

**E-mail Customer Service Quality: The Case of Thai Travel Agencies**

**Nuttjika Saweksup**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Business Administration in Hospitality and Tourism Management**

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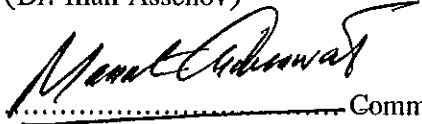
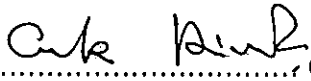
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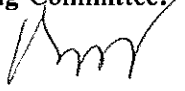
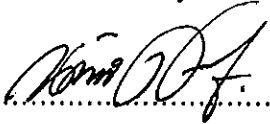


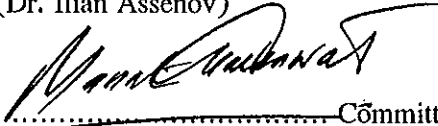
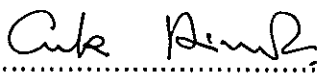
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### บทคัดย่อ

เนื่องจากยังไม่มีการศึกษาวิจัยเกี่ยวกับคุณภาพการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวไทยมาก่อน จุดมุ่งหมายของงานวิจัยนี้คือ เพื่อจะประเมินการใช้จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวไทยเชิงพฤติกรรมในเรื่องอัตราการตอบ ระยะเวลาการตอบ ความลึกซึ้งของเนื้อหา และการวิเคราะห์หาค่าความแตกต่างในพฤติกรรมการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ระหว่าง ประเภทลูกค้า (ลูกค้าชาวต่างชาติและไทย) ลักษณะของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ (จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่ใช้ชื่อยี่ห้อของสถานประกอบการ และจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่ไม่ใช้ชื่อยี่ห้อของสถานประกอบการ) และสถานที่ตั้งของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยว เพื่อเสนอแนะสำหรับการปรับปรุงการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ ของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวไทย

งานวิจัยเชิงสำรวจนี้ ใช้ “ลูกค่านิรนาม” เป็นวิธีศึกษาและวิเคราะห์การใช้จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ 2 ฉบับที่แตกต่างกัน (ฉบับหนึ่งใช้ชื่อของชาวต่างชาติและอีกฉบับหนึ่งใช้ชื่อไทย) ถูกส่งไปที่ตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวทั้งหมดที่มีรายชื่ออยู่ในฐานข้อมูลสำนักทะเบียนธุรกิจและมัคคุเทศก์กรุงเทพมหานคร (จำนวน 2,258 สถานประกอบการ) ดังนั้นจำนวนของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่ถูกส่งไปรวมทั้งสิ้นเป็นจำนวน 4,516 ฉบับ คำตอบของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่มีคุณภาพจะต้องครอบคลุมทั้ง 5 ด้านได้แก่ ด้านความรวดเร็ว ความสุภาพ ความเป็นส่วนตัว ความเป็นมืออาชีพ (ด้านส่วนประกอบของข้อมูลและด้านการนำเสนอคำตอบ) และ ด้านการส่งเสริมการตลาด ซึ่งการประเมินคะแนนทั้ง 5 ด้านนั้นมาจาก “การวิจัยกลุ่มย่อย” นอกจากวิธีดังกล่าวแล้ว ยังมีการสัมภาษณ์เจ้าของกิจการ หรือผู้จัดการ หรือพนักงานตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวในเขตจังหวัดกรุงเทพมหานคร ภูเก็ต และกระบี่ เป็นจำนวนรวม 30 แห่ง เพื่อที่จะศึกษาปัญหาการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์

ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่าเกือบครึ่งหนึ่งของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวตั้งอยู่ในกรุงเทพมหานครและภาคกลาง หนึ่งในห้าของตัวแทนเจ้าหน้าที่การท่องเที่ยวใช้จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ในการติดต่อกับลูกค้าและมีเพียงหนึ่งในสี่เท่านั้นที่ใช้จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ซึ่งเป็นชื่อยี่ห้อของสถานประกอบการ อย่างไรก็ตาม หนึ่งในสี่ของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่ส่งไปได้ถูกตีกลับเนื่องจากปัญหาทางเทคนิคหรือรายชื่อของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ผิดพลาดในฐานข้อมูล งานวิจัย

ยังชี้ให้เห็นอีกว่ามีเพียง 7 เปอร์เซ็นต์ของตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวไทยที่ตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์และมีเพียง 13 เปอร์เซ็นต์ของคำตอบมีคุณภาพดี ผลจากการวิจัยกลุ่มย่อยชี้ให้เห็นว่า ความเป็นมืออาชีพ ด้านส่วนประกอบของข้อมูลมีความสำคัญมากที่สุด รองลงมาคือความรวดเร็วในการตอบ และความเป็นส่วนตัวมีความสำคัญน้อยที่สุด คุณภาพการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์แตกต่างกันตามเชื้อชาติของลูกค้า ลักษณะของจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ และสถานที่ตั้งของตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยว ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ให้แก่ลูกค้าชาวต่างชาติมากกว่าชาวไทย แต่มีความเร็วในการตอบที่น้อยกว่า ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวที่ใช้จดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ซึ่งมีชื่อของของสถานประกอบการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ในอัตราที่มากกว่าและคุณภาพดีกว่าตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวที่ไม่ใช้ชื่อชื่อของสถานประกอบการ และตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวที่ตั้งอยู่ในเขตที่ไม่ค่อยมีชื่อเสียงในด้านอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์มากกว่าสถานประกอบการที่ตั้งอยู่ในบริเวณที่มีชื่อเสียงด้านอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวส่วนใหญ่ไม่มีแม่แบบในการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ และเกือบทุกสถานประกอบการเสนอข้อมูลที่เกี่ยวข้องเพิ่มเติมหากมีรายการส่งเสริมการขายในช่วงเวลานั้น ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวเกือบทั้งหมดอ้างว่าไม่มีการแสดงความไม่พอใจเกี่ยวกับการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์จากลูกค้า และปัญหาหลักของคุณภาพการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์คือ ทักษะด้านคอมพิวเตอร์ ทักษะด้านภาษา ความรู้เกี่ยวกับผลิตภัณฑ์ และความปลอดภัย

มีข้อเสนอจากงานวิจัยว่าแต่ละสถานประกอบการสามารถเพิ่มความได้เปรียบในการแข่งขันโดยใช้แม่แบบของการตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ การส่งจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์จากลูกค้าปลอมโดยผู้จัดการ เพื่อที่จะวัดคุณภาพการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ในสถานประกอบการ และการจัดเตรียมหลักสูตรเพิ่มเติมให้แก่พนักงาน พนักงานควรจะมีใจรักการบริการและมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการใช้อินเตอร์เน็ตและการบริการ รวมถึงมีความกระตือรือร้นที่เรียนรู้ทักษะคอมพิวเตอร์และภาษาด้วยตนเอง อีกทั้งควรจะใช้แม่แบบอย่างมีความยืดหยุ่นและความริเริ่มสร้างสรรค์ที่จะตอบจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ที่สอบถามเข้ามา ลูกค้าสามารถที่จะช่วยให้ตัวแทนประกอบการท่องเที่ยวตระหนักถึงปัญหาในการให้บริการโดยการร้องเรียนโดยตรงหากไม่พึงพอใจ

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยวอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ คุณภาพการให้บริการลูกค้าทางจดหมายอิเล็กทรอนิกส์  
ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยวไทย

<b>Thesis Title</b>	E-mail Customer Service Quality: The Case of Thai Travel Agencies
<b>Author</b>	Miss Nutjika Saweksup
<b>Major Program</b>	Hospitality and Tourism Management (International Program)
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#### ABSTRACT

There were no previous studies about the e-mail customer service quality of Thai travel agencies which prompted this research. The research aimed to assess the prevalence rate of e-mail usage by Thai travel agencies. This included measuring their response behavior in terms of response rates, response time and information depth, to analyze whether there were any differences in response behavior depending on the type of customer (foreigners and Thai), e-mail characteristics (branded and non-branded e-mail) and travel agencies' location and to make recommendations for improving the e-mail customer service for Thai travel agencies.

This exploratory research used "mystery guest" approach to study and examine the use of e-mail. Two different e-mails (one with a foreign name and another with Thai name) were sent to all known Thai travel agencies who have registered e-mail addresses with the database of Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office (2,258 travel agencies). Therefore, the total number of sent e-mails was 4,516. The requirements of a good answer were measured by five main dimensions as follows: promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism (informative content and answer presentation) and promotional. The point evaluation of these 5 dimensions was done by "focus groups". Moreover, interview methods would be used through 30 travel agency owners, managers or staff in Bangkok, Phuket and Krabi to study e-mail customer service problems.

The results showed that nearly half of Thai travel agencies were located in Bangkok and the central part of Thailand. About one in five travel agencies, have an e-mail address. Only one-fourth of the travel agencies used branded e-mail addresses. However, about one quarter of e-mails were bounced back due to technical problems or wrong e-mail addresses provided in the database. Significantly, this study found that only 7 percent of Thai travel agencies replied to any inquiries and only 13 percent of travel agencies was good quality. The focus groups agreed that the professionalism: informative content was the highest important followed by promptness. The least important dimension was personal approach. The

quality of reply also differed across customer nationality, e-mail characteristics and location. The response rate and quality to foreign customers was higher than Thai customers but the speed of answers to Thai customers were better than those of foreigners. The response rate and response quality of the travel agencies with branded e-mail addresses was better than those of the agencies with non branded e-mail addresses. In addition, the travel agencies where were located in those regions where tourism is not important responded more than the location where tourism plays major roles. The majority of travel agencies did not have an e-mail template to answer e-mails. In addition, almost all travel agencies offered additional relevant information to the customers if there were any promotion related to the customers question in that time. Nearly all agencies claimed that there were no complaints about their e-mail responses. The main problems surrounding e-mail customer service included the lack of computer skills, language skills, product knowledge and security issues.

This study suggested that the travel agencies can enable their competitive advantage by implementing basic e-mail templates. Sending e-mail inquiries from disguise customers was recommended for the managers to evaluate the e-mail customer service quality in their own company and providing extra courses to staff. Nevertheless, the staff should be service-minded and have a positive attitude towards the Internet and service industry. They should be keen to take extra courses or learn by themselves about computer and language skills. They should follow the travel agency template but also should be flexible and take initiative to answer any inquiries. The customer can help the agencies to realize the problems by their direct complaint to the agencies if unsatisfied.

**Key Words:** e-tourism, e-mail customer service, Thai travel agencies

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Nutjika Saweksup

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

Nowadays, everything has changed. The world is becoming more globalized. Business needs to be competitive by thinking about global markets instead of just national markets. Communication technology is considered essential in doing business, as it is a tool in reaching customers, aside from assisting with providing information and news that is happening in the world. It is important in the sense that distance is no longer an obstacle in doing business deals (Department of Industrial Promotion of Thailand, 2003). This leads to the growth of Internet access and e-commerce in any country as well as in Thailand, which is booming (started around 1990). Internet and e-business are too great for any business to ignore and it becomes a part of almost every business, included tourism.

When the Internet was opened up to everyone, travel booking became an easy option for companies that wanted to use the technology. Globalization, de-regulation and the Internet technology have given consumers more information, increased expectations for specialized trips and subsequently increased tourism industry competition (Rayman & Molina, 2001). Among the agencies involvement with the Internet, travel agencies were one of the first to actually do business online. Agencies were the ones booking tickets on Global Distribution Systems (GDS) computer systems and offering consumers choices by using online technology (Sudeikis, 2005). As the Internet operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can be accessed everywhere in this connected world, it makes more convenient for the customers. The Web sites are also easier to use than traditional methods and people are becoming more familiar with the Internet.

Moreover, after the Internet and e-commerce were boomed, many developers try to add new functions and tools that enable customers to communicate with companies. These tools include bulletin boards, chat rooms, live customer service via individual chat and E-mail. The result is the travel industry has changed dramatically and Internet travel market dominated traditional travel agencies. The rapid growth of online transactions provides a new channel to increase their markets by directly reaching to consumers. The travel agencies remained the dominant source of hotel e-commerce,



generating 81% of total GDS room nights for both the fourth quarter of 2003 and total year (Travelclick, 2004).

The growth of online business leads to raise questions about the level of customer service quality. Customer service is a vital part of doing business. It has a strong link to customer satisfaction, which then yields customer loyalty and long-term profitability (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Many analysts agree that travel agencies that will survive in the coming decade need to constantly develop and evolve their customer service policies. The travel agencies need to provide services that are valuable to their customers and need to position themselves as consultants and trusted advisors who can provide knowledge, experience and advice (Dixon, 2000).

By its nature, the online customer service is much more difficult than offline customer service. For the online customer service, the relationship with customers will be less personalized and they may have greater expectations of the service as a result. There is also a higher learning curve to support staff as they learn the ins and outs of dealing with customers in the virtual realm (Picozzi, 2005). Offline customer service involves immediate interaction via phone or face to face. Tone of voice plays a significant role in how customers and staff interact as well as the body language that can determine a customer's stress level. Physical and audible signs such as these disappear in online customer service because wording and language are the only medium for communication. The written word is highly interpretable and online service sessions put more pressure on written communication (Teal, 2005).

The online medium may induce lower customer satisfaction and loyalty compared to the offline medium. Higher pricing, lower credit card security, lack of human contact and low accuracy reservations concerns continue to reduce customer satisfaction and stop newer Internet users from booking travel online. The majority of Internet travelers still divert the confirmation of their travel reservations to traditional travel agencies. 56 percent of online travelers reported having completed travel reservations with a traditional travel agency after visiting travel-related Web sites. More than 60 percent of potential online consumer shopping is abandoned before reaching the credit card transaction process (National Purchase Diary Research, 1999). The Customer service continues to be a seemingly impenetrable barrier for some e-tailors and 53 percent said they would be less likely to buy from an offline store if they had a bad experience with the same retailer's online service (Jupiter Research, 2002).

The main problems of e-mail customer service might be human resources. A well thought out implementation of technology to answer certain inquiries can eliminate the cost of people but since good technology is implemented by good people, people are always much more important than anything else (Ray, 2004). The existing problems include lack of qualified staff especially language barriers, lack of computer skill and poor attitude. In Thailand, though travel agencies have started to use the Internet mainly for information and communications, the expensive nature of technology and limited staff knowledge, the use of the Internet by both travel trade and consumers is limited (Tourism Australia, 2005). These problems lead to decreased e-mail customer service quality. Only 30 percent of online retailers responded customer service email requests within 6 hours during the holiday season. This figure is a slight increase from 27 percent in the same period in 2000, but is still markedly unsatisfactory. Although 88 percent of consumers expect a response to e-mail inquiries within 24 hours, just 54 percent of companies sampled met those expectations; the same percentage as in year 2001. Additionally, 57 percent of consumers said the speed of response from a retailer to a customer service email would affect their future purchasing decisions (Ryan, 2003).

Due to several difficulties, obstacles and problems occur from e-mail customer service. The travel agencies need to take these into account and try to solve the problems. This should include creating an e-mail template. The e-mail standard or guideline in e-mail response service should be related to the main aspects of customer service. The most important aspects of online customer service are speed, accuracy, completeness, accessibility, and automation, not necessarily in that order (Ray, 2004). In other words, e-mail response should be prompt, polite, personal, professional and promotional- like to reply within 24 hours. To open with "Dear", address the recipient by name, include the employee's name, answer the question and include the name of travel agency (Barnes & Cumby, 2002). Moreover, recruiting qualified staff and providing the training to them are very important.

Thai travel agencies faced several difficulties in developing their online customer services. The travel agencies need to communicate in English. Many travel agencies in Thailand faced the additional pressure of having to answer customer e-mails in a foreign language due to the reliance of the tourism industry in the country on international tourists. The tourism industry relies heavily on seasonality of work and results in high turnover untrained staff. It also leads to less quality of service and decrease customer

satisfaction. Moreover, many travel agencies are small. They traditionally rely on walk-in tourists only and deny offering online service or using e-mail to communicate with customers.

The subsequent section provides a review of literature relevant to information technology, e-commerce and service quality. The research methodology part describes the methods that are used in this research. The next chapter, presents the results by examining in main three comparisons: different customers branded e-mail and location. Lastly, recommendations: a discussion of the implications for Thai travel agencies to overcome the obstacles and also improve online customer service quality.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

1.2.1 To assess the prevalence rate of e-mail usage for customer service among Thai travel agencies

1.2.2 To study e-mail customer service's behavior among Thai travel agencies.

1.2.3 To identify possible problems of e-mail customer service in Thai travel agencies.

1.2.4 To make recommendations to improve e-mail customer service of Thai travel agencies.

## **1.3 Expected benefits**

This study will contribute practical knowledge to the travel agencies. It is emphasized on the problems and recommendations that each travel agency can use to improve their own customer service quality as a competitive advantage to compete with other travel agencies. Moreover, the government, especially the Tourism and Sport Ministry can use the results as a guideline to set standards and training courses to improve online travel agency quality. It will help to improve the whole tourism industry in Thailand to compete with other countries.

## **1.4 Scope of the study**

1.4.1 Scope of area, this study limits area to examine e-mail customer service quality in Thai travel agencies.

1.4.2 Scope of demography, this research is planned to study on Thai travel agencies that offer e-mail customer service.

1.4.3 Scope of research period, this research is limited to study from December 2005 to September 2006.

## **1.5 Definition of Terms**

### **1.5.1 Internet**

A worldwide network of computers that enables the exchange of information in a variety of formats.

### **1.5.2 Information Technology**

The enabling mechanism that facilitates the processing and flow of information in an organization and between organizations, encompassing information the business creates, uses and stores, as well as the technologies used in physical processing to produce a product or provide a service.

### **1.5.3 Computer reservation system (CRS)**

It is organized by individual airlines to handle reservations, ticketing, schedules, seat inventories, and have created great advances in speed and accuracy for the booking of airline flights.

### **1.5.4 Global distribution system (GDS)**

Basically, a computer reservations system that contains a vast database of inventories and travel information of participating travel carriers and suppliers who pay a

fee to subscribe to the GDS service. It helps to distribute a company's products to audience in the most effective and cost-efficient means available.

#### **1.5.5 E-commerce**

A system of conducting business activities using the Internet and other information technologies. Refers to using computer networks to conduct business, including buying and selling online, electronic funds transfer, business communications and other activities associated with the buying and selling of goods and service online.

#### **1.5.6 E-tourism**

A new way of doing business. It means fast communications, global accessibility and minimal costs for new businesses going online.

#### **1.5.7 E-mail**

The transmission of messages over a network. Private messages sent from one computer to another. Users can send e-mail to a single recipient or broadcast the same message to multiple users. Attachments can be used to transmit large files in addition to the e-mail message.

#### **1.5.8 Tourism industry**

Describes both private firms and establishments providing facilities and services for tourists as well as the public sector authorities planning and managing tourism in a region.

#### **1.5.9 Travel agency**

Intermediary selling travel services on behalf of principals.

#### **1.5.10 Attachment**

A file attached to an e-mail message. The file could be a photo, text, a webpage, or any other type of file.

#### **1.5.11 B2B**

Business-to-business. B2B sites are constructed to sell business products and services to other businesses.

#### **1.5.12 B2C**

Business-to-consumer. B2C sites are constructed by business to sell their products and services to consumers.

#### **1.5.13 C2C**

Consumer-to-consumer. C2C sites are constructed by individuals to sell products and services to consumers.

## CHAPTER 2

### RELATED CONCEPT, THEORY AND LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature relevant to information technology, e-commerce and service quality. The researcher presented results as follow:

- 2.1 Ideas and theories related to Information technology and e-tourism
  - 2.1.1 Information technology and e-commerce
  - 2.1.2 Information technology in tourism industry and e-tourism
  - 2.1.3 Information technology in travel agencies and e-tourism
- 2.2 Ideas and theories related to service quality
  - 2.2.1 Service quality
  - 2.2.2 Online service quality
- 2.3 Related Researches
  - 2.3.1 Travel agent service
  - 2.3.2 E-commerce
  - 2.3.3 E-tourism
  - 2.3.4 E-mail customer service

#### 2.1 Ideas and theories related to Information Technology and e-tourism

##### 2.1.1 Information Technology and e-commerce

The phrase “Information technology” (IT) refers to the creation, gathering, processing, storage and delivery of information. It also includes the processes and devices that make all this possible (Nyheim et al., 2005). However, it is quite difficult to define IT in an accurate manner. Several authors have attempted to define IT as follow (Buhalis, 2003):

- Thomas (1998) philosophically suggests that technology consists of society’s pool of knowledge concerning the industrial, mechanical and practical areas.
- Peppard (1993) defines information technology as the enabling mechanism that facilitates the processing and flow of information in an organization and between organizations, encompassing the information the business creates, uses and stores, as

well as the technologies used in physical processing to produce a product or provide a service.

- Runge and Earl (1988) propose that information technology includes telecommunication networks that provide information highways over which new products and services can be offered, thereby redefining concepts of customer service, opening up new arenas of innovation and altering the economics of distribution.

Information technology has two distinct sides (Peacock, 1995). On one side, it is an automator. It can increasingly take over routine tasks and perform them in a way, which reduces the need for human intervention. At the same time, it is called an informant. It provides information in a manner and in quantities not previously available. Information technology supports the development and maintenance of organizational competitiveness by enhancing the ability of organizations to manage their own resources, increase productivity, communicate policies and marketing, develop partnerships with all stakeholders and namely consumers, suppliers, public sectors and interest groups (Daft, 2003).

Moreover, Information technology provides managers quickly with more information than ever before. IT improves efficiency and effectiveness whether through computer-aided manufacturing, information sharing with customers, or international inventory control. In another word, information technology aids operational processes and decision making.

IT is one of the greatest forces driving change in almost any industry. The IT wave will likely continue for several reasons (Nyheim et al., 2005). Firstly, the pace of change and the expected number of the technological advances continue to grow at alarming rates. Secondly, the technological demands of customers and partners continue to rise. Thirdly, the competitive environment is growing intensively with increased investment in and emphasis on IT. Fourthly, labor issues continue to be an obstacle in the industry. Both the cost of labor and the scarcity of people willing and able to fill industry positions require greater focus on technology as an alternative to run the business and service guests. For these reasons, IT is an important aspect and is quickly becoming one of the most important in today's organizations in every country, as well as Thailand.

IT was introduced to Thailand in the early 1980s and plays a significant role in many sectors (Runckel, 2004). From the late 1980s onward, the country has developed a nationwide IT infrastructure that could serve the private sector and the government. Information technology could be utilized in Thailand in order to develop high-



quality human resources, develop Thai technology and increase the channels to access information around the country. However, Thailand faces problems about lacking people who have knowledge in information technology. Due to the majority of Thai people working in the agriculture sector, they hesitate to use the new technology and are not familiar with Information technology.

Importantly, in 2002, Thailand established the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and gave the new ministry the objective to develop and support more comprehensive electronic processes for government, commerce, industry, business and education. This new ICT policy aims to incorporate IT into every aspect of Thai society and, ultimately, transform the economy and the nation. Thai government is rushing to develop a sufficiently qualified human resource which will lead to an increase of the speed of development of technology (Nasingkun, 2003).

Significantly, as IT has been driving the globalization and re-engineering of almost all business processes, the need for expanding the communication networks between service providers and customers has increased. The internet has been utilized as a mean for communicating widely. The internet has created a universal platform for communication and presentation, a truly open, global network (World tourism organization, 2001). It is a vast network of computer networks, linking computers in every corner of the globe so that people can communicate and share data with each other (O' Connor, 1999). The main advantages of the internet are reaching global markets, easy access as it can be access from different types of equipment; TV, mobile devices, in-car technology, etc., including two-way communication offered by the internet. Moreover, the cost of access is going down and the speed of access is going up. So, the internet and World Wide Web become more useful and more user-friendly, this is a powerful combination of factors driving increased usage (World tourism organization, 2001).

Due to people becoming more internet savvy, we have observed the rise in electronic commerce (EC, e-commerce). E-commerce describes the process of buying, selling, or exchanging products, services and information via computer networks, including the Internet. Kalakota and Whinston (1997) (quoted in Turban and King, 2003) define e-commerce from four perspectives:

- From a communications perspective, e-commerce is the delivery of goods, services, information, or payments over computer networks or by any other electronic means.

- From a business process perspective, e-commerce is the application of technology toward the automation of business transactions.
- From a service perspective, e-commerce is a tool that addresses the desire of firms, consumers, and management to cut service costs while improving the quality of customer service and increasing the speed of service delivery.
- From an online perspective, e-commerce provides the capability of buying and selling products and information over the Internet and other online services.

Others (Haag et al., 2002) define e-commerce as just really commerce, but it is commerce in which technology facilitates business. The technology aspect of e-commerce assists the business in the sense of reaching more customers, distributing more information quickly, establishing strong and lasting relationships and being innovative in how to perform all types of commerce functions.

E-commerce can be categorized according to how one can interact with it (Haag et al., 2002). If the customers can interact with a business only by visiting a physical location, it is called a "brick-and-mortar business". It exists only in the physical world like a store and does not perform an e-commerce function. Due to globalization, there are many businesses that exist in the physical world and also on the web, then it is a "click-and-mortar" business. However, some businesses do not have even a place where the customers can go to shop, it is a "click-and-order" business which exists solely on the web. Furthermore, e-commerce can be classified according to who the customers are (Haag et al., 2002 and Whiteley, 2000).

The business that takes place of commercial transactions between two organizations is business-to-business (B2B). The customers of B2B are primarily other businesses. Such an example is [hotelbusiness.com](http://hotelbusiness.com). If the target markets of the business are individuals, it is business-to-consumer (B2C). The majority of sites in almost all industries are B2C. These are sites such as, [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com), and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Another type of e-business is consumer-to-consumer (C2C) which is an individual who sells products and services to another individual like [Ebay.com](http://Ebay.com).

The benefits of e-commerce falls into three main categories: organizations, consumers and societies as follow:

- Firstly, benefits to organizations. E-commerce brings benefits to business in term of globalization because company details on the net are available to an international marketplace and brings the business to global markets by pushing their products to existing

and potential customers (Beattie and Yeoman, 2004). E-commerce helps organizations by expanding a marketplace. A company can easily and quickly locate more customers and can easily select the best suppliers and the most suitable business partners. E-commerce also offers significant cost savings. With e-commerce, companies no longer need to bear the costs of creating, processing, distributing, storing and retrieving paper-based information. So, the administration costs such as costs of creating, processing, distributing and telecommunications cost are cheaper. The cash flow for businesses is greatly improved when ordering online as payment by immediate electronic payment to the business. E-commerce can improve business organization and processes by allowing for many innovative business models that provide strategic advantages and increase the profit or increase level of spending (Turban and King, 2003). Also, e-commerce allows companies to interact with their customers and business partners and to receive quick and accurate feedback.

- Secondly, benefits to consumers. It is mostly about convenience, speed and cost (Beattie and Yeoman, 2004). E-commerce allows the consumer to shop and perform other transactions 24 hours a day, all year round from almost any location. It provides more choices of more products, from more vendors. Moreover, the consumer can buy at a cheaper price with fast delivery.

- Lastly, benefits to society. E-commerce benefits to society are an improvement in the standard of living and delivery of public services (Turban and King, 2003). People in less-developed countries and in rural areas can purchase products and services that are available through e-commerce. Also, public services like health care and education can be delivered via e-commerce to reduce cost with improved quality.

Everyday, developers are adding new functions to the array of tools that enable clients to communicate to companies and with each others (Cox and Koelzer, 2004). Increasingly, business sites are adding bulletin boards, chat rooms, live customer service via individual chat and E-mail. E-mail and contact forms are now so universal and pervasively used in e-commerce. E-mail is an electronic mail that is sent and received via computers (Rice and Todd, 2005). An e-mail message is very similar to an office memo, sharing the following characteristics (Lehnert, 2002):

- E-mail messages are usually fairly short
- Each message usually addresses a single topic
- Many messages rely on plain text (no graphics or fancy fonts), although

this is changing

- Messages are usually written in an informal style
- Some messages can be sent to one person or many people
- Messages can be forwarded to many other people
- E-mail is often timely
- A reckless e-mail message might someday come back to haunt you

E-mail is a simple and effective method to push message in front of clients (Maurer, 2003). Good e-mail marketing pays off as long as it is done professionally and consistently. E-mail is a cheap and easy communication tool. E-mail increases productivity and reduces mailing costs because the expense, time and effort needed to reach people or groups of people anywhere in the world are all low. E-mail is as important a business tool as the telephone. It can help to distribute valuable news and sales bulletins to clients with ease, at lightning speed, minimal cost and also help to stay well ahead of the competitors. Clients can read e-mail and reply to messages from anywhere in the world, as long as they have access to an online computer. For these benefits, it leads to increase in e-mail usage. As survey by The American Society of Travel agencies (ASTA) indicated that 77.6 percent of travel counselors use e-mail and 26.5 percent use it everyday for client communication (Rice and Todd, 2005).

Significantly, e-mail is used pervasively due to free e-mail services are easily available. A pioneering e-mail service was Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com/>). Hotmail users could access their e-mail from any online computer, anywhere, anytime. This feature allowed the company to stay in touch with their clients. With such a service, the company can always send and receive important communications. Some of the free e-mail services include:

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ● IName (AltaVista's e-mail)        | <a href="http://www.iname.com/">http://www.iname.com/</a>           |
| ● Eudora Webmail                    | <a href="http://www.eudoramail.com/">http://www.eudoramail.com/</a> |
| ● Hotmail (part of the MSN network) | <a href="http://www.hotmail.com/">http://www.hotmail.com/</a>       |
| ● LycosEmail                        | <a href="http://www.mail.lycos.com/">http://www.mail.lycos.com/</a> |
| ● Yahoo! Mail                       | <a href="http://mail.yahoo.com/">http://mail.yahoo.com/</a>         |
| ● Loxinfo (in Thailand)             | <a href="http://loxinfo.co.th">http://loxinfo.co.th</a>             |

### 2.1.2 Information technology in tourism industry and e-tourism

Tourism can be simply defined as the travel and stay of a non-resident (Egziabher, 2000). The reasons to travel might differ. A person may travel for leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives, health, education, etc. Transport is necessary to travel and accommodation to stay at the destination. So, tourism has three major components: attraction, accommodation and transport. In the developed world, all these components have reached the peak in satisfying their customers' needs aided by modern technology. These components also offer a range of products, which suit to different tourists needs around the world.

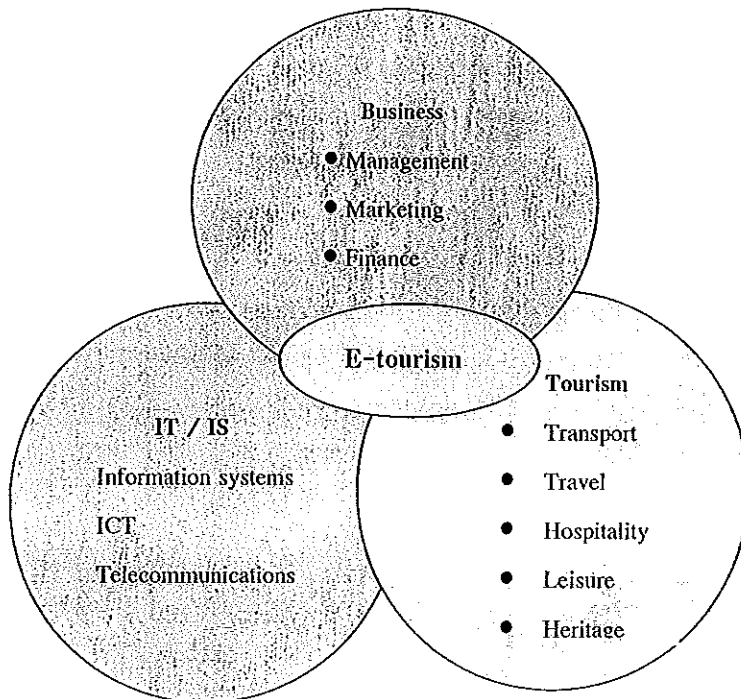
The tourism industry has always been among the first to use new technology. It is an information-rich industry which depends heavily on finding and developing new means to distribute travel products and services, marketing information to customers, and offering comfort and convenience to travelers (Zhou, 2004). Consumers are also seeking new sources of information to help them make decisions before purchasing travel services to make their trips more satisfying. The adoption of IT by the travel industry started well before the development of the Internet. The increase in the demand side has resulted in a shift away from traditional supply chains and communication channels (The Scottish Parliament: The information center, 2002). Information technology supports all business functions and so the use of IT in tourism is famous, due to the information being essential for both the day-to-day operations and the strategic management of tourism (O'Connor, 1999). The exchange of information is very important at every stage in the sales cycle of the tourism product. Information must be able to flow quickly and accurately between the client, intermediaries and each of the tourism suppliers involved in servicing the client's needs. As a result, information technology, the combination of computing communication and electronics, has become an almost universal feature of the tourism industry.

Travel and transportation companies are also now looking to the Internet for improved communication and cross-enterprise collaboration with partners, suppliers, and even competitors. Hotel and travel agencies have been keen adopters of technology, using it to help to manage and streamline their operations and to gain strategic advantage. The travel industry continues to evolve through online booking, travel personalization, and customer self-service (Curtin et al., 1998).

Given the way in which IT is reshaping the basic structure of both commerce and society in general, and consumers' increased demand for information, its importance to the success of a tourism enterprise can only grow in the future (O'Connor, 1999).

Many tourism businesses are involved in developing their Internet services. This means of doing business is known as "e-tourism", or "tourism e-business" (The Scottish Parliament: The information center, 2002). The key differences of e-tourism compared to traditional markets are the speed at which information can be communicated, global accessibility and the minimal costs of establishing a business online. The e-tourism concept includes all business functions as well as e-strategy, e-planning and e-management for all sectors of the tourism industry, including tourism, travel, transport, leisure, hospitality, principal, intermediaries and public sector organizations. E-tourism bundles together to three disciplines, which are business management, information systems and management and tourism (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The e-tourism concept



Source: Buhalis (2003).

However, some authors define all travel related business transactions that completing through Internet application as "e-traveling". E-traveling includes customer acceptance and satisfaction, services rendered, value added for both the travel businesses and consumers, privacy concerns, profitability, operational risks and competition from traditionally non-traveling firms (Yang et al., 2002).

Before the Internet was created, a travel marketing and distribution system known as Computer Reservation Systems (CRS) was introduced in 1970. This was one of the early technologies that were used in the tourism industry. It was an airline database that managed and distributed reservations electronically to remote sales offices and external partners. This computerized system assisted tourism enterprise with handling their inventories profitability and with facilitating the tourism product distribution (Curtin et al., 1998). CRS are normally operated by tourist producers such as airlines, hotels and tour operators and are distributed nationally and globally, via computerized systems. CRS allowed customers like travel agencies to make and confirm reservations and allowed all travel businesses to operate flexibly. It offered travel agencies increased productivity and competitive advantage as thereafter they were able to offer the consumer quick access to the most up-to-date information and indeed access to CRS is of continuing importance to online travel agencies.

Many tourism businesses implement IT to increase efficiency. One of the early adopters of IT has been the airline business. Airline computer reservation system emerged to become the global distribution system (GDS). It was introduced before Internet but after CRS. It provides distribution channels that give customers the ability to easily and quickly search for products and services with full disclosure of rate and availability (Curtin et al., 1998). It also provides a mean to conduct the transaction. The GDS objective is to distribute company's products like hotel room to as broad an audience as possible in the most effective and cost-efficient means available. However, GDS is repositioning itself to become a marketing and service company for suppliers and provides links between end users and suppliers (Ruzie and Medic, 2002). GDS also changes its focus from airlines to other travel industry segments.

The online connection is through the support of other intermediaries, plus mergers, acquisitions and partnership with selected online businesses. Interestingly, the globalization and e-business leads to create a trend among major airlines to form an online alliance (Nadkarni and Peng, 2001). The airlines focused on B2C strategy on the premium

and corporate sector competing on brand and value added service while intermediaries competing on basis of fares, discount and last minute fare segment. On B2B aspect, the benefits in term of efficiency and costs that accrue through e-commerce will lead airlines to force operators and travel agencies to do business electronically. The advantages of being online offer price comparisons, discounts, last minute offers and provides confidence in the success of e-business model on a local as well as global scale.

In addition, accommodation establishments use IT to manage inventory and control their assets. IT penetrates the hotel industry at a fierce pace, by integrating the hotel operation, reshaping the marketing function, improving total efficiency, providing tools for marketing research and partnership building and enhancing customer services while providing strategic opportunities (Buhalis, 2003). In addition, consumers increasingly expect IT facilities in hotel rooms. The hotel provides more Internet access in the hotel's room and reservation is changed to GDS and Internet. Thus, IT is recognized as a mean of achieving competitive advantage for the hospitality industry and hotels will be unable to perform their profitably without using IT.

Moreover, IT is critical for tour operators. Tour operators can change significantly by allowing the customers to access through website and e-mail. IT is also important for the distribution of a tour operator's packages (Wanhill, 1998).

Traditionally, tour operators distributed their products by displaying brochures of their packages in travel agencies. A pre-printed form was normally provided to be completed by travel agencies in order to request a holiday from a tour operator. Travel agencies search tour operators' database and make bookings through videotext booking systems. The introduction of the Internet can also be a strategic tool that provides benefits for tour operators.

As mentioned above, IT impacts on many sections like hotels, tour operators and airlines. Importantly, IT also impacts on travel agencies business that will be reviewed in the next section.

### **2.1.3 Information Technology in travel agencies and e-tourism**

A travel agent is a retailer in travel services who receives income directly from suppliers (airlines, hotels, car rental companies) and other intermediaries in the form of commissions (typically 10 percent for airlines and lodging reservation) (Chon and Sparrowe,



2000). Typically, tourists contact travel agencies during the planning process of their travel. The nature of the tourist and travel agent encounter is differs, it depends on the needs of the tourists. Some tourists may be very well prepared, having definite plans, and only requiring the agent to make the necessary bookings. However, others may only have the desire to go on holiday and need assistance in selecting their destination, their travel provider, their accommodation and a range of activities, as well as making the bookings. The outcomes of these encounters can have effects throughout the many different stages of the travel experience (Cliff and Ryan, 2002).

Travel agencies had an almost exclusive lock on travel knowledge before the advent of the Internet. They had sole access to up-to-date transportation information, and they had documentation needed to make intelligent travel decisions. (hotel guides, cruise and visa information and so on). Many travel agencies began to install computer terminals in the 1970s, long before the personal computer became famous in other small businesses (Maurer, 2003). Airlines granted travel agencies CRS access, allowing them to gather information and to process reservations more efficiently. Furthermore, GDS has also provided an effective reservation mechanism that helps travel agencies to get information, make reservations and issue travel documents for the entire range of tourism products to increase efficiency (Buhalis, 2003).

Traditional travel agencies; sometimes called brick-and-mortar agents are transforming themselves (Ruzie and Medic, 2002). Due to reduced or eliminated airline commissions, the travel agencies are increasingly using the Internet to save cost. Furthermore, the limitations of brick-and-mortar operations are eliminated, leading to expansion in the potential market of end users (Ryan and Hoontrakul, 2004). The travel agent can create an inventory system for accurate information. The travel agencies can increase the use of computers and technology by establishing a database on past consumers. Combining products like hotel rooms and golfing into packages could enhance business. The successful intermediary could benefit from taking a creative role in designing attractive packages for different clients. The role of the travel agent is to counsel travelers. Using their greater knowledge of the travel market, the agent can offer a number of options to the client, and then assist the client in making a decision (Cliff and Ryan, 2002).

The Online travel agencies (OTAs)-including both brick-and-mortar (both online and offline) and click-and-order (online only) travel agencies- are increasingly important. OTAs provide a service via World Wide Web (WWW) to enable customers to

search for appropriate flights and fares (Clemons et al., 1999). Then, they can make a selection, book and be issued a ticket by OTA. OTA represents independent online travel agencies, traditional travel agencies, airlines and reservation systems. An OTA performs several services: reservation information and recommendation service, reservation services and ticketing service. However, as airlines and hotels increasingly sell directly to customers through the Internet, the role of travel agencies that are not depends on the location, become more critical to focus (Nadkarni and Peng, 2001). Travel agencies focused more on CRS and provide Web based interface.

Due to these developments, Dube and Renaghan (2000) (quoted in Tsai et al., 2004) suggested that travel agent businesses needed to play four significant roles in the future. Firstly, acting as information brokers, passing information between guests and managers. Secondly, processing transactions by booking rooms and transferring money. Thirdly, providing advice to customers, be they individual guests or members of an association attending a convention. Lastly, providing value-added services by integrating customer requirements for hotels with other travel needs.

Significantly, the travel agencies need to redefine their role and position themselves as infomediaries rather than intermediaries (Nadkarni and Peng, 2001). The travel agencies need to come up with a totally different business model that adds value to a traveler's traveling experience to ensure its survival (Ching-biu Tse, 2003). Providing travel advice, enhancing customer satisfaction and bundling hotel bookings with other related services are just some of the many options travel agencies need to explore and implement. The agents should reinvent themselves, being able to provide the personal service and support that guest's need. They must invest in deep learning about their target customers' preferences to find out what would most satisfy them.

The tourism industry in Asia still heavily relies on wholesaler agencies because there are effective and reliable B2B and B2C channels (Nadkarni and Peng, 2001). A low Internet and credit card penetration can be the obstacles, which affects the growth and development of e-travel in the region. The GDS model in Asia, like elsewhere throughout the world, is undergoing change. The airlines are conscious of what they pay for distribution and maintain a constant pressure on GDS to reduce distribution fees. In addition, as more and more travel business goes online, GDS will continue to be important suppliers of both content and functionality in Asia (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2005). It is estimated that the majority of bookings are still being made through travel agencies and that Internet and direct

bookings reservations represent perhaps 10 per cent of the total in Asia-Pacific region and the market is finding a balance between the traditional bricks-and-mortar travel agent, the online booking channel and direct sales. The overall rise in demand for flights and a range of related products, and the changing consumer demands are indicative that there will be sufficient business to support all channels.

In Thailand, travel agencies have started to use the Internet mainly for information and communications. Due to the expensive nature of technology and limited staff knowledge, the use of the Internet by both travel trade and consumers is limited (Tourism Australia, 2005). A small number of travel agencies have access to the Internet at their desks. However, agents generally prefer to make reservations via traditional Computer reservation systems (CRS) and by fax and phone. Email usage is becoming more common. Internet booking has been used especially by low cost airlines. However, consumers still prefers to deal through agents and the travel industry in Thailand continues to operate under the traditional retail system.

## 2.2 Ideas and theories related to service quality

### 2.2.1 Service quality

Quality is an extremely difficult concept to define in a few words. At its most basic, quality has been defined as "conforming to requirements". It is also stated that quality is all about fitness for use and a definition based primarily on satisfying customers' need (Palmer, 2001). Moreover, Parasuraman et al. (1985) (quoted in Johns, 1993) defined quality as a function of five gaps located as follows:

1. Between the consumer's requirement and the supplier's perception of it.
2. Between management's perception of what the consumer requires and the service quality which is eventually specified.
3. Between the specified service quality and the actual standard of service which is delivered.
4. Between the standard of service delivered and the promised in external communications (advertisements, brochures, etc.) to consumers.
5. Between the consumer's perception of the service quality received and the standard expected.

Moreover, by Parasuraman et al. (1988) (quoted in Cliff and Ryan, 2002) proposed service quality, which were tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Parasuraman et al's five dimensions of service quality**

Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Empathy	The caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers

Source: Cliff and Ryan, (2002).

Indeed, the reliability of the information and staff is even more crucial to the tourist than reassurance gained from the nature of the interactions involved (Cliff and Ryan, 2002). This means that to meet or exceed those expectations, a company must develop a reliable system to provide accurate information, train staff on how to complete all necessary processes correctly and motivate staff to perform all aspects of their jobs correctly the first time, every time, in a courteous manner.

Simply stated, customer service is whatever satisfies the customer (Rice and Todd, 2005). Satisfaction with a product or service is usually based on perceptions and expectations. This is partially due to the intangible nature of the service, the complexity of the arrangement and the inherent variability in human interaction. The difficulty with a definition of customer service is that each individual has his own personal definition. Customer expectations also have a way of changing. As customers gain more experience with a particular product or service, the more exacting their expectations become. The visionaries place the customer at the core of their organization's business systems. The company that establishes itself as the winner in the market place is committed to meeting and exceeding customer satisfaction with a continuous and self-questioning attitude of how well is product fulfills needs and expectation of the customers (Hadi, 1999). The leading and dominant firms continuously deliver superior value to customers. Value is created by providing a

benefit, solving a problem, meeting a need or helping a customer. A company that can provide greater benefit to a customer is the winner of the market place.

Importantly, the service quality has a strong link to consumer loyalty (Taylor and Terhune, 2001). Customer loyalty is important in the sense of loyalty customers cost as much as thirty percent less in marketing, advertising and overhead than do first time customers and they are also an excellent source of advice friends and relatives. Loyal customers are important to companies because they contribute directly to the profitability of the firm (Van Riel et al., 2004). Their commitment to the firm is reflected in return- and re-purchase behavior, the willingness to pay a price premium, and favorable word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, the service quality is a one of factors that influenced purchasing. As an American Society (ASQ) survey on end user perceptions of important factors that influenced purchases showed the service is ranked as third, following performances and features. An emphasis on customer service is emerging as a method for organizations to give the customer-added value (Besterfield, 2003). However, as mentioned above, customer service is an intangible. It is made up of many small things, all geared to changing the customer's perception. Intangible characteristics are those traits that are not quantifiable; yet contribute greatly to customer satisfaction. Providing excellent customer service is different from and more difficult to achieve than excellent product quality. Organizations that emphasize service never stop looking for and finding ways to serve their customers better, even if their customers are not complaining. Therefore, it seems like the company needs to set the service standard and policies to make sure that the company will achieve, as they wanted (Rice and Todd, 2005). The basics are included follow:

- Acknowledge every customer as soon as possible, even if you are busy at the time.
- Get the customer's name and use it in your interaction.
- Make every customer feel special; even if he is not buying much this time, there is next time.
- Exhibit enthusiasm every time you serve a customer.
- Never argue with a customer; remember, the customer is always right.
- Be conscious of how you say things: your tone of voice is sometimes more meaningful than the words you say.

- “I don’t know” should always be followed by “but I will be happy to find out”.
- Provide more than the customer expects.
- Always thank the customer.

Interestingly, Horovitz and Cudenne-Poon (1990) (quoted in Johns, 1993) proposed a five-point practical framework for a service quality management program, which could be a useful checklist for the evaluation of practical use studies of quality management. It can be divided to five areas as follows:

- *Quality care* consists of accurately identifying and specifying the service quality requirements of each target customer group, and then ensuring that everyone shares the same definition of service quality.
- *Customer care* consists of placing the customer first, by designing the service system from the customers’ point of view and dealing delivery with customer complaints.
- *Front line people (FLIP) care* consists of involving service staff in the quality process, empowering them to take initiatives and giving them the tools to do their job, so that they can happily serve the customers.
- *Communication care* consists of prompt, efficient telephone and reception services, plus attention to documentation and the external environment, so that communication to customers reflects the quality of service.
- *Lead care* is the commitment of managers to service quality, which they must demonstrate by taking an interest in quality issues, encouraging staff commitment and setting a good example.

The service quality is necessary for all service businesses including travel agencies (Lockwood et al., 1996). Travel products consist of both tangible and intangible characteristic. Then, it is a need to implement service quality theory. Moreover, Millan and Esteban (2003) developed models specifically for the travel agent business and extended from Parasuraman et al’s five dimensions of service quality. Based on their research about the customers survey, they found and conclude that the final factors of satisfaction with the service of travel agencies are 25 items which are categorized in 6 dimensions which are service encounters, empathy, reliability, service environment, efficiency of advice and additional attributes (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Final scale of satisfaction with the service of travel agencies

Dimension	Items
Service encounters	Accuracy of employees when providing service. Ability of employees to help client. Employees transmit confidence. Continually provide service well. Confidence in the dealings of the agency. Individual follow up of each client. Time dedicated to each client.
Empathy	Find best options for client. Understanding of specific needs for client. Interest in solving client's problems. Individual attention and information.
Reliability	Provide service within agreed time. Inform of the service accurately and sincerely. Comply with agreed promises. Provide fast and flexible service.
Service environment	Decoration and setting of agency. Attractive documentation and materials. Comfortable and attractive surroundings. Size and layout space.
Efficiency of advice	Quantity and variety of information. Direct and immediate access to information. Precise knowledge of products and destinations. Follow-up of proceedings by agents.
Additional attributes	Special service of sending tickets and reservations. Follow-up before, during and after holiday.

Source: Millan and Esteban, 2003

Concerning the travel industry, delivering quality involves reliably providing the accommodation, transportation, and service within an environment that meets customers' expectations and at the same time, creating opportunities for adding value that will exceed expectations and result in delight, repeat purchase and recommendation (Lockwood et al., 1996). Nevertheless, from the travel agent's perspective about service quality, the agent should be acting as marketer, collecting information on the tourist's motivations and desires, developing a package to meet those needs and then selling the package (Cliff and Ryan, 2002). How well the agent performs this role depends on a number of factors include his or her ability to listen to the client, knowledge of the travel market, responsiveness to the client, ability to match needs with available products, the provision of the information in an accurate and timely manner, and how the sale is closed. The encounters are generally face-to-face but all other communications between the client and the agent, including telephone calls, written correspondence and e-mail should also be seen as vital engagements. They are all vital because at any one of these the tourist may be given information which later causes a problem, or may decide that the agent is not meeting his needs, so requiring a change of agent, which includes performing the service right first time, honoring promises, the accuracy of information provided and the records kept, has been identified as the most important determinant of travel agent customers' evaluation of service quality.

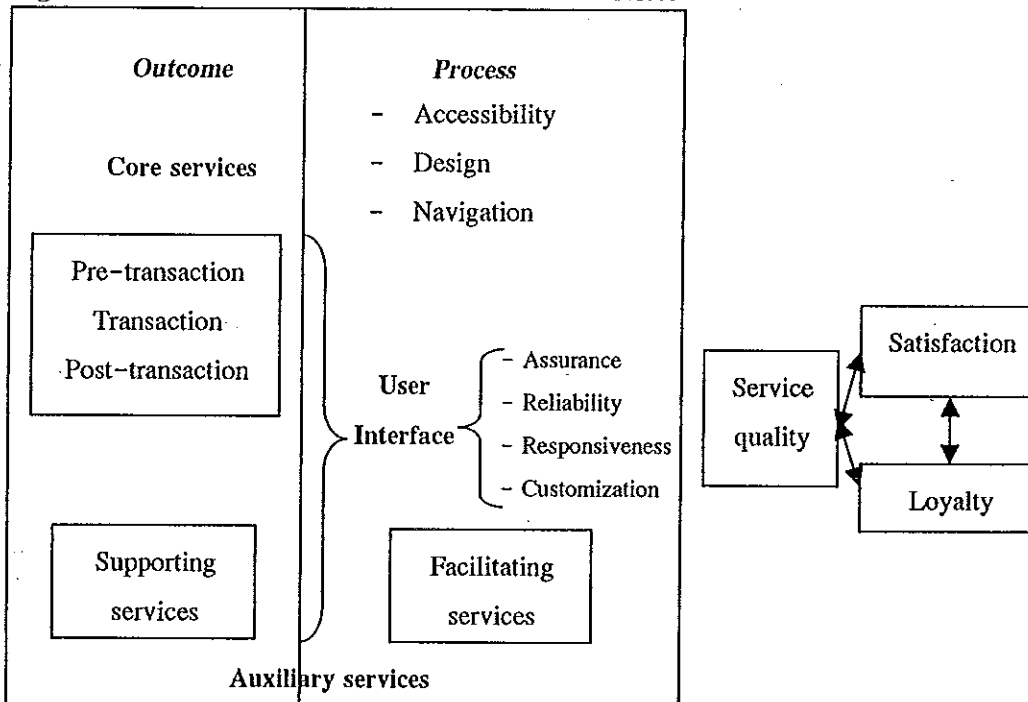
### 2.2.2 Online service quality

The five fundamental quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy by Parasuraman et al. (1988) can be adapted to use in online service quality. Furthermore, some additional dimensions should be constructed. With the objective of adapting and extending traditional service quality dimensions, viewing online services as a Self Service Technology (SST), which enables customers to service themselves without the involvement of employees, can be very helpful (Dabholkar, 2000). Gronroos et al., 2000 (quoted in Van Riel, 2004) proposed that in the case of online services, the role of information technology is most clearly observable in the user interface. Therefore, an important quality dimension customers encounter when visiting a website is its functionality as an interface between themselves and the firm. Making a distinction between the "process" or technical, and "outcome" or functional



aspects of service quality. The role of the user interface and the relationships between the various components in the online service offer and customer responses are illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 The role of the user interface in online services



Source: Adapted from Liljander *et al.* (2002). (quoted in Van Riel, 2004).

The links between service quality, satisfaction and loyalty is important, especially in the case of online travel services, satisfaction with pre-transaction services will be more vital, as it may leads to return behavior and word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth can spread quickly. Online customers can easily use e-mail, often offered by the provider in the form of a web-link, to recommend their favorite web site to friends and family (Van Riel, 2004).

Online customer service is quite different from offline customer service (Teal, 2005). The offline customer service involves immediate interaction via phone or face to face. Tone of voice plays a significant role in how customers and staff interact. Staff can usually judge a customer's stress level from the tone of voice, and quickly determine how to respond. Likewise, a staff's friendly, calm tone both provides assurance to the customer. In-

person contact incorporates all of these audio signs as well as the body language that can determine a customer's stress level.

Differently, online conversations are not the same as face-to-face or even telephone conversations (Lehnert, 2002). If people are inexperienced with online dialogs, they might not realize how important and useful all of unspoken communications. When people talk online, no body language cues or vocal intonations are available to help the recipient interpret the message. Physical and audible signs disappear in online customer service. Moreover, most people do not like the feeling of talking to computers (Peacock, 1995). The customers may feel like no human contact. Some customers want reassurance that there is a human behind the web page, and not just some wizard speaking out of a microphone. Some people feel resistant towards technology because it lacks the phrases like, "Can I help you?" and, "What are you doing here?". It seems like during online sessions, wording and language are the only medium for communication. The written word is highly interpretable. Online service sessions put more pressure on written communication because time is limited (Teal, 2005).

Because online business is a faceless commerce, many managers are concerned about how online medium influences satisfaction and loyalty and the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Shankar et al., 2002). They fear that the online environment might raise customer's expectations about the service and induce lower customer satisfaction and loyalty compared to the offline medium. The online medium affects customer decision and influences customer satisfaction. The online medium enables customers to sort (e.g. sort hotel rooms by price, miles from nearest airport, etc.) and group information (e.g. categorize hotel by quality rating). Additional information will improve the quality of the choices that customers make, which in turn, is likely to result in a service experience that will deliver higher satisfaction when the choice are made online rather than offline.

Therefore, travel agencies have made effort to improve different aspects of online customer service. The major online agencies have introduced customer service initiatives by investing in new technologies that allow electronic reservations to be processed with fewer errors (Elliott, 2005). The result for travelers could be a better overall customer service experience. The initiative systems usually include a training program for frontline agents and giving them broad authority to solve customer problems. The investment in new technology can help to prevent glitches like unconfirmed hotel reservations. Also, it prevents travel disasters: building e-mail notification systems that allow the agency to contact

customers when there is a weather delay, hotel closing or a flight rescheduling. The customer service initiatives also offer a human touch, with customer service representatives available by phone and e-mail 24 hours a day.

There are several important aspects of online customer service, which are speed, accuracy, completeness, accessibility, and automation, not necessarily in that order (Ray, 2004).

- Speed - People expect answers much quicker in the online world than in the offline world. Answer easy emails immediately, and if an answer will take longer to research, let the person know. The guests are waiting for a reply, so even if the staff email to say "We're checking" they are somewhat satisfied.

- Accuracy - A wrong answer quickly is ten times worse than the right answer 24 hours later (especially if the person providing the right answer wrote back right away to say they received the inquiry, were researching the answer, and would get right back with an answer). Incorrect answers lead to further inquiries, or worse, misinformed customers.

- Completeness - Almost as bad as a wrong answer is an incomplete answer. On the phone, if staff do not provide the complete answer, the customer will ask the rest of the question a second time, and the lack of a complete answer the first time will not usually result in a second call. In email, the lack of a complete answer results in a second email, effectively doubling the cost of replying.

- Accessibility - People must know how to ask a question in order to be able to get online customer service. Either an email address or a link to an inquiry form must be clearly accessible. Some people think that by hiding the contact info, they have to handle fewer inquiries. What actually happens is they handle the same amount of inquiries (or more), but they are usually dealing with people that are more frustrated or upset.

- Automation - This can be translated to, "answer their question before they ask it". It includes providing a way for the customer to lookup an information and order on the company's web site. If there is tracking or delivery confirmation, make the tracking number a link to the carriers tracking infrastructure so they can track it themselves. It is also sending the email to the customers to inform them when it is in the process of implementing and when the product is to be delivered. It is great if the customer inquiries can be answered with automation, however, this is the most expensive option or system to implement.

While communicating by telephone and mail is important, e-mail is part of the fabric of how people interact and companies often do not take this into account. As many small main businesses are offering a more personalized service, e-mail can be more personalized than large corporations are able to provide. Service and forum queries are typically handled by online businesses within 24 hours; rarely do weekends or holidays alter response rates (Housley, 2005). Customer demands and the “need” for instant answers have driven the standard. The customers want instant information and an immediate response. So, many companies provide 24-hour customer service. Importantly, the good “netiquette” (a combination of the word “net” and “etiquette”) shows respect for people whom staff do not know (Lehnert, 2002). It is especially important in online communication because the Internet encourages interactive communication between strangers. The netiquette guidelines which will be used as measurement criteria in this research can be categorized to promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism and promotional. (Table 2.3)

**Table 2.3** The standards to measure quality of e-mail reply

Promptness	Reply in 24 hours
Politeness	Use an appropriate salutation Thank the customers' interest Be careful with humor; avoid sarcasm
Personal approach	Address the customer by name Include sender's name in the message body Identify the employee's name
Professionalism	Never leave the subject field blank Reply in English and follow English norms Watch grammar and spelling Keep messages short and to the point Answer all the questions Avoid using attachments
Promotional	Identify the travel agent' name and contact address

Source: Adapted from Matzler et al. (2003), Frey et al. (2002), Murphy et al. (2003), Murphy and Tan (2003), and Lehnert (2002)

## 2.3 Related research

### 2.3.1 Travel agent services

A number of studies have focused on travel agent services, which are proposed by Wolfe et al. (2004), Cliff and Ryan (2002), Ozturan and Roney (2003), Saneetantikul (2003) Jansattum (2003) and Lubbe (1997). The first two researchers studied in a developed country, which are the United States of America and New Zealand. The other four researchers were conducted in emerging markets, which are Turkey, Thailand (2 studies) and South Africa. The results are different. In developing countries like America, half of Americans use the Internet to book and purchase travel products whereas in emerging countries like Turkey and Thailand, people rarely use the Internet as a medium to book the travel products. However, the results show the same thing which is customer service quality is one of the factors that affect customer decision to use a particular travel agent service.

A study on buyer characteristics among users of various travel intermediaries (Wolfe et al., 2004), which collected data from people who had used a travel agent and had booked travel arrangements online in United States of America. It showed that over half of the respondents had purchased travel related products (e.g. airline ticket, car rental reservation and hotel room reservation) through the Internet and almost three-fourths had used a travel agent for purchasing travel related products in the year 2003. There was little difference in expectations of travel agencies among travelers who purchased travel accommodations through different travel intermediaries like traditional travel agencies and online travel agencies as well as other travel companies (e.g. airlines, hotels and car rental agents). Moreover, it found that the travel agent clients relied more on their agent, especially for airline tickets. However, they did not book hotel accommodations and car rental services through a travel agent as often as airline tickets. The travelers who used only a travel agent were more focused on service, friendliness and travel knowledge of the agent. For current clients, traditional travel agencies should continue to focus on providing expert advice and friendly, personalized service. In addition, the level of customer service affects which travel agent is selected. There were some differences in their ratings of selection criteria. The respondents ratings of selection criteria of travel agencies are trustworthiness, quality service and ability in locating the cheapest fares and rates.

Moreover, a study on the gap between expectation and perception in New Zealand travel agencies (Cliff and Ryan, 2002) found that the clients are generally satisfied with the tangible components of the service and personal skills of employees, but are less satisfied with levels of reliability. Normally, the customer's perception are less than customer's expectation. The three greatest differences between guest perception and guest expectation are when the travel agent promise to do something by a certain time, it will do it, the travel agent will provide its services at the time it promise to do so and when the customers have a problem, the travel agent will show a sincere interest in solving it.

The study in emerging market is different from a developed country like the USA. As a study on Internet use among travel agencies in Turkey (Ozturan and Roney, 2003) shows that even though there is an increase in the use of the Internet, Turkish travel agencies use it simply as an additional mode of communication. The current emphasis is still on traditional marketing communication channels such as printed media and telephone.

Importantly, there are some studies focused on travel agent services in Thailand. A study on factors influencing customer purchasing decision for travel agencies of Muang District, Phuket Province (Saneetantikul, 2003), found that problems that the customers always face during and after service are, taking a long time, inflated prices, impolite and un knowledgeable staff. The top three customer recommendations are suggestion of tourist attractions, restaurants and souvenir shops to the customers, willing to service, trust and honest to the customers and can be contacted when customers want. Furthermore, most customers (68%) book the products and services through telephone and only 12 % book through the website and Internet.

Another study is very similar to the previous one, a study on factors influencing an international tourist's travel agent buying decision at Patong Beach, Phuket Province (Jansattum, 2003) found that the factors influencing customers decision making are discount rate, various payment methods offered, various trips and programs offered, staff's language competency and customer service. Moreover, 26 percent of the sample group never uses a travel agent service. The top three reasons are bad attitude (32%), inflated prices (27%) and feel that they can not trust travel agencies (21%).

Significantly, Lubbe (1997) studied a travel intermediary in South Africa. It showed how the travel agencies think about roles of travel agencies in the future. The majority of respondents, 56%, saw themselves as becoming travel management companies, with 27% believing that they would only provide travel advice and reservations. 11 %

thought that travel agencies would become irrelevant. 6% of the respondents saw themselves as catering for other segments of the market such as specializing in cruises or business travel.

### 2.3.2 E-commerce

E-commerce grows very fast and affects the ways to do business in almost all industries, in almost all countries. There are several studies focused on e-commerce, which are proposed by Chang (2003), Shankar et al. (2002), Sung (2004), and Efendioglu and Yip (2004). The studies are conducted in different parts of the world including Australia, United States of America, Korea-Japan and United States of America, and China, respectively. The results are very similar in that convenience or ease of access are the main reasons that the customers choose to purchase online. Interestingly, speed is the main factor influencing customer satisfaction on e-commerce in Asia countries like Korea and Japan but in the USA, speed is not the important factor.

The online medium is better than offline medium. As a study on online shopping advantages over the offline medium (Chang, 2003) has showed that the use of the Internet as a shopping medium provides more advantages to the shoppers over traditional shopping. Shopping on the Internet offers convenience and time-saving benefits to shoppers, as compared to shopping in traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Australian shoppers cited convenience as the leading reason to purchase online, followed by price and product selection. It was found that the Internet makes it easier for shoppers to compare prices between vendors. Online vendors offer the prices of their goods in their websites. Simply by viewing different vendor websites, shoppers are able to compare prices easily. Such behavior, might decrease the probability of increasing price competition in electronic market.

Interestingly, a study on customer satisfaction and loyalty in online and offline environments (Shankar et al., 2002) showed that loyalty has a stronger positive impact on overall satisfaction when customers make choices online and overall satisfaction had stronger positive impact on loyalty online than offline. At the same time, customers are more loyal when they choose a hotel online, and the relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty is also higher when the service is chosen online. The online medium offers more information and makes it easy for customers to access and use that information which also fosters loyalty to the service provider. It was suggested that people care more about the actual service received, which is no different whether the service is chosen online or offline.

Others have studied factors influencing customer satisfaction with e-commerce. Sung, (2004) compares three countries: Korea, Japan and the United States of America. It shows that to Korean respondents rate delivery of goods/services as the most critical success factor, followed by speed of the system and ease of use. Similarly to Korean, Japanese respondents perceive customer orientation as the most critical success factor, followed by speed of system, plenty of information and ease of use. In contrast to Korean and Japanese respondents, USA respondents evaluate plentiful information as the most critical success factor, followed by privacy of information, customer orientation and security of systems (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4** The most critical success factors among Korea, Japan and USA

Rank	Korea	Japan	USA
1	Delivery	Customer	Plenty
2	Speed	Speed	Privacy
3	Ease	Plenty	Customer
4	Customer	Ease	Security
5	Low price	Low price	Delivery
6	Variety	Variety	Variety

Source: Sung, 2004

Korean and Japanese perceived that service is evaluated as the least critical factor, followed by security and evaluation. However, USA respondents perceived that stability is the least critical factors. USA respondents also perceived that the speed is a less important factor whereas Korean and Japanese perceived that it is very critical (Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5** The least critical success factors among Korea, Japan and USA

Rank	Korea	Japan	USA
1	Service	Service	Stability
2	Security	Security	Evaluation
3	Evaluation	Evaluation	Speed

Source: Sung, 2004



Significantly, there is a study which identified the most popular items bought through e-commerce which is interesting. A study on e-commerce in China (Efendioglu and Yip, 2004) shows that convenience was identified as the most selected reason for conducting an online transaction, with price, delivery, and speed as being next three reasons with almost equal frequencies. The result also shows that the obstacles for the consumers, in the order of importance, were Internet security, lack of feel-and-touch associated with online purchases and problems in returning products. In addition, the most popular items that the respondent bought online was books (34.83%) followed by video-CD (26.39%) and travel (15.57%).

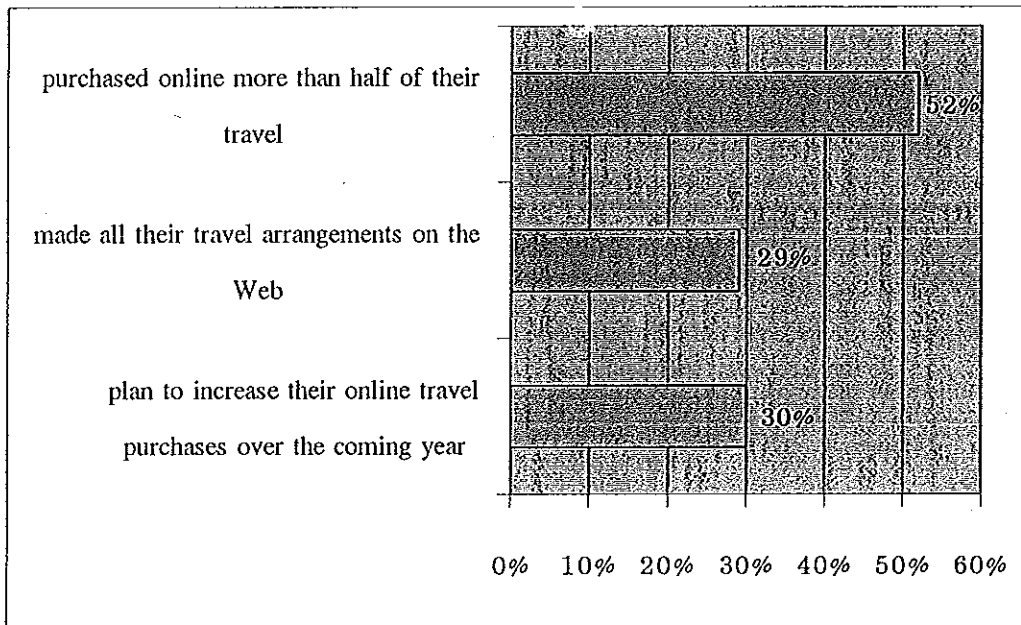
### 2.3.3 E-tourism

The fast growth of e-commerce led to a change in the tourism industry. A number of studies about e-tourism which are conducted by Garcles et al. (2004), CyberAtlas (2003), ComSource (2006), Buhalis and Licata (2001), and Heung (2003). The research was conducted in different countries including Spain, The United States of America (2 studies), United Kingdom and Hong Kong. It shows that e-tourism is growing and leads to an increased amount of spending. It also shows similar results that convenience or ease of use is the main reason to purchase travel online. Interestingly, the most serious barriers for the company are cost of implementation and a shortage of well-trained staff whereas the main obstacles for the consumers are Internet security, lack of feel-and-touch associated with online purchases and problems in returning products.

E-commerce brings benefits to the tourism industry. As Garcles et al (2004) studied the impact of electronic commerce (e-commerce) on the management of Spanish tourism, it showed the degree of importance of the company's reasons to adopt e-commerce. The most important reason is to increase the market size, followed by the desire to improve customer service and to use e-commerce as a marketing tool. The least important reason is to reduce costs. Regarding the perceived degree of difficulty in using e-commerce. The main difficulty is the customer's distrust to use electronic payment, followed by a slow connection to Internet, and consumer habits. The least important difficulty was an increase in sale costs and the unavailability of products and services to offer via Internet.

The growth of e-commerce leads to the rapid change of customers' purchasing behavior. The customers tend to book and purchase more travel online for example more than 50% of U.S. customers have purchased online more than half of their travel and 30% of customers plan to increase their online travel purchase over the year 2004 (Figure 2.3).

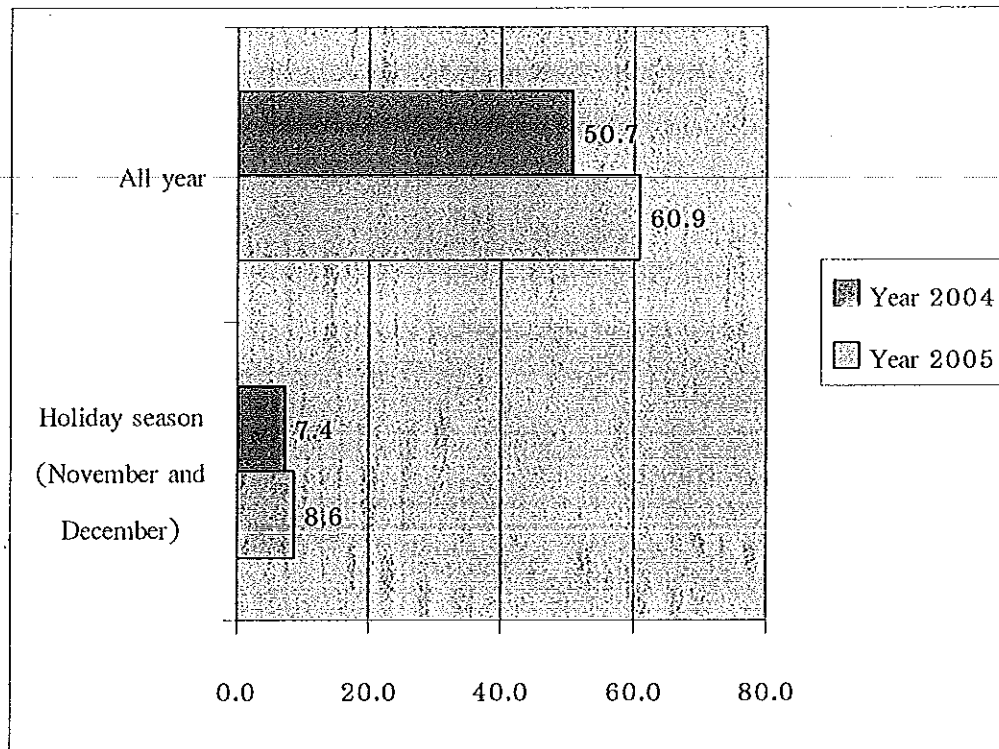
Figure 2.3 U.S. Customer decision to purchase travel online



Source: CyberAtlas, 2003.

The rapid change of people booking the travel and consuming the products more via online leads to the increase of customers spending over 60 billion U.S. Dollars in the year 2005 and increase more than 10 billion U.S. dollars from year 2004 (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 U.S. travel Online Consumer Spending, 2004 and 2005



Source: comScore, 2006

Interestingly, a study on eTourism intermediaries in the United Kingdom (Buhalis and Licata, 2001) shows that the advantages of Internet distribution for travel companies are greater flexibility and convenience, increased penetration and reach of customers base and lower distribution costs.

However, the Internet brings disadvantages, which are lack of human contact during the interaction and lack of face-to-face up-sell opportunities. Respondents felt that since online users do not have physical contacts with the actual seller, it is more difficult for the sellers to lead the customers to purchase more expensive or additional products.

Moreover, many respondents agreed that the traditional travel intermediaries will increasingly sell directly to the consumers and start distributing more than just travel products. The online travel agencies will also increasingly connect directly with travel suppliers, bypassing the GDS.

Other studies also show the benefits from purchasing online. The result is very similar to a previous study. A study on online travel purchases in Hong Kong (Kolsker et al., 2004) found that Hong Kong consumers are heavy users of the web and use

it for transactional as well as communication and recreation purposes. The respondents are most interested in the potential time saving offered by web-base shopping. Also, respondents indicate that the perceived ease of purchase is another important benefit, which attracts them online.

There is a deep-rooted reluctance to purchase airline tickets online, primarily because these are relatively highly involvement and high priced items. The researchers also conclude the online airlines and agents should attract the consumers by targeting the Hong Kong market with a clear value proposition which include online and offline customer support, price-related promotions and tailored offline service which reinforce online offerings.

However, although e-commerce brings several benefits, some companies still can not implement it. As a study on barriers to the company for implementing E-commerce in the travel industry (Heung, 2003) which is a study about travel agencies in Hong Kong found that the most serious barriers are cost of implementation, short of well-trained staff, security concerns, hard to manage travel data and lack of e-commerce education and training. The researcher also suggests that due to global business moving towards innovation and the development of advanced information technology to improve productivity, the travel agencies have to reposition their traditional retail role and change their ways of doing business.

#### 2.3.4 E-mail customer service

As e-mail is one of the common forms used in e-tourism, many studies have focused on e-mail customer service. The researchers are Matzler et al. (2003), Frey et al. (2002), Murphy et al. (2003) and Murphy and Tan (2003). The first three researches were conducted among the hotel industry. The first one was among Austrian hotels. The another two were related to Swiss hotel business. The last research was conducted among Singapore travel agencies. Although the studies are conducted in different businesses and various geographies, the results are very similar especially in the sense that e-mail customer service is poor and the researchers divided e-mail response characteristics by promptness, politeness and personal and professionalism.

There are many factors that effect service quality. A study on determinants of response to customer e-mail enquiries to hotels: evidence from Austria (Matzler et al.,

2003) is clearly showed that there is some difference between off-season and high season for two reasons. Firstly, in the high season fewer rooms are available. As a consequence, employees might put less priority to answering requested information. Secondly, high season probably causes more time related pressures and work overload for hotel staff. They may decided to decrease the workload by not answering the e-mail or may do not have to even checking e-mails. Hence, response rates are much lower in the high season (86.6% versus 77.7%).

Interestingly, e-mail response from both Austria and Swiss hotels has similar results. The response time and information depth of the answers depends on hotel size. Small hotels have low response rate, need more time to answer and depth of information in their answer is poor. As about 30% of the large Swiss hotels answer the inquiries but only 18% and 20% for medium and small Swiss hotels, respectively. On average, the small hotels in Australia needed 1.12 days to answer the e-mail request, compared to 0.81 days for medium-sized hotels and 0.92 for large hotels. Moreover, larger hotels answer to an average of 2.76 questions, medium-sized hotels to an average of 2.51 questions and small hotels to an average of 2.42. The e-mail address characteristic of Singapore travel agencies also affects the service quality. Travel agencies with branded e-mail addresses responded significantly more and had better quality response than agents without branded e-mail addresses (Murphy and Tan 2003).

The response rate within the hotel industry is quite high. The overall response rate in the Austrian hotel was 82.1% whereas the response rate in both Swiss hotel is 74% and 53 % percent. For the travel agent business, the response rate is low as only one in four agents or 25% truly answered the e-mailers' questions. Moreover, hotels reply sooner than travel agent industry.

However, the e-mail service quality is not based on only response rates, but also depends on promptness. The results show that some respondent inquiries had not been promptly or within 24 hours. More than 25% of the Austria hotels need more than 2 days to answer and 21% of Swiss hotels reply late and the last respond with the excuse, "Sorry, we are closed during the Easter day", arrived 11 days later. Nevertheless, the travel agent answers more late if compared with hotel industry, as only 32% of Singaporean travel agent respondents replied after 24 hours.

The e-mail responses do not meet the standard in the sense of politeness. Only 39 % of Austrian hotels opened e-mail with "Dear" and just two out of three or

33% of Swiss hotel replies began the e-mail with a proper salutation. Moreover, the percentage of replies that thanked the customers is low for Austria hotels which is only 47%. Interestingly, the result from e-mail customer service in the Swiss hotel industry shows that 12% used informal greetings like, greetings from hotel, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, good day, etc.

If considered in personal aspects, the reply from the hotel has less quality than the travel agencies' reply. The results from both Swiss hotels studies are similarly that nearly half of respondents forget to identify themselves whereas only 12% of Singaporean travel agencies forget to identify the employee's name. Nevertheless, the results of Swiss hotels shows that 67% addressed the customer by name and 78% identified the sender whereas 84% of Singaporean travel agencies addressed the potential customers by name.

Significantly, the travel agencies' answers are more professional than the hotels. 93% of Singapore travel agencies answered all questions whereas only 33.3% of Austrian hotels answered all the questions in the enquiry. In addition, nearly half or 42% of Singaporean travel agencies identified the agents but only 12% of Swiss hotel identified the hotel in e-mail message.

There are similar suggestions from the researchers. Murphy and Tan (2003) shows that there are poor management attitudes towards the Internet resulting in poor e-mail responses—better e-mail policies and training should give agents an immediate competitive advantage via improved e-service. Moreover, as a consequence of poor response behavior, guests might not only be lost for the hotels but also for the whole destination (Matzler et al., 2003). The destination management is required to intervene. It should try to encourage hotel managers to provide all the requested information on the destination and, for instance, forward requests to the local tourism office, which should subsequently be responsible to attract and satisfy the potential guest.

Murphy et al. (2003) also suggest that hotels should establish e-mail templates that use basic business communication procedures such as polite greetings thanking the recipient, addressing the recipient by name, answering the questions and identifying the sender and the hotel by name, postal code, phone and fax numbers, and website address.

As well as Frey et al. (2002) recommended that e-mail customer service for Swiss hotels should include addressing the question promptly and in a friendly manner, personalized salutations, thank the guests for their query, close politely and include hotel's

name, sender's name, contact details and position. The informal expressions such as hello should be avoided and attachments are discouraged as large attachments like company logo's which take time to download and are needless for inquiries. The study suggests that hotels can gain an immediate competitive advantage by implementing basic e-mail procedures and these recommendations for travel agent customer service also concerns the hotel customer service.

As mentioned above, Information technology is important in many aspects and critical in every business include tourism business. As tourism industry is the industry that depends heavily on finding and developing new means to distribute travel products and services while maintaining and increasing the comfort and convenience to travelers. IT supports all business functions and so the use of IT in tourism is famous. Importantly, IT drives the globalization and re-engineering of business processes, which leads to the rise in e-tourism; tourism businesses like tour operators, hotels, airlines and travel agencies which are involved in developing their Internet services.

One of the important tools in use in e-tourism is e-mail. E-mail customer service is much more difficult than offline customer service as it is a faceless communication and lack of human touch. Moreover, the staff might not be familiar with the new technology especially in Thailand. These reasons lead to low service quality in e-mail reply in any countries. However, there is no research conducted and the e-mail customer service quality is still questionable in Thailand. Therefore, this research attempts to study about e-mail customer service quality in Thailand.

The researcher selected the travel agencies for three reasons. Firstly, the travel industry is one of the largest industries in Thailand. So, many travel agencies opened to service and satisfy the travelers. Secondly, although the customers can make travel choices online, they still can use the service offline. Then, it can compare between both online and offline. Lastly, the travel agent is a part of service industry which offers intangible products which are customer oriented. It is more difficult to provide a service which meets the standard and exceeds customers' satisfaction.

In this research, the researcher will assess the prevalence of e-mail customer service among Thai travel agencies. The researcher also intends to study e-mail customer service behavior and problems of Thai travel agencies. Moreover, the researcher will study and compare the response rate and e-mail response quality between three main aspects. This included the comparison between the service of foreign and Thai customers, the comparison

between the agencies with branded and the agencies non branded e-mail and lastly, the comparison by using location of travel agencies. Then, making recommendations to improve e-mail customer service of Thai travel agencies.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is the survey method to collect data. In this chapter, researcher presents the methodology as follow:

- 3.1 Population
- 3.2 Sample size
- 3.3 Data collection
- 3.4 Statistics used in this research
- 3.5 Research design and implementation

#### 3.1 Population

The total travel agency in Thailand was 5,968 travel agencies. However, the target population of this study refers to Thai travel agencies who provide e-mail service. According to Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office, 2005, the total amount was 2,258 travel agencies as presented in the following table (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1** The proportion of population by region

Region	A number of sample	Percentage
Bangkok and central	1266	56.07
South	744	32.95
North	206	9.12
Northeast	42	1.86
Total	2258	100.00

Source: Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office, 2005

### 3.2 Sample size

As the researcher expected that travel agencies' response rate was very low, the researcher took the entire number of the population to be the sample size. However, e-mails were sent to the travel agencies twice; one from mystery guests posing as Thai customers and another one from mystery guest posing as a foreign customer.

### 3.3 Data collection

#### 3.3.1 Primary Data:

3.3.1.1 Data were collected from travel agencies in Thailand by the use of "mystery guest" approach. This technique was adopted by sending e-mails under alias names, posing as a potential customer of the travel agency and inquiring specific travel itineraries.

3.3.1.2 Evaluate e-mail quality by the use of focus groups.

3.3.1.3 Direct interview in supplement to 3.3.1.1.

#### 3.3.2 Secondary data:

Collect information about travel agencies in Thailand from books, journals and Internet.

### 3.4 Statistics Used in this research

3.4.1 A frequency is the condition of occurring repeatedly at short interval.

3.4.2 Mean is generally used to measure a central location for the purpose of statistical inference.

3.4.3 Standard Deviation is one of widely used measures of the variability of a set of quantitative data and that is the positive square root of the variance of the observation.

3.4.4 Correlation Coefficient is used to analyze the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. If the result is equal to 1, it means that the variables have a very close relationship.

3.4.5 Pearson Chi-square is the most common test for significance of the relationship between two or more than two categorical variables for ordinal and interval scale. Interpretation of the result was done at 5% level of significance or 95% confidence level.

3.4.6 Analysis of variance: ANOVA is used to analyze the difference between the independent variables that have more than two sub-variables for nominal scales. It was done at 90%, 95% and 99% confidence intervals.

### 3.5 Research design and Implementation

3.5.1 The “mystery guest” approach was adopted by sending e-mails under alias names, posing as a potential customer of the travel agency and inquiring specific travel itineraries. Two different e-mails were sent to all known Thai travel agencies who have provided e-mail addresses in the database of Bangkok Tourist Business And Guide Register Office by using blind carbon copy (Bcc). The e-mail inquiries were sent on different days from different e-mail addresses, one with a foreign name (Figure 3.1) and another with a Thai name (Figure 3.2), in order to test, among other things, the anecdotal evidence that foreigners in the country tend to get better customer service. The questions and requirements in e-mail inquiries that were sent to all Thai travel agencies include follows:

- The price of air tickets from Swiss Airlines
- Comparing the ticket price between Swiss, other Star Alliance airlines and other cheaper airlines
- The various choices of package tours for 3 or 4 days

Figure 3.1 E-mail inquiry from a foreign customer

To: Thai travel agency  
From: Natassja Freytag (natassja.freytag@gmail.com)  
Subject: Inquiry

Hi,

I live in Thailand and I am looking to fly to Geneva, Switzerland with my family and would like to enquire about two-ways air ticket price for the whole family. My husband and two kids, 13 and 10 years old will be going. We would like to fly on economy class, departing from Bangkok in the beginning of May 2006 and coming back from Geneva approximately 2 weeks later. I prefer to fly with Swiss, or with Star Alliance, but the price is also very important. Could you tell me the best price you can give on the air tickets?

Also, my daughters and I would like to go to Disneyland, Hong Kong. I am looking for 3 or 4 days package tour to Hong Kong at the end of June for one adult and two kids. Please suggest me the most interesting program with reasonable price. However, I will appreciate if you recommend me different choices.

Thank you for your efforts,

Natassja Freytag

**Figure 3.2** E-mail inquiry from a Thai customer

To: Thai travel agency  
From: Oranat Wongpaisarn (orاناتw@gmail.com)  
Subject: Asking about tickets and package tours

I am Thai and live in Bangkok. I will go to Geneva in Switzerland with my family for 2-3 weeks. I will go about 1 May 2006. There are 4 people in my family: my husband, 2 sons with age 15 and 9 years and I. I want to know the price for round tickets, in economy class. I have limited budget but still want to fly with the best airline. I prefer Swiss airline or with Star alliance airlines. Tell me the options and the best price that you have. My relatives (25, 18 and 10 years) also want to go to Disneyland, Hong Kong at the end of June. They will go for 3 to 4 days. They want to know about the interested tour programs and price. Tell me the options and the best price you have.

Thanks,  
Oranat Wongpaisarn.

The standards to measure quality of e-mail reply were adapted from Matzler et al. (2003), Frey et al. (2002), Murphy et al. (2003), Murphy and Tan (2003), and Lehnert (2002) as mentioned in table 2.3. It was divided to five main dimensions: promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism (informative content and answer presentation sub-dimensions) and promotional (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 The standards to measure quality of e-mail response

Dimensions	Items	Criteria
Promptness	Reply in 24 hours	Within hours; 25-48 hours; 49-72 hours; 73-96 hours; over 97 hours
Politeness	Use an appropriate salutation	Not use salutation; Use informal salutation (e.g. hi, hello); Use formal salutation (e.g. dear)
	Thank the customers' interest	Not thank the customer; Thank the customer
	Politely close	Not close at all; Close but not politely (e.g. thanks); Politely close (e.g. best regards, sincerely yours)
	Be careful with humor; avoid sarcasm	Use sarcasm; Not use sarcasm
Personal approach	Address the customer by name	Not address by name; Address the wrong name; Address the correct name
	Identify the employee's name	Not identify; Identify informal name (nickname only); Identify formal name (full name)
Professionalism (Informative)	Answer air ticket question	Not answer this question at all; Not do this service; Not do this service but recommend other agents; Promise to answer later; Ask clarifying questions; Answer the question
	Various choices of airlines	1 airline; 2 airlines; 3 airlines; 4 airlines; 5 airlines
	Offer Swiss airline	Not offer; Offer

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Dimensions	Items	Criteria
	Offer Star Alliance airlines	Not offer; Offer 1 airline; Offer 2 airlines; Offer 3 airlines
	Offer other Cheaper airlines	Not offer; Offer 1 airline; Offer 2 airlines; Offer 3 airlines
	Ticket price recommendation	Child only; Adult only; Both child and adult
	Air ticket answer's quality	Offer 1 information; Offer 2 information; Offer 3 information
	Air ticket price answer's quality	
	# Air ticket price	Not inform; Inform approximately price; Inform exact price
	# Tax charge	Not inform; Inform approximately price; Inform exact price
	# Total price	Not inform; Inform approximately price; Inform exact price
	Offer the tour program	Not offer; Offer but not related; Offer related program
	Answer tour program question	Not answer this question at all; Not do this service; Not do this service but recommend others agent; Promise to answer later; Ask clarifying questions; Answer the question
	Various choices of packages	1 package; 2 packages; 3 packages

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Dimensions	Items	Criteria
	Package price recommendation	Child only; Adult only; Both child and adult
	Various choices of packages	1 package; 2 packages; 3 packages
	Package tour answer's quality	Offer 1 information; Offer 2 information; Offer 3 information
	Package tour recommendation	Child only; Adult only; Both child and adult
Professionalism	Never leave the subject field blank	Leave the subject blank; Not related subject; Related subject
	Reply in English	Thai only; Combination of English and Thai; English only
(Answer presentation)	Watch grammar and spelling	Poor (over 5 spelling and grammar errors); Fair(3-4 spelling and grammar errors); Good(1-2 spelling and grammar errors)
	Not use attachment	Use attachment; Not use attachment
	Provide additional relevant information	Not provide additional relevant information; Provide additional relevant information



Table 3.2 (Continued)

Dimensions	Items	Criteria
	Avoid abbreviation	Use abbreviation; Not use abbreviation
	Avoid replying in capital letter	Reply in capital letter; Not reply in capital letter
	Include original e-mail	Not include original e-mail; Include original e-mail
	Offer further assistance	Not offer further assistance; Offer further assistance
Promotional	Identify the travel agent's name	Not identify agent's name; Identify agent's name
	Identify the contact address	Identify only 1 address (postal address, telephone No. or website only)
		Identify 2 addresses; Identify 3 addresses

Apart from those criteria, the points for each aspect and overall impression were considered. The points shown level of quality and could divided to 5 scales: very poor(1), poor(2), fair(3), good(4) and excellent(5). This part could not be done by the researcher only as it would subjective. However, the people and time were limited. The evaluation could not be done by using a large group of people. Therefore, focus groups were formed to evaluate the e-mail quality.

There were two different focus groups. For the first group, the researcher brought eight people together and discussed about the weight or the importance of each dimension towards e-mail responses. For the second focus group, it consisted of six members. The members discussed and evaluated the point for each aspect (promptness, politeness, personal approach, informative content, answer presentation and promotional) for every e-mail responses. Every member made an evaluation based on the same criteria as mentioned in table 3.2. There were 5 scales or 5 points for each aspect (Table 3.5). The overall impression point, it was calculated from 6 aspects (promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism: informative content, professionalism: answer presentation and promotional) for the agencies that offered both international ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong. Differently, it was calculated from 5 aspects (promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism: answer presentation and promotional) for the agencies who did not offer both international ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong. The calculation for overall impression was not the sum of points of each aspect only, but also considering the weight of importance level as mentioned in table 3.3 and 3.4.

Table 3.3 The scales for evaluation e-mail response quality

Dimension	Evaluation scales
Promptness	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Politeness	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Personal approach	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Professionalism: Informative content	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Professionalism: Answer presentation	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Promotional	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent
Overall impression	1=Very poor; 2=Poor; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent

3.5.2 Interview method would be done through 30 travel agency owners, managers or staff in Bangkok, Phuket and Krabi. The interview would be focused on company background, e-mail response behavior, problems and recommendations. The interview questions were as follow:

- Do you have website? If not, do you have a plan to use website? Do you have "Contact us" form in your website or not?
- How do you advertise you online business?
- Do you use e-mail as business communication to the customers? If not, do u have a plan to use e-mail?
- How many e-mail address that you have? Is it branded e-mail?
- Why you use branded e-mail (or non branded e-mail)?
- How long that you use e-mail?
- Why do you use e-mail? What are main benefits of using e-mail as business communication to the customers?
- How often do you answer e-mail? Do you answer all e-mail or select some? Why?
- How many people in your company? How many people responsible for answering e-mail?
- How many e-mails booking per day or per week? What percentage from all sales? Is it worth? Why?

- Do you have standard or template to answer e-mail?
- What kind of language that you use to answer e-mail? Thai? English?

Formal? Informal? Why?

- Do you provide relevant information to the customer or just answer what they ask? Why?

- How can you make sure that the customer satisfied with your service via e-mail? How can evaluate?

- Is there any complaint about e-mail response from the customers? What is it about? What is your solution?

- What is your e-mail or online plan in the future?

- What are the problems of e-mail customer service? How to improve the service quality?

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This research aims to study the prevalence rate of e-mail usage for customer service and customer service's behavior among Thai travel agencies by using a "mystery guest" approach. Moreover, interviews were carried out to study problems in e-mail customer service of Thai travel agencies. In this chapter, the researcher presented results as follow:

#### 4.1 The prevalence of e-mail customer service

#### 4.2 The customer service's behavior among Thai travel agencies

##### 4.2.1 Comparison e-mail quality by customers

##### 4.2.2 Comparison e-mail quality by e-mail characteristic

##### 4.2.3 Comparison e-mail quality by location

#### 4.3 The problems in e-mail customer service for Thai travel agencies (results of the direct interviews)

#### 4.1 The prevalence of e-mail customer service

Thai travel agencies were located in every part of Thailand (Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office, 2005). The number of agencies may vary depending on tourism's growth and the popularity of tourist destination in each region. Thailand is categorized into 4 main regions: central (included Bangkok: capital city of Thailand), south, north and northeast. Almost all travel agencies were located in the famous provinces like Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Suratthani and Chiang mai. These provinces were in the central, southern and northern regions. Therefore, the number of agencies in these three regions was quite high. Nearly half (48%) of travel agencies were located in Bangkok and the central part of Thailand. Many travel agencies, which were about 38% and 12% also located in southern and northern regions. For the northeast region, there was not a famous tourism destination and less tourism growth. Therefore, the number of agencies in that region was low, only 2% (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Location of Thai travel agencies (Categories by region)

Region	No. of travel agencies	Percentage
Bangkok and central	2847	47.69
South	2274	38.09
North	711	11.91
Northeast	138	2.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>5970</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office, 2005

According to the database of Thai Tourism Authorities or Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office (2005), Thai travel agencies had e-mail addresses of only 38% or 2258 from 5970 travel agencies. However, some travel agencies may simply not announce an e-mail address to the Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office. If categorized by region, the results also depended on the tourism's growth in that area. The travel agencies in Bangkok and central region offered e-mail customer service the most in Thailand, at 44%. However, the travel agencies in south, north and northeast region had very similar number of e-mail addresses, approximately three in ten (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 A number of Thai travel agencies that have e-mail address

Region	E-mail address		Not have e-mail address		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bangkok and Central	1266	44.46	1581	55.53	2847	100.00
South	744	32.72	1530	67.28	2274	100.00
North	206	28.97	505	71.03	711	100.00
Northeast	42	30.43	96	69.57	138	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>37.82</b>	<b>3712</b>	<b>62.18</b>	<b>5970</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Although 38% of travel agencies used e-mail as a business tool, only one in four of them used branded e-mail addresses (e.g. info@TravelAgencyName.com). This number was quite low. It was probably because of using branded email was much more costly. So, only large travel agencies used it. Out of 1266 travel agencies, only 364

agencies in Bangkok and central used branded e-mail. Nearly one in four agencies in the south used branded e-mail address and only 7% for north and northeast region (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3** A number of Thai travel agencies that have branded e-mail address

Region	Branded e-mail		Non Branded e-mail		Total e-mail	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Bangkok and Central	364	28.75	902	71.25	1266	100.00
South	178	23.92	568	76.08	744	100.00
North	14	6.80	192	93.20	206	100.00
Northeast	3	7.14	39	92.86	42	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>24.76</b>	<b>1701</b>	<b>75.24</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>100.00</b>

For the travel agencies that did not use branded e-mail, nearly half of them used the most popular domain name which was Hotmail, followed by Yahoo (14%) and Loxinfo (8%). However, one-third of Thai travel agencies also used other e-mail domain names like Samart, Ksc, Chaiyo, Ego, Asia net, Thaimail and Lemononline (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4** A number of Thai travel agencies that do not use branded e-mail address

Region	Hotmail		Yahoo		Loxinfo		Others		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Bangkok and Central	343	38.03	126	13.97	74	8.20	359	39.80	902	100.00
South	310	54.58	81	14.26	38	6.69	139	24.47	568	100.00
North	98	51.04	29	15.10	18	9.38	47	24.48	192	100.00
Northeast	20	51.28	10	25.64	0	0.00	9	23.08	39	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>45.33</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>14.46</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>7.64</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>32.57</b>	<b>1701</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Although the e-mail inquiry was sent to all travel agencies; 2258 agencies, about 31 percent was bounced back due to the technical problems and wrong e-mail addresses. If categorized by characteristic of e-mail address, only about 18 percent of e-mail was bounced back for branded e-mail address and nearly one in three was bounced back for non branded e-mail address. This was probably because the agencies where used

to using non branded e-mail addresses had changed to use website and branded e-mails (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5** A number of bounced back e-mails (categorized by characteristic of e-mail)

Type of e-mail	Sent e-mail		Bounced back e-mail		Percentage of bounced back e-mail from sent e-mail
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Branded e-mail	559	24.76	100	14.47	17.89
Non branded e-mail	1699	75.24	591	85.53	34.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30.60</b>

If categorized by region, the e-mails of the travel agencies that were located in northern region were bounced back the most: approximately 41 percent. Additionally, the e-mails from the travel agencies that located in southern part were bounced back only about one in five (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6** A number of bounced back e-mails (categorized by region)

Location	Sent e-mail		Bounced back e-mail		Percentage of bounced back e-mail from sent e-mail
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Bangkok and central	1266	56.07	429	62.08	33.89
South	744	32.95	163	23.59	21.91
North	206	9.12	84	12.16	40.78
Northeast	42	1.86	15	2.17	35.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30.60</b>



#### 4.2 The customer service's behavior among Thai travel agencies

It could be divided to three main comparisons: comparison of e-mail quality by customers (foreign and Thai customers), comparison of e-mail quality by e-mail characteristics (branded and non branded e-mails) and comparison of e-mail quality by location (Bangkok and central, south, north and northeast regions).

##### 4.2.1 Comparison e-mail quality by customers

Two different e-mail inquiries were sent to all known Thai travel agencies who provided an e-mail address in the database of Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office. The first email inquiry was under a German alias name and another was under a Thai alias name. However, many of them were bounced back due to wrong e-mail addresses or technical problems. Only 3134 e-mails inquiries that successfully sent. Out of 3134 e-mail inquiries, only 230 e-mail responses; 122 responses were answered foreign and 108 responses were answered Thai customers. The response rate was not very different between foreign and Thai customers and it was not considered as being different statistically significant at 90%, of confidence interval (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 E-mail response rate (Comparison between Foreign and Thai e-mail)

Customer type	Successfully sent e-mail		Response e-mail	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Foreign	1567	100.00	122	7.78
Thai	1567	100.00	108	6.89
Total	3134	100.00	230	7.34
P-value	0.373			

To evaluate the response quality, the requirements of a good answer were divided in several dimensions, as follows: (1) *Promptness*: Reply within 24 hours; (2) *Politeness*: Use of an appropriate salutation, Thank the customers' interest, Close politely, Be careful with humor, Avoid sarcasm; (3) *Personal approach*: Address the customer by name, Identify the employee's name; (4) *Professionalism*: (4.1) *Information content*:

Answer air ticket question, Various choices of airlines, Offer Swiss airline, Offer Star Alliance airlines, Offer other Cheaper airlines, Air ticket answer's quality, Answer tour program question, Offer the tour program, Various choices of packages, Types of package, Package tour answer's quality; (4.2) *Answer presentation*: Never leave the subject field blank, Reply in English, Watch grammar and spelling, Do not use attachment, Volunteer relevant information, Avoid abbreviation, Avoid replying in capital letters, Include original e-mail, Offer further assistance; and (5) *Promotional*: Identify the travel agency's name, Identify the contact address and lastly, *Overall impression*.

For the promptness dimension, about half of e-mails to both foreign and Thai customers were responded to within 24 hours or 1 day. However, in general, Thai travel agencies took more time to answer inquiries to foreign customer (2.52 days) than Thai customers (1.69 days). The longest time that the agencies took to answer e-mail to foreign customers was only 5 days but for Thai customers, the agency took 14 days. Additionally, Chi-square test was performed to determine whether differences in response times between Thai and foreign customers were significant. It was considered significantly different at 95% of confidence interval (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 E-mail response time (Comparison between Foreign and Thai e-mail)

Response time	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Within 24 hours	64	52.46	63	58.33	127	55.22
25-48 hours	19	15.57	27	25.00	46	20.00
49-72 hours	15	12.30	14	12.96	29	12.61
73-96 hours	9	7.38	2	1.85	11	4.78
97-120 hours	5	4.10	0	0.00	5	2.17
121-144 hours	2	1.64	0	0.00	2	0.87
145-168 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
169-192 hours	2	1.64	2	1.85	4	1.74
193-216 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
217-240 hours	1	0.82	0	0.00	1	0.43

Table 4.8 (Continued)

Response time	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
241-264 hours	3	2.46	0	0.00	3	1.30
265-288 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
289-312 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
213-336 hours	2	1.64	0	0.00	2	0.87
Total	122	100.00	108	100.00	230	100.00
Mean (days)	2.52		1.69		2.13	
P-value	0.034*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the significantly different at  $p \leq 0.05$

For the politeness dimension, there was not much different between Thai and foreign customers. Approximately three in four travel agencies used formal salutation, which was "dear". Of 230 responses, about 30 agencies used informal salutation like "hi", "hello" and "to". About 30 percent of all responses did not use any salutation at all. Only half of responses thanked the customers. The majority of responses (over 60 percent) closed politely by using formal words such as, "best regards", "kind regards" and "sincerely yours". About one in five closed with informal words for example, thank you, all the best, await your reply soonest and hope to hear from you again. Some responses (16 percent) did not close politely at all. Almost all inquiry responses answered politely. However, it was surprising that about one in hundred used an expletive. The difference was not considered to be statistically significant at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in the politeness aspect between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9** E-mail quality in politeness dimension (Comparison between Foreign and Thai e-mail)

Politeness dimension	Foreigner		Thai		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
<b>Use an appropriate salutation</b>							
Formal	88	72.13	81	75.00	169	73.48	
Informal	19	15.57	16	14.80	35	13.48	
Not use	15	12.30	11	10.20	26	13.04	
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.856						
<b>Thanks for the customer interest</b>							
Yes	65	53.28	49	45.37	114	49.57	
No	57	46.72	59	54.63	116	50.43	
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.231						
<b>Politely close</b>							
Formal	81	66.39	61	56.48	142	61.74	
Informal	26	21.31	26	24.07	52	22.61	
Not close	15	12.30	21	19.44	36	15.65	
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.226						
<b>Avoid sarcasm</b>							
Yes	121	99.18	107	99.07	228	99.13	
No	1	0.82	1	0.93	2	0.87	
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.931						

For the personal approach dimension, there was not much different between Thai and foreign customers. About 47 percent of responses addressed the foreign customer by using correct name and 60 percent addressed the correct name of Thai customers. Of 230 responses, 36 responses addressed the wrong name included missed spelling and addressed other names, not the guests' name. Moreover, over a quarter did not address the customers by name at all. One-fourth of responses has mentioned employees' full name. Half of responses had mentioned only a nickname and 20 percent of employees did not identify the name at all. Significantly, as analyzed by Chi-square, the difference was considered as not being statistically significant at 90% of confidence interval. So, there was no difference in personal aspect between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10 E-mail quality in personal approach dimension (Comparison between Foreign and Thai e-mail)

Personal dimension	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Address the customer by name</b>						
Name	57	46.72	65	60.19	122	53.04
Wrong name	22	18.03	15	13.89	37	16.09
No	43	35.25	28	25.93	71	30.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.124					
<b>Identify the employees' name</b>						
Formal	31	25.41	30	27.78	61	26.52
Informal	65	53.28	53	49.07	118	51.30
No	26	21.31	25	23.15	51	22.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.816					

For the professionalism dimension, it was divided to 2 sub-dimensions: informative content and answer presentation. For informative content aspect, the results were similar. About half responses answered the first question, which was about an air

ticket to Switzerland. Fifteen out of a hundred promised to answer later but there was still no answer. Interestingly, one in ten responses asked clarifying questions like telephone number, exact names for the whole family and exact date of departure. About 14 percent of responses did not offer an air ticket booking service and only 4 percent recommended to other travel agencies. Out of 230 responses, 17 responses did not mention the air ticket question at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi-square, any difference was not considered as being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. So, there was no difference in answering the air ticket question between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11** E-mail quality in answering air ticket question (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Nature of respond	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Answer the question	66	54.10	57	52.78	123	53.48
Promise to answer later	20	16.39	13	12.04	33	14.35
Ask clarifying questions	13	10.66	9	8.33	22	9.57
Recommend to others	4	3.28	4	3.70	8	3.48
Not do	12	9.84	15	13.89	27	11.74
No answer at all	7	5.74	10	9.26	17	7.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.717					

Although the travel agencies responded better to a foreign than Thai customers, the agencies offered more choices of airline to the Thai customers. The average of choices that were offered to Thai customers was about 2.43 airlines whereas for foreign customer was only 1.82 airlines. However, four in ten of e-mail responses to both Thai and foreigner offered only 1 airline. Chi-square was performed to determine whether differences were significant in numbers of airline choices between foreign and Thai customers. The difference was considered as being statistically significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in the sense of airlines' choices between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12** A number of airlines offered in e-mails (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Various choices of airlines	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 airline	32	48.48	23	40.35	55	44.72
2 airlines	19	28.79	18	31.58	37	30.08
3 airlines	11	16.67	12	21.05	23	18.70
4 airlines	3	4.55	2	3.51	5	4.07
5 airlines	1	1.52	1	1.75	2	1.63
6 airlines	0	0.00	1	1.75	1	0.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean	1.82		2.43		1.90	
P-value	0.836					

The inquiries regarding air ticket price to Switzerland by Swiss airline, approximately half of the responses mentioned Swiss airline. Out of 122 inquiry responses to foreign customers, only 62 responses mentioned a Swiss air ticket price whereas 52 travel agencies from 108 e-mail inquiry responses to Thai customers offered Swiss airline. The inquiry also asked for ticket price by other Star Alliance airlines and about 30 responses offered other Star Alliance airlines. Out of all responses airlines, about 18 percent of them offered Austrian airline. Some travel agencies offered cheaper airlines as required. Over half of responses to Thai customers mentioned Etihad airline. Significantly, based on calculation by using Chi square method, it was not considered as being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in the sense of airlines offered to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13 The airlines offered in e-mail (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Airline offered	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Swiss airline</b>						
Offered Swiss	62	93.94	52	91.23	114	92.68
Not offered Swiss	4	6.06	5	8.77	9	7.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.57					
<b>Other Star Alliance airlines</b>						
Offered Star Alliance	29	43.94	32	56.14	61	49.59
#Lufthansa	8	12.12	8	14.04	16	13.01
#Austrian	12	18.18	11	19.30	23	18.70
#Thai	1	1.52	2	3.51	3	2.44
#Lufthansa and Thai	1	1.52	0	0.00	1	0.81
#Lufthansa and Austrian	4	6.06	5	8.77	9	7.32
#Lufthansa and Scandinavian	3	4.55	2	3.51	5	4.07
#Thai and Scandinavian	0	0.00	2	3.51	2	1.63
#Austrian, Thai and Lufthansa	0	0.00	2	3.51	2	1.63
<b>Not offered Star Alliance</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>56.06</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>47.37</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>50.41</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.495					



Table 4.13 (Continued)

Airline offered	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Other cheaper airlines</b>						
Offered cheaper airlines	17	25.76	13	22.81	30	24.39
#China	4	6.06	1	1.75	5	4.07
#Etihad	3	4.55	7	12.28	10	8.13
#Eva	1	1.52	0	0.00	1	0.81
#Turkish	4	6.06	2	3.51	6	4.88
#Jordan	2	3.03	1	1.75	3	2.44
#Etihad and Kuwait	1	1.52	1	1.75	2	1.63
#Etihad and Turkish	2	3.03	0	0.00	2	1.63
#Etihad and China	0	0.00	1	1.75	1	0.81
Not offered cheaper airlines	49	74.24	44	77.19	93	75.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.428					

In response to e-mails inquiring about air tickets, a good travel agency should provide all useful information including price, condition and flight schedule. However, the majority of e-mail responses, about 60 percent mentioned the price only. One-fifth mentioned both prices and conditions. The conditions such as, this fare is effective on 1 January 2006, rebooking is permitted without charge and all fares are subject to change without prior notice. Only 11 out of 123 responses mentioned price, condition and flight schedule. Interestingly, it was not considered as being different, (statistically significant at 90% of confidence interval). Then, there was no difference in air ticket answer's quality between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14 Air ticket answer quality (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Air ticket answer's quality	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Price only	40	60.61	37	64.91	77	62.6
Price with condition	18	27.27	8	14.04	26	21.14
Price and flight schedule	3	4.55	6	10.53	9	7.32
Price with condition and flight schedule	5	7.58	6	10.53	11	8.94
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.22					

The ticket price consists of two main parts; air ticket price only and tax charge. However, over half of inquiry responses did not mention air ticket price and tax charge and only seven in ten responses offered the exact price (Which was the sum of the ticket price and tax charge). Although the inquiry asked for the ticket price for both adult and child, some responses, about 13 percent still offered the price for adult only. The results for foreign and Thai customers were very similar and it was not considered as being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15 Air ticket answer information quality (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Price information	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Air ticket price information</b>						
Exact price	26	39.39	14	24.56	40	32.52
Approximately price	1	1.52	2	3.51	3	2.44
Not mention	39	59.09	41	71.93	80	65.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.188					

Table 4.15 (Continued)

Price information	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Tax charge information</b>						
Exact price	17	25.76	11	19.3	28	22.76
Approximately price	6	9.09	3	5.26	9	7.32
Not mention	43	65.15	43	75.44	86	69.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.441					
<b>Total price information</b>						
Exact price	43	65.15	41	71.93	84	68.29
Approximately price	4	6.06	3	5.26	7	5.69
Not mention	19	28.79	13	22.81	32	26.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.719					
<b>Ticket offering</b>						
Adult only	7	10.61	9	15.79	16	13.01
Adult and child	59	89.39	48	84.21	107	86.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.394					

In general, the product and service that was offered to foreign customers will be more expensive than Thai. However, the air ticket price that the travel agencies offered to foreign and Thai customers was no difference (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16 Air ticket price (Comparison between foreign and Thai customers)

Airline	Type	Customer	Frequency	Percentage	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Swiss airline	Adult	Foreign	58	53.21	40490	45170	41838	1137.26
		Thai	51	46.79	39300	49300	41812	1764.1
	Child	Foreign	54	56.84	26250	35800	32906	1448.31
		Thai	41	43.16	30075	39300	33300	1740.51
Lufthansa airline	Adult	Foreign	18	51.43	41235	46800	44202	1296.46
		Thai	17	48.57	39900	46800	43982	1796.10
	Child	Foreign	17	56.67	31496	37600	35372	1521.37
		Thai	13	43.33	30700	37750	35388	1935.58
Thal airways	Adult	Foreign	4	40.00	47500	54000	49266	3162.15
		Thai	6	60.00	48065	61000	52263	4641.96
	Child	Foreign	4	50.00	37300	42600	38704	2598.79
		Thai	4	50.00	39495	42400	40576	1272.12
Austrian airline	Adult	Foreign	16	47.06	38200	41800	39798	1057.61
		Thai	18	52.94	37900	42305	39975	1473.72
	Child	Foreign	15	51.72	30800	33800	32067	837.24
		Thai	14	48.28	30600	34305	32410	1288.67
Scandinavian airline	Adult	Foreign	2	28.57	50300	50770	50535	332.34
		Thai	5	71.43	44200	51000	48805	3002.73
	Child	Foreign	3	42.86	40400	41000	44010	6054.61
		Thai	4	57.14	35260	41000	39465	2806.11
China airline	Adult	Foreign	4	57.14	38615	39700	38894	537.69
		Thai	3	42.86	23900	39945	31125	1018.23
	Child	Foreign	4	66.67	26711	33250	29942	2778.49
		Thai	2	33.33	30405	31845	31125	1018.23
Etihad airline	Adult	Foreign	7	43.75	28800	32200	29979	1072.23
		Thai	9	56.25	29260	31750	30461	820.45

Table 4.16 (Continued)

Airline	Type	Customer	Frequency	Percentage	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Child	Foreign	5	41.67	22300	41500	27280	8075.29
		Thai	7	58.33	23750	28270	25053	1603.56
Eva airline	Adult	Foreign	1	100.00	33500	33500	33500	0.00
		Thai	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00
	Child	Foreign	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00
		Thai	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00
Kuwait airline	Adult	Foreign	1	50.00	24200	24200	24200	0.00
		Thai	1	50.00	24200	24200	24200	0.00
	Child	Foreign	1	50.00	19200	19200	19200	0.00
		Thai	1	50.00	19200	19200	19200	0.00
Turkish airline	Adult	Foreign	5	83.33	29020	41000	34800	4413.86
		Thai	1	16.67	29020	29020	29020	0.00
	Child	Foreign	2	66.67	23420	26400	24910	2107.18
		Thai	1	33.33	23420	23420	23420	0.00
Jordan airline	Adult	Foreign	2	66.67	31830	32500	32165	473.76
		Thai	1	33.33	32500	32500	32500	0.00
	Child	Foreign	2	66.67	26500	27080	26790	410.12
		Thai	1	33.33	26500	26500	26500	0.00

The second question asked about the package tours to Disneyland, Hong Kong for 3-4 days. The results between foreign and Thai customers were similar. It showed that about 17 responses answered the question. One in three responses promised to answer later but there was still no answer. Interestingly, one in ten responses asked clarifying questions like the star rating of the hotel, the airline preference, exact date for departure and exact names for the whole family. Of 230 responses, 41 responses did not offer a package tour service and 18 percent did not mention the package tour question at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi-square, it was considered as not being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. So, there was not much difference in answering

package tour questions between inquiry responses to foreign and Thai customers (Table 4.17).

**Table 4.17** Package tour answer quality (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Nature of respond	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Answer the question	21	17.21	17	15.74	38	16.52
Promise to answer later	43	35.24	38	35.19	81	35.22
Ask clarifying questions	14	11.47	13	12.04	27	11.74
Recommend others	6	4.92	8	7.41	14	6.09
Not offer package tour service	14	11.48	13	12.04	27	11.74
No answer at all	24	19.67	20	17.59	43	18.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.976					

The travel agencies not only offered more airline choices to Thai customers, but also offered more choices of package to them. The average choices that offered to Thai customers was about 1.25 packages whereas for foreign customer was only 1.11 packages. However, it was not considered as being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in the sense of package tour choices between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.18).

Table 4.18 A number of package tour choices (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Various choices of packages	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 package	16	88.88	12	75.00	28	82.35
2 packages	2	11.11	4	25.00	6	17.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean	1.11		1.25		1.18	
P-value	0.188					

Apart from offering more choices of package to Thai customers, the travel agencies also offered more varied choices. It was interesting that the inquiry responses offered both 3 days 2 nights and 4 days 3 nights package tours to Thai customers only. It was considered as being significantly different at 95% of confidence interval in type of package between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.19).

Table 4.19 Type of package tours (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Type of package	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
3 days 2 nights	14	77.78	7	43.75	21	61.76
4 days 3 nights	4	22.22	5	31.25	9	26.47
Both	0	0.00	4	25.00	4	11.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.042*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

Although the e-mail inquiry asked for tour program and price, the majority or three-fourth of e-mail responses to Thai customers mentioned the price only. Differently, for the e-mail responses to foreign customer, nearly half mentioned price, condition and itinerary. The conditions such as tour price include 2 nights hotel accommodation, depart and return by Dragon air and a surcharge will be added to the tour price during peak season. Interestingly, it was considered as being significantly different at 99% of confidence interval. Then, there was a significant difference in package tour answer's quality between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.20).

**Table 4.20** Package tour answer's quality (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Package tour answer's quality	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Price only	4	22.22	12	73.33	16	47.06
Price and condition	6	33.33	1	6.67	7	20.59
Itinerary and condition	0	0.00	1	6.67	1	2.94
Price, itinerary and condition	8	44.44	2	12.50	10	29.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.007*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The e-mail inquiry was sent to ask for information for adult and child. However, it seems like the travel agencies emphasized more on adults only. Over half (66 percent) of inquiry responses to foreign customer offered the package tours to adults only whereas approximately 53% of inquiry responses to Thai customers that offered packages to adult only. Nevertheless, the difference was considered as not being statistically significantly at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in package offers between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.21).



**Table 4.21** Package tour offered information (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Package offer	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Adult only	12	66.67	8	53.33	20	60.60
Both adult and child	6	33.33	7	46.66	13	39.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.435					

The second sub-dimension in professionalism dimension was answer presentation. The results between answers to foreign and Thai customers were not much different. Almost all responses used an appropriate subject. However, About 3 percent of responses did not use appropriate subject. These included the employee's name, the agency's name and others like ATTN. The majority of responses used English to communicate and only 4 from 230 agencies responded in Thai to Thai customers. It was surprising that some responses (about 3 percent) used combinations of Thai and English to answer foreign customer. The overall grammar and spelling quality was fair. Nearly half of agencies communicated efficiently. About 50 percent had misspelling and used the wrong grammar for example not using full stops and not using capital letters in the first letter of the sentence. Out of 230 responses, only 10 responses had poor grammar and spelling and only 5 percent used attachments. Most of them did not attach the air ticket information and package tours. About 15 percent volunteered relevant information such as, "the price will be cheaper if you go before 3 May 2006", "the price from this airline is much cheaper but it has the flight only once a week" and "if you go to Hong Kong with other airlines, it will be cheaper". Approximately one in five responses used non worldwide abbreviation such as, "we are the sales agency for UTC", "Brgds (best regards)" and "Brg". Three-fourth included the original e-mail in their response. Out of 230 agencies, only 35 agencies offered further assistance like please do not hesitate to contact me if you need more information. Many travel agencies; about nine in ten did not use capital letter to answer. It was good because a capital letter made it much more difficult to read. As analyzed by Chi square method, it was considered as being significantly different at 95% of confidence

interval for two aspects; avoid abbreviation and avoid replying in capital letters question. Therefore, there was a difference in, “avoid abbreviation” and “avoid replying in capital letter” question (Table 4.22).

**Table 4.22** E-mail quality in answer presentation (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Presentation quality	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Subject field</b>						
Appropriate subject	118	96.72	103	95.37	221	96.09
Inappropriate subject	2	1.64	4	3.70	6	2.61
No subject	2	1.64	1	0.93	3	1.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.557					
<b>Language</b>						
English only	119	97.54	100	92.59	219	95.22
Combination of English and Thai	3	2.46	4	3.70	7	3.04
Thai only	0	0.00	4	3.70	4	1.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.084					
<b>Grammar and spelling</b>						
Good quality	62	50.82	46	42.59	108	46.96
Fair quality	53	43.44	59	54.63	112	48.70
Poor quality	7	5.74	3	2.78	10	4.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.178					

Table 4.22 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Avoid attachment</b>						
Not use attachment	117	95.9	101	93.52	218	94.78
Use attachment	5	4.10	7	6.48	12	5.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.417					
<b>Volunteer relevant information</b>						
Provide	17	13.93	18	16.67	35	15.22
Not provide	105	86.07	90	83.33	195	84.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.565					
<b>Avoid abbreviation</b>						
Not use abbreviation	108	88.52	82	75.93	190	82.61
Use abbreviation	14	11.48	26	24.07	40	17.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.012*					
<b>Include original e-mail</b>						
Yes	85	69.67	90	83.33	175	76.09
No	37	30.33	18	16.67	55	23.91
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.199					
<b>Offer further assistance</b>						
Yes	22	18.03	13	12.04	35	15.22
No	100	81.97	95	87.96	195	84.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.658					

Table 4.22 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Avoid replying in capital letter</b>						
Not use capital letter	111	90.98	100	92.59	211	91.74
Use capital letter	11	9.02	8	7.41	19	8.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.015*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

For the promotional dimension, the results were nearly the same. Half of travel agencies identified the agency names in the end of responses. However, only 17 percent identified address, telephone number and website. Moreover, six in ten of responses did not identify the contact address at all. It was considered as not being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in promotional dimension between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23 E-mail quality in promotional dimension (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Promotional	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Identify the travel agency's name</b>						
Identify	47	38.52	46	42.59	93	40.43
Not identify	75	61.48	62	57.41	137	59.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.53					

Table 4.23 (Continued)

Promotional	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Identify the contact address</b>						
Address only	2	1.64	5	4.63	7	3.04
Telephone No. only	12	9.84	9	8.33	21	9.13
Website or e-mail only	4	3.28	1	0.93	5	2.17
Address and telephone No.	5	4.10	2	1.85	7	3.04
Address and website	0	0.00	3	2.78	3	1.30
Telephone No. and website	6	4.92	5	4.63	11	4.78
Address, telephone No. and website	20	16.39	18	16.67	38	16.52
No contact address	73	59.84	65	60.19	138	60.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.366					

Apart from evaluation in each dimension, the point of each dimension was evaluated by the focus group. The researcher brought eight people together and discussed about the weight or the importance of each dimension towards e-mail responses. They agreed that informative content was the most important factor affecting e-mail quality, followed by promptness. For them, personal approach was the least important (Table 4.24).

**Table 4.24** The importance level of each dimension for the travel agencies where offering both international ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong

Dimension	Importance level (percentage)
Professionalism: Informative content	45.00
Promptness	20.00
Promotion	10.00
Professionalism: Answer presentation	10.00
Politeness	10.00
Personal approach	5.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The overall impression, which was calculated from five main dimensions (promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism and promotional) showed that the majority of responses where offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong, to both foreign and Thai customers were fair. There were no responses were of excellent quality. A statistical T-test was used to analyze the data and showed that it was not be significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in overall impression between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.25).

**Table 4.25** Overall impressions of the responses offering international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Overall impression	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	2	3.70	0	0.00	2	2.02
Poor	29	26.85	28	31.11	57	28.79
Fair	62	57.41	52	57.78	114	57.58
Good	15	13.89	10	11.11	25	12.63
Excellent	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (5 points)	2.76		2.64		2.82	
P-value	0.517					

However, some e-mail responses said that they did not offer both international ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong. Therefore, there was a lack of information in informative content. For these travel agencies, the focus group members agreed that promptness was the most important factor for them (Table 4.26).

**Table 4.26** The importance level of each dimension for the travel agencies where did not offer international ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong

Dimension	Important level (percentage)
Promptness	40.00
Promotion	15.00
Professionalism: Answer presentation	15.00
Politeness	20.00
Personal approach	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>

For the overall impressions of e-mail responses that did not offer international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong, the overall impression was higher than the agencies where offering those services. The results were very similar for foreign and Thai customers. The majority of the agencies was of good quality and only 3 percent were of poor quality. A statistical T-test was used to analyze the data and showed the results were not be significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in overall impression between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.27).

**Table 4.27** Overall impressions of the responses where did not offering international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong. (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Overall impression	Foreigner		Thai		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Poor	1	7.14	0	0.00	1	3.13
Fair	5	35.71	5	27.78	10	31.25
Good	7	50.00	12	66.67	19	59.38
Excellent	1	7.14	1	5.56	2	6.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (5 points)	3.60		3.68		3.69	
P-value	0.605					

In conclusion, the travel agencies answered to foreign (7.78%) more than Thai customers (6.89%) but the agencies took longer time to answer e-mail to foreign (2.52 days) than Thai customers (1.69 days). The travel agencies thanked foreign customers more than Thai customers and also closed more politely. The travel agencies answered air ticket questions to foreign customers in the higher rate than Thai customers (4.84 vs 4.58 points). However, the agencies volunteered additional information and offered further assistance to Thai customers more than foreign customers (Table 4.28).



Table 4.28 E-mail quality (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Items	Foreigner	Thai	Total	P-value
<b>Response rate</b>				
Response rate (percentage)	7.78	6.89	7.34	0.37
<b>Promptness</b>				
Reply in 24 hours (days)	2.52	1.69	2.13	0.034**
<b>Politeness</b>				
Use an appropriate salutation (3 points)	2.6	2.65	2.62	0.856
Thank for the customers' interest (2 points)	1.53	1.45	1.5	0.231
Politely close (3 points)	2.54	2.37	2.46	0.226
Avoid sarcasm (2 points)	1.99	1.99	1.99	0.931
<b>Personal approach</b>				
Address the customer by name (3 points)	2.11	2.34	2.22	0.124
Identify the employee's name (3 points)	2.04	2.05	2.04	0.816
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>				
Answer air ticket question (5 points)	4.84	4.58	4.72	0.717
Various choices of airlines (number of choices)	1.82	2.00	1.9	0.836
Offer Swiss airline (2 points)	1.94	1.91	1.93	0.57
Offer Star Alliance airlines (number of choices)	0.56	0.79	0.67	0.495
Offer other Cheaper airlines (number of choices)	0.30	0.26	0.28	0.428
Air ticket answer's quality (3 points)	1.47	1.46	1.46	0.22
Air ticket price (2 points)	1.8	1.53	1.67	0.188
Tax charge (2 points)	1.61	1.44	1.53	0.441
Total price (2 points)	1.36	2.49	2.42	0.719

Table 4.28 (Continued)

Items	Foreigner	Thai	Total	P-value
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>				
Ticket price recommendation (3 points)	2.79	2.68	2.74	0.394
Answer tour program question (5 points)	3.83	3.82	3.83	0.976
Various choices of packages (number of choices)	1.11	1.28	1.18	0.188
Package tour answer's quality (3 points)	2.22	1.38	1.82	0.007***
Package tour recommendation (3 points)	1.67	1.93	1.79	0.435
<b>Professionalism (Answer presentation)</b>				
Never leave the subject blank (3 points)	2.95	2.94	2.95	0.557
Reply in English (percentage)	97.54	92.59	95.22	0.084*
Watch grammar and spelling (3 points)	2.45	2.4	2.43	0.178
Not use attachment (2 points)	1.96	1.94	1.95	0.417
Provide volunteer relevant information (2 points)	1.14	1.17	1.15	0.565
Avoid abbreviation (2 points)	1.89	1.76	1.83	0.012**
Avoid replying in capital letter (2 points)	1.7	1.83	1.76	0.015**
Include original e-mail (2 points)	1.18	1.12	1.15	0.199
Offer further assistance (2 points)	1.91	1.93	1.92	0.658
<b>Promotional</b>				
Identify the travel agency's name (2 points)	1.61	1.57	1.6	0.53
Identify the contact address (4 points)	1.82	1.82	1.82	0.366

Notes: 1. P-values shown are based on the results of the Chi-square tests as presented in tables 4.7-4.23

2. \*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.10$
3. \*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$
4. \*\*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The results from focus groups (based on the criteria presented in table 3.5) showed that the e-mail quality to foreign customers was better than Thai customers in every dimension except promptness. The agencies that offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong offered higher quality of e-mail than Thai customers (2.83 vs 2.80 points). However, the responses from agencies where did not offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong to Thai (3.78 points) customers were better than foreign customers (3.57 points) (Table 4.29).

Table 4.29 The e-mail quality in each dimension (Comparison between foreign and Thai e-mail)

Dimension	Foreigner	Thai	Total	P-value
Promptness	3.85	4.36	4.11	0.005***
Politeness	3.69	3.56	3.68	0.446
Personal approach	3.34	3.00	3.18	0.027*
Professionalism: Informative content	2.23	1.99	2.12	0.073
Professionalism: Answer presentation	2.60	2.03	2.33	0.00***
Promotional	2.03	1.99	2.01	0.830
Overall impression for the agencies where offering both services.	2.83	2.80	2.82	0.517
Overall impression for the agencies where did not offering both services.	3.57	3.78	3.69	0.605

Notes: 1. The total point for each dimension is 5 points

2. P-values shown are based on the results of the T-test as presented in tables 4.25 and 4.27

3. \*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.10$

4. \*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

5. \*\*\* Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

#### 4.2.2 Comparison e-mail quality by e-mail characteristic

If compared between branded (e.g. info@TravelAgencyName.com) and non-branded e-mail (usually free e-mail services such as Hotmail, Yahoo and Gmail), the travel agencies that used branded e-mail address responded in the higher rate which was about 11 percent. On another hand, out of 2216 agencies, only 128 agencies or 6 percent that had non-branded e-mails responded the e-mail inquiries. Moreover, Chi-square tests indicated the significantly different at 99% (Table 4.30).

**Table 4.30** Characteristic of e-mail response (categorized by e-mail's characteristic)

Type of response	Successfully sent e-mail		E-mail response	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Branded e-mail	918	41.43	102	11.11
Non branded e-mail	2216	70.71	128	5.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>3134</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>7.34</b>
P-value	0.00*			

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

From 230 e-mail responses, 102 responses were from branded e-mail and 128 responses were from non branded e-mail. For promptness dimension, about half of the e-mails were responded to within 1 day and only 2 percent took more than 10 days to answer. Some travel agencies took several days, like 14 days to respond to the e-mail inquiries. However, in general, the travel agencies with branded e-mail took more time to respond than the travel agencies with non branded e-mail. Additionally, a chi square was performed to determine whether differences in response day between branded and non branded e-mail were significant. It was considered as not being different statistically, significant 90% of confidence interval (Table 4.31).

Table 4.31 E-mail response time (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Response time	Branded e-mail		Non-branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Within 24 hours	57	55.88	70	54.69	127	55.22
25-48 hours	15	14.71	31	24.22	46	20.00
49-72 hours	18	17.65	11	8.59	29	12.61
73-96 hours	5	4.90	6	4.69	11	4.78
97-120 hours	2	1.96	3	2.34	5	2.17
121-144 hours	0	0.00	2	1.56	2	0.87
145-168 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
169-192 hours	2	1.96	2	1.56	4	1.74
193-216 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
217-240 hours	0	0.00	1	0.78	1	0.43
241-264 hours	2	1.96	1	0.78	3	1.30
265-288 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
289-312 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
213-336 hours	1	0.98	1	0.78	2	0.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (days)	2.19		2.09		2.13	
P-value	0.402					

For politeness dimension, there was a difference between branded and non branded e-mail. Approximately three in four travel agencies (78 percent for branded e-mail and 69 percent for non branded e-mail) used formal salutations, which was "dear". Out of 230 responses, 35 agencies used informal salutations like, "hi", "hello", and "to". About 26 percent of all responses did not use any salutation at all. Only half of responses thanked the customers. However, it was surprising that about 2 percent of branded e-mail used an expletive. Majority of responses (over 60 percent), closed politely by using formal words such as, "best regards", "kind regards" and "sincerely yours". Seven in ten of branded e-mail closed with a formal word whereas about 55 percent for non branded e-mail closed politely. About one in five closed with informal words for example "thank

you”, “all the best”, “await your reply soonest” and “hope to hear from you again”. Some responses (16 percent) did not close politely at all. Almost inquiry responses answered politely. It was considered as being significantly different at 95% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was a difference in politeness dimension between branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.32).

**Table 4.32** E-mail quality in politeness dimension (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Politeness dimension	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Use an appropriate salutation</b>						
Formal	80	78.43	89	69.53	169	73.50
Informal	11	10.78	24	18.75	35	15.20
Not use	11	10.78	15	11.72	26	11.30
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.221					
<b>Thanks for the customer interest</b>						
Yes	48	47.06	66	51.56	114	49.57
No	54	52.94	62	48.44	116	50.43
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.497					
<b>Politely close</b>						
Formal	72	70.59	70	54.69	142	61.74
Informal	20	19.61	32	25.00	52	22.61
Not close	10	9.80	26	20.31	36	15.65
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.029*					

Table 4.32 (Continued)

Politeness dimension	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Avoid sarcasm						
Yes	100	98.04	128	100.00	228	99.13
No	2	1.96	0	0.00	2	0.87
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.112					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

For personal approach dimension, there was a difference between branded and non branded e-mail. About 60 percent of branded e-mail addressed the customer by using the correct name, while only 46 percent of non branded e-mail addressed the correct name. Of 102 responses, 21 responses from branded e-mail did not address the guests' name. For non branded e-mail, approximately two in five did not address at all. Two in ten of responses from branded e-mail mentioned employees' full name whereas only 14 percent from non branded e-mail identified employees' full name. Out of 102 responses, only 13 responses from branded e-mail did not identify the name. For non branded e-mail, nearly two-fifth did not identify the employees' name at all. In addition, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval for addressing the customer by name and it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval for identify the employees' name question. So, there was a difference in personal dimension between branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.33).

**Table 4.33** E-mail quality in personal dimension (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Personal dimension	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Address the customer by name</b>						
Correct name	63	60.78	59	46.09	122	53.04
Wrong name	18	16.67	19	14.84	37	16.09
No	21	20.59	50	39.06	71	30.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.01*					
<b>Identify the employees' name</b>						
Formal	43	42.16	18	14.06	61	26.52
Informal	46	45.10	72	56.25	118	51.30
No	13	12.75	38	29.69	51	22.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.00**					

Note: 1. \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

2. \*\*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

For professionalism dimension, it was divided to 2 sub-dimensions: informative content and answer presentation. For informative content aspect, the responses from branded and non branded e-mail were very similar to that of over half the responses answered the first question, which was about air tickets to Switzerland. Fifteen from one hundred promised to answer later but there was still no answer. Interestingly, one in ten responses asked clarifying questions like telephone number, exact names for the whole family and exact date of departure. About 14 percent of responses did not offer an air ticket booking service and of 230 responses, 27 responses did not mention the air ticket question at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi square, it was considered as not being different



statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. So, there was no difference in answering air ticket question between inquiry responses from branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.34).

**Table 4.34** E-mail quality in answering air ticket question (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Nature of respond	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Answer the question	58	56.86	65	50.80	123	53.48	
Promise to answer later	14	13.73	19	14.80	33	14.35	
Ask clarifying questions	8	7.84	14	10.90	22	9.57	
Recommend to others	2	1.96	6	4.69	8	3.48	
Not do	13	12.75	14	10.90	27	11.74	
No answer at all	7	6.86	10	7.81	17	7.39	
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00	
P-value	0.784						

The travel agencies with branded e-mail offered more choices of airline to customers. The average number of choices that were offered by branded e-mail was about 2 airlines whereas from non branded e-mail was only 1.82 airlines. However, approximately four in ten of e-mail responses by both branded and non branded e-mails offered only 1 airline. It was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in the sense of airlines' choices between inquiry responses from branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.35).

Table 4.35 A number of airlines offered in e-mails (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Various choices of airlines	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 airline	23	39.66	32	49.23	55	44.72
2 airlines	18	31.03	19	29.23	37	30.08
3 airlines	13	22.41	10	15.39	23	18.70
4 airlines	2	3.45	3	4.62	5	4.07
5 airlines	2	3.45	0	0.00	2	1.63
6 airlines	0	0.00	1	1.54	1	0.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean	2.00		1.82		1.90	
P-value	0.453					

As the inquiries asked for the air ticket price to Switzerland by Swiss airline, over half of responses mentioned the Swiss airline. Out of 102 inquiry responses from branded e-mail, only 56 responses mentioned a Swiss air ticket price, whereas 58 travel agencies from 128 non branded e-mails offered Swiss airlines. Over half of the agencies with branded e-mails offered other Star Alliance airlines but only about 40 percent of agencies with non branded e-mails offered other Star Alliance airlines. For the cheaper airlines, a quarter of both branded and non branded e-mails offered other cheaper airlines. About one-tenth of responses from branded e-mail offered Turkish airline only, but the majority of responses from non branded e-mail mentioned Etihad airline. Based on calculation by using Chi-square method, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval for other cheaper airlines recommendation. Therefore, there was a difference in the sense of other cheaper airlines recommendation to branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.36).

**Table 4.36** The airlines offered in e-mails (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Airline offered	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Swiss airline</b>						
Offered Swiss	56	96.55	58	89.23	114	92.68
Not offered Swiss	2	3.45	7	10.77	9	7.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.12					
<b>Other Star alliance airlines</b>						
Offered Star Alliance	32	55.17	29	44.62	61	49.59
#Lufthansa	10	17.24	6	9.23	16	13.01
#Austrian	12	20.69	11	16.92	23	18.7
#Thai	1	1.72	2	3.08	3	2.44
#Lufthansa and Thai	0	0.00	1	1.54	1	0.81
#Lufthansa and Austrian	4	6.90	5	7.69	9	7.32
#Lufthansa and Scandinavian	3	5.17	2	3.08	5	4.07
#Thai and Scandinavian	0	0.00	2	3.08	2	1.63
#Austrian, Thai and Lufthansa	2	3.44	0	0.00	2	1.63
Not offered Star Alliance	26	44.82	36	55.38	62	50.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.441					

Table 4.36 (Continued)

Airline offered	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Other cheaper airlines</b>						
Offered cheaper airlines	15	25.86	15	23.08	30	24.39
#China	2	3.45	3	4.62	5	16.67
#Etihad	4	6.90	6	9.23	10	33.33
#Eva	1	1.72	0	0.00	1	3.33
#Turkish	6	10.34	0	0.00	6	20.00
#Jordan	0	0.00	3	4.62	3	10.00
#Etihad and Kuwait	0	0.00	2	3.08	2	6.67
#Etihad and Turkish	2	3.45	0	0.00	2	6.67
#Etihad and China	0	0.00	1	1.54	1	3.33
Not offered cheaper airlines	43	74.14	50	76.92	93	75.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.046*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

The majority of e-mail responses; about half of branded e-mail and 72 percent of non branded e-mail mentioned the price only. One-fourth of branded e-mail mentioned both price and condition whereas only 11 from 65 agencies with non branded e-mail offered both price and condition. The conditions such as, "this fare is effective On 1 January 2006", "rebooking is permitted without charge" and "all fares are subject to change without prior notice". It was 14 percent from branded e-mail mentioned prices, conditions and flight schedules. For non branded e-mail, only one in twenty offered price, flight schedule and condition. Chi-square was performed to indicate that there was no difference statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in air ticket answer's quality between inquiry responses to branded and non branded e-mails (Table 4.37).

**Table 4.37** Air ticket answer quality (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Air ticket answer	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Price only	30	51.72	47	72.31	77	62.6	
Price with condition	15	25.86	11	16.92	26	21.14	
Price and flight schedule	5	8.62	4	6.15	9	7.32	
Price, condition and flight schedule	8	13.79	3	4.61	11	8.94	
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.095						

Over half of inquiry responses did not mention an air ticket price and tax charge. However, seven in ten responses offered the exact price (which was the sum of the ticket price and tax charge). Although the inquiry asked for the ticket price for both adult and child, some responses: about 13 percent still offered the price for adult only. The result for branded and non branded e-mail was very similar and the difference was not considered as being statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval (Table 4.38).

**Table 4.38** Air ticket answer information quality (Comparison branded and non branded e-mails)

Price information	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
<b>Air ticket price information</b>							
Exact price	21	36.21	19	29.23	40	32.52	
Approximately price	2	3.45	1	1.53	3	2.44	
Not mention	35	60.34	45	69.23	80	65.04	
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>50.78</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>	
P-value	0.525						

Table 4.38 (Continued)

Price information	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Tax charge information</b>						
Exact price	14	24.14	14	21.54	28	22.76
Approximately price	5	8.62	4	6.15	9	7.32
Not mention	39	67.24	47	72.31	86	69.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.795					
<b>Total price information</b>						
Exact price	36	62.07	48	73.85	84	68.29
Approximately price	5	8.62	2	3.08	7	5.69
Not mention	17	29.31	15	23.08	32	26.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.255					
<b>Ticket offering</b>						
Adult only	7	12.07	9	13.85	16	13.01
Adult and child	51	87.93	56	86.15	107	86.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.77					

The second question asked about the package tours to Disneyland, Hong Kong for 3-4 days. The result showed that about 38 responses (11 percent for branded e-mail and 21 percent for non branded e-mail) answered the question. One in three responses promised to answer later but there was still no answer. Interestingly, one in ten responses asked clarifying questions like the star of hotel, the airline preference, number, exact date for departure and exact names for the whole family. Of 230 responses, 41 responses did not offer package tour service. About 18 percent of responses (23 percent for branded e-mail and 16 percent for non branded e-mail) did not mention the package question at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi-square, it was considered as not being

different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. So, there was no difference in answering the package tour question between branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.39).

**Table 4.39** — Package tour answer quality (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Nature of respond	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Answer the question	11	10.78	27	21.09	38	16.52
Promise to answer later	39	38.24	42	32.81	81	35.22
Ask clarifying questions	9	8.82	18	14.06	27	11.74
Recommend others	7	6.86	7	5.47	14	6.09
Not do	13	12.75	14	10.94	27	11.74
No answer at all	23	22.55	20	15.63	43	18.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.203					

The travel agencies with branded e-mail offered more choices of package than agencies with non branded e-mail. The average of choices that were offered by agencies with branded e-mail was about 1.33 packages whereas agencies with non branded e-mail were only 1.12 packages. However, it was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in the sense of package tours' choices between inquiry responses with branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.40).

**Table 4.40** A number of package tours choices (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Various choices of packages	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 package	6	66.67	22	88.00	28	82.35
2 packages	3	33.33	3	12.00	6	17.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean	1.33		1.12		1.18	
P-value	0.775					

The majority of agencies with both branded and non branded e-mail offered 3 days 2 nights package. However, it was approximately 12 percent that offered both 3 days 2 nights and 4 days 3 nights. Nevertheless, it was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in type of package between branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.41).

**Table 4.41** Type of package tours (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Type of package	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
3 days 2 nights	7	77.78	14	56.00	21	61.76
4 days 3 nights	1	11.11	8	32.00	9	26.47
Both	1	11.11	3	12.00	4	11.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.449					

The majority of agencies with non branded e-mail which was over half mentioned the price only. In contrast, 45 percent of branded e-mail mentioned price, itinerary and condition. The conditions such as, tour price include 2 nights hotel accommodation, depart and return by Dragon air and a surcharge will be added to the tour price during peak season. Interestingly, it was not considered as being different statistically,



significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in package tour answer's quality between inquiry responses from branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.42).

**Table 4.42** E-mail quality in package tour answer's quality (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Package tour answer's quality	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Price only	2	22.22	14	56.00	16	47.06
Price with condition	2	22.22	5	20.00	7	20.59
Itinerary and condition	1	11.11	0	0.00	1	2.94
Price, condition and itinerary	4	44.44	6	24.00	10	29.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.149					

Over half (75 percent) of inquiry responses from branded e-mail offered the package tours to adults only, whereas approximately 56% of inquiry responses from non branded e-mails offered packages to adult only. It was considered as not being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in package offers between inquiry responses from branded and non branded e-mail (Table 4.43).

**Table 4.43** Package tour offered information (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Package offer	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Adult only	6	75.00	14	56.00	20	60.61
Both adult and child	2	25.00	11	44.00	13	39.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.338					

The second sub-dimension in professionalism dimension was answer presentation. The results between travel agencies with branded and non branded e-mail were quite different. Almost all responses used an appropriate subject. However, About 3 percent of responses did not use an appropriate subject. These included the employee's name, the agency's name and others like ATTN. The majority of responses used English to communicate and only 3 agencies from branded e-mail and 8 agencies from non branded e-mail answered by using Thai language. Over half of the travel agencies with branded e-mail used good quality English but travel agencies with non branded e-mail used fair English. One in ten agencies that used branded e-mail had poor quality whereas approximately 7 percent from non branded e-mail used poor English. Only 5 percent used an attachment. Most of them attached the air ticket information and package tours. Two-tenth of branded e-mails volunteered relevant information such as, "the price will be cheaper if you go before 3 May 2006", "the price from this airline is much cheaper but it has the flight only once a week" and "if you go to Hong Kong with other airlines, it will be cheaper". However, out of every ten agencies, only 1 agency with non branded e-mail volunteered relevant information. Approximately one in five responses used non worldwide abbreviation such as we are the sales agency for UTC, Brgds (best regards) and Brg. Three-fourth's included original e-mail in the responses. Out of 102 agencies, 21 agencies that used branded e-mail offered further assistance like please do not hesitate to contact me if you need more information. Interestingly, only approximately 10 percent of non branded e-mail offered further assistance. One-fourth of travel agencies did not include the original e-mail message in the responses. Many travel agencies; about nine in ten did not use a capital letter to answer. It was good because capital letter made it much

more difficult to read. As analyzed by Chi-square method, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval for three questions which were grammar and spelling, volunteered relevant information and offered further assistance. Therefore, there was a difference between these three questions (Table 4.44).

**Table 4.44** E-mail quality in answer presentation (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Presentation quality	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Subject field</b>						
Appropriate subject	97	95.1	124	96.88	221	96.09
Inappropriate subject	4	3.92	2	1.56	6	2.61
No subject	1	0.98	2	1.56	3	1.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.502					
<b>Language</b>						
English only	99	97.06	120	93.75	219	95.22
Combination of English and Thai	3	2.94	4	3.13	7	3.04
Thai only	0	0.00	4	3.13	4	1.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.196					
<b>Grammar and spelling</b>						
Good quality	57	55.88	51	39.84	108	46.96
Fair quality	44	43.14	68	53.13	112	48.7
Poor quality	1	0.98	9	7.03	10	4.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.011*					

Table 4.44 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Avoid attachment</b>						
Not use attachment	97	95.10	121	94.53	218	94.78
Use attachment	5	4.90	7	5.47	12	5.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.848					
<b>Provide additional relevant information</b>						
Provide	21	20.59	14	10.94	35	15.22
Not provide	81	79.41	114	89.06	195	84.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.043*					
<b>Avoid abbreviation</b>						
Not use abbreviation	85	83.33	105	82.03	190	82.61
Use abbreviation	17	16.67	23	17.97	40	17.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.796					
<b>Include original e-mail</b>						
Yes	80	78.43	95	74.22	175	76.09
No	22	21.57	33	25.78	55	23.91
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.457					
<b>Offer further assistance</b>						
Yes	21	20.59	14	10.94	35	15.22
No	81	79.41	114	89.06	195	84.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.043*					

Table 4.44 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Avoid replying in capital letter							
Not use capital letter	94	92.16	117	91.41	211	91.74	
Use capital letter	8	7.84	11	8.59	19	8.26	
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00	
P-value	0.837						

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

The majority of branded e-mails identified the travel agency's name whereas only approximately four in ten of non branded e-mails identified the agencies' name. Moreover, about 44 percent of branded e-mail did not identify the contacts address at all. For non branded e-mail, nearly three-fourth failed to identify the contact address. It was considered as not being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in promotional dimension between inquiry responses for branded and non branded e-mails (Table 4.45).

Table 4.45 E-mail quality in promotional (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Promotional	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Identify the travel agency's name							
Identify	57	61.29	36	38.71	93	40.43	
Not identify	45	32.85	92	71.88	137	59.57	
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00	
P-value	0.00*						

Table 4.45 (Continued)

Promotional	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Identify the contact address						
Address only	3	2.94	4	3.13	7	3.04
Telephone No. only	8	7.84	13	10.16	21	9.13
Website or e-mail only	3	2.94	2	1.56	5	2.17
Address and telephone No.	5	4.90	2	1.56	7	3.04
Address and website	1	0.98	2	1.56	3	1.30
Telephone No. and website	7	6.86	4	3.13	11	4.78
Address, telephone No. and website	30	29.41	8	6.25	38	16.52
No contact address	45	44.12	93	72.66	138	60.00
Total	102	100.00	128	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.00*					

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The overall impression, which was calculated from five main dimensions (promptness, politeness, personal approach, professionalism and promotional) by the focus group (Table 4.24) showed that the majority of responses to both branded and non branded e-mail were of fair quality. However, the agencies (where offering international air ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong) with branded e-mail had a higher quality than non branded e-mail. About 18 percent of responses from branded e-mail were of good quality and 21 percent were of poor quality. For non branded e-mail, only 9 from 111 responses were good and about 34 percent was poor quality. It was considered as being statistically significant at 95% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was a

difference in overall impression between inquiry responses from branded and non branded e-mails (Table 4.46).

**Table 4.46** Overall impressions of the responses offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong. (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mail)

Overall impression	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	0	0.00	2	1.80	2	1.01
Poor	19	21.84	38	34.23	57	28.79
Fair	52	59.77	62	55.86	114	57.58
Good	16	18.39	9	8.11	25	12.63
Excellent	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	87	100.00	111	100.00	198	100.00
Mean (5 points)	2.97		2.72		2.82	
P-value	0.039*					

Note: \*T-test indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

For the overall impressions of e-mail responses where did not offering international air ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong, the researcher could not evaluate the information content. The focus group agreed that promptness was ranked as the highest important (Table 4.26). The overall impression was higher than the agencies where offered those services. 2 responses from the agencies that used branded e-mail were of excellent quality. The average points for branded e-mails also higher than non branded e-mails (3.80 vs 3.59 points). A statistical T-test was used to analyze the data and showed there was not be significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in overall impression between inquiry responses to Thai and foreign customers (Table 4.47).

Table 4.47 Overall impressions of e-mail responses that did not offering both international air ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong.  
(Comparison between branded and non branded e-mail)

Overall impression	Branded e-mail		Non branded e-mail		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Poor	0	0.00	1	5.88	1	3.13
Fair	5	33.33	5	29.41	10	31.25
Good	8	53.33	11	64.71	19	59.38
Excellent	2	13.33	0	0.00	2	6.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (5 points)	3.80		3.59		3.69	
P--value	0.339					

In conclusion, the travel agencies with branded e-mail addresses (11.11%) answered the e-mail inquiries more than the agencies with non branded e-mail addresses (5.78%) but the agencies with branded e-mail addresses (2.19 days) took a longer time to answer the e-mail than the agencies where used non branded e-mails (2.09 days). The agencies where used branded e-mails had better quality in personal approach than the agencies with non branded e-mails. The agencies that used branded e-mails answered the air ticket question more but answered tour packages less than the agencies with non branded e-mail. The agencies with non branded e-mails focused on promotional more than the agencies with non branded e-mails (Table 4.48).



Table 4.48 E-mail quality (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mails)

Items	Branded e-mail	Non branded e-mail	Total	P-value
<b>Response rate</b>				
Response rate (percentage)	11.11	5.78	7.34	0.00***
<b>Promptness</b>				
Reply in 24 hours (days)	2.19	2.09	2.13	0.402
<b>Politeness</b>				
Use an appropriate salutation (3 points)	2.68	2.58	2.62	0.221
Thank for the customers' interest (2 points)	1.47	1.52	1.5	0.497
Politely close (3 points)	2.61	2.34	2.46	0.029**
Avoid sarcasm (2 points)	1.98	2.00	1.99	0.112
<b>Personal approach</b>				
Address the customer by name (3 points)	2.41	2.07	2.22	0.01***
Identify the employee's name (3 points)	2.29	1.84	2.04	0.00***
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>				
Answer air ticket question (5 points)	4.79	4.66	4.72	0.784
Various choices of airlines (number of choices)	2	1.82	1.9	0.453
Offer Swiss airline (2 points)	1.97	1.89	1.93	0.12
Offer Star Alliance airlines (number of choices)	0.74	0.60	0.67	0.441
Offer other Cheaper airlines (number of choices)	0.29	0.28	0.28	0.046**
Air ticket answer's quality (3 points)	1.62	1.32	1.46	0.095*
Air ticket price (2 points)	1.76	1.6	1.67	0.525
Tax charge (2 points)	1.57	1.49	1.53	0.795

Table 4.48 (Continued)

Items	Branded e-mail	Non branded e-mail	Total	P-value
Total price (2 points)	2.33	2.51	2.42	0.255
Ticket price recommendation (3 points)	2.76	2.72	2.74	0.77
Answer tour program question (5 points)	3.40	4.01	3.83	0.203
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>				
Various choices of packages (Number of choices)	1.33	1.12	1.18	0.775
Package tour answer's quality (3 points)	2.22	1.68	1.82	0.149
Package tour recommendation (3 points)	1.5	1.88	1.79	0.338
<b>Professionalism (Answer presentation)</b>				
Never leave the subject blank (3 points)	2.94	2.95	2.95	0.502
Reply in English (percentage)	97.06	93.75	95.22	0.196
Watch grammar and spelling (3 points)	2.55	2.33	2.43	0.011**
Not use attachment (2 points)	1.95	1.95	1.95	0.848
Provide volunteer relevant information (2 points)	1.21	1.11	1.15	0.043**
Avoid abbreviation (2 points)	1.83	1.82	1.83	0.796
Avoid replying in capital letter (2 points)	1.78	1.74	1.76	0.837
Include original e-mail (2 points)	1.21	1.11	1.15	0.457
Offer further assistance (2 points)	1.92	1.91	1.92	0.043**
<b>Promotional</b>				
Identify the travel agency's name (2 points)	1.44	1.72	1.6	0.00***
Identify the contact address (4 points)	1.98	1.66	1.82	0.00***

Notes: 1. P-values shown are based on the results of the Chi-square tests as presented in tables 4.30-4.45

2. \*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$
3. \*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$
4. \*\*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The results from focus groups showed that the travel agencies with branded e-mails were of higher quality than the agencies with non branded e-mails in every dimension except promptness. The agencies with branded e-mails were offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong offered higher quality of responses than the agencies with non branded e-mail (2.97 vs 2.72 points). Moreover, the agencies where used branded e-mails but did not offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong offered better quality (3.80 points) than the agencies with non branded e-mails (3.59 points) (Table 4.49).

**Table 4.49** The e-mail quality in each dimension (Comparison between branded and non branded e-mail)

Dimension	Branded e-mail	Non branded e-mail	Total	P-value
Promptness	4.08	4.13	4.11	0.175
Politeness	3.78	3.51	3.68	0.319
Personal approach	3.46	2.96	3.18	0.033*
Professionalism: Informative content	2.18	2.07	2.12	0.629
Professionalism: Answer presentation	2.54	2.16	2.33	0.021*
Promotional	2.62	1.53	2.01	0.00**
Overall impression for the agencies where offering both services.	2.97	2.72	2.82	0.039*
Overall impression for the agencies where did not offering both services.	3.80	3.59	3.69	0.339

Notes: 1. The total point for each dimension is 5 points

2. P-values shown are based on the results of the T-test as presented in tables 4.46 and 4.47

3. \*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$

4. \*\* Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

#### 4.2.3 Comparison e-mail quality by location

As over half of the agencies were located in Bangkok and central regions, the majority of e-mail responses were from this area. If considered in response rate aspect, it was found that the agencies in the northeast region responded in the highest rate, which was about 17 percent. The agencies located in Bangkok and central and northern regions responded only approximately one in ten. Lastly, only 3 percent of agencies in the southern part responded to the inquiries (Table 4.50).

Table 4.50: E-mail response rate (categorized by region)

Location	Successfully sent e-mail		E-mail response		Percentage from Successfully sent e-mail
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Bangkok and central	1674	53.41	166	72.17	9.92
South	1162	37.08	35	15.22	3.01
North	244	7.79	20	8.70	8.20
Northeast	54	1.72	9	3.91	16.67
Total	3134	100.00	230	100.00	7.34
P-value	0.00*				

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

If considered in promptness dimension, the agencies from the north took only approximately 1.7 days to answer, whereas the agencies that were located in the northeast took longest time, which was approximately 2.56 days. Although the agencies in Bangkok and central areas took an average time to answer, about 2.17 days, some agencies took several days (the longest time was 14 days) to answer. Chi-square was performed to determine whether differences in response day between each region. It was considered as not being significantly different at 90% of confidence interval (Table 4.51).

Table 4.51 E-mail response time (Comparison between each region)

Response time	Bangkok and Central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Within 24 hours	92	55.42	22	62.86	12	60.00	1	11.11	127	55.22
25-48 hours	34	20.48	4	11.43	4	20.00	4	44.44	46	20.00
49-72 hours	19	11.45	5	14.29	3	15.00	2	22.22	29	12.61
73-96 hours	8	4.82	1	2.86	0	0.00	2	22.22	11	4.78
97-120 hours	3	1.81	1	2.86	1	5.00	0	0.00	5	2.17
121-144 hours	2	1.20	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.87
145-168 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
169-192 hours	2	1.2	2	5.7	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	1.74
193-216 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
217-240 hours	1	0.6	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.43
241-264 hours	3	1.81	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	1.30
265-288 hours	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
289-312 hours	2	1.20	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean	2.19		2.00		1.70		2.56		2.13	
P-value	0.645									

For politeness dimension, there were some different between responses from each region. Approximately three in four travel agencies from each region used a formal salutation, which was "dear". Some agents from Bangkok and central, south and north used informal salutation like hi, hello and good morning. The agents from the northeast region did not use the salutation the most which was about 22 percent whereas the percentage of agents from other regions ranged from 5 to 10 percent. Only half of all responses thanked the customers. The majority of responses (over 60 percent) of travel agencies where located in Bangkok and central, south and north regions closed politely by using formal words such as, "best regards" and "sincerely yours". For the agents that were located in northeast region, only four in ten agents closed politely. Interestingly, out of 35 agents, 2 agents from southern regions used an expletive. It was considered as being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was a difference in avoiding the sarcasm aspect between each region (Table 4.52).

For personal approach dimension, there was a difference between each region. Over 60 percent of responses from the south and north addressed the customer by using the correct name while only four-tenth of responses from the central and northeast regions addressed the correct name. Approximately one in ten of agents from central and northeast addressed the wrong name (both missed spelling and wrong people). Of 230 responses, 71 responses did not address the guests' name. Over 35 percent of agents that located in the north and northeast regions mentioned the employees' full name whereas only about 20 percent from central and south identified an employees' full name. Significantly, out of 166 responses from Bangkok and central regions, 40 responses did not identify the employees' name. It was considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval for addressing the customer by name. So, there was a difference in this aspect between each region (Table 4.53).

For the professionalism dimension, it was divided to 2 sub-dimensions: informative content and answer presentation. For informative content aspect, the responses from each region were different, about four-tenth of agents in the south, north and northeast regions answered the air ticket to Switzerland question whereas 57 percent of agents in central answered this question. Over five percent from every region except northeast did not answer this question at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi-square, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval. So,

there was a difference in answering air ticket question between inquiry responses from each region (Table 4.54).

Table 4.52 E-mail quality in polite dimension (Comparison between each region)

Items	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Use an appropriate salutation	Formal	73.49	26	74.29	14	70.00	7	77.78	169	73.50	
	Informal	23	13.86	7	20.00	5	25.00	0	35	15.20	
	No	21	12.65	2	5.71	1	5.00	2	26	11.30	
	Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.645										
Thanks for the customer interest	Yes	83	50.00	18	51.43	8	40.00	5	55.56	114	49.57
	No	83	50.00	17	48.57	12	60.00	4	44.44	116	50.43
	Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
	P-value	0.82									
Politely close	Formal	102	61.45	22	62.86	14	70.00	4	44.44	142	61.74
	Informal	37	22.29	7	20.00	4	20.00	4	44.44	52	22.61
	No	27	16.27	6	17.14	2	10.00	1	11.11	36	15.65
	Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.763										
Avoid sarcasm	Yes	166	100.00	33	94.29	20	100.00	9	100.00	228	99.13
	No	0	0.00	2	5.71	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.87
	Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
	P-value	0.01*									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$



Table 4.53 E-mail quality in personal dimension (Comparison between each region)

Items	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Address the customer by name	Name	81	48.80	22	62.86	15	75.00	4	44.44	122	53.04
	Wrong name	34	20.48	1	2.86	0.00	0.00	2	22.22	37	16.09
	No	51	30.72	12	34.29	5	25.00	3	33.33	71	30.87
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00	
P-value	0.047*										
Identify the employees' name	Formal	43	25.90	7	20.00	7	35.00	4	44.44	61	26.52
	Informal	83	50.00	21	60.00	10	50.00	4	44.44	118	51.30
	No	40	24.10	7	20.00	3	15.00	1	11.11	51	22.17
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00	
P-value	0.651										

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

Table 4.54 E-mail quality in answering air ticket question (Comparison between each region)

Nature of respond	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Answer the question	96	57.88	14	40.00	9	45.00	4	44.44	123	53.48
Promise to answer later	28	16.87	3	8.57	2	10.00	0	0.00	33	14.35
Ask clarifying questions	13	7.83	8	22.86	0	0.00	1	11.11	22	9.57
Recommend to others	5	3.01	1	2.86	2	10.00	0	0.00	8	3.48
Not do	11	6.63	7	20.00	5	25.00	4	44.44	27	11.74
No answer at all	13	7.83	2	5.71	2	10.00	0	0.00	17	7.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.002*									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The travel agencies that were located in the northeast region offered more choices of airlines to customers. The average was about 3.5 airlines whereas the agents from southern part offered only 1.43 choices, which was the lowest number of choices. Moreover, it was surprising that the agents from Bangkok and central offered 6 choices to the customer. It was considered as being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval. Then, there was a difference in the sense of airlines' choices between inquiry responses for each region (Table 4.55).

Table 4.55 A number of airlines offered in e-mail (Comparison between each region)

Various choices of airlines	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 airline	44	45.83	8	57.14	3	33.33	0	0.00	55	44.72
2 airlines	27	28.13	6	42.86	4	44.44	0	0.00	37	30.08
3 airlines	19	19.79	0	0.00	1	11.11	3	75.00	23	18.70
4 airlines	4	4.17	0	0.00	1	11.11	0	0.00	5	4.07
5 airlines	1	1.04	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	25.00	100	1.63
6 airlines	1	1.04	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.81
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	9	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
Mean	1.90		1.43		2.00		3.50		1.90	
P-value	0.008*									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

As the inquiries asked for the air ticket price to Switzerland by Swiss airline, over half of responses mentioned Swiss airline. Out of 123 inquiry responses from all regions, 114 responses mentioned Swiss air ticket price. There were 59 agents that offered other Star Alliance airlines. The majority of agents from Bangkok and central and the south offered Austrian airline whereas majority of the responses from the north offered Lufthansa airline. It was surprising that agents from all regions except south offered more than one Star Alliance airlines. For the cheaper airlines, the majority of agents from the south and north offered Etihad airline but agents from Bangkok and central offered Turkish

airline. The responses from northeast region did not offer other cheaper airlines at all. In addition, only agents located in Bangkok and central offered more than 1 cheaper airline. Based on calculation by using the Chi-square method, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval for other cheaper airlines recommendation. Therefore, there was a difference in the sense of other cheaper airlines recommendation from the agents in different regions (Table 4.56).

Majority of e-mail responses; about half of agents from central and south, four-fifth of agents from the north and all responses from the northeast, mentioned price only. Nearly 10 percent of agents located in central and southern regions mentioned price, flight schedule and condition. The conditions such as, "this fare is effective On 1 January 2006", "rebooking is permitted without charge" and "all fares are subject to change without prior notice". There was no agent from the north and northeast that offered price, flight and schedule. Interestingly, it was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in air ticket answer's quality between inquiry responses from the travel agencies in different regions (Table 4.57).

The result in each region was quite different and it was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90%, 95% and 99% of confidence interval. Over half of inquiry responses from every region did not mention an air ticket price and tax charge. However, over sixty percent of responses located in central, south and north offered the exact price (which was the sum of the ticket price and tax charge) whereas all agents from northeast offered the exact price. Although the inquiry asked for the ticket price for both adult and child, some responses (except from the south region); over one-tenth, still offered the price for adult only (Table 4.58).

Table 4.56 The airlines offered in e-mail (Comparison between each region)

	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Swiss airline										
Offered										
Swiss	93	96.88	9	64.29	8	88.89	4	100.00	114	92.68
Not offered										
Swiss	3	3.13	5	35.71	1	11.11	0	0.00	9	7.32
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	9	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
P-value	0.00*									

Table 4.56 (Continued)

Airline offered	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Other Star Alliance airlines										
Offered Star Alliance	45	46.87	7	50.00	5	125.00	4	100.00	61	49.61
#Lufthansa	12	12.5	2	14.29	2	22.22	0	0.00	16	13.01
#Austrian	18	18.75	5	35.71	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	18.70
#Thai	2	2.08	0	0.00	1	11.11	0	0.00	3	2.44
#Lufthansa and Thai	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	11.11	0	0.00	1	0.81
#Lufthansa and Austrian	7	7.29	0	0.00	1	11.11	1	25.00	9	7.32
#Lufthansa and Scandinavian	3	3.13	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	50.00	5	4.07
#Thai and Scandinavian	2	2.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.63
#Austrian, Thai and Lufthansa	1	1.04	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	25.00	2	1.63
Not offered Star Alliance	51	53.13	7	50.00	4	66.67	0	0.00	62	52.03
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	4	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
P-value	0.00*									

Table 4.56 (Continued)

Airline offered	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Other cheaper airlines										
Offered cheaper airlines	24	25.00	4	28.57	2	22.22	0	0.00	30	24.40
#China	4	4.17	0	0.00	1	11.11	0	0.00	5	4.07
#Etihad	5	5.21	4	28.57	1	11.11	0	0.00	10	8.13
#Eva	1	1.04	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.81
#Turkish	6	6.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	4.88
#Jordan	3	3.13	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	2.44
#Etihad and Kuwait	2	2.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.63
#Etihad and Turkish	2	2.08	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.63
#China and Etihad	1	1.04	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.81
Not offered cheaper airlines	72	75.00	10	71.43	7	77.78	4	100.00	93	75.61
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	9	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
P-value	0.92									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

Table 4.57 Air ticket answer quality (Comparison between each region)

Air ticket answer's quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Price only	58	60.42	7	50.00	8	88.89	4	100.00	77	62.60
Price with condition	22	22.92	3	21.43	1	11.11	0	0.00	26	21.14
Price and flight schedule	6	6.25	3	21.43	0	0.00	0	0.00	9	7.32
Price, condition and flight schedule	10	10.42	1	7.14	0	0.00	0	0.00	11	8.94
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.342									



Table 4.58 Air ticket answer information quality (Comparison between each region)

Price information	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Air ticket price information										
Exact price	37	38.54	1	7.14	1	11.11	1	25.00	40	32.52
Approximately price	3	3.13	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	2.44
Not mention	56	58.33	13	92.86	8	88.89	3	75.00	80	65.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.163									
Tax charge information										
Exact price	25	26.04	1	7.14	1	11.11	1	25.00	28	22.76
Approximately price	9	9.38	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	9	7.32
Not mention	62	64.58	13	92.86	8	88.89	3	75.00	86	69.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.325									

Table 4.58 (Continued)

Price information	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Total price information										
Exact price	59	61.46	13	92.86	8	88.89	4	100.00	84	68.29
Approximately price	7	7.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	5.69
Not mention	30	31.25	1	7.14	1	11.11	0	0.00	32	26.02
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	9	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
P-value	0.136									
Ticket offering										
Adult only	12	12.5	0	0.00	3	33.33	1	25.00	16	13.01
Adult and child	84	87.5	14	100.00	6	66.67	3	75.00	107	86.99
Total	96	100.00	14	100.00	9	100.00	4	100.00	123	100.00
P-value	0.116									

The second question asked about the package tours to Disneyland, Hong Kong, for 3-4 days. The result had showed that less than one-fourth of the agents that were located in every region answered the question. Many responses especially from Bangkok and central regions (40.36 percent) promised to answer later but there was still no answer. Interestingly, about three-fourth of agents from the south and north asked clarifying questions like the star of hotel, the airline preference, number, exact date of departure and exact names for the whole family. About 20 percent of agents located in central, south and north did not answer at all. Moreover, as analyzed by Chi square, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 99% of confidence interval. So, there was a difference in answering package tour question in each region (Table 4.59).

The travel agencies that were located in the northeast regions offered more choices of package tour than others. The average of choices that were offered by agents in the northeast was about 2 packages whereas average of choices that were offered by other regions was ranged from 1 to 1.3 packages. However, it was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 90%, 95% and 99% of confidence interval. Then, there was no difference in the sense of package tours' choices between inquiry responses from each region (Table 4.60).

The majority of agents from every region offered a 3 days, 2 nights package. However, one-third of agents from south region offered two packages, which were a 3 days 2 nights package and a 4 days 3 nights package. It was not considered as being different statistically, significant at 95% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in the type of package between agents located in each region (Table 4.61).

Half of the agents located in central and northern regions mentioned the price only. Only about 30 percent of responses from central and northern region mentioned price, itinerary and condition. There were not any responses from southern and northeastern mentioned all needed information (price, itinerary and condition). The conditions such as tour price include 2 nights hotel accommodation, depart and return by Dragon air, and a surcharge will be added to the tour price during peak season. Interestingly, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Then, there was a difference in package tour answer's quality between each region (Table 4.62).

Half of the inquiry responses from southern and northern regions offered the package tours to adults only whereas all responses from northeast did not offer the price for children at all. Nevertheless, it was considered as not being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in package offer between each region (Table 4.63).

The second sub-dimension in professionalism dimension was answer presentation. The result between each region was quite different. Approximately 95 percent of responses from central and southern and all responses from north and northeast region used appropriate subject. However, out of 166 agents in central region, 3 agents leaved the subject blank. Majority (over 95 percent) of responses from central, southern and northern regions used English to communicate and all responses from the northeastern region used English. Approximately half of the travel agencies from central, southern and northern regions used English in a good quality but for travel agencies in the northeast, only one in ten used good English to communicate. Only 5 percent used attachment and these 5 percent were located in Bangkok and central region. Most of them attached the air ticket information and package tours. About one-tenth of responses volunteered relevant information such as, "the price will be cheaper if you go before 3 May 2006", "the price from this airline is much cheaper but it has the flight only once a week" and "if you go to Hong Kong with other airlines, it will be cheaper". Approximately one in five responses from central and southern used non worldwide abbreviation such as, "we are the sale agent for UTC", "Brgds (best regards)" and "Brg" whereas the agents from the northeast did not use any abbreviation. About 70 percent of agents from central, north and northeast included the original e-mail in the responses. For the southern part, 91 percent of agents included the original e-mail in the response. Out of 230 agents, 35 agents that were located in central, southern and northern regions offered further assistance like "please do not hesitate to contact me if you need more information". The agents that were located in the northeast did not provide further assistance. Many travel agencies, about nine in ten for central, southern and northern regions did not use capital letters to answer and all agents from the northeast were avoiding using capital letters. It was good because capital letters made it much more difficult to read. As analyzed by Chi-square method, it was considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval for include original e-mail aspect. Therefore, there was a significant difference in this aspect (Table 4.64).

The majority of e-mail responses from north and northeast identified the travel agent's name whereas over half of the responses from central and southern regions did not identify the agent's name. Only about 20 percent of agents located in central, southern and northern regions identified the address, telephone number and website. There was no response from northeast that identified full information (address, telephone number and website). Over half of responses from every region did not identify the contact address at all. It was considered as being different statistically, significant at 90% of confidence interval for identifying the travel agencies' name aspect. Therefore, there was a difference in identifying the agents' name between each region (Table 4.65).

Table 4.59 Package tour answer quality (Comparison between each region)

Nature of respond	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Answer the question	28	16.87	3	8.57	5	25.00	2	22.22	38	16.52
Promise to answer later	67	40.36	10	28.57	1	5.00	3	33.33	81	35.22
Ask clarifying questions	14	8.43	9	25.71	4	20.00	0	0.00	27	11.74
Recommend others	12	7.23	1	2.86	1	5.00	0	0.00	14	6.09
Not do	13	7.83	4	11.43	6	30.00	4	44.44	27	11.74
No answer at all	32	19.28	8	22.86	3	15.00	0	0.00	43	18.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.001*									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$

Table 4.60 A number of package tour choices (Comparison between each region)

Various choices of packages	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 package	22	78.57	2	66.67	4	100.00	0	0.00	28	82.35
2 packages	4	14.29	1	33.33	0	0.00	1	100.00	6	17.65
Total	26	100.00	3	100.00	4	100.00	1	100.00	34	100.00
Mean	1.07		1.33		1		2		1.18	
P-value	0.562									

Table 4.61 Type of package tours quality (Comparison between each region)

Type of package	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
3 days 2 nights	16	61.54	2	66.67	2	50.00	1	100.00	21	61.76
4 days 3 nights	8	30.77	0	0.00	1	25.00	0	0.00	9	26.47
Both	2	7.69	1	33.33	1	25.00	0	0.00	4	11.76
Total	26	100.00	3	100.00	4	100.00	1	100.00	34	100.00
P-value	0.203									



Table 4.6.2 E-mail quality in package tour answer's quality (Comparison between each region)

Package tour answer's quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Price only	13	50.00	1	33.33	2	50.00	0	0.00	16	47.06
Price with condition	4	15.38	1	33.33	1	25.00	1	100.00	7	20.59
Itinerary and condition	0	0.00	1	33.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.94
Price, condition and itinerary	9	34.62	0	0.00	1	25.00	0	0.00	10	29.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.065*									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$

Table 4.6.3 Package tour offered information (Comparison between each region)

Package offer	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Adult only	16	61.54	1	50.00	2	50.00	1	100.00	20	60.61
Both adult and child	10	38.46	1	50.00	2	50.00	0	0.00	13	39.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.815									

Table 4.64 E-mail quality in answer presentation (Comparison between each region)

Presentation quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Subject field</b>										
Appropriate subject	159	95.78	33	94.29	20	100.00	9	100.00	221	96.09
Inappropriate subject	4	2.41	2	5.71	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	2.61
No subject	3	1.81	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	1.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.771									
<b>Language</b>										
English only	157	94.58	34	97.14	19	95.00	9	100.00	219	95.22
Combination of English and Non branded e-mail	7	4.22	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	3.04
Non branded e-mail only	2	1.20	1	2.86	1	5.00	0	0.00	4	1.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.59									

Table 4.64 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Grammar and spelling</b>										
Good quality	83	50.00	16	45.71	8	40.00	1	11.11	108	46.96
Fair quality	78	46.99	16	45.71	11	55.00	7	77.78	112	48.70
Poor quality	5	3.01	3	8.57	1	5.00	1	11.11	10	4.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.239									
<b>Avoid attachment</b>										
Not use attachment	154	92.77	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	218	94.78
Use attachment	12	7.23	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	12	5.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.181									
<b>Provide additional relevant information</b>										
Provide	27	16.27	4	11.43	3	15.00	1	11.11	35	15.22
Not provide	139	83.73	31	88.57	17	85.00	8	88.89	195	84.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.00</b>
P-value	0.885									

Table 4.6.4 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Avoid abbreviation										
Not use abbreviation	135	81.33	27	77.14	19	95.00	9	100.00	190	82.61
Use abbreviation	31	18.67	8	22.86	1	5.00	0	0.00	40	17.39
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.175									
Include original e-mail										
Yes	124	74.70	32	91.43	13	65.00	6	66.67	175	76.09
No	42	25.30	3	8.57	7	35.00	3	33.33	55	23.91
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.09*									
Offer further assistance										
Yes	25	15.06	6	17.14	4	20.00	0	0.00	35	15.22
No	141	84.94	29	82.86	16	80.00	9	100.00	195	84.78
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.557									

Table 4.64 (Continued)

Presentation quality	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Avoid replying in capital letter										
Not use capital letter	153	92.17	32	91.43	17	85.00	9	100.00	211	91.74
Use capital letter	13	7.83	3	8.57	3	15.00	0	0.00	19	8.26
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.561									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$

Table 4.65 E-mail quality in promotional (Comparison between each region)

Promotional	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Identify the travel agent's name										
Identify	59	35.54	17	48.57	12	60.00	5	55.56	93	40.43
Not identify	107	64.46	18	51.43	8	40.00	4	44.44	137	59.57
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.084*									
Identify the contact address										
Address only	6	3.61	1	2.86	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	3.04
Telephone No. only	14	8.43	1	2.86	2	10.00	4	44.44	21	9.13
Website or e-mail only	4	2.41	0	0.00	1	5.00	0	0.00	5	2.17
Address and telephone No.	6	3.61	0	0.00	1	5.00	0	0.00	7	3.04
Address and website	1	0.60	2	5.71	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	3	1.30
Telephone No. and website	7	4.22	3	8.57	1	5.00	0	0.00	11	4.78
Address, telephone No. and website	26	15.66	8	22.86	4	20.00	0	0.00	38	16.52
No contact address	102	61.45	20	57.14	11	55.00	5	55.56	138	60.00
Total	166	100.00	35	100.00	20	100.00	9	100.00	230	100.00
P-value	0.112									

Note: \*Chi-square tests indicated the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$

The overall impression, which was evaluated from five main dimensions (Table 4.24) by the focus group showed that the majority of responses where offering international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong, to both foreign and Thai customers were fair. The travel agencies where located in the area where tourism plays a significant role like northern and northeastern regions had higher e-mail quality than the area where tourism is important. A statistical ANOVA was used to analyze the data and showed that not be significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in overall impression between inquiry responses in each region (Table 4.66).

For the overall impressions of e-mail responses that did not offering international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong, the researcher could not evaluate the information content (Table 4.25). The overall impression was higher than the agents where offered those services. The travel agencies where located in Bangkok and central region had better quality (3.93 points) than other regions, followed by northeastern region (3.67 points). The agents in southern and northern had the same quality (3.57 points). A statistical ANOVA was used to analyze the data and showed there was not be significantly different at 90% of confidence interval. Therefore, there was no difference in overall impression between inquiries in each region (Table 4.67).



**Table 4.66** Overall impressions the responses offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong  
(Comparison between each region)

Overall impression	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	25.00	1	3.13
Fair	3	20.00	3	42.86	2	33.33	2	50.00	10	31.25
Good	10	66.67	4	57.14	4	66.67	1	25.00	19	59.38
Excellent	2	13.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	6.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (5 points)	3.93		3.57		3.57		3.67		3.69	
P-value	0.235									

Table 4.67 Overall impressions of the responses that did not offering both international air ticket booking service and package tour to Hong Kong (Comparison between each region)

Overall impression	Bangkok and central		South		North		Northeast		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very poor	2	1.32	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.01
Poor	43	28.48	11	39.29	3	15.00	0	0.00	57	28.79
Fair	89	58.94	12	42.86	8	40.00	5	55.56	114	57.58
Good	17	11.26	5	17.86	3	15.00	0	0.00	25	12.63
Excellent	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Mean (5 points)	2.80		2.79		3.00		3.00		2.82	
P-value	0.495									

In conclusion, the travel agencies where located in regions where tourism is not important like the northeast (16.67%) and north (8.20%) parts responded more than the location where tourism plays major roles which were Bangkok and central part (9.92%) and southern part (3.01%). However, the speed of answers were higher in regions where tourism plays major roles – Bangkok and the South of Thailand. The travel agencies that were located in regions where tourism is not important had better e-mail quality in personal approach, informative content and overall impression (Table 4.68).

Table 4.68 E-mail quality (Comparison between each region)

Items	Central	South	North	Northeast	Total	P-value
<b>Response rate</b>						
Response rate (percentage)	9.92	3.01	8.2	16.67	7.34	0.00***
<b>Promptness</b>						
Reply in 24 hours (days)	2.19	2	1.7	2.56	2.13	0.645
<b>Politeness</b>						
Use an appropriate salutation (3 points)	2.61	2.69	2.65	2.56	2.62	0.645
Thank for the customers' interest (2 points)	1.5	1.49	1.6	1.44	1.5	0.82
Politely close (3 points)	2.45	2.46	2.6	2.33	2.46	0.763
Avoid sarcasm (2 points)	2	1.94	2	2	1.99	0.01***
<b>Personal approach</b>						
Address the customer by name (3 points)	2.18	2.29	2.5	2.11	2.22	0.047**
Identify the employee's name (3 points)	2.02	2	2.2	2.33	2.04	0.651
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>						
Answer air ticket question (5 points)	4.93	4.29	4.1	4	4.72	0.002***
Various choices of airlines (number of choices)	1.9	1.43	2	3.5	1.9	0.008***

Table 4.68 (Continued)

Items	Central	South	North	Northeast	Total	P-value
<b>Professionalism (Informative content)</b>						
Offer Swiss airline (2 points)	1.97	1.64	1.89	2	1.93	0.00***
Offer Star Alliance airlines (number of choices)	0.61	0.50	0.78	2.25	0.67	0.00***
Offer other Cheaper airlines (number of choices)	0.30	0.29	0.22	0.00	0.28	0.92
Air ticket answer's quality (3 points)	1.50	1.57	1.11	1.00	1.46	0.342
Air ticket price (2 points)	1.8	1.14	1.22	1.5	1.67	0.163
Tax charge (2 points)	1.61	1.14	1.22	1.5	1.53	0.325
Total price (2 points)	2.3	2.86	2.78	3	2.42	0.136
Ticket price recommendation (3 points)	2.75	3	2.33	2.5	2.74	0.116
Answer tour program question (5 points)	3.93	3.51	3.45	3.89	3.83	0.001***
Various choices of packages (Number of choices)	1.07	1.33	0.8	1	1.18	0.562
Package tour answer's quality (3 points)	1.85	1.00	1.75	2.00	1.82	0.065*
Package tour recommendation (3 points)	1.77	2	2	1	1.79	0.815

Table 4.68 (Continued)

Items	Central	South	North	Northeast	Total	P-value
<b>Professionalism (Answer presentation)</b>						
Never leave the subject blank (3 points)	2.94	2.94	3	3	2.95	0.771
Reply in English (percentage)	94.58	97.14	9.50	100.00	95.22	0.59
Watch grammar and spelling (3 points)	2.47	2.37	2.35	2	2.43	0.239
Not use attachment (2 points)	1.93	2	2	2	1.95	0.181
Provide volunteer relevant information (2 points)	1.16	1.11	1.15	1.11	1.15	0.885
Avoid abbreviation (2 points)	1.81	1.77	1.95	2	1.83	0.175
Avoid replying in capital letter (2 points)	1.75	1.91	1.65	1.67	1.76	0.561
Include original e-mail (2 points)	1.15	1.17	1.2	1	1.15	0.09*
Offer further assistance (2 points)	1.92	1.91	1.95	2	1.92	0.557
<b>Promotional</b>						
Identify the travel agency's name (2 points)	1.64	1.51	1.4	1.44	1.6	0.084*
Identify the contact address (4points)	1.78	2.02	1.75	1.44	1.82	0.112

Notes: 1. P-values shown are based on the results of the Chi-square tests as presented in tables 4.50-4.65

2. \*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.1$
3. \*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$
4. \*\*\*Indicate the difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

The results from focus groups showed that the e-mail quality from the agencies located in northeast region had better quality in promptness, personal approach and professionalism than the agencies in other regions. The agencies where located in Bangkok and central performed better than other parts in promotional. The agencies where located in northeast and north regions that offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong offered highest quality of e-mail. However, the responses from agencies where located in Bangkok and central that did not offering both international air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong performed better than other regions (Table 4.69).

**Table 4.69** The e-mail quality in each dimension (Comparison between each region)

Dimension	Bangkok and Central	South	North	Northeast	Total	P-value
Promptness	4.12	4.17	4.3	4.44	4.11	0.169
Politeness	3.63	3.66	3.65	3.56	3.68	0.998
Personal approach	3.19	2.83	3.50	3.78	3.18	0.222
Professionalism: Informative content	2.11	1.93	2.29	3.00	2.12	0.284
Professionalism: Answer presentation	2.39	1.89	2.40	2.78	2.33	0.125
Promotional	2.05	1.94	1.95	1.67	2.01	0.899
Overall impression for the agencies where offering both services.	2.80	2.79	3.00	3.00	2.71	0.495
Overall impression for the agencies where did not offering both services.	3.93	3.57	3.67	3.00	3.65	0.235

Notes: 1. The total point for each dimension is 5 points

2. P-values shown are based on the results of the ANOVA tests as presented in tables 4.46 and 4.47

As considered correlation between each dimension, it showed low correlation. So, every travel agency had done something wrong. However, the agencies that performed well in answer presentation had more possibility to perform well in informative content. The agencies that performed well in personal approach dimension also had more potential to answer politely (Table 4.70).

Table 4.70 Correlation between each dimension

Correlation	Promptness	Politeness	Personal	Informative	Presentation	Promotion
Promptness	1.00	0.01	-0.01	-0.16	-0.16	0.08
Politeness	0.01	1.00	0.59	0.22	0.39	0.12
Personal	-0.01	0.59	1.00	0.34	0.46	0.10
Informative	-0.16	0.22	0.34	1.00	0.67	0.10
Presentation	-0.16	0.39	0.46	0.67	1.00	0.14
Promotion	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.14	1.00

#### 4.3 The problems in e-mail customer service of Thai travel agencies

Based on a database of Thai tourism authorities, it showed that only approximately 7 percent of travel agencies provided a website address. However, the interview results showed that two-thirds of agencies used a website and almost all agencies that used a website had a "Contact us" form in the website. The travel agencies advertised their online business to general people by using brochures, business cards, newspapers and magazines and free websites like, [www.sanook.com](http://www.sanook.com) and [www.pantip.com](http://www.pantip.com). Moreover, one of them advertised their company by posting stickers of the travel agency back of a car. For previous guests, the travel agencies advertised by informing them directly via telephone and business cards.

For agencies that did not use a website, they were of small size travel agencies that had only one or two staff (normally the travel agency's owner). These agencies did not use a website due to budget limitations. Also, the travel agencies faced the problem of lacking qualified staff as such the staff prefer to work in large companies instead of small agencies. The numbers of e-mail addresses in each travel agency varied from 1 to 10 addresses. The agencies that used websites also used branded e-mail addresses. They used branded e-mail as they already had their own website. They used e-mail addresses to promote their website and increase brand awareness. The branded e-mail also helped the travel agencies to look more reliable and professional. Furthermore, the travel agency owners perceived that using branded e-mail was more secure than using free e-mail services. Although many travel agencies did not have a website, all of them used e-mail to communicate with previous guests. They agreed that the reasons that they used non branded e-mail were free service and ease of use. The agency owners selected the e-mail service by popularity (the popular e-mail service such as hotmail and yahoo) and the storage size (for example hotmail domain had 250 megabytes, yahoo domain had 1 gigabyte and gmail domain had 2 gigabytes).

The travel agencies used e-mail to communicate with customers varied from 1 to 6 years. The travel agency owners agreed that the main benefits of e-mail were time saving, cost saving and convenience. The staff can edit the matter in e-mail and forward easily and immediately. The travel agencies can also send pictures and details to customers easily. It is needless to hire staff or work 24 hours as the e-mail message will be



kept in the e-mail system automatically. Furthermore, the e-mail message can help to reduce errors in booking and can keep evidence of booking.

The travel agencies that did not use a website selected and answered e-mail from loyal guests only as they were afraid of viruses and spam. The travel agencies that used a website claimed to answer all e-mails. However, the results from the mystery approach showed that only 7 percent of e-mails were responded to.

For response time, almost all agencies (both agencies that used and did not use a website) answered e-mail everyday. About 7 percent of travel agencies answered e-mail every 2-3 days and about 7 percent answered e-mail once a week. For large size travel agencies, the staff in the operation department would be responsible for answering e-mail but for small size travel agencies, all staff or the business owner only were in charge of answering e-mail. The percentage of booking via e-mail from all sales varied from 1 to 20 percent for the agencies that did not use a website and 10 to 70 percent for the agencies who used a website. Almost all agencies found that it was worth using e-mail as a communication tool because it was a free service and easy to use. Out of 30 agencies, only 3 agencies agreed that it was not worth at all, due to taking a long time to get all the information needed. The travel agencies need to wait for several days to get the information from the customers and if any information is missing, the travel agencies had to send e-mails to ask again. It was impossible to ask directly, like to telephone. Moreover, the customers always send e-mail inquiries to many travel agencies to compare price. So, there was less of a chance to get booking from the customers for the small agencies.

One-third of travel agencies had a full e-mail template to answer e-mails. However, the staff could adapt the template to suit the individual customer. About 33 percent of them had only a signature template (which was normally the staff name, the agency name, website address, postal address, and telephone number). The remaining agencies did not have any template at all. For Thai customers, all travel agencies would use both Thai and English language to answer, depending on the language that the customers used. For foreign customers, the staff in large travel agencies used different languages (for example English, Japanese, Italian, German and Chinese), to communicate depending on the customer's nationality. However, in the case of small agencies, they used English to communicate to foreign customers because it is a global language. Over half of agencies used formal language to communicate but some agencies especially the small agencies used

informal language like hi, hello and thanks. They perceived that the main idea of e-mail response was information, not politeness.

Most travel agencies volunteered relevant information to the customers if there were any promotions related to the customers question in that time. Only a few agencies answered only what the customers asked. Significantly, only about 3 percent of agencies would be send questionnaires to the customers after using the service to evaluate the performance. The majority of agencies think that there was no need to have a questionnaire because if the customers contacted or asked information to the agencies again, it meant the customers were satisfied with the service. Most agencies agreed that there was no complaint about e-mail response. Only few agencies found that the main complaints were expensive price and late response. The online plan in the future included using websites, using a chat program like MSN messenger to communicate with customers, increasing the number of e-mail addresses, staff numbers and training the staff better.

The problems of e-mail customer service could be divided to three main issues: staff, security issues and others. The staff problem included staff not being familiar with using a computer, the staff did not use English to communicate efficiently so they might misunderstand some words, or idioms and decided not to answer an e-mail and the staff did not have enough product knowledge to offer the customers. For the security issue, it was if the customers might be afraid of a lack of security to buy online, so they just asked for information only and the staff did not answer as they were afraid of viruses and spam mail. The others included that it was difficult to communicate via e-mail as a faceless communication tool, they needed to take more time before getting to the conclusion and the competition via e-mail between agencies was very fierce including the price competition.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no previous studies of e-mail customer service quality of Thai travel agencies which prompted this research. The purpose of this study was to measure response behavior of Thai travel agencies through e-mail inquiries. It was based on the “mystery approach”, sending e-mails to travel agencies pretending to be a potential customer interested in a specific product, and then evaluating the quality of answers by the researcher and focus groups. This study follows the general approach of previous research in other countries, but also differs in that the e-mails that were sent to travel agencies were in their second language; English, to acknowledge the fact that many travel agencies in Thailand face the additional pressure of having to answer customer e-mails in a foreign language due to the reliance of the tourism industry in the country on international tourists. Two different e-mails were sent to all known Thai travel agencies who have provided e-mail addresses in the database of Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office (2,258 travel agencies), by using blind carbon copy (Bcc). It was decided to target the entire population, rather than a sample of it, due to expected low response rates. After the analysis of the e-mail answers’ quality, interviews would be carried out with a selection of 30 travel agencies in Bangkok, Phuket and Krabi to identify the problems they meet in adapting to the digital era and to providing online services. The results would be summarized and sent to all the travel agencies who responded to the original mystery e-mails or participated in the interview.

Specifically, the researcher aimed to compare the results in three aspects which were to analyze whether there are any differences in response behavior depending on the type of customer (foreign and Thai), e-mail characteristics (branded and non-branded e-mail) and travel agencies’ location. To analyze the information collected, the use of SPSS was intervened. The SPSS functions used in this study included Frequency, Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation Coefficient, Pearson Chi-square, Z or t-test and ANOVA. In this chapter, the researcher presented results as follow:

## 5.1 Summary of main findings

### 5.2 Recommendations

- 5.2.1 Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office
- 5.2.2 Private sectors related to travel agency business
- 5.2.3 Travel agencies
- 5.2.4 Travel agencies staff
- 5.2.5 Customers

### 5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

### 5.4 Conclusion

## 5.1 Summary of main findings

Only one-fourth of travel agencies used branded e-mail. It was quite low, probably because using branded e-mail was much more costly. One-quarter of the agencies that located in the region where tourism plays major roles like Bangkok and central and southern part, used branded e-mail whereas only 7 percent of the agencies located in the region where tourism is not important, like northern and northeastern regions used branded e-mail. For the agencies that did not use branded e-mail, over half of them used popular domain names like Hotmail (45%), Yahoo (14%) and Loxinfo (8%). The finding from the study also showed that the response rate was poor, approximately about 7 percent or 230 responses. The result conforms with Matzler et al. (2003) who studied the response to customer e-mail inquiries to hotels in Austria and concluded that the e-mail response rate is low.

For promptness dimension, the average time that the agencies took to answer was 2.13 days. The travel agencies performed well in politeness dimension as majority of the agencies used appropriate salutation, closed politely and avoid sarcasm. Also, half of the agencies thanked for customer interest. The travel agencies did not seem concerned about adopting a personal approach as they should. Only half addressed the customer by name and a quarter identified the employees' name. For professionalism dimension, only approximately 17 percent answered both two questions (ticket price and tour program). The average number of choices of airlines given was 1.90 and choice of package tour was 1.18 choices. Out of 230 responses, only 35 agencies provided additional relevant information and offered further assistance. The travel agencies did not

perform well in promotional dimension as four in ten agencies identified the agency's name and 17 percent of them identified the full contact address (the postal address, telephone number and website). Significantly, for overall quality, the results showed that there was no agencies provided excellent quality. Only 13 percent of travel agencies was good quality and the majority was fair. The result was quite different from Matzler et al. (2003) and Murphy and Tan (2003) in the sense of e-mail response quality as they agreed that the e-mail quality was poor.

The focus groups agreed that the professionalism: informative content was the highest important (45 percent), followed by promptness (20 percent), promotion (10 percent), professionalism: answer presentation (10 percent) and politeness (10 percent). The least important dimension was personal approach (5 percent). For some travel agencies where did not offering both air ticket booking service and package tours to Hong Kong, these e-mail responses lack of information in informative content. For these travel agencies, the focus group members agreed that promptness was the most important factor for them (40 percent), followed by politeness (20 percent), promotion (15 percent), professionalism: answer presentation (15 percent) and The least important dimension was personal approach (10 percent).

The researcher proceeded with test on the differences in the quality of answers to Thai and foreign customers, to test the anecdotal evidence that foreigners get better service from Thai travel agencies. The response rate to foreign customers was slightly higher than to Thai. However, the travel agencies took shorter time to answer to Thai customers (the average was 1.69 days) than to foreign customer (2.52 days). One possible explanation is that travel agencies feel more comfortable answering to Thais, and are uncertain of how to communicate with foreigners; however, this issue needs further exploration. The quality of responses to foreign customers (2.83 points) was better than to Thai customers (2.80 points).

Looking at the differences between answers from branded and non-branded e-mails, we found that travel agencies with branded e-mails had a significantly ( $p = 0.00$ ) higher response rate than agencies with non-branded e-mails (11.11% vs. 5.78%). The quality of answers from branded e-mails was, as expected, higher. At the same time, it took longer for branded e-mail agencies to answer the inquiry. The results are similar with Matzler et al. (2003) who investigated response behavior to e-mail inquiries and found

that lower rated hotels have the lowest response rate and the poorest information depth in their answers.

The travel agencies that were located in regions where tourism is not important like the northeast (16.67%) and northern (8.20%) parts, responded more than the location where tourism plays major roles which were Bangkok and central parts (9.92%) and southern parts (3.01%). However, the speed of answers was higher in regions where tourism plays major roles - Bangkok and the South of Thailand. This result conforms with Matzler et al. (2003) who found that the response time and information depth of hotel responses to inquiries are related to the tourism intensity of the region. The travel agencies in regions where tourism played major role may realize better the importance of new technologies, and have better exposure to them, than travel agencies in regions where tourism is less important.

The numbers of e-mail addresses in each travel agency varies from 1 to 10 addresses. The agencies that used website also used branded e-mail addresses. They used an e-mail address to promote their website and increase brand awareness. The branded-email also helped the travel agencies to look more reliable and professional. The travel agency owners perceived that using branded e-mail was more secure than using free e-mail services. The small agencies who faced budget limitation problems did not use a website and used non branded e-mail addresses. They used e-mail to communicate with the previous guests and they answered e-mail from loyal guests only as they were afraid of virus and spam mail. The travel agency owners agreed that the main benefits of e-mail were time saving, cost saving, convenience, easy to edit the matter in e-mail and forward immediately, allow to send picture and detail to customers easily, e-mail message will be kept in e-mail system automatically and reduce of error in booking and can keep as evidence of booking.

For response time, almost all agencies (both agencies that used and not used website) claimed that answering e-mail everyday. For large size travel agencies, the staff in operation department would be responsible for answering e-mail but for small size travel agencies, all staff or the business owner only were in charge to answer e-mail. The percentage of booking via e-mail from all sales were various from 1 to 20 percent for the agencies that not used website and 10 to 70 percent for the agencies where used website. Out of 30 agencies, only 3 agencies agreed that it was not worth at all due to taking long time to get all information needed. It was impossible to ask directly like telephone.

Moreover, the customers always send e-mail inquiry to many travel agencies to compare price.

Majority of travel agencies did not have e-mail template to answer e-mail. Some agencies found that it was useless to answer e-mail politely as the main idea of response was information. Almost all travel agencies offered additional relevant information to the customers if there were any promotion related to the customers' question in that time. Only about 3 percent of agencies would be sent questionnaire to the customers after using the service to evaluate the performance. Majority of agencies claimed that there was no complaint about e-mail response. It might be because the customers who did not satisfy with the service would find somewhere else instead of complaint. The problems of e-mail customer service included computer skill, language skill, product knowledge, security issue and others.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

From the study results, several guidelines could be used to improve e-mail customer service quality grouped by related sectors.

### **5.2.1 Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office**

The database of Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office was incomplete and sometimes with wrong e-mail addresses. The office should update information regularly, at least yearly. The staff who work on keying information to the database should more carefully as only spelling error could totally changed the e-mail address and could not reach to the real agency. Moreover, the office should include other related information like the number of staff in the database.

The Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office should gauge service quality of travel agencies in order to set the rate for each travel agency. It should be similar with the hotel industry which has star ratings to show service quality. It brings benefits to the agencies as the travel agencies should maintain and improve their own quality and they also could use these ratings to promote the company. Moreover, the organization should drive to have an annual test for to check whether the travel agency can efficiently to service the customers.

### 5.2.2 Private sectors related to travel agency business

The main private sectors related to travel agencies business are Association of Thai Travel agencies (ATTA) and Thai Travel agencies association (TTAA). Both associations are in a position to exchange and expand knowledge in regard to the travel industry and improve the efficiency of services by member agencies. Therefore, ATTA and TTAA should motivate travel agencies to be members by promoting the benefits of being a member, offering a reasonable fee charge and presenting interesting activities to persuade travel agencies.

The associations should be the center to train and educate members in order to up-grade and increase their management efficiency in travel services. The training course included language skills, computer skills and up selling techniques. Moreover, the organizations could help to create and maintain a positive attitude toward the hospitality business. Therefore, the travel agency owners and staff can understand more about service industry and how to increase customer satisfaction.

### 5.2.3 Travel agencies

The manager should recruit the qualified staff who feel comfortable to use the Internet, familiar with foreign languages and have good attitude towards customer service. Nevertheless, the travel agency owner or manager should have positive attitudes towards Internet as Pechlaner et al. (2002) found that poor management attitudes and low priorities towards the Internet resulted in poor e-mail responses, and better e-mail policies and training should give agencies an immediate competitive advantage via improved eService.

To enhance their competitive advantage, the travel agency should establish e-mail templates that use basic business communication procedures such as polite greetings, thanking the customer, addressing the customer by name, offering additional information via a website, offering further assistance, closing politely, identifying the employee's name and including the agency contact address. The suggested model response was followed the standards and criteria from previous researches (Murphy et al., 2003 and Murphy and Tan, 2003) (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Suggested model response to the inquiry sent to 2,258 Thai travel agencies <sup>1</sup>

Subject: Your inquiry for flights to Geneva and tour program to Hong Kong <sup>2</sup>

Dear Mrs. Natassja Freytag <sup>3</sup>

Thank you for your e-mail to ThaiBooking concerning economy class flights to Geneva and package tours to Disneyland, Hongkong. <sup>4</sup>

Several airlines have daily flights to Geneva, Switzerland with departure in the morning and afternoon. The price depends upon the airline, date and advanced booking.

The price can start as low as 41,250 for adult and 29,450 Baht for child for Swiss Airline. <sup>5</sup> However, you can get a cheaper price if you depart on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. <sup>5</sup> It costs only 39,250 and 28,000 Baht for adult and child, respectively. For other Star Alliances, some airlines offer cheaper tickets than Swiss airline which are follows:

Austrian Airline : 38,000 Baht (Adult) and 30,120 Baht (Child)

Scandinavian Airline : 35,360 Baht (Adult) and 26,000 Baht (Child)

If you do not mind about the Star Alliance brand, I would like to offer other cheaper airlines as follows:

Turkish Airline : 29,020 Baht (Adult) and 23,420 Baht (Child)

Etihad Airline : 28,150 Baht (Adult) and 22,100 Baht (Child)

Kuwait Airline : 24,200 Baht (Adult) and 19,000 Baht (Child)

Remarks: This price represents a discount for one child and includes all airport fees.

Figure 5.1 (Continued)

For package tours to Disneyland, Hong Kong, all programs are quite similar. The main tourist attractions for 3 days 2 nights package include Disneyland, Repluse Bay and Victoria Peak. For 4 days 3 nights program, traveling at Lowu shopping Arcade and Cultural Village will be added. The price is quite different, depending on the number of days and airline as follows:<sup>7</sup>

4 days 3 nights

By Thai Airways: 29,700 Baht (Adult) and 24,200 Baht (Child)

By Cathey Pacific: 22,800 Baht (Adult) and 20,800 Baht (Child)

3 days 2 nights

By Srilankan Airline: 23,900 Baht (Adult) and 22,900 Baht (Child)

By Dragon Air: 19,800 Baht (Adult) and 18,800 Baht (Child)

Remarks:

This price includes rounded tickets, accommodation, meals, entrance fee and transportation.

Thai Booking agency will also help you with booking accommodations, package or other amenities to make your trip to Geneva and Hong Kong more pleasant. You will find more information about Switzerland and Hong Kong on Thai Booking agency Website, [www.thaibooking.com](http://www.thaibooking.com)<sup>8</sup>

Thai Booking agency is happy to deliver your tickets to you, or you may pick them up from our office. Please let us know if you have other questions about your flight, package tour or stay in Geneva and Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 5.1: (Continued)

Best Regards,<sup>10</sup>  
 Tanya Tanyaluk (Tanya@thaibooking.com)  
 Thai Booking travel agency  
 48/366 Sukhabhiban 2 Road  
 Klong-Kum Bung-Kum  
 Bangkok 10120  
 Tel.: + 66 2254 1010  
 Fax: + 66 2254 1010  
[www.thaibooking.com](http://www.thaibooking.com)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The response should be within 24 hours to provide promptness.

<sup>2</sup> Using the subject name that related to the message.

<sup>3</sup> Using "Dear" adds politeness and addressing by full name

<sup>4</sup> Thanking adds politeness and using the agency name reminds the potential guest, provides agency branding and provides professionalism.

<sup>5</sup> Answering the first question and making sure that the reply covers all needed information.

<sup>6</sup> Providing additional relevant information.

<sup>7</sup> Answering the second question and making sure that the reply covers all needed information.

<sup>8</sup> Offering additional information via the website.

<sup>9</sup> Offering further assistance and including politeness, "please".

<sup>10</sup> Closing politely to increase politeness.

<sup>11</sup> This section includes the sender's name and full contact details, including the website address, for the agency. This entire section, which provides both personal approach and professionalism.

To increase the number of e-mail responses and e-mail quality, managerial intervention is required. This includes training for employees, to make sure that they realize the importance of new technologies for the success of the business, and to ensure that they are aware of the basic rules of e-mail customer service. A quick and easy test to gauge the e-service of their staff is for managers to send an e-mail from mock customers to their own company. Another possible approach is to attach a simple evaluation form in the e-mail message to the customer, politely asking for a feedback on the response quality.

#### 5.2.4 Travel agencies staff

The staff should be service-minded and have a good attitude towards the Internet and service industry. The employees should be concerned more about the need to use e-mail as Siguaw et al. (2000) found that compared with other travel industry software, e-mail programs are easy to use. The staff must realize the high return on their technology investments by focusing on basic procedures to manage e-mail service quality. As well as Stevens and McElhill (2000), agreed that the staff members must appreciate that e-mail is as important as a phonecall, fax or letter.

The staff should be alert to take extra courses or learn by themselves about computer and language. The staff should be confident to communicate with the customers. If employees do not understand some words or idioms or the whole question, they should consult with a colleague or manager instead of assuming by themselves and answering wrongly or not answering at all. Moreover, to reduce error in e-mail responses, the staff should recheck the e-mail before sending to the customers. The staff should make sure that they answer all questions, offer related products, use polite language and be free of spelling errors. However, the motivation of staff depended heavily on the manager. So, the manager should explain to the staff about the need to improve e-mail customer service clearly.

The staff should follow the travel agency standard or template to answer e-mail. However, the employees should be flexible and had some initiative to answer the inquiries. This includes offering not only the required information but also interesting information related to their inquiry, which should increase customer satisfaction.

### 5.2.5 Customers

The customers who are unsatisfied with the e-mail customer service provided by the travel agencies should complain directly to the agencies. These complaints can help the agencies to understand the real problems and enable them to improve service.

### 5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The researcher attempted to conduct an extensive survey of all Thai travel agencies using e-mails in their work. However, the only comprehensive database with information on travel agencies' e-mail addresses, provided by the Bangkok Tourist Business and Guide Register Office, was found to be incomplete and sometimes contained wrong e-mail addresses. The provision of e-mail addresses by travel agencies to the tourist authorities is voluntary, resulting in the researcher being unable to reach all travel agencies using e-mails. It also appears that some e-mail addresses had been mistyped in the database. About a quarter of the e-mails sent by the researcher was bounced back, and the reasons were apparently wrong e-mail addresses, or out-of-date e-mails. Moreover, as our attempts to compare between answers to English and Thai versions of the inquiry, we had to send two e-mails to each travel agency, several days apart, from different e-mails and under different names, and with different text. However, the requirements of both e-mails were similar and as a result some travel agencies might have decided not to answer the second e-mail. This may have further lowered the response rate. Another limitation was related to evaluation method. Ideally, the evaluation should not be done by the researcher only as it would be subjective and it should include the exploration of actual customers' reactions to e-mail responses. However, the people and time were limited. The evaluation could be done by using only a small group of people or focus groups. It would be better if using a large group of people.

Further exploration of e-mail customer services could check for differences in the quality of service provided by different travel agencies, with different periods of existence of the company and even with different age structure of staff. Our guess is that bigger, newer and with younger staff travel agencies would provide better online customer service. The future research could test whether there are differences between the customer service quality of online customers, walk-in customers and even customers using other

media (telephone and fax). Furthermore, to increase efficiency and accuracy, the researchers might increase the number of people in exploration of actual customers' reactions to e-mail responses.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

The low response rate and fair quality of e-mail responses suggested that these agencies are in the early stages of adopting e-mail as a business communication tool. Many travel agencies failed to implement the most basic communication tool: e-mail. These travel agencies might not only lose their customers, but also lose other potential customers due to negative word of mouth effect. Some travel agencies in this study provided better e-mail responses than others. The response rate and responses quality of the travel agencies with branded e-mail addresses was better than that of the agencies with non branded e-mail addresses. The quality and speed of answers to Thai customers was better than to foreigners. In addition, the travel agencies that were located in regions where tourism is not important responded more and had higher quality than the location where tourism plays major roles. The main problems of e-mail customer service included lack of computer skills, language skills, product knowledge and security issue.

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**APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A The list of travel agencies where responded e-mail inquiries in “mystery guest” approach

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
1	Pimporn Travel	Bangkok
2	Majestic Travel International Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
3	Gtf Tour*	Bangkok
4	Sun far Travel*	Bangkok
5	Travel smart Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
6	All about travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
7	Le Bateau Voyage*	Bangkok
8	Pacific Travel	Bangkok
9	Igsa International General Sales Agency Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
10	New line Travel and Tour Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
11	Breakaway Travel International Ltd.	Bangkok
12	Nana Tour*	Bangkok
13	Best Passage Travel*	Bangkok
14	24 Jan Travel*	Bangkok
15	Roomy Route Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
16	Ambika Tours*	Bangkok
17	TBIB Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
18	Pan air Travel*	Bangkok
19	Greenn leaf Travel	Bangkok
20	Princess leisure Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
21	Eastern Holiday	Bangkok
22	Marvel Holidays*	Bangkok
23	Variety International Co., Ltd.	Bangkok

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
24	PEP Travel Centre Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
25	Tour East Thailand	Bangkok
26	Waves Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
27	ITC International Tours Centre Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
28	The Exclusive Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
29	World Traevl Service Ltd.*	Bangkok
30	RT Tour Service Ltd.	Bangkok
31	CBS Travel Asia	Bangkok
32	Master Tour	Bangkok
33	Travel Trip	Bangkok
34	Cross Sky International Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
35	Marvin Tours (Thailand) Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
36	Educational Traevl Center Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
37	Pineapple Travel*	Bangkok
38	Glint Horizon Inter Travel Business Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
39	Diethelm Travel*	Bangkok
40	SpiceRoads Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
41	Asia plamet Tour Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
42	Nancy Tours and Travel Centre Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
43	Pan oceana Travel Service Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
44	Uranium Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
45	Travel Smart Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
46	Pan House Travel Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
47	P.T. Travel service Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
48	Asia Pacific Co., Ltd.	Bangkok

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
49	SP Thai Connectionc Travel Ltd.	Bangkok
50	Sumphaothong Tour Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
51	Going Online Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
52	Ticket Discounts Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
53	Charisma Travel Service Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
54	N.K. Express Group Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
55	Major One Travel Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
56	Thailand Tourist service*	Bangkok
57	Thaifly Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
58	Jysk Travel Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
59	Green Travel Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
60	True View Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
61	E.A.S. Maritime and Travel Services Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
62	Siam Heritage Travel Ltd.	Bangkok
63	SITH Tour and Travel	Bangkok
64	ASKA Plus Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
65	Songsunee Group service (Thailand) Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
66	Charie Connection Travel and Tour	Bangkok
67	Thai style Travel*	Bangkok
68	Nordic Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
69	SP Thai Connections Travel Ltd.*	Bangkok
70	Olavi Tours	Bangkok
71	PB Tours (Thailand) Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
72	North Thai Tour (1997) Co., ltd.	Bangkok
73	S.E.A Gateway Travel and Tours	Bangkok
74	I&E Trading Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
75	Butterfly Tours	Bangkok



## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
76	Pacific Travel Management	Bangkok
77	Coster Tour	Bangkok
78	Blue Planet Travel Agency	Bangkok
79	Nature Trails	Bangkok
80	Arlymear travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
81	Dhakul Chain Travel Service (Thailand) Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
82	Intra Mekong co., Ltd.	Bangkok
83	New Space Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
84	L T S Travel Service	Bangkok
85	Hat Siam Thailand Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
86	Queen Orchid International Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
87	Bird Eye's View Network Co. Ltd.	Bangkok
88	C.V.J Travel Ltd., Part	Bangkok
89	Come True Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
90	Timex Tour	Bangkok
91	Gem Jupiter Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
92	Enjoy Holiday Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
93	Wattanasatit Study Tour Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
94	Flyby Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
95	Altaly Tours and Trading Co., Ltd.*	Bangkok
96	Asia Vacation Tour Ltd., Part	Bangkok
97	Look at Thai Travel co., Ltd.	Bangkok
98	The Angel Travel Service	Bangkok
99	Siam General Aviation Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
100	The Thai Tour Group	Bangkok
101	Krisna Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
102	Topline Travel	Bangkok

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
103	Benjapark Tour	Bangkok
104	Oriental Discovery Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
105	All in one Travel Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
106	Brissbright Co., Ltd.	Nonthaburi
107	Swiss International Airlines Ltd.	Nonthaburi
108	Follow The Sun Tour	Nonthaburi
109	Susanee Inter Tours*	Samutprakarn
110	Future Agency Co., ltd.	Samutprakarn
111	Sab Tawan Co., Ltd.	Nakhonpatom
112	R. Sakul Travel& Transport Ltd. *	Nakhonpatom
113	Cha-am Booking	Phetchaburi
114	Cook Travel and Taxi Service	Phetchaburi
115	Mission Inter Tour	Chonburi
116	JW. Travel*	Chonburi
117	Phenix Travel Service*	Chonburi
118	Narin Interface Ltd.*	Chonburi
119	Y.J. Holidays	Chonburi
120	Impress Pattaya Travel	Chonburi
121	One-O-Five Travel*	Chonburi
122	Tez Tour Co., Ltd.	Chonburi
123	Lada Tour Co., Ltd.	Chonburi
124	Chai and Sons Travel Co.,Ltd.	Chonburi
125	Tad Fah Tous Ltd.	Chonburi
126	Smart World Travel Agency	Pathumthani
127	R.S.P. Jumbo Travel Centre	Kanchanaburi
128	CLS International Co., Ltd.*	Phuket
129	Deevana Patong Resort and Spa Co., Ltd.*	Phuket

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
130	Asia Voyage	Phuket
131	JF Travel*	Phuket
132	Karon Rexplorer Travel Group	Phuket
133	Zenith Patong*	Phuket
134	Sea Canoe Thailand Co., Ltd.	Phuket
135	Let's go Travel	Phuket
136	Sunny Sunflower Co., Ltd.	Phuket
137	Noknoi Tourist Co., Ltd.	Phuket
138	South Tours Co., Ltd.	Phuket
139	Online Reservation Co., Ltd.*	Phuket
140	Island Holidays Co., Ltd.	Phuket
141	Phuket Travel Mart Co., Ltd.	Phuket
142	Phuket Travel Shop	Phuket
143	Economy Holiday Tour	Phuket
144	South Services (Thailand) Co., Ltd.	Phuket
145	Travel Solutions Co., Ltd.	Suratthani
146	Glory Worldwide Travel	Suratthani
147	D.J. Paradise Tours	Suratthani
148	Koh Tao Coral Grand Resort*	Suratthani
149	Asia Travel International	Suratthani
150	T.W.C.Tour and Travel	Suratthani
151	Sunrise Tropical Co., Ltd.	Krabi
152	Thai Hotels Links Co., Ltd.	Krabi
153	Phi Phi Your & Phi Phi Villa Resort	Krabi
154	Krabi Star Tour and Travel	Krabi
155	Hatyai Ah Leck Tour	Songkla
156	Rak Lay Tour	Satun

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
157	Agora Tour	Chiang Mai
158	RSN Tour	Chiang Mai
159	CNX Air ticketing*	Chiang Mai
160	Gem Travel Thaifocus*	Chiang Mai
161	3rd Eye Travel*	Chiang Mai
162	Vessawan Travels	Chiang Mai
163	Meelarp Tour	Chiang Mai
164	World Express Chiang Mai	Chiang Mai
165	Samak Tour*	Chiang Mai
166	Erawan P.U.C. Tour	Chiang Mai
167	Manit Travel	Chiang Mai
168	Swan Travel	Chiang Mai
169	Journey First Travel	Chiang Mai
170	Chiangmai Travel center	Chiang Mai
171	Siam Travel Club	Chiang Rai
172	Sieang Zeung Resort	Tak
173	Khao Yai Thongsak Tour	Nakhonrachasima
174	Muna Tours	Khonkan
175	Tres Bien Travel Co., Ltd.*	Khonkan
176	Rapport Service and Travel*	Nongkhai
177	Indochina Gateway Travel and service Ltd., Part	Ubonratchathani
178	OG Tours Co., Ltd.*	Maharakarm

Note: \* The travel agencies where responded to both foreign and Thai customers

## APPENDIX B The list of travel agencies where participated in interview

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
1	24 Jan Travel*	Bangkok
2	Travel You Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
3	M.S.C. Travel	Bangkok
4	Marvel Holidays*	Bangkok
5	Pti-Asia Co., Ltd.	Bangkok
6	In Siam Travel Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
7	At Tour & Travel	Bangkok
8	Thai Han Trading Travel Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
9	V.V. Victory Tour Ltd.	Bangkok
10	Nantaka Travel Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
11	Sudkhobfa Panorama Travel Co.,Ltd.	Bangkok
12	APS Travel	Bangkok
13	Phuket Travel Mart Co., Ltd.*	Phuket
14	New born Tour and Travel co., Ltd.	Phuket
15	Andaman Travex Co., Ltd.	Phuket
16	Ocean Adventure	Phuket
17	Family Tour and Service	Phuket
18	Cristal Tour Co., Ltd.	Phuket
19	South Services (Thailand) Co., Ltd.*	Phuket
20	Angelina Levante Tour and Travel	Phuket
21	J.S. Scorpion house and tour	Phuket
22	Bonjour Phuket Tour	Phuket
23	Phuket Discovery Tours	Phuket
24	Deevana Patong Resort and Spa Co., Ltd.*	Phuket
25	P.A.N Tour	Krabi
26	C. S. V. Trvel and Tour	Krabi
27	K. Guesthouse and Tour	Krabi

## APPENDIX B (Continued)

No.	Travel agency's name	Location
28	Krabi Friendly Tour and Travel	Krabi
29	Laikram Travel	Krabi
30	Thai Hotels Links Co., Ltd.*	Krabi

Note: \* The travel agencies where responded e-mail in "Mystery guest" approach

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Saweksup, Nutjika and Ilian Assenov. "*E-mail Customer Service Quality; The Case of Thai Travel agencies*", the 5<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Forum for Graduate Student Research in Tourism, Bangkok, Thailand, 20-22 September, 2006.