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Finger Lakes Visitors Connection
Whitepaper on Websites-Ontario County
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June 11, 2007

Impact of the World Wide Web on our industry

The World Wide Web (www) was first created and introduced in 1990 and according to U.S. Destination Marketing has been the fastest growing communication tool ever. “It took radio broadcasters 38 years to reach an audience of 50 million, television 13 years, and the Internet just 4 years,” cites Leah Woolford, CEO, USDM.net. “Technology has evolved from simple desktop computers processing and storing information to highly portable computers interacting instantaneously 24/7 with a worldwide network of computers to access and share documents, digital images, databases, audio, streaming video, and ...human experience.”(Woolford)

The Finger Lakes Visitors Connection began its first presence on the World Wide Web in December of 1995. (<http://www.vivanet.com/~hartline/ontario.html>)

We have all seen the dramatic transformation over the last ten years as the marketplace and consumer behaviors have created new online businesses and billions of dollars in revenue streams. Travel now accounts for more commerce online than any other industry, including computers, books and music. (USDM.net) Internet technologies of today have portability and speed. Consumer expectations are enhanced by high-speed access, wireless access, handheld portable devices (PDA) or phone, specific information by global positioning satellites (GPS) and more.

The Travel Industry of America quotes data from 2002, when 85% of 113 million adults who used the internet indicated they were travelers, translating to 96 million travelers...and this information is five years old! These online travel planners typically have used the web for airfares/schedules, maps and driving directions, and locating places to stay.

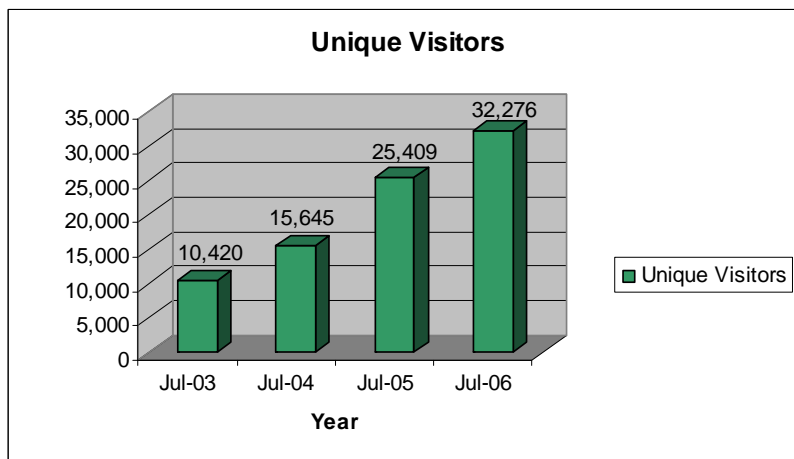
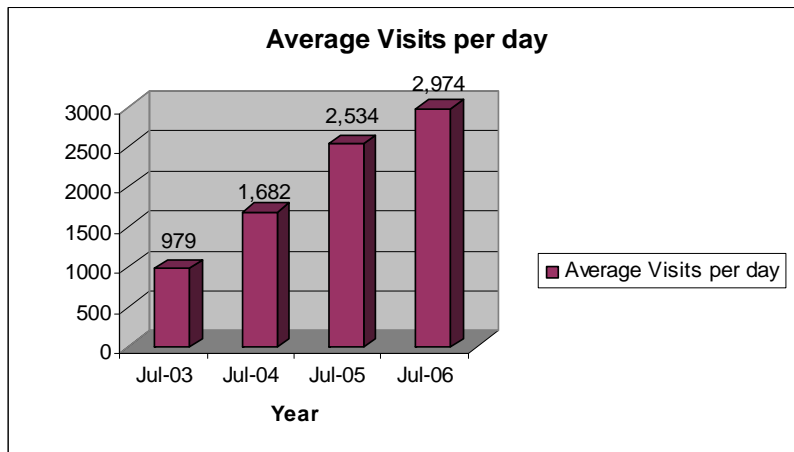
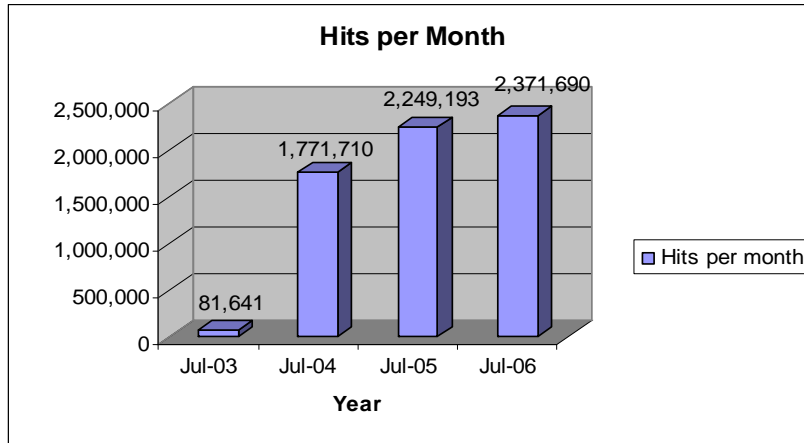
In Woolford’s article, *The Internet’s Impact on Travel & Tourism, Part 1*, she states “The need for examining and implementing ‘best practices’ for both what today’s online bookers and travel planners expect and what competing DMO web sites are offering continues to grow. DMOs must keep up with, not only updating their online content, but updating the entire ‘Internet consumer experience’ and the expectations for Web site design, navigability, online booking, search engine presence, and more. Actually, they must keep pace with what their competing destinations are offering online—in content, value, convenience, and ‘consumer friendly’ technical ease.”

TIMELINE next Page:

As you will see by this timeline, FLVC has maintained and expanded its presence on the Web through several different niche market Websites, and has continued to evaluate its content and design throughout the years, updating and improving as needed and fundable.

CURRENT STATUS

Below are comparative statistics on our website growth and popularity since 2003 during the peak month of July:



SEARCH ENGINE RANKINGS:

The use of keywords and Search Engine Optimization since 2003 has brought our site into the top 5 rankings with Google/AOL, Jeeves, MSN and Yahoo.

2003 Search Engine Rankings:

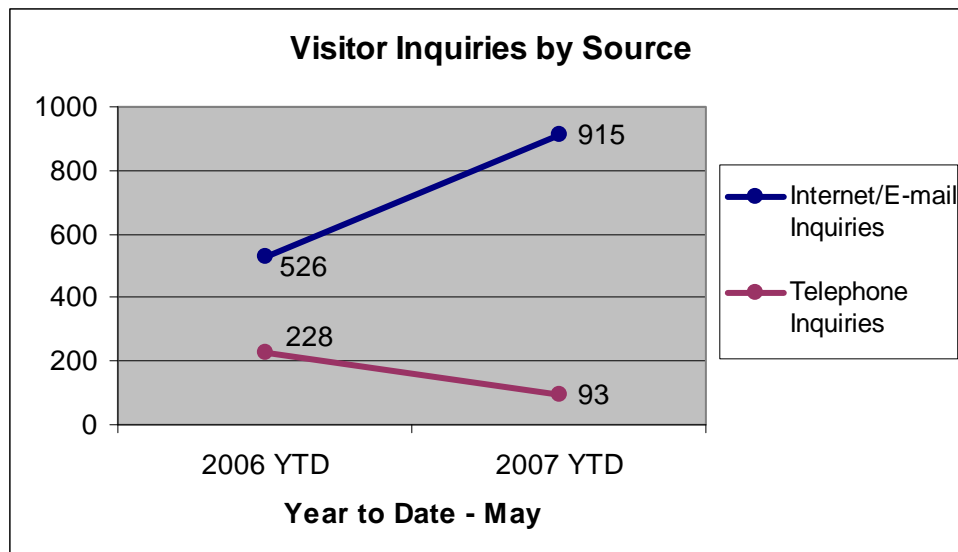
Google #31
Yahoo #30
Ask Jeeves #5

2007 Search Engine Rankings on Key words (Finger Lakes New York):

Google/AOL #3
Yahoo #2
MSN #1
Jeeves # 2

VISITOR INQUIRIES

In a survey released in March 2007, Randall Travel Marketing reported that 65% of mail survey respondents used the website for trip planning. Additionally, from the respondents of the intercept survey, 39% of all visitors used the website for information.



Tracking FLVC visitor inquiries shows that for 2007 YTD inquiries from the Internet/email are up 57% over the same YTD last year, while phone inquiries YTD are down -68%. What we are seeing is not fewer phone calls, but the types of questions we are getting are more planning itineraries in nature. Visitors have already researched us on the website and are calling for specific details and direction or many times they are already here.

Print publications: It has been noted that requests via phone and internet are down for printed materials. Visitors are asking different questions, because for the most part they have already been on the website and have their initial information.

IMPACT ON STAFF AND BUDGET

Budget Year	Internet	* Marketing Actual	% of Marketing	County Contract	Matching funds	Total Budget **	% of Total Budget
1996	\$1,750.00	\$144,271.00	1.2%	\$ 260,928.00	\$48,296.00	\$309,224.00	0.6%
2001/2002	\$23,250.00	\$239,210.00	9.7%	\$ 475,087.00	\$85,666.00	\$560,753.00	4.1%
2005/2006	\$48,600.00	\$227,022.00	21.0%	\$ 571,963.00	\$72,225.00	\$644,188.00	7.5%

* No personnel expense included

* Internet marketing not included

** Private sector partnerships and funding not included

Will the World Wide Web impact staff and budget at the Visitors Connection? Yes. It already has in many ways. As you can see by the chart above internet expenses now make up 21% of the marketing budget for FLVC and nearly 8% of the total budget. As for staff, websites have become a major focus because of the time required in updating individual databases (I LoveNY.com, VisitFingerLakes.com, Finger-Lakes.com, Routes 5 & 20.com, FingerLakesTrails.com, ExploreNYArts.com, slicedicespice.com, natureshealthclub.com), responding to inquiries from the internet, content updates, design changes, etc. Maintenance and updates involve every member of the staff keeping content accurate and current.

THE FUTURE WWW.VISITFINGERLAKES.COM

What is ahead for FLVC technology? Simply put, Web 2.0-the user defined web. Internet users and travelers are now able to create and distribute in their own way the information content and the channels through which they wish to distribute it. Have you heard of or have you ever used Travelocity, Myspace.com, Wikipedia, Youtube.com? Interactive, experiential, and instantaneous information from around the world is at the users' fingertips.

Gaining in Internet technology popularity are **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication) subscribers, getting online news and information which saves information search time for users; **Video podcasts** (youtube.com) which allows visitors to "experience" before they decide to come; and **blogs or weblogs**, a form of online diaries or journals which can be very general topics (traveling in the Finger Lakes) or very specific (staying at a particular hotel) and obviously can be posted as good or bad "news" for future visitors. **Social networking** (myspace.com) allows users to create their profile and match it with others who are similar, so they can create and organize trip experiences with the reassurances of others like them who had similar experiences. **Wikis** (wikipedia.com or wikitravel.org) allows Internet users to collaboratively create and continuously update online information for a global travel guide.

Web 2.0 technologies enable Internet users to become co-producers, co-designers, co-marketers and co-distributors of tourism experiences and services. This will be the web of the future. (*Web 2.0 in the Tourism Industry: a new tourism generation and new e-business models, by Dr. Mariana Sigala*)

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion and again citing from Woolford's article, "Having the destination Web site of your destination marketing organization or convention and visitor bureau be search engine compliant and visible is literally worth a fortune in marketing value and should, therefore, be a vital part of the technical requirements, ongoing marketing tactics and a major portion of your marketing budget."

Sources:

Executive Summaries-Travelers' Use of the Internet, 2004 edition, Travel Industry of America, The Power of Travel

The Internet's Impact on Travel & Tourism, Part 1, Woolford, Leah, CEO, USDM.net

WEB 2.0 in the tourism industry: A new tourism generation and new e-business models, Sigala, Dr. Marianna, Business School, University of the Aegean

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection Visitors Warehouse Database

www.VisitFingerLakes.com web trends reports