

Karsten Kärcher

Reinventing the Package Holiday Business

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# **Reinventing the Package Holiday Business**

**New information and communication technologies**

**With a Foreword by Prof. Dr. Beat Schmid**



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To My Parents

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## **Foreword**

Tourism is an industry where the transformation towards a digital economy, based on electronic markets, may be observed in a broad context. For many years, components from travel and tourism principals have been available on computerised reservation systems. These systems have had a profound impact on many sectors, especially the airline industry. Customers have had access to these systems for several years through travel agencies. Today, however, more and more travellers get their information directly through the Internet and other on-line networks. These new possibilities are altering demand. Consequently, there is a growth of individual holidays and late bookings in the tourism industry. Therefore, the type of services offered by intermediaries - in the tourism industry: tour operators and travel agents - must be changed in electronic markets. Disintermediation is a term widely used for the effects on intermediaries, caused by the new possibilities of on-line systems offered to the customer. Hence, new types of added values are required, resulting in what, at times, is called re-intermediation. The open question is, whether the old intermediaries become the new ones, or whether their business will be taken over by alien service providers.

This book by Karsten Kärcher gives profound evidence of the fact that major European tour operators are re-engineering their business in both the production and distribution of holiday packages, and that this seems to be a successful way of overcoming the threat of disintermediation affecting them, which, otherwise, would become reality. Kärcher's work is based on a carefully worked out theoretical framework and very extensive empirical material. It provides a systematic and detailed insight into the package holiday business. Kärcher is exploring a key sector in the evolution towards the electronic market business and gives, with remarkably profound precision, a snapshot of great value for the researcher interested in this transformation. Moreover, Kärcher's work is no less valuable for the practitioner in tourism, striving to understand and manage his or her business in the future.

Prof. Dr. Beat F. Schmid

## **Preface**

Tour operators and travel agents are threatened with disintermediation in the travel and tourism industry, especially as a consequence of altered customer demand and new information and communication technologies which foster direct bookings. In this book, however, it is argued that major European tour operators are reinventing their business activities to adapt to these changes and to secure their strategic position in the package holiday business. These tour operators are in particular developing and implementing new information and communication technology strategies to support both their production and distribution of holiday packages and, moreover, to enable them to automatically assemble and market individually tailored holidays.

Data to support this argument was gained from an extensive empirical survey in Britain and Germany. A total of 44 tour operators were interviewed in Britain and Germany, which controlled over 65% of their respective national market shares. The interviewed tour operators also included ten of the top twelve European tour operator groups. Leading tour operator associations and charter airlines were interviewed in addition. This research provides a detailed insight into the tour operator sector, particularly in Britain and Germany, thus contributing to research in the travel and tourism industry. Moreover, a theoretical framework is developed and proposed, largely based on industrial organisation and new institutional economics literature. The application of this framework in this book for the study of the package holiday business contributes to travel and tourism research, and provides a useful methodology for the study of a sector or industry.

This book is largely based on my Ph.D. thesis, which was submitted immediately after the Viva, which took place in the Business Centre at London Heathrow Airport on 17 October 1996. However, until the end of February 1997, industry data has been updated, where indicated, and further references been added to make this publication as up-to-date as possible. Nevertheless, as there is great similarity between the Ph.D. thesis and this book, this publication is referred to in the following as the 'thesis'.

Dr. Karsten Kärcher

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Dr. Karsten Kärcher  
Ph.D., M.Sc., M.Inst.T.T., M.T.S.

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## Abbreviation

- N. A. = not annotated, or not available

## A Note to Practitioners

While this book was written primarily for academic purposes and with the academic community in mind, it contains much data and information which (travel and tourism) practitioners may find of great interest and value. However, practitioners may want to skip some of the more theoretical chapters and sections and, instead, want to focus on Section 1.1, Section 1.2, Section 4.5, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Chapter 7, Section 8.1 and Section 8.4.

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