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BUILDING AN E-STRATEGY MODEL BASED ON THE
USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

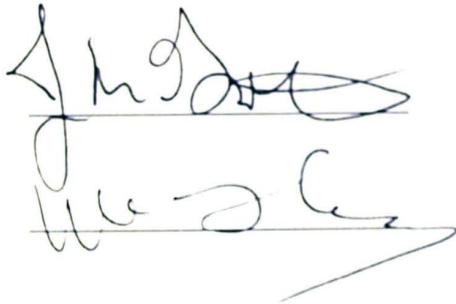
PEIWEN LI

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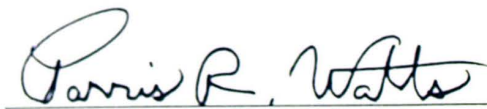
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Dr. Margaret Duffy, Major Professor

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BUILDING AN E-STRATEGY MODEL BASED ON THE
USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY**

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

Austin Peay State University

Peiwen Li

May 2001

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to
my dear parents Mr. Ronghua Li and Mrs. Meihua Wang,
my brother and sister-in-law Drs. Zhiqian Li and Jiayi Yue,
and my lovely niece Xiaojun.

I appreciate that the Lord arranged for us to be a family,
offering me invaluable educational opportunities,
encouraging me to pursue a better life,
and most important of all,
sharing with me His love,
which has supported me in every step of my life.

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ABSTRACT

With the development of the Internet, discovery of explanatory communication perspectives on the effects of this medium have become an important area of inquiry. Uses and gratifications theory is a commonly applied communication approach. However, most research in this area has been theoretical in nature and there are few examples of this theory as applied in Internet context. Similarly, there are few theoretical and methodological guidelines for the development of Internet advertising. This thesis seeks to provide a strategy model in online advertising for the hotel business based on the uses and gratifications theory.

This is a case study of a successful Internet advertising campaign for a large Southern hotel in a top tourist market. Evaluation of the campaign guided the development of the Internet advertising plan for the same property, and findings in the research were used as a strategy model in the 2001 Internet plan for several properties operated by the same business group.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of the Internet, advertisers, marketers, and communication researchers are seeking answers for a wide array of questions. Why and how do people use this medium? What are the routes to e-commerce success? How is the Internet reinventing the basics of social and business life? Specifically, marketers and advertisers are seeking to understand how the Internet and World Wide Web may be used as a persuasive medium. This thesis proposes that the uses and gratifications theory offers researchers a useful theoretical framework in Internet communication studies, especially in the area of Internet advertising and marketing.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Internet has changed our lives in less than ten years. Technological improvements offer the public more opportunities to take an active role in choosing which media they want to use. Meanwhile, technology has enabled the mass media to be more specialized to meet the needs of many unique market segments. So far, we have not truly understood what this new medium is, how it works, and how it is being used. However, understanding of how people are using this new medium, its services and content can help us better understand the audience and develop useful e-strategy models in marketing.

This thesis will attempt to clarify the above questions and seek to provide a strategy model in online advertising specifically for the hotel business based on the question "How are people using the Internet?"

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Introduced by Elihu Katz in 1959, uses and gratifications theory in media research seeks to explain how people use different media to satisfy their different needs. Prior to that, most communication research responded to a much different research question, i.e., "What do media do to people?" This type of research viewed audience as passive receivers of the medium and its message. Katz (1959) shifted the focus of the research from the intentions of communicators to the needs and desires of audience members (Severin & Tankard, 1997). In effect, he and others in this research tradition asked "What do people do with media?" Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) put forward a more developed view of the uses and gratifications theory:

"The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (p. 20).

This refined view incorporates three elements:

1. Media use is goal oriented and thus the audience is active.
2. The audience member takes the initiative to link his/her need gratifications with his/her media choices. Therefore, media use is a means to satisfy wants or interests such as seeking information to reduce uncertainty or to solve personal dilemmas.
3. The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 332).

Uses and gratifications theory was one of the earliest to define the audiences as active consumers of media content. According to this theory, audience members take an active role in selecting the media messages, which replaced the image of the audience member as a passive victim. It does not suggest that the media have no effect on the audience, but that the effect is what the audience expects (Fortner, Wallwork, & Hood II), because the act of selecting for his/her desired needs or gratifications leaves the media with less influence (Leckenby).

A further elaboration of this stream of research is the expectancy-value perspective, which examines motives in association with media effects, exposure, and contents (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). It emphasizes the audience's motives for making specific consumption choices and attempts to explore the sources of audience gratification with specific media content (Baran, 2001). Thus, expectancy and evaluation influence the seeking of gratifications, which in turn influence media choice and use (Gunn, 1997).

McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) cited four categories of need gratifications:

1. Diversion (escape from routine problems; emotional release)
2. Personal relationships (social utility of information in conversations; substitute of the media for companionship)
3. Personal identity or individual psychology (value reinforcement or reassurance; self-understanding; reality exploration, etc.)
4. Surveillance (information about things which might affect one or will help one to do or accomplish something) (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 332).

Research Evidence of Uses and Gratifications in Traditional Media

Researchers in this genre have examined audiences for radio, newspapers, television broadcasting, and television cable programming. For instance, a study in the early 1940s found that radio soap operas were used by their viewers for emotional release, escape from reality, and solutions to problems (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1944). Another study found that most people read newspapers for escape, relaxation, entertainment, and for social prestige (Berelson, 1949).

Klapper (1960) examined the reasons for media appeals by asking the audience what they think, feel and appreciate on the basis of their personal media use. He found that the media serve functions of relaxation, stimulating the imagination, and provide for vicarious interaction and a common ground for social intercourse.

Mass communication researchers applied the uses and gratifications approach to study a wide range of mass media, particularly television. For example, television programming has been shown to be related to a variety of motivations, including the need for information acquisition, escape, companionship, and value reinforcement (Rubin, 1994).

Research Evidence of Uses and Gratifications in New Media other than the Internet

Since the 1980s, new technology has become the topic of considerable research because media users have a much larger array of choices. Cable television provides diverse opportunities for audience members to become active (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Heeter and Greenberg (1985) discovered that strategies used by cable viewers for program searching include: 1) automatic (going from channel to channel in numerical order) or controlled (going from one selected channel to another based on a desired goal);

2) elaborated (involving all or most channels) or restricted (involving a limited number of channels); 3) exhaustive (searching all channels before returning to the best choice); or 4) terminating (stopping at the first acceptable choice). These strategies reflect the various consumption habits of cable viewers.

Rubin and Bantz (1989) studied VCR use and found the following motives for VCR use: 1) library storage of movies and shows; 2) watching music videos; 3) using exercise tapes; 4) renting movies; 5) letting children view; 6) time-shifting; 7) socializing by viewing with others; 8) critical viewing including TV watching and studying tapes. The findings show that people use VCR for very specific purposes.

Another new technology studied by communications researcher is computer-mediated communication (CMC). Rafaeli (1986) examined how audiences reported their use of a university computer bulletin board and found that bulletin boards served a diverse set of needs. The primary motivation for use includes recreation, entertainment, and diversion, followed by learning what others think and controversial content facing the community.

Kuehn (1994) also studied computer-aided instructional (CAI) settings from the uses and gratifications perspective. The uses and gratifications found in the study include convenience, diversion, relationship development, and intellectual appeal. Perse and Dunn (1998) applied the theory to home computer use. They explored how CD-ROM ownership was linked to computer utility. Modest utility was found in home computers for entertainment, escape, habit, and killing time. CD-ROM ownership was mostly linked to learning and escape.

Assessments of the Uses and Gratifications Approach

McQuail (1991) summarized the extensive critiques of uses and gratifications research and notes that it has been criticized for its use of verbal statements aggregated into statistics and reified into supposed new constructs. Additionally, he notes that critical theorists have objected to the functional and utilitarian nature of the research, suggesting that it contributes to the status quo and a conservative view of society. McQuail argues that the approach, nevertheless, has offered useful insights in regard to audiences and their experiences, defining and helping to categorize the wide array of audience experience and reactions. Moreover, he suggests that the understanding of the audience as active, rational, resistant to influence and able to self-report remains a useful one. In particular, the approach seems useful in understanding Internet audiences who are, to use Bauer's term, particularly "obstinate" (Bauer, 1964.)

Development of the Internet

It has become a cliché that the Internet has become an explosively popular medium in the past several years. Several factors account for its fast growth. One is the increase in the online population. Observers expect that the number of Internet users will grow from about 172 million in 2000 to 720 million by 2005 ("Arizona's IT"). Another factor is the introduction of technological advances including graphics, sound, and motion on the Internet to demonstrate products and promotions. A third factor is the availability of technologies that make the online use of credit card, address, and other sensitive information safer than before (Baran, 2001).

The Internet "is any set of [computer] networks interconnected with routers, [network] devices [or host computers] that forward packets [or short blocks of data] between networks" (Metzger, 1994, p. 65). Compared with traditional media, the Internet has the characteristics of being more convenient, informative, and interactive,

Promoters of e-commerce believe that the primary value of the Internet is its ability to make marketing, transactions, and communication easier, faster and less expensive (Bishop, 1996). In marketing communication, timely response and delivery of products and services are very important. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year, the Internet is well suited to be the contact point for a wide range of marketing applications (Schwartz, 1997). Consumers can now sit in the comfort of their own homes, businesses or schools, gather relevant information and take time to make purchase decisions. If they have questions or comments, they can provide feedback directly to the company (Minoli & Minoli, 1998). In fact, now customers can access product and corporate information not only at anytime they want, but also from anywhere they want. The global nature of the Internet makes it a good resource for international marketing, attracting new customers and partners with wider market reach.

Information is no doubt the best resource provided by the Internet. Consumers can find all kinds of product information on the Internet in two primary ways. First, businesses can send information to each individual consumer through one-on-one relationship based upon the understanding of customer's specific needs. This approach has replaced the traditional product-centered marketing with a customer-centered marketing (LaBonty, 1998). Second, consumers can more easily provide content or

information to business, based on which businesses can constantly gather information about the customers and put it into a database for product and service development (Gascoyne & Ozcubukcu, 1997).

These two basic ways of dealing with information are a reflection of the Internet's interactive nature. "Interactivity is the user's ability to dynamically select, manipulate, integrate, and format the information to suit particular and changing needs" (Meyer & Zack, 1996, p. 44). Marketers construct product messages based on the customer profile collected on the Internet, ensuring the right message is delivered to the appropriate individuals (Gascoyne & Ozcubukcu, 1997). Meanwhile, each customer is seen as a unique person with his/her own needs, lifestyle, preference, and buying patterns (Bishop, 1996). Therefore, instead of overwhelming customers with masses of data, businesses now seek to provide highly customized information or services to each individual. In fact, personalized services not only allow individuals to tailor information but also help create products of their own (Martin, 1997). The new personalized customer-supplier relationship assists the customers use more initiative in choosing the right product and gives marketing communicators a better chance to collect information on customer needs and behavioral patterns. Throughout these interactions, the needs and buying patterns of the customer are identified and future marketing efforts can be fed and enhanced.

Ha and James (1998) suggest that interactivity on the Internet includes two dimensions: choice, which is the consumer's choice of initiating or terminating communication at any time; and information collection, i.e., the gathering of demographics, psychographics, and personality characteristics by the Internet sites. In fact, interactivity is the greatest difference between traditional media and the Internet

(Meyer & Zack, 1996). Below is a comparison of the characteristics among different media (Hoffman & Novak, 1996):

Table 1
Comparison of the Characteristics Among Different Media

Medium	Person Inter-activity	Machine Inter-activity	Number of linked sources	Communication model	Content	Media feedback symmetry	Temporal synchronicity
Broadcast TV	No	No	Few	One-to-many	Audio, Video, (little Text)	No	N/A
News-paper	No	No	One	One-to-many	Text, Image	Yes	N/A
Internet	No	Yes	Many	Many-to-many	Text, image, Audio, Video	No	Yes

Application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in Internet Communication Research

One of the Internet's most important characteristics is interactivity, which emphasizes audience choice. In fact, it may be inappropriate to call Internet users "audiences" inasmuch as the term audience suggests a receiver not an "inter-actor." As discussed above, Internet users are active "choosers" of material. The characteristics of Internet use discussed above suggest that the uses and gratifications model is particularly applicable since it proposes that media users are rational decision-makers who actively choose to use a medium in anticipation of receiving gratifications. From those Internet channels of information and entertainment, they satisfy their personal and social needs (Edelstein, Ito, & Kepplinger, 1989).

According to Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1974), all media users have essentially the same five categories of needs.

1. Cognitive needs - needs related to strengthening of information knowledge, and

understanding of our environment.

2. Affective needs- needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experiences.
3. Personal integrative needs- needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status of the individual.
4. Social integrative needs- needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world.
5. Escapist needs- needs related to escape, tension release, and desire for diversion (p. 166-167).

The needs best served by the Internet are cognitive ones because it covers virtually every topic. Affective needs also are well represented on the Internet by web sites focused on art, music or theatre that serve audience's entertainment needs. There are also many sites related to increasing people's self-confidence. Some are self-help related, which satisfy the personal integrative need to improve self-esteem. Social integrative needs can be fulfilled even internationally as the Internet helps people communicate with each other without regard to geographic boundaries. Finally, a lot of web sites also have rich resources to satisfy escapist needs by providing the users a world of fantasy. Although other media serve some of the above needs, only the Internet appears to meet all five of these needs (Hunter, 1997).

According to the expectancy-value theory, people have an idea about which particular medium or message will best satisfy their needs. Some researchers have been trying to find out the motivations for a person to select the Internet over another medium. One survey found people used different media because of each medium's qualities.

Television was characterized by visual factors such as sight, sound, color and movement; print media allowed the reader to control the amount of the stimuli; and radio provided a pure aural stimulus (Edelstein, Ito, & Kepplinger, 1989). The Internet has the ability to incorporate all aspects of these media. Therefore, people can use the Internet to complement their use of other mass media (Hunter, 1997).

Many researchers have conducted comparison studies between traditional media and the Internet. Ferguson and Perse (2000) designed a study to explore the similarities between television and the World Wide Web (WWW). They found that the WWW may be functionally similar to television as to entertaining, killing time and seeking information, but may not be as relaxing as television viewing. Similarly, Hunter (1997) found the gratifications people get from the Internet as an alternative to the traditional media include browsing, information seeking, and entertainment seeking.

The gratifications users gain from browsing and exploration from the Internet can be seen as an extension of their affective and cognitive needs. One Nielsen survey (1995) found that about 90 percent of Internet users were simply browsing and exploring. By surfing the Internet, users seem to enjoy the excitement of exploring a new world, satisfying the affective need for diversion and cognitive need for information. Rafaeli (1988) also found that the interactive features of the Internet can lead to greater acceptance and satisfaction, greater learning, and increased feelings of cooperation.

Hunter (1997) pointed out that compared to television, radio, and print advertising, the Internet offers a unique environment where one will not just be able to learn about a product, but will also be able to instantly purchase the item. He referred the needs created by this new way of purchasing as the “commercial need,” in which media

users access the Internet specifically to purchase goods and services. However, Hunter pointed out that so far the Internet is primarily satisfying the cognitive and affective needs of users. Based on the above assumption, Hunter conducted a study to learn about the Internet use at Boston College. With the Internet available as entertaining and learning devices, the students and faculty use the medium to satisfy their particular needs. Specifically, the Internet serves as an entertainment, education and communication tool for students and a communication and research tool for faculty.

Some researchers have studied the Internet from a more specific perspective based on the uses and gratifications theory. Thomsen (1996) explored the impact of PR Forum, a subscription-based newsgroup on the Internet on the public relations community by examining the nature, function, and content of the online communicative exchanges and by probing the uses and gratifications associated with participation. The research indicated that the forum is used for three primary functions: to facilitate the exchange of information and advice; to create a forum to debate issues affecting the profession; and to cultivate and foster a sense of self-validation and enhanced efficacy both at a personal and professional level.

Previous research found a great deal of evidence that the Internet is satisfying the personal integrative, social integrative, and escapist needs (Perry, 1996). Eighmey and McCord (1995) conducted a pilot study regarding web site development and usage. This perspective dealt with a variety of issues such as entertainment value, personal involvement, personal relevance, information involvement, clarity of purpose, controversy, credibility, and interest in continuing communication. Results show web site users are assisted by information placed in an enjoyable context, a clear and attractive

structure, and efficiently executed designs. The conclusion is that the gratifications perspective can be utilized in analyzing audience reactions to web sites. Papacharissi & Rubin (2000) also identified various motives for using the Internet. The results suggested distinctions between instrumental and ritualized Internet use, as well as Internet use serving as a functional alternative to face-to-face interaction.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTION

The Internet provides marketers a new platform of customized advertising, efficient communication, product display, and one-on-one service. It has combined the characteristics of print, broadcast, outdoor, and direct response media and served a variety of functions in marketing communication such as creating awareness, demonstrating products, providing information, helping customers in product evaluation and selection, and projecting a favorable corporate image (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996). Internet advertising has tremendous communication power. A single exposure of online advertising can generate increases in advertising awareness, brand awareness, product attribution communication and purchase intent ("The Internet Advertising Bureau", 1998). The most prominent effects of interactive marketing activities include targeting, brand building, E-commerce, audience reach and click-through to corporate sites, etc. (The Myers Group).

Uses and gratifications research in Internet communication helps marketers understand what the audiences are trying to get out of the medium, thus creating better marketing communication plans to fulfill their needs (Tan, 1985). However, while most research in this field is focused on the gratifications that audiences get from media, there is little research in application of the theory in business operations. Research has been even scarcer in the hotel business. Nonetheless, the industry has already been strongly impacted by the new medium. Using the Internet in travel planning and booking has become a trend worldwide. Travel services will become a major source of online purchases. In fact, online travel booking is expected to total over \$29 billion in 2003

(Pastore, 2000), in which hotel booking will reach \$10 billion (Forrester Research, 1999). Meanwhile, traditional marketing communication has become less effective in part because of increases in the volume of messages and the diversity of media. Considerable marketing dollars were wasted in the scope of Internet marketing because there are no guidelines on how and why people turn to and respond to a new medium. Therefore, how to effectively market a hotel on the Internet requires strategies based on the understanding of the audience, for which the uses and gratifications theory lays a useful theoretical foundation. This case study seeks to set up a strategy model of online advertising for the hotel business.

Research Question: what are the effective strategies in site selection, advertising format selection and creative development in an online advertising campaign for the hotel business based on the uses and gratifications theory?

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

According to the uses and gratifications theory, audience members have certain expectations about how the media can meet their needs. They are active selectors of the media and the message because they know what gratifications to anticipate. Whether selecting a web site to host advertising or creating a creative copy, marketers should bear in mind one keyword, i.e., audience. It is not only the understanding of who they are and what they need but also how they use the medium to meet their gratifications. The following model in website selection, advertising format selection and creative development is summarized from thorough analysis of a variety of websites based on the uses and gratifications theory.

Web Site Selection Criteria

Findings in previous research in the uses and gratifications models concluded that Internet users are goal-oriented. Half of them go online regularly to purchase products and services, 75% search for information about their hobbies, and 64% visit travel sites. Internet users feel as if they take greater control over their lives. Moreover, they feel more autonomy, enjoyment and diversity and see personalization as a benefit (Cook, 2000).

Since audience members look for specific information rather than aimlessly surfing on the Internet, choosing the web site that serves the right function to meet their needs is one of the most important strategies. In travel planning, 62% of the travelers use search engines, 51% use destination sites, 48% use company sites, and 36% use commercial sites. In travel booking, 51% of the online travelers use corporate sites, 39%

use commercial sites, and 32% use search engines (Cook, 2000). Therefore, corporate sites, destination sites such as local portals, search engines, and commercial sites such as travel booking sites are the major web sites that we have studied.

Basically, there are two ways for people to locate a web site on the Internet. One is to start from a search engine. For example, if an audience member wants to find the information about hotels in New Orleans, the audience member can log on a search engine and go through the travel category or type the name of the destination in the search section. The web site will then pull up a list of hotels with a brief introduction of each listing and a URL, which will lead him/her to the destination site when clicked upon. Another method to locate a web site is to try typing the name of the destination directly in the address box on a browser. Many tourist markets have portals named after the city. For example, if a target audience wants to take a trip in New Orleans, he may try <http://www.neworleans.com> and will immediately log on the destination site.

Therefore, a good URL is very important in drawing traffic, especially first-time visitors.

Since the audience member is goal-oriented, the quality of the content usually decides how long he/she will stay on the site. It not only refers to the quality of the content of the web site, but also the overall reputation and credibility of the web site. Because there is no specific distinction among their various needs, audiences may seek more than one gratification on a web site. For example, audiences may search information for travel planning and booking. Therefore, cognitive needs for travel planning and commercial needs for travel booking may be the two primary needs they seek on the Internet. At the same time, they may also search affective needs during the surfing because the experience may bring him/her enjoyment or excitement. If the

audience member feels the site brings him/her gratifications he/she expects, he/she will not only remain on the web site but also come back to visit again. In a long run, the habit will develop into loyalty to the website, which is one of the ultimate goals of marketing communications. Therefore, quality of the web site is another important criterion to retain the audiences.

According to the uses and gratifications theory, the audience member chooses a medium not only to meet his needs, but also as a result of a comparison of a variety of information sources. When choosing the Internet over the other media, the audience member wants to get information faster and easier. Therefore, the ease with which an individual can obtain information also influences how long the person stays on the site, further impacting on the advertising exposure. Many audience members give up visiting a web site because too much time was taken when they try to download the information. There are always contradictions here. On the one hand, the web site developer tries to draw as many audience members as possible; on the other hand, the more users on the site, the slower the downloading speed. Solving the problem of traffic and speed is an important issue for the growth of a web site. One common practice to diffuse traffic is to offer the audiences options between HTML and text versions of the site on the home page. Some audiences have high-speed Internet access and may enjoy the surfing with sound and video, so HTML or flash will be their primary option. Others may have a slower Internet access and probably just want to obtain information without graphics or audio in order to maintain a stable downloading speed. The text version can be a good choice for them. In this way, traffic is diffused as soon as the target audience gets onto

the home page, and audiences members can enjoy the ease in navigation based on their selection.

In addition to obtaining information faster and easier, audience members expect to receive as much information as possible if it is what they expect. Therefore, advertising space and editorial environment are very important when considering a web site for the ad. This is not only decided by the size of the advertising space available on the particular page, but also the credentials of advertisers on that particular page. For example, Hilton New Orleans Riverside may have to put their advertisement on the same page of a five-star hotel, but it may also be listed on the same page with small inns in the area. Which is more advantageous, again, depends on what kind of gratifications the audience is looking for.

Besides the qualitative criteria, there are some quantitative criteria that can be taken into consideration in web site selection. The most important factor is target audience profile. As a matter of factor, it is so important that all other criteria are based on it. Target audience profile covers the demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioral information known about audience. The more detailed information the marketers have about what they need, the better they are able to serve audience gratifications. This understanding assists marketers in selecting the right web site and page to host advertising. For example, many local portals have different pages that attract either visitors or local residents. Therefore, advertisers should avoid sites or pages with a local focus. Although tourists interested in local information, they usually have a different level of involvement. Some local portals let the audiences choose whether to get into the site for local residents or for visitors on the homepage. This approach is very

effective as it not just helps the audience to find the information they need, but also helps advertisers to be more targeted in reaching the audiences.

High traffic and large number of visitors is an important factor in evaluating a web site. As discussed before, a memorable URL and quality content can help draw audiences. Besides, traffic is highly influenced by the promotion of the web site. As more than half of the Internet users start looking for information on search engines, to have the hotel listed by every search engine and directory is a cost-effective promotional tactics. Some hotels use newspapers, television or radio for promotion. Most of these media have a geographical emphasis and are limited in reaching. Only the Internet is international in nature. Therefore, the Internet is the best promotional tool from this perspective.

If a web site is well targeted, it is very possible that time spent per visit by the target audience will grow. Therefore, the average length per visit is also a criterion for web site selection. Ideally, the longer a visitor stays at a site the better, since the time of exposure to advertising messages is longer. However, the problem with a high traffic and well-targeted web site is that the advertising space is usually very expensive. Therefore, finding the most cost-effective web sites is a challenging task to marketers.

One final quantitative criterion is the evaluation of the web site. Some web sites providing tracking reports so that marketers can have an idea of the performance of the site. However, when selecting a new web site, decision-makers most probably will have to refer to the tracking information of another advertiser. Because the audiences are different, this only provides information a reference point. In addition, evaluation metrics has remained a challenge in interactive marketing. Because of the interactive

nature of the Internet, behavioral responses such as click-throughs may be more important to advertisers. Advertisers need to consider all these factors before they select a web site for ad hosting.

Advertising Format Selection Criteria

In traditional advertising, advertisers initiate communication and control the exposure of the advertising message. Audiences are passive because they have less control over the medium. The characteristics of the Internet as a convenient, informative, and interactive medium allow audiences to respond immediately to online advertising. In addition, the online audiences have the control of whether or not to receive, skip or stop an ad. As uses and gratifications theory indicates, the audiences become active selectors of the medium and its message because they are goal-oriented and are “inter-actor” with the medium in the communication process. Attracting audiences to visit a web site has been regarded as the most basic goal of Internet advertising (Kohda & Endo, 1996). Understanding of the uses and gratifications theory in Internet communication can help define how people use these new tools such as interactivity, hypertext and multimedia so that marketers can find out the best online advertising format to target the audience.

Banner Ads

Because selecting an ad on the Internet is a two-way communication process rather than the one-way communication process seen in traditional media, advertisers create different kinds of advertising format that reflecting the interactivity. Banner ads are the primary form of interactive advertising. A banner ad is “typically a rectangular graphic element which acts as an advertisement on the web and entices the viewer to click on it for further information, typically on the advertiser’s web site” (Internet

Advertising Bureau, 2000). Banners vary in sizes, usually measured in pixels: width x height. Below is the standard of banners set up by Internet Advertising Bureau (<http://www.iab.net/advertise/content/adstandards.html>):

Table 2
Standards of Banner Ads

Banner Size (pixels)	Type	Banner Size (pixels)	Type
468*60	Full Banner	392*72	Full Banner with Vertical Navigation Bar
234*60	Half Banner	125*125	Square Button
120*90	Button #1	120*60	Button #2
88*31	Micro Button	120*240	Vertical Banner

Banner ads reflect audience members are active inter-actors with the medium.

When they select (click) the ads, audience members show their interest in learning more about how the product or service serves their needs. Therefore, they are no longer passive receivers of the ads, but goal-oriented and rational decision-makers. If they find the information on the advertiser's site doesn't bring them the gratifications they expect, they will stop the communication process, either going back to the original site or a similar site for further gratification seeking. Thus, banner ads are an enticement for audiences to go to the advertiser's site where they can learn more about the product or service (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

The interactive characteristic of the Internet provides the most prominent feature of banner ads, i.e., providing audience members an immediate behavioral response to the advertising. When the information meets his/her needs, the audience member will either click to learn more about the product or service or click to purchase the product directly from the advertiser. The interactivity makes the communication more effective than before, bringing more benefit to both advertiser and audience members.

Banners were seen as effective communication tools in the early stage of interactive marketing as they attempted to establish a presence, bring up name recognition, and generate traffic to target ads (Kassaye, 1997). Briggs and Hollis (1997) have also shown banner ads familiarize products and raise brand awareness even before a click-through. However, the effectiveness of banner ads has been questioned recently. With the increase in online advertising clutter, the average click-through rate has dropped much below 1%. Many audiences avoid banners because they know they are paid ads. Despite the low click-through rates, some advertisers believe banner ads are effective in leading to a future behavioral response. According to Wall Street Journal, 25% of web users went to a web site after seeing a banner ad, compared to 14% of Television ad and 4% of radio ad ("Banner ads", 1999). This shows good banner ads can impact the audience's behavior, whether it is an immediate response or a later response.

As the most effective function of banner ads is enticing audience members to take further action, many people argued that the best way to measure banner ads is the click-through rate because it shows an immediate behavioral response. So far, measurement of online ads has remained problematic for advertising and marketing professionals. Meanwhile, it makes the calculation of online advertising costs more complicated than before. Traditionally, most online advertising is on a CPM (cost per thousand) base. The problem of CPM is there is no indication of a behavioral response. If the ad has no effect in attracting audience clicking, does it mean it is a failure? How about if the ad has a high page view but a low click-through? Is it determined by the quality of the content on this particular page or the quality of the ad? In order to answer these questions, several behavioral measurements have been introduced that reflect the

concept of active audience. For example, the cost per click (CPC) model suggests “the advertiser and the content site mutually agree that the content site will continue to display the advertiser’s ad creative until X number of clicks have been delivered – the amount purchased” (Internet Advertising Bureau, 2000). Ranging from 10 cents to 2 dollars, CPC provides a different approach in measuring advertising performance and an alternative for advertisers in expensive hosting sites. Since the click-through rate is very low, CPC may be more cost-effective compared with CPM.

Hypertext & Hyperlink

Introduced by Ted Nelson, hypertext means non-sequential writing (Zeltser, 1995). Hyperlink, a special form of hypertext, is a non-sequential connection between two documents, image maps, or graphics, etc. (Internet Advertising Bureau, 2000). When an audience member clicks on a word or an image on one web page, the hyperlink will lead him/her to another web page either in the same web site or in some other web site.

Hypertext also reflects the uses and gratifications theory because the audiences are actively involved in clicking on the hyperlinks to learn more about the product and service or to make a booking (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Instead of passively receiving the message, audience members are active seekers for gratifications. In this sense, hypertext is similar to banner ads because it entices behavioral responses. When pointing at a highlighted word or image, the audience member has total control over whether or not to respond to the ad. However, hypertext has been found to be more effective than banner ads. As hypertext is embedded in an editorial environment with relevant topic of the advertised product or service, hyperlinks and hypertext are considered less intrusive

than banner ads. Audience members usually perceive them as information provided by the editors and are more willing to interact with the ads. 25

Keyword Sensitive Advertising

A special kind of banner ads or hypertext has appeared in some search engines, directories and content sites, i.e., keyword sensitive advertising. When an audience member types in the words in the search section, the banner ads or the hypertext will appear on the top or the bottom of the result page.

As with banner ads and hypertext, keyword sensitive advertising requires audience's interaction. However, it is more effective because the audience member tells the web site what exactly he needs by typing in the search words or phrases. Because of the audience member's input, the ads usually appear on the pages most related to expected gratifications.

Email Newsletters

Because of its convenience and cost-efficiency, the use of email has become one of the most important services of the Internet and an essential marketing communication tool. Marketers can now use it to reach their stakeholders by creating a list with thousands of email addresses and send out an email to each of them in just a few seconds at virtually no cost.

Email newsletters are very well targeted because audience members request them. When they subscribe to email newsletters, they choose to be exposed to the media message that is expected to meet their needs. The process of subscription makes them interact with the media. When receiving email newsletters, the audience members will

expect the newsletter to bring them gratifications they seek, which is exactly what the uses and gratifications theory states. 26

Compared with banner ads and hypertext, email newsletters have more value to advertisers because audience members initiate the communication, and thus are more willing to receive the information. In addition, receivers of email newsletters can choose a convenient time and place to read and respond to the messages, greatly enhancing the effectiveness of marketing communication (LaBonty, 1998). However, email newsletters are considered effective only when they are targeted. Some Internet services send out bulk advertising emails to everyone on their service list, which immediately turn the newsletter into junk mail. Bulk email is definitely not recommended because it will make the business quickly lose its reputation.

Sponsorship

Some web sites provide sponsorship opportunities for advertisers, a combination of various online ad forms. For example, advertisers can purchase exclusive sponsorship space on destination pages of travel sites, including content, hyperlink and banner ads. Sponsorship partners usually have the privilege in selecting the relevant page. Therefore, it may have a strong reach to a large and highly desirable audience and provide effective targeting by increasing product exposure and brand awareness.

Listing

Research shows more than half of the Internet users start looking for information on search engines or directories. In addition, many search engines and directories offer free listing. Therefore, to have the URL listed by every search engine and directory is a cost-effective promotional tool.

Advertising Architecture

When an audience member clicks on an advertisement, he or she is goal-oriented and is making his/her own decisions about what kind of gratifications to seek. Therefore, the advertising architecture needs to be efficient so users can immediately reach the information they need. However, some web sites such as travel sites do not allow hyperlinks to any sites with a booking function. Therefore, setting up a bridge page between the advertising site and the destination site is a good approach to avoid the conflict.

Introduced by Kathleen Dalglish, the concept of interstitial advertising is a new form of intrusive advertising. It is a page with flash media that comes in between two web pages (ILAC, 2000). Although interstitial ads may not be a good idea for every advertiser because of the requirement for high Internet access speed, the concept of setting up a page between the ad hosting page and the destination page provides a foundation for a new advertising architecture. Illustration of the advertising structure is shown below:



In addition to serving as a transition, the bridge page can also provide information about the advertiser. However, because of the limited attention span of audiences and because of the goal to lead audiences to the destination site rather than keeping them on the bridge page, information on a bridge page should be as simple as possible. Flash or multi-media should be avoided to shorten the downloading time.

On the Internet, the advertisers' goal is to isolate the advertising being viewed to make the ad stand out from advertising clutter and media fragmentation to obtain the desired effect. Therefore, good advertising not only needs to be eye-catching but also needs a position that can be easily located. Many web sites offer free listings for local business. However, it is very difficult for the audiences to locate the business if the listing is very long. A premier position can definitely cut through the clutter and draw more attention.

Content and Creative Design

Good Internet advertising needs to be informative and attractive. Although used in the same campaign, different copies need to be created for various web sites because audiences may vary in their needs. In this case, copy needs to be focused on the facilities of the hotel to target meeting planners while also highlighting competitive rates for leisure or business travelers looking for special deals.

Customization of ad copies on each web site to meet the audience's needs can increase awareness and bring more responses to the destination page. Meanwhile, various copies need to be consistent in their appearance and verbiage so that there is more synergy in the campaign.

Situation Analysis

Throughout the first five months of 2000, Hilton New Orleans Riverside had enjoyed strong productivity from both leisure and business segments. August is a traditionally slow period. By the end of May, there were 8,959 room-nights sold according to the annual budget with a booking lead of less than two months. To achieve budget projections for August 2000, sales had to be increased.

Goal

Because of the limited lead-time in the campaign, a marketing goal rather than an advertising goal was set up because of its easiness in evaluation. The marketing goal for the campaign was to increase the occupancy rate of the Hilton New Orleans Riverside in the months of July and August from 53% to 70%.

Target Audience Definition

Three major market segments were identified:

Leisure market: individual or group leisure travelers. 70% of the leisure travelers have full-time jobs with an average age of 43 (Longwoods, 1999).

Business market: individual or group business travelers. 70% of the travelers are male with an average age of 44. 78% of the travelers have managerial or professional occupation and about half of them have an annual income over \$75,000 (Longwoods, 1999).

Corporate meetings market: meeting planners in big corporations, associations and government as well as individual meeting planners. Meeting planners provide

recommendations on suitable venues and programs, processing registration forms, preparing travel plans and budgeting for corporate meetings. However, it is the chief executive officer and board of directors who usually make the final site selection decision for major conventions and annual meetings in a big corporation or organization. Among the decision-makers, 27% are CEOs, 43% are board directors, 15% are meeting professionals, 11% are committee members and the others take up 9% (Conference Management, 2001).

Advance travel planning varies according to the purpose of the trip. Among the leisure travelers, 45% of the visitors plan the trip within two months and 30% plan the trip three to five months ahead. Only 4% of the travelers plan more than one year in advance. Similarly, 63% of the business travelers plan two months ahead, while only about 6% plan the trip more than one year before the trip. Compared with the leisure and business travelers, meeting planners usually plan with much more lead-time. Most of the meetings are planned more than one year ahead, some are even planned three years in advance (Longwoods, 1999). Therefore, it is very difficult to push sales in the meeting planners' market during the summer campaign. Based on this information, our target audience for the summer promotion was narrowed down to leisure and business travelers (Longwoods, 1999).

Marketing Research

The selection of the Internet as a primary promotional tool for the campaign was based on research of the traveler's market in New Orleans. When planning the trip, 73% of the target audience in the leisure market use personal experience and advice from friends or relatives, and 13% of them use online services or the Internet. Among the

business travelers, 33% visitors use personal experience or advice from friends and relatives, and 12% use online services or the Internet. The rest of them use books, magazines, 1-800 numbers, airline or commercial carriers, etc. When planning activities, the use of the Internet rises to 50%, followed by guidebook in the hotel, brochure, newspaper, concierge, yellow book and television (Longwoods, 1999). Although newspapers are still the primary medium, the Internet has surpassed travel TV shows, magazines or guidebooks and has become the second most important media used in travel planning. Among frequent travelers, 69% of visitors use online planning and 22% book online (Cook, 2000).

As the uses and gratification theory indicates, audience members are active selectors of the medium, the Internet is competing against other sources for need gratifications in audiences' travel planning and booking. Research shows that the Internet is serving the functions of providing audience members hotel information and booking. Combined with the Internet's characteristics as interactive, convenient and informative, the Internet was selected as the primary promotional tool because it best served audience members' cognitive and commercial needs.

Secondary research shows the main reasons leisure travelers are visiting New Orleans include seeing friends or relatives, attending special event such as the Mardi Gras, and touring. The main reasons for New Orleans business trips include attending conventions or conferences, business meetings and trade shows. Dining is a major attraction to visitors. 48% of the visitors choose restaurants as the primary activity planned after arrival, followed by shopping (45%), museums or exhibitions (26%) and sight seeing (24%) (Longwoods, 1999).

The hotel business in New Orleans is an intensely competitive environment. Primary competitors for the Hilton New Orleans Riverside include the Ritz-Carlton, Les Triumph and Renaissance Hotels. There are about 200 hotels in the market (Hotel Guide New Orleans, 2001). Therefore, positioning of the hotel is a key to developing the Internet advertising plan.

The positioning of the hotel is focused on:

1. Prime location for both recreational and business attractions. The hotel has central location within walking distance to venues for shopping, antiquing, and sightseeing.
2. Creative marketing in leisure traveling. The hotel has affiliated programs with the recent opened Jazzland Theme Park, National D-Day Museum, and Harrah's Casino, etc.
3. Competitive daily room rate. Cost per room per night ranges between \$89-\$109, which is much lower than the usual cost of \$160-\$230 in peak season. In addition, Hilton offers complimentary parking, which is a \$20 value per day. Therefore, the rate is very competitive among key competitors whose costs usually range between \$99-\$129 without complimentary parking.

Moreover, the hotel has strong brand name and offers free access to the hotel club and hotel fitness center, and is flexible to change travel itinerary for the target audience, etc. Among the key competitors, Hilton offers the most comprehensive array of venues (rooms, meeting space, retail, food and beverage) to meet the needs of all market segments.

Web Site Selection

Two major categories of web sites have been identified, one is destination sites and the other is traffic control sites (Hoffman, Novak and Chatterjee, 1995). “Destination sites” are identified as such because they provide the ultimate “destination” of target audience’s visit on the Internet (Hoffman, Novak and Chatterjee, 1995). The destination sites for Hilton’s target audience include Hilton Corporate site, travel sites, meeting planners’ sites, and food and beverage sites, etc.

Corporate Site

As stated before, corporate site is one of the most popular web sites in travel booking. Since consumers choose to visit a company’s site and initiate the interaction with its marketing communication efforts on the Internet, the corporate site is a good form of non-intrusive advertising (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). The Hilton Corporate web site (<http://www.hilton.com>) primarily meets audience’s cognitive and commercial needs by providing them information about the property and a tool for them to make reservations online.

Interactivity is shown throughout the web site. On Hilton’s homepage, there is a list of promotional programs such as Special Offers, Value Rates and Honor Programs, etc. Once an individual clicks on one of the items, it will link him/her to that particular page. The user can immediately check the availability of the property by inputting the location, arrival and departure date. If he or she wants to book a room, he/she can do so online immediately. If the user has questions or comments about the service or the properties, he/she can choose the relevant comment category and submit it online. When

feedback comes to headquarters, it will be electronically delivered to the right person for a reply, increasing the efficiency of the sales force and customer service.

One unique feature of Hilton corporate web site is that an audience member can choose to talk to a representative on the Internet. This feature also shows the interactive nature of the Internet and the activity of audience selection. In addition, subscriptions to a corporate email newsletter are available, which not only provides target audiences with the latest information on promotions, but also acts as an effective public relations tool. Furthermore, the web site is increasing its features to better serve the audience's needs. For instance, the Destination Guide offers information on restaurants, business services, and local events, etc., which will be good resources for travel planning.

The Hilton corporate site includes promotions and occupancy information of more than 1,000 Hilton hotels as well as Hilton Family Properties, such as Conrad International, DoubleTree, Embassy Suites, Hampton Inn, Red Lion Hotels & Inn, Hampton Inn & Suites, Hilton Garden Inn and Hilton Suites, etc. The corporate site is designed to provide the audience an easy access to each of the family properties so that the business is kept in the same group.

Understanding of the target audience and translating their needs into marketing programs is a challenge. Many hotels are now in partnership with airlines and some popular travel sites. On the one side, the partnership gives the audience more benefits, but on the other side it brings more market competition. The key to success is to track what the target audience want and keep the web site updated based on the understanding of their needs.

Two different kinds of travel sites are available for the business and individual travelers. One type is the local portals that focus on providing destination information. The other type is the booking engines that serve as a tool for audiences to book the hotel room online. Basically, the former meets the audience's cognitive needs and the latter meets their commercial needs.

Local Portals

Local portals provide information in local news, weather, traffic, accommodation and site seeing, etc. Because of the focus, local portals usually provide targeted information to local and visiting audiences. Since local portals fit very well with the hotel business, the cost of advertising is much lower than those destination pages in big entry portals. However, in top tourist markets, there are tens or even hundreds of local portals with similar functions, making it a chaotic environment. In addition, clutter is very high in accommodation pages. Although sometimes the host will limit the number of listing on a page in order to keep the page look neat, it increases the advertising cost. Therefore, choosing the right site and right page needs particular attention because it may be easily turned into a waste of the advertising budget.

The local portals considered for the campaign include

<http://www.neworleans.com> and <http://www.gayneworleans.com>. New Orleans.com is one of the highest trafficked Internet sites in the city. It is targeted at both local residence and tourists. Traffic is separated once the user enters the site. Since a booking engine <http://www.turbotrip.com> is in affiliation with the site, a bridge page was recommended in order to have link to Hilton New Orleans Riverside's corporate site for booking. At the

time of the campaign, the average length per visit is 14 minutes. Gayneworleans.com is targeted at the homosexual market. Since New Orleans is one of the major homosexual tourist markets in the US, it targets a special group of the leisure travelers. In addition, it is very flexible in its advertising format and very low in advertising cost, therefore, hyperlink on the accommodation page was recommended. 36

Booking Engines

Booking engines are another type of travel site. They provide tools to book hotel rooms and air tickets or to rent a car on the Internet. Many booking engines are in affiliation with local portals so that the traffic will be sent to the booking engine when an inquiry about a hotel room is made on a local site.

The hotel booking engine is the best site for our target audience. However, those sites usually don't have much flexibility in the advertising formats they provide, with most of them limited to banner ads. In addition, booking engines charge a 10% commission on every hotel room booked on its site, so they usually won't allow advertisers to have any hyperlink to the hotel's web site where the audience can book the room directly through the hotel. Advertising space in some top travel sites is very expensive. Meanwhile, clutter is very high in those sites, too. Therefore, what the campaign team sought in these sites is flexibility in advertising format.

The booking engine recommended for Hilton New Orleans Riverside was <http://www.travelocity.com> and <http://www.citysearch.com>. Travelocity.com merged with Preview Travel, Inc. in March 2001, making it the largest one-stop travel company on the Internet. By April 2000, it had more than 20 million members. The average length per visit is 16 minutes. It is in affiliation with a variety of search engines and

directories such as Yahoo!, Excite.com, and Lycos.com, etc. However, the advertising format is not flexible. Banner and micro-banner are the two major advertising formats available and there are restrictions on the hyperlink to another site that provides booking function. Therefore, the micro-banner on the Special Deal Page was recommended on a cost per click basis. CitySearch.com provides in-depth and local information with entry portals in over 70 US cities. It generated about 700,000 pages on the New Orleans' site. It has won various rewards as the best city guide site. In addition, it is very flexible in its advertising formats such as banner, hyperlink and sponsorship, etc. An email newsletter was recommended in the major tourists resource markets because of its reach in the target audience.

Meeting Planners' Sites

Although meeting planners are not the primary target audience in our summer campaign, they are important guest resources for the hotels because of the large volume of rooms they book. In fact, meeting planners are also gradually moving online. 77% of them are Internet users. Among them, 84% are looking for hotel options on the Internet. 80% of the meeting planners will consider making a buying decision based on information obtained online. There was an increase of 42% online Request for Proposal (RFP) generation in the first 6 months of 2000 (Meetings News & Meetings Today, 2000).

Meeting planners usually seek hotel information such as detailed meeting space, layouts of floor plans and a friendly environment. In fact, meeting planners' needs are not only different from individual or business travelers, but also vary greatly among themselves (Longwoods, 1999). For example, planning lead-time varies from one year to

three years. Some big corporations may book rooms for as many as thousands of people, while small companies may seek hotels just big enough to host a meeting for fifty people. The purpose of the meetings can differ from purely recreational to solely for business. As a result, some meeting planners may be attracted by the facilities for entertainment while others may seek high tech facilities such as big auditorium, projectors and high-speed Internet access, etc. Advertisers need to have a clear idea about the hotel's positioning and strength in market competition so that they can send out the right message. Big hotels like Hilton New Orleans Riverside are very flexible in hosting both big and small meetings, therefore, they should take the opportunity to attract meetings of any size. Some smaller hotels might choose to advertise on web sites targeting planners for small meetings and try to focus on its small and intimate environment.

Traditionally, meeting planners' market is an expensive to reach. Below is a comparison of cost of print advertising in meeting planner's markets (SRDS, 1999):

Table 3
Cost of Print Ads in Meeting Planner's Market

Publication	Size	Cost
Hotel & Travel Index	FP4C	\$49,360/year
Official Meeting Facility Guide	FP4C	\$38,040/year
Successful Meeting	FP4C	\$18,050/year
Brochure	10,000 receivers	\$15,000/ mailing
Postcards	10,000 receivers	\$3,500/ mailing

As the Internet provides virtually any information that a meeting planner needs, there is growing interest in this medium among the planners. Hilton corporation has already taken good care of the meeting planners on its web site. There is a special page for the meeting planners to submit their proposal online. Once the corporation receives

it, they will send a sales representative to contact the meeting planner for more details. 39

A lot of web sites are targeting meeting planners. Undoubtedly, there is great potential for online booking among the meeting planners. However, as most of the sites are start-up sites, the awareness is quite low. Moreover, not many flexible advertising formats or detailed information of meeting space or layout of floor plans are available on those web sites. Many sites even charge a commission for every RFP submitted. Therefore, meeting planner's sites are not recommended if a hotel needs to push sales in a short period of time.

Food & Beverage Sites

As shown in the Longwoods Study (1999), 48% of the visitors choose restaurants as the primary activity planned after arrival at the city. Besides, food and beverage venues are usually more profitable than hotel rooms. Therefore, foods and beverages can be good selling point in the advertising even though they are not the primary focus for this summer campaign.

Hilton New Orleans Riverside has three top restaurants offering different types of cuisine. The restaurant by the River Walk with a good view of the Mississippi River is famous for its Sunday Brunch, attracting not only guests in the Hilton, but also those living in hotels nearby. However, restaurant reservations have not gone online. Currently only one local portal, <http://www.neworleansrestaurants.com> provides online restaurant reservations. Because awareness is low, usage is low. Therefore, the online advertising budget for the food and beverage sites should be limited because return on investment might be very low.

Some other content sites can be taken into consideration for the hotels. Most of these sites provide relevant topics at a low cost. Therefore, these sites can be used to test the effectiveness of the advertisement or creative. The problem is that a lot of sites don't provide tracking reports for free advertising or listings, which adds difficulties in ad evaluation.

Free placement of video and a hyperlink for Hilton New Orleans Riverside was offered by <http://www.travelvideonetwork.com>, which is a site that offers different venues in cities to include their promotional video on their website. Although video was not a major format of advertising, it is a free test for multi-media advertising. The only challenge is that there is no tracking report, and the effectiveness of the advertising is unknown. In addition, <http://www.aaa.com> offered the hotel a website listing at a reduced rate as added value of a regular advertiser in their tour book. Therefore, it was a good option to keep synergy of different promotional tools.

Search Engines and Directories

Traffic control sites usually direct consumers to various destination sites (Hoffman, Novak and Chatterjee, 1995). The most common traffic control sites are search engines and directories that lead the audiences to their individual destination sites.

Search engines, also called search agents, are those sites that help the audience locate other web sites through keyword search of a database on the Internet (Hoffman, Novak & Chatterjee, 1995). Directories are those sites that help the audience search through categorizing on the web site and facilitating their navigation through structured menus (Sarkar, Butler, & Steinfield, 1996). There's an advantage to being listed in a

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directory versus a search engine because directory listings are created by human editors from manual submissions, which eliminates the redundancies caused by automatic software submissions. Another reason why directory listings are more valuable is that they power so many other portals and draw major traffic. Therefore, it's important to make directory listings a part of the Internet marketing plan (Hoffman, Novak, & Chatterjee, 1995).

According to a recent survey (<http://www.realnames.com>), over 75% of the Internet users use search engines to traverse the web; half of the web users spend more than 70% or more of their time searching online. 70% of those surveyed know specifically what they are looking for when they use the search engine, making the advertising more targeted. However, if the audiences cannot find the information they want, most of them will leave the site and try another search engine and 20% of them will completely give up. Therefore, providing the best-tailored information according to the keyword search and structured categories is the decisive factor for a target audience to remain on a search engine or directory.

As search engines and directories usually have a high reach, the awareness of those web sites is also very high. Therefore, a search engine is ideal for building brand awareness. A good example is in the instructions provided by some search engines. When a target audience is trying the search box on <http://www.yahoo.com>, there are several examples about how to use the keywords to guide his search. The examples given in each page are Hilton, Hilton Hotel and hotel. These words can not only raise Hilton's brand awareness, but also act as a reminder for target audience when they search for hotel information. However, advertising cost on these sites is very high and

advertising space is very limited in those well-targeted categories. For example, advertising space on Yahoo! travel page in 2001 was booked up before August 2000. Meanwhile, the large amount of traffic also generates a lot of waste in effective reach. Therefore, unless the hotel has a large advertising budget and tries to build brand awareness, it should avoid investing in traffic control sites.

The most important reason for not recommending traffic control sites for Hilton New Orleans Riverside is that it was not our goal to sell the hotel on the search engines or directories, as they are only a transient and not the destination site for our target audience. Once a user finds the URL of Hilton New Orleans Riverside on any search engine or directory, he/she is expected to leave that site for Hilton New Orleans Riverside's web site. Although advertising space is very expensive, most search engines and directories provide free listing of a URL and a brief description of a service or a product provided. The information will show up in the Index page when the target audience searches by categories or by keywords. Free listing is the primary option to utilize in traffic control sites for hotel business.

Summary

Destination sites are preferred as they provide most of the information content that meets the audience's cognitive and commercial needs; while traffic control sites are suggested because they organize this information for easy access. Original content is the most important trait of a good web site, which should provide timely, credible and valuable information. Besides, good sites are also interactive. The maintenance of quality is an important factor in choosing the right web site to host the advertising.

Banner Ads

Some travel sites have very high traffic, but at the same time the clutter and the ad cost are very high as well. Moreover, they don't allow any direct link to a site that has the booking function. Therefore, banner ads were not strongly recommended on these sites.

The CPC model provides an alternative option in advertising on these sites. The banner ad considered for Hilton New Orleans Riverside is on <http://www.travelocity.com>, which was the number one travel site at the time. However, it is not only high in clutter but also blocks hyperlinks to any other booking sites except in the Special Deals page where a square button with any kind of hyperlink is available on a CPC base. Since audiences usually have an idea about where they are going to and what they are looking for when they come to the Special Deals page, the ad will be very well targeted. As the ad cost is based on CPC, it will be especially useful to push a low season in sales within a controlled budget.

Hypertext & Hyperlink

Because of the limitations in banner ads, some non-banner ads were taken into consideration in the summer campaign. Hypertext was recommended in two local portals for Hilton New Orleans Riverside. One is <http://www.neworleans.com> and the other is <http://www.gayneworleans.com>. In <http://www.neworleans.com>, hypertexts appeared in the Accommodation and Attraction Pages. In <http://www.gayneworleans.com>, hypertext appeared in the Accommodation and Lodging Pages.

Keyword Sensitive Advertising

Key word sensitive advertising was recommended to Hilton New Orleans Riverside in <http://www.neworleans.com>. Based on the business function and the positioning, several key words and phrases were suggested: hotel, Hilton, Hilton Hotel, accommodation. When an audience member types any of these words to assist searching, the web site will pull out a search result page, on top of which is a hypertext of Hilton New Orleans Riverside with a brief description.

Email Newsletters

The email newsletter has been used to deliver market information. In the hotel business, it is used to deliver the latest information on travel booking and hotel reservations (Baran, 2001). Some web sites offer the audience a choice between HTML and text version of the email newsletter. Others provide a hyperlink to advertiser's site. These customized format helps increase customer loyalty.

In order to increase the precision in targeting, many web sites provide geographic targeting based on the information that the audiences input in their subscription or registration form. Geographical targeting is very effective for hotels because each market has its major guest resource or feeder's market. For example, the major feeder's market in New Orleans includes Atlanta, Houston and Austin. Therefore, email newsletters were planned to send to subscribers in those cities from <http://www.citysearch.com>. A hyperlink was provided on the email newsletter so that the user can transfer to the corporate site directly when he/she is reading the newsletter.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship was not recommended for Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Although it is an efficient way to achieve the marketing objectives in branding or awareness

(Internet Advertising Bureau, 2000), it may be more effective when used by a corporate brand rather than an individual hotel. In addition, sponsorship is usually very expensive, which makes it different for individual hotels to use it. 45

Some Creative Ad Formats in Online Advertising Considered

In addition to these major formats, some different creative ad formats were considered in online advertising.

Banner Exchange

Banner services are a great source of free advertising. Usually one advertiser agrees to display a banner on his site and in return, the banner service displays his banner on other sites. The chance of a banner being displayed is based on how many times the advertiser's site displays other banners. Therefore, the more traffic comes to the advertiser's page, the more times his banner will be displayed on other sites (Paritosh, 2000).

Banner exchange is mostly used among small business and personal web sites of those who have similar interests. Among corporate sites or content sites, it is seldom used because of the large traffic drawn from the search engines, directories and unique users. Although banner exchange was not recommended to Hilton New Orleans Riverside, it can be considered by several family properties, especially those smaller hotels in the same city because it can keep the business in the same family group. For example, when user finds out that a hotel is booked out for one night, he or she will go to another hotel's web site to check availability. At this time, the exchanged banner reminds him or her of available rooms in a hotel of the same family property just a couple of blocks away. Because it is exactly what he or she wants to know, the likelihood for

the user to click on the banner is very high. The challenge in banner exchange service is that sometimes it may not be easy to reach agreements with competitors.

Targeted Banner

Some online advertising agencies are providing a new tool for targeting by which the content or ad can be adapted to better suit the individual audience. For instance, advertisers can put banner ads based on geographic location, domain name or SIC code. Options are also available according to the organization's name, size or revenue and browser type, etc. (<http://www.doubleclick.com>).

The advantage of this ad format is greater precision in targeting. However, most web sites with the highest traffic would not wholesale advertising space to online ad agencies. Therefore, targeted banner were not recommended because of the limit in the number of top web sites and low click-through rates of banners.

Webrings & Clicktrade

A web ring is a group of web sites targeting at people of similar interests. Each of the web sites displays some links to other sites in the ring so that traffic of the web site from everyone involved will be increased by people's visiting of each other. The problem with web ring is that sometimes they get too large to be of value. For example, if a site is at the 4,000 in a total of 6,000 sites, the chance for this site to be found in a ring is very limited. A second problem is that the users can get lost if there is more than one web ring on a site (Paritosh, 2000). Therefore, the team did not recommend this.

Another format of online advertising is clicktrade. Advertisers pay the web masters for referring visitors to their sites through links. As an affiliate, the person can get paid for hosting the link on his web site. The purpose to use clicktrade is to get traffic

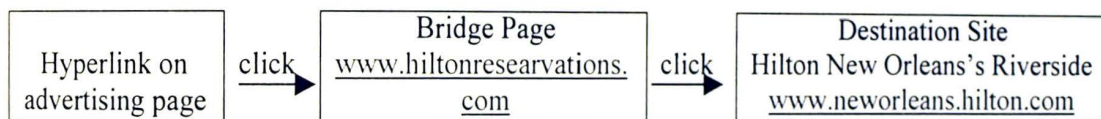
on the web site and make some money to maintain the web site. It was not recommended for hotels because it does not look very professional (Paritosh, 2000).

Most creative ad formats in online advertising were not recommended in the summer campaign because of their uncertainty in effectiveness and because of their inability to target effectively.

Guideline in Creative Development

Advertising Architecture

As mentioned before, some travel sites do not allow hyperlinks to any sites that has booking function. Therefore, setting up a bridge page between the advertising site and the destination site can avoid the conflict. The advertising structure for the summer campaign is shown below:



The bridge page can be designed to deliver essential information of the advertiser such as telephone number and contact information. However, in order to save the user's time in traversing the site, the bridge page should be as simple as possible. In order not to lose any potential customers, animation or flash was not recommended because it takes too long to download if the audience's Internet connection speed is not fast enough.

Ad Positioning

Many web sites provided premier position in the listing as added value for advertisers, hence providing a better chance of ad exposure to advertisers. On <http://www.neworleans.com> and <http://www.gayneworleans.com>, the hyperlinks were provided the first and second listing individually as priority for advertisers.

Several different copy strategies were used on different web sites to show the principles in informative, attractive and non-intrusive advertising. Since leisure and business travelers are the major target audiences of the campaign, the primary theme is the competitive price provided by Hilton New Orleans Riverside, meeting audiences' needs for special deals when planning and booking travel. Consistency was shown in different ads for different sites. In the ads for Travelocity.com and Gayneworleans.com, both designs were in a blue background with the same logo and fonts, keeping the ads similar appearance. In fact, these creative designs were not only consistent with each other, but also with those used in previous promotions. The designs on the bridge page (<http://www.hiltonreservations.com>) were based on that of a recent print ad campaign. Therefore, both ads can be a reminder of each other when audience members book and plan travel.

Although keeping a consistent look in different ad sites and formats is important, customization of different web sites is necessary to suit the editorial and advertising environment of each web site. For example, the copy on Travelocity.com read "A Cheap Date in New Orleans" while the copy on Gayneworleans.com read "New Orleans is a Cheap Date." The difference in the copy reflects the difference in the target audiences of the two web sites.

In addition, understanding the nature of ad hosting sites and their audiences also assisted in the copy development for AAA.com and Travelvideonetwork.com. On AAA.com, the ad is posted on the New Orleans hotel page, so the audience members are already self-selected. Therefore, the focus of the ad was on the location and facilities of

the hotel. On Travelvideonetwork.com, the ad is on a page of hotels across the nation.⁴⁹ Obviously, the primary function of the ad is to draw audience's attention to New Orleans before getting their attention to Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Most importantly, an understanding of the target audience has again directed the development of creative strategies and helped enhance the awareness and the effectiveness of the ads.

Evaluation

The Internet has offered marketers a way to check people's responses immediately. Most computers accessing the Internet have to go through a service provider, which stores information that can be used to track users. This characteristic of the Internet is also valuable to uses and gratifications research, because it provides evidence of how people use the new medium.

One of the criteria in evaluating a web site is in the tracking report it provides. Tracking reports are usually based on the number of hits, page views or ad views, etc. A hit is a file sent by a server, so it can be text, graphic, audio or video, etc. (Internet Advertising Bureau, 2000). When a page has three text or graphic files viewed, it is calculated as four hits because the page itself is a hit. Generally speaking, hits is a not a reliable measurement in online advertising. A web page is viewed when it is requested by a user. It is so far the most common evaluation tool among web servers. However, a page view is not the ideal measurement because it does not indicate whether or not the advertisement has been successfully downloaded. Based on this idea, the ad view measurement has been adopted by some web sites. The advantage of ad view is that it provides the advertisers a clear idea about the number of exposures of the advertisement, and serves as valid data in calculating the click-through rate.

Because of the interactivity of the Internet, behavioral responses are more valuable to advertisers. A click is measured when a visitor interacts with an advertisement. Because the audience may quit viewing at any time before the ad is downloaded, a click only measures the opportunity for the visitor to be transferred to the target URL, but does not show if a visitor actually arrives at the requested site. A click-through is measured when an ad is fully downloaded at the audience's request ("Metrics and Methodology", 1997).

A third-party server usually provides reliable tracking data. However, it is important for advertisers and the third-party server to make an agreement in their definition of the tracking terms in order to avoid confusion in the tracking report. Among the advertising host websites selected, Neworleans.com, Gayneworleans.com, Travelocity.com and CitySearch.com provided tracking reports for advertisers.

Media Plan

The media plan developed for the summer campaign is summarized below:

Table 4
Media Plan – Internet Advertising Jul.-Sep. 2000

Web Site	Web Page	Ad Format	Period
www.neworleans.com	Accommodation Page / Attraction Page	Hypertext	July-September (space is only available quarterly)
	Search Result Page	Hypertext (Keyword Search)	Hilton, Hotel, Hilton Hotel, Accommodation
www.neworleans.citysearch.com	Atlanta, Houston and Austin	Email Newsletter	Three Weeks in July and August
www.travelocity.com	Special Deals Page	Square Button	7,500 clicks starting from Jun. 17 th
www.gayneworleans.com	Accommodation / Lodging Page	Hypertext	July-September (space is only available quarterly)

Web Site	Web Page	Ad Format	Period
www.aaa.org	Hotel Page	Listing – 4 Photos, Headline information and text body	July-September, 2000
www.travelvideonetwork.com	Hotel Page	Video	July-September, 2000
www.insideneworleans.com	Hotel Page	Listing	No Limit

Results

The campaign was very successful both from an advertising perspective and from a marketing perspective.

Travelocity.com delivered 10,752 requests to Hilton New Orleans Riverside's homepage. Because the Micro button is on a cost-per-click base, all of the ad requests are directly sent to Hilton's data system. CitySearch.com delivered a total of 100,000 email newsletters to audiences in Austin, Atlanta and Houston in three weeks. The total number of emails transferred to Hilton's web site was 636 and the transferring rate ranging from 0.44% to 1.15% with an average of 0.90%. Gayneworleans.com delivered a total of 396 click-throughs to Hilton's web page. Based on a total ad view of 1,382, the click-through rate was 28.65%. As the total number of ad views was not available, the click-through rate of <http://www.neworleans.com> was not available. However, the web site generated a total of 5,688 click throughs to Hilton's bridge page. Since the average click-through rate in online advertising was around 0.28% at the time the campaign was conducted, the campaign was very successful evaluated from an advertising standpoint.

In addition, Hilton New Orleans Riverside's August occupancy grew to 73% as measured at the end of July, setting up a new record in the off season in the local market.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS

The uses and gratifications theory served as a useful model for the campaign. Understanding of audience needs provides the theoretical foundation for advertising, media selection and creative planning. Below is a summary of the factors considered in planning:

Table 5
Web Site Selection Criteria

Quantitative Factors	Qualitative Factors
Target profile	Site function and memorable or easy-to-locate URL
High traffic and large number of users	Quality (reputation, credibility, advertising and editorial environment)
Average length per visit	Flexible and creative ad formats
Cost	Advertising quality and feasibility for details
Evaluation metrics	Self-promotion and synergy in cross-promotion
Tracking report	Ease in navigation

Table 6
Advertising Format Selection Criteria

Forms	Explanations
Banner	Used mostly for branding
Hypertext	Suggested in local portals and travel sites
Keyword search	Suggested in various kinds of web sites
Email newsletters	Suggested in travel sites in feeder's markets
Sponsorships	Use mostly for branding
Listing	Suggested in various web sites

Table 7
Creative Concepts

Content	Explanation
Site development	Building a bridge page if no direct hyperlink to destination site
Ad positioning	Guarantee premier position in the list or on the page
Content and creative design	Informative, attractive, non-intrusive, and consistent

Findings in the summer campaign have been used as a guideline in Internet advertising planning for the year 2001 for several family properties. Two major categories were added: one is the free listing in major search engines, directories and local portals; and the other is the use of meeting planner's sites and food and beverage sites. Although most of them are still in their infancy, there are some sites that provide good planning resources with a very reasonable cost. Therefore, these sites were considered as test sites in this market segment for the next year. Some other sites that provide free services are also considered relevant based on the content.

In addition, this case study has not only provided evidence of how audiences are using the Internet, but also a case study on how to apply the theory in a business application. Therefore, it provides evidence that the uses and gratifications theory offers a useful theoretical framework in Internet communication studies, especially in the area of Internet advertising and marketing.

IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the campaign was successful, the case study has some limitations. Feasibility of integrating the Internet as a part of the overall marketing and advertising plan is strongly influenced by the “wiredness” of the target market.

Reliability of tracking reports also remains a question. However, the development of Internet marketing or advertising depends heavily on the establishment of reliable standards. Thus, the difference in metrics and the comparison of their effectiveness in tracking Internet advertising or marketing plans can be an interesting topic for future research.

In addition, among travelers over the age of 55, traditional media and travel agents remain the major resource in travel planning (Longwoods, 1999). Therefore, when using the Internet as the primary medium in a campaign, other media are necessary for cross-promotion and for reaching audiences who are not online yet. Future research can also investigate how to effectively use the Internet as a part of marketing communication mix and how to effectively combine online and off-line campaigns.

In general, the case study has provided a model in how to integrate existing communication theory with Internet advertising and a guideline for marketing professionals on how to apply Internet advertising to the hotel business.

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