VICs in 2013 – Can Technology Replace Them?

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Why VICs if travellers have smart phones?
Google Mobile Planet Australia 2012

• 52% smart phone penetration

86% of smartphone users have looked for local information

88% have taken action as a result
VIC Inquiries Study – 2011/2012

• Analysis of visitor inquiries received by Destination Wollongong through their visitor information centre (VIC), their mobile visitor information centre van (MYGONG), email, phone and their social media sites (Facebook and Twitter).

• The inquiries from the VIC, MYGONG, email and phone were collected by Destination Wollongong staff July – October 2011. For social media sites all inquiries dating back to 2008 were considered.

• The final data set included 788 inquiries. Up to four questions per inquiry were recorded. In total, 1530 questions were included in the analysis.
### Inquiry Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Communication Channel</th>
<th>Includes navigation question(s)</th>
<th>Includes transportation question(s)</th>
<th>Includes recommendation question(s)</th>
<th>Includes only 1 question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYGONG</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIC inquiries are conversations!
### Specificity of Queries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Communication Channel</th>
<th>Level of Specificity</th>
<th>Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYGONG</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VICs provide more opportunity for inspiration! Although most questions concerned Wollongong and the surrounding areas, the visitors also asked questions about Sydney, Canberra, even Melbourne, the Blue Mountains, Hunter Valley, Jervis Bay, etc.
### Query Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Communication Channel</th>
<th>Object of Query</th>
<th>Place/destination</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Camping</th>
<th>Restaurant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYGONG</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Communication Channel</th>
<th>Object of Query</th>
<th>Attractions/tours</th>
<th>Lookout/drives</th>
<th>Parks</th>
<th>Activities/Entertainm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYGONG</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many actively ask for maps.
At-Destination Information Search Study - 2012

• Pilot Study for ARC Linkage Grant application:
  • Australian Institute of Tourism Officers
  • Destination New South Wales
  • Newcastle City Council
  • Destination Wollongong
  • Lake Macquarie City Council

• 38 qualitative interviews of domestic and international tourists (aged 18 to 70+)
• Sydney and Wollongong/Kiama
Trip Planning

• Not much advance planning
• Want local knowledge, info about special events, limited-time attractions, “off-the-beaten-track” activities
• “What there is to do, because I haven’t got a clue”
• Information about multiple areas, not just the immediate area
• Free maps
Technology Use

- Smart phones, tablets, laptops, GPS/navigation system, including mobile apps and QR code readers
- Even international visitors
- Technology cannot answer all questions/provide all information
- Convenience, e.g. quick scan of QR codes
VIC Perceptions

• Generally good in NSW, not as good as US
• For many still the first stop at the destination
• Knowledgeable, motivated staff is key:
  – “They lack personal information usually in cities”
• Accessibility is important:
  – “To go looking for a visitor centre, you can just go look it up on your phone anyway”
  – “We explored the city yesterday and didn’t see one”
  – “I heard about it but I don’t know where I can find it”
  – “We knew there had to be one but we did many circuits and we couldn’t find it.”
The Ideal VIC

• “What I like is some garrulous person behind the counter that you can walk up to and say: ‘What’s worth seeing here?’ and they’re chatty and friendly and they say we’ve got this and we’ve got that. Someone that knows the area, that’s what I like. A personal recommendation goes a long way”
Digital Natives Study - 2011

- Funded by Destination Wollongong
- 3 focus groups, total of 21 participants
- Ranging from 14 – 32 years
- Mixed gender and occupations
Digital Natives - Who are they?

- Born after 1980
- Grown up using technology
- Totally immersed in technology in their daily lives
- Anywhere, anytime access to anyone and anything
What makes them special?

- Communicate in fundamentally different ways
- = social generation
- Want to see and be seen
- Make decisions based on social proof
- Collaborate with others online
- Exceptionally curious, adaptable, global outlook
- More inclined to travel and experience the world
The Malleable Brain
# Information Processing Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native learners (Digital Natives) (Neo-Millennial Learners)</th>
<th>Emerging Digital learners (Digital Immigrants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple multimedia information sources rapidly</td>
<td>Slow controlled information release – limited sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel process &amp; multi-task</td>
<td>Singular process and single or limited task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing order</td>
<td>Processing order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture, Video &amp; Sound --&gt; Text</td>
<td>Text --&gt; Picture, Video &amp; Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random access to interactive media</td>
<td>Linear, logical sequential access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact/network simultaneously to many</td>
<td>Interact/network simultaneously to few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable in virtual and real spaces</td>
<td>Comfortable in real spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer interactive/network approach to work</td>
<td>Prefer students to work independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Just in time&quot; learners</td>
<td>&quot;Just in case&quot; learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instant access, rewards &amp; gratification</strong></td>
<td>delayed/differed access, rewards &amp; gratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is relevant, instantly useful and fun</td>
<td>Learning is to teach to the curriculum guide and standardized tests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Travel Planning

• Multiple sources
• Traditional sources still used but for specific purposes (e.g. Travel agent to get quote)
• **EXTENSIVE RESEARCH**, but booking decisions often postponed to allow for flexibility in plans
• Preference for sources that provide **UNIQUE** information
• Seek out locals
VIC Use & Perceptions

• Not top-of-mind info source (something they visited during school excursion) but sometimes stumble upon them
• Would not go out of their way
• Think Australian VICs are “run-down”, “full with old people”
• Brochure racks
Comments

“The info you get from a visitor centre is the same as you would get in a hotel but in the hotel it is more comfy – you can eat food while looking.”

“I would go to a visitor centre if there was someone there to talk to.”

“If you have to go out of your way [to visit the VIC], why bother?”

“If it is just a booth with brochures, I can go online instead.”

“I went inside and it was full of grumpy, old ladies. I felt intimidated.”
Ideal VIC

• Conveniently located and offers more than just information:
  – cafés with local food
  – blackboards with event listings
  – children displays to keep them occupied while parents ask questions
  – QR codes linking to information
  – actual, young people to ask for recommendations
  – big local maps with “You are here”.

• They describe visitor centres as worthwhile if they are **attractions** themselves, if they provide **personalised information**, and if they are **open** when the information is needed and nobody else is around.
Conclusion

• VICs can still be influential!
• VIC experience needs to change.
• It’s not primarily about technology, but technology can help (e.g. QR codes).
Thank You!

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