eLearning in Travel and Tourism

It is generally acknowledged that the hospitality and tourism industry is well suited to adopt and make use of eLearning [1], as technology in general becomes central within the working environment of tourism employees. Furthermore, eLearning is not just about using technologies for educational purposes, but it’s a way in which individuals or companies can exchange information and gain required knowledge to increase their competitive edge.

Significance

In the tourism industry eLearning is particularly well suited for SMEs (Collins et al., 2003), that in several cases are positioned in geographically peripheral zones and have difficulties finding time and resources to involve the employees, including managers, into ordinary classroom training programs. Also tourism corporations have seen the benefit of eLearning usage as an additional tool to training provision among employees globally, especially in the multi-units, which are dispersed geographically and where the employees should be trained at the same level. Additionally, eLearning training is increasingly being used within the hotel sector, especially for training soft skills online (Cobanoglu et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2011; Weber et al., 2009).

Academic research on eLearning in tourism has been very fragmented, though several attempts by tourism academics to understand and represent the use of eLearning in the hospitality and tourism have been made (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cantoni, 2012). The relevance and advantages of eLearning for the tourism and hospitality education have been acknowledged in the recent years likewise (Cantoni & Kalbaska, 2010; Haven & Botterill, 2003; Kalbaska, 2012; Kuttainen & Lexhagen, 2012; Nadkarni & Venema, 2012; Sigala, 2002, 2004).

Based on a study by Cantoni et al. (2009), existing online courses in the field of the hospitality and tourism can be classified into four categories according to the providers of the online training service: Academic, Corporate, Destination Management Organization and Independent courses.

1. Academic courses are all online training programs, whose provider is an officially registered academic or educational establishment. This category includes the cases such as Bachelor in Tourism at Anglia Ruskin University (United Kingdom);

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1 This article is downloaded from the IFITT e-Tourism Wikipedia: http://www.ifitt.org/resources/wiki
Introduction to tourism course at the University of Southern Queensland’s (Australia), Introduction to Spa and Hospitality Operations at the University of California Irvine’s (United States), Online MBA at the Glion Institute of Higher Education (Switzerland).

2. Corporate courses are all online training offers, whose provider is a company or an institution working in the tourism field, and managing online training for its own employees, being current workers, whose knowledge requires updating or newcomers who need an initial training on products, corporate culture, selling or hospitality skills. The next examples can be mentioned: Silversea Academy and Rail Canada Training.

3. Destination Management Organization courses are offered by tourism offices at different levels (e.g. national, regional or local) to trade partners, who sell the country, region or city as a tourism destination. For example: Canada Specialist Program initiated by the Canadian Tourism Commission, Dubai Expert provided by Dubai Department of Tourism, Commerce and Marketing and Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist, created by Ticino Turismo, regional tourism board in Switzerland. Full list of eLearning courses about tourism destinations can be found at the following address: [www.elearning4tourism.com](http://www.elearning4tourism.com).

4. Independent are the eLearning courses, whose provider is a third party other than an academic institution, a tourism enterprise, or a DMO. The topics of the online training courses still cover the required knowledge to work within the tourism and hospitality industry. The following are such examples: Ecotourism and sustainable tourism development training, English terminology in tourism, Travel writing or GDS eLearning for travel agents.

A new approach of using technologies for the knowledge sharing within an academic environment has started to appear in the last years with the development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), where the universities are opening in-campus courses through an open access portal to students across the globe for free. MOOCs are rising the interest also within tourism and hospitality community, though offered recourses are still very limited (Murphy et al., 2013). The most significant example has been “New Media: Social, Mobile, and Search” course provided by Cornell University’s School of Hospitality Administration (United States), which has been online in spring 2013.

[1] eLearning can be defined as “the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration” (CEC, 2001, p.2).
References


