PhD Studentship Project Description

BU STUDENTSHIPS 2014

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title
Maximising return on marketing investment for tourism small business enterprises through online analytics

Project Summary

The aim of this PhD is to investigate Small Business Enterprise online marketing practice and the opportunities and barriers to more agile, ‘test and learn’ marketing. A key component of this study will be the evaluation of online marketing analytics (e.g. Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, email marketing analytics) as an enabler of more effective and responsive online marketing. This is a relatively under-researched field and yet one that is of paramount importance to SBEs as customers increasingly engage with them through online channels. Online marketing provides a wealth of data as customers engage with content through different channels however the sheer volume of that data (‘big data’) is itself a barrier to SBEs which are constrained by lack of time, money and knowledge.

In a recently completed ESRC-funded study "Digital Destinations" led by Dr Alford, which investigated current online marketing practice among SBEs, less than 5% of the 60 SBEs that participated in the project were utilising online marketing analytics. The impact of that on their business is captured in the following quote from one of the participants:

“One thing that I was really interested in after the last session was about Google Analytics because I truly have no idea what people are doing on our website. I don’t know how many hits, I don’t know where it’s going, I don’t know what’s going from there.” (Self-catering operator in West Dorset – 3 employees)

This PhD is timely in two aspects: firstly, in that it will extend Digital Destinations and conduct an in depth study among a sub set of the Digital Destinations cohort leading to contribution to knowledge in the field of agile, adaptive online marketing.

Secondly, the study will also be conducted with the 15 businesses that comprise the VisitWiltshire Online Marketing Group. This group was established to give a voice to the 600 businesses that comprise the VisitWiltshire membership.

The precise methodology will emerge during the PhD, however this study has the opportunity to be innovative in testing an agile marketing planning framework in a live environment. Expertise exists within the School of Tourism to support the student in the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

This PhD has a number of exciting research outputs including:

1) Contribute to marketing theory in the field of SBE online marketing

2) Development of an agile marketing framework which has been tried and tested in a live context and which enables SBEs to maximise their investment in online marketing.

3) Direct impact on SBE marketing and influence public policy at regional and national level related to SBE tourism
### Academic Impact

The wider marketing literature pertaining to digital analytics is predominantly concerned with larger organisations (e.g. Chaffey and Patron, 2010) and recent studies in the tourism literature relating to digital analytics relate to destination marketing websites. For example Plaza (2011) used a time series data analysis methodology for measuring a destination marketing organisation’s website performance through Google Analytics and is an interesting approach which could be repeated within this PhD study, however it views the click-stream data independently of the wider marketing goals and there remains a need, demonstrated through the Digital Destinations project, to place the research in the wider context of SME goal-setting. Dr Alford and Professor Page have submitted a paper (based on the Digital Destinations study) to the Journal of Marketing Management “Developing small business digital marketing: Innovative approaches to adoption” (under review) proposing a framework for SME digital marketing and this PhD will provide an opportunity to test that framework. Given the access to live data and an opportunity to test propositions over an extended period of time, the outputs of this study will be of interest to journals in the wider marketing literature (e.g. Journal of Marketing Management [ABS 3*]), the small business literature (e.g. International Small Business Journal [ABS 3*]) and the tourism literature (e.g. Tourism Management [ABS 4*]).

### Societal Impact

The research outputs will generate immediate economic impact on those small businesses that participate in the study. For example the owner of a small Bournemouth-based surf school who participated in the Digital Destinations project reduced the amount of money he paid through Google Adwords each month from £70 to £9 through a process of testing and refining the combination of keywords he used. A small B&B operator in West Dorset saved £50 per month by cancelling a subscription to an accommodation booking agency when she examined her Google Analytics data and found that the site was not generating any traffic to her website. The findings of the study will be disseminated through destination management organisations in Dorset, Poole, Bournemouth, New Forest and Wiltshire through a series of launch events in order to reach a wider audience. For example VisitWiltshire is committed to offering a series of digital analytics workshops to its partnership base (comprising over 500 SMEs). Finally the findings of the study will be disseminated at national level via the Tourism Management Institute’s ‘Hot Topic’ digital events and the VisitEngland innovation initiative to which Dr Alford has contributed (http://www.visitengland.org/Blog/author/Philip%20Alford.aspx).

### Training Opportunities

Training will take place in the following areas:

- **Digital Analytics:** this training will focus on Google Analytics including creating tailor-made dashboards, constructing advanced segments, setting conversion goals and creating Google Experiments; however in addition to Google Analytics, the student will also receive training on other software which generates analytical data including Hootsuite, MailChimp, Facebook Insights, twitratr.com; this training will be provided by the supervisory team and through online courses (for example US-based Market Motive provides comprehensive online training for 3 months at a cost of £500);
- **Statistical analysis:** while a basic grasp of statistics is a pre-requisite, the student will receive extensive training on structural equation modelling;
• Nvivo: in order to capture and code the interview data, the student will enrol on the QDA Training workshops organised by the Graduate School (Phil James, one of Dr Alford’s PhD students, recently completed these workshops which will help to provide peer to peer support).

• Online marketing: the theory and practice of online marketing will be provided by the supervisory team as well as through attendance at academic and industry conferences and forums including the Academy of Marketing and the ENTER conference aimed at tourism academics and practitioners.
### SUPERVISORY TEAM & RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

<table>
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<th>First supervisor</th>
<th>Dr Philip Alford</th>
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| Additional supervisors | Professor Roger Vaughan  
|                        | Professor Yanqing Duan |
| Recent publications by supervisors relevant to this project | Eze, S., Duan, Y., Chen H. (2014) Examining emerging ICT’s adoption in SMEs from a dynamic process perspective. Information Technology & People 27(1):63-82.  

### INFORMAL ENQUIRIES

To discuss this opportunity further, please contact either Dr Philip Alford via email: palford@bournemouth.ac.uk

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

All Candidates must satisfy the University’s minimum doctoral entry criteria for studentships of an honours degree at Upper Second Class (2:1) and/or an appropriate Masters degree. An IELTS (Academic) score of 6.5 minimum (or equivalent) is essential for candidates for whom English is not their first language.

### HOW TO APPLY

Please complete the BU Research Degree Application 2014 and submit it via email to the School Research Administrator – Denise George – stresearch@bournemouth.ac.uk by 26 August 2014. Further information on the application process can be found at www.bournemouth.ac.uk/phd2014.