SEARCH VISIBILITY AND ONLINE SOCIAL PRESENCE FOR BED AND BREAKFASTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Online visibility and social media presence of a business have become very influential in the way people conduct business. Hospitality businesses are gravitating toward things like social media, in an effort to reach a larger customer base on a more socially interactive level, infused with technology, as a means to boost business. This study examined the extent to which the Bed and Breakfasts (B&B) sector of the industry uses social media tools (particularly Facebook and Twitter) and whether or not using them had any effect on how Bed and Breakfast websites appeared on the three major search engines. The study also aimed to find the difference in how Bed and Breakfasts ranked across the three major search engines (Bing, Google and Yahoo).

The study revealed that although social media has become extremely popular in marketing efforts for many hospitality businesses, there was no direct relationship between Bed and Breakfasts using social media in marketing efforts and how the Bed and Breakfasts ranked on search engines. It was shown however that having a strong online presence and using social media can help Bed and Breakfasts boost their marketing efforts, and business.

Keywords: Online Presence, Social media marketing, web 2.0, web marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Bed and Breakfast marketing.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

New online media and the host of features such as social interacting sites, wikis, and blogs have developed into tools of great significance in travel planning and buying (Schegg et al 2008). These tools are referred to as Web 2.0 tools. Web 2.0 is a vast collection of powerful web tools (like wikis, blogs and social media) that can be tailored to do what the user wants them to do. The user selects the tool that best serves their purpose. Web 2.0's user-generated platform, has and continue to reform the marketing processes of travel (Yang et al., 2010). The impetus for such a reform is the fact that the internet has been recognized by the world of hospitality "as an opportunity" (Egger and Buhalis, 2008) to promote the visibility of the products and services. Bed and Breakfasts are a part of the tourism industry (Rogers, 2005). According to Rogers (2005), "a bed and breakfast's visibility increases when it utilizes the Internet". The author further elucidated that the increase in business can vary depending on the depth of the website and online guidebooks listings.

Currently, several hospitality suppliers are becoming more aware of the online visibility and the value of gathering intelligence from social media, their own websites, and other online sites, to get a better feel for customer behavior patterns in a bid to predict what their needs are and be in a better position to meet those needs (Hospitality Industry Report, 2011).

A few years ago, gathering quantitative responses from guests through surveys was the sole feedback method used by hospitality service providers. (Hospitality Industry Report, 2011) Hospitality businesses have gathered structured information about their customers like names, addresses, phone numbers, and membership levels and properties the customer has stayed at in the past and used that data to make better decisions regarding campaigns and offerings (Hospitality Industry Report, 2011). Now they are turning to the internet in a bid to expand their reach in gathering customer information. Using advanced analytics, hotel executives can now combine that structured data with unstructured feedback from customers, such as online reviews, Facebook comments and Twitter posts, to get a more complete picture of customer feedback in order to serve them better. These tools have become very popular in gathering intelligence about customers and their preferences. However, many businesses (Bed and Breakfasts included) are still behind in adopting this valuable resource to be used as a strategic part of their business model.

1.1.1 Background of Bed and Breakfast Establishments

Bed and Breakfast (B&B) represents a distinctive segment within the hospitality industry, primarily because it is often operated by people who offer personalized service in a homely environment. According to research, discrepancies exist regarding how many bed and breakfasts exist (Rogers, 2005). Valhouli (2002), and Kline, et al (2004) claim that there were 18,000. However, the Professional Association of Innkeepers International (PAII) stated on their website that there were an estimated 17,000 in the United States, and an estimated worth of $3.4 billion (PAII website, 2012). This form of small-scale operation attracts guests from all walks of

life, who may be bored or unhappy with the typical hotel establishment, and want to experience something different (Hsieh & Lin, 2010).

The median performance for these establishments (based on PAII study data) was Occupancy Rate 43.7%, while Average Daily Rate (ADR) $150 and revenue per available room (RevPar) at $58 (PAII website, 2012).

It is vital to differentiate between Bed and Breakfasts and guest-houses, as the terms are often used interchangeably. Misperceptions are sometimes formed because the term "bed and breakfast" is used in two key ways. The first refers to the type of establishment and the other is to refer to a form of rooming rate being offered (Lynch, 1994). Misperceptions also arise for cultural reasons (Lynch, 1994). For instance a bed and breakfast in the United States is often quite different from one in Britain. Therefore the expectations of US visitors to a British bed and breakfast are unlikely to be met (Lynch, 1994).

Various definitions continue to arise as the B&B industry grows. However the American Bed and Breakfast Association have suggested that Bed and Breakfast establishments be categorized as the following: B&B Homestay; B&B Inn; Country Inn; and Small or Historic Hotels (Smith, 2007).

Sometimes bed and breakfast establishments choose tradition over a practical way to generate more income. Many owners will make decisions based on the motivation for having the business in the first place (Smith, 2007). According to (Lynch, 1994), existing literature shows complex motivational dynamics that influence Bed and Breakfast operators. These include, but are not limited to, guest/host conflict, financial limitations and tradition (Lynch, 1994).

While the B&B segment continues to grow and this flourishing trend has led many persons wanting to open their own B&Bs (Karen and Berg, 2007), many find

themselves in positions where they go empty for different lengths of time due to several reasons. Among the reasons for this problem are poor planning, uncompetitive pricing strategies, low demand (depending on location), lack visibility due to a poorly maintained web presence, no specific website, seasonality, poor advertising, lack of resources, and government restrictions

In the present literature, there is sparse coverage of B&Bs. Additionally, there is not a generally accepted standard by which to measure most of these establishments due to the fact that they vary from country to country, state to state and city to city although they follow one general format in that they provide a bed to sleep and breakfast in the morning for their guests.

Many of these establishments are small (4-11 rooms) with an average of 6 rooms (PAII website, 2012), which means that they operate on a smaller budget as compared to full-service hotels. According to Levitan, (2008), the majority of Bed and Breakfasts with 8 rooms or less, need supplemental earnings to sustain economic viability. PAII 2007-8 report revealed that 83% of owners of smaller B&Bs (1-4 room) and 61% of the B&Bs with 5-8 rooms depend on external Earnings (PAII, 2008 & Levitan, 2008).

This reality causes some owners to be very cautious in spending habits. Levitan (2008), further points out that the additional earnings is usually derived from outside income of one partner, "retirement funds, or other income of Innkeepers" (Levitan, 2008). Others may find technology to be a waste of resources as they have long operated without dependence on technology and still earned a profit. They do get

customers from time to time and this hinders them from seeing the full potential of marketing their business using the internet.

According to the Professional Association of Innkeepers International 72% of inn owners are couples, 18% are individual females, 5% are individual males, while 5% are non-couple partnerships. The association also pointed out that 79% of owners live on site. (PAII website, 2012)

1.2   Web 2.0 and visibility

What is web 2.0? If you type that question into Google you will get approximately 201,000,000 results, including thousands of YouTube videos. Many IT professionals have attempted to address just what web 2.0 is. Because of the grid of confusion associated with a true definition for web 2.0, many opt to explaining benefits of the platform or liken it to terminologies such as "the network as platform" (Oreilly, 2006). He later attempted to redefine web 2.0 again in 2006 stating that Web 2.0 is "the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform" (Oreilly, 2006). Others just refer to it as social media, "wisdom Web, people-centric Web, participative Web, and read/write Web" (Murugesan, 2007). Barsky (2006) & Giustini (2006) suggest that it's is more important to focus on the "spirit of open sharing and collaboration" than the inherent benefits of web 2.0

However, it is important to understand what Web 2.0 is in order to effectively suggest ways to improve visibility. Web 2.0 is simply a vast collection of powerful web tools that can be tailored to do what the user wants them to do. Successful use of these tools is strongly dependent on what the user wants to achieve from using them.

The user selects the tool that best serves their purpose. If a user needs a free advertising platform that can reach millions of people and save on marketing cost, Facebook can be a useful tool in such a case. Web 2.0 tools include blogs, wikis, social networking sites, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, folksonomies and podcasts among others. (Wikipedia, 2012) What differentiates web 2.0 from its predecessor, web 1.0 is the usability. These tools are highly dependable on user interaction. With web 1.0, users played a more passive role during consumption, with little or no influence on said tools. Web 2.0 connects users to the Net in a more interactive and concerted manner, putting emphasis on social interface and shared intelligence, and presents new opportunities for leveraging the Web and engaging its users more effectively (Murugesan, 2007).

It is vital that the user of Web 2.0 knows exactly what the objectives are when selecting a tool for use. This makes the selection process easier, as specific tools can then be identified that would best meet the need of that particular user. For the purpose of this study the main focus will be on the social media aspect of web 2.0.

1.3   Problem Statement

Even though Bed and Breakfast establishments are now adopting web2.0 tools like social media into their business models to boost online presence, our understanding of the impact of online social presence and search engine visibility on these small establishments have remained deficient.

1.4   Motivation

Social media presence can play a vital role in online visibility for the Bed and Breakfast Industry. Social networking sites like Facebook can help in reducing

advertising cost by providing a platform for actively communicating with, tracking and meeting customer needs and expectations. Despite the benefits of using social media, some B&Bs still do not use these tools. This intern limits their web presence and can affect visibility for customers to find and purchase services. Evidence exists that shows research involving the use of social media in hospitality. However, there is no evidence of studies concentrating on the use of this Web 2.0 tools in the Bed and Breakfast sector of the hospitality industry. Additionally, according to Pineda and Paraskevas (2004), academic study focused on the use of these tools in hospitality and tourism is limited.

1.5   Research Questions

This study aimed at exploring the Bed and Breakfast industry's use of these tools and investigate the extent to which these tools play or do not play a role in how B&Bs showed up on search engines. This has led to following questions:

Q1. How do Bed and Breakfasts that are included in this study rank in search results across the search engines Google[=, Yahoo and Bing?

Q2. To what extent do B&Bs included in the study, actively use/do not use Web2.0 (social media sites, blogs etc.) to advertise their business?

Q3. How is the use of search engine visibility and Web 2.0 tools such as social media related to B&B online presence?

1.6 Purpose of the Study

- To investigate the extent to which Bed and Breakfast establishments are visible in the three major search engines.

- Identify how this visibility/lack of visibility affects their rank.

- Identify and propose ways in which the use of Web 2.0, and website development, can increase visibility for Bed and Breakfast establishments.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1   Bed and Breakfast and the Internet

The Fifth Annual Innkeeper Tracking Study (2001), revealed that 50% of bed and breakfasts guests located the property via the Internet, an increase of 12% from 1999. The Internet allows bed and breakfasts to create an interactive experience for guests (Rogers, 2005). This interactivity exists as a marketing goal for many innkeepers (Kline et al., 2004). For example, the Internet allows guests to view the bed and breakfast prior to visiting it (Countryman, 2000, in Kline et al. 2004). Bed and breakfast establishments traditionally use print media, brochure, etc. to reach guests (Schleim & St. Amour, 2001; Rogers, 2005). Bed and breakfast owners are able to market their property on the Internet with little time and expense required (Rogers, 2005).

Despite these reports, many bed and breakfast websites are poorly maintained. Some websites sometimes have outdated information and serves the basic purpose of providing the phone number, the location and who to contact if accommodations is needed at that particular location. This can cause frustration to a guest and result in the bed and breakfast establishment losing business. According to Beldona (2004) a comprehensible travel website would entail characteristics such as "navigability, efficiency, consistency and Compatibility". He further made the point that perceived ease of use, the information, features and functionality available on the site as important factors in this regard.

Customers today want fast reliable service encounters and with the existence of strong competition and options, if fast quality service is not delivered they will take their business elsewhere. Most guests relish the idea of and will pay for convenience when traveling. Convenience can serve as a key driver of the travel planning process (Beldona, 2004).

Only a few bed and breakfast establishments now allow guests to book stays through links from their websites. This is obviously a huge disadvantage for bed and breakfasts that are not up to speed with the adaptation of technology and the effective use of the internet. Most travelers take advantage of the convenience of using a credit/debit card to book their stays online.

Empirical research has revealed that the dominance of the internet has provided customers with easy access to hotel reservations, and has altered the landscape of tourism advertising and distribution (Li, Pan, and Smith, 2009). Customers can now reserve accommodations directly using their own computers anytime, and are able to receive immediate confirmations (Chung & Law, 2003). Moreover, (Werthner and Ricci, 2005) stated that tourism had grown into the leading industry with regards to online transaction volume.

The Internet has reduced overhead and allowed small businesses and individuals to conduct global transactions from the coverts of their home (Lituchy & Rail, 2000). The speedy progression of the Internet makes travel and tourism a significant, but economical distribution channel, empowering customers' ease of access to international markets (O'Connor, 1999). According to (Law, 2000) the Internet allows hospitality suppliers to create direct communication links with

customers, reducing the barriers between customers and suppliers. Haung (2008), and helping the industry to grow.

With this growth however, only larger mainstream lodging establishments have taken full advantage of utilizing the internet as a strategic tool to provide effective and efficient customer service in a bid to boost satisfaction and revenue. Bed and breakfast establishments are behind as it relates to the integration of technology and the internet, and the optimization of their websites.

It is imperative for bed and breakfast establishments to realize that traditional indirect channels of distribution through leisure industry intermediaries are declining in use. People are using more direct channels (Williams & Palmer, 1999). According to Lituchy & Rail (2000) small inns and B&B operators promote their businesses heavily on websites as a means of showcasing their presence in the global market (Lituchy & Rail, 2000). But are they doing enough?

According to Haung (2008), B&B operators need to advertise to make the public aware of their establishments. Such a vital move helps small businesses like B&Bs boost visibility (Rogers, 2005). Additionally, today's travelers are very fast-paced and demand speedy information to queries. Hence they have little time or patience to request and wait for paper brochures. This creates a timely avenue where web-based travel planning is ideally suited for travelers (Haung, 2008).

There are bed and breakfasts that do not have their own website and advertise through an intermediary. However, research has shown that actually building websites can create great marketing prospects for many B&B operators (Higley, 1998; Jeong, 2004; Lee, Reynolds, & Kennon, 2003). On the other hand, monitoring and updating these websites after they have been created is equally as important as creating them. The extent to which principals succeed in keeping a direct relationship with the customer depends on a successful online strategy built around an effective proprietary web site (Pineda and Paraskevas, 2004).

Many B&B's fail in this regard. There are Bed and Breakfast websites that are listed on the American Bed and Breakfast Association's website with the direct link provided for these websites giving an error message if one attempts to go to that site. This can be a deterrent for customers trying to book a stay with that bed and breakfast, causing it to lose business and revenue.

According to Pineda and Paraskevas, (2004), hotels view their web sites as a "strategic asset of vital relevance for long term profitability". Bed and Breakfasts need to view their websites in that light in order to be success and gain the ability to compete on a global scale. Several scholars have pointed out that the greatest weaknesses of B&B's has been the individual owners' inability to effectively market their business, and many are plagued by the limitation of marketing resources (Jeong, 2004; Lanier, Caples, & Cook, 2000). Online B&B businesses that effectively market themselves using e-commerce development have a distinct advantage (Haung, 2008) Adding website optimization and analytics to the mix will only boost the business by providing a better platform on which to measure success against failures in order to gain a footing in this competitive industry. One of the best ways for Bed and

Breakfasts to measure the effectiveness of their web activities and that of their guests is through the use of web analytics.

2.2   Industry use of Web Analytics

Traditionally, successful companies have understood who their customers are and provided them with what they want. Web analytics can help a company do this by providing vital information on customers every move on a website. Web analytics is the measurement, gathering, examination and reporting of internet data for the purposes of full comprehension and optimization of web usage. This very effective tool can also be used for business and market research, in addition to serving as a guide to improving the effectiveness of a web site. Web analytics software can also be effective tool in helping businesses quantify the effects of traditional print advertising campaigns. In this regard it can help to estimate how the flow of traffic to a website changes before and after the introduction of a new marketing campaign.

Web analytics provides statistics on the quantity of visitors to a website and the number of page viewed. This can prove to be a very effective tool in market research and strategy application. Web strategy is essential for gaining full benefits from the new shift in consumer behavior in this age of robust competition and technology. Therefore, it is critical for companies to manage the success of their own web site as such actions are vital for the overall effective performance of that company (Pineda and Paraskevas, 2004). The keystone of the management of productive web tactics requires scrutinizing the online behavior patterns of customers. There are specific tools needed to enable website data collection and investigation. These tools are widely available in the market and are known as web analytics.

According to Pineda and Paraskevas (2004), the core literature regarding web analytics is based on books written by (Friedlein, 2003; Inan, 2002; Sterne, 2002). He does point out however, that academic study focused on the use of these tools in hospitality and tourism was limited. The study intention is to add to the existing literature by presenting web analytic tools currently available in the market, exploring the Bed and Breakfast industry cognizance of these tools and investigate the extent to which the full potential of these tools are exploited (if at all) by Bed and Breakfast operators in the Delaware Valley.

E-marketing trends change unceasingly, and to maintain successful businesses on the Internet, website owners need to monitor and evaluate their guests in order to create effective marketing tactics. Lately many businesses have started making use of web analytics tools to give them a better idea of their website. Through the use of these effective tools, owners can monitor different aspects of the business such as: where the business is failing, which web pages are the most visited, what are the trends when people visit these pages, what do their clients buy/want when they visit, and demographic information on these clients. Without web analytics it is almost impossible for a business to have real knowledge of their web traffic. Additionally, ascertaining what guests want when they navigate through the website and comparing that information with the goals and products of the business makes it easy to create successful marketing strategies (Palacios, 2009).

Olmeda & Sheldon, (2001) state that research in hospitality addresses web analytics in the context of data mining. Some researchers address it as a tool for improving the benefits of a CRM system. Alford (2001) endorsed connecting Internet data with CRM systems, but made no mention of using web analytics for data collection. The exploration of the concept of web based affiliation advertising in the hotel industry was conducted by Gilbert and Powell-Perry (2002). However, their discussion was restricted to database analysis. Murphy et al. (2001) defined the benefits of web site-generated information; however they restricted their argument to log files.

Providers of these analytics software are constantly working to improve them, and competition is ever growing even in that arena. Roell, (2008) stated that leading properties have solid information of precisely what guests see, the length of time they view this information and whether or not they have been to the Web site before. According to him, web analytics currently combines data collecting techniques with business goals to provide vendors with vital information regarding the way people interact with Web sites.

The combination of software and industry experts has made it much easier for your Web site to provide you with instrumental feedback about consumer demographics, optimization opportunities and brand identities (Roell, 2008). The process takes shape in the form of cookies being downloaded to a browser's computer to track Web behavior for a short period of time (typically 30 to 90 days). An analytics expert or team can then determine if any correlations exist between traditional promotion efforts like print ads and commercials, and see if there is a spike in visitors during a campaign.

There are several web analytics Software available for use in the market. Some of them are free and some require the user to purchase the software. However, despite the availability of these tools, many hospitality businesses (bed and Breakfast included) have failed to utilize them as a means to gain a competitive edge.

2.3   Search Engine Visibility

Search engines provide search results by letting users' state words or phrases and bring back pages that possibly match the user's needs (O'Connor, 2009). According to Beldona et al (2012) they are an integral part of the travel process that serves as a transactional and informational gateway for hospitality businesses. In the past search engines were unbiased by commercial considerations. This caused results displayed to be the most pertinent answers to user inquiries (Sullivan, 2002). That has changed, as search engines try to meet the sizable expenses of maintaining their databases and improving their technology (O'Connor, 2009). Due to this, many market their ability to direct consumers towards particular websites (Martin, 2007). Search engines have found themselves in an increasingly influential position, by routing the attention of users to websites, and generating revenue for sites through "contextual advertising programs (Evans, 2007). Several paid search networks exist, with the largest being Google AdWords and Yahoo. (O'Connor, 2009)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the method of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in search engines via the un-paid ("organic") search results. (Wikipedia, 2012) This is an effective Internet marketing strategy that has helped a lot of businesses to gain customers. With SEO the earlier a website shows up in the search results, the greater the prospect of visitors it might receive from the search

engine's users. SEO may target different kinds of search, including image search, local search, video search and academic search (Wikipedia, 2012).

More than half of all visitors to a web site are rerouted from a search engine rather than from a direct link on another web page (McCarthy, 2006). Search engines collectively handle more than 4.5 billion user queries per month (Nielsen, 2005). Because of this magnitude of traffic there is fierce competition among companies to attract those users to their (Evans, 2007).

Search engines use specialized software programs, known as spiders, to search (crawl) the web, cataloguing each page they come across and adding it to their databases so that it will consequently appear in search results (O'Connor, 2009). The aim of any smart business these days is to get their website into those results, and as close to the top of these results as is possible. Marketers modify the hyper-text markup language (HTML) code of webpages (the title tag, meta-tags, headings, or links) and page content in a bid to convince the ranking algorithm to place the page in a higher position compared to others results on the same search result listing (Sen, 2005).

While this process is very popular as businesses try to get the top spot on the search engines, Organic SEO, suffers from quite a few limitations. First, the search engine spiders' algorithms are both complex and surreptitious, making it challenging to establish what modifications are needed for better positioning (O'Connor, 2009). Additionally, algorithms change regularly; therefore, any advantage achieved initially may subsequently be lost with the next change. Also, each search engine stresses different key points, so optimizing for one engine may hurt positioning on all others (O'Connor, 2009).

Despite search engine complex algorithms and evidence of literature on the SEO's business repercussions, it is possible to gather some general ideas and advice concerning the steps to take for a "white hat" SEO of a web site (Gandour and Regolini, 2011). However, if you are not knowledgeable on this sort of thing it can have dire consequences. You may run into the issue of Black hat SEO among other challenges. Black hat SEO is the reverse of "white hat" SEO (Berman and Katona, 2010). The latter advances one's site content, so that it's more relevant for visitors, therefore optimizing its indexing by search engines. Because of the intricacies of the process of SEO it is imperative to employ the expertise of a professional when attempting to optimize your website. Budget hotels, which can be likened to B&Bs because of size in some cases, have fewer resources to use on SEO practices in general (Beldona et al, 2012). However, with proper planning and execution of these plans, along with the use of web 2.0 tools (many of which are free or at a much reduced cost) they can reduce unnecessary spending on print ads and pamphlets and use those resources in a more effective manner.

2.4 Bed and Breakfast Distribution

According to Beldona et al (2012) the main indicator of a supplier's trademark is their website. They pointed out that a business's website can serve as a gateway for the direct access to or purchase of products/services. Hotels have tried for years to get a strong grip on direct distribution efforts by facilitating direct reservations on their own websites (Beldona et al, 2012, Jeong, Oh, and Gregoire 2003, Law and Hsu 2006). While some B&Bs are slowly adopting the trend, many still do not offer this option. To make a reservation in some B&Bs a customer has to call the property and make the reservation via telephone. To add to the inconvenience, many of these

B&Bs only offer seasonal service. This means that they might not be readily accessible to guests who wish to travel at a specific time of the year. So with these issues affecting B&B businesses, how can they effectively use web 2.0 tools to increase revenue and boost business? This study will suggest ways in which the tools can help in this regard.

2.5 Why is this study necessary? (B&Bs in Delaware)

According to the website www.bedandbreakfast.com (accessed January 8th, 2012), there are only 22 bed and breakfasts in Delaware, 1 in northern Delaware and 21 in southern Delaware. However, according to the American Bed and Breakfast Association (AB&BA) website, www.abba.com (accessed January 8th, 2012), there are forty (40). When attempts were made (on the day of access) to visit many of the listed links to the websites of these B&Bs, they did not work. Some links returned with an error message, other links routed to a different site that has little or no information about the intended B&B, or a message stating that the site has been moved.

According to Xiang et al (2008) a study done by "Prophis Research and Consulting, Inc" revealed that 55% of adults in America who travel use the internet as a tool when preparing for their trip (Prophis-Research, 2007, and Xiang et al, 2008). Therefore, travelers who may be faced with error messages and websites with limited information may move to another business that is less hassling. Xiang et al (2005) quoted other scholars while pointing out that travelers can become very frustrated when using online search tools to plan their travels. Hence, it is important to keep the stress level to a minimum in an attempt to not lose business by frustrating the web user.

The top B&Bs that show up on the search engine Google, when searching for

Bed and breakfast in Delaware are listed in the exact order they appear in table1

below.

Table 1:   Top 9 Google search results for B&B in Delaware. (Accessed January 8th, 2012)

Name of B&B	Location	Number of Rooms	Listed on AB&BA Website	Website
Delaware Inn at Rehoboth	Rehoboth	8	Yes	www.delawareinn.com
The Towers	Milford	4	No	www.mispillion.com
Royal Rose Inn	Rehoboth		Yes	www.royalroseinn.com
The Causey Mansion	Milford	4	No	www.causeymansion.com
Lighthouse Inn	Rehoboth	4	Yes	www.lighthouseinn.net
Lazy L	Lewes	5	Yes	www.lazyl.net
Inn at Canal Square	Lewes	28	Yes	www.theinnatcanalsquare.com
The Addy Sea	Bethany Beach	14	Yes	www.addysea.com
The Blue Water House	Lewes	9	Yes	lewes-beach.com

Only three of these B&Bs had an active Facebook page. All of the direct links

of the top B&Bs that were listed on the ab&ba website went directly to the B&Bs

website, with the exception of The Inn at Canal square website link, which gave an

error message. Two of the nine are not listed on the ab&ba website.

Table two (2) below shows the number of Bed and breakfast establishments that are listed on American Bed and Breakfast Association website but did not show up in search results on Google's first page.

Table 2:   B&B geographical data and numbers according to ab&ba website
             (Accessed January 8th, 2012) http://www.abba.com/b/251

Location (ab&ba)	# of Bed & Breakfast (ab&ba)	Name of B&Bs	Link from ab&ba site works	Online Reservations
Bethany Beach	2	The Addy Sea	Yes	No
		The Cedar Breeze	No	No
Claymont	1	Darley Manor Inn	No	
Dewey Beach	3	Barry's Gull Cottage	No	No
		The Old Farm House	No	
		Rodney Dunes Pier 12 Apartments	Yes	No
Dover	2	Country Comfort	Yes	No
		Little Creek Inn	No	No
Harrington	1	Shawnee Inn Bed and Breakfast	No	No
Lewes	9	The Bay Moon	No	Unclear
		Beachwood's Hideaway	No	Unclear
		The Blue Water House	Yes	No
		Country Lane	No	Unclear
		The Inn at Canal Square	No	Unclear
		Pine Hollow House	No	Unclear
		The Royal Retreat	No	Unclear
		Lazy L at Willow Creek	Yes	No
		Deep Branch Retreat	No	Unclear
Milton	2	Cool Spring	No	Unclear
		Victorian Jewel	No	Unclear
New Castle	1	The Terry House Bed and Breakfast	Yes	No

Table 2 continued

Location (ab&ba)	# of Bed & Breakfast (ab&ba)	Name of B&Bs	Link from ab&ba site works	Online Reservations
Rehoboth Beach	16	Cabana Gardens	Yes	No
		Chesapeake Landing	Not B&B	N/A
		The Corner Cupboard	Yes	No
		Delaware Inn	Yes	No
		The Gladstone Inn Victorian	No	Unclear
		Lighthouse Inn	Yes	No
		Lord and Hamilton Seaside	No	Unclear
		The Mallard Guest House	No	Unclear
		The Pelican Loft Guest House	No	Unclear
		Rehoboth Guest house	Yes	No
		The Rose Bud Inn	No	Unclear
		The Royal Rose Inn	Yes	No
		The Sea Voice Inn	Yes	No
		Sea Witch Manor Inn	Yes (New Name)	No
		The Shore Inn		No
		Three Maples Bed and Breakfast	Yes No	Unclear
Selbyville	1	Victorian Rose Bed and Breakfast	No	Unclear
Wilmington	2	Boulevard Bed and	No	Unclear
		The Worth House	Yes	No

Of the forty listings on the ab&ba website twenty three of the links to these B&B websites do not work. Two of the forty links reroutes the user to the web page www.beach-net.com, where after clicking on lodging you will find a host of unlisted B&Bs and local hotel/motels in Delaware. Table 3 consists of B&Bs that are listed on Beach-net.com but not on the Ab&ba site. Once beach.com website is accessed, access is gained to each B&B by selecting the specific town they are located in.

Table 3: B&Bs not listed on the ab&ba website but was listed on www.beach-net.com. (Accessed January 8th, 2012)

Name / Address / Phone	Type	Months Open	Online Reservations
Journey's End	Bed & Breakfast	Year Round	No
Woodsong Country Inn	Bed & Breakfast	Year Round	No
Awaken Inn	Bed & Breakfast	Year Round	No
The Beach House	Bed & Breakfast	Apr.-Oct.	No
The Homestead at Rehoboth Bed & Breakfast	Bed & Breakfast	Year Round	No
Silver Lake Guest House	Bed & Breakfast	May-Nov.	No
The Sussex House	Bed & Breakfast	Year Round	No
Tempo Bed & Breakfast	Bed & Breakfast	May-Oct.	No

Although these B&Bs are not members of the American Bed and Breakfast Association, they are members of the Association of Delaware Shore Inns Bed and Breakfast. This mainly consists of B&Bs in Rehoboth Beach, Dewey Beach, Bethany Beach, Lewes Beach and the surrounding communities.

A total of 48 Bed and Breakfast Establishments are listed on the internet between the two websites (www.abba.com and www.Beach-net.com). Because some of the website links to many of these B&Bs did not work properly at the time of the researcher's access (Accessed January 8th-10th 2012), it was difficult to ascertain whether it is possible to book a stay directly through these website.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1   Introduction

The fast pace with which technology has grown over the years has significantly influenced the developments in search engine technologies as well. (Beldona et al, 2012) Additionally, search engine optimization (SEO) has been proven to be a powerful strategic tool. (Beldona et al, 2012) Based on the existing literature, the following research questions have arisen.

Q1. How do Bed and Breakfasts that are included in this study rank in search results across the search engines Google, Yahoo and Bing?

Q2. To what extent do B&Bs included in the study, actively use/do not use Web2.0 (social media sites, blogs etc.) to advertise their business?

Q3. How is the use of search engine visibility and Web 2.0 tools such as social media related to B&B online presence?

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of social media presence and an updated, optimized website on B&Bs visibility. Because of the aforementioned and the examined literature, it is believed that actively using social media in marketing efforts will increase web visibility of these establishments on search engines. It is also believed that there is a direct relationship between using social media tools and search engine visibility. Finally it is believed that significant differences exist in how Bed and Breakfast Rank across search engines.

3.2   Sampling

Bed and Breakfast that appears on the American Bed and Breakfast Associations (ABBA) website was identified by name and state. States are listed in alphabetical order on the ABBA website. A stratified random sampling procedure was adopted and every 10th state was selected. Therefore a total of five (5) states were selected for the study. Every 10th Bed and Breakfast listed by states, was selected to be added to a pool and used as the sample for the study. The final sample was a total of forty nine (49) Bed and Breakfasts.

3.3   Data Collection

The words "Bed and Breakfast" combined with the name of each state was used as keywords and put into the three major search engines. The researcher observed only the first page of search results to see if the selected B&Bs from that particular state show up on the first page. The ranking of the Bed and Breakfast websites was then recorded.

According to Beldona et al (2012) the results of search engine differ depending on the area the search was conducted from. Consequently, it is vital to point out that the study were done in the United States.

The name of the Bed and Breakfasts included in the sample were specifically entered in the search engines to see if they used, a Facebook page, twitter or any other web 2.0 tool showed up on the first page of search engine results. This was to provide insight as to whether there exists a direct positive relationship between B&Bs who use these sites, and their appearance on the first page of search engines.

The exact name of each Bed & Breakfast was then entered directly into Facebook and twitter to see if there was a designated page for them and to see if these pages were actively updated as a part of marketing efforts. A rubric was developed as a guide for what would be considered an active page. For the purpose of this study a social media page is considered active if it is updated at least once a month with information directed toward customers. Other factors such as number of Facebook page "likes" among two additional factors were also used to measure level of activity of these pages. Table 5 shows the rubric used to determine activeness of B&B social media pages.

Table 4:   Criteria for a B&B's social media page to be considered active

FACEBOOK	TWITTER
Updated at least once a month with marketing advertisements	Updated at least once a month with marketing advertisements
Shows recent (within a month) guest/operator interaction	Shows recent (within a month) guest/operator interaction
Has more than 5 likes	Displayed as a designated page and not a "@mention"
Displayed as a real page (not a places page)	Has more than 5 subscriptions

Additional rubrics were developed for "likes" and "subscribe" and level of activity in Facebook and twitter. These measurements were applied to a four month period of January to April of 2012.

Table 5:   Rubric for B&B social media page level of activity and "like" and "Subscribe" score.

RUBRIC FOR "LIKE" and "SUBSCRIBE" SCORE		RUBRIC FOR "ACTIVITY LEVEL" SCORE	
LIKES and SUBCRIBE	SCORE	ACTIVITY (monthly)	SCORE
100 OR MORE	5 PTS	10 OR MORE POSTS	5 PTS
75-99	4 PTS	8-10 POSTS	4 PTS
50-74	3 PTS	5-7 POSTS	3 PTS
25-49	2 PTS	3-5 POSTS	2 PTS
0-24	1 PT	0-2 POSTS	1 PT

A process adopted from a study by Beldona et al (2012), was modified and used for this study. The use of social media was the independent factors in the study. A B&B website's rank in a search engine result, based on a search of the B&Bs by state, was be the dependent variable. If a B&B's website did not appear on the first page of the search results, a score of 0 was given to that B&B. However, if a B&B's website that showed up in the number one spot on the organic search results, it was assigned a score of 10; if a B&B that appears in the second spot was assigned a score of 9, the third was given a score of 8, and so on.

A coding system developed by Beldona et al (2012), was used in the study in a way where the greater the number given in the analysis, the higher the rank that the website earned on the organic search results. The results was further tabulated across all three search engines and then averaged for a final score to determine level of visibility. It is important to point out that organic search results in search engines usually show a total of 10 results on each page. This is considered to be the most influential page since it is the first viewed (Beldona et al, 2012, Hitwise 2009; Lewis 2009). Because of this only the first page of search results was used in the study. After data was collected and analyzed additional data was collected in the form of a telephone interview with B&Bs who did not have a Facebook page to ascertain why this was so.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1   B&Bs visibility across major search engines

The primary focus of this study was examining the visibility of the selected B&Bs for this study, across the major search engines such as Google.com, Yahoo.com and Bing.com. The main argument of this study was that B&Bs visibility varies across these major engines. The results confirmed this. The secondary focus was on online social presence. The study investigated the visibility of the B&Bs in five states. appeared on intermediaries' and online travel agents' website. Only 15 of the 49 B&Bs studied had their own websites appear on the first page of the search engines. While some B&Bs scored lower in rank on the first page of the three search engines, the majority of B&B websites that did show up on the search engines ranked very high with an overall average of 9.25 out of 10.

Tables 6-10 highlight the results of the internet investigation of the B&Bs. The results for Bed and Breakfast establishments and the average scores are as follows:

Table 6:   Georgia Bed and Breakfasts (observed on February 14th, 2012)

B&B	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Average Score	Designated Facebook page	Twitter page
B&B 1	10	10	10	10	Requires request	none
B&B 2	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 3	0	0	0	0	Active Use (11 likes)	none
B&B 4	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 5	0	0	0	0	None	none
B&B 6	10	10	10	10	None	none
B&B 7	10	10	10	10	Active (26 likes)	none
B&B 8	0	0	0	0	Not Active (8 likes)	none
B&B 9	0	10	10	6.67	none	none
B&B 10	0	0	0	0	Not Active (2 likes)	none
B&B 11	10	7	9	8.67	Active(382 likes)	none
B&B 12	10	10	10	10	Active (88 likes)	none
B&B 13	10	10	10	10	Active (598 likes)	none
B&B 14	10	10	10	10	none	none
B&B 15	10	0	8	6	none	none
B&B 16	0	0	0	0	Not Active (2 likes)	none

Table 6 above presents the finding for B&B visibility across the three search engines in the state of Georgia. The names of the selected B&Bs were withheld to protect the owners privacy. B&B #1 showed up in the first spot on all three search engines and was given a score of 10 on each engine, for a total score of 30. The final score was then averaged to 10. This means that the website for this B&B is perfectly optimized. In contrast B&B # 15 had an average score of 6 as it appeared in the 1st

place on Google, but appearing 3rd on Yahoo, and did not appear at all on the Bing. It is important again to note that only the first page of search engines was observed. Of the B&Bs studied in the state of Georgia 43% did not appear on any of the three search engines' first page, and did not have a Facebook page. This could be because they did not participate in search engine optimization or did not have their own websites. B&Bs that did not show up on the search engines first pages were awarded a score of zero (0).

Table 7:   Maryland Bed and Breakfast (Observed on February 16th, 2012)

B&B	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Average Score	Facebook Page	Twitter Page
B&B 1	0	0	0	0	Active Use (47 likes)	none
B&B 2	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 3	9	7	7	7.67	Active use (278 likes	none
B&B 4	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 5	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 6	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 7	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 8	10	10	10	10	none	none
B&B 9	0	0	0	0	Not Active (11 likes)	none
B&B 10	10	10	9	9.67	Active (153 likes)	none

B&Bs in Maryland (table 7 above) had only 30% of the websites appearing on search engines' first page results. This was the lowest compared to the other states. New Jersey B&Bs (Table 8 below) ranked higher than Maryland B&Bs on the three search engines with 90% of the B&Bs appeared on all three search engines with the exception of one that only appeared on Yahoo and not the other two engines.

Table 8:   New Jersey Bed and Breakfast (Observed on February 16th, 2012)

B&B	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Average Score	Facebook Page	Twitter Page
B&B 1	0	0	8	2.67	none	none
B&B 2	10	10	10	10	Active use (41 likes)	none
B&B 3	10	10	10	10	Active use (380 likes)	none
B&B 4	9	7	7	7.67	none	none
B&B 5	9	10	10	9.67	none	none
B&B 6	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 7	9	10	9	9.33	none	none

The one B&B selected from South Carolina (shown in Table 9 below) appeared on all three search engines with an average score of 9 out of 10. This means that this B&B's website was very well optimized for Bing and Yahoo, but needed improvement for Google where it only scored 7 out of 10.

Table 9:   South Carolina Bed and Breakfast (Observed on February 16th, 2012)

B&B	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Average Score	Facebook page	Twitter page
B&B 1	7	10	10	9	none	none

Table 10 below presents the ranking of the selected B&Bs across the major search engines from the state of Wisconsin.

Table 10:   Wisconsin Bed and Breakfast (Observed on February 17th, 2012)

B&B	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Average Score	Active Facebook page	Twitter Page
B&B 1	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 2	10	10	10	10	Active use (826 likes)	none
B&B 3	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 4	10	10	10	10	Active (80 likes)	none
B&B 5	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 6	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 7	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 8	0	0	0	0	Active use (437 likes	none
B&B 9	0	0	0	0	None	none
B&B 10	0	0	0	0	Not Active (8 likes)	none
B&B 11	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 12	0	0	0	0	Not Active (105 likes)	none
B&B 13	0	0	0	0	none	none
B&B 14	9	10	10	9.67	none	none
B&B 15	10	10	9	9.67	Active (236 likes)	none

Wisconsin also had low records with only 27% of B&Bs websites appearing directly on the first page of search engine results, and they ranked high in results.

4.2   Measuring online social presence: T-Test

Table 11 presents the ranking of the 49 B&Bs in the study across all three of the major search engines (Bing, Google and Yahoo) and table 12 shows the results

from a Two-sample T-Test. The T-Test was conducted to ascertain information on whether there was a significant difference between the Bed and Breakfasts that had a Facebook page and those that did not have one. Based on the results, the T-Test showed that there were significant differences between the two groups (P value, one tailed =0.02883). This means that there is a difference in results of B&Bs that have an active Facebook page and those without one. However, there were B&Bs without Facebook page that scored very high in the rank on the search engines. Thus it cannot be said that B&Bs that utilized Facebook will have a direct effect on Bed and Breakfast rank on the search engines (Bing, Google and Yahoo).

Table11:   B&B Ranking across the three major search engines (Google, Bing and Yahoo.

B&B #	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Facebook page "like" score	Average Score	Designated Facebook page (Y/N)
1	10	10	10	4	10	Y
2	10	10	10	2	10	Y
3	10	10	10	5	10	Y
4	10	10	10	5	10	Y
5	10	10	10	4	10	Y
6	10	10	10	5	10	Y
7	10	10	10	1	10	Y
8	10	10	10	1	10	N

Table 11 continued

B&B #	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Facebook page "like" score	Average Score	Designated Facebook page (Y/N)
9	10	10	10	1	10	N
10	10	10	10	1	10	N
11	10	10	9	1	9.67	Y
12	10	10	9	5	9.67	Y
13	9	10	10	1	9.67	N
14	9	10	10	1	9.67	N
15	9	10	9	1	9.33	N
16	7	10	10	1	9	N
17	10	7	9	5	8.67	Y
18	9	7	7	5	7.67	Y
19	9	7	7	1	7.67	N
20	0	10	10	1	6.67	N
21	10	0	8	1	6	N
22	0	0	8	1	2.67	N
23	0	0	0	1	0	Y
24	0	0	0	1	0	Y
25	0	0	0	2	0	Y
26	0	0	0	1	0	Y
27	0	0	0	5	0	Y
28	0	0	0	1	0	Y
29	0	0	0	5	0	Y
30	0	0	0	1	0	N
31	0	0	0	1	0	N
32	0	0	0	1	0	N
33	0	0	0	1	0	N

Table 11 continued

B&B #	Google Score	Bing Score	Yahoo Score	Facebook page "like" score	Average Score	Designated Facebook page (Y/N)
34	0	0	0	1	0	N
35	0	0	0	1	0	N
36	0	0	0	1	0	N
37	0	0	0	1	0	N
38	0	0	0	1	0	N
39	0	0	0	1	0	N
40	0	0	0	1	0	N
41	0	0	0	1	0	N
42	0	0	0	1	0	N
43	0	0	0	1	0	N
44	0	0	0	1	0	N
45	0	0	0	1	0	N
46	0	0	0	1	0	N
47	0	0	0	1	0	N
48	0	0	0	1	0	N
49	0	0	0	1	0	N

Table 11 above shows all 49 Bed and Breakfasts scores in order from highest to lowest average. B&Bs with zero average and scores are the ones whose websites did not show up on the three search engines first pages. The table also displays information on whether or not the B&B had a Facebook page and the "like" score for that page. A T-test was conducted using the above information to see if there was a significant difference between B&Bs who use Facebook and B&Bs who did not use the tool. Table 12 shows the results of the t-test.

Table 12:   The difference between Bed and Breakfast with Facebook Page and bed
             and Breakfasts without Facebook page.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	Average Score W FB	*Average score WO FB*
Mean	5.871111111	3.126896552
Variance	23.56215163	18.49880074
Observations	18	31
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	33	
t Stat	1.966737746	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.028834731	
t Critical one-tail	1.692360309	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.057669461	
t Critical two-tail	2.034515297	

4.3   Correlation Coefficient

A correlation was conducted to see if there existed a direct correlation between having a Facebook page and how Bed and breakfasts ranked on the three major search engines. Table 13 shows the results of the correlation.

Table 13:   Correlation table showing relationship between the three major search
             engines and Facebook page for Bed and Breakfasts.

	Google Score	*Bing Score*	*Yahoo Score*	*Facebook page Ssore*
Google Score	1			
Bing Score	0.894624407	1		
Yahoo Score	0.913643942	0.939516025	1	
Facebook page score	0.413732225	0.359256142	0.338475219	1

The analysis showed evidence of a strong positive correlation between how Bed and Breakfasts appeared on the three major search engines Bing, Google, and Yahoo. However, correlation between the search engines and Facebook scores was weak. The results also indicated weak correlation between Facebook likes and search engine visibility, and strong correlation between how B&Bs ranked across search engine results when directly compared to each.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The key intentions of this study were to:

a) To investigate the extent to which Bed and Breakfast establishments are visible in the three major search engines.

b) Identify how this visibility/lack of visibility affects their rank.

c) Identify and propose ways in which the use of Web 2.0, and website development, can increase visibility for Bed and Breakfast establishments.

5.1   Factors affecting online social presence

This study revealed that Bed and Breakfasts had a Search Engine visibility rate of 30%. This low figure not only affects the way they rank across search engines, but also confirms the need for Bed and Breakfasts to invest in their websites and search engine optimization to assist in the improvement of search engine visibility.

The adoption of web 2.0 tools, particularly social media, in the business model of Bed and Breakfast establishments is still at a stage early. The study revealed that 69% of the 49 Bed and Breakfasts analyzed did not have a presence on Facebook. None of the Bed and Breakfasts had a twitter page. Therefore, although this variable was analyzed it was not included in the results.

Research shows that web 2.0 tools such as social networking sites, wikis, and blogs have become a vital part of the planning and buying process of travel (Schegg et al 2008). Hence, incorporating this in the marketing strategy can add inexpensive relevance to the business in the form of free advertising and an opportunity to interact directly with customers. Additionally, the fact that many operate on a small budget and have to rely on supplemental income (Levitan, 2008), is also an indication of the practicality of gravitating toward a more cost effective way to market their business. Bed and Breakfasts can now advertise their businesses on the internet (Rodgers, 2005) not only through their websites but by using free platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Yet a significant number of Bed and Breakfasts do not utilize the tools.

According to www.msn.com in an article published on May 3rd, "data leaks, hacks, and scams" were a major concern for Facebook users regarding security (Consumer Reports, 2012 & msn.com, 2012). This explains some Bed and Breakfast owners' reluctance about using social media.

5.2   Key factors affecting Web visibility of Bed and Breakfast

This study has shown that online social presence plays a small role in online visibility for Bed and Breakfast establishments. However it highlighted five (5) major factors affecting web visibility for Bed and Breakfast operations. These areas are Search Engine Optimization, Website Development, Web 2.0 tool use, Distribution Channel and Name Selection. These five factors are key if the Bed and Breakfast industry is to advance in a more profitable and competitive way.

5.2.1 Utilizing SEO and effective website development.

One of the key findings of the study is that 70% of the Bed and Breakfasts studied, website did not appear on the first page of the three major search engines. However, their names showed up on several intermediaries like Trip advisor and kayak and www.Bedandbreakfast.com. The other 30% appeared on the first page of the three major search engines.

Since a great majority of all visitors to a web site are re-routed from a search engine rather than from a direct link on another web page (McCarthy, 2006), studies show that the higher a website appeared in the search results, the greater the number of visitors it might receive from the search engine's users. Bed and Breakfasts should realize that having their website optimized to appeared on the first page of search results is critical, in order to effectively benefit from the internet and remain competitive.

5.2.2 Using web 2.0 and Distribution

Facebook is the leading social networking site in the world and while the site does have problems, they have addressed many of those problems and have now given users the option to limit the kind of information they openly share. Additionally, there are also hundreds of other tools that can be used to market a B&B if they are fearful of using Facebook. Furthermore, studies indicate that a bed and breakfast's visibility surges when it make the most of the web (Rogers, 2005). Therefore, it is vital that a healthy level of online social interaction takes place between B&B owners and their guests, especially since that is where majority of customers can be found. In addition, this gives a Bed and Breakfast owner the opportunity to create a collaborative experience between the business and the guest (Rogers, 2005). This can provide

guests with a platform on which to voice their opinions, experiences, and post photographs and videos of the property, while giving B&B owners an opportunity to quickly address concerns or respond to compliments. This can also allow for inexpensive marketing that can reach a greater audience.

Direct distribution was almost nonexistent in the study. During the telephone interview only one B&B offered the opportunity to make a reservation directly on their website. To book with all the others you either had to call them directly or book through a third party. While hotels are quickly moving more toward direct distribution through their own websites (Beldona et al, 2012, Jeong, Oh, and Gregoire 2003, Law and Hsu 2006), Bed and Breakfasts have been slower in adopting this practice. However, depending on third party sites for visibility is not without risks as some are more popular than others and business flow sometimes depend on how many online guidebooks a B&B is listed (Rogers, 2005).

While direct distribution can be an intricate and expensive process, Bed and Breakfast owners need to view it as an investment and work toward such a goal as it is to their direct benefit. If an unsecure website is the problem then getting a secure website would be of great benefit in the long run.

Direct distribution can not only reduce cost in the long run but it will expand their customer base and remove the complexity of the middle man relationship that can sometimes hurt the business. Direct booking can boost guest confidence in the business, and give the B&B operator a chance to interact with the guest and add the guest to mailing lists for future promotions. This would also alleviate the cost of listing the business on the third party's website.

5.2.3   Name selection

Name selection factor came out of direct web observation during this research. Several Bed and Breakfasts from different parts of the United States (sometimes in the same state) appeared on the search engines with the same name. Furthermore, some Bed and Breakfasts had changed names and that information was only updated on some sites but not on others. This created a problem when doing a direct search for those Bed and Breakfasts. Therefore, it is vital that Bed and Breakfast owners do research before choosing a name for their B&B. Also, it is equally important that they monitor their online presence, even if they do not directly manage their websites. If they can identify the issues above then they can take corrective action to address them in a timely fashion.

5.3   Implications of the Study

Upon careful analysis of this study, it has been shown that using social media does have a strong effect on search engine visibility. Hospitality businesses are becoming more aware of this and are turning their efforts to the tools as a part of their marketing strategy to help boost business. However, Bed and breakfasts that do not use social media, should consider using the technology in order to reduce marketing cost and compete on a global scale.

5.3.1   Academia

The results of this study have not only added to the sparse knowledge that exists regarding Bed and Breakfast establishments, but have also provided direction for future research regarding Bed and Breakfasts, search engine visibility and online social presence. This type of research is needed to shed light on this section of the industry in an effort to expand the literature and to assist B&Bs to be more successful.

5.3.2 Industry

Bed and Breakfast establishments as well as other hospitality sectors can draw from this study, recommendations that can assist in boosting revenue if applied properly. Using web 2.0 tools like social media can boost online social presence. If web presence is boosted, businesses have a greater chance of attracting customers. Additionally, there are many benefits of using web 2.0 tools such as 1) Easy accessibility & requires minimum skills to operate. 2) The range of tools to choose from is very diverse and advanced. 3) Cost effective. 4) A Global interaction platform. 5) It is a very large source of information and a mode of communication.

5.4   Limitations and Future Research

This study has three major limitations. The first is sample size. The sample size limited the extent of data analysis. Future research could expand the sample size to conduct a more comprehensive analysis and to determine the challenges that remain with the industry.

Another limitation is sample selection. The sample was selected from the American Bed and Breakfast Association website. The website was the only one that listed B&Bs in alphabetical order in a way that every 10th B&B could be selected for analysis. However, it does not contain all Bed and Breakfasts in the states represented. Therefore, the number of B&Bs listed (by state) on the site is not an accurate representation of all B&Bs across the United States. Hence future research can be done using a different population. Additionally, the research was limited to the North America and the results may not be generalizable to other regions of the world.

Future studies could involve Bed and Breakfasts from other parts of the world, and could also examine how much more revenue B&Bs generate using social media as

a marketing tool. The same could be done for B&Bs whose website appeared on the first page of search engines in comparison to ones that did not.

5.5   Conclusion

One of the purposes of this study was to make Bed and Breakfast owners aware to just how far behind many of them are compared to other hospitality businesses. With a 30% search engine visibility rate, it is evident that more effort needs to be put into search engine visibility. Additionally, Bed and Breakfasts that do not have a website are limited to the level of optimization the third party site has.   It is the researcher's hope that this study will assist B&Bs' in discovering how important having an updated website is, and the advantages of adopting search engine optimization to improve search engine visibility.

Many Bed and Breakfast operations do not perform to their full potential for several reasons. With the evolution of technology and the internet many of them have fallen even further behind. Incorporating social media and other web 2.0 tools into B&Bs business models can improve customer satisfaction and business growth.

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