Booking.com as an Online Community of Practice

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Booking.com (http://www.booking.com) is a web site that travelers use to book rooms. However, one can see it as an Online Community of Practice inasmuch as it provides a resource for people “engaged in a common practice, who communicate, negotiate, and share their practice with one other directly” (Harasim, 2012, p. 142) solely through online means. The site uses Web 2.0 crowd sourcing to build a knowledge base about lodging and tourism. It is successful in both the qualitative sense that it provides travelers with information useful for travel and the quantitative sense that it is a heavily-trafficked resource, responsible for the booking of many hotel rooms.

About Booking.com

Booking.com is a travel web site that travelers use it to search for hotels in specific areas and get comprehensive information about hotels and their rates. The site allows travelers to select and book lodgings. Booking.com sends e-mail confirmations and reminders to travelers who have booked rooms. Crucially for this paper, Booking.com sends follow-up e-mails after a traveler’s stay at a hotel to solicit rating feedback and reviews which are made available on the site. Booking.com also keeps a history of a traveler’s bookings, archiving hotels users of the sites have booked and searched, and sends e-mails about special promotions in those areas.

The service originated as Active Hotels.com; Priceline acquired the site and changed its name to Booking.com in 2006 (Davies, 2006, November 27, para 1). Today, Booking.com claims to have 8,600 employees across the world and to book 4.5 million room nights a week through the service (Booking.com, 2015, para 11).
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In defining Communities of Practice (CoPs), Harasim (2012) writes that members in them “share or develop several core commonalities” (p. 146) and that “some CoPs reflect an intense passion or urgency to solve problems” (p. 146). For a traveler, deciding where to spend the night is certainly a problem to be solved. Harasim defines Online Communities of Practice (OCoPs) writing, “while sharing all the features of traditional communities of practice, they are conducted via the Web, rather than onsite” (p. 147). Booking.com conducts all of its activities electronically, via its web site, apps, or e-mail.
Creating a Community of Practice

Primary to the definition of Booking.com as a successful OCoP is the presence of verified ratings and reviews by former guests. People who have stayed at hotels as the result of
Booking.com “demonstrate commitment to the community” (Harasim, 200, p. 154) by submitting ratings and both positive and negative feedback about the hotels. This feedback is useful for travelers deciding whether to stay at a particular hotel, especially as one knows that actual guests have provided information. The fact that most hotels have numerous comments helps a traveler separate someone with a problematic individual experience from general trends. For example, if nearly everyone says that the location of the hotel was extremely convenient, a logical conclusion is that the hotel is in an extremely convenient location. Similarly, one traveler’s negative feedback can be positive for another, e.g., single travelers might view a complaint that a property is not particularly family friendly as a ringing endorsement.

The reviews of a hotel help travelers solve other problems when planning a trip. If a hotel is described as having a convenient location, the traveler can deduce that proximate hotels would be similarly well-situated. One of the reviews of a hotel in Edinburgh describes the property as close “to everything we wanted to see -- Royal Mile and also a short ten minute walk to Rabbies Tours” (Booking.com, 2015b, para. 18). Thus a traveler planning a trip there deduces that the Royal Mile is a major attraction and that Rabbies Tours is a service to consider. Booking.com also fosters a sense of community by keeping track of traveler’s previous bookings, making it easy for travelers to recommend hotels to others.

**Learning Theory and Booking.com**

In many ways, Booking.com is a Constructivist lesson plan in which the reward for the student is travel value rather than a grade. According to Constructivist theory, “people hold their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing the world and reflecting on their own experiences” (Harasim, 2012, p. 60). Travelers use the site to “actively construct new
knowledge” (Koohang, Riley, & Schuers, 2009, p. 95). Four key principles for constructive learning pedagogy are active learning, learning-by-doing, scaffolded learning, and collaborative learning (Harasim, 2012, p. 68). The site rewards traveler’s efforts on three of those counts: active learning and learning by doing in their searching of the site and collaborative learning in the use and generation of reviews. The site does not offer much in the way of scaffolded learning.

**Success of Booking.com**

According to Harasim, the key indicator of success for an OCoP is “is it alive and well?” (p. 152). In that regard, being responsible for the aforementioned 4.5 million hotel rooms a week is certainly a sign of success; moreover, Alexa (2015) ranks Booking.com as the 115th most popular site in the world. Harasim writes that CoPs “not only accumulate knowledge, but also contribute to advancing knowledge” (Harasim, 2012, p. 60). The very granular travel information that Booking.com supplies not only accumulates a great deal of knowledge about hotels and rates, but it also advances the knowledge in the field through the reviews of past guests.

**Conclusion**

Booking.com is a success as a service in the way it fulfills its corporate vision “to help leisure and business travelers, whatever their budgets, easily discover, book, and enjoy the world’s best places to stay” (Booking.com, 2015a, para 6). The site is also a success for the sheer quantity of travelers booking many room nights. Part of this success is due to the site’s successful crowd-sourcing of reviews from previous guests. Constructivists would argue that active learning and user collaboration contribute to the success of the site. Finally, the site is
successful as an OCoP in that it supports a community of travelers who create and employ collaborative knowledge to solve the real-world problem of where to stay while travelling.
References


