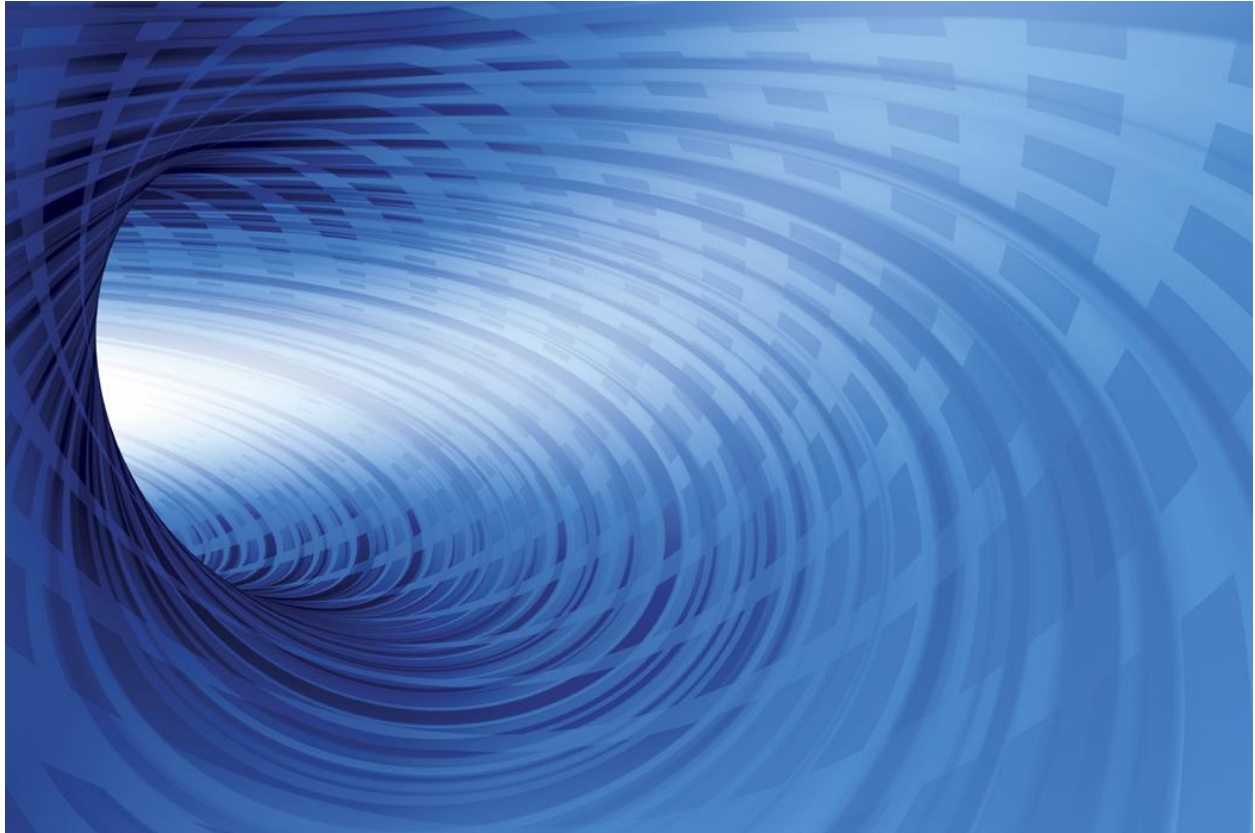


# TEXAS CVB WEBSITE EVALUATION REPORT 2009



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Laboratory for Intelligent Systems in Tourism

**Best Texas CVB Website 2009 Award Sponsored by:**



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## Introduction

With the majority of travelers searching for travel information and planning trips online (US Travel, 2010), Websites have become the most important communication channel for destination marketing organizations (DMOs). However, many smaller DMOs such as Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs), face several challenges when dealing with creating and maintaining Websites (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica & O’Leary, 2006). They often lack financial resources, personnel, time and know-how to constantly keep up with rapidly changing technologies. Innovation in American CVB Websites tends to be low as a result of these constraints (Zach, Gretzel & Xiang, 2010).

Websites have evolved from the brochure-like sites of the late 1990s (Hanson, 1999) to include interactive platforms that host a series of technologies and support a multitude of marketing functions. In order to effectively communicate with potential visitors, Websites need to be usable, accessible and persuasive.

Usability refers to the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use (ISO, 2010). Thus, it involves the ease with which it can be used and the lack of errors that would make use impossible or difficult.

Accessibility refers to the extent to which a Website can be used by users with different needs (e.g. visually impaired users). Government Websites in the United States are obliged to follow accessibility standards.

Persuasiveness refers to a Website’s ability to change user attitudes and to encourage certain behaviors in users (e.g. brochure requests or bookings) (Gretzel, 2005). It requires the effective integration of branding, search engine marketing, customer relationship management, etc.

## Goals and Objectives

The research reported here involved an assessment of the overall effectiveness of all CVB Websites in the State of Texas. The overarching goal was to identify the most effective CVB Website in Texas based on usability, accessibility and persuasiveness criteria. In addition, the study focused on:

- Identifying the most common usability and accessibility issues on Texas CVB Websites; and,
- Examining the extent to which these Websites integrate innovative marketing approaches and technologies.

## Methodology

The 42 students enrolled in the Texas A&M University RPTS 331 Tourism Marketing course evaluated Websites in the Spring semester 2009 as part of their course assignments. The study was conducted in two phases, where the first phase involved detailed content analysis of each CVB Website and was completed the end of March; the second Phase, on the other hand, focused on the overall feel of the CVB Website and was completed by the end of April 2009. The study included all CVBs who were members of the Texas Association of CVBs in 2009 and had their Websites listed in the TACVB online directory (<http://www.tacvb.org/content.cfm?p=directory>). The evaluation focused on both usability/accessibility as well as marketing effectiveness of the CVB Websites and involved two distinct phases.

### Phase 1: Automated Tests and Content Analyses

Phase 1 involved the evaluation of 151 Texas CVB Websites. Each Website was evaluated by two students.

#### Usability Criteria

Usability of the Websites was evaluated using the following tools and measures (Table 1):

**Table 1. Usability Measures**

| Tool   | Measure  |
|--|--|
| <a href="http://validator.w3.org/checklink">http://validator.w3.org/checklink</a>                                | Number of broken links<br>Number of redirects  |
| <a href="http://validator.w3.org/#validate_by_uri">http://validator.w3.org/#validate by uri</a>                  | Number of markup errors  |
| <a href="http://websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze/">http://websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze /</a> | Total number of HTML files on homepage<br>Total number of objects on homepage<br>Total number of images on homepage<br>Total number of external CSS files on homepage<br>Total number of external multimedia files<br>Total size of homepage<br>Total number of external script files on homepage<br>Total size of homepage HTML file<br>Total size of images on homepage<br>Total size of external scripts on homepage<br>Total size of external CSS on homepage<br>Total size of external multimedia on homepage |

Accessibility Criteria

Accessibility of the Websites was assessed using the tools and measures described in Table 2.

**Table 2. Accessibility Measures**

| <b>Tool</b>   | <b>Measure</b>   |
|---|--|
| <a href="http://www.etre.com/tools/accessibilitycheck/">http://www.etre.com/tools/accessibilitycheck/</a> | Number of reported problems  |
| <a href="http://fae.cita.uiuc.edu/">http://fae.cita.uiuc.edu/</a>   | % Pass Navigation & Orientation<br>% Pass Text Equivalent<br>% Pass Scripting<br>% Pass Styling<br>% Pass Html standards |
| <a href="http://validator.w3.org/mobile/">http://validator.w3.org/mobile/</a>                             | Reported accessibility percentage  |

Persuasiveness Criteria

Persuasiveness encompassed several aspects of marketing communication effectiveness. One of the areas investigated was search engine marketing effectiveness. The tools used to determine search engine marketing effectiveness are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Search Engine Optimization Measures**

| <b>Tool</b>   | <b>Measure</b>  |
|---|---|
| <a href="http://www.alex.com">http://www.alex.com</a>   | 3 month average traffic rank  |
| <a href="http://www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php">http://www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php</a> | Presence of meta-keywords<br>Presence of meta description                               |
| <a href="http://www.webconfs.com/backlink-summary.php">http://www.webconfs.com/backlink-summary.php</a>                             | Total number of backlinks   |
| <a href="http://tools.marketleap.com/siteindex/default.htm">http://tools.marketleap.com/siteindex/default.htm</a>                   | Search engine saturation  |
| <a href="http://tools.marketleap.com/publinkpop/">http://tools.marketleap.com/publinkpop/</a>                                       | Number of links reported by Yahoo   |
| <a href="http://www.google.com">http://www.google.com</a>   | Number of links reported by Google  |
| Google, MSN and Yahoo   | Organic search engine ranking for:<br>"destination" + travel<br>"destination" + tourism |

The persuasiveness evaluation also included measures that assess branding, credibility and interactivity of the Website. Table 4 summarizes the measures used. They were assessed by conducting a content analysis of the Websites.

**Table 4. Marketing Communication Effectiveness Measures**

| <b>Measure</b>  |
|---|
| Privacy statement present on Website                  |
| word "official" on homepage                           |
| Phone number present on Website                       |
| Postal address present on Website                     |
| About us statement present on Website                 |
| Logo present on homepage                              |
| Logo present in URL                                   |
| simple, easy to remember domain name/URL              |
| Video present on Website                              |
| Virtual tour present on Website                       |
| eBrochure present on Website                          |
| Photo gallery present on Website                      |
| pdf map present on Website                            |
| interactive map present on Website                    |
| Podcasts present on Website                           |
| RSS feeds present on Website                          |
| Blog present on Website                               |
| Tag cloud present on homepage                         |
| Customer reviews present on Website                   |
| Bookmark tool (for Facebook, etc.) present on Website |
| newsletter sign-up present on Website                 |

## **Phase 2: Holistic Evaluation**

Phase 2 involved an assessment of the overall impression and the overall communication effectiveness of the TOP 15 most usable and accessible Websites as determined in Phase 1. All 42 student judges evaluated these fifteen Websites in terms of their ability to communicate the destination, their professional look, their ability to support travel planning tasks, and their potential to wow Website visitors. The judges then provided detailed comments for their TOP 5 choices.

The individual TOP 5 lists were then tallied and condensed into an overall TOP 5 list. These five Websites were discussed as a group. Students were asked to provide arguments for why a specific Website should win the award or not. At the end of the discussion, a final vote was taken.

## Results of Phase 1

The following provides a summary of the Phase 1 evaluation results.

### Usability

The Texas CVB Websites had, on average, six broken links and four redirects. The tests also showed that the Websites had an average of 90 markup errors, with the lowest number being 1 and the highest being 783!

File numbers and sizes can slow down the loading of Websites. The Texas CVB Websites had on average 1.2 HTML files on the homepage (with the maximum being 5), 30 objects (max = 186), 24 images (max 163), 1.7 external CSS files (max = 14), 0.34 multimedia files (max = 9), and 2.8 external script files (max = 19). The sizes of the homepages as well as the files contained on the homepages varied considerably and suggested that some of the Websites require substantial amounts of time to download.

### Accessibility

The first accessibility test using etre.com showed that some of the Websites have major accessibility issues. On average, 74 problems were reported. The maximum was 1,646 problems. None of the Websites passed the Navigation and Orientation Accessibility test. Only 16 of the Websites reached a 100% pass for the text equivalent test and 19 completely passed the styling test. Scripting and html standards were less of an issue, with over three quarters of the Websites passing these tests.

The Websites reached on average only 50% of the mobile accessibility rating. A total of 6 Websites passed the test with 100% scores.

### Persuasiveness

The search engine optimization reports showed the many of the Websites were not effectively designed to achieve high search engine rankings. The Alexa.com ranking reports were not available for all CVB Websites. In general, the ranks were really high, suggesting that the Websites did not attract a lot of traffic in the overall Internet flow, with the average ranking being close to 5 Million.

Only about half of the CVB Websites have meta-descriptions and meta-keywords. The average number of backlinks is 35 and 6 Websites had no backlinks whatsoever.

The number of pages indexed by search engines was on average 3,223. However, the median is only 662. Indeed, for 16 Websites the number is below 50. Yahoo reports that on average 1,860 Websites link to an individual CVB Website, with the median being 681. For some Websites, no links were reported. Google finds on average close to 700,000 records linking to the individual CVB pages, with the median being 5,580. Clearly, there are big differences among the Texas CVB Websites.

Most users of search engines do not look beyond the first three pages of search results and many only consider the first page (= first 10 records). The majority (more than 75%) of the CVB Websites did not appear in the top three pages of the search results for the keyword travel in combination with the destination name. The results were much better for the keyword tourism in combination with the destination name. About 47% didn't make the result list in Google, 42% did not make it in MSN and 35% were not ranked in the top results in Yahoo searches.

An important issue is the integration of specific marketing strategies and tools. Table 5 shows that innovative tools are only used by a small minority of Websites and even basic tools such as newsletter sign-ups are not implemented by a large number of the CVB Websites.

**Table 5. Implementation of Marketing Communication Strategies and Tools**

| <b>Feature</b>  | <b>% of Websites with Feature</b> |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Privacy statement present on Website                  | 19.5                              |
| Word "official" on homepage                           | 8.7                               |
| Phone number present on Website                       | 94.0                              |
| Postal address present on Website                     | 93.3                              |
| About us statement present on Website                 | 46.3                              |
| Logo present on homepage                              | 53.0                              |
| Logo present in URL                                   | 22.8                              |
| Simple, easy to remember domain name/URL              | 92.0                              |
| Video present on Website                              | 26.9                              |
| Virtual tour present on Website                       | 2.7                               |
| eBrochure present on Website                          | 36.2                              |
| Photo gallery present on Website                      | 32.2                              |
| pdf map present on Website                            | 35.6                              |
| Interactive map present on Website                    | 42.3                              |
| Podcasts present on Website                           | 2.0                               |
| RSS feeds present on Website                          | 9.4                               |
| Blog present on Website                               | 3.4                               |
| Tag cloud present on homepage                         | 0                                 |
| Customer reviews present on Website                   | 2.0                               |
| Bookmark tool (for Facebook, etc.) present on Website | 3.4                               |
| Newsletter sign-up present on Website                 | 22.8                              |

## Results of Phase 2

Based on the results of Phase 1, the TOP 15 Websites in terms of usability and accessibility were selected. The Websites were first ranked based on the results of their usability statistics and then based on their accessibility ratings. The most usable and accessible Texas CVB Websites are presented in alphabetical order in Table 6.

**Table 6. TOP 15 Websites in terms of Usability and Accessibility**

| <b>Destination</b> | <b>URL</b>  |
|--------------------|---|
| Balcones Heights   | <a href="http://www.reachfortheheights.org/">http://www.reachfortheheights.org/</a>             |
| Belton             | <a href="http://www.seebelton.com/">http://www.seebelton.com/</a>                               |
| Corpus Christi     | <a href="http://www.corpuschristicvb.com/">http://www.corpuschristicvb.com/</a>                 |
| Eagle Pass         | <a href="http://www.eaglepasstexas.com/">http://www.eaglepasstexas.com/</a>                     |
| Galveston          | <a href="http://www.galveston.com/">http://www.galveston.com/</a>                               |
| Georgetown         | <a href="http://georgetown.org/">http://georgetown.org/</a>                                     |
| Grand Prairie      | <a href="http://www.gptexas.com">http://www.gptexas.com</a>                                     |
| Hillsboro          | <a href="http://www.hillsborochamber.org/">http://www.hillsborochamber.org/</a>                 |
| Irving             | <a href="http://www.irvingtexas.com/">http://www.irvingtexas.com/</a>                           |
| Longview           | <a href="http://www.longviewtx.com/">http://www.longviewtx.com/</a>                             |
| Salado             | <a href="http://www.salado.com/">http://www.salado.com/</a>                                     |
| Sweetwater         | <a href="http://www.sweetwatertexas.org/main.html">http://www.sweetwatertexas.org/main.html</a> |
| Uvalde             | <a href="http://www.visituvalde.com/">http://www.visituvalde.com/</a>                           |
| Waco               | <a href="http://www.wacocvb.com/">http://www.wacocvb.com/</a>                                   |
| Plainview          | <a href="http://www.plainviewtexaschamber.com/">http://www.plainviewtexaschamber.com/</a>       |

The 42 tourism marketing students evaluated these Websites based on:

- Ability to communicate what the destination has to offer
- Ability of Website to help tourists plan a trip
- Professional look
- WOW-Factor

They then identified the TOP 5 Websites based on these criteria. Their votes were tallied and resulted in a consolidated list of the TOP 5 Websites as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7. TOP 5 Websites Based on Individual Student Ranking**

| <b>Destination</b> | <b>Count</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Galveston          | 30           | 1           |
| Irving             | 27           | 2           |
| Corpus Christi     | 20           | 3           |
| Grand Prairie      | 20           | 3           |
| Waco               | 17           | 4           |

The student judges were presented with the list of TOP 5 Websites and were asked to present arguments in favor or against any of these Websites. After all comments were heard, the group was asked to vote for the Website that should win the Best Texas CVB Website Award. The Website with the most votes was the Galveston, CVB Website.

## Winning Website 2009

Website Address: <http://www.galveston.com/default.asp>

The screenshot shows the Galveston.com website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: 'Interact & Discover', 'Where to Stay', 'What to Do', 'Living in Galveston', and 'Galveston.com Newswire'. The main header features the Galveston Island logo and a weather widget showing '92° M/sunny'. A large banner for 'Circo Comedia' is the central focus, with text describing the performance and providing details like dates and ticket information. To the left, there's a 'Special Value Rates' section starting at \$79 per night. Below that is an 'e-mail GALVESTON.COM' sign-up area and a search bar. On the right, a 'reservations' sidebar includes a form for lodging with fields for check-in, nights, rooms, adults, and children. The bottom of the page is divided into three columns: 'SUMMER CONCERT', 'CABARET', and 'STRAND MOVIE', each with a small image and a brief description.

### What the judges said about the Website:

I think Galveston's website is definitely doing its part to bring the tourists back to Galveston after the hurricane. The website communicates all that Galveston has to offer in a very organized manner. It lists all the current news and events going on in Galveston right on the homepage. It also has a drop down list of everything you can do in Galveston. It is very helpful for tourists looking to visit Galveston. It has a drop down list of the places where you can stay in Galveston, information on the weather, webcasts, and an information request form. It also has a trip planner right on the front page. You can put in when you want to arrive, how long you want to stay, how many people are coming, and what property you would like to stay at. This website is also very professional looking. The graphics are great and the pictures are really eye catching, but I believe it is a little busy. I like that it lists the news and events going on in Galveston, however I thought it listed too many. It was a very long list and it made the website look a little crowded. Even with the clutter it was still one of my favorite websites. I really liked the banner at the top advertising Moody Gardens with the slogan, "Party for the Planet." Overall the Galveston website was very intriguing and made me want to visit the island.

Galveston owns a well designed site that is obviously professionally developed. The amount of content they provide for potential visitors provides plenty of answers and opportunities to plan and gain excitement. They have done the basics like providing an on-site reservations application and RSS feed. The information provided makes this a great way to plan a trip. Though I didn't necessarily get a wow factor, the bold colors and grid based design exudes personality accompanied with confident professionalism. The media the site provided was vast and met potential visitors at their own preference, pictures, videos, and podcasts. Everything they presented stayed within the standard navigation, making the site usable, although cluttered. Overall, the site showed Galveston is active and interested in attracting visitors. It makes you want to call because you believe you will hear a voice on the other end of the line interested in helping you enjoy Galveston.

The Galveston site is another that I feel should be a winner in this contest. This website effectively communicates what its city has to offer. It has sections titled "Interact & Discover," "Where to Stay," "What to Do," and "Living in Galveston." When clicked, these different sections offer potential sites and attractions that a visitor might want to see during their stay in Galveston. This website also is very friendly in helping tourists plan their trip. In the section titled "Where to Stay," it provides a booking service to many different types of people. It offers condo and hotel rentals, beach house rentals, RV park accommodations, and bed and breakfast listings. The site also provides a list of operating restaurants on the island. These features are extremely helpful to potential visitors by allowing them to plan their trip before they arrive. The Galveston site also maintains a professional appeal. As the site should be, it is user friendly in that it is easy to navigate and straight forward when offering information about the island. It is made very easy for a traveler to see what the city of Galveston has to offer. The wow factor of this site is extremely strong. It maintains a fun and colorful attitude in addition to providing pictures of the island. It easily brings a smile to the traveler's face.

I believe the website that deserves to win the award for best website is without a doubt the Galveston website. This website has an easy web address to remember, and upon entering the website jumps out at you with lovely bright colors. This attracts the tourist automatically as it catches your attention immediately. The website also looks very professional and well set up, which means the city really wants visitors. The website is very user friendly in the sense that it has various tabs, such as things to do, where to stay, and even an interactive section. The website also has a reservations planner that allows you to book flights, hotels, cruises, and car rentals. This is convenient because one doesn't have to go through the hassles of booking with a travel agency. One can also subscribe to a newsletter that updates you on events and attractions. In my opinion, this website deserves the award.

The fourth website that I have chosen as one of the top five is the Galveston website ([www.galveston.com](http://www.galveston.com)). This website is the best in letting the visitor know what Galveston has to offer from the very start. Everything from the pictures to the color scheme let the visitor know about Galveston from the very start. Since Galveston is a destination where there are many tourists, the website is much more of a vacation booking site. The clarity in what Galveston has to offer is like no other website on the list. Seeing how there are

thousands of beach tourists that come to Galveston, they must have a professional website. The CVB does a great job of this. The website fits the personality of the town and at the same time is still very professional looking. The “wow-factor” of this website is just the overall look of the homepage. The color scheme and the pictures give you a great feel for a great beach town. The website makes you desire to go visit this town by the way that they have put every detail perfectly in place on the site.

Galveston – This website really grabs your attention when you first visit it. It is quite easy to make reservations and select the hotel or other accommodation desired. It seems to have everything you need at your fingertips.

Galveston was another website that carried characteristics that met the criteria for top five. Like the Corpus website, it carried the area of plugging in certain dates for your vacation. Unlike the other websites, Galveston went more in depth on the living options, real estate, etc. The graphics on the page were eye catching. The colors and set up of the website were also very exquisite. This website met all of the criteria! It had everything from reservations to photo shows and all of it had a WOW look.

I believe that this is the most deserving website because it impressed me on every level. I made a chart and rated each website from 1-5, one being the best on the four different criteria and this website scored an average of one. It had an amazing wow factor with the picture of the world and the use of different bright colors that reminded me of the ocean. Yet it still retained a very professional feel to it. It communicated very well what there was to do there with the scroll down bars for everything. It was also very easy to plan a trip with hotels and a link to their website on the page. Also the ability to add it to your itinerary made planning a trip a breeze.

I believe that Galveston has the most deserving website because not only does it encompass all four criteria but it is also extremely user-friendly, is easy on the eyes, incorporates great colors and pictures, offers accommodation discounts, and provides the visitor with information about living in Galveston. All the information provided on the website is easy to find and is well-organized. It also provides detailed information about different activities that visitors can take part in.

Galveston's website is very informative, organized, and helpful. Under the Interact and Discover tab, visitors have the ability to gain information on Galveston through many media options including video, podcasts, forums, webcams and photo shows. Under the Where to Stay tab, visitors have the ability to research various hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts before booking online. Like the Corpus Christi website, Galveston also provides visitors with the ability to book flights and rooms straight from its homepage. Under the What To Do tab, the website provides visitors with historical background on the city as well as current attractions and a calendar of events. This website was also very organized and informative, but I did not find it as aesthetically pleasing as other websites.

Galveston, Texas – Galveston’s website was my next favorite website. This website also did a good job of communicating the unique aspects of Galveston. As Corpus Christi’s website

it also has a tool that a visitor can plan a trip to this destination. The website is very professional looking. The website does a great job all in all but to me it is lacking the wow factor. The colors are kind of dull and other than pictures there are not any videos or other tools to catch the viewers eye.

Right from the beginning, this website communicates a variety of things Galveston has to offer. There are many pictures, demonstrating some of the different aspects of traveling Galveston has to offer. Also, on the sides there are scrolling ideas for tourists to involve themselves in, and coupons for discounts. This website excels in assisting the tourist plan a trip. In the top right hand corner of the site there is an application designed to make reserving anything from plane tickets, lodging, car or bicycle renting, or cruises easy for the traveler. The site is well designed and laid-out. It looks very professional with its bright colors, easy to navigate toolbar, and pictures. Also, because of its bright colors and exciting pictures, viewers are probably drawn to the site. When I was evaluating the different web pages, I kept coming back to this one and looking at it over and over again. I love the layout and the design.

Galveston with <http://www.galveston.com/> had a very nice immediate and lasting impact on me as a visitor. It was very visually pleasing and easy to navigate. The “Interact & Discover” portion of the website is really what set it apart from other websites. Easy to access podcasts, webcams, and videos about the city really made the website seem “welcoming”. In addition to direct links to all advertised business it also offered a “reservations” toolbar on the right hand side of the website. Everything from lodging, airport transfers and car rental to event ticket purchase and bicycle reservations were available through the toolbar. Galvenston.com also gave an extensive list of things to do while in the city. Everything from nightlife and shopping to church tours and meeting planning was available in the “Why Visit the Island” section.

Galveston has so much to offer and the website put in all together in an organized fashion with different colored taps with drop-down bars and a Galveston search engine. The site offers a trip planner that tourists can type in the date they wish to stay and get a hotel. The website planner is for tourists who need a plane ride, lodging, cruise parking, cruise reservations, bicycle rentals and events ticketing. The site is very professional looking and I like how it states on the top of the website “official website.” There is a definite wow factor with the bright flowers on the homepage and the colored tabs. The site includes photos that are really eye-catching such as the piano keys.

The website communicates what the town has to offers very well. There is a list running down the left side of the website, as well as a blog style list that runs on the main page with happenings around the town. Those are for smaller attractions. Additionally, there are the staple attractions like Schlitterbahn, that are also highly visible. Lodging is very easy to do on this website. There are options to book hotels, rent bicycles, and even a cruise for a short list of reservation options made available on the site. The look is professional. The website is fun to look at and easy to use, but still holds a professional look to it. The wow factor is probably a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. The website is easy to use, interactive, and resourceful.

The Galveston website is the most attractive in my opinion. It also has links to discounted hotel rooms, a calendar of events, a reservations link where you can check into your hotel, flight etc., and a weather link. The website is decorated with beautiful and inviting photos.

Much like the website for Corpus Christi, the Galveston website has a great deal of information on attractions, dining, lodging, and attractions that only a location such as Galveston can offer. The Galveston website categorizes attractions such as arts, nightlife, and shopping further by breaking these down into sub-categories. For example, an attraction category such as arts and entertainment is divided into sub-categories such as art galleries, orchestras, and theaters. Such a format can allow visitors to specifically target attractions that cater to their greatest interests. Once an attraction is found, the “Add to Itinerary” tool allows one to add the attraction to their vacation schedule. This is a great help to those wanting to plan their vacation via internet. The website has a great color scheme and images that focus on Galveston’s location on the Texas coast. It also has a light and airy nature about it that produces a sense of relaxation. The site also offers online booking of lodging and the “Add to Itinerary” tool is offered here as well. General information on the community, such as real estate prices and education, healthcare, and religious institution information, is offered as well to those who wish to make Galveston their community of residence. The website utilizes multimedia such as podcasts, photo galleries, and blogs effectively to enhance the site and the community’s image. The website does not have a tremendous wow-factor, but much like the Corpus Christi website is entertaining and engaging, and is well put-together. It does the best of all sites presented here in helping tourists plan vacations, and it communicates a great deal about what Galveston offers to visitors and residents.

When I came across the website for Galveston the first thing that grabbed my attention was the pinkish/purple flowers and a picture of a piano below. The pictures invite you to visit website first and then you look to see what city the website is advertising for. The websites home page advertises the city of Galveston to be fun, entertaining and beautiful. The website does contain a lot of wording, but the wording just shows that the city has a lot to offer to its potential residents and visitors. The websites ability to help tourists to plan a trip seems easy with tabs at the top of the website specifying exactly what the users are interested in. If residents are looking at the website they can click on the “Living in Galveston” tab and see the following: real estate, apartment living, education, and organizations, etc. The website is friendly to both visitors and residents which help set it apart from other websites who focus primarily on outside visitors and trying to entice them in to bring money into the city. The website looks professional, but it also has an “elegant-fun” look. The bright, bold colors add to the fun side of the website, and the beautiful pictures like the flowers and the piano give the website a touch of “elegance” and maturity. The colors also add to the wow-factor. The purples, pinks, greens, and blues entice you to stay at the website and browse the different tabs to learn more about the city.

This site has a lot of things happening on the home page, but it doesn’t detract from the effectiveness of it. This site also has a box for booking a hotel, cruise, car rental and other accommodations. A feature I really like is a search box. This will allow for quickly finding

the information you are looking for and adds to the professional look of the site. The vibrant colors and different pictures of the site add to the wow factor. Like the Corpus site, I like the weather update on the homepage, it adds to the professionalism of the site.

Galveston's website, at [www.galveston.com](http://www.galveston.com), had many complimentary colors contributing to the "wow factor" of the site, with several distinct boxes containing different information about Galveston. There were multiple drop-menus for tourists to choose their specific needs in planning a vacation as well. The fact that there were many drop menus for visitors to choose, all containing relevant information for planning visits, made the site seem professional while allowing the visitor to clearly see what the destination has to offer.

The Wow Factor to this webpage would be all of the beautiful colors incorporated with the pictures and fonts. This website is very professional looking and is easy to navigate. The only thing I would suggest to add is a homepage button to the top to navigate back to that page instead of having to click the back button. Planning a trip as a visitor seems rather easy in that there is a side part for making reservations. The top tabs above also make it easy with informing visitors on what to do, where to stay, local news, information on cruises, and different things to discover and interact with. I like that they also have good contact information and information on current weather and maps. I find it useful also with the tab of living in Galveston, which helps also any people considering moving there. Even though I know that a huge storm damaged some of the town, by the looks of the webpage you would never know. I am not too familiar with the city, but I hope that they have altered their webpage concerning the outcomes of the huge storm. I think this website should win the award because it is very appealing and has a wide variety of target markets. The webpage alone reaches many different ones. I also really like the layout of the webpage. It is neat and clean and there is no clutter to add confusion.

I think that this website should win the award because everything you need to know can be accessed from the home page. There are drop down menus from the home page that list what to do in Galveston, where to stay in Galveston and a neat tab for interacting and discovering. This is a very effective way to communicate what the website has to offer. Also, the site has a reservations section where you can find lodging, plane tickets, cruises, bikes and event tickets. This makes it super easy to plan a trip and makes it so that you can have your trip planned before leaving your home. This relieves much worry about what you will do at a site and is wonderful. The site is very professional looking and has a very symmetrical layout. It is easy to use and seems like it would be useful to visitors as well as residents to Galveston. It does a good job of being attractive and still conveying all the information it needs to get across. The wow factor of the website is that you can literally get all of the information you would ever need to know about Galveston from this site. There is current news listed as well history about Galveston. This site does such a wonderful job of being useful to all who would visit it unlike most sites. Also, the reservation tab was so awesome. You could literally reserve everything you need for a trip so then you could travel worry free. This site is great and should win.

Galveston's website is very attractive, although a little busy. The best feature of this website is the homepage, which is easy to navigate, but this is not why I am commenting on

it. It not only has almost every link sourced from the homepage, but is also extremely helpful at a glance. It has news, weather, activity planner, and special interest links for visitor and resident use.

I think this website's use of color and its attractive nature, give it a wow factor that is very incomparable. It has a very nice colorful theme but does not over do this theme. I really like the pop down screen being all the way up to the top so that it does not get in the way of anything else. This feature also is very detailed, making it seem very professional. I also think this website highlights the best features of the island well. This website is also very good at giving up to date news and events that help to make the website and the location very unique and giving it another point of emphasis to show off its qualities. I also like the reservations box on the left side making it easily accessible and user friendly.

Galveston has a very colorful website and entices you to look around to see what the city has to offer. They have a newsletter to keep you informed on what the town is doing. You can not only make reservations for hotels, but get cruise tickets, buy event tickets and even get airplane tickets. The website also highlights the hot spots in town including hotels, restaurants, and entertainment.

The Galveston tourism website gives you a feeling of how fresh and trendy the city could be. It is very bright and colorful. However, when you scroll down after the attractive pictures, there is a long list of text. I feel this is very discouraging and could turn off tourists visiting the site and potentially from visiting the city. A plus for the ability of helping a tourists plan a trip, is that on the right side they have a handy reservation table where you can put in your dates and accommodations, you can also choose if you need lodging, reservations, parking, and/or rentals. The overall layout is very professional and clearly labeled making it easy to navigate. It is also fully loaded with detailed drop down menus. Although it is very appealing, like I mentioned before, when you scroll down it is too busy and too much information all at once. This is not only seen in the homepage but on many of the pages (underneath the pictures). But the pictures are very detailed and appetizing. I would rank this page as a 4 on the wow-factor. I ranked it high for its first impression look, but the busy text subtracted from a better score.

The Galveston website immediately sends an image and theme of seaside activities with images of boats, beaches, and sunsets. The website is well laid out in an easy to navigate order that allows the user to see many options by just scrolling the mouse over certain menus. This feature is both positive and negative to the website because the menus are hard to keep visible; if you move your mouse too much they disappear. The Galveston website has presented many options for lodging and has a wide range of food and drink options to participate in. This website makes it easy for someone to plan a trip, because you can make your own itinerary and print it off to have a list of all the things that you want to do. The links to the hotels have an option right on the webpage that lets you put down how many people you want to stay in the hotel room and reserve the room right online. The website also has impressive list of restaurants that have updated profiles fully equipped with maps, menus, and reviews. The Galveston website has a very professional look, and is flashy and catchy. The images could easily coax someone into thinking that Galveston

Island is a paradise. Finally, the wow factor for this website came in how often the website is updated. The website has a ticker on the right side that shows an updated schedule of events that would appear to be updated daily. On the home page, there is an updated list of news stories about Galveston, and what is happening in the city.

Galveston – This site is appealing to look at. There are many amenities and functions to use on the site. I like how it looks like a travel agents website; it gives that extra bit of confidence.

The Galveston website gave me many options on how to book a trip there, what to do and where to stay. It narrowed down the places where to stay, where to visit and made it easy to navigate the website. I had no problems loading pages and the website itself gives a good overview of the destination. The website contains videos, maps, events, and many more information.

First off, the overall look was very striking due to the array of its color scheme, as well as vivid eye catching pictures. The website did an outstanding job at communicating what the destination had to offer whether it was for vacation under “what to do” or actually living in the Galveston area-it was convenient for different markets. The ability for the website to help tourists plan a trip was clearly evident on the right hand side of the homepage under “reservations”. Not only did it offer lodging reservations, but it is made convenient by offering airport transfers, cruise parking and reservations, bike rentals, as well as tickets to events. I liked how they had pull-down options at the top of the page, also convenient for the tourist needing key information. The website surpassed a professional look by the way the website was organized; readable text, accessible information, and great color contrast, which made it very desirable to look at!

## Conclusions

The results of this study show huge differences in the development level of the Texas CVB Websites. They also indicate big usability and accessibility issues for many of the Websites even though most of these errors could be easily fixed or avoided. As far as search engine optimization is concerned, the results also indicate that most Websites are currently not optimized to be found and indexed by search engines. In terms of the implementation of specific marketing communication strategies and tools, it can be clearly seen that some Websites do not even have very basic features such as a phone number on the homepage or a simple URL. More sophisticated tools are only implemented by a few CVBs.

Interestingly, the Websites that made the TOP 15 list after Phase 1 were not necessarily from those destinations with the biggest marketing pockets. This suggests that innovation in CVBs might not necessarily be driven by size of the CVB.

The results of this study also suggest that a combination of aesthetics, organization of contents and functionality helped the Galveston CVB Website win the award.

A growing body of research suggests that destination Websites increasingly compete with other information offerings on the Internet and need to be easily found by consumers. Once a potential traveler clicks on the Website, they make very quick judgments as to whether the Website is worth spending time on (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). The overall results presented in this report suggest that many of the Texas CVB Websites are currently lacking the ability to be found and to effectively communicate with potential travelers. Thus, it is clear that there is a great need for most Texas CVBs to improve the usability, accessibility and persuasiveness of their Websites.

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