

BULKSMS PRESS PRELEASE (TECHNO TIMES)

BULKSMS.COM

April 21, 2009

Tourism benefits from SMS messaging

The benefit of SMS messaging for tourism is that it provides a personalised communication channel in a service intensive industry and allows service providers to increase operational efficiencies and reduce costs.

Customer confidence is enhanced when booking confirmations or trip information is sent directly to a traveler's cellphone for their future reference. At the same time, in promoting service excellence using mobile communications, travel or accommodation booking agencies are also able to reduce their overall telephony spend by spending less time calling customers with travel details.

The fact that the business of tourism is essentially about social interactions means that it is an ideal industry for the adoption of SMS communications. Irrespective of whether their niche is attracting tourists to a destination, transporting them from airports, taking them on safaris, providing accommodation, offering local culinary delights, or entertaining visitors, there are opportunities for tourism businesses to SMS enable their communications.

"The uniqueness of SMS communications is that your customer does not need to be near their computer to be updated on booking confirmations for accommodation, flights, car hire or other activities at a destination. SMS's are delivered directly to a customers' cellphone and can be stored for future reference as a digital travel itinerary," says Dr Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com, a global mobile messaging company headquartered in Cape Town.

"If anything, using SMS to compliment your business communications will create operational efficiencies and save you time and money. Instead of tying up a booking agent with several phone calls to a customer, an Internet-based messaging solution enables an agent to send quick SMS updates or confirmations on bookings. This frees up your staff to work on new business and reduces the amount of time spent telephoning customers. It also means that a customer does not need to take down any details as these have been sent directly to their cellphone," says Streicher.

Online accommodation booking service benefits from SMS

SafariNow.com, the Cape Town based online accommodation booking service, uses SMS notifications to compliment email alerts to southern African establishment owners of a new online booking enquiry from local or international visitors. This speeds up the provision of information and allows a customer to make an informed choice when selecting accommodation in an unfamiliar destination. It also means that enquiries are converted into confirmed sales more quickly to the financial benefit of both SafariNow and their clients.

SafariNow has been in operation since 1999 and has secured 1 million bookings through its innovative use of new technologies. It adopted SMS early on in developing a robust online booking system and currently 65% of all registered users of their service have requested to receive SMS alerts. As result of the efficiencies created by its digital communications strategy, the company has been able to minimise its staffing compliment for its customer service centre to only ten agents.

A further spin-off of SafariNow's email and SMS notification service has been to enhance service excellence among its clients. In stimulating better communications between those backpackers, bed and breakfasts, guesthouses and safari lodges who are listed on their travel website and potential customers, SafariNow has boosted the confidence that customers have in quickly accessing relevant tourism product

information. For this achievement, and for stimulating tourism growth, SafariNow has been awarded the 2007 Bed and Breakfast Association of Namibia Award and the Jump E-commerce Award in 2006 and 2007 for the best travel booking website in South Africa.

Further uses of SMS messaging in the tourism industry

While the management of the customer relationships is the prime outward focus of tourism businesses, there are several other areas that may benefit from SMS messaging within a broader adoption of e-Tourism.

The trend towards including mobile within the e-Tourism mix was already clearly visible by 2007. In the "E-Tourism: A Survey of e-Business among South African Tour Operators" report, researchers found that all the small and medium sized business interviewed were connected to the Internet and used email. In addition, 87% of these tour operators were using SMS or MMS in their operations.

E-Tourism refers to a range of tourism services that can be enabled via electronic communications to ensure that a business is able to survive in a globalised tourism marketplace. It includes technologies that support websites, e-commerce transactions, online bookings, online collaboration with business partners, social networking, and mobile marketing.

"Mobilising e-Tourism will play a key role in growing customer interactions with tourism products. Mobile marketing is an important way tourism product owners can develop a direct relationship with customers. It is ideal for placing product information in the hands of customers and allows a customer to reply via SMS to the message," says Dr Streicher.

The key to mobile marketing is to adhere to the principles of permission based marketing where only those customers who elect to receive SMS alerts for new promotions are sent an SMS message about flight specials, a weekend getaway, island holidays or out of season accommodation prices.

Other business areas where SMS messaging can create more internal efficiencies is in inter-firm communications, liaising with suppliers, or eliciting customer feedback. Sending an SMS reminder about a staff meeting or getting order updates from suppliers all help in streamlining day-to-day operations. For example, the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) uses SMS to gather feedback from passengers about their airport experience.

In furthering operational efficiency and ensuring that customers have all the relevant details, many firms providing car hire send automated SMS messages to confirm bookings, the emergency contact numbers for roadside assistance as well as billing information on the return of a rental car.

There is another side of mobile messaging that is also growing. Tourists on the move and/or needing to arrange last minute accommodation or find a restaurant in a new destination can access tourism related information by SMS'ing a keyword to a shortcode. The mobile tourism information service then automatically selects three options and returns an SMS with the relevant contact details to the cellphone.

Another form of tourist interaction while traveling is provided by global online services such as WAYN (Where Are You Now), which includes the sending and receiving of SMS messages. With the WAYN social networking site, a tourist is able to keep all their friends and family updated on their trip and allows travelers to share their opinions and experiences.

"Information is the key element in all tourism interactions. It stands to reason that any tourism business that is able to communicate quickly with customers and provide relevant product information will gain a competitive advantage. It is here that SMS messaging is, and will continue, to benefit tourism by providing

a communications channel that delivers short, relevant and personal messages directly to a targeted customer,” concludes Dr Streicher.

[1,124 words]

About BulkSMS.com

BulkSMS.com, a division of Celerity Systems (Pty) Ltd, has been in operation since 2000 and is headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa. BulkSMS is a leading wireless application service provider offering bulk SMS messaging solutions to large and small businesses, public benefit organisations, and individuals. BulkSMS.com has a global market presence, including Europe, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. To further an organisation’s SMS communication needs, BulkSMS offers two-way bulk SMS messaging, premium rate solutions and supports mobile marketing campaigns. BulkSMS flagship messaging solution is the BulkSMS Text Messenger, a desktop application. BulkSMS is a member of the Wireless Application Service Provider Association (WASPA).

For more information on BulkSMS’s commercial messaging services visit www.bulkSMS.co.za and for details on BulkSMS’s messaging service offering discounted bulk SMS message prices for public benefit organisations (such as schools, NGOs and faith-based organisations) visit <http://community.bulkSMS.com>. For direct enquiries email sales@bulkSMS.com or contact BulkSMS telephonically on +27-21-552 6321.