

Bachelor Thesis 2014

Educating and Training North American Travel Agents and Tour Operators with Webinars: The Case of Switzerland Tourism North America

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Switzerland.
get natural.

Abstract

Switzerland Tourism provides reliable, informative, high quality and long-term contacts to key accounts such as Travel Agents and Tour Operators in North America with the aim of boosting Switzerland's presence in the market. The Trade Department is using various online tools such as e-learning platforms, a social media group and Webinars to educate and train the travel professionals. Since 2003, participants to Webinars have increased smoothly; therefore the Company would like to know if this online learning tool is beneficial for Travel Agents and Tour Operators. This research paper analyzes Switzerland Tourism education and training with the aim to find out if Webinars are significantly increasing the participants' knowledge and recommendations about the destination. A mixed method approach including both quantitative and qualitative research instruments has been adopted. The results of the online survey show that the participants are highly satisfied with Switzerland Tourism Webinars. Webinars provide a flexible and cost effective learning environment that increases participants' knowledge and recommendations on Switzerland. The interviews among Switzerland Tourism Key Partners show that Webinar tool is effective as it cuts the cost of travel expenses while reaching many travel professionals at the same time, and does not need a high investment. This paper presents specific recommendations and future trends that Switzerland Tourism can use in the future.

Keywords: Online learning, Tourism training, Switzerland Tourism, Destination Marketing, Webinars

Foreword

For my last semester as a student at the HES-SO Valais-Wallis, School of Management and Tourism, I had the fantastic opportunity to do my one-year internship at Switzerland Tourism in New York. During this year, I had the chance to be part of the Trade Department as well as the entity Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau (SCIB).

Working with the Trade team has given me a more in-depth understanding of Switzerland Tourism as an educator promoting the country internationally from Business to Business (B2B). In agreement with Pascal Prinz, Account Manager Trade Relations for the East Coast, and Alex Herrmann, Director of Americas, both based in New York, I decided to become involved in the world of online education provided by a Destination Management Organization.

This research was challenging as I had little knowledge about online learning before the actual study. Indeed, my education was mainly in tourism management and not as much as in Information and Communication Technologies. Nevertheless, I am thrilled to have discovered this new and interesting field which gave me the desire to continue building my knowledge in it the future.

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List of abbreviations

B2B	Business to Business
CAN	Canada
CEU	Continuing Education Units
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
GDS	Global Distribution System
KAM	Key Account Management
KMM	Key Media Management
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
SCIB	Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau
ST NA	Switzerland Tourism North America
TA	Travel Agent
TO	Tour Operator
U.S.	United States of America

Introduction

The tourism industry has been tremendously affected by the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the Internet, changing the way in which tourism professionals work and inform new tourists about tourism destinations. With increasingly tailored demands from the end-consumer, Travel Agents and Tour Operators must educate and train themselves to increase their skills and knowledge. Online learning has become popular in the tourism industry, as it offers the possibility to combine learning with work. Flexible as it is cost effective and accessible from everywhere in the world, online learning prepare the travel professionals to recommend and sell more products or trips in a given destination. Nowadays, online learning has been adopted by many travel professionals as well as Destination Management Organizations such as Switzerland Tourism North America.

Switzerland Tourism North America is the national marketing company that promotes Switzerland in the United States and in Canada. The Company is using different channels to advertise the destination: directly to the final consumer, through the media or through Travel Agents and Tour Operators. With the aim of educating and training travel professionals, the Trade Department uses different online tools, such as Webinars co-hosted by Key Partners. Switzerland Tourism has been using these Webinars without knowing whether they provide an efficient method of education. With the number of participants constantly increasing, the Company wanted to find out if Webinars were meeting Travel Agents and Tour Operators' needs, and to get recommendations for improvement in order to increase the number of participants.

This study analyzes the impact of Switzerland Tourism Webinars on Travel Agents and Tour Operators participants. It aims to determine whether the Travel Agents and Tour Operators have increased their knowledge by attending a Switzerland Tourism Webinar and therefore are recommending more the destination to their clients. The first chapter gives definitions about some specific terms used in the tourism industry and establishes the current situation of the Company worldwide as well as on the North American Market. The second part of this work reviews the existing literature related to the topic of online learning and describes the use of online learning in the travel industry, more specifically the use of Webinars. The third chapter presents the research question with the problematic and

the hypothesis as well as the research justifications and limitations. In the fourth part of the thesis, the reasons why using a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative techniques are explained and justified. The data collection including the research population and the sample size are also shown in this chapter. The fifth section of this work presents the results from the online questionnaire among the Travel Agents and Tour Operators, and from the interview of the Key Partners. The last chapter draws the main findings from data presented in the previous chapter. Recommendations according to the findings are explored, and possible directions for future research are given.

1. Literature reviews

Before beginning the actual study, this first chapter gives definitions about some specific terms used in the tourism industry and establishes the current situation of the Company worldwide as well as on the North American Market.

1.1. Definitions

Switzerland Tourism North America (ST NA): Switzerland Tourism North America is the topic of this Bachelor thesis, referring three office locations in New York, Toronto and Los Angeles. However, the term Switzerland Tourism or Company is used throughout the study in order to simplify.

Travel Agent or Agent (TA): A Travel Agent or Agent is “a person or company that arranges tickets, hotel rooms, etc. for people going on holiday or making a journey” (Travel Agent, 2014).

Tour Operator or Operator (TO): A Tour Operator or Operator is “a person or company that provides package holidays” (Tour Operator, 2014). A Tour Operator “contracts with suppliers to create and/or market a tour and/or subcontract their performance” (Tour Operator, 2011). Most Tour Operators sell through Travel Agents and/or directly to clients. For example, Tauck and Globus Family of Brands are two Tour Operators based in the North American market.

Key Partners: In order to participate in Switzerland Tourism’s marketing activities, Swiss Destination Management Organizations such as regional and local tourism offices need to pay a membership every year. Additionally, Tour Operators that have a business plan with Switzerland Tourism also take part in some Switzerland Tourism marketing activities. Those Key Partners are also called Swiss Partners in this thesis, even when referring to North American Tour Operators (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 46).

Audio-visual presentation, Web-conference, and Webinar: To simplify throughout the thesis the general term “Webinar” is used. Webinar is the main subject of this thesis and is going to be defined further below in the text.

Online learning and eLearning: The description below will be used as a background term within this thesis:

The term online learning (or, as it is sometimes called, distance learning) includes a number of computer-assisted instruction methods. Online teaching and learning is faculty-delivered instruction via the Internet. Online instruction includes real-time (synchronous) and anytime, anywhere (asynchronous) interaction. (Stassen & Poe, 2012, p. 5)

1.2. Switzerland Tourism - Company profile

In this section, the Company Switzerland Tourism is described starting with general information and then more specifically with details about the branch office operating on the North American Market.

Switzerland Tourism is the national marketing Company that has been promoting the country as a vacation, travel and congresses destination since 1917, both within Switzerland and around the world, using the slogan “Switzerland. Get natural.” (Switzerland Tourism, Facts & Figures, 2014). The Company is promoting the destination of Switzerland globally to travelers and tourists with the goals of developing, cultivating, and reinforcing the country’s image (Switzerland Tourism, Brand Switzerland’s new communications presence, 2014). The Company “positions Switzerland as a tourism brand standing for quality, naturalness, authenticity, sustainability and modernity, under the overall concept of Swissness” (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 8). The Company is represented in twenty-seven countries and employs more than 242 staff (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 8). The organization chart can be found in appendix I for a better understanding of the structure. Switzerland Tourism is financed sixty percent (60%) by the

government and forty percent (40%) by its marketing earnings and Key Partners contributions (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 11).

Switzerland Tourism has been present on the North American market since 1927, and has three offices located in New York (U.S.) – main North America office, with fourteen employees – and – Los Angeles (U.S.) and Toronto (CAN), both with two employees. According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Huser and Ambord (2014), the U.S., with a total of 1,585,467 overnights in 2013, are one of Switzerland Tourism’s seven priority travel markets along with Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (with Ireland). All together, these markets represent 75.2% of overnights in the Swiss hotel sector in 2013 (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, pp. 8-9). Compared to last year, the U.S. market had significant growth in 2013, with a notable growth of 5.7% in hotel arrivals and 4% in overnights (Huser C. , 2014, p. 4). With a share of 8% of all visitors from all markets and based on hotel overnights, the U.S. is the third most important foreign market for Switzerland, and second most important foreign market behind Germany regarding arrivals (Huser C. , 2014, p. 4).

With a total of 230,189 overnights in 2013 (Huser & Ambord, 2014, p. 1), Canada is considered a Switzerland Tourism active market with nine others countries such as Australia (with New Zealand and Oceania), Austria and Hungary, Belgium and Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Japan, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand), and South Korea. Altogether, they represent 11% of overnights in the Swiss hotel sector in 2013 (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, pp. 8-9).

Switzerland Tourism North America is composed of three offices as mentioned above. The appendix II shows the organization chart of the Company which represents six departments: Administration, Media, Customer Care, Promotion, Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau (SCIB) and Trade. All the departments of the Company are working according to the so-called “4 wheel drive” (Figure 1) in order to reach the largest amount of consumers possible and make them travel to Switzerland (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, pp. 24-25).

Figure 1: Switzerland Tourism "4 Wheel Drive"

Source: Adapted from Switzerland Tourism (2013)

The Company uses every kind of promotion, such as print and TV advertisements, live campaigns, fair appearances and special offers to market Switzerland. E-marketing includes digital communication such as social media campaign, banners ads and apps for smartphones and tablets. Key Media Management (KMM) is one of Switzerland Tourism's most important components, as it "helps the media with research, promotes campaign themes and organizes media trips and conference" (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 25). The last key element of the "4 wheel drive" is Key Account Management (KAM) which is pushing Switzerland's presence in brochures, working with leading Tour Operators and running informative workshops (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 25).

In order to boost Switzerland's presence on the North American Market, it is essential for Switzerland Tourism to provide trustworthy, high quality and long-term contacts to key accounts such as Travel Agents and Tour Operators. The Trade department of Switzerland Tourism North America is in charge of this mission since Travel Agents and Tour Operators are the ones who advise, recommend and sell Switzerland to the final consumer. Indeed, they transform the desire to travel into reality. With many tourism destinations around the world, Travel Agents and Tour Operators do not have a perfect knowledge about Switzerland. This is where Switzerland Tourism intervenes, by developing internally and implementing

different activities and tools to support and help the key accounts. It is crucial to do so as the clients of Travel Agencies and Tour Operators want to have advice when purchasing their vacation to Switzerland (Switzerland Tourism, 2013 Annual Report, 2013, pp. 47-49).

To start, the Trade department is producing an annual “Switzerland Guide”, a sales manual containing valuable information on the Key Partners, such as their contact details, tourist highlights and tips on why and how to sell Switzerland. The Switzerland Guide is reinforced by a monthly Trade Newsletter which also includes various offers and information. Secondly, the Company is organizing Sales Calls, also called Best of Switzerland, six times a year for Swiss Partners throughout the U.S. and Canada. The goal is to meet Travel Agents and Tour Operators personally during one week in order to train them to sell Switzerland or to include Switzerland as a new destination in their brochures. Another activity is the collaboration of the Company with external entities, more specifically with Consortia such as Virtuoso and Signature Travel Network. Those marketing alliances or travel industry networks represent a group of Travel Agents, who pay a membership fee in order to be under the umbrella of the alliance in many different countries. To finish, the Trade department has created a website called the Trade Corner where Travel Agents and Tour Operators can find news about Switzerland; offers and ideas for itineraries; a multimedia library including direct access to the pictures and videos database of Switzerland Tourism; and a contact section regrouping all the Swiss Regions information as well as some Incoming Tour Operators. Furthermore, the Trade Corner has a section called “Switzerland Campus”. The Switzerland Campus is dedicated to the online education and training of travel professionals.

1.3. Switzerland Tourism Campus

In this chapter, the Switzerland Tourism Campus tools such as online learning programs, the LinkedIn Group, and Webinars, are explained.

Nowadays, specialization is the key for travel professionals “to stay on the cutting edge and to consolidate their position on the market” (Kalbaska, Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013, p. 9). Therefore, the Travel Agent and Tour Operator need to be aware of the products they are selling to their customers and also need to have knowledge about the vacation destination.

In others words, they need to have knowledge of the country's culture, mentality, history, customs and traditions, as well as what it offers. They need to know the product in detail in order to better recommended and sell it. To fulfil this need, Switzerland Tourism has created a Switzerland Campus dedicated to the education and training of the travel professionals. It is a virtual campus that regroups four online tools: two e-learning programs, one LinkedIn group and Webinars (Switzerland Tourism, 2014).

1.3.1. Switzerland Specialist and Advisor Programs

The Switzerland Specialist program, also called the "Switzerland Platinum-Level Program" was created in 2005 by the Company and was the first online learning platform part of the Switzerland Campus. The platform is on the website Switzerland Travel Academy (www.myswitzerland.com/academy) and is educating members on "practical information on how and where to travel in Switzerland, enhancing travel agents to plan and market trips to Switzerland" (Switzerland Tourism, 2007). Divided into seven modules, the course can be accessed at any time or place, once the user creates a log-in and password. From a detailed overview of the country to "various topics of use for the planning and selling trips to Switzerland" (Switzerland Tourism, 2007), each module requires approximately three hours of study. A table describing each module with detailed content can be found in appendix III. In order to become certified Switzerland Specialists, participants need to have one hundred percent of correct answers with a maximum of three chances per module to pass the exam. The Switzerland Specialist program offers different benefits for Travel Agents and Tour Operators, including a referral of their agency listing on the main website of Switzerland Tourism www.MySwitzerland.com; the possibility to order brochures for free up to twenty pounds; the right to use the Switzerland Specialist logo; a certificate enabling their clients to recognize their knowledge and specialization; Continuing Education Units (CEU) credits¹ from the Travel Institute and from the Canadian Institute of Travel Counselor; eligibility for consideration for Tour Operators to lead study trips; and access to Switzerland Tourism Webinars and newsletters (Switzerland Tourism, 2007).

¹ According to the Travel Institute, "Certified Travel Associates (CTAs) and Certified Travel Counselors (CTCs) are required to earn a minimum of ten Continuing Education Units (CEUs) per year to maintain their certification and ensure that their travel-industry knowledge is up-to-date." (The Travel Institute, 2014).

The second online learning program, which is also part of the Switzerland Campus, is the Switzerland Advisor program also called “Switzerland Gold-Level Program”. This program was created in 2013 in collaboration with the Travel Agent Academy. This online learning program is divided into five chapters which include images, multiple videos and quizzes, and can be completed in three hours in total. It offers the same benefits as the Switzerland Specialist program with the difference that at the end the Travel Agents will be a certified Switzerland Advisor. This program was mainly created in order to have a better control of the registrants. Indeed, the Travel Agent Academy controls registration by enabling access for travel professionals only, which is not the case with the Switzerland Specialist program (Travel Agent Academy, 2013).

1.3.2. LinkedIn Group

With more than 310 million members in 200 countries and territories, and over 109 million members in North America, LinkedIn is an excellent platform to network professionally, to find employees and freelance workers, and to advertise a company (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014). The Trade department of Switzerland Tourism created a LinkedIn professional group in 2012 called “Switzerland Tourism Goldflower Club” (appendix IV).

The group is accessible only for the professionals of the tourism branch on the North American market and it is not mandatory to be part of the Switzerland Campus for being part of the Goldflower Club. The Trade manager and interns post and share news about the Key Partners, top offers and some valuable tips for the tourism professionals. The goal of this group is to offer support and knowledge about travelling to Switzerland, and to promote Switzerland Tourism’s educational tools such as its e-learning programs and Webinars. Moreover, it enables its 341 members to be in a network where they can share their experiences, interact with each other and ask questions (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014).

1.3.3. Switzerland Tourism Webinars

Since 2003, Switzerland Tourism offers to Travel Agents and Tour Operators the opportunity to attend twenty-four web-conferences a year. Switzerland Tourism North America was the first market to offer such an online education to travel professionals. At that time, not all the Key Partners could afford to take part in the different packages offering Best of Switzerland Sales Calls. Therefore, Switzerland Tourism decided to organize Webinars in order to offer the possibility to Key Partners to present their destination to North American Travel Agents and Tour Operators (Nijlant, 2014).

These so-called Webinars were first hosted once a month with specific themes such as “Transportation” and “Cities”. Since then, the interest from the Key Partners to co-host Webinars increased. Nowadays, Webinars are presented every two weeks by the Trade manager and one intern of Switzerland Tourism in collaboration with a Key Partner, which is either a Swiss Partner or an American Tour Operator. The participants can take the opportunity by listening to them live or by retrieving them afterwards online on the Trade corner at the following address: www.MySwitzerland.com/trade.

Webinars are also used by the Media Department and by the Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau in North America. Although the form of these Webinars is similar to the Trade ones, the target audience is different and therefore the content is more oriented for the media and meeting professionals. Additionally to the Webinars on the North American market, other branch offices of the Company use Webinars to educate and train specific audiences. Recently, the Trade department in the Indian market and the Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau in the French market have started to use Webinars as an educational tool.

2. Research Topic

In this chapter, online-learning which is the main research topic will be explained with several pieces of literature such as scientific articles and theoretical literature. Then, an explanation on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning compare to traditional learning will be given. Finally, the impact of online learning on the tourism industry and on Travel Agents and Tour Operators will be described.

2.1. Online learning

The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for learning and training activities has been defined with many different terms, including “eLearning”, “online or distant learning”, “computer-based training”, or “electronically enabled learning”, and was used for the first time in the late 1990s (Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 20). The Commission of the European Communities (2001) define online learning as follow:

eLearning is the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitation access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration. (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 2)

The development of the ICTs over the past twenty years have been affected significantly the development of online learning worldwide creating a global educational platform (Collins, Buhalis, & Peters, 2003; Markovic, 2010; Kalbaska, Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013; Kalbaska N. , 2013). It has affected various fields: educational, business and social domains such as universities, banks, governmental companies, insurances companies, health corporations, IT firms, etc. (Roca & Gagné, 2008; Kalbaska N. , 2013) transforming the training contents as well as design of a course. Kalbaska (2013, pp. 19-23) affirmed that the Internet has made it possible for employees from different industries in different locations and students all around the world to learn, be trained and interact online. According to McGreal and Elliot (cited in Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 19), “education is one of the fastest-growing economic and social sectors in the world, and the use of new technologies is an integral and driving component of that growth”.

Online learning includes the use of ICTs in education and training, and is delivered on different platforms such as through the Internet and intranet, interactive television, on computers, tablets and mobile devices (Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 20). Wang and Hsu (2008, p. 175) suggest in their study that computer-mediated communication (CMC) significantly supports online learning. According to Stassen and Poe (2012, p. 6), CMC has two dimensions: synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous means the education live via the Internet, usually involving the following tools: “Live chat, audio and video conferencing, data and application sharing, shared whiteboard, virtual “hand raising”, webinars, joint viewing of multimedia presentations and online slide shows” (Stassen & Poe, 2012, p. 6). In contrast, asynchronous learning is also using the Internet but in delayed time. It involves the following instruments: “Email, threaded discussion, newsgroups and bulletin boards, file attachments” (Stassen & Poe, 2012, p. 6). According to Wang and Hsu (2008, p. 176), most of the time, CMC systems are using more than two tools mentioned above.

Although, various online learning tools exist, the focus in this thesis is on the Webinar tool, the main subject of this study. Additionally, a small chapter below is explaining the trendy online learning tool which is the Massive Online Open Course (MOOC).

2.2 Webinar tool

The Webinar, also called web seminar, does not have a clear origin, but has been defined by Cambridge University Press as “an occasion when a group of people go online at the same time to study or discuss something” (Webinar, 2014a). Moreover, Webinar can be also defined as “a seminar or other presentation that takes place on the Internet, allowing participants in different locations to see and hear the presenter, ask questions, and sometimes answer polls” (Webinar, 2014b).

The Webinar tool has been described by Wang and Hsu (2008, p. 175) as “one of the most advanced CMC systems” which attracts “more and more attention with the advancement of online learning technologies”. It enables users to share and exchange information in real time via different multimedia tool such as audio, video and images (Wang & Hsu, 2008, p. 176). With the possibility to use whiteboard and to sharing applications, the tool creates online interaction between the educators and the learners. Unlike others means of online

communication, the Webinar can be delivered in three different formats (Wang & Hsu, 2008, p. 176):

- a) Presenter vs. multiple participants from one site
- b) Presenter vs. multiple participants from multiple sites
- c) Multiple participants from one site vs. multiple participants from one or more multiple sites

According to Wang and Hsu (2008, p. 176), an unfortunately few number of studies have been undertaken by academics to research the interaction in online learning. Nevertheless, they state that even if Webinars are still a new tool, they already have been widely adopted by corporations in various domains, as they reduce the travel expenses and travel time (Wang & Hsu, 2008, p. 177).

2.3 MOOC: The Booming Trend

The Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are shortly described below as they are part of the understanding of online learning, and represent the booming trend in higher education.

According to Markovic (2010, p. 292), American faculties such as the prestigious Stanford University were pioneers in online learning as they created the MOOCs which are open courses accessible from all around the world and free for everyone (Centre e-learning HES-SO Cyberlearn, 2013, p. 3).

A MOOC is an educational tool that incorporates different multimedia content such as videos, exercises represented by quizzes, different assessments and exams that can be auto-corrected or corrected by a group, and immediately given feedback from teachers (Centre e-learning HES-SO Cyberlearn, 2013). According to Markovic (2010, p. 291), nowadays only 18.7% of American faculties do not offer an online learning program for their study programs and about 2.4% have kept the traditional educational form. Markovic also states that, regarding education and knowledge acquisition, more than 90% of students who follow virtual courses are satisfied. Markovic (2010, p. 292) has proven in her study that due to

total flexibility and constant innovation and evolution, online learning is a popular way of studying.

Although the registration to online learning is usually high, it is also important to note that the registrant who finishes and succeeds the course is very low. Indeed, “on 60,000 MOOC participants, only 2,100 finished and succeeded the course which represent only 3.5%” (Centre e-learning HES-SO Cyberlearn, 2013, p. 4).

2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

In their study, Collins et al. (2003, pp. 3-5) have illustrated the pros and cons of online learning in work and school environments (Table 1). Looking at the Table 1, the main advantage for online learning that can be highlighted is the easy integration with work. Indeed, online learning enables the employee to learn and be trained with greater flexibility in terms of when, where and how. Moreover, online learning is cutting the cost of traditional learning as it saves travel expenses and time. According to Collins et al., online learning is an effective way of educating and training employees as they retain more information compared to traditional learning. Last but not least, retrieving past courses is another big advantage of online learning compare to traditional learning (Collins, Buhalis, & Peters, 2003, p. 4).

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. The technology offers the opportunity to integrate learning with work	1. Initial set up and running costs or purchasing access to commercial system can be high
2. Enhances employee performance in a dynamic, interactive and measurable way	2. An infrastructure needs to be in place for employees to use the system
3. Provides information instantaneously	3. Bandwidth limitations – high speed internet access is required.
4. Can increase efficiency	4. Lack of robust internet connection to take advantage of the graphic rich courses designed for online learning
5. It is less expensive method of training as it eliminates travel expenses and the time that it takes to travel to a training session	5. An assessment systems needs to be in place which helps to determine what information employees are learning and to provide feedback to inform manager of how successful employees are in the modules
6. Enables employee to log on from everywhere	6. Electronic communication requires a specific skill which not many people have mastered.
7. Eliminates the need to create and print bulky manuals, which become obsolete after being distributed	7. Learning is impersonal and limited interaction with tutor
8. Mostly modular based, employees can dedicate shorter time periods over a number of days or weeks and still learn the required information	8. Tutor does not take sufficient feedback from students and hence limited diagnostics of learning
9. Additional material is easily accessible online	9. Student requires high degree of self-discipline
10. Some courses linked to professional and academic qualifications	
11. Allows the employee to learn and his/her own pace in the style of learning that works best from them	
12. Ability to retain more information (Employees can retain 30% more information from an online platform compared to 10% retained if learning in the traditional way)	

Source: Adapted from Collins, Buhalis, & Peters (2003, p. 4)

Even if online learning has many advantages, there are a number of disadvantages that should be noted. One major challenge for online learning compared to traditional learning is that participants need to be self-disciplined and stay motivated. A structure needs to be implemented in order to see results. Also, the employees or the students need to have the necessary IT equipment required for learning online such as a computer and Internet access (better quality with high speed access). Furthermore, traditional learning may be preferred to online learning as it requires no additional skills in computer. For some employees or

students, using online learning without support might represent a challenge (Collins, Buhalis, & Peters, 2003, pp. 3-5).

All the advantages and disadvantages of online learning listed above can be applied to the tourism industry which is also using online learning for educating and training travel professionals.

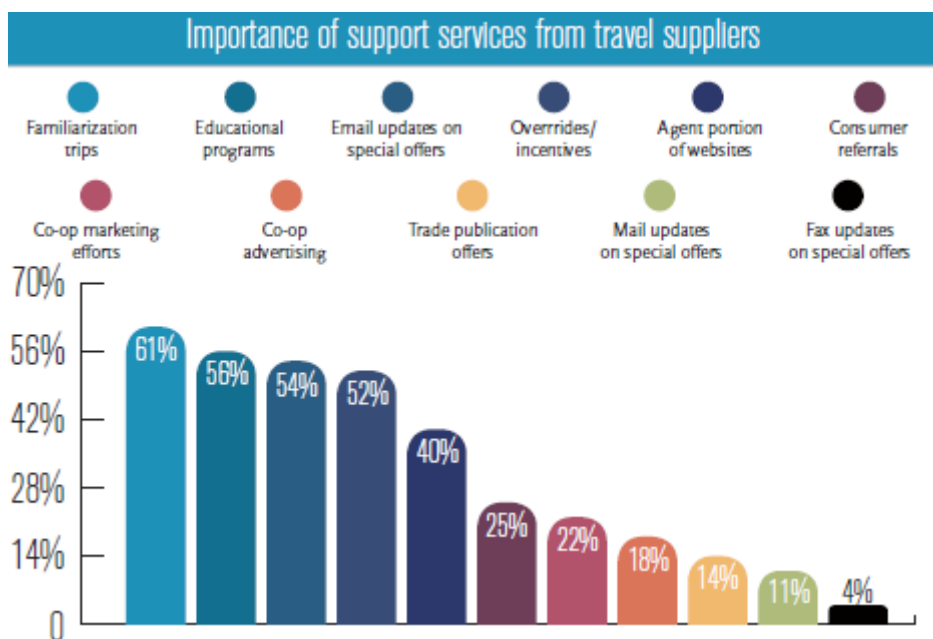
2.5 Online learning in the tourism industry

The tourism sector has also been deeply affected by the ICTs, and many tourism academics have tried to understand the impact and the use of online learning (Kalbaska, Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013; Collins, Buhalis, & Peters, 2003; Cantoni, Kalbaska, & Inversini, 2009; Cantoni & Kalbaska, 2010). The use of ICTs has been widely adopted over the last decades in all core activities of the tourism industry and in various tourism experiences: “online promotion and marketing distribution of tourism products, coordination of main stakeholders involved in the creation and delivery of the tourism products/services” (Adukaite, Kalbaska, & Cantoni, 2014, p. 28). Furthermore, Travel Agents and Tour Operators are using every day computers and global distribution systems (GDS) in order to book flights and hotel arrangements, to get in touch with suppliers, and to look for more information about the destination (Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 24).

According to Kalbaska (2013, p. 23), due to fast growing changes notably because of a high level of staff turnover, seasonality and a high number of small and medium size enterprises in the industry, tourism professionals require an on-going education. Indeed, to be competitive, it is important that employees exchange information and acquire new knowledge constantly (Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 23). Therefore, online learning has been widely used for educating and training travel professionals. According to Cantoni et al. (in Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 24), online learning courses in the tourism industry can be classified into four different categories: “Academic” (for example, online training programs provided by a School of tourism management), “Corporate” (online training programs provided by a firm working in the tourism industry), “Destination Management Organization” (for example, online training programs provided by Switzerland Tourism for trade partners), and “Independent” (online training programs provided by a third party other than the one listed

previously). The Figure 2 below created by Travel Weekly (2013, p. 4), reinforces the opinion that online learning is needed in the travel industry. Indeed, the figure shows that educational programs are the second most important support services from travel suppliers (56%).

Figure 2: Importance of support services from travel suppliers



Source: Travel Weekly (2013, p. 4)

2.6 Importance of Travel Agent and Tour Operator education

According to Buhalis and Law in their study “Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet” (2008, pp. 612-613), the development of the Internet and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) over the past twenty years has not only affected education, but also tremendously transformed the tourism industry into eTourism. New channels of distribution have been created, fierce competition has arisen between online and traditional travel agencies, and tourism consumer behaviors have changed dramatically, creating the “new” tourist who is knowledgeable about the destination, well-informed, and is seeking tailored vacations for an exceptional value (Buhalis & Law, 2008, pp. 612-613). According to the figures in Google’s report of “The Travellers Road to Decisions” (cited in Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 11), the Internet is the primary source where tourists plan and book their trips.

To understand why the education of Travel Agents and Tour Operators is necessary, a closer look at the customer journey is needed. The table below was produced by the World Tourism Organization and explains in details the journey of a tourist or traveler (World Tourism Organization, 2007, pp. 18-19). The table is valuable as it enables to see where Travel Agents and Tour Operators intervene on the customer's choice.

Table 2: the customer journey

Dreaming:	The customer is considering a vacation. They may have an idea of when they will travel, for how long and how much they might spend, but they have not decided where they will go or what they will do. They will be looking for inspiration, ideas and recommendation. Decision making will probably begin at the national level, as different countries are considered.
Planning:	The customer may have a clearer idea of where and what they want. They will be looking for further specific information about their choice such as transport and accommodation options, things to do, "must sees", events, the weather, and bad weather options. The decision making may be narrowed down to regions and/or destination in the country of choice.
Booking:	The customer may make comparisons of best values – price may be the main priority followed by convenience and security. The booking may be made through an intermediary – a tour operator, travel agent, booking agent or DMO or directly with individual providers (e.g. transport and accommodation providers).
Experiencing:	This is the stage at which the visit is experienced and will include transport to and arrival at the destination as well as every aspect of the visitor's stay once they have arrived. This stage covers everything from the overall welcome that they receive, the standard of the facilities, the quality of the attractions, accommodation and other amenities and the information that visitors receive.

Remembering:	The customer will recall their journey and will assess whether it was good or bad. The experience at every step of the journey will inform this decision. If the experience was good, then the customer may recommend to others, or return themselves. If the overall experience was bad, then the customer will not return, will not recommend to others, and may well speak badly of the destination.
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Source: World Tourism Organization (2007, pp. 18-19)

The table shows at the first stage, “Dreaming”, that the customer is looking for ideas and suggestions for his trip. He might look for information on the Internet, ask his friends and relatives about suggestions, or go to a Travel Agency or Tour Operator in order to look for more information and grab some brochures about different destinations around the world. Already at the first stage, the knowledge of a Travel Agent and Tour Operator about the destination is necessary. Indeed, if they cannot correctly inform the client or make him dream, the customer will not consider the destination and will look for another one. The second and third stages, “Planning” and “Booking”, are also decisive for Travel Agents and Tour Operators as the customer will look for more concrete and specific information related to his vacation. Knowledge and aptitudes from Travel Agents and Tour Operators will be determining factors, because if the client feels the travel professional does not know the destination or the product well, he might look for another destination or another supplier company.

Destination Management Organization understands that Travel Agents are salespeople and that is why they are investing nowadays in certified training. If Travel Agents do not know about the destination, they cannot recommend or sell it. On the other hand, if they are trained, they are more confident in discussion. The more the destination is included in conversation, the more bookings the destination will receive (Travalliancemedi, 2012).

2.7 Online training in the tourism industry

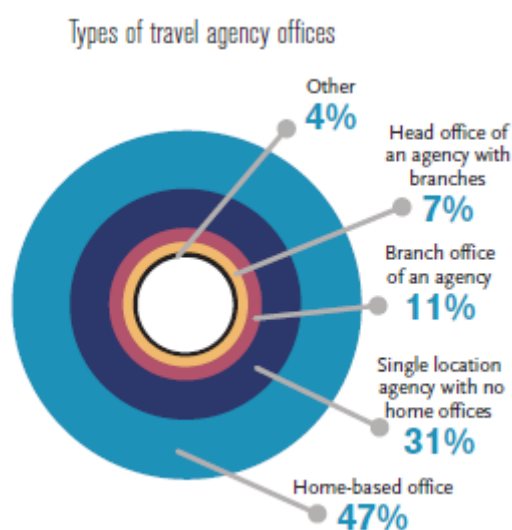
The development of ICTs has not only deeply transformed the tourism industry as mentioned above, but has also changed how tourism companies are training their employees and partners. According to the World Tourism Organization (in Kalbaska , Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013, p. 8), since 2006 Destination Management Organizations worldwide have been training their business partners via online training in order to deliver an excellent service to end-consumers and to prepare them to sell more trips to a given destination. Indeed, online training has been described as “a means of increasing skills and providing knowledge” (Kalbaska et al., 2013, p. 7) and an excellent method of training. Digital technologies support Travel Agents and Tour Operators by providing them with more information, educating and offering them more opportunities to gain knowledge on a destination and its attractions (Kalbaska et al., pp. 7-9). Collins et al. (2003, p. 3) described in their study that small companies that cannot afford to pay for courses for their employees are using online training as it is a low cost, time-independent learning environment, which can be use in a flexible working environment. According to UNWTO (in Kalbaska N. , 2014, p. 36), Destination Management Organizations can support and train Travel Agents and Tour Operators with the following tools: “website, e-newsletters, and online training: “destination specialist” programs” and webinars.

2.8 The use of Webinars for travel professionals

According to Molay (2010, p. 1) webinars can be used for many different purposes: “presenting a company, products, or services”; “free or fee-based training for customers or employees”; educational sessions for establishing “thought leadership on a specific topic”; or “limited-access web meetings for investors, press, Industry analysts, and other groups”. The use of the webinar as a support learning and teaching tool has become popular not only for many universities but also for companies across the world. It enables travel professionals to actively engage with each other and with their clients with total flexibility in location and time (Reushle & Loch, 2008, p. 19); it enables participants to assist in conferences thousands of kilometers away; and it might replace face-to-face meetings with virtual tools. Webinars are also an excellent tool for staying ahead in the industry, especially in the tourism as it is a fast growing industry. Indeed, it requires being constantly innovative, creative and

knowledgeable in order to compete with others (Burgess, 2014). End-consumers want to have always more and that their investment as an excellent return. Therefore, they are looking for knowledgeable travel professional who can meet their needs and wants (Burgess, 2014). Webinars are a perfect learning tool for travel professional as it enables them to stay up-to-date on a tourism destination and its offers. Furthermore, it is also an excellent way to learn in a flexible environment, which is an advantage for many Travel Agents based at home.

Figure 3: Types of travel agency office in the U.S.



Source: Travel Weekly (2013, p. 8)

Indeed, most of the Travel Agency offices in North America are home-based (47%) according to the figure above produced by the magazine Travel Weekly (2013, p. 8). The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) confirms that home-based Travel Agents are predominant in the travel industry: 40,000 in 2011, compared to 14,000 retail storefront locations (ASTA, 2014, p. 2). Also, Shillinglaw (2014, p. 4) reveals in his survey that the primary reason why Travel Agents are working from home is because they can have flexible hours (more than 68 percent of persons interviewed).

According to Smith (2014, p. 1), travel professionals are using Webinars as they enable them to “reduce the cost of operations while improving business efficiencies”. With the use of the Table 3 that Smith (2014, p. 2) produced in his research, a comparison between the cost of an in-person meeting and a Webinar can be described. In order to make an

estimation of the cost, a hypothetical meeting that a Key Partner could do with one of its clients in New York is described in Table 3.

Table 3: In-Person Meetings vs. Webinars

Variables	In-Person Meetings	Webinars
Travel time and distance	10h - 6,400km ^a	-
Flight ticket Zurich-New York - Zurich	\$1,200 ^a	-
Number of people traveling	1	-
Travel expenses (hotel, food expenses, transport)	\$450 ^b	-
Cost of meeting room	Meeting at the client's office	Meeting at their own office
Cost of Webinar solution per month	-	\$80 ^c
Internet access	-	\$50 ^d
Equipment (cameras, mics, lights, PCs or tablets, headsets, speakers, etc.)	-	-
	\$ 1,650	\$ 130
	Total meeting costs incl. Travel (per meeting, per month/year)	Total cost of Webinar solution including internet and peripherals

Source: Table adapted from Smith (2004, p. 2) with data from multiple sources:

- Swiss International Air Lines AG (2014), round-trip Zurich-New York, economy class, one adult.
- Author own assumption (\$300 accommodation in New York, \$45 food and \$100 transport).
- Citriy Systems, Inc (2014).
- New America (2014).

The table above includes the cost for an in-person meeting like a round-trip flight ticket from Zurich to New York; travel expenses such as one night in a hotel, one breakfast, one lunch and one dinner; and a number of similar meetings per month. The cost of a meeting room is not taken into account, as usually the Swiss Partner is meeting his client in his office. In comparison, the costs of a Webinar with the same clients based in New York are outlined, including the cost of the Webinar solution and high-speed Internet access for one month. The equipment such as the computer, the mics and the speakers are not taken into account as they are part of the company inventory.

Smith (2014) proves with his table that a Webinar is significantly saving travel time and travel expenses of a company compared to an in-person meeting. This technology has a real impact especially in an economic or industry downturn. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Webinars will not replace a face-to-face meeting, as they can be perceived as impersonal and may affect the meeting between the participants (Smith, 2014, pp. 1-3).

2.9 Switzerland Tourism Webinars

In this section, we describe the organization, functioning and management of the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism.

Since 2003, Switzerland Tourism has been using Webinars to educate and train Travel Agents and Tour Operators that are part of the Switzerland Campus. At that time, it was the first market of the Company using this kind of online learning tool (Nijlant, 2014). Nowadays, the Company has expanded the use of Webinars to the Media department as well as for Switzerland Convention and Incentives Bureau on the North American market. Additionally, since 2014, the French market is offering Webinars for its clients in the Meeting industry.

Swiss Partners and Tour Operators that have a business plan with the Company co-present the Webinars. Each partner has a specific amount of Webinars depending on the integrated packages they have signed for. Indeed, every year, the Company presents its market activities to all the Swiss Partners during its annual meeting “Ferientag”. The Company presents different packages called “Gold”, “Silver” and “Bronze” which include marketing activities in the Trade, Media and Promotion departments. Webinars have a value of \$1,000 and are part of the three packages for the Trade marketing activities (Switzerland Tourism, 2013).

Using Webinars for training and educating Travel Agents and Tour Operators offers many advantages for Switzerland Tourism, its Key Partners and the participants. Indeed, the main advantage of training with Webinars is that it eliminates the time and travel expenses. Moreover, it enables the Swiss Partners to stay in Switzerland and at the same time to reach many Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Additionally, the solution offers the participants the opportunity to integrate learning with their work and to work in a totally flexible environment from every geographic location. In contrast, some disadvantages can also arise, such as the limitations of the Internet speed. For a Webinar that is running smoothly, the participants and Switzerland Tourism require high-speed Internet. Additionally, a Webinar can be interpreted as something impersonal that limits interaction between the participants, Switzerland Tourism and the Swiss Partners.

2.9.1 Planning 2014

In this section, the Webinars planning for 2014 is described. In total, twenty-four Webinars were scheduled for the year 2014 (Table 4).

Table 4: Webinars schedule 2014

Dates	Key Partners
January 16, 2014	Lake Lucerne Region
January 30, 2014	Globus Family of Brands' Switzerland Tours
February 06, 2014	Swiss Travel System
February 20, 2014	Zurich
March 06, 2014	Ticino
March 20, 2014	Interlaken / Jungfrau Railways
April 03, 2014	Avanti Destinations
April 17, 2014	Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region
May 01, 2014	Collette Vacations
May 15, 2014	Lake Lucerne Region, Mount Pilatus
May 22, 2014	Engadin St. Moritz
June 12, 2014	<i>tbc</i>
June 26, 2014	Bern
July 10, 2014	Lake Lucerne Region
Summer Break	-
August 21, 2014	Swiss Travel System and Rail Europe
September 04, 2014	Gstaad
September 18, 2014	Zürich Airport
October 02, 2014	Jungfrau Region
October 16, 2014	Travel Bound
October 30, 2014	Engadin St. Moritz
November 13, 2014	Lake Lucerne Region, Mount TITLIS
November 20, 2014	Basel
December 04, 2014	Zurich
December 18, 2014	Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region

Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

2.9.2 Webinars format

Members of the Switzerland Campus and the tourism professional's part of the Trade database, which represent about 2,800 contacts, will receive invitations two weeks prior to the Webinars and can register for them using an online form. The Company uses the tool Gadmin to create and send the invitation. It includes a picture of the Webinar topic, a short description of the destination and the needed information such as the guest speaker, time

and date of the Webinar, and a hyperlink with the registration form. An invitation and a registration form are given in appendix V and appendix VI in order to demonstrate the process.

After the registration, every participant will receive a reminder one week and one day before the Webinar session. Switzerland Tourism Webinars take place every two weeks on Thursday at 12:00pm Eastern Standard Time/ Eastern Daylight Time and last 45 minutes. They are divided into three parts. In the first ten minutes, Switzerland Tourism presents the Trade team with its detailed contact information, general news and offers about the country related to the main campaign of the Company. Switzerland Tourism 2014 Summer Campaign was based on vistas, and this theme was included in the first part of each Webinar with for example a section called “Swiss Hidden Gems” or “Best Vistas”. During the second part of the Webinar and for about 25 minutes, the floor is given to the presenter - either a Swiss Partner or an American Tour Operator. The presenters have the choice to present what they want about their destination or products from basic to more detailed information. The last part of the Webinar is used for questions and answers, normally taking from five to fifteen minutes. The participants can use the chat function or ask permission to be unmuted.

2.9.3 Webinars software

Until March 2014, Switzerland Tourism was using the software called Webex, owned by the company Cisco. This software is often used by the Company headquarter in Zurich for internal online meeting all around the world. The Trade team realized in the beginning of February 2014 that Webex had some limitations for its Webinars. To cite only few examples, Key Partners could not have the control of the mouse during their presentation and the Trade team had issue with the sound quality as it was not possible to mute all the participants automatically. Moreover, the software was not user friendly and time was wasted on the Webinars’ set-up.

Consequently, the question of whether to work with different software came up in February 2014. Victoria Kurt was mandated by the Company to benchmark different software programs and to give recommendations for a possible change. After their analyses and many recommendations from travel professionals doing Webinars, Victoria Kurt

suggested working with GoToWebinar, which is owned by the company Citrix System. It is an integrated Webinar environment providing many different features such as audio and video conferencing, shared desktop, an instant chat function, toll-free audio service, and a recording session function that enables the Company to upload its past Webinars on its Trade Corner (Citrix Systems Inc., 2014). Additionally the solution GoToWebinar offers the possibility to regenerate a report after each Webinar, which is valuable for gathering all the participants' data such as their contact information, email addresses and professions. Therefore, the Company can include the data in its database and share the report with the Key Partners.

The Company has chosen to have a one year contract with the company Citrix System which includes one organizer seat, a capacity of 100 attendees per meeting and an open-voice offering toll-free number for the United States, Canada and Switzerland. Switzerland Tourism can at any time adapt any options and raise the number of attendees per meeting up to 500 or 1000 attendees These changes will increase the cost of the Webinar solution from \$240 to \$320 (Citrix Systems Inc., 2014).

2.9.4 Webinars participation

In comparison to 2013, the participants in Switzerland Tourism Webinars have increased consistently in the first period of 2014. The table below shows a comparison between 2013 and 2014 Webinars that had the same topics. Taking in account that more invitations to Webinars were sent during the year 2014, due to the fact that Switzerland Tourism is constantly gathering more contacts, the evolution of participants have mainly increased from 0.20% to 1.19%. Only two Webinars in 2014 had fewer participants than the previous year, representing an evolution of -0.70 % and -0.23% (Author data, 2014).

Table 5: Comparison Webinars participation 2013-2014

Webinar Topics	2013			2014			Evolution in %
	Invitations	Participants	%	Invitations	Participants	%	
Lake Lucerne Region	1629	26	1.60	2477	58	2.34	0.75
Zurich	1617	37	2.29	2533	63	2.49	0.20
Ticino	1590	11	0.69	2566	35	1.36	0.67
Interlaken / Jungfrau Railways	1613	35	2.17	2576	50	1.94	-0.23
Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region	1619	26	1.61	2624	55	2.10	0.49
Lake Lucerne Region	1596	9	0.56	2732	48	1.76	1.19
Engadin St.Moritz	1621	30	1.85	2793	32	1.15	-0.70
Bern	1596	19	1.19	2874	52	1.81	0.62
Lake Lucerne Region	1629	26	1.60	2865	67	2.34	0.74

Source: data gathered by the author (2014, own illustration)

According to Table 5, Switzerland Tourism sent on average of 2,670 invitations per Webinar in 2014, which is a huge number compare to the participation rate per Webinar. The gap can be explained with different reasons. First, the invitations sent are sometimes not received due to either a soft or hard bounce back. Soft bounces have temporarily failed but the actual email address of the recipient is still valid, for example if the mailbox is full. The hard bounces back are on the contrary permanent and mean the email address of the recipient is no longer valid. Another reason why the number of invitations sent is bigger than the number of participants can be explained by the low open rate of the invitation (between 17% and 27%); the fact that the invitation might arrive in the spam box; and that the participants registered for the Webinars and then forgot to participate. Nevertheless, the participation in at least one Webinar has significantly increased from 193 participants in 2013 to 494 participants in 2014 (data collected by the author at the end of October 2014). On average, participants attend at least two Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism. Only forty-three Travel Agents and Tour Operators are regular participants that have attended more than five Webinars (Author data, 2014).

Table 6 below shows the ranking of Webinars with the highest participation in 2014. Lake Lucerne Region with its two Webinars about Lucerne had the first and third position, Zurich Tourism is second in the ranking. Tour Operators such as Avanti Destinations and Globus Family of Brands are on the bottom of the ranking.

Table 6: Ranking Webinars 2014 with the most of participants

Topics	Partners	Participants
Lucerne	Lake Lucerne Region	67
-	Zurich	63
Lucerne	Lake Lucerne Region	58
-	Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region	55
Public Transportation System	Swiss Travel System	52
-	Bern	52
-	Interlaken / Jungfrau Railways	50
Mt. Pilatus	Lake Lucerne Region	48
-	Collette Vacations	44
Gastronomy & Events	Ticino	35
-	Globus Family of Brands	34
-	Engadin St.Moritz	32
-	Avanti Destinations	28

Source: data gathered by the author (2014, own illustration)

2.9.5 Costs and management

In this section, the financing of the Webinars by Switzerland Tourism is explained.

As mentioned previously, Switzerland Tourism has a one-year contract with the company Citrix System for owning the software GoToWebinar. The investment represents \$2,669 for one year and includes a capacity of 100 attendees per meeting, and an open voice solution with three toll-free numbers for the United States, Canada and Switzerland (Citrix Systems Inc., 2014). Table 7 shows the details of the investment.

Table 7: Investment for the software GoToWebinar

Solution	Attendee capacity per meeting	Quantity	Per month investment	Per year investment
GoToWebinar	100	1	\$79.00	\$948.00
Solution	Flat rate per attendee		Per month investment	Annual investment
Openvoice	U.S. & Canada	\$0.05	\$150	\$1,800
	Switzerland	\$0.20		
	Investment per year (net)			\$2,748
	Activation and set-up fee			\$79.00
	2 months free service			\$(158.00)
Total first year investment			\$2,669.00	

Source: Citrix Systems Inc. (2014)

Additionally, the Company needs to have at disposal one computer, one meeting room where the Webinars can be performed to avoid background noise and one phone for dialing-in. Those costs are not taken into account, as they are already part of the Company inventory.

Regarding the management of the Webinars, junior interns are responsible for the creation of the Webinar invitation, the Power Point presentation from Switzerland Tourism and the Key Partners, the set-up of the solution, the communication with the Swiss Partners and the promotion of the Webinar via the LinkedIn platform. The time for these tasks has been estimated to around five hours which is taken into account in this thesis.

3. Research question

In this Chapter, the problematic, the research question and the hypothesis are explained. Then, research justifications and limits are given.

Problematic: Travel Agents and Tour Operators are the ones who advise, recommend, and sell Switzerland to final consumer (tourists and travelers). They are transforming the desire to travel into reality.

Research question: How can Switzerland Tourism increase Travel Agents and Tour Operators' knowledge about Switzerland in an efficient way in order to recommend and sell the destination more?

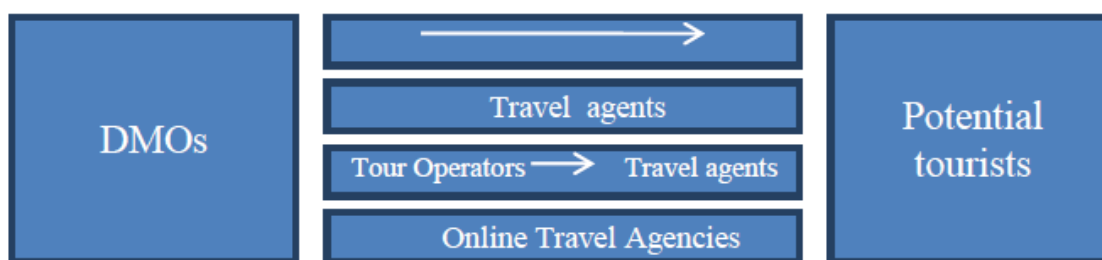
Hypothesis: The Webinars organized by Switzerland Tourism to educate and train Travel Agents and Tour Operators are significantly increasing their knowledge and recommendations on Switzerland and its touristic destinations.

The duality of the research concerns on one hand understanding if the education and training of Travel Agents and Tour Operators via Webinars is significantly increasing the participants' knowledge and recommendation, and on the other hand, giving specific recommendations that will be usable in the future. The aim of this paper is to present concrete results and recommendations to Switzerland Tourism, so the Company can improve its education and might apply it to other markets.

3.1. Research justifications

In this section the research justifications will to be explained.

To start, it is important to understand that Switzerland Tourism has several channels to sell its destination. According to Kalbaska (2013, p. 33), the first channel is to communicate and interact directly with the end consumers. This can be done either online, with its website MySwitzerland.com and via emails, or offline with walk-ins, phone calls or letters. Others intermediaries for the Company are the travel professionals. The figure below describes the relationship between DMOs (Switzerland Tourism), trade partners and potential tourists.

Figure 4: Relationship between DMOs, trade partners and potential tourists

Source: Kalbaska (2013, p. 33)

According to Carey et al. (in Kalbaska N. , 2013, p. 33), “one of the major powerful and influential bodies for nature of the tourism demand” are the Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Indeed they are decisive as they are the ones who influence the image of the destination and “are involved in the definition of the market trends” (Kalbaska N., 2013, p. 33).

For the reasons mentioned above, we decided to take an interest in the education and training of Travel Agents and Tour Operators from Switzerland Tourism. The e-learning programs of the Company (Switzerland Advisor and Switzerland Specialist) have already been part of various researches about online learning (Adukaite, Kalbaska, & Cantoni, 2014; Cantoni & Kalbaska, 2010; Kalbaska N. , 2014; Kalbaska N. , 2013; Kalbaska, Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013). Therefore, we decided to concentrate our research on Switzerland Tourism Webinars since at the moment, the Company has not done any studies about it.

3.2. Research limitations

The research was undertaken from January to December 2014. Nevertheless only the Webinars from January to July 2014 were taken into account in the research. This decision was made due to time constrains as the thesis needed to be finished for the month of December 2014. Consequently, some limitations appear, such as the fact that the Company changed the Webinar solution from Webex to GoToWebinar in March 2014, as well as the changes to how the Webinar are presented. Changing the solution could have an impact on how the Webinars are perceived by the participants. Indeed, some participants have attended one or two Webinars and it is possible that it was with the previous Webinar solution Webex.

Another limit to take into account is the possibility that the respondents to the online questionnaire as well as the participants to the interview might have biased their answers as the researchers were also working for the Company. Even if the online questionnaire was anonymous and the Key Partners' answers were not going to be related to their name, the answers might not be one hundred percent true.

4. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is explained below in two parts. In the first part, the reasons why using a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative techniques are explained and justified. Afterwards, the survey designed for the Travel Agents and Tour Operators is described as well as the interview for Key Partners. Finally, the research population, the sample size and how the data were collected are shown in the last part.

4.1. Research methods

This research aims to fill the gap identified in the literature review by exploring the perceptions of Travel Agents and Tour Operators towards Switzerland Tourism which is educating and training them with Webinars. In order to prove the hypothesis exposed in Chapter 3, we have chosen to adopt a mixed method approach including both quantitative and qualitative research instruments as it give us a much more comprehensive picture.

According to Creswell (2003, p. 15) in his study “Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches”, the concept of mixing qualitative and quantitative strategies is still a new method that was created in 1959 by Campbell and Fiske in psychological traits. Campbell and Fiske combined field methods such as interviews (qualitative data) with traditional surveys (quantitative data) as both of the method had their own limitations (Creswell, 2003, pp. 15-16).

On one hand, the quantitative research is based on an online survey among Travel Agents and Tour Operators on the North American market in order to use measurable data to formulate facts. According to Schutt (2011, p. 160), a survey is an efficient method for collecting data from a large sample whitout increasing the cost or the time. Moreover, the web-based survey is a popular form that is flexible, inexpensive and reduces the risk of a data entry error as the data are recorded automatically. The major drawback of the web-based survey method is that it could be that the email ends up in the spam inbox which reduces the number of respondents (Schutt, 2011, pp. 160-161).

In the other hand, the qualitative research is based on individual interviews and is used to gain an understanding on the perceptions of the Key Partners about Webinars. According

to Boodhoo and Purmessur (2009, p. 2), qualitative research is also called “soft science since it is not subjective and not directly quantifiable”. Interviews were chosen since numerical data did not provide a more realistic feeling of the research.

4.2. Data collection

For the theoretical and literature parts, the data researches were made at the Queens Library and online. Information and data concerning the North American tourism market as well as Switzerland Tourism facts and figures were found on the intranet *stnet.ch* and in the Annual Report of the Company. The data mainly comes from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and were put together by the department of research of Switzerland Tourism. Regarding trends and numbers on the North American travel industry, the data were found online in international surveys, on various websites and on paper in different Trade Magazines and newspapers.

4.2.1. Online questionnaire among Travel Agents and Tour Operators

A survey among Travel Agents and Tour Operators part of the Switzerland Campus was set up on Google Drive Survey. It was designed to find out if Switzerland Tourism Webinars are significantly increasing the knowledge and recommendation of its participants. The population to be sampled has been identified as North American Travel Agents and Tour Operators that are part of the Switzerland Campus. The sample size has been determined and limited to 300 Travel Agents and Tour Operators, as the larger the population size, the smaller the percentage of the population required to get a representative sample. The simple random sampling method has been chosen as it enables each individual to have the same probability of being chosen at any stage during the process. In total, 162 questionnaires were completed which make a response rate of 54% and a representative sample.

The online questionnaire included forty-seven questions that were either closed or open, with the possibility of having sometimes multiple choices answers. It is important to note that some questions of the online questionnaire were taken and adapted from

Kalbaska (2013, pp. 244-249) in her study “eLearning Courses about National Tourism Destinations: Destination Management Organizations' Offers and Travel Agents' Perceptions and Motivations”. Indeed, some questions part of her questionnaire were extremely valuable for this research. Therefore, the decision was made to include them in this thesis.

The online questionnaire was structured into six categories:

- Demographics of the respondents
- Strategies of their knowledge acquisition
- Participation or non-participation in a Webinar about a tourism destination
- Participation or non-participation in a Webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism
- Acquired knowledge and satisfaction
- Improvements

Depending on their answers, the respondents were redirected to other questions in order to find out more information or to be more specific in their answers. The questions can be seen in appendix VII.

Respondents required approximately five to ten minutes to answer the online questionnaire. An incentive presented as a sweepstake was generously sponsored by Switzerland Tourism in order to motivate and thanks the respondents for taking the time to answer the questions. People wanting to enter the draw to win a “Swiss Box” (box full of chocolate and Swiss giveaways) could enter their name, email address or address or phone number at the end of the survey. Anonymity was guaranteed to everyone and no data were used for any other purpose than the sweepstake.

The online questionnaire was sent out via email on August 5th, 2014. The Trade department sent out its Trade newsletter on July 31st, 2014, therefore we decided to wait until the first Tuesday of the month to send the survey, a day which usually has a better opening rate than the first day of the week. Recipients of the email were able to fill out the questionnaire within the time frame of four weeks, and then it was closed on September 7th, 2014. An additional email was sent on August 14th, 2014, mentioning that there had already been eighty-seven responses and reminding the respondents to fill out the online questionnaire before the due date.

Although the actual study provides valuable insights into Travel Agents and Tour Operators' perception of Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism, the findings should be interpreted with the consideration of the limitations mentioned in Chapter 3.2.

4.2.2. Interviews with the Key Partners

The online questionnaire gave general and important insights on the perception and evaluation of Travel Agents and Tour Operators in the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism. However, the online questionnaire does not consider the perception of the Key Partners which put limitations on the research. Indeed, looking at the perspective of the Key Partners that are co-hosting the Webinars with Switzerland Tourism from January to July 2014 is also needed for the research. Therefore, an email was sent on August 17th, 2014 to twelve Key Partners that co-hosted Webinars with Switzerland Tourism during the first period of the year. Only seven Key Partners responded positively to the email. Interviews were done via Skype during the month of August 2014 with the following Swiss Partners: Jungfrau Railways – Interlaken Tourism, Swiss Travel System, Engadin St. Moritz, Lake Lucerne Region – Mount Pilatus, Ticino Tourism, Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region and GoColette. Ten open-questions were part of the interview with the aim to have more insights about the Key Partners motivation, perception and management. The protocol of the interview can be found in appendix VIII.

5. Synthesis of the results

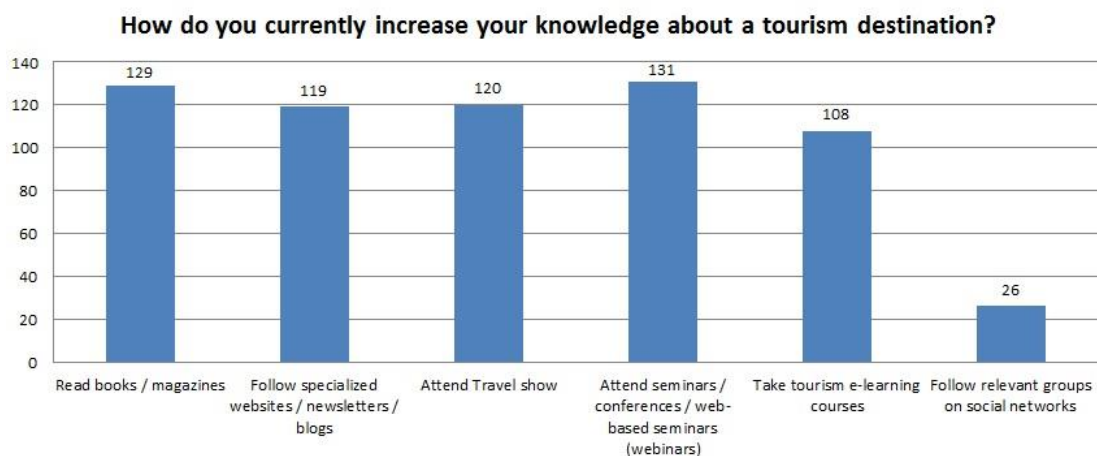
In the following chapter, the results of the survey and the interviews are explored. First of all, a survey participants' profile is described below, then the results of the online questionnaire are given. Secondly a profile of Key Partners interviewed is described and the findings of interviews are summarized in the Chapter 5.2.

5.1. Results of the online questionnaire

A total of 162 valid questionnaires were received through this online survey, with two nationalities represented: United States of America (91%) and Canada (7%). The most represented in the sample were Independent Travel Agents (49%), Home-based Travel Agents (19%) and Tour Operators (14%). Most of the respondents are female (75%), over 50 years old (76%), have worked in the travel industry for more than ten years (70%) and have a higher degree in education (43% have a Bachelor degree, 22% have a Master degree and 18% have an associate degree).

Thanks to the online questionnaire, indicative numbers on how the respondents are currently increasing their knowledge about a tourism destination were received. Among respondents, 131 Travel Agents and Tour Operators (81%) confirmed that their first source of education is by attending seminars, conferences and Webinars (Figure 5).

Figure 5: How do you currently increase your knowledge about a tourism destination



Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

Reading books and magazines is their second tool representing 80%, followed by attending Travel show (74%), specialized websites such as blogs and newsletters (73%), and taking tourism e-learning courses (67%). Only twenty-six respondents (16%) affirmed that following relevant groups on social network is increasing their knowledge about a tourism destination.

5.1.1. Participation or non-participation in a tourism destination Webinar

Among 162 respondents, the level of participation in a Webinar about a tourism destination is very high, reaching 91%. Only fifteen Travel Agents and Tour Operators have affirmed that they have never attended a Webinar about a tourism destination, mainly because they have no or little time for it (9%). The others reasons include their wish to go to an actual seminar (3%) or that Webinars are not useful as the information is most of the time too general (2%). Nevertheless, eight respondents out of the fifteen would be interested in attending a webinar within twelve months.

As mentioned above, 147 respondents (91%) have attended at least one webinar about a tourism destination. In fact, 43% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators affirmed that since January 2014, they have attended between one and five Webinars, and 33% have attended more than ten Webinars. Therefore, the respondents were asked to suggest up to three Webinars (other than Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism) they liked the most. The most appreciated Webinar as suggested by twenty-one Travel Agents and Tour Operators is hosted by Tourism New Zealand. On the second position is the Webinar about Australia with twenty preferences. The third position is occupied by France and its different regions. The list of the top fifteen best Webinars is below in Table 8.

Table 8: List of top 15 best Webinars

Rank	Webinar Topic	Mentioned (by Travel Agents and Tour Operators)
1.	New Zealand	21
2.	Australia	20
3.	France	19
4.	Italy	13
5.	Mexico	12
6.	Peru	11
	Germany	11
7.	South Africa	10
8.	Africa	9
9.	Ireland	8
10.	Austria	7
11.	River Cruises	6
	United Kingdom	6
12.	Argentina	5
	Spain	5

Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

The main reasons why the respondents suggested the Webinars above are because they were interested in the destination itself (74%) and the content was detailed (71%). Also, 41% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators liked the beautiful pictures and/or the videos shown. 20% of the respondents liked them due to their interaction and 9% for the quiz during the Webinar.

Among respondents, 136 Travel Agents and Tour Operators (84%) confirmed that attending a destination Webinar increased their current knowledge about the destination (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Attending a destination Webinar



Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

72% of them (116) affirmed that Webinars make them more confident to recommend and sell the destination, and ninety-seven suggest that they improve their business sales. Only 1% think that Webinar brings nothing. To the question, “Have you ever sold or recommended a destination to customer because you attended a Webinar about the destination?”, 83% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (120) replied “Yes”.

5.1.2. Participation or non-participation in a Switzerland Tourism Webinar

Among 144 respondents, the level of participation in a Webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism is high, representing 73% (105 Travel Agents and Tour Operators). Only thirty-nine of them affirmed that they have never attended one. The main reasons are that they have no or little time to attend it (46%) and also because they did not know about the possibility to attend to a Webinar (41%). Only one respondent affirmed not being interested by the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism. In total, 20% of them would be interested in attending a Webinar about Switzerland and 3% do not know.

Travel Agents and Tour Operators who have participated in a Switzerland Tourism Webinar were asked to give their three main reasons why they attended it. The main reason for 103 respondents is to acquire knowledge about the destination. The second reason is to respond to their client’s needs and requests (seventy-three respondents). The third and fourth reasons are because they want to sell more and earn more (fifty-seven Travel Agents and Tour Operators) and they want to participate in educational trips, also called familiarization or study trips (thirty-nine respondents). Twenty Travel Agents and Tour Operators wanted to have access to special offers by attending a Webinar about Switzerland and only eighteen have affirmed they wanted to enrich their curriculum vitae by participating such as Webinar. Finally, three respondents have attended the Webinar due to their manager requests.

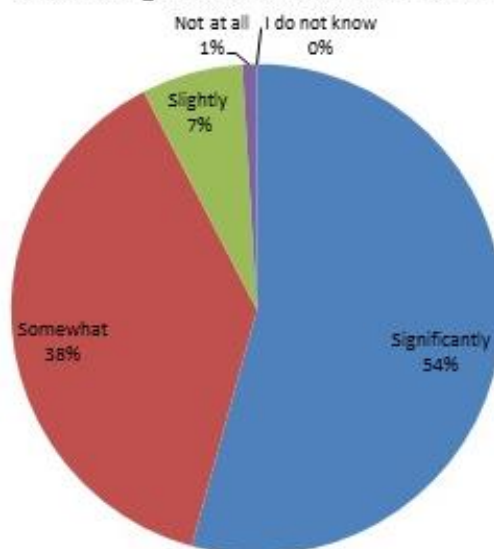
To the question “What would you like to learn in a Webinar about Switzerland?”, 14% of the respondents that have never attended a Webinar about Switzerland answered they would like to learn more about the main activities at the destinations. It includes information about museums, events, shopping areas, must-sees and restaurants for example. Information about the transportation system, such as price of the tickets, different passes,

how to move around, etc. is also relevant for 15% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Moreover, twenty-three of them have affirmed that they would like to learn top selling tips about the country and nineteen would like to know special offers at the destination (packages, promotion, special events, etc.). Finally, 10% of respondents are interested in learning more about incoming Tour Operators and Tour Operators on the North American market that feature Switzerland.

The online questionnaire reveals that fifty-seven Travel Agents and Tour Operators (54%) have significantly increased their knowledge about the destination and forty of them somewhat (38%) (Figure 7). In contrast, 7% of respondents affirmed their knowledge about Switzerland has slightly increased and only 1% responded not at all.

Figure 7: Did the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism have increased your knowledge about the destination?

Did the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism have increased your knowledge about the destination?



Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

To the question “Did you get the information you were looking for by attending Switzerland Tourism Webinars?”, most of the Travel Agents and Tour Operators (95%) replied “Yes”.

The ones who gave a negative answer (five respondents) justified their choice with the following answers:

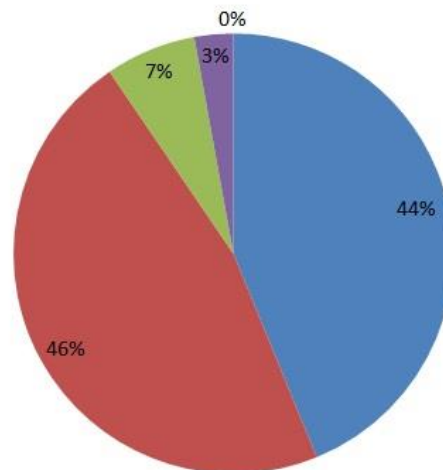
- Did not address the specific part of Switzerland I needed to know;
- Did not know how clients should get from one place to another and in which order to send them;
- Lacking of “insider information” to share with a client to encourage travel or a more in-depth visit. Missing information on upcoming events which could generate sales;
- Not specific enough;
- Too basic information.

Among Travel Agents and Tour Operators, the level of assurance was very high. 90% of the respondents feel “significantly” or “somewhat” (44% and 46% respectively) confident selling Switzerland after having attended a Webinar about it.

Figure 8: Do you feel more confident selling Switzerland after having attended a Webinar about it?

Do you feel more confident selling Switzerland after having attended a Webinar about it?

■ Significantly ■ Somewhat ■ Slightly ■ Not at all ■ I do not know

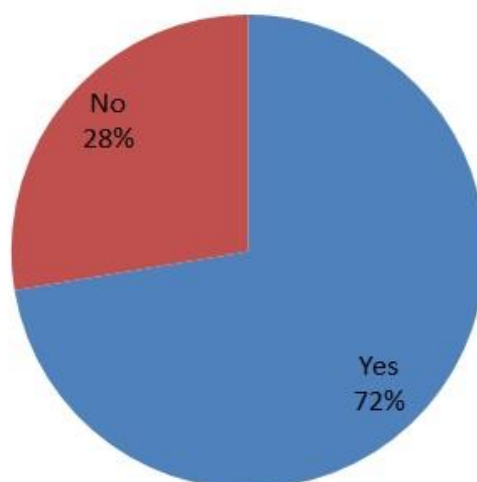


Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

Additionally, 72% of respondents affirmed they have already recommended Switzerland to customers because they attended a Webinar about the destination. However, only 48% - fifty Travel Agents and Tour Operators - have sold customers a trip to thanks to the Webinars about Switzerland.

Figure 9: Have you ever recommended Switzerland to customer because you attended a Webinar about the destination?

Have you ever recommended Switzerland to customer because you attended a webinar about the destination?



Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

5.1.3. Acquired knowledge and satisfaction

The online survey shows that the most valuable information for Travel Agents and Tour Operators is information about transportation in Switzerland (24%); main activities in the country or in its different regions such as information about museums, events, shopping area, must-sees and restaurants (23%); and general information about the destination (20%) (e.g. about the language, culture, currency, food, etc.). Slightly less important for the respondents was knowing more about the destination's special offers (packages, promotion, special events, etc.) and top selling tips (12% and 11% respectively). Only 8% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators affirmed that it is valuable to learn more about incoming Travel Agents and Tour Operators on the North American market that feature Switzerland in their tours.

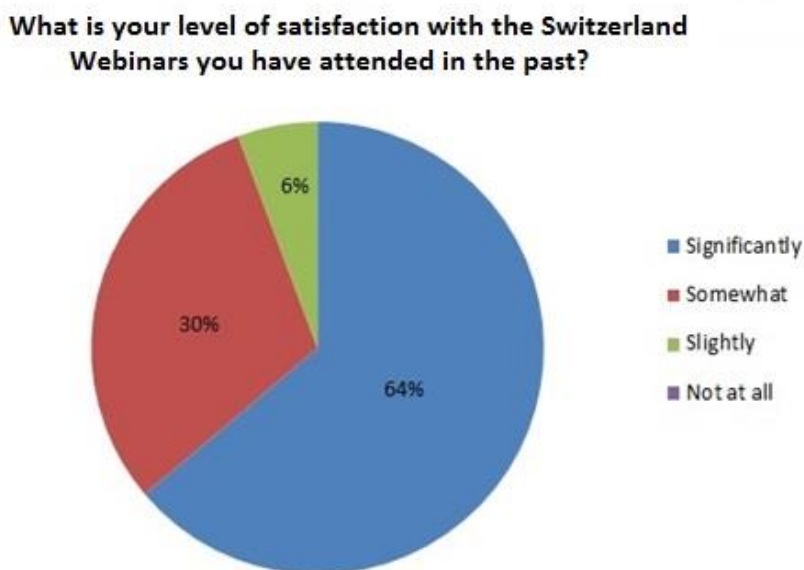
The online questionnaire shows another point regarding the structure of Switzerland Tourism Webinars. Most of the participants responded favorably to attending a Webinar from Tuesday to Thursday (total of 81%) with a higher tendency on Wednesday (33%). Moreover, the current frequency of Switzerland Tourism Webinars, one Webinar every

two weeks, is appropriate (76%). Nevertheless, eighteen Travel Agents and Tour Operators affirmed that the Webinar frequency was too much (17%).

The structure of Switzerland Tourism Webinars has been rated positively on a scale of one to five (one=very poor and five=excellent). 87% of respondents have given the grade four and five (48% and 39% respectively). Moreover, Travel Agents and Tour Operators gave the same grades regarding the depth of the Webinars' content, as 45% found it "Excellent" and 37% "Very good". The interaction during the Webinar has also been rated by the responded on the same scale. Here a slight different can be observed as 36% of participants rated the interaction "Very Good" and 30% of them "Good". Only 28% of them rated the interaction during the Webinar as "Excellent". Furthermore, the length of the Webinars has been rated "Very good" (38%) and "Excellent" (30%). Nevertheless, 28% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators find the length "Good". The software "GoToWebinar" used for the Webinars has been rated positively by 89% respondents. Only two of them rated it "Poor".

To the question "Have you ever quit a Switzerland Webinar before its end?", 74% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators replied "No". The main reason why the rest of the respondents (26%) gave a positive answer is that they said that it was too long (53%). Other reasons are that the Webinar was too theoretical (9%) and participants already knew everything about the destination (5%). Furthermore, 21% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators have chosen the option "Others".

Figure 10 shows the level of satisfaction with Switzerland Webinars that Travel Agents and Tour Operators have attended in the past. Among the respondents, the level of satisfaction is very high. 94% of them are "Significantly satisfied" or "Somewhat satisfied" (64% and 30% respectively) about the Switzerland Tourism Webinars they have followed.

Figure 10: What is your level of satisfaction with Switzerland Webinars you have attended in the past?

Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to suggest what they liked best in a Webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism. Every Travel Agents and Tour Operators could give their own suggestions as the question was open. Twenty-five respondents liked the fact that the local people presented the Webinar live from Switzerland; and ten of them liked the lively interaction of the presenters. Indeed, according to the respondents, locals are knowledgeable and give insider tips, which are valuable for Travel Agents and Tour Operators. The content of the Webinar, such as the detailed, new and up-to date information was appreciated by fifty-nine respondents. Eleven participants most liked information about activities such as outdoor and cultural activities, shopping, museums, restaurants and events, and ten of them enjoyed receiving information about transportation. Ten of the respondents liked the multimedia shown during the Webinars (videos and images). The summary of the answers to this question can be found below in Table 9.

Table 9: What do you like the best in a Webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism?

What do you like the best in a Webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism?	Total respondents in %
New content, up-to date information (offer, top selling tips)	24.2%
Presented by local knowledgeable people (insider tips)	16.8%
Detailed Information	15.4%
Information about activities (outdoor, culture, shopping, museums, restaurants, events)	7.4%
Information about transportation	6.7%
Interaction of the presenters, lively, well presented	6.7%
Multimedia (videos and images)	6.7%
Information about cities	4.0%
Information about Hotels	3.4%
Information about the geography	2.7%
Questions and Answers session	1.3%
Suggested itineraries	1.3%
Length, structure of the webinar	1.3%
Information about where to book	0.7%
Different perspective from TradeCorner	0.7%
Possibility to retrieve the webinar (recorded)	0.7%

Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

Moreover, 97% of the Travel Agents and Tour Operators would recommend such a training activity to their colleagues and 95% of them were interested in attending others Webinars about Switzerland in the next twelve months. The reasons why 5% of respondents are not interested in other Switzerland Tourism Webinars in the future are the following:

- Got enough information online
- Do not like Webinars in general
- Do not have time to repeat countries
- No current need to develop knowledge about Switzerland

5.1.4. Improvements

The online questionnaire also gathered suggestions for improvement with an open question to collect ideas from the Travel Agents and Tour Operators. With the different answers, the author created the following table (Table 10) which presents a synthesis of the main suggestions from the respondents.

Table 10: In what way should the Webinars be improved?

In what way should the Webinars be improved?	Total of respondents
Make it shorter (from 30 minutes to 45 minutes)	14%
Nothing to change	14%
More information about hotels	8%
Learn more about off the beaten path	6%
Follow up emails with available content from Webinars / support (suggested itineraries, transportation, list of offers)	6%
Make sure the presenters are prepared and professional (language, accent)	6%
Have two Webinar sessions: one general and one more specific	6%
Learning portal on the website with video content that can be shared, library of webinars available at any time	5%
More maps (transportation system, cities, etc.)	4%
Change date / time	4%
More videos / images in order to experience more, to have more action	3%
More interactive	3%
More quiz and prices	3%
Improve technical issue such as internet speed	2%
Always update with new trends and information	2%
Less frequent	2%
Cover different area	2%
Add a winter ski Webinar (presentation of different ski resorts, price and activities around the resorts)	2%
Start on time, not waiting for late comers	1%
More information about activities	1%
More information about cities	1%
Accept questions before the webinar	1%

Source: data gathered by author (2014, own illustration)

To start with, 14% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators wanted the Webinars to be shorter, suggesting between thirty and forty-five minutes in length. The main reason is because the Webinars are during their lunch break and they do not want to spend additional time on learning. According to the respondents, the Webinars should include more information about hotels in each different region and insider tips should be more highlighted (8% and 6% respectively). Among participants of the survey, 6% of them would like to receive follow-up emails, including the content that was presented during the Webinar, such as suggested itineraries, transportation details and a list with current offers. The respondents also noted room for improvement with the Webinar presenters. 6% of the respondents said that the presenters have accents that make comprehension difficult, and would like them to be more prepared. Nevertheless, it is also valuable to know that 14% of respondents did not have any suggestions for improvement, suggesting that the current Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism are good the way they are. Last but not least, 5% of Travel Agents and Tour Operators have voluntarily suggested to have an online learning portal which will include videos that can be shared and a library of Webinars available at any time.

This last point can be linked with the last section of the online questionnaire, which aims to determine if Travel Agents and Tour Operators would be interested in having a free mobile learning platform. This platform would be accessible from any mobile device

(phone, tablet or computer) and would enable the respondents to review the past webinars. In addition, they could find all the documentation and information about Switzerland and its regions on this platform, including pictures and videos, as well as a social corner where they could interact with others Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Half of the respondents affirmed the desire to have such kind of platform and 22% of them did not have an opinion about it. The respondents interested in the suggestion confirm they would like to have a forum (57% said yes) along with a section where they could download and order brochures from the online platform (86% responds positively). The last suggestions from the Travel Agents and Tour Operators concern the features that the mobile learning platform should have. They are summarized and presented in the list below:

- Information about hotels, restaurants, tour guides and rental car companies;
- Ability to review the past Webinars;
- Suggestions of itineraries;
- Contact information of the Swiss Partner and Tour Operators;
- Train schedules;
- Local tips;
- Ability to share information on social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, etc.);
- Climate facts;
- Multimedia gallery with a link to download pictures and videos to share with their clients;
- List of events and festivals;
- Forum for questions and networking.

5.2. Results of the interviews

In this chapter, the results of the interviews of the Key Partners are summarized in different sections according to the questions asked during the interviews.

5.2.1. Motivation to participate in a Switzerland Tourism Webinar

The Skype interviews show that the motivation to participate in a Trade Webinar organized by Switzerland Tourism is related to time, cost and flexible environment. Indeed, according to the Swiss Partners, the Webinar is an easy tool that enables them to reach out a lot of Travel Agents and Tour Operators at the same time while being in their office in Switzerland. Moreover, the real value is time and cost efficiency, as the Webinars do not require flight or accommodation. According to the interviewed, it is beneficial for a single destination as the participants have registered for the specific Webinar about it, meaning that they are interested and want to learn more about it.

5.2.2. Main goal of the participation

The main goal of Swiss Partners participating in a Switzerland Tourism Webinar is to give participants information, updates and news about their products. Their aim is to describe in as much detail as possible their destination with the goal of educating and training the Travel Agents and Tour Operators. According to the Key Partners, the challenge is that participants have two levels of knowledge: some are very knowledgeable about the destination and need more details, and some are new and need to know the basics. Therefore the goal of the participation is to give a mix of information that will be useful for recommending and selling the destination.

5.2.3. Management

The interviews show that for a Webinar, one to five employees are involved in preparation. According to the Swiss Partners, Switzerland Tourism does a lot in the background such as preparing the invitation, setting up the Webinar and sending

the reminder. Therefore, at least one employee needs to work on the presentation, which can take from one hour to two days of work.

5.2.4. Structure of the Webinar

The interviews show that the Swiss Partners are highly satisfied with the structure and the interaction of the Webinar. According to the interviewed, Switzerland Tourism needs to do the introduction first as it gives an overview of the country and then the Key Partners can present their destination more in depth. In addition, respondents of the interviews affirmed that the interaction during the Webinar is excellent. Indeed, according to them it is better to have interaction such as in an American talk show rather than a long monologue. Two Swiss Partners said they would like to have participants' questions before the Webinars start in order to prepare themselves and be more specific during their presentation.

Among the Swiss Partners, the majority thinks that their time of presentation is ideal (thirty-five minutes). Concerning the software use, the interviews affirmed that the system Webex was not ideal, as it did not enable them to have mouse and keyboard control. The Key Partners agreed that the software GoToWebinar meets their needs better, is adequate and more enjoyable to work with. Four Swiss Partners would like to include videos in their presentation but are concern about the live rendering.

5.2.5. Content presentation

Most of the Swiss Partners use a main presentation for the Webinar and adapt it for the American Market. Seasonal news, new offers and stories about the destinations are part of the adaptations. One Key Partner admitted that he customized his presentation about summer activities as he knows that North American tourists come to his region more often during the summer period. Another Swiss Partners creates his presentation according to a special topic such as gastronomy, outdoor activist our events in his region. Most of the respondents agreed that a presentation for the North American market does not need to be dramatically changed for the European Market as both of them are similar.

5.2.6. Relationships with the participants after the Webinar

The interviews revealed that Swiss Partners have no or very few relationships with Travel Agents and Tour Operators after the Webinar. Most of them do not do a follow-up with the participants and do not include their contact in their database. Only three of them use the data provided by Switzerland Tourism after the Webinar for their newsletters and database. Two respondents are following-up with the Travel Agents and Tour Operators participants after the Webinar. Nevertheless, most of the Swiss Partners receive questions and requests from the participants.

5.2.7. Possibility of new resources

The Key Partners were asked in the interview if they would like to have new resources that would support Travel Agents and Tour Operators participating at the Switzerland Tourism Webinars. Most of the respondents agreed that it would be beneficial to have a platform including for example their sales manual, videos and pictures of their destination and links to their websites. According to the Swiss Partners, the platform could have also the recorded Webinars and links to the social media networks such as LinkedIn. While the Key Partners agreed with a new platform, they said that it should not be something additional to the existing Trade Corner or the main website of Switzerland Tourism (www.MySwitzerland.com).

6. Discussion

In this chapter, the main findings from the current study are drawn. Recommendations according to the findings are explored; limitations and possible directions for future research are given.

6.1. Interpretation of the results

This research explored existing Trade Webinars hosted by the Company Switzerland Tourism and co-hosted by Key Partners from January to July 2014. It investigated how Switzerland Tourism is educating and training its North American Travel Agents and Tour Operator with its Webinars with a mixed method approach.

An online questionnaire with the Travel Agents and Tour Operators part of the Switzerland Campus has been undertaken to evaluate if the Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism was increasing their knowledge and their recommendations on Switzerland and on the Swiss touristic regions.

Moreover, seven Skype interviews were undertaken with the following Swiss Partners: Jungfrau Railways-Interlaken Tourism, Swiss Travel Systems, Engadin St. Moritz, Lake Lucerne Region – Mount Pilatus, Ticino Tourism, Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region, and GoColette. The aim of those interviews was to provide an in-depth view from the partners' side on their participation and management of their Webinar.

The research revealed that the tourism industry has been tremendously affected by the development of ICTs and the Internet, changing the way in which the tourism professionals work. With these fast growing changes, the end-consumers have become more and more knowledgeable about tourism destinations, and fierce competition has arisen between traditional and online Travel Agencies and Tour Operators. Emerging new systems have enabled the end-consumer to book their own arrangements without the need to consult a tourism professional. With more and more tailored demand from the end-consumer, Travel Agents and Tour Operators are educating and training themselves in order to increase their skills and knowledge. Being knowledgeable, certified specialists having specific professional

skills about a tourism destination enables Travel Agents and Tour Operators to have a strong advantage on their competitors.

This study showed the benefits of Switzerland Tourism Webinars as an educational and training tool for Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Moreover, Switzerland Tourism Webinars are believed to be an efficient cost effective tool as it enables to learn in a flexible environment from different geographic locations.

From the perspective of Switzerland Tourism, Webinars provide helpful and valuable detailed and up-to date information about tourism destination and products, including transportation and activities including events, cultural offers and outdoor activities. Moreover, Webinars add value and strength to the image of the destination among the participants. It has also been proven that Webinars are low cost education and training tools as the solution GoToWebinar is the Company's only expense. Additionally, the creation of the Webinars needs few time and investment from the employees of the Company.

The Key Partners suggested that the Webinars are also a time and cost effective method of educating and training as they can reach many Travel Agents and Tour Operators located in a different geographic location. Even if the Webinars are perceived as impersonal and do not replace a face-to-face meeting, the Key Partners agree that it cuts the cost of travel expenses as they can stay in their office in Switzerland while presenting the Webinar. The study revealed that Key Partners do not need a medium investment for the preparation of their presentation as most of them are adapting their main resources. Moreover, while Switzerland Tourism is giving them data about the Travel Agents and Tour Operators, the study shows that the Key Partners do not or seldom use it for their own purposes.

From the perspective of Travel Agents and Tour Operators, Webinars offer them the possibility to learn in a flexible environment while staying at work or at home. The study revealed that participants are significantly satisfied with the Switzerland Tourism Webinars, while pointing out that they might be more interactive in the future, involving more local tips and information about hotels. Travel Agents and Tour Operators believe that Webinars significantly increase their knowledge and enable them to better recommend the destination to their clients. Moreover, Travel Agents and Tour Operators suggest that the Webinars make them more confident in selling the tourism destination even if their sales

have not increased. Indeed, if Travel Agents and Tour Operators are selling Switzerland, it is not necessarily possible to link this sale with the fact that they have attended a Webinar about the destination. Finally, Travel Agents and Tour Operators are undertaking Webinars because they are interested by the specific topic presented and want to know more about it. They like to received up-dates and new offers about it and to increase their knowledge in less than one hour. Participating to a Webinar on a Thursday at 12.00 pm EDT-time is not the best moment during the week as Travel Agents and Tour Operators would rather have the Webinar on a Wednesday at a different time. Unfortunately as North America has different time zones and the Swiss Partners are at least six hours ahead of New York time, it is not possible for Switzerland Tourism to change the scheduled time. Nevertheless, the Company might consider looking into the possibility of changing the day of the week, as it might increase the number of participants.

As a general conclusion, it can be said that Webinars are a valuable cost effective tool used to increase the tourism destination and product knowledge and help the Travel Agents and Tour Operators be more confident recommending it to their clients.

6.2. Recommendations

In this section, recommendations based on the analysis of the results will be given. First, an improvement of the current Switzerland Tourism Webinars will be suggested with concrete examples. Then, a suggestion for an online learning platform will be given. Finally, limits of the thesis as well as future trends are going to be described.

6.2.1. Improvement of the current Webinars

According to the analysis of the results, the Travel Agents and Tour Operators are satisfied with the actual Webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism. Nevertheless, some improvements need to be applied in order to better meet their needs and wants. The following recommendation could be used by Switzerland Tourism in order to give suggestion to its Swiss Partners.

6.2.1.1. Before the Webinar

To begin, the invitation for the Webinar should be sent two weeks prior to the Webinar. It will include a picture in the title, a short description of the topic explaining who is going to present the destination and important information to remember such as the date and the time of the Webinar. Additionally, the invitation should include a direct link where the participants can register, and a section with the contact information of the presenter. It should also have the email address of Switzerland Tourism that participants can send their questions to up to one week prior to the Webinar. It will enable Switzerland Tourism and the Swiss Partner to know in advance what the participants would like to have and to better prepare them. Finally, the presentation of the past Webinar should be included in the invitation as a follow-up to the past Webinar. Indeed, as Switzerland Tourism hosts Webinars every two weeks, we think it is better to combine the invitation with a follow-up rather to send one email every week to the participants. In appendix IX, an invitation draft included the follow-up is presented in order to have a better idea of what it will look like.

6.2.1.2. During the Webinar

The Webinars itself should be between thirty to forty-five minutes maximum in length. Switzerland Tourism should first welcome the participants, then present the Company for five minutes in one or two Power Point slides with its contact details, and then present three quiz questions on the presentation. Then the floor should be given directly to the Key Partner co-hosting the Webinar. Indeed, as explained in the analysis of the results, the Travel Agents and Tour Operators participating to the Webinars are interested specifically in the topic they registered for. Therefore the Swiss Partners should have the full time of the Webinar (twenty-five to forty minutes) to present their destination and products.

We recommend to the Key Partners to give a presentation with local tips and tricks based on the main topic of the current marketing campaign of Switzerland Tourism: Views (summer campaign 2014), the Original Winter (winter campaign 2014) or the Grand Tour of Switzerland (summer campaign 2015-2016). The duality of this recommendation is that Travel Agents and Tour Operators attending to a Switzerland Webinar have different level of

knowledge (some have little knowledge about the destination and others have advanced know-how). Therefore, we recommend the following structure for the Webinar presentation:

1. Location of the destination

The presenter should start with a map showing where the destination is located in Europe and in Switzerland and how it can be reached by transportation (flight, train or bus) with an approximation of the travel time. This will give the Travel Agents and Tour Operators a better idea of how their clients can get to the destination and how long it will take them.

Figure 11: Example of a destination location on a map



Source: Bern Tourism (2014)

2. Accommodation

We suggest the presenter to give minimum three hotel recommendations within the destination with pictures. The hotels should be in different categories, and the presenter should describe their location and the reasons they are suggested. The Swiss Partner could take for example the topic “Views” and pick three hotels with a view. Also very valuable for the participants are explanations on how and where to book the accommodation.

3. How to explore the destination

In this part, we suggest describing how Travel Agents and Tour Operators’ clients can explore the destination. For example, a presentation of the guided tours, the possibility of an audio-guide or a city bus tour. It should always include the price of the services as well as the

dates of availabilities and the available languages of the tour. Also, the presenter should inform the participants on where and how to book those services.

4. Unique selling point of the destination

Why should Travel Agents and Tour Operators recommend and sell this destination? In this section, the presenter should highlight with pictures the unique selling point of the place. It could be the must-see, a special attraction or the cultural heritage of the destination. The Swiss Partner should give at least three reasons why it is worth discovering and visiting the place. Those reasons will be used by Travel Agents and Tour Operators as selling tips with their clients.

5. Shopping

We recommend the presenter to describe this section not in detail, but to give more of a general insight of where tourists can do shopping and to expose where the locals are going. For example, highlighting a well-known street or building with lot of boutiques and shops for different budgets.

6. Culture

Museums, galleries and current local events should be presented in this section. Three suggestions should be proposed with a description of the event or museum, along with the price entry, discounts, dates of the event and accessibility. Some pictures could be shown in order to give a better idea to the Travel Agents and Tour Operators.

7. Culinary

Travel Agents and Tour Operators want to learn about where the locals are going to dine. Therefore, the presenter should give three recommendations on local and typical restaurants in the destination with the reasons for those choices. It could be because those restaurants have the best dish in town or because the presenter loves their special menus.

8. Activities

We recommend that the presenter suggest three traditional, outdoor activities that can be experienced by families, couples and elderly persons. It could be, for example, a suggestion of an e-bike tour, the visit to a cheese factory with the possibility to make cheese, a guided tour in a watch factory with the creation of your own watch, or an initiation to alphorn or wrestling.

9. Sample itineraries

In this section, the presenter should give the Travel Agents and Tour Operators three sample itineraries that can be done in three days. We recommend including outdoor and cultural activities, culinary experience and means of transportation at least.

10. Contact information

The last part of the presentation is very important for the Travel Agents and Tour Operators as they need to have all the contact details of the Swiss Partners including name of the manager, email address, phone number and website of the destination.

Travel Agents and Tour Operators are looking for detailed information that is off the beaten path. Indeed, the results of the survey shows that participants want to learn more about the activities and places that locals go to. Clients who are going to Travel Agents and Tour Operators to book their trips to Switzerland are looking to experience and live the Swiss local style. That is why the presentation of the Key Partners should be adapted and based on the participants' needs.

Additionally, we suggest the Key Partners to use the data provided by Switzerland Tourism after each Webinar. The data could be integrated in their database and used for updating the Travel Agents and Tour Operators about the latest news and offers. The Key Partners could send to the Webinar participants their newsletter and other promotional materials.

6.2.2. Learning platform

Currently Switzerland Tourism has its Trade Corner which is a platform dedicated to the travel professionals (B2B) and its main website MySwitzerland.com for the consumers (B2C). Those two platforms have valuable information and are a real encyclopedia for the Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Therefore, this recommendation does not propose to creating another learning platform, but rather improving and thinking about the current Trade Corner. Indeed, according to the survey, Travel Agents and Tour Operators would like to have specific information which already exists either on the Trade Corner or on the main website MySwitzerland.com. The first recommendation would be to promote the Trade Corner more via the Webinars as well as on the LinkedIn platform. We think that the Travel Agents and Tour Operators have little knowledge about the content of the Trade Corner, which is a shame as it has real valuable and useful information.

We recommend that the Company add the follow sections to its Trade Corner:

- A multimedia library where Travel Agents and Tour Operators can download, view and share Key Partners' pictures and videos. This section would enable Travel Agents and Tour Operators to share pictures and videos with their clients, which will give a first glimpse of their vacation;
- A library where the travel professionals can download and order brochures, Key Partners' sales manuals, as well as promotional materials such as posters. We believe that having these materials at our disposal helps Travel Agent and Tour Operators to recommend better the destination. Additionally, offering brochures to clients is a plus, as it gives them more ideas and suggestions;
- A section called "Travel like a local" where Switzerland Tourism would post an off-the beaten path suggestions each week for a given destination. This post would be shared on the LinkedIn Goldflower group as well. The content for this post could come from the employees of Switzerland Tourism that would give their personal suggestions of activities and places they like to visit, or from Key Partners who will give their tips and tricks about their touristic destination;

- A hotel section that would be linked directly to MySwitzerland.com as the main website has a fantastic hotel search engine. We think having a search engine tool for the hotels in Switzerland helps Travel Agents and Tour Operators to find what their clients are looking for. Indeed, the hotel section on the main website enables clients to search for hotels according to a map, various hotel categories or guest recommendations.

In appendix X, some example of the recommendations mentioned above can be seen.

6.2.3. Adaptation to other markets

According to the study, Switzerland Tourism North America was the first market to use Webinars for travel professionals. Since then, Webinars have been used in the Indian and French market. With the result of this research, we recommend the Company to use Webinars as an educational and training tool in other markets where Switzerland Tourism is present. Indeed, offering Webinars to the Key Partners is an added value in the marketing activities and represents another promotional tool which can create awareness about Swiss tourism destinations. The focus could be on emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, and China.

6.3. Limits of the thesis

As the limitations of the thesis were discussed in the Chapter 3.2, a summary will be presented below.

Although the research has reached its aims, we are aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First, due to the time limit, this research was conducted only from January to July 2014 which represents the analysis of only thirteen Webinars out of twenty-three. Therefore, to generalize the results, the study should have involved all the Webinars for the year 2014. It would have then been possible to make a more accurate comparison with the previous year.

Second, it is important to note that during the research, some recommendations were implemented by the Company. For example, the software Webex was replaced in March 2014 with the solution GoToWebinar, and the structure was adapted regarding Travel Agents and Tour Operators feedback. Those changes might have had an impact on the online questionnaire respondents.

Last but not least, even if the online questionnaire and the interviews gave crucial insights on the perception of Switzerland Tourism Webinars, there is a possibility that the results were biased due to the fact that the researchers were working for Switzerland Tourism at the same time. Therefore, there is a possibility that the answers received were not partial towards Key Partners and the Travel Agents and Tour Operators.

6.4. Future trends

In this section, we decided to propose two different trends, which future research might focus on. We have chosen them as we think that they are fitting for Switzerland Tourism. It is important to note that they are not exclusive and that other trends exist.

As the research states, online learning is growing fast: every month new technologies are emerging and are allowing for the improvement of the quality of education and training. The future trends will depend mainly on the advancements and development of the Internet and the technologies. According to Kim and Bonk (2006, pp. 25-26), video conferencing tools are expected to increase significantly. As the current solution GoToWebinar does not support the video streaming well, Switzerland Tourism could look into other Webinar solutions that could better support videos such as for example GoToWebcast. This solution would also be offered by the company Citrix Systems, which has additional features such as: “Unlimited Audio or Video Webcasting Event up to 1,000, 5,000 or 10,000+ attendees, LiveVideo Broadcasting, Streaming Video, Recording with Editing, Social Media Integration, mobile apps for attendees, and more.” (Citrix Systems Inc., 2014).

Another trend growing in popularity that Switzerland Tourism could look at is micro-learning. It has been defined by Job and Ogalo (2012, p. 92) as micro content about a single topic that is permanently in circulation. The video length is limited to five minutes and

enables viewers to watch in a total flexible environment. This kind of learning would be advantageous for employees that have a busy daily life, since micro learning is suited for mobile devices (Pappas, 2014). Disadvantages regarding micro-learning is that Switzerland Tourism would need to have a high capacity for the storage of all the videos. Moreover, the Travel Agents and Tour Operators might get lost with all the different topics of the videos. From the perspective of the Key Partners, micro-learning would be tough to realize as they would need to create many videos to present their touristic region.

Conclusion

In summary, the study has proven the research hypothesis, which was that the Webinars organized by Switzerland Tourism were significantly increasing the Travel Agents and Tour Operators' knowledge and recommendations on Switzerland and the Swiss touristic destinations. Thanks to the online questionnaire among Travel Agents and Tour Operators, it can be concluded that Switzerland Tourism Webinars are enhancing the knowledge of Travel Agents and Tour Operators as they give in depth and up-to-dated information and valuable help. Furthermore, Webinars give more confidence to their participants and therefore, Travel Agents and Tour Operators recommend the destinations more to their end-customers. Additionally, through the interviews with the Key Partners, the study has shown that Webinars offer a flexible learning tool that do not need much investment of time or money from Switzerland Tourism and from the Key Partners.

The findings of the study contribute to a better understanding of what Travel Agents and Tour Operators need in order to recommend and better sell a tourism destination. Moreover, it gives the Company recommendations for improvement and future development. Although this research generates best practices for Switzerland Tourism, the results and the conclusions should take into account the following limitations. The study was limited in time and therefore not all of the 2014 Webinars were analyzed. Moreover, the research was conducted by an employee of the Company which might have affected the answers from the participants of the online questionnaire as well as the interviews.

In conclusion, future research could explore further online learning tools that Switzerland Tourism could use for the education and the training of Travel Agents and Tour Operators. Additionally, the Company could do a benchmark of Webinars hosted by concurrent Destination Management Organizations. Those researches could bring new ideas for improvement and future development.

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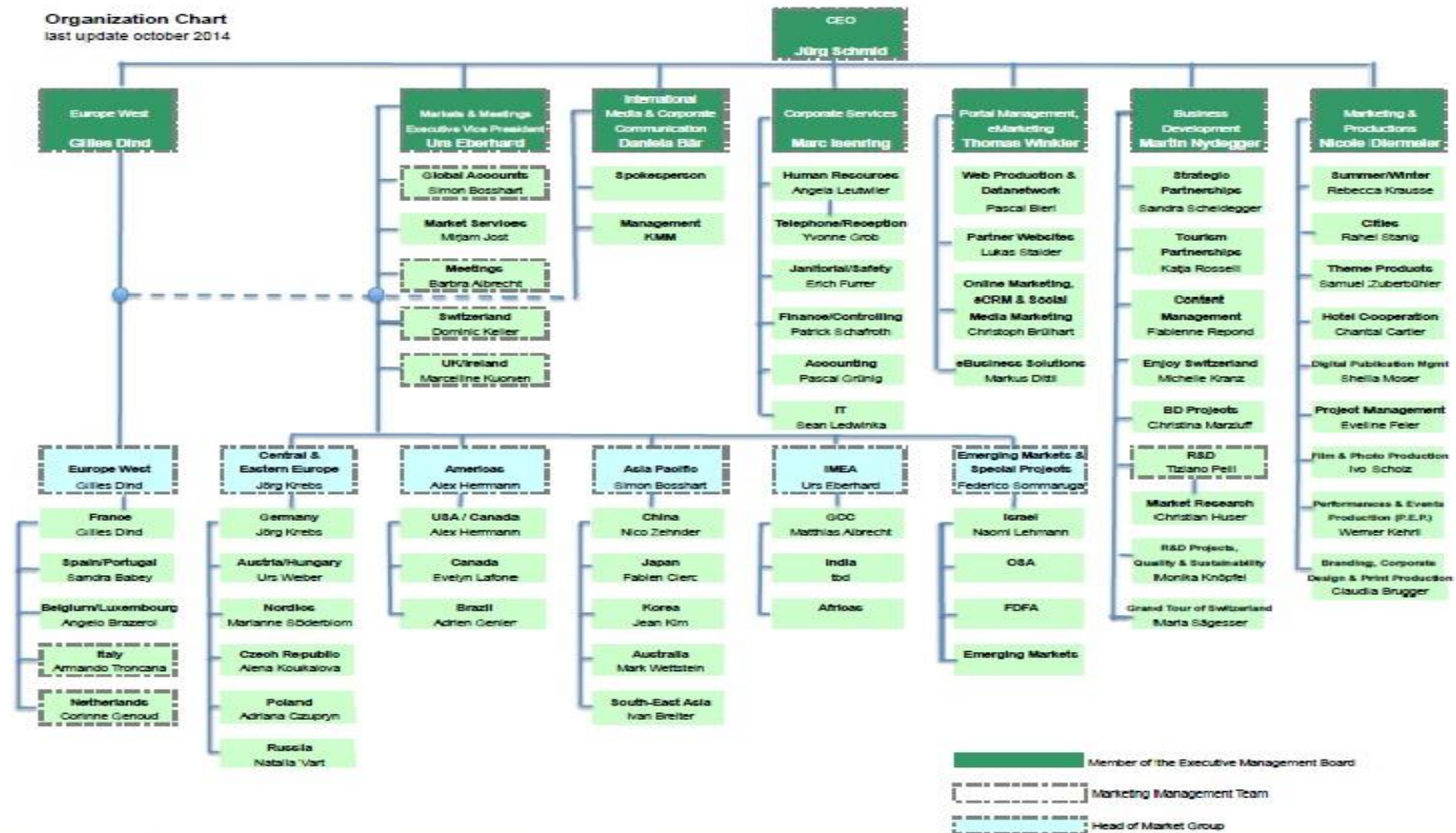
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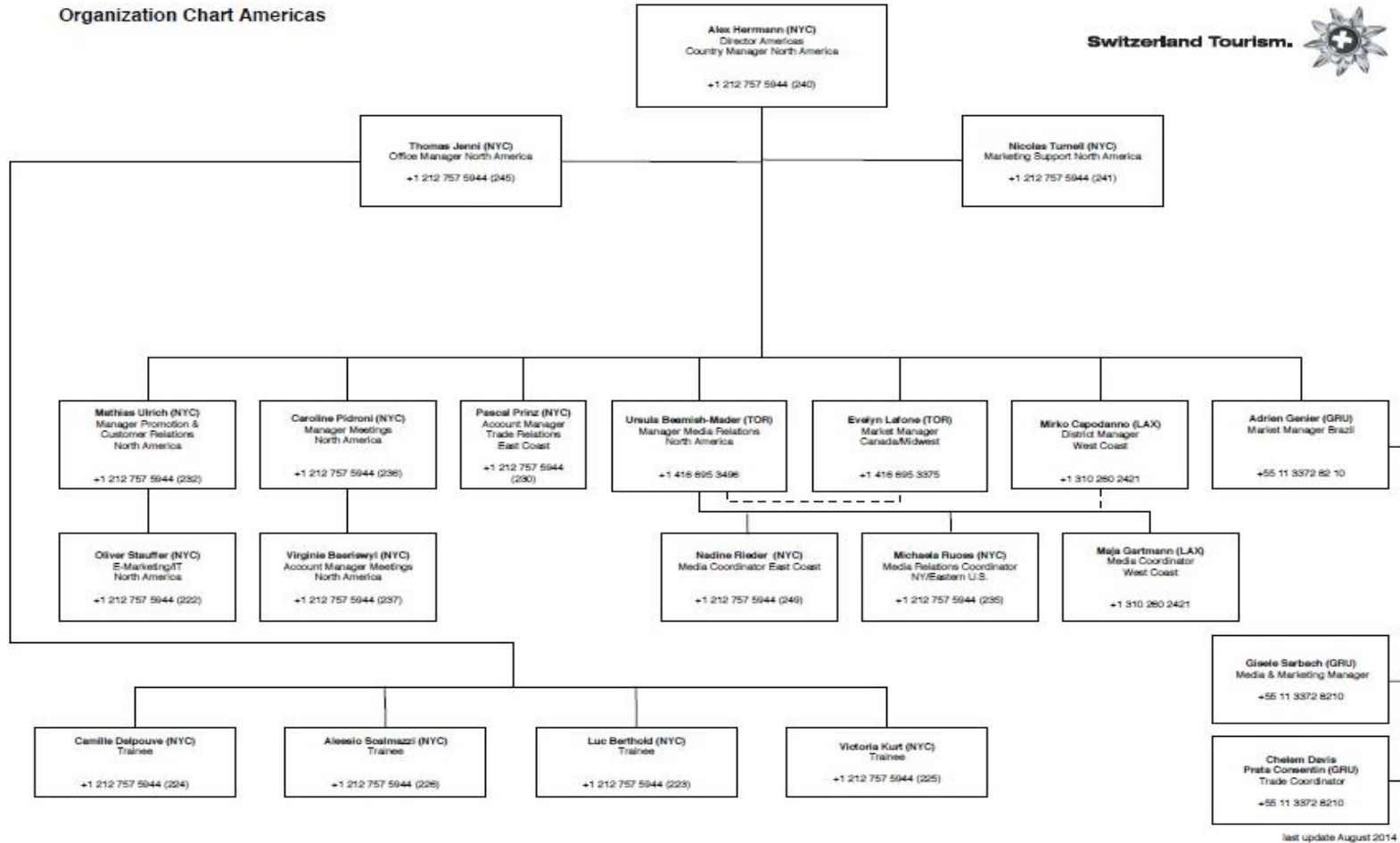
Appendix I: Switzerland Tourism Organization Chart

Switzerland Tourism (2014). Organization chart of Switzerland Tourism. Retrieved from www.stnet.ch/files/?id=80654



Appendix II: Switzerland Tourism North America Organization Chart

Switzerland Tourism (2014). Organization chart of Switzerland Tourism North America. Retrieved from <http://www.stnet.ch/files/?id=80750>



Appendix III: Switzerland Specialist Program

Adapted from Switzerland Tourism (2007). Welcome to becoming a Certified Switzerland Specialist. Retrieved from Switzerland Travel Academy: <http://elearning-us.myswitzerland.com/welcome.html>

Name of the module	Content
Welcome to Switzerland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General Information: location, country name and history, population and culture, language, geography, weather and climate, facts and figures, public holidays 2. Four Seasons: four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, winter 3. Travel Tips: before you travel, passport and visas, how to get there, by air, by train, by car, car rental, public transport and the Swiss Travel System, currency, exchange and credit cards, prices and budgeting, customs / duty-free, shopping, business hours, tipping and postage, Sales Tax (VAT) / Cash refund, time zone and electricity, mobile phones, health, insurance and security, useful information and emergency call numbers, climate and clothing 4. Food and Wine: Wine, chocolate, cheese, make your own cheese, show dairies, cuisine, regionals specialties
Summer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction Summer: our Alpine summer, hiking, mountain-bike and cycling country, some great tours 2. Summer Regions: most important summer regions 3. Switzerland Mobility: discover Switzerland – the active way, Switzerland Mobility – different activities, pointing the way, planning, combine rail-bus-boat, great services, guides and maps, effortless, thanks to Flyer and cycle hire 4. Hiking Paradise Switzerland: top 12 hiking routes 5. Swiss Nature Parks: Swiss nature parks, regionals parks 6. 11 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and 2 Biosphere 7. Families: family resorts, special activities for families, excursions 8. Culture and Events: most important events during

	summer
Cities	1. Swiss Cities: list of the 25 cities in Switzerland
Winter	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction Winter: Winter paradise, learn skiing, winter resorts, winter sports report, highest winter sports resorts, highest snow sports regions 2. Most Important Winter Regions: list of the 8 winter regions 3. Top Winter Destinations: list of 14 winter destinations 4. Skiing and snowboarding: long run, night slopes, mogul runs, summer skiing, the 5 ski resorts with the most ski runs 5. Activities in the snow: winter hiking trails, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, tobogganing, freestyle 6. Wellbeing: wellbeing overview, list of 7 wellness resorts 7. Families: Swiss Family Hotels, family resorts, kids in the snow 8. Mountain Huts with a Twist: mountain huts 9. Culture and Events: annual sports event in winter, annual culture events in winter
Accommodation	1. Accommodation: various types of accommodation, tips when staying at a hotel, product campaigns, typically Swiss hotels, wellness hotels, Swiss deluxe hotels, Swiss family hotels, inspiring meeting hotels, design and lifestyle hotels, Swiss historic hotels, ICOMOS, Interhome: holiday homes and apartments
Transport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transport: international transport, travel to Switzerland by air and by public transport, travel in Switzerland by air, public transport, taxi, bicycle, car 2. Panoramic Routes: list of 7 panoramic routes 3. More Scenic Routes: list of 7 scenic routes 4. Zürich Airport, Gateway to Switzerland: Zürich Airport, arriving at Zürich Airport, departing from Zürich Airport
Top attractions	1. Top Attractions: list of 48 top attractions

Appendix IV: LinkedIn Group Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism

LinkedIn Corporation (2014). Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism LinkedIn Group.

Retrieved from: <http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Goldflower-Club-Switzerland-Tourism-4346282/about>

The screenshot displays the LinkedIn group page for "Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism". At the top, there is a search bar and navigation tabs for "Discussions", "Promotions", "Jobs", "Members", "Search", and "Manage". The main banner image shows a scenic mountain range with a goat perched on a rocky outcrop. Below the banner, there is a "Your Activity" section with a text input field for starting a discussion. Two posts are visible:

- Post 1:** "2014 Best Ski Resort in the Alps: Zermatt is the winner!" by Victoria Kurt. The text mentions that five out of the top 10 resorts are in Switzerland and that Zermatt received the Best Ski Resort award at a ceremony in Zurich on 6 November 2014.
- Post 2:** "Thank you very much for selling Switzerland!" by Pascal Prinz. The text reports that the number of nights Americans spent in Swiss hotels in the summer season of 2014 (May through September) shows a growth of 5.6% compared to 2013.

Appendix V: Webinar invitation

Author own illustration with data from multiple sources (2014):

- a. Image: Swiss-Image.ch (2014). Bern city STC6126. Retrieved from: <http://www.swiss-image.ch/>
- b. Text: Switzerland Tourism (2014). Bern. Retrieved from <http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/bern.html>

If this message is not displayed correctly, [please click here](#).



Grüezi, Bonjour, Buongiorno, Allegra

Get to know Bern!

The Swiss capital still enchants its visitors with its charm and diverse attractions and events. Bern offers such a wonderful wealth of culture, leisure and entertainment. It is entirely easy to relax and enjoy oneself in the unique atmosphere of the Old Town UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Please join our webinar session next week with guest speaker Marianne Schatzmann from Bern, to learn more and to get all exciting news.

Topic: Bern
Date: Thursday, June 26th, 2014
Time: 12:00 pm, Eastern Daylight Time (New York, GMT-04:00)

[Click HERE to register for the webinar](#)

If you have any question, you can contact us at:
nyc.trade@switzerland.com

Kind regards,
Your Switzerland Network

➤ [MySwitzerland.com](#) ➤ [Contact](#) ➤ [Privacy](#) ➤ [Unsubscribe](#)

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Find us on the web



Appendix VI: Webinar Registration Form

Citrix Systems, Inc (2014). Webinar Registration Form. Retrieved from:
<https://global.gotowebinar.com/webinars.tmpl>



Webinar Basel

Thu, Nov 20, 2014 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM EST

[Show in My Time Zone](#)

*Required field

First Name*

Last Name*

Email Address*

Street Address

City

State/Province

Choose One...

Zip/Postal Code

Country

Choose One...

Phone Number

Job Title

Organization

By clicking this button, you submit your information to the webinar organizer, who will use it to communicate with you regarding this event and their other services.

Register

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View the GoToWebinar Privacy Policy (http://www.gotowebinar.com/faq/privacy/PopUp/11g2w_p03).

To review the webinar organizer's privacy policy or opt out of their other communications, contact the webinar organizer.

Appendix VII: Online questionnaire

Author own data (2014) with the use of data adapted from Kalbaska, N. (2013, September, pp. 244-249). eLearning Courses about National Tourism Destinations: Destination Management Organizations' Offers and Travel Agents' Perceptions and Motivations. Retrieved from Réro doc: <http://doc.rero.ch/record/208823>

We are kindly asking you to participate in our research regard Switzerland Tourism's webinars that analyzes travel agents and tour operators' needs.

The survey is conducted by Victoria Kurt – student in tourism management at the University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland.

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated and will contribute to a better understanding of the current role of Switzerland Tourism as an educator of travel agents and tour operators. Moreover, the survey is highly valuable as it is part of Victoria Kurt's Bachelor Thesis.

Filling out the survey will not take more than 5 to 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is totally anonymous and voluntary. Thank you for filling out this survey by September 7th, 2014.

In order to thank you for your contribution, do not miss the chance to participate to the sweepstake at the end of this survey! You can win an amazing Swiss Box full of surprises.

Kind Regards

Victoria Kurt

* Required

1. How do you currently increase your knowledge about a tourism destination? *

Check all that apply.

- Read magazines; books; newsletters
- Websites; e-newsletters; blogs
- Attend Travel show
- Attend conferences; web-based seminars (webinars)
- Take tourism online learning programs
- Follow groups on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- I do not know
- Other:

2. Have you ever attended to a webinar about a tourism destination? *
(It can be about any destinations in the world)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 6.
- No Skip to question 3.

You have never attended a webinar about a tourism destination

3. Why have you never attended a tourism destination webinar? *

Check all that apply.

- Not interested
- No or little time to attend it
- Not useful
- Did not know about the possibility
- I do not know
- Other:

4. Would you be interested in attending a webinar about Switzerland within 12 months? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 42.
- No Skip to question 5.

5. Please specify why *

Skip to question 42.

You have attended to a webinar about a tourism destination

6. How many tourism destination webinars have you attended since January 2014? *

Check all that apply.

- 1-5
- 5-10
- More than 10

7. Please name 3 destination webinars that you liked *
(Others than webinars about Switzerland)

8. You liked them because of: *

Check all that apply.

- The destination itself
- The detailed content
- The beautiful pictures and/or videos
- The interaction during the webinar
- The quiz during the webinar
- Other:

9. Attending a destination webinar: *

Check all that apply.

- Improves your business sales / ability
- Increases your current knowledge about the destination
- Makes you more confident to recommend / sell the destination
- Brings you nothing
- I do not know
- Other:

10. Have you ever sold or recommended a destination to customer because you attended a webinar about the destination? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever attended any webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 15.
- No Skip to question 12.

You have never attended any webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism

12. Why have you never attended any webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism? *

Check all that apply.

- Not interested
- No or little time to attend it
- Not useful
- Did not know about the possibility

- Other:

13. What would you like to learn in a webinar about Switzerland? *

Check all that apply.

- General information about the destination (language, culture, currency, food, etc.)
- Information about transportation system (price, tickets, how to move around, etc.)
- Main activities at destinations (museums, events, shopping, must see, restaurants)
- Top Selling Tips
- Special offers at destination (packages, promotion, special local events, etc.)
- To learn about Incoming Tour Operators / Tour Operators featuring the destination
- Other:

14. Would you be interested in attending a webinar about Switzerland? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Skip to question 42.

You have already attended webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism

15. Did the webinars hosted by Switzerland Tourism have increase your knowledge about the destination? *

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly
- Somewhat
- Slightly
- Not at all
- I do not know

16. Did you get the information you were looking for by attending Switzerland Tourism webinars? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes *Skip to question 18.*
- No *Skip to question 17.*

17. Please specify why *

18. Do you feel more confident selling Switzerland after having attended a webinar about it?*

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly
- Somewhat
- Slightly
- Not at all
- I do not know

19. Have you ever recommended Switzerland to customer because you attended a webinar about the destination? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

20. Have you ever sold to customer a trip to Switzerland because you attended a webinar about the destination? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

21. What is the most valuable information you learnt in a webinar about Switzerland? *

Check all that apply.

- General information about the destination (language, culture, currency, food, etc.)
- Information about transportation system (price, tickets, how to move around, etc.)
- Main activities at destinations (museums, events, shopping, must see, restaurants)
- Top Selling Tips
- Special offers at destination (packages, promotion, special local events, etc.)
- To learn about Incoming Tour Operators / Tour Operators featuring the destination
- Other:

22. When is the best day for you to attend a webinar during the work week? *

Check all that apply.

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- I do not know

23. Do you think the webinar pace is appropriate? *
(One webinar every two weeks)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, it is appropriate
- No, it is too much
- No, it is not enough
- I do not know

24. Please rate the structure of the webinar *
(Combination of general Swiss news, presentation of one Swiss region, Q&A)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor (1)						Excellent (5)

25. Please rate the depth of the webinar content *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor (1)						Excellent (5)

26. Please rate the interaction during the webinar *

(Quiz, possibility to ask questions)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
--	---	---	---	---	---	--

Very poor (1)						Excellent (5)
---------------	--	--	--	--	--	---------------

27. Please rate the length of the webinar *

(60 minutes in total)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor (1)						Excellent (5)

28. Please rate the software GoToWebinar used for the webinars *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor (1)						Excellent (5)

29. Have you ever quit a Switzerland webinar before its end? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 30.
- No Skip to question 31.

30. Why have you quit a Switzerland webinar before its end? *

Check all that apply.

- It was too long
- It was too theoretical
- It had too much detailed information
- It was missing pictures and/or videos
- I knew already everything about the destination
- Other:

Skip to question 31.

31. What is your level of satisfaction about Switzerland webinars you have attended in the past? *

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly
- Somewhat
- Slightly
- Not at all

32. What do you like the best in a webinar hosted by Switzerland Tourism? *

33. Please select three main reasons for you on attending webinars about Switzerland *

Check all that apply.

- To enrich my CV
- To sell more and earn more
- To acquire knowledge about the destination
- To respond to my client's needs / requests
- To respond to my manager's requests
- To participate in educational/familiarization trips
- To access special offers
- Other:

34. Would you recommend such a webinar to your colleagues? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

35. Are you interested into attending others webinars about Switzerland in the next 12 months? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 37.
- No Skip to question 36.

Skip to question 37.

You are not interested into attending others webinars about Switzerland

36. Why are you not interested into attending others webinars about Switzerland in the next 12 months? *

Skip to question 37.

Improvements

Switzerland Tourism would like to improve its educational offer. The company would like to help you as much as possible for promoting your products and boosting your sales.

37. In what way should the webinars be improved? *

38. Would you be interested in having a free mobile learning platform? *

This platform would be accessible from any mobile devices (phone, tablet or computer) and would enable you to review the past webinars. In addition, you could find on this platform all the documentation and information about Switzerland and its regions, including pictures and videos, as well as a corner where you could interact with others travel agents.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes *Skip to question 39.*
- No *Skip to question 42.*
- I do not know *Skip to question 39.*

You are interested in having a free mobile learning platform

39. Would you be interested in having a forum on the mobile learning platform where you could talk to other travel agents who are part of the Switzerland Network? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

40. Would you be interested in having a section on the mobile learning platform where you could download and order brochures about Switzerland and its different regions? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

41. What else would you like to have on the mobile learning platform? *

42. Please indicate if you are *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male

43. Please indicate your age *

Mark only one oval.

- Under 29
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 49
- 50 to 59
- Over 60

44. In which country are you based? *

Mark only one oval.

- Canada
- United States of America

45. Where do you currently work for? *

Mark only one oval.

- Franchise Travel Agency
- Independent Travel Agency
- Homeworker Travel Agency
- Online Travel Agency
- Tour Operator
- Other:

46. What's your highest level of education? *

Mark only one oval.

- High school or GED degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Master degree
- Other:

47. For how many years have you been working in the tourism industry? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 2
- 2-5
- 6-10
- More than 10

Skip to question 48.

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your collaboration and for your time for this study. We would like to remind you that your participation in this research is totally anonymous and voluntary. If you would like to participate to the Swiss Box sweepstake, please enter your contact details (your email address, phone number or name and address) in the text box below

Kind Regards

Victoria Kurt

48. Contact for the Swiss Box sweepstake

Appendix VIII: Interview protocol

Author own data (2014)

Date and time of interview	
Company	
Name	
Job description	

1. Participation motivations in a trade Webinar organized by Switzerland Tourism
2. Main aims of the participation
3. Management (how many employee involved, time for preparation, etc.)
4. Feedback on the structure of the Webinar
5. Presentation content (adaptation to the North American market or to Switzerland Tourism's campaign)
6. Time of presentation, interaction, software use
7. Relationships with the Travel Agents and Tour Operators after the Webinar
8. Statistical information (use of the data after the Webinar)
9. Possibility to have new resources (mobile learning platform, forum, contact section)
10. General feedback

Appendix IX: Webinar Invitation & Follow-up Recommendation

Author own illustration with data from multiple sources (2014):

- a. Image: Swiss-Image.ch (2014). Chapel bridge STC3435. Retrieved from: <http://www.swiss-image.ch/>
- b. Text: Switzerland Tourism (2014). Lucerne. Retrieved from <http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/lucerne.html>
- c. Image: Switzerland Incentive & Convention Bureau (2014). Team picture. Retrieved from:
- d. Image: Swiss-Image.ch (2014). Engadin region ESM3930. Retrieved from: <http://www.swiss-image.ch/>
- e. Image: Swiss-Image.ch (2014). Key visual ibex STS7905. Retrieved from: <http://www.swiss-image.ch/>
- f. Image: Swiss-Image.ch (2014). Lavaux region STN7535. Retrieved from: <http://www.swiss-image.ch/>

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Grüezi, Bonjour, Buongiorno, Allegra

The City. The Lake. The Mountains. Welcome to Lucerne!

Lucerne, the gateway to central Switzerland, is embedded within an impressive mountain panorama. Thanks to its attractions, the beautiful lakeside and the nearby excursion mountains, the town is a destination for many travel groups and individuals on their journey through central Switzerland.

Please join our webinar session on Thursday, April 9th, 2015 with guest speaker Camille Berthold from Lake Lucerne Region, to get all exciting news.

Topic: Soft Adventure in Lake Lucerne Region

Date: Thursday, April 9th, 2015

Time: 12:00 pm, Eastern Daylight Time (New York, GMT-04:00)

Click [HERE](#) to register for the webinar

Do you have any questions about Lake Lucerne Region? Please send them to us by Monday, March 30th, 2015 at nyc.trade@switzerland.com

Kind regards,

Your Switzerland Network

Follow-up with our previous Webinar with Engadin St. Moritz



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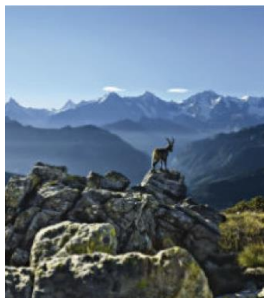
www.engadin.stmoritz.ch



Your Engadin St. Moritz documentation.

With the below links, you are now ready to propose the destination St. Moritz and its surrounding region to your clients:

- Webinar presentation in pdf
- Sample itineraries
- Brochures



The answers to the quiz.

1. Which of the following countries - Belgium, France, Germany, Italy - does not have a border with Switzerland?
Belgium
2. What is the name of the 1st luxury Hotel in the Alps?
Hotel Kulm
3. Who are the stars of the movie "Clouds of Sils Maria"?
Juliette Binoche, Kristen Stewart, Chloë Grace Moretz



Our upcoming webinar.

Enjoyed the presentation about Engadin St. Moritz? Why not join us for our upcoming webinar! Here are the details:

April 23rd, 2015 - 12.00 pm EDT
Webinar Topic: Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region

[Register here](#)

MySwitzerland.com/webinars

[Brochures](#)

[Contact](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)



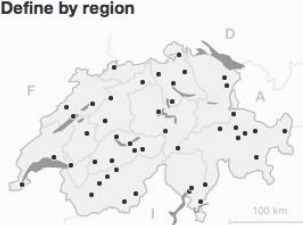








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Appendix X: Trade Corner Recommendations

Switzerland Tourism (2014). Brochures. Retrieved from: <http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-gb/about-switzerland/brochure.html>

Brochures




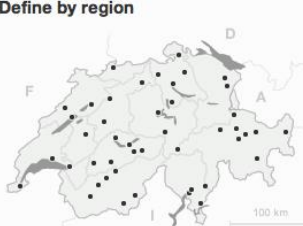






 <p>Booklet MyTop10 (E) 14/15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	 <p>The Swiss holiday magazine winter 2014/2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	<p>32 Results</p> <p>Define by region</p>  <p>Enter a place/destination <input type="text"/> 5 km</p> <p>Search with keyword <input type="text"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Switzerland Tourism <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodation <input type="checkbox"/> Transport <input type="checkbox"/> Packages/special offers <input type="checkbox"/> Sport and wellness <input type="checkbox"/> Culture <input type="checkbox"/> Congress <input type="checkbox"/> "Welcome to Switzerland" in 20 languages <p>— Show less options</p> <p><input type="button" value="X Remove all filters"/></p>
 <p>The best hotels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	 <p>The holiday magazine Switzerland, Summer '14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	
 <p>The 100 finest views.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	 <p>Tales of the city swiss. (Hochfrequenter)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	
 <p>The Swiss Parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	 <p>Switzerland, Meetings (SCIB) 14/15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	
 <p>Families. Discover Switzerland's top family getaway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	 <p>Outdoor adventure. Swiss made 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > View online > Download > Select 	

Appendix X: Trade Corner Recommendations

Switzerland Tourism (2014). Hotels. Retrieved from:

<http://www.myswitzerland.com/enus/accommodation/hotels.html>

Hotels

 <p>Inspiring Meeting Hotels Atrium Hotel Blume ★★★ Baden</p>	 <p>Swiss Family Hotels Hotel Alpine Lodge ★★★ Saanen</p>	 <p>Typically Swiss Hotels Sunstar Boutique Hotel Beau-Site ★★★★★ Saas-Fee</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p>2294 Results</p> <p>Sort: Selection</p> <p>Choose quality</p> <p>★★★★★</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cost-free WLAN</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Dog-friendly hotel</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair accessible hotel</p> <p>Define by region</p>  <p>Enter a place/destination: 5 km</p> <p>Find hotel</p> <p>Search with keyword: ></p> <p>Filter content</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All topics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Typically Swiss Hotels</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Wellness & spa hotels</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Swiss Family Hotels</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Swiss Deluxe Hotels</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Swiss Historic Hotels</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Design & Lifestyle Hotels</p> </div>
 <p>Swiss Historic Hotels Hof Zuort Ramosch</p>	 <p>Typically Swiss Hotels Hotel Handeck - Hotel und Naturresort ★★★★ Guttannen</p>	 <p>Typically Swiss Hotels Der Teufelhof Basel ★★★★ Basel</p>	
 <p>Design & Lifestyle Hotels Radisson Blu Hotel (International Chain Hotel) Zürich</p>	 <p>Typically Swiss Hotels Grand Hotel Giessbach ★★★★ Brienz</p>	 <p>Inspiring Meeting Hotels Seminar- und Wellnesshotel Stoos ★★★★ Stoos</p>	

Appendix X: Trade Corner Recommendations

Switzerland Tourism (2014). Multimedia / Videos. Retrieved from

<http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/video/>

Multimedia / Videos

1460 Results

Sort: **Recent Videos**

Define by region

Enter a place/destination: 5 km

Define search

Search with keyword

Filter content

- All
- Bars
- Cities
- eHeinz
- Events
- Excursions
- Funny
- + More topics

X Remove all filters

Thumbnail	Category	Title	Length	Views
	Mountains	150 Jahre Wintertourismus	3:45	91
	Mountains	150 Jahre Wintertourismus	3:45	97
	Snow	Winter nostalgia	1:55	380
	Snow	Winter nostalgia	1:55	387
	Mountains	Dreaming Lenzerheide	2:31	535
	Mountains	Dreaming Lenzerheide	2:31	537
	Mountains	Pizol - 5 lakes route from a drone		
	Mountains	Pizol - 5 lakes route from a drone		
	Meetings	Switzerland Meeting Trophy		

Author declaration

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow:

- Alex Herrmann, Director of Americas at Switzerland Tourism
- Pascal Prinz, Account Manager Trade Relations at Switzerland Tourism



Victoria Kurt