

Birth of a Partnership

The University of Guelph's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) program is Canada's most long-standing and arguably most prestigious university hospitality degree program, with a forty-two year history of providing educational service to the Canadian hotel, food service and tourism industries. Programs have evolved and changed through the years, with notable accomplishments in research, curriculum development, and IT has been integrated into courses on operations and lodging. A review of the curriculum highlighted an e-tourism gap in the marketing area.

To reduce this gap, HTM faculty established an alliance with Meridian Reservation Systems, Inc. (Meridian) in order to inform and facilitate the development of e-marketing curriculum at the University of Guelph.

Meridian Reservation Systems was founded in 1998 in Niagara Falls. Their clients include Ottawa Tourism, Tourism Toronto, and Niagara Region. Their Central Reservation Systems (CRS) manage accommodation reservations and tracks booking information for clients. Meridian has been serving the Niagara Falls region of Ontario since the beginning of the decade and is expanding

rapidly into other major centers in Ontario, in Canada and beyond. Its portals receive over 4 million visits annually and over 100,000 accommodation bookings per year.

The **alliance is mutually beneficial** in that the HTM program at the University of Guelph required the IT expertise of Meridian and Meridian required the teaching and training modules from HTM to address an identified gap in their marketplace. This alliance led to **partnerships in both the classroom and research.**



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Partners in Teaching

To bring e-marketing into the classroom, a central reservation system-based project was created for HTM undergraduate students in their third year of study. Meridian created an application for the classroom and HTM faculty developed and delivered the curriculum.

HTM faculty and Meridian worked together to create a teaching module that incorporated a range of teaching methods. First, classroom teaching covers current theory and practises in the e-tourism environment and e-marketing.

Final Student Project Sample

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Fort George info http://www.pc.gc.ca/htn-htn/fortgeorge/index_E.asp

Lundy's Lane Museum info <http://www.niagarafallsmuseum.ca/lundylanehistoricalmuseum.html>

Laura Secord's Homestead info <http://www.niagaraparks.com/heritage/Aurasecord.php>

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Next, a computer lab session is held to introduce students to the Meridian system where students are given access to a live destination management system (DMS), and a web-based tutorial is also available to enable students to learn independently. Students are guided through the process of package development and promotion in an e-environment.

Class Assignment

Student teams are assigned Demo properties within the Meridian CRS. The teams analyze regional information, property, and booking reports to complete:

- Situation and market analysis
- Segmentation, targeting and positioning
- Package creation and micro-site development
- Presentation to panel of industry judges

The assignment provides students the hands-on experience of interfacing with a DMS database and student feedback on the assignment is overwhelmingly positive. **The modules are an integral part of the program's curriculum.**

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Partners in Research

An example of the research partnership developed with Meridian is the "Packaging Travel on the Web: A Case Study of Ottawa Tourism" project. Meridian shared reservation data with HTM faculty, who then provided the analysis and understanding to support future marketing and e-commerce initiatives.

This study assessed Ottawa Tourism's adoption of a CRS with advanced packaging capabilities provided by Meridian. Meridian's destination-driven packaging engine has enabled Ottawa Tourism to create, manage, promote and sell dynamic packages to a range of target audiences. The project reviewed two years of booking data, comprising over 13,000 bookings worth \$4.3 million to evaluate packaging effectiveness.

Meridian Reservation System booking data for Ottawa Tourism

Type of Booking	Nights Booked			Amount Booked		
	2008/09	2009/10	% Change '08/9-'09/10	2008/09	2009/10	% Change '08/9-'09/10
Accommodation Only	9,414	8,943	-5.0%	\$1,445,288	\$1,257,767	-13.0%
Package Booking	4,449	7,372	65.7%	\$658,406	\$949,056	44.1%
Total Bookings	13,863	16,315	17.7%	\$2,103,694	\$2,206,823	4.9%

¹Nights and Amounts Booked, April 2008 to March 2010

• While accommodation only bookings still outnumber package bookings (60% and 40%, respectively), results indicate that packages continue to gain a sizable share of bookings

• Most impressively, in terms of performance, packages represent longer stays (2.6 nights versus 2.2 nights) and higher expenditure amounts per booking (\$337 versus \$305) than regular accommodation only bookings

• These increases represent a 20% longer stay and an 11% greater expenditure for booked packages

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Moving Forward

Executive Development

HTM faculty are working on the development of an eMarketing training platform using Meridian's CRS system, adapted for hands-on learning through simulations, currently unavailable anywhere in the world. This will allow industry professionals to "learn by doing" the various aspects of eMarketing, the use of features from packaging to imbedding social media, and the tracking, analysis and translation into concrete actions from the wealth of information produced by CRS systems, whether they are in-house systems, global systems like Expedia and Travelocity, or customized ones like Jackrabbitt and Meridian.

Communicating the Research and Teaching Knowledge

• Elliot, S. (2011). "Borderland Tourism as an Indicator of National Travel". Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference International, London, ON.

• Elliot, S. and Joppe, M. (2009). "A Case Study and Analysis of e-Tourism Curriculum Development" Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism, 9(3/4), 230 – 247

• Elliot, S. & Joppe, M. (2010). "Packaging Travel on the Web: A Case Study of Ottawa Tourism", Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference International, San Antonio, Texas.

• Joppe, M., Elliot, S., & van Dijk, J. (2009). "Putting the "e" in Tourism Curriculum", The 2009 UNWTO Ulysses Conference on Innovation in Tourism Education, 27th – 28th May 2009, Madrid, Spain.

Commercialization of Value-Added Reservation Analytics

The rationale for this new project is to **empower destination marketing organizations** to retain their dominant role in the on-line marketplace in the face of growing competition from large scale entities and make it possible to supply tourism sector clients with the latest analytical software to conduct their own market research, discover trends in their business and develop comprehensive marketing plans for **greater success** in a competitive marketplace. Through an investment from the *Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario's Applied Research and Commercialization initiative*, Meridian will develop a new executive dashboard system for DMS clients, both present and future, and an amalgamated data set for the entire province.

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