Tourism and Hospitality Management

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THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET AS AN SST

- AN ONLINE BOOKING SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The Internet presents a great possibility for the tourism industry to sell and market their services online. Travel agents used to be the main provider of booking systems but with the development of information technology, this trend has shifted and booking systems are now accessible to the consumers themselves. Because of this development and the growth of self-service technology (SST), the customer has gained greater power and insight in the booking procedure. Today, consumers are truly in the tourism driving-seat.

This research investigates the role of the Internet used as an SST in an online booking service. The study shows to what extent and to what purpose the customers actually use the online service and how they perceive Internet as an information tool. Suggestions on how the service could be developed and improved are also provided. Results of the study indicate a diminishing importance of tourist offices and telephone services as traditional, human interaction-based booking channels regarding this type of service. Instead, their role will be to support the online business with qualified information and customer-oriented advice.

Key words: The Internet, self-service technology (SST), tourism, online cottage booking

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CONTENT

CHAPTER 1: THE RESEARCH SUBJECT EMERGES

…information technology is reshaping the basic structure of both commerce and society in general … its importance to the success of a tourism enterprise can only grow in the future

(Davis and Davidson, 1991 in O'Connor, 1999 p. 4)

1.1 Introduction to research area

Information technology has during the last decade evolved in a dramatic way and has become a part of everyday life for most people in modern society. The information technology development has had a major impact on the tourism industry, one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. The tourist business is the industry, alongside the financial sector, that to the largest extent uses the Internet in order to market and distribute their services (Lexhagen and Nysveen, 2000).

The development of information technology has had a particular impact on the tourism business because it provides unique opportunities for interaction between partners, suppliers and customers no matter how distant they may be (Buhalis, 2000). Tourism and technology are presently two of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (Sheldon, 1997). One of the major factors that led to increased growth in tourism is the growing number of people in the western world, especially the age group 35 – 45 and the age group over 60 that will be economically capable and willing to travel (Baines, 1998). In a study on the Internet use by Swedish people aged 16 to 64 (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2002) it was revealed that the Internet is most commonly used for information search but almost as many use it for communication purposes.

Purchasing and selling goods and services online is done by 48 per cent of the population and is most common in the age group 25 – 44 years (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2002).

The Internet presents a great possibility for the tourism industry to use this media to sell their products and it has had a major impact on the development in many tourism areas such as hotels, airlines and travel agents. Consumers in general have a positive attitude towards booking and purchasing travel online and value the comfort and time saving attributes that such a service offers (Eriksson and Olsson, 2002). Many tourism companies use the Internet to market and distribute their service offerings and this has affected the way the consumer interacts with the company. Various tourism companies such as airlines (SAS, Ryan Air), hotels (Scandic, SAS Radisson) and tourism organisations (The West Swedish Tourist board, Göteborg & Co.) offer the possibility of booking and/or purchasing a service over the Internet. This is a growing trend and many companies want to invest in this kind of service. According to Statens Järnvägar (SJ), 17 percent of all SJ customers book their tickets online or through other means of self-service-technology and the goal is that this number will increase to 30 percent in 2005 (www.sj.se 031119).

Travel agents used to be the main provider of booking systems but with the development of the information technology, this trend has shifted and booking systems are now accessible to the consumers themselves. Because of this new development and the growth of self-service technologies, the customer has gained greater power and insight in the booking procedure (Inkpen, 1998). Traditional customer behaviour and attitudes have been affected by the new ways of doing business (Bitner et al. 2000a).

The emerging use of machines in the service encounter is referred to as self-service technology or SST in research literature. Research on self-service technologies confronts the notion that employee-customer interaction is an essential characteristic of service marketing. Much of the manual work that was performed before, that was very costly and labour intense, has been replaced by computerised systems and telecommunications (O'Connor, 1999). The customers find themselves interacting with a machine and the traditional opportunity of face-to-face evaluation for companies is no longer possible (Dabholkar, 2000). Companies need to discover other ways to gain knowledge of how customers evaluate on-line offers and services.

1.1.1 Our interest in the research area

We are convinced that the tourism industry can only grow in the future, in spite of present concerns of terrorist acts and world turbulence. It is important for the industry, not only to keep up with the fast technological development, but also to be an active participator and innovator in the field of technology. The benefits of the growth and development of information technology for the tourism industry has been substantial but there is room for further improvements (Bitner et al. 2000a).

We believe that self-service technology can generate benefits for both customers and companies in a traditionally personnel intense business. There is a potential to create added value to customers by offering them more control and power over the service delivery. Through technology, companies can rationalise their service operations by cutting personnel costs and by streamlining their service functions.

From the perspective of the tourism organisations it would be valuable to gain insight in the importance of self-service technology use in service offerings,

such as online booking, in order to make full use of the potentials of technology. The present study attempts to explore these issues by using a regional tourist organisation, the West Swedish Tourist board, as our case study.

Early on in our education of Tourism and Hospitality Management we got into contact with the West Swedish tourist board. We learnt about how they work through several projects to strengthen and develop the region's tourism industry. When deciding our thesis subject we consulted Marie Linde, who is in charge of student contacts at the organisation to enquire about subjects that were of current interest to the organisation. Linde presented us with several options that were connected to ongoing projects within the organisation.

We felt that the study area of information technology and online booking was interesting and worth investigating deeper. The area of information technology is an area that we did not have any deeper knowledge about beforehand, and we saw it as an opportunity to challenge ourselves to learn more about an area that is undoubtedly important to the development of the industry. Since the West Swedish Tourist board introduced us to the research area and because we find their organisation interesting from a tourism destination perspective, we have used the West Swedish Tourist board as a basis for our empirical study.

Information technology, especially booking services of tourism services online is an area that the West Swedish Tourist board spends a lot of resources on, both in terms of time and finance (see 1.3.1). Because of this, they are particularly interested in what role the Internet and online booking plays in order to develop and broaden their Internet service. The current online booking service is a service that they want to develop into more complex offerings. At the moment the West Swedish Tourist board offers the service of booking

cottages through their website, but they would like to broaden the concept with additional products such as excursions or canoe rental. They are also interested in learning how customers use the online booking service today.

1.2 The first step – investigating the organisation

To get a wider understanding of the West Swedish Tourist board and more specifically the service of online cottages we have performed an exploratory research study. Exploratory studies are useful at an initial stage in a research process (Kinnear & Taylor 1996). By investigating the organisation and the service, we wanted to form a platform of knowledge on which to base the second step in our research process, a customer interview study.

Our information about the organisation was collected from primary sources through interviews and secondary sources through studying the organisation's booking system and printed material. We have conducted interviews with Malin Elofsson who is responsible for the online booking system support at the West Sweden Tourist board and Hans Gundmar, which is the organisation's information technology manager. The interviews took place at the West Swedish Tourist board and were structured as informal conversations around Internet's role in the organisation and the online cottage rental service. During the thesis work we also asked Alexandra Hallgren and Ann Säterman at the organisation's Internet department for specific information regarding information technology.

Further we have studied the West Swedish Tourist board's web portal www.vastsverige.com with additional links to the cottage rental organisations Bo i Bohuslän and Dalslandsstugor as well as the cottage booking system with its customer database. This was done to gain understanding about how the booking proceeds from what the customer inserts over the Internet to what the

database shows the tourist organisations' employees. Studying the customer database ourselves was a good way of getting first hand understanding of how the system works. We read the organisations annual report 2002 and the information brochure Kort Nytt to find more information about the organisation and what they specify the role of information technology to be.

When we conducted the personal interviews with the employees at West Swedish Tourist board, we were aware of the fact that face-to-face interview questions should be asked in a clear manner and recorded correctly. To further avoid any misunderstandings or errors, we have asked the interviewed persons to review the edited version of the interview text. The researcher must be aware of the fact that the situation can cause biased answers because of the respondent for example trying to satisfy or impress the interviewer (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). In the case of interviewing persons about their company, it is important to realise that the answers can be of a flattering nature in favour of the organisation. The same principle applies when studying the organisation's own material or material produced by other organisations. When reading the material about the West Swedish Tourist board, we tried to be aware of the purpose of the material and to use it critically. We have also clearly stated that this is commercially published material when referring to the content in our thesis.

1.3 The West Swedish Tourist board – a company description

One of the bigger tourist areas in Sweden is West Sweden (Västsverige). The region is known for its beautiful nature and coastal areas. Sweden's second largest city, Göteborg, is also a part of the region.

Figure 1: *Map over Sweden*   **Figure 2:** *West Sweden (Västsverige)*

www.svearike.com/kartor_2.htm   www.hallevadsholm.com/karta/vastra_gotaland.htm

The West Swedish Tourist board (WSTB) is a regional organisation that works to increase tourism in the West Sweden area. One of their missions is offering services to tourism-oriented companies in the region in order to facilitate and promote their work (Malin Elofsson 031002).

Since 1999/2000 the West Swedish Tourist board is owned by the governmental organisation *Västra Götalandsregionen* (www.vgregion.se 031008). It is the Swedish government that has decided what responsibilities and tasks should be carried out by the different regional organisations such as *Västra Götalandsregionen*. The West Swedish regional organisation *Västra Götalandsregionen* is foremost in charge of health care in the West Sweden region, but is also responsible for supporting, planning and developing the area in terms of issues concerning business and trade, culture, infrastructure,

information technology, tourism etc. This work is conducted in close co-operation with various different actors in the region, such as the industry, universities, other governmental organisations and stakeholders. This is where the WSTB comes in to the picture.

The West Swedish Tourist board is responsible for tourism issues and the development of the tourism and hospitality industry in the West Sweden region. The organisation works nationally and internationally with marketing, product development, research and development, commissioned by *Västra Götalandsregionen*. Developing tourism is considered to be one of the areas that is important in the overall effort to develop and generate economic growth to the region (www.vgregion.se 031008). Being a governmental non-profit organisation allows the company to invest and support other companies in a way that would not be possible if they had to make a profit (Hans Gundmar 031020).

The tourism and hospitality industry is a major generator when it comes to strengthening the region's identity and making it possible to market in Sweden and abroad (Annual report 2002). The West Swedish Tourist board disposes of project funding that they use to co-finance regional and municipal projects, in some cases even their own projects. The ambition is to take a active role in the management, implementation and follow up of the projects the supported organisation, in order to make sure that allocated funding leads to business- and destination development.

1.3.1 Internet and the development of tourism in West Sweden
In order to make West Sweden more accessible in an easy and inexpensive manner to interested consumers all over the world, the West Swedish Tourist board has invested in information technology development. By offering

products and services over the Internet, West Sweden is accessible to a variety of markets. Through the Internet the tourists that visit the region should be able to find all information they need, and easy access to information often leads to guests staying longer to experience more. Development within the Internet area is crucial in order to compete on both the national and international market. Co-operation in this area is done with Göteborg & Co, an organisation that works with developing and marketing the Gothenburg region (Annual report 2002). WSTB's main aim when it comes to the Internet is to make the region's offerings accessible over the net to potential customers. As Hans Gundmar (031020) puts it: "we want to use our Internet portal as a display window to show all the quality products the region has to offer".

One of the major Internet trends is the shift in focus, from an information intense website primarily used to inform the potential consumers, to a more sales oriented page. In the future the tourists interested in visiting West Sweden will more easily be able to reserve and purchase tourism products over the Internet. The tourism research institute ETOUR concludes that the West coast, i.e. the coastal areas of Bohuslän and Gothenburg, is a popular tourism destination and is well known by potential tourists (Kort Nytt 2:2003). ETOUR also concludes that most tourists have acquired information prior to the trip either through word-of–mouth from relatives and friends or by simply having previous knowledge of the area. Interesting to note is that apart from word-of-mouth and previous knowledge, the Internet is the most common way to search for new information about the destination, even more common than the traditional tourist information bureau.

According to the West Swedish Tourist board's brochure Kort Nytt (2:2003) the overall target for the organisation is to make West Sweden Scandinavia's most visited and appreciated tourist region. A way of reaching this target is to

develop and increase tourism in the area through developing Internet as a fundamental marketing channel with information, sales and service. The most prioritised area for development during the next couple of years will be the "Virtual Tourist Information office". The aim of the virtual tourist information office is to create an informative, selling and virtual destination portal over the Internet to improve the possibility for potential and current visitors to, whenever they want, find information, book and receive services (Alexandra Hallgren 031023).

Tourists should be able to access the virtual tourist information through their own computer and via mobile information units in the region (Alexandra Hallgren 031023). The virtual tourist information bureau will offer the tourists traditional tourist information about accommodation, activities and so on, but also allow them to see and hear through virtual visits in the region. The idea is to create more information value and further encourage visitors to book a trip. Services such as maps, weather reports and sea temperature will also be presented online. Marketing and sales will be done through displaying products that can be purchased online, presented in an online store under the name of "Book West Sweden". The online store would consist of ready packages and links to tourism products that the region has to offer. There will be certain quality standards that the products must live up to in order to be represented by the West Swedish Tourist board (Hans Gundmar 031020).

1.4 The aim of the thesis

The overall aim of our thesis is to investigate the role of the Internet used as a self-service technology in an online booking service. Through our interview study and the study of the organisation, and in combination with our conceptual framework, we want to investigate the current situation of the online booking

service. This will provide us with a foundation on which to base suggestions on how the online booking service can be developed and improved.

1.5 Limitations and perspective of the study

We have focused our study on the use of SST in the tourism business. To limit the scope we have chosen to look at booking services offered online. In order to conduct a study on a manageable level, we have used the online booking service of cottages at WSTB. When studying this phenomenon, a company perspective has been more appropriate than a customer perspective in order to reach our aim of presenting recommendations to tourism organisations.

1.6 Research questions

By the introduction of self-service technology in the tourism business, the service encounter between customer and organisation is going through changes. This means that both company and customer are faced with new challenges regarding the interactions in the service production process. Booking tourism services over the Internet is a form of SST that is gaining popularity, and many tourism companies offer this kind of service to their customers. West Sweden is a popular tourist destination, and private cottage rental is one of the region's most well-liked accommodation alternatives. The WSTB is keeping up with the technology development, and taking advantage of the possibilities that the Internet provides by offering online booking of private cottages on their web portal.

Due to the growing use of SST and its development in the area of tourism, we believe that this is an interesting research area. In our opinion, an online booking service is a good example to base our thesis study on. Our main interest lies in the possibilities to develop and improve the Internet's role as a SST in a tourism context, such as the online cottage booking services at WSTB.

Founded on this discussion, we have formulated two research questions. Our first research question is:

What is the role of the Internet as an SST in the online booking service?

This question will help us to describe the online booking service and define the borders of Internet-use. Further, in order to give legitimate recommendations concerning service improvements and development, we need to investigate how the online booking service is actually used by customers today. Our second research question is thus:

How does the customer use the Internet as an SST in the online booking service?

This question will help us to describe interactions and see variations in the use of the service and to what extent the Internet as a self-service technology is present in the service encounter.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

In order to enhance our knowledge in the field of information technology in tourism, we conducted an extensive literature study of the area to increase our understanding of the chosen subject. This resulted in a literature review in order to identify a problem and determine courses of action (Christiansson and Sporrek, 2003). This type of pre-study of literature can be classified as an exploratory study of secondary data in the field i.e. data that has already been published and produced for other purposes than those of this specific research (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). Secondary data is suitable to use to get wide range information on a subject before proceeding to use primary data i.e. data

collected by the researcher for the specific study at hand. The aim of our literature review was to examine the scope of literature in the field of information technology use in tourism. We searched for articles through the university library database GUNDA using key words as "Self Service Technology", "E-commerce", "customer behaviour" and "buying behaviour" in relation to "Internet". We also read books primarily on e-commerce and Internet in the tourism business in general.

A preliminary thesis proposal, based on the literature review, later formed the ground for this thesis project and helped us to further pinpoint the relevant theories to be used in our thesis. Our primary literature review was narrowed down to present a conceptual framework relevant to our study and is presented in chapter two. We present concepts and labels related to service management to use in our analysis. We describe and discuss the changes in service concepts, which have taken place from the 60s and 70s until today. Special attention has been given to concepts of customer participation and technology-use in service. In chapter two we also give an overview of current studies in the field of self-service technology and e-commerce. We want to build on this research to conceptualise our view on the role of the Internet as an SST.

Chapter three describes and explains the motives behind the methodology of the interview study and how we conducted our field studies. We present the questions used in our interview study and explain and motivate the use of them. The chapter is concluded with a section where we evaluate our interview research and discuss the trustworthiness of our study.

In chapter four we present our description of the online cottage booking service at the West Swedish Tourist board using the "Service Production System" (Grönroos, 1990) as a conceptual framework. By using this model to describe

the service we give the reader an overview of the service. We discuss the different recourses and how they are combined in the particular service of online cottage booking. We present our own model of the online cottage booking service based on Grönroos model, to further illustrate the specific service production system.

A deeper analysis and discussion regarding the role of the Internet and the interactions that take place between the customer and the online booking service is presented in chapter five. We have developed a model that we call the "generic type model" and we base our discussion around this model in order to show what role the Internet plays in the interactions and what variations occur during the booking process. We also discuss ways of improving the online booking service. In chapter six we summarise and conclude our findings and offer managerial implications and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interaction between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems

(Grönroos, 2001 p. 46)

2.1 Services differ from goods

In the 60s and 70s, the service industry attracted focus from researchers, especially in areas of marketing and management. A discussion was being held about the different nature of services compared to traditional manufactured goods.

Levitt (1972) stated that everybody is in service and that there are no service industries, because all industry consists of more or less service components. He meant that focus should lie on efficient production results and looking for solutions in the task that has to be done instead of looking for solutions in the performer of the task.

Berry (1980) presented a series of characteristics that differentiated services from goods. He pointed out that a service was more intangible than tangible. He meant that when a service was purchased, money had been spent but there was nothing tangible to show for it. It was the essence of what was being bought, tangible or intangible, that decided if a product classified as a good or a service. Berry also raised the fact of simultaneous production and consumption in services. A good is first produced, then sold and then consumed. A service on the other hand is, in many cases, first sold and then produced and consumed

at the same time. According to Berry, the service provider becomes a significant factor in the service production.

Berry inspired both Grönroos (1983) and Normann (1983) to discuss the differences between goods and services and to develop Berry's thoughts. Service is not just a part of the service industries but also an important part in all industries. Three types of services can be distinguished; customer service (for example information desk service), service as value added service (for example computer support) and service offerings as the product (for example a hair cut) (Bitner et al. 2000b) In all three types, the customer plays an important role.

2.1.1 The customer as co-producer

In the discussions of what makes a service different from a good, the customer was brought forward in a new way. Chase (1978) discussed how to manage the customer in service operations. The customers have an important role in the service production and can act unpredictably which may lead to decreased quality and productivity. Chase divided services into high-contact versus low-contact, based on the extent of contact between the customer and the service provider. The extent of contact was defined as the amount of time the customer spends in the system relative to the total time it takes to serve him or her.

Chase meant that this way of looking at services has several implications for management. In a high-contact operation you can only rationalise to some extent. Technical solutions can substitute some jobs performed by direct contact workers, but here the attitudes of both the personnel and the customers determine the level of quality experienced. Distinction should be made between high-contact and low-contact operations in the service system. Because the skills required for doing high-contact work differ from the skills needed for

low-contact work, the work functions should be divided into two groups of personnel performing the different types of activities. This minimises the customer's influence and makes performance more effective.

Normann (1992) discussed the issue of the customer as a part of the service delivery system. Part of what the customer believes to be the service outcome is dependent on how much and in what way the customer participates in the production of the service, and what type of problems and satisfaction are involved in the process.
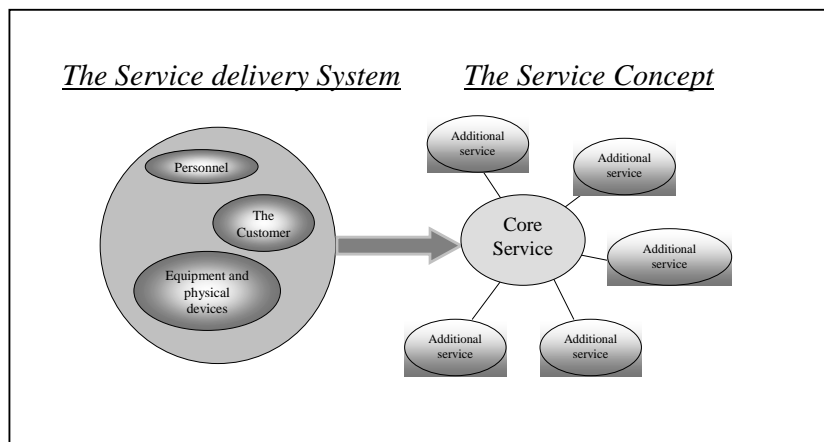
Model 1: *The service delivery system and the service concept* (Normann 1992 p. 78)

The term *prosumer* was founded by Toffler to describe the growing integration between the functions of production and consumption (Normann 1992). The service sector is personnel intense and this means that the costs easily rise more than productivity, leading to self-service being a preferable way for many to do business (Zeleny, 1978 in Normann, 1992). The customer will best be persuaded to participate more by lowering their costs or giving the customer more quality for less money (Normann, 1992). Apart from this, self-service can educate customers and make them more efficient. Some customers might even be content with less social interaction.

Bitner et al. (1997) suggest that customer education, effective and realistic expectation settings and other efforts should be provided to facilitate customers in their role. By clearly defining the role the customers are expected to play, a company can investigate further into the issue of customer participation. This will lead the company to ask what types of information it may need to share with its customers, and how to train, encourage and reward its customers for participation. Approaches for monitoring customer contribution can be developed in order to provide feedback to guide improvement of the customers' role in the service delivery.

2.2 Technology-use in the service encounter

Even though a service is intangible and can best be described as an action, there are certain elements that are material, such as equipment and buildings (Normann 1992). Many service companies today are very technology intense and the material elements can play an important role in the production of the service. Transport and computerised services can be placed in this category. The more equipment based and capital intense the service is, the more there is a need for efficient supervision and control of the customers and the staff.

Grönroos (2001) classified services into high-touch or high-tech services. High-touch services are mainly reliant on people in the service process producing the service, whereas high-tech services are primarily based on the use of automatic systems, information technology and other types of physical resources. High-tech services such as Internet booking systems are, in critical moments where there is a service failure, in need of supporting high-touch services such as a helpdesk number to call. The human interaction that then occurs is very dependent on customer-oriented staff, since the human interaction in high-tech services is scarce and mostly occurs in critical situations. If the high-touch interaction fails in these cases, there are fewer

opportunities for service recovery than in a completely high-touch service situation.

According to Normann (1992) there are five factors that are especially affected by the role of physical elements in the service delivery system. The first is cost rationalisation through use of technology and machines, in order to cut down personnel costs or to increase productivity. This can be done in the interaction with the customer, as in the case of an Internet booking service, or as a part of the service delivery system behind the line of visibility. Secondly, the introduction of technology into a service can make it easier to control and standardise the service quality. The interaction with a machine may not be as pleasant as interaction with sales staff but a machine will often behave in a more predictable way. Technology can thirdly be seen to increase service quality through offering 24-hour service in a way that would be impossible with a human interaction due to impractical and financial reasons. The forth factor mentioned by Normann is the opportunity to closer integrate the customer in the service system. Through consumer databases, the company can learn more about the customer. Finally, technology and physical elements can assist in creating desirable customer behaviour.

Bitner et al. (2000b) also recognises some of the problems with technology infusion. In some cases, technology based service encounters may result in negative outcomes and raise questions about privacy and security with the consumer. It is dangerous for a company to rely too much on technology and not provide the customer with other options. According to Bitner et al, it is critical to provide customers with alternatives, though benefits can be substantial if the problems of implementing technology can be overcome.

2.3 Self - Service Technology (SST)

New literature is emerging around the position of self-service technology. A self-service technology can be for example airline ticketing machines, automatic teller machines, and computer-based booking services (Lee and Allaway, 2002). SSTs allow or force, depending on your point of view, consumers to help produce their own service encounters via machine interaction rather than by interacting with a human being. Companies that introduce SSTs wish to establish fast acceptance and usage of these technologies by potential consumers. SSTs can help firms to widen their service offerings and gain customer satisfaction while simultaneously cutting labour costs. Employees can be rid routine tasks to focus on providing more varied, and potentially more valuable, services. SSTs potentially offer customers 24-hour access to services. According to Bitner et al. (2000a), SST is gradually changing the way customers and companies interact when creating service outcomes. Until now the focus in the academic literature has been on the interpersonal dynamics of service encounters; much is to be learned about customer interactions with technology-based self-service delivery options.

2.3.1 Studies on Self - Service Technology (SST)

Customers are performing more and more services on their own, self-service technology enables the customer to produce the service without any direct interaction with an employee. Bitner et al. (2002) suggests that in the eagerness to introduce technology that enables customers to get service on their own, it is often found that implementing and managing effective SSTs is more complicated than it was first thought to be. Bitner et al. (2002) present lessons to guide managers in developing successful SST based on factors that impact customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with SST. Customer adoptions of SSTs are also explored and factors that are necessary for a customer to try an SST for the first time are pointed out. While customer satisfaction is important

to guarantee continued use of an SST, to get a customers to try a new SST for the first time is an even bigger concern for many companies. Making the customer aware of the SST as an alternative purchase channel is crucial. Furthermore even if customers are aware of the service they may not be ready to use it. Here the customers' perceived ability to use SST plays an important role. Also it is important for customers to understand their role in using SST and see the potential benefits of the usage.

Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002) suggest that the increased speed of growth in technology-based self-service today is giving rise to questions about the acceptance of such forms of service delivery by all kinds of consumers and under varied situational contexts. Relevant consumer traits for SSTs are examined and include inborn novelty seeking, self-efficacy with respect to technology, self-consciousness, and the need for interaction with a human.

Bitner et al. (2000a) categorised critical incidents to distinguish sources of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with SST. Through the critical incident study they found three major categories leading to satisfaction and four major factors leading to dissatisfaction. The first category that leads to satisfaction is SSTs' possibility to help a customer in an immediate or troubling situation because of its relatively easy access. Secondly, customers perceive the relative advantage in comparison to traditional means of service as positive. The third major *satisfactory factor* is the novelty of the technology and its ability to perform the service correctly. *Dissatisfactory factors* are technology failure, process failure following the SST encounter, poor SST design and failure caused by the customers themselves because of for example lack of knowledge. Bitner et al. (2000a) present a discussion of these resulting critical factors and their relationship to customer attributions, complaining behaviour, word of mouth, and repeat purchase intentions.

As technology continues to develop, and as companies are provided with more opportunities to offer self-service options to consumers, they need to be aware of what affects consumers' attitudes and behaviour in relation to technology-based self-service. Dabholkar and Bobbitt (2001) propose a conceptual framework that integrates attitudinal theories to provide a better understanding of consumer motivation and behaviour related to technology-based self-service. Implications based on the framework are provided for both practitioners and researchers, and relate specifically to the Internet as well as to technology-based self-service in general. It is suggested that marketers should identify any unfavourable attitudes towards using SST. Generalised attitudes can have an effect on consumer attitudes towards using a specific technology-based self-service, such as online reservation.

Eriksson and Olsson (2002) present a study on consumer attitudes towards booking and buying trips over the Internet. They claim that consumers in general possess a favourable attitude, even though variations can clearly be seen between different age categories. The Internet is viewed by the customers as a comfortable and timesaving alternative to similar services offered by ordinary travel agents.

A conceptual framework put forward by Dabholkar and Bobbitt (2001), suggests that marketers would benefit by determining the perceived risks associated with a particular technology-based self-service. Even if consumers have favourable attitudes towards using SST, they may not engage in behaviour such as Internet shopping because of the perceived risks associated specifically with the Internet. Furthermore, in the case of the Internet, if consumers perceive other shopping alternatives to provide more relevant information on a product, the model suggests that they will be less likely to shop through the

Internet, despite favourable attitudes. Marketers also need to make sure that customers do not become frustrated in attempting to use their technology-based self-service. Marketers should focus on building user friendly web sites, with easy navigation and minimum download time for any linked sites or promotions.

Lee's and Allaway's (2002) study investigates whether providing more personal control to consumers can reduce their perceived risk, enhance the perceived value of SST, and encourage acceptance regarding the new technology. The study shows significant relationship between personal control and the adoption process. Lee and Allaway (2002) measure personal control through *predictability*, *controllability* and *outcome desirability*. Results from the study show that the concept of personal control seems to influence the adoption process in a complex manner. Potential consumers seem most likely to adopt SST when all three types of personal control - high predictability, high controllability and high outcome desirability are fulfilled. People that are certain of high outcome desirability report lower perceived risk and higher perceived value of the innovation than people that report low outcome desirability. In addition, outcome desirability has a considerable key effect on the adoption intention. Outcome desirability is therefore a significant factor influencing the perceived risk, perceived value and purchase intention of the innovation. But even when an SST has high desirable outcome benefits, it is still important for potential customers to perceive both predictability and controllability in the SST.

Bitner et al. (2000b) discuss the benefits that can be gained from introducing technology to former high-touch, low-tech services. They believe that the traditional way of seeing the customer-employee interaction as a foundation of service marketing has been challenged in research by the introduction of SSTs.

Bitner et al. suggest a technology infusion matrix as a framework to show how effective use of technology can improve the service encounter. Three key drivers of service encounter dis/satisfaction make up the framework. The first driver is *customisation/flexibility*. Bitner et al. mean that personal contact no longer is the only way to individualise service offerings but that technology in the service encounter actually can be a benefit in the customisation process and help in making the service suit the customers' needs. Mass customisation is in many ways fuelled by technology. The second driver is *effective service recovery* where technology infusion may, for example, increase customer access to sales and make it easier for the customer to contact the company and voice their complaints. The third key driver is *spontaneous delight* during service encounters. Technology can be a means to pleasantly surprise the user, for example when a customer is fascinated with the abilities of the technology.

A contribution to the discussion on customer evaluation of SSTs is presented through two alternative models concerning customer evaluation of service quality of SSTs based on attributes versus overall affects (Dabholkar 1996). The attribute model is based in particular on what consumers would expect from SSTs. The overall affect model is based on the customers' feelings toward the use of technology. The attribute model showed that enjoyment and control strongly influence service quality as well as intentions clearly suggest that these two attributes should be highlighted in service design and promotion. The fun or novelty aspect should be built into the service design, perhaps through the use of colourful icons and humorous instructions. Control and ease of use are also factors that through this study proved to be important for SST users. Findings related to the overall affect model have long-range implications for service firms. Generalized attitudes toward using technological products had a positive effect on evaluations of service quality for technology-based self-service options. Hence, service firms that plan to offer such options would do

well in the long run to promote positive attitudes toward using SST by encouraging greater use of technology in general.

Moon and Frei (2000) offer a somewhat critical approach to the understanding of the Internet as an SST. They argue that it is mistaken to perceive the Internet as a self-service channel and will lead to failure in attracting customers to shop online. To assume that online customers should help themselves to whatever product or service they need is a problem because when companies do less, the customer ends up doing more. But most customers do not want to do more, therefore a better approach to e-commerce is what the authors call co-production. Suggestions to help companies adopt a co-production strategy is provided in four steps: deconstruct the transaction process, make a distinction between functions performed by the company and those performed by customers, consider the costs and benefits of each customer function, and discover ways to create added value for the customer.

2.3.2 E-commerce

E-commerce, referred to as doing business electronically according to a UN definition, is an evolving phenomenon. The emergence of information technology, Internet and the World Wide Web, has fundamentally transferred business transactions and ways of communication. Doing e-business, particularly over the Internet, is a phenomenon that is still growing rapidly and with it the attention of many researchers (Timmers, 2000).

Slywotzky (2000) proposes that electronic commerce will reallocate the power towards the consumer. The Internet will bring an alternative to the traditional, supplier-customer interaction. With the Internet, the customer will soon be able to describe exactly what they want, and suppliers will be able to deliver the

desired product or service without compromise or delay. The role of the customer will transfer from passive receiver to active designer.

Nicholas et al. (2003) have done a case study of the new digital information consumers that are emerging, and the information seeking behaviour in the new digital interactive environment. They point out the key characteristics of these consumers as "all-conquering/powerful, short on attention, promiscuous, untrusting and - above all - interested in speed of delivery." Nicholas et al. want to advocate a new way of seeing the concept of the information user. The consumers using the new technologies have changed from being only those with profound knowledge of the system to being used by the general public. Purchase patterns are changing and the customers get more and more knowledgeable with the vast amount of information that is available today (Nicholas et al. 2003). Many people have easy access to the web today and more and more customers do their own research on the Internet (Bernstein and Awe, 1999).

Wikström (2002) examined the changes in consumers' e-buying behaviour, from the enthusiastic early adopters at the beginning of the IT era, to the more critical consumer of today. In her research she found that even though a belief in the Internet and e-buying possibilities still exists, consumers are waiting for improvements that will make e-buying more user-friendly. De Ruyter et al. (2001) advocate the new *e-services* as a response to customers' growing need for contact and support from the company when consuming over Internet. An e-service is a function of e-business and it delivers value-added, interactive services to customers. The implementation of e-services in a company's e-business enlarges the options for customers, and to provide additional e-services may have a positive effect on the relationship with a particular company for the customer (Alsop, 1999 in de Ruyter et al. 2001). One form of

developed e-service is the virtual human online that act as guides for the customers. This service is meant to enhance the service provided and facilitate the use of the company's service (Gustavsson, 2002).

The developing e-commerce also raises new questions about customer encounters and the service experience on the Internet. With the new emerging technology, traditional theories on for example service encounters and service quality seem to be changing. In order to give good service online and satisfy customers, there is a need for an understanding of what customers need and expect of an online service offering. Understanding what creates a satisfying customer experience online seems to be an area that is not dealt with sufficiently in the literature. Dawes and Rowley (1998) elaborated on the subject of the changes in the service experience that is a result of the increasing use of information technologies. According to Dawes and Rowley, main research focus on information technology usefulness has been about using information technology to gain information about the customer, but little has been written on the notion that information technology in itself can enhance the service experience if certain criteria are met. Vijayasarathy and Jones (2000) elaborated on this subject when studying customers' attitudes and intentions to shop online using print and Internet catalogues. Traditional models of service experiences need to be modified to suit the new emerging technologies by reflecting the customers' increased participation and the diminishing role for service personnel (Dawes and Rowley, 1998).

According to Szymanski and Hise (2000) few studies have examined the factors that make consumers satisfied with their e-retailing, although this understanding would be important. Establishing profiles of consumers who have already conducted shopping through Internet, and of those who are interested in adopting Internet shopping, is a way of gaining understanding of

the online customer. Based on theories and processes of consumer adoption decision and diffusion of innovations, Vrechopoulos, Siomkos and Doukidis (2001) found that it is important for managers to find the common demographic and behavioural characteristics of early adopters in order to make them act as models and persuaders to more adoption reluctant customers. Research shows (van der Poel and Leunis, 1999) that not long ago, the Internet was fully accepted by the Internet community as an information channel and as a mean for reservations but not as trusted when it came to actual physical delivery. One group that is usually looked upon as reluctant to adopt new innovations in technology are the group of older people. Tatnall and Lepas (2003) present a research framework for investigating adoption of Internet technologies by people over 55 years of age.

2.4 Implications for our study

Dabholkar and Bobbit (2001) discuss the phenomenon of SST in terms of customer behaviour and motivation. Bitner et al. (2000a; 2000b; 2001) discuss factors that influence customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with SST. We have used these authors' knowledge in the field of SST to enhance our understanding of the subject and to help us define and position our research area. Further on, we want to relate our research findings to the recognized theories and frameworks of SST and e-commerce presented above (see 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

So far we have learnt that the group of Internet customers have evolved from being a minority of early adopters towards a larger group of the general public (Wikström 2002; Nicholas et al. 2003; Bernstein & Awe 1999). In relation to our study of the role of the Internet in an online booking service we want to build on these findings and explore what type of customers use the online service and how knowledgeable they are. Can it be confirmed through our

study that people with general information technology knowledge use the Internet for booking purposes? Also, in relation to the thoughts of Tatnall and Lepas (2003) we would like to investigate if there are any differences in Internet knowledge and use between younger and older people.

It is apparent that the service encounter and the service experience are shifting (Dawes and Rowley, 1998; Slywotzky, 2000) with the continued development of SST's and the Internet in the tourism business. How is the interaction between customer and company changing with the growing use of SST compared to traditional service encounters with more face-to-face customer-employee interaction? What role will human interaction with a company play in the future when it comes to online services? Building on Grönroos (2001) definition of services into high-touch and high-tech, we want to investigate to what extent a high-tech service such as the online cottage booking is in need of supporting high-touch services.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTERVIEW STUDY

3.1 Our interview study

In order to find additional information to answer our research questions, we decided to complement our investigation of the West Swedish Tourist board with an interview study of the customers that use the online cottage booking service R2/R360^o. We wanted to find out how the respondents used the service and how they perceived Internet as an information tool. We also wanted to know if it was enough with the Internet as an exclusive source of information or whether we could see a need for complementary information channels. To obtain this knowledge, we first needed to decide what form of information gathering technique was to be used in the study.

3.2 Choosing an interview technique – the telephone interview

In the beginning of our research process we had several suggestions on what communication techniques should be used. To collect data from respondents we would either have to observe them or communicate with them (Holme and Solvang, 1997). It would not be possible for us to observe our study objects in action for obvious reasons. Therefore, we settled for the communication alternative. Kinnear and Taylor (1996) state that there are three main methods for collecting communication data: personal or face-to-face interviews, self-administered questionnaires or telephone interviews. Each of the data collection methods has both advantages and disadvantages. We considered several different methods for conducting our study, including distributing questionnaires by mail, doing telephone interviews and using pop-ups on the homepage of West Swedish Tourist board. There is no evidence to show that one method of administering questionnaires is better than another. The choice of a method is situational and will depend on calculations of cost, convenience, and the nature of the questions you are asking (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996).

After having discussed various methods of conducting investigations, we finally chose to conduct our study by doing telephone interviews. The choice was based on the advantages of this method such as low costs, convenience and simplicity (Holme and Solvang, 1997). The customers live all over Sweden, which could have created a problem if we were to do personal interviews, both in cost and time. An interview over the phone also eliminates much of the inconvenience for the respondent and therefore we preferred to use this method. The low degree of interaction between interviewer and respondent reduces the potential bias if you compare with personal interviews (Kinnear and Taylor 1996).

To reduce the respondents' confusion and unwillingness to answer our questions, we decided to write a presentation letter of the project, presenting our study and ourselves (see appendix 1 and 2). The letter was sent out to every person in the sampling frame. In consultation with WSTB, we were also given permission to offer five cookbooks produced by WSTB as incentives. In the letter we told the potential respondents that we would draw lots among those who participated in our study. Some weeks after the interviews were finished, we selected five respondents at random to whom we sent out the cookbook.

3.3 Choosing a sampling frame - the respondent list

The study population we wanted to use was found in the R2 database at the West Swedish Tourist board. We decided to conduct our study among the persons that had used the Internet online booking service when reserving their cottage summer vacation. One of the major components in a study is the selection process of respondents. In most cases it is not realistic to undertake census research (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996; Holme and Solvang, 1997). A sample saves time and money and can sometimes be more accurate due to the fact that nonsampling errors are less than in a study conducted on a whole

population. In order to draw a sample, a sampling frame needs to be produced. The sampling frame is a list of all the sampling units that are available for selection (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). In order to retrieve a matching sampling frame, we needed to modify the study population of the database. First, we used the database functions to exclude all bookers that had used other booking channels than online bookings, such as via the tourism offices, travel agents or by telephone bookings. After this was done we needed to further clarify the borders of the sample frame. This was done in two steps: by determining a suitable time-span and by excluding web bookers not suitable for our research.

Most cottages are owned by private owners and because of this, the availability varies throughout the year. The demand however, is almost exclusively concentrated to the summer months (June, July and August) and a few weeks around Christmas. When studying the database, we found that the summer period of three months is the most booked during the year and attracts people from all over Sweden. The time-span we chose to find a matching sampling frame was then set to the 1: st of June to the 31: st of August. Every customer that had booked a cottage visit within this time period was used to make up our sampling frame.

After this was done we decided to exclude every booker that did not suit our research profile. West Sweden is a popular destination not only for Swedes and therefore the database contains many foreign clients that have used the Internet booking to book a cottage in the region. During June-August, a 100 people had entered a home address outside Sweden which was 44% of the total number of online bookers (see appendix 6). Every booker that had entered a home address outside of Sweden was excluded. This decision was made based on the perceived language problem that may arise during interviews and also on our decision to only include people living in Sweden in our study.

When these two modifications had been undertaken, we ended up with our matching sampling frame, consisting of a census of 126 different names. The names were put on a list in no particular or logical order, other than how they were organised in the database, i. e. according to date of visit. Our estimation was that this order would not in any way have an affect on the results of our interviews since the date of arrival within the time-span had no importance to our research. After having decided the sample frame, we now needed to produce a sample.

3.4 Choosing the respondents – the sampling

When we had determined our sampling frame we had to decide what sampling procedure to choose. When using a probability sampling method, every element in the population has a known chance of being selected (Johansson Lindfors, 1993). Probability sampling is the most common method used in business research since it provides a more accurate result that nonprobability sampling. The easiest and most frequently used method in probability sampling is *simple random sample*, where every element has an equal chance of being selected (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). We agreed upon a simple random sample because of the simplicity of the method.

We did not know exactly how many interviews would be needed in order to gain a satisfying result, so we decided to choose a number and when that amount of respondents had been contacted, revise and see if we were in need of additional interviews. To select the respondents that were to be interviewed, we picked every third booker on the list. This gave us a total of 41 potential respondents.

We rang each potential respondent at least once. In those cases where it was occupied, no answer or an answer machine we tried to contact them again (no message was left on answer machines). In cases where the intended respondent was not at home or was occupied, we asked if it would be possible to call back later or another day. After having tried to contact every respondent in the sample of 41 potential respondents, we had succeeded in completing 27 interviews. We felt that this number was too low to be counted as an adequate response rate so we decided to extend the sample with an additional of 41 potential respondents. After the second round, we had completed 11 more interviews.

Of a sample of 82 potential respondents, we succeeded in interviewing a total of 38 persons. We only had one case where a potential respondent refused to participate in the study and one case where the interview was interrupted in the middle and could not be finished. The persons that we failed to get in contact with were 51 % of the total, 42 out of 82. Yet all, except one, of the potential respondents that we succeeded in contacting were willing to answer our questions. This would give us a response rate of 95 %, which we see as a very good result. We felt saturation regarding the number of responses after having interviewed 30% of the number of persons within the total sample frame of 126 persons, and therefore we did not continue to try to contact the respondents that we had not yet been able to contact personally.

3.5 Designing a questionnaire – the interview questions

In order to collect the data we wanted within the boundaries of time, costs and the character of our study problem, we decided to use a mixture of a questionnaire and an interview (Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson, 1982). Questionnaires are formalised schedules for collecting data from respondents and according to Kinnear and Taylor (1996), the function of the questionnaire

is to measure past behaviour, attitudes and/or respondent characteristics. Johansson Lindfors (1993) states that questionnaires with given answers should be used when the research problem is focused on finding facts and/or attitudes. Questions about attitudes are posed to find information about a respondent's social environment but are not always easy to estimate. Our interview form consisted of a total of 14 questions, where most of the questions had open answers. Before beginning the interviews, we tested our questions on a test group of friends and family, to find out if there were any problems with the questions such as leading questions, misunderstandings or similar problems. After the tests, some modifications were undertaken and the interview form was settled (see appendix 3). We conducted our interviews in Swedish for convenience reasons, since an interview in English was not necessary when interviewer and respondent both spoke Swedish. The interview form has been translated into English (see appendix 4).

Questions should be placed in a logical and for the respondent convenient order. We tried to put the simple but necessary questions first. By starting the interview to ask about Internet access, we gave the respondent a clear message of what the interview was to be about. The opening questions did not require much reflection and were easy for the respondent to answer without much thought. The following questions (6 – 9c) were more reflective and required the respondent to think through their answers. The last questions (11 – 14) were yes or no questions, which facilitated the end of the interview. We placed the question about age last, since this subject could be uncomfortable for some people.

3.5.1 Past behaviour
We had six questions (3, 5, 5b, 8, 9, 9c) that dealt with the respondent's past behaviour. Information about customers' past behaviour is important when a

marketer wants to predict future behaviour (Kinnear and Taylor 1996). Understanding past behaviour includes several dimensions and the researcher must find the dimensions relevant to the study that is to be undertaken, so that the data collection corresponds with the study objective. We were interested in estimating the bookers' Internet habits and to find out how they found information about the possibility of booking a cottage in West Sweden.

Question number 3: *How often do You use Internet?* was asked to determine if the respondent had a habit of frequenting the Internet and thereby gain a rough estimate of how well the respondents handled the Internet interface. We believed that it is more likely for a person that uses Internet frequently to find it convenient to make bookings online, than for those who are not familiar with the principles used on the Internet.

Question number 5: *Had You ever booked anything via the Internet prior to the cottage booking?* was enclosed to see whether the respondent had any previous experience in using an Internet booking service. We believed that persons not accustomed to using that kind of service would find it more difficult to use the Internet booking and require more additional support during the booking procedure than people who had used a similar service before. The respondents were grouped into four different categories: no; rarely < two times; occasionally two-five times; often > five times. If a person had used any Internet booking service on the Internet more than five times before, we estimated that the person would have enough experience of similar services to know how it works. If a person rarely or had never used any similar services before, it would provide us with information about the user-friendliness of the booking service provided by WSTB.

Question number 5b: *If yes, what kind of service did You book*? was in direct connection to question 5 since it was designed to establish what booking services the respondent had experience of and also give us an idea of what booking services people use on the Internet. We assumed that any booking service on the Internet uses at least some common features such as specification of dates, time and price. Having used one or several booking services before would have served as some kind of "education" for the customer in our point of view, and prepare her for similar situations on the Internet.

Question number 8: *How did You get information about the cottage rental possibilities?* was intended to portray the different ways the clients gain knowledge about the cottages for rent. We wanted to see if people were more likely to use the traditional ways such as visiting a tourism office or making a call in seeking information, or if they saw Internet as a good starting media for seeking information. This question was essential in order to find out where Internet's role as an SST could be placed in the buying process.

Question number 9: *Apart from the Internet, did You seek any additional information during the actual booking?* had the resulting question *If yes, how?* These questions were meant to find out if the respondents felt any need for additional information related to the booking other than what could be found on the website. If a majority of the respondents had in some way contacted another media for information, it would then indicate that the booking service could be in need of changes and improvements.

Question number 9c: *For what reason did You seek additional information other than the Internet?* was posed since we thought it interesting to see what caused people to seek more information in addition to the Internet in order to determine what actions needed to be taken to improve the service. In relation to

the answers we would get, it would be possible to see what was missing in the Internet encounter and to determine why people sought additional information.

3.5.2 Feelings and opinions

Attitudes and behaviour are assumed by many to be related and therefore it can be interesting to study attitudes among customers in a marketing context. There are many theories on how an attitude should be measured and therefore, attitudes are a phenomenon that is difficult to study. Some researchers say that it is not necessary to be able to define an attitude in order to measure it (Allport, 1935 in Eriksson and Olsson, 2002). According to Kinnear and Taylor (1996), there are three main components that can be said to make up a person's attitude. The cognitive component refers to a customer's knowledge of the object that is being studied. The affective component is an emotional dimension where a person's feelings about an object are considered. The last component is behavioural, which deals with a customer's readiness to respond behaviourally to an object. In our questionnaire we decided to ask the respondents their opinion of the online booking service and their feelings regarding new features such as additional products and electronic bills. Thus, question n. 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 were oriented towards finding out the respondents' general feelings and opinions about certain features.

Question number 6: *What advantages can You name with the booking service web page?* and question number 7: *What disadvantages can You name with the booking service web page?* aimed at finding out how the client experienced the offered service and if there were any flaws that caused client dissatisfaction. The questions required the respondents to evaluate the service and to present their personal opinion. We hoped that the respondents would be able to describe both good and bad things according to their own frame of reference. We believed that the opinions about the booking service were more important

that a more technical approach. If the respondent had positive criticism we would see this as a sign of the web page working satisfactorily. If the respondent had negative criticism we would try to capture the cause of the dissatisfaction in order to find ways to improve the service.

Question number 10: *Did You find that the actual booking took a long or a short time?* This question was asked to find out the feelings towards the booking service and not the actual reality time it took to use the booking service. We believed that if the customer experienced that it took a long time they would be more dissatisfied with the service and therefore more inclined to use other means of booking. We also thought that this question could be linked to the type of connection that the respondent had access to.

Question number 11: *Would You consider receiving the bill via e-mail?* was enclosed at the request of WSTB. The company wanted to know whether their customers were interested in this option or not since they want to put as much of the business on-line as possible. From our point of view, this question was interesting in order to find out how much of the contact with the company the customer is willing to have online.

Question number 12: *Would You be interested in booking some or all of the following additional services in correspondence with the cottage booking? – activities such as canoeing, golf, bicycle tours; tickets to events; restaurant visits; cottage house cleaning; boating possibilities; the Göteborg Pass.* This question was also included on the behalf of the WSTB that wanted to know if there was any interest from the customer point of view to extend the options on the web page and in that way increase sales in the region. We believed this question to be useful in terms of determining the customers' intentions to purchase additional products online.

Question number 13: *Would You consider using the Internet booking services again if You rented a cottage for next year?* We posed this question to measure the satisfaction among the bookers and to get an estimate of how well the online booking is working.

3.5.3 Respondent's characteristics

We had two questions that gained knowledge of the respondent's characteristics; one question about gender and one question about age (nr 1 and nr 14). Respondent characteristics have been found to have an effect on purchase behaviour on some occasions. Therefore it can be useful to research demographic, socio-economic and psychological characteristics with respondents (Kinnear and Taylor 1996).

The purpose of these questions was to help us determine if there exist any differences or similarities in the answers due to age or gender. The questions about age would help us conclude if there was one (or several) groups that, based on their age, were more reluctant to use Internet as a booking medium. Our assumption was that people over 45 are less used to the new technology and therefore lack the experience of using a computer for these purposes. We offered four age categories so that the respondent would not have to state their exact age and so that it would be easier for us to group the respondents.

Questions number 2 and 4 (*Where do You have access to Internet?* and *What type of Internet connection do You have access to?*) were asked to gain practical information about the respondents Internet access and connection speed. The answers to these questions were meant to help us understand if some people had trouble with using the Internet or felt dissatisfaction because of a slow connection.

3.6 Evaluation of the interview study strategy

In accordance with the recommendations of e.g. Kinnear and Taylor (1996) this part discusses the trustworthiness of our interview study. In this study, we should ask ourselves if we are really estimating how the customers use the Internet booking service and if we are estimating it in the correct way?

When doing surveys and interviews, there is always the possibility of a low response rate. The idea of distributing a questionnaire by mail or e-mail was discharged in favour of a telephone interview, since we feared that the response rate would otherwise be very low due to the trouble that the respondent would have to go through. Sending out a questionnaire might have given the respondents more time to think through their answers compared to a telephone interview, but we believed that the likeliness of people actually responding to the questionnaire and then sending it back to us was rather low. This, combined with the fact that we would have to wait for an uncertain number of questionnaires to return, made us decide that it would not be a good method for us. The idea of using pop-ups on the website was also rejected because of its uncertain response rate and the lack of respondent control. We would have no control over who participated in the study or if they were the target group we wanted. We also believed that it would be difficult to judge if the respondents took the survey seriously.

When conducting an interview there are some issues that need to be addressed. A badly designed questionnaire can result in error in the research result. We tried to design both the wording and the structure of our questionnaire based on recommendations by researchers like Kinnear and Taylor (1996), Holme and Solvang (1997), Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson (1982) and Johansson Lindfors (1993). We tried to use a simple language, to avoid leading or biased

questions and to consider the respondents' frame of reference. By conducting a smaller test interview before the actual customer interview we wanted to diminish the risk of misleading and confusing questions. We tried to avoid using complicated technical language in order to consider our respondents' assumed different Internet experiences and knowledge. We structured our questionnaire by asking a simple but interesting opening question followed by more general questions and placed difficult questions later.

According to recommendations by Johansson Lindfors (1993), we decided to write a presentation letter of the project presenting our study and ourselves (see appendix 1), to reduce respondents' confusion and unwillingness to answer our questions. We strongly believe that the presentation letter and offering an incentive had a positive effect on the response rate. Because of the letter, we were provided with an easy opening phrase. By referring to the letter, the respondents were immediately informed of who we were and why we were calling. This saved both the respondents and us a lot of time and we were, in most cases, able to start the interview directly after that the respondent had agreed to participate. We also believe that the chance of winning a cookbook had an impact on their willingness to be interviewed. Looking at the response rate of our interviews, we had only one case where someone declined an interview. We interpret this as a very good result and take it as a sign of success for our strategy.

# CHAPTER 4: SERVICE PRODUCTION AT THE WEST SWEDISH TOURIST BOARD

4.1 The Service production system – online cottage reservation

The Service Production System (Grönroos 1990) is a development of the Servuction system presented by Langeard et al. (1981) and serves as an integrated framework for analysis and planning of the service production. We use the model to describe and visualise the service production of the cottage rental online through the West Swedish Tourist board's web portal www.vastsverige.com.

By using this framework to present the online booking system service we can describe the organisation of the service production in a dynamic way and highlight the customers as active parts in the system. This description will lay the ground for further analysis and suggestions on how to develop and improve the online cottage booking service produced by the West Swedish Tourist board.

In the model various resources are combined and organised to describe what the customers see and how they interact with the company in the production of the service. The different parts of the model represent different interactions that take place during the production and they all affect the customers' evaluation and perception of the service. By looking at the customers as a part of the production system one can begin to recognise them as co-producers of the organisations output rather than just passive receivers. This viewpoint will help us to identify and analyse the role that the customers play in the service production.

We also want to use the model in order to recognise to what extent self-service technology, in this case the Internet, is actually used. The findings in this part of our study will be developed further in a generic model (see 5.1) where the interactions will be presented from a process-oriented approach. The blueprint model shows the different interaction phases that take place between the customer and the organisation during the online booking process.
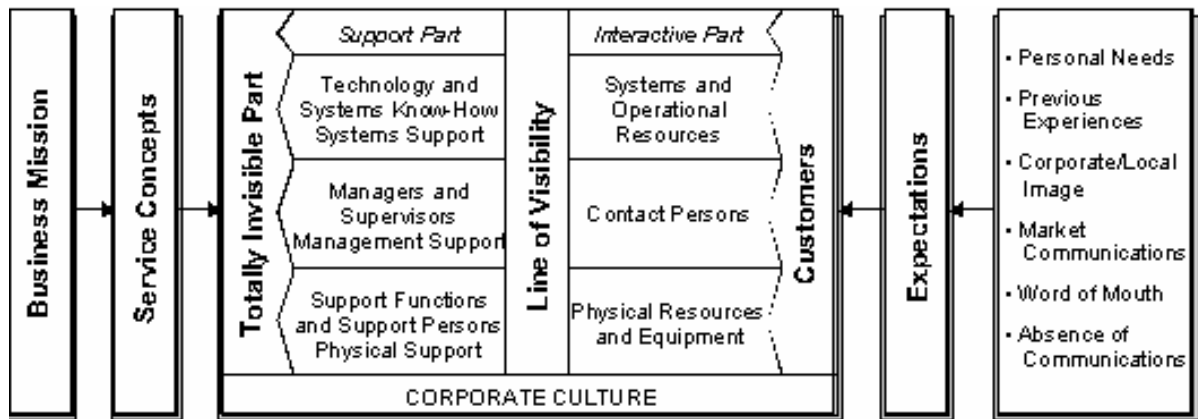
Model 2: *The service production system* (Grönroos, 1990, p 208)

4.2 The Business Mission and the Service Concept – developing an attractive tourist region

One of the major tourist attractions is the possibility to rent a private cottage for a week or two in the special surroundings in the West of Sweden. During June to August 2002 a total of 165344 guest nights in privately owned cottages or apartments in the V*ästra götaland* region where reported (SoL 2002). Private summer resident owners that wish to rent their house to tourists can contact an organisation that offers cottage rental to get help with this. The tourist organisation or cottage rental company takes care of the practical organisation, the marketing and also handles the contact with the customer.

The West Swedish Tourist board's "service concept" in the case of online cottage rental, is to facilitate the work of the organisations that offer cottages in

the West of Sweden in order to achieve the "business mission" of developing the region as an attractive tourist destination. The business mission and service concepts are guides in planning and managing the service production system (Grönroos 1990). Cottage rental over the Internet is an important part of the total service offering on the West Swedish tourist board's web portal according to Hans Gundmar (031020).

Organisations do not pay to have their service offers and products linked on the WSTB portal; this is a service that the organisation offers to make visitors and tourists aware of the regions tourism products. Any company that has a good quality product can be represented on the webpage. When it comes to the service concept of cottages online this service has been active for two years and the organisation would like to develop the service of booking a single cottage to more complex service offerings such as the cottage, a boat and a fishing card. By offering the full packages combined with a cottage accommodation the visitors will be able to appreciate the full range of products and experiences the region has to offer.

4.3 The Support Part – co-operation with cottage rental organisations

The service and support part of the service production system at the West Swedish Tourist board is something that the end customer does not directly see. The West Swedish Tourist board offers the support service to five organisations that offer cottage rental in the West Sweden region. The five organisations are Bo i Bohuslän (including Kungälv-Marstrand, Uddevalla and Bästkusten), Dalslandsstugor and Marks municipality.

All organisations use the same booking system. Bo i Bohuslän and Dalslandsstugor are represented with their online cottages on the webpage www.vastsverige.com whereas Marks municipality does not offer cottage rental online.

Bo i Bohuslän is a collective name for the three organisations Kungälv-Marstrand, Uddevalla and Bästkusten. The Kungälv-Marstrand cottage rental is organised by the Kungälv-Marstrand tourist information office. The cottages for rent in Uddevalla is conducted through the official tourism and event company Uddevalla evenemangs- och turistforum AB. Bästkusten is represented by the tourist- and marketing company Bästkusten i Bohuslän AB. A cottage rental company called Dalslands stugförmedling offers the cottages presented under the name Dalslandsstugor. The cottages in Marks municipality can only be rented through Marks tourist information office.

The support part consists of three components; management-, physical- and system – support (Grönroos 1990). Managers and supervisors are primarily responsible for the duty of passing and supporting a service culture to the rest of the service organization. Physical support consists of support persons or support employees. In order to ensure service quality to the final consumer the internal service between employees must be considered. The employees at the different cottage rental organization will have to consider the contact person at West Swedish Tourist board as their internal customer and in their turn they should be considered as internal customers by support functions further behind in the service production system.

The system and physical support consists of a joint billing service for the cottage rental organisations and a data support function linked to the booking system used by all the organisations. The organisation has one person physically situated at the West Swedish Tourist board working with this. The joint billing service facilitates the different organisations' invoice handling since they can let one person do the work instead of several different units having to be involved.

All bills to customers are printed at the WSTB and sent out to the customer by ordinary mail, along with the booking confirmation, a brochure of the area and a location map. Only on rare occasions does the customer request a bill to be sent by email. The data support service includes support when there is a problem with the booking system and the organisations can then call and get professional help from someone with deeper knowledge of the system.

The West Swedish Tourist board does not have direct contact with the end customer, except on rare occasions. Contact takes place between the WSTB and the cottage rental companies, tourism offices and others who use the same booking system.
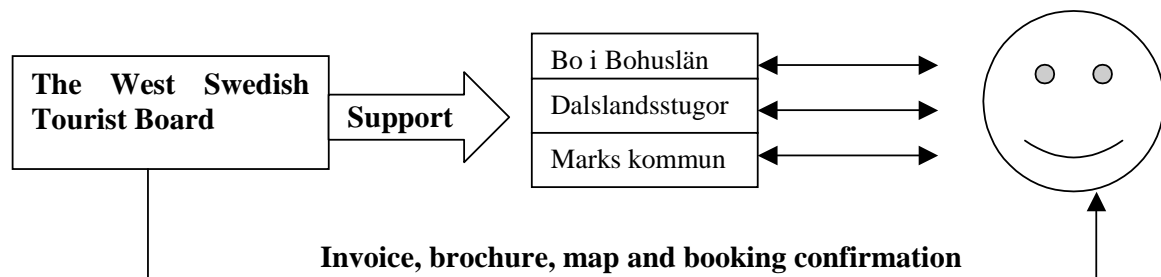
Model 3: *Contact model* – Illustration of the contact between companies and end-customer

The companies pay a fee based on the turnover of the cottage rentals through their organisation and a yearly fee for usage of the joint booking system. Investments such as upgrading of the system and further education for employees in relation to that are paid by the WSTB. The West Swedish Tourist board is also responsible for producing statistics that are sent out to the Swedish statistical bureau (SCB) (Malin Elofsson 031002).

4.3.1 The booking system

The systems support in the service production model includes all the technological investments and systems know-how in the organization (Grönroos 1990). It should always aim at the simplification and fast execution of back and front office tasks and must always be carried out by specialized knowledge employees such as the West Swedish Tourist board's computer support linked on behalf of the booking system. The booking system used by the West Swedish Tourist board and the tourism organisations mentioned above is called R2. During our study the West Swedish Tourist board upgraded their cottage rental database to a new version called R360°.

The R360° system produced by the company ResTech is an online reservation system targeted towards the resort and hotel industry. R360° allows you to distribute the cottage availability over the Internet; all online reservations take place directly into the native system installation. R360° is designed with a concept in mind that the customer would be able to book anything, not only accommodation (www.restech.se 031008). Accordingly, it can be used for package reservation such as a cottage combined with a canoe rental in Dalsland. The system is also designed to handle billing, different currencies, switchboard handling and can be integrated into the organisations economic system.

The booking system collects information about all the cottage bookers in a database. The database is made up by data of the customers that have booked a cottage vacation through the Internet or that have used other means of booking a cottage such as going in personally to the tourism office or the cottage rental organisation or making their reservation over the phone.

Information stored about each customer is their name, address, phone number, e-mail address and the different financial transactions made such as bookings and cancellation insurance. The customer is required to register an account before being able to make a booking, and the customer enters their personal data themselves when he or she registers. Customers are presented with an identification number and a password and are asked to use these when completing the booking of their choice.

When searching the database you can search via booking dates, booking method (Internet or other) you wish the database to select. The database will list the bookers sorted by the dates of arrival to the cottage; there is no other criterion that decides the order. The list contains the dates and names of the customers, to obtain further information you must click onto another page beyond the list. It is not possible to print a list of names and addresses if one should wish to for example send targeted information to the entire database list of cottage bookers.

4.4 The line of visibility - the web pages

The 'line of visibility' at the West Swedish Tourist board can be considered to be drawn on the web portal www.vastsverige.com separating the parts in the service production process that are visible and invisible to the customer. For customers that are seeking information about West Sweden on the Internet, www.vastsverige.com is a good place to start. It is the West Swedish Tourist board's official portal where a lot of tourism information can be found such as on-going activities, vacation offers, news and much more. The portal can be shown in four languages: Swedish, English, German and Norwegian.
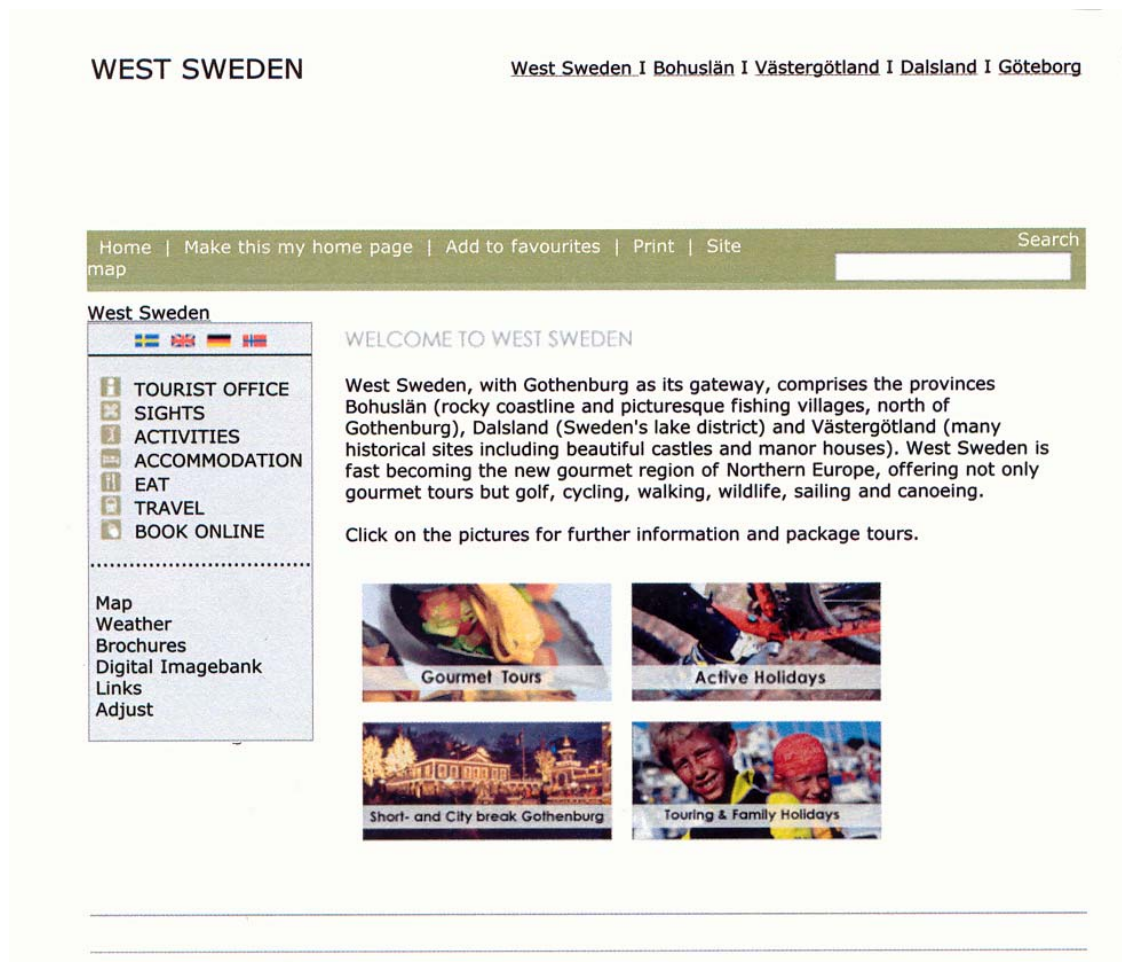
Figure 3: *Front page of the West Swedish Tourist board's official web portal*

It is built up of one start page for West Sweden, where information about the whole area is posted, and from where the visitor can choose a specific area that interest them most and get special information about that certain area. Göteborg, Bohuslän, Dalsland and Västergötland make up the four areas. The portal also contains information about where to eat and stay, links to the tourism offices in the areas, transport information, suggestions of what to do as well as a link to the cottages online (book online). The different steps that the customer has to go through in the booking process are illustrated in model 4.
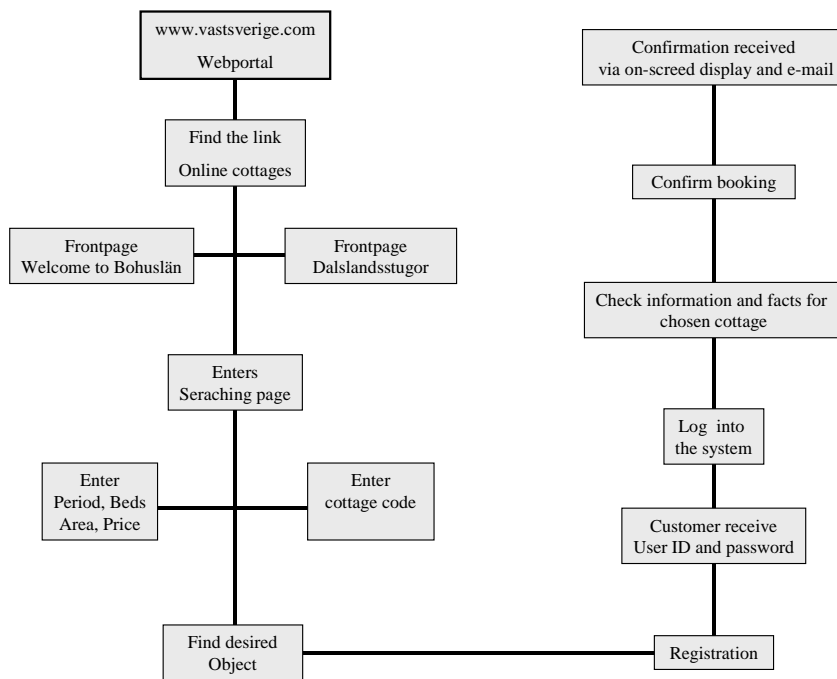
Model 4: *Step by Step model* – Illustrates the customer's steps in the booking process

The page of cottages online contains links to different cottage rental companies that offer their products in the West Sweden area. The links are to Bohuslän (including Kungälv-Marstrand, Uddevalla and Bästkusten), Dalsslandsstugor (Cottages in Dalsland and the coast of Lake Vänern), Novasol and Cottages in Läckö-Kinnekulle country. Two of the organisations use the R2/R360^o booking system supported by WSTB; Bo i Bohuslän and Dalslandsstugor. Therefore their online booking service looks the same even though it is not the same websites.

Figure 4: *Web page of Cottages Online*

The homepage of "Welcome to Bohuslän" (Bo i Bohuslän) is made up of the three geographical areas of Uddevalla, "Bästkusten" (Stenungsund, Tjörn, Orust) and Kungälv-Marstrand. The customer can choose the area that she is interested in and thereafter look for an available cottage in that area. The method of searching for cottages is the same for all three areas as they use the same system.

On the homepage of Welcome to Bohuslän, the customer can find information about the booking terms, the cottages and answers to common questions. It is also possible for the customer to order paper copies of cottage catalogues and tourism brochures for the whole West Sweden area. For the customer that does not want to book online, there is a telephone number to be found under the link "Cottages; Apartments".
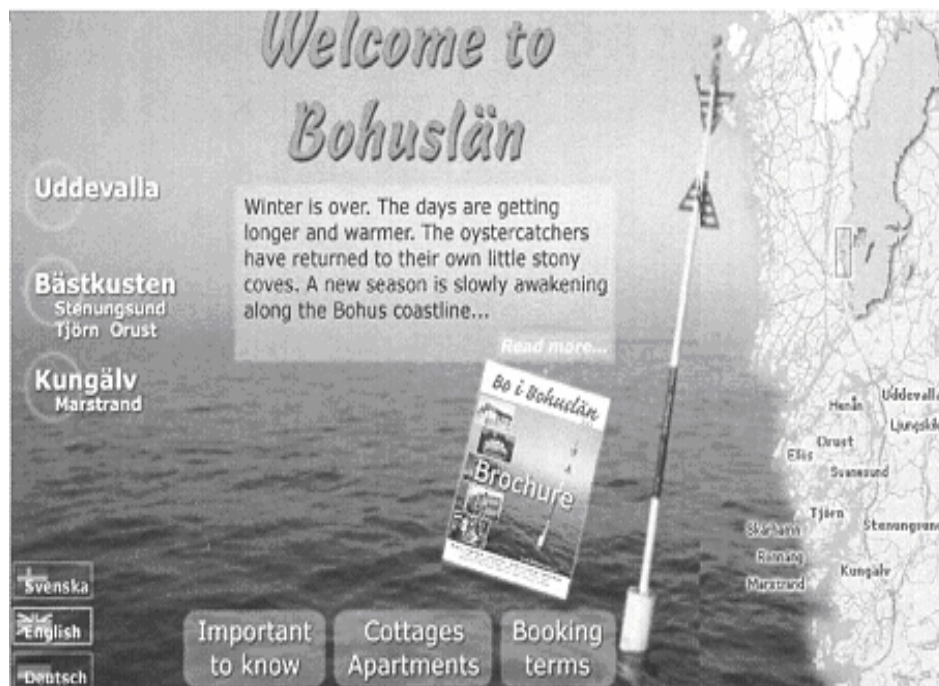
Figure 5: *Homepage of Welcome to Bohuslän*

On the homepage of Dalslandsstugor, the visitor can find not only the booking service online, but also the possibility to download the cottage catalogue to the home computer as well as information about the latest objects available. The visitor can find important information about rules and regulations in connection to the online booking, general information about the cottages and about the areas.

Figure 6: *Homepage of Dalslandsstugor*

4.5 The Interactive Part - the online booking system from the customer's point of view

Through the webpage the customers can book their cottage directly online, and this is where the customer meets the provider in the service production system. As mentioned the customer interested in renting cottages in West Sweden also has the option to book via telephone or by visiting the tourism offices. In the service production system of the cottages online service the components of the interactive part are the contact personnel, services and routines and physical resources and equipment (Grönroos, 1990).

The customers that book via the Internet do not interact face to face with other customers or contact personnel unless they seek information through alternative channels, such as word of mouth in the case of other customers and visiting or calling the tourism offices in the case of contact personnel. The only direct employee-customer interaction in a solely online reservation service is the bill, confirmation letter and map sent out by the West Swedish Tourist board. Most often service providers depend more on their contact persons than on any other resource, thus making the contact personnel the most crucial resources for them (Grönroos, 1990).

In the case of the online cottage reservation on the West Swedish Tourist board's web portal it is through the system and operational routines and the physical resources that most of the interaction between the company and the customer takes place. System and operational routines such as the booking system and paying methods can influence the perceived service quality since they affect the way of consuming the service and the performing of various tasks. A non-service oriented system would most probably have a negative impact on both customers and employees that interact through it (Grönroos, 1990).

The booking system that the organizations use is a part of the physical resources and equipment in the service production system. Physical resources and equipment influences how the customer perceives both the technical and functional quality of the perceived service for customers and employees that are using it (Grönroos, 1990). Technical quality being what is received and functional quality being the way it is received. The computer the customer uses to make the booking should also be considered a part of the system and can therefore influence the perception of the service without the company being able to control it.

When the customer wants to find a cottage, she or he uses the same search method on all the websites that are connected to R2/R360°. The search service is constructed of five different boxes: Period; Beds; Area; Price (SEK) and Cottage Code (see figure 7). The box for period is constructed week-wise and allows the customer to use weeks as a search criteria to find available cottages. Most people are restricted to their vacation period when planning for their holidays and therefore the week period is a good alternative for most people. A limitation to the service in the R2 booking service is that the customer cannot book beyond week 52 the same year. The database is updated with the coming year's cottages first in November. The alternative box for beds allows the customer to specify how many beds the cottage needs to contain. The customer also has to specify in which area a cottage is desired. The price box offers the possibility for customers to choose how much they are willing to spend. The online search service can also be used together with the paper catalogues, where all cottages are numbered with a special code. A customer interested in a special cottage needs only to fill in the cottage code and the desired week to see if the cottage is available.

When all the desired search criteria have been filled in, the search can begin to look for available cottages that match the customer's needs. If there is a cottage available that matches the customer's specifications, the result may look like in figure 7.

Figure 7: *Example of cottage search result*

When the customer has found a cottage to their liking, the next step is to register. To be able to book a cottage online every booker needs a user-ID and a password. To receive this, the customer must register with the R2 database. The customer goes to the link "New user" and automatically arrives at the register page (see figure 8).

The customer fills in the required data. It is compulsory to leave an e-mail address. The customers are free to choose a password of their own, but it must

be at least five characters. When all required data has been filled in, the form should be sent by clicking on the button *Send*. If the registration is successful the customer is presented with a user ID and the chosen password, both displayed directly on the screen. The customer now has the possibility to log into the system and to book the cottage of their liking.

Figure 8: *The register page*

To confirm a booking, the customer enters his or her user ID and password to login into the system. To book the chosen cottage, the customer has to check the personal data entered at the registration and then click the *Confirm booking* – button. A confirmation is both displayed directly on the screen and sent to the customer's e-mail address within a few minutes. If the customer wants to cancel the booking, it has to be done over the telephone.
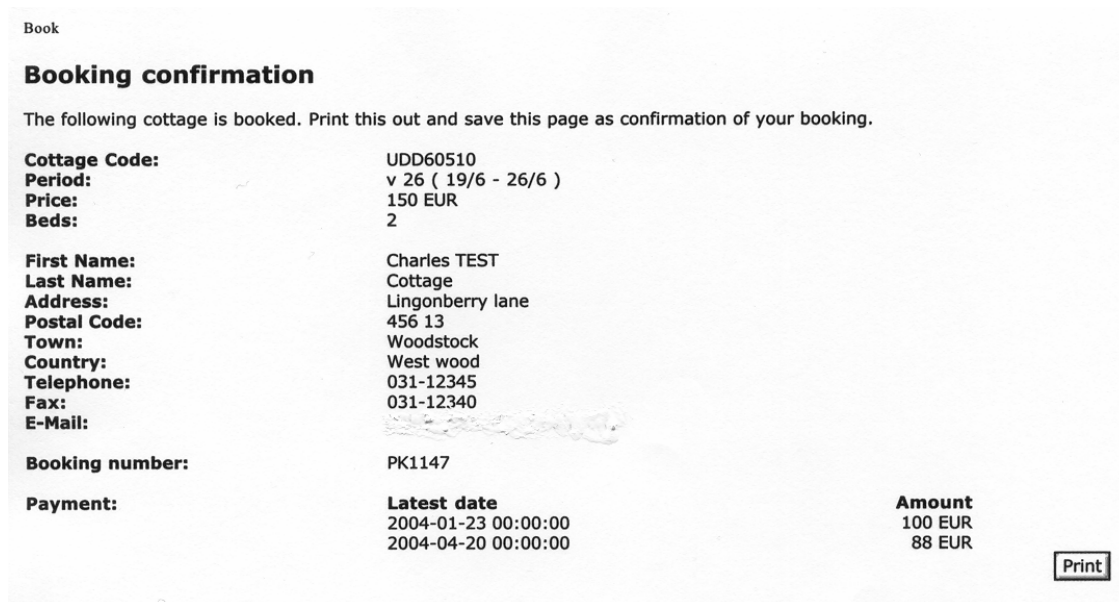
Figure 9: *On-screen confirmation*

4.6 The Customers

The customers in the model are considered as dynamic parts of the system, a resource active in the service production that interacts with other parts of it and among each other by mouth-to-mouth interaction (Grönroos 1990). By conducting a customer survey we have tried to map this part of the service production system of cottage rental online.

The customer that uses the online reservation service at www.vastsverige.com evaluates the experience partly determined by the customer's personal needs, wishes, and through both their own and others previous experience of online reservation. Through our study we found that the majority of the customers are experienced Internet users and have used online booking before. Common things to book are trips, tickets and cottages. The customer's perception of the company's image and external market communication or lack of communication will also affect the experience. The West Swedish Tourist board markets the online reservation through the website, brochures and tourism offices and organisations. In our study, most of the customers found

information about the online booking over the Internet. Those who searched for information apart from the Internet used the catalogue.

4.7 A model to illustrate the online cottage booking production system

Based on the preceding discussion we have developed an online cottage booking production system to illustrate the different resources and inputs. Combined these make up the service of online cottage booking available through the West Swedish Tourist board's web portal.

Business mission	Service Concept	Totally Invisible Part		The Web portal		Online bookers	Expectations	
			Support part		*Interactive part*			- Personal needs
			Booking system		Booking system			-Previous Internet booking experience
								-Image
								-Word of mouth
			Management		Contact persons			-Market communication
			Computer support		Computers, web design			-Lack of communication
		Corporate culture						
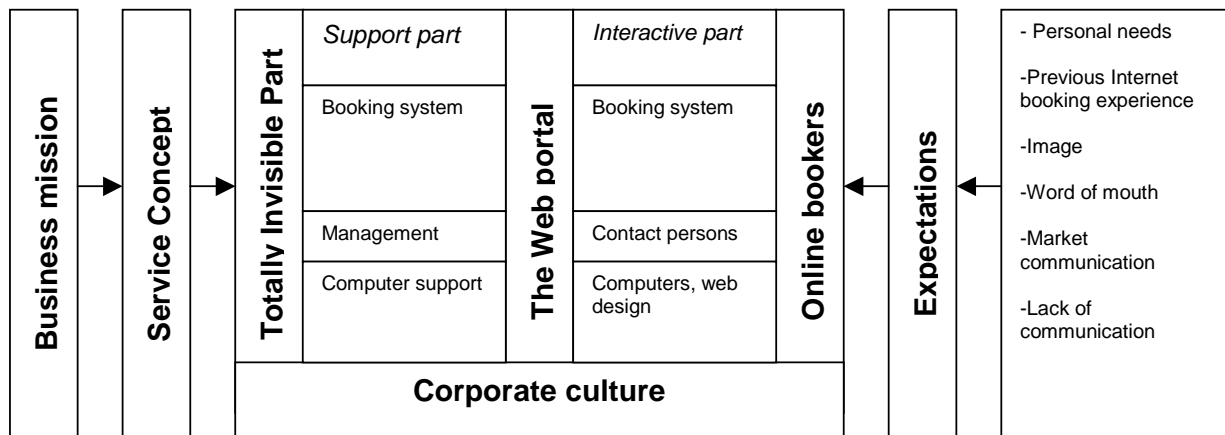
Model 5: *The online cottage booking system* based on the model *Service production system* presented by Grönroos (1990).

As noted in the previous chapter the "Service Production System" model can be used to analyse and plan service production. We have used the model to identify the different resources at the West Sweden Tourist board and how they interact with each other in order to produce the service of online cottage booking. This is especially useful in our study as we wish to investigate which interactions the customers have with the organisation in connection to what role the Internet as an SST plays in the service production process.

As concluded by Norman (1992) and Bitner (1997) and found through our investigation of the online cottage booking service production system above the customer plays an important role in the service production. This viewpoint is a crucial part of our study, as we recognise that customers engaged in self-service technology based services are important resources to be considered when developing such a service. In the case of the West Swedish Tourist board the organisation wishes to develop the service offering online and by accurately mapping the current situation it is easier to make out where improvement is needed.

CHAPTER 5: A MODEL EMERGES

5.1 Interactions between customer and organisation – a generic model

To further analyse the findings of our study and pinpoint the Internets role as an SST in the service production system, we have developed a "generic model" (see model 6), presenting service production phases and the additional interactions between customer and the West Swedish Tourist board needed to perform the service. The model describes the interactions that take place in the visible part of the service production system. The relations between the tasks are presented in a process-oriented manner to illustrate the different parts of the booking procedure. The model is inspired by the method of service blueprinting (for additional information on service blueprinting read publications by Shostack, 1984 and 1987).

The "generic model" describes the generic interactions that take place during the process of booking a cottage online through www.vastsverige.com. Generic in this sense means that the customer is a pure online customer that strictly follows the booking procedure available on the Internet. We will describe and analyse other types of online customers in relation to the generic type model. Further in the concluding chapter, the "generic model" is developed into a "current situation model" (see 6.3), showing the variations of interactions found through our study that actually take place in the online booking procedure today. Finally, an "expanded generic model" (see 6.4) will be presented and suggestions will be given on how to improve and expand the online booking service.

The online booking service as currently designed enables the customer to book over the Internet and to have almost no other contact with the company apart from electronically.
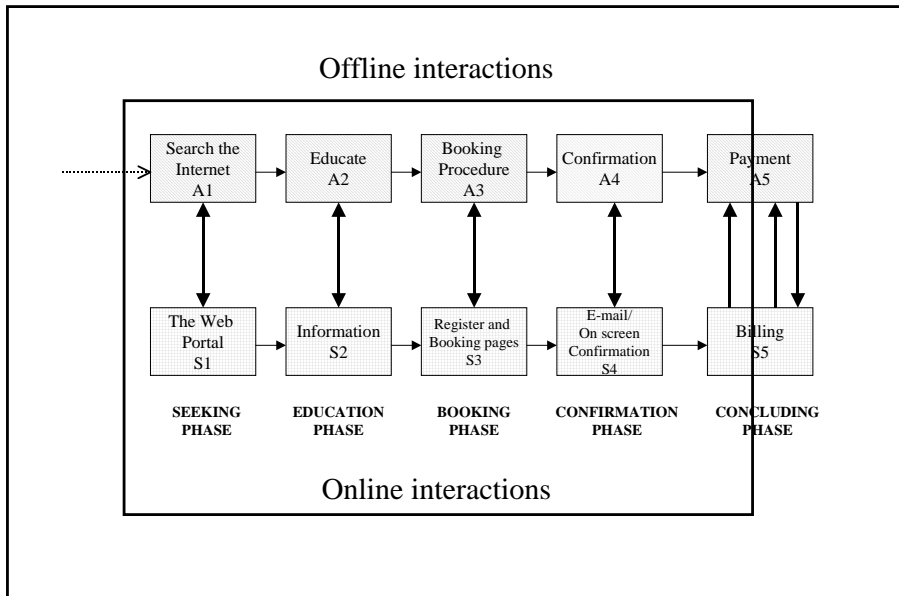
Model 6: *Generic model* – interactions between service and action

The "generic model" is our way of showing the interactions in a simple scheme where S stands for *Service* and A for *Action*. The different parts of the model describe the five different Interaction Phases taking place during the online booking process. In the different Interaction Phases the services (S) offered through the West Swedish Tourist board are described in relation to which actions (A) the customer takes. The border framing parts of the model is added to show what interactions can currently be performed online.

The model is useful in order to present the intended service and to discuss variations found through our interview study. We want to discuss the variations in relation to the generic model and further pinpoint areas where improvement

is needed or where customers are likely to choose alternative actions such as calling the tourist organisation.

5.2 The Seeking Phase - Service one (S1) and Action one (AI)

The initial interaction phase, preceded by the customers' decision to visit the West Sweden area and rent a cottage, is referred to as the Seeking Phase. This decision can be based on for example previous experience or word of mouth. Based on investigations conducted by ETOUR (Kort Nytt 2:2003) most visitors to West Sweden have visited this area before, suggesting that the area is well known by potential customers. Making the customer aware of the self-service technology option as an alternative purchase channel is then of importance (Bitner et al. 2002).

After the customer has decided to rent a cottage in West Sweden they take action (A1) to find information about how and where they can rent a cottage. We found that when searching for information about cottages online, the hit rate for West Sweden combined with cottages ("Västsverige" AND "stugor") on www.altavista.se gives 271 hits and the seven first are web pages found on the West Swedish Tourist board's web portal (S1). Searching www.google.se gave a similar result. This suggests that the site is easy to locate on the Internet. Because the amount of information found on the Internet is extensive, it is important for companies to be easy to find when potential customers search with help of the main search engines.

We believe that the site it is easy to find by customers that are willing to search the Internet for cottages. Most of the customers in our study have previously booked some service over the Internet suggesting that they are familiar with this type of offering. They know how to search the Internet for information and will do so rather than first picking up the phone to call the tourist bureau (see

appendix 4, question 8). A common statement made by the customers that became aware of the online booking service existence elsewhere was that they had previous experience of booking through the West Swedish Tourist board or had found the Internet web address through a catalogue.

Through our study we found that the vast majority of the Internet bookers found initial information about the online booking service by searching the Internet (see appendix 4, question 8). This suggests that the role of the Internet as an information-seeking tool is important. Many people have access to the Internet at home and use it regularly (see appendix 4, question 3). These findings are supported by studies on Internet information seeking behavior by Bernstein and Awe (1999) and Nicholas et al. (2003). Nicholas et al. claim that these consumers are knowledgeable, impatient and have high demands. This affects the way in which to view customers; the consumers using the new technologies have changed from being only those with deeper knowledge of the system to be used by the general public. We believe that this must be considered when designing a website because people will not be satisfied with a basic design and occasional updates any more.

Even if customers are aware of the service they may not be ready to use SST (Bitner et al. 2002). Customers need to feel that they have the ability to use SST, understand their own role and see the potential benefits in using it. We think that customers that have a favourable feeling towards SST are more likely to proceed to explore a website. This is where customers move on to the education phase. Offering multiple choices to customers and displaying the service offerings clearly on the front page can lead to more potential customers clicking beyond the first page to educate themselves about the service and eventually becoming online bookers.

An important factor is thus the initial front-page design and attractiveness in order to make the customer click further into the site. It is for example crucial that the booking online link is clearly displayed. The website should not only be aesthetically appealing but ease of use must also be considered (Dabholkar and Bobitt, 2001). We believe that if a customer does not find the front page appealing and structured he/she will more likely turn to alternative booking sources without giving the actual booking page a chance. Wikström (2002) suggests that customers today are more critical of the Internet and e-buying and would like it to become more user-friendly.

According to Hans Gundmar (031020) the launching of the VTB (see 1.3.1) with a display window will lead to a situation where the person seeking information online will clearly see what is offered and that the site will become even more sales focused. Through our research we found that approximately one third of the total bookings of online cottages last season were done over the Internet. This has been a significant growth since 2002 when only twelve percent booked online. We believe that the development towards a more user-friendly and attractive website is necessary in order to attract more customers to book online and thus broaden the role of the Internet.

5.3 The Education Phase - Service two (S2) and Action two (A2)

The second interaction phase is referred to as the education phase where the customer interacts with the organisation to seek deeper information about the cottages, the area and about the booking service itself (S2) in order to educate themselves (A2) before making the final decision to book a cottage online. In this phase it is crucial that there is enough easily accessible information on the Internet in order to fulfil the customers' needs. Bitner et al. (2000a) conclude that dissatisfaction with a self-service technology can arise from lack of information about how to use it.

In our study we found that most bookers rely solely on the Internet for information seeking. This concludes that in most cases the information presented on the Internet is sufficient enough for the customer interested in booking a cottage. If customers feel that there is a lack of useful information they will turn to alternative sources such as searching the catalogue or calling or visiting the tourism office (see appendix 4, question 9b). This could be a temporary variation from our "generic model" if the customer returns to interact online and complete the booking online. Some of the reasons mentioned for seeking information outside the Internet were to get additional information about the cottage, surrounding area and activities. The most common way to search for additional information is to use the catalogue or telephone the tourism office.

We believe that the education phase is critical in order to get the customer to book online because if there is a lack of information the customer will not feel secure enough to continue and actually book the cottage over the Internet. Dabholkar and Bobbitt (2001) suggest that if consumers perceive other shopping alternatives to provide more relevant information on a product, they will be less likely to shop through the Internet, despite favourable attitudes. Therefore we believe that it is crucial that the web portal contains all relevant information surrounding the service and sufficient information regarding the booking procedure in order to make the customers feel that they have enough information to continue with an actual booking.

At this stage there could be a total diversion from the "generic model" and the customer chooses to interact with the organisations human resources instead. Lee's and Allaway (2002) imply that providing more personal control to consumers can reduce their perceived risk, enhance the perceived value, and

encourage acceptance regarding new technology. By letting the customers educate themselves online we believe that the customer will feel more secure and be positive towards the booking site and more willing to go further and complete a booking.

5.4 The Booking Phase – Service three (S3) and Action three (A3)

When the customer has examined the online information available concerning rules, regulations and facts, it is time for the customer to perform the actual booking (A3). The customer utilises the built in system of online booking that is provided on the web pages of Bo i Bohuslän and Dalslandsstugor (S3). During this booking phase, there are many interactive processes taking place (for a more detailed step by step model of the booking procedure see chapter four, model 4). The booking that takes place in this phase can be determined to be the core service that the West Swedish Tourist board offers. Because of the West Swedish Tourist board's unusual company mission of supporting regional tourism business without demand for revenue (see chapter one), the core service is offered to the customers through the cottage rental companies web pages and not their own. Seen in relation to for example Bitner et al. (2000a), we determine the online booking service to be a clear self-service technology, where the customer has an active role in creating the service and the service encounter is different from traditional customer-personnel meetings, due to technology.

In the generic model there would be no confusion or need for further information after the customer has completed the education phase. All information needed would be found on the web pages and it is presumed that the customer has the knowledge, capacity and willingness to use the information on the web pages correctly and satisfyingly. Under these

conditions the customers would not have any trouble using the booking service, even though there is always the chance of technical problems.

In our study, however, we found variations to the generic interactions in the booking phase. The result of our interview study supported our initial belief that some customers would need other sources of information in connection to the booking. Almost 40% of the interviewed stated that they used other information channels in connection to the booking procedure, for example a telephone number, a catalogue or a tourist bureau (see appendix 4, question 9 and 9b). The interview study also showed that the main reason for turning to another media for support was not, as we initially believed, due to technical problems, but to a lack of information regarding the accommodation and its surroundings. Some respondents that wanted to cancel their booking were forced to use another information channel since this possibility was not available online.

Only one respondent experienced technical difficulties. Again, this result corresponds to research (Bitner et al. 2000a) showing that customers are dependent on extensive and reliable information in order to be satisfied customers. Looking at our results, technology failures were not common. Eriksson and Olsson (2002) claim that experienced online customers are less likely to reject a malfunctioning service than an inexperienced Internet customer. Since most of the respondents in the interview survey were experienced Internet users i.e. used the Internet every week (see appendix 4, question 4), and none of the inexperienced respondents had any technical difficulties, we can assume that the booking service in general do not lose many customers because of technical problems.

We believe that the online customers' need for information about accommodation and surroundings is, at some level, due to the fact that it is hard to put sufficient and easy-access information on the net. The online booking service can in some ways be compared to Internet catalogue shopping in that the customers use the internet to compare and choose among displayed objects. The Cottage Rental companies in West Sweden have traditionally used print catalogues to present the cottages. Vijayasarathy and Jones (2000) expressed some researchers belief that even though the Internet offers plenty of possibilities to develop the catalogue-shopping concept with multimedia and interaction, the customer can be discouraged by malfunctions such as bad quality pictures, difficult navigation etc. Some of the customers in our interview study used a paper cottage catalogue as an alternative source of information (see appendix 4, question 8).

A paper catalogue can perhaps express a more tangible appearance and communicate safety better than an online equivalent. It can also be perceived as a more relaxing alternative. Some participants stated in our interview study that a paper catalogue was "convenient" and "pleasant" to browse through. The online booking service at Dalslandsstugor presents the customer with a catalogue online to browse, similar to the paper catalogues offered in for example tourist bureaux. An advantage that we can see for using the online catalogue is that it is updated more frequently than the paper catalogues, for obvious reasons. The customer can also use the cottage codes in the paper catalogue when booking a cottage (see step by step model 4.4).

Based on the findings in our study, we can assume that, since the customers mainly turn to alternative sources of information in search for complementary information about the cottage and the area around it, the information found on the booking pages is not sufficient for some customers. We believe that it could

be possible to extend the cottage information with more pictures, virtual walk-rounds etc. The question is if it is worth investing the money and effort in such a service. Maybe it is wiser to develop the additional support channels such as a cottage information desk number. With the planned development of the virtual tourist information bureau, potential and actual customers will have access to much more information about activities in the area. This will hopefully have an effect on the customers booking cottages through the web portal and enhance their perception of the service.

It can also be assumed that some customers turned to alternative information channels because of experiencing irritating moments of wait and technical problems before the actual booking. Even if answers to customers' questions could have been found online, customers may have turned to alternative sources of information during the booking phase if they were not thorough in the education phase. At this we can only guess, based on our own experience, since our interview question only concerned the actual booking procedure. We do believe however, that many of our interviewed Internet bookers probably went back to the education phase during the actual booking in order to find interesting information (see current situation model 6.3).

Based on the discussion above, we claim that it is difficult for a company to put all their offerings online without having the backup of a helpdesk number or a similar service. It is even more important that this support is well functioning if not all steps in the booking procedure can be performed online (such as a cancellation). This finding is consistent with the findings by Bitner et al. (2000b) that warn of the dangers for a company to think online products can handle themselves. The customer must be presented with alternative choices, both technological and interpersonal. In the case of the West Swedish Tourist board, providing booking details such as descriptions of the cottages, activities

in the area and how to get there is not their responsibility but the responsibility of the cottage rental companies. Even so, we strongly believe that it is important for WSTB to make sure that the booking system support offered to Dalslandsstugor and Bo i Bohuslän is functioning correctly and also take action to ensure the end-customer support functions. WSTB is interested in generating more tourism to the West Sweden region, and we believe that ensuring a good service for the cottage rental customers is one part of making this happen. If WSTB is aiming to put more tourism offerings onto their web portal and to offer a virtual tourist information office it is important to support the cottage rental companies in their customer service efforts.

5.5 The Confirmation Phase – Service four (S4) and Action four (A4)

The S in the confirmation phase consists of the West Swedish Tourist board's service of confirming the customers' booking details (S4) by displaying them directly onto the screen and also sending a confirmation via e-mail. The A is the customers' interest in knowing if the booking has been carried out to their satisfaction (A4). The customer action can be said to differ somewhat from the other actions (A1-A3) in that the customer is more of a passive receiver and the only action in this stage is to wait for the system to confirm that they have performed the service correctly. Action is only taken if the confirmation details from the company should in some way be wrong or fail altogether. The customer lays the ground for the service to function correctly when performing phases two and three. Unless the customer has done something wrong, like misspelling the address or giving wrong facts, the customer is not expected to take any action apart from checking the confirmation details. The customer only acts if he or she experiences that there is something wrong with the confirmation and the action in this case would probably be better called a reaction.

Eriksson and Olsson (2002) claim that it is crucial for the customer's willingness to book online to get a confirmation of their purchase. If the customer experiences confusion or obscurity when having completed the booking, there is a high likeliness that the consumer will judge the service as unreliable and high risk and therefore choose to avoid online booking by using other channels instead. In our study we found that only a few respondents had experienced trouble with the confirmation part and had taken action to contact the responsible person to sort the problem out. This action can be seen as a variation to the generic model. The result indicates that the confirmation service is currently working at a satisfactory level. We do not know how many of the customers, that booked off line, used the Internet up until the booking phase but did not complete a booking online because of perceived risk or experienced problems. We presume that there would have been a number of these kinds of customers but we found in our study that all of the respondents would be willing to use the booking system online again, if they should book another cottage in West Sweden (see appendix 4, question 13). This result we see as evidence of a well functioning and customer appealing service, even if the online booking system would have lost some customers due to various problems related to the web pages.

5.6 Concluding Phase - Service five (S5) and Action five (A5)

The West Swedish Tourist board currently maintains the billing service (S5) for the cottage rental companies. The billing service is performed in the same way whether the customers booked online or through another channel. The bill is printed on paper at West Swedish Tourist board and is sent out via ordinary mail to the customer, along with a confirmation and a map. The customer gets a remittance slip and makes the payment (A5) any way they choose. There is currently no option presented online to pay the vacation over the Internet. The

West Swedish Tourist board is considering moving the billing services online by sending out bills via e-mail, but has not mentioned a possibility for the customer to also make the payment online, in relation to the booking. We believe that one reason for this is that many customers book well in advance and are not interested in making a direct payment. Another reason could be that customers feel insecure about online payment.

We found that a majority of the respondents would be willing to receive the bill via e-mail. This indicates that it would be possible for West Swedish tourist board to put their billing service online, however there might be a problem in unifying the billing service because of customers that do not want the bill over the Internet. We found that one disadvantage of sending out bills via e-mail could be that some customers do not have a computer at home, even though many do (see appendix 4, question 11). We assume that it is still easier and more familiar for the customer to receive the bill via ordinary mail and especially older people can have a problem with the new technology. We did not, however, find that older people, in our case customers over 45 years, were more negative to receiving a bill via e-mail than people under 45 (see appendix 5). According to findings by Tatnall and Lepa (2003), older peoples' views and adoption of new technology does not depend on the characteristics of the technology but more on their network of interactions with both technology and people. Whether or not a person over 55 years of age is willing to learn the Internet has more to do with how the technology can help them in their social interaction rather than the features of Internet itself (Tatnall and Lepa, 2003).

We had an initial belief that, as found in a study by Eriksson and Olsson (2002), Internet-use and experiences of booking services online would not be as favourably viewed in the older age groups as in the younger groups. But in relation to the discussion above, we have found that almost all respondents over

45 years use Internet every week (see appendix 5) and have used some kind of booking service before. This may indicate that the older online bookers are people that embrace the new technology to suit their needs. If this is the case, it means that the West Swedish Tourist board has succeeded in offering a service that appeals even to older people. This is a positive result, and it also suggests that marketing efforts to promote the online service can be very useful in order to attract even more users.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

6.1 Important factors

Today, consumers are in the tourism driving-seat. When it comes to tourist services offered over the Internet several studies show that this is becoming more and more common (O'Connor 1999). Customers have experience of using the Internet and are sophisticated enough to demand more attention to their needs. Organisations that ignore this fact will be left behind in the wake of the organisations that offer more customer-focused self-service technologies.

Based on analysis of the generic model presented in the previous chapter we have identified several significant factors that are important to consider when offering a self-service technology service such as the online cottage rental service at WSTB. Further, the "generic model" presented in chapter five has been developed into a "current situation model" (see 6.3), showing the variations of interactions found through our study that actually take place in the online booking procedure today. Finally, an "expanded generic model" (see 6.4) is presented and suggestions will be given on how to improve and expand the online booking service.

In the seeking phase we believe that customers' *awareness* of the booking site's existence is a key factor to consider, if customers do not know about the online service they cannot consider it an alternative. We found in our study there is work to be done in this area. The total amount of online bookers only amounts to approximately one third of the total population of cottage bookers. The question arises whether these potential online customers are aware of that there exists an online booking service, and if not how can the company market the web portal to make customers more aware of it.

Bitner et al. (2002) suggested that whereas customer satisfaction is an important factor when discussing SST-use, the aspect of getting the customer to try the SST for the first time is for many companies an even greater issue. Wikström (2002) proposed that consumers are waiting for more user-friendly options when it comes to e-buying. We found through our study that although consumers are experienced and highly demanding they are overall satisfied with the online service, everyone in our study would be willing to book again next year. Our conclusion is thus that the online booking service is well functioning in the sense that the current customers are satisfied enough to want to use it in the future. More effort should be focused on getting the customers who book offline to use the website.

We identify *appearance* as another important factor in the seeking phase. When customers search the Internet to find information about a tourism service, the initial front-page design and appearance determines if the customer will continue into the site and explore the company's offerings further. The front page must clearly state the content, the purpose of the site and have suitable links so that the customer can easily locate where to go. Our conclusion is consistent with Dabholkar and Bobitt (2001), who stated that information must be easy to find and clear user instructions are needed to avoid confusion and frustration.

In order to feel confident enough to pursue the intent of actually booking or purchasing a service online, the potential customers must feel that they have enough information and understanding of the service and their role. Thus, in the education phase the most important factor is *learning*. Bitner et al. (1997) suggested that customer education is a prerequisite for facilitating customers in the active role of learning to become online bookers. Both the customers themselves and the company need to understand the role of the customer.

Companies need to be able to provide the customer with appropriate information and support in the service delivery. The customers themselves need to understand what is expected of them and feel confident that they can perform the self-service in a proper way. We found that customers use both on and offline information sources to educate themselves about the service offering. Our conclusion is that there is a need for the Internet based booking service to be complemented with for example telephone support and catalogues.

In the booking phase, we have found the most important factor to be *security*, in the form of high predictability, high controllability and high outcome desirability, as suggested by Lee and Allaway (2002). The customer needs to feel secure in a very high-tech situation, according to the concept of high-tech, high-touch services developed by Grönroos (2001). If the customer does not feel that they know what they are doing, it is more likely that he or she will break off the interaction with the SST and instead turn to a more high-touch alternative, such as a tourist bureau. Our findings are consistent with Dabholkar and Bobitt's (2001) that, if customers see that a human alternative can give more security or information, they will probably choose that alternative over an online option. Therefore it is important, as we have already pointed out, that the company ensures that the customer feels secure. As found in our interview study, the WSTB seems to have succeeded in communicating this kind of security to their online customers. But we believe that since the tourism organisation plans to enlarge their offerings online in the near future they need to continue the efforts to make the customers secure.

The virtual information bureau will not only contain booking services, but also purchasing possibilities. Seen in relation to the research by van der Poel and Leunis (1999), we believe that customers will be more untrusting when it comes to purchasing services on the Internet web portal compared to the

booking service. This places higher demands on the organisation to get the customer to trust them, since purchase offers usually involve payment online. As pointed out by Aslop (in de Ruyter et al. 2001) it is a good idea for a company to offer the customers the option of e-services, and we believe that it can enhance the customers feeling of trust. In the case of the online cottage booking service provided by WSTB, the need for additional e-services does not seem necessary at the moment. The customers seem to know what is expected of them and the service is more or less unproblematic to use.

Technical improvements on web sites are often regarded as positive development. As we have seen through our study, we assess the situation at WSTB today to be favourable. The online cottage bookers apparently do not have many problems using the service, even though the information offered in some cases was too sparse. But it is easy to forget that just because a company or organisation has the possibility to implement the latest technical innovations, the customer does not necessarily have the abilities to appreciate the efforts. In our opinion, it is of great importance to take into account the customer that will actually use the service when developing new features on the Internet web site in terms of technical equipment capacity, Internet experience, Internet connection etc. Through our interview study we found that the online bookers at WSTB are mostly people between 30 and 45 with general knowledge and experience of Internet use. This has led us to conclude that the online bookers are favourable towards the new technology, but not necessarily technology experts.

Based on the result of our interview study and suggestions presented by Eriksson and Olsson (2002), we have found consistency and dependability to be important issues in the confirmation phase. If the customer does not get any proof of their activity, it is likely that a feeling of distrust may occur. Therefore,

we consider *reliability* to be an important factor for the companies to consider. For the online bookers, we believe that the confirmation of the booking is seen as a proof of the experienced commitment formed during the booking phase, but it can also be viewed as a form of attestation of their capabilities to use the SST correctly. When the customer is confident that the service has been performed right, it will most certainly create a feeling of satisfaction. Therefore it is important for the organisation to have a confirmation function that works properly in order to keep customers pleased and loyal.

In the conclusion phase, one of the natural important factors to consider is the *risk* factor. However, we assume that the perceived risk consumers may experience at WSTB today is at a very low level. This assumption is based on the facts that no payment is at the moment implemented online. All bills are sent out in paper form, and this form of payment the customer is very familiar with. The issue of risk is therefore of growing importance if and when the organisation decides to put payment options online, for example in connection to an increased range of offered products and services.

Another interesting find that we discovered in connection to the conclusion phase at the WSTB is that one major part is missing. The WSTB is currently not engaged in any form of evaluation projects or marketing efforts in relation to the information that can be found in the R360^{o} database. We strongly believe that both the WSTB and the West Sweden tourist region would benefit form such a commitment. Our suggestion is that the WSTB should take advantage of the customer information that already exists, but is not used, to for example distribution of evaluation forms to old customers, direct marketing campaigns and customer surveys. We are certain that the importance of this feature will only grow in the future since more and more offers will be put online. Then it is of outmost importance that the customers can feel a bond or connection to the
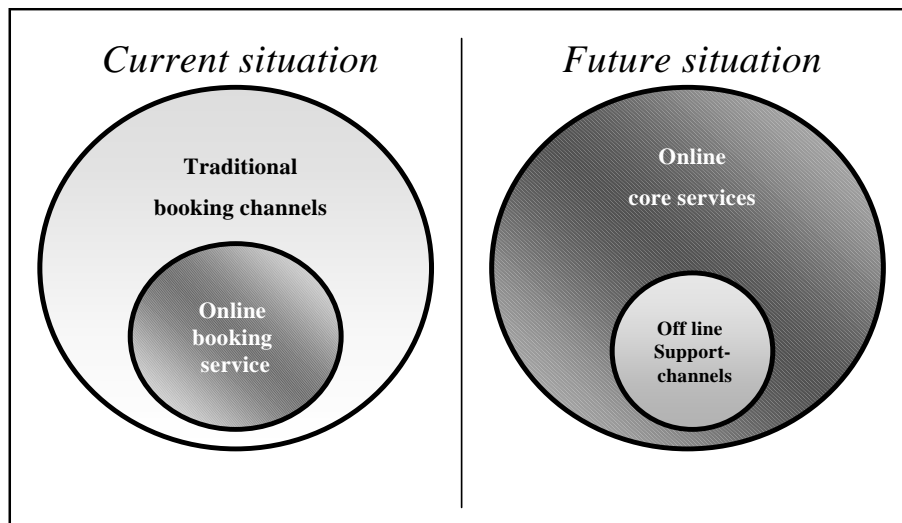
West Sweden region in general and the tourism organisations in particular. Our conclusion is thus that an organisation such as the WSTB must work harder on tying the customers to their organisation by using information that is already available.

6.2 What is the role of the Internet as an SST in the online booking service?

We have through our study discovered that the online booking service at the WSTB is constructed in a complex way. There are many companies working together to produce the service offer, and the WSTB's role is to promote and support the local West Swedish tourist organisations offering cottage rental with an online booking service. Through their web portal www.vastsverige.com, the customers can find links to different websites that offer bookings online. We have thus come to the conclusion that the Internet's role as an SST in the online booking service is currently that of a booking channel and an information source. The Internet is, for obvious reasons, a natural part in an online offering. However, among our respondents in the interview study we noted that several of them turned to the Internet as a natural first step to find information. Thus, before even reaching the actual booking possibilities provided by the WSTB at the websites, the customers use the Internet as a self-service technology to find information and gain knowledge about their interest area. The role of the Internet as a self-service technology can therefore be seen as beginning already with a customer's wish to spend a vacation in a rented cottage in West Sweden, as well as being the essential part in the actual online booking service.

Many bookers still use the traditional booking channels, but the online booking service is gaining ground. As it seems, the use of the Internet as an SST for booking possibilities and information access can only grow in the future. We

are convinced that more and more of the core booking service, which the customers can perform by themselves, will find its way online, along with new products and purchase offers. A clear sign of this tendency is the WSTB's current development of the virtual information bureau. The expansion of online self-service offers will perhaps lead to the Internet becoming more of a channel for purchase as well. We believe that such a development will result in the diminishing importance of tourist offices and telephone services as traditional, human interaction-based booking channels. Instead, their role will be to support the online business with qualified information and customer-oriented advice. As we perceive it, the roles are about to change.
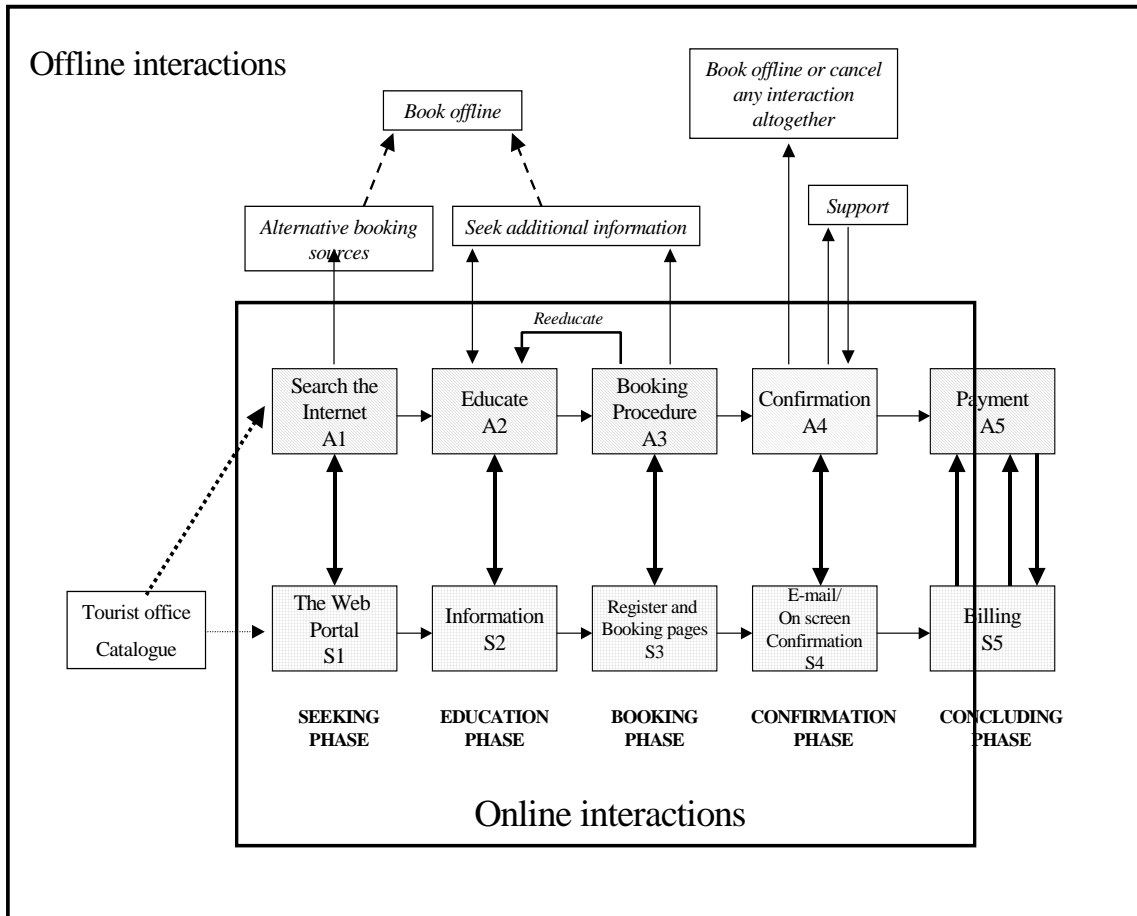
Current situation   *Future situation*

Traditional booking channels

Online core services

Online booking service

Off line Support-channels

Model 7: *Current and future situation model* – Illustration over the Internets changing role.

6.3 How does the customer use the Internet as an SST in the online booking service?

We have concluded that the meeting between the customer and the organisation is changing into using more self-service options, and human interaction will in the future become a complement to technological service encounters. Based on the result and analysis of the customers' interaction with the booking service at the WSTB, we have produced a "current situation model". In this model we

recognize critical encounters where the customers' actions differs from the "generic model" (see chapter five).

Model 8: *Current situation model* – Illustration of the actual interactions in the service production

The model illustrates how the customers actually use the Internet as an SST in the current online booking service. We have concluded that *awareness* of the online booking service and the physical *appearance* of the front page will determine if the customers will find the page at all or click further into the site. In the first two steps the customers can use alternative channels to get information about the booking alternative itself, the service offer and the booking procedure. The biggest problem in the education phase is if the

customer comes to the conclusion that they have not *learnt* enough to feel confident to continue on to the actual booking phase.

When reaching the booking phase and actually proceeding with a booking the customer should have all the background information they need and if the booking site is functioning correctly they will be able to complete their booking in a *secure* manner. During the booking phase the customers will turn to the tourism office if they feel insecure about booking over the Internet. After concluding the booking the customer expects to get a confirmation verifying that the booking is completed correctly. Here the customers have to *rely* on the organisation and wait for their confirmation to appear on the screen and by e-mail. When entering the last stage of payment the customer could perceive a sense of *risk*, but because the payment is not part of the online service interaction it is today considered to be a relatively safe stage.

6.4 Suggestions on how the online booking service can be developed and improved
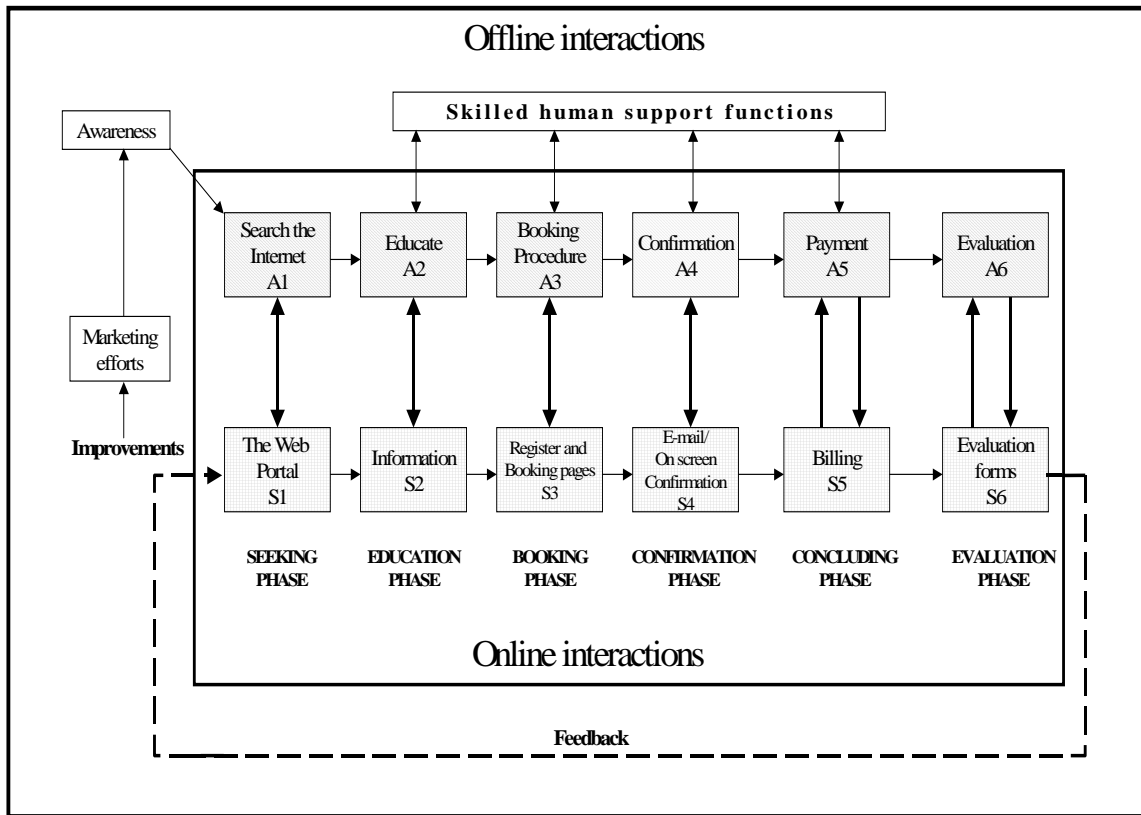
Based on our findings we have developed an "expanded generic model" to illustrate our recommendations. This model is also based on the generic model presented in chapter five. First of all it should be emphasised that the majority of the online bookers were satisfied with the current online booking. All of them would use the site again if they were to book a cottage in the West Sweden area.

However, because we have no information of whether customers that do not book online are aware of the option and how they feel about using an online booking service, there are some aspects to be considered before giving recommendations on how to improve the online booking service. In our opinion there is a need for marketing the existence of the web portal more and

clearly communicating the benefits of booking online. We believe that the site is easy to find if searching the Internet, nevertheless potential customers must be encouraged by the organisation to visit the web portal. Through targeted marketing efforts we believe that the awareness of the possibilities for online booking can increase.

Also managers must focus more on their current customers and get them to book more and again. This can be done through making use of the customer database that exists through the R360^{o} booking system. One suggestion could be to send the customers an online evaluation form in order to provide the company with feedback that they can use to develop and improve their service offering. Customer relationship building and tying the customer closer to the company and its offerings can be achieved through showing the customer that improvements are being made based on their suggestions and needs.

Regarding the expected and planned development towards an expansion of the booking offerings online discussed in part 1.1.2, we have concluded that the booking online will always need to be supported by offline activities. Our results show that several customers use alternative ways to find information before and during the booking process. If something is unclear or goes wrong in the self-service technology encounter, customers need to trust that there are alternative sources to turn to. For managers it is important to understand that customers will always require human interaction and support in connection to the online offerings. This support must be highly attentive and knowledgeable about all information regarding the use of the online booking itself and the services that are being offered.

Offline interactions

Skilled human support functions

Awareness

| Search the Internet A1 | Educate A2 | Booking Procedure A3 | Confirmation A4 | Payment A5 | Evaluation A6 |

Marketing efforts

Improvements

| The Web Portal S1 | Information S2 | Register and Booking pages S3 | E-mail/ On screen Confirmation S4 | Billing S5 | Evaluation forms S6 |

SEEKING PHASE | **EDUCATION PHASE** | **BOOKING PHASE** | **CONFIRMATION PHASE** | **CONCLUDING PHASE** | **EVALUATION PHASE**

Online interactions

Feedback

Model 9: *Expanded generic model* – suggestions on how to improve the interactions in the service production

We have concluded that improvements and developments in the current online booking service need to be consistent with the customers' technological development and maturity. If there is an imbalance between the customers' ability and computer capacity and the technological functions of the booking service, it will cause confusion and irritating delays in the booking procedure. An alternative when introducing high tech services online is to offer customers with different Internet connections different options to suit their needs.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

We believe that our study can form the basis for further research in the area of online bookings of tourism services. We have found that the existing online bookers in general are satisfied with using self-service technology. One

interesting research area would then be to investigate the motives and actions of the persons that do not use the online booking service. We consider that it is of interest to find the reasons to why some customers do not use the online service, for organisations that wish to put more offerings online. Through conducting this kind of research, a deeper understanding of what is needed to get more people to book online can be gained. It can also help organisations to customize their online offers.

In this study it was found that a very high percentage of the online customers would consider using the booking site again next year. This raises questions about loyalty and customer relationships over time. Would these customers be just as prepared to book through another organisation? Can existing models and frameworks of relationship marketing be applied to online services? Can there be such a thing as loyalty online and how is this developed? We suggest based on our research of the interactions between the customers and the organisation, that there are special considerations to be taken into account when forming a relationship with customers that rarely interact directly with the human part of the organisation. We suggest that it would be interesting to study if and how customer relationships can be formed online.

Another interesting subject to examine in relation to our thesis is customer attitudes towards booking and, in the long run, purchasing more complex offers over the Internet. There is already a tendency in the business to offer packages of tourism products and services online. In practice, we believe that tourism products with their special features such as heterogeneity and intangibility are perhaps easier to sell online than material products that customers are used to examining beforehand. The Internet, as an interactive technology, is hypothetically the perfect medium to visualise and promote the intangible tourism offering through. But from the customer's point of view, is there a limit

to what can be sold online? Are their any special types of services that are easier to promote and sell online? We propose that investigating what kind of tourism services are suitable to sell online, and how they can be packaged would be an interesting research topic.

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Personal interviews

Malin Elofsson 031002

Hans Gundmar 031020

Alexandra Hallgren 031023

Original letter

Hej,
Hoppas att Ni haft en trevlig stugsemester i sommar!

Vi heter Hilary och Katarina och är studenter på Handelshögskolan i Göteborg och vi skriver vår Magisteruppsats i Turism i samarbete med Västsvenska Turistrådet. Vi kommer att genomföra telefonintervjuer med kunder som har bokat sin sommarstugevistelse via Internet. Urvalet kommer att ske slumpvis ur Västsvenska Turistrådets adressregister och Ni kan komma att bli en av dessa.

Telefonintervjun tar ca 10 minuter och kommer att handla om hur Ni bokade Er stuga och var Ni hittade information om stugboendet. Bland Er som blir intervjuade kommer vi att lotta ut fem exemplar av den vackra kokboken "Köksvägen till Västsverige" som utarbetas i samarbete med Västsvensk Mersmak.

Vi hoppas att Ni vill delta i vår undersökning
Tack på förhand!

Hilary och Katarina

Era adressuppgifter har vi fått genom det bokningssystem Ni använde Er av vid bokningen av Er sommarstuga. Alla uppgifter behandlas konfidentiellt och alla svar kommer att vara anonyma.

APPENDIX 2

Translated letter

Hello,
We hope you enjoyed your cottage vacation this summer!

We are two students, named Hilary and Katarina, studying at the School of economics and commercial law at Gothenburg University. We are currently writing our Master thesis in tourism in cooperation with the West Swedish Tourist board. We will conduct telephone interviews with customers that have booked cottages online this summer. The respondents will be selected at random from the West Swedish Tourist boards address register, and you may be one of them.

The telephone interview will take approximately ten minutes and we would like to know how you booked your cottage and where you found information about the online cottage rental service.

We will draw lots among the respondents and give five of them a copy of the beautiful cookery book "Köksvägen till Västsverige", that has been written in cooperation with "Västsvenk Mersmak".

We would greatly appreciate your participation in our study
Thank You!

Hilary and Katarina

Your address details have been taken from the booking system you used when booking your cottage. All details will be handled confidentially and all answers will be anonymous.

Original interview questions

Fråga 1:

Kön

Fråga 2:

Var har Ni tillgång till Internet? (Internetaccess)

Fråga 3:

Hur ofta använder du Internet?

Fråga 4:

Vilken typ av uppkoppling har du tillgång till?

Fråga 5:

Har Ni bokat någonting via Internet tidigare (exempelvis flyg, tåg) och i så fall hur

många gånger då?

Fråga 5.b

Vad har Ni bokat då?

Fråga 6:

Skulle Ni kunna nämna något som Ni upplevde som bra med stugbokningssidan?

Fråga 7:

Skulle Ni kunna nämna något som Ni upplevde som dåligt med stugbokningssidan?

Fråga 8:

Hur fick Ni information om att det fanns stugor att hyra?

Fråga 9:

Sökte Ni information utöver Internet i samband med bokningen?

Fråga 9b:

Om ja, hur då?

Fråga 9c:

Av vilken anledning sökte du information utöver Internet?

Fråga 10:

Hur lång tid tog själva bokningen? (Hur upplevde du själva bokningen, tog det lång eller kort tid?)

Fråga 11:

Kan Ni tänka Er att få fakturan via e-mail?

Fråga 12:

Hade Ni kunnat tänka er att boka några av följande tjänster i samband med stugbokningen?

Fråga 13:

Skulle Ni kunna tänka Er att använda Internetbokningen igen om Ni skulle hyra en stuga nästa år?

Fråga 14:
Ålder:18-29; 30-45; 46-60; over 60

APPENDIX 4

Translated interview questions

Question 1:

Gender

Question 2:

Where do You have access to Internet?

Question 3:

How often do You use Internet?.

Question 4:

What type of Internet connection do You have access to?

Question 5:

Had You ever booked anything via the Internet prior to the cottage booking? For example train tickets, airline tickets?
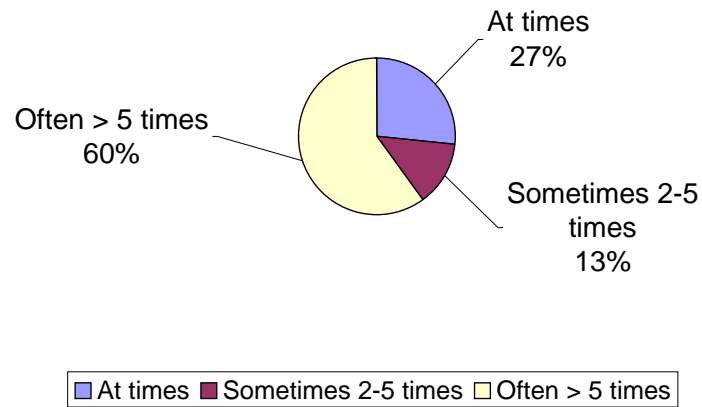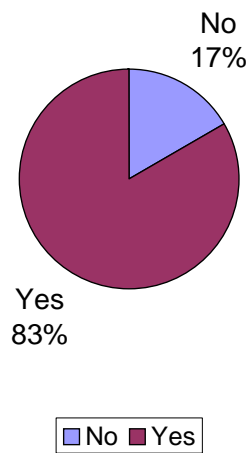
Question 5b:

What kind of service did You book?
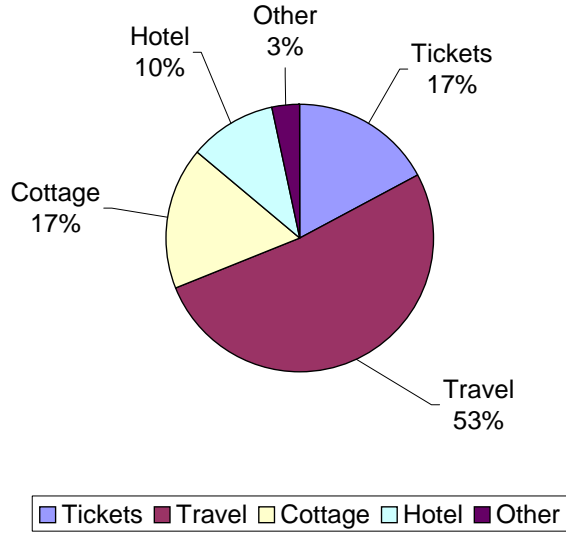
Question 6:

What advantages can You name with the booking service web page?
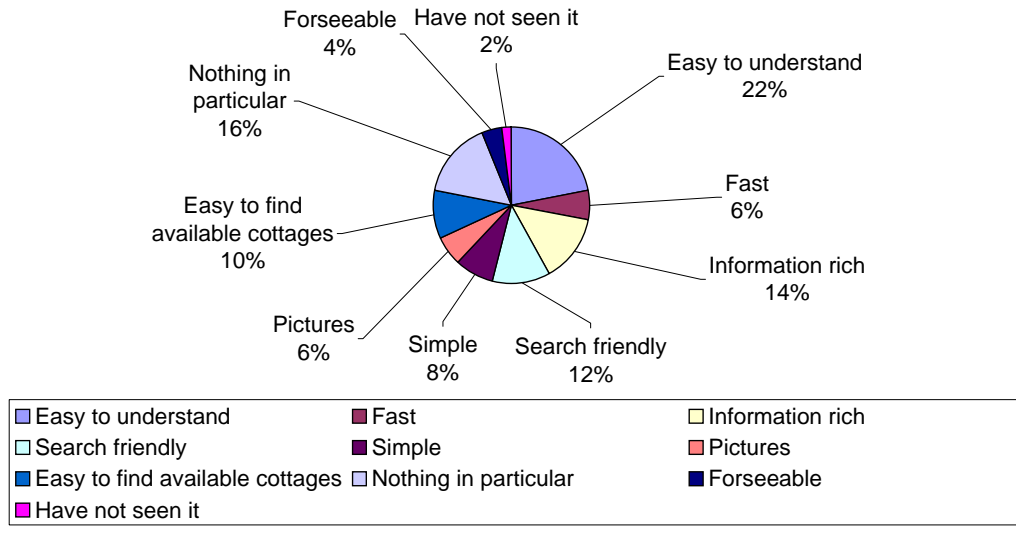
Question 7:

What disadvantages can You name with the booking service web page?
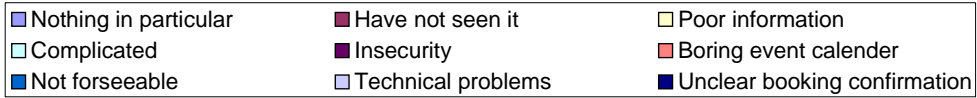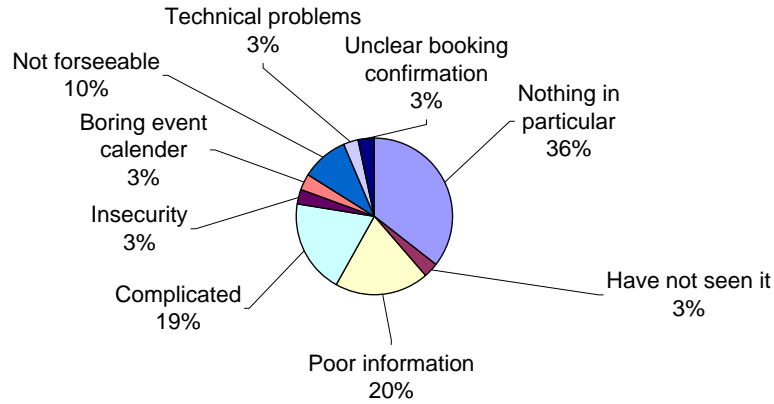
Question 8:

How did You get information about the cottage rental possibilities?
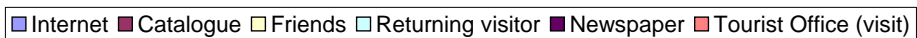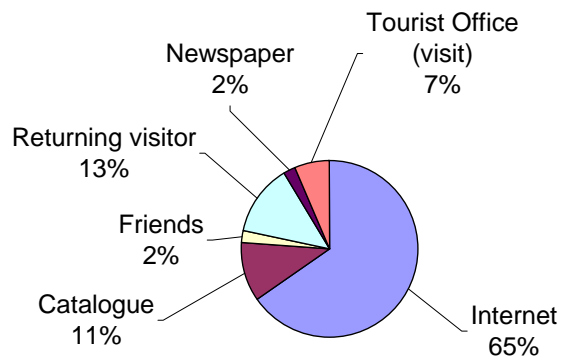
Question 9:

Apart from the Internet, did You seek any additional information during the actual booking?
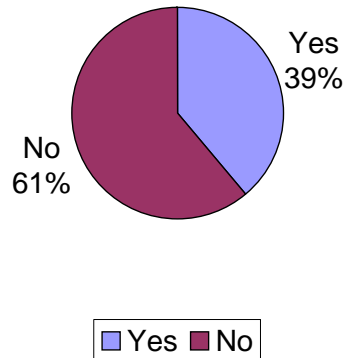
Question 9b:

If yes, how?

Question 9c:

For what reason did You seek additional information other than the Internet?

Question 10:

Did You find the actual booking taking a long or a short time?

Question 11:

Would You consider receiving the bill via e-mail?

Question 12:

Would You be interested in booking some or all of the following additional services in correspondence with the cottage booking? – activities such as canoeing, golf, bicycle tours; tickets to events; restaurant visits; cottage house cleaning; boating possibilities; the Goteborg Pass.
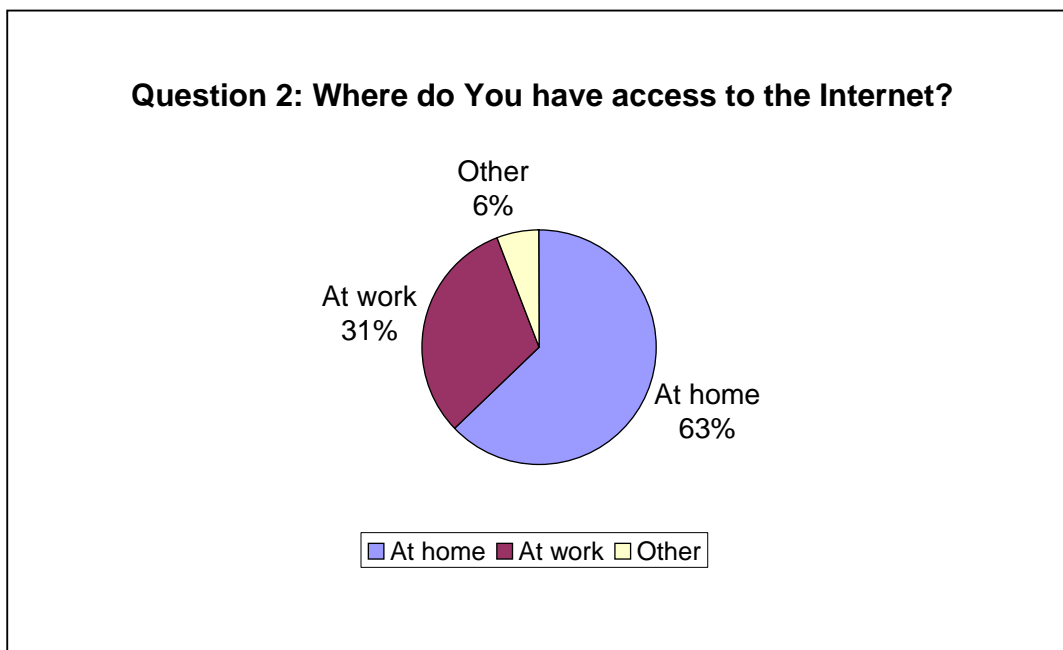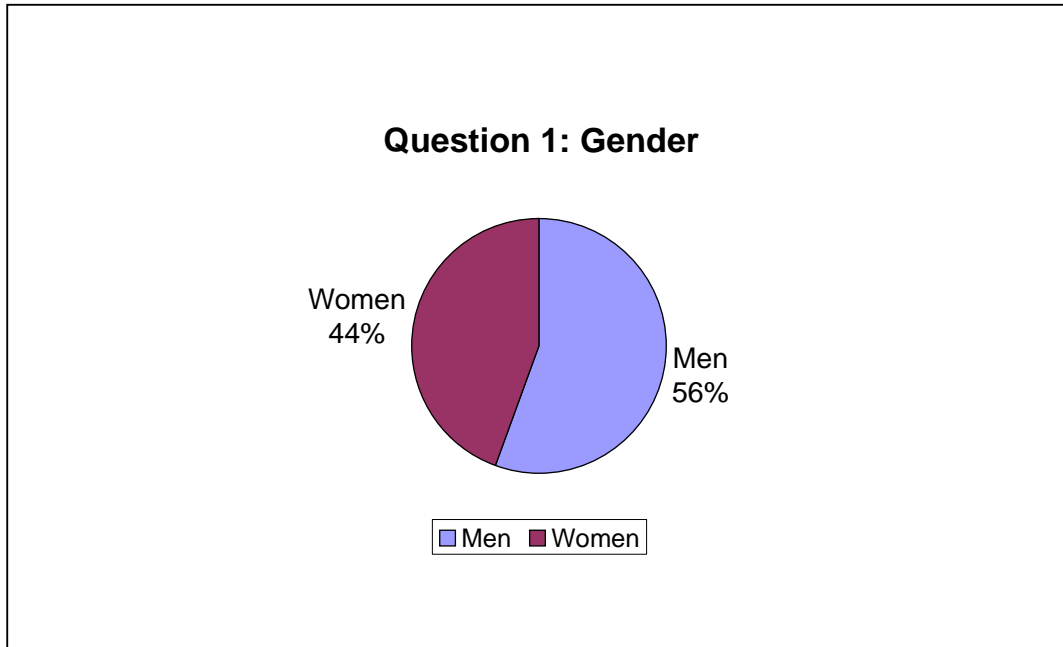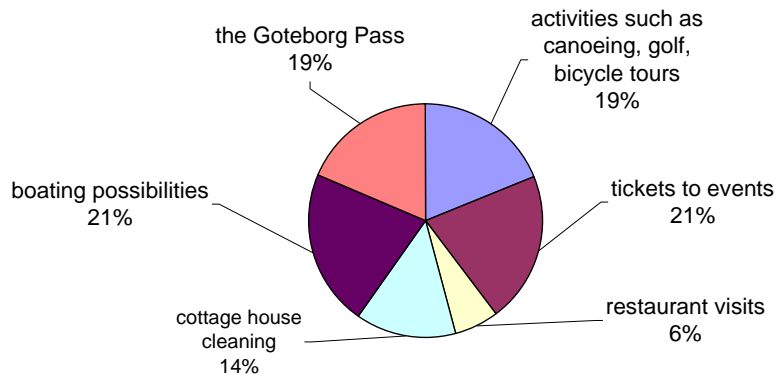
Question 13:

Would You consider using the Internet booking services again if You rented a cottage for next year?
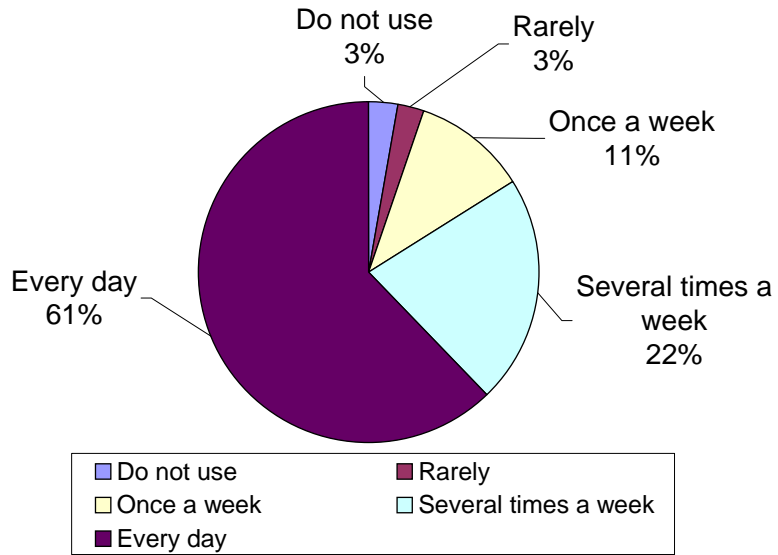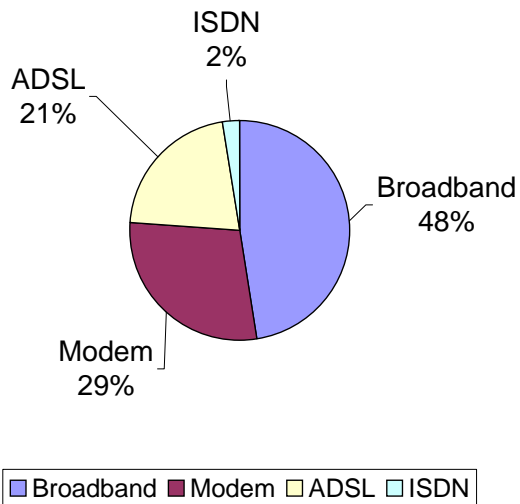
Question 14:

Age: 18-29; 30-45; 46-60; over 60

Results of the interview study

Question 1: Gender

Women 44%

Men 56%

☐ Men ☐ Women

Question 2: Where do You have access to the Internet?

Other 6%

At work 31%

At home 63%

☐ At home ☐ At work ☐ Other

Question 3: How often do You use the Internet?

Do not use
3%

Rarely
3%

Once a week
11%

Several times a
week
22%

Every day
61%

- Do not use
- Rarely
- Once a week
- Several times a week
- Every day

Question 4: What type of Internet connection do You have access to?

ISDN
2%

ADSL
21%

Broadband
48%

Modem
29%

- Broadband
- Modem
- ADSL
- ISDN

Question 5: Had You ever booked anything via the Internet prior to the cottage booking?

At times
27%

Often > 5 times
60%

Sometimes 2-5
times
13%

☐ At times ☐ Sometimes 2-5 times ☐ Often > 5 times

Question 5: Had You ever booked anything via the Internet prior to the cottage booking?

No
17%

Yes
83%

☐ No ☐ Yes

Question 5b: What kind of service did You book?

Other
3%

Hotel
10%

Tickets
17%

Cottage
17%

Travel
53%

☐ Tickets ■ Travel ☐ Cottage ☐ Hotel ■ Other

Question 6: What advantages can You name with the booking service web page?

Forseeable
4%

Have not seen it
2%

Nothing in particular
16%

Easy to understand
22%

Easy to find available cottages
10%

Fast
6%

Information rich
14%

Pictures
6%

Simple
8%

Search friendly
12%

☐ Easy to understand   ■ Fast   ☐ Information rich
☐ Search friendly   ■ Simple   ☐ Pictures
■ Easy to find available cottages ☐ Nothing in particular ■ Forseeable
■ Have not seen it

Question 7: What disadvantages can You name with the booking service web page?

Technical problems
3%

Unclear booking
confirmation
3%

Not forseeable
10%

Boring event
calender
3%

Insecurity
3%

Complicated
19%

Nothing in
particular
36%

Have not seen it
3%

Poor information
20%

- ☐ Nothing in particular ■ Have not seen it ☐ Poor information
- ☐ Complicated ■ Insecurity ☐ Boring event calender
- ■ Not forseeable ☐ Technical problems ■ Unclear booking confirmation

Question 8: How did You get information about the cottage rental possibilities?

Tourist Office
(visit)
7%

Newspaper
2%

Returning visitor
13%

Friends
2%

Catalogue
11%

Internet
65%

☐ Internet ■ Catalogue ☐ Friends ☐ Returning visitor ■ Newspaper ■ Tourist Office (visit)
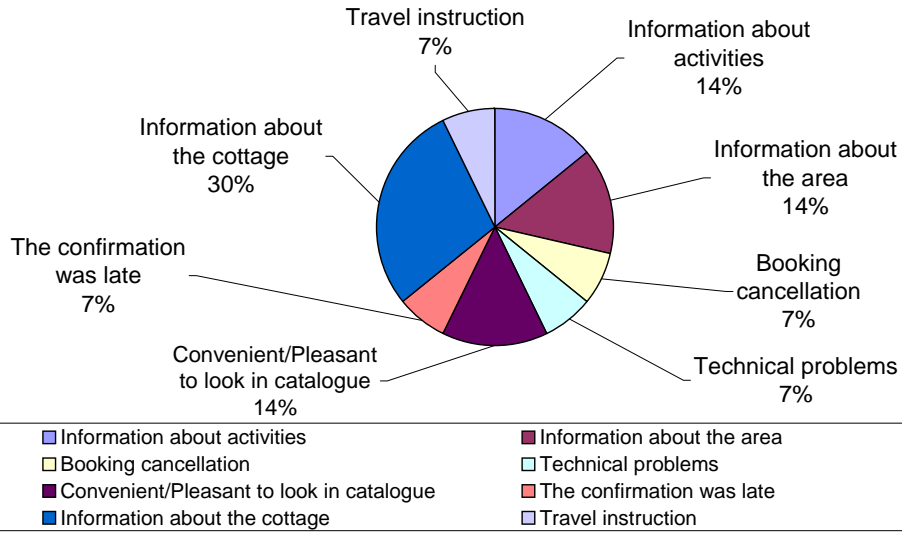
Question 9: Apart from the Internet, did You seek any additional information during the actual booking?

Yes
39%

No
61%

☐ Yes ■ No

Question 9b: If yes, how?

Payed a visit to the
Tourism Office
6%

Called
41%

In a catalogue
53%

☐ In a catalogue ■ Called ☐ Payed a visit to the Tourism Office

Question 9c: For what reason did You seek additional information other than the Internet?

Travel instruction
7%

Information about activities
14%

Information about the area
14%

Information about the cottage
30%

Booking cancellation
7%

The confirmation was late
7%

Technical problems
7%

Convenient/Pleasant to look in catalogue
14%

- Information about activities
- Information about the area
- Booking cancellation
- Technical problems
- Convenient/Pleasant to look in catalogue
- The confirmation was late
- Information about the cottage
- Travel instruction

Question 10: Did You find the actual booking taking a long or a short time?

Booked several times since there was no confirmation
3%

Visited the website several times
5%

Long time
13%

Short time
79%

- Long time
- Short time
- Visited the website several times
- Booked several times since there was no confirmation

Question 11: Would You consider receiving the bill via e-mail?

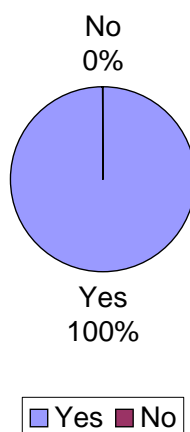No access to
the Internet at
home
5%

Maybe
5%

Yes
53%

No
37%

Yes No Maybe No access to the Internet at home

Q 12: Would You be interested in booking some or all of the following additional services in correspondence with the cabin booking?
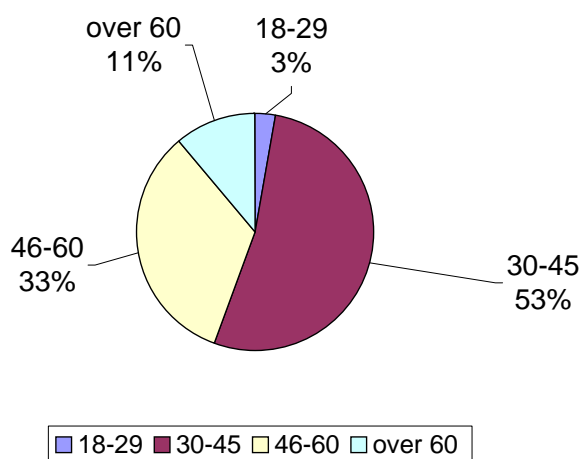
the Goteborg Pass
19%

activities such as
canoeing, golf,
bicycle tours
19%

boating possibilities
21%

tickets to events
21%

cottage house
cleaning
14%

restaurant visits
6%

activities such as canoeing, golf, bicycle tours tickets to events
restaurant visits cottage house cleaning
boating possibilities the Goteborg Pass

Question 13: Would You consider using the Internet booking services again if You rented a cottage for next year?
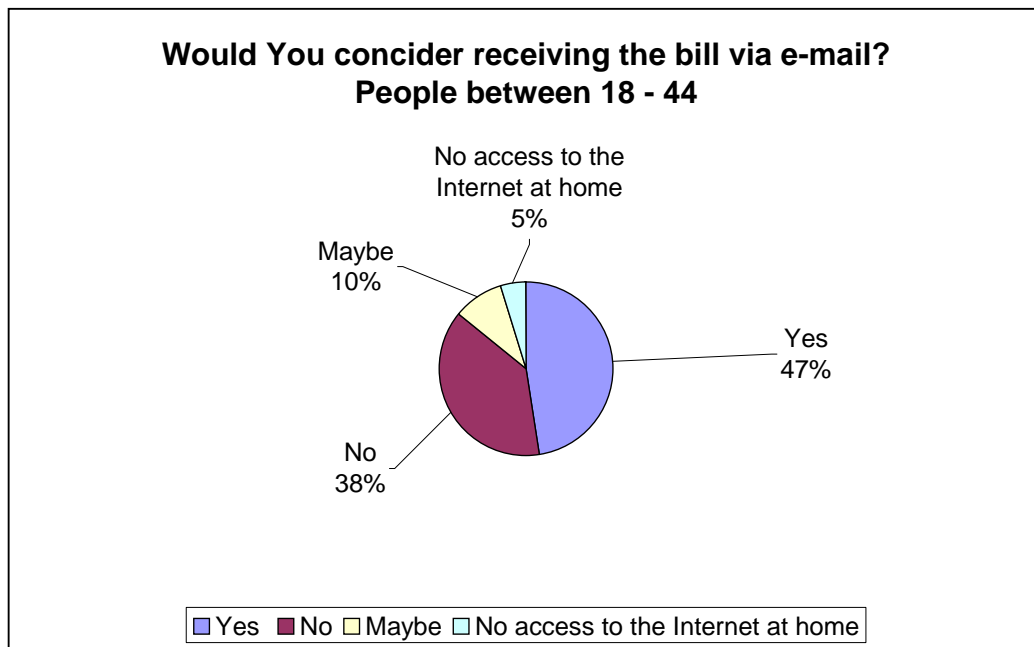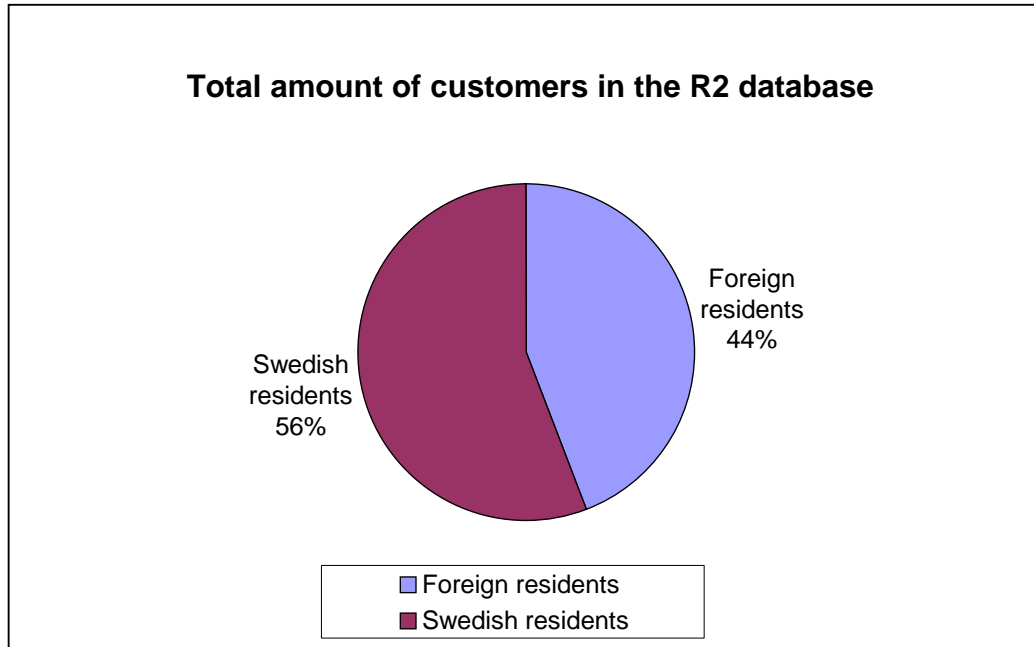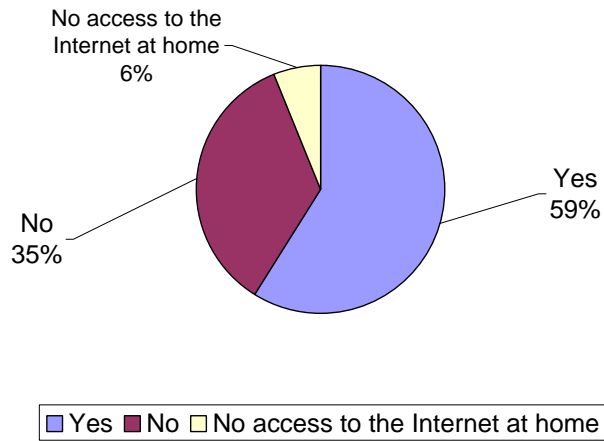
No
0%

Yes
100%

Yes ■ No

Question 14: Age group

over 60
11%

18-29
3%

46-60
33%

30-45
53%

■ 18-29 ■ 30-45 □ 46-60 □ over 60

Additional results of the interview study

Total amount of customers in the R2 database

**Would You concider receiving the bill via e-mail?
People between 18 - 44**

Would you concider receiving the bill via e-mail? People over 45

No access to the Internet at home 6%

No 35%

Yes 59%

Yes ■ No □ No access to the Internet at home

How often do You use the Internet? People over 45

Do not use 6%

Rarely 6%

Every week 88%

Do not use ■ Rarely □ Every week