

Beyond the browser

So you think you have your online strategy finally sorted out? Well, says LAWRENCE SMITH, it's all about to change... again.



AFTER more than a decade online, the web now plays a vitally important role in many tourism businesses' operational, marketing and sales functions. These days, the need for a great website is a given, as is (increasingly) the ability for visitors to book online via their computer, from anywhere in the world.

But this is all changing - ironically just as many businesses have finally embraced the web and understood the impact on their business. The dominance of the computer and browser (such as Internet Explorer or Firefox) is about to be threatened by a new device. It's called a phone.

If that sounds too fantastical, consider this: In Japan in the past 12 months, mobile devices - not computers - became the most commonly used tool for accessing the internet.

On July 11 that change begins in New Zealand with the arrival of one of the most hyped and desired mobile devices. It's called the Apple iPhone and not only is it the most useful piece of technology I now own, it's also one I now 'love'.

So how will the iPhone change our world? Well, in a few ways actually. As an example, I am currently at a technology conference in Sydney called WebDU. Using my iPhone I can connect to the internet via a wireless connection; I can check my email, browse the internet to get the latest news, check the weather, use Google maps to get directions, I can take photos of conference slides, and if

I get bored I could settle back and listen to some of my music, or even watch videos on YouTube. I could even make a phone call. All this in a single device that is incredibly easy to use and fits in your hand.

The introduction of the iPhone, however, is also about to change the world in other ways. It has jolted 'traditional' phone manufacturers from their sleep. Nokia has outlined its future direction with the imminent launch of a new breed of phones that, not surprisingly, offer functionality equal to, or better than, the iPhone.

Nokia is the world's largest maker of phones, so it is a certainty that their new direction is going to have a profound impact on the way that many of the world's travellers communicate with us - tourism business owners.

And how else will this affect our businesses? Just when we thought we'd made it to the "finish line" and achieved what we've all been told we needed to do online, a whole host of opportunities have been unleashed.

While we may not reach Japan's level of mobile use for some time, there is nothing surer than the fact that many visitors will now interact with you - from both their home and while they are travelling - using a phone, not a computer.

It's time to start thinking beyond the browser and to start planning the next wave of innovation, directed towards an audience that is on the move. On July 11, go get yourself an iPhone. As soon

as you have one in your hand you'll understand why this is the next big thing. You'll love it! ☺

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HOW DO YOUR VISITORS HEAR ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

The use of TouchScreen surveys at the Christchurch Gondola tourist attraction really paid off with 1750 visitors responding and providing invaluable feedback.

"We can use our marketing dollar more effectively to reach our target market...make more accurate business decisions and focus on advertising through more defined media channels."
Joanne Small International Marketing Manager Christchurch Gondola & Tram

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