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The Online Traveler and the ASEAN countries

The paper proposes a method to estimate the competitive strength of Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs). The competitive strength will be estimated based on three critical success factors: search engine positioning; core areas of the DMO; and the website development of the DMO. The paper will concentrate on the ASEAN DMOs, and will use other selected DMOs in the region as benchmarks.

Key words: Competitive Strength; Destination Marketing Organisations; Online travelers

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Introduction

According to Internet WorldStats(2004) the English speaking countries with the greatest number of internet users are the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. For the tourism industry the profit potential can be substantial. The paper will examine the relationship between the English speaking Internet user and the various DMO's(Destination Marketing Organisations) found in the ASEAN countries.

Rita Paulo(2000) stated that a successful DMO addresses the following areas:

1. The search engine positioning of DMO must be done correctly. The assumption of the paper is that the DMO must be positioned on the first page of any search engine positioning.
2. The web site must have information on the following four core areas:
 - a. Travel to the destination centre
 - b. Travel while at the destination centre
 - c. Accommodations while at destination centre
 - d. Attractions at destination centre

Besides the information on these core areas, the portal should have real time and online reservation capabilities.

3. The web site should contain at least the following components:
 - a. Background of the DMO including the mission and vision statement.
 - b. Is the web site user friendly?
 - c. Does the web site have an interactive request form, a guest book, or a survey?

The DMO must connect with the tourist. The DMO should collect valuable information for future database development and e-mail marketing activities.
 - d. Does the portal produce a newsletter with updates on the activities of the DMO?

- e. Does the DMO offer the Internet traveler free giveaways such as postcards, wallpapers, and screen savers.

This paper will utilize Paulo's ideas, and compare the competitive strength of DMOs in the ASEAN countries.

The Sample

The sample will consist of the ASEAN countries DMOs. The web sites used for the study are given below.

Malaysia	http://www.tourism.gov.my/europe/default.asp
Indonesia	http://www.tourismindonesia.com/
Laos	http://www.visit-laos.com/
Brunei	http://www.tourismbrunei.com/home.html#
Singapore	http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/index.html
Philippines	http://www.tourism.gov.ph/
Thailand	http://www.tourismthailand.org/default.aspx
Vietnam	http://www.vietnamtourism.com/
Cambodia	http://www.tourismcambodia.com/
Myanmar	http://www.myanmar-tourism.com/

Four benchmark DMOs will also be used.. The web sites are given below.

Australia	http://www.australia.com
Japan	http://www.jnto.go.jp/
Hong Kong	http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/welcome/welcome.html
New Zealand	http://www.newzealand.com/travel/

Methodology and Findings

This paper will compare the competitive strength of DMOs using the critical success factors of Search Engine Positioning, the Core Areas, and Web Site Development.

Critical Success Factor 1 - Search Engine Positioning

a. The Methodology

The search engines to be used in the study are listed below (Major Internet Search Engines, 2005). The number of search engines can be increased or decreased depending on the needs of the user

- Google <http://www.google.com.my/>
- Yahoo <http://search.yahoo.com/>
- Big Clique <http://www.bigclique.com/>
- iWon http://home.iwon.com/index_gen.html
- Ask Jeeves <http://www.ask.com/>
- FactBites <http://www.factbites.com/>
- MSN.com <http://search.msn.com/>
- Alexa <http://www.alexa.com/>
- AlltheWeb <http://www.alltheweb.com>
- AltaVista <http://www.altavista.com/>
- Excite** <http://www.excite.com/>
- A9 <http://a9.com/-/home.jsp?nc=1>
- Wisnut <http://www.wisnut.com/>
- SearchHippo <http://www.searchhippo.com/>
- Teoma <http://www.teoma.com/>
- Lycos <http://www.lycos.com/>
- InfoGrid <http://www.infogrid.com/>

For each of the search engines, the search query will be **Tourism Country**. The search

listings will be scored as follows:

- First 5 entries 2 points
- Over 5 but on first page 1 points
- Not on first page 0 points

Maximum allocation of points is 34. Again this will vary on the number of search engines used in your study.

b. The Findings

Appendix 1 shows the final results for the search engine positioning. The following table is a summary of these results. Malaysia has the best search engine positioning of the DMOs. .

Malaysia	30
Myanmar	29
Cambodia	27
Philippines	27
Thailand	27
Indonesia	26
Singapore	26
Vietnam	26
Brunei	25
Laos	23

Critical Success Factor 2 - The Core Areas

a. Methodology

The Core Areas will be the same as those proposed in Paulo’s paper.

The weighting for each of the core areas will be the following:

Core Area	Weighting
Travel to Destination Area	0.25
Travel Around destination Area	0.25
Accommodations	0.25
Attractions at Destination Center	0.25
Total	1.0

Each of the core areas will be graded using the following scale. Each of the core areas will have a weighting of 0.25 because they have equal importance.

Rating	Explanation
0 points	No information on the critical success factor, and no online application facilities
2.5 points	There is basic information on the critical success factor; No online application facilities
5.0 points	There is extensive information on the critical success factor; No online application facilities
7.5 points	There is basic information on the critical success factor; Online application facilities are provided
10.0 points	There is extensive information on the critical success factor; Online application facilities are provided.

For each core area the maximum allocation of points is 10.

b. The Findings

Appendix 2 shows the results of the core areas. The following table is a summary of these results. For the core areas, the top DMOs were from Vietnam and Cambodia.

Vietnam	5.625
Cambodia	5.625
Indonesia	5
Brunei	5
Singapore	5
Philippines	5
Laos	4.375
Thailand	3.75
Myanmar	3.75
Malaysia	3.125

Critical Success Factor 3 - The Web Site Development

a. Methodology

This section will examine the following areas:

- Background of the DMO
- User friendliness
- Interactive forms, guest book, surveys
- Newsletter
- Giveaways

Each of these areas will be scored using the following scale:

Good	2 points
Fair	1 points
Poor	0 points

Maximum allocation of points is 10.

b. The Findings

Appendix 3 shows the final results for this critical success factor. The following table summarizes the findings of the appendix. Singapore has the highest tabulation for this critical success factor.

Singapore	8
Thailand	7
Myanmar	7
Indonesia	4
Laos	4
Philippines	4
Vietnam	4
Malaysia	3
Brunei	3
Cambodia	3

The total – The DMO Marketing Index

The DMO Marketing Index is the addition of the totals received for critical success factor 1, 2 and 3. From a strategic management viewpoint, this could be called the competitive strength. In theory, the maximum score that a DMO can receive is 54 points. After all the tabulations are completed, the following table is the DMO Marketing Index for the different countries. From the following table Myanmar’s DMO has the highest DMO Marketing Index.

	CSF#1	CSF#2	CSF#3	Total
Myanmar	29	3.75	7	39.75
Singapore	26	5	8	39.00
Thailand	27	3.75	7	37.75
Malaysia	30	3.125	3	36.125
Philippines	27	5	4	36.00
Vietnam	26	5.625	4	35.625
Cambodia	27	5.625	3	35.625
Indonesia	26	5	4	35.00
Brunei	25	5	3	33.00
Laos	23	4.375	4	31.375

The Averages

The following table is the averages for the different components of the Index, and final average for the Index itself.

Critical Success Factor	Average
Part #1 – Search Engine Positioning	26.6
Part #2 – Core areas	4.625
Part #3 – Web site development	4.7
DMO Marketing Index Average	35.925

The shaded areas in the preceding tables represent those DMOs that are above average for that particular component and/or above average for the DMO Marketing Index itself.

The Benchmarks

The following table summarizes the DMO Marketing Indices of the Benchmark DMOs:

These figures were obtained from Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

DMO	Critical Success Factor 1	Critical Success Factor 2	Critical Success Factor 3	DMO Marketing Index
Australia	24	5	7	36
Japan	21	5.625	5	31.625
Hong Kong	16	4.375	5	25.375
New Zealand	26	5	8	39

Interestingly only two of benchmark's DMO Marketing Indices were above the average set by the ASEAN countries. Therefore, you could conclude that the competitive strength of the ASEAN DMOs is comparable to non member countries.

Conclusions

For the developers of the different DMOs, the findings can be used in a number of ways. The higher a DMO Marketing Index is, the greater the competitive strength of that DMO.

Competitive strength can be increased by:

1. **Search Engine positioning** – If a country's positioning is below average, then the DMO has to improve its positioning. Appendix 1 displays the results. Therefore, the DMO should discover ways to improve its positioning using that search engine.
2. **The Core Areas** – Appendix 2 shows the complete tabulation of the core areas. If a DMO is below average, then it has to look at ways to improve its position. Core area #1 is probably the hardest core area to address. However, the Brunei DMO

does a credible job in this area. Each DMO has to examine each core area, and make changes to improve its ratings.

3. **Web Site Development** – This is probably the easiest critical factor to change.

For example, if a DMO doesn't give free gifts away then it should give away free gifts. Appendix 3 gives a summary of the findings for this critical success factor.

For the online traveler, the DMO Marketing Index could be used to discover DMOs that meet their needs. Usually the higher a DMO Marketing Index, the greater their satisfaction will be using the DMO.

For the tourism industry, a DMO Marketing Index might be a way to plan different promotional campaigns. A DMO with an above the average Index will be used by more online travelers than a DMO with a below average index. Also the Index can be constructed for any tourist destination in the world. The only stipulation is that there is a DMO present. Then Indexes can be constructed for different parts, and can be compared to which is better at addressing the needs of the online traveler.

Appendix 1 - Summary of the Search Engine Positioning

	Malaysia	Indonesia	Laos	Brunei	Singapore	Philippines	Thailand	Vietnam	Cambodia	Myanmar
Google	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Yahoo	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Big Clique	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	2
iWon	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Ask Jeeves	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
FactBites	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	0	2
MSN.com	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
Alexa	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
AlltheWeb	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
AltaVista	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Excite**	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
A9	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wisnut	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
SearchHippo	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teoma	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lycos	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
InfoGrid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	30	26	23	25	26	27	27	26	27	29

	Australia	Japan	Hong Kong	New Zealand
Google	2	2	2	2
Yahoo	2	2	1	2
Big Clique	2	0	0	1
iWon	2	2	0	2
Ask Jeeves	2	2	0	2
FactBites	0	0	0	0
MSN.com	2	0	1	2
Alexa	2	2	1	2
AlltheWeb	2	2	2	2
AltaVista	1	1	0	1
Excite**	1	1	2	2
A9	2	2	2	2
Wisenut	0	1	1	2
SearchHippo	0	0	2	0
Teoma	2	2	1	2
Lycos	2	2	1	2
InfoGrid	0	0	0	0
Total	24	21	16	26

Appendix 2 - The Core Areas

Weight	Travel to Destination Area 0.25		Travel Around Destination Area 0.25		Accommodations 0.25		Attractions at Destination Area 0.25		Total 1
	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	
Malaysia	2.5	0.625	2.5	0.625	2.5	0.625	5	1.25	3.125
Indonesia	5	1.25	2.5	0.625	7.5	1.875	5	1.25	5
Laos	2.5	0.625	2.5	0.625	7.5	1.875	5	1.25	4.375
Brunei	7.5	1.875	2.5	0.625	5	1.25	5	1.25	5
Singapore	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5
Phillipines	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5
Thailand	2.5	0.625	2.5	0.625	5	1.25	5	1.25	3.75
Vietnam	5	1.25	5	1.25	7.5	1.875	5	1.25	5.625
Cambodia	5	1.25	5	1.25	7.5	1.875	5	1.25	5.625
Myanmar	2.5	0.625	2.5	0.625	5	1.25	5	1.25	3.75
Australia	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5
Japan	5	1.25	5	1.25	7.5	1.875	5	1.25	5.625
Hong Kong	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	2.5	0.625	4.375
New Zealand	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5	1.25	5

Appendix 3 - Summary of the Web Site Development

	Background	User Friendliness	Interactive Forms	Newsletter	Giveaways	Total
Malaysia	1	2	0	0	0	3
Indonesia	1	2	1	0	0	4
Laos	2	2	0	0	0	4
Brunei	1	2	0	0	0	3
Singapore	2	2	1	2	1	8
Phillipines	2	2	0	0	0	4
Thailand	2	1	1	2	1	7
Vietnam	2	2	0	0	0	4
Cambodia	1	2	0	0	0	3
Myanmar	2	2	1	0	2	7
Australia	2	2	1	2	0	7
Japan	2	2	1	0	0	5
Hong Kong	2	2	1	0	0	5
New Zealand	2	2	1	1	2	8

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