

**SOLUTIONS FOR ONLINE MARKETING  
COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AT TOURISM  
SERVICE BUSINESS  
(CASE STUDY AT VIETRAVEL TOURISM AND  
TRANSPORTATION JOINT STOCK COMPANY -  
VIETRAVEL)**

*Nguyen Thi Hoai An\**, *Nguyen Trung Kien\**, *Mac Van Hai\**, *Sai Khanh Linh†*  
*Email: hoaian@hou.edu.vn*

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***Abstract:** This study was conducted to propose solutions for online marketing communication activities in tourism service businesses towards business recovery and development after a prolonged recession caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Case study at Vietnam Transport Marketing and Tourism Joint Stock Company (Vietravel) - a large-scale company with a long history of operation in Vietnam is also trying to find ways to recover and improve its business performance and has chosen marketing communication as one of the basic tools to help the company solve this problem. By appropriate scientific research methods such as desk research, non-participant observation, in-depth personal interviews with managers and specialists in charge of online marketing communication activities of Vietravel, along with the survey by online questionnaire, the research has summarized and evaluated the current status of online marketing communication activities of Vietravel. Solutions to develop Vietravel's online marketing communication activities are proposed based on the limitations drawn from the survey results. The research results will serve as a reference for the leadership of Vietravel and other tourism service businesses in Vietnam in the coming time.*

***Keywords:** marketing communication, online marketing communication, tourism, Vietravel.*

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\* Hanoi Open University

† University of Social Sciences and Humanities

## I. Introduction

Affected by the Covid-19 epidemic and the economic recession, the accommodation, catering and travel services industry has also been severely influenced. As a travel service business - Vietravel is not an exception. However, after the epidemic was under control, Vietravel took positive steps to take the lead to keep up with the new situation. The company has implemented measures to “defrost”, innovated thinking in direction and administration, applied technology to production and business activities, effectively controlled expenses, improved labour productivity, and contributed to the profit after tax of enterprises. Faced with many difficulties, the tourism industry in general and Vietravel, in particular, have made great efforts to implement many response solutions to overcome the challenges, focusing on online marketing communications. It is one of the most effective business market approaches today. The growth of online marketing communication is further mirrored by the expansion of digital media in all aspects of daily life.

## II. Literature review

There are many different concepts from different perspectives on marketing communication, but they all have common points. In this study, marketing communication has the fundamental purposes of informing, reminding and persuading the audience to receive information about the brand and products of the business. Enterprises notify customers about the presence of companies and products on the market through message

content, convince them of the product’s advantages over competing products, and remind them to remember the product when needed.

Communication is increasingly important from the perspective of business enterprises, and companies use communication as a tool in the marketing mix to influence the target market to achieve marketing goals. Companies need to communicate that value clearly, accurately and convincingly to their customers.

The terms Promotion and Marketing Communications can be used interchangeably. Still, there is a relatively reasonable explanation of the different approaches of the two terms that make it easier for readers to understand. According to Robert Lautenborn (1990), the “4Ps” (in the Marketing Mix) are from the perspective of the company – the seller. Each of these “4Ps” could be better described by four “Cs” from the customer’s perspective.

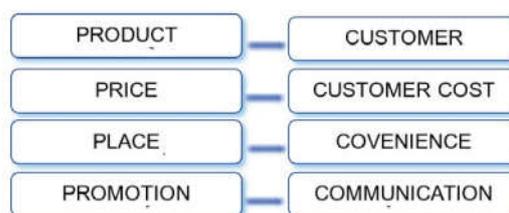


Figure 2.1. Interpretation of 4P and 4C

[Robert Lautenborn (1990), cited by Kotler P & Armstrong G, 2012]

In essence, marketing communication involves creating and transmitting brand information (products and companies) to target customers, maintaining and establishing relationships, and convincing customers to buy.

Companies use various communication tools to achieve this goal, the most basic of which are: advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing and interactive marketing.

As a result, it can be understood that online marketing communication is a form of marketing communication combined with electronic communication methods (high-tech tools, equipment, and applications connected to the Internet). The online marketing communication tools that are interesting and used in tourism service businesses are: Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Mobile Marketing, Performance Marketing, and Content Marketing.

Regarding the online marketing media planning model, the common popular model for companies nowadays is the 07-step model created by Belch, George & Belch, Michael. (2009) proposed, including Analysis of promotion situations; Analysis of the communication process; Determining the communication budget; Developing integrated communication programs; Integrating and executing communication strategies; Evaluating and adjusting communication programs.

### **III. Methodology**

In the research process, the research uses different qualitative and quantitative data collection and processing methods, specifically:

1) Theoretical research method (including classification and systematization) is used to synthesize the

theory of online marketing communication through previously published papers to find the fundamental concepts as the literature review of the article, thereby forming a theoretical framework and finding an appropriate research method for the current situation;

2) Theory development method: has been done through collecting and comparing data to identify, build and connect concepts to form a scientific theoretical framework;

3) In-depth interview method: the research conducted in-depth interviews with 08 leaders and employees of Vietravel to collect maximum information about this situation at the enterprise. The interview scenario revolves around the process, content, tools and resources of the company's online marketing communication activities today.

4) Survey method by questionnaire: Based on the theoretical framework that has been synthesized and the scales of previous research, the research synthesizes and develops a questionnaire to assess the status of online marketing communication activities at Vietravel. The questionnaire is structured into three parts: a) Personal information includes: gender, age, place of residence, occupation, and income; b) General information includes questions related to the level of interest and knowledge about Vietravel, such as: from what information sources do you know the company, the reason for choosing the service, which marketing activities you have been exposed to, What is the

company's message,... c) Information about the respondents' evaluation of online marketing communication activities and factors affecting Vietravel's online marketing communication activities. Using the 5-point Likert scale to measure the respondents' views on the statements: Level 1 – Strongly disagree; Level 2 – Disagree; Level 3 – Normal; Level 4 – Agree; Level 5 – Strongly agree. The questionnaire is formatted on the Google form platform and distributed via email or social networking accounts such as Facebook, Zalo,...to collect information. Surveys on up to 330 contacts are Vietravel customers, of which 200 people answered validly (accounting for 60.6%). The generated data from Google forms is processed by the specialized statistical software SPSS 20.0.

## **IV. Results and Discussions**

### ***4.1. Overview of Vietravel***

Vietravel is one of the professional units in the tourism service business, achieving many noble titles and awards from the State and related ministries and sectors. The company was established in 1995, headquartered at 190 Pasteur, Vo Thi Sau Ward, District 3, Ho Chi Minh City. Vietravel's mission is to be a pioneer; in exploring, shaping and developing, so Vietravel has been focusing on building a diverse ecosystem with three significant fields of travel; Air transport; Trade in Services. During nearly thirty years of construction and development, Vietravel has always set a business philosophy: the customer is the centre, professionalism is the measure, and quality is the honour to

perfect itself and bring the best products and services to the customer. The company's organizational model includes the board of directors, internal audit committee, company executive board, professional divisions/departments, support and sales offices, branches and enterprise. During the two years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietravel's business activities have experienced a considerable decrease, and traditional forms of communication no longer meet customers' needs in this digital age. Therefore, the company has promoted online marketing, especially online marketing communication, to approach the market and promote products to customers. Currently, Vietravel selects search engines (Google/Bing, website), social networks, and mobile devices (apps on phones) as three main online marketing communication tools because these tools meet the changing trends of the times, catch up with consumer trends, low advertising cost but high efficiency; access to a "huge" customer base; rapid revenue growth; increase customer trust; and create compelling customer service.

### ***4.2. Results***

*a. Results of analyzing survey data by questionnaire for customer groups about Vietravel's online marketing communication activities*

Regarding customer evaluation of Vietravel's website, out of 200 customers participating in the survey, 188 people have accessed and used Vietravel's website (accounting for 94%), and 12 people have never used the company's website (accounting for 6%).

Table 4.1: Reviews of customers about Vietravel's website

Evaluation Criteria	Level of consent (%)					The average value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Vietravel's images and logos stand out	5	13,5	12,5	31	33,5	<b>3,78</b>
Vietravel's message is clearly conveyed	5	15	12,5	53,5	31	<b>3,72</b>
People can easily find information about Vietravel's products and services on the website	5	13,5	14	23,5	39,5	<b>3,83</b>
Vietravel always updates information about new products and services	4,5	15,5	12,5	23,5	38	<b>3,80</b>
Information received from Vietravel's website is valuable	5	12	14	23,5	41	<b>3,87</b>
The content of articles on Vietravel's website is attractive	4,5	15	12,5	26	37	<b>3,80</b>

[Source: Results generated from SPSS software in the author's research program]

In general, the criteria about the website are rated by customers at an average level, reaching from 3.72 to 3.87. Which information received from Vietravel's website has the most favourable value, with an average value of 3.87. Through the analysis data, the number of visitors to the website to receive information and book tours is still modest. Therefore, the company needs to pay more attention to

upgrading and developing the website to attract more visitors.

Regarding customers' evaluation of Vietravel's social networking sites, out of 200 customers participating in the survey, 189 people have accessed and used Vietravel's website (accounting for 94.5%), and 11 people have never used the company's website (accounting for 5.5%).

Table 4.2: Customer reviews about Vietravel's social networking site

Evaluation Criteria	Level of consent (%)					The average value
	1	2	3	4	5	
You can easily find Vietravel social networking sites	5	17,5	8	39	25	<b>3,65</b>
Vietravel's social networking sites have complete, up-to-date and accurate information	5	13	15	37	25	<b>3,67</b>
Vietravel's social networking sites have standard and easy-to-understand articles	4,5	15,5	13	30,5	31,5	<b>3,73</b>
Vietravel's social networking sites have attractive and lively video clips	4,5	15,5	11,5	23,5	39,5	<b>3,83</b>
You can easily contact the company when needed	4,5	16,5	12	26	35	<b>3,75</b>
Vietravel's social networking sites have content posted that matches your search needs	4,5	15,5	12	27,5	35,5	<b>3,78</b>

[Source: Results generated from SPSS software in the author's research program]

The statistics show that the satisfaction level of Vietravel's social networking site is just above average, slightly ranging from 3.65 to 3.83. Customer reviews make it easy for the company to see all the factors that need improvement, especially the popularity of Vietravel's page on social networks and the accuracy and urgency of information.

By distributing survey questionnaires to 200 customers participating in the survey, 171 people have accessed and used Vietravel's mobile application (accounting for 85.5%), and 29 have never used the company's App (accounting for 14.5%). Although the number of customers using mobile applications is less than other online means, the level of satisfaction is higher, detailed in Table 4.3.

*Table 4.3: Customer reviews about Vietravel's mobile App*

Evaluation Criteria	Level of consent (%)					The average value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Vietravel's app content is suitable for your search needs	2	2,5	7	38	36,5	<b>4,22</b>
Vietravel's app form is lively and attractive	2	2	7,5	39	35,5	<b>4,21</b>
Vietravel's features are suitable for your needs	2	2,5	6,5	31,5	43,5	<b>4,30</b>
Vietravel's App fully meets your information needs about the company, products and services	2	2	6,5	27,5	48	<b>4,37</b>
You can quickly contact the company when needed	2	2,5	6	29,5	45,5	<b>4,33</b>

*[Source: Results generated from SPSS software in the author's research program]*

In general, the criteria for assessing the level of satisfaction when using Vietravel's mobile applications are quite high, reaching from 4.21 to 4.37. In particular, the criterion "Vietravel's App fully meets your information needs about the company, products and services" is rated high, with an average value of 4.37. From there, it shows that Vietravel's App is being appreciated by customers, and is one of many communication channels that promote its mission well, proving that efforts in investing in app development have had particular effectiveness.

*b. Results of data analysis from in-depth interviews with Vietravel's leadership and management team about the Company's online marketing communication activities*

The data collected from the in-depth interview program with Vietravel's leadership and management team about the progress, content, tools, and resources of the company's online marketing communication activities today were interpreted and extracted into meaningful information as follows:

Regarding the content of communication planning, thanks to the detailed identification of the target audience according to geographical location, trip purpose, and demographics, Vietravel has established a clear and specific communication goal that it wants to achieve. The message of Vietravel since its establishment is "Vietravel - a professional travel organizer". In addition, during its operation, the company has deployed a lot of other communication

messages; these messages are built specifically for a group of activities or seasonal, specific campaigns.

Regarding the programs and tools of online marketing communication implemented, Vietravel uses three main communication tools: SEO search engines, social networks, and mobile applications. The company's online marketing department has implemented profound and practical SEO activities. The company's virtual office on the internet is the website, an essential marketing tool in developing the Vietravel brand. Vietravel's social networking sites constantly update all information about new products, product promotions and information about promotions. The mobile application provides customers full details on new products or related things and secure payment.

Regarding resources for online marketing communication, Vietravel always focuses on training human resources to reach the world. For marketing communication activities, Vietravel regularly organizes training courses and promulgates policies to encourage employees to improve their employees' qualifications and expertise in the field of online marketing communication to update new knowledge to meet communication goals. Vietravel has focused on building methodically and strongly developing technology applications. With a long-term plan and a clear-oriented information development roadmap, the enterprise has invested in synchronous infrastructure, continuously improving the information security and safety system. In addition, Vietravel's

team of professional and well-trained IT engineers always effectively updates information technology applications in the field of travel. The budget for online marketing communication activities of Vietravel was significantly invested, accounting for 12% of the previous year's net revenue. Vietravel invests in all online marketing communication activities, such as search engine optimization, design and maintenance of websites, mobile applications, social networks, PPC advertising,...

### ***4.3. Assessing the online marketing communication activities at Vietravel***

#### *4.3.1. Achievements*

The main message that Vietravel sends to current customers, "Vietravel - a professional travel organizer", is unambiguous and concise.

The company deploys new and updated tools to communicate for businesses, such as SEO web, Social Media, social networks, and mobile applications. The development of media content is quite reasonable and harmonious between the elements of sound, colour, and image,...

Human resources for online marketing communications at the "upper level" - the company level have been invested in and developed by the company. The staff has professional qualifications and good skills. The planning of the company's communication strategy is quite clear. Technical infrastructure and information security for communication activities are adequately invested. Budgeting at 12% of revenue is also high for companies in the same tourism sector.

#### 4.3.2. Limitations and reasons

Besides the above-mentioned results, Vietravel's online marketing communication activities also reveal some limitations that need to be overcome, namely:

Regarding the content of media planning, Vietravel's current forms of deployment need to be more diverse to analyse the media context. The identification of media messages is still chaotic because the company has a long operation history, and requires better planning. Vietravel's customers receive information from many sources, and the line between mainstream media and social networks needs to be clarified for businesses. The integration of communication programs and tools to create resonance according to the integrated marketing communication approach has not been implemented; each product and each channel has a discrete strategy, message and communication method. Each other has not been linked and has not created strength. The company needs to have appropriate online marketing communication evaluation criteria. Besides, the evaluation expenditures have not been used synchronously.

Regarding programs and online marketing communication tools implemented, customers can only see Vietravel website information when typing the keywords "Vietravel". In addition, the company has not focused on communication channels through social networks with the implementation method: Key Opinion Leaders and digital creators. It is a very effective method of

communication and is suitable for the tourism industry, as tourists often leave behind photos and videos at tourist attractions.

Regarding resources for online marketing communication, although the number of employees at Vietravel is quite large, the number of employees with a deep understanding of online marketing communications still needs to be more modest. The company will spend a lot of time finding and training personnel for this activity. Websites still appear websites impersonating Vietravel to scam recruitment and business cooperation and sell poor quality products and services, directly affecting Vietravel's personnel and potential customers. Determining the media budget based on the previous year's revenue is inadequacy. Firstly, it is a method based on past results, while future business goals. Secondly, the tourism industry is too heavily affected by the Covid-19 epidemic. Hence, the revenue in the years 2020 to 2022 is too low. If based on the previous year's income to determine the communication budget for the following year, communication activities will decrease in effectiveness.

#### **V. Solution for online marketing communication activities at Vietravel**

To increase the effectiveness of communication planning, Vietravel needs to have some specific solutions, as mentioned below. For the online marketing communication planning process, the company needs to diversify the forms of information collection to ensure that the communication goals are always accurate, build a system of standards for messages,

and clearly distinguish the company's general statement and the message for each product, each campaign; implementing integrated communication by a system of well-defined communication plans and goals, building upline communication and logical downlink communication; develop and implement unified communication evaluation criteria.

For online marketing, communication tools and content need to be optimized. Firstly, expand the scope of communication and reach target customers. For example, on the website [travel.com.vn](http://travel.com.vn), there should be a language selection function because the number of foreign customers in Vietnam is quite large. The fact that the website does not have a multi-language function also makes it difficult for foreign customers in the shopping process. Moreover, the price displayed on the website can be converted into a foreign currency corresponding to the website language. Secondly, the company should pay attention to the semantics and rationality of keywords when placing them. Besides, it is necessary to break up the keyword phrase into many smaller clusters and put them scattered in the article content because search engines prioritize filtering each keyword over the words. Thirdly, combine keyword phrases because it is hard to know which keywords users will choose. The combination of keyword phrases will help the unused keywords still be found by the search engines. They are explicitly combining the two keyword phrases "tourism" and "ecology" into one

term "ecotourism". The keyword phrases, after combining, can bring a whole new phrase or individual phrases or odd words into the article. Fourth, using valuable link connections, most search engines rank results by measuring the quality and quantity of websites that link to a highly rated website. For example, put the link at: [tuoitre.com](http://tuoitre.com), [Vnexpress.net](http://Vnexpress.net), [dantri.com.vn](http://dantri.com.vn), [zing.com.vn](http://zing.com.vn), ...

Next, the company needs to increase the use of Marketing through social networks. Engage and expand the community of users via social media by inviting digital creators, Key Opinion Leaders who are influencers in a specific field, and people who have many fans on social networks. This solution's benefit is expanding the brand, increasing revenue quickly and saving time and marketing costs. Along with that, monitoring feedback with the user community continuously for ways to adjust or reorient because users can create content according to their own opinions or without control, so the Content from users may be negative or not in line with the direction outlined by the company. Increasing the number of participating members is also a helpful solution by choosing a reasonable frequency of posting information for the page, avoiding causing discomfort by posting too many stories in a dense manner or news with objectionable content unsuitable for the channel's criteria.

The company should have the solutions for resources for corporate online marketing communications. Regarding

human resources, Vietravel needs to raise awareness of the important role of online marketing communications, from senior management to employees. Along with that, regularly organize dialogues between management and marketing department, as well as update online marketing communication programs of the enterprise being deployed to other departments within the enterprise to prove the effectiveness of online marketing communication in business activities. About technology, communication techniques. Firstly, it is necessary to improve the information technology infrastructure for Vietravel. Improving the quality of an enterprise's information technology infrastructure is a top goal in the current period. It will help customers secure information and, at the same time, bring results for businesses in promoting image and reputation and compete well in the market. Next is to strengthen network security solutions. Ensuring information security is not only the responsibility of the technical team. Therefore, Vietravel will need to upgrade equipment, software, and tools related to the network system and website, building a comprehensive security policy for the company and customers in both present and future.

Regarding the media budget, Vietravel should change the determination of the media budget. Instead of basing on the previous year's revenue, the company should perfect the method of using the media budget according to the target revenue. It requires marketing staff to develop a media budget by identifying the

tasks that must be performed to achieve the above objectives, determine the business's goals, and estimate the cost to complete those tasks.

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