

E-tourism at a glance.... Quebec



Quebec's e-tourism initiative is sufficiently advanced to be able to structure the presentation of this case study by focusing on the main components of the model suggested by UNCTAD, to which some information more specific to the context in Quebec was added.

Introduction

Summary of the e-tourism initiative in Quebec

The Tourism Ministry, to carry out its mission more effectively, launched an innovative tourist destination management system known as 'Bonjour Québec.com' (BQC) in public-private partnership (PPP).

Based on new technologies, BQC is a technological and business solution which incorporates several services via various channels. It allows potential tourists to have access via Internet, telephone, information counters, e-mail and post to good quality tourist information, to obtain literature and book accommodation, packages and transport. BQC modernized how Quebec is promoted and marketed as a destination. It means customer data can be used while protecting personal information and allows the efficient building of customer loyalty and trade with tourism enterprises.

Multi-channel access and the integration of 39 functions¹ for tourists, tourism enterprises and the Ministry of Tourism, make BQC a completely innovative achievement. BQC improved its relations with tourists by offering a one-stop shop for information/literature/booking which they could access via the channel of their choice. Regarding the marketing strategy, the Ministry of Tourism took a conclusive e-marketing approach by injecting almost 4% of its traditional marketing budget into on-line promotional activities.

The main success was a 470% increase in the number of customers served every year since 1999. In 2004, 9.4 million customers were served, of whom 69% were outside Quebec; the Internet has now become the access channel for 92% of consumers while, before BCQ, 50% obtained information on the phone or over the counter.

¹ The list of 39 functions is provided in the appendix to the Quebec case study.

The level of customer satisfaction ranges between 96% and 100% according to the criteria assessed. The management of the change in working methods is cited as an example, as well as the successful experiment with public-private partnership². BQC has been awarded several international and national prizes.

The tool

As a tourist destination management organization for Quebec, the Ministry of Tourism's mission is to support the development and promotion of tourism in Quebec by furthering dialogue and partnership between the actors involved, with the aim of creating jobs, economic prosperity and sustainable development.

To fulfil its mission more effectively, the Ministry of Tourism took the initiative in creating and running a tourist destination management system (DMS) known as Bonjour Québec.com (BQC). It is both a technological tool and a service to carry out the tasks of promotion, assistance with marketing, tourist information and knowledge of customers for which the Ministry of Tourism is responsible.

Objectives of the tool

The aim of creating the BQC was to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to raise Quebec's profile as a tourist destination, particularly for potential customers outside Quebec. It aimed to improve the quality of and access to the services offered to tourists by creating a one-stop shop for information/literature/booking, accessible via the Ministry of Tourism's web site, telephone, tourist information offices in Quebec, e-mail, post and even travel agents. By making consumption of these tourism products easier, Quebec has become more competitive in the face of the fierce competition from other tourist destinations.

Two other complementary objectives were to improve knowledge of customers with a view to planning better-targeted marketing campaigns and to use the technological platform to make electronic trade easier with tourism enterprises.

The originality of the BQC concept is to offer the consumer, as part of an integrated approach, a choice of access channels for planning his trips to Quebec and, at the same time, helping companies to sell their products and make the drastic shift to the Internet and to fill in the Ministry of Tourism about its customers.

Functions of the tool

The Quebec DMS is particularly complex due to the fact that it incorporates 39 important functions and services aimed directly at the main categories of users, namely: consumers³ (to get information and book on the Internet); establishments

² The first public-private partnership in Quebec.

³ Including tourists, the media, wholesalers, travel agents, professionals.

where one can reserve⁴ (to update and receive information for extranet secure transactions⁵); the Ministry of Tourism staff, especially for training, updating and using databases, to support its information clerks, for the management of deliveries and reservations, for the publishing of the magazine and the management of the electronic newsletter; and the staff of Bell Canada to manage the back office of the booking service and all of the technological systems and billing.

Partnerships

To create its DMS, the Ministry of Tourism opted for a public-private partnership (PPP). This led to an agreement being signed with Bell Canada, the Canadian telecommunications giant.

Sharing the financial risk

The partners shared the financial risk. The Ministry of Tourism met the development and technological operating costs linked to its tourist information services and the use of the DMS' customer files. It also ensured the promotion of Quebec and the BQC on the markets and custom for its call centre, tourist information centres and its Internet site. Bell, for its part, took on the role of the technology provider for the BQC and the risks and costs of developing and marketing, booking and e-commerce services.

Strategy for setting up the DMS

The two partners in the DMS opted for a strategy of gradually setting up the 39 functions necessary for providing services. Some constraints influenced the calendar for setting them up (especially the need to ensure the continuity of services existent before the BQC, the urgency to resolve the problems linked to the millennium bug), mitigating the negative impact by testing the major functions at the call centre before extending them to all the channels, by avoiding changes in the high season and respecting the staff's capacity to take these changes on board.

Durability and transferability

The goal of developing a DMS and exportable know-how, that other destination management organizations could therefore use, was one of the initial goals and was planned in the public-private partnership (PPP). The visionary concept behind BQC has stirred up great interest elsewhere. The project's managers are in great demand to explain the BQC concept at international and national E-Tourism conferences. Several foreign delegations have come to Quebec to study the BQC. The idea of a tourism portal for the French-speaking world was the result of exchanges on the BQC.

A testing laboratory for public-private partnerships

⁴ Establishments which have joined the on-line reservation services in return for membership costs and monthly charges.

⁵ Limited access Web interface, accessible with a password, to manage the products offered.

BQC was an experimental project for public-private partnerships and providing public services on-line. It was the forerunner of the recent adoption of the new governmental policies in this field. It changed attitudes and the contractual frameworks of partnerships in Quebec. The multi-channel access approach became the recommended way to offer citizens on-line services by the Quebec government.

The method

Marked improvements and changes to services

BQC's results have followed the initial vision and exceeded expectations in several areas. BQC meant that the Ministry of Tourism could make up for the serious technological backwardness which compromised existing services and, thanks to the Internet, could offer more comprehensive services to many more customers with basically the same staff.

In 1999, before the BQC, the Ministry of Tourism relied on its information clerks to answer a million requests for information, and a web site with limited content, which a million Internet-users used. In 2004, 9.4 million customers were served, of whom 92% through the Internet. This is an increase of 470% in five years and which is still continuing. Sixty-nine per cent of customers come from outside Quebec. Despite this growth, the number of customers served by clerks has decreased by 50%, which has meant the additional costs of the new booking services, gathering information on customers and processing e-mails have been absorbed.

The quality of services has also improved

Now the booking service is available at the same time as the information. The multi-access one-stop shop is now a reality. A bilingual up-to-date databank on 13,000 geo-referenced companies and 7800 hyperlinks support the info-booking service carried out by clerks and on the www.bonjourquebec.com portal. Around 500 editorial pages in French, English, Spanish, Italian (partially in German and Japanese), dynamic maps, videos, photos, brochures which can be downloaded, a bilingual electronic magazine, currency conversation, weather forecasts as well as educational games – all these features make www.bonjourquebec.com the most comprehensive official tourist portal for Quebec. A management system for postal and electronic deliveries optimizes the postal delivery service. The booking service is moreover available through 95 relevant private Internet sites, which increases its visibility.

BQC is a major turning point in the Ministry of Tourism's provision of services. [bonjourquebec.com](http://www.bonjourquebec.com) complemented existing services with a telephone number (1-877-BONJOUR in America) as the main entry-point in marketing campaigns aimed at tourists.

The Ministry of Tourism is directly involved in selling tourism products; this imposed ethical rules on companies and regions. Employees at the call centre and counters are no longer responsible solely for giving out information but also for sales and gathering customer data.

The techniques for updating data on the companies have been transformed by information technology, as well as the tools of the employees. The call centre is now supporting the web portal to answer the growing number of e-mails and for after-sales service for bookings.

A major strategic turning point for the promotional Internet Service

The Ministry of Tourism developed know-how which previously did not exist in the government departments. Electronic communication and e-marketing techniques proved much more effective than traditional campaigns. The bilingual electronic newsletter (112,000 customer subscribers), the reciprocity of hyperlinks, the purchase of keywords, the listing of the site, the positioning of banners are particularly effective and measurable new ways to reach customers in the domestic and foreign markets.

The protection of personal information and the use of customer data for marketing purposes

BQC is also a source of expertise consulted regarding other more in-depth aspects. In a sensitive political context, BQC developed procedures and measures which can reconcile the protection of personal information and the use of customer data for marketing purposes. The success in applying these e-marketing methods is unique in the machinery of government and at the cutting edge in Quebec. The management of the change in the BQC has been the subject of several conferences and studies. The customer relations techniques in the call centre and the tourist information centres are considered exemplary in Canada.

Partnership with local and regional destination management organizations in Quebec

Finally, the BQC experiment contributed to the government's recent decision to extend its partnership with Bell Canada and to make the technological tools and databanks available to about a hundred local and regional destination management organizations in Quebec. It is hoped that by increasing the number of access points to tourism services, this will have an increased impact on all the regions.

Project timeline (1996-2004)

January 1996	The adoption of a government strategy to implement the information superhighway, which provides for the development of a destination management system (DMS).
January 1997	Invitation to tender for public-private partnership to create the DMS for Quebec.
April 1997	Signing of an agreement with Bell Canada to design and technologically engineer the DMS.
November 1997	Submission of the design and start of negotiations for a partnership agreement with Bell.

March 1999	Signing of a partnership agreement with Bell to create and run the Bonjour Québec.com DMS until 2005.
December 2000	Commissioning of the document dispatch module and the module for computerizing the business databank as well as the new system for managing telephone calls.
Spring 2000	Commissioning of the computerized databank at the call centre and on the web site, and of the electronic magazine, and experimental introduction of the booking module at the call centre and on the web.
Spring 2001	Extending info-booking services to the 7 tourist information centres.
2002	Launch of dynamic maps: introduction of the booking form on private web site and test of the information form in the non-governmental tourist information offices; launch of the electronic newsletter for consumers.
2003	Consolidation and optimization of features and services.
2004	Launching of the modules for gathering customer profiles and for analysing BQC data; launch of the electronic newsletter for companies.
November 2004	Signing of a new agreement with Bell Canada to extend the partnership until 1st January 2009 and to extend several features of the BQC in regional offices and organizations.

The market

Supply

The gathering and management of data on companies and customers have become new useful services for planning, just like those for establishing supply and demand. This data allowed electronic communication with companies as well as connected customers. This also made it necessary to resolve the issue of personal information protection, a concern that did not exist before BQC; a procedure of requesting consent and removing customers from mailing lists was set up. The result is that electronic communication means that more information can be transmitted to more target customers at a much lower cost than sending literature by post.

Demand

Increased customer appreciation

The Ministry of Tourism exceeded its service quality objectives, as published in the “Declaration of services for Citizens”. One of the great successes is having

maintained the continuity and quality of the service while radically changing the methods and services on offer. Customer satisfaction goals were exceeded: customer satisfaction is between 96.3% and 100%; average processing time for e-mails is less than 2 days; average time for postal delivery of documents in 3.2 days in Canada and 5.2 days in the United States; average time for getting through to an operator at the call centre is 43 seconds and between 84 and 136 seconds at the two main tourist information centres; service 7 days a week.

Internet users who have booked on the Internet have a satisfaction level of 98% for the service's ease of use. The number of complaints after a booking is very low (0.19%) and each complaint is followed up. The electronic newsletter sent to customers who agree to this has become a very effective way of building customer loyalty, if one can rely on the high number of hits every month and the tiny number of people unsubscribing.

Prize for excellence

BQC won the Ministry of Tourism 14 international prizes for its tourism web site, for its e-marketing campaigns and for its performance as part of "on-line government" services.

Lessons learned

Several lessons can be learned from the experience of developing the BQC services. Firstly, this project would not have been possible, in the government's budgetary situation, without resorting to a public-private partnership.

It is essential to have a clear vision at the beginning of such a project. The vision stated in the initial invitation to tender and specified in the administrative and technological design set the Quebec DMS apart.

Technology experts could not have made the Quebec DMS a success with the active involvement of the experience front-line staff (information clerks) for a focused definition of the requirements and in evaluation technological solutions. Their knowledge of customers and their mobilization greatly contributed to high level of customer satisfaction.

The attentive management of the change was a central concern - implementing services and ways of working which were so different from before and the acceptance of the public-private partnership, where the imposed combination of cultures had to be a success, and overcoming the distrust that this can cause. The training of all staff in change management, attentive listening to their grievances, social meetings for the staff of both partners, the involvement of users in determining requirements, the training and support of users produced good results for acceptance of the change. On the other hand, the impact of these changes on the supervisors was under-estimated.

The Web has become one of the most important vehicles for raising the profile of a destination and informing tourists. However, the change in tourists' habits has proved slower than expected concerning booking on-line. On-line transactions have gained

considerable ground, but Internet users prefer to book with a person, hence the need for multi-channel access.

Finally, e-marketing strategies will account for an increasingly large share of the budget for promoting tourism in Quebec.

Conclusion

The risk of failing for integrative projects such as BQC is in the region of 65%, according to “The Standish Group”. This makes BQC’s success all the more impressive. To achieve it, the Ministry of Tourism and its partner had to pay a lot of attention to managing change, involving frontline staff in the design process, training and supporting internal and external users, defining and following up working procedure and measuring results.

To sum up, the DMS in Quebec is an exceptional success regarding its level of customer service and multi-channel access. It respected the initial vision of improving customer relations; BQC is a fantastic showcase for Quebec in the world. It is also a success due to the quality of services it offers consumers. For Quebec, it is an innovative achievement technologically, since it incorporates 39 functions and multiple access channels which serve four types of customers. It is innovative regarding its approach to change management, its shift towards e-marketing and management of personal data protection. Finally, it is one of the first experiments in public-private partnerships carried out by the Quebec government. It is therefore not surprising that it has given rise to a great deal of interest from governmental bodies, universities and other destination management organisations, and is the subject of presentations at various national and international conferences as well as winning several international prizes.

Appendix to the Quebec case study – the functions of the DMS Bonjour Québec.com

1. Multi-channel tourist information
 - 1.1 Multiple channels
 - 1.2 High capacity, upgradable databank
 - 1.3 Multiple attributes for each file
 - 1.4 Interface with external databank
 - 1.5 Multiple search engines
 - 1.6 Multilingual databank
 - 1.7 Dynamic maps

2. Tourist bookings
 - 2.1 Multiple channels
 - 2.2 Integration of partner sites and hotel sites
 - 2.3 Databank of bookable products
 - 2.4 Booking of several products simultaneously
 - 2.5 Automatic price calculation (including tax)
 - 2.6 Updating of bookable products via secure extranet
 - 2.7 Summary of the secured booking

- 2.8 Booking interface for travel agents
- 2.9 Billing solutions for hotels
- 2.10 Incorporation of tourist information at the booking stage
- 2.11 Commercial agreements to add to the services available

- 3. Management of individual dispatches of literature (6 functions)
 - 3.1 Specific to the generating market
 - 3.2 Multi-parameter document databank
 - 3.3 Multi-channel document ordering management
 - 3.4 Automatic and manual dispatch management
 - 3.5 Follow up of customer file
 - 3.6 Optimizing dispatch

- 4. Management of the customer databank (3 functions)
 - 4.1 Entering information into the customer databank
 - 4.2 Secure access to the databank
 - 4.3 Filing of information

- 5. Activities to develop customer loyalty and direct marketing (5 functions)
 - 5.1 Survey to profile customers
 - 5.2 Analysis and segmentation tools
 - 5.3 Dispatch of electronic documents
 - 5.4 Establishing customer profiles
 - 5.5 Compilation of operator codes

- 6. Performance criteria and results
 - 6.1 Multidimensional management charts

- 7. Running a call centre
 - 7.1 Call management system
 - 7.2 Interactive vocal response system

- 8. Running a web site and e-magazine (3 functions)
 - 8.1 Creation and dissemination of e-magazine
 - 8.2 BQC promotional site
 - 8.3 Technological infrastructure

- 9. Electronic communication with tourism actors
 - 9.1 Newsletter and/or messages for targeted groups