- FINAL RESEARCH DISSERTATION -

The balanced scorecard approach as a web site evaluation tool: a qualitative analysis of 5-star lodges in South Africa

BY

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE

**MAGISTER COMMERCII
(MARKETING MANAGEMENT)**

IN THE

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. C.H. VAN HEERDEN

Pretoria, South Africa   July 2009

Dedicated in loving memory to my brother,

Louis Alwin Wessels.

You had the courage to make your dream a reality

and inspired me to do the same.

I will never forget you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Popular author Marian Keyes may have said it best: "This book (read: dissertation) took an embarrassingly long time to write, so there's a very good chance that someone may have given me invaluable help at an early stage and that I've now completely forgotten. If you are that person, I am a) mortified and b) truly sorry."

However, I gratefully acknowledge the following people and institutions for the invaluable help I have *not* forgotten about:

- My Heavenly Father for giving me not only the opportunity, but the tenacity, dedication and aptitude to take on this challenge. Thank you for providing me with the strength, resources and special people to aid me in the completion of this, at times, mammoth task.
- My supervisor, Prof CH van Heerden for his infinite patience and for allowing me the freedom to take this study in whichever direction I wanted. Neels, your contributions to my development, both professionally and personally, are greatly appreciated.
- A special thank you to my friends and colleagues at the Department of Marketing and Communication Management for motivating me when I seriously contemplated giving up and walking away. In particular, Prof. Yolanda Jordaan, Prof. Ernest North and Mr. Theuns Kotzé deserve a special mention.
- An even greater thank you to my family for silently rooting for me. I know that I always have your unwaivering support and I love you for that.
- A heartfelt thank you to Ms. Jacqui Somerville of the Department Statistics for the time and effort she and her colleagues invested in the statistical analysis for this study. Without her intuitive knowledge of what I needed, who knows how badly this would have ended!
- Mr. Geoff Elske and the staff of the AA Travel and Tourism Call Centre for being so gracious about participating in this study.
- Lastly, to Dylan for providing me with a much needed incentive (or ultimatum!) to finally complete this work.

ABSTRACT

THE BALANCED SCORECARD APPROACH AS A WEB SITE EVALUATION TOOL: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF 5-STAR LODGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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This study examines the extent to which a sample of lodges graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa effectively use their web sites as online marketing communication tools, based on their user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects.

A content analysis was carried out to investigate the web sites of selected 5-star lodges based on evaluation criteria first formulated in the so-called Balanced-Scorecard methodology; the analysis supports the notion that web site effectiveness is not merely the outcome of a single set of features, but rather the end result of the *balance* between separate (although interrelated) categories of features. In summary, four more or less independent "perspectives" (or "quadrants") were incorporated into a measuring instrument for the purposes of this study:

Quadrant 1: User-friendliness;
Quadrant 2: Site attractiveness;
Quadrant 3: Marketing effectiveness; and
Quadrant 4: Technical aspects.

User-friendliness (Quadrant 1)

A web site that is easy to navigate enables the user (a potential guest) to freely click in and out of pages without causing confusion or distress. The more user-friendly a web site, the more a potential guest is likely to continue to view the lodge's information and to want to find out more about the property. Although less than half of the sampled lodge web sites sported a "search" function, most scored well in terms of overall user-friendliness by including elements such as clear contact details (fax number, e-mail address, telephone number), a site map or index and a "Home" button on all pages.

Site Attractiveness (Quadrant 2)

A lodge web site should entice the user's interest; if the web site is not attractive, then a guest will feel that the lodge itself is not appealing. Overall, the sampled lodge web sites performed best in this quadrant, indicating that they made good use of the tools at their disposal to make their web sites visually attractive. In particular, the lack of clutter on most pages apparently made them more attractive to the individuals who participated in the study. However, more appealing backgrounds and more effective use of colour could contribute further to enhanced site attractiveness.

Marketing effectiveness (Quadrant 3)

The marketing effectiveness aspects evaluated were all judged to be important for an interactive tourism web site that follows sound marketing principles. These include that the lodge web site should define the uniqueness of the lodge and its surrounding environs by providing information on the history of the property, as well as information about the innkeepers, local events, rates, photographs, awards, testimonials, packages and promotions. These factors make the virtual experience of the lodge more tangible for the user. Sadly, this quadrant was the section in which the sampled web sites performed most poorly. From the plethora of potential marketing tools available to them, the sampled web sites made good use of the following three: logos were present on almost all the sites (97%), room pictures were available on more than 90% of the sampled lodges, and lodge pictures were available on 93% of the web sites

sampled. However, less than 30% of the web sites incorporated a calendar of events, and only 55% could facilitate online bookings. Considering that 5-star lodges rely largely on overseas clientele and (affluent) local travelers from upper LSM groups, whose members are likely to have access to the Internet and to be comfortable in using it to obtain information and/or make online reservations, this is a startling state of affairs. The South African Advertising Research Foundation's LSM (Living Standards Measurement) is a unique means of segmenting the South African market. It cuts across race and other outmoded techniques of categorising people and, instead, groups people according to their living standards, using criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances. Individuals that fit the criteria of LSM groups 9 and 10 are likely to exhibit the following characteristics in terms of media usage and general attributes:

LSM 9 comprises 6,7% of the total population. Most are female, aged 35 and over, with education levels reaching Matric and higher. Many stay in urban as opposed to rural areas. On average, individuals in this group earn approximately R12 600 per month. They enjoy access to a wide range of media, including commercial / community radio stations, television (SABC 2, SABC 3, e-TV, M-Net and DStv), daily / weekly newspapers and magazines. Typically, members of LSM 9 access the Internet weekly, and are most likely exposed to both cinema and outdoor advertising. This group further has full access to services, full ownership of durables including a personal computer, DVD player and satellite dish (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2007).

LSM 10 makes up approximately 6,0 % of the overall population. Members are mostly male, aged 35 and over, with at least a Grade 12 education or higher qualification. Individuals tend to live in urban areas as opposed to rural areas. They earn an average of R20 000 per month. They enjoy access to a wide range of media, including commercial / community radio stations, television (SABC 2, SABC 3, e-TV, M-Net and DStv), daily / weekly newspapers and magazines. Typically, members of LSM 10 access the Internet weekly, and are most likely exposed to both cinema and outdoor advertising. This group further has full access to services, full ownership of

durables including a personal computer, DVD player and satellite dish (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2007).

Technical aspects (Quadrant 4)

The use of NetMechanic.com (available free of charge at www.netmechanic.com) allowed the researcher to perform an accurate evaluation of the technical design aspects of each web site. NetMechanic.com is a diagnostic web site for evaluation of the following technical components of any (accessible) web address, using a 5-star rating per aspect per page. Comparisons were based on the average scores for the pages assessed. Ratings are based on the following criteria:

i   Link check;
ii   Load time;
iii HTML check and repair;
iv   Browser compatibility;
v   Spell check.

Although a number of contributing factors that could potentially increase a web site's effectiveness were identified in an extensive literature review, this plethora of factors was crystallised into a comprehensive yet concise measurement instrument for the purposes of this study. The extent to which South African 5-star lodges actually employed the techniques at their disposal to make their web sites more effective was then determined. The findings show that the sampled lodges were not using their web sites as effectively as they could to communicate with their target audiences. As indicated previously, this was not the result of consistently poor performances across all of the categories tested, but rather of an imbalance between the quadrants of the Balanced Scorecard, which adversely affected overall web site effectiveness.

Comparisons were also drawn between the sampled lodges, based on their rankings in terms of the four primary Balanced Scorecard categories. Overall, rankings per quadrant revealed little difference amongst the lodge web sites in terms of the marketing techniques employed. However, greater discrepancies were uncovered when quadrant scores were compared per lodge, clearly signalling that when the same

lodge tended to over- and underperform across quadrants, its overall web site effectiveness was virtually always affected negatively.

The main recommendation arising from this study is that web designers of tourism-related web sites should attempt to include as many of the items that form part of the Balanced Scorecard into their web sites. This should reduce imbalances across categories/quadrants, and thus improve overall web site effectiveness.

This study was limited to lodges with a star grading from the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, and its findings cannot be generalised across all of the South African tourism industry. Future research could compare the performance of different types of accommodation establishments based upon the criteria of the Balanced Scorecard, to uncover key focus areas for future web site development.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA:	analysis of variance, a collection of statistical models
B&B:	bed and breakfast
B2B:	business-to-business
BSC:	Balanced Scorecard
CSF:	critical success factor
DMO:	destination marketing organisation
E-commerce:	Electronic commerce
E-mail:	Electronic mail
GDP:	gross domestic product
IMC:	Integrated Market Communications
LSM:	living standards measure
NTO:	national tourism organisation
ROI:	return on investment
RTA:	regional tourism authority
SAARF:	South African Advertising Research Foundation
SATOUR:	South African Tourism (now defunct)
Site:	web site
TGCSA:	Tourism Grading Council of South Africa
The Net:	Internet
URL:	Uniform Resource Locator
WOM:	word-of-mouth
WTO:	World Tourism Organisation
WTTC:	World Travel and Tourism Council
WWW or Web:	World Wide Web

DEFINING THE KEY TERMS

Content analysis is a research technique for making valid inferences from data to their contexts. In its broadest definition, it is a systematic attempt to codify subject matter in order to discern trends and concepts (Krippendorff, 1980:3).

The **marketing mix** is the particular blend of controllable marketing variables that the firm uses to achieve its objective in the target market (Kotler, 1980:29).

A **web site** is defined as a collection of related Web pages and associated items, such as documents and pictures, stored on a Web server (Shelly, Cashman & Vermaat, 2003:209).

Web site content includes the text, images, audio and video that constitute the site on the World Wide Web (Weber, 1990:16; McCluskey-Moore, 2000:[2]).

Internet marketing can be described in a number of ways (see sections 3.3 and 3.4). For the purposes of this study, the definition by Imber and Toffler (in Ngai, 2003:24) will be used. This definition states that: "Internet marketing is the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of both buyers and sellers."

Lodge: As this study focuses on lodges graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), the Council's definition of a lodge will be utilised. According to the TGCSA a lodge is: "… an accommodation facility located in natural surroundings. The rates charged are usually inclusive of an experience offered at the lodge (e.g. game drives, battlefield tours). In general, food and beverage services are provided for all meals." (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2004).

THE BALANCED SCORECARD APPROACH AS A WEB SITE EVALUATION TOOL: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF 5-STAR LODGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.
Teach him to use the Net and he won't bother you for weeks." – Anon.

The quote, humorous as it may be, actually provides a rather accurate account of the proliferation of e-commerce and the Internet. The rapid growth of the Internet in recent years has led to increasing interest in the evaluation of web sites. However, most research on web site evaluation has focused on the evolution and subsequent evaluation of electronic reference sources or materials, not on the quality evaluation of people-based services provided via the Web. Therefore, the existing body of knowledge would seem to be of great value to a relatively small (and primarily academic) audience, but when it comes to final consumers as end users, our understanding of the criteria the said consumers use in their own evaluation of web sites, is not nearly comprehensive enough at present.

As with the Internet, rapid growth has also taken place in various industries, notably the South African tourism industry. With the consumer spoilt by a choice of options in his/her selection of a holiday destination, means of transport, accommodation and entertainment, it has become increasingly important to understand which factors influence consumers of tourism products in selecting certain products or services rather than others. And since the new technology enables consumers to access the above-mentioned information with very little

effort at the click of a mouse, there is an evident need to understand how they subsequently evaluate the tourism-related web sites they have visited.

A lack of understanding of how to capitalise on the opportunities that the Internet offers is one of the major obstacles faced by members of the South African tourism industry. A large number of web sites have been developed for tourism firms, but they show little or no regard for overall business aims and challenges and consequently contribute little or nothing to the bottom-line (WildNet Africa, 2004:[1]).

This study, therefore, investigated ways in which design elements of the web sites of South African star-graded lodges could be modified to make these web sites more effective marketing communication tools from a consumer perspective. In order to do this, this study attempted to compile a set of criteria based upon which consumers evaluate web site effectiveness, to enable firms in this industry to communicate more effectively with their online target audiences and, ultimately, bring about an increase in overall profit levels.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Studies have indicated that online travel planning is fast becoming a booming business (Diefenbach, 1998). In particular, Dunham (1999:33) states that travel and vacation planning, e-commerce and financial activities are the most popular Internet applications. Dunham (1999:34) continues by saying that the most important factor for a successful business-oriented web site is to focus on the needs of the customer (i.e. making it client centred). If a company can provide valuable web sites that benefit their visitors, such visitors would ultimately reward the company.

Daniel, Wilson and Myers (2002:257) claim that once you understand who your audience is, you can start creating appropriate content for them. Highly targeted marketing and sending the right message through the web site are crucial for capturing these valuable customers. Hospitality operators are increasing their

resources allocated to Web promotions. However, the effectiveness of these resources has become very important. How effective is the Internet as a marketing medium? What are the important features of a web site? And how important is the content of a web site really?

Further, the explosion of ever-changing content in an increasingly Web-centric business climate exposes the groups responsible for developing web sites and their content to the risk of becoming dysfunctional – if they have not already become so (Gupta, Govindrajan & Johnson, 2001:281). Many companies, including those in the hospitality industry, may still not have sufficient knowledge to build a "useful" web site. Many hotels, lodges and casinos are outsourcing their web site construction to individuals who may possess the required technical knowledge but lack the industry-related wisdom. As early as 1996, an exploratory content analysis of 36 hotel-related sites by Murphy, Forrest, Wotring and Brymer (1996:70-86) revealed that the Internet can be an effective management and marketing tool for hoteliers in that it can be used for effective management communications, reservations and advertising. This study followed research by Murphy, Forrest and Wotring (1996:20-36) done on the success of restaurant marketing efforts online. Lodges, hotels and resorts offer information about their product and service offerings and can provide reservation capabilities via their web sites. Globally, the hospitality industry has become very serious about the online medium for marketing.

South Africa not only possesses a wide range of features that make it an attractive tourism destination, but tourism also plays a significant part in the South African economy (Burtenshaw, 2005:1).

One of the most important components of a tourism destination is *hospitality* (Lubbe, 2003:7). *Hospitality* refers to all commercial activities that offer clients accommodation as well as food and beverage services (George, 2001:18; Keyser, 2002:178). This research is focused on *accommodation* as part of the hospitality sector of the South African tourism industry.

Previous studies in a tourism or hospitality context have evaluated web sites of accommodation establishments according to certain categories of evaluation criteria in various countries. A common purpose of all web sites is the effective transfer of information to an online target audience by paying attention to such factors as user-friendliness, appearance and site attractiveness, amongst others. Nevertheless, few previous studies have focused on the *consumer* as a source of web site evaluation criteria; instead, most have opted to evaluate web sites from a managerial perspective or a design perspective. Therefore, by using current models of web site evaluation, it is impossible for a firm to determine whether its understanding of elements like, for instance, "user-friendliness" or "site attractiveness" corresponds with the ways in which its target audience would define these constructs. Hence, this study attempted to address this gap.

This study investigated ways in which current models of web site evaluation could be utilised to assess the effectiveness of the web sites of South African tourism-related web sites. Specifically, the study focused on the web sites of South African 5-star lodges. Thus, the study did not attempt to replace existing categories of evaluation criteria with new ones, but instead attempted to expand existing categories through the inclusion of customer-defined criteria. By doing so, current models of web site evaluation can be made more comprehensive and useful.

Previous studies into the evaluation of accommodation establishment web sites were conducted in (amongst others) Turkey, Taiwan, the United States of America and Wales (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Ham, 2004:295-306; Kline, Morrison & St. John, 2004:253-267; Wan, 2002:155-160). As far as the author could determine, no similar studies have been conducted in South Africa. This underscores a further gap that was addressed in this study.

Quality control is a crucial management issue in the hospitality sector. The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) was established specifically for this reason: to define acceptable standards and administer a star-grading system, ranging from one to five stars, in the hospitality and accommodation

industries (Keyser, 2002:185). The TGCSA grades hotels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses, **lodges**, self-catering accommodation, backpacker lodges, caravan and camping sites as well as country houses (Bennett, Jooste & Strydom, 2005:45).

To the best knowledge of the author, no previous research has expressly focused on evaluating the web sites of star-graded *lodges* as accommodation establishments. This study therefore also addressed this gap and evaluated the web sites of selected 5-star lodges that had been graded by the TGCSA.

Taking the above into consideration, the following problem statement (section 1.3) and research objectives (section 1.4) for this study are presented below.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even though effective communication and an eventual contribution to the firm's bottom-line are common purposes of all web sites (Du Plessis, Bothma, Jordaan & van Heerden, 2003:349), little previous research has examined ways in which a tourism firm's web site could be enhanced or improved by incorporating specific design elements that its *users* find valuable.

Although a number of previous studies (cf. Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006:171-176; Ham, 2004:295-306; Kline *et al.*, 2004:253-267; Wan, 2002:155-160) have evaluated web sites in a tourism context, none of these studies were conducted within a *South African context* and although other accommodation establishments were investigated, no previous research pertinently examined the web sites of *lodges.* Hence, this study attempted to close these gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

Taking the above into account, the main aim of this study was to examine the web sites of South African 5-star lodges graded by the TGCSA, based on an adapted version of the so-called Balanced-Scorecard (BSC) approach utilised by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) in a number of studies to evaluate a variety of

tourism-related web sites. It was hoped that the analysis of lodge web sites based on this set of criteria would reveal the extent to which star-graded lodges effectively utilise their web sites as online marketing tools. The methodology and criteria of the BSC approach are discussed in detail in section 3.2.

Other than the references mentioned above in this section, an examination of existing literature has exhibited a striking lack of models for web site evaluation. How then, are web site designers to know what content to include or exclude from these sites? It would seem that the current process of web site design takes place on an arbitrary basis based largely on "guesstimates" by and experience of the designer. And although there is a lot to be said for experience, guidelines need to be formulated to also enable novice web site designers to consistently develop web sites that communicate successfully with their users. There is, as yet, no universal "seven point plan", so to speak, which all web site designers abide by in the creation of their web sites.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Considering the problem statement presented in Section 1.3, the specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To assess the effectiveness of 5-star lodge web sites as marketing and communication tools.

2. To rank selected web sites according to their effectiveness based on the criteria of the balanced scorecard (see chapter 5).

3. To determine the greatest strengths and weaknesses that 5-star lodge owners/managers face in respect of web site design and development (based on the best and worst performance factors identified in the balanced scorecard).

4. To assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of existing 5-star lodge web sites from marketing, customer and technical perspectives.

5. To adapt and test a standardised instrument to objectively measure various marketing aspects of tourism-related web sites.

6. To provide a set of recommendations to tourism operators in the serviced accommodation sector as a whole to improve the design and marketing effectiveness of their web sites.

In order to address these objectives, existing literature in the form of academic journal articles, subject-related textbooks and tourism web sites were consulted. As the study was of a qualitative nature, information was also gathered by means of content analysis of the web sites of a number of 5-star-graded lodges in South Africa, in order to determine to what extent these web sites exhibit similarities in terms of their layout, content and interactive features. Furthermore, an effort was made to determine whether any overlap occurred as a result of a conscious effort by the web site developer to adhere to a common shared model, or by mere coincidence.

To achieve these objectives, the following specific **research questions** were tested in this study.

1. How well do the web sites of the selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *user-friendliness*?

2. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges perform in terms of *site attractiveness*?

3. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *marketing effectiveness*?

4. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *technical components*?

5. What implications do responses to the above-mentioned questions hold for developers of other tourism-related web sites, if any?

The impact of technology and, more specifically, the Internet on the global economy is undeniable. As more and more people gain access to the World Wide Web, a Web presence becomes crucial to service providers for remaining competitive. Moreover, a *successful* Web presence is needed to attract the interest of potential customers and to maintain the interest of existing customers.

Thus, the value of examining consumer needs when designing a web site cannot be underestimated.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the web sites of South African 5-star lodges based on a set of criteria contained in the Balanced Scorecard, along with suggested modifications from a consumer perspective. Star-graded lodges, and 5-star lodges in particular, were selected for this study, as one would assume that such lodges cater for relatively upmarket LSM groups likely to a.) have access to the Internet and b.) to use it to obtain information and/or make online reservations. For such sophisticated Internet users, a nondescript web site will almost certainly signal inferior service quality and could result in lost business for the service provider. Furthermore, it could be argued that especially 5-star lodges should be in a position to develop high-quality web sites – more so than, for example, the majority of lesser star-graded bed-and-breakfast establishments or guest houses.

1.5 RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

The core research question to be answered was: *what makes a viable and effective 5-star lodge web site – not only from a* **marketing** *perspective, but also from a* **customer** *and* **technical** *point of view?* Lodges were chosen for this study, as they typify South Africa as a unique tourism destination. Also, as the study in large part mirrors an existing study by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) it is thought that a comparison between the findings of the original study and the South African version could uncover important discrepancies or similarities.

The study was regarded as qualitative in nature, due to its use of *content analysis* – a qualitative research technique. The specific type of content analysis used was the so-called Balanced Scorecard (BSC) methodology, as it was found to be one of the most comprehensive means of content analysis and also a technique well suited to the analysis of interactive media like the Internet.

All previous studies done using the BSC or a modified version thereof, most of which are in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this document, uncovered valuable information regarding the design of effective web sites. It was hoped that this study would manage to do the same, but in a uniquely South African context.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

After a brief preface, this chapter commenced with an explanation of the theoretical background as well as the research objectives and research questions the study aimed to address. The chapter also included an introduction to the Balanced Scorecard methodology as a means of web site evaluation, clarifying in brief why and how it would be applied within the context of the current study.

Chapter 2 provides more in-depth information on the South African tourism industry, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) and how effective marketing is valuable to both of the afore-mentioned bodies.

CHAPTER 2: THE SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM INDUSTRY AND MARKETING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Socrates is believed to have said: "See one peninsula, one mountain, one sea, one river and you have seen them all". Foreign tourists visiting South Africa during 2005 seem to have disagreed – 566 966 of them entered the country during February 2005 alone (Burtenshaw, 2005:1). Moreover, Chavan (2009:393) estimates that travel and tourism is expected to generate R535,3 billion in economic activity by 2015. In addition, growth rates in travel and tourism demand between 2006 and 2015 are expected to reach 5,7 % per annum.

In this chapter, the importance of the travel and tourism industry in South Africa is outlined by emphasising the dependence of its activities or systems on favourable patterns of supply and demand. Next, the focus falls specifically on the hospitality and accommodation components of the South African tourism trade, followed by a brief introduction to the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), its functions and its grading structures.

Lastly, the elements of the hospitality marketing mix are addressed.

2.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is arguably one of the most fortunate countries in the world when it comes to tourism potential. The country boasts a wealth of tourism resources, not least of which is its diversity. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (1996:[33]) identified a number of features that contribute to South Africa being an attractive tourism destination. Amongst others, these include striking scenery, unblemished wilderness areas and wildlife, a diversity of cultures, a mild

and temperate climate and virtually endless opportunities to pursue special interests like whale-watching, river rafting, fishing, hunting and hiking, to name but a few. What is more, South Africa also possesses the necessary infrastructure to make such activities possible and relatively simple to engage in.

With its internationally recognised attractions such as Table Mountain, the Kruger National Park and World Heritage Sites like the Cradle of Humankind and the St. Lucia wetlands, as well as a plethora of world-class amenities (e.g., sports, conference and exhibition facilities, telecommunications networks and medical services), South Africa is close to being an all-inclusive tourism destination. In addition, its close proximity to other popular tourist attractions like the Mozambique coastline, Victoria Falls, Zambezi River and Okavango Swamps mean unparallelled travelling prospects for visitors to the region (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1996:[34]).

Based on a survey of its readers, *The Star* (2004:11) revealed that South Africa was considered to be the "hottest" destination in travel at the time. The results of this survey mirrored the success of South African establishments in Travel and Leisure's 2004 World's Best Awards, where five of the top 10 hotels in the world were located in South Africa. In response to this, Prudence Solomon of South African Tourism (then SATOUR) was quoted as saying that South Africa is a fabulous destination and a world-class tourism experience (*The Star*, 2004:11).

From an economic point of view, the impact of tourism in South Africa is vast. In the 2005 Travel and Tourism Economic Research Report for South Africa, the South African travel and tourism industry was expected to generate R191,3 billion in economic activity (i.e., total demand) in 2006 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005:6). In the same report it was estimated that the industry would generate 522 054 employment opportunities (amounting to 4,0 % of total employment) and account for R58,7 billion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equivalent to 3,9 % of the total GDP. The effects of these figures are far-reaching, as travel and tourism trends tend to spill over into other sectors of the economy. In this way, South Africa's travel and tourism economy directly and

indirectly contributed 8,3 % to total employment (1 100 460 jobs) and 9,0 % (or R136,1 billion) to the total GDP in 2005 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005:6).

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (2002:[1]) reported on a speech made by then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr. Mohammed Valli Moosa, in which he claimed that South Africa was one of the best-performing international tourism destinations in the world. This statement would seem to make sense when one considers the 7,7 % increase in the number of foreign travellers visiting South Africa, from 561 142 in September 2004 to 604 263 for the same month in 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2005:1).

2.3 THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR AND ACCOMMODATION

"Hospitality" is generally considered to encompass two distinct but related sectors: accommodation and catering (or food and beverage services). Thus, in its simplest of forms, hospitality is that sector of the tourism industry which provides food and shelter to a tourist (Keyser, 2002:176). George (2001:18) concurs by declaring that: "…hospitality includes those commercial activities which offer consumers accommodation, meals and drinks when they are away from home". These two parts may function independently (e.g., a self-catering chalet and a restaurant) or they can be interlinked as components of one establishment (e.g., a hotel with a banqueting division). For some hospitality operators, however, the two aspects are inseparable (e.g., a hotel with both a breakfast room and a restaurant) (Keyser, 2002:178).

Keyser (2002:168) defines accommodation as the temporary home of a tourist. The opinion of what constitutes a ''home'' may of course vary greatly from one tourist to the next. Thus, accommodation may range from luxury hotels to bed-and-breakfast establishments, self-catering apartments and camping grounds. In addition, numerous tourists avoid accommodation expenses by staying with family or acquaintances. Furthermore, accommodation can be classified as being either serviced or non-serviced (Middleton, 2001:388-389). Serviced

accommodation implies that staff are on the premises to provide certain services, such as cleaning, laundry services and room service. The availability of such services is included in the establishment's rates, even if they are not utilised. According to Bennett *et al.* (2005:44), hotels, motels, guest houses, game lodges and bed-and-breakfasts typically fall within this category. As this study focused on star-graded lodges, any reference to accommodation denotes serviced accommodation, unless otherwise indicated.

On the other hand, non-serviced accommodation implies that sleeping accommodation is provided without the addition of personal services. Although such services may be provided upon request, they are not as a general rule included in basic rates. Examples include time-share, rented flats, chalets, apartments, camping sites and any other type of self-catering accommodation (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:44; Middleton, 2001:388-389).

Since accommodation, as a temporary "home" for the tourist, plays such an important role, several countries worldwide have experienced the need for grading systems to regulate quality within the accommodation sector. South Africa is no exception, and like any industry that markets a product in a highly competitive environment, the South African tourism industry also realises that being aware of quality issues is vital. In addition to performing quality (control) functions, grading systems serve to protect the interests of tourists. Keyser (2002:183-185) asserts that an official grading system assists tourists in assessing the plethora of accommodation establishments they may encounter at any one destination. In this way, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) serves as a voluntary grading system for accommodation establishments in South Africa.

As this study focused on lodges with a five star-grading allocated by the TGCSA, the following section will briefly address the main functions of the TGCSA. The process and the procedures involved in the grading of an accommodation establishment conclude this chapter, along with a discussion of the hospitality marketing mix.

2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM GRADING SCHEMES

As the star-grading system as used by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa has now become the industry standard and the preferred means of classification endorsed by government, this classification scheme was used to select the sample of lodges that formed part of this study. An introduction to the TGCSA and its methods is therefore paramount. The following section addresses this need.

2.5 THE TOURISM GRADING COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

The TGCSA was established in September 2000 by the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism with the main purpose of improving the quality of tourism establishments in the South African travel trade (Dicey, 2004). Council members are recruited from sub-sectors in the tourism industry, including the Tourism Business Council, the Southern African Tourism Services Association, provincial tourism authorities and the South African Tourism Board (Keyser, 2002:185).

The national star-grading system used in South Africa was developed after extensive international research studies. Market research within the industry further moulded the system into the one currently used. The "stars" signify quality around which consumers can make a "value for money" assessment on where they want to stay, based on the impartial and independent assessment of a grading body. Intentional trends indicate a move away from structured and inflexible grading schemes to ones that focus on customer expectations (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2006). The TGCSA has secured exclusive rights to the system and is the only tourism body allowed to use the "star" symbol to denote quality. The TGCSA assesses establishments and, based on set criteria, gives a "star" rating. Ratings differ for serviced and self-catering accommodation (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45).

As mentioned in section 1.5., this study focused on serviced accommodation, more specifically star-graded lodges. Table 1 contains a brief description of what each star-grading used by the TGCSA represents for serviced accommodation (i.e. hotels, bed-and-breakfast accommodation, guest houses, lodges and country houses).

Table 1: The national star-grading system for serviced accommodation establishemtns

Star grading classification	Description
1 star	Fair to good (acceptable/modest) quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care. Clean, comfortable and functional accommodation.
2 stars	Good quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
3 stars	Very good quality in the overall standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
4 stars	Superior (excellent) comfort and quality with a high standard of furnishings, service and guest care.
5 stars	Exceptional quality and luxurious accommodation (matching best international standards). Highest standard of furnishings, flawless service and meticulous guest care.

Source: Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2006).

The aim of this grading system is not to police, or to impose strict and inflexible guidelines on, graded establishments. Its main objective is to assist in the improvement of the overall quality levels of accommodation and services in South Africa (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2006). The TGCSA aims to work together with the establishments in improving quality in the tourism industry.

2.5.1 History of the Tourism Grading Council

What began as an ambitious program to measure the quality offered by the tourism industry has, through its star-grading system, blossomed into the recognised national standard, and from its inception the Tourism Grading Council

has achieved a number of significant goals. Presently more than three quarters of available accommodation rooms on offer have been graded. In February 2004 the grading system for Meetings, Exhibitions and Special Events (MESE) was introduced, a world-first. In 2005, the introduction of Food and Beverage as a sector began with restaurants as the starting point.

From the outset, it was always the intention to work with the industry on the understanding that the Council is not a policing body, but rather a partner whose goal is the same as that of the establishments: quality assurance (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2007).

2.5.2 Vision of the Tourism Grading Council

It is the vision of the Tourism Grading Council that a process of quality assurance should be continuously sought, across the range of the many tourism facilities and services offered to the consumer. This process is expected to be a collaborative one, with as much voluntary participation as possible, from all businesses seeking to showcase their products in this industry.

The TGCSA also seeks to increase consumer confidence and involvement in the process, and thus to enhance the marketing value of the overall system. This has led to, and assisted in, the development of grading criteria across all the facilities and services offered by the South African tourism industry (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2008).

2.5.3 Functions of the Tourism Grading Council

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa was established in September 2000 by the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. The mandate of the TGCSA is to provide a framework and process for grading across all relevant sectors of the tourism industry in South Africa. The TGCSA is representative of the entire tourism industry. Thus it performs a vital role in ensuring that a uniform standard of quality is achieved across all the services and facilities offered by the South African tourism industry.

The achievement of this goal is made possible through the willing participation of the many establishments who choose to continuously improve and update the services they offer to their customers. To ensure credibility and independence in measurement, a consumer feedback mechanism monitors the customer's expectations. This valuable tool guides the grading system, always ensuring that the best-established practices are followed, and where adjustments or improvements are required, the establishment concerned is advised accordingly.

Because the grading system is market driven and voluntary it stimulates improvement throughout all levels of service offering. This process continuously encourages the industry to re-invent, revalue and grow itself. In doing so it provides a key function in the overall development and transformation of tourism in South Africa. Whilst the stars awarded by the TGCSA are an important recognition of an establishment's quality, what is perhaps of more importance is an understanding of the philosophy of a shared responsibility and the end benefit this brings to the customer (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2006).

As has been mentioned, initially only hotels were graded in South Africa, as this was required of them by law. Today, however, all types of accommodation may be graded (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45). Establishments are evaluated according to the type of accommodation they provide. As there are few other ways for accommodation establishments to communicate their commitment to quality to prospective customers, it has become critical for them to be graded and classified by the TGCSA, in accordance with their service quality (Bennett *et al.*, 2005:45). The TGCSA defines a lodge as: "An accommodation facility located in natural surroundings. The rates charged are usually inclusive of all meals and the experience offered at the lodge, with game drives, battlefield tours, et cetera. Only establishments that cater for transient guests (the travelling public) qualify for grading."

The criteria according to which lodge accommodation is graded by the TGCSA, as well as the minimum requirements for serviced accommodation to be graded, are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

2.6 THE GRADING PROCESS

Prospective partners are provided by the TGCSA with documents that cover the applicable minimum requirements and grading criteria. These documents set out exactly what will be required to meet the quality levels needed when obtaining a star grading.

"Minimum requirements" define the lowest quality standards demanded throughout each area of the establishment and which areas will be selected for review. For example, a description under "Housekeeping" reads: "All rooms, venues, fittings, furniture and equipment should be kept clean and well maintained." These written explanations should provide an understanding of how and what is expected, in each area, from the establishment.

The Minimum Requirement document (see Appendix B) contains a description of each area within the establishment, and those are the areas that the assessor judges when making a final recommendation. The document is essentially a detailed guide as to what the management or owner of an establishment needs to have in place in order to begin to offer a quality product or service.

The Grading Criteria document (see Appendix A) takes an in-depth look at each aspect and area of the establishment's service offering. There are separate documents for each category, and definitions as to the nature of the different types of establishments. Each Grading Criteria document provides a score for each defined standard, from one to ten (unacceptable to excellent).

Following these definitions is a percentage calculation that provides the guideline for each grading band (1 star to 5 stars). It is by working through each definition that one is able to make an assessment of the overall grading of an establishment.

A careful study of each definition and the value attached to it is another great assistance to the management or owner wishing to get a rough idea of the grading their establishment. A cross-check of the definition against what the

establishment actually provides can help show the establishment the possible overall grading achievable.

Once the management or owner of an establishment is satisfied that the standards covered in these documents can be met, then application for grading can begin. There are certain business, licence and safety documents that will need to be completed (contact TGCSA for further advice, or go to Application on the web site).

Following its application, the establishment will be notified as to when and how the assessment will take place. Every effort is made to ensure the establishment is clear what is expected of it, prior to the assessment.

During the assessment the assessors continually refer back to the documents mentioned above and to their acquired knowledge gained from previous experiences. The assessor then makes a recommendation to the Awards Committee. Final ratification of assessor recommendation rests with the Council.

It should be remembered that the function of TGCSA is not that of policing, rather that of a business partner. TGCSA is always ready and willing to offer any possible assistance to any establishment wishing to be graded.

What is involved?

Only establishments satisfying the following minimum requirements are considered for grading:

- Public liability insurance;

- Safety and security of clients and staff;

- Health and safety certificate - conformance with fire and building regulations;

- Registration as a business with the provincial authority;

- No unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, gender, citizenship, physical and mental conditions, etc.;

- Conformance with official smoking regulations.

The operator is responsible for indicating, on the application form, general compliance with minimum requirements, providing proof where necessary.

The operator files his/her application with the TGCSA and selects the assessor whom he/she wishes to assess the business. Within two weeks of the application, the assessor visits the establishment concerned. The assessor then discusses the results of the assessment with the operator/manager and submits his/her recommendations in writing to the TGCSA, with photographs. Assessors' recommendations are verified and approved by the TGCSA Awards Committee which meets once every month. Should an establishment be unhappy with the final result of the grading, an appeal process has been established. A number of establishments, at least 10 % every month, are randomly selected for an audit. The aim of the audit is to ensure that assessors are applying the grading system correctly.

Renewal

Each property is assessed at least once a year. A grading is only valid for a 12-month period. Additional audit assessments and mystery visits may be conducted if a number of complaints are received, or if conditions noted during the annual assessment indicate that a return visit is necessary. Each establishment is assessed individually within its category. The assessor compares each establishment to the grading criteria and similar properties. An assessor will always evaluate a property in the context of its operation and market.

The operator's knowledge of his/her market and product is taken into account during the assessment (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, 2008). It is important to note that a property is only graded on what is present and not penalised for *not* having a particular facility or *not* offering a particular service. This was an important consideration in the present study, when it became apparent that not all of the 5-star lodges randomly selected for research purposes had active web sites at the time. Thus, what initially seemed an

inconceivable omission for an establishment sporting 5-star status, became clear as this guideline from the TGCSA was reviewed.

Table 2 contains a summary of all the accommodation establishments that were graded by the TGCSA at the time of sample selection for this study, as well as a breakdown of the number of 5-star graded establishments in each category.

Table 2: A "snapshot" of all accommodation establishments graded by the TGCSA (July 2007)

Accommodation category	Number of star-graded establishments in category	Number of 5-star-graded establishments in category
Backpacker & Hostelling	63	2
Bed & Breakfast	1064	22
Caravan & Camping	139	5
County House	142	35
Guest House	1731	35
Hotel	579	64
Lodge	438	92
MESE	157	28
Self Catering	1082	83

Source: Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2007).

Table 3 contains a summary of all the lodges graded by the TGCSA at the time of sample selection and subsequent data collection in the present study. At the time, only 81 of the 92 establishments with 5-star ratings provided web site addresses, as touched upon previously.

Table 3: A "snapshot" of lodges graded by the TGCSA (July 2007)

Star-grading category	Number of graded lodges in category	Number of graded lodges that provide a web site address
One star	4	1
Two star	13	4
Three star	144	110
Four star	185	163
Five star	92	81
Total	**438**	**359**

Source: Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (2007).

To fully understand the functioning of the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, a basic insight into fundamental services marketing principles may prove useful. For this reason, the hospitality marketing mix is discussed in the following section.

2.7 THE HOSPITALITY MARKETING MIX

Services marketing or hospitality marketing is a separate branch of marketing management, with its own unique characteristics and requirements. As early as 1981, researchers have suggested a modified marketing mix for the hospitality and other service industries (Renaghan, 1981:31-35). Most authors agree that, for services, the traditional "marketing mix" consisting of "the four Ps" (product, price, place and promotion) has to be expanded to the so-called seven Ps of services marketing. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:18) assert the services marketing mix to consist of the following elements:

- product;
- price;
- place (distribution);
- promotion;
- people;

- processes; and
- physical evidence.

In a South African context, Jordaan and Prinsloo (2004:23) echoed this taxonomy and provided local examples to elaborate upon the constructs.

However, before the proposition of the so-called "seven Ps of services marketing", which have since become the accepted industry standard, some discrepancies existed in the labelling of the last three Ps. As early as 1996, authors like Morrison (1996:13) even went so far as to support the notion that the marketing mix for the hospitality and travel trade actually comprises *eight* controllable factors - product, place, price, people, packaging, programming, promotion, and partnership. Theoretically, the marketing mix reflects the wants and desires of consumers within the target market.

Product/Service: According to Kotler (1980:36), a "product" need not only be a physical product or an intangible service, but could also refer to persons, places, organisations, activities and ideas. In this way, the product offering of a lodge, for example, could include not only accommodation, but banquet and convention facilities, entertainment, customer service facilities and amenities such as a gift shop, spa, beauty salon, shuttle service, room service and child care service, amongst others.

Place: "Place" within the hospitality industry not only refers to the channels through which the tourism products are made available and accessible to final consumers, but also to the physical location of an establishment. A favourable location can strengthen a company's competitive positioning and differentiate it from rival firms. In this way, it not only communicates to customers where a company is located, but also which target markets it is likely to appeal to.

Pricing: Effective buyer-pricing (pricing *for* the buyer, in other words) usually comprises a price range that the market is willing to pay and then to arrive at a final price which is the crucial decision maker. When customers have

little prior knowledge of a property, they often form their perceptions of the product based on its price. Kotler, Bowen and Makens (1996:88) found that price is increasingly being used in Web-based marketing to attract the attention of the Web "surfer" and to encourage his or her visit to a particular web site.

People: In its most simplified form, the central relationships within hospitality and travel marketing are formed between two groups of people – the customers (guests, patrons or passengers) and the hosts (those who work within the tourism operation). Morrison (1996:94) is of the opinion that the management of this relationship is the most important function of the hospitality enterprise. The selection and treatment of both these groups of people greatly impact on marketing effectiveness. Internal marketing is a marketing activity that is often neglected as a company focuses on the pursuit of its external customers, and yet it can be an extremely valuable resource if utilised properly. For instance, web sites that address employee and management issues can lead to an increased sense of community amongst staff members.

The second important people-related decision an organisation needs to make is that of the customer-mix. Most hospitality and travel organisations make it clear in their positioning approach which group(s) of customers they wish to attract and serve (Morrison, 1996:22). This has important consequences as the types of customers who use a hospitality and travel organisation influence its image amongst both present and potential customers.

Packaging and programming: Morrison (1996:17) defines packaging as the combination of related and complementary services into a single price offering. Programming is closely related to packaging and involves developing special activities, events or programmes to increase customer spending or to give added appeal to a package or other hospitality//travel service. The advantages of packaging and programming include greater convenience, greater economy, increased ability to budget for trips, the implicit insurance of consistent quality, and satisfaction of special interests for the customer. Companies benefit by increased business in off-peak periods, enhanced appeal to specific target

markets, attraction of new target markets, easier business forecasting, greater utilisation of complementary facilities, the flexibility to capitalise on new market trends, increased per-capita spending and increased customer satisfaction.

Promotion: Promotion represents the communication role of marketing, by which the organisation provides customers with information and product knowledge in the hope of persuading them to purchase the organisation's products or services, or both. Hence, the purpose of promotion to the marketer is to modify behaviour through communication. This requires aiding customers through the steps of the buying process that leads to the eventual purchase or repeat purchase of particular products or services. The term Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) refers to the combination of advertising, publicity, word-of-mouth, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotions that promotes an organisation and its product offering.

Partnership: Technically, partnership could be included as part of each of the other seven Ps. Partnerships are cooperative marketing efforts by hospitality or travel organisations, such as links between lodges and the local tourism offices of the regions within which they operate. By cultivating links to regulatory or social bodies, organisations can enhance their "clean" or socially responsible image. Needless to say, this also provides wonderful public relations opportunities.

When deciding on the theoretical model to be utilised in the current study, the author considered where an organisation's web site should be categorised. In other words, under which of the Ps discussed above would web sites feature most prominently? The obvious choice would be to group web sites under "Promotion" (an element that occurs in both of the afore-mentioned models) along with other forms of promotional media, but it could also be argued that web sites relate closely to "Packaging and Programming" (as proposed by Morrison). However, the lines between the different categories tend to become blurred when service industries are under discussion. For example, one methodology may incorporate packaging and programming as sub-divisions under promotion, while

another treats them as separate constructs altogether. As the current study was conducted within a South African context, the services marketing mix adopted by Jordaan and Prinsloo (2004:23) formed the theoretical basis for further discussions on the services marketing mix and its elements. This was the most recent and most comprehensive work of its kind available to the present author at the time.

In the following chapter, which focuses largely on the Internet and its uses in marketing, the services marketing mix will once again be examined – but this time from an "e-marketing" perspective, so as to incorporate the virtual components unique to marketing via electronic channels.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the importance of the travel and tourism industry in South Africa was examined. The notion that tourism can be viewed as a set of activities or systems was explored, as well as the dependence of these activities or systems on favourable patterns of supply and demand. A section detailing the hospitality and accommodation components of the South African tourism trade was then followed by a brief introduction to the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA), its functions and its grading structures. Lastly, the elements of the hospitality marketing mix were addressed.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTERNET AND TOURISM MARKETING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

With more than 627 million people shopping online (including 325 million within the last month) of which 86 million were consumers who made hotel and/or tour bookings, the significance of studying this dynamic medium and its uses to tourism suppliers becomes increasingly clear (ACNielsen, 2005). In 2005, airline reservations comprised 21 % of all online transactions worldwide, with hotel and tour bookings encompassing 14 % of all Internet transactions globally.

This chapter commences with an introduction to the Internet - its basic components and benefits - before investigating current business practices and the role of the Internet in them. Thereafter, past research on Internet marketing in general and within the tourism industry will be examined. As this study centres on the analysis of web site content, a brief discussion of web sites and the most prominent means to evaluate them has also been included.

3.2 UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNET

This section defines the Internet with its components and then considers its main benefits. The significance of the Internet in current business and marketing practices will also be highlighted.

3.2.1 The Internet and its components

The Internet is a patchwork of more than 25 000 government, university and commercial networks worldwide. The Internet or World Wide Web has been growing rapidly since the late 1990s as it represents an extremely efficient medium for accessing, organising and communicating information. Business conducted via the Internet is commonly referred to as electronic commerce or "e-commerce" (Lewis & Chambers, 2000:84). According to Sheldon (1997:40),

travel-related services are among the fastest-growing areas on the Web and lodging is one of the fastest-growing travel segments on the Internet. Lewis and Chambers (2000:87) estimated that in 1998, almost two million travel-related Web sites were in existence, and hospitality firms reported annual increases of 200 % to 400 % in usage.

In many ways the Internet "levelled the playing field" by eliminating many of the marketing (and hence competitive) advantages that large companies could afford. Chaffey, Mayer, Johnston and Ellis-Chadwick (2003:41) define Internet marketing as "the application of the Internet and related digital technologies to achieve marketing objectives". By deploying an appropriate mix of dynamic and interactive features such as custom animation and video, a marketer can build a more powerful and effective online presence which in turn can contribute to the bottom-line performance (Bender, 1999:6).

The range of creative, practical and profitable uses of the Internet goes far beyond simply pitching products to consumers. For one, the Internet allows marketers to reduce their traditional reliance on mass media advertising by providing a more targeted alternative in seeking customers (Law & Lau, 2004:118).

By means of the Web, marketers can reach out to a broader customer base than before by locating target customers, identifying their needs and communicating with them at relatively low costs. Nevertheless, the convenience of the Internet comes with its own set of potential pitfalls: technical problems, connection and transmission speeds, evolving technology and browser compatibility (or lack thereof) can cause Internet-related frustrations (Murphy *et al.*, 1996b:75). These potential stumbling blocks were earlier identified by Beck (1997:1-6) who suggested that web content should be carefully evaluated in order for it to be truly useful.

Robins (2000:249-274) suggests that the technical characteristics of the Internet are:

- Low transaction cost (once infrastructure is established);
- speed;
- reach;
- interactivity; and
- individual nature.

According to Bender (2001) such features permit marketers, for the first time, to economically design individually customised marketing communications together with individualised product/service offerings. Given time, this commercial opportunity is certain to be fully exploited.

3.2.2 <u>The main benefits of the Internet as a communication medium</u>

The majority of tourism operators rely heavily on the use of their web sites to communicate with, inform and serve their respective customers. According to Yesawich (2000:15), the Internet revolution will continue and consumer use of the Internet will result in significant opportunities and challenges. Organisations such as lodges will be able to reach previously unknown prospects, and therefore need to be attentive to the benefits that could be at their disposal if they continue to use the Internet. Moreover, lodges should seriously consider continuous updates of their web sites to increase their usefulness to (potential) customers. Yesawich (2000:15) identifies the benefits of using electronic channels as:

- Electronic channels involve a low cost usage and so will always be an affordable alternative to traditional media.

- Customer contact convenience: Where a customer is able to access a web site whenever he/she wants, this allows marketers to present their initiatives to a large group of customers simultaneously.

- An electronic channel also allows organisations (in this case, star-graded lodges) to interact with a larger number of intermediaries (for instance, tour operators and travel agents) and makes their distribution channel that much wider.

- Customers are able to customise the service offering to their specific needs via the use of Web sites, and they can inform service providers beforehand of any special needs.

- Lastly, the use of electronic channels allows for quick and efficient feedback on customer requests or a customer's evaluation of service delivery.

3.2.3 <u>Significance of the Internet in current business practices</u>

All organisations operate within an environment that influences the way in which they conduct business. The Internet introduces many new facets of the environment that must be considered by marketers since strategy development is strongly influenced by considering the environment in which the business operates in. Technological innovation is vital in providing opportunities for services superior to those of competitors and in changing the shape of the market place (Chaffey *et al.,* 2003:41).

Lagrosen (2005:64) states that in the building and management of relations, the interactivity of the Internet makes it a particularly useful tool. On the Internet, it is usually a customer who initiates contact and is seeking information on a web site. In other words, it acts as a "pull" mechanism, unless e-mail generated by the sponsoring organisation is used (this is considered as a "push" technique). The Internet should be used to encourage two-way communications, which may be an extension of the direct response approach (Chaffey *et al.*, 2003:28). The Internet can be used as a relatively low-cost method of performing marketing research, particularly about customer perceptions of products and services. An important feature of interactive marketing communications is that they can be tailored to the individual. This is an important aspect of achieving customer relationship management online through Web pages and e-mail (Kiang, Raghu & Shang, 2000:83).

When assessing the significance of web sites in current business practice, the role of the Internet in communicating with customers and other partners should

be considered. Like most other commercial ventures, lodges can use the Internet as an integrated communications tool in the following ways (Chaffey *et al.,* 2003:31):

- The Internet can be used as a direct-response tool which enables customers to respond to offers and promotions publicised in other media. This would seem to imply that star-graded lodges should ensure the inclusion of their web site links and e-mail addresses in other media such as brochures.
- A direct-response or call-back facility built into a web site may also prove beneficial.
- The Internet can be used to support the customer's decision on making a reservation at a lodge by supplying fax or phone details if the customer is not comfortable making a reservation online.
- Customer information delivered on the Web site can be integrated with other databases of customer and order information.
- The Internet can be used to support customer service. For example, lodges can compile a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) compiled from previous customer enquiries and encourage customers to check the list of questions first before phoning the lodge with queries.

Although the study of Chaffey *et al.* in 2003 was conducted three years later, its results corresponded closely with those of Yesawich (2000:15).

Electronic media also increase the reach of company communications to the global market. This creates opportunities to sell to international markets that may not have been previously accessible. This is a great advantage for South African star-graded lodges as one of their main target markets consists of international tourists visiting the country.

3.3 EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN MARKETING

For almost a decade, academic researchers have been commenting on the need to investigate the characteristics of the Web as an advertising medium (Dréze & Zufryden, 1997:77-91). In this regard, an important research issue of practical as well as academic importance is to empirically examine attributes of commercial web sites that lead to increased visitors or higher daily "hit-rates". Daily hit-rate can be defined as "the number of Web-surfers accessing the home page on a single day" (Chaffey, 2000:35).

Tierney (2000:212) defines "hits" as the number of files that are downloaded from a Web server (host computer). Both definitions are based on the rationale that the greater the number of Web-surfers accessing the home page, the greater will be the success of the Web page in fulfilling the objectives for which it was set up. The identification of hit-rate determinants is likely to be of great value, both to Web page designers as well as to the many small and large firms seeking to establish their presence on the Web.

3.3.1 <u>Grasping Internet marketing</u>

The World Wide Web is now regarded as the principal navigational tool for accessing the resources of the Internet. The Web's interactive features, its ability to offer multimedia content, and its capacity to accommodate customisation inexpensively have increasingly attracted the attention of firms and other commercial enterprises alike (Kling, 1994:147).

Marketers face several challenges as they seek to determine the best way of establishing their firm's presence on the Web, mainly because of several unique characteristics of this medium. Firstly, the Web represents a relatively easy and inexpensive way to advertise, lowering the barriers to entry for small businesses. Kling (1994:172) suggests that the cost of advertising on the Web is likely to be a small fraction of one percent of equivalent advertising in a newspaper. At the same time, however, this also results in reduced distinctiveness, since a

company's Web site has to compete with the clutter of thousands of other Web pages selling similar products and services.

Secondly, the Web overturns the traditional hierarchical system of distribution channels, making former channel partners competitors in the global marketplace. Because of lower entry barriers and more widespread exposure, manufacturers, distributors and retailers can all set up web sites selling essentially the same products and services.

Third, unlike traditional communication channels such as newspapers or television, in the case of the Web the customer is in greater control of choosing and processing information about the firm. In other words, it is entirely within the customer's power to decide which Web pages to browse, for how long, and how much information to obtain. Finally, the width and efficiency of the channel allows wider availability of hard-to-find products and a wider selection of items (Hoffman, Novak & Chatterjee in Dholakia & Rego, 1998:724-736).

The Web presence of a company can be one of different types, dependent mainly on the size of the company, the evolutionary path and the focus chosen by it (Geissler, 2001:498). For this study, a commercial Web page is defined as the "home page" of the company, i.e. the page that is first accessed when a company's Web address is entered. This allows for a comparison between web sites when using content analysis.

It is important to classify commercial web sites into different categories of principal functions, in order to get a better idea of the predominant marketing objectives of firms in establishing a Web presence, and of their strategies to do so. Dholakia and Rego (1998:724-736) compiled a typology of advertising types, based on their principal marketing objectives. To evaluate the informativeness of content on commercial web sites, Dholakia and Rego (1998:724-736) relied on a coding scheme based on the Resnik and Stern (1977:50-53) paradigm of objective information content evaluation. This method permits the informational elements of the advertisement to be separated from the emotional elements, allowing them to be examined in isolation. Resnik and Stern's (1977:50-53)

method has been extensively used to study different media like magazines, newspapers and television as well as to study the information content of media in other countries and cultures (Dholakia & Rego, 1998:727). Based on this method, the following list of criteria for evaluating information content of commercial Web pages was formulated by Dholakia & Rego (1998:733):

- price or value;
- components or contents;
- performance;
- quality;
- availability;
- product variations;
- directions for use;
- special offers, premiums or contests;
- packaging or shape;
- guarantees or warranties;
- safety features;
- nutritional values;
- independent research;
- specific advantage(s) over competing brands;
- approval of product/service by certifying agencies;
- approval of Web page by certifying agencies;
- new concept, development or ideas.

Needless to say, as the present research is concentrated on the tourism industry (an intangible) as opposed to a tangible product category, all of the above criteria may not be applicable in this study. For example, factors like "nutritional values", "product variations" and "directions for use" are not relevant within a service industry like the tourism trade.

Nonetheless, determining the information content of commercial Web pages is likely to give rich insight, not only into the perusability of current commercial pages, but also into the objectives of firms in establishing web sites. While researchers have investigated the content of Web documents to obtain

interesting statistics pertaining to the quality of HTML programming and design, there is lack of research examining the information content of commercial Web pages from a marketing perspective. Closing this gap in the existing literature is one of the main objectives of the current research (see section 1.4).

In attempting to determine the effectiveness of commercial Web pages, Dholakia and Rego (1998:724-736) used daily hit-rate as the criterion of Web page popularity and effectiveness, bearing in mind that people visit commercial Web pages for a number of reasons. These include: search for specific information, random Web surfing, participation in contests or competitions, word-of-mouth from other Web enthusiasts, et cetera.

A commercial web site must compete with thousands of other sites on the Web. In this situation, Web page designers are faced with the difficult question of how to design pages to make them popular with Web users (Hu, 1996:37). One alternative is to design the page to be "cool", with coloured backgrounds, Java applets, and sound and video files while another alternative is to focus on the functional presentation of content at the expense of novelty and visual appeal (Dholakia & Rego, 1998:730). The relative effectiveness of these contrasting design techniques in making a site popular is an interesting research issue that this study seeks to address (see section 1.4).

A further fascinating research issue from a marketing perspective is to determine the attributes of a Web page that lead to popularity and/or effectiveness. With the exception of Abels, White and Hahn (1999:35-44); Tierney (2000:212-219); Chaffey and Edgar (2000:45-57) and Law and Hsu (2006:295-312), few empirical studies have sought to address this important question. As a result, the present study represents one of the first attempts to try to identify the determinants of commercial home page popularity from the viewpoint of the consumer in a South African context.

An intriguing finding by Sinha, Hearst and Ivory (2001) suggests that the information content of web sites, *per se*, does not appear to attract visitors to the web sites. The popularity of a Web page, however, was found to be strongly and

positively influenced by the number of *changes* made to it in the preceding three-month period. A clear notion of the Web as a dynamic and interactive medium and of online consumers as variety-seeking and interested in staying "current" with the firm's offerings emerges from that study. The number of *other Web pages that a home page is linked to* was also found to be a significant determinant of popularity in Dholakia and Rego's (1998:724-736) study. Evidently, firms well-embedded in the Web network appear to attract visitor traffic (in other words those that are listed on a variety of *search engines* like Yahoo, Google or Alta Vista). According to Dholakia and Rego (1998:735) online consumers "surfing the Web" with no prior search objectives appear to be a significant number of the visitors to commercial web sites. The finding helps to provide guidelines for Web advertisers as it suggests that a primary responsibility of Web advertisers is to provide publicity and visibility to the commercial web site. Firms should invest in publicising their web sites by getting their home page listed in various online directories and commercial search-engines, as well as by obtaining links from other related sites and pages to their home pages. In essence, the greater the number of links obtained for the home page, the higher the amount of Web traffic to the site is likely to be (Dholakia & Rego, 1998:733).

In addition, *complexity and extensiveness* of a company's web site, operationalised by the number of links from the home page, are found to make it popular (Dholakia & Rego, 1998:734). Results further show that pages should have a greater number of *pictures* and specifically clickable pictures, leading to other Web pages. Thus, web sites utilising the multi-media capabilities of the Web by making use of graphics and pictures are likely to be more popular (Lagrosen, 2005:63).

Enhancements like Java applets and animations also increase popularity, probably because of the novelty and greater potential of these applications to create complex and interactive messages. Furthermore, a greater number of advertisement banners are found to increase popularity, suggesting that advertisement banners may have effects beneficial to the site's popularity, in addition to generating revenue from advertisers (Dholakia & Rego, 1998:735). In addition to compiling a table of the key factors used in *tourism-related* web

evaluation studies (see table 5), Park and Gretzel (2007:46-63) also formulated a table outlining the most commonly used factors in *non-tourism*-related web evaluation studies. This is shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: Key factors in non-tourism related web evaluation

Study	Key factors
Rice (1997)	Design features or emotional experience. Enjoyability. Quality of the organisation or layout. Uniqueness. Information/content. Excitement. Visual attractiveness. Ease of navigation. Speed of moving around the site.
Griffith and Krampf (1998)	Online sales. Communication. Customer service.
Palmer and Griffith (1998)	Multimedia use. Site navigability. Promotional activities. Sales and delivery. Product support.
Abels, White, and Hahn (1999)	Use. Content. Structure. Linkage. Search. Appearance.
Liu and Arnett (2000)	Information and service quality. System use. Playfulness. System design quality.
Fink and Laupase (2000)	Tangibles. National culture.
Huizingh (2000)	Content: Information. Transaction. Entertainment. Number of features. Design: Navigation structure. Search function. Protected content. Quality of structure. Image. Presentation style.
Ahuja and Webster (2001)	Disorientation. Ease of use.
Van Riel, Liljander, and Jurriens (2001)	Core service. Supplementary services. User Interface.
D'Ambra and Rice (2001)	Training. Interests. Information. Shopping cost. Difficult information. Fun. Social influence. Identify control. Use control.
Lee and Kim (2002)	Convenience: Information gathering. Order making delight: Interface to system. Interface to people. Firmness: Robust. Security.
Yeung and Lu (2004)	Information. Communication. Downloading. Transaction.
Constantinides (2004)	Usability. Interactivity. Trust. Aesthetics. Marketing mix.
Hong and Kim (2004)	Robustness dimension: Internal reliability. External security for structural robustness. Utility dimension: Useful contents. Usable navigation. Aesthetic appeal dimension: System interface attractiveness. Communication interface attractiveness.

Hassan and Li (2005)	Screen. Appearance. Content. Accessibility. Navigation. Media Use. Interactivity. Consistency.
Yenisey, Ozok, and Salvendy (2005)	Perceived operational factors. Perceived policy-related factors.
Cyr, Bonanni, Bowes, and Ilsever (2005)	Menu layout. Access to product information. Professional design. Logical presentation of product info. Screen design. Navigation. Sequencing. Presentation of product attributes. Product availability.
Bart, Shankar, Sultan, and Urban (2005)	Privacy. Security. Navigation and presentation. Brand strength. Advice. Order fulfilment. Community features. Absence of errors.
Wulf, Schillewaert, Muylle, and Rangarajan (2005)	Content. Organisation. Technology.

Source (including references): Park & Gretzel (2007:46-63).

One can only speculate at this point on the relevance of these findings in a South African context, especially on the notion that advertisement banners positively affect site attractiveness or popularity. As these banners in essence seek to distract Web users from their primary reasons for visiting a site, this study may prove that the presence of advertisement banners is not a great contributing factor to the popularity of star-graded lodge web sites in South Africa.

3.3.2 The effect of the Internet on the elements of the marketing mix

Marketing is the process of developing, pricing, promoting and distributing goods, services and ideas to satisfy the needs of customers. Marketing is the art of linking producers or suppliers of products with potential and existing customers. Attempting to convince a disinterested marketing segment to purchase a product they neither need nor want, is an expensive and rarely successful exercise. Therefore, marketing executives engage in marketing research to determine what consumers want and what they are willing to pay for it, in the hope of obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage. The science of marketing management assists in the practical application of this process.

From the information gathered for use in this study, it is clear that the Internet differs from traditional forms of advertising in a number of significant ways. To Robins (2000:250), these differences are so important as to justify the

development of an entirely new marketing mix for Internet marketing. Robins (2000) calls this departure from the traditional "four Ps" the "e-marketing mix" (see section 2.7) and suggests its use as a distinct strategic analysis tool.

The elements Robins (2000:255) identifies as forming part of the e-marketing mix are:

- The *inexpensive* nature of the Web means that every existing buyer who migrates to the Web can typically benefit from a cost saving. In the case of an airline transaction, for example, customer online self-service is encouraged, eliminating the need for an expensive branch office.

- Another buyer benefit and element of the e-marketing mix is the *interactivity* offered by online commerce. Levi's and Dell are but two examples of providers that accept buyer-specified orders online.

- The multimedia advantages of the Internet lead to greater *involvement* on the part of customers, resulting in their willingness to surrender personal information in order to be permitted to participate in online novelty campaigns.

- The Internet offers marketers a unique ability: to supply virtually unlimited specialised *information* to the seriously interested, without cluttering simpler messages designed to target a wider audience.

- The popularity of web sites like eBay and Amazon.com illustrates the value of *instantaneous* buying made possible on the Internet.

- With its ability to gather customer information and to tailor product or service offerings accordingly, the Internet is unrivalled as a communication medium with regard to *intimacy.* Customers can now obtain "virtual brands" based on their personal preferences that are not otherwise available in stores.

- Closely related to intimacy is the fact that the Internet can be readily used to create *individualised* one-to-one, personal service.

- Perhaps not quite yet available, but coming soon, is "*Artificial Intelligence"* to simplify and speed up product or supplier selection. All that artificial intelligence requires is for the customer to tell the software agent what is

wanted, and it will locate a dealer, negotiate the best price, and close the deal in a matter of minutes.

This "e-marketing mix" proposed by Robins (2000:249-274) comprises an array of *personal* (not general) benefits marketers can offer their customers online and, unlike the traditional mix, the e-mix focuses on *individuals* as opposed to consumer groups. For this reason, though, the list is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, Robins (2000:270) states that the list above (the so-called eight Is) forms at least the outline of a new electronic marketing mix.

Robins (2000:249-274) is not the only author who suggests a paradigm shift in marketing with the uprising of Internet marketing. McDonald and Wilson in Chaffey *et al.* (2003:27), developed their own "six Is of the e-marketing mix". These Is are interactivity, intelligence, individualism, integration, industry restructuring and independence of location. However different from traditional marketing, Internet marketing has retained a number of very familiar activities. Promotional offers, for example, are often little different from those of the "old economy" (Scharl, Taudes, Wober, Bauer & Natter, 2001).
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Against this background, Robins (2000:265-266) makes two assertions about the traditional marketing mix. One is that the analytical value of the mix and of "marketing-mix thinking" remains unchanged. This thinking still provides an easy-to-remember means of checking that all relevant aspects of a marketing task are being given attention. Secondly, there is now a new e-marketing mix to be given attention as well. This comprises a parallel group of factors which are also under the control of the firm and which, like the traditional mix, may be adjusted and amended to appeal to customers. This time, however, the variables are more intimately interrelated than ever before (Connolly & Sigala, 2001:123).

3.4 INTERNET MARKETING WITHIN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

In order to fully comprehend the need for properly defined measures of successful Internet marketing, research into the topic was reviewed.

3.4.1 Past research on Internet marketing within a tourism context

Much literature exists on the topic of Internet marketing, and the same can be said for Internet marketing within the tourism industry. However, few studies were found to have focused on the Web-based marketing activities of star-graded lodges, and none could be located that had been conducted in a South African context. Authors like Connolly, Olsen and Moore (1998:46) studied the advantages of establishing web sites for casinos. As previously mentioned, Murphy *et al.* (1996:70-86) conducted a study in which an exploratory content analysis of 36 hotel-related sites revealed significant details about the use of the Internet as an effective management and marketing tool.

In the same vein, numerous other studies have examined the Internet's application to the marketing efforts of hotels (Morrison*,* Taylor, Morrison & Morrison, 1999:97-113; Chung & Law, 2003:119-125). Similarly, Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) researched the Internet marketing efforts of bed-and-breakfast (B&B) establishments, following in the footsteps of authors like Donthu and Garcia (1999:52-58) and Countryman (2000:430-432). Research into Web-based marketing for restaurants has been conducted by Murphy *et al.* (1996a:20-36) as well as Lee, Sung, DeFranco and Arnold (2004:205-223). The broader topics of tourism marketing and destination marketing were addressed in the studies of Countryman (1999:210-218), Benckendorff and Black (2000:11-21) and Chung and Law (2003:119-125).

The afore-mentioned studies revealed a diverse selection of factors important for web site success, and although the scope and focal areas of the studies varied, three factors appeared consistently in virtually every piece of existing literature studied:
- accessibility,
- ease of navigation, and
- content.

In a US study, Countryman (1999:210-218) analysed the content of 50 State Tourism web sites and the recorded subjective ratings on pre-selected criteria. Each web site was evaluated based on the application of fundamental marketing concepts like accessibility, segmentation, positioning, web site design, content, links to other web sites, and the use of "cookies" for the purpose of consumer research.

Thereafter, Ho (2002:18-26) evaluated the World Wide Web in a global study of 1000 commercial sites, including 25 luxury hotels, motel chains, destination resorts and casinos. It was found that these sites were little more than modest travel brochures. Apart from travel tips and destination guides, value provision was rather scanty (Ho, 2002:20). Few of the sites analysed made use of contests or lucky draws, while online reservations and availability checking were considered important keys to future development.

Benckendorff and Black (2000:11-21) evaluated the Web sites of 16 regional tourism authorities (RTA's) in Australia and proposed the concept of an Internet Marketing Star, with four points comprising site planning, design, content and management characteristics.

Even ostensibly specialised marketing activities like those of Native American casinos have come under the spotlight of researchers (Choi & Hsu, 2001:101-116). Unsurprisingly, approximately half of the Native American casinos studied did not have a web site. This could be significant to the current study if one were to assume that the average South African tourism supplier may also underestimate the value of a web site, as their Native American counterparts did. Choi and Hsu (2001:114) suggested that the providers of tourism products need to take a more proactive stand in marketing their facilities and services through well planned and executed Web marketing plans. This advice could almost certainly also be applied to players within the South African hospitality industry.

Research of this nature has not been limited to the United States. In 2002, Blum and Fallon evaluated the Web sites of 53 Welsh visitor attractions using six

groups of features (product, price, place, promotion, customer relations and technical aspects). Clearly this set of criteria differs significantly from that used by Countryman (1999:210-218) quoted earlier, supporting a statement by Kasavana, Knutson and Polownski (1997:31-44) that it is exceedingly difficult to create a concrete set of criteria against which to evaluate web site content . This was one contributing factor towards the development of the so-called Balanced-Scorecard approach to web site evaluation – the need for a standardised and objective Web evaluation mechanism.

3.4.2 <u>The role of Internet marketing in service industries</u>

The Internet provides several advantages for hospitality operators and other service providers in their marketing activities (Kline *et al.,* 2004:253-267). Most tourism products such as hotel rooms, airline seats and tourism destinations are invisible during the purchasing process. Allowing potential customers to take virtual tours of intangible service offerings enhances their confidence in the purchasing process. Therefore, the Internet has become one of the best tools for customers to gather information and actually view products prior to purchase (Countryman, 2000:430).

The Internet is now widely used as a marketing tool and electronic distribution channel, since   it is able to provide multiple pages of text and graphical information with the same amount of detail as, but at a much lower cost than, traditional advertising and distribution channels (O'Connor & Frew, 2000:179-199). According to Law and Leung (2000:202) the Internet fits the marketing principles for travel and tourism because it (1) allows travel suppliers to establish a direct link with (potential) customers, (2) eliminates unequal barriers for customers and suppliers, (3) facilitates equal competition, and (4) decreases price discrimination opportunities. For these reasons, Law and Leung (2000:209) state that, after computer technology, making travel arrangements via the Web is the Internet's second largest commercial application. But, as with all other advertising and distribution channels, a web site must "strike a chord" in the

minds of intended target customers in order to justify the expenditure of capital by the sponsoring organisation on web site development, design and maintenance.

The next section considers past research into the field of web site evaluation.

3.5 EXISTING MODELS OF WEB SITE EVALUATION

Most research studies into the topic have attempted to evaluate tourism and hospitality web sites by using the content analysis methodology. The following section contains a short overview of content analysis as a web site evaluation tool.

3.5.1 Content analysis as a web site evauation tool

Before content analysis as an evaluation technique can be discussed, a brief explanation of the term "content" is warranted. "Content" describes the information provided on a web site. Good content is engaging, relevant and appropriate to the audience. It has been specifically created for the Web and it is clear and concise, working well in this medium. Good content takes a stand. It has a distinct voice, a point of view. It may be informative, useful and/or funny, but it should always leave you wanting more (Poll, 2008:26).

Content analysis is a qualitative research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data (Krippendorff, 1980:3). It is a summarising analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, inter-subjectivity, *a priori* design, reliability, validity, generalisibility, replicability and hypothesis testing) and it is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented (Neuendorf, 2002:22). It uses an objective, systematic approach to measuring the meaning of commercial material through the classification and evaluation of selected words, themes, concepts and/or icons. In its broadest definition, it is a systematic attempt to codify subject matter in order to discern trends and concepts. It requires the researcher to analyse the communication messages by

systematically coding and counting the frequency of items within established categories.

The critical step in content analysis is the development of explicit recording instructions with a clear definition of the coding units. Content analysis is an inductive research method. It is a systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer categories, based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorf, 1980:6). Content analysis embodies the study of the message and not of the communicator or the audience (Kelly, 1956:14).

3.5.2 Previous studies into content analysis in a Web environment

In addition to establishing a web site and creating a presence on the Internet, it is important that the web site is developed well. Ho (2002:18) states that the way to create a positive user experience is to design a site that is personal (recognition and personalised service), relevant (information that the user wants) and appealing (correct amount of easily accessible content, photos, sounds, streaming media and special effects).

A common question amongst marketing professionals is, "How successful is our web site?" Such a reactive rather than proactive approach to the use of the Internet for marketing often defers a definition of criteria and processes for measuring web site success until after site launch. Chaffey *et al.* (2003:33) provide practical guidelines toward the effective design of a web site with customer orientation and an ability to appeal to different market segments. Once a company has been successful in attracting prospective clients to its site, it must effectively communicate the features and benefits of its product or service to the customer in a few seconds or risk the customer losing interest. The image projected by the organisation's web site should ideally be consistent with the customer's perception of himself/herself (i.e., it should have "design affinity" with the customer). Communicating with the customer in a personal human tone despite the barriers imposed by technology is becoming increasingly important. Another important element to consider is service quality. One method to

determine the significant aspects of online service quality is to review the factors that customers perceive as important.

Murphy, Hofacker and Bennett (2001:82) suggest that a web site's marketing goals influence the site design. If the marketing goal is to communicate product information (for instance benefits, prices or add-ons) the site's design should facilitate the transfer of this information. If the marketing goal is to convey an image, elicit an emotion or build a relationship, the site should be fun and possibly, interactive. Effectively done, this would create flow, brand involvement and a positive attitude change in visitors to the site. If the marketing goal is to promote an established product, accelerate repeat purchases or increase market share, the site could tie in contests, offer coupons, or be linked to retail and off-line media campaigns. In such cases, an appropriate measure of success could be the number of hits on contest – and sign-up – pages, or the use of online coupons. Should the marketing goal be online sales, the site should funnel visitors to the appropriate page where payment information is provided.

A study conducted by Forrester Research in 1998 uncovered that, amongst the 8 600 online households polled, the top four criteria for effective Web sites were considered to be:

- High quality content (75 %)
- Ease of use (66 %)
- Quick to download (58 %)
- Updated frequently (54 %)

For those items listed, the success factors included:

- Content quality (Can the customer locate relevant, updated content with ease? Are there conspicuous errors?);
- Performance of web site infrastructure (availability of information and download speed);
- Ease of contacting the company for support via e-mail, telephone or any other channel;

- Quality of response obtained to e-mail inquiries and fulfilment quality;
- Acknowledgement of customer privacy.

In a study of the web sites of international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan, Wan (2002:155-160) claims that although the number of people using the Internet in Taiwan surpassed four million in 2000, only 50 % of that country's international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers had established web sites at the time. Wan (2002:155-160) identified and used three criteria in his study for analysing the content of web sites: "user interface", "variety of information" and "online reservations systems". Wan's research indicated that Taiwan's fairly conservative market is still reluctant to do credit card transactions online, rendering an online reservation system virtually useless. The implication of Wan's (2002) study is the need for the tourist industry to have well-designed web sites, in order to enhance the consumer business online.

The methodology adopted by Wan (2002:155-160) is the so-called value-added model based on information systems. The key elements of this model are user interface (accessibility, formatting, help and flexibility) and system quality (simplicity, currency and comprehensiveness). Wan adapted this model in designing a simple web site rating system to evaluate international tour hotels and wholesalers. This rating system emphasises the user interface and variety elements, particularly from the user's perspective. Salam, Rao and Pegels (in Wan, 2002:157) concluded that content analysis could be used on several types of media, and therefore accepted that content analysis was also suitable for evaluating Web sites. In a similar study, Park (2003:11-18) evaluated the Web sites of 23 large Korean travel agencies through a content analysis that measured factors such as the availability of online reservations, a home page in English, tourism information and company background, electronic boards, interactive communication tools, product search engines, links, cyber events, special prizes and customised products.

Perdue (2001:21-38) evaluated major North American ski resorts using four general web site characteristics: speed and quality of site accessibility, ease of navigation, visual attractiveness of the site, and quality of information content.

This study found that the perceived quality of a resort as presented through its web site is primarily a function of the site's navigability, visual attractiveness and information content. Using an experimental design method, Jeong and Lambert (2001:129-146) had 250 conference attendees evaluate the information quality of eight hypothetical hotel web sites.

Wan (2002:160) asserts that the use of web sites in the tourism/hospitality industry as well as other business enterprises in Taiwan will undoubtedly become more significant in the 21st century. Therefore, tourism/hospitality professionals should frequently evaluate the content of their web sites in order to meet the needs of consumers. Wan (2002:160) believes the traditional travel/hospitality industry should apply the full range of the Internet's potential to its field so that integrating the travel/hospitality industry with the information industry will result in a win–win situation for both service providers and consumers.

As suggested by Tierney (2000:215), the evaluation of web site effectiveness is necessary because of the significant setup and maintenance costs. Although online sales are a good way to measure web site effectiveness, tourism sites do not have this feature since they generate little or no evidence of their own. Other than the use of online sales, it has been difficult to create a set of criteria against which to evaluate web site effectiveness (Kasavana *et al*., 1997:31-44). For this reason, Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) recognised that measuring a web site's performance was a multidimensional task. To that end, Morrison *et al.* (1999:101) identified four perspectives for hotel web site evaluation: customer, technical, marketing and internal.

The approach was called the modified Balanced-Scorecard approach (BSC), after the original Balanced Scorecard developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992:71-79) upon which it was loosely based. The most recent full table of previous studies related to the topic was compiled by Park and Gretzel (2007:46-63) and is depicted in table 5.

Table 5: Key factors in tourism-related web evaluation

Study	Key Factors Identified
Morrison, Taylor, Morrison, and Morrison (1999)	Technical, marketing, internal, customer.
Weber and Roehl (1999)	Security, quality of information, Internet vendor's reliability, getting orders/services in timely manner, ease of contacting vendor, ease of placing orders, ease of handling returns/refunds, customer service and after-sale support, variety of choices, ease of canceling orders, ease of payment procedures, lowest price, satisfaction of being cutting edge.
Friel, Sombert, and Crimes (2000)	Transparency, proactiveness, service, speed, reliability, care, creativity.
Pröll and Retschitzegger (2000)	Quality of access, quality of content, ability to customize.
Jung and Butler (2000)	Successful web site: regular updating, repeat visits, appearance, useful information, interactivity, web design, promotion (off-line), forming partners, value-added info, institutional support, building royalty, clear navigation paths. Successful web design: appearance, added value, content, design and creativity, ease of use.
Chu (2001)	Informative, interactive, attractive.
Perdue (2001)	Speed and quality of site accessibility, ease of navigation, visual attractiveness of the site, quality of the site, quality of information content.
Yip and Law (2002)	Special discounts, free delivery of tickets, extra benefits, complementary shopping coupons, secure personal information.
Wan (2002)	User interface: ease of physical access, ease of accessing specific information within the web site, Standardised format, ability to access information in multiple ways.

Palmer (2003)	Download delay, navigation/ organisation, interactivity, responsiveness, information/ content.
Liang and Law (2003)	Customer contact information, facilitation information, reservations information, surrounding area information, management of web site.
Nysveen, Methlie, and Pedersen (2003)	Search engine, service integration, personalisation, trust, reversed pricing, auctions, collective volume discount, service aggregation, customer community.
Law and Wong (2003)	Secure payment methods, different price ranges for products/services, user-friendly system, rapid information search, on-line booking and confirmation, comprehensive destination information, availability of help functions, provision of related Web links, late availability information, availability of virtual tours/video files of destination, presentation style, specifically designed for user group.
Yeung and Law (2004)	Language usability, layout and graphics, Information architecture usability, user Interface and navigation usability, general usability.
Xiang and Fesenmaier (2004)	Functionality, ease of use, learnability, speed, design, interactivity, novelty.
Scharl, Wöber, and Bauer (2004)	Product, speed, intelligence, layout, services, languages, navigation, interactivity.
Schaffer and Mills (2004)	Product quality, processing capacity, credit card protection, data handling/privacy policy, web site design, navigation, customer service.
Zins, Bauernfeind, Missier, Venturini, and Rumetshofer (2004)	Design/layout, functionality, ease of use, learnability, outcome/future use, errors/system reliability.

Yoches and Erdem (2005)	Interface, navigation, content, reliability, technical performance.
Mich, Franch, and Martini (2005)	Identity, content, services, location, maintenance, usability.
Law and Hsu (2006)	Reservations information, facilities information, contact information, surrounding area information, web site management.
Baloglu and Pekcan (2006)	Interactivity, navigation, functionality, marketing.
Kaplanidou and Vogt (2006)	Content (trip information functionality), content (motivating visuals), accessibility (fast downloads).
Law and Leung (2002)	Information quality: accompanying persons, airline preferences, availability of regulations and rules, class choices, date or time not available for booking, price comparison of different airlines, special airfare promotion, seat selection, ticket type. System use: confirmation period, express search, free entry of origin, free entry of destination, free entry of departure day/time, online ticket purchase, reservation steps to follow, steps to make reservation and payment.
Sigala and Christou (2002)	Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived functionality of Internet tools, perceived usefulness as an education tool, perceived competencies, perceived level of IT support.
Ranganathan and Ganapathy (2002)	Information content, design, security.

Source (citations and content of table): Park & Gretzel (2007:46-63).

Based upon the information provided in this chapter, table 6 was compiled. It represents a sample of key studies considered to be relevant to and influential on the present study.

Table 6: Previous studies evaluating web sites of accommodation establishments

Evaluation criteria	Scope of study	Location	Author(s)
Seven criteria: impression, content usefulness, accuracy, navigation, accessibility, online reservations and timeliness of information.	Top 25 limited-services chain lodging operations	United States	Ham (2004:295-308)
Four categories: technical aspects, user friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness.	Bed-and-breakfast establishments	United States	Kline, Morrison & St. John (2004:253-267)
Three general user criteria: user interface, variety of information and online reservations.	International tourist hotels and tour wholesalers	Taiwan	Wan (2002:155-160)

As the modified Balanced Scorecard is the content analysis approach that will be used in the current study, it will be explained in Chapter 5 of this document, following a discussion in Chapter 4 of the origin and current uses of the Balanced Scorecard as a management instrument as well as a web site evaluation tool. A number of authors have written about the usefulness of the BSC in the evaluation of web site effectiveness for a variety of tourism web sites, and as this existing literature will form the basis of certain key components in the research methodology of the current study, the following chapter has been devoted to considering the findings of the different schools of thought on the topic.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an introduction to the Internet and investigated the role of the Internet in current marketing practices. In order to do this, the Internet and its components were defined, after which the main benefits of the Internet as a promotional tool and/or communication medium were considered. In conclusion, the impact of the Internet in current business and marketing practices was highlighted. The specifics of content analysis and web site evaluation criteria were not discussed. Instead, a synopsis of content analysis as a research technique was provided, and the topic will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5. As this study centres around the evaluation of the Web sites of star-graded lodges from *multiple perspectives*, existing studies focused on these perspectives (viz., customer, technical, marketing and internal) will be covered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: WEB SITE EVALUATION FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES – THE BALANCED SCORECARD APPROACH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Content analysis as used in this study was discussed in Chapter 3. The present research was conducted from multiple perspectives as proposed in the works of Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) and Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267). The main focus was on determining whether the web site of each lodge under examination succeeded in selling its service product as seen from the four perspectives: user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness, and technical aspects. This approach neccessitated the examination of previous research done on the topic and the assessment of how many prior studies actually considered multiple perspectives, instead of merely using a design perspective.

4.2 DETERMINING MULTIDIMENSIONAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Sharp (2001:42) states that every web site in existence is, by its very nature, a unique entity. Every web site then should have one overriding, generic goal: to achieve positive response action from every visitor. If web sites are going to be useful in any way they need to be understandable (Licker, Bailey, Scott & Stamper, 2000:190).

In the same vein, Neilson Web Usability Studies (in Sharp, 2001:49) found that users of web sites do not like long, scrolling pages; they prefer text to be short and to the point. The study further found that users do not actually read the web site text; instead, they often only scan through the pages, trying to find a sentence or section containing the information they want. Chung (in Sharp, 2001:50) suggests some "common sense" design elements that work well within Web sites.

These are:

- high impact, good quality images;
- uncluttered design;
- bold titles and large print;
- sensible use of colour;
- modern or classic look;
- care for language;
- consistent style;
- quick-loading information.

In order for any organisation to survive and succeed, it must deliver the service the customer wants with precise and accurate quality, and the service must be delivered promptly. Evidence suggests satisfaction of the customer will lead to repeat sales and profits (Gehrke & Turban, 1999).

As with most other tourism operators, a lodge's services are intangible, and customers are unable to assess the service quality prior to purchase. This means that the customer takes a financial leap of faith in deciding to visit a lodge based solely on information contained on its web site or in other promotional media (Juwaheer, 2004:360). The management of a 5-star lodge must realise that web site content may create certain expectations on the part of the customer, and that satisfaction can only be guaranteed if these expectations are met or exceeded.

According to Gilbert, Powell-Perry and Widijosi (1999:22), setting up a web site is considered affordable as it costs relatively less than other types of media. The web site, once it is established, enables an organisation to conduct a relatively more targeted business 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and to connect with a potential audience from all over the world. The Web allows anyone access who has an Internet connection, regardless of location, time or computer operating system. Technology allows for classy digital images, video and sound. The most valuable Web applications, however, are those that allow organisations to rise

above communication barriers and institute dialogue directly with customers (Gilbert *et al.*, 1999:22).

Gilbert (1996) in Gilbert *et al.* (1999:23) projected that the long-term maintenance of customers would involve four incremental steps:

1.   *Find out more about the customer through database analysis.* Five-star lodges can attempt to collect information about what individual customers purchase or require from a service provider by using an incentivised online questionnaire on its web site. The site can follow and evaluate customer reactions to different offers posted on the web site, and customer profiles can then be created.

2.   *Improve and make the product or service more attractive.*   Online questionnaires can be aimed at a database of former or current guests to gather their attitudes toward certain services or loyalty programmes. Lodges can use this information to improve features and characteristics of the service if feedback uncovers that some services are not meeting customer expectations. By making use of such questionnaires, lodges can collect information about likes and dislikes of guests. Inactive guests can be contacted via e-mail – a cost-effective method of keeping in touch and maintaining awareness.

3.   *Inform to build the customer's knowledge of the company.*   Important information such as details on any new services can (and should) be posted on the site or could be mailed to potential and existing customers in the form of an electronic newsletter. Gilbert *et al.* (1999:26) state that this way the customer will have better knowledge of the organisation, which will improve brand loyalty.

4.   *Retain the customer by developing different forms of loyalty schemes.* A web site can be designed to contain sections for the exclusive use of loyalty scheme members. Entry into the web site is restricted by the use of identification numbers and passwords. Gilbert *et al.* (1999:26) declares that members' only magazines and special offers can be posted on these Web pages for which one would have to register before gaining access.

In addition to those already mentioned, various other studies have been done on the evaluation of web sites, where scholars try to determine the criteria that are necessary to evaluate these sites. For example, Johnson and Misic (1999:383-392) found that organisations use benchmarking to evaluate their own web sites, as well as comparisons of their web sites with those of other relevant organisations.

The Internet is becoming an important new channel for exchange in an increasing number of industries. Opportunities presented by the Internet might seem obvious, but there is still much debate and speculation on how the use of the World Wide Web will affect established industries (Wynne, Berthon, Pitt, Ewing & Napoli, 2000:420). Information overload is nowhere more evident than on travel or tourism sites on the World Wide Web (Bernstein & Awe, 1999:364).

Recent surveys point out that travel purchases and reservations are among the fastest-growing segments of electronic commerce in the USA and Europe (Weber & Roehl in Bernstein & Awe, 1999:364). This great potential for travel sales by way of the Internet is so widely recognised that there has been a substantial increase in the number of sites dedicated to travel, with a massive redundancy in the data available (Bernstein & Awe, 1999:364).

Previously, travel agents were the main sources of travel information, but that has changed significantly in the past few years (Bernstein & Awe, 1999:364). More and more general consumers are using the Internet to do their research and bookings. Because of this trend Bernstein and Awe (1999:365) deemed it important to set forth certain criteria that can be used to evaluate travel sites. These criteria are:

- Quality and reliability of content;

- Ease of navigation - the site is well organised and user friendly;

- Unique and original information;

- Regular updates;

- Reliable, relevant and active links;

- Download speed;

- Minimum, relevant advertising;

- Ability to print or print selectively;

- No fees, and if registration is required, it is not a complicated process.

The criteria listed above can be used, not only by experts to determine the usefulness of a site, but can also to serve as a guideline for all Web users when trying to locate the most relevant sites. Baloglu and Assante (1999:117) examined a number of hospitality management journals in an attempt to determine the most commonly encountered study areas and research methods, and a resulting list of web site evaluation criteria developed by these authors closely mirrored the list formulated by Bernstein and Awe (1999:365). Rayport and Sviokla (in Wynne *et al.*, 2000:426) contend that only when managers master the ability to control both their physical and virtual value chains will they be able to create value in the most effective and efficient way.

According to Tillotson (2002:392) very little literature exists on the ways consumers evaluate web sites. There are countless lists of criteria that *can* be used by customers to analyse web sites, but uncertainty persists as to which criteria *are* used. A research study conducted by Fogg, Marshall, Laraki, Osipovich, Varma, Fang, Paul, Rangnekar, Shon, Swani and Treinen (2001:61-68) attempted to establish what elements of a web site the average person appraises when forming a perception of the credibility of that web site. The study found that most of the elements identified as important could be organised into one of seven categories. These categories are: "… real-world feel, ease of use, expertise, trustworthiness, tailoring, commercial implications and amateurism" (Fogg *et al.*, 2001:61).

Clearly, one of the main reasons for people to visit a particular Web site is to view the content of that site (Allis, 2002). In the case of lodges or virtually all other

commercial enterprises, individuals visit Web sites to gather more information on the particular establishment. The type of information sought may include: contact information, maps, rates and a directory of supplementary services available at the lodge or in the surrounding areas. Content should be regularly updated to reflect price changes or any other facts that might be of particular importance to existing or potential customers. Fogg *et al.* (2001:64) lists a number of variables that comprise the so-called "real-world feel" category of his study. According to this list, a web site should provide speedy responses to customer service queries, the physical address of the establishment, all relevant contact numbers, an e-mail address and some images of the facilities.

Equally important is the visual appeal of a web site, which includes how the site looks, colour schemes and images or graphics used to enhance the site, as well as professional features that make it consistent with other company cues. Visuals can motivate users to revisit a site, based on the fact that they liked what they saw. Web sites, especially those of players in the tourism industry, should guard against putting too much information and too many visuals on a page as users could find it confusing. Often Web sites tend to be so cluttered that the desired information is lost amongst excessive content and pictures. In the words of one author, getting information off the Internet can be like taking a drink of water from a fire hydrant… utterly overwhelming.

Navigation of a web site deals with the level of effort required of users to browse through the site, moving from different areas within the site and back. Fogg *et al.* (2001:64) also refers to this characteristic as "ease of use", under which he groups the ability to allow users to view past content, the way in which information is arranged, the time it takes to download, and the overall simplicity of navigation.

For most people, time is a valuable resource, and few will remain patient indefinitely with a web site that takes forever to download. Most types of Internet connections available in South Africa are via fairly slow landlines, with the exception of recent developments like ADSL or LAN connections. For this

reason, South African service providers should be especially weary of further delaying an already slow connection with redundant information. If not, they will struggle to remain competitive in the fast growing virtual marketplace.

Interactivity refers to the way in which a web site can respond to inputs from users. Examples are, for instance, online discussion or feedback forums, surveys and submission of questions to experts. The user enters certain data and the web site generates a response, either an immediate response or a response within a reasonable period.

Chakraborty, Lala and Warren (2003:50-61) performed research of which the main purpose was to develop and validate measurement scales for factors that customers consider important in business-to-business (B2B) web sites. Based on a review of academic and trade press literature, Chakraborty *et al.* (2003:50-61) identified seven factors that might influence web site effectiveness and developed scales for measuring these factors for B2B web sites. According to Chakraborty *et al.* (2003:50-61), their study represented one of the first efforts in the academic literature to determine the factors that were considered to be important in B2B web sites at the time – at least from a quantitative perspective. Much of the previous research conducted up to this point was qualitative in nature.

Chakraborty *et al*. (2003:50-61) obtained interesting results when investigating the relative comparison of importance ratings, which showed that managers should focus their efforts on improving their web site organisation, including the manner of presentation of content and the design features. This finding of a significant interaction between web site-usage objectives and web site factors suggested that buyers and non-buyers (who nevertheless are important because they often influence, specify, or recommend products in business-to-business situations) differ in what they consider important. While both groups consider organisation to be the most important factor in a B2B web site, their self-rated importance differs on some of the other factors.

Results suggested that for buyers, managers should focus on improving buyer perceptions of purchase-related features such as privacy/security and transaction related interactivity. For non-buyers, the emphasis should be on improving the web site experience through non-transaction-related interactivity, personalisation, and enhancing product-related information. This finding suggests that a behavioural segmentation approach in web site design may be useful. That is, if it is possible to identify a web site visitor's intended use (perhaps based on prior knowledge or by asking a simple question), it may be beneficial to change the web site design on the fly to appeal to the differing tastes of the different groups.

The increasing use of "back-end software" for creating dynamic pages by B2B web sites lends validity to these findings. In electronic design automation, front-end stages of the design cycle are logical and electrical design (e.g., logic synthesis). Back-end software programmes aid in custom layout design and physical verification (e.g., design rule checking).

It is perhaps not surprising that, although entertainment is often cited as the most important factor in B2C web site effectiveness, this factor was found to be least important by both buyers and non-buyers in the Chakraborty *et al.* (2003:50-61) study. However, the utilitarian aspects of B2B sites are more important to customers. Rapid advances in technology have transformed what were relatively uncommon and innovative features in a web site three years ago (such as e-commerce capability and personalisation) into common features. This may be the reason for the relatively low importance attributed to transaction-related interactivity and personalisation.

However interesting its results, the study by Chakraborty *et al.* (2003:50-61) had several limitations. First, that study was based on customers in the construction industry. Replicating these findings in other industries would be extremely important in establishing the generalisability of these results. A second limitation was the low response rate (21 %). While this response rate is typical of other web or email-based survey research, the low response rate suggests caution in generalising results from this study. A related issue in this regard is the shortage of actual purchase behaviour data from the respondents. While the use of self-

reported web site behaviour was a good start, future research could try to use actual behavioural data to replicate the findings from that study.

Table 7 provides a summary of the most commonly used or tested concepts in previous studies focused on web site evaluation.

Table 7: Concepts most prominently used in previous studies of

web site evaluation

Tourism related		Non-tourism telated	
Key Factor	**Papers using key factor (%)**	**Key Factor**	**Papers using key factor (%)**
Information quality	**87**	Fulfilment	**90**
Ease of use	**60**	Information quality	**83**
Security/Privacy	**43**	Ease of use	**69**
Responsiveness	**42**	Visual appearance	**63**
Customer service	**39**	Security/Privacy	**53**
Interactivity	39	Responsiveness	47
Accessibility	29	Interactivity	45
Navigation	27	Customer service	39
Visual appearance	23	Accessibility	35
Personalisation	19	Navigation	25
Trust	18	Personalisation	24
Brand/Reputation	16	Customisation	20
Incentive	16	Trust	20
		Brand/Reputation	17
		Return policy	15

Source: Park & Gretzel (2007:46-63).

4.3 THE ORIGINAL BALANCED SCORECARD EXPLAINED

The original BSC proposed by Kaplan and Norton (1992:71-79) came at a time when there was a need to break away from measuring company performance solely in terms of financial measures. In Al Bawaba (2008:538) the Balanced Scorecard concept (BSC) was selected by the editors of the Harvard Business Review as one of the most influential management ideas of the past 75 years.

However, this is not the only reason the BSC was deemed relevant to web site evaluation. In the most basic terms, the BSC is a set of carefully selected measures originating from the organisation's vision and strategy (Niven, 2002).

Furthermore, the BSC is a tool used by company exectuvies to communicate to employees and shareholders the outcomes of the company's value drivers and their success in achieving its vision and objectives. Similarly, the Balanced-Scorecard Objective (Niven, 2002) defines the BSC as "a tool that translates an organisation's mission and strategy into a comprehensive set of measures that provide the framework of strategic measurement and management system".

The BSC specifies that performance should be measured from four perspectives: customer, financial, learning and growth and internal business processes. It, thus, captures both financial and non-financial elements of a company's strategy, and examines the cause-and-effect relationship that drives results. This allows organisation's to be strategic by using lead indicators as opposed to lag indicators to evaluate performance. Lead indicators are the drivers of future economic performance, while lag indicators represent the outcomes of actions previously taken, which provide an account of historical performance. The BSC allows a company to translate its vision and strategy seamlessly into logical performance measures that are easily associated at the various levels of the organisation.

The original performance measures as first introduced by Kaplan and Norton (1992:71-79) are described as follows:

- The financial perspective addresses the question of "How do we look to shareholders?", based on profits, revenue growth and shareholder value.
- The second perspective is that of the customer and answers the question "How do customers see us?", based on service levels, customer satisfaction, customer retention and market share.

- The third perspective examines internal business processes and procedures and looks into their efficiency in utilising the company's core competencies.
- The final perspective deals with innovation, learning and growth based on intellectual assets, innovation and skills development intiatives.

Central to the success of the BSC is the integrated relationship among the key parts of the model: vision, strategy and the four perspectives discussed above. Balance is achieved through the use of the four perspectives, the decomposition of the organisation's vision into business strategy and into operations, and the translation of strategy into the contribution each member of the organisation must make to successfully meet goals (Rohm, 2002:4).

Until the late 1980s there was a widespread fixation on measuring financial performance only. Performance measurement was then relying on reporting systems focused on the past, and this paralleled management's inward view. But today, these measures are out of step with the skills and competencies companies are trying to master. Hence, the development and subsequent evolution of the BSC and similar models remains crucial.

4.4 EVOLUTION OF THE MODIFIED BALANCED SCORECARD (BSC) APPROACH

After its initial modification and use by Morrison *et al.* in 1999 to measure the effectiveness of hotel web sites, the BSC was also applied in subsequent studies beyond the field of hotels. Kim, Morrison and Mills (2002:195-206) conducted an evaluation of the performance of the web sites of convention centres in the United States using the same perspectives as originally used by Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113). In a follow-up study, Kim *et al.* (2003:24-31) enhanced the Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) methodology by evaluating the same 10 web sites one year later.

Ismail, Labropoulos, Mills and Morrison (2002:165-179) adopted the modified BSC approach in evaluating the marketing of culture on the web sites of European national tourism organisations (NTOs). In this study, a number of important adjustments were made to the existing methodology, and in doing so the BSC as evaluation tool was further refined. Amongst others, the measurement scales were changed from Likert formats to dichotomous "yes/no" questions, indicating the presence or absence of specific site features. This removed the level of subjectivity noted in the Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) study. Similarly, Feng, Morrison and Ismail (2002:43) evaluated and compared destination marketing organisation (DMO) web sites in China and the US using the modified BSC approach. Furthermore, So and Morrison (2004:93-118) applied the modified BSC approach in evaluating the web sites of 14 NTOs in East and South East Asia.

Subsequent studies, such as those mentioned above, improved the modified BSC by addressing and correcting elements upon which Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) had been criticised. In the initial study, four perspectives were introduced, namely customer, technical, marketing and internal. However, the internal perspective was difficult to measure, as the researchers did not have access to all the information required to do so. Additionally, the authors realised that the scoring system used in the initial study could be questioned, as the final scores for the four perspectives were unbalanced. Furthermore, the use of several Likert scales led to a high level of subjectivity in the Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) study.

Yet another limitiation was that only one member of the original research team – although highly qualified in web site design and marketing – evaluated all of the web sites selected for the study. How the four perspectives were chosen raised further questions, as did the way in which the perspectives were evaluated. For example, the study did not measure return on investment of the small hotel web sites. Also, an expert Web designer evaluated the customer perspective, not customers themselves. In addition, no one from the included hotels was involved in the evaluation, so a truly internal perspective was not obtained. Chung and Law (2003:120) criticised Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) for failing to incorporate

the views of hoteliers into the development of the research instrument. Other authors suggest that different perspectives can be adopted. According to Blum and Fallon (2002:91-102) there are three broad directions of Web site evaluation: (1) business perspective; (2) customer perspective; and (3) a combination of the first two elements.

However, arguably the strongest criticism of Morrison *et al.* (1999:97-113) arises from the fact that evaluating any web site(s) at only one point in time is insufficient to reflect the variability in sites over time. Similarly, the majority of prior studies into the topic, as highlighted in table 8 below, tended to make use of a single "expert" to conduct evaluations, and more often than not, only a single evaluation was done. In this respect, the current study is unique and, dare one say, superior to previous works. In the current study, thirteen indivuals were used as evaluators, in an effort to reduce bias introduced through the use of a single person. Table 8 provides an overview of studies in which contect analysis was used as research methodology. Although these studies were, for the most part, also conducted within a tourism context, they differ from the present study in terms of the number of evaluators used. As previously mentioned, most prior studies relied on the responses of a single individual, whereas the current research was conducted with the assistance of thirteen evaluators.

Table 8: Summary of prior studies using content analysis as research

Methodology for web site evaluation

Approach and authors	Industry sector focus and geographic area	Method	Evaluators/ Evaluations
Modified BSC			
Morrison et al. (1999)	Small hotels; Scotland	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Kim et al. (2002)	Large convention centers; USA	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
So and Morrison (2002)	National tourism organisations; East and South East Asia	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Feng et al. (2002)	Destination marketing organisations; USA	Content analysis	Three experts; one evaluation

	and China		
Ismail et al. (2002)	National tourism organisations; Europe	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Kim et al. (2003)	Large convention centers; USA	Content analysis	One expert; two evaluations
Other			
Murphy et al. (1996)	Hotel chains and independent hotels; USA	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Weeks and Crouch (1999)	Six industry sectors; Australia	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Benckendorff and Black (2000)	Regional tourism authorities; Australia	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Law and Leung (2000)	Airlines; worldwide	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Jeong and Lambert (2001)	Hotels; hypothetical	Experimental design	Conference attendees; one evaluation
Perdue (2001)	Top 50 downhill ski resorts; USA and Canada	Content analysis	Students; one evaluation
Blum and Fallon (2002)	Attractions; Wales	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Gilbert and Perry (2002)	Hotels; worldwide	Content analysis	One expert: two evaluations
Choi (2003)	Fine dining restaurants; USA	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Chung and Law (2003)	Hotels; Hong Kong	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation
Park (2003)	Travel agencies; South Korea	Content analysis	One expert; one evaluation

Source (citations and content of table): Morrison, Taylor and Douglas (2004:241).

Application of a Balanced Scorecard to a destination is an approved modern strategic management instrument, which is assumed to be applicable also to the special case of a tourist destination. The heterogeneity in products and production processes of the different tourist service providers demands a methodology that is able to account for outputs and inputs that are measurable in monetary and non-monetary terms. The dynamics of tourist markets additionally challenge the feed-forward and adaptability features of such an instrument.

Orthodox performance measurement systems concentrate on financial and past time-oriented performance indicators, which tend to make the system inflexible with respect to sudden environmental changes. The Balanced Scorecard has become a broadly applied and successfully adapted performance measurement instrument (Kimiloglu & Zarali, 2009:250). It is a tool that translates an organisation's mission and strategy into a comprehensive set of qualitative and quantitative performance indicators which provide the framework for a strategic management and measurement system in an effective, dynamic and timely manner. Following this assumption, the Balanced Scorecard seems to be an instrument for the strategic management of tourist destinations and service providers.

The Balanced Scorecard provides the possibility to individually view and optimise a companies' performance and balance it within the different strategic perspectives. However, it is not an isolated internal performance management tool. Consideration of its various perspectives provides an opportunity for comparison in order to find best practices and potential for improvements. In order to permanently achieve optimal or at least satisfying results, a company must remain prepared to respond to the dynamic and uncertain environment it faces. To improve the performance of service providers in order to contribute to the destination's efficiency, companies need to constantly evaluate operations and services. Performance evaluation and benchmarking are widely acknowledged instruments for the identification and adoption of best practices, as a means to improve performance and increase productivity. They are particularly valuable when no objective or engineered standard is available to define efficient and effective performance.

Service providers acting within a destination are assumed to aim at the optimisation of their respective profits. This is very often expressed as Return on Investment (ROI). The ROI is the ratio of profit (output) to invested capital (input). Therefore service providers aiming to maximise their efficiency in a rational manner take into account only those figures that represent costs or returns in the profit-and-loss accounts.

As mentioned above, typical tourist destinations are managed simultaneously with respect to political decision makers' top-down – often not financial - and service providers' bottom-up multidimensional strategic objectives. "The simplicity of the efficiency criterion in commercial organisations is due in large part to the fact that money provides a common denominator for the measurement of both output and income. The concept must be broadened, therefore, if it is applicable to the process of decision where factors are involved that are not directly measurable in monetary terms." Destination management explicitly has to include external effects that go beyond the service providers' internal perspective.

Learning from generic best practices of other branches allows an organisation to apply innovative solutions on an individual basis and become a pioneer in its own industry. Taken overall, performance increases of the individual organisations are assumed to affect the whole destination's added value positively.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined existing models developed for web site evaluation, as produced by past studies of the topic. The discussion initially focused on the evaluation of web sites from a customer perspective, before considering the evaluation of web sites from a design perspective. Finally, the chapter explored divergencies between the evaluative techniques employed by consumers and those used by web designers. In the following chapter, the research propositions for this study are formulated, and the research design and methodology required to test the research propositions are examined.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

"Did you know? The USA is 20th in the world in terms of broadband Internet penetration (they've just been overtaken by Luxemburg). Before the launch of the highly popular Wii interactive gaming system, Nintendo invested more than $140 million in research and development in 2002 alone. The United States Federal Government spent less than half as much on research, development and education innovation during 2002.

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Did you know? There are over 106 million registered users of the "blogging" web site, MySpace (as of September 2006). If MySpace were a country, it would be the 11th largest in the world (between Japan and Mexico). The average MySpace page is visited 30 times a day and one out of every eight couples married in the United States during 2005 met on web sites like MySpace and Facebook.

*There are **over 2,7 billion** searches performed on Google each month. To whom were these questions addressed B.G. (before Google)? The number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the population of the **planet**. It is estimated that 1.5 exabytes (one exabyte is equal to one billion gigabytes) of unique new information will be generated worldwide this year. That's estimated to be more than in the previous 5000 years combined.*

*Did you know? The amount of new technological information is doubling every two years. For students starting a three-year university degree, this means that half of what they learn in their first year of study will be outdated by their final year of study. The amount of new technological information is predicted to double every **72 hours** by 2010.*

Did you know? Third-generation fibre optics has recently been tested by Alcatel (USA) that pushes 10 trillion bits per second down one strand of fibre.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Even if the above quote cannot be believed entirely, the impact of technology and more specifically the Internet on the global economy is undeniable. As more and more people gain access to the World Wide Web, a Web presence becomes a crucial decisive factor for service providers to remain competitive. Moreover, a *successful* Web presence is needed to attract and maintain the interest of

potential customers. Thus, the value of examining multiple perspectives when designing a web site cannot be underestimated.

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the web sites of South African 5-star lodges, based on the methodology known as the modified Balanced Scorecard (BSC). Star-graded lodges, and 5-star lodges in particular, were selected for this study as one would assume that such lodges cater for relatively upmarket LSM (Living Standards Measure) groups whose members are likely to have access to the Internet and to be comfortable in using it to obtain information and/or make online reservations. The South African Advertising Research Foundation's LSM has become the most widely used marketing research tool in Southern Africa. It divides the population into ten LSM groups, LSM 1 being the lowest and LSM 10, the highest.

The SAARF LSM is a unique means of segmenting the South African market. It cuts across race and other outmoded techniques of categorising people and, instead, groups people according to their living standards, using criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances. Individuals that fit the criteria of LSM groups 9 and 10 are likely to exhibit the following characteristics in terms of media usage and general attributes:

LSM 9 comprises 6,7% of the total population. Most are female, aged 35 and over, with education levels reaching Matric and higher. Many stay in urban as opposed to rural areas. On average, individuals in this group earn approximately R12 600 per month. They enjoy access to a wide range of media, including commercial / community radio stations, television (SABC 2, SABC 3, e-TV, M-Net and DStv), daily / weekly newspapers and magazines. Typically, members of LSM 9 access the Internet weekly, and are most likely exposed to both cinema and outdoor advertising. This group further has full access to services, full ownership of durables including a personal computer, DVD player and satellite dish (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2007).

LSM 10 makes up approximately 6,0 % of the overall population. Members are mostly male, aged 35 and over, with at least a Grade 12 education or higher

qualification. Individuals tend to live in urban areas as opposed to rural areas. They earn an average of R20 000 per month. They enjoy access to a wide range of media, including commercial / community radio stations, television (SABC 2, SABC 3, e-TV, M-Net and DStv), daily / weekly newspapers and magazines. Typically, members of LSM 10 access the Internet weekly, and are most likely exposed to both cinema and outdoor advertising. This group further has full access to services, full ownership of durables including a personal computer, DVD player and satellite dish (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2007).

 For such sophisticated Internet users, an inexpert web site will almost certainly signal inferior service quality and could result in lost business for the service provider. After all, it could be argued that 5-star lodges should be in a position to develop high quality web sites – more so than the majority of lower star-graded establishments across all categories.

This chapter deals with the research design and research methodology applied in this study. In section 5.2, the research design is classified in terms of different descriptors. Section 5.3 centres around questionnaire design, and Section 5.4 outlines the sampling design adopted in this study. The sampling approach is discussed in terms of the target population, sampling method and sample size. This section further details data collection by covering the survey method as well as highlighting research objectives and their related variables. This section proceeds to shed light on the constructs investigated and measurement scales used, prior to providing a short account of pre-testing of the instrument. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis approach utilised in this study.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:146-151) the research design of a study highlights what is to be done, in technical terms. The research design applied in this study is what is referred to as a classification scheme by Cooper

and Schindler (2003:146-151). This scheme, inter alia, takes into account the degree of crystallisation of the research questions, the method of data collection, researcher control of variables, the purpose(s) of the study, time dimensions, topical scope and research environment. These aspects will be dealt with below.

5.2.1 Characteristics of the research

Pure or basic research aims to solve perplexing questions (or problems) of a theoretical nature that have little direct impact on action, performance, or policy decisions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:12). This study aims to provide answers to a number of research questions that are theoretical in nature. It does not attempt to provide answers to specific practical questions related to action, performance or policy needs. Therefore, this study could be qualified as **basic research.**

Cooper and Schindler (2003:146) state that a formal study "… begins with a research question and involves precise procedures and data source specifications. The goal of a formal research design is to answer the research questions posed." This study began with a number of research questions (see section 1.4), followed precise procedures in collecting and analysing the data and reported findings in a numeric format (see Chapter 7). The goal of this study was to answer the research questions posed, hence, this study was a **formal study**.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The study did not intend to monitor or observe subjects but rather to elicit responses from them. Therefore, this study could be classified as a **communication study**, in terms of data collection method used (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149).

When research is concerned with finding out *who, what, where, when* or *how much*, the study is descriptive (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149). The objective of this study was to examine the web sites (*what*) of selected 5-star lodges graded by the TGCSA (*who*) in an Internet environment (*where*) during the month of July 2007 (*when*) to determine the extent (*how much*) to which they conformed to the

guidelines as set in the modified BSC approach. Therefore, this study was a **descriptive study**.

A cross-sectional study refers to research that is only carried out once and represents a snapshot at one point in time (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:149). This research was carried out on a single occasion and thus represents a snapshot of how well the selected lodges fared in terms of their web site effectiveness when measured using the modified BSC. Hence, this was a **cross-sectional study**.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:149), statistical studies are designed for breadth rather than depth, meaning that statistical studies tend to estimate the characteristics of a population by making inferences from the characteristics of a sample. By contrast, the present study made use of a fairly small sample size about which greater in-depth information was obtained; it could therefore be regarded as a **non-statistical study**. This notion is confirmed by the fact that the sample size was purposefully kept small, to mirror that of the original study by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) upon which the current research was primarily based. Using previous sample sizes is a non-statistical approach to sample size.

The respondents involved in the study where sensitised to the fact that they were participating in a research study. This meant that their normal daily routine was modified. Therefore, this study could be described as a **modified routine study** by Cooper and Schindler (2003:149).

Research that takes place under field conditions refers to research that is conducted under actual environmental conditions. This study took place in an Internet environment and was thus carried out under actual environmental conditions with no manipulation of variables taking place. Therefore, this study was conducted under **field conditions**.

In terms of data collection techniques, most can be grouped into two categories, namely quantitative (data collected in the form of numbers) and qualitative (data collected in the form of words or pictures) (Neuman, 2000:33). Content analysis,

the main data collection technique used in this study, is generally considered to be a qualitative data collection technique, although some statistical analyses are required in order to transform raw data into usable information (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:102; Struwig & Stead, 2001:11). A second group of researchers regards content analysis as a quantitative research technique (Neuman, 2000:33-34; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:140-141). A third group supports the notion that content analysis is both qualitative and quantitative in nature (Du Plooy, 2002:194; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:142-143).

The main reason for this is the fact that a crucial step in any content analysis is to tabulate the frequency of each characteristic found in the material being studied. Unlike a quantitative study, in which one aims to quantify the variation in a phenomenon, situation, problem or issue, qualitative research aims to describe a situation, phenomenon, problem or event (Kumar, 1999:10). The former utilises quantitative variables (interval and ration scales) to gather information, while the latter makes use of nominal or ordinal scales to obtain data (Enz, 2001:3). As this study attempted to describe how South African 5-star lodge web sites fare in terms of user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects, it could be regarded as a **qualitative study**.

5.2.2 Content analysis as a research tool

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:142) content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases. As content analysis enables a researcher to discover features in the content of large amounts of material that may otherwise go unnoticed. This technique may be used for exploratory and explanatory research, but is most often used in descriptive research, as is the case in this study.

As discussed in section 3.5, content analysis has also been applied to the Web (Ehlers, 2002:204). McMillan (2000:80-98), in an analysis of 19 previous studies, found content analysis to be a stable research technique that can successfully be applied to a dynamic environment such as the Internet.

Neuendorf (2002:6) identified *subjectivity* as a problem in web site evaluation, and suggested that a larger variety of measures should be used to reduce it. Due to the subjective nature of evaluating web sites, the modified BSC approach was used in this study because it balances different measures of web site effectiveness. Morrison, Taylor and Douglas (2004:233-251) first adapted the BSC approach from Kaplan and Norton (1992; 1993) to evaluate the web sites of small hotels in Scotland. They analysed critical success factors (CSFs) from four perspectives: technical, marketing, internal and customer. They supported Neuendorf's contention that web site evaluation is subjective by nature and must be performed with a balanced set of measures.

McMillan (2000:81-82) suggests five primary steps for application in a content analysis technique. These steps include formulating the research questions and/or hypotheses, sampling, data collection and coding, training coders and checking the quality of their work, and analyzing and interpreting the data (McMillan, 2000:81-82).

The manner in which these steps were applied in this study is highlighted below.

Step 1 – Formulating the research questions: The advent of the Internet has given rise to many new research questions (McMillan, 2000:81). To this end, a list of research questions was developed to be tested in this study. These questions revolved around the extent to which South African 5-star graded lodges are effective as marketing tools. Their effectivity was tested based on four primary performance dimensions.

Step 2 – Sampling: The population for this study is discussed in detail in section 5.4.1.

Step 3 – Data collection and coding: This step in the research process centres around defining categories which concern two key units of measurement, namely coding units and context units, as well as detemining the time frame in which the data are collected (McMillan, 2000:82).

Step 4 – Training of coders, and inter-coder reliability: Wimmer and Dominick (2003:152) identify individuals who do coding in a study as coders. More than one coder is generally used in a content analysis, to reduce bias in the evaluation process (Wan, 2002:156). However, the number of coders involved in a content analysis is still small in comparison with other methods of data collection and coding, as generally only between two and six coders are used.

In this study 13 coders (or evaluators) were used. It was thus necessary to train the coders and also to test for inter-rater reliability. These considerations are discussed in Chapter 6.

Step 5 – Analysing and interpreting the results: The final step in the research process involves the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the coding process. The fact that the content being analysed was web-based did not change the basic procedures of data analysis and interpretation. The manner in which the data were prepared, analysed and interpreted in this study is considered in Chapter 6.

5.2.3 Application of content analysis to the BSC four-quadrant model

This study used a similar evaluation approach to that of Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267), which stems from the original Kaplan and Norton (1992; 1993) BSC model. In addition, Countryman (2000:430-432) recommended evaluation criteria specific to B&Bs, which Kline *et al*. (2004:253-267) took into consideration in the development of their modified BSC. Using the original BSC as foundation, the modified BSC instrument developed within that study included four more or less independent "perspectives" (somewhat arbitrarily called "quadrants"), which also produced the research questions of this work:

Quadrant 1: User-friendliness;

Quadrant 2: Site attractiveness;

Quadrant 3: Marketing effectiveness; and

Quadrant 4: Technical aspects.

User-friendliness (Quadrant 1)

User-friendliness was evaluated with nine different yes/no items, and one overall question with a four-point Likert scale response. Based on the literature review, these items were all important aspects of B&B web site design, and in the current study, it was interesting to test whether the same could be said for five star lodge web site design. A web site that is easy to navigate enables the user (a potential guest) to freely click in and out of pages without causing confusion or distress. The more user-friendly a web site, the more a potential guest is likely to continue to view the lodge's information and to want to find out more about the property. When a home button is clearly available on every page, this makes it easy to find information without getting confused, which could lead to accidental closure of the browser. Of course, clearly displaying contact information of all kinds (phone, fax, address, and e-mail) is vitally important to communicate with potential guests. The use of buttons enables the user to click from page to page without having to scroll through multiple pages to find information.

Site Attractiveness (Quadrant 2)

Nine specific aspects of site attractiveness were evaluated with yes/no responses. An overall question with a four-point Likert scale response was also included. If a lodge web site does not have clear and readable text, colour, hyperlinks, and good quality photographs and images, then Web-page space is being misused. A lodge web site should not be a photocopy of a print brochure, but an interactive display of what is available at the property. Cluttered and unclear pages decrease a web site's effectiveness. The lodge web site should entice the user's interest; if the web site is not attractive, then a guest will feel that the lodge itself is not appealing.

Marketing effectiveness (Quadrant 3)

Closely following the design of the original questionnaire, the researcher identified 18 specific marketing effectiveness criteria to be evaluated with yes/no responses. An overall evaluative question with a four-point Likert scale response was again incorporated. The aspects evaluated are all judged to be important for an interactive tourism web site that follows sound marketing principles. These include that the lodge web site should define the uniqueness of the lodge and its surrounding environs by providing information on the history of the property, as well as information about the innkeepers, local events, rates, photographs, awards, testimonials, packages and promotions. These factors make the virtual experience of the lodge more tangible for the user.

Technical aspects (Quadrant 4)

As indicated by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267), the use of NetMechanic.com (available free of charge at www.netmechanic.com) allowed the researcher to perform an accurate evaluation of the technical design aspects of each Web site. Founded in 1996, NetMechanic was created for small to medium-sized business webmasters who needed easy, affordable, self-service, web tools to help run high-quality business web sites. Acquired by Keynote Systems Inc. in May of 2002, Keynote NetMechanic is the largest independent provider of web site tools. Keynote serves over 2300 corporate customers with unbiased benchmarking data, competitive analysis and operational metrics from the customer perspective (NetMechanic, 2008).

NetMechanic aims to help businesses increase revenue, satisfy customers and improve overall web site quality. The system's automated tools analyse web site availability and reliability, improve page visualisation, optimise search engine rankings and monitor performance. NetMechanic's mission is to provide small to medium-sized business webmasters with easy, affordable self-service web tools that help them create a quality web experience for customers, as well as accessibility for search engine users.

Keynote NetMechanic has built a strong industry presence among small to medium-sized business webmasters. NetMechanic serves a broad base of clients, including companies such as Jet Blue Airways, the London Stock Exchange, Five Star Video, the Foundation for the National Institute of Health, Xerox and New York University, amongst others (NetMechanic, 2008).

NetMechanic.com is a diagnostic web site for evaluation of the following technical components of any (accessible) web address, using a 5-star rating per aspect per page. Comparisons were based on the average scores for the pages assessed. Ratings are based on the following criteria:

i   Link check;

ii   Load time;

iii HTML check and repair;

iv   Browser compatibility;

v   Spell check.

Each aspect and the method of its assessment is discussed briefly in te following sections.

i.   Link Check Rating

A page rating is based on the number of "bad" (inactive/defective) links on the page.

- 5 stars: no bad links

- 4 stars: one bad link

- 3 stars: two bad links

- 2 stars: three bad links

- 1 star: more than three bad links

ii.   Load Time Rating

Ratings are based on the time required to load the page using a 28.8 modem. A two-second connection time penalty is added for every Web server that must be accessed to load a page and its graphics.

- 5 stars - loads in less than or equal to 13 seconds
- 4 stars - loads in less than or equal to 24 seconds
- 3 stars - loads in less than or equal to 35 seconds
- 2 stars - loads in less than or equal to 46 seconds
- 1 star - loads in more than 46 seconds

In addition, a site's rating is lowered by 1 star if it has HTML problems that affect load time.

To get a 5-star score, the size of a page and all of its graphics should be kept as low as possible (without compromising on image quality); it should only connect to one Web server, and be kept free of HTML errors.

iii. *HTML Check & Repair Rating*

Ratings are based on the number of HTML errors found on the page.

- 5 stars: no errors
- 4 stars: less than or equal to six errors
- 3 stars: less than or equal to 12 errors
- 2 stars: less than or equal to 18 errors
- 1 star: more than 18 errors

iv. *Browser Compatibility Rating*

A rating is based on the number of compatibility problems affecting more than 10 % of a site's visitors.

- 5 stars: no compatibility problems
- 4 stars: less than or equal to four problems
- 3 stars: less than or equal to eight problems
- 2 stars: less than or equal to 12 problems
- 1 star: more than 12 problems

v. *Spell Check Rating*

Ratings are based on the percentage of suspected misspellings on the page.

- 5 stars: no misspellings

- 4 stars: less than or equal to 5% misspellings

- 3 stars: less than or equal to 10% misspellings

- 2 stars: less than or equal to 15% misspellings

- 1 star: more than 15% misspellings

A review of the evaluation criteria for quadrant 4 is contained in table 9.

Table 9: Quadrant 4 aspects for evaluation

Number of stars	Type of rating				
	Link check [1]	**Load time** [2]	**HTML check & repair** [3]	**Browser compatibility** [4]	**Spell check** [5]
5 stars	No bad links	≤ 13 s	No errors	No compatibility problem	No misspellings
4 stars	One bad link	≤ 24 s	≤ 6 errors	≤ 4 problems	≤ 5 % misspellings
3 stars	Two bad links	≤ 35 s	≤ 12 errors	≤ 8 problems	≤ 10 % misspellings
2 stars	Three bad links	≤ 46 s	≤ 18 errors	≤ 12 problems	≤ 15 % misspellings
1 star	More than three bad links	> 46 s	> 18 errors	> 12 problems	> 15 % misspellings

[1] A page rating is based on the number of "bad" (inactive/defective) links on the page.

[2] Ratings are based on the time required to load the page using a 28.8 modem. A two-second connection time penalty is added for every Web server that must be accessed to load a page and its graphics.

  In addition, a site's rating is lowered by 1 star if it has HTML problems that affect load time.

  To get a 5-star score, the size of a page and all its graphics should be kept as low as possible (without compromising on image quality); it should only connect to one Web server, and be kept free of HTML errors.

[3] Ratings are based on the number of HTML errors found on the page.

[4] A rating is based on the number of compatibility problems affecting more than 10 % of a site's visitors.

[5] Ratings are based on the percentage of suspected misspellings on the page.

In using the services of NetMechanic.com, the following research question was addressed:

How well do the web sites of selected South African 5-star lodges fare in terms of their *technical components*?

An example of a NetMechanic "scorecard" is attached to this document as Appendix E.

In summary, and by way of a visual representation, the four quadrants of the BSC and the variables related to each are depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1: The four quadrants of the Balanced Scorecard

QUADRANT 1: User-friendliness	**QUADRANT 2: Site Attractiveness**
Availability of telephone number(s)	Readability of text
Availability of mailing address	Hyperlinks available
Availability of e-mail address	Uncluttered pages
Limited vertical and horizontal scrolling	Quality of photos and images
Availability of home button on all pages	Effective use of space
Navigation tool on each page	Images reinforcing text
Availability of fax number	Contrast between background and text
Availability of site map or index	Appeal of background
Availability of site content search function	Use of colour
Overall user-friendliness	Overall site attractiveness
QUADRANT 3: Marketing Effectiveness	**QUADRANT 4: Technical Aspects**
Availability of lodge pictures	Link check
Availablility of guest room pictures	Load time
Availability of rates or tariffs	HTML check and repair
Apparent uniqueness of the lodge	Browser compatibility
Local activities and events	Spell check
Links to activities and area attractions	
Availability of limited offer packages	
Hyperlinks to sponsors	
Information on innkeepers or owners	
Presence of logo	
Online reservation function	
Special promotions	
Special needs (children, pets etc.)	
Calendar of events	
Testimonial information	
Virtual tour available	
Mission statement	
Awards information	
Overall marketing effectiveness	

Based upon the information contained in this diagram, a questionnaire for use in the current study was developed. This process is explained in the next section.

5.3 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The original study by Kline *et al*. (2004:253-267) mentioned web site effectiveness as being a unidimensional construct. This warrants a brief discussion of dimensionality and the closely related concept of scaling. The main part of this chapter deals with the design of the questionnaire itself.

5.3.1 <u>Dimensionality and scaling</u>

Figure 1 shows the diversity of aspects which contribute to the perceived quality of a web site. Yet it is possible to take e.g. all the aspects listed under Quadrant 1 and lump them together as contributors to the same construct, "user-friendliness". If each aspect is (arbitrarily) given the same weight (i.e., is regarded as equally important in determining the overall property "user-friendliness"), then the assessment values given to each can be added up to give one quantity; the "value" determined for the "user-friendliness" of that web site home page.

Since scaling involves "a process of measuring or ordering entities with respect to quantitative attributes or traits" where "certain methods of scaling permit estimation of magnitudes on a continuum, while other methods provide only for relative ordering of the entities" (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2009), it is clear that the above process of "quadrant" aspect assessment has created a scale on which the user-friendliness values of various web sites, as defined in Quadrant 4, can be established and compared. This scale is by definition one-dimensional.

One now has the choice of treating each of the other three quadrants in the same way, thus creating altogether four different scales and making the overall assessment of the web site a four-dimensional entity (which could be called a vector with four components). Or one may take the argument one step further by assuming that the assessment results for the four quadrants are somehow

entities of the same kind and can in turn be lumped (added) together, after allocating each an appropriate weight. This would constitute a "linearisation" of the web site assessment into a single dimension with a single (rather capricious) scale.

Whether one wants to use a multidimensional or a one-dimensional (unidimensional) assessment approach will depend to a large extent on personal preference, type and number of data available, and the need to differentiate. A unidimensional approach would probably be best for first attempts at assessments using some form of content analysis, whereas a multidimensional approach would be considered in cases where one aims to achieve distinct targets simultaneously (e.g. where an industry wants to optimise both its profit and its contribution to environmental sustainability).

According to Trochim (2006:77) scaling is used firstly to test hypotheses. Secondly, scaling can aid in identifying the dimensionality of a construct or concept. Arguably the most common reason for scaling is for scoring purposes. For instance, when a participant gives his or her responses to a set of items, researchers often like to assign a single number that represents that person's overall attitude or belief. The numbers used to represent various attitudes or beliefs form part of a scale.

5.3.2 <u>Structure of the questionnaire</u>

The modified BSC questionnaire, as developed by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) for the evaluation of B&B web sites, was used in this study, with minor adjustments to change the focus of the questionnaire from bed-and-breakfast web sites to 5-star lodge web sites. The modified questionnaire is attached to this document as Appendix C. This was the same *modus operandi* Kline *et al.* adopted in 2004 when they modified Kaplan and Norton's questionnaire for use in the analysis of small hotel web sites.

The questionnaire was thus used as the measuring instrument in this study. The measuring instrument was made up of a number of coding units. A coding unit

refers to the smallest segment of content counted and scored in a content analysis (McMillan, 2000:82). The coding units in this study consisted of a number of key attributes which 5-star lodge web sites may contain. During data collection, it was merely noted whether a specific coding unit was present or absent from a web site. Where a specific coding unit was present, a "yes" response was marked on the questionnaire and where a coding unit was absent, a "no" response was recorded. The "yes" and "no" responses were numerically coded as 1 and 2 respectively. Where responses were omitted or unclear, such answers were coded with a 0. A separate questionnaire was completed by every respondent/evaluator for every lodge selected as part of this study.

Table 10: Coding units used in research questions 1 to 3

Construct measured	Research question	Coding unit analysed
User-friendliness	1	Clearly available telephone number
		Clearly available mailing address
		Clearly available e-mail address
		Limited vertical and horizontal scrolling
		Availability of home button on all pages
		Clear and effective navigation tool on each page
		Clearly available fax number
		Availability of site map or index
		Availability of site content search function
Site attractiveness	2	Clear and readable text
		Easy-to-read hyperlinks
		Clean and uncluttered pages
		Good quality photos and images
		Effective use of Web page space
		Reinforcement of text by pictures and images

		Sufficient contrast between background and text
		Effective and appealing background
		Use of colour to improve visual appearance
Marketing effectiveness	3	Availability of lodge pictures
		Availability of guest room pictures
		Availability of rates or fares
		Text describes uniqueness of the lodge (architect, historical, etc.)
		Local activities and events listed on site
		Availability of links to activities and area attractions
		Availability of packages offered on a limited basis
		Hyperlinks to sponsors/advertisements available
		Availability of information on innkeepers or owners
		Logo present on the Web site
		Availability of an online reservation function
		Special promotions addressed
		Special target markets addressed (children, pets, ADA, etc.)
		Calendar of events available
		Testimonial information available
		Virtual tour available
		Mission statement available
		Awards information available
		Overall marketing effectiveness

When considering data collection for a content analysis, one must also keep in mind the context unit and time frame in which data are collected (Ehlers, 2002:205). The context unit is the body of material surrounding the coding unit. Some researchers use the term "unit of analysis" to describe the context from which coding units are drawn.

Within the larger realm of the Web, a home page is considered to be the ideal context (or unit of analysis) because many visitors to a site decide whether they will continue to browse the site based on their initial impressions of the home page. Because the coding and analysis of entire sites would have proven extremely time-consuming, evaluators were instructed to limit their evaluation of the selected web sites to the home pages only. Thus, the home pages of the web sites investigated formed the units of analysis for this study.

Changes to the content and appearance of a web site can and do happen fairly quickly and easily. Therefore, it is imperative that data be collected in a short time to ensure that all respondents/evaluators analyse the same content (McMillan, 2000:85). McMillan (2000:85) found that the most rapid data collection reported for a study based on content analysis was two days, while the longest was five months. Most studies, however, collected data over the course of one to two months. The data for this study were collected over a period of one month, during July 2007.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections, corresponding respectively to quadrants 1 to 3 in figure 1 (see page 85).

Question 1

Section 1 was geared towards the measurement of *user-friendliness* and consisted of nine yes/no questions ("scale items") to this effect. An additional item with a four-point Likert-scale response to assess overall user-friendliness concluded this section of the questionnaire.

As detailed in table 10 above, the scale items (coding units) considered important in the measurement of user-friendliness were the nine items listed in table 9, plus the item "Overall user-friendliness based on the above items".

As mentioned in section 5.2, a web site that is easy to navigate enables one to access and exit pages without causing bewilderment. When a home button is clearly available on every page, this makes it easy to find information without getting confused. Clearly displayed contact information of all kinds (phone, fax, mailing address, and e-mail) is vitally important to communicate with potential guests. The use of buttons enables the user to click from page to page without having to scroll through multiple pages to find information.

Question 1 therefore attempted to answer the following research question:

How well do the web sites of selected South African 5-star lodges fare in terms of their *user-friendliness*?

Question 2

Question 2 addressed the construct of *site attractiveness* and consisted of nine scale items (coding units, as given in Figure 1, Quadrant 2) with yes/no responses. A tenth item with a four-point Likert-scale response to assess overall site attractiveness concluded this section of the questionnaire.

As detailed in table 9 above, the scale items considered important in the measurement of site attractiveness were the nine items listed in table 9, plus a question on overall web site attractiveness.

If a lodge web site does not have clear and readable text, colour, hyperlinks, and good quality photographs and images, then Web page space is being misused. A lodge web site should provide an interactive display of what is available at the property. Cluttered and unclear pages decrease a web site's attractiveness, which in turn contributes to lessened overall effectiveness. If the web site is not

attractive, potential guests are likely to view this as a reflection on the lodge itself and to conclude that the lodge is not appealing enough to warrant a visit.

Question 2, therefore, attempted to answer the following research question:

How well do the web sites of selected South African 5-star lodges fare in terms of their *site attractiveness*?

Question 3:

Question 3 centred on *marketing effectiveness,* and 18 yes/no response items were included to measure this construct. A nineteenth item with a four-point Likert scale response for assessing overall marketing effectiveness completed this section of the questionnaire.

As detailed in table 10 above, the scale items considered important in the measurement of marketing effectiveness were the same as in figure 1, Quadrant 3.

Thus, question 3 attempted to answer the following research question:

How well do the web sites of selected South African 5-star lodges fare in terms of their *marketing effectiveness*?

As detailed in section 5.2 above, the aspects evaluated were all determined to be important for an interactive tourism web site that follows sound marketing principles. These include that the lodge web site should define the uniqueness of the lodge and its surrounding environs by providing information on the history of the property, as well as information about the innkeepers, local events, rates, photographs, awards, testimonials, packages and promotions. These factors make the virtual experience of the lodge more tangible for the user. This is especially important in a service industry such as the hospitality sector, as potential customers are often forced to make purchase decisions with very little

physical evidence being available to them. The services marketing mix and how it differs from the traditional marketing mix were discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

5.4 SAMPLING DESIGN

This section defines the target population and describes the sampling method used and details of the actual sample that was realised.

5.4.1 Population and sample

A target population refers to the total collection of elements about which one wishes to make some inferences. A population element, on the other hand, is the subject, or the unit of analysis, on which the measurement is being undertaken (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:179). The target population for this study consisted of all the 5-star lodges graded by the TGCSA, provided that such lodges had their own independent web sites. A list of the above-mentioned lodges was obtained from the TGCSA's web site on 2007-06-12.

The star-grading scheme of the TGCSA is the most widely recognised and accepted grading scheme in South Africa. There are also other grading schemes in use, but as star-grading is also the scheme with which most international visitors are familiar, it was deemed most appropriate for use in this study. Star-graded lodges were selected as target population because of their uniquely South African nature as well as the fact that this category contained more 5-star establishments than any other full-service accommodation category at the time. 5-star establishments were targeted for the study because one would expect most, if not all, of them to have fully functioning and highly effective web sites.

At the time of sample selection, 92 lodges enjoyed 5-star status according to the TGCSA web site. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:179) *all* the elements in a population can be examined in order to collect accurate data. This sampling method is called a census. Due to certain constraints (e.g., time, budget and/or geographic distances) a census is often impractical. Therefore, a sample is drawn from the larger population (Du Plooy, 2002:100). As a census would

require every respondent in the current study to complete 92 questionnaires, each consisting of 36 items, this was not deemed feasible and a systematic sample was drawn from the population instead. Systematic sampling is a form of probability sampling. In general, probability samples are preferable to non-propability samples (Sudman & Blair, 1998:353). In systematic sampling every ith member of a numbered population is drawn after a random start between 1 and i.

First, the total population size was divided by the desired sample size to get the sampling interval. Thus, 92 ÷ 20 = 4,6. This meant that every 5th lodge would be selected after choosing a random starting point. Sampling was done by arranging all 5-star lodges alphabetically into a list and then selecting every fifth name from the list until a sample size of 20 was reached. (The same sample size was used in the original study performed by Kline *et al.* in 2004.) The units of analysis were therefore the individual lodges whose web sites were selected for evaluation.

Systematic sampling can save a great deal of time over random sampling. Only one random number needs to be drawn and used repeatedly, rather than having to number all of the population members and attempting to draw a sample by generating multiple random numbers. Furthermore, according to Sudman and Blair (1998:353), systematic sampling has a potential advantage over other methods in that it spreads selections through the sampling frame and does not allow bunched selections to occur, while simple random sampling can.

When determining sample size, there are a number of practical and statistical considerations to keep in mind. These include the degree of variability, precision, confidence and the use of sub-samples for cross-classification (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:16-17). In addition, two further requirements, namely, internal and external validity, need to be met regarding the size and type of sample drawn. The internal and external validity of the data used in the present study is discussed in Chapter 6.

The sample as it looked at this stage of the research process is reflected in table11 below.

Table 11: First sample for testing with the modified BSC methodology

	Establishment Name	**Town/suburb**
1	Amakhosi Lodge	Pongola
2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	Magaliesburg
3	Camp Jabulani	Hoedspruit
4	Dunkeld Country Estate	Dullstroom
5	Fairways Golf Lodge	Durban
6	Hlosi Game Lodge	Paterson
7	Ivory Tree Game Lodge	Rustenburg
8	Ka'Ingo Main Lodge	Vaalwater
9	Kuname River Lodge	Hoedspruit
10	Lukimbi Safari Lodge	Alberton
11	Matumi Golf Lodge	Nelspruit
12	Morukuru Lodge	Madikwe
13	Pumba Private Game reserve	Alicedale
14	Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence	Madikwe
15	Sanbona Wildlife Reserve - Tilney Manor	Montagu
16	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	Welgevonden
17	Thakadu River Camp	Madikwe
18	Timamoon Lodge	Sabie
19	Tuningi Safari Lodge	Madikwe
20	Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	Mookgophong (Naboomspruit)

Of the 20 lodges selected, only 17 had active web links, and that then was the size of the final realised sample. To avoid any form of subjectivity or bias, the three lodges without active web links (namely, Lukimbi Safari Lodge, Ka'Ingo Main Lodge and Pumba Private Game Reserve) were not replaced by others. Although this method of sample selection may appear less scientific than others, it was used in an effort to proceed in a manner which did not deviate too much

from the methodology used in the original study by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267). Based on criteria of the TGCSA, all of the lodges selected conformed to the requirements set for a 5-star full-service accommodation establishment as detailed in Chapter 2.

The lodges forming the final sample (renumbered to account for the three lodges eliminated from the sample) are listed in table 12.

Table 12: Realised sample for testing with the modified BSC methodology

	Establishment Name	**Web Address**
1	Amakhosi Lodge	www.amakhosi.com
2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	www.budmarsh.co.za
3	Camp Jabulani	www.campjabulani.com
4	Dunkeld Country Estate	www.dunkeldestate.co.za
5	Fairways Golf Lodge	www.fairwayslodge.com
6	Hlosi Game Lodge	www.hlosilodge.com
7	Ivory Tree Game Lodge	www.ivorytree.co.za
8	Kuname River Lodge	www.kuname.co.za
9	Matumi Golf Lodge	www.matumigolflodge.co.za
10	Morukuru Lodge	www.morukuru.com
11	Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence	www.royalmadikwe.com
12	Sanbona Wildlife Reserve - Tilney Manor	www.sanbona.com
13	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	www.shibulalodge.co.za
14	Thakadu River Camp	www.thakadurivercamp.com
15	Timamoon Lodge	www.timamoonlodge.co.za
16	Tuningi Safari Lodge	www.tuningi.co.za
17	Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	www.witwater.com

The BSC approach balances, as the name implies, different measures of web site effectiveness. Kaplan and Norton first used the BSC in 1992 and Morrison *et al.* then adapted it in 1999 for analysis of the web sites of small Scottish hotels. In 2004, the subsequent study on web sites of B&Bs, upon which the current study

was based, followed. However, to date and to the best of our knowledge, the methodology has not yet been applied to *lodges* as accommodation establishments, whether in a South African context or otherwise.

5.4.2 Pilot testing of the instrument

In tandem with the first objective of this study, which was to adapt and test a standardized web site evaluation instrument specifically for 5-star lodges, the instrument was pilot tested. An instrument needs to have validity and reliability in order to be of value to its users. To this end, the author piloted a version of the instrument on a 5-star lodge web site **not** forming part of the sample for the current study (www.kloofzicht.co.za), among ten randomly selected respondents, none of whom would later take part in the actual study. The instrument was revised based on the feedback from this first run. In particular, quadrant 3 was totally redesigned to incorporate more specific marketing effectiveness questions. Therefore, the instrument in its present form was believed to have strong content validity with respect to 5-star lodge operations and web site marketing.

5.4.3 Data collection

Veal (2006:39) stated that the use of certain data collection methods may have disadvantages when using people as respondents. When people are aware of research conducted about them, they do not always remain passive subjects. The results of the research may motivate them to change their behaviour accordingly.

The Travel & Tourism Call Centre of the AA (Automobile Association) situated at the Kayalami Racetrack, Midrand was approached for the purpose of the actual data collection. Thirteen consultants were employed in the Travel Call Centre at the time, and all of these individuals were used as raters (evaluators) to evaluate the web sites of the selected lodges, based on the three dimensions of the BSC described above. All of these employees had experience in the tourism industry, performed many of their daily tasks on computers, were familiar with and confident in using the Internet and had received no specific training in web

evaluation prior to participation in this study. All evaluators made use of the same web browsers to do their evaluations. They were required to do their evaluations in the same time frame in the same location and surroundings, for the sake of consistency. In all, 36 items (per questionnaire) were evaluated by recording a "yes" or a "no" answer to each item. (YES = 1; NO = 2; NO ANSWER INDICATED = 0). In addition to the 36 yes/no items, three four-point Likert scale questions per questionnaire were also included (1 = POOR; 2 = FAIR; 3 = GOOD; 4 = EXCELLENT).

Prior to the evaluation, participants were given a 30-minute training session in which each item of the questionnaire was explained to them. They were also provided with the web link to a test lodge (not forming part of the study) to analyse according to the questionnaire, in order to establish that all understood what was expected of them. During this time and before commencing with the actual evaluation, respondents were encouraged to ask questions of the researcher to clarify any ambiguous questions. During the web-site evaluation, a supervisor remained present to prevent respondents communicating with each other or influencing each other's responses in any way. Each respondent was provided with a list of the selected lodges and a random starting point at which to begin his or her evaluation. Therefore no two evaluators were evaluating a particular lodge at the same time. This was done to prevent a bias toward any of the lodge web sites based upon the order of evaluation. The evaluators did not rate the fourth quadrant, as its five attributes were evaluated using the free services of NetMechanic.com.

No incentives were used to encourage respondents' participation in this study. Data were collected over a one-month period during July 2007. Permission to distribute copies of the questionnaires had been obtained in advance from Mr Geoff Elske, manager of the AA Travel and Tourism Call Centre.

As respondents, individuals irrespective of age culture or background, with regular access to and familiarity with the Internet, were considered ideal for participation in the study. More specifically, individuals who had reason to visit

tourism-related web sites on a regular basis, whether it be to obtain information or to make reservations online where targeted. The author also worked under the assumption that individuals falling within LSM groups 8-10 where most likely to visit or have visited 5-star lodge web sites. Prior visits to specific lodges and/or their web sites were not required for participation in this study.

Screening of potential candidates was taken care of in the selection of a specific group of individuals as respondents. To work as a consultant in the AA Travel and Tourism Call Centre, individuals must be computer-literate and competent in accessing, browsing, and utilising the interactive features of any given web site. Thus no screening questions were included in the questionnaires *per se*. As the majority of prior studies in which content analysis was used as research methodology had made use of only one evaluator (see Table 8, page 66), the present study is almost certainly an improvement (at least in terms of the reduction of bias) in that 13 evaluators were used.

5.5 PREPARATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data analysis involves the reduction of accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries, looking for patterns and applying statistical techniques (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:87)

This section pertains to the editing and coding of raw data as well as the method of analysis and statistical techniques utilised in this study.

5.5.1 Editing and coding of data

Editing refers to the process of detecting errors and omissions, correcting them where possible and ensuring that minimum data quality standards have been achieved. Field editing is done when a researcher checks for errors that may have occurred during data collection soon after the data collection has been completed. In this way, respondents may be re-contacted if there are entry gaps

or unclear answers. This is preferable to attempting to guess what the respondent "probably would have said" (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:455).

As some respondents in this study failed to complete entire sections of the questionnaires allocated to them, these respondents were contacted to determine why this was the case. In all cases, respondents claimed to have been denied access to a particular web site at the time of data collection or redirected from the site they were attempting to access to another, unrelated web site. This effectively reduced user-friendliness and marketing effectiveness of the relavant site(s) to zero, whilst site attractiveness could not be assessed at all. The researcher, however, experienced no problems in accessing any of the web sites for the NetMechanic testing of technical aspects to be done.

In some cases, a specific respondent was no longer available for contact about missing or ambiguous responses, and in such cases central editing was done. In this way, all ambiguous or missing answers were dealt with in a consistent way. Failure to do so would have resulted in skewed results when statistical testing was done.

Coding involves assigning numbers or other symbols to responses so that they may be grouped into a limited number of classes or categories (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:456). As discussed previously, a simple coding system was applied for entering data where the number 1 was allocated to "yes" responses and the number 2 was allocated to "no" responses in the case of all dichotomous questions. For the Likert-type questions, numbers from one to four represented a respondent's opinion on the overall attractiveness, user-friendliness and marketing effectiveness of each site under investigation. For these questions, 1 = Poor; 2 = Average; 3 = Good; 4 = Excellent. Thus, for dichotomous questions, no values other than 1, 2 or 0 could be entered and for Likert-type questions, no values other than 1, 2, 3 or 4 could be entered. Once the data had been captured, the data set was checked by the researcher to detect and rectify such coding errors.

5.5.2 Method of data analysis and statistical techniques

The focus of any analysis takes one of three basic forms, namely description, estimation and hypothesis-testing (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000: 64-65). With a descriptive focus, the aim is to paint a summary picture of the sample in terms of variables of interest. The statistical techniques used in a descriptive analysis are called descriptive statistics.

With an estimation focus, the aim is to utilise information from the sample to estimate a situation likely to exist in the population as a whole. With a hypothesis-testing focus, the aim is to test specific propositions concerning variables of interest and to then use the evidence provided by the sample to draw conclusions for the population as a whole. This study did not attempt to test hypotheses, nor to draw conclusions for the population as a whole based on its results. Instead, the study reflected a descriptive focus and attempted to discuss the variables of interest only in the context of the sample tested.

According to Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch (2000:65) the starting point for a descriptive analysis is the creation of a frequency distribution for each variable of interest. This indicates in absolute or relative terms how often the different values of the variable were recorded in the sample. Cooper and Schindler (2003:488) support the use of frequency tables as simple devices for summarising data. Frequency tables are drawn up based on a frequency distribution for each variable of interest.

The content analysis data in this study were captured and analysed in Microsoft Office Excel 2004. The results were then reported by means of a frequency distribution for each variable of interest (i.e. each of the four quadrants of the BSC). Comparisons could then be made between the lodges based on the frequencies of each variable. It is important to note that although comparisons were made between the lodges, this was done based purely on the rankings of the lodges with respect to each variable of interest, and not based on statistical significance tests performed for these comparisons.

5.5.3 <u>Validity and reliability</u>

As with any research study, validity and reliability are two crucial considerations. This section therefore details the validity and reliability in relation to content analysis.

For content analysis to be deemed objective, its measures and procedures must be reliable. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003:156) a study is reliable when repeated measurement of the same material results in similar decisions or conclusions.

Inter-coder reliability refers to levels of agreement among independent evaluators who analyse the same content using the same instrument. If the results fail to achieve reliability, this implies that something is amiss with the coders, the coding instructions, category definitions, the unit of analysis or some combination of these (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003:156). Findings of the tests for validity and reliability in the present study are discussed in Chapter 6. A literature review was carried out to gain an understanding of the topic under investigation. The categories and units of analysis for the study were defined accordingly. Therefore, it can be assumed that the researcher possessed an adequate understanding of the key issues in this study and adequately communicated these to the individuals used as evaluators. As the researcher was responsible for the subsequent coding and analysis of the results obtained, one can also assume that reliable results have been obtained.

Apart from being reliable, a content analysis should also yield valid results. Wimmer and Dominick (2003:159) define validity as: "… the degree to which an instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure". According to Du Plooy (2002:124) a measure cannot be valid unless it is also reliable, thus by claiming that a measure is valid, its reliability is also implied. In studies where separate constructs are investigated and tested, validity is easier to determine than in studies where multidimensional constructs are tested. The present study represents one such case: web site effectiveness was the all-encompassing

construct to be measured, and web site effectiveness was determined as expressed by four interrelated (and often overlapping) dimensions, namely site attractiveness, user-friendliness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. Thus, conventional methods to test validity may have yielded results that would imply little validity, however, these relatively lower scores could also have been explained by the levels of overlap between the concepts tested.

In relation to the sampling design of a research study, the requirements for internal and external validity should be met. Internal validity relates to the extent to which the design can account for all the factors that may affect the outcome of the hypotheses to be tested or the research questions to be answered. External validity refers to the extent to which conclusions reached in the study may be generalised to the "real world" (Du Plooy, 2002:84).

The time dimension of a study can threaten the internal and external validity of the study. The time dimension of a study can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal. As this was a cross-sectional study (see section 5.2.1), internal and external validity are considered from a cross-sectional perspective. A number of factors contribute to internal validity. In a cross-sectional study use of reliable measuring instruments, drawing random samples, unobtrusiveness of the measuring instrument and/or the researcher's behaviour are especially important. The researcher should attempt to in no way disrupt, direct or intrude on what is being researched (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85).

Trochim (2006:103) suggests that, depending on their philosophical perspectives, some qualitative researchers reject the framework of validity that is commonly accepted in quantitative research. This school of thought rejects the basic realist assumption that there is a reality external to our perception of it. Consequently, the "truth" or "falsity" of an observation with respect to an external reality becomes less important than in quantitative research. Instead, some qualitative researchers argue for different standards for judging the quality of research (Trochim, 2006:166).

Guba and Lincoln (in Trochim, 2006:200) propose four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research. They assert that their four criteria better reflect the underlying assumptions involved in qualitative research. Their proposed criteria and the "analogous" quantitative criteria are listed in table 13.

Table 13: Proposed qualitative research criteria vs. traditional quantitative research criteria

Traditional criteria for judging quantitative research	Alternative criteria for judging qualitative research
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

The criteria listed in the table above are briefly addressed in the following section.

Credibility

Credibility involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. From this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest through the participants' eyes, and therefore the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results (Trochim, 2006:294).

Transferability

Trochim (2006:297) describes transferability as the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective transferability is primarily the

responsibility of the individual doing the generalising. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. The person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment on how sensible the transfer is.

Dependability

The traditional quantitative view of reliability is based on the assumption of replicability or repeatability. Essentially it is concerned with whether the same results would be obtained if the same set of variables were observed and tested twice. But Trochim (2006:299) argues that one cannot actually measure the same thing twice. This is a sentiment shared by Perry and Bodkin (2004). A second measurement implies that two separate (and therefore different) things are being examined and subsequently measured. The idea of dependability thus emphasises the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The researcher is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affect the way the research is approached.

Confirmability

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to a study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability (Trochim, 2006:301). The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher could then assume a "devil's advocate"-type role with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. The researcher can actively search for and describe results that contradict prior observations. And, after the study, one could conduct a data audit that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

Trochim (2006:303) concedes that there has been considerable debate among methodologists about the value and legitimacy of this alternative set of standards for judging qualitative research. On the one hand, many quantitative researchers see the alternative criteria as a mere relabelling of successful quantitative criteria in order to gain greater legitimacy for qualitative research. They argue that quantitative criteria are not limited to quantitative research alone and can be applied equally well to qualitative data. They further suggest that the alternative criteria represent a different philosophical perspective, which is subjectivist rather than realist in nature.

Perhaps there is some legitimacy to this counter argument. Certainly a broad reading of the traditional quantitative criteria might make them appropriate to the qualitative realm as well. But historically the traditional quantitative criteria have been described almost exclusively in terms of quantitative research (Jackson & Decormier, 1999:135-139). No one has yet done a thorough job of translating how the same criteria might apply in qualitative research contexts.

While alternative criteria may not ultimately be necessary, these alternatives do serve to remind us that qualitative research cannot easily be considered only as an extension of the quantitative paradigm into the realm of nonnumeric data. Findings regarding the internal validity of the present study are discussed in Chapter 6.

Factors that contribute to the external validity of a study include drawing a representative sample from the population, conducting research in a real-world setting as well as avoiding multiple measurements or treatments of a single subject by the same individual, thereby avoiding interference factors such as fatigue (Du Plooy, 2002:84-85). Findings regarding the external reliability of the present study are addressed in Chapter 6.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Data were collected from web sites that are publicly accessible on the Internet. Therefore, it can be deduced that all the lodges under discussion "volunteer" the information on their web sites for any and all interested parties. Due to this public access and the fact that the study was in no way intended to "harm" any of the lodges involved, this study was deemed ethical. The study, its methods and techniques were also approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed the research design and research methodology applied in the present study. In section 5.2, the research design was classified through different descriptors. Section 5.3 dealt with the design of a suitable questionnaire for use in the study. This was followed in section 5.4 by a discussion of the sampling approach adopted, discussed in terms of the target population, sampling method and sample size. Thereafter followed a section on data collection covering the survey method as well as highlighting research objectives and their related variables. Finally, this section elucidated the constructs investigated and the measurement scales used.

CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the empirical findings and conclusions of the current study are detailed. The statistical analyses used in the present study are discussed after the theoretical framework for their use is examined. Then, the discussion centres around the actual testing and how it took place within the context of this study. Furthermore, descriptive and inferential statistics stemming from the data obtained during data analysis is provided.

6.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The underlying aim of this study was to investigate the web sites of selected 5-star lodges according to the criteria of the so-called Balanced Scorecard to determine the extent to which these lodges use their web sites as effective marketing tools. The frequency and percentage with which the various elements of the BSC (grouped under four separate "quadrants") were employed in the web sites examined were calculated. These values form the basis for the findings and conclusions of this study as well as for subsequent calculations of means and standard deviations.

Considering the problem statement presented in section 1.3, the specific *objectives* of this study were as follows:

1. To assess the effectiveness of 5-star lodge web sites as marketing and communication tools.

2. To rank selected web sites according to their effectiveness based on the criteria of the balanced scorecard (see Chapter 5).

3. To determine the greatest strengths and weaknesses that 5-star lodge owners/managers face in respect of web site design and development (based on the best and worst performance factors identified in the balanced scorecard).

4. To assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of existing 5-star lodge web sites from the marketing, customer and technical perspectives.

5. To adapt and test a standardised instrument to objectively measure various marketing aspects of tourism-related web sites.

6. To provide a set of recommendations to tourism operators in the serviced accommodation sector to improve the design and marketing effectiveness of their web sites.

To achieve these objectives, the following specific **research questions** are tested in this study.

- How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *user-friendliness*?
- How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges perform in terms of *site attractiveness*?
- How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *marketing effectiveness*?
- How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *technical components*?
- What implications do responses to the above-mentioned questions hold for developers of other tourism-related web sites, if any?

6.3 TESTING FOR RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF DATA

As this study was qualitative in nature, a different set of tests for reliability and validity was required than those one would typically encounter in a quantitative study (see section 5.5.3). The required tests to establish reliability and validity of content included:

a. Testing the data for inter-rater reliability

Due to the use of two types of scales per questionnaire, two methods of testing had to be used:

Firstly, for dichotomous scales containing yes/no items, *Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance* was used. This was evident based on the following criteria:

1.   Three or more evaluators had to have been used.

2.   Data had to have been dichotomous and then ranked.

As the study made use of 13 evaluators and data were gathered in a way that was dichotomous and then ranked, this was the appropriate test to do.

The calculation of Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance looks as follows:

$$N = \frac{X^2}{J\,(n\text{-}1)}$$

The results of this test are reflected in table 14 on page 111.

The chi-square in the original Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) study was calculated with Friedman's chi-square, where n = number of lodges and J = number of evaluators. When the p-value for this test is small (usually <0,05) evidence is sufficient to reject the null hypothesis or in the case of a qualitative study, the research proposition in question.

Friedman's test is a non-parametric test (distribution-free) used to compare observations repeated on the same subjects. Unlike the parametric repeated measures ANOVA or paired t-test, this non-parametric test makes no assumptions about the distribution of the data (i.e. its normality).

This test is an alternative to the repeated measures ANOVA when the assumption of normality or equality of variance is not met. This, like many non-parametric tests, uses the ranks of the data rather than their raw values to calculate the statistic. Since this test does not make a distribution assumption, it is not as powerful as the ANOVA.

The hypotheses for the comparison across repeated measures are:

H_o: The distributions are the same across repeated measures.

H_a: The distributions across repeated measures are different.

The hypothesis makes no assumptions about the distribution of the populations. These hypotheses could also be expressed as comparing mean ranks across measures. In the context of the present study, this test is used to determine whether the responses gathered from the evaluators were similar/consistent. Greater consistency would imply greater reliability.

Table 14: Kendall's coefficient of concordance test results for the present study

Quadrant	Coefficient of Concordance (level of inter-rater reliability)
User-friendliness	0.15532
Site attractiveness	0.14619
Marketing effectiveness	0.31786
ALL QUADRANTS	0.23760

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance always falls between zero and one, with zero representing complete disagreement and one representing complete agreement. A result between 0,4 and 0,6 is considered to indicate a moderate level of agreement, while a statistic between 0,6 and 0,8 reflects a substantial level of agreement. Table 14 contains the scores obtained in each category of the present study. With low scores across all three categories (0,1553 for user-friendliness; 0,1462 for site attractiveness; 0,3179 for marketing effectiveness) and an equally low total score (0,2376), it would appear that the evaluators used in this study exhibited high levels of disagreement about the items on which they were questioned. Comparatively, the highest levels of agreement, although still lower than average, were achieved in the section of items testing marketing effectiveness of the lodge web sites used in the study.

In terms of user-friendliness and site-attractiveness, respondents were divided in their opinions. This could probably be best explained by the expression that

"beauty is in the eye of the beholder" – a construct like site attractiveness is likely to be viewed very subjectively by each respondent, and their answers to items could have been led by their individual preferences. In comparing the responses of the 13 travel call-centre staff, the low coefficients indicate a low level of agreement between the raters on all three quadrants.

Secondly, the original Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) study calculated the Cronbach Coefficient of Alpha to compare the Likert-scale responses for the overall ratings of the three sub-sections of questions, as a means to determine the internal reliability of variables/dimensions used to test a multi-dimensional construct such as web site effectiveness. The present study discovered an anomaly in the use of this test: as the three sub-sections of items measured three different constructs entirely, one would not expect the internal reliability between these sections to be high. High internal reliability would seem to support the notion that the categories are not rigidly and independently defined, but instead are all facets of a bigger, overall construct, namely web site effectiveness. It would also seem to indicate that respondents in the study did not see the three categories as being entirely independent, but instead experienced enough overlap between the categories for the constructs to be used interchangeably to describe essentially the same thing. For example, the presence of clear contact details on a 5-star lodge web site did not only increase the site's user-friendliness (under which it was listed) but also made the site's marketing efforts more effective in the minds of the evaluators.

Based on the high Cronbach's Alpha scores in the original study, it is apparent that respondents perceived the questions they answered to measure a single, unidimensional construct. In the present study however, the lower Cronbach's Alpha scores (as shown in Tables 15 and 16) would seem to indicate that respondents experienced the subsets of questions as measuring separate and distinct (i.e. multidimensional) constructs.

In the orginal study it would have made more sense to compare all the items in each separate section with one another to determine their internal reliability, as they were, after all, supposed to measure the same construct. Thus, for the

purposes of this study, this test was performed in the hope of improving or contributing to the results obtained in the original study by Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267).

It is possible that the BSC questionnaire needs to be adapted in future research to account for this apparent overlap, so that categories may be more rigidly defined and tested. It is also possible that the questionnaire should be tailored specifically to the product or service category under investigation, instead of using the original questionnaire with only minor modifications.

As Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha measures how well a set of items (or variables) measures a single unidimensional latent construct the resulting numeric value is used to test for reliability between question/item scores. When data have a multidimensional structure, Cronbach's alpha will usually be low, as proved to be the case in the present study. Technically speaking, Cronbach's alpha is not a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (or consistency). Thus, if one has multidimensional data, Cronbach's Alpha will generally be low for all items.

If the inter-item correlations are high, then there is evidence that the items are measuring the same underlying construct. This is really what is meant when it is said that the measurements have "high" or "good" reliability. This is a reference to how well items measure a single unidimensional latent construct, as was the case in the original study.

Table 15: Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha for Likert-scale items

Item number	Variable	*N*	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sum	Minimum	Maximum
1.10	Overall site attractiveness	203	3,14	0,66	638	1	4
2.10	Overall user-friendliness	203	3,19	0,76	648	1	4
3.19	Overall marketing effectiveness	203	2,82	0,82	573	1	4

Raw Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha: 0,702168

Standardised Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha: 0,703684

As 0,7 is regarded as an acceptable level of internal reliability, the three above-mentioned items were clearly internally reliable as interrelated dimensions of the key construct, web site effectiveness.

Although the three sub-categories of questions are discussed later in greater detail, it is interesting to note at this point that, based on the simple mean scores of the three Likert-scale questions, the lodge web sites studied performed above average in terms of overall user-friendliness and overall site attractiveness, while the overall marketing attractiveness score was substantially lower.

Table 16:   Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha exculding Likert-scale items

Deleted Variable	Raw Variables		Standardised Variables	
	Correlation with total	Alpha	Correlation with total	Alpha
Overall site attractiveness	0,451	0,692	0,455	0,693
Overall user-friendliness	0,635	0,456	0,634	0,464
Overall marketing effectiveness	0,490	0,657	0,481	0,661

The original study did not test the Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha for the remaining data (in other words, the data excluding the Likert-scale items) however, It was included in the present study as a means to add to the body of knowledge on the topic of web site effectiveness. It is interesting to note that, with item 1.10 deleted, the Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha for items all expected to measure site attractiveness only reaches 0,69, as opposed to the 0,7 reached between the three Likert-scale questions (that were not even intended to measure the same construct!) One has to wonder whether this apparent lack of internal reliability was the reason this particular test was not included in the original study…

With the exclusion of item 2.10, the Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha for question 2, measuring user-friendliness, experienced the biggest drop from 0,7 to 0,45. It would therefore appear that without the presence of the Likert-scale question, some items included as dimensions of user-friendliness, do not, in fact, measure this construct at all. Similarly, with the removal of item 3.19, measuring overall marketing effectiveness, the remaining items' Cronbach coefficient of Alpha only reaches 0,66. This is also below the acceptance level of 0,7.

This apparent lack of internal reliability may be indicative of the three variables (site attractiveness, user-friendliness and marketing effectiveness) being interrelated and having overlapping components relevant to web site effectiveness. Thus, they do not mean much in isolation, but it is in conjunction with one another that they become valuable tools in the determination of web site effectiveness. In the absence of one or more of these dimensions, the internal reliability of the measuring instrument is compromised.

b. Measuring the relationship between the rankings of lodges on each scale

Because two types of scales were used, namely dichotomous and Likert, the relationship between the rankings of lodges on each scale needed to be correlated. To do this, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test for non-parametric testing was performed (to obtain a *p*-value) to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between each question's (or subset of questions) ranking and the total BSC ranking, and also whether the mean/average score for the dichotomous (i.e. Yes/No) questions was different to the 4-point Likert scale overall score for the corresponding quadrant. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test is a *most* useful test to see whether the members of a pair differ in size. However, this test is not commonly used. It is not quite clear why this test appears to be less popular than other similar tests.

The low *p*-values/levels in table 17 provide statistical evidence that the dichotomous and the Likert-scale scores are different in all three of the quadrants. Ranking was done by giving equal weight to each category (or

subsection) of items: user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects.

Table 17: Wilcoxon signed-ranks order test

	Valid N	T	Z	p-level
Mean: user-friendliness & overall user-friendliness (item 1.10)	207	0.00	12.44484	**0.00**
Mean: site attractiveness & overall site attractiveness (item 2.10)	212	0.00	12.62435	**0.00**
Mean: marketing effectiveness & overall marketing effectiveness (item 3.19)	212	0.00	12.62435	**0.00**

By performing this test it would be apparent if the use of two different scales (dichotomous and Likert) had resulted in a significant difference between the ranked data obtained. In the original study, this was not the case, but it was interesting to note that in the present study the opposite was true. Although respondents tended to give relatively negative answers to items on the three sets of dichotomous items, they tended to give positive responses when asked to rate *overall* user-friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness. The fourth quadrant was rated by NetMechanic.com and therefore was not checked for inter-rater reliability.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) was used to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the selected 5-star lodge web-sites. Descriptive statistics was gathered predominantly from the dichotomous scale(s) as they contained more aspects to compare the lodges in question than the three Likert-scale items. The Likert-scale items were included, however, to examine

how their results compare to the matching set of dichotomous questions used to measure each construct.

6.4 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

All missing value were removed from the data set before statistical analysis commenced. This was done to ensure that non-responses would not be confused with or added to negative responses, thus distorting the results obtained. As non-responses did not necessarily indicate the absence of a variable, but rather an evaluator's indecision, these responses were omitted from the final data set and only definite yes/no responses were included. Table 18 below indicates respondents that had submitted incomplete data for analysis.

Table 18: Respondents and the values absent from their questionnaire data

Respondent	Lodge		Missing data
1	1	Amakhosi Lodge	1.8 – 3.19
	2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	2.5, 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10
	3	Camp Jabulani	2.5, 2.6, 3.4, 3.10, 3.15
	5	Fairways Golf Lodge	2.5, 3.5, 3.11
	7	Ivory Tree Guest House	3.9
	12	Sanbona Wildlife Reserve – Tilney Manor	2.4, 2.6-2.10, 3.3
	14	Thakadu River Camp	2.5
	16	Tuningi Safari Lodge	3.9
2	No missing data		
3	8	Kuname River Lodge	1.10, 3.12
4	1	Amakhosi Lodge	2.2, 3.9
	4	Dunkeld Country Estate	3.9
	5	Fairways Golf Lodge	3.18
	6	Hlosi Game Lodge	3.18
	8	Kuname River Lodge	2.2
	16	Tuningi Safari Lodge	3.15

	17	Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	2.2
5	2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	1.10
	10	Morokuru Lodge	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)
	13	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)
6	1	Amakhosi Lodge	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)
7	No missing data		
8	6	Hlosi Game Lodge	1.9
	14	Thakadu River Lodge	1.10
9	2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)
	8	Kuname River Lodge	3.1
	10	Morokuru Lodge	3.10
	15	Timamoon Lodge	1.2
	16	Tuningi Safari Lodge	2.5-2.10
	17	Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	3.4
10	No missing data		
11	2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	1.3
12	1	Amakhosi Lodge	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)
	6	Hlosi Game Lodge	1.1-1.4, 1.6-1.10
	9	Matumi Golf Lodge	3.11
13	3	Camp Jabulani	3.5
	5	Fairways Golf Lodge	3.19
	9	Matumi Golf Lodge	1.10
	12	Sanbona Wildlife Reserve – Tilney Manor	1.10
	13	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	1.1-3.19 (Entire questionnaire)

According to this table, the only lodge for which no data was missing, was lodge 11, Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence. All respondents had completed all questions pertaining to this particular lodge. Table 19 details which lodge web sites returned the most comprehensive information, based on the number of respondents that omitted answers pertaining to a specific lodge.

Table 19: Listing of respondents who omitted answers from questionnaires (per lodge)

Lodge	Respondent	Number of respondents with incomplete questionnaires
Amakhosi Lodge	1, 4, 6, 12	4
Budmarsh Private Lodge	1, 5, 9, 11	4
Camp Jabulani	1, 13	2
Dunkeld Country Estate	4	1
Fairways Golf Lodge	1, 4, 13	3
Hlosi Game Lodge	4, 8, 12	3
Ivory Tree Guest House	1	1
Kuname River Lodge	3, 4, 9	3
Matumi Golf Lodge	12, 13	2
Morokuru Lodge	5, 9	2
Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence	No missing data	0
Sanbona Wildlife Reserve – Tilney Manor	1, 13	2
Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	5, 9, 13	3
Thakadu River Camp	1, 8	2
Timamoon Lodge	9	1
Tuningi Safari Lodge	1, 4, 9	3
Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	4, 9	2

By comparing these two tables it is possible to determine whether there were any respondents who consistently refrained from completing questionnaires fully. Similarly, it is possible to determine whether any one lodge consistently under-performed among all of the respondents. If a particular lodge's web site proved to be inaccessible to more than one respondent, causing them to leave the lodge's questionnaire incomplete, it is possible that there was indeed a problem with web site accessibility and not merely a respondent unwilling to complete the questionnaire.

This having been said, Amakhosi Lodge and Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa were the only lodges for which more than one questionnaire had not been completed (respondents had cited that the webpages were blocked at the time they attempted to access them). Ironically, these two lodges were ranked lowest overall and highest overall respectively. Lodge rankings per quadrant and overall is addressed in section 6.8.

Respondents who most frequently failed to complete questions on their questionnaires were respondent 1 (nine questionnaires were incomplete or not completed at all), respondent 4 (seven questionnaires were incomplete or not completed at all) and respondent 9 (seven questionnaires incomplete or not completed at all). Respondent 5, however, was the only respondent who had neglected to complete two entire questionnaires. It may therefore be argued, based on the information contained in the tables above, that the most reliable information could be obtained from respondents 2, 7 and 10 (the only respondents to have completed all questions on all questionnaires) and the web site of lodge 11, Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence (the only lodge for which all respondents had answered all questions on all questionnaires). In the case of all other questionnaires, the data gathered may have been compromised to a lesser or greater extent, based on how many respondents had encountered difficulties in completing their questionnaires, and the missing data that was subsequently discarded.

6.4.1 Frequency tables and graphs

Table 20 contains frequencies and percentages of all items or variables tested in the present study. Tables 21 to 29 depict the frequencies and percentages of items divided into their separate sections/quadrants – first only dichotomous items, then Likert-scale items and then the combined data (dichotomous and Likert-scale data combined). Figures 2 through 10 provide visual representations of the data in each corresponding table.

Table 20: Frequency and percentage at which specific BSC elements were employed in the web sites investigated

Quadrant and variable	Total number of responses	Frequency with which variable was used	Percentage with which variable was used
USER-FRIENDLINESS			
Clear telephone number	214	212	99.07
Clear mailing address	213	157	73.71
Clear e-mail address	213	197	92.49
Limited scrolling	214	188	87.85
Home button on all pages	215	178	82.79
Navigation tool on all pages	214	185	86.45
Clear fax number	214	193	90.19
Site map/index	213	166	77.93
Search function	212	102	48.11
SITE ATTRACTIVENESS			
Clear & readable text	214	190	88.79
Clear hyperlinks	211	178	84.36
Uncluttered pages	214	199	92.99
Good quality images	213	192	90.14
Effective use of space	209	168	80.38
Images reinforce text	211	182	86.26

Contrast between background & text	**212**	**176**	**83.02**
Appealing background	**212**	**152**	**71.70**
Effective use of colour	**212**	**160**	**75.47**
MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS			
Lodge pictures	**213**	**200**	**93.90**
Room pictures	**214**	**195**	**91.12**
Rates available	**213**	**177**	**83.10**
Emphasis on uniqueness of lodge	**212**	**170**	**80.19**
Local activities listed	**211**	**172**	**81.52**
Links to activities/attractions	**213**	**126**	**59.15**
Special packages	**214**	**105**	**49.07**
Hyperlinks	**214**	**104**	**48.60**
Description of owner/innkeeper	**209**	**111**	**53.11**
Presence of logo	**210**	**204**	**97.14**
Online reservation function	**212**	**116**	**54.72**
Promotional offers	**213**	**96**	**45.07**
Special target markets	**214**	**119**	**55.61**
Calendar of events	**214**	**56**	**26.17**
Testimonials	**212**	**96**	**45.28**
Virtual tour	**214**	**116**	**54.21**
Mission statement	**214**	**98**	**45.79**
Awards information	**212**	**101**	**47.64**

Table 21: Total user-friendliness frequencies (dichotomous items only)

Yes/No	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1578	82.102
No	344	17.898
Total	**1922**	**100**

Figure 2:   **Total user-friendliness percentages (dichotomous items only)**
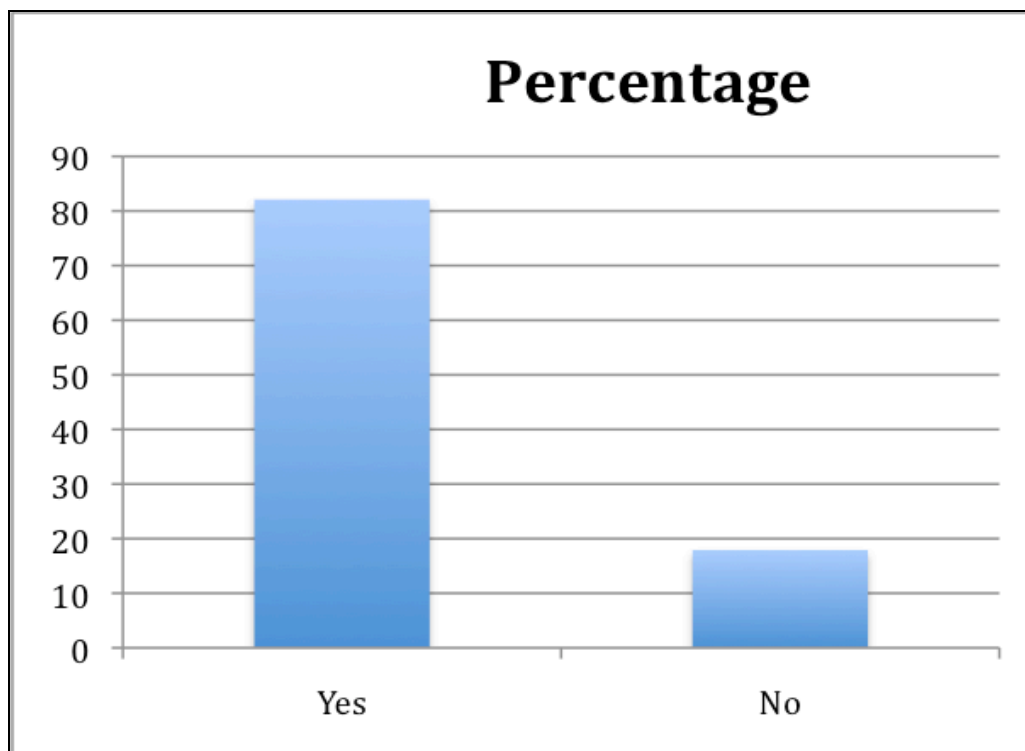
Percentage

Table 22: Total site attractiveness frequencies (dichotomous items only)

Yes/No	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1597	83.700
No	311	16.299
Total	**1908**	**100**

Figure 3: Total site attractiveness percentages (dichotomous
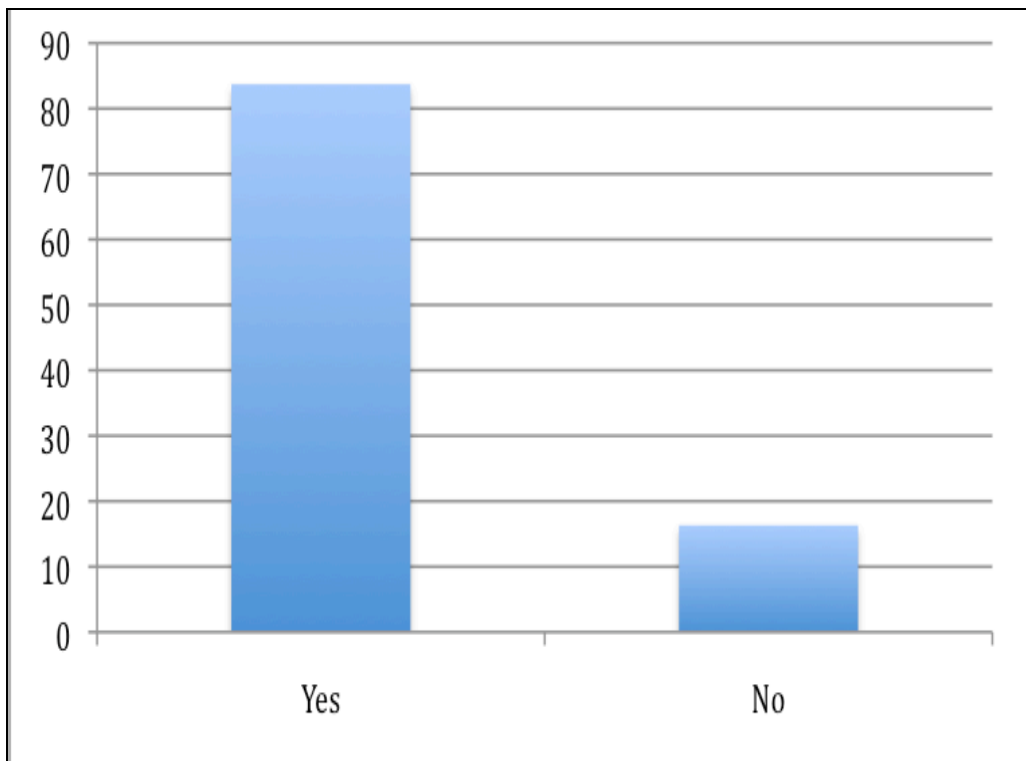
items only)

Table 23: Total marketing effectiveness frequencies (dichotomous

items only)

Yes/No	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2362	61.400
No	1464	38.600
Total	**3826**	**100**

Figure 4: Total marketing effectiveness percentages (dichotomous

items only)
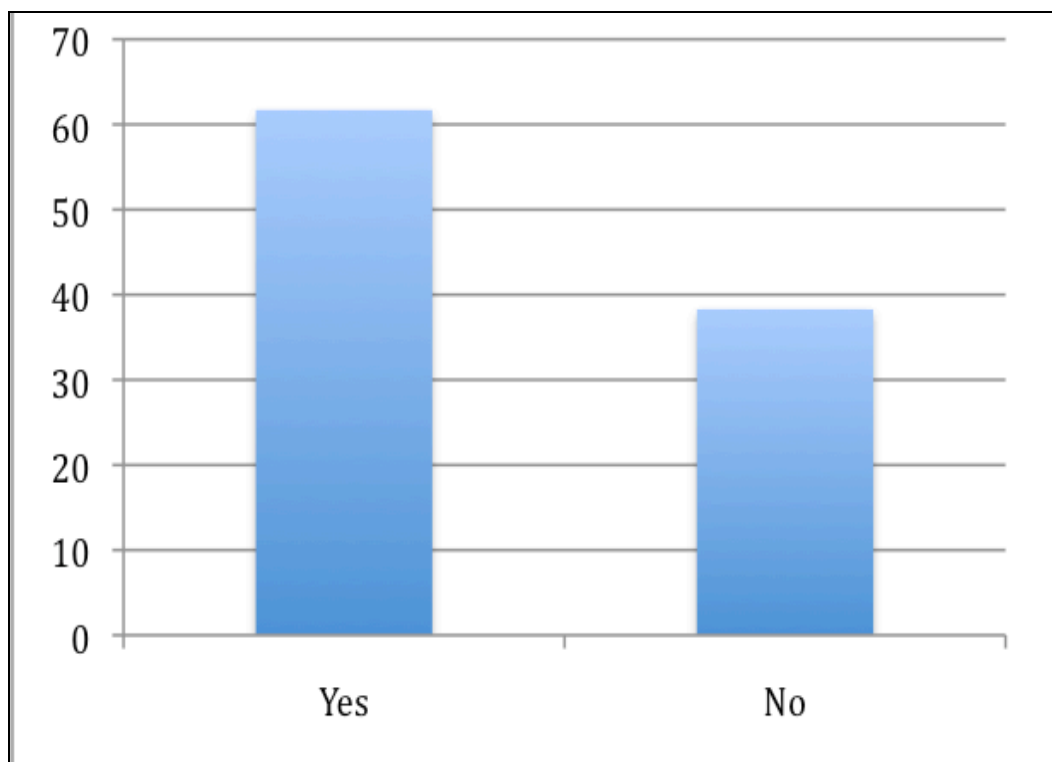
Table 24: User-friendliness frequencies (Likert-scale only)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	3	1.45
Fair	23	11.11
Good	122	58.94
Excellent	59	28.5
	207	**100**

Figure 5: User-friendliness responses (Likert-scale only)
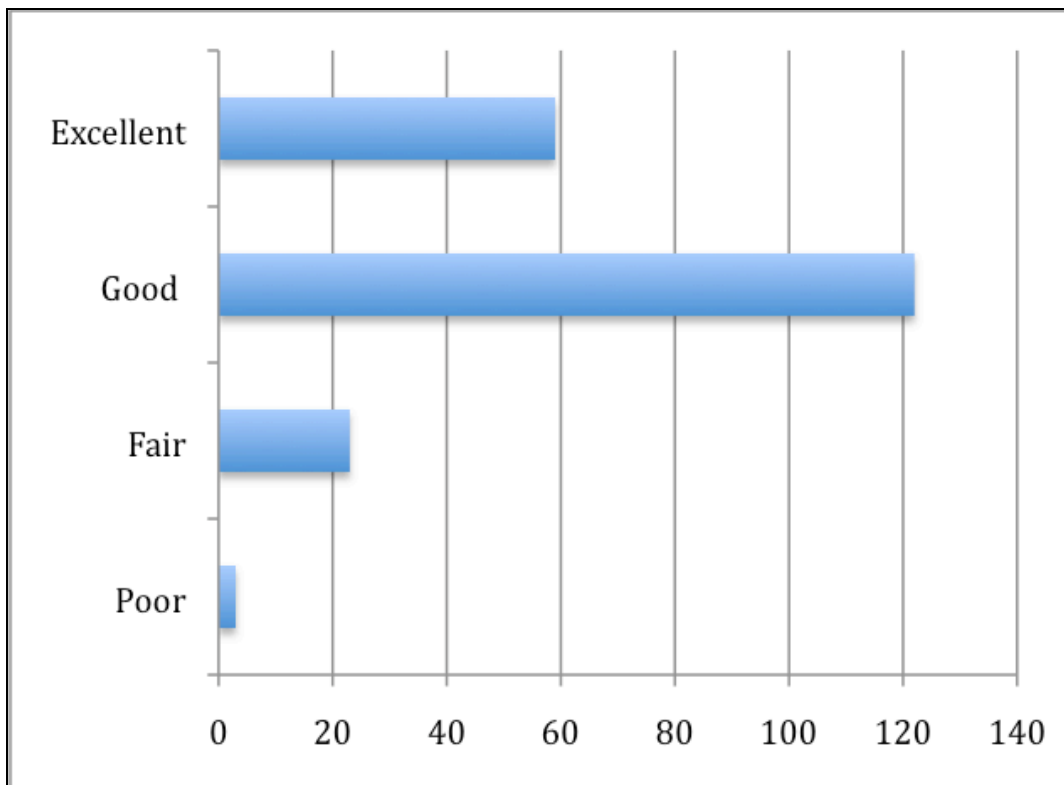
Table 25: Site attractiveness frequencies (Likert-scale only)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	6	2.83
Fair	27	12.74
Good	101	47.64
Excellent	78	36.79
	212	**100**

Figure 6: Site attractiveness responses (Likert-scale only)
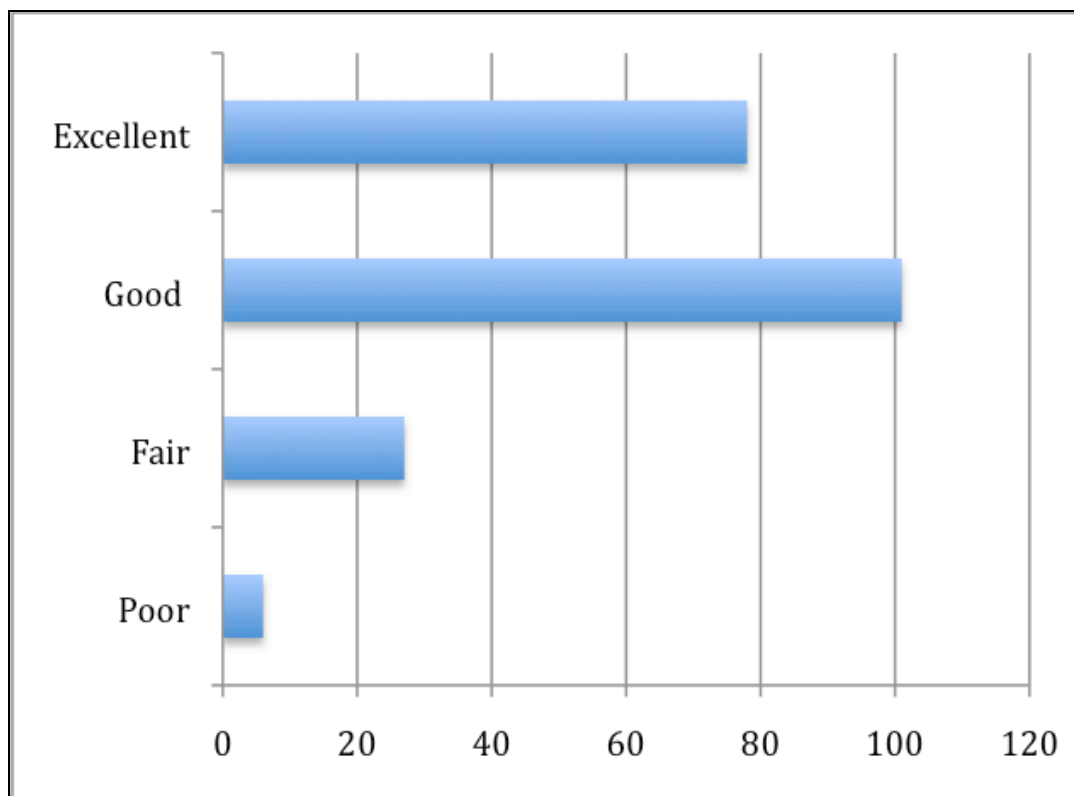
Table 26: Marketing effectiveness frequencies (Likert-scale only)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	13	6.13
Fair	57	26.89
Good	100	47.17
Excellent	42	19.81
	212	**100**

Figure 7: Marketing effectiveness responses (Likert-scale only)
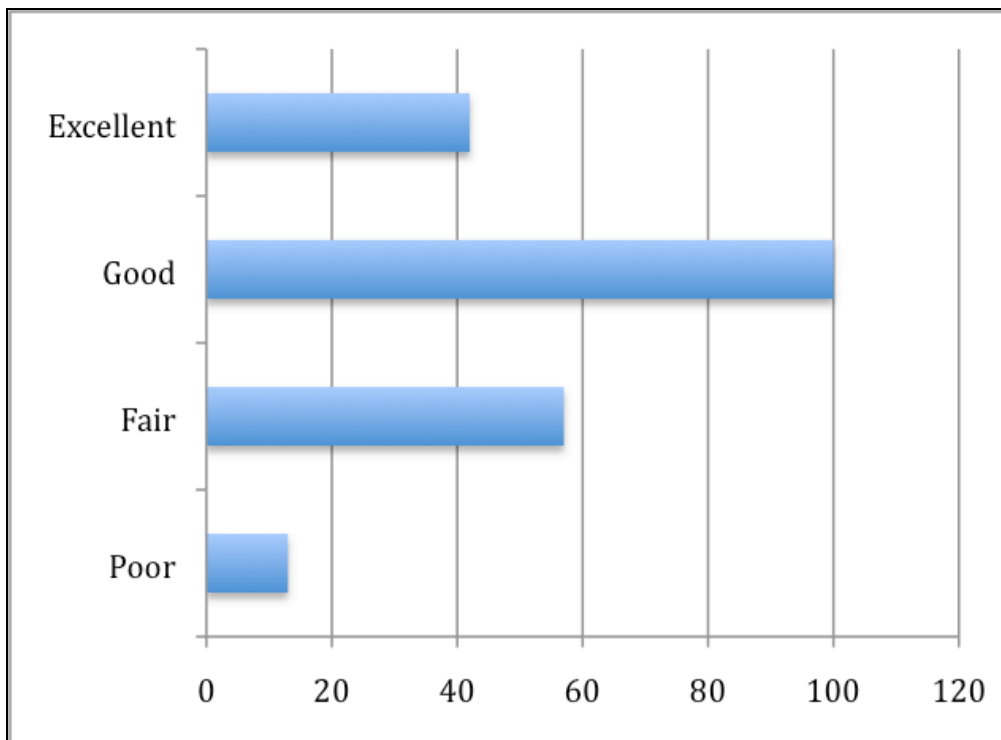
Table 27: User-friendliness frequencies (Likert-scale and dichotomous)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1759	82.62
No	370	17.38
Total	**2129**	**100**

Figure 8: User-friendliness percentages (Likert-scale and
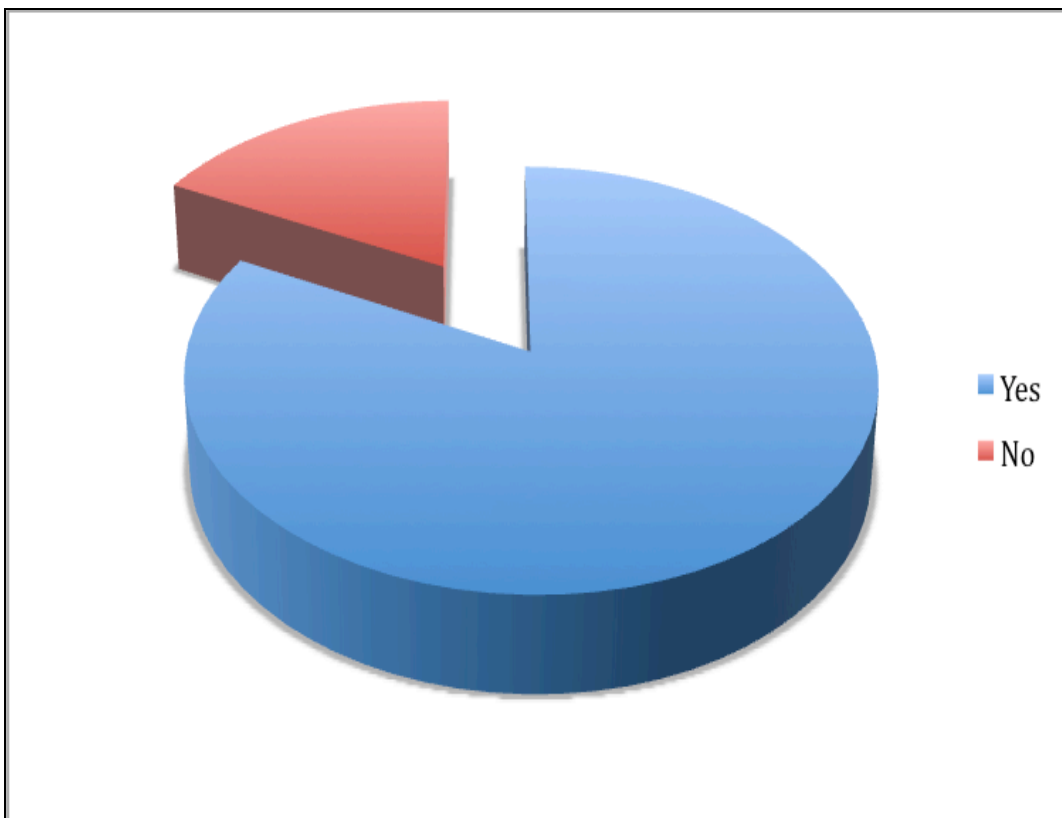
       dichotomous)

Table 28: Site attractiveness frequencies (Likert-scale and dichotomous)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1776	83.77
No	344	16.22
Total	**2120**	**100**

Figure 9: Site attractiveness percentages (Likert-scale and dichotomous)
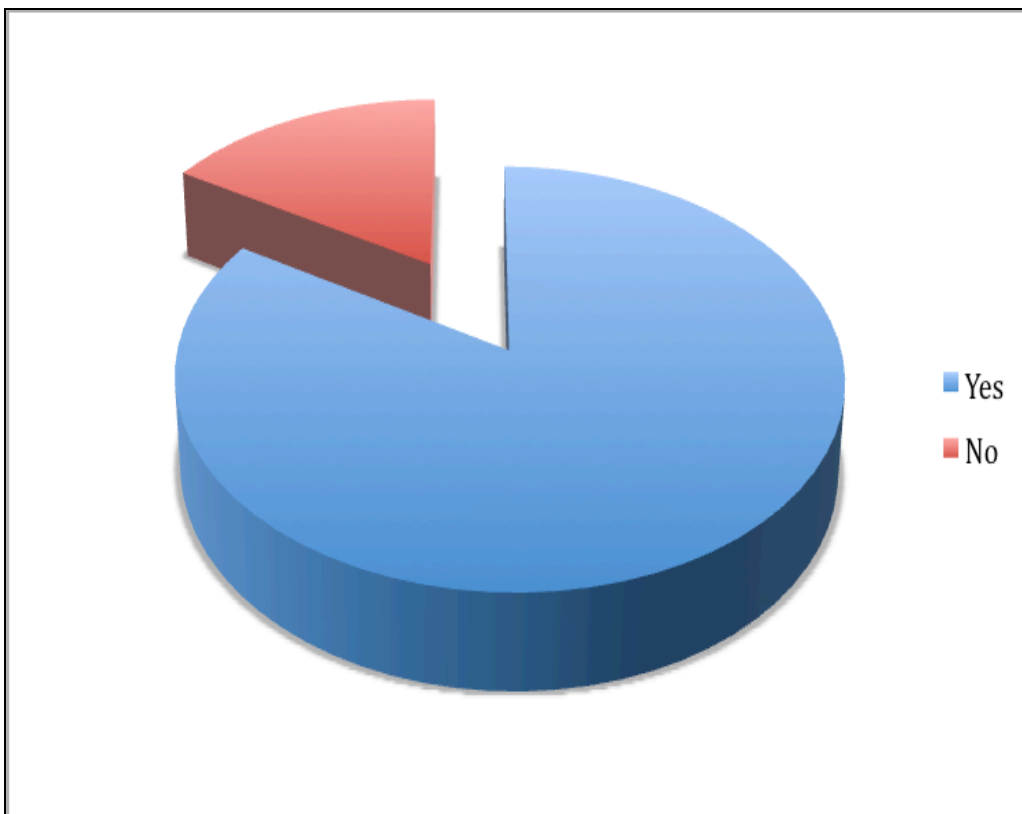
Table 29: Marketing effectiveness frequencies (Likert-scale and

dichotomous)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2504	61.98
No	1536	38.02
Total	**4040**	**100**

Figure 10: Marketing effectiveness percentages (Likert-scale and

dichotomous)
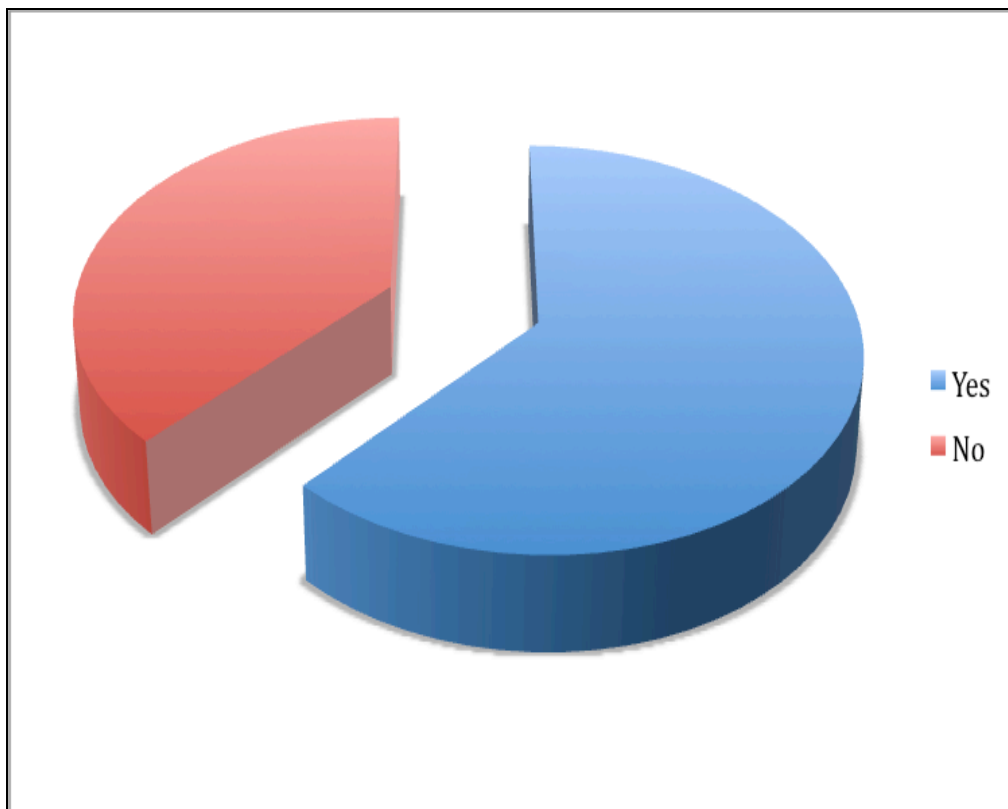
It is important to note that in the calculation of item means and standard deviations, "Yes" responses were still coded as 1, but as "No" responses indicated the absence of a particular variable, their coding was amended from 2 (as used in the questionnaire) to 0. This meant that all data, when converted to a

dichotomous state average, fell between the values of zero and one, where zero represented the respondents' level of agreement about the *absence* of a variable and one represented the respondents' level of agreement about the *presence* of a variable.

Table 30: **Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of all items as dichotomous questions**

	Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
QUADRANT 1: USER-FRIENDLINESS	Clear telephone number	214	0.990	0.096
	Clear mailing address	213	0.737	0.441
	Clear e-mail address	213	0.924	0.264
	Limited scrolling	214	0.878	0.327
	Home button on all pages	215	0.827	0.378
	Navigation tool on all pages	214	0.864	0.343
	Clear fax number	214	0.901	0.298
	Site map/index	213	0.779	0.415
	Search function	212	0.481	0.500
	Overall user-friendliness*	207	0.874	0.332
	ALL ITEMS (Quadrant 1)	215	0.826	0.171
QUADRANT 2: SITE ATTRACTIVENESS	Clear & readable text	214	0.887	0.316
	Clear hyperlinks	211	0.843	0.364
	Uncluttered pages	214	0.929	0.255
	Good quality images	213	0.901	0.298
	Effective use of space	209	0.803	0.398
	Images reinforce text	211	0.862	0.345
	Contrast between background & text	212	0.830	0.376
	Appealing background	212	0.716	0.451
	Effective use of colour	212	0.754	0.431
	Overall site attractiveness**	212	0.844	0.363
	ALL ITEMS (Quadrant 2)	214	0.835	0.240
QUADRANT 3: MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS	Lodge pictures	213	0.938	0.239
	Room pictures	214	0.911	0.285
	Rates available	213	0.830	0.375
	Emphasis on uniqueness of lodge	212	0.801	0.399
	Local activities listed	211	0.815	0.389
	Links to activities/attractions	213	0.591	0.492
	Special packages	214	0.490	0.501
	Hyperlinks	214	0.485	0.500
	Description of	209	0.531	0.500

	owner/innkeeper			
	Presence of logo	210	0.971	0.166
	Online reservation function	212	0.547	0.498
	Promotional offers	213	0.450	0.498
	Special target markets	214	0.556	0.498
	Calendar of events	214	0.261	0.440
	Testimonials	212	0.452	0.498
	Virtual tour	214	0.542	0.499
	Mission statement	214	0.457	0.499
	Awards information	212	0.476	0.500
	Overall marketing effectiveness***	212	0.669	0.471
	ALL ITEMS (Quadrant 3)	214	0.618	0.260
QUADRANT 4: TECHNICAL ASPECTS	Links****	17	0.623	0.299
	Load time****	17	0.811	0.179
	HTML format****	17	0.647	0.260
	Browser compatibility****	17	0.635	0.190
	Spelling****	17	0.952	0.112
	ALL ITEMS (Quadrant 4)	17	0.734	0.096
TOTAL BSC SCORE		215	0.728	0.185

* Four-point Likert scale responses (item 1.10) converted to dichotomous data

** Four-point Likert scale responses (item 2.10) converted to dichotomous data

*** Four-point Likert scale responses (item 3.19) converted to dichotomous data

**** 5-star rating converted to dichotomous data

6.5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS INVESTIGATED

As outlined in Chapter 1, the following **research questions** were tested in this study:

1. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *user-friendliness*?

2. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges perform in terms of *site attractiveness*?

3. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *marketing effectiveness*?

4. How well do the web sites of selected 5-star graded lodges fare in terms of *technical components*?

5. What implications do responses to the above-mentioned questions hold for developers of other tourism-related web sites, if any?

6.5.1 <u>User-friendliness of the sampled web sites</u>

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of user-friendliness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 82,7% and 17,3% respectively. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with user-friendliness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,87), it could be established that a high level of satisfaction was demonstrated among respondents regarding the overall user-friendliness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

6.5.2 <u>Site attractiveness of the sampled web sites</u>

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of site attractiveness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 83,8% and 16,2% respectively. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with site attractiveness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,84), it was established that a high level of satisfaction was demonstrated among respondents regarding the overall site attractiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

6.5.3 Marketing effectiveness of the sampled web sites

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of marketing effectiveness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 62% and 38% respectively, although at a level considerably lower than was recorded in the two preceding quadrants. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with marketing effectiveness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,61), it could be established that compared to the two previous quadrants, respondents exhibited only moderate levels of satisfaction regarding the overall marketing effectiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

6.5.4 Technical aspects of the sampled web sites

As only a single technical evaluation per lodge was performed by NetMechanic, multiple scores were not accumulated for variables in this quadrant, and hence, frequency tables could not be created. However, based on the high mean score (0,73) and very small standard deviation (0,09) recorded in this category, it would appear that the 5-star lodge web sites included in the sample performed very well in terms of the technical aspects evaluated by NetMechanic.

6.5.5 Implications of research findings for other tourism-related web sites

The quadrant with the lowest (positive) score overall was marketing effectiveness. Although most of the web sites examined as a part of this study were considered user-friendly and attractive by the evaluators, their performance in terms of marketing effectiveness was decidedly average in comparison. Specifically, the absence of a calender of events, promotional

offers, testimonials and a mission statement lowered the overall scores in this quadrant significantly.

As web sites are predominantly established for use as marketing communications tools, the relatively poor performance in this quadrant is perplexing. It implies that of the web sites sampled a noteworthy number fail in performing the marketing function for which they were created in the first place.

This information could convey valuable advice not only to the developers of 5-star lodge web sites, but to other tourism-related web site developers as well. In service industries, such as hospitality and tourism, the value of a well-designed web site should not be underestimated. As services are by their very nature intangible, a web site is often the only means a potential customer has to "interact" with the service product. Therefore, the content and presentation of information on such a web site could be critical factors in the customer's decision making process.

An attractive and user-friendly web site may impress a visitor at first glance, but if the subsequent search for relevant information is unsuccessful, this initial impression could be tarnished. First impressions of a web site are largely superficial and intended to attract the visitor's attention, but it is the inherent qualities "built into" the site through its marketing effectiveness and technical development that will keep the visitor browsing the site more thoroughly.

This notion is further supported by the fact that, second to marketing effectiveness, technical aspects as contained in quadrant 4 also received a lower score than those recorded for user-friendliness and site attractiveness. Tourism-related web site developers should therefore pay particular attention to maintaining the delicate balance between the elements of the BSC when their sites are conceptualised. Exceptional performance in one quadrant and poor performance in another are

ultimately counter-productive and diminish the web site's effectiveness as a whole.

6.6 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES INVESTIGATED

Considering the problem statement presented in section 1.3, the specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To assess the effectiveness of 5-star lodge web sites as marketing and communication tools.

2. To rank selected web sites according to their effectiveness based on the criteria of the balanced scorecard (see Chapter 5).

3. To determine the greatest opportunities and threats that 5-star lodge owners/managers face in respect of web site design and development (based on the best and worst performance factors identified in the balanced scorecard).

4. To assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of existing 5-star lodge web sites from the marketing, customer and technical perspectives.

5. To adapt and test a standardised instrument to objectively measure various marketing aspects of tourism-related web sites.

6. To provide a set of recommendations to tourism operators in the serviced accommodation sector to improve the design and marketing effectiveness of their web sites.

6.6.1 <u>The effectiveness of 5-star lodge web sites as marketing and communication tools</u>

This study attempted to evaluate a sample of 5-star lodge web sites in terms of the four quality dimensions of the Balanced Scorecard. To do this, performance in respect of user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects was assessed by a group of independent evaluators and the online service provider, NetMechanic. To calculate the overall web site effectiveness of the web sites included in the sample, the total scores across all categories had to be combined and averaged to produce an overall BSC score.

This score therefore reflects the overall web site effectiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites that formed part of the study. An overall mean score was obtained by adding all values across all quadrants of the instrument and dividing the total through the total number of responses. In doing so, a total mean score of 0,73 was reached, with a standard deviation of 0,19.

According to these figures, the web sites evaluated in this study proved to be effective marketing and communication tools, bearing in mind that a mean score of 0,73 veers more toward the highest possible mean score of 1 (which would indicate complete effectiveness) than toward the lowest possible score of 0 (which would indicate complete ineffectiveness).

6.6.2 <u>Opportunities and threats in terms of web site development and design</u>

Opportunities and threats toward the improvement of web site user-friendliness

Using the BSC methodology, the four "quadrants" or dimensions that together are believed to produce web site effectiveness should be equalised as far as possible for maximum effectiveness. This means that designers and developers could take advantage of great opportunities for improvement of their web sites if they knew where present web site designs fell short and improved upon those shortcomings in future. The present study attempted to address this need for information.

Figure 11 depicts the percentage of 5-star lodges investigated in this study, which utilised elements contributing to user-friendliness in their web sites. For other 5-star lodges embarking on the development of a web site, an improvement on elements in which this sample of lodges underperformed may be an opportunity, whereas a focus on too many of the factors that several of the lodges employed could be a threat in that visitors may not experience the lodge as unique or different from others.

Figure 11: Percentage of sampled web sites containing elements related

to user-friendliness
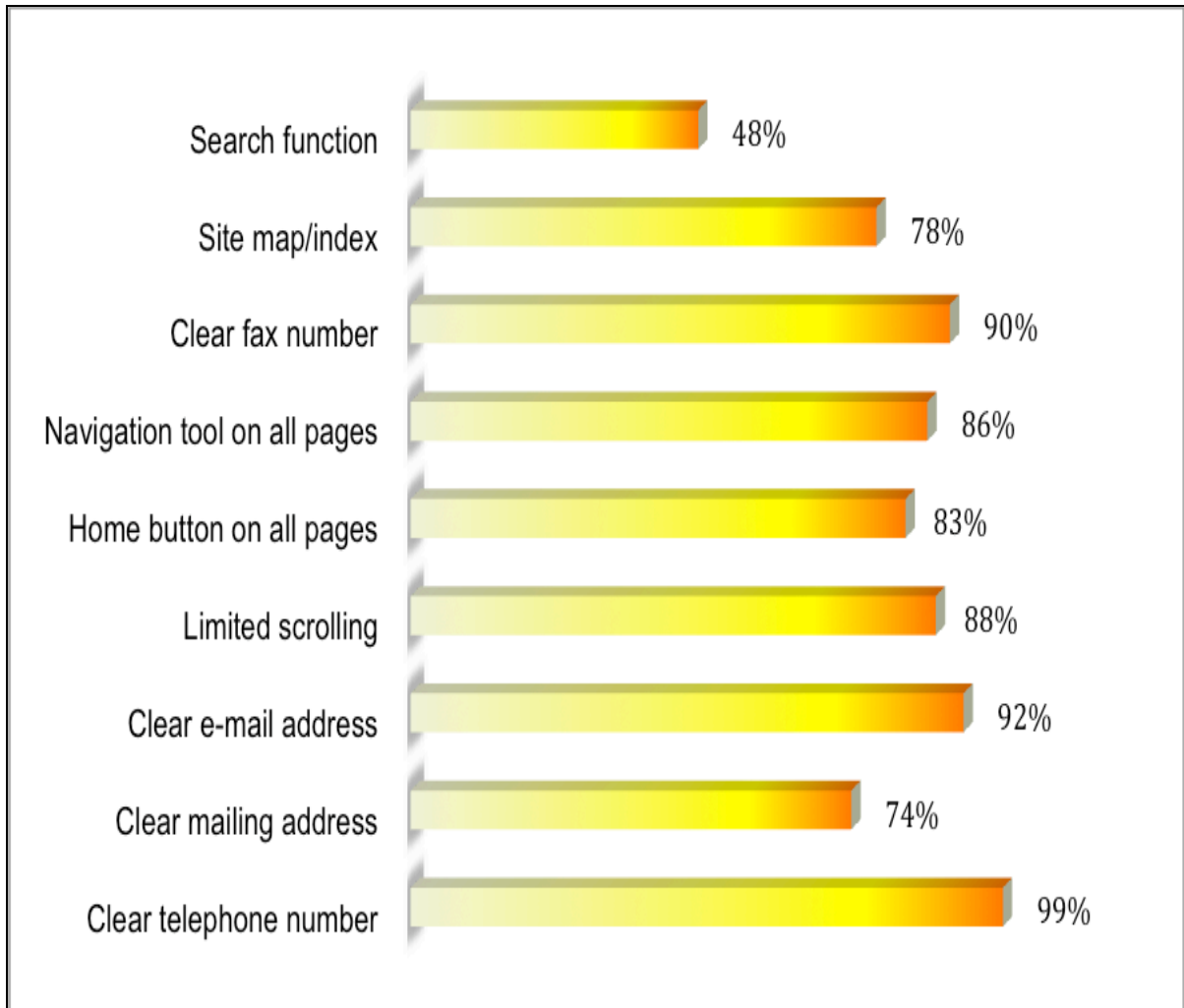
Based on this figure, it is apparent that more than half (51,89 %) of the lodge web sites evaluated lacked a search function on the site itself; this could be an opportunity in the design of other tourism-related web sites. Similarly, the inclusion of a site map or index could also contribute to making a 5-star lodge web site more effective. As many as 26,29 % of the lodges in this study did not post clear mailing addresses on their web sites, but this may be due to the fact that mail in the traditional sense of the word has largely been replaced by e-mail or fax correspondence as the preferred means of communication between potential visitors and a service provider.

Opportunities and threats toward the improvement of web site attractiveness

Based on the percentages in Figure 12 it is apparent that most of the lodge web sites included in the sample for this study made successful use of the tools at their disposal in order to make their web sites visually attractive. A possible opportunity for improvement, though, lay in the use of more appealing backgrounds or greater use of colours to complement the overall look and feel of the site. Homepages of a number of the sampled lodges are shown in figures 14 to 18.

Figure 12: Percentage of sampled web sites containing elements related to site attractiveness
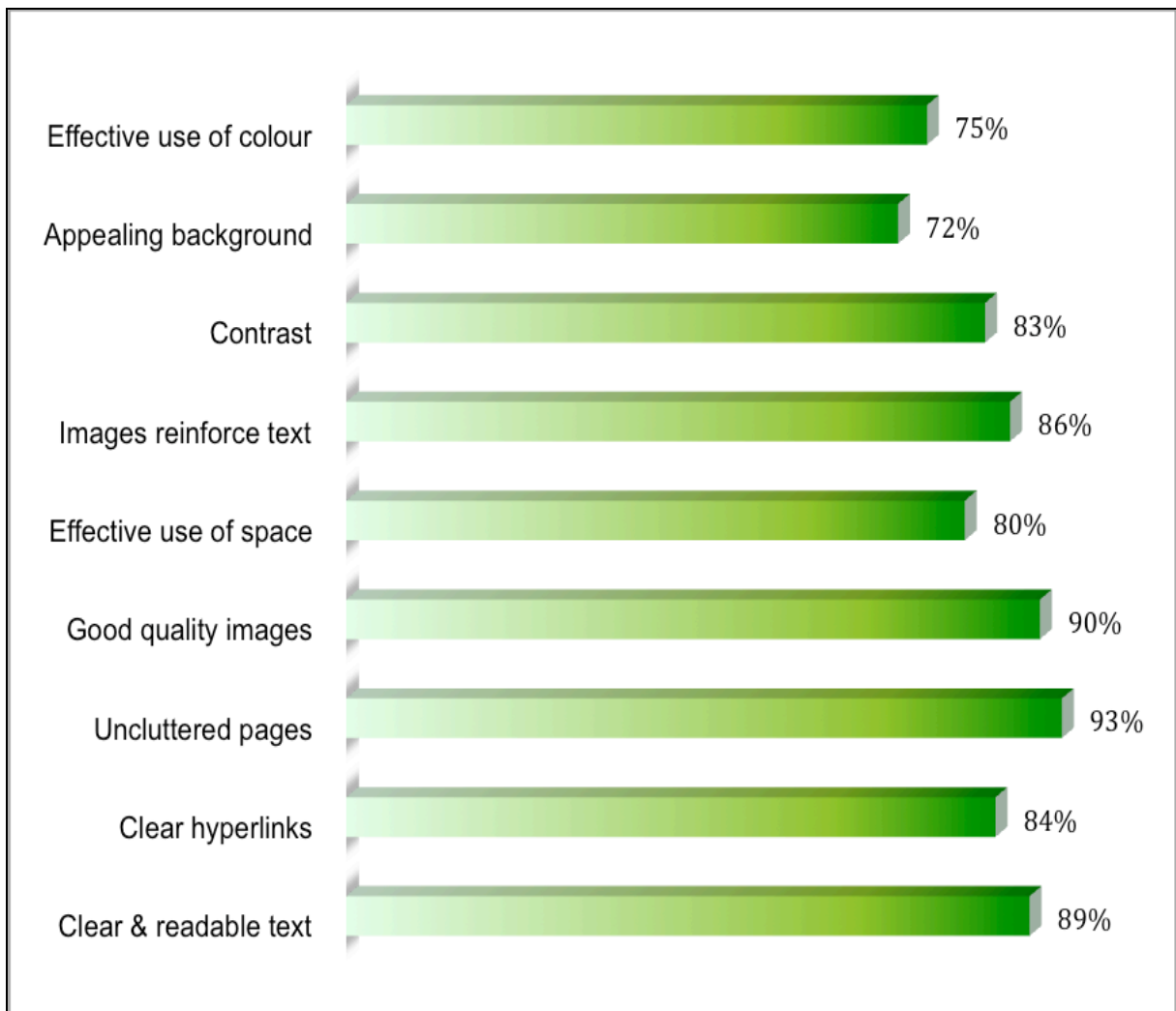
Opportunities for and threats toward the improvement of web site marketing effectiveness

Of the three quadrants of the BSC evaluated by the respondents in this study, marketing effectiveness was the section in which the sampled lodges performed most poorly. Therefore, weaknesses in the web sites were predominantly found in this quadrant, and consequently the greatest opportunies for improvements could be found here. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the various web sites will be detailed in the following section, and thus will only be touched upon here. At the time of data collection in July 2007, traditionally considered an "off-peak season" for tourism operators in South Africa, the researcher expected that more of the sampled lodges would be running special promotions during this time in order to attract visitors. However, as seen in Figure 13, only 45,07 % of the lodges sampled advertised special promotions on their web sites at the time of data collection. This presents an opportunity to 5-star lodges, since promotions displayed on their web sites may attract repeat visits and may give them an advantage over web sites that do not advertise such promotions.

Figure 13: Percentage of sampled web sites containing elements related to marketing effectiveness

Element	Percentage
Awards information	48%
Mission statement	46%
Virtual tour	54%
Testimonials	45%
Calendar of events	26%
Special markets	56%
Promotional offers	45%
Online reservation	55%
Presence of logo	97%
Description of owner	53%
Hyperlinks	49%
Special packages	49%
Links to attractions	59%
Local activities listed	82%
Uniqueness	80%
Rates available	83%
Room pictures	91%
Lodge pictures	94%

Most of the web sites did not contain a calender of events taking place either at the lodge itself or in the immediate vicinity, although several are located in areas where local events are otherwise well-publicised. In the same vein, links to area attractions or activities could also prove useful although only 59,19 % of the sampled web sites contained such links.

Furthermore, the web sites failed to communicate information about package deals available and whether any guests with special needs (i.e. disabled guests, guests with children, policy surrounding pets etc.) may be accommodated at the facility.

Arguably the greatest opportunity for web sites like these is the implementation of an online-reservation system. Approximately half of the lodges in this sample did not have online reservation systems in place at the time of data collection, and if one considers that their clientele is predominantly based overseas and that the upcoming Soccer World Cup in 2010 is looming ever closer, enabling guests to make bookings online is crucial. This goes hand in hand with visuals of the lodge available on the web site – an area in which most lodges performed well – but could be enhanced and aided by the addition of a "virtual tour" feature that would supplement static images of the lodge with three-dimensional visuals or guest rooms and other facilities.

6.6.3 Strengths and weaknessness of sampled 5-star lodge web sites

Strengths and weaknesses in terms of user-friendliness

Based on the means scores calculated per item and depicted in Table 30, it is apparent that the sampled lodges performed best in this category overall. It could thus be asserted that of the four quadrants incorporated into the BSC, the greatest strength 5-star lodge web sites possess is their user-friendliness. To illustrate this point, figure 14 shows the homepage of Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa. This was the lodge ranked highest in terms of user-friendliness in the present study.

According to the respondents in this study, this web site and others that performed well in terms of user-friendliness, did so because they all contained, at the very least, clear contact details either on the homepage or by means of a direct link from the homepage.

Figure 14: Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa home page
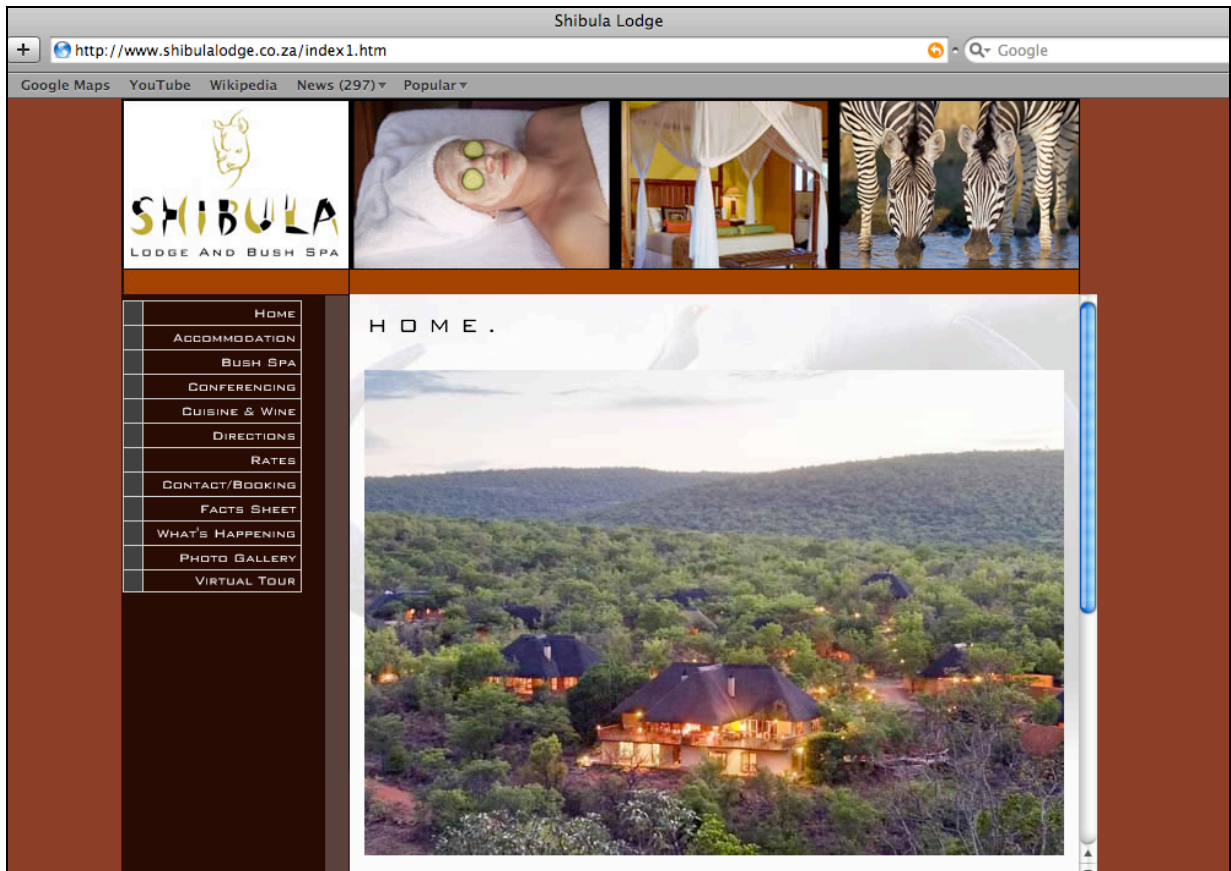
Source: Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa (2009).

Contact details include all the means a potential visitor could use to communicate with the lodge, including telephone, e-mail and fax correspondence. For all three these elements, total mean scores in excess of 0,9 were recorded, indicating a presence of these details on virtually all of the lodges sampled. A possible weakness, however, can be seen in the relatively low mean score (0,74) recorded for the presence of clear mailing addresses on the sampled web sites. Nonetheless, when one considers that faster means of communication have all but replaced traditional mail, this lower score is not completely unexpected.

The lowest mean score for this quadrant, and therefore almost certainly a weakness most of the lodges revealed, was the lack of a search function on the sites. A search function means an area is set aside on the homepage, where

visitors to the web site may enter specific keywords on the homepage in order to be directed to the relevant information they require immediatedly.

This eliminates the need to search the entire site for single pieces of information. With a mean score of 0,48, this was by far the item that most lodges failed to incorporate into their web sites. Similarly, a site map or index was not available on all the lodge web sites, making navigation on such sites more difficult than on others.

Figure 15: Amakhosi Safari Lodge home page
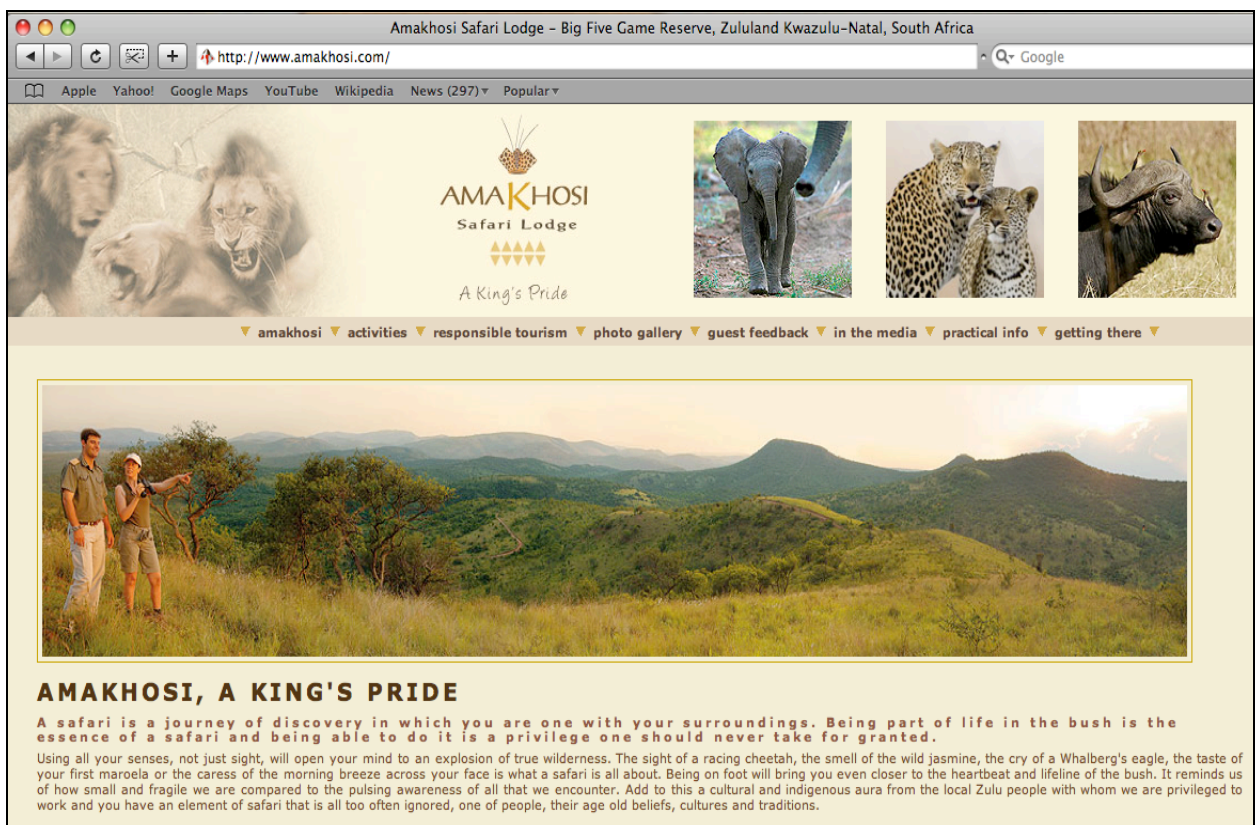
Source: Amakhosi Safari Lodge (2009).

Strengths and weaknesses in terms of site attractiveness

In terms of site attractiveness, mean scores for all items tested tended to be consistent instead of varying greatly. The overall mean score for this quadrant was 0,83, second only to that of user-friendliness. There were no aspects of site

attractiveness in which the lodges performed particularly poorly, although in the use of appealing backgrounds and the effective use of colour the mean scores were slightly lower than the average at 0,72 and 0,75 respectively. Respondents rated uncluttered pages and good-quality images as being the components of site attractiveness that most of the sampled lodges incorporated into their web sites. This is illustrated clearly in the ranking of Tuningi Safari Lodge as the most attractive web site overall. The design of the homepage (figure 16) is indeed simple and striking.

Figure 16: Tuningi Safari Lodge home page
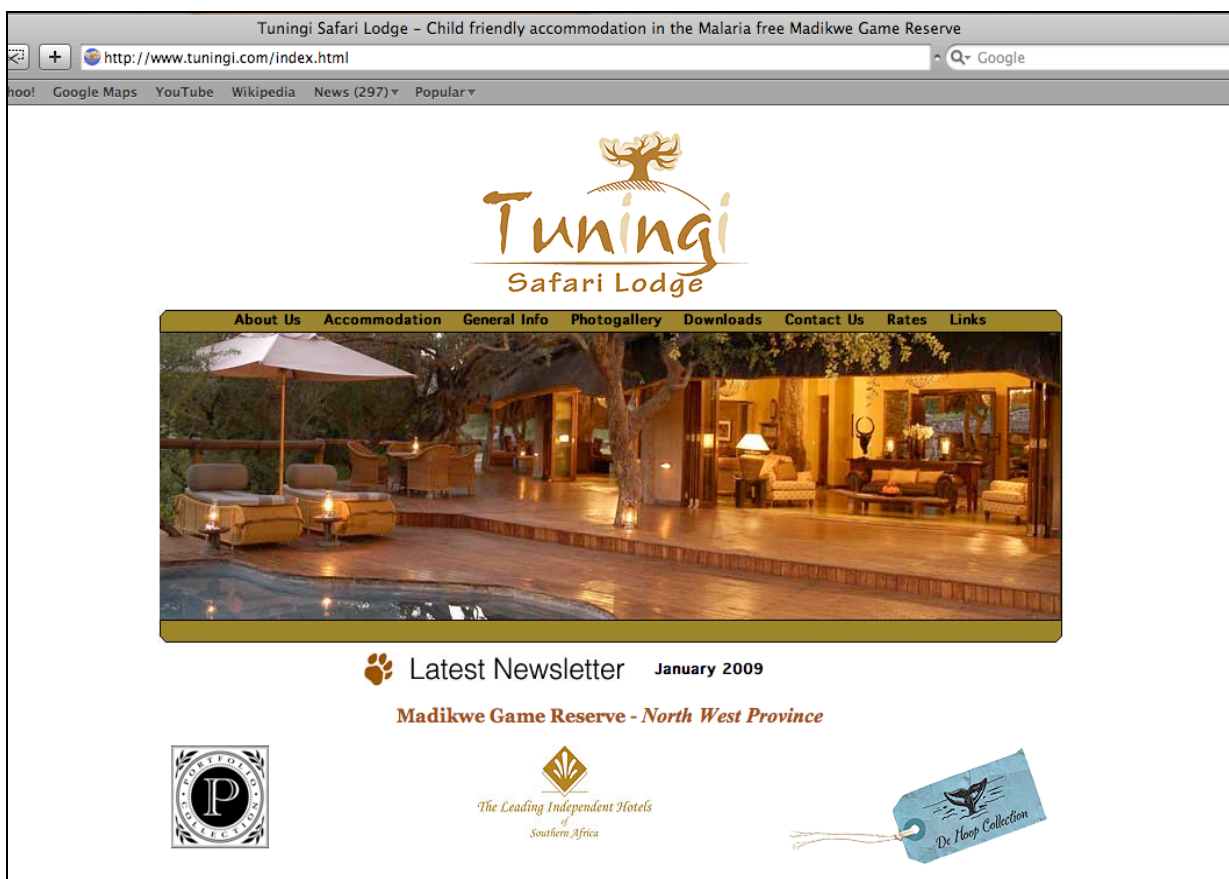
Source: Tuningi Safari Lodge (2009).

Strengths and weaknesses in terms of marketing effectiveness

Of the three categories tested by the respondents in this study, it was marketing effectiveness in which the sampled web sites performed most poorly. Of the 18

items tested, only six obtained a mean score higher than 0,8. All other items recorded scores lay between 0,26 and 0,59. The six items in which most lodges performed relatively well, in other words, elements that were included in most of the web sites sampled, were the presence of lodge pictures, presence of room pictures, an emphasis on the uniqueness of the lodge, presence of a logo, listings of local activities and attractions. However, in terms of items that one would consider standard in web sites of 5-star establishments like an online reservation function or a virtual tour function, the lodges performed particularly poorly with mean scores of 0,55 and 0,54 respectively. The item with the lowest mean score, and thus the item that respondents were missing from most of the web sites they examined, was the presence of a calender of events at the lodge or in the vicinity. The mean score for this item was 0,26.

Figure 17: Kuname River Lodge home page
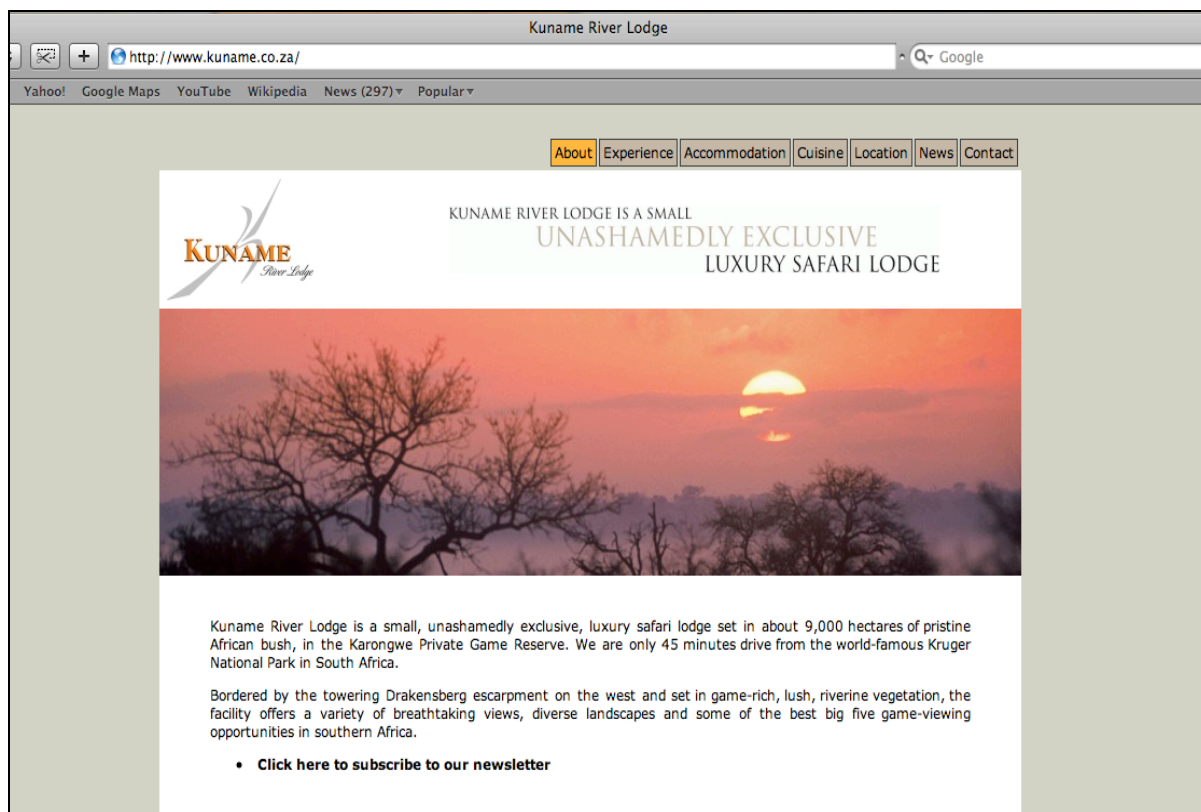
Source: Kuname River Lodge (2009).

Strengths and weaknesses in terms of technical aspects

Based on the mean scores calculated by NetMechanic in this category, the sampled lodges performed at satisfactory levels in terms of links, HTML format and browser compatibiltiy. The highest mean scores were recorded for loading times, which means that all the lodge web sites uploaded fast enough to avoid frustration, and the absence of spelling errors, at 0,81 and 0,95 respectively. It is also interesting to note that, although some spelling errors were made on some of the web sites, NetMechanic is an American-based service and therefore classified some indiginous African names (like Amakhosi, Hlosi, Shibula and Kuname) as spelling errors, when clearly they are not. Had this been taken into account when the analysis was done, the lodges' overall mean score would arguably have been higher in this quadrant.

The lodges that were rated best and worst respectively in terms of technical aspects were Budmarsh Lodge and Fairways Golf Lodge, whose web site – ironically – could not be accessed by the researcher at the time this chapter was being completed.

Figure 18: Budmarsh Lodge home page
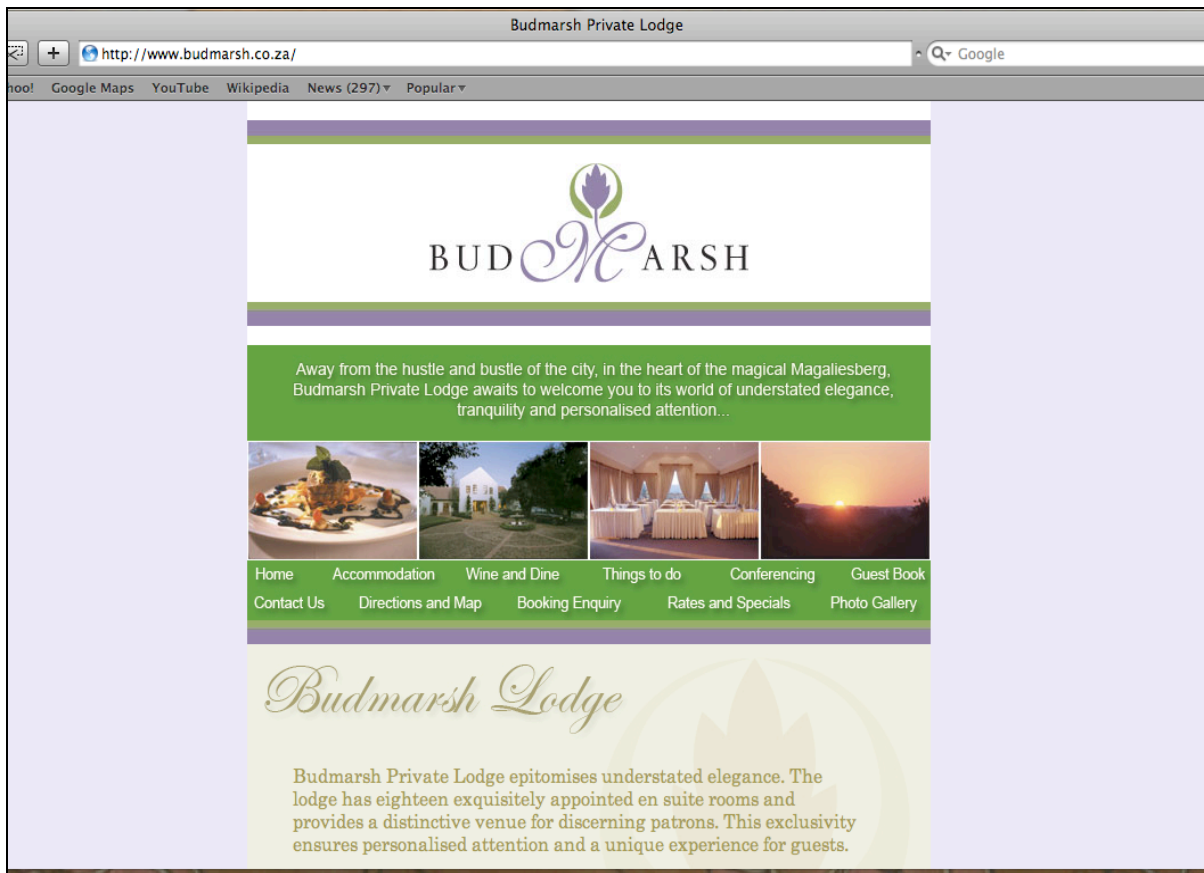
Source: Budmarsh Lodge (2009).

6.6.4 The adaptation and testing of the BSC instrument in the present study

The modified BSC approach was employed in the present study. The term "modified" refers to the fact that the original BSC had already been modified once by the original set of authors involved in the study upon which the present study was based.

The measurement instrument in the Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) study which was used as the starting point for the current study, was a questionnaire containing three sets of dichotomous questions that measured user-friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness of a sample of US bed-and-breakfast establishments

(B&Bs). Students in the marketing field were used as respondents/raters in the Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) study. Technical aspects were evaluted by NetMechanic.

In the study, a population consisting of all B&Bs registered as members of the Indiana Bed and Breakfast Association (IBBA) was selected as target population. At the time, there were 70 B&Bs in this population, 54 of which had active web sites. From the 54 properties with their own web sites, a random sample of 20 properties was selected for evaluation (Kline *et al*., 2004:256). Nine students were used as raters/evaluators of the selected B&B web sites.

Similarly, the present study identified a population of 5-star South African lodges as the target population for the research. These lodges were identified based on their star-grading status awarded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA). Lodges rather than B&Bs were chosen because lodges are a form of accommodation rather unique to South Africa as a tourism destination, at least compared to B&Bs, which are a global phenomenon. At the time of sample selection, 97 lodges enjoyed 5-star status. Lodges were not checked at this point for active web sites. Instead a sample of 20 lodges was drawn, in tandem with the sample size of the original study. The 20 lodges that formed part of the primary sample were then checked for active web sites, and three of the lodges were found not to have web sites of their own. These three lodges were then eliminated from the sample and not replaced, in an effort to avoid the the introduction of any form of bias on the part of the researcher.

A greater number of respondents were used in the present study than in the original Kline *et al*. (2004:253-267) study. As the study had a qualitative focus, it was thought that more detailed information could be obtained from a larger pool of evaluators. To this effect all 13 members of the call-centre staff at the AA's Travel and Tourism division were selected for participation in the study. As a pilot instrument in the current study, a

first version of the modified BSC questionnaire was developed, the sole difference being the replacement of the word "B&Bs" with "lodges". This pilot instrument was then tested by using it to evaluate ten 5-star lodge web sites (of lodges not forming part of the sample tested in the study itself). From this exercise, the questionnaire was modified again by, amongst other minor modifications, changing the sequence of items to facilitate a more logical flow. More instructions to evaluators were also incorporated than had been present in the original instrument.

The original measuring instrument had been developed in much the same way, and great care was taken in the present study to observe the actions of the original researchers. The goal of the current study was not to reinvent the wheel, as it were, and by not straying too far from the methods of the original researchers, it was believed that the same levels of content validity reached in the original study could be ensured.

6.6.5 <u>Recommendations towards the improvement of webiste design and marketing efficiency</u>

Recommendations toward improving web site design and subsequent improvements in marketing effectiveness are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. From the results of the research done in this study, it is clear that the sampled South African 5-star lodge web sites are not utilising their web sites to their full potential as marketing tools. It would appear that lodge owners or managers are under the impression that *having* a web presence is more important than the quality of its development and design *per se*. This mindset needs to be reconsidered if 5-star lodge web sites are to perform optimally as the effective marketing tools they were created to be.

Greater attention to the functionality and features of a web site would make it more informative and useful to a web visitor, instead of merely being a virtual "brochure" that contains very little valuable detail. Too great a focus is directed towards making web sites attractive and user-friendly, and too little

efforts aimed at making these web sites technically sound and effective in terms of the marketing functions they are expected to perform. Although attractiveness and user-friendliness are also important, in terms of the BSC they account for only 50 % of a web site's effectiveness. A greater balance against the remaining two components – marketing effectiveness and technical aspects – is needed for total web site effectiveness.

6.7 OVERALL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR THE RESEARCH PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

The central aim of this study was to determine what "web site effectiveness" encompasses within a tourism context. To this end, a measurement instrument that would provide comprehensive and multi-dimensional information, the Balanced Scorecard, was selected and adapted to test the web site effectiveness of a sample of 5-star South African lodges. Web site effectiveness was evaluated by examining the selected web sites' user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects (see section 1.3).

The findings of this study indicated that only three of the four above-mentioned dimensions or "quadrants" were well-represented in the selected sample of web sites. Where most sites delivered a satisfactory combination of attractive visuals and user-friendly features (made possible in part by professional technical development) the 5-star lodge web sites sampled consistently underperformed in the area of marketing effectiveness. The majority of tools identified in the BSC as contributors to marketing effectiveness were not frequently employed by the web sites examined.

Taking the above into account, it is concluded that South African 5-star lodges do not utilise their web sites optimally as marketing and communication tools, based on the evident imbalance encountered between the quadrants. It became evident that some of the sampled lodges neglected marketing effectiveness in favour of site attractiveness or user-friendliness and in doing so compromised the value of

their web sites as successful marketing tools to communicate with their target audiences.

6.8 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RANKING OF SAMPLED LODGES BASED ON BSC SCORES

This research determined which 5-star lodge sampled had the best web site, based on a final ranking that gives equal weight to the four quadrants of the BSC. The three quadrants rated by all the evaluators were analysed to calculate the mean and standard deviation recorded for each item, with regard to a specific lodge. In doing so, it was possible to rank the lodge web sites from best to worst or, in other words, from the web site with the highest overall mean score to the web site with the lowest overall mean score. As no questions in the questionnaire had to be reverse-scored, calculating the mean to each category was relatively simple. All "YES" responses = 1 and all "NO" responses = 0. Thus, to calculate the mean, the number of YES responses for a specific item and for a specific lodge were summed and then divided by the total number of responses to that item, in order to determine whether answers were predominantly positive or negative. As the highest possible score a web site could obtain for each item was one, any scores lower than 0,5 could be deemed negative or below average.

With regard to technical aspects, the original study erred in that the NetMechanic scores were converted to a dichotomous scale, where one or two stars equalled a zero, and three or four stars equaled a one. However, NetMechanic works on a 5-star scale, which would imply that either no establishment in that study obtained a score of five, or that the researchers completely disregarded these scores in their conversion to a dichotomous scale. This would have resulted in flawed overall scores, and incorrect interpretations based on faulty information. This study attempted to correct some of the errors and improve upon some of the techniques present in the original study, in order to determine whether the correct procedures and calculations would make a difference to the final results obtained.

Quadrant and overall means per lodge were calculated in order to rank lodge web sites according to their performance on each of the four aspects of the BSC.

Table 31: Ranked lodge mean and standard deviation based on user-friendliness (all items)

Lodge no.	Rank	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
13	1	11	0.9454545	0.0687552
12	2	13	0.9145299	0.080301
9	3	13	0.9059829	0.0976699
17	4	13	0.9	0.1
5	5	13	0.8615385	0.1556624
3	6	13	0.8461538	0.1126601
2	7	12	0.8398148	0.1173461
6	8	13	0.8230769	0.1640825
7	9	13	0.8230769	0.169085
11	10	13	0.8230769	0.183275
14	11	13	0.8205128	0.1613246
8	12	13	0.8068376	0.1749508
10	13	12	0.775	0.2179449
4	14	13	0.7538462	0.1808101
16	15	13	0.7538462	0.2295481
15	16	13	0.7307692	0.2626297
1	17	11	0.7298701	0.2058784

Table 32: Ranked lodge mean and standard deviation based on site attractiveness (all items)

Lodge no.	Rank	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
16	1	13	0.9384615	0.0767948
7	2	13	0.9384615	0.1325296
3	3	13	0.9269231	0.1535895
13	4	11	0.9181818	0.2713602
4	5	13	0.9	0.2041241
14	6	13	0.8880342	0.1905408
17	7	13	0.8649573	0.2365669
5	8	13	0.8512821	0.192265
12	9	13	0.8384615	0.2844247
6	10	13	0.8153846	0.2303843
11	11	13	0.8	0.2915476
2	12	12	0.7888889	0.2328277
9	13	13	0.7615385	0.2785033
1	14	10	0.76	0.275681
10	15	12	0.75	0.2938769
8	16	13	0.7478632	0.2530629
15	17	13	0.6923077	0.3148056

Table 33: Ranked lodge mean and standard deviation based on marketing effectiveness (all items)

Lodge no.	Rank	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
13	1	11	0.7607656	0.1735464
6	2	13	0.7597841	0.2133396
3	3	13	0.7417341	0.1836967
12	4	13	0.7199333	0.2153006
11	5	13	0.7125506	0.2697554
16	6	13	0.7008547	0.1991898
14	7	13	0.6356275	0.266177
17	8	13	0.6165092	0.258343
7	9	13	0.5967161	0.2612026
15	10	13	0.5910931	0.2736115
10	11	12	0.585039	0.331309
1	12	10	0.5815789	0.2567794
2	13	12	0.5561404	0.2792166
4	14	13	0.5364372	0.241556
9	15	13	0.4826811	0.269848
5	16	13	0.4756423	0.2347199
8	17	13	0.4700855	0.2928022

Table 34: Ranked lodge mean based on technical aspects (all items)

Lodge	Rank	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	3	1	0.84	-
10	3	1	0.84	-
13	3	1	0.84	-
15	3	1	0.84	-
16	3	1	0.84	-
3	8	1	0.76	-
7	8	1	0.76	-
8	8	1	0.76	-
9	8	1	0.76	-
11	8	1	0.76	-
4	11.5	1	0.72	-
17	11.5	1	0.72	-
14	13	1	0.68	-
6	14	1	0.64	-
12	15	1	0.6	-
1	16.5	1	0.56	-
5	16.5	1	0.56	-

Table 35: Overall ranked lodge means and standard deviations based on combined data from all four quadrants

Lodge no.	Rank	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
13	1	4	0.866100475	0.083239006
3	2	4	0.81870275	0.085313911
16	3	4	0.8082906	0.104013804
7	4	4	0.779563625	0.142545773
17	5	4	0.775366625	0.131480178
11	6	4	0.773906875	0.048499265
12	7	4	0.768231175	0.137804243
6	8	4	0.7595614	0.084548657
2	9	4	0.756211025	0.135531401
14	10	4	0.756043625	0.118124881
10	11	4	0.73750975	0.108494403
4	12	4	0.72757085	0.149456343
9	13	4	0.727550625	0.177019113
15	14	4	0.7135425	0.102847834
8	15	4	0.696196575	0.152870285
5	16	4	0.687115725	0.198539098
1	17	4	0.65786225	0.101675005

Table 36: Final web site ratings per lodge (in ascending order)

Lodge number	Lodge name	Quad 1 rank	Quad 2 rank	Quad 3 rank	Quad 4 rank	Overall rank
13	Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa	1	4	1	3	1
3	Camp Jabulani	6	3	3	8	2
16	Tuningi Safari Lodge	15	1	6	3	3
7	Ivory Tree Guest House	9	2	9	8	4
17	Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa	4	7	8	11.5	5
11	Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence	10	11	5	8	6
12	Sanbona Wildlife Reserve – Tilney Manor	2	9	4	15	7
6	Hlosi Game Lodge	8	10	2	14	8
2	Budmarsh Private Lodge	7	12	13	3	9
14	Thakadu River Camp	11	6	7	13	10
10	Morokuru Lodge	13	15	11	3	11
4	Dunkeld Country Estate	14	5	14	11.5	12
9	Matumi Golf Lodge	3	13	15	8	13
15	Timamoon Lodge	16	17	10	3	14
8	Kunami River Lodge	12	16	17	8	15
5	Fairways Golf Lodge	5	8	16	16.5	16
1	Amakhosi Lodge	17	14	12	16.5	17

When lodge rankings per quadrant were compared to overall lodge rankings, it was apparent that in the case of the two lodges with the higest overall rankings, at least two out of the four quadrant rankings corresponded with the overall ranking. (Rankings were determined by sorting the lodge web

sites according to their mean scores. The lodge with the highest mean score in any given category was ranked first and so forth.)

For the highest rated lodge overall, Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa, the two corresponding quadrants were user-friendliness and marketing effectiveness, indicating that efforts to improve the web site should be geared towards site attractiveness (the only quadrant where this lodge was not the top performer). In the case of the lodge ranked second overall, Camp Jabulani, the two corresponding quadrants were site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness, which would mean that a potential weakness in the site's design lay in it's user-friendliness or lack thereof.

Apart from the two afore-mentioned lodges, only for six others did the overall ratings correspond with at least one other quadrant rating. The remaining nine lodges' overall rankings did not correspond with any quadrant rankings. This signals great discrepancies between the quality of the web sites' attractiveness, user-friendliness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. The lodges with the lowest rankings, therefore, did not necessarily perform consistenly poorly over all the quadrants but instead tended to perform very well in certain quadrants and particularly poorly in others. So poorly, in fact, that their overall rankings were influenced dramatically. This would seem to indicate that a lapse in only one of the categories can seriously hamper the overall effectiveness of a 5-star lodge web site.

Hence the desirability of *balance* in the Balanced Scorecard – performance in all of the quadrants should be balanced to produce an acceptable overall rating. Matumi Golf Lodge, for example, whilst performing extremely well in terms of user-friendliness (it was ranked third in this quadrant) was ranked 13th and 15th in terms of site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness – reducing its overall ranking to 13th place. Similarly, Fairways Golf Lodge performed relatively well in terms of its user-friendliness and attractiveness (ranking fifth and eigth respectively), only to be ranked 16th in terms of both marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. This lodge web site ended up

being one of the two lowest-ranked web sites in the study. Another extreme example is that of Tuningi Safari Lodge, ranked 15th in terms of user-friendliness, but first in terms of site attractiveness. This apparent imbalance caused Tuningi's web site to drop from being a frontrunner in the rankings to third place overall. As a point of interest, the homepages of all the lodge web sites forming part of this study are attached to this document in Appendix D.

6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the empirical findings and associated conclusions of the current study. The main and/or most revealing findings presented in this chapter are summarised below.

6.9.1 <u>The main findings and conclusions for the overall research problem investigated</u>

The findings of this study indicated that only three of the four above-mentioned dimensions or "quadrants" were well-represented in the selected sample of web sites. Where most sites delivered a satisfactory combination of attractive visuals and user-friendly features (made possible in part by professional technical development), the 5-star lodge web sites sampled consistently underperformed in the area of marketing effectiveness. The majority of tools identified in the BSC as contributors to marketing effectiveness were not frequently employed by the web sites examined.

Taking the above into account, it is concluded that South African 5-star lodges do not utilise their web sites optimally as marketing and communication tools, based on the evident imbalance encountered between the quadrants. It became evident that some of the sampled lodges neglected marketing effectiveness in favour of site attractiveness or user-friendliness and in doing so compromised the value of

their web sites as successful marketing tools to communicate with their target audiences.

This study attempted to evaluate how effective a sample of 5-star lodge web sites are in terms of the four quality dimensions of the Balanced Scorecard. To do this, performance in user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects was assessed by a group of independent evaluators and the online service provider, NetMechanic. To calculate overall web site effectiveness of the web sites included in the sample the total scores across all categories had to be combined and averaged to produce an overall BSC score. This score therefore reflects the overall web site effectiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites that formed part of the study. An overall mean score was obtained by adding all values across all quadrants of the instrument and dividing the total through the total number of responses. In doing so, a total mean score of 0,73 was reached, with a standard deviation of 0.19. A mean score of 0.73 veers more toward the highest possible mean score of 1 (which would indicate complete effectiveness) than toward the lowest possible score of 0 (which would indicate complete ineffectiveness), and therefore this conclusion was drawn. According to these figures, the web sites evaluated in this study proved to be effective marketing and communication tools.

6.9.2 <u>A summary of the findings and conclusions for the BSC quadrants investigated</u>

Summarised findings and conclusions for quadrant 1: user-friendliness

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of user-friendliness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 82,7 % and 17,3 % respectively. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with user-friendliness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,87), it was established that a high level of satisfaction existed among respondents regarding the overall user-friendliness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

Summarised findings and conclusions for quadrant 2: site attractiveness

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of site attractiveness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 83,8 % and 16,2 % respectively. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with site attractiveness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,84), it was established that a high level of satisfaction existed among respondents regarding the overall site attractiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

Summarised findings and conclusions for quadrant 3: marketing effectiveness

Based on the frequency tables in section 6.4, it is evident that the number of "yes" responses in terms of marketing effectiveness is greater than the number of "no" responses at 62% and 38% respectively, although at a level considerably lower than was recorded for the two preceding quadrants. This indicates that more respondents found the variables associated with marketing effectiveness to be present than absent.

By examining the mean score for this quadrant (0,61), it was established that compared to the two previous quadrants, respondents exhibited only moderate levels of satisfaction regarding the overall marketing effectiveness of the 5-star lodge web sites sampled.

Summarised findings and conclusions for quadrant 4: technical aspects

Since only a single technical evaluation per lodge was performed by NetMechanic, multiple scores were not accumulated for variables in this quadrant, and hence, frequency tables could not be created. However,

based on the high mean score (0,73) and very small standard deviation (0,09) recorded in this category, it would appear that the 5-star lodge web sites included in the sample performed very well in terms of the technical aspects evaluated by NetMechanic.

6.9.3 The main findings and conclusions surrounding the rankings of sampled lodge web sites

This research determined which 5-star lodge sampled had the best web site, based on a final ranking that gives equal weight to the four quadrants of the BSC. The three quadrants rated by all the evaluators were analysed to calculate the mean and standard deviation recorded for each item, with regard to each lodge. In doing so, it was possible to rank the lodge web sites from best to worst or, in other words, from the web site with the highest overall mean score to the web site with the lowest overall mean score. As no questions in the questionnaire had to be reverse-scored, calculating the mean to each category was relatively simple. All "YES" responses = 1 and all "NO" responses = 0. Thus, to calculate the mean, the number of YES responses to a specific item and based on a specific lodge were summed and then divided by the total number of responses to that item, in order to determine whether answers were predominantly positive or negative. As the highest possible score a web site could obtain for each item was one, any scores lower than 0,5 could be deemed negative or below average.

With regard to technical aspects, the original study erred in that the NetMechanic scores were converted to a dichotomous scale, where one or two stars equalled a zero, and three or four stars equalled a one. However, NetMechanic works on a 5-star scale, which would imply that either no establishment in that study obtained a score of five, or that the researchers completely disregarded these scores in their conversion to a dichotomous scale. This would have resulted in flawed overall scores, and incorrect interpretations based on faulty information.

This study attempted to correct some of the errors and improve upon some of the techniques present in the original study, in order to determine whether the correct

procedures and calculations would make a difference to the final results obtained.

Quadrant and overall means per lodge were calculated in order to rank lodge web sites according to their performance on each of the four aspects of the BSC.

When lodge ranking per quadrant were compared to overall lodge rankings, it was apparent that in the case of the two lodges with the higest overall rankings, at least two out of the four quadrant rankings corresponded with the overall ranking.

For the highest rated lodge overall, Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa, the two corresponding quadrants were user-friendliness and marketing effectiveness, indicating that efforts to improve the web site should be geared towards site attractiveness (the only quadrant where this lodge was not the top performer). In the case of the lodge ranked second overall, Camp Jabulani, the two corresponding quadrants were site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness, which would mean that a potential weakness in the site's design lay in its user-friendliness or lack thereof.

Apart from the two afore-mentioned lodges, only six others showed an overall rating that corresponded with at least one other quadrant rating. The remaining nine lodges' overall rankings did not correspond with any quadrant rankings. This signals great discrepancies between the quality of the web sites' attractiveness, user-friendliness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. The lodges with the lowest rankings, therefore, did not necessarily perform consistenly poorly over all the quadrants but instead tended to perform very well in certain quadrants and particularly poorly in others. So poorly, in fact, that their overall rankings were influenced dramatically. This would seem to indicate that a lapse in only one of the categories can diminish the overall effectiveness of a 5-star lodge web site substantially. Hence the need for *balance* in the Balanced Scorecard – performance in all of the quadrants should be balanced to produce an acceptable overall rating.

Matumi Golf Lodge, for example, whilst performing extremely well in terms of user-friendliness (ranked third in this quadrant) was ranked 13th and 15th in terms of site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness – reducing it's overall ranking to 13th place. Similarly, Fourways Golf Lodge performed relatively well in terms of its user-friendliness and attractiveness (ranking fifth and eigth respectively) only to be ranked 16th in terms of both marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. This lodge web site ended up being one of the two lowest ranked web sites in the study.

Results like these made the researcher question whether South African lodge owners, managers or marketers have a sufficiently clear purpose in mind when it comes to creating and launching a web site. Based on the lopsided scores awarded the selected sites for site attractiveness or user-friendliness when compared to marketing effectiveness, it would appear that many South African 5-star lodges feel compelled to have a web site without really understanding *why.* And if this is indeed the case, does that not defeat the purpose of having a web site entirely? Merely "having" a web site without utilising it to its full potential in no way benefits the organisation.

If one had to extract a core truth from all the facts and figures, it would be this: for the most part, the 5-star lodge web sites tested in this study appeared to have been created with aesthetics and ease of use in mind, instead of being seen as a valuable and powerful weapon in the lodge's marketing arsenal. Web sites that "work" are those that succeed in generating business for the organisation, and in order to do this they cannot just exhibit the organisation's products (or in this case, service product) they have to actively *sell* those products. Only then does mere *attractiveness* become hightened *effectiveness*.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers managerial implications based on the findings and conclusions of the present study. Furthermore, the chapter makes a number of recommendations for future research, after highlighting the key limitations of this study.

7.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This section provides recommendations for the owners, managers and/or marketers of the star-graded lodges investigated in this study. The literature review conducted in previous chapters supports the notion that all of the dimensions of the BSC methodology are necessary and beneficial to tourism firms. Therefore, the main recommendation concerning this study is that South African 5-star lodge managers should include as many of the items identified in the research questionnaire for this study in the web sites of their tourism firms.

Any 5-star lodge innkeeper can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his or her web site using the instrument developed in this study. Each of the four quadrants in the instrument supplies a set of aspects that provide for a user-friendly, attractive, effectively marketed web site that is technically sound. The overall goal of a 5-star lodge web site should be to clearly describe the experience of staying there and convey the special qualities, and characteristics of the property and personality of the innkeepers. In essence, the web site should reflect the guest's experience-to-be at the property, and it gives the innkeeper the opportunity to communicate and interact directly with potential guests. As recent statistics suggest, a web site is a powerful tool to generate business for a 5-star lodge (Schleim & Saint-Amour, 2001).

This study concludes that there is room for improvement in all the four aspects of existing 5-star lodge web sites. Actual site attractiveness should be reflected in the visual aesthetics of a web site. This sample of 5-star lodges scored extremely well on web site attractiveness, with an overall score of 88,5 %.

Contrasting text by the use of appealing colour to improve the visual appearance is important to the appeal of a web site. Innkeepers can still improve their web sites in this respect. Another aspect that can be improved is ensuring that the photographs and images are reinforced by adjacent text.

For user-friendliness, although several web sites offered a homepage button on every page, there is considerable scope left for enhancing the user's ability to search sites. In particular, there is a need to incorporate more navigation tools, such as site maps and searches, and to add fax contact details. Although this may seem to be an obvious and essential part of a web site, not all of the 5-star lodges prominently displayed a telephone number, address, and e-mail contact. Contact information needs to be displayed clearly, with a working link for the e-mail address. Five-star lodges scored lower for providing a fax number, but this may be due to the increased use of communications through e-mail and less reliance on fax machines. However, if a 5-star lodge has a fax machine on its property, the number should be displayed on the web site.

This sample of 5-star lodges performed poorly in the marketing effectiveness of their web sites. Earlier, the point was made that 5-star lodges are well suited for the online environment due to their uniqueness, coupled with the content-rich nature of the Web. In marketing principles terminology, a web site provides a great opportunity to "tangibilise" the uniqueness of a 5-star lodge for the Web user. However, although most of these web sites included photographs of the property and the guest rooms, almost all lacked virtual tours. Here the major purpose of the web site is to reflect the guest experience and communicate the unique personality of the 5-star lodge. To achieve this, the site must include more than still photographs of the interior, exterior, and various rooms at the property.

A virtual tour more effectively tangibilises the 5-star lodge experience, taking the web site to a higher level of comprehension for the user.

The web site text must also convey the "personality", or atmosphere, of the 5-star lodge. Although most sites had photographs, fewer provided narrative descriptions highlighting the uniqueness of the properties. A description of the architecture, history, special location, or other unique feature of the 5-star lodge should complement the photographs and convey the core personality of the property. This is also true for the innkeepers.

Very few web sites had photographs or descriptions of the innkeepers. The absence of this information may convey that the owners are not managing the property or are not on-site.

More importantly, however, the web site must convey the personality of the innkeepers, their backgrounds, and interests. According to BedandBreakfast.com (2001), 5-star lodge innkeepers need to use or express three Ps on their web sites: professionalism, personality, and pictures. Under personality, the Web provides a prime opportunity for innkeepers to introduce themselves to virtual guests and welcome them to their 5-star lodges. This greeting should be in text, but it can also be done virtually in the same manner as the virtual tour. For example, the innkeeper could welcome the guest and describe the 5-star lodge in the virtual tour.

Several techniques can be used to bring the innkeepers and 5-star lodge to life. Virtual tours, sound or movie clips that feature the innkeepers welcoming their virtual visitors can better engage visitors online and bring the web site experience closer to the experience of a real visit. The addition of sound and video takes the online experience beyond the static brochure-on-the-Web experience that one finds on most existing 5-star lodge web sites.

The main product and service of 5-star lodges is the rental of rooms. Although many properties had the rates on their sites, very few provided the ability to make

online reservations. As indicated in the literature, an increasing proportion of guests are finding 5-star lodges online. Five-star lodges need not create complicated room reservation HTML code to accomplish this. Some of the 5-star lodges in this sample used existing Web-based reservation services to allow online booking. As more guests shop on the Web for 5-star lodges, the trend to offer online booking will become more important, and eventually it will be a necessity.

Overall, there is much room for improvement in respect of other facets of marketing effectiveness. Innkeepers need to expand the description of packages and special promotions, as well as provide more links to area attractions. Awards, guest testimonials, and vision and mission statements are all opportunities for innkeepers to make their properties more concrete for Web users by providing positive evidence and opinions on the qualities of their 5-star lodges.

With regard to the fourth quadrant, good spelling, links that work, and quick load-time speeds offer the Web visitor a well functioning web site that looks professional and works as expected. A technically sound web site adds to the visit experience. It is also a reflection of the innkeeper's ability to maintain the 5-star lodge. If the site is well maintained, one can make the assumption that the 5-star lodge is also well maintained, and the opposite can also be inferred. I is also thought that a solid technological framework contributes to making a site more user-friendly, which yet again reinforces the notion that *balance* between the components of the BSC is all important, and that much overlap exists between the four quadrants. Web site effectiveness in this context was very much a multidimensional construct.

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section highlights a number of limitations encountered in the present study that should be kept in mind when assessing its conclusions.

- The study was limited to one particular sub-section of the South African hospitality and tourism industry, namely 5-star lodges graded by the TGCSA. It is therefore not possible, nor would it be wise, to generalise the findings of the study to all South African lodges or to other types of accommodation establishments.

- This study did not examine which of the lodges sampled manage and maintain their web sites internally or whether this function is outsourced to a third party, such as a professional web designer. This knowledge might have explained some trends observed in the results of the study.

- This study determined whether a sample of 5-star graded lodges incorporated specific elements into their web sites, based on the key elements identified in the BSC methodology. The study is thus limited in that it did not attempt to uncover potential reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of elements.

- A fairly small and homogenous group of individuals were used as raters/evaluators in this study. This was preferable to the researcher performing all content analyses by herself which would almost certainly have introduced bias into the evaluation process. However, the homogenous nature of the group of respondents may have produced very specific results that would not necessarily have been present had the respondents been more varied in nature.

- Although an extensive literature review had been conducted, the research methodology used in this study was based exclusively on the modified BSC intorduced by Kline *et al*. (2004:253-267). This means that elements or dimensions important to web site effectiveness may have been identified in the literature review, only to be ignored during data collection in this study, as they did not form part of the BSC measuring instrument.

- This study uncovered the importance of balancing the four quadrants of the BSC in promoting web site effectiveness, by assessing how many of the elements identified in the BSC were incorporated in the web sites sampled. However, it did not

- investigate which techniques or elements actual web site visitors or online consumers regard as important or desirable.

- A rapid increase in the number of 5-star graded lodges on the TGCSA web site from commencement to completion of this study means that the sample drawn for the purposes of this study may no longer represent other establishments in the category accurately.

- There appeared to be some anomalies in terms of the statistical analysis performed on the data in the original Kline *et al.* (2004:253-267) study. For example, in the conversion of the NetMechanic scores from a Likert-type scale to dichotomous data, one and two-star ratings were deemed negative and was thus coded as a zero, whereas three or four star ratings were coded as positive responses (i.e. one). However, 5-star ratings were not incorporated into the dichotomous data at all.

  Furthermore, testing for the Cronbach's coefficient of Alpha between only three items (items that were not supposed to measure the same construct, no less) is not desirable. Flawed procedures in the original Kline *et al*. (2004:253-267) study such as those mentioned here required the researcher in the present study to modify the statistical analyses in order to correct or at the very least avoid the errors made in the prior research. Therefore, an exact reproduction of the original study was not possible, and thus, concrete comparisons between the results of the two studies could not be made.

- The lack of incentives for evaluators could have resulted in lowered commitment or motivation on the part of the respondents/evaluators to devote sufficient time and care to the completion of the questionnaires. All web links were tested prior to the study to ensure that they were operational. All links were found to be in working order. However, on some questionnaires respondents merely recorded "web site blocked" and then neglected to answer any questions on the particular lodge in question. This may have lowered the quantity of quality data for statistical analyis.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While acknowledging this work as an exploratory study, there is a great opportunity in the future to increase the geographical scope of this research, as well as evaluating a larger pool of 5-star lodges. As the inter-rater reliability found in this study was very low, it might have been possible to increase it. For example, this might have been accomplished by having two evaluation sessions, one acting as a pilot and the second being the evaluation proper. The author could have used the pilot session to pinpoint where the major variations in scoring were occurring among the evaluators. This could have then been used as the basis for a second training session to encourage greater consistency in evaluator ratings.

One limitation of the present study was the lack of direct involvement of 5-star lodge owners or managers/marketers in the design of the web site evaluation instrument. In future, it is suggested that these operators should be consulted about the specific criteria they believe should be incorporated in any 5-star lodge web site evaluation instrument. It may also be desirable to have the web sites evaluated by former guests of 5-star lodges, who may have greater insight than computer-trained evaluators into the inherent qualities of these properties.

The in-depth focus of this study was not on any specific lodges' Internet marketing strategies, but merely on any trends that would be uncovered in the examination of their web sites. However, very detailed information about each lodge's online activities was gathered which could have been useful if presented to the respective lodge owners or managers. As this fell outside the scope of the current study, this possiblility was not explored in further detail. This could possibly be the focus of future studies.

More care could be taken in future studies to select a sample of lodges that equally represents all provinces or geographical areas of South Africa. In the same vein, a sample that equally represents different types of lodges, for

instance game lodges, safari lodges, golf lodges, forest lodges etc. could also yield interesting results. Comparisons between the web sites of different types of accommodation establishments could also be considered as material for future studies of this nature.

Similarly, future research could replicate this study and investigate the web sites of non-graded South African lodges. Comparisons could then determine the differences, if any, between the web site effectiveness of graded and non-graded lodge web sites.

Future research could be geared towards uncovering the reasons why the sampled lodges may have included or excluded certain elements of the BSC in their web sites. It could also be examined whether the management of a lodge's web site by a third party instead of by the lodge itself has any effect on the inclusion or exclusion of certain BSC variables.

Needless to say, a BSC content analysis need not only be applied to the virtual environment of the Internet. It could also be used to assess the content of 5-star lodge brochures or advertisements placed in magazines. It would be interesting to compare the performance of any one lodge if a BSC assessment was done on its marketing material across different types of media.

Lastly, future research could determine whether there are additional items that should be included in the measuring instrument for the evaluation of star-graded lodge web sites. This could be done by consulting the owners or managers of such lodges about elements they regard as being central to the development of an effective lodge web site. Alternatively, regular consumers, instead of individuals employed in the tourism industry, could be used as evaluators of lodge web sites to uncover whether there are additional aspects that they would have included in the BSC questionnaire for this product/service category.

7.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study described in Chapter 6, this chapter provided recommendations for the owners, managers and/or marketers of star-graded South African lodges. Limitations of this study were highlighted, and appropriate recommendations for future research were also provided.

This study focused on the current content of web sites. The results of the present research offer evidence of current web site practices and create a check-list of sorts against which lodge web sites, or indeed any tourism-related web site, may be assessed as to its usage of principles associated with the hospitality marketing mix. The content analysis was explored to help in making web sites more customer-centric. Furthermore, this research was conducted in an effort to aid marketers in making the most of their limited marketing budgets by spending their resources on web sites that are effective as opposed to merely attractive.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of the researcher that, if South African 5-star lodges hope to use web sites to attract and retain customers from upper LSM groups, they must realise that sophisticated consumers and travelers are not likely to be appeased by pretty pictures and convenience of use alone. True web site effectiveness requires a delicate balance between superficiality and substance.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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APPENDIX A

- Serviced Accommodation Grading Criteria -

Serviced Accommodation Grading Criteria

Serviced accommodation includes:

- Hotels

- Lodges

- Guest houses

- Bed and breakfasts

- Country houses

Each establishment wishing to be graded needs to comply with the minimum criteria detailed for each accommodation category including the specified minimum criteria per star grading. Thereafter the establishment will be graded according to the criteria listed in this document.

The grading criteria have been developed on the expectations of the guests and include…

- The building exterior

- The bedrooms

- The bathrooms

- Public areas

- Dining facilities

- Food and beverage

- Services and service

- Housekeeping

Not all areas will be applicable to every establishment. Where an area is not applicable the establishment will not be graded and the lack of a service or facility will not affect the overall scoring. An establishment will not be penalised for not having a service or facility beyond the minimum requirements.

The grading assessor will award a score of between 1 and 10 for each area assessed. The score will be based on:

- The assessor's experience which is a balance between quality and condition (taste and fashion will not have an influence).

- Guest experience, consumer feedback and comments.

The score for each standard is defined as follows:

Excellent	10
Very good	9
Good	8
Standard	6 or 7
Acceptable	5
Poor	3 or 4
Unacceptable	1 or 2

Examples of all possible standards are provided in the criteria. It is important to consider that these are examples and guidelines only. The criteria are not exhaustive, rather a guideline to steer assessors and property owners or managers in the right direction in respect of scoring.

Required overall score for each grading band

5-Stars

Overall score of	95% - 100%
Items to score	9 or 10
No more than 1 item to score	8

4-Stars

Overall score of	85% - 94%
Items to score	8 or more
No more than 1 item to score	7
All service elements to score	8, 9, or 10

3-Stars

Overall score of	71% - 84%
Items to score	7 or more
No more than 2 items to score	6
All service elements to score	8, 9 or 10

2-Stars

Overall score of	61% - 70%
No unacceptable items	Less than 3
Items to score	6 or more
No more than 2 items to score	5
All service elements to score	7, 8, 9 or 10

1-Star

Overall score of	51% - 60%
No unacceptable items	Less than 3
All service elements to score	7, 8, 9 or 10

Exterior

1   Appearance of Buildings

10 – 9   New buildings – absence of weathering, fresh well-maintained paintwork, an overall clean and "new" look. Older buildings – no unsightly staining, well-maintained paintwork. Visible outbuildings or annexes to be of a similar standard. Good external lighting. Good clear signage. Addition of attractive architectural features.

8   High quality maintenance of paint, stone or brickwork, although a certain natural weathering may be present. All areas of paintwork to be in sound condition. Some additional external features to enhance appearance.

7 – 6   Paintwork, windows, drains, etc in good state of repair. No obvious structural defects or damage. "Plain" architectural features are acceptable

5 - 4 – 3   Some areas of paint may be ageing and rather weathered. Small defects, damage, cracks, etc. No evidence of recent repairs, paintwork, etc. Ageing signage.

2 – 1   Generally neglected buildings. Obvious structural defects or damage. Flaking paint, illegible signs, rotting wood.

2   Grounds and Gardens

All facilities within the grounds should be evaluated in this section, including: gardens, swimming pools and sports facilities.

10 – 9   Evidence of a systematic programme of maintenance – well tended formal gardens or an attractive "natural" environment. Tidy and well-lit pathways. Looking good throughout the year. Well-maintained driveway and entrance. No disorder or rubbish and no evidence of litter. Provision of garden furniture or

architectural features appropriate to the nature of the guests attracted to the establishment.

8   High standards of maintenance in formal gardens. Pleasant and tidy appearance throughout the year. No clutter or disorder around the service areas. External lighting and good driveway etc. Some architectural features appropriate to the guests.

7 - 6   No overgrown, tangled areas. Immediate surrounds kept tidy and well maintained. Some attempt to produce a pleasing effect with interesting design. Uncluttered access to accommodation. No potholes in driveway. Some external lighting. Clear access.

5 - 4 - 3   Gardens and enclosed area around the establishment are kept under control. Little attempt at interesting design. Driveway may have an uneven surface. Disorder kept to a minimum.

2 - 1   Neglected and overgrown appearance. Badly surfaced driveway with potholes or puddles. Rubbish and clutter visible. Disorderly appearance. Poor lighting.

3   Parking

10 – 9   Marked parking bays in a secure environment. External security lighting. Effort made to provide covered parking.

8   Organised, secure parking close to accommodation.

7 – 6   Parking in secure environment but not always organised.

5 – 4 – 3   Little attempt to control or secure parking.

2 – 1   Owner or manager vehicles taking up most of available parking space. No parking available, or pavement parking only.

Bedrooms

If there are a number of bedrooms which have been decorated or refurbished at different stages, different times then they may each be assessed at a different level of quality and condition.

In this case the lowest mark is applied.

4   Decoration

10 – 9	High quality of wall covering (paint or wallpaper). Attention to detail, thoughtful co-ordination of patterns, colours and textures. If the décor is "plain" then addition of high quality pictures or objects d'art, etc although some "minimalist" styles require less. All work should look professional and be well executed.
8	High quality wall coverings but need not be in perfect condition. Signs of wear and tear (i.e. scratches, water splashes, finger marks, etc). Room décor may range from excellent to good.
7 – 6	Competent, average quality wall coverings. Some pictures in good frames. Reasonable attempt to co-ordinate patterns and colours. No jarring mismatch of colours and styles. Décor may be some years old but not damaged, scratched, torn or strained. Room décor may range from excellent or very good to good.
5 – 4 – 3	Aging or old looking décor, of average quality to begin with. Amateur application of paint or wall paper. Little attention to detail. Plain style with no adornment. Some wear and tear.
2 – 1	Low-grade materials poorly executed. Uncoordinated styles and colours. Noticeable wear and tear, stains, splashes, scratches, tears, etc. Few pictures, graphics, wall hangings or works of art (if any). Unsightly pipe work. Exposed wiring. Signs of damp.

5 Furniture and Furnishings

10 – 9   Excellent intrinsic quality and condition. Furniture of sound construction, with attractive professional finishes and detail. Little or no sign of ageing, wear and tear or ill-use. Ample hanging space. Attractive and comfortable seating with upholstery in excellent condition. Full, well-lined curtains with the appropriate accessories, in working order. Electronic goods of excellent quality and in excellent condition.

NB. Some antique furniture may show signs of "distress" which does not detract from its excellence depending on the degree of deterioration.

8   High intrinsic quality of materials may show some signs of use. Alternatively new, good (instead of excellent) quality furniture and furnishings. Some contract furniture even when brand new will only be "very good". Well cared for domestic furniture in a B&B may be very good. Curtains to be full and effective in keeping out light and retaining warmth. Good quality electronic goods in good working condition.

7 – 6   Furniture which may have been "excellent" or "very good", but as a result of ageing, shows signs of wear and tear. Alternatively, a medium quality range of materials and construction in sound and usable condition. There should be no damage, stains or fraying on furniture. No jarringly uncoordinated styles – all furniture to be of a similar standard. Medium quality electronic goods in good working order.

5 – 4 – 3   Furniture of average quality in well-used condition. Little co-ordination of styles, some slight damage may be apparent, but all items capable of use. Surfaces not well maintained. Thin, short, skimpy curtains. Some stains, marks on soft furnishings.

Out-dated electronic equipment but still in good working order or newer equipment in poor state of repair.

2 – 1   Furniture of a low quality material, poor construction, damaged, marked or scratched. Uncoordinated styles. Thin, unlined curtains. Stained or worn upholstery. Electronic goods that are very old, not working, components broken, badly tuned, channels not conforming to directory, etc.

6   Flooring and Ceiling

10 – 9   High quality fitted carpets (high percentage wool content), good thick pile and underlay. Alternatively excellent quality domestic carpeting, fit for purpose. High quality wooden or tiled flooring with high quality occasional rugs or mats. Ceilings to be of an excellent quality, no sagging or evidence of water leakage or seeping, marks or stains.
All of the above should be professionally fitted, painted and in pristine condition.

8   High quality carpets beginning to show some signs of ageing (flattening or wearing). No stains, burns or marks, etc. Alternatively carpet with higher percentage of man-made fibre but in new condition. Wooden or tiled flooring in need of buffing but with high quality rugs. Ceiling of good quality, no sagging, evidence of water leakage or seeping. Professionally fitted and painted.

7 – 6   High quality carpet with flattening in areas of most traffic but all in sound condition – some small discolouration in places. Alternatively a cheaper new carpet. Wooden or tiled floors a little scratched in places.   Ceiling of average quality, competent job of application. Paintwork competently applied, although not necessarily of a professional standard.

5 – 4 –   Carpets showing considerable use – flattened spots, bleached
3   by   sunlight   through   windows,   some   thinning.

Unprofessionally fitted with ripples, rough ill-fitting edges, thin or no underlay. (There should be no holes, tears, burns of other defects that render the carpet unsound). Vinyl or low quality flooring. Chipped wooden or tiled floors. Poor quality ceiling, amateurishly fitted, but no evidence of sagging. Ceilings slightly stained paintwork of a poor standard.

2 – 1   Carpets with distinct signs of wearing, visible canvas or backing fabric, patches, stains, discolouration, obvious seams. DIY fitting with gaping joints, gaps between carpet and wall. Several unmatched styles or newer carpets laid on top of damaged or worn-through older ones. Wooden floors that have aged – now in need of a new coat of varnish, with worn and stained rugs. Missing tiles and obvious chips. Poor quality sagging ceilings and evidence of water seepage. Stained paintwork, old and amateurishly done.

NB: In all levels there may be a high quality natural alternative to carpeting, tiles or wooden floors. In these cases the intrinsic quality and condition would be assessed, taking the style of the property into consideration.

7   Beds and Linen

10 – 9   Beds sizes frequently larger than standard sizes. Sound mattresses and sprung bases. Decorated, interesting bedframes (excellent quality). High quality linen, "crisply" laundered. Good supply and variety of pillows, cushions. Thick, weighty blankets with spares available. Good quality duvet (season dependent) co-ordinated with bedroom décor and softs if no separate bedcover. Bedcovers quilted or similar high quality, co-ordinated with bedroom décor and other soft furnishings. Valances where appropriate. Headboards offering comfort and free from head or other stains.

8	Very good firm mattresses and sound base. All bed linen and bedding to of a high quality, but not necessarily in brand new condition, co-ordinated with other soft furnishings. Bed frames may be of an older style, but in good condition and quality.
7 – 6	Standard domestic quality bed frames, divans and mattresses in sound condition. Sheets well ironed, but not necessarily best quality linen. Medium quality bed covers or spreads free from stains, holes and wear. Headboards may be a simple wooden board or a continental pillow.
5 – 4 – 3	Domestic mattresses that are well used thin and set on a shallow divan base. Tendency to move or creak. No sagging, broken struts, uneven legs. Wobbly headboards or sloping frames. Linen of a cheaper polyester mixture, thinning, faded. Thin pillows.
2 – 1	Mattress with little or no resistance or bounce. Legs loose, casters missing, stains, marks, and holes. Creaking frame, sagging supports. Cheap sheets with fraying edges, holes, faded.

8 Temperature Control

10 – 9	Thermostatically and individually controlled heating and or cooling system capable of maintaining a comfortable temperature of between $18^{O}C$ and $25^{O}C$ appropriate to size and location of room. Appliance in excellent condition. An excellent score would apply for remote controlled air-conditioning.
8	Individual control by guests at all times, some ageing of excellent apparatus. Good quality and quiet wall mounted air-conditioners would receive this rating. In B&B's new, good

quality domestic heating and or cooling appliances are acceptable, (free standing wall or ceiling mounted – fans, heaters or air-conditioner units).

7 – 6   Effective heating and or cooling provided in rooms when appropriate (with individual control). Not necessarily the most up to date system. Large, slightly noisy, wall mounted air conditioners apply here.   In B&B's good quality, not necessarily new heating and or cooling, freestanding appliances are acceptable.

5 – 4 – 3   Free standing appliance able of maintaining a reasonably comfortable temperature in the room. Ageing appliances. In B&B's low quality heating or cooling, freestanding appliances in good condition are acceptable.

2 – 1   Old low quality appliances. Heating or cooling only available close to apparatus i.e. apparatus unable to maintain a comfortable temperature throughout the room.

9   Lighting

10 – 9   Overall high standard of lighting in room. Controllable dimmer. Light sources in all appropriate places – especially for shaving, make-up, contact lenses, reading, etc.   Bedside lighting with separate control for each guest. Bedroom lights can be switched off at the bedside. Picture lights. Recessed spot lamps. All lights and shades of high quality manufacture and in excellent order. No wobbly connections, burnt shades, flimsy bases that could fall over, etc.

8   Provision of more sources of light than is strictly necessary i.e. more than just centre and bedside lights. High quality fittings, lamps bases, etc.

7 – 6   More than adequate room light. Quality bedside and or bedhead lamps with separate control for each guest.

Preferably additional sources of light in room but not necessarily. Good blend of natural or electric light during day.

5 – 4 – 3	Minimum light in room. Restricted natural light. Ageing fittings, looking scruffy.
2 – 1	Dim, gloomy lighting. Low quality fittings and appliances. Light in inappropriate places. Poor natural light. Hidden controls. Shades burnt, scruffy, stained, etc.

10 Accessories

10 – 9   A wide range of high quality extras for guest use e.g.:
- Fruit bowl,
- Plants,
- Satellite television,
- Remote controls,
- Pay channels, videos,
- Books, magazines,
- Suit stand,
- Suit press,
- Mending kit,
- Potpourri,
- Shoe polishing cloth or pad,
- Biscuits,
- Pack of cards, games,
- Mineral water,
- Sweets, mints or chocolates,
- Tea tray,
- Variety of teas and coffees,
- Fresh milk,
- Comprehensive room information, well presented,
- Mini bar, etc.

8   A reasonable proportion of the above.

7 –6   A small selection of the above.

5 – 4 –
3   One or two items only of average quality.

2 – 1   One or two items only of very poor quality.

11 Spaciousness and Overall Impression

10 – 9   A spacious, well-planned room with furniture conveniently

placed. Ease of access to all furniture, cupboards, wardrobes, drawers, etc. A sitting area with sufficient space to relax. Space to put luggage so that it does not clutter the room or obstruct access. Easy access to all facilities e.g. use of desk without having to move tea tray. TV visible from the sitting area or bed. Unrestricted view of full mirror. No intrusive noise from other rooms or public areas.

8	Reasonably spacious room with good access to all furniture and facilities. No areas of restricted access or obstruction. Not necessary to have a self-contained sitting area but room must be large enough to comfortably contain 2 easy chairs in addition to the standard bedroom furniture. No creaky boards or intrusive noise.
7 – 6	Room large enough to contain all necessary furniture and to allow access to all facilities but there may be some slightly restricted areas e.g. narrow access along sides of a double bed. A chair may serve a dual purpose, easy seating and for the dressing table. To allow greater access some care may be taken in the positioning and design of furniture i.e. TV on a wall bracket. No intrusive noise from plumbing, corridor, lifts, etc.
5 – 4 – 3	Cluttered feel to room. Overlarge furniture for floor space. Need to move some things to get to others. Awkward opening of drawers, cupboards, wardrobes, etc. Little room for luggage. Noisy plumbing, sounds from adjoining rooms, corridor or lifts.
2 – 1	Furniture too large or plentiful for room. Access to most facilities restricted or awkward. Noises from other rooms or public areas clearly audible. Disturbance from music, noise in public rooms or other areas.

12   Decoration and Flooring

10 – 9	Highest quality floor and wall coverings. Tiles well fitted. Grouting in excellent condition. No marks, stains or condensation damage. No peeling wallpaper or flaking paint. Flooring well-fitted and free from stains or water damage.
8	May be a high quality finish but not recent – some signs of wear but all in sound condition. Alternatively, may be recently decorated but not with the highest quality materials, though a competent and professional job. High quality floor covering or tiles.
7 – 6	Not necessarily recently decorated though in sound condition. Some signs of wear. Standard quality bathroom flooring. No stains or marks.
5 – 4 – 3	Lower quality materials, ageing, and evidence of poor standard of DIY. Very plain with no attempt at adornment. Grouting discoloured. Tired, dated style. Some stains and marks.
2 – 1	Very tired and old style. Damp or condensation marks. Cheap very low quality finish, unprofessionally applied. Sealant or grouting mouldy, carpet rotting, smelly. Paintwork chipped, flaking. Area around toilet discoloured or damp.

13   Fixtures and Fittings

10 – 9	High quality, solid, well-made fittings in excellent order and matching style. High quality finish. Sturdy cast iron or steel and enamel bath. Attractive shower screen. Good sized washbasin. Easy to use with responsive controls. Plenty of hot water at all times.
8	Generally high quality fittings throughout, but not necessarily new. Good-sized bath. Shower screen or good quality curtain (if necessary to keep surrounding area free from water). All porcelain in good condition – no cracks, dull finishes, no stains. Matching and co-ordinated styles.
7 – 6	Standard domestic range of bathroom fittings. Sturdy steel or acrylic bath. Bathroom may have a shower or a bath. May be showing some wear but in a sound and clean condition. No small baths or under-sized showers with awkward access. Hot water at all reasonable times.
5 – 4 – 3	Ageing fittings – dull finish to porcelain, chrome wearing off. Weak shower pressure. Intermittent hot water or at restricted hours. Fittings not matching. Out of date style or colour, over used. Rough DIY grouting or sealant. Some "module" bathrooms with very restricted space and inconvenient layout.
2 – 1	Bath enamel chipped, stained or dull. Cheap plastic bath that moves and creaks. Very small shower with insufficient water supply. Stained or mouldy grouting or sealant and cheap, thin shower curtain. Cracked washbasin or toilet. Badly fitted cheap plastic toilet and cover. Discoloured plastic cistern. Plastic taps. Loose or broken towel rail. Evidence of cigarette burns, damage, etc.

14 Linen

10 – 9	Full range of towel sizes – bath sheet, (bath towel optional), hand towel, face cloth for each guest. Provision of towelling robes. Thick, heavy, fluffy quality with plenty of pile. Replaced daily or after each use (unless guest requests otherwise with particular reference to environmental issues).
8	Range of towels including bath sheet or towel and hand towel per guest but not quite such heavy quality as above. Changed frequently or at guest's request.
7 – 6	Good quality bath and hand towels in sound condition.
5 – 4 – 3	Moderate quality towels, showing age. Rather thin, fraying edges, small size. Faded.
2 – 1	Very thin, small, scratchy, old, fraying, some holes, stained, faded. Low absorbency.

15 Lighting and Ventilation

10 – 9	Lighting effective for all purposes – shaving, make-up, and contact lenses, particularly at washbasin and shaving point. Excellent quality fittings, recessed lights, spot lamps. In cold climates heated towel rails and or other ways of warming towels should be provided. Either windows that open or effectively working extractors.
8	High standard of light fittings – centre, main light plus adequate shaving light, possibly supplementary lights. Possible heated towel rail and or other form of heating towels in cold climates and cooler conditions.
7 – 6	Centre light and shaving light, well positioned providing adequate light.
5 – 4 –	Dim centre light and awkwardly placed shaving light. Stark

3	fluorescent tube on ageing fittings.
2 – 1	Gloomy poor lighting, badly placed, ageing, damaged light fittings.

16   Accessories

10 – 9	Luxury 2 ply toilet paper. A wide range of excellent quality accessories provided in the bathroom e.g.:

- Wrapped soap;
- Shampoo,
- Moisturiser,
- Aftershave,
- Cologne,
- Shower gel,
- Conditioner,
- Talcum powder,
- Tooth brushes,
- Tooth paste,
- Shower cap,
- Toilet bags,
- Tissues,
- Flowers,
- Magazines,
- Cotton wool balls,
- Cotton buds, etc.

8	A reasonable proportion of excellent quality items from the above list. No well-used ageing bottles, scrappy sachets or sticky containers. High quality toilet paper.
7 – 6	A small range from the above, all in good condition and of good quality. Medium quality toilet paper.
5 – 4 – 3	One or two items from the above list of average quality. (Wrapped soap or shower gel is compulsory).

| 2 – 1 | One or two items from the above list of poorer quality. (Wrapped soap or shower gel is compulsory). |

17 Spaciousness

10 – 9	Separate bath and shower for 5-stars. Conveniently laid out bathroom with easy access to all facilities. Plenty of provision for laying out toiletries and hanging up clothes, etc. <u>A high level of spaciousness.</u>
8	Good-sized rooms with access to all facilities. There may be room for only one guest at a time. No awkward corners or obstructed parts. Good space for toiletries.
7 – 6	Adequate size of room for one guest – may be a shower only, but no awkward access or inconvenient position of facilities, etc. Adequate space for toiletries.
5 – 4 – 3	Restricted space leading to small bath or shower, small washbasin and awkward access. Limited space for toiletries.
2 – 1	Very small room with facilities in separate small rooms. Very awkward access. Limited room for drying and dressing. Small washbasin. Cramped access to toilet.

Public Areas

All areas other than the areas previously mentioned, which are inside a building and are accessible to guests and the public should be evaluated under this section.   This includes: conference facilities, corridors, public toilets, lounges, reception areas, fitness centres, business centres, etc.

18 Decoration

| 10 – 9 | High quality wall covering in excellent condition. Evidence of co-ordinated design. Interesting architectural features, artwork, objects d'art, etc. No evidence of ageing, wear and |

tear (some historical locations accepted). High quality professional finish.

8   Use of high quality materials, though not necessarily in pristine condition. Alternatively more moderate quality materials if recently decorated. Attempt to co-ordinate design with additional attractive features. No scratches, chips, stains, or scuffs. Professional workmanship throughout.

7 – 6   Standard "domestic" style and quality of décor, some ageing but no major wear and tear. Use of wall hangings, pictures, etc. Competent workmanship.

5 – 4 – 3   Moderate quality, ageing. Some slight damage, wear and tear. Dated style. Amateur application of décor. Little design input or co-ordination. Looking tired.

2 – 1   Very old, faded, damaged wall covering. Evidence of damp or water penetration. Grubby marks. Unsightly paintwork or exposed wiring. General neglect.

19   Furnishings and Fixtures

10 – 9   High degree of comfort and luxury. High quality in excellent condition. Attractive, co-ordinated extras. Decorative, occasional pieces in main room or rooms and corridors. In B&B's high quality domestic furniture in excellent condition.

8   High quality furniture but not necessarily new. All in sound condition, but may have a "lived-in" feel. Alternatively, more moderate quality furniture in excellent condition. Comfortable easy seating.

7 – 6   Medium to high quality of manufacture but showing some wear and tear. Maybe rather dated but sound. Alternatively, new furniture of medium quality. Comfortable but with little luxury.

5 – 4 –   Uncoordinated style. Ageing seating. May show marks, sparse

3   arrangement. Not particularly comfortable or attractive. Low quality.

2 – 1   Low quality, uncomfortable, ageing furniture. May show some damage – scratched, loose arms or legs. Stained or grubby upholstery. Dated, jaded and unattractive.

20   Flooring and Ceiling

10 – 9   High quality fitted carpets (high percentage wool content), good thick pile and underlay. Alternatively excellent quality domestic carpeting, fit for purpose. High quality wooden or tiled flooring with high quality occasional rugs or mats. Ceilings to be of an excellent quality, no sagging or evidence of water leakage or seeping, marks or stains.
All of the above should be professionally fitted, painted and in pristine conditions.

8   High quality carpets beginning to show some signs of ageing (flattening or wearing). No stains, burns or marks, etc. Alternatively carpet with higher percentage of man-made fibre but in new condition. Wooden or tiled flooring in need of buffing but with high quality rugs. Ceiling of good quality, no sagging, and evidence of water leakage or seeping. Professionally fitted and painted.

7 – 6   High quality carpet with flattening in areas of most traffic but all in sound condition – some small discolouration in places. Alternatively a cheaper new carpet. Wooden or tiled floors a little scratched in places. Ceiling of average quality, competent job of application. Paintwork competently applied, although not necessarily of a professionally standard.

5 – 4 – 3   Carpets showing considerable use – flattened spots, bleached by sunlight through windows, some thinning. Unprofessionally fitted with ripples, rough ill-fitting edges thin or no underlay. (There should be no holes, tears, burns of

other defects that render the carpet unsound). Vinyl or low quality flooring. Chipped wooden or tiled floors. Poor quality ceiling, amateurishly fitted, but no evidence of sagging. Ceilings slightly stained paintwork of a poor standard.

2 – 1   Carpets with distinct signs of wearing, visible canvas or backing fabric, patches, stains, discolouration, obvious seams. DIY fitting with gaping joints, gaps between carpet and wall. Several unmatched styles or newer carpets laid on top of damaged or worn-through older ones. Wooden floors that have aged – now in need of a new coat of varnish, with worn and stained rugs. Missing tiles and obvious chips. Poor quality sagging ceilings and evidence of water seepage. Stained paintwork, old and amateurishly done.

NB: In all levels there may be a high quality natural alternative to carpeting, tiles or wooden floors. In these cases the intrinsic quality and condition would be assessed, taking the style of the property into consideration.

21   Lighting

10 – 9   Overall high standard of illumination providing sufficient light for all purposes but also designed for good effect – showing off features in rooms or corridors. All lights and shades of high quality manufacture and in excellent working order.
No wobbly connections, burnt shades, flimsy bases that could fall over, etc. No harsh fluorescent lighting.

8   High quality fittings with more than adequate spread of illumination for practical use, though no or limited use of sophisticated lighting "effects". Occasional lamps, reading lights, perhaps picture lights.

7 – 6   More than minimal lighting. Medium quality fittings in sound condition. No burnt shades, ageing lamps, etc. Main light plus one or two small occasional lamps. No extra lights for effect.

5 – 4 – 3	Enough light for practical use, but nothing more. No occasional lamps. Fittings dated, ageing, discoloured. Stark, unattractive and harsh lighting.
2 – 1	Low quality fittings in poor condition. Exposed, fraying wires, wobbly fittings, loose plugs. Dim, gloomy effect creating dark areas. Glaring, irritating, harsh fluorescent lights with no diffuser.

22   Atmosphere and Ambience

10 – 9	Harmonious combination of décor, lighting and comfortable furniture. Soothing co-ordinated effect. No jarring elements. Interesting architectural features. Spacious rooms. No intrusive noise. In a B&B's no intrusion of boisterous pets.
8	Comfortable, relaxed feel. Maybe some busy activity or music in background but not intrusive. Co-ordinated décor, finishing, etc.
7 – 6	Comfortable seating area but maybe used for other things at times. A degree of activity but not irritating. In a B&B some evidence of family activities. Domestic family atmosphere.
5 – 4 – 3	Busy area with lots of activities going on creating a "corridor" effect. Harsh lighting. Intrusive noise. Awkward seating. Cooking smells. Not particularly comfortable.
2 – 1	Uncomfortable, awkward seating in an area clearly used for other purposes. Loud noises from TV's, radios, etc. Smoky, old, persistent cooking smells. Draughty. No personal touches. Nothing to look at or read.

Dining Facilities

23 Decoration

Same as public areas and should be assessed as part of the public areas, if in an open plan area. Assessed separately, if it is a separate room. B&B's assessed under public areas.

10 – 9	High quality wall covering in excellent condition. Evidence of co-ordinated design. Interesting architectural features, artwork, objects d'art, etc. No evidence of ageing, wear and tear (some historical locations accepted). High quality professional finish.
8	Use of high quality materials, though not necessarily in pristine condition. Alternatively more average quality materials if recently decorated. Co-ordinated design with additional attractive features. No scratches, chips, stains, or scuffs. Professional workmanship throughout.
7 – 6	Standard "domestic" style and quality of décor. Some ageing but no major wear and tear. Use of wall hangings, pictures, etc. Competent workmanship.
5 – 4 – 3	Average quality, ageing. Some slight damage, wear and tear. Dated style. Amateur application of décor. Little design input or co-ordination. Looking tired.
2 – 1	Very old, faded, damaged wall covering. Evidence of damp or water penetration. Grubby marks. Evidence of neglect. Unsightly paintwork. Exposed wiring.

24 Furnishings

General principles of furnishings in public areas with additional considerations.

10 – 9	High degree of comfort. Well-spaced chairs of appropriate height for tables.

Co-ordinated themed design. Spacious tables.

| 8 | All of high quality but not necessarily the same design although co-ordinated. Good sized tables. |

| 7 – 6 | Average quality. Tables large enough for uncluttered use. May be a mix of styles and ages, but all in good order. Design may take precedence over comfort. |

| 5 – 4 – 3 | May be quite a mix of styles, ages, designs, shapes and heights. Chairs not very comfortable. Tables too close together. |

| 2 – 1 | Inadequate table size. Cluttered and inconvenient. Cramped and uncomfortable layout. |

25 Flooring and Ceiling

Same as public areas and should be assessed as part of the public areas, if in an open plan area. Dining area assessed separately, if it is a separate room.

| 10 – 9 | High quality fitted carpets (high percentage wool content), good thick pile and underlay. Alternatively excellent quality domestic carpeting, fit for purpose. High quality wooden or tiled flooring with high quality occasional rugs or mats. Ceilings to be of an excellent quality, no sagging or evidence of water leakage or seeping, marks or stains. All of the above should be professionally fitted, painted and in pristine conditions. |

| 8 | High quality carpets beginning to show some signs of ageing (flattening or wearing). No stains, burns or marks, etc. Alternatively carpet with higher percentage of man-made fibre but in new condition. Wooden or tiled flooring in need of buffing but with high quality rugs. Ceiling of good quality, no sagging, evidence of water leakage or seeping. Professionally |

fitted and painted.

7 – 6   High quality carpet with flattening in areas of most traffic but all in sound condition – some small discolouration in places. Alternatively a cheaper new carpet. Wooden or tiled floors a little scratched in places. Ceiling of average quality, competent job of application. Paintwork competently applied, although not necessarily of a professionally standard.

7 – 6   High quality carpet with flattening in areas of most traffic but all in sound condition – some small discolouration in places. Alternatively a cheaper new carpet. Wooden or tiled floors a little scratched in places. Ceiling of average quality, competent job of application. Paintwork competently applied, although not necessarily of a professionally standard.

5 – 4 – 3   Carpets showing considerable use – flattened spots, bleached by sunlight through windows, some thinning. Unprofessionally fitted with ripples, rough ill-fitting edges thin or no underlay. (There should be no holes, tears, burns of other defects that render the carpet unsound). Vinyl or low quality flooring. Chipped wooden or tiled floors. Poor quality ceiling, amateurishly fitted, but no evidence of sagging. Ceilings slightly stained paintwork of a poor standard.

2 – 1   Carpets with distinct signs of wearing, visible canvas or backing fabric, patches, stains, discolouration, obvious seams. DIY fitting with gaping joints, gaps between carpet and wall. Several unmatched styles or newer carpets laid on top of damaged or worn-through older ones. Wooden floors that have aged – now in need of a new coat of varnish, with worn and stained rugs. Missing tiles and obvious chips. Poor quality sagging ceilings and evidence of water seepage. Stained paintwork, old and amateurishly done.

NB: In all levels there may be a high quality natural alternative to carpeting, tiles or wooden floors. In these cases the intrinsic quality and condition would be assessed, taking the style of the property into consideration.

26   Lighting

Same as public areas and should be assessed as part of the public areas, if in an open plan area. Dining area assessed separately, if it is a separate room.

10 – 9	Overall high standard of illumination providing sufficient light for all purposes but also designed for good effect – showing off features in rooms or corridors. All lights and shades of high quality manufacture and in excellent working order. No wobbly connections, burnt shades, flimsy bases that could fall over, etc. No harsh fluorescent lighting.
8	High quality fittings with more than adequate spread of illumination for practical use, though no or limited use of sophisticated lighting "effects". Occasional lamps, reading lights, perhaps picture lights.
7 – 6	More than minimal lighting. Medium quality fittings in sound condition. No burnt shades, ageing lamps, etc. Main light plus one or two small occasional lamps. No extra lights for effect.
5 – 4 – 3	Enough light for practical use, but nothing more. No occasional lamps. Fittings dated, ageing, discoloured. Stark, unattractive and harsh lighting.
2 – 1	Low quality fittings in poor condition. Exposed, fraying wires, wobbly fittings, loose plugs. Dim, gloomy effect creating dark areas. Glaring, irritating, harsh fluorescent lights with no diffuser.

27   Menu presentation

10 – 9   Clear, informative layout. Attractive design in excellent condition. No grease, thumbprints, wine stains, written corrections, etc. Wine set out in clear sections with options available. Menu items could be explained.

8   High standard of presentation. May show a little wear, although not dirty. Where wines are not available they are clearly marked. No written corrections.

7 – 6   Clear layout but not a top quality production. Clean, not worn or grubby. Large majority of wines available, those that are not, are clearly marked.

5 – 4 – 3   Scrappy appearance. Well used, stained. Many wines out of stock. Not marked as such. Vintages wrong.

2 – 1   Dirty, dog-eared. Difficult to read. Wine list out of date, bearing little relation to what is available.

28   Table Appointments

Cognisance will be taken of the nature and style of the establishment.

10 – 9   An emphasis on style and high quality (stainless steel, silver, etc). All cutlery and crockery of high quality, matching and co-ordinated. No wear, damage, cracks or chips in glassware, etc. Additional features such as vases, candlesticks, coasters, etc. Good quality linen and cloth napery. Large napkins. Equally high quality accessories, ice buckets, sauce boats and jam pots, etc. Provision of appropriate styles of cutlery for different functions and different glasses or crystal for different uses.

8   Items of similar style and quality as above but perhaps more limited in range, fewer glasses, smaller napkins. Alternatively,

high quality domestic crockery rather than professional china. Fine glass rather than crystal. Good quality stainless steel rather than silver, etc. Limited wear, damage, etc.

7 – 6	Middle to high range domestic cutlery and crockery. All in sound condition with main service matching. Perhaps accessories of different style but good quality. Thick (multi-ply) paper napkins. Shorter tablecloths.
5 – 4 – 3	Variety of styles and quality. Some damage, wear and tear (fading of pattern or glaze). Thin napkins. No accessories. Sauces in bottles and or packets.
2 – 1	Mismatched patterns. Cracks, chips, well-used appearance. Pyrex or low quality functional crockery. Small, thin (one-ply) napkins. Sticky sauce bottles on table.

29   Atmosphere and Ambience

10 – 9   Harmonious combination of décor and lighting.   Spacious room and good layout of tables.   No intrusive noises or smells.   Themes or designs may add to the ambience.   In a B&B it may be a comfortable family dining room with high quality domestic furniture.

8   High standard of fabrics. Perhaps busy, with some background noise. Tables rather close together. A little noise from the bar or in a B&B, the sound of family in kitchen. Smaller room. Atmospheric lighting.

7 – 6   Tables quite close but with sufficient space to allow private conversation, staff and customers to pass without inconvenience.   A certain amount of noise and activity from other areas.   In a B&B there ma be some evidence of family i.e. games, knitting machine (but tidy, not cluttered).

5 – 4 – 3   Crowded tables. Awkward access. Difficult to have private conversation. Intrusive noise and stuffy.

2 – 1   Very crowded, cramped, uncomfortable. Loud noises. Very stuffy. Impossible to have privacy. In B&B table clearly used for other purposes. Clutter all around.

Food and Beverage

Applies to outsourced as well as internal F&B. If the guest sees the outsourced facility as being part of the hotel establishment (irrespective of whether that is a branded product), it should be included in the assessment.

30   Dinner Presentation

10 – 9   Well presented on appropriate plates with attractive and appropriate garnishes. Pleasing combination of colours, textures, and shapes. Care in execution with attention to

visual appeal. Carvery to be attended and refreshed. Buffet replenished and refreshed. In a B&B careful thought as to combinations of texture and colour. In simpler dishes the use of garnishes, tidy and neat arrangements.

8	Obvious care and attention to detail with visual effect, but perhaps not with the highest degree of skill. Tendency to follow standard garnishing.
7 – 6	Attractive arrangement and garnishes. Neat arrangements on plates.
5 – 4 – 3	No real attempt to enhance appearance. No variety of colours and textures. No careful arrangements. Some drying out of food, wrinkled skin on sauce. Not particularly hot.
2 – 1	Badly presented. No garnish. Dull combination. Lukewarm.

31 Dinner Quality

10 – 9	Skilful use of finest, fresh ingredients. Could be simple in style but with great attention to detail and quality. Everything prepared to the right degree. Good balance on menu with something for all tastes.
8	Evidence of aiming for highest quality, but may not quite reach top level of execution. High quality fresh ingredients.
7 – 6	Maybe a mixture of fresh ingredients and high quality prepared meals. Obvious care and attention paid to preparation but perhaps domestic in style.
5 – 4 – 3	Low quality food or inexpertly prepared. Not very appetising but edible.
2 – 1	Lowest quality ingredients, poorly prepared. Burnt, dried out, over salted. Unappetising. Inedible.

32   Breakfast Presentation and Quality

10 – 9   Cold buffet neatly set out, attractive containers. May opt for plated cold courses. In hotel, preferably a refrigerated counter. Good range of hot and cold food. Preferably plated main course and eggs cooked to guests order. High quality fresh ingredients and wide choice. Speciality foods and unusual dishes. Wide selection of breads and pastries. Service must be offered.

8   Smaller range of items on buffet or fewer cold courses. Less attention to detail. Smaller range of cooked items. High quality ingredients. Perhaps lower skill in execution, but noticeable attempt to provide high quality and some unusual items. Eggs cooked to guests order.

7 – 6   Standard range of cold courses. Limited range of choice for cooked items. All ingredients of good quality. Competent cooking, but no unusual or sophisticated dishes. Some choices available.

5 – 4 – 3   Only basic breakfast and limited choice of hot and cold courses. Low quality ingredients. Small portions.

2 – 1   No choice. Low quality ingredients. Badly cooked.

Services and Service

33   Welcome, Friendliness and Attitude

10 – 9   Warm friendly smile. Helpful attitude. Help with luggage and provision of information about the establishment. Everyone at the establishment attempt to establish a good rapport and show willingness to please.

8   Cheerful demeanour and attitude. Guests shown to room and given necessary information. Asked if anything else is

required.

7 – 6 Pleasant appearance. Willingness to help when asked.

5 – 4 – 3 Neutral behaviour. No particular enthusiasm. Just doing the job.

2 – 1 Surly or rude behaviour. Clear indifference to guests. Irritation at being asked for anything.

34 Reservation, Check-In and General Efficiency

10 – 9 Efficient and helpful telephone reservation. All details taken down and checked. All necessary information provided. Prompt thorough check-in. All essential information given to guests, layout of property, available facilities, meal times, etc. Any messages forwarded promptly. Efficient communication with other departments, porters, booking of restaurant tables, etc.

8 Reservations dealt with promptly. All necessary information taken and provided.   Efficient check-in. Perhaps not always given full information about facilities. Good responses to any requests. Guest's needs aren't always anticipated.

7 – 6 Reservations dealt with fairly well. All necessary information taken and provided. When registered key is given and guest is directed to room. All requests dealt with pleasantly.

5 – 4 – 3 Name and address taken. Minimal information given. Key given without directions to room. Rather unwilling response to any requests.

2 – 1 Name only taken. Administrative errors not proficiently rectified. Surly manner. Marked reluctance to give any help.

35   Porterage

Porterage may not apply to all serviced accommodation, but some assistance with luggage is expected at all 4- and 5-star hotels.

10 – 9	Smart, helpful manner of staff readily available. Good knowledge of accommodation facilities and local area.
8	Willing and friendly. Reasonably knowledgeable about most matters, willing to find out more. May have other duties but endeavours to be prompt.
7 – 6	Member of staff available to carry bags, though there may be some delay. Cheerful, but not necessarily skilled in dealing with matters outside hotel environs. Happy to help where he or she can.
5 – 4 – 3	Long delay in getting bags to room. No further help or information. Responds to requests for information or help in an indifferent way.
2 – 1	Bags ignored or taken to wrong room with error not proficiently rectified. Great difficulty in finding a porter when one is required. Unforthcoming, unhelpful and clearly resents having to carry other people's bags. Not interested in helping guests.

36   Room Service

Applies to outsourced as well as internal room service.

10 – 9	High standard of promptness and efficiency. Telephone answered promptly. Order delivered with minimal delay. Attentive manner. Orders correct no items wrong or missing. Appropriate condiments. Attractive presentation. Cutlery and napkin provided. Dirty dishes removed at earliest

convenience.

| 8 | Order taken in pleasant manner. Delivered in reasonable time. Pleasant attitude. Order correct. Asks if anything else required. Tray collected from outside room. |
| | If outsourced a tray (or table), plate, and cutlery is provided by the accommodation establishment, on which the guest can place their food. |

| 7 – 6 | Order taken efficiently. No undue delay. Order correct but condiments missing. |

| 5 – 4 – 3 | Some items on room service menu not available. Some delay in answering phone. Lengthy wait. Orders only partially correct no napkins, knife and forks. Indifferent attitude. Told to leave tray outside room. Trays not collected for several hours. |

| 2 – 1 | Long delay in answering phone. No knowledge of what is available. Room service not available until chefs come in for shift. Order wrong. No tray. Dirties never taken or left for a long time to clear away. |

37   Public Area Service

| 10 – 9 | Efficient, attentive service from smart, willing staff. Needs of guests anticipated. Polished, professional manner. Drinks correctly served and presented. Top ups offered. |

| 8 | Brilliant, willing staff. Helpful and attentive, though perhaps lacking the final polish. Shows willingness when anything is requested, may have to go away, to find out. |

| 7 – 6 | Staff always present and respond helpfully when asked. Willing, though could possibly benefit from further training. |

| 5 – 4 – 3 | Staff difficult to locate at times. Do what they are asked without enthusiasm. |

No rapport with guests. Little interest.

2 – 1   Surly inefficient staff. Missing for long periods of time. No willingness to be helpful. Ignoring the customer they are serving. Little product knowledge. No interest.

38   Meal Service

10 – 9   Cheerful friendly, polite and well-trained staff. Well-informed about food and wine. High standard of personal cleanliness. Prompt and efficient service. Correct cutlery and glasses supplied for each meal. Good judgement on timing of courses and drinks. Any further needs are responded to. For breakfast a cheerful welcoming. Prompt service, dirty dishes cleaned promptly and top-ups noted.

8   Well-motivated staff. Evidence of aspiring to excellent standard, may fall a little short, would benefit from further training.

7 – 6   Willingness to be helpful and attentive. More enthusiastic than polished, but trying to do their best. Would benefit from further training.

5 – 4 – Low skills but basically pleasant. Informality bordering on
3   inefficiency. Not really interested, but responds in a reasonably and helpful way to requests. Conversely, well skilled and trained, but lacking social skills, arrogant or insensitive.

2 – 1   Surly, indifferent, poorly skilled staff. Slow service. No professionalism or interest.

39   Check-Out Efficiency

10 – 9   Prompt attention. Bill correct in all details. Every item explained by receptionist. Guests asked if they enjoyed their

stay. Positive last impression. Staff well versed in all methods of payment.

8	Prompt attention. Attempt at excellence, but perhaps lacking professional polish. Cheerful. Bill correct.
7 – 6	Bill correct. Staff obviously willing and trying to be helpful.
5 – 4 – 3	Bill unclear (some charges not explained). Arithmetic wrong. Staff unable to explain why charges made but sort things out eventually. Lack training.
2 – 1	Bill wrong and unexplained. Staff have no idea and are unwilling to assist the guests. Surly manner. Long wait. Staff unable to manage some forms of payment.

40   Tourist Information

10 – 9	Information pack in bedrooms, reception or lounge. Information covers immediate and surrounding area as well as specific accommodation information. Books, pamphlets on matters of local interest, leisure facilities, etc. Personally prepared information. Staff well versed on relevant tourist information. Staff willing to assist and inform tourists on the local area. High attention to personalised itineraries and personal interest in guest's information requirements.
8	As above but a limited range. Staff not as well versed.
7 – 6	Fewer pamphlets available on surrounding area. Staff able to assist but not well versed.
5 – 4 – 3	Limited information at reception only. Staff lack required knowledge.
2 – 1	No information or out-of-date information. Staff unable to assist.

41   Bedrooms

10 – 9   High standard of cleanliness and attention to detail. Well-made beds. Gleaming surfaces, no smears or marks. Evidence of thorough, not just superficial cleaning. No blown bulbs or broken equipment. Turndown service. Room tidied, any trays taken away. Lights on and curtains drawn in the evening.

8   High standard of cleanliness but attention to detail may not come up to the same standard as above. One or two small areas of attention missed.

7 – 6   No dust, efficient vacuum cleaning. Equipment and room accessories not perhaps quite as tidy and well arranged as they should be. Occasional lapse in maintenance – odd bulb blown. All surfaces free from dirt and polished.

5 – 4 – 3   Surfaces smeary or dusty. Evidence of neglect of vacuum cleaning under beds and in inaccessible corners. Pieces of paper, debris in corners and under furniture. Blown bulbs, dusty lamp shades.

2 – 1   Very heavy dust on all surfaces. Debris in wardrobes, drawers. Bits of paper, threads and other items, grit, etc on carpet. Long-term neglect.

42   Guest Bathrooms

10 – 9   Fastidious attention to hygiene. All surfaces gleaming. Clean, fresh smell. High level of efficiency.

8   Generally very high standard, but perhaps one or two slight lapses.

7 – 6   No evidence of dirt, dust, hair or grime. Surfaces all clean. Floors clean. Slight discolouration of enamel or grout.

5 – 4 –   Generally clean but lacking attention to detail. Dirt and dust

3	on low and high surfaces and in inaccessible places. Surfaces and enamel dull. Flooring discoloured.
2 – 1	Low standard of housekeeping. Dirt and dust on all surfaces. Long-term encrusted grime in inaccessible places. Dirt, dust and hairs on floor, in corners. Flooring around toilet stained, smelly.

43   Public Areas

10 – 9	All well vacuum cleaned. All surfaces, high and low, dirt and dust free. No cobwebs. Table surfaces well polished. Ashtrays clean. No fingerprints left on doorplates or light switches, etc. Flowers fresh and well arranged. Newspapers, books, etc up to date and tidy. In B&B's personal or family items all tidy and uncluttered.
8	Generally a very good level of vacuum cleaning and dusting. Everything tidy and well arranged.
7 – 6	High level of cleanliness. Easy seating area may have "lived-in" feel with some books, magazines, etc on tables.
5 – 4 – 3	Clean but with some dust on high and low surfaces. Personal clutter. Books and magazines out of date and in untidy piles. Dying houseplants. Smears on surfaces.
2 – 1	Generally neglected housekeeping. Carpets badly vacuum cleaned. All surfaces dirty or dusty. Cobwebs, dead insects. Dead or wilting plants. Ashtrays not emptied. Newspapers, magazines and books on floor. Dirty glasses or cups on tables.

44   Public Toilets

10 – 9	Fastidious attention to hygiene. All surfaces gleaming. Clean and fresh smell. High level of efficiency.

8	Generally very high standard, but perhaps one or two slight lapses.
7 – 6	No evidence of dirt, dust, hair or grime. Surfaces all clean. Floor cleaned and free from dirt and dust.
5 – 4 – 3	Generally clean but lacking attention to detail. Dirt and dust on low and high surfaces and in inaccessible places.
2 – 1	Low standard of housekeeping. Dirt and dust on all surfaces. Long term encrusted grime in inaccessible places. Dirt and hairs on floor, in corners. Flooring around toilet stained and smelly.

45 Restaurant

10 – 9	High standard of cleanliness in all areas. No evidence of previous meals. Efficient cleaning. Tables always set-up to high standard.
8	Generally high standard of cleanliness – no dirt, dust, etc. May be some clutter. Pile of menus, wine lists, etc.
7 – 6	Always tidy and clean in time for beginning of meal service. Generally good standards of cleaning and tidiness.
5 – 4 – 3	Not always at its tidiest. Bottles, glasses, menus on surfaces. Generally clean but may be some dirt and dust on high or low surfaces. Some tables remain unset during meal service. Pot plants and flowers neglected.
2 – 1	Untidy. Dusty, crumbs on carpet, surfaces smeared, ring marked. Dead or dying flowers. Untidy piles of menus etc scattered around. Marks, stains on tablecloths. Dirty, unclean ashtrays.

46 Appearance of Staff

The nature of the establishment will be taken into account as formality may vary significantly.

10 – 9	Clean, neat, appropriate dress. A general smart, well-groomed appearance. Sleeves, trousers and skirts the right length. Clothing fresh and well ironed. Hair clean and under control. Hands and fingernails clean. Polished shoes.
8	Approaching excellent, but lacking the final touch. Perhaps some clothing items a little ill fitting. All clothing clean.
7 – 6	A noticeable attempt to be smart. No stains, tears, etc but dressed for comfort rather than smartness.
5 – 4 – 3	Clothes starting to look worn, rumpled, lived in, but basically clean. Hair a bit uncontrolled.
2 – 1	Clothing dirty, stained, frayed, holed. Dirty shoes. Hands and fingernails grubby. Hair unwashed and out of control. Unshaven. Personal hygiene lacking.

APPENDIX B

- Serviced Accommodation Minimum Requirements -

Serviced Accommodation Minimum Requirements

1   Definitions

Bed & Breakfast - accommodation is provided in a family (private) home and the owner/manager lives in the house or on the property. Breakfast must be served. Bathroom facilities may or may not be en-suite and/or private. In general, the guest shares the public areas with the host family.

Country House - is a large Guest House, usually situated in natural, peaceful surroundings such as near a nature reserve, a forest, a lake etc. It offers all the services of a hotel, including dinner.

Guest House - can be an existing home, a renovated home or a building that has been specifically designed to provide overnight accommodation. A guest house will have public areas for the exclusive use of its guests. A guest house is a commercial operation enterprise and as such the owner or manager may live on the property.

Hotel - provides accommodation to the travelling public, has a reception area, and offers at least a "breakfast room" or communal eating area. In general a hotel makes food and beverage services available to guests; these may be outsourced or provided by the hotel.

Lodge - an accommodation facility located in natural surroundings. The rates charged are usually inclusive of all meals and the experience offered at the lodge, with game drives, battlefield tours, etc.

Only establishments that cater for transient guests (travelling public) will qualify for grading.

2 Minimum Requirements for Classification

2.1 General

2.1.1 Safety and Security

The best possible precaution should be taken at all times, to maintain the safety and security of the guests, to prevent damage or theft of their property and possessions.

Emergency information, procedures and after hours contacts for assistance should be clearly displayed in English, multilingual, if possible (dependent on the customer profile of the establishment).

A person responsible for safety and security should be on call 24-hours a day.

To provide safety, security and comfort for guests, lighting needs to be adequate throughout all public areas, particularly stairways and car parks.

The best possible locking devices need to be fitted within all guest rooms. These locks should enable the guest to lock their room from the outside, when leaving the room, as well as from the inside, whilst in the room. In situations where rooms are inter-connecting, locking methods need to be secure and certain.

A safe, if not available in each room, should be provided at reception for the secure storage of guests valuables.

Once a guest is registered, security codes or remote control devices should be made available, providing the guest access to the premises at all times.

2.1.2 Cleanliness and Comfort

Every effort to maintain the highest possible standards of cleanliness and comfort should be made throughout the establishment, ensuring that every guest enjoys the comfort they expect.

2.1.3 Statutory Obligations

All establishments are expected to comply with all statutory and local government regulations.

Assessors may request that the relevant documentation and certificates are presented at the time of the assessment, this would include…

- Business registration entitling the guest house to operate legally (including tax status).
- Provincial registration (if applicable).
- Public liability insurance.
- Compliance with local authority regulations – fire safety certificate; building accessibility regulations; hygiene regulations.

2.1.4 Access

Establishments should be open every day of the year providing all appropriate services and facilities, unless offering only seasonal accommodation, or are closed for refurbishments.

Access should never be denied based on race, ethnicity and gender, physical or mental condition.

2.1.5 Courtesy

Courtesy of the highest standard should be shown to guests at all times.

Any complaints should be dealt with promptly and courteously.

2.1.6 Marketing, Reservations and Pricing

Clear communication regarding what the establishment has to offer should be made available whether by advertisement, brochure, word of mouth or other means to all guests or prospective guests upon request. This should include…

- Detailed prices for: accommodation, meals, refreshments, any additional services, service charges, surcharges and levies. All prices should include VAT.
- Full details of cancellation policy and in-house rules, e.g. smoking or pets to be on hand.

- An honest description of all amenities, facilities and services offered.

All of the above should be communicated before, or at the time of reservation. All requests, correspondence, enquires and complaints should be handled in a friendly and efficient manner.

2.2 Buildings

2.2.1 Exterior

The grounds and gardens of each establishment should always be well maintained, neat and clean.

All signage needs to be clearly visible, both on and off property, ensuring guests are correctly guided to the appropriate entrances at all times. Additional directional signage, with lighting may be required along paths leading to annexes.

2.2.2 Maintenance

All interior and exterior structures, fittings, fixtures and furnishings should be maintained in a sound, clean and working condition.

2.3 Bedrooms

2.3.1 Housekeeping

All bedrooms should be cleaned daily. Beds should be made daily and all linen, including duvets should be changed for each new guest.

All bed linen, including duvet covers, should be changed at least every 5 days. Should environmental reasons prevent this, then this period can be extended with the guests consent. Any soiled linen should be changed immediately.

2.3.2 Bedroom Size

The size of a bedroom should allow for guests to move easily, with free access to all furniture and fittings in the room. All doors, windows, cupboards and draws should open with ease.

Minimum ceiling height should allow for a person of 1.8m tall, to move without stooping.

2.3.3 Beds

All beds should be in good condition providing a secure headboard, where style prohibits, a continental pillow will suffice.

Mattresses should be of a good quality, sprung or foam and fitted with a mattress protector or under-blanket.

A single bed should comfortably accommodate an average sized adult and a double bed, two adults.

2.3.4 Bedding

All bedding has to be clean and sufficient in quantity. One blanket and one pillow per sleeping space as minimum, with extras readily available should the guest or weather conditions demand. Duvets are acceptable. Under-sheets, top-sheets should be on each bed and a pillowcase for each pillow.

Beds should be covered with a bedspread, quilt or duvet. The base of the bed should never be exposed, preferably covered with a "skirt", valance or bedspread.

Non-allergic pillows and duvets should be available on request.

2.3.5 Bedside Tables

All beds should be accompanied by a bedside table and a reading light, where there are two beds in a room, a single table, between the two, will suffice. A dressing table or writing table may double as a bedside table.

2.3.6 Windows and Lighting

A minimum of one window per room is recommended to provide natural light and ventilation.

Even if the window is unable to open, guests must be able to 'look out' and in such a case a ventilation system must be provided.

In addition to a main covered or shaded bedroom light, a bedside, or bed-head light is appropriate. The number of beside lights should be determined by the number of guests in each room. Twin beds may share a light. A double bed may have one shared bed-head light.

Emergency lighting is essential e.g. a torch.

2.3.7 Curtains

Curtains, blinds or shutters should be installed on all windows including glass panels and glass doors to provide both privacy and light exclusion for the guest. Consideration should be given for additional privacy in the form of net curtaining or blinds where appropriate.

2.3.8 Heating and Cooling

A heater or fan should be available for each room on request. The typical climate of the region should be considered when determining the heating or cooling requirements.

2.3.9 Flooring

Ease of cleaning and hygiene should be considered when determining the appropriate flooring.

2.3.10 Clothes Storage

Each room should provide sufficient space for hanging clothes, with good quality hangers. In addition to a wardrobe, adequate drawer and shelf space should also be available.

2.3.11   Luggage storage

Sufficient storage space should be available in each room for storing suitcases, bags, etc. In addition a luggage rack to support suitcases should also be accessible.

2.3.12   Dressing or Writing table

Each guest room should have a dressing or writing table, a chest of draws or equivalent, thus providing the guest with suitable space to either work or to place their belongings. The dressing or writing table may double-up as a bedside table. There should be a mirror adjacent to the dressing or writing table with adequate lighting.

2.3.13   Seating

There should be a minimum of one chair in each room.

2.3.14   Beverage facilities

Tea and coffee making facilities should be provided in each bedroom, unless a self-service beverage buffet is available (could be a vending machine) or the equivalent room service is offered.

2.3.15   Television and Radio

If a broadcast signal is available then a colour television set suitable for the size of the room should be provided in each bedroom. If there are no televisions in the bedrooms then a colour television should be available in the lounge area. Should a television signal be unavailable then a radio would offer an alternative

Lodges: TVs are optional

2.3.16   Stationery

Stationery and other writing materials should be available from reception.

2.3.17   Telephones

Telephones in guest rooms are optional; however the guest should be able to make use of the household telephone.

Hotels: Bedroom telephones should be provided – at minimum for internal communication.

Where there are phones in a bedroom the number of the phone, the establishment's number, reception number, switchboard number and all emergency numbers should be displayed.

Guests should also be informed of all telephone charges on request.

2.3.18   Miscellaneous

In addition to the above each bedroom should provide the following…

• A waste bin.
• Clean drinking glass per permanent sleeping position.
• An ashtray (if smoking is permitted).
• Sufficient, safe and conveniently located power sockets, for electrical equipment.
• A towel rail or equivalent if the room is not en-suite.

2.4   Bath / Shower room

2.4.1   En-suite, private bath or shower rooms

Each room within the establishment (the number of beds may vary dependant on the configuration of the establishment's rooms) should have either an en-suite bathroom or alternatively a private bathroom.

A private bathroom is one solely designated for the use of one guest room only. The bathroom should be reasonably close to the bedroom and lockable. Access to the bathroom via any public area (lounge, kitchen etc) is not acceptable.

Lodges & Guest Houses - shared bathrooms: There should be at least one bath or shower and toilet with washbasin to every 4 resident guests. Proprietors must have their own facilities separate from that of the guest.

B & B: There should be at least one bath or shower and toilet with washbasin to every 4 resident guests. Where the maximum number of persons (including guests and the proprietor / family members) using a bath or shower room, toilet and washbasin facility is no more than 6, it is acceptable that the facility is shared between guests and proprietors/family. Where a shared facility exists, proprietors and their family should avoid prolonged use during peak guest demand periods (this may be in the early to mid-morning period). In addition, personal belongings of proprietors and family should be removed from the bathroom.

2.4.2   Ventilation

All bathrooms must provide sufficient ventilation. This can be a window that opens. Where there is no window, an extraction fan must be fitted

2.4.3   Housekeeping

All bathrooms should be cleaned daily.

All bathroom linen should be changed at least every 5 days. Should environmental reasons prevent this, then this period can be extended with the guests consent. Any soiled linen should be changed immediately.

2.4.4   Bathroom Size

All bathrooms should provide sufficient space to allow freedom of movement for guests and access to all fittings.

2.4.5   Fixtures and Fittings

Each bathroom should have…

- Bath or shower

- Washbasin with adjacent mirror

- Toilet

- Soap dish/holder/dispenser

- Toilet roll holder and toilet paper.

- Waste bin

- Adequate ventilation (extractor fan or opening window)

- Towel rail, shelf or equivalent

- Running, hot water for bathing should be available at all reasonable times

- Clean hand and bath towel for each guest

- Fresh soap for each new guest

- Clothes hook or equivalent

- Private & shared bathrooms must be lockable from the inside.

2.4.6   Lighting and Windows

All bathrooms should be well lit with the light switch near the entrance to the bathroom.

For guest privacy all bathroom windows should be tinted, opaque or made of a glass that ensures privacy, alternatively a blind, curtain or shutter should be used.

2.5   Public Areas

2.5.1   Reception Area

A clean central meeting or reception area should be provided. This should also provide the guests with the means (a bell or buzzer) of gaining attention when the reception is not attended.

Hotel: A clearly designated reception area should be provided.

In addition information regarding the local area should be readily available. This should include maps, activity schedules, local tours, transport, restaurants, etc.

2.5.2   Seating Area

Lodges & Hotels: There should be a sitting area (lounge) available to guests throughout the day and evening with sufficient comfortable seating.

GH: There should be a sitting area (lounge) available to guests throughout the day and evening with sufficient comfortable seating. This may be within the guest room

B & B: 4 & 5 star: A communal lounge area with comfortable chairs should be available for guest use.

2.5.3   Dining Area

At least one dining or "communal eating" area should be provided for the service of breakfast and other meals (if served). The dining area should be on or adjacent to the establishment.

2.5.4   Public Toilets

A separate toilet facility should be conveniently located in the public areas (may be unisex).

All toilets should be well maintained, clean and frequently checked.

At minimum a basin with running water, toilet paper, soap and a drying mechanism (clean towel, paper towels, hot air dryer, etc) should be provided.

2.6   Services and Food & Beverage

2.6.1   Reception

Reception facilities should be available at all reasonable hours during the period that the establishment is open.

A message taking service should be available.

2.6.2   Porter Service

Assistance with luggage should be available on request.

2.6.3   Morning Call

Guests should be able to request an early morning wake-up call if there is no alarm clock in guest rooms.

2.6.4   Laundry

At minimum an iron and ironing board should be available on request.

2.6.5   Food & Beverage – General

The establishment should make dinner available if located in an area where no alternative meals can be obtained.

Staff should demonstrate adequate levels of product knowledge and provide efficient service.

All food should be hygienically stored, prepared and presented.

2.6.6   Breakfast

At a minimum a continental breakfast (or other appropriate breakfast e.g. traditional) should be available (buffet style is acceptable). This may be outsourced.

2.7   Additional Requirements for 4- and 5-Star Serviced Accommodation

2.7.1   General

For 4 and 5 Star establishments a higher level of spaciousness will be required in all areas – e.g. Corridors, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.

Some account may be taken of limitations in older or historic properties.

2.7.2   Bedrooms

The bedroom should have at least two comfortable seating chairs.

If appropriate televisions must have remote control and a wide choice of channels should be provided.

Air conditioning: Mandatory in 5 star establishments.

Heating and cooling: Ceiling fans with a remote or wall-mounted control preferred.

There should be a safe in each room.

There should be a hairdryer in each room.

In areas where Malaria occurs, adequate protection against mosquitoes in the form of netting, window gauze and or insecticide should be provided in each guest room.

2.7.3   Bathrooms

Separate bath and shower: Mandatory for all 5 star establishments.

Bath with overhead shower: Mandatory for all 4 star Hotels.

Bath OR shower accepted for 4 star GH; B & B & Lodges. Showers not to be cramped. Minimum 900X900 with shower doors & no floppy shower curtains. Shower rose to be of a superior quality and type; space to be provided for toiletries, etc.

Other serviced establishments: All guest bedrooms should have en-suite bath or shower.

Showers must be a minimum size of 900 x 900cm. Must have shower doors and NOT plastic curtains. The Shower rose to be of a superior nature and there needs to be space for soap.

Bath sheets must be provided by all 5 star establishments.

An extensive range of quality guest amenities should be available.

For new properties twin wash hand-basins are required for 5 star establishments.

2.7.4   Services

A 24 hour reception service for Hotels – not however for Lodges, Guest Houses, Country Houses and Bed & Breakfasts, 18 hours for 4 star hotels – not however for Lodges, Guest Houses, Country Houses and Bed & Breakfasts.

Guest laundry service is required.

A comprehensive bedroom / bathroom turn-down service is expected in 5 star establishments.

2.7.5   Food & Beverage

There should be a served beverage service in the public lounge, deck or bar area.

In hotels a full service restaurant open to residents must be available if no alternative restaurants are available in the vicinity of the hotel.

Hotels: Room service should be provided (24 hours in 5 star hotels and 18 hours in 4 star hotels). This may be outsourced, but the standard must conform to the standard of the hotel.

Meals can be served in the room if the appropriate table and chair arrangement is provided.

Guest and Country Houses to provide meals on request in cases when sufficient notice has been given and there are no quality restaurants in the vicinity.

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APPENDIX C

- Final questionnaire developed for the present study -

Universiteit van Pretoria

Respondent no.	V1		
Lodge no.	V2		

- WEB SITE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE -

Dear respondent

Thank you for cooperation in completing this series of questionnaires. The purpose of this survey is to determine how South African 5-star lodges perform in terms of internationally accepted criteria for Web site design. Each questionnaire consists of a series of yes/no type questions and should not take more than ±10 minutes to complete. Your input will determine the success of the study and your cooperation would be highly appreciated. This is an anonymous and confidential survey. You cannot be identified and the answers you provide will be used for research purposes only.

Please feel free to contact Lorinda Hern (082 210 5678) or Prof. Neels van Heerden (083 415 3541) if you have any queries.

Lodge: Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence

URL for Web site: www.royalmadikwe.com

Date of evaluation: _____

QUESTION 1

The following statements relate to the user-friendliness of a Web site. **Please answer <u>all</u> the questions by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.** There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions of the Web sites that form part of the survey.

		Presence of Element			
1.1	Telephone number clearly available	YES	NO	V3	
1.2	Mailing address clearly available	YES	NO	V4	
1.3	E-mail contact clearly available	YES	NO	V5	
1.4	Limited vertical and horizontal scrolling	YES	NO	V6	
1.5	Home button available on all pages	YES	NO	V7	
1.6	Clear and effective navigation tool on each page	YES	NO	V8	
1.7	Fax number clearly available	YES	NO	V9	
1.8	Site map or index available	YES	NO	V10	
1.9	Site content search function available	YES	NO	V11	

Based on your responses to the statements in Question 1, **please rate** the **overall user-friendliness** of this Web site **by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.**
1 = Poor   2 = Fair   3 = Good   4 = Excellent

		1	2	3	4	V12	
1.10	Overall user-friendliness						

QUESTION 2

The following statements relate to the site attractiveness of a Web site. **Please answer all the questions by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.** There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions of the Web sites that form part of the survey.

		Presence of Element			
2.1	Text clear and readable	YES	NO	V13	
2.2	Hyperlinks easy to read	YES	NO	V14	
2.3	Pages clean and uncluttered	YES	NO	V15	
2.4	Photos and images are good quality	YES	NO	V16	
2.5	Effective use of Web page space	YES	NO	V17	
2.6	Pictures and images reinforce text	YES	NO	V18	
2.7	Sufficient contrast between background and text	YES	NO	V19	
2.8	Background effective and appealing	YES	NO	V20	
2.9	Use of color improves visual appearance	YES	NO	V21	

Based on your responses to the statements in Question 2, **please rate** the **overall site attractiveness** of this Web site **by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.**
1 = Poor   2 = Fair   3 = Good   4 = Excellent

2.10	Overall site attractiveness	1	2	3	4	V22	

QUESTION 3

The following statements relate to the marketing effectiveness of a Web site. **Please answer all the questions by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.** There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions of the Web sites that form part of the survey.

		Presence of Element			
3.1	Lodge pictures available	YES	NO	V23	
3.2	Guest room pictures available	YES	NO	V24	
3.3	Are the rates available?	YES	NO	V25	
3.4	Text describes uniqueness of the lodge (historical etc.)	YES	NO	V26	
3.5	Local activities and events listed on site	YES	NO	V27	
3.6	Links to activities and area attractions	YES	NO	V28	
3.7	Are special packages offered?	YES	NO	V29	
3.8	Hyperlinks to sponsor/advertisements available	YES	NO	V30	
3.9	Text describe innkeepers or owners	YES	NO	V31	
3.10	Logo reflected on the Web site	YES	NO	V32	
3.11	Can you make a reservation online?	YES	NO	V33	
3.12	Special promotions addressed	YES	NO	V34	
3.13	Special target markets (children, pets, ADA, etc.)	YES	NO	V35	
3.14	Calendar of events available	YES	NO	V36	
3.15	Testimonial information available	YES	NO	V37	
3.16	Virtual tour available	YES	NO	V38	
3.17	Mission statement available	YES	NO	V39	
3.18	Awards information available	YES	NO	V40	

Based on your responses to the statements in Q... **rall marketing effectiveness** of this Web site **by marking a cross [X] in the appropriate block.**
1 = Poor   2 = Fair   3 = Good   4 = Excellent

3.19	Overall marketing effectiveness	1	2	3	4	V41	

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION - YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY IS MUCH APPRECIATED.

APPENDIX D

- Home pages of all 5-star lodge web sites forming part of the study -

Amakhosi Safari Lodge home page

Budmarsh Lodge home page

Camp Jabulani home page

South Africa's premier elephant back safari

http://www.campjabulani.com/elephantbacksafaris.htm

Apple   Yahoo!   Google Maps   YouTube   Wikipedia   News (297) ▾   Popular ▾

Organic

CAMP JABULANI

STORY OF AN ELEPHANT

THE ELEPHANTS

THE CAMP

DAILY ACTIVITIES

GETTING TO THE CAMP

RATES & TERMS

USEFUL INFORMATION

MARKETING MATERIAL

PACKAGES

GUEST COMMENTS

VISITORS' MEMORIES

ONLINE BOUTIQUE

CONTACT US

NEWS & SPECIALS

Jabulani

Rejoice: v 1: feel happiness or joy [syn: joy] 2: to express great joy; "Who cannot exult in Spring?" [syn: exult, triumph, jubilate] 3: be ecstatic with joy [syn: wallow, triumph]

IsiZulu translation: JABULANI

This is the story of an abandoned baby elephant who could never have known the impact he would have on the lives of countless people, and of 11 fellow elephants. This is a story of the power of a greater cause. It is a tale of celebration – the tale of Jabulani.

Just 4 months old, injured, severely dehydrated - practically dead. This is Lente Roode's first memory of Jabulani in June 1997. He had been found firmly stuck in the mud of a silt dam. After attempts to rescue him failed, his mother, with the rest of the herd, abandoned him. He was left to the elements.

It took a full year to nurse the tiny elephant back to health. He truly beat the odds amongst much medical skepticism as to whether he could survive. Lente worked with professionals to develop a special milk formula specifically for the tiny patient. He was monitored around the clock, cocooned in the love and affection of a dedicated team (including a hand-reared sheep called Skaap who acted as a surrogate mother) and slowly brought back to a state of vitality.

Dunkeld Country Estate home page

Fairways Lodge home page

Hlosi Game Lodge home page

Welcome, Hlosi, Lion Roars

http://www.hlosilodge.com/Pages/Detail.aspx?pageId=29

Google

Apple   Yahoo!   Google Maps   YouTube   Wikipedia   News (297)   Popular

HLOSI
GAME LODGE

WELCOME

SUITES

AMENITIES

ACTIVITIES

SPECIALS & PACKAGES

SAFARI COMPANION

FINE DINING

RATES

NEWS

CONTACT DETAILS

BOOK ONLINE

GALLERY

CLICK HERE FOR OUR
VIRTUAL TOUR

WELCOME

Lying along a curve of hill above a wide Eastern Cape river plain, Hlosi Game Lodge is a quiet, grassland retreat offering rich game viewing and 5-star accommodation in a location that welcomes and provides for children.

As part of the 7000-hectare, malaria-free Amakhala Game Reserve, Hlosi provides a rich, informative experience for adults and children alike, as we share our enthusiasm for conservation, for food, for life.

GUEST BOOK

What a great stay. Excellent, helpful and friendly staff without exception. We haven't stopped talking about our holiday since we got back! Thank you!

~ Peter

LATEST NEWS

New wine and single malt offering

We're proud to announce our brand-new wine list and single malt offering at all Lion Roars lodges.

Ivory Tree Lodge home page

Kuname River Lodge home page

http://www.kuname.co.za/

Q▾ Google

Apple   Yahoo!   Google Maps   YouTube   Wikipedia   News (297)▾   Popular▾

About | Experience | Accommodation | Cuisine | Location | News | Contact

KUNAME RIVER LODGE IS A SMALL
UNASHAMEDLY EXCLUSIVE
LUXURY SAFARI LODGE

Kuname River Lodge is a small, unashamedly exclusive, luxury safari lodge set in about 9,000 hectares of pristine African bush, in the Karongwe Private Game Reserve. We are only 45 minutes drive from the world-famous Kruger National Park in South Africa.

Bordered by the towering Drakensberg escarpment on the west and set in game-rich, lush, riverine vegetation, the facility offers a variety of breathtaking views, diverse landscapes and some of the best big five game-viewing opportunities in southern Africa.

- **Click here to subscribe to our newsletter**

Matumi Safari Lodge home page

Morukuru Lodge home page

Royal Madikwe Luxury Safari Residence home page

Shibula Lodge & Bush Spa home page

Thakadu River Camp home page

GG
GREENWOOD
GUIDES

THAKADU
River Camp

home | lodge | tents | safaris | community | news | guests | tariff | directions | general | collection

Madikwe Game Reserve is one of the few reserves in southern Africa, which is malaria free. Located in South Africa along the Botswana border and 20 kilometres from Gaberone, the reserve lies within a transition region between Lowveld bushveld and the Kalahari thornveld. As a result the region is host to an incredible diversity of species from both ecosystems. Geographically the region has enormous volcanic intrusions known as Inselbergs, wide open plains and the riverine environment along the Marico River in the east of the reserve. Thakadu River Camp is a wholly-owned, Community-based Tented Safari Camp within Madikwe Game Reserve. The Camp, on the banks of the Marico River, is an ecotourism partnership between North-West Parks, the Molatedi Community and The Madikwe Collection.

The community has a 45-year lease to operate a commercial lodge with traversing rights across the

Tilney Manor home page

http://www.sanbona.com/properties/content.asp?PageID=74

Apple   Yahoo!   Google Maps   YouTube   Wikipedia   News (297)   Popular

visit mantis   sitemap   search   Search our website
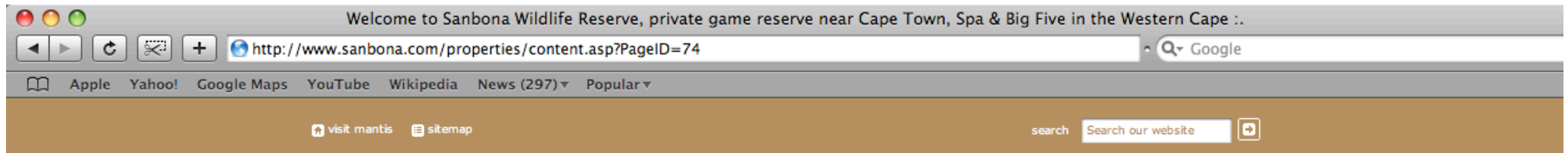
Sanbona WILDLIFE RESERVE   · BOOK ONLINE

ARRIVAL: 20 FEB 09   DEPARTURE: 21 FEB 09   ADULTS: 1   ROOMS: 1   BOOK

HOME PAGE   PHOTO GALLERY   ENQUIRY FORM   LOCATION MAP

CLICK HERE TO MAKE AN ONLINE BOOKING

SUBSCRIBE TO NEWS
HOME PAGE
ENQUIRY FORM

TILNEY MANOR

Tilney Manor has six luxuriously appointed rooms. This exclusivity ensures that guests can experience personal service and world-class cuisine in an atmosphere of privacy and tranquillity.
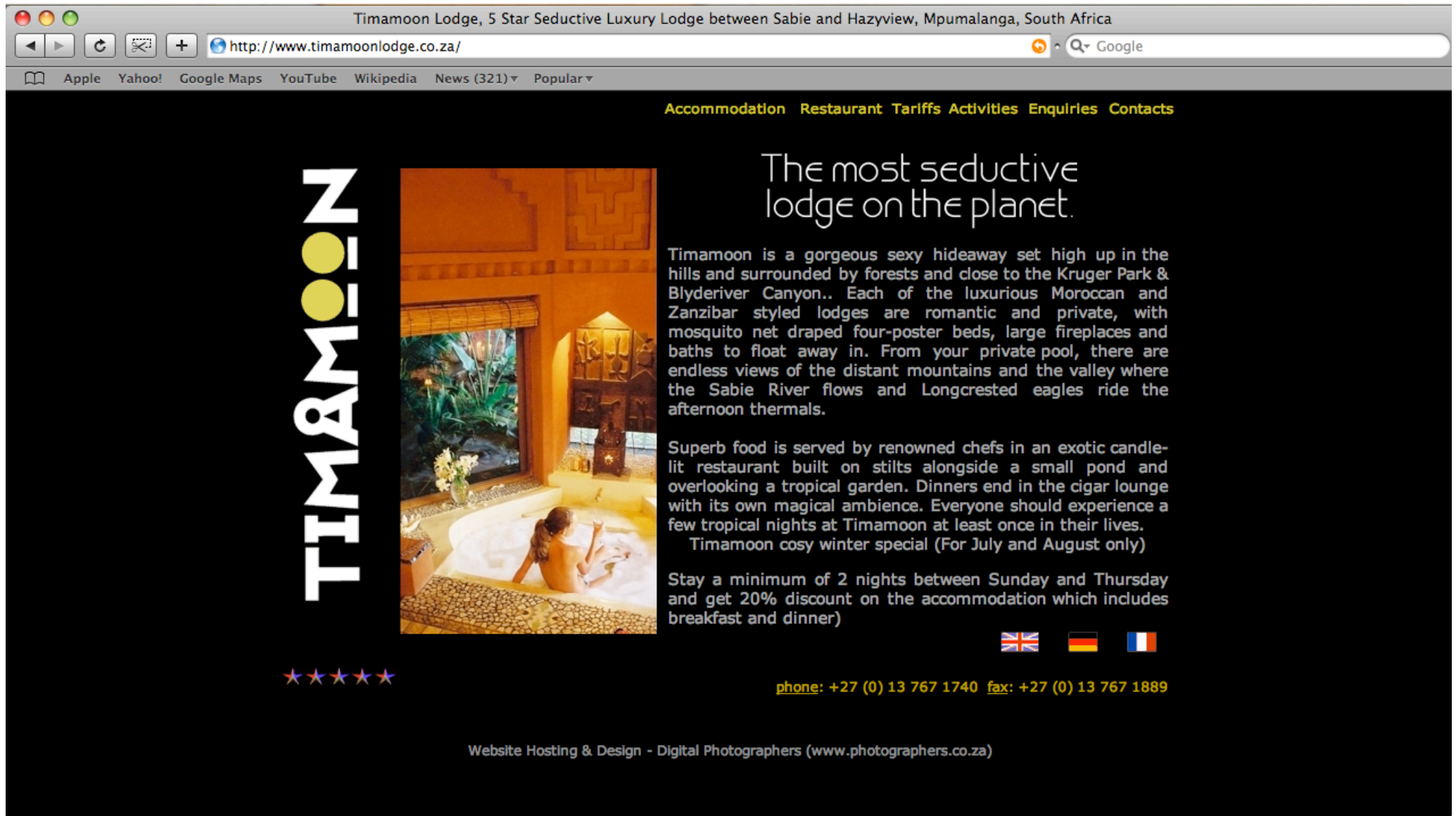
Comfortable lounges with fireplaces for winter nights, private verandas, romantic freestanding baths and carefully sheltered outdoor showers are just a few of the pleasure that guest can enjoy. More modern comforts include air-conditioning, satellite television, private bars and tea and coffee making facilities.

Timamoon home page

Timamoon Lodge, 5 Star Seductive Luxury Lodge between Sabie and Hazyview, Mpumalanga, South Africa

http://www.timamoonlodge.co.za/

Apple   Yahoo!   Google Maps   YouTube   Wikipedia   News (321)▾   Popular▾

Accommodation   Restaurant   Tariffs   Activities   Enquiries   Contacts

The most seductive lodge on the planet.

Timamoon is a gorgeous sexy hideaway set high up in the hills and surrounded by forests and close to the Kruger Park & Blyderiver Canyon.. Each of the luxurious Moroccan and Zanzibar styled lodges are romantic and private, with mosquito net draped four-poster beds, large fireplaces and baths to float away in. From your private pool, there are endless views of the distant mountains and the valley where the Sabie River flows and Longcrested eagles ride the afternoon thermals.

Superb food is served by renowned chefs in an exotic candle-lit restaurant built on stilts alongside a small pond and overlooking a tropical garden. Dinners end in the cigar lounge with its own magical ambience. Everyone should experience a few tropical nights at Timamoon at least once in their lives.
Timamoon cosy winter special (For July and August only)

Stay a minimum of 2 nights between Sunday and Thursday and get 20% discount on the accommodation which includes breakfast and dinner)
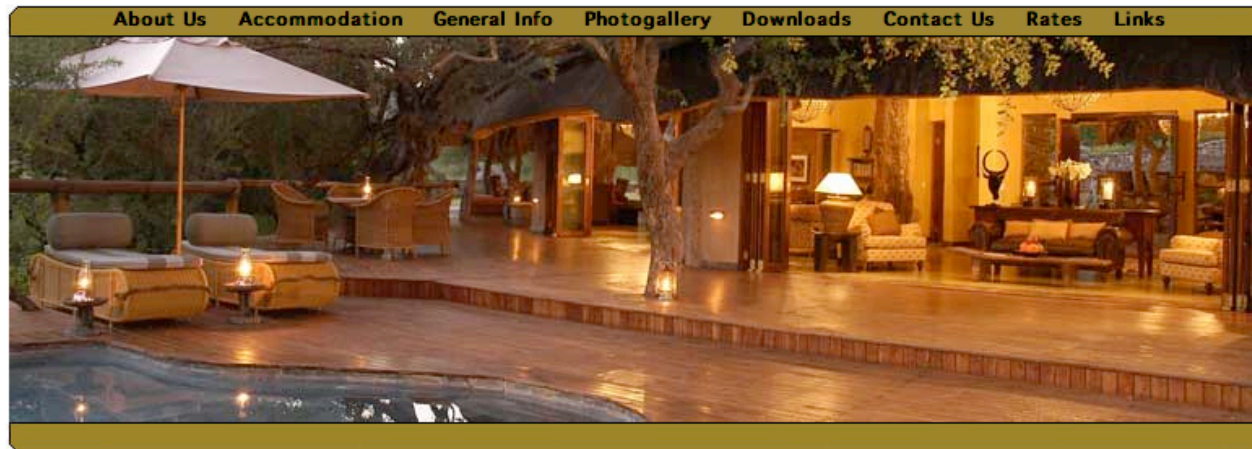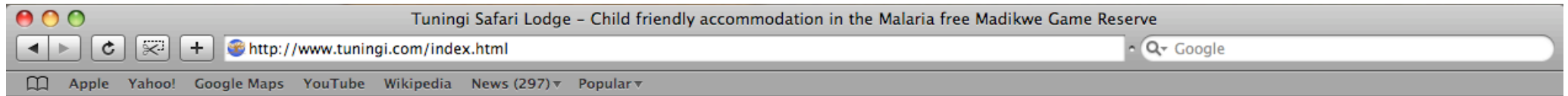
★★★★★

phone: +27 (0) 13 767 1740   fax: +27 (0) 13 767 1889

Website Hosting & Design - Digital Photographers (www.photographers.co.za)
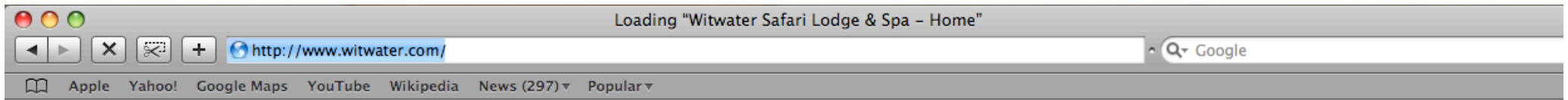
Tuningi Safari Lodge home page

Witwater Safari Lodge & Spa home page

APPENDIX E

- Example of a NetMechanic "scorecard" -