THE MAP AS A TOOL IN TRAVEL DESTINATION MARKETING ON THE INTERNET

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We report on a study investigating the role of maps in Internet-based tourism destination marketing. The research goal is to develop design guidelines for incorporating maps into travel destinations web sites. The research involved two phases.

Phase one investigates how maps currently are used on travel destination web sites. A sample of forty official national tourism web sites[1] is analyzed for map content. Maps found are reviewed, categorized and evaluated based on design characteristics, purpose, usefulness, and location within the web site. A subset of representative maps is selected for phase two of the research.

Phase two is a market survey of experts and users of Internet based travel destination web sites. The survey first asks respondents to comment on their expectations of how maps should be used for marketing travel destinations on the Internet. Respondents subsequently are given an opportunity to visit the subset of maps identified in phase one of the research. They are encouraged to comment on and critique the design and usefulness of this subset.

Our presentation will introduce the study, show the representative sample of Internet travel maps, and discuss the classification strategy used to select the representative sample. We will move on to report on the market survey findings, highlighting respondents' expectations, preferences, critiques and suggestions. We will conclude with an outline of our suggestions for guidelines and recommendations for map use and design for tourism destination marketing on the Internet.

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[1] "Official" tourism destination web sites are those created by the organizations (e.g. Tourist Board, Chamber of Commerce) responsible for marketing in their respective regions.