of cyber travel intermediaries that are emerging. Chapter 9, on destinations, covers the critical issues well and is a strong discussion. It would, however, have been pleasing to see the issue of destination sustainability and ICT application to assist in that endeavor addressed. For example, discussions of the use of geographic information systems, global positioning systems, and other such technologies to manage and monitor the use of a destination's resources would be a welcome addition. The final chapter is good and points to the future. It describes some important trends and recognizes that change is the only constant particularly in the field of ICT—a very true assessment.

In summary, Buhalis has done an excellent and thorough job of capturing the power of ICT in strategic tourism management. This is an important addition to the literature on tourism information technology, with its first part strong and innovative. The book's only weaknesses are its tendency to euro-centricity (which has precluded the adequate capturing of nuances of ICT applications in other parts of the world), its rather limited coverage in some of the sector chapters, and the exclusion of some tourism sectors. Overall, though, the book is highly recommended for all university-level classes; many practitioners would also gain much insight from reading the book. **A**

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