

Summary

Development of the volunteer tourism section for the German market

1 Oct 2008 - 28 Feb 2009

Undertaken at Buffalo Tours, 94 Ma May, Hanoi, Vietnam
www.buffalotours.com



The project was conducted as part of an internship at the Vietnamese tour operator Buffalo Tours (BT) in Hanoi. BT was founded in 1994 by a young Vietnamese medical doctor with a passion for adventure travel. In his role as CEO he is a promoter of local empowerment and sustainable principles and has won several prizes reflecting BT's positive contribution to local communities. As well as the English speaking market, BT is also targeting the French, German and Spanish speaking markets, each with their own web sites and small sales teams (1-3 people). The project topic "Development of the volunteer tourism section for the German market" was suggested by BT who had started to include volunteer tourism into their business in 2007 with the focus then on the English speaking market e.g. Australia, UK, US. The main contact persons for the project were BT's volunteer tourism coordinator belonging to the English teams and the German Sales manager who was also the supervisor.

The original project plan (job description) was to translate BT's English "assets" i.e. feedback/application forms, tour/project descriptions, web site contents, etc. into German. Very quickly it became apparent that a lot of the English material didn't have the quality to serve as a basis for a high quality 1:1 German translation. The solution was either to first improve and consolidate some of the English material or to focus on the German assets and design them in the best possible way even if that meant deviating from the English assets. The first solution would have been very time consuming and couldn't be achieved in the project timescales so the second solution was taken with the agreement of the German Sales manager.

One of the key activities in the demand analysis was conducting an online survey of the German speaking market. Although representative sampling couldn't be realized because of time and budget constraints, the results were very useful and were taken into account for the ongoing work, e.g. evaluating new volunteer projects or improving the German web site. Field trips to orphanages, a national park and a world heritage site were made to evaluate new volunteering opportunities in North Vietnam.

The update and maintenance of BT's entire German web site had to be performed as part of the internship duties and in parallel to the project work. Though the focus was on volunteer

tourism, the web site had to be considered as a single entity and the work on the volunteer topic couldn't be easily separated from work on other web site topics. A template was created to structure the descriptions of all volunteer tourism products and the search engine optimization focused on these. Google Analytics was used for monitoring web site activities and AdWords was used to place adverts for BT's volunteer tourism section on the web.

Performing the project work revealed many quality issues at BT such as, a lack of quality assurance and configuration management for all kinds of internal and external documentation, many inconsistencies between the different language web sites and within the sites or insufficiencies in the capturing and monitoring of customer feedback. At the end of the project the results were presented to BT's management at an especially convened meeting.

This is the structure of the project report:

Chapter 1 (Introduction) describes the background of the internship, some conventions and the document structure. The project management activities are described in **chapter 2 (Project management)**. The project work starts with **chapter 3 (Analysis)**, where volunteer tourism as a tourism sector, Vietnam as a volunteer tourism destination, BT as a volunteer tourism provider and BT's competitors are analyzed. The chapter ends with the description of a survey of the German market to analyze the demand side. **Chapter 4 (Marketing mix for the German speaking market)** deals with the marketing mix for the volunteer tourism product describing the product itself and discussing its price, distribution and promotion. An action plan for expanding the promotional activities is provided at the end of the chapter. **Chapter 5 (Product and process improvement)** deals with the improvement of existing volunteer products and the processes required by these products. BT's web presence, as part of the marketing mix, is described in a separate **chapter 6 (Buffalo Tours's web presence)**, because it took such a substantial amount of resource. After some general comments on BT's different web sites and their maintenance, a description of the history of the German web site and the subsequent improvements applied to it, is given. Testing and quality assurance issues are followed by a description of search engine optimization techniques. The chapter ends with the description of how Google Analytics and Google AdWords are used in BT's web site environment. The project work ends with the lessons learned, recommendations given and a conclusion in **chapter 7 (Learning phase)**. **Chapter 8 (Abbreviations)**, **9 (References)** and **10 (Tables)** complete the report. The **Appendix** contains, for reference, more detailed information for some of the chapters, e.g., review findings, list of competitors, forms, and reports.